

Mapping a New Socio-Political Landscape: British Columbia, 1871–1874

DANIEL P. MARSHALL*

Historians have generally believed that the provincial legislature in post-Confederation British Columbia divided along “Island vs. Mainland” lines prior to the introduction of political parties. This myth is challenged in a study using political voting records and the computer-based methods of legislative roll-call analysis. A systematic re-examination of a traditional source, nineteenth-century newspapers, further supports a new interpretation: that in the inaugural period of Confederation an “Island vs. Mainland” schism did not exist in the B.C. legislature, but a “Rural vs. Urban” split was evident. The underlying divisive issue was adoption of the Canadian tariff.

Les historiens ont cru en général que la législature provinciale de la Colombie-Britannique post-Confédération était partagée par une ligne de démarcation entre les représentants de l’île de Vancouver et ceux de la terre ferme avant l’arrivée des partis politiques. Ce mythe est contesté dans une étude fondée sur les documents électoraux politiques et les méthodes informatiques de l’analyse du vote législatif par appel nominal. Le réexamen systématique d’une source traditionnelle, les journaux du XIX^e siècle, appuie également une nouvelle interprétation voulant qu’aucun schisme « île versus terre ferme » n’existait à la législature britannico-colombienne durant la période inaugurale de la Confédération, mais qu’on y observait bel et bien une division « milieu rural versus milieu urbain ». La question divisive sous-jacente était l’adoption d’un tarif canadien.

HISTORIANS GENERALLY believe that the post-Confederation British Columbia legislature divided along “Island vs. Mainland” lines prior to the introduction of political parties. Noted B.C. historian Judge Frederick Howay claimed:

* Daniel P. Marshall is a doctoral candidate in the Department of History, University of British Columbia, and historian to the Cowichan Tribes of Vancouver Island. The author is grateful to Peter Baskerville, Dianne Newell, and Eric Sager for superb advice, encouragement, and helpful assistance.

All was in an inchoate condition. With confederation the whole past, was, as it were, blotted out. There were no parties and no party lines. It was impossible to forecast how the dividing line would be drawn, or what forces would be operative. The old "Island vs. Mainland" cry had, however, sufficient vitality to survive. The mainland had thirteen members, the island twelve; the island had two salaried portfolios, the mainland one. Here was a spark which might be blown into a flame.¹

Most often, the parochial battles fought between the rival colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia are offered as the rationale for such continued "in-fighting" during the early years of provincehood. For instance, Margaret Ormsby noted that in 1870 the farmers of Langley, B.C., were nervous about demands for responsible government included in the terms of Confederation. Ormsby transcribed from her historical source that:

Responsible Government at present would only enable the unscrupulous politicians of Victoria to plunder more effectively the interests of the Mainland, and impede the progress of the country generally. ...should any more of this foul treatment appear to be furthered, we shall do everything in our power in conjunction with the rest of the Mainland to rid ourselves of all connection with that part of the United Colony known as Vancouver Island.²

Strong words indeed, and perhaps indicative of the kind of sentiment that led to the label "Island vs. Mainland" as a description of the political era.

Many of British Columbia's first historians were content to accept such rhetoric at face value. Likewise, historians of today readily accept — without question — these early histories and the portrayals of early politics that have become so entrenched. Martin Robin is only one of several who has advanced the "Island vs. Mainland" myth without providing any supportive evidence. He confidently asserts:

A ready cause of debate was the "Mainland versus Island split", a sectionalism which plagued Coast politics until the nineties.... The Mainland-Island cleavage coloured all aspects of public policy during the McCreight and subsequent

1 F. W. Howay, *British Columbia: From Earliest Times to Present*, vol. 2 (Vancouver: S. J. Clark Publishing Co., 1914), p. 331. Walter Sage stated, "federal parties as such took no part in provincial politics until 1903. Political divisions in the provincial arena were local rather than national. Until the population of the Mainland had surpassed that of Vancouver Island the division was Mainland vs. Island." See Walter N. Sage, "British Columbia Becomes Canadian, 1871–1901", *Queen's Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 2 (1945), pp. 168–183. Reprinted in J. Friesen and H. K. Ralston, eds., *Historical Essays on British Columbia* (Toronto: Gage, 1980), p. 64.

2 *Victoria Daily Standard*, December 1, 1870, as quoted in Margaret A. Ormsby, "Canada and the New British Columbia", *The Canadian Historical Association Annual Report* (1948) reprinted in Friesen and Ralston, eds., *Historical Essays on British Columbia*, p. 100.

administrations: railroads, public works, taxation, legislative and cabinet representation.³

Where did Robin find the evidence to suggest that “the Mainland-Island cleavage coloured all aspects of public policy”? All provincial historians have supported the Island-Mainland thesis, but none perhaps quite so fully as this. Unfortunately, there are exceedingly few biographies of MPPs who participated in the first “Provincial Parliament” of British Columbia, and consequently little light has been shed either to confirm or deny the assertion of an “Island vs. Mainland” voting alignment. One suspects that there has been a large degree of reticence to delve into the often murky and uncharted waters of nineteenth-century provincial politics for this very reason. Patricia Roy is right to conclude that provincial politics before 1903 are “a virtual *terra incognita*”.⁴ Quite amazingly, with the exception of general histories and a very small number of theses covering the lives of notable premiers, there has never been a thorough examination of British Columbia’s early provincial period.⁵ The dominant “Island versus Mainland” model faces a challenge, however, from a neglected historical source and a previously unapplied methodology: in particular, political voting records and the computer-based methods of legislative roll-call analysis. A systematic re-examination of a traditional source, nineteenth-century newspapers, further supports a new interpretation: that in the inaugural period of Confederation an “Island vs. Mainland” schism did not exist in the B.C. legislature, but a “Rural vs. Urban” split was evident. This study demonstrates the value of multidimensional analysis for testing political myths and revealing political configurations that offer more detailed explanations of events.

In 1896 Orin G. Libby presented “A Plea for the Study of Votes in Congress” to the American Historical Association that effectively initiated the use of roll-call data in historical analysis.⁶ It took 60 years for Libby’s

3 Martin Robin, *The Rush for Spoils: The Company Province, 1871–1933* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972), p. 51. Other recent works that continue to promote the “Island vs. Mainland” thesis are Donald E. Blake, *Two Political Worlds: Parties and Voting in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985); Michael Kluckner, *Victoria: The Way It Was* (Vancouver: Whitecap Books, 1986). More recent histories of B.C. are a little more cautious in advancing the Island-Mainland label, but nevertheless give credence to it in place of new alternatives. These are George Woodcock, *British Columbia: A History of the Province* (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990), p. 145; Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 103.

4 See Patricia Roy, “The First Three Decades of Confederation”, in J. L. Granatstein and Paul Stevens, eds., *A Reader’s Guide to Canadian History 2: Confederation to the Present* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 161–186.

5 Allan Smith, “The Writing of British Columbia History”, in W. Peter Ward and Robert A. J. McDonald, eds., *British Columbia: Historical Readings* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1981), pp. 22–23. Also see Margaret A. Ormsby, “Neglected Aspects of British Columbia’s History”, *British Columbia Library Quarterly*, vol. 23, no.4 (April 1960), p. 10.

6 Orin G. Libby, “A Plea for the Study of Votes in Congress”, *Annual Report of the American*

challenge to be met with any appreciable systematic response, but today the extent of sophisticated historical analyses of legislatures has firmly established legislative roll-call analysis as a distinct sub-discipline of the historical profession.⁷ Although the volume of research has been great, the field is still primarily devoted to American studies, with other nations lagging behind in comparable enthusiasm.⁸ American legislative roll-call analysis has provided historians with statistical tools to refine, or substantially alter, many crude generalizations and impressionistic “hunches” that were once commonplace in American political history.⁹

The technique used here was first offered by Valerie Cromwell, a British scholar, whose “Mapping the Political World of 1861: A Multidimensional Analysis of House of Commons’ Division Lists” plotted “Maps of Similarity” in which individual members of Parliament were represented by points on a two-dimensional map. The technique required for such research is a form of multivariate analysis that is well suited to isolating “eccentric or unexpected behaviour” of groups or individuals. When politicians’ votes are in close agreement, then plots, as represented by distance between points, are close together. Alternatively, politicians whose voting records are widely divergent appear on the periphery of this spatial representation and are considered to be “rogues” or political mavericks.¹⁰ Unlike other forms of legislative roll-call analysis, the multidimensional technique does not require any prior definition of political groupings within a legislature, and is therefore particularly suited for the study of non-party politics. In a legislature such as that found in nineteenth-century British Columbia — where political parties were absent and political alliances in a state of flux — multidimensional analysis is best able to capture and compare individual voting records for all political actors concerned.

Historical Association for 1896, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1897), pp. 323–324.

7 Margaret Susan Thompson and Joel H. Silbey, “Research on Nineteenth-Century Legislatures: Present Contours and Future Directions”, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 9, no. 2 (May 1984), p. 322.

8 After the Americans, British studies are a very distant second and Canadian studies, as far as this author has been able to determine, are almost nonexistent. One exception is Stephen David Eggleston, “Party Cohesion in the Early Post-Confederation Period” (Master’s thesis, Political Science Department, University of British Columbia, 1988). For an earlier example, see Paul G. Cornell, *The Alignment of Political Groups in Canada, 1841–1867* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).

9 Perhaps one of the greatest achievements in American studies was recognition of the early establishment of political parties as the dominant political force in America, in contrast to earlier impressionistic works that had promoted the myth of a non-party tradition. Thompson and Silbey, “Research on Nineteenth-Century Legislatures”, p. 328.

10 Valerie Cromwell, “Mapping the Political World of 1861: A Multidimensional Analysis of House of Commons’ Division Lists”, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 7, no. 2 (May 1982). For an update of Cromwell’s work, see Valerie Cromwell, “House of Commons’ Voting, 1861–1926: A Computer-Eye View”, in Peter Denley and Deian Hopkin, eds., *History and Computing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 132–136.

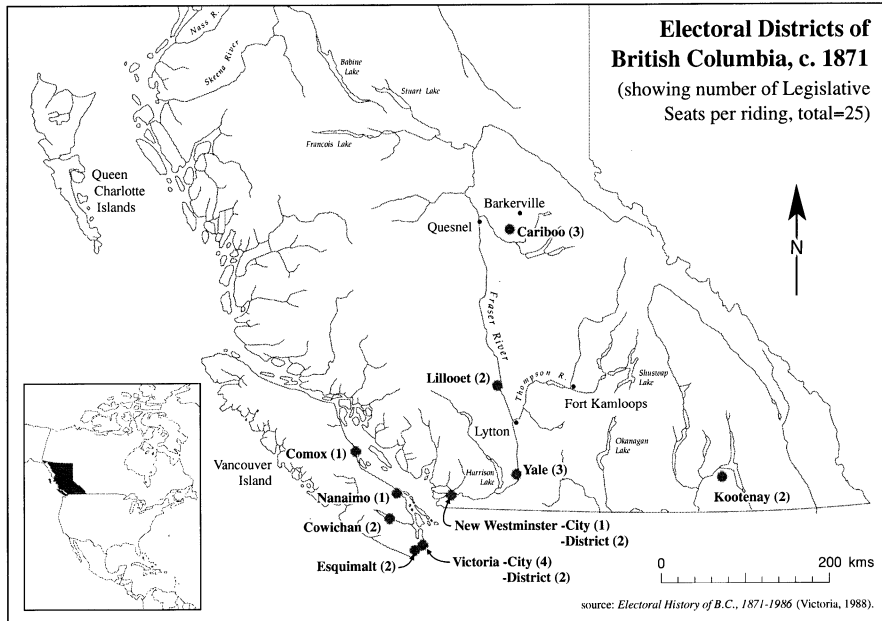


Figure 1 Electoral Districts of British Columbia, c.1871. Source: *Electoral History of B.C., 1871–1986* (Victoria, 1988).

By employing multidimensional analysis using the votes recorded in *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia*, we are able to plot maps of similarity for both the McCreight (1871–1872) and De Cosmos (1872–1874) administrations to test the “Island vs. Mainland” thesis.¹¹ In addition, electoral districts¹² were coded and larger geographical locations considered: for example, whether the member was an “Island” or “Mainland” representative, “Rural” or “Urban”, or from one of eight distinct regions within the province.¹³ Although this discussion focuses

11 For a detailed description of multidimensional techniques, see Joseph B. Kruskal and Myron Wish, *Multidimensional Scaling* (London and Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1978). For methods employed in this particular study, see chaps. 38 and 39, entitled “Proximities” and “Alscal” respectively, in *SPSS-X User’s Guide*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: SPSS Inc., 1988).

12 See map entitled “Electoral Districts of British Columbia, c. 1871” (Figure 1). My thanks to Ken Josephson, cartographer, Department of Geography, University of Victoria, for his assistance in map design.

13 For further explanation of this technique, see Appendix A in Daniel Patrick Marshall, “Mapping the Political World of British Columbia, 1871–1883” (Master’s thesis, University of Victoria, 1991). Similarity scores were calculated using a simple matching formula that constructed contingency tables for each pair of legislators. Politicians who voted identically most often would have high similarity scores. These scores were then inserted into a larger data matrix so that the multidimensional scaling

on the years 1871 to 1874, I have prepared multidimensional maps of similarity for every government administration from McCreight to McBride (1903–1915), up until 1906.¹⁴

Figure 2 is a map of the McCreight administration, 1871–1872, in which each MPP is represented by a single point. In the absence of group affiliation labels, let alone designated political parties, members' names have been appended to this chart to show individual positions. The first government administration to come to power in the B.C. legislature showed somewhat loose political alignments. Premier McCreight's precarious hold on power is clearly illustrated in Figure 2; MPPs are cast widely across the map with little evidence of strong group clustering. If McCreight had been a strong personality with a devoted following in the legislature, then Figure 2 would likely have shown a tighter clustering of individuals around the premier (upper left corner), and therefore evidence of voting similarity. Nonetheless, we find a legislature in which McCreight's own cabinet members — George Walkem, A. Rocke Robertson, and President of the Council Henry Holbrook — voted with the premier on the majority of legislation in which roll-call votes were recorded.¹⁵ Yet it is not surprising that the First Parliament assembled should represent such a state of flux. When one considers that six of the MPPs in this House were ultimately chosen as premier, it is not difficult to imagine the kind of competing loyalties that worked against the

process was able to plot the amount of agreement or disagreement among MPPs within a two-dimensional space. As a result, the map of similarity shows the unique position of each and every legislator in relation to all other members of provincial parliament, based on individual voting records. The source for a roll-call analysis of the B.C. legislature is the *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia* (Victoria: Government Printer, 1872–1874), vols. 1–4 (hereafter cited as *JLA*). In this study all recorded votes are used and all politicians considered. Voting data were collected and coded for all “Members of Provincial Parliament (M.P.P.)” who sat in the B.C. legislature between 1871 and 1874. A separate data file was created for each premier's administration. In all cases, each administration was given a special group number and individual politicians present under any given administration were identified with their own unique codes. To this basic system of file organization was added the individual voting records for each MPP. Thus, a politician's “yeas” and “nays” were translated into numeric form easily read by computer.

14 In all, I have coded approximately 50,000 pieces of information, although results only for the years 1871–1874 are presented here. Twenty-one separate data files, G1.dat to G21.dat, were created using SPSS-X from information contained in *JLA*, Division Lists, vols. 1–35, 1871–1906. All cases in all data files are, to the best of my knowledge, completely cleaned or 100% error-free. This study made tremendous use of a variety of software packages available at the University of Victoria. Software used in the preparation of this study and for which University of Victoria site licences are in effect are: SPSS-X, Version 3.1, SPSS Inc., 444 North Michigan Ave., Chicago, Illinois, 60611 (University of Victoria CMS); SAS, Version 6.06, SAS Institute Inc., SAS Circle, Box 8000, Cary, North Carolina, 27512–8000 (University of Victoria CMS); Harvard Graphics, Version 2.12 PC, Software Publishing Corporation, Box 7210, 1901 Landings Drive, Mountain View, California, 94039–7210.

15 Nineteen roll-calls were recorded under the McCreight administration, 1871–1872. De Cosmos is not included in this map because of his low record of attendance while representing Victoria in the House of Commons in Ottawa.

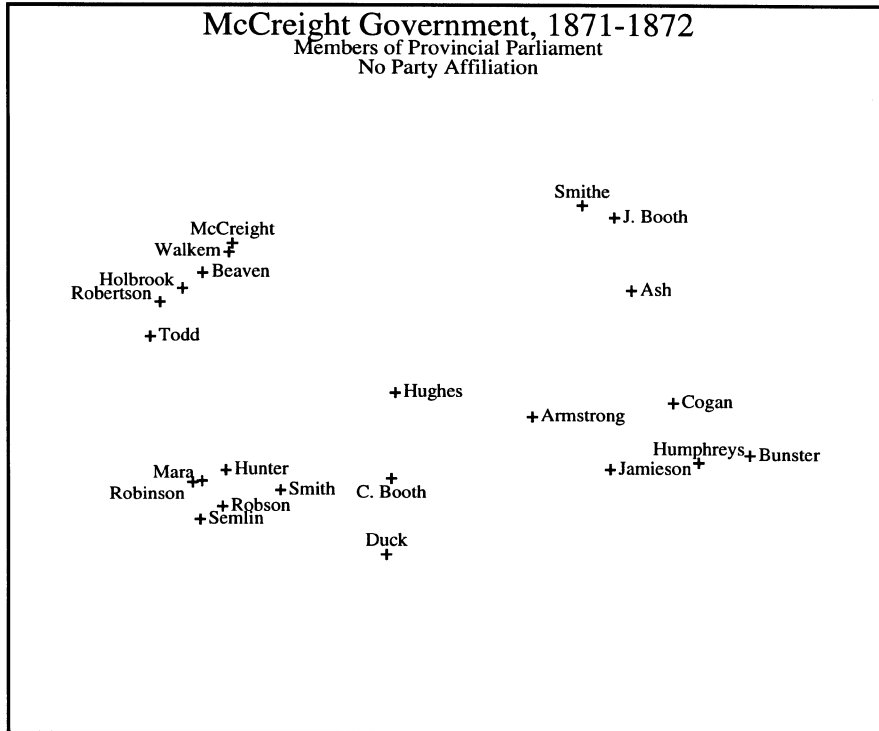


Figure 2 McCreight Government, 1871–1872, Members of Provincial Parliament. Source: *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia* (Victoria: Government Printer, 1872–1874), vols. 1–4 (hereafter *JLA*).

formation of any firm, party-like alignment.¹⁶ Indeed, Joseph Trutch, in his capacity as Lieutenant Governor, predicted a “grand fight” for the future De Cosmos government, as he viewed the McCreight legislature as being divided into three nearly equal sections identified with McCreight, De Cosmos, and John Robson.¹⁷ Figure 2 confirms Trutch’s opinion, illustrating three distinct groupings: McCreight’s supporters in the near upper left corner of the chart, Robson’s falling directly below, and the loose coalition of De Cosmos MPPs as represented by T. Basil Humphreys and Arthur Bunster to the right.¹⁸

16 The six MPPs present in the 1st Session of the First Parliament who ascended to the premiership between 1871 and 1898 were John Foster McCreight, George A. Walkem, Robert Beaven, William Smithe, John Robson, and Charles A. Semlin.

17 Trutch to Sir John A. Macdonald, December 31, 1872, *Macdonald Papers*, vol. 278, as quoted in J. T. Saywell, “Sir Joseph Trutch”, *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 19, nos. 1–2 (January–April, 1955), p. 83.

18 Although De Cosmos is not included in this chart, the Humphreys-Bunster grouping, while widely dispersed in the map, represents many of De Cosmos’s supporters.

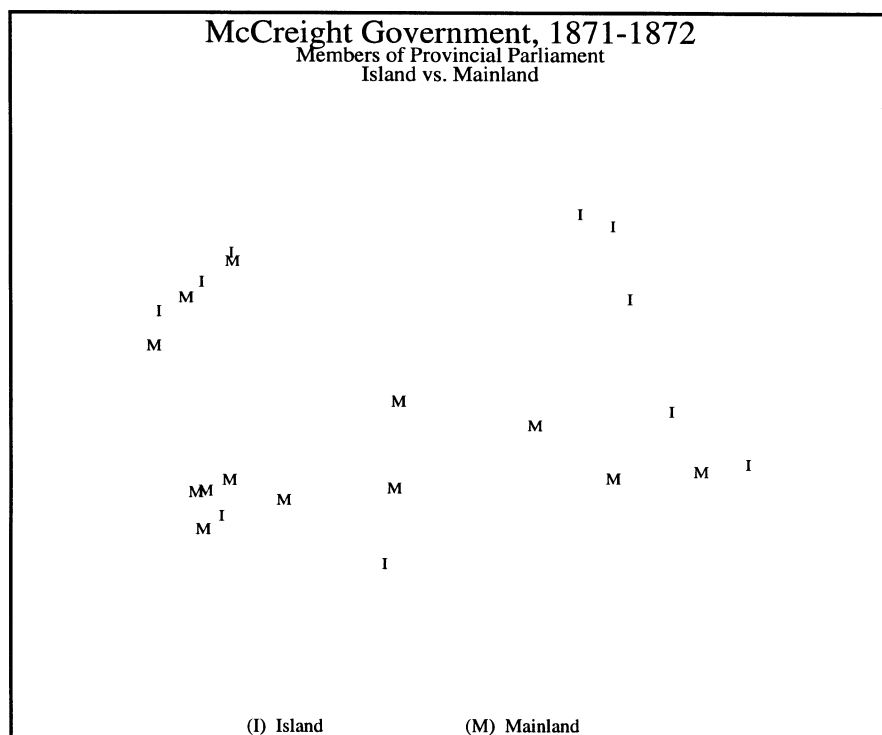


Figure 3 McCreight Government, 1871–1872, Island vs. Mainland. Source: *JLA*.

The more pertinent question to be addressed is whether this loose collection of individuals represented an “Island vs. Mainland” cleavage. Figure 3 again uses the same similarity scores for MPPs, but the individual points on the map have been relabelled as either (I) or (M), representing Island or Mainland respectively, and therefore show how MPPs voted on this basis. As Figure 3 clearly demonstrates, there is little indication of an “Island vs. Mainland” voting alignment during the McCreight government’s reign. Instead, both Island and Mainland members are found in rough proportion across the map. In fact, the existence of an Island-Mainland balance is particularly noticeable among McCreight’s closest supporters (upper left, Figure 3).

The legislature under De Cosmos’s control appears to have been almost as loosely defined as under McCreight. Figure 4 depicts the relative position of all MPPs under De Cosmos’s leadership and effectively illustrates the absence of any rigid factionalism.¹⁹ If clear government and opposition

¹⁹ All members are present in the McCreight charts with the exception of Speaker of the House Dr. James Trimble. The speaker normally only voted to break a stalemate. Twenty-one divisions were recorded

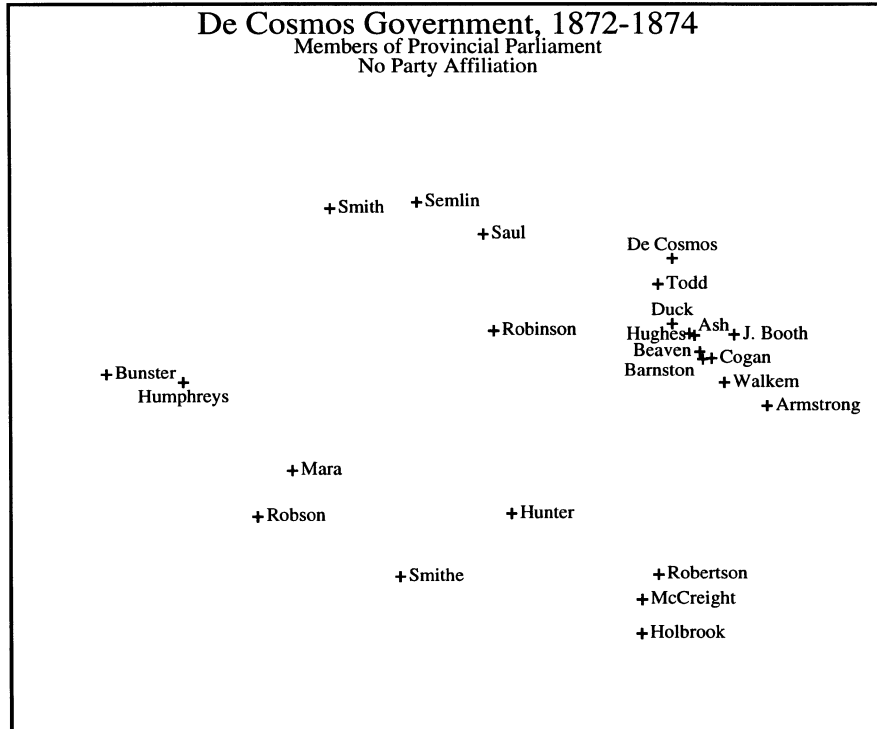


Figure 4 De Cosmos Government, 1872–1874, Members of Provincial Parliament. Source: *JLA*.

factionalism was present during De Cosmos’s reign, then MPPs would be found aligned at opposite sides of the chart. Yet there are strong apparent groupings. Cabinet members Walkem, Beaven, Ash, and Armstrong are in close proximity to Premier De Cosmos (middle right), and former government members McCreight, Robertson, and Holbrook continued to vote the same way after their defeat (lower right) but in occasional alignment with the De Cosmos program. This is the same collection of politicians who were assembled under McCreight.

Of the 41 recorded votes that occurred under the administrations of McCreight and De Cosmos, only two can be seen to have forced a dramatic “Island vs. Mainland” ordering of votes. The first such division involved a request introduced on March 13, 1872, that a bill be constructed to amend the “Road Act so as to include the Mainland of [the] Province in all the

during De Cosmos’s term of office. All maps of similarity produced for the De Cosmos years, 1872–1874, are two-dimensional representations of MPPs’ voting (Stress = 0.177, RSQ = 0.868).

provisions of that Act”.²⁰ On the surface, the motion is rather puzzling, perhaps as it suggested that the Mainland had no comparable legislation with respect to roads to that of Vancouver Island. Yet it must be remembered that the forced merger of the old colonies of Vancouver Island (1849–1866) and British Columbia (1858–1866) into the “United Colony” of British Columbia (1866–1871) had occurred just six years previously and much of the independent legislation from each of the older colonies had probably not been “harmonized” at this time. Such was the case for B.C.’s two independent judicial systems that continued to exist for Island and Mainland after the formation of the United Colony.²¹ The subsequent vote to include the Mainland under the provisions of the Road Act made particular sense if one consults the *Journals of the Legislative Assembly* for the previous day, March 12, 1872, where it is noted that a Select Committee had been formed to investigate charges of fraud with respect to wagon road work in the Upper Country (Cariboo District).²² Clearly, Island members must have believed that their Road Act was superior to the Mainland’s for the regulation of public works and so voted completely for a general application to the entire province. Only the Island member for Nanaimo, John Robson, a former resident of New Westminster and one-time proprietor of the Mainland’s chief newspaper, the *British Columbian*, voted against the proposal. Interestingly, both Mainland members who voted with the Island, thereby effecting a majority vote, were from New Westminster area — Vancouver Island’s “traditional” foe.²³

The other bill that proved to produce an even more pronounced “Island vs. Mainland” schism came to a vote after Premier De Cosmos forfeited his provincial seat to devote his energies solely to the federal representation of Victoria.²⁴ During the remainder of the Third Session, George Anthony Walkem replaced De Cosmos as premier and presided over second reading

20 *JLA*, vol. 1, p. 38. Moved by William Smithe, seconded by John Paton Booth, both of Cowichan district.

21 The “Act of Union” in 1866 did not specify the structure of the courts following the merger. Consequently, Chief Justice Needham continued to preside over Vancouver Island until retirement in 1870, at which point Justice Begbie of the Mainland assumed control of the Island jurisdiction. See David R. Williams, *The Man for a New Country: Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie* (Sidney, B.C.: Gray’s Publishing, 1977), pp. 158–159.

22 Minutes for March 12, 1872, *JLA*, vol. 1, pp. 36–37.

23 Speaker of the Legislature, James Trimble of Victoria, was called on to break the 11–11 tie vote that changed the result to 12–11 in favour of Vancouver Island.

24 *JLA*, vol. 2, p. 30. The Dominion Parliament had passed the “Dual Representation Act, 1872” that forced prospective MPs to resign their provincial seats before running, if the provincial legislatures had passed a similar prohibition. In fact, the B.C. Assembly had passed such a motion during De Cosmos’s term as premier, most probably in response to his abysmal attendance rate in the legislature while holding both provincial and federal seats. The division recorded was 13–9. See George Woodcock, *Amor De Cosmos: Journalist and Reformer* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 147.

of a bill — introduced by John Robson — entitled “An Act to amend the ‘Constitution Act’, 1871”.²⁵ In this division, all Island members present, with the exception of the Speaker, voted for second reading of the bill,²⁶ while all Mainland members, with the exception of one, voted against (9–12).²⁷ Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine exactly what caused this rift as the *Journals of the Legislative Assembly* are relatively unspecific on this question. Before the division, Lieutenant Governor Joseph Trutch, in his opening address, perhaps alluded to the content of the bill when he stated: “The clauses in the Constitution Act respecting the Indemnity of Members of your Honourable House having been repealed during the last Session, a Bill will be submitted to you for the purpose of providing an Indemnity and Mileage allowance.”²⁸ Perhaps Island members felt this a needless expense on the public purse (considering that the majority lived in, or in close proximity to, the capital city), while distant Mainland members probably depended on a subsidy for the kind of arduous travel required in nineteenth-century British Columbia.²⁹

These divisions, then, are the two best examples of the presence of an “Island vs. Mainland” parochialism. By far the majority of recorded votes found under both McCreight and De Cosmos are a strange mix of changing alignments that, on the surface, give the perception of a legislature in flux — perhaps understandable in the age before party affiliations. Figure 5 proves once again the usefulness of multidimensional analysis by disproving the existence of “Island vs. Mainland” factionalism for the De Cosmos era as well. If there had been a strict “Island vs. Mainland” cleavage, Islanders and Mainlanders would be grouped in vigorous opposition to one another. Figure 5 would have depicted two such regional camps on the periphery of the chart, separated by a substantial and unrelenting distance. This obviously was not the case. Indeed, in one instance, there is evidence to suggest that Mainland members were larger supporters of Island concerns than Islanders themselves. In this exceptional division, a majority of Mainland MPPs voted in favour of an amendment to extend shipping services to the Saanich Peninsula.³⁰ The anomaly of this motion was that the majority of Island

25 *JLA*, vol. 3, p. 48.

26 Both seats for Victoria District were vacant as Arthur Bunster and Amor De Cosmos had become federal MPs.

27 Of the total 13 members who represented the Mainland, only T. Basil Humphreys of Lillooet voted for second reading. It should perhaps be noted that Humphreys was later to represent Victoria District once Bunster and De Cosmos left for Ottawa.

28 *JLA*, vol. 2, p. 2. For general discussion of the “Constitution Act, 1871”, see Campbell Sharman, “The Strange Case of a Provincial Constitution: The British Columbia Constitution Act”, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1984), pp. 96–108.

29 Previous to being repealed in the First Session, the sessional allowance for MPPs was \$5 a day to a maximum of \$250, as noted in Howay, *British Columbia: From Earliest Times to Present*, vol. 2, p. 327.

30 *JLA*, vol. 2, p. 21.

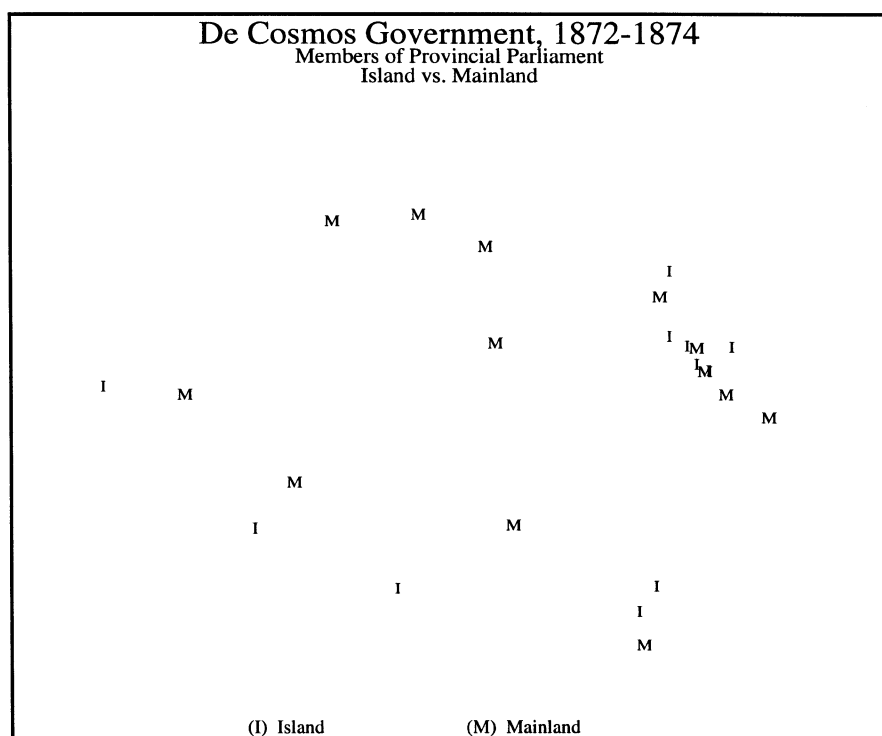


Figure 5 De Cosmos Government, 1872–1874, Island vs. Mainland. Source: *JLA*.

MPPs broke with their Mainland brethren and voted against an extension of steamboat service to their own backyard. The division lists of the B.C. legislature during the McCreight and De Cosmos ministries indicate rather conclusively that an “Island vs. Mainland” cleavage was insignificant between the years 1871 and 1874.

Only slightly more sense is made of this inaugural period in responsible government if the province is divided into a greater number of geographical regions beyond Island and Mainland. Under McCreight and De Cosmos, there is a noticeable coincidence between individuals with similar voting alignments who represent the same region. An example of this is found at the bottom of Figure 6, which depicts a loose clustering around Robson of members from the Interior (6) (lower left), or the two seat-mates from Cowichan District (2) near the top right of the chart. T. Basil Humphreys of Lillooet (6) is situated with Arthur Bunster of Saanich (2) at the lower right of the chart, yet Humphreys later represented the Island riding of Victoria District once Bunster departed from the provincial scene to run federally. Local sentiment undoubtedly contributed significantly to the

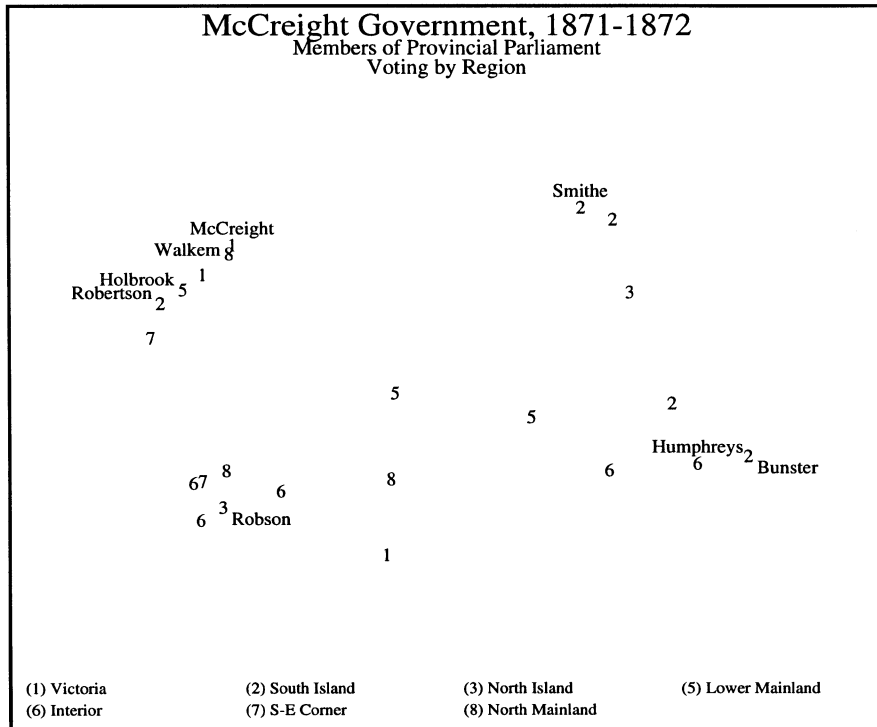


Figure 6 McCreight Government, 1871–1872, voting by region. Source: *JLA*.

voting considerations of representatives, yet not in an all-determining way.³¹

What, then, held certain politicians together, yet caused others to divide before the introduction of party affiliations? Attempts to develop models to describe political systems elsewhere in Canada — with varying degrees of success — have also been applied to British Columbia, but without particular effect. The essential models variously offered by historians and political scientists are the “Tories vs. Reformers”, “The Ins vs. the Outs”, and the “English vs. Canadian” cleavages.³²

The “Tories vs. Reformers” alignment gained a certain amount of credence in analyses of the McCreight-De Cosmos era for the simple reason

31 The names of office holders have also been included on these maps to illustrate cabinet solidarity at this time. Office holders are clustered around the “leader” as one might expect. Also, opposition to the McCreight government (Figure 6) is found in the loose clustering around Robson (lower left), and those around Bunster and Humphreys (lower right).

32 For discussion of these approaches and others, see Hugh G. Thorburn, “Interpretations of the Canadian Party System” in *Party Politics in Canada*, 5th ed. (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1985), pp. 20–40.

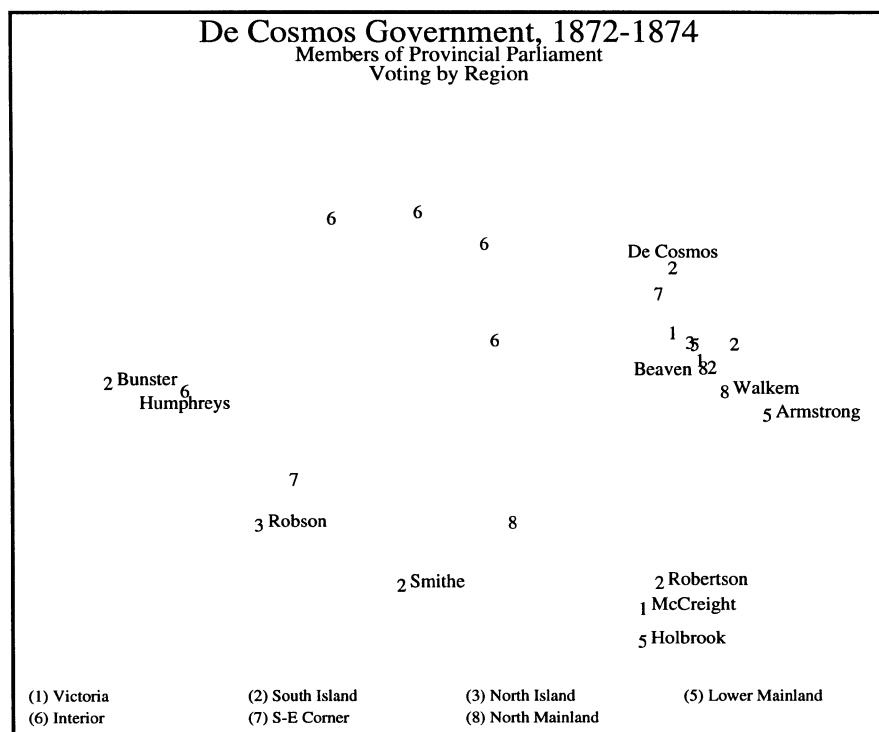


Figure 7 De Cosmos Government, 1872–1874, voting by region. Source: *JLA*.

that McCreight had opposed the introduction of responsible government in B.C. while De Cosmos supported it.³³ This cleavage was further emphasized on the basis of McCreight's cabinet membership, which included A. Rocke Robertson as Provincial Secretary and Henry Holbrook as President of the Council — both of whom, like McCreight, had predicted the failure of responsible government.³⁴ More important was the unprecedented domination of cabinet meetings under McCreight by Lieutenant Governor Joseph Trutch, whose magisterial presence allegedly thwarted the institutions of democracy. Yet, when De Cosmos assumed the premiership, apparently not much changed. Legend has it that De Cosmos ejected the Queen's Representative from future cabinet meetings but, as Walter Sage noted, "The

33 Margaret Ross, "Amor De Cosmos, a British Columbia Reformer" (Master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1931), p. 144.

34 Ivan E. M. Antak, "John Robson: British Columbian" (Master's thesis, University of Victoria, 1972), pp. 88–89.

De Cosmos government, in spite of the new premier's protests while in opposition, in the main carried out its predecessor's programme."³⁵

For this reason, some have suggested that "The Ins vs. the Outs" thesis, stressing opportunism, better describes the base difference between the McCreight and De Cosmos administrations. In a private letter to Sir John A. Macdonald, Joseph Trutch claimed that "The *outs* had combined to take the place of the *ins* upon McCreight's resignation."³⁶ Yet Figure 4 shows the deposed McCreight cabinet in the lower right of the chart as being tentatively aligned with the De Cosmos government, and therefore this political interpretation fails to explain fully the pattern of voting. Trutch further surmised that "whether De Cosmos' ministry will stand depends on McCreight as Robson's friends will oppose bitterly — I fancy McCreight will in general help De Cosmos, although on some questions he must with his friends vote against him...".³⁷ This opinion is supported by Figure 4. De Cosmos essentially formed his new cabinet without the real opposition that was present during McCreight's term of office. To believe that the "Outs" had secured the spoils of office is patently false. De Cosmos's new cabinet included a former cabinet minister, George Anthony Walkem (Attorney-General), and Robert Beaven of Victoria City (Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works), both of whom had voted against the non-confidence motion on Premier McCreight. In addition to these former members of the McCreight coalition were John Ash of Comox (Provincial Secretary) and William James Armstrong of New Westminster District (Minister of Finance and Agriculture) who, although they supported non-confidence, nonetheless were not leaders in the opposition that formed against the first government. Macdonald advised Trutch that, in the event there was no clear opposition leader to become premier, the mover of the non-confidence motion — no matter how disagreeable — should be elevated to the post.³⁸ Instead, Trutch selected De Cosmos who had been absent from the legislative assembly for a majority of recorded votes. The true instigators of the non-confidence vote were, in fact, T. Basil Humphreys of Lillooet and Arthur Bunster of Victoria District, yet neither was included in cabinet.³⁹ De Cosmos built a new coalition from existing government supporters, partial support from McCreight's old cabinet, and the addition of marginal supporters or "loose fish".

35 Walter N. Sage, "Amor De Cosmos, Journalist and Politician", *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 8 (1944), p. 207. For the story of De Cosmos's exclusion of Joseph Trutch from cabinet meetings, see Sidney W. Jackman, *The Portraits of the Premiers: An Informal History of British Columbia* (Sidney, B.C.: Gray's Publishing, 1969), pp. 17–28.

36 British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCARS), *O'Reilly Family*, Add. Mss. 412/Box 2/File 2, Trutch to Macdonald, December 31, 1872.

37 *Ibid.*

38 BCARS, *O'Reilly Family*, Add. Mss. 412/Box 2/File 3, Macdonald to Trutch, December 18, 1871.

39 Humphreys moved and Bunster seconded the non-confidence motion on the McCreight government. The recorded roll-calls show that these two MPPs consistently voted against the McCreight administration.

Lastly, the traditional “English vs. Canadian” explanation for a B.C. legislative alignment needs consideration. Of the 25 MPPs, the nationalities of 21 can be determined. Of these, 10 were born in the United Kingdom and 11 in Canada — mainly Upper Canada. This theory gains support only insofar as McCreight, Holbrook, and Walkem hailed from the United Kingdom, and Robertson, although originally from Ontario, was a staunch Anglican transplant. If, however, the division lists are used to their fullest potential, little evidence is found of “English vs. Canadian” voting patterns. Further to this point is that Walkem and Beaven were educated at McGill University and Upper Canada College respectively.⁴⁰ More significant to the McCreight cabinet, possibly, were the mutual affiliations that each held in common. Three of the four held the top executive positions in the Law Society of British Columbia: Walkem as president, McCreight as treasurer, and Robertson as secretary.⁴¹ Also, all four were members of the Masonic Order and belonged to lodges that practised the English Rite (E.R.) as compared to the Scottish Rite (S.R.) used by most Eastern Canadian Lodges.⁴²

Certainly further research is required in the area of group affiliations of politicians. Yet we must return to the division lists to find a more compelling explanation of legislative voting patterns. This entailed an examination of all divisions recorded under each of the McCreight and De Cosmos ministries. Particular attention was paid to the non-confidence motion of December 19, 1872, that not only forced MPPs into open support or non-support of the McCreight programme but also served as a register of members’ discontent that could be compared to other specific divisions. For the two ministries, 19 divisions were recorded during Premier McCreight’s term of office and 22 during that of De Cosmos. Of the 19, six divisions were lost, especially in the last days before the non-confidence vote, with an additional three divisions won by margins of only one vote. By contrast, of the 22 divisions recorded during Premier De Cosmos’s reign — for which he was absent on five — only three were lost. Of the motions that succeeded, all were carried by significant majorities. Unless one accepts that

40 See Henry J. Morgan, *Canadian Parliamentary Companion*, 9th ed. (Montreal: John Lovell, 1874).

41 For confirmation see Morgan’s *Canadian Parliamentary Companion*.

42 McCreight and Holbrook were, at different times, Deputy Grand Masters under Robert Burnaby. Conversely, Simeon Duck, Member for Victoria City, practised the Scottish Rite and in time had become the Grand Master of B.C., 1874–1875. His low level of support for the McCreight government perhaps illustrated the schism that had developed between adherents of the two forms of Freemasonry in the province, or it may be — as Freemasons contend — that their craft was above politics. For confirmation of McCreight’s, Walkem’s, and Holbrook’s membership, see John T. Marshall, *History of Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1871–1970* (Victoria: Colonist Printers, 1971), p. 619. For A. Rocke Robertson, see BCARS, Add. Mss. 2, vol. 198, “Porch Book”, Vancouver’s Island, Victoria Lodge No. 783. For Simeon Duck, see BCARS, Add. Mss. 2, Box 3, File: Vancouver Lodge 421, “Statement of Intrants in the Lodge Vancouver, No. 421”. In addition to McCreight, other Masonic Premiers of nineteenth-century British Columbia were De Cosmos, Walkem, Beaven, A. E. B. Davie, Turner, Prior, and McBride.

the B.C. legislature was imbued with the egalitarian spirit of the free vote, one can safely assume that Amor De Cosmos had constructed a more durable coalition than that of John Foster McCreight. What held the De Cosmos coalition together? Certainly not the “Island vs. Mainland” alignment, as suggested by previous scholars. As the maps of similarity convey quite clearly, individual voting records between 1871 and 1874 do not establish such a legislative alignment. The issue that united these politicians and that best describes political alignments of the time was of a different stripe: a central determinant was the introduction of the Canadian system of tariffs into British Columbia.

Of the 41 divisions recorded, five specifically concerned the introduction of Canadian tariffs. The introduction of the tariff instilled particular misgivings amongst the agricultural and certain commercial interests of the province — the same interests that Amor De Cosmos represented in the rural farmlands of Victoria District versus McCreight’s commercially oriented Victoria City. The introduction of the Canadian tariff structure to British Columbia, shortly after Confederation in 1872, was perhaps one of the most politically significant but neglected topics of historical investigation of the province’s formative years. Extensive political debates before, during, and after the Confederation talks divided legislators and the public alike into separate camps throughout the first three sessions of the B.C. Legislative Assembly. In much the same way as the Canadian Liberal party had once spoken for the “agrarian underdog” against business-dominated Conservatives in early electoral contests prior to the “Pacific Scandal”,⁴³ British Columbia, too, divided on the fundamental question of tariff protectionism. Nonetheless, the Canadian tariff debate has been ignored as a potentially exciting and useful explanation of political division in the province for part of the period before the age of party.⁴⁴

To go beyond the rejection of traditional explanations to propose a new one, we shift methodology. Here, in seeking a more supportable interpretation for political division in a new province in Confederation, we analyse the content of a continuous series of primary records: the reports and editorials contained in nineteenth-century newspapers. The province’s two leading political newspapers for the period were the *British Colonist* and the *Victoria Daily Standard*.⁴⁵ Political coverage from each on all days in which the

43 Canadian Liberals had more often aligned themselves with the farmers of Western Ontario and rural Rouges south of the St. Lawrence. Thorburn, “The Development of Political Parties in Canada”, *Party Politics in Canada*, p. 4.

44 A good example of an historical work that glosses over the Canadian tariff issue is Howay, *British Columbia: From Earliest Times to Present*, vol. 2, pp. 296–297, 328.

45 This is not an attempt to derogate other newspapers in the province such as the Mainland *Guardian*, New Westminster *Herald*, or Cariboo *Sentinel*, for instance. Yet the close proximity of Victoria’s press to the legislature, combined with the fact that editors Robson and De Cosmos were also opposing political players for the period of study, suggests that Victoria’s newsprint contained greater

B.C. legislature was sitting reveals little evidence of “Island vs. Mainland” animosity.⁴⁶ These papers are of particular interest as they not only represented the political rhetoric of their respective editors, John Robson and Amor De Cosmos, each a power-seeker and the professed enemy of the other, but also editorial positions that were diametrically opposed on the issue of Canadian tariffs.⁴⁷

Concern over the possible impact of the eastern trade scheme on the fledgling B.C. economy was exemplified in the minutes of the “Debate on the Subject of Confederation With Canada”.⁴⁸ Extensive deliberation on this issue alone raised tariffs to a status equal to, if not greater than, the most commonly scrutinized demands during the debates over Confederation for responsible government and a transcontinental rail link with Canada. Most enlightening were the positions of John Robson and Amor De Cosmos. Their arguments previous to Confederation are comparable to the stances they later publicly adopted in the first provincial legislature. Although Robson acknowledged in 1870 that “the only real arguments against Confederation worthy of consideration, are against the present Canadian Tariff”, he nonetheless considered any modification “a federal matter” and not within B.C.’s legislative jurisdiction.⁴⁹ Conversely, Amor De Cosmos and his newspaper the *Victoria Daily Standard* were consistent advocates of a modified Canadian tariff that extended protection to farmers in particular.⁵⁰ De Cosmos had advocated Confederation with Canada and the intro-

political coverage. Further research will, of course, require a proper canvass of other newspapers in the province.

46 Exceptions are “The Kootenay Seats”, *Standard*, February 19, 1872, p. 3, in which members are cautioned “not to create a sectional feeling between the Island and Mainland”; also “The Seat of Government”, *Standard*, March 26, 1872, p. 2, that identified John Robson with a rumoured attempt to relocate the B.C. capital to the Mainland. Also see the election advertisement entitled “Electors”, *Colonist*, February 26, 1874, p. 3, that is an extreme, yet uncommon, illustration of “Island vs. Mainland” sentiment in which voters were warned: “Remember! Vancouver Island has fewer members than the Mainland. If you elect Dalby you will give the Mainland one more member and then the Island voters can at anytime be out voted.” This lack of evidence conflicts with Edith Dobie’s assertion that an “Island vs. Mainland” alignment did exist. This is particularly curious as she based her piece primarily on Victoria newspapers of the period. Howay is cited frequently in the work, however, and this is probably the more likely, although erroneous, source. See Edith Dobie, “Some Aspects of Party History in British Columbia, 1871–1903”, *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, vol. 27 (1936), pp. 235–251. Of more particular interest is an article that claimed “Island vs. Mainland” sectionalism was being contrived. See “Manufacturing Public Opinion”, *Colonist*, March 8, 1874, p. 3.

47 “History of the Tariffs”, *British Colonist*, March 6, 1873, p. 2.

48 James E. Hendrickson, ed., *Journals of the Colonial Legislatures the Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, 1851–1871* (Victoria: Queen’s Printer, 1980), vol. 5, Appendix A (hereafter *JCL*).

49 John Robson, “Confederation Debates”, March 9, 1870, *JCL*, p. 455. Joseph Trutch, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, further explained that “the [federal] ‘Organic Act’ puts it virtually out of the power of the colony to prescribe what form of Tariff we should have under Confederation. The scheme ... is based on the transfer of the control of customs to Canada” (p. 553). See also John Robson, Member for New Westminster, March 9, 1870, *JCL*, p. 454.

50 Amor De Cosmos, Member for Victoria District, March 10, 1870, *JCL*, p. 470.

duction of responsible government ever since the beginning of his political career.⁵¹ Yet he further believed that protection for the agricultural interests of the colony — “the very keystone” of Confederation — was “of more consequence than responsible government”.⁵²

Ultimately, rigid protectionist members acceded to principle and deferred, in good faith, to the Canadian government in the hope that an honourable solution might break the impasse.⁵³ In negotiations with Canada, the final compromise to which the province assented really did nothing to solve the problem. Article Seven of the Terms of Union stated that the old B.C. tariff should “continue in force in British Columbia until the railway from the Pacific Coast and the system of railways in Canada are connected *unless the Legislature of British Columbia should sooner decide to accept the Tariff and Excise Laws of Canada* [author’s emphasis]”.⁵⁴ Article Seven effectively postponed any decision on modified tariffs. Protectionist legislators undoubtedly believed they had won a temporary victory and a period of amnesty during which proper representations could be made to Ottawa. Those less enthralled with B.C.’s higher rates of protection obviously achieved some measure of success too, as the additional proviso in Article Seven awarded British Columbia the right to accept the Canadian tariff in advance of a completed rail connection with the East. Future provincial legislators were henceforth given the opportunity to campaign for the immediate introduction of the Canadian tariff and the further possibility of electing a legislative body more favourably inclined to free trade principles than the previous colonial legislative council.

Article Seven of the Terms of Union provided the roots of polarization in the early provincial period. It had a central role in setting the tone of the first provincial electoral contest between those who desired an immediate reduction in commodity and other prices and those who favoured adequate protection for fledgling agricultural and certain industrial pursuits. The recurrence of debate on Canadian tariffs throughout the first three sessions of the B.C. legislature acted as a focal point for MPPs in the absence of formal party platform or ideology. In the first provincial election of 1871, the early-acceptance proviso of Article Seven caused quick action on the part of politicians who adopted a pro-Canadian versus modified Canadian

51 See “The Struggle for Confederation” in Woodcock, *Amor De Cosmos: Journalist and Reformer*, pp. 97–126.

52 Amor De Cosmos, “Confederation Debates”, March 22, 1870, *JCL*, vol. 5, p. 549. In 1870 British Columbia employed 1,827 persons in agriculture, 403 in manufacturing, 1,303 in trading, and 2,348 in mining as recorded in *British Columbia: Report of the Honourable H. L. Langevin, C.B.* (Ottawa, 1872), as cited in G. P. V. Akrigg and Helen Akrigg, *British Columbia Chronicle, 1847–1871: Gold and Colonists* (Vancouver: Discovery Press, 1977), p. 404.

53 *JCL*, March 24, 1870, vol. 5, pp. 565–566.

54 As quoted in Margaret A. Ormsby, “The Relations Between British Columbia and the Dominion of Canada, 1871–1885” (Ph.D. dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, 1938), p. 90.

tariff position, most often as the main plank in their political platform.⁵⁵ Yet supporters of a modified tariff — particularly Amor De Cosmos — felt that amendments to the Canadian version were far from impossible, and as proof they cited the “Report of the Privy Council” in addition to correspondence from the federal Finance Minister, Sir Francis Hincks, that suggested that the Dominion Parliament would “be inclined to consider them favourably” if the first, duly convened, provincial parliament also expressed itself in favour.⁵⁶ For this reason, De Cosmos hoped for a majority return of the modified tariff supporters.

The pro-Canadian tariff forces, however, appeared to have won the day, or at least election day.⁵⁷ Victoria City, as the main commercial centre of the province, returned a full slate of four MPPs committed to the immediate introduction of the Canadian tariff. Conversely, the rural farming communities of Victoria District returned two MPPs who were both pledged to the concept of a modified tariff.⁵⁸ From a total of 25 MPPs, the newly formed cabinet of John Foster McCreight was cemented together not so much by shared birthplace, political ideology, profession, or other mutual affiliations, but quite simply by the members’ shared commitment to the immediate introduction of the Canadian tariff; on this issue all four ministers were in full agreement.⁵⁹

55 For example, Robert Smith’s successful bid in Yale District had used a political advertisement that expressed his support for the immediate adoption of the Canadian tariff. Conversely, the Junior Member for Esquimalt, Henry Cogan, like other MPPs, listed his support for a modified tariff as the first in a group of issues. See “Election Notices”, *Standard*, October 17, 1871, p. 1. For successful Victoria candidates Robert Beaven and James Trimble (pro-Canadian tariff) see *Standard*, October 13, 1871, p. 1, and for John Robson of Nanaimo see *Colonist*, October 13, 1871, p. 4. See also the election notices of Chas. B. Brown, *Standard*, October 17, 1871, p. 1, and Robert Williams, “Election Advertisement”, *Colonist*, September 24, 1871, p. 4.

56 “The Tariff Question”, *Standard*, September 30, 1871, p. 2. De Cosmos’s use of Sir Francis Hincks’s dispatch is also noted in “Victoria District Nomination”, *Colonist*, October 15, 1871, p. 3. Hincks’s favourable disposition towards a modified tariff may perhaps explain why Arthur Bunster (an anti-Canadian tariff man) resigned his federal seat of Vancouver [Island] District in favour of Hincks, who had lost his own personal riding in the federal election of 1872.

57 Editor and MPP John Robson reported that “De Cosmos acknowledged defeat on the Tariff question” in “The Liberals Win a Victory”, *Colonist*, October 22, 1871, p. 3. This was subsequently denied in the *Standard*. The allusion to the Liberal label is interesting in that Robson’s paper claimed victory for the “Constitutional Reform” party. Individual candidates, though, had not identified themselves under these labels in any election advertisements examined. These labels therefore appear to be more the creation of the press.

58 In 1870 Victoria City employed 609 persons in the field of commerce as compared with 196 persons in agriculture. Those elected on a pro-Canadian tariff stance were J. F. McCreight, Simeon Duck, James Trimble, and Robert Beaven. By comparison, Victoria District employed 101 persons in commerce versus 214 in agriculture. The two gentlemen elected on a modified tariff position were Amor De Cosmos and Arthur Bunster. See *Langevin Report* as quoted in Akrigg and Akrigg, *British Columbia Chronicle*, p. 404.

59 In this sense Ormsby was partially correct to state, “The issue of the contest was the tariff, and if De Cosmos had not resisted the adoption of the Canadian tariff, his chances of heading the poll in Victoria

The battle lines were once again quickly drawn. The first issue of consequence in the new legislature was not the founding of responsible government, the expectation of railway construction, or any other capital works of imperial concern, but, as in the election itself, the tariffs. Motions met with procedural wrangles by incipient opposition forces who were once again defeated.⁶⁰ When the dust settled, members voted fourteen to nine in favour of the Canadian tariff. This was greeted by the *Colonist* as a “Victory” and the end of “the War of the Tariffs”.⁶¹ The *Standard*, by comparison, regretted that all other interests in the province had become subservient to commerce, and ventured to predict that the proponents of the Canadian tariff would “see their mistake by-and-by, when too late to apply a remedy. ...there will be no drawing back, no help for it, however much we hereafter may have occasion to regret the suicidal policy we have pursued.”⁶²

Roll-call analysis supports the division reflected in these differing newspaper accounts. Figure 8 suggests that there was something of an emergent “Rural vs. Urban” cleavage in British Columbia’s First Parliament. Although urban centres, as such, were limited to the old colonial townsites of Victoria, New Westminster, and Barkerville, it should nevertheless be noted that these commercial hubs were aligned more closely to McCreight’s pro-Canadian tariff government (middle left), than to the loose collection of rural-farming MPPs that represented the main opposition to the McCreight cabinet (middle right).⁶³

The opposition lost the fight, but within a few days further procedural wrangles and postponement were proposed.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the bill received

district and being named the first premier of the province would have been very good.” De Cosmos did, in fact, top the poll in Victoria District and, had he supported the Canadian tariff, undoubtedly would have lost the election as did William Dalby, his pro-Canadian tariff opponent. At the same time, De Cosmos’s support for a modification obviously precluded him from any premiers’ short list as it would have further stalled a final “unified” resolution to the question of Confederation. See Ormsby, “Relations Between British Columbia and the Dominion of Canada”, p. 131.

60 *JLA*, vol. 1, pp. 20–22. For a detailed account, see “First Provincial Legislative Assembly”, *Colonist*, March 2, 1872, p. 3; see also letter from “A Farmer” entitled “The Tariff Question”, *Standard*, March 1, 1872, p. 3.

61 “The War of the Tariffs Ended!”, *Colonist*, March 3, 1872, p. 2. Those in favour were Robertson, McCreight, Walkem, Holbrook, Todd, Beaven, Hunter, Robinson, Smith, Semlin, Mara, Robson, Booth (Cariboo) and Duck — 14. Those against were Hughes, Armstrong, Humphreys, Bunster, Booth (Cowichan), Ash, Cogan, Smithe, and Jamieson — 9. See Minutes for March 2, 1872, *JLA*, vol. 1, p. 21.

62 “The Question of the Tariff Settled”, *Standard*, March 4, 1872, p. 2.

63 Compare Figure 8 with Figure 2 to illustrate the relative positions of McCreight cabinet members and MPPs clustered around John Robson. Note that the seven urban (U) MPPs are located on the middle to left side of the chart. Number of voters recorded in 1871 for each of the above townsites: Victoria City, 1,515; New Westminster City, acclaimed; Cariboo (Barkerville), 785. By comparison, the coal mining town of Nanaimo had 90 voters and therefore is not designated as Urban on this chart. See *Electoral History of British Columbia, 1871–1986* (Victoria: Elections British Columbia, 1988).

64 “Tariff! Tariff!!!”, *Standard*, March 8, 1872, p. 3; “The Tariff Bill”, *Standard*, March 13, 1872, p. 3.

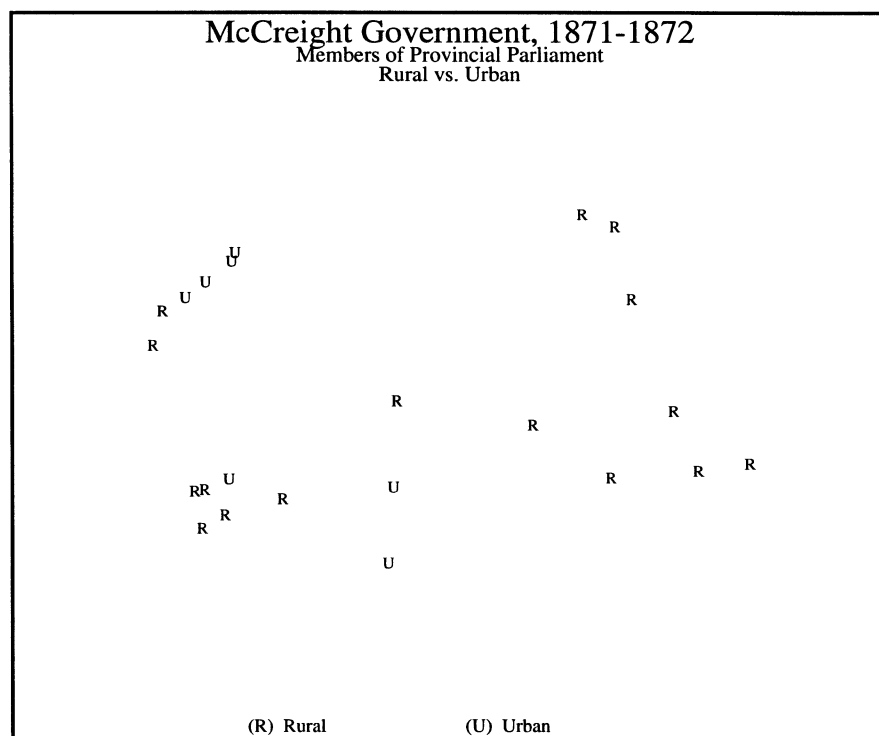


Figure 8 McCreight Government, 1871–1872, rural vs. urban. Source: *JLA*.

a speedy second reading and on the following day, March 14, 1872, a third and final reading was executed so that only Royal Assent remained before the Canadian tariff system had full force in the Pacific province.⁶⁵ Prime Minister Macdonald, as if anticipating a *fait accompli*, instructed Lieutenant Governor Trutch: “The moment that your act passes adopting the Canadian Tariff, you should send a copy duly certified.”⁶⁶

Yet the official consolidation of British Columbia into the Canadian tariff structure did not end opposition debate. In Figure 9, all divisions for the McCreight term of office have been used once again, but individual MPPs have been relabelled according to their support or non-support for the introduction of the Canadian system of tariffs to the new province. When the map of similarity is recoded in this manner, it becomes quite apparent that the question of tariff protection versus free trade was the underlying alignment found during McCreight’s tenure of office. The tariff issue helped

⁶⁵ “The Tariff”, *Standard*, March 14, 1872, p. 3.

⁶⁶ BCARS, *O’Reilly Family*, Add. Mss. 412/ Box 2/ File 3, Macdonald to Trutch, March 16, 1872.

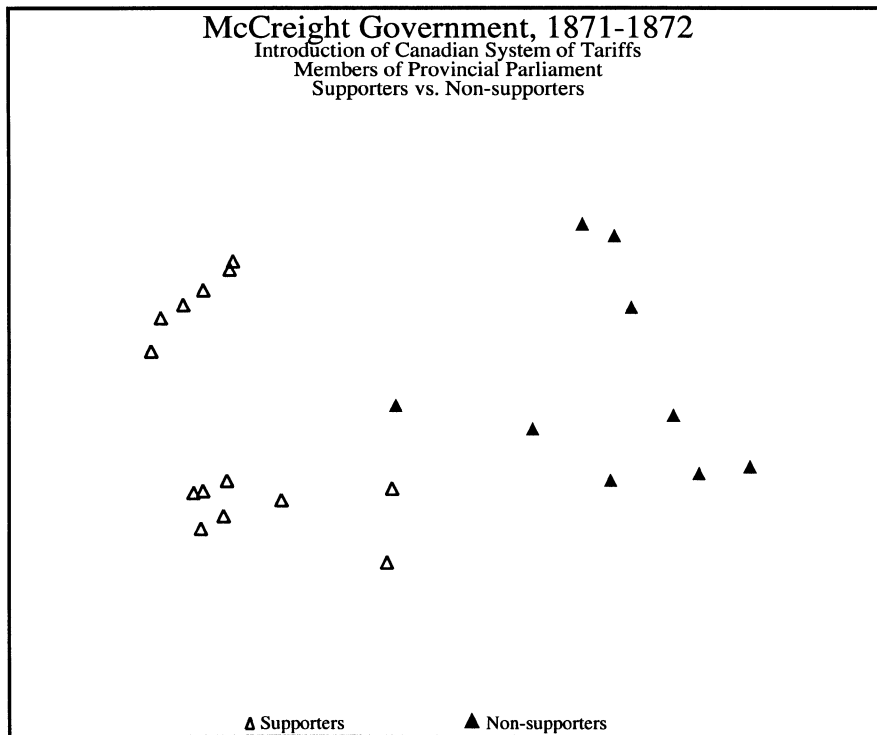


Figure 9 McCreight Government, 1871–1872, supporters vs. non-supporters of Canadian tariff. Source: *JLA*.

give McCreight the premier's post, but it also led to a rather tenuous hold on power, and ultimately to defeat.

The McCreight government fell on December 19, 1872, on an amendment to the throne speech which asserted that the administration of public affairs had “not been satisfactory to the people in general”.⁶⁷ Officially, the issue used to denounce the McCreight ministry was not the introduction of the Canadian tariff but responsible government. This political brush was perhaps seen to be the best for tarring a ministry composed of gentlemen who had confided to the public their doubts about the feasibility of full-fledged democracy on the Pacific coast.⁶⁸ This old bugbear was a popular “issue” that any MPP could realistically adopt without serious electoral repercussions. More importantly, it was an issue, unlike tariffs, that allowed the

⁶⁷ Minutes for December 19, 1872, *JLA*, vol. 2, p. 8.

⁶⁸ See “The Ministry”, *Standard*, December 16, 1872, p. 2; “Second Session of the Provincial Legislature”, *Colonist*, December 17, 1872, p. 2; “Opening of the Legislature,” *Standard*, December 18, 1872, p. 2; “A Weak Government and an Empty Treasury”, *Colonist*, December 20, 1872, p. 2.

new premier-designate, Amor De Cosmos, the opportunity of building a more secure coalition in the House. A modified tariff non-confidence motion would not have provided De Cosmos with the additional support he needed to oust McCreight: the House had already divided in favour of the Canadian tariff. It was, nevertheless, his true base of political support. Of the nine MPPs who voted against the immediate introduction of the Canadian tariff, eight also voted for non-confidence — the single exception being Andrew Jamieson of the Cariboo who likely would have followed suite had he not died. With De Cosmos's return from Ottawa, his vote brought the non-confidence forces to a total of nine. The subsequent anti-McCreight vote divided the legislature with eleven members for non-confidence and ten members against. It can be seen, therefore, that De Cosmos only required two converts — in this case John Robson and Robert Smith — to secure a slim, but effective, majority of one. If non-confidence had centred on the Canadian tariff, neither Robson nor Smith could have possibly sided with the opposition in light of their past commitments to Nanaimo and Yale respectively.⁶⁹

The tariff issue remained a force, however. The new premier had to work with the same group of MPPs who had already largely committed themselves to the Canadian tariff. This realization was perhaps reflected in the composition of the second ministry, in that two anti-Canadian tariff and two pro-Canadian tariff MPPs were offered cabinet positions.⁷⁰ It also happened that the extreme voices of the earlier debate on tariffs were effectively shut out of this new cabinet coalition. Figure 10, when compared with Figure 4, depicts the De Cosmos coalition generally as an alliance of moderates. The brief coalition that had formed to eject McCreight — mainly anti-Canadian tariff MPPs — quickly fractured, and the first counter-insurrection attempted against De Cosmos, as in McCreight's term previously, was again the issue of tariffs.

One of the first members to switch sides publicly in the debate was the Honourable George Walkem, who retained a cabinet portfolio in the De Cosmos government. As the new Attorney General, he advocated a "broader view" of the question than previously; one that afforded "a fair protection for farm produce". His conversion was aided, in part, by the offer of another cabinet portfolio; yet, to be fair to the member for Cariboo District, economic

69 See *JLA*, vol. 1, p. 21, for original tariff motion and vol. 2, p. 8, for subsequent non-confidence motion.

70 De Cosmos's cabinet membership attested to his appreciation of B.C.'s myriad of political rivalries: of the four ministers, not including the premier, of course, historians have stressed most often that there were two Island and two Mainland MPPs balanced against each other. Yet of more importance, possibly, was the fact that De Cosmos further balanced two non-confidence with two pro-confidence supporters who also represented both sides of the tariff debate — evenly. Before later defections, the pro-Canadian tariff men were Robert Beaven and George Walkem. Anti-Canadian tariff men were Dr. John Ash and William Armstrong.

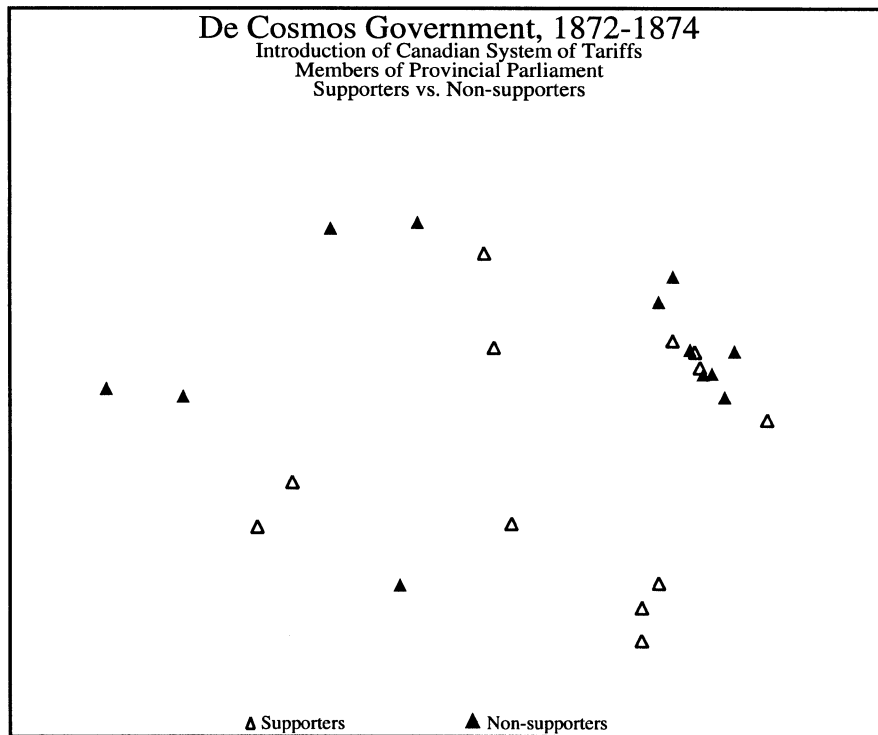


Figure 10 De Cosmos Government, 1872–1874, supporters vs. non-supporters of Canadian tariff. Source: *JLA*.

conditions for the farmer had worsened under the Canadian tariff, and this had probably also altered his view. Indeed, there were other MPPs who had not directly benefited from the change of power, yet followed the Attorney General's lead.⁷¹ This partial migration in favour of the modified tariff resulted from the very real concern that had developed over the eastern tariff's negative impact on the raw agronomics of British Columbia. Arthur Bunster confirmed that the "Canadian tariff had proved a curse to the country, inasmuch as its tendency was to drive people out of it":

The general verdict after a year's trial of the Canadian Tariff was, that they [the farmers] would gladly sell at cost and leave the Province.... Was it not a shame and a disgrace to see Chicago bacon sent away into our mines and under selling Provincial bacon? Was it not a shame to see California flour sold less in this market than Provincial flour was sold?⁷²

⁷¹ "Customs and Excise", *Standard*, January 22, 1873, p. 3.

⁷² "Excise and Customs", *Colonist*, January 21, 1873, p. 3. Saanich farmers petitioned the government for protection at this time; see "The Tariff Question Again", *Standard*, January 20, 1873, p. 2.

Evidently, many felt it was a disgrace that home production was being severely undercut. MPPs resolved in committee of the whole on January 27, 1873, to pursue the preparation of a petition that outlined specific changes to federal customs duties.⁷³ This report was confirmed by a majority of one vote (12–11) and represented a complete change in philosophy and direction for the House — something that never would have happened under the McCreight ministry. Yet before the opponents of freer trade could applaud their victory, Committee Chairman Joseph Hunter added his vote against the report for tariff modifications, thus effecting a tie (12–12). With full membership in attendance, the legislature was now more evenly divided than on any issue previously addressed.⁷⁴ Parliamentary procedure required that the legislative impasse be broken at the House level, to which the Speaker, James Trimble of Victoria City, readily agreed. In casting his deciding vote, Trimble attempted to end any future doubt that the province lacked legal jurisdiction on tariffs within the federal Dominion of Canada. By his vote alone the report was not accepted.

While De Cosmos had by now left for Ottawa, having resigned himself to working within the federal realm for changes to the Canadian tariff, Arthur Bunster continued to promote the concept of a made-in-B.C. scheme. Under Bunster's instigation, the B.C. House was again prepared to re-examine the question in committee of the whole, but no report was forthcoming during the remainder of the De Cosmos government's time in office.⁷⁵ With the collapse of the Conservative government in Ottawa over the "Pacific Scandal", Liberals prepared to take power in the next federal election, and the tariff debate soon entered the field of federal politics. In January 1874 at public meetings in Saanich all contenders for the federal riding of Vancouver [Island] District pledged their support for a modified tariff.⁷⁶ In provincial byelections being held at the same time in Victoria District — created by the departure of Arthur Bunster and Amor De Cosmos, who

73 Minutes for January 21, 1873, *JLA*, vol. 2, p. 42. Specifically, the petition requested that the federal government raise tariffs on "Barley, Oats, bacon, Hams, Lard, Hops, Butter, and Cheese, to the rate levied on them respectively under the British Columbia tariff at the date of union; that the tariff on wheat be 10 cents per bushel, and flour be 50 cents per barrel: That no Excise be enforced on brewers and Maltsters; and that the Stamp duty not be extended to this Province."

74 *Ibid.*

75 Minutes for January 29, 1874, *JLA*, vol. 3, p. 31. See "First Provincial Legislative Assembly. Third Session", *Colonist*, January 30, 1874, p. 3; *Standard*, January 30, 1874, p. 3. The feasibility of changes to the Canadian tariff was still an issue by 1877. See William Fraser Tolmie's question to Premier A. C. Elliot in *JLA*, vol. 2, p. 43.

76 "The Saanich Public Meetings", *Colonist*, January 20, 1874, p. 3. This is not to suggest that enthusiasm waned at the provincial level — even with the apparent jurisdictional incapacity of the De Cosmos-Walkem government — as vacancies created by Arthur Bunster and Amor De Cosmos in Victoria District, due to the "Costigan Act", created competitive byelections where all candidates supported the modified tariff as the pre-eminent issue of the campaign. See "Political Meeting at Cedar Hill", *Colonist*, February 1, 1874, p. 3.

sought federal office — farmers convened at the Prairie Inn and unanimously endorsed a pledge that demanded each candidate’s support for modified tariffs. The declaration read: “I sincerely declare that I will not support or accept office from the present or any government until they shall have first introduced some policy or measure calculated to insure such a modification of the Tariff as will afford real and substantial protection to farmers.”⁷⁷

Needless to say, all candidates endorsed this resolution. Provincially, the Canadian tariff was still the main issue of contention by 1874. Federally, new Member of Parliament Arthur Bunster also continued the fight for modifications. In response to Liberal Edward Blake’s insensitive, indeed acid, assertion that British Columbia was “an inhospitable country, a sea of sterile mountains”, Bunster, before assembled MPs, hauled a sack of home-grown Saanich wheat from under his Commons desk, “took a handful out of it and indignantly tossed it toward the member for South Bruce [Blake] as the best answer to his statement”.⁷⁸ For Bunster, such efforts were pursued in vain. After having warned the province and the dominion for so many years that inadequate protection would drive people out of British Columbia, Bunster ultimately vacated to Oakland, California, in 1883, where he continued to brew ales, as he had done in Victoria.⁷⁹

The issue of the electoral contest was, without a doubt, tariffs. In hindsight it seems so obvious. We know that tariffs were important in any discussion of post-Confederation Canada, and certainly for the prairies. Why, then, has the introduction of the Canadian tariff in British Columbia received so little attention from historians? Perhaps it is in part due to an over-reliance on traditional histories that are unfortunately often inaccurate. For instance, Judge Frederick Howay, easily one of the most-cited B.C. historians, stated without elucidation that the acceptance of the Canadian tariff was “in accordance with the general feeling [of the province] and served to make the Government quite popular”.⁸⁰ Yet the evidence provided here indicates that this was not at all the general sentiment of the province, particularly of the farming interests. Large portions of early B.C. society were clearly dissatisfied, and this feeling manifested itself in the Legislative Assembly.⁸¹ Also, the continued popularity of the “Island vs.

77 “Pledging Candidates”, *Colonist*, February 28, 1874, p. 3.

78 See the account of this colourful debate in James Morton, *In the Sea of Sterile Mountains: The Chinese in British Columbia* (Vancouver: J. J. Douglas, 1974), p. 50.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

80 Howay, *British Columbia: From Earliest Times to Present*, vol. 2, p. 333.

81 Unfortunately, agriculture in B.C. has received little attention to date, yet the idea that the colony would be agriculturally based was a pervasive notion held by most nineteenth-century British Columbians. This topic is explored in R. W. Sandwell, “Peasants on the Coast? A Problematique of Rural British Columbia” (BC Studies Conference, Kelowna, B.C., October 1994). During the first three decades of the twentieth century, farming and logging alternated between second and third place in overall economic importance to the province, as noted in Clint Evans, “Unimportant or Over-

Mainland” myth has blocked the search for realistic explanations and the pursuit of more interesting questions such as the impact of the Canadian tariff scheme on regional politics. Such tidy labelling of political eras must always be suspect, especially in unorganized frontier regions where political party affiliation is absent. Primary research has employed newspapers, but not in the way I suggest. The problem, perhaps, lies in the selection of what newspapers and what aspects of those papers to sample. Newspapers carried both reports of what was said in political contests and legislative debates. Although most editorials of the period expressed support for and against the Canadian tariff, only one side of the debate has been told. I would suggest the single greatest reason why an erroneous view of B.C. history became entrenched is the unsystematic use of nineteenth-century newspapers.⁸² For one thing, the views of any one paper cannot be fully understood without a close reading of other opposing papers. Newspapers were, not surprisingly, intensely partisan; in most instances, editors were aligned with either a government or opposing faction, and at times, as we have seen, were even political players themselves. On the question of British Columbia and tariffs between 1871 and 1874, for example, the *Victoria Daily Standard* and the *British Colonist* were political propaganda machines used to elect and sustain their editor-politicians in office.⁸³ Middle ground is often difficult for a researcher to locate when examining the roots of political culture for any Western society, perhaps an explanation in itself for the lack of primary research that has been the hallmark of B.C.’s political history. Yet, as this project demonstrates, a sensitive handling and comparison of the two opposing papers is essential. For the years 1871 to 1874, the *Standard* has not been examined nearly enough, although it was one of the main opposition newspapers under key political figures such as McCreight and, more impor-

looked? The Historical Role of Agriculture in British Columbia” (unpublished paper presented to Qualicum Conference, Parksville, B.C., 1991).

82 The *British Colonist* is readily available in library collections, yet the opposing paper, the *Victoria Daily Standard*, is virtually inaccessible. Original hard copies are available at BCARS, and I ventured to read these originals for the entire period of study.

83 John Foster McCreight apparently complained, as did fellow cabinet members, that the predominant reason for his ministry’s downfall was quite simply that it lacked the support of any newspaper in B.C. See “Without an Organ”, *Colonist*, December 21, 1872, p. 2. There is perhaps some truth to this accusation, as Lieutenant Governor Joseph Trutch claimed that John Robson was offered a future cabinet position if he supported the McCreight government both in the House and in the *British Colonist*. According to Trutch, the offer was accepted, but Robson “failed to give such support to the Government either in his place in the house or in his capacity as Editor — but on the contrary his course has been such that Mr. McCreight and his colleagues now regard him as having been during the past year their most subtle and dangerous enemy and have become so convinced of his political dishonesty that they have lately declared their determination not to connect themselves with him in any way or under any circumstance.” See BCARS, *Sir John A. Macdonald Papers*, Add. Mss. 1433/Vol. 254–255, Trutch to Macdonald, October 24, 1872.

tantly, the government newspaper of both De Cosmos and Walkem.⁸⁴ It clearly enunciated opinions distinctly different from the *Colonist*. Yet most writings on British Columbia history, in having unwittingly passed it over, simply produced a one-sided *Colonist* point of view. In the case of the early tariff debate, the protests of the farming communities of recent immigrants and their demands for greater tariff protection were either clearly condemned, glossed over, or entirely ignored in the pages of the *Colonist* until later political and economic exigencies forced their acknowledgement. While in hindsight the key role of the tariff makes sense and seems obvious, only systematic application of a set of methodologies brings us to this conclusion.

Legitimizing and giving expression to other voices is a central and proper concern of contemporary historical research. The alternative use of recorded votes combined with the computer-based methods of roll-call analysis provide the key to my search for a new explanation. Content analysis — using other types of sources such as newspaper reports and editorials — suggests and confirms a new interpretation. British Columbia politics during the formative years of provincehood was not a contest between Island and Mainland interests, but rather a fight over the Canadian tariff. Surely it is time we questioned other myths that may inform political models used elsewhere in Canada. Applying similar methodology and computer-based techniques to the vast storehouse of legislative records to be found both on a continental scale and at all levels of government may lead us to a much greater understanding of the critical, immediate Confederation period.

84 The *Standard* was a “family” operation run at various times by Charles Smith, the brother of Premier Amor De Cosmos, and Dr. William Wymond Walkem (later MPP), the brother of Premier George A. Walkem. I would like to thank Alan Grove for having brought the Walkem connection to my attention.