

SIR CHARLES HIBBERT TUPPER AND THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1903-1924

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WHEN SIR CHARLES HIBBERT TUPPER died in Vancouver in March 1927 BC newspapers characterized him as “one of Canada’s most outstanding men.”¹ Profiles of Tupper (see illustration, p. 64) have emphasized his birth in Amherst, Nova Scotia, as the second son of Sir Charles Tupper, a Father of Confederation and briefly, in 1896, the prime minister of Canada; Charles Hibbert’s election to Parliament in 1882 at the age of twenty-seven; his appointment in 1888 as the youngest person ever to serve in the federal cabinet; the knighthood that Queen Victoria granted him in 1893 for his work as the British agent on the board of the Bering Sea Arbitration; the “scintillating brilliance” of his forcible and convincing platform speeches; and, finally, his stature as an outstanding lawyer in British Columbia, where he practiced law for almost thirty years after establishing a second career in Vancouver in 1898.² In these accounts, Charles Hibbert’s public career peaked early, during the twenty-two years (1882-1904) when he sat as a member of parliament (MP) for the Nova Scotia riding of Pictou. These included six years after he had moved to British Columbia.

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¹ *Victoria Daily Times*, 31 May 1927, 16. See also the *Vancouver Province*, 31 May 1927, 1.

² Frank H. Patterson, “Some Incidents in the Life of Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper,” *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society* 35 (1966): 127-62; quotation from James M. Cameron, *Still More about Pictonians* (Hansport, NS: Lancelot Press, 1985), 15; and *Daily Colonist*, 31 March 1927, 1 and 7. One source – E.M. MacDonald, *Recollections: Political and Personal*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Ryerson, 1938), 523-30 – states that Tupper moved west in 1897, but Patterson and Cameron say 1898. He applied for admission to the British Columbia bar in April 1898. See Sir C.H. Tupper Correspondence 1893-1908, Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia (hereafter PANS), MFM no. 234, reel 2.



Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper, ca. 1920, BC Archives photograph no. G-05858.

While recognizing his stature as a “famous statesman,” comments on the British Columbia half of his career convey a hint of lost potential, perhaps even of failure. He seriously considered returning to Parliament in 1908 for seats in either Pictou or Vancouver but changed his mind before the election and never again ran for public office. A *Vancouver Province* editorial in 1909 remarked on what a “pity” it seemed that “a man of Sir Hibbert Tupper’s ability and wide experience of public affairs should be lost to the country.”³ As one Nova Scotia writer put it, at the age of forty-five “his public career was over.”⁴ Or, so we are told.

A closer look at Tupper’s years in British Columbia suggests, however, that his public career

did not so much end as change when he left Parliament and electoral politics. Historians have noted Sir Hibbert’s occasional role in provincial politics but have overlooked its significance.⁵ He intervened on several occasions as a wise elder statesman offering moral and policy guidance to the rapidly expanding but – in his view – politically unsophisticated settler population of the west coast province. Tupper became the most forceful critic of the governments of Richard McBride and William Bowser from 1903 to 1916, played a key role in creating a new political party in the early 1920s, and actively campaigned in three provincial elections (1909, 1916, and 1924) while exerting less direct influence in others. Yet,

³ *Vancouver Province*, 16 November 1909, 6.

⁴ Patterson, “Some Incidents,” 151 and 158.

⁵ Tupper’s role in BC politics is noted in Edith Dobie, “Party History in British Columbia, 1903-1933,” in *Historical Essays on British Columbia*, ed. J. Friesen and H.K. Ralston (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 73-4; Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1958), 334, 346, 356, 365, 392-3, and 420; Patricia E. Roy, “Progress, Prosperity and Politics: The Railway Policies of Richard McBride,” *BC Studies* 47 (Autumn 1980): 11; and Martin Robin, *The Rush for Spoils: The Company Province, 1871-1933* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 103, 109, 112, 122, and 157-9.

what stands out from the story of Sir Hibbert Tupper's involvement in provincial politics is how unsuccessful he was in shaping political opinion and political practice in British Columbia. Part of the problem was that his family connection and his work in Ottawa, London, and Nova Scotia defined him as a person of national stature, a political insider brought up to expect success and to act in leadership roles. Sir Hibbert held assumptions about the nature of politics and expectations about the position he should hold in public life that made him a bad fit to succeed as a political leader in British Columbia. As an editorialist for the *Victoria Times* noted in 1913, "Politically, Sir Charles could never thrive in this [British Columbia] soil."⁶ While his established prestige and oratorical skills gave him presence, they also limited his influence. An insider at the national level, he remained an outsider at the provincial.

The following essay charts Sir Hibbert Tupper's role in BC provincial politics from the early 1900s to the 1920s and explores how his outsider status in British Columbia illuminates key aspects of this province's political culture in the early years of the twentieth century. David Elkins defines political culture as "a framework for action rather than a set of specific actions or beliefs. It consists of the largely unspoken assumptions about the world so 'taken for granted' most of the time that they have become 'second nature.'"⁷ For Jeffery Simpson these unspoken assumptions consist of the "customary and approved aspects of political life which reflect the expectations, goals and laws [that] the public uses to judge political behaviour."⁸ Here, I explore the meaning of provincial politics to voters in the two decades after national party labels were adopted at the provincial level in 1903. While focusing on the public career of a very prominent man, Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper, this article is, ironically, less an example of "great man" history than an exploration of the meaning of partisan politics and party affiliation as viewed through the eyes of a political outsider. It stresses the need to move beyond an emphasis on party histories, electoral contests, and the histories of individual leaders to explore the pattern beneath the surface of political behaviour. It concludes that, for a generation after 1903, the shared interests and commonly held goals of the settler community were a more important part of British Columbia's political culture than was partisan attachment to the newly established provincial Liberal

⁶ *Victoria Daily Times*, 6 December 1913, 4.

⁷ David Elkins, "British Columbia as a State of Mind," in *Two Political Worlds: Parties and Voting in British Columbia*, ed. Donald E. Blake (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1985), 53.

⁸ Jeffery Simpson, *Spoils of Power: The Politics of Patronage* (Toronto: Collins, 1988), 10.

and Conservative parties. In so doing it questions the conventional understanding of the 1903 election as a point of fundamental change in British Columbia's political history.

After arriving in British Columbia Sir Hibbert began speaking out on provincial political matters, starting with a three-hour speech at Chilliwack in April 1900 against the partisan and irresponsible behaviour of the lieutenant-governor, T.R. McInnes, in selecting the hapless Joseph Martin as premier. This intervention into local politics was followed in the 1903 provincial election by campaign support for Richard McBride, the recently appointed premier and leader in the Legislature of the newly created British Columbia Conservative Party, which now headed British Columbia's first "party" government. Indeed, McBride thanked Tupper for his "magnificent work" and expressed the hope that this "distinguished gentleman" would take as prominent a role in west coast affairs as he had done in eastern affairs.⁹

Tupper did become a significant figure in provincial politics, but in ways that challenged rather than supported McBride. Starting with a difference of opinion about oil leases soon after McBride became premier, Tupper began what would become a twelve-year attack on the governments of Richard McBride (1903-15) and his successor, William Bowser (1915-16), for their arbitrary and speculative distribution of the province's resources. In a heated exchange in June 1904 Tupper asserted that he "opposed tooth and nail" the government's "administration of the mining interests of the province" and argued that the courts, not politicians, should resolve conflicting applications for mineral leases in the Kootenays.¹⁰ By ignoring Tupper's advice and intervening as he had intended, McBride provoked Tupper to make an issue of McBride's patronage policies in the Lillooet by-election of 1904.¹¹ A far more significant point of conflict was the government's sale to speculators of 10,000 acres of land on Kaien Island, future site of Prince Rupert, the terminus of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, at well below market value. As legal counsel for three Boer War veterans whose applications for land at Kaien Island had been turned down

⁹ Quotation from Richard McBride to Sir C.H. Tupper, 13 October 1903, Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper Papers (hereafter *CHTP*), Special Collections, University of British Columbia, box 4, file 3, no. 1929; and the *Daily Colonist*, 17 April 1900, 1 and 23 September 1904, 3.

¹⁰ Sir C. H. Tupper to Richard McBride, 20 June 1904, *CHTP*, Box 4, File 3, Doc's. 1958-1960.

¹¹ For the 1904 by-election, see Peter Roberts Hunt, "The Political Career of Sir Richard McBride" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1953), 94-5; and *Vancouver Province*, 20 November 1909, 12.

“at the last minute,” presumably to make way for the speculators, Tupper joined provincial Liberal leader James A. MacDonald in attacking the government’s handling of the sale and succeeded in having a legislative inquiry investigate it. The inquiry’s members split along party lines but did force R.F. Green, the minister in charge of the sale of Kaien Island lands, to admit “that he had refused lands to private applicants that he later gave to ... speculators” who were dealing with the Grand Trunk Pacific.¹² According to Brian Smith, a McBride biographer, by 1906 Tupper was firmly convinced that “McBride was in league with a crafty group of speculators.” Tupper’s solution was simple: the provincial Conservative Party should “spew the McBride government out of its mouth.”¹³ The McBride government “should go down.”¹⁴

Tupper again spoke out against McBride in 1909 when, upset by the premier’s decision to offer irresponsibly generous terms to the Canadian Northern Railway (CN) in return for extending its transcontinental line through British Columbia to Vancouver, he campaigned actively against the provincial Conservatives in the general election. Tupper was not alone in his opposition: two of McBride’s ministers, R.G. Tatlow and Frederick J. Fulton, resigned from the government to protest the railway deal. They believed not only that the bond guarantee of 4 percent on \$35,000 per mile was excessive but also that no guarantee should have been given at all. Tupper criticized the duplication of expensive rail service through the Fraser Canyon and argued that McBride failed to secure favourable freight rates on the line in return for the government’s promise to pay bondholders if the Canadian Northern could not. At Revelstoke, for example, “in a characteristically aggressive speech” Tupper, ignoring the fact that McBride’s CN policy would open up North Thompson land to settlers, exhorted an enthusiastic and admiring crowd to vote against McBride’s “bold and monstrous” policies.¹⁵ Two and a half years later, when McBride went to the people with an electoral package that featured similar government aid for the construction of the Pacific Great Eastern Railway (PGE) from Vancouver to Prince George, Tupper again attacked McBride’s railway policies,

¹² Brian Ray Douglas Smith, “Sir Richard McBride: A Study in the Conservative Party of British Columbia, 1903-1916” (MA thesis, Queen’s University, 1959), 48-53, quotation from 49.

¹³ Smith, “McBride,” 51; and CHTP, box 4, file 3, nos. 1987-2000; quotations from Smith, “McBride,” 49 and 51.

¹⁴ Sir C.H. Tupper to Clive Phillips Wolley, 30 December 1906, CHTP, box 4, file 3, nos. 2020-5.

¹⁵ Ibid., 8 November 1909, 4, and 18 November 1909, 6-7; Hunt, “Political Career of Sir Richard McBride”; and CHTP, box 17, file 2, no. 315. For a larger discussion of the split in the Conservative Party caused by McBride’s Canadian Northern Railway policy in 1909, see Smith, “Sir Richard McBride,” 122-36; and Roy, “Progress, Prosperity and Politics,” 10-14.

TABLE 1

Party Results in BC Provincial Elections, 1903-24

YEAR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL	LABOUR	SOCIALIST	OTHER	PROVINCIAL
1903	22	17	1	2	—	—
1907	26	13	—	3	—	—
1909	38	2	—	2	—	—
1912	39	—	—	2	1	—
1916	9	36	—	1	1	—
1920	15	25	3	—	4	—
1924	17	23	3	—	2	3

For the 1903 election, the “Socialists” who were elected belonged to the Socialist Party of British Columbia, and for 1907 and 1909, the Socialist Party of Canada; in 1912, the Social Democratic Party and the Socialist Party of Canada each elected one member; in 1916, the successful socialist candidate had run under the “Independent Socialist” banner; in 1920, those elected included three “Federated Labour Party” candidates, three Independents, and one “People’s Party” candidate; in 1924, those elected included three Canadian Labour Party candidates and two Independent Liberals, along with three candidates of the recently created Provincial Party. SOURCE: Elections British Columbia, *Electoral History of British Columbia, 1871-1986* (Victoria: Elections British Columbia and the Legislative Library, 1988).

this time in an article in the *Vancouver Sun*.¹⁶ The people of British Columbia thought differently, granting McBride – always sensitive to settler interests – massive majorities in both elections (see Table 1).

Changing economic conditions in 1913 and 1914 reinvigorated Tupper’s critique of provincial government policies. Undermined by political instability in Europe and the collapse of investor confidence in capitalist countries, “the spirit of reckless speculation” that had characterized public and private investment in British Columbia disappeared, and the political fortunes of the Conservative government declined.¹⁷ Richard McBride resigned as premier in December 1915 to be replaced by William Bowser, formerly the attorney general and architect of the Conservative Party’s powerful political machine. The man most associated with patronage and corruption was now the premier and an obvious target for reform-minded critics of the government. Particularly outrageous to Tupper was the fact that Bowser’s law firm of Bowser, Reid and Wallbridge acted as solicitors for the Pacific Great Eastern Railway Company – as well as many other companies doing business with the provincial government – even while Bowser was attorney general and

¹⁶ *Vancouver Sun*, 11 March 1912, 1. See also Ormsby, *British Columbia*, 365.

¹⁷ Quotation from *Vancouver Sun*, 11 March 1912, 1-2. See also Robin, *Rush for Spoils*, 125-64.

premier, and while the rail company in 1916 was successfully negotiating an additional \$6.5 million loan from the province. The Liberal *Victoria Times* put the issue succinctly: "Does Mr. Bowser imagine that all these corporations retain his firm because they believe it to be superior ... to its rivals?"¹⁸ With his forceful criticism of the government Tupper, described by the *Canadian Annual Review* as "a master of direct, scathing and unflinching denunciation," was now back in the thick of provincial politics and saying things that British Columbians wanted to hear.¹⁹ Throughout the 1916 election he stood on Liberal Party platforms and endorsed Liberals while claiming simply to be a non-partisan supporter of "clean government" and "effective administration."²⁰ At campaign stops such as Vancouver and Nanaimo Liberals treated Tupper as "one of the outstanding figures in Canadian public life" and gave him a place of honour in the speaking order.²¹ This time Tupper was on the winning side.

Tupper was not simply a marginal figure in BC politics, or someone whose political role on the west coast focused on national affairs; rather, he had been the principal opponent of the McBride and Bowser governments. His influence is explained in part by the weakness of the Liberal Party in the legislature after being reduced from thirteen seats in the 1907 election to two in 1909 and to none in 1912. The intensity of feeling that divided him from provincial Conservatives illustrates the importance of Tupper's role as critic. For instance, when members of the Vancouver Board of Trade tried to nominate Tupper as the Conservative candidate in the 1908 federal election, the McBride/Bowser machine in Vancouver²² mounted a powerful and ultimately successful campaign against him, claiming that these businesspeople were an inappropriate and undemocratic clique within the party. A headline in the *Vancouver Province*, mouthpiece of the McBride Conservatives, proclaiming "Conservative Leaders Move against Tupper," prompted Sir Hibbert's father, Sir Charles Tupper, to write darkly about the ruinous influence of

¹⁸ *Victoria Daily Times*, 3 March 1916, 1 and 7; and 27 March 1916, 4 (quotation). See also *The Searchlight*, 2 (1923): 2.

¹⁹ For a summary of Tupper's political activity to 1916, see *Victoria Daily Times*, 19 December 1923, 4 and 10. Quotation from J. Castell Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs 1916* (Toronto: Canadian Review Company, 1917), 777.

²⁰ *Vancouver Sun*, 4 September, 1916, 1. See also 4 August 1916, 1 and 13 September 1916, 1-2; *Daily Colonist*, 22 August 1916, 11; and Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review*, 778.

²¹ *Vancouver Sun*, 2 September 1916, 4; and *Vancouver Province*, 2 September 1916, 13.

²² Despite having stated that he was out of politics, Tupper had agreed to run again in Nova Scotia but later changed his mind. See Patterson, "Some Incidents," 153-5; Chas. E. Tanner to Sir C.H. Tupper, 22 July 1907, in CHTP, box 4, file 3; *Halifax Herald*, 10 August 1907, 1 in CHTP, box 15, file 4; and *Manitoba Free Press*, 26 October, 1907, 9, in CHTP, box 15, file 4.

“machine dictators” in British Columbia.²³ Faced with such opposition Sir Hibbert withdrew from the race, citing opposition from “those enjoying or expecting patronage” from the BC government and “personal abuse by those largely in control of the [provincial] Conservative organization.”²⁴

The McBride faction blamed Tupper’s large ego and haughty manner for the conflict – as one McBride supporter put it, he always wanted to be the “whole show” – and thus viewed Tupper’s opposition as a “personal one on the part of Sir Hibbert.”²⁵ Brian Smith suggests that the split between McBride and Tupper began because “Tupper believed ... he should occupy a special position, [and be] a sort of elder statesman to the McBride government,” an opinion clearly not shared by McBride.²⁶ The argument that Tupper’s desire to control politics made it difficult for him to accept the leadership of a young upstart such as McBride rings true, to a point, and is supported by the tone of his letter to McBride in June 1903 after McBride, who only days earlier had become premier, refused to follow Sir Hibbert’s advice about oil lands in eastern British Columbia: “I confess to a keen disappointment that [you took] action directly opposed to my views,” Tupper wrote, and did so “without the courtesy of [my] being told of this intention before action [was taken].”²⁷ Clearly, the young McBride wasted little time asserting his political independence, and feelings between the two men remained intense. Personal antipathy peaked in the 1909 campaign when Tupper and F.C. Wade, a prominent Liberal, vigorously attacked the McBride government’s railway policies. The premier replied with a “scathing denunciation” of Tupper before a huge Vancouver audience that spilled out from two crowded meeting halls. Recounting the latter’s “treachery”

²³ *Victoria Daily Times*, 15 April 1908, 1; *Vancouver Province*, 9 April 1908, 5, 10 April 1908, 6, 11 April 1908, 1, and 20 April 1908, 13; Nova Scotia newspaper clippings in CHTP, box 17, file 4; Sir Charles Tupper to G.H. Barnard, 13 April 1908, CHTP, box 5, file 5-1, nos. 2124-7; C.W. Sawyer to R. Borden, 13 June 1908, CHTP, box 5, file 5-1, nos. 2171-2; and Sir Charles Tupper to R.L. Borden, 30 May 1908, CHTP, box 5, file 5-1, nos. 2161-3. See also Patterson, “Some Incidents,” 153-6.

²⁴ Sir C.H. Tupper to Borden, 4 May 1908, CHTP, box 5, file 5-1, nos. 2141-4.

²⁵ Quotation from CHTP, box 17, file 20, no. 320 and *Vancouver Province*, 9 August 1916, in CHTP, box 5, file 2, nos. 2393-4. See also CHTP, box 4, file 3, nos. 1949-51; *Victoria Daily Times*, 24 November 1909, 18; and *Vancouver Province*, 20 June 1916, 3. In April 1908 the *Eastern Chronicle*, a Liberal paper, portrayed Sir Hibbert as a man suffering from “overfed vanity” and “monumental conceit” (28 April 1908, n.p.). The *Winnipeg Telegram* saw Tupper’s ego as the key to his conflict with McBride, arguing that, upon his arrival in the province, Tupper “made an active effort to establish his leadership in British Columbia” but found the “head seat” already occupied by McBride; within such a context Tupper’s “temperament and circumstances combined to render him unwilling to accept second place” (21 February 1916, located in CHTP, box 16, file 5, newspaper clippings).

²⁶ Smith, “Sir Richard McBride,” 42.

²⁷ Sir C.H. Tupper to Richard McBride, 17 June 1903, CHTP, box 4, file 3, no. 1956.

to the provincial Conservative government in 1904 and 1907, McBride exclaimed, "Let [Liberal leader John] Oliver have him ... We don't want him."²⁸

Tupper's arrogance and desire for control were very real and, in part, explain why such a prominent national figure found himself at odds with, and outside of, British Columbia's emerging provincial political elite. Sir Hibbert, who came from an old and established professional family in Nova Scotia (his father had been a medical doctor before entering Nova Scotia politics), had enjoyed a privileged education, studying at King's College Collegiate in Windsor, Nova Scotia, McGill University, and Harvard Law School, and, as the son of a former prime minister and one-time Canadian high commissioner in London, moved easily within elite circles on both coasts.²⁹ Indeed, he and Lady Tupper, herself the daughter of the chief justice of Nova Scotia, were Vancouver society leaders.³⁰ His prominence was evident during the war when he and other members of Vancouver's business and social elite actively supported the war effort by heading or giving highly visible leadership to wartime organizations such as the Red Cross and Canadian Patriotic Fund.³¹ As a strong imperialist his enthusiastic wartime support for conscription and the creation of a union government that would include both Conservatives and Liberals was predictable.³² The links between wealth, high status, and duty found unique expression in January 1916 when he agreed to donate his limousine, worth a hefty \$4,000, to a draw that would raise money for the Patriotic Fund.³³

It should not surprise us, then, that people who supported Tupper's arguments against the McBride and Bowser administrations included members of Vancouver's elite. For instance, the movement to nominate him for a seat in Parliament in 1908 came from seventy prominent supporters in the Vancouver Board of Trade and the local political establishment, including Robert G. Tatlow and George Cowan.³⁴ Tatlow, then McBride's finance minister and a long-time and much respected member of the Vancouver business community, had been

²⁸ *Victoria Daily Times*, 22 November 1909, 1, 9, and 11; and undated newspaper clipping entitled "The People's Premier," CHTP, box 17, file 1, nos. 279-80.

²⁹ Patterson, "Some Incidents," 127-8.

³⁰ See Robert A.J. McDonald, *Making Vancouver: Class, Status, and Social Boundaries, 1863-1913* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996), chap. six.

³¹ *Vancouver Sun*, 5 October 1916, 5 and 7 November 1916, 4.

³² Sir C.H. Tupper, "An Appeal to the Liberals of British Columbia," n.d., CHTP, box 19, file 1, nos. 36-9; Memo to Sir George Foster and Hon. Mr. Reid, 23 September 1916, in CHTP, box 21, file 3; and *Vancouver Sun*, 3 March 1917, 4; 3 April 1917, 2; and 28 May 1917, 2.

³³ *Vancouver Sun*, 24 January 1916, 10.

³⁴ *Vancouver Province*, 9 April 1908, 5.

connected to the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in the 1890s. Cowan, another socially prominent Vancouver lawyer who won the Vancouver federal riding for the Conservatives in 1908, was “a Tupper man” who had “been at odds with Bowser and McBride for a number of years.”³⁵ His poor relationship with the provincial Conservative Party may explain why he did not run again for Parliament in 1911.

Tupper’s opposition to speculative capitalism also reflected an elite perspective on the economic practices of British Columbians. In a hard-hitting article in the new Liberal paper, the *Vancouver Sun*, in March 1912 Sir Hibbert argued that because the majority of British Columbians were “practically exempt” from taxes, they felt no need to discipline “a bold and reckless and unprincipled government” that was left free “to squander public money, waste our resources and involve us in titanic burdens.” The provincial government had fallen prey to the influence of railway corporations, which thus were allowed to raid “the provincial treasury and the resources of British Columbia” in support of their doubtful schemes. Though provincial revenues were strong in 1912, Tupper presciently observed that they were vulnerable to the “inevitable financial storm” that, when it comes, will evoke a “deadly reckoning.”³⁶ Along with other top professionals and businesspeople such as F.C. Wade (a socially prominent lawyer), Henry Bell-Irving (a leading salmon canner), and Benjamin Rogers (a wealthy sugar refiner), Tupper believed that speculative capitalism such as that encouraged by the McBride government was unstable and unsustainable.³⁷ British Columbia’s economic collapse in 1913 and 1914 proved them correct.

High status also challenged Sir Hibbert’s capacity to appreciate what politics meant to ordinary people in a society still establishing its transportation infrastructure and governmental institutions. To begin, Tupper could not hide his belief that British Columbia’s electorate was unsophisticated. The “old country ... had trained statesmen, and a studious, well-informed public,” he asserted in 1915, but in British Columbia the population “had been gathered up in a hurry and well-considered opinion has not been brought to bear.”³⁸ Certainly, British Columbia was a newer, less politically mature place than the Old Country

³⁵ Smith, “Sir Richard McBride,” 50–1 and 180; Hunt, “The Political Career of Sir Richard McBride,” 124; *Province*, 3 January 1907, 5 and 22 March 1916, 5; and *Vancouver Sun*, 13 September 1916, 1–2.

³⁶ *Vancouver Sun*, 11 March 1912, 1.

³⁷ Smith, “Sir Richard McBride,” 136; McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 135; and Henry Bell-Irving to Byron E. Walker, 20 January 1910, City of Vancouver Archives, Bell-Irving Family Papers, Add. Mss 1, vol. 87, Correspondence Outward.

³⁸ *Province*, 22 October 1915, 12.

or, for that matter, than Old Canada. What rural people wanted, a recent study of provincial politics in northwest British Columbia up to the mid-1950s has shown, was “a pro-active representative [in the Legislature] who could ... guarantee government funds for local development needs.” What mattered to settlers was getting things done; party labels meant little.³⁹ Thus, issues of economic growth and construction of infrastructure dominated provincial politics. In a region of recent settlement such as British Columbia, where non-Aboriginal peoples lived in highly localized and poorly connected communities, patronage turned political parties into province-wide instruments of integration.⁴⁰

Patronage also provided jobs. Patronage from William Bowser’s very efficient political organization, or “machine,” which tied a wide variety of government jobs, licences, and contracts to support for the McBride and Bowser governments, had an important economic impact on outlying areas of the province. Bowser’s party organization operated through “special committees of the Beaver Club,” which, in Martin Robin’s words, was a “social organization peopled with Conservative mayors, bank managers, mining magnates and timber barons” located in towns and cities across the province.⁴¹ In 1913 journalist Britton Cook published a comprehensive study of the Bowser machine, identifying a wide range of government functions – such as construction contracts, liquor licences, and printing jobs – that were awarded on the basis of support for the provincial Conservative Party. Indeed, Cook argued, Bowser, “the real brains of the government,” controlled the names on wage rolls of almost “all the important employers in the interior” of the province.⁴² In his diary entry for 21 April 1915 Roger John Sugars, a young Englishman living at Shorts’ Point, now Fintry, in the Okanagan illustrates how patronage shaped government allocations:

After all the talk and “hot air” about the road coming ... it has, as usual, been “postponed” ... Somebody wants the road to start at Nahun and somebody else wants it to start at Ewing’s. We all have to vote Conservative for fear of getting out of favour with the Conservative member (a rank grafter!) and thereby losing the road altogether. In other words we are being bribed for our votes. The Conservative

³⁹ Anthony Daio Price, “Looking for Populism in Northwest British Columbia: The Inter-War and Post-War Years” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 2000), 9 and 27 (quotation).

⁴⁰ See Simpson, *Spoils of Power*, 6–7.

⁴¹ Robin *Rush for Spoils*, 128.

⁴² *Victoria Daily Times*, 25 March 1913, 9; originally published in *Canadian Colliers Weekly*. On the Bowser machine, see also Robin, *Rush for Spoils*, 127–8 and 135–6; and “Bowser’s Record (In Part)”, n.d. (192?), CHTP, box 12, file 2.

member dangles a road before us and says, "Vote for me or I'll take it away again." In all probability he will keep up the road bluff until he secures his votes and then will "postpone" it again for a few years.⁴³

Tupper saw this kind of government practice from a perspective above the fray of everyday experience. He saw in local politics the crude partisanship that accompanied the awarding of contracts and government jobs without understanding the role of the provincial government in local community life or the reasons for British Columbia's exaggerated emphasis on economic development, some of it highly speculative. Richard McBride was popular because his policies reflected the growth-oriented goals of non-Aboriginal settler pioneers.

To personality conflict and class differences must be added two other influences that shaped Sir Hibbert's opposition to political parties at the provincial level in British Columbia. One was Tupper's understanding of Canada's constitutional structure. Raised in a family headed by a Father of Confederation, Sir Hibbert had assimilated the view shared by several of the men who framed the British North America Act – that Canada's Constitution was primarily monarchical in structure and only secondarily federal. The Fathers for the most part agreed on the need for a federal structure that divided powers between the national and provincial governments and gave the important powers to the central government. The structure was monarchical in that it essentially replicated the British Constitution, which was "executive-dominant." Sir John A. Macdonald's well known preference for a single government (or legislative union) was an extreme expression of this thinking. As political scientist Frederick Vaughan notes in summarizing conventional wisdom about Confederation, key participants in the constitutional talks that led to the British North America Act agreed that, while provinces were necessary, the general (or national) government should have – in the words of Sir Charles Tupper (Sir Hibbert's father) – "the general centralized power." The implication of this reasoning is that provincial governments were "local" governments, much like "large municipal corporations."⁴⁴

Charles Hibbert regularly referred to the provincial government as British Columbia's "Local Government."⁴⁵ In a letter published in the

⁴³ John A. Sugars, ed., *An Okanagan History: The Diaries of Roger John Sugars, 1905-1919* (Westbank, BC: Sugars Publishing, 2005), 162-3.

⁴⁴ This paragraph is drawn from Frederick Vaughan, *The Canadian Federalist Experiment: From Defiant Monarchy to Reluctant Republic* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), xi and 58-III (quotations from 92, 101, 105, and 61). See also Paul Romney, *Getting It Wrong: How Canadians Forgot Their Past and Imperilled Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 88-108.

⁴⁵ Sir C.H. Tupper to the Editor, *Winnipeg Telegram*, 26 February 1916, in CHTP, box 5, file 2.

Vancouver Province in May 1924 he repeated his long-held view that British Columbia's legislature "is essentially administrative. The old parties have no more place in local [i.e., provincial] politics than in municipal."⁴⁶ Arguments against party politics in provincial affairs "were just as cogent" as "arguments against partyism in municipal affairs."⁴⁷ Years earlier, when serving as a member of parliament, Sir Hibbert's preference for speaking on national and imperial rather than on regional (i.e., Nova Scotia and Pictou) issues and his lack of interest in local constituency work had revealed the same orientation towards the centre and away from the periphery.⁴⁸ Such constitutional thinking reinforced Tupper's view that BC provincial politics was marginal to the more important affairs of nation and empire.

Tupper's opposition to political parties, machine politics, and corruption also invites speculation that he was influenced by the reform movement of the early twentieth century, which historians have labelled "progressivism."⁴⁹ In parts of the United States progressivism took the form of a concrete political movement, whereas in Canada it was a more general ethos or way of thinking. Furthermore, the ethos of progressivism had many strands, some more radical than others, and Sir Hibbert showed no interest in the more radical aspects of progressivism, such as reforms to promote social justice, an expanded state, or popular democracy. But if we ask the question: why is it that Sir Hibbert was so concerned about patronage and corruption in the early 1900s when he had come from a political family whose history was marked by the extensive use of patronage and, in his father's case, by an unapologetic willingness to employ insider knowledge for personal gain,⁵⁰ the emergence of progressivism suggests a possible answer.

⁴⁶ *Vancouver Province*, 22 May 1924, 4.

⁴⁷ *Vancouver Sun*, 22 October 1915, 8.

⁴⁸ Cameron, *Still More about Pictonians*, 17–18.

⁴⁹ Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896–1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), 189.

⁵⁰ Peter Waite, "Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, <http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=42008&query=>; and Phillip Buckner, "Sir Charles Tupper," in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Vol. 14: 1911–1920 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 1022. Waite's assertion that for Sir Hibbert Tupper "patronage was politics" appears to generalize from the Nova Scotia half of his career rather than from the British Columbia half. Concerning conflict of interest, John English observes that, "given Canada's overwhelming need for development" in the nineteenth-century, politicians saw no stigma attached to the use of political advantage to protect and advance their private affairs (John English, *The Decline of Politics: The Conservatives and the Party System, 1901–20* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977], 24). In that sense the business practices of the McBride and Bowser governments in British Columbia reflected a general practice in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Canada – a practice that progressives challenged.

Broadly speaking, as summarized by Stephanie Pinczl in her political history of California, progressivism was “part of a nationwide movement [in the United States] for reshaping government so that it would better correspond to the technological, industrial, demographic, and economic forces that were changing the country from an agricultural nation to a capitalistic urban one.” Generally led by upper-middle class, well educated professionals, progressives were inspired by “the successful models of efficient corporations that used scientific expertise and modern management techniques.”⁵¹ The elitist strand of the progressive movement in the United States saw political parties, with their dependence on patronage and control by machines, as obstacles to good government. In the rhetoric of progressivism, efficiency and professional management stood against patronage and corruption. The general goals of the progressive movement were shared by many Canadians, none more so than Robert Borden, prime minister from 1911 to 1919. Tupper and Borden had been law partners in Nova Scotia and colleagues in Parliament, and the former had orchestrated the latter’s selection as federal Conservative Party leader by parliamentary caucus in 1900. Borden too “admire[d] the achievements of business leaders in developing the country,” had reservations about extreme partyism, and saw “the meanness of partisanship” as the “root cause of inefficiency in the administration of the state.”⁵² In an important speech in 1907 he called for Conservatives to commit themselves to “progressive” policies such as the reform of the civil service through the appointment of public officials by an independent commission on the basis of merit.⁵³ Borden spoke much more extensively than did Tupper about expanding the role of the state in governance through measures such as public control of utilities, while Tupper, traditional on social issues, was more radical than was Borden in challenging partisanship when “corruption” appeared in his own party, in this case the “rotten-to-the-core” provincial Conservative government of Richard McBride.⁵⁴ Tupper would not have seen himself as a “progressive,” but he held views about partyism,

⁵¹ Quotations from Stephanie S. Pinczl, *Transforming California: A Political History of Land Use and Development* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 25–6 (see also 27–9 and 58). Sources on American progressivism include Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); and David M. Kennedy, “Overview: The Progressive Era,” *The Historian* 37, 3 (1975): 453–68.

⁵² Brown and Cook, *Canada 1896–1921*, 189. See also English, *Decline of Politics*, 17–29 and 71–7.

⁵³ Henry Borden, ed., *Robert Laird Borden: His Memoirs* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1938), 1:192–3.

⁵⁴ Sir C.H. Tupper to Robert Borden, 3 January 1907, Borden Papers, Archives Canada, Memoir Notes Series, Correspondence 1900–10, micro C-4470, nos. 6335–7.

patronage, and machine politics that were gaining currency among upper middle-class progressives across North America in the early years of the twentieth century.

During the 1916 campaign popular revulsion against patronage and corruption, symbolized by the huge cost overruns for construction of the PGE, had helped to create a veritable surge of enthusiasm for political and social reform. The reform impulse, animated by war idealism, found expression in many parts of Canada during the First World War, including British Columbia, where it reinforced anxiety caused by collapsing real estate values that brought down the Dominion Trust Company, for which Bowser, Reid, and Wallbridge were the solicitors, and the costly construction of the PGE around which allegations of corruption and scandal swirled. The Liberal Party responded to the shift in political mood by promising to clean up BC politics. The leading advocate of change, Harlan Brewster, a Baptist salmon canner who was elected as premier, claimed that the public had strongly endorsed the Liberals' policy "to minimize the evils of the patronage system."⁵⁵ He promised, therefore, to "absolutely destroy this cursed system of political patronage" by establishing a civil service beyond party control.⁵⁶ In speeches and letters brimming with phrases such as "technical training," "efficient organization," and "scientific" supervision – the language of progressive reform – Brewster argued for hiring government workers on their merit rather than for their political connections.⁵⁷ In particular, professional engineers, not local appointees, would direct road maintenance around the province. Predictably, rank-and-file Liberals were not pleased. How could local Liberals be denied access to government jobs after working for the party without reward for years? Now that the Liberal Party had won office, was it not the turn of its workers for government positions? By June 1917 rumblings of discontent could be heard on Liberal Party back benches, but Brewster's resolve continued until he died of pneumonia eight months later.⁵⁸ His successor,

⁵⁵ H.C. Brewster to Mrs. F.T. Bustin, 15 June 1917, British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), Premiers' Papers, GRO441, box 185, file 2.

⁵⁶ *Victoria Daily Times*, 22 August 1916, 1, 7, and 13.

⁵⁷ H.C. Brewster to A. Barnes, 15 June 1917, and letters between R.J. Burns and H.C. Brewster, 8 June–4 July 1917, BCA, Premiers' Papers, GRO441, box 185, file 2; and H.C. Brewster to W.T. Slavin, 6 June 1917, BCA, box 187, file 4.

⁵⁸ For unrest in the Liberal Party over Brewster's policy on patronage, see letters between Mrs. F.T. Bustin and H.C. Brewster, 30 May and 15 June 1917, British Columbia Premiers' Papers (hereafter BCPP), box 185, file 2; letters between J.R. Campbell and H.C. Brewster, 25 May,

John Oliver, the son of a farm labourer, himself a successful farmer, and a man whom Prime Minister Arthur Meighen in 1920 described as “narrowly partisan,” was not burdened by Brewster’s idealism, and the patronage practices of times past quickly returned.⁵⁹ Oliver spoke for many Liberals in 1922 when he told the party’s convention: “We in the innocence of our hearts passed over to a commission patronage rights that should have been exercised by the members of the government and the representatives elected by the people.” The idealism that had led Liberals before the war to agitate for merit-based appointments and in 1917 to create a civil service commission was now viewed as folly.⁶⁰

Sir Hibbert soon realized that throwing out the Conservatives and bringing in the Liberals changed political practices in British Columbia very little – a realization made clear by the Liberal Party’s handling of evidence that construction of the PGE was plagued by corruption. Public debate focused on two issues. The first was solid evidence that in 1915 the railway company had set aside a fund of \$500,000 from which D’Arcy Tate, the PGE’s promoter and later chief counsel, was “to take care of campaign funds, so far as the Conservative Party was concerned.”⁶¹ But Tate refused to cooperate with a committee of the legislature called for the purpose of looking into campaign fund corruption. He then disappeared from Canada, as did two other key executives of the railway company. Private ledgers were also spirited away. What must have been particularly disturbing to Tupper were charges that the Liberals, whom he had so vigorously supported during the election, had also accepted campaign money from the PGE – one source spoke of \$70,000 going to Bowser and almost \$50,000 to William Sloan, newly elected MLA for Nanaimo and “custodian of the Liberal slush fund from the PGE.”⁶² Another prominent Liberal later spoke of being told by Robert Kelly, a Vancouver wholesaler and key member of the provincial Liberal Party machine, that Foley, Welch and Stewart, the consortium that controlled the PGE, had given the Liberals \$250,000

30 June, and 3 July 1917, BCPP, box 185, file 5; newspaper clipping, 26 June 1917, BCPP, box 186, file 8; and H.C. Brewster to Margaret G. Reid, 16 May 1917, BCPP, box 187, file 3.

⁵⁹ Quotation from Arthur Meighen to Sir C.H. Tupper, 4 December 1920, in CHTR, box 5, file 4, no. 2655. For a study of Liberal Party patronage, see Robert A. Campbell, “Liquor and Liberals: Patronage and Government Control in British Columbia, 1920–1928,” *BC Studies* 77 (Spring 1988): 30–53; and Andrew Nelson Cameron to H.C. Brewster, 3 June 1917, BCA, Premiers’ Papers, GR0441, box 185, file 5. Also concerning the Liberal Party machine in Vancouver, see J.L. Fraser et. al. to John Oliver, 17 July 1924, BCA, Thomas Dufferin Pattullo Papers (hereafter Pattullo Papers), Add. Mss. 3, vol. 18, file 20, pp. 77–82 (micro. A0798).

⁶⁰ *Vancouver Province*, 29 September 1912, 16, cited in Dobie, “Party History in British Columbia,” 70.

⁶¹ *Searchlight* 2 (1923): 3.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 4.

during the 1916 election. What particularly disconcerted Tupper was the Liberal Party's acting as if it had something to hide.⁶³ When, in March 1920, four independent-minded Liberals and three Independent MLAs introduced a motion in the legislature for the establishment of a royal commission to study corruption surrounding the PGE, most Liberals and all Conservatives united to defeat it.⁶⁴ The Liberal Party had been drawn further into the quagmire of corruption surrounding the PGE when the provincial government in 1918 was forced to assume control of the bankrupt company and fund ongoing construction from government revenue. Financial controls were almost entirely absent and costs soared. In 1920 E.J. Rossiter, a construction accountant appointed to the PGE in 1918, reported massive overcharging for construction materials, totally inadequate accounting practices, and the unwillingness of Premier Oliver to respond to allegations of bad management and outright graft.⁶⁵ Not surprisingly, then, by 1922 Tupper was writing about "the wild-cat schemes" of McBride and Bowser and "the reckless and unscrupulous government of Oliver."⁶⁶ The basic rhythm of BC politics, a rhythm that transcended party affiliation, had returned. Tupper was left once again a political outsider calling for an end to party government and patronage in British Columbia. Conservative or Liberal: in this province party label did not seem to matter. Perhaps the solution, Tupper concluded, was a completely new, and quite different, political organization.

From this logic emerged the last of Sir Hibbert's political initiatives in British Columbia, the creation of the province's first important "third party": the Provincial Party. It took root in an environment of political anxiety in the early 1920s. William Bowser and John Oliver remained leaders of the Conservative and Liberal parties, respectively, despite opposition to both. Leadership divided the Conservative Party in particular, and much of the Provincial Party's support came from Conservatives disaffected by the leadership of Bowser, who was renamed as leader in 1922.⁶⁷ The PGE, which by the early 1920s extended from

⁶³ "Information Which Frank Burnett, Senior, Can Give," CHTP, box 11, file 1.

⁶⁴ *Searchlight*, 2 (1923): 22-3.

⁶⁵ "Statement of E.J. Rossiter..." CHTP, box 10, file 2.

⁶⁶ Sir C.H. Tupper to Arthur Meighen, 22 August 1922, PANS, Sir C.H. Tupper Correspondence 1909-1924, MFM no. 11,089, reel 3, no. 2694. See also Sir C.H. Tupper to Editor, *Vancouver Province*, 9 June 1924, in CHTP, box 5, file 7, nos. 3079-81.

⁶⁷ *Victoria Daily Times*, 30 May 1924, 12. On the return of Conservatives to their own party at the end of the campaign, see D.S. Tait to Sir C.H. Tupper, 27 June 1924, CHTP, box 5, file 7, nos. 3171-3; and *Daily Colonist*, 3 August 1924, 1 and 6. In his dissertation on the Conservative Party, Donald Alper cites a letter of 28 May 1924 from thirty-nine "good Conservative[s]" to H.H. Stevens, stating: "Thousands of good conservatives are supporting the Provincial Party in order to clean up the provincial political situation." See Donald Keith Alper, "From

Squamish to Quesnel, continued to drain provincial resources and to be a festering sore on the body politic. In this environment a subgroup of the United Farmers of British Columbia, an agrarian party formed in 1917, called for reform-minded business, labour, and farm people to consider forming a new party. Leading Vancouver businesspeople responded. Meeting first in Vancouver in December 1922, they then linked up with the farmers' political committee in January 1923 at Vernon to found the Provincial Party.⁶⁸ Major-General A.D. McRae, Vancouver's leading industrialist before the war and still British Columbia's largest timber holder, dominated the new party, serving as its informal leader and chief financier.⁶⁹

Tupper's role in establishing the party is less certain. For instance, we do not know whether he was among the group of forty businesspeople who met in December 1922 at Vancouver's Grosvenor Hotel to take up the farmers' call for a new political party. But Tupper had articulated the idea of a new party as early as 1915, when, according to the *Vancouver Sun*, he had considered forming an exclusively "local" party to be called the "Provincial Party."⁷⁰ In addition, in August 1922 Tupper had indicated to Arthur Meighen, the national Conservative leader, that he was again considering the creation of a new BC political party. In it he stated,

I have, I believe, some influence in this Province, and it is only fair to say [that] I shall do my utmost to prevent a return to "Bowserism." My present intention is to form a Provincial Party, to gather "Liberals" and "Conservatives" and men of no particular Party and men of any other Party, and organize upon a platform in the sole interest of the Province.⁷¹

Once the party had been organized, Tupper actively supported McRae's leadership and put forward ideas for *The Searchlight* – a broadsheet that published nine issues attacking the moral failings of both established

Rule to Ruin: The Conservative Party of British Columbia, 1928-1954" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1975), 33n.39.

⁶⁸ *Daily Colonist*, 22 December 1922, 2 and *Vancouver Province*, 15 January 1923, 15.

⁶⁹ Ian Parker, "The Provincial Party," *BC Studies* 8 (Winter 1970/71): 17-28. See also Robin, *Rush for Spoils*, 197-210. For McRae's role in funding the party, see *Vancouver Province*, 31 May 1924, 27 and *Victoria Daily Times*, 20 June 1924, 15. For his control of timber limits see the *Vancouver Sun*, 11 June 1924, 1. McRae funded the party through 1923, when it was being established, and then again from its founding convention in December 1923 up to and during the provincial election of June 1924.

⁷⁰ *Vancouver Sun*, 5 April 1915, 2, and 24 July 1915, 2.

⁷¹ Sir C.H. Tupper to Arthur Meighen, 22 August 1922, in CHTP, box 5, file 4, no. 2694; and Charles M. Woodsworth to Sir C.H. Tupper, 27 October 1922, in CHTP, box 5, file 4, nos. 2697-9.

parties. Tupper also directed the campaign for a royal commission to look into the financing of the PGE. In this he succeeded when the Galliher Commission was set up in early 1924. The narrow terms of the commission led it to exonerate the Tories and Liberals, despite very credible evidence that, in 1916, the PGE had kicked back hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of campaign “boodle funds” into the campaign coffers of both parties.⁷² In November 1923 the aging Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper appeared on a platform in Vancouver in front of 800 supporters where he was portrayed, along with McRae, as one of the two pillars of the Provincial Party.⁷³ Tupper provided policy leadership and, as he had done in 1909 and 1916, campaigned actively in the 1924 election.⁷⁴ While Martin Robin portrays Tupper as one of the “stray politicians” who, as a “johnny-come-lately,” became a firm supporter of the Provincial Party only after other businesspeople, and especially McRae, had established it, the long time member of parliament for Vancouver Centre, Harry Stevens, believed that provincial party leadership came “largely” from Tupper.⁷⁵ There is reason to believe that Tupper influenced the formation and principles of the Provincial Party from its inception.

Success in establishing a new political organization – one that McRae described as not a party in the conventional sense but, rather, “a union of citizens without party”⁷⁶ – did not, however, translate into success at the ballot box. While capturing almost a quarter of the vote, the Provincial Party won a disappointing three seats in the Legislative Assembly before quietly disappearing as an organized political force. By contrast, the Conservative Party led by Bowser captured seventeen seats with almost 30 percent of the vote, and the Liberals under Oliver formed a minority government by taking twenty-three seats with the popular support of less than one-third of the electorate. The distribution of seats in British Columbia’s first-past-the-post electoral system disadvantaged the third party, but the “Provincials,” as they were called, had come close. Ironically, what hurt the Provincial Party was a

⁷² *Vancouver Province*, 5 March 1924, 2.

⁷³ *Victoria Daily Times*, 30 November 1923, 9 and 1 December 1923, 32. In the latter, Tupper was described as a “prominent organizer of the new Provincial Party.”

⁷⁴ Sir C.H. Tupper to Gen. H.F. McDonald, 4 June 1924, CHTP, box 5, file 7, no. 3074; and *Vancouver Province*, 7 June 1924, 4.

⁷⁵ Robin, *Rush for Spoils*, 198 and 203 and National Archives of Canada, H.H. Stevens Papers, mg27, mB9, vol. 162A, transcripts from the interview of Stevens with J.A. Munro, 14 June 1966, 20.

⁷⁶ Address by Major-General A.D. McRae, New Westminster, 5 April 1923, in Pattullo Papers, vol. 16, file 12 (micro. A0798).

last-minute surge of partisan support for the Conservative Party from Conservatives who, disaffected by Bowser, had temporarily supported the McRae and Tupper alternative but who, in the final days of the campaign, had returned to the old party. Partisan support for federal parties had become a more deeply rooted part of the province's political culture than the leaders of the Provincial Party had either wished for or expected.⁷⁷

This last phase of Sir Hibbert Tupper's participation in BC politics underlines the class basis of his alienation from the province's mainstream political culture. Men from Vancouver's upper class dominated the Provincial Party. The farmer activists who initially supported the idea of a farmer-business alliance under McRae's leadership soon concluded that businesspeople, not farmers, controlled the new party.⁷⁸ Party backers with names such as Davis, Abbott, McRae, Creery, McPhillips, Rounsefell, Leckie, Senkler, Bell-Irving, Angus, Spencer, and Tupper headed Vancouver's most prestigious and powerful families, and they support Martin Robin's characterization of the Provincial Party as the "Shaughnessy Crusade" (a reference to the CPR's elite residential development on the southern edge of Vancouver).⁷⁹ Provincial politics in 1924 reverberated with populist rhetoric as Premier Oliver, representing "the people," attacked McRae's business history and, especially, his very expensive style of life.⁸⁰ McRae, by contrast, boasted proudly that his Hycroft mansion – "a happy white man's home – employed directly or indirectly "from 50 to 60 of Vancouver's population" at a huge annual cost of almost \$25,000.⁸¹ McRae saw this expenditure not as profligate excess but, rather, as support for the local economy. "Do you think a couple of hundred such homes in Vancouver would do any harm to the people there?" he asked, rhetorically, in response to his critics.⁸² Sir Hibbert and Lady Tupper, the former on numerous occasions having

⁷⁷ See Elections British Columbia, *An Electoral History of British Columbia, 1871-1986* (Victoria: Elections British Columbia and the Legislative Library, 1988), 149. For comments on the Provincial Party's poor showing in 1924, see the letters in CHTP, box 5, file 7; McRae's assessment in the *Daily Colonist*, 3 August 1924, pp. 1 and 6; and T.D. Pattullo to Maxwell Smith, 5 July 1924 and T.D. Pattullo to John Oliver, 4 August 1924, Pattullo Papers, vol. 18, file 18 (micro. A01798). For the party's disintegration, see Alper, "From Rule to Ruin," 19-22.

⁷⁸ Margaret A. Ormsby, "The United Farmers of British Columbia: An Abortive Third-Party Movement," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 17 (1953): 70-1.

⁷⁹ *Vancouver Province*, 10 April 1924, 13 and 15, and 23 May 1924, 5; and Robin, *Rush for Spoils*, chap. 7. For Vancouver's prewar elite see McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, chap. 6.

⁸⁰ *Victoria Daily Times*, 4 January 1924, 1 and 13; 6 February 1924, 3 and 8; 9 May 1924, 9; and 29 May 1924, 1.

⁸¹ Address by Major-General A.D. McRae, New Westminster, 5 April 1923, in CHTP, vol. 16, file 12 (micro. A01798).

⁸² *Searchlight* 1 (1923), 13.

complained that personal financial pressure prevented his return to electoral politics, belonged comfortably to this class but were not wealthy like the McRaes.⁸³

The policies of the Provincial Party reflected the interests of Vancouver's, and British Columbia's, upper class. From the outset Sir Hibbert stressed the need for efficient government managed, in a business-like way, by experts. His response to excessive patronage expressed not only moral outrage at the inefficiency and waste of patronage but also concern about the cost of patronage to business. Tupper was well connected to the business community, thought like a businessperson, and spoke of creating a "business legislature."⁸⁴ His earlier concern about efficiency and waste crystallized after the war into a focus on taxes.⁸⁵ As he stated in 1923, "I propose to do all in my power to support the Provincial Party, my main reason being that I expect a Business Government will be able to get rid of party political patronage, and ... reduce the level of taxation."⁸⁶ The Provincial Party, "composed of businessmen," wanted lower taxes and government run by experts; the "people have been taxed until they have been bled white, and they can stand the suffering no longer. Let us get rid of graft, outrageous party extravagance and the unnecessary army of officials."⁸⁷ Tupper's emphasis on taxes and his expression of anti-statist business values became more explicit after the war yet were consistent with his long-time critique of the messiness, inefficiency, and unbusiness-like behaviour of settler governments in British Columbia.

Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper's active engagement with British Columbia provincial politics suggests one obvious conclusion. Through his criticism of the McBride, Bowser, and Oliver governments, Tupper illustrated that BC politics was primarily shaped by the needs of immigrant settlers. This culture transcended particular parties or

⁸³ The Tupper family maintained a socially prominent style of life, but their wealth did not compare with that of Vancouver's richest business families. At his death in 1927 Sir Hibbert's estate was worth a modest \$59,760.49. See Sir C.H. Tupper to Harry J. Crowe, 23 October 1918, CHTP, box 5-4, nos. 2569-70; and BCA, British Columbia, Attorney General, Estate Records, BC Supreme Court, Vancouver Probates, GR1415, file 1927/11, 930.

⁸⁴ A.D. McRae to A.M. Manson, 16 March 1923, Pattullo Papers, vol.16, file 12 (micro. A01798).

⁸⁵ Tupper had spoken about taxes before the war but less frequently than he did after the war. See *Vancouver Sun*, 11 March 1912, 1-2.

⁸⁶ Sir C.H. Tupper to J.F. McDonald, 12 June 1923, CHTP, box 5, file 5, no. 2736.

⁸⁷ *Daily Colonist*, 30 November 1923, 7 and 3 May 1924, 1 and 6.

premiers. As in the nineteenth century, provincial governments still aimed to build infrastructure, promote the rapid extraction of resource wealth, entrench British institutions, and, of course, make British Columbia a “white man’s province.”⁸⁸ Whether the party in power was Conservative or Liberal made little difference. The historian Edith Dobie noted this many years ago, and her words bear repeating. After examining party platforms, resolutions of local and provincial associations, speeches from the throne, and debates in the legislature for the first thirty years after party government was adopted in 1903, Dobie concluded that Liberals and Conservatives were in “almost complete agreement ... both in theory and in policies. Both urged railway expansion, exclusion of Asiatics, [and an] increase of bonded indebtedness in order to bring population and business into the province.”⁸⁹ Despite the introduction of party government, and with it Conservative and Liberal Party machines, the underlying goals of government were not much different from what they had been in the 1880s and 1890s, before national party labels were introduced. Patronage was not new, just more extensive and systematic. Tupper’s frustration with politics in British Columbia, the practices of which transcended party, thus reflected the incompatibility of this outsider’s interests and ideas with the goals of the white settler community in Canada’s far west.

Tupper’s story suggests two other conclusions of a more speculative nature. First, starting with the election of a Social Credit government in 1952 scholars have identified populism as a distinctive part of the province’s political culture; they have also said little about the roots of BC populism.⁹⁰ Those roots revealed themselves, perhaps, in the response of British Columbians to Tupper. At its core populism is an

⁸⁸ Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man’s Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858–1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989). Tupper spoke very little about race issues, and in that sense also he stood apart from the province’s mainstream political culture. In 1907 he argued that there should be no objection to the immigration of strong, healthy Japanese or Chinese settlers (*Vancouver Province*, 13 September 1907, 1), and during the First World War, while professionally retained by the Canadian-Japanese Association, he urged that all who enlisted to fight in the war should be given Canadian citizenship, regardless of race. He also urged that Japanese residents of British Columbia who were British subjects be given the vote (*Vancouver Province*, 21 April 1917, 14 and 24 April 1917, 15). On the other hand, he held passionate, and very negative, views of French Canadians (*Vancouver Province*, 4 January 1901, 6 and 14 January 1901, 2; “Anglo-Saxon Will Rule in Canada Come What May,” *Vancouver Daily World*, n.d., in CHTP, box 19, file 1, no. 61; and *Victoria Daily Times*, 19 September 1921, 18).

⁸⁹ Dobie, “Party History in British Columbia,” 70–1.

⁹⁰ For example, see Elkins, “British Columbia as a State of Mind”; and Donald E. Blake, “Conclusion: The Two Worlds of the BC Voter,” in Blake, *Two Political Worlds*, 57 and 172.

ethos or syndrome that tends “to idealize the people and ... regard elites with hostility.”⁹¹ Interpreted for North America as the political response of small independent producers, led by farmers, to regional and occupational inequities, populism is said to involve “some kind of exaltation of and appeal to ‘the people’” who “are all in one sense or another antielitist.”⁹² Populism becomes evident in a language that expresses the sense of worth and goals of “ordinary people” in the face of the bureaucratic and structural forces of modernity. British Columbia in the 1920s exhibited the conditions out of which a populist movement might occur – and eventually did occur, in the 1952 election: a society of workers and small producers who saw themselves as “plain people.”⁹³ Even though the majority of British Columbia’s non-Aboriginal population had migrated from elsewhere, or were the sons and daughters of migrants, their lived experience was local, and their political interests were those of struggling settlers trying to establish themselves through wage labour or small-scale production. They had no time for the likes of Tupper, whose world was cosmopolitan and whose manner was superior. Nor were they sympathetic to the modernizing influences of men such as Premier Harlan Brewster, who, like Tupper, wanted to end patronage and make government and administration more efficient. By contrast, John Oliver, a brusque and unsophisticated farmer, had populist appeal and was able to score political points especially against the wealthy Provincial Party leader A.D. McRae in the 1924 election. Tupper’s outsider status in British Columbia challenged, and was resisted by, the populist tendencies of the province’s electorate.

In addition, the arguments of Tupper and McRae in the 1920s for more efficient government and lower taxes implied criticism of the expanding role of the state in British Columbia’s civic life. For instance, Tupper complained about the cost of the Oliver government’s plan to build a university, stating: “To be frank ... I believe that on certain principles my views are contrary to those of the electorate. I consider that we are going mad in respect to higher education at the expense of the people of the Province.”⁹⁴ McRae argued for “good, efficient civil servants,”

⁹¹ Margaret Canovan, *Populism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 81. See also Peter Wiles, “A Syndrome, Not a Doctrine: Some Elementary Theses on Populism,” in *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics*, ed. G. Ionescu and E. Gellner, 166–79 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).

⁹² Canovan, *Populism*, 294. See also Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford, 1978).

⁹³ Gordon Hak, “Populism and the 1952 Social Credit Breakthrough in British Columbia,” *Canadian Historical Review* 85, 2 (2004): 277–96.

⁹⁴ Sir C.H. Tupper to John Nelson, 13 April 1924, CHTP, box 5, file 4, nos. 2677–80.

as did Tupper, and said that a Provincial Party government “had no intention of carrying along a lot of drones.”⁹⁵ Both made reduced taxes, and by implication reduced government, central parts of their appeal to the province in the 1924 election. The Provincial Party articulated a business-centred and upper-class agenda that represented, one might argue, an important ideological turn in BC politics, a discernible shift to the right that foreshadowed the election of a business-oriented Conservative government under Simon Fraser Tolmie in 1928 and the radically anti-government recommendations of the Kidd Commission in 1932.⁹⁶ In addition to proposing dramatic cuts to the size of government, including a reduction in the number of civil servants and MLAs and the amalgamation of government departments, the Kidd commissioners suggested that free education end at age fourteen, that funding for UBC be discontinued, and that party politics cease. The parallels between the Kidd Commission proposals and the arguments of McRae and Tupper in the early 1920s are striking. Tupper’s work with McRae and other elite businesspeople in the Provincial Party suggests that his importance to British Columbia history was no longer, by the 1920s, simply that of an outsider whose critical analysis of BC politics illuminated the core values of a settler society. He had also emerged as the harbinger of a more explicit polarization of provincial politics – a polarization that would occur along left-right lines. Such polarization is often said to be a distinguishing feature of British Columbia’s political history, yet the impetus for ideological division is usually interpreted as coming from the left of the political spectrum through the election of labour and socialist politicians in mining districts and cities and the emergence in 1933 of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation as British Columbia’s official opposition. Tupper’s history reveals that the impulse for polarization, and the shift from settler politics to ideological politics, was also coming from the emerging political right.

⁹⁵ *Victoria Daily Times*, 20 June 1924, 1 and 15.

⁹⁶ See Robert M. Groves, “Business Government: Party Politics and the British Columbia Business Community, 1928-1933” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1976).