



**University
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

**Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts**

of

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BA Honours (Concordia University, 1977)
MA (Simon Fraser University, 1979)

**“Protesting Smoke: A Social and Political History
of Vancouver Air Pollution”**

Department of History

Monday, July 10, 2017
10:00 A.M.
Clearihue Building
Room B215

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Eric Sager, Department of History, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Richard Rajala, Department of History, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Michael V. Hayes, Department of Geography, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Marjorie MacDonald, School of Nursing, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract

This thesis examines social and political responses to poor air quality in Vancouver, British Columbia from the 1950s through the early 1970s. Businesses dependent on local markets, the City of Vancouver and medical health officers organized the first civic efforts to strengthen air pollution control in the early 1950s. The provincial government only engaged with the air pollution issue publicly in the early 1960s, and delayed developing clear policy until 1969. Social Credit politicians and representatives of exporting industries generally characterized pollution impacts as aesthetic rather than as harmful to health. This characterization helped justify keeping air policy implementation at the municipal level. Excepting Vancouver, this level proved incapable of dealing with the problem. Public protests of poor air quality increased over time even as visible pollutants decreased. The capitalist state's imperative to support large corporate interests helps explain the Province's consistently weak stance on air pollution policy. However, the contradictory imperative of democratic legitimation helps explain policy shifts during the Bennett administration, such as occurred during the public wave of environmental concern in the late 1960s. Vancouver's consistently stronger stand on air pollution was supported by the local market oriented business community, market shifts to liquid fuels and deindustrialization. Vancouver's policy experience and federal-provincial political rivalries best explain Greater Vancouver's retention of industrial air pollution management when the Bennett administration finally asserted control over this pollution source for the rest of the province.