

With television cameras rolling

Police raid home of British Columbia premier

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On the evening of March 2 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police carried out a raid on the home of British Columbia Premier Glen Clark. This extraordinary event raises troubling questions about the possible collusion of the RCMP and the Attorney-General's Department in the right-wing campaign to unseat Clark's New Democratic Party government.

How did a reporting crew from BC's largest television station, the notoriously right-wing BCTV, come to be outside the premier's Vancouver home, cameras ready, when three officers from the RCMP's commercial-crime section arrived to execute a search warrant?

If Clark himself is not the target of a police investigation, as an RCMP spokesman has asserted, why was it necessary for the police to obtain a warrant and raid his home? Do the police, top officials in the Attorney-General's Department, and the judge who granted them sanction to search Clark's home contend that the premier would not have cooperated with the criminal investigation into the activities of his neighbor, Dimitrios Pilarinos, and suppressed or destroyed evidence? Or was the RCMP raid a means of tarnishing Clark, for whose political blood the capitalist media has been braying for months, as a criminal, and possibly fishing for something that could be hung on him in the future?

At a press conference Thursday, Clark's lawyer, David Gibbons, said the police and press actions smacked of McCarthyism. Said Gibbons, "I am appalled at the way the premier and his family have been treated, and at the way they have been portrayed in the media." Gibbons vigorously denied any suggestion that Clark may have contravened conflict-of-interest rules and assisted Pilarinos, who was arrested Tuesday for running an illegal gambling operation, in obtaining a license to run a legitimate charity casino.

Gibbons insisted the premier's only connections to Pilarinos are that they are neighbors whose children sometimes play together and that Pilarinos, who is a building contractor, did some renovations to the Clark family home.

Speaking in Parliament Wednesday, NDP MP Svend Robinson denounced BCTV's broadcast of lengthy extracts of the videotape its crew made of the two-hour police raid. Not content with capturing images of the RCMP arriving at Clark's east Vancouver home and demanding and gaining entry into the premises, the BCTV crew trained its camera through the windows of the Clark home so as to record police officers searching through drawers and cupboards and looking at papers, the premier and his wife answering police questions, and a visibly angered Clark pacing the floor of his kitchen. "There is only one way [BCTV] could have found out" about the police raid charged Robinson. "And that's a leak, a tip-off by the RCMP."

Socialists have no brief for Glen Clark. First as a senior minister and then as premier, he has been a key figure in a right-wing social democratic government that has slashed social and public services, closed hospitals, and threatened to deprive welfare benefits to jobless persons who have come to BC from elsewhere in Canada.

But even if one were to draw the worst inferences from the information currently in the public domain and accept that Clark's ties to Pilarinos are not entirely innocent--something, and this bears repeating, not even the police have alleged--the events of this past week have been extraordinary. Moreover, they must be seen in the context of a longstanding and increasingly frenzied campaign on the part of big business to unseat BC's NDP government.

Because of the public outcry, the RCMP have had to

announce an internal investigation into how the BCTV crew learned of the impending raid on Clark's home. Those familiar with the workings of the criminal justice system observe that the police, having seen a television crew was present, could easily have chosen to delay the raid. Instead, the RCMP officers appear to have relished the fact that their actions were being videotaped. The videotape shows that when Clark's wife opened the door, an RCMP officer bellowed "There's three from the RCMP and two media behind us."

Canada's most influential newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*, has virtually charged the police of setting up Clark. Friday's issue says a "former highly placed RCMP official" told the paper "he has little doubt that some sort of political agenda was at work, based on the media's presence" during the raid. The *Globe* then cites its source as saying, "This is not a normal situation. The point was to discredit someone before they had their day in court. And it worked." In a second *Globe* article, a source, apparently the same top RCMP official, declares, "This is not just anyone. This is the Premier of the province, and they've connected him with strip club operators and gamblers. If you want to convict someone without a trial, this is how you do it."

The Clark government has been subjected to a non-stop barrage of scathing media and business criticism since it narrowly won reelection in May 1996, capturing a majority of the seats in the BC legislature but trailing the Liberals in the popular vote. This campaign--which aims to bring to power an extreme-right government modeled after the Tory regimes in Ontario and Alberta, and committed to drastically slashing social and public services and gutting workplace and environmental regulations--has grown ever fiercer in the past year as BC's economy has been rocked by the fallout of the East Asian economic crisis.

Last month the Concerned Citizens of B.C. announced a "Total Recall Campaign" aimed at gathering petitions to recall a sufficient number of NDP MLAs to force a new election. The Concerned Citizens claims to be a grassroots organization, but enjoys lavish attention from the media and undoubtedly hefty financial support from big business. BC's principal business organizations themselves hosted a summit last fall to sponsor a united campaign behind the Liberals to unseat the NDP and to pressure the Clark government

still further right.

The social democratic NDP's response to this unrelenting pressure has been to cede, and adapt, to it. Finance Minister Joy McPhail recently said she will cut the budgets for all departments, except Health and Education, in the province's coming budget. At the conclusion of a recent meeting with Reform Party leader Preston Manning, Clark said he could do business with the leader of Canada's most right-wing party and that the historic divisions between left and right have been rendered meaningless.



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