Preface

I have had an interest in British Columbia politics ever since coming to this province in 1971. In my early years here, I was particularly interested in questions related to BC political economy. But I also began to follow the province's shifting political currents, from the New Democratic Party government of the early 1970s, to the restraint policies of the Social Credit government of the mid-1980s, to the realignment of provincial politics in the 1990s.

Like many others who have made BC their home, I felt that this province was different. The politics was a good deal zanier than in Ontario, where I had spent a number of years as a graduate student in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Nor did it resemble that of my native Quebec, where, coming of political age during the Quiet Revolution, I had experienced the politics of the new nationalism firsthand.

Out here on the Pacific Coast, Ottawa seemed far away and federal issues seemed to matter less than in places further east. BC's political divisions between right and left seemed to be cast in concrete, with business and its supporters and trade unions and their supporters squaring off against one another with passionate intensity. Social movements such as environmentalism, the peace movement, and New Age religions cropped up like magic mushrooms in the rain. For its part, the BC media, with an eye for the larger-than-life scandals that periodically rocked the province, treated what passed for politics as a blood sport.

To be honest, I found – and still find – the minutiae of BC politics of little interest. My horizons are more Canadian than British Columbian; more global, for that matter, than purely national. I suspect I am not the only British Columbian to feel this way. At the same time, I have found myself drawn over the past decade or so into the Canadian unity debate, which is primarily a debate about Quebec's place in

Confederation. I have had occasion to participate in this debate in various ways – briefs to parliamentary committees, conference papers, a regular column between 1995 and 1997 in the Montreal newspaper *Le Devoir,* and the writing of a number of book-length essays: *Letters to a Québécois Friend* (1990), *Toward a Canada-Quebec Union* (1991), and *Thinking English Canada* (1994).

I sometimes thought of undertaking a book-length study on British Columbia. Invariably something else intervened, and my attention shifted elsewhere. Yet the desire to come to terms with the province that I had come to call home never quite left me. Finally, a series of events in 1997 led me to return to the study of BC via the debate about Canadian unity.

That autumn, Victor Armony, a recent PhD graduate from the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), came to work with me at the University of British Columbia as a postdoctoral student. Victor's doctoral thesis had involved the study of political discourse in his native Argentina, and he had also been part of a research project at UQAM involving the computerized textual analysis of documents.

We decided to embark on a comparative study of BC regionalism and Quebec nationalism. We hoped to combine the analytical, narrative approach that I have brought to much of my work with the computerized textual analysis that Victor had adopted. I approached the BC Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat for help in obtaining copies of speeches that had been made by BC premiers and intergovernmental affairs ministers, principally to federal-provincial conferences, and they obliged with some thirty or so documents. Doug McArthur, then deputy minister to the premier, was particularly helpful in expediting my request, and I thank him for it. These official documents form the backbone of Chapter 2.

Subsequently, the editor of the *Vancouver Sun*, John Cruickshank, and the *Sun* librarian, Debbie Millward, provided access to *Sun* files dealing with Canadian unity from the 1970s through the 1990s. I thank them both for their help. No small number of quotations, particularly in Chapters 2 and 3, come from this source.

Finally, during the autumn of 1997, the BC government, in the aftermath of the Calgary Declaration, set up the BC Unity Panel to tour the province and garner the opinions of British Columbians on issues related to Canadian unity. When the panel's report was released in February 1998, we were given access to the official transcripts of all the public hearings as well as to the written briefs that had been submitted to the panel. This material forms the basis for Chapter 4.

By the spring of 1998, it became clear that we had gathered a good deal of material on British Columbia – so much, in fact, that it made sense to drop the Quebec component of the study and to focus on BC exclusively. The goal became to produce a book on BC and Canadian unity.

When Victor Armony joined the Department of Sociology at the University of Ottawa later that year, he was no longer able to participate in the project as one of the co-authors. He has, however, made a direct contribution to this book: the second section of Chapter 4 is his undertaking. He has also contributed a good deal, through discussions and exchanges, to the project, and I thank him very warmly for this.

So in 1999, I finally found myself tackling the book on British Columbia that I had always managed to put off. It deals with the theme of BC regionalism and Canadian unity. Implicitly, however, it aims at something more. It represents my attempt to explore what makes BC stand apart as a region of Canada. It provides an analysis – the first, I think, that has ever been attempted in book-length format – of the reactions of the inhabitants of Canada's westernmost province to the challenges posed by Quebec nationalism, reactions often characterized by resentment. And it represents my attempt to provide a new formulation for describing BC's place within the Canadian federation.

Chapter 1 is an overview of some of the things that historians, social scientists, writers, and politicians have had to say, over the years, about this most particular province. It is also an attempt to come to terms with some of the theoretical literature that explores the theme of regionalism. In that sense, it is meant to set the stage for what follows.

Chapter 2 involves a close examination of the views of BC premiers from W.A.C. Bennett to Glen Clark and of other leading BC politicians on a number of questions. These include attitudes towards Quebec, attitudes towards the federal government and federal institutions, views on BC as a distinct region, attitudes towards BC separatism, and, finally, visions of Canada.

Chapter 3 looks at the same five themes discussed in Chapter 2, but examines them from the point of view of a broad range of BC opinion-makers: business spokespersons, trade union representatives, consultants, journalists, academics, ex-politicians, environmentalists, and others.

Chapter 4 looks closely at the proceedings of the BC Unity Panel

in the autumn of 1997. The first section summarizes some of the findings of an extensive poll that was undertaken for the Unity Panel. The second section involves computerized textual analysis of the submissions to the public hearings of the Unity Panel. The third section involves a detailed analysis of some of the written briefs submitted to the Unity Panel. Both the second and third sections explore the same five themes as Chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 5 tries to think more globally about the implications of the material presented in Chapters 1 to 4. It rejects the notion of region-state that has been promoted by a number of recent commentators. Instead, it proposes a new way of looking at Canada, in which BC would find its symbolic place as one of Canada's region-provinces.

Finally, Chapter 6 represents a short excursus into the business of future-gazing. What if Quebec were to vote "yes" in a third referendum on sovereignty? How would British Columbians be likely to react? What might their role be in keeping a post-Quebec Canada together?

In addition to those I have already thanked above, let me mention a few others:

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