

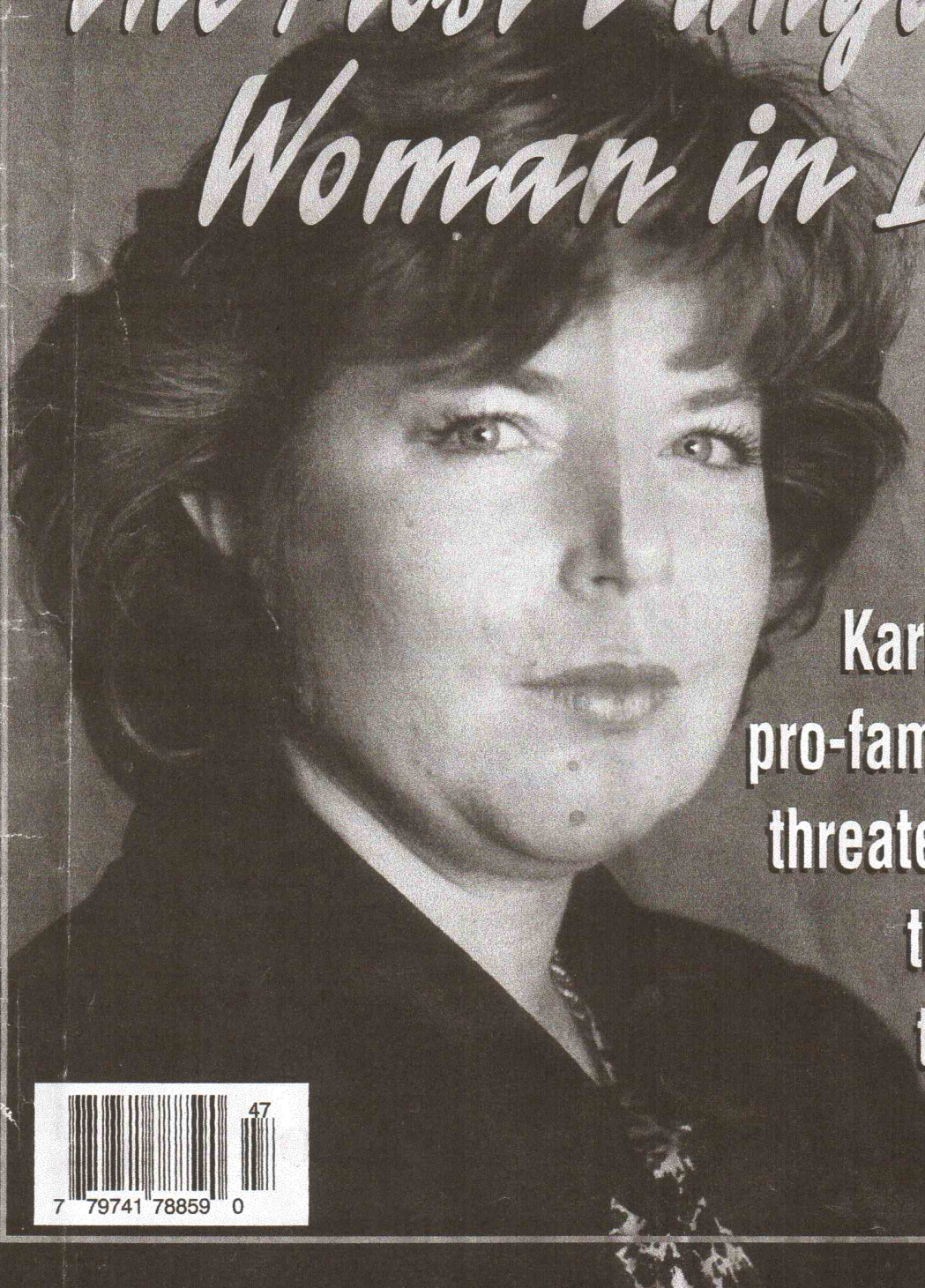
# BRITISH COLUMBIA **REPORT**

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## *The Most Dangerous Woman in B.C.*



**Kari Simpson's  
pro-family crusade  
threatens not only  
the NDP, but  
the Liberals**





# On the march for B.C. families

*Kari Simpson leads social conservatives in a growing counter-attack on the state*

It is a rainy evening on November 6 in Nanaimo, and 11 uniformed RCMP officers are patrolling the grounds of Beban Park Recreation Centre. Additional security guards are on duty inside, where 800 central Vancouver Island residents fill an auditorium to listen to a speaker who has addressed six similar rallies across B.C. in recent months. Camera flashes illuminate the speaker as she concludes her two-hour address to a thunderous standing ovation.

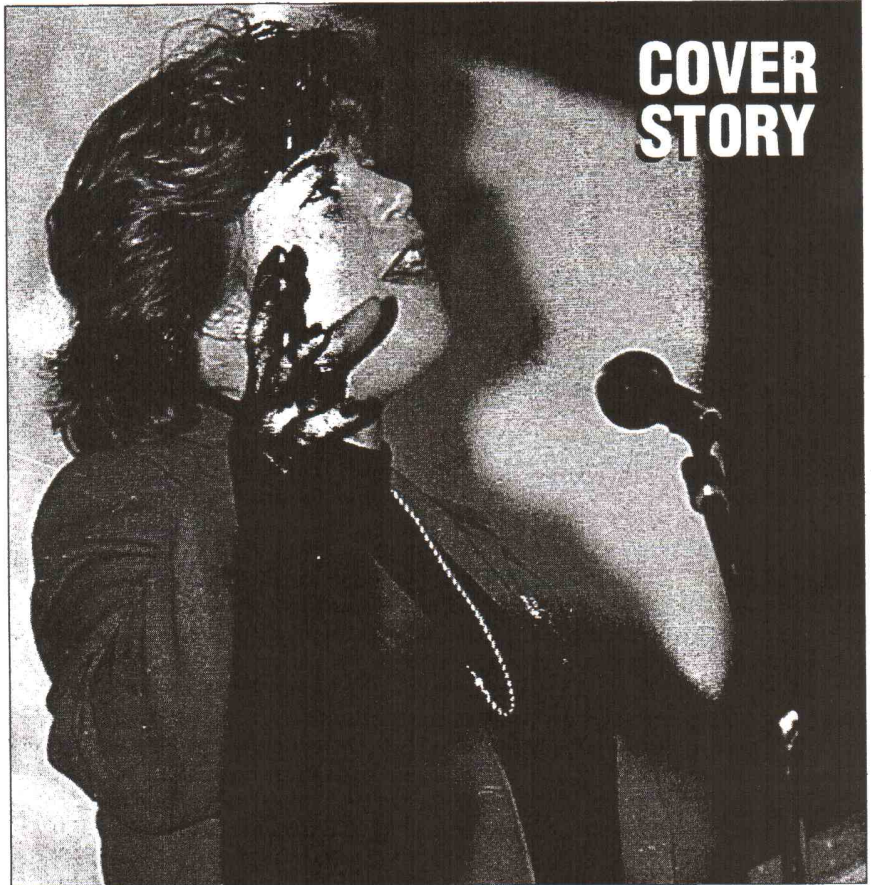
Observers might assume that a political leader was at the podium. The truth is, however, that a politician would be lucky to attract such a crowd. Indeed, when only 30 people attended a Reform Party of B.C. leadership forum in Terrace in July, organizers cut proceedings short to join the 700 who had gathered across town to hear the speaker in question.

That woman was a Langley homemaker and mother of four, Kari Simpson. She may not be a politician—some say her support is growing precisely because she represents a pro-family constituency that has no political home—but Mrs. Simpson wields much influence through the network she has built up in the nine years since she co-founded the Citizens Research Institute (CRI) to support parents whose children had been wrongfully seized by government social workers.

Examples of her influence are the campaigns to unseat NDP MLA Helmut Giesbrecht in Skeena and Education Minister Paul Ramsey in Prince George North. Both recall attempts were given a major boost at rallies organized by Simpson supporters. Her efforts earned her public vilification by Mr. Ramsey and NDP supporters, who have labelled her “homophobic,” “dangerous” and a “troublemaker.”

But Mrs. Simpson remains untroubled and unswayed. Since its inception, CRI has broadened its work to include reform of public school curriculum, election regulations and even divorce laws. Earlier this year, the CRI helped reveal an Internet connection between the government’s youth website and a pornographic homosexual website. More recently, it campaigned against the soft sentence handed to Burnaby school principal William Bennest, convicted of possession of child pornography.

Significantly, the CRI’s 60,000 supporters are angry not just with the NDP, but are frustrated by the B.C. Liberal Party’s reluctance to fight such government initiatives as expanded powers for social workers to



Activist Simpson: 'When we go into battle, we win.'

seize children, recognition of homosexual marriages, and proposed curriculum that would force public schools to advocate non-traditional family structures.

Some of Mrs. Simpson’s sympathizers, however, fear that her work is playing into the hands of the NDP by diverting energy from political parties where it might have more tangible effect. By rallying behind a non-elected figure, they say, Mrs. Simpson’s supporters run the risk of giving up on the political process entirely, or aggrandizing her rather than furthering the issues for which she stands. Some would prefer Mrs. Simpson join the Liberals and reform it from within, or throw her support behind one of the third parties more sympathetic to moral traditionalists.

For her part, Mrs. Simpson would like nothing more than for political leaders to emerge with a genuine respect for parental rights, and thus make her job unnecessary.

Born in the U.S. to Canadian parents and raised in Los Angeles, she returned to Vancouver Island as a teenager and earned her commercial pilot’s licence when she was only 18. She flew charter flights for hotels and tour companies before giving birth to her first child. Ironically enough for one of the province’s leading family-values advocates, Mrs. Simpson is now raising her four children, aged 10 to 17, by herself; her husband left their marriage five years ago. Famous in many circles for the speed for which she can spread news of her latest project, she nevertheless falls silent when asked her age, saying only that she is under 40.

There is no keeping her quiet when it comes to the CRI, however. The organization’s primary objective is to be a resource for individuals to participate in the democratic process, she says. It is essential to understand, Mrs. Simpson emphasizes, that the historical ideological divisions have become irrelevant.



The old politics of left versus right no longer exists. The new division is between those who support the state and those who support the family. That means the CRI is more effective on the sidelines, lobbying for change among all parties. "We're enablers," she says. However, she adds that, "When we go into battle, we win."

While some question Mrs. Simpson's analysis, noting that issues of state versus family still tend to divide politicians according to left and right, her support is undeniably growing. And it is being driven by a broad coalition of community groups.

Her growing influence has not gone unopposed. In April, one month after the B.C. Teachers' Federation passed a resolution to eliminate "heterosexism" in state schools, 450 people turned out to hear Mrs. Simpson in Fort St. John. In May, after the Prince George Ministerial Association invited her to speak, more than 600 attended. Mr. Ramsey, who had refused to attend the rally, instead participated in a much smaller vigil outside.

Real estate agent Alfredo Lavaggi, now organizing the recall campaign against Mr. Ramsey, was one of those inside. Mr. Lavaggi had already begun recall efforts because of widespread dissatisfaction with Mr. Ramsey on a variety of issues, not just homosexual curriculum. Nevertheless, he reports that 110 volunteers signed up to join him after Mrs. Simpson's speech, and says the May rally was undeniably a major boost to the campaign.

The opposition turned ugly in June at Vancouver's Robson Square. After the B.C. Coalition for the Protection of Parental Rights invited Mrs. Simpson to speak about the BCTF's heterosexism resolution, homosexual activists organized a counter-protest. Supporting them were the International Socialists, the BCTF, the Gay and Lesbian Educators of B.C. and Heterosexuals Exposing Paranoia, the same groups involved in a pending court challenge against the Surrey school board (see story, page 15).

More than 200 protesters overran the proceedings, heckling and kicking parents in attendance and, in one case, dumping soil on a participant. They also chanted "10% is not enough. Recruit, recruit, recruit," in reference to the homosexual proportion of the population. (The latest scientific studies put the figure at 3%.)

Pro-homosexual activists repeated the tactics at a rally in Victoria two weeks later. Mrs. Simpson was again prevented from speaking when 150 demonstrators threatened to swarm the podium. RCMP were forced to

escort her to a car and drive her away to prevent a riot from erupting.

At this month's Nanaimo rally, organizers decided not to risk another protest. The Mid-Island Pro-Family Action Committee, together with the Victoria-based Parents for Healthy Children (PFHC), limited publicity and informed police of possible controversy. Nanaimo City Council responded by



Organizer Podetz: Fighting an anti-family NDP.

slapping the groups with a \$6,000 fee to pay for extra policing (later reduced to \$3,000).

Mayor Gary Korpan, who opposed the fee reduction, insists he is not discriminating against Christian groups, and that any organizer of an event that requires extra policing, such as a rock concert, must likewise pay up. He then makes a curious comparison. "If the KKK or Hells Angels would've wanted to rent that facility for a legal purpose, we would have no choice but to rent it," he says. But Vicky Podetz, a rally organizer, counters that in the case of rock concerts, it is the patrons who are the cause of disruptions, not outsiders.

The fact that 800 concerned parents attended, and donated more than enough money to pay for the policing, shows that supporters are not about to retreat in the face of resistance, says Mrs. Podetz. A Nanaimo school trustee who ran for the Family Coalition Party in the last election,

Mrs. Podetz says Nanaimo is a conservative community whose values are reflected in the school district's curriculum and resources. But parents are concerned by the anti-family policies the NDP is trying to impose on them. "I believe Kari has a message that needs

to be heard here," she says.

Although detractors have tried to pigeon-hole Mrs. Simpson as "anti-gay," those at her Nanaimo speech were concerned with a range of issues. Jannette Vandervalk, a Qualicum director of PFHC, became active in education issues as a member of her children's school's Parents Advisory Council two years ago, when the government brought in its Career and Personal Planning curriculum. In particular, she was alarmed by the advocacy of "outercourse," including oral sex and mutual masturbation, as an alternative to sexual intercourse.

Mrs. Vandervalk is also worried that the NDP is introducing values-laden moral education under the guise of health and anti-discrimination curricula. In particular, the province's vaguely defined outcomes-based curriculum can be seen by teachers as licence to teach whatever they wish. "It's like trying to pin Jell-O to a wall," she says.

Other participants see the education battle as merely the front of the NDP's war on tradition. Nanaimo parent Susan McLean is concerned by the government's expansion of casino gaming. A proposal currently before the B.C. Gaming Commission aims to bring 300 slot machines to the Nanaimo mall where Mrs. McLean's community church, Southside Christian Fellowship, currently meets. The congregation regularly sponsors food

bank drives and soup kitchens for the poor, many of whom are gambling addicts, and now faces eviction if the casino licence is approved. "The government isn't listening," she says.

The problem for voters such as Mrs. McLean, however, is how to translate their frustration into political change. This predicament is highlighted by the recall campaigns in Prince George and Skeena, where organizers buoyed by grow-

ing support now wonder if the opposition will be any more fit to govern than the NDP. Mr. Lavaggi concedes that the Liberals have failed to woo social conservatives because they have passively accepted many of the very policies that spawned recall. In



Robson Square protest: Accusations of homophobia.



particular, the Liberals have made no commitment to curb the Ministry of Children and Families, nor are they committed to scrapping the BCTF's proposed curriculum changes. Most Liberals voted in a free vote in favour of Bills 31 and 32, the legislation extending spousal recognition to homosexual couples.

Kathleen Toth, leader of the Family Coalition Party (FCP), says that until voters are willing to channel their frustration into support for parties that share their values, the political vacuum will persist. She lauds the CRI's work, and has asked Mrs. Simpson to join her party, but Mrs. Simpson insists, however, she remains a more effective voice on the outside. The problem is that Mrs. Simpson's sympathizers feel the same way, says Mrs. Toth. Many have told her they like FCP policies, but are not willing to waste their votes.

The FCP would happily disband tomorrow if another party endorsed its commitments to family and to the principle that life begins at conception, says Mrs. Toth. "I wish the people trying to unite the right would endorse these policies," she says. "They're afraid to, but if they did, they would be mightily surprised."

Trinity Western University political scientist John Redekop agrees that the Liberals ignore social conservatives at their peril. He says that B.C. politics is dominated by a bi-polar ideological rift, and parties that gain power are those that are able to occupy the centre, while also retaining their left- or right-wing flank. If a party alienates the centre, as Social Credit did under Bill Vander Zalm, or abandons its core, as the CCF did with trade unionists during the 1940s, it will fail.

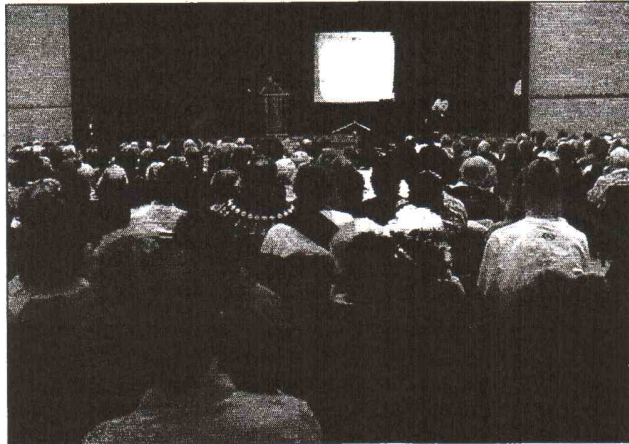
Still, Liberal alienation of the pro-family right has occurred, in part, because social conservatives have not exerted a stronger presence within the party, says Prof. Redekop. His concern is that, by focusing support on a person outside the political process, the CRI is fuelling the very political alienation that spawned it. "It is healthier for the body politic if these large blocks of opposition are channelled through the Legislature, instead of outside it," he says.

Liberal Rich Coleman agrees. "I think people have to recognize that they can't work on any organization from the outside," says the Fort Langley-Aldergrove MLA. "If they want to impact policy they have to be on the inside. I think there is a home for social conservatives in the Liberals."

"Yes, I've heard it all before," responds Mrs. Simpson. The problem with such analy-

ses, she says, is that the old political view of left versus right is based primarily on economic issues. But government today is dominated by social issues. The Ministry of Children and Families alone has a budget of over \$1 billion, and social spending is the largest component of the B.C. budget.

After government allots social spending to its various ministries, it has very little control over how the bureaucrats use it, says Mrs. Simpson. Examples include Mr. Ramsey's outcome-based approach to curriculum objectives, and the NDP's new Children's Com-



Nanaimo rally: A standing ovation from 800 when it ended.

mission Act, which allows social workers to screen families for the risk of abuse, and to remove any children under threat, even where abuse is not proven.

This bureaucratic autonomy is not unique to left-wing governments, says Mrs. Simpson. CRI was formed when the Socreds were in power, and gained profile by exposing several unwarranted child seizures by social workers. After Mrs. Simpson publicized these cases in *B.C. Report* and later with radio host Rafe Mair, then-social services minister Norm Jacobsen struck an inquiry by the ombudsman that recommended greater accountability from social workers.

Mrs. Simpson is adamant that all parties, the left and right, must commit themselves to curb the bureaucracy's intrusion into the family. Far from diverting voters from joining the political process, CRI is equipping them to do just that. She says her strength is fomenting increased public awareness.

It is a role that has made her enemies. Mr. Ramsey labelled the CRI's Declaration of Family Rights, which has gathered over 20,000 signatures, "dangerous." The declaration calls for an end to BCTF's heterosexism resolution. Likewise, Carol James, president of the B.C. School Trustees' Association, accused Mrs. Simpson of "fear-mongering" and spreading misinformation. Others have accused her of hypocrisy in champi-

oning family values while she herself is a single mother.

Gareth Kirkby, editor of the homosexual-issues newspaper *Xtra! West*, says he accepts that Mrs. Simpson may not be "anti-gay," and that she may believe in respect for homosexuals, as she claims, while at the same time opposing the mandatory depiction of homosexual families in curriculum as normal. But he questions how traditionalists can truly respect homosexuals if they believe the lifestyle is unacceptable. "Do you stop at saying 'don't beat them up because they're abnormal?'" he asks. "If this is not an acceptable lifestyle, then how can you say you can't hate them?"

Mrs. Simpson responds that teaching respect for homosexuals does not mean that their lifestyle ought to be promoted, particularly given the well-documented health risks of homosexual activity.

Mrs. Simpson concedes that not all churches have shown love to homosexuals, but many do. And while public schools must teach respect, they also ought to present the traditional family structure as the ideal, she says. "It's like smoking," she declares. "If you choose to do it, fine, but let's be honest about the consequences."

As for her separation from her husband, Sean, Mrs. Simpson is forthright, even discussing the ordeal at her rallies. She says her husband went through a painful personal period and decided he needed to find himself. She says such behaviour is symptomatic of a society that has devalued the role of fathers. While he remains uninvolved with his children, Mrs. Simpson is hopeful that he will once again assume his responsibilities as a father.

Her supporters appreciate such honesty, and note that she has the integrity to practise what she preaches. She is currently housing a young mother who lost her child to the state last year after being diagnosed as suffering from Munchausen Syndrome By Proxy, a dubious condition in which the mother allegedly wishes her child to be ill and dependent.

"If you walk the walk, you can talk the talk," observes Victoria political pundit John Twigg. He suspects attempts to undermine Mrs. Simpson's work are the result of envy. "Her organization has an amazing structure, and if Kari wasn't there, these people would be finding other routes," says Mr. Twigg, press secretary to former NDP premier Dave Barrett. "There is clearly a huge majority in B.C. that wants a better alternative to Liberals and Reform. She's pulling out 800 people to her rallies. The question is, next year will it be 700 or 900?"

—Dave Cunningham