

Politics

By Jim-Beau Lieyeah

Feb. 13th- Invariably life whips one in never ending circles. The harder one goes, the more dizzying the speed. Eventually enough, momentum is generated to get the sense that you have no more power over your life than a hammock caught in a hurricane.

But, like Hurricane Carter, there are times when we sink to the depths of an abyss and see the very eye of the monster. It is rarely pretty there usually occupied by small things that have made its way to the bottom. Eventually, they will get shit out to a life after utility.

And this reminds me of government in general, especially the types that try to bribe their population in their dying days of its life. Once upon a time, the ruling party gave the population a simple choice: elect their member and you will get electricity; or a paved road; or a bridge; or a sewage line. But that was then and the offer usually had some benefit to the collective population. The nature of this has changed over time, but the principal of blackmail still prevails. Now governments are targeting the individual.

It is this corrupt theme that I want to stamp my opinion on.

BC

Let's start on the west coast. The NDP has governed over the province for the better of the 90s. Glen Clark replaced a tired and corrupt Social Credit Party (Socreds), who were led by an interesting character named Bill Vander Zalm. Now the Zammer has an interesting part in the colourful history of BC provincial politics. He left in disgrace after selling a theme park (Fantasy Garden, which his wife, head ban Lillian owned on paper)

which he built on land that was originally zoned agricultural. Normally, this would be a difficult task. But as mayor, Zalm built first and rezoned later.

The real disgrace appeared in the way that he sold the park. The story goes that he received a brown bag full of unmarked American dollars from the Asian purchaser. Zalm tried to blow it off, but the stink was so bad that even his hardcore support in the Okanagan melted away.

Out of all this, BCers surprised a lot of people by swinging from the far right (where the Socreds would have sat on the political spectrum) and giving the keys to the store to the left of centre NDP. They pretty much took an efficiently-run government and civil service and ran it into the ground as well as debt (some historians might be reminded of the previous NDP government from 1972-75 who pretty much followed the same pattern). Or so it would seem.

Here lies the beauty of the accounting profession. That is that you can make the numbers look any way you want with some creative practices. And they used this discretionary power during, the, surprise-surprise-surprise (thank you Gomer Pyle), 1996 provincial general election. Frankly, they lied to the population about the deficit which bought it lock stock and two smoking barrels. I guess Hitler had something with the idea, the bigger the lie, the more its believable.

Since then, a separate audit turned a balance budget into a billion-dollar oops. Or should I say deficit? The premier has left in disgrace over handing out lucrative lottery licenses. The NDP, to its credit, has elected the first ever premier with Far Eastern origins (born



in India). But that has not prevented him from his newest blackmail scheme.

Basically, the state of California has deregulated its electricity from the public trust to the private sector. It was thought that the private sector would drive the price of electricity down for consumers. But supply and demand operate on their own rules as they search for that happy middle ground known as equilibrium. The price has risen gradually, but not as much as would have been expected. This was because the private sector did not want to deal with an irate consumer. Hence, the supply available has been reduced. This has led to rotating blackouts in response to the lack of supply. It has also meant that these providers have looked elsewhere for power. It should be pointed out that these suppliers are slowly going bankrupt for selling

power at a much lower price than it costs to produce, especially when the high start-up costs are factored in instead of having a government absorb them on their ledgers. So who picks up the slack? Hello provincially-owned BC Hydro.

This has created a \$2 billion windfall on paper. Premier Ujjai Dosanjh has decided to give about \$404 million of this out (rather than reduce the deficit or overall debt of BC). But Robin Hood has his own motive. He must call an election before June 28 (the last day of his five-year term). His party has slumped to single-digit support and things look dark indeed. He is hoping that firing out three-digit checks to help cover the cost of rising energy prices that all Canadians have been facing of late might lead support to rise back to two-digit levels and might even buy them back another term. They had better