

## CONTROVERSY / POLÉMIQUE

# The British Columbia CCF's Working-Class Moment: Socialism Not Populism

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IN AUGUST 1934, DELEGATES of the Socialist Party of Canada, the dominant of the two affiliates to the British Columbia Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (BC/CCF), returning from the National Convention of the CCF in Winnipeg, lamented that “the Convention was far from being revolutionary, and tended further to the right.” The only bright spot on the horizon, they felt, was the small national youth movement that understood the necessity of “forg[ing] an instrument” capable of “the revolutionary transformation of our economic and social system.”<sup>1</sup> Throughout the 1930s, the BC CCF was considered nationally as the most left wing of the movement’s provincial sections, and the BC CCF itself considered itself to be responsible for providing a revolutionary and working-class anchor to a national movement that seemed, at times, to drift from its socialist moorings. And, for the most part, historians – most recently Benjamin Isitt – have acknowledged the BC CCF’s place on the left-wing of the Canadian movement in the 1930s and beyond.<sup>2</sup>

As Robert A.J. McDonald rightly argues, however, there was much in the day-to-day practice and language of the BC CCF that seemed to violate its own self-perception. Indeed, its actions appear not very different, for the most part, than other provincial CCF sections that engaged in socialist education and ran in elections. He argues that was most apparent in the CCF’s breakthrough provincial election in 1933, which he sees as a “populist moment” wherein the

1. University of British Columbia Special Collections (UBC), Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection (AMMC), Box 45, File 45-5, Socialist Party of Canada, 1934–35, Provincial Executive, 26 August 1934.

2. Benjamin Isitt, *Militant Minority: British Columbia Workers and the Rise of a New Left, 1948–1972*, (Toronto 2011).

frustrations of a broad range of British Columbians in the political system were vented in support for the new and unproven CCF. McDonald's argument goes deeper than this, however. Elsewhere he has argued that the various streams that he identified within the BC CCF, including populism, labourism, and social democracy, are all "variants of liberalism" reflective of the fundamental liberal character of the province's political culture.<sup>3</sup>

The suggestion that the CCF had, at least, populist roots is far from new, particularly on the prairies. In the 1970s, John Conway argued that both the CCF and the Social Credit League in Saskatchewan and Alberta continued that tradition, reflecting the class interests of their shared social base among the agrarian petit-bourgeoisie. Each represented a class-determined reaction to farmers' increased vulnerability in the market place.<sup>4</sup> As Alvin Finkel points out in his incisive and careful analysis of Alberta Social Credit, reading the political programs of these parties directly from their class position fails to explain their political characteristics or trajectories. Moreover, he argues that it is simply incorrect to associate Social Credit specifically with farmers, as urban workers were often no less enthusiastic supporters; the same point could be made, even more strongly, of course, about the CCF. Analyzing these developments requires careful examination of the movements themselves, particularly since they had specific histories and influences. In both Saskatchewan and Alberta, farmers largely abandoned the populism of the foundering Progressive Party, seeking new political solutions to the crises of the 1930s. In Alberta, the CCF fared poorly due to its association with the ineffective United Farmers of Alberta provincial government. In Saskatchewan, the Progressive tradition gave way to a more explicitly socialist movement, one clearly tied to the working-class roots of the national CCF. Indeed, as Finkel points out, the Saskatchewan CCF's drift away from socialist policies and towards liberalism in the late 1930s and 1940s is best analyzed as a process of electoral socialism (or social democracy) nationally, rather than as a specific feature of a rudderless petit-bourgeoisie in one province.<sup>5</sup>

3. Robert McDonald, "'Variants of Liberalism' and the Liberal Order Framework in British Columbia" in Jean-François Constant and Michel Ducharme, ed., *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution*, (Toronto 2009), 322–46.

4. J.F. Conway, "Populism in the United States, Russia, and Canada: Explaining the Roots of Canada's Third Parties," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 11 (March 1978), 99–124, and J.F. Conway, "The Prairie Populist Resistance to the National Policy: Some Reconsiderations," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 14 (Fall 1969) 77–91. Similar explanations were presented by a range of critics of the CCF's abandonment of some of its earlier radicalism, including Peter R. Sinclair, "The Saskatchewan CCF: Ascent to Power and the Decline of Socialism," *Canadian Historical Review*, 54 (December 1973), 419–433, John Smart, "Populist and Socialist Movements in Canadian History," R.M. Laxer, ed., (*Canada Ltd.: The Political Economy of Dependency*, (Toronto 1973), 197–212, and R.T. Naylor and Gary Teeple, "Appendix: The Ideological Formations of Social Democracy and Social Credit," in Gary Teeple, ed., *Capitalism and the National Question in Canada*, (Toronto 1973), 251–6.

5. Alvin Finkel, *The Social Credit Phenomenon in Alberta*, (Toronto 1989), 202–13.

This debate has little direct bearing on British Columbia since the organized farmers' movement in that province had only the briefest flirtation with the CCF. In 1931, the BC section of United Farmers of Canada established a "People's Party" on a classically populist program designed to challenge the "present vicious and wasteful system of party machine politics."<sup>6</sup> While enthusiastic about the creation of the national CCF, J.E. Armishaw who, besides leading the People's Party, edited their paper and headed the provincial UFC, assailed the BC section for its socialism. Not surprisingly the People's Party quest to affiliate to the CCF was rebuked and it briefly formed an "Independent CCF" that campaigned for a "co-operative commonwealth" distinct from a "socialist state."<sup>7</sup> Such a formation had very little resonance in BC and the provincial CCF president, Robert Skinner, considered it of little consequence and Armishaw to be a political adventurer.<sup>8</sup> Like the rest of Canada outside of Saskatchewan and Alberta, organized farmers' role in the CCF was short lived, at best.

That is not to say that the CCF did not have some cross class appeal. The challenge of categorizing the CCF lies, in part, in its diversity. It was, as its name implies, a federation of "labour, farmer, and socialist" forces, seeking to unite various forms of protest without demanding (at least at the outset) that any of them abandon their autonomy. And, as a mass movement, it was inevitably diverse in its composition. Consequently, it is possible to see many contradictory CCFs. For instance, in BC, the CCF leadership, based in Vancouver, appears very much to the left of the local political activists in Port Alberni and Prince George analyzed by Gordon Hak.<sup>9</sup> Hak notes the complex social composition of the left in these towns, characterizing them as largely petit-bourgeois, although the same could possibly be said of socialist activists across the continent early in the twentieth century. The trajectories of individuals were complex. Many were wage workers, but others found themselves barred from paid labour or using their business acumen in order to support themselves and their political activities. And the movement attracted individuals who rejected the dominant ideology in any number of ways. In Vancouver alone, the gamut ran from the revolutionary left to the Advance CCF Club in the city's Mount Pleasant neighbourhood which was vocally "antisocialist" in its views, at least according to Herbert Gargrave, incoming provincial secretary of the CCF.<sup>10</sup>

6. *The People* (Vancouver), April 1932.

7. *The People*, 29 June 1933; Library and Archives Canada (LAC), MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, volume 10, file 1934 Convention Correspondence, T. Catherwood to Norman Priestley, 14 July 1934 and "The True Status of the C.C.F.B.C. Section"; *Challenge* (Vancouver), March 1933.

8. LAC, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, volume 5, file: Provincial Council Correspondence, Skinner to Norman Priestley, 28 April 1933.

9. Gordon Hak, "The Socialist and Labourist Impulse in Small-Town British Columbia: Port Alberni and Prince George," *Canadian Historical Review*, 70 (December 1989), 519–42.

10. *Commonwealth* (Vancouver), 1 February 1935.

The BC CCF attracted enthusiasts of any number of interwar trends from technocracy to theosophy, and attracted followers of individuals from Gandhi and Major Douglas.<sup>11</sup> Evidence for a wide range of characterizations is plentiful and populist sentiments, and language, certainly existed within the CCF. But to consider these more than minority currents is to misunderstand the central message of the movement.

It is more useful to consider the CCF's collective character and its impact on Canadian and British Columbia politics more generally. Ian McKay's "reconnaissance" of Canadian history has provided the occasion to reflect on the extent to which the CCF helped construct, or resist, the liberal social order. Indeed, he specifically identified the CCF and argued that those who emphasize "the CCF's essential moderation and mild 'social democracy'" seriously underestimate the movement's challenge to liberalism.<sup>12</sup> There is much to be said on either side of this debate, largely because of the CCF's complexity and the often contradictory roles it played; certainly, over time, it would be difficult to argue that the CCF and its successor, the NDP, did not make its peace with the liberal order. In keeping with McKay, this paper argues that the early BC CCF reflected a profoundly anti-liberal movement although for reasons somewhat different than he suggests. McKay tends to equate the dominant current in the CCF with a tendency toward "Radical Planism," itself a challenge to "liberal acquisitive individualism."<sup>13</sup> He points, in particular, to the Regina Manifesto and then to the 1940s leadership of the CCF, particularly David Lewis and Frank Scott's *Make This Your Canada* (1943).<sup>14</sup> This is, of course, a reference to those in and around the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR). However, this very much overstates the weight of this current in the CCF in the 1930s,

11. Technocracy: UBC, AMMC, Box 45, File 45-5, SPC Provincial Executive, 8 April 1934; Theosophy, Irene Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice in British Columbia: Helena Gutteridge, The Unknown Reformer*, (Vancouver 1992) and Samuel Eldon Charles Wagar, "Theosophical Socialists in the 1920s Okanagan: Jack Logie's Social Issues Summer Camp," Masters Paper, Simon Fraser University, 2005; Gandhi: Nancy Knickerbocker, *No Plaster Saint: The Life of Mildred Osterhout Fahrni*, (Vancouver 2001); Major Douglas/Social Credit: Dorothy G. Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel: Ernest Winch and the Growth of Socialism in Western Canada* (Vancouver 1977), 80, 109.

12. Ian McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review*, 81 (December 2000), 643n59.

13. Ian McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework" and especially, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada's Left History*, (Toronto 2005), esp. 179; On Radical Planism, McKay cites Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (Oxford 2002), 240–241, although Gerd-Rainer Horn's description makes clear that the Belgian model associated with Hendrik de Man, which McKay references, is distinct from the Canadian case. Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism: Ideology, Activism and Contingency in the 1930s*, (Oxford 1996), 74–95.

14. David Lewis and Frank Scott, *Make This Your Canada*, (Toronto 1943).

and ignores the very rough ride the LSR got in the BC CCF.<sup>15</sup> BC CCF delegates to the 1933 convention were unenthusiastic about the direction being given to the new movement at the hands of J.S. Woodsworth and the newly arrived LSR notables who were tasked with writing the Regina Manifesto.<sup>16</sup> Even more specifically, the BC CCF Education Committee banned the LSR's *Social Planning for Canada* from its study lists, a decision that was upheld by the provincial executive.<sup>17</sup> In Wallis Lefeaux's assessment, its "muddled thinking" was "barely distinguishable from the proposals of present-day radical liberals."<sup>18</sup> The CCF, with its vision articulated by the likes of Lefeaux, represented something quite different, but something no less at odds with the liberal social order.

Individuals such as Lefeaux are perhaps easy to dismiss as holdovers from a previous era. Lefeaux had been a mainstay of the old Socialist Party of Canada (SPC). Active since 1905, he continued to champion intellectual rigour in the new SPC of the 1930s, insisting, as an old Marxist "of the third way" (to cite Peter Campbell), that a well educated membership was necessary to avoid a vanguardist cult of leadership, and he wrote extraordinarily long articles on economics in the *Clarion*.<sup>19</sup> Walter Young, who largely established the academic assessment of the CCF, is particularly damning. The elected leadership of the Socialist Party – Lefeaux, Ernest Winch, and the like – who viewed themselves as guarding the gates of the CCF against liberalism "were self-righteous to the point of arrogance and intolerance," while their emphasis on education, building on deep autodidactic roots among both the labour and radical movements, was seen as a "fetish" designed to "preserve the elitist character of the socialist movement in British Columbia."<sup>20</sup> Young, however, offers little direct evidence of their problematic behavior outside of the assessment that

15. Dorothy Steeves, who came through the LSR, commented that the SPC "didn't regard us with a very great kindness." University of Toronto Rare Book Library (UT), J.S. Woodsworth Memorial Collection (WMC), Box 10A, File: Steeves, Dorothy Gretchen, Dorothy Steeves interviewed by Paul Fox, n.d.

16. William G. Godfrey, "The 1933 Regina Convention of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation," MA Thesis, University of Waterloo, 1965; Michiel Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada, 1930–1942*, (Toronto 1980), 36–54.

17. UBC, AMMC, Volume 45, File 45-12, minutes, Provincial Executive, C.C.F. (B.C.), 15 February 1936.

18. *Clarion* (Vancouver), February 1936.

19. *Commonwealth* (Vancouver), 25 October 1933; UBC, AMMC, Volume 45, 45-5, minutes, Socialist Party of Canada, Annual Convention, 5 and 6 January 1935, President's Report (Lefeaux). Peter Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way*, (Kingston and Montreal 1999), 61–62.

20. Walter D. Young, "Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia," *BC Studies*, 32 (Winter 1976–77), 145.

they were not “practical and pragmatic.”<sup>21</sup> Their social pathology, in short, was that they did not conform to a liberal model of political behaviour. A key problem with such a view is that such people, who defined themselves as revolutionary Marxists, built a broad, popular, and arguably effective movement by defining a political subject in ways quite distinct from liberal discourses of individual autonomy and property rights. They defined the working class as subject in ways that provided a distinct standpoint from which to view and, they hoped, to reconstruct the world.

There were other currents in the BC CCF whose proximity to the liberal order might seem more apparent, but only by ignoring what was historically specific about the Depression decade. Walter Young, for instance, was particularly keen on the “reformist” Angus MacInnis, although MacInnis himself would no doubt have spurned the label in the 1930s since he, as would others in the CCF, generally denied that they were aiming at “reforming” capitalism.<sup>22</sup> They may have been electoralist and gradualist, but they did foresee a future that they defined, keeping with the movement as a whole, as “working-class.” For this reason, describing these or other currents in the BC CCF as liberal is highly problematic.

The difficulties of characterizing both the CCF as a whole, as well as individual activists, persist. Even Ian McKay’s generally impressive and sweeping reassessment of Canadian radical history is of very limited help in sorting out this problem as his boundaries of both “leftism” and “liberalism” are porous and shifting. It is not at all clear why he credits some historical figures with “reasoning otherwise,” while others are painted as bulwarks of the liberal order. Why is labourism and social democracy, for the most part, placed in the liberal column, while several individuals, such as Winnipeg’s Fred Dixon and novelist Alice Chown, important critics of elements of the social order but not primarily self-identified socialists, celebrated as “leftists”? This is made possible by leaving unexamined the relationship between liberalism and capitalism, a shortcoming identified by several commentators.<sup>23</sup> Its corollary is McKay’s tendency to eschew the category of “socialism,” with its anti-capitalist connotations, for an ill-defined “leftism,” which can easily accommodate much of early twentieth-century progressivism. McKay is rightly critical of

21. Young, “Ideology, Personality and the Origins of the CCF,” 141.

22. As Ernest Winch acknowledged in private correspondence: MacInnis is “very definite for Socialism without any academic hair-splitting but without side-stepping fundamental essentials.” UT, WMC, Box 8, Socialist Party of Canada, Ernest Winch to Bert Robinson, 3 March 1933.

23. James Naylor, Review of Ian McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise: Leftists and the People’s Enlightenment in Canada, 1890–1920*, in *Canadian Historical Review*, 90 (December 2009), 796–798; David Camfield, Review of Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Re-thinking Canada’s Left History*, in *Labour/Le Travail*, 57 (Spring 2006), 201–204; Bryan D. Palmer, “Radical Reasoning,” *Underhill Review*, (Fall 2009), <http://www3.carleton.ca/underhillreview/09/fall/reviews/palmer.htm>

the ways in which historians have downplayed some of the radical liberal roots of socialism, but failure to draw firmer distinctions creates exactly the sort of problem we are examining here. Not surprisingly, then, in a volume dedicated to unpacking the possibilities presented by following McKay's reconnaissance of the liberal social order, Robert McDonald's categories perpetuate the confusion. In this case, McDonald identifies in the BC CCF multiple "variants of liberalism" which, he argues, have been obscured from historical view by historians' fascination with a smaller group of Party leaders based in Vancouver.<sup>24</sup>

There is a danger, firstly, of subsuming so much under liberalism that it ceases to be analytically useful, particularly since the currents McDonald has identified as feeding into the BC CCF all represent, to some degree, class-identified challenges to possessive individualism. Just as seriously, none of the variants of liberalism identified by McDonald, including populism and labourism, capture the dominant character or particularly the trajectory of the 1930s movement. The measure of populism is, of course, whether, on the one hand, "the people" comprise the political subject, denied access to a potentially neutral state, or whether, on the other, in Marxist terms, the state itself comprises an instrument of capitalist class rule. David Laycock tends to argue that the boundary between the two was porous, but does not deny this distinction. In fact Laycock's definition of populism differs from McDonald's as Laycock notes that (I would argue misnamed) "social democratic populism" tended to break with the notion of the neutrality of the state.<sup>25</sup> The SPC of the 1930s rigorously maintained a Marxist view of the state; the question here is whether that view had a wider currency among other CCF members and voters.

Many SPCers emerged out of a labourist past, but one should not presume that its liberal characteristics had persisted. Labourism had been predicated on a working-class identity. As Craig Heron points out, however, labourism was imbued with a commitment to liberal democracy that shied away from replacing capitalist dominance with proletarian "class rule."<sup>26</sup> But this tradition was long exhausted. Heron notes that a combination of factors spelled the demise of classic labourism during and after World War I. Growing class conflict, along with the active participation of radicals in labourist projects, blurred the line between labourists and socialists. The independent labour parties that persisted after the war tended to be much less naïve about the ability of working-class interests being served within what they increasingly identified as a capitalist democracy. At the same time, a battered craft union movement, whose leaders were particularly suspicious of labour political

24. McDonald, "'Variants of Liberalism' and the Liberal Order Framework in British Columbia."

25. David Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910–1945*, (Toronto 1990), 136–202, esp. 139, 163.

26. Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 45–76.

activists deprived labourism of its main source of support. Consequently, labour parties were generally small and isolated during the 1920s. The Depression, in many ways, put paid to even a formal link to the old politics. In British Columbia, the Independent Labour Party (itself an amalgamation of labour and socialist parties in 1925) changed its name twice, first to the ILP (Socialist) in December 1931 and to the Socialist Party of Canada six months later.<sup>27</sup> This initiated a period of considerable growth as the number of SPC branches grew from 24 to 60 in a little more than year.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, the message of the SPC resonated in left circles.

The creation of a new SPC was far from an exercise in political purity. Harold Winch's declaration to the SPC provincial convention was accurate: "Our work is to make Socialists – founded upon a clear understanding of Marxian principles – not doctrinaire high priests of hairsplittingdom. This, however, is not enough. A theoretical socialist who does not strive at all times to act as a practical one might as well never have been made for he is neither use (sic) nor ornament."<sup>29</sup> This is very much the argument being made here: the SPC reflected a working-class identity; presented an argument that labour, as a class, should lead society; and did so in a manner that made its orientation hegemonic in the CCF and popular beyond it. Indeed, this was the group which formulated the notion of a broader political formation – the CCF – and gave it birth in BC and, to a great extent, nationally.<sup>30</sup> The CCF grew out of the western labour conferences (rather than emerging from the parliamentary labour and ginger caucuses as the mythology has it), where the BC ILP/SPC was the sole British Columbia representative. From the outset, the BC SPC was in favour of a wider political coalition and felt it important to organize broadly, including among the middle class and, then, educate this membership in working-class principles. Failure to do so, they felt, would leave the middle class open to radically anti-labour ideologies, including fascism.<sup>31</sup> With little opposition, the SPC voted, by referendum, to affiliate to the new national CCF.

27. The history is summarized in UBC, AMMC, Volume 45, File 45-5, "Socialist Party of Canada Report to the Convention of the C.C.F. Affiliates (B.C. Section), Vancouver, 27 and 28 July 1935."

28. UBC, AMMC, Volume 45, File 45-3, "Annual Convention, 21 and 22 January 1933," Report of the Provincial Secretary (H. Winch); LAC, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Volume 5, File: Provincial Council Correspondence, Robert Skinner to Priestley, 28 April 1933.

29. UBC, AMMC, Volume 45, File 45-3, "Annual Convention, 21 and 22 January 1933," Report of the Provincial Secretary (H. Winch).

30. An independent, yet very similar, "Socialist Party of Canada" existed in Ontario. While the BC SPC played a key role in the Western Labour Conference leading to the formation of the CCF, the Ontario group organized the "Labour Conference" which was core to the new Ontario CCF, and planned to hold an Eastern Labour Conference. See UT, WMC, Box 8, Socialist Party of Canada, and particularly the correspondence between Ernest E. Winch and Bert Robinson in 9 March 1932 to 11 March 1933. See also, *Socialist Action* (Toronto), 16 March 1934.

31. There are many examples of this concern. See for instance A. Sprice's letter warning



Nonetheless, a number of members in the Party's largest branch, Vancouver Centre, rejected affiliation to the CCF, took over the headquarters of the branch, and ran "educational classes in History, the Science of Economics, and the Dialectic [which were] fully up to the standard set in previous years by the old Socialist Party of Canada"<sup>32</sup> The episode is of significance to the extent it demonstrates what the new SPC was not. It had clearly broken with "impossibilism," as it sought to combine a commitment to what it considered revolutionary socialism with a political practice which would lead to the creation of a mass party.

It was for this reason that the SPC as a whole was so open, albeit carefully, to collaborating with the Reconstruction Party, which emerged from the BC League for Social Reconstruction. Dorothy Steeves, in whose home the Vancouver League for Social Reconstruction (LSR) had been formed, remembers that the SPC approached Reconstruction Party with some trepidation, but added that the Socialist Party "was quite right to be cautious." The Reconstructionists were a "weird collection of people" but the "core was made up of genuine converts to socialism, mostly belonging to the middle class, who had been voting labour for years."<sup>33</sup> In the summer of 1933, the Reconstruction Party led in forming the "Associated CCF Clubs (ACCF)," which functioned as the second affiliate to the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in BC, after the SPC. At the Clubs' founding convention, SPC president Arthur Turner declared that the SPC guardianship over the broader movement had been necessary "to prevent the Federation from being overwhelmed by elements seeking to ride what was a fast growing and popular movement" but this socialist protectorate had fulfilled its purpose and was no longer required.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, the SPC continued to consider itself to be the unique repository of "working-class knowledge" in the BC movement.

The test was the extent to which the SPC's "working-class knowledge" infused a wider audience. This would be the measure of whether the CCF represented a significant challenge to the liberal social order. The CCF did remarkably well in the November 1933 provincial election, receiving a third of the provincial vote even though, as Robin Fisher notes, it "was a collection of disparate and fractious groups that had been cobbled together at the last moment" and many "of its leaders were rather more interested in bickering among themselves about the fine points of doctrine."<sup>35</sup> Clearly that was not off-putting to

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that the "desperate lower Middle-Class" could be driven "into the arms of fascism," and the editor's concern that "technicians" could become the backbone of fascism," *Commonwealth* (Vancouver), 26 July 1933.

32. UT, WMC, Box 8, Socialist Party of Canada, Sid Earp to Bert Robinson, 14 September 1933.

33. UT, WMC, Box 10A, File: Steeves, Dorothy Gretchen, Steeves interviewed by Paul Fox, n.d.; Dorothy Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel*, 80.

34. *Commonwealth* (Vancouver), 30 August 1933.

35. Robin Fisher, *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia*, (Toronto 1991), 234.

the CCF electorate. Moreover, the fact that Duff Pattullo's Liberals ran on a "new deal" platform suggests that something other than simply a more paternalist liberalism was attractive to a large number of voters. Despite the large vote, the concentration of ballots, particularly in some Vancouver ridings, gave the CCF only seven seats. However, six of the new MLAs were members of the SPC, including Ernest and Harold Winch. Not only had the CCF been wildly rebaited in much of the BC press leading up to the campaign, Ernest Winch's struggle at the Regina CCF Convention against the "reformism" and "constitutionalism" of the Regina Manifesto had been widely reported. Winch privately commented that "we do not suggest that the 90,000 [CCF voters] are for Socialism but they are against Capitalism"<sup>36</sup> or, one might qualify this, against the social order that the outgoing Conservatives *and* the Liberals appeared to represent. This was a credible analysis, in part, because of British Columbia history. Socialism had had a sustained presence in British Columbia for decades, the newly named Socialist Party of Canada resonated in radical working-class memory, its role in the working-class explosions of 1919 easily recalled. There was no mistaking that the SPC and CCF identified with a far more class-specific and politically focused critique of capitalism than can be encompassed by any "populist" rubric.

Evidence of whether the 1933 election was a socialist or populist "moment" is apparent in its aftermath, both in the character of political discourse in the months and years that followed, and the nature of the subsequent provincial election in 1937. Immediately following the 1933 election, both affiliates of the CCF grew quickly, especially the CCF Clubs. From August 1933 to May 1934, the number of CCF Clubs grew from 34 to over 170.<sup>37</sup> By January 1934, the SPC had grown to 62 branches with a reported membership of 1800.<sup>38</sup> The membership numbers of the two organizations are not really comparable, since it was harder to join the SPC. While the Clubs recruited widely and experienced a "mushroom" growth (always derided by the SPC who rightly noted that much of this would melt away), the SPC was wary of attracting those without a grounding in socialist theory. In presenting a balance sheet of the relationship of the two affiliates in 1935, the SPC commented that since "the formation of the Affiliated Club Section, the Socialist party has concentrated more particularly on the educational field than on the extension of its own Branches and membership." The emergence of the ACCF produced new platforms for SPC speakers and many attended the SPC's regular educationals on history and economics. Further, the SPC maintained a weekly radio show through which

36. UT, WMC, Box 8, E.E. Winch to Bert Robinson, 16 November 1933.

37. UBC, AMMC, Box 45, File 45-8, Associated C.C.F. Clubs (BC) Bulletin, #8, 8 May 1934.

38. UBC, AMMC, Box 45, File 45-5, Socialist Party of Canada, Annual Convention, 20 and 21 January 1934.

W.W. Lefeaux, A.M. Stephen, and George Weaver presented Marxist ideas to a much wider audience.<sup>39</sup>

While differences, of course, persisted, Lefeaux felt it was easy to overstate them. In 1935, the two affiliates agreed to merge into a unitary organization. Certainly, if the SPC had felt that this would have spelled the demise of working-class politics, it never would have entertained such a move. Lefeaux's articulation of the evolving relationship reflects the comments by activists along the way:

Although at one time I shared the fears of our members regarding the numerical superiority of our affiliate [the CCF Clubs], I came to the conclusion that the philosophy of Socialism was more widely spread than many of us thought and our influence has been greater than we anticipated it would be. The recent referendums wherein the Associated Clubs voted almost unanimously to identify themselves with the 'irreconcilable' Socialist Party of Canada is proof of the potency of our work. It is true that there are many individual members of our affiliate whose knowledge of socialism is not of a very high order, but the same can be said of quite a number of our own members.<sup>40</sup>

The amalgamation received a rougher ride in the SPC, where it took two referenda to attain the required two-thirds approval. Due to the experiences gained through a growing level of class conflict, particularly the relief camp workers' strike, the SPC's paper concluded that the whole of the movement in BC had converged to form a "revolutionary socialist organization."<sup>41</sup>

The joint amalgamation convention was, according to some press reports, a tense affair and, on the part of some SPCers, at least, there were some second thoughts. A more sober assessment in the February 1936 *Clarion* (which continued as an independent publication, put out by former SPCers), noted that "from one end [of the BC CCF] to the other, individualism is still rampant, with no apparent effort to consolidate or co-ordinate the basic philosophy which must underlay any successful movement."<sup>42</sup> As we noted from the outset, the CCF was a broad mass movement that would prove difficult to corral. Still, six of the nine members of the incoming executive were SPC members, and that proportion would be maintained.<sup>43</sup> Within this movement, association with the ideas of constructing a revolutionary working-class society, however that was understood, was no debilitating liability.

39. UBC, AMMC, Box 45, File 45-5, Socialist Party of Canada Report to the Convention of C.C.F. Affiliates (B.C. Section), Vancouver 27 and 28 July 1935.

40. UBC, AMMC, Box 45, File 45-5, Socialist Party of Canada, Annual Convention, 5 and 6 January 1935.

41. *Clarion* (Vancouver), August 1935.

42. *Clarion* (Vancouver), February 1936.

43. UBC, AMMC, Box 45, File 45-5, clippings "C.C.F and Socialist Parties Complete Merger," and Socialists, C.C.F. Clash"; York University Archives, Edward Arthur Beder Collection, Box 9, File II.42, E.E. Winch to E.A. Beder 13 August 1936.

This can be seen by examining the two most public disputes in the CCF in the 1930s, the “Connell Affair,” and the debate over collaborating with the Communists in Popular Front campaigns. On the face of things, each of these threatened to tear the CCF apart as well as undermine electoral support for the movement. Neither of these outcomes occurred. How and why they did not tells us much about the nature of adherence to the BC CCF.

Scottish-born, Anglican minister and teacher, Robert Connell was the one non-SPC member of the CCF provincial caucus and had been selected leader in 1933. Active in the Victoria LSR, Connolly, according to Dorothy Steeves, seemed to offer a combination of “bourgeois respectability” and a “genuine knowledge of socialist classics” which could appeal to both the Club and SPC wings of the movement.<sup>44</sup> As it turned out, Connell’s “bourgeois respectability” was increasingly challenged by Ernest Winch and his son Harold. In the received historiography, Connell’s socialism is generally defined as “pragmatic, Fabian, and anti-communist,”<sup>45</sup> in contrast to the “dogmatism” of the Winches and the SPC. The disputes that arose, sometimes appearing to be programmatic in character, clearly revolved around issues of class identity, both in the sense that Connell was clearly from a non-proletarian background, but in a broader sense, in his refusal to pay homage to an SPC working-class epistemology. In Winch’s eyes, his own class background and the working-class identity of the movement provided a means of understanding class politics and created the possibility of imagining a working-class future. Winch’s critiques were delivered with a strong dose of proletarian pride: “I learned my socialism not merely from books, but from the bitter experiences of life.... Therefore, when I speak of capitalism and socialism, I am giving voice to the experience and aspirations of the ever growing mass of workers who are so often referred to – frequently in scathing terms – as the proletariat, to which I belong.”<sup>46</sup>

If “middle class” former Club members disagreed with the CCF leadership and program, Connell was the one to lead the revolt, which is exactly what he did beginning with a speech in the legislature in which he attacked the Marxism of the party leadership, particularly Ernest Winch.<sup>47</sup> The choice of venue – the floor of the legislature – spoke to Connell’s attempt to bypass the structure of the CCF and appeal directly to the membership and the electorate. Interestingly, Connell did not strongly defend his words at the provincial CCF convention that occurred shortly afterwards. This was not an arena where he would have succeeded, not so much due to the party “machine” as some commentators have suggested, but because BC CCF conventions were, in

44. Steeves, *Compassionate Rebel*, 91–92.

45. Gordon Wickerson, “Conflict in the British Columbia Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and the ‘Connell Affair,’” MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1973, 2.

46. Cited in Steeves, *Compassionate Rebel*, 108.

47. *Commonwealth* (Vancouver), 20 March 1936.

themselves, a celebration of working-class identity and power; Connell's words would have been deeply dissonant.<sup>48</sup> Although Connell did survive a motion to expel him (76–138) – the convention was predictably hesitant to decimate its legislative caucus – the sentiment of the meeting was reflected by the election of even more ex-SPC left wingers to the executive.

Almost immediately afterwards, Connell upped the ante, writing to the provincial executive declaring that he could not support the BC CCF platform which had just been adopted and, as commentators subsequently recognized, made his bid to take over the movement.<sup>49</sup> Some outsiders considered this entirely possible and suggested that the consequence would be the SPC abandoning the CCF.<sup>50</sup> Although several issues were raised, the key point was the BC CCF's vague promise to "socialize finance." This could be read as a socialist measure to plan the economy or as a social-credit type measure to spur spending. In any case, recent events in Alberta had demonstrated that such measures were beyond provincial jurisdiction. This policy, although adopted, had been opposed by a range of CCF members from left to right, including Wallis Lefeaux and Angus MacInnis. Connell had not spoken on the issue at the convention, but his letter denounced the financial plank as "fantastic and impracticable," and rebaited his left-wing colleagues for supporting limited joint actions with the Communists on working-class issues.<sup>51</sup> The CCF executive tried to manage the crisis and the newly elected provincial president, Lyle Telford (who had sparred with Connell on several occasions), even offered to resign from his post. In the end, though, Connell and two other MLAs who supported him were expelled from the CCF; they persisted in the legislature as "Social Constructivists."

There are a number of significant features of this episode. The fissure did not occur neatly along either SPC/Club lines, nor through a left/right split. Programmatic differences proved to be the occasion, not the cause, of the dispute. Debate over the offending financial plank was heated, and many besides the future Social Constructivists objected to it. To the chagrin of the BC CCF, Connell made good use of a letter from LSR figure Frank Scott who endorsed his criticisms and suggested that Connell was in line with the national CCF.<sup>52</sup> It is worth noting that the BC CCF dropped the plank, after Connell's departure, without particular difficulty. Interestingly, Angus MacInnis and the "right-

48. Wickerson, 37 and Dorothy June Roberts, "Doctrine and Disunity in the British Columbia Section of the CCF, 1932–1956," MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1972, 32.

49. Matthew Glenday in *Federationist*, 29 October 1936.

50. G.W. Hegger, who had been in discussions with various internal sources commented: "From all the comment I have heard the membership is likely to be strongly behind Connell." LAC, MG 32 C13, Herbert W. Herridge Papers, Hegger to H.W. Herridge, 16 March 1936.

51. UBC, AMMC, Box 45, File 45-12, Robert Connell to Provincial Executive, CCF, 28 July 1936.

52. LAC, F.R. Scott Papers, MG 30 D 211, Volume 12, File: C.C.F. General, 1935-Aug. 1938, Harold Winch to Scott, 27 October 1936 and Scott to H. Winch, 3 November 1936.

wing” of the SPC, although politically sympathetic to Connell’s complaints both about program and about the rhetoric of individuals such as Lefeaux and the Winches, rejected Connell’s attempts to build a less working-class-identified political party. A potential wrinkle in this analysis is the decision of a couple of old working-class socialists, Bill Pritchard and Vic Midgley, to support Connell, but Peter Campbell considers this the result of a conscious decision (at least on Pritchard’s part) to abandon, at least temporarily, his SPC past.<sup>53</sup> That very few followed Connell’s lead, despite the qualms that a significant minority had regarding elements of the SPC *cum* CCF program, suggests a loyalty to class and to party that transcended political differences. CCF clubs and district councils almost unanimously supported the CCF leadership in its handling of Connell.<sup>54</sup> This applied not only to the Party, but to its electoral base.<sup>55</sup> Nationally, David Lewis assessed the impact of the affair and determined that Connell’s group “has no following and therefore does not represent any real threat to the CCF in the province.”<sup>56</sup> In fact, Connell’s class-free, anti-communist brand of gradualism not only had no significant resonance within the CCF, it also played poorly with CCF voters. The provincial election that followed in June 1937 saw the CCF maintain its vote (although it lost the status of official opposition to a rebuilt Conservative Party); the Social Constructivists were eliminated. The argument that a move to liberalism was necessary for electoral success was, as yet, not at all apparent in British Columbia. The new BC CCF paper, the *Federationist*, launched to fill the void that appeared with the collapse of Pritchard’s pro-Connell *Commonwealth*, drew a similar balance sheet. A broad movement was necessary, and most of those who came into the CCF through the Clubs movement had not supported Connell in the end. His compromises, not unlike the “votes first” principle of the British Labour Party “and kindred movements,” seemed undemocratic and unnecessary. The provincial CCF Council organized an educational campaign to reinforce that message.<sup>57</sup>

As evidenced in Connell’s letter, the question of the relations with the Communist Party and specifically the debate over whether to participate in Communist-dominated Popular Front campaigns came to play an enormous role in debates across the left. The issue confronted the CCF everywhere and proved challenging, with a range of opinions expressed. By and large, though, the most substantial debate occurred among those CCF affiliates that had a

53. Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way*, 116–117.

54. “There are 81 Clubs and 20 District Councils in favour of the action and only two opposed.” UBC, AMMC, Box 45, File 45-12, Provincial Council, 29 August 1936.

55. *Federationist* (Vancouver), 21 August 1936.

56. LAC, CCF Records, Volume 95, File: E.J. Garland, 1934–1940, Lewis to Garland, 8 March 1937.

57. *Federationist* (Vancouver), 4 January 1937; UBC, AMMC, Box 45, File 45-12, 29 August 1936.

longer history in the labour and socialist movements. They tended to have both a more developed understanding of the nature of the Communist Party and its evolution, and they shared, with the Communists, a common working-class identity. Many of them had participated in the Canadian Labour Party in the 1920s, a united front with the Communist Party which collapsed for a number of reasons, but primarily due to the Communist International's sectarian "third period" turn in the late 1920s. This generally soured them on cooperation with the Communists, although the specific conclusions they drew varied widely. Conversely, many of the newer recruits to the CCF, particularly those attracted to the CCF Clubs, lacked both a common experience and a shared class identity with the Communists. To them, the idea of associating with the much maligned Communists was foolhardy. They failed to understand the pull of working-class solidarity on their labour and socialist colleagues.

It was consistent, then, with this broader pattern that the SPC appeared more open than the Associated CCF Clubs to participation in popular front activities. It joined the Communist-initiated BC League against War and Fascism, recognizing that "the action taken is contrary to the positions taken by the Dominion and B.C. Provincial Conventions of the C.C.F.," but argued that "it is in complete accord with the declaration of principles of the C.C.F. itself which is signed by every member when joining."<sup>58</sup> The dramatic relief workers' strike over the winter of 1934–35 raised participation in united activity to a working-class duty, at least in the eyes of the SPC (and of a considerable number of other BC workers). Here, finally, was a way to unite labour activists, regardless of affiliation, in a huge and potentially effective struggle against the Bennett government's draconian response to unemployment. The SPC formally signed an agreement with the Communist Party to work together to fight the disenfranchisement of the relief workers, to refrain from "attacking and criticizing the organizations and militants participating loyally in this action," and to allow each to present to each other, and other working class organizations "their own particular program" openly.<sup>59</sup> A "united front committee" of five Communists and five SPCers was formed to this end. As a sign of the differences in the BC movement, the executive of the SPC protested the abstentionist policy of the provincial CCF in such important working-class struggles.<sup>60</sup>

58. UBC, AMMC, Box 45, File 45-5, Socialist Party of Canada, Annual Convention, 5 and 6 January 1935.

59. UBC, AMMC, Box 45, File 45-5, Socialist Party of Canada, Annual Convention, 5 and 6 January 1935 and SPC Provincial Executive minutes, 14 April 1935; *Clarion* (Vancouver), February, 1935. Comments by the Communist International suggest that they saw this as a model of cooperation, LAC, MG 10 K 3, Communist International (CI) fonds, File 169, Draft Letter to Canada on Federal Election and Application of United Front, 23 February 1935.

60. UBC, AMMC, Box 45, File 45-5, Socialist Party of Canada, Provincial Executive 7 July 1935.

This was the high point of cooperation in BC, at least so far as the SPC and the Communist Party were concerned. In fact, the relationship was a difficult one and predictable conflicts emerged. Older slanders (originating from the period before the Communists' turn towards unity) were repeated and the Communist Party's self-perception as *the* vanguard party of the working class made real cooperation awkward. Some Communists (or as the SPC youth group called them, the "Stalinist factions") accused the CCF of appropriating funds for their own purposes, a statement for which the Communist Party later apologized.<sup>61</sup> Internally, the Communist Party recognized the problems of its actions and sought to reorient itself in a less sectarian direction.<sup>62</sup> An editorial in the CCF's *Commonwealth* articulated what seems to have been, at the moment, the dominant opinion of the SPC and perhaps much of the CCF as a whole. Reiterating Lyle Telford's words at a recent mass rally, the CCF and the Communist Party shared the same "general objective," but differed as to tactics and behavior, which the editor declared, often came down to "ordinary downright lying." The CCF, he claimed, was entirely in favour of unity, but the Communists drove away potential allies.<sup>63</sup> Even among SPCers there were those on either side of the debate, as they tried to square the goals of working-class unity with their vision of revolutionary politics.<sup>64</sup>

The united front committee was conceived, at least by the SPC, in quite narrow terms, as a means of providing support to particular struggles including an array of strikes that had taken place around the province. Beyond that it had not been very active.<sup>65</sup> Clearly, CCFers generally, however much they wanted to be engaged in popular struggles like the relief workers' strike, were wary of a more sustained relationship. This was particularly the case as the Communists began to agitate for common "popular front" candidates. Interestingly, the BC CCF's reaction to a Communist proposal for a "working agreement in respect of working class nominations" in the 1935 federal elections was negative, but not dismissive. Rather, the CCF provincial executive simply pointed out that the CCF had already nominated its candidates; it would

61. *Amoeba* (Vancouver), May 1935. UBC, AMMC, Box 45, File 45-5, SPC Provincial Executive minutes, 14 April 1935.

62. LAC, MG 10 K 3, CI fonds, File 180, "Copy of Report on Ninth Plenum – District #9, n.d. (November 1935).

63. *Commonwealth* (Vancouver), 10 May 1935.

64. The Communist Party tallied this in their own documents. In November 1935 they counted A.M. Stephen, E.E. Winch, Bill Braithwaite and George Weaver as supporting the popular front. Harold Winch, Bill Pritchard, Arnold Webster and Lyle Telford were opposed. LAC, MG 10 K 3, CI fonds, File 180, "Copy of Report on Ninth Plenum – District #9, n.d. (November 1935), 17.

65. LAC, MG 10 K 3, CI fonds, File 180, "Report from District No. 9 (CAN.), 20 April 1935. The strikes had been in Nanaimo, Corbin, Burnaby and Vancouver. UBC, AMMC, File 45-12, CCF Convention, 27 and 28 July 1935.



be a “breach of faith” to withdraw them.<sup>66</sup> The CCF’s practice was consistent; it was opposed to what it would term “political” cooperation.<sup>67</sup> At its 1936 convention it reaffirmed its position “dealing with co-operation on specific issues with other working class groups.”<sup>68</sup> Such alliances were possible around “day-to-day” struggles, but the CCF would retain its political independence, particularly around educational and electoral campaigns.

The appearance of continuity, though, was misleading, as the CCF was backing away from cooperation. What is of most interest is the language they used to explain this trajectory. The CCF did not redbait the Communists. Rather they patiently explained that the Communists had betrayed working-class and socialist principles and that it was up to the CCF to defend them. In part, this involved explaining the history of the Communist Party and the extent to which their scurrilous attacks on other working-class allies during the “Third Period” of the late 1920s and early 1930s had undermined trust and continued to inhibit solidarity. The CCF provincial executive, while recognizing that the CCF convention had endorsed cooperation on “specific issues,” added that “time must elapse before Communist mistakes are forgotten.”<sup>69</sup>

The primary criticism of the Popular Front, though, was that it undermined the fight for socialism. Editorially, under the title, “The Facts of Life,” the CCF newspaper lampooned the distractions caused by their suitor’s ardent approaches:

The romplings of some of our friends are causing us socialists to blush these nights. Not content with leaving the political blind up on their ecstatic embracings of the lady who is known as ‘People’s Front,’ these folks would like us to come over and join them. As socialists concerned with the extermination of capitalism and the erection of a new social order we have to get up pretty early in the morning. It is because of this that we like to get a little rest at night, which is difficult with the lovebirds next door fluttering around the way they do.

Striking a more serious tone, the point was made that their common enemies – poverty, fascism, and war – were products of capitalism. Constructing, as in the case of France, a Popular Front government that shied away from challenging capitalism and, indeed, sought to ally with liberal businessmen, was counterproductive.<sup>70</sup>

What followed, beginning in the *Federationist* in late 1936, was an extremely open debate in the BC CCF over the popular front with A.M. Stephen taking the lead in defending it and youth leader Gerald Van leading the charge against

66. UBC, AMMC, Volume 45, File 45-12, CCF Convention, 27 and 28 July 1935.

67. See, for instance, UBC, AMMC, Volume 46, File 46-1, Provincial Executive, C.C.F. (B.C.), 9 January 1937.

68. UBC, AMMC, Volume 45, File 45-12, CCF Convention 3-6 July 1936.

69. *Federationist* (Vancouver), 29 October 1936.

70. *Federationist* (Vancouver), 5 November 1936.

it. "The Socialists," Van argued, "oppose the 'Popular Front' policy that Mr. Stephen promotes because it would swing our movement away from its revolutionary basis to the petty-bourgeois attempt of maintaining the status quo."<sup>71</sup> By the end of December, letters on the topic filled a full page in the paper. In January, the CCF provincial executive tried to close down the debate in the Federation's press, but that hardly put an end to it.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, the editor of the paper, Don Smith, soon joined in the fray. Acknowledging that the contentions over the Popular Front echoed international disputes between Stalin and Trotsky, Smith was agnostic on the issue of "socialism in one country," but effectively sided with Trotsky (and Van) on the issue of the Popular Front. Fascism, he said "is backed by Big Business" and breeds on the misery and hopeless despair of idle people who have become disillusioned with democracy. The solution was to give them an alternative to fight for: socialism.<sup>73</sup> The debate was on again, but with little movement. When the Communists assailed the CCF for rejecting electoral alliances, the *Federationist* continued to speak in class terms, denying "splitting the working class," given the electoral marginality of the Communists, but adding that they had no desire to fight the Communists. Rather, each should aim their fire at the common enemy.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, the debate reached a denouement, of sorts, with the suspension of the main supporter of the popular front in the CCF leadership, A.M. Stephen. While a handful of commentators suggested that an alliance with the Communists would prove an electoral liability, the majority of the debate revolved around the abandonment of class politics implicit in the Communists' strategy. Stephen was criticized for his appeal for unity with "left-wing Liberals" and other "progressives," and references were made to the Communists some-time inclusion of Social Credit in the bloc.<sup>75</sup> An editorial in April 1937 demonstrates the official CCF distance from what might be termed populism. Assailing "progressivism," the editor took issue with putative non-socialist allies in a potential Popular Front, noting that they fail to acknowledge the very nature of capitalism and the impossibility of fundamental reform within it. Uniting without working-class education and a socialist program could not create an effective movement bringing real change, as demonstrated by the Ramsay MacDonalds and Kerenskys of yesterday, and the Aberharts of the present.<sup>76</sup>

The significance is that the *Federationist* position was consistent with the class politics which had marked the SPC, and then the CCF. This was, in fact,

71. *Federationist* (Vancouver), 10 December 1936.

72. UBC, AMMC, Box 46, File 46-1, Provincial Executive, C.C.F. (B.C.), 6 January 1937.

73. *Federationist* (Vancouver), 14 January 1937.

74. *Federationist* (Vancouver), 25 February 1937.

75. See editorials and letters to the *Federationist*, 25 March to 6 May 1937.

76. *Federationist* (Vancouver), 8 April 1937.

what distinguished the CCF from the provincial Liberals. Premier Duff Patullo had run on a platform of “work and wages” which was, one might argue, potentially popular among much of the CCF’s electorate. As the CCF explained, however, Patullo failed to deliver on his promise because capitalism was not “equal to the job.” In the end, the Liberals (and one might argue the Popular Front), “chose to stand by the system rather than by his promised reforms.”<sup>77</sup>

The CCF, then, considered itself revolutionary in very much the same way that the SPCs, both old and new, had. It offered an alternative to capitalism, and it did so on the basis of a class-based identity that equated working-class politics with a rejection of capitalism and reforms to capitalism. They, certainly, would have rejected labels of populism, labourism, or social democracy. This was not just the language of the “left” in the CCF. Grace MacInnis, for instance, was not considered part of the SPC inner circle; in fact Eugene Forsey had complained in 1934 that the “B.C. extremists” had refused to appoint her or her husband Angus as delegates to the federal CCF convention.<sup>78</sup> She shared the broader commitment to “education,” but distanced herself from those she called the “fundamentalists” by downplaying Marxist economics in favour of more pragmatic discussions of “club activities and organization plans.”<sup>79</sup> Much to the annoyance of some of these same “fundamentalist” CCFers, she pointed to Scandinavia and New Zealand as potential models for social development.<sup>80</sup> Still, MacInnis assailed “reformism” in speeches such as she made to the CCF Vancouver Centre campaign during the 1937 provincial election in stark class terms: “Any man that comes before you and tells you that conditions for the workers can be altered for the better without changing the ownership of industry is either deliberately or unwittingly deceiving you.”<sup>81</sup>

In the same speech, however, she defended the “parliamentary system,” urging supporters to “use it” rather than smash it. This did distinguish her as a more “moderate” CCFer only to the extent that she addressed the issue explicitly. In fact the SPC’s *Clarion* explored at some length the relationship between parliamentary action and revolutionary change. Electoral activity, and the possibility of forming governments, was key to the paper’s strategy. As it explained, “With Socialists, parliamentary action is a means to an end – first for propaganda, next for the purpose of obtaining control of and utilizing the means for the social administrative machinery for the purpose of taking over those institutions and activities whose operations are essential to

77. *Federationist* (Vancouver), 29 April 1937.

78. LAC, MG 30 D204, Frank H. Underhill Papers, Volume 4, File: E.A. Forsey, Forsey to Underhill, 3 July 1934.

79. UBC, AMMC, Volume 54, File 54-8, Grace MacInnis to Angus MacInnis, 15 October 1937.

80. *Federationist* (Vancouver), 23 December 1936, *New Commonwealth* (Toronto), 22 October 1938. Criticized by William Offer in *Federationist* (Vancouver), 11 February 1937.

81. *Federationist* (Vancouver), 27 May 1937.

the social well-being.” At the same time, socialists must continue to educate, and prepare for assaults from capitalist provocateurs. As long as capitalism continues, reforms are but palliative. “Yet [socialists] must continue to fight for these, whilst at the same time striving through education and organization to place the working-class movement upon a revolutionary basis.”<sup>82</sup>

What this all meant, then, for the “left” in the CCF, was to continue to educate, organize, and run in elections. Indeed, what allowed a diverse formation such as the CCF to hold together was that there was a high degree of consensus about most day-to-day activity. This kind of activity, of course, was unexceptional. From afar, it appears consistent with a commitment to liberal democracy. And, arguably, many British Columbians voted for the CCF because they supported specific potential legislative measures even though CCFers would, officially, consider these mere palliatives, way stations on the road to a qualitatively different social order. Lefeaux himself had argued that it was important not to create undue expectations of what a first term CCF government in BC would be able to accomplish. “In the first place, we must realize that we would be called upon to administer Capitalism”; BC was “not an all-sufficient unit” in the world and there were severe limitations on what was immediately possible. Education and organization were the keys to further progress.<sup>83</sup> Here lies the key to the enigma to understanding the CCF and its language: a concomitant commitment to both revolutionary change and to parliamentarianism and gradualism.

It is worth noting, however, that leading CCFers who found themselves outside of the movement – Reverend Connell and A.M. Stephen – were shunned not because they opposed the specific CCF planks, but because they had abandoned both the language of class and the concrete goal of socialism. They, of course, had done so in quite different ways, but in each case they could be accused of having made concessions to liberalism. In Connell’s case it was to challenge the truisms that permeated the movement and defend what could be characterized as a classless reformism that would lead, down the road, to incorporation into the liberal social order. Ernest Winch was withering in his assessment in his communications to Angus MacInnis: “We, who feel we have some scientific knowledge of the economic basis of human society and the factors which dominate it, refuse to be muzzled by utopians whose bourgeois respectability and hunger for the sweets of parliamentary office they feel to be menaced by our class-consciousness and actions arising therefrom.”<sup>84</sup>

In Stephen’s defense of the Popular Front, it was to make at least a temporary peace with the existing social order in defiance of a greater potential threat of fascism. To CCFers, this implied disarming workers in the face of exactly those dangers. In fact, CCFers abandoned, in practice, party planks

82. *Clarion* (Vancouver), March 1935.

83. *Clarion* (Vancouver), June 1936.

84. UBC, AMMC, Box 54A, File 54A-7, E.E. Winch to A. MacInnis, 14 June 1936.

with some regularity. Elected legislative and municipal CCF politicians more or less wrote their own scripts. Individual planks were, after all, simple “red herrings” and “nostrums” reified by “pseudo social reformers.”<sup>85</sup> Hence, the specific measures that the party took to defend workers under capitalism were not, in themselves, points of principle. It was only when those principles – of working-class identity and the promise of a qualitatively different social order – were overtly challenged, that major schisms occurred.

On the eve of the 1937 BC CCF convention the *Federationist* editorialized that over the past year the movement had successfully weathered the two greatest crises in its history, the Connell Affair and the Popular Front dispute. The delegates proceeded to expel Stephen, and to elect Wallis Lefeaux president of the provincial CCF, succeeding Lyle Telford. The latter development is perhaps the most telling. These two crises had, if anything, reinforced the Marxist orthodoxy of the CCF; as one commentator suggested “the betrayal by the Connell group had the tendency to make our executive a more and more ‘pure’ socialist position.”<sup>86</sup> Wallis Lefeaux was the main standard bearer of this current. Again, the CCF was a broad and diffuse movement with a mass electorate. But the public restatement of socialist orthodoxy did the leadership no harm among either the membership of the CCF or among those who would vote for it. While it was true that the Federation’s electoral activity and advocacy of immediate reforms (despite the public announcement of their limitations as palliatives) posed little threat to liberal assumptions, the CCF’s very public stance against apostasy seems to have resonated well, and widely. Large numbers of British Columbians appear to have been willing to identify with the class-based, socialist critique of the liberal social order. While the 1933 election may have appeared inchoate in its language of class, the language of the CCF served to sharpen working-class identity as the subject of provincial politics. The CCF’s secure place in BC politics suggests that 1933 had not been a “populist moment,” but a victory for a political working-class identity, a moment when the CCF had been able to “hegemonize identity, to order it into a strong programmatic direction.”<sup>87</sup> This had allowed the Federation to survive the challenges of liberalism both from within and without its organization.

85. *Clarion* (Vancouver), March 1935.

86. J.H. Pratt, *Federationist* (Vancouver), 11 March 1937.

87. Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, *The Future of Class in History: What's Left of the Social?* (Ann Arbor 2007), 169.