

Masks of Hegemony:
Populism, Neoliberalism, and Welfare Narratives in British Columbia, 1975-2004

by

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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For all but thirteen years of the decades from 1952 to 2017, British Columbia was electorally dominated by the Social Credit Party and its ideological successor, the BC Liberal Party. These organizations represented the interests of business in opposition to the social democratic NDP, which has drawn a core support base from organized labour and the public sector middle class. This thesis frames the Social Credit-BC Liberal political formation as a ruling class bloc that maintained hegemony by switching between distinct rhetorical modes as the political situation required or allowed, with economic austerity, framed as objective necessity, on one hand, and populism, employing overt moralism and down-to-earth posturing, on the other. I posit that both modes operated to mask the class conflict at the heart of the neoliberal project of free markets, public sector reduction, and social atomization that has attained the status of political and economic “common sense” since its policies began to be widely adopted around the world in the late 1970s.

After providing a background for the rise of Social Credit in British Columbia under W.A.C. Bennett (premier from 1952-1972), this thesis tracks the continuities and changes of the province’s hegemonic bloc, using welfare policies and poverty discourses as a focus. I consider the party’s transition from a populist one that appealed to the province’s evangelical Christian population to a modernized, neoliberal party under Bill

Bennett's leadership (1975-1986). Exploring the rationales surrounding the cuts to welfare funding enacted under the Social Credit governments of Bill Bennett and Bill Vander Zalm and the BC Liberal government of Gordon Campbell (2001-2011), I analyze how neoliberal and populist styles were employed, what the relationship between the two was, and the extent to which moralism was part of both styles/discourses regarding poverty. I also look at the extent to which the collective solidarity of anti-poverty activists and progressive religious groups was able to push back against neoliberal and populist policies, resisting the individualism that neoliberalism attempts to enforce. In these ways, this thesis seeks to contribute to making neoliberalism a topic of critical political analysis and deliberation at a time when its policies are often framed as non-ideological.

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Introduction

As an economically-subordinated region both nationally and globally, British Columbia experienced a form of development strongly directed by external structural and ideological trends. As the post-war economic boom slid into decline in the 1970s, long-gestating ideological processes laid by neoliberal thinkers began to bear fruit across the western capitalist world, prompting a turn to economic austerity that pushed back against the growth of organized labour and the welfare state. British Columbia was not immune in this regard. For much of the time since the 1950s, the Social Credit Party and its ideological successor, the BC Liberal Party, have held political power in the province, and the populist conservatism that initially fueled their rise has increasingly ceded precedence to modernized neoliberal currents. Charting the development of British Columbia's dominant right-wing political bloc, my thesis will provide a brief background on its origins in the W.A.C. Bennett premiership before focusing on the changes and continuities that occurred from the Bill Bennett Socred era to the government of Gordon Campbell's BC Liberals. I will examine the relationship of this bloc to policies governing social services and welfare, considering in particular both changes and continuities in narratives surrounding welfare and the poor. Conscious of the province's colonial-extractive context, my research will attempt to situate neoliberalism's exaltation of personal responsibility within existing British Columbian hegemonic narratives of rugged individualism. Considering the elements of moralism which were present in government policy rationales, I will also explore how moral and neoliberal frameworks were challenged by those who resisted changes to welfare policies.

My research will provide historical contextualization to topics over which political science approaches currently dominate, while supplementing existing narratives of B.C. history by employing updated theoretical lenses, bringing neoliberalism, political hegemony, and populism into focus. It will also provide in-depth coverage of Bill Vander Zalm's 1988 cut to monthly Guaranteed Available Income for Need (GAIN) rates, where his Socred government redefined which recipients were considered "employable", and therefore needing to be pushed from their state of "dependency". A consideration of the rationales behind the move, and the response it elicited, will shine light on an under-documented historical moment in the province's political evolution, situating it within the context of his broader social policy and contemporary discourses surrounding poverty, personal responsibility, and morality. Connecting the welfare and broader social policies of the BC Liberals and Gordon Campbell to existing coverage of Bill Bennett and Vander Zalm will in turn contribute to the range of historical inquiry on the province, as the early 21st century moves into the purview of the historical discipline.

Beyond the issues of welfare and poverty, my work will contextualize patterns of political decision making at the provincial level within broader trends occurring nationally and internationally, as the dominance of neoliberal assumptions began to determine the boundaries of policy, forcing even centre-left parties, like the BC NDP governments of the 1990s, to make concessions. I will balance these considerations by factoring in the social particularities of British Columbia, including its history of class struggle, rooted in colonial resource extraction, and the tensions between traditional grassroots politics, often tied to evangelical Christianity, and the emergence of a more sophisticated and modernized political machine that has sought broader appeal amongst a

largely secular and increasingly diverse population. Combining theoretical influences with social, political, and economic history, my work attempts to advance the cause of interdisciplinarity within the practice of B.C. history.

Conscious of the ongoing legacy of BC Liberal austerity on healthcare, education, and the broader social fabric, I came to this project seeking to situate the party's agenda within the broader development of neoliberalism in the province. Inspired by the increased scrutiny that neoliberal "common sense" has undergone in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, I seek to contribute to the framing of neoliberalism as an ideology that can be challenged, as opposed to a supposed necessity that is taken for granted as its logic pervades social, political, and economic life. With right-wing populism currently rising as a supposed "anti-establishment" political wave, I have attempted to locate such populist tendencies in the British Columbian context. My analysis complicates the sometimes-oppositional image of the relationship between neoliberalism and right populism, suggesting that they amount to different approaches for the maintenance of ruling class power that have been applied alternately or in combination, depending on what the political climate has demanded or allowed. Whether exploiting public frustrations or employing deterministic narratives of economic necessity, these approaches have served to obfuscate class conflict and the political nature of economic policy.

Theoretical Background

Neoliberalism

Charting a course from the intellectual emergence of neoliberalism to its current status as political "common sense", geographer Jamie Peck locates its conceptual roots in

1920s Vienna, where economist Ludwig von Mises and his protégé Friedrich von Hayek were estranged from the predominant political culture there by their rejection of central planning and socialist analysis in favour of a “free-market”-centred version of classical liberalism.¹ Though Hayek’s work would initially be overshadowed by the successes of rival John Maynard Keynes’ state interventionist approach, Peck points to the establishment of the Mont Pellerin Society in 1947 as a pivotal turn in the neoliberal project, a key point of exchange between Austrian School economists like Hayek and Americans like Milton Friedman, who would be central to the emergence in the 1950s of the Chicago School as a “recognizable ‘project’”, pushing market libertarianism towards a combination of “free-market scientism” and “principled antistatism”.² Peck describes the formation, through the Chicago School, of a “transnational network” of neoliberal economists who would lay the ideological groundwork necessary to promote their project when the opportunity occurred. When the economic crisis of the 1970s arrived, they capitalized on it, promoting a narrative around its causes and propagating market-driven solutions.³

Operating within a Marxist framework, David Harvey defines class struggle as the motor of neoliberalism’s establishment as a political process. As the structural crisis of capital accumulation in the 1970s produced rising unemployment and the acceleration of inflation, rising discontent from labour and social movements in advanced capitalist

¹ Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 39, 45.

² *Ibid.*, 54-55.

³ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

countries and elsewhere threatened to challenge the compromise between labour and capital that had stabilized the economy during the postwar boom.⁴ The political and economic establishment acted in turn to restore its control, for example, with the U.S.-backed 1973 coup in Chile which served as a blueprint for forced privatization; effectively a redistribution of wealth in favour of elites both at home and abroad, its resultant increase in social inequality would prove “structural to the whole [neoliberal] project”.⁵

After engaging in years of ideological struggle within think tanks and the academy, neoliberal ideas achieved a breakthrough during the Jimmy Carter administration of the late 1970s, when the U.S. government began adopting economic deregulation in an attempt to solve stagflation. This shift was further consolidated with the 1979 election of Margaret Thatcher in Britain. Seeking to do away with the features of the postwar social democracy, Thatcher’s government confronted trade unions, dismantled or rolled back welfare state commitments, privatized public enterprise, and reduced taxes.⁶ Harvey describes an attack on “all forms of social solidarity that hindered competitive flexibility”⁷ along with a strong imperative to attract foreign investment, priorities encapsulated in Thatcher’s famous assertion that there was “no such thing as society, only individual men and women”.⁸ Comparable policies would be applied in the

⁴ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸ Quoted in Harvey, *A Brief History*, 23.

U.S. during the Ronald Reagan presidency (1981-89), with the US and UK then together leading the charge amongst Western countries. The political discourse used to legitimate these policies often played to the fears, insecurities, and desires of the populace: Harvey points to the euphemistic way in which the cause of advancing “individual freedoms” was touted in Thatcherite and Reaganite programs to mask the “restoration of economic power to a small elite”.⁹

In contrast to Harvey, historian Daniel Stedman Jones adopts an interpretation more in line with contemporary liberalism, taking “moderate” capitalism as the normative framework of social relations, in contrast to the apparently skewed analyses of left and right. In doing so, he characterizes what he sees as the two major interpretations of neoliberal history, which he depicts as “diametrically opposed” and “extremely limited”.¹⁰ On one hand is the “myth of the historical inevitability of neoliberal success” fostered by its proponents, to which he responds that rather than a “conservative political ascendancy”, neoliberalism can be seen to offer a “lens through which to view transformation across the political spectrum”: accepting the need for changes in economic policy in the 1970s did not necessitate that these policies act as “Trojan horses for a more polemical neoliberal faith in free markets”.¹¹ On the other hand, he points to the analyses of critics on the left, such as Harvey. While he concedes that these hold value for considering the “corrosive relationships among business, finance capital, and political power”, he argues that they nonetheless tend to mistakenly reduce the nuances of

⁹ Harvey, *A Brief History*, 40

¹⁰ Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), 12.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 13.

postwar neoliberal ideas to neoclassical economics.¹² Rather than being predetermined by structural forces, Stedman Jones asserts, the mediated, transatlantic development of neoliberalism was forged primarily from a combination of “luck, opportunism, and a set of contingent circumstances”, and was “far from inevitable”.¹³

Harvey’s framing of neoliberal policy as an advanced method of capitalist rule has been particularly useful in considering its British Columbian manifestation. A 1989 article by sociologists William K. Carroll and R.S. Ratner represents an important early effort to apply this approach to the provincial context, employing a Gramscian perspective to consider the political shifts of the 1970s and 1980s. The authors argue that the social democratic reforms of the 1972-75 NDP government prompted ideological and political “counter-mobilization” by the right, including the founding of the corporate-sponsored Fraser Institute.¹⁴ They consider B.C. to be a vanguard province in the development of (what is here referred to as) “neo-conservatism” in Canada, with its strong labour movement and weakened basis for a Fordist manufacturing sector “setting the stage for hegemonic crisis in the 1980s”, when the Bill Bennett Socredits moved “decisively to transform the wage relation” and Keynesian Welfare State.¹⁵ Meanwhile, they characterize the inability of the B.C. left to “articulate a general interest” for popular

¹² Ibid, 14.

¹³ Ibid, 20.

¹⁴ William K. Carroll and R.S. Ratner, “Social Democracy, Neo-Conservatism and Hegemonic Crisis in British Columbia”, *Critical Sociology* Volume 16, Issue 1 (April 1989): 34.

¹⁵ Ibid, 36.

unity, with labour “taking on the appearance of a ‘special interest group’, at odds with the new common-sense of free markets”.¹⁶

The imposition of neoliberal “common sense” to normalize the dismantling of social services continued under the Campbell Liberal government of the 2000s. In her 2006 Dispute Resolution MA thesis, Kari Wolanski examines how the neoliberal tenet of individual choice was used by the Ministry of Human Resources and the Fraser Institute to frame the debate around the government’s 2002 welfare reforms. Wolanski employs a Foucaultian understanding of discourse as a vehicle for the operation of power,¹⁷ contrasting neoliberal narratives with the “social responsibility frame” employed by government critics like the progressive Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which emphasized collective responsibility and mutual investment in maintaining the safety net.¹⁸

Hegemony

A consideration of how the parameters of “legitimate” discourse are set, and how that in turn frames conversations about “structural” versus “contingent” modes of explanation, leads to the concept of hegemony, strongly associated with the work of the interwar Italian Marxist theorist and political leader Antonio Gramsci.¹⁹ Sociologist Robert Boccock notes that in breaking with the rigid and deterministic emphasis placed on

¹⁶ Ibid, 47-48.

¹⁷ Kari Wolanski, “‘Poverty is a Lifestyle Choice’ And Other Neo-Liberal Discursive Tactics” (master’s thesis, University of Victoria, 2006), iii.

¹⁸ Ibid, 111.

¹⁹ In *The H-Word: The Peripeteia of Hegemony* (London: Verso, 2018), Perry Anderson explores the broader range of contexts in which the term has been employed, from its description of city-state power in ancient Greece, to the objectives of early Russian socialists in their struggle against tsarist absolutism, to the *realpolitik* prescriptions for American power by Cold War international relations theorists.

“economism” by some Marxists, Gramsci asserted that in addition to control of the economic means of production, a ruling class also exercises power through the state and the institutions of civil society;²⁰ together these arms of cultural and material production set the stage for the parameters of normative cultural discourse, cumulatively constituting cultural hegemony. Bocoock gives the example of “an apparent shift of large sections of public opinion towards privatization... and greater legal controls over trade unions”, since the emergence of Thatcherism in Britain, tying them to the cumulative impact of representations in media, political and religious groups, and legal and educational institutions.²¹ Harvey meanwhile refers to the related Gramscian notion of “common sense”, which is “constructed out of longstanding practices of cultural socialization often rooted in deep regional or national traditions”; the values embedded in it can be “mobilized to mask other realities”²² in the construction of popular consent without direct coercion by force. Long-ripening discourses ingrained in the cultural structures of capitalist societies could be opportunistically picked as the result of an historic opening.

The Gramscian schema deploys the term *historical bloc*, originally borrowed from political theorist Georges Sorel, to conceptualize the assemblage of social forces required to maintain hegemony in a given period. Theorist and historian Darrow Schecter points to Gramsci’s characterization of capitalism as a dynamic system wherein “different factions of the economically dominant class are in a constant process of fusion, separation and recomposition”; in these conditions, the Gramscian concept of passive

²⁰ Robert Bocoock, *Hegemony* (Chichester, Sussex: Ellis Horwood Limited, 1986), 35.

²¹ *Ibid*, 11-12.

²² Harvey, *A Brief History*, 39.

revolution applies to situations where “constituent elements of the bloc are reshuffled so that power relations can be preserved against democratic challenges and related threats to established practices posed by insubordinate subaltern groups”.²³ Schecter points to fascism, the New Deal, Thatcherism and “possibly even New Labour” as examples of such attempts to “salvage or establish hegemony”.²⁴

Populism

While Francisco Panizza notes that it is by now nearly a cliché to begin a discussion of populism by “lamenting the lack of clarity about the concept and casting doubts about its usefulness for political analysis”²⁵, political scientists Benjamin Moffitt and Simon Torney attest that Ernesto Laclau’s conceptualization of populism as a “political logic” has been the most impactful in the realm of political and social theory.²⁶ Rather than locating it at the level of *content*, in terms of an ideology or a particular political movement, Laclau identifies a movement as populist when it displays a ‘particular *logic of articulation*’.²⁷ He asserts that no political movement will be entirely devoid of populism, because all will attempt, to some extent, to interpellate “the ‘people’ against an enemy”, with the degree of populism dependent on the “depth of the chasm

²³ Darrow Schecter, “The Historical Bloc: Toward a Typology of Weak States and Contemporary Legitimation Crises”, in *Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Mark McNally (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 181.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Francisco Panizza, “Introduction: Populism and the Mirror of Democracy”, in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, ed. Francisco Panizza (London: Verso, 2005), 1.

²⁶ Benjamin Moffitt and Simon Torney, “Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatization, and Political Style”, *Political Studies* Volume 62 (2014): 384.

²⁷ Ernesto Laclau, “Populism: What’s in a Name?”, in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, ed. Francisco Panizza (London: Verso, 2005), 33.

separating political alternatives”.²⁸ Since a condition of politics is the presence of social division or difference that responds positively or negatively to the status quo, politics ends when “the community conceived as a totality, and the will representing that totality become indistinguishable”, and are “replaced by administration”, dissolving into the absolute rule of Hobbes’ Leviathan, or the classless society of Marx.²⁹

Moffitt and Torney critique Laclau’s conclusion that populism becomes “synonymous with politics”³⁰, arguing that the approach opens the door for conceptual “slippage” between terms like hegemony, populism, and politics, and ignores movements which have distanced themselves from populist methods by avoiding the articulation of demands through a leader, or even any articulation of concrete demands.³¹ Writing soon after the rise of Donald Trump and parallel right wing, anti-immigrant movements in Europe, Jan-Werner Müller likewise disputes such seemingly broad definitions of populism as Laclau’s. While Laclau assigned an emancipatory potential to the populism of figures like Hugo Chavez, and while Chantal Mouffe sees it as a potential left-wing response to the legitimacy crisis inflicted on neoliberalism by the 2008 economic recession,³² Müller is not convinced of populism’s utility for the left. He paints a more critical picture, suggesting that populism is an “exclusionary identity politics” that rejects

²⁸ Ibid, 47.

²⁹ Ibid, 48.

³⁰ Ibid, 47.

³¹ Moffitt and Torney, “Rethinking Populism”, 384.

³² Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2018), 5.

pluralism.³³ He asserts that while appropriating the language of democracy and claiming to represent “the people”, populism actually results in a “blatantly antidemocratic” politics that poses the greatest threat to the degradation of liberal democracy’s post-Cold War hegemony.³⁴

For their part, Moffitt and Tormey propose framing contemporary populism as a “political style” rooted in the “collapse of the legitimacy of ‘traditional’ or ‘mainstream’ politics”, with ordinary citizens becoming alienated from party politics as “ideological cleavages” and discourses surrounding class are sanded down.³⁵ Political style, defined by the authors as “*the repertoires of performance that are used to create political relations*”, emerges from the increased “stylization” of the political in the era of the mediatised spectacle, taking populist, technocratic, authoritarian, and post-representative forms, among others.³⁶ In the “feedback loop” between political performance and audience subjectivity, populists attempt to “bring a subject called ‘the people’ into being”³⁷, usually contrasting the interests of this group with those of an “elite”, an “establishment”, or a “system” and criticizing the ability of “politics as usual” to respond to perceived “crisis, breakdown, or threat”.³⁸ This framework proves useful when considering the patterns of leadership style which have emerged in British Columbia,

³³ Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁵ Moffitt and Tormey, “Rethinking Populism”, 387.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 389.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 391-92.

where performances of technocratic “pragmatism” have contrasted with more folksy and unpolished populist political personas.

Historiography

B.C. Political History

While there are a few scholarly historical books that focus particularly on the political history of British Columbia, much of the major coverage of the post-W.A.C. Bennett era comes in the form of political biographies written by insiders and reporters who were close to the events they document, or in political science analyses. My work seeks to build off the narrative groundwork that has been established by incorporating current theoretical sensibilities. Works of political economy, critical appraisals of government from veteran journalists, and empirical analyses of party membership and electoral trends have been particularly useful in forming a long-term, comparative analysis of different political eras.

British Columbia-focused political economy appears to be largely a development of the last fifty years. Approaching the material relations of the province through a Marxist lens, political scientist Philip Resnick opined in a 1974 article that analysis had theretofore been primarily “an Ontario-centred affair”, with theorists largely trapped within the paradigm of “seeing Canada (or English Canada) as essentially a centralized nation-state, with a homogenous ruling class, working class, etc”; conversely, globally-situated analyses of B.C. were “at a premium”.³⁹ He characterized the province as a “hinterland region within a broader capitalist world, tied by bonds of varying intensity to Eastern Canada, the United States, Britain, and more recently, Japan”, serving primarily

³⁹ Philip Resnick, “The Political Economy of British Columbia: A Marxist Perspective”, in *Essays in B.C. Political Economy*, ed. Paul Knox and Philip Resnick (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1974), 4-5.

to provide raw materials and staples to metropolitan markets, and in turn, to provide a market for the products of external secondary industry.⁴⁰ Class relations, therefore, historically reflected the predominance of resource production, with a high degree of polarization between workers and the owners of the means of production, where “relations of production have been, in quite unembellished terms, relations of exploitation, and the province’s working-class traditions have probably been the most radical in Canada”.⁴¹ In this atmosphere, Resnick viewed the B.C. economy as “extremely vulnerable to any major crisis in international capitalism”, with capitalists rejecting “the concept of an independent political economy, B.C. or Canadian... out of hand”, and arguing for more free trade, “something Eastern Canadian capitalists would never accept”.⁴²

By the 1980s, the province’s economy was structurally amenable to the deregulation of international trade that would be a central feature of the neoliberal project. What were the origins of the hegemonic bloc that was able to adapt itself to this historical moment? Historian Leonard B. Kuffert has explored how the Social Credit era under W.A.C. Bennett, which lasted from 1952 to 1972, established right-wing political dominance, with Bennett, a former Conservative, joining the Socreds in 1951, a year before the dissolution of a “fragile” Liberal-Conservative Coalition government.⁴³ The break between coalition parties led to the splitting of the traditional free enterprise vote, a

⁴⁰ Ibid, 5.

⁴¹ Ibid, 5-6.

⁴² Ibid, 6, 8.

⁴³ Leonard B. Kuffert, “‘Reckoning with the Machine’: The British Columbia Social Credit Movement as Social Criticism, 1932-52” *BC Studies* Number 124 (Winter 1999/2000): 11.

void which Social Credit would rise to fill, in a pragmatic shift away from its own theoretical roots as a “scientific” response to economic flaws, towards a populism that appealed to “previously secondary tenets of support for a free-enterprise economy and personal liberty”.⁴⁴ The party therefore simultaneously filled the void of political representation for business interests, and, Kuffert posits, provided a surrogate culture for the atraditional settler population “by promoting nineteenth-century liberal values and the prudent exploitation of the province’s resources - the reason many had been drawn there - as authentic British Columbian ideals”.⁴⁵ Essentially, capitalism-as-culture.

Honing in on this culture is political scientist Martin Robin’s *The Company Province* series. It remains one of the most comprehensive narratives of B.C.’s early political history, examining class relations in the province’s resource extraction economy in two volumes covering the period from 1871 to 1972. Favourable to labour in its evaluation of the roles played by the private sector and class conflict in shaping provincial development, it is not alone in having a clear political perspective, as many of the secondary sources on the province’s political history were written by those clearly positioned on one side or the other in this polarized environment.

As Robin’s chronicle ends with the conclusion of W.A.C. Bennett’s premiership, Meggs and Mickleburgh’s *The Art of the Impossible* provides the most detailed account of the subsequent tenure of the Dave Barrett NDP government (1975-75). Coming from backgrounds in journalism, with Mickleburgh having covered labour and Meggs having worked for the NDP in addition to serving in Vancouver City Council, the authors

⁴⁴ Ibid, 29-30

⁴⁵ Ibid, 31.

obtained access to key insiders from that period, painting a picture of the urgency with which policy was enacted by an NDP government that realized its time could be brief, given its encirclement by hostile forces in the business sector and its confrontations with its erstwhile allies in the labour movement. They also paint a portrait of a premier whose charismatic populist persona gave his approach some common ground with his Socred predecessor.

In a 1981 study that is key for understanding the adaptations of provincial power, Blake, Johnston, and Elkins interpreted the voting tendencies and party affiliation trends of British Columbians, focusing particularly on the shifts that occurred during the 1970s. Accounting for the 1975 election results, they determined that Social Credit had succeeded in forming a “coalition of the right”, consolidating much of the minor parties’ support to regain power, despite the incumbent NDP largely maintaining its previous vote share.⁴⁶

Bill Bennett’s 1975 Socred victory set the conditions of the eventual shift to austerity in motion. For an understanding of the chain of events leading up to the cutbacks and deregulation of 1983’s “Restraint” legislation, along with its aftermath, Stan Persky’s *Bennett II* and *Fantasy Government* are the most in-depth and comprehensive works on the era. Drawing on his experience as a commentator on provincial affairs, Persky narrated the late Bill Bennett years and the Bill Vander Zalm premierships, respectively. Clearly sympathetic to the NDP cause, he provided a critical view of the personalities and policies of Social Credit in the 1980s.

⁴⁶ Donald E. Blake, Richard Johnston, and David J. Elkins, “Sources of Change in the B.C. Party System”, *BC Studies* Number 50 (Summer 1981): 4.

Vander Zalm's premiership (1986-91) would end in scandal, leading to the party's electoral collapse. A mid-1990s quantitative study by Blake and Carty serves as a useful companion to Blake's previous analysis of the party's rebirth. Acknowledging that the Socreds of the mid-1970s had been able to "absorb most of the Liberal élite who had resisted them for two decades", completing "the creation of the modern bipolar party system" in B.C., they examined a parallel process, starting in 1991, wherein the B.C. Liberals became the beneficiaries of a Social Credit defeat, seemingly taking up the anti-socialist coalition in the polarized political structure.⁴⁷ It was the Liberals who now possessed "diversity of opinion", similar to the bloc which had lent the former Social Credit government an advantage in strategic and ideological flexibility over the NDP.⁴⁸

As the "free-market" bloc regrouped following Social Credit's collapse, the NDP governments of the 1990s attempted to navigate a political terrain that had been much altered since the Dave Barrett years. Incorporating interviews with ministerial officials and MLAs, Carroll and Ratner's "The NDP Regime in British Columbia, 1991-2001: A Post-Mortem" explored the challenges of attempting to establish social democratic policies as neoliberal austerity was becoming the bipartisan consensus in the West. The authors contextualized the NDP's shortcomings, discussing the hostility it faced from the press and business community, in addition to its struggles to reconcile bureaucratic constraints with the needs of the social movements that had supported its rise.

Political scientist Tracy Summerville's chapter in 2017's *The Campbell Revolution?* likewise contextualizes the policies of the BC Liberal government that

⁴⁷ Donald E. Blake and R. Kenneth Carty, "Partisan Realignment: The Case of the Provincial Liberal Party", *BC Studies* Number 108 (Winter 1995-1996): 61-62.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 74.

succeeded the NDP, noting that Gordon Campbell was “riding the wave” of established neoliberal approaches, making him “not particularly visionary in his approach”.⁴⁹ He profited at the same time from having followed an NDP government that had left office with its reputation in tatters, reinforcing public amenability to fiscal restraint and lowered taxation. Summerville notes that Campbell also cut off some of the NDP’s relevance by seemingly pivoting to the left on the environment through the promotion of a carbon tax, while framing it as “revenue neutral”.⁵⁰

The Welfare State in Canada and B.C.

Welfare state literature is largely critical of the impact of neoliberalism on social assistance and the broader social safety net in Canada and British Columbia, with several researchers observing the extent to which anti-intervention austerity discourse has permeated to varying degrees across the mainstream political spectrum. In B.C., the continued efforts of non-profit organizations like the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Canadian Council on Social Development, and the Social Planning and Research Council of B.C. have been important for documenting the effects of neoliberal social policies and balancing the coverage, given the monopolized provincial media’s reputation for political bias. My research attempts to build on the empirical work of non-profit studies and the political analysis of academic scholarship, adding comparative history and considering the rationales and debates that have surrounded austerity measures in B.C.

⁴⁹ Tracy Summerville, “Riding the Wave of Available Policy Options: Gordon Campbell and the Rhetoric of Neoliberalism”, in *The Campbell Revolution? Power, Politics, and Policy in British Columbia*, eds. J.R. Lacharite and Tracy Summerville (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2017), 88.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 106.

At the national level, Alvin Finkel's *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History* explores the development of social services in Canada from pre-confederation to the neoliberal turn. Writing from a socialist perspective, Finkel complicates the welfare state/neoliberal dichotomy by noting that both economic formations developed in a context of continuous social struggle between left and right-wing political forces.⁵¹ Tracking the creep of spending restraint in the inflationary 1970s, Finkel notes that while Pierre Trudeau "supported social entitlements in theory" his Liberal government embraced "contradictory" economic policies while avoiding the "full-blown neoliberalism" of Thatcher and Reagan.⁵² Finkel identifies the federal government's full shift to neoliberal social policy to the aftermath of the 1984 election: Brian Mulroney, "at once a member of both the political and economic elite", sought to cut social spending early to keep tax rates low, though plans to reduce old age pension payments, unemployment insurance, and Established Programs Funding for provinces were met with backlash. His Progressive Conservative government would retreat from these ideas in time to win a second term in the 1988 election; this empowered them to sign the Free Trade Agreement that included expectations for Canada to "bring its social programs in line with their less generous American counterparts".⁵³ In its second term, the Mulroney government sought to follow through on these expectations, removing universality from old age pensions and family allowances, and placing a cap on spending increases for the Canada Assistance Plan (which provided social assistance funding) for the three

⁵¹ Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 1-2.

⁵² *Ibid*, 286-287.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 289-290.

provinces not receiving equalization payments. Finkel notes that the unpopularity of such cuts to social assistance was magnified by the arrival of a recession in 1990 that produced double-digit unemployment.⁵⁴

Finkel points out that despite the federal Liberal party's "Red Book" promises to defend social legislation during the 1993 election, the Jean Chrétien government would continue its predecessor's prioritization of reducing debt and deficits. Finance Minister Paul Martin's 1995 budget speech introduced a plan to cut spending by \$25 billion over three years, including \$7 billion in provincial transfers. Before the 1997 election, the Liberals had also undone the Canada Assistance Plan, a staple of the party's welfare state legacy, replacing it with a lump sum Canada Health and Social Transfer that provincial governments could spend as they wished.⁵⁵

In British Columbia, Bill Bennett's 1983 "Restraint" program predated the national shift identified by Finkel, introducing a far-reaching set of neoliberal austerity policies that cut social service funding and undermined labour rights. As part of a collection of articles critical of the premier's agenda, economist Angela Redish argues in "Social Policy and 'Restraint' in British Columbia" that the narrative of economic necessity used to rationalize social cuts to GAIN and other social supports belied the government's overestimated deficits and aversion to tax increases, which revealed counter-egalitarian income distribution priorities.⁵⁶ Against government arguments for

⁵⁴ Ibid, 290-291.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 292.

⁵⁶ Angela Redish, "Social Policy and 'Restraint' in British Columbia", in *Restraining the Economy: Social Credit Economic Policies for B.C. in the Eighties*, eds. Robert C. Allen and Gideon Rosenbluth (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1986), 158.

the benefits of a leaner government budget, Redish suggests that money and jobs were actually lost due to the reduction in consumer spending caused by the GAIN cuts,⁵⁷ while pointing out that social service cuts had been imposed just as need was expected to increase by 26 percent.⁵⁸

Employing a socialist feminist perspective, political scientist Margaret Little and historian Lynne Marks compare the welfare policies of two contemporary neoliberal governments: the BC Liberals under Gordon Campbell and the Ontario Progressive Conservatives under Mike Harris. They contrast the fiscal conservative emphasis of the Liberals, based on welfare time limits and restricted eligibility, with the more socially-conservative, moralistic approach of the Harris government, with its workfare program, concern with welfare fraud, and monitoring of the spousal status of single mothers. Complicating narratives of a homogenous neoliberalism, they situate the differences between these manifestations of neoliberalism in the historical particulars of their respective provinces, including the historically larger role of religion in Ontario politics,⁵⁹ and the British Columbian “frontier myth”, based on an image of hard-working, independent masculinity, which found echoes in the Liberals’ framing of unemployment as a choice.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid, 154.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 168.

⁵⁹ Margaret Little and Lynne Marks, “A Closer Look at the Neo-Liberal Petri Dish: Welfare Reform in British Columbia and Ontario”, *Canadian Review of Social Policy/Revue canadienne de politique sociale* Number 57 (2006): 36.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 38.

In a 2009 report commissioned by the Canadian Council on Social Development, a progressive non-profit, social researchers Graham et al. lay out factors and statistics relating to rural and urban poverty in British Columbia, and the impacts of poverty on different population groups. They also provide an overview of the welfare policies and programs introduced by successive B.C. governments, from Dave Barrett's NDP to Gordon Campbell's BC Liberals. Assessing the outlook for the immediate future of poverty reduction in the province, the authors factor in economic instability, inadequate support from the Liberal government, and under-resourced anti-poverty groups, to paint an uncertain future.⁶¹

Feminist political scientist Katherine Teghtsoonian's chapter in 2010's *British Columbia Politics and Government* tracks the incursions of neoliberalism in provincial social policy from the NDP era of the 1990s to the BC Liberal government in 2009. In addition to covering the major policy areas, she explores how these governments have "engaged with the interests of historically marginalized or otherwise vulnerable groups" and considers their relationships with "community-based organizations and service providers".⁶² She notes that as of 2009, "markets are clearly not functioning well", with the BC Liberals having repealed their own balanced budget legislation that year to allow for deficit spending in the next two, though she concludes that there have been "few indications" of "less punitive, more supportive social policy measures on the horizon",

⁶¹ Scott Graham, Jill Atkey, Crystal Reeves, and Michael Goldberg, *The Best Place on Earth?: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives on Poverty Reduction Policies and Programs in British Columbia* (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2009), 26.

⁶² Katherine Teghtsoonian, "Social Policy in Neo-liberal Times", in *British Columbia Politics and Government* eds. Michael Howlett, Dennis Pilon, and Tracy Summerville (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2010), 312.

and that it is unclear whether the neoliberal measures adopted by the NDP during its decade in power in the 1990s were temporary or a “harbinger” of a “more thoroughgoing change” to their approach.⁶³

Out of the available secondary literature, the work of Carroll and Ratner has been perhaps the most helpful in centering class conflict at the heart of the “Restraint” program and situating it within the development of the neoliberal paradigm. They have also provided insight into the ways in which entrenched hegemonic forces have resisted and undermined NDP governments, constraining social democratic policies.⁶⁴ Stan Persky’s work has been key to guiding my understanding of the personalities behind the policies of the Bill Bennett and Vander Zalm governments, informing my critique of political style and rhetoric. In terms of comparing neoliberal and populist governmental approaches, Little and Marks’ work has provided a helpful precedent. While much has been written by historians, political scientists, and journalists about the policies and identities of successive B.C. governments, these writings have tended to be either historical or theoretical in their approach, and have generally focused on particular governments or events. My work seeks to help fill gaps in the historiography by applying critical theoretical lenses, fleshing out Bill Vander Zalm’s GAIN cut, and incorporating Gordon Campbell’s New Era cuts into a broader historical continuum.

⁶³ Ibid, 325.

⁶⁴ See William K. Carroll and R.S. Ratner. “The NDP Regime in British Columbia, 1991-2001: A Post-Mortem”. *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* Volume 42, Number 2 (May 2005): 167-196.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One will begin by providing background on the political economy of British Columbia in the first half the twentieth century, establishing its history of dependence within the global economy as a primary resource-based frontier. I will then explore how W.A.C. Bennett's Social Credit Party became a vehicle for hegemony in this environment, employing a populist political rhetoric that played to discourses of rugged individualism and appealed to religious populations in the "heartland" regions. From 1952 to 1972, the W.A.C. Bennett dynasty overlapped with much of the postwar economic boom, but to its detriment, the growth of the welfare state and of the province's unionized workforce provided an expanded support base for the NDP, whose governmental interlude in the 1970s was a brief window for the implementation of social democratic policies. After covering these shifts, I will address the 1975 resurrection of the Socreds under Bill Bennett, wherein the party consolidated its relationship with the province's economic elites, leading a "free-enterprise" coalition at the expense of the provincial Liberals and Conservatives. With the world economy experiencing a downturn in the early 1980s, the Socreds aligned with the broader neoliberal project by employing the rhetoric of economic necessity to rationalize the deep public spending cuts of their "Restraint" package, provoking the formation of the broad-based Solidarity coalition in opposition.

In Chapter Two, I will investigate Bill Vander Zalm's rise to Social Credit leadership, situating his success within intra-party divisions between long-time grassroots membership and an emergent neoliberal political machine. After exploring the role of performative populism in Vander Zalm's political rise as a "rebellious" figure in contrast

to the party establishment, I will consider his track record of negative rhetoric towards welfare and the poor. I will then look closely at the discourse surrounding his government's 1988 cut to GAIN, including official justifications and responses from activists, the media, and the public, and concessions that followed the backlash and resistance to the measure. Factoring in Vander Zalm's erratic and unpolished approach to self-presentation and policy, and the eventual downfall of his political career and party, I will consider the implications of his premiership for the development of the province's hegemonic bloc during the neoliberal era.

The third chapter will begin with a brief examination of the challenges faced by the NDP governments of the 1990s in an era where western liberal and social democratic parties were making "Third Way" concessions in response to neoliberalism's ideological entrenchment. I will then look at the BC Liberal party's shift from conventional liberalism under Gordon Wilson's leadership to becoming the new vessel of the neoliberal bloc under Gordon Campbell. After addressing how the Campbell Liberals harnessed anti-NDP sentiment to take power in 2001, I will contextualize their cuts to public services and social assistance within their broader prioritization of tax cuts and balanced budgets. Considering the rhetoric and rationales used by the government in defense of their welfare time limit policy, I will look at the response from anti-poverty groups and its effects. Contrasting the BC Liberals' fundamentalist approach to so-called fiscal responsibility with their relative de-emphasis on traditional conservative moralism, I will consider the extent to which they represented a "purer" manifestation of neoliberalism than the Vander Zalm government.

Cumulatively, these chapters attempt to further develop the interdisciplinary tendons tying political theory and historical investigation together in the study of B.C. politics, bridging the gaps between each side. Situating the theoretical terrains of the concepts of neoliberalism, hegemony, and populism within the history of the region is helpful in clarifying the current juncture, in which these themes are still very much at play. Populist and neoliberal narratives, whether complementary or antagonistic, remain central to the maintenance of political hegemony in the contemporary climate, where populist rhetoric allows leaders to project an image of rebellion while upholding a system that enforces austerity and stigmatizes the poor.

Chapter 1

Hegemony in Transition: From Populism to Neoliberalism

From the early 1970s to the early 1980s, British Columbia saw major shifts in the ideological and organizational makeup of its hegemonic forces. Under W.A.C. Bennett, the Social Credit Party's populist, protest-based identity found initial electoral success amidst the collapse of a Liberal-Conservative coalition that governed a weak state apparatus rendered subservient to private interests. During their twenty years in government, the W.A.C. Bennett Socreds constructed a strengthened post-war welfare state that produced an expanded public sector, whose workers supported the electoral upset of the NDP in 1972. Bennett's son and successor to party leadership, William (Bill) Bennett, led a reconstituted Social Credit Party back to power in 1975 as an ideologically-broader anti-NDP tent that included former provincial Liberal and Conservative supporters.

While the younger Bennett initially followed a more traditional governing model, his government's transition to neoliberal policies in the early 1980s served as a tactical pivot by the province's ruling bloc, for which Social Credit served as the consolidated political vehicle. The new-look Socreds adopted a more modernized approach to image-making and governance, reflecting increased support from Vancouver business elites and the diminished primacy of its traditional grassroots base. At the same time, the appeal to "rugged individualism" which undergirded the party's earlier success under W.A.C. Bennett would prove amenable to the more theoretical approach of neoliberalism, with its prioritization of individual economic responsibility at the expense of the social safety net.

Neoliberal ideology found its first major provincial manifestation in the “Restraint” program of 1983, which introduced welfare cuts and undermined labour and human rights protections. The decline of the Fordist economic model in the West, which was centred around domestic mass production for mass consumption, had exposed the vulnerabilities endemic to the province’s export-dependent primary industry economic base. The resultant economic downturn provided a basis for the Socreds to argue that austerity measures constituted a “new reality” for the provincial economy.⁶⁵ By framing these policies as rational ones taken in the name of economic necessity, the government was able to downplay any ideological or partisan motivations while continuing to pursue the interests of the province’s ruling bloc in practice, combatting the NDP’s support base and maintaining the socioeconomic hierarchy.

Relations of Extraction: A Colony’s Economic Origins

Edwin R. Black frames the “governmental way of life” produced by the social conditions in British Columbia up through the first Bennett dynasty as a “politics of exploitation”.⁶⁶ This characterization includes a “great provincial occupation with economic development as the most important question in provincial politics” originating in a settler culture established through an economic periphery of predominantly single-industry communities, and a core in metropolitan Vancouver focused on the service sector as a port city, the entire chain being “frontier-oriented and economically

⁶⁵ Quoted in Ian Mulgrew, “Clear message beneath the surface”, *Globe and Mail*, April 4, 1984.

⁶⁶ Edwin R. Black, “British Columbia: The Politics of Exploitation”, in *Exploiting Our Economic Potential: Public Policy and the British Columbia Economy*, ed. R. Shearer (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1968), 23.

vulnerable” due to its staple-based reliance on the external marketplace.⁶⁷ To this Black adds the “peculiar context and the particular processes” by which governments have reached decisions on policy relating to natural resource utilization: a population grown via a diverse influx of immigrants arriving with “largely materialist” motivations and lacking cohesive “tradition” has produced a tendency to demand a “government that gets things done” in the parlance of W.A.C. Bennett’s Socreds; the precarious frontier community’s “extreme orientation towards action” accentuated the tendency towards short-term thinking characteristic of electoral democracy.⁶⁸

The rush for raw materials that fueled early settlement in B.C., and the relative lateness of the province’s establishment as a colony shaped it into a periphery/hinterland region tied economically to older, more industrially-developed colonial metropolises. Geographical position, as Philip Resnick notes, opened links to Europe and the Pacific which made the province less dependent on the Eastern Canadian metropolis than its landlocked prairie neighbours were.⁶⁹ The development of economic relations that were more diverse than those characterizing the prairie regions complicated the “economic colonization” of B.C. by Eastern Canadian business interests. This diversity of trade relationships manifested politically in what Resnick sees as a “quasi-autonomous power base” within Canadian capitalism for the B.C. bourgeoisie, which allowed B.C. governments “considerable independence from and even opposition to Ottawa”.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ibid., 23-25.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 23, 27-29.

⁶⁹ Philip Resnick, “The Political Economy of British Columbia: A Marxist Perspective”, in *Essays in B.C. Political Economy*, eds. Paul Knox and Philip Resnick (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1974), 7.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 6-7.

Industrial calcification in the role of supplier of primary resources to external secondary markets was not the result of passive happenstance, however. The economic primacy of local private interests, who dominated the extraction process, ensured a disproportionate role for the private sector in the development of the colony's thinly-spread public institutions: Resnick describes a subordinate role for the government pre-Second World War, which alienated crown land for use by private interests and provided militias for strike breaking.⁷¹ The focus on direct extraction in the interest of private coffers ensured not only the stalling of public service development, but also limited the government's capacity to provide the infrastructure for the further development of capitalist industry. With tax revenues low, the government was "not an economic force in its own right", verging on bankruptcy by the 1930s while allowing projects like the Pacific Great Eastern Railway to flounder.⁷²

Post-war, the transition from military production to commercial production geared toward a growing consumerism led to increased demand for British Columbian staples. Resnick points to this period as the catalyst for the shift from the precedence of localized entrepreneurial capitalists to a new monopoly capitalism. Consolidated firms like MacMillan-Bloedel and largely American multinationals began to take precedence, aided by such developments as the 1945 Sloan Commission on Forest Resources, whose call for "sustained yield" and "vertical integration" in response to increased demand favoured the productive capacities of larger companies.⁷³ B.C.'s economic dependency on

⁷¹ Ibid., 7.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

international markets, along with increasing foreign control, made provincially-based interests early Canadian proponents of free trade, while its narrow extractive focus and concentration of capital in few hands served as an impediment to the creation of a domestic secondary manufacturing sector.⁷⁴

In analyzing the social role of corporate elites in the province, Addie et al. observed a cohesion of interests by the beginning of the 1970s. They found that 13 of the top 25 companies in B.C. were foreign-owned, reinforcing the image of a hinterland economy's external dependence, while control of provincial assets was highly concentrated amongst a few top firms.⁷⁵ Considering these developments, the authors were skeptical that the economic elite would be content with "system preservation" and the "mere absence of negative actions by government"; rather, they would expect policies which were favourable to corporations, wielding their economic clout or making their presence directly felt by supporting the election of corporate representatives, like Einar Gunderson with the Socreds.⁷⁶ In the case of W.A.C. Bennett's Social Credit Party, the economic elite had managed to "ensure that a party *of* small businessmen would be a party *for* big business".⁷⁷

Sides are Drawn: B.C.'s Political Realignment

The Social Credit Party which former Progressive Conservative W.A.C. Bennett came to lead shortly after its election to a minority government in 1952 diverged in its

⁷⁴ Ibid, 6.

⁷⁵ John Addie, Allan Czepil, and Fred Rumsey, "The Power Elite of B.C.", in *Essays in B.C. Political Economy*, eds, Paul Knox and Philip Resnick (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1974) 26-27.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 30.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

political approach from the roots of the broader Social Credit movement. Leonard B. Kuffert notes that by the mid-1940s, the original Social Credit theories of C.H. Douglas, with their technocratically-oriented focus on a system of nationalized credit and their prioritization of efficiency and the elimination of poverty, was being overtaken by more traditionally-conservative values. At the same time, he observes, the post-war economic boom led to increased concern with individual prosperity and a Cold War fear of collectivism.⁷⁸ Arising first, along with the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), as a protest party against years of alternation (or coalition) between Conservative and Liberal governments, the B.C. Social Credit Party presented itself as anti-establishment while touting free enterprise; it became “more sensual than cerebral”, serving as a vessel for a mainstream dissatisfied with the status quo, which the Socreds framed as interventionist.⁷⁹ In this way, Bennett was able to form a new, unified vehicle for the right, one unhampered by interference from affiliated federal parties.⁸⁰

In addition to promises of economic vitalization, Social Credit’s populist approach appealed to the socially-conservative religious elements of the province, often concentrated in the agriculturally-rich “heartland” regions. Its appeal to religious populations within a largely secular province appears consistent with the protest-based image the party cultivated in opposition to the traditional B.C. political order. Robert Burkinshaw notes that from its roots as a colony, B.C. had a “long-standing secular character”, in part explained by British Columbians having long been “a transient

⁷⁸ Ibid, 23.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 39.

⁸⁰ Donald E. Blake, “The Politics of Polarization: Parties and Elections in British Columbia”, in *Politics, Policy, and Government in British Columbia*, ed. by R.K. Carty (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996), 71-72.

people”, who often immigrated for material gain, especially during economic boom cycles, or to escape the traditions of their places of origin.^{81 82} While the province’s overall secularism has been notable from its inception, the trends of religious affiliation amongst its believers are also unusual when compared to the national average. Canada-wide, the conservative Protestant proportion of the population remained relatively stable, going from 8 percent in 1921 to 7 percent in 1981, while in B.C., the percentage of conservative Protestants in B.C. grew, from 4.5 in 1921 to 8.1 in 1981. Meanwhile, mainline Protestant membership in B.C. declined sharply from 1961 to 1981.⁸³ Roman Catholicism has had even less success in the province: Burkinshaw notes that it never gained a strong foothold amongst the settler population, and its influence was less in B.C. than in any other province throughout the twentieth century.⁸⁴

Considering the “strong preference” amongst conservative Protestants for Social Credit during the 1952 B.C. election, Burkinshaw posits that much was tied in with an “antipathy for the CCF”, which evangelicals associated with “theological liberalism and the social gospel or, worse, with secularism or communism; or with both”; at the same time, Social Credit was open about its religious ties, opening rallies with hymns and associating itself with the evangelism of Alberta Sacred Premiers William Aberhart and

⁸¹ Robert Burkinshaw, *Pilgrims in Lotus Land: Conservative Protestantism in British Columbia, 1917-1981* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995) 4.

⁸² The role of secularism in the province’s history has been further explored by Tina Block in *The Secular Northwest: Religion and Irreligion in Everyday Postwar Life* (2016) and Lynne Marks in *Infidels and the Damn Churches: Irreligion and Religion in Settler British Columbia* (2017).

⁸³ Burkinshaw, *Pilgrims*, 5.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

E.C. Manning.⁸⁵ With tight races in many ridings, and the outcome a minority victory with a slim 30.2 percent of the vote, the evangelical vote was “enough to give an edge”.⁸⁶ Pentecostal minister Phil Gaglardi was named to cabinet, and emphasized in his first legislative address that he was a minister not only of the Crown and the Queen, but also of the ““King of Kings””.⁸⁷ In addition to appealing specifically to evangelical protestants, the post-war Socreds’ pro-business stance also meshed well with the more broadly accepted Protestant work ethic.

The populism of the W.A.C. Bennet Socreds was framed around the freedom of the individual (often manifested though championing free enterprise), advocating “action” over “bureaucracy”. While it criticized the nationalization plans of its CCF opposition during the 1960 election, in practice, it was open to state control when it suited selected perceived economic needs, as in the case of B.C. Electric, which as a private company had hindered development plans.⁸⁸ While the Socreds claimed to oppose monopolies,⁸⁹ in practice, as Resnick notes, their economic strategy was “primarily one of leaving the province’s resources open for large-scale capitalists, while simultaneously favouring the little businessman though government contracts”, as the party remembered

⁸⁵ Ibid, 197.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 169.

⁸⁸ Black, “British Columbia: The Politics of Exploitation”, 27.

⁸⁹ Kuffert, ““Reckoning with the Machine””, 39.

that its voting strength lay with the latter and “other petit bourgeois elements, especially in the smaller centres”.⁹⁰

Bennett exercised centralized control over decision-making, while maintaining a small cabinet;⁹¹ on the other hand, more typical to the welfare state model of the early post-war era, his government presided over an expansion of the public sector and social services as the population expanded rapidly.⁹² Still his government’s populist streak created friction with the very system it was producing. Clague et al. note that towards the end of the regime, Phil Gagliardi was appointed Minister of Social Welfare, and the authors describe his belief that “welfare recipients were abusing the system”; he established a “Provincial Alliance of Businessmen” which set out to find jobs for “hardcore unemployables”, and the department itself was renamed the “Department of Rehabilitation and Social Improvement” to better reflect the government’s policies.⁹³

As its twenty-year reign attested, this was a regime which was able to maneuver and adapt while playing to various interests, all the while maintaining an individualist narrative which resonated with many. Still, typical of the cycles of electoral politics, the longevity of B.C.’s first Socred dynasty eventually worked against it, when the large unions which grew alongside the public sector ran into confrontation with the government. The 1972 election was preceded by disputes with hospital and government

⁹⁰ Resnick, “The Political Economy of British Columbia”, 7.

⁹¹ Morley et al., *The Reins of Power: Governing British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1983), 59, 63.

⁹² Blake, “The Politics of Polarization, 72.

⁹³ Michael Clague, Robert Dill, Roop Seebaran, and Brian Wharf, *Reforming Human Services: The Experience of the Community Resource Boards in B.C.* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984), 24-25.

employees, doctors, and teachers. Meanwhile, the general growth in the numbers of public sector and unionized jobs, with an accompanying increase in the geographical dispersal of industry, contributed to the expansion of the NDP voter base. The result was a Sacred defeat.⁹⁴ Conscious of a hostile business community and widespread prejudices towards perceived “socialism” in a polarized political climate,⁹⁵ Dave Barrett’s NDP government pursued a rapid pace of policymaking, averaging over two bills a week for a total of 367 pieces of legislation,⁹⁶ introducing reforms to the labour code and social services, and promoting the advocacy of human and consumer rights, along with limited moves towards the socialization of capital.⁹⁷

The urgency displayed was coupled with radical calls for a new social approach: Minister of Human Resources Norman Levi criticized the “myth” of so-called ““free enterprise””, which held that “everyone can have enough if they are prepared to compete”, along with the belief that “economic growth in the private sector of the economy, spurred on perhaps by cash incentives from government, could eliminate poverty”.⁹⁸ He later called instead for a reframing of government’s social responsibility, including the abandonment of meager “traditional welfare approaches” for a new focus on “seeking a comprehensive, co-ordinated, and hopefully, imaginative approach to

⁹⁴ Ibid, 73.

⁹⁵ Geoff Meggs and Rod Mickleburgh, *The Art of the Impossible: Dave Barrett and the NDP in Power, 1972-1975* (Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour Publishing, 2012), 305.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 326.

⁹⁷ William K Carroll and R.S. Ratner, “Social Democracy, Neo-Conservatism and Hegemonic Crisis in British Columbia”, *Critical Sociology* Volume 16, Issue 1 (April 1989): 34.

⁹⁸ Norman Levi, “A New Direction - Now!” (position paper presented to the Conference of Canadian Provincial Welfare Ministers, Victoria, British Columbia, November 22, 1972).

social security”, including a “guaranteed adequate income”, with benefit levels “established by Federal-Provincial agreement”.⁹⁹

The window of opportunity to pursue this course was shortened by Barrett’s gambit of calling an early election. Facing a strengthening opposition in the self-styled “free enterprise bloc”, a decline in the polls, and an unpromising economic turn, along with an inexperienced opposition leader in Bill Bennett, the NDP hoped to extend their tenure while circumstances were still electorally hopeful.¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, however, the Barrett government was unable to overcome a growing and increasingly unified opposition. There were also internal struggles over his resistance to calls from within the NDP for more radical reforms,¹⁰¹ and over his position in labour disputes which elicited NDP back-to-work legislation uncharacteristic of a pro-labour party.¹⁰² While Morley et al. note the “improvisational” tendencies of the Barrett era, they also describe it as a transitional stage in the development of B.C. governance, from the “formal and essentially amateur government” of the senior Bennett, to the “more overtly professional and sophisticated apparatus” of the younger.¹⁰³ Meggs and Mickleburgh describe the NDP as a party both unaccustomed to and unprepared for a long-term strategy required of governance: on one hand, Barrett employed charisma and improvisation in public relations; on the other, his party governed with urgency, conscious that its potentially

⁹⁹Norman Levi, “Adequate Income - A Proposal” (paper presented to the Conference of Federal and Provincial Ministers of Welfare, Edmonton, Alberta, February 19-20, 1974).

¹⁰⁰ Meggs and Mickleburgh, *The Art of the Impossible*, 307.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 12-13.

¹⁰² Ibid, 286-87.

¹⁰³ Morley et al., *The Reins of Power*, 64.

brief opportunity was an anomaly breaching the hegemonic narratives of the ruling interests.¹⁰⁴

The Establishment Rallies: The Path to “Restraint”

The 1970s witnessed a reconstruction of the two-party format of old, with NDP and Social Credit tents firmly replacing Liberal and Conservative ones in a political environment polarized by the increasing concentration of capital into fewer hands and the expansion of the unionized public sector. Willingness to abandon former party affiliations to ensure the containment of an ideological opponent outweighed ideological subtleties and traditional loyalties. G.L. Kristianson describes the establishment of the “Majority Movement” in 1973 by “self-made millionaire and sometime Liberal” Jarl Whist and Burnaby lawyer Arnold Hean in an attempt to solidify a “free enterprise” majority in the legislature against the NDP.¹⁰⁵ Following a 1974 Movement rally, four Liberal and Conservative MLAs publicly pledged willingness to abandon their parties for a new anti-NDP organization; the leaders of both parties had already rejected the idea of a unified front, despite overtures from the Movement.¹⁰⁶ Ultimately, the Socreds maintained ranks, while several Liberal and Conservative MLAs previously supportive of the Movement eventually capitulated, crossing over to Social Credit as the vehicle of opposition.¹⁰⁷ While the politicians that supported unity were “responding to a very real public demand”, an alternative to the largest existing party failed to gain the formal political

¹⁰⁴ Meggs and Mickleburgh, *The Art of the Impossible*, 11-12.

¹⁰⁵ G.L. Kristianson, “The Non-Partisan Approach to B.C. Politics: The Search for a Unity Party 1972-1975”, *BC Studies* Number 33 (Spring 1977): 15.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 17-20.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 26-27.

momentum necessary to overcome existing structures; on the political right, Social Credit became “virtually the sole recipient of significant [financial] contributions after mid-1974”, while neither of the traditional free enterprise parties were able to become a significant alternative in the anti-socialist race, partly due to hampering associations with their federal counterparts.¹⁰⁸

Assessing the results of the ensuing 1975 province election, Blake, Johnston, and Elkins note that this “coalition of the right” resulted in the NDP achieving a voter share similar to that of its 1972 victory (from 39.6 percent to 39.2 percent) while losing to a revitalized Social Credit, whose support rose sharply from 31.2 to 49.3 percent at the expense of the Conservatives and Liberals.¹⁰⁹ The authors attribute the formation of the Sacred coalition more to “antipathy to the NDP” than a “positive attachment to Social Credit itself, its policies, or its leader”.¹¹⁰ Demographically, the 1970s saw regional growth for the NDP through the geographical homogenization of the province’s industrial base; meanwhile, the authors observe that Social Credit’s image as “a party of the province’s interior and farming regions” no longer held; besides “surpluses in the Peace and Fraser Valley” it no longer dominated non-metropolitan areas, instead seeing “Upper Status Vancouver” become one of its “very bastions”, along with support in other parts of the metro Vancouver area.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 28-29.

¹⁰⁹ Donald E. Blake, Richard Johnston, and David J. Elkins, “Sources of Change in the B.C. Party System”, *BC Studies* Number 50 (Summer 1981): 4.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 7.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 20-21.

Considering the implications of increased support from the political centre on Social Credit's development, Blake, Carty and Erickson acknowledge the influx of federal Liberal voters as a major factor in the Socred turnaround. While the majority of party activists still skewed federally Conservative in ideology, the influx of Liberal Vancouver elites "preoccupied with the task of coalition-building" represented a challenge to their ideological control of the party.¹¹² Ruff et al. note that in general, while Social Credit retained "many of the forms and attitudes of a populist movement", its activist core came to represent the "economically privileged interests of the society", as the party transformed under Bill Bennett from its "old-fashioned" roots into a "professional, modern, right-of-centre party".¹¹³

Tracking the Neoliberal Turn

William K. Carroll and R.S. Ratner observe that the policies of the Bill Bennett governments of the second half of the 1970s did not yet display the hallmarks of a neoliberal agenda; during a period of provincial economic strength, although neoliberalism was on the rise internationally, the Keynesian welfare state model was not fundamentally challenged in B.C., and the Labour Code was left "largely intact".¹¹⁴ In the style of the senior Bennett's regime, major infrastructure projects were still pursued, which "boosted aggregate demand and extended the province-building agenda".¹¹⁵

¹¹² Donald E. Blake, R. K. Carty, and Lynda Erickson, *Grassroots Politicians: Party Activists in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991), 56-57.

¹¹³ Norman Ruff, with Donald E. Blake, R. K. Carty, and Lynda Erickson, "Continuity and Change: Party Activists, 1973-87", in *Grassroots Politicians: Party Activists in British Columbia*, by Donald E. Blake, R.K. Carty, and Lynda Erikson (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991), 27.

¹¹⁴ Carroll and Ratner, "Social Democracy, Neo-Conservatism and Hegemonic Crisis in British Columbia", 34.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Nonetheless, while a far-reaching campaign of “reform” was not yet being applied to the public sector, attempts were made to erase the fingerprints of the previous NDP government. In the case of the Community Resources Boards established by the Barrett government, an entire organizational structure for the administration of social services was dismantled in 1977, providing a preview of what was to come.

Clague et al. note that the Boards were established under the ministry of Norman Levi with the principles of “decentralization, integration, and community participation” in mind, and they were developed in consultation with social work organizations, local government, concerned citizens’ organizations, and community organizations like the United Way and children’s aid societies.¹¹⁶ Designed by the NDP to increase citizen involvement and localized service, the Community Resources Boards were composed of publicly-elected members, with “professionals and human care workers” being the most represented groups. The institution would be short-lived after the NDP’s defeat, however. Sacred Human Resources Minister Bill Vander Zalm, the former Surrey mayor known for hardline views towards welfare, took aim at the boards. The minister claimed he had received concerns from the public about additional bureaucracy, and cited the need for total accountability for everyone involved in the welfare process, including applicants.¹¹⁷ Clague et al. note the irony of the anti-bureaucracy/pro-community voluntarism Sacred opposing an administrative structure in which “volunteerism had prospered”, along with more on-the-ground administration and localized accountability.¹¹⁸ Clearly there was

¹¹⁶ Clague et al., 34-35.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 184-85.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 191.

more at play than administrative logistics. For critics on the right, anyone involved with the boards was “considered left of centre in provincial politics and therefore an NDP ‘sympathizer’”.¹¹⁹ From the start, the project had faced Socred accusations that it was a “socialist experiment” to create a political base of “hacks in every corner of the province” through “sham elections”.¹²⁰

By the 1980s, the traditional free enterprise strategy of playing to fears of socialism and countering them with assurances of prosperity was giving way to new political discourses. The stability that had characterized the earlier part of the Bill Bennett era was being replaced by a weakened global resource economy subject to increasingly internationalized capital flow and growing competition from newly-industrialized peripheral regions.¹²¹ Government rhetoric began to take on the form of an appeal to necessary discipline, presenting austerity as an unavoidable and rational response to the natural laws of economics; it was necessary that “special interests and organized sectors” be made to learn that “they too must share in restraint with all British Columbians”.¹²² The province would remain competitive “for future business investments” by “demonstrating that B.C. has the resolve to control the size of government and limit future tax increases”.¹²³ The influx of neoliberal thinking into government policy had a

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 202.

¹²⁰ British Columbia, Debates of the Legislative Assembly, 6 June 1974 (Mr. Cabot, Social Credit Party). https://www.leg.bc.ca/documentsdata/debatetranscripts/30thparliament/4thsession/30p_04s_740606p

¹²¹ Carroll and Ratner, “Social Democracy, Neo-Conservatism and Hegemonic Crisis in British Columbia”, 35.

¹²² Province of British Columbia, *Restraint and Recovery: The Next Steps* (Victoria, British Columbia: Queen’s Printer, 1983), 1.

¹²³ Ibid, 4, 6.

theoretical buttress in the Fraser Institute, a think tank founded by economist Michael Walker and T. Patrick Boyle, then-vice president of MacMillan Bloedel. Established in 1974, the organization's research and outreach propagated the "free-market" ideas of thinkers like Milton Friedman (who was also a contributor); its board of directors would include representatives from domestic and international mining and forestry firms, along with executives from finance, manufacturing, and communications sectors.¹²⁴ The Institute's work of constructing a new ideological climate involved consultations with governments across Canada, with Walker speaking to the B.C. Socreds at the 1983 Okanagan meetings that hammered out the "Restraint" platform, advocating cutbacks, user fees, deregulation, and private incentives.¹²⁵

Patricia Marchak notes that what the government framed as the "new economic reality" was a combination of changes in the global economic structure and the province's limited capacity to adapt due to its reliance on the resource sector; postwar B.C. governments had "voluntarily accommodated" foreign resource companies, rather than encouraging local manufacturing or "genuine development".¹²⁶ Carroll and Ratner consider British Columbia to have been a "neo-conservative vanguard" region since the 1980s, since Canada's division of powers lent much of the authority for social services and labour relations to the provinces. This left the tensions inherent to the "hegemonic crisis" of the Fordist state, based on mass production and consumption, to be "displaced",

¹²⁴ Allen Garr, *Tough Guy: Bill Bennett and the Taking of British Columbia* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1985), 90-92.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

¹²⁶ Patricia Marchak, "The New Economic Reality: Substance and Rhetoric", in *The New Reality: The Politics of Restraint in British Columbia*, eds. Warren Magnusson, William K. Carroll, Charles Doyle, Monika Langer, and R.B.J. Walker (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1984), 23.

in varying degrees, onto provincial governments.¹²⁷ Unlike the manufacturing-heavy provinces like Ontario, which possessed a more integrated chain of domestic production and consumption that allowed them to delay the neoliberal shift to a preoccupation with “increasing national ‘competitiveness’”, British Columbia’s outward-looking resource-based industries had less to gain from domestic demand stimulation.¹²⁸ This is not to say there were no Canadian precedents. At the federal level, Pierre Trudeau’s Liberals had begun to incorporate neoliberal policies since the mid-1970s: in 1975, they imposed wage and price controls for a three-year period in order to contain inflation, despite campaigning against these measures the previous year.¹²⁹

On July 7, 1983, the Bennett government’s major “Restraint” package sweepingly recast the public sector’s role in British Columbia, seeking to reduce its size by 25 percent.¹³⁰ In addition, several pieces of legislation were introduced which struck back at gains made by the labour movement. The Compensation Stabilization Amendment Act indefinitely extended public sector wage controls, while the Employment Standards Amendment Act undermined rights like pregnancy leave and job safety by removing minimum employment standards from collective agreements; it also abolished the Employment Standards Board.¹³¹ Dramatic labour legislation continued with the Labour

¹²⁷ Carroll and Ratner, “Social Democracy, Neo-Conservatism and Hegemonic Crisis in British Columbia”, 34-36.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada*, 286-287.

¹³⁰ Province of British Columbia, *Restraint and Recovery*, 6.

¹³¹ “Appendix A: The ‘Restraint’ Package”, in *The New Reality: The Politics of Restraint in British Columbia*, eds. Warren Magnusson et al. (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1984), 281-2.

Code Amendment Act that came into law in May of 1984; this limited political protests involving job action, outlawed secondary picketing, and enabled cabinet to designate “Economic Development Projects” that were open to non-union labour and exempt from strikes and to regulate union voting on decisions like striking. Union power over discipline and membership was also limited by legislation.¹³² The Pulp and Paper Collective Bargaining Assistance Act, which became law in April of 1984, lifted the pulp and paper industry lockout, outlawing future strikes in the industry and extending the previous contract indefinitely; it also gave cabinet the power to impose a collective agreement.¹³³

Though some proposed legislation did not see realization as law, these attempts at policy change also provide a window into the extent to which the government of Bill Bennett sought to set the boundaries of public sector labour. For example, the Public Service Labour Relations Amendment Act died on the order paper as part of the “Kelowna Accord” between the government and the major labour elements of the Solidarity movement, but it had nonetheless sought to remove the rights of government employees to negotiate various working conditions, including job security, promotion, transfer, and work hours.¹³⁴ Meanwhile, the Public Sector Restraint Act allowed for public sector employees to be fired without cause, though this *carte blanche* prerogative

¹³² Ibid, 284.

¹³³ Ibid, 284-85.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 281.

was later reduced to still-broad termination conditions, with exemptions negotiated by major unions.¹³⁵

In addition to attacks on collective labour action, the initial “Restraint” package extended the primacy of the individual into the realm of human rights. The Bennett government’s Human Rights Act abolished the Human Rights Commission, along with the NDP-established Human Rights Branch, an independent agency.¹³⁶ The Socreds also repealed the Human Rights Code introduced by the Barrett government,¹³⁷ and a government-appointed council without fixed terms was established in place of those previous bodies. The council was given more arbitrary power in pursuing discrimination complaints, including the power to dismiss an ombudsperson; the onus would be pushed onto the complainant to prove “intent” to discriminate, and with the government no longer a party to complaints, complainants would be responsible for obtaining a lawyer, witnesses, and evidence.¹³⁸ Allen Garr describes the approach as a “do-it-yourself system”, wherein the discourse of “individual responsibility” tasked the citizen with combating discrimination; this contrasted with the previous NDP legislation, where if a hearing was required, the Branch director would be party to the complaint along with the complainant, a “lawyer with human rights experience would be provided”, and “the

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Garr, *Tough Guy*, 106.

¹³⁷ “Appendix A: The ‘Restraint’ Package”, 282.

¹³⁸ Garr, *Tough Guy*, 106.

complainant wouldn't have to pay a cent".¹³⁹ While the initial act died on paper, it was replaced with the comparable Bill 11 in May of 1984.¹⁴⁰

Income assistance and social services are perhaps the government programs closest to the neoliberal stances around individualism and individual responsibility. Angela Redish ties the emergence of social security to the state's realization that "unemployment was a natural hazard of highly industrialized economy", since industrialization had increased both standards of living and vulnerability to "random fluctuations" in income.¹⁴¹ With life becoming "riskier", higher overall income levels could ensure compensation for those who were "unlucky in the lottery of the industrialized economy"; Redish notes that a withdrawal of such support would imply that "the taxpayer accepts the benefits of such economic growth without being willing to accept a share of the costs".¹⁴² This principle of shared risk is tied to an understanding of wealth as socially-created, and of the wellbeing of the individual as being directly tied to that of the collective; Redish argues that the framing of Socred cutbacks as necessary was meant to correct a supposed "fiscal imbalance" that was based on overestimated deficits, and was grounded in an aversion to tax increases, suggesting that the decision to make

¹³⁹ Ibid, 179-80.

¹⁴⁰ "Appendix A: The 'Restraint' Package", 282.

¹⁴¹ Angela Redish, "Social Policy and 'Restraint' in British Columbia", in *Restraining the Economy: Social Credit Economic Policies for B.C. in the Eighties*, eds. Robert C. Allen and Gideon Rosenbluth (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1986), 158.

¹⁴² Ibid.

cuts to social programs “reflects political expediency and choices about desirable income distribution rather than any fiscal necessities”.¹⁴³

In the July 1983 budget that marked the onset of Bill Bennett’s “Restraint” program, the government announced that it would defer the regular increase to Guaranteed Available Income for Need (GAIN) rates. GAIN had been established in 1976 to consolidate income assistance programs, giving the Ministry of Human Services authority to disburse income assistance and social service funds. Its regulations had been amended at near-annual intervals in order to maintain the real purchasing power of the benefits during the high inflation of years following.¹⁴⁴ In February of 1984, however, the government introduced actual cuts to the GAIN program. These included a \$25 reduction to single persons and childless couples during their first month of assistance, a further \$25 reduction for singles and couples under age 26 during their first eight months, an extension of the wait period for “unemployable” recipients on income assistance to receive the higher “basic” benefits (from four months to eight), deferring the exemption on additional wages earned until recipients had been on assistance for eight months, and a requirement that those awaiting unemployment insurance benefits be only eligible for emergency income assistance.¹⁴⁵ In April, the government ignored the question of inflation adjustment for the 1984/85 fiscal year, while arguing the fiscal necessity of the

¹⁴³ Ibid, 152.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 153.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 153, 155.

cuts; the government also suggested that community groups such as churches should pick up the post-cut difference.¹⁴⁶

After GAIN cuts and rate freezes, Redish estimates a \$350 million cumulative savings for the government over three years, but taking into account the 50 percent federal reimbursement of most of the social welfare expenditures, along with income and sales taxes received from the transactions of recipients, finds the actual cost of maintaining pre-“Restraint” levels to be \$125 million.¹⁴⁷ She also posits a loss of \$350 million that would have been injected into the economy had the pre-“Restraint” funding levels been maintained, given the ‘high marginal propensity to consume’ of low-income recipients spending most of their income on immediate survival needs.¹⁴⁸ Taking into account the multiplier effects of the forgone expenditures on Gross Provincial Product, she suggests that approximately 6, 300 jobs may have been lost due to the policy.¹⁴⁹

Social service cuts were also implemented under “Restraint”, at a time when vulnerable citizens who would be likely to need social services increased by about 26 percent, as measured by Redish as the increased number of households receiving GAIN.¹⁵⁰ In July of 1983, the government eliminated several programs, and the Ministry of Human Resources staff was already cut by 18 percent in the 1984/85 budget as compared to that of the 1982/83 budget. Child abuse assessment teams were eliminated,

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 153.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 154.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 168.

along with the Community Involvement Program, which permitted a payment of \$50 per month for the expenses of unemployable and handicapped community volunteers, and three programs developed to smooth transitions out of institutions and prevent the institutionalization of children and handicapped persons: the Family Support Worker Program, the Provincial Inservice Resource Team, and the Mental Retardation Coordination position.¹⁵¹ The cuts to child welfare came at a time when recent numbers showed that need was greatly increasing: from 987 cases of reported probable child abuse in 1980 to 1,536 cases in 1982.¹⁵² In addition to cuts, Human Resources had transferred some child welfare services to the for-profit sector. Marilyn Callahan points out that previous cases of areas managed by for-profit organizations led to “increasing user fees and/or a declining quality of service”.¹⁵³

Redish notes many of these programs were relatively new, and that many addressed issues affecting women and children. She points out that while the Bennett government referred approvingly to the social role played by grandmothers in the times before these community programs served as an alternative source of care, more grandmothers had joined the workforce by the time of the cuts, and a reversion to an old level of service ignored subsequent social research into the scale of issues like child abuse and domestic violence.¹⁵⁴ There had been earlier legislated attacks on women and family issues leading up to “Restraint”, including plans in 1981 to force mothers of six

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 163-64.

¹⁵² Marilyn Callahan, “The Human Costs of ‘Restraint’”, in *The New Reality: The Politics of Restraint in British Columbia*, eds. Warren Magnusson et al. (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1984), 230-31.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 233.

¹⁵⁴ Redish, “Social Policy and ‘Restraint’ in British Columbia”, 165.

month old babies back into the workforce; the Welfare Rights Coalition, formed by low-income mothers and other welfare recipients, organized protests against this and other welfare cutbacks, while advocating for affordable housing and the recognition of domestic labour and childcare as legitimate work.¹⁵⁵

In the case of the child welfare services targeted by “Restraint”, Callahan observes that those benefitting from these services lacked a “powerful constituency” to take political action on their behalf, with “relatively small numbers” of children and families affected, and voluntary family agencies risking “retribution if they vigorously oppose the policies of the government which funds them”.¹⁵⁶ The government’s call for the voluntary sectors to pick up the slack in these areas contrasted with the reduction or elimination of community agency grants, with affected groups including the Vancouver Women’s Health Collective, Vancouver Transition House, rape crisis centres, seniors’ centres, daycare centres, and the British Columbia Association for the Mentally Retarded.¹⁵⁷ These cuts were made in lieu of tax increases, increases in borrowing, or reductions in other areas, as Redish notes;¹⁵⁸ in contrast, the “prestige” of costly megaprojects like Expo 86 were pursued despite hidden costs and dubious prospects for economic benefit.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Lynne Marks, Margaret Little, Megan Gaucher, and T.R. Noddings, “‘A Job That Should Be Respected’: contested visions of motherhood and English Canada’s Second Wave women’s movements, 1970-1990”, *Women’s History Review* (2016): 10.

¹⁵⁶ Callahan, “The Human Costs of ‘Restraint’”, 237.

¹⁵⁷ Redish, “Social Policy and ‘Restraint’ in British Columbia”, 166.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Charles Blackorby, Glen Donaldson, Robert Pickard, and Margaret Slade, “Expo 86: An Economic Impact Analysis”, in *Restraining the Economy: Social Credit Economic Policies for B.C. in the Eighties*, eds. Robert C. Allen and Gideon Rosenbluth (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1986) 274-276.

The sweep and aggressiveness of the “Restraint” program provoked an equally diverse response from the strata of affected social groups. Carroll and Ratner describe a “conjunctural basis of unity” in 1983, both at the “top-down” level of Operation Solidarity, an alliance of B.C.’s labour organizations, and at the grassroots level, centred primarily in Vancouver, with participation from “unionists, human rights activists, feminists, socialists, and communists”.¹⁶⁰ The grassroots elements formed the Solidarity Coalition in August 1983, with Operation Solidarity, “essentially a creation of the BCFed”, i.e. the B.C. Federation of Labour, serving as a leading member organization and committing itself to provide funds.¹⁶¹ Carroll and Ratner observe that popular mobilization held the potential for the “possibility of transforming defensive mobilization into a new historical bloc”, beyond the Fordist project and “toward a counter-hegemonic politics”,¹⁶² but while mass demonstrations, the occupation of provincial cabinet offices, and parliamentary filibustering by the NDP took place, Carroll and Ratner argue that a plan to begin gradual job action escalation on November 1 with a BCGEU strike amounted to a “minimalist program to defend seniority rights for provincial employees”.¹⁶³ On November 14, the Kelowna Accord was negotiated between BCGEU leadership and the government, with little input from other popular organizations in the coalition. The seniority principle and the right to bargain working conditions were preserved for provincial government employees, but issues surrounding tenants’ and

¹⁶⁰ Carroll and Ratner, “Social Democracy, Neo-Conservatism and Hegemonic Crisis in British Columbia”, 38.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 39.

¹⁶² Ibid, 38.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 40.

human rights were reduced to a “vague process of consultation”.¹⁶⁴ Without the economic clout of its union branch as a bargaining chip, Solidarity as a whole was effectively deflated.

Conclusion: A Polarized Centre

In a postmortem of the Solidarity campaign, Bryan D. Palmer ascribes the failure to meet its broader objectives to the hierarchical nature of its organizational structure. He argues that the “reformist trade union bureaucracy” had priorities closer to those of capital than to the needs of the broader working class; their strategies “carved up the class struggle into economic and sociopolitical halves”, while taking the progressive trajectory of the welfare state for granted.¹⁶⁵ Pointing to an absence of “genuinely democratic committees”, which would have represented vulnerable groups and bridged the divide between public and private sector workers, Palmer considers the lack of “institutionalized challenge to labour officialdom” to have opened the door for the narrow interests of “opportunistic reformism” and the neutralization of militant protest.¹⁶⁶ Tied to the social democratic NDP in the electoral arena, the labour union leadership was “unable to conceive that a victory could be won through struggle”, instead fearing polls which suggested that a continued Solidarity campaign could hurt the party’s chances in the next election.¹⁶⁷ For their part, the NDP under Dave Barrett “followed a path of abstentionism” in relation to Solidarity, emphasizing that the real battle was to be fought

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Bryan D. Palmer, *Solidarity: The Rise & Fall of an Opposition in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1987), 87.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 93, 97.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 102.

in the legislature; they were united with the labour bureaucracy in the objective of redirecting mass mobilization away from “militant struggle” and into the “subdued politics of electoralism”, with hopes of avoiding any potential contamination of their mainstream viability.¹⁶⁸

The bureaucratization of leadership and narrowing of interests amongst the mainstream (centre-)left reflected the heightened stakes of British Columbian politics in the neoliberal era. The concentration of wealth and monopolization of corporate interests had produced a hegemonic assault upon the working-class gains of the welfare state, with the short-term pragmatism of centre-left moderation producing a trend of diminishing returns. The perceived costs of success or failure for corporate, labour, liberal, conservative, and radical interests had produced a rush towards the simultaneous consolidation and polarization of a two-party system, wherein the battle for “mainstream” votes produced a narrow terrain of political mobility. With the clout of a newly-consolidated hegemony balancing a traditional populist base with elite corporate elements, the boundaries of the political centre tilted increasingly rightward under the gravitational pull of the ruling Sacred narrative.

Carroll and Ratner note that on the whole, the “Restraint” program “fell short of producing a new hegemonic project”, instead serving as a “tactical response to a specific conjuncture”, framed as “crisis intervention”; and yet, while “imposing restraint without promoting an alternative project” the Sacred party had set a new precedent by relinquishing the “legitimizing capacity of the Fordist state to pose as a neutral umpire

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 54-55.

between labor and capital as benefactor of the disadvantaged”.¹⁶⁹ Nonetheless, while the welfare state had not been totally wiped away in a clean sweep of privatization, Social Credit under the younger Bennett had sowed the seeds for doing so by introducing a more sophisticated, normalized framing of cutbacks and tax cuts as a “necessary” and “unavoidable” pills to be swallowed. This was a more technocratic and seemingly “apolitical” representation of class warfare than the populist, redbaiting calls for freedom and free enterprise of a generation previous.

Most importantly perhaps for the future of British Columbia’s ruling bloc, the premier had re-established Social Credit as its primary political vehicle. Shortly after Bennett’s 1986 resignation, David J. Mitchell argued that the premier’s “greatest megaproject” was the party itself; until his tenure, “because of its history or its name or its regional base”, it had “never been fully accepted”, and the 1972 NDP victory had brought Social Credit’s future political viability into question.¹⁷⁰ Unlike the overt association with evangelical Christianity pursued by the Socreds under W.A.C. Bennett, religious appeals do not appear to have been a notable focal point for the younger Bennett’s regime. This can perhaps be attributed to the combination of long-consolidated support amongst evangelical communities and the diversification of the party’s support base with its incorporation of former provincial Liberal and Conservative supporters, who were often more metropolitan. While the original Socred dynasty relied heavily on the personality of W.A.C. Bennett, the new Social Credit had been “institutionalized” by his

¹⁶⁹ Carroll and Ratner, “Social Democracy, Neo-Conservatism and Hegemonic Crisis in British Columbia”, 38.

¹⁷⁰ David J. Mitchell, *Succession: The Political Reshaping of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & MacIntyre, 1987), 89.

son to “outlive any single leader”¹⁷¹ In doing so, the party was trading some of the populist performativity of old, with its appeals to small business enterprise in an emergent settler society, for a professional veneer more in line with its more affluent new recruits and the broader corporate zeitgeist. Now entrenched as the vessel for an emerging hegemonic discourse, the party channeled the “rugged individualism” narrative that had energized its original base into the ascendant neoliberal mindset that posed the individual as an atomized unit within the market’s cold logic of necessity.

A televised April 1984 speech exemplified this synthesis. Addressing the government’s ongoing labour disputes, Bill Bennett used the term “new reality” nearly 12 times in 15 minutes, while speaking in reportedly “soothing, fatherly tones” that contrasted with the “fire and brimstone” he had spat at public sector workers and the NDP the previous fall.¹⁷² The premier asserted that this “reality” had to be “shared by all British Columbians”, with the recognition that “recovery does not imply a return to past practices — no matter how successful they may have been”, since the global marketplace meant “tougher competition for diminished markets”. He noted that while “no one begrudged our construction workers a decent living”, these were “difficult economic times and a new reality must take hold”. He urged the unemployed to prove their mettle, suggesting that a “front-line mentality” must be replaced with a “bottom-line mentality”, and warned that “in the new world economy there will be survivors and there will be casualties but there will be no special privileges”.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Mitchell, *Succession*, 89.

¹⁷² Ian Mulgrew, “Clear message beneath the surface”, *Globe and Mail*, April 4, 1984.

¹⁷³ Quoted in Ian Mulgrew, “Clear message beneath the surface”, *Globe and Mail*, April 4, 1984.

Reporting for the *Globe and Mail*, Ian Mulgrew observed that this address had ignored the government's recent legislation, which had included the weakening of public sector collective bargaining and placed a greater burden of the recession on welfare recipients, "particularly the young". It had also failed to address any plans to diversify the province's economy, since its dependence on a few industries was "the crux of its economic problems". He also contrasted the premier's stress on creating an environment that was attractive to investors with a recent study showing that the province was "among the most attractive places in which to invest". Despite employing tones of subdued, compassionate concern, Mulgrew opined that the speech amounted to a "strident declaration that the final offensive had begun in the ideological war between the left and right".¹⁷⁴

Regardless of the premier's attempts to conceal partisan motives, his rationalizations were ultimately applied to legitimate an inverted subsidization, with resources shifted from the hands of working-class individuals and publically-accountable services, into the coffers of the corporate sector. The Social Credit Party's shift from a small business-oriented, more traditionally-conservative populism to a movement that housed a broader coalition, including metropolitan, federally-Liberal elites, laid the groundwork for the party's transition to a modernized political machine better prepared to cater to the age of monopolized corporate capital. Lending its ear to the recently-formed Fraser Institute, an organization designed to spread the gospel of free markets to Canada, the Socred government took a front-line role in the neoliberalization of the nation's politics, following the lead of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald

¹⁷⁴ Ian Mulgrew, "Clear message beneath the surface", *Globe and Mail*, April 4, 1984.

Reagan in the United States. Rationalizing austerity measures by employing the rhetoric of economic necessity, the Socreds called for the bitter medicine of “discipline” and “restraint” within a “new reality”. Framed as beyond partisan politics or ideology, this approach echoed Thatcher’s “there is no alternative” refrain.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in Norman Webster, “Tina and her foes dig a hole that might trap them”, *Globe and Mail*, December 27, 1980.

Chapter 2

Bad Form: Bill Vander Zalm and the Limits of Populism

By 1986, the consolidation of neoliberal austerity policy in British Columbia via the “Restraint” programme had exposed the provincial government to the paradoxes inherent to the realization of policy objectives. Granted an increased majority in the electoral victory of 1983, Social Credit moved quickly, enacting sweeping cuts to social services and labour rights through the July budget. These moves were framed as pragmatic measures, necessary to ensure debt reduction, along with competitiveness within the increasingly-integrated matrix of global trade. While official statements presented the decisions as “difficult” for the government to make, they were also suggested to be part of a new status quo of unclear duration: one of “vigilant government restraint on a long-term basis”.¹⁷⁶ Aggressive policy invited invigorated opposition, however, as the formation of the Solidarity coalition had demonstrated. Social Credit would pursue a soft image makeover under the helm of Bill Vander Zalm, a more “human” leader whose tendency to shoot from the hip with both policy and soundbites contrasted with the more reserved and calculated approach of Bill Bennett.

Vander Zalm’s self-presentation evoked the conservative populism of W.A.C. Bennett’s era, but his differences in terms of identity, political style, and support base would be accompanied by his own attempts to restructure the social safety net, painting a complicated picture of his position within the broader neoliberal terrain. Bill Bennett’s government had offered cold, supposedly rational and purely economic explanations for

¹⁷⁶ Province of British Columbia, *Restraint and Recovery: The Next Steps*. (Victoria, British Columbia: Queen’s Printer, 1983), 6.

the “new reality” of “Restraint”, echoing the assertion of neoliberal contemporary Margaret Thatcher that there was “no alternative” to the contraction of the welfare state. In contrast, a study of the rationale behind Vander Zalm’s 1988 welfare cut finds appeals to more traditional conservative values, cohering with his populist tack. The government paternalistically framed it as a compassionate policy that would supposedly lift the poor out of a dependency cycle, while simultaneously emphasizing the value of “self-sufficiency” and moralizing against the perceived “laziness” of those on welfare. Vander Zalm’s evangelism also made waves when he advocated finding Christ as a way to alleviate the struggles of poverty. These rhetorical shifts appealed to ideological sections of the Social Credit support base that had been previously alienated by the direction of the previous premier, while simultaneously provoking a backlash that revealed the weakened overall position of the party. Vander Zalm’s eventual downfall would put into relief the contradictions inherent to the composition of British Columbia’s hegemonic bloc, and the challenges of maintaining it.

“Renewal” or Re-brand? The Vander Zalm Shift

The mixed messages of the Vander Zalm era contrasted with the earlier, more resolute approach to social service cuts displayed under the Bill Bennett regime. As the Bill Bennett government shifted towards economic neoliberalism and austerity in the early 1980s, its rhetoric had exhibited a different sort of fundamentalism than Vander Zalm’s religious form, upholding the necessity of free markets and budgetary restraint. Human Resources Minister Grace McCarthy argued in 1981 that welfare in Canada had to become less easily accessible, or “we will end up with such countries as Britain”,

where she said families passed on welfare generationally.¹⁷⁷ In response to accusations of callousness towards the poor and needy in 1984 after his latest budget had halved the deficit, Finance Minister Hugh Curtis asserted that “I don’t feel cold-blooded and brutal about it. I feel realistic about it. We’re not happy doing it.”¹⁷⁸ When Roman Catholic bishop Remi De Roo, a well-known advocate of social justice, in a 1983 interview had condemned the “Restraint” budget as “evil” for its erosion of “the social consensus and the safety net we have built up for the less powerful elements in society” and for favouring the rich and powerful,¹⁷⁹ Bill Bennett responded that the bishop simply had “a different economic philosophy than I have. He does not trust the private sector, he does not believe in profits”.¹⁸⁰ Disagreeing with the notion that “larger government” was the answer, Bennett harkened back to the refrain of creating “a climate to invest, create business and jobs”.¹⁸¹

Nearly three years into the “Restraint” era, Bennett announced his resignation from the premiership in a fashion typical to his impersonal leadership style. Over two days, he informed his deputy minister and had his principal secretary notify his cabinet.¹⁸² A day later, May 22, 1986, he held a press conference where he argued that “the time to have changes within a party is when things are good”, in light of

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in Andrea Maitland, “Fighting new cuts in welfare”, *Globe and Mail*, September 5, 1981.

¹⁷⁸ Quoted in Ian Mulgrew, “Criticism of ‘callous’ budget exasperates Sacred minister”, *Globe and Mail*, February 22, 1984.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Stephen Hume, “Restraints program evil - De Roo” *Times Colonist*, August 16, 1983.

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in Peter Comparelli, “Bennett rejects Bishop’s criticism”, *Vancouver Sun*, August 17, 1983.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Stan Persky, *Fantasy Government: Bill Vander Zalm and the Future of Social Credit* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1989), 19.

experiencing his father “having stayed as premier and leader too long”.¹⁸³ Not mentioned was the fact that Social Credit was currently trailing the NDP in the polls, or that the image of fiscal restraint that the party had worked to cultivate had been complicated by a slow recovery from the recession, the costs of recent megaprojects, accumulating deficits, and double-digit unemployment.¹⁸⁴ The premier’s “tough guy” image had been promoted to deflect from his lack of charisma and finesse in selling the purportedly necessary choices of “Restraint”,¹⁸⁵ but may have backfired in the aftermath. His principal secretary, Jerry Lampert, later reflected that Bennett “just wasn’t able to change his image, or convince people that what he did was right, or get people to trust him”, and believed that Bennett “came to the conclusion that he couldn’t renew the party. And the only thing that could renew the party was the leadership process”.¹⁸⁶

The leadership campaign that followed revealed some cracks in the unified front that Bennett had sought to form by institutionalizing the party out of the raw material of various factions and interests. The names of many potential candidates from inside and outside the legislature were bandied about and tested for buoyancy against the polls, as decades of Bennett family rule had seemingly allowed ambitions to gestate. Twelve would emerge, and the early frontrunners, and ultimately the top four candidates in terms of support, were Grace McCarthy, Brian Smith, Bud Smith, and Bill Vander Zalm.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Quoted in Dan Smith, “A dynasty ends as Bennett bows out”, *Toronto Star*, May 23, 1986.

¹⁸⁴ Persky, *Fantasy Government*, 3-4.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 6-7.

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in Mitchell, *Succession*, 81.

¹⁸⁷ John Cruikshank, “Socreds make Vander Zalm B.C. premier”, *Globe and Mail*, July 31, 1986.

They offered contrasting directions for the party in terms of both political image and loyalties.

David J. Mitchell notes that both Bud Smith, Bennett's former principal secretary, and Brian Smith, the Attorney-General, stressed "moderate, modern approaches to politics and government, with "high-tech strategies" and leadership styles that sought consensus; neither were charismatic leaders or "overtly populist", and both were considered potential recipients of Bennett's support.¹⁸⁸ Both were also advised by consultants who had previously worked for the "Big Blue Machine" of the Ontario Progressive Conservatives, who Mitchell notes were seen by many prominent Socreds as an "unwelcome element": a "political elite" who "threatened the populist tradition" of the party, though it had already been incorporated as part of Bill Bennett's process of party modernization.¹⁸⁹ There were fears within the party that "city slickers" were co-opting it to determine its leadership direction: frontrunners had been asked to meet with the Top Twenty Club, a group of the province's top businesspeople; it had been meeting with Bennett since 1981, with each of the 60 members required to donate \$5, 000 annually.¹⁹⁰ Bud Smith was particularly resented by some Socreds as the designated choice of the party elites, despite his never having held elected office; this led to a reported "Anybody-but-Smith" movement, or "Budlash", within the party.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ David J. Mitchell, *Succession: The Political Reshaping of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & MacIntyre, 1987), 99.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁹⁰ Gord Crann, "City slickers' under fire in B.C. Socred race", *Toronto Star*, July 20, 1986.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Grace McCarthy, a Socred veteran whose career stretched back to the 1960s caucuses of the senior Bennett, represented an alternative to the incursions of modern spin. She could certainly not be accused of being an upstart or outsider, though she would not be seen as a breath of fresh air either, having served in a multitude of posts over two decades, including cabinet portfolios, as party president, and as deputy premier.¹⁹² McCarthy styled herself as a “true” Socred, whose lack of ties to federal Conservatives or Liberals would give her broad appeal within the provincial coalition.¹⁹³ Her campaign was dubbed “Project Grassroots”, and while she received support from the old guard of the party, including several cabinet ministers, her momentum was dampened by a perceived alliance with Vander Zalm.¹⁹⁴ After having engaged in much public vacillation over whether to run, Vander Zalm would say that her encouragement had ultimately convinced him, though she would deny that they were running in cooperation.¹⁹⁵

The potential stigma of associating with Vander Zalm came partially out of his complex history with the party, one that could cast him as an outsider or a veteran, depending on one’s interpretive lens. Having served as an MLA and in multiple cabinet posts from 1974 to 1983, he was currently a private citizen, a millionaire with a background in gardening whose business interests included Fantasy Garden World, a tourist attraction with Biblical themes.¹⁹⁶ His exit from politics prior to the 1983 election

¹⁹² Persky, *Fantasy Government*, 25-26

¹⁹³ Crann, “City slickers”.

¹⁹⁴ Mitchell, *Succession*, 100.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 102-103.

¹⁹⁶ Persky, *Fantasy Government*, 23.

provoked resentment from leadership candidate Bill Ritchie, and Mitchell notes that some Socreds viewed Vander Zalm as “a renegade they could never serve alongside”.¹⁹⁷

Fellow candidate Stephen Rogers cited his competitor’s lack of consistency: “So much of his policy is the very last thing that anybody said to him, whether it was a taxi driver or somebody he talked to in the hallway”.¹⁹⁸

Beyond perceptions circulating in party circles that he was disloyal and unreliable, Vander Zalm’s renegade status had at times been very publicly displayed. As Municipal Affairs Minister, he had been attempting for over two years to introduce a land use bill that proposed to restructure local government by centralizing more power under the ministry, while doing away with a trust designed to protect the Gulf Islands from real estate development.¹⁹⁹ The bill was unpopular with municipalities and provoked protest, and the legislature ultimately adjourned in July 1982 without passing it; Vander Zalm would call the move of his own government “gutless”, though he vowed to remain in cabinet “because I’m not a quitter- I’m a fighter”.²⁰⁰ The Minister’s tendency to rock the boat was further recorded in a 1979 *Globe and Mail* article, which noted that “he has talked openly about challenging Premier Bennett in a future leadership conference”.²⁰¹

Vander Zalm had been known for his outspokenness on a diverse range of issues, particularly welfare and employment, while his political allegiances had shifted over his

¹⁹⁷ Mitchell, *Succession*, 102-103.

¹⁹⁸ Quoted in Mitchell, *Succession*, 103.

¹⁹⁹ Mitchell, *Succession*, 42-43.

²⁰⁰ “Quoted in “Shelving bill ‘gutless’, B.C. minister says”, *Globe and Mail*, July 31, 1982.

²⁰¹ Robert Williamson, “Vander Zalm: B.C.’s controversial grass-roots golden boy”, *Globe and Mail*, March 1, 1979.

career. After building his nursery business in the sixties, his political career began with Surrey city council, where he was elected mayor in 1969: from his post, he had criticized W.A.C. Bennett's government for its approach to dealing with welfare fraud, even going so far as to hire a professional investigator to attempt to find the perceived perpetrators; Stan Persky notes that "this vigilante approach to social services yielded few criminals".²⁰² During berry picking season, his council was known for cutting off welfare to those recipients without dependents; councilor (and future Vander Zalm cabinet minister and successor) Rita Johnson announced that "they should go and pick berries and fruit, we're not giving them welfare".²⁰³ Despite reproach from both the federal and provincial governments, Vander Zalm refused to back down on the issue in 1974, claiming that there were numerous jobs available, and blaming a shadowy, unnamed organization for counselling welfare recipients to turn down jobs and seek welfare in other municipalities.²⁰⁴

Vander Zalm's first foray into provincial politics was a failed run for the leadership of the B.C. Liberal party, where his campaign included promises to "whiplash drug dealers" and "cut off welfare deadbeats".²⁰⁵ He would later join Social Credit and be sworn in as an MLA following the party's 1975 return to power. Immediately named Minister of Human Resources, he proclaimed: "If anyone is able to work, but refuses to

²⁰² Persky, *Fantasy Government*, 60.

²⁰³ Quoted in Malcolm Gray, "Pick berries or else' rule upsets Human Resources Minister: Surrey policy on no work, no welfare starting to catch on in neighbouring B.C. centres", *Globe and Mail*, July 13, 1974.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Quoted in Persky, *Fantasy Government*, 61.

pick up the shovel, we will find ways of dealing with him”.²⁰⁶ His brash attempts at humour would play to themes of Anglo-Canadian chauvinism at a time when Quebec separatism was a hot-button issue: he invited controversy when he performed a song that described René Lévesque as having “the voice of a frog”, and earlier made waves for commenting that Quebec’s potential exit from confederation would save him from paying extra for French being added to corn flake boxes.²⁰⁷

The sources of Vander Zalm’s appeal and opposition often overlapped, and revealed the potential tensions within a party that had expanded beyond its original populist roots to contain a broader assortment of anti-NDP elements, despite Bill Bennett’s insistence that Social Credit was not a coalition, because “coalitions of convenience always break up”, while his party was a “political vehicle that can change with the times without sacrificing its basic philosophy”.²⁰⁸ Under Bennett, British Columbia was moving towards the more technocratic and bureaucratic approaches to governing increasingly found elsewhere in Canada, while moving away from the politics of performance and personality that were hallmarks of the two previous administrations.²⁰⁹ Vander Zalm, meanwhile, brought a flair that evoked the elder Bennett, and while his rhetoric of individual responsibility technically aligned with the ideological implications of bootstrap-tightening neoliberal “Restraint” tactics, its form was moralistic in a way that contrasted with the drier and more neutrally-framed

²⁰⁶ Quoted in Malcolm Gray, “Dutch Treat: Vander Zalm hopes B.C. will be envy of nation”, *Globe and Mail*, April 17, 1976.

²⁰⁷ “‘Frog’ song no slight, Vander Zalm asserts”, *Globe and Mail*, January 30, 1979.

²⁰⁸ Quoted in Mitchell, *Succession*, 89.

²⁰⁹ Mitchell, *Succession*, 32

rationales of economic necessity that would have been more palatable to the newer, yuppie-leaning element who might have voted for the Liberals federally. In an increasingly urbanized and technologically-developed economy, it was not surprising for a ruling party to embrace the cultural antecedents of these changes, accommodating the influx of a contingent with more modern, cosmopolitan, and centrist-leaning sensibilities. Conversely, it was unsurprising that longtime supporters of the party from its culturally-conservative antiestablishment days would resent these changes, and the accompanying influence of more globally-oriented economic elites. In this context, Vander Zalm's candidacy contained elements of rebellion; in form, if not in substance.

Vander Zalm's backstory was likely to appeal to the ideals of industriousness and mastery of nature woven into the narratives of British Columbian settler ideology. Born in the conservative Catholic Dutch town of Noordwykerhout, he lived through the German occupation of the Netherlands during the Second World War, and would emigrate to British Columbia with his family at age twelve, settling in the Fraser Valley.²¹⁰ His start in the family bulb business would contribute to the cultivation a hard-working, "self-made" image. He would later reflect that he was "brought up to work hard, not to squander", and in a particularly revealing self-analysis: "In those days we didn't have special education classes set up especially for immigrants, which is why from time to time, the biases that I have developed about these programs may show in me".²¹¹ At the age of seventeen, his plans to study law were put on hold when his father suffered

²¹⁰ Persky, *Fantasy Government*, 59.

²¹¹ Quoted in Persky, *Fantasy Government*, 59.

a heart attack; taking over his father's bulb business as a travelling salesman would hone the enthusiastic promotional skills he would later take into politics.²¹²

Despite his personal wealth, Vander Zalm's background lent him the air of a local entrepreneur, in contrast to the trope of the aloof metropolitan elite. At his leadership campaign announcement, he proclaimed that he sought to "restore a true measure of individual enterprise".²¹³ He was also critical of Social Credit's recent relationship with the financial sector, saying that it had "become more the party of Howe Street".²¹⁴ On the other hand, as multinational corporations increasingly encroached upon local markets, the concepts of "local" and "small business" were sometimes only relative. Peter Toigo, Vander Zalm's friend and business advisor, took a lead role in organizing the leadership campaign.²¹⁵ A *Globe & Mail* profile published the next year called the owner of a "multi-million-dollar restaurant empire" Vander Zalm's "closest confidant", and someone with "fiercely populist views" who was "deeply suspicious of big labor, big government and big business". The article pointed out that he did not fit the typical image of a yuppie businessman, and described him as "short, stout, and, on the day of the interview, very casually dressed". The portrait aligned Toigo with the ideal of the self-made capitalist, having "started business in a small corner grocery store", and completed his first real estate deal while still in high school.²¹⁶ Like Vander Zalm, however far

²¹² Persky, *Fantasy Government*, 60.

²¹³ *Ibid*, 29.

²¹⁴ Malcolm Turnbull, "Betting on Bill", *Vancouver Province*, June 22, 1986.

²¹⁵ Mitchell, *Succession*, 117-18.

²¹⁶ John Cruickshank, "The confidant Vander Zalm adviser wields power in quiet way", *Globe & Mail*, September 1, 1987.

removed he now was from the experience of the ordinary British Columbian, his scrappy image and local ties granted him a populist appeal.

Unlike the Smiths, Vander Zalm ran a low-budget, low-tech campaign built from the grassroots up: small advertisements in newspapers across the province led to an outpouring of small donations, while his staff was made up entirely of volunteers, not paid consultants.²¹⁷ This, combined with a fortuitously-timed departure from provincial politics that allowed him to avoid the stigma associated with “Restraint”, helped to contrast his candidacy with the forward trudge of the status quo. Enthusiasm amongst the populace contrasted with a lack of support within the legislature however, as only three MLAs would endorse him ahead of the convention.²¹⁸ His appeal simultaneously called back to another political time and left him well-suited to the soundbite era: an event at Fantasy Garden World ten days before the convention would run as BCTV’s top story, and Vander Zalm viewed the campaign as win-win regardless of the result, thanks to the publicity being afforded his business.²¹⁹

When the Whistler convention finally arrived, Vander Zalm’s speech reiterated his position amongst the pack: “I have made no deals with anyone” he emphasized, “not the other candidates and not their consultants... A cabinet post or a consulting job won’t be traded. It must be earned.”²²⁰ Despite his campaign’s noted relative lack of communication and behind-the-scenes brokering with the other camps, several fallen

²¹⁷ Mitchell, *Succession*, 104.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 105, 108.

²²⁰ Quoted in Mitchell, *Succession*, 113.

candidates would cross the floor to lend him their support, the most prominent being a surprise move by Bud Smith, who followed the momentum of the convention after a fourth-place finish on the second ballot.²²¹ McCarthy, on the other hand, would step down after the third ballot, surprisingly not directing her followers towards a remaining candidate, despite her friendship with Vander Zalm: she did not want to rankle the small group that did not support him, but would later note that “my people were basically his people and his people were my people.”²²² A fourth ballot would be required for a definitive victory over runner-up Brian Smith. Columnist Marjorie Nichols would sum up the result: “The neo-conservative Social Credit machine built by Bill Bennett is dead, the victim of a freakish head-on collision with a grassroots bulldozer driven by an unelected rampaging populist”.²²³

For his part, Vander Zalm’s post-victory pronouncements would include comments which were seemingly meant to conciliate ruffled feathers and reassure concerned factions. “I can be a new man”, he assured; “I can be non-confrontational, and I will be”.²²⁴ His call for a turn towards social harmony was synthesized with his credo of personal responsibility: “the answer to any problems we suffer from lies in attitude. We really need to be, number one, very positive, and secondly, understanding of one another. This is not a time to knock the NDP. This is not a time to bash the unions. This is not a time to come down on big business. This is a time for people to get it together for the

²²¹ Mitchell, *Succession*, 106, 119.

²²² Quoted in Mitchell, *Succession*, 122.

²²³ Marjorie Nichols, “Charismatic charm won out in bitter Socred leadership battle”, *Ottawa Citizen*, August 1, 1986.

²²⁴ Dave Margoshes, “I’m ‘a new man,’ Vander Zalm says” *Vancouver Sun*, August 1, 1986.

common good”.²²⁵ Social Credit had managed to distance itself from the bad taste left by “Restraint” by choosing a leader who presented as “authentic” and “human” in the semiotics of media-minded politics, in contrast to the image of hard pragmatism that formed the basis of the previous administration’s identity. Vander Zalm’s well-defined persona (if not ideology or policies) would play well in the next election against an NDP leader, Bob Skelly, who was seen to be lacking the media-friendly personality and political instincts of his predecessor, Dave Barrett.²²⁶ Fellow Socred leadership candidate (and future Prime Minister) Kim Campbell would remark in her convention speech that “Charisma without substance is a dangerous thing”, warning: “It raises expectations that cannot be satisfied. Then comes disillusionment and bitterness that destroys not only the leader, but the party.”²²⁷ For his part, when the NDP accused him of valuing style over substance, Vander Zalm would tellingly respond that “style is substance”.²²⁸

If not a harbinger of competence and long-term stability, the new leader provided the party with a short-term injection of energy. An examination of his support base suggests that he was also a salve for elements of the party which had perhaps felt alienated by Bennett’s modernization drive. In an analysis of the political makeup of the leadership convention’s delegates, derived from a survey with a response rate of approximately 27 percent, Vander Zalm supporters placed the highest in metrics

²²⁵ Margoshes, “I’m ‘a new man’”.

²²⁶ Mitchell, *Succession*, 67, 151-53

²²⁷ Quoted in Orland French, “Seeking solutions with style”, *Globe and Mail*, October 9, 1986.

²²⁸ Quoted in John Cruickshank, “Vander Zalm show: style is substance”, *Globe and Mail*, October 23, 1986.

measuring tendencies to support individualism, populism, deregulation, and restraint.²²⁹ The researchers found the last result somewhat surprising, given that Vander Zalm had opposed the “what were considered the excesses of the restraint programme” during his leadership bid.²³⁰ The range of results may have been an outgrowth of the catch-all tendencies of his platform, where he “appeared to be at pains” to moderate his image and distance himself from his right-wing reputation; while he suggested a need to increase welfare rates for some recipient categories and possibly increase spending in public services, his “one consistent theme” was “decrying government regulation and red tape”.²³¹ Out of first ballot Vander Zalm supporters, relatively few chose “Experience/ability” or “Policy/philosophy of candidate” as factors in their reasoning, while nearly 40 percent pointed to “Public appeal”, where he measured far higher than any other candidate.²³² As an “outsider” to the party’s recent, seemingly “top-down” reforms, he fared better with long-time party members than runner-up Brian Smith; this was significant, since half of the delegates had joined the party before 1975, and 30 percent had been involved since the W.A.C. Bennett days.²³³

In terms of demographics, unlike the other top four candidates, Vander Zalm did not rely primarily on a particular regional support base.²³⁴ The authors of the study noted

²²⁹ Donald E. Blake, R.K. Carty, and Lynda Erickson, “Ratification or Repudiation: Social Credit Leadership Selection in British Columbia”, *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique* XXI:3 (September / septembre 1988): 514, 532.

²³⁰ Ibid, 532.

²³¹ Ibid, 526.

²³² Ibid, 531.

²³³ Ibid, 517, 533.

²³⁴ Ibid, 527.

that the image of Social Credit members as “religious zealots” seemed overblown, with half not claiming religious affiliation; of those that did, 75 percent were Roman Catholic, Anglican, or United Church members;²³⁵ many members of the latter half must have been drawn to the open religiosity of Vander Zalm, himself a Catholic. At the beginning of his campaign, he had announced his goal to “bring to government high moral standards based on true Christian principles”, and he had also declared support for prayer in schools.²³⁶ His fundamentalist views would attract controversy during his time in office, as he attempted to defund abortions, refused to fund an AIDS prevention sex education video for teens, and framed the normalization of homosexuality as harmful to young people.²³⁷

Vander Zalm’s candid and spontaneous image seems to have constituted an element of the “populism” commonly-attributed to him, which contrasted with the leadership approaches of both his immediate predecessor as premier and his main leadership rivals. This would seem to align him with Benjamin Moffitt and Simon Tormey’s conceptualization of populism as a “political style”, wherein an increasingly mediatized landscape has led to candidates employing different modes of self-presentation. In the case of the populist, the interests of a narrativized “people” are usually contrasted with the interests of an “elite”, “establishment”, or “system”, with

²³⁵ Ibid, 517.

²³⁶ Quoted in “B.C.’s Vander Zalm takes pride in grassroots heritage”, *Toronto Star*, July 31, 1986.

²³⁷ B.C. may have to back down on abortion, Vander Zalm says”, *Toronto Star*, March 22, 1988; Tom Barrett, “Premier dislikes AIDS video”, *Vancouver Sun*, April 27, 1987; Keith Baldry, “Vander Zalm worried about gays’ declarations”, *Vancouver Sun*, March 5, 1988.

criticism directed at the ability of “politics as usual” to respond to perceived “crisis, breakdown, or threat”.²³⁸

Elements of this framework certainly resonate with the Vander Zalm case, but since he rose to the premiership through an internal party avenue before defeating an ineffective NDP, the antiestablishment element of his persona was a matter of degrees. While his pro-business worldview generally aligned with the free enterprise mandate of Social Credit, and he attempted to temper his brash image during his run for leadership, his initial success was largely based on the contrast of his political style with that of the technocratic party machine. Denouncing red tape and bureaucracy during the leadership campaign, his stance sometimes blurred political lines; he proposed barring unions in the “essential services” from the right to strike, while also being critical of government handouts for the private sector, framing them as “not good free enterprise”.²³⁹ Criticizing the political influence of the Top Twenty Club was more likely to align his image with the small business contingent of the party, giving him the image of a grassroots, Main Street capitalist. His dislike of government reliance on opinion polls fit with an image of intuition and authenticity, while on the other hand, he was known to praise the idea of putting questions to voters in referenda.²⁴⁰ His espousal of “Christian principles” could also be seen as anti-systemic, appealing to conservative fears of the breakdown of perceived traditional values. Vander Zalm’s prioritization of a conservative Christian

²³⁸ Benjamin Moffitt and Simon Tormey, “Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatisation, and Political Style”, *Political Studies* Volume 62 (2014): 391-92.

²³⁹ Quoted in Duart Farquharson, “Vander Zalm has mandate but where is his agenda?” *Ottawa Citizen*, October 25, 1986.

²⁴⁰ Duart Farquharson, “Vander Zalm has mandate but where is his agenda?” *Ottawa Citizen*, October 25, 1986.

worldview in opposition to the secular neutrality of the modern liberal state also aligns with Jan-Werner Müller’s argument that populism represents an “exclusionary identity politics” that rejects pluralism.²⁴¹

Another populist component, following the Moffitt and Tormey formula, would be Vander Zalm’s display of what they call “bad manners”: breaking with the stuffy and established conventions of political legitimacy, such as “seriousness, earnestness, gravitas, intelligence, and sensitivity to the position of others” in favour of the “outsider’s” tendency towards “directness, playfulness” and “a certain disregard for hierarchy and tradition”.²⁴² Vander Zalm’s “messiness” signified humanity to the Sacred faithful; a reprieve from the incursion of Bill Bennett’s bland, bureaucratic modernity.

Tentative Steps: The 1988 GAIN Cut

After Vander Zalm took over the premiership in August 1986, the media-friendly “Vandermania” of the leadership campaign would soon be tempered by the complexities of actually holding office. On September 24, the now-incumbent Vander Zalm called a provincial election for October 22, asking for a mandate to “roll out the red carpet for business”.²⁴³ While Stan Persky notes that NDP leader Bob Skelly’s public awkwardness and lack of charisma was much-scrutinized, Skelly’s efforts to grapple with substantial issues and articulate a clear platform contrasted with the colourful, if vague musings of the premier. Nonetheless, the *Vancouver Sun*, in a “typical assessment”, framed the NDP

²⁴¹ Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 3.

²⁴² Moffitt and Tormey, “Rethinking Populism”, 392.

²⁴³ Quoted in Persky, *Fantasy Government*, 72.

programme as expensive and idealistic, endorsing Vander Zalm.²⁴⁴ Ultimately, Vander Zalm's election victory did not present a significant increase in the popular vote from the previous election, though Persky argues it may have recaptured support that might have been drifting due to unpopular Bennett policies.²⁴⁵

Despite the premier's leadership campaign assurances that he sought harmony with both business and labour, on April 2, 1987, the government introduced Bills 19 and 20. Bill 19 replaced the 1973 Labour Code with the Industrial Relations Act, under which an Industrial Relations Committee could intervene in any labour dispute deemed a threat to the "public interest", along with other measures which Stan Persky notes tended to increase the rights of employers at the expense of trade unions.²⁴⁶ Bill 20, the Teaching Profession Act, ostensibly gave teachers the right to organize into unions, while making membership in the British Columbia Teachers Federation no longer mandatory, forcing teachers to individually apply for union status, and placing control of professional development, certification, and teacher discipline in the hands of a new College of Teachers.²⁴⁷ Both bills provoked walk-offs and protests which in turn brought on some amendments, while an attempt by the attorney-general to ban future job action against Bill 19 was shot down in the courts.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ Persky, *Fantasy Government*, 85.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 86.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 103-4.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 104-5.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 115-16, 122-23.

In addition to the controversies courted by Vander Zalm's labour policies and social views, the first two years of his premiership would see the tarnishing of his campaign promises to bring transparency and accountability to government. The premier would draw accusations of favouritism when he was seen as having intervened on behalf of his longtime friend Peter Toigo during the bidding process for the Crown-owned site of Expo 86, a task that officially fell under the domain of economic development minister Grace McCarthy, who objected to the attempted interference of Toigo in the eventual sale to Hong Kong businessman Li Ka-shing.²⁴⁹ On August 4, 1988, the premier's principal secretary David Poole resigned, having created a rift between Vander Zalm and his caucus that brought on the resignation of party stalwart McCarthy, who had criticized Poole and other nonelected officials for interfering in her portfolio.²⁵⁰ The November revelation that Poole was being given a severance package in the \$175, 000 range brought renewed heat on the premier, who had been laying low since the summer.²⁵¹

An additional controversy would provide a cross-section of the differences and similarities between the neoliberal agenda of Bill Bennett's tenure and the populist pivot undertaken during the Vander Zalm era, with surrounding public discourse indicating the shaky ground on which the Social Credit project now stood. On November 1st, 1988, the government implemented an alteration to the province's Guaranteed Available Income for Need (GAIN) program: by changing the procedure for classifying recipients as "employable" or "unemployable", it would reduce income assistance by \$50 per month

²⁴⁹ Persky, *Fantasy Government*, 187-89.

²⁵⁰ Don Hauka, "Poole resigns to help premier", *Vancouver Province*, August 5, 1988.

²⁵¹ Persky, *Fantasy Government*, 216.

for approximately seven thousand families.²⁵² The cut arrived amid already-inadequate funding conditions: an annual review of 1988 by the nonprofit Social Policy and Research Council of British Columbia concluded that “current income assistance rates in B.C. are too low to sustain the physical well-being of the men, women, and children who are recipients”, let alone “the costs of participating in the daily life of a community”.²⁵³

In discussing the Ministry of Social Services and Housing’s plans for the 1988-89 fiscal year, Minister Claude Richmond brought up the recommendations of the report by a GAIN Action Committee which the Premier had appointed the previous October. Richmond assured the public that this committee included “representatives from the business community who were clearly sensitive to social policy concerns” and that “the GAIN action plan provides an excellent example of cooperation between government and the private sector in improving the delivery of services to those in need”.²⁵⁴ Emphasizing the role of the business community in crafting this policy was consistent with the continuing neoliberal impetus to increasingly hand the reins of social management to the private sector. At the same time, it appealed to the idealized image of the entrepreneur as moral exemplar, resonating with the Protestant work ethic model etched into the self-image of Vander Zalm’s populist base.

Richmond would also make the implicit suggestion that welfare recipients were choosing dependency and needed to be pushed out of it, aligning with a moralistic

²⁵² Michael Goldberg, *Regaining Dignity 1989: An Examination of Costs and the Adequacy of Income Assistance Rates (GAIN) in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia, 1989), 2.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, ii.

²⁵⁴ British Columbia, Debates of the Legislative Assembly, 12 April 1988 (Hon. Mr. Richmond, Social Credit Party). https://www.leg.bc.ca/documents-data/debate-transcripts/34th-parliament/2nd-session/34p_02s_880412a

interpretation of poverty. He framed the recommended changes as a boon to those who would be having their coverage reduced, as well as for the interests of the government, as they were “intended both to assist income assistance recipients towards independence and to streamline our system for better service and for increased monitoring and follow-up of recipients”.²⁵⁵ He went on to announce that, working from these recommendations, the government had decided to limit the designation of “unemployable”, to “situations involving the health of recipients or their dependents”, while “that of ‘handicapped’ will be reviewed periodically and will no longer be a lifetime designation”, all in the name of avoiding “inappropriate labels or disincentives to seeking financial independence”.²⁵⁶

Under the GAIN changes, single parents who were not working when their children turned fifteen weeks old could now be among those now designated “employable” and losing \$50 per month, while under the previous rules, they had been designated “unemployable” if they had two children under the age of twelve, or one child under seven months.²⁵⁷ The \$50 loss could make the difference in terms of paying rent for these parents; in Victoria, asking them to live on \$430 a month would bring them below the approximately \$470 needed to pay for the average one-bedroom basement suite.²⁵⁸

While Claude Richmond would generally be tasked with communicating the government’s position during the GAIN controversy, Vander Zalm had directed his

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Tim Harper, “Vander Zalm takes tough line: Harder time for the poor in B.C.”, *Toronto Star*, April 23, 1988.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

Christian moralism towards the welfare topic shortly after the announcement of the cut, at a mayor's prayer breakfast to members of the Christian Business Men's Committee of Trail.²⁵⁹ He argued that since the government could not provide everything that people asked for, if welfare recipients and women with unwanted pregnancies would turn to Jesus, they would be "much happier and their problems [would] be resolved much easier".²⁶⁰ In an interview after the breakfast, he opined that after months of meeting with different individuals and groups, he had determined that believers did not suffer as much as unbelievers. When asked if single mothers on welfare would find it easier if they sought help through belief in Christ, Vander Zalm expressed his view that "we'd all find it easier. We shouldn't just turn to God at time [sic] of trouble, obviously. It's there for us all the time and it's for free, it's available. It's something that doesn't cost (money) and all people can benefit by this tremendously".²⁶¹

Amongst the critical responses to these comments, NDP leader Mike Harcourt found them especially offensive in light of the recent GAIN cut, and accused Vander Zalm of "once again" missing "the whole point of a pluralistic society".²⁶² Jean Swanson of End Legislated Poverty saw the irony in the premier's avoidance of the aspects of Christianity that call for helping those living in poverty, while pointing out that not all British Columbians were Christians: "Some are Sikhs, some are Hindus, some are

²⁵⁹ Sarah Cox, "Turning to Christ will aid poor, Vander Zalm says", *Vancouver Sun*, April 18, 1988.

²⁶⁰ Quoted in Sarah Cox, "Turning to Christ will aid poor, Vander Zalm says", *Vancouver Sun*, April 18, 1988.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*

agnostics and some are atheists. Whether or not you believe in God, you still have to have enough money to live on”.²⁶³

In the same month, the government had introduced a \$20 million package of programs that Vander Zalm called “initiatives to strengthen the family”. These clearly sought to further his fight against abortion.²⁶⁴ They included a \$1.9 million advertising campaign that the premier said would “ensure that women who find themselves facing an unexpected pregnancy are as informed as possible about the options available to them”, plus homes for women “who require alternate living environments during pregnancy and following delivery”, increases to the infant care portion of the provincial daycare subsidy, and additional funds for counselling and support services for single mothers.²⁶⁵ These moves came on the heels of the government’s failed attempt to limit most public funding for abortions, while the government had also previously committed funds to a “family life education program” in schools, and a “tougher” family maintenance enforcement program.²⁶⁶ While extending the austerity doctrines of his predecessor in other areas, Vander Zalm could also lay claim to his trademark “human touch” and traditional Christian morality by reinforcing the nuclear family.

The contradictory relationship between the GAIN decision and Vander Zalm’s family initiative was not lost on critics. Even Betty Green, a general supporter as the president of the Vancouver Right to Life Society, called the changes to GAIN “totally

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Quoted in John Cruickshank, “B.C. allots \$20 million to boost family”, *Globe and Mail*, April 6, 1988.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ John Cruickshank, “B.C. allots \$20 million to boost family”, *Globe and Mail*, April 6, 1988.

reprehensible", though she reportedly suggested that the Premier had been led astray by bureaucrats who were trying to undermine the family policy.²⁶⁷ Meanwhile, NDP social services critic John Cashore argued that this was another case of the Premier's "messianic streak"; as with other policies, Vander Zalm's "personal morality" was the "common theme".²⁶⁸ Cashore asserted that the mothers were "not going to go out and work by being pushed", and that the government had to create "meaningful jobs", rather than making them "go out to the Okanagan to pick cherries for a few days and leave their children in nonexistent day-care spaces."²⁶⁹ For his part, Claude Richmond declared that taking people off of the "unemployable" list would free them from stigma and increase their self-esteem, asserting that this, too, was in the best interest of families, since "family relations are not strong when you're into your third generation of welfare".²⁷⁰

The irony of the two simultaneous policies was not lost on the media either, as the \$50 reduction's late October rollout drew near. A Vancouver *Province* editorial assailed the government's "'strengthen the family' program" as having "no basis in reality", having evolved from a "simple-minded, naïve view of complex sociological and economic phenomena", and having "more to do with abortions than families". The plan was accused of ignoring the "root causes of unwanted pregnancy", without recognizing "either the reality or the validity of shifting family constellations". Single mothers dealing with the \$50 monthly GAIN reduction could "only laugh (or cry) at corny TV ads

²⁶⁷ Quoted in Tim Harper, "Vander Zalm takes tough line: Harder time for the poor in B.C.", *Toronto Star*, April 23, 1988.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

portraying blissful nuclear family life”, while couples in faltering relationships could find a government counsellor, “provided the woman is pregnant”. The editorial pointed out that the decreased support came at a time when instances of the government taking children from their families had risen 30 percent from 1982 to 1986, despite a 5 percent drop in the child population of the province during that span; meanwhile, “Restraint” policies were estimated to have reduced family support services by half.²⁷¹

In early October, Claude Richmond sent out a letter to the editor in an attempt to stem the tide of criticism. He claimed that critics of the recent GAIN changes had lost sight of the government’s objective to break the “cycle of welfare dependency” by “providing the maximum incentives to independence”. He pointed out that “additional benefits and services” would be provided for those who had been reclassified, many of whom were “young, mobile, single, people”, and added that “after three months on GAIN”, those designated as employable could “more than make up” for the \$50 loss, with “babysitting jobs and casual and part-time work available”.²⁷²

Richmond was met with a quick rejoinder two days later from Garry Colley of the Vancouver Unemployment Action Centre, who disputed the minister’s claims of Ministry support for transportation and day care, and asserted that the training programs that Richmond had pointed to were “not there”, having been “steadily eroded over the last few years”, with those seeking to upgrade their education or training having to “either crawl and beg or scream or shout for the help”. With many of those being reclassified being “single parents with two children under 12”, he said, the loss of \$50 dollars would

²⁷¹ *Vancouver Province*, October 5, 1988.

²⁷² Claude Richmond, letter to the editor, *Vancouver Province*, October 4, 1988.

not help to break the welfare dependency cycle, but would simply “take food from the mouths of these children”, with all of this making the Ministry a “direct accessory to child abuse”.²⁷³

Vancouver mayoral candidate Jean Swanson and nine other members of End Legislated Poverty met Richmond in Victoria a week later, asking him to expand Vancouver’s elementary school lunch program and cancel the GAIN cutback.²⁷⁴ Child hunger and welfare funding were certainly not unrelated, though earlier that year, Vander Zalm courted backlash by claiming that “if any children are going to school hungry, they are not being looked after by their parents... I would expect that, although not always, but in the majority of cases”.²⁷⁵ Swanson reported that while Richmond had been “very polite in his words”, his actions continued to be “vicious”: the lunch program funding had been rejected, while he would “mull over” the cutbacks, once again suggesting that women babysit as an alternative.²⁷⁶ Swanson would note that babysitting was not a job protected by minimum wage standards, with few babysitters able to reach it.²⁷⁷ After the meeting, Richmond reportedly “bent” on some details to allow more women to remain “unemployable” but was adamant that the plan would remain in place, and made clear his opposition to offering welfare recipients more than they would receive from minimum

²⁷³ Garry Colley, letter to the editor, *Vancouver Province*, October 6, 1988.

²⁷⁴ Jean Kavanagh, “Minister rejects school lunch bid”, *Vancouver Sun*, October 14, 1988.

²⁷⁵ Quoted in “Vander Zalm's hungry kids remark called ignorant”, *Vancouver Sun*, May 12, 1988.

²⁷⁶ Quoted in Jean Kavanagh, “Minister rejects school lunch bid”, *Vancouver Sun*, October 14, 1988.

²⁷⁷ Barbara McLintock, “Welfare riddles remain”, *Vancouver Province*, October 16, 1988.

wage jobs.²⁷⁸ “I honestly think that one of the goals is to push women into low-paying jobs”, Swanson said of \$50 reduction.²⁷⁹

An estimated 20, 000 of the 40, 000 who had been designated as unemployable were reclassified, with many left scrambling to make up the difference.²⁸⁰ Meanwhile, the president of the B.C. Government Employees’ Union expressed concern that clerks working in social services or the housing ministry would be put danger while dealing with angry clients who had been affected by the cuts.²⁸¹ The anger was compounded with the government’s November announcement of an \$129 million surplus: “They are devastating the people of this province in order to make their books look good”, Swanson said.²⁸²

There was an outpouring of letters to the editor in newspapers following the introduction of the cut. Not all Christians agreed with Vander Zalm’s approach, as representatives from the Ecumenical Committee for Social Responsibility criticized the impact of the cut on mothers, as well as on handicapped people, who were additionally seeing medical coverage eliminated. They condemned a provincial welfare system that “degrades, punishes, entraps and disables further those unfortunate enough to need help”, and called on British Columbia to follow the lead of Ontario, whose Social Assistance Review Committee had held public hearings, visited communities, and received over

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Quoted in Barbara McLintock, “Welfare riddles remain”, *Vancouver Province*, October 16, 1988.

²⁸⁰ “Welfare cuts spark anger, confusion”, *Vancouver Sun*, October 27, 1988.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Quoted in Steve Berry, “Budget surplus called cruel”, *Vancouver Province*, November 27, 1988.

1, 500 submissions, leading to 274 recommendations to “make the welfare system more humane and equitable” that were now being implemented.²⁸³

Not all of the public responses were supportive of the welfare recipients, however. While letters and editorials in the major B.C. papers largely reflected disdain for the cut, seeing it as heartless, counterproductive, and out of touch with the hardships it would exacerbate, a vocal minority of letters aligned with the morally-rationalized economic individualism to which Vander Zalm’s populism appealed. A West Vancouver reader had little sympathy for those who “complain things are so bad they are having to give up their color TVs and so on”. He went on to describe the long hours his parents had worked when he was a child and questioned how “these people” could “complain about ‘their’ money or ‘their’ services being cut”, when it was “not theirs, but mine”. Frustrated that he had to work “hard at two jobs to get what I want”, and then see “blobs lying in the park or lined up outside the welfare office”, he said that “eventually there will be a taxpayer revolt and they’ll be in for a big surprise”.²⁸⁴ Another critical letter displayed the heterogeneous nature of Christian attitudes towards government interventions, responding to a December 6 *Province* editorial which had contrasted Vander Zalm’s “boasts” of his Christianity with the “humility, love, compassion, and tolerance” of Christ, and the government’s actual policies towards the poor.²⁸⁵ The letter writer from Sicamous asked “where on earth the idea ever came from that government is responsible for the welfare of the populace. Karl Marx, perhaps?”, and asserted instead that the

²⁸³ Rev. Barry Morris and Pam Cooley, letter to the editor, *Vancouver Province*, October 24, 1988.

²⁸⁴ Richard Kroeker, letter to the editor, *Vancouver Province*, December 13, 1988.

²⁸⁵ “Pious promises are not enough”, *Vancouver Province*, December 6, 1988.

people in the Bible had been “instructed to care for their own”, to ensure that they were not “beholden to any civil government, good or bad”.²⁸⁶

There were also suggestions that the majority of published views were disproportionate to the attitudes of British Columbian society at large. One Abbotsford reader wrote that while there were few areas in which they agreed with Social Credit, they were “sick and tired of hearing the minority complain” about the \$50 cut, opining that “welfare for the able-bodied is not supposed to be comfortable”.²⁸⁷ The reader’s reference to the complaints of a “minority” had some precedent in a national Gallup poll released on December 1, with 84 percent of Canadians and 75 percent of British Columbians reported to believe that welfare recipients should be forced to work. The same poll found that 35 percent of Canadians did not believe that welfare recipients needed the assistance, while 40 percent felt that governments spent too much on welfare.²⁸⁸

The stories of those who were actually affected by the cuts painted a compelling picture. In a letter to the *Province*, one parent described how the “so-called ‘work incentive program’”, had caused her to lose “the last bit of self-worth I had”, since she was already struggling to feed their children. As a result, she attempted suicide, after “internalizing my rage at the government for treating single parents so shabbily and for having so little regard for our children’s lives”. End Legislated Poverty would later put her in touch with a Legal Services Society lawyer who was interested in helping her fight

²⁸⁶ G. MacDonald, letter to the editor, *Vancouver Province*, December 13, 1988.

²⁸⁷ Byron O’Neill, letter to the editor, *Vancouver Province*, December 13, 1988.

²⁸⁸ “Welfare worries”, *Vancouver Province*, December 2, 1988.

the cutback and get her “own personal power back”.²⁸⁹ Among those who had been designated “employable”, End Legislated Poverty would receive a call from a hallucinating man who was diagnosed schizophrenic, while a woman suffering from depression, ulcers, and arthritis was told she was fit to work.²⁹⁰ While her doctor was willing to sign a form to declare her medically unable to work, the B.C. Medical Association noted that not all doctors knew their patients as well, making it “unrealistic” to ask them to determine that after as little as one visit.²⁹¹

The Vancouver Legal Aid Society had seen “phones ringing off the hook” with inquiries from those who had been reclassified; they were investigating provincial legislation to determine whether a case could be mounted on behalf of those affected.²⁹² End Legislative Poverty was receiving dozens of calls a day from those concerned about how they would cope; the organization suggested that reclassified individuals appeal the cut, even though the ministry was telling people there was no process for appeal.²⁹³ The public outcry would soon have an effect: on December 15, the government announced that the \$50 cut would be reversed for single parents starting in January. Claude Richmond acknowledged that “because of the public attention, the premier has asked us to complete a comprehensive review of the needs of single parents”, which had found that those parents were “experiencing considerable financial difficulty, particularly those

²⁸⁹ Anita Archambault, letter to the editor, *Vancouver Province*, October 18, 1988.

²⁹⁰ Greg Middleton, “Welfare job scheme ‘a blow’”, *Vancouver Province*, October 30, 1988.

²⁹¹ Quoted in Greg Middleton, “Welfare job scheme ‘a blow’”, *Vancouver Province*, October 30, 1988.

²⁹² Kim Bolan, “Welfare challenge considered: \$50 cutback is a hardship for many”, *Vancouver Sun*, October 29, 1988.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

with older children”.²⁹⁴ He would point out that despite the retraction of the cut, those whose children were over six months old and did not have medical issues would still be considered “employable”, and would be expected to actively seek work or job training.²⁹⁵ Even when retracting the cut, he was unrepentant in his moralistic notion of welfare as a lifestyle choice: “If we were to put our rates any higher, we would probably have thousands more people on welfare, because it wouldn’t pay them to stay employed, and we’d also probably have thousands more people moving to B.C.”²⁹⁶

Despite the relative relief this change of heart provided, there was still frustration that recipients had been put through the ordeal at all. The director of the Vancouver Food Bank called for an inquiry into “why these kinds of decisions are made without an investigation of the facts”.²⁹⁷ Pat Chauncey of the Child Poverty Action Committee noted that the reversal “brought rates back to one-half of the poverty level”, while Jean Swanson called it “a victory of sorts, given the times”, though single men and women were still suffering from the cutback.²⁹⁸ The editors of Victoria’s *Times Colonist* derided the government for its “persistent notion that the poor are deliberately poor, forever poised to forage at the public trough”,²⁹⁹ and called for Richmond to reimburse families

²⁹⁴ Quoted in Robert Sarti, “Feelings mixed over restored welfare cuts”, *Vancouver Sun*, December 16, 1988.

²⁹⁵ Les Leyne, “Socreds abandon \$50 welfare cut, elect to give 20, 000 payment boost”, *Times Colonist*, December 16, 1988.

²⁹⁶ Quoted in Les Leyne, “Socreds abandon \$50 welfare cut, elect to give 20, 000 payment boost”, *Times Colonist*, December 16, 1988.

²⁹⁷ Quoted in John Armstrong, “Food bank director demanding answers in appeal to premier for poverty probe”, *Vancouver Sun*, December 23, 1988.

²⁹⁸ Quoted in Robert Sarti, “Feelings mixed over restored welfare cuts”, *Vancouver Sun*, December 16, 1988.

²⁹⁹ *Times Colonist*, December 19, 1988.

for the \$100 dollars that had been “withheld under the inane justification that even more dire straits would act as some incentive to self-reliance”.³⁰⁰

Conclusion: Hegemony in Crisis?

The reversal of the GAIN reduction for single parents was not only consistent with the broader populist trend of Vander Zalm’s policy tendencies, but was also a microcosm of the Premier’s position within the province’s ideological landscape. As Patrick J. Smith notes, a regular feature of Vander Zalm’s tenure was his government’s “policy gambling”, wherein unpredictable policy decisions, often with little consistent vision or foresight into outcomes, were hastily-enacted and often quickly reversed.³⁰¹ The \$50 cut, enacted with seemingly little consultation with actual poverty experts, provided another example, contrasting with the more systematic and ambitious neoliberal rollout that was “Restraint”. Vander Zalm’s rhetoric around it fluctuated between condemnations of laziness and calls for the poor to turn to Christ, while Claude Richmond masked moral judgements in more euphemistic, neoliberal talking points, framing the cut as a way to assist the poor out of a cycle of dependency. This lack of consistency displayed the built-in weaknesses that the party had contracted by undergoing its mid-eighties shift back to populism: neoliberalism had been diluted.

Long-time Social Credit activists, alienated by Bennett’s modernization of the party, were lured by Vander Zalm’s supposed alternative. At the same time, the shift to moralistic rhetoric was bound to alienate some of the more socially-liberal contingent that

³⁰⁰ *Time Colonist*, December 21, 1988.

³⁰¹ Patrick J. Smith, “Labour Markets and Neo-conservative Policy in British Columbia, 1986-1991”, in *Continuities and Discontinuities: The Political Economy of Social Welfare and Labour Market Policy in Canada*, eds. Andrew F. Johnson, Stephen McBride, and Patrick J. Smith, 291-305 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 292-93, 300.

had grafted itself onto the party during the formation of the “anti-socialist” coalition in the mid-seventies. When Vander Zalm crafted an image that relied on upholding a particular form of religiously-derived morality, his welfare policies were exposed to charges of hypocrisy that a government with a more secular image might not have faced. The haste with which the government backtracked on the GAIN cut suggests a concern on the part of the government that there could be political consequences for pushing the disciplining of the poor too far. While polling on contemporary attitudes suggested significant popular support for the tightening of the welfare purse, this contrasted with the more oppositional attitudes expressed in the majority of responses published in the province’s major newspapers. Social Credit’s hegemony had grown precarious, with the party machine taking a back seat to the image and impulses of one man; this made it more difficult for the government to keep its head down and weather the contradictions exposed by public reactions. While Vander Zalm was initially able to configure a support base within the complex makeup of the party membership, this balance was more difficult to maintain amongst the general populace.

Nonetheless, for all the controversy that Vander Zalm’s social policy had attracted, it was ultimately a business scandal that would bring the curtain down on the Social Credit era. The premier was caught participating in the sale of his Fantasy Gardens to Taiwanese billionaire Tan Yu while simultaneously offering to help him establish business in the province, violating the government’s own conflict-of-interest guidelines. His 1991 resignation over the controversy followed those of several other Social Credit ministers over conflicts-of-interest since 1986.³⁰² He would eventually be acquitted of the

³⁰² Michael Bernard, “Business, labor disagree over Vander Zalm resignation”, *Ottawa Citizen*, April 3, 1991.

charge of breach of trust; the judge ruled that while the former premier's actions may have been "foolish" and "ill-advised", they could not be considered a criminal offence.³⁰³ By this point, Vander Zalm's replacement, Rita Johnston, had already lost the 1991 provincial election to the NDP.

That election resulted in the decimation of Social Credit, as it fell from 47 to seven seats. The Liberals, meanwhile, would rise from having no seats in the previous legislature to standing as the official opposition with 17. While Donald E. Blake and R. Kenneth Carty acknowledge that vote splitting between Social Credit and the Liberals was one factor in producing the NDP's 51-seat majority (the NDP's vote share had actually declined from 1986), they also point to struggles within Social Credit leading up to Vander Zalm's resignation and the "bitter battle to succeed him".³⁰⁴ This was compounded by Liberal leader Gordon Wilson's well-received showing in the televised leader's debate, and the NDP's shift to a more moderate image during four years of Mike Harcourt's leadership.³⁰⁵ The improved images of both the NDP and the BC Liberals made it easier for former Social Credit supporters who were not entrenched in the grassroots to abandon ship for the latter.

This confluence of external factors, combined with the culmination of Social Credit's slow-motion collapse, placed the status of British Columbian political hegemony into question. In the immediate aftermath of the 1991 election, The *Vancouver Sun's* Keith Baldry noted that the Social Credit dynasty had been "a coalition that was formed

³⁰³ Quoted in Greg Joyce, "Vander Zalm ruled foolish, but innocent", *Toronto Star*, June 26, 1992.

³⁰⁴ Donald E. Blake and R. Kenneth Carty, "Partisan Realignment in British Columbia: The Case of the Provincial Liberal Party", *BC Studies* Number 108 (Winter 1995-96): 63.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 63-64.

essentially to keep the NDP out of power”, and wondered whether the new “so-called ‘free enterprise’ coalition” would “now revolve around the Liberal party”, or if Social Credit would “regroup and rebuild —as the party did successfully following its 1972 defeat”.³⁰⁶ The previous status quo had perhaps been too emboldened by its own success, before ultimately retreating from the sweeping programmes of Restraint and political modernization into the more familiar embrace of populist moralism. As an international project, however, the onward march of neoliberalism had not been stalled, though certain strands of it would be rebranded under the “Third Way” rhetoric of the Clintons and Blairs of the 1990s. It remained to be seen how British Columbian politics would reintegrate into the grid.

³⁰⁶ Keith Baldry, “Social Credit rule ends; Liberals in from the cold” *Vancouver Sun*, October 18, 1991.

Chapter 3

A New Fundamentalism: The Campbell Budgetary Regime

Though the 1991 provincial election brought an end to Social Credit's four-decade run as British Columbia's dominant party, the arrival of an NDP government was not necessarily heralded as a political paradigm shift. In an analysis of electoral narratives in the B.C. media, Matthew Mendelsohn notes that media discourse was not centred around a mandate for social democratic policies; instead the results were portrayed as a Socred loss rather than an NDP win.³⁰⁷ Despite the optimism of supporters, this image of a placeholder government, not elected on its own merits, but rather as the side effect of a population's dissatisfaction with the previous regime, foreshadowed challenges that the NDP would face throughout its decade-long tenure in proving its legitimacy to business interests and the media. Despite the formal dissolution of Social Credit, the socioeconomic forces behind its success had not been supplanted, and would soon find a new vehicle in the BC Liberal party. The latter party's landslide victory in the May 16, 2001 election announced the new B.C. government's ideological realignment with the prevailing neoliberal winds.

Under Gordon Campbell's leadership, the Liberals had cultivated the image of a business-friendly, fiscally responsible alternative to a supposedly inept NDP. With their "New Era" election platform, the Liberals promised to lower taxes, presenting themselves

³⁰⁷ Matthew Mendelsohn, "The Construction of Electoral Mandates: Media Coverage of Election Results in Canada", *Political Communication* Volume 15 Issue 2 (1998): 247.

as an alternative to “big government” interference,³⁰⁸ and upon reaching office, they portrayed their inherited surplus as a deficit.³⁰⁹ When their swift post-election introduction of extensive tax cuts failed to produce growth, in January 2002 the government announced that 30 percent (\$581 million) would be cut from the Ministry of Human Resources over the next three years; these would include welfare benefit cuts and stringent eligibility rules that included time limits.³¹⁰ Campbell’s government was able to further “discipline” the working class and poor in an environment where neoliberalism had been entrenched over 20 years, with the traditional welfare state in retreat and austerity policies becoming more normalized. As Margaret Little and Lynne Marks note, B.C. welfare policies in the early 2000s took a less moralistic tone than under the contemporary workfare model employed in Ontario, being perhaps an outgrowth of the former province’s relative secularism.³¹¹ At the same time, the BC Liberals made overtures to a few more socially-liberal policies, like environmental protection and a carbon tax. By emphasizing a fiscal conservatism that could hold appeal cross-culturally, the BC Liberals were better equipped to harness the neoliberal winds than Bill Vander Zalm, with his exclusionary religious rhetoric, had been.

³⁰⁸ J.R. Lacharite, “Tax Policy in British Columbia from 2001 to 2011: Too Progressive, Too Regressive, or Just the Right Mix?”, in *The Campbell Revolution?: Power, Politics, and Policy in British Columbia*, eds. J.R. Lacharite and Tracy Summerville (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2017), 108.

³⁰⁹ Will McMartin, “Fiscal Fictions”, in *Liberalized: The Tyee Report on British Columbia under Gordon Campbell’s Liberals*, ed. David Beers (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2005), 120.

³¹⁰ Seth Klein and Andrea Long, *A Bad Time to be Poor: An Analysis of British Columbia’s New Welfare Policies* (Vancouver: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2003), 4.
<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/bad-time-be-poor>

³¹¹ Margaret Little and Lynne Marks, “A Closer Look at the Neo-Liberal Petri Dish: Welfare Reform in British Columbia and Ontario”, *Canadian Review of Social Policy/Revue canadienne de politique sociale* Number 57 (2006): 18-19.

Operating in a historical context where the range of acceptable policy positions had been narrowed, the Campbell government's welfare policy was a manifestation of a market fundamentalism which placed a secular faith in the inherent good of a balanced budget. An analysis of the rhetoric and image-management employed during the early Campbell-era welfare cuts reveals that while a degree of populist and moralistic discourse was still in play, the government took on a much more clinical, distant, and impersonal form of self-presentation in this period, with justifications couched in managerial language. Accompanied by parallel attempts to stifle watchdogs, access to data, legal aid, and advocacy services,³¹² this "neutralization" of the issue placed the BC Liberals within broader neoliberal attempts to draw a veil over economic inequality (along both class and gender lines) as a terrain of struggle, while appropriating other progressive discourses that both appealed to middle-class sensibilities and did not immediately threaten capital. Despite the electoral dominance that empowered the Liberals' austerity policies, opposition from activists, religious groups, academics, and individual citizens challenged the government's control of the moral narrative surrounding welfare cuts, successfully pressuring them to abandon some of their more extreme measures.³¹³

The NDP Years: Hegemony on Hiatus

Mendelsohn observes a contrast in the degrees of agency that commentators had granted to the winners of the 1987 and 1991 elections. Vander Zalm's 1987 victory was

³¹² Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag, "Downsizing Equality, 2001-11: The Best Place on Earth for Whom?", in *The Campbell Revolution? Power, Politics, and Policy in British Columbia* eds. J.R. Lacharite, and Tracy Summerville (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2017), 171-172.

³¹³ Marge Reitsma-Street and Bruce Wallace, "Resisting Two-Year Limits on Welfare in British Columbia" *Canadian Review of Social Policy* 53 (Spring/Summer 2004): 173.

framed as the result of his outsized personality: the absence of a substantial platform making it a “personal mandate” as opposed to one largely connected to policy. In contrast, while the NDP’s 1991 campaign had been built around contrasting the image of an honest, competent leader in Mike Harcourt with the ethical controversies surrounding Vander Zalm, its win was essentially portrayed by the media as a protest vote rather than an earned mandate, which “constricted its ability to pursue its agenda”.³¹⁴ Building on interviews with key participants in the NDP governments of the 1990s, William K. Carroll and R.S. Ratner observe that the party lacked room to manoeuvre within the existing systemic structure, and as a result, “no clear, durable, tendency towards social democratization” could be entrenched to outlast them.³¹⁵

For the first time in sixteen years, the NDP were not a critical voice representing activists, but rather the authority to be critiqued. Carroll and Ratner note that as many prominent activists “disappeared into the state”, the corporate-owned news media, which was already “highly-sympathetic” to the private sector, turned to feature “business” voices as the “dominant oppositional current”, despite the challenges that social movements were still experiencing while negotiating the bureaucratic apparatus.³¹⁶ Put on the defensive, the government turned to contemporary state and corporate tactics of image management and spin, which tended to further distance them from their erstwhile allies.³¹⁷ Meanwhile, ever attempting to project moderation, NDP premier Mike Harcourt

³¹⁴ Mendelsohn, 246-247.

³¹⁵ William K. Carroll and R.S. Ratner, “The NDP Regime in British Columbia, 1991-2001: A Post-Mortem”, *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* Volume 42, Number 2 (May 2005): 171-172.

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, 175-176.

³¹⁷ *Ibid*, 176.

made overtures to include business in policy decisions, but relations never warmed, with proposals reportedly agreed upon in private sometimes being criticized by business leaders in the press the next day.³¹⁸

The NDP of the 1990s was operating within a more restricted political milieu than its predecessor government of two decades prior. While Katherine Teghtsoonian notes that the NDP did pursue social assistance policies that were consistent with its traditional social democratic identity, she adds that early achievements in this area were followed by directions which were “more reflective of neo-liberal orientations and commitments”.³¹⁹ Early in the Harcourt premiership, with Joan Smallwood as Minister of Social Services, the government made changes to the earnings exemption and the asset exemption, increasing the amount of income recipients could keep before government deductions and the assets an individual could hold while still being eligible for social assistance. They also removed the rule requiring single parents to be in training or a job search to receive assistance.³²⁰ Teghtsoonian notes that the shift towards neoliberal traits intensified after the 1996 election, which coincided with federal cuts to the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST), but the shift was also evident towards the end of Harcourt’s tenure, as Joy MacPhail took over Social Services.³²¹ BC Benefits, passed into law in July of 1996, were enacted by Glen Clark’s government based on recommendations made by The

³¹⁸ Ibid, 182.

³¹⁹ Katherine Teghtsoonian, “Social Policy in Neo-liberal Times”, in *British Columbia Politics and Government* eds. Michael Howlett, Dennis Pilon, and Tracy Summerville (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2010), 315.

³²⁰ Ibid, 313.

³²¹ Ibid, 315.

Premier's Forum on New Opportunities for Working and Living, appointed by Harcourt in 1993 to review provincial social programs. Under these reforms to social assistance, eligibility requirements were made more strict, while mandatory job training was now required for those recipients deemed "employable", which now included single parents with children who were seven or older. Meanwhile, monthly amounts were reduced for "employable" recipients without children.³²²

The NDP's mixed record on social assistance took place at a time when mainstream discourses on poverty were trending rightward. Vancouver anti-poverty activist Jean Swanson suggests that while "poor-bashing was around before the media assault of the 1990s", by this time, the media's coverage "made poor-bashing acceptable to many Canadians who then did it themselves", and "members of the NDP, who in the past had stuck up for the poor, were no exception".³²³ As early as 1993, Harcourt was discussing the topic of welfare fraud with the press, assuring that his government wanted to "clear the cheats and the deadbeats off of the welfare rolls".³²⁴ The NDP appeared to be following the lead of other traditionally liberal or social democratic parties in the western hemisphere; the wilderness years of the 1980s increasingly encouraged the adoption of some traditionally right-wing talking points and economic policies in the name of electoral "pragmatism". In the United States, Bill Clinton and the centrist "New Democrats" were taking the lead in this regard. Facing a deficit, budget cutbacks were

³²² Ibid, 316.

³²³ Jean Swanson, *Poor-Bashing: The Politics of Exclusion* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2001), 100.

³²⁴ Quoted in Justine Hunter, "Harcourt takes aim at welfare 'deadbeats'", *Vancouver Sun*, September 22, 1993.

implemented in the name of low interest rates³²⁵, and in 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act was introduced as a compromise with a Republican-controlled Congress, implementing a five-year welfare time limit for single parents and restricting Food Stamp access.³²⁶

Within their own situation in B.C., the NDP struggled to fulfill the role of a social democratic party while navigating the gravitational pull of the province's hegemonic interests. Carroll and Ratner note that the political pressures faced by NDP ministries dealing directly with industry and finance were disproportionate to those such as Human Resources who dealt with a socioeconomically-disempowered clientele, inevitably skewing bureaucratic priorities: with "fiscal discipline radiating from Finance", welfare policy shifted from seeing clients as "citizens with needs and rights", to seeing them as a drain on tax funds to be minimized.³²⁷ A counterproductive siege mentality developed within the NDP government as it faced criticism from not only the private sector and press, but also the social movements who were dissatisfied with the government's shift to a politics of deal-brokering with interest groups over open communication.³²⁸ The government was also struck by successive leadership controversies, with Harcourt announcing his resignation in 1995 in response to criticism of his handling of a scandal involving a former MLA, misuse of party funds, and the NDP Nanaimo Commonwealth

³²⁵ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 51.

³²⁶ Brendon O'Connor, "Policies, Principles, and Polls: Bill Clinton's Third Way Welfare Politics 1992-1996" *Australian Journal of Politics and History* Volume 41, Number 3 (2002): 396.

³²⁷ Carroll and Ratner, 183.

³²⁸ *Ibid*, 191.

Holding Society,³²⁹ and his successor Glen Clark resigning in 1999 amid accusations of providing a lottery license kickback to a neighbor, a charge for which he was later acquitted.³³⁰

The government would wrap up their tenure in this hostile environment, where their legitimacy was further damaged by a 1996 election where they failed to win the popular vote and the disclosure shortly after the election that a previously-claimed budget surplus was actually a deficit.³³¹ Meanwhile, after leading the Liberals to official opposition status following Social Credit's collapse, Gordon Wilson would submit to a leadership convention in 1993 in response to growing rebellion within the party and friction with key members of the business sector, who had nonetheless been increasingly jumping ship from the discredited Socreds to his Liberals, as the main opposition to the NDP.³³² As leader, Wilson's liberalism was better aligned with the its common connotations than the ideological position his party would soon adopt. He had roots in the 1983 Solidarity movement, but moved to the BC Liberals due to concerns about the power of labour unions, and would promote his party as a moderate alternative to the province's political polarization during the 1991 election. Soon afterwards, his opposition to the Charlottetown accord would alienate members of the business community who

³²⁹ Stephen Phillips, "Party Politics in British Columbia: The Persistence of Polarization", in *British Columbia Politics and Government* eds. Michael Howlett, Dennis Pilon, and Tracy Summerville (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2010), 118.

³³⁰ Neil Hall, "Clark cleared: 'Act of folly', but not criminal behavior", *Vancouver Sun*, August 30, 2002.

³³¹ Phillips, "Party Politics" 118.

³³² *Ibid*, 116-117.

supported the “Yes” campaign of its accompanying 1992 referendum.³³³ Gordon Campbell, in the midst of his third term as mayor of Vancouver, would be Wilson’s main challenger, bringing a sophisticated campaign machine supported by both Socred and federal Liberal organizers that took advantage of the party’s shift from a delegate-based voting system to a one-member-one-vote approach by recruiting supportive new party members.³³⁴ Donald E. Blake and R. Kenneth Carty note that many of the new recruits who voted in the leadership race were also Socreds, and held more conservative policy views than Wilson.³³⁵

Campbell’s leadership victory consolidated the transformation of the party, with his time in municipal politics as a member of the centre-right Non-Partisan Association in Vancouver presaging his eventual approach to provincial politics. Kevin Ginnell notes that Campbell’s tenure at city hall included budget cuts, confrontations with labour, and the implementation of “policies favourable to capital”, along with “an attention to rationalizing systems and improving accountability mechanisms” that was “relentless” in his earlier period before his focus turned to “legacy and more macro-related issues”.³³⁶ At the same time, he made some efforts on more progressive issues, including addressing the AIDS epidemic and environmental issues.³³⁷ Campbell, with his ability to be

³³³ Phillips, “Party Politics”, 116.

³³⁴ Ibid, 117.

³³⁵ Donald E. Blake and R. Kenneth Carty, “Partisan Realignment: The Case of the Provincial Liberal Party”, *BC Studies* Number 108 (Winter 1995-1996): 67-68.

³³⁶ Kevin Ginnell, “Charting Gordon Campbell’s Rise to the Top: The Pragmatic Mayor and the Politics of ‘Efficiency’?”, in *The Campbell Revolution? Power, Politics, and Policy in British Columbia*, eds. J.R. Lacharite, and Tracy Summerville (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2017), 34-35.

³³⁷ Ibid, 34.

ideologically flexible on certain social issues while adhering to fiscal discipline, was an astute political operator who had been rising steadily and learning the mechanics of consolidating power: Ginnell observes that he “rarely lost a political battle”.³³⁸ This image stands in stark contrast to the Vander Zalm approach that had temporarily saved and ultimately sunk the Liberals’ predecessor pro-business party, with the former premier’s showy but often-insubstantial proclamations and chaotic policies suggesting a weaker grasp of the mechanics of governance and long-term political strategy.

After a withering barrage of criticism in the media, the NDP entered the 2001 election campaign behind in the polls, under the leadership of Ujjal Dosanjh after a brief interim period with Dan Miller as premier. Though Dosanjh, as the party’s fourth premier in ten years, attempted to placate critics by introducing a balanced budget law, his party was still trailing as the election neared, despite warning (correctly, as it turned out) of the harm that would result from the Liberals’ tax cut promises.³³⁹ *A New Era for British Columbia*, the BC Liberal campaign platform, gave clear indications of the party’s ideological position, while unsurprisingly leaving out the more painful side effects of its objectives. The plan promised to “cut the base personal income tax rate to the lowest level in Canada for the bottom two income brackets” without making cuts to healthcare or education, assuring voters that “when income tax rates are cut, tax revenues go up over time as the economy grows”.³⁴⁰ Attacking the NDP’s “decade of incompetence”, the document pointed to “8 consecutive deficits” under the incumbent government, and a

³³⁸ Ibid, 35.

³³⁹ Phillips, “Party Politics”, 120-121.

³⁴⁰ BC Liberal Party, *A New Era for British Columbia: A Vision for Hope and Prosperity for the Next Decade and Beyond* (N.p.: N.p., 2001), 5.

doubling of the debt from “\$17 billion to almost \$35 billion” since 1991³⁴¹ (though notably, it was later revealed that the Liberals in fact inherited a \$1.5 billion dollar surplus,³⁴² while they would increase the debt to \$66.7 billion by the end of fiscal year 2017).³⁴³

Forebodingly for the labour movement, the Liberals euphemistically argued that in order to “compete and prosper in the new economy, workers and employers alike need more flexibility”, promising that “Our New Era is about liberating our economy and minimizing undue government intervention in people’s lives”.³⁴⁴ Meanwhile, references to welfare or social assistance were not to be found in *A New Era*, perhaps reflecting the relatively-affluent gaze for which the document was intended. The language of “liberation” and the narratives of NDP ineptitude would ultimately win out, as the Liberals cruised to a majority that was unprecedented in the history of the province, taking 77 of 79 seats (despite, in another display of the flaws of the voting system, winning 58 percent of the popular vote).³⁴⁵ In his analysis of voter migration, Werner Antweiler observes that the Liberals’ unprecedented majority involved few gains among previous NDP voters: from supporters in the 1996 election, the NDP “retained less than 40 percent core support”, while 13 percent went to the Green Party and 36 percent

³⁴¹ Ibid, 7.

³⁴² Will McMartin, “Campbell Misled Public on NDP Finances”, *The Tyee*, April 20, 2005. <https://thetyee.ca/Views/2005/04/20/CampbellMisledPublic/>

³⁴³ Andrew MacLeod, “Running on ‘Debt Free BC’ Slogan, Clark’s Liberals Added \$10.85 Billion to Debt in Four Years”, *The Tyee*, April 13, 2017. <https://thetyee.ca/News/2017/04/13/Clark-Debt-Free-BC/>

³⁴⁴ BC Liberal Party, 11.

³⁴⁵ Lynda Erickson, “Electoral Behavior in British Columbia”, in *British Columbia Politics and Government*, eds. Michael Howlett, Dennis Pilon, and Tracy Summerville (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2010), 137.

“drifted into non-votes”.³⁴⁶ As the “New Era” began, British Columbia had essentially become a one-party province, as the NDP had failed to meet the seat threshold for official party status. The Liberals had legislative *carte blanche* to pursue their mandate.

Early Upheavals: The Balanced Budget Doctrine

The NDP government had been unable to overcome entrenched ideological and institutional barriers to the expansion of the welfare state, let alone to planting firm roots for a genuinely social democratic policy. Nonetheless, in the narrative of the Liberals and the interests they represented, the ouster was akin to a hanging cloud dissipating from the economy. Shortly after taking office, the Liberals announced that they would be following through on an election promise by introducing a dramatic cut to the provincial portion of personal income taxes. Finance Minister Gary Collins declared that “today’s announcement puts the rest of the country and the rest of the world on notice that British Columbia is competitive again — we are open for business”, while Campbell asserted that “any plan to restore hope and prosperity to British Columbia... must show people in this province that if they are willing to work hard they can get ahead”.³⁴⁷ A near-25 percent decrease over the next two years, the cut would affect all tax brackets, upon full implementation giving British Columbia Canada’s second-lowest marginal tax rate after Alberta.³⁴⁸

While treasury officials predicted that the cuts would set the previous March’s budget back by \$1 billion, the premier predicted that the stimulus produced would

³⁴⁶ Werner Antweiler, “Estimating voter migration in Canada using generalized maximum entropy” *Electoral Studies* 26 (2007): 761.

³⁴⁷ Quoted in Craig McInnis, “Campbell delivers on dramatic tax cuts” *Vancouver Sun*, September 7, 2001.

³⁴⁸ Craig McInnes, “Campbell delivers on dramatic tax cuts” *Vancouver Sun*, June 7, 2001.

counter this, with citizens putting their untaxed income back into their community, creating “more jobs, more opportunities and a healthier economic environment”.³⁴⁹

Notably, the move contradicted a previous promise to conduct an audit of the province’s financial situation prior to cutting personal income taxes: Will McMartin observes that this fact was “ignored by the news media and the pundits”.³⁵⁰ On July 30, the government introduced another bundle of dramatic tax cuts, this time for businesses. These would boost the annual loss to over \$2.1 billion; on the same day, the Finance Minister announced a year-over-year spending increase of \$2.3 billion, amounting to a 12.1 percent increase from the previous fiscal year.³⁵¹

The expectation that tax money saved would be reinvested into the economy and translate into growth aligned with the neoliberal ideal of freedom being rooted in economic voluntarism. The stakes surrounding the outcome of the tax cuts were high, as the other pillar of the Liberals’ attempt to differentiate themselves from the NDP was their drive to project “accountability”. To that end, it was quickly announced that the premier and other cabinet members would have 20 percent of their ministerial stipends withheld each year until annual audits had been completed; ministers would receive the amount back if they met the budgetary and service goals set out in “service plans”, while the other half would be returned if the government met its overall goals for the year. The NDP government had introduced a similar policy for ministers as part of balanced budget

³⁴⁹ Quoted in Craig McInnis, “Campbell delivers on dramatic tax cuts” *Vancouver Sun*, June 7, 2001.

³⁵⁰ McMartin, “Fiscal Fictions”, 144.

³⁵¹ *Ibid*, 148.

legislation, but were defeated before it could be applied.³⁵²

The Liberals' radical restructuring of ministries conveyed the image of a reckoning being brought upon the legacy of their supposedly-inept and profligate predecessors. About 200 government employees, of whom around half had been NDP appointments, were fired almost immediately, while many dedicated portfolios, including women's equality, aboriginal affairs, the environment, multiculturalism, and social housing, were lost.³⁵³ At the same time, the cabinet was expanded; framed as a move towards greater accountability, the new, more numerous ministries reflected new priorities: there were now portfolios for "deregulation" and "competition".³⁵⁴ Joy MacPhail, one of the two remaining NDP voices in the legislature along with Jenny Kwan, expressed concern that "by far the largest and most expensive cabinet in British Columbia history" had ensured that "the corporate interest has great and multiple levels of representation at the cabinet table", while "seniors, youths, people who care about human rights, people who care about making sure our multicultural diversity is represented, are left out".³⁵⁵

While the Liberals' original campaign promise had been to cut the bottom two tax brackets, the eventual personal income tax cut would disproportionately benefit higher earners, with a Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives study finding that in 2001, those

³⁵² Craig McInnes, "Campbell's cabinet will forfeit pay if they don't meet government goals", *Vancouver Sun*, June 5, 2001.

³⁵³ Jim Beatty, "The province's new Liberal government aims to improve accountability, access" *Vancouver Sun*, June 6, 2001.

³⁵⁴ Craig McInnes, "27-member cabinet biggest in B.C. history", *Vancouver Sun*, June 6, 2001.

³⁵⁵ Quoted in Jim Beatty, "The province's new Liberal government aims to improve accountability, access" *Vancouver Sun*, June 6, 2001.

with a single individual gross income of \$10, 000 would save \$45, or 0.03 percent of their income, while those making \$150, 000 would save \$ 4, 985, or 3.3 percent.³⁵⁶ Because women as a whole earned less than men, their savings were also relatively less; in the case of seniors, factoring in the fact that many did not make enough to pay income taxes, most were calculated to receive cuts of less than a hundred dollars.³⁵⁷ Rather than paying for themselves, the cuts led to what the report called “cost shifting”, wherein costs were ultimately transferred “off of the government books and onto individuals, families, and in some cases employers” as the government scrambled to fill the “large hole in revenues caused by the tax cuts”.³⁵⁸ One form of compensation for this was to offset the decreased income tax revenues by increasing other fees: this included adding to sales taxes and hiking MSP premiums by 50 percent,³⁵⁹ both of which would hit the wallets of lower income earners proportionally harder.

In addition to replacing revenues, the government would advocate other approaches to compensate for their radical moves. After previously backtracking on the growth goals of 2.2 percent for the current fiscal year and 3.8 percent for the next, Gary Collins admitted on September 12 that the province was “facing some significant economic and fiscal challenges” and that the situation was “much worse than people

³⁵⁶ Sylvia Fuller and Lindsay Stephens, *Cost Shift: How British Columbians are paying for their tax cut* (Vancouver: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2002), 9.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

thought it would be two or three months ago”.³⁶⁰ On September 13, Collins announced that the provincial deficit was now nearing \$2 billion, with provincial debt expected to increase by over \$3 billion by the end of the fiscal year. Meanwhile, legislation passed that summer meant that the government had to bring in a balanced budget by the 2004-2005 fiscal year.³⁶¹ By October, Collins was bracing his colleagues for severe departmental cuts, and admitting that the government was not “forecasting big growth in revenues in any way, shape or form”.³⁶²

Though the September 11 attacks triggered an unforeseeable economic downturn, the economy had already been sluggish, and the government had been warned by mainstream business commentators of the recklessness of its actions. Economist David Bond, who had criticized the Liberals’ plans in January, was in fact also critical of the situation that had been inherited from the NDP, but argued in the *National Post* in August that the approach of “dramatic tax cuts and nothing else” had “a very high risk of failure”.³⁶³ After calling the NDP era “a decade of fudge-it budgets and other foolishness”, Bruce Little added in the *Globe and Mail* that there was no “strong dose of economic realism” on the horizon for British Columbia.³⁶⁴ Pointing out that tax cuts could not offset the “easily predictable” U.S. levies on B.C. softwood lumber exports,

³⁶⁰ Quoted in Vaughn Palmer, “B.C. has huge economic stake in blast aftermath”, *Vancouver Sun*, September 13, 2001.

³⁶¹ Craig McInnes, “B.C.s’ deficit balloons to almost 2 billion”, *Vancouver Sun*, September 14, 2001.

³⁶² Quoted in Will McMartin, “Fiscal Fictions”, in *Liberalized: The Tye Report on British Columbia under Gordon Campbell’s Liberals*, ed. David Beers (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2005), 152.

³⁶³ David Bond, “Tax cuts won’t do the trick: The B.C. Liberals are placing their hopes for an economic turnaround on dramatic cuts to corporate and personal income taxes. It isn’t enough.”, *National Post*, August 8, 2001.

³⁶⁴ Bruce Little, “B.C. economic forecast nothing but sheer fantasy”, *Globe and Mail*, August 16, 2001.

Little observed that with all the attention “paid to the tax cuts (planned and announced), spending and service cuts (obviously planned, but not announced)... this vapid forecast for the entire economy has escaped even rudimentary scrutiny”, perhaps because the business community was “just so relieved to be rid of the New Democrats”.³⁶⁵

On January 17, 2002, the rumblings of drastic measures were made official, with at least 11, 700 public sector jobs to be eliminated over the next three years, along with an average of 25 percent being cut from government services, even reaching upwards of 50 percent in some ministries. This would be coupled with new fees for many remaining services and private sector partnerships for service delivery.³⁶⁶ Campbell insisted that the restructuring was the “reasonable” and “right thing to do”, pinning the deficit on the NDP when he rationalized that “government spending has increased far beyond our rate of growth in the last decade and is simply not sustainable”.³⁶⁷ Analyzing what lay ahead for the province, political scientist Norman Ruff ominously suggested that the restructuring “in some respect... turns back government 30 or 40 years in the reduction of public services” and as a result, the provincial government would be “a less significant focus in our lives”, with people “thrown back on their own resources as individuals and as families”.³⁶⁸

January would close out with further upheavals, with the government introducing

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Craig McInnes and Jim Beatty, “The new BC: Big government out, individual responsibility in”, *Vancouver Sun*, January 18, 2002.

³⁶⁷ Quoted in Craig McInnes and Jim Beatty, “The new BC: Big government out, individual responsibility in”, *Vancouver Sun*, January 18, 2002.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

dramatic legislative measures reopening contracts for major public employee sectors. Bill 29, the *Health and Social Services Delivery Improvement Act*, repealed existing collective agreements in healthcare while removing provisions for employment security and rescinding clauses protecting employees from being contracted out; within the year, more than 6,500 Hospital Employees' Union (HEU) and BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU) workers would be laid off by regional health authorities.³⁶⁹ After the legislation was pushed through late in the preceding evening, the *Vancouver Sun* reported "virtually every health care service that doesn't directly touch a patient's bed" could now be contracted out to the private sector.³⁷⁰ Health Services Minister Colin Hansen assured the public that the legislation would "actually result in fewer hospital closures than might otherwise be necessary if we had to live with the rigidity of the arrangements that have been in place until now", while Chris Allnutt of the HEU warned that "every community should be concerned that their hospital can close with 60 days [sic] notice" as a result of the changes, which he called "more draconian than we thought in our wildest nightmare".³⁷¹ The HEU also charged that Campbell's government had defamed its members by suggesting that secret deals which were harmful to taxpayers had been negotiated between the union and the previous NDP government.³⁷²

In the education sector, Bill 27 imposed a settlement in the government's contract

³⁶⁹ Alan Davidson, "The Politics and Policies of Health-Care Privatization in BC", in *British Columbia Politics and Government*, eds. Michael Howlett, Dennis Pilon, and Tracy Summerville (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2010), 295.

³⁷⁰ Jim Beatty and Craig McInnes, "Hospitals will close, Hansen admits", *Vancouver Sun*, January 28, 2002.

³⁷¹ Quoted in Jim Beatty and Craig McInnes, "Hospitals will close, Hansen admits", *Vancouver Sun*, January 28, 2002.

³⁷² Beatty and McInnes, "Hospitals will close, Hansen admits"

dispute with the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF),³⁷³ and Bill 28 denied the union its right to bargain many aspects of teachers' working conditions, along with class size and composition.³⁷⁴ This came after the Liberal government had designated public education an "essential service" in 2001, allowing the minister to decide which aspects were considered "essential", potentially denying teachers the right to withdraw all labour in the event of a strike and thereby limiting their bargaining power. Gary Teeple considers this an "odd change of policy", since while some workers are placed in this category "for reasons of public safety", education workers do not usually come under that, and "time lost in BC to strike action in this sector has been very limited", with BC being the only province to have introduced a provision of this kind into their labour code.³⁷⁵

Joy McPhail questioned the timing of the legislation, asking how "ramming clause after clause that affects hundreds of thousands of people's [sic] lives and patient care" could be "democratic when it happens at 1 a.m.?"³⁷⁶ Holding the legislative upper hand, Campbell had simply explained that the sweeping changes had to be passed quickly because the government needed to prepare the budget to be tabled on February 15.³⁷⁷ The rationale was consistent with the tensions between determinism and freedom ingrained

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Gary Teeple, "BC Labour Relations in an Era of Neoliberal Reform: The Campbell Years, 2001-11", in *The Campbell Revolution? Power, Politics, and Policy in British Columbia*, eds. J.R. Lacharite, and Tracy Summerville (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2017), 134.

³⁷⁵ Ibid, 135-136.

³⁷⁶ Quoted in Jim Beatty and Craig McInnes, "Hospitals will close, Hansen admits", *Vancouver Sun*, January 28, 2002.

³⁷⁷ Beatty and McInnes, "Hospitals will close, Hansen admits"

within the government's neoliberal rhetoric: policy inflexibility for budgets and workers was necessary to ensure flexibility for administrators and the market.

Questions regarding the government's intentionality and awareness of potential consequences inevitably arise when considering the relationship between the initial tax cuts and the budgetary sacrifices that they eventually provoked. Reflecting on the New Era cuts in a 2019 doctoral dissertation, former BC Liberal cabinet minister George Abbott notes that "long before tax cut optimism began to fade" the government introduced processes, such as core review, deregulation, devolution, and alternative service delivery, which were tenets of New Public Management (NPM),³⁷⁸ a "body of political and managerial doctrine" with roots in Margaret Thatcher's Conservative governments in the UK.³⁷⁹ He supports the suggestion that these processes were the outgrowth of "dramatic tax cuts that were introduced into a recessionary environment" with the intention of producing "a self-induced crisis, thereby underlining the imperative of austerity", but qualifies that this "burning platform" became a "far greater conflagration than its authors anticipated".³⁸⁰ Abbott describes how the formation of New Era policy was indirectly influenced by NPM through its application in other jurisdictions, such as Alberta, Ontario, and New Zealand. While a mention of NPM to New Era cabinet ministers "would, in most instances, have drawn a blank stare", those jurisdictions had been discussed by the BC Liberal caucus prior to the 2001 election, sometimes with out-of-province speakers, and "stories of [economic] decline and the

³⁷⁸ George Malcolm Abbott, "Prescription Before Diagnosis: The Dynamics of Public Policy Construction in the BC Liberal New Era, 2001-2005" (PhD dissertation, University of Victoria, 2019), iv.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, iv.

need of harsh medicine to address such decline were common”.³⁸¹

Managing the Poor: The Introduction of Welfare Time Limits

Indicative of the hollowing out of the public sphere that ensued were the changes to welfare announced in the January cuts, which further reduced the government’s role in ensuring the well-being of society’s most vulnerable. The rhetoric and rationales employed by the Liberals aligned with the neoliberal focus on minimizing state interventions, which were seen as inhibiting the freedom and potential of the individual. The supposedly “heavy hand” of the NDP was employed as a scapegoat, blamed for producing stagnation amongst the latent labour force that welfare recipients represented. The Liberals could rely on the NDP boogeyman to explain unemployment, a luxury not afforded to Vander Zalm-era Social Credit. At the same time, there would remain traces of that government’s moralism in the Liberals’ suggestion that welfare recipients had essentially fallen into a state of stagnation. Rather than recognize the impact of broader economic forces, entrenched inequality, and deep-seated social issues, the government saw individuals as restrained by their own ignorance of their best interests, in a manner not far removed from the moralism of propertied liberals during the Victorian era. As Gareth Stedman Jones notes, by the 1870s, there was a growing acceptance amongst that strata that action must be taken to overcome the “demoralization of the casual poor”, with the aim of imposing “a system of sanctions and rewards” intended to “convince them that there could be no escape from life’s miseries except by thrift, regularity, and hard work”.³⁸²

³⁸¹ Ibid, 48.

³⁸² Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Social Classes in Victorian Society* (London: Penguin, 1984), 271.

Echoing the explanations of previous governments, Human Resources Minister Murray Coell explained that the changes were being introduced with the intention of turning the ministry's focus to getting recipients back into the workforce.³⁸³ Single parents designated "employable" had previously been expected to return to work when their youngest child turned seven; the age was now changed to three. The government also announced that it would be ending two forms of assistance for low-income seniors: the monthly supplement of \$49.30 for single seniors and \$60.25 for couples, along with the bus pass subsidy that allowed seniors to buy their annual passes for \$45. Meanwhile, all recipients designated non-disabled and "employable" would be allowed to collect full benefits for only two years out of five before being cut off entirely from welfare payments, while "employable" parents would see a similar two years out of five policy, with subsequent benefits cut by 11 percent.³⁸⁴ The government also intended to reduce the monthly payments for "employable" recipients between 55 and 64 by \$60 per month. Accompanying these cuts, Coell announced that \$300 million would be spent on training and employment programs. Prospective welfare recipients would be allowed to fill out applications for benefits only after participating in what the ministry called "an employment orientation and three-week self-directed job search", and then signing an agreement outlining the actions they would take to find work, with those deemed to be have failed to live up to their agreements having their benefits reduced.³⁸⁵

³⁸³ Tom Barrett, "Single moms, seniors hit by changes to welfare", *Vancouver Sun*, January 18, 2002.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁵ Quoted in Tom Barrett, "Single moms, seniors hit by changes to welfare", *Vancouver Sun*, January 18, 2002.

These moves, while dramatic, had been foreshadowed in previous Liberal rhetoric. A recurring theme in the government's welfare discourse was the framing of payments themselves as further enabling the problem they were intended to alleviate. Compared to the rhetoric of Bill Vander Zalm, the Liberals were less overt in their moral judgement of the unemployed. Nonetheless, there was a subtle paternalism in the implication that unemployment was a "choice", with negative reinforcement being necessary to pry welfare recipients from their supposedly passive reliance on it. The Liberals presented their intention to "liberate" recipients from these shackles, irrespective of external causal factors. 2001 welfare caseloads had already dropped by 28 percent from January 1996, though advocates argued that this reduction was partly due to recipients being legislated off of welfare by restrictions and eligibility changes during the NDP era,³⁸⁶ yet in a 2001 core review of the Ministry of Human Resources, Coell echoed Claude Richmond's contention in the late 1980s, maintaining that the current system encouraged "dependency" and represented "a waste of people's potential".³⁸⁷ In February 2001, Coell discussed the legislation he planned to introduce in the spring; it was reported that he "did not foresee more people being cut off assistance under the new system", as he reportedly believed that "people want to lick their alcohol and drug addiction problems and receive the right job training",³⁸⁸ reinforcing the notion that the

³⁸⁶ Les Payne, "Coell's welfare crackdown has a familiar sound", *Times Colonist*, November 8, 2001.

³⁸⁷ Quoted in Les Payne, "Coell's welfare crackdown has a familiar sound", *Times Colonist*, November 8, 2001.

³⁸⁸ Judith Lavoie, "Single mothers targeted by Coell in his efforts to change welfare culture", *Times Colonist*, November 8, 2001.

poor were reprobates who required prodding to make the right “choice”, as though the human will was independent of the broader social conditions.

Coell’s rhetoric also played into the neoliberal ideal of the “rational actor” who simply required liberation from oppressive state regulation to achieve a freedom rooted in economic flexibility. Perhaps, if these restraints had become too habitual, an extra push was needed: there was a hint of negative reinforcement when he noted that the minimum wage was now \$8 an hour, or twice as much as what a person would receive on welfare, “so I think the motivation will be there”.³⁸⁹ Much more than Vander Zalm’s calls to force the unemployed to pick up the shovel, or his attempts to frame the erosion of the traditional family as the source of social breakdown, Coell’s rationalizations were, as we have noted, reminiscent of those previously employed by Claude Richmond, Vander Zalm’s minister of Social Services and Housing during the Socreds’ 1988 GAIN cut. Coell’s predecessor had emphasized the need to end the “cycle of welfare dependency” by “providing the maximum incentives to independence”.³⁹⁰ Both times, the ministers employed positive-sounding euphemisms like “incentives” and “potential”, ostensibly placing blame on the systemic levers in place and thereby depersonalizing their criticisms. This time, however, the message was not in danger of being overshadowed by a populist leader’s candid musings.

The policies outlined in January were made official when the *Employment and Assistance Act* and the *Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Act* were passed in June, and while the new provisions would come into effect in September, the

³⁸⁹ Quoted in Judith Lavoie, “Single mothers targeted by Coell in his efforts to change welfare culture”, *Times Colonist*, November 8, 2001.

³⁹⁰ Claude Richmond, letter to the editor, *Vancouver Province*, October 4, 1988.

two-year time limit would be retroactively applied starting April 1. In presenting the *Employment and Assistance Act* for a second reading in April, Coell had argued that it signified a move from “culture of entitlement, which I believe has trapped too many British Columbians into an overreliance on government supports” to a “culture of employment, self-reliance and independence where people take responsibility for their own future and break free of the cycle of welfare dependence”. Emphasizing “personal responsibility” as one of its guiding principles, he asserted that the bill “provides the right mix of support, encouragement and motivation for clients”, and “consequences for those who would unnecessarily rely on long-term support”.³⁹¹ While overt references to “laziness” were not employed as they had been by previous B.C. governments, denunciations of “entitlement” and “dependence” arguably expressed the same implicit message, perhaps reflecting a more refined mastery of modern spin, rather than a change in governmental values.

Along with the time limits being introduced for non-disabled applicants, the Ministry of Human Resources was initiating a process of eligibility reassessment for the claims of 62, 000 people with disabilities, having been instructed to cut costs. This move not only became costly in its own right, but was opposed by 400 disability groups, and ultimately did not prevent the number of recipients from rising between 2002 and January 2004.³⁹² An additional challenge added for disabled applicants was the elimination of “unusual and continuous costs” as a factor defining disability. The upshot: the amount an

³⁹¹ British Columbia, Debates of the Legislative Assembly, 16 April 2002 (Hon. Murray Coell, BC Liberal Party). <https://www.leg.bc.ca/documents-data/debate-transcripts/37th-parliament/3rd-session/20020416am-Hansard-v6n8>

³⁹² Reitsma-Street and Wallace, “Resisting Two-Year Limits”, 170-171.

individual needed to spend on the care and management of their disability would no longer be a factor in qualifying for benefits.³⁹³

Compounding the new hurdles to accessing benefits, the Income Assistance Advisory Board had been eliminated, while the right to appeal benefits reduction or denial had been limited; at the same time, advocacy groups, women's centres, housing registries, and community law clinics were seeing their funding reduced, and eventually eliminated in 2004.³⁹⁴ The broader support network had already been diminished by the cuts to legal funding introduced in January. A 40 percent reduction to the legal aid budget was to be implemented over three years, with the non-profit Legal Services Society expected to make up for the difference (or not), while funding for poverty law had been nearly eliminated, affecting issues like landlord-tenant disputes and challenges to the Workers Compensation Board, B.C. Benefits, and Employment Insurance.³⁹⁵ Family law funding was also cut dramatically, disproportionately affecting mothers in cases of marital breakdown where women had been the primary caregivers.³⁹⁶ Attorney-General Geoff Plant acknowledged that while the province "traditionally had one of the most generous legal aid systems in Canada", that level of service would not be maintained, and he expected that some people would "have an even harder time finding access to justice than before". In line with the Liberal government's lowering of expectations, he rationalized that after preserving funding for criminal matters, domestic violence

³⁹³ Klein and Long, *A Bad Time to be Poor*, 31.

³⁹⁴ Reitsma-Street and Wallace, "Resisting Two-Year Limits", 169.

³⁹⁵ Jim Beatty, "Legal aid cuts will hurt the poor, A-G admits", *Vancouver Sun*, January 31, 2002.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

restraining orders, child protection, and mental health proceedings, “there just frankly isn’t much money left over for other things”, suggesting that more pro bono work from lawyers would be needed to pick up the slack for low-income clients.³⁹⁷

The Liberals’ approach of withdrawing welfare access and support services contrasted with the more interventionist approach to managing the poor displayed by their Ontario contemporaries. Margaret Little and Lynne Marks note that the tactics of Mike Harris’ Progressive Conservative governments could be seen as comparatively “paternalistic and controlling”, with workfare being a “means of teaching the moral values of hard work”, while the government displayed a “belief that welfare recipients are likely to cheat the system and thus need to be closely overseen”, with a focus on welfare fraud including a moral element wherein “the sexual lives of single mothers” were “closely regulated” to make sure that they were not “cohabiting with a partner”.³⁹⁸ The BC Liberals, meanwhile, did not implement a workfare program and were less preoccupied with welfare fraud. Little and Marks observe that while the BC Liberals’ tax cut-induced fiscal pressures may have precluded their enactment of costly enforcement measures, the Progressive Conservatives faced comparable pressures. They point to the differing religious histories of the two provinces as a partial explanation, with churches and their leaders having historically played a “central role” in lobbying for mother’s allowances in Ontario, with micromanagement and moralism becoming ingrained within bureaucratic practice long after.³⁹⁹ Governing a province that remained relatively secular,

³⁹⁷ Quoted in Jim Beatty, “Legal aid cuts will hurt the poor, A-G admits”, *Vancouver Sun*, January 31, 2002.

³⁹⁸ Little and Marks, “A Closer Look at the Neo-Liberal Petri Dish”, 18-19.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 35-36.

the Liberals were less reliant on appealing to social conservatism, focusing more on the fiscal component and less on policing the moral “worthiness” of single mothers.

The introduction of the two bills mobilized activist groups and community organizations to voice their opposition and compile research on their social effects. Affected professional organizations also voiced resistance: the Law Society of BC proposed a motion to censure the Ministry of the Attorney General after the Ministry fired the Legal Services Society Board in February 2002 for refusing to implement the elimination of legal aid for poverty law. The B.C. Society of Social Workers passed a similar motion to censure Coell, himself a former social worker, in May 2002.⁴⁰⁰ Marge Reitsma-Street and Bruce Wallace note that government employees, welfare recipients, and advocates made use of “cumbersome, administrative processes” to justify legal exemptions, including a “surge of innovative approaches” to stop the time limit clock: two ways this was practiced were the registration of individuals in short-term training courses, or their re-classification as being “persons with persistent and multiple barriers” (PPMB), such as “serious but not permanent health limitations”, or “unemployability due to the effects of relationship abuse”. The number of clients with a PPMB designation increased from zero in 2002 to 14, 733 in 2004, and those designated were temporarily exempt from time limits and eligible for limited training benefits.⁴⁰¹

As the Liberals began to execute these policies, opposition to the welfare time limits began to pick up momentum while fears over their eventual effects grew. In a September 2003 piece titled “The ticking time bomb of BC's welfare time limits”, Seth

⁴⁰⁰ Reitsma-Street and Wallace, “Resisting Two-year Limits”, 170-171.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid, 171.

Klein of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives noted that B.C. was the first province to introduce time limits, which were an “import from the United States”, where they had been introduced federally in 1996. Klein explained that while the effects of time limits south of the border had been muted due to their introduction coinciding with a period of “unprecedented economic growth and job creation” and a “host of exceptions” built into the legislation, there was now “troubling evidence of what we might expect in BC” to be found in U.S. states where time limits were now running out, as those forced off of welfare due to time limits now “faced greater hardship than those who left welfare voluntarily”, while being “more likely to rely on food stamps” (which are not an option in B.C.) and face eviction, all while having comparatively lower incomes. Statistics also showed that as such welfare reforms combined with an economic downturn, former United States recipients were “finding themselves with no source of income”.⁴⁰² In B.C., the two-year limits initiated on April 1, 2002 would end the following spring, and Klein speculated that Coell was feeling “nervous”: the minister was introducing several exemptions to the two-year rule, while an internal ministry document leaked in October 2003 gave figures showing that over 14, 000 adults designated “employable” had 13 months accumulated on their clocks by that month, while another 15, 000 were only one to six months behind.⁴⁰³

While criticism from a progressive think tank like the CCPA was par for the

⁴⁰² Seth Klein, “The ticking time bomb of BC’s welfare time limits”, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, October 1, 2003. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/commentary/ticking-time-bomb-bcs-welfare-time-limits>

⁴⁰³ Seth Klein, “Leaked numbers sound alarm on welfare time limits”, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, October 1, 2003. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/commentary/leaked-numbers-sound-alarm-welfare-time-limits>

course for the Liberals, the time limit also faced opposition from some religious groups, showing that while the party held an entrenched electoral hold over many ridings with large religiously-conservative populations, there were counternarratives being produced amongst the faithful. The Anglican Diocese of Vancouver Island passed a resolution to write a letter to each of its 70 parishes, encouraging them to lobby the government to end the time limits.⁴⁰⁴ United Church members heard similar letters from their pulpits, and multifaith groups urged letter writing to the government.⁴⁰⁵ In February 2004, a multifaith prayer service took place on Ash Wednesday on the front steps of the legislature. The liberal-leaning, social gospel-oriented denominations behind the letter writing campaigns were seemingly at the heart of the service, which was led by an Anglican bishop. Organized in direct response to the two-year time limit plan, the event called for the government to show compassion for the poor, and was followed by religious leaders spending the night on the street with homeless people.⁴⁰⁶

Murray Coell responded to growing criticism through an op-ed published in late October of 2003, accusing those opposed to the time limits of “really saying that they are in favour of ‘welfare forever’ for individuals who can work”, which was not fair to “clients who need assistance the most”, the “taxpayer who funds the system”, and “most of all... the clients who can work”. The minister pointed to “10, 000 jobs in our job bank for our clients province-wide”, which were “good jobs like painter, telemarketer, tour

⁴⁰⁴ Bruce Wallace and Tim Richards, *The Rise and Fall of Welfare Time Limits in British Columbia* (Victoria, British Columbia: Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group, 2008), 16. <https://vipirg.ca/publications/2017/3/16/the-rise-and-fall-of-welfare-time-limits-in-bc>

⁴⁰⁵ Reitsma-Street and Wallace, “Resisting Two-year Limits”, 172.

⁴⁰⁶ Dirk Meissner, “Welfare minister to attend Ash Wednesday service calling for compassion” *Prince Rupert Daily News*, February 25, 2004.

operator, cashier or security guard that pay, on average, \$11 an hour”.⁴⁰⁷ The job availability claims had previously been challenged by Klein, who argued that the “numbers don’t add up”, since supposedly “employable” recipients who remained on welfare long-term were either facing a “tough job market”, or faced “invisible” barriers, such as “social, mental and addiction problems unrecognized by the Ministry” or a “lack of affordable childcare”. With over 50, 000 “employable” adults receiving social assistance, Klein argued that it was those who had been on welfare for a shorter amount of time, and likely had fewer invisible barriers, that would be most likely to obtain available jobs, though a 9% percent unemployment rate with 200, 000 people looking for work made the competition even steeper.⁴⁰⁸ Despite Coell’s public optimism, the CBC had obtained Ministry of Human Resources documents through the Freedom of Information Act in July that confirmed the government’s knowledge of the impending hardship for those on time limits, with a briefing note by ministry staff acknowledging that there was limited research available on the impact of time limits, and that “while some applicants appear employable, they may have invisible barriers”, with time limits potentially creating “a hardship for this group”.⁴⁰⁹

Reitsma-Street and Wallace observe “several significant features” of the opposition to two-year time limits: a “singular abolitionist focus” that minimized debates on alternatives like longer time limits, “formal, public challenges and official motions” from Boards of Directors and elected officials, a “remarkable absence of coordinated

⁴⁰⁷ Murray Coell, “Giving British Columbians every chance to work”, *Times Colonist*, October 23, 2003.

⁴⁰⁸ Klein, “Leaked numbers sound alarm on welfare time limits”

⁴⁰⁹ CBC News, “Welfare reforms triggered internal warnings”, July 7, 2003, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/welfare-reforms-triggered-internal-warnings-1.409974>

strategies or attempts to organize coalitions” beyond the “singular focus of rescinding the two-year limit”, and “visible and invisible linking” between people and groups in an effort to “spread information about the law and welfare limits” and “initiate strategies about how policies could be interpreted and messages represented” that did not amount to “coordinating activities or coalition-building”.⁴¹⁰ Despite the limitations of the campaigns, a significant capitulation was achieved on February 6, 2004. The *Vancouver Sun* reported the next day that in contrast to the “months of speculation that 28, 000 people could be affected” the government had announced extensive exemptions to time limits, meaning that while 339 were still at risk of losing all or a portion of their benefits, anyone who had and complied with an employment plan and was actively looking for work would continue to receive benefits.⁴¹¹ Minister of Human Resources Stan Hagen rationalized that the changes were the result of the “huge success” that the government was having in moving recipients off of welfare and into the workforce, while Victoria city councilor Rob Fleming, a prominent NDP figure, argued that the government had “misread the public” by thinking that “welfare bashing” would earn votes.⁴¹² Reitsma-Street and Wallace argue that though “significant”, the victory was “small”: while the opposition to time limits managed to “capture a measure of positive, albeit fleeting public support”, the time limits were not abolished, public and government discourse still centred on “the importance of employment, not its adequacy or relevance to a person’s

⁴¹⁰ Reitsma-Street and Wallace, “Resisting Two-year Limits”, 171-173.

⁴¹¹ Lindsay Kines, “Province backs off plan for dramatic cuts to welfare”, *Vancouver Sun*, February 7, 2004.

⁴¹² Quoted in Lindsay Kines, “Province backs off plan for dramatic cuts to welfare”, *Vancouver Sun*, February 7, 2004.

situation”, and “far more people are denied assistance, than cut off”.⁴¹³

Conflict and Consolidation: The Maintenance of Hegemony

Campbell’s pre-election promise to lead “the most open, accountable and democratic government in Canada” would soon fall by the wayside as Liberal dominance in the legislature empowered the government to increasingly protect itself from scrutiny. In July of 2003, Michael Smyth commented in the *Province* that Campbell was no longer doing media scrums in the legislature after question period, instead being “whisked back to his west-wing office to huddle with his spin-doctors”, with the media “sometimes” invited back to ask questions afterward.⁴¹⁴ By this point, the Information and Privacy Commissioner’s office was being cut by 35 percent, with the office staff being cut by one-third, despite the commissioner’s warning that he would not be able to perform his responsibilities at the new funding level. Further retreats from the public gaze were evidenced by an increase in the maximum wait time for records and the exclusion of more legislative committees and of BC Ferries from freedom-of-information laws.⁴¹⁵

The Liberals would face labour backlash for the bills rushed through in January 2002. The BCTF would take Bill 28 to court, and after a very long struggle (with the government implementing its agenda in the meantime), the BC Supreme Court would finally in 2011 rule it unconstitutional, for having infringed on collective bargaining rights.⁴¹⁶ Granted a year to negotiate a ruling with the BCTF, the government under

⁴¹³ Reitsma-Street and Wallace, “Resisting Two-year Limits”, 173-174.

⁴¹⁴ Michael Smyth, “Campbell’s ‘open government’ pledge is a joke”, *Vancouver Province*, July 18, 2003.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁶ Teeple, “BC Labour Relations in an Era of Neoliberal Reform: The Campbell Years, 2001-11”, 134.

Christy Clark, Campbell's successor as premier, would return with Bill 22, which used some of the same language that had been deemed unconstitutional, along with adding additional restrictions to possible negotiable items while introducing financial penalties against teachers and the union which Gary Teeple notes made strike action "almost impossible".⁴¹⁷ This, in turn, was challenged by BCTF, leading to a 2014 BC Supreme Court decision that again ruled against the government, which would again appeal the decision only to definitively lose again in 2016.⁴¹⁸

In response to the government's bold-faced pro-privatization efforts in the healthcare sector, 40, 000 HEU members would engage in an illegal strike in April of 2004, leading to sympathetic action from 30, 000 other workers in the private and public sectors. Further escalation of action was ultimately averted when HEU leaders made an agreement with the government that restricted future contracting out while accepting a fifteen-percent rollback on wages.⁴¹⁹ The scenario echoed the conclusion and aftermath of the Solidarity protests that occurred during Bill Bennett premiership, with a concessionary deal made by union leadership defusing movement momentum amongst the working class. Different sections of the broader labour and left movements of the province sought different outcomes from the HEU's situation, with BC labour leaders ultimately pushing HEU leadership to call off the strike, while CUPE and community leaders were part of the movement favouring expanding the conflict into a full general

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, 134-135.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, 135.

⁴¹⁹ Benjamin Isitt and Mellissa Moroz, "The Hospital Employees' Union Strike and the Privatization of Medicare in British Columbia, Canada", *International Labor and Working-Class History* No. 71 (Spring 2007): 91.

strike.⁴²⁰ Benjamin Isitt and Melissa Moroz note that “opposition to neoliberal cutbacks and privatization was channeled through the agency of the HEU strike” for workers in other sectors defying their collective agreements to support the hospital employees, but the “absence of a coherent strategy” with which to mobilize a general strike, on the part of both elected and grassroots leadership, contributed to an outcome that ultimately produced disillusionment.⁴²¹

While the Liberals’ contentious relationship with public sector workers planted them clearly in the economic tradition of their Social Credit predecessors, their social policies would pivot away from Bill Vander Zalm’s right-populism to foster an image more amenable to the socially-neoliberal wing of the pro-business bloc. In terms of the environment, George Hoberg calls Campbell’s legacy “complex” given his government’s “business oriented” identity, but with the premier also transforming the province into an “innovative champion of climate policy” by having introduced carbon pricing and greenhouse gas reduction targets.⁴²² In 2006, Campbell (his hand forced by court decisions) also announced a land use agreement for the Great Bear Rainforest, standing onstage alongside First Nations leaders, industry CEOs, and representatives from environmental groups.⁴²³ The image of consultation and diplomacy it projected was a PR coup, particularly given NDP premier Glen Clark’s labelling opponents of logging as

⁴²⁰ Ibid, 106.

⁴²¹ Ibid, 106-107.

⁴²² George Hoberg, “Ambition Without Capacity: Environmental and Natural Resource Policy in the Campbell Era” in *The Campbell Revolution? Power, Politics, and Policy in British Columbia*, eds. Michael Howlett, Dennis Pilon, and Tracy Summerville (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2010), 192.

⁴²³ Ibid, 181.

“enemies of BC” in 1996.⁴²⁴

Concerning land negotiations with indigenous groups, the Liberals initially catered to anti-land claim sentiments, following up on a populist 2001 campaign promise by holding a referendum in the spring of 2002. While Campbell reported that 80 percent of responders voted “yes” to all eight proposed principles on the ballot, critics charged that the proposals were skewed to encourage support for the government’s position in land negotiations and to incite negativity to First Nations’ claims. Indigenous leaders expressed concerns that the referendum could provoke racism towards indigenous people, and their calls for a boycott were taken up by religious and political groups.⁴²⁵ Polling veteran Angus Reid would call the referendum “one of the most amateurish, one-sided attempts to gauge the public will that I have seen in my professional career”.⁴²⁶

Christopher Alcantara and Iain Kent note that despite the government claiming a mandate from the referendum, it was “widely viewed as an embarrassment that hardened positions and feelings on both sides”, and a shift in policy soon followed, with an official apology issued to First Nations in the 2003 Throne Speech.⁴²⁷ The Liberals would then introduce a document titled “New Relationship—Shared Vision and Principles”, which advocated government-to-government consultation; Alcantara and Kent note that while this was

⁴²⁴ Quoted in George Hoberg, “Ambition Without Capacity: Environmental and Natural Resource Policy in the Campbell Era” in *The Campbell Revolution? Power, Politics, and Policy in British Columbia*, eds. Michael Howlett, Dennis Pilon, and Tracy Summerville (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2010), 181.

⁴²⁵ CBC News Online, “B.C. Treaty Referendum”, July 2, 2004.
https://www.cbc.ca/news2/background/aboriginals/bc_treaty_referendum.html

⁴²⁶ Quoted in CBC News Online, “B.C. Treaty Referendum”, July 2, 2004.
https://www.cbc.ca/news2/background/aboriginals/bc_treaty_referendum.html

⁴²⁷ Christopher Alcantara and Iain Kent, “Aboriginal Peoples in British Columbia: From Impoverished to Restored Societies?” in *British Columbia Politics and Government*, eds. Michael Howlett, Dennis Pilon, and Tracy Summerville (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2010), 273.

seen by some as an attempt to undercut the NDP's traditional support among indigenous groups in the province, the first three years did see success in some goals of the relationship, though many First Nations leaders remained unhappy with the rate of progress.⁴²⁸

Likely benefitting from residual stigma attached to the NDP brand, Campbell led the Liberals to additional electoral victories with smaller majorities in 2005 and 2009. Able to parlay their combination of fiscal conservatism and forays into traditionally-liberal causes into a political dynasty, the Campbell government was nonetheless not without its share of fiscal and political controversy, including over its breaking a promise to not sell BC Rail that led to questions of propriety in the sale and a raid on the BC Legislature,⁴²⁹ and a divisive decision to host the 2010 Olympics that ultimately went significantly over budget⁴³⁰ and failed to produce quantifiable evidence of the predicted revenues.⁴³¹ The fact that the Olympics were funded by the province in an environment of increasing homelessness and economic inequality did not go unnoticed, with activist groups staging a "Poverty Olympics" in Vancouver days before the real games.⁴³² It was

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Bill Tieleman, "How BC Rail Was Made to Disappear" *The Tyee*, December 27, 2011. <https://thetyee.ca/Opinion/2011/12/27/BCRail/>

⁴³⁰ Bob Mackin, "Olympic budget blown by \$325 million", *The Tyee*, July 11, 2010. https://thetyee.ca/Blogs/TheHook/Olympics2010/2010/07/11/OlympicBudget/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+thehookblog+%28The+Hook%29

⁴³¹ Bob Mackin, "As Money Machine, Games Didn't Deliver", *The Tyee*, February 15, 2011. <https://thetyee.ca/News/2011/02/15/GamesDidntDeliverMoney/>

⁴³² Stephen Hui, "Poverty Olympics to be held in Vancouver days before 2010 Winter Games", *The Georgia Straight*, January 15, 2010. <https://www.straight.com/article-281132/vancouver/poverty-olympics-be-held-vancouver-days-2010-winter-games>

a more obvious hit to the public's pocketbooks, however, that ultimately brought down Campbell's tenure.

In July of 2009, the government announced that a Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) would be enacted the following summer. On the heels of a similar announcement in Ontario that spring, the new tax structure was intended to alleviate the economic effects of the 2008 recession and help the B.C. government contain the provincial deficit.⁴³³ The government would quickly face public backlash for the move, both for its tax increases for some goods and services, and for its sudden announcement and rushed timeline for implementation.⁴³⁴ The HST had been introduced shortly after the Liberals' victory in the May provincial election; during the campaign, the party had assured voters that the tax was "not something that is contemplated in the BC Liberal election platform".⁴³⁵ Jonathan R. Kesselman notes that HST had been touted for years by taxation experts in economics, law, accounting, and a "panel of non-partisan policy experts" ranked it as "foremost among potential initiatives to improve the Canadian economy's long run performance".⁴³⁶ While the policy may have had the technocratic stamp of approval, it fueled a populist "Fight HST" movement that recruited Bill Vander Zalm as its public face, bringing together both the populist right on one hand and political left, as represented by the NDP, public sector unions, and some private sector unions, on the

⁴³³ George Malcolm Abbott, "The Precarious Politics of Shifting Direction: The Introduction of a Harmonized Sales Tax in British Columbia and Ontario", *BC Studies* No. 186 (Summer 2015): 131-134.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁴³⁵ Quoted in Vaughn Palmer, "Liberals sing different tune on HST after Ottawa dangles carrot", *Vancouver Sun*, July 24, 2009.

⁴³⁶ Jonathan R. Kesselman, "Consumer Impacts of BC's Harmonized Sales Tax: Tax Grab or Pass-Through?", *Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques* Vol. 37, No. 2 (June/juin 2011): 140.

other.⁴³⁷ The movement would obtain 557, 383 petition signatures, well above the threshold needed to trigger a referendum,⁴³⁸ and achieved a winning result when the referendum occurred in the summer of 2011.

By the time that vote occurred, Campbell had already left office and been succeeded by Christy Clark. When he announced his resignation in November of 2010, the latest opinion poll had given him a nine percent approval rating.⁴³⁹ Indicating the extent to which his party's traditional liberal-conservative coalition was in danger of breaking down, the BC Conservative Party also experienced a brief polling boost as a result of the backlash. Though their momentum would fade by the time of the 2013 provincial election, they appeared for a short time as a potential right-wing alternative.⁴⁴⁰

Conclusion: Old Wine, New Bottle?

While the BC Liberals essentially inherited the support base of Social Credit following their collapse under Bill Vander Zalm, they were more careful stewards of the balancing act needed to maintain it than Vander Zalm had been. During the 1990s, British Columbia maintained the two-party dynamic that had emerged in the 1970s when Social Credit absorbed supporters from the provincial Liberal and Conservative parties, and this anti-NDP coalition would largely remain intact under a new brand name. Bill Vander Zalm's ideological bent and rhetoric had appealed to evangelical Christians and the populist right, groups who formed significant portions of the Social Credit base, but not

⁴³⁷ Abbott, "The Precarious Politics of Shifting Direction", 142-143.

⁴³⁸ Ibid, 141-142.

⁴³⁹ Jonathan Fowlie, "Campbell's resignation 'emotional' for Liberals", *Vancouver Sun*, November 4, 2010.

⁴⁴⁰ Bill Tieleman, "BC Conservatives Rising", *The Tyee*, October 19, 2010.
<https://thetyee.ca/Opinion/2010/10/19/BCConservativesRising/>

its entirety; this made him controversial even within his own party. Furthermore, while the rhetoric he had employed throughout his career towards welfare recipients appealed overtly to traditional right-populist notions of the supposed laziness of the poor, his approach to political discourse was already being supplanted in an era of scripted language and spin doctoring, while his welfare policies invited accusations of moral hypocrisy. By contrast, the Liberals under Gordon Campbell ensured that their leader's media exposure was limited, avoiding off-the-cuff rhetoric in favour of more purely neoliberal talking points that emphasized the need to maximize the "potential" of individuals who had been held back by a state-imposed culture of "dependency" supposedly fostered by the NDP.

Critical of what he sees as the reckless overconfidence with which his one-time government rushed into the 2001 tax cuts, George Abbott calls them "ideologically-based and poorly diagnosed plans" that led to "unanticipated and painful consequences".⁴⁴¹ While discussing tax reductions, Abbott contrasts the 2001 election document *A New Era for British Columbia*, which he notes avoided mention of smaller government or welfare reform, with its tougher 1996 predecessor, *The Courage to Change*. He asks whether, following the Liberals' 1996 electoral defeat, the *New Era* promises attempted to be "all things to all people", perhaps creating unrealistic expectations for both voters and government.⁴⁴² While notably favouring the related "New Public Management" framework over the concept of "neoliberalism" (which he avoids outside of a direct quote), George Abbott nonetheless stands by the policy-focused neoliberal perspective,

⁴⁴¹ Abbott, "Prescription Before Diagnosis, 217.

⁴⁴² Ibid, 23-24.

generally leaving the issues of vested class interests and moralism out of the equation when discussing the government's motivations and attitudes to welfare. One exception is his acknowledgement that the Ministry of Human Resources' "imperative to meet expenditure reduction targets" had "often blurred the line between motivational and mean-spirited policy" with the enforced cuts undermining the "moral authority of broader goals such as strengthening the culture of employment and self-sufficiency".⁴⁴³

Nevertheless, with Campbell's government having emerged from the Socred tradition, it was not immune to more judgemental rhetoric that evoked the populist sentiments of old. Claude Richmond, Vander Zalm's former Minister of Social Services and Housing, was one Socred figure who had made the jump to the BC Liberals, serving under Gordon Campbell as Minister of Employment and Income Assistance from 2005 to 2008. Under Vander Zalm, Richmond had served as a public relations balance to the premier's controversial moralistic musings, defending the government's GAIN cut by sticking to the neoliberal script. Under the Campbell regime, he himself would display a moralistic tone in 2008, calling an April proposal by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives for a 50 percent increase to welfare rates an "unreasonable" idea that would make B.C. a "welfare magnet", suggesting that people would flock to the province to exploit the system.⁴⁴⁴ Warning of the possibility that such a move would allow recipients to receive assistance "above the rate some people who work earn", he insisted that the system was already working, with the province going from "from a culture of dependence

⁴⁴³ Ibid, 167.

⁴⁴⁴ Quoted in Andrew MacLeod, "Welfare Hike Would Make BC 'Magnet' for Poor: Minister", *The Tyee*, May 5, 2008. <https://thetyee.ca/News/2008/05/05/PoorMagnet/>

and entitlement to a culture of independence and employment”.⁴⁴⁵ This shift in approach indicates that beyond strategic sea changes spurred by party leaders, individual politicians could switch between populist and neoliberal approaches when it was deemed useful.

Campbell himself was sometimes willing to play to populist sentiments when deemed politically advantageous, as with the apparent overture to settler populism that was the 2002 treaty referendum, which Joel S. Fetzer finds was partially a move to gain votes from former BC Reform Party supporters.⁴⁴⁶ On the other hand, Campbell was an ideal vessel for neoliberalism’s technocratic features, wherein policy choices are framed as necessary and therefore supposedly detached from ideology. When asked about provincial or federal affiliations while still mayor of Vancouver, he responded by questioning their purpose: “What’s a Liberal? What’s a Conservative? What’s a New Democrat?”. He went on to suggest that “these are just names that don’t mean anything anymore”, suggesting “what matters is discipline, not dogma”.⁴⁴⁷ By the time the BC Liberals emerged as a political force under Campbell, neoliberal discourse had become solidly entrenched internationally, with even the NDP governments of the 1990s being forced to submit to its logic to an extent. As governments were pressured by economic constraints, decreasing federal support, and the influence of media narratives, trimming down the welfare state had increasingly become an issue that transcended party orientations within mainstream politics.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Joel S. Fetzer, “The Politics of British Columbia’s 2002 Aboriginal Treaty Negotiations Referendum: Democratic Governance or Electoral Strategy?”, *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 48, Number 2 (2016): 157.

⁴⁴⁷ Quoted in Jamie Lamb, “Whither Gordon Campbell? Put nicely: go fly a kite”, *Vancouver Sun*, January 21, 1989.

The Campbell Liberals continued to euphemistically frame their approach to welfare as maximizing the freedom for the workforce by removing the supposed crutches of the state. While they avoided the more overtly ideological and moralistic rhetoric and tactics of Vander Zalm or Mike Harris, the implication that unemployment was a choice remained, carrying with it a more subtle moralism. This suggests that their more “pure” manifestation of neoliberalism, which was more focused on policy jargon and the withdrawal of services, nonetheless served as a more covert and modernized continuation of long-standing ruling class attitudes.

Conclusion

The history of British Columbia's dominant political bloc reveals the challenges of maintaining political stability in a polarized province. The two-party system that has developed, with labour and the public sector middle class aligning with the NDP on one side, and corporate interests coalescing on the other, has produced increasingly big tents. At the same time, tensions have at times emerged between intra-party groups. By the Bill Bennett era, Social Credit was often accused of being an alliance rather than a party. In the 1980s, the Socreds struggled at times to balance the more sophisticated strategies of neoliberalism with the populism that W.A.C. Bennett had used to inspire those who were dissatisfied with the status quo, including small business owners and evangelical Christians. And in the early 1990s, the BC Liberals were politically colonized by former Socred loyalists.

While Bill Vander Zalm, with his off-the-cuff style and appeal with religious conservatives, emerged in the 1980s as an alternative within Social Credit who appealed to the grassroots politics of old, he did not represent a significant overhaul in substance of the neoliberal direction that Bill Bennett had entrenched. This could be seen from the government's approach to poverty and welfare: while Vander Zalm had a history of moralistically accusing the poor of laziness and calling for the renewal of family values, his Human Resources minister, Claude Richmond, took a more euphemistic and calculated approach during the 1988 GAIN cut controversy, employing the rhetoric of "empowerment" for the poor to sell a policy that would ostensibly "help them" escape "dependence". If anything, Vander Zalm's loose cannon rhetoric produced a sideshow

that disrupted the smooth functioning of the party machine, while the scandals he courted simultaneously undermined the image of pragmatism and managerial competence constructed under Bill Bennett.

While inheriting the Socred base in the 1990s, Gordon Campbell's BC Liberals in turn avoided making socially-conservative populism a flagship component of their own image, a seemingly wise move considering the recent collapse of Vander Zalm's premiership. While once again bringing neoliberalism to the fore led to repeated electoral success for the Liberals, the HST controversy allowed both Vander Zalm and the BC Conservatives a brief revival, signifying that populism still had some life in the province. During the controversy over welfare time limits in the aftermath of their "New Era" cuts, the Liberals employed calculated neoliberal rhetoric similar to that employed by Richmond under the Socreds. They also took the aloofness of Bill Bennett to a new level by limiting media access to the premier.

Apart from the 1991 electoral collapse occasioned by Socred scandals, the neoliberal political bloc that was consolidated with Bill Bennett's 1975 election victory has persisted, whether under the banner of Social Credit or the BC Liberals. Beyond Vander Zalm's theatrics and erratic policy gambling, the neoliberal objectives and discourses established under Bill Bennett have also endured, suggesting the shallow or superstructural nature of the party's right-wing populism. Ultimately, both neoliberal spin and populist accusations of laziness have contained forms of moralism against the poor. While Vander Zalm's rhetoric was explicit in judging the character of the poor and calling them to turn to Christ, the neoliberal narrative pointed to the need to liberate the poor from the overbearing state, allowing them to become "rational actors" in the market

once more; at the same time, references to a culture of “entitlement” and “dependence” contained an implicit element of blame. Despite their electoral mandates, Vander Zalm and Campbell both faced opposition to their welfare cuts from anti-poverty activists and religious groups outside of their evangelical base, indicating that alternative discourses of morality were being promoted which challenged the narrative of individual responsibility divorced from social context and conscience. The pushback led Vander Zalm’s government to backtrack on their GAIN cut, while the BC Liberals also made concessions, adding extensive exceptions to their welfare time limits. These results display the extent to which currents of social solidarity and community have persevered despite neoliberal ascendancy.

The meandering lineage of neoliberalism in B.C., featuring such internal tensions and reconfigurations, aligns with David Harvey’s conceptualization of neoliberal discourse as an ideological development in the history of class struggle, rather than a rational set of policy strategies detached from partisanship, disguising its retaliatory offensive against the gains of the welfare state. Neoliberalism’s ability to control the narratives of economic crises in order to justify its underlying ambitions of disempowering labour, shrinking the public sphere, and minimizing the role of popular agency in shaping policy has produced a self-reinforcing cycle, with neoliberal hegemonic dominance over discursive production weakening the public’s capacity to produce alternative social conceptualizations. As Harvey notes, while the “institutions from which struggle had hitherto been waged on behalf of the working class” have been

“under fierce assault”, for decades, “many progressives were theoretically persuaded that class struggle was a meaningless category”.⁴⁴⁸

Neoliberalism’s role in both fostering and exploiting the breakdown of class consciousness found fertile ground in the polarized British Columbian context. Social Credit’s early advocacy of free enterprise and individualism under W.A.C. Bennett was well-timed for the transition to consumerism made possible by the increased living standards of the post-war boom. Capitalizing on the foundational tenets of settler accumulation that had fueled the province’s colonial origins, Social Credit’s early rhetoric laid the ideological groundwork for the eventual transition to neoliberal governance models that upheld budgetary restraint, economic competitiveness, and labour “flexibility” as dogma.

Several factors originally drew me to investigate the history of neoliberalism and populism in the British Columbia. On a broad level, ongoing trends in international politics have placed the relationship between the two political methods into focus. Since the 2008 financial crisis, neoliberalism’s authority has been brought into question, and the rise of movements on the left and right that have been called populist can be seen as attempts to respond to this crisis of confidence. On the left, a rejuvenated push to move past the Third Way horizon has emerged, with popular protest movements like Occupy bringing the gulf between “the 1%”, or economic elite, and “the 99%” into popular discourse. Grassroots left movements, centred around leaders like the democratic socialists Bernie Sanders in the United States and Jeremy Corbyn in the United Kingdom,

⁴⁴⁸ David Harvey, “Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Social Science* Volume 610, NAFTA and Beyond: Alternative Perspectives in the Study of Global Trade and Development (March 2007): 41.

could be painted with the populist label for employing a narrative that places “the people” in opposition to the increasing inequality produced by a political system framed as in thrall to corporations and the financial sector. On the other hand, right wing populist movements, emerging around leaders like Donald Trump in the United States or Viktor Orban in Hungary, have employed xenophobic explanations for economic stagnation. That the populist right has thus far seen more electoral success than movements on the left is perhaps unsurprising, given their willingness to avoid direct opposition to capital and instead place the blame on the corruption of a nebulous political “establishment”. While British Columbian electoral politics have not seen the rise of comparable developments to date, I was interested to see what affinities could be gleaned from the province’s past.

On a more personal level, having lived through the BC Liberal era of Gordon Campbell and Christy Clark and experienced the impacts of austerity on healthcare employees and education workers, I hoped to flesh out my understanding of the dominant political agenda and the roots of neoliberalism in the province. Interested in the ways that Thatcherism’s denial of society and erosion of the public sphere have infiltrated British Columbia, I felt that welfare policy and poverty discourse would be a useful focus around which to track such developments.

The topics broached in this thesis suggest other questions that are ripe for further research. While work has been done to consider the role of religiosity within Social Credit membership, with evangelical Christianity clearly carrying an ideological weight through the leadership of Bill Vander Zalm, it would be of value for future studies to construct a clearer picture of the relationship between the more evangelical and socially

conservative factions of the BC Liberals and its more secular and at times socially liberal supporters.

The prospects of populism in British Columbia today are also worth evaluating, even if this largely amounts to an explanation of its current relative weakness, for example as compared to the rise of Doug Ford in Ontario and Maxime Bernier's People's Party of Canada federally. Despite being less pronounced with the BC Liberals under both Campbell and current leader Andrew Wilkinson, the leadership of Wilkinson's predecessor Christy Clark indicates that there remains a taste for populism in the new millennium. Clark's succession to the Liberal leadership in the wake of the HST controversy that plagued Gordon Campbell garnered comparisons with Vander Zalm's replacement of Bill Bennett. In both cases, folksy, charismatic leaders succeeded distant neoliberal tacticians after a period the new leader had spent away from their party and its controversies,⁴⁴⁹ and like Vander Zalm, Clark belied her federal Liberal roots by playing to the conservative side of her provincial party's base.⁴⁵⁰ Both were somewhat divisive figures within their own parties: Clark followed Vander Zalm in producing friction within her caucus, with high-profile leadership rivals Kevin Falcon and George Abbott not seeking re-election after her leadership win, in addition to then prominent former Finance Minister Colin Hansen.⁴⁵¹ These patterns reinforce the image of a relationship between

⁴⁴⁹ Gary Mason, "Christy Clark's leadership bid echoes that of Bill Vander Zalm", *Globe and Mail*, December 11, 2010.

⁴⁵⁰ Nancy Macdonald, "The curious emptiness of Christy Clark's legacy", *Maclean's*, August 3, 2017. <https://www.macleans.ca/politics/the-curious-emptiness-of-christy-clarks-legacy/>

⁴⁵¹ Ken MacQueen, "Christy Clark shuffles the deck chairs", *Maclean's*, September 28, 2012. <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/shuffling-the-deck-chairs/>

populism and neoliberalism that is both complementary and a source of intra-party friction for the right.

Further exploration of the historical connections between think tanks, their funding sources, and political parties could also shine further light on the composition and ideological development of British Columbia's historical hegemonic bloc. A project building upon more nationally-focused work of media watchdogs, like Hackett et al.'s *The Missing News: Filters and Blind Spots in Canada's Press*, would also be useful to that end. Situating media control, monopolization, and bias within the province's political and historical context would contribute to the fleshing out an understanding of the cohesion between ruling interests, while further substantiating and documenting the challenges of narrative control faced by NDP governments under media siege.

Working through the questions of this project has allowed me to reflect on how neoliberal ideology has presented itself for the public gaze. The neoliberal approach to governance has infiltrated, to varying degrees, the discourse on all sides of the mainstream political spectrum, to the point where any significant expansion of public spending is commonly framed by establishment politicians and media outlets as "radical" and "unrealistic". While populism could be seen as sometimes oppositional to the neoliberal order, right populism's perpetuation of economic inequality and hollowing out of democratic institutions could be seen as a culmination of processes that are built-in to the methods and aspirations of neoliberal ideology. In the case of Social Credit and the BC Liberals, right-wing populism and neoliberalism have often overlapped or alternated, with opposition between the two, and performances of populist difference, functioning in practice to maintain the same basic social-political order and the hegemonic bloc's

essential opposition to state intervention and the interests of labour. Breaking down this dichotomy and revealing the hollow performativity of populist rhetoric (though its consequences are real and serious) is an important task in challenging its hold on segments of the global population. Meanwhile, situating British Columbia's neoliberal turn in historical context can help to break the illusion of austerity as an inevitable reality that generations have grown up with, challenging the normalization of social atomization and the disbalance towards consumer individualism that has eroded class consciousness and social solidarity.

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