



Left to Centre *Can Carole James convince voters to forgive the NDP? Can she move her party to the middle? Can she get some attention?*

BY KATHARINE HAMER It's a cold January night outside Lucy Mae Brown, with a slivered moon and three-day-old snow going grey underfoot. Downstairs in the bar, the woman who wants to become B.C.'s next premier is preparing for her entrée into Vancouver society. It's an unofficial campaign kickoff for the provincial New Democrats—and although she's headed the party since November 2003, few people know anything about Carole James.

The faithful are squeezed in elbow-to-elbow, at \$175 a pop, for an audience with James and the guest of honour she hopes to emulate: Manitoba premier Gary Doer. The premier, who was personally urged by Gordon Campbell not to attend this fundraiser, takes the microphone to welcome the crowd to a "family event," where he intends to offer "family advice." If not for the fact that newly minted Surrey-Panorama Ridge MLA Jagrup Brar is addressing people as "brothers and sisters," you'd be forgiven for mistaking this gathering for a bible seminar instead of a gathering of (moderate) socialists.

Doer takes the stage to tell the assembled crowd: make promises you can keep. Slim your priorities down to a handful: health care, education, the environment, ending privatization. Doer doesn't believe that party politics should be divided along labour and big business lines; he's banned campaign donations from both in a bid to get them working together for the betterment of his province. So far, it seems to be working: Doer is one of the most popular premiers in the country.

This centrist path is the one James wants to follow, though she's faced opposition even from within her own party. The notion of business and labour putting aside their differences won't be an easy sell in a province that is notoriously polarized in its politics, and where NDP loyalties are often per-

ceived to lie primarily with the labour movement. Still, her supporters see James as someone who can build consensus.

"I've found her to be intelligent, warm, and she doesn't get distracted by the clutter of politics," says Doer. "She seems very calm, which is a very important characteristic."

A calm political leader? Are we really ready for this? There does seem to be a new energy here tonight, a party atmosphere that can't solely be ascribed to the free-flowing Chardonnay. James is smiling and unruffled as she's wheeled around the dingy space by an unending stream of handlers, all of whom are dressed like the cast of *Men in Black*.

Former party leader Joy MacPhail, less well known for being calm, is bobbing between pillars next to the bar. "When I was a kid, about five or six," she confides, "me and my siblings used to get so excited about Christmas that we'd vomit. I'm feeling like that again."

"I DON'T THINK anyone expected the NDP to recover from 2001 as well as they did," says University of Victoria political science professor Norman Ruff. "Those that thought the NDP would recover saw a two-election scenario." The party has been in an upbeat mood ever since Brar won his legislative seat in a by-election late last year—an event that the MLA describes as one that "certainly gave a lot of energy to the NDP troops ... I think there's a very common understanding when I talk to people now. [They] actually say to you, 'We made a mistake. We don't have a strong opposition.' That's a very strong feeling in this province."

Brar's win boosted the battle-power of MacPhail and fellow MLA Jenny Kwan, the duo who've been solely responsible for nipping at Liberal heels in Victoria. "People were writing our obituary three and a half years ago," says MacPhail. "The party has spent a lot of time renewing, learning, modernizing.

Carole James: "She seems very calm," says Manitoba premier Gary Doer. Are we ready for a calm political leader?

politics

The key is to examine the past and learn from our mistakes and grow. We did all that, even though it was painful.” Part of that modernization meant jettisoning MacPhail as leader. Though her tenacity has been widely admired, her attack-dog style and links to the Glen Clark era mean she has “very high negatives,” notes *Vancouver Sun* legislative columnist Vaughn Palmer. “My sense of James is that on her personal qualities, she’s quite likeable.”

TO HER SUPPORTERS, James is the embodiment of compassion, commitment and moderation. Her opponents are more skeptical. Former deputy premier (and outgoing MLA) Christy Clark maintains that James was chosen for her malleability. “I don’t think she’s in control of her party,” says Clark. “I think she’s the face of the party. The decisions are made by people behind the scenes.” Already, Clark and James have gone head-to-head on the issue of women candidates. Clark points out that 28 percent of Liberal candidates are female, while James, she says, has squandered a huge opportunity to bring more women on board.

Both parties would like you to believe that this campaign will not involve taking potshots. But that’s a tall order, considering that the foundering of the NDP under Glen Clark and the stringent budget cuts under Gordon Campbell are obvious fodder. “The Liberal struggle is going to be around the meanness thing with Campbell,” says Palmer, “the feeling that he went too far, that people don’t like his style. They don’t feel they can entirely trust him. The NDP struggle isn’t going to be around James, it’s going to be around the NDP. It’s either going to be around the issue of how much power will the unions have in their government, or it’ll be around to what degree are we going back to what we hurled out of office in 2001.”

At the Chinese New Year’s parade through the Downtown Eastside in February, James walks mostly unrecognized through the crowd. Midway along the parade route a gaggle of fans waves to her peach silk-clad opponent. “Gordon Campbell! Gordon Campbell!” they cry, jostling for camera space. Half a block later, outside the Channel M building, Campbell gets mobbed.

THE BIG QUESTION: now that they have a new leader and a new sales pitch, will the NDP

be forgiven by voters for the Clark era? “Well,” says Ruff, “There was an old gothic rock song—I think it was by the Sisters of Mercy: ‘We forgive as we forget.’ It’s so true in politics. The Liberals are still harping on The Dismal Decade, and I think it’s no accident that the Liberal platform is The Golden Decade. It’s meant to be a not-too-subtle contrast.”



THE CLAMOUR OVER CAROLE TAYLOR'S BID FOR OFFICE SURPRISED EVEN TAYLOR: "I WENT BACK TO BED AND PULLED THE COVERS OVER MY HEAD," SHE SAYS OF THE LAVISH COVERAGE.

It’s also no accident that—after announcing Olympic gold wrestler Daniel Igali as a nominee—the Liberals brought Carole Taylor on board. That’s Carole Taylor, former Vancouver city councillor, former chair of the CBC, holder of the Order of Canada—and definitely high-profile. The media fell all over themselves to write up Taylor’s bid for office, touting her as a “star candidate” who could make up for the Liberal loss of more centrist cabinet ministers like Christy Clark, Gary Collins and Geoff Plant.

The clamour surprised even Taylor. “I went back to bed and pulled the covers over my head,” she says of the lavish coverage. “I just see this as my tiny way of trying to make my community a better place.” It’s Taylor’s commitment to community issues that has pundits positioning her as the Liberal answer to James. After all, when she was on council, it was Taylor who was responsible for bringing a children’s advocate on board. She doesn’t believe such values are exclusive to the NDP.

“The really hard reality,” she says, “is that you don’t have the money to pay for the

social services unless the economy is working. So it’s a bit of a Catch-22: which comes first, which comes second? The situation we’re in today is that the economy is finally starting to work, and the dollars are starting to be there so that you can do those things on social issues that we all care about.”

Balancing social issues and the budget is a tough job, and there have been many questions about James’ intent to do so. Kevin Evans, chair of the Coalition of B.C. Businesses, says many of his colleagues fear the NDP is still too closely tied to organized labour to meet business needs. He points to lingering figures from the Clark years such as Corky Evans and Mike Farnworth. “You’ve got a number of those people still hoping to get into a Carole James cabinet, and that does not make people feel warm and fuzzy,” he says. He does concede, though, that the business people who’ve met James have found her to be “a very impressive person.”

“As far as I can tell,” says Paul Ramsey, a James supporter and a cabinet minister under Glen Clark, “the Campbell government doesn’t want to run against Carole. They’d much rather run against (B.C. Federation of Labour president) Jim Sinclair and Glen Clark, and neither of them are on the ballot. It’s an interesting strategy. It’s like, ‘We can’t really poke a hole in her because in many ways she’s mainstream, so we’ll just attack her as Jim Sinclair and Glen Clark.’”

“I think some people would think that she might be too soft, but she’s not soft at all,” says Donna Michaels, now school superintendent for Brandon, Manitoba, who held the same position in Victoria when James was head of the B.C. School Trustees Association. “She’s kind, she’s compassionate, she’s fair, but she is also tremendously resilient and tremendously strong.”

IT’S A STRENGTH that James no doubt gets from the other “strong, stubborn women” in her family. Her grandmother, Edith Jones, was a nurse in North Battleford, Saskatchewan who moved the family to Victoria after getting

Carole Taylor: Is she the B.C. Liberals’ best weapon against Carole James’ appeal?

politics

caught in a blizzard and losing a leg to gangrene. Her mother, Mavis DeGirolamo, was a peace activist and special education teacher who gave birth to James at the age of 16—a pregnancy she hid from James' grandparents by heading home to England on the pretense of homesickness, and by wearing “baggier and baggier clothes” until the delivery. After she returned to the fold and James' sister Janice was born, Mavis became a single mother—a pattern repeated by her oldest daughter years later. James wed her high-school sweetheart at 21 and had two children. Alison, now 25, is in her last year of a political science degree at the University of Victoria, where her mother is a frequent topic of conversation. Evan, 23, is a cook and drummer in a rock band. James was divorced from her children's father five years ago.

Last year, she married Al Gerow, a former RCMP officer and Burns Lake First Nations band member she first met when both were working as school trustees. The pair reconnected when James was working as the director of family services for the Carrier-Sekani Tribal Council in Prince George. It was, according to James, one of the toughest and most rewarding gigs she'd ever had—and one that strongly drove her decision to seek the party leadership. Her job included tackling homelessness and teen suicide in a rural community where, according to James, 70 percent of children in care are aboriginal—and where, James says, she witnessed the direct impact of Liberal social service cuts on people already struggling to get by. She was encouraged in her political mission by native elders in the community and by her husband, who took her camping in remote Moose Lake, “so I could spend a couple of days just thinking and making sure I was making a clear decision.” Since meeting Gerow, James has learned to love the north. Every year the couple goes ice fishing at his ancestral hunting grounds. James recently found out that the father she never knew was part Métis.

She and Gerow now share a light-filled, book-lined townhouse in Victoria's James Bay neighbourhood—the same neighbourhood James and her children grew up in. Almost all of her family lives within a few blocks. Her sense of social activism began in this community, and at an early age. James grew up with—and then took on responsibility for—dozens of foster children, many of them with special needs. An urge to

contribute led to her involvement with her children's preschool, to sitting on the Victoria School Board and, eventually, to running (for three terms) the B.C. School Trustees Association.

The BCSTA is a politically driven organization if ever there was one, according to Vancouver-Kensington NDP candidate and former B.C. Teachers' Federation president David Chudnovsky. “The tasks she carried out were very political,” he says, “all about trying to build consensus, all about trying to move forward, at a time when there's all kinds of tension and all kinds of challenges.” (James' leadership of the BCSTA coincided with a Liberal government drive to halve the number of school districts in the province.) “Frankly, I don't think she has any lack of political experience; in fact she's got the opposite—a wealth of political experience.”

In 2001, James took a leave of absence from her job as provincial director of childcare to run as an NDP candidate in Victoria-Beacon Hill, but lost, and has never sat in the legislature. She doesn't see it as a negative. “There's no school to be premier, no school to be in the legislature,” she says. “I think you get that experience when you're in there. I think that what's important are the leadership skills that are needed for that kind of position. I think people are looking for a proven track record; someone who does what they say. It's not just words, it's not just messages that they're putting out there, but that they've actually lived that. I think it's very important to build that trust.”

HOW'S THE BUSINESS community responding to James' centrist moves?

Brar came from the small business ranks, as did Vancouver-Fairview candidate Gregor Robertson, founder of the Happy Planet juice company. Rick Doman was at James' nomination meeting, and more Keynesian-inclined business people, like former investment banker Paul Summerville, see her path as the economic way forward.

“Governments are supposed to deliver intelligent social policies that are measurable,” says Summerville. “Waiting times at hospitals and the number of kids that graduate—those are the pillars of a dynamic economy.”

But mostly, the corporate world has yet to be convinced. The presidents of both the Vancouver Board of Trade and the B.C. Business Council declined to comment, citing a desire to remain non-partisan. The president of

The Best for Last

2 Harbour Green has the final word in luxury waterfront living

AS THE SOLE remaining piece of north-facing waterfront in Vancouver, ASPAC Development's Harbour Green Place has generated understandable buzz. Located just above the Seawall promenade in Coal Harbour, the first of its three towers sold out within 10 weeks at prices upward of \$750 a square foot. The second 30-story tower, 2 Harbour Green, is set for pre-sale this spring, and every one of its 71 suites enjoys stunning, permanently unobstructed views. Floor-to-ceiling windows make the most of the scenery, but the premium luxury doesn't stop there.

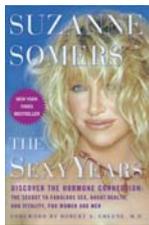
Whether two-story lofts or two-bedroom suites, the smallest unit available weighs in at 2,300 square feet. Three-bedroom suites are no less than 3,600 square feet. “Two Harbour Green was intended to deliver spacious luxury home living with the security and low-maintenance convenience of a condominium,” says ASPAC's Lance Brown. “To have that opportunity in such a gorgeous setting, close to one of the world's most livable urban centres, is very rare.”

Private, secured garages accompany all the units, along with the amenities of a five-star resort: 24/7 concierge service, full-size pool and gym. You can even play Augusta at the virtual golf centre.

This attention to detail marks 2 Harbour Green as Vancouver's most lavish and elite residence. “We're distinguished not only by being the last of the prime waterfront, but by being the first condominium in Canada to use Snidero handcrafted Italian cabinetry,” Lance explains. “Premium quality was our goal for all features.” Miele appliances, Lutron lighting and spa-appointed bathrooms make good on 2 Harbour Green's promise. It's a promise just waiting to be discovered. ■

Bioidentical Hormone Therapy

for Optimal Health



The Safe Alternative to Traditional HRTs

Aging is a natural process – but it doesn't have to include profuse sweating, insomnia, mood swings, weight gain and energy loss. Until recently, the only help for age-related body changes came in a synthetic form – a one-size fits all approach to hormone therapy that failed. More recently, Suzanne Somers has now brought bioidentical hormones onto the world stage.

Dr. Martin Braun, the Lower Mainland's leading medical cosmetic rejuvenation specialist, now brings to Vancouver Laser & Skin Care Centre, the natural way to balance changes associated with age with the **Bioidentical Lifestyles Program**. This is a program tailored to meet your body's unique needs – it's the way to optimize your health, safely and effectively, and counter the clock!

Book a consultation and discover for yourself why Bioidentical Hormones can succeed where traditional synthetic hormones fail.



vancouver
laser & skin care
centre inc.

309-750 West Broadway,
Vancouver, BC V5Z 1H2
Tel. 604.708.9891

www.vancouverlaser.com

politics

the B.C. Chamber of Commerce, meanwhile, called on the business community's support via email, asking them to participate in an advertising campaign crediting Gordon Campbell and the Liberals for turning the provincial economy around. The leaders of both high-tech and biotech companies have used the daily press to utter warnings about the risks of supporting the NDP, claiming that if the party were returned to power, investment in B.C. would vanish. At an NDP nomination meeting the day one of these reports is published, a party member who works for one of the high-tech companies tells James' aides that she received a company-wide email asking employees not to vote for the NDP.

"There's absolutely no question," says Corky Evans, "that there is extreme unease on the part of some individuals in the business community about the impact of a return to an NDP government on the investment climate in this province... There is naturally a worry in some quarters that the opposition's policies are going to be the same disastrous ones that they implemented when they were last in government. All of the most sincere statements aside... I think there's going to be some skepticism."

"The B.C. Business Council will never endorse Carole James," says Paul Ramsey. "Well, fine. Carole has been out talking to all the chambers of commerce, and sure there's been some negative reaction. But she's willing to do it, and say, 'We need you.' How many labour unions has Gordon Campbell addressed?" To Bill Tieleman, former communications director for Glen Clark and now a political commentator for the *Georgia Straight* and CBC Radio, it's the social issues the party should focus on.

"This isn't exactly like we've got a three-goal lead in a hockey game," he says. "It's a real challenge. In my view, you should take more chances, pull the goalie and have some fun—because the odds are against you. We're not going to win if we just play it safe."

JAMES STILL BELIEVES in Gary Doer's message: that it is possible to level the playing field and meet the needs of all stakeholders. Her friends say her ability to act as a conciliator—and to keep her word—could lead to her one day becoming B.C.'s first elected female premier. Right now, she represents the party's best hope.

"Way back in 1992, she and I were talking about something over coffee one day," says Donna Michaels, "and I was joking that I knew she was thinking of running for something in the NDP. I said, 'You know, Carole, one day you're going to be premier of this province.' 'Oh,' she said, 'Donna, you're just dreaming,' and I said, 'No, I feel it, I believe it.' I think that more provincial governments and federal governments need the balancing influence of women, and I believe her time has come."

It's unlikely that time has come just yet. "You're still up against a historical trend," says the *Sun's* Vaughn Palmer. "In general, Canadians tend to give a government a second chance, even if they don't like some of what it did. James would like to get everybody thinking, 'You move forward to what I'm offering,' but there's going to be a struggle around that."

Whatever the struggle, Carole James is sure to keep chipping away at the issues she believes in passionately—the issues that have driven four generations of strong, stubborn women. Besides, her first wedding anniversary falls on May 22—just five days after the election. "Either way," says her husband, Al, "we'll have something to celebrate." ●