

**POLITICAL LEGITIMACY AND REGIME CHANGE:
THE 1972 BRITISH COLUMBIA ELECTION**

by

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Abstract

The 1972 British Columbia general election marked the end of the twenty-year dominance of the Social Credit Party and Premier W.A.C. Bennett. Dave Barrett led the New Democratic Party to its first majority government ushering in the first Social Democratic government in the province's history. The reversal of Social Credit fortunes in 1972 should not be seen, however, as a rejection of the core values of the Social Credit party, but rather as a crisis of legitimacy faced by the party and its aging leader. As a case study, the 1972 election provides an opportunity to examine the agenda-setting function of media during an election campaign and the effects of declining political legitimacy and trust on voter behaviour.

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Political Legitimacy and Regime Change: The 1972 British Columbia Election

On June 7, 1972, five hundred angry protesters descended on the Royal Towers Hotel in New Westminster, British Columbia, a suburb of Vancouver. They had gathered to greet the Social Credit premier, W.A.C. Bennett, and his cabinet ministers on the final stop of a province-wide pre-election tour. The Premier was whisked into the building under police guard before the protesters were able to respond. The infuriated crowd chanted “Seig Heil,” “Chabot must go” and “Kill Him.” As tensions mounted the scene became increasingly threatening; ministers and their police escorts were shoved, punched and spit on. As the last three ministers attempted to thread their way through the human blockade, a club-wielding protester swung at the head of Isabel Dawson. When her cabinet colleague Cyril Shelford attempted to block the attack, he suffered fractures to his arm and collarbone. Seven other ministers sustained minor injuries, mostly bumps and bruises. This violent protest in New Westminster, during a period of labour unrest across the province, foreshadowed an election campaign punctuated by anger. As a case study, the 1972 provincial election in British Columbia provides a unique opportunity to explore the broader consequences of declining political legitimacy and authority and the function of mass media in shaping political discourse.

The 1972 British Columbia election is notable, not only for the volatile nature of campaign, but also as a key event in British Columbia political history. The election ushered in the first Social Democratic government in BC history. While the predecessor of the New Democratic Party (NDP), the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), had first formed the official opposition in 1933, the party had since failed to capture much more than a third of the popular vote provincially. The 1972 election, in which Dave Barrett led the NDP to its first majority government, reducing the Socreds to just ten seats, marked the end of the two decades

of Social Credit government under W.A.C. Bennett. The reversal of Social Credit fortunes in 1972 should not be seen, however, as a rejection of the core values of the Social Credit party, but rather as a crisis of legitimacy faced by the party and its aging leader.

Historiography

The historiography of the W.A.C. Bennett era in British Columbia has focused on the policies and programs implemented by the Social Credit government, from dam building¹ and highway construction² to forest policy³ and labour relations,⁴ as well as studies of Bennett's leadership.⁵ Similarly, the accomplishments and failures of the New Democratic Party and its leader Dave Barrett have been explored.⁶ What has not been studied is the process of regime change.⁷ By comparing the sources of political legitimacy with the specific issues that proved salient during the 1972 election I hope to provide an analysis of Social Credit's decline that looks beyond policy pronouncements and political organization to examine the issue of political trust. From the perspective of government policy and the personality of key political figures, there was little indication before the election that the NDP was poised to form the next government. The results of the election make it clear, however, that between the triumphant Social Credit victory

¹ Tina Loo, "People in the Way: Modernity, Environment and Society on the Arrow Lakes," *BC Studies*, Vol. 142/143 (Summer/Autumn 2004), 161-196.

² John M. Munro, "Highways in British Columbia: Politics and Economics," *The Canadian Journal of Economics*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (May, 1975), 192-204

³ Richard A. Rajala, "'This Wasteful Use of a River': Log Driving, Conservation, and British Columbia's Stellako River Controversy, 1965-1972." *BC Studies*, No. 165 (Spring 2010), 31-74. Soroka, etc.

⁴ Robert McDonald, "'Strike and You'll Be Fired: The Civil Service and Political Culture in Postwar British Columbia, 1952-1972

⁵ David J. Mitchell, *W.A.C.: Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1983

⁶ Philip Renick, "Social Democracy in Power: The Case of British Columbia," *BC Studies*, No. 34 (Summer 1977), 3-20

Paul Tenant, "The NDP Government of British Columbia: Unaided Politicians in an Unaided Cabinet," *Canadian Public Policy*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Autumn 1977), 489-503.

⁷ Peter Calvert, ed. *The Process of Political Succession*, London: Macmillan, 1987, 18

Calvert's definition of 'regime' is useful here to distinguish between a simple change in government and change in regime. "A regime is the name usually given to a government or sequence of governments in which power remains essentially in the hands of the same social group." While often used pejoratively to describe authoritarian governments, this definition captures the essential elements of continuity and of power consolidation under the 20-year reign of Social Credit under Premier W.A.C. Bennett.

in 1969 and the repudiation of the party in 1972, W.A.C. Bennett had lost his grip on the reins of power. He was unable to maintain party discipline and he was not able to deliver a compelling message about his government's platform any longer.

Understanding the sources of democratic legitimacy is essential to understanding the processes of regime change. Frederick Barnard's study of legitimacy in liberal-democratic regimes seeks to identify "what matters most in the validation of democratic rule."⁸ Barnard argues that "democracy is closer... to a continuous challenge of competing claims than to the embodiment of equilibrium," adding that "majoritarianism is not the only condition of democratic legitimacy."⁹ According to Barnard, democratic legitimacy is derived from three component parts: "the electoral (constitutional) right to rule; the procedural (normative) rightfulness in the exercise of rule; and the substantive (teleological) rightness in the ends of rule."¹⁰ Barnard's model provides a useful framework for evaluating the component parts of Social Credit legitimacy and its apparent decline immediately before and during the 1972 general election. The tension between the authenticating value of both procedural and substantive sources of legitimacy is central to this analysis. While the Socreds clearly possessed the electoral right to rule during its twenty-year tenure, by 1972 the party faced several challenges related to its exercise of power in the imposition of austerity measures on the public service and the desirability of its policy outcomes regarding its continued focus on industrial development.

Theories surrounding the concept of "political trust" offer another lens through which to view Social Credit decline in 1972. Hetherington in 1999 and Bélanger and Nadeau in 2005 examined the effect of political trust on voter choice and institutional legitimacy in the American

⁸ Frederick M. Barnard, *Democratic Legitimacy: Plural Values and Political Power*, Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001, 24

⁹ Barnard, 24

¹⁰ Ibid., 26

two-party and Canadian multi-party systems. Bélanger and Nadeau define political trust as “a reservoir of favourable attitudes that can help citizens tolerate a certain level of dysfunction, under-performance or even misbehaviour within the political system.”¹¹ Hetherington asserts that when support for government institutions falters, legitimacy may also be contested. Furthermore, Hetherington argues that failing political trust may have long-term implications for a regime, stating that, “If distrust begets disapproval and disapproval makes it more difficult for leaders to marshal resources to solve problems, then government will solve fewer problems. In this sense, “distrust breeds the conditions for the creation of further distrust.”¹² Bélanger and Nadeau discerned that declining political trust not only affects claims to legitimacy but correlates directly to voter choice. They found that while incumbents were affected negatively by declining trust and that traditional opposition parties were only occasionally affected, third-party alternatives benefitted the most from voter distrust. Bélanger and Nadeau concluded that “third parties can be thought of as channels used by voters to voice popular disenchantment with representative government and ‘politics as usual’.”¹³

Setting the Stage

There were only faint signs of Socred vulnerability on March 30, 1972 as the British Columbia legislature was prorogued. During the 1972 session, the Social Credit government had enacted a new subsidy for elderly renters and increased the grant for home-owners over 65 years of age. They had funded new programs for reforestation, green-belt protection and park development and created a new annual scholarship in commemoration of the province’s

¹¹ Eric Bélanger and Richard Nadeau, "Political Trust and the Vote in Multiparty Elections: The Canadian Case." *European Journal of Political Research*, No. 44 (2005), 122

¹² Hetherington, Marc J. “The Political Relevance of Political Trust.” *American Political Science Review*. Vol. 92, No. 4 (December 1998), 792

¹³ Bélanger and Nadeau, 136

centennial year.¹⁴ The *Summary Convictions Act* allowed sentences of imprisonment to be served on weekends and the *Criminal Injuries Compensation Act* provided compensation to the victims of crime. The Socreds had also approved a \$1.45 billion supply budget, the largest in the history of the province, without raising taxes.¹⁵

A detailed examination of press and television news coverage in the months immediately preceding and during the election campaign, however, indicates that legislative and electoral pronouncements were largely eclipsed by the spectre of labour strife, unemployment and the rising cost of living. The prominence of these issues is critical to my analysis of the 1972 election.¹⁶ The front page and the lead story on the evening news were as likely to be about labour demonstrations or the status of a strike as the election itself. The CBC Hourglass News television broadcast in Vancouver ran labour stories in the top segment before the first commercial break in more than fifty per cent of its broadcasts between the beginning of May and end of August 1972.¹⁷ Media coverage of labour disputes also dominated the front page of newspapers across the province.¹⁸ The constant attention to labour strife in the news constructed the image of a province in a general state of crisis, in which everyone was out of work or on strike. Coverage of the specifics of campaign announcements was often secondary to stories related to Bennett's age and fitness for office, and to reports of the internal tensions within the Social Credit party. Overall, election coverage had a limited place in the nightly news line-up

¹⁴ "Official Report of Debates of the Legislative Assembly (Hansard)," March 30, 1972 1004-1005

¹⁵ *Hansard*, March 30, 1972, 989

¹⁶ George Gerbner, "Mass Media Discourse: Message System Analysis as a Component of Cultural Indicators," in *Discourse and Communication: New Approaches to the Analysis of Mass Media Discourse and Communication*, edited by Teun A. van Dijk, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), 14. Gerbner has argued that the institutional structure of mass media outlets shape public discourse by creating and maintaining mass publics.; Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 2, (Summer 1972), 176. McCombs and Shaw argued that mass media sets the public agenda and defines salient issues.

¹⁷ *CBC Hourglass News*, Show line-ups and scripts - May 1, 1972 to August 31, 1972

¹⁸ *Prince George Citizen*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Victoria Times Colonist* - May 1, 1972 to August 31, 1972

until the last two weeks of the election campaign. It was within the context of labour unrest, questions about party leadership and the efficacy of government that voters assessed the claims of past Social Credit accomplishments and the appeal of future Social Credit promises.

In the previous election, just three years earlier in 1969, the government had earned its largest ever majority with 46.79 per cent of the popular vote, winning 38 of 55 seats in the legislature. Internal tensions within the Social Credit caucus were exposed, however, when two Members of the Legislative Assembly elected in the 1969 Socred landslide crossed the floor to join the Progressive Conservative Party, which had been reinvigorated by a new young leader, Derril Warren. The defection of two prominent Socred MLA's, Dr. George Scott Wallace from Oak Bay and Donald Marshall from South Peace River, lent credibility and voice to Warren's bid to win Social Credit voters over to his vision of a renewed political right, and raised questions about Bennett's ability to enforce party discipline and to inspire trust. Marshall explained that his departure was "in no way condemning Premier Bennett," before adding "But, I am looking ahead 10 years and I can't see any change in this government. The premier has indicated there is not alternative to his leadership."¹⁹ While these internal battles, on their own, may not have proved fatal to the Social Credit government, they exposed the Premier to a new round of criticism from within the party and brought media attention to political dissent against the leader of the once-invincible Social Credit political machine.

The Context of the Election: Voter Behaviour

Explanations for the NDP victory in 1972 are plentiful. The sudden reversal in Social Credit fortunes is often attributed to a fracturing of the political right with the re-emergence of

¹⁹ Canadian Press, "Bennett era over, defecting Socred says," *Prince George Citizen*, March 23, 1972, 1

the provincial Progressive Conservative Party and the continued strength of the Liberals.²⁰

Michael Howlett and Keith Brownsey concluded that in 1972 “the two old-line parties obtained nearly 30 per cent of the vote - enough to give the NDP an overall majority.”²¹ Vote splitting, however, provides only a partial explanation for the election results. Provincial totals obscure the limited reach of both the Conservatives and Liberals into most regions of the province where they failed to present a serious challenge to either the Social Credit Party or the NDP. In the 1972 election, while the Conservatives dramatically increased their popular vote share to 12.67 per cent province-wide, up from 0.11 per cent in the previous election,²² the party won only two seats in the legislature, one of those by Social Credit defector and incumbent Dr. George Scott Wallace. Furthermore, Conservative Leader Derril Warren, despite running what appeared to be a successful campaign, failed to win his own seat in North Vancouver-Seymour, finishing well behind the NDP’s Colin Gabelmann.²³ Vote splitting was a factor in only a few ridings. In total, Social Credit lost only ten seats by less than the vote share siphoned off by the Conservatives. Tellingly, the Conservatives had the greatest influence on the outcome of the election in ridings that had been Social Credit strongholds. Fort George, Kamloops and Omenica had been Socred seats since 1952; Esquimalt and Victoria since 1953; Delta since 1952 except for a brief flirtation with the CCF from 1960-1963; Dewdney since 1952 except for 1960-1966 when Dave Barrett held the seat before redistribution shifted Barrett to Coquitlam and returned the Dewdney riding to the Socreds. Vancouver-Little Mountain, in its various configurations before the 1966 redistribution, had been held by the Socreds continuously since 1952. Thus, while the

²⁰ Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, 3rd ed., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007, 295; Michael Howlett and Keith Brownsey, “The Old Reality and the New Reality: Party Politics and Public Policy in British Columbia 1941-1987,” *Studies in Political Economy*, Vol. 25 (Spring 1988), 154; Resnick, 9; Tennant, 491

²¹ Howlett and Brownsey, 154

²² *Electoral History of British Columbia*, 303 and 311

²³ *Ibid.*, 315

Conservatives did not deliver the NDP majority, they did play a significant role in the shaping of political rhetoric during the election.

In contrast, the Liberal Party, which positioned itself as a traditional free enterprise party and utilized the same political rhetoric as the provincial Progressive Conservative party, failed to attract disenchanted Socred voters. The Liberal vote share dropped by 2.63 per cent from its 1969 performance to 16.4 per cent of the popular vote in 1972.²⁴ Though the party maintained five seats in the legislature, Barrie Clark, first elected in 1966, lost in the Liberal stronghold of North Vancouver-Seymour, a seat held by the Liberals since 1960. Liberal Leader David Anderson managed to pry one of the two seats in the Victoria riding away from the Social Credit control, defeating Waldo Skillings, who had held the seat for the Socreds since 1960, by a scant 527 votes. Social Credit candidate Newell Morrison took the other seat in Victoria, which had been vacated by Social Credit veteran William Chant. Overall, Liberal support declined in 65 percent of the ridings in the province. In the riding of Columbia River, where Liberal candidate Stanley Lim lost to the embattled Social Credit Minister of Labour Jim Chabot, the Liberal vote share dropped by nearly eighteen per cent. The Liberals had held the Oak Bay seat from 1952 to 1969 when Dr. George Scott Wallace won it for Social Credit. Despite the controversy over Wallace's defection to the Conservatives and the strong support the Liberals had traditionally enjoyed, the party saw its vote drop by twenty per cent in 1972. Though the Progressive Conservatives did influence the election outcome, vote splitting by the Liberals did not contribute to the defeat of the Social Credit government.

Dispersion of Union Membership

Union membership and a shifting class structure have also been cited as important factors in the NDP's 1972 electoral success. In an article published in 1981, Donald Blake, Richard

²⁴ *Electoral History of British Columbia*, 303 and 311

Johnston and Dave J. Elkins argued that the political change in the 1972 election “reflects underlying changes in the province’s economy,”²⁵ as growing numbers of British Columbians found “themselves in work settings which encourage NDP support.”²⁶ They concluded that industrialization in the BC Interior and North was particularly important, as many workers were employed by large-scale capital-intensive firms in which employee-management relations were mediated through unions. Furthermore, they argued that the growth of the public sector was of particular importance as public employees had “a direct stake in public sector growth, as advocated by the NDP.”²⁷ In a subsequent article, published in 1984, Donald Blake argued that Bennett’s failure to recognize the significance of union membership and public sector employment was at least partly responsible for his defeat in 1972, “a defeat preceded by major battles with important groups within or dependent upon the public sector: hospital workers, government employees, school teachers and doctors.”²⁸

Social Credit Cabinet Minister Cyril Shelford was among those who attributed the Social Credit loss to the growth of unionized labour in Northern and Interior industries.²⁹ Shelford recalled, “years ago when [Ray] Williston and I were talking about industrialization and the need for power, transport and all this sort of stuff a fellow came to us and said, “you two are working real hard but you’ll defeat yourselves. Because, once you get industrialized you’ll have union workers who will vote against you.”³⁰ Shelford added that in the early years in Omenica, “there wouldn’t have been a union person in the whole of Omenica hardly. Even the wood workers weren’t unionized when I was first elected up in that part of the county. And then there was no

²⁵ Donald Blake, Richard Johnston and Dave J. Elkins, “Sources of Change in the BC Party System,” *BC Studies*, No. 50 (Summer 1981), 22

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Donald Blake, “The Electoral Significance of Public Sector Bashing,” *BC Studies*, No. 62 (Summer 1984), 31

²⁹ “Cyril Shelford Interview,” 1980, British Columbia Archives, accesssion number T3683:0008, audio cassette

³⁰ Ibid.

mines. Grand Isle and Endako came in during my term of office and that brought in thousands of unionized workers.”³¹

The transformation of the economy under the Social Credit government was evident throughout the province, particularly in the North and Interior where industrialization had occurred on a massive scale. During the twenty years that the Socreds held power, the province’s population nearly doubled from 1.2 million to over 2.3 million.³² While the traditional resource sector remained dominant, industrialization in rural British Columbia played a critical role in the rapid economic growth and expansion that characterized the postwar period. In 1961 only three of fourteen pulp mills were located outside the Lower Mainland or Vancouver Island. By 1971 just one new mill had been built in the more populous south while nine new mills bolstered the economies of the interior and northern regions of the province.³³ Sawmills followed a similar pattern. In 1972, forty of fifty-seven sawmills, with a daily production capacity of over 100,000 board feet, were located outside the Lower Mainland compared to only eleven of twenty-nine a decade earlier.³⁴

The shift in the British Columbia economy was not limited to primary resources and industrialization nor were unionized workers confined to these sectors. Furthermore, unionization and voting patterns cannot be directly correlated. In an article published in 1988, Howlett and Brownsey concluded that the growth of a “new middle class and public-sector working class, in alliance with the private-sector working class, helped to defeat Social Credit in 1972.”³⁵ During the campaign, WAC Bennett argued that union membership had not translated

³¹ Cyril Shelford, Interview

³² John Belshaw, *Becoming British Columbia: A Population History*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009, 201

³³ Blake, Johnston and Elkins, 24

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 23

³⁵ Howlett and Brownsey, 152

into NDP votes in the past. He boldly predicted that despite the ongoing acrimony between the BC Teachers' Federation and the provincial government, "90 per cent of the province's teachers would support his government."³⁶ Indeed, many of the regions of the province most profoundly affected by Social Credit economic development policies had consistently delivered Social Credit members to the legislature. The Peace and Columbia River regions, where hydro-electric development had created both controversy and jobs, were Social Credit strongholds and remained in Social Credit control after the 1972 election. Similarly, Fort George, Omenica, and Skeena, where the spread of the saw mills, plywood plants and pulp mills from the lower mainland into the province's hinterland was accompanied by a growth in union membership, had elected Social Credit candidates until 1972. What remains unanswered is why this sector of the voting public deserted the Socreds in 1972.

Some political analysts have attributed the Social Credit defeat to less tangible causes, arguing that it was simply time for a change. David Mitchell, in his 1983 biography of W.A.C. Bennett, concluded that "the social forces produced by the new affluence were largely responsible for the demise of Social Credit. Change and progress, the dominant themes of W.A.C. Bennett's stewardship, left him behind."³⁷ Marjorie Nichols, the legislative bureau chief for the *Vancouver Sun*, said, "For twenty years, he [WAC Bennett] had been running the province from his hip pocket. He was his own finance minister. He had none of the modern bureaucratic tools. He had nothing."³⁸ The NDP certainly agreed with Nichols' assessment of entrenched and outdated Socred policy and practice. The NDP campaign focused less on policy pronouncements than on the need for renewal. Late in the campaign, a province-wide ad read,

³⁶ "Teachers will vote against Bennett," *Vancouver Sun*, July 25, 1972, 8; Canadian Press, "Teachers against Socreds," *Prince George Citizen*, July 25, 1972, 9

³⁷ Mitchell, 422

³⁸ Marjorie Nichols and Jane O'Hara, *Mark My Words: The Memoirs of a Very Political Reporter*, Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1992, 86

“For twenty years they’ve promised more, and they’ve “kept” their promise: more pollution, more unemployment, more taxation, more labour problems...”³⁹ NDP ads and billboards around the province cried, “Enough is enough.”⁴⁰ Derril Warren and his Progressive Conservatives also offered voters renewal and a new kind of conservatism. Warren took to the political battlefield believing that Bennett “was no longer giving the kind of government that we felt the province required... he’d made a tremendous contribution, say in the first 15 years, but it had begun to decline... there were enough signals, that we thought the province was due for a change.”⁴¹ “Now you do have a choice,” proclaimed Progressive Conservative campaign material.⁴²

Common to all of these assessments is the idea that Bennett had lost touch with the normative expectations of citizens. Barnard argues that “the recognition that there is more to procedural norms than procedures” is critical, adding that “there is an ethic involved in the *how* of politics that needs guarding if democracy is to be seen as a road that in itself comprises normative principles of political morality.”⁴³ Barnard concludes that “standards of political legitimacy must command general normative validity regardless of particular contexts.”⁴⁴

Hetherington noted that political trust in the American model was most closely tied to presidential approval and to the personal characteristics of the leader. Hetherington adds, “Since the president is portrayed by the media and perceived by the public as the government’s central actor it is not surprising that such assessments inform an overall view of the government.”⁴⁵

Bennett was often criticized for his autocratic rule and micromanaging style. As Premier, he was

³⁹ New Democratic Party, *Prince George Citizen*, August 18, 1972, 21

⁴⁰ Photo, *Prince George Citizen*, August 9, 1972, 15

⁴¹ "Derril Warren Interview," July 13, 1978, British Columbia Archives, Accession Number 3095:0001, Transcripts, 5

⁴² British Columbia Archives, John A. Clark Fonds, MS 0815, Box 25, File 5, *New Directions: The Conservative Party*, Pamphlet

⁴³ Barnard, 42

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 200

⁴⁵ Hetherington, 793

the public face of Social Credit and set government priorities. As Finance Minister, Bennett meted out funds to the programs and projects that fell within his vision of progress. The Social Credit government was principally defined by W.A.C. Bennett and his master plan for the province. Mitchell described Bennett as “the force that did the most to sculpt the face of British Columbia. He left his record not so much in the statute book but in miles of and tons of asphalt, concrete and steel.”⁴⁶ Bennett's focus on economic growth continued through the 1972 election campaign with the announcement of a new coal mining development in the Peace River region.⁴⁷ Dave Barrett reiterated his party's long held claim that the mining industry was not paying royalties for access to precious public resources⁴⁸ and Alf Nunweiler promised that an NDP government would “stop the give-aways.”⁴⁹ When Bennett's definition of good government began to diverge from the public's, so too did his government's claim to legitimacy.

Growth of the Public Sector

While the population and economy both grew, so too did government. The provincial government expanded both in actual size and in reach. Social Credit, despite preaching the benefits of small and minimally invasive government, dramatically increased taxes and regulation in virtually all sectors over its twenty-year tenure while simultaneously expanding the provincial public service. In 1951, approximately 8,000 people were employed in the public service. By 1961, that number stood at just over 10,000. A decade later, on the eve of the NDP victory, more than 29,000 people worked directly for the provincial government.⁵⁰ Similar

⁴⁶ Mitchell, 424

⁴⁷ Canadian Press, “Bennett reveals Peace coal plan,” *Prince George Citizen*, August 1, 1972, 5

⁴⁸ Gerry Soroka, “Barrett asks TV car insurance debate,” *Prince George Citizen*, August 2, 1972, 1

⁴⁹ “Stop give-aways,” *Prince George Citizen*, August 2, 1972, 3

⁵⁰ Rennie Warburton and David Coburn, “The Rise of Non-Manual Work in British Columbia,” *BC Studies*, No. 59 (Autumn 1983), 23

increases occurred in education and healthcare. The BC Teachers' Federation in 1972 had over 23,000 members.

As the public service grew, the provincial budget reallocated resources to social spending. In 1956 highways accounted for twenty per cent of the provincial budget. Health and education represented almost 58 per cent of the provincial expenditures in 1972. The political discourse that the Social Credit Party utilized to appeal to voters, however, continued to focus on spending on infrastructure. As journalist Jack Webster observed, "To try to convince him [Bennett] that there was something beyond highways, beyond power megaprojects, beyond the physical things you could build with bulldozers, was impossible. The Social Credit government didn't promote anything its members couldn't have their picture taken beside at election time... They didn't understand things like fair expropriation laws, day care or drug treatment centres."⁵¹

As spending on social services increased, the civil service expanded. The growth of the public sector in BC had outpaced every other region in Canada.⁵² At the same time, as a result of the government's media focus on megaprojects, critics complained that the Socreds had fallen behind other provinces in program development and administration of social services. Social Credit Cabinet Minister Ray Williston believed that while the Socreds had improved social services, increased welfare rates, and expanded support for seniors, by 1972 the expansion of services had slowed.⁵³ That growth in social programming could not keep pace with the public's demand for services is evident in Webster's comments.

This dynamic economic and social reconfiguration of the province created new politics and introduced new political issues. Barnard has argued that such rapid change can itself

⁵¹ Jack Webster, *Webster! An Autobiography*, Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990, 152

⁵² Blake, "Sources of Change..."

⁵³ "Ray Williston Interview," October 9, 1975, British Columbia Archives, Accession Number T1375:0026, Transcription, 9

“threaten the constitutive meanings of legitimacy and self-authentication.”⁵⁴ As the public demanded solutions to rising inflation, unemployment, pot-holed highways and crowded hospitals, Bennett and his Socreds answered with a policy of austerity to limit public spending. Increasingly promises to continue to deliver British Columbians “the good life”⁵⁵ fell on deaf ears. In 1972 voters, it seemed, were measuring success by a different scale.

Labour Conflict

The endemic conflict between the Social Credit government and organized labour proved instrumental to the government’s defeat. Throughout the 1960s, the Socreds had repeatedly sought to limit the power of labour generally, and to prevent the deleterious effects of prolonged job action by intervening in strikes.⁵⁶ NDP Leader Dave Barrett was one of a chorus of critics who maintained that the “Socreds had created a climate of confrontation on the labour front”⁵⁷ through the passage of compulsory arbitration legislation and the creation in 1968 of the Mediation Commission (Bill 33). The Mediation Commission Act had attracted considerable criticism from the opposition benches and organized labour. The BC Federation of Labour promised to boycott the work of the Commission. In the months before the Legislative Assembly was prorogued in 1972 a series of legislative initiatives raised the ire of unionized employees in both the public and private sectors against the Social Credit government, setting the stage for conflict as the province headed towards an election.

⁵⁴ Barnard, 24

⁵⁵ The phrase “The Good Life” began as a Social Credit campaign slogan in the 1950s and was used by the party until 1972. It was also adopted by critics who used the phrase sarcastically to contrast Social Credit rhetoric with policy deficiencies.

⁵⁶ See 1961 labour code, BC Federation of Labour issued a pamphlet entitled “Labour’s case against Social Credit anti-labour legislation” Vancouver: BC Federation of Labour: Political Education Department, 1961, PAM 603: Collection AM 1519-City of Vancouver Archives Pamphlet Collection; The Mediation Commission Act of 1968: the BC Federation of Labour boycotted the Commission after inconsistent rulings, notably an adjudication for the Teamsters that imposed a wage settlement less than that already offered by the employer.

⁵⁷ Dave Barrett and William Miller, *Barrett: A Passionate Political Life*, Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1995, 54

As MLA's prepared to return to Victoria for the 1972 session, labour trouble was widely anticipated. Contracts for 5,000 Teamsters, 9,000 hospital workers and over 2,000 nurses had expired in December 1971. Contracts for 44,000 construction workers and 28,000 forest workers would expire in the first half of 1972, school board agreements covering some 23,000 teachers were set to expire at the end of the year, and negotiations with longshore workers, and coastal towboat officers and crew were upcoming.⁵⁸ At the same time, municipalities throughout the Lower Mainland were scheduled to negotiate new contracts with their inside and outside workers. Meanwhile, a seven week long strike by the municipal workers that started in April 1972⁵⁹ and the walkout by longshoremen in August coloured public perceptions of labour relations in the province. Liberal MLA Garde Gardom laid responsibility for labour strife at the feet of the Social Credit government, declaring, "One of the worst calamities this province has faced has been this government's patent inability to effectively deal with labour-management problems and I'd say, let alone ineffectively dealing with them, it has compounded them by its policies of division of polarization and of confrontation."⁶⁰ In a speech to the house, Gardom painted a bleak picture of the labour front. "B.C. is pointing to an awful summer and the possibilities of a very, very, sick, sick, sick economy," adding, "The climate here today in B.C. is really bad. In my view the forecast for the future is even worse."⁶¹ On the eve of the 1972 legislative session, Labour Minister Jim Chabot ordered the Hospital Employees Union to call off job action planned at hospitals in Port Alberni, Kamloops and North Vancouver and issued an

⁵⁸ "\$2-an-hour hike demanded by Royal City IWA local," *Vancouver Sun*, January 18, 1972, 1; "Labor talks grow hotter," *Prince George Citizen*, January 19, 1972, 22

⁵⁹ "Strike halts civic operations," *Vancouver Sun*, April 27, 1972, 1; "Municipal 2-year pact rejected," *Vancouver Sun*, May 1, 1972, 1; "Civic Strike Spreads to Royal City," *Vancouver Sun*, May 5, 1972, 1; "Civic workers strike Burnaby," *Prince George Citizen*, May 1, 1972, 1; "Garbage backlog: Civic workers go back," *Prince George Citizen*, June 19, 1972, 1; "Garbage trucks finally rolling," *Vancouver Sun*, June 19, 1972, 1

⁶⁰ Garde Gardom, *Hansard*, February 10, 1972, 400

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

order-in-council directing the union and employer to appear before the much-maligned Mediation Commission.⁶²

Teachers and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation

One of the first and most controversial pieces of legislation introduced to the house in January, 1972 was Bill 3, *An Act to Amend the Public Schools Act*.⁶³ Education funding, whether for school construction or teacher salaries, became a key issue in the months before the election campaign. During the second reading of the bill, Education Minister Donald Brothers warned the House that education costs overall were increasing rapidly, and that costs per student had escalated by more than 35 per cent since 1968. At \$448,671,000, the 1972 budget for education was \$44,711,000 higher than in 1971⁶⁴ and nearly five times greater than it had been a decade earlier, and if left unchecked would consume some \$600 million dollars of the provincial budget by 1976. Brothers acknowledged that British Columbia was not the only jurisdiction facing a funding crisis, and that every state and province in North America struggled with the same issue.⁶⁵ To control the budget the government bill held salary increases for teachers to 6.5 per cent,⁶⁶ imposed a new funding formula to limit total operating budget increases to 108 per cent of the current levels and required individual boards to acquire additional funding through local referenda if they chose to exceed the government-prescribed allowance for their districts. Bill 3 generated a fierce debate over the responsibility of government not only to deliver high quality education but also over the rightful place of legislators to intervene in collective bargaining.

⁶² "Arbitration ordered for hospitals: Action heads off threatened strike," *Vancouver Sun*, January 20, 1972, 1; "Hospital union plans appeal," *Vancouver Sun*, January 21, 1972, 23; Canadian Press, "Labor action blasted," *Prince George Citizen*, January 21, 1972, 2

⁶³ *Hansard*, January 28, 1972, 163

⁶⁴ British Columbia Archives, William Chant Fonds, MS 0393, Box 1, File 16, *Highlights: 1972 Budget Speech*, Government of British Columbia: 1972

⁶⁵ Donald Brothers, *Hansard*, February 18, 1972, 631

⁶⁶ *Hansard*, March 13, 1972, 772

Liberal Alan Williams called the bill “the most unprincipled piece of legislation that this government has ever produced” concerning education.⁶⁷

To rally public support for Bill 3, the government launched an ad campaign defending its position. In the March 17 edition of the *Vancouver Sun*, the government launched its first salvo in the public relations battle over teachers’ salaries, publishing an ad entitled “Ontario Has Education Problems Too.”⁶⁸ More ads followed that claimed that teacher salaries had vastly outpaced inflation, that BC teachers were the highest paid in Canada and that education now consumed nearly 31 per cent of the provincial budget.⁶⁹ The BC Teachers’ Federation was quick to launch a counter-attack on the government plan, seeking support both from other professional groups and from the public at large. BCTF President Adam Robertson framed the dispute in moral terms, telling the press, “We have a public image that pictures us as a bunch of money-grubbers. But it’s a false picture. We are sincerely worried about the quality of education in this province.”⁷⁰ He added, “There is also a moral issue involved. Our government now has a very highly centralized control of finances for education. The guy who controls the buck controls the system and the programs, and I think it is highly dangerous.” Furthermore, Robertson claimed that the Socreds were settling the score with teachers for campaigning against them in the 1969 election, first by eliminating mandatory membership in the BCTF for teachers and then by imposing a ceiling on salary increases, explaining that “We’ve been forced into direct political

⁶⁷ *Hansard*, March 20, 1972, 881; See also George Dobie, "Worst labor bill, unionists charge," *Vancouver Sun*, March 17, 1972, 1

⁶⁸ “Ontario Has Education Problems Too,” *Vancouver Sun*, March 17, 1972, 10

⁶⁹ Government of British Columbia, “British Columbia Has the Highest Paid, Best Qualified Teachers in Canada,” *Vancouver Sun*, April 4, 1972, 14 and *Prince George Citizen*, April 4, 1972, 15; Government of British Columbia, “Education: The largest expenditure of your provincial government in 1972,” *Prince George Citizen*, April 17, 1972, 14

⁷⁰ “B.C. education crisis keyed on teacher salaries,” *Prince George Citizen*, April 26, 1972, 3; See also “Gov’t double-cross charged by teachers’ union chief,” *Vancouver Sun*, April 3, 1972, 1; “Teachers OK strike vote: Fund to be raised in war on BC gov’t,” *Vancouver Sun*, April 4, 1972, 1

action once again because the government won't listen to us at the professional level." Teachers escalated the political confrontation with the government over Bill 3 by setting up a \$1.3 million "political action fund" to target the Socreds in the next election.⁷¹ When the fund was frozen by court order over questions regarding the legality of compelling teachers to contribute a day's pay to a political cause, the BCTF asked for teachers to voluntarily contribute to the fund and formed a new organization called the "Political Action Committee." The committee's sole purpose was to coordinate the teachers' campaign against the Socreds in the upcoming election.⁷²

Teachers maintained their vigilance throughout the election campaign, demanding bargaining rights and the elimination of the arbitrary ceiling on district funding. Although the Political Action Committee was clear that its goal was to remove the Socreds from office, they did not support the entire NDP slate, choosing instead to support the candidates in each riding that they believed had the best chance of defeating the Socreds. In Victoria the committee endorsed the Liberals, including leader David Anderson, as well as Conservative Dr. Scott Wallace in Oak Bay. The teachers also lent their moral, though not financial, support to NDP leader Dave Barrett, stating that they expected Barrett to easily win his seat.⁷³ During the campaign, all three opposition leaders had sided with the teachers and promised to eliminate the controversial clause limiting teacher salaries. Derril Warren even suggested a complete overhaul of the school financing system, proposing the elimination of school taxes on real property in favour of paying for education out of general revenues. As the election neared, the media reported that fifteen BC teachers were among a group of 150 Canadians educators headed to Australia to take jobs there. The BC teachers reported that work was hard to find and that there

⁷¹ "B.C. education crisis keyed on teacher salaries," *Prince George Citizen*, April 26, 1972, 3

⁷² "New Teachers Organization," *CBC Hourglass News*, 1972-07-14-2; "New B.C. teacher group vows war against gov't," *Vancouver Sun*, July 15, 1972, 1

⁷³ "Teachers Back Liberals, Tory," *Victoria Times*, July 31, 1972, 1

was a surplus of teachers in the province. The BCTF added that it expected there would be 2,000 unemployed teachers in BC in September.⁷⁴

The very public dispute between the teachers and the Social Credit government revealed that the gap between economic and social imperatives was growing and that the Socreds stood firmly on the economic side of the debate. The education crisis was prominent in television and print media from the beginning of the legislative session in January through to the end of the election campaign. Government arguments for restraint as a means of combating inflation were measured against teachers' demands for bargaining rights and claims that public education was under threat. The issue illustrates the growing distance between the Social Credit government, the public service and the public. While Bennett preached restraint, the teachers and the public at large demanded higher wages and more services and believed that the only impediment was Bennett's archaic administration.

The Private Sector

Private sector labour disputes were especially heated in the summer of 1972 and garnered considerable attention from news media. A January 1972 Canadian Press story considering the potential impact of wide-spread work stoppages reported that "When organized labor in B.C. manages to combine solidly on a particular issue, it presents a formidable front against employers and government."⁷⁵ Liberal MLA Garde Gardom told the house that the Social Credit labour relations record was leading the province towards a crisis, as dozens of contracts were set to expire in 1972. He warned that "Industrial turmoil in the province has grown year by year," rising from 34,659 worker-days lost in 1961, to 406,729 in 1969, to a high of 1,684,463 in 1970⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Robert Sarti, "15 B.C. teachers find new life Down Under," *Vancouver Sun*, August 21, 1972, 8; Canadian Press, "Teachers Leave Canada for Jobs in Australia," *Prince George Citizen*, August 21, 1972, 3

⁷⁵ Canadian Press, "Union bosses sit gingerly: B.C. Labor bosses," *Prince George Citizen*, January 20, 1972, 20

⁷⁶ Garde Gardom, *Hansard*, February 10, 1972, 400

Protracted disputes in the construction and forestry industries, which affected thousands of workers, tested government's authority to act. Allegations of intimidation on the picket lines were frequent as were demonstrations meant to attract public sympathy for strikers. The construction and forestry conflicts captured headlines and exposed the Socreds to widespread criticism, in one case for using their legislative authority to end a strike, in the other for not acting to end a crippling dispute.⁷⁷ In both cases the government appeared powerless to resolve the issues that put thousands out of work as renegade factions within the unions carried on their fight long after negotiations had apparently settled conflicts.

Coast Forest Industry Strike and Wildcat Fallers

Wildcat strikes and other illegal work stoppages had become a regular feature of the BC labour environment through the 1960s and early 1970s. The mid-sixties was a particularly volatile period with over 1100 wildcat strikes recorded nationally over 1965-66.⁷⁸ Bryan Palmer, has interpreted the proliferation of illegal and often violent work stoppages in the 1960s as expressions of youthful rebellion "channelled through conservative union leaders and the procedural morass of the legally ordered trade union settlement."⁷⁹ While wildcat strikes had declined in other Canadian jurisdictions by the end of the 1960s the frequency of illegal walkouts had increased in British Columbia. E.G. Fisher argues that the increase in "wildcat strike activity in British Columbia seems to have mirrored a deterioration of labour relations in the forest products industries,"⁸⁰ which accounted for more than half the unauthorized walkouts in BC.

⁷⁷ "More fallers stop work: 800 estimated idle over pricing formula," *Vancouver Sun*, May 8, 1972, 1; "Fallers issue up to gov't," *Vancouver Sun*, August 5, 1972, 8

⁷⁸ Palmer, Bryan. *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008, 222

⁷⁹ Ibid. 220

⁸⁰ E.G. Fisher, "Strike Activity and Wildcat Strikes in British Columbia: 1945-1975," *Relations Industrielles*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (1982), 290

Fisher attributes the rising trend in wildcat strikes in BC to an increase to the cost of living and the unemployment rate.⁸¹

In the forest industry, MacMillan Bloedel's logging operations were the first hit, but the dispute soon escalated to a massive industry-wide shutdown. The episode started in January 1972, when thirty-four fallers staged a wildcat strike against MacMillan Bloedel's Franklin River operation on Vancouver Island.⁸² A court injunction to end the illegal work stoppage was violated in April when more than 400 workers staged another wildcat strike.⁸³ CBC reported three weeks later that MacMillan Bloedel had announced it would start cutting back production at two of its Vancouver mills because of a log shortage caused by the strike. The fallers were CBC's lead story again on May 29 when approximately 100 men walked out of an IWA union meeting and demanded that a new committee be struck to represent their interests and seek an end to the stalemate. One union official described the scene in the meeting as "mob rule".⁸⁴ On June 12 the dispute escalated to include the whole coastal operation when the International Woodworkers of America issued 72-hour strike notice on 115 coast forest companies. The agreement, covering some 28,000 workers, was set to expire two days later. IWA boss Jack Moore said at the time that strike notice was "just a formality" and that he still held out hope for a negotiated settlement.⁸⁵ Ten days later, the coast forest industry was completely shut down, the

⁸¹ Fisher, 298

⁸² "Fallers intimidated by colleagues, MB contends at contempt hearing," *Vancouver Sun*, May 9, 1972, 13; Canadian Press, "Threats alleged," *Prince George Citizen*, May 10, 1972, 3

⁸³ "Fallers urged back to work," *Vancouver Sun*, April 19, 1972, 2; George Dobie, "'All or none at all,' say fallers," *Vancouver Sun*, April 20, 1972, 1; George Dobie, "Hourly pay versus tree-rate: the controversy with fallers," *Vancouver Sun*, April 21, 1972, 1; Canadian Press, "Logging halt hits coast," *Prince George Citizen*, April 19, 1972, 3

⁸⁴ "Fallers and Wives, *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-05-29-1

⁸⁵ "IWA serves strike notice," *Prince George Citizen*, June 13, 1972, 1; "Union leaders optimistic of IWA contract terms," *Vancouver Sun*, June 13, 1972, 29

first industry-wide strike in thirteen years.⁸⁶ On July 4, the *Vancouver Sun* newspaper reported that a settlement had been reached, and that union members would be asked to ratify the agreement.⁸⁷

Labour troubles in the forest industry, however, were far from over. Leaders of three of the largest locals, representing about half of the striking workers, said they would recommend that their members reject the offer.⁸⁸ IWA Regional President Jack Moore once again expressed confidence, saying it was the best contract ever negotiated by the IWA and that it would make the coast members the highest paid woodworkers in the world.⁸⁹ The deal was accepted by the majority of members but the fallers still refused to return to work. Moore told reporters that there was nothing he could do to force the men back into the woods.⁹⁰

The fallers' dispute, rather than the official start of the election campaign, remained the focus of media coverage. On July 29, CBC reported that the "forest industry and their fellow woodworkers" were feeling the first serious effects of the fallers' strike and their holdout from the negotiated agreement between the IWA and the industry. During the wildcat strikes Lower Mainland sawmills had been shut down by the sudden appearance of pickets, and more than 400 mill workers at MacMillan Bloedel's Alberni Pacific saw mill had been laid off due to log shortages. Finally, on August 10 the steering committee representing dissident fallers recommended that the holdouts return to work after four long months of public acrimony. However, media reports of unrest in the forest sector continued throughout the final stretch of

⁸⁶ "28,000 woodworkers strike, shut down forest industry: Failure of talks first in 13 years," *Vancouver Sun*, June 22, 1972, 1; Nick Hills, Southam News Services, Vancouver, *Prince George Citizen*, June 23, 1972, 1

⁸⁷ George Dobie, "Forest negotiators agree on contract: Return to jobs likely Monday," *Vancouver Sun*, July 4, 1972, 1

⁸⁸ "Thompson - IWA Settlement," *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-07-05-1; George Dobie, "Signs point to a close vote: 3 IWA locals asked to reject pact," *Vancouver Sun*, July 5, 1972, 1

⁸⁹ "Thompson - IWA Settlement," *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-07-05-1

⁹⁰ "Moore and Fallers" *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-07-21-1; Peter Trask, "Communist role claimed in holdout faller dispute," *Vancouver Sun*, July 21, 1972, 1

election campaign, with the threat of another strike in the interior forest industry where contracts were set to expire on August 31. Just two days before the election, the *Prince George Citizen* reported that a labour disruption had been averted for some 1800 members of IWA Local I-424 when a settlement was negotiated on terms similar to those negotiated with the coastal forest workers.

Throughout the forest dispute, Labour Minister Jim Chabot refused to intervene and rejected proposals sent to him by the fallers. Instead he urged dissidents to accept the contract that had been negotiated by their union. Although the government had decided to respect collective bargaining in the forestry dispute, it still faced criticism for failing to defend the rights of workers who had been laid off or prevented from returning to work by the illegal strike, and thereby failing to protect the provincial economy. The prolonged dispute between labour and industry and the sometimes violent clashes between dissident fallers and their fellow IWA members remained in the headlines for the four-month duration of the strike, which dragged on through the election campaign, ensuring that the perception of government impotence in the face of labour unrest also remained in the public eye.

Strikes in the Construction Industry

As the forest industry struggled with its labour problems, the construction industry was facing its own contract issues. In this case government chose intervention, which sparked further political controversy and public reaction to the decision. Forty-four contracts covering eighteen different building trades unions had expired on March 31, a day after the legislature had prorogued the session. Negotiations between the BC and Yukon Building Trades Council representing the unions and the Construction Labour Relations Association (CLRA), the bargaining agent for 840 member companies, had stalled by mid-April. As the CLRA prepared to

send the unions a new offer in hopes of averting a province-wide strike, neither side expressed any optimism that they could reach a deal. Jim Kinnaird, President of the Building Trades Council, said he expected the CLRA offer to be about 6.5 per cent and if so, the offer would be rejected. Labour Minister Jim Chabot said the province would not intervene in the dispute until the unions had opportunity to respond to the forthcoming offer.⁹¹ A week later, the CLRA served 72-hour lockout notice. As the industry braced for a shutdown, news media reminded their audiences of the 1970 dispute that had brought construction to a standstill for three months.⁹² On April 28th, the lockout forced 30,000 workers off the job and halted about \$500 million worth of construction.

Little progress was made in the following week to resolve the ongoing standoff. Members of the building trades unions demonstrated outside the CLRA offices in Burnaby. Jim Chabot had ask to meet with both sides, concerned that the work stoppage was “proving to be very injurious to the province’s economy.”⁹³ To ease public concerns over the effects of the lockout, Chabot asked the protagonists to lift the lockout order for hospital and school construction. The CLRA refused to accede to the minister’s request. Editorials and 'Letters to the Editor' complained that critical community facilities were caught up in the dispute and citizens were falling victim to rancour between the union and management. As the lockout showed no sign of resolution after a month, union members mounted a noon-hour protest in downtown Vancouver in front of Pacific Centre shopping mall.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Canadian Press, "New construction offer due Friday," *Prince George Citizen*, April 19, 1972, 1

⁹² "Contractors give notice of lockout," *Vancouver Sun*, First Ed., April 24, 1972, 1; "Chabot intervenes in building impasse: Contract talks stall on offer," *Vancouver Sun*, Second Ed., April 24, 1972, 1; Canadian Press, "Chabot pessimistic: Construction lockout predicted by Thursday," *Prince George Citizen*, April 25, 1972, 1; "Construction strikers defy Chabot," *Vancouver Sun*, April 25, 1972, 1

⁹³ "Bldg Trades Demo," *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-05-09-1

⁹⁴ "Bldg Trades Rally," *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-05-26-02

On May 30, as the lockout entered its second month, the Labour Minister, who was touring the province with other Cabinet members, called a special cabinet session in Terrace⁹⁵ and stated that he would not rule out compulsory arbitration under the Mediation Commission Act.⁹⁶ The next day he gave the unions and management seven days to negotiate a deal, telling the media that “they can either resolve the dispute alone at the bargaining table or agree to my earlier proposal that a three man arbitration board be selected to bring down a binding settlement.”⁹⁷ Chabot issued a clear ultimatum, but the unions were unmoved by the threat, arguing that they would never accept a binding settlement.⁹⁸ Construction workers responded to Chabot’s announcement with another demonstration in Vancouver, this time shutting down Hastings Street in front of the BC Mediation Commission offices. Police blocked off streets and intersections, leaving motorists to fume as the 300 or so protesters carrying placards reading “Collective Bargaining Yes - Compulsory Arbitration No” and “The CLRA proposes and Chabot imposes” wound their way through the downtown core. As the June 7 deadline approached, the BC Building Trades Council executive voted to instruct its members not to go back to work. Jim Chabot returned to Victoria to sign the back-to-work order that would require construction workers to return to work at construction sites across the province at the beginning of the work week, telling reporters that he had no choice but to issue the edict.

The stage was now set for the violent confrontation between frustrated workers and the government. On the last day of their provincial tour, Cabinet members were met by angry

⁹⁵ "Cabinet Tour," *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-05-30-1; Iain Hunter, "Cabinet tackles B.C. labor crisis: Compulsory arbitration possible, says Chabot," *Vancouver Sun*, May 30, 1972, 1

⁹⁶ "Cabinet Tour," *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-05-31-1

⁹⁷ Iain Hunter, "Chabot moves in construction tie up: Week's deadline given both sides," *Vancouver Sun*, May 31, 1972, 1; "Chabot orders end to lockout," *Prince George Citizen*, May 31, 1972, 1; *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-05-31-1

⁹⁸ "Chabot - Deadline," *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-06-07-1; "Tonight says Chabot: Building tieup order vowed," *Vancouver Sun*, June 7, 1972, 1; "Building union leader says: 'Chabot can go to hell,'" *Vancouver Sun*, Second Ed., June 7, 1972, 1

protesters in Lillooet, Chilliwack, Mission and Langley. Cyril Shelford recalled a group in Mission leaving the protest there to go to the “big show” in New Westminster.⁹⁹ By the time the Cabinet members reached their final stop in New Westminster, several hundred union members had jammed the parking lot of the Royal Towers Hotel and were hanging an effigy of Labour Minister Jim Chabot.¹⁰⁰ New Westminster Police were reinforced by another twenty members from local RCMP detachments. Club-wielding protesters pushed their way through police lines to spit on and punch passing ministers. In the face of violent opposition, the government remained resolute. Chabot, who arrived at the Royal Towers shortly after the incident, told reporters there was no chance the back-to-work order would be postponed.¹⁰¹

After Chabot obtained the back-to-work order, negotiations resumed. Within a few days agreements with some of the unions were ratified and tentative agreements were reached with several others. But, a few of the larger unions continued to hold out. On June 12, the back-to-work order was given royal assent, with the stipulation that the dispute would be referred to the BC Mediation Commission at 8am on the morning of June 14. In a media statement, Chabot emphasized that “This dispute has reached a stage where we can no longer tolerate further delays and we are also aware there is an anxiety on the part of workers... to get back to work.”¹⁰² An hour after the deadline had passed it was clear there would be widespread defiance of the order. A union spokesman told reporters, “There are no carpenters going back to work today. None of our people are going back to work until we get a new contract with the CLRA.”¹⁰³ Nine of the

⁹⁹ Cyril Shelford, *From Snowshoes to Politics: A British Columbia Adventure*, Victoria: Orca Book Publishers, 1987, 247

¹⁰⁰ Shelford, *From Snowshoes to Politics*, 247

¹⁰¹ “Cabinet (Royal Towers Riot),” *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-06-07-2; Iain Hunter and Robert Sarti, “Peterson clubbed, Gagliardi struck: Angry Mob roughs up Bennett cabinet,” *Vancouver Sun*, June 8, 1972, 1

¹⁰² “Chabot - Section 18,” *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-06-12-8; Canadian Press, “Lockout order signed,” *Prince George Citizen*, June 13, 1972, 1

¹⁰³ “Building Unions defy gov't order,” *Vancouver Sun*, June 14, 1972, 1; Canadian Press, “Unions defy return order,” *Prince George Citizen*, June 14, 1972, 1

unions and 84 contractors were still without agreements. Defiant workers shut down traffic in Vancouver again as about 400 joined another demonstration at the BC Mediation Commission office. Carpenters union spokesman John Takech told reporters that the unions were determined to boycott the Mediation Commission.

As the unions dug in for the fight, government responded with another controversial move, ordering raids on several union offices to find evidence that union executives had directed their members to defy the back-to-work order.¹⁰⁴ Crown lawyer Bruce McColl announced that charges had been laid against the leaders of locals of the Carpenters Union in Victoria, Kamloops and Prince George along with four locals of other construction unions in Vancouver.¹⁰⁵ After three weeks of hearings the BC Mediation Commission finally handed down its settlement decree to the holdout unions. Chabot said he would give the unions a few days to reach an agreement with the CLRA on their own, or the order would take effect. The BC Federation of Labour called the commission ruling a sell-out to the CLRA.¹⁰⁶

Although work on building sites resumed and most construction trades workers had returned to their jobs by the time the election was called in the last week of July, the legacy of the nearly three-month shutdown was clearly seen across the province in stalled and delayed construction projects. The school district in Prince George asked for and was granted additional funding to pay overtime to expedite completion of a school project that had been delayed. The Mackenzie district realized that their new school would not be ready in time for the start of the school year. Hospital expansions were also behind schedule. Government intervention aimed at

¹⁰⁴ "RCMP seize union papers: Sacred intimidation charged by labor," *Vancouver Sun*, June 21, 1972, 1; Canadian Press, "Construction union offices raided," *Prince George Citizen*, June 21, 1972, 1

¹⁰⁵ Canadian Press, "P.G. construction union charged," *Prince George Citizen*, July 12, 1972, 1

¹⁰⁶ "Labour Relations," *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-07-17-01; "Commission awards \$1.07: Binding after five days, building workers told," *Vancouver Sun*, July 18, 1972, 1; Canadian Press, "Binding award battle looms," *Prince George Citizen*, July 18, 1972, 1

resolving the bitter fight between labour and management had, if anything, added to the resolve of unions across the province to hold out for more money and to affirm their rights to bargain in good faith. And while legislating an end to the construction dispute was controversial in its own right, the government's move to prosecute union leaders for defying the back-to-work order appeared vindictive. The strike/lockout was eventually ended but not before government's policy on workers' rights was thrust into the public domain for all to see and assess.

Labour Crisis

The labour dispute in the construction industry had barely been concluded when another wildcat strike captured headlines throughout the province. The majority of the 1800 longshoreman employed at the Port of Vancouver walked off the job on August 7, leaving several ships idle in the harbour.¹⁰⁷ Like the forestry and construction disputes the dock workers' strike soon spread to other jurisdictions. On August 23, the strike had been extended to Victoria, Nanaimo, Port Alberni, Prince Rupert and other smaller ports, effectively shutting down shipping on the west coast of Canada.¹⁰⁸ As the strike wore on, editorials and letters to the editor attacked the federal government for not acting to put an end to the disruption that resulted in dozens of ships sitting idle in Vancouver Harbour.¹⁰⁹ Though ports are a federal responsibility, Premier Bennett did call on the Prime Minister to declare the port strike a national emergency in an attempt to force the longshoremen back to work.¹¹⁰ Despite the request, Prime Minister Pierre

¹⁰⁷ "Longshore Ruckus," *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-08-07-1; Canadian Press, "Labor dispute hits Vancouver docks," *Prince George Citizen*, August 7, 1972, 1; "City dock work slowed to crawl: Workers claim lockout, firms say jobs available," *Vancouver Sun*, August 7, 1972, 1

¹⁰⁸ "Idle Docks," *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-08-23-1; "Dockers shut down all B.C. ports," *Vancouver Sun*, August 23, 1972, 1

¹⁰⁹ "O'Connell takes reins in port crisis: Labor minister flies to city," *Vancouver Sun*, August 24, 1972, 1; "Dock crisis point reached," *Prince George Citizen*, August 25, 1972, 4

¹¹⁰ "Bennett Rally," *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-08-16-2; "Iain Hunter, "Does Bennett want War Act? asks PM," *Vancouver Sun*, August 17, 1972, 1

Trudeau did not intervene until August 31, the day after British Columbia had elected a new government.¹¹¹

The longshoremen's strike added to the general sense of crisis on the labour relations front. Citizens of Vancouver and other port cities could see the effect of the dock dispute as ships jammed their harbours, unable to offload or load cargo. In the Lower Mainland, many citizens had already endured weeks of inconvenience due to a municipal strikes in Vancouver, Burnaby, Richmond, Delta and New Westminster.¹¹² In Vancouver residents went without garbage pick-up, parks and golf course were left un-mowed. Bodies piled up in hospital morgues while the city morgue was shut down. Welfare recipients were forced to pick up their cheques in person because there was no staff to mail them.¹¹³ In a particularly dramatic expression of public frustration and outrage, a bomb was left on the steps of Vancouver City Hall as councillors met to vote on a two-year seventeen-percent settlement offer.¹¹⁴

Added to these scenes of local turmoil, the daily news was filled with images of violent confrontations between longshoremen and the police in the United Kingdom¹¹⁵ and scenes of labour unrest on the West Coast of the United States. CBC news covered the mass arrest of black construction workers who had rioted in the streets of Seattle.¹¹⁶ Understandings of local labour demonstrations undoubtedly were mediated by a wider vision of social unrest.

While strikes took centre stage in news reporting for most of the summer during the election campaign in British Columbia, concerns over unemployment and inflation played an important supporting role in elevating public anxieties. Federal unemployment statistics released

¹¹¹ Canadian Press, "House passes bill to end dock strike," *Prince George Citizen*, September 1, 1972, 1

¹¹² Canadian Press, "Garbage backlog: Civic workers go back," *Prince George Citizen*, June 19, 1

¹¹³ Nick Hills, Southam Western Bureau, "God's country getting high on garbage," *Prince George Citizen*, May 24, 1972 4

¹¹⁴ "Garbage to Phillips," *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-06-16-4

¹¹⁵ "British dock strike turns violent," *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-08-08

¹¹⁶ "Bldg Trades Demo," *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-07-09-4

in June showed that while BC was better off than some other provinces, there were still 9,000 more unemployed people in the province than in 1971. The opposition leaders all made the jobless rates in British Columbia a talking point during the election. Dave Barrett kicked off the campaign by telling voters that “it’s work and wages with the NDP or waste and welfare with Social Credit.”¹¹⁷ Labour Minister Jim Chabot told a Revelstoke audience that the Social Credit jobs plan would continue to create jobs at a rate of 4.3% annually, adding that the rising unemployment numbers were “due to people flocking to BC for opportunities.”¹¹⁸ The next monthly unemployment update, published at the mid-point of the campaign, did little to ease anxieties as the national jobless rate was still well above 1971 levels, with 69,000 people looking for work in BC.¹¹⁹ Bennett went on the defensive, calling the statistics a mathematical slight-of-hand achieved by a federal amendment to the unemployment insurance scheme. The premier directed voters to look instead at the positives in the report, noting that there were 926,000 gainfully-employed persons in BC, an “all-time” record, and 35,000 more than July 1971. Bennett did not mention that the federal Job Vacancy Index estimated there were only 6,100 jobs available in the province.¹²⁰ The NDP was not going to let the premier off so easily. In the final week of the race the party launched a province-wide advertising campaign attacking the Social Credit jobs record. The August 22 ad read:

...People who want to work, would work, but can’t find work. Because there just aren’t any jobs. Raw materials from primary resources leave our province daily, creating thousands of jobs in foreign countries. Many of those secondary industries could be developed right here in British Columbia...¹²¹

¹¹⁷ "Barrett, Anderson, Warren," *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-07-25-2

¹¹⁸ Canadian Press, “Clean living Bennett only 46,” *Prince George Citizen*, August 10, 1972, 1

¹¹⁹ Canadian Press, “Jobless figures higher than 1971,” *Prince George Citizen*, August 15, 1972, 1

¹²⁰ Statistics Canada, *Historical Statistics of Canada, Section D: The Labour Force*, Series D522-527 Job Vacancies and help-wanted indexes, by region, annual averages, 1951-1975, Accessed June 18, 2011, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-516-x/pdf/5500094-eng.pdf>

¹²¹ New Democratic Party, “One of Canada’s richest province has 71,000 unemployed,” *Prince George Citizen*, August 22, 1972, 7 and *Vancouver Sun*, August 25, 1972, 10

The ad invited voters to connect BC's unemployment problem to Social Credit resource policy. The province's riches were providing jobs, just not within the province. The NDP ads concentrated on criticism of government policy, only minimally alluding to an NDP solution for the unemployment problem. It did, however, help focus public attention on the undeniable fact of rising unemployment. Social Credit campaign promises to support the development of secondary industries merely validated the NDP's criticism and growing public anxiety over job security.

Social Credit unveiled the basic planks in its campaign platform during the cabinet tour of the province. The Kelowna Charter, as Bennett dubbed it, laid out the Social Credit platform in broad brush strokes: an increase in the supplementary allowance to seniors, an increase in social assistance benefits to the elderly and disabled, an increase to minimum wage, a training subsidy to stimulate youth employment and the creation of a new Crown Corporation to facilitate growth in secondary industries.¹²² Though short on detail, the Charter did not depart substantially from the economic and social policies of the NDP, Conservatives, or Liberals. All four leaders agreed that job creation and support for seniors were important goals. The main point of divergence for the three opposition parties was the need for wage controls for public sector workers, an issue that came to dominate the election as teachers, the BC Federation of Labour,¹²³ the BC Government Employees Association, the BC Medical Association and others joined the fight to unseat the Bennett Government and put an end to government restrictions on their salaries and fees-for-service.

During the campaign all parties indicated support for stricter environmental policies. Social Credit had improved greenbelt protection and pollution regulations in the 1972 legislative

¹²² British Columbia Archives, John Tisdalle Fonds, MS 1242, Box 34, File 10, "The Kelowna Charter 1972," *A personal report from the Premier: 20 years of achievement-and now, the Kelowna Charter*. Social Credit Party of British Columbia, 1972, 5

¹²³ BC Federation of Labour, "What do you do with a government that makes its civil servants "second class citizens?" *Prince George Citizen*, August 23, 1972, 29

session, but was roundly criticized for doing too little. David Anderson promised that a Liberal government would create an environmental assessment process before approving new mining projects.¹²⁴ Barrett and Warren both promised enhanced conservation and pollution regulations, though neither offered much detail on their environmental policy. Despite a growing constituency of environmentally concerned citizens and the emergence of several environmental groups, however, the issue of environmental protection failed to resonate with voters on a significant level.

The debate over public auto insurance, while not a key factor in the campaign, is illustrative of the changes that had occurred during Bennett's time in office. Invoking the 'red scare' had proven an effective means for the Socreds to delegitimize the opposition in previous elections. In contrast, by 1972 Bennett's cry that 'the socialist hordes are at the gates'¹²⁵ had little effect in swaying voter behaviour. Changes in the ownership of public resources introduced by the Social Credit government over the previous decade and shifting patterns of public spending had effectively defanged the NDP bogeyman, reducing public resistance to social democratic policies. The 1961 takeover of BC Power had not resulted in higher energy costs nor the flight of capital from the province. Monumental increases in education, healthcare and social services spending had not crippled the provincial economy. Criticism of the NDP's proposed public auto insurance scheme, based on a Manitoba program largely came not from the general public or political commentators, but from Bennett and the Insurance Bureau of Canada,¹²⁶ and was based

¹²⁴ Liberal Party of BC, "David Anderson for Premier: The Platform of the Liberal Party in BC for the 1972 Provincial Election," *Vancouver Sun*, August 10, 1972, 14

¹²⁵ Les Odum, "'Socialist hordes' are here, says Bennett," *Vancouver Sun*, August 22, 1972, 2; "Bennett Rally," *CBC Hourglass News*, 1972-08-22-2

¹²⁶ Insurance Bureau of Canada, "A Comparison: NDP Promises, NDP Results," *Prince George Citizen*, August 28, 1972, 12

on self-interest and an anti-socialist rhetoric that had lost its appeal to voters. In an age of radical politics, provincial automobile insurance was a relatively uncontroversial proposal.

Legitimacy and Age

One of the key issues that emerged during the campaign was not about party platforms, or provincial government policy, but rather about the image of leadership within the Social Credit Party generally, and the age of the Premier specifically. Bennett was 71 years old during the campaign and would turn 72 just a week after the election. The other candidates used the age of the premier and the idea of a tired leadership to full advantage and television and newspaper media kept the issue in front of the public. Marjorie Nichols bluntly stated, “Wacky lost because he was seventy-two years old and there was a perception that he was really losing it.”¹²⁷

Concerns over the political implications of Bennett’s status as a senior citizen, however, had shown up on the radar long before the 1972 campaign. Cyril Shelford told the premier in the lead up to the 1969 election that “there were some danger signals and that some people were saying openly that it was time for a younger person to take over.”¹²⁸ By 1972 it had become clear to Shelford that people were not happy with the government. “Their main concern was W.A.C. Bennett; they believed that he had governed well but had been around long enough, and that someone younger should take his place.”¹²⁹ The attention paid to his age prompted Bennett to undertake some rather creative calculations, telling an audience at a Revelstoke campaign rally that they could subtract 25 years from his age because of his teetotalling (or non-drinking), non-smoking, clean-living ways. “So that makes me right in the prime. And that’s what I feel tonight, in better physical and mental health than I was twenty years ago,” he concluded.¹³⁰ His

¹²⁷ Nichols, 86

¹²⁸ Shelford, *From Snowshoes to Politics*, 228

¹²⁹ Shelford, Interview

¹³⁰ *CBC Hourglass News*, 72-08-10-1

competitors, however, were younger than even Bennett's most generous estimates of his physical age. Dave Barrett was the elder statesman at 41 years old. David Anderson celebrated his 35th birthday during the campaign and Derril Warren was just 32.

The provincial Progressive Conservatives, in particular, emphasized Bennett's age and presented Derril Warren as the new face of conservative politics. Warren was a young lawyer who with a group of like-minded friends decided that both the Progressive Conservative party and the government in BC needed a fresh perspective.¹³¹ A Progressive Conservative campaign pamphlet emphasized the generation gap, quoting Warren's comment that "There is a new generation - not just of age but of thought. A generation of thought that will demand and expect from government much more than manipulation and divisiveness - a generation that demands accountability and social responsibility. This is what I mean when I talk about building a credible alternative."¹³² Warren's physical appearance was especially important to selling the idea of generation change in BC politics. CBC's Jack Wasserman interviewed an articulate, young, thin and shirtless Warren at the beach in Kelowna. In contrast, the portly premier looked tired and stumbled over his words as he tried to avoid the questions of a radio reporter after a campaign meeting in Hope.¹³³ Warren reflected a growing demographic bulge in the twenty to thirty-nine age group in the province that included 663,000 thousand people, about twenty-nine per cent of the total population and over forty-five per cent of voting aged citizens.¹³⁴ More importantly, however, in an era of public discourse in which youthfulness, political engagement and the potential for political renewal had been firmly intertwined in the Canadian imagination during

¹³¹ Warren Interview, 6

¹³² British Columbia Archives, John Clark Fonds, MS 0815 Box 25 File 4, *New Directions: The New Progressive Conservative Party*, Progressive Conservative Party: 1972

¹³³ CBC 72-08-03 and Wasserman, "Election Wrap-up," *CBC Hourglass News*, Sept 1, 1972

¹³⁴ BC Stats, "Population Estimates: Population by Age and Sex" Accessed July 11, 2012, <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/StatisticsBySubject/Demography/PopulationEstimates.aspx>

the 1968 federal election,¹³⁵ Warren was portrayed as the embodiment of youth and modernity, the opposite of the aging Premier whose message about clean living held little appeal to younger voters.

Throughout the campaign, Bennett did not exude his customary vigor, nor was his confident public persona on display during media events. The events of June 7 appeared to shake his usually unflappable demeanour. Another event that seemed to unduly affect the Premier was the intrusion of Derril Warren on the press conference called to announce the election. As the Premier walked away from the podium, Warren stepped out from behind a column, took the Bennett's hand and wished the scowling premier good luck in the election. Warren's hijacking of the press conference was caught on film by a *Province* newspaper photographer and focused media attention away from Bennett in favour of his brash young political competitor. Thereafter, Bennett refused to announce his itinerary to the press, leaving reporters to guess at the location of his next appearance, which resulted in his notable absence from news coverage during the first several weeks of the campaign. By choosing to avoid rather than confront his political adversaries, and by leaving the fight to his cabinet ministers, Bennett gave the appearance of being an indecisive leader and undermined his reputation for pugnacity on the campaign trail, the very characteristic that had made him such a formidable opponent in previous elections.

It was not just Bennett who contributed to the aged appearance of his government. Of his sixteen cabinet ministers at prorogation, ten of them had been elected prior to 1960, seven of them had first stood for office in either the 1952 or 1953 elections, and three had been in the original 1952 cabinet. Of the cabinet veterans who sought re-election in 1972, only Frank Richter was successful. The backbenches were populated mainly by younger politicians. Like their

¹³⁵ Paul Litt, "Trudeaumania: Participatory Democracy in the Mass-Mediated Nation," *Canadian Historical Review* 89, no. 1 (2008): 27-53.

cabinet colleagues, none of the four Social Credit members who had been in office since 1956 or earlier were able to defend their seats.

The youth movement was not unique to BC politics. The year 1970 had been marked by vigorous debate about political renewal, challenges to governance, and political violence. Six provinces, whether through a change in party leadership or through a change in government, saw much younger leaders take up the reins of power. Robert Bourassa in Québec started the wave, unseating Jean-Jacques Bertrand who was 17 years his senior. At 71 years old, Joey Smallwood was the last of the elder statesmen to fall when Frank Moore became only the second premier of Newfoundland in October 1971. When Bennett stepped up to the ballot box to cast his vote in 1972, he was the oldest Premier in Canada by 25 years.¹³⁶ The following day after the ballots had been tallied, the 52 year old Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau was now the oldest government leader in Canada.¹³⁷ The premier-elect Dave Barrett at 41 was the average age of the new group of Canadian premiers.

In contrast to his youthful rivals, Bennett represented another era. Bennett had served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in France and Belgium in the First World War, formed many of his political views during the Great Depression in the 1930s and came into political maturity during the Second World War. Bennett's approach to governance was both paternalistic and moralistic. He was reluctant to place women elected to office in positions of responsibility. While three of the four female Socred MLAs at prorogation held cabinet seats, all three were ministers without portfolio. Patricia Jordan and Grace McCarthy would hold full cabinet

¹³⁶ Alberta-Lougheed, 44; Saskatchewan-Blakeney, 46; Manitoba-Schreyer, 37; Ontario-Davis, 43; Quebec-Bourassa, 39; New Brunswick-Hatfield, 41; Nova Scotia-Regan, 44; Prince Edward Island-Campbell, 39; Newfoundland-Moore, 39

¹³⁷ Canadian Press, "Trudeau feels age with Bennett gone," *Prince George Citizen*, September 1, 1972, 1

positions only after the Socreds returned to power in 1975 under the leadership of William Richard Bennett, the son of WAC and premier from 1975 to 1986.

In 1971-1972, the decision of the Bennett government to ban tobacco and liquor advertising was seen as the imposition of an antiquated moral code by a teetotaling Premier. According to Hetherington, voters “connect their views on social and cultural issues with their perceptions of government activity,” and have less trust in governments that exhibit opinions and values that diverge from their own beliefs.¹³⁸ Bennett’s claim that he could deduct twenty-five years from his age during the 1972 campaign because of clean living did little to close the generation gap, highlighting instead the differences between him and a more hedonistic youth culture that had emerged during the sixties.¹³⁹ Perceived failings in Social Credit health care, education and environmental policy further distanced the party from a public that had learned to expect government to deliver more than business incentives and mega-projects.

Bennett’s age led to questions about leadership and succession planning. It was widely expected that Bennett would step down after the 1969 election to allow a new leader time to consolidate control of the party and establish a public profile. When Bennett decided to shepherd the Socreds through one more campaign in 1972, leadership succession suddenly became a pivotal issue in media coverage, and in public perception. Ray Williston believed that people lacked confidence that Bennett either could or would complete his term if elected. Williston said, “I think in their minds they thought in voting for him they really weren’t voting for the person who was going to be leading and that he was taking them on a bit of a wild-good chase.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Hetherington, 794

¹³⁹ Myrna Kostash, *Long Way from Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada*, Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1980.; Bryan Palmer, *Canada’s 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era*

¹⁴⁰ Williston Interview, 10

Phil Gaglardi, the controversial and high profile Minister of Rehabilitation and Social Improvement first elected to the legislature in 1952, cemented the importance of succession when in the final days of the election he told *Toronto Star* reporter, Chris Dennett, that Bennett was out of touch and that he would announce his retirement after the election. The fifty-nine year old Gaglardi went on to say that he was the obvious successor to the aging Bennett and that the only reason the Premier had stayed on after the 1969 election was to block his own bid for leadership.¹⁴¹ The *Vancouver Sun* and the *Province* reprinted the entire interview, and the story made the front page of other papers around the province. When confronted with the political fallout generated by his intemperate and self-serving comments, Gaglardi denied responsibility, calling the story trash and claiming he had never said any such thing about Bennett. The Premier, demonstrating uncharacteristic doubt in his team, plainly stated that there would be a vacancy at the cabinet table unless Gaglardi cleared himself in the courts.¹⁴²

Dave Barrett recalled the episode as “probably the single most influential event of the campaign. It directed the spotlight not only on a pending leadership struggle within the party ranks but also on the Socred politician most often tainted with scandal.”¹⁴³ During Nanaimo campaign rally, he noted that the Socreds were exhibiting a “singular lack of loyalty.”¹⁴⁴ While the real impact of Gaglardi’s indiscretion cannot be truly known, it undoubtedly weakened the Socred claim to the right to rule. As Williston pointed out, the succession issue left voters uncertain of who they were actually voting for.¹⁴⁵ To many, the thought of lending de facto support to the scandal-ridden Gaglardi was simply unpalatable. With no other successor

¹⁴¹ "Gaglardi calls Toronto report 'trash': Angry Phil denies 'attack' on Bennett," *Vancouver Sun*, August 25, 1972, 1

¹⁴² Nick Hills, Southam Western Bureau, "Bennett's comments: Gaglardi must clear himself," *Prince George Citizen*, August 28, 1972, 1

¹⁴³ Barrett, 57

¹⁴⁴ Marian Bruce, "Socred 'political expediency' slammed by NDP leader," *Vancouver Sun*, April 28, 1972, 33; Canadian Press, "Barrett notes leadership fight," *Prince George Citizen*, August 28, 1972, 13

¹⁴⁵ Williston, Interview, 10

confirmed the chance that Gaglardi would become premier without their direct consent remained a very real possibility.

The timing of Gaglardi's indiscretion was critical to the outcome of the election. With only five days left before voters cast their ballots there was no time for damage control. While Gaglardi was the last to break ranks with the premier, party discipline had been showing cracks since Dr. George Scott Wallace had crossed the floor to sit as an independent in August 1971. When Donald Marshall followed a few months later the internal divisions within the Social Credit party and declining trust in Bennett's leadership had become widely visible to media observers and to the electorate. During the 1972 legislative session, the Socreds could claim the electoral right to rule - the right to make law and implement policy - as conferred on the party by the overwhelming majority it had secured in the 1969 election. But the election call had thrust leadership succession and party unity issues into the spotlight. The very public contest for succession weakened the Social Credit government's claims to future legitimacy. Bennett's request for a renewed mandate opened a channel through which his claim to the electoral right to rule could be challenged.

Conclusion

The campaign by the BC Teachers' Federation against Social Credit undoubtedly played a role in the election in 1972. The political actions of 23,000 teachers spread across the province, however, were not enough to topple a government. The power of the teachers to influence the election resided in their ability to keep their critique of the government's fiscal policies regarding education in the public domain for a sustained period of time. Though the teachers positioned themselves as defenders of the public good they were also defending their own economic interests in the face of wage freezes and caps on spending. Regardless of their motivation,

teachers organized themselves to topple a government that they regarded as unfit to rule, based on the government's arbitrary assertion of political authority. The imposition of austerity measures stood in sharp contrast to Bennett's assurances that economic prosperity lie ahead. In large part, Bennett had engineered the expectation that economic growth would never end. Teachers were demanding that Bennett deliver on the promise.

The reporting of widespread labour unrest was also an influential issue. Threats of major labour disruptions caused considerable anxiety months before the first job action was taken. From the municipal strikes in the spring of 1972 to the conclusion of the dock workers' strike after the election, labour strife was prominent in both television news, newspaper articles and editorials throughout the year. For the four months leading up to the election, labour stories either led or were part of the first segment of CBC's evening news more than fifty per cent of the time. The Social Credit government appeared both heavy handed and ineffective in dealing with labour disputes. Intervention through legislation appeared to incite greater resolve on the part of holdout construction unions. The government had the legal authority to impose back-to-work legislation but their actions were seen to contravene the rights of individuals to withdraw their labour and broke with societal expectations, undermining their claims to substantive legitimacy. Inaction during the coastal forest industry dispute exposed the government to heavy criticism for failing to shield the public from labour confrontation. Strikes within municipal and federal jurisdictions fuelled discontent and frustration.

The 1972 collapse of Socred support does not represent an ideological shift to the left in British Columbia politics, as evidenced by the prompt return of Social Credit to power in 1975. It does reflect a growing disenchantment with how the party exercised the power vested in it by voters. The election of 1972 was a demonstration of what Frederick Barnard has described as

civic space “in which citizens can be free to form their own political judgement... to assess their government’s exercise of rule and its manner of accounting for it.”¹⁴⁶ Barnard suggests that governments will be held accountable for their actions regardless of their reasons for acting or the intended results. He concludes that in accounting for their actions "governments may succeed in making a good case for themselves by way of explanations and justifications, without being found any the less responsible for what they in fact managed to bring about... [W]hat has been done cannot be undone.”¹⁴⁷

British Columbians had been free to judge the performance of the Social Credit government for twenty years and had repeatedly voted to return the party to office. However, declining trust in the government was evident throughout the 1972 campaign. According to Belanger and Nadeau, trust declines as a result of “a perceived gap between the ideals and the realities of the political process by which the country is run.”¹⁴⁸ The defeat of Social Credit in 1972 reveals the incongruence between voter expectations and government actions. Premier Bennett had failed to adapt his leadership style to meet contemporary expectations, and the party had failed to keep pace with the dynamic cultural transformation then underway. Several Social Credit incumbents in the 1972 campaign describe a noticeable difference in public conduct. Hecklers were in attendance at public gatherings in every election, but during the 1972 campaign, the incumbents felt that the heckling was increasingly personal and the behaviour of the hecklers increasingly aggressive. This seething anger is symptomatic of something besides policy disagreement and is especially notable given the lack of policy differences in the government platform between the 1969 election and the 1972 campaign. What was new was the level of impatience with the government, and the perception that the Premier was not doing

¹⁴⁶ Barnard, 219

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 7

¹⁴⁸ Bélanger, 122

enough. On August 30, 1972, British Columbians demonstrated that political authority is conditional and that Bennett no longer met the conditions required to continue as premier.

The 1972 British Columbia election marks a critical juncture in BC history. It also provides a lens through which the process of regime change may be brought into focus. The specific characters and circumstances of the 1972 campaign are unique to time and place. A detailed examination of the issues that dominated media coverage before and during the election, however, illuminates the broader themes of political trust and legitimacy that affect every election. By exposing areas of the discontinuity between the government and voters we are able to look beyond the particular issues of the day to understand the dynamic interaction between declining trust and voter behaviour.

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