

“RECKONING WITH THE MACHINE”: *The British Columbia Social Credit Movement as Social Criticism, 1932–52*

LEONARD B. KUFFERT

WITH A SMALL MEMBERSHIP AND FAINT PROMISE of its eventual political success, the British Columbia Social Credit movement dwelt in obscurity for most of the twenty years following its incorporation in 1932. Consequently, this early phase of its development has not drawn much scholarly attention. Yet a consideration of the movement's career before its electoral breakthrough in 1952 may dispel some misconceptions about the movement itself and lead to a clearer understanding of mid-twentieth-century Canadian attitudes towards ideas like planning and democracy. The movement's members tended to gaze disapprovingly upon the social changes they perceived, especially from the later stages of the Second World War to the early 1950s, a time in which talk of "reconstruction" prevailed and many were cheered by the prospect of a new world order. Viewed in the context of a depression-war-prosperity cycle, the movement's internal difficulties and protracted inability to recruit a mass following raise fascinating questions about the effects of rapid economic and cultural change on doctrines like Social Credit. In developing a critique of collectivism and the welfare state that historians of wartime and post-war Canada rarely consider characteristic of the period, the movement nonetheless reflected its cultural milieu by gradually turning away from the "scientific" Social Credit system of monetary reform and embracing individualism, Christianity, and free enterprise. Historians of Alberta's Social Credit regime have argued that a similar shift occurred in that province, and interpretations of the BC movement's evolution have presented Social Credit's electoral success in British Columbia as an outgrowth of its Albertan experience. But before 1952, BC Social Credit, with its own set of pamphleteers and radicals, was more than a mimetic political entity. The present

article is not an organizational or political history of the British Columbia Social Credit movement.¹ It is an examination of how profound discomfort with the apparent irresponsibility of mid-twentieth-century life commandeered what was, in the light of Social Credit's socialist/technocratic origins, an unlikely political vehicle.

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In Social Credit, English mechanical engineer Major C.H. Douglas proposed a monetary system designed to free humanity from the whims of distant financiers by consuming all the goods industry produced. He asserted that technological advances fostering increased production constituted a kind of "social capital," which should be distributed to consumers periodically as dividends in order to increase their purchasing power. Fear of inflation made it difficult for Douglas and his followers to muster much support in Britain, yet they spent the 1920s seeking fertile ground for the scheme both there and in North America, lobbying governments, producing pamphlets, and forming study groups.² At the time British Columbia's first Social Credit group was formed in 1932, political parties in the tradition of Britain or central Canada had existed in the province for less than thirty years. In 1933, despite some early organizational hurdles, the fledgling Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (ccf) gained significant support in British Columbia.³ Two years later, voters in neighbouring Alberta elected a government that promised to implement the Douglas system. Compared to the ccf and the flamboyant Alberta version of Social Credit, the small, fragmentary, education-oriented Social Credit movement in British Columbia

¹ For more on the political and organizational aspects of the movement's early history, see Leonard B. Kuffert, "Easier to Believe Than to Reflect: The British Columbia Social Credit Movement, 1932-1952" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1994). Barbara Horsfield's "The Social Credit Movement in British Columbia" (BA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1953) is helpful in identifying some of the main figures in the early movement and is based largely on interviews with some early Social Credit members. However, it contains little analysis of the movement's program.

² The A + B theorem, Douglas's way of explaining under-consumption theory, reasoned that workers were paid wages, A, to do their jobs, but that goods and services cost A plus B, the cost of overhead, bank charges, and so on. Therefore, consumers had to gain possession of A + B in order to make the economic system run at full capacity, and governments were to provide B by issuing a periodic dividend, or "social credit." Douglas's earliest expressions of the Social Credit doctrine were 1919 articles in the British Guild Socialist organ *New Age* and *The English Review*. See John L. Finlay, *Social Credit: The English Origins* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), 120.

went unnoticed. By 1941, both the ccf and Social Credit had to contend with a powerful wartime coalition of the BC Liberal and Conservative parties. A strengthened economy during and after the Second World War soothed public discontent with government financial policy, the traditional target of Social Credit's wrath, but none of the BC movement's branches officially abandoned the idea of the dividend. The BC Social Credit League came into being in 1949, unifying a previously disorganized movement. Around the same time, old hatreds re-emerged in the Liberal-Conservative Coalition, each party convinced that it alone could seize power. By early 1952, the fragile partnership had dissolved. Before they parted, however, the Coalition parties approved the use of a transferable, or preferential, ballot in the next provincial election. Adopted to avoid splitting the so-called "free-enterprise" vote, the new system failed to perform as expected. The strong showing predicted for the ccf materialized, accompanied by a swing towards Social Credit, and these two "protest parties" became, respectively, the official Opposition and the government.⁴ Choosing W.A.C. Bennett, a former Conservative, as their new leader and premier, the British Columbia Social Credit League adopted a strategy that was distinct from that of the Douglas system so revered by its early adherents.

The foregoing sketch of the political events surrounding the developmental stage of BC Social Credit suggests a movement growing from chaos into power over a twenty-year period. Sharp divisions plagued most of its early history. Studies treating Social Credit in British Columbia have equated these schisms with paralysis rather than evolution.⁵ The government era's appeal to scholars has been strong, and the relative wealth of sources dealing with a unified Social Credit from 1952 onward has exacerbated a tendency to dismiss the movement period and Social Credit's early program as the ranting of a few malcontents.⁶ Political scientists cite protest voting, a new electoral system, evangelical Alberta Social Crediters, and W.A.C.

³ Walter Young, "Ideology, Personality, and the Origin of the ccf in British Columbia," *BC Studies* 32 (Winter 1976-7): 139-62.

⁴ For a more detailed explanation of the transferable ballot and BC party politics in this era, see H.F. Angus, "Note on the British Columbia Election in June 1952," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 18, 4 (November 1952): 518-25; or David J. Elkins, "Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows: The B.C. Party System in the 1952 and 1953 Provincial Elections," *BC Studies* 30 (Summer 1976): 3-26.

⁵ Martin Robin, *Pillars of Profit: The Company Province, 1934-1972* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), 32; Paddy Sherman, *Bennett* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), 90-1; Thomas Sanford, "The Politics of Protest: The Co-operative Commonwealth

Bennett's dynamism as explanations for the second "revolution" in BC politics – the rejection of the established parties in favour of the CCF and Social Credit in 1952.⁷ Accounts of Social Credit in British Columbia advance models of polarization and protest,⁸ offering an Arthurian legend in which an opportunistic Bennett pulls the legislative mace from the yielding grip of the Liberal-Conservative Coalition to claim his coastal kingdom. Jean Barman wrote that "a new party gained power in 1952 headed by a leader committed to change" and that among "the *early* adherents to Social Credit in the province was William Andrew Cecil Bennett."⁹ Bennett did not join Social Credit until 1951, nineteen years after the movement's inception. Although they serve as evidence of his maverick style as premier, none of the three biographies of Bennett documents the career of the Social Credit movement, to which he was a latter-day convert.¹⁰ Historical writing about Social Credit before its election in British Columbia has largely attributed its success to an imitative organizational/ideological connection to Alberta.¹¹ The Aberhart and

Federation and the Social Credit League in British Columbia" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1961), 187-8.

- ⁶ Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 34; Donald Blake, R.K. Carty, and Lynda Erickson, "Federalism, Conservatism, and the Social Credit Party in B.C.," *BC Studies* 81 (Spring 1989): 4-5. Donald Smiley contended that even Bennett's high-profile party had no consistent ideology (or at least none of the idealism that distinguished Social Credit in Alberta). See Donald V. Smiley, "Canada's Poujadists: A New Look at Social Credit," *Canadian Forum* 42, 500 (September 1962): 121-3.
- ⁷ Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 124 ff.; Donald E. Blake, with David J. Elkins and Richard Johnston, *Two Political Worlds: Parties and Voting in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1985), 18; Sanford, "Politics of Protest," 179-80, 192-4; Walter Young, "Political Parties," in *The Reins of Power*, ed. Terry Morley et al. (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1983), 94. The first revolution is considered to be the adoption of a provincial party system in 1903.
- ⁸ Jeremy Wilson, "The Impact of Communications Developments on British Columbia Electoral Patterns, 1903-1975," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 13, 3 (September 1980): 530; Blake, *Two Political Worlds*, 12, 18, 54-5; Terry Morley, "Politics as Theatre: Paradox and Complexity in British Columbia," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 25, 3 (Fall 1990): 28; Martin Robin, "The Social Basis of Party Politics in British Columbia," *Queen's Quarterly* 72, 4, (1976): 675-90; Stephen G. Tomblin, "W.A.C. Bennett and Province-Building in British Columbia," *BC Studies* 85 (Spring 1990): 45-61; Alan Cairns and Daniel Wong, "Socialism, Federalism and the B.C. Party Systems, 1933-1983," in *Party Politics in Canada*, 5th edition, ed. Hugh Thorburn (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1985), 291; Michael Howlett and Keith Brownsey, "The Old Reality and the New Reality: Party Politics and Public Policy in British Columbia, 1941-1987," *Studies in Political Economy* 25 (Spring 1988): 141-76; Elkins, "Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows," *passim*.
- ⁹ Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 270 ff. Emphasis mine.
- ¹⁰ David Mitchell, *W.A.C.: Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1983); Paddy Sherman, *Bennett* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966); Ronald Worley, *The Wonderful World of W.A.C. Bennett* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971).
- ¹¹ Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 128-33.; Horsfield, "The Social Credit Movement in British

Manning governments were certainly involved in the rise of BC Social Credit, although the evidence also suggests that this involvement was sporadic and limited.¹² Ironically, Social Credit's dramatic expansion in the early 1950s was the culmination of a process that began with the original league's attempts, in the 1937 election, to counter an Aberhart-sponsored threat to ultra-orthodox Douglas Social Credit in British Columbia. Subsequent attempts to run candidates in 1945 and 1949 taught members in British Columbia that Social Credit principles must be expressed as part of a venerable set of social ideals – a difficult task when the movement's executive members had jobs that forced them to pursue that goal in spare hours. Only late in the movement period did they hire a full-time organizer.¹³

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British Columbia's acquaintanceship with Social Credit began in 1932, when *Vancouver Sun* reporters Henry Torey and William Tutte, armed with literature from Major Douglas's English headquarters, formed the first study circle. It was known as the Douglas Social Credit Group, British Columbia Section.¹⁴ In 1934, Tutte, by then styled "mentor" of the Douglasites in British Columbia, noted the long breadlines in Canada and bemoaned governmental inability to rationalize an antiquated credit system, the source of widespread "poverty in the midst of plenty." He contrasted the financial establishment's "rule of thumb" approach with the Douglas method, touting Douglas's "scientific plan," which was

not a political reform. It deals solely with the economic system – with the defects of the machine, not the shortcomings, if any, of the engineer. It could be administered by any political party the people of Canada prefer to put into office. They can be Liberals,

Columbia," 82-4; Mac Reynolds, "How Social Credit Took BC," *Maclean's*, 1 September 1952; David Mitchell contends that the BC movement was distinctive mainly because it was not as overtly religious as was Aberhart's. However, he maintains that BC Social Crediters allowed Albertans to manipulate their organization in the early 1950s. See Mitchell, *W.A.C.*, 120. Thomas Sanford presents the ccf and Social Credit in British Columbia as protest parties peculiar to the politics of British Columbia, yet he links them both to "the deviant culture of the prairie provinces." See Sanford, "Politics of Protest", 23.

¹² The Peer Vernon Paynter Papers at the British Columbia Archives were particularly useful as primary sources on this interprovincial relationship. For more on differences between the Alberta and British Columbia organizations, see Kuffert, "Easier to Believe Than to Reflect," especially chap. 2.

¹³ The league's headquarters remained in league president Lyle Wicks' house on Brunswick

Conservatives, Labor, or even a despotic monarchy or dictatorship (from which last God save Canada); if they were reasonably intelligent it would make no difference.¹⁵

Accordingly, the early movement offered no apologies for seeking pensive British Columbians as members. The Reverend F.W. McKinnon of Victoria considered Social Credit to be thoroughly modern, the only method able to “reckon with the machine,”¹⁶ but not all observers shared his enthusiasm. Social Credit’s 1935 victory in Alberta prompted Victoria columnist A.B. Sanders to doubt that the Douglas scheme was modern or rational at all. He argued that Social Crediters and their supporters were dupes searching frantically for a grand solution to economic depression. “Among the half-educated a great error is propagated more easily than truth,” he wrote, “because it is easier to believe than to reflect, and men prefer the wonders of romance to the plain economic facts.”¹⁷

Though the Alberta experiment appeared to some to rest on faith, the early movement in British Columbia viewed the education of those already interested in the “money question” as its prime mission. In this way it resembled the United States-based Technocracy Inc., which was most active in similar educational activities in the early 1930s.¹⁸ To understand the money question and the Social Credit system’s relationship to it was a task with steep prerequisites, and the early membership in British Columbia contained a high proportion of relatively well-educated people. The Douglas Social Credit College Extension Course greeted students by demanding that they possess a “comprehensive background” in orthodox economics so that they would be able to grasp “all the implications of a Social Credit Economy.”¹⁹ At the formation of a new Douglas Social Credit group in 1934, University of British Columbia professor R. Rolleston West and industrial relations expert R.W. McDowell were chosen president and vice-president, respectively. The slate of Social Credit League of British Columbia (SCLBC) candidates in the 1937 provincial election

Street in Vancouver until late in 1951, and Wicks did not leave his regular job with BC Electric Railway until early March 1952. Interview with Lyle Wicks, conducted by the author, 17 February 1994, Victoria (hereafter referred to as Wicks interview).

¹⁴ Horsfield, “The Social Credit Movement in British Columbia,” 35-7.

¹⁵ Douglas and his followers consistently used the poverty-amid-plenty metaphor to describe the human condition in relation to the potential of technology. See W.A. Tutte, *Economic Madness and the Path to Sanity: An Outline of Douglas Social Credit* (Vancouver: Douglas Social Credit Group, BC Section, 1934), 1-3, 23.

¹⁶ “Gives Talk on Credit Scheme,” *Victoria Colonist*, 27 November 1934, 4.

¹⁷ A.B. Sanders, “The Social Credit Delusion, part 3,” *Victoria Times*, 30 October 1935, 10.

included a civil engineer, four businessmen, a lawyer, a doctor, and a former magistrate.²⁰

In his pamphlet, *Douglas Social Credit for Canada*, Tutte saw conditions in the 1930s as Douglas did: not as problems born of moral causes, but as the direct results of an inequitable distribution of purchasing power, suggesting that the sound administration of goods or resources would eventually replace the government of people. Tutte also rejected Marxist arguments that a proletarian uprising would overwhelm the capitalist system and, instead, thought that a broadly-constituted consumer class's indignation over the unscientific management of purchasing power would overthrow the financial establishment. "The Reds do not constitute the peril," he wrote, "they are an ineffective minority. The danger zone lies within the Great Middle Class, [the] last people on earth who might be suspected of a desire for revolt."²¹

As they did elsewhere, Douglas's critics in British Columbia pointed to a paradox within Social Credit theory that made it much less palatable to a middle-class audience. Its opponents claimed that Social Credit intended to distribute newly created purchasing power by declaring that surplus goods produced by advances in technology were the bounty of modern life and were not actually owned by anyone. While even the CCF's Fred Henderson agreed with Social Crediters that the "problem of poverty" – scarcity – had been solved by modern manufacturing techniques, he contended that Social Credit had not accounted for the problem of property.²² A young Bruce Hutchison concurred, declaring that the expropriations or denials of private ownership necessary in schemes like Social Credit were too radical for the average citizen:

Communism will never be adopted in America. But America quite conceivably can be stampeded for Townsendism, Share-the-Wealthism, Social Credit or Technocracy. What the high priests of all these things never tell you is that they can't be worked with the private ownership of the machine and the public doesn't want [to hear] that.²³

¹⁸ William E. Akin, *Technocracy and the American Dream: The Technocrat Movement, 1900–1941* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 136–8.

¹⁹ Douglas Social Credit College, "Study No. 1" (Vancouver: Douglas Social Credit College, extension course, 1934), 1.

²⁰ "Economic Freedom From Social Credit," *Vancouver Sun*, 29 October 1934: 14; "B.C. Social Crediters Nominate 11 for House," *Vancouver Province*, 27 November 1936, 1, 6. Not all of the eleven nominees' occupations were listed, but the remainder of the candidates were

As participants in the 1935 On-to-Ottawa Trek made plain, the public wanted jobs. Social Credit viewed unemployment as leisure earned through humankind's ingenuity. Being out of a job would not be a problem under a Social Credit system for, as Tutte explained: "If Science is morally right in displacing human labour then the individuals so displaced, being truly products of national progress, should not be financially penalized."²⁴ Increased industrial productivity, also called "Cultural Heritage," justified paying a dividend to everyone, including displaced workers. However, destitution and the meagre wages offered in the relief camps remained the effects of joblessness for many unemployed British Columbians, and this functioned to remind those still working that they were fortunate to have jobs. In that climate, orthodox Social Credit's optimistic view of unemployment, its view of certain claims to ownership, and its overall cerebral tone hindered its wide acceptance among either the propertied or labouring classes.

In addition, Douglas's interpretation of democracy was complex and alien to many British Columbians. He did not trust the masses to know exactly how his system would work but only to indicate, through "unions of electors," that their goal was a general prosperity. Douglas wrote: "A mob feels, it does not think, and consequently by whatever mechanism we represent a mob we can only represent a desire, not a technique."²⁵ Implementing Social Credit would be the job of financial experts authorized to regulate credit. Douglas did not advocate the formation of explicitly political organizations to initiate this system – a feature of his doctrine that would remain important to a significant portion of the BC movement's membership. Within two years of Douglas's 1934 visit to Vancouver, study groups existed in Vancouver, Victoria, Nelson, and Duncan, but no political wing had yet been formed. One Victoria group undertook educational work through the mid-1930s and, true to Douglas's dicta, did no more than urge officials of both "traditional" parties to adopt Social Credit techniques.²⁶ However, the early movement recognized that the state must control the credit system and play a role that was somewhat coercive in order to prevent counter-productive strategies like the hoarding of currency. Independence from the dictates of international

described as having been "educated in the money question" or economics.

²¹ Tutte, *Douglas Social Credit for Canada*, 253-4; *Economic Madness and the Path to Sanity*, 1.

²² Fred Henderson, *The Social Credit Illusion* (speech) (Vancouver: Commonwealth Press, 1934), 17.

²³ Bruce Hutchison, "Insult," *Victoria Times*, 21 November 1935, 4.

²⁴ Tutte, *Douglas Social Credit for Canada*, 218.

²⁵ Douglas, *Nature of Democracy*, 7. (London: The Social Credit Secretariat, 1934)

finance would ensure social freedom for the individual.²⁷ How individuals spent their dividends did not matter, but the Douglas system was willing to penalize those who did not contribute to the system's success and the common good through consumption. The theoretical penalties for not participating in a Social Credit economy were the very circumstances the system hoped to eliminate: a lower standard of living or even poverty. At the outset, then, the movement considered consumers and small business owners to be victims of traditional economics and potential beneficiaries of a Social Credit economy, but it did not believe the nationalization of credit would conflict with individual rights.²⁸

While Social Crediters in Alberta embraced political action under Aberhart, most in British Columbia clung to Douglas's idea of "unions of electors," especially during the movement's first five years. These blocs were to vote for candidates committed to the Social Credit system, regardless of party affiliation. The introduction of a Social Credit electoral presence in British Columbia came as a reaction to Aberhart's abortive attempt to form a Social Credit organization here in 1936. By allying Social Credit and religion, Aberhart alienated many BC Social Crediters, for whom there was little point discussing morals while the material necessities of life were scarce.²⁹ In a brief submitted to the *Vancouver Sun*, Tutte and fellow Vancouver group member Milford Wright argued that Aberhart created a false impression of Social Credit through his limited, God-addled grasp of the Douglas system:

It is quite normal for a group of Douglas Social Credit adherents to have quite different reasons for their membership in the movement, in which, however, they can unite to achieve an economic end ... Mr. Aberhart has, perhaps in all sincerity created another Geneva with himself as its Calvin ... It is difficult to separate his religion from his "Social Credit" plan.³⁰

²⁶ Horsfield, "The Social Credit Movement in British Columbia," 39-40; "Gives Talk On Credit Scheme," *Victoria Colonist*, 27 November 1934, 4; "Douglas Credit Students Meet," *Victoria Colonist*, 13 February 1935, 2; "Appealing For Royal Inquiry," *Victoria Colonist*, 27 February 1935, 2.

²⁷ Tutte, *Douglas Social Credit For Canada.*, 174. Douglas Social Credit College, "Study No. 15," 1-2.

²⁸ C.H. Douglas, "The Pyramid of Power," *English Review*, January 1919, 56; Douglas Social Credit College, Study No. 15, 1; Social Credit League of British Columbia, *Social Credit for British Columbia: Official Manual*. (Vancouver: Social Credit League of British Columbia, 1937), 19.

²⁹ Aberhart seemed to ignore Major Douglas's acolyte Maurice Colbourne, who warned against

Despite the movement's success in portraying itself as doctrinally pure and autonomous, more pragmatic members realized that some form of organization was necessary if Alberta's "perverted" but well-publicized example of Social Credit was to be countered in British Columbia. With the satisfaction of public curiosity in mind, the Social Credit League of British Columbia (SCLBC) was formed late in 1935. The league, in turn, created a separate political arm.³¹ Like the British Douglasites, the SCLBC considered social concerns subordinate to economic readjustment. It stood for election in 1937 and fared badly, probably largely owing to its narrow focus on Douglasite economics, with only a hastily appended social policy.³²

Although the SCLBC had emerged as the hardiest Social Credit faction in the province, two others, one led by William Rose, the other by J. Vans Macdonald, continued to function. A mid-1930s turn in Douglas's writing inspired their differences. Members identifying strongly with the Douglas's Social Credit Secretariat in Liverpool continued to heed his instructions to leave the technical details of the Social Credit system to the experts and "appeal to the emotions of the people to get them to demand action in their constituencies." With Douglas's advice in mind, by early 1938 Macdonald had become chairman of a breakaway faction called the United Democrats.³³ After the outbreak of the Second World War, Douglas placed the dismantling of a Zionist financial monopoly on the Social Credit agenda, and religion again became a topic of debate.³⁴ The Macdonald and Rose factions evolved in response, with Rose's group remaining com-

the "disastrous Christlike behaviour" of emphasizing spiritual over material security. See Maurice Colbourne, *The Meaning of Social Credit*, 4th edition (London: Figurehead, 1935), 27.

³⁰ "Brief of the Douglas Social Credit Group, British Columbia Section, on the proposals of Aberhart," cited in Horsfield, "The Social Credit Movement in British Columbia," 43.

³¹ "BC Social Credit League Formed," *Vancouver Province*, 16 October 1935, 23; Horsfield, "The Social Credit Movement in British Columbia," 44-6. It chartered the British Columbia Social Credit League as its political arm and the press commonly used that name when referring to league activities, but official publications bore the name Social Credit League of British Columbia. See Social Credit League of British Columbia, *Social Credit for British Columbia: Official Manual, 1937* (Vancouver: Social Credit League of British Columbia, 1937). In 1949, the charter members of the 1935 SCLBC allowed the new Social Credit League to use the name British Columbia Social Credit League, even though both names had been registered to the older organization under the Societies Act. Lyle Wicks to the author, June 1994.

³² SCLBC, *Social Credit for British Columbia*.

³³ Horsfield, "The Social Credit Movement in British Columbia," 56, 59.

³⁴ This trend towards what we now view as the conspiratorial, or anti-Semitic, side of the Douglas canon culminated in *The "Land for the Chosen People" Racket* (Stratford-on-Avon: KRP Publications, 1943). The debate continued until 1948, and was considered counter-

mitted to economic theory alone, and with Macdonald's group willing to incorporate whatever Douglas might write. The split further eroded the credibility of BC Social Credit as a unified organization; those supporting Douglas's more extreme views seldom rose to prominence in the larger movement.

In 1939, at the invitation of the United Democrats, W.D. Herridge spoke in Vancouver. In *New Democracy*, a scheme he was soon to promote throughout Canada, the former diplomat aimed at monetary reform and advocated a "war party" comprised mainly of Social Credit and the CCF.³⁵ This last proposition went too far for most Social Crediters. By 1940, British Columbian adherents to Herridge's *New Democracy* had recanted, and the United Democrats appropriated its name. The United Democrats, now called BC *New Democracy*, survived only a few months.³⁶ After flirting with Herridge's ill-fated scheme, Aberhart orchestrated another of his own, the Democratic Monetary Reform Association (DMRO). It featured odd rituals and encouraged the formation of "unions of electors" in every province except Alberta.³⁷ In British Columbia, Social Crediters eventually had a choice of three national organizations: the DMRO; the short-lived National Dividend Association; or the Federation of Canadian Voters, which included the core of the Macdonald group, eager supporters of Douglas's anti-Semitic theories. The DMRO died with Aberhart in 1943, and the rest folded by 1944.³⁸ One wartime Social Credit group in British Columbia, the Perfect Circle, was a haven for those with a demonstrated knowledge of Douglas Social Credit principles. It had approximately thirty members, including long-time

productive by more progressive members. Lyle Wicks to the author, June 1994. See also John Irving, "The Evolution of the Social Credit Movement," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 14, 3 (August 1948): 339; C.H. Douglas, *The Big Idea* (Liverpool: K.R.P. Publications, 1942), 16.

³⁵ H.B. Smith, "Mr. Aberhart Leads a Foray," *Country Guide* 59, 10 (October 1940): 3; Mary Hallett, "The Social Credit Party and the New Democracy Movement, 1939-1940," *Canadian Historical Review* 47, 4 (December 1966): 318-20; J.L. Granatstein, *The Politics of Survival: The Conservative Party of Canada, 1939-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), n. 48.

³⁶ Hallett, "The Social Credit Party and the New Democracy Movement," 320; Horsfield, "The Social Credit Movement in British Columbia," 61.

³⁷ Horsfield, "The Social Credit Movement in British Columbia," 61, sets the date for the DMRO's formation in late 1937, but both Alvin Finkel, in *The Social Credit Phenomenon in Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 74, and C.B. Macpherson, in *Democracy in Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953), 204, claim that this body was formed in 1941. Lyle Wicks asserts that it was formed in Winnipeg in 1940. Clearly, it neither attracted a large membership nor attained lasting significance within the national Social Credit movement.

Social Crediter Peer Paynter. Initiation consisted of finding one's way through a maze of doors labelled with Social Credit's basic tenets and opposing philosophies.³⁹

As this pack of small organizations suggests, it was not surprising that many Social Crediters began to tout a national body as the most rational way to pursue economic restructuring under the Douglas principles. In 1944, proponents of a national Social Credit organization convened in Toronto, calling themselves the Social Credit Association of Canada (SCAC). However, by the end of the year, British Columbia's chief delegate to the Toronto meetings, veteran Douglasite Major A.H. Jukes, DSO, OBE – a retired military man who had served in India – had helped charter a new provincial group, the Social Credit Association of Canada, British Columbia Section, (SCAC-BCS), which he would take over by 1946.⁴⁰

While discouraging for political genealogists seeking a unified strand of opinion or a charismatic figure within the movement, the maze of groups in British Columbia during the war years claiming some connection to Social Credit afforded Social Credit in British Columbia a chance – which it essentially ignored until at least 1943 – to re-invent itself. Failing to nominate any candidates for the 1941 election, adherents to the Social Credit system found it difficult to decide which of the traditional parties to support.⁴¹ On the whole, prosperous conditions – the “results desired” in Major Douglas's jargon – prevailed in wartime, precluding the kind of depression-era misery that Social Credit had previously played upon to make its appeals for radical reform.⁴² By 1940, observers sensed the climate of wartime quiescence and noted that those reliable ghosts of the thirties – want and profound inequality of opportunity – had become nearly impossible for the various flavours of monetary reformers to conjure:

B.C. already has several movements or parties dedicated to monetary reform, some working openly[,] others outlawed under the Defense of Canada Regulations. Like S[ocial] C[redit] all of these claim to

³⁸ The intransigence of the Quebec delegation was also blamed for the failure of the DMRO. The Macdonald group formed the Armed Forces Union, which ran for about two years, from September 1944 to August 1946. See Horsfield, “The Social Credit Movement in British Columbia,” 61, 70.

³⁹ Mitchell, *W.A.C.*, 117-8; Interview with Paynter, Provincial Archives of British Columbia (now British Columbia Archives and Records Service) no. 1175.

⁴⁰ A.H. Jukes, “Doctors' Dilemma: Political and Economic,” address to the Vancouver Medical Association, 2 May 1944; Horsfield, “The Social Credit Movement in British Columbia,” 62-64.

⁴¹ “Social Credit Endorses Pattullo,” *Vancouver Province*, 27 November 1940, 5. Pattullo

be working for the uplift of the common man. And the tragedy ... is that the common man isn't paying any great attention to any of them. ... But the fact is that he seems unable to see an undernourished child in every youngster clamoring for an ice cream cone or a financial tycoon in every man with his pants pressed.⁴³

Before the war ended, the movement was attracting a new type of member who was interested not only in the scientific promise of Social Credit finance but also in its record in Alberta and in its more general pledge to champion the cause of the individual. One such member was Lyle Wicks, a Vancouver street railwayman who joined a study group in Vancouver in 1944 after rejecting what he saw as the theoretical mire of socialist discourse. Supporters of free-enterprise, inside the movement and outside it, longed to dismantle the structure of rationing, controls, planned production, and government intervention that nonetheless was helping to win the war.⁴⁴ The first evidence of Social Credit concern about reconstruction came, ironically, from the pen of Major Jukes, who styled himself a farmer but was considered an intellectual by many in the movement (mainly because his pamphlets and broadcasts often incorporated or alluded to topics outside most voters' experience). Jukes began distributing his pamphlets and making broadcasts in 1943, certain that Canada would once again face the problems of poverty it had experienced following the First World War and in the 1930s.⁴⁵ His thought represented a departure for Social Credit in British Columbia in that it introduced the theme of social decay, a clear divergence from the monetary reform harangue and one that would become paramount in the movement's program by 1952. Jukes argued that although Canadians could expect the financial system to return to chaos after the war, "no longer is poverty the most pressing issue. The focal point now is the curtailment of liberty through increasing restrictions and legislative decrees." Jukes believed that individual Canadians had "surrendered the right and power to frame and control our own policy. We are rapidly losing the whip-hand."⁴⁶

resigned over the issue of coalition, leaving the coalition's premiership to Liberal John Hart.

⁴² C.H. Douglas, *The Tragedy of Human Effort* (Liverpool: KRP Publications, 1936), 7; A.H. Jukes, "Let Us Establish Every Man in His Own Rights," address to the Kinsmen Club of Victoria, 22 June 1944, 7; Barman, *The West Beyond the West*, 262.

⁴³ Smith, "Mr. Aberhart Leads a Foray," 3.

⁴⁴ Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 105. *Vancouver Province*, 14 March 1952, 2. Wicks considers his experience more as an "event of understanding." Wicks interview.

Jukes first articulated the individual rights stance that differentiated the BC movement from Douglas's theory of a world financial conspiracy and served as a foundation for Social Credit's later support of free-enterprise economics. Another Social Crediter who wrote about the grim prospects of the post-war era, L.D. Byrne, an English advisor to the Aberhart and Manning governments in Alberta, expressed similar objections to growing bureaucracies but toed the Douglasite anti-Semitic line.⁴⁷ Jukes ignored talk of a Zionist plot but echoed Byrne's repudiation of rationing, regulation, and the expanded role for the state recommended in Leonard Marsh's influential *Report on Social Security for Canada*, released in 1943.⁴⁸ Though Jukes had pioneered criticism of big government in British Columbia, he did cling tenaciously to Douglasite proposals for monetary reform.

The best surviving expression of BC Social Credit thought during the movement's late-war-time transitional phase comes from a campaign speech delivered during the 1945 election. A candidate who ran as "Mrs. Lyle" Campbell – a choice itself worthy of note – indicates clearly where BC Social Crediters had followed Douglas and where they had modified his prescriptions. She promised to "make the freedom and happiness of the individual the cheif [sic] end" and to "press for the abolition of all controls, regulations, boards and bureaus, and other bureaucratic wartime regulations, at the earliest possible date." Had they been issued during the 1937 provincial election, pledges like Mrs. Campbell's to uphold the rights of the individual would have been antagonistic to Social Credit's primary goal: state-administered monetary reform. She made no attempt to reconcile the movement's relatively new-found opposition to bureaucracy with the massive administration needed to monitor a Social Credit financial scheme.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Wicks to the author, June 1994. A.H. Jukes, "Dictatorship by Stealth," annotated address to Rotary Club of Vancouver, 15 June 1943, 1; "Veterans," in *Five Broadcasts by Major A.H. Jukes, D.S.O., O.B.E.* (Vancouver: Social Credit Association of Canada, British Columbia Section, 1945), 2-3.

⁴⁶ Jukes, *Dictatorship by Stealth*, 1, 4.

⁴⁷ L.D. Byrne, *Battle for Freedom* (Edmonton: Social Credit Board, 1943). This was originally an address to the Rocky Mountain House Board of Trade, delivered 10 February 1943. The CCF noted this trend in the writings emanating from Alberta and criticized Social Credit severely, linking it to various fascist organizations in the United States and Europe. See William Ivens, *Social Credit Sense – or Nonsense?* (Winnipeg: Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, 1947), 22-4. David Elliott makes the contrary case that the Alberta Social Credit Movement had rid itself of its anti-Semitic element by the mid-1940s in "Anti-Semitism and the Social Credit Movement: The Intellectual Roots of the Keegstra Affair," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 17, 1 (1985): 78-89.

⁴⁸ Jukes, "Doctors' Dilemma," 14. Leonard Marsh, *Report on Social Security for Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975). Thomas Sanford argues that the Douglasites,

Criticism of modern bureaucratic methods had risen, in the course of a few years, to a more prominent place in the movement's program. The rest of Campbell's speech presented credit reforms as companions of "freedom and happiness," while unemployment remained a positive indicator of technological progress. Possible methods of distributing each citizen's "basic income" included pensions and the new family allowances, and money to supplement these federal programs was to be made available through standard Social Credit bookkeeping practices. The overall system remained dependent on the nationalization of credit but, rather than citing efficiency and the elimination of poverty as prime motivating factors, the movement presented social harmony and freedom as equally compelling reasons to join and support Social Credit.⁵⁰

An uneasy balance between the Douglasite concern with credit and a new, unprecedented advocacy of traditional social norms came to characterize the movement's public face during the mid-1940s. Early members in British Columbia considered social questions to be outside the domain of Social Credit, but prosperity born of wartime made it difficult to argue that monetary reform was urgently needed. Cold War era fear of communism led Social Crediters to declare that freedom from regimentation and compulsory measures had always been part of their creed and that substantial changes to a stifling financial system were still compatible with the freedoms that a six-year war had been fought to preserve.⁵¹ The war's consequences – peace and prosperity – allowed the movement to become more concerned with the quality of individual life and more vehemently opposed to collectivist ideologies that denied the primacy of the individual.

Though his output during the mid-1940s did much to advance a distinctly British Columbian perspective on Social Credit, Major Jukes's commitment to action through unions of electors and his determination to guide BC Social Credit himself undermined the blend of Douglasite technique and libertarian ideals that he espoused. He lost control of the movement to the upstart BC Social Credit League in 1949. The group that assumed leadership in the movement echoed Jukes in raising the alarm against government intervention, but it also realized that any lingering hope for enacting Social Credit economic reforms on a provincial basis had died in 1948 with Alberta's

among which Major Jukes was the most prominent, had damaged their chances for power within the movement by clinging to Douglas's anti-Semitic and anti-democratic writings. See Sanford, "Politics of Protest," 182.

⁴⁹ Mrs. Lyle Campbell, Social Credit candidate for Burnaby, "Address to the Burnaby

last attempt to pass financial reform legislation.⁵² That same year, British Columbia's coalition government inaugurated the roundly condemned British Columbia Hospital Insurance Service (BCHIS). Social Credit finally had an issue approachable on theoretical *and* practical grounds: mandatory premiums robbed citizens of their freedom to choose, and the premiums were too high. Jukes held that the provincial government had removed the individual "right to contract out" as granted "under the Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights and so on." He called the hospital insurance plan "completely alien to the British tradition of freedom and responsibility," contending that Social Credit stood for "inducement in all fields of our political and economic life."⁵³ In 1950, the more moderate Peer Paynter devoted an entire radio broadcast to the evils of the plan, declaring:

We recognize that any monopoly is bad but here we have a Compulsory Government Monopoly, which eliminates competition, destroys efficiency and invites corruption. A Monster created in spite of the wishes of the people, to cause dissention [sic] in our midst and destroy our much vaunted faith in the democratic form of government.⁵⁴

The hospital insurance plan lingered through 1950, and in 1951 the BC Social Credit League, by then the dominant association of Social Crediters, had resolved that the whole system be scrapped because it was "dictatorial in nature ... [and] controlled by a centralized board, which has supreme power, which is fascism." Under a Social Credit health plan, municipalities would undertake the building and maintenance of hospitals, and voluntary subscribers to the plan would pay one dollar a day for hospitalization for the first ninety days, after which the service would be free. Pensioners in need and maternity cases were exempt.⁵⁵ This resolution revealed much about the values of Social Credit members: local districts were responsible for their own affairs; a nominal charge for hospitalization would keep triflers away; mothers and older people, venerated as net contributors to society, deserved an exemption. The Social Credit solution to the problem of providing hospital insurance fit with its philosophy of

Ratepayers Association," Norburn Hall, 16 October 1945, 1-3, BCARS, Victoria, Peer Vernon Paynter Papers (hereafter PVP), box 4, file 10, speeches, addresses, etc. by various BC Social Credit officials.

⁵⁰ Campbell, "Address," 1-3.

⁵¹ Jukes, "The Veteran," 8.

⁵² Sanford, "Politics of Protest," 182; Finkel, *Social Credit*, 104.

⁵³ Jukes, *Pacific Current* 1, 1 (January 1949): 2, 6.

providing “Freedom with Security”⁵⁶ by advocating a basic level of service and allowing individuals to contract out and obtain coverage elsewhere. Social Credit opposition to the coalition’s existing plan recalled the movement’s early adherence to the “British” traditions of freedom and responsibility of which Jukes spoke so highly. They had been combined with the Douglasite notion that citizens could opt out of legislation if they did not vote for the political organizations enacting it.⁵⁷

In the wake of the Second World War, responsibility became a prominent part of the BC movement’s message and was no longer discussed only in terms of the voter’s prerogative to reject programs like BCHS. The movement’s executive urged members to “do their part” and to contribute to the fight for Social Credit lest its opposite – a government and society offering security *without* freedom from compulsion – result from their inactivity. “Consider the issues in this election,” warned Mrs. Campbell in 1945, “and without hesitation, every intelligent voter in British Columbia will know why he must face the facts squarely this time, or pay for it later.”⁵⁸ Facing the facts – debt, oppressive legislation, the struggle against party machines and Social Credit’s critics – was an extension of the wartime imperative to enlist and contribute. Adopting the rhetoric of reconstruction, the movement’s leaders urged Social Crediters in British Columbia to “roll up their sleeves” to end the cycle of financial and social oppression, predicting that they would be the victims of their own complacency under the emerging welfare state. In reporting the dismal results of the 1949 election, the Social Credit *Bulletin* implored members “not to blame someone else for some of the mistakes which may have crept in, but rather let each one of us first examine our own record carefully, and see how we ourselves failed; then apply the lessons learnt, so that our next effort may be of a higher standard.”⁵⁹ A movement that initially claimed that it cared little for political distinctions as long as the Social Credit system was implemented had come, by the late 1940s, to abhor political apathy. Regardless of what the coalition did, shirking one’s responsibility to Social Credit principles could only lead to disaster. “If we fail to elect a Social Credit Government we can blame no one but ourselves,” warned Martha Slater in a 1952

⁵⁴ Peer Paynter, “Radio Speech,” CBR Provincial Affairs Broadcast, 3 April 1950, PVP, box 4, speeches, addresses, etc. by various BC Social Credit officials.

⁵⁵ BCSC, “Resolutions,” Annual Convention, 2–3 November 1951, New Westminster. Resolution 53 (a–f), W.A.C. Bennett Papers, Simon Fraser University Archives (hereafter WACB), MG 1/2, 6/1.

election pamphlet: "If we haven't suffered enough from the old line party system it[']s our God-given right to suffer some more."⁶⁰

As economic conditions improved after the Second World War, the movement's members identified Social Credit more as a technique to combat poverty than as a "way of life." In a circular that began: "Dear Neighbor," the league assumed the voice of a new British Columbian archetype: a carpenter, a married veteran with two children, a new homeowner whose own father had been unemployed during the 1930s.⁶¹ Social Credit viewed employed individuals, able to support themselves and their families in their own homes, as representatives of an exalted British Columbian ethic because they had not succumbed to convenient collectivism. The writer went on to promote the Social Credit scheme of distribution and ended by issuing a call for action: "Of course I want your help too, so why not do a little investigating, then get behind a worth while movement and boost."⁶² The league aimed to shed the movement's image as a gathering place for fanatical monetary reformers and to portray it as a means by which responsible citizens could protect their property and a commonsense way of life. Joining Social Credit remained a solemn step, and prospective members – even a prospective leader like Bennett – were always obligated to attend a meeting before making a commitment.

Though individual responsibility was a central Social Credit ideal, the theme of competency also distinguished the movement during its later period. A historian of colonial North America, exploring the broader significance of this term, defines it as a state that allowed individuals the time and latitude to express their political views and to participate in public life – "a degree of well-being that was both desirable and morally legitimate ... a degree of comfortable independence."⁶³ A similar veneration of independence and moral legitimacy characterized the BC Social Credit movement's program as Douglas's conception of the individual – the sovereign component of an economic system – gave way to one in which the individual was expected to do more than indicate a general desire for prosperity. Early in its history, Social Crediters had pointed to British Columbia's unfulfilled potential "to produce an ever-increasing quantity of real

⁵⁶ Lyle Wicks, *Fundamentals of Social Credit* (Vancouver: British Columbia Social Credit League, 1952), 4-5.

⁵⁷ Tutte, *Douglas Social Credit for Canada*, 27; Douglas, *The Big Idea*, 55.

⁵⁸ Mrs. Lyle Campbell, "Address," 3.

⁵⁹ *Bulletin No. 5*, 18 June 1949, 1.

⁶⁰ Martha S. Slater, "To Those Who Read and Think," (BC Social Credit League, 1952), PVP,

wealth” as justification for adopting Social Credit monetary policy. However, they also distinguished between ordinary citizens and “worthless people” who refused to work. The SCLBC’s 1937 platform admitted that if a Social Credit economy was put in place these people “would live at the lowest level of subsistence ... the same common sense would be used as we practice when dealing with the criminal, the insane, etc.” Though all would receive dividends, the reward for those with jobs would be an “immensely higher standard of living.”⁶⁴ Rather than dwell upon what it considered to be social problems, the early league chose to emphasize what the socially responsible – the competent – could expect if Social Credit were implemented. By the early 1940s, the idea that governments had ignored Social Credit methods in favour of adopting relief, make-work, and direct welfare policies disappointed British Columbia’s Social Crediters. “What is the difficulty about enabling every man to pay his own way through life?” asked Major Jukes, “haven’t we more than enough for all?”⁶⁵

The example of the carpenter suggests that Social Credit consistently viewed certain kinds of people as “more typical” British Columbians. Committed to the individual, the movement espoused the idea of “equal rights for all, special privileges for none” but saw certain minority groups as monolithic, erratic, or dangerous because they did not display initiative or follow a code of ethics defining the competent citizen. A couple in Grand Forks expressed their concern about a Social Credit meeting that featured “a Douk” as chairman.⁶⁶ Provincial Organizer Peer Paynter’s reply indicates a common attitude towards socially “unconventional” groups and contempt for those unwilling to take part in *any* movement: “Mr. Martens is not a “Douk” but a Menenite [sic] ... There are so many people in any district who are not willing to accept their responsibility as citizens in working for a movement such as ours that it is often hard to get an organization started on the proper basis.”⁶⁷ It is not surprising that an erroneous sighting of a Doukhobor at a Social Credit meeting caused alarm among less tolerant members, especially since Doukhobors cared little for worldly politics and had long been stereotyped as troublesome pacifists and semi-citizens.⁶⁸

box 4, miscellaneous material, Social Credit philosophy and policy.

⁶¹ SCLBC, *Social Credit for British Columbia*, 19; Jukes, *Let Us*, 8.

⁶² BCSC, “Dear Neighbor,” (1951), PVP, box 4, file 12, mimeographed material re: BC Social Credit League.

⁶³ Daniel Vickers, “Competency and Competition: Economic Culture in Early America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 47, 1 (January 1990): 3.

⁶⁴ An effect of this higher standard was to be more single-family housing to halt an alarming

Once Social Credit formed a government in 1952, and again when it secured a majority a year later, Bennett promised to solve the “Doukhobor Problem” by treating Doukhobor law-breakers firmly.⁶⁹

Although they recognized economic and legal distinctions between men, before 1944 BC Social Crediters did not consider attention to women’s issues an important prerequisite to the achievement of Social Credit. Women and men alike could join and participate fully in Social Credit groups; three of the eighteen Social Credit candidates in 1937 were women.⁷⁰ By war’s end, women were no less prominent in the movement, but female candidates were likely to express support for traditional women’s roles. The dominant provincial organization at that time, Jukes’s SCAC-BCS, included the “sanctity of the home” among its “Great Freedoms,” an echo of Franklin Roosevelt’s wartime “Four Freedoms.”⁷¹ In spite of her advocacy of equal pay for equal work, candidate Campbell upheld an image of women as domestic and nurturing, explaining her own candidacy in such terms: “Women are becoming more interested in the business of our country today than ever before. They realize that the future of our children depends on our action today.” The Social Credit League later supported the formation of Women’s auxiliaries but did not specify what their activities were to be.⁷²

Social Credit’s perception of racial and ethnic minorities differed little, if any, from that of most White British Columbians. Major Jukes used the example of the Japanese evacuation to push monetary reform, arguing that the removal of the Japanese was swift and efficient because no partisan divisions existed regarding the urgency of the task: “the execution of our policy was left to the Federal authorities. In just the same way we [should] unite in all major problems once we saw it was for our mutual good.”⁷³ Though the individual was the basis of Social Credit belief, it was clearly simpler for some members to evoke stereotypes for groups distinguished by race or creed. Alma Wright wrote to Peer Paynter to inform him that “a number have asked if the Indians are being informed re S.C.! We understand that our C.C.F.

growth in tenancy, which Social Crediters had long viewed as a condition breeding crime and apathy. See SCLBC, *Social Credit for British Columbia*, (1937), 4, 6, 19, 26.

⁶⁵ Jukes, “Doctors’ Dilemma,” 4.

⁶⁶ Mr. and Mrs. H. Manchester to Paynter, 25 February 1952, PVP.

⁶⁷ Paynter to Mr. and Mrs. H. Manchester, 11 March 1952, PVP.

⁶⁸ See George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968) for a careful account of Doukhobor experience in Canada and their dealings with several BC governments.

⁶⁹ W.A.C. Bennett, *Message to the Electors from Hon. W.A.C. Bennett, Premier and Leader of*

Indian [Frank Calder] is at heart S.C. Will he run as S.C. in the next election? Should not they and the Chinese etc. be informed[?]"⁷⁴ For Wright, informing "them" was a political tactic. Social Crediters did not consider ethnic or minority cultural concerns in the process of defining popular opinion. Members of the league reasoned – as Jukes and others had previously – that every citizen would be satisfied in an atmosphere of "freedom with security,"⁷⁵ regardless of the Doukhobors' desire to live and worship communally, Native concerns regarding hunting and fishing rights, or women's issues. They based their understanding of what people desired upon the virtues of initiative and personal responsibility, qualities that, they argued, transcended biological or national identities.

While the movement committed itself to alleviating poverty during the 1930s, increasing state involvement in the affairs of British Columbians towards the end of Second World War and beyond prompted Social Credit to claim that an enlarged welfare state, financed through property taxes, a 3 per cent provincial sales tax, and onerous hospital insurance premiums, would burden hard-working British Columbians beyond what they should reasonably bear.⁷⁶ Competent citizens – employed and able to manage their own affairs – were not a drain upon the public purse, so why should they be forced to replenish it? Lyle Wicks explained the fundamental objection to the quasi-socialist policies of the coalition: "you can't build something that's based on revenge, to take away from somebody who's got something."⁷⁷ In the view of Social Crediters, the coalition government had failed to protect competent British Columbians from the politics of economic revenge, previously thought to be the strategy of the CCF alone, that now seemed part of the fabric of BC society.

The movement never completely repudiated Major Douglas's radical method of balancing consumption and production, but it demoted it from its position at the head of the Social Credit creed in favour of a more pragmatic program laden with neo-conservative values. Conversely, parts of Social Credit theory that had been secondary, or altogether absent, became more prominent. For example, the representation of Christianity as an important basis of Social

the Social Credit Movement in B.C. (Vancouver: British Columbia Social Credit Campaign Committee, 1953), in City of Vancouver Archives pamphlet collection.

⁷⁰ SCLBC, *Social Credit for British Columbia*, 4, 28.

⁷¹ SCAC-BCS, "Constitution and Bylaws," (1944), 2. Henrietta M. Thompson Papers, City of Vancouver Archives.

⁷² Campbell, "Address," 1.; BCSC, "Constitution and Bylaws, 1950," City of Vancouver

Credit belief served the movement's political aims because an identification with "Christian democracy" resisted criticism more effectively than had Douglasite economic reforms. During the later movement period, formal statements of Social Credit principles concerned themselves with values and a sense of morality circumscribed by traditional notions of gender and race. Most of all, members were to engage Social Credit's enemies in the manner of competent, confident, proactive citizens. "If you are satisfied with the way your province is being run," said Paynter in one of his broadcasts, "just say nothing, do nothing and be nothing."⁷⁸ Though the movement exhibited an early attachment to the "collective desires of the entire community"⁷⁹ and continued to express concern for the well-being of all British Columbians, the right-wing segment of what Thomas Sanford called the "politics of protest" seemed most comfortable when opposing overbearing taxation and defending enterprising citizens who stood to lose freedom and property under a socialist state. Peer Paynter's campaign notebook illustrates the importance of principle to late-movement-era Social Credit in British Columbia. At meetings and on the election trail, one of his "talking points" was: "S.C. on basic principal [sic] Christian way of life ... To put these into effect we must have *Grit*[".⁸⁰ Paynter suggested that the trend in legislation and society in British Columbia had been a retreat from responsibility and morality. The movement needed people who embraced what the movement had, by 1951, catechized as its "Philosophy of Life." Paynter summarized this philosophy for the campaign trail and edited it as follows:

- [1] Man is the most important thing on the face of the earth – Sanctity of Individual
- 2 We must have, FREEDOM WITH SECURITY.
- 3 Government has only one reason to exist & that is ~~to carry out the will of the people~~ to give the people the results they want from the management of their affairs.⁸¹

Even before the BC Social Credit League was formed in 1949, variations upon these themes cropped up in statements about the movement's foundations.⁸² These vague principles do not indicate *how* Social Credit proposed to govern, for the details of government

Archives, Henrietta M. Thompson Papers.

⁷³ Jukes, *Dictatorship by Stealth*, 13.

⁷⁴ Alma Wright to Paynter, 16 January 1952, PVP. Calder was the CCF MLA for Atlin and a member of the Nisga'a nation.

⁷⁵ Douglas Social Credit College, Study No. 15, 1; Jukes, *Dictatorship by Stealth*, 14.

were subordinate to *policy*, a term it employed in a distinctive way. In Douglas's theory, policy was the expression of a general desire, not the method employed to reach an objective. This definition changed little throughout the movement period. Major Jukes noted the efficiency of a common policy in his example of Japanese internment. At its conventions, the BC Social Credit League sought this same kind of policy: directives from the membership to obtain certain results, referred to as "the results [the people] desire from the management of their own affairs."⁸³ In the context of such issues as hospital insurance and the imposition of a provincial sales tax, to say that democracy and freedom from compulsion were what the people wanted – their *policy* – submerged Douglas's stark technical system and emphasized a program built around freedom and guarantees of a Christian democracy in which all could develop their personalities.⁸⁴

By 1952, BC Social Credit had honed its statement of principle to four easy-to-memorize points, or *fundamentals*, through which it protested the decay of BC society:

- i. The individual human is the most important of God's creations.
- ii. The major function of any Government is to bring the people the results the people want from the management of their affairs.
- iii. Security alone is not enough. We must have freedom with security.
- iv. Anything that is physically possible and desirable can and must be made financially possible.⁸⁵

In the light of these articles of the movement's latter-day faith, the ideological changes of twenty years emerge clearly and bear closer examination. Significantly, the first three principles addressed social conditions. The fourth vaguely recalled the dream of monetary reform, by then untenable. BC Social Crediters had embraced the first fundamental during the worst years of the Depression, hoping for the return of an era of individualism in business and society through a credit revolution.⁸⁶ BC Social Credit viewed the individual as literally "individual" – a particle of opinion unable to be divided. Major Jukes

⁷⁶ Tutte, *Economic Madness*, 32; Jukes, "Doctors' Dilemma," 15.

⁷⁷ Wicks interview. This firm opposition to the redistribution of wealth was a long-standing part of Social Credit ideology. See SCLBC, *Social Credit for British Columbia*, 12.

⁷⁸ Paynter, "Radio Script," 3 April 1950, 6.

⁷⁹ W.A. Tutte, *Douglas Social Credit for Canada* (Vancouver: Social Credit Publishing, 1934), 155.

⁸⁰ Peer Paynter's notebook 1951, PVP, box 4, handwritten notes.

contrasted individual and public welfare, explaining that the idea of the public was “a pure abstraction. It does not bleed ... In no sense of the word could it be made real.” The individual was the basis of Social Credit policy, he argued, yet everywhere the rights of the individual had been subordinated to the inevitably imperfect ideal of the public good.⁸⁷

God did not enter the reckoning in BC Social Credit’s earliest incarnations, mainly because Social Credit financial reforms were to take place on earthly terms. But, by 1945, the movement had made the encouragement of Christian principles one of its primary aims and had identified individual freedom with Christianity.⁸⁸ In that same year, Mrs. Campbell urged schools to provide instruction in the “duties and responsibilities of citizenship in a Christian democracy.”⁸⁹ Jukes’s doomed faction did not share in any revival, as his surviving pamphlets and broadcasts contain no references to Christianity. Indeed, no records of a running debate over Christianity’s place in the movement have survived.⁹⁰ Thomas Sanford claimed that the movement’s affiliation with Alberta’s Social Credit League in the months before the 1952 election contributed to an increase in religious awareness, but that leaves six or seven increasingly pious years unexplained. Nonetheless, documents show that the movement strengthened its overtly Christian outlook during the later league period, consistently reminding members of Christ’s sacrifice for individual freedom and that Social Credit was the “means whereby Christianity can be established.”⁹¹ They further suggested that any system of government not honouring the individual first and foremost was in violation of natural and supernatural laws, and they viewed democracy as a Christian concept because, ideally, the state would be subject to the “sovereignty of God, from which springs the brotherhood of man.”⁹² In *Pilgrims in Lotus Land*, Robert Burkinshaw analyzes

⁸¹ Paynter’s notebook 1951.

⁸² SCAC-BCS, “Constitution and Bylaws”, (1945), 1.

⁸³ BCSCCL, “Constitution and Bylaws,” (1950), 1. WACB. MG 1/1, 7/13.

⁸⁴ BCSCCL, *What Social Credit Will Do for British Columbia: Provincial Program of British Columbia Social Credit League* (Vancouver: BCSCCL, April 1952), 4, in City of Vancouver Archives.

⁸⁵ Lyle Wicks, *Fundamentals of Social Credit*, 3-6.

⁸⁶ Douglas Social Credit College, Study No. 15, 1; SCLBC, *Social Credit for British Columbia*, 19.

⁸⁷ Jukes, *Let Us*, 8-9.

⁸⁸ SCAC-BCS, “Constitution and Bylaws,” (1945), 1; Jukes, *Let Us*, 7.

⁸⁹ Campbell, “Address,” 1-2. William Rose’s 1944 series of articles on Social Credit policy avoided religion completely. See *Vancouver Sun*, 11, 13, 15, 19 December 1944. The 1944 constitution of the Social Credit Association, British Columbia Section, mentions the

the role of conservative Protestantism in British Columbia, linking an evangelical Protestant revival with the late-movement-era Social Credit membership, by then steeped in the rhetoric of individualism.⁹³ Fundamentalist and evangelical political support for Social Credit was a contributing factor in the movement's eventual triumph, and Social Credit's move towards the integration of Christianity and individualism shows how much the movement changed as it made plain the strength of its anti-modern convictions.

After the league's revival in 1949, freedom of personality was added to the movement's principles, but one's fully developed personality could not infringe upon another's rights as a citizen.⁹⁴ It was clear that the trend towards the veneration of the competent Christian individual paralleled some important historical developments. In 1933, the advent of the CCF in British Columbia augmented an established socialist tradition,⁹⁵ but for Social Crediters the mere nationalization of a debt-based economy was no answer to the problems of the Depression. They considered modern means of generating employment and revenue like Liberal premier Pattullo's "Work and Wages" plan to be unfair because the money needed to finance relief and make-work schemes was borrowed and because those who had retained their jobs and owned property would eventually be penalized by taxation. Governments were "pulling some of the people down in order to raise others up."⁹⁶ The Second World War drove BC Social Credit further right, as the movement opposed the larger bureaucracies and regulations identified with the program for reconstruction. By the 1950s some of Social Credit's dire warnings about the erosion of rights in favour of collectivism apparently had been proven correct. Higher taxes and more onerous government-generated costs for small businesses, particularly lumbering and mining operations, allowed

Christian principles of Social Credit. See SCAC-BCS, "Constitution and Bylaws" (1944), 1, in City of Vancouver Archives, Henrietta M. Thompson Papers.

⁹⁰ Jukes's mid-1940s output contained no religious references, and his short-lived *Pacific Current* of 1949 was openly critical of Social Crediters like L.D. Byrne who argued that faith should be the basis of a Social Crediter's life. See *Pacific Current* 1, 1 (January 1949): 8.

⁹¹ BCSC, *Bulletin* 13, 12 December 1949, 1. "Economists Refuse to Agree But Social Credit 'Steps on Gas,'" *Vancouver Province*, 14 March 1952, 25.

⁹² BCSC, *What Social Credit Will Do*, 4.

⁹³ Robert K. Burkinshaw, *Pilgrims in Lotus Land: Conservative Protestantism in British Columbia, 1917-1987* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 3, 8, 196-7. Though Burkinshaw's study grants us some insight into a twentieth-century rejuvenation of Protestant culture in British Columbia, he follows others in assuming that Social Credit changed little before its government years. His argument regarding Social Credit, a brief treatment given the prominent place of Social Credit in the book's introduction, would

the Social Credit movement to claim that it was the only organization in the province morally and materially opposed to such measures.⁹⁷

The second fundamental of late-movement-era Social Credit philosophy – “the results that the people want” – relates more directly to the idea of policy. Political scientist David Elkins considered populism a component of Social Credit’s continuing appeal, contending that BC Social Credit’s ideological profile contained populist components, of which a profound suspicion of experts and a commitment to popular action were the most important.⁹⁸ A distinguished scholar of North American populism, Lawrence Goodwyn, has suggested that “in its twentieth-century usage, the word ‘Populism’ has come to imply – simply and inaccurately – a mass popular movement unencumbered by serious intellectual content.”⁹⁹ While it is clear that the Social Credit movement in British Columbia shed the Douglasite “intellectual” trappings of its early years, applying Elkins’s and Goodwyn’s principal criteria to some examples of change within the movement suggests that populism alone does not adequately describe BC Social Credit thought.

Given Elkins’s model of populism in British Columbia in the 1970s and 1980s, it seems reasonable to expect that Social Credit’s later movement period would feature at least the roots of distrust in experts. Yet movement literature from the late 1940s and early 1950s reveals that, while calls for popular control and support for democratic reform played increasingly important roles in the Social Credit program, the attitude towards experts remained congenial and essentially unchanged from a time when the movement was more concerned with the mechanics of financial reform. Expertise held a prominent place in early Social Credit doctrine because experts in econometrics were to issue orders governing the distribution of new money, thereby ensuring that the popular policy of ending poverty was carried out. Even though some members identified intellectuals critical of Social Credit theory with socialism, under the revitalized Social Credit League, appeals to implement Social Credit still envisioned the employment of “qualified men whose duty it would be to see that the money system served the people.”¹⁰⁰ By 1952, BC Social Credit had little practical need for experts because the more technocratic part of Social Credit

have been strengthened by treating the more protracted development of the religious component in Social Credit thought on an equal footing with the plainly religious overtones of 1952 and after. His work allows us to place this development within the broader context of a religious resurgence during the late 1940s and early 1950s.

⁹⁴ BCSC, *What Social Credit Will Do*, 1.

ideology had either vanished or been submerged in the movement. The league no longer condemned or praised experts, as its wrath had been diverted towards a social climate that had fostered schemes such as the hospital insurance system. As its membership grew significantly in 1951-2, Social Credit secured the services of political experts by adopting the Reverend Ernest Hansell and W.A.C. Bennett as leaders, indicating that an alloy of principle and political pragmatism had effectively replaced technique as the central feature of Social Credit ideology in British Columbia. Neither man was known to be an expert in Douglas's economic philosophy, but both could tend the machinery of politics.

The last two fundamentals in Social Credit's 1952 creed were closely linked, and they reflected changes in the movement's position on monetary reform. At the outset, Social Crediters had claimed that security – enough material wealth for everyone – was an essential goal in any society and that raising incomes necessarily meant raising production. The later league presented security and freedom as “two great heritages which Social Credit maintains are inseparable,” and it considered itself to be the proprietor of freedom.¹⁰¹ It argued that socialist methods could bring security but that socialism relied upon two premises – wealth must be redistributed and the state is the ideal agent of redistribution – that were antithetical to current Social Credit principles and to freedom.¹⁰² Social Crediters objected to the assault on liberty and property they thought accompanied state-run programs. Major Jukes asked his readers to “take, for instance, a plan of so-called Social Security. It is not enough to know what it will do for us. We must also know what it will do *to* us ... it will half-fill the hungry with fairly good things and the rich it will send slightly emptier away.”¹⁰³ In arguing for the maintenance of freedom, the BC Social Credit movement argued for the protection of the responsible, independent individual – the competent citizen – from the grasping hand of collectivism. Without explicit mention of class barriers, it appealed to those with jobs, to homeowners, independent labourers, and businesspeople to oppose the “first steps towards a Slave State.”¹⁰⁴ While the Social Credit League of the early 1950s still advocated monetary reform, it perceived the greatest threat coming from those

⁹⁵ Walter Young, “Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the ccf in British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 32 (Winter 1976-7): 139.

⁹⁶ SCLBC, *Social Credit for British Columbia*, 12.

⁹⁷ Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 99.

⁹⁸ David Elkins, “British Columbia as a State of Mind,” in Blake, *Two Political Worlds*, 61-3.

who promoted security at the price of freedom. Consequently, BC Social Credit saw citizens who, during the 1940s, had succeeded within a market framework as targets of a new collectivist oppression. Operating under a value system in which freedom meant freedom of choice for everyone, it could not promote mandatory schemes.

For journalists and historians the “crusade” of 1952 has been the touchstone of the BC Social Credit movement era, and they have portrayed an organization that abandoned the fourth pillar of the fundamental principle – monetary reform. Although constitutional impediments and a reluctance on the part of the general public to study Social Credit combined to move such measures “further down the ladder” of Social Credit priorities by 1949,¹⁰⁵ references to them were not dropped. Though many members of the league hoped that Social Credit monetary reforms could be implemented, increased support for individualism did not condone making the consumption of all that was produced possible through some degree of state coercion. To use the movement’s own language, the *policy* of security with freedom could be carried out in other ways, and Social Credit exemplified this by renewing on behalf of the citizen its claims to British Columbia’s “cultural heritage.” It extended this claim from the province’s industrial potential to its resources. Members had always realized that the resources of the province could be a source of revenue, but only relatively late in its career did the movement view resource exploitation as a method of debt reduction and industrial development that could effectively replace traditional Social Credit monetary theory.¹⁰⁶ The *fundamentals* suggested that credit reform would be best applied on the federal level and that “our natural wealth plus individual enterprise can bring security with freedom, providing Social Credit principles [the fundamentals] are applied by the [federal] government.”¹⁰⁷ Even the league’s fictional carpenter recognized the irony of indolence in the midst of abundance: “when bad times were here people wanted

⁹⁹ Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), xvi.

¹⁰⁰ BCSC, *What Is Social Credit?: A Simple Explanation for the Busy Reader* (Vancouver: British Columbia Social Credit League, 1950), WACB, MG 1/1, 7/13, 9.

¹⁰¹ Wicks, *Fundamentals of Social Credit*, 4-5.

¹⁰² SCLBC, *Social Credit for British Columbia*, 13; “The Canadian Brand of Socialism” (n.d.), PVP, box 4, file 7, 3.

¹⁰³ Jukes, *Dictatorship by Stealth*, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Wicks, *Fundamentals of Social Credit*, 5.

¹⁰⁵ BCSC, “Provincial Platform” (1949), PVP, box 4, file 13, 1.

¹⁰⁶ The theme of a “storehouse” of potential wealth arose early in BC Social Credit’s history, but at that time resources were portrayed as a kind of secure foreign exchange medium that would allow the province to buy imported goods in the event that Social Credit was

houses, carpenters were out of work, mills were closed down, lumbermen were idle, but we had plenty of lumber in our forests.”¹⁰⁸ In 1951, Ron Worley’s Victoria Group No. 1 had resolved that “Natural Resources are the answer to queries from the public regarding Finance.”¹⁰⁹

On BC Social Credit’s list of priorities, the credit revolution longed for by the old Douglasites came well after pay-as-you-go budgets, elimination of debt, administrative cuts, and income tax amendments.¹¹⁰ The league still presented Douglas’s doctrine but surrounded it with talk of British Columbia’s abundance as a tangible guarantee of security and freedom. Claiming it was out to get the people the results they desired, BC Social Credit chiefly consulted its own members to determine these results and to prescribe courses of action to achieve them. Once defined as a state of economic well-being based on the speedy enactment of rational monetary reforms, by 1952 Social Credit had become a state where almost everyone was to be left alone to reap the dividends of their “cultural heritage”: British Columbia’s abundant resource base. It had become, by 1952, a “way of life” governed by a Christian ethic, a sense of the individual’s sovereignty, and a conventional, free-enterprise agenda, all promoted in the name of democracy.

* * *

Initially, Social Credit interested a handful of British Columbians because it seemed a direct and scientific way to combat severe economic depression. Major Douglas’s study of the financial system had supposedly revealed its flaws, and BC Social Credit’s roots lay in his theories. The movement’s branches, however, exhibited a profound disdain for welfarism, faceless corporations, and big government. Becoming more sensual than cerebral, the *meaning* of Social Credit changed over its first twenty years in British Columbia as belief in a society founded upon Christian values and simple democracy displaced reflection upon how to tackle modern problems with modern tools. The politicization of the BC movement required an identification of Social Credit principles with popular values, but the deference to the wisdom of the masses necessary to make this long

adopted in British Columbia. See SCLBC, *Social Credit for British Columbia*, 3-4, 13; Douglas Social Credit College, Study No. 1, 1; Jukes, *Let Us*, 3; “Cash to Come from Resources,” *Vancouver Province*, 17 March 1952, 17. Edwin Black’s “The Politics of Exploitation,” in Patricia Roy, *A History of British Columbia: Historical Readings* (Toronto: Copp Clark

process a profoundly populist act remained absent. In view of the movement's responses to such stimuli as Leonard Marsh's *Report on Social Security for Canada* and the provincial health insurance scheme, conservatism seems an apt summation of BC Social Credit thought. However, this thought was assembled from a sufficiently disparate collection of ideologies to suggest that its history more nearly describes the development of indigenous anti-modernist social criticism than the program of a political faction. Social Credit in British Columbia could portray the province as dystopian and decadent in a way that its Alberta counterpart – compelled to argue that its domain was an equitable society – could not.

Social Credit's lament for the passing of values rooted in the province's past was an essential element of the movement's identity and undoubtedly contributed to its political success. However, the political record, largely the tale of a protest party's instant genesis, cannot be relied upon to fully appreciate how Social Credit ideology in British Columbia responded to historical conditions, casting off economic "science" in favour of morality. Social Crediters in British Columbia were relatively few through the 1930s, scattered for much of the 1940s, and a mildly fractious lot even after their escape from obscurity in 1952. In search of a way to "bring about" the harmonious state of Social Credit *as they conceived of it*, the movement came to emphasize the previously secondary tenets of support for a free-enterprise economy and personal liberty – a far cry from the expert-run system embraced as Social Credit in 1932. As Clifford Geertz wrote: "Ideology bridges the emotional gap between things as they are and as one would have them be, thus insuring the performance of roles that might otherwise be abandoned in despair or apathy."¹¹¹ In this same way, keeping the movement together was an expression of Social Crediters' determination to offer social criticism and to agitate for fundamental change, even though what passed for Social Credit doctrine had changed considerably. The scope of BC Social Credit thought and the structure of the movement's organization altered to reflect the interests of British Columbians who preferred a more competitive, open society and who felt threatened economically by a consolidation of capital and threatened ideologically by the ruling coalition's perceived leftward shift during the 1940s.

Pitman, 1989), 129-46, develops the theme of the resource economy's importance in more detail.

During the 1940s, the limited applicability and radical tint of the orthodox Social Credit system became an ideological burden for Social Crediters in British Columbia as they tried to identify more precisely what dissatisfied them and tried to suggest simpler solutions to the complex problems presented by modernization. The movement circumvented what Edwin Black called a “lack of tradition”¹¹² in British Columbia by promoting nineteenth-century liberal values and the prudent exploitation of the province’s resources – the reason many had been drawn there – as authentic British Columbian ideals. The movement professed to place little value on ethnic, racial, cultural, or gender differences, tying its definition of the responsible citizen to the nuclear family, male-breadwinner model that was enjoying a renaissance in post-war North America. After two decades spent observing increasing government activity, the expansion of the welfare state, and a consolidation of capital in British Columbia’s primary industries the league’s declaration that it alone stood “for free enterprise, the reduction of the provincial debt, elimination or control of monopoly, abolishing compulsory forms of legislation, and the decentralization of control” indicated that the movement had filled the vacuum Bennett and others had perceived on the right.¹¹³ No other movements or parties in the province had embraced anything resembling Social Credit’s call for fiscal and moral responsibility, and of the free-enterprise parties, none personified the desires of the “yeoman wage-earner” or the competent citizen more convincingly than did the Social Credit League of the early 1950s. Faced with a coalition government it perceived as interventionist and subversive of freedom, BC Social Credit replaced its original call for the nationalization of credit with the traditional liberal message that individual rights were supreme and formed the basis of collective security. Despite the promise of technocratic systems in the 1920s and 1930s, wartime and an era of reconstruction that rededicated itself to democratic principles combined to ensure that Douglas’s complex doctrine paled before a vision of “Christianity in practice.”¹¹⁴ Following Social Credit in British Columbia became more a way of life than the work of an engineer.

¹⁰⁷Wicks, *Fundamentals of Social Credit*, 5-6.

¹⁰⁸BCSCL, “Dear Neighbor.”

¹⁰⁹BCSCL, “Resolutions,” Annual Convention, 2-3 November 1951, 6.