

The Cold War and Working-Class Politics in the Coal Mining Communities of the Crowsnest Pass, 1945-1958

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Volume 49, 2002

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/ilt49art02>

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Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Langford, T. & Frazer, C. (2002). The Cold War and Working-Class Politics in the Coal Mining Communities of the Crowsnest Pass, 1945-1958. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 49, 43–82.

Article abstract

This paper is concerned with the resilience of socialist workers' movements during the early years of the Cold War in Canada. Our study compares the workers' movements on either side of the BC/Alberta border in the Crowsnest Pass through the Rocky Mountains between 1945 and 1958. These are interesting movements because, although they were equally strong at the end of World War II, in the period in question one movement was very resilient (BC) and one suffered an electoral collapse.

We found that the Cold War eroded the Labour Progressive Party's (LPP) electoral base in exactly the same way on the Alberta and BC sides of the Crowsnest Pass. Anti-communism was certainly promoted by extra-local sources of news and analysis such as newspapers, radio and movies, and was based upon international and national events. However, there were important local processes that amplified and concretized the more general forces, such as joint organizing against the LPP by a CCF leader and the Catholic Church in the Alberta Crowsnest, the recruitment of anti-communist miners from Eastern Europe, and the anti-communist stance of a roster of ethnic organizations.

The resilience of the socialist workers' movement in the BC Crowsnest between 1945 and 1958 was due to a labour unity strategy which allowed Labour and the Left to deflect Cold War pressures and maintain mass electoral support among workers. It is significant that the strategy was built around a local organization (the Fernie and District Labour Party) which involved all of the unions in the area, and a local politician (Thomas Uphill) who had built up a dense network of personal support during his many years as MLA and mayor. The socialist workers' movement in the Alberta Crowsnest might have proven to be much more resilient in the 1950s had the LPP attempted to duplicate the successful labour unity strategy it had stumbled on in the BC Crowsnest.

The Cold War and Working-Class Politics in the Coal Mining Communities of the Crowsnest Pass, 1945-1958

Tom Langford and Chris Frazer

THIS IS A STUDY of working-class politics during the early years of the Cold War in Canada: we compare what transpired on either side of the British Columbia-Alberta border, in the Crowsnest Pass region of the Rocky Mountains. By the end of World War II, the coal mining communities straddling the Crowsnest Pass had produced a socialist workers' movement that seemed resilient and united, and that had strong ties to the communist movement. Our objective is to explain why the socialist workers' movement on the British Columbia (BC) side of the border proved to be much more resilient in the face of Cold War pressures than its companion movement in Alberta (AB). The study concludes that the difference in cross-border resilience was largely due to the successful pursuit of labour unity politics in the BC Crowsnest and to the collapse of a labour unity strategy in the Alberta Crowsnest. The Cold War represented the strengthening of reactionary elements within dominant social groups (locally and nationally), and opened the door for aggressive attacks against militant working-class politics and left-wing movements. The comparative methodology and localized focus of our research demonstrates that such periods of intense struggle do not lead inevitably to the defeat of workers' movements. However, the success of leftist resistance to reactionary offensives depends, then, as now, on working-class unity around struggles, organizations, and public figures that enjoy widespread public sympathy and loyalty.

There is a significant body of scholarship on working-class politics in Canada during the Cold War. The key works, however, have concentrated on national or

Tom Langford and Chris Frazer, "The Cold War and Working-Class Politics in the Coal Mining Communities of the Crowsnest Pass, 1945-1958," *Labour/Le Travail*, 49 (Spring 2002), 43-81.

provincial events and on the political struggles within labour federations, major unions, and political parties.¹ While there are a few interesting memoirs of Cold War politics in Local Unions, there is an absence of detailed research on the ways that working-class politics in particular geographic locales were affected by the Cold War.² This type of study is necessary not only to recover the lived experiences of workers in different communities during these years, but also to explain how local processes influenced the character of working-class politics in the Cold War. Despite the omnipotence often attributed to the reactionary political forces of the early Cold War years, these forces were never mechanically superimposed on a given locale; rather they were mediated through local political forces and their impact was modified by the experience of particular working-class struggles.³ As Doreen Massey asserts, the relative degree of influence of social processes operating on different spatial scales must be investigated rather than assumed, just as it is necessary to study the ways that "smaller scale processes operate in articulation with wider ones." The empirical and theoretical challenge confronting studies such as this one "is not only to assert the importance of the local level but to analyse its articulation into a spatially multifarious set of forces."⁴

In neglecting local processes and workers' lived experiences, scholars have necessarily disregarded the constituency branches of political parties and their relationships to local workers' movements. One consequence of this neglect is that generalizations about the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and Labour Progressive Party (LPP) during the early Cold War years continue to be replicated in the historical record without qualification or engagement with a range of evidence. A most unfortunate aspect of these generalizations is that political

¹Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945-1957* (Toronto 1994); Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour 1935-1956* (Toronto 1973); Alvin Finkel, "The Cold War, Alberta Labour, and the Social Credit Regime," *Labour/Le Travail* 21 (Spring 1988), 123-52; and Dan Azoulay, "The Cold War Within: The Ginger Group, the Woodsworth Foundation, and the Ontario CCF, 1944-53," *Ontario History* LXXXIV (2 1992), 79-104.

²A recent example is Al King (with Kate Baird), *Red Bait: Struggles of a Mine Mill Local* (Vancouver 1998).

³A sentence in a recent study of the United Electrical Workers in the United States illustrates this analytical tendency. Exaggerating the causal efficacy of international and national political forces, Ronald Filippelli and Mark McColloch argue "the times" demanded that progressives make "the fundamental shift to anticommunism" if they were to survive in positions of influence. Ronald Filippelli and Mark McColloch, *Cold War in the Working Class: The Rise and Decline of the United Electrical Workers* (Albany 1995), 84.

⁴Doreen Massey, "The Geography of Trade Unions: Some Issues," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 19 (1994), 95-98. Our general point in this paragraph also draws upon Howard Kimeldorf, "World War II and the Deradicalization of American Labor: The ILWU As a Deviant Case," *Labor History*, 33 (1992), 278.

activists are characterized as if party affiliation tells us everything we need to know about them; no attention is paid to local circumstances or activists' strategic initiatives in those circumstances. For instance, some recent publications have carried on the tradition of harshly judging Communists in the early Cold War, even questioning whether they were legitimate socialists. Concomitant with this is a tendency to uncritically sanitize the actions of the CCF.⁵ There is also continuing dispute about the degree to which the wartime policies of the Communist Party (CPC) restrained workers' struggles. To address the validity of existing generalizations, much more historical research needs to be done to unravel the dynamics of CCF-LPP relations in particular locales and to ascertain the role of Communist workers in wartime struggles. Our research setting is particularly important in this regard, since, as we detail in the next section, at war's end the Crowsnest Pass was one of the few areas of Canada where the LPP had considerable political support.

Case Study Design

Our theoretical interest is in the resilience of socialist workers' movements during the early years of the Cold War in Canada. One empirical approach to this subject is to select cases that represent very strong socialist workers' movements at the end of World War II on the presumption that they will have the best chance to exhibit resilience. Both the Alberta and BC Crowsnest movements fit this criterion. These two cases are also interesting because one movement was very resilient (BC) and one suffered an electoral collapse (Alberta). Finally, it is easier to isolate the causal factors in this divergence because the two cases are geographically adjacent, involve the same dominant industrial base and labour process, and are part of the same union.

Although we can justify the utility of the two cases on theoretical grounds, we did not begin our research with this logic in mind. Indeed, our initial research stemmed from curiosity about what happened to the left in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass between the 1944 provincial election, when the labour unity candidate (the respected Communist mayor of Blairmore, Enoch Williams) was narrowly defeated, and the surprise election of Garth Turcott (Alberta's first New Democratic Party MLA), in a by-election in Pincher Creek-Crowsnest in 1966. Through our study of primary sources on the Alberta Crowsnest Pass as well as our reading of the literature on labour during the Cold War, we developed an understanding of the theoretical import of this case as well as an appreciation of the need to carry out a parallel study of developments in the BC Crowsnest. Therefore, our research fits the theoretical case approach described by John Walton: "The processes of coming to grips with a particular empirical instance, of reflecting on what it is a case of,

⁵Whitaker and Marcuse, *Cold War Canada*, xii, 209, 214, 269; Desmond Morton, *Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Labour Movement*, fourth edition, (Montreal and Kingston 1998), 201-212.

and contrasting it with other case models, are all practical steps towards constructing theoretical interpretations."⁶

This article compares the resilience of the two socialist workers' movements between 1945 and 1958, a period that encompasses all of the main events of the early Cold War as well as the rapid decline in the market for railway steam coal. The remainder of this section provides background details on the workers' movements that existed on either side of the border in 1945.

At the end of World War II, the Crowsnest Pass was a major producer of steam coal for the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). The five mining companies in the area operated a number of underground mines, some of which had been in operation for over twenty years, and others which had only recently been developed. In addition, to keep up with the high demand for coal during the war, the companies had started to strip mine coal at places where the seams outcropped on mountainsides. At war's end there were approximately 1,750 working members in the 3 Alberta Crowsnest Locals of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), while the 2 BC Crowsnest Locals had approximately 750 additional working members. These miners and their families made up the majority of the population in a series of five tightly bunched communities in Alberta, and three communities in BC (two side-by-side in the Pass itself and a third on the banks of the nearby Elk River).

The two BC Crowsnest Union Locals (Ferne and Michel) made up Sub-District 8 of District 18 of the UMWA. The three Alberta Crowsnest Locals (based in Coleman, Blairmore, and Bellevue) made up Sub-District 5 of District 18. Although geographically proximate (today it takes less than an hour to drive from Bellevue in the east to Fernie in the west of the Pass), the two Sub-Districts were somewhat distinctive, partly because there were different mine operators on each side of the provincial border and, consequently, different histories of workers' struggles, but also because provincial politics were so different between Alberta and BC.⁷

Four aspects of socialist politics in the Crowsnest Pass deserve mention. First, unlike the situation in most places in Canada, on the Alberta side of the Pass the LPP was the stronger of the two leftist parties. In the 1945 federal election, the LPP candidate was the president of the Blairmore Local of the UMWA; he gained the largest share of Pass votes in a five-party race, winning 37 per cent of the 3,646 ballots cast.⁸ In comparison, the CCF candidate, an outsider to the Pass, finished

⁶"Making the Theoretical Case," in Charles C. Ragin and Howard S. Becker, eds., *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry* (Cambridge 1992), 129.

⁷A sketch of the natural and built environments of the Crowsnest Pass in 1952, travelling east to west, is found in William James Cousins, *A History of the Crow's Nest Pass*, original manuscript 1952 (Lethbridge 1981), 1-9.

⁸Because the LPP had little support in the Southern Alberta farming communities that made up over 75 per cent of the electorate in the riding, the LPP candidate finished dead last in the election with only 9.3 per cent of the total vote. The CCF candidate finished next to last with 14.9 per cent of the vote. The Social Credit candidate was victorious with support from



Harvey Murphy addresses a May Day gathering at a picnic ground west of Natal, BC, 1930s. Murphy was the Labour Progressive Party's candidate in Kootenay East in the 1945 federal election and polled 37 per cent of the votes in Natal. *Glenbow Archives*, NC-54 2008. Photo by Thomas Gushul.

third with thirteen per cent of the vote. Second, on the BC side of the border the two leftist parties were much more evenly balanced. In the same election the LPP candidate, Harvey Murphy, a well known Communist organizer who had helped reestablish a union at Michel-Natal in the 1930s, won 29 per cent of the 2,890 ballots cast. In comparison, the CCF candidate, the Reverend James Matthews of Fernie, who had also run for the CCF in the 1941 national election, won 33 per cent of the vote.⁹ Third, on both sides of the border the left had experienced considerable electoral success in the years preceding the Cold War. In the provincial constituency of Fernie in BC, the long time socialist and Boer War veteran, Thomas Uphill, had been elected continuously since 1920 as the candidate of the Fernie and District Labour Party (FDLP). Uphill was very friendly with the Communists throughout the Pass, a point that infuriated the anti-communist leadership of the BC CCF.¹⁰ In Alberta, Communists and their supporters had controlled the town of Blairmore's council and school board since the mid-1930s, as well as the village of Frank's local government. Furthermore, as mentioned above, Blairmore's Communist mayor, Enoch Williams, had almost been elected to the Alberta legislature in 1944. Fourth, labour unity politics in the Crowsnest were rooted in the struggles of coal miners and their families, and therefore never countenanced unity with pro-capitalist parties, even at moments such as the mid-1940s when the national leadership of the

36.7 per cent of the electorate. Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, Results of the Twentieth Canadian General Election for the Alberta riding of MacLeod, *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Twentieth General Election, 1945* (Ottawa 1946), 707-710.

⁹Kootenay East was a much different riding than MacLeod in that it contained important working-class mining and logging communities beyond the Crowsnest. Support for the CCF candidate, Rev. Matthews, was particularly strong in the mining community of Kimberley, and he won the election with 36.4 per cent of the vote. The LPP's Murphy finished next to last with 12.6 per cent support among electors. Social Credit, which won the Alberta riding of MacLeod, finished last in the BC riding of East Kootenay. Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, "Results of the Twentieth Canadian General Election for the British Columbia riding of Kootenay East," *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Twentieth General Election, 1945* (Ottawa 1946), 546-47.

¹⁰For instance, Uphill chaired the 20 November 1943 meeting in Fernie addressed by LPP leader Tim Buck. An audience of approximately 500 was in attendance. National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), Record of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (hereafter CSIS), Access to Information Request (hereafter AIR) 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3632, File: Communist Party of Canada (hereafter CPC) — Fernie-Michel club (hereafter FMC), Crow's Nest Pass (hereafter CNP), BC, 549-553. Subsequent citations: NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 1 3632, File: CPC, FMC, CNP, BC, 549-553. Throughout the entire period in question Uphill maintained close personal and political ties with the provincial and Crowsnest leaderships of the LPP, seemingly unaffected by the changed political climate of the Cold War.

CPC called for such an alliance. On both sides of the border, labour unity meant the unity of labour unions and socialist parties.¹¹

At war's end, therefore, there were strong, indigenous socialist workers' movements in both sections of the Crowsnest Pass. These movements had matured during a half-century of struggles in the coal mines and in miners' communities. The ascendance of the CPC-LPP to a position of political pre-eminence in the region is tied to the peculiarities of militant union and socialist political organizing in the Pass. This dates back to the late 19th century when the militant Western Federation of Miners (WFM) organized the area, especially on the BC side. The WFM represented miners on both sides of the border until 1903, when the UMWA moved in. After World War I, and in the early 1920s, the area became a hotbed of support for the One Big Union. Politically, the area had also been a stronghold for the Socialist Party of Canada and its left wing, whose local militants went over to the CPC in their majority in the early 1920s. This gave local Communists a long-standing

¹¹ For some time during its first term in office, the Social Credit movement was included in the pro-labour ranks in the Alberta Crowsnest. As Alvin Finkel has noted: "Though Social Credit would eventually prove a reactionary force, the early party, despite its emphasis on the right-wing populist panacea of monetary reform, espoused redistribution of income, price controls, medicare, and some state control over industry in the public interest." "The Rise and Fall of the Labour Party in Alberta, 1917-42," *Labour/Le Travail*, 16 (Fall 1985), 90-91. (Hereafter L/LT.)

In the summer of 1937, Communist and Social Credit leaders in the Crowsnest conducted a door-to-door political canvass together. In September 1937, a Blairmore RCMP officer reported: "The Communist party in the Crows Nest Pass are presently in favour of giving the Social Credit government all support as long as the legislation passed or proposed does not interfere with their organization. The heads of the party very definitely point out to the rank and file that the Communist party are not bound to the Social Credit party and can withdraw their support at any time." However, in May 1938 the Blairmore officer reported that "contrary to the previous attitude of Communists, i.e. supporting Social Credit, a vast change has come over the party members during the last three weeks, they are openly condemning the present government of Alberta, and this matter has been discussed by them at their meetings as well as on street corners and beer rooms." NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3616, File: CPC — Crowsnest Pass (hereafter CP), Alberta (hereafter AB), 93, 112, and 115. Subsequent citations: NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-0018a, RG 146, vol. 3616, File CPC, CP, AB, 93, 112 and 115. For background on the Communist Party's attitude towards the Aberhart Social Credit Party, see Ben Swankey, "Reflections of a Communist: 1935 Election," *Alberta History*, 28, 4 (1980), 28-36. It should be noted that although unity with Social Credit was not pursued in the Alberta Crowsnest from 1938 onwards, the Social Credit Party continued to be widely seen as a workers' party for a number of years. For instance, an advertisement in the *Blairmore Enterprise* on 8 June 1945 on behalf of the CCF candidate for Macleod in the 1945 national election explicitly identified the CCF, LPP and Social Credit as competing workers' movements that each aimed to form a Labour Government in Ottawa. See: "A Final Appeal to Labor: Vote Wobick and Win Coldwell and a Victory for Labour," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 8 June 1945.

purchase on support and loyalty within the area that was not available to the CCF, which was not founded until 1932. Communist activists were deeply rooted in the region's history and working-class culture, although the same can be said for some of the anti-communist elements of the workers' movement.¹²

As a consequence, where leaders of the Crowsnest workers' movements were members or sympathizers of the LPP, this hardly meant that they slavishly followed a party line dictated by provincial, national, or international leaders. Their leadership depended upon understanding the complex realities of class struggle in the local area and keeping in close touch with the needs and desires of the coal mining working class. For instance, throughout the 1942-45 period, the national LPP leadership opposed strikes in the interests of maximizing wartime production, but Communists in the Crowsnest Pass were active organizers in the continent-wide strike of coal miners' in November 1943, in the September-October 1945 strike in District 18 over inadequate meat rations, and in numerous wildcat strikes over local issues.¹³ These cases thus afford the opportunity to study the impact of Cold War processes on workers' movements with long socialist traditions that were grounded in the history of struggles in the Crowsnest Pass coal mines.

Research Questions and Organization

Our interest in the resilience of these two socialist workers' movements between 1945 and 1958 encompasses a number of dimensions. The first concerns support for the Communists within the workers' movements: at what point did the LPP experience a significant decline in its electoral support, was the decline similar on both sides of the border, and did the decline reflect a drop in party membership and activism? Do structural or political factors explain the decline in Communist support in the Crowsnest Pass? Secondly, was there an overall decline in support

¹²The best source on the development of these workers' movements is Allen Seager, "A Proletariat in Wild Rose Country: The Alberta Coal Miners, 1905-1945," PhD dissertation, York University, 1982. Cousins, *A History of the Crow's Nest Pass*, 72-79, provides a particularly critical view of Communist influence.

¹³Glenbow Archives (hereafter GA), United Mine Workers of America (hereafter UMWA) District 18, M6000 Box 72, ff616, "Unauthorized Strikes in District 18, U.M.W.A. – during last three years, 23 October 1945." Subsequent Citations: GA, UMWA, District 18, M6000 Box 72, ff 616, "Unauthorized Strikes." During the war years, the official Communist Party line against strikes was promoted during visits to the Crowsnest by party officials like Harvey Murphy. For instance, in a speech at the Blairmore Miners' Hall on 19 February 1944, Murphy "urged the workers not to strike unless there was no other way of settling their disputes." NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3616, File: CPC, Blairmore, AB, 284. Such advice was certainly not treated as an absolute commandment by Crowsnest miners or by the leadership of the five UMWA Locals in the Crowsnest. In the two years after the continent-wide strike for a new contract in November 1943, there were seven separate wildcat strikes at different Crowsnest locals. Furthermore, the District-wide wildcat for better meat rations in September-October 1945 was spearheaded by the Crowsnest Locals.

for socialist political candidates in the provincial and federal elections between 1945 and 1958? As in the first question and for all subsequent questions, we desire to know whether the pattern was the same in Alberta and BC. Relatedly, did the CCF benefit from LPP decline? What factors account for the decline or persistence in support for socialist candidates? Thirdly, did Cold War pressures affect miners' willingness and capacity to struggle with their bosses or with the District 18 Mineworkers' leadership in Calgary? Fourthly, was working-class involvement in local government adversely affected by the Cold War? Finally, was the culture of worker solidarity which animated these two movements undermined by Cold War processes, and if so, how did this happen? Concomitantly, was the growth of the union movement in other industries in the Pass arrested?

Our material is presented in four sections, divided by time period (1945-53 and 1954-58) and locale. The first period coincides with the span between the 20th and 22nd Canadian general elections. Since the LPP and CCF each ran candidates in both elections on both sides of the border, the change in electoral strength of the parties can be measured for this eight year period. In addition, the first period approximately coincides with relatively high levels of coal production on both sides of the border (1952 would have been a better cut off on this count because production in the Alberta Crowsnest declined by over twenty per cent in 1953), and encompasses the entire Korean War. The second period, 1954-58, is dominated by the economic crisis caused by the rapid shift to diesel locomotives by the CPR. A number of mines on both sides of the border were closed in these years, although the industry in Alberta was much harder hit than in BC.

In a study of the communities of the Crowsnest Pass during the Cold War, it is impossible to go into what was happening at the same time on provincial, national, and international stages. We are among those who understand the Cold War as originating in the Truman administration's desire to establish the US as the single hegemonic power in an integrated capitalist world economy, although from the late 1940s Soviet actions also contributed to a sense of deep crisis in international relations.¹⁴ We also accept the position that the anti-communism of the Cold War was much more intense in character than earlier forms of anti-radicalism due to the military and economic rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union.¹⁵

Three Contexts

Before turning to the influence of Cold War events on working-class politics in the Crowsnest Pass, three contexts need to be established. The first has to do with the history of District 18 of the UMWA, a district with jurisdiction over the three Western

¹⁴Thomas J. McCormick, *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War* (Baltimore and London 1989); and Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: the Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London 1994).

¹⁵Martin Halpern, *UAW Politics in the Cold War Era* (Albany 1988), 128.

Canadian provinces. District 18 signed its first contract in 1903 (with the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company (CNPCC), which operated in Fernie and Michel-Natal, BC). The District suffered major reversals in the mid-1920s when the CNPCC used lockouts to break the Fernie and Michel-Natal UMWA Locals in 1924-25, and when many Alberta Locals withdrew later that year. Between 1925 and 1936 a "dual union" organized by Communists, the Mine Workers Union of Canada (MWUC), was more important than the UMWA in the Alberta coal fields.¹⁶

In 1936, however, District 18 consummated an agreement with the Communist leadership of the dual union. The MWUC Locals rejoined the UMWA, Communist activists committed themselves to organizing non-union "home locals" into District 18, and Communists were appointed to a few of the leadership positions in the District. The most prominent of these appointments was John Stokaluk, who shortly thereafter became vice-president of the District, a position he held continuously until his retirement at the end of 1959. Another Communist, Enoch Williams, was appointed as Sub-District 5's representative to the District Executive Board. Documents in the Comintern archives indicate that at almost exactly the same time a formal agreement was reached between UMWA president John L. Lewis and the Communist Party in the US over the employment of Communist organizers by the CIO.¹⁷ It seems certain that Communist involvement in District 18 was every bit as formalized from 1936 onwards.¹⁸

Largely due to the tireless efforts of Communist miners, the workers at the Hillcrest mine (Alberta Crowsnest) were reorganized into the UMWA in 1938, and the miners at the two Coleman mines (Alberta Crowsnest) similarly rejoined the UMWA in 1941.¹⁹ From that time throughout the period under consideration, the workers at all mines in the Crowsnest Pass were members of the UMWA, as were employees of contractors hired by the mining companies to run strip mines.

Throughout the period of this study, District 18 was run as a "provisional district," as were almost all UMWA districts throughout this period of John L. Lewis' autocracy. Although this meant that District Officers and District Executive Board members were appointed rather than elected, there was still a great deal of democracy at the District level. Importantly, the District leadership continued to allow the membership to ratify or reject tentative agreements. District President

¹⁶Seager, "A Proletariat in Wild Rose Country," 391-396.

¹⁷Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven and London 1995), 106fn26.

¹⁸On the appointment of Communists to official District 18 positions, also see Seager, "A Proletariat in Wild Rose Country," 515.

¹⁹An RCMP intelligence report of 16 May 1938 noted that the Communist Party has "been active in connection with the organization of the Coleman Camps to the U.M.W. of A. It has been noticed that members of the party from Bellevue, Maple Leaf, Hillcrest and Blairmore have been active among persons of their own tongue at Coleman." NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3616, File: CPC, CP, AB, 97.

Robert Livett explained the practice in a 10 June 1953 letter to John L. Lewis (after the membership had narrowly rejected a tentative agreement supported by the District officers): "Whilst there is nothing in the Constitution giving us any power to take such a vote, as I have already stated, it has been a custom ever since the District received a Charter."²⁰ Democracy in the District was also grounded on the holding of a convention prior to contract negotiations where resolutions submitted by Local Unions were debated and voted upon by dozens of elected delegates (with representation based on a Local's size). Furthermore, yearly elections were held for officers and committee positions in the Crowsnest Pass UMWA Locals, and the Locals were very active decision making bodies which communicated actively with the District office.²¹ Finally, the organization of the five Crowsnest Local Unions into two Sub-Districts gave them a forum from which opposition to District policies could be organized.

The second context is the size of the market for the bituminous coal found in the Crowsnest Pass and the economic viability of the mines. Detailed production figures for the mines in the Crowsnest Pass are found in Table 1. Between 1945 and 1952, total coal production in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass fluctuated around two million tons a year. Nevertheless, during these years there was an increase in coal from strip mining and a decrease in coal from underground mining. When looking at western Canada as a whole, the percentage of coal from underground mines decreased from 78 per cent of the total in 1945 to 54 per cent of the total in 1952.²² In the Alberta Crowsnest Pass, underground mines still accounted for 62 per cent of coal production in 1952.

The first major shock to the mining industry in the Crowsnest Pass came in 1953-54 when production in Alberta decreased by 50 per cent. After 3 consecutive years of about 1 million tons of production, a second shock hit the Alberta mines in 1957-58 when coal production again fell by about 50 per cent. In 1958 only 168,000 tons of coal was produced by underground mining in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass mines, whereas the bulk of the two million tons in yearly production in the mid-1940s had been mined underground. The CPR's switch to diesel railway locomotives, which would be complete by the end of the decade, had decimated the coal mining industry on the Alberta side of the border. The mines in the BC Crowsnest escaped the first downturn in 1953-54. Between 1956 and 1958, however, production by the CNPCC fell by 44 per cent (see Table 1, last column).

²⁰GA, UMWA District 18, M6000, Box 93, ff 762.

²¹For example, the Coleman Local held regular membership meetings every second week up until the middle of 1954 and monthly meetings thereafter. GA, Coleman Local 2633, UMWA, M6048, ff3, minute books. One of the two old underground mines in Coleman closed at the end of March, 1954, greatly reducing the membership of Local 2633.

²²From a submission to the Government of Canada by a joint delegation representing the UMWA, District 18, the Coal Operators' Association of Western Canada, and the provincial governments of Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, 22 November 1954. GA, UMWA District 18, M6000, box 72, ff 608.

TABLE 1: COAL PRODUCTION 1945-58, CROWSNEST PASS (000s of tons)^a

Year	Alberta All Mines			West Canadian Collieries (Major company in Alberta to 1956)			Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company (Only company in British Columbia) ^b	
	Strip	Underground	Total	Strip	Underground	Total	Total	
1945			1,856			906	974	
1946			2,256			1,183	966	
1947			1,967			1,112	1,074	
1948			1,907			1,055	1,075	
1949			2,450			1,204	1,228	
1950			2,029			1,073	1,114	
1951	870	1,522	2,392	487	792	1,279	1,164	
1952	821	1,347	2,168	388	655	1,043	1,192	
1953	680	1,017	1,697	331	530	861	1,124	
1954	446	641	1,087	253	364	617	1,039	
1955	562	595	1,157	332	360	692	1,133	
1956	629	581	1,210	351	310	661	1,188	
1957	358	285	643	160	127	287	844	
1958	247	168	415	83	47	130	660	

^aRoyal Commission on Coal, 1959-60. National Archives of Canada, RG 33/42, Vol. 18, Files: "Coal Statistics: Alberta Bituminous" and "Coal Statistics: British Columbia and Yukon." See charts in pencil: "Alberta Bituminous Coal Production by Colliery and District" and "British Columbia Coal Production by Collieries"

^bIn 1947 and 1948, the Alberta-based Hillcrest-Mohawk Collieries strip mined 220,840 tons of coal on the BC side of the Crowsnest. In all other years in this series, the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Co. was the only operator in British Columbia.

Of all the mines in the Crowsnest Pass, only Michel-Natal, BC maintained reasonable production levels through the late 1950s because of their coking and coal byproducts divisions.

The third context is the District 18 social welfare program for retired miners that in 1950 began to pay monthly retirement pensions to miners 62 years of age and older who had at least 20 years service in the coal mining industry. This plan had the effect of encouraging many elderly miners to retire at a time when employment in the industry was decreasing. It also encouraged miners who were approaching the 20 years service or qualifying age of 62 to remain in the industry. By the end of 1955 the fund was paying retirement benefits of \$100 per month to a total of 1,272 beneficiaries, the majority of whom were between 62 and 69 years of age.²³

In combination, the decline in demand for railway steam coal and the introduction of retirement pensions had an enormous impact on the coal mining labour force in the Crowsnest Pass, especially in the Alberta mines. In the immediate post-war years, the management of the West Canadian Collieries (WCC), which operated two major underground mines in the Alberta Crowsnest, often complained about shortages of miners and absenteeism. Among the new employees in Crowsnest coal mines in the late 1940s were university students (employed during the summer), farm labourers, coal miners recruited from Nova Scotia, and, beginning in 1948, European Displaced Persons (DPs).²⁴ The extent of the change in the labour force is seen by 1946 statistics for the two underground mines in Coleman, Alberta: in a combined workforce of less than 1,000, there were 443 separations and 459 placements during the year.²⁵ During the mid-to-late 1940s the Crowsnest coal mines relied upon a core workforce of middle-aged to elderly miners, supplemented by a variety of new recruits, many of whom did not remain in the industry very long.

Although coal production levels remained high at the end of the 1940s, there was growing public talk about the long-term health of the industry in light of railway dieselization. WCC first noted a decline in absenteeism among its employees in the summer of 1949.²⁶ Nevertheless, there continued to be labour shortages in the mines in 1950 and 1951 since the comparatively low wages in the industry made it difficult

²³GA, UMWA District 18, M6000 Box 18, ff223, "Welfare and Retirement Fund of District 18, Summary for the Year 1955," and "Report on the Welfare and Retirement Fund to the Delegates at a Special Wage Scale Convention, 2 April 1956."

²⁴GA, West Canadian Collieries Ltd. (hereafter WCC), M1601, ff571, "Labour Questions" 18 March 1946, 24 April 1946; "Labour Situation" 27 September 1947, 4 October 1947, 6 December 1947, 4 September 1948; 7 October 1948; and 10 December 1948, 3 February 1952.

²⁵"Notes and Comments: Must Increase Housing Accommodation!" *Coleman Journal*, 27 March 1947.

²⁶GA, WCC, "Labour Situation" 27 June 1949, 28 July 1949.

to replace the initial wave of Retirement Fund retirees.²⁷ As the market for steam coal started to decline in 1952, however, labour shortages became less of a problem. The miners were laid off for one or two days per week due to a shortage of orders. The management of WCC commented: "Our men are concerned, as is natural, over short time operations yet it is strange how few men we are losing on such account."²⁸ The prospect of a retirement pension served to stabilize the workforce in the Crowsnest Pass during the initial period of economic downturn. By the end of 1953, however, WCC was complaining about a shortage of underground miners: "Coal miners in the West are leaving the industry in increasing numbers due entirely to short time work. Those that can are going on Pension while the younger men are seeking and finding employment in other fields of endeavour." The company was able to fill its orders only by increasing its strip mining production.²⁹ During this period the most viable mines in the Crowsnest Pass were on the BC side of the border; beginning in 1953 it became commonplace for Alberta miners, who were either laid off or unwilling to work short weeks in the Alberta mines, to commute to the BC mines.³⁰ Still, the decline in employment in the mines in Alberta more than offset the loss of miners. In the spring of 1954 the management of WCC noted: "Some of our men, mostly the younger ones, are leaving our employ with endeavour to find more lucrative employment, but this will not cause us any trouble since common labour is plentiful and miners, if necessary, could be found without too much trouble."³¹

In the decade between 1945 and 1955, therefore, the employment situation for miners in the Crowsnest Pass had changed in two fundamental ways. First, whereas the industry was quite strong on both sides of the border at war's end, by the mid-1950s only the mines in BC were operating at anything close to a five-day-a-week operation. Second, the underground miners who remained employees of the Alberta Crowsnest mines were mainly just hanging on, hoping the mines would last long enough that they would be able to qualify for their retirement pension. In comparatively assessing the effects of Cold War processes on working-class politics on both sides of the border, the radically different economic trajectories of the Alberta and BC mines after 1952 are important confounding factors.

The Cold War and the Left in the Alberta Crowsnest, 1945-53

The Gouzenko spy scandal hit the press in early 1946. Canada's only LPP member of parliament, Fred Rose, was arrested in March and convicted in June for espionage. These developments did not receive extensive discussion in the Cole-

²⁷GA, WCC, "Labour Situation," 6 June 1951, 10 September 1951, and 10 October 1951.

²⁸GA, WCC, M1601, ff 571, "General Situation," 10 May 1952, and "Labour Situation," 10 November 1952.

²⁹GA, WCC, "Labour Situation," 10 September 1953, see also 1 April 1954.

³⁰GA, WCC, "Labour Situation," 6 November 1953.

³¹GA, WCC, "Labour Situation," 8 May 1954.

man or Blairmore weekly papers. However, a 14 April RCMP intelligence report indicated that the LPP held meetings between 12 and 15 April in Alberta Crowsnest Pass communities in response to the spy arrests. At a meeting in the Frank community hall, four films about Russia were shown and the speaker "spoke of the spy prosecutions in Canada, hinting that it was an attempt to destroy friendly relationship between Russia and Canada." According to the RCMP officer, "the meeting was attended by about 30 people, practically all of whom did not seem to understand what the speaker was talking about."³²

In 1946 and 1947, the LPP engaged in high profile political activities in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass communities. In March 1946 the two leading Communists in Blairmore spoke at an initial meeting to unionize the lumber workers in the area. Both men also held leadership roles in the Blairmore UMWA Local and city government; Mayor Enoch Williams was secretary-treasurer of the Union and Councillor Bill Arland, was president of the Union.³³ In September 1946 an organizing meeting of the Coleman Housewives' Consumer Association was held. It was addressed by Mayor Williams and Peter Meroniuk, a Coleman resident, who, along with Bill Arland had been elected to the Provincial Executive Committee of the LPP in February 1945. The main issue discussed at the meeting was the need to maintain subsidies for milk producers in the area.³⁴ The Housewives' Consumer Association remained active in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass until at least early 1948; its most prominent activist had gone to Ottawa in 1947 as part of the organization's lobbying efforts for price controls. At the 29 February 1948 meeting of UMWA Local 2633 in Coleman "A letter from Housewives [sic] Consumer League enclosing petition for the members to sign protesting and asking for the rolling back of prices was discussed. It was moved and seconded that the President and Secretary take charge of Petition and get signatures from our membership."³⁵

LPP members were also prominent organizers of a Slavonic cultural festival, held in Blairmore and Coleman over two days in August 1947. This festival was part of the ambitious mass-work carried out by the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians (AUUC) in 1946-47; similar festivals were held in Edmonton, Alberta, and five Ontario communities. Among the highlights of the festival was a performance by a "massed choir consisting of singers from all Pass towns," accompanied by the stringed orchestras of the AUUC from Lethbridge and Calgary. Honoured guests at the Festival included a representative from the Soviet embassy and John Stokaluk, the vice-president of District 18 who had had a long association with the CPC. The Festival was described in a press report as "the biggest event to take place

³²NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3616, File: CPC, Blairmore, AB, 238.

³³"Pass Workers Organizing," *Blairmore Examiner*, 22 March 1946.

³⁴"Mrs. McCarthy Heads Coleman's Housewives' Assoc," *Coleman Journal*, 19 September 1946, and "Macpherson Heads Labor-Progressives," *Blairmore Enterprise* 2 February 1945.

³⁵GA, Coleman Local 2633 UMWA, M6048 ff2, minute book.



Slavonic Festival Dancer (Bill Petrunik, a teenager whose family lived in Coleman). The Slavonic Festival was held in the Alberta Crowsnest towns of Coleman and Blairmore in early August, 1947. Among the dignitaries in attendance were a representative from the Soviet embassy and the Vice-President of District 18 of the United Mine Workers of America, John Stokaluk. *Collection of the Crowsnest Museum, Coleman AB. Photo by Thomas Gushul.*

in the history of the Crowsnest Pass."³⁶ However, while it was successful in involving large sections of the Russian, Ukrainian, Czechoslovakian, and Polish communities in the area, three anti-communist organizations publicly refused to participate in organizing the festival. The opposition from the Slovak National League, the First Catholic Slovak Union, and the Polish Society of Brotherly Aid, did not markedly diminish the Slavonic Festival in 1947, but it did indicate that the Cold War had fundamentally changed the terrain for left organizing in these communities.³⁷

A decline in Communist organizing efforts is most evident after the high profile campaigns of 1946-47. Developments in eastern Europe and the recruitment of eastern European refugees as miners definitely posed difficulties for the party after 1947. An RCMP intelligence report on the LPP campaign during the August 1948 provincial election noted: "There have been house gatherings and general discussion of the Labour Progressive Party in Maple Leaf, a community adjoining Bellevue. The population here is largely Ukrainian, Hungarian, and Polish. The arrival of some displaced persons from Europe has been the cause of much discussion as the D.P.'s are said to be anti-communist."³⁸

To further compound the LPP's problems at this point, there was also a concerted anti-communist drive inside the Blairmore Local of the UMWA. It was organized by John Lloyd, who won election as Local Union president in 1947 after LPP leader Bill Arland resigned and left the area. Lloyd ran as the CCF candidate in the 1948 provincial election. In early 1949 an RCMP officer recorded that "the writer has been aware for several months that John Lloyd ... had recently joined the Catholic Faith and in cooperation with [Blank; probably Father M.A. Harrington, Blairmore's parish priest] was organizing an anti-communist drive in the Blairmore Local of the UMWA. Their first objective, which apparently has failed, was to stop the Blairmore Local of the UMWA from paying for 25 copies of the communist publication *Canadian Tribune* [the national communist weekly]." Indeed, this particular campaign succeeded later that year. The District 18 Office received letters from the Blairmore and Bellevue Local Unions regarding the right of the Locals to use Union funds to purchase political papers. The issue was discussed at the May 1949 District Executive Board meeting that passed the motion that "under the laws of our Organization no Local Union can vote any of its funds for the purchase of

³⁶"Slavonic People Hold Gala; N. Serov of Russian Embassy Among Honoured Guests," *Coleman Journal*, 14 August 1947. On the Coleman festival as part of an AUUC organizing effort, see a document written by prominent communist John Boychuk and published in the AUUC press, in John Kolasky, ed., *Prophets and Proletarians: Documents on the History of the Rise and Decline of Ukrainian Communism in Canada* (Edmonton 1990).

³⁷"Letters to the Editor," *Coleman Journal*, 17 April 1947.

³⁸NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3616, File: CPC, Blairmore, AB, 202.

any political organ." A second motion allowed the local unions to pay for copies of papers already ordered.³⁹

Overall there was relatively little anti-communist commentary in the weekly newspapers in the Alberta Pass communities in the late 1940s. However, on 11 March 1948, the *Coleman Journal* reprinted a story from the *Calgary Albertan* that reported an anti-communist talk in Calgary by a delegate to the Pan-American Ukrainian conference in New York in the autumn of 1947. Two weeks later the same paper printed an anti-communist editorial with a local focus. The *Coleman Journal* of 25 March had covered a LPP meeting in Blairmore that featured LPP national leader Tim Buck and provincial party leader Ben Swankey. The meeting was attended by 200 area residents; Swankey, who had been previously nominated as the party's provincial election candidate for the area, "stated in conclusion that the Pincher Creek-Crow's Nest constituency had the honour of electing the first labour member to the legislature. He predicted that after the next provincial election they would have the honour of electing the first Communist to Edmonton." The following week the editor of the *Coleman Journal* published an editorial attacking Swankey and the LPP. "It's An Honour?" argued that Swankey was "whistling in the dark" with his prediction of an LPP victory: "The world to-day is seeing the hand of communism spread throughout eastern Europe. It sees the power of the people placed in the hands of a few, freedom of the press abolished, personal liberty abolished, it sees people of subjugated nations being virtual prisoners in strong-armed police controlled states" Swankey's reply was published six weeks later. In it he defended the eastern European state socialist countries as democracies "of a new type."⁴⁰ This exchange revealed that the LPP in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass, like Communist Parties throughout the capitalist world, was now burdened with the task of defending countries that purportedly threatened Canadians' cherished democratic freedoms.

Despite the growing forces of anti-communism in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass in the late 1940s, miners associated with the LPP continued to play prominent and respected roles in the three UMWA Local Unions in the Alberta Pass. These Locals played a crucial role in the only major strike in District 18 during these years when they walked off the job on 12 January 1948, initiating a district wide walkout. A new contract was signed in mid-February and included a wage increase of two

³⁹NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3616, File: CPC, Blairmore, AB, 160; GA, UMWA District 18, M6000 Box 109 ff899. Anti-communist Catholics and socialists worked together in many Cold War struggles in the North American labour movement, such as in the United Electrical Workers and United Auto Workers. Halpern, *Cold War in the Working Class*, 75, 91-92. Lloyd's conversion to Catholicism and failure to stay involved in the CCF after leaving employment as a coal miner suggest his own actions were mainly motivated by religious conviction. The CCF in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass was a convenient political arm for that conviction.

⁴⁰"Tim Buck Defends Communism at Blairmore," *Coleman Journal*, 25 March 1948; "It's an Honour?" 1 April 1948; and "Letter to the Editor," 13 May 1948.

dollars per day and a two cent per-ton increase in operator payments to the Welfare and Retirement Fund.⁴¹ The Blairmore Local, and to a lesser extent the Coleman and Bellevue Locals, also regularly pressured the District office to take action on various matters; together the Blairmore and Michel, BC Locals served as usually loyal but militant oppositions within District 18. In taking on this role, the Local Union leaders understood their membership and could count on its support.

Through Sub-district 5 the three Locals took the lead in organizing yearly May Day celebrations for workers and their families, although the Coleman Local began to resist participation in this event as the Cold War progressed. When William J. White, the Coleman Local's secretary-treasurer, took over the secretary job for Sub-District 5 in June 1948, he made it clear that he reserved the right not to serve as secretary for the May Day celebrations. In 1949, only five of the nine delegates to a Sub-District 5 meeting voted in favour of holding a May Day parade, and a Coleman Local motion to refrain from participation in May Day that year lost in a close seventeen-fourteen vote. However, the Coleman Local did refuse to assess their membership 25 cents each to cover the costs of May Day. For the 1950 celebration in Hillcrest the Coleman Local reinitiated a 25 cent assessment. In 1951 the Coleman Local officially withdrew from the May Day celebration citing poor weather conditions as the reason, and proposed holding a new mid-summer celebration. The next year a motion to rescind the 1951 withdrawal motion was soundly defeated fourteen-three. By the early 1950s, the Coleman Local had definitively split with the other Locals in the Pass over May Day. This certainly reflected the anti-communist orientation of some of the Union leaders in Coleman, but more importantly it indicated that the commitment to sustaining and building solidarity throughout the Pass had been seriously weakened as a hegemonic element of workers' culture.⁴²

Nevertheless, the anti-communism inside the Coleman Local was extremely mild compared to what was happening in the broader provincial and national labour movements at this time. A case in point is the Coleman Local Union's responses to the anti-communist purges and raiding in the broader labour movement. In every case recorded in its minute book, the Local expressed its support for communist-unions that were under attack by the leadership of the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL). Among the Local's actions were publicly distancing itself from comments made by an Alberta CCL official and former UMWA district representative, Thomas McCloy, regarding the Mine Mill Union (MMU) in Medicine Hat, opposing the expulsion of the United Electrical Workers from the CCL, and formally protesting

⁴¹"Coal Miners Tied Up Since Monday," *Blairmore Graphic*, 16 January 1948, and "Pass Mines Reopen Thursday Morning," 20 February 1948.

⁴²GA, Coleman Local (hereafter CL) 2633 UMWA, M6048 Box 2, ff8: Sub-District 5 documents, 1946-54; M6048 ff2, minute book: 27 March 1949, 10 April 1949, 9 April 1950, 8 April 1951, and 13 April 1952.

the raiding activities of the CCL against the MMU.⁴³ While many in the Coleman Local leadership were no friends of the LPP, their anti-communism could not countenance undermining union solidarity through expulsions or raiding. This was an important measure of the workers' movement in the Crowsnest Pass at the height of the Cold War.

Throughout this period UMWA members continued to play prominent roles in local government. Enoch Williams continuously served as mayor of Blairmore until his retirement in 1951. The only election in which he was challenged was 1947, when he easily defeated Romano Peressini, who had previously served as a Communist town councillor. Williams played a crucial role in the campaign to build a public hospital that would serve the entire Pass and be financed out of property tax assessment, which opened in early 1949. This represented a significant extension of the socialized provision of health care in the Pass; already each of the UMWA locals had contracted the services of doctors who were paid a negotiated monthly salary to care for union members and their families — funded by a monthly deduction from wages.⁴⁴

The August 1948 provincial election was the last hurrah of the Communists as a mass political party in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass, and indeed in Alberta. In the two previous provincial elections Enoch Williams had run as a labour unity candidate. In 1944 Williams won a plurality of first count votes in the Crowsnest Pass (43 per cent) and had lost the constituency to the incumbent Social Credit member by 358 votes on the second count (4,909 votes were cast).⁴⁵ According to the only known account of these events, Williams' labour unity candidacy in 1944 had at first been endorsed by local CCF members. This decision was overruled at some level of the CCF hierarchy, however, and a local United Church minister was nominated the CCF candidate. It is noteworthy that no CCF officials from the Alberta provincial party were involved in the last minute nomination of a candidate, nor did they appear in the constituency during the campaign. Instead, it was the BC

⁴³GA,CL 2633, UMWA, M6048, ff2, Minute book: 13 November 1949, 23 January 1950, 12 March 1950, and 5 July 1950.

⁴⁴"Election Day Next Monday," *Blairmore Examiner*, 7 February 1947; "Mayor Williams Returned to Office," *Blairmore Examiner*, 14 February 1947; "Municipal Hospital Rate-payers in Favor of Money By-Law," *Coleman Journal*, 13 March 1947, and "Hollingshead and Coupland Re-elected to Crows Nest Pass Municipal Hospital Board," *Coleman Journal*, 31 March 1949.

⁴⁵There are no official provincial Alberta election statistics broken down for the polls within each constituency. For unofficial poll by poll results in the Crowsnest Pass, see "E.O. Duke, Social Credit, Re-Elected, Social Credit Party Sweeps Province," *Coleman Journal*, 10 August 1944 and "Official Count Not Finished; Social Credit Landslides to Victory; Liberal Party Second Choice," *Coleman Journal*, 19 August 1948. For official constituency-level results see Kenneth A. Wark, *A Report on Alberta Elections, 1905-1982* (Edmonton 1983).

provincial CCF leader, Harold Winch, who orchestrated events on the Alberta side of the border.⁴⁶

The LPP made two questionable decisions in the 1948 campaign. The first was to run a candidate under its own name unless the CCF agreed to jointly support a unity candidate. The second was to run an outsider — provincial party leader Ben Swankey — rather than a well known local figure. LPP members in the Crowsnest Pass realized that Swankey's candidacy had no chance of success. An RCMP intelligence brief dated 14 May 1948 reported: "Advice has been received that leading LPP members in the Pass towns hold out very little expectation that [Ben Swankey] LPP candidate, can poll more than 800 votes in the next provincial election." This expectation proved to be fairly accurate as Swankey won 856 of the 5,377 first count votes cast in the constituency on 17 August, despite a campaign that, in addition to Tim Buck's visit in March, included visits by A.A. Macleod (a sitting member of the Ontario legislature), party organizer Annie Buller, and the active involvement of Mayor Enoch Williams. In the polls in the Crowsnest Pass, Swankey won a respectable 24 per cent of the first count votes, including 52 per cent at the Frank polling station and 36 per cent at Blairmore, and secured more votes than the anti-communist CCF candidate, and Blairmore Union president, John Lloyd.⁴⁷ As an exercise in showing that the LPP still had more electoral support in the Crowsnest Pass than the CCF, the campaign was a success. Furthermore, LPP leaders could also take comfort in knowing that this vote total understated the party's support in the area since some of its supporters were not Canadian citizens and consequently ineligible to vote. But, as a serious attempt to win an election it was doomed from the start, a fact that was lost on Annie Buller, who, according to an RCMP informant, "flew into a rage" on election night and claimed Swankey's poor showing was due to election irregularities and "insisted that court action be taken by the party to have the Pincher Creek-Crows Nest election declared invalid."⁴⁸ That local Communists had an accurate reading of the party's provincial electoral prospects in 1948, while Annie Buller believed in an impossible electoral breakthrough, demonstrates the extent to which the LPP national and provincial leaderships were out of touch with both the nuances of the workers' movement in the

⁴⁶See Jack McCarty's "Letter to the Editor," *Fernie Free Press* 2, August 1945. In the summer of 1943 the LPP requested affiliation with the CCF. The CCF's National Council discussed the matter at its September meeting that year. By a vote of 23-4, the National Council affirmed the CCF's position of "refusing to affiliate in any way with the Communist Party of Canada." Three of the four dissenters were Alberta delegates, including Alberta party secretary and organizer William Irvine. GA, Alberta CCF Records, M1722, ff1, "Alberta CCF Party Papers, 1940-1961."

⁴⁷NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3616, File: CPC, Blairmore, AB, 227-28.

⁴⁸Murphy spoke at an LPP picnic on 25 July. Buller was in the Crowsnest Pass from July 26 until after the election. Macleod spoke at rallies just before the election. NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3616, File: CPC, Blairmore, AB, 193-220.

Crowsnest Pass and the difficulties that the Cold War was increasingly posing for party activism.

After the 1948 provincial election the LPP experienced a steady erosion of strength in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass, and the CCF virtually disappeared. In the context of Cold War pressures, the local ethos of working-class solidarity that underwrote the labour unity platform in the 1944 provincial elections had given way to narrower and more divisive electoral strategies dictated in part by the calculations of LPP and CCF leaders far removed from the Alberta Crowsnest Pass. This compromised the credibility of local Communists and their supporters as a viable force for working-class unity and electoral success; it hastened the ultimate withering of the party's hard won historical roots on the Alberta side of the Pass. The CCF's strange fate likewise reflected this salient fact, but its demise was also tied to its very tenuous roots in the local working class. The CCF simply could not hope to inherit the loyalty and support which the Communists had built up over time, and with the decline of the LPP, the CCF was no longer needed as an organizational vehicle for anti-communist organizing. In the 1949 federal election, neither party ran a candidate. This indicated the disarray in both LPP and CCF ranks, but it also reflected the peculiar character of Alberta politics where the governing Social Credit Party (SCP) continued to exercise a populist appeal that attracted the votes of many workers.

At the time of the 1948 election the RCMP estimated LPP membership between Pincher Creek to the east of the Crowsnest Pass and Coleman as 84. They held to this estimate a year later, identifying party branches in Blairmore, 27 members; Hillcrest, 12; Bellevue, 20; and Coleman, 25. Nevertheless, other RCMP reports at the time of the 1948 election indicate that longtime LPP activists were withdrawing from party activity, particularly in the erstwhile Communist stronghold of Blairmore. A 27 July report maintained that "except for some strength among the Ukrainians at Coleman and among Hungarians in the Bellevue-Hillcrest district the party at Blairmore is almost in a state of collapse. Previously the strength of the party was in the town of Blairmore now it is stated to be almost nonexistent at least as far as open and active support is concerned." The report noted that "some party members blame this condition on the excesses of [BLANK] who left the party in the Pass heavily in debt. The party is still trying to pay off some of these debts." A report filed a few days later indicated "that regular party members of the Pass towns are quite depressed on the lack of support being shown by former staunch communists at Blairmore."⁴⁹

The LPP's decline continued in 1949. On election day in the Pass, the party distributed handbills titled "Don't vote for a War Policy. Mark Your Ballot for Peace." The handbill asked people to spoil their ballot by writing "Keep Canada Out of War!!"; according to the RCMP, of the spoiled ballots in the Alberta

⁴⁹NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3616, File: CPC, Blairmore, AB, 172, 215, 218, 220.

Crowsnest Pass, only four had words with some sort of peace message written on them. In the summer of 1949 the RCMP noted an absence of LPP branch activity and public meetings. In October of that year the Coleman branch did hold a meeting at a private home. This apparently was the last party activity in Coleman until 1953.⁵⁰

While the CPC's decline in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass was quite advanced prior to the beginning of the war in Korea in April 1950, the war exacerbated the party's crisis. *The Coleman Journal* featured stories on local residents who fought in Korea and, beginning in 1952, on civil defence training and exercises in the event of an enemy air attack. That same year the RCMP was preoccupied with the fact that Blairmore's civil defence organization was led by individuals who were believed to be Communists. In this atmosphere one might hypothesize that Communists in the Crowsnest Pass were merely being circumspect about their political beliefs and engaging in quiet political campaigns. Support for this idea is found in an RCMP report of 20 July 1951, which noted that LPP members "seem to have adopted a hush-hush policy in that they do not speak openly about communist matters as heretofore" and that "communists have taken over key positions in the Blairmore branch of the Canadian Legion." However, something far more serious than conscious reticence was at work. By the summer of 1951, the party leaderships in Alberta and BC had concluded: "The once numerically strong Party organization in this proletarian centre had lost a considerable number of its members and had practically withered away." The leadership's wholly ineffective response was to send an organizer to the area in the fall of 1951 to ideologically train the comrades in Marxism-Leninism.⁵¹ In Blairmore the LPP's problems were compounded by the September 1951 retirement of Enoch Williams from his many leadership positions and his decision to retire to a fruit farm in British Columbia. On 4 April 1952, the RCMP recorded: "General informants report no apparent activity on the part of the Blairmore Labour Progressive Party adherents. For some months there has been no report of meetings, or organizational activity on the part of known communists such as [LONG BLANK]. Since the departure of Enoch [WILLIAMS] there has obviously been a decline in party activity."⁵²

The decline in the strength of the left-wing parties in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass between 1945 and the end of the Korean War is demonstrated by the election results recorded in Table 2. In both of these federal elections, the LPP fielded a candidate who was publicly identified with the party and who was an executive member of the Blairmore UMWA Local. Similarly, in both elections the CCF fielded a candidate who was not a resident of the Crowsnest Pass. While it is undoubtedly the case that the LPP nominee in 1945 was viewed as a stronger candidate than the

⁵⁰NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3616, File: CPC, Blairmore, AB, 173, 175; NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3616, File: CPC, Coleman AB, 495-496.

⁵¹NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3616, File: CPC, Blairmore, AB, 143, 148.

⁵²NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3616, File: CPC, Blairmore, AB, 121.

TABLE 2 LPP (COMMUNIST) VOTE IN THE MACLEOD (ALBERTA) AND EAST KOOTENAY (BRITISH COLUMBIA) FEDERAL RIDINGS, 1945 AND 1953*

ALBERTA			BRITISH COLUMBIA		
Community	Arland 1945	Palera 1953	Community	Murphy 1945	English 1953
Lundbreck	26%	12%	Corbin	20%	00%
Burmis	18	04	Crow's Nest	14	04
Hillcrest	42	13	Harmer	26	03
Blairmore	N 53	19	Natal	N 38	21
	W 19	06		S 44	15
	SE 84	29	Total	37	17
	SW 49	16	Michel	N 59	29
	Total 54	18		S 21	19
Carbondale	19	13	Total	35	21
West Coleman	31	12	Hosmer	48	14
Coleman	W 14	09	Fernie North	44	32
	E 19	06	Fernie	29	11
	Total 17	07	Fernie West	14	10
East Coleman	48	29	Coal Creek	07	04
Maple Leaf	50	19			
Bellevue Central	30	12			
North Bellevue	29	13			
Frank	64	34			
Total Pass	37(1) ^b	15(3)	Total Pass	29(2)	14(4)
Compared to:			Compared to:		
Social Credit	29(2)	43(1)	Social Credit	03(5)	18(3)
Liberal	10(5)	32(2)	Liberal	22(3)	35(1)
CCF	13(3)	04(5)	CCF	33(1)	31(2)
Conservative	10(4)	06(4)	Conservative	13(4)	none
Spoiled	02	01	Spoiled	01	03

* Percentages based on total vote, including spoiled ballots

^b Placing in brackets

Source: Results of the Twentieth and Twenty-Second General Elections, ridings of Macleod (Alberta) and Kootenay East (British Columbia)

nominee in 1953, personal popularity alone cannot account for the dramatic change in LPP fortunes.

The general election of 1953 occurred just after armistice in Korea and during the first year of a two year period that would see coal production in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass decline by close to 50 per cent (see Table 1). Finding new markets for Crowsnest Pass coal was the dominant issue in the election, and the governing Liberal Party recruited a former Coleman mine manager in its attempt to unseat the SCP incumbent in the riding.

As shown in Table 2, whereas the LPP had won 37 per cent of the Alberta Crowsnest Pass votes in 1945 — more than any of the other four parties — in 1953 the LPP won only 15 per cent of the vote and finished third behind SCP and the Liberals. As a proportion of their 1945 vote percentage, the CCF suffered even

greater losses: from third place with 13 per cent in 1945 to a minuscule 4 per cent and last place in 1953. The LPP's electoral decline was evident in every Pass community. Still, there was a core constituency of Communist voters in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass in 1953, numbering almost 500 — a fairly remarkable total given that the party had no chance at all of election in a riding dominated by the rural voters in the southern Alberta ranch land to the east of the Rocky Mountains. But, while the party maintained a core vote up until 1953, it was unable to maintain a core set of respected local leaders. This would hasten its disappearance as an important political force in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass communities.

Comparative Notes:

The Cold War and the Left in the British Columbia Crowsnest, 1945-53

As in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass, a number of examples of anti-communist organizing can be found in the historical record for the BC side of the border. For one thing, the major paper in the area, the *Fernie Free Press*, was firmly anti-communist and against union militancy in its editorial policy in the period under consideration. For instance, during 1946 the paper regularly published commentaries on topics like the Canadian spy scandal and the problem of Communists in the labour movement. Often these commentaries were based upon information first published in *The Financial Post*, the major Canadian paper with the strongest anti-communist orientation at the time. In 1946, the Fernie paper also identified the CCF as an enemy of democracy.⁵³ Compared to the Alberta Pass towns, Cold War anti-communism had much more of a public face from 1946 in Fernie and Michel-Natal due to the efforts of the *Free Press*. The paper was not monolithic in its editorial policy, however. In 1949 it published a series of articles by a local youth who had travelled to eastern Europe and the Soviet Union with the Beaver brigade. It also published critiques of the articles by Harry Miard, an official of the Fernie Knights of Columbus. A few months earlier, Miard had unsuccessfully run against Tom Uphill for the position of Fernie's mayor.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, in other ways the sources of anti-communism were very much the same on both sides of the border. The most important were the Catholic Church and the anti-communist ethnic organizations. Evidence of their messages in the area is found in a press report from 1952. In the summer of that year the Slovak League of Canada held a memorial meeting in Fernie to mark the 50th anniversary of the Coal Creek mine disaster of 1902 (which killed 128 miners). Mayor Tom Uphill, a longtime associate of the CPC, opened the meeting by welcoming the visiting

⁵³See Whitaker and Marcuse, *Cold War Canada*, 294. "Advice to Labor Leaders," *Fernie Free Press*, 12 September 1946; "Communists Aim at General Strike," *Fernie Free Press*, 10 October 1946; "Grave Warnings in By-Election Vote," *Fernie Free Press*, 7 November 1946.

⁵⁴"Correspondence: Freedom Behind Iron Curtain?" *Fernie Free Press*, 21 April 1949, "Correspondence: Communism or Christianity," 12 May 1949.

Slovak League officials. He was followed by a Fernie parish priest "who pointed out to those present that it was their duty when new immigrants from their homeland came to Canada to see to it that they were kept away from Communistic influences, to learn the English language as quickly as possible, and encourage them to attend their church regularly." The main speaker, editor of the *Canadian Slovak*, also had a strong anti-communist message for the audience, noting that "hundreds of thousands of enslaved people live in concentrations camps and prisons" in Slovakia "under communist tyranny."⁵⁵

The factor that most distinguished working-class politics on the BC side of the border from the Alberta Crowsnest communities was the continual re-election of Thomas Uphill to the provincial legislature for the Fernie constituency as a member of the FDLP. First elected in 1920, Uphill served continuously as a provincial representative until his retirement in 1960 at the age of 86. The FDLP was supported by all the major unions in the constituency, with the most important being the Fernie and Michel-Natal Locals of the UMWA. Uphill also had a strong personal following in Fernie and for most of the decade from 1946-55, served as Fernie's mayor. Nevertheless, Uphill was strongly identified with the CPC, and his electoral ups and downs give a good indicator of the impact of Cold War processes on working class politics.⁵⁶

Uphill's most difficult campaigns occurred in the immediate post-war years. In December 1946 he decisively lost the mayoral election in Fernie to the local

⁵⁵"Mine Explosion Fifty Years Ago Recalled in Week-end Ceremony," *Fernie Free Press*, 24 July 1952.

⁵⁶Uphill's close association with the LPP is demonstrated in four ways. First, local Communist leaders like Sam English were actively involved in the FDLP and Uphill's provincial election campaigns. See English's letter, "On The Election," *Fernie Free Press*, 26 June 1952. Second, Uphill was in contact and sometimes worked in association with the provincial LPP leadership; an example is the Labour Representation Committee of 1952 (described below). Third, Uphill was very faithful in being a guest speaker at any LPP-organized event on either side of the border in the Crowsnest Pass. And fourth, RCMP surveillance reports suggest a close personal relationship between Uphill and LPP provincial leaders like Nigel Morgan. It is also important to note that LPP strength in the BC Crowsnest in the 1940s and early 1950s was sufficient that it could have easily mounted a credible provincial election campaign in the Fernie constituency, had it chosen to do so.

On reading an earlier draft of this paper, a *Labour/Le Travail* reviewer opined, "The party's decision not to run against Uphill had more to do with his personal popularity and the party's own inability to field much of a slate than adherence to a principled commitment to unity or political agreement with Uphill." We think the reviewer underestimates the ties between Uphill and the LPP and the LPP's strength in the area. In addition, we are convinced that local LPP activists along with the broader socialist workers' movement in the BC Crowsnest were committed in principle to the labour-unity electoral approach. That said, we would agree with the reviewer that the question of unity was seen through the prism of partisan advantage by the provincial and national leaderships of the LPP, just as by their contemporaries in the CCF.

theatre operator. He reclaimed the position in an election after the new incumbent resigned and moved away. Then, in the 1949 provincial election, Uphill defeated the Liberal-Conservative Coalition candidate, another Fernie businessman, by a mere nine votes. In that campaign the only other candidate was from the CCF, which had the effect of splitting the left vote in the face of a united right candidate. Needless to say, the BC CCF's anti-communism was so fervent at that point that they wanted to see Uphill defeated at all costs, a strategy which embittered prominent local labour leaders throughout the period. The CCF ran against Uphill again in 1952, but not in 1953 after Uphill indicated he would support the CCF rather than the SCP after the 1952 election resulted in a virtual dead heat between the two parties. Uphill's winning share of the popular vote in the provincial elections in the early 1950s was 34 per cent in a 4 candidate election in 1952 and 44 per cent in a 3 candidate election in 1953. He won the elections by winning a plurality of votes in each of the coal mining centres of Fernie and Michel-Natal, and because the population of the constituency was concentrated in those centres. In 1953 they accounted for 70 per cent of the registered voters in the constituency. Uphill did well in these elections even though he was publicly identified with the LPP's attempt to elect "Labour Representation Committee" candidates in the 1952 election, and received both local and national media attention for travelling to Vienna to attend a Peace Congress in late 1952.⁵⁷ Uphill was also regularly re-elected as Fernie's mayor in the early 1950s. It seems clear that Uphill's core constituency in the coal mining working class was not perturbed by his Communist links even during the open hostility of the Korean War. This is because his presence in the local area predated and transcended his links to the CPC, and because communism still had a local, humane, and active face among miners that blunted the excesses of anti-communist propaganda. Quite simply, when it came to Uphill, his cooperation with the LPP was not that salient a factor for his supporters. But, this did not mean that the LPP itself was able to maintain itself as a viable mass political party in the area.

Uphill's electoral successes during the early Cold War years seemed to do little to sustain the vote for the LPP. As shown by the electoral data in Table 2, the decline in the LPP vote in the BC Crowsnest Pass between 1945 and 1953 almost exactly paralleled the decline in the Alberta Pass where there was no sympathetic provincial representative. By 1953, then, there was a clear dissociation between the active and vital workers' movement in the BC Crowsnest Pass and the flagging Communist movement. Communists and their supporters played important roles in the workers' movement, but no longer was communism a leading force in the workers' movement, as it had been just a few years before.

⁵⁷"Communication: Sam English," *Fernie Free Press*, 5 July 1945; "The Campaign is Under Way," *Fernie Free Press*, 17 April 1952; "Tom Uphill Speaks at Campaign Meeting," *Fernie Free Press*, 11 June 1952; and "Mayor Uphill to Peace Congress," *Fernie Free Press*, 11 December 1952.

Between 1945 and 1950 the decline in the LPP in the BC Crowsnest paralleled its decline in the Alberta Pass. In the early 1950s, however, there is evidence of ongoing LPP activism in the BC mining communities, whereas the party branches in the Alberta towns were inactive. The economic health of the mines in Fernie and Michel contributed to this difference, since there was much greater stability in the workforces in the BC mines and much more room for militancy. Furthermore, the LPP in the BC Crowsnest was sustained by a stronger provincial party, a highly committed and effective local leader in Sam English, and the reflected glory of being associated with Tom Uphill's continuing electoral success. That said, the LPP was merely a shadow of its former strength by 1953 and was certainly no more than a supporting actor in the workers' movement in the area during the 1950s.

*Left Decline, Continuing Worker Solidarity:
The Alberta Crowsnest 1954-1958*

The downturn in the coal mining industry in the Alberta Crowsnest between 1952 and 1958 was phenomenal (see Table 1). The decline in employment was just as severe: to illustrate, in the summer of 1957 there were only 150 people employed in coal-mining in Coleman, whereas 1,200 had been employed just 5 years earlier. Earlier that year WCC had closed the largest coal mine in Alberta, the Greenhill mine in Blairmore, leaving only a strip mine and its Bellevue underground mine in production. Indeed, if it were not for the fact that property values in the Alberta Pass communities were so low that retired miners could not sell their homes and afford to move elsewhere, and that Alberta miners who had secured jobs in Michel-Natal or Fernie often chose to commute rather than move because of the differential in property values across the border, the communities in Alberta would have resembled the mining ghost towns that had been created in other parts of Alberta.⁵⁸

In conjunction with the worst of the downturn in mining was a virtual abandonment of the two left political parties by their local memberships. As explained earlier, the CCF in this area of Alberta had been an anti-communist shell in the late 1940s, by the mid-1950s it literally had no active members and no organizational presence. RCMP intelligence reports indicated that in the former Communist stronghold of Blairmore, LPP membership was down to two in 1954 and the party club was inactive. By 1956 the only functioning party club in the area was in Coleman. Hoping to resurrect some former glory, LPP provincial leader Ben Swankey was a candidate in Pincher Creek-Crowsnest in the 1955 provincial election. Prominent party officials, like former member of the Ontario legislature A.A. Macleod, campaigned on his behalf. In a three-candidate race, with nominees from SCP and Liberals-Conservatives, Swankey secured only 363 votes (7 per cent

⁵⁸"Coleman Again Hit by Mine Layoffs," *Coleman Journal*, 31 July 1957; *Calgary Albertan*, 29 April 1957; and "Oldtimers Hardest Hit by Closure of Pass Mine" and "Thermal Plant is Possible," *Lethbridge Herald*, 3 May 1957.

of total votes cast) in the entire constituency, down from 856 votes (16 per cent) in 1948. This poor result occurred even though Swankey promoted a program calling for government investment in the industrialization of the Crowsnest Pass, a position in line with that of the business community in the area. Indeed, the LPP leader's ideas on solving the economic crisis in the Pass were so popular with the editor of the *Coleman Journal* that they were reported as the lead story on 11 January 1956. But, the LPP in the Alberta Crowsnest no longer had a critical mass of active party members for local political campaigns. One of the few signs of political life among local Communists occurred at a meeting in Coleman's Ukrainian Hall in December 1954 where Ben Swankey was nominated as the party's election candidate. According to an RCMP intelligence report, after Swankey had been nominated, one of the local party members nominated another local member to contest the nomination against the provincial leader: "this caused some consternation" but "after considerable discussion" the second person declined the nomination and Swankey was acclaimed. More typical of the weakened condition of the LPP was the parade of automobiles that was organized to travel from Pincher Creek to Fernie on 12 January 1955 to demonstrate "against the rearmament of Germany." The RCMP reported that only five cars took part.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, neither the CCF's non-existence in the Crowsnest Pass, nor the LPP's ineffective final attempts to mobilize political support, meant that the traditions of radical action and political independence had been lost in these working class communities. Within District 18 of the UMWA, the leadership of the Alberta Crowsnest Locals remained prepared to defend democratic traditions and challenge the District's appointed leadership whenever necessary. In March 1954, by a vote of ten-three, the Executive Board of District 18 decided to bypass the traditions of a contract convention and membership ratification, and successfully sought to get the Coal Operators Association to agree to renew the existing agreement. This action was strongly opposed by the three Locals in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass: indeed, at a meeting of the Coleman Local the next month, District Vice-President Stokaluk claimed that only the Coleman, Blairmore, and Bellevue Locals from among all the Locals in the District had protested the decision. A major grievance was that seniority was not portable between the two mines run by Coleman Collieries and simple renewal of the collective agreement would not allow for a negotiated solution to this absurd situation. That the Alberta Crowsnest Locals had been so quick to voice their displeasure with the undemocratic renewal of the collective agreement demonstrates the ongoing strength and militancy of their Local leaders, backed by a core of active members. The membership of the Coleman Local also demonstrated their solidaristic mettle by rejecting an executive recommendation to cut Local costs in 1956 by "eliminating all women from our local Funeral Benefit Fund." At its 31 January meeting the membership decided to place a special 50 cent assessment on all working members whenever such funeral

⁵⁹NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146 vol. 3616, File: CPC, Coleman AB, 401, 441, and 462.

expenses arose and "in the event that more than one case should occur in any one month, the assessment to carry on until such cases are taken care of."⁶⁰

A militant and politicized union culture also survived in the broader population of the Alberta Pass towns during these years. The electoral race for school board in Coleman in 1956 provides a noteworthy example of its existence. Four candidates ran for two vacancies in the election. One candidate was a former secretary-treasurer of the Coleman UMWA Local who was the only candidate officially endorsed by the Local Union. The other candidates were a Department of Highways worker who was president of the Civil Service Association branch in the area and a declared supporter of the SCP government; a store owner; and a Japanese-Canadian (Tets Kitaguchi) who had been forcibly relocated from Vancouver to Raymond, Alberta in 1942 and moved to Coleman to work in a lime factory in 1945, and been a key organizer of a successful CCL union drive at the factory in 1954.⁶¹ The winners in the election were the UMWA Local Union official and Tets Kitaguchi.⁶²

The solidaristic union culture also continued to exist in the neighbouring town of Blairmore. The Blairmore UMWA Local hosted the Pass-wide May Day celebration in 1955. Among the speakers were Thomas Uphill and Arthur Roberts, a Communist UMWA activist from Drumheller. In 1956, with the celebration in Michel-Natal, Blairmore's mayor declared May Day as a public holiday, with all stores and businesses closed. With the closing of the Blairmore mine in 1957 it fell to the Michel local to carry on the tradition of organizing a Pass celebration of May Day into the 1960s. Other indications of a widely held collectivist culture in the Alberta Pass in the mid-1950s were the contracts successfully negotiated by the International Woodworkers of America at local saw mills; the leading role that Pass residents took in building the Old Age Pensioners Association of Alberta — community branches were established in 1955 and 1956 — and in 1957 the Southern Alberta convention was held in Coleman; and an advertisement which appeared on the front page of the *Coleman Journal* on 31 October 1956: "We, the nurses of Crowsnest Pass Chapter of the A.A.R.N. [Alberta Association of Registered Nurses] have full confidence in Mrs. C. Dunlop R.N., Matron of the Crowsnest Pass hospital, who was recently dismissed without written notice or given reason. Margaret R. Johnson, R.N. Secretary." The nurses' advertisement only makes sense in an area

⁶⁰GA, UMWA District 18, M6000 Box 109 ff899, District Exec. Board minutes, 16 March 1954; GA, Coleman Local 2633 UMWA, M6048 ff3, Minutes, 17 April 1954 and 29 January 1956; and GA, UMWA District 18, M6000, Box 106, ff883, Minutes, Fernie Local 7310, 15 May 1954.

⁶¹Alvin Finkel notes that up until 1960 the Alberta civil service was "riddled with patronage" and that, as a consequence, the Civil Service Association was very sympathetic to the Social Credit government. Finkel, "The Cold War, Alberta Labour," 144-145.

⁶²"Brief History of Candidates for Coleman School Board," *Coleman Journal*, 29 February 1956.

where a working-class morality was part of the fabric of social life. Neither the Cold War nor the major loss of coal mining jobs had destroyed workers' solidarity and consciousness of class relations.

Resilient and Organized in the BC Crowsnest Pass, 1954-58

The key differences between the BC and Alberta Pass communities in these years were the greater economic militancy of the miners in BC — occasioned by the relatively healthy state of the mines in which they worked, the continued electoral success of the FDLP in re-electing Tom Uphill to the provincial legislature, and the emergence of the CCF as the dominant party in both Michel-Natal and Fernie. The solidarity and militancy still evident in the Alberta mining communities was given a strong political voice across the border. This demonstrates how uneven the effects of the Cold War were on working class politics, beyond the common decline in Communist activism and electoral support in both BC and Alberta.

The relative militancy of BC miners in this period is illustrated by the results of a 24 July 1956 ballot on a proposed wage agreement in District 18. Miners in Michel voted 87 per cent against the agreement with the miners in Fernie voting 80 per cent against it. In contrast, miners in every Local in Alberta with the exception of Blairmore (61 per cent against) voted in favour of the agreement.⁶³

Tom Uphill retired as mayor of Fernie in 1955 due to health reasons, but ran for one final time as the candidate of the FDLP in the 1956 provincial election. He defeated a SCP challenger, and Fernie alderman, by only 121 votes: his margin of victory in Coal Creek, Fernie, Michel, and Natal was a combined 169 votes, showing where his support was concentrated. Success in provincial politics seemingly spilled over into other areas of working-class politics. For instance, the Fernie Local Union responded positively to a 1955 appeal by the Montreal Civil Liberties Union on Quebec's Padlock Law: a membership meeting decided to buy 300 copies of the pamphlet "The padlock law threatens you," at 10 cents per copy for distribution to the Local's membership. This action was taken by a Local that, unlike the Michel and Blairmore Locals, was not well known for its sympathies with communism. In addition, as recorded in the membership meeting minutes of the respective Union Locals, the Fernie executive took a much keener interest in municipal elections and made a much more concerted effort to ensure a labour majority on council than members of the Coleman executive did during the same years.⁶⁴

The strength of the CCF in the BC Crowsnest in the mid-1950s compared to its annihilation in the Alberta Pass is, of course, partly due to the strength of the respective provincial parties. In Alberta the CCF had elected at most 2 candidates in the provincial elections of 1944, 1948, and 1952, and in that period had seen its

⁶³GA, UMW District 18, M6000 Box 19 ff227.

⁶⁴GA, UMW District 18, M6000 Box 106 ff883, Minutes, Fernie Local 7310, 20 March 1956.

share of the popular vote decline from 25 per cent to 14 per cent. In contrast, the CCF in BC had narrowly missed forming the provincial government in the 1952 election, trailing the victorious SCP's 19 seat total by only 1, and had seen only a modest decline in its share of the popular vote in the 4 elections between 1945 and 1953 (from 38 per cent to 31 per cent). Nevertheless, there is an important local component to the much different fortunes of the CCF in the Crowsnest Pass on either side of the border.

After Tom Uphill indicated he would support the CCF and not the SCP in the BC legislature formed after the 1952 election, Uphill and the CCF reached an electoral truce, and the CCF never ran against him again.⁶⁵ This set the stage for

⁶⁵Uphill played a crucial role as Bennett (with 19 seats 30.2 per cent of the final count votes) and Winch (18 seats and 34.3 per cent of the vote) lobbied the BC Lieutenant-Governor, Clarence Wallace, to see who would be asked to form a government after the final results were issued in July 1952. Tom Uphill had sat in the Legislature with both men for a number of years and knew them well. Uphill's warm personal relations with Bennett are noted in passing in David J. Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia* (Vancouver 1983 and 1995), 72. These relations were enhanced by Bennett's move of 15 March 1951 to join Uphill in the lonely ranks of independents in the legislature; this was a way station for Bennett between the Conservatives that had twice rejected him in leadership conventions and the Social Credit Party he coveted to lead. As a member of the opposition in the legislature, Bennett cooperated with other opposition members and staked out a position to the left of the governing Liberal-Conservative coalition on issues like increasing hospital insurance premiums and introducing user fees for hospital stays. See Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett*, 101.

In contrast, Harold Winch and Tom Uphill had been engaged in an acrimonious political fight for many years as Winch put considerable energy into trying to defeat Uphill in successive provincial elections. Their relations were undoubtedly at a low ebb in 1952 as Uphill worked with leftist union-activists, many associated with the LPP, to run a slate of candidates in the provincial election under the banner of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC). The Committee was condemned by both TLC and CCL officials for its association with LPP leaders. Furthermore, the BC director of the CCL, Dan Radford, attacked Uphill's record: "His contribution as a labour member has been practically nil in Victoria." See: "The Campaign is Under Way," *Fernie Free Press*, 17 April 1952, quoting from a story originally appearing in the *Vancouver Sun*, 10 April 1952. Winch carried the fight against the LRC and Uphill to Fernie during the 1952 election campaign. In a speech at the Legion Hall on 10 May, he denigrated Uphill's work as a legislator, stating that in nineteen years Uphill had introduced but one resolution, that regarding sweepstakes. Significantly, "the question period that followed proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the audience was by no means composed entirely of faithful followers of the CCF party." See: "CCF Leader Flayed Johnson Government and New Labour Group," *Fernie Free Press*, 15 May 1952.

The 1952 election allowed electors to rank order their preferences for those listed on the ballot. This meant that candidates had to campaign for both first and second choice support since most races would go to multiple counts. Part of Uphill's strategy in Fernie involved a letter to Bennett: "Dear friend: If it is in order, I would like to notify the Social Credit

Uphill's working-class majorities in Fernie and Michel-Natal in 1953 and 1956, and also paved the way for a strong CCF vote in those communities in the 1957 federal election. Overall, in the Kootenay East riding that year, the CCF candidate lost by only 648 votes in a 4 party race, winning 27 per cent of the popular vote. However, in the coal mining communities the CCF was victorious, polling 39 per cent of the vote in both Michel and Natal, and 35 per cent in Fernie.

A final contrast between the Alberta and BC sides of the border in 1954-58 has to do with LPP activity. Although it was finished as a mass party in Michel/Natal and Fernie, due to the persistent efforts of the prominent Michel miner Sam English and support from the BC party office, the LPP carried on its public activities in the area. Through the mid-1950s, separate party clubs were maintained in Fernie and

Association in Fernie to give me their second choice A word from you would help considerably." See Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett*, 155.

The preferential voting method also meant that the final result of the 12 June vote was unknown for more than a month while officials struggled to reassign the votes of trailing candidates until one contender secured more than 50 per cent of the votes. In this period, when it was uncertain whether the CCF or Socreds would elect the most members, Uphill wrote to Bennett expressing his hope that "you beat out the CCF in numbers." See Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett*, 172. This comment has the character of a personal greeting based upon Uphill's respect for Bennett and antipathy towards Winch.

However, when the final count results revealed that the Socreds had won only 19 of the 48 seats, and were only one seat ahead of the CCF, Uphill's allegiance became a matter of strategic importance. On 17 July 1952 the *Fernie Free Press* reported that Bennett had offered Uphill the Minister of Mines cabinet post. Uphill was quoted as saying, "There's lots to be said in favour of it, but it is something I shall have to discuss with my main supporters." See: "Cabinet Post is Offered to Uphill by Socred Govt," *Fernie Free Press*, 17 July 1952. Sometime between then and early September, Tom Uphill concluded his consultations and decided to support the CCF despite his personal respect for Bennett. Based upon what Mitchell reports of Harold Winch's discussions with Lieutenant Governor Wallace in late July, it appears that Uphill may have decided to support the CCF as early as then. Certainly Uphill never communicated support for a Social Credit government after the final results were released, since the only proof that Bennett offered Wallace on 1 August 1952 of Uphill's support was the personal greeting written weeks before, when the results were unknown. See Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett*, 170. If discussions between Uphill and Bennett had progressed any further, Bennett would surely have used evidence of such to try to convince Wallace to choose the Socreds over the CCF as the next government.

Mitchell's account of Uphill's role in these events, told from the perspective of W.A.C. Bennett, is generally consistent with what Uphill himself told local reporters in the summer of 1952. Other popular accounts, however, have misrepresented the nature of Uphill's support for Bennett and the Socreds in the summer of 1952. For instance, Paddy Sherman, *Bennett* (Toronto 1966), 119, erroneously reports that Uphill told the Lieutenant Governor he would support Bennett, and then argues that this is because Uphill was a latent Conservative! Martin Robin, *Pillars of Profit: The Company Province 1934-1972* (Toronto 1973), 164, cites Sherman when claiming that Uphill "expressed a preference for Bennett."

Michel/Natal.⁶⁶ In 1957 a Communist presence in Michel-Natal was evidenced by the journey of a local youth to the 6th World Youth Festival in Moscow that summer.⁶⁷ The ongoing May Day celebrations, held at the UMWA hall in Natal from 1956 onwards, were ably organized by Sam English.

Despite its much reduced profile in the 1950s, the LPP continued to be treated respectfully and seriously by local leaders of the workers' movement in the BC Pass. Tom Uphill never wavered in his public participation in party activities. Furthermore, the party was treated as a serious and supportive ally by Fernie miners faced with the closure in the Coal Creek mine in early 1958. The Fernie Local held its second special membership meeting to discuss the closure on 14 February. Special guests at the meeting were two District 18 officials and the entire Michel Local Union executive. The minutes record that after reports from the Local Union president and the two district officials, the president "read correspondence from the LPP sent to the BC government regarding the closure of Elk River Colliery, which was well received by the meeting."⁶⁸ Also, giving the LPP much attention in the mid-1950s was the RCMP, which, demonstrating the illogic of their anti-subversive work, apparently increased their surveillance of the LPP in the Pass just as the party's influence waned. For instance, officers from the Cranbrook special section of the RCMP were assigned to the 1 May 1956 celebration in Natal, and reported taking pictures of everyone in attendance.⁶⁹

Conclusions

The Cold War eroded the LPP's electoral base in exactly the same way on the Alberta and BC sides of the Crowsnest Pass. At the same time, Cold War processes did little to damage the collectivist union culture which dominated working class life in the coal mining communities. Indeed, collectivist union culture meant that the anti-communism found in the Crowsnest Pass between 1945 and 1958 was of a decidedly mild variety without any sort of McCarthyite seasoning. At a time when union leaders across the country were being forced from office because of their alleged sympathies for communism, UMWA leaders in the Crowsnest Pass could openly run as LPP candidates and afterwards carry on their active involvement in the UMWA and the broader labour movement without any sort of overt repercussion. Throughout these years those associated with the Communist movement also continued to successfully carry out leadership roles in municipal government,

⁶⁶The RCMP reported the Fernie club's membership in 1955 as nine. NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3632, File: FMC, CNP, BC, 331.

⁶⁷"F. Kozler Returns from Youth Festival," *Fernie Free Press*, 19 September 1957.

⁶⁸GA, UMWA District 18, M6000, Box 106, ff 883, Minutes, Fernie Local 7310, 14 February 1958.

⁶⁹NAC, CSIS, AIR 96A-00189, RG 146, vol. 3632, File: CPC — FM Club, CNP, BC, 292-93, 300.

branches of the Royal Canadian Legion, and even the Blairmore Civil Defence organization.

One issue our research allows us to decide is whether LPP decline was the result of Cold War processes or structural changes; namely the changing social composition of the Crowsnest communities due to retirements and new hirings, or the general decline in the Western Canadian steam coal industry. Our findings on this issue are unequivocal. By 1950, the LPP's electoral support and, to a greater extent, activism by LPP members, had greatly diminished. This was before the beginning of either the mass retirement of older workers or large production cutbacks. Both the timing of Communist decline and its evenness across the provincial boundary indicate that the political processes known as the Cold War were the determining factor in undermining LPP support, not structural changes in the labour force or industry.

This conclusion is sustained by our somewhat surprising finding that LPP electoral support in Alberta held up rather well between 1945 and 1953 compared to its membership activism, which totally collapsed. While electoral support is very susceptible to structural changes, activism of existing members is largely a matter of political convictions and organization. Our research indicates the extent to which the LPP in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass had lost its most important resource — active members — at a very early point in the Cold War, well before Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin's tyranny or the crushing of the Hungarian revolution by the Soviet military made communist utopian dreams seem macabre to numerous party members.

The LPP's rapid decline in the Crowsnest Pass demonstrates the power of Cold War forces in relation to local traditions of Communist support. The wave of anti-communism was certainly promoted by extra-local sources of news and analysis such as newspapers, radio, and movies, and was based upon international and national events. There were important local processes, however, that amplified and concretized the more general forces, such as joint organizing against the LPP by a CCF leader and the Catholic Church in the Alberta Crowsnest, the recruitment of anti-communist miners from eastern Europe, and the anti-communist stance of a roster of ethnic organizations. The anti-communist wave was only able to sweep through "this proletarian centre" on the basis of local organizing that made Cold War issues personal and practical to many individuals.

Into the 1950s, the LPP was able to maintain more active members on the BC side of the border than on the Alberta side. We partially attribute this to the fact that in provincial politics the LPP in the BC Crowsnest continued to be a relevant force, successfully working for the re-election of Thomas Uphill of the FDLP. In contrast, in provincial politics in the Alberta Crowsnest, the LPP abandoned a labour unity approach in the provincial election of 1948 and from that point on was a marginal political force. Significantly, the party even chose to run its provincial leader rather than a strong local candidate in the 1948 election, further limiting its

vote potential. Cold War pressures in combination with electoral irrelevance were enough to cause most Communists in the Alberta Crowsnest to withdraw from active work with the LPP after that.

In less than a decade after the end of World War II, the LPP went from being the dominant political party in the Alberta Crowsnest Pass to an insignificant force. Much was lost in these years, as Communists tended to be disciplined activists, who, because of their party culture, would unselfishly pursue struggles with a doggedness not exhibited by other socialists. The LPP was also committed to involving women in the political process like no other party. This was a particularly important contribution in the masculinized worlds of coal mines and coal miners' unions. Because power in the Crowsnest Pass centred on the class relations of coal mining, and because women were excluded from production and management jobs in the mines, they were often invisible in important public discussions. The Communists countered this trend in a number of ways. For instance, they promoted women's activism between 1946-48 in the Housewives' Consumer Association. They were also notable for having women in prominent national and provincial leadership roles, and some of these women spoke in the Crowsnest Pass at different points in the 1940s. While these contributions were small relative to the sum of women's disadvantages in the gender order of Crowsnest communities, they dwarfed the contributions of all other political parties.

Between 1945 and 1958 the balance of political parties in the BC Crowsnest became very different from the balance in the Alberta Crowsnest. In the latter case, despite a strong, collectivist working-class culture that continued to propel the labour movement and worker involvement in local government, the left collapsed as a viable force in provincial and national elections. As the contrasting events in the BC Pass suggests, this need not have been so. There had been a tradition of running labour unity candidates in Alberta provincial elections, and continuance of this tradition would definitely have maintained a viable left working-class electoral alternative during the early Cold War years. This would have been the case especially if union activists in the Alberta Crowsnest had built a local labour party along the lines of the FDLP and involved teachers, loggers, nurses, and other unionized workers, along with the three UMWA Locals. But, for this to have happened the LPP would have had to set aside its continuing rivalry with the CCF and supported a local Labour Party approach regardless of what the CCF did. Perhaps this is asking too much of an embattled national leadership that wanted to show it was still a stronger political force than the CCF in a few working-class locales across the country. Nevertheless, given the example of the FDLP right next door, and the knowledge held by local Communists that a strong labour unity provincial candidate was the only realistic hope for provincial electoral success, it is not too much to have expected a sensible strategic decision from the LPP leadership.

In the BC Crowsnest, a labour unity strategy preserved left electoral strength throughout the period in question. Up until 1952, this strategy was supported by

the unions, LPP, and independent socialists, and vociferously opposed by the CCF. Ironically, however, it was the CCF that was the long term beneficiary of the strategy. Labour and the left worked together in support of Thomas Uphill in provincial campaigns, and the CCF was able to inherit that united electoral front in the national election of 1957, since it had long become apparent that the LPP lacked the mass support necessary for electoral success.

Therefore, the resilience of the socialist workers' movement in the BC Crowsnest between 1945 and 1958 was due to a labour unity strategy that allowed labour and the left to deflect Cold War pressures and maintain mass electoral support among workers. It is significant that the strategy was built around a local organization — the FDLP — that involved all of the unions in the area, and a local politician, Thomas Uphill, who had built up a dense network of personal support during his many years as MLA and mayor. The local Labour Party and Uphill both had a long history of effective service to the working class, and people's personal knowledge of that service tended to negate the generalities of the anti-communist propaganda that they encountered. Put differently, the FDLP and Thomas Uphill had built up considerable goodwill that proved to be largely immune from destruction by Cold War arguments. The strength and resilience of the goodwill was undoubtedly a product of it being rooted in local social relations.

Nevertheless, Uphill barely held his seat in the 1949 provincial election because the CCF refused to support the labour unity approach and only one right wing candidate was on the ballot. The national and BC leaderships of the CCF held such a powerful anti-communist animus that the party ran provincial candidates in the Crowsnest Pass in the 1940s and early 1950s in a conscious attempt to split the left vote and defeat the Communist supported candidates. Indeed, Harold Winch, the BC party leader, even took the initiative in ensuring a CCF candidate in the 1944 Alberta provincial election after the Alberta provincial leadership demonstrated that it did not have the stomach for this approach. The CCF vote splitting scheme was unsuccessful in the BC Crowsnest; it was abandoned after Tom Uphill decided to support Harold Winch and the CCF, rather than W.A.C. Bennett and the SCP following the 1952 BC provincial election. Although Uphill was tempted by an offer of a Minister of Mines cabinet post in exchange for joining the SCP government, and although he was much friendlier with Bennett than Winch, Uphill publicly declared his support for the CCF in the late summer of 1952. "I'll have to support the CCF," he told a reporter, "otherwise I would be betraying many of my supporters ... mind you, Premier Bennett is an old friend of mine."⁷⁰

But on the Alberta side of the border, the vote splitting scheme worked in both the 1944 and 1948 elections, and contributed to the virtual disappearance of left electoral power in the 1950s. So fervent was the CCF's anti-communism, even prior to the end of World War II, that they chose to impose a bureaucratic electoral policy on the Crowsnest Pass rather than respect the history of decision making autonomy

⁷⁰"Uphill Thinks Socreds Will Stay Four Years," *Fernie Free Press*, 4 September 1952.

of local socialists. Unfortunately, in the 1948 Alberta provincial election the national and provincial LPP leaderships made the same error in response to CCF intransigence. They even compounded the mistake by nominating an outsider, and parachuting a number of outsiders into the constituency to take charge of the campaign.

The socialist workers' movement in the Alberta Crowsnest might have proven to be much more resilient in the 1950s had the LPP attempted to duplicate the successful labour unity strategy it had stumbled on in the BC Crowsnest. The best option available in 1948 was to nominate the Communist mayor of Blairmore, Enoch Williams, as a labour unity candidate just as they had done in 1944. In the years after the end of World War II, Williams was the most important civic leader in the Alberta Crowsnest, as well as continuing in his role in the UMWA. Most importantly, Williams took the leading role in building the first district hospital in the Pass, opened in 1949. We suspect that the goodwill that Williams created as a result of his civic service in the late 1940s more than outweighed any negative fallout from his ongoing association with the LPP. And even if he had not been elected in 1948, his candidacy would have provided a model for carrying forward united working-class political action into the 1950s.

In conclusion, our study serves as an additional illustration of the limitation of structuralist explanations of working-class solidarity and radicalism. A recent analysis of political action by coal miners in Vorkuta, a Russian arctic city, at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, offers a typical structuralist overgeneralization: "Living in secluded communities, subject to horrific working conditions but with considerable workplace autonomy, miners throughout the world are renowned for their radicalism and militance."⁷¹ A detailed study of coal strikes in Britain, 1889-1966, by Roy Church and Quentin Outram, however, shows that structural factors such as colliery seclusion and workplace size provide a very partial guide to understanding strike patterns in the British coal industry. Some collieries that were neither isolated nor large were nevertheless strike prone; a much larger number of collieries were isolated and large but not at all strike-prone. As a consequence, the authors reject "the characterization of the coalminer as the archetypal, militant artisan or proletarian worker, programmed by working experience and isolation in occupational communities to strike hard and often."⁷²

According to Church and Outram, solidarity among British coal miners was the outcome of deliberate social action which drew upon the social and cultural resources available to workers in a particular community.⁷³ Prominent local politicians like Thomas Uphill and Enoch Williams, and important local institutions

⁷¹ Michael Burawoy and Pavel Krotov, "Russian Miners Bow to the Angel of History," *Antipode* 27 (1995), 118.

⁷² Roy Church and Quentin Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity: Coalfield Conflict in Britain, 1889-1966* (Cambridge 1998), 173, 261.

⁷³ Church and Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity*, 262.

like May Day celebrations, militant and democratic unions and union run medical care were essential cultural and social resources in coal miners' struggles in the Crowsnest Pass during the early Cold War years. In the BC Crowsnest these resources were of sufficient extent, and were marshalled in such a way, that the socialist workers' movement was resilient between 1945 and 1958. In the Alberta Crowsnest, however, important local resources were squandered and the socialist workers' movement consequently collapsed as an electoral force by the early 1950s. Our research demonstrates the importance during reactionary times of preserving working-class social and cultural resources and of uniting behind respected local leaders who can maintain public loyalty in the face of a barrage of criticisms.

This research was partially supported by a short-term grant from the University of Calgary's Research Grant Committee. The authors thank Louis Grenier and Rachael McKendry for their assistance with archival research, the superb staff at the Glenbow Archives in Calgary, and Doug Luchak of the National Archives. The paper has benefited from detailed, thoughtful criticisms by the anonymous Labour / Le Travail reviewers.

The local newspapers we have cited were mainly published on a weekly basis. Microfilm copies of the Alberta papers were borrowed from the Legislative Library, Edmonton. Microfilm copies of the Fernie Free Press were consulted at the Fernie Public Library.

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