

# THE QUEST FOR “MODERN ADMINISTRATION”:

*British Columbia’s Civil Service,  
1870s to 1940s*<sup>1</sup>

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SOON AFTER BEING APPOINTED in the early 1920s by Premier John Oliver to the position of supervisor of assessors and agents, Lieutenant-Colonel Ross Napier, an officer in the Canadian forces during the Great War,<sup>2</sup> began to speak out on what he saw as the thoroughly unprogressive and inefficient nature of British Columbia’s civil service. It was a role he would take on again at the end of the decade. Napier was a modernizer who “preached consistency, standardization, and rationalization of the bureaucracy.”<sup>3</sup> What he saw in British Columbia was the opposite, a provincial civil service – now a half-century old – marked by politics, patronage, and inefficiency. The province’s failure to develop what Napier called a “modern administration”<sup>4</sup> was evident in the “blatant pandering to patronage”<sup>5</sup> that he believed to be as pervasive in the late 1920s and early 1930s as at any time in the province’s history. It was also evident in the chaotic nature of government administration in rural British Columbia. In his July 1921 report on the government agency office in Princeton, for instance, he noted that the government agent there had “been in the service

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Patricia Roy, Keith Ralston, two anonymous readers, and the students of UBC History 305 for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper, which was originally presented at the British Columbia: Inner and Outer Worlds Conference, Harrison Hot Springs, April 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel (formerly Major) Ross Napier, born at Stonehaven, Scotland, in 1878, joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force in September 1914, was wounded twice, and remained with the Canadian forces in combat and non-combat roles until 1920. See Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, C.E.F. Regimental Documents, War Service Records, Major Robert Ross Napier, accession 92-93/166, box 7233.

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Munroe Anholt, “An Administrative History of the British Columbia Government Agents” (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 1991), 231.

<sup>4</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, 9 August 1932, 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 March 1933, 9.

for 32 years,” practically all of it “spent in the present office.” Like the agent himself, office methods had not changed, perhaps explaining the absence of any “system” of record keeping. No attempt had been made to file letters; instead, letters had been “thrust into a box file” that had “to be searched through every time” back correspondence was sought. At the rear of the office was a small room where papers and books were “piled into one heterogeneous mass.” A bare stove pipe passed through the room, threatening fire.<sup>6</sup> Above all, it was the absence of a “single modern filing cabinet” in the offices of government agents, even as late as the early 1930s,<sup>7</sup> that symbolized for Napier a “certain ... slackness” in provincial administrative procedures.<sup>8</sup>

“Modern” principles of public administration for the English-speaking world were defined in 1854 in a report to the British Parliament entitled *The Organisation of the Permanent Civil Service*. Also known as the Northcote/Trevelyan Report, this seminal document envisioned “an efficient, permanent civil service, free from corruption and patronage, recruited by open competition, divided into grades, and centrally directed.”<sup>9</sup> Crucial to the implementation of these principles was a clear “distinction between ‘politics’ and ‘administration,’” the “eclipse of patronage as an instrument of selection and promotion in government offices and its replacement by a system of competition based on intellectual merit,” and the “gradual emergence of a uniform pattern of grading.”<sup>10</sup> Standard evaluations through examinations, uniform salaries for comparable work, and promotion based on merit were to bring an end to the variable, idiosyncratic, and inefficient conditions of work that then prevailed in the British government service. These principles laid the foundation for a long history of civil service reform in Britain and set the standard for what a “modern” public administration should constitute

<sup>6</sup> Lt.-Col. R. Ross Napier, “Inspection of [the] Princeton Agency, Report,” 27–31 July 1921, Provincial Archives of British Columbia (hereafter PABC), GR879, British Columbia, Supervisor of Assessors and Agents (hereafter SAA), box 2, file P.

<sup>7</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, 25 August 1932, 10. See also Napier, “Inspection of (the) Fort Steele Agency, Report,” 24–29 April 1921, SAA, box 2, file E; and Napier, “Government Agencies of British Columbia,” Okanagan Historical Society, *Sixth Annual Report*, 1935, 217.

<sup>8</sup> Napier, “Inspection of [the] Rossland Agency, Report,” 7–11 August 1921, SAA, box 2, file R.

<sup>9</sup> Richard A. Chapman and J.R. Greenaway, *The Dynamics of Administrative Reform* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 15. See also Richard A. Chapman, *The Civil Service Commission, 1855–1991* (London: Routledge, 2004), chap.2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

at both the national and provincial levels in Canada.<sup>11</sup> Yet, they were implemented in a comprehensive manner in Canada only very slowly.

While little attention has been given to the early history of public administration in British Columbia,<sup>12</sup> political scientist Neil Swainson has observed that much "of the change in thinking" about provincial administration "took place during and after World War II." This shift in administrative culture, he suggests, was also evident elsewhere in Canada,<sup>13</sup> an observation supported by a remarkably similar pattern of mid-1940s initiatives that culminated in the adoption of service-wide standards of classification and an end to the widespread use of patronage – defined as granting favours, giving contracts, or making government appointments in return for political support – in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia.<sup>14</sup>

The following article examines the acceptance of "modern methods" of public administration in one western province, British Columbia. In it the 1940s emerge as a decade that separated the informal practices of the pioneer years from the era of "modern administration," marked by systematic and professional governance. The transition to modern administration emerges from this story as a slow and halting process marked by persistent recourse to patronage, despite serious efforts to end

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<sup>11</sup> Ken Rassmussen has observed that "ideas taken from the renowned Northcote/Trevelyan report of 1854" were "referred to endlessly in Canadian debates over [administrative] reform." Such was the case in British Columbia, when Premier Harlan Brewster, introducing into the provincial Legislature in March 1917 a bill to reform the administration of British Columbia's civil service, explicitly identified the connection between Britain's Northcote/Trevelyan Report and civil service reform in Canada. See Ken Rassmussen, "Administrative Reform and the Quest for Bureaucratic Autonomy, 1867-1919," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29, 3 (1994): 50; and *Victoria Daily Times*, 27 March 1917, 7.

<sup>12</sup> An exception is Thomas Fleming's studies of school administration in British Columbia. See Fleming, "'Our Boys in the Field': School Inspectors, Superintendents, and the Changing Character of School Leadership in British Columbia," in *A History of British Columbia: Selected Readings*, ed. Patricia E. Roy (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1989), 218-38; and Fleming, "In the Imperial Age and After: Patterns of British Columbia School Leadership and the Institution of the Superintendency, 1849-1988," *BC Studies* 81 (Spring 1989): 50-76.

<sup>13</sup> Neil Swainson, "The Public Service," in *The Reins of Power: Governing British Columbia*, ed. J. Terence Morley, Norman J. Ruff, Neil A. Swanson, R. Jeremy Wilson, and Walter D. Young (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1983), 122-25. See also Norman J. Ruff, "Managing the Public Service," in *ibid.*, 166-67.

<sup>14</sup> The pattern of reform initiatives in the four provinces is quite striking. Initiatives to reform the civil service in British Columbia occurred in 1909, 1917, and 1945; in Manitoba they occurred in 1918 and 1947; in Saskatchewan they occurred in 1913, 1930, 1945, and 1947; and in Ontario they occurred in 1918 and 1945-47. See M.S. Donnelly, *The Government of Manitoba* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 3; Evelyn Eager, *Saskatchewan Government: Politics and Pragmatism* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980), 161; and J.E. Hodgetts, *From Arm's Length to Hands On: The Formative Years of Ontario's Public Service, 1867-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 178-79 and 208-09.

the practice. The old ways continued because they served the needs of a province that, throughout the interwar years, remained a geographically fractured region of local communities. In such an environment, face-to-face politics and political patronage made sense. But economic and social change that preceded the Second World War and accelerated during and after it challenged the assumptions of the “pioneer” era, especially the dominance of Victorian liberalism, with its emphasis on independence, small-scale production, and localism. The impulse for modernization finally gained force when the scale and complexity of organizational life in British Columbia made necessary a more systematic and efficient approach to government administration.

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In the first decades after Confederation, British Columbia’s public service was tiny and uncomplicated. It inherited from the colonial period three departments – provincial-secretary, attorney-general, and lands – and in 1873 added a fourth, finance.<sup>15</sup> The number of salaried, yearly employees initially constituted more a “corporal’s guard” than a coherent bureaucracy. Driven by railway construction, resource industry expansion, and population growth, the public service began to expand in the 1880s and almost tripled in the 1890s (Table 1). Indeed, for the last two decades of the century the core group of public servants grew faster than the population as a whole, though it remained small. While this group can be thought of as the “civil service” proper, the number of people listed in the province’s *Public Accounts* as working for the state in casual or part-time labour – people like T. Christopher, a “temporary” cook at the New Westminster Lunatic Asylum who earned \$120 for government work in the year ending 1 July 1881, but who would not be included among the “public servants” referred to in Table 1 – expands the category considerably. Thus, the number in 1881 increases from 42 to 93 and in 1891 from 109 to 196. Thinking about public service in this less restrictive way (and thus expanding the category beyond the core civil service) suggests that government employment was somewhat larger than the core part of the public service – that is, the civil service. Nonetheless, the limited scale of British Columbia’s early public administration is clear.

<sup>15</sup> Anholt, “An Administrative History,” 70–71 and 105–06 (quotations from 69 and 71). Agriculture was included under Department of Finance, mining under Department of the Provincial Secretary, and works under Department of Lands.

TABLE 1  
*British Columbia Public Service, 1871-1911*

DATE	ESTIMATES OF PERMANENT PUBLIC SERVICE			INCREASE OVER PREV. DECADE (%)	BC POPULATION INCREASE OVER PREV. DECADE (%)
	HQ	FIELD	TOTAL		
1871	31	29	60		
1880-81	19	23	42	-30	36
1890-91	45	64	109	160	99
1900-01	108	185	293	169	82
1910-11	238	308	546	86	120

*Sources:* Dennis Munroe Anholt has estimated the size of the permanent public service for the period up to 1917-18, when the British Columbia Civil Service Commission was formed. His calculations appear to correspond to the definition of "civil servant" presented in the Public Service Act, 1909, that is, someone who was "paid a yearly salary" (B.C., R.S. 1909, c.39, s.3). See Anholt, "An Administrative History of the British Columbia Government Agents" (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 1991), Tables 1 and 4, 71 and 105-06. Anholt's 1871 data are from "An Act to Provide for a Permanent Civil Service, no. 16, BC Ordinances and Acts, 1866-1871 and Colonial Estimates," *Journal of the Colonial Legislatures of the Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, 1851-1871*, ed., James E. Hendrickson (Victoria: Provincial Archives, 1980), 7:635-45, Appendix C. His remaining data are from British Columbia, *Public Accounts* located in British Columbia, *Sessional Papers* (Victoria, BC).

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of British Columbia's public service immediately after the colonial period was its highly decentralized nature, which was anchored by a system of government agents who served as multi-purpose administrators around the province. Having emerged during the colonial period as magistrates or gold commissioners, government agents (as they became known after 1871) represented an administrative system that was organized by territory rather than by function, with these generalists administering across large areas a range of tasks that included managing land registration, collecting taxes, registering births, marrying people, caring for "lunatics," administering the Jurors Act and the Graveyard Act, and providing needed social services. Initially after Confederation, provincial police constables reported to local agents; however, in the 1890s, constables became more clearly defined within the jurisdiction of the superintendent of police,

and government agents were no longer to be responsible for police work.<sup>16</sup> Government agents were well connected to local elites, especially in the colonial and early national periods, and were often locally respected community leaders. Dennis Anholt identifies six magistrates, or gold commissioners, in 1871 and eight government agents in the early 1880s and 1890s, respectively. By 1891, their subordinate staffs, including “collectors, assessors, constables, road superintendents and the like, were stationed at as many as twenty-six additional points across the province.”<sup>17</sup> In the early years, agents in the field received little instruction for their work and were subjected to only sporadic administrative oversight.<sup>18</sup> The shift from a territorial structure (through agencies) to a functional structure (through departments) is a key part of the history of government administration in British Columbia.

Discussion of patronage after Confederation continued a debate that had emerged during the colonial period. This debate was between Tories and Reformers, the former being those connected to the colonial administrative elite, magistrates, and former Hudson’s Bay officers who saw office holding as the necessary foundation of a hierarchically structured society, the latter being small “1” liberals who argued for the need to “clear away the debris of the Crown colony and lay the foundation of a people’s government.”<sup>19</sup> The second, third, and fifth premiers – Amor De Cosmos from 1872–74 and George Anthony Walkem from 1874–76 and again from 1878–82 – saw in cheap government a necessary foundation for popular democracy, and they viewed a “bloated civil service” as one of the chief ailments of the colonial period.<sup>20</sup> Yet, with democracy and elections came partisanship, and though not organized through formally constituted parties for another thirty years, fluid but perceptible partisanship was observable by the mid-1870s. For instance, in February 1876 a resident of Cowichan argued in the press that the first Walkem government had “removed a competent, impartial gentleman from being Collector of Votes and illegally appointed in his stead a strong partizan

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 113–14. Yet, as Anholt notes, into the 1940s and 1950s government agents continued to ask constables to be “their ‘foot soldiers’ in matters of relief payments and other outside investigations” (244).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 73–74 and 135.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>19</sup> *Daily Colonist*, 12 May 1872, 2. For colonial period politics, see Jean Barman, “Transfer, Imposition or Consensus? The Emergence of Educational Structures in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia,” in *Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History*, ed. Nancy Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and Davis C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig, 1986), 241–64.

<sup>20</sup> *Daily Colonist*, 12 May 1872, 2. See also *ibid.*, 21 August 1877, 2; and the *Victoria Daily Standard*, 30 April 1878, 3, 6 May 1878, 2, and 11 May 1878, 4.

and an intending candidate."<sup>21</sup> Supporters of the cheap-government argument now also began to assert that "to the victors belong the spoils,"<sup>22</sup> a position that seemingly contradicted their earlier attacks on the "bloated" administration of the colonial period and of the early 1870s. More such changes followed the June 1878 election, which returned the Walkem faction to power, a change of government that, in the year following, appears to have increased the turnover of people working either full time or part time for the state.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the data, fragile though they are, indicate a deviation from the norm immediately after the election that is likely explained by a patronage-based turnover of government employment.

The civil service grew from 109 people in 1891 to almost 300 in 1901, and more than 500 in 1911 (Table 1). It more than doubled again during the next (wartime) decade to reach 1,262 in 1921 but expanded little thereafter until the 1940s, increasing through the interwar years at a much slower rate than the population of the province as a whole (Table 2). Women filled 18 percent of permanent civil service positions in 1920, 31 percent in 1940, and 44 percent in 1960.

The public service also began to reflect the modernist impulse for specialization in British Columbia as the province's population and economy grew in size and complexity. Program specialists in forestry and mining were first appointed in the 1880s and 1890s, a separate Department of Mines was established in 1898, the Department of Lands was carved out of the Department of Lands and Works in 1908, and the Department of Agriculture "underwent phenomenal changes ... expanding from a minor adjunct of the Department of Finance to a flourishing, independent department."<sup>24</sup> In 1899, administrative specialists such as an inspector of mines, an inspector of fruit pests, an inspector of animals, and a provincial timber inspector were added to the province's public service.

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<sup>21</sup> *Daily Colonist*, 15 February 1876, 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Mainland Guardian*, 18 October 1876, 2.

<sup>23</sup> I reached this conclusion by creating a "public service" category that included people listed in the *Public Accounts* as working full time or part time for the provincial state (i.e., including more than the salaried employees). I excluded teachers from the study on the grounds that they constituted an administratively coherent but separate group of state workers. I identified people whose names persisted in the *Public Accounts* from the first half of 1878 into the *Public Accounts* for 1879 (i.e., the first year after the election). For comparative purposes, I did the same for names that spilled over from the *Public Accounts* of 1879 into the *Public Accounts* of 1880 (i.e., the second full year after the election). I found that the turnover was much greater immediately after the election than it was in the second year thereafter (56 percent turnover versus 24 percent), with persistence the opposite (44 percent versus 76 percent).

<sup>24</sup> Anholt, "An Administrative History," 100-9 and 178. For an overview of the history of the development of government departments, see Swainson, "The Public Service," 129-37.



TABLE 2  
*British Columbia's Public Civil Service, 1921-51*

DATE	PERMANENT MEMBERS OF CIVIL SERVICE	INCREASE	TEMPORARY MEMBERS OF CIVIL SERVICE*	TEMPORARY AS % OF ANNUAL TOTAL	BC
		OVER PREVIOUS DECADE (%)			POPULATION INCREASE OVER PREVIOUS DECADE (%)
1921	1262	131	73	5	25
1931	1443	14	174	11	41
1941	1631	13	320	16	24
1951	6480	297	1514**	19	34

\* There are no accurate figures on the number of temporary workers in the BC public service before the BC Civil Service Commission was created in 1918.

\*\* Starting in 1948, the Civil Service Commission inaugurated a separate category known as "Probationary." In the 1948 statistics it included these under "Temporary," as I have done here.

Sources: "Numerical Summary of Civil Lists," Civil Service Commissioner, *Annual Reports*, 1920-1941, British Columbia Provincial Archives, Civil Service Commission Records, GR 101; and British Columbia, Civil Service Commission, *Reports*, 1946-1951 (Victoria: King's Printers, 1947-52).

Specialists such as surveyors, inspectors, and superintendents were "seven times more prevalent (in British Columbia's civil service) in 1917 than in 1890."<sup>25</sup> As departments developed they also extended their presence beyond Victoria. Thus government agents and the provincial police, "Victoria's only representatives outside of the capital" in 1890, had by 1917 been joined by "a number of regionally-based public employees."<sup>26</sup>

Despite the first signs of administrative specialization, the number of civil service positions that could provide attractive careers to active and intelligent young middle-class men remained few. Most civil service jobs were routine and demanded little skill beyond the capacity to read and write.<sup>27</sup> Work was poorly paid, methods of fixing salaries were haphazard, and administrative practices were highly inefficient. Speaking at a Civil Service Commission dinner in the 1930s, a long-time public servant offered the following impression of British Columbia's early civil service culture:

<sup>25</sup> Anholt, "An Administrative History," III.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>27</sup> Donnelly, *The Government of Manitoba*, 122.



The sole staff [when he entered the office as an employee around 1907] consisted of four men, all of whom were well on in years. The deputy had been in the Service for thirty or forty years, and was rarely seen outside of his own office, nor did he encourage visitors. The chief clerk, who was seventy or thereabouts at the time I speak of, is remembered by me chiefly because he wore dundrearies, long side whiskers which he used to dye every Sunday. They were a fine reddish colour on Monday but by Friday showed a lot of gray. Then there was the elderly gentleman with a gray beard who operated the only typewriter in the office. I remember him because he wore three waistcoats, summer and winter, and used to tell me the same jokes and anecdotes day after day. There was a temporary clerk in his eighties who did nothing but index the orders-in-council. He had been an officer in the Black Watch and had seen service in India during the Mutiny [1857]. He died in harness, aged eighty-five.

It was unthinkable that a woman should be employed in the office and no dictation was given. The Deputy wrote his letters in pencil on the backs of envelopes and any scraps of paper available. His letters were then slowly typed out by the old gentleman with the waistcoats. Carbon copies were unknown. Letters were copied in the old-fashioned letter book which was supposed to be indexed, but was always a year or two behind ... The Deputy's table, chairs and floor, were covered with files and paper, kept in place with mineral specimens, on top of each pile, and, of course, important papers were hidden and lost sight of, and could not be found when wanted. I don't think the Deputy saw his Minister more than three or four times a year.<sup>28</sup>

While documenting inefficient clerical practices, the above description also includes an element of pathos. The old men toiling in this departmental headquarters (perhaps the Department of Mines) illustrate vividly the point made by Ontario's civil service commissioner in the 1920s: that before the introduction of superannuation "many old persons were retained long after their usefulness had passed." Lacking a pension plan, the public service served for some as "a charitable institution."<sup>29</sup> In 1921, the provincial government passed a "Superannuation

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<sup>28</sup> British Columbia Provincial Archives, Provincial Secretary, GR497, box 1, file 6, n.n., n.d. [1937].

<sup>29</sup> Hodgetts, *From Arm's Length to Hands On*, 198-99. See also *Daily Colonist*, 19 February 1899, 4.

Act” that established a system of pensions for provincial and municipal government workers and, eventually, for teachers.<sup>30</sup>

The slow acceptance of modern methods of administration is explained, in part, by the prevailing influence of patronage as the method for staffing the public service. The extent to which partisanship and personal connections influenced hiring and promotion in British Columbia varied in intensity over the seventy-five years after the province entered Confederation. It was most obvious after key elections, when one political party gave way to another, and was practised much more fully among seasonal and part-time employees of the government than among the core civil service (especially its more highly trained managers and technical specialists). Evidence of patronage comes substantially from the press and reflects outbursts of emotionally-charged public debate. There are no hard data on the proportion of public service appointments – including those made both inside and outside the civil service – by patronage. The key point, however, is that, in British Columbia up to the 1940s, patronage continued in some form to disrupt full acceptance of the merit principle, understood by reformers to be the “keystone to the arch of progress.”<sup>31</sup>

Another major outburst of patronage appointments followed the victory in 1898 of the opposition faction headed by Charles Semlin, which, according to the opposition press, was accompanied by “wholesale dismissals” from the civil service.<sup>32</sup> The rhetoric is political and exaggerated, but firings did occur. One involved J. Preston Forde, a mining recorder and constable from the Bridge River/Lillooet area who was first dismissed on three day’s notice, rehired when a successor could not be found, and cut again two weeks later.<sup>33</sup> Others who faced the axe were the surveyor-general, the deputy registrar of the Supreme and County Court in Vancouver, and a mining recorder at Tom Creek in the Cassiar district. While the first two were salaried members of the civil service, employed for eleven and five years, respectively, the third had been a low-paid outside worker for only seven months.<sup>34</sup> None of

<sup>30</sup> An Act Respecting Superannuation, 1921 (R.S. 1921, c.60). Teachers were also included in the bill, but funding for teachers’ pensions was to come from local school boards. See Diane McNay, “The Teachers of British Columbia and Superannuation,” *BC Studies* 2 (Summer 1969): 30-44.

<sup>31</sup> Hodgetts, *From Arm’s Length to Hands On*, 208.

<sup>32</sup> *Daily Colonist*, 6 November 1898, 7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 November 1898, 4.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 February 1899, 7. Names and salaries were checked in British Columbia, *Public Accounts*, for the year 1897-98. The salary of Tom Kains, the surveyor-general, for the year ending 30 June 1898 was \$1,728; that of W.J. Thicke, the deputy registrar of the Supreme and County Court, was \$1,026; and that of L.D. Wells, the mining recorder, was \$75.

these cuts, however, created the same level of indignation from the opposition press as did that of poor Miss Woolley, secretary to three premiers through the 1890s but now "dismissed without notice." She was, wrote the partisan editor of the *Daily Colonist*, "simply told to go, as one might turn out a tramp or a trespasser."<sup>35</sup> Such obvious cases of patronage notwithstanding, a more important insight might be the *Colonist's* comment that "appointments out of the ranks of friends" were more numerous than cuts.<sup>36</sup> A calculation of the names of full- and part-time employees of the government between 1897 and 1901 reveals a sharp but temporary increase in the number of public employees (including members of the civil service) in the year immediately after the July 1898 election.<sup>37</sup> As in 1878, such evidence hints at patronage-motivated changes to the province's public service on the part of an incoming government.

The "real significance of patronage" may be, as political scientist J.E. Hodgetts has suggested, the fact that "measures taken to eradicate it have left their mark on the public service."<sup>38</sup> Civil service history is indeed very much about recurring reform initiatives that aimed to shape public service administration along "modern" lines. The first serious reform impulse in British Columbia occurred in 1907 and 1908, when the provincial secretary, Dr. Henry Esson Young, who in 1908 initiated the process to create a provincial university, drafted a new Civil Service Act based on British models. The principal goal was to create a "modern" public service that featured standardized, graded categories of job status that would equalize salaries across the civil service for similar types of work. A patronage-based system of hiring and promotion did the opposite because key decisions about promotion and pay were made at department and local levels rather than through a standardized and centrally managed process of evaluation. To implement the provisions of the act drafted in 1908, and redrafted in 1909, a three-man commission to regrade the civil service staff was appointed, its mandate to grade all clerks into one of four classes and thus to create a more uniform and fair

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<sup>35</sup> *Daily Colonist*, 18 September 1898, 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 February 1899, 7.

<sup>37</sup> I used the same methodology here as I did for the 1878 election (see note no. 23). The annual totals for this "public service" category were: for 1897-98, 407; for 1898-99, 500; for 1899-1900, 439; and for 1900-01, 467.

<sup>38</sup> J.E. Hodgetts, *The Canadian Public Service: A Physiology of Government, 1867-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 52.

structure of salaries.<sup>39</sup> Heading the three-man commission was a truly remarkable advocate of modernity, Moses Cotsworth. Martin Robin describes this important reformer as follows:

Cotsworth was an accountant, statistician, economist, and author of a standard text on railway rates in Britain, *Maximum Railway Rates* ... He was one of the foremost railway experts in the Empire. Cotsworth came to Canada in 1907 and helped the McBride government draft its Civil Service and Superannuation bill ... He was later appointed Provincial Auditor to investigate the municipal affairs of New Westminster and Burnaby.<sup>40</sup>

The Public Service Act, 1909, created by Cotsworth and others, is a classic statement of reform thinking about administration. It advocated a three-person Civil Service Commission to manage hiring and promotion, public competitive examinations for everyone hoping to enter the public service, a re-grading of the civil service to standardize work and pay, and an appeal procedure for members dissatisfied with the grade that they had been assigned. The 1909 version of the act added that “only British subjects shall be or (shall) become members of the Public Service,” except where technical knowledge was required.<sup>41</sup>

Subsequent comments by Cotsworth suggest that the effect of this initiative in public administration reform was negligible. The impact of the regrading commission’s work was compromised by the effect of the 1909 election, after which the overwhelming McBride majority made it impossible for the commissioners to dismiss poorly performing civil servants because the workers’ friends and supporters in the government were now “too numerous.”<sup>42</sup> Evidence suggests that the Public Service Act, 1909, was moribund from the outset.

The construction of a public service through politically motivated appointments continued. By the time the first wave of reform had come

<sup>39</sup> *Daily Colonist*, 19 November 1907, 3, 8 March 1908, 4, 29 July 1908, 7, and 28 October 1909, 2; *Victoria Daily Times*, 4 February 1908, 6 and 4 March 1909, 9; *Vancouver Province*, 20 February 1908, 9, 23 February 1909, 1, 2 March 1909, 3, 3 June 1909, 1, and 8 November 1909, 21. The records of workers who grieved their classifications offer useful insight into aspects of civil service work in the early years of the century. See M.B. Cotsworth, J.A. Mara, and W. Curtis Sampson, “The Grading Commissioners Report,” 21 June 1909, SAA, box 6, file 2. The commissioners’ responses to civil servants’ complaints about the grade status accorded them can be found in SAA, box 6, file 7.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Robin, *The Rush for Spoils: The Company Province, 1871–1933* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 282. See also the *Vancouver Sun*, 1 May 1915, 4 and 2 June 1915, 1, 2, and 4.

<sup>41</sup> The Public Service Act, 1909 (R.S. 1909, c.39, s.3[2]).

<sup>42</sup> *Vancouver Province*, 24 November 1915, 10.

and gone, the McBride government, under the direction of Attorney-General William Bowser, constructed a very efficient political organization, or "machine," which tied a wide variety of government jobs, licences, and contracts to support for the McBride (to 1915) and Bowser (1915-16) governments. Bowser's party organization operated "special committees of the Beaver Club," which, in the words of political scientist Martin Robin, was "a social organization peopled with Conservative mayors, bank managers, mining magnates and Timber barons" located in towns and cities across the province.<sup>43</sup> In 1913, journalist Britton Cook published a comprehensive study of the Bowser machine, identifying a wide range of government functions – such as construction contracts, liquor licences, and printing jobs – that were awarded on the basis of support for the Conservative Party. Indeed, Cook argued, Bowser, "the real brains of the government," controlled the names on wage rolls of almost "all the important employers in the interior of the province."<sup>44</sup>

The blatant partisanship of the McBride-Bowser electoral machine in the decade before the 1916 election generated another attempt to end patronage, but once again the reform impulse was short-lived.<sup>45</sup> At the forefront of the movement was the now familiar modernizer Moses Cotsworth, in the 1907-10 period an agent of the McBride government, now a fierce opponent. Along with Congregationalist minister A.E. Cooke, Cotsworth penned a pamphlet called *The Crisis in British Columbia*, which was published under the auspices of the Ministerial Union of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Cotsworth later published his own document, *Railway Bungling (And Worse) in British Columbia*, to document charges of blatant influence peddling in both the Conservative and Liberal parties on the part of officers of the Pacific Great Eastern Railway, then being constructed northward to Prince George from Squamish.<sup>46</sup> The maverick politician Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper joined the crusade and, although a life-long Conservative, campaigned for the Liberals in the 1916 election.

<sup>43</sup> Robin, *Rush for Spoils*, 128.

<sup>44</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, 25 March 1913, 9 (originally published in *Canadian Colliers Weekly*). On the Bowser machine, see also Robin, *Rush for Spoils*, 127-29 and 135-36; and "Bowser's Record (In Part)," n.d., (192?), Charles Hibbert Tupper Papers, Rare Books and Special Collections, University of British Columbia, box 12, file 2.

<sup>45</sup> Robert A.J. McDonald, "Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper and the Political Culture of British Columbia, 1903-1924," *BC Studies* 149 (Spring 2006): 73-79.

<sup>46</sup> Ministerial Union of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, *The Crisis in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Saturday Sunset Press, 1916); and M.B. Cotsworth, *Railway Bungling (and Worse) in British Columbia* (Vancouver: C. Appleby, 1918).

These voices of outrage also spawned a new movement to modernize the public service – a movement headed by the Liberal leader Harlan Brewster, a salmon canner and social gospel reformer of the Baptist faith. Once elected, Brewster quickly introduced the important Civil Service Act, 1917, which was drafted at his suggestion by Dr. Adam Shortt, a political economist from Queen’s University who, in 1908, was appointed as the Dominion civil service commissioner in charge of implementing Canada’s Civil Service Act, 1908.<sup>47</sup> An idealist “who assiduously strove to develop in Canada the British model of public administration,” Shortt, like Brewster, was committed to sweeping away every vestige of patronage and replacing it with “the merit system.”<sup>48</sup> Patronage promotes inefficiency, Brewster asserted, but the “universal cry to-day is for efficiency.”<sup>49</sup> The 1917 act created a permanent civil service commission to be headed by a single commissioner with deputy minister status. One of the commissioner’s primary tasks was, once again, to grade and classify workers in each branch of the civil service, the object being to adjust salaries in a fair and equitable manner.

In the ongoing rhythm of patronage and reform that marked British Columbia’s early administrative history, the good intentions behind the Civil Service Act, 1917, soon fell victim to the province’s circumstances. Brewster’s untimely death in 1918 placed the government in the hands of John Oliver, the Liberal premier from 1918 to 1927 who represented a return to conventional thinking that regarded patronage as a necessary part of the political process. Oliver promptly “knocked out” a “corner stone principle of the Civil Service Act” by having the act amended to transfer authority over the office of civil service commissioner from the Legislature to the Cabinet. In this fashion the commissioner’s independent status was replaced by government control.<sup>50</sup> In addition,

<sup>47</sup> J.E. Hodgetts, *The Biography of an Institution: The Civil Service Commission of Canada, 1908–1967* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1972), 39. For Adam Shortt, see Hodgetts, *From Arm’s Length to Hands On*, 179; Doug Owsram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900–1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 10, 13, 60, and 69; and Barry Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism: The Intellectual Legacy of Adam Shortt, O.D. Skelton, W.C. Clark, and W.A. Mackintosh, 1890–1925* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), chap. 5. The 1917 bill reflected American influence. In his study of Canada’s national public service, J.E. Hodgetts notes that both British and American influences shaped reform thinking at the national level in Canada. For instance, in 1908, a civil commission was created, with statutory powers similar to those of the US Civil Service Commission. British Columbia followed Canada’s lead in creating a civil service commission mandated to develop a detailed classification of public offices. See Hodgetts, *The Canadian Public Service*, 39.

<sup>48</sup> “A Courageous Premier,” *Toronto Globe*, n.d., cited in the *Victoria Daily Times*, 8 May 1917, 4.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 March 1917, 1 and 7. On the political context from which Brewster emerged as premier in 1916, see McDonald, “Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper,” 63–86.

<sup>50</sup> *Daily Colonist*, 16 April 1920, 1.

the Liberal Party's use of liquor patronage to support its Vancouver-centred party machine provided one of the most contentious issues in provincial politics during the 1920s.<sup>51</sup>

Election of a Conservative government in 1928 evoked another vigorous expression of the adage that "to the victor belongs the spoils" as post-election stories of hirings and firings, especially among certain sectors of the public service (e.g., road foremen and coroners), resounded across the province. Geoffrey Simpson suggests that, "from his earliest days in office, Tolmie found himself caught between his own preferences and election promises [to avoid patronage appointments] ... and the incessant demands for rewards and place." Tolmie wrote to a senator shortly after the election complaining that "there was a tremendous fight for patronage control [in the Conservative Party] and it was demanded of me that I discharge all Liberals in the civil service."<sup>52</sup> Despite Premier Tolmie's portrayal of himself as a victim of patronage mania, his government was quick to amend the Civil Service Act, 1917, to ensure that appointments were legal only when approved by the Cabinet. This change made it "possible for any appointment to be made ... by approval of Order-in-Council without reference to the [Civil Service] Commission."<sup>53</sup> In other words, the reform aspects of the Civil Service Act, 1917, were completely scrapped. Thus, in February 1929 we find Opposition leader Thomas Dufferin Pattullo announcing in the Legislature that no fewer than 360 orders-in-council dealing with dismissals and appointments of government employees had been passed.<sup>54</sup> Soon afterwards, the *Vancouver Sun* reported that "only one Liberal road-foreman remained; all the coroners, registrars, janitors, clerks, mechanics, and many senior civil servants had gotten the chop."<sup>55</sup> Employees in the "outside" service, who worked away from the departmental offices in Victoria, were especially affected. As usual, high-profile cases of patronage stand out, including the hiring of Lottie Bowron, a long-time Conservative Party supporter, to the position of rural teachers' welfare officer and the dismissal of prominent Juvenile

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<sup>51</sup> Robert A. Campbell, "Liquor and Liberals: Patronage and Government Control in British Columbia, 1920-1928," *BC Studies* 77 (Spring 1988): 30-53.

<sup>52</sup> Jeffrey Simpson, *Spoils of Power: The Politics of Patronage* (Toronto: Collins, 1988), 291.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 February 1929, 4 and 29 March 1929, 4.

<sup>54</sup> *Vancouver Province*, 2 February 1929, 20; and *Victoria Daily Times*, 2 February 1929, 15.

<sup>55</sup> Simpson, *Spoils of Power*, 291.



Court judge Helen Gregory McGill.<sup>56</sup> In one particularly controversial patronage case, a “high state of indignation” erupted in Prince Rupert when Norman Watt, a “gassed war veteran” who had once been secretary to Minister of Lands Pattullo, was dismissed from his position of five years as the city’s government agent. In response to the ensuing outcry, Finance Minister Shelly professed that he and his government were indeed friends of returned soldiers, even decorated ones such as Lieutenant Watt. But the new Simon Fraser Tolmie administration claimed that the government service it had inherited was “reeking of politics” and that, well, something had to be done.<sup>57</sup> Even though dismissals and reappointments may not have been as extensive in British Columbia as in Saskatchewan and Ontario, where sitting governments were turfed from office in 1929 and 1934, respectively,<sup>58</sup> the election of the Tolmie Conservative government did generate a very discernible patronage moment in British Columbia’s political history.

Yet, even a patronage-burdened government such as that of the Tolmie Conservatives was moved to initiate a study of the bureaucracy, the aim of which was to make it more efficient. Defining his administration as a “business” government that aimed to manage the province on “business-like lines,”<sup>59</sup> Tolmie in 1929 appointed Colonel Ross Napier – formerly employed by the Oliver Liberals as a “departmental commissioner” – to reclassify and regrade the entire provincial civil service. This, of course, had been the goal of both the regrading commission of 1909 and the Civil Service Act, 1917. Napier, who was strongly committed to the modernist principles of standardization and efficiency, took on his new job with evangelical zeal and, by the spring of 1931, had written a series of reports highly critical of the civil service. Under the Tolmie government, Napier proclaimed, “the powers of patronage had asserted themselves to an extent never before heard of.”<sup>60</sup> Napier’s bosses could

<sup>56</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, 30 October 1928, 1, 1 November 1928, 1, 18 December 1928, 1, 22 March 1929, 1, 29 March 1929, 4, and 15 April 1929, 1; *Vancouver Sun*, 1 November 1928, 14, and 29 November 1928, 17; J. Donald Wilson, “‘I Am Here to Help If You Need Me’: British Columbia’s Rural Teachers’ Welfare Officer, 1928–1934,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 25, 2 (1990): 94–118.

<sup>57</sup> *Vancouver Sun*, 29 May 1929, 3; *Victoria Daily Times*, 17 May 1929; and *Daily Colonist*, 8 February 1930, 1 and 2. Shelly eventually lost his job over the issue. See Anholt, “An Administrative History,” 221–23; and Robin Fisher, *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 219–20.

<sup>58</sup> Norman Ward and David Smith, *Jimmy Gardiner: Relentless Liberal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 127 and 179; and Hodgetts, *From Arms Length to Hands On*, 211.

<sup>59</sup> Robert M. Groves, “Business Government: Party Politics and the British Columbia Business Community, 1928–1933” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1976).

<sup>60</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, 28 September 1932, 12.

not have liked what they read and heard, and in the spring of 1931 they fired him. The alternating surges of patronage and reform continued. Napier's replacement, Major Roger Monteith, was an active member of the provincial Conservative Party in Victoria and unquestionably a patronage appointment.<sup>61</sup>

More than patronage is required to explain the government's rejection of Napier's reports. The anti-statist thinking of the business-oriented Tolmie government had hardened under the intense pressure of the Depression and had led, in April 1932, to the appointment of a five-man commission to study the state of government finances and administration in British Columbia. Headed by businessman George Kidd, the commission argued that the cause of the crisis in government finance was extravagance resulting from a "crude form of party politics." The recommended solution included a drastic downsizing of government expenditures on social programs and a sharp reduction in the number of government employees and the level of civil service salaries.<sup>62</sup> In such an environment Napier's desire to reform and professionalize the civil service was entirely out of step with government and popular thinking.

While Napier's reports on the civil service have disappeared, in early 1933 he published his findings in a series of articles in the *Victoria Daily Times*. They constitute the most thorough analysis of the civil service to that time. At their core was a simple truth: the Civil Service Act, 1917, born of high expectations, had been "moribund" for years, its reform intent "openly and flagrantly contravened" by British Columbia's governments "at the behest of patronage interests."<sup>63</sup> Several points stand out. The first is that the "chaotic conditions" that prevailed across the civil service reflected the complete lack of any integrating system. This fact was evident in the varied levels of payment for similar types of work in different departments. In Napier's view, a "lack of system with regard to the advancement of salaries," marked by an absence of uniform job descriptions and rates of pay, stifled initiative.<sup>64</sup> So, too, did overstaffing, which resulted from the creation of patronage jobs. Napier concluded

<sup>61</sup> *Vancouver Sun*, 26 March 1931, 11; *Victoria Daily Times*, 26 June 1931, 1, 24 September 1931, 4, and 7 April 1932, 2; *Vancouver Province*, 22 September 1931, 1, and 25 September 1931, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Robin, *Rush for Spoils*, 239-40.

<sup>63</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, 2 March 1933, 5. Napier published a number of articles in 1932 and 1933 in the *Victoria Daily Times* that, together, provide a useful overview of the civil service. See, for example, *ibid.*, 9 December 1931, 18, 9 August 1932, 4, 25 August 1932, 10, 21 September 1932, 1, 23 September 1932, 10, 28 September 1932, 12, 1 October 1932, 12, and a series of essays under the title of "How to Save BC's Millions." They appeared irregularly from 27 February to 25 April 1933.

<sup>64</sup> *Vancouver Province*, 8 December 1929, 12.

that pay was constantly “kept down to conceal in the aggregate the additional political appointments of untrained help which effectively blocked promotion.”<sup>65</sup> Training, he argued, was an essential prerequisite to better working conditions, promotions by merit, and higher pay. So, too, was giving civil servants the annual salary increases that they had been promised. For some, the frustration generated by low salaries and slim prospects led to resignations. Such was the case for John Duncan, a twenty-six-year-old member of the court registry staff of the Vancouver Courthouse who had joined the civil service at age thirteen but, despite holding a number of responsible positions, had continued to retain the same rank and practically the same pay. He had been advised that, to raise his salary, he should “consult local politicians.” He was leaving, he stated in April 1942, “after wasting 13 of the best years of his life.”<sup>66</sup>

Napier’s analysis also emphasized the development of bigger and more specialized staffs in departments. Britain’s Northcote/Trevelyan Report had argued for centralization and against an increased division of the British civil service along departmental lines, the reason being that departmental control of hiring would encourage hiring by patronage.<sup>67</sup> Yet, according to Napier, the “costly growth of separate departmental staffs” was exactly the “political sickness” that held back the introduction of modern methods of administration.<sup>68</sup> In the early 1930s, British Columbia’s civil service was in an “unorganized state” because an “ever-increasing departmentalism” had inhibited coordination between departments.<sup>69</sup> As a consequence, government agents around the province might receive direct instructions from no fewer than thirteen different departments or branches of departments.<sup>70</sup> Uncoordinated departments required more staff than a centralized bureaucracy and gave plenty of scope for local MLAs to influence hiring. Departmental barriers also blocked the promotion of able civil servants across departments into higher positions demanding more skill and offering more authority, thus accentuating inefficiency. In Napier’s view, departmentalism confined opportunities for promotion “to the original [local] office.” Civil servants hoping to be promoted, then, practically

<sup>65</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, 9 December 1931, 18.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 April 1942, 6.

<sup>67</sup> Chapman and Greenaway, *The Dynamics of Administrative Reform*, 53–56.

<sup>68</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, 1 October 1932, 12.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 September 1932, 10. See also *ibid.*, 2 March 1933, 5, and 4 March 1933, 5.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 March 1933, 5.

had to wait "for the dead man's shoes."<sup>71</sup> Given this history, Labour Minister George Pearson's comment in February 1942 that the Civil Service Act, 1917, had "never been really operative in BC" rings true.<sup>72</sup>

When change finally came, it seems to have done so with uncharacteristic haste. The Coalition government (the provincial Conservative and Liberal parties formed a single government after the Liberals lost their majority in the October 1941 election) began eliminating political patronage as soon as it took office and quickly established a committee to study the civil service. By December 1942, journalist Bruce McKelvie could write that patronage was "definitely on the way out" in Victoria.<sup>73</sup> A new civil service act, quietly passed by the Legislature with the support of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in March 1945, mandated a public service in which merit alone was to be the guiding principle.<sup>74</sup> In the words of Dennis Anholt, the Civil Service Act, 1945, "was a milestone in the evolution of the British Columbia civil service," the first occasion when "government took management of the public service seriously." The public service was totally reclassified, and standardization replaced the whims of ministers and deputy ministers in areas of recruitment, classification, promotion, and salary administration. In Anholt's opinion, the Civil Service Act, 1945, "dramatically and irrevocably modified" British Columbia's administrative culture.<sup>75</sup>

It did so by implementing, at last, the principles of a modern, liberal administration. The Civil Service Commission's goal was public administration "conducted along scientific and modern lines."<sup>76</sup> Starting in mid-1945, professionally trained personnel officers were employed and a personnel division established. The first personnel officers, all men, were university-trained, and two had developed their expertise during the war. So, too, had Miss J. Meryl Campbell, employed during the war by the US Army's civilian personnel pay-roll department in Prince Rupert, who also joined the Personnel Division.<sup>77</sup> In 1946, the government

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<sup>71</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, 25 March 1933, 5. See also see *Daily Colonist*, 23 September 1922, 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Vancouver Province*, 7 February 1942, 8.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 December 1942, 3.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 March 1945, 5; *Victoria Daily Times*, 28 March 1945, 13; and British Columbia, Civil Service Commission (hereafter csc), *Report 1955* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1956), 9.

<sup>75</sup> Anholt, "An Administrative History," 189-90; and csc, *Report 1955*, 19.

<sup>76</sup> csc, *Report 1947*, 7-8. One of the changes involved the breaking down of departmental barriers to promotion. Yet, as Neil Swainson notes, through the 1960s there remained "some unhappiness at the absence of a well-developed transfer program between departments." See Swainson, "The Public Service," 141.

<sup>77</sup> Anholt, "An Administrative History," 191; and csc, *Report 1946*, 5.

purchased what it called a “modernized key-punch and IBM system” to manage records efficiently.<sup>78</sup> Uniform salary grids were established, and written exams were implemented.<sup>79</sup> In-service training was begun, first for stenographers and then for office supervisors, and, in the mid-1950s, educational connections with the University of British Columbia were established.<sup>80</sup> In 1949, the government announced an efficiency survey by the management engineering firm of Stevenson and Kellogg, and other “scientific” surveys followed.<sup>81</sup> The 1951 Commission Report outlined a new policy of employee promotion linked to “an aggressive and sound training programme.”<sup>82</sup>

Patronage, for the most part, disappeared, though not entirely at the senior management and advisory levels.<sup>83</sup> The extent of this change explains the outburst of one rural member, Dr. J.J. Gillis of Yale, who, in 1948, proclaimed in the Legislature that local members possessed “a much better knowledge of the people and conditions of their ridings” than did the professional bureaucrats now making hiring decisions. He asked that local members once again be consulted about appointments to the civil service. Definitely not, replied Provincial Secretary George Pearson, who forcefully rejected the request. Civil service positions must now be filled either by promotion from within the service or “by selecting the most suitable men.”<sup>84</sup> W.A.C. Bennett’s Social Credit government readily accepted these new “rules-of-the-game” when it came to power in 1952.<sup>85</sup>

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Why, then, did this resistance to “modern methods” of public administration persist so determinedly into the 1930s, and what explains the timing of the transition to modern administration? A number of reasons for the persistence of older administrative methods come to mind.

<sup>78</sup> CSC, *Report 1947*, II.

<sup>79</sup> CSC, *Report 1948*, 17; and *Report 1949*, 9.

<sup>80</sup> CSC, *Report 1949*, 9-10; *Report 1950*, 9; *Report 1956*, 2 and 16; *Report 1960*, 13-14; and *Report 1965*, 12-15.

<sup>81</sup> CSC, *Report 1951*, 13; *Victoria Daily Times*, 21 November 1949, 1, 13 March 1951, 7, and 19 November 1951, 1; *Vancouver Province*, 22 November 1951, 7. See also A. Douglas Turnbull, “Memoir: Early Years of Hospital Insurance in British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 76 (Winter 1987-88): 74-75.

<sup>82</sup> CSC, *Report 1951*, II.

<sup>83</sup> *Daily Colonist*, 7 September 1945, II.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 April 1948, 3.

<sup>85</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, 26 October 1954, 4; *Vancouver Province*, 26 October 1954, 6; and Ian Street, “Civil Servants Justifiably Angry,” *Daily Colonist*, 24 November 1968, 5.

Most obviously, British Columbia's non-Aboriginal population was still relatively small, with almost half spread over a large geographic area. In the outlying parts of the province what people most wanted were proactive representatives in the Legislature "who could ... guarantee funds for local development needs" and provide jobs. Party mattered less than action. Face-to-face communication and localism prevailed.<sup>86</sup> Rural politics was about roads, including the supplementary income that seasonal road work accorded farmers. As one rural supporter of Premier Oliver observed, "the average voter cares only for the party" that "gives him the most money for the least work."<sup>87</sup> At the same time, party labels did matter within the narrow world of political activists, and the fact that parties at the provincial level had been established only recently (in 1903) meant that, in partisan circles, building the party and enjoying the benefits of power required patronage. Thus, for example, supporters of Victoria's Beaver Club reacted negatively to the provision in the Civil Service Act, 1909, calling for appointments through professionally managed examinations and promotions from within the civil service. In the words of a Conservative who called himself "Beaver," civil service examinations would strike "a death blow to the hopes" of those who "have been repeatedly promised something ... [for] working for the party ... Who is going to do the dirty work of the party after this, when there is no possibility whatever of getting anything in return for it?"<sup>88</sup> The Liberal Party's John Oliver agreed. "My position is that the liberals have not had a 'look-in' for fourteen years," he stated in May 1917.<sup>89</sup> Government jobs should be given to Liberals "until there is a fair balance."<sup>90</sup>

In addition, despite evidence of the increased specialization of public service work in the early years of the twentieth century, most state workers at the provincial level still needed "little more than an ability to read and write."<sup>91</sup> One of the consequences of this was the relatively low status accorded to government work as pejorative descriptions such as "soft jobs" (from 1879) and "fat cushy jobs" (from 1921) suggest. In 1898, a Victoria-area speaker named Higgins (probably Esquimalt MLA David Higgins) spoke of the provincial civil service "as a place for the

<sup>86</sup> McDonald, "Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper," 73.

<sup>87</sup> Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1971), 412.

<sup>88</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, 10 May 1909, 7.

<sup>89</sup> *Daily Colonist*, 4 May 1917, 7.

<sup>90</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, 23 November 1922, 1.

<sup>91</sup> Donnelly, *The Government of Manitoba*, 122.

indolent and incompetent.”<sup>92</sup> Saskatchewan’s first premier, Walter Scott, could have been commenting on career prospects in the BC public service when he stated, while reflecting upon the resignation of a valued official in his own province: “I am always sorry ... [to] see a good man enter the [Government] Service, knowing as I do, the disappointment he is likely to meet.”<sup>93</sup> This low status reflected, in part, the central place of nineteenth-century liberalism and the values of small-scale production and independence that dominated the thinking of settler British Columbians, an ethos that privileged working with one’s hands over white-collar clerical labour. John Oliver, the son of a farm labourer and himself a farmer, viewed the white-collar civil service through the lens of the producers’ ideology. Thus, in 1908, when he played a key role in blocking the passage of a superannuation bill for civil servants in the Legislature, he proclaimed: “Why should non-producers [civil servants] who carry easy jobs be supported by producers?”<sup>94</sup> In the early 1920s, Oliver also argued, not against universities per se, but against the idea that taxpayers should shoulder the cost for such education, especially when the training was “not used in a productive manner.”<sup>95</sup> In a similar vein, the member for Kamloops questioned the need for agricultural inspectors “and so on ... It doesn’t take experts to accomplish economy, surely!”<sup>96</sup> The intellectual world of early settlers also included a mix of working-class self-sufficiency and resistance to the intrusion of the state into people’s lives. Strands of Victorian liberalism, the dominant ideology of British Columbia’s emerging settler society, worked in paradoxical ways both to encourage modern methods – including the creation of a rational civil service based on meritocratic values – and to resist bureaucratization. These ideological strands together suggest why, in a pioneer settler society such as British Columbia, and indeed in British Columbia for more than three-quarters of a century after Confederation, the values of “economy” and cheap government prevailed over the modernist value of “efficiency.”<sup>97</sup> Thus, calls for reform

<sup>92</sup> Quotations from the *Vancouver Sun*, 10 February 1969, 16; *Victoria Daily Times*, 14 January 1921, 9; and *Daily Colonist*, 14 June 1898, 8. In 1938, Norman Baker, the BC superannuation commissioner, stated that, in his opinion, the “civil servant is not appreciated by the majority of the public” (*Victoria Daily Times*, 15 March 1938, 8).

<sup>93</sup> Eager, *Saskatchewan Government*, 158–59.

<sup>94</sup> *Vancouver Province*, 3 March 1908, 7.

<sup>95</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, 23 November 1922, 1.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 March 1921, 11.

<sup>97</sup> For instance, see the *Daily Colonist*’s call for “retrenchment and economy” in an editorial of 4 May 1937, 4.



of the civil service most often meant cutting costs. These cuts, in turn, led critical observers like the *Daily Colonist* in 1918, and Ross Napier in 1931, to proclaim that civil servants were "notoriously underpaid."<sup>98</sup> The government's across-the-board reductions to an already underpaid civil service in the fall of 1931 were especially painful.<sup>99</sup>

Perhaps we should not be surprised that "politics" gave way to "administration" in the 1940s. The Second World War encouraged greater commitment to the value of "efficiency" and less to that of small government and "economy." The fact that, in 1941, Liberals and Conservatives began to share power in a governing coalition undoubtedly dampened partisanship. More important, the war effort dramatically increased the role of the state in the lives of Canadians and laid the foundation for a much more state-directed society afterwards. At both the national and provincial levels governments initiated postwar planning, in British Columbia through a legislative committee called the Post-War Rehabilitation Council, which brought down its report in February 1943. Informed by more than 1,500 briefs from around the province, the committee embraced the modernist goal of reorganizing British Columbians' "civilian way of life upon a more efficient basis."<sup>100</sup> To achieve this goal the council recommended a new provincial department of planning and reconstruction. It also encouraged more commitment to education, which led to the appointment of a commission to study the province's education system. Headed by Commissioner Maxwell Cameron, it recommended that British Columbia's 650 school districts be consolidated into one hundred, allowing the expansion of high school education across the province. The influence of non-elected experts also generated a fundamental shift in forest policy during and immediately after the war. Growing concern among Forest Service officials, headed by chief foresters Ernest C. Manning (1935-41) and C.D. Orchard (1941-58), regarding wasteful and inefficient forestry practices led, in 1943, to the appointment of a royal commission on the province's forest resource. The recommendation of the chief commissioner, Mr. Justice Gordon Sloan, that British Columbia adopt sustained-yield forestry laid the foundation for a "modern" and "scientific" approach to forest

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 December 1918, 4; and *Victoria Daily Times*, 9 December 1931, 18. See also *ibid.*, 28 September 1932, 12.

<sup>99</sup> *Vancouver Province*, 11 October 1931, 1; and *Victoria Daily Times*, 23 November 1931, 1.

<sup>100</sup> British Columbia Legislative Assembly, *Post-War Rehabilitation Council Interim Report* (Victoria: King's Printers, 1943), "Introduction," 11. See also the *Vancouver Province*, 16 February 1943, 16.

management. The policy of “farming the forest” was incorporated into the Forest Act, 1947.<sup>101</sup>

Yet, while it is worth noting that what geographer David Harvey refers to as the “positivistic, technocratic, and rationalistic” values of modernism, especially belief in the power of science and technology to deliver social benefit, were embraced almost without question in British Columbia during and after the war,<sup>102</sup> the influence of values such as efficiency and rationality had revealed themselves earlier through the evolving relationship between universities and government. Cole Harris has argued that coming “strongly into British Columbia in the decade after 1900 was the concept of the expert,” and of the expert’s “importance as planner and manager in government and industry.”<sup>103</sup> The importance of producing needed technical expertise for the more efficient development of the region’s resource economy was, Harris argues, a key motive behind the creation of a provincial university in British Columbia in 1908. A forestry program that aimed to train professional foresters soon followed.<sup>104</sup> Links between universities and government grew under the Pattullo government in the 1930s, when three intellectuals were recruited from universities into key administrative roles in British Columbia. Pattullo successfully encouraged Dr. George Weir, employed in the Department of Education at the University of British Columbia, to run for the Liberals in 1933 in the Vancouver-Point Grey riding, where he was elected. As minister of education he played a key part in drafting a hospital insurance bill that would have been the first of its kind in the country but for severe opposition from groups such as

<sup>101</sup>Jeremy Wilson, “Forest Conservation in British Columbia, 1935-85: Reflections on a Barren Political Debate,” *BC Studies* 75 (Winter 1987-88): 8-12; and Gordon Hak, *Capital and Labour in the British Columbia Forest Industry, 1934-74* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 46-50.

<sup>102</sup>David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990), 9. One writer who did challenge this growth ethos was Roderick Haig-Brown. See Arn Keeling and Robert McDonald, “The Profligate Province: Roderick Haig-Brown and the Modernizing of British Columbia,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 36, 3 (2001): 7-23.

<sup>103</sup>R. Cole Harris, “Locating the University of British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 32 (Winter 1976-77): 112-15.

<sup>104</sup>Degree-granting forestry programs were established at the University of Washington in 1911, at the University of Oregon in 1912, and at the University of British Columbia in 1920. For a discussion of the need to professionalize the management of British Columbia’s forests, see Robert Howard Marris, “‘Pretty Sleek and Fat’: The Genesis of Forest Policy in British Columbia, 1903-1914” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1979).

the province's doctors.<sup>105</sup> Dr. Harry Cassidy, a British Columbian with a doctorate in social work, has been described as "one of the first of a new breed in Canada: the academically trained social policy expert."<sup>106</sup> He left his academic job at the University of Toronto to take up the newly created position of director of social welfare in British Columbia. Finally, believing "that government action should, whenever possible, be informed by the advice of experts," Pattullo recruited Dr. W.A. Carrothers from the Department of Economics at UBC to chair a new economic council. Among other contributions, Carrothers developed British Columbia's case for the Rowell-Sirois Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations in 1938 and contributed to the report of the Rehabilitation Council in 1942-43.<sup>107</sup> Together the Pattullo appointments can be seen as a provincial example of what Doug Owram has explored so insightfully at the national level: the government's employment of professional experts, often from universities, as advisors and policy-makers. Says Owram, these highly trained intellectuals symbolized the belief that "significant improvement [in administration] would only come when men with expertise and ability sufficient to meet modern problems gained influence within the civil service."<sup>108</sup> Elite appointments of this kind did not, in themselves, ensure the end of patronage and old administrative ways, but they did signal a shift in thinking about the need for efficiency and planning in government, a change that facilitated a broadly based professionalization of administrative methods when the conditions for such reforms occurred. These conditions had emerged by the 1940s, by which time a widespread embrace of modernist values virtually required that British Columbia have a "modern" – that is, an efficient, rational, and politically neutral – provincial bureaucracy.

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My argument here is that British Columbia remained a geographically fractured province of local communities into the 1940s. In such an environment, face-to-face politics and political patronage made sense. But economic and social change during the war and postwar years challenged the assumptions of the "pioneer" period. The rapid mod-

<sup>105</sup> Fisher, *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia*, 233, 250-51, and 273-76.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 274-75 (quotation on p. 274 from James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 64); and Owram, *The Government Generation*, 363n15.

<sup>107</sup> Robin Fisher, "Regulating Fuels in the Depression: The Coal and Petroleum Control Board of British Columbia," *BC Studies* 66 (Summer 1985): 3-27.

<sup>108</sup> Owram, *The Government Generation*, 128.

ernization that occurred during what James Scott has called the age of “high modernity”<sup>109</sup> in the 1940s and 1950s was accompanied by British Columbians’ widespread ideological embrace of new liberalism (with its emphasis on planning and expertise) and socialism (with its emphasis on placing the good of society before the good of the individual).<sup>110</sup>

Perhaps the key to explaining the timing of change is to be found in J.E. Hodgett’s observation that patronage in the age of responsible government and party politics persisted as long as the nation (or province) could “afford the waste and inefficiency” that inevitably accompanied its widespread use.<sup>111</sup> Clearly, some aspects of the story of civil service reform reflected the demographic, geographical, and economic particularities of British Columbia. Yet, a comparison of civil service legislation at the national level and in three other provinces in the mid-1940s reveals a corresponding embrace of service-wide standards of classification and an end to the widespread use of patronage. In other words, while reflecting on conditions particular to the west coast province, BC administrative history should also be understood as part of a much larger and more profound Canadian impulse to modernization in the middle years of the twentieth century.

<sup>109</sup>James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). See also Tina Loo, “People in the Way: Modernity, Environment, and Society on the Arrow Lakes,” *BC Studies* 142/43 (Summer/Autumn 2004): 161-96.

<sup>110</sup>Robert A.J. McDonald, “Variants of Liberalism’ and the Liberal Order Framework in British Columbia,” in *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution*, ed. Jean-François Constant and Michel Ducharme (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 322-346, and James Murton, *Creating a Modern Countryside: Liberalism and Land Resettlement in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 3-16.

<sup>111</sup>Hodgetts, *The Canadian Public Service*, 51.