

Bill Vander Zalm

William Nicholas "Bill" Vander Zalm (born May 29, 1934) is a politician and entrepreneur in British Columbia, Canada. He was the 28th Premier of British Columbia from 1986 to 1991.

Contents

- Early life
- Early political career
- Social Credit MLA
- Provincial Premier
- 1999 Delta South byelection
- Successful Fight HST Campaign
- 2012 Defamation suit
- Conspiracy theories
- References
- Further reading
- External links

Early life

Vander Zalm was born **Wilhelmus Nicholaas Theodore Marie Van der Zalm** and raised in Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands.^[1] He emigrated to Canada after World War II, settling in the Fraser Valley in 1947. After completing high school, he sold tulip bulbs and ultimately established himself in the nursery and gardening business.

Early political career

Bill Vander Zalm
28th Premier of British Columbia
 In office
August 6, 1986 – April 2, 1991
Monarch Elizabeth II
Lieutenant Governor Robert G. Rogers David Lam
Preceded by Bill Bennett
Succeeded by Rita Johnston
29th Mayor of Surrey
 In office
1969 – December 11, 1975
Preceded by W.E. Stagg
Succeeded by Ed McKitka
Member of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly for Richmond
 In office
October 22, 1986 – October 17, 1991
 Serving with Nick Loenen
Preceded by James Arthur Nielsen
Succeeded by <i>Riding Abolished</i>
Member of the

Vander Zalm was elected an alderman of Surrey in 1965, and served as the city's mayor from 1969 to 1975. His tenure was marked by his crackdown on welfare "deadbeats" (up to the early 1970s, welfare in BC was a municipal responsibility).

Vander Zalm was originally a supporter of both the Liberal Party of Canada and the BC Liberal Party. He sought election to the Canadian House of Commons in the 1968 federal election as a Liberal in Surrey. He lost by 5,000 votes. He was also a candidate at the 1972 provincial Liberal leadership convention, where he lost to David Anderson. He joined the BC Social Credit Party in 1974.

Social Credit MLA

He was first elected to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia in the 1975 election for the riding of Surrey (he would later represent Richmond after the 1986 election), in which Social Credit won back power after a three-year hiatus.

He served in the cabinet of Premier Bill Bennett as Minister of Human Resources from 1975 to 1978, where he continued his crusade against welfare fraud. After the swearing in ceremony, the media asked him to comment on what the public could expect regarding welfare people, to which he replied "If people are truly in need, they can expect and will be treated fairly and compassionately. If people are elderly we will treat them with respect and when in need reward them for their lifelong contributions. If people are handicapped they will be treated generously, hopefully even more so than in the past. But if someone is able to work and refuses to do so, they had best pick up a shovel or I'll give them a shovel." He became widely known overnight when the media reported his off-the-cuff remark with headlines "Vander Zalm Says Give Them a Shovel".

On June 22, 1978, the *Victoria Daily Times* published a political cartoon by Bob Bierman that portrayed the then-Minister of Human Resources as a grinning sadist deliberately snapping the wings off helpless flies. Vander Zalm launched legal action for libel, *Vander Zalm v. Times Publishers*. Justice Craig Munroe of the B.C. Supreme Court awarded Vander Zalm \$3,500 in damages. The decision was overturned by the BC Court of Appeal in 1980, a decision praised by journalists as a victory for free speech. The original cartoon was purchased by the National Archives of Canada for \$350.^{[2][3]}

He also served as Minister of Municipal Affairs & Transit from 1978 to 1981 and as Minister of Education from 1981 to 1983.

Vander Zalm greatly overstepped his authority when as Minister of Education he personally intervened in a local matter in Smithers by publicly demanding the local school board suspend without pay a school counsellor, Madeleine Sauve, over a Human Resources Ministry-produced questionnaire that she distributed to students. Under public pressure due largely to Vander Zalm's comments, Sauve lost her job. An inquiry commission into Sauve's firing found that she lost her job

British Columbia Legislative Assembly for Surrey	
In office	
December 11, 1975 – May 5, 1983	
Serving with Ernest Hall	
Preceded by	Ernest Hall
Succeeded by	Rita Johnston William Earl Reid
Personal details	
Born	Wilhelmus Nicholaas Theodore Marie van der Zalm May 29, 1934 Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands
Political party	Social Credit Party
Spouse(s)	Lillian Vander Zalm

due to Vander Zalm's comments that "publicly tried, convicted and sentenced a teacher without the slightest hint of due process." Furthermore, the inquiry commission found that the counsellor was an 'innocent victim' and strongly recommended that the school district find Madeleine Sauve another position in the district. After it was over Vander Zalm said that if the same situation came up again, he would do exactly the same thing.^[4]

In 1984, he bought Fantasy Garden World, a theme park. The same year he ran unsuccessfully for mayor of Vancouver, as the candidate for the Non-Partisan Association. He lost to Mike Harcourt, who was later the provincial NDP leader during most of Vander Zalm's tenure as premier.

Provincial Premier

In 1986, Premier Bennett announced he was retiring. Vander Zalm attracted considerable attention as he considered whether he would run for the leadership of the Social Credit Party. He generated more press out of the race than the other candidates did in it. At the party's convention in Whistler, British Columbia, he prevailed over 11 other candidates by winning on the fourth ballot.

He was sworn in as premier just a month before the 1986 election. During the subsequent provincial election campaign, "Vandermania" swept BC, and the Socreds easily won another term over the opposition New Democratic Party (NDP). Bill and his wife, Lillian, attracted public adoration with their high-voltage smiles, positivity and charisma.

Vander Zalm promised a "fresh start" after the confrontational Bennett years. However, he and his government had no public plan for what they intended to do in the long term.

Once elected in his own right, Vander Zalm filled most of the cabinet slots with MLAs who had languished on the backbench under Bill Bennett. Oddly, Vander Zalm decided to release the normally secret list of cabinet appointments to two Vancouver Sun reporters hours before the official announcement was to be made.

The Social Credit Party had been a tenuous alliance between urban fiscal conservatives, federal Liberals and Christian conservatives in the province's Bible Belt. Fiscal conservatives had dominated the party for over a decade. However, Vander Zalm was a member of the social conservative wing, and under him social conservatives took control of the party. His government once tried to cut public funding for abortions that were not medically necessary. The resulting uproar forced Vander Zalm to drop the program. His government also had a confrontational relationship with labour unions. More moderate Socreds began drifting to the provincial Liberals, a trend that would come back to haunt the party later.

As well, he appointed David Poole, a close friend, to be his "Principal Secretary". Before resigning in 1989, Poole had allegedly become the second most powerful person in the province despite never having been elected. This naturally attracted the anger of numerous cabinet ministers, such as Grace McCarthy, an influential Sacred MLA who resigned in protest from Vander Zalm's cabinet in 1988.

Vander Zalm became embroiled in a conflict of interest controversy over the sale of his Fantasy Gardens flower garden and theme park. The conflict of interest arose because the Taiwanese buyer, Tan Yu, was provided VIP treatment and lunch with the Lieutenant-Governor prior to the sale. Vander Zalm claimed that control over the theme park was his wife's responsibility. Adding fuel to the fire, Faye Leung, a colourful Chinese-Canadian entrepreneur and the woman who

brokered the deal, thought that Vander Zalm was a "bad man" since the day she first met him and secretly recorded conversations she had with him, and was happily willing to speak to the media and provide copies of her audio tapes.

Vander Zalm resigned as premier in disgrace in 1991 when a provincial conflict of interest report by Ted Hughes found he had mixed private business with his public office in the sale of the gardens. He was charged with criminal breach of trust, but found not guilty in B.C. Supreme Court in 1992. The judge ruled that Vander Zalm had acted a manner that was 'foolish, ill-advised and in apparent or real conflict of interest or breach of ethics'. The judge however found that the prosecution had not proved their case beyond a reasonable doubt. It was revealed that during the sale of Fantasy Gardens, Premier Vander Zalm had accepted \$20,000 payment in cash from Tan Yu (buyer of Fantasy Gardens) to which Vander Zalm said he took 'for innocent reasons'. Vander Zalm never really did explain why he took the money, nor did he take the stand in his breach of trust trial.^{[5][6][7]}

Vander Zalm was succeeded as premier by Deputy Premier Rita Johnston, who defeated McCarthy in the race to replace him as Socred leader. Unfortunately for the Socreds, Johnston had little time to recover from the damage caused by the scandal, as she faced a statutory general election in October. It did not help that Johnston had long been identified politically with Vander Zalm, and was thus unable to separate herself from her now-detested predecessor. Additionally, a number of moderate Socred supporters deserted the party in favour of the Liberals, allowing them to vault from no seats in the legislature to Official Opposition. Combined with the antipathy toward Vander Zalm, Social Credit was knocked down to third place in the legislature with only seven seats, behind the NDP and Liberals. As it turned out, these would be the last seats the provincial Socreds would ever win. In subsequent elections the Socreds were completely shut out, and now only exists in nominal fashion, having been briefly deregistered from 2013 to 2016 after years of running an ever-dwindling number of candidates.

1999 Delta South byelection

After many years out of the spotlight, Vander Zalm again took a stab at office by running in Delta South in a by-election in 1999 for the Reform Party of British Columbia. This by-election was notable for many reasons, including the incredibly low support the governing NDP received (coming in fourth), and marking the absolute low point for the NDP's electoral support. NDP candidate Richard Tones received just 2.44% of the vote. Tones finished behind Green Party candidate, Rob LaBelle, who was the first Green candidate to finish ahead of the NDP in the province's history. Vander Zalm finished second with 32.91% of the vote to Liberal Val Roddick who received 59.63%. Vander Zalm retired from politics and now resides in Ladner.

Successful Fight HST Campaign

Vander Zalm returned to the political spotlight in 2009 alongside Bill Tieleman as a recurring critic of the provincial government's conversion of the Provincial Sales Tax to the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST). A series of populist rallies led to him becoming the official proponent, in accordance with the *Recall and Initiative Act*, of a petition seeking a referendum to cancel the HST. Vander Zalm established a website, FightHST, to promote the initiative.^[8] The provincial Liberal government countered Vander Zalm's campaign and devoted a section of their website to the positive aspects of the HST.^[9]

For the petition to be certified, there was a requirement to secure the signatures of a minimum of 10% of all registered voters on the provincial voters list in each riding in the province, no later than June 30, 2010.^[10]

On June 30, 2010, Vander Zalm delivered 85 boxes containing 705,643 signatures from voters in every riding across the province. Those signatures represented some 45% of votes cast in the 2009 provincial election.^[11]

On August 11, 2010, Elections BC verified the official anti-HST petition submitted by the province's Fight HST campaign.^[12]

Vander Zalm said he was pleased with the result, but "very disappointed" to learn the province's chief electoral officer would not act on the petition until all court proceedings involving the tax were complete. The anti-HST campaign turned its attention to a recall campaign for Liberal MLAs. Vander Zalm told reporters. "We will recall every Liberal MLA in the province, if that's what it takes." However, the initial attempts at recalls were unsuccessful.^[13]

On August 20, 2010, Chief Justice Robert J. Bauman ruled that the petition was valid. Bauman said Elections BC was correct when it approved the petition on August 11.^[14]

On September 14, 2010, it was announced a referendum would be held September 24, 2011 on repealing the HST. Premier Gordon Campbell stated a simple majority (50%+1) of those eligible and casting ballots would be sufficient for the government to cancel the HST if the referendum went against the government.^[15]

Elections BC conducted the referendum via mail-in ballot. The British Columbia sales tax referendum, 2011 was conducted throughout June and July 2011.

The Question on the ballot was: *Are you in favour of extinguishing the HST (Harmonized Sales Tax) and reinstating the PST (Provincial Sales Tax) in conjunction with the GST (Goods and Services Tax)? Yes or No*^[16]

On August 26, 2011, Elections BC revealed the results of the referendum: 55% of 1.6 million voters in favour of abolishing the HST. The BC Liberals revealed a plan to re-instate the GST/PST system within 18 months, with a target date of March 31, 2013.^[17]

2012 Defamation suit

In 2012, a B.C. Supreme Court judge and jury heard a defamation lawsuit lodged against Vander Zalm by retired conflict-of-interest commissioner Ted Hughes. The former judge and Officer of the Order of Canada alleged that he was defamed in Vander Zalm's 2008 self-published autobiography *For The People*. The book suggested that Hughes, then in an interim appointment, may have conducted an unfair inquiry of Vander Zalm in 1991 due to the prospect of achieving a permanent employment.^[18]

Vander Zalm defended the statements about Hughes, saying they were fair comments, not facts, and that they were made as a matter of public interest.^[19]

On Feb. 9, 2012 Vander Zalm was found guilty of defaming Hughes and was ordered to pay him \$60,000 in damages. The amount could be higher once the court determines how much of Hughes' legal cost the former premier will have to pay.^[20]

Conspiracy theories

In 2013, Vander Zalm filed a freedom of information request for government disclosure on chemtrails.^[21] The former premier further appeared in an online video by *Press for Truth* elaborating on his belief in the conspiracy theory, stating "we don't know who's doing it, we don't know what it is they're putting into the sky, we think it's aluminium, barium, and strontium, but we don't know for sure. No one talks. Governments don't tell us and they *have to know*. They can't do that in the sky above us without the provincial and the federal government being aware."^[22] Vander Zalm has furthermore expressed concerns over smart meters, stating that he believes they are intended as a secret means for governments to spy on people.^[23]

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Further reading

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External links

- CBC Archival footage of "Vander Zalm's Kingdom" from "The Journal" (http://archives.cbc.ca/IDCC-1-73-1637-11317/politics_economy/british_columbia_elections/)
- David Ingram interviews Bill Vander Zalm about his past including during World War II (<https://web.archive.org/web/20090608090619/http://david-ingram.com/article.php/BillVanderZalm2009>)

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