

PLURALISM, INSTITUTIONALISM, AND THE THEORIES OF BC POLITICS

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THE CONCLUDING SENTENCES of Margaret Ormsby's 1958 opus, *British Columbia: A History*, express belief in a singular west coast identity:

The name chosen for the Gold Colony by Queen Victoria seemed to the Duke of Newcastle in 1858 to be neither "very felicitous" nor "very original." But one hundred years later, "British Columbia" still suggests more aptly than any other name could do, the sentiment and the outlook of the Canadian people who live in the furthest west.¹

Ormsby's description has a colonial ring that is jarring to the ears of many Canadians today, especially First Nations and New Canadians; nonetheless, it does seem to capture the sense that something about the imposition of a British parliamentary and legal system upon the frontier political economy and culture beyond the Rockies produced a unique compound.

Those who sought to explain the political dimensions of that uniqueness focused on the nature of the provincial party system, asking, for instance, why the Social Credit Party and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF)/New Democratic Party (NDP) predominated provincially, and why the former was particularly dominant. But such discussion also led to a consideration of British Columbia's unique political economy, political culture, and ideological features as well as its styles of public policy, leadership, and citizen-state relations. The early 1970s, in particular, produced a burst of scholarship on these questions, much of it in the pages of *BC Studies*. In a series of articles, book reviews, and exchanges that produced much heat as well as light, professors Black, Robin, Sproule-Jones, Blake, Ruff, and Cairns debated

¹ Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1958), 495.

the nature and evolution of the provincial state and political behaviour in British Columbia.

Today's readers will find these articles interesting not only as reflections of their time but also as points of reference for subsequent developments, both empirical and theoretical. Two main theories promulgated in the 1970s have proven particularly influential: Martin Robin's account of British Columbia's polarized politics as the outcome of an especially pronounced class struggle, brought about by the structures of ownership and conditions of employment in the province's resource industries; and Edwin Black's "politics of exploitation," which locates the origins of Social Credit in populist protest and a desire by various marginalized social groupings, in particular small business, for a bigger piece of the wealth generated by resource industries. Mark Sproule-Jones's attempt to provide a better explanation of voting results, which locates Social Credit electoral dominance in the state's ability to control flows of information to the province's hinterland, also had staying power.

Forty years on, each of these theories needs to be reappraised. The decades since 1970 have seen, among other things: a growth in the number of interest groups and a massive increase in their linkages to each other and to the state; growth of the provincial state; new waves of immigration from different (principally Asian) sources; major shifts in the economy due to the growth of service industries, the impacts of technological change, and new global markets; changes in communications and the roles of the media; and the re-emergence of First Nations as consequential political actors, along with intensified and increasingly complicated debates over land use. We need to ask whether the continuing influence, or lingering effects, of structural determinants such as class or frontier immigrant culture can still be counted upon to explain the still unique features of the BC political system.

New theories also warrant attention. Postmaterialism, for example, suggests that the relative material comfort and higher levels of education evident after the Second World War gave increased prominence to cultural values associated with quality of life and personal identity.² Its central thesis – that political values are becoming less materialistic – clashes directly with both Black's and Robin's claims that British Columbia's political uniqueness turned on the clash of material interests. A second approach, known as "new institutionalism," attempts

² "Postmaterialism," in John McMenemy's *The Language of Canadian Politics: A Guide to Important Terms and Concepts*, 4th ed. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 285. Postmaterialist theory is discussed in more detail below.

to locate sources of political continuity and change in the dynamics of institutional development rather than in interest group activity or the salience of cultural values per se. It has moved empirical political science some distance away from its formal legal and historical roots and from the scientific “behavioural” revolution of the mid-twentieth century. This has refocused attention upon the state, but with a more nuanced appreciation of the social constructedness of institutions (or the “embeddedness” of organizations in social and political environments) and their influence upon the cognitive dimension of politics – beliefs, preferences, policies, and decisions that guide action.

Political scientists differ in their preferred new institutionalist approach to explanation and research. Rational choice institutionalism defines political institutions as structures of incentives and focuses on individual rational actors as they pursue their preferences within those structures. Historical institutionalists define political institutions as historical regularities and rules that have been shaped as a consequence of key events. Sociological institutionalism focuses on how both individuals and groups act within political institutions according to culturally framed norms and values. Some scholars have also argued that the growing focus on the construction and communication of political ideas and meanings in institutional contexts constitutes a fourth school, “discursive institutionalism.”³

All of these approaches share a concern with the dynamics of institutional development. For example, the concept of “path dependence” has been used to explain how established patterns of political mobilization, institutional rules of behaviour, and ways of thinking become self-reinforcing and difficult to reverse.⁴ The reasons for this can be understood in economic or rational choice terms as the “increasing returns” that accrue to actors who engage in certain courses of action as opposed to the “increasing costs” of switching to another path.⁵ As Paul Pierson argues, there are particularly good reasons for thinking that political processes will be marked by dynamics of increasing

³ Vivien A. Schmidt, “Taking Ideas and Discourse Seriously: Explaining Change through Discursive Institutionalism as the Fourth New Institutionalism,” *European Political Science Review* 2, 1 (2010): 1–25; and Vivien A. Schmidt, “Speaking of Change: Why Discourse Is Key to the Dynamics of Policy Transformation,” *Critical Policy Studies* 5, 2 (2011): 106–26.

⁴ Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 10–11.

⁵ See, for example, Paul David, “Clio and the Economics of QWERTY,” *American Economic Review* 75 (1985): 332–37; Brian Arthur, *Increasing Returns and Path Dependence in the Economy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); and Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

returns: the high transaction costs associated with collective pursuit and provision of public goods; the short time horizons of political actors; and the status quo bias found in decision rules governing most political institutions are all obstacles to self-correction or radical change.⁶ Sociologists also point out that ideologies and social understandings of the political world display a similar dynamic: Robert Wuthnow's comparative analysis of the development of ideologies describes how relatively brief periods of historical openness give way to processes that favour and institutionalize particular paths of ideological development.⁷

The prevalence of path-dependent processes also justifies attention to issues of temporal ordering – in particular, the *timing* and *sequence* of events. Many arguments about path-dependent sequences concern competing social actors who seize upon a limited opening of “political space.” Those who occupy this space may be able to manipulate institutional rules and reallocate resources in a way that gives them durable and sustainable organizational advantages over political latecomers. A good illustration of this is found in Jacob Hacker's comparative analysis of health policy, which identifies sequencing as the crucial determinant of health systems: if the establishment of physician-dominated private insurance plans and the development of the medical industry precede universalization of access, the political barriers to the passage of national health insurance are “virtually insuperable.”⁸ Collier and Collier's comparative study of regime dynamics in Latin American countries, which reveals the crucial importance of the *timing* of organized labour's politicization for the strength and character of subsequent ideological and political developments, is another good example.⁹

NEW INSTITUTIONALISM AND BC POLITICS

Adopting an institutional approach could reinvigorate the study of BC politics by offering a more systematic understanding of the ways in which particular interests and ideas have come to dominate, leading to a distinctive pattern of political development. It could also provide

⁶ Pierson, *Politics in Time*, 38–41.

⁷ Robert Wuthnow, *Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁸ Jacob Hacker, “The Historical Logic of National Health Insurance: Structure and Sequence in the Development of British, Canadian, and US Medical Policy,” *Studies in American Political Development* 12, 1 (1998): 128.

⁹ Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

a clear and testable hypothesis: that the specific feedback loops (or “mechanisms of reproduction”) that once generated and sustained paths of development weaken as the social conditions that gave rise to them become less influential. Third, the institutional approach raises a new set of research questions, which points to a new theory of BC politics. Do factors such as the relative decline of primary resource industries (and, consequently, of trade union power), the growth of institutional pluralism, and globalization imply that BC politics will increasingly resemble the politics of other provinces and jurisdictions? Recognizing the potential for polarization between materialist and postmaterialist elements in the political culture of British Columbia, and the centrality, timing, and sequence of debates over land rights and land use, this article answers: not necessarily.

Much of the intellectual interest in BC politics has sought to understand its “party system” – which is to say the prevalent pattern of relationships among parties, usually expressed in terms of the number of parties and their relative strength of support among voters.¹⁰ The watershed election of 1991 – which ended the Social Credit Party’s long-standing dominance of BC politics – produced a newly polarized two-party system, but an anti-NDP coalition of the centre-right continued to drive (and thrive in) the electoral politics of the province. The geographical and socio-economic bases of support for, and the style of political leadership of, this centre-right grouping differed from those of the earlier Socreds. The Campbell Liberals won many of their seats in Vancouver, and its core supporters were the city’s high-income earners (business and professional elites).¹¹ Some have seen this shift as opening the way for the emergence of a right-wing splinter party, particularly in the Interior, but none of the main contenders to succeed Gordon Campbell as Liberal leader in 2011 mounted a challenge that was conspicuously populist, anti-Vancouver, or anti-elite.

Although the politics of resource wealth and land development are still important in British Columbia, today’s political divisions have less to do with the demands of labour, small business, and the hinterland for a bigger share of rising prosperity than with competition for legal

¹⁰ See Norman Ruff, “Birth Pangs: The Emergence of British Columbia’s Fifth Party System 1991-2000,” in *Party Politics in Canada*, 8th ed., ed. Hugh G. Thorburn (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 2001), 369-80.

¹¹ “The data ... confirm the persistence of the economic and class base of party support that [Donald] Blake reported in the mid-1990s and indeed suggests that the relationship has sharpened.” See Lynda Erickson, “Electoral Behaviour in British Columbia,” in *British Columbia Politics and Government*, ed. Michael Howlett, Dennis Pilon, and Tracy Summerville (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2010), 141.

rights. The continuing importance of the “Land Question” contributes to the distinctiveness of the province’s politics and has elevated the provincial state – its rights, rules, regulations, and entitlements – into a zone of contestation. Some of these fault lines cut across party lines, as is illustrated by Campbell’s belated embrace of the New Relationship with First Nations and the Climate Action Plan as well as the NDP’s extensive engagement with environmentalist and First Nations constituencies and labour.

The Growth of the Provincial State

The critique, by Edwin Black and Alan Cairns, of centralist views of Canadian federalism for neglecting the importance of the provincial state is related to a more general critique of sociological approaches to understanding politics.¹² As Cairns noted in 1977: “The significant question, after all, is the survival of provincial governments, not of provincial societies, and it is not self-evident that the existence and support of the latter is necessary to the functioning and aggrandizement of the former. Their sources of survival, renewal, and vitality may well lie within themselves and in their capacity to mould their environment in accordance with their own governmental purposes.”¹³ Theories of BC politics need to be clear regarding whether the growing capacity of the state is an element of the distinctiveness they are trying to explain or whether they are merely concerned with “the historic residue of the cleavages of yesteryear.”¹⁴ The expanding capacity of the BC provincial state tracks a pattern evident in Western societies more generally: provincial government expenditures as a percentage of provincial GDP rose from a little over 6.5 percent in 1952 to about 14 percent in 1972; this figure rose to the 18 to 20 percent range in the 1980s and 1990s, before shrinking to 15 to 16 percent during the past decade.¹⁵ This pattern of state expenditure has provided a structural framework within which distinctive patterns of institutional development have evolved; certain groups and discourses were advantaged by the rapid expansion of state activity.

¹² Edwin R. Black and Alan C. Cairns, “A Different Perspective on Canadian Federalism,” *Canadian Public Administration* 9 (1966), 27–44; Alan C. Cairns, “The Study of the Provinces: A Review Article,” *BC Studies* 14 (1972): 73–82.

¹³ Alan C. Cairns, “Governments and Societies of Canadian Federalism,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 10 (1977): 695–725 at 699.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Canada’s total level of government spending as a proportion of GDP, usually slightly more than double that of British Columbia’s, levelled off to just under 40 percent at the onset of the 2008 recession. See Canada, Department of Finance, *Fiscal Reference Tables* (Ottawa: Department of Finance, 2009), Table 54.

In the past three decades, the number and complexity of “third-sector” organizations and state-sponsored networks and linkages has increased markedly and is probably most evident in the thousands of listings in national surveys and registries of interest groups and the proliferation of environmental and social policy groups in British Columbia.¹⁶ Another, more qualitative, indicator of increasingly “networked” governance – meaning processes of government that rely upon voluntary compliance and participation by various stakeholders – has been a shift in the character of regulation from the command-and-control model typical of the industrial era to the “co-regulation,” “self-regulation,” and mandated public consultation that is increasingly common today. In British Columbia, the provincial state has facilitated the institutionalization of interest group influence and representation through such devices as the Lobbyists Registration Act, which requires many hundreds of in-house lobbyists, consultants, and officers of business and other civil society organizations to reveal their identities and contacts with government. Self-regulation and licensing authority has also been extended to about twenty different professions and a wide range of permanent and ad hoc public advisory positions in many policy areas.¹⁷ These shifts have become entrenched to the point at which complaints about the effectiveness of lobbying legislation results in amendments that effectively constrain government and force lobbyists to act through prescribed legal channels, and Aboriginal title and land claims cause government to improve consultation and representation processes, reinforcing the perception of consultation as a rights-based entitlement.

SOCIAL CLASS AND BC POLITICS

Martin Robin’s thesis that class structure and class conflict are the most important factors distinguishing BC politics first appeared in 1966 in a short essay on BC political parties in the *Queen’s Quarterly*. Later, he developed it in more depth in his two-volume political history of British

¹⁶ See, for example, *Associations Canada: An Encyclopedic Directory*, 29th ed. (Millerton, NY: Grey House Publishing, 2008); and Statistics Canada, *National Survey of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2003).

¹⁷ See Anthony Ogus, “Regulation Revisited,” *Public Law* 2 (2009): 332-46; and Mark Crawford, “Transitions to New Governance: NGO and Interest Group Activities in British Columbia,” in Michael Howlett, Dennis Pilon and Tracy Summerville, eds., *British Columbia Politics and Government* (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2010) 177-85. The most distinctive of these new positions are probably those representing First Nations and environmental NGOs in activities touching upon land and resource use.

Columbia entitled *The Company Province*.¹⁸ There Robin emphasizes the importance of linkages between economy (resource base and industry), social structure, and political and partisan conflict. By this account, the BC anomaly (“in no other province are the two federal minor parties – Social Credit and New Democratic – major parties in the legislature”) was attributable, in part, to “the peculiar nature of the coast social structure,” in which “extreme social cleavages, based primarily on class differences” inhibited the rise of consensus politics.¹⁹ The particular character of these cleavages – a stronger, more organized, and more militant labour movement pitted against Robber Baron industrialists, and a more dispersed and variegated cadre of farmers and small businesspeople both opposed to socialism and resentful of corporate and financial centres in Vancouver and in the east – was, in turn, rooted in an industrial economic structure very different from that of the Prairies and distinguishable from the industrial manufacturing bases of Ontario and Quebec. The central role of primary resource extraction industries made British Columbia a corporate frontier and a company province in which “the large enterprise, rather than the small family homestead, [was] the dominant shape of the social landscape.”²⁰

Although Robin acknowledges that “it is difficult to say which cleavage, class or regional, is more critical in determining the structure of British Columbia politics,”²¹ he leaves little doubt that class struggle accounted for the distinctiveness of BC politics in Canada. Large-scale production in the timber and mining industries ensured the predominance of industrial unionism within the provincial labour movement, and it enticed militant unionists and organizers to settle in British Columbia:

The British Workingmen who first led the unions and worked the coal mines of Vancouver Island were not the highly skilled and exclusive artisans who dominated the trade assemblies of Ontario during the 1880s. They were men from the north of England who brought to Canada organizational skill and a marked propensity toward independent

¹⁸ Martin Robin, “The Social Basis of Party Politics in British Columbia,” *Queen’s Quarterly* 72 (1966): 675–90 reprinted in Hugh Thorburn, ed., *Party Politics in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall, 1967); Martin Robin, *The Rush for Spoils: The Company Province, 1871–1933* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972); Martin Robin, *Pillars of Profit: The Company Province, 1934–72*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973); Martin Robin, “British Columbia: The Company Province,” in *Canadian Provincial Politics: The Party Systems of the Ten Provinces*, 2nd ed., ed. Martin Robin (Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall, 1978), 28–60.

¹⁹ Robin, “Social Basis,” 201.

²⁰ Robin, *Canadian Provincial Politics*, 29.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

politics characteristic of the English and Scottish northern mining communities. Equally militant were the many American workers who provided the early constituency of radical unions like the Western Federation of Miners ... The question of labor's political action, together with a host of issues arising from working-class participation, form enduring themes.²²

By Robin's account the BC labour movement was the most highly organized and most strike-prone in the country. Industrial unionism was far more important than craft unionism, and almost 43 percent of the paid labour force was unionized, fully 10 percent above the national figure. Between 1949 and 1959 British Columbia's non-agricultural workforce (accounting for 10 percent of the national total) was responsible for 15 percent of the nation's labour stoppages.²³ The closed nature of single-industry resource communities with small or non-existent middle classes, coupled with seasonal and cyclical unemployment and unstable markets, all reinforced working-class insecurity, intensified working-class consciousness, and contributed to labour militancy.

According to Robin, British Columbia developed as a "corporate frontier":

Unlike all other provinces in Canada, socialism settled on the ground floor of industrial development in the coast province and socialist politicians claimed the affiliations of large blocs of unionists at the very beginning of growth of the organized labour movement. In Ontario, the only other province where the NDP has a moderately strong urban and working class base, socialist organization appeared after the working class and trade unions had been disciplined electorally and ideologically by the elite dominated Liberal and Conservative parties. The socialists had to break down an established structure of political loyalties. Their task was considerably less onerous in British Columbia where a weakly developed party system, structurally generated class conflict, and a traditionally radical working class population concentrated in key industrial constituencies, combined to facilitate early radical political representation.²⁴

Organized labour was heavily involved in the BC electoral arena – initially with socialist and independent labour candidates, then with the Socialist Party of Canada, and, eventually, the CCF and the NDP.

²² *Ibid.*, 29-30.

²³ Robin, "Social Basis," 203.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Robin notes that Prairie farm movements were relatively militant, class conscious, and cohesive compared to farm movements in British Columbia. The smaller size, variegated nature, and comparative affluence of the agrarian sector in British Columbia made it more receptive to Social Credit ideology than to agrarian radicalism, even during the Depression years.²⁵

This picture of a politics centred on resource extraction has not disappeared entirely, but it has been undergoing constant modification and gradual erosion. As Philip Resnick pointed out in 1985, a “new international division of labour” was emerging as Canada’s trade shifted from the Atlantic to the Pacific region.²⁶ A shift in the provincial social and economic structure accompanied Vancouver’s growing status as a hub for all of western Canada: the services sector accounted for 80 percent of the employment growth in the province between 1961 and 1991.²⁷ Thomas Hutton describes this “process of tertiarization” in the Vancouver city-region as having been spurred by the need to respond to the deep recession of 1982–84. During that crisis, unemployment levels reached 14 percent in metropolitan Vancouver due to its tight linkages to British Columbia’s staple regions.²⁸ Vancouver’s city government, in conjunction with the business community and other stakeholders, drafted an economic development policy that assigned a leading role to “advanced services” (producer services, banking and finance, higher education, international transportation, film and tourism) and emphasized the need for a comprehensive reorientation towards Vancouver’s linkages with the markets, cities, and societies of the Asia-Pacific rather than with the traditional resource hinterland of British Columbia.²⁹ That this reorientation was successfully realized in the late twentieth century may seem odd in view of the limited jurisdiction and resources of municipal governments in Canada. Yet the agency of the City of Vancouver described by Hutton can be understood in neo-institutionalist terms as actors seizing an opening afforded by the economic crisis to leverage change with regard to levels of ideas and discourse as well as with regard to policy. As a result, Vancouver has played a leading role as a “new industrial space” within the Asia-Pacific region, less

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 204–5.

²⁶ Philip Resnick, “BC Capitalism and the Empire of the Pacific,” *BC Studies* 67 (1985): 29–46.

²⁷ Ronald A. Shearer, “The Economy,” *BC Studies* 100 (1993–94): 131.

²⁸ T.A. Hutton, “Services and Urban Development in the Asia-Pacific Region: Institutional Responses and Policy Innovation,” in *Service Industries and Asia-Pacific Cities: New Development Trajectories*, ed. P.W. Daniels, K.C. Ho, and T.A. Hutton (London: Routledge, 2005), 60.

²⁹ City of Vancouver, *An Economic Strategy for Vancouver in the 1980s: Proposals for Policy and Implementation* (Vancouver: Department of Finance, 1983).

constrained by inertial forces associated with Fordist production and a resource-based industrial structure than would have been the case in the absence of a crisis.³⁰

Union membership in British Columbia, once the highest in North America, is now barely above the national average (approximately 30 percent).³¹ Strike activity has declined, and by 1998 union membership in the public sector was four times greater than it was in the private sector, even as the government contracted out and commercialized domestic services.³² The NDP has aligned itself with the new service-sector workforce, while the Liberals have attempted to mediate “the tensions between the resource hinterland and the service-based urban economy” by adopting a neo-liberal agenda that promises prosperity by protecting corporate interests and advancing privatization, deregulation, and tax restraint. By increasing spending on infrastructure and by pursuing a more progressive social agenda (First Nations, climate change, less privatization) in their second term, the Liberals were able to “disrupt the traditional class division of electoral politics in British Columbia.”³³ But this has left them with the challenges of appearing sufficiently progressive to undercut the Opposition while preventing conservatives and Interior supporters from splitting off. Meanwhile, the NDP strives to gain middle-class support by refusing to become too strongly identified with public-sector workers while attempting to hold on to its shrinking industrial working-class base. Old class and regional antagonisms, in party politics and in questions of employment standards and industrial relations, still resonate, but the decline in industrial unionism, falling voter turnout, and a more variegated economy and social structure greatly complicate the tasks of political mobilization and electoral strategizing for BC political parties.

³⁰ Roger Hayter, *Flexible Crossroads: The Restructuring of British Columbia's Forest Economy* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 7-33; T.A. Hutton and H.C. Davis, *Toward a Service Sector Strategy for British Columbia: Policy Context, Objectives, Models and Programs* (Victoria: British Columbia Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, 1992); Roger Hayter and Trevor Barnes, “Innis’ Staple Theory, Exports and Recession: British Columbia, 1981-86,” *Economic Geography* 66 (1990): 150-73.

³¹ Statistics Canada, “Unionization,” *Perspectives on Labour and Income* 19 (2007): 1-8.

³² Keith Brownsey, Michael Howlett, Joshua Newman, “From Forestry to Film: The Changing Political Economy of British Columbia,” in *British Columbia Politics and Government*, ed. Michael Howlett, Dennis Pilon, and Tracy Summerville (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2010), 23-24.

³³ *Ibid.*, 26. Of course, these “progressive” policies were often pursued by neo-liberal means, such as authorizing private hydro power generation, using revenue from carbon taxes to cut income tax rates instead of funding environmental policies, and building infrastructure using public-private partnerships.

The results of the 2011 referendum on the harmonized sales tax (HST) suggest the contours of a possible growing social cleavage: votes across the province consistently correlated with income levels, with the highest support for the HST in wealthy Vancouver ridings with average household incomes of at least \$140,000 and the lowest support in a Surrey riding in which the average household income was about \$70,000. But if this is an indication of a “class” divide, it is one spawned by a *decline* of manufacturing jobs and industrial unionism coupled with a relatively fixed supply of land and spiralling rents and real estate prices. These factors may result in a chronic frustration of middle-class aspirations, a loss of confidence on the part of many British Columbians that they or their children will climb to the next rung of the social ladder.³⁴ This may be correctly seen as a “downstream” development of institutional paths that are heavily conditioned by early industrial conflicts, but the character and source of contemporary cleavages are nonetheless quite different.³⁵

The importance of *institutional origins* and *sequences* of different social processes in giving rise to unique self-reinforcing dynamics of institutional development is therefore highly evident in British Columbia. Distinct patterns of labour organization and political institutionalization provided room for “ideas and interests [that were] not only learned in interaction, but sustained by it.”³⁶ As with path-dependent processes more generally, political choices in British Columbia became constrained as successive decisions reinforced earlier patterns. At least partly as a result of this, a degree of polarized politics has endured, despite declining union membership and growing social complexity. Nevertheless, the examples of the rapid reorientation of the Vancouver economy in the 1980s, the gradual evolution of political party bases of support during the past three decades, and the new polarization revealed by the HST debate illustrate in very different ways how historically shifting social conditions and changing social capacities of various actors can combine to alter existing trajectories of institutional development.

³⁴ Paul Willcocks, “HST Vote Shows a New Class-Based Voter Division,” *Paying Attention*, available at <http://willcocks.blogspot.com/2011/08/hst-result-shows-new-class-based-voter.html> (accessed 13 December 2011).

³⁵ Pierson, *Politics in Time*, 70–71.

³⁶ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

THE POLITICS OF EXPLOITATION

Another major interpretation of BC politics that surfaced in the late 1960s was that of Edwin R. Black, who proposed that British Columbia's "governmental way of life" was best characterized as "the Politics of Exploitation."³⁷ The purpose of this phrase was to direct readers' attention to (1) "the great provincial preoccupation with economic development as the most important question of provincial politics" and (2) "the peculiar context and the particular processes within and through which are made those governmental decisions affecting the utilization of natural resources."³⁸ Like Robin, Black explains the materialism of British Columbia's political culture in terms of its character as a continuously evolving "frontier" – "with a frontier population, a frontier economy, and a frontier type of politics."³⁹ But Black also stresses factors constraining government decision other than class structure, such as high rates of immigration: "Immigration has always been a big factor in British Columbia's growth, and very rarely has the number of native-born exceeded the number of immigrants."⁴⁰

There were several cultural consequences of an immigrant population that Black found to be politically significant. A population in flux inhibited the growth of incipient local custom, while the generally materialist motivations for moving to British Columbia in the first place further reinforced attitudes shaped by both economic opportunity and vulnerability. Lack of traditionalism, along with political uncertainty and instability, gave rise to weak party loyalties and a weak party system, as evidenced by the fact that British Columbia did not even have a government formed along party lines until 1902. From 1902 to 1941 successive Conservative and Liberal governments had "personality leaders" who had to justify federal party connections in terms of whatever concessions could be wrung out of Ottawa – and their ability to stave off the rising threat of a ccf government. When the wartime coalition broke down and the watershed election of 1952 gave the province a new party system, each of the two major parties attempted to exploit sur-

³⁷ Edwin R. Black, "British Columbia: The Politics of Exploitation," in *Exploiting Our Economic Potential: Public Policy and the British Columbia Economy*, ed. R. Shearer (Toronto: Holt Rhineholt Winston, 1968), 23-41. Reprinted in Hugh G. Thorburn, *Party Politics in Canada*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 225-36.

³⁸ Thorburn, *Party Politics*, 225.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

living non-partisan feeling by emphasizing their character as a popular “movement” rather than as a party.⁴¹

Social Credit, in particular, showed a remarkable ability to channel popular protest against social elites, even after many years in government. The key to making this “institutionalized protest” work was, of course, the “one-man government” style and personality of the premier, W.A.C. Bennett. A corollary of the lack of respect for established elites was a lack of respect for “their” institutions or the “niceties of their parliamentary procedures”⁴² and an affinity for “government that gets things done.”⁴³ The events surrounding the 1960 and 1963 BC provincial elections demonstrated all of these elements of materialism, activism, personalized leadership, and institutionalized protest quite well.⁴⁴ Bennett had campaigned vigorously against the CCF’s plans to nationalize the BC Electric Company in the fall 1960 election campaign, calling it “socialism” and bad for the investment climate in the province. But in the summer of 1961 he reversed this position and announced the expropriation of BC Electric in order to achieve the government’s ambitious plans for the development of the province’s hydro potential.

In the ensuing 1963 campaign, the much-heralded new Conservative leader, former Second World War commander, federal cabinet minister, lawyer, and Rhodes scholar E. Davie Fulton, who had been buoyed by the Conservatives’ strong second-place finish in the Columbia by-election in the summer, seized upon the nationalization issue, insisting that BC Hydro was legally non-existent. Meanwhile the NDP Opposition tried to portray a new and more responsible image to contrast with both the arbitrary and footloose Socreds and its own more radical past. All Opposition leaders argued that the cheque giving BC Electric fair value was worthless without legislative approval. Meanwhile, the highways minister, the Reverend “Flying Phil” Gagliardi, who had been on the defensive because of allegations of kickbacks in his ministry, had to fight Fulton in their mutual home riding of Kamloops.

The *Vancouver Province* congratulated the Opposition leader, Bruce Strachan, for his more restrained style and “frankness, dignity and statesmanlike approach to provincial problems.” *Vancouver Sun* editor-

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 228.

⁴³ “The Government That Gets Things Done” was a Social Credit campaign slogan.

⁴⁴ These events are just touched upon in Black’s article. I rely upon Walter D. Young, “British Columbia,” *Canadian Annual Review of Politics and Public Affairs*, 1963 (1964): 133-42, and newspaper accounts as well.

in-chief Bruce Hutchinson gushed: “Mr. Fulton towered over all other party leaders.”⁴⁵ In contrast, Social Credit advertisements urged BC voters to “Keep BC Moving” and to “Elect That Government That Gets Things Done.” The result: Fulton was trounced by Gagliardi in Kamloops, and the Socreds (to the surprise of many commentators) were returned with an increased majority, raising their share of the popular vote by 2 percent (to 41 percent) and even making considerable inroads into NDP working-class support in several ridings.⁴⁶

So what has changed since? Paradoxically, the Asian immigration of recent decades may have helped to maintain traditional levels of materialism, but that materialism is no longer so directly connected with the resource wealth of the province. This, coupled with the growth of the service and knowledge economies centred in Vancouver and the retreat from the province-building strategy centred upon resource development in the hinterland, reflects a changed political geography.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the electorate’s penchant for activism and personality leadership has declined, or, more precisely, come into conflict with the growing *institutional density* of political life.⁴⁸ There has been an accumulation of accountability measures, usually brought in by newly elected governments after a spell in Opposition: for example, full *Hansard*, question period, and parliamentary reforms brought in by the Barrett government in 1972; the auditor general and financial management measures of the Bill Bennett Socreds after 1975; freedom of information in the 1990s and lobbyist registration in the 2000s. As these government obligations have become more numerous and more entrenched, they have become a new focus for media coverage of government and, therefore, for Opposition and citizen activities and attitudes. This critical orientation is further reinforced by widespread proceduralism and rights-consciousness on the part of citizens, powerfully symbolized and encouraged by the Charter of Rights after 1982. Modern leaders can still successfully appeal to the materialism and populism of BC voters, but it is sheer folly to do so with the kind of expediency, spontaneity, and disdain and disregard for rules, traditions, and procedures that was common in W.A.C. Bennett’s day.

Recent history has furnished two spectacular examples that illustrate this point perfectly. William Vander Zalm and Glen Clark both

⁴⁵ *Vancouver Sun*, editorial 28 September 1963.

⁴⁶ Young, “British Columbia,” 141.

⁴⁷ Tracy Summerville, “The Political Geography of British Columbia,” in *British Columbia Politics and Government*, ed. Michael Howlett, Dennis Pilon, and Tracy Summerville (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2010), 69–84.

⁴⁸ See Pierson, *Politics in Time*, 31, 34–36.

displayed classic political skills and dynamic personalized leadership in the great tradition of colourful BC premiers but ran afoul of a less forgiving cultural and legal/institutional environment. Several books have been written about the accident-prone and scandal-ridden Vander Zalm years. It will suffice to mention four subjects that relate both to his pre-election commitments and to the politics of exploitation: industrial relations, parliamentary government, financial management, and conflict-of-interest. Despite a pre-election commitment to create a premier's economic development council within which a more cooperative labour relations climate might develop, Vander Zalm endeavoured to introduce his own amendments to the province's labour code (Bill 19) as soon as possible after the election. In what Graham Leslie, the author and former deputy minister of labour described as "the first betrayal," Bill 19 significantly eroded the bargaining power of unions, enflaming an already heated industrial relations climate. The bill was produced by two private-sector lawyers "with exclusively management backgrounds" and introduced in a way that "deliberately ignored" "even the simplest checks and balances available to the government," such as consideration by cabinet and/or a cabinet committee.⁴⁹

The true costs and benefits of the Expo lands sale and the Coquihalla Highway project became major subjects of media inquiry and Opposition criticism, leading to the establishment of a commission of inquiry that found evidence of financial reporting "tainted with an atmosphere of deceit and prevarication by both politicians and public servants."⁵⁰ The aptly acronymed Budget Stabilization (BS) Fund, while not illegal and arguably within the Social Credit tradition of financial accounting innovation concerning "perceptions about funding availability," created considerable confusion and derision among MLAs, media, and the general public. Last but not least was the premier's insistence that, once the formality of transferring ownership of Fantasy Gardens into his wife's name was complete, he could continue promoting "Lillian's place" while acting as premier.⁵¹ It was a dance with impropriety redolent of Gagliardi's tenure as minister of highways, but after his receipt of a wad of \$100 bills in the early hours of 4 August 1990, it ultimately sealed his fate and led to his resignation.

⁴⁹ Graham Leslie, *Breach of Promise: Sacred Ethics under Vander Zalm* (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 1991), 52-54.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 194-95.

⁵¹ Gary Mason and Keith Baldrey, *Fantasyland: Inside the Government of Bill Vander Zalm* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1989).

The case of NDP premier Glen Clark's fall from grace is perhaps an even better illustration of the point that the legal and political context has changed incontrovertibly since the postwar era. For Premier Clark ran into trouble even though, like W.A.C. Bennett, he was not out of his depth on the issues, as Vander Zalm clearly was in the 1986 forestry negotiations, the Meech Lake negotiations, the South Moresby issue, and the Expo lands sale, to name just a few.⁵² In contrast, Clark's political judgments often displayed Bennett-like courage and acuity. When he displayed extreme action orientation – in stark contrast to Harcourt – he *did* enjoy brief spikes in popularity, as when he defused the well-laid Liberal trap of the BC Hydro scandal by promptly firing two senior Hydro executives right after assuming office. Clark also took rapid action in several social program areas and certainly showed workers in the fishing and shipbuilding industries that he was determined to “get things done” for them as well, as when he threatened to close the Nanoose Bay torpedo-testing range and determinedly circumvented all bureaucratic obstacles to the building of the fast ferries. “Process is for cheese” was a phrase used to announce the Clark government's new action orientation in 1996. It was also revealed to be an anachronism, both in an auditor general's report on the fast ferries project, which was found to have contravened sound principles of project management, and in a criminal court decision concerning Glen Clark's alleged breach of trust stemming from his involvement with a friend who stood to benefit from the conferral of a gambling licence. (Although she cleared Clark of all charges, Madame Justice Elizabeth Bennett did say that his actions constituted “an act of folly.”)

The “chickens coming home to roost” for these two premiers reflected the changed context of policy making. On the one hand, the continuing salience of traditional economic and populist value preferences is borne out by the ascension of both Vander Zalm and Clark to the leadership of their respective parties, their subsequent electoral victories, and the undoubted popularity of some of their decisions. On the other hand, both leaders collided with the forces of (1) declining deference, rights consciousness, increasing demands for information, consultation, and participation on the part of citizens; (2) legal and procedural constraints on action that were more pronounced than they had been a generation earlier; (3) more densely populated interest group networks; and (4) a radically changed communications environment and concomitantly changed media culture.

⁵² Leslie, *Breach of Promise*, 323.

It is easy to find more examples of politicians bumping into this new institutional reality in the contemporary political environment. When the current premier, Christy Clark, confirmed in early 2011 her preference for an election call the following autumn, it had the effect of waking up the Opposition rather than catching it napping – completely nullifying one of W.A.C. Bennett’s favourite weapons. Clark also had a problem that the old fox never did, namely, the need to legitimate the breach of a fixed election date law. It is difficult to pinpoint the relative importance of a legalized culture, highly developed institutions of accountability, and an activated media in accounting for the premier’s predicament. That remains a challenge for scholars. But all of these factors point to a similar broad conclusion: while British Columbia’s political culture retains a distinctiveness derived in part from its high immigration rate and high materialism, the populist “no-holds-barred” nature of its politics has diminished over time. Several processes have operated to induce changes in the broader organizational ecology, constraining executive discretion and often reducing the relative costs of challenging government.

Like Robin’s class theory, Black’s “politics of exploitation” thesis illustrates the importance of institutional origins and path dependent-dynamics of institutional development – in particular, the enduring salience of values, attitudes, and personalities that gained a foothold on the “ground floor” of British Columbia’s political development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when social and cultural formations were comparatively weaker, and overarching imperatives to grab a share of resource wealth were comparatively stronger, in this province than in other parts of Canada. It continues to be a source of insight into British Columbia’s political distinctiveness, even as growing institutionalization, new economic and cultural currents, and changing immigration patterns force us to look elsewhere to fully understand the province’s politics in the twenty-first century.

“SPONSORED CONCEPTUAL IDEOLOGY”

Mark Sproule-Jones’s attempt to provide a better explanation of Social Credit dominance in the 1950s and 1960s through a more rigorous statistical approach to voting data, although not as influential as Robin’s or Black’s theories, is important for two reasons. First, it may exemplify the problem that Paul Pierson and other neo-institutionalists have identified in most variable-oriented political research: that a “snapshot” focus on

variables at a particular moment of interest may cause investigators to lose sight of the sequences through which the variables developed and the ways in which history is remembered by agents and carried forward through long-term social processes.⁵³ Second – and quite paradoxically, in view of the first point – Sproule-Jones suggests an alternative explanation of the party system in terms of the influence (or lack thereof) of interest groups’ mediating flows of information between the state and citizens. This insight can now be more fully understood and thoroughly developed into a theory through an analysis of the dynamics of institutional development.

Sproule-Jones’s regression analysis of party preferences, as expressed in the 1960 *Statement of Votes* against the 1961 Census list of the population according to occupational categories, indicates that there were only a relatively small number of statistically significant relationships, suggesting that Robin’s thesis that a deep class cleavage shaped the pattern of provincial voting was suspect.⁵⁴ As for the “anti-elitist” interpretation of voting behaviour – the thesis, attributed to Edwin Black, that Social Credit support was distinguished by its animosity towards established social elites – Sproule-Jones found that, of the relevant demographic (“unorganized ranks of the lower class and lower middle class groups, and ... small and medium-sized businessmen”), only small businessmen and the self-employed showed a positive and statistically significant preference for Social Credit (although the negative repulsion of professionals was also found to be consistent with Black’s thesis).⁵⁵ These data were deemed insufficient to prove the validity of Black’s theory since the party would have needed a more generalized appeal to win elections so consistently.

Sproule-Jones’s alternative interpretation of the data was that, from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, Social Credit dominance was secured as a result of two basic processes: (1) a large proportion of the electorate came to “identify” with the party at the provincial level; and (2) the party had a net partisan advantage in pulling weaker identified NDP, Liberal, and Tory voters as well as independent voters to their cause at election time. The Social Credit Party consistently defined issue alternatives in ideological terms – as a battle between “free enterprise”

⁵³ Pierson, *Politics in Time*, 44-45 and 169-71.

⁵⁴ “It was only one of the occupational categories, that of ‘transport and communications, craftsmen, production process and related workers’ ... that distributed itself consistently for one party (the CCF) and against all others.” See Mark Sproule-Jones, “Social Credit and the British Columbia Electorate,” *BC Studies* 12 (1971): 34-35.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

and “socialism.” This sponsored ideology was of the “conceptual” type, “in that voters were asked to evaluate all political objects in terms of this one dimensional ordering.”⁵⁶ The reason for the particular effectiveness of this “sponsored conceptual ideology” in British Columbia? The very weakness of “intermediate structures of interest group influence” (with the possible exception of trade union influence on its members) meant that the usual “two-step flow of influence” from partisan appeals through the norms of the mediating groups to the electorate found in most advanced electoral democracies was largely absent. Instead, the BC electorate experienced a “one-step flow” of information coming from the political parties, with most of the weakly identified partisans migrating to the ruling party, which had the loudest and clearest voice.

Although Sproule-Jones was careful to say that his was an “interpretation” and not a full-blown theoretical explanation,⁵⁷ he drew sharp replies from Black and Robin, both of whom argued that his approach was no more supported by the data than was theirs.⁵⁸ Their complaints received considerable methodological support from Donald Blake, who pointed out that Sproule-Jones’s regression analysis did not produce coefficients that indicated precisely what percentage of the variance in party support was produced by occupational differences and did not compare the role of social class (Robin’s key variable) or social status (that attributed to Black) in explaining partisan choice to other social characteristics, such as religion, ethnic origin, or rural/urban residence.⁵⁹

Nor is it likely that even the most popular recent advance in statistical technique for incorporating sensitivity to time into quantitative research (i.e., regression analysis based on pooled time series),⁶⁰ could rehabilitate Sproule-Jones’s analysis by capturing the full significance of sequencing and path dependence as temporal processes: “Can we really assume that the causal relationship between two variables – say, economic openness and labor-union density – was the same in 1965 as it was in 1995? Pooling represents an attempt to deal with one kind of causal complexity by wishing away another – namely, the fact that

⁵⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁸ Edwin Black, “Rejoinder: No Death-Bed Repentance from This Man,” *BC Studies* 12 (1971): 46-48; Martin Robin, “Rejoinder: Class Still Counts,” *BC Studies* 12 (1971): 49-50.

⁵⁹ Donald Blake, “Another Look at Social Credit and the British Columbia Electorate,” *BC Studies* 12 (1971): 53-62 at 55-56.

⁶⁰ Lois W. Ayrs, *Pooled Time Series* (London: Sage, 1989). Of course, there are other methodological techniques that are friendlier to the understanding of historical processes, such as event history analysis and agent-based modelling. See Pierson, *Politics in Time*, 173-75.

relationships among variables of interest are likely to change as broader background conditions change over time or across space.”⁶¹

Nonetheless, Sproule-Jones’s thesis of sponsored conceptual ideology did represent a *theoretical* advance, particularly from the perspective of modern discursive institutionalism.⁶² It directs our attention towards the role of interest groups as a structure of influence mediating communications between the state and citizens. It also raises an important research question: why was the discursive dominance of the Social Credit government identified by Sproule-Jones not as evident either before or after the postwar period from 1952 to 1972? One specific hypothesis is that W.A.C. Bennett seized the potential for political dominance at a time when provincial state capacity to control communications and to shape discourse was developing faster than were the communicative networks of civil society. Prior to this period, a relatively small and weakly developed system of state institutions and laws strongly reflected their socially constituted and culturally framed origins in a post-colonial frontier political economy and could not overcome local parochialisms. During the W.A.C. Bennett era, the governing party could take advantage of the new province-wide frame of reference. After the W.A.C. Bennett era, in the late twentieth century, this new-found hegemony was dissipated, even after Social Credit regained power for an extended period (from 1975 to 1991).

The reasons for this attenuated discursive dominance post-1972 were at least threefold. First, there were the impacts of further developments in communications and transportation. Jeremy Wilson demonstrated how “the communications revolution” (especially the introduction of radio, television, and an improved highway system) had contributed to a decline in electoral localism between 1903 and 1975, as measured by increased swing uniformity.⁶³ The spread of cable and satellite facilities throughout the Interior in the 1970s and 1980s, followed by the establishment of the internet in the 1990s and 2000s, has undoubtedly accentuated this context-broadening trend, bringing global as well

⁶¹ Pierson, *Politics in Time*, 170.

⁶² See Vivien Schmidt, “Reconciling Ideas and Institutions through Discursive Institutionalism,” in *Ideas and Politics in Social Science Research*, ed. Daniel Beland and Robert H. Cox (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 64–89. Schmidt argues that “discursive institutionalism” (i.e., a focus on ideas and discourse as well as an overall “constructivist” viewpoint) explains political action and institutional change while still recognizing the importance of contexts of interest-based power, structure-based position, and culture-based framing addressed by other institutionalist theories and methods.

⁶³ R. Jeremy Wilson, “The Impact of Communications Developments on British Columbia Electoral Patterns, 1903–1975,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 14 (1980): 509–36.

as provincial and national mass media into practically every home. The sheer quantity and variety of news sources and cultural influences would have also likely undermined any “one-step flow” of information about provincial politics that could be directly controlled by the provincial government.

Second, there has been an equally impressive “proliferation and institutionalization of interest groups” constituting precisely the kind of dense thicket of mediating influences that Sproule-Jones argued was conspicuously lacking in British Columbia in the early and mid-twentieth century. To some extent the lines of communication between interest groups and government have reduced the importance of political parties as the principal conduit of interest articulation, interest aggregation, and policy formulation.

Third, the relationships of state and interest group actors with each other and with individual citizens are increasingly governed by legal rules, rights, norms, and procedures, which (in addition to constituting and reinforcing an ideological influence in their own right) helped to shape the communicative discourse between political actors and the public. Some of these norms have powerfully enabled hitherto marginalized groups, such as First Nations, by giving them symbolic capital (rights of recognition) that could be drawn upon in demanding political influence.

A NOTE ON POSTMATERIALISM

Postmaterialism is a theory of intergenerational value change based on two key hypotheses, first set out in Ronald Inglehart’s 1977 book *The Silent Revolution*.⁶⁴ (1) the scarcity hypothesis postulates that individuals’ priorities reflect the socio-economic environment by placing the greatest subjective value on those things that are in relatively short supply; and (2) the socialization hypothesis holds that there is a substantial time lag between socio-economic environment and value priorities since, to a large extent, one’s basic values reflect the conditions that prevailed during one’s pre-adult years. Taken together, these two hypotheses generate a clear set of predictions concerning value change: conditions of prosperity (such as those generally experienced by baby boomers) lead to a fundamental but very gradual shift, in which needs for belonging, esteem, intellectual and aesthetic satisfaction, and a cleaner

⁶⁴ Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

environment become more prominent as a younger generation replaces an older one (raised with the scarcity values associated with the Great Depression and the Second World War).

Thus Inglehart found that a “New Politics” emphasizing quality-of-life issues was being superimposed on the older, class-based cleavages of industrial society.⁶⁵ His later books, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* and *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*,⁶⁶ not only use the cumulative results of the massive World Values Survey to confirm these theoretical expectations empirically but also situate this value shift within a much broader historical process of postmodernization: hence the core societal project of traditional societies is survival; of modern societies, maximized economic growth; and of postmodern societies, maximized subjective well-being. Furthermore, a growing emphasis on individual freedom leads not only to a rejection of traditional authority that is characteristic of processes of modernization but also to an erosion of the rational-legal institutional authority that is often seen as the hallmark of political modernization.⁶⁷

However, the question of postmaterialism and the New Politics, and how it cuts across both class-based and populist analyses, did not begin to be considered seriously in the BC context until the 1990s, no doubt in response to the volume of theoretical and comparative postmaterialist literature but also because of the transformation of the BC party system in the 1991 provincial election, which was associated with the election of a large number of “baby boomers” to positions of leadership. Indeed, one could have given a fairly compelling account in the early 1990s of how the new party system and policy agenda were straightforward manifestations of intergenerational value change as analyzed by Inglehart and Neil Nevitte.⁶⁸ A look at the *Parliamentary Guide* for the years 1990 through 1995 shows clearly how, in the Vander Zalm and Johnston governments, the majority of cabinet members, including the premier, were born before 1940, while in the Harcourt cabinet the majority, including the premier, were born after 1940.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Ibid., 179-261.

⁶⁶ Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁶⁷ Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*, 78.

⁶⁸ Neil Nevitte, ed., *Value Change and Governance in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

⁶⁹ The median birth year revealed by members of the 34th BC Legislature in the 1990 *Parliamentary Guide* is 1940 (average 1937.846); the median birth year for the 35th Legislature as

It is easy to attribute large parts of the Harcourt government's agenda to the postmaterialist attitudes of the baby-boom generation: the importance of women's issues; the importance of the environment (reflected in the creation of new parks, the cancellation of Kemano II, and a new forest practices code); and recognition of an educated citizenry's new demands for participation and involvement (reflected in the significant new mechanisms for consultation represented by the CORE process, land-use plans, economic summits, the treaty process, freedom of information legislation, and so on). While the value preferences expressed in these policies had also grown in importance under the Socreds, in keeping with the gradualness of change implied by the socialization hypothesis, the sudden appearance of a new-look party system in 1991 largely dominated by the postwar cohort pushed them, quite predictably, to the top of the policy agenda. Significantly, all of the major initiatives relating to land use involved brokering between labour, environmentalist, and First Nations interests rather than simply reflecting a labour agenda.

Nevertheless, the first systematic comparison of postmaterialism with other value orientations in British Columbia concluded that, in the 1990s, populism and the clash between left-wing and right-wing political philosophies still largely structured the political orientations of the electorate.⁷⁰ Blake observed that, although the importance of the New Politics was increasing, that trend may have been blunted by the greater priority accorded to traditional materialist values (such as law and order and economic security) by the province's Asian ethnic minority, especially given the large component of immigrants from newly industrialized countries in that group.

More recent studies generally confirm the conclusion that New Politics has been structuring neither the party system nor the policy agenda in a dominant or determinative fashion. Erickson suggests that the Liberals may have made some inroads among postmaterialist voters due to Campbell's climate change initiatives, while the NDP (as the Opposition party) has made gains among those with populist sentiments.⁷¹ The traditional antagonism between labour and capital has been supplemented by conflicts between economic and environmental interests

revealed in the 1995 *Parliamentary Guide* is 1944 (average 1943.96). See Kathryn M. Flanagan and Katherine J. Miller, eds., *The Parliamentary Guide/Guide Parlementaire* (Toronto: Info Globe, 1990).

⁷⁰ Donald E. Blake, "The Politics of Polarization," in *Politics, Policy and Government in British Columbia*, ed. R.K. Carty (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995), 67-84.

⁷¹ See Erickson, "Electoral Behaviour in British Columbia," 144-49.

that are more pronounced on the south coast of British Columbia than perhaps anywhere else in Canada; but British Columbia's postmaterialist streak is only one aspect of the province's political distinctiveness.

FIRST NATIONS AND THE LAND QUESTION

British Columbia's land base – two-thirds of which is forest and over 90 percent of which is publicly owned – has played a central role in theories of BC politics as battles over wealth generated by resource extraction was the basic focus of both Robin's economic class theory and Black's political culture of exploitation. But that role is changing, as resource-based economic activity has fallen to under 19 percent of provincial GDP. Howlett and Brownsey's survey of the transition from the "old staples political economy" to the "new political economy" stresses the role of the rising service sector and the politics of identity in the new party system that emerged in 1991. The new electoral dynamic features the NDP, which caters to voters who are relatively more dependent upon the state but who are likely to be alienated once it forms government and is forced to confront constraints upon government spending; and the main anti-NDP party (presently the Liberals), which, once in office, is apt to lose voters to third parties when it confronts regulatory or taxation issues not to the liking of the private sector.⁷²

The electoral class struggle that characterized BC politics from the 1930s through the 1980s is still there, but it has been pushed to the background, where it must contend with other elements of a more pluralistic political system and political culture. And while the massive wave of Asian immigration over the past three decades represents a remarkable continuity in a couple of respects – British Columbia is currently the only province in Canada in which a majority of the population has been born elsewhere (and the Asian population expresses a higher materialist value orientation than does the population as a whole) – the new immigrant materialism is now largely detached from the resource wealth of the hinterland, which had once been the principal reason for coming to British Columbia.

Yet there are good reasons for thinking that the land will continue to occupy centre stage in BC politics. This extends well beyond the fact that resource industry is disproportionately more important outside the southern urban centres and is still responsible for most of the province's

⁷² Michael Howlett and Keith Brownsey, "From Forestry to Film: The Changing Political Economy of British Columbia," in Howlett et al., *British Columbia Politics*, 27.

international export earnings. The new distinctiveness stems less from the opening of the land base to industry than from its growing *scarcity* in the face of various competing First Nations, industrial, residential, recreational, investor, conservationist, and other users. Amidst this growing institutional pluralism, the most striking feature is that the number of modern treaties that have yet to be negotiated is greater in British Columbia than in the rest of Canada combined: claims relating to virtually all of the public land base not covered by Treaty 8, the Douglas treaties on Vancouver Island, and a few subsequent urban land purchases.⁷³ There are also a number of First Nations who have opted out of the treaty process altogether, in part to avoid the surrender of sovereignty claims implied by its “certainty and finality” clauses.

The Land Question in British Columbia illustrates some broad themes in the literature on path-dependent sequences. First, the sequence and timing of entry into a relatively open political space is often crucial because, “in contexts conducive to path dependence, groups able to consolidate early advantages may achieve enduring superiority. Actors arriving later may find that resources in the environment (e.g., potential supporters) are already committed to other patterns of mobilization.”⁷⁴ First Nations in the period from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries were too late in the sense that they became greatly outnumbered, in addition to being technologically disadvantaged, by European settlers. But those First Nations who signed treaties during this period were also too early in the sense that their bargaining power was relatively weak. First Nations who pressed their claims after the 1973 *Calder* decision, the 1982 Canada Act, and the 1997 *Delgamuukw* decision were in a far better position than were their predecessors.

This relates to a second theme in the path-dependency literature: the development of *social capacities* – “the stock of available resources in social life – material, technological, organizational and ideational.”⁷⁵ The string of legal victories for First Nations in the late twentieth century not only secured a package of abstract rights but also spurred the development of Aboriginal leadership and education, prompted improvements in federal and provincial public policy, stimulated public awareness, and garnered broad public and political support. These factors combined to produce positive feedback loops that have been self-reinforcing – by reducing

⁷³ The clever and “devious” purchases of land from the Songhees, False Creek, and Kitsilano First Nations, orchestrated by the government of Richard McBride in the early twentieth century, is colourfully described by Robin in *Rush for Spoils*, 141–43.

⁷⁴ Pierson, *Politics in Time*, 71.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

the cost of entry of First Nations into the political and legal system and by increasing their influence and likelihood of success in pressing their claims. Having the terms of Aboriginal self-government and rights to the land negotiated *after* these self-reinforcing dynamics have become well established is enormously significant for Aboriginal peoples as well as for land policy. In Canada, only the northern territories have had a comparable proportion of their land and resource base subjected to new comprehensive treaties, and they have had neither the presence of provincial jurisdiction nor the sheer number and variety of interests in play as does British Columbia. Although the Land Question may not serve as a general structuring framework for party politics in the same way as did the frontier political economy in the theories of Robin and Black, the new politics of land scarcity provides an axis of conflict that will touch the lives of all British Columbians and that will serve as a continuing source of the province's political distinctiveness.

CONCLUSIONS

The declining explanatory effectiveness of the classic theories of BC politics reveals some crucial common threads and important clues for understanding the modern trajectory of the province's institutional development. One is the reliance that the class-based, "exploitation" and "sponsored conceptual ideology" theories placed on the comparative *simplicity* of social structures and patterns of interest group activity, particularly at crucial formative periods in the province's history. In British Columbia, a later period of colonial settlement than in eastern Canada and a constant stream of newcomers, combined with a very different political economy from that of the Prairies, provided room for business corporations, organized labour, and/or the state to shape, and at times to dominate, the province's political discourse. In the late twentieth century, growing social pluralism and complexity – as evidenced by the kind and number of interest groups and organizations, the development of the service economy, the changing ethnic composition of the population, improved communications and transportation between British Columbians as well as between the province and the outside world, and the addition of a new postmaterialist dimension to public opinion – have partially eroded and greatly altered all of the major theorized conditions of British Columbia's distinctive political culture and party system. Yet the tilted pendulum (left-right

polarization with right-wing predominance) still persists. Is that continuing distinctiveness merely inertial and destined to fade?

Some possible answers lie in the importance of the temporal ordering (timing and sequence) of historical events and processes. Robin stressed how a conjunction of factors had facilitated the creation of radical political organization, and Black discussed how the late development of the party system and the shallow roots of local tradition made for populist politics. Over time, the twin processes of pluralism and increased institutionalization are diminishing the importance of these factors. Nevertheless, the “lateness” of the treaty process – the formal negotiation of most BC First Nations terms of integration with the Canadian state coming only *after* modernization, urbanization, the institution of constitutional rights, and the development of resource economies on the land base – is an example of a sequencing of events that is unique in Canada and that is of *growing* significance. A new wave of immigrants with a highly materialist orientation represents a great continuity with British Columbia’s past, but the independence of that phenomenon from resource exploitation, and its coincidence with strong postmaterialist and rights orientations in the political culture, represents a new conjuncture with uncertain and possibly polarizing implications. British Columbia is not necessarily losing its capacity for political novelty or excitement.