

Comment: The 1974 Federal General Election in British Columbia

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There are many who would insist, no doubt with a certain justification, that it is the height of folly for one but newly arrived in British Columbia to hazard conclusions (particularly in print) about the nature of politics in this tumultuous province. Yet, by taking de Tocqueville as my scholarly muse, there is surely some excuse for recording first blush impressions, even at the risk of being called to order by more seasoned political analysts.

In any event, in terms of comment about the results of the last federal election in B.C. it is with these seasoned political analysts, or the bulk of them at any rate, that I wish to deal. Certainly what most forcibly strikes a would-be Tocquevillian emigré from Ontario is the extraordinary self-confidence of the political commentators who appear in the various forms of British Columbia mass media. It matters not if they are professional journalists, politicians seeking a wider venue for their pronouncements, ordinary folk whose thought about politics has been, as if by accident, immortalized in cold type or warm videotape, or even the occasional academic of variegated description — all who parade on the media seem to speak with divinely inspired authority. The causes and consequences of political events in B.C. are revealed with a certainty that would even bring a blush (albeit momentary) to the cheek of a Peter Newman or an Anthony Westall.

I should like to examine some problems with this cultural trait of self-confident, unquestioning assurance in political commentary by investigating six publicly proclaimed hypotheses about the results of the July 8th federal election. Before setting out these “popular” hypotheses it would be instructive to list results for the last three federal elections in terms of seats won, and by percentage vote for each British Columbia constituency. This is done in Table I. It should be noted that the 1968 general election was held under newly redistributed boundaries, and that the 1972 and 1974 elections were held under the same boundaries.

In order to make the comparison more meaningful I have, in addition,

computed the percentage point shift in vote for the periods 1972 to 1974 and 1968 to 1974. Also I have arbitrarily grouped the constituencies by class composition and geographical location. I have done the latter merely for the sake of convenience in referring to certain groups of constituencies by an easily understood "label" and I do not defend these categorizations except as they serve this purpose of easy reference. This is not to say that inferences about the character of B.C. politics do not arise from the observable differentiation of electoral results between these categorized constituencies. Rather it is to warn the reader that these inferences must, by necessity, be general and not precise. The doctrine of "ecological fallacy," though it prohibits conclusions about the behaviour of individual voters that are derived from an analysis of aggregate electoral and socio-economic data, does, nonetheless, permit statements about the behaviour tendency of large groupings of the electorate. I am restricting my generalizations about the causes and consequences of the last election to these weak "tendency" propositions.

Whether or not this information is analytically helpful is not immediately clear. It is useful, therefore, to test a number of recent "popular" hypotheses about the election results against these rather fundamental electoral data.

The first hypothesis I shall examine is the suggestion that the Liberals did much better in the 1974 election than in the previous election (up from four seats to eight in the whole province) because they succeeded in capturing a large portion of the working class vote that traditionally went to the New Democratic Party. Now if this hypothesis is accurate one would expect that the Liberals would garner more votes in heavily unionized working class constituencies, where, even in the Trudeaumania election of 1968, the NDP maintained its traditional working class support. (In the 1968 election the NDP achieved only one per cent fewer votes than it obtained in the highwater 1972 election when it seemed to be buoyed in federal politics by the success of the provincial New Democrats in winning the 1972 provincial election.) Yet if we look at the percentage point shift from 1968 to 1974 in these working class seats we find that the Liberals did not make any startling gains.

In the Vancouver East seat, for example, where the Liberals were surprise winners in 1974, the Liberals actually went down 0.1% in this period while the Conservatives jumped 17.0% in the same time span. Without concluding that the Conservatives captured the working class vote in Vancouver East (the absence of a Social Credit candidate in 1974 and the possibility of a significant difference in turnout between

TABLE I*

CONSTITUENCY PERCENTAGES FROM THE 1968, 1972 AND 1974 GENERAL ELECTIONS

<i>Federal Constituencies</i>	<i>NDP</i>			<i>LIBERAL</i>			<i>PROG. CONS.</i>			<i>OTHER**</i>		
	68	72	74	68	72	74	68	72	74	68	72	74
Burnaby-Richmond-Delta	37.9	33.1	15.2	42.4	29.6	26.1	13.2	35.7	58.2	6.5	1.6	0.5
Burnaby-Seymour	44.9	37.8	27.3	45.2	37.2	36.6	8.1	23.0	35.5	1.8	2.0	0.6
Capilano	14.7	16.9	10.0	66.4	47.5	40.6	17.1	34.6	48.9	1.8	1.0	0.5
Coast-Chilcotin	34.4	34.5	30.0	47.3	33.1	35.0	10.8	29.5	33.7	7.5	2.9	1.3
Comox-Alberni	39.3	49.7	29.4	39.4	27.0	35.8	17.0	18.3	33.2	4.3	5.0	1.6
Esquimalt-Saanich	26.2	31.6	18.7	39.5	24.1	29.8	32.5	41.0	49.7	1.8	3.3	1.8
Fraser Valley East	23.9	23.7	16.9	34.7	29.1	37.4	12.6	34.7	45.7	28.8	12.5	—
Fraser Valley West	39.6	47.5	32.1	37.8	20.7	23.7	13.7	31.2	41.3	8.9	0.6	2.9
Kamloops-Cariboo	23.6	26.3	19.2	40.5	35.2	41.9	30.2	33.5	35.2	5.7	5.0	3.7
Kootenay West	44.9	53.6	38.5	28.7	14.9	20.2	16.4	31.6	41.3	10.0	0.1	—
Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands	41.7	56.9	40.9	31.1	15.9	22.2	24.0	22.7	36.2	3.2	4.5	0.7
New Westminster	39.8	41.6	33.1	44.5	23.8	31.8	11.7	32.0	32.4	4.0	2.6	2.7
Okanagan Boundary	27.8	28.0	16.8	32.7	29.5	36.4	28.4	42.5	43.1	11.1	—	3.7

Okanagan-Kootenay	31.0	30.1	19.1	36.9	32.7	34.9	13.2	32.3	39.6	18.9	4.9	6.4
Prince George-Peace River	22.0	21.7	14.8	34.9	31.6	34.0	29.7	39.4	47.1	13.4	7.3	4.1
Skeena	52.2	47.8	30.9	34.9	22.2	40.5	14.9	30.0	28.6	—	—	—
Surrey-White Rock	44.6	47.4	26.3	32.3	17.2	26.7	16.4	33.2	43.7	6.7	2.2	3.3
Vancouver Centre	24.6	26.7	19.5	56.1	41.3	41.7	18.4	30.3	37.5	0.9	1.7	1.3
Vancouver East	50.0	48.8	35.8	36.6	31.4	36.5	8.9	16.5	25.9	4.5	3.3	1.8
Vancouver Kingsway	49.6	56.8	33.1	34.4	18.8	37.4	10.4	21.3	28.5	5.6	3.2	1.0
Vancouver Quadra	15.0	20.2	11.3	54.3	35.9	39.6	30.3	42.6	48.1	0.4	1.3	1.0
Vancouver South	22.7	25.1	15.3	49.3	32.8	31.8	23.7	40.0	52.5	4.3	2.1	0.4
Victoria	22.5	23.3	14.6	43.9	25.5	29.6	32.4	47.5	55.4	1.2	3.7	0.4
PROVINCIAL VOTE	34	35	23	41	29	33	19	33	42	6	3	2
SEATS WON	7	11	2	16	4	8	0	8	13	0	0	0

Comment

* Based on the Reports of the Chief Electoral Officer for the 1968 and 1972 general elections, and on the Canadian Press tabulation for the 1974 election found in *The Vancouver Sun* on July 9, 1974. The 1974 data is unofficial, and probably slightly inaccurate, although I do not expect that there will be any significant error in the percentages.

** Much the largest percentage of this vote was for Social Credit candidates, particularly in those constituencies where the percentage obtained is at all significant.

TABLE II

PERCENTAGE POINT SHIFT IN VOTE FOR PERIODS 1968-1974 AND 1972-1974
BY CONSTITUENCY AND SELECTED GROUPINGS OF CONSTITUENCIES

	<i>NDP</i>		<i>LIBERAL</i>		<i>PROG. CONS.</i>		<i>OTHER</i>	
	<i>72-74</i>	<i>68-74</i>	<i>72-74</i>	<i>68-74</i>	<i>72-74</i>	<i>68-74</i>	<i>72-74</i>	<i>68-74</i>
Island Working Class	-18.1	- 5.4	+ 7.5	- 6.3	+14.2	+14.2	- 3.6	- 2.6
Comox-Alberni	-20.3	- 9.9	+ 8.8	- 3.6	+14.9	+16.2	- 3.4	- 2.7
Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands	-16.0	- 0.8	+ 6.3	- 8.9	+13.5	+12.2	- 3.8	- 2.5
Island Middle Class	-10.8	- 7.7	+ 4.9	-12.0	+ 8.3	+20.1	- 2.4	- 0.4
Esquimalt-Saanich	-12.9	- 7.5	+ 5.7	- 9.7	+ 8.7	+17.2	- 1.5	0.0
Victoria	- 8.7	- 7.9	+ 4.1	-14.3	+ 7.9	+23.0	- 3.3	- 0.8
Vancouver Working Class	-18.3	-15.4	+11.8	+ 1.5	+ 8.3	+17.6	- 1.8	- 3.7
Vancouver East	-13.0	-14.2	+ 5.1	- 0.1	+ 9.4	+17.0	- 1.5	- 2.7
Vancouver Kingsway	-23.7	-16.5	+18.6	+ 3.0	+ 7.3	+18.1	- 2.2	- 4.6
Vancouver Middle Class	- 8.2	- 5.2	- 0.9	-18.1	+ 9.9	+24.4	- 0.7	- 1.1
Capilano	- 6.9	- 4.7	- 6.9	-25.8	+14.3	+31.8	- 0.5	- 1.3
Vancouver Centre	- 7.2	- 5.1	+ 0.4	-14.4	+ 7.2	+19.1	- 0.4	+ 0.4
Vancouver Quadra	- 8.9	- 3.7	+ 3.7	-14.7	+ 5.5	+17.8	- 0.3	+ 0.6

Vancouver South	- 9.8	- 7.4	- 1.0	-17.5	+12.5	+28.8	- 1.7	- 3.9
Vancouver Bedroom Suburbs	-16.5	-19.5	+ 1.8	-10.2	+15.2	+33.2	- 0.5	- 3.5
Burnaby-Richmond	-17.9	-22.7	- 3.5	-16.3	+22.5	+45.0	- 1.1	- 6.0
Burnaby-Seymour	-10.5	-17.6	- 0.6	- 8.6	+12.5	+27.4	- 1.4	- 1.2
Surrey-White Rock	-21.1	-18.3	+ 9.5	- 5.6	+10.5	+27.3	+ 1.1	- 3.4
Fraser Valley	-10.2	- 7.1	+ 6.4	- 8.0	+ 7.2	+27.1	- 3.4	-12.0
Fraser Valley East	- 6.8	- 7.0	+ 8.3	+ 2.7	+11.0	+33.1	-12.5	-28.8
Fraser Valley West	-15.4	- 7.5	+ 3.0	-14.1	+10.1	+27.6	+ 2.3	- 6.0
New Westminster	- 8.5	- 6.7	+ 8.0	-12.7	+ 0.4	+20.7	+ 0.1	- 1.3
Interior	- 9.8	- 7.6	+ 4.6	- 3.5	+ 4.7	+18.8	+ 0.4	- 7.6
Coast Chilcotin	- 4.5	- 4.4	+ 1.9	-12.3	+ 4.2	+22.9	- 1.6	- 6.2
Kamloops-Cariboo	- 7.1	- 4.4	+ 6.7	+ 1.4	+ 1.7	+ 5.0	- 1.3	- 2.0
Kootenay West	-15.1	- 6.3	+ 5.3	- 8.5	+ 9.7	+24.9	- 0.1	-10.0
Okanagan Boundary	-11.2	-11.0	+ 6.9	+ 3.7	+ 0.6	+14.7	+ 3.7	- 7.4
Okanagan-Kootenay	-11.0	-11.9	+ 2.2	- 2.0	+ 7.3	+26.4	+ 1.5	-12.5
North	-11.9	-14.3	+10.4	+ 3.4	+ 3.2	+15.6	- 1.6	- 4.7
Prince George-Peace River	- 6.9	- 7.2	+ 2.4	- 0.9	+ 7.7	+17.4	- 3.2	- 9.3
Skeena	-16.9	-21.3	+18.3	+ 7.6	- 1.4	+13.7	-	-

Comment

1968 and 1974 are other factors to be considered) it is clear that the Liberals did not perform such a feat. Nor are the results much different in other working class seats taken in 1974 by the Liberals. In Comox-Alberni the Liberals dropped 3.6 points from the 1968 results while the Conservatives picked up 16.2%. Even in Skeena where the Liberal vote jumped 7.6% from 1968 we still find that in the same period the Conservatives jumped 13.7%.

There certainly was a dramatic decline in the NDP vote in working class constituencies in B.C. between 1968 and 1974. But at the same time, with two exceptions, the Liberal vote also declined in these same seats while only the Conservatives made significant gains. Thus our first "popular" hypothesis is falsified by an examination of the above aggregate electoral data; and while the counter thesis that it was the Conservatives who picked up a significant portion of the traditional NDP trade union, working class vote is not confirmed by these data, it does seem to be a more interesting proposition to be investigated.

The second popular hypothesis is even more readily nullified. After the 1974 results there was virtual unanimity that the New Democrats had made a disastrous showing. Reduced from eleven seats to two seats with a loss of 12 percentage points of popular vote from 1972 there could be little quarrel with this assessment. However several commentators advanced the proposition that 1972 had been an *unusually* favourable election for the NDP in B.C. and that the reversal in NDP fortunes in 1974 was the more dramatic for being compared with these 1972 results. In other words it was contended that a comparison of 1974 with the 1968 results would not indicate such a dramatic collapse. After all, in 1968 the NDP won only seven seats in the province. Yet even a cursory glance at Table II will show that in terms of percentage point loss there is not a great difference between the '72 to '74 comparison and the '68 to '74 comparison. In terms of seats there is some comfort for New Democrats in making a comparison with the earlier results; in terms of popular vote, there is none.

The third hypothesis I wish to examine is really a series of related hypotheses about individual candidates. Politics necessarily involves personalities, and it should be no surprise that the media often have more to say about the merits and shortcomings of individual candidates than they do about ideological stance and party platforms. Moreover the politicians themselves attribute vote getting propensities (either positive or negative) to the personalities of the different candidates. As a consequence there are a number of hypothetical speculations about the

impact of candidates upon the voting results. For example one view expressed suggests that the NDP ran a number of rather colourless and lacklustre candidates in certain key ridings where the sitting NDP member had retired, and that this, in large part, accounts for the party's dismal showing. Again it has been hinted in the press that John Fraser's handy win in Vancouver South indicates that he has the kind of extraordinary candidate appeal that ought to enhance his prospects for the Conservative Party leadership.

In order to set up some kind of objective measure to help test these various candidate-oriented hypotheses I decided to compare the percentage point shift for each party across the province between 1968 and 1974 with the shift in each constituency for the same period. That is, I wanted to compare the 11 point provincial wide loss of support for the NDP in these six years with, for example, the 18.3 point loss in the constituency of Surrey-White Rock. For most, if not all, constituencies in British Columbia there will be some departure, as in Surrey-White Rock, from the "normal" 11 percentage point loss.

In order to discover whether any particular departure is significant I have computed the mean departure from the "normal" percentage point shift for the three parties that captured seats in the elections under consideration. Thus for the NDP the mean point for those constituencies where the party did better than the province-wide average is -6.0% , and for those seats where the party did worse than the province-wide average the mean point is -17.5% . For the Liberals the corresponding mean points are $+0.6\%$ and -13.7% , while the figures for the Conservatives are $+30.0\%$ and $+15.8\%$. As a result of these manipulations we now have an objective measure (though arbitrarily assigned) for categorizing constituencies in which the local candidate ran either well ahead of his party or well behind. In Table III those constituencies which fall on the extreme side of these mean points are listed. It is in these constituencies where it might be argued that the candidate, or peculiar local circumstance, had an important bearing on an election outcome so significantly different than the "normal" outcome for that party in the province.

A number of hypotheses about candidate impact might be tested with these data, although not without assessing additional information in most instances. That is, there are some difficulties in using this objective technique by itself in order to confirm or falsify hypotheses. For example, the constituency of Capilano finds its way to the listing under all three

TABLE III

CONSTITUENCIES (LISTED WITH 1974 CANDIDATES) BY PARTY WHERE
THE PERCENTAGE POINT SHIFT FROM 1968 TO 1974 EXCEEDS
THE PARTY MEAN BOTH ABOVE AND BELOW THE PARTY'S
"NORMAL" PERCENTAGE POINT SHIFT

Constituencies Above Mean for NDP Candidates (-6.0)

1. Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands	(- 0.8)	Tommy Douglas
2. Vancouver Quadra	(- 3.7)	Nigel Nixon
3. Coast Chilcotin	(- 4.4)	Harry Olausson
4. Kamloops-Cariboo	(- 4.4)	Ron Anderson
5. Capilano	(- 4.7)	Lawrence Minchin
6. Vancouver Centre	(- 5.1)	Ron Johnson

Constituencies Below Mean for NDP Candidates (-17.5)

1. Burnaby-Richmond-Delta	(-22.7)	Jean Pier-Daem
2. Skeena	(-21.3)	Frank Howard
3. Surrey-White Rock	(-18.3)	Len Friesen

Constituencies Above Mean for Liberal Candidates (+0.6)

1. Skeena	(+ 7.6)	Iona Campagnola
2. Okanagan Boundary	(+ 3.7)	John Dyck
3. Vancouver Kingsway	(+ 2.7)	Simma Holt
4. Fraser Valley East	(+ 2.7)	Jerry Pringle
5. Kamloops-Cariboo	(+ 1.4)	Len Marchand

Constituencies Below Mean for Liberal Candidates (-13.7)

1. Capilano	(-25.8)	Jack Davis
2. Vancouver South	(-17.5)	Peter Oberlander
3. Burnaby-Richmond-Delta	(-16.3)	Joan Wallace
4. Vancouver Quadra	(-14.7)	Frank Low-Ber
5. Vancouver Centre	(-14.4)	Ron Basford
6. Victoria	(-14.3)	Frances Elford
7. Fraser Valley West	(-14.1)	Ralph Baizley

Constituencies Above Mean for Progressive Conservative Candidates (+30.0)

1. Burnaby-Richmond-Delta	(+45.0)	John Reynolds
2. Fraser Valley East	(+33.1)	Alex Patterson
3. Capilano	(+31.8)	Ron Huntington

Constituencies Below Mean for Progressive Conservative Candidates (+15.8)

1. Kamloops-Cariboo	(+ 5.0)	Don Couch
2. Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands	(+12.2)	Don Taylor
3. Skeena	(+13.7)	Everett Stevens
4. Okanagan Boundary	(+14.7)	George Whittaker

parties. Can we state that as a result Minchin (NDP) and Huntington (PC) are superior candidates while Davis (Lib) is an inferior, or at least an unpopular one, or is just one of these people, say Davis, a federal Minister, so unpopular that he creates this kind of extreme result? If I had to make a judgment, I suppose I should choose the latter hypothesis on the basis of *additional* information.

The objective measure then is really too crude to be used by itself to test hypotheses. What it does do, however, is eliminate certain hypotheses. Thus, since Vancouver South does not appear on the "PC above the mean list," it would seem that John Fraser, though undoubtedly a fine young man, is not as extraordinary a candidate in terms of popularity as has been claimed. It would also seem, with only three NDP constituencies on the "NDP below the mean" list, that there is good reason to doubt the hypothesis about the NDP collapse being a result of poor candidates being nominated in a number of key ridings. The collapse is too uniform for a candidate causal explanation. It could, of course, be argued that almost all the NDP candidates were of such poor quality and this contributed to the result; however, it must be recognized that this is a much different hypothesis than the one about poor candidates in key ridings like Vancouver East and Vancouver Kingsway, and a much more difficult proposition to test.

There are a number of other propositions which could be usefully set against the above constructed measure, but I shall confine myself to only one further proposition which appeared in the newspapers shortly after the election. This fourth "popular" hypothesis was suggested by the Liberal candidate in Okanagan-Kootenay, Hari Singh, who insisted that he was badly hurt, and may have lost the election, because many electors in Okanagan-Kootenay voted against him on racist grounds. Singh is an East Indian.

If this were true, it would not be unreasonable to expect that Okanagan-Kootenay would be found on the "Liberals below the mean" list. This is not the case. Moreover, Singh, in fact, was not a candidate who was even below the province-wide average for Liberals; instead he was only slightly off the mean point of those Liberals who did better than the province-wide average. No doubt there are individuals in Okanagan-Kootenay who harbour racist sentiments, and who may have made overt remarks about the Liberal candidate that are unacceptable in any civilized community. It is equally true, however, that these individuals do not characterize the electorate of that constituency, and consequently Mr. Singh cannot accurately blame his showing on racist senti-

ment; a happy conclusion arising from this examination of aggregate electoral data.

The fifth proposition with which I wish to deal concerns the Social Credit vote in British Columbia. There is some survey evidence to show that provincial Social Credit supporters tend to support the Conservatives in federal elections. This evidence, and speculation based on it, has led to the hypothesis that much of the Conservative upsurge in British Columbia since the low point of 1968 is the result of the federal collapse of the Social Credit party in this province. Yet, if one examines the percentage point shift by constituency it becomes apparent that this is not the case. The point loss by the Social Credit from 1968 to 1974 exceeds -5% in only seven constituencies. Even if we make the assumption that the great bulk of this Social Credit vote has gone to the Conservatives, it still would not account for much of their 23 percentage point upward shift in the same period. It is true that in three constituencies, Kootenay West, Okanagan-Kootenay and Fraser Valley East the slippage of Social Credit support to the Conservatives would seem to be quite significant, the more so because in the last two named seats the PC candidate had actually been a Social Credit MP for much of the same area. These three seats are exceptional, however, and it must be concluded that the rise in Conservative Party support throughout the province is generally a result of a slippage from some combination of Liberals, New Democrats, or non-voters than from Social Crediters. This is not to say that before 1968 the Conservatives did not benefit from Social Credit slippage. Rather it is to conclude that the Conservative surge since that time has been a result of other factors.

Finally there is the much proclaimed hypothesis that a very important factor in the drubbing taken by the NDP in 1974 was a general unhappiness with the policies of the NDP provincial government — the so-called “Barrett backlash.”

It is, of course, extremely difficult to examine propositions about the motivations of voters using aggregate data. Motivation is quite clearly a personal phenomenon that is very difficult to analyse even with sophisticated survey data. But at least the surveys are based on interviews with the individuals who possess the psyches one would like to analyse in terms of motivation. Aggregate data can only give us limited information about large groups of people. Even so, something can be stated about this sort of question provided one keeps in mind the severe limitation of the data available.

The “backlash” hypothesis as pronounced by the media suggests that

this motive for voting can be attached to a very large number of voters in the province. A large plurality, if not a majority, of B.C. voters, it is alleged, are very unhappy with the performance of the provincial government to the extent that they would take any opportunity, such as a federal election, to express their displeasure with the New Democratic Party. This is so, it is argued, because of a profound dissatisfaction with many of the "socialistic" programs introduced by the provincial government.

Well, if this is the case, we should expect that this motivation would not be uniformly present among all segments of society in B.C. After all, the impact of these various programs clearly does not fall equally on all segments of society, and the reaction to the NDP of these different communities of people is, therefore, bound to vary. This being the case it would seem probable that in 1974 the NDP would do particularly badly in the North, the Interior and the Fraser Valley, where the recent mining royalties legislation and the freeze on the subdivision of agricultural land have caused a great public furore. Yet by ranking the different areas of the province from greatest percentage point loss for the NDP to least percentage point loss (see Table IV) we find that only the North tends

TABLE IV

SELECTED AREAS RANKED BY PERCENTAGE-POINT SHIFT IN
NDP VOTE FROM GREATEST TO LEAST LOSS

1968-74

1. Vancouver Bedroom Suburbs	—19.5
2. Vancouver Working Class	—15.4
3. The North	—14.3
4. Island Middle Class	— 7.7
5. The Interior	— 7.6
6. Fraser Valley	— 7.1
7. Island Working Class	— 5.4
8. Vancouver Middle Class	— 5.2

1972-74

1. Vancouver Working Class	—18.3
2. Island Working Class	—18.1
3. Vancouver Bedroom Suburbs	—16.5
4. The North	—11.9
5. Island Middle Class	—10.8
6. Fraser Valley	—10.2
7. The Interior	— 9.8
8. Vancouver Middle Class	— 8.2

to confirm backlash hypothesis, while the results in the other areas would tend to falsify it. The NDP lost the same number of percentage points in the Fraser Valley seats as in the province as a whole, and significantly fewer percentage points in the Interior ridings than in the whole province.

It must be stressed again, of course, that this cannot be a definitive statement about the "backlash" hypothesis given the limitations of the aggregate data presented here. By the same token, it seems certain that the hypothesis is not as self-evidently correct as many in the media would have it, and that it is, at the very least, an explanation of the election results that requires rather more evidence to be sustained.

Is there then, some homily to be gleaned from this short exercise in demythologizing "popular" explanations of the 1974 federal election results from British Columbia? It is not news, surely, to find that newspapers and other communications media betray a certain carelessness in political analysis. This happens everywhere.

Yet, if I can return for a moment to my de Tocqueville conceit, in other political climes one does not find that the media are as central to all political debate as they seem to be in this province. If this is valid, therefore, then there is a warning to scholars in the above questioning of hypotheses. Put not your faith in the works of journalists becomes one's motto.

It would be unwise, of course, to give much, if any, credence to a first blush impression, presented as this is, unadorned by evidence. Still, evidence of a sort might be mustered. The political sophistication of *The Globe and Mail* and *The Vancouver Sun* could be tested and compared. A comparison of the role in public affairs of the universities in British Columbia and in other parts of Canada might be examined, particularly in terms of the view that the B.C. universities seem to have seen themselves in a state of siege from a hostile government since time immemorial. A comparison of reading habits and political knowledge between B.C. residents and residents of other jurisdictions might also be undertaken.

In short, the possibility that this impression may be defensible ought to give some pause to those scholars who might have relied a bit too heavily on the reports in the various media for their understanding of the "facts" of B.C.'s political history.