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The Rise and Fall of the Labour Party in Alberta, 1917-42

Alvin Finkel

FOR HALF A CENTURY Alberta workers have been in the anomalous position among western Canadian workers of displaying limited enthusiasm for political parties of the left. While left-wing parties have scored some political successes — for example, in the provincial election of 1944[1] — these parties have failed to maintain the solid core of working-class votes which left-of-centre parties in the other western provinces enjoy. The working-class impact on Alberta political life at mid-century was so unimpressive that C.B. Macpherson, in his classic analysis of Alberta politics in 1952, virtually ignored organized labour.[2] And a poll in 1956 demonstrated that the governing right-wing Social Credit Party enjoyed overwhelming support from both skilled and unskilled workers in the province.[3]

But for two decades before Social Credit achieved office, Alberta workers had embarked upon a political course which suggested they felt a strong sense of autonomous class feeling. They created committees, leagues, and finally parties which were under the control of the unions of skilled workers in the cities, and were dedicated to the election of working people and to a lesser extent middle-class allies of the union movement to public office. While the ideology of these labour-based political organizations oscillated uneasily between "labourism" and ethical socialism, these organizations proved capable of attracting impressive electoral support and created the contemporary view that Calgary and Edmonton were "workers' towns." This essay attempts to explain why large numbers of working people cast an unambiguous "class

[1] The CCF won 25 per cent of the provincial vote that year but only two legislative seats. The Communists won 5 per cent of the vote but no seats. *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*.

[2] C.B. Macpherson, *Democracy in Alberta: Social Credit and the Party System*, second ed., (Toronto 1962).

[3] Owen Anderson, "The Alberta Social Credit Party: An Empirical Analysis of Membership, Characteristics, Participation and Opinion," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Alberta, 1972), 46.

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vote" for two decades in Alberta and why their voting patterns began to change in the mid-1930s. It also attempts to explain the success of the Canadian Labour Party in Alberta despite its fractious history elsewhere in the country.

I

WHEN ALBERTA BECAME A province in 1905, western agricultural expansion was in full swing. The CPR's Ogden Shops in Calgary were the city's major employer and a number of food processors, led by Burns, also employed hundreds of workers. In Edmonton, meanwhile, both the establishment of Canadian Northern shops and the choice of the city as the provincial capital gave a boost to the existing employment opportunities provided by agricultural servicing, manufacturing, and mining.[4] The city's population reached 70,000 by World War I.[5] Construction boomed and drew in skilled workers from throughout the country as well as from overseas; indeed the fledgling construction trades unions spent much of their time trying to discourage union members from outside the province from flocking to Calgary and Edmonton, thereby forcing down wages by providing employers with an overwhelming supply of skilled workers.[6]

The skilled construction workers, along with printing trades workers, formed the Calgary Trades and Labour Council in 1901, and an Edmonton counterpart in 1905. By World War I, these councils also represented such diverse groups as barbers, musicians, retail clerks, journeyworker tailors, garment workers, hotel and restaurant employees, and the various railway trades. The construction workers, railway trades, and the printers, however, dominated council committees.[7]

Initially, the two urban trades councils restricted their activity to the adjustment of "difficulties arising between employers and employees in different trades" and did not directly concern themselves with politics.[8] Inevitably,

[4] On the early economic development of Calgary, see Max Foran, *Calgary: An Illustrated History* (Toronto 1978), 25-50; on turn-of-the-century Edmonton, see Carl Betke, "The Original City of Edmonton: A Derivative Prairie Urban Community," in Alan F. Artibise, ed., *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development* (Regina 1981), 309-45. The early formation of unions in Alberta is detailed in Warren Caragata, *Alberta Labor: A Heritage Untold* (Toronto 1979), 9-28.

[5] *Edmonton Journal*, 12 July 1935, reported the city's 1914 population as 72,516.

[6] United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, Local 1325 (Edmonton) papers are replete with motions calling on the local officers to inform locals of the union throughout the country that Edmonton had a surfeit of carpenters. UBCJ Papers, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton.

[7] Minutes of Edmonton Trades and Labour Council, 2 December 1905, ETLC Papers, Provincial Archives of Alberta; Minutes of Calgary Trades and Labour Council, various meetings, CTLC Papers, Glenbow Archives, Calgary.

[8] The minutes of Edmonton Trades and Labour Council of 18 December 1905 listed the two goals of the council as "the mutual federation of trades and labor" and the adjustment of disputes.

however, they were soon petitioning governments on behalf of their members, whether it was to encourage the city councils to pay union rates to civic employees or, in a more reactionary vein, to get the federal government to prevent Asians from entering Canada.[9] Such lobbying did not immediately lead to independent political activity. Indeed, when the East End Ratepayers' Association in Edmonton offered to endorse any two candidates nominated by the trades council for the municipal election in 1907, the council declined to nominate candidates. Instead it offered to endorse all candidates who favoured a civic franchise for tenants as well as a more equal distribution of civic spending among rich and poor sections of the city than then prevailed.[10] The council agreed to become a member of the Edmonton Board of Trade and both the Edmonton and Calgary councils endorsed the radical farmers' newspaper as the official newspaper of their cities.[11]

A former president of the Calgary council, James Worsley, a metal worker, had attempted briefly to provide Calgary workers with a more radical newspaper. He and CPR clerk Alfred Palmer published a newspaper called *The Bond of Brotherhood* from May 1903 to June 1904. While this journal espoused a class collaborationist viewpoint on industrial relations, it advocated a peaceful political evolution towards socialism. Apparently, however, the *Bond*'s socialism "proved to be a source of disunity within the labour community" and the paper died an early death because of "lack of funds, insufficient subscribers, opposition from employers, and the departure of James Worsley for England."[12]

Socialism was not the "source of disunity" in the mining districts that it may have been in the formative years of the urban labour movement. Lethbridge elected Donald McNabb, a coal miner and moderate socialist, in a provincial by-election in January 1909. McNabb, however, had won by acclamation and proved unable even to keep his deposit in the general election.[13] More successful was Charlie O'Brien, a Socialist Party candidate in the Crow's Nest Pass, who squeaked to a victory by 35 votes in the 1909 provincial election; his defeat by a Liberal in the 1913 election by a mere 81 votes left the legislature without working-class representation for the next four years.[14]

[9] ETCL Minutes, 20 May 1907; 19 August 1907.
[10] *Ibid.*, 7 October 1907.
[11] *Ibid.*, 5 August 1907; 2 December 1907.
[12] Henry C. Klassen, "The Bond of Brotherhood and Calgary Workingmen," in Anthony W. Rasporich and Henry C. Klassen, eds., *Frontier Calgary: Town, City and Region 1875-1914* (Calgary 1975), 267-71.
[13] Caragata, *Alberta Labor*, 33, 35. Lethbridge was the first Alberta constituency in which a self-styled Labour candidate had run for provincial office. Though no Labour candidates were in the running in Alberta's first provincial election in 1905, an independent Labourite ran in a by-election in Lethbridge in April 1906, and receive 463 votes against 543 for the victorious Liberal and 231 for the Conservative.
[14] A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement* (Toronto 1977), 62.

The urban trade unionists, while remaining suspicious of the revolutionary ideal which the Socialist Party promoted, did however develop by 1911 a "labourist" consciousness of the type described by Craig Heron:

> Labourism was the political expression of skilled men and women who worked with their hands and thus made "honest toil" the touchstone of their value system; it was also the politics of people who cherished the personal freedoms which the great struggles for popular democracy in the British political system had brought. In its narrowest, probably most common form, this meant the freedom to be left alone. Certainly it involved a suspicion of too much intervention into their lives by either their employers or the state. In its more aggressive manifestations, however, freedom became the right to full participation in all aspects of social and political life. The bitterness at the exclusion of the working class from this full life prompted labourists' most militant, class-conscious flourishes.[15]

In 1911, the Calgary Trades and Labour Council amended the preamble in its constitution to make political activity a major goal of the council. The wording reflected classic labourist thinking:

> With the introduction of the modern machinery of production and the harnessing of the forces of nature, it is only fitting that the wealth producers should participate in the benefits derived. We therefore pledge to unceasingly demand a universal work-day of eight hours or less as long as labour power is sold as a commodity. We believe there is more efficiency in electing working-class representatives to write our law than by supplicatory methods, and our efforts will be more in that direction in future. We are firmly convinced that the future belongs to the only useful people in human society — the working class.[16]

Such class bitterness had resulted from frustration with the council's lack of success in its lobbying efforts with all levels of government. It had been unable to convince city councillors either to pay union rates to all unionized civic employees or to insist that contractors receiving city business pay union rates; its complaints about lack of enforcement of provincial labour laws had gone unanswered; and its endless attempts to convince the federal government that uncontrolled immigration was the cause of growing unemployment in the West fell on deaf ears.[17] The provincial wings of the Conservative and Liberal parties were dominated by local business people and lawyers who lacked the will or foresight to coopt local labour leaders as their central Canadian counterparts, on occasion, proved able to do.[18]

[15] Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 74.

[16] "Rules of the Calgary Trades and Labour Council (revised 1911)," 2, CTLC files, Box 14.

[17] Minutes of both trades councils from 1909 on demonstrated a growing frustration with the apparent lack of regard for labour's political views evident at all levels of government. On the evolution of the Calgary council see Elizabeth Ann Taraska, "The Calgary Craft Union Movement," (M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1972).

[18] On the Liberal Party of this period, see L.G. Thomas, *The Liberal Party in Alberta* (Toronto 1959). The Conservatives were led by R.B. Bennett, later to become prime

Labour Day, 1909, taken from Ernest Brown's studio looking west. From Provincial Archives of Alberta: E. Brown Collection B4801.

Labour leaders in Alberta, in common with their colleagues throughout the country, thus groped towards political action less from a desire for total social transformation than from the need to participate in political decision-making. Like other labour leaders in the West, moreover, they saw the necessity of presenting themselves as an alternative to the Industrial Workers of the World in attempts to unionize unskilled workers and to the Socialist Party in attempts to represent workers politically.[19]

Both the Edmonton and Calgary trades councils followed a policy of endorsing only trade unionists for political office. Several candidates nominated by the trades councils were elected in both cities between 1912 and 1917, a period during which the councils provided neither a platform for the candidates they endorsed nor a continuing electoral organization. And Scottish-born stonemason Alex Ross, to date the only trade unionist who has served in an Alberta cabinet, defeated a Liberal 1,328 votes to 1,273 (this was the last provincial election before 1959 in which Calgary and Edmonton were divided into constituencies; from 1921 through 1955, Edmontonians and Calgarians each elected first five and later six representatives in one city-wide

minister of Canada. At the time Alberta became a province, Bennett was the CPR lawyer in Calgary and neither he nor his party proved a match for the Liberals.

[19] Caragata, *Alberta Labor*, 35, 41.

constituency).[20] But the growth of the union movement and of worker militancy during the war soon made such a limited labour political involvement appear insufficient.

II

THE RADICALISM ENGENDERED BY World War I has been well documented.[21] In Alberta, as elsewhere, union organizing flourished throughout the period of labour shortages and the confidence and aggressiveness of the trade union movement grew apace.[22] The Calgary Trades and Labour Council threatened a general strike in 1918 if city hotels and restaurants continued to refuse to recognize trade unions for their workers.[23] While the strike failed to materialize,[24] the vote of 28 to 6 in its favour among council delegates was a dramatic turnaround from the 14 to 3 vote in 1914 against staging a two-day sympathy strike on behalf of the embattled Vancouver Island miners.[25] Calgary workers had gained confidence in their ability to flex their collective muscles to support fellow workers.

In 1919 the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council, which had once endorsed a farmers' newspaper as labour's official organ, began its own weekly newspaper, the *Edmonton Free Press*. By the end of 1920, this newspaper had become the *Alberta Labor News* and acted as the official organ for the Alberta Federation of Labour.[26] Labour was beginning to see itself as a separate social entity with interests distinct from all other social groups. The Calgary trades council, for example, rejected a request for affiliation from the radical Calgary United Farmers of Alberta local in 1918, claiming there was "too much at variance between the aims of the farmers and workers."[27]

The separate labour newspaper and the willingness to consider sympathetic strikes were not the only signs of a growing labour sense of forming a distinct social class whose interests were opposed to those of other classes. A Labour Church in both Calgary and Edmonton ministered to the souls of those who continued to be believers but who felt the moneychangers controlled the tem-

[20] *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*, 1919, 472.

[21] See, for example, McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries*, 118-64; and Gregory S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (1984), 11-44.

[22] The number of locals affiliated with the trades councils in the two largest cities doubled and so did attendance at council meetings. ETLC and CTLC Minutes.

[23] *CTLC Minutes*, 26 April 1918.

[24] The Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union signed two hotels and six restaurants and withdrew their call for a general strike in favour of a call for a boycott of the non-union establishments. CTLC Minutes, 8 July 1918.

[25] *Ibid.*, 23 January 1914.

[26] *Edmonton Free Press*, 12 April 1919; *Alberta Labor News*, 4 September 1920.

[27] CTLC Minutes, 18 January 1918.

ples.[28] Labour education classes were sponsored by the trades councils (though Calgary reported disappointing attendance).[29] Labour Day picnics on St. George's Island near Calgary attracted 3,000 unionists and their families; Labour Day parades in Edmonton were similarly well attended.[30] Within this context of increased working-class confidence and activity, it was inevitable that class-based political action would take place. Many workers, at least during the period from 1919 to 1921, preferred the syndicalist alternative to electoral politics. The One Big Union, while more popular in the mining towns than in the cities, enjoyed considerable support.[31] But the 1919 general strike, in sympathy with the Winnipeg strikers, lasted four weeks in both Edmonton and Calgary and had the endorsation of the labour councils in the two cities, both of which were anti-OBU.[32] The council leaders, however, no longer advocated the pure labourist politics of the pre-war period; they now advocated ethical socialism and argued that social justice for labour required a complete social transformation.

III

THE CREATION OF AN Alberta branch of the Dominion Labour Party in January 1919, marked the change from pure labourism to ethical socialism as the official ideology of the Alberta labour movement. Anger over conscription, war profiteering, and the federal government's clampdown on radicals, had all contributed to the view that a new order of society should be labour's goal.

Working-class Marxists emphasized the view that hostile relations between the capitalist class and the working class were inevitable. Arguing that a ruling class never abandons power without a struggle, they believed that workers must be educated to recognize the limitations that faced them despite their possession of the ballot. Only a militant — and preferably, armed — proletariat could

[28] Activities of the Labour Church in Edmonton and Calgary are discussed in *Alberta Labor News*, 5 March 1921; 7 May 1921; 11 June 1921; 18 October 1924; 11 July 1925; and CTLC Minutes, 13 September 1918 and 12 September 1919. See also Anthony Mardiros, *William Irvine: The Life of a Prairie Radical* (Toronto 1979), 76.

[29] CTLC Minutes, 19 November 1920.

[30] *Alberta Labor News*, 11 September 1920.

[31] Caragata, *Alberta Labor*, 72, 77-9.

[32] The *Edmonton Free Press* began the attack on the OBU in its first edition on 12 April 1919 and did not let up for several years. Organized labour's sponsorship of the general strikes is indicated in the *Edmonton Free Press*, 24 May 1919. By 7 June, however, the *Edmonton Free Press* indicated the view that general strikes could not become labour's chief method of gaining its demands; the official journal of the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council lauded collective bargaining and labour politics as an alternative to syndicalism. Among union locals expelled temporarily from the Edmonton TLC for working for the formation of the OBU were carpenters, miners, machinists, and labourers. Several important Labour Party figures in Calgary also supported the OBU including Aldermen A.G. Broatch and Bob Tallon, future alderman Bob Parkyn, and a future DLP president, Walter Smitten. Mardiros, *Irvine*, 71.

hope to force the capitalists not to repress or sabotage a working-class victory, whether at the polls or in a general strike. Ethical socialists, by contrast, were fairly sanguine about the ballot box as a means of change and less concerned about various potential forms of ruling-class sabotage. Rather than speaking of the inevitable hostility between an exploiting class and an exploited class, they stressed the moral superiority of socialism with its emphasis on production for use over capitalism with its emphasis on production for profit. If their analysis was incomplete, it was nevertheless popular among skilled workers whose views had shifted leftward because of anger over conscription, war profiteering, and the federal government's clampdown on radicals.[33]

The framework for a party organization had been established in Edmonton and Calgary in 1917. Shortly after the election of Alexander Ross to the legislature, the young president of the Calgary Trades and Labour Council, Elmer Roper — a man whose 50-year political career included a long period of leadership of the provincial CCF (1942-55) and a shorter stint as mayor of Edmonton (1959-63) — pressed the Calgary council to establish a permanent Labour Representation League. Such leagues had been the forerunners of the Labour Party in Britain and closer to home, of the Labour Party in Manitoba. William Irvine, a Unitarian preacher and the guiding force behind the farm-oriented Non-Partisan League, joined Roper and Ross in encouraging the formation of a Labour League. The Calgary League was to be financed by an assessment of 25 cents on each unionist belonging to a union affiliated with the council.[34] Later that same year, Roper, having moved to Edmonton to become foreman in the *Edmonton Bulletin* printshop, was instrumental in encouraging the Edmonton council to establish a parallel body.[35]

While the leagues mounted the anti-conscription campaigns of 1917, their leaders were themselves the major advocates in favour of a province-wide labour party committed to a socialist programme.[36] The federal government's conscription of labour but not of wealth was, no doubt, the key catalyst in shifting labour's viewpoint leftward. But another major factor was the adoption by the British Labour Party of a socialist programme for post-war Britain. The Alberta branch of the Dominion Labour Party, at its founding convention in

[33] Working-class Marxists are discussed in Norman Penner, *The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis* (Scarborough 1977) and McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries*, among other works. The views of Canada's best-known ethical socialist, J.S. Woodsworth, are critically evaluated by Allen Mills in "Cooperation and Community in the Thought of J.S. Woodsworth," *Labour/Le Travail*, 14 (1984), 103-20; and in "The Later Thought of J.S. Woodsworth, 1918-1942: An Essay in Revision," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 17, 3 (1982), 75-95. Somewhat less critical but still useful in outlining the political views of ethical socialists are two biographies: Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto 1959) and Anthony Mardiros, *Irvine*.

[34] CTLC Minutes, 16 March 1917.

[35] ETLC Minutes, 4 May 1917.

[36] Finkel interview with Elmer Roper in Victoria, 21 February 1984.

January 1919, adopted the BLP's programme as its own. This programme, noted the *Edmonton Free Press,* supported the gradual socialization of industry, the allotment of "surplus wealth for the common good," a "revolution in national finance," and guarantees of minimum incomes for all citizens.[37] Elmer Roper, one of the party founders and, as editor first of the *Edmonton Free Press* and later the *Alberta Labor News,* the chief party propagandist, recalled 65 years later that "my whole philosophy was pretty well based on my knowledge of the British Labour Party and my association with some Labour Party people."[38]

But the change in labour thinking during this period should not be overstated. As Craig Heron observes, labourists and ethical socialists had achieved a measure of cooperation during the war. But the split between supporters of craft unionism and industrial unionism left a legacy of distrust that caused many "labourist craftsworkers" to oppose "full-scale socialism."[39] In Alberta, however, the craft unions, having embraced socialist philosophy, did not formally abandon it for many years to come. But their party, the DLP, subordinated its socialist philosophy to labourist demands and did not oppose crafts unions.

The DLP, it must be emphasized — and later the Canadian Labour Party — was largely a creature of the trade unions in the province. Its founding convention was timed to coincide with the conclusion of the Alberta Federation of Labour convention for 1919.[40] Active DLP locals existed only in cities and towns where the labour movement was well-organized: Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and the mining towns near Drumheller, Edson, and, once the OBU had been broken, in the Crow's Nest Pass.[41] While the party was open to participation both by union affiliates and individuals, the party's elected officials and its candidates in elections were generally the same people who participated in the labour councils and the Alberta Federation of Labour. The election federally of preacher William Irvine in Calgary in 1921 and solicitor William Adshead in 1926 on the Labour ticket provides evidence that middle-class ethical socialists influenced the development of both the DLP and CLP. But seven of eight elected Labour candidates in the provincial house between 1921 and 1935 were active trade unionists and so were most elected Labour civic officials, including Labour mayors in Edmonton and Edson.[42]

[37] *Edmonton Free Press,* 6 September 1919.
[38] Roper, interview.
[39] Heron, "Labourism," 71.
[40] CTLC Minutes, 4 December 1918.
[41] On the evidence of articles in the *Alberta Labor News.*
[42] Irvine, running in Calgary East, received 6,135 votes to 4,237 for his Conservative opponent and 3,684 for the Liberal. *Canadian Parliamentary Guide.* Information on Labour MLAs is found in various editions of *Canadian Parliamentary Guide.* Edmonton's Labour mayor Dan Knott was a printer; Edson's Labour mayor A.D. MacMillan was an assistant locomotive fireman at the Canadian National Railways. Ten of twelve alderpeople elected on a Labour ticket in Calgary between 1913 and 1938 as well as a

And printer Fred White, leader of the Labour caucus in the Alberta legislature from 1926 to 1935, was president of the Alberta Federation of Labour from 1926 to 1941 as well as a long-serving secretary of the Calgary Trades and Labour Council and a Labour alderman for most of the period from 1917 to 1939. Even Irvine, it might be mentioned, despite his background as a preacher, had been working as a railway labourer to two years (1918-20) before his election in 1921; but he was regarded as an intellectual rather than as a worker by most party members even during that period, according to Elmer Roper.[43]

The overlap in leadership of the DLP (and later the CLP) with the trade union leadership provided only one of the links between the economic and political organizations of organized workers. The official organ of the Alberta Federation of Labour, the *Alberta Labor News*, edited by Elmer Roper, secretary-treasurer of the AFL from 1922 to 1934, acted as well as a *de facto* organ of the Labour Party.[44] Candidates for civic office on the DLP ticket in Edmonton and Calgary were chosen jointly by the DLP executive and a trades council sub-committee.[45] And the DLP staged the rallies in support of the workers who abided by the labour councils' call for sympathetic strikes with the Winnipeg strikers. Later, it also raised funds to aid the Winnipeg strike leaders tried after the strike.[46]

The close relationship of the Dominion Labour Party with the trade unions insured that the DLP would be well-funded and was unlikely to have rifts with the trade union movement. Eventually, however, it would also result in a subordination of the political labour movement to the interests of the trade unions. But, from the start, there were differences within the political labour movement about tactical questions, particularly relations with the organized farmers who were breaking with the old-line parties to seek group representation for the agricultural classes.

Labour commissioner were trade unionists as were eight of twelve Labour alderpeople elected in Edmonton during that period. "Civic Election Results," City of Edmonton Archives; City of Calgary Papers, Glenbow Archives.

[43] Information on White is from *Canadian Parliamentary Guide* and City of Calgary Papers. Roper's comments on Irvine were made in his interview with the author. For an appreciation of the impact of this truly remarkable individual on labour politics and politics more generally both in Alberta and nationally, see Mardiros, *Irvine*.

[44] The *Alberta Labor News* provides the most comprehensive record of the DLP and CLP available. Roper served as president of the party for a number of years and always held an executive position in the organization. The *News* devoted almost as much attention to the party activities as to trade union activities. The 4 September 1920 edition of the *News* announced the AFL's adoption of the paper as the provincial labour paper.

[45] *Edmonton Free Press*, 18 October 1919.

[46] *Ibid.*, 17 January 1920.

IV

THE FARM MOVEMENT IN Alberta, which had restricted its political activities to lobbying before World War I, had become increasingly disillusioned with the old-line parties, particularly when the wartime Conservative and Union (Conservative and conscriptionist Liberal) governments proved unwilling to control profiteering. In common with farm movements across the country (except in Quebec), it decided after the war that an electoral wing of the farmers' movement was needed to circumvent the old-line parties' political domination. The United Farmers of Alberta, the major farmers' organization in the province, had 38,000 members in 1921, a significant minority of whom had been active in the Non-Partisan League, in which William Irvine had played a major role. The NPL, modeled after the organization which formed the government of North Dakota from 1916 to 1922, called for a grassroots control over constituency representatives rather than party caucus control over the individual MLA. It was the pressure of the NPL which induced the UFA to enter the political arena, and the UFA's strength among the farming population guaranteed a decisive victory in the 1921 provincial election.

UFA president Henry Wise Wood, who had been reticent about the farmers' movement running candidates for office, was determined that the UFA not become another traditional political party. He espoused a philosophy of "group government" which entailed direct representation of various economic groups — as opposed to partisan representatives of geographical constituencies — in legislatures. While it was always a puzzle how such a system could be superimposed upon the existing legislative set-up, Wood's philosophy opened the door to cooperation between "groups" or social classes without any group being forced to compromise its philosophy or its policies. And the UFA therefore offered an olive branch to labour.[47]

Labour, recognizing that the group consciousness of the farmers was likely to become a central factor in the province's politics, proved willing to effect an alliance with the UFA. Although the Calgary Trades and Labour Council had rejected the local UFA as an affiliate, many DLP activists in Calgary and elsewhere joined UFA activists in promoting electoral cooperation. They feared that the Liberals would win seats in which both the UFA and DLP nominated candidates. But from labour's point of view, the alliance was purely tactical. Elmer Roper commented editorially:

[47] On the reactions of farmers to Union government policies, see John Herd Thompson, *The Harvests of War: the Prairie West, 1914-1918* (Toronto 1978), 148-56. The rise of the farmers' political movement nationally is detailed in W.L. Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada* (Toronto 1950). The United Farmers of Alberta decision to enter the political arena is discussed in Macpherson, *Democracy in Alberta*, 44-54. A biography of Henry Wise Wood, the major figure in the early UFA, is W.K. Rolph, *Henry Wise Wood of Alberta* (Toronto 1950).

If it is seen to be advisable to cooperate in elections, as was done in East Calgary in the case of William Irvine, MP, such cooperation should not compromise the position of either group. Mr. Irvine, it will be remembered, is the Labor representative. He is only answerable to Labor and is not subject in any way to any other organization. The cooperation was a cooperation of voting strength only. The same applies to Robert Gardiner, the UFA member for Medicine Hat, who was supported by Labor. It should be freely admitted that in East Calgary the farmers had no candidates because they doubted their ability to elect one, and their support was given to Labor as the group that more nearly represented the economic position of the farmers. The same applies to the reverse situation in Medicine Hat.[48]

Roper's statement understates the complexity of relations between the DLP (and later the CLP) and the UFA organizations. Labour recognized that in the large mixed urban-rural federal constituencies only a few seats could be won by a Labour candidate. But it was not willing to endorse anyone the farmers wished to nominate and threatened to run its own candidate in 1921 in two Edmonton area seats when the United Farmers rejected Labour-endorsed farmers in favour of other candidates; the DLP was only appeased when a third Edmonton-area constituency agreed to run D.M. Kennedy, who was regarded as pro-labour.[49] In Lethbridge, the DLP and UFA both sought the right to nominate, and the two could not agree to a common candidate; both ran and the results demonstrated a temporary collapse of old-line party support in the riding.[50] The farmers in Medicine Hat, on the other hand, anxious to have a candidate acceptable to the railway workers of the city, chose Robert Gardiner, who presented himself as a Farmer-Labour candidate and endorsed the DLP programme.[51] Similarly, Ted Garland, a pro-Labour farmer in the Calgary-area seat of Bow River, owed his nomination, in part, to the assurance that no Labour candidate would be nominated against him.[52] Gardiner, Garland, Kennedy, and William Irvine, who was chosen as a UFA candidate for Wetaskiwin in 1926 after his defeat in Calgary in 1921, formed the core of the "Ginger Group" who worked with the Labour members in the commons and eventually joined with them to found the CCF.

Labour's cooperation with the UFA thus accounts in part for the relative radicalism of a majority of the elected UFA MPs. But its cooperation with the UFA for the provincial elections in 1921 produced a more modest success and

[48] *Alberta Labor News*, 14 October 1922.

[49] *Ibid.*, 15 October 1921; 19 November 1921. Ironically the farmer candidates who Labour supported, Rich Sheppard and George Bevington, eventually became Social Credit activitists. So did S.A.G. Barnes, an insurance adjuster and the man Labour had initially nominated to run in West Edmonton before D.M. Kennedy was chosen by the UFA.

[50] *Ibid.*, 26 November 1921. The results were Jelliff (UFA), 4,961; Finn (Labour), 3,170; Ball (Conservative), 1,328; and Lovering (Liberal), 615. *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*.

[51] *Alberta Labor News*, 4 June 1921.

[52] *Ibid.*, 26 November 1921.

ultimately proved fatal for the Labour Party. The provincial constituencies were small enough generally to be easily classified as dominantly urban or dominantly rural, and the DLP was rarely in a position to influence a UFA constituency's choice of candidates. And when the farmers did not have to appease the DLP, they chose candidates who were community leaders rather than proven friends of labour.[53]

But, while the United Farmer administration might be conservative, Premier Herbert Greenfield believed sufficiently in the "group government" principle to invite Alex Ross, one of four elected DLP members, to join the cabinet as minister of public works. Ross, with 7,294 votes, had topped the polls in Calgary, now a multi-member constituency, which, for this election only, was to be represented by the top five vote-getters (proportional representation had been introduced by 1926). The other elected Calgary Labourite, Fred White, received 6,190 votes, 210 votes less than the second-place finisher and almost a thousand votes ahead of the fourth-place finisher. The other elected Labourites were railway workers William Johnson in Medicine Hat and miner P.M. Christophers in Rocky Mountain (the Crow's Nest Pass seat). Medicine Hat was a two-member urban-rural constituency and the UFA and CLP agreed to run one candidate each. The result was a victory for both parties, with Johnson winning 3,602 votes and the Farmer candidate winning 4,165, with their two "independent" opponents trailing with 2,278 and 2,013 votes respectively. Christophers carried Rocky Mountain with 1,304 of the 3,258 ballots cast.[54]

Ross, originally elected as a Calgary Labour Council candidate in 1917, had been the DLP's first president. Nevertheless, he does not appear to have consulted formally with his party as to whether he should join the cabinet. But the consistent praise he received in the *Alberta Labor News* for his efforts to represent Labour's viewpoint in cabinet deliberations suggests that the trade union leaders within the party, at least, appreciated his efforts. Ross was one of the more open-minded union officials in the province. He had declined to engage in attacks upon the OBU and, unlike many other DLP leaders, was enthusiastic about the Soviet revolution and as willing to learn from Russian Communists as British Labourites.[55] His participation in the cabinet, however,

[53] On the conservatism of the United Farmers of Alberta administrations, see Carl F. Betke, "Farm Politics in an Urban Age: The Decline of the United Farmers of Alberta After 1921," in Lewis H. Thomas, ed., *Essays on Western History* (Edmonton 1976), 175-89.

[54] The votes for the winners in Calgary were: Ross (Labour), 7,294; Edwards (Independent), 6,400; White (Labour), 6,190; Marshall (Liberal), 5,260; Pearson (Independent), 5,141. In Rocky Mountain P.M. Christophers won 1,304 of the 3,258 votes cast. All five Edmonton seats went Liberal. The three Labour candidates received 3,736, 2,931, and 2,515 votes. The winning members of the Liberal slate polled between 5,289 and 6,498 votes. *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*.

[55] Years later, Elmer Roper remained at a loss to explain Ross's defeat in 1926, Roper interview. Ross's attitudes to the OBU and the Soviet Union are indicated in *Edmonton*

demonstrated that the tension between labourism and socialism in the Labour Party programme was gradually being resolved in favour of labourism.

Still, the Labour Party did not shy away from proposals which the electorate might consider radical. Its civic platform in Edmonton and Calgary included a call for the cities to lease land both for industrial purposes and homebuilding rather than to sell it. According to the *Edmonton Free Press*, this was seen as a "step in the direction of socialization of the land, and is calculated to create a community interest that would be without precedent."[56] While this declaration was made before the DLP became a silent partner of the UFA government, organized labour was not anxious to bury its socialist rhetoric. Indeed, the creation of a provincial branch of the Canadian Labour Party as a successor to the DLP provided an opportunity for a restatement of its socialist commitment.

V

THE FOUNDING CONVENTION OF THE Alberta section of the Canadian Labour Party occurred shortly after the founding meeting of the national CLP in 1921. The party enjoyed little success outside Alberta. Its success in this province can largely be attributed to the fact that its establishment meant little more than a name change for the province's only labour party of consequence, the Dominion Labour Party. The founding members of the CLP in Alberta were all DLP activists and the four DLP members of the legislature as well as MP William Irvine and all elected DLP aldermen aligned themselves with the new organization. The DLP had been commonly referred to in the newspapers as "the Labour Party" and the Canadian Labour Party was also usually mentioned in the same way. The parties' structures were also similar. Membership in the DLP had been open to members of union affiliates and to city-wide party organizations for non-unionists wishing to affiliate with the party. The CLP constitution indicated that the party was to be composed of a collection of affiliated organizations, including "trade unions, socialist societies, co-operative societies and local labour parties."[57] Local labour parties included the general membership affiliates of the DLP, some of whom chose to retain the Dominion Labour Party name.

The official organ of the Alberta Federation of Labour justified this form of party organization with reference to British experience — its usual reference point.

As in the old land, the Canadian political Labor movement should, and will, provide an opportunity for the affiliation of all working-class organizations. Until such a move is

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Free Press, 12 April 1919, and a report of his address on the speech from the throne, *Alberta Labor News*, 28 February 1920.

[56] *Edmonton Free Press*, 15 November 1919.

[57] "Constitution of Alberta Section of the Canadian Labour Party," *Alberta Labor News*, 26 November 1921.

consummated the success of Labor in politics in Canada will be spasmodic and evanescent at best.[58]

The CLP platform approved at the founding convention — which had delegates only from Calgary, Edmonton, Drumheller, and Medicine Hat — was largely a copy of the platform adopted by the Calgary branch of the Dominion Labour Party for the federal election in 1921.[59] One would scarcely have guessed that this was the platform of a party already politically compromised by a close relationship with a mildly reformist Farmer administration. "We have in view," it began, "a complete change in our present economic and social system. In this we recognize our solidarity with workers the world over."[60]

The party indicated that its "ultimate economic aims" were "the social ownership of the means of wealth production and distribution," and the organization of educational institutions "so that the function of education will be to prepare for a complete living." "Employment for all" was listed as an immediate aim. Other party pledges were higher taxes on big incomes, a corporations profit tax, public ownership and control of financial institutions, public operations of hospitals, unemployment insurance (though it might seem to contradict "employment for all") and international disarmament.[61]

The formation of the CLP, however, had no impact on Labour's willingness to work with the UFA or on much else affecting Labour's political strategy. But it did produce one major change that had a lasting impact on Labour politics provincially: it allowed the fledgling Communist Party to join the province's dominant political labour organization.

VI

THE COMMUNISTS IN ALBERTA joined the Canadian Labour Party as they did everywhere in Canada. So did the Communist-sympathizing ethnic organizations such as the Ukrainian Labour and Farm Temple Association.[62] The Comintern policy of the period enjoined Communists to work inside the trade unions to create a left-wing which would break with the reformist practice of the existing union leadership. And, because the CLP was a party largely sponsored by the unions, Communists were also expected to work inside this organization to promote the Communist viewpoint.[63]

[58] *Ibid.*, 1 October 1921.
[59] *Ibid.*, 24 September 1921.
[60] *Ibid.*, 26 November 1921.
[61] *Ibid.*
[62] Communists who were members of unions affiliated with the CLP were automatically CLP members. But the Communist Party and ULFTA were also affiliates of the CLP. So members of these organizations who were not members of a union affiliate also became members of the CLP.
[63] Norman Penner, *The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis* (Toronto 1977), 130-1;

For a few years, the Communists and the established union leadership sought to accommodate each other's presence in the Canadian Labour Party. Both sides worked to elect CLP candidates of the opposing faction.[64] The presence of the Communists, in fact, forced the union leadership to promote a degree of party participation which did not exist before the Communists entered the scene and would not survive their forced exit from the CLP in 1929. Party conventions, both provincially and locally, were attended by delegates on the basis of the voting strength of an affiliate and were little susceptible to Communist majorities. But the selection of party candidates for elections in Edmonton and Calgary was done at a meeting open to all members of groups affiliated with the party. Communists and their supporters unsurprisingly took advantage of their votes to attempt to nominate supporters of their party as CLP candidates. The CLP establishment, forced to work hard to prevent Communists from sweeping the board, made sure that non-Communist workers were encouraged to attend nominating conventions. The result was some large turnouts for nominating meetings. For example, 875 of a possible 2,000 voters participated in the nomination of the five Edmonton Labour candidates for the 1926 provincial election.[65] Four years later, with the Communists purged, fewer than half as many people participated in the nomination process.[66]

The CLP and the Communists worked together not only in elections but also to sponsor unemployed organizations, rallies, speakers, and demonstrations,

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Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour 1880-1930* (Kingston 1968), 254-6; Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal 1981), 106-9; and *Canada's Party of Socialism: History of the Communist Party of Canada 1921-1976* (Toronto 1982), 41-3. The second convention of the Workers' (Communist) Party, in February 1923, adopted the following statement on the Canadian Labour Party as part of its resolution on the United Front: "As the Labour Party is organized on a federated basis, inclusive of industrial as well as political organizations, it becomes the instrument for establishing a common front on all the vital issues of the labour movement. The Workers' Party not only reaffirms its resolution to work inside the Labour Party, but clearly recognizes the necessity for making it a really effective instrument of aggressive political action. The Workers' Party will join and strengthen the sections of the Labour Party, wherever there are such, take the initiative in their creation where these are absent, will attempt to bring about their greater coordination throughout the country; in short will strive for a strong, united, Dominion-wide party, filled with a truly proletarian spirit, and broadened conception of political action, in place of the present narrowly parliamentary conception. The basis and guarantee for a real proletarian development of the Labour Party must be the redoubled effort to renovate the trade union movement."

[64] The *Alberta Labor News*, for example, championed Jan Lakeman, a Communist leader, in the federal election of 1926 once he had been nominated by a CLP convention. *Alberta Labor News*, 21 August 1926.

[65] *Alberta Labor News*, 8 May 1926; there were 31 organizations with 2,060 members affiliated to the Edmonton Central Council Labour Party in February 1926. *Alberta Labor News*, 26 March 1927.

[66] *Ibid.*, 17 May 1930; 402 members voted at the nominating convention in Edmonton that year.

all of which attracted the watchful eyes of the Alberta Provincial Police. Police spies noted the enthusiastic response of workers to such events as the annual May Day mass meeting. In 1923, for example, as workers in Edmonton rallied on May Day to support striking Edmonton-area coal miners as well as to commemorate the international day of working people, a police observer reported the solidarity of a crown addressed by both Communist and labour leaders. He described the scene:

> . . . I was invited to attend this meeting by Cummings of the Labor Church and upon my arrival there that evening at 7:10 the band was playing, around which several hundred people had gathered. Radical literature was being sold by numerous men and women although they had a news stand erected near the Market Building. In back of the news stand there were banners there with the following inscriptions "Workers of the World Unite" "You have nothing to loose [sic] but your chains" "You have the world to gain." These were carried in the parade which started about 7:40 headed by one band, and the CNR employees band was about in the middle of the column, which was over thousand [sic] strong. . . . All the leaders of the Friends of Soviet Russia were there including some of the Labor Church leaders. . . . A member of the Trades and Labor Congress read a lecture which he had prepared. . . . [A collection taken was] to be divided between the strikers and the strikers' wives committee, to help them in their coming trial.[67]

The police agent observed that George Latham, the CLP president, a non-Communist, in his address to the meeting, warned that anti-communism was a tool of the bosses. He had been in Britain during the British railway strike of 1919 and, though he had been told that the strikers were Bolshevists, he observed at a railway workers' demonstration that "seven out of every ten had silver buttons on their chest." Both Latham and Labour Alderman James East spoke favourably to the same gathering regarding the Soviet Union.[68] And while admiration of the Soviet Union was not universal among CLP members, key non-Communists such as Latham, East, and Rocky Mountain MLA P.M. Christophers were outspoken apologists for Russia.[69] So, the Communists had no need to fear that they were a despised minority in the CLP; they had important allies within the larger labour movement. But there were tensions between the Communists and some of the party leadership.

A key area of contention between the Communists and the party majority was relations with the Farmer government. The Communists fought unsuccessfully for Labour to disassociate itself from the UFA administration. Just before the 1926 election, *Alberta Labor News* featured a debate between Elmer Roper, still the editor of the AFL official organ, and Jan Lakeman, a railway

[67] "Copy of report re mass meeting of workers on May Day on Market Square," A. Moreau, Commissioner, Alberta Provincial Police to J.E. Brownlee, Attorney-General, 5 May 1923, Alberta Provincial Police Papers, Provincial Archives of Alberta, File 4607.

[68] *Ibid.*

[69] "Speech by P.M. Christophers, MLA to Workers' Party of Canada meeting at Rialto Theatre, Edmonton, February 26, 1923," *Ibid.*, File 4613.

machinist and a leading Alberta Communist. Both were key figures in the CLP and both had been nominated as Edmonton candidates in the provincial election.[70]

Roper commented favourably on increases in worker's compensation and boasted that Alberta's Workmen's Compensation Act was "one of the best acts on the continent." He also praised the government's legislation of minimum wages and maximum hours (54 hours per week) for most workers, its generosity in its provision of relief to the urban unemployed as well as improved widows' pensions. Roper also claimed that, unlike the former Liberal government, the Farmers were making a genuine effort to enforce the Factories Act. Concluded Roper: "... I personally wouldn't want to find myself joining the pack that is already yelping at the heels of the Farmer-Labour group in an attempt to defeat the first government of the producing classes of the province."[71]

Lakeman, a leader of "the pack," disputed Roper's assessment, though, unlike his reformist colleague, he provided no statistics to buttress his arguments (though certainly the weekly reportage in the *News* of accident statistics and living and working conditions for the province's workers would have served to make his case). Lakeman noted some points which Roper had ignored: the government was apparently doing little to enforce the Mines Act despite appalling conditions in many mines and had used provincial police against workers during several industrial disputes.[72]

Roper's argument represented the dominant party view. Communist suggestions that Labour place candidates in the field against UFA candidates were ignored. The CLP nominated only twelve candidates in 1926, all in urban or industrial constituencies where the Farmers had little chance of winning. There were five candidates in Edmonton, three in Calgary, and one in each of Lethbridge, Edson, Rocky Mountain House, and Medicine Hat.[73]

The Communists, however, were not alone in questioning the philosophy of group government as practised by the UFA government. P.M. Christophers, the miner and former OBU organizer and Socialist Party activist, who sat as the Labour member for Rocky Mountain, told a meeting of the Workers' (Communist) Party in 1923:

> We have now to a certain extent group government. That is, the government is based on one group and that is no new thing to us. What we wish to have is a change of group. We always had group government, whether Liberal or Conservative and they governed for the capitalist class and they did their work well. You have in Alberta at the present time about seven or eight hundred lawyers. Parasites as they are well called. We find that these 700 or 800 have seven representatives in the present house, and in the same

[70] *Alberta Labor News*, 8 May 1926.
[71] *Ibid.*, 6 March 1925.
[72] *Ibid.*
[73] *Ibid.*, 26 June 1926.

assembly about 14,000 railway workers have only one representative. I submit that these 14,000 workers should have a pro rata representation in that assembly.[74]

For Christophers, the soviets in the Soviet Union provided a proper model of group government which he hoped the Canadian workers would eventually struggle to adopt as well.

Election literature in 1926 reflected the presence of both reformist and socialist views within the CLP. One election card distributed in Edmonton emphasized the class nature of the party. Entitled "Lessons from the British Strike," it stated militantly:

The Conservative Party — the party of the Bosses in all countries, voted into power by millions of workers and their wives, proves that it, if need be, will force the workers to work for Coolie wages, in order that the Coal Barons and other Barons may make profits. . . . The lessons to you are: That you can only vote and work for the representatives of your class — the Labor Party candidates.[75]

Equally characteristic however of the Labour campaign was a card that was addressed to "retail clerks, laundry workers, restaurant employees, factory workers, and other women and girl workers who have benefitted by the operation of the Minimum Wage Act." It emphasized Labour's role in convincing the UFA administration to raise minimum wages and asked: "If Labour can raise the wages of Alberta women workers by $150,000 a year with only four members, what can we do with larger representation?"[76]

The results of the provincial election (see Table 1) indicate that, at the time, workers were not prepared to reject the Labour party because of its strategy of providing critical support to the Farmer government. Six Labour members were returned — two from Calgary, and one each from Edmonton, Edson, Lethbridge, and Rocky Mountain.[77] It is difficult to assess whether Labour's collaboration with the UFA won the party support or alienated potential support. The CLP, as noted, prodded in part by its Communist faction, was involved in extra-parliamentary working-class activities and its parliamentary representatives could be seen as representatives of a broad working-class movement. They could hope to win votes from class-conscious workers who supported them as class representatives despite disagreements about electoral strategies or particular policies.

Interestingly, however, one of the six elected Labourites was a CLP defector, Robert Parkyn, a carpenter and Calgary alderman who had rejected the party's decision to run only three candidates for the five seats allotted to Calgary.[78] Calgary was a multi-member constituency whose representatives

[74] "Speech by P.M. Christophers, MLA to Workers' Party of Canada meeting at Rialto Theatre, Edmonton, February 26, 1923," Alberta Provincial Police Papers, File 4613.
[75] James East Papers, City of Edmonton Archives, Manuscript 202, File 7.
[76] *Ibid.*
[77] *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*, 1927, 359-60.
[78] Despite Parkyn's defection, the *Alberta Labor News* ran as its headline, "Six Labour MPs for Alberta Legislature." Parkyn worked closely with the CLP MLAs. *Alberta Labor News*, 3 July 1926.

TABLE 1
Election results for Labour in 1926

Seat	Number of first-ballot Labour Votes	Labour percentage of total votes cast
Calgary	5377	28.7
Edmonton	3563	19.6
Edson*	1116	41.1
Lethbridge*	1584	37.1
Rocky Mountain	1765	52.7
Medicine Hat	718	20.1

* Alberta employed a preferential voting system in single-member constituencies. The second preferences cast on ballots for the recipient of the least votes were counted on subsequent ballots. Both Chris Pattinson in Edson and Andrew Smeaton in Lethbridge won absolute majorities on the second ballot, Pattinson with 1219 votes to his opponent's 1139, and Smeaton with 1962 to his opponent's 1713.

were determined on the basis of a complex proportional representation system. Parkyn received about twice as many first-ballot choices as the two major CLP candidates. And, when the counting was all done, Parkyn and Fred White had won two of Calgary's five seats, but Alex Ross had been narrowly defeated. While the *Alberta Labor News* regretted his defeat,[79] it would appear that many workers were not entirely pleased with the UFA record and preferred to support Labour candidates who were less identified with the government than Ross.

Once the election was over, Labour relations with the government gradually soured. Despite Labour's increased legislative representation and its expressions of support for the government during the election, J.E. Brownlee, who had replaced Greenfield as premier in 1925, did not appoint a Labour representative to cabinet to replace Ross. Brownlee was an Edmonton lawyer whose chief connection with farmers was the legal work he had taken on for several farm organizations,[80] and his conservatism caused consternation among Labourites,[81] though it did not produce a clean break in relations between

[79] The paper commented editorially: "The defeat of Hon. Alex Ross is a disappointment . . . he has been primarily responsible for greater improvement in Labor legislation than has ever been accomplished in a similar time in any province in the Dominion of Canada since Confederation." *Alberta Labor News*, 3 July 1926.

[80] Ernest Watkins, *The Golden Province: A Political History of Alberta* (Calgary 1980), 67.

[81] The *Alberta Labor News* complained that the 1927 session of the legislature, the first after the election, was "barren of much progress." The Alberta Federation of Labour programme presented to the government before the session "did not get very far with the lawmakers" and "it was the least resultful of any session since the present Government

Labour and the UFA. The *Alberta Labor News* called for re-election of the Farmers in 1930 and the CLP again limited its candidacies to the dominantly industrial constituencies and attacked only the old-line parties.[82] Labour's loss of two seats in that election — Rocky Mountain and one Calgary seat[83] — is no doubt partly attributable to its close association with a government whose popularity was fading. It is also partly attributable to the chaotic state of a party organization which had spent the two years before the election doing little more than debating whether to purge Communists from the party ranks.

VII

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TRADE union establishment and the Communists in Alberta, like relations between the Communists and the union establishment elsewhere in the country,[84] were tense. Communist involvement in the breakaway Mine Workers' Union of Canada (MWUC), which formed in 1925, particularly embittered the leaders of the Alberta Federation of Labour despite the fact that non-Communists initially led the union and that Communists had attempted to convince the United Mine Workers' rank and file not to engage in dual unionism. From the Communist viewpoint, the UMW had self-destructed by concentrating its energies against the Communists rather than against mine operators.[85] The Alberta leaders of international unions also observed with distaste the Communists' alignment with the national unions when the All-Canadian Congress of Labour was formed in 1927. There were ACCL unions in the Canadian Labour Party in Alberta, and there is little doubt the international

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has come into office." *Alberta Labor News*, 9 April 1927. One year later, C.L. Gibbs, Edmonton CLP MLA, responding to the Speech from the Throne, complained: "I do heartily agree that we are all curious as to the real social philosophy underlying the farmer government. . . . The workers of this province are watching it with that hope that springs eternal in the human breast. It will be too bad if it turns out to be only another variety of old-line party." *Alberta Labor News*, 18 February 1928.

[82] *Ibid.*, 14 June 1930.

[83] *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*, 1931, 360-1.

[84] Desmond Morton with Terry Copp, *Working People* (Ottawa 1980), 131-6; Robin, *Radical Politics*, 268-9; *Canada's Party of Socialism*, 39-40.

[85] Caragata, *Alberta Labor*, 92; Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 141; *Canada's Party of Socialism*, 37. The Communist view of the origins of the breakaway movement was expressed in *The Worker*, the party newspaper. "Owing to the treachery of [John L.] Lewis and the district leadership of the weak, cowardly and incompetent Shermanites, who wrecked the union by their war upon the communist miners and their cooperation with the operators; the miners of the Crowsnest are today utterly disorganized except for the scab company unions. The break from the UMW of A began in the camp where there was neither a Communist nor Left Wing organization and where Sherman was strongest, viz.: in his home town, Fernie. The nearest town, where the efforts of those who are more concerned with fighting those workers who are open enemies of the boss class — the Communists — had been successful soon followed." *The Worker*, 20 June 1925.

union leaders were as unwilling to let the political Labour movement fall from their control as they were to let control of the union movement slip from their hands. The *Alberta Labor News* began a campaign for the purge of Communists from the Labour Party in March 1928,[86] twenty months before the purge finally occurred. The Communists' vitriolic attacks against leading trade unionists disqualified them from membership in the political Labour movement, argued the official organ of the AFL.

But a purge of the Communists proved divisive within the party. Many non-Communists, as noted earlier, admired some of the Communist leaders and agreed with the Communist analysis that Labour should disassociate itself from the Farmer administration and adopt a tougher political stance, emphasizing worker mobilization rather than the call for reforms. Jan Lakeman was able to defeat two other candidates with over 300 of 600 first-ballot votes cast for the East Edmonton federal nomination in August 1926.[87] It is unlikely that even half of those who voted to nominate him were Communists since only a few months earlier Lakeman, though he was the only Communist candidate on a long ballot, received only 119 first-ballot votes of 875 cast for provincial candidates.[88]

But the Comintern's shift to a far left strategy in late 1928 caused the Communists to step up their denunciations of the reformist leaders of Labour and to alienate a large section of the CLP in Alberta.[89] The *Alberta Labor News* charged that Communists were responsible for the demise of the CLP in Ontario and elsewhere;[90] only a purge of Communists in Alberta could save the Alberta party from extinction. Yet, while the trade union leaders tried to insure that their delegates to the CLP provincial convention in 1929 were committed to purging the Communists, the purge was approved only by a close vote of 102 to 88.[91] The purge was total: neither organizations affiliated with the Communist Party nor members of union affiliates who belonged to the CPC or its affiliates could be members of the CLP. Unsurprisingly, the Communist response was to increase the vigour of its attack on the Labour Party. And in the Crow's Nest

[86] *Alberta Labor News*, 24 March 1928.
[87] *Ibid.*, 21 August 1926.
[88] *Ibid.*, 1 May 1926.
[89] A letter from the Comintern's Political Secretariat on 8 April 1929 directed the party to take a more aggressive political stance. Among other things, it accused the Canadian Communists of "subordination of Party to Labor Party" and attacked "the maintenance of a Labour Party as a screen for the Communists in the belief that the CP can only become a mass Party through the medium of a Labour Party (Alberta)." Angus, *op. cit.*, 233. The party's national convention in May 1929 accepted the Comintern's criticism of its past actions. Jack MacDonald, party general secretary, in his report to the convention, called for "eventual liquidation of the Canadian Labor Party." Angus, *op. cit.*, 239.
[90] *Alberta Labor News*, 28 October 1928. For the Communist view of the demise of the CLP, see *Canada's Party of Socialism*, 43-4.
[91] *Alberta Labor News*, 16 November 1929.

Pass, where Communist strength was greatest, a Workers' Unity League organizer and Communist Party member received 783 votes to 820 for the CLP candidate in 1930. Their divisions gave P.M. Christophers' former seat (sympathetic with the Communists, Christophers left both the CLP and the Crow's Nest area in 1930 and did not stand for re-election) to an "independent" associated with the Liberal Party. The *Western Miner*, organ of the miners' section of the Communist-led Workers' Unity League, called Fred White, the CLP leader as well as president of the AFL, the "Prince of Alberta Labor Fakirs" and claimed the Labour Party was controlled by "corrupted union officials and unprincipled reactionary politicians" who were in charge of a " 'Labor' political machine of the bosses."[92] Such overstated charges reflected the Communist sectarianism of the period.[93] But there is little doubt that the trade union leaders took a proprietary interest in the party which probably prevented its growth after 1929. The long battle to purge the Communists had demonstrated to the leaders that the political party created by the unions could very easily take a path divergent from that which the unions took if it were not closely guarded. The international unions were, in any case, fighting for survival. The Depression left many of their members unemployed and unable to pay dues, and the leadership feared challenges to their monopoly on the dues of those who continued to work.

The result was that the battle between the international unions and the Canadian unions, which had been submerged within the CLP, began to infect the political Labour movement. Before 1930, the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees was the only ACCL union of any size in Alberta and its leaders were active in the CLP. But, during the Depression, for a variety of complex reasons, breakaways of union locals or sections of union locals from various internationals to the ACCL occurred with sufficient regularity to concern the AFL leadership. Groups of dissident street railway workers, carpenters, printers, and theatre employees, among others, formed ACCL locals, with the internationals and the *Alberta Labor News* proclaiming on every occasion

[92] *Canadian Parliamentary Guide; Western Miner*, 30 May 1920; 10 May 1930; Frank Paul Karas, "Labour and Coal in the Crowsnest Pass: 1925-1935," (M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1972), 77.

[93] The Communists might be excused, however, for regarding their rivals for the miners' hearts, the UMWA leaders, of class collaborationism pure and simple. The following excerpt from a letter sent by District 18 provisional president Robert Livett, a CLP activist, to an employer, speaks for itself: "I am of the opinion that there will not be enduring peace at the said Mine until the Management at the Colliery takes a firmer stand against those who are agitating against the agreement. I would appreciate if you would take a hand in this and instruct your manager to deal with these disruptions in a manner that will result in mutual benefit and insure the carrying out of the agreement that was honestly and justly arrived at, believing that both parties have an obligation to meet in this respect." Robert Livett to George Kellock, president, McLeod River Collieries, Coleman, Alberta, 26 June 1929, United Mine Workers of America, District 18 Papers, Glenbow Archives, Box 3, File 15.

Hunger March, Market Square, Edmonton, November 1932. From the Provincial Archives of Alberta A9217.

that these locals had been set up with bosses' help to undermine an existing union contract. The CLP, following this line of argument, refused membership to the theatre employees' local affiliated with the ACCL. Predictably the CBRE and the other ACCL affiliates protested and left the CLP.[94] Operating under the name Independent Labour Party, the national unions now began to work against Labour candidates on behalf of "Independents" with some success. As we shall see, the ILP played a role in defeating the Labour mayor and council in Edmonton.

The Labour Party appeared more interested in pushing the Communists and the national unions out of the party than in attracting new elements to the party, particularly the unemployed. The CLP stayed aloof from the organizations of the unemployed, whose leadership by Communists was as much the result of indifference of the CLP as the organizational skills of the Communists. A proposal in 1935 to actively recruit the unemployed to join the Labour Party met with hostility from federation secretary-treasurer Alfred Farmilo and federation executive member Carl Berg. Berg, a former One Big Union organizer, had been a left-wing CLPer in the mid-1920s and was on the party's right wing by 1935; he would eventually become a close cooperator with the Social Credit administration. Even though a strike of the Edmonton unemployed for more relief money and less control over what reliefers spent presented organizing

[94] The Carpenters, whose Edmonton membership had dropped by a third during the Depression, charged that the ACCL Carpenters local consisted solely of workers who had been expelled from the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners for nonpayment of dues over an extended period. Local 1325 UBCJ Papers; *Alberta Labor News*, 6 February 1934.

opportunities for the CLP, Berg commented: "We are not interested in dealing with great masses of people who do not know where they stand. . . . We do not want a lot of people brought in just to get a few votes, but must insist on our members having the Labour discipline and our principles at heart."[95] Such suspicion on the part of the trade union leadership towards possible new entrants into the CLP reflected the lack of confidence about the union movement's future that prevailed during the Depression and contrasted with the confident spirit of the period from about 1917 to 1928. The union leaders, while unwilling to open up the political Labour movement, themselves no longer had much time between elections to devote to the CLP. The party was largely inactive except at election time and even activists reported that growing "prejudice" against the CLP resulted from the view that it was purely "a machine organized by certain dominating influences to catch votes."[96] The rallies and parades the CLP and TLC had once organized with the CPC were now largely Communist affairs. And though the unemployed organizations were even bigger than they had been in the 1920s, the CLP stayed aloof.

The formation of the Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation in 1932, and the CLP's subsequent decision to affiliate with the new party might have provided the CLP with an infusion of new blood or ideas. Instead, it appears to have caused some union officials to lose interest in the Labour Party whose separate existence was no longer assured.[97] Resistance to the CCF lasted until 1942 when the remnants of the Labour Party finally allowed the CCF to shed its federated structure and become a constituency-based party.[98] By then, the CLP was too weak for anyone to be terribly concerned that labour was surrendering its right to autonomous politics. Even most of the union officials who once had jealously guarded the doors to the CLP had, by then, abandoned the party. Of course, Social Credit's strong cross-class appeal during desperate economic times[99] had "insured" the burial of the Labour Party and its sometime partner, the UFA. But what role did Labour's own temerity play in causing its own downfall?

VII

Dan Knott was essentially a labour official. I don't think he had any political views apart from his labour position. When he became mayor, you didn't know where he

[95] *Edmonton Journal*, 20 May 1935.
[96] *Alberta Labor News*, 16 September 1933.
[97] According to Aylmer Liesemer, a Calgary Labour alderman from 1934 to 1939 and CCF MLA for Calgary from 1944 to 1952. Aylmer Liesemer interview, 1972, Provincial Archives of Alberta.
[98] *People's Weekly*, 28 March 1942.
[99] On the Social Credit appeal to working people in Alberta, see Alvin Finkel, "Populism and the Proletariat: Social Credit and the Alberta Working Class," *Studies in Political Economy*, 13 (1984), 109-35.

stood on many things. He lost the confidence of the general labour movement in the city.[100]

THE PREDICAMENT OF DAN KNOTT, the CLP candidate who won the Edmonton mayoralty in 1931, 1932, and 1933 before suffering a humiliating third-place finish in 1934,[101] (see Table 2) underlined the CLP dilemma during the 1930s. Once Knott had been defeated, his party refused him nominations both provincially and federally and, in 1937, he ran successfully for Edmonton city council as a candidate of the pro-business Citizens' Committee.[102] But, while he was in office, he received support from the party and union hierarchies though his actions created clear divisions within the party.

Knott, cooperating with the provincial Farmer administration, agreed to allow troops to break up a mass Communist-led hunger march in December 1932, identifying his administration in many minds with the repressive forces which the CLP had always claimed to oppose.[103] Yet the chair of a CLP meeting held in Edmonton just after suppression of the hunger march refused even to allow a discussion of the city's action; his grounds were that the mayor could not be present at the meeting.[104] But it appears that no such discussion ever occurred and the *Alberta Labor News*, while providing space to those who denounced the actions of Mayor Knott and the Labour city council, only mildly chastised the administration. It also denounced the demonstrators as fools for believing that changes could be won in the streets rather than at the ballot box.[105] Knott continued to alienate the unemployed. In May 1934 married reliefers, who were required to work for the city in exchange for relief, struck under the leadership of the Unemployed Married Men's Association for three weeks to back up demands for a bigger food allowance. The largely non-Communist UMMA had worked closely with the trades council and several Labour alderpeople supported the strikers against the combined forces of the Labour mayor, several other Labour alderpeople and all the non-Labour alderpeople. Alderman Sid Bowcott, a delegate to the city's Trades and Labour Council, called on the labour council to support the strikers' demands. But the labour council chose instead to play the role of mediator and refused to take sides.[106] Once the strike was settled, the *Alberta Labor News* commented that many of the unemployed remained bitter against the Labour Party, and chided them to be patient with a civic administration which, at bottom, was on their side.[107] Certainly the CLPers were more susceptible to pressure from the unem-

[100] Elmer Roper interview.
[101] "Civic Election Results," City of Edmonton Archives.
[102] *Ibid.*
[103] See Caragata, *Alberta Labor*, 105-6; and Finkel, "Populism and the Proletariat," 119-20.
[104] *Alberta Labor News*, 24 December 1932.
[105] *Ibid.*
[106] ETLC Minutes, 21 May 1934.
[107] *Alberta Labor News*, 9 June 1934.

Table 2
Votes for Labour Mayoralty and Aldermanic Candidates — Edmonton, 1931-38

Election Year	Votes for Labour mayoralty candidate	Percent of total
1931	13014	57.7
1933	13453	63.7
1934	5996	21.8
1935	No candidate	—
1938	No candidate	—

Year	Number of Labour aldermanic candidates	Votes received by Labour candidates	Votes received by winners
1931	3	*10316, *10186, 7994	11519, 10316, 10186, 9839, 9741
1932	3	*11161, *9529, 7837	11161, 10287, 10052, 9529, 9119
1938	2	9876, 5083	13424, 11893, 11354, 11231, 10695

Source: "Civic Election Results," City of Edmonton Archives.

* indicates the candidate receiving that vote was elected.

ployed than the non-Labour councillors, all of whom were members of the pro-business Civic Government Association (CGA) and none of whom were prepared to accept any compromise with the strikers.[108] And Edmonton's relief rates were reportedly the second highest paid by any municipality in Canada, exceeded only slightly by Calgary's rates (and Calgary's council was evenly split between Labour and the CGA).[109]

Yet the separation of the political Labour movement from the movements of the unemployed made the civic administration vulnerable to the charge that its leaders were as financially orthodox as their opponents and that there was therefore little to choose from among them. Early hopes of the building trades

[108] *Ibid.*

[109] According to Premier Brownlee in Brownlee to Andrew Davison, Mayor of Calgary, Minutes of City of Calgary Council Meeting, 2 June 1934, City of Calgary Papers, Box 31.

unions for example, that a Labour council would promote public works that would provide jobs for their members[110] were not met because Knott insisted on budgeting annual surpluses.[111]

As well as the alienation of the unemployed, Knott faced a concerted attempt by the ACCL-ILP to unseat both himself and Labour councillors. Junior street railway workers, frustrated because their union contract gave senior workers the sole right to day shifts, had joined the ACCL when the majority of senior workers refused to share day shifts. They then attempted to negotiate a new contract with the city but were told that the city would not recognize their union. The junior street railway workers ran an effective campaign, aided by daily newspapers anxious to discredit the city's CLP administration, to gather thousands of names on petitions in their favour. They argued that their relegation to the night shift upset their family lives but that, under Depression economic conditions, they clearly could not simply quit their jobs. The Labour Party and the unions, refusing to recognize any merit in the young workers' case, harped solely on the issue of seniority, which they argued endlessly — and perhaps a bit irrelevantly in this instance — was the principle which the labour movement had fought countless struggles to achieve.[112] Having lost the support of the unemployed and members of national unions, among others, Knott's share of the mayoralty vote in 1934 fell to only 22 per cent of total votes cast, about one-third of what he had polled two years earlier but four times the percentage of the vote that Labour would manage to hold in Edmonton in the provincial election one year later.[113]

IX

LABOUR'S RATHER MIXED RECORD AS A civic administration in Edmonton should be balanced against the effective performance of the CLP alderpeople in Calgary, who worked together with two representatives of the Unemployed Married Men's Association to produce narrow votes in favour of maintaining Calgary's relief scales and providing cash relief to single workers to replace ration cards.[114] While a former CLPer, Mayor Andrew Davison, a printer, opposed his former colleagues on issues pertaining to relief and wished to cut the relief rolls,[115] responsibility for relief policy rested largely with the elected commissioner and, from 1932 to 1936, that was Thomas Riley, railway machinist and Labour candidate. Riley, like Knott in Edmonton, was no sooner

[110] Local 1325, UBCJ Papers, Box 6, "Correspondence Books," 5 September 1931; 3 December 1932.
[111] *People's Weekly*, 29 February 1936.
[112] *Alberta Labor News*, 28 October 1933; 17 November 1934; *Edmonton Bulletin*, 23 July 1935.
[113] "Civic Election Results," *Canadian Parliamentary Guide* (Ottawa 1936).
[114] "Minutes of City of Calgary Meetings," 1 April 1933; 19 March 1934.
[115] *Albertan*, 30 July 1934.

Table 3
Labour representation on Edmonton and Calgary city councils (selected years)

	Edmonton (of 10)	Calgary (of 12)
1914	1	—
1916	—	1
1920	3	2
1923	3	6
1929	6	4
1932	4 (plus mayor)	3
1933	5 (plus mayor)	5*
1934	6 (plus mayor)	6*
1935	4	4*
1937	—	2
1939	—	1*

* (plus one Communist)

elected than he began to demand cuts in the relief rolls and in relief rates; but, unlike Knott, he submitted to pressure from the labour movement, particularly from Fred White, and recanted.[116] Nevertheless Davison's willingness to support the CGA alderpeople agains the Labourites, whose best electoral victories produced ties on council with the CGA (see Table 3), limited Labour's ability to help the unemployed, and the Communists kept up a barrage of attacks against the Labour councillors.[117]

Outside of Calgary and Edmonton, the Labour Party, based almost exclusively on union affiliates, collapsed as the affiliates concentrated on survival and abandoned politics. In the Crow's Nest Pass, for example, the MWUC-UMW battle paralyzed the CLP, which had based its support on the participation and funds supplied by the once-powerful UMW. Labour politics in the Pass, however, were not at an end. Communists and independent socialists in the Pass worked closely together both in municipal and provincial elections. A united front of workers controlled the Blairmore town council from 1933 to 1939, and Communist candidates in the Pass provided Social Credit with strong opposition in the provincial elections of 1935, 1940, and 1944. Only the

[116] Calgary Board of Trade accusation made to City of Calgary council meetings, 1 April 1933, "Minutes of City of Calgary Meetings;" George B. Gooderham interview with T.B. Riley, 4 November 1965, Glenbow Archives.

[117] *Western Miner*, 10 May 1930, for example, denounced the Calgary Labourite councillors for their alleged unwillingness to support a "work or wages" policy.

closing of the coal mines in the region after World War II ended the long history of radicalism in the area.[118]

Before the 1935 provincial election, there was no provincial convention to determine a party programme. The party, no doubt, could not financially afford such a convention at that point. Interrupting its recent affiliation with the CCF and its espousal of the Regina Manifesto, party candidates tended to run on labourist platforms stressing that only labour people could look after labour's interests. They hoped to minimize Social Credit electoral support by emphasizing the virtual exclusion of trade unionists from that party's election candidates.[119] But it did not work. Labour still had the millstone of the UFA around its neck, and Social Credit, rather than Labour, represented the prospect of change to most working-class voters (see Table 4). Labour angrily denounced Social Credit during the election and avoided saying anything about the UFA.

The mood of confidence that characterized working-class thought for several years beginning about 1917 had allowed a political party based on the organizations of skilled workers to establish itself and to exercise considerable influence on Alberta's political life. And, despite the Communists' insistence otherwise, Alberta in the mid-1930s, thanks to legislation passed during the first Farmer administration, had the country's second highest minimum wage, the highest relief rates, and the second largest group of factory inspectors per worker.[120] But both the trade unions and the Labour Party had given up the mobilizing role they assumed in the period from 1917 to the early 1920s and concentrated purely on collective bargaining on the one hand, and electoral activity on the other. Labour Day gradually became a day of rest rather than a day of Labour parades. Talk of general strikes became taboo. Rallies and demonstrations were frowned upon and the Labour administration in Edmonton, as mentioned, even tried to ban some of them. Mobilization of workers continued, led by Communists and by non-party people, but the link between the unions and the Labour Party with popular protest had largely disappeared.

X

SOCIAL CREDIT FILLED A POLITICAL vacuum created by the rightward drift of the UFA and the inability of existing parties, including the CLP, to offer attractive alternatives to the Farmer government. The arrival of Social Credit on the political scene did not initially signify a shift to the right in Alberta politics. Though Social Credit would eventually prove a reactionary force, the early party, despite its emphasis on the right-wing populist panacea of mone-

[118] On labour politics in the Pass and the environment which contributed to class polarization in the Crow's Nest, see Allen Seager, "The Pass Strike of 1932," *Alberta History*, 25 (1977), 1-11; and Karas, "Labour and Coal."

[119] *Alberta Labor News*, 17 August 1935.

[120] A.E. Grauer, *Labour Legislation: A Study Prepared for the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations* (Ottawa 1939), 35, 98.

Table 4
Provincial Election Results 1926-35 Labour Party Vote, Edmonton and Calgary

Election	Labour vote in Edmonton	(% of total)	Labour vote in Calgary	(%of total)
1926	3563	19.6	5377	28.7
1930	4657	23.1	4085	18.2
1935*	1373	3.8	1869	4.5

* Social Credit obtained 58.6 per cent of the Calgary vote and 38.7 per cent of the Edmonton vote in 1935.

tary reform, espoused redistribution of income, price controls, medicare, and some state control over industry in the public interest.[121]

But the party's appeal to "the people" to unite against "the interests" marked a shift away from the organizations of parties on the basis of social class that the UFA-CLP period had witnessed. Many workers and farmers clearly felt in 1935 (and afterwards) that Social Credit would better represent their interests than had Labour and the UFA. But the men and women who would represent them in the legislature were mainly small business people and schoolteachers rather than workers and farmers. Aberhart had the final say over whom a Social Credit constituency organization could nominate,[122] and he favoured professionals and business people. His caucus of 56 included 10 farmers and 1 worker (the latter, a railway worker, representing a rural constituency — he soon became a party dissident and eventually joined the CCF), a contrast with the 30 farmers and 3 workers who made up the caucuses of 39 and 4 respectively of the UFA and Labour in 1930 (4 of 4 Labour MLAs in 1921 and 5 of 6 in 1926 were workers).[123]

Workers did, however, participate in the Social Credit party, and both the Labour Party and the Communist Party were forced to address this fact. Social Credit, in fact, invited the mass participation which the Labour Party, suspicious of new entrants, had discouraged since 1929.[124] While the Labour Party sought to convince workers of the error of their ways by relentlessly denounc-

[121] Finkel, "Populism and the Proletariat," 122; William Aberhart, *Social Credit as Applied to the Province of Alberta* (c. 1935); John Irving, *The Social Credit Movement in Alberta* (Toronto 1959).
[122] Macpherson, *Democracy in Alberta*, 147.
[123] *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*.
[124] On the Social Credit organization, see Finkel, "Populism and the Proletariat," 120-4.

ing the Aberhart administration, the Communists attempted to form a broad united front composed of Communists, Labourites, and progressive Social Crediters. The revolutionary isolation of the 1929-34 period had given way to the Comintern policy of the "united front against fascism" and the Alberta party believed that "unity of the progressive forces" in Alberta included unity with Social Credit.[125] A Communist-Social Credit alliance in the municipal elections of 1936, 1937, and 1938 in Calgary and Edmonton was responsible for the election of Calgary's best-known Communist, Patrick Lenihan, to that city's council in 1938.[126] And in 1937 the Labour Party had — if unenthusiastically — joined with Communists in Edmonton and Calgary in what proved to be an unsuccessful attempt to regain working-class representation which had been lost because of a split in workers' votes municipally in 1935 and 1936.[127] More successful had been a united-front campaign — to which the CLP-CCF's major contribution had been not to run a candidate — to elect Social Crediter Orvis Kennedy in a federal by-election in 1937.[128] But Kennedy's left-wing credentials were dubious, and the Communist determination to elect him resulted more from a desire to demonstrate to rank-and-file Social Crediters the party's sincerity regarding united fronts than from a belief that Kennedy would represent workers' interests. The Communists believed that by offering the olive branch to misguided workers whose false consciousness had led them to embrace Social Credit, it could eventually win them over to the party once they had become disillusioned with Aberhart and his monetary fixations. But the "united-front" tactic gave way to isolation once again as the two parties divided on the issue of Canada's participation in World War II.[129]

As for the Labourites, their brief flirtation with the Communists and Social Credit in 1937 had been precipitated by pressures from the youth wing of the CCF. The CCF clubs, rather than the Labour Party, had begun the negotiations for a united front with the CPC and Social Credit in the 1937 municipal elections, and Labour agreed to the coalition rather than face a division of the CCF vote in the election.

Labour also agreed in 1940 that it would run no candidates in the provincial election under its own banner. Instead, CCF candidates would be chosen at meetings attended by Labour Party members as well as CCF club members. The CCF won 11 per cent of the provincial vote in 1940, though it contested only 34

[125] The *People's Weekly*, successor to *Alberta Labor News*, rarely found common ground with the government on any issue. On the Communist response to Social Credit, see *Canada's Party of Socialism*, 117; Finkel, "Populism and the Proletariat," 124-5; Ben Swankey, "Reflections of a Communist: 1935 Election," *Alberta History*, 28 (1980), 36.

[126] *People's Weekly*, 26 November 1938.

[127] *Ibid.*, 23 October 1937.

[128] Swankey, "Reflections," 36.

[129] Communist attitudes to the war have been much debated. The party's official version of its attitude in the period from 1939 to 1941 is found in *Canada's Party of Socialism*, 133-6.

of 55 seats. But the CCF won no seats; it received about 10 per cent of the vote in each of the two major cities, about half the vote required to win seats under proportional representation.[130] Despite the failure of Social Credit to deliver on its promises,[131] the CCF, the party which included the discredited CLP, was not regarded as a credible alternative to Social Credit by most workers.[132] The only "Labour" candidate elected in Alberta in 1940 was Angus Morrison, who defeated a sitting member of Social Credit in Edson. Morrison, the president of District 18 of UMW, did not run as the candidate of any party, and he was opposed by a CCFer.[133]

Interestingly, however, the CLP resisted dissolution as a separate organization from the CCF until January 1942. The middle-class character of many of the CCF clubs alienated some of the CLP's veteran members, who clung to the view that the party's class composition was as important as its policies. But the Labour Party's direct link with the unions, which once had been one of its key working-class credentials, came unstuck after the Social Credit sweep. Union after union withdrew its affiliation, and, at the time of the party's dissolution, no union was any longer affiliated. The party which had hoped to act as a unifying force among all sectors of the province's working class had degenerated into a small, aging sect whose continued existence inhibited the CCF's attempts to create a unitary organization.[134] The CCF was the inheritor of the

[130] *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*.

[131] Alvin Finkel, "Social Credit and the Unemployed," *Alberta History*, 31 (1983), 24-32; Walter D. Young, *Democracy and Discontent: Progressivism, Socialism and Social Credit in the Canadian West*, second ed., (Toronto 1978), 98-9.

[132] The 1940 provincial campaign is detailed in Harold J. Schultz, "A Second Term: 1940," *Alberta Historical Review*, 10 (1962), 17-26. *People's Weekly*, the unofficial CCF organ (until 1945, when it officially became the party newspaper), observed: "the progressive voters of the province are remaining loyal to the government they elected in 1935." 30 March 1940. Myron Johnson, commenting on the CCF's inability to break through in Alberta, claims CCF problems "stemmed not from deep antisocialist sentiment but directly from the strength of the Social Credit." "The Failure of the CCF in Alberta: An Accident of History" in Carlo Caldarola, ed., *Society and Politics in Alberta: Research Papers* (Toronto 1979), 100. But while Johnson recognizes that the CCF's link with the UFA hurt the CCF, he appears unaware that the CCF's other affiliate, the Canadian Labour Party, was also in trouble. In short, both organizations which had claimed to embrace socialist ideology and subsequently affiliated with the CCF had lost some public support. Social Credit's early openness to grassroots input (see Finkel, "Populism and the Proletariat," 120-5) gave this party an edge in attracting mass support over the cliquish parties and groups which formed the CCF. On the early history of the Alberta CCF see Alvin Finkel, "The Obscure Origins of the CCF in Alberta," J. William Brennan, ed., *Building the Cooperative Commonwealth: Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada* (Regina 1985); and M. Marcia Smith, "The Ideological Relationship Between the United Farmers of Alberta and the Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation," (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1967).

[133] *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*.

[134] The final dissolution of the CLP occurred at a convention in January 1942. *People's Weekly*, 31 January 1942.

ethical-socialist side of the traditions of the Labour Party and the UFA. But its link with labour was never as close as the CLP's link had been. In June 1944, at the height of its popularity in Alberta, the CCF could claim only 357 members in affiliated unions in Calgary and Edmonton.[135]

Nevertheless, 1944 was the year in which left-wing parties made their best showing to date in a provincial election. The CCF won 25 per cent of the vote and the Labour Progressive Party (the party established by Communists in the wake of the banning of the CPC) won 5 per cent. But despite the preferential ballot system, the two parties had proved unable to cooperate.[136] Their 30 per cent of the vote translated into 2 CCF seats and no LPP seats in the 55 seat assembly.[137] The poor showing in the race for seats produced defeatism that made continued growth of the left impossible.[138] The CCF share of the provincial vote declined to 19 per cent in 1948, 13 per cent in 1952, 8 per cent in 1955, and a mere 4 per cent in 1959, the year it lost representation in the legislature.[139]

The apparent impregnability of Social Credit caused labour leaders, anxious not to antagonize the government, to maintain an arm's length relationship with the CCF. Indeed, the Alberta Federation of Labour, which represented over 80 per cent of all organized labour at the time of the merger with the provincial section of the Canadian Congress of Labour, is seen as having been largely in bed with Social Credit from 1945 to 1954 by the AFL official historian.[140]

The CCF meanwhile went from a peak membership of 12,000 in 1944 to a membership of 3,200 in 1949 and about 1,000 members through most of the 1950s.[141] Interestingly, however, Social Credit, which boasted 41,000 members in 1937, had also become a party of few members. It claimed fewer than

[135] William Irvine to David Lewis, 28 June 1944, Alberta CCF Papers, Glenbow Archives, Box 5, File 42.

[136] While some Alberta CCF leaders, particularly William Irvine, favoured cooperation with the Labour Progressive Party, the Alberta party complied with a CCF National Council decision against any cooperation with the Communists. William Irvine to David Lewis, 2 March 1944, Alberta CCF Papers.

[137] *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*. In four other seats, the combined CCF-LPP vote was greater than the vote of all other candidates. In three agricultural seats — St. Paul, Vegreville, and Willingdon — both left-wing parties received an impressive vote and the failure of most LPP voters to mark second preferences cost the CCF a victory. Similarly, in the coal mining/agricultural seat, Pincher Creek—Crow's Nest, the "Labor United" candidate (an LPPer) would have been victorious had even half the CCF voters marked him as their second preference (presuming that most of the remaining half abstained rather than voted Social Credit).

[138] This is reflected in the correspondence in the CCF Papers for the years following the election.

[139] *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*.

[140] Caragata, *Alberta Labor*, 140-2.

[141] The 12,000 figure in 1944 is mentioned in Alberta Provincial Office to Margaret Telford, 4 November 1944, Alberta CCF Papers.

8,000 members in 1944, the year it won 50 of 55 legislative seats and over half the popular vote.[142] Alberta politics had lost their pre-war intensity, and this made the revival of the class-polarized politics of the 1919-40 period highly unlikely.

Municipally, candidates sponsored by the trade unions — the CCF had bowed out of municipal politics in Calgary and Edmonton by 1946 — and by alliances of progressive groups were able to regain minority representation on the city councils of Edmonton and Calgary. But, while there has been little written about the character of the opposition municipal alliances in the cities since the war, it would appear that the clear division between labour and its enemies which marked pre-war municipal elections no longer existed. Voting turnouts, which had once averaged over 50 per cent, gave way to turnouts of less than 20 per cent.[143] And the conservative groups which controlled the city councils had sufficiently lost their fear of the left's municipal intentions that a largely Liberal-Conservative coalition approached Elmer Roper, who had led the CCF in the legislature from 1942 to 1955, to be their "reform" candidate for mayor of Edmonton in 1959 and 1961. Roper claims that, despite his CCF colours, he had little difficulty in finding broad agreement with his municipal colleagues, who were mainly Conservatives and Liberals.[144]

Opposition was not, of course, dead in Alberta. But the province's post-war prosperity and the view that little could be changed politically created a pervasive apathy which has only lifted on rare occasions over the past 40 years.

XI

"IN THE CANADIAN CASE," observes Reginald Whittaker, "it is the 1930s which would seem to be the decisive period for the freezing of political alternatives."[145] In the case of Alberta, the late 1930s produced a legacy of Social Credit domination provincially and conservative domination municipally. For almost two decades before 1935, it had appeared that, in the cities and mining districts, a labour-based party would also be a permanent feature of the province's political scene. The Dominion Labour Party/Canadian Labour Party electoral successes suggested that many workers, particularly unionized skilled workers, wished to be represented on public bodies by other working people.

[142] Premiers' (Manning) Papers, Provincial Archives of Alberta, File 1118.

[143] For example, in Edmonton in 1944, the last year the CCF ran candidates under its own banner in the city, only 16 per cent of the electorate voted, and the turnout was particularly light in working-class districts. *People's Weekly*, 11 November 1944. The next year a CCFer, Harry Ainlay, was elected as mayor of Edmonton, and the president of the Calgary Trades and Labour Council, James Watson, was elected mayor of Calgary. Neither ran under a party banner.

[144] Roper interview.

[145] Reginald Whittaker, *The Government Party: Organizing and Financing the Liberal Party of Canada, 1930-58* (Toronto 1977), xvi.

But the Labour Party's growing bureaucratism and its electoral fixation disillusioned many of its supporters.

While moves towards "pragmatism" on the part of the labour movement after 1921 have been hailed by many labour historians, and were not without fruit for some workers, they would appear, in the Alberta case at least, to have alienated workers from narrowly class-based politics. As many other class practices — Labour Day parades, solidarity strikes, mass rallies, Labour churches, etc. — had withered, the political party which came to life in the same environment withered as well. Indeed the Labour Party's reluctance to support and amplify the protest movement of the early 1930s probably contributed to the demise of both. And while working people obviously continued to play a role in the province's politics after the rise of Social Credit and the demise of the Labour Party, the views that workers could best represent workers in public offices and that a socialist transformation of society should be the workers' major political objective became minority views among both skilled and unskilled labour in the province.