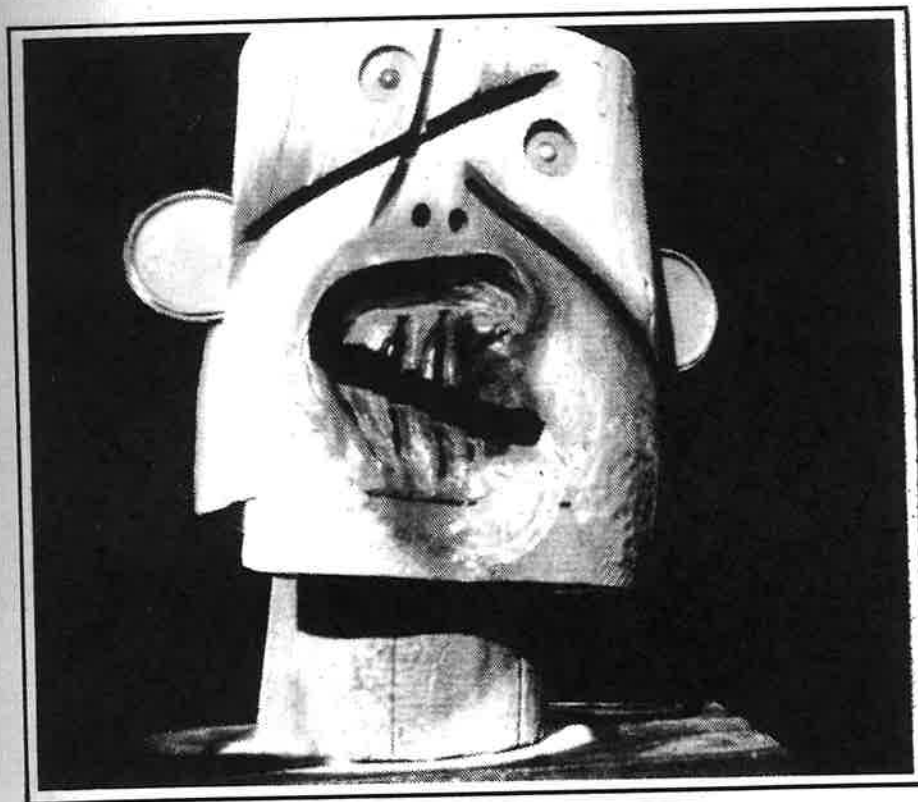


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The Politics of Development: Right-Radicalism in Queensland and British Columbia

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Queensland is said to be quite different from the other Australian states, with the region's right-radical politics usually being cited as proof of this difference. What attracts attention is the way this and other forms of right-radicalism, in attempting to bring about rapid social change, come to attack the social democratic principles which form the foundations of western democracies. Within Queensland, these attacks are attempting to transform the state's social structure for the benefit of business and industrial interests and, thus, the dominant social classes. It is for this reason that the term 'right-radicalism' is used; it is a political movement attempting to institute rapid social change for the benefit of these dominant classes.

Many Australians are repulsed by Queensland's right-radicalism but express relief that it is confined, like the cane toad, to Queensland. They feel it could not emerge in the 'more civilised' States - New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia - or in another western country, because social democracy is so well entrenched as to provide a formidable barrier. The Queensland situation, then, is said to be unique; the politics an aberration, seemingly resulting from an unfortunate malfunctioning of the state's social structure.

The purpose of this paper is to show that Queensland's politics are not as exceptional as many Australians believe. Right-radicalism is to be found in certain regions of certain other western countries and is even evident, to some extent, at the national level, especially in Britain with Thatcherism and in the United States with Reaganism. Also, it is, or has been, present in other parts of Australia's outlands - in the Northern Territory, Tasmania, and Western Australia (Harman & Head, 1982) - and between 1975 and 1983 it existed weakly at the national level in the form of Fraserism. The recent march of the cane toad south from Queensland into New South Wales may now also be portentous to the futures of the 'civilised states'. The Queensland premier's (failed) attempt to take right-radicalism into the federal arena during the 1987 federal election campaign may symbolise its advance.¹

A comparative analysis is the only way Queensland's politics can be shown to be unexceptional, and since Queensland's politics are a regional politics this paper looks at the existence of right-radicalism in comparable regions. What will be undertaken is a comparative regional analysis of the politics of Queensland's

development and the politics of development of one of these comparable regions; in this case the Canadian province of British Columbia. As will be shown, both Queensland and British Columbia have striking similarities, not only in terms of their politics, but also their social structures and patterns of development. These in turn seem related to a historical parallel in the national development of Australia and Canada (Ehrensaft & Armstrong, 1978). Of course, there are important differences between Queensland and British Columbia, some of which are identified, but similarities are sufficiently striking to suggest that similar social processes have been operating in both regions.

Queensland and British Columbia: Economic, Social and Political Comparisons

Queensland and British Columbia are geographically very large regions; Queensland is 1.7 million square kilometres, comprising 22 per cent of Australia's land area, while British Columbia is 0.9 million square kilometres and has 10 per cent of the Canadian land mass. But climatically the two are totally different; Queensland is subtropical to tropical and British Columbia is cool-temperate to cold. Demographically, both have populations of similar size. Queensland has 2.5 million people (1986) and British Columbia has 2.8 million (1984), with both having grown rapidly over recent decades and having gained an increased share of their national populations; in 1961, Queensland had 14 per cent of Australia's population but by 1983 this had risen to 16 per cent, while over the same period British Columbia's share of Canada's population increased from 9 per cent to 11 per cent. In Australia, this shift represents a northward drift - accompanied by a smaller westward movement to Western Australia - of the nation's population, while in Canada's case it represents a westward drift not only to British Columbia but to Alberta as well. Internal migration - particularly from New South Wales and Victoria - brought about Queensland's transformation (Hugo, 1986), while with British Columbia, internal migration and immigration were equally responsible (Canadian Yearbook, 1985). This geographical redistribution of population occurred earlier in Canada, with the fastest period of growth in British Columbia being in the 1950s and 1960s, while in Queensland it was during 1960s and 1970s. Finally, there is a similarity in pattern of urban development in the two regions. The largest cities, Brisbane and Vancouver, each contain 46 per cent of their state/provincial populations, and each is many times bigger than the second largest city; Brisbane is seven times larger than the Gold Coast and Vancouver is five times the size of Victoria.

These demographic similarities are tied directly to similarities in economic development. Both Queensland and British Columbia experienced prolonged and very rapid economic expansion over recent decades and in both cases this was based on the exploitation of natural resources. Queensland's resources boom of the 1960s and 1970s centred on the expropriation of minerals, notably coal for export (essentially to Japan), while British Columbia's resources boom of the 1950s-1970s was overwhelmingly based on export-oriented forest products

(mainly for the United States market). Queensland's development was also tied to a significant expansion in other export-oriented industries, notably agriculture (particularly with sugar), pastoralism (particularly with beef), and tourism. Actually, Queensland (and Australian) tourism is overwhelmingly domestic, although the number of international tourists is increasing rapidly, and tourism may become the basis of a new Queensland economic boom. Tourism's rapid expansion is clearly seen in the explosive growth of two tourist cities, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast, located immediately south and north of Brisbane. All these economic developments, in turn, stimulated the State's construction and real estate industries, particularly in Brisbane, the Gold Coast, and the Sunshine Coast, and the rapid increase in the state's population stimulated manufacturing and retail activity. British Columbia had similar additional developments, with the expansion of mining (particularly coal for Japan), fishing, construction and real estate, and (for reasons similar to Queensland) manufacturing and retail activity.²

The crash in world commodity prices in the early 1980s brought to an end these economic booms and once again the inherent instability of the two economies was apparent. A dependence upon export-oriented primary produce creates economic insecurity and as a result of this both Queensland and British Columbia have been classified as 'underdeveloped' (Marchak, 1986; Mullins, 1980). Specifically, it is the concentration on primary production and the absence of manufacturing industry - relative to the core regions (New South Wales and Victoria, and Ontario) - which has led to this definition. Marked fluctuations in demand for primary produce causes instability, whereas a strong manufacturing base tends to create a more integrated and thus more stable economy. Developed regions, then, are industrialised regions.

Apart from economic instability, there are a number of other indices of Queensland's and British Columbia's underdevelopment. The rate of unemployment in both is high; in 1984 it was 9.7 per cent in Queensland while in British Columbia it was 15.6 per cent. Moreover, Queensland has the highest level of unemployment of the Australian States and British Columbia one of the highest in Canada. But what is striking about Queensland is that even during the resources boom the rate of unemployment tended to be the highest or second highest in Australia (Mullins, 1986), while British Columbia's unemployment increased dramatically only when the resources boom ended (Persky & Beckman, 1984); in 1980 British Columbia was placed sixth (of ten provinces), but by May 1984 it was second (after Newfoundland). In addition, Queensland has tended to have the highest rate of poverty in Australia, the lowest level of welfare expenditure, and the lowest level of educational achievement (Chamberlain, 1985).

The two regions do differ significantly on at least one major socio-economic indicator - per capita income. British Columbia's per capita income is one of the highest in Canada (Brym, 1986; Canadian Yearbook, 1985) and the province has held this position for at least fifty years. Queensland's per capita income, in contrast, is one of the lowest in Australia (Harman, 1982; Harris, 1985) and the

state's economic boom seems to have done nothing to change its position relative to other Australian States. This means that, relatively, British Columbia's resources boom brought more wealth to the residents of that region, than Queensland's resources boom for Queenslanders.

In considering these questions of regional development and underdevelopment, it is worth noting one major difference between Australia and Canada. While it is possible to identify 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' regions in both, regional disparities are far more marked in Canada than they are in Australia (Higgins, 1981). Australia's underdeveloped regions (the Northern Territory, Tasmania, Queensland, and Western Australia) are similar to Canada's Western provinces (Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and probably Manitoba), while Australia's developed regions (New South Wales and Victoria - and to a far lesser extent, South Australia) parallel Canada's developed regions (Ontario and the area around Montreal). But Australia has no underdeveloped regions equivalent to Canada's Maritime provinces, which are even more underdeveloped than the Western provinces (Brym & Sacouman, 1979).

It is this underdevelopment of Queensland and British Columbia which is behind the emergence of right-radicalism in the two regions. Right-radicalism is both a response to underdevelopment as well as a political means to remove it. In neither case, however, has this latter aspect of its program been successful.

In Queensland, right-radicalism was apparent in the coalition government the National Party formed with the Brisbane-based Liberal Party (the junior partner) over the years 1957 to 1983, but since the 1983 State election there has been a new and more extreme era in this politics, resulting from the National Party winning government in its own right. The National Party was, traditionally, the party of primary producers, but following the economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s it gained the support of the urban-based capitalists and *petite bourgeoisie* involved in construction, real estate, land development and tourism. Support was also forthcoming from those sections of the working-class involved in rapidly expanding sectors of the economy - construction, mining and tourism (Mullins, 1986). In parallel fashion, Social Credit in British Columbia has been the political force behind right-radicalism and it held government for every year since 1952, except when the left-of-centre New Democratic Party was in power from 1972-75. As with the National Party, 'Social Credit's constituents (were) small businessmen and large, non-unionised employees, immigrants drawn to B.C. by the lure of fortune' (Resnick, 1987, p. 8). For British Columbia, as for Queensland, 1983 was a momentous year, for after Social Credit was re-elected a new and more extreme era in British Columbia's right-radicalism began. This post-1983 period is of particular interest to this paper, then, as the response to the marked downturn of the two economies was the introduction of harsh policies.

In sum, the social structures of Queensland and British Columbia are strikingly similar because both regions are economically underdeveloped and this, in turn, has led to a distinctive right-radical political response. Social and demographic

similarities between the two, moreover, are closely related to these economic and political processes.

Before looking in detail at right-radicalism in Queensland and British Columbia, a number of concepts need clarification. As well as 'right-radicalism' itself, 'the New Right' and 'neo-conservatism' must be defined.

Right-radicalism

Led by sections of the dominant social classes, right-radicalism is a political movement which attempts to initiate *rapid* social change for the advantage of these classes. In attempting this transformation the movement attacks the state, particularly the welfare state, and advocates a new society in which the state plays a far more circumscribed role. By removing much of the welfare component, taxation and government expenditure would be substantially reduced, thus benefiting business and industrial interests. If right-radicalism is successful, then, the outcome will disproportionately benefit dominant social classes and groups, and severely disadvantage subordinate social classes and groups.

Established after 1945 and based on a complex set of social democratic principles, the welfare state attempts to maintain the integration of capitalist societies by managing social relationships between classes; that is, by trying to reduce conflicts inherent in these antagonistic relationships, primarily those involved in the way resources are distributed. In taking this role, the state provides much needed assistance to subordinate classes, particularly by improving wages, working conditions, and - through the social wage - living conditions. Although these redistributive actions were often to the disadvantage of dominant classes, the long post-war period of economic boom (1945-70) muted much criticism. But once the 1970s recession hit, the dominant classes mounted, in the form of right-radicalism, a political movement aimed at destroying the welfare state. However, it is worth noting that both Australia and Canada developed fairly limited welfare states (Castles, 1985; Finkel, 1977; MacIntyre, 1986), suggesting that right-radicalism has fewer barriers to overcome here than in countries with very elaborate welfare states, such as Sweden.

Right-radicalism was clearly visible in western countries by the mid-1970s and it is seen today in Britain with Thatcherism, in the United States with Reaganism (Hall & Jacques, 1983; Krieger, 1986), and it was evident to some extent in Australia with Fraserism. But these nationally based movements appear far less radical than the regionally based ones, such as those of Queensland and British Columbia. Two factors seem to account for this. Firstly, right-radicalism's lower level of success at the national level seems a consequence of the greater institutional strength of social democracy at that level. In contrast, the greater success of right-radicalism in Queensland and British Columbia seems associated with the relative weakness (at least in the 1970s and 1980s) of these regions' social democratic structures. This weakness probably resulted from unresolved development problems and it meant that right-radicalism had a far easier run.

Secondly, and more importantly, differences are associated with the type of development problems experienced. The greater success of right-radicalism in Queensland and British Columbia seems tied to the greater severity of their development problems, for, unlike Britain and the United States, they have *always* been underdeveloped. As a result, the opportunity to develop the regions' resources offered with the help of foreign capitalists evoked a right-radical response. An alliance was struck between these foreigners, certain local capitalists and some of the local *petite bourgeoisie*, with these locals being the social base of the right-radical political movement (Mullins, 1986).

The term 'the New Right' is invariably used to summarise these political movements (Sawer, 1982a), but, as already implied, this term may not be particularly appropriate for Queensland and British Columbia since their regional right-radicalism is different from that of nationally oriented movements. Moreover, having emerged only in the 1950s (British Columbia) and the 1960s (Queensland), these regionally based movements are somewhat old to be part of the New Right.

The New Right is a political movement with a diverse social base. It includes (particularly) economic rationalists (those wanting to totally deregulate the economy), libertarian thinkers (those who demand total individual freedom from the State), and religious fundamentalists (those who demand strict adherence to moral codes). Basic contradictions can appear between these elements, with libertarian thinkers and moral conservatives, for instance, taking opposite stands on abortion. But what they all have in common is a belief that the State must withdraw from its strong interventionist role, which they say reduces individual liberty, the central social value of the New Right. There is a belief that if people are free from state influence they will extend themselves for their own benefit and thus for the benefit of society.

Economic rationalists lead the New Right. They demand the end to state intervention in the economy, which is to be achieved through deregulation, including freeing the labour market and the lowering of taxes. The trade union movement would be destroyed or substantially changed and employers and employees would be able to come together to negotiate wages and working conditions with the state and trade unions playing little or no role in these negotiations. All of this, it is said, would allow a return to a 'true' free enterprise system.

Some of the discussion on British Columbia's New Right (e.g. Resnick, 1984, 1987) uses 'New Right' and 'neo-conservatism' interchangeably. But neo-conservatism seems inappropriate because the province's politics are about rapid social change, not conservatism or even neo-conservatism. 'Conservatism' and 'neo-conservatism' refer to politics which attempt to maintain an existing social order, not significantly change it (Sawer, 1982b). The existing order in contemporary capitalist societies is still largely social democratic and so what right-radicalism is trying to do is demolish this system, not conserve it. In writings on British Columbia, 'neo-conservatism' is used to refer to a political movement

which attempts to return the society to some pre-welfare state past (pre-1940s); that is, to the period before social democracy. In other words, it is used to refer to a reactionary movement, not a conservative or a neo-conservative one. Whether British Columbia's (or Queensland's) right-radicalism is reactionary, or whether it is a movement attempting to develop a new capitalist society, is yet to be seen; either way, 'neo-conservatism' seems an inappropriate term.

It is now appropriate to consider the nature of right-radicalism in both Queensland and British Columbia and see whether or not these movements are part of 'the New Right'. Differences between the right-radicalism of the two regions need to be considered also.

Right-Radicalism in Queensland and British Columbia

In both Queensland and British Columbia right-radicalism involves a very marked economic involvement by the state, an involvement which disproportionately benefits certain business and industrial interests, and thus dominant social classes. However, up until 1983, there was little to suggest that economic rationalism was a component of governmental policy in these two regions. Only from 1983 did the governments of Queensland and British Columbia adopt such principles. In Queensland, the major move in this direction was the deregulation of the electricity workforce. Electricity workers employed by the South East Queensland Electricity Board (SEQEB), a state government quango, were dismissed in 1985 following a strike over working conditions and work practices (Gilbert, 1986; McQueen, 1986). Those replacing the sacked workers were hired on contracts containing a no-strike clause. In deregulating this part of the workforce, then, the government also succeeded in demoralising the union involved. In British Columbia, in contrast, the attacks on labour were far more severe. In 1983, the provincial government introduced several acts which directly threatened labour, particularly government employees who comprise a significant section of the province's working population, as well as civil liberties and social services. In addition, the provincial government has managed to centralise power more than ever before (Magnusson, Carroll, Doyle, Langer & Walker, 1984).

Yet before 1983 - and even after - the governments of both regions were anything but economic rationalists; they were heavily interventionist, particularly in providing assistance to capitalists and the *petite bourgeoisie* involved in exploiting natural resources and in related activities such as tourism and construction. This assistance came mostly in the form of infrastructural developments (e.g. rail, electricity, roads). Not surprisingly, the term 'state capitalism' has been used to characterise these actions (Stuart, 1985; Resnick, 1987). Clearly, then, there is nothing 'New Right' about this subsidisation of capitalist enterprise. Indeed, when the Queensland premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, began his campaign (which subsequently failed) to lead the Australian New Right in the federal election of July 1987, and have himself ensconced as prime minister, influential members of the Australian New Right severely criticised his

government's (interventionist) economic record. Writing in his weekly newspaper column, one of the 'driest' of the Australian New Right, John Hyde, has suggested that:

Premier Bjelke-Petersen, cast as the champion of free enterprise, is Gilbertian... (because)... between 1982 and last year Queensland's public debt increased 77 per cent, faster than any State... (and)... from 1983 to 1985 Queensland had the greatest growth in public sector employment... (Also)... the Confederation of Australian Industry believes that over the past 10 years, Queensland has passed more regulations than any other Australian government... One might think this the work of a socialist government. It is. His record is that of a big-spending, interfering socialist who got one thing right - the south-east Queensland power strike [Weekend Australian, Feb. 14-15 1987, p.25].

In summary, the right-radical governments of Queensland and British Columbia have used the state to assist a particular type of capitalist development; to assist certain capitalists in their quest to accumulate capital and to aid certain members of the *petite bourgeoisie*. These movements are not free enterprise movements in the way of the New Right.

Although the governments of Queensland and British Columbia have, in economic terms, been highly interventionist, they have done little to improve the social wage; that is provide a high quality of housing assistance, health care, education, welfare services, etc. For example, although Queensland has a free hospital system - introduced during the Labor era (1915-29, 1932-57) - government expenditure on the social wage is far less than in other States (Chamberlain, 1985). Similarly, in British Columbia, there has been a marked reduction in the number of public servants and in the level of expenditure on education and health care since 1983 (Carroll, et al, 1984; Callahan, 1984; Magnusson & Langer, 1984).

Associated with these economic and social actions are a number of profound political changes. In their efforts to encourage and sustain economic growth, both governments have attacked civil liberties and manipulated parliament for their own advantage. In Queensland, for example, some of the most ferocious attacks have been directed at Queenslanders generally, rather than just at workers and trade unions (Mullins, 1986). They have been aimed particularly at the environmental movement and others opposing certain developments; and, following public objections to these attacks, assaults have been made on civil liberties (Applegarth, 1985; Foley, 1986). Similar patterns of attack have been observed in British Columbia (Rankin, 1984; Lord, 1984). Furthermore, the parliamentary system is being undermined, since it has become surprisingly easy for governments to manipulate parliamentary procedures in the loosely-structured political system Australia and Canada adopted from Britain. This partly explains the ease with which repressive statutes were passed in British Columbia in 1983 (Wilson, 1984); and, in Queensland, it helps explain the alleged corruption, patronage, and privilege existing within the government. The zonal malapportionment legislation is symbolic of this - the National Party can be returned to power with considerably less than 50 per cent of the vote. At the

1986 election it formed government with only 40 per cent (Coaldrake, 1986; Jaensch, 1985).

Of course, these assaults on social democracy have not gone unopposed, with the most dramatic response occurring in British Columbia after the passing of the 1983 acts (Carroll, 1984; Resnick, 1987). A loose coalition of forces opposing these bills formed 'Operation Solidarity' and this subsequently brought tens of thousands of people out in mass demonstration. Similarly in Queensland, the 1985 SEQEB strike and its aftermath evoked considerable union and public demonstration, while the 1970s' history of Queensland is one of constant clashes between police and people opposing certain projects and the State government's attacks on civil liberties (Mullins, 1986).

One further characteristic of Queensland's right-radicalism is worth mentioning. This is religious fundamentalism, particularly in terms of sexual morality and issues affecting the nuclear family. Contrary to Thornton's (1986) claim, this fundamentalism is not simply a leftover from Queensland's strong rural past but is very much part of contemporary Queensland. It is linked to the way family labour is central to the economic endeavours of small capitalists and the *petite bourgeoisie*; classes which have been larger in Queensland than other States, and classes which have played an important role in the State's recent economic development (Mullins, 1986). With its opposition to abortion, divorce, sexual permissiveness, independent working women, changes in gender roles, etc., this pro-nuclear family stance is a distinctive characteristic of these classes in all capitalist countries (see for example, Bertaux & Bertaux-Wiame, 1981). Religion in its most fundamental form is used to protect the nuclear family and so ensure the economic viability to these classes, a viability constantly under threat (Bechhofer & Elliott, 1981). In other words, because the nuclear family is fundamental to the economic well-being of these classes, particularly in providing cheap labour, the strongest possible measures are taken to protect the family and, thus, these classes' interests. Since religious sanctions are used, the role of religious fundamentalism becomes obvious. In Queensland this situation was most apparent with agriculture and pastoralism, but today it is more clearly urban-based, particularly in terms of small capitalists and the *petite bourgeoisie* involved in providing services, and is especially apparent in the new rapidly developing tourist cities of the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast (for example, Mullins, 1984).

Conclusion: Right-Radicalism and Populism

How then can Queensland's and British Columbia's right-radicalism best be explained? The starting point is a realisation that the politics of the two regions is a politics of underdevelopment. The particular politics of underdevelopment common to both regions is populist in style and claims to be attempting to remove development problems.

Populism is a politics which emerges in response to development difficulties and appears specifically in export-oriented, primary-producing regions which are

underdeveloped. It involves a political alliance between those social classes, or parts of classes, which are most affected by the region's development problems. These form the basis for a social movement which seeks to counter, politically, these development problems. Populist programs, then, are couched not in class terms but as actions by the people against the oppressor causing the development problem; an oppressor invariably located outside the region. The *petite bourgeoisie* is the lynch pin in this alliance because as the major producer of primary goods it is most severely affected by development problems. A close tie also exists between the social organisation which directs the movement and its members, with a close relationship appearing between the leader and the led; a relationship said, rhetorically, to be 'personalised'. Most importantly, however, populist politics attempt to initiate rapid social change, change which is to the advantage of those in the alliance and change which is assumed to counter underdevelopment (Conway, 1978, 1979). Populism can also take different forms. There is left populism, which is initiated by subordinate classes (the working class and the *petite bourgeoisie*) for the advantage of these classes, and right populism which is initiated by dominant classes to their own advantage, as well as to the advantage of other classes within the alliance, particularly the *petite bourgeoisie* and even including some of the working class (Mullins, 1986).

The right-radicalism of Queensland and British Columbia, then, is right populist. In both regions, it was initiated by a section of the capitalist class - foreign capitalists - wishing to exploit the regions' resources (for details of Queensland, see Mullins, 1986). The social base of both movements centred on alliances between the local *petite bourgeoisie*, small local capitalists, and parts of the local working class. In turn, these groups were allied with foreign capitalists. Organisationally, these movements centred on the National Party and Social Credit, with these parties forming governments in their respective regions and initiating social change to the advantage of those in the alliance. Right populism, then, is revolutionary, for it attempts to develop new social structures, ones contrary to those based on social democratic principles. It is possible, of course, to get right-radical political movements which are not populist. Certain military dictatorships, political oligarchies, and in governments based on political clientelism are examples: these can all be right-radical but not populist (see for example, Mouzelis, 1985).

From this discussion, then, we can readily understand why the governments of Queensland and British Columbia have been so interventionist and why both have initiated oppressive measures. The intervention benefits those in the alliance and harsh measures are attempts to control the populations, generally, and the workforces, specifically. The tough, post-1983 actions were initiated during a period of recession - following major economic booms - and are being used to reinforce control of the labour force in the hope that capital will continue to be attracted to these regions.

Notes

1. Early in 1987 the Queensland National Party attempted to force its federal counterpart to end its long standing coalition with the Liberal Party and campaign as an independent party. When Prime Minister Hawke called an early election the disunity among the non-Labor parties contributed significantly to the re-election of the Hawke Labor government for an unprecedented third term. The Nationals had used the veteran Queensland premier, Sir Johannes Bjelke-Petersen, as the spearhead of their campaign. The collapse of the 'Joh for PM' campaign led to recriminations within the Queensland National Party government which eventually precipitated Bjelke-Petersen's retirement in December 1987. (Editor's note)
2. For a political economy of Queensland see Harris (1985) and Mullins (1980). For a political economy of British Columbia see Marchak (1983; 1986).

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