THE POLITICS OF MAKING PARADISE

A Forum on Robert A.J. McDonald, A Long Way to Paradise: A New History of British Columbia Politics *(Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021)*

INTRODUCTION

Bradley Miller

Robert A.J. McDonald's *A Long Way to Paradise* is an important book. It examines a century of debates over how government should work, what its role should be, and who should hold the levers of political power in British Columbia. In doing so, the book advances an insightful rethinking of BC political history, emphasizing the power of political ideas and rebutting the often reductive class-based or economic explanations offered up by previous writers. While it examines and explains pivotal elections, ideologies, and big-picture political shifts, *A Long Way to Paradise* humanizes them using the lives and ideas of individual people struggling to make change or achieve power in and through the provincial government. It's also eloquent, pithy, and memorable. In short, this is a must-read for anyone interested in the way that British Columbia works.

The book examines the century between British Columbia's joining Confederation in 1871 and the first victory of the provincial New Democratic Party (NDP) in 1972. It begins by looking at the Confederation-era development of the foundational structures of provincial politics: factions among the elite white men allowed to vote, then the emergence of political populism, and then, eventually, formal political parties. These early years also implanted the imperative of economic and infrastructure development in the province, first manifested in railways and later in twentieth-century highway and hydroelectric dam projects. It then explores the triumphs of Conservative premier and classical liberal Sir Richard McBride, followed by the emergence of a new reformist liberalism under the Liberals, particularly the short-lived premier Harlan

Brewster and then Premier Duff Pattullo, who sought to modernize and professionalize provincial administration and to expand social services. The book soon tackles the crumbling of the Conservative Party and the rise of the Social Credit dynasty under W.A.C. Bennett, who combined a classical liberal preference for small government and private enterprise with a modernizing impulse to develop the province through infrastructure and to power it with new sources of electricity, all of which required government intervention. The book also explores the permutations of the political left, from Marxist radicals who contemplated revolution to the predominance of social democrats in the Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and the NDP, which took power under Premier Dave Barrett.

This sweeping survey and its emphasis on ideas is an important and welcome contribution to the historiography of British Columbia. But its publication is also bittersweet. Robert McDonald wrote it over many years, coming into his office in the University of British Columbia's Department of History most days of the week long after he retired from teaching in order to finish the manuscript. Bob often made this sound like an unending, uphill slog. Often, when I asked him at the end of the day how his writing had gone, he would reply simply, "I rewrote my paragraph," giving me the impression that he was fighting with the same few sentences day after day. As it turns out, he was actually making steady progress. He finished a draft in early 2019, submitted it to UBC Press, received positive peer reviews, and was beginning to do final revisions on the manuscript when he died suddenly that June after a stroke.[1]

For a different historian, this might have meant that the book would be forever unpublished. But Bob McDonald was a big character with a big, supportive community in BC history circles. He was professor emeritus at UBC, former editor of *BC Studies*, former president of the Vancouver Historical Society, and former chair of the Vancouver City Archives advisory committee, among other things. From the time of his death, his family and his huge circle of friends and colleagues, as well as his editors at UBC Press, were determined that the book should go forward. His UBC friends and colleagues Jean Barman, Michel Ducharme, and Tina Loo were particularly instrumental in helping to complete the revisions. The book was published in the fall of 2021, a little over two years after Bob's death. At the 2022 Canadian Historical Association

[1] See Lara Campbell, "In Memory: The Legacy of Bob McDonald," *BC Studies* 203 (Autumn 2019): 11–19. Also, "B.C. historian Robert McDonald dies at age 75," CBC News, 30 June 2019, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/b-c-historian-robert-mcdonald-dies-at-age-75-1.5196005.

Conference, it received the Clio Prize for BC History, recognition that it richly deserves.

This forum gathers a group of Canadian historians to discuss *A Long Way to Paradise*. All of the contributors were friends and colleagues of Bob, and their essays often reveal the extent of their personal connections to him. Elizabeth Mancke completed her MA at UBC and took a seminar with Bob. They were friends for decades. She is a historian and Canada Research Chair in Atlantic Canada at the University of New Brunswick, currently working on law-making in pre-Confederation British North America. Will Langford was an MA student under Bob and is now a political historian at Dalhousie University, specializing in the history of political activism, including a new project on right-wing politics that he discussed with Bob. Lara Campbell is a historian of gender at Simon Fraser University and author of a recent book on women's suffrage in British Columbia. She knew Bob almost from the moment that she arrived in Vancouver, and Bob read and critiqued her book in manuscript form before he died. Jeremy Mouat is professor emeritus at the University of Alberta and has written extensively on resource development. He also took a course on BC history with Bob, which helped start their long friendship and their many years of back-and-forth debate. Finally, I was a colleague of Bob's in the UBC history department, where I focus on Canadian legal history. For years, Bob and I fought daily in the office about political history and politics generally.

As several of the contributors note, Bob loved rigorous, raucous debate. This was also how he tested the quality of ideas – his own, and everybody else's, as Tina Loo writes in her moving foreword to the book.[2] Indeed, years ago I remember watching Bob lean across the table at a campus pub during an academic conference and tell an eminent historian whose book had just won multiple major prizes all of the things that he thought were wrong with it. He would not have wanted his book to be spared the same dissection. As a result, the contributors point out not just how and where the book is a substantive contribution to our knowledge of British Columbia and where it is methodologically or conceptually innovative; they also examine where it is weaker, where they dispute his characterizations and conclusions, and where they wish that they could start a long, boisterous debate with Bob about their lingering questions.

[2] Robert A.J. McDonald, *A Long Way to Paradise: A New History of British Columbia Politics* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021), xi.

ELUSIVE PARADISE AND THE LIMITS OF LIBERALISM

Elizabeth Mancke

When Premier Harlan Brewster responded to a constituent in 1917 that "it was a long way to Paradise" when it came to resolving the problems that plagued British Columbia, he echoed the sentiments of earlier North American leaders. John Winthrop cautioned Puritan colonists about the challenges of positioning their endeavours on Massachusetts Bay as building a "City on a Hill." In a similar vein, political refugees from the American Revolution convinced themselves they could establish a new colony in New Brunswick that would be "the Envy of the American States."[3] They quickly discovered, however, that the British would provide few resources after disembarking them in Saint John and that establishing homes and building a new colonial economy would be hard won and modest achievements. Invocations of ambitious plans recur in Anglo-North American political discourse, like an imperial call-and-response ricocheting across the continent and the centuries, re-emerging in new places as fresh possibilities of human happiness. Yet, by 1917, centuries after Europeans first began giving voice to these ambitious visions of human renewal, Brewster articulated the often silent caveat – that Paradise was a "long way" off.

Brewster's quip found new life in 2021 as the title of Robert A.J. McDonald's last book, *A Long Way to Paradise: A New History of British Columbia Politics*. It was also the year that saw Lytton, BC, break Canadian heat records before disappearing in a ball of fire. Then, in November, an atmospheric river refilled Lake Sumas nearly a century after settlers had drained it to make farmland. The impact of climate change seems to confirm Brewster's intuition that Paradise might be elusive, notwithstanding the frequent claims of politicians.

A Long Way to Paradise poignantly captures the idea that political leadership is about imagining a better society, persuading people what it should look like, and then attempting to enact it. Among the changes in the centuries after Winthrop's Puritans is the level of participation by the governed, initially limited to property-owning white men and gradually expanding to allow all citizens over eighteen to participate. When British Columbia joined the Dominion of Canada in 1871, the starting date for McDonald's analysis of a century of BC politics, debates

[3] Daniel T. Rodgers, *As a City on a Hill: The Story of America's Most Famous Lay Sermon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020); Ann Gorman Condon, *The Loyalist Dream for New Brunswick: The Envy of the American States* (Fredericton, NB: New Ireland Press, 1984), 60.

over the extent of the franchise increasingly turned on the right of women and visible minorities to vote. As the electorate expanded, so, too, did the liberal belief that modern societies were grounded in protecting individuals' inherent rights to liberty, property, and equality. These "three main pillars of liberalism's ethical system" were understood to apply, in principle, to all of humanity.[4] To be exercised in the political arena, however, "the core components of rationality, a belief in rational change, and a commitment to legality and constitutionality, and a concern for the public good" were needed.[5] White men, in their deep "concern for the public good," and in their self-interest, repeatedly convinced themselves that only they had sufficient rationality and understanding of law and constitutions to participate in governing. It took decades of debate for a majority of them to abandon this conceit and allow women to vote, with rights for visible minority settlers to follow, and Indigenous rights coming far too slowly.

As one of the last white majority settler colonies in the British Empire, and one that quickly confederated with the first white dominion, British Columbia became a site of convergence for a complex of modernity, a combination of timing, geography, and socio-ethnic diversity. Settlers represented a broad spectrum of social classes, ranging from farming families to timber barons, from hard-scrabble gold miners to industrial capitalists. The Confederation agreement to link British Columbia to the rest of Canada by extending the railway to the Pacific resulted in the need to recruit labourers to build it; a large number of these workers were Chinese, many of whom relocated from the United States and became a new visible minority when many politicians were committed to protecting "White Canada Forever."[6] Richly fertile but limited tracts of arable land were hemmed in by towering mountains, making access expensive. Colonial officials in British Columbia felt so confident about the ascendancy of whites in the world and the disappearance of Indigenous Peoples that they largely dismissed the need for treaties with the province's numerous First Nations. Indigenous leaders, in turn, explored legal avenues of redress and, perhaps not surprisingly, pioneered legal breakthroughs in the recognition of Indigenous title. In the *Calder* case, named for Nisga'a MLA Frank Calder, the Supreme Court decided

[4] McDonald, *A Long Way to Paradise*, 8.
[5] McDonald, 8.
[6] W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy toward Orientals in British Columbia,* 3rd ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

in 1973 that the Nisga'a held title to land in British Columbia at the time the colony was created.[7]

Determined to promote prosperity, the government lured investors with staggeringly large grants of land: a consortium headed by Robert Dunsmuir, the coal-mining entrepreneur, received 1.9 million acres in return for agreeing to build a stretch of railway on Vancouver Island. Labour practices in extractive industries like coal mining and timber radicalized workers: in 1900, British Columbia had 100 unions; by 1903, another 116 had organized and the province had 87 strikes.[8] But, in British Columbia, no single economic niche could assure the prosperity that politicians promised, and, indeed, the diversity of paths, from small-scale family businesses to capital- and labour-intensive enterprises backed by the federal government, guaranteed that political debates would be fractious and that fault lines would trigger sudden and dramatic realignments of the political landscape. While other scholars have seen BC politics as fractured by class differences, McDonald understood that, despite all the quarrels over how to achieve prosperity, most politicians were ideological liberals simply because most of us, politicians and electorate alike, want the options and opportunities that liberalism promises.

A Long Way to Paradise captures the conceits of four centuries of British settler colonialism as expressed through British Columbia's political culture, circa 1871 to 1972. Bob focuses on the words and actions of politicians, the ideas that shaped them, and the new tools of modernity available to them – including harnessing the power of the provincial and federal states. He persuasively argues that liberal ideology was malleable and elastic enough to encompass most British Columbians, from author and social critic Roderick Haig-Brown, an English-raised conservative with genteel rural leanings, to Premier W.A.C. Bennett, also a conservative but heralding from hard-scrabble rural New Brunswick and more comfortable with men of practical skills than with university-educated experts. At the other end of the political spectrum, liberalism's plasticity gave it the resilience to co-opt and incorporate the socialist-inspired Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, later reorganized as the New Democratic Party. Bob recreates a century of impassioned agendas, replete with examples of sharp tongues, personal foibles, and surprising political shifts – not least Bennett's nationalization of BC Electric and the creation of BC Hydro, pivoting away from small

[7] McDonald, *A Long Way to Paradise*, 273–74
[8] McDonald, 57.

government conservatism to create a major provincially owned utility. For decades, however, liberalism's tensile strength stopped short of the serious inclusion of women and visible minorities as political actors. As a consequence, they have only minor roles in the century of BC politics that Bob analyzes. And in a strange and eerie way, this is the book's strength.

Did Bob McDonald intentionally write a book that would evocatively but quietly convey the sexism and racism of the political culture of British settler colonialism, of Canadian liberalism, and relate it in such an empirically driven way that it is hard to even argue with him? Of course, it was that racist. Of course, it was that sexist. I can imagine graduate students writing historiographic papers and criticizing the book for not having enough women and visible minorities. But I am quite certain that Bob knew they were not there, they were intentionally not there. I sat in a year-long grad seminar with him, and questions about race, class, and gender were predictable. I know from four decades of raucous conversations that he was keenly aware of race and gender. But to gratuitously add women and visible minorities into a book on BC political culture when they were seldom included would have been to falsify the past. Bob was not going to make *A Long Way to Paradise* more ideologically comfortable reading by including them.

I wish I could pick up the phone and simply ask him if he intended to make the reader uneasy at the limited appearances of women and visible minorities. I'm sure I would hear him instantly belly laugh. What I can't quite figure out, however, is whether he intentionally intended to skewer the conceits of white, male liberalism or whether his commitment to reconstructing the evidence as the evidence presented itself just enabled this to happen. Even though Bob spent most of his life in British Columbia, part of him was always the guy from Brandon, Manitoba, whose family had a small grocery store. This placed him in a liminal space with petty bourgeois roots that, of necessity, embraced working-class practices to survive and an aspiration to social advancement, especially through education. He worked hard to understand the limits, at times the lies and deceits, of Canadian liberal democracy as it expressed itself in British Columbia. Some parts of it he accepted as integral to himself, some he disdained. He professionally practised his belief that he was of the people, that he understood what it meant to work long hours in the interest of one's social betters – something that was often related through his memories of butchering and prepping Thanksgiving turkeys for Brandon's elite. In combining a visceral appreciation of working

people with his professorial achievements, he was able to reach broad audiences. He crafted stimulating lectures and selected engaging tutorial readings that let his students see themselves in Canada's past while challenging them to understand that seeing yourself does not always mean that you fit. Despite decades of working from an office in Buchanan Tower at the University of British Columbia, part of Bob would always feel a bit like the interloper from Brandon. Similarly, despite women and visible minorities checking all the required achievement boxes, British Columbia's governing class only slowly opened spaces for them in government, notwithstanding their citizenship, the franchise, their educational levels, and their growing presence in political movements.

In his professional work, Bob was assiduously intentional and thoughtful, spending long hours in his office to puzzle through a problem with a student's thesis, to finish the manuscript review that would make a new scholar's work publishable. Bob took years to write *A Long Way to Paradise*, in part because of those other professional commitments but also because he wanted to write a book that would engagingly and affectionately relate political history while still being a deeply critical assessment of settler political culture in British Columbia. In his own modest but determined way, Robert A.J. McDonald delivered a primer on what was wrong and right with the liberal political culture of British settler colonialism, which offered opportunities to millions but too often overreached or created casualties as it did so. He would want you to come away from reading it feeling unsettled, questioning the choices that have been made in our name, that we might have made ourselves. And we need to accept that *Paradise* is over the rainbow and that our political culture must adjust to that reality. Thank you, Bob, for such a bracing, yet humane, intervention. It's been a good last seminar.

"POLITICAL FAULT LINES": *A LONG WAY TO PARADISE* AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Will Langford

I was Bob McDonald's second-to-last master's student, and by the latter part of my degree, I lived within a block of him on West 13th Avenue in Vancouver. But it was still downright surprising the couple of times I ran into him on the street. Bob was *always* in his office on the UBC campus, by routine and by dedication. It was up in Buchanan Tower that you knew you could find him. And he was always willing and eager to talk. I came to know what colleagues and students long knew. With a

distinctive belly laugh and a mischievous twinkle in the eye, he went out of his way to be welcoming and to foster meaningful intellectual community. As Tina Loo recalls fondly in her preface to Bob's book, he exuberantly drew people into debate about history and politics.[9]

His experience writing *A Long Way to Paradise* was a little less joyful. It took him a long time – and he was self-conscious about how long it took. He didn't love all the material he thought he should include in a synthesis of BC political history. In a pre-emptive self-critique, Bob once told me that his approach to political history in this book was bound to be received as old-fashioned. Yet with the benefit of much time spent, Bob's book is careful and considered. It builds on his close reading of decades of BC historical scholarship. The arguments of other historians are handled with precise regard, often quoted and incorporated into his analysis. His own interpretations are subtle and nuanced.

In this essay, I explore part of what makes Bob's book significant: his approach to political ideology and polarization. Although unsure of whether he fully put the "new" in new political history, Bob was right to suggest that he has written "less a traditional story of political parties, elections, and great men than an exploration of the political culture that shaped them."[10] Disagreeing with the interpretation of some labour historians and political scientists, Bob argues that, while class difference was an essential dynamic of BC politics, the confrontation between capital and labour could not be mapped directly onto electoral politics. Across class lines, ideology was key to the "political fault lines" of a "polarized political culture."[11] Political ideology played a key role in shaping policies and, crucially, perspectives on the proper role of the state.[12] Throughout the book, Bob demonstrates how political ideologies shaped left/right political alignment over time. Yet, more than that, Bob emphasizes the internal tensions within ideologies as well as fruitfully explores how liberal, socialist, and conservative thinking often shared elements within BC political culture.

The book often focuses on legislators and legislation, and it takes politicians, political parties, and the state seriously. In the early chapters, through punchy biographies of selected politicians, Bob smuggles a lot of social context into the narrative.[13] Few extra-parliamentary activists

[9] Tina Loo, foreword to Robert A.J. McDonald, *A Long Way to Paradise: A New History of British Columbia Politics* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021), xi.
[10] McDonald, *A Long Way to Paradise,* 12.
[11] McDonald, 6.
[12] McDonald, 322.
[13] McDonald, e.g., 49–51 or 81–83.

receive comparable treatment (passages on suffrage activist Helen Gregory MacGill are a notable exception). Social movements and labour activism do grow in narrative importance by the middle of the book. Yet formal provincial politics and party leaders take precedence, as Bob privileges analyzing those men – and a few women – who shaped the government's ethos and directed the provincial state's activities. The emphasis placed on Harlan Brewster, Liberal premier for some sixteen months from September 1916 to May 1918, partly flows from Bob's approach to political history.

Yet Brewster is important in Bob's interpretation for another reason. *A Long Way to Paradise* is especially a history of the emergence of an activist state committed to social welfare. For Bob, Brewster was a harbinger of things to come, a premier steeped in "new liberalism" and willing to make legislative and administrative reforms suitable to modernizing the province. Bob's analysis remains critical yet approving, in line with his own belief in a liberal interventionist state.[14] Indeed, the book is most concerned with the two decades between 1952 and 1972, with Bob's emphasizing that a welfare state emerged by the mid-1960s.[15] At a conference several years ago, I talked with Bob about my plans to research the history of right-wing activism. He responded enthusiastically, and I was encouraged to think that I was onto something worthwhile. I think his response stemmed from his efforts to understand BC politics as a whole. He took conservatism, liberalism, and socialism all seriously. And political polarization is an important theme of his book.

Bob's account of when BC politics became polarized between left and right is a little inconclusive, even as he argues that the division itself was complex and changed over time.[16] From the 1900s to the 1960s, Bob demonstrates that an individualistic liberalism was challenged by a progressive liberalism concerned with greater social equity. Yet he is a little too eager to add "nineteenth-century" as an adjective to qualify "classical liberalism."[17] Indeed, far from consigning small-state, individualistic liberalism to the past, Bob's own analysis demonstrates its continued salience in the mid-twentieth century.

Though drawing a clear division between two liberalisms, he reserves the language of left and right for the statist versus anti-statist debates involving not just Liberals and Conservatives but also the CCF (and then the NDP) from the 1930s on. As well as describing a business-backed

[14] My thanks to Elizabeth Mancke for this observation.
[15] McDonald, *A Long Way to Paradise*, 246.
[16] McDonald, 220.
[17] McDonald, 294.

"right-wing view of modernity,"[18] Bob notes that the first election fired by anti-socialist rhetoric took place in 1933. He also stresses that the 1945 and 1949 elections, won by coalition governments, shaped a left/right axis.[19] Certainly, condemning compulsion, bureaucracy, and taxation, postwar Conservative leader Herbert Anscomb was quite willing to wear the label of right wing.[20] Elsewhere, Bob maintains that the significance of the 1952 election was the solidifying of left/right opposition, even though he demonstrates that the election campaign itself was not fought in those terms. More generally, he describes the entire 1930s to 1960s period as one of left/right polarization.[21]

Yet Bob's analysis is considerably richer than a simple account of left/right opposition (an ideological gulf, it appears, often stoked for effect at election time). He teases out the complexity in what he argues became a common pursuit of modernization. In characterizing modernization, Bob stresses a few things. There was the pursuit of economic development via resource extraction and industrialization; the professionalization and growing capacity of state administration, especially when that capacity was used to improve social provision; and the uneven eclipse of "parochialism" in provincial political culture.

Divergences emerged in how politicians tried to achieve said modernization. On the right, Bob provides a close reading of W.A.C. Bennett's ideology and policies. Bob tends to show that Bennett's views did not wholly align with either of the parties to which he belonged, first Conservative and then Social Credit. Bennett was tight-fisted with social spending, preoccupied with paying down the provincial debt, and eager to cast labour as a special interest group exerting intolerable political pressure.[22] Yet, while committed to small government, Bennett approved of state involvement in health insurance and felt that the state should also build dams and other infrastructure to boost provincial capitalism, thereby expanding industry, small business, and employment.[23] Bob argues that Bennett's commitments to entrepreneurialism, Presbyterian-inspired values like hard work, and British-Canadian identity remained consistent, yet his "flexibility led him to embrace modernization" and province building.[24] As Bradley Miller highlights in this forum, Bob manages to humanize the political thinking of politicians.

[18] McDonald, 120–23.
[19] McDonald, 313.
[20] McDonald, 202–03, 213–14.
[21] McDonald, 10.
[22] McDonald, 232.
[23] McDonald, 242.
[24] McDonald, 247–48.

On the left, Bob does much to parse the divisions within the CCF and the NDP. Ideology, personality, and class identity all mattered. Somewhat unfortunately, Bob probably hews too closely to the pejorative terms of the 1930s–1950s debate. He contrasts "doctrinaire" (or "theoretical") socialism with "pragmatic" (or "populist") socialism.[25] Yet the so-called "doctrinaire" Marxist socialists come across as deeply immersed in BC politics and material conditions. They responded to a political culture steeped in the pursuit of economic development and applied a Marxist analysis to a resource economy marked by deep class inequalities. Looking to eradicate capitalism by democratic means, they sought an alternative form of economic development, rooted in social ownership of land and the cooperative extraction of timber, water, and mineral resources.[26] Bob does not similarly charge Fabian socialists with holding a doctrine or theoretical perspective.[27] Here, in singling out the further-left ideology as a doctrine, I think Bob reproduces the assumptions of the more recent NDP, a party in whose politics he was well-versed. Later chapters describe the conflicts on the left as opposing "moderates" and "radicals," terms that might have been applied to the earlier period as well.

A Long Way to Paradise also wrestles with the history of liberalism in settler colonial British Columbia. In the introduction, Bob suggests that the three core values of liberalism are individual liberty, economic prosperity, and equality.[28] A footnote adds that, while largely accepting historian Ian McKay's "liberal order framework," Bob substitutes "equality" where McKay uses "property."[29] I find it striking that Bob's account often hinges on the questions of both property and equality.

Influenced by recent scholarship on settler colonialism and applying Edwin Black's 1968 description of "frontier politics," Bob stresses that BC politics was a white settler politics concerned with "settler development."[30] The book demonstrates that raw dispossession of Indigenous Peoples, resource exploitation, and industrial development were ongoing, involving the labours of many, as well as capital big and small. The enclosure of Indigenous lands was such that railway companies were handed huge concessions, wealthy investors established vast

[25] McDonald, e.g., 154.
[26] McDonald, 230.
[27] McDonald, 260.
[28] McDonald, 8.
[29] McDonald, 326n9.
[30] McDonald, 195, 336n3. See Edwin R. Black, "British Columbia: The Politics of Exploitation," in *Exploiting Our Economic Potential: Public Policy and the British Columbia Economy*, ed. Ronald A. Shear (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston of Canada, 1968), 23–41.

interior ranches, forestry corporations profited off the commodification of timber resources, and mining interests acquired water rights and benefited from new dams. But individuals could pre-empt or buy their own piece. Labourers could participate in militant unionism or back socialism, just as they could hold everyman aspirations to small property owning and the enjoyment of the fruits of one's own independent labour.[31]

From one angle, liberals in Bob's account were ideologically progressive to the extent that they proposed restricting monopoly capitalism, and populist to the extent that they appealed to the small property holder. Socialists were moderate or radical according to what extent they advocated public ownership and the eradication of private property and capitalism.[32]

In also paying attention to equality, Bob stresses the expansion of social citizenship more than the advance of labour rights or the democratization of political rights. Harlan Brewster features as an advocate of "orderly reform" and patronage-free government, though it is noted that his support of suffrage and parental rights for women coexisted with his anti-Asian militancy.[33] As Bob notes, the first BC legislature dispensed with property qualifications on male voting while disenfranchising Chinese and Indigenous Peoples, whose voting rights were restored only in the late 1940s. But his central focus is how new social legislation and increased social spending slowly expanded social citizenship. For liberals, debate turned on what measure of social security and redistribution was needed to preserve capitalism (none, said some). Somewhat differently, for socialists interested in human rights and equality, the question was whether a social minimum was an immediate or secondary concern, given the structural inequalities of the economic system. Suggesting the emergence of a synthesis in the 1960s, Bob asserts that the NDP mixed "new liberalism and pragmatic socialism."[34] In the larger frame, the book charts the emergence of new attitudes concerning government as well as interventionist uses of the state, changes Bob felt were for the better.

Bob has written an insightful history of BC politics that engages in a sustained way with political ideology. *A Long Way to Paradise* is a worthy winner of the Canadian Historical Association's Clio Prize for BC History.

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[31] McDonald, *A Long Way to Paradise*, 115.
[32] McDonald, e.g., 152–54, 201, 254, 261.
[33] McDonald, 99–102.
[34] McDonald, 10.

THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF *PARADISE*

Bradley Miller

Not long before Bob McDonald died, his department at UBC had a party to celebrate the end of the school year. The department head gave a brief talk in which he listed some of the faculty's accomplishments – prizes, grants, and a few published articles and new books. At the end of this list, he added with a smile that our emeritus colleague Bob McDonald had finally finished writing his long-awaited history of BC politics and had submitted it for publication. Bob was wearing a bright crimson sweater and, as the room exploded into prolonged applause, his face reddened to the point at which he matched it.

That moment is a cherished memory of Bob – embarrassed at the attention but joyful in his own modest way at having achieved something a long time in coming and worth the wait.

A Long Way to Paradise is a masterful book. Smart and sweeping, it makes a really important point about the power of ideology in politics backed up by Bob's skilful engagement with a vast amount of scholarship on British Columbia and lots of his own original research. It's also eloquent and accessible, and it will appeal to everyone from experts on provincial politics to those who don't yet know the difference between the provincial and federal Liberals or between Vancouver and Vancouver Island. In other words, it richly rewards the years that Bob put into it, working away in his office at the top of Buchanan Tower at UBC. Whether we knew him or not, Bob has given all of us something remarkable to remember him by.

Although the subtitle of the book describes it as a "new history of British Columbia politics," Bob makes his focus more precise in the introduction, where he says that the book "is less a traditional story of political parties, elections, and great men than an exploration of the political culture that shaped them."[35] This essay focuses on how Bob conceives of and uses this idea of political culture.

Bob doesn't define political culture in the book. Perhaps as part of his desire to make it accessible, he stayed away from slathering it with methodology, theory, and historiography. But in a 2006 *BC Studies* piece he quoted UBC political scientist David Elkins, who defined the concept as "a framework for action rather than a set of specific actions or beliefs.

[35] McDonald, 12.

It consists of the largely unspoken assumptions about the world so 'taken for granted' most of the time that they have become 'second nature.'"[36]

In important ways, that definition helps us understand what Bob does in *A Long Way to Paradise*. One of his main arguments is that, while key events in BC political history have often been explained in terms of class conflict, ideology mattered even more. As he puts it, "ideology lies at the heart of the province's political fault lines," making it one of the core ingredients of political culture.[37] In particular, the essential, "taken for granted" ideology in British Columbia was liberalism, which in its various and changing forms was what Bob calls "the bedrock common sense" of political culture across the century that he examines.[38] To be clear, not everyone in British Columbia was a liberal – not everyone liked its classical formula of private property, private enterprise, individualism, and small government. But liberalism was powerful enough in the province that it formed a baseline set of beliefs for most of the settler population regarding the role and operation of government, while its opponents failed to win much public support for governance based on fundamentally different principles. As Bob shows, liberalism was also malleable enough that its classical emphasis on small government could be modified by twentieth-century "new liberals," who injected an expanded role for an activist state without disturbing its other core elements.

In this sense, the book is an intellectual history. But Bob is not very interested in the abstract intellectual lineages of these notions or how they were developed or refined by philosophers, theorists, or global statesmen outside of British Columbia. What matters here is how and when these ideas affected politics in the province and how they shaped the divisions between political figures as they fought for power – how they became a "framework for action," in Elkins's words. Bob isn't very interesting in categorizing the ideas wielded by these figures, except when such categories help us understand how people participated in that fight and why some ideas had more practical power than others.

Moreover, Bob avoids one of the challenges of intellectual history, which might have swallowed much of the book and diverted his focus, by not trying to show that the political figures he profiles were

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[36] David Elkins, "British Columbia as a State of Mind," in *Two Political Minds: Parties and Voting in British Columbia*, ed. Donald E. Blake (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1985), 53, quoted in Robert A.J. McDonald, "Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper and the Political Culture of British Columbia, 1903–1924," *BC Studies* 149 (Spring 2006): 65.

[37] McDonald, *A Long Way to Paradise*, 6.

[38] McDonald, 11.

self-conscious philosophers browsing the works of Mill or Gladstone as they decided how to vote in the provincial legislature. In his depiction, not all approaches to politics were intellectually developed in the sense of having been chosen rationally from among all possible viewpoints. Bob doesn't make this claim. Instead, he often mentions people's backgrounds as helping to determine the way that they approached politics and government while also showing how, once their approach was settled and their views formed, ideas spawned other ideas and policies spawned other policies. The through line between them was ideology, and this ideology was usually liberalism.

Bob's treatment of Social Credit premier W.A.C. Bennett, who is often described as a conservative, is a good example. He establishes the origins of Bennett's political consciousness by reviewing his family history, describing the "strong Anglo-Canadian roots, deep religious beliefs, firm commitment to small-town family life, and an enthusiasm for free enterprise that reflected the values of Main Street not Wall Street" that were implanted in Bennett at a young age.[39] Bob doesn't deny that pragmatism and partisan self-interest played some role in Bennett's decision making as premier, including in his government's expansion of public funding for health care and in the huge hydroelectric dam projects that might seem inconsistent with the small-government principles implanted by the Bennett family background. But Bob nonetheless illustrates an intellectual consistency in Bennett's views, writing that the premier's enduring "belief in entrepreneurial capitalism as the road to progress was consistent with the nineteenth-century liberal values that underpinned his conservatism; these beliefs and values freed him to employ the state to build job-creating infrastructure."[40]

The subtlety of this approach – the way that Bob humanizes political thought – mirrors Elkins's notion of political culture as embodying the "largely unspoken assumptions about the world … 'taken for granted' most of the time." Bob frequently does this by describing what he calls "impulses" in politics and policy-making. He describes the "democratic impulse" associated with Confederation-era premiers Amor De Cosmos and George Anthony Walkem, which led to the establishment of responsible government and fuelled the first of British Columbia's fights with Ottawa over federalism.[41] He describes the "reform impulse," embodied by early twentieth-century Liberal premier Harlan Brewster,

[39] McDonald, 225.
[40] McDonald, 247–48.
[41] McDonald, 38.

that attacked the patronage system, began the professionalization of the civil service, and helped achieve women's suffrage.[42] And he describes in detail the increasingly powerful "modernizing impulse" that drove generations of political figures like Bennett to undertake massive road- and railway-building projects as well as dams.[43] These impulses certainly reflected big-picture political views about the role and operation of government, but what Bob cares about is that they also illustrated a political common sense and a set of assumptions that had a tangible impact on state action in British Columbia.

The people Bob examines in exploring political culture aren't just premiers, cabinet ministers, and party leaders. We meet suffragettes like Evlyn Farris, a Vancouver political insider who is said to have brought Brewster around to supporting votes for women, and Helen Gregory MacGill, who helped weave equal rights for women into the reform impulse that Bob describes.[44] We also meet backbench MLA's, some of whom Bob uses to illustrate the enduring power of what he calls local "parochialism" in provincial political culture. These include the Port Alberni Liberal Richard J. Burde, who campaigned for the rights of white male lumber workers and against the participation of Asians in the industry. While his politics was "starkly racist," he also wielded regional divides, mobilizing anxiety in his part of the province at the growing power of Vancouver and Victoria and at the emerging power of university-educated urban professionals in public policy.[45] We also meet party activists, many of whom Bob uses to illustrate the fierce tensions within, and not just between, political parties. These include UBC political science professor Walter Young, member of what one leader called the "egghead wing" of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, the more radical forerunner of the NDP. As Bob notes, Young was part of a group of policy experts who fought inside the party "to reconceptualise the socialist CCF as the social democratic NDP."[46]

So, it's not all premiers and party leaders. But, as these examples show, he doesn't stray all that far from the halls of power. For example, there's little discussion here of far-right movements, though he does devote some space to exploring the far left, including the ideas of a few very illiberal revolutionary socialists who struggled in vain to convince their comrades that the state should seize the means of production by force

[42] McDonald, 105.
[43] See, for example, McDonald, 107, 127, 195, 255.
[44] McDonald, 89–107.
[45] McDonald, 116.
[46] McDonald, 260.

and without compensation. We meet almost no radical activists working outside of political parties and very few Indigenous people advocating for their land rights or sovereignty. These aren't oversights on Bob's behalf; rather, their absence illustrates that, in thinking about political culture as a "framework for action," he's interested in the action of the provincial state and those who shaped it. No one is guaranteed a place in Bob's political culture except with regard to when and how they actually exerted an influence on that action.

This may strike some readers as under-inclusive, as Elizabeth Mancke notes in this forum. Bob was keenly aware that future historians might use this to argue that their particular group or theme of interest had been wrongly ignored by establishment scholarship. However, I see it as typical of the disciplined way in which Bob framed political culture. For example, one component of political culture in the book is what Bob saw as period-specific issues debated in the province. As a result, race and gender matter mostly only insofar as they were issues on the mainstream political agenda that defined the parameters and fault lines of politics: when suffragists successfully waged their campaign and when whiteness and anti-Asian racism were wildly popular among those who were allowed to vote, Bob covers them. Once those issues dropped in prominence and influence, race and gender mostly vanish from the book. In short, they are not continuing categories of analysis; for a different scholar, they might be.

Still, I do think there are some gaps in Bob's version of political culture. Federalism, for example, is touched on several times but doesn't get the prominence that it probably deserves as an enduring organizing force in provincial politics. The division of powers in the British North America Act, 1867, set the parameters for what provincial states could do, making it essential to the common sense of government. The continual fights over what those constitutional terms meant has framed politics across the country almost since the moment of Confederation. Even more important, Bob pays almost no attention to the news media. There's almost nothing in his book on newspapers and their partisan alignments, their role in disseminating political ideas to people throughout the province, the relationship between local papers and regional parochialism, or the impact of the press on state action. Nor is there much mention of radio or television once those media appeared and the faces and voices of BC political figures were brought directly into the homes of voters. This strikes me as a crucial ingredient of political culture even in the constrained and disciplined sense in which Bob applies the concept.

I wish Bob were here to receive this praise and these critiques. I bet he'd start off red-faced and embarrassed at the compliments, as he was that day at the UBC party. But, as just about everyone in this forum agrees, he'd quickly throw himself into the fight, pushing back in the most emphatic terms where he thought I and the rest of his readers had got it wrong. As his friend and colleague Tina Loo writes in her foreword to the book, Bob loved to stir things up in rigorous, rollicking discussions. "It was his way of working out ideas – his and yours, whether you wanted to or not," she observes.[47] That he isn't here to do that is a tragedy, but at least we have *A Long Way to Paradise* to remember him by.

CHALLENGING THE STATE: WOMEN, GENDER, AND THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Lara Campbell

When I began writing a book on the history of women and the vote in British Columbia, Bob McDonald and I began an ongoing conversation about the histories of women, gender, and politics in the province. Conversations with Bob often merged into passionate but good-natured arguments, and they left me thinking more rigorously about how to assess women's role in building the political culture of the province. Bob was a generous and supportive scholar, and never afraid to ask his friends, colleagues, and students questions about the nature of historical evidence and interpretation. These conversations helped me grapple with one of the foundational questions of my project: How can historians write women into the formal political history of a place when that place excluded them from political citizenship?[48]

Bob would have been the first to say that *A Long Way to Paradise* was not intended to be a history of women or gender in British Columbia. He wanted to tell a story that inspired readers to think expansively about how the political culture of British Columbia was forged, and the book achieves that vision: it is a powerful synthesis exploring the intersection of ideology and formal politics over a century of the province's history. McDonald argues that ideological frameworks concerning the function

[47] Tina Loo, foreword to McDonald, xi.

[48] On gender, women, and history in British Columbia, see Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849–1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Adele Perry, "Feminism, History, and Writing British Columbia's Past," *Atlantis* 25, no. 1 (2000): 60–74.

and responsibilities of the state drove political shifts in the province and that these political ideologies were shaped, in turn, by region, class, race, and ideas about progress and modernity. If there is a central axis on which the book turns, it is the election of the Liberal Party in 1916, which McDonald calls the "jumping-off point" for understanding how changing ideologies – in this case, the interventionist reform politics of new liberalism – laid the groundwork for an emerging welfare state.[49] McDonald identifies liberalism as the foundational political ideology of the province, but his approach to understanding liberalism is nuanced and attentive to the way it changed and adapted over time.[50]

Although *A Long Way to Paradise* does not foreground gender as a category of analysis, McDonald's story of British Columbia's shifting political culture suggests multiple ways of integrating histories of feminist activism into the political history of the province. First, McDonald positions pre-franchise feminist social reformers as political actors in a modernizing province, arguing that suffragists and their supporters played a "key role in challenging laissez-fare assumptions" about the state.[51] This argument not only opens an opportunity to trace how political women were central to the rise of new liberalism but also raises deeper questions about how feminist women's collective and relational understanding of equality and justice simultaneously embraced *and* challenged the theoretical underpinnings of the liberal order they were attempting to enter. Second, McDonald's sharp focus on the role of political actors on the state and his interest in socialist and social democratic politics allows him to explore progressive women's political influence in the interwar and post-franchise years. In so doing, however, he raises unanswered questions about how lingering pre-franchise political cultures of non-partisanship played out in highly partisan times.

Challenging Liberalism

As one of many politically marginalized groups, white settler women tried to force their way into the liberal order through lobbying, education, and other forms of democratic protest. Pre-franchise feminist social reformers shared similar values with others critical of the "established political and social order": politicians who imagined a wider popular democracy that included larger numbers of white settler men; labour organizations that asserted a labour value of wealth; socialist politicians

[49] McDonald, *A Long Way to Paradise*, 7.
[50] McDonald, 13, 8.
[51] McDonald, 13.

who aimed to abolish capitalism but also supported reforms to improve working-class living and workplace conditions.[52]

But as much as suffragists shared values with those who challenged exclusion and wealth accumulation, McDonald rightly points to the "distinctly masculine" political culture of the province.[53] There was little room, for example, in the "most widely debated reform of the period" – the single tax idea of Henry George – to engage with the complexities of women's political, economic, and legal subordination. George's argument that "wealth resided in land" and that land "belonged equally to all members of society" challenged some principles of private property but neither understood Indigenous claims to territory nor took seriously women's exclusion from inheritance, wages, and property.[54] And although worker-led resistance to wealth accumulation was supported by sympathetic women – reformer and suffragist Mary Ann Cunningham's support of the Nanaimo Workingman's platform in the 1890s comes to mind – most labour politicians had limited space for women.[55] White settler women were not understood as the autonomous rights holders or independent persons that underpinned both classical liberalism and the ideologies that challenged it: rather, they were understood as relational beings who held particular reproductive, familial, and cultural value. Those without that fundamental personhood – immigrants from Asia, Indigenous people, and, to a lesser extent, Eastern European men – were also excluded from liberal politics. However, the latter were excluded in different ways from white settler women because they were imagined neither as relational beings encoded in the family fabric that shored up the nation nor as independent persons capable of rational political engagement. When political women positioned themselves as inheritors of British values and traditions, they were aligning themselves with the settler colonial "Angloworld" that McDonald identifies as central to BC history, but they were also rejecting the non-personhood encoded in the bodies of racial and ethnic "others."[56]

McDonald's argument about the central and linked role of reform and suffrage opens an opportunity to think more deeply about how women

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[52] McDonald, 47.

[53] McDonald, 13.

[54] McDonald, 48. On George's impact, see Eric W. Sager, *Inequality in Canada: The History and Politics of an Idea* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2020).

[55] *Vancouver Daily World,* 9 March 1894, 4.

[56] McDonald, *A Long Way to Paradise,* 27; Lara Campbell, *A Great Revolutionary Wave: Women and the Vote in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2020), 117–41. On race and Britishness in the West, see Sarah Carter, *Imperial Plots: Women, Land, and the Spadework of British Colonialism on the Canadian Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016).

intentionally and unintentionally challenged aspects of the liberal order they were attempting to enter. As a result of their political exclusion and their relational positionality, settler women made arguments for equality that sounded different from those made by men – whether those men argued from a liberal, a social democratic, or a socialist standpoint. At times, political women's claims to equality embraced the liberal language of autonomy, independence, and democratic representation. Political women spoke of breaking the chains of bondage and dependence, the importance of being recognized as rational beings, and the necessity of political representation and equality before the law. "Since I am man's equal *under* the law, then surely I should be his equal *before* the law," argued teacher, writer, and suffragist Agnes Deans Cameron in 1895.[57]

McDonald's assertion that suffragist reformers were central to the political culture of British Columbia raises the prospect that some of the earliest challenges to liberal individualism emerged from women's organizations and opens possibilities for understanding their influence beyond the boundaries of his book. Because women existed within a system that emphasized their primary role in reproduction, their arguments were more powerful when made on the basis of a collective identity of womanhood rooted in relational experiences and identities as mothers, daughters, and wives. Even as they made claims to liberal rights – to vote, to hold property and guardianship of their children, and to have access to paid labour – their language simultaneously challenged the centrality of the individual and elevated the collective. When suffrage women spoke of "degradation," for example, they were not referring solely to harm inflicted by individual men but to harm resulting from structural inequality. After the turn of the century, suffragists like Marxist-feminist Bertha Merrill Burns and labour organizer Helena Gutteridge used this term to link the economic harm of capitalist inequality to the prevalence of sex work. Social gospel suffragist Florence Hall understood degradation and harm in the context of progressive Christianity, which saw men's grip on power as a perversion of the divine's desire for equality. And when suffragists spoke of breaking the "chains" of bondage and dependence, their language invoked abolitionist movements against slavery, the liberalism of John Stuart Mill, emerging ideas about progress and cultural modernity, and Marxist theories of historical development. Vancouver socialist Nora Tutty rewrote the words of Marx in the populist liberal *Vancouver Daily World* in 1913, urging women to push harder for the franchise: "Delay no longer! ... You have a world to win; You have

[57] *Daily Colonist*, 28 May 1895, 5.

nothing to lose but your chains."[58] Even as political women pushed to expand the boundaries of liberalism they introduced ways of destabilizing some of its foundational principles.

Political women adopted language that reflected their sense of themselves as both individuals *and* relational beings. Suffragists held individual and collective identity in unresolved tension: the desire to be recognized as individuals and intelligent beings (just like/as men) and as embodied and gendered beings with unique responsibilities and experiences. This interplay between sameness/difference has long marked feminist thought, and we see it slowly unfolding in suffrage and reform circles beginning in the late nineteenth century.[59] The unfolding of this debate reflects an attempt to uphold the collective dignity of womanhood while recognizing the limits associated with embracing it too tightly. In suffrage political thought, women were individuals deserving of dignity who had been devalued because of their gender, caregivers without the power to influence policies that affected the lives of those they cared for, workers denied the ability to live with independence and bodily integrity. They approached the question of equality not just as individuals gaining access to sets of rights but as whole people with obligations and interdependencies shaped by connections of care. If historians take seriously McDonald's argument that a key provincial turning point was Harlan Brewster's' election in 1916 – and that his victory was a product of the powerful "link between social reform and suffrage activism, a link that ultimately set the stage for the welfare state"– then political women were more central to the rise of new liberalism and welfare state politics than they have been given credit for.[60]

Political Action, Political Parties, and Non-Partisanship

As other authors in this forum have pointed out, *A Long Way to Paradise* is most interested in tracing the influence of political actors on the state. Without access to liberal democratic forms of political power, it is not

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[58] Nora Tutty, *Vancouver Daily World*, 2 July 1913, 7. On progress, modernity, and civilization, see Ann Towns, "The Status of Women as a Standard of 'Civilization,'" *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 4 (2009): 681–706; Peter Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for Third Way* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); Lara Campbell, "Modernity and Progress: The Transnational Politics of Suffrage in British Columbia, 1910–1916," *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice* 41, no.1 (2020): 90–104.

[59] Ann Snitow, *The Feminism of Uncertainty: A Gender Diary* (Durham, ND: Duke University Press, 2015); Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (1988): 32–50.

[60] McDonald, *A Long Way to Paradise*, 13.

surprising that settler women appear more frequently in the book after franchise legislation of 1917. McDonald introduces Mary Ellen Smith and Helen Gregory MacGill, Liberal partisans who engaged with new possibilities of political power open to certain white settler women in the post-suffrage world. The book captures the sense of possibility surrounding the five serving female MLAs in the 1940s (Dorothy Steeves, Laura Jamieson, Grace MacInnis, Nancy Hodges, and Tilly Rolston), showing how they had differing ideological beliefs but shared common interests in increased spending on social services.[61] McDonald's extensive profiles of CCF MLAs Steeves, Jamieson, and MacInnes reflect his interest in exploring the permeable boundaries between liberalism, social democracy, and socialism. The founding of the CCF made space for progressive women to bring feminist insights to questions about economic reform and social welfare. He positions the three CCF women as important political actors at a time when the interwar left was growing in popularity and influence but just as the Liberal-Conservative coalition emerged to limit its power. By highlighting their differing personal and intellectual approaches to doing politics, McDonald shows how a range of competing political ideologies existed – sometimes precariously – within one party.

A focus on formal politics, however, minimizes the importance of non-partisanship, which was central to suffrage organizing and remained part of women's political culture into the 1920s. As settler women attempted to enter the political sphere, many of them did so in ways that retained a commitment to compromise and cooperation. Suffrage-era non-partisanship was premised on beliefs that traditional parties functioned in the interests of men, and it was forged by interactions with a gendered political system that did not prioritize the needs of women. Some leading suffragists refused to join existing parties, ran for office as Independents, or pondered the possibility of a woman-centred party that crossed partisan divides. Liberal partisans like MacGill and Mary Ellen Smith worked across party lines over their careers, and leading political women belonged to multiple organizations to create leverage for women's rights.[62] Helena Gutteridge, for example, worked with socialist organizers, the Trades and Labour Council, the Local Council of Women, the Political Equality League, and her own working-class Woman's Suffrage League. In the lead-up to the 1916 provincial election

[61] McDonald, 183. On Jamieson, see Veronica Strong-Boag, *The Last Suffragist Standing*: *The Life and Times of Laura Marshall Jamieson* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018).

[62] On Mary Ellen Smith, see Veronica Strong-Boag, *A Liberal-Labour Lady: The Times and Life of Mary Ellen Spear Smith* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021).

and suffrage referendum, she (and other women) shared the stage with liberals, conservatives, and socialists at rallies across the province. She refused to join a political party until the formation of the CCF, under whose banner she ran for office as Vancouver's first female councillor.[63] This suspicion of party politics perhaps limited women's political influence in the post-franchise years, and it was ultimately within formal parties that they gained access to political power in greater numbers. McDonald's book unintentionally demonstrates how difficult it was for women to wield power outside of the formal political system, and it shows how those excluded from power became more intelligible as political actors when they worked within it.

In the spirit of a good conversation (and a good argument), *A Long Way to Paradise* raises as many questions as it answers. For example, it explores the thread of populism in the province, showing how it functioned in socialist, social democratic, and conservative politics. Political women often embraced this populism to criticize unregulated capitalism and profit imperatives, but it does not seem that feminist populism survived the Social Credit years. The book attends carefully to postwar Indigenous politicians like Frank Calder, organizations like the Native Brotherhood, and supporters of Indigenous rights like labour lawyer Tom Berger. But, as a result of both sexism and colonialism, Indigenous women were generally excluded from more mainstream settler and Indigenous political organizations. Sarah Nickel shows that Indigenous women in British Columbia were political actors, but it is important to recognize that their disenfranchisement means that they (and their organizations) are less visible within a synthetic political history.[64] Finally, McDonald's analysis of populism and modernity might look different if women's relationship to both were positioned at the centre of the story. Populists are often understood as resisting modernization, centralization, and technocracy. But, in British Columbia, feminist populists embraced modernization and technocratic expertise in the provision of health and welfare. In an era of high infant and maternal mortality, embracing modern disease control and scientific progress was a response to corporeal experiences of pain and suffering. The language of expertise strengthened the professionalization of the civil service and contributed to the growth of a

[63] Irene Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice in British Columbia: Helena Gutteridge, the Unknown Reformer* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992).

[64] Sarah Nickel, "'I Am Not a Women's Libber although Sometimes I Sound Like One': Indigenous Feminism and Politicized Motherhood," *American Indian Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (2017): 299–335; Sarah Nickel, "'A Genuine Revolution': Transracial Gendered Relationships During International Women's Year, 1975," https://shekonneechie.ca/2019/03/21/a-genuine-revolution-transracial-gendered-relationships-during-international-womens-year-1975/.

welfare state bureaucracy, which, in turn, challenged male-dominated patronage politics and created employment opportunities for a wider range of settler women.[65]

All good books ask complicated questions. The unanswered questions of *A Long Way to Paradise* mean that Bob's work and ideas will remain part of a complex and ongoing historiographical conversation. Those of us who had the privilege of being Bob's friends, students, and colleagues know that he would have loved arguing and countering every challenge to his historical interpretations. The book reflects his life-long desire to be open to new ideas and approaches to doing history, to engage in good faith with those who disagreed with him, and to keep the doors of the profession open so that new people would tell different stories about British Columbia's past and, in turn, reshape its future.

GETTING TO PARADISE: BOB MCDONALD'S HISTORY OF THE JOURNEY

Jeremy Mouat

I found it hard to read *A Long Way to Paradise* without recalling conversations about the book-in-progress with Bob, in person and via email. In fact, one of the last emails I received from him included a copy of chapter 9 from the book. Earlier, I had sent him a piece that I had written on the Columbia River treaty. In his email, Bob noted where we agreed on our assessment of W.A.C. Bennett's time as premier as well as where we disagreed. (He included the relevant page numbers from both works.) Bob admitted that he had ducked "the question of how effective Bennett's policy was as an industrial strategy," something in which I was quite interested, although he added that he was interested "in the politics of the issue … and here I have come to a somewhat different conclusion about the opposition to Bennett's Columbia River policy." Bob's careful summary, followed by reasoned disagreement, was typical of the exchanges that we had over the years. In person, these conversations would often be accompanied by good-humoured teasing and laughter.

I first met Bob in September 1982, when I began doctoral studies at UBC. I was not long returned from New Zealand, where I had lived for close to a decade (and had completed a BA and MA in history). I had a

[65] See Margaret Little, "Claiming a Unique Place: The Introduction of Mothers' Pension in BC," *BC Studies* 105/106 (Spring/Summer 1995): 80–102; Lisa Pasolli, *Working Mothers and the Child Care Dilemma: A History of British Columbia's Social Policy* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015).

vague plan to undertake a comparative study for my dissertation, looking at three communities, one each in New Zealand, Australia, and western Canada. Ironically, the place I knew least about was British Columbia, where I had been born. To overcome this gap in my knowledge, I enrolled in Bob's fourth-year undergraduate class on BC history. I could not have had a better introduction to the topic.

Bob's classes reflected his dedication to teaching. The BC course included two lectures as well as a weekly seminar. Upon entering the classroom for the lectures, Bob would write his key points on the whiteboard. Once he had performed this stage-setting, he would turn to face the class and begin. But the highlight of the course (at least as far as I was concerned) was the seminar, where we discussed the assigned readings. Bob would sit at the table with us, no longer the voice of authority speaking from the podium. There was, however, a quid pro quo: we had to come prepared. This meant bringing a note card summarizing the reading. No one attended the seminars without the note card, an assignment calculated to ensure that we had all done the reading.

Inevitably, Bob's insistent question dominated each seminar: "but what's the thesis?" His eyes would dart around the table, seeking a response from someone, anyone. My fellow students were a good deal younger than I, and a good deal more intimidated by the prospect of having to respond to Bob's question. Often, they would look at me with a hint of pleading in their eyes, hoping I might bail them out. Although I tried to bite my tongue, the seminar at times did come close to being a conversation between Bob and me, a thoughtful teacher and an overconfident grad student. Thus my note card on Peter Ward's *White Canada Forever* concluded airily that the author "has described racism in BC but … has not explained it." Bob gave me an "A," although his written comments on the card suggest that he was not wholly convinced: "The examples you give are all economic ones. But do economic tensions explain all outbursts of racism & particularly its persistence over a long period of BC history?"[66]

Reading *A Long Way to Paradise* reminded me of that class, not least because Bob cited the essay that I had written for it. It was not my best work, but Bob's familiarity with and willingness to cite his students' contributions was very much in character. The book is similar to the class in other and more fundamental ways. For one thing, Bob argues

[66] Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy towards Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978). The quotations are my original comments in the note card, followed by Bob's (underlining in the original).

that previous scholars have been wrong to reduce so many foundational dimensions of BC politics to economic issues or class tensions – just as he did when challenging my summary of Ward's book. *A Long Way to Paradise* also reflects the care and dedication that Bob brought to the study of history in the classroom. As with those lectures and seminars I attended long ago, the analysis in the book is astutely developed chapter by chapter, and each concludes with a final paragraph elaborating Bob's thesis.

Thinking back to those times at UBC in the 1980s, I am struck by the diverse currents that then seemed to be swirling around Point Grey. New histories were being written, work that challenged earlier accounts. The reading lists for graduate seminars included books like Robin Fisher's *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774–1890* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977) and Ward's *White Canada Forever* as well as a growing number of articles and theses that stressed the need to deal seriously with the role of race, class, and gender in the province's past. The book of readings that Bob co-edited with Peter Ward in 1981 reflected this new turn in the province's historiography.[67] Argument and controversy accompanied the mounting challenges to the existing literature, although Bob managed to chart a middle way, always congenial, no matter how heated the discussions might become. His 1981 book chapter, "Victoria, Vancouver, and the Evolution of British Columbia's Economic System, 1886–1914," was illustrative of the approach he followed, carefully and dispassionately assembling the evidence that explained Vancouver's rise and why this was accompanied by Victoria's decline. An important contribution to the province's economic history, it anticipated similar and similarly important pieces that Bob would go on to write.[68] In all of this work, Bob was never overtly partisan, and his even-handedness is a considerable strength of *A Long Way to Paradise*. I can think of no one else capable of writing a book on the province's fractious political history that could include on its back cover ringing endorsements not only from a central Canadian historian but also from the province's leading political journalist and prominent BC politicians of both major parties.

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[67] W. Peter Ward and Robert A.J. McDonald, comps. and eds., *British Columbia: Historical Readings* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1981).

[68] The piece was published first in Alan Artibise's edited collection, *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1981), but was also reprinted that same year in W. Peter Ward and Robert A.J. McDonald's *British Columbia: Historical Readings*. Campbell's "In Memory: The Legacy of Bob McDonald," lists Bob's numerous important articles.

When I arrived at UBC, my own interests were largely grounded in labour history, like many others in that period, influenced by the work of E.P. Thompson. Contemporary British Columbia had its own dynamic labour history, of course, a point that the 1983 Solidarity strike drove home. Around that time a group of graduate students and faculty from Simon Fraser University and UBC, as well as other colleagues, formed an ad hoc labour history reading group. The group – most of its members, at any rate – soon took on a related project: to produce a commemorative volume for the upcoming centenary of the city of Vancouver, a book that would acknowledge the people whose lives were central to the city's history. It was published in late 1985 with the title *Working Lives: Vancouver, 1886–1986* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1985). Bob wrote some key parts of the book, and, while I don't think he ever considered himself a labour historian, he was becoming increasingly interested in how class had functioned in British Columbia generally and in Vancouver in particular. His 1984 article on Stanley Park is illustrative of the direction in which he was moving.[69]

Much of the descriptive detail and analysis in the first five chapters of *A Long Way to Paradise* reflects Bob's extensive research on businesspeople and politicians that began with his doctoral work in the mid-1970s. He and I had numerous conversations about class, especially about how best to understand the ambiguous position of BC labour politicians like Ralph Smith and George Maxwell, both of whom were (at least nominally) Liberals. A jointly written entry on Maxwell for the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* was one consequence of our exchanges.

While we certainly agreed on many things, we disagreed on others. I regret that I'll miss the chance to tease Bob about the book, to push him to defend some claims and to justify some notable omissions. I have already noted our differences when it comes to assessing the political career of W.A.C. Bennett. My own view remains that Bennett was far more a political opportunist than he was the dynamic visionary, as Bob often depicts him. Consider, for example, his government's enthusiasm for the Kaiser Corporation's offer to build a "free" dam on the Columbia River in 1954. The project's putative advantages were a good deal less compelling than Bob's account suggests.[70] As the legal scholar Charles B. Bourne pointed out, Kaiser would use the cheap power generated by the project "to manufacture aluminum … within the protective tariff walls of

[69] Robert A.J. McDonald, "'Holy Retreat' or 'Practical Breathing Spot'? Class Perceptions of Vancouver's Stanley Park, 1910–1913," *Canadian Historical Review* 65 (1984): 127–53.

[70] McDonald, *Long Way to Paradise*, 237–38. Bob errs in locating the project at Mica Creek rather than the Arrow Lakes.

the United States, [and] would therefore be highly competitive with the Canadian aluminum manufactured at Kitimat, British Columbia … If one viewed it in the broader context of the economy of British Columbia and of Canada as a whole, it became clear that it would expose British Columbia's aluminum industry to damaging competition." In light of this, Bourne concluded that the federal government's opposition to the project was hardly surprising.[71]

I don't dispute the larger point that Bob is making about Bennett and his commitment to dam-building; I agree that "hydroelectric development was the most prominent manifestation of the high modernist impulse."[72] But I do not think this was as carefully planned as Bob implies, nor was the focus only on dams. The creation of the BC Ferry system was an excellent example of the kind of politics in which Bennett excelled, although Bob has little to say about this in *A Long Way to Paradise*.[73] This seems a curious omission. In terms of the Socred government's success with province-building, I would argue that the ferries that linked the Lower Mainland to Vancouver Island were at least as significant as the new interior highways. It certainly seemed so at the time. Through the fateful summer of 1972 I worked as a dining-room steward on one of the ferries, the *Queen of Saanich*. With the election campaign going full tilt, Bennett was a frequent passenger on the ferry as he headed back and forth between the mainland and Vancouver Island. He often came into the dining room, where he would lean back with a broad smile, surveying the place contentedly. Watching him then, I imagined that he was thinking that this ferry and its dining room were tangible evidence of his party's success.

While *A Long Way to Paradise* is a provincial history, the absence of much discussion of the federal government's role in the province seems a little odd to me. Through the 1960s and on into the early 1970s, the "Different Times" that the book describes were not confined to the province.[74] The social changes then affecting British Columbia were evidence of the influence of other regions reaching the province.

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[71] Charles B. Bourne, "The Development of the International Water Resources: The 'Drainage Basin Approach,'" *Canadian Bar Review* 47, no. 1 (1969): 82. Bob's claim that "the CCF and nationalist-minded citizens hated it because they saw it as a sellout of resource wealth to the Americans" (McDonald, 237) discounts broader opposition to the project.

[72] McDonald, *A Long Way to Paradise,* 237–43. Here Bob is quoting from Tina Loo's "People in the Way: Modernity, Environment, and Society on Arrow Lakes," *BC Studies* 142 and 143 (Summer/Autumn 2004): 165.

[73] The index includes no reference to the ferries; the text itself includes only passing mention (McDonald, *A Long Way to Paradise*, 234, 292).

[74] McDonald, 281–85.

To some extent the changes were facilitated by federal legislation and, more broadly, by the actions of the federal government, as Bob notes in passing.[75]

The book considers other jurisdictions only rarely, but it seems to me that the ways in which events in British Columbia followed or anticipated events in those jurisdictions is well worth considering. This seems especially the case with Alberta. For example, to what extent did the suffrage movement in that province influence developments in British Columbia? Specifically, how did other members of the Famous Five – based in Alberta – work with Helen Gregory MacGill, the feminist activist and later juvenile court judge whose work Bob highlights? What about the role of the provincial Liberals in Alberta and, later, the United Farmers: How was this different from that of the Conservatives in British Columbia?

All of these points are quibbles. They would have informed the sorts of questions that I would have asked Bob. I'd ask them in hopes of getting a rise and then having the chance to share in the laughter as he responded, likely to accuse me of being too long out of the province to appreciate the points he was making.

For most of his adult life, Bob studied the province's history, during which time he was also actively writing and lecturing about that history. *A Long Way to Paradise* rests on impressive scholarship. But if the book demonstrates his profound knowledge of the province, those of us fortunate enough to have had Bob as a friend and colleague will perhaps best remember his ready smile and infectious laughter. Not only was he a gifted historian, he was also a lot of fun to be around.

[75] McDonald, 301–02. In an astute aside (at 265), Bob points out that, by the late 1960s, the province's NDP appreciated that Trudeaumania underlined the need to consider the party's image.