EDITORIAL

"In Canada, politics gets into your soup and poisons your claret,"[1] wrote Irish immigrant Captain John Martley of Marble Canyon, between Cache Creek and Lillooet, in 1894. We are reminded of this lively opinion by the contents of this issue of *BC Studies*. Five articles, brought together by the contingent alignment of chance – chance in the choice of research topics, in the timing of the submission of these articles to the journal, in the progress of the review process, and so on – consider radically different topics, at a variety of scales and from distinct vantage points. But all five have a good deal to say about the origins of BC institutions and about the ideological influences that shaped them. Various "isms" – high modernism, imperialism, maternal feminism, environmentalism, neoliberalism – local manifestations of larger currents of Western thought, loom large in the pages that follow, shaping the practices of the local state (planning in Vancouver), the emergence of militia forces across British Columbia, the development of welfare institutions (the Vancouver crèche), the implementation of a provincewide carbon tax, and the failure to provide housing services for students in the Okanagan Valley. Neither soup nor (sadly) claret will be found within the covers of this, our 173rd issue, but of politics there is plenty.

In echoing a question asked by several Vancouverites in the 1960s – "Is Sutton Brown God?" – historian Will Langford highlights the power of modernist urban planners and the contentious character of their actions. Planning is a political process. Yet, as implemented by Gerald Sutton Brown, a colonial Jamaican who trained in England as a civil engineer before becoming Vancouver's director of planning from 1952 to 1959 and city commissioner from 1960 to 1973, planning was insufficiently attentive to local interests. Sutton Brown's approach to planning turned on that central tenet of high modernist conviction, "an exaggerated belief in the capacity of scientific and technological progress to meet growing human needs and to bestow social benefits."

Facing the challenges posed by postwar prosperity, the rise of the automobile, and the expansion of suburbia, Sutton Brown placed his faith in urban renewal, downtown redevelopment, freeways, and comprehensive zoning. These, notes Langford, "were high modern initiatives: expert-managed technical solutions to perceived urban problems that involved

[1] Erl Viking [Captain John Martley], *Songs of the Cascades* (London: Horace Cox, 1894), 104.

the drastic alteration, regulation, standardization, and modernization of city space." But as things turned out, Sutton Brown's initiatives changed the city in ways he neither intended nor imagined. His grand schemes – particularly his plans for freeways surging through Chinatown – ran into barriers thrown up by rapidly changing circumstances shaped by the anti-establishment ideologies of the counterculture, society's growing rejection of technocracy, the emergence of new social movements, cross-class alliances, and the rise of social activism.

Local opposition to freeways and urban renewal projects that spelled the destruction of inner-city neighbourhoods stimulated the political engagement of young people (many of whom, including Mike Harcourt and Shirley Chan, continued their social activism for years afterwards) and spawned the creation of a new civic party, the The Electors' Action Movement. Together, these developments changed the course of urban growth, maintaining a downtown core scaled to people rather than to automobiles, foregrounding the idea of the "liveable city" and creating space for what British urban planner John Punter celebrated as "Vancouver's Achievement."[2]

Jim Wood frames his article with another rhetorical question: was the early BC militia a "Social Club or Martial Pursuit?" In truth, the answer is probably "both." Through a quarter century of rapid immigration, mostly from the British Isles, militia units, like other clubs and associations, surely formed welcome and valuable points of attachment, familiarity, and friendship in a society in which so much was new, strange, and in-process. But there was also, as Wood notes, a "growing sense of militarism" in British Columbia in the two decades before 1914, fuelled by the Boer (South African) War of 1899-1902, reflected in the enthusiasm for marksmanship competitions in newly settled areas and for cadet training in the province's public schools, and reinforced by the unequivocal declaration of the self-confident provincial Legislature, late in the nineteenth century, that "British Columbia is British."

In Wood's telling, the politics and ideology of imperialism are in plain view. The militia, he notes, "remained a visibly British institution." Various regiments flourished in the soil of massive recent British immigration. The officers of one Vancouver regiment were all of British birth or descent, while "all officers of both the Okanagan Mounted Rifles and the independent squadron in the Nicola Valley appear to have been of British descent." For the militia volunteers, "visible links

[2] John Punter, *The Vancouver Achievement: Urban Planning and Design* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003).

to the British Empire displayed their patriotism and social status before family, friends, and the wider community."

In "A Proper Independent Spirit," a study of "Working Mothers and the Vancouver City Crèche, 1909-20," Lisa Pasolli shows how the city bureaucracy subsumed a welfare institution formed by the self-interest of maternal feminists. This is an intriguing study of the workings of what political scientist Warren Magnusson once called "little state" interests – here a collage of municipal planners and politicians, welfare officials, social agencies, women's groups, child welfare advocates, and mothers and families – and their roles in defining the boundaries of social citizenship. Insisting that these boundaries are "flexible and permeable, often opened only temporarily, and subject to expansion and contraction based on specific economic, political, and social contexts," Pasolli demonstrates how social citizenship "is often granted only on a limited or partial basis" because it "is conditional upon class, race, gender, and other factors," and may reflect the conviction that "social benefits are privileges rather than rights." These are important reminders of challenges that remain with us, a century on.

Further, Pasolli's account demonstrates that social citizenship is not just a matter for modern national and provincial welfare states, because its boundaries are also constructed in local sites and contexts. Still, her history of the Vancouver City Crèche is relevant well beyond the particular confines of the city during the tumultuous decade that spanned the First World War. The development of the crèche as a public institution is clearly "a story about the politics of mothers' employment and about public responsibility to working mothers." Pasolli's account makes plain that the crèche "enjoyed support when working-class mothers were needed for domestic labour or when the imperative to promote the work ethic and working-class family independence was foremost." By contrast, its value as a public institution was questioned when the postwar focus on women's domestic and maternal "service to the state" made it politically inopportune to encourage the employment of mothers.

Political scientists Chelsea Peet and Kathryn Harrison examine the political conundrum posed by reactions to British Columbia's carbon tax, introduced in 2008. Hailed by academics and environmentalists, the initiative met considerable voter resistance (although invariably described as "revenue-neutral," it was still called, and perceived as, a tax). Peet and Harrison are intrigued by the geographical pattern of this political opposition. Writ broad, it was strongest in the north of

the province, where local politicians argued long and loud that the tax was unfair to their constituents, and weaker in the Lower Mainland, although analysts agreed that commuters in the Vancouver suburbs would be hardest hit by the levy.

To explain this, the authors draw on three theoretical approaches. Collective action theory focused on voter ignorance of the tax and its effects, helps them understand disapproval of, and a lack of political engagement with, the carbon tax. Rational choice theory goes some way to explain why local politicians spoke out on behalf of their constituents' latent interests but not why only northern politicians seized on the issue. Ideational theory accounts for this geographical pattern because long-established community identities shaped the debate, and (in Peet and Harrison's view) the tax reignited a deep-rooted "sense of alienation and exclusion among northerners," who saw it as a levy on "core aspects of the northern identity: cold weather, vast distances, and a resource-based economy." From all of this, Peet and Harrison recognize that *perceptions* of the costs and benefits of carbon tax pricing may matter more than concrete evidence in shaping public reactions to such policies, and they suggest ways in which their implementation might be improved.

Dedicated readers of *BC Studies* might recall that in Issue 168 (Winter 2010-11) we focused on the Okanagan Valley and asked whether the recent course of development in this rapidly growing, sub-humid region was sustainable. Jamie McEwan and Carlos Teixeira add to that debate by questioning some aspects of the valley's social sustainability. In "Doing Their 'Home' Work: A Case Study of University of British Columbia Okanagan Student Youth Rental Housing Experiences in the City of Kelowna," McEwan and Teixeira identify an extreme shortage of housing for students. Established in 2005 to supersede Okanagan University College, University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBCO) soon enrolled over six thousand students but was not provided with a student housing service. By 2008, the demand for rental housing in the Kelowna area had produced a vacancy rate of 0.0 per cent: a landlord's market.

Reviewing the many strategies used by students to find accommodation – the use of online websites, bulletin boards, and informal social and family networks as well as, more tangibly, room-sharing, "couch surfing," crowding into apartments with friends, and renting motel or hotel rooms by the month – McEwan and Teixeira find it "unacceptable to just let local (private) market forces dictate the future of Kelowna's housing markets"; rather, they seek to make a political intervention by

arguing for greater public-sector involvement, by UBCO and the City of Kelowna, in providing "youth-specific housing services in Kelowna."

Taken together, then, the contents of this issue remind us that all human relationships and societal actions have a political dimension and that politics, in the very broadest sense, lies at the very heart of our constructions of, actions in, and satisfaction with the social worlds in which we live. Our circumstances may not be of our own making, but historical perspective on (and thoughtful engagement with) them promise, at worst, the benefit of a fuller understanding of where we stand and, at best, an appreciation of our individual and collective capacities to change the world – at least in some degree. Let's raise a glass of claret to that.

Graeme Wynn and Richard Mackie