A Long Way to Paradise

A New History of British Columbia Politics

ROBERT A.J. McDONALD

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Getting to Paradise

Tina Loo

The book you're about to read by my late friend and colleague Bob McDonald is as much a piece of travel writing as it is history. It's the story of how a group of people tried to get to paradise and bring everyone along with them, sometimes kicking and screaming – kind of like those long-distance summer car trips some of us were subjected to as kids. In this case, the parents are successive generations of BC politicians who differed as much about the destination as they did the route. They tried, in turn, to convince their passengers just who was the better driver and that they were almost, but not quite, there. Placating the sporadically restive people in the other seats – some of whom were ready and able to drive but wanted to go in a different direction – involved a combination of threats, bribery, compromise, and, on occasion, theft. Then as now, stealing another party's ideas and calling them your own was effective politics.

Bob's book is a sustained and encompassing look at a century of BC politics, a subject many have opinions about but few have had the wherewithal to take on fully. Until now, Margaret Ormsby's 1958 work has been the standard reference, supplemented with Martin Robin's engaging but flawed two-volume study, published in the early 1970s.[1]

By virtue of its rarity, the appearance of a new, comprehensive political history of British Columbia is worthy of note. By virtue of its content, I think this particular volume is destined to replace Ormsby: it will become the go-to source. Full of colourful, bickering personalities, the theme that ties it all together are the successive efforts by different politicians and parties to modernize the province.

While many British Columbians agreed that the desired destination was a prosperous, "modern" society, they differed on where it was, what it looked like, and how far you had to travel to get there. The disparities weren't confined to people of different political stripes; even those belonging to the same party had divergent views of the political landscape. Place mattered: things looked different from the Kootenays than they did from the coastal urban centres of Vancouver and Victoria. The only thing British Columbians might have agreed on was that "it is a long way to paradise," as Premier Harlan Brewster told one voter frustrated by the pace of reform in 1917.

For Brewster, a Liberal, paradise was a place where pork-barrel politics – patronage – didn't exist, where merit governed civil service appointments, and where formally trained experts and technical knowledge informed how decisions were made. Those were the hallmarks of modernity. In addition, for the Liberals, members of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), and, for a brief time, British Columbia's Conservatives and the Social Credit party, paradise also had an activist state. This state was concerned – to differing degrees, at different times – with the social welfare of British Columbians as well as the province's economic development.

While the peculiarities of personalities (Amor De Cosmos!), private interests (liquor licensing!), and place (the coast versus the interior and north) shaped the tone and tenor of political discourse, Bob insists BC politics was more than a clash of economic interests, as Martin Robin and those who have followed in his interpretive footsteps argue. While not discounting class, Bob makes the case that ideology was at the root of the disagreements and conflicts over if and how to modernize the province. The century saw a shift from "classical" late-nineteenth century liberalism – with its emphasis on individualism, private property, and small government – to "new" liberalism, characterized by a willingness to use the power of the state to intervene in people's lives in ways meant to benefit them. The ideas associated with new liberalism contributed greatly to the emergence of the welfare state. However, as this book points out, getting to that part of paradise was due in no small measure to the increasing appeal and influence of socialism, and the work of a group of feminist CCFers in the 1930s in particular. Helena Gutteridge and Laura Jamieson, among others, pushed the party away from its explicit goal of eliminating capitalism and toward a more reformist one of building a cooperative society. This trajectory later resulted in the creation of the New Democratic Party in 1961.

Regardless of whether it was a Liberal, Conservative, CCF, or Social Credit politician or supporter giving voice to their party's platform, the destination they promised to take British Columbians to was often characterized as a *people's* paradise. Candidates from across the ideological spectrum used populist ideas and rhetoric at one point or another as a way to counter their opponents and to reinforce the idea that, somehow, they were outsiders to politics or beyond it. W.A.C. Bennett was a master of this. A former Conservative MLA and one-time supporter of a modern, expert-informed, activist state, Bennett managed to engineer a surprise victory for his new Social Credit party in 1952, portraying them as outsiders and free-enterprise friends of the people.

Bob shared populist politicians' desire to connect. Although he brought the expert, technical knowledge of an academic historian to bear on his subject, Bob took pains to make this book accessible. It uses personalities and specific places and debates deftly, with a light touch, to leaven and colour ideas and arguments that are more abstract. Communicating history and connecting with an audience that included, but went far beyond, specialists was important to Bob. This desire was evident in the care he took with the thousands of undergraduates he taught as well as in his work with the Vancouver Historical Society and the City of Vancouver Archives.

More often than not, for Bob, communicating and connecting involved vigorous debate – something his students, colleagues, and friends can attest to. It meant "stirring things up," as he put it. Even when some of us might have wished for more moments of quiet disengagement, Bob was always ready to hash things out, often noisily and joyfully, with over-the-top propositions, even ones that undermined the arguments he was trying to make. It was his way of working out ideas – his and yours, whether you wanted to or not.

While he traded in the extravagant and overblown, doing so was a way to engage rather than a characteristic of his writing. Bob was the most careful of scholars, offering precise, nuanced arguments that emerged from sitting with his archival sources for a long time. He read them as someone trained in political history – thanks to his UBC dissertation supervisor Margaret Prang and her colleague, the BC historian Keith Ralston – and the "new" social history, which was just emerging when he was a graduate student.

This book, the last result of Bob's historical vision, bears the imprint of that early training and sensibility: it's attentive to both high politics and class (and, to a lesser extent, gender and race). It's the work of a fully

committed, unapologetic regionalist – someone known to "go after" (his phrase) his prairie colleagues with a twinkle in his eye for what he considered to be their imperialistic use and understanding of "west," one that didn't take BC and its particularities into account.

But this book is also informed by a deep reading and understanding of context: Bob McDonald's British Columbia doesn't exist in a geographical, historical, or intellectual vacuum. One look at the notes will tell you that: there you'll find references to theorists Stuart Hall and Theda Skocpol alongside ones to whiggism in India and Ontario politics from the late-eighteenth to the late-nineteenth centuries.

The immersion in sources and deep appreciation of context that characterize this book and inform its arguments didn't come quickly. It couldn't and, in Bob's view, it shouldn't have. Good history required time – time spent sitting and reading on the eleventh floor of UBC's Buchanan Tower, before, during, and after hours, all year long – for years. Many of us tried to tempt him with diversions or convince him there were shortcuts, but Bob remained steadfast in his determination to get his readers to paradise in the best way he knew how. It's an eye-opening ride. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

Introduction

Writing during the height of postwar prosperity in the 1960s, political scientist Edwin R. Black characterized the quest for material wealth as a determining feature of British Columbia's political culture. In British Columbia, he stated, the "underlying consensus about what is good for B.C." revolved around development, around "how to harness a bountiful nature, achieve economic progress, and spread the benefits around."[1] British Columbia was an evolving "frontier" where the quest for prosperity meant that politics was always related to economic development.[2] Writing in the same period, political scientist Martin Robin likewise emphasized the economic foundations of the province's political culture. Robin argued that corporate desire for a stable investment environment and the resulting clash between capital and labour had centred politics on class issues.[3] As business and labour leaders put forward duelling visions of how the province's wealth should be managed – on how the economic pie should be divided – political discourse aligned along a left-right continuum, supporting the view that class considerations fuelled BC politics. Indeed, political scientist Stephen Phillips recently observed that cleavages along class lines have been so persistent in BC politics that centre parties have found it impossible to redefine politics in nonclass terms.[4]

A key goal of this book is to offer up a new history of the province's polarized political culture, as it evolved from British Columbia's entry into Confederation in 1871 to the election of province's first social democratic government in 1972. Class divisions certainly have a role in the story, but I argue that ideology lies at the heart of the province's political fault lines.

Historian Kevin Anderson has noted that political historians in Canada have generally overlooked how ideologies have shaped the past in favour of focusing on key events and personalities.[5] I navigate this tension by attending to both.

Consider the 1916 election, which I view as a jumping-off point for this new, alternative framework. When the election results came in, British Columbians learned that the old-guard regime, headed by Conservative premiers Sir Richard McBride and then William Bowser, had been cast aside in favour of a reform-minded Liberal government headed by Harlan Brewster, a women's suffrage–supporting salmon canner and Social Gospeller who aimed to "modernize government." Intent on introducing radical legislation to address social problems, the province's first reform premier also wanted to make government more efficient by abolishing patronage. He advocated hiring civil servants based on their qualifications rather than their personal and political connections, a disruptive idea that provoked an outcry from the party faithful, who felt that they should have a turn at hiring local people for government jobs. A year later, when a Nakusp voter wrote to Brewster complaining of inadequate social services, the disease of patronage, and corporate exploitation of resources, Brewster replied that "it is a long way to Paradise with respect to such problems in British Columbia." But he assured him that reform was on the way.[6]

As they lined up on opposing sides of the political fault line, the McBride-Bowser Conservatives and the Brewster Liberals represented opposing views on how the politics of development and economic growth should meet the challenges and changing circumstances of modernity. At the turn of the century, modern societies were those that embraced the idea of ceaseless development and progress, of constant change. But during this era, the idea of what constituted modernity itself changed: it came to mean the standardization of knowledge and production, the expansion of bureaucracy, and adhering to a more positivistic, technocratic, and rationalistic definition of "modern." In both capitalist and socialist societies, from Canada to Russia, industrialization was generating an increasingly scientific understanding of social organization and a new technocratic middle class.

Modernity was a global phenomenon, but it was also shaped by the particularities of place. As sociologist Stuart Hall has observed, "few modern societies are or even look the same." From the United States to France to Japan, nations took radically different paths to modernity and followed no single logic of development.[7] British Columbia was no different. From 1871 to 1972, the province experienced unrelenting change shaped by

distinctive regional influences: a challenging geography, a resource-based economy with limited agriculture, a partially racialized labour force, and idiosyncratic (if not eccentric) political leadership.

In this context, Bowser and Brewster might have headed two opposing political parties, but both espoused variants of liberalism, the political theory of modernity and the ideology "most intimately connected with the birth and evolution of the modern capitalist world."[8] Liberty, property, and equality stood as the three main pillars of liberalism's ethical system, and all variants of liberalism included the core components of rationality, a belief in rational change, a commitment to legality and constitutionality, and a concern for the general good.[9] But not all liberals thought alike. Richard McBride, although labelled "conservative," embodied the ideals of classic nineteenth-century liberalism, the liberalism of Victorian Britain, with its focus on individualism and private property. Brewster, by contrast, embraced a new type of progressive (or left) liberalism that privileged collectivism and social equality and that would, in mid-century, lead to the welfare state.[10]

As Brewster's triumph in 1916 suggests, liberalism evolved. In the words of sociologist Stuart Hall, it "gradually shed its militant laissez-faire individualist and competitive skin."[11] While classical liberals emphasized freedom from constraint and equality of opportunity to compete, a number of late nineteenth-century British intellectuals questioned whether the individual could have effective freedom in an industrializing society without state intervention. These iconoclasts suggested that, for liberty to thrive, the state must create the conditions that would allow individuals to pursue self-realization.[12] In doing so, they linked liberalism to social reform and refashioned classical liberalism into the new liberalism, which was characterized by greater state intervention, especially in the fields of distributive justice and social welfare.[13] As liberalism evolved, traditional liberal values such as individualism, private property, and small government gradually came to be perceived as conservative.

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McBride and Bowser had ideological ties that at once bound them together and divided them. These ties reflected a shared or core belief in BC settler society that had been there since before Confederation: the "bedrock common-sense wisdom" of liberalism. The province, as part of modern Canada, was a liberal order where individuals and corporations had the absolute right to own land or property, and individualism was the dominant characteristic of its inhabitants.[14] The white settlers who shaped the

ideological contours of BC politics – liberal, socialist, and conservative – were predominantly British, and the province's white settler majority population remained overwhelming British until well after the Second World War.[15]

In the colonial and early provincial periods, when modern political parties had yet to be established, the landholding and administrative elite embraced liberal values in the tradition of Britain's Whig politicians; theirs was a socially conservative, antiquated type of liberalism. They were conservative in their resistance to the democratization of society and the birth of popular politics and in their deference to institutions of authority such as the law, the monarchy, and parliamentary democracy, but they also respected the values of compromise and gradualism. Aligned against them emerged an Opposition group led by George Anthony Walkem, a vocal critic of Ottawa's railway and immigration policies who leaned toward accepting popular democracy. Walkem embodied the traditional struggle of radicals within British liberalism. Like them, he railed against monopoly and privilege, posing a challenge to elites that would later nourish the populist tendency in BC politics.[16]

At the turn of the century, when the arrival of more and more settlers led to the founding of provincial parties in 1903, classical liberalism, marked by a focus on economic development and limited government, continued to reign supreme until politicians such as Harlan Brewster took up the banner of reform. The first signs of this transition to the new liberalism came in the early years of the century, when ideas about the need to transition from a patronage-based government to a government managed by experts began to enter public discourse and when first-wave feminists sparked conversations about social reform as they championed women's suffrage. The reform impulse found support within the Liberal Party under Brewster's premiership, and it surged again after Thomas Dufferin or "Duff" Pattullo carried the Liberals to victory in 1933. Pattullo's enthusiasm for collectivist ideas and modern management techniques defined his government as Canada's most progressive during the Great Depression.[17]

But embrace of more statist notions of government was not limited to the Liberal Party: it was also advocated by socialists. From the formation of the Socialist Party of British Columbia in 1901 to the election of nine socialist candidates between 1903 and 1912, socialism emerged as a radical alternative to mainstream liberalism in BC and a distinguishing feature of BC politics. While the Marxists who controlled the party in the early years viewed reform as incompatible with the ultimate goal of revolutionary change through the destruction of capitalism, other members were

more pragmatic. In the early 1930s, a socialist resurgence led to the forma-
tion of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), which defined
itself as a working-class labour party committed to the revolutionary agenda
of eradicating capitalism and implementing a full program of socialized
planning. The CCF won seven seats in 1933, making it the most successful
radical party in Canada during the Depression.

Although the CCF maintained an explicitly anti-liberal, Marxist outlook
throughout the 1930s, reform-minded socialists within the party worked
to advance socialism. Moderates such as Robert Connell, Helena Gutter-
idge, and Laura Jamieson connected the CCF to a broader progressive
tradition, setting the stage for the postwar period, when the goal of replacing
capitalism gave way to a more reformist emphasis on building a coopera-
tive society. This trend culminated in 1960 with the formation of a new
progressive party – the New Party, which was renamed the New Democratic
Party or NDP a year later. The NDP brought the new liberalism and
pragmatic socialism together into a hybrid ideological formation known
as social democracy.[18]

The modernizing impulse that led to the emergence of a vibrant, organ-
ized left between 1930 and 1960 shaped partisan politics in two ways. First,
it divided right against left in a classic confrontation that continues to this
day. Because mainstream settler culture was based on the liberal values of
property and freedom, the CCF's challenge to private property frightened
elites. In response, Pattullo's Liberals not only embraced collectivism and
modern management techniques, they also positioned the Liberal Party
as free enterprise's defender against socialism during the 1933 provincial
election. In December 1941, following the election of a minority legisla-
ture, the Liberals joined with the Conservatives to form a Coalition gov-
ernment. Over the decade, the Coalition evolved from an arrangement to
fight the Second World War to an instrument for keeping the socialists at
bay. The Coalition government promised to protect property from con-
fiscation and to protect investors from labour militancy.[19] Continuing
the BC government's long-term function as a public agent of private in-
vestment, during the 1949 election campaign Premier Byron Johnson
promised "aggressive ... development of our natural resources" in a stable
business environment.[20] The Coalition's collapse in 1952 led to the election
of a Social Credit government headed by W.A.C. Bennett. Through eight
elections, the Socreds cast themselves as Canada's "free enterprise" defend-
ers against socialism. Here was the classic fault line of BC politics described
by political historians: defenders of the free market on the right, its radical
critics on the left.

Second, among progressives, the modernizing impulse shifted the CCF's focus from the more radical goal of public ownership to the more moderate goal of advancing social justice through the welfare state. In response to widespread enthusiasm for "modern civilization," as revealed in wartime submissions to the Post-War Rehabilitation Council, the province's political culture was becoming less focused on development issues (symbolized by the language of the "frontier") and more accepting of state activism.[21] Over time, social policy gained the lead and became the government's "major field of activity."[22]

This expansion of the welfare state generated resistance among conservatives who reiterated their faith in the agency of individuals, viewed university-educated experts with skepticism, and sought to restrain government expansion. Identified mostly with the Conservative Party in the interwar years, with the Coalition government from 1941 to 1952, and with the Social Credit government thereafter, anti-statist conservatism in British Columbia is best understood as a variant of classical liberalism. As the public increasingly expected the government to play a social role, conservative-minded administrations at first opposed the trend but then, from the Coalition government on, adapted to it, if reluctantly. For instance, although Bennett embraced province building, he rejected the idea of the welfare state.[23]

* * *

Throughout the 1960s, Bennett's small-government philosophy increasingly seemed out of step with the modernization impulse, and in the 1970s and 1980s this fact attracted the attention of a generation of young political scientists who set the direction for interpreting the province's political history.[24] To explain Social Credit's success, they focused on the strength of populist values in BC politics, and they defined populism as "the belief that individuals can have a significant effect on political matters."[25] A 1979 UBC study by David J. Elkins, Donald E. Blake, and Richard Johnson of the political attitudes and behaviour of BC voters confirmed that populism was indeed important. Their study identified anti-elitist sentiments on both the left and right among "those in lower-status occupations, the less educated, and those living outside the major urban areas."[26] But tellingly, they also concluded that "the real ideological gulf between the major parties" – Social Credit and the NDP – centred not on populism but on the ideas of "individual versus collective responsibility and risk-sharing."[27]

The growth of the welfare state did not end British Columbia's identity as a development-oriented region or the government's role as a promoter

of economic growth and the good life. But it did rejig the contours of political identity. As Donald Blake argues, Bennett justified Social Credit's development policies on the grounds that they would create blue-collar jobs, an argument that played to the individualist streak in British Columbia's working class.[28] Indeed, the 1979 study found that development policies had drawn 40 percent of the working class to Bill Bennett's Social Credit Party, the successor to his father's Socreds. But the bureaucratization of society – including the expansion of the civil service – also enlarged the ranks of middle-class professionals and semi-professionals whose economic interests tied them to state-funded programs. Blake concluded that changing attitudes about the state's ideal role were making the divide between left and right much less about capitalism and socialism and much more about individualism and bureaucracy – posed as the question: Less government or more?[29]

As this book shows, this underlying shift in the province's political polarization occurred much earlier – in the 1940s, when the Conservative and Liberal Parties responded to the rise of progressive liberalism and Marxist socialism. Class politics did inform the province's political culture, particularly at the turn of the century. Martin Robin's description of British Columbia as a "company province" emerged from his understanding of an era when land-based capitalism was giving way to industrial capitalism and reformist and radical dissent challenged the province's elite. In the 1910s and 1920s, class tensions ebbed and flowed until they crystallized into a radical socialist party, the CCF, and into large-scale conflicts between capital and labour that continue to the present day. These struggles shaped a pattern of partisan politics that political historians have characterized as British Columbia's "elementary left-right struggle," the defining feature of its political culture.[30]

But an exclusive focus on class has caused political historians to overlook the ideational foundations of British Columbia's welfare state. In the pages that follow, the province's political history, as it unfolded between 1871 and 1972, is less a traditional story of political parties, elections, and great men than an exploration of the political culture that shaped them. And race and gender played a role. British immigrants saw themselves as the bearers of "civilization" and "progress." Viewing the rest of the world through stereotypes that emphasized their superiority (a perception reinforced by the more pervasive, and scientifically defined, idea of race), BC settlers drew boundaries of exclusion that separated them culturally and socially from the Indigenous peoples whose lands they had colonized and from the Asian immigrants they employed.[31] Until the 1940s, race was

a more rigid and less porous boundary than class.[32] Consequently, politics was very much a discourse of power among white settlers and politicians, who denied citizenship rights to Asians and Indigenous peoples.[33] Although prominent CCFers questioned the treatment of Japanese in the 1930s and their support for the citizenship rights of Japanese became an election issue in 1945, race predominantly entered provincial politics through local opposition to Ottawa's immigration and fishery licensing policies.[34] That racial issues generated limited debate between provincial political parties is itself a profound statement on the racialized character of British Columbia's political culture.

That culture was also distinctly masculine. Before 1972, only 17 (or 5 percent) of the 343 individuals elected to the legislature after April 1917 (when women gained the vote) were female.[35] The patriarchal assumptions that defined politics as the dominion of men ran deep in Anglo-Canadian society. For instance, although Harlan Brewster was a suffrage-supporting progressive, not a conservative traditionalist, he crafted a patronizing reply when he received a suggestion from the North Vancouver Ladies' Liberal Association in May 1917:

> I sincerely hope that now the franchise has been granted to women ... that it will not become a practice to forward promiscuous resolutions ... I believe that it will redound to the credit of the women voters themselves ... if the newly enfranchised ladies will take the pains to inform themselves upon all matters under discussion before they adopt any resolution.[36]

Although the vote failed to level the political playing field for men and women, women nonetheless shaped the province's political culture. Because social reform was a "a well-trodden pathway to suffrage activism" in the early 1900s, suffrage supporters played a key role in challenging laissez-faire assumptions about the role of the state.[37] Brewster's election as premier in 1916 was, in part, a product of this link between social reform and suffrage activism, a link that ultimately set the stage for the welfare state.

1

Confederation and
the Birth of Popular Politics,
1871–83

When British Columbia joined Confederation in 1871, its transition from a British colony to a Canadian province was difficult and conflict-ridden. Words and phrases such as "secession" and "Fight Ottawa" resonated more forcefully in West Coast political discourse than did affection for a country that was far away and virtually unknown. British Columbia was an outpost of empire on the Pacific Ocean, an outpost tied to Britain by the sea and with access to Canada only through arduous travel through difficult terrain. Although its settler population, concentrated in and around Victoria, shared a heritage of law, culture, and political traditions with Anglo-Canadians, the province had practically nothing in common with the country it joined.[1]

For colonial British Columbians such as Amor De Cosmos, who supported Confederation, and Dr. John Sebastian Helmcken, who opposed it, Confederation had been a matter of terms. But for many British North Americans in the East, the terms seemed outrageously high and included a financial subsidy based on inflated population numbers and the promise of a transcontinental railway to be started in two years and completed in ten. When the prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, and his Conservatives negotiated British Columbia's entry into the union, they envisaged the transcontinental railway as an instrument of commerce that would integrate British Columbia into an artery of trade across Canada, linking Britain with Asia. But for members of the federal Liberal Party, whose supporters were typically rural, British Columbia, unlike the fertile Prairies, was a miserable region of the West, a land of "sterile mountains and

gloomy canyons" that lacked the agricultural base required for national prosperity.[2]

When Macdonald's government collapsed following the Pacific Scandal of 1873 and the Liberals came to power, their lack of commitment to the railway project was reinforced by a severe recession. Out of this context emerged a popular politics shaped by issues from the colonial period, above all the "acrimonious, and seemingly endless, conflict between British Columbia and the federal government" over fulfilment of the terms of Confederation.[3] Led by Amor De Cosmos and George Anthony Walkem, the governing majority between 1871 and 1883 fuelled popular opposition to the federal government's railway policy and control of the courts. As liberal reformers of the colonial period, they had embraced responsible government and Confederation. Following Confederation, they continued to embrace the democratization of BC society, but their support for labour, combined with fear of Chinese immigration and its perceived threat to the settler community's white identity, also informed their popular politics, which was distinctly race-based. Their opponents, led by John Foster McCreight and Andrew Charles Elliott and other members of the conservative colonial elite, adhered to an older "Whiggish" liberalism, which caused them to resist the lure of democracy and modernization. The two groups' responses to the railway and immigration debates were profoundly ideological. Together, they broadened and modernized political discourse on the West Coast, contributing to British Columbia's transition from a British colony to a Canadian province.

Laying the Foundations of a People's Government

Before British Columbia entered Confederation on 20 July 1871 as Canada's sixth province, political power was controlled by an administrative elite centred on the colonial governor. This British-born strata of landholders, retired fur trade officers, and colonial administrators embraced core elements of Victorian liberalism, including the private ownership of land and resources, limited government, and the fundamental liberties of speech and assembly. But given their conservative social and political views, their political ideology is best understood as a form of Whiggish or antiquated liberalism.[4] The elite's property holdings, comfortable incomes, and higher-than-average levels of education accorded them a privileged position in the small white settler populations of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, colonies that united in 1866. A privileged social group, they embraced and

accepted as normal the concept of a hierarchical social order, a structured system of classes, in which fee-based (rather than free) education would "ensure the maintenance of class distinctions from generation to generation."[5] Exhibiting faith in the natural leadership of the elite, they believed that the social order should be maintained by government support for an established (Anglican) church, a landed gentry, and a private denominational system of education. Politically, they distrusted representative institutions and feared what Henry Pellew Crease, the attorney general of British Columbia from 1861 to 1870, called "the unreasoning and leveling tendencies of universal suffrage."[6]

Colonial administration extended across the province's vast expanse. The system was "a local form of administration almost unique in the Empire – that of a government agency, one of delegated functions."[7] At the local level, the government was organized by geography rather than by function, which meant that a single person or a handful of persons, all appointed by those in power in Victoria, governed a range of government services in a particular area. Government officials had emerged out of the office of gold commissioner, first created by Governor James Douglas through the Gold Fields Act of 1859.[8] Although intended to provide "orderly and law abiding operation of the mine fields," the gold commissioners, also called stipendiary magistrates, and their assistants were respected local officials "involved in every arena of government business" in the mining regions of the central interior. Gold commissioners and magistrates were also "very much part of the colonial establishment."[9] Unlike the former British North American colonies of Nova Scotia and the Canadas, British Columbia was governed by a Legislative Council, which consisted of a mix of elected and appointed representatives, and by an appointed Executive Council, which was responsible to the governor but not to the elected legislature.

Opposition to the colony's elite began early when, in 1858, the Nova Scotia–born Amor De Cosmos, upon coming to Victoria from California, established the *British Colonist* newspaper. Through it, he launched an "open and fearless criticism" of the colonial administration of Governor Douglas. He labelled its educated civil servants and "gentlemen" from England the "family-company compact."[10] De Cosmos was joined throughout the 1860s by several other journalists – including John Robson, Leonard McClure, and David Higgins – as colonial government critics and advocates of the rights of Englishmen. They were political radicals, which in the context of the time meant they proposed greater democracy and political accountability, especially acceptance of the principle that the executive

should be responsible to elected representatives. These oppositionists were radical in their commitment to greater democracy (historian Keith Ralston describes McClure as a radical democrat) but still limited by their belief that electors should be men of property. Their call for accountability crystallized around the demand for responsible government, the achievement of which was a key incentive to join Confederation. Yet the governor, colonial officials, and magistrates continued to resist the reformers' demands for democracy. The three delegates they sent to Ottawa to negotiate the terms of British Columbia's entry into Confederation – John Sebastian Helmcken, Joseph Trutch, and William Carrall – all opposed responsible government. It was accepted only after the colony gained provincial status.[11]

As historian Hamar Foster has noted, when Confederation arrived in July 1871, "the tensions of the colonial era did not disappear. Those who had opposed responsible government generally remained skeptical and continued to be wary of American and even Canadian enthusiasm for the democratic forces at work in the world."[12] At the centre of the resistance was Joseph Trutch, the commissioner of lands and works from 1864 to 1871 and "the archetypal colonialist" who had reshaped Governor Douglas's Indian land policy to the advantage of white settlers.[13] During Confederation negotiations, the well-connected and conservative-minded civil engineer had impressed Macdonald as a man of substance who understood British Columbia and would support the building of a transcontinental railway.[14]

After being appointed the province's first lieutenant-governor, Trutch refused to select either of the colony's two leading proponents of Confederation and responsible government as the province's first premier. Instead of De Cosmos or Robson, he called on a well-respected and socially prominent lawyer who had played no substantial part in the colony's politics, John Foster McCreight.[15] And during the first year of McCreight's administration, Trutch sat in on Executive Council meetings, in effect undermining the principle of popular sovereignty.

However, when De Cosmos and Robson engineered the defeat of McCreight's government in December 1872, Trutch had no choice but to select De Cosmos as premier. As writer George Woodcock tells the story, when Trutch asked De Cosmos to form a government, De Cosmos "refused to carry on cabinet business until the lieutenant-governor [had] left the room." It was at that point that "British Columbia gained effective responsible government."[16] Thus began a decade in which the second, third, and fifth premiers (De Cosmos, George Anthony Walkem, and Walkem again) were liberal reformers from the colonial period. They argued that

Joseph Trutch, the commissioner of lands and works in British Columbia from 1864 to 1871, negotiated the province's terms of entry into Confederation in 1871. The archetypal colonialist, he opposed responsible government and reshaped Governor Douglas's Indian land policy to the advantage of white settlers. | Library and Archives Canada, PA-025343

it was time to "clear away the debris of the Crown Colony and lay the foundation of a people's Government."[17]

Railway Politics

Politically engaged British Columbians shared the view that British Columbia should honour its terms of entry into Confederation, but differences over the railway soon became a source of political contention. Although

the federal government was supposed to begin construction within two years and finish within ten, by July 1873 the only evidence of railway construction on the West Coast was "a sod lifted symbolically at Esquimalt."[18] Anxiety centred in Victoria, where the issue of getting the line built was compounded by the question, Built to where? On 7 February 1874, a mob of two thousand people invaded the legislative building, known as the Birdcages. They chanted: "We'll hang old De Cosmos on a sour apple-tree" to insult the premier for not ensuring the fulfilment of the railway agreement. They feared that if Alexander Mackenzie's new government in Ottawa reopened discussion of the Confederation terms, Vancouver Island would lose its claim to being the railway's western terminus. De Cosmos resigned his provincial seat but remained a member of Parliament (MP), having held both seats concurrently since Confederation.

George Walkem, Cariboo member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and now premier, emerged as the leader of the first major wave of popular politics in the province's young history. His Victoria-centred government connected Vancouver Island members with those in the Cariboo and Lillooet ridings on the Mainland by promising that a rail line would cross the Chilcotin Plateau and then proceed along Bute Inlet and down Vancouver Island to a terminus at Esquimalt. In other words, consensus about Ottawa's need to carry out the terms of union fractured into proposals for alternatives routes – one through Bute Inlet and the other through the Fraser Canyon and terminating at Burrard Inlet instead of Esquimalt.[19]

In May 1874, Trutch noted the "extraordinary wave of radicalism" that had overtaken the province because of lack of progress on the railway.[20] To deal with the issue, a reluctant federal government, now headed by Alexander Mackenzie, sent J.D. Edgar, a prominent young Liberal, as a special envoy to persuade British Columbians to accept a relaxation of terms. His mission failed. But an offer by Lord Carnarvon, the secretary of state in the imperial government, to mediate between British Columbia and the federal government was accepted by the province, as were Carnarvon's subsequent terms: the immediate building of the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway; the completion of surveys on the Mainland; and a minimum annual expenditure of $2 million on railway works within the province. In return, British Columbia agreed to extend the ten-year limit for completing the railway. Although the Mackenzie government "more or less accepted the terms," in April 1875 the Senate defeated a bill to begin construction of the Esquimalt and Nanaimo line. An offer of money to compensate British Columbia merely exacerbated anti-Canadian feeling on Vancouver Island.[21]

The Carnarvon Terms could have been viewed as a sop to the Island, but there was no guarantee that its section of the line would be part of the transcontinental railway. The political community in Victoria consequently made his terms the symbolic focus of politics. In January 1876, Premier Walkem sent a petition to Queen Victoria. The legislature had accepted it "without a dissenting vote," and it listed British Columbia's grievances regarding the railway and threatened secession if Canada did not fulfil its contractual obligations.[22] However, several months earlier, Walkem's group had lost a provincial election. In February, Walkem was replaced as premier by Andrew Charles Elliott, a Victoria lawyer who joined the colony's administrative bureaucracy in 1859. An Irishmen trained in law at London's Inns of Court, Elliott had served the administration in several capacities, including as a gold commissioner, high sheriff, and stipendiary magistrate. His ties to the colonial elite were both professional and personal; his daughter was married to James Douglas's only son.[23]

But a change of government could not quell the oppositional intensity of railway politics, which persisted even during the five-week visit of Governor General Lord Dufferin to British Columbia in the late summer of 1876. In Victoria, "'people of all classes' demonstrated their enthusiasm for the British connection." They greeted the governor general during his tour through the city with arches festooned with celebratory messages such as "English Laws Are Just" and "We Honour Our Queen." Yet political dissent also broke through. One arch erected by the Fort Street Shopkeepers proclaimed "Carnarvon Terms or Separation."[24] Facing an awkward political encounter, the official cavalcade was forced to alter its course onto a neighbouring street.[25]

In September, political activists formed the Carnarvon Club, creating a political movement that was "the next best thing to a political party." With the pro-railway forces divided between supporters of the Fraser Valley and Bute Inlet routes, it was the Islanders, led by Carnarvon Club members, who set the agenda. They held three mass meetings in Victoria in fall 1876 and early 1877 to support the cause of "Carnarvon Terms or Separation."[26] Passions were further inflamed by the Mackenzie government's announcement in December 1877 that it had chosen the Fraser River route for the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). Elliott's fragile government could not counter the political clout of the Carnarvon Club–backed Walkem group, which swept all Victoria ridings in the general election in May 1878. In August, when Walkem, along with Victoria MLA Robert Beaven, introduced a memorial to the Queen, he asserted that the federal government's continued failure to build the Vancouver Island railway as suggested

The east portal of the CPR's Connaught Tunnel at Mount Macdonald. Although it was a promise of Confederation, the last spike on the Canadian Pacific Railway was not driven until November 1885, fourteen years after British Columbia became part of Canada. | Courtesy Royal BC Museum and Archives, C-02516

in 1874 by Lord Carnarvon gave British Columbia "the right to exclusively collect and retain her Customs and Excise duties and to withdraw from the Union." The legislature endorsed the ultimatum of secession by a vote of fourteen to nine.[27]

Both Walkem and Amor De Cosmos, his parliamentary ally, continued to press the Macdonald government, which had been returned to power in 1878, to build the transcontinental railway and extend it to Vancouver Island. On 14 May 1880, construction began on the 128-mile line between Emory's Bar, near Yale, and Savona, near Kamloops. British Columbia would finally get its promised railway! But having failed to achieve the second part of the provincial government's railway agenda, Walkem renewed separatist talk. In March 1881, he introduced into the legislature another petition to the Queen, the third since the railway controversy began. Calling for complete fulfilment of the Carnarvon Terms, the petition was accepted overwhelmingly by the legislature and presented in London by De Cosmos, but to no avail.[28] Even though some concessions were achieved, including a promise from Ottawa to compensate British Columbia for its failure to build the island railway and to provide financial support for the unfinished dry dock at Esquimalt, the routing of the new line to a terminus at Burrard Inlet was unquestionably a major loss for Victoria.

By 1882, the Walkem faction's "Fight Ottawa" policy had collapsed. Support had diminished to the point where the government could pass legislation only with the support of the Speaker.[29] Amor De Cosmos met defeat in the June 1882 federal election, ending a colourful political career. Back in British Columbia, "the cost of the Esquimalt graving dock was escalating beyond the ability of the province to pay," creating anxiety among mainlanders, who feared that financial difficulties might threaten the completion of the railway. In July, the government, now led by Victoria's Robert Beaven (Walkem was been appointed to the British Columbia Supreme Court) suffered a "resounding defeat at the polls."[30]

The Courts Controversy

George Anthony Walkem, who served as both premier and attorney general during the province's first decade, can perhaps be considered British Columbia's first modern politician.[31] Certainly, as a professional politician who embraced parliamentary sovereignty and popular issues, he challenged

the fading but still observable influence of the province's pre-Confederation elite. Though born in Northern Ireland, Walkem was North American in style and outlook and a transitional figure in British Columbia's evolution from British colony to Canadian province. After immigrating at age fifteen to Quebec City in 1847, he attended McGill College in Montreal and established himself as a lawyer in both Lower and Upper Canada (which would eventually become Quebec and Ontario), before falling prey, in 1862, to the lure of the Cariboo Gold Rush, which had begun in 1860 when prospectors discovered gold on the Horsefly River and near Barkerville. In the Cariboo, he established a prosperous law practice and won election to the Legislative Council for Cariboo East and Quesnel Forks District in 1864, thus beginning almost eighteen years of continuous representation on the Legislative Council and in the provincial legislature. During the colonial period, he identified with the men who supported reform and Confederation, and he remained part of this group after Confederation rather than joining "the more conservative elements who before that date had run the colony." His defence of miners arrested in 1877 during a strike at Robert Dunsmuir's Wellington mine added to his "reputation as a friend of the working man," as did his opposition to Chinese labour. As a popular (and, in that sense, modern) politician, he led opinion on two of the dominant issues of the period: the fight for a transcontinental railway and the restriction of Chinese immigration, which had begun during the gold rush.[32]

Both Walkem's and Elliott's governments pressed for a professional court system administered by the province rather than the federal government. The struggle brought to the surface conflicting attitudes about democracy and the legal system in post-Confederation British Columbia.[33] The courts issue pitted a handful of former colonial officials against the newly elected members of the Legislative Assembly in a dispute "fueled by a hotly partisan local press."[34]

At Confederation, the new province had a court system that comprised three judges – Matthew Baillie Begbie, John Hamilton Gray, and Henry Pering Pellew Crease – who formed a superior or Supreme Court. The system also had six lower court judges, five of whom had been colonial magistrates. Begbie, Gray, and Crease were well educated and, with the exception of Gray, who was a New Brunswick politician appointed in July 1872, they were all part of the British-born administrative and social elite. So, too, were the magistrates, who were called county court judges after Confederation. Among them was Peter O'Reilly, who started as a gold

commissioner and magistrate in the 1860s and moved on to work as a county court judge in the 1870s and Indian reserve commissioner from 1880 to 1898. Wealthy and connected by marriage to Joseph Trutch, O'Reilly was a key member of the Victoria-centred upper class for more than thirty years. All six members of the County Court in the 1870s were lay judges who had not been trained in law. Their legal authority stemmed from their position in the social hierarchy and their capacity to decide legal questions on evidence of fact rather than from their knowledge of the principles of law.

The courts controversy centred on two issues. The first was "the extent to which the provincial legislature could dictate the rules under which BC judges and its Supreme Court could act."[35] At its core, the issue was about who should make decisions concerning the court system now that responsible government had been accepted in British Columbia: representatives responsible to the electorate or appointed judges backed by the federal government? While both the more conservative Elliott government and the more reformist Walkem group argued that elected representatives should control the court system, Walkem, while he was premier from 1878 to 1882, led what the establishment, especially Judge Crease, viewed as an "assault on the judiciary." From 1877 to 1879, the legislature passed several pieces of legislation that would put the courts under provincial control and require judges to be trained professionally in law and live in the district where they worked. The colonial-era legal establishment, who wanted to adjudicate in Victoria, where they had built their homes, strongly opposed this legislation, which Judge Crease viewed as "communistic." The transition to popular control of the courts ended in 1883, when the Supreme Court of Canada accepted the provincial legislation and declared BC courts to be provincial and subject to legislative regulation.[36]

Judge Crease, the most vocal of the old guard, was particularly upset by the democratic turn in British Columbia. In concert with three prominent office holders – Senator Clement F. Cornwall, Senator W.J. Macdonald, and Member of Parliament Edgar Dewdney – he wrote to the prime minister to complain about the unfortunate fact that "what is known as universal suffrage" was now in force in the province.[37] Starting in 1876, voting became universal for white men who had resided in the province for one year. Women and nonwhites were excluded.[38] Cornwall and Macdonald were major landholders in the province, and Cornwall would be British Columbia's lieutenant-governor from 1881 to 1887. Dewdney, who later served as lieutenant-governor of both the North-West Territories and British Columbia and as a federal cabinet minister, was well connected to

political power in Ottawa through his friendship with Macdonald. The suffrage, of course, was far from universal. But in the context of the time, and from the perspective of the elite, who felt that those who had no stake in the country now controlled elections, the change was disturbing.[39] They felt that provincial control would render the Supreme Court subservient to "the ever shifting politics of a young province ... with all of its prejudices and passions at fever pitch and wielding an authority based upon the unreasoning and levelling tendencies of universal suffrage."[40] In Judge Crease's view, responsible government and a broad suffrage had "brought to the surface men 'who are entirely without any Education or Manners,'" such as the "little Trickster," George Walkem.[41]

<center>IMMIGRATION AND INDIGENOUS LANDS</center>

Colonial-era political reformers such as George Walkem, Amor De Cosmos, and Robert Beaven supported campaigns to "Fight Ottawa," and part of that struggle involved stopping Chinese immigration. Between 1871 and 1882, De Cosmos spoke on the issue as an MP for Victoria. Beaven did so as the MLA for Victoria City, a position he held for twenty-three years, one of them as premier (1882–83) and eleven of them as leader of the Opposition (1883–94). An underappreciated political leader of nineteenth-century British Columbia, Beaven had been active in the Confederation League in 1868, and as with others in the Walkem faction, he opposed elites and supported working-class views. Throughout the 1880s, he supported labour's opposition to Chinese immigration and clashed with Robert Dunsmuir over the coal baron's labour and land-holding policies.[42]

John Robson and Noah Shakespeare also contributed to the politicization of the immigration issue. Robson, another colonial-era political reformer, sat in the Legislative Assembly for Nanaimo from 1871 to 1875 and for New Westminster from 1882. He worked for the CPR for a period in the 1870s and was more business-oriented than members of the Walkem group. He would also become a key member of the development-oriented governing elite in the 1880s and 1890s and a pro-development premier from August 1889 to June 1892. Although he was a mid-Victorian liberal who supported responsible government and Confederation, Robson also articulated illiberal racial views based on his belief that Chinese "were 'essentially different in their habits and destination' ... did not contribute a fair share to the provincial treasury, and competed with 'civilized
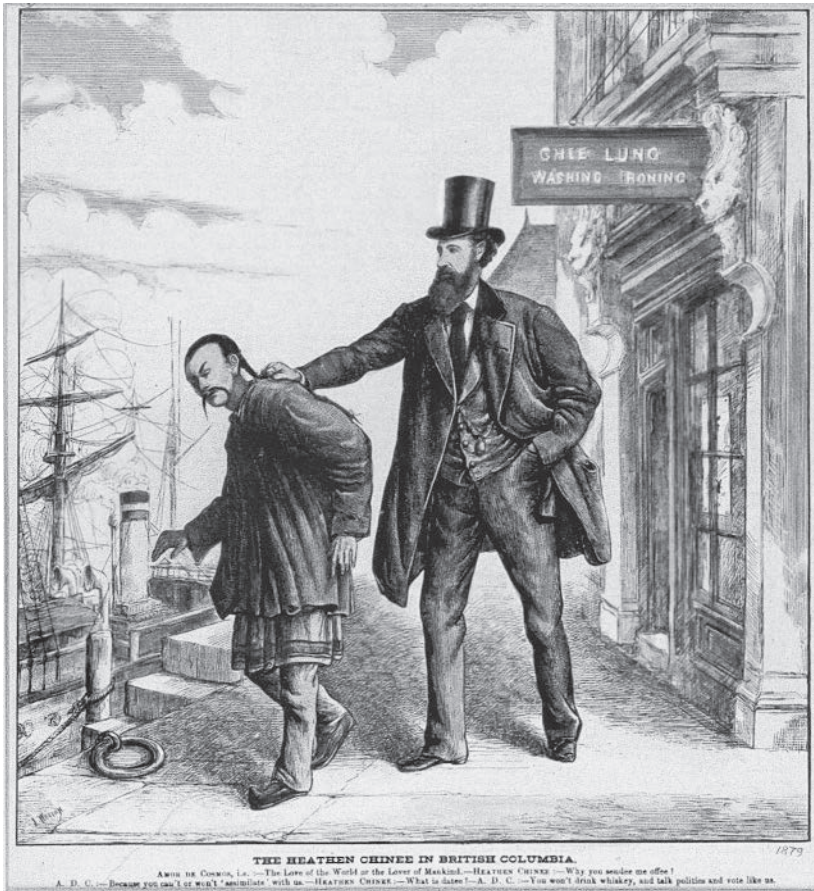
"The Heathen Chinee in British Columbia," *Canadian Illustrated News,* 25 April 1879. Amor De Cosmos tells a Chinese man to leave British Columbia because he refuses to assimilate. | Courtesy Royal BC Museum and Archives, PDP01873

labour.'"[43] Shakespeare, described by one historian as "openly bigoted" and by another as British Columbia's "first professional anti-Chinese agitator," hailed from a working-class family in Staffordshire, England, and, upon migrating to Vancouver Island, had worked in a Dunsmuir mine. He then set himself up as photographer and tax collector in Victoria. He became more visible in the mid-1870s when he committed himself to keeping British Columbia white. As Victoria's MP in the 1870s and 1880s, he stood out as the most stridently racist anti-immigration spokesmen of the era.[44]

In the late nineteenth century, people throughout the Angloworld shared opinions about racial minorities that placed those of British origin at the pinnacle of a cultural hierarchy.[45] In addition, pejorative attitudes toward "other" people were becoming increasingly racialized through the influence of scientific reasoning and the competitive intensity of late nineteenth-century European imperialism. Settlers viewed Indigenous peoples as culturally and racially inferior, and though population decline since contact suggested that Indigenous populations might be headed toward extinction, integration and assimilation were generally considered solutions to the challenges raised by colonialism. Yet even though Indigenous peoples greatly outnumbered those of European heritage in 1871 and remained the province's largest population group until the mid-1880s, it was the small population of Chinese migrants, understood through a cluster of mostly unflattering stereotypes, who generated anxiety and political resistance among settlers.

Perceived by whites to be culturally and socially inferior, Chinese migrants fostered fears that China's large population would result in mass migration from the "Orient" and the loss of British Columbia's still developing settler identity.[46] Certainly, Chinese labourers found a ready market for work in the region's fishing and coal-mining industries, especially salmon canning after 1876, and in the homes of middle-class settlers as domestic servants. But as historian Patricia Roy has noted, the "doubling of the white population between 1871 and 1881 was no solace; the tripling of the Chinese population lent credence to fears of Mongolian 'hordes' discouraging other immigrants" (see Table 1).[47] Between 1881 and 1884, Chinese population growth quickened when upwards of fifteen thousand labourers from San Francisco and China entered through the port of Victoria, destined for construction camps along the CPR line.[48] British Columbia after Confederation was a region where people who "identified as 'whites,' 'Chinese,' or 'Indians' lived in different places within quite different demographic, occupational, and cultural arrangements." It was a place where "deep social and cultural cleavages ... corresponded to the boundaries between 'white,' 'Chinese,' and 'Indian.'"[49]

The colonial relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples found explicit expression in land policy. Colonial officials and settlers perceived the acquisition of Indigenous land "as part of the natural order of things, a process that was predictable, expected, and would contribute to the colonies' (inevitable) development."[50] Early provincial governments continued Trutch's policy of moving Indigenous peoples onto reserves without acknowledging and extinguishing Indigenous ownership, or "title."[51]

TABLE 1 BC's population by racial and ethnic origin, 1871 and 1881

Year	British	Continental European	Chinese	Indigenous	Total
1871	8,576 (23.7%)		1,548 (4.3%)	est. 25,661 (70.8%)	36,247
1881	14,660 (29.6%)	2,490 (5.0%)	4,350 (8.8%)	25,661 (51.9%)	49,459

Source: Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia,* 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), Table 5, 429.

Throughout the twentieth century, successive governments would continue to assert Trutch's position that there was no title and that, if there had been, it would have been extinguished by colonial settlement. But the process of opening provincial lands for settlement was complicated by the problem of constitutional jurisdiction. While authority for Indigenous peoples (including the establishment of reserves) fell to the federal government, the province retained sovereignty over provincial land, from which reserve lands would be drawn. To solve the problem, the two levels of government in 1876 set up a Joint Indian Reserve Commission, which consisted of a provincial representative, a federal representative, and a third joint representative. An extensive allocation of reserves took place over the next twenty-five years, and the process dragged on until 1938, when the province conveyed 1,221 reserves to the Dominion. Although "Indians" were wards of the federal state, it was the provincial state, reflecting settler thinking, that determined the scale and character of British Columbia's reserve system.[52] In the words of cultural geographers Cole Harris and Robert Galois, "white (settler) prejudices pushed people into defined spaces, whether or not they wanted to be there. Had Natives been treated as people, rather than as Indians, there would have been no reserves."[53]

In an August 1875 memorandum, Premier Walkem further articulated the provincial government's "Indian" policy by arguing that British Columbia's Indigenous peoples should "mingle with and live amongst the white population with a view of weaning them by degrees from savage life." By doing so, they would gradually adopt the "habits of peace, honesty, and industry." Through well-directed labour, they would, by implication, mingle with and participate in the immigrant economy. For Walkem, labour before schooling "was the way to civilize the Indians."[54] Indeed, integration and assimilation would lessen the need for reserves.

But while whites viewed Indigenous peoples as a race apart from settler society, such was not the case for the Chinese. Symptomatic of the general Sinophobia of European settlers, elected representatives in the first legislature voted unanimously to disenfranchise Indigenous and Chinese people. John Robson – the editor of the *British Colonist,* MLA for Nanaimo, and a strong advocate of political and social reform during his thirty-year career in journalism and politics – was particularly strident in his support of the franchise bill. He also urged, without success, that Chinese be banned from employment on public works and assessed a per capita tax. Franchise restrictions eventually succeeded, but the initial bill, the Qualification and Registration of Voters, 1871, overlooked that Chinese residents at the time of Confederation had been allowed to vote in the province's first election and, through a loophole in the actual legislation, would be able to do so again. Amended and given royal assent in 1874, the act disenfranchised Chinese for the next seventy-three years. In 1876, legislators extended the franchise disqualification to municipalities, and since the federal government used provincial voter lists, Chinese in British Columbia were disenfranchised federally.

Anti-Chinese sentiment exploded into public prominence at mid-decade, when talk about taxes, a subject of constant conversation in the 1870s, was framed as an issue of race.[55] Financing government was a huge problem for the new province, dependent as it was on federal subsidies and limited resource rents. When the first Walkem government was defeated in 1875 on the grounds "of recklessly mortgaging British Columbia's future," the new Elliott administration, facing "a depleted treasury and no obvious source of revenue," introduced a series of taxes. Among them was the first instance of direct taxation in Canada, which required inhabitants to declare their incomes and their property holdings; a school tax of three dollars per head for all adult men; the reinstitution of a toll on the Cariboo Road (previously abolished in 1871); and a tax on the value of wild land, which was defined as "land claimed by any person on which there shall not be existing improvements to the value when assessed of ten dollars per acre."[56] The new property and income taxes caused discontent. Resentment and frustration coalesced around the idea that the Chinese population, almost all working-age men, were not paying their fair share.[57] Although never accurate and criticized by employers, the "unfair tax" argument did generate a surge of anti-Chinese sentiment that helped bring down the Elliott government in 1878.

This argument also gave life to popular politics, which had already been charged with rhetorical energy over the railway issue. Politicians in the

faction associated with George Walkem, who was once again the premier, led the way. In 1878, the assembly, no longer afraid to embrace overtly racist legislation, as it had been in response to Robson's initiatives earlier in the decade, approved a law to tax Chinese. Before Ottawa could consider disallowance, Noah Shakespeare, the Victoria tax collector, began seizing Chinese property in lieu of the fee. His actions provoked a strike throughout Victoria. Chinese merchants stopped selling to whites, and vegetable peddlers, restaurant cooks, and domestic servants withdrew their services. The special tax bill was disallowed.[58]

Then Canadians re-elected the Macdonald government, which was committed to starting railway construction. While "the railway was most welcome ... the likelihood that contractors would import thousands of Chinese labourers was not." Victoria workers reacted by organizing a short-lived political pressure group called the Workingman's Protective Association and, the following year, a successor organization, the Anti-Chinese Association. Through his leadership in these associations, Noah Shakespeare played a key role in stoking working-class fears of Chinese immigration. In 1879, for instance, he organized a 1,500-name petition to prohibit Chinese from railway work. Amor De Cosmos joined the cause by giving speeches in Victoria "laden with anti-Chinese invective," presenting Shakespeare's petition to the House of Commons, and chairing a parliamentary committee on Chinese immigration and public employment.[59] But taxes also remained a key part of the anti-Chinese narrative. In 1882, Noah Shakespeare, Victoria's mayor and soon to be elected as De Cosmos's successor in Parliament, "submitted a petition, the result of a public meeting, which complained that soaring numbers of tax-evading Chinese were driving out white labour, starving the treasury, and repelling the 'Anglo-Saxon race' of settlers."[60]

The anti-Chinese rhetoric that became a signature part of the Walkem faction's politics in the 1878–79 period welled up again in 1884–85 under new political leadership. Taxes were still a focus, but concern about Chinese unemployment following completion of the railway also fuelled racial anxiety. New anti-Chinese legislation, a federal royal commission, and the implementation of Canada's head tax in 1885 followed, bringing to an end a decade-long period when racially charged opposition to the presence of Chinese marked an important stage in the development of popular politics in British Columbia. Through franchise and racial policies, early provincial politicians were also seeking to forge a regional consciousness around the idea of whiteness. By concentrating "into a 'counter-idea' everything that

RETURN

To an Address presented to His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor requesting him to cause to be placed before the House copies of all Orders in Council, correspondence, and other documents in any way connected with the carrying into effect of the desire of this House, as expressed last Session by resolution, respecting the making of the "Chinese Immigration Act of Canada" more restrictive in its provisions.

By Command,

JNO. ROBSON,

Provincial Secretary.

Provincial Secretary's Office,
   16th March, 1892.

Copy of a Report of a Committee of the Honourable the Executive Council, approved by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor on the 3rd day of March, 1891.

The Committee of Council submit for the approval of His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor the following Resolution passed by the Legislative Assembly during its present Session, viz. :—

"Whereas the 'Chinese Immigration Act of Canada' has proven in a great measure beneficial, but in some respects defective, more especially as the 5th section permits vessels to carry one Chinese immigrant to any part of Canada for every 50 tons of its tonnage ; but we are of opinion that a much larger restriction should be imposed, and fewer Chinese carried on each vessel, or their importation prohibited ;

"And whereas the 8th section imposes only an entrance duty of $50 on every person of Chinese origin entering Canada, when $100 is in our opinion the lowest entrance duty that should be charged, if Chinese are allowed to enter Canada at all ;

"And whereas the 4th sub-section of the 8th section provides that the entrance duty of $50 shall not apply to any Chinese person who resided or was within Canada on 1st January, 1886 ; and the 13th section authorizes the issuance of a certificate of leave to depart and return to Chinese who wish to leave and return to Canada ; but, in our opinion, the entrance duty should apply to all Chinese other than those mentioned in sub-sections (a) and (b) of section 8, and the issuance of the above mentioned certificates should be entirely abolished ;

"Be it therefore resolved, That a respectful address be presented to His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor, requesting him to move the Dominion Government to cause the 'Chinese Immigration Act of Canada' to be made more restrictive in the manner indicated."

The Committee advise that a copy of this Minute, if approved, be forwarded to the Honourable the Secretary of State for Canada.

Certified.

(Signed)   A. CAMPBELL REDDIE,
   Deputy Clerk, Executive Council.

[Receipt of the above acknowledged by the Secretary of State, in despatch dated 11th March, 1891.]

On March 1892, the BC legislature passed a resolution to ask the federal government to make its Chinese Immigration Act more restrictive. The act, passed in 1885, was intended to limit the entrance of Chinese into Canada by charging each immigrant a head tax of fifty dollars. | *Sessional Papers of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 1892*

was thought to be in conflict with the building of an ideal society," a society they defined as white and British, politicians were using the racial idiom to cement "the collective sense of an in-group." They were creating what historian Patricia Roy has called a white man's province.[61]

* * *

Histories of post-Confederation BC politics usually emphasize the undeveloped nature of the province's political institutions. Electoral data suggests why. The 1874 voters list registered only 2,858 eligible voters; in 1881, there were 4,766, all males of European descent within a province that had about fifty thousand people. Early provincial politics was conducted by a limited number of men who mostly engaged with one another in face-to-face dialogue. Anomalies abound. In 1878, 535 voters in Nanaimo elected one representative while 485 voters in Comox elected three. That same year, the province had 5.7 MLAs per one thousand voters, or 17.5 voters per MLA.[62] Given the small number of voters, it is not surprising that elected representatives connected with one another in loosely organized factions that reflected their personal loyalties and local and regional concerns, including the tariff, the railway route, and taxes. The English-born Thomas Basil Humphreys epitomized the partisan instability of politics after Confederation. Having arrived at Victoria in 1858 as an eighteen-year-old adventurer, he worked at various jobs, including auctioneering and manual labour. In the 1870s, he made his mark in politics as an unreliable partisan, moving back and forth between those in power and those in opposition. Known as the "Destroyer of Governments," the "acid-tongued" Humphries was "one of the earliest politicians in British Columbia" and a symbol of the popular politics that the colonial elite found threatening.[63]

Historian Daniel Marshall has argued that "prior to political parties and at least before 1883, the major cause of legislative alignment in B.C. was issue-oriented politics as determined by the terms of union contract of Confederation. More particularly, such issue-oriented cleavage was a manifestation of the politics of region and thus local interest, as opposed to alignments based on ideological polarization."[64] Marshall makes his case effectively by exploring votes in the legislature on tariffs and the railway. Immediately after Confederation, legislators voted on whether to accept the lower Canadian tariff or challenge the federal government to reintroduce the higher tariff of the colonial period. In the next decade, they voted on the scheduling and location of the transcontinental railway.[65] The racially charged issues of taxation and immigration also reflected regional influences.

But the story of early provincial politics as it unfolds here suggests a different reading, one that is distinctly ideological. Despite the lack of partisan discipline and the organizational framework of competing parties, politics followed a discernible pattern, one shaped by conflicting responses to democratization. While the conservative colonial elite resisted this trend, the governing majority, which would remain in power almost continuously until early 1883, advanced popular issues such as opposition to the federal government's railway and immigration policies and control of the provincial courts. Led by De Cosmos and Walkem, popular politics meant racist politics, as shown in the legislators' aggressive attempts to promote a white province through discriminatory taxation. The first period of provincial politics in British Columbia was, then, really about the emergence of popular politics and its challenge to the power of a fading colonial elite. As historian Hamar Foster convincingly argues, the 1883 victory of elected legislators over judges and their socially advantaged and politically connected supporters marked an important transition in the province's political history. The "colonial era was truly over."[66]