

British Columbia: Three Years Later

By Emily & Ben Achtenberg

BC: THREE YEARS LATER

Vancouver, British Columbia. The 4,000 people who lined up before dawn in Steveston, a small fishing community near Vancouver, were there to get bargain salmon. But along with the fish, they also got a practical demonstration of where their food dollars go.

The salmon sale was part of "Operation Strike Relief," set up last summer by British Columbia's United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union (UFAWU) to raise money and build public support during their strike against the major packing companies.

"We're asking the companies to pay 80 cents a pound for sockeye," said Bruce Yorke, organizer of the sale. "The cost of our wage demands for tendermen and shoreworkers is about 5 cents a pound each. So the real cost is under \$1.00 a pound, which is the price at which we're selling to the public. Contrast this with the \$2.50 a pound which is charged in the supermarkets, and the people start to get the message. If anyone is ripping off the consumer, it's not the workers—it's the companies."

Fishing is the province's fourth largest industry, and the UFAWU strike was expected to be costly both to the workers involved and to the economy generally. Moreover, it was only one of several major labor disputes going on, and conservative newspaper columnists warned that BC's very economic survival was threatened. But the scene on the line at Steveston had a cheerful mood, and the good humor extended even to the bloodied union members gutting fish for the sale.

Life in Vancouver is relaxed, and people take things in stride. The strike causing the most visible distress was the one that cut off supplies from one of the area's largest breweries. Despite stratospheric housing and food costs, despite the steady winter rains that Vancouverites warn visitors about, BC's Lower Mainland is clearly a pleasant place to live—an impression supported by the steady stream of immigrants from other parts of Canada.

Still, there were reminders on the waiting line at Steveston that all was not yet well in Canada's Pacific province, despite its election three years earlier of a government committed to "a New Deal for People." While a few customers were well dressed, most appeared to be working people and elderly. Several people told us that they were unemployed, or on strike themselves. An unemployed carpenter, waiting with his three children and a metal washtub for his limit of five fish, said that at normal prices his family could almost never afford to eat fresh salmon, despite living

Photographs by BEN ACHTENBERG.



in one of the richest salmon-producing areas of the world.

On December 11, 1975, a provincial election ended the three-year rule of the socialist New Democratic Party (NDP) in British Columbia (see box). Some of the problems contributing to the NDP's defeat were apparent, on the salmon piers and elsewhere, when we lived in Vancouver last summer. The party had accomplished much while it was in power. But it also had much left to do, and it wavered in some critical areas.

Because the NDP lost, this review of its successes and failures has something of the character of a post-mortem. It's not, really: a post-mortem would be premature, for the NDP's effect will depend partly on how many of its reforms the victorious Social Credit party is able or willing to roll back. Then too, the NDP is by no means dead. Political fortunes have a way of reversing themselves quickly, and a few years of the conservative Social Credit party may convince BC voters to give the NDP another chance.

At the provincial NDP convention last spring Premier Dave Barrett told the delegates, "From our earliest days the people of British Columbia have been split into two groups: workers and owners. And despite many attempts, the owners' political desires alone had been served—until August 30, 1972, when our New Democratic Party government was finally elected." "The election of a humanist, democratic socialist government," he announced, "was inevitable."

Inevitable or not, the NDP victory surprised many British Columbians. And while the New Democrats won 38 of 55 seats in the provincial parliament, they received only 39 percent of the popular vote. Many

observers felt the upset had to do less with a desire for democratic socialism than with a growing dissatisfaction with the big business conservatism of the entrenched Social Credit party and with "Socred's" sell-out of provincial interests and resources to developers. (An opponent once described Socred leader W.A.C. Bennett as having "an unlimited taste for cement.")

Whatever the reasons for its victory, the NDP's achievements in slightly more than three years were impressive. While the provincial budget was about 25 percent higher than that of the last Socred administration, personal income taxes were not raised. The difference was made up by increases in corporate taxes and in royalties for mining and forest products, the province's largest industries.

Among their other reforms, the New Democrats increased the minimum wage to \$2.50 an hour, the highest in the world. And they introduced "Mincome," a program that provides a minimum income for the elderly, \$244 a month as of July 1975. (In an announcement on October 24, coupled to his freeze on food prices, Premier Dave Barrett said that the minimum wage would be increased to \$2.75 December 1 and to \$3.00 on June 1, 1976. On January 1, 1976, Mincome payments were to be raised to \$265 a month.)

A Socred freeze on hospital construction was eliminated and a provincial ambulance service, charging a flat rate of \$5, was introduced. The BC Medical Plan is now universal in the province, guaranteeing "portability" of coverage. "Pharmacare" provides free prescription drugs to the elderly and disabled, and subsidies for drugs to other low-income residents.

The government established the province's first Department of Housing and increased its involvement in housing production. It increased grants to homeowners and tenants, and introduced a law allowing homeowners over 65 to defer property taxes until their property is sold. Decentralized, locally elected Community Resource Boards now initiate and manage social service programs in several cities.

Some efforts were made to deal with the persistent problems of Indian land claims and other native demands. Although these met with limited success at best, progress was greater than under the Socreds. Among other things, the government provided financing for fishermen's cooperatives and other Indian development ventures.

In one of its most controversial moves, the government empowered itself to buy stocks of private corporations. It invested about \$70 million of provincial funds in a range of companies including the privately held BC telephone company. The intent was not

THE NDP: WHAT HAPPENED?

On November 3, 1975, as many observers had been predicting, BC premier Dave Barrett scheduled a provincial general election for December 11. While elections could have been postponed for more than a year, party leaders were concerned about growing Social Credit ("Socred") strength in by-elections (which are held when parliamentary vacancies occur). Barrett obviously hoped to capitalize on the wave of public approval that followed his back-to-work order and price freezes. He may have badly misjudged the situation.

The 38-day campaign was marked by a singular avoidance of substantive questions on both sides. The Socreds, led by millionaire businessman Bill Bennett, claimed that "the real issue is socialism or individual freedom." They and their supporters, including lobbyists for the mining and insurance companies, mounted a massive ad campaign attacking the NDP for "ruining the economy" and promising to "get BC back to work again." A Vancouver source said, "The advertising campaign was just incredible. If you called up to find out what time it was, you got a Socred ad."

For their part, Barrett and his Toronto public relations man stressed "leadership" as the central campaign focus. Their ads often featured big pictures of the premier and no mention of the NDP. Irritated party campaign workers accused Barrett of "ego-tripping" and "opportunism."

Whatever the reasons for Barrett's timing and strategy, the outcome was disastrous for the party. The NDP held on to only 17 seats in the 55-member provincial parliament, while the Socreds went from 10 seats (in 1972) to 36. The Liberals and Progressive Conservatives (Tories) took one seat each.

While the NDP kept many of its seats in the mining and agricultural areas of the interior, it lost badly in the major cities, and especially in the suburbs. The party lost all but 3 seats from Vancouver, and Barrett himself was defeated by a used-car salesman—in a provincial district that had given him a 12,000 vote margin in 1972. (Barrett lost by only 167 votes, however, and a recount is expected.) Several cabinet members also lost their seats, including the minister of human resources and the head of the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC). One of the few bright spots was that Vancouver representative Rosemary Brown managed to hang on to her support.

While the parliamentary outcome represents almost a complete reversal of previous NDP and Socred standings, the NDP, always a minority government, lost less than 1 percent of its popular vote as compared with 1972. It is still supported by almost 40 percent of the voters. Its defeat was almost entirely caused by a shift

of center voters, who backed Liberal or Tory candidates in 1972, but this time lined up solidly behind the Socreds.

Social Credit went from 31 percent of the vote in the last election to almost 50 percent this time. The new premier's father, W.A.C. Bennett, who led the Socreds until the NDP victory in 1972, commented that the voters of BC had "put their finger on the hot stove of socialism and tonight they have taken it away." The new government has apparently committed itself to retaining the most popular NDP social welfare measures, including pharmacare and rent control. It has also said that it will not sell the industries acquired by the New Democrats unless it can find Canadian buyers. On the other hand, the Socreds plan to restore private auto insurance—though they may keep ICBC as a "yardstick" competitor—and eliminate the NDP Mineral Royalties Act, which had been bringing large amounts of revenue into the provincial treasury.

A Vancouver NDP supporter said after the election, "The mining industry says that it will take them 15 years to recover from the last three years of socialist legislation—so they've got an excuse ready for when economic recovery doesn't come." She feels that in the long run the Socreds may have hurt themselves by their promises to end recession and unemployment—conditions over which the provincial government can have little control.

Like any incumbent government, the NDP had the problem of being identified with the current economic crunch. However, despite the party's parliamentary losses, its popular vote indicates that it has maintained the support of its traditional left and labor constituency. In the campaign it had the full backing of the BC Federation of Labour, even though the unions had vigorously opposed the premier's back-to-work order of the previous month.

On the other hand, Barrett's attempts to placate center voters with a more moderate NDP image have angered many supporters and have undercut the party's historic role as a voice of populist socialism, without leading to any appreciable gains at the ballot box. A more uncompromising class position might not have helped the NDP at the polls but, given the December election results, it could hardly have hurt much either. And it might have strengthened the party's base for future struggles.

One clear casualty of the campaign and election has been Dave Barrett's personal prestige, even within his own party. While the defeated premier commented that "We have not lost anything tonight but the battle; the war for a mature, loving society goes on," some of his former supporters were saying, "We'll be back again in a few years—with a better team."

merely to reap profits for the province but, more importantly, to give the government a strategic handle on corporate planning and decision making. Altogether about 5 percent of the budget was devoted to stock purchases and direct take-overs.

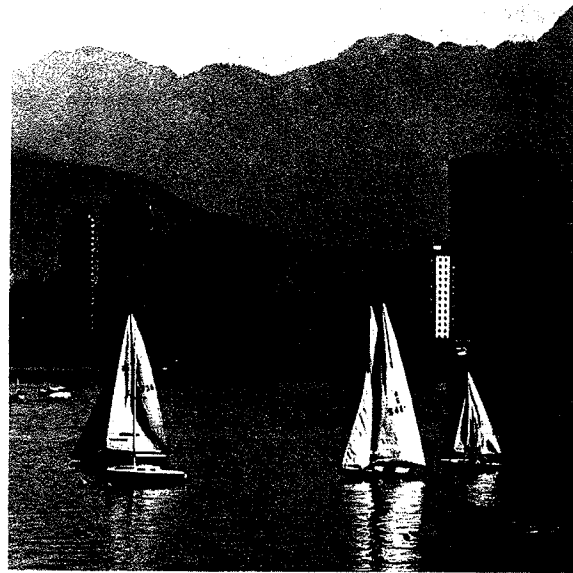
Ecological considerations were increasingly emphasized in planning, and the government declared nuclear power too risky for use in the province. Among other environmental actions the NDP, with unanimous support in parliament, recently banned pay toilets in public places. The people of the province, declared health minister Dennis Cocke, were "flushed with pride."

At a more serious level, the New Democrats removed Socred freezes on school construction and teachers' salaries and increased support for the community college system. A campaign to reduce class sizes by one-and-a-half students over each of three years was initiated but not fully carried out. Jim MacFarlan, head of the BC Federation of Teachers and considered one of the most militant union leaders in the province, criticized the government's performance on education in his report to the union's annual meeting:

There is a long and positive record of accomplishments of this government in the field of education, but there is also a substantial balance sheet on the negative side The school system is just as undemocratic as it was two-and-a-half years ago. The students and the community at large remain uninvolved in the decision-making process The failure to change an education system that is class biased, sexist and even racist, the failure to reduce the power of administrators at the school, the district and the provincial levels and, finally, the broken pupil-teacher ratio pledge—these things cannot be overlooked or ignored.

As in the other two NDP provinces, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the BC government took over the private auto insurance business, resulting in faster servicing of claims and a substantial reduction in rates. The Insurance Company of British Columbia (ICBC) plan also returns more of its premium dollars to customers in awards than private companies.

Despite a prolonged strike by ICBC adjusters this past summer, which caused considerable inconvenience to BC motorists, public support for the program remains strong and there seems little likelihood of any retreat. In fact the government was considering going into casualty and life insurance in competition with private companies. Such programs are seen by the NDP not merely as a public service, but also as a major source of investment capital for other public enterprises.



New NDP legislation last spring placed fishermen, domestic workers, professional employees, and trappers under the provincial labor code, and extended workmen's compensation to cover commercial fishermen and boat masters. These measures were long sought by labor, especially by the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union, many of whose members are self-employed, small-boat fishermen.

The government also reversed a previous Socred policy denying collective bargaining rights to provincial employees, and established a \$5 million fund to set up a labor education center.

While the NDP repealed most of the Social Credit government's antilabor legislation, its own labor act was criticized by the BC Federation of Labour and others for setting up a labor relations board with sweeping powers to intervene and issue binding orders in labor disputes. A critique in *Canadian Dimension*, the best-known publication of the Canadian left, said, "In government the NDP attempts to harmonize class relations. It claims to rule on behalf of 'all the people,' not just working people NDP governments are responding to the economic crisis in ways little different than those being used elsewhere in the country. That means urging workers to restrain their wage demands, legislating against striking workers and holding back on necessary social reforms." It quoted BC premier Dave Barrett as having said, "It takes socialism to save free enterprise."

The government was also criticized for failing to improve labor-management relations in the companies it acquired or bought into. There was some talk of experimenting with worker self-management, but little was done.

Rent Control

The rental housing crisis in BC, particularly in the Lower Mainland, may be the most severe in North America. Staggering increases in land and mortgage costs in recent years have brought new apartment construction to a standstill. Vancouver's vacancy rate—a widely used measure of housing shortage—is the lowest in Canada at 0.2 percent. (Boston's vacancy rate, by comparison, is 3.5 percent.)

Low vacancies combined with rapid population growth have produced a dramatic escalation in rents at a time when most families are feeling the impact of rampant inflation in the cost of food and other necessities. During the 1960s Vancouver rents rose 70 percent, leading the nation. The average rent today is about \$190.

Vancouver's large real estate companies have been well served by the housing shortage with its inflationary impact on property values and profits. Many smaller entrepreneurs have also made a killing in capital gains, which were untaxed by the federal government until recently. According to a study prepared for Canada's Central Housing and Mortgage Corporation, after-tax equity yields for Vancouver apartment investors averaged about 50 percent during the 1960s.

The NDP came to power on a campaign plank stating that "housing is a basic right and must be provided on the basis of need rather than profit." It promised to institute a major program of socially owned housing, and did in fact significantly expand the government's role in housing production. At the same time, the party recognized the need to protect tenants from the costly effects of the present housing shortage. It promised to promote collective bargaining between tenants and landlords, and to establish strong municipal rent boards with tenant representatives.

The government's initial step toward the establishment of rent control was an interim law passed in May 1974, which limited rent increases to 8 percent annually. No enforcement mechanism was set up to administer this program.

Later in the year the government proclaimed a new landlord and tenant act that fundamentally altered landlord-tenant relationships. It was by far the most progressive tenant legislation in Canada. In addition to authorizing the cabinet to prescribe a maximum allowable rent increase for 1975, the act prohibited evictions except for specified "just causes" such as nonpayment of rent, and regulated tenancy terms, security deposits, maintenance, and repairs. The act was to be administered by a "Rentalsman," conceived as a kind of impartial ombudsman with authority to arbitrate disputes.



In July, a conservative economist was commissioned to determine the allowable rent increase for the province. His report recommended outrageous rent-increase ceilings of 16—30 percent. The government balked at this and settled instead on a limit of 10.6 percent plus an allowance for major renovations. According to Attorney General Alex MacDonald, the figure was intended to be "sufficient to meet anticipated operating costs as well as to maintain the values of the landlords' investment." In other words, inflated profits were to be protected.

The newly appointed Rentalsman, Barrie Clark, a former Liberal party politician and radio broadcaster, refused to administer rent controls. As a result, the attorney general appointed a separate rent review commission, while the Rentalsman retained jurisdiction over other landlord-tenant matters.

Controversy over the impact of rent controls raged all year. The BC Rental Housing Council, which claims to represent 1,600 landlords owning more than 100,000 rental units, maintained a steady barrage of anti-rent-control propaganda, replete with appropriate socialist rhetoric. Blaming rent control for the lack of new construction, the Council announced that "Housing capital is *on strike* . . . for a fair wage and improvement in the conditions of employment."

Actually, the NDP's form of rent control was only a limited threat to the profitability of BC real estate

investments. While extreme rent gouging was thwarted, the government-sanctioned percentage encouraged some landlords to raise rents more than they otherwise would have. Other owners successfully exploited legal loopholes to secure increases above the permissible maximum. Many ignored the law entirely.

The Rent Review Commission viewed its role largely as an information agency, and was less than aggressive in enforcing compliance. Moreover, the split jurisdiction between the Rentalsman and the commission created considerable public confusion and opportunities for bureaucratic buck-passing. Tenant groups accused Clark of "obvious bias and incompetence" in his handling of evictions which, they felt, effectively undermined the government's rent policy. Clark also frustrated tenant organizing efforts by refusing to hear collective grievances.

The BC Tenants Organization, a federation of tenant groups throughout the province, called for a basic overhaul of the existing rent control system. To replace the allowable rent increase concept, they proposed that a standard rent schedule be determined for each community by a provincial rental authority composed of landlord, tenant, and government representatives. Rents would reflect the property's age, location, services, and amenities, as well as the average family income in the community. Tenants paying more than 20 percent of their income for rent under this scheme would receive rent subsidies. Municipal boards would hold hearings on individual rent appeals and would also settle evictions and all other landlord-tenant disputes.

During the year, an interdepartmental study team of cabinet advisers conducted an in-depth review of provincial rent and housing policy. Reflecting the NDP's ambivalence, tensions arose between those who viewed rent control as a necessary but temporary evil, and those who sought a vehicle to substantially restructure existing ownership patterns. In the end, the study team settled for a continuation of the allowable rent increase concept, with some minor changes, and in October Premier Barrett announced the outlines of a new program that would allow rents to rise in 1976 between 5 and 8 percent. With the Sacred victory in December however, tenant hopes for a more progressive rent control plan quickly evaporated.

Communications

In March 1974, Minister of Transport and Communications Robert Strachan commissioned Barrie Clark, a former talk-show host (later the Rentalsman), to analyze the communications needs of the province.

The Clark report concentrated almost exclusively on the need for educational programming, and was immediately attacked by citizens groups as being too limited. The Metro Media Association of Vancouver, for example, proposed as an alternative model a "democratically structured, decentralized Citizens' Communication System," with cable television stations owned and operated by local cooperatives and used for community programming as well as education.

According to Jean McNulty, coordinator of the Telecommunications Research Group at Simon Fraser University, the government unofficially favored cooperative ownership, but did little to encourage it. Deputy Minister of Transport and Communications Chuck Dalfen acknowledged the government's inaction but blamed it on lack of demand. "Community groups just haven't gotten themselves together to do it," he said. He wanted to see cable companies giving better service to their communities, and supported a proposal by the Canadian Radio Television Commission (parallel to the FCC in the United States) to require cable operators to devote 10 percent of their revenues to community programming. "I would hope there would be a spillover effect," Dalfen said, "such that the control of a community channel would become so central, and people's sense of commitment would be so great, that they would then say, well, maybe we ought to put in a bid for the license. I'm not sure that will happen very often."

By contrast, Saskatchewan's NDP government actively encourages cooperative community ownership of cable. The government-owned Saskatchewan Telecommunications Corporation announced in 1972 that it would install and own cable systems in major cities and would operate the network as a public utility; only nonprofit, community-controlled organizations would be able to qualify as cable operators and programmers. In Saskatchewan, however, cable is still relatively new, while many of BC's major cities are already cabled—in fact Vancouver has the highest cable penetration in the world.

BC does have one community-owned cable system, in Campbell River on Vancouver Island. It was started in 1956, without government assistance, and has since provided its members with better service, at lower cost, than any other system in the province. It is frequently cited but so far has not been imitated.

More recently, activists in Vancouver have succeeded in getting an FM-radio broadcasting license; Co-op Radio went on the air last summer with three to five hours an evening of community-produced, community-oriented programming.

Cable licenses in Canada are issued and regulated by the federal government. BC wanted that control, as well as control of intraprovincial broadcasting and telecommunications, to be at the provincial level. While this might guarantee greater responsiveness to local needs, it is not clear that the government had any very radical changes in mind. Dalfen said, "Provincial regulation would *not* mean revoking existing cable licenses to set up co-ops or for any other reason. What it probably *would* mean is more extensive development of cable systems to parts of the province that don't have it now because it's not economical, using money generated in the large centers to subsidize development out in the smaller centers."

Asked whether the province had anything that could be called a "socialist communications policy," Dalfen laughed. "I can't answer that. Too many undefined terms. I would say that the province which our policy most closely resembles is Ontario, and Ontario has had for the past 35 years a Tory government. That's never a consideration with us, you know, what is a socialist communications policy, any more than what is a socialist parks policy or a socialist highway policy."

Labor

The Vancouver *Sun's* August 30 headline read, "B.C. Labour Day Studded with Picket Signs." Although the fishermen's strike was over, the industry had already missed a substantial part of the important sockeye runs, and the final economic impact was expected to be severe. ICBC employees were back at work—with the first white-collar contract since the corporation's formation—but had at least 200,000 back claims to process.

The following week most of the Lower Mainland's supermarkets were shut down by a lockout following strikes by bakers and meatcutters. The media predicted disaster and suffering, but Vancouverites seemed to get by quite well with the city's many corner groceries. However, it appeared likely that supply problems would show up if the strike continued for long.

Most important of the ongoing labor conflicts was a series of confrontations that threatened to shut down, for the first time in history, the province's forest industries—its major source of exports.

When forest industry employers warned of disastrous effects on the BC economy resulting from a shutdown, the unions responded by pointing out that only 5.8 percent of the provincial budget came from forest royalties, while 20 percent was from personal income taxes and 18 percent from consumption taxes. The way to save the economy, they argued, was not

government intervention but a good settlement for the forest workers.

Secretary-Treasurer Len Guy of the BC Federation of Labour, in his Labor Day statement, said, "Throughout the province the prevailing mood in the trade union movement is one of grim determination to see that wages catch up and stay in front of cost-of-living increases."

Predictions of antiunion action by the Barrett government came true in early October, when the NDP introduced Bill 146, banning strikes and lockouts for a 90-day cooling-off period in the forest and propane gas industries, the supermarkets, and on the (provincially owned) BC Railway. It imposed fines of \$1,000 a day for individuals and \$10,000 a day for unions defying the order. While many union executives and rank-and-file members, particularly in the pulp and paper unions, were prepared to resist, the final decision by the BC Federation of Labour was to go back to work under protest. A representative said, "Employers have no incentive to bargain now, with all the pressures off. They have been given a blank cheque to wait for the government to settle their disputes at the end of the freeze."

Left critics suggested that the NDP should have intervened in the forest industry dispute by settling—on favorable terms—with the workers in the government-owned forest product plants. They argued that a wage agreement by the government would have broken the deadlock and set a pattern for the industry. While there is some doubt that a settlement in the small publicly controlled sector of the industry would really have affected the major companies, the experiment was never tried.

While union leaders in the NDP were bitter, Barrett gained support from other sectors of the party. However, the Vancouver area labor council, representing six provincial districts, came out against the bill and promised its support for any union action opposing it. Those opposing Bill 146 saw it as an opportunistic move on Barrett's part to pick up support from center and right voters unhappy about labor unrest, while taking for granted the continued support of the party's labor and left constituency who, despite their dissatisfaction, had nowhere else to go.

Barrett himself immediately departed on a "meet the people" tour of the northern part of the province, where he met generally approving reactions from his audiences, although he had to beef up his usually light security after a fake bomb threat. Mayor John Baker of Burns Lake, who calls himself "an old Socred," praised Barrett for having "the intestinal fortitude to make a hard decision." The premier appeared anxious

NDP: THE PROSPECTS ELSEWHERE

National Leaders. The NDP in British Columbia is considered to be more "left" than NDP parties in the other provinces and has been more open in calling for a socialist Canada. But the approach appears to have spread to the federal party, as evidenced by last year's national convention, held in Winnipeg in July. Rhetorically, at least, it was the most radical in the party's history; the word "socialism," generally shunned by the NDP in the past, showed up frequently in almost every speech and position paper.

Perhaps the most interesting of the national leadership candidates was Rosemary Brown, black MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly—the provincial parliament) from the Vancouver-Burrard district. A 45-year-old former social worker, she polled 12,162 votes in the 1972 election, 5,000 more than her Socred opponent. According to the *Vancouver Sun*, when she entered the race for the party leadership one NDP regular complained, "Take away her race and her sex and what have you got?" Brown's answer when the remark got back to her was, "Take away my race and my sex and what you've got is a socialist." She has been a strong proponent of minority and women's rights and was a major force in getting rent control enacted in BC. She was one of only three NDP MLAs to vote against Barrett's October back-to-work order.

Brown frequently clashed with the BC premier, who was said to dislike her unequivocal and sometimes inconvenient insistence on attention to women's issues. In the leadership struggle, Barrett supported the NDP "establishment" candidate Ed Broadbent, as did the major unions, which supply a large portion of the party's votes. Broadbent won, as expected, but Brown came in a surprisingly close second.

Brown's strategy had been to work for a popular base rather than party support. "Even God," she said, "makes things grow from the ground up. And I never question Her wisdom."

Ontario. In elections held in September, the Ontario New Democratic Party ended 32 years of uninterrupted majority government by the Conservatives, and beat out the Liberal Party to become the province's official opposition for the first time. The final tally gave the Conservatives 51 seats in the provincial parliament to the New Democrats' 38 and the Liberals' 36. The NDP won 14 of the 29 seats in the Toronto metropolitan area.

The party's campaign focused on four issues: the scarcity and high cost of housing, rising energy bills, loss of agricultural land to developers, and the Conservative government's unresponsiveness. Thirty-seven-year-old party leader Stephen Lewis said, "It's wonderful for a change to have a political victory rather than a moral victory."

to reinforce the image of his government as "responsible" and "decisive."

On October 24, Barrett followed up his back-to-work order by placing a freeze on the prices of food and essential commodities and services until January 1. He described the new program as an effort to make federal prime minister Trudeau's recently announced antiinflation measures "fairer and more equitable" for the people of British Columbia. Ottawa's new wage and price controls were being criticized by labor and community groups as an attack on the living standards of working people, and Barrett's freeze seemed designed to shore up the NDP's eroding prestige with its labor and left constituents—the party's traditional power base.

It is hard for a visitor to British Columbia to evaluate the NDP's impact on life in the province during its three years in power. We lived in Vancouver for only three months, and we didn't go there to study the government. Inevitably, though, in the course of the

work each of us was doing, we found ourselves trying to get some kind of a grip on what government by professed "democratic socialists" meant in practice.

We found it easy to be misled by differences between life there and life in the United States, and to blame or credit the New Democrats for things that actually had more to do with the particular Canadian or provincial circumstances.

For example, one of the more enjoyable features of life on the Lower Mainland was the comfortable, convenient, and cheap BC ferry system up the coast and to Vancouver Island. The system is state owned, but this was an innovation not of the socialist NDP but of the conservative Social Credit government. The Socreds also "provincialized" BC Hydro, which provides Vancouver with inexpensive electrical power and excellent public transportation. Public enterprise has a longer history and broader acceptance in Canada than in the United States, and is not necessarily viewed as either "radical" or "socialist." This is true not only on the provincial level, but also federally (Air Canada,

Canadian National Railroad, and the CBC are all owned and operated by the federal government).

The scope of powers Canadian provinces have over their internal economies can also be confusing to Americans used to the more circumscribed role of our states. While state-owned enterprises are not unheard of (North Dakota, for example, owns a bank) they are much rarer in the United States; it is hard to imagine an American governor suddenly declaring a statewide freeze on food prices, as Premier Barrett recently did in BC.

While the New Democrats introduced a wide range of welcome and popular social reforms—and extended others begun by the Socreds—it seemed to us that they had done little to increase the people's sense of participation in, and control over, their government. NDP leaders were still seen by most people as "just politicians." This may have been partly a result of the Canadian system of voting in parliament along strict party lines, a system that may discourage a feeling of being "represented." But it also stemmed from the NDP's political style. It made some hesitant steps in the direction of popular participation, but its primary concern was to govern effectively—and to be seen to be governing effectively.

The argument that the NDP should have acted as a working-class government, rather than as a "government of all the people," is difficult to assess. For one thing, it tends to obscure the historical tension within the party between the radical tradition of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and the pragmatism of the big labor unions. Within the party itself the words "class government" sometimes seem to mean "labor government" and sometimes something broader. The split could be seen after Barrett's back-to-work order, when, despite virtually unanimous opposition to the move by the unions, many old CCF leaders in the party backed the premier.

In any event, the NDP saw itself as part of an evolutionary process toward democratic socialism, not as the outcome of a popular revolution. It was subject to the constraints of operating within a basically capitalist nation and a still predominantly capitalist provincial economy. It was faced with the tedious necessity of making its reforms work, and work so irrefutably that they would not be rolled back.

Beyond that, there was the party's desire to keep winning. The NDP was trying to broaden its base of support while continuing to meet the needs—and hopes—of its traditional labor and left constituency. It was an effort bound to invite criticism.

The real questions are these: Could the party have done more to promote social and economic equality,

and still govern? Did it listen too much to the voices of mining and timber companies threatening to pull their capital out of the province, and not enough to the claims of its miners and woodcutters? Did it give too much credence to the "striking" real estate developers, and too little to the province's tenants? Could the wave of strikes in core industries have been resolved through measures other than a mandatory back-to-work order, without undermining the stability of the economy?

Our tentative answer to these questions is yes; we feel the government made some bad decisions, some unnecessary compromises. These issues are at the heart of the dilemma faced by social democracy. During its rule, the NDP government was forced to continue to rely on capitalist production for the province's economic growth, which in turn was needed to generate the necessary capital for expansion of the public sector, increased social welfare programs, capital construction projects, and so on. It had neither the economic resources nor the political mandate for total control of the economy.

Nonetheless, we were left with the feeling that the limits of democratic socialism in British Columbia were yet to be fully explored.

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NOTES AND SOURCES

Derek Shearer's article in *Working Papers* (Spring 1974) includes a good bibliography on BC and the New Democratic Party. A few additions may be of interest:

The party magazine *Democrat*, Vol. 15, No. 6, is a special convention issue on "Looking Back: Perspectives on Democratic Socialism in British Columbia." New Democratic Party, 1881 East Hastings St., Vancouver. The office also has recently-updated summaries of the party's accomplishments.

A monthly report on happenings in Victoria is available from *British Columbia Government News*, Department of the Provincial Secretary, Parliament Buildings, Victoria.

NDP: The Dream of Power, by Desmond Morton (Toronto: Hakkert, 1974. \$3.95) is an "official" history of the party from its beginnings through 1973, written by a former party staffer, now a history professor at the University of Toronto. It may be difficult to obtain in the United States but can probably be gotten through the NDP office.

The complete text of Teachers' Federation leader Jim MacFarlan, "Report of the President to the 1975 Annual General Meeting," is available from the BC Teachers' Federation, 105-2235 Burrard St., Vancouver. It is a remarkable document covering a wide range of educational issues.

"The Rentalsman and You," summarizing the Landlord and Tenant Act, is available from Office of the Rentalsman, 525 Seymour St., Vancouver. Copies of the Act itself are 35¢ from Queen's Printer, Parliament Bldgs., Victoria.

Also of interest, "Proposals of the B.C. Tenants' Organization for a democratic, flexible, just and socially acceptable form of rent control," can be obtained from the BCTO, 199 East 8th Ave., Room 4, Vancouver.

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