In the Imperial Age and After: Patterns of British Columbia School Leadership and the Institution of the Superintendency, 1849-1988

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The 1980s have been turbulent years for British Columbia school superintendents. Within a decade, 67 of the 129 men and women who have served as chief educational officers for the province's 75 school districts have left the superintendency to seek positions inside and outside British Columbia schools.[1] This attrition, which has become a hallmark of the position, reached a high point in 1986 when approximately one-quarter of the superintendency corps were replaced.[2] No doubt, many complex personal and professional factors shaped individual decisions to leave, or school board decisions to change leadership.

It is not the purpose of this paper, in any event, to inquire into "who jumped and who was pushed" from office. Instead, the extent of such "turnover" suggests that it may be more appropriate to examine from a broader perspective the social and professional forces that have precipitated recent events. If the superintendency is in a state of crisis, or if it can be described today as an embattled institution, it may be instructive to explore historically how developments within provincial school administration relate to time and circumstance and to what extent the institution of the superintendency, like other institutions, is both a product and hostage of its own past.

In previous research, I investigated how structural changes within provincial schooling led to the emergence of the local superintendency and, especially, how the modern superintendent's role gradually evolved from that of the school inspector.[3] Throughout that study, emphasis centred on how twentieth-century school practices "in the field" shaped the office of

[1] Vernon J. Storey, "Leadership in Uncertain Times: Findings of a study of the British Columbia School Superintendency, 1987" (Victoria, British Columbia: University of Victoria Research Project, 1987), 3.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Thomas Fleming, "'Our Boys in the Field': School Inspectors, Superintendents, and the Changing Character of School Leadership in British Columbia," in Nancy M. Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David C. Jones, eds., *Schools in the West* (Calgary, Alberta: Detselig Enterprises, 1986), 285-303.

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the superintendent. Here the emphasis is different, the perspective is longer. The scope of this discussion cuts across two centuries and the superintendency as an institution is examined within the larger structure of provincial school governance and administration. This paper will argue that the salient characteristic of school administration and, indeed, of provincial education generally has been its long-standing dominance by a central governing authority — and that to understand fully the superintendency, or any other educational institution situated outside the departmental offices on Government Street, one must first appreciate the history of provincial control and how it has overshadowed all other developments.

Accordingly, this discussion will chronicle how patterns of provincial school governance and administration, drawn themselves from traditions of British colonial government, have shaped the style and character of school leadership in British Columbia from 1849 to the present. Because of this enormous British colonial influence on the practice of civic and educational administration in British Columbia, metaphors and historical divisions borrowed from the British experience at home and abroad are used to describe and date three distinct periods in provincial leadership, now identified as: The Imperial Age of School Administration 1849-1958; The Decline of the Educational Raj 1958-1980; and the Technocratic Restoration of the 1980s. Within the context of these three administrative eras, the superintendency is examined with a view toward outlining its evolution and describing its character as an educational institution in the 1980s.

1. *The Imperial Age of School Administration, 1849-1958*

The school governance and management system that emerged in British Columbia during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, although influenced by the work of Ontario school reformers, can be more generally traced to Imperial concepts of civic administration which held sway at this time wherever the "pink" of the British Empire coloured the globe.[4] The intimate relationship between "trade and the flag" was as much a part of British Columbia colonial history as it was continents away in far-flung tropical dominions. In Victoria, the Hudson's Bay Company, like its commercial counterparts elsewhere, the British East India and, later, the British South Africa Company, provided the first educational and religious

[4] For a classic statement of Ontario's influence on British Columbia schooling in the nineteenth century, see F. Henry Johnson, "The Ryersonian Influence on the Public School System of British Columbia," in David C. Jones, Nancy M. Sheehan, and Robert Stamp, eds., *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West* (Calgary, Alberta: Detselig Enterprises, 1979), 29-36.

services in the Crown Colony of Vancouver Island and, in doing so, forged the traditions of paternalism and centralized authority that have shaped the administration of British Columbia schools and other provincial institutions for more than a century.

At the heart of these traditions was the rule of law. In Victoria, the first comprehensive legislation to deal with schools was passed in 1865 and placed virtually all administrative authority in the governor's hands.[5] Under this act, the governor was empowered to appoint a colonial board of education, a superintendent for colonial schools, and local boards of trustees, as well as teachers in some parts of the province. The legislation further made explicit, as turn-of-the-century provincial superintendent Alexander Robinson later observed, that "the general mode of transacting business by the local board," as well as the nature of their reports on schools, would be "subject to the order and direction" of the central authority.[6] Subsequent school legislation, given assent to by Governor Seymour in March 1869, reaffirmed the broad jurisdiction of the colonial government to: define, repeal, alter, or amend school district boundaries; apportion monies granted by the Legislative Assembly for the support of schools; examine, appoint, inspect, and dismiss teachers; and select school textbooks.[7] Such legislation decentralized educational decision-making only to the extent that local boards were granted discretionary powers to determine how their share of school costs would be borne. The Imperial, if not imperious, cast of colonial administration was exemplified at this 1869 legislative sitting by the assembly's refusal to act upon a motion put forward by John Robson, New Westminster editor, school promoter, and later-to-be provincial Premier, concerning the payment of some $4,000 in salaries owed to colonial teachers.[8] Such matters would be dealt with in time, the assembly ruled, at the convenience of colonial authorities not yet fully bound by the forces of populist politics.

Thus, when British Columbia entered Confederation two years later, it did so, as educational historian F. Henry Johnson pointed out, "with the most centralized school system on record."[9] Indeed, the educational world that the first provincial superintendent of schools, John Jessop,

[5] Alexander Robinson, "History of Education," in Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, eds., *Canada and Its Provinces* (Toronto: Edinburgh University Press, 1914), 401-42.

[6] Ibid., 409.

[7] Ibid., 418.

[8] Ibid., 420.

[9] F. Henry Johnson, *A History of Public Education in British Columbia* (Vancouver, British Columbia: University of British Columbia Publications Centre, 1964), 88.

inherited from his colonial predecessors had already made decisions about who would control school governance and administration in what was then the dark pedagogical continent of British Columbia. Serving under the direction of the provincial secretary and the "six fit and proper persons" who constituted the Board of Education, Jessop framed the public school act of 1872 which, although modelled in form on Ryerson's earlier Ontario legislation, reiterated in substance the authority structure of the colonial past.[10]

This 1872 legislation and subsequent legislation enacted over the following one hundred years commonly assumed that only a strong central authority could provide the vision and control necessary to establish a provincial school system in a vast territory with a diverse population and uncertain economic prospects. A century of school law was, therefore, written in such a way so that the government minister with the educational portfolio was charged with the ultimate policy and decision-making authority in schooling and empowered to intervene in any matter, at any level, for the good of the system.[11] This body of legislation also made it clear that government officials and their staffs in the Education Office would be liberated from the problem of actually delivering school services; this responsibility would accrue to local trustees who were, in the final analysis, "creatures of provincial authority" and ever "subject to the constant scrutiny and, if warranted, intervention" of provincial officers.[12] Thus free, the government's men in education could walk the high ground to organize, manage, supervise, and inspect the operations and policies of a system others maintained.

Administratively, the legacy of the colonial past made itself felt in providing a management model for schools strung out across an isolated and mountainous frontier. From Capetown to Cairo, from the entrepreneurial ventures of Clive in India to the post-World War II dismemberment of the protectorates, British colonial administration around the world made manifest a particular set of organizational concepts.[13] Whether the subject was education or law, tax collection or boundary disputes, public health or

[10] Ibid.

[11] L. W. Downey and A. E. Wright, "The Statutory Bases of the B.C. Educational System: A Report of an Analysis" (Vancouver, British Columbia: University of British Columbia, 1977), 9.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Two particularly useful sources which describe the social and organizational character of British colonial administration are: Phillip Mason, *The Men Who Ruled India* (London: Pan Books, 1987) and Charles Allen, *Tales From the Dark Continent: Images of British Colonial Africa in the Twentieth Century* (London: Futura Publications, 1985).

civil engineering, the management of the Empire across three centuries was built around the idea of a politically led but neutral civil service whose field officers enforced regulations and policy directives and, through their work "in country," supplied at the same time the political, economic, and social intelligence that headquarters required for its planning and other deliberations. It was not a system of administration that late twentieth-century textbooks on management science might entirely espouse in that it was based, essentially, on a "generalist" rather than a "specialist" view of management and the understanding that expertise in anything, especially government, took time and patience to develop. Among its principal characteristics were: "territorial" rather than "functional" divisions of responsibility; trust in hierarchical authority; the delegation of responsibility and discretionary powers to field staff; faith in the values of law, tradition, loyalty, and seniority; reliance on personal contact; and, finally, the belief that "real administration" meant "rural" or "field service."[14]

If the Empire had been acquired "in a fit of absent mindedness," as Oxford historian Sir John Seeley once remarked, it was not administered in casual fashion by its colonial officers. In practical terms, the edifice of colonial government rested upon the person of the "district officer" or "district commissioner" who attended to all manner of civic matters, not least of which was to serve generally as steward of the jurisdiction under his care. Such men provided "the common thread" that bound so many different territories under one flag, undertaking their work with obvious dispatch and efficiency as witnessed in the fact that, at the height of the British presence in India, some twelve hundred of these officers proved capable of ruling a nation of 350 million.[15]

Given the British imprimatur on mid- to late-nineteenth-century British Columbia (and, indeed, on Canada as a whole), it was natural that early government and early school leaders would adopt a management model for schooling based on Imperial traditions of public service. In educational terms, the district officer became Her Majesty's inspector of schools, a field position staffed first in 1887 by David Wilson, formerly principal of Boys' School, New Westminster, who was appointed to assist the superintendent to monitor the activities of teachers and local boards and to ensure that provincial regulations were enforced.[16]

[14] Mason, *The Men Who Ruled India,* 386-99; and Allen, *Tales From the Dark Continent,* xii-xix.

[15] Mason, *The Men Who Ruled India,* 397.

[16] Fleming, "Our Boys in the Field," 287. It should be noted in this regard that, prior to Wilson's appointment in 1887, the superintendent's job was largely inspection and supervision rather than administration.

By the time of Putman and Weir's 1925 survey, the Department of Education boasted a well-organized supervisional brigade of two high school inspectors, sixteen elementary inspectors, and four municipal inspectors. Altogether, from the founding of the inspectorate in 1887 to 1958, when the inspector's position was superseded by that of the government-appointed district superintendent, 118 men and one woman served as the province's agents and the chief instruments by which educational headquarters in Victoria administered a growing network of provincial schools. The manner in which these individuals were vetted and appointed, the tight fraternity and community of interest they represented, and, above all, the length of time they spent in service, provided a continuity to government policy across generations.[17] Of the more than one hundred individuals who worked as inspectors from 1919 to 1958, most remained with the government until retirement as inspectors, as members of normal school staffs, or as senior administrators brought in from the wilderness to serve in Victoria.[18]

Victorian and Edwardian School Superintendents

In sharp contrast to the occupational stability of the inspectorate stands the experiences of early provincial and municipal superintendents whose careers were no less troubled or shaped by political or economic forces than those of their modern counterparts. Somewhat paradoxically, from the first public school act in 1872 to the creation of the Department in 1920, the careers of the senior men who shaped the course of provincial schooling, and who designed its institutions, proved considerably more at risk than those of their subordinates at headquarters or in the field. The world of the chief superintendent was an educational world that was more turbulent and conflict ridden than that of the inspectors — and considerably more vulnerable to the incursions of politics.

John Jessop, for example, the first provincial superintendent and the individual who constructed the framework of the public school system, was driven out of office in 1878, after six years of service, due to a change in government and the Walkem administration's punitive actions and parsimony toward the Education Office.[19] For Jessop, there would be no life in education after the superintendency. Despite his reputation as a common

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 292.

[19] Much of the debate over Jessop's dismissal or resignation can be found in the "Third Provincial Legislative Assembly — First Session," *Daily Colonist*, 24 August 1878, 1, and "The Resignation of the Superintendent of Education," *Daily Colonist*, 27 August 1978, 1-2.

schools advocate, his far-sighted administrative ability, and his experience as teacher and principal, he would never again be professionally active after his resignation — the best he would achieve was a minor and modestly paid post as an immigration agent which he held for the remainder of his life.[20]

The rise and fall of Jessop's career is chronicled in a letter of petition he penned in 1900, a year before his death, to C. A. Semlin, Premier and Minister of Immigration.[21] In this letter, Jessop recounts how he crossed the continent on foot in search of success, "not having the means to pay for a steerage from New York via the Isthmus," how he established the first nondenominational school in Victoria, how he wrote the first school act, and how he generally served the province for thirty years in various capacities.[22] He asks Semlin to consider these contributions if his position as immigration agent is made redundant and to authorize "a small retiring allowance" to prevent him from becoming "a candidate for the Old Men's Home" in his final years.[23] An unfitting end, perhaps, for an individual who had so dramatically shaped the course of the province's educational life.

Colin Campbell McKenzie, British Columbia's second superintendent, fared little better than Jessop as school leader, although he successfully established a second career in Nanaimo real estate which provided a financial prosperity unknown to his predecessor.[24] McKenzie, who held a graduate degree from Cambridge, had served as a schoolmaster and, later, principal of the High School in Victoria, prior to his appointment as provincial superintendent. Like Jessop, however, his appointment was relatively short-lived (1878-1884). He was "relieved of his position" by Provincial Secretary John Robson, the minister in charge of schools, when he attempted to gain admission to the provincial bar, an ambition interpreted by government leaders as evidence of divided loyalties. "It would not be doing justice to the department with which you are connected," Robson advised, in dismissing him, "to allow you to play fast and loose with so important a branch of the public service."[25]

20 The details of Jessop's life are recounted in F. Henry Johnson, *John Jessop: Goldseeker and Educator* (Vancouver, British Columbia: University of British Columbia Press, 1967).

21 John Jessop to C. A. Semlin, 31 January 1900, 1-2. Provincial Archives of British Columbia (hereafter PABC), GR 441, box 14, file 5.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 "Another Esteemed Pioneer Passes Away," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 15 August 1899, 1.

25 J. Robson to C. C. McKenzie, 3 March 1884, British Columbia Provincial Secretary Correspondence Outward, PABC, GR 540, vol. 8, 68.

McKenzie's successor, Stephen Pope, a doctor of laws graduate from Queen's, served with distinction as the province's third chief education officer from 1884 to 1899 (a period of service twice that of Jessop or McKenzie's), until he was forced from office by the Semlin government's decision to reduce his salary substantially — a move, Dr. Pope regarded, as "something to which he ought not to submit."[26] Salary cuts of this order, however, were not unknown in the civil service during the late nineteenth century and were used sometimes as mechanisms to thin out administrative ranks or to ensure political purification among senior government officers.

Later, while attempting to earn a living as a teacher at Craigflower School and principal of Queen's Academy, a small and unsuccessful school for girls, Pope joined the stationer's trade. A year before his death in 1910, the voter's list described Pope's occupation as "clerk," an end seemingly not in keeping with his reputation as "the schoolmaster's friend" or someone celebrated in Begg's 1894 history of Canada for his "great administrative ability," "strict impartiality," and his work in bringing "the educational system of the province into a high state of perfection."[27]

The uncertain character of Victorian and Edwardian school leadership was further exemplified in the career of Alexander "Sandy" Robinson, the superintendent of education who realized Jessop's dream of establishing a normal school and building a provincial university. Robinson, a medal-winning classics scholar and a commanding figure distinguished by his height and silver hair, served for twenty years (1899-1919) as provincial education leader until he was removed from office by the Oliver administration one year before the Education Office became a distinct civil service department.[28] Although Robinson's tenure had been longer than any school leader to this time, his career had been controversial. In particular, his 1916 battle with Premier W. J. Bowser over a departmental dispute with Victoria's school board became a legend in educational circles. When summoned to cabinet to be reprimanded for his conduct with the local trustees, he reportedly commented "in short expletives and few . . . on Mr. Bowser's size, his appearance, his physical condition, and his ancestry," before leaving the Premier's office.[29]

Although Robinson's luck held on this occasion, he was not as fortunate

[26] "Superintendent Pope Resigns," *Daily Colonist*, 10 March 1899, 5.

[27] Alexander Begg, *History of British Columbia: From Its Earliest Discovery to the Present Time* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1894), 470-71.

[28] British Columbia Department of Education, *One Hundred Years: Education in British Columbia* (Victoria, British Columbia: Queen's Printer, 1972), 97.

[29] D. A. McGregor, "He Told the Premier Off," *Vancouver Province*, 21 April 1952, 5.

in his post-superintendency career as principal of Victoria High School, the jewel in the Empire's educational crown at this time. After one year of service (1920-21), the Victoria board, with whom he had previously warred, convinced the Education minister to appoint S. J. Willis, Robinson's successor as superintendent of schools, to investigate "the general administration" of the high school. Willis' inquiry underscored, among other things, the school's abysmal performance on government exams, its chaotic order, and its poor discipline, and subsequently led to a request for Robinson's resignation. He refused and was fired.[30] Robinson did, however, return to teaching and spent his remaining professional years teaching Latin and Greek at Oak Bay — the only member of this cadre of early provincial superintendents to complete a career in education.

The uncertainty that marked Jessop, McKenzie, Pope, and Robinson's careers also contributed to the professional demise of two early twentieth-century municipal school leaders — W. P. Argue, Vancouver City Superintendent, and Margaret Strong, New Westminster municipal inspector and the lone female to hold a senior leadership position in provincial school administration prior to the 1970s. Argue, formerly chief clerk of Manitoba's education department (a post equivalent to provincial superintendent), was appointed in 1903 as superintendent of city schools, a position he held for almost a decade. His career, however, was eventually undermined more by what *The Sun* newspaper called the "old unkindness between the Vancouver school board and the Victoria department" than by his own administrative actions.[31] Argue, in fact, became a casualty of war caught in the political crossfire surrounding the issue of local autonomy — an issue which had haunted the provincial system from its inception and which has continued to divide senior and local governments to this day.

The cause of Argue's undoing lay in the late nineteenth century, when Vancouver sought provincial permission to hire its own senior school official, an appointment without precedent at this time. Recognizing the growth in size and complexity of emerging urban systems as well as the promise of local school leadership, education officials in Victoria acceded to this request, despite misgivings about the divided allegiance such an appointment might promote or the possibility that Vancouver might somehow remove itself beyond the pale of provincial control.

[30] Peter L. Smith, *Come Give A Cheer: One Hundred Years of Victoria High School 1876-1976* (Victoria, British Columbia: Victoria High School Centennial Celebrations, 1976), 73.

[31] "The New School Superintendent," *The Sun*, 13 November 1912, 6.

This experiment in local autonomy proved short-lived and was terminated when Argue and his board sought to acknowledge the administrative leadership of principals by relieving them of their teaching duties, a view opposed by headquarters staff in Victoria. Perceiving this initiative as a challenge to government authority, provincial officials reasserted their control over local operations by amending legislation which changed the title of "city superintendent" back to "municipal inspector of schools," a move that quickly prompted Argue's resignation.[32]

J. S. Gordon, the inspector who investigated the Vancouver case on behalf of the Education Office, was subsequently assigned as the new municipal inspector of schools — a decision which caused an editorial writer to suggest that it was Gordon's affiliation with the Maritime provinces and McGill, and the currency of such affiliations within the Education Office, rather than his pedagogical expertise, which was suspect, that ensured his appointment.[33] Following his resignation, Argue did not "find ample opportunity for doing good work elsewhere," as one well-wisher had hoped.[34] He never found employment in the public schools again, although he did later serve (ironically alongside Gordon) on UBC's senate. In retrospect, the Argue story provides perhaps the clearest illustration of the educational colonialism that has marked the history of school administration in British Columbia and the struggle for local control of schools.

The facts of Margaret Strong's case are less apparent and research to date does not provide a comprehensive picture of the circumstances which ended her brief inspectorial career.[35] What is known is that she was appointed municipal inspector by the New Westminster school board in 1913 and was dismissed two years later. Reasons for the board's displeasure with her performance remain unclear, but it is apparent that trustees acted in her absence to remove her quickly and quietly from office, and that this was done with the tacit approval of the Government Street officials who controlled such appointments jointly with local boards. Such was the often-uncertain context in which early school leaders struggled.

In reflective moments, educators today sometimes hearken back to school administration in earlier eras, imagining a past simpler and more tranquil than the present. If such a past did exist, and if the work of senior school leaders was once less precarious, it was not during the first half

[32] Fleming, "Our Boys in the Field," 86.

[33] "The New School Superintendent," *The Sun*, 13 November 1912, 6.

[34] "Vancouver's Schools at the Department's Mercy," *Vancouver Province*, 14 June 1912, 7, GR 476, PABC, vol. 1.

[35] Presently, I am attempting to reconstruct more fully the details of Strong's appointment and dismissal.

century of public schooling. The experiences of those who directed provincial schools from the time of Confederation to the end of World War I illustrate clearly the instability of the provincial superintendent's job: such men enjoyed little security, and even those with extensive political connections such as Jessop and McKenzie remained unsheltered from the winds of changing government leadership and priorities. Indeed, evidence suggests Jessop and McKenzie's educational careers were to some extent both made and lost as a result of their own professional ambitions and political associations.[36] Until the 1920s, when the reins of the educational civil service were steadied in the hands of S. J. Willis, the vulnerability and political turmoil characteristic of the modern local superintendency equally described the organizational culture in which the province's chief schoolmen worked.

2. *The Decline of the Educational Raj, 1958-1980*

It is interesting to note that Victoria's declining influence in school leadership after mid-century paralleled the British Empire's general decline in the years following the end of World War II. In education, as in other fields of civic and national endeavour, this decline was prompted by widespread disenchantment with all forms of colonialism and with the desire of locals everywhere for greater control of their own destinies.[37] A century of government domination in British Columbia schooling had created a bureaucratic ruling class, an educational Raj not dissimilar in power or stature to the administrative masters who held sway in distant dominions of the Empire — individuals such as Willis, G. M. Weir, F. T. Fairey, H. B. King, J. F. K. English, D. L. MacLaurin, W. A. Plenderleith, and H. L. Campbell were indeed the King's men in education charged with protecting the interests of the Crown. And it was this ruling class in provincial education and their successors who were now under siege.

War's end in 1945 had ushered in a new age, and by the late 1950s

[36] Jessop, in fact, began applying and lobbying for the superintendent's job prior to Alfred Waddington's appointment in 1865, and it was through his political connections that he eventually secured the position of immigration agent, after his dismissal by the Walkem government. McKenzie, on the other hand, was a favourite of the Walkem administration but ran afoul of the Robson government when his own ambitions to become a barrister embarrassed the government. He was later elected on the opposition ticket to represent Nanaimo as an MLA. See Shortt and Doughty, *Canada and Its Provinces*, 330-31, for allusions to the politics of education in the 1870s.

[37] Phillip Mason, *The Men Who Ruled India*, 386-99; Charles Allen, *Tales From the Dark Continent*, 166-80; James Morris, *Farewell The Trumpets: An Imperial Retreat* (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 511-60; and Paul Johnson, *A History of the Modern World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), 466-543.

and early 1960s traditional beliefs and values, as well as the legitimacy of long-standing institutions, were being questioned as perhaps never before. Within this new social context, the modern school superintendency was born. Its immediate origin lay symbolically in the 1958 breakup of the school inspectorate and the subsequent creation of the district superintendency — an institutional halfway-house for a Department of Education not prepared at this time to relinquish complete control over senior leadership appointments.

Intellectually, the idea for the district superintendency may be traced directly to Putman and Weir's survey in the mid-1920s which called for the appointment of "local superintendents" or "directors" who would serve as "municipal officials working in closest possible union with school boards," as well as "government officers responsible for administering the schools in accordance with school law."[38] This model of joint appointment, or "service under two masters," Putman and Weir advised, would provide much-needed school leadership at local levels, promote administrative efficiency, help renovate outdated pedagogical practices (principally through new supervisory techniques, psychological testing, and teacher selection processes), and assist trustees in managing municipal systems that were becoming too large and complex for trustees to manage alone.[39]

The broad and forward-looking responsibilities Putman and Weir outlined for superintendents as local agents represented a view of school administration decidedly more American than British in origin. As part of their indebtedness to American educational progressives, Putman and Weir had borrowed emerging ideas about reforming and democratizing school leadership — ideas which they attributed directly to the new administrative science of Stanford's Ellwood Cubberley, Columbia's Edward Thorndike and David Snedden, Chicago's S. E. Beckett, and Yale's Frank Spaulding, as well as to others in the vanguard of American school management.[40]

Such writings likewise furnished the intellectual and philosophical framework for the 1926 volume, *Peace and Efficiency in School Administration*, a 216-page examination of British Columbia school supervision commissioned by the Lower Mainland High School Teachers' Association

[38] J. H. Putman and G. M. Weir, *Survey of the School System* (Victoria, British Columbia: King's Printer, 1925), 235-44.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., 9, 43, 384-85, 412-13, 423, 488-89, 510-26. Parenthetically, American notions, particularly about governance and administration, later proved to be equally influential when the British Columbia School Trustees Association began to look south of the border in the early 1950s for new organizational and role models for trustees.

and endorsed (at least by way of introduction) by J. D. Maclean, Minister of Education.[41] This volume, like Putman and Weir's report, saw value in both the management efficiency and democratic administration movements then coursing through the corridors of American schools and universities. In arguing for complete local control of senior administrative positions, the *Peace and Efficiency* study, however, went far beyond Putman and Weir's concept of dual allegiance. As Norman Black, the study's editor, advised: "Every city and every rural municipality should form the whole or a part of an 'inspectorial division' in the charge of a 'director of education,' also known as a 'local superintendent.'"[42] These individuals, according to Black, would be "solely responsible" to trustees, although their qualifications would have to be judged "satisfactory" by the Department of Education. Black and his colleagues concluded that such employment be contractually defined (three- to five-year contracts), that salaries be determined and paid locally, and that, wherever possible, the principle of authority commensurate with responsibility be fully applied throughout the administrative system.[43] This view would not be acknowledged in government circles until the election of the NDP in 1972, when long-standing cries for local autonomy were finally answered by a government agenda that saw political or organizational value in decentralizing control of administrative appointments.

The issue of school board autonomy and the local appointment of superintendents was kept alive from the time of Putman and Weir to Sperrin Chant's Royal Commission report in 1960 by important structural changes within the provincial system. The school district consolidation movement spearheaded by Inspector Plenderleith in the 1930s led to Maxwell Cameron's recommendation in 1946 to reduce the number of school districts from 650 to 74, a decision taken soon after by the Department.[44] Even without other forces, the creation of 74 larger districts would have reshaped the inspector's role into that of a general superintendent of instruction for local systems. But other forces did conspire: around the same time, government officers in the field were influenced, like other educators, by postwar writings on management which espoused less autocratic and authoritarian methods of school supervision. Increasingly, inspectors

41 Norman Black, ed., *Peace and Efficiency in School Administration* (Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1926), 16, 17, 26, 30-31, 33, 35, 44-45, 79, 86, 91-92, 102, 159, 169-70.

42 Ibid., 203.

43 Ibid., 175.

44 Maxwell Cameron, *A Report of the Commission of Inquiry* into Educational Finance (Victoria, British Columbia: King's Printer, 1945), 86-87.

wished to be viewed "as educational statesmen, not judges dispatched to rule on the pedagogical proficiency of others."[45] By the mid-1950s, educators had generally come to believe that "the improvement of teaching is not so much an activity of the inspector in which pupils and teachers participate as an activity of teachers and pupils in which an inspector participates."[46]

The District Superintendency

Such changes in practice and thought led directly to the closure of the inspectorate in 1958 and the subsequent creation of the district superintendency — two events which, in themselves, heralded the decline of the educational Raj. Even though the government's officers, now called district superintendents, were still paid principally by the Department and still functioned as the government's supervisory corps in the field (in some cases until the late 1970s), they saw themselves — and indeed, were seen by local communities — increasingly as school board officers. The joint-appointment system, upon which the district superintendency was now founded, offered advantages to government and school trustees alike. On one hand, through the superintendents, the province continued to influence and monitor local affairs; on the other, the superintendents provided much-needed on-site expertise for school boards at the bargain rate of a small administrative stipend with which trustees supplemented their civil service salaries.

For both sides, their work as expediters, "brokers," and managers of conflict assured stability in the rapidly expanding provincial system of the 1960s and 1970s. Through their good offices, they softened and sold policy directives from headquarters and carried back from the field expressions of compliance and concern. Their expertise, as well as their sensitivity to local political upheavals and possible rebellions, furnished senior staff in Victoria with the information and advice necessary to adjust government plans and programs in accordance with local conditions or, at times, to sidestep confrontation. Where compromise or peace was not possible, they could — and did — enforce the school act and regulations with the full weight of provincial authority behind them.[47] Moreover, they did so with little risk to their own administrative careers, immunized as they were from the rough and tumble of local politics by their provincial affiliation. In cases

[45] Fleming, "Our Boys in the Field," 296.

[46] Treffle Boulanger, "The Changing Role of the School Inspector," Paper delivered 15 May 1956, at the CEA — University of Alberta Short Course, 5.

[47] Interview with Bill Lucas, Vancouver, 7 December 1983.

where they erred or ran afoul of trustees, failure was seldom fatal. The Department, through the deputy minister or chief school inspector (a position later retitled superintendent of field services), would perform a "salvage operation" and the superintendent under fire would be reassigned to another district or transferred to headquarters until the dust settled.[48]

However, the formation of the district superintendency failed to assuage long-held resentments toward provincial control in education. Although superintendents were more closely associated with school boards than ever before, psychologically as well as physically, they still carried the stigma of being "the government's men" in the eyes of local communities and their trustees — and still symbolized the authority of a colonial regime.

Such feelings were again forcefully expressed by both the BCSTA and the BCTF in the late 1950s during Chant's inquiry into provincial education.[49] And, even though both organizations represented powerful new political factions in education — the trustees through the larger political base they had acquired through district amalgamation and the teachers as a result of their rapidly rising membership — Chant and his colleagues ruled against any radical refashioning of the authority structure in provincial schooling.[50]

If Chant's conservative recommendations disappointed trustees and teachers, district superintendents were also disappointed, especially concerning the issue of salary — long the primary source of contention between the Department and its officers. In many cases, superintendents earned less than principals they supervised: one superintendent, for example, ranked fifty-seventh on his district's salary scale.[51] This long-festering issue of inadequate pay would ultimately drive the superintendents out of the civil service two decades later.

In addition, local employment conditions were sometimes far from attractive. District leadership responsibilities had proved greater than imagined as the superintendent's job expanded as fast as the school system itself in postwar decades. Vast territories, "some larger than France," as one superintendent put it, required "supervision with few or no support staff."[52] For some, it became a case of "keeping things going smoothly,"

[48] Interview with Terry McBurney, Vancouver, 25 January 1988.

[49] British Columbia, *Report of the Royal Commission on Education* (Victoria, British Columbia: Queen's Printer, 1960), 28-31.

[50] Ibid., 67-82.

[51] Interview with Bill Lucas, Vancouver, 7 December 1983.

[52] Interview with Alan Newberry, Calgary, 27 February 1987.

or "you didn't get to go south" on the annual or bi-annual rotation of assignments.[53] All the while, of course, superintendents felt pressured by the locals who remained insistent that superintendents should be "their men" who would deal with teachers and district problems as they arose and secure from Victoria the district's share of money for buildings and programs.

The NDP victory in 1972 signalled the beginning of the end of Victoria's control over the superintendency. The new government was committed to a policy of administrative decentralization, not simply in education but in other areas of public administration. Eileen Dailly, Minister of Education, believed that "the people out there," as one government official put it, should control administrative appointments as well as other aspects of public schooling.[54] And so the century-old struggle by local communities to appoint their own school leaders appeared to end on 18 April 1973, when the legislature granted school boards with an enrolment of 20,000 pupils the right to hire superintendents to "advise and assist" them.[55]

But a battle and not the war had been won. The 1974 legislation directly affected only the province's seven largest school districts (Burnaby, Coquitlam, Richmond, Surrey, Vancouver, Victoria, and later Prince George), and throughout the post-1975 period, when the Social Credit government returned to office, pressure for the extension of local autonomy intensified in the face of stiffening government resistance.

In the midst of this struggle were the government officers themselves, who were increasingly unsure about their future with the civil service and the nature of their duties both at headquarters and in the field. Understandably, the declining influence of the Department since the late 1950s had been felt most acutely within the government's own ranks. The retirement, resignation, or reassignment of prominent figures within the Department during the 1960s and 1970s (including such people as Frank Levirs, Harold Campbell, John Meredith, Les Canty, and others) had caused a vacuum in leadership. Also, the system of career advancement and reward that had existed in the Department since its earliest beginnings had begun to collapse as early as 1965, when Neil Perry, a UBC economist and academic administrator, was recruited as the first "outsider" to become deputy minister of education. Perry's resignation in 1970, in turn, led to the promotion of Joe Phillipson, Assistant Superintendent of Administration,

[53] Interview with Les Canty, Vancouver, 28 October 1983.

[54] Interview with Joe Phillipson, Victoria, 8 December 1983.

[55] British Columbia, *An Act to Amend The Public Schools Act*, 1973.

over his superior Frank Levirs, Chief Superintendent of Schools.[56] With the election of the NDP government in 1972, Phillipson was removed from the deputy minister's chair and Jack Fleming, formerly of IBM, was selected by Dailly to replace him. Within months of the new government's formation, other changes rattled the Department's foundations. Ed Espley, a longtime power in school finance and the Department's primary link with the Premier's Office, was edged from power. John Bremer's ill-fated appointment as educational commissioner-at-large neutralized much of the influence once held by Phillipson's senior management committee, otherwise known cynically as "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs."[57] The arrival of Stanley Knight and the "R and D gang" (research and development) further polarized the Department into "new" and "old" factions and signalled to some the growing politicalization of the civil service itself.[58] Even the authority of Bill Reid, Chief Inspector of Schools, was challenged. Following an unsuccessful attempt to "place one of his boys" in a Vancouver Island superintendency, Reid reportedly fractured his arm by slamming it on a fender of his car in frustration. No event perhaps better symbolized how the government's influence over local boards was ebbing. In describing the government's declining power and the turbulence within the education bureau during the NDP years, one official noted: "During the 1972-1975 period, there seemed to be a complete breakdown of ministerial control. Local employment was greatly accelerated, sporadic attempts were made by those in charge to find 'new ways' to manage the system . . . [and] morale among field staff was low."[59]

At the superintendent's conference, held annually by the Department, expressions of discontent were voiced increasingly after the mid-1970s. Field staff openly complained that field–headquarters relations were strained, that major decisions about finance and construction were being made in Victoria without consulting superintendents or local boards, and that the Department made little use of the "excellent reservoir of expertise" held by government officers throughout the province.[60] Not even attempts

[56] Interview with Harold Campbell, Victoria, 8 December 1983; Interview with Les Canty, Vancouver, 28 October 1983.

[57] I am indebted to Andy Soles, who first brought to my attention this description of the government's mandarins in the education department.

[58] A. Bavelas, T. Fleming, C. Hodgkinson, A. Kratzmann and K. G. Pedersen, *Report to the Minister of Education: A Study of Research and Development in British Columbia* (Victoria, British Columbia: University of Victoria Faculty of Education, 1975).

[59] Interview with Joe Phillipson.

[60] E. J. Ingram, "Locally Employed Superintendents of Schools: The Alberta Experience," in *The Local Employment of Superintendents: Conference for District*

to restore solidarity and pride through the Department encouraging its staff to wear green departmental blazers could stem the disaffection and sense of alienation now felt by many of the government's field men.

This alienation intensified in the late 1970s as government ambivalence toward its own officers appeared to increase. Senior Ministry officials continued to resist superintendents' requests for salary readjustments and clarification about job security provisions.[61] At the same time, government leaders appeared reluctant to surrender control of leadership appointments entirely to the locals who were prepared to pay higher administrative salaries. In fact, government seemed to harbour second thoughts about the extent of local employment that already existed.[62] Faced with such ambiguity, the newly formed Association of British Columbia School Superintendents (ABCSS), in concert with teacher and trustee organizations, lobbied vigorously throughout 1978 and 1979 for full local employment for all the province's seventy-five districts.[63] In a May 1979 survey, superintendents opted overwhelmingly for local employment in an "open market" with conditions to be defined in contractual terms between boards and their appointees.[64] Little if any enthusiasm was shown by respondents for recent Ministry initiatives to retain government involvement in setting salary levels, candidacy lists, or other terms of employment.

When Brian Smith, the Minister of Education, finally announced in August 1980 that the *School Act Regulations* had been amended "to permit all school boards with an enrollment in excess of 250 pupils to appoint a local Superintendent of Schools," the collapse of the educational Raj was complete.[65] Ironically, in the end this collapse may have been occasioned as much by internal changes within the educational civil service

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Superintendents, 1979 (Victoria, British Columbia: University of Victoria Faculty of Education, 1979), 44-45.

61 This fact is made clear in 1978 and 1979 correspondence and briefs from the Association of British Columbia School Superintendents to the Premier's Office, school board offices, the British Columbia School Trustees Association, and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation. See, for example, the Association of British Columbia School Superintendents correspondence to Premier W. R. Bennett, 11 April 1979. Association of British Columbia School Superintendents files (hereafter ABCSS files).

62 Correspondence: Association of British Columbia School Superintendents to Chairmen of Boards, 22 September 1978, 2-4. ABCSS files.

63 See, for example, the British Columbia School Trustees Association and Association of British Columbia School Superintendents joint brief to government, 17 April 1979, "The Future of Educational Leadership in British Columbia." ABCSS files.

64 Association of British Columbia School Superintendents, "Results of Survey on Local Employment," 17 May 1979. ABCSS files.

65 Correspondence: Minister of Education Brian Smith to Board Chairmen, 25 August 1980, 1. ABCSS files.

as by the influence of new social and political forces far beyond the reach of government control. The "boys in the field" could have "stayed on" in a quasi-government arrangement as many other colonial officers did around the world in the post-Imperial age. That they did not and, instead, chose "the field" over Victoria testified to their sense of disillusionment with an educational bureau that to them no longer cared about its own men or recognized and rewarded faithful service.

3. *The Technocratic Restoration of the 1980s*

The advent of local employment for superintendents in the early 1980s did not mean that provincial influence in schooling had waned — only that the conduit of government authority would no longer be through the British colonial system of "district officers reporting to headquarters." Even as the shift from provincial to local control of school leaders was occurring in the 1970s, a new and different authority structure, or pattern of provincial administration, was emerging — an authority structure that would have less to do with the expertise or symbolic leadership of government officers and more with new policies and technical procedures designed in Victoria to manage the system.

Several forces prompted the Ministry's change in perception about its administrative function. Throughout the 1970s, government found itself forced to respond to equity and access issues raised by long-neglected and disenfranchised constituencies who now saw fit to challenge the fairness of schools and their responsiveness to handicapped or "special needs" children.[66] Pressure by these constituencies and others (including women and various ethnic and minority groups) for integration, improved social and medical services, curricular reform, non-sexist literature, and the schools' acknowledgement of Canada's cultural plurality compelled educational officials in government to develop more defensible and systematic approaches to program planning, funding, delivery, and evaluation.

While government was attempting to address this clamour for a broader, fairer, and more "inclusionary" concept of schooling, it was also besieged by demands for other kinds of accountability to do with school costs and academic performance. Concerns with educational quality and focus emerged in the early 1970s in reaction to the "loosening" of curricular requirements and the "softening" of school standards a decade earlier. By the mid-1970s, fears about declining scholastic scores had become an issue

[66] Fleming, "Our Boys in the Field," 300.

in the popular press as the public sought reassurance that Susie or Johnny could still master reading, writing, and computation.[67]

The political valence of the pupil performance issue was greatly increased, at least in the eyes of government, by the fact that expenditures on schooling in the 1970s were continuing to rise sharply as they had done since the early postwar years. In 1975, Dave Barrett's NDP administration expressed government unease about the spiralling cost of public services, as did the Social Credit government later that year when they resumed power.[68] The cost of the growth in the size and scope of the postwar school system had become apparent to senior policy makers in the 1970s but had been overshadowed by other items on the social agenda: in the twenty-four-year period from 1947 to 1971, there had been a thirty-five-fold increase in educational funding.[69] In 1971, expenditures on education surpassed the entire provincial budget only nine years earlier. They now equalled nearly 29 percent of total provincial expenditures compared to only 15 percent twenty years before.[70] The meaning of this growth was not overlooked by the Economic Council of Canada, which forecast in 1970 that, if the costs of education and health services continued to rise at the rate they had in the previous five years, they would absorb Canada's entire gross national product by the year 2000.[71] A buoyant provincial economy throughout much of the 1970s meant that the issue of financial accountability did not fully surface until the early 1980s, when provincial tax revenues abruptly declined, prompting government to enact severe corrective measures to restrain public sector spending.[72]

In response to these external forces, the provincial government's administrative function in schooling was gradually redefined over a period of a decade. The main features of the Ministry's new administrative character were illustrated through the following government initiatives: the development of the provincial learning assessment program in 1976; the introduction of the "core curriculum" in 1977; the re-organization of the special programs branch of the Ministry in 1978 (to facilitate mainstreaming for

67 For a summary of the 1970s educational debate concerning school accountability, see Thomas Fleming, "Accountability: Some Considerations of a Continuing Educational Dilemma," *The Journal of Educational Thought* (April 1978), 28-36.

68 Thomas Fleming, "Restraint, Reform and Reallocation: A Brief Analysis of British Columbia Government Policies in Education, 1981-1984," *Education Canada* (Spring 1985), 4-11.

69 British Columbia Department of Education, *One Hundred Years*, 90.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid., 15.

72 Fleming, "Restraint, Reform and Reallocation," 6-7.

handicapped pupils); the introduction of budgetary incentive grants in 1979; the implementation of the financial restraint program in 1982; and the re-introduction of provincial examinations in 1984. Altogether, these policy and procedural developments outlined the portrait of a ministry that had come to see its role principally as that of evaluating, monitoring, and controlling what was being taught, what was being learned, and what was being spent.[73] Although the government's education bureau had always supervised such matters, they did so now in the 1980s not through the century-old face-to-face administration tradition of field inspection but through recently developed management information and analysis systems. The elimination of the "field services" division in the August 1987 Ministry reorganization plan symbolically testified to the final passing of the Imperial age in school administration and to the distance that now separated provincial authorities from local school leaders and the culture of the schools themselves.

In summary, within the space of a decade, a new pattern of provincial control in schools had been forged to accommodate the operational needs of a larger and more differentiated system. The task of overseeing schools in the 1970s and 1980s, perhaps, had become too complex to tolerate the charismatic and individualistic management styles long associated with the "administration by personal contact" colonial model traditionally favoured by provincial authorities; or, alternatively, the anti-authoritarian social movement of the 1960s and their influence and broadening public participation in institutional affairs, may have, in themselves, rendered

[73] The clearest statement of the government's intention to curtail school costs, to establish financial responsibility on the part of local school districts, and to develop a new technically driven system of accountability can be seen in British Columbia Ministry of Education, "Indicators of Management Performance" (Victoria, British Columbia: Ministry of Education Data Services, 1982). Elsewhere, it is noted: "Nevertheless, it is within this broad fascination with centralization that the seeds of the government's great romance with productivity and efficiency lie. Looking at 'Indicators of Management Performance' ... it is evident that government thinkers have become infatuated with the idea of efficiency and with the kinds of systems engineering that today promises such results. In a manner reminiscent of the pseudo-scientific school surveys conducted across North America at the turn of the century and after, this report compares expenditures of the 75 provincial school districts in a thinly-disguised attempt to highlight local inefficiencies. For example, it itemizes costs on a per pupil basis for administration, instruction, equipment, grounds, and buildings. It details in comparative terms total school area per pupil, instructional area per pupil, operations costs per square metre, pupils per administrator, pupils per non-educational staff, and a host of other things. For anyone who looked at this document carefully, the handwriting of government intentions was clearly on the wall: in the future, there would be more rather than less ministry control." See K. G. Pedersen and Thomas Fleming, "Education Under Siege: Academic Freedom and the Cult of Efficiency," *Journal of Business Administration* 14 (1983-1984): 13-40.

anachronistic the idea of government rule through a "top-down," paternalistic system of school officers in the field.

In any event, this new authority system was characterized by its lack of visible or even rhetorical leadership — the government's monitorial and regulatory functions were now made evident in paper and not in person; a "government of laws" had supplanted a "government of men," and the subjectivity of individual reports had given way to data collection and analysis techniques made possible by emerging communications and information technologies. In relative terms, this new administrative role for senior government was less personal, less visible, more bureaucratic, and more objective in its intentions than that which preceded it. Government had lost little in the transition. In fact, it had redefined school management expertise in quantitative terms and controlled the production of such knowledge, allowing it to analyze and compare district-to-district expenditures and levels of pupil performance. If the government's educational bureau had lost its way in the 1960s and 1970s, it had found, through technocracy in the 1980s, a new way to restore its power and influence in determining the course and character of provincial schooling, as well as a means to determine the level of accountability that would obtain throughout the entire system. In short, through technocratic recentralization, the old order of central power had been remade in a new way and the government's officers in education, whether consciously or unconsciously, found themselves once again occupying the high ground on what had become a new administrative frontier.

Parenthetically, the government's recentralization of power in the 1970s and 1980s may have been at least partially prompted by its own inability to draft a written and codified mandate for the schools which would delineate the scope and responsibility of provincial authority and establish the zones of authority to be exercised by local boards as well as other so-called "stakeholder" groups in education, most notably the British Columbia School Trustees Association, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, and the newly formed Association of British Columbia School Superintendents. The problems faced by the educational bureaucracy in Victoria in divining its own path through the mire of school politics in the post-1972 years, or its failure, unwillingness, or incapacity to accommodate the ambitions of constituencies outside Victoria who hungered for governance and administrative power, led to a number of abortive attempts to construct a mandate paper. In senior government circles repeated efforts to draft such a mandate became known as "Project Phoenix," in obvious reference to the creature who kept rising from the ashes of its own

destruction to be reborn again — such has been the world of provincial school politics in recent years and one explanation for the drift to find satisfaction in order and technical perfection, if in nothing else.

The Superintendency and the Context of School Leadership in the 1980s

British Columbia school superintendents entered the 1980s caught between two traditions of provincial school administration, one of which they did not fully understand. Almost all of the first generation of locally employed superintendents knew first-hand something about the Imperial traditions of administration, either as former district superintendents themselves, or as teachers or principals who served under such men. They knew less, however, about the import of the post-1975 shift in patterns of provincial governance and administration. Their own proximity to the educational action of the 1970s and lack of any historical perspective made it difficult for them to see with any clarity the contours of the new administrative world they were entering.

What, then, was the meaning of this transition from provincial to local employment? How did this transition change the context in which superintendents work? And what have been the effects of this transition on the nature of the superintendency itself? These are but a few of the salient questions concerning the superintendency today.

From an analysis of the documents which chronicle the shift from provincial to local employment, it is evident that, on the eve of the changeover, superintendents recognized some of the problems and risks attendant with their new roles. Papers presented at annual meetings from 1975 to 1980 — in some cases by those already locally employed, or by those who had studied similar transitions elsewhere — made plain the advantages and pitfalls of "going local."[74] Local employment, it was known, meant an important change in organizational fealty: the divine right of headquarters over its men would now belong to local trustees. No longer would superintendents enjoy the intercession of the Ministry, the mobility it offered, or the security they once held within its ranks. Instead of being part of a team, they would now venture forth as individuals in a competitive employ-

[74] See, for example, *The Superintendency at the Crossroads: Conference* for District Superintendents (Victoria, British Columbia: University of Victoria Faculty of Education, 1974); *The Local Employment of Superintendents: Conference for District Superintendents* (Victoria, British Columbia: University of Victoria Faculty of Education, 1979); *Nine Position Papers on Current Issues in Education in British Columbia* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Association of British Columbia School Superintendents, 1979); and *Pathologies in Education: Conference for District Superintendents* (Victoria, British Columbia: University of Victoria Faculty of Education, 1980).

ment marketplace whose tenure, regardless of contractual provisions, would remain solely a tenure of competence. Even before the advent of full local employment, it was anticipated that such appointments would be riskier than government service and that the odds might be stacked against becoming a "career" superintendent in the new scheme of things. The history of local employment elsewhere also suggested a need for caution in dealing with trustees, particularly inexperienced or partisan ones, as well as the tenuous character of any administrative position whose continuance was ultimately at "the pleasure of the board."[75]

From the vantage point of the 1970s, however, it was impossible to foresee all the forces that would emerge in the 1980s at local and provincial levels to make the work of superintendents more difficult and their positions less secure.

Today, these forces are evident. The partisan politics that had been confined to urban boards in the 1970s have become more pronounced in the 1980s throughout the province. Trustees have also increasingly reflected the views of single-issue or special-interest constituencies, bound as they are sometimes to such groups for support. Teachers, special education lobbies, and language rights associations, in Byzantine fashion, now indirectly shape administration decisions through their influence with governance officials. At the same time, the zone of community consent about administrative activity, which had been generally large in earlier decades, has shrunk in the 1980s as more diverse community interests question the "science of schooling" as well as the great unwritten consensus about the purpose and value of schools.[76]

In the 1980s, superintendents have also found themselves caught up in the intense teacher-government struggle that has marked this decade, or what columnist Crawford Kilian has called "the school wars."[77] The effects of the provincial government's 1982 restraint program in curtailing local spending removed from local boards their authority to set district budgets — traditionally their most important responsibility. With their *raison d'être* suspended, and a narrower tax base from which to operate, trustees naturally sought fulfilment by enlarging their interest in other

[75] In a series of interviews with experienced British Columbia school superintendents conducted in 1986 and 1987, almost all pointed to the dangers of serving boards who were inexperienced or politicized. Under such circumstances, service "at the pleasure of the boards" was seen to hold particular dangers.

[76] Thomas Fleming, "From Provincial to Local Control," unpublished manuscript, University of British Columbia, 1986), 44-45.

[77] Crawford Kilian, *School Wars: The Assault on B.C. Education* (Vancouver, British Columbia: New Star Books, 1985).

areas, some of which had been exclusively administrative domains — thus blurring governance and administrative functions.[78]

At the same time, local dissatisfaction with levels of funding made available through provincial finance formulas led to board resistance and, in some instances, open rebellion against provincial authorities.[79] All the while, superintendents found themselves in an untenable position, caught between their obligation to enforce provincial regulations under the school act and their allegiance to their new political masters. For some, such difficulties have been further compounded by declines in district school populations and the problems of managing organizations in a state of contraction. Within this context, superintendents have learned that their work involves more than technical proficiency in management, more than managing the work culture of the schools, and more than providing the symbolic leadership ordinarily expected of them at educational and other community events.

Occupational survival for school superintendents in the 1980s has caused them to spend much of their time, as more than one superintendent has put it, "managing their political profiles." In this regard, several superintendents have reported that they spend from one-third to one-half of their time engaged in "support or coalition building" activities to bring trustees "on side," or to defuse potentially divisive situations that might lead to conflict among board members or between boards and their senior administrative staff.[80]

In addition, standing as they are knee-deep in the riptides of local politics, superintendents are increasingly expected to be the personal and institutional embodiment of the interests and values of the districts they serve. The growing demand for this kind of environmental coloration is manifest in job advertisements, in tests for applicants, and in the inquiries of "headhunting" firms who vet and shortlist candidates. More than ever

[78] This observation was a topic of discussion in a number of interviews with school superintendents, including: Interview with E. Froese, Burnaby, 18 February 1987; Interview with Alf Clinton, Coquitlam, 4 March 1987; Interview with Bob Johnson, Kimberley, 25 February 1987; Interview with Sue Granger, Golden, 26 February 1987; Interview with Duane Sutherland, Cranbrook, 25 February 1987; and Jim Imrich, Prince George, 21 February 1987.

[79] Anti-government sentiment and board resistance to the post-1982 provincial restraint program is chronicled in Crawford Kilian's *School Wars*.

[80] One potentially fruitful line of historical research into the superintendency could take as its subject a comparison of the work activities of district and local superintendents prior to and after 1974. The "presumed effects" associated with the changing social composition of school boards in recent decades could, at least, be partially documented in one respect through an examination and contrast of how superintendents spent their time before and after the shift to local control of such appointments.

before, factors such as church attendance, family status, cultural activities, language skills, and leisure preferences are weighed by boards, in some communities, in evaluating the suitability of chief school officers. Such criteria, of course, are not carved in stone and remain subject to electoral changes and their impact on the social and political composition of boards themselves.

While such forces and the uncertainty they caused were making their presence felt at local levels, the Ministry's new and highly prescriptive role, expressed chiefly in policy and other directives, also served to destabilize the superintendency. Once-strong communications links between Victoria and the field had been disrupted, or severed, in the midst of the change-over to local employment and in the face of the government's own re-definition of role. As a result of this communications gap, superintendents had little early warning of forthcoming government initiatives, or their meaning to district operations. Like the trustees they served, they now found themselves out in the cold and cut off from sources of political intelligence which allowed them to make sense out of government actions and decisions on other than an *ad hoc* basis. Such developments, no doubt, proved particularly injurious to superintendents whose claim to administrative expertise and, indeed, professional status rested largely on their "insiders'" knowledge of "what was coming down the line" and "how the system worked."

Concluding Comments: The Existential Superintendent

And so, the portrait of the British Columbia school superintendency that has emerged in the late 1980s is a troubled one. In earlier times it was said that "God talked to superintendents and superintendents then talked to others." If the lines of authority were ever such, it is no longer true! Today, superintendents are, to some extent, exiles in their own land. Like their counterparts elsewhere in Canada and the United States, they find themselves occupying a lonely pew. They no longer enjoy the protection of the government's mantle or the security of gradual career progress through the ranks. Circumstance has compelled them to be entrepreneurial in spirit, to compete with each other for positions, and to carry the burden of leadership alone. Nor do they represent as they once did "the irresistible voice" in local school administration, secure in their technical mastery of the system.[81] Over recent decades, their expertise in manage-

[81] For an enlightened discussion of the research on superintendents as masters or servants see William L. Boyd, "School Board — Administrative Staff Relationships" in Peter J. Cistone, ed., *Understanding School Boards* (Toronto: Lexington Books, 1975), 103-29.

ment and administration has seemingly depreciated in a social context that mistrusts "experts" and that seeks resolution of complex educational questions in individual values and simplified ideological positions. Theirs is the low ground on this new administrative frontier — a place where the struggle for survival seems more immediate and intense and where hopes for security depend almost entirely on whatever blend of competence, savvy, and neutrality individuals can bring to bear at times of crisis.

In some cases, perhaps, they are out of step with their time. No doubt the most senior members of the fraternity were born in an era when the province was still more rural than urban, when it was not a child's right to pass school, and when the problems of school administration, like the architecture of the schools themselves, were simpler in form. They grew up in a moral and professional universe of absolutes which has become relativistic with age. Those who joined the profession as young teachers in the 1940s and 1950s entered a career that never seemed brighter, at least in terms of public faith and support. Within their own lifetimes, however, they have seen the once-united profession of education become fractionalized and fractious; they have seen schools become battlegrounds for competing social and political forces; and, they have seen the authority and leadership of school professionals give considerable ground to the influence of special interest groups.

Like the characters in John le Carré's fiction, they are sometimes required to fight for causes that are not their own and in which they may not believe. Theirs is an existential situation. They are involved in important decisions, yet isolated — caught somewhere between the levels of government they serve and, at the same time, alienated to some extent from the professionals they supervise and even their own staffs. They work, for the most part, with little in the way of administrative or educational orthodoxy to guide them. Their professional experience and graduate education has made them more than practitioners but not quite scholars. They are institutional leaders in an age not known for its faith in institutions. Like the protagonists of existential novels, they spend much of their time peering into a void of uncertainty trying to unravel the meaning of things. And, finally, like the anti-heroes of modern literature, it may be questionable whether superintendents are ever masters of their own fate, or whether their administrative destinies are shaped more often by circumstances beyond their control.