

# "The Company Province" and It's Centennials A Review of Recent British Columbia Historiography

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politicians. And a new breed of "pavement bred" historians is beginning to record this history as well. Theirs is as much the story of the west as are the writings of Morton and others of his stripe, but is more concerned with society and economics, social movements, ethnic groupings and regional characteristics. Here Rea discussed scholars such as John Thompson, who has undertaken a study on the immigrant/prohibition question, William Calderwood, who has explored the fascinating appeal of the Ku Klux Klan to the "xenophobia" of the Anglo-Saxon population of Saskatchewan, and Richard Allen, who has done so much to uncover the roots, accomplishments and legacies of the social gospel movement in the Canadian west. Rea concluded this fascinating look at prairie history with the hope that this new research may bring about the recognition that "the west, as a complex social matrix, was much more than an agricultural domain."<sup>20</sup>

There is, thus, much that is new and exciting developing in prairie historiography. The old one dimensional, dry and dusty, images are fast disappearing. Reinterpretation, controversy and vigorous debate are the foundations upon which a mature historiography is being built. If the scholarship of the last few years offers true portent of things to come, then the study of the prairie west is about to embark on its most fascinating and enlightening adventure to date.

DAVID J. BERCUSON

### "THE COMPANY PROVINCE" and ITS CENTENNIALS A REVIEW OF RECENT BRITISH COLUMBIA HISTORIOGRAPHY

Upon crossing the mountains to British Columbia, a visitor is soon struck by the extent of public recognition given the province's relatively brief history: a myriad of historical markers alongside the highways; new historical museums in small towns and large; reconstructions of old towns at Barkerville and Fort Steele; and a variety of historical pamphlets on the newsstands. History in British Columbia, however, is more than an adjunct to the tourist industry. Much of the physical evidence of historical interest is the legacy of provincial centennials in 1958, 1966 and 1971 and the Canadian centennial of 1967. These, and long-standing general interest have inspired the publica-

20 J.E. Rea, "Images of the West," in D. Bercuson (ed.), *Western Perspectives I* (Toronto, Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1974).

*Prairie Perspectives II*, *Western Perspectives I* and *The Twenties in Western Canada* are papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conferences held annually at the University of Calgary. *A Region of the Mind* is a publication of the Canadian Plains Studies Centre located at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina.

tion of several shelvesful of books, mostly of a popular nature, on various aspects of British Columbia's history. Such volumes range from pictorial records and community histories compiled by local enthusiasts to two general histories by academics. Studies of land policies, the labour movement, immigrants, education and contemporary politics have also appeared. So extensive is the historical literature about British Columbia that one centennial project was the preparation of a three volume bibliography of it.<sup>1</sup> In addition to these retrospective lists, each quarterly issue of *BC Studies* includes a bibliography often ten or more pages in length, of current publications. *BC Studies* (1968- ) is multi-disciplinary but historians have been its chief contributors. Its articles representing recent research, indicate the colonial period still attracts scholars but the provincial era receives greater attention. Since the majority of recent books also focus on the provincial period, this review is confined to books about British Columbia since 1871 selected to provide a brief introduction to recent historiography.

The main general studies of British Columbia history are Margaret Ormsby's *British Columbia: A History*<sup>2</sup> and Martin Robin's two volume work, *The Company Province*.<sup>3</sup> Both touch on such basic themes as sectionalism within the province and its sense of isolation from the rest of Canada; both are concerned with political history. There, the similarities end. The striking contrast between the books is reflected in their reception. Ormsby's history was justifiably well-received; Robin has been severely and properly criticized for his sloppy scholarship. Indeed, only Robin himself has challenged his unfavourable reviews.<sup>4</sup> Ormsby's history, originally commissioned by the provincial Centennial Committee of 1958, is a thoroughly researched, smoothly written and comprehensive survey of British Columbia history from the explorations of the eighteenth century to the centennial celebrations of 1958. It is narrative history at its best. Regrettably, the brief epilogue covering the years after 1941 was not extended in the 1971 revision which added new appendices, expanded the bibliography and corrected some minor errors. Political events provide the framework for Ormsby who also considers the economy, society and culture. The overall picture is of a happy people but

1 Barbara J. Lowther, *A Bibliography of British Columbia: Laying the Foundations, 1849-1899* (Victoria, University of Victoria, 1968); Gloria M. Strathern, *Navigations, Traffiques & Discoveries, 1774-1848; A Guide to Publications Relating to the Area Now British Columbia* (Victoria, University of Victoria, 1970). The twentieth century volume is in preparation.

2 Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto, Macmillan, 1958). Rev. ed., 1971.

3 Martin Robin, *The Rush for Spoils: The Company Province, 1871-1933* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1972); *Pillars of Profit: The Company Province, 1934-1972* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1973).

4 Review of *The Rush for Spoils* by Norman J. Ruff, *BC Studies*, no 17 (Spring 1973), pp. 69-76; Martin Robin, "Comments on Norman Ruff's Review of *The Rush for Spoils*", *BC Studies*, no. 18 (Summer 1973), pp. 84-9. Review of *The Rush for Spoils and Pillars of Profit* by H.V. Nelles, *Canadian Forum*, LIII (November-December 1973), pp. 20-1; Martin Robin to the editor, *Canadian Forum*, LIV (April 1974), p. 27.

Ormsby, whom Robin has accused of having “a sunny Okanagan view,” does not ignore such sordid aspects of provincial life as political patronage, the treatment of racial minorities and persistent labour unrest. On the whole, *British Columbia* is a balanced study with carefully restrained judgements.

Ormsby writes in the tradition of the objective scholar; Robin in the fashion of a muckraker. He set out to illuminate “the political side of British Columbia history in its profoundly gloomy as well as cheerful aspects . . .” (*Rush*, 9). Defining politics quite narrowly, Robin finds little cheer until the last page when he records the election of the N.D.P. in 1972 as bringing to British Columbia’s second century “a new politics, and renewed hope”. (*Pillars*, 313) Only time will tell if his final assessment is valid. In both of Robin’s volumes, gloom abounds as he reiterates his thesis that “rapacious entrepreneurs acting through companies” (*Rush*, 16) carved out empires by acquiring land, minerals and timber resources with the co-operation of successive administrations which saw as “the proper business of government: the facilitation of development through extensive concessions to private interests”. (*Rush*, 60)

Robin’s thesis is plausible but some of his evidence is suspect. One example must suffice to illustrate his research methods. Referring to the administration of Richard McBride (1903-15), Robin describes the “methodical pursuit” of “a reckless policy of land sales and timber alienation”. (*Rush*, 91) Although readily conceding the importance of revenue from land sales and timber licenses in restoring solvency to the provincial treasury, he emphasizes the “wholesale alienation of timber lands” by “ravenous” “timber barons” who were “served up a fine feast” by the government in its forest policy of 1905-7. (*Rush*, 92) He does not explain this policy but, as a significant part of his evidence, he states in respect to its effect: “The Forestry Commission appointed by the Government in 1910 [it was actually appointed 9 July 1909] reported . . . that more than 11,250,000 acres, approximately 80% of the government timber land, had been alienated from the Crown, leaving only 3,750,000 acres of the poorest scrub timber, in remote areas, in reserve for the people”. (*Rush*, 92-3) In the next chapter he repeats the statement, almost verbatim — the “poorest scrub timber” becomes “the poorest timber, a scrubby and remote remnant” — as one of the many examples of the “burgeoning” provincial economy in 1911. (*Rush*, 116) This must be important information or Robin would not cite it twice within twenty-five pages. To the unwary reader, it is persuasive evidence of the “timber barons” “fine feast”.

Tracing the source of the statement offers an interesting lesson on how information can be distorted as one gets away from original sources. Robin’s footnotes indicate the information came from page 14 of [*The*] *Crisis in British Columbia*, published in 1916 [it actually appeared in April 1915] by the Ministerial Union of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Indeed, on page 14 is the statement: “the Forest[ry] Commission Reported [*sic*] that more than 11,250,000 acres, approximately 80 per cent of the Government Timber,

had been alienated from the Crown, leaving only about 3,750,000 acres of the poorest timber as their 'estimate' of the scrubby and remote remnant left". The Ministerial Union, several of whose leaders were active social gossellers, believed they were "duty bound" as "moral leaders" to "place before the people of British Columbia some authentic facts, the knowledge of which is essential to the redemption of the life of the province". (*Crisis*, 2-3) That redemption, it is clear, could only be accomplished by full investigation of the exploitation of the province's resources and, by implication, the replacement of the McBride government which permitted it. This attack on the government may have been inspired by its inaction on prohibition. When Robin later (*Rush*, 151) characterized *The Crisis* as a "muckracking pamphlet" he accurately assessed it. That he should rely on such a source when the Report of the Royal Commission on Timber and Forestry is readily available is a telling comment on his research.<sup>5</sup>

In good muckraking tradition, M.B. Cotsworth, the statistician who prepared *The Crisis* selected information from government reports and then embellished it for his own purposes. The Commission, for example, did estimate that some 11,250,000 acres of merchantable timber were held under special license, crown grant or lease hold but emphasized its estimate of 3,750,000 acres of timber lands still under crown reserve was "a pure conjecture" because of the lack of surveys and cruises.<sup>6</sup> And, the Commission made no comment on the quality or location of the crown reserve timber. Further pursuit of the matter makes the "feast" seem even less "fine". Under the unique feature of the 1905 policy, the "timber barons" were subjected to increasing fees or royalties as the value of the timber increased. The land itself remained under government control. Indeed, the Royal Commission reported the bulk of British Columbia's timber was "Crown property; most of it under Government control ... the Provincial has made the Government a sleeping partner in forest exploitation — a sharer in the profits of the lumber industry". (*Report*, D20) Moreover, as soon as the McBride government recognized the extent of the demand for timber, it reserved the remaining

5 When using primary sources, Robin also tends to misread the evidence. After relating his account of how the C.P.R. forced McBride to turn the Columbia and Western Railway land grant to it in 1905, he states: "The C.P.R. and the Conservative Party lived happily ever after. Company funds poured into party coffers and the trains were placed at the disposal of legislative members and supporters during the approaching election campaign". (*Rush*, 967) As the source of this information, Robin cites a letter from J. Harvey to McBride. According to the letter, the Conservatives may have expected support but they did not get it. Harvey wrote: "[The] C.P.R. disappointed us. They promised to bring in our outside vote but went back on that at the last minute . . ." (J. Harvey to McBride, 4 February 1907, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, McBride Papers, Private, 76/07).

6 British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, Royal Commission on Timber and Forestry, 1909-1910, *Final Report* (Victoria, King's Printer, 1910), p. D16.

timber lands. Had Robin used R.E. Cail's the "Disposal of Crown Lands in British Columbia, 1871-1913",<sup>7</sup> he would have gained a more balanced perspective. Relying mainly on published government records, Cail traced the development of land and resource policies. He concluded that laws relating to lands and resources "were always framed with a view to accomplishing three things — encouraging settlement, forestalling speculation and securing revenue". (abstract) Cail argued that "a surprisingly small area of forested land was permanently alienated by 1913" (161) but he was no sycophantic defender of government resource policies. Indeed, he clearly demonstrated that policy and practice often differed.

Not only does Robin ignore important sources but he disappoints the reader by failing to explore some of his interesting ideas. In a study titled *The Company Province* one might expect an examination of company towns and their inhabitants especially since Robin's introductory chapter refers to these "isolated single industry communities where class differences were immediately transparent and communication between workers was facilitated by proximity and similar work and living conditions. The mediating influences of the middle classes and the sanguine currents of 'public opinion', were absent from an environment where company and worker directly confronted one another". (*Rush*, 27) For purposes of investigating his concept of the "company province", the company towns offer a laboratory, albeit not a very scientific one, for testing class consciousness and the thesis that companies have ruled the province. Moreover, the company towns, in a sense, represent a microcosm of the province. Their isolation parallels the splendid isolation the whole province often feels from the rest of Canada. Robin, however, did not take advantage of this testing ground.

Several recent histories of company towns are available.<sup>8</sup> Like most local histories in British Columbia, none of them pretends to be a scholarly treatise. As source material these histories have serious limitations. Neither residents nor professionals hired by a local committee can act as detached observers. The reader inevitably suspects the authors of trying to remember the good old days and forgetting or down playing the bad. In addition, the interdependence of the companies and the towns encourages proud citizens to present a favourable image. When unpleasant episodes are mentioned, they are drawn from what, in the span of these towns' lives is ancient history. Yet, in spite of

7 Robert Edgar Cail, "Disposal of Crown Lands in British Columbia, 1871-1913" (Vancouver, University of British Columbia, Unpublished M.A. thesis, 1956). The University of British Columbia Press is about to issue a revised version of this thesis under the title, *Land, Man and the Law: The Disposal of Crown Lands in British Columbia, 1871-1913*.

8 Emma de Hullu, *Bridge River Gold* (Vancouver, Bralorne Pioneer Community Club — Bridge River Valley Centennial Committee, 1967); Bruce Ramsey, *Britannia: The Story of a Mine* (Vancouver, Britannia Beach Community Club, 1967); Bruce Ramsey, *Rain People: The Story of Ocean Falls* (Vancouver, Ocean Falls Centennial '71 Committee, 1971).

their limitations, the histories of the company towns, when taken together, raise questions about generalizations of companies as “truculent employers”. (*Pillars*, 70) Nostalgia may explain Pete Loudon’s happy boyhood memories but his judgement of Anyox as a fine place “to spend those years where love and comfort and security are so necessary” is also implicit in other company town histories.<sup>9</sup> If these histories accurately reflect life in company towns, it was a happy experience. Class consciousness was almost unknown; the fortunes of local athletic teams caused greater concern than Labour or Socialist politics; community spirit, fostered by isolation and often encouraged by company management, was ever present. Security was a way of life. The companies provided jobs, supplied such amenities as good housing at reasonable cost, schools and medical services and, in most cases, also had a monopoly or near-monopoly of retail trade. Yet, the only significant complaint recorded in these books was part of the general resentment against two early autocratic managers at Britannia who, between 1911 and 1922, refused to allow residents to import merchandise. A new, and popular, manager took over about the same time the store was turned into a successful cooperative. The company for its part was apparently glad to be rid of an operation whose poor management had created more problems than profit.

If Robin’s argument about confrontation between companies and workers is correct, the resentment felt at Britannia would be general rather than exceptional. This was not the case. The personality of the general manager made a distinct impression on these towns but it was normally a favourable one. A successful manager — Don Matheson at Bralorne Mines in the Bridge River Valley (1930-47) or C.P. Browning at Britannia (1922-48) — inspired community spirit and earned respect, not resentment. Such managers were townspeople; there is no indication of their being regarded as members of a special class. Class consciousness on economic lines is not a part of the histories of these towns. As an Ocean Falls poet explained about his community:

It’s a town of friendly spirit  
Where people meet in cheerful tone  
Where the laws of class distinction  
To its folks are still unknown.<sup>10</sup>

The verse is not completely accurate. Ocean Falls and the other towns had class divisions drawn on racial or moral lines. When Orientals were employed, they lived in a separate part of town; houses of ill repute were always outside the town limits. Relations between the companies and their employees were generally amicable. The company, of course, could dismiss employees who showed an interest in union organization. Moreover, prior to the 1919 pro-

9 Pete Loudon, *The Town That Got Lost* (Sidney, B.C., Gray, 1973)

10 J.G. Wilson, *Rhymes of Ocean Falls and Other Poems* quoted in Ramsey, *Rain People*, p. 90.

vincial legislation giving free access to company towns, companies could deny union organizers legal entry. Both the Ocean Falls and Britannia companies prevented unions from organizing World War One when labour unrest was general. By the 1930's and 1940's when unions were again being actively organized in British Columbia, the local histories intimate the companies no longer put up any significant resistance to unionization.

The picture is not completely clear. One of R.B. Bennett's correspondents illustrated the difficulty of assessing conditions in these towns. A week after arriving in Ocean Falls in 1934 he described it as probably "the most contented town in Canada — if not in the whole world". Five weeks later, he wrote, "the picture of the town as I described it . . . was only a surface one such as impresses the casual visitor. I had not had time to get underneath but when I did, the conditions which became apparent certainly should not prevail in any town in Canada . . . the Company controls every activity in the community".<sup>11</sup> A thorough examination of company towns might confirm Robin's impressions but the happy memories of the people who lived in them suggest his unsubstantiated generalizations are too harsh. The companies may well have controlled the towns but some residents were content to exchange certain freedoms for the security provided by paternalistic companies.

Robin pays some attention to labour relations. Yet, in light of his earlier very good book on *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1920*,<sup>12</sup> his assertion that "labour issues have always occupied the centre of political debate" (*Rush*, 29), and his contention that one of the functions of government was to "restrict and control unions as much as possible" (*Rush*, 41) it is disappointing that he does not explore organized labour in greater depth. For the student of British Columbia's history, this is not a serious problem; he can go directly to one of Robin's major sources on the labour movement. *No Power Greater* by Paul Phillips<sup>13</sup> was a centennial 1967 project of the B.C. Federation of Labour and the Boag Foundation. In their basic ideas about the economy and the development of organized labour, Phillips and Robin share many of the same thoughts about "robber barons", industrial empires and the frontier nature of the economy. For Phillips, however, these are only the setting for the growth of organized labour in response to a high degree of insecurity. (Phillips, 158)

The company side of labour disputes is less well known. Business history is not yet an active field of study. Although two of the major forest companies have appointed archivists, the fruits of this work are not, thus far, public.

11 F.E. Smith to R.B. Bennett, 28 March 1934 and 3 May 1934, Public Archives of Canada, R.B. Bennett Papers, Box 569, Letters 353150-1 and 353237.

12 Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1920* (Kingston, Industrial Relations Centre of Queen's University, 1968).

13 Paul A. Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver, B.C. Federation of Labour and Boag Foundation, 1967).



In the mining industry, the suppressed history of the Dunsmuirs,<sup>14</sup> the industrial magnates of Vancouver Island before World War One, is really family history. Railways, however, have received some attention. The well-known histories of the C.P.R. need not be mentioned here. A wholly British Columbian railway, the Pacific Great Eastern, is the subject of a popular history based on extensive research into readily accessible primary sources but the complete story of the tangled origins of the P.G.E. may never be known.<sup>15</sup> Richard McBride's other major railway project, the Canadian Northern Pacific, is examined in T.D. Regehr's forthcoming history of the Canadian Northern. This study, based on company as well as political records, will provide another outlook on Robin's "Rails of Steal". My own research on the British Columbia Electric Railway supports Robin's argument that companies wanted protection for private property and "a stable investment climate" (*Rush*, 81) but shows he errs in implying that politicians were always the servants of the corporations. In this case, the company's records reveal its feeling of being subject to the wishes of the government and the people.<sup>16</sup>

Robin champions "the people", but does not analyse them in any detail. Given the limited secondary material available, this is not a surprising omission. Only partial approaches have been made to the study of social history in British Columbia and none is completely satisfying. British Columbia's reluctance to accept certain immigrants is well known. A useful introduction to the ethnic groups of the province and their problems is *Strangers Entertained*.<sup>17</sup> A project of the Centennial '71 Committee, it includes sections on every "ethnic" group in the province, often prepared by members of the group. What might have been a very disjointed and uneven volume is pulled together by John Norris' skilful editing and his long introductory overview. Unfortunately, but understandably, the editor chose to define "ethnic" as "identification with a non-English Canadian ethnic element". Thus, he gave native Indians and French Canadians a chapter each but excluded English-speaking immigrants from elsewhere in Canada. There are only a few studies of individual ethnic groups. Irene Howard's *Vancouver Svenskar: A History of the Swedish Community in Vancouver* is really a study of the Swedes throughout British Columbia.<sup>18</sup> The Chinese and the Japanese have been the

14 James Audain, *From Coalmine to Castle: The Story of the Dunsmuirs of Vancouver Island* (New York, Pageant Press [1955]).

15 Bruce Ramsey, *P.G.E.: Railway to the North* (Vancouver, Mitchell Press, 1962).

16 Patricia E. Roy, "The Fine Arts of Lobbying and Persuading: The Case of the B.C. Electric Railway, 1897-1917" in *Canadian Business History*, ed. by David S. Macmillan (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1972), pp. 239-254.

17 John Norris, *Strangers Entertained: A History of the Ethnic Groups of British Columbia* (Vancouver, British Columbia Centennial '71 Committee, 1971).

18 Irene Howard, *Vancouver's Svenskar: A History of the Swedish Community in Vancouver* (Vancouver, Vancouver Historical Society, 1970).

subjects of recent articles in *BC Studies* and elsewhere; the books relating to the Orientals in British Columbia are dated but still useful.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the Doukhobors have been the topic of two relatively recent works. *Terror in the Name of God* by Simma Holt is a journalist's account of the contemporary difficulties of the Sons of Freedom.<sup>20</sup> In *The Doukhobors*, a general study of these people and their religion, George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic present a broader perspective.<sup>21</sup> Anthropologists have long studied the native Indians; historians are just beginning to do so. Indians are also concerned about their culture and several have published their stories.<sup>22</sup> A helpful introduction to the study of Indians in British Columbia is Wilson Duff's *The Indian History of British Columbia*,<sup>23</sup> while an excellent guide to further study is the forty-eight page selected bibliography in an issue of *BC Studies* devoted to Indians in British Columbia.<sup>24</sup>

Ethnic studies provide one approach to social history; two others are church and educational history. The relative absence of public controversy on religious matters may explain why only two books relating to church history have been published since 1958. Both commemorate church centennials. *The Anglican Church in British Columbia* by Frank A. Peake is an institutional history tracing the development of the church from the establishment of the Diocese of British Columbia in 1859 to the mid-1920's.<sup>25</sup> To celebrate a century of their missionary work in the province, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a Roman Catholic order, commissioned Kay Cronin to write an anecdotal volume, *Cross in the Wilderness*.<sup>26</sup> Of the several books about education, the most comprehensive is F.H. Johnson's *A History of Public Education in British Columbia*.<sup>27</sup> For the social historian it is, unfortunately, mainly an institutional study. In *John Jessop: Gold Seeker and Educator*, Professor Johnson adds some flesh to the picture through a bio-

19 C.J. Woodsworth, *Canada and the Orient* (Toronto, Macmillan, 1941); C.H. Young, H.R.Y. Reid and W.A. Carrothers, *The Japanese Canadians* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1938); F.E. LaViolette, *The Canadian Japanese and World War II* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1948).

20 Simma Holt, *Terror in the Name of God* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1964).

21 George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1968).

22 For example, George Clutesi, *Potlatch* (Sidney, B.C., Gray, 1969) and James Wewid, *Guests Never Leave Hungry: The Autobiography of James Sewid*, a Kwakiutl Indian, ed. by James P. Spradley (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1969).

23 Wilson Duff, *The Indian History of British Columbia: Volume 1. The Impact of the White Man* (Victoria, Provincial Museum of Natural History and Anthropology, 1964).

24 No. 19 (Autumn 1974), pp. 73-121.

25 Frank A. Peake, *The Anglican Church in British Columbia* (Vancouver, Mitchell, 1959).

26 Kay Cronin, *Cross in the Wilderness* (Vancouver Mitchell Press, 1960).

27 F. Henry Johnson, *A History of Public Education in British Columbia* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 1964).

graphy of the first provincial superintendent of education.<sup>28</sup> Johnson credits Jessop with being the father of British Columbia's non-sectarian public school system. Although the government has not aided them financially, private schools have long existed and sometimes flourished in British Columbia. Some catered to the children of the well-to-do while others served religious minorities, particularly Roman Catholics. A part of the Catholic school system is the subject of *A Century of Service: The History of the Sisters of St. Ann in British Columbia* by Sister Mary Margaret Down.<sup>29</sup> The origins and development of higher education are set forth in the history of the University of British Columbia which only lost its provincial monopoly on the granting of degrees, except in theology, in 1963. *Tuum Est* by H.T. Logan is a readable blend of nostalgia and institutional and political history.<sup>30</sup>

Although political history provides the framework for both Ormsby and Robin, there are no published studies of individual parties nor is there any analysis of the apparent absence of provincial political parties before 1903. As subjects of books, the politicians themselves are not much better off. Of politicians who were not premiers, only E.E. Winch, a founder of the C.C.F. in British Columbia, has a biography to himself. *The Compassionate Rebel* by Dorothy Steeves, a party and legislative colleague, is a sympathetic study not only of Winch's life but of his times.<sup>31</sup> It is particularly useful as a source on the internal politics of the provincial C.C.F. Of British Columbia's twenty-five premiers, only three have been the subjects of book length biographies. Neither Roland Wild's *Amor de Cosmos*<sup>32</sup> nor James Morton's *Honest John Oliver*<sup>33</sup> is satisfactory. The former is, at best, slight; the latter is an eulogistic account by a loyal secretary who does not claim to be exact. W.A.C. Bennett, who also awaits a definitive biography, has been the main subject in several works. Almost half of Robin's second volume, *Pillars of Profit*, is devoted to the Bennett era. In describing twenty years of Bennett's rule, Robin finds many occasions to reiterate his thesis that "the tentacles of the companies and of the government were amicably intertwined". (*Pillars*, 186) Characteristically, he does not develop these allegations. For example, in reference to the government's decision to permit Western Pacific Products and Crude Oil Pipeline Company to construct an oil pipeline from the Peace

28 F. Henry Johnson, *John Jessop: Gold Seeker and Educator* (Vancouver, Mitchell Press, 1971).

29 Sister Mary Margaret Down, *A Century of Service: A History of the Sisters of Saint Ann and Their Contribution to Education in British Columbia, the Yukon & Alaska* (Victoria, The Sisters of St. Ann, 1966).

30 Harry T. Logan, *Tuum Est: A History of the University of British Columbia* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 1958).

31 Dorothy Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel: Ernest E. Winch and His Times* (Vancouver, Boag Foundation, 1960).

32 Roland Wild, *Amor de Cosmos* (Toronto, Ryerson, 1958).

33 James Morton, *Honest John Oliver* (London, Dent, 1933).

River to the lower mainland, Robin notes only “it was a good deal” for its owners who “eventually gained a profit estimated at fifteen million dollars”. (*Pillars*, 222-3)

Robin’s account of the Bennett years, based primarily on files of the Vancouver *Sun* and Vancouver *Province*, is not the only one in print. The former leader of the provincial Liberal party, Patrick L. McGeer, wrote *Politics in Paradise* as a diversion during the 1970 and 1971 legislative sessions.<sup>34</sup> Partly composed of personal reminiscences, this book is also an election manifesto and an indictment of the Bennett government which, McGeer argues, undermined the institutions of law and government. (McGeer, 232) On the other hand, Ronald B. Worley in *The Wonderful World of W.A.C. Bennett* lauds Bennett, his close personal friend and employer.<sup>35</sup> This anecdotal account is carefully laundered history omitting such episodes as the Sommers scandal over the issuing of forest management licenses. This is consistent with Worley’s self-proclaimed principle of selection: “The need to remedy the deficiencies and correct the biases of prior accounts of W.A.C. Bennett, the man”. (Worley, viii) Worley’s target was *Bennett* by Paddy Sherman, the editor of the Vancouver *Province*, a newspaper not always hostile to the premier.<sup>36</sup> Sherman, a former legislative reporter, is fascinated by the contradictions in Bennett who avowed free enterprise principles yet took over such companies as the B.C. Electric and the Black Ball ferries. He also intimates the companies did not have their own way in dealing with Bennett. Concerning the announcement that Frank McMahon’s Western Pacific Products and Crude Oil Pipeline Company would build from the Peace River to the lower mainland, he suggests “there was good reason to suspect that Bennett was using McMahon, not the other way around.” The major oil companies had refused to build an all-British Columbia pipeline which initially was “a precarious project”. (Sherman, 183) Sherman, however, wisely suspends final judgement on Bennett observing that “by the time it can properly be decided where history should place him, another generation will be running things — either reaping the benefits or paying the bills”. (Sherman, xii) Although written when the Bennett era was still seven years from its end, Sherman’s study remains the best introduction to the recent political history of British Columbia.

Nevertheless, Martin Robin’s hypotheses about British Columbia cannot be ignored. Because of the abundance of errors in his volumes — many, but not all, the result of inadequate copy editing and proof reading — those unfamiliar with British Columbia’s history should read Robin only at their own risk. Fortunately, Robin set out the essence of his arguments in a short article which,

34 Patrick L. McGeer, *Politics in Paradise* (Toronto, Peter Martin Associates, 1972).

35 Ronald B. Worley, *The Wonderful World of W.A.C. Bennett* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1971).

36 Paddy Sherman, *Bennett* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1966).

despite a few errors and misleading interpretations, well summarizes his provocative ideas.<sup>37</sup> While Robin wrote his volumes to argue a thesis, most British Columbia historians have been content to relate the story of their subject. Do these shelvesful of history represent once-in-a-generation efforts soon to become dusty souvenirs of centennials past? They may become relics but only because they have been superceded by better works. The study of the history of British Columbia is thriving. For proof, one need only scan the bibliographies in *BC Studies* or lists of theses in preparation<sup>38</sup> or seek a place in a British Columbia history class at any one of the provincial universities.

Why are British Columbians so interested in their history? Official encouragement through Centennial Committees has been a factor as has nostalgia. Because of the relative brevity of the province's history, much of it is within living memory. More significant perhaps, is the fact that two-thirds of British Columbians aged twenty or over are immigrants to the province. In searching for the past of their adopted home they may well be seeking that sense of security, that sense of belonging which concerned so many of their predecessors. And, because of their physical and psychological isolation from the rest of Canada, British Columbians are inspired to seek their own identity. Whatever their motive, historians of British Columbia are examining a fascinating subject of which only the surface has been scratched.

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37 Martin Robin, "The Social Basis of Party Politics in British Columbia," *Queen's Quarterly*, 72 (Winter 1966), pp. 675-690. [Reprinted in Hugh Thorburn, ed. *Party Politics in Canada* (Scarborough, 1967) and in R. Blishen et al. *Canadian Society* (Toronto, 1968)].

38 For completed theses see Frances Woodward, *Theses on British Columbia History and Related Subjects* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Library, 1971). [Reference Publication No. 35].