

The Electoral Significance of Public Sector Bashing*

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The confrontation between Operation Solidarity and the government of British Columbia precipitated by the unveiling of the Social Credit restraint package in July 1983 represents much more than the expected response to a radical legislative program. The episode raises questions about the rights of extraparliamentary opposition in a democratic political system and about the political acumen of government advisors who seem not to have anticipated the extent and intensity of opposition generated by their program. Its significance goes beyond the immediate interests of both sides in the dispute to the question of the proper role for government in ensuring economic stability and individual well-being. As a manifestation of the attempt to implement neo-conservative solutions to social and economic problems its significance goes beyond the borders of British Columbia. It may even represent the onset of political instability generated by the "fiscal crisis of the state" predicted by political economists.¹

The battle also reflects profound changes in the occupational structure of the province and concomitant changes in the support bases of the two main political parties.² Whatever the outcome of the current battle, these changes will continue to shape the party system and partisan conflict. The government staved off a general strike with the core of its program intact, but it will have to reckon with the electoral consequences of its

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¹ Carol Nackenoff, "O'Connor's State Sector Model of the United States Economy: Examining Some Political Consequences," *British Journal of Political Science* 12 (April 1982): 221-39.

² A detailed analysis of changes in the occupational structure of British Columbia can be found in Rennie Warburton and David Coburn, "The Rise of Non-Manual Work in British Columbia," *BC Studies* 59 (Autumn 1983): 5-27. This analysis represents, in part, an exploration of political changes they speculate about.

actions at a later date. This article provides a framework for assessing those consequences.

For most of the time that political scientists have been interested in them, British Columbia politics have been seen as class politics. The CCF, free of the agrarian protest complications which characterized it elsewhere, maintained a fairly steady one-third of the popular vote based, so far as we can tell, on the support of working class trade union members and a few middle class intellectual sympathizers. Its electoral impact was confined largely to areas where blue collar supporters existed in sufficient numbers to determine the result in the riding — some of the mining areas and east Vancouver. Since 1941 the middle class has rallied behind a single champion, the coalition of Liberals and Conservatives until 1952 and Social Credit afterwards.

But the language of class analysis does not give a completely accurate picture of provincial politics. Social Credit under W. A. C. Bennett had credentials as an anti-establishment party, cultivated a populist image and added to its appeal among blue collar workers by presiding over an unprecedented expansion of economic opportunities in the province. During the same period CCF socialism moderated as it completed its transformation into the NDP and added positions on environmental issues and resource development to its traditional concerns with labour and social policy issues.

The province's class structure has experienced dramatic changes as well. The W. A. C. Bennett era coincided with major transformations in the economy and social structure of the province which created new political forces and thrust new issues onto the public agenda. The labour force doubled during his twenty years as Premier and changed in character. Employment in the public sector expanded along with new demands in the health, education and social welfare fields brought about, in part, by Bennett's development policies.³ The service, finance and real estate sectors rather than primary industry experienced the highest growth rates. Phenomenal population growth occurred in the interior. Kamloops and Prince George, which ranked eleventh and seventeenth respectively among B.C. cities in 1952, became important regional centres, and by 1972 were the fourth and third largest cities in the province.⁴ In part because of the growth of employment in tertiary industries, membership

³ The political significance of these changes has been explored in Donald E. Blake, Richard Johnston and David J. Elkins, "Sources of Change in the B.C. Party System," *BC Studies* 50 (Summer 1981): 3-28.

⁴ A. L. Farley, *Atlas of British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1979), p. 135.

in the trade union movement peaked at 55.4 percent of the paid labour force in 1958⁵ and has declined since then, although British Columbia remains the most unionized province in Canada.

Failure to comprehend the significance of these changes was partly responsible for W. A. C. Bennett's defeat in 1972, a defeat preceded by major battles with important groups within or dependent upon the public sector: hospital workers, government employees, school teachers and doctors. As Martin Robin put it, "British Columbia's classic confrontation between labour and capital was complemented . . . by a second struggle; between the old and the new middle classes, between Sunday politicians administering a welfare state and Monday morning professionals eager to ensure its efficiency and humanity."⁶

The occupational trends have continued during the past decade. By 1981 fully 70 percent of the province's labour force was employed in service-producing rather than goods-producing industries.⁷ Parts of the service sector (finance, insurance and real estate and community, business and personal service) experienced the largest growth rates of any industrial sector.⁸ These developments were accompanied by another phenomenon, the growth in white collar and public sector union membership. By 1979 three out of ten union members in British Columbia worked in the public sector.⁹

These developments have blurred the distinctions traditionally made between class groupings just as the growth of the public sector has robbed the terms "left" and "right" of their traditional meanings. Governments of the right, no matter how ideologically pure and non-interventionist they claim to be, must administer the welfare state. They preside over a state sector with unparalleled power to shape the investment decisions of private enterprise, whether it be through the provision of transportation infrastructure, loans, subsidies or financial guarantees.

⁵ Employers' Council of British Columbia, *British Columbia: Collective Bargaining Environment, 1980*, table 28, p. 46.

⁶ Martin Robin, *Pillars of Profit* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973), p. 290.

⁷ Calculated from figures in British Columbia Ministry of Labour, "Labour Bulletin," January 1982, p. 4.

⁸ Operation Solidarity was launched with the support of the province's trade unions and the B.C. Teachers' Federation within one week of the unveiling of the government's program. The Solidarity Coalition is an umbrella organization representing a variety of groups opposed to legislative changes regarding the protection of human rights, tenants' rights, programs for women and a variety of social programs in the health and welfare area. Their combination is referred to as "Solidarity" in this article.

⁹ *Vancouver Sun*, March 1983.

Governments of the left must cope with the power of private capital and are equally dependent on revenues generated by the resource industries. The support base of the left has become much more diversified and contains increasing numbers of state sector employees and white collar groups whose demands and interests do not always coincide with those voiced by the NDP's traditional blue collar supporters.

When viewed from this perspective, the changes unveiled by Social Credit following the 1983 election and the responses to them take on a new meaning. The development of Operation Solidarity and the Solidarity Coalition¹⁰ displayed the political muscle which could be exercised by an alliance of private and public sector unions with spokespersons for health, education, welfare, human rights and other groups whose interests are closely tied to the expanded state role in social policy. At the same time, tactical disagreements within the alliance point to sources of weakness in the opposition to Social Credit which characterize the support base of the NDP as well.

TABLE 1
1979 Provincial Vote by Sector of Employment
(Vertical Percentages)

	<i>Private Sector</i>	<i>Public Sector</i>
Liberal	2.3	1.7
Conservative	3.8	6.0
NDP	42.0	47.0
Social Credit	51.9	45.0
Other	0.0	0.2
	(479)	(245)

NOTE: Public sector includes employees of federal, provincial and municipal governments, publicly funded institutions such as schools, universities and hospitals, Crown corporations and the armed forces. Respondents who have never worked have been classified according to the occupation of a family member.

This division was graphically illustrated by recriminations which arose over the agreement negotiated to end the strike of the B.C. Government Employees' Union in November 1983 and thus avert a threatened general strike. The agreement secured traditional trade union rights for the BCGEU, but its public sector allies were forced to settle for "promises to consult" on human rights, educational cutbacks and social policy issues.

¹⁰ Calculated from figures in Employers' Council, *Collective Bargaining*, table 29, p. 47.

I will return to this theme later. For now let us turn to the electoral significance of employment in the public or private sector.

There are pronounced differences in the voting patterns of public sector and private sector employees. Private sector employees and their families are strong supporters of Social Credit, with nearly 52 percent voting for that party in 1979 (table 1). NDP support in the private sector was only 42 percent. NDP support is substantially higher among public sector workers, and the party even enjoys a slight lead over Social Credit within that group. Thirty-six percent of NDP voters in 1979 were from the public sector.¹¹

Sectoral divisions complicate the relationship between social class and party support (table 2). Looking at just the two-party vote, the NDP lead over Social Credit among blue collar workers in the private sector is approximately 9 percentage points. In the public sector that lead increases to 25 percentage points. A Social Credit margin of 15 percentage points among those in private sector managerial and professional occupations turns into a deficit of 10 percentage points in the public sector. Curiously, the quintessential bureaucrats, skilled and semi-skilled clerical employees in the public sector, prefer Social Credit to the NDP (the margin is nearly 8 points in favour of Social Credit). However, their enthusiasm does not match that of their private sector counterparts (a margin of almost 30 points for Social Credit). Table 2 also contains a hint of another important wrinkle in the class-party relationship, one which will be dealt with shortly — the upper status occupational group is not as pro Social Credit as other white collar groups.

A full-scale analysis of philosophical and policy differences between Social Credit and the NDP is beyond the scope of this article, but it does appear that the battle between the two parties over the government's restraint package reflects competing visions of the appropriate role for government. Social Credit champions individual initiative, the free enter-

¹¹ Unless otherwise indicated, the public opinion data used in this article are from a large-scale survey of the British Columbia population conducted following the 1979 provincial election. A total of 1,051 individuals were interviewed. For details of the survey see Blake, Johnston and Elkins, "Sources of Change," Appendix.

The operational definition of "public sector" in this paper combines federal, provincial and municipal employees, employees of publicly funded institutions such as schools, hospitals and universities, employees of Crown corporations and members of the armed forces. Those not in the labour force were classified by occupation and sector of employment of a family member — spouses in the case of married respondents, father in the case of students and non-students never employed — and on the basis of former occupation for those who were retired or unemployed. If the analysis is restricted to direct employees of the provincial government, the NDP lead over Social Credit appears much larger.

TABLE 2
Social Credit Margin over NDP
by Occupation and Sector — 1979
(Social Credit and NDP Voters Only)

	<i>Private Sector</i>	<i>Public Sector</i>
Managerial/Professional	15.0	-10.2
Other White Collar	29.8	7.6
Blue Collar	- 9.2	-25.0
Total	7.5	-12.6

NOTE: Table entries are percentage point differences calculated as % Social Credit minus % NDP within a given group.

A negative figure indicates an NDP lead over Social Credit.

prise system and a role for government as a facilitator of private economic initiatives. It operates the welfare state, but sometimes rather grudgingly with an eye peeled for welfare cheats.¹² It endorses universality of medical care but argues that those who can afford it should pay a larger share of their own costs. The NDP tends to view the private sector as a beast to be watched rather than given its head, and in the 1983 election the party advocated direct government job creation rather than private sector stimulation as the way to economic recovery. In its view government must be ever vigilant lest unrestrained individualism run roughshod over the underprivileged.

Differences of opinion regarding the propriety or degree of government intervention in economic and social policy offer one way of analyzing the link between public attitudes and party positions and of assessing public response to restraint proposals which involve reducing the role of government. To that end I have utilized an opinion index, developed from survey data, labelled "Individual versus Collective Responsibility," which seems to capture major elements of the debate over the role of the state in economic regulation, provision of a social safety net, and in relieving individuals of some responsibility for their own well-being.¹³ The pattern

¹² The government has been constrained by its own rhetoric in defending itself against critics of its approach to restraint. For example, expenditures for the Ministry of Human Resources have *increased* as a percentage of the provincial budget according to 1983-84 estimates, and, despite cutbacks, expenditures on social welfare programs per capita remain the highest in Canada. Neither of these facts has been trumpeted by the government.

¹³ The items making up the scale were as follows, with the answer corresponding to endorsement of collective responsibility given in parentheses:

of responses to the six questions making up the index permits me to give people scores from 0 to 6 depending on the number of statements favouring collective responsibility or government action on these matters that they agree with. Those with low scores on the index support individualistic positions.

For ease of presentation individual scores on this index have been grouped in table 3. The most individualistic quarter of the sample has been placed in the "individualistic" category, and the quarter most supportive of collective responsibility in the "collective" category. The remaining half have been grouped into a middle category labelled "neutral."

TABLE 3
1979 Provincial Vote by Occupation and Ideology
(Vertical Percentages)

	Occupation					
	Managerial/Professional			Blue Collar		
Ideology:	Indiv.	Neut.	Collect.	Indiv.	Neut.	Collect.
Liberal	4.9	2.9	3.0	2.9	0.8	1.6
Conservative	7.3	5.8	6.1	2.9	6.4	3.3
NDP	24.4	38.5	62.1	22.9	50.4	77.0
Social Credit	63.4	52.9	28.8	71.4	42.4	16.4
N	(41)	(104)	(66)	(35)	(125)	(61)

NOTES: Respondents were classified into individualistic, neutral, or collective responsibility categories on the basis of their score on the "Individual versus Collective Responsibility" scale. The two extreme categories represent the top and bottom quartiles of the distribution on this measure.

"Other white collar" and "farmer" have been omitted to simplify the presentation.

1. After a person has worked until he is 65, it is proper for the community to support him. (Agree)
2. The government ought to make sure that everyone has a decent standard of living. (Agree)
3. Let's face it, most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted to. (Disagree)
4. Why should the government spend my tax dollars on sick people; my family always put aside something for a rainy day. (Disagree)
5. Government regulation stifles personal initiative. OR Without government regulations, some people will just take advantage of the rest of us. (Chose second statement)
6. If I do my best, it is only right that the government should help me out when I get some bad breaks. OR Each individual should accept the consequences of their own actions. (Chose first statement)

Neo-conservative appeals to individualism are an obvious source of Social Credit strength, especially among the working class. Over 70 per cent of the most individualistic blue collar workers voted Social Credit in 1979, a rate even higher than among individualistic managers and professionals. Conversely, collective sentiments within the highest status occupational group are an impressive source of NDP support — over 60 percent for those at the collective responsibility end of the scale. This figure must be borne in mind when we come to evaluate the rationality of the Social Credit restraint program as an electoral strategy.

Support for an activist and interventionist government role among state sector employees is probably one source of the sectoral differences in vote already noted. The link between employment in the public sector and support for the NDP may be tied to self-interest in other cases.¹⁴ Despite the fact that Social Credit has been in office during the major expansions in public employment, it was the NDP which granted full collective bargaining rights to its employees. The NDP, not Social Credit, extols the benefits of social engineering. Both Social Credit and NDP governments have made frequent use of Crown corporations, but for Social Credit they seem to have been created mainly to facilitate economic expansion by the private sector, albeit heavily influenced by government preferences governing location and timing. The NDP retained those created for that purpose but developed others to achieve redistributive goals (ICBC), to create a state presence in the forest industry to counter corporate concentration, and for social purposes (the purchase of the pulp mill at Ocean Falls).¹⁵ The NDP had only three years to show its intentions regarding state employment but seems to have convinced many public sector employees that they would be better protected under the NDP. Those who became members of public sector unions, or at least those enthusiastic about it, had the pro-union reputation of the NDP as an additional incentive.

Ideology, in the sense of support for or opposition to an interventionist role for government, and self-interest, as measured by employment in the public or private sectors of the economy, both provide justifications for choosing between Social Credit and the NDP. However, they were statis-

¹⁴ An exploration of the political significance of employment in the public sector in the United Kingdom was unable to distinguish between the effects of self-interest and ideology. See James E. Alt and Janet Turner, "The Case of Silk-Stocking Socialists and the Calculating Children of the Middle Class," *British Journal of Political Science* 12 (April 1982): 239-46.

¹⁵ See Marsha A. Chandler, "State Enterprise and Partisanship in Provincial Politics," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 15 (Dec. 1982): 711-40.

TABLE 4
Marginal Effect of Sector on Vote — 1979
(Social Credit and NDP Voters Only)

N = 470

Dependent variable: "1" if Social Credit
 "0" if NDP

<i>Explanatory Variables</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>standard error</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>standard error</i>
Middle age	.10	(.04)	.10	(.04)
Blue collar	-.17	(.05)	-.17	(.05)
Professional/ Semi-Professional	-.16	(.06)	-.13	(.06)
Union member in family	-.18	(.04)	-.15	(.04)
Family income	.08	(.02)	.08	(.02)
Individual versus collective responsibility	-.13	(.02)	-.12	(.02)
Private sector	—	—	.10	(.05)
(Constant)	.86	(.09)	.76	(.10)
R-squared	.25		.26	

NOTES: Blue collar, professional, union membership, private sector and middle age ("1" if age 40-60) are dummy variables. Family income is scored 1 to 5 from lowest to highest quintile; individual versus collective responsibility scored from 0 (most individualistic) to 6 (most supportive of collective responsibility).

All coefficients are significant beyond the .05 level.

tically independent determinants of the vote in 1979 (table 4). The individual entries in the column labelled "b" tell us what effect the characteristics listed as explanatory variables have on the probability of voting Social Credit. Higher incomes, middle age, the absence of union members in the family, managerial and clerical occupations (the complement of the occupational classifications which appear in the table with negative signs), individualistic attitudes, and employment in the private sector are all strongly associated with support for Social Credit.

Because the results were obtained by excluding those who voted for parties other than Social Credit or the NDP, the figures for probability of an NDP vote would be identical but of opposite sign. The first two columns of numbers are based on an analysis which ignored the distinc-

tion between employment sectors. The last two columns include its effects. The table confirms the expectation that even after taking into account the position of voters on the major ideological questions arising in provincial politics, those employed in the private sector have a higher probability (about .10 higher) of voting Social Credit than similar (in terms of income, age, occupational status, union membership and ideology) voters in the public sector.¹⁶

I should say a word about the coefficients associated with occupation. The "blue collar" and "professional/semi-professional" coefficients signify that the probability of a Social Credit vote is lower among individuals in these occupations, other things being equal, than among "owners and managers" and "other white collar" groups. It represents a statistical test of the apparent division within the highest status occupational group noted earlier. Moreover, that division is independent of sector of employment and union membership, an important factor to bear in mind when evaluating the electoral consequences of public-sector bashing — support for an interventionist state is not confined to state employees or those, such as trade union members, who require state protection of their rights.

Given this background, what can we say about the electoral payoffs of public-sector bashing? Downsizing the public service and restraint were not features of the 1979 provincial campaign; nevertheless, the data gathered about that election provide some clues as to the opinions of civil servants held by the mass public. Simply put, most British Columbians, regardless of party, feel that civil servants in Victoria (and in Ottawa for that matter) waste tax dollars, but most also feel that civil servants are competent. Moreover, despite a concerted attempt to find more civil servant haters within the Social Credit electorate, I am forced to conclude that, if anything, Social Credit voters are more likely to endorse positive statements about civil servants than are NDP voters. I suspect many voters interpreted questions about waste and incompetence as questions about the quality of government provided by the party in power. Since Social Credit was that party, criticism of civil servants by its supporters may have been more restrained as a result.

What factors other than the presumed unpopularity of civil servants could have motivated the government? Some see the hand of neo-Conservatism and the Fraser Institute. Others, pointing to the fact that many

¹⁶ Strictly speaking, an alternative procedure such as probit rather than regression should be employed in order to produce unbiased probability estimates. In practice, there is little difference in the conclusions reached about the relative importance of different variables using either procedure.

of the proposed changes would not save any money and that the government budgeted for a larger increase in expenditures than any other province in Canada except Manitoba, see an attempt to remove a variety of obstacles in the way of potential investors who desire the freedom to operate in an unregulated environment with a chastened labour movement.¹⁷ Revenge is another possible motive. The groups who came under attack in the legislative blitz were vocal critics of government policies, and many campaigned actively against it in the 1983 election.¹⁸

A longer-term perspective suggests simple self-preservation as another possible motive. The NDP entered the 1970s with the support of roughly one-third of the electorate. It entered the 1980s with nearly half. W. A. C. Bennett's economic development policies undoubtedly produced support for Social Credit, but they also helped to alter the economy and social structure of the province in ways which contributed to growth of the NDP. The expansion of the mining, logging and pulp and paper industries in the interior contributed to the spread of unionized occupational settings. The expansion of educational, health and social welfare services which accompanied industrial growth made a further contribution to the geographical diffusion of sources of support which could be tapped by the NDP.¹⁹ Whatever the other reasons for it, a desire to place restrictions on the growth of the public sector or to shrink it absolutely would seem to be a sensible step for a party to take when it derives so little electoral benefit from an investment about which it is also ideologically embarrassed.

In fact, investment in economic development is a two-edged sword. If the government could retain its traditional role as supplier of the transportation and energy infrastructure within which private sector development of the province's resources can take place, but at the same time restrain growth in "non-productive" services, it will have minimized the negative (in an electoral sense) side-effects of its development policies. At the same time it could work to exploit potential weaknesses in the NDP electoral coalition.

The growth of the NDP in the 1960s and 1970s was largely a result of the expansion of middle class support for the NDP. Its candidates have been increasingly recruited from among public sector professions such as teaching and from other white collar, middle class groups. Newspaper

¹⁷ See A. R. Dobell, "What's the B.C. Spirit? Recent Experience in the Management of Restraint," University of Victoria (September 1983).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ For details see Blake, Johnston and Elkins, "Sources of Changes . . ."

descriptions of Solidarity, which suggest that it has replaced the NDP by providing more broadly based opposition to the government, are mistaken. Operation Solidarity and the Solidarity Coalition are the symbolic organizational representation of the modern NDP electorate. Disagreement between its public sector and private sector components is testimony to the vulnerability of NDP support at election time to similar divisions. Social Credit is undoubtedly aware of these divisions. It tried to exploit them during the 1983 election campaign and afterwards. How significant are they?

TABLE 5
*Political Attitudes by Occupation and
Economic Sector
(NDP Voters Only)*

A. Mean Populism Score

	<i>Private Sector</i>	<i>Public Sector</i>
Managerial/Professional	3.5	3.4
Other White Collar	4.4	4.2
Blue Collar	4.6	3.9

B. Mean Individual versus Collective Responsibility Score

	<i>Private Sector</i>	<i>Public Sector</i>
Managerial/Professional	4.1	4.3
Other White Collar	4.2	4.2
Blue Collar	4.2	4.1

The modern NDP electorate consists of an alliance between its traditional unionized blue collar supporters (among whom I would include blue collar public sector workers) and a new middle class of public and private sector professionals and semi-professionals. But there is no significant difference between sectors in the degree of support for a state role as protector of the weak, as shaper of economic decisions, and as a solver of social problems regardless of occupational level (table 5).

Working class populism is another matter. Attacks on the privileged position of public employees and the wisdom of educators, the enumeration of frivolous human rights complaints, and bulldozer tactics in the legislature which characterized the pursuit of restraint objectives reflect

TABLE 6
*Attitudinal Differences among Blue Collar Workers
 by Sector and Union Membership
 (NDP Voters Only)*

A. Mean Populism Score

	<i>Private Sector</i>	<i>Public Sector</i>
Nonunion	4.4	3.7
Union	4.7	4.0

B. Mean Individual versus Collective Responsibility Score

	<i>Private Sector</i>	<i>Public Sector</i>
Nonunion	4.2	4.9
Union	4.2	3.9

the populist background of Social Credit and may have been directed to blue collar populists in the electorates of both parties. Blue collar NDP voters employed in the private sector score much higher than other New Democrats on a battery of attitude items used to create a "Populism" scale.²⁰ Even the NDP's public sector blue collar supporters are more populist than managers and professionals working for the state.

The traditional bastion of NDP support, unionized blue collar workers, may be wooed by the government's defence of downsizing which exploits stereotypes about the privileged position of civil servants compared to their private sector counterparts. It is apparent from table 6 that unionized private sector workers are the most populist group in the NDP electorate (with a mean populism score of 4.7). However, the same table shows once more that there are only minor differences (and not statisti-

²⁰ The measurement of populist attitudes is based on a six-item scale consisting of the following items with the populist answer indicated in parentheses:

1. I don't mind a politician's methods if he manages to get the right things done. (Agree)
2. In the long run, I'll put my trust in the simple, down-to-earth thinking of ordinary people rather than the theories of experts and intellectuals. (Agree)
3. In politics, talk without action is worse than doing nothing at all. (Agree)
4. We would probably solve most of our big national problems if government could actually be brought back to the people at the grass roots. (Agree)
5. What we need is a government that gets the job done without all this red tape. (Agree)
6. In times of trouble, it doesn't really matter so much how you act but whether you act. (Agree)

cally significant ones) between sectors in the degree of support for an interventionist state among unionized blue collar workers.

What are the costs which might be incurred in pursuing these limited openings in the NDP coalition? Support for an interventionist state is not confined to public sector employees. Social Credit is unlikely to increase its support significantly among the middle classes by its approach to restraint. Indeed, it may even lose support. In fact, resistance to Social Credit individualism and economic conservatism seems to be responsible for partisan divisions within the middle class employed in the private sector. A return to populist rhetoric is unlikely to heal it. Social Credit revival during the 1970s was based largely on its attractiveness to those who feared the adventurism or questioned the competence of the NDP. It did not represent a ringing endorsement of neo-conservatism.²¹

By participating in a battle which resulted in defining restraint as an attack on trade union rights, the government may have also lost the opportunity to drive a wedge between public and private sector blue collar workers based on an appeal to populist sentiments. Whatever its current internal problems, the fact that Solidarity exists at all may have strengthened rather than weakened the NDP electoral coalition.

One can only speculate on the immediate consequences for party support of the events of 1983. The Marktrend poll published in the *Vancouver Sun*²² revealed that virtually identical percentages of those intending to vote Social Credit or NDP, 42 percent and 40 percent, respectively, endorsed the goal of "restraint" in the abstract but disapproved of the methods being used to achieve it. The only specific goal overwhelmingly supported by Social Credit voters (75 percent in favour) was the plan to reduce the numbers of civil servants. Thirty-six percent disagreed partly or completely with proposals to increase user fees for medical care, and 35 percent disagreed with the decision to abolish the Human Rights Commission. I would argue that these are dangerously high levels of opposition for Social Credit to accept in an electorate so evenly shared with the NDP. The verdict of the voters will not be rendered until the next election, providing sufficient time for passions to cool and for compromises to be worked out. But the structural changes which shaped responses to the government's legislative package will no doubt continue to affect the choice voters make between Social Credit and the New Democratic Party.

²¹ For details see Blake, Johnston and Elkins, "Sources of Change . . .," especially 12-16.

²² *Vancouver Sun*, 24 September 1983.

The expansion of the public sector and the creation of a new middle class in both the private and public sectors has added a new dimension to the traditional conflict between left and right in British Columbia. Employees of the state together with private sector proponents of the positive state now constitute an important part of the NDP electorate, but, at the same time, have confronted the party with problems of coalition maintenance. Populism is a source of division with the NDP electorate and coincides with the division between private and public sectors of employment. However, sectoral divisions do not completely coincide with divisions of opinion on the appropriate role for government. Divisions within the middle class on that score, particularly between professional and business élites, will continue to provide problems for Social Credit electoral strategists. The sheer numbers of public sector employees which will remain after downsizing will do so as well.