

# Emergency and Organizational Legitimacy: The Dilemma of Emergency Planning in B.C.

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Predictably, active interest in matters relating to the protection of the civilian population is most intense during floods, earthquakes and other natural disasters and in periods of acute international tension. At these times a state emergency organization fulfills a vital need and receives general political and public support. It is perceived as legitimate. Governments provide adequate resources to finance contingency planning and often delegate to the organization the legal authority to carry out programs and enforce its decisions. Agencies with which the emergency organization interacts are inclined to co-operate by accepting subordinate roles in civil defence planning and to willingly participate in civil defence programs. The public provides volunteers for civil defence work and an interested press publicizes emergency-oriented activities.

On the other hand, when the threat of imminent disaster diminishes attitudes change. Survival is taken for granted and the activities of an emergency organization lose their immediate relevance. In these circumstances the organization risks the loss of its organizational legitimacy and faces possible legal, social and economic sanctions. Often the key to survival for an organization is its ability to modify its objectives and programs and create for itself a distinct policy area in which to operate. The organization must also establish its competence in its new role in order to be fully accepted. It must not only demonstrate that it can successfully carry out its new duties but also that this capability itself is a distinctive skill.

The loss and re-emergence of organizational legitimacy in the Manitoba Emergency Measures Organization has been examined in a case study which explains how that agency finally proved its value during the 1973 Red River floods.<sup>1</sup> The British Columbia equivalent to the Manitoba agency, the Provincial Emergency Programme (named Provincial Civil Defence until 1974) suffered a similar separation from social priori-

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Hannigan and R. Kueneman, "Provincial Emergency Measures," *Emergency Planning Digest*, May-June 1976, pp. 2-7.

ties but, unlike its Manitoba counterpart, has failed to regain its former status. An explanation of this failure lies not only in the study of the organization and development of the British Columbia Provincial Emergency Programme but also in an analysis of the circumstances in which it has existed.

### *Early Organizational Development*

In August 1949 the Soviet Union successfully exploded a nuclear device and the United States lost its monopoly on the atomic bomb. If the Cold War became hot the United States and Canada would very likely suffer damage from nuclear weapons. Canadian government officials, both federal and provincial, began to prepare for the protection of citizens and the continuation of government in the event of an atomic attack.

The first move toward organizing for civil defence in post-World War II British Columbia was the decision in May 1950 by the Liberal-Conservative coalition government to appoint a committee to study the implications of creating a civil defence plan for the province. A directive from Premier Byron Johnson appointed Provincial Secretary W. T. Straith to chair this committee which also included the Deputy Provincial Secretary, the Deputy Ministers of Health and Public Works, and the Executive Assistant to the Premier. The committee's first steps were to take an inventory of all the resources which could be made available at short notice to the provincial government in the event of a war emergency and to collect information on civil defence from a variety of sources which included Ottawa, the United Kingdom and the United States. After analysing this information the committee concluded that civil defence was an urgent and major function which could not be administered by a committee of civil servants already occupied by other tasks.

Following the committee's report a Civil Defence Act was passed by the Legislature on 18 April 1951. The preamble to the Act spoke of the "existing and increasing possibility of the occurrence of disasters, or emergencies from enemy attack, sabotage, or other hostile action . . .", revealing the legislation's wartime emphasis, but also mentioned "peacetime" emergencies, an aspect of civil defence which was to assume increasing importance in the future.

The Civil Defence Act provided for the creation of a permanent civil defence organization in the province, Provincial Civil Defence (PCD), to be headed by a Provincial Civil Defence Co-ordinator and assisted by an advisory council. The Provincial Secretary was named as minister for civil

defence and for formulating recommendations to the government concerning civil defence matters. The Provincial Civil Defence Co-ordinator was assigned the responsibility for carrying out provincial civil defence policies. The Act also empowered the provincial cabinet to make regulations for the purposes of civil defence in the province, to prepare plans for civil defence, to designate target and disaster areas, and to seize private property during an emergency, and stated that where the provisions of the Act conflicted with those of any other legislation, the provisions of the Civil Defence Act would prevail.

Major-General Charles Stein, a graduate of Canadian, American and British civil defence staff colleges, was chosen for the position of Provincial Civil Defence Co-ordinator. The Civil Defence Advisory Council was composed of the Deputy Ministers of the government departments most closely associated with civil defence: the Provincial Secretary's Department, Education, Health, Public Works, Welfare, and Municipal Affairs. The Provincial Civil Defence Co-ordinator, the Provincial Fire Marshal and the Assistant Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, "E" Division, were also members of the advisory council.

Provincial Civil Defence, once organized, was charged with two tasks: to arrange for the survival of the province's population and to preserve the continuity of government in the event of an attack. Arrangements for the survival of the population were predicated on the provision of protection against nuclear fallout, on voluntary dispersal from major centres, the reception and care of evacuees, and the removal of persons from endangered areas. The maintenance of government continuity was based on the preservation of essential records, the designation of emergency locations for government, the establishment of emergency communications, the determination of automatic lines of succession for government and the creation of emergency plans for the use of all personnel and resources available to the province.

Toward these ends British Columbia was divided into Civil Defence Areas, each of which was to operate under the supervision of the Provincial Civil Defence Co-ordinator. The federal government designated Vancouver, Victoria and Trail as Target Areas while the province assigned Prince Rupert and Kamloops a similar status. To support the Vancouver and Victoria Target Areas the province organized through PCD a Mutual Aid Area adjacent to each. In addition, Mobile Support and Reception Areas were established as sources of personnel and equipment for disaster relief and to provide refuge for evacuees from the Target Areas. Two more remote regions, Powell River and Peace River, were assigned inde-

pendent status by PCD and organized to provide emergency services within their own borders.

The individual responsibilities of the three levels of government were also identified at this time. Municipalities were to provide for civil defence inside their boundaries. This task included the education of the individual citizen as well as the basic organization and co-ordination of all services available for disaster survival and restoration pending outside help. Municipal authorities were also responsible for the initiation of effective action immediately upon an emergency arising. A locally or provincially declared disaster could be declared a national disaster by the federal government if requested by the provincial government. This would enable participation by federal departments and agencies located within the province, including the armed forces and the RCMP.

Even if a national disaster were not declared, federal departments could be requested to provide assistance in local emergencies. Such a request was to be submitted through the Deputy Provincial Secretary to the B.C. representative of the federal Emergency Measures Organization. Local authorities were advised not to approach local federal organizations directly as they were powerless to act without approval from Ottawa.

Provincial civil defence responsibilities included the provision of aid to municipalities in organizing civil defence measures, financial assistance to municipalities for civil defence purposes, civil defence training within the province and general assistance to municipalities in the event of a major disaster. The co-ordination of the services of adjacent municipalities as well as the organization of mutual aid and mobile support between areas were also provincial obligations. In addition, the province standardized fire hose connections and couplings throughout B.C., established a province wide emergency communications system, and shared equally with the federal government the payment of compensation to Provincial Civil Defence workers injured while training.

Federal civil defence responsibilities in B.C. included the development of an emergency warning system in cooperation with provincial and local authorities, the provision of protection from sabotage, research and development in civil defence, and advanced training through special courses on technical matters such as treatment of injuries from atomic, biological and chemical warfare. The federal government also undertook the provision of training aids for civil defence and special equipment necessary for atomic, biological and chemical warfare defence. Medical supplies and equipment stockpiles in strategic locations around the province were provided at federal expense as were sirens for federally designated Target

Areas. Ottawa also paid one-third of the cost of standardizing fire-hose connections and couplings and provided PCD authorities with financial assistance in the form of matching funds.

These federal funds were part of a Financial Aid Plan (FAP) negotiated by delegates to the Federal-Provincial Conference on Civil Defence Arrangements in April of 1952. The basic formula governing the operation of the FAP called for Ottawa to make a contribution as high as 50 per cent of the cost of approved projects, leaving the province and the municipalities to share between them the remaining 50 per cent. After 1959 the federal share climbed to 75 per cent. A difficulty arose out of the fact that the operation of this formula was subject to an overall provincial quota in the case of each province. The amount appropriated by Parliament each year for federal financial assistance to the provinces in connection with co-operative civil defence projects was divided on the basis of a formula taking into account population and Target Area factors in such a way that B.C. received a quota slightly higher than would be the case if the funds were shared on a population basis among the provinces. British Columbia civil defence projects, however, usually resulted in expenditure estimates in excess of the federal quota available under this formula.

The B.C. Provincial Civil Defence Co-ordinator consistently, but unsuccessfully, urged Ottawa to introduce a new element into the formula which would permit the transfer of portions of the unused quotas of other provinces to British Columbia. As a result the basic problem remained. The B.C. spending program on civil defence was more than could be encompassed within the FAP formula.

The shortage of federal funds did little to dampen the development of PCD. Nineteen fifty-three proved to be the organization's peak year. Civil defence was allotted an alltime high of .2 per cent of the total provincial budget for 1953-54 and 3.2 per cent of the Provincial Secretary's budget.<sup>2</sup> Appropriations for civil defence projects proposed by the province and approved by Ottawa totalled \$265,232, an amount shared equally by the two levels of government.<sup>3</sup> Volunteers engaged in Provincial Civil Defence programs numbered 20,840 and PCD statistics showed 14,502 persons associated with the agency.<sup>4</sup> Among these were members of police and

<sup>2</sup> British Columbia, Department of Finance, *Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure*, 1954.

<sup>3</sup> B.C., Department of the Provincial Secretary, Provincial Civil Defence, *Civil Defence Circular*, # 22, 1 March 1953, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, # 23, 1 June 1953, p. 1.

fire departments and employees of federal, provincial and municipal governments whose duties brought them in contact with PCD. PCD employed some twenty permanent staff in 1953.<sup>5</sup> Most PCD activities, then, depended upon volunteer participation.

### *The Decline of Legitimacy*

In 1961 the government of W. A. C. Bennett issued an ultimatum to newly appointed Provincial Civil Defence Co-ordinator John Erb. If Erb could not completely change the image and nature of PCD in five years the organization would be abandoned.<sup>6</sup> There are two principal reasons why PCD, considered a vital government agency only ten years before, experienced such a dramatic decline in its organizational legitimacy. First, PCD had failed to gain sustained support from the legislators, the media, the public and the government agencies with which it dealt, and second, the nature of the organization's personnel was a constraint upon its development.

Political concern about the value of the PCD organization became evident in the late 1950s. Speaking at the Dominion-Provincial Conference on Civil Defence Arrangements held in Ottawa in 1959, the Minister of National Defence criticized existing contingency plans, pointing out that the public was becoming uneasy about vague civil defence policies on evacuation and shelter. Civil defence was losing support as the public lost confidence in the ability of civil defence organizations to make realistic preparations for war. At a similar federal-provincial conference in 1961 many provincial representatives, including B.C. Provincial Secretary Wesley Black, agreed that "there appeared to be a tendency to overplan government arrangements to the comparative exclusion of positive measures for the people."<sup>7</sup> Black further questioned the relevance of an aspect of civil defence policy by asking, "... with the effects of blast and heat of the nuclear explosion, are we misleading our public in the program of fallout shelters in the Target Areas?"<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, the federal government further increased the gap between civil defence planning and public expectations by emphasizing continuity of government over population

<sup>5</sup> B.C., *Estimates*, 1953.

<sup>6</sup> John Erb interview, 26 September 1977.

<sup>7</sup> Canada, Emergency Measures Organization, Privy Council Office, Dominion-Provincial Conference on Civil Defence Arrangements, *Report* (Ottawa, 1960), p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

survival. In 1961 the Privy Council Office issued the statement that “the purpose of emergency planning is to ensure that all levels of government are maintained and are capable of providing the direction to the country which will be required in a national emergency.”<sup>9</sup>

The bond between the news media and PCD had weakened as well. Press releases, once published in the province’s major newspapers, were simply discarded when passed out by Erb to the legislative press gallery.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, radio and television showed little interest in reporting PCD activities. Consequently the organization passed from the public eye and the public mind.

Public interest in PCD receded with the threat of war. Vague civil defence policies created an environment in which an interest in civil defence was difficult to sustain. Moreover, against the possibilities of swift and widespread devastation civil defence efforts appeared futile. An episode of the CBC television program “Inquiry” indicated the level of public concern over civil defence.<sup>11</sup> Of forty-eight persons interviewed in Vancouver only eighteen had some knowledge of provincial and federal civil defence plans. Four of the eighteen were well informed while the remaining fourteen had only a vague idea. If this sample group accurately represented the views of society as a whole then clearly civil defence efforts generally, and PCD specifically, no longer seemed relevant. In fact some of the public considered civil defence efforts a joke, sending prank letters ridiculing air raid wardens to PCD volunteers.

Commenting on the results achieved through civil defence training, B.C. PCD Co-ordinator Brigadier G. A. McCarter stated in 1960 that it was very difficult to keep people interested in civil defence matters indefinitely. Though most trainees would likely be available in times of crisis, McCarter was concerned that the steadily diminishing number of volunteers participating in B.C. civil defence programs or attending the National Civil Defence College in Ontario did not always maintain an association with PCD for any useful period.<sup>12</sup> It was the practice in B.C. to give a twenty-hour course two nights a week for a month, after which the trainees would be called together about once a year for further training or participation in an exercise.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> John Erb interview.

<sup>11</sup> Episode of CBC-TV program “Inquiry”, aired on CBUT 22 May 1961. Transcript in PCD file in the Provincial Archives.

<sup>12</sup> Canada, Emergency Measures Organization, Privy Council Office, Provincial Co-ordinators’ Conference on Civil Defence Arrangements, *Report* (Ottawa, 1959), pp. 27-28.

In addition, the quality of the relationship between PCD and other government bodies also deteriorated as the threat of an impending Armageddon diminished. A Provincial Interdepartmental Planning Committee organized to advise and assist the Provincial Secretary in the creation and co-ordination of departmental emergency plans and to provide a forum for the exchange of departmental ideas on the nature of emergency plans met only periodically and had little impact on the development of interdepartmental contingency plans.<sup>13</sup> Occasionally other meetings and conferences did take place in which members of PCD and associated agencies participated, but often co-operation was achieved only after intervention at the ministerial level. The Provincial Secretary frequently interceded on the behalf of PCD, explaining to a fellow minister the importance of a particular PCD scheme.

Of 129 incorporated municipalities in B.C. in 1962 only forty had submitted formal emergency plans to PCD for examination and comment. Municipal emergency plans had low priority for municipalities and PCD members found it very difficult to promote participation. This lack of enthusiasm to take part in PCD plans led to friction between civil defence planners and their client groups. Some municipal officials resented the arbitrary selection of civic employees to attend federal civil defence courses as their training took them away from their jobs and the municipalities had to pay their wages while they were away. Other government agency officials were reluctant to travel to their assigned posts during civil defence exercises. Still others refused to provide the co-operation to which PCD personnel felt they were entitled from provincial departments until pressure was brought to bear by civil defence representatives upon their superiors.

Erb attributed this lack of response to the fact that most persons did not take the probability of another war seriously and assumed civil defence efforts were unnecessary. In addition, he suspected that "everyone was afraid that PCD was going to take over the bureaucracy that they were involved in."<sup>14</sup> Erb believed that PCD was tolerated by other agencies only "because they were never quite sure what would happen".<sup>15</sup>

The second major problem facing PCD during this period stemmed from the nature of its personnel. PCD remained a paramilitary organization until late in 1961. Its staff was composed entirely of ex-military men,

<sup>13</sup> John Erb interview.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

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

The plan also provided for the reorganization of operational areas in the province. In 1962 B.C. was divided into six Zones which replaced the Civil Defence Areas created a decade before. Two of these Zones, Vancouver and Victoria, were labelled Target Zones while the others — Prince Rupert, Prince George, Nelson and Kamloops — were classed as non-target or reception zones. Zone Emergency Government Headquarters (ZEGHQ) were located in Duncan, Chilliwack, Prince Rupert, Prince George, Nelson and Kamloops. The ZEGHQ are an intermediary echelon between REGHQ and the various Municipal Emergency Government Headquarters (MEGHQ). Each municipal government was responsible for the organization of its own MEGHQ, from which it would supervise civil defence survival operations and co-ordinate activities with the army when necessary.

Erb and his staff endeavoured to counter PCD's wartime image, perpetuated by the Civil Defence Plan, by stressing the part the organization could play in peacetime disasters. An opportunity for PCD to mobilize support for this new role occurred in 1964 when the Alberni Valley was struck by a series of tidal waves over the Easter weekend. PCD integrated itself into existing community government and organizations instead of assuming direct control over the actual disaster-coping activities. PCD co-ordinated rescue, welfare and rehabilitation measures, allotted work priorities, supplied communications and equipment, performed a liaison function between civil authorities and the army, and arranged an emergency control system for joint government by the two stricken municipalities. During the crisis and in more recent operations PCD assumed an equal rather than either a dominant or subordinate role, acting as the key co-ordinating agency but making decisions only after discussions with the other organizations present. Interorganizational friction, not uncommon in everyday affairs, was practically extinguished for the period of the emergency.<sup>17</sup>

Valuable as its role in the Alberni Valley disaster proved to be, PCD did not achieve at that or any other time the level of visibility necessary for the re-establishment of its organizational legitimacy. As a result PCD was not able to create a successful operational domain, the third requirement for organizational legitimacy. The organization's failure to establish a sphere of activity perceived by the public as important or essential did not escape the attention of its leaders, for in 1965 PCD's public relations campaign was significantly intensified. As L. R. A. Hart, Assistant

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

Provincial Civil Defence Co-ordinator, stated, "the object is to sell Civil Defence to the centres of population."<sup>18</sup>

In the past PCD issued news releases covering current and planned activities and utilized permanent and mobile exhibits at fairs across the province to publicize its programs. PCD personnel spoke at service clubs and at local Chamber of Commerce meetings and appeared occasionally on radio and television. A PCD newsletter, the "Civil Defence Circular", was widely distributed in and out of British Columbia. In December 1965 the "Civil Defence Circular" was replaced by a more comprehensive publication, the "B.C. Civil Defencer", copies of which were sent to news media and elected officials throughout the province. In the meantime other efforts to promote PCD were intensified. PCD began an aggressive "hard sell" campaign to convince the public, municipal governments, police, army, fire marshal's office and various provincial government departments that participation in PCD programs was important. Erb met with officials from these agencies to explain why PCD was an essential organization which was concerned only with co-ordination and getting the best use from existing facilities.

In spite of attempts to improve the image of civil defence in B.C., support for this new orientation could not be mobilized where it counted heavily — the cabinet in Ottawa. In June of 1965 during a federal-provincial conference on emergency measures considerable time was spent discussing the need to re-evaluate the threat of nuclear attack and the consequent risks to various areas of Canada. Behind this re-evaluation was Ottawa's increasing concern over the impact of rising costs in most sectors of the economy.

Lester Pearson's Liberal government, having campaigned in 1963 on a platform emphasizing government efficiency, was anxious to curb spending and restrictions were felt by civil defence organizations across Canada. The low priority assigned emergency planning made those agencies the logical victims of financial constraints. C. M. Drury, federal minister responsible for civil defence, stated the international situation had cooled to the point that a nuclear war was possible but unlikely and Ottawa believed that should an attack occur the probability of it being initiated with little or no warning was remote. Thus, emergency measures activities could be programmed over longer periods of time and at less immediate cost.

Financial and policy changes were not long in coming. Effective 1 April

<sup>18</sup> L. R. A. Hart, Assistant Provincial Civil Defence Co-ordinator, to the Provincial Civil Defence Co-ordinator, 23 August 1965.

still using their military titles, who were primarily devoted to planning for the eventuality of a nuclear war and reluctant to depart from this orientation. In the context of the early 1950s this perspective was congruent with society's demands but as the Cold War subsided the motives of the PCD staff were no longer perceived as useful or acceptable to a large part of the organization's clientele. As a result, Erb was faced with the challenge of altering PCD's wartime complexion and the "Colonel Blimp" image of its staff and volunteers.<sup>16</sup>

### *Efforts to Re-establish Legitimacy*

For Provincial Civil Defence to survive, rapid and fundamental changes were necessary. To re-establish the organization's legitimacy several courses of action were open: the agency could attempt to link itself in the public mind to the armed forces or other organizations and symbols having a strong foundation of social legitimacy; PCD leaders could attempt to change the definition of social legitimacy to conform to the agency's prevailing goals by conducting a vigorous publicity campaign to bring to the public's attention the possible consequences of being unprepared for a nuclear war; or PCD could adapt its wartime orientation to one emphasizing preparedness for peacetime disasters in order to conform to present definitions of legitimacy. Of these alternatives the last was the most realistic for PCD and was the plan chosen. A successful solution to the crisis descending upon PCD appeared to depend upon three major factors: the structural constraints upon change within the organization, a willingness to re-evaluate its goals, and its ability to carve out a domain in which to cultivate community acceptance.

The centralized structure of PCD facilitated change. Municipal and Target Area organizations were subject to the policies formulated by the province. The PCD Co-ordinator could exert considerable authority over the activities of local PCD volunteers. Moreover, local civil defence organizations, though they initiated and were responsible for civil defence activities in the community, were dependent upon funds provided by the province. In short, there was no organizational machinery to block a new program initiated in Victoria. A new program did not need ratification at a lower level than the PCD Co-ordinator and there were no subgroups within PCD to offer effective resistance to change.

The fact that the provincial government was not totally discouraged by

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

the state into which PCD had fallen and was willing to support the organization in the face of general apathy was demonstrated when John Erb was hired as Provincial Civil Defence Co-ordinator in 1961. Erb, the only civilian on the staff of an organization composed of steadily aging retired soldiers, was given a five-year period in which to revitalize the agency at a time when the two main PCD projects in B.C. were the preparation of evacuation plans and the promotion of bomb shelters. Erb realized that this emphasis had to change and continue to change if PCD was to regain its legitimate status. He removed the military titles used by his staff and gave the highest priorities to peacetime emergencies. Clearly, the new PCD Co-ordinator was willing to re-evaluate the organization's objectives.

Although given a mandate to change the nature of PCD, Erb was hampered in his efforts by a provincial cabinet decision made a year earlier which maintained the popular view that the organization was primarily concerned with atomic war. As directed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, a "Civil Defence Plan for British Columbia" was inaugurated in 1960 to facilitate the co-ordination of emergency planning within the provincial government. The defence plan established operating principles, provided for emergency organization and detailed a simple course of action for government designed to deal with all conceivable disasters but especially those pertaining to war.

The Civil Defence Plan contained standing instructions for warning and manning of emergency equipment in the event of a national (war) emergency. The army arranged a Regional Telephone Fanout with the British Columbia Telephone Company to alert B.C. residents of the likelihood and imminence of an attack. The network was to be used to disseminate national alert or public warnings which were sounded on sirens and broadcast by radio over an Emergency Broadcast System (the CBC).

In accord with the plan's requirements a Regional Emergency Government Headquarters (REGHQ) was completed near Nanaimo in 1964. The REGHQ, staffed by federal, provincial and army officials, was the centre from which emergency operations would be directed within the province in the event of a severe crisis. Its operation would be aided by relocation units near the same site. The provincial staff component was to be composed of cabinet members and designated officials from key government departments. Other departmental officials would be relocated to two other areas of the province, one near Lake Cowichan and the other at Kamloops. PCD provided detailed instructions concerning assembly and transportation to the relocation areas.

1966 all provincial emergency measures organization personnel services were frozen and PCD purchases were restricted. Rescue and welfare equipment that had worn out could be replaced using funds from the Financial Aid Program but the purchase of new equipment for expansion was not permitted. Commitment of funds within the province, which in the past could be rearranged at any time, could not be rearranged in 1967-68. The total federal estimates for civil defence in 1967-68 were \$300,000 less than for the previous year, and Ottawa asked the provinces to share the reduction. The provinces planned for an FAP allocation of \$5.1 million, of which the share for B.C. was set at \$476,800, the third largest allotment after Ontario and Quebec, but short of the 1966-67 figure by \$17,000. A major policy change was evident as well. While those measures considered necessary for Canada to survive as a nation in the event of war were maintained, any new capabilities for handling disasters were to be developed for peacetime civil emergencies.<sup>19</sup>

There is a fundamental difference between war and peacetime emergency planning in Canada and this difference had important consequences for PCD. Because war preparations are primarily a federal responsibility, Ottawa determines the extent and format of war-oriented programs. On the other hand, peacetime civil emergencies are nearly always local incidents before they become the concern of provincial or national authorities. Peacetime emergency preparedness must therefore first consider the needs of the local level and fashion a preparedness program to satisfy those needs. In British Columbia, where rugged terrain, a long coastline, many isolated communities and the hazardous nature of indigenous industries emphasized the need for preparedness programs, there was considerable enthusiasm for government involvement and leadership in peacetime emergency planning. This was an opportunity for PCD to establish the viable domain necessary for organizational legitimacy. That it was necessary for PCD to demonstrate that it was engaged in incisive, continuous work was indicated by the agency's ever decreasing share of the provincial budget. From the 1967-68 fiscal year to 1970-71, provincial allocation for civil defence purposes had slipped steadily from .09 per cent to .06 per cent of the total budget.

### *A New Image for PCD: The Provincial Emergency Programme*

In 1971 Provincial Civil Defence members conducted a questionnaire survey of all municipalities in British Columbia with a view to further

<sup>19</sup> B.C., Provincial Emergency Programme, *Annual Report*, 1974, p. 2.

redefining the organization's aims and goals and planning a proper course of action for achieving those goals. The results of the survey reflected a desire for PCD to promote and assist the development of functional and continuous preparedness programs best suited to local needs. Provincial contingency planners consequently adopted the principle of developing in every provincial community an optimal capability of dealing with emergencies with the least disruption of essential services and the greatest economy. However, it was not until 1974 that the most radical changes affecting the image of PCD were made.

Effective 1 January 1974 the provincial NDP government, then engaged in a program of sweeping administrative reform, renamed Provincial Civil Defence the Provincial Emergency Programme (PEP). Provincial Secretary Ernie Hall stated the change was intended to give the organization a new sense of direction and emphasis. Hall said PEP would become more community oriented in that the agency's goal would be to bring every community in B.C. to a state of optimum emergency preparedness and to provide liaison and co-ordination of activities and resources in all emergencies requiring provincial involvement or assistance. "The new name," stated Hall, "more clearly reflects the nature of the vital role the Branch is to perform."<sup>20</sup>

The principles upon which the Provincial Emergency Programme was established and its chief functions and goals were an extension of those that guided Provincial Civil Defence. PEP was designed to prepare a comprehensive ongoing emergency preparedness program to serve all British Columbia and to co-ordinate the activities of the various agencies participating in emergency operations. In fulfilling its duties PEP continued many of the programs initiated by PCD and instituted others which were more aligned with its current peacetime role.

Training programs were devoted to those areas of service considered most essential for improved immediate effectiveness at the local level. In response to the increasing number of lost-person incidents, a greater portion of PEP effort was directed toward search-and-rescue courses. PEP was also designed to provide general orientation for elected civic officials and other key personnel as well as technical training for selected civic employees and volunteers who in turn trained others at the local level. The provision of emergency communications, originally based on PCD owning or renting equipment, underwent considerable change as well. The 1971 survey revealed that if properly co-ordinated plans were made for the

<sup>20</sup> B.C., *Provincial Emergency Programme News*, # 1, January 1974, p. 2.

emergency use of province-wide communications resources owned by government departments, crown corporations and other agencies the need for an independent PEP access to existing communications networks would be eliminated. The policy of PEP access to existing communications networks was soon being implemented. Meanwhile, PEP had taken advantage of available private communications resources. An effective liaison was established with a radio network operated by British Columbia Indians, and a British Columbia Amateur Radio Net was created to serve as an emergency alternative in the event of failure or overload of the regular communications systems.

Provincial financial responsibilities, first undertaken by PCD, were maintained by PEP. Through the Financial Assistance Programme PEP subsidized 90 per cent of the approved expenditures made by municipalities in the development of their own emergency plans. Depending on demonstrated need and available funds, grants were made toward the purchase of firefighting, rescue and communications equipment. The direct costs of emergency services such as search-and-rescue operations were borne by PEP and the organization also paid the costs of such items as food for searchers, mileage charges for volunteers using their own vehicles and payments for aircraft rentals. PEP also provided uniforms and necessary equipment for auxiliary police being trained for the RCMP and municipal police forces. In co-operation with the Canadian Red Cross PEP provided emergency welfare services such as the registration of evacuees and the provision of emergency lodging, feeding and clothing for disaster victims. Other programs operated by the organization included a volunteer air service for search-and-rescue work, a volunteer Marine Rescue Service, an Auxiliary Police Program and Firefighting Training.

In the meantime the campaign launched by Erb a decade before to gain support for the organization was producing favourable results. Though interaction with other agencies remained at a low level interorganizational friction had lessened substantially and co-operation in routine matters had markedly improved. By the middle 1970s 138 municipal organizations were participating in PEP programs, contributing 10 per cent of their cost. Some 18,000 persons were registered PEP volunteers and an increasing number of persons were enrolling in PEP-sponsored courses. In addition Erb believed that the news media which had neglected PCD in the 1960s now "gave PEP reasonable publicity for things that were going on".<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> John Erb interview.

By 1976, then, PEP should have re-emerged as a legitimate organization. PEP leaders had re-evaluated the agency's goals, adapted its role to one more congruent with current social priorities and established a more distinct operational domain. Yet an examination of the provincial estimates for the fiscal year 1976-77 reveals that though the PEP budget increased by 72 per cent from 1973-74, when the last major reorganization occurred, the organization's share of the total provincial budget slipped from .04 per cent to .035 per cent. Clearly expenditure upon contingency planning was falling behind that in other areas. Moreover, the number of full-time PEP staff declined from forty-three to forty-one during the same period.

There are at least two possible explanations for this phenomenon. First, a public organization's legitimacy is to a degree tied to the state of the economic environment in which it exists.<sup>22</sup> An economic recession is usually accompanied by government austerity measures, and in the light of a cost-benefit analysis many agencies considered necessary in an era of prosperity become unaffordable luxuries. Federal financial constraints initially diminished the already shaky legitimacy of PCD in the 1960s and led to the reconceptualization of the organization's functions at the provincial level. The low priorities associated with PEP then precluded any significant reallocation of funds to the organization in the uncertain economic climate of the 1970s.

Second, having undergone a major transition PEP has been confronted by what has been termed "the liability of newness".<sup>23</sup> An organization in this position must adapt to new roles, cultivate new loyalties and form new decision-making criteria. Unlike the Manitoba case, in which the Manitoba Emergency Measures Organization proved its value during the 1973 Red River floods, the effectiveness and efficiency of the British Columbia PEP remains untested. PEP has yet to demonstrate its competence by establishing that it can successfully co-ordinate the activities necessary to cope with a major disaster and that this ability is itself distinctive, but then only a major disaster will enable it to do so.

In conclusion, it appears that the total recovery of organizational legitimacy by PEP depends upon two factors: not only the actual congruence of the organization's functions and goals with current social values but also the perceived congruence of the two; and an increase in its operational funds. A provincial disaster on the scale of that in Manitoba would

<sup>22</sup> Hannigan and Kueneman, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> A. L. Stinchcombe, "Social Structures and Organizations," in J. G. March, ed., *Handbook of Organizations* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973), pp. 142-93.

likely place PEP in a position to obtain the visibility required for public recognition of its role, while an upswing in the national and provincial economy could lead to more funds being channelled into the organization's coffers.

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