

Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia

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At the time the CCF was founded the socialists of British Columbia did not then see and, indeed, had never seen themselves as belonging to a national movement. There had been, through the early years of the century, a great deal of contact with groups outside of the province, and attempts had been made to establish an organization of the left that was truly national. The attempts had all met with failure, largely through the inability of any of the groups to agree on either doctrine or politics. The left in Canada at this time — post-Winnipeg strike and pre-CCF — was fissiparous, elitist, paranoid and self-centred. The chief figures in the movement in British Columbia were, without any doubt, committed socialists, but their commitment was no less self-seeking than that of any politician, however much they would lard their disagreements with pious statements of socialist dogma.

This is not to criticize socialist movements as such, but rather to say that individual socialists have the appetite for power common to most politicians. The perspective of history enables one to observe that the often self-righteous view that socialists took of the "old-line" parties was based on an inaccurate assessment of their own motives.

For Ernest Winch, for example, the formation of the CCF was not the boon it was seen to be by the prairie farmer. Winch had fought many battles to maintain the purity and independence of socialism in British Columbia — and the dominance of Ernest Winch in that province's socialist movement.

The influx of reformers from Saskatchewan served to dilute the red wine of revolution. It meant as well a dilution of the power of the old guard. The selection of Rev. Robert Connell as House leader in 1933 was probably more a tribute to the Winch faction's determination to preserve their control than it was to Connell's more favourable public image. The struggle that ultimately resulted in Connell's expulsion was a power struggle although it is entirely possible that Connell failed to see this fact, believing the conflict turned on doctrinal and constitutional questions.

Winch was unwilling to see the party shaped in any image but his own, and this was a position which took precedence over his much-trumpeted concern for the working class, although his sentiments on the matter were undoubtedly valid.

Angus MacInnis, on the other hand, emerges from the early history of the socialist movement in British Columbia as an individual who took second place to no one in his dedication to the socialist philosophy, and who saw perhaps more clearly than any of the other principal actors the need for patience and compromise in building an effective party. His motto was "theory bakes no scones." Not a doctrinaire like Winch or Lefaux, he was politically active in a way that they were not — and hence understood more readily the rules of the game.¹ He was enough of a pragmatist to prefer immediate gains to ultimate ends, however pure the theory might be. MacInnis was one of the few native-born Canadians in the socialist movement in British Columbia. Perhaps better than his colleagues who emigrated from Britain with many of their ideas and attitudes well shaped, he understood the nature of the Canadian polity. His socialism was, paradoxically, more Fabian and rooted in a deep commitment to constitutional change; and that made him much more of the ally of the party's "right wing" — those who came in under the banner of the League for Social Reconstruction or the Associated Clubs, men and women like Frank Mackenzie and Dorothy Steeves. From his vantage point in the dogmatic Socialist Party, Angus MacInnis was able to work effectively to unite a potentially fissiparous group.

The decade following the Winnipeg General Strike was, in the words of Dorothy Steeves, marked by "a decline in radical thinking in British Columbia."² The left was in tatters. Moderates like Angus MacInnis, Arthur Turner and Robert Skinner constituted the active core of the Federated Labour Party, a party created in 1918 by the B.C. Federation of Labour that included many members from the old Socialist Party of Canada and the Social Democratic Party.³ Their approach was practical

¹ See R. G. Stuart, "The early political career of Angus MacInnis" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1970). The material on which this paper is based was collected with the generous assistance of a grant from the Boag Foundation. As a result of this grant the Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection of material concerning socialism and socialist parties in British Columbia was established in the library at the University of British Columbia. It has proven a mine of information for many scholars. Some whose work on socialism in B.C. has been invaluable in the writing of this brief essay are Gordon Wickerson, Jeremy Wilson, R. G. Stuart, D. J. Roberts, Ronald Shaw and Ross Johnson.

² Dorothy Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel* (Vancouver, 1960), p. 70.

³ For the early history of the socialist movement in B.C. see R. Johnson, "No Com-

and pragmatic. The immediate objective of the party was to seek reforms that would alleviate the condition of the unemployed. The revolution was too far in the future to attract their energies. The more scientific socialists whiled away their time within the branches of the Socialist Party of Canada, debating the minutia of Marxism, "hurling epithets, expletives, jibes and sneers upon each other's revolutionary heads with a venom and hatred they never exhibited towards the capitalist class."⁴ It was a singularly unproductive period for the left. The precarious position of the socialists was exacerbated by the growing disenchantment with the great experiment in Russia and by the prosperity in British Columbia in the twenties.

The first move toward a national organization occurred in 1924 when the Federated Labour Party affiliated with the Canadian Labour Party, a national federation of provincial labour parties created by the Trades and Labour Congress. The affiliation was purely electoral and lasted only four years. In 1925 MacInnis undertook to unify the left in British Columbia by calling a meeting of the FLP to consider ways of amalgamating "the various existing political labour groups in some organization that would appeal to the great mass of the workers."⁵ The meeting set up a select committee to meet with the various and sundry labour and socialist groups in the lower mainland. Two meetings later, and after much discussion, the Independent Labour Party was formed with all the major radical groups participating except the Socialist Party of Canada, which would neither amalgamate nor disband. The SPC remnants retreated into their cells to read, study and dispute the finer points of Marxian socialism with monastic dedication. The new organization attracted support from most of the radical spectrum, except communists, who were excluded.

Among those to join MacInnis in amalgamating "the various existing political labour groups in some organization that would appeal to the great mass of the workers"⁶ were moderates like Skinner and Arthur Turner, radicals like Ernest Winch and Wallis Lefieux, and the unclassifiable Dr. Lyle Telford. At the end of 1926 the *Annual Report of Labour Organizations* indicated that the ILP boasted 147 members and ten branches.⁷

promise, No Political Trading: The Marxian Socialist Tradition in British Columbia" (Ph.D. thesis, UBC, 1975).

⁴ *Western Clarion*, 16 February 1925.

⁵ Minute Books, F. L. P., 25 September 1925, Angus MacInnis Collection (AMC).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Annual Report of Labour Organizations*, pp. 200-02, King's Printer.

The significance of the ILP was that it provided an active core that maintained the semblance of a vital left in British Columbia, serving as a point of contact for the other left-wing groups in the country. J. S. Woodsworth had been a member of the old Federated Labour Party and maintained contact with the ILP and with Angus MacInnis. In 1926 Woodsworth met with MacInnis, Robert Skinner, John Sidaway and John Price of the ILP at Skinner's home to discuss the formation of a national socialist party. He provided Skinner with a list of key contacts. Skinner wrote to them but the response was disappointing, confirming the view that the labour and socialist parties were "all mixed up like a dog's breakfast."⁸

William Ivens, the energetic secretary of the Manitoba ILP, was also a frequent correspondent. The second annual convention of the British Columbia ILP in January 1928, attended by twelve delegates,⁹ reported a letter from Ivens stressing the importance of some formal contact in order that a national party might be formed. It was Ivens who brought about the first meeting of the Western Conference of Labour Parties, which was the forum from which the CCF emerged in 1932.

In 1928 the ILP withdrew from the Canadian Labour Party, largely as a result of the increasing communist control of the CLP, but the question of the enfranchisement of orientals was also an issue. The 1927 CLP Convention passed a resolution supporting enfranchisement, which antagonized many trade union affiliates who had traditionally opposed such rights for Chinese labourers as one way of expressing their concern regarding the impact of oriental workers on the labour market.

A number of the ILP's labour affiliates had withdrawn from the CLP earlier, so it was with little difficulty that the break was made. A year later the ILP annual convention faced the fact of declining numbers and undertook a consolidation of its organization in the lower mainland area, amalgamating the Vancouver locals into a single body. Here again the determination of MacInnis to keep the organization alive was evident; he was not prepared to see it dissipate its energies in managing a shrinking body of locals that would ultimately wither and die. As a school trustee and city alderman he had demonstrated his own political capacities, both on the hustings and in working out an accommodation with the apparent enemies of the socialist movement in order to speed the necessary reforms. It is not wholly unreasonable to conjecture that MacInnis' ability to "make it" in the real world of politics enhanced his influence in the move-

⁸ Interview with Robert Skinner, July 1966.

⁹ Minutes, AMC.

ment, although it is perhaps as easy to imagine that envy and distaste might have been generated by the ease with which he was able to work with the minions of capitalism. His election to the House of Commons on the ILP platform in 1930 gave more weight to his position but removed him from the scene of the struggles.

Nineteen twenty-nine was a watershed in the history of socialism in British Columbia. The apparent collapse of capitalism brought new hope to the left and within a year the onset of the Depression swelled the ranks of the ILP. From the third annual convention in May of 1929 to the fifth in December of 1931, the party's membership increased fivefold.¹⁰ It was in 1929 that the first meeting of the Western Conference of Labour Political Parties was held, under the aegis of Ivens and the Manitoba ILP.¹¹ The British Columbia ILP was represented by William Bartlett, who was elected chairman of the gathering and first vice-president of the new organization that emerged. The purpose of the gathering was to "unify the activities of the affiliated parties, to arrange common action, and to bring about the unification of the entire labour and socialist movement throughout Western Canada."¹² The second meeting took place in Medicine Hat a year later, again attended by Bartlett — the fact that as a CPR employee he had a railway pass was largely responsible for his presence. Bartlett was elected president and John Sidaway of the ILP elected vice-president in British Columbia, in absentia.

The significance for the British Columbia ILP of these conferences and the two which followed — in Winnipeg in 1931 and Calgary in 1932 — lay essentially in the contact they provided with similar parties in other provinces. Admittedly, only Bartlett attended, but he provided a vital link and nourished the consciousness of other groups that was so necessary at this stage. Combined with the presence of Angus MacInnis in the House of Commons after 1930, it meant that there were influences to help break the stranglehold of parochialism on the socialist movement in British Columbia. As the Depression deepened, these conferences grew more radical in programme — and in style: at the 1929 and 1930 meetings delegates were referred to as Mr. and Mrs.; the 1931 minutes only referred to Comrades.

The end of 1929 brought an end to the great British Columbia boom.

¹⁰ See Convention Minutes for 1929, 1930, 1931, AMC.

¹¹ See Minutes of Conference of Western Labour Political Parties, CCF Papers, Public Archives of Canada (PAC).

¹² *Ibid.*

In January of 1930 the unemployment rate in Vancouver increased by 300 per cent, and the police were busy breaking up protest marches and demonstrations.¹³ By the end of that year there were more than 7,000 men on relief in Vancouver alone. In 1930 the ILP branches in Vancouver and Burnaby met and reorganized themselves, consolidating the district apparatus in each case. The great surge ahead had not occurred but there were clear signs that the tide was turning.

The revitalization of the ILP rekindled the interest of many of the more Marxist members and the party began to move leftward. The election of Winch as secretary-treasurer at the December 1931 convention, with Wallis Lefeaux and A. M. Stephen on the executive, signified a shift away from the reformist bent provided by Angus MacInnis. The same convention which endorsed the idea of the Dominion-wide labour party — a response to the reports from the Western Conferences — also passed a motion urging the party executive to work toward unity with all groups that had a “Marxian basis.”¹⁴ During the ensuing year branches of the ILP were supplied with “lists of questions upon Marxian philosophy suitable for study classes and training speakers.”¹⁵ Wallis Lefeaux offered classes in economics in which *Das Capital* was the text book. It is not surprising, then, that the 1931 annual convention agreed with the executive decision to change the party name to ILP (Socialist) but not without a bitter debate.¹⁶

The executive — chiefly Lefeaux, Winch and Stephen — prepared a new statement of party objectives that was presented to a meeting of the executive in February of 1932¹⁷ and subsequently circulated to the ILP locals, along with a new constitution that provided for strong central control by the provincial executive committee. The stated objectives were, “to spread education in the Economic Foundation of Human Society and to bring all workers together in a political organization for the purpose of obtaining collective control of wealth production and distribution.”

The education bias was clear. The manifesto went on to point out:

The only salvation for society is for the workers to shake off the appropriation and control of Capitalism and inaugurate some other means of distributing wealth.

¹³ M. A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto, 1958), pp. 442-43.

¹⁴ Minutes, 6 December 1931, AMC.

¹⁵ ILP Minute Books, *passim*, AMC.

¹⁶ ILP Minute Books, 6 December 1931, AMC.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

The workers must obtain control of the machinery of government and use it to support the introduction of socialism.

The Independent Labour Party (Socialist) is a political party of the working class formed for this purpose.

Some of the party branches objected to the statement of objectives, but the manifesto was adopted as was a "new" name, Socialist Party of Canada, in June of 1932.¹⁸

Under the emerging leadership of Winch and Lefeaux, the ILP/SPC became more a socialist party than a labour party. It was not a reincarnation of the old SPC, however much these men wanted to make it so. For one thing, events were moving too swiftly for them to have as much control as they had in the old days; for another there were more in the party whose interest was in short-run reform rather than long-run revolution. The leading figures might want to ensure the Marxian purity of all who entered, participating in the "dogmatic tradition [of] the British Columbia Socialist movement,"¹⁹ but they had to contend with Angus MacInnis, whose influence was great and whose success made his position unassailable, and Dr. Lyle Telford, a radical meteor who burned fiercely in the highly charged atmosphere of the Depression and could not be ignored.

To a large extent, education was a fetish and an excuse that was used in an attempt to preserve the elitist character of the socialist movement in British Columbia. Applicants for membership in the SPC were required to demonstrate a knowledge of "Scientific Socialism" and Marxian economics before they could be accepted. The examination was, of course, set by the executive who thereby controlled access to the movement. Lefeaux, Winch, Smith and others delighted in the opportunity that the regular lecture series provided them to demonstrate their mastery of Marxist analysis. However humanitarian their goals may have been, Wallis Lefeaux, Ernest Winch, A. M. Stephen and J. W. Hope were self-righteous to the point of arrogance and intolerance. The millenium had to come — their Marxism told them that; but it would come on their terms. It is a nice tribute to MacInnis' skills as a politician and a conciliator that there were no open clashes between him and the radical leadership of the SPC.

Ernest's son, Harold, who was chairman of the publicity committee of the SPC, was made editor of the party newspaper, the first issue of which appeared in August 1932. It, like the new/old name of the party, hearkened back to the good old days when theory was king, and was called

¹⁸ ILP Minute books, 13 June 1932.

¹⁹ Stuart, p. 62.

The Clarion. Its aim, according to its young editor, was to transmit "high tension Marxism" to the masses.²⁰ Throughout its short life (the paper died in 1936) the *Clarion* remained as the voice of the "impossibilists" — those who saw as the goal of the party the education of the masses to prepare for the revolution. It was read by relatively few within the party and lacked the overall circulation of the vastly superior *Commonwealth* that was established in May 1933 by W. A. Pritchard after the CCF was founded.

The radical core viewed the formation of the CCF in Calgary in 1932 with considerable misgiving. But there was little that they could do beyond labouring mightily to ensure that the new party would remain as doctrinally pure as their efforts could make it. The news of the development of the new federation of labour and socialist parties came from Angus MacInnis and W. J. Bartlett, John Sidaway and J. W. Hope, each of whom had been delegates to the Western Conferences of Labour Political Parties, and each of whom had been elected to one executive post or another of that body.

J. W. Hope had been selected as the SPC delegate to the fifth conference of the Labour Political Parties, held in Calgary in August 1932 to facilitate meeting with the farmers' groups. Hope had been instructed to press for the name "Socialist Party of Canada" and the executive had endorsed Hope's own draft plan for a socialist state which he proposed that the new party adopt.²¹ Although the SPC was not alone in its preference for a name, the minutes of the conference give no indication that Hope's programme received any serious consideration.²²

The leading figures in the SPC were not enthusiastic about the broad policy statement adopted at Calgary by the new party, nor were they pleased that the new name gave only passing reference to the cause they held so dear: Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (Farmer, Labour, Socialist). For them the CCF was merely the "third party of capitalism." The question of affiliation was the next step and it was taken reluctantly by the party chieftains although the membership endorsed the idea by a vote of 305 to fifty. Most of the dissidents were members of the Vancouver Centre branch. They later expressed this dissent by seizing the party headquarters on Homer Street.²³

²⁰ *Clarion*, vol. 1, # 1, AMC.

²¹ ILP/SPC Minute Books, July 1932, AMC.

²² Minutes of Western Conference of Labour Political Parties, 1932, PAC.

²³ Steeves, p. 79.

Although initially opposed to affiliation with the CCF, Ernest Winch gradually became reconciled to the change, helped along no doubt by a provincial nomination that offered wider horizons for his restless ambition. An indication of the SPC suspicion of the new creature that brought together trade unionists, farmers and socialists can be found in the committee that was struck to work out SPC relations with the CCF. It consisted of Wallis Lefeaux, A. M. Stephen, Ernest Winch, Robert Skinner and Arthur Turner.²⁴ Only the latter two could be considered at all sympathetic toward social democracy.

The SPC Convention in January 1933 provides a very clear indication of the determination of the Socialist Party's executive to ignore the CCF as much as it could. It was a fine convention, attended by 104 delegates representing 1,600 members in forty-six branches. In his report to the delegates, party chairman Wallis Lefeaux made no mention at all of the new party. His statement was strikingly doctrinaire and insular. Characteristically it laid chief emphasis on education rather than immediate reform as the objective of the SPC, an easy enough tack to take for a man for whom the Depression held no fears, his financial independence well secured not only by his legal training but by his skilful activity in the real estate market. For his part, Ernest Winch was at pains to inform the delegates that the CCF was "very loosely formed of a number of 'all sorts and conditions' of groups."²⁵

The convention then proceeded to adopt a fairly radical declaration of principles, presumably on the assumption that the less digestible the SPC was the longer it would last. The declaration stated that

... the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that [the] machinery of government... may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.²⁶

The SPC indicated that it was prepared to cooperate with any group whose principles were similar. In view of the policy objectives temporarily adopted by the CCF, it might be suggested that it would not be one such group. As a final fillip the convention passed a resolution instructing

²⁴ SPC Minutes, 8 August 1932, AMC.

²⁵ Minutes, SPC Convention, 21-22 January 1933, AMC.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Angus MacInnis "to press for a monopoly of political activity in this province for the Socialist Party of Canada."²⁷

The purists in the SPC were clearly concerned for their own ideals but were equally disturbed by the prospect of having to deal with the growing number from outside the SPC who were clamouring to join the CCF or to have the group they already belonged to affiliate with the CCF. As the sole British Columbia affiliate of the CCF, and hence the only provincial constituent of the national council, the SPC was in the advantageous position of controlling access to the new national party, but in the disadvantageous position of having to provide access to those who were, clearly, not part of the Socialist Party of Canada. Groups in B.C. which applied to the national CCF for affiliation were referred by the party's national secretary to the SPC.²⁸

The groups that were anxious to become part of the new political movement ranged all the way from the Reconstruction Party, which was an outgrowth of the Vancouver branch of the League for Social Reconstruction, to the people's party of J. E. Armishaw, which had a platform that was a long distance from socialism. The Reconstruction Party, which was eventually accepted for affiliation, was itself a polygot organization, as Dorothy Steeves — who was a charter member — writes:

Besides those who were socialistically inclined, the Reconstruction Party contained Social Creditors, supporters of the Gesell monetary system and other species of monetary reformers . . . There were crypto-communists, four pointers and others who flocked into the Reconstruction Party, because it seemed like the best bet.²⁹

Branches of the League for Social Reconstruction had been established in Vancouver and Victoria in the summer and fall of 1932. Ronald Grantham, who was the first secretary of the Vancouver branch, describes the membership as including many who "were prominent in Vancouver schools, libraries, organizations and professions."³⁰ It was clearly a middle-class organization. The Victoria group included Robert Connell, an Anglican clergyman, and Victor Midgley — both of whom were to figure large in the subsequent history of the CCF. In December of 1932 the

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ See minutes of the Provisional National Council, 24 January 1933, CCF papers, PAC.

²⁹ Steeves, p. 80.

³⁰ R. G. Grantham, "Some aspects of the socialist movement in British Columbia, 1898-1933" (M.A. thesis, UBC, 1942).

political action committee of the LSR wrote to J. S. Wordsworth, informing him of their intention to form a "Commonwealth Party" with a platform consistent with the goals of the CCF and the LSR. They then proceeded to create the "Reconstruction Party" and entered into discussions with the SPC in January, following Wordsworth's advice to affiliate.³¹

The Reconstruction Party described itself as "... a political organization of persons who are dissatisfied with the present social and economic order and who aim by *constitutional methods* to obtain control of the powers of government in order to achieve a planned system of social economy."³² The Reconstruction Party was obviously determined to make the distinction between the road to the cooperative commonwealth favoured by its membership and that espoused by the SPC. In federal matters it endorsed the national CCF platform and in provincial matters the party undertook to "deal with special problems of vital importance to the population of B.C. and [to] ... form a Government of men and women of honesty and vision, capable of immediately putting into effect the measures most necessary to meet the present crisis, particularly as it affects finance, unemployment and other social services." The platform included a set of proposals to extend social services, socialize health services and prevent further "alienation of natural resources." It was not a noticeably radical programme and contained none of the Marxist nostrums so dear to the left wing of the SPC. *The Clarion* urged these "advocates of pacific evolutionary gradualism" to work through "some other medium of political expression where they will not be required to face economic facts and cooperate with the great mass of workers upon a distinctly revolutionary objective."³³

Affiliation to the CCF was not simply a matter of applying. A committee of the SPC was struck to examine the socialist bona fides of the Reconstructionists and judge "as to their fitness for admission into the CCF."³⁴ The Reconstruction Party was, nevertheless, admitted by the SPC as a co-affiliate to the CCF in British Columbia in May of 1933, but the structure of the Provincial council left no doubt that the Socialist Party was the senior partner. It provided that the council consist of "three members from each provincial body plus the President and Secretary-Treasurer," who were to be appointed by the SPC.³⁵ To ensure a tight

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

³² Programme of Reconstruction Party, AMP. (Emphasis added.)

³³ *Clarion*, April 1933.

³⁴ Steeves, p. 80.

³⁵ SPC Minutes, 12 March 1933.

rein the provincial constitution further provided that "Candidates for election to public bodies must, before being announced, receive the approval of the Provincial Council following an examination by a committee formed for this purpose." The committee would rule upon the prospective candidates' "knowledge of the fundamental principles of socialism," the only category of member excluded from this inquisition being people who had previously stood for the SPC.³⁶

The suspicion of Winch, Stephen and Lefeaux of both the new party and the newcomers to the cause was viewed with some concern by Angus MacInnis. He wrote frequently to Skinner — one of the few moderates at the centre of the SPC — complaining about the situation:

It is rather too bad that we are not having the unstinted cooperation of Lefeaux, Winch, and Stephen. I think they are very shortsighted. The movement will have to build out of the materials we have at hand. We cannot make our material and then create our organization.³⁷

MacInnis was not himself sufficiently pragmatic to countenance the serious dilution of socialist principle, but he was enough of a realist to recognize that dogmatism would destroy the new party far more readily than any willingness to compromise and cooperate with the new groups. He recognized as well the electoral advantage in widening the party's base.³⁸

MacInnis had played an important role in holding the disparate groups together in the ILP but subsequent to his election to the federal parliament it was increasingly difficult for him to exert any influence. His correspondence betrays, from time to time, his impatience with the narrowness of his provincial colleagues' perspective.³⁹

The onset of the 1933 provincial election was both a blessing and a curse for the conglomerate that passed for the provincial CCF in that year. Lyle Telford's charisma — retailed by radio broadcasts and through the pages of his newspaper *The Challenge*, and enhanced by a highly successful tour of the province — had led to the creation of a large number of CCF clubs throughout the province. Unable to join the CCF directly, they were advised to affiliate with either the SPC or the Reconstruction Party. Most chose the latter. In August the clubs, which had

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ MacInnis to Skinner, 11 April 1935, AMC.

³⁸ See Stuart, pp. 77 ff.

³⁹ See, as examples, MacInnis to Skinner, 11 May 1933, MacInnis to Lefeaux, 10 May 1933, AMC.

continued to grow in number, amalgamated with the Reconstruction Party to form the Associated CCF Clubs of British Columbia and elected Bill Pritchard as president on a twelve-point programme that was much less radical than that of their co-affiliate in the CCF, the Socialist Party of Canada. Moreover the new group vastly outnumbered the SPC.

The growth in the numbers on the right was disturbing to the old-guard socialists in the SPC, particularly so for Ernest Winch, given the pre-eminence of Pritchard. Not only was Pritchard's *Commonwealth* a successful competitor to his son Harold's narrow-gauge *Clarion*, but Pritchard had also been an antagonist back in the days of the One Big Union when the two had differed in their approach and Winch had pulled the lumber workers out of the union, contributing decisively to the collapse of the OBU. Winch, Pritchard and Victor Midgley had all been active on the executive of the OBU and generally in radical politics in B.C. Pritchard and Winch were both members of the Socialist Party of Canada in 1919; Winch and Midgley were on the executive of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council during the same year. Pritchard was, at this point, one of the more popular figures in radical circles in Vancouver. On his return from prison in 1921 he was greeted by several thousand people at the station.⁴⁰ That he and Midgley should subsequently make common cause against the Winch faction was more a reflection of conflicting ambition (no doubt exacerbated by their falling out over the OBU) than conflicting ideology.

The antagonism was increased further by Pritchard's determination to have the Burnaby nomination in the provincial election. Ernest Winch had been nominated in 1931 and, changed party circumstances notwithstanding, was unwilling to surrender the seat. Pritchard based his claim on the fact that he had been a successful reeve of the municipality and clearly had the endorsement of by far the largest segment of the party. Winch prevailed with the judicious support of MacInnis, who was unwilling to alienate the left when procedurally at least Winch had the stronger case.

The party met in Victoria in September to hammer out an election platform. It was a compromise document that pleased no faction completely, and the SPC least of all. As Dorothy Steeves has pointed out, in the program for immediate reforms there was little difference from the measures advocated by the Liberal Party.⁴¹ Despite, or because of, the

⁴⁰ See Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour* (Kingston, 1968), pp. 136, 172, 179, and Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater* (Vancouver, 1967), p. 87.

⁴¹ Steeves, p. 89.

presence of a variety of left-wing candidates on the hustings, and a vigorous and vituperative anti-CCF campaign in the press, the CCF managed to poll 31.5 per cent of the vote, electing seven members, among them Ernest Winch, but not Bill Pritchard, who finally ran in Point Grey — not the most productive riding then or since for socialists. Indeed, all but two of the elected members were from the SPC side of the party, including Ernest's son Harold, but apart from the Winch family and Swailes, they represented the moderate position.

Having entered the campaign leaderless, the party set about the task of choosing a parliamentary leader. Not surprisingly, Winch thought that he should lead the group. The executive of the SPC had urged that he be chosen,⁴² but clearly the new party had not been impervious to the attacks against it in the press; moreover the caucus, dominated by the moderates, was anxious to avoid perpetuating either the division in the movement or the intellectual dominance of the left. So it was that at a special meeting they elected as House leader the MLA for Victoria, Rev. Robert Connell. Winch voted for himself.⁴³ The CCF Provincial Executive endorsed the caucus decision.

Connell was a compromise figure. In the election of five members to the provincial council at the 1933 convention with ten nominated, Connell placed eighth.⁴⁴ An Anglican clergyman, he was best known in Victoria for his regular newspaper columns on the botanical wonders of the capital city. His interest in politics was largely an intellectual one, although he had been an active pacifist during the First World War. His political career with the CCF lasted four years. In July of 1933 he was writing in the *Times* of the "violets that bloom at Shawnigan Lake and elsewhere." In August he was in the political swim,⁴⁵ and on 27 June 1937 his column reappeared in the *Colonist* under the heading "Buttercups and Roses."⁴⁶

Harold Winch, reflecting on the choice some years later, said, "The view of the party was that they wanted to make a good showing and a reverend gentleman who loved the birds and bees and the flowers, and wrote a weekly column on botany, and who was a minister of the pulpit would make a better front show than a terrible socialist."⁴⁷ The choice was

⁴² SPC Executive Minutes, 10 December 1933, AMC.

⁴³ Steeves, p. 91.

⁴⁴ Minutes of the Provincial Convention, 30 September - 1 October 1933, AMC.

⁴⁵ *Victoria Times*, 14 August 1933.

⁴⁶ *Victoria Colonist*, 27 June 1937.

⁴⁷ Reynoldston Research and Studies, *Oral History* no. 148, 1 March 1973.

not the most popular with either side in the party but a necessary compromise. Yet Connell was more than “a reverend gentleman who loved the birds and the bees and the flowers.” He was well read in the literature of socialism, knew his Marx as well as any of the more vocal Marxists, but was by nature and practice a pacifist determined to work within the prevailing system to improve the immediate lot of mankind. He was not fired by either personal ambition or chiliastic zeal — a marked contrast to Ernest Winch. He nevertheless did demonstrate a self-righteousness that sat well with his professional commitment and with his political views, but was ultimately inconsistent with his role as leader. Moreover, a man who was self-righteously moderate as was Connell was bound to collide with one who was self-righteously radical, as was Ernest Winch.

Connell’s election as House leader did not serve to bind the disparate elements in the party together. The admixture of significant ideological differences with conflicting personal ambitions made an open confrontation inevitable. While Connell’s presence may have served to give the CCF an outward appearance of respectability, his complete lack of political experience and almost total inability to compromise meant that he was, in the long run, a liability. Connell kept his own counsel, and was supported vigorously by Victor Midgley and Bill Pritchard in the pages of the *Commonwealth* just as Ernest Winch was supported by the *Clarion*. The flamboyant Dr. Telford aligned himself with the left wing of the party for what must have been purely opportunistic motives, since his personal philosophy was a combination of socialism and social credit that was more in line with the subsequent arguments of the Liberal Gerry McGeer than with anything any of Telford’s socialist colleagues ever espoused.

Not even the remarkable success of the CCF in the provincial election served to lubricate the abrasive surfaces within the party. The election of a clearly radical slate to its executive in January 1934 gave notice that the SPC would brook no compromise with its version of socialism. The SPC was feeling beleaguered at this point, for the number of CCF Clubs was growing by leaps and bounds — there were over 185 in the fall of 1934,⁴⁸ and many SPC branches were converting themselves into CCF Clubs “simply because there has been a large group of people who would go to a club meeting but not to an SPC meeting.”⁴⁹ The erosion of SPC membership was, in Mackenzie’s view, also due to the fact that “Winch and his

⁴⁸ *Commonwealth*, 6 September 1934.

⁴⁹ Frank Mackenzie to J. M. Smith, 27 June 1934, AMC.

gang have been engaged in a consolidation of their machine control which has caused a continuous exodus of moderates from the Socialist Party . . . ”⁵⁰

The 1934 legislative session saw tension growing between the two wings in the legislature. The two Winches were determined that their speeches would reflect the accepted radical line in contrast to the moderate reformism of Connell and his fellow reformists. In his annual report as an MLA, Ernest Winch warned against the party developing a “reformist complex.”⁵¹ He had some reason to fear such a development, for not only had the caucus exercised some editorial authority in connection with a few of Winch’s more radical speeches, but the reports from the constituencies indicated that the SPC was losing ground.⁵²

According to Skinner, Ernest Winch was convinced that a split was coming in the B.C. party and was “shaping his programme with that in view so that the SPC will come out with a working organization.”⁵³ Skinner was anxious that the two constituent bodies should merge into a single party but had been unable to convince Winch of the wisdom of such a course. Winch, Skinner felt, was not prepared to forgive his colleagues for electing Connell leader and was therefore not about to cooperate.⁵⁴ For his part, Angus MacInnis was equally distressed by Winch’s attitude. He wrote Victor Midgley in May 1934:

Winch gives me a pain in the neck. One would think that the present as well as the future of the revolutionary socialist movement was in his custody. It would seem to me that what he wants is not a revolutionary socialist movement but a sort of mutual admiration society with the Winches at the centre.⁵⁵

Connell was not in favour of revolutionary socialism and was determined to state this position at every occasion in the provincial House and on the hustings. During the debate on the Pattullo government’s Special Powers Act, Connell had made it clear that the CCF position, as far as he was concerned, did not support any non-constitutional means of bringing social change. In an address to the CCF Clubs in Victoria he pointed out that the party had “suffered detrimentally from talk of violence.”⁵⁶

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ E. E. Winch, “Annual Report as MLA,” 1934, AMC.

⁵² Skinner to MacInnis, 14 March 1934, AMC.

⁵³ Skinner to MacInnis, 17 May 1934, AMC.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ MacInnis to Midgley, 26 May 1934, AMC.

⁵⁶ *Times*, 29 May 1934.

Change, he argued, "could only be brought about because the majority of the people wished it and expressed their wish through the . . . ballot boxes."⁵⁷

The only way to avoid a possible split in the CCF ranks was through a merger of the Clubs and SPC. In a referendum held in October of 1934, the SPC affiliates narrowly rejected the proposal while the Clubs enthusiastically endorsed it.⁵⁸ The following January a second vote was held and the resolution passed.⁵⁹

The first convention of the merged party in July 1935 was remarkable for the fact that members of the old Socialist Party captured two-thirds of the executive positions and Ernest Winch, in his report to the convention, took the view that the merger was a victory for the left.⁶⁰ This view was endorsed, not surprisingly, by his son Harold in the *Clarion* — which in May of 1935 had been insulated from any untoward influence resulting from the merger by the device of setting it up as a private publication responsible to a board of trustees who would continue it as "a socialist paper free from political and propagandist activities of any party."⁶¹ In the August 3 issue, the *Clarion* saw the merger as swinging the whole movement "definitely into line with the former Socialist Party and becoming a revolutionary class conscious organization."⁶² In fact, the most likely explanation for the success of the representatives of the left is simply that they were better known and, of most importance, were skilled convention organizers, which the more numerous Club delegates manifestly were not.

Wickerson points out, correctly,⁶³ that by making a virtue of necessity the SPC executive were avoiding the inevitable disappearance of their party by clambering aboard the CCF wagon, insisting the ownership and direction of the vehicle was really theirs all along. They were, as well, firing another salvo in the direction of Robert Connell, who had then to take notice that the thieves had been truly welcomed into the vault. According to the correspondence published in the *Commonwealth* following Connell's expulsion a year later, Winch had been highly critical of

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Report of Provincial Secretary, 1935 CCF Convention, AMC.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Clarion*, 3 August 1935.

⁶³ Gordon Wickerson, "Conflict in the British Columbia Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and the 'Connell Affair'" (M.A. thesis, UBC, 1970), p. 25.

Connell's leadership in 1935 and had accused him directly of not earning the monthly allowance the party paid him.⁶⁴

Throughout this period the moderates received counsel and comfort from the pages of Pritchard's *Commonwealth* and from Angus MacInnis, who was increasingly concerned that the B.C. party — which had made such a startling electoral beginning — would throw it all away as a result of ideological bickering and the personal bitterness that was the product of thwarted ambition.

Matters came to a head in 1936 when Connell, apparently determined to establish the party's reformist credentials in advance of the next election, attacked the position of the Marxian socialists in general, and the remarks of Ernest Winch to the House in particular. Connell was responding to an editorial in the *Clarion* for February 1936, which had advocated cooperation with the communists and criticized the CCF for its lack of discipline and "rampant individualism."⁶⁵ Connell fired his first salvo in the pages of the *Commonwealth*. He charged the *Clarion* with disloyalty and described its position as "narrow and doctrinaire."⁶⁶ He followed this up with a speech on the floor of the House, following Ernest Winch's contribution to the budget debate.

The point of Connell's speech, as reported in the press, was to reassert the constitutionalism of the CCF and the democratic, non-Marxian character of the Regina Manifesto, and to "repudiate and castigate the whole spirit and tenor" of Ernest Winch's earlier remarks in the budget debate in which he had espoused a Marxist and revolutionary position.⁶⁷ Bruce Hutchison observed that the speech marked the emergence of Connell as a "major figure in our politics — most unwillingly, for he is happier with his rocks and his flowers."⁶⁸ One immediate result was Harold Winch's resignation as party whip.

At no time a skilful politician, Connell was dealing with the internal division in the manner he best understood — direct confrontation. Moreover, in the legislature Connell had the upper hand; hence it was the obvious forum for the attack.⁶⁹

The *Commonwealth*, not surprisingly, supported Connell. Harold

⁶⁴ Winch to Connell, 27 August 1935, as published in the *Commonwealth*, 4 September 1936.

⁶⁵ *Clarion*, February 1936.

⁶⁶ *Commonwealth*, 21 February 1936.

⁶⁷ *Times*, 14 March 1936.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Wickerson, p. 32.

Winch resigned as whip and the two sides began to prepare for what would be a major battle in the struggle for control of the B.C. CCF. Angus MacInnis supported the stand taken by Connell but counselled caution, fearing that the tactic which the Winch faction might adopt would be to drive the Connell group out of the CCF.⁷⁰

Ernest and his son wrote to the party president, Arnold Webster, demanding that Connell "withdraw his whole action"; otherwise they would appeal to the party membership.⁷¹ Both sides realized the inevitability of a split, yet both seemed powerless to effect a reconciliation. MacInnis, from Ottawa, was not certain how to deal with Connell and could not mollify the Winches without taking sides.⁷²

The *Commonwealth*, for its part, featured Connell's speeches prominently and roundly attacked the left and Dr. Lyle Telford — whose self-seeking endeavours could hardly be described as either left or right in the context of the party struggle. They were designed primarily to maintain the Telford profile at a considerable height.

The party convention would be the watershed. Ernest Winch wrote to Angus MacInnis in June stating his position and pointing out that he believed that the convention would have the effect of settling this question for the whole movement, not just British Columbia:

We, who feel we have some scientific knowledge of the economic basis of human society and the factors which dominate it, refuse to be muzzled by utopians whose bourgeois respectability and hunger for the sweets of parliamentary office they feel to be menaced by our class consciousness and action arising therefrom.⁷³

It was a patently unfair assault on Connell, who was many things, but manifestly not hungry for the sweets of parliamentary office. That description fits Ernest more precisely.

The lines drawn at the convention reflected a concern over four issues: the role of the House leader, Connell's leadership in particular, the relevance of the Regina Manifesto, and relations with the Communist Party.

The Winch faction, supporting a narrowly defined role for the House leader, opposed Connell's leadership for obvious reasons, viewed the

⁷⁰ MacInnis to W. E. Turner, 3 April 1936, AMC. And see also MacInnis to Midgley, 4 May 1936, AMC, in which MacInnis said he was convinced that Connell was right but should "avoid making martyrs of the left."

⁷¹ E. E. and H. E. Winch to Arnold Webster, n.d. AMC.

⁷² MacInnis to Webster, 23 April 1936, AMC.

⁷³ Winch to MacInnis, 14 June 1936, AMC.

Manifesto as a bourgeois document and favoured cooperation with the communists. The Connell element took a strict parliamentary line on the leadership question, backed the Manifesto and refused any cooperation with the communists. Their position was simply the position of Woodsworth and the National Party, shorn of any diplomatic expression. Despite this, the Connell-Pritchard group managed to undermine their support among such moderates as Dorothy Steeves, Grant MacNeil and Arnold Webster, who were unable to accept Connell's apparent unwillingness to compromise with the left, and who found his insistence that the leader, once elected, must have virtually absolute authority, quite inconsistent with the democratic ethic of the CCF.⁷⁴

By virtue of its superior oratorical and managerial skills, the left dominated the convention although a resolution of "No Confidence" in Connell was lost 138 - 76. The convention refused to endorse Marxian socialism although it did resolve that it was not opposed to it.⁷⁵ It established the Provincial Executive as "the supreme authority" of the party between conventions and provided "that M.P.'s, MLA's and other elected representatives are at all times subject to its final authority." Moreover, speakers' tours and the content of speeches were placed under the control of the Speakers' Committee, which was chaired by A. M. Stephen, "a pro-communist, if not a communist."⁷⁶

The left dominated the new executive with Telford president, and such left-wingers as Herbert Gargrave, Ernest Winch, Helena Gutteridge and A. M. Stephen elected to other executive positions.

The most significant event of the convention, however, was the debate on the resolution presented by Lyle Telford calling for a plank on "socialized finance" in the party election platform. The proposal was a curious mélange of socialism and social credit. It carried despite the vigorous opposition of such party notables from both camps, as Wallis Lefebvre, Angus MacInnis and Grant MacNeil.⁷⁷ The convention, at that point, was Dr. Telford's. Displaying all the arts of charismatic leadership, he accused the opponents of the plank of wanting to sabotage the party and destroy any chance of bringing prosperity to the masses. His flamboyant oratory won the day — indeed, he was the focal point of the gathering — and he was subsequently elected party president by acclamation. Bruce Hutchison

⁷⁴ See the *Commonwealth*, 1 May 1936.

⁷⁵ See the *Times*, *Colonist* and *Vancouver Sun* of 4, 5, 6 July 1936, for coverage of the convention.

⁷⁶ MacInnis to M. J. Coldwell, 30 November 1936, AMC.

⁷⁷ *Sun*, 6 July 1936.

commented that the CCF convention had rejected Connell's gradualism and added that "if the CCF wants to get elected it had better unload (1) the present platform and (2) the doctor."⁷⁸

Connell himself took very little part in the convention proceedings. He had been given a vote of confidence at the convention, but other than that his presence had hardly been noted. Indeed, it was asserted in the *Commonwealth* that the convention resolutions committee had refused to put Connell's platform proposals before the convention.⁷⁹ Although leader of the party he took a back seat to the Winch faction and, of course, to the colourful Dr. Telford. Clearly the hurly-burly of a party convention was not to Connell's taste, especially so when it was unlikely he would receive the deference that, as a clergyman, he was accustomed to and, as a leader, he would feel was his due. In the relatively unstructured atmosphere of a socialist convention he would have been no match for Winch.

Subsequent to the convention he made it clear to his supporters that he would not accept the program adopted by the convention, and would not accept executive control. His supporters were divided on these issues, some favouring a confrontation, expulsion and the inevitable split, believing that Connell could carry the party with him; others were concerned that it would destroy either Connell or the party.⁸⁰

In an exchange of letters, Telford urged Connell to publicly indicate that the party was united behind the convention decisions.⁸¹ For his part, Connell indicated that he would not make any public appearance since he was unalterably opposed to the plank on socialized finance. Telford's pleas were to no avail and even his telegraphed offer to resign in an effort to keep Connell from splitting the party had little effect on Connell.⁸² Connell replied that he was "not prepared to pay the price the present situation demands of me. I refer particularly to the communist and pro-Communist influences which have already broken our unity."⁸³

Possibly because he had been misled by Pritchard and Midgley and believed that there was a good deal of support for his position,⁸⁴ and probably because he was genuinely distressed by the platform and felt he

⁷⁸ *Times*, 9, 10 July 1936.

⁷⁹ *Commonwealth*, 14 August 1936.

⁸⁰ Provincial Executive Minutes, 29 July 1936, AMC.

⁸¹ Telford to Connell, 20 July 1936; Connell to Telford, 22 July 1936, 23 July 1936, AMC.

⁸² Telford to Connell, 1 August 1936, AMC.

⁸³ Provincial Executive Minutes, 1 August 1936, AMC.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 29 July 1936.

had no choice but to dissociate himself from it and from the executive's support of the convention decisions, Connell remained adamant. As Arnold Webster was later to remark to J. S. Woodsworth, Connell was a very stubborn man.⁸⁵ In his letter to the press and the executive, Connell indicated another possible explanation for his intractable behaviour: "... I refuse to accept the position of a mere delegate of Convention or Executive ..."⁸⁶ It was unlikely that a man of Connell's temperament, with Connell's well-established unwillingness to compromise and, in fact, play the party game, would behave otherwise than he did. The executive responded by indicating that they represented the will of the convention, and that Connell had been ill-advised by those around him. Connell refused to meet with the executive and in August was formally expelled.⁸⁷

In disposing of Connell, the executive demonstrated their superior political sense with some clarity. The letter to Connell, which was released to the press, depicted Connell quite accurately as a man who either did not understand the democratic nature of the party or, if he did, was not prepared to accept the authority of the party rank and file in convention. The tone of the letter was "more in sorrow than in anger." It pointed out that the CCF was "a movement built up by the people," and asserted that "in the hands of the people control will remain."⁸⁸ It continued: "... with all due respect to Mr. Connell, we feel that this attempt to dictate the course of the movement according to his own personal ideas and those of a few men, is in itself overwhelming justification of the resolution that was passed." Connell, the executive concluded, had been "victimized by the advice of the men who have, by their actions during the past year, completely forfeited the confidence of the membership of the CCF."⁸⁹

The party executive had skilfully established itself as the defender of party democracy and, by attacking Connell's advisors rather than Connell himself, avoided creating a martyr, thereby making his dismissal relatively simple. Formal expulsion took place August 1.⁹⁰ He was followed into the wilderness by three of his legislative colleagues, Price, Swailes and Bakewell, along with Pritchard and Midgley. The Connell faction contested the 1937 election as the British Columbia Constructives, and made no impact on the electorate.

⁸⁵ Webster to J. S. Woodsworth, 12 October 1936, AMC.

⁸⁶ Provincial Executive Minutes, 29 July 1936, AMC.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1 August 1936.

⁸⁸ *Times*, 31 July 1936.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, and see also the Provincial Executive Minutes for 29 July 1936, AMC.

⁹⁰ Provincial Executive Minutes for 1 August 1936, AMC.

Dorothy Steeves, who was a close and shrewd observer of party affairs — as well as a major participant — subsequently described the Connell split as “a clash between personalities, a matter of ancient rivalries, of bitter words written and spoken which had rankled throughout the years.”⁹¹ Winch had been a constant critic of Connell’s and had made great use of his role as party organizer to undermine Connell’s position by writing “to all corners of the province setting forth the shortcomings of the leader.”⁹² Years later Harold Winch described his role in the general assault on Connell: “In 1933 I was the whip, like quip, I quipped in opposition to the Reverend Robert Connell.”⁹³ However much they found his view and style inconsistent with their perception of the job, neither Ernest nor Harold Winch were prepared to accept Connell as leader and give him even the minimal support he was entitled to. Arnold Webster commented later that “. . . he [Connell] did the right thing at the wrong time.”⁹⁴

It would be simple to describe the conflict as purely a matter of ideology, but the Connell affair, like the events that preceded and followed it, demonstrated what might almost be a truism of the left in British Columbia: that is, that the ideological distinctions that were invariably drawn in such disputes must be seen as covers for conflicting ambitions. The antagonism that was directed toward Pritchard’s successful Commonwealth was as much a function of the inability of the ruling clique to control it as of its ideological stance. The individualism of Ernest and Harold Winch, and of Lyle Telford, which was expressed through the domination of the party apparatus and clad in the raiment of scientific socialism, was outraged by the individualism of a Connell or a Pritchard which stood outside the structures others had created as vehicles for their particular ambitions. Moreover the Winches, Stephens and Gargraves were “outsiders” who found in the socialist movement not only a platform that legitimized their personal discontent, but an identity that they were not prepared to have threatened by those who came late to the cause by the more comfortable route of middle-class concern over social concerns.

In all of this Telford was a chameleon whose colours were so various and brilliant that he was a highly satisfactory ally, his doctrinal inadequacies notwithstanding. But even he fell victim to the determination of the

⁹¹ Steeves, p. 107.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Reynoldston Research.

⁹⁴ Arnold Webster to Angus MacInnis, 26 February 1937, AMC.

Winch faction to make the party in their own image. When in 1937 he became mayor of Vancouver, he too was asked to leave. His brief career as a CCF MLA had revealed an unfortunate independence of mind and spirit.

The period immediately following Connell's expulsion was marked by continued tension, largely over the question of cooperation with the Communist Party and the various front organizations that it spawned, most notably the League Against War and Fascism. But even that particular struggle can best be understood in the light of the personal involvement of the left wing with ideology as a vehicle for the expression of personal ambitions and for the resolution of significant personal conflicts. Personal insecurities or a sense of personal inadequacy can be effectively overcome with the aid of an aggressive political position. The continued tension in the CCF and, to a lesser extent, in the NDP that succeeded it (indeed, the animosity generated in British Columbia at the time of the creation of the NDP is an interesting study in the psychology of left-wing politics) was very largely a demonstration that, for many of the leading figures, the doctrine was a vehicle for personal salvation as well as for social salvation.