

PATTULLO, THE PRESS, AND THE DOMINION-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE OF 1941*

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ON 14 JANUARY 1941, Prime Minister Mackenzie King convened a Dominion-Provincial Conference in Ottawa to discuss the *Rowell-Sirois Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations*, popularly known as the *Rowell-Sirois Report*.¹ In its Plan I, the report proposed sweeping changes to Dominion-provincial financial relations, including the assumption by the Dominion of all provincial debt. The Dominion would also assume complete responsibility for relief of the employable, unemployed, and their dependents. In return, the Dominion would acquire exclusive rights to levy personal and corporate income taxes and succession duties.² These proposals met spirited opposition from some provinces. The conference quickly collapsed without agreement on 15 January, when three premiers — Duff Pattullo of British Columbia, William Aberhart of Alberta, and Mitch Hepburn of Ontario —

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¹ The commission was appointed in 1937 to undertake “a re-examination of the economic and financial basis of Confederation and of the distribution of legislative powers in the light of economic and social developments of the last seventy years.” Cited in Donald V. Smiley, ed., *The Rowell-Sirois Report* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), 2. The commission was largely prompted by severe fiscal problems arising from the Great Depression and submitted its report in May 1940. See also Edwin R. Black, *Divided Loyalties* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975), 114-19; Doug Owsram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 269-79.

² Plan I also proposed abolishing existing subsidies to the provinces and replacing them with “national adjustment grants, calculated to enable the provinces to maintain an average Canadian standard of essential services with an average level of taxation.” “Dominion-Provincial Conference Tuesday, January 14 1941, and Wednesday, January 15 1941,” in *Dominion-Provincial Conferences, November 3-10, 1927, December 9-13, 1935, January 14-15, 1941* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1951), 7 (hereafter *Conferences, 1927, 1935, 1941*).

refused to participate in committee debate on Plan 1, which they believed would destroy provincial autonomy.³

The collapse of the conference evoked a vigorous response from the press. According to the prairie-based *Western Producer*, it was the signal for the release of "a flood of special dispatches and editorial comment, hysterical in tone and viciously mischievous in content . . . The dictionary is scoured for adjectives to damn the three premiers who refused to proceed with the conference on the terms laid down."⁴ Vancouver's largest daily newspapers, the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Vancouver Daily Province*, were particularly vitriolic; the latter, for example, described the "wilful and wanton destruction" of the conference as "worse than a crime of malevolence, it was a blunder of almost inconceivable stupidity."⁵ Although divergent in political outlook,⁶ both the *Sun* and the *Daily Province* labelled the dissenting premiers as "saboteurs," "scuttlers," "Founderers of Confederation," and "wreckers." Pattullo was singled out as "chief of the wrecking crew."⁷

The *Sun* and the *Daily Province* claimed that Pattullo acted in defiance of both reason and of his provincial colleagues. They considered that Pattullo's refusal to discuss the *Rowell-Sirois Report* in committee was irrational, obstructionist, and parochial; they argued that he had acted in an arbitrary and dictatorial manner and that his actions were an embarrassment to his cabinet, caucus, and party. Pattullo's finance minister, John Hart, was singled out as the focus of cabinet opposition to the premier's stand.⁸

A similar interpretation is advanced by most scholars. Margaret Ormsby, for example, contends that while Hart and other cabinet colleagues issued press statements explaining Pattullo's stand, "Hart's

³ British Columbia and Ontario, as the most prosperous provinces of the day, were also convinced that Plan 1 would benefit other provinces at their expense. See John Hart's detailed submission on this issue in the *Victoria Daily Times*, 25 January 1941.

⁴ *The Western Producer*, 23 January 1941, cited in the *Thomas Dufferin Pattullo Papers*, British Columbia Archives and Records Service (hereafter *TDPP*, BCARS), Addit. MSS 3, vol. 68, file 10. Similarly, Ma Murray declared in the *Bridge River-Lillooet News*, 7 March 1941, that "high powered propagandists filled the minds of the Canadian people with the belief that the Conference was a riot, and that premiers had sabotaged, crucified, torpedoed and blasted Confederation."

⁵ *Vancouver Daily Province*, 18 January 1941.

⁶ Although not an admirer of Pattullo during his last year in office, the *Sun* was generally regarded as Liberal, the *Daily Province* as Conservative. See Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958), 452; Robin Fisher, *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 334.

⁷ *Vancouver Daily Province*, 15 and 16 January 1941; *Vancouver Sun*, 16 January 1941.

⁸ *Vancouver Daily Province*, 16 January 1941; *Vancouver Sun*, 17, 27, and 29 January 1941.

statement lacked the ring of conviction." Galvanized by wartime hopes and fears, British Columbians were gripped by resurgent Canadianism, and the premier was soon "rejected for his parochialism."⁹ Similarly, R.M. Burns contends that Pattullo misjudged the public mood and that there is "no doubt at all" that his stand "was almost universally unpopular with the press, with most of his colleagues, and with the public."¹⁰ Martin Robin contends that the premier "overstepped the bounds of parochialism and behaved like a petty obstructionist."¹¹

A different interpretation of the collapse of the conference is advanced by Robin Fisher, who argues that Pattullo's stand was logical, realistic, and principled. Pattullo, he notes, was "absolutely correct" in his belief that the "undue centralization" proposed by the *Rowell-Sirois Report* would ultimately endanger Confederation. Fisher lays the blame for the collapse of the conference squarely at the feet of Mackenzie King and the Dominion government. The Dominion's insistence on rigidly clinging to an agenda that confined discussion solely to the report's recommendations placed provincial premiers "in the position of saying 'yes' or 'no' to plan 1. For Pattullo it was no choice."¹²

This article assesses the considerable and sometimes conflicting evidence surrounding the Dominion-Provincial Conference of 1941 and its aftermath. In many respects, it reinforces Fisher's interpretation, but it also addresses a vital question not resolved in his account of the controversy: how did Pattullo's actions affect his relationship with his cabinet and caucus? It argues that the premier maintained the active support of virtually all his colleagues in cabinet and caucus. Pattullo's stand reflected his deeply felt belief that the "way to build a strong Canada [was] to build strong provinces"¹³ and his deep distrust of the fiscal centralization embodied in Plan 1 — a distrust shared by his cabinet and caucus. His stand was neither impulsive nor arbitrary; it was the product of discussion and consultation prior to and during

⁹ Ormsby, *British Columbia*, 478.

¹⁰ R.M. Burns, "British Columbia and the Canadian Federation," in R.M. Burns, ed., *One Country or Two* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971), 261. Burns cites W.A.C. Bennett's account of the event, which elevates Pattullo's refusal to participate in committee debate on Plan 1 to a "walkout." This would have been a dramatic and perhaps irresponsible gesture, but it did not occur. Bennett was still a Kelowna merchant at the time of the conference. See also Norman J. Ruff et al., *The Reins of Power* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1983), 296; Donald E. Blake, "Managing the Periphery: British Columbia and the National Political Community," in R. Kenneth Carty and W. Peter Ward, eds., *National Politics and Community in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), 172.

¹¹ Martin Robin, *Pillars of Profit* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), 47-48.

¹² Fisher, *Duff Pattullo*, 330.

¹³ *Victoria Daily Times*, 14 March 1941.

the conference. Pattullo intended to scuttle Plan 1, but he hoped to salvage an alternate agreement from the conference; he urged the Dominion government to broaden the agenda in order to make this possible. This approach could not succeed, however, because the conference — from the Dominion government's perspective — was "in reality, intended to achieve nothing."¹⁴

This article also examines how the controversy was viewed by British Columbia's press. The harsh, intemperate rhetoric of Vancouver's largest dailies was not typical of other daily and weekly newspapers in the province. Although other newspapers were critical of Pattullo, few saw the Dominion-Provincial Conference in such stark terms as did the *Sun* and the *Daily Province*. Most expressed disappointment over the conference's collapse, hardly a surprising sentiment given that Canada was at war; and most attributed a portion of the blame to Pattullo. Beyond this, however, there was considerable diversity of opinion among the province's newspapers. Few endorsed Plan 1 without reservation and few criticized Pattullo without qualification. This diversity of opinion was also evident within at least one provincial opposition party and among the general public.

British Columbians shared common concerns regarding the war but disagreed about Pattullo's stand at the conference. They also displayed symptoms of a malady that, more recently, has been characterized as "constitutional fatigue." Then, as now, people sought a lasting resolution to seemingly interminable constitutional bickering; then, as now, politicians were unable to translate such feelings into an agreement acceptable to all partners in the Canadian federation.

The Dominion-Provincial Conference was a critical event in Canada's ongoing debate over the balance between federal and provincial powers. Like more recent attempts at constitutional amendment, the conference foundered on divergent interests and conflicting conceptions of federalism. The response of the Dominion and provincial governments to the *Rowell-Sirois Report* largely reflected their respective economic positions and prospects. The report was a powerful defence of what, in today's constitutional parlance, is termed "national standards." To weaker provinces, the promise of relief from the burden of debt, in combination with national standards, was attractive if not irresistible.

Canada's two strongest provinces, Ontario and British Columbia, provided the strongest opposition to the *Rowell-Sirois Report* (Quebec,

¹⁴ Christopher Armstrong, "Federal-Provincial Meetings Before the Second World War," in Carty and Ward, *National Politics*, 141.

in contrast to its stand in more recent decades, was ambivalent toward fiscal centralization). Pattullo, his cabinet, and his caucus believed in building a strong Canada by building strong provinces, adumbrating, to some extent, the concept of Canada as “a community of communities.” They believed that Plan 1, if implemented, would severely impede British Columbia’s social and economic development; it would betray the province’s long-term interests for the sake of giving in to short-term pressures. They shared a common conviction that British Columbia, unfettered by excessive federal control and arbitrary national standards, had a bright and prosperous future. Despite the charges of “parochialism” levelled at Pattullo by some newspapers and some opposition politicians in 1941, this conviction has continued to guide successive governments in this province, regardless of partisan stripe.

THE DOMINION-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE AND ITS COLLAPSE

Mackenzie King’s invitation to British Columbia to confer on the *Rowell-Sirois Report*, received in Victoria on 4 November 1940, posed a dilemma for Pattullo and his government. On the one hand, Pattullo did not want to appear uncooperative or obstructionist, particularly during wartime; on the other hand, the report — its Plan 1 in particular — “was the antithesis of all that Pattullo’s career in British Columbia had meant and a contradiction of everything he had stood for.”¹⁵ Plan 1 would have shifted the balance of power in Dominion-provincial relations heavily in favour of the central government. With exclusive control of income taxes and succession duties, the ability to fund new programs or initiatives would have rested largely with the Dominion government. The central control of “national adjustment grants” would have strongly encouraged provincial governments to follow Dominion direction. The *Rowell-Sirois Report* reflected the centralist sympathies of most of the commissioners as well as of their advisors and researchers;¹⁶ it stood, consequently, in direct opposition both to British Columbia’s brief to the commission in 1938 and to the province’s traditional demands for “better terms.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Fisher, *Duff Pattullo*, 326.

¹⁶ See Owsram, *Government Generation*, 269-78; David Fransen, “Unscrewing the Unscrutable’: The Rowell-Sirois Commission, the Ottawa Bureaucracy and Public Finance Reform, 1935-1941,” (PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1984), 452-53; 457-61.

¹⁷ One of the key elements in British Columbia’s brief was greater provincial control over income taxes. This was also advanced as a key demand by the province at the Dominion-

Pattullo's initial comments were relatively guarded. The *Rowell-Sirois Report*, he noted on 8 November, was of a "most valuable character, but this Government is not prepared to accept the recommendations of this report *in toto* as suitably applicable to British Columbia." Without explicitly mentioning Plan 1, Pattullo clearly signalled his government's disapproval of "undue centralization," which, after the conclusion of the Second World War, would lead to "disruption and disunity."¹⁸ In a speech a week later, Pattullo declared, "We are going to Ottawa with open minds, but I do not think for one moment that we should permit any interests to use the war for the purpose of hog-tying and hamstringing this province . . . in perpetuity."¹⁹ British Columbia's position was effectively characterized by Provincial Secretary George Weir as "full co-operation without betrayal of B.C.'s interests." Like Pattullo, Weir had no sympathy for "some little Canadians, masquerading as patriots, who would use war conditions as an altar on which to sacrifice legitimate provincial rights."²⁰

Despite urging from the opposition parties, Pattullo refused to make "an unalterable statement" that "might have the effect of prejudicing the position of the Province."²¹ Outright repudiation of Plan 1 would have invited charges that British Columbia's position was "cast in stone" and that he and his government were indifferent to the problems, concerns, and opinions of other Canadians. Had he followed this approach, Pattullo would have borne the blame for the failure of the conference. On balance, the best approach was probably the one adopted: reserve definitive comment on the *Rowell-Sirois Report* and its Plan 1 until the conference, then attempt to secure Dominion-provincial agreement on an alternate plan involving temporary wartime measures.

Provincial Conferences of 1927 and 1935, respectively. See "Precis of Discussions, Dominion-Provincial Conference, November 3-10, 1927," 18-19, "Dominion-Provincial Conference, 1935, Report of Proceedings," 16, in *Conferences, 1927, 1935, 1941*; *Vancouver Daily Province*, 16 March 1938; Fisher, *Duff Pattullo*, 257-58.

¹⁸ From "Statement by Premier T.D. Pattullo in Legislature," 7 November 1941, which was forwarded to Prime Minister King and was subsequently included in *Conferences, 1927, 1935, 1941*, xi.

¹⁹ *Vancouver Sun*, 15 November 1940. Pattullo and his cabinet members may have had open minds with respect to Dominion-provincial relations generally, but certainly not with respect to Plan 1. See Pattullo's comments in the *Vancouver Daily Province*, 16 February 1941, and the following comments by Agriculture Minister K.C. MacDonald in the *Vernon News*, 20 February 1941: "[BC] went to the conference prepared to discuss readjustments as between the province and Dominion, but was unalterably opposed to part one of the report."

²⁰ *Vancouver News-Herald*, 27 November 1940.

²¹ *Nelson Daily News*, 8 November 1940.

Pattullo did not receive the conference agenda until 2 January 1941, three days prior to the British Columbia delegation's departure for Ottawa. The agenda not only confirmed the Dominion's intention to pursue Plan 1, as Pattullo and his ministers had anticipated, but also revealed the Dominion's determination to exclude discussion of alternate proposals. Nevertheless, the members of the delegation departed with the hope that discussions in Ottawa would produce a reasonable compromise; they hoped, as Labour Minister George Pearson later explained, that "the conference would be broadened, that Plan 1 wouldn't be the basis of the agenda, and the way would be open to discuss the problems of the present. We hoped and expected to get into committee."²² These hopes were soon crushed by a combination of the Dominion's intransigence regarding its agenda and of Ontario's overt hostility towards Ottawa.

The decision of the Dominion cabinet to call the Dominion-Provincial Conference was not easily reached. The conference was largely the product of a persistent and determined effort by the Dominion minister of finance, J.L. Ilsley. The demands of the war effort had strained Dominion finances and no end to the war was in sight. New sources of revenue were essential. Cabinet directed Ilsley to canvass the provinces for their views with respect to the adoption of Plan 1. These discussions revealed that, while Premier Bracken of Manitoba strongly supported Plan 1, there was considerable provincial opposition, particularly from Premier Hepburn of Ontario.²³

Mackenzie King had misgivings about calling a conference when there were obvious divisions among the provinces.²⁴ Despite these misgivings, Ilsley ultimately convinced King and the rest of his cabinet that, given the Dominion's gloomy financial picture, a conference was essential. Although the federal cabinet saw little or no prospect of gaining agreement from the provinces, a conference was deemed necessary to prepare both the latter and the general public for a Dominion invasion of provincial fields of taxation.²⁵

King adopted a conciliatory tone in his opening address; the Dominion's proposed agenda, he claimed, was "merely tentative. The opinions of the delegates here assembled will be the deciding factor."

²² *Kamloops Sentinel*, 6 March 1941.

²³ J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), 164-65; see also J.W. Pickersgill, *The Mackenzie King Record*, vol. 1, 1939-1944 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960), 159; H.S. Ferns, *Reading from Left to Right* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 157-58.

²⁴ Granatstein, *Canada's War*, 166.

²⁵ Fransen, "Unscrewing the Unscrutable," 408-12.

By professing openness, King masked the Dominion's reluctance to broaden its agenda. He claimed that if "a better solution can be found, it will be welcome," but he added that no solution could be adequate "which does not take into account the suggestions made by the commission for their solution."²⁶ King carefully laid out the Dominion's case for Plan 1, assuring the provinces at every turn that substantial benefits would accrue to all.

King then invited the nine provincial premiers to submit general comments with respect to the *Rowell-Sirois Report's* recommendations. These comments, well documented elsewhere, ranged from blunt criticism of Hepburn to unreserved support of Bracken.²⁷ Pattullo, while critical of Plan 1, was more diplomatic than the Ontario premier. Pattullo described the report as "a very remarkable compendium of useful information," then outlined British Columbia's concerns:

Under the mechanics of Plan 1, there will be immediate and ever increasing centralization authority in the Dominion. So far as our province is concerned, we will be in such a position of incapability to move forward or even to maintain existing standards, as will assuredly lead to grave dissatisfaction and friction.

After "an arduous struggle up the hill of public economy," Pattullo declared that British Columbia did not want to be pushed back down to a position where it would "turn the treadmill of mediocrity in perpetuity." He favoured the adoption of "effective temporary measures" to deal with the war crisis and agreed that permanent measures should be considered only after the war.²⁸

The second day of the conference began with an in camera meeting of the agenda committee, which was comprised of the nine provincial premiers and Dominion ministers Ernest Lapointe and T.A. Crerar. According to Pattullo's account of this meeting, he urged that "a new agenda should be prepared and fullest discussion thereon be undertaken, but the dominion representatives would not consent to any other basis of discussion than that already laid down."²⁹

Pattullo, like Aberhart and Hepburn, saw no point in engaging in

²⁶ *Conferences, 1927, 1935, 1941*, 2 and 6.

²⁷ See Granatstein, *Canada's War*, 169-71; Fisher, *Duff Pattullo*, 330-33; and Fransen, "Unscrewing the Unscrutable," 432-46.

²⁸ *Conferences, 1927, 1935, 1941*, 38-41.

²⁹ *Trail Daily Times*, 31 January 1941.

detailed debate on proposals that his government opposed in principle; such debate, as Weir later noted, would have been “a first class piece of hypocrisy.”³⁰ In the final public session, Pattullo repeatedly emphasized a willingness to discuss wartime finance or any other issue of dominion-provincial relations; he again pleaded for a revised agenda — not based on the *Rowell-Sirois Report’s* recommendations. “I repeat that if you want this conference to continue,” said Pattullo, “why not let us discuss questions of mutual interest? Leave the discussion wide open, and do not insist upon a consideration of the Sirois Commission’s report at this time.”³¹

King called a brief recess to meet with his cabinet prior to closing the Dominion-Provincial Conference. In line with Pattullo’s comments, he suggested that “we consider calling [the] conference at an end but having committees meet to deal with subjects decided on.” Although there was support for this suggestion, some ministers were strongly opposed to it. The general feeling, King noted in his diary, was “that it would be better to have [the] conference ended altogether, and just have Ministers themselves come and talk over any question.”³² This decision was undoubtedly influenced by Hepburn’s threat “to withdraw and to leave these wreckers of confederation, under the guise of patriotism, to continue to carry on their nefarious work.”³³ Although the Ontario delegation did not withdraw, Hepburn’s inflammatory rhetoric undoubtedly upset Dominion ministers and undermined Pattullo’s attempt to forge a compromise solution. “Hepburn’s antagonism made it useless to even confer on war problems,” according to George Pearson. “It was there that the conference was scuttled.”³⁴

In closing the Dominion-Provincial Conference, King argued that, “in the absence of any alternative proposal which would offer a better solution than that suggested in the report,”³⁵ the latter provided the “only real basis” for discussion. In the Dominion cabinet’s view, no such proposal was forthcoming. King was not unhappy that the conference had ended; as David Fransen notes, he had little enthusi-

³⁰ Weir to Pattullo, 25 March 1941. *TDPP*, BCARS, vol. 68, file 10. See also *Vancouver Sun*, 19 February 1941, where George Pearson states: “B.C. delegates feared any negotiations that would tie the province to the Report.”

³¹ *Conferences, 1927, 1935, 1941*, 81 and 102.

³² William Lyon Mackenzie King (hereafter WLMK), diaries, 15 January 1941, *King Papers*, National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), MG 26, J13.

³³ *Conferences, 1927, 1935, 1941*, 80.

³⁴ *Victoria Daily Times*, 1 March 1941; *Kamloops Sentinel*, 6 March 1941.

³⁵ *Conferences, 1927, 1935, 1941*, 103.

asm for the *Rowell-Sirois Report* and looked forward to "its peaceful burial."³⁶ Although the conference failed to endorse Plan 1, King noted in his diary:

In reality it has served the purpose we had in view, of avoiding attack for not having called the Conference, and particularly what would have followed, invasion of provincial sources of revenue. We have now got the pledge of the provinces to let us take their revenues if we need them — a tremendous achievement.³⁷

Pattullo also had good reason to consider the outcome of the conference at least a partial success. He went to it with every intention of derailing Plan 1, a plan which he and his colleagues firmly believed was hostile to the interests of British Columbia, and that aim had been achieved. And Pattullo, like King, believed the conference concluded "in friendly spirit."³⁸ Unfortunately for Pattullo, the press did not share this benign interpretation.

WHO WRECKED THE DOMINION-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE?

Vancouver's largest daily newspapers had no difficulty in assigning blame for the collapse of the Dominion-Provincial Conference. The *Sun* and the *Daily Province* were enthusiastic proponents of the *Rowell-Sirois Report* long before the conference, the latter criticizing Pattullo in early November as "neither a good British Columbian nor a good Canadian"³⁹ for his refusal to embrace fiscal centralization. Similar criticism continued after the conference, both in editorials and in "news" despatches laced with interpretive comments.⁴⁰ B.A. McKelvie, correspondent for the *Daily Province*, claimed that Pattullo, Hepburn, and Aberhart "went out deliberately to scuttle the whole project" and "bluntly and brutally . . . damned the whole thing."⁴¹ Bruce Hutchison, correspondent for the *Sun*, argued that the "three musketeers . . . came frankly to prevent the conference [from]

³⁶ Fransen, "Unscrewing the Unscrutable," 462.

³⁷ WLMK, diaries, 15 January 1941, *King Papers*, NAC, MG 26, J13.

³⁸ *Victoria Daily Times*, 31 January 1941.

³⁹ *Vancouver Daily Province*, 8 November 1940.

⁴⁰ For example, a news photo of King, Quebec premier Adélard Godbout, and Pattullo bears the caption "PROPONENT, MEDIATOR, SCUTTLE." *Vancouver Daily Province*, 16 January 1941.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 15 January 1941.

doing anything.”⁴² These suggestions of premeditated collusion among the dissenting premiers appear to be without foundation.

Pattullo acknowledged that British Columbia’s position on the *Rowell-Sirois Report* was prepared before he left for Ottawa, but, he offered no apologies:

I prepared the statement in Victoria because nothing that the Prime Minister of Canada or anyone else could say could change the report of the commission . . . [It] would have been presented to the conference regardless of the attitude of any other province.⁴³

He denied that there was any collusion with Aberhart or Hepburn. “I went to Ottawa with my mind made up on the report,” said Pattullo, “there was absolutely nothing in the way of any understanding between myself and the other two.”⁴⁴ He was also given a strong and clear direction by his cabinet and his party; he did not need the views of other premiers to help him shape his position on Plan 1.

In the wake of the conference collapse, both the *Sun* and the *Daily Province* alleged that there was dissension within the Pattullo cabinet. McKelvie claimed that the “attitude adopted by Premier Pattullo came as a shock both to the Dominion Government and to a number of members of his own delegation as well.”⁴⁵ Similarly, Hutchison argued that “if Mr. Pattullo had listened to his ministers he would have taken a very different course at the Conference.”⁴⁶ A *Sun* editorial of January 27 expanded on this theme: “We refuse to believe for a moment that Mr. Hart agreed with his leader’s refusal to confer.

⁴² *Vancouver Sun*, 15 January 1941. Hutchison’s despatches were also featured in the *Victoria Daily Times* along with articles by Norman MacLeod. *Victoria Daily Times* editorials were moderate in tone in comparison to those published in the largest Vancouver dailies. See *Victoria Daily Times*, 15, 16, 17, 23, and 27 January 1941.

Ma Murray had no admiration for Hutchison and coined a verb from his name to express her view. She noted, for example, that Pattullo had been “bruzhuchissoned almost daily all winter.” *Bridge River-Lillooet News*, 28 February 1941.

⁴³ *Victoria Daily Times*, 31 January 1941. Prior preparation of the province’s opening statement was the object of much criticism in the press. In his diary, King also noted: “They [presumably his cabinet colleagues] all think Pattullo particularly stupid, having had his speech printed before leaving BC.” WLMK, diaries, 15 January 1941, *King Papers*, NAC, MG26, J13. Given that King and Bracken had obviously prepared their lengthy speeches well in advance, the criticism of Pattullo likely relates more to the content of his statement than to the date of its preparation.

⁴⁴ *Vancouver Daily Province*, 16 February 1941.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 16 January 1941.

⁴⁶ *Vancouver Sun*, 17 January 1941.

That Mr. Hart and all the other cabinet ministers regretted Mr. Pattullo's stand seems to be knowledge in Ottawa."⁴⁷

Did these claims reflect the speculation and wishful thinking that abounded at the conference,⁴⁸ or did the principle of cabinet solidarity mask differences of opinion among cabinet members? In Ontario, a prominent cabinet minister resigned before the conference, apparently because he disagreed with Hepburn's assessment of the *Rowell-Sirois Report*.⁴⁹ In British Columbia, there was no public disagreement within cabinet. Pattullo claimed that the "course which I pursued at the conference was followed after consultation with and concurrence of my colleagues at the conference."⁵⁰

And, indeed, ministerial comments reflected firm opposition to Plan 1 and whole-hearted support for Premier Pattullo. Finance Minister John Hart, as author of the province's detailed financial critique of Plan 1, knew all too well the effect it would have on provincial revenues.⁵¹ He strongly defended Pattullo's stand against a plan that would have greatly curtailed provincial autonomy by centralizing control in Ottawa "under a finance commission from whose decision there would be no appeal."⁵² Like Hart, Labour Minister George Pearson believed the adoption of Plan 1 "would have done British Columbia an everlasting injustice. That is the opinion of the cabinet. We are prepared to share with Mr. Pattullo whatever responsibility there is."⁵³ Provincial Secretary George Weir claimed that if Plan 1 had been adopted, "education and social service standards in BC would [have been] set back 25 years."⁵⁴ To Attorney-General Gordon Wismer, the Dominion-Provincial Conference was an attempt by "the rich and influential eastern advocates of centralized government to try and force Plan 1 . . . down the throats of the provinces."⁵⁵ Agriculture Minister K.C. MacDonald emphasized that he was "cradled in the school known as provincial rights" and that he "would go down to defeat ten times over rather than sell the future of

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 January 1941.

⁴⁸ In his diary, King notes: "I understand all his [Pattullo's] cabinet is against the position he is taking. Some of Aberhart's colleagues, the same. I think Hepburn's colleagues, the same. Some of them at least." WLMK, diaries, 15 January 1941, *King Papers*, NAC, MG26, J13.

⁴⁹ Eric Cross, Minister of Public Welfare. See *Vancouver News-Herald*, 28 November 1941.

⁵⁰ *Victoria Daily Times*, 31 January 1941.

⁵¹ *Victoria Daily Times*, 25 January 1941. For more on the Hart/Pattullo relationship see George M. Abbott, "Duff Pattullo and the Coalition Controversy of 1941," *BC Studies* 102 (Summer 1994) 30-53.

⁵² *Victoria Daily Times*, 30 January 1941.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1 February and 1 March 1941.

⁵⁴ *Vancouver Sun*, 14 February 1941.

⁵⁵ *Victoria Daily Times*, 15 March 1941.

this province, to hand over financial control to centralized authority.”⁵⁶ The tenacity of cabinet opposition to Plan 1 was also reflected in Public Works Minister C.S. Leary’s claim that its adoption “would have given almost totalitarian powers to our Federal Government and our Provincial Government would have become nothing more than a glorified city council.”⁵⁷

Several of Pattullo’s backbenchers expressed similar concerns prior to the conference.⁵⁸ For example, C.R. Bull, MLA for South Okanagan, declared in the Legislature on 5 December that “the people would deeply resent and blame us if any of the limited standards we have reached were lowered, or the aims we have for the future were frustrated.”⁵⁹ The absence of visible Liberal support for the *Rowell-Sirois Report* cannot be explained as devotion to caucus solidarity. Only months earlier, four Liberal backbenchers broke ranks to vote against a major government bill.⁶⁰

The only hint of division within the Liberal caucus came from Harry Perry, MLA for Fort George and editor of the *Prince George Citizen*. Like others in the caucus, Perry nursed serious concerns about the report, which he expressed in editorials prior to the conference.⁶¹ In his first editorial after the latter’s collapse, Perry suggested that “a more sportsmanlike attitude on the part of the three dissenters” would have been welcome, but he added that the “adoption or otherwise of the Sirois report is not such a serious matter as to justify the suggestion that it will disrupt the Confederation.”⁶² However, speaking to the Prince George Board of Trade in late March, Perry deplored the “scant courtesy” and “dictatorial” actions of the three dissenting premiers.⁶³

Apart from Perry, caucus support for Pattullo held firm after the conference. For example, MLA R.H. Carson (Kamloops) believed the premier had saved the province from “the hands of a loan council

⁵⁶ *Vernon News*, 20 February 1941.

⁵⁷ *Nelson Daily News*, 18 February 1941.

⁵⁸ MLAs included George Murray (Lillooet), Howard Forester (Vancouver), C.R. Bull (South Okanagan), Louis Lebourdais (Cariboo), Manfred McGeer (Mackenzie), and R.R. Burns (Rossland-Trail). See *Vancouver Sun*, 23 November 1941; *Vancouver Daily Province*, 20 and 23 November 1941; and *Kelowna Courier*, 5 December 1941.

⁵⁹ *Kelowna Courier*, 5 December 1941.

⁶⁰ *Vancouver News-Herald*, 10 May 1940.

⁶¹ *Prince George Citizen*, 9 and 16 January 1941.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 23 January 1941.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 27 March 1941. Perry had a well-established reputation as a maverick and a critic of Pattullo. See Fisher, *Duff Pattullo*, 162 and 339; Ormsby, *British Columbia*, 414-15; and Russell R. Walker, *Politicians of a Pioneering Province* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1969), 126-27.

directed by the big financial interests." British Columbia, he declared, "will live to see the day when it thanks T.D. Pattullo for the stand he has taken."⁶⁴ Despite a fierce battle between the Trail Board of Trade and the premier, the MLA for Rossland-Trail, R.R. Burns, was an unwavering Pattullo supporter. Noting that Plan 1 would leave the province with little revenue apart from liquor and gas taxes, Burns argued that "to obtain sufficient revenue to carry on, we would have to drink ourselves to death or drive ourselves crazy."⁶⁵ One of the most persistent and vocal critics of Plan 1 was George Murray, MLA for Lillooet and publisher of the *Bridge River-Lillooet News*, who claimed that the *Rowell-Sirois Report* "would in time establish a dictatorship in Ottawa."⁶⁶

Murray's attitude was apparently shared by many Liberals across the province. Prior to his departure for the Dominion-Provincial Conference, Pattullo called together the executive of the BC Liberal Association to discuss the *Rowell-Sirois Report*. According to one of the participants, the executive strongly supported the premier's position,⁶⁷ and this support apparently persisted after the conference. Although some Liberals undoubtedly sided with their federal leaders, newspaper accounts of party meetings in various towns and cities reveal no hint of opposition to Pattullo.⁶⁸ Party president W.J. Knox claimed that, "after consultation with numerous members of the party in many parts of the province," an "overwhelming majority" solidly supported Pattullo's stand at the conference. Knox added, in a gentle swipe at the press: "I am just as positive that his attitude has not been fairly reported to the public."⁶⁹

⁶⁴ *Vancouver Daily Province*, 28 January 1941.

⁶⁵ *Trail Daily Times*, 12 March 1941; *Nelson Daily News*, 11 February and 12 March 1941.

⁶⁶ *Vancouver Sun*, 1 February 1941. See also comments of MLA A.J. McGrath (Cranbrook) in *Victoria Daily Times*, 24 January 1941.

⁶⁷ According to W.H. Campbell, president of the Vancouver Centre Liberal Association: "It is charged by some of the newspapers that the premier did not speak for the people of British Columbia . . . When he went to Ottawa he was so careful and considerate of the opinion and wish of the people that he called a meeting of all members of the BC Liberal Association just before the delegation was to leave for Ottawa." *Vancouver News-Herald*, 12 February 1941. See also *Vancouver Daily Province*, 12 February 1941; *Vancouver Sun*, 12 February 1941.

⁶⁸ For example, in Cranbrook (*Nelson Daily News*, 27 January 1941) Trail (*Ibid.*, 12 March 1941), Fernie (*Ibid.*, 23 March 1941), Lumby (*Vernon News*, 27 February 1941), Revelstoke (*Revelstoke Review*, 1 May 1941), and Vancouver (*Vancouver News-Herald*, 12 February 1941). Among Pattullo's critics were Liberal MPs Tom Reid (New Westminster) and J.G. Turgeon (Cariboo) as well as Dominion minister of pensions and national health Ian Mackenzie. *Victoria Daily Times*, 17 and 21 January 1941. MP G.G. McGeer declined comment, saying: "No good can be done by stirring dissension" *Vancouver Sun*, 17 January 1941. See also Fisher, *Duff Pattullo*, 336.

⁶⁹ *Vancouver Sun*, 31 January 1941.

PATTULLO AND THE PRESS

The *Sun* and the *Daily Province* were the only newspapers in British Columbia to send their own correspondents to the Dominion-Provincial Conference. Some smaller newspapers did not cover the event, while others published reports by the Canadian Press or by freelance correspondent Norman MacLeod. These reports were usually factual and fairly objective,⁷⁰ in sharp contrast to the subjective and emotional accounts of Bruce Hutchison in the *Sun* and B.A. McKelvie in the *Daily Province*.

Not surprisingly, many Liberals were offended. In an interview with the *Vancouver News-Herald*, Pattullo declared: "There's no use mincing words on the subject. Press despatches from Ottawa contained lies."⁷¹ John Hart stated, upon his return to Victoria: "It would appear that reports reaching British Columbia regarding the conference and Premier Pattullo's stand have created a wrong impression in the minds of some of the people."⁷² George Weir was less diplomatic; he charged that Pattullo was the victim of "ridicule, vituperation and blackguardism" in "one of the most vicious and dastardly newspaper campaigns . . . ever conducted in a civilized community."⁷³ George Pearson noted, again in obvious reference to the *Sun* and the *Daily Province*, that "small papers have been very fair. Two large newspapers are out to kill the premier."⁷⁴

The collapse of the Dominion-Provincial Conference was a popular subject for editorial comment across British Columbia. Of twenty-four newspapers surveyed, eighteen made some editorial pronouncement on the subject (in contrast, only half of the newspapers surveyed made any comment on the *Rowell-Sirois Report* prior to the conference).⁷⁵ Two newspapers — the *Bridge River-Lillooet News* and the

⁷⁰ See, for example, Canadian Press coverage in the *Trail Daily Times*, 14 and 15 January 1941, and an article by Norman MacLeod in the *Victoria Daily Times*, 21 January 1941.

⁷¹ *Vancouver News-Herald*, 1 February 1941.

⁷² *Victoria Daily Times*, 25 January 1941.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 14 February 1941.

⁷⁴ *Vancouver Sun*, 19 February 1941. In a speech in Kamloops, Pearson added that the "tendency of these newspapers with large circulations is to try to find in every public man something that is wrong." *Kamloops Sentinel*, 6 March 1941.

⁷⁵ Among the newspapers that did not comment on the controversy were the *Trail Commentator*, *Salmon Arm Observer*, *Rossland Miner*, *Fernie Free Press*, and *Peace River Block News*. The *Comox Argus* expressed unqualified support for the *Rowell-Sirois Report* prior to the conference but made no comment after. Other newspapers that expressed unqualified support included the *Vancouver Sun*, *Daily Province*, *Kelowna Courier*, and *Nelson Daily News*. More tentative support came from the *Peace River Block News*, *Vancouver News-Herald*, and *Victoria Daily Times*.

Prince Rupert Daily News (from Pattullo's home riding) — expressed support for the premier's stand. Three others expressed regret over the collapse of the conference but did not direct blame at Pattullo.⁷⁶ All of the remaining thirteen newspapers attributed at least a portion of the blame to Pattullo. Of these, only the *Grand Forks Gazette*, edited by provincial Conservative candidate T.A. Love, rivalled the largest Vancouver dailies in the intensity and persistence of its editorial comment. The remainder were more moderate in tone.⁷⁷

The editorial approach of the *Vancouver News-Herald*, the *Vernon News*, and the *Prince George Citizen* was typical of that of provincial newspapers: critical of Pattullo's refusal to participate in committee debate on Plan 1 but also critical of the more venomous editorial attacks on him. The *Vancouver News-Herald* deplored the "wilful opposition" of Pattullo but claimed that "disappointment and anger" carried his critics "beyond the bounds of reason."⁷⁸ The *Vernon News* concluded that Pattullo had "made a grave mistake," but that "talk of dirty work and that the Premier is any less a Canadian citizen than his critics, is just plain silly."⁷⁹ The *Vernon News* also reviewed the editorial comments of other weekly newspapers and found that in "many instances [they were] more tolerant and restrained" than were those of daily newspapers.⁸⁰ Similarly, *Prince George Citizen* editor and maverick Liberal MLA Harry Perry declared that "rash editorial statements" regarding the conference collapse were "to be deplored."⁸¹

In Ontario, the Hepburn government responded to criticism of its conference stand with full-page newspaper advertisements; in British Columbia, the Pattullo government bought radio time for its own belated counterattack.⁸² Pattullo spent over a week in Ottawa and

⁷⁶ These included the *Revelstoke Review* (6 March 1941), *Nelson Daily News* (16 January 1941), and Victoria's *Daily Colonist* (15, 16, and 17 January 1941). The latter described King as "Mr. Facing Both Ways" for allowing the conference to be held when he was not personally convinced that the time was right.

⁷⁷ These included the *Victoria Daily Times*, *Vancouver News-Herald*, *Prince George Citizen*, *Marpole-Richmond Review*, *Kelowna Courier*, *Powell River News*, *Chilliwack Progress*, *Kamloops Sentinel*, and *Vernon News*. The *Trail Daily News* did not criticize Pattullo until after the premier's harsh and perhaps impolitic response to criticism from the Trail Board of Trade (see articles of 27 February and editorial of 12 March 1941).

⁷⁸ *Vancouver News-Herald*, 20 January 1941.

⁷⁹ *Vernon News*, 23 January 1941.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 6 February 1941.

⁸¹ *Prince George Citizen*, 23 January 1941.

⁸² Pattullo's radio speech of March 13 was broadcast over CKWX in Vancouver and rebroadcast the following day over shortwave on CKFX so that it could reach northern sections of the province. Tapes of the speech went out to Interior centres for subsequent rebroadcasting. *Nelson Daily News*, 6 March 1941.

New York prior to returning to British Columbia on 31 January 1941. As Robin Fisher notes, "In the days immediately after the conference he either underestimated the extent of opposition to his stand in British Columbia or overestimated his facility to overcome it."⁸³

Hart and Weir, the first ministers to return from the conference, were concerned by the premier's delay in responding to press criticism of his role in its collapse. In a letter to Pattullo on 24 January, Hart noted that he was releasing a statement aimed at "changing the wrong impression that was placed in the minds of the people through press reports."⁸⁴ Evidently Hart was not convinced that his statement achieved this aim. In a telegram to the premier on 29 January, Hart wrote: "Principal criticism from press is that you refused [to] discuss Sirois Report in committee stop Public do not understand and are awaiting your explanation."⁸⁵ A telegram from Weir to Pattullo on the same day also reflected considerable alarm:

Mr King insisted on limiting discussion to basis [of] Sirois Report [and] this narrow limitation overrode your wider appeal and virtually destroyed conference stop A long statement dealing with financial and other matters would not allay intense feeling here stop Local press have poisoned public mind including many Liberals stop Your appeal to save conference and denial that you scuttled same would be both true and probably ease intense situation.⁸⁶

Almost two months later, Weir remained deeply concerned about the impact of the conference on the minds of the voters. In a letter to Pattullo, he claimed that 90 per cent of "friends in Vancouver" are "of the opinion (and I agree with them at the present juncture) that not a single liberal [sic] could possibly be elected in Vancouver today; but that the manifesting of a little goodwill towards the Ottawa Government could work a wholesome change here." Despite Weir's evident pessimism about his own electoral chances in Vancouver, he did not attribute Liberal weakness to Pattullo's leadership. On the contrary, Weir suggested that the country needed "the support and propulsive influence of men like Pattullo who can rise to national heights both in

⁸³ Fisher, *Duff Pattullo*, 335.

⁸⁴ Hart to Pattullo, 24 January 1941, *TDPP*, BCARS, vol. 68, file 8.

⁸⁵ Hart to Pattullo, 29 January 1941, *TDPP*, BCARS, vol. 68, file 10.

⁸⁶ Weir to Pattullo, 29 January 1941, *TDPP*, BCARS, vol. 68, file 8.

sentiment and in oratory.⁸⁷ In the minds of Liberals like Weir, the press — not Pattullo — was to blame for any adverse consequences flowing from the collapse of the Dominion-Provincial Conference.

THE PROVINCIAL OPPOSITION PARTIES

The centralization of fiscal authority proposed by the *Rowell-Sirois Report* posed a political dilemma for some sections of British Columbia's opposition parties, the Conservatives and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). The report was heartily endorsed by the province's largest newspapers and appeared to be consistent with the need for a strong central government during wartime. On the other hand, as Pattullo argued, Plan I proposed permanent changes to the structure of Dominion-provincial finances, and British Columbia potentially had much to lose if its recommendations were implemented.

The official Conservative position, as enunciated by provincial party leader R.L. Maitland, was that the *Rowell-Sirois Report* "stands as a groundwork for solving Canada's problems"⁸⁸ — something less than a full endorsement. Prior to the Dominion-Provincial Conference, Maitland attempted to pressure the premier into a full legislative debate on the report. Pattullo refused, but he invited Maitland to submit his party's recommendations. When Maitland declined this invitation, Pattullo suggested that the Conservative ranks were divided on the matter.⁸⁹

Following the conference, Maitland accused Pattullo of committing a "breach of faith" by refusing to cooperate with the Dominion government.⁹⁰ No political disadvantages followed such an attack; Maitland faced no awkward questions from the press about whether an attack on Pattullo implied support for permanent fiscal centralization. If a division existed within Conservative ranks, it was not exposed by the press.

Most of the CCF's political elite, including party leader Harold Winch, strongly supported the *Rowell-Sirois Report*. Winch believed

⁸⁷ Weir to Pattullo, 25 March 1941, *TDPP*, BCARS, vol. 68, file 10. Cabinet ministers Weir and Wismer lost their Vancouver seats in the 1941 election; Lands Minister A. Wells Gray retained his seat in New Westminster.

⁸⁸ *Vancouver Daily Province*, 22 January 1941.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 18 November 1940.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22 January 1941. The issue was undoubtedly complicated to some degree by the critical attitude of federal Conservatives towards the *Rowell-Sirois Report*. See, for example, *Victoria Daily Times*, 17 and 30 January 1941.

that centralization was “not only inevitable but essential if Canada [was] to progress as a nation.” He believed, however, that there should be “a clear enunciation of provincial safeguards so that one province will not be able to limit the progress of another.”⁹¹ Similarly, CCF MLA Dorothy Steeves (Vancouver North) noted that her party had “given general support to the report because our program, which aims at national social democracy, depends on a national program of social security which would be possible only through the greater centralization of powers provided for in the report’s recommendations.”⁹²

A *Sun* report of 22 January claimed that “one or two” CCF MLAs were opposed to some of the *Rowell-Sirois Report’s* proposals, but that party leaders insisted that there was no serious dissension.⁹³ Party records reveal that influential party members — including MPs Angus MacInnis (Vancouver South) and Grant MacNeil (Vancouver North), and MLAs Colin Cameron (Comox) and Grace MacInnis (Vancouver Burrard) — were concerned with excessive centralization of authority under Plan 1. According to the minutes of a provincial council meeting, Cameron “opposed greater centralization of power at Ottawa when Quebec and Ontario dominate the Federal House, he being of the opinion that since we have an opportunity of gaining power in the province, we shall require all the powers possible in the hands of the province.”⁹⁴ Angus MacInnis supported much of the *Rowell-Sirois Report*, but he was concerned that the provincial leadership had misinterpreted some aspects of it. He complained in a letter to the CCF’s provincial council that Winch and party president Wallis Lefaux “went farther than the BC section suggested in that all social services should be the Federal responsibility with concurrent powers to the provinces.”⁹⁵

The rift within the British Columbia CCF reflected to some degree the ongoing tension between its moderate and radical wings, led by Angus MacInnis and Harold Winch, respectively (although “moderate” is not a label commonly associated with Cameron).⁹⁶ The issue

⁹¹ *Nelson Daily News*, 26 November 1940.

⁹² *Vancouver Daily Province*, 16 January 1941. See also comments of CCF provincial secretary Herbert Gargrave, same date and source.

⁹³ *Vancouver Sun*, 22 January 1941.

⁹⁴ Minutes of Provincial Council Meeting, 22 February 1941, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, University of British Columbia (hereafter *AMMC*, UBC), box 46, file 6.

⁹⁵ *Loc. cit.*

⁹⁶ Walter D. Young, *The Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF, 1932-61* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 128 and 279; W.D. Young, “Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 32 (Winter 1976-77): 141-7.

came to a head at a meeting of the provincial executive, where a majority upheld Winch and Lefeaux, and only six of the twenty-eight members supported MacInnis. The majority opinion was reflected in the comment, contained in the executive minutes, that "the reasons expressed by Comrade Angus MacInnis as spokesman seemed more vehement than coherent or logical."⁹⁷

MacInnis also aired his concerns with regard to the *Rowell-Sirois Report* at a national council meeting in early February 1941, but he would have preferred that the issue be left off the agenda entirely. In a letter to the ccf's national secretary, David Lewis, MacInnis argued: "As you may know there are differences of opinion among our own people as to the Report. Would it be wise at this time to expose our differences[?]"⁹⁸ MacInnis's concern was apparently unwarranted. Whether through good management, good luck, or an uninterested press, little hint of division within the British Columbia ccf was reflected in the pages of the province's newspapers.

PATTULLO, THE PRESS, AND THE PUBLIC

Unlike his political opponents, Pattullo faced a barrage of hostile editorials from Vancouver's largest dailies; during the month following the Dominion-Provincial Conference, the *Sun* and the *Daily Province* each ran fifteen editorials that were critical of Pattullo. The extent to which these editorials reflected public opinion is difficult to assess, particularly from a distance of more than fifty years. Evidence drawn from a variety of sources suggests that public opinion — like editorial opinion elsewhere in the province — was mixed. In the midst of war, people wanted a resolution of Dominion-provincial bickering; however, opinion was divided on how such a resolution should be achieved.

Public concern over Pattullo's stand was most evident among the province's business groups. At least ten boards of trade and chambers of commerce vigorously condemned the premier's actions.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Minutes of Executive Meeting, 14 February 1941, *AMMC*, UBC, box 46, file 5.

⁹⁸ MacInnis to Lewis, 17 January 1941, *AMMC*, UBC, box 54A, file 14.

⁹⁹ The business groups that went on record as opposing Pattullo's position were scattered geographically; they included Duncan, North Vancouver, Nelson, Penticton, Trail, Powell River, Kamloops, Nanaimo, and Salmo Valley. Among those who discussed the issue but took no action were boards of trade in Vancouver, Victoria, and Vernon. The Creston Board of Trade took a different approach. It stated, in response to a letter from the Nelson Board of Trade, that while "regretting that the Conference failed to consider in free discussion the recommendations of the Royal Commission we find ourselves unable to give any sort of

Undoubtedly, the commission's promise of a \$4 to \$5 million saving to British Columbia's taxpayers, a promise unequivocally and uncritically endorsed by Vancouver's largest dailies, influenced the attitude of the business community. In articles written prior to the conference, B.A. McKelvie and Bruce Hutchison effectively linked Plan 1 to themes that had broad and enduring appeal among business groups: tax relief, non-partisanship, and business government.¹⁰⁰ These themes had also figured prominently in the British Columbia boards of trade presentation to the Rowell-Sirois Commission in March 1938. In line with the Kidd Committee's 1932 report, spokesman H.R. MacMillan advocated an immediate reduction of the Legislature from forty-eight to sixteen members, to be followed by a referendum on its abolition.¹⁰¹

Boards of trade did not reflect the views of all British Columbians. Pattullo's stand at the conference was the subject of numerous letters to the editor, with support and opposition running about even.¹⁰² A similar division of opinion was evident in the correspondence received by the premier after the conference.¹⁰³ Divergent opinions were even evident among religious groups.¹⁰⁴ At least one British Columbian's perception of the controversy was shaped by his distrust of the central government. On his return from the conference, the premier participated in an impromptu sidewalk forum in front of the Vancouver courthouse. Pressed for a comment, one bystander stated, "In some ways I think we ought to have tried it [Plan 1]. But, judging from the past, I don't trust that Ottawa bunch, and a leopard don't change his spots!"¹⁰⁵

approval to the kind of judgement which has been passed by the Council of your Board." Until all points of view were heard "this Board must, in all equity, reserve judgement and express confidence meanwhile in the [Pattullo] Administration." Copy of letter of 22 January 1941 in *TDPP*, BCARS, vol. 68, file 10.

¹⁰⁰ *Vancouver Sun*, 3 to 10 January 1941; *Vancouver Daily Province*, 8 to 11 January 1941.

¹⁰¹ See *Vancouver Sun*, 22 March 1938; *Vancouver Daily Province*, 22 March 1938.

¹⁰² Of the seventeen letters related to the Dominion-Provincial Conference published by the *Vancouver Sun* between 15 January and 1 March, twelve opposed Pattullo's stand while five supported it. Elsewhere in the province, responses to this issue varied in both nature and magnitude. Of the sixteen letters published by the *Victoria Daily Times* over the same period, five opposed Pattullo's stand while eleven supported it. Most Interior newspapers published no letters on the subject before, during or after the conference.

¹⁰³ In the weeks following the conference, Pattullo received eleven letters supporting his position and twelve opposing it (including eight from business groups).

¹⁰⁴ A Protestant minister is quoted in the *Vancouver News-Herald*, 27 January 1941: "Let me warn you to exercise care in forming an opinion on anything the press is condemning, especially if that thing is desired by big money and the church of Rome." However, the Roman Catholic Archdeacon of Nelson "deplored the selfish attitude of the dissenting premiers." *Trail Daily Times*, 11 February 1941.

¹⁰⁵ *Vancouver Daily Province*, 16 February 1941.

Opposition politicians clearly saw Pattullo's stand as the dominant issue of the day, but many British Columbians did not. Harold Winch, addressing an audience of about 100 people in Rutland on 3 March 1941, dealt "almost exclusively" with Pattullo's role in the collapse of the conference. According to the local press report, Winch "was given an attentive and uninterrupted hearing, but it was a very reserved and undemonstrative audience, the applause being restricted to the conclusion of his address."¹⁰⁶ Overall, the evidence suggests that public opinion with respect to Pattullo's conference stand was mixed.¹⁰⁷

Had Pattullo agreed to Plan 1, he would soon have suffered the wrath of the electorate when — in response to a sharply reduced tax base — the province would have been forced to reduce or eliminate programs and services. Although some newspapers and business groups were captivated by the promise of tax relief, Pattullo believed — probably correctly — that attitudes would shift when the destructive effect of Plan 1 was apparent:

What would the press be howling had I meekly said, "Yes, Sir" to the Rowell-Sirois recommendations? The Press would be hailing me as the man who sold British Columbia down the river; who sold the sovereign rights of the people of British Columbia; who yielded to Ottawa dictatorship.¹⁰⁸

As Pattullo and his colleagues anticipated, British Columbia would have suffered ongoing financial losses under Plan 1; in the House of Commons, on 22 February 1941, Finance Minister Ilsley released figures showing that seven provinces would have enjoyed substantial financial gains under Plan 1, while Ontario and British Columbia would have suffered net losses of \$6,019,000 and \$3,611,000, respectively.¹⁰⁹

Plan 1 was completely unacceptable to Pattullo and the members of his cabinet. Nevertheless, they attended the Dominion-Provincial Conference in good faith, hoping to broaden the agenda and secure agreement on an alternate proposal — possibly along the lines of the wartime tax rental agreement concluded later in 1941. This strategy

¹⁰⁶ *Vernon News*, 6 March 1941.

¹⁰⁷ Although the Liberal share of the popular vote in the 1941 election dropped by more than four points from its 1937 level of 37.3 per cent, the party won 21 of 48 seats, including Pattullo's in Prince Rupert, and finished second in 16 others. See G.M. Abbott, "The Formation of the Liberal-Conservative Coalition in 1941" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1978), 20-1.

¹⁰⁸ Notes from Pattullo's speech of 4 February 1941, *TDPP*, BCARS, vol. 68, file 10.

¹⁰⁹ *Victoria Daily Times*, 22 February 1941.

failed because of the Dominion's refusal to reconsider its agenda; as Christopher Armstrong has noted, the conference "provided the illusion of consultation rather than the reality."¹¹⁰ King and his ministers were well aware of provincial opposition to Plan 1 but, despite the near certainty of its failure, called the conference to pave the way for an invasion of provincial tax fields.

George Pearson described the decision to call the conference as "the greatest political blunder ever perpetrated in Canada."¹¹¹ It was, in fact, a remarkably shrewd gamble, particularly given the obvious affection for Plan 1 exhibited by many of the nation's largest newspapers. If Plan 1 were to be adopted, the balance of power in Dominion-provincial relations — where "spending power" is a critical factor — would shift dramatically in favour of the central government; if it were to be rejected, "parochial" provincial politicians would shoulder most of the blame. However, despite the fact that Vancouver's largest dailies condemned Pattullo's stand at the Dominion-Provincial Conference, he clearly retained the support of his cabinet, caucus, and party. Provincial Liberals were united in their belief that "Canada's strength lies in the autonomy of its component parts"¹¹² and that Plan 1 would destroy that autonomy. They attended the conference hoping to find compromise; when they did not, they refused to abandon what they considered to be the province's long-term interests in order to win favour with the Dominion government and the press. Pattullo's dreams for his province were expansive but so, too, were those of his colleagues.

¹¹⁰ Armstrong, "Federal-Provincial Meetings," 141.

¹¹¹ *Victoria Daily Times*, 1 March 1941.

¹¹² MLA George Murray, cited in the *Vancouver Sun*, 1 February 1941.