

The "Gigantic Scheme"; Crofter Immigration and Deep-Sea Fisheries Development for British Columbia (1887-1893)*

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Between 1887 and 1893, the British Columbia government unsuccessfully negotiated a "gigantic scheme" to settle Scottish crofter families on Vancouver Island and to stimulate deep sea fisheries development. The scheme originated partly in the British government's temporary willingness to provide state-assisted emigration to destitute highland crofters and partly in the initiative of Alexander Begg, "crofter commissioner" for British Columbia. Despite a lengthy period of negotiations between the province and the United Kingdom, the plan was, in the end, never implemented. The reasons for the failure lay in changing British political and economic conditions, in the provincial Premier's death during a critical stage in the negotiations, and in the controversy surrounding the proposal in British Columbia. Yet the unrealized scheme merits attention for two reasons. First, the provincial government proposed to intervene in both social and economic sectors through the vehicles of state-assisted emigration and incentives for resource development. And, secondly, public debate about the crofter colonization and deep-sea fisheries development scheme revealed much about the materialistic and individualistic attitudes of late nineteenth-century British Columbians.

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Proposals in the 1880s for state-assisted crofter emigration from Scotland to Canada developed from the British government's response to highland conditions.¹ By 1882, a decline in the sheep-farming industry had created

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¹ For a description of highland economic, social and political conditions at this time, see R. H. Campbell, *Scotland since 1707; The Rise of an Industrial Society* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 293-95; Gordon Donaldson, *Scotland; The Shap-*

severe economic distress, and migration to the lowlands had resulted in general depopulation. Deer forests maintained for sporting interest by a new class of industrialist landlords displaced the sheep farms. Meanwhile, land holdings were increasingly subdivided and overpopulated, and crofters, who erroneously believed that deer forest could be turned over to farming land, grew more and more discontented. Disturbances in June 1883, known as the "Crofters' Wars," caused the British government to fear another Ireland in the highlands and islands and prompted it to appoint a royal commission under Lord Napier and Ettrick to inquire into highland conditions.² The 1884 *Report* of the Napier commission, which also made numerous recommendations about tenancy and consolidation of land holdings, fisheries, communications, education, justice and deer forests, suggested state-assisted crofter emigration in the form of an advance, or loan of money, to facilitate the transfer of entire families, principally from the most troubled areas in the northern Hebrides and the adjacent coasts of Ross and Sutherland, to the colonies.³ It recommended that emigrants be given employment or homesteads by which they would be able to repay the government advance.

The British government acted upon the emigration recommendation within four years of the completion of the *Report*. Although it was generally reluctant to expend public money upon emigration and encouraged instead private, charitable or colonial assistance, it was occasionally

ing of a Nation (Newton Abbot, Devon: David and Charles, 1974), pp. 169-72; Bruce Lenman, *An Economic History of Modern Scotland, 1660-1976* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1977), pp. 197-200; Rosalind Mitchison, *A History of Scotland* (London: Methuen, 1970), pp. 392-96. For a description of conditions on Lewis in 1887, see City Archives of Vancouver (CAV), Alexander Begg, Correspondence and Writings on the Crofter Immigration Scheme, 1887-1904, Add. Mss. 181, 35-43, Morrison to Begg, 6 December 1887.

² Lenman, p. 199; Mitchison, pp. 393, 395; British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, *Sessional Papers*, 1892, "Papers in Relation to the Settlement of Fishermen and Others and the Development of Deep Sea Fisheries in the Province of British Columbia," p. 686.

³ Great Britain, Parliament, *Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into the Condition of the Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, Cmd. 3980, 1884, Reprinted in *Irish University Press Series of British Parliamentary Papers: Agriculture* (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1969), vol. XXI, pp. 97-108. "Crofter" was defined on p. 3 of this report as "a small tenant of land with or without a lease, who finds in the cultivation and produce of his holdings a material portion of his occupation, earnings, and sustenance, and who pays rent directly to the proprietor." "Cottar" meant "the occupier of a dwelling with or without some small portion of land, whose main subsistence is by the wages of labour, and whose rent, if any, is paid to a tenant and not to the landlord" (p. 3). The majority of crofters and cottars were "wholly or largely dependent for their sustenance on their earnings as fishermen" (p. 53).

pressed into aiding emigrants by acute economic depression and social disturbance of the sort experienced in 1883 by the Scottish crofters.⁴ In 1888 and 1889 it provided an advance to assist the settlement of Hebridean families at Killarney, Manitoba, and Saltcoats, North West Territories (now Saskatchewan).⁵ Killarney was moderately successful, although the settlers took several years more than originally required to repay their advance, but Saltcoats was eventually abandoned due to unfavourable weather conditions, poor agricultural practices and the fishermen crofters' unsuitability to farming.

While the British government demonstrated some willingness to assist emigration to Canada in the late 1880s, the initiative for a British Columbia crofter colonization scheme came from Alexander Begg. Born the son and grandson of crofters in 1825 at Watten, Caithness, Begg was apparently motivated by humanitarian concern for the crofters' distress.⁶ In time, he revealed more worldly ambitions for financial reimbursement and for appointment as selection and settlement agent.⁷ Although he pursued a varied and eventful career as teacher, journalist and civil servant during his forty years in Canada, he had acquired some experience in emigration and colonization matters when he acted as emigration commissioner in Scotland for the Ontario government (1872) and established a temperance colony at Parry Sound (1874).⁸ While ranching in the

⁴ For secondary material on state-assisted emigration, see W. A. Carrothers, *Emigration from the British Isles* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1929), *passim*; Helen I. Cowan, *British Emigration to British North America; The First Hundred Years* (Rev. ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), *passim*; H. J. M. Johnston, *British Emigration Policy, 1815-1830; "Shovelling out Paupers"* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), *passim*; G. F. Plant, *Oversea Settlement; Migration from the United Kingdom to the Dominions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), *passim*.

⁵ Carrothers, *Emigration from the British Isles*, pp. 233-35; Kent Stuart, "The Scottish Crofter Colony, Saltcoats, 1889-1904," *Saskatchewan History*, vol. XXIV, no. 2 (1971), pp. 41-50.

⁶ For details of Begg's life, see Madge Wolfenden, "Alexander Begg Versus Alexander Begg," *B.C. Historical Quarterly*, vol. I, no. 2 (April 1937), pp. 135-39. For his crofting origins, see Great Britain, Parliament, *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation*, Cmd. 274, 23 July 1889, Reprinted in *Irish University Press Series of British Parliamentary Papers: Emigration* (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1969), vol. IX, pp. 163-64; CAV, Begg, 499 [unidentified newspaper clippings]. For his concern about the crofters, see *ibid.*; Scottish Record Office (SRO), Crofter Settlement Scheme Collection, AF 51/151, Begg to Lothian, 23 November 1887 (Microfilm copy in Provincial Archives of British Columbia).

⁷ For Begg's ambition to become agent, see CAV, Begg, 473-79, Begg to Lothian, 29 June 1892; for his desire for reimbursement, see *ibid.*, 439, Ingle, Cooper, and Holmes, Solicitors, to Engledue, 24 July 1891; *ibid.*, 440-41, Engledue to Begg, 16 October 1891.

⁸ Wolfenden, pp. 135-36; SRO, Crofter Settlement Scheme, AF 51/152, Begg to Lothian, 23 November 1887.

North West Territories in the 1880s, Begg, a voracious newspaper reader, became aware of highland crofting conditions.⁹ He submitted a proposal for crofter colonization to the British Columbia Lieutenant-Governor, who passed it along to the executive council.¹⁰ In September 1887 the British Columbia government appointed him emigration commissioner without salary to organize "a colonization scheme for settling Scotch crofters upon the seaboard of his Province, with a view to their engaging in fishing and agriculture"; he was to do this "without involving any financial charge upon the Province."¹¹ When he was unable to find support for his plan from Scottish philanthropists, he decided to approach the British government.¹² His application and British interest in state-aided emigration were clearly well-timed.

Negotiations directed towards securing emigration assistance from the imperial government on terms acceptable to both it and the provincial government began within two months of Begg's appointment and met with initial success. In November 1887, Begg, as British Columbia's representative, applied to the British government through the Secretary for Scotland, Lord Lothian, who arranged an interview for him with the First Lord of the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.¹³ In mid-December the Imperial Treasury unofficially agreed to advance a loan of £150,000 to transfer as many as 1,250 crofter families to Vancouver Island if British Columbia would provide security for repayment.¹⁴

Unfortunately, two complications frustrated negotiations at that point and delayed agreement on terms for four years. The first difficulty arose in 1888 when Begg submitted the British offer to the provincial government. He became aware that the British Columbia executive council was reluctant to assume responsibility for repayment of the advance because of "a prejudice against the crofters . . . to the effect, that those colonists

⁹ *Ibid.*; *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation*, 1889, p. 178.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, *Sessional Papers*, 1888, "Papers Relating to the Crofter Colonization Scheme," p. 463. Begg thereafter referred to himself as "crofter commissioner" and attached "C.C." to his name to distinguish himself from another Alexander Begg (1839-1897) with whom he is often confused; see Wolfenden, pp. 133-39.

¹² *Sessional Papers*, 1888, pp. 463-64; *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation*, 1889, p. 164; SRO, Crofter Settlement Scheme, AF 51/152, Begg to Lothian, 23 November 1887.

¹³ CAV, Begg, 28-34 [letters arranging an appointment with Lothian, 19-29 November 1887]; *ibid.*, 62-63, Begg to Robson, 14 December 1887.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; SRO, Crofter Settlement Scheme, AF 51/151, Goschen to Lothian, 22 December 1887.

would come as paupers — that the taxes of the Province would consequently be increased to support them — that they could not be depended on for repayment of advances made to them, etc., etc.¹⁵ The executive council suspected that it would have to spend public money in addition to the British government's advance if the crofters required relief or were unable to repay the advance. The burden of the large public debt that had been incurred by the province over the years probably increased the council's concern.¹⁶ This reluctance was not peculiar to the British Columbia executive council, however, for the Canadian government also refused to furnish security for repayment in the Killarney and Saltcoats schemes.¹⁷ The financial terms for repayment proposed by the British government added to the council's dissatisfaction, although in time Begg was able to negotiate conditions more favourable to British Columbia.¹⁸

Begg's reaction to the executive council's resistance was to conceive a second scheme that proposed the formation of a commercial company to develop the deep-sea fisheries off coastal British Columbia and to provide employment for the fishermen crofters.¹⁹ He correctly reasoned that the council's fears about financial risk would be diminished if it were certain that the crofters could prosper sufficiently to repay the advance to the British government. In London Begg interested Major William Clark and Colonel W. J. Engledue in the formation of an investment syndicate, the Vancouver Island Development Syndicate (Limited), to back the proposed deep-sea fisheries company.²⁰ As Begg had hoped, the British Columbia Premier, John Robson, indicated his support for the commercial scheme.²¹

An additional complication arose in 1888 when the British government changed its application procedure for emigration assistance. It set up a Select Committee on Colonization to review several emigration projects including the British Columbia colonization plan.²² Although the select

¹⁵ CAV, Begg, 90-91, Begg to Colonial Secretary, 23 May 1888. See also *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation*, 1889, p. 164.

¹⁶ CAV, Begg, 171-73, Note A, n.d.

¹⁷ Carrothers, *Emigration from the British Isles*, pp. 233-34.

¹⁸ *Report of the Select Committee on Colonisation*, 1889, xiii. The interest rate was lowered from $3\frac{1}{8}$ percent to 3 percent, and repayment was to commence five years following the initial loan instalment.

¹⁹ CAV, Begg, 207-208, Begg to Ritchie, 2 August 1889; *ibid.*, 249-56, Begg to Clark, 1 January 1890; *ibid.*, 499 [unidentified newspaper clippings]; *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation*, 1889, pp. 169-70.

²⁰ CAV, Begg, 422, Begg to Turner, 27 June 1891.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 284, Robson to Begg, 17 June 1890.

²² *Ibid.*, 117-19, Office of Secretary for Scotland to Begg, 14 August 1888.

committee sat in 1889 and 1890, it was not until 1891 that the committee recommended state-aid for the British Columbia scheme.²³

Preliminary negotiations were finally concluded when the Imperial Treasury issued a 10 June 1891 memorandum acceding to the provincial government's application and when British Columbia thereafter consented to the British terms.²⁴ The Treasury agreed to advance a £150,000 loan in three instalments to the provincial government, provisional upon the passage in the British Columbia Legislative Assembly of legislation satisfactory to the imperial government as well as the authorization of the advance by the British Parliament. The provincial government would then transfer as many as 1,250 fishermen crofter families in parties from Scotland to Vancouver Island, furnish them with land, dwellings and employment, watch over the colonists' welfare and guarantee repayment of the advance at 3 percent per annum commencing five years after receipt of the first instalment.

In 1892 the governments of the United Kingdom and British Columbia both won parliamentary approval for the terms. The British Columbia legislation authorized the provincial government to enter into formal agreements with the British government and the Vancouver Island Development Syndicate in order to effect the colonizing and commercial schemes. The provincial Legislative Assembly simultaneously debated and passed Bills 61 and 62 dealing respectively with colonization and deep-sea fisheries development; on 8 April 1892, the Lieutenant-Governor gave royal assent to the Colonization and Deep Sea Fisheries Acts.²⁵ The British Parliament subsequently passed legislation authorizing the advance to the provincial government to undertake assisted crofter emigration; on 27 June 1892, the British Columbia (Loan) Act received royal assent.²⁶

²³ Great Britain, Parliament, *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation*, Cmd. 152, 17 March 1891, Reprinted in *Irish University Press Series of British Parliamentary Papers: Emigration* (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1969) vol. IX, xiii-xiv, xvi; CAV, Begg, 499 [unidentified newspaper clippings]. The 1889 select committee interviewed Begg, but was confused about his credentials to make representations for the British Columbia government; see *Report from the Select Committee*, 1891, pp. 23-24.

²⁴ CAV, Begg, 394-95, Smith to Begg, 10 June 1891; *Sessional Papers*, 1892, p. 688.

²⁵ For the progression of Bills 61 and 62 through the Legislative Assembly, see British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, *Journals*, 1892, pp. 69, 70, 75, 83, 84-86, 90-91, 100. For the Colonization and Deep Sea Fisheries Acts, see British Columbia, *Statutes*, 55 Vict., c. 14-15 (1892).

²⁶ For debate on the legislation, see Great Britain, *4 Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) IV (1892), 1644, 1738-44, 1763-69, 1844-48. For the act, see Great Britain, *Statutes*, 55 and 56 Vict., c. 52 (1892).

Once parliamentary approval was given, the provincial government was empowered to conclude two separate formal agreements with the British government and with the Vancouver Island Development Syndicate. At the invitation of the United Kingdom, John Robson went to London to handle negotiations on behalf of the province.²⁷ He died there suddenly on June 30 before he could work out agreements with the British government and the syndicate. Consequently, the syndicate sent its representative, William Clark, to Victoria to negotiate with the British Columbia government. On 25 August 1892 Clark and the provincial government finalized a contract.²⁸ However, neither of the governments of the United Kingdom or British Columbia pursued the remaining formal agreement necessary for implementation, and by the end of 1893 the schemes for colonization and deep-sea fisheries development had collapsed altogether.²⁹

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The nature of the schemes, had they been realized, was determined by August 1892. In accordance with the Colonization Act and with the Imperial Treasury's 10 June 1891 memorandum, the provincial government would administer a colonization scheme in which settlers would be transferred to British Columbia using an advance from the imperial government. The province assumed responsibility for the colonists' repayment of that advance. The Deep Sea Fisheries Act and the 25 August 1892 agreement between the provincial government and the Vancouver Island Development Syndicate defined the commercial scheme.³⁰ The government required the syndicate to form a deep-sea fisheries company before 31 December 1892, although it would entertain application for a year's extension. In order to make the prospective company attractive to investors, the government agreed to grant it up to 500,000 acres of

²⁷ Ivan Earl Matthew Antak, "John Robson: British Columbian" (unpublished Master's thesis, Dept. of History, University of Victoria, 1972), p. 206.

²⁸ British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, *Sessional Papers*, 1893, "Additional Papers Relative to the Carrying out of the Object of the 'Deep Sea Fisheries Act, 1892' and the Scheme of Colonization and Settlement Provided for by This Act and the Colonization Act, 1892," pp. 649-54.

²⁹ In 1896-97, Begg's attempts to initiate another state-assisted colonization scheme were rejected by the British Columbia government and the Scottish Office; see CAV, 539, Moncrieff to Begg, 17 April 1896; *ibid.*, 570, Gosnell to Begg, 11 May 1897.

³⁰ See also the commercial company's prospectus, SRO, Crofter Settlement Scheme, AF 51/155, State-Aided Enterprise; The Commercial Company of British Columbia, Limited [1892?].

public lands along portions of the coasts of Vancouver Island, the Queen Charlotte Islands and the mainland.³¹ The government intended to allot 25,000 acres of the grant to the colonists.³² The land grant would be exempt from taxation for ten years following the selection date, and the company's personal property would be tax-free for two years past the incorporation date. For its part, the company was to be responsible for supplying the colonists with dwellings, employment, equipment and markets and could be expected to assist the government in the selection, transfer and settlement of colonists.

The syndicate proposed to establish a company that would develop the halibut fisheries off coastal British Columbia with British capital and immigrant fishermen.³³ It intended to export fresh halibut to eastern American markets using specially built cold-storage steamers, depots and railway cars. Secondly, it planned to be involved in the curing of fish, the extraction of oil from edible and non-edible fish and the manufacture of fish products. In time it meant to operate contingent industries like saw-milling, box and barrel-making, and boat and ship-building.

John Robson referred to this integration of colonization and commercial activity as the "gigantic scheme."³⁴ J. H. Turner, the provincial finance minister, also noted the interconnection of colonists and company, labour and capital.³⁵ In addition, the press recognized that "Crofter immigration and the establishment of the Commercial Company are parts of one great scheme" and that "one part of it is to better the conditions of the Crofters, to make them self-sustaining and independent; and the

³¹ Schedule A of the Deep Sea Fisheries Act reserved coastal land in the area of Port San Juan, Barclay Sound and Clayoquot Sound, Esperanza Inlet and Nootka Sound, Quatsino to Esperanza including Kyuoquot Sound, Goletas Channel to Quatsino Sound, Johnstone and Broughton Straits, Cape Caution to Port Simpson, and the Queen Charlotte Islands; see British Columbia, *Statutes*, c. 15. The reserve had been selected by Begg and by Clark and Engledue, commissioners for the syndicate, on an expedition into these coastal areas in 1891. See *Sessional Papers*, 1892, pp. 683-84, for the original memorandum from Clark and Engledue proposing to reserve a total of 1,319,000 acres of land.

³² *Sessional Papers*, 1893, p. 653.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 685, Crofter Settlement Scheme, AF 51/155, State-Aided Enterprise. For the halibut industry's development in the early 1890s, see William F. Thompson and Norman L. Freeman, *History of the Pacific Halibut Industry*, International Fisheries Commission Report, No. 5 (Vancouver: Wrigley Printing Co. Ltd., 1930); W. A. Carrothers, *The British Columbia Fisheries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1941), pp. 85-89.

³⁴ CAV, Begg, 489-91, Begg to Lothian, 11 July 1892; *Victoria Daily Times*, 29 March 1892, p. 2.

³⁵ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 29 March 1892, p. 6.

other is to utilize the wealth of the sea that washes our shores."³⁶ The integration of colonization and commercial development meant that the collapse of one scheme endangered the realization of the other.

The colonizing and commercial schemes, if implemented, would have represented extensive intrusion by the British Columbia government into the social and economic sectors of the province's life. Under the colonization scheme the government would assume the administrative and financial responsibility of immigration and settlement. Under the commercial scheme it would stimulate deep-sea fisheries development through incentives to industry in the form of an enormous land grant and generous tax concessions. The aggressive intervention proposed by the government into the province's economic growth permitted and rationalized its hesitant involvement in immigration matters. Moreover, the inter-connection of the two schemes and their enshrinement in provincial legislation would intensify the impact of the government's intrusion.

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Why, therefore, was this "gigantic scheme" not effected? The reasons for its failure may be found in the changing political and economic conditions in the United Kingdom, in the death of John Robson at a particularly critical time, and in public response to the scheme in British Columbia.³⁷

The change of government in the United Kingdom during the summer of 1892 negatively influenced the implementation of the scheme. W. E. Gladstone once again replaced Lord Salisbury as Prime Minister. Whereas the Salisbury government had approved assisted emigration to Killarney and Saltcoats, had appointed the sympathetic Lord Lothian as Secretary for Scotland and had passed the British Columbia (Loan) Act, the Gladstone administration rejected crofter emigration because it needed the support on the crucial Irish home rule question of several Scottish members of Parliament who opposed removal.³⁸ Indeed, Gladstone's short-lived government of 1886 had already attempted to win their support by

³⁶ *Colonist*, 23 February 1892, p. 4; *ibid.*, 22 March 1892, p. 4.

³⁷ R. E. Gosnell and I. E. M. Antak have expressed opinions about the failure of the scheme; see R. E. Gosnell, *A History of British Columbia; Part II: Being a History, Mainly Political and Economic, of the Province since Confederation up to the Present Time (Sixty Years of Progress)* (Vancouver and Victoria: British Columbia Historical Association, 1913), p. 140; Antak, p. 216n.

³⁸ Lothian was supportive of crofter emigration to British Columbia; see SRO, Crofter Settlement Scheme, AF 51/153, Office of the Secretary for Scotland to Colonial Office, 23 April 1891.

passing the Crofters' Holdings Act which gave crofters security of tenure in contradiction of the Napier *Report's* recommendations.³⁹ Gladstone himself did not favour state-aided emigration since he believed it would inhibit self-reliance and discourage charitable assistance.⁴⁰

The Scottish members' resistance to crofter emigration reflected a segment of public opinion in Scotland. Many Scots, particularly those highlanders who had migrated to industrialized urban areas like Glasgow, criticized state-assisted emigration because they regarded it as forcible removal.⁴¹ Moreover, although Begg had encountered numerous willing emigrants, most crofters were ambivalent about emigration.⁴² They wanted to improve their way of life; consequently, they would be content to stay in the highlands if they could prosper on adequate land holdings, or they would be willing to emigrate if they could be certain of success in the colonies.⁴³ Alex Morrison, an emigration enthusiast, reported to Begg that he needed both "time and treasure" to gather support for the British Columbia colonization scheme at Stornoway crofter meetings.⁴⁴ Not unexpectedly, public opposition to emigration was linked with Gladstonianism, whereas support for it was connected with the Unionist cause.⁴⁵

The governments of the United Kingdom and British Columbia never reached a final agreement on the crofter emigration scheme after Gladstone resumed power in 1892. The Imperial Treasury issued a minute outlining its agreement proposal on 15 August 1892, the day upon which Gladstone once again became Prime Minister.⁴⁶ Scottish members of Parliament who opposed the scheme requested the new government to hold the agreement in abeyance pending an inquiry.⁴⁷ In October 1892

³⁹ Michael Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism; The Reconstruction of Liberal Policy in Britain, 1885-94* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1975), p. 48; Mitchison, p. 396.

⁴⁰ Carrothers, *Emigration from the British Isles*, p. 219.

⁴¹ Great Britain, Parliament, 4 *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), IV (1892), 1739; Freda Ramsay, *John Ramsay of Kildalton* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1969), pp. 40-41.

⁴² CAV, Begg, 64-66, McPherson to Begg, 14 December 1887; *Sessional Papers*, 1888, p. 464; *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation*, 1889, p. 175. Lord Lothian was approached by many individuals interested in emigrating to British Columbia; see SRO, Crofter Settlement Scheme, AF 51/152, *passim*.

⁴³ CAV, Begg, 72-74, Macrae to Begg, 19 December 1887.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 427-30, Morrison to Begg, 6 July 1891.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*; *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh), 19 August 1889, p. 7.

⁴⁶ *Sessional Papers*, 1893, pp. 655-58.

⁴⁷ *Times*, 17 November 1892, p. 4.

the report of a British Columbia executive council committee officially revealed a fundamental disagreement between the two governments over colonist selection.⁴⁸ The British government, according to the British Columbia (Loan) Act, stipulated that emigrants be selected from thecrofting parishes of Scotland, whereas the province, according to the Colonization Act, planned to select colonists from all over the United Kingdom. The difference in positions proved to be irreconcilable.

The inability of the Vancouver Island Development Syndicate to float a deep-sea fisheries company also hindered implementation.⁴⁹ The 1890-1895 depression in the United Kingdom apparently discouraged investment in a new and untried resource industry that would not yield dividends in the first year.⁵⁰ Moreover, when the syndicate applied to the British Columbia government for a year's extension to form the company, the government gave its permission on the condition that the company's land reserve could be pre-empted during that year.⁵¹ The imposition of the pre-emption condition meant that the land grant was no longer reserved from settlement and could not be used to advantage in raising capital investment.⁵² The syndicate's unsuccessful attempt to float a company by 31 December 1893 effectively nullified the Deep Sea Fisheries Act as well as its August 1892 agreement with the provincial government. Given the interconnection of fisheries development and colonization, this failure seriously threatened realization of the emigration proposal.

The death of John Robson during negotiations with the British government and the syndicate contributed to difficulties in implementation.⁵³ Robson was wholly committed to both the colonizing and commercial aspects of the plan. He had promoted immigration to British Columbia throughout his political career; he had defended the colonization and deep-sea fisheries bills in the Legislative Assembly with the strongest speech of the debate; he had gone to London to work out the final agreement himself.⁵⁴ His death on 30 June 1892 not only critically delayed

⁴⁸ *Sessional Papers*, 1893, pp. 658-59.

⁴⁹ SRO, Crofter Settlement Scheme, AF 51/156, Notice of Question for 11 March 1893.

⁵⁰ *Sessional Papers*, 1893, pp. 659-60.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 660. No evidence is available to explain the inclusion of this condition. However, controversy about the land grant may have forced the government to impose pre-emption.

⁵² CAV, Begg, 500-508, Begg to Turner, 28 January 1893.

⁵³ SRO, Crofter Settlement Scheme, AF 51/156, Notice of Question for 17 March 1896.

⁵⁴ Antak, pp. 206, 213-14; *Colonist*, 29 March 1892, pp. 6-7.

negotiations at a point when governments were about to change in the United Kingdom but also removed the scheme's most powerful supporter in British Columbia. J. H. Turner afterwards carried on where Robson had left off, but, although he had given Bills 61 and 62 staunch support in debate, his commitment diminished as time passed.⁵⁵ Within a few months of Robson's death a reporter from the *Dundee News* detected in an interview Turner's disinclination to carry out the scheme.⁵⁶

Legislation for the proposal generated considerable controversy during debate in the Legislative Assembly. As Turner himself later admitted to the press, misgivings about the scheme were attributable to the financial risk to the province inherent in the colonization plan.⁵⁷ Robson alleviated some of this uneasiness among government supporters before his untimely death. However, by the autumn and winter of 1892 the controversy had significantly reduced the government's interest in the proposal.

Apprehension about British Columbia's financial involvement was widespread among government and opposition members in the Legislative Assembly who were generally concerned that the province might have to spend public money on the relief and debts of unsuccessful colonists. Imbued with materialistic and individualistic values, they disapproved of public expenditure on social welfare. From the inception of the scheme the government's reluctance was apparent in its original instructions to Begg, in the executive council's "prejudice" against pauper crofters and in the formulation of the deep-sea fisheries proposal. Later, during debate, the opposition voiced its objection to the province's financial responsibilities in the scheme.⁵⁸

Some opposition members carried their argument against financial involvement to its limits and rejected the idea of state-assisted emigration altogether.⁵⁹ They asserted that state-aid was unfair to immigrants like themselves who had arrived in British Columbia by their own means and established themselves on their own initiative.⁶⁰ They preferred immigration under *laissez-faire* conditions.

Although the opposition remained negative to the colonization bill during its passage through the Legislative Assembly, government mem-

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵⁶ *Times*, 17 February 1893, p. 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Daily Columbian* (New Westminster), 1 April 1892, pp. 1-2; *ibid.*, 2 April 1892, pp. 3-4; *Times*, 29 March 1892, p. 2; *ibid.*, 1 April 1892, p. 2.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 17 February 1893, p. 7.

bers overcame their reservations.⁶¹ They were persuaded, first of all, by the deep-sea fisheries development proposal. Secondly, Robson and Turner assured them that, in order to protect the province's financial interest, the government would intervene in the immigration process through tight regulation of repayment of the loan and careful selection of colonists. Thirdly, Robson also pointed out to them several "benefits" calculated to increase the scheme's popularity.

The deep-sea fisheries proposal appealed to government members because they perceived that it would provide colonists with employment and thereby reduce the province's risk in the emigration plan.⁶² They further expected that the proposal would stimulate British Columbia's economic growth and their own prosperity.⁶³ As members of what was essentially an immigrant society, they were intent upon improving their own material circumstances.⁶⁴ Consequently, they endorsed government incentives to industry that fostered resource development and improved the province's economic climate. To them, the land reserve and tax concessions offered to the deep-sea fisheries company were consistent with the land grants and mineral and timber rights that successive governments gave to railway companies throughout British Columbia's "great potlatch" era.⁶⁵

The government assured its members of its determination to decrease financial risk by adherence to a rigidly formulated schedule for the colonists' repayment of their loans.⁶⁶ It would expect the colonists to exhibit self-reliance and to work "honorably up to their engagements or suffer the consequences."⁶⁷ Moreover, this government-imposed ethic of self-

⁶¹ Awareness of the British Columbian political division extended to British observers; see SRO, Crofter Settlement Scheme, AF 51/156, Notice of Question for 17 March 1896.

⁶² *Colonist*, 29 March 1892, p. 6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ For the connection between British Columbia's immigrant society and materialism, see Edwin R. Black, "British Columbia: The Politics of Exploitation," in R. Shearer, ed., *Exploiting Our Economic Potential; Public Policy and the British Columbia Economy* (Toronto and Montreal: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1968), pp. 24-28.

⁶⁵ For background material on "the great potlatch," see Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1971), pp. 294-325; Martin Robin, *The Rush for Spoils; The Company Province, 1871-1933* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972), pp. 49-86. For the connection between the land reserve and the railway bonuses, see CAV, Begg, 275-78, Begg to Turner, 29 April 1890.

⁶⁶ *Sessional Papers*, 1892, p. 690. There was some suggestion that the proposed commercial company might be empowered to retain a percentage of every catch of fish to ensure repayment; see CAV, Begg, 473-79, Begg to Lothian, 29 June 1892.

⁶⁷ *Colonist*, 22 April 1891, p. 2.

improvement and hard work, so in accord with Samuel Smiles' doctrine of "self-help" and his "gospel of work," was the accepted means by which lower-class British colonists might raise themselves to a middle-class status in British Columbia society.⁶⁸ The government's approach to the correction of the colonists' situation — regulated assistance to selected immigrants in order that they might improve their own circumstances — borrowed somewhat from the nineteenth-century English-speaking world's attitude to charity, although government intervention in the form of state assistance to immigrants philosophically contradicted the evangelical protestant and liberal roots of charity in Canada at that time.⁶⁹

The government meant as well to undertake careful colonist selection with the purpose of ensuring successful settlement and loan repayment. Members on both sides of the Legislative Assembly and the press were concerned that destitute crofters would lack the character, habits and skills to settle well. Many considered the crofters' poverty a moral failing despite the Napier *Report's* reasoned assessment of conditions in the crofting parishes and its assurances about the crofters' good character.⁷⁰ James Baker, a government supporter from East Kootenay, decried the crofters' degradation, and C. A. Semlin, an opposition member from Yale, severely criticized those "thriftless, discontented, mutinous and idle people."⁷¹ Even the *Victoria Daily Colonist*, which promoted the scheme editorially, lacked confidence in the ability to succeed of the first generation of crofters.⁷² In anticipation of this criticism, the government proposed to select colonists of "good moral character" and "industrious and energetic habits."⁷³ Furthermore, it planned to choose colonists with fishing skills, not only from the western highlands and islands, but from the

⁶⁸ For a summary of Samuel Smiles' doctrine of "self-help" and his "gospel of work," see Asa Briggs, *Victorian People: A Reassessment of Persons and Themes, 1851-67* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965), pp. 124-47.

⁶⁹ For this approach to charity, see Stephen A. Speisman, "Munificent Parsons and Municipal Parsimony: Voluntary vs Public Poor Relief in Nineteenth Century Toronto," *Ontario History*, vol. LXV, no. 1 (1973), pp. 33-34. For state involvement in social services, see Diane L. Matters, "Public Welfare Vancouver Style, 1910-1920," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. XIV, no. 1 (Spring 1979), pp. 3-15; Speisman, pp. 32-49.

⁷⁰ *Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into the Condition of the Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, p. 110.

⁷¹ *Times*, 1 April 1892, p. 2. Baker was involved in coal, railway, and townsite development in and around Cranbrook; see John Fahey, *Inland Empire; D. C. Corbin and Spokane* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), pp. 99-100.

⁷² *Colonist*, 31 July 1891, p. 4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 29 March 1892, p. 6.

east coast of Scotland and from elsewhere in the United Kingdom.⁷⁴ The need to assure its own members in particular of the colonists' character and skills rendered the government unwilling and, indeed, unable to retreat from its position in the disagreement with the British government over selection of immigrants.

During debate in the Legislative Assembly, Robson also pointed out other aspects of the colonization scheme which were intended to increase the scheme's popularity.⁷⁵ Two of these "benefits" revealed the racist attitudes of British Columbia's host society towards native and oriental groups. British fishermen colonists would replace Chinese workers in the fishing industry; in addition, their daughters would take the place of Chinese domestics.⁷⁶ Since the first group of colonists would be settled in the San Juan Valley near an Indian reserve, they could help "civilize" the Indians.⁷⁷ In addition, the government noted that Scottish crofter naval reserves would shore up defences on the western frontier of the Empire.⁷⁸

Thus, despite their apprehension about the province's financial involvement, government members were persuaded to give the scheme parliamentary approval. Following Robson's death, they became less supportive of it with the emergence of the disagreement over selection of colonists and with the syndicate's inability to form a fisheries company.⁷⁹ Increasing resistance to the scheme among the government's own members, coupled with the opposition's continuing antagonism, reduced Turner's interest in implementation. He did not pursue the conclusion of a final agreement with the British government.

The scheme's unpopularity with Legislative Assembly opposition members was heightened by their dissatisfaction with the incentives offered to the proposed deep-sea fisheries company. They objected to the "give-

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, "Sessional Clipping Books," April 1892, "What Jno. Robson Had to Say to the Opponents of the Colonist Scheme" (Microfilm copy).

⁷⁶ CAV, Begg, 90-91. Begg to Colonial Secretary, 23 May 1888; *ibid.*, 186-89, Begg to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 25 January 1889; "The Crofter Scheme of British Columbia," *Commercial* (Winnipeg), British Columbia Supplement, 24 June 1893, p. 30; *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation*, 1889, p. 175.

⁷⁷ Provincial Archives of British Columbia, John Robson Collection, 1867-1892, Add. Mss. 525, vol. II, AER57R57.1, 18-19, Robson to Tupper, 17 October 1891; CAV, Begg, 275-78, Begg to Turner, 29 April 1890.

⁷⁸ *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation*, 1889, p. 170; CAV, Begg, 161-62, Begg to Chamberlain, 27 March 1889.

⁷⁹ *Times*, 17 February 1893, p. 7.

away" of land and tax concessions in the same way that they opposed bonuses to railway companies.⁸⁰ Moreover, they realized that the land grant would likely result in the company's monopoly of the halibut fishing industry since other companies would be prevented from using the reserved land as fishing station locations. Mindful of the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly of earlier times, they rejected any similar control of the deep-sea fisheries.⁸¹ Their resistance to the "give-away" and monopoly was supported by small companies, including the British Columbia Fishing and Trading Company, which were already operating in the coastal halibut industry, and by the New Westminster *Daily Columbian*.⁸² Some opposition members and the *Columbian* feared as well that the colonists would become "serfs" at the mercy of a company intent on making a profit and maintaining exclusive control of supplies and markets.⁸³ The monopoly was rejected because it would frustrate the materialistic and individualistic aspirations of many British Columbians. Hostility directed toward the land grant may have induced the government to impose the pre-emption condition on the syndicate's extension of time, which in turn may have exacerbated the difficulties in forming a fisheries company.

The history of the controversy surrounding the scheme reinforces generalizations made by other historians about the individualistic and acquisitive values of British Columbia's immigrant society in the late nineteenth century.⁸⁴ Some participants in the public debate opposed the state-assisted emigration plan according to these convictions, whereas others were persuaded to approve it when their concerns about self-reliance and material prosperity were eased by government proposals for resource development, colonist selection and loan repayment. The same

⁸⁰ For the opposition's reaction to the "give-away," see *Columbian*, 1 April 1892, pp. 1-2; *ibid.*, 2 April 1892, pp. 3-4; *Times*, 29 March 1892, p. 2; *ibid.*, 1 April, 1892, p. 2. For the opposition's criticism of Robson's railways' subsidization, see Ormsby, pp. 309, 311; Robin, *Rush for Spoils*, p. 63.

⁸¹ *Columbian*, 1 April 1892, p. 2; *Journals*, 1892, cxix.

⁸² The British Columbia Fishing and Trading Co. (Ltd.) of Vancouver presented the Legislative Assembly with a petition which criticized government intervention in aid of the proposed commercial company; see *ibid.* For the *Columbian's* editorial position, see *Columbian*, 1 April 1892, p. 2. The *Columbian's* editors, Robert and James Kennedy, were also in conflict with the Robson government over the publication of what the government considered to be a libellous article; for a summary of this incident, see Antak, pp. 201-203.

⁸³ *Columbian*, 1 April 1892, pp. 1-2.

⁸⁴ See Black, pp. 23-30; Martin Robin, "British Columbia: The Politics of Class Conflict," in Martin Robin, ed., *Canadian Provincial Politics: The Party Systems of the Ten Provinces* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1972), pp. 27-43.

attitudes created conflicting viewpoints on the "give-away" and monopoly issue. Furthermore, the government proposed financial involvement in immigration and colonization with some hesitancy but pursued economic intervention with aggressiveness in conformity with these attitudes. In 1892, British Columbians accepted government intrusion into the social sector far less readily than they supported state interference in the province's economic development.

The "gigantic scheme" for crofter emigration to Vancouver Island and deep-sea fisheries development off coastal British Columbia was never realized. Yet, as an example of a government proposal involving extensive social and economic intervention and as a stimulus to a public discussion revealing popular attitudes, the scheme is significant in British Columbia's history.