

# ELUSIVE UNITY:

## *The Canadian Labor Party in British Columbia, 1924–28*<sup>1</sup>

---

BENJAMIN ISITT

IN THE 1920S, BRITISH COLUMBIA workers experimented with a form of political organization that was distinct in the twentieth century: a united front of Communist and non-Communist workers in the BC section of the Canadian Labor Party (CLP). Disheartened with militant job action and facing “Open Shop” conditions in most industries, workers intensified political action to challenge employers’ power. From 1924 to 1928, the vehicle for this working-class challenge was the CLP. Situated in the political economy of the 1920s and British Columbia’s working-class history, the BC CLP challenged working-class liberalism and conservatism and shaped the contours of labour politics for the remainder of the twentieth century. A chasm of strategy and ideology separated Communist and non-Communist workers, divisions aggravated by enduring racism among Anglo-Saxon workers. CLP support peaked at 11 percent of the vote and three legislative seats in its inaugural election in 1924; the party was eclipsed by the upstart Provincial Party, an unlikely alliance of farmers and businesspeople that captured a quarter of the popular vote.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the 1928 election, the CLP split over Asian enfranchisement, with Communists favouring an extension of the vote to British Columbians of Asian descent and non-Communist workers and unions disagreeing. Already angered

---

<sup>1</sup> The author acknowledges financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and University of Victoria, and thanks Patricia Roy, Eric W. Sager, Ian Macpherson, and the journal’s anonymous readers for providing feedback on earlier drafts. Readers may note a distinction in spelling, between “Labor” in party names and direct quotations and the modern Canadianism “labour” in most other instances, which was not commonly used among British Columbia workers until after the Second World War.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Parker, “The Provincial Party,” *BC Studies* 8 (Winter 1970–71), 17–33; Martin Robin, *Rush for the Spoils: The Company Province, 1871–1933* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 197–210; *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 1 February 1924. Founded in 1923, the Provincial Party represented a BC equivalent of the federal Progressives, led by millionaire lumber baron Major-General Alexander D. McRae, a renegade Tory. Going the same route as the Progressives, McRae and his fellow Provincial Party MLAs soon returned to the Conservative fold. See also W.L. Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950).

over “Communist tactics,” the latter severed affiliation from the CLP, leading to the party’s demise. The CLP’s collapse ensured the exclusion of Communists from future attempts at labour political unity, including the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF).

The CLP was the last expression of organizational unity, in a single party, between the two major traditions of British Columbia’s left, an attempt at fusion politics that sought to bridge divisions of ideology and personality, as Walter Young described them.<sup>3</sup> From 1928 on, Communist “isolation from the labour political movement was permanent,” Martin Robin observed.<sup>4</sup> The CLP demonstrates the impact of local conditions in BC politics (a theme pursued by Robert A.J. McDonald and Keith Ralston) as well as external factors such as changes in the international Communist movement.<sup>5</sup> While Alvin Finkel examines the CLP experience in Alberta, and Robin traces its national contours, there is no study of the BC CLP.<sup>6</sup> Sandwiched between the literature on the early socialist movement and later works on the Communist Party and the CCF, the BC CLP merits attention.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Walter D. Young, “Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 32 (Winter 1976–77): 139–62. In his survey of BC labour history, Paul Phillips provides a brief description of “factionalism along communist – non-communist lines.” Ian Parker shines additional light in his study of the Provincial Party, illuminating “persistent attempts to reform provincial politics.” See Paul A. Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Boag Foundation, 1967), 99; Ian Parker, “The Provincial Party,” *BC Studies* 8 (Winter 1970–71): 17.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880–1930* (Kingston: Queen’s Industrial Relations Centre, 1968), 269.

<sup>5</sup> See Robert A.J. McDonald, “Just a working man: Tom Uphill,” in *A World Apart: The Crow’snest Communities of Alberta and British Columbia*, ed. Wayne Norton and Tom Langford (Kamloops: Plateau, 2000), 109n48; John Manley, “Canadian Communists, Revolutionary Unionism, and the ‘Third Period’: The Workers’ Unity League, 1929–1935,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 5 (1994): 167–91.

<sup>6</sup> Alvin Finkel, “The Rise and Fall of the Labour Party in Alberta,” *Labour/Le Travail* 16 (Fall 1985): 61–96; Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour*, 252–67.

<sup>7</sup> Dorothy G. Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel: Ernest Winch and the Growth of Socialism in Western Canada* (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas, 1977); A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899–1919*, (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977); Carlos A. Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885–1917* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1979); Sean Griffin, ed., *Fighting Heritage: Highlights of the 1930s Struggle for Jobs and Militant Unionism in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Tribune, 1985); Gerald Friesen, “Yours in Revolt: Regionalism, Socialism, and the Western Canadian Labour Movement,” *Labour/Le Travailleur* 1 (1976): 141–57; Ronald Grantham, “Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement in British Columbia, 1898–1933” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1942); Thomas Robert Loosemore, “British Columbia Labour Movement and Political Action, 1879–1906” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1954); Richard Grey Stuart, “The Early Political Career of Angus MacInnis” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1970); Dorothy J. Roberts, “Doctrine and Disunity in the British Columbia Section of the CCF, 1932–56” (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1972); A. Ross Johnson, “No Compromise – No Political

ORIGINS OF THE CANADIAN LABOR PARTY  
IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

On 29 April 1924, a group of workers met in Vancouver's Labor Hall on Hastings Street to organize a provincial section of the CLP.<sup>8</sup> The idea for such a party had circulated for decades, tapping a tradition of independent working-class politics that extended back to the turn of the century and drew support among class-conscious immigrants from the British Isles who sought to forge an organization akin to the British Labour Party.<sup>9</sup> Between 1906 and 1909, an earlier CLP had existed in British Columbia, described by Martin Robin as "a paper organization." Liberals, eager to weaken the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) (which had elected members to the legislative assembly), welcomed it.<sup>10</sup> During the First World War, this labourist strain surged as anger against conscription and profiteering prompted the BC Federation of Labour to field candidates in the 1917 federal "Conscription Election" and form the Federated Labor Party (FLP) "for the purpose of securing industrial legislation for the collective ownership and democratic operation of the means of wealth production." Former SPC MLA James Hawthornthwaite won a 1918 by-election and promptly joined the FLP.<sup>11</sup>

With the defeat of the 1919 general strikes in Vancouver, Victoria, and Prince Rupert, and the eclipse of the militant One Big Union (OBU), British Columbia's class-conscious workers intensified their involvement on the political field.<sup>12</sup> In the 1920 provincial election,

---

Trading: The Marxian Socialist Tradition in British Columbia" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1975); Patrick George Hill, "A Failure of Unity: Communist Party-ccf Relations in British Columbia, 1935-1939" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1977); Raymond Frogner, "Within sound of the drum: Currents of Anti-Militarism in the British Columbia Working Class in the 1930s" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> "Labor Is United," *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver) (hereafter *Federationist*), 2 May 1924; Akers, "Rebel or Revolutionary," 41. The meeting was held at the Holden Building at 16 East Hastings, headquarters of the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council.

<sup>9</sup> British Columbia, *Statement of Votes* (1920), reprinted in British Columbia, *Electoral History of British Columbia, 1871-1986* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> Martin, *Pillars of Profit*, 101-2.

<sup>11</sup> *Federationist*, 25 January 1918; 1 February 1918; 8 February 1918; Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour*, 119-37; Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 70-71.

<sup>12</sup> Allen Seager and David Roth, "British Columbia and the Mining West: A Ghost of a Chance," in *The Workers' Revolt in Canada: 1917-1925*, ed. Craig Heron, 231-67 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); David Jay Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978); Gordon Hak, "British Columbia Loggers and the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, 1919-1922," *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (1989): 67-90; Dorothy G. Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel: Ernest Winch and the Growth of Socialism in Western Canada* (Vancouver: Boag Foundation, 1977), 44-60; Benjamin Isitt, "The Search for Solidarity: The Industrial and Political Roots of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in British Columbia, 1913-1928" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2003).

three labour candidates were elected to the BC Legislature as the FLP captured nearly 10 percent of the vote.<sup>13</sup> Within a short time, however, the FLP descended into inner-party strife as the SPC split over the Russian Revolution.<sup>14</sup> Industrial struggle reached a nadir. In December 1923, longshore workers in Vancouver, Victoria, Chemainus, Port Alberni, Nanoose, and Prince Rupert voted to end a nine-week strike that had paralyzed coastal shipping. They had suffered an unqualified defeat as the Shipping Federation established “Open Shop” conditions on the waterfront.<sup>15</sup> The 1923 waterfront strike represented the final volley in BC labour’s postwar upheaval. In the wake of the failed waterfront strike, the *Federationist* lamented that “workers are not educated to the ballot.”<sup>16</sup>

Leadership of British Columbia’s working class was hotly contested by an array of labour and socialist parties, mirroring volatility in the resource-extraction economy and fluidity in political alignments (see Table 1).<sup>17</sup> A robust strain of working-class conservatism – a pillar of the McBride administration that governed from 1903 to 1916 – had undermined moves towards independent labour politics.<sup>18</sup> The policies

<sup>13</sup> British Columbia, *Statement of Votes* (1920).

<sup>14</sup> See *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), March–August 1921. See also Peter Campbell, “Making Socialists: Bill Pritchard, the Socialist Party of Canada, and the Third International,” *Labour/Le Travail* 30 (Fall 1992): 42–65; Peter Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 1999); David Akers, “Rebel or Revolutionary? Jack Kavanagh and the Early Years of the Communist Movement in Vancouver, 1920–1925,” *Labour/Le Travail* 30 (Fall 1992): 9–44.

<sup>15</sup> “End of the Strike,” *Federationist*, 14 December 1923. In February 1926, the Vancouver Trade and Labor Council’s *Labor Statesman* newspaper would report: “The economic supremacy of the Shipping Federation is for the time being absolute.” See *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 26 February 1926; William Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Broadway Printers, 1937), 99–100; Andrew Parnaby, *Citizen Docker: Securing a Square Deal on the Vancouver Waterfront, 1919–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 9–10, 18–41.

<sup>16</sup> “Want Affiliation,” *Federationist*, 14 December 1923.

<sup>17</sup> For class formation in British Columbia’s frontier economy, see Martin Robin, “British Columbia: The Company Province,” in *Canadian Provincial Politics: The Party Systems in the Ten Provinces*, 2nd ed., ed. Martin Robin, 28–60 (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1978); Phillip Resnick, “The Political Economy of BC: A Marxist Perspective,” in *Essays in BC Political Economy*, ed. Paul Knox and Phillip Resnick, 3–12 (Vancouver: New Star, 1974); Allen Seager, “Socialists and Workers: The Western Canadian Coal Miners, 1900–21,” *Labour/Le Travail* 16 (Fall 1985): 23–60; James Conley, “Frontier Labourers, Crafts in Crisis and the Western Canadian Labour Revolt,” *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (Spring 1989): 1–37; Robert A.J. McDonald, “Lumber Society on the Industrial Frontier: Burrard Inlet, 1863–1886,” *Labour/Le Travail* 33 (Spring 1994): 69–96; David J. Bercuson, “Labour Radicalism and the Western Industrial Frontier, 1897–1919,” *Canadian Historical Review* 57 (June 1977): 154–77; Mark Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows: The Industrial Workers of the World in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star, 1990); and Mark Leier, *Red Flags and Red Tape: The Making of a Labour Bureaucracy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> Robert McKenzie and Allan Silver, *Angels in Marble: Working-Class Conservatives in Urban England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Martin Pugh, “The Rise of Labour and the Political Culture of Conservatism, 1890–1945,” *History* 87, 288 (2002): 514–37; Michael

of “Honest John” Oliver’s Liberals (elected in 1916) also wooed working-class voters, such as women who had agitated for the Minimum Wage Act and Mothers’ Pension Act and helped elect British Columbia’s first woman legislator, Mary Ellen Smith, at their first opportunity at the polls.<sup>19</sup> As several scholars have emphasized, a broad segment of BC workers was not socialist.<sup>20</sup> In 1923, the Liberal government divided Nanaimo’s Newcastle riding, “depriving Sam Guthrie of his seat,” the *British Columbia Federationist* newspaper alleged.<sup>21</sup>

The Trades and Labor Congress of Canada (TLC) had endorsed the idea of a CLP in 1917, an idea revived at the Congress’s 1921 convention in Winnipeg as a smattering of Labour MPs were elected to Parliament alongside Farmer and Progressive members. J.S. Woodsworth, who had worked on the Vancouver waterfront and contested the 1920 BC election as an FLP candidate in Vancouver, led the tiny labour caucus in Ottawa.<sup>22</sup> Provincial CLP sections formed in Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec. At the TLC’s September 1923 convention, held in Vancouver, delegates voted to form a BC section.<sup>23</sup> According to Angus MacInnis, an officer in the Vancouver Street Railwaymen’s Union, TLC leaders resisted this move, but BC delegates, acting through a labour representation committee and a Communist secretary, Albert Wells, persevered.<sup>24</sup> They

---

Mann, “Sources of Variation in Working-Class Movements in Twentieth-Century Europe,” *New Left Review* 212 (July–August 1995): 14–54; Robert A.J. McDonald, “Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper and the Political Culture of British Columbia, 1903–1924,” *BC Studies* 149 (Spring 2006): 63–88.

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Norcross, “Mary Ellen Smith: The Right Woman in the Right Place at the Right Time,” in *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women’s Work in British Columbia*, ed. Barbara K. Lantham and Roberta J. Pazdro, 357–64 (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984); Betty Griffin and Susan Lockhart, *Their Own History: Women’s Contribution to the Labour Movement in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UFAWU/CAW Senior’s Club, 2002), 50.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Leier describes class as “a daily, lived experience, as accessible and as plain as race and gender, even if workers do not articulate it with the precision of a sociologist or translate it into a vote for a socialist candidate.” See Mark Leier, “W[h]ither Labour History: Regionalism, Class, and the Writing of BC History,” *BC Studies* 61 (August 1996): 67. See also Robert A.J. McDonald, *Making Vancouver: Class, Status and Social Boundaries, 1863–1913* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> “Longshoremen Affiliate,” *Federationist*, 21 December 1923.

<sup>22</sup> In the 1920 provincial election, Woodsworth took 7,444 votes, finishing thirteenth in a field of twenty-eight candidates vying for six seats. The top finisher was Liberal candidate Mary Ellen Smith, with 17,510 votes, while former Conservative premier William Bowser took the sixth and final seat, with 11,617 votes. A few months later, Woodsworth left the coast for Winnipeg, where he took the helm of the city’s Labor Church before being elected MP for Winnipeg Centre as a candidate of the Independent Labor Party. See British Columbia, *Statement of Votes* (1920); *Canadian Parliamentary Guide* (Ottawa: Mortimer, 1921); Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959).

<sup>23</sup> *Federationist*, 21 March 1924; Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour*, 239–40.

<sup>24</sup> *Federationist*, 15 December 1922; 21 March 1924; 3 April 1925.

TABLE 1  
*Labour and Socialist Parties in BC, 1924-1928*

PARTY	YEARS
Canadian Labor Party (CLP)	1924-1928
Communist Party of Canada (CPC)	1924-
Federal Labor Party (FLP)	1918-1926
Independent Labor Party (ILP)	1926-1931
Labor Party of New Westminster	1924-1926
Labor Party of South Vancouver	1924-1926
Labor Representation Committee (LRC)	1923-1924
Socialist Party of Canada (SPC)	1903-1926
Workers' Party of Canada (WPC)	1921-1924

looked closely to Britain, where Ramsay MacDonald formed the first Labour government in January 1924. These efforts coincided with the Provincial Party's emergence in British Columbia, formed by farmers and disgruntled Conservatives, and a decision to change the name of the Workers' Party to the Communist Party of Canada (CPC).<sup>25</sup> In April 1924, the Victoria Trades and Labor Council endorsed the idea of a provincial labour party.<sup>26</sup>

Delegates from the FLP, the Communist Party, and many Vancouver unions attended the CLP's founding convention in April 1924. They provisionally adopted a constitution modelled on that of the Ontario section and called a nominating convention for 31 May in anticipation of a provincial election. Provisional officers were also chosen: former OBU organizer Harry Cottrell as president and FLP MLA Harry Neelands as vice-president.<sup>27</sup> The *Federationist* enthusiastically reported that "the various forces of the labor movement are making an earnest attempt to co-ordinate their efforts for the purposes of presenting a united front in the political arena."<sup>28</sup> The newspaper had earlier commented on internal tension:

<sup>25</sup> Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 77-78. This CPC decision was taken at the third convention of the Workers' Party of Canada held in Toronto, 18-20 April 1924. According to Rodney, six of forty-two delegates were from British Columbia.

<sup>26</sup> *Federationist*, 18 April 1924.

<sup>27</sup> For a report of Cottrell's organizing work, see *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 24 July 1920.

<sup>28</sup> *Federationist*, 2 May 1924.

Shall we allow differences of opinion to hold us back from our rights? ... Difference of opinion is largely a matter of degree. Those of us who are extreme in our ideas will one day see them materialize after a gradual and persistent effort ... [E]very step we take, every institution we found, can be made to serve their purpose. Unity is needed, however, if we are to remain, as a movement, free from the bigotry and narrowness which have characterized other great movements and eventually brought about their downfall.<sup>29</sup>

Foreshadowing future events, the *Federationist* warned that “sinister influences” would attempt to “disrupt the ranks”: “If ... any group or faction endeavors to gain control of this body in an effort to make it serve their own ends, it will be a dismal failure, and will do more to retard the Labor movement than all the intrigue of capitalism combined.”<sup>30</sup>

Despite lofty hopes, the CLP was hindered from the outset by rival ambitions and divergences of ideology and strategy. Vancouver unionist Alf Taylor insisted that the labour movement was “not the vested privilege of labor officials, to be traded here and there for personal favors or to aid personal ambitions.” He reminded leaders who felt they were “the ‘whole cheese’ in the labor movement” that it had “existed long before they were born” and would “continue to function in spite of them long after they [were] all under the sod.”<sup>31</sup> The *Federationist* echoed this advice: “Until men of position are willing to be nothing in order that the great cause may win, labor will always be vanquished and lose the support of its oft professed friends and supporters.”<sup>32</sup> John L. Martin issued a call to arms: “The master class has kept us divided for long enough. Now that we have it divided, let us unite and rule.”<sup>33</sup>

## THE 1924 PROVINCIAL ELECTION

Industrially and politically organized men and women have entered the present political campaign as the Canadian Labor Party, representing over five thousand workers after having realized that the old line political parties and the new provincial party cannot and dare not legislate in the interest of the toiling masses.

- *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 13 June 1924.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 14 March 1924.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 9 May 1924.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 16 May 1924.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 20 June 1924.

<sup>33</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 13 June 1924.

On 10 May 1924, Premier Oliver dissolved the BC Legislature for an election. Though exonerated by a Royal Commission into allegations of graft on the problem-plagued Pacific Great Eastern (PGE) Railway, Oliver remained on the defensive. The Provincial Party made hay out of \$50,000 campaign contributions from PGE contractors to the Liberals and Conservatives and lambasted the government for its close relationship with liquor interests. Eager to court working-class voters, the Liberal government had introduced a general eight-hour bill, which labour had demanded for decades, and Oliver announced a plebiscite in tandem with the election to authorize the sale of beer by the glass.<sup>34</sup> The Eight-Hour Bill lay on the order paper when the election was called.

Despite these overtures, British Columbia's organized working class was moving away from the old-line parties and displaying uncharacteristic solidarity. Days before the Legislature dissolved, the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council buried a relic of the OBU split, accepting credentials from Hod Carriers' delegate Jack Kavanagh, a Communist, and lather (and former OBU secretary) Victor Midgley.<sup>35</sup> The SPC embraced this new-found solidarity by nominating only two candidates, Jack Harrington in Vancouver and Bill Pritchard in Nanaimo, who subsequently received the CLP's endorsement. The new party nominated fifteen candidates of its own, including incumbent labour MLAs Harry Neelands in South Vancouver, Tom Uphill in Fernie, and Sam Guthrie in the reconfigured Cowichan-Newcastle riding as well as MacInnis and Cottrell in Vancouver.<sup>36</sup> One woman, Priscilla Janet Smith, ran in Vancouver, while Mary Gertrude Graves ran in Victoria. The CLP's nominating convention was marked by a great "spirit of unity" and an "earnest desire to further the cause of labor," the *Federationist* reported: "Although all the parties present were not agreed as to the ways and means ... to accomplish the desired end, yet they were in agreement on this one important feature, that the capitalist parties must be defeated wherever and whenever possible."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Robin, *Rush for the Spoils*, 202-6.

<sup>35</sup> *Federationist*, 9 May 1924.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 May 1924; 30 May 1924.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 May 1924. One of the few controversies of the 1924 campaign was Tom Barnard's last-minute decision to withdraw in Comox. A hero of the Great War and a veterans' leader who leaned towards the Communists, Barnard received the CLP nomination and encouragement from the Labor Party group on Valdes Island and in the Comox Valley. Barnard claimed, however, that Cumberland, "the largest industrial centre in the constituency," gave him little support and suggested that "the miners on the political field were like they are on the industrial field, viz., not yet desiring any organized political expression of their views, at least in sufficient magnitude to warrant me contesting the seat." Barnard's erstwhile supporters on Valdes Island, meanwhile, accused him of cowardice and, worse, of collusion with the Liberal



On 20 June 1924, British Columbians went to the polls and the CLP fell short of its lofty hopes – in an election historian Margaret Ormsby described as “a revolt by the masses against the caucus system, against machine politics and against the spoils system.”<sup>38</sup> The Liberal Party, though weakened by the PGE railway scandal, returned to power on a platform that included the Eight-Hour Day.<sup>39</sup> Sam Guthrie lost his seat by a mere 114 votes, a victim of poor organization and alleged gerrymandering.<sup>40</sup> Pritchard received strong support in Nanaimo, finishing within five hundred votes of victory. The CLP candidates in Vancouver City performed well, but not one was returned. Two re-elected members, Tom Uphill in Fernie and Neelands in South Vancouver, were joined by CLP candidate Frank Browne in Burnaby; across the province, the CLP took 11 percent of the vote. This three-member labour caucus soon grew to four, as Major R.J. “Dick” Burde, elected as an Independent Liberal in Alberni, joined the voting bloc of labour MLAs.<sup>41</sup> Since Oliver’s Liberals had only twenty-three seats out of forty-eight in the Legislature (and less than one-third of the popular vote), labour held the balance of power (see Table 2).<sup>42</sup>

The CLP’s strength worried Liberals and Conservatives, who made vehement personal attacks against the labour candidates. Complicating the election was the Provincial Party, which secured three seats and 24 percent of the vote but was soon reabsorbed into the Conservative fold.<sup>43</sup> Several prominent labour leaders, including Vancouver TLC officer Birt Showler and Victoria TLC secretary and “Labor” Alderman Eugene S.

---

Party. “There are many supporters of the labor party in the Comox riding who contend he got cold feet, ran out and left us in the air!” FLPer William Law wrote. See *Federationist*, 4 July 1924; 6 June 1924; *Labor Statesman*, 6 June 1924.

<sup>38</sup> Margaret Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Vancouver: Macmillan, 1958), 423.

<sup>39</sup> Robin, *Rush for the Spoils*, 202–9. For the Eight-Hour-Day provision and efforts by organized capital (such as the timber interests) to prevent its implementation, see *OBV Bulletin*, 4 September 1924; 25 December 1924.

<sup>40</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 20 June 1924. A writer in the next issue, Murphy, attributed the Newcastle defeat to “local incompetence.” Pritchard countered this claim, arguing that many potential Guthrie supporters were prevented from voting because they had been added to an auxiliary voters’ list for the 1921 Dominion elections but had been excluded from the provincial list. Murphy responded with some compelling evidence: “A thousand loggers on Cowichan Lake and seventeen labor votes at the polling station ... Newcastle [gave] a majority against labor for the first time since 1909.” See *Labor Statesman*, 27 June 1924; 11 July 1924; 1 August 1924.

<sup>41</sup> Burde had been elected in the postwar upheaval and migrated to the left, attending the 1926 CLP convention on behalf of the Port Alberni ILP. See Gordon Hak, “The Socialist and Labourist Impulse in Small-Town British Columbia: Port Alberni and Prince George, 1911–33,” *Canadian Historical Review* 70, 4 (1989): 532–35; *Labor Statesman*, 28 May 1926.

<sup>42</sup> British Columbia, *Statement of Votes* (1924); Robin, *Rush for the Spoils*, 209.

<sup>43</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 13 June 1924; Parker, “The Provincial Party,” 17–33; McDonald, “Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper,” 78–86.

TABLE 2  
*Party Support in BC Provincial Elections, 1920-1928*

PARTY	1920			1924			1928		
	NO. OF CANDIDATES	ELECTED	% OF VOTE	NO. OF CANDIDATES	ELECTED	% OF VOTE	NO. OF CANDIDATES	ELECTED	% OF VOTE
Canadian Labor Party	-	-	-	15	3	11.30	-	-	-
Conservative Party	42	15	31.20	47	17	29.45	48	35	53.30
Federal Labor Party	14	3	9.10	-	-	-	-	-	-
Independent	18	3	10.37	3	0	0.73	9	0	1.01
Independent Labor Party	1	0	0.01	-	-	-	9	1	4.95
Liberal Party	45	25	37.90	46	23	31.34	45	12	40.04
Provincial Party	-	-	-	45	3	24.16	-	-	-
Socialist Party of Canada	7	0	3.50	2	0	1.26	-	-	-
Other	28	1	7.93	10	2	1.76	6	0	0.70

Source: British Columbia, *Statement of Votes, 1920-1928*.

Woodward, rejected the CLP by running as Provincial Party candidates. Neither was elected. The Provincial Party “did not attract the Labour vote,” historian Ian Parker concluded.<sup>44</sup> In Victoria, outcast independent candidate James Hawthornthwaite found himself near the bottom of the poll, between CLP standard-bearers Mary Gertrude Graves and W.E. Pierce.<sup>45</sup> Despite the ambivalent result, the *Federationist* was optimistic: “the future of the labor political movement is an assured success.”<sup>46</sup>

#### UNITED FRONT?

Despite appearances of an electoral united front, the CLP was threatened by dissension from several quarters. Exposing a clash of personalities, the Vancouver TLC voted to send Birt Showler – recent Provincial Party candidate – to the founding convention of the CLP’s Greater Vancouver District Council, a move the *Federationist* assailed as “a brazen effrontery.” At the meeting, delegates voted three to one against seating Showler, “a lesson to others who may feel a little inclined to ‘wobble,’”

<sup>44</sup> Parker, “The Provincial Party,” 27.

<sup>45</sup> Graves received 1,304 votes, with 960 for Hawthornthwaite and 822 for Pierce. J. Hinchliffe, a Conservative, topped the polls with 6,928 votes. See *Federationist*, 27 June 1924.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

the newspaper chided as it urged the CLP not to “become a plaything for politicians.”<sup>47</sup> The *Federationist* suggested that some “would-be leaders” of the party were “not, altogether, in the business for the good that they can do their fellows, but rather are trying to have it serve as a stepping stone for themselves.”<sup>48</sup> Mrs. C. Lorimer, a self-described “class-conscious worker,” denounced CLP candidates for Vancouver municipal council: “keep out of our way; no weak-kneed variety can carry the banner of the worker.”<sup>49</sup> Unity was also strained by a move, shortly after the election, to organize a labour party of New Westminster. The FLP-controlled *Federationist* opposed the plan, asking whether “the Labor movement is going to persist in breaking itself up into a myriad of small groups without any common objective ... If they cannot agree among themselves, it might appear to the public that they would not be a very safe body to be allowed to control the government.”<sup>50</sup>

The presence of Communists also provoked tension. A writer in the *Labor Statesman* described “the futility of carrying the Socialist load along,” suggesting that Britain’s Labour government had “shown us the way to unload the communists; they are useless, all they advocate is disruption, destruction, and chaos. Their leaders’ only claim for glory is all the unions they have destroyed.”<sup>51</sup> The Communist Party’s Provincial Executive Committee responded that it was “in the CLP for the purpose of keeping it on class lines, and preventing it from becoming merely a vote catching apparatus to be used by political opportunists.”<sup>52</sup> One observer lamented that “the two most advanced bodies are [not] any nearer to the ‘united front’ than they were, and apparently the united wisdom of the

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 August 1924. Delegates at the same convention agreed to seat Walter Scribbens, who was accused of belonging to the Conservative Party. The convention, held 1 August 1924, elected an executive committee that included MacInnis, W. Dunn, J. Flynn, Mrs. Dolk, and Mrs. C. Lorimer.

<sup>48</sup> *Federationist*, 13 September 1924.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 January 1925. During this campaign, Victor Midgley re-emerged in active politics, serving on the publicity committee of the CLP Greater Vancouver Central Council. In January 1925, he narrowly missed election as trustee of the Vancouver TLC. Lyle Telford, an FLP member and later CCF president, served on the CLP’s Legislative Committee. See *Labor Statesman*, 22 August 1924; 23 January 1925.

<sup>50</sup> *Federationist*, 11 July 1924. Arguing that the CPC was in the field “for those who hold more radical views upon our economic problems” and that the FLP existed for those who want “to follow in the footsteps of such a party as we have exemplified in England today,” the *Federationist* declared bluntly: “Forming new parties is no solution for the many difficulties that are confronting the movement ... Nothing will so delight the old-line parties as to see the Labor movement divided into various groups.”

<sup>51</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 18 July 1924.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 August 1924.

two bodies seems unable to formulate a common basis for action against the common enemy, namely, the abolition of capitalism.”<sup>53</sup>

Angus MacInnis, the street railway worker who was elected as a Vancouver alderman in 1925, warned that efforts to unify and broaden the Labour Party could blunt its ideological strength: “there is a danger that in our efforts to form a party that will be acceptable to all shades of thought, or lack of thought,” labour would create a party “that [would] be useless as an instrument for effecting the emancipation of the working class.” He discussed the tension between “customary political methods” and “industrial and mass action,” and the impact of the Russian Revolution on British Columbia’s working class:

The contention was that what had happened in Russia could be duplicated in any part of the world regardless of what particular conditions in that country happened to be ... However, the pendulum is now sweeping back in the opposite direction, influenced to a great extent, no doubt, by what has happened in Great Britain in the past year.<sup>54</sup>

MacInnis, like the FLP generally, was inclined towards the gradualism of the British Labour Party, which saw a surge in votes in the November 1924 election despite losing its hold on power.<sup>55</sup> While conceding that the Russians’ “methods of getting rid of their ruling class was very effective,” he suggested it was futile to hope for “a revolutionary change by sudden or violent methods ... As capitalism develops the chances grow less.” MacInnis articulated FLP policy: “We believe it an error to hold that the social revolution can take place only in a certain way [and] to expect the complete collapse of capitalism.”<sup>56</sup>

The debate over industrial or political action persisted through the 1920s, despite hostile economic conditions that weakened workers’ bargaining power. Nanaimo coal miners, still without a union, struck for one hour in October 1924 to successfully overturn a wage reduction, while unemployed workers marched in Victoria and stormed Vancouver’s

<sup>53</sup> *Federationist*, 16 January 1925.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 July 1924.

<sup>55</sup> The FLP’s ideological orientation was conveyed in a front-page article entitled “The Fabian Society,” published in the *Federationist* prior to the BC CLP’s founding meeting. See *Federationist*, 18 April 1924.

<sup>56</sup> *Federationist*, 1 August 1924. MacInnis went on to assert that, while “the sudden breakdown of capitalism” would not occur, the fact “that it is slowly disintegrating is everywhere apparent, but how long it will take before it fails to fulfill the needs of society in any manner is a question for speculation.”

City Hall demanding relief.<sup>57</sup> Despite economic recovery mid-decade, working-class living standards lagged, proving the lie of the “roaring twenties”: “The much-heralded prosperity in the Pacific north-west is further off than ever so far as unemployment is concerned.”<sup>58</sup> Breadlines persisted in the larger cities, and, in Victoria, unemployed workers were denied relief after lumber interests opened an employment bureau to secure cheap labour. This bureau was headed by Dan Campbell, who, as a Dominion Police officer, shot Ginger Goodwin in 1918.<sup>59</sup> Rose Henderson, a Montreal socialist who joined the BC CLP, asked: “When will the industrial and the political organizations, both arms of the one body, of the labor movement, unite ... ?”<sup>60</sup> J.S. Woodsworth, meanwhile, told a Vancouver crowd that workers were beginning to realize that “to gain their own emancipation they must, themselves, enter into the political arena and deal with the social problems in the light of socialism.”<sup>61</sup> When Burnaby’s municipal council refused to grant leave to Frank Browne, a municipal accountant, to assume his legislative seat, the *Federationist* expressed outrage:

Workers have been urged at all times to adopt only constitutional methods ... If they succeed in rendering labor’s efforts to accomplish anything on their own behalf by constitutional methods of no avail, then, we ask in all seriousness, what method would they have us adopt? Are they tempting labor to become radical so that they might have something to rave about, and something to call the police and militia out for.<sup>62</sup>

The *Labor Statesman*, usually a voice of moderation, declared that the worker “can remedy his condition only by rewriting the Law ... if he must rewrite it in blood.”<sup>63</sup>

The CLP grappled with ideological questions as well as with questions regarding its structure: should it be a federation of affiliated groups or a party in its own right, with individual members? The CLP constitution explicitly forbade the establishment of party branches. This naturally favoured the FLP, which benefited from the CLP’s electoral muscle while

<sup>57</sup> *Federationist*, 3 October 1924; 5 December 1924; *OBU Bulletin*, 25 December 1924.

<sup>58</sup> *OBU Bulletin*, 9 April 1925. See also issues for 4 September 1924; 4 December 1924; and 5 February 1925.

<sup>59</sup> *OBU Bulletin*, 30 April 1925. See also Roger Stonebanks, *Fighting for Dignity: The Life and Death of Albert Goodwin* (St. John’s: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 2004).

<sup>60</sup> *Federationist*, 26 December 1924.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 October 1924.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 October 1924. See also issues for 12 September 1924; 19 September 1924.

<sup>63</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 24 July 1925.

remaining the public face between elections. Vancouver TLC leaders resented this arrangement. They wanted a stronger party organization and agitated for a constitutional amendment: "Let the CLP constitution be changed and the province organized."<sup>64</sup> In the winter of 1924-25, the debate spilled over into a fight over the CLP's official organ. The party's Vancouver executive committee endorsed the *Labor Statesman*, prompting accusations from the privately owned, FLP-aligned *Federationist* of a plot "to put this labor newspaper out of business."<sup>65</sup> *Labor Statesman* editor H.W. Watts countered that efforts to unite the two publications "were laughed at by the owners of the *Federationist*."<sup>66</sup> Angus MacInnis also weighed in, shedding light on the CLP's origins:

When an underground campaign is carried on because the FLP refused to drop its official organ, The Federationist, it is time that it should be known ... The SP of C refused to co-operate with the FLP at elections, and the situation was still further complicated by the split in the SP of C and the formation of the Workers Party.

He alleged that the TLC BC executive had approached the FLP as "an underhanded way of getting control, or trying to get control, of the political labor movement."<sup>67</sup>

When the CLP's Vancouver District Council formed a South Vancouver branch, in direct violation of the party constitution, the dispute intensified. Dave Rees defended the South Vancouver Branch, where "the words unity and harmony" were "not merely prattled." More than forty Labour MPs could be elected, Rees insisted, "if we quit acting like spoiled kids":

Just imagine three or four men working hard in the shop or factory to get the workers into a political party. One has CLP cards, the other FLP, another Workers' Party, SP of C, or perhaps IWW ... Surely we have wasted sufficient time thus ... We must be prepared to forget some party name if we are to be in one party in Canada.<sup>68</sup>

As the CLP convention approached, the *Labor Statesman* claimed that the CLP had succeeded in organizing South Vancouver and New Westminster where the FLP had failed.<sup>69</sup> The FLP, meanwhile, warned

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 27 March 1925.

<sup>65</sup> *Federationist*, 5 September 1924.

<sup>66</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 27 June 1924.

<sup>67</sup> *Federationist*, 3 April 1925.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 10 April 1925; 3 April 1925; *Labor Statesman*, 3 April 1925.

<sup>69</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 10 April 1925. Watts replaced Bill Pritchard as editor of the *Labor Statesman* in October 1924 "because of increased work and sickness." See *Labor Statesman*, 17 October 1924.

of the dangers of allowing violations of the constitution to continue unchecked.<sup>70</sup> A writer identified as I.L. Peer called for the transformation of CLP and FLP branches into local Labour parties (such as an East Burnaby labour party, a Victoria labour party, etc.), all of which would be affiliated to district councils and to the provincial CLP.<sup>71</sup> On 2 May 1925, the CLP's second annual convention opened in Vancouver. After a heated debate, delegates from the renegade CLP branches were seated. Party structure dominated the convention and delegates adopted a compromise: they did not empower the CLP to form local branches but agreed that workers in any locality could form their own organization and affiliate to the CLP. In elections for the presidency, Angus MacInnis lost to W.H. Cottrell on the third ballot by a vote of thirty-four to fifteen. The convention pledged to field a full slate of candidates in all provincial and federal constituencies. While the *Federationist* anticipated "much less friction," tensions endured.<sup>72</sup>

The summer of 1925 represented a moment of transition in British Columbia's socialist movement. The hallowed *British Columbia Federationist* and *Western Clarion* newspapers ceased publication. Reborn as the *Canadian-Farmer Labor Advocate*<sup>73</sup> (and, later, the *Canadian Labor Advocate*), the *Federationist*'s final issue revealed the ongoing clash of personalities, criticizing the "personal greed and personal ambition" that constituted "the outstanding feature in many of our local labor circles." The newspaper alluded to the failed amalgamation with the *Labor Statesman*, claiming that "a few officials were desirous of having control of their paper so that nothing would be said or done that would be injurious to their own personal aims and ambitions. Upon this rock, all too often, many labor movements are wrecked, for a time at least."<sup>74</sup> A fixture since 1912, the *Federationist* departed from the scene.

A month later, the twenty-one-year-old *Western Clarion* followed the same path, and, with it, the Socialist Party of Canada disappeared from the political landscape. The demise of the *Federationist* and *Western Clarion* triggered a brief flurry of introspection and nostalgia. A rambling, impressionistic article by spc stalwart Wallis Lefeaux illuminates this milieu: "IWW, OBU, AF of L, Syndicalists, Socialists, Anarchists, Communists and Christians ... each hold forth on their special road and

<sup>70</sup> *Federationist*, 17 April 1925.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 April 1925.

<sup>72</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 8 May 1925.

<sup>73</sup> This reflected a potent coalition in Canada's political landscape: "Farmer-Labor: The time has come when these two great groups must unite." See *Federationist*, 1 May 1925.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 June 1925.

solution of man's ills. The Federation of the World – The Parliament of Man – not yet.” The war and the Bolshevik Revolution had “jarred the preconceived notions somewhat,” and “the recovery is not yet.”<sup>75</sup> CLP vice-president John Sidaway wrote a telling obituary on the SPC and *Clarion*:

Its philosophy was suitable and successful in an era of prosperity when the IWW and the AF of L were flourishing locally. But with the loss of the miners' union on Vancouver Island and industrial stagnation the power of these organizations waned and with it the SP of C and its mouthpiece. The *Clarion* represented an era in the socialist movement which culminated with the Russian Revolution ... Its circle of friends narrowed with the years until of late only a few of the faithful were on hand to prepare its funeral.<sup>76</sup>

The most bleak prognosis appeared in the *Western Clarion* itself. Jack Harrington summed up the party's waning fortunes: “From the prophetic preaching of capital's collapse and exhorting to the revolution, we have passed through and beyond back to a period, void and empty to any revolutionary outlook.”<sup>77</sup> The *OBU Bulletin*, for its part, spared little energy eulogizing the SPC and its organ: “The passing of the *Clarion* seems to forecast the burial of the party. There is little regret at the passing of either.”<sup>78</sup>

#### FEDERAL AND MUNICIPAL POLITICS

The Labour caucus held the balance of power in British Columbia's Legislature, but the *Labor Statesman* criticized it for failing “to wield it to any effect.” If the Labour MLAs thought “it was not good policy to defeat the government and open the way for the Conservatives ... the quicker the organizations responsible for their nomination and election settles that question better ... Labor doesn't want rubber stamps in the house, it wants fighters like Woodsworth in the present Federal House.”<sup>79</sup>

<sup>75</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 24 July 1925.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 August 1925.

<sup>77</sup> Reprinted in *Labor Statesman*, 6 August 1925.

<sup>78</sup> *OBU Bulletin*, 13 August 1925. See also issue for 26 March 1925, which states that the “SP of C is a back number and that the workers are no longer interested in what he and his fellow members of the party have to say.”

<sup>79</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 21 August 1925; 5 December 1924. This stance contradicted advice the newspaper had given the Labour MLAs eight months earlier: “While the tactics of the Liberal government are far from favourable to the workers and the so-called Labor legislation not enforced in the interests of the masses, the question arises whether or not it would be good tactics to defeat the government at the present time.”



BC Labour turned its attention to federal politics as Liberal prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King went to the people in September 1925. Political alignments were in flux as the Liberals ruled with a minority, the Progressives maintained a strong third-party challenge, and the two-member Labour caucus vied for a larger role. The CLP nominated five federal candidates in British Columbia: Wallis Lefeaux, John Sidaway, and Alfred Hurry in Vancouver; Rose Henderson in New Westminster; and the “Red Dentist” Dr. W.J. Curry in North Vancouver. In the campaign, Dr. Curry asserted that “Socialist sentiment, and revolutionary tendencies” were rapidly advancing and that unity of “understanding and organization on the political, and industrial field” would “bring freedom, and power to the workers.”<sup>80</sup> Lefeaux, meanwhile, discussed the CLP’s short-term and long-term utility as “a common meeting ground for AFL, OBU, IWW, SPC, FLP, [and] WP,” an experiment to determine whether “it is possible to unite the various sects of the labor movement and organize them to at least the extent of their common interests and so anticipate and smooth the inevitable clashings and confusion that will take place when the workers in some future contingency are forced to take action to preserve society from chaos.”<sup>81</sup>

On election day, 29 October 1925, all five CLP candidates were soundly defeated. Rose Henderson had the strongest showing, with 3,315 votes to 7,774 for the Conservative victor (see Table 3).<sup>82</sup> The *Labor Statesman* attributed the CLP defeat to a lack of volunteer campaign workers.<sup>83</sup> Woodsworth, meanwhile, was re-elected in the reconfigured riding of Winnipeg North-Centre, joined by Abe Heaps in North Winnipeg, another jailed martyr of the Winnipeg strike.<sup>84</sup> Two weeks after the election, Woodsworth returned to British Columbia, calling for “reinforcements” in a speech to a capacity crowd in Vancouver’s Royal Theatre. Woodsworth stressed that his Ginger Group of Labour and Farmer MPs, who held the balance of power, were “out for ... the introduction of a new social order.” Regretting that Vancouver had not yet elected a Labour MP, he suggested contesting municipal offices “with the object of developing men who could be instructive in advancing the best interests of the movement.” In Woodsworth’s estimation, “Too much

<sup>80</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 9 October 1925. See also issue for 23 October 1925.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 September 1925.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 November 1925.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 October 1925.

<sup>84</sup> The *OBU Bulletin* took full credit: “There is an old saying that ‘the proof of the pudding is in the eating’ and the results of the election give concrete proof of the correctness of the OBU position, i.e., that clarity on the industrial field will reflect itself on the political field.” See *OBU Bulletin*, 5 November 1925.

propaganda and not enough organization and administrative [work] had been detrimental to the movement on the Coast.”<sup>85</sup>

The CLP heeded Woodsworth’s advice, turning to municipal politics to develop organizational muscle. In December 1925, Angus MacInnis was elected a Vancouver alderman in Ward Eight, taking 776 votes to 556 for his nearest rival. “It shows that seats can be captured, but to do so means plenty of spade work and a constant attention to small details that have a bearing on such contests,” the *Labor Statesman* concluded.<sup>86</sup> MacInnis, too, attributed his victory to hard work on the part of “voluntary workers in the ward. And most of this work was done by women.”<sup>87</sup> On the heels of MacInnis’s Vancouver victory, four CLP candidates won seats in South Vancouver and Burnaby in January 1926.<sup>88</sup>

Buoyed by electoral success, the CLP’s non-Communist workers reconfigured their forces. In February 1926, delegates from the Labor parties of South Vancouver and New Westminster joined representatives of the FLP’s Vancouver-area branches to form the Independent Labor Party (ILP).<sup>89</sup> Provisional officers were elected and a constitution adopted, stipulating that all branches must affiliate with the CLP. Significantly, the SPC – for years marked by a self-righteous refusal to cooperate with other groups – considered joining the ILP. “The FLP is to be congratulated on sinking its identity for the general good,” the *Labor Statesman* commented: “The benefits of this amalgamation will be more pronounced in the outside districts where the difficulties of carrying on effective work are obvious ... Up to now it has been too much Vancouver and practically nothing from the rest of the province.”<sup>90</sup> On 15 February 1926, an ILP branch organized in Port Alberni.<sup>91</sup>

Volatility in federal politics brought an early return to the polls, after the governor general refused King’s request for dissolution in the infamous King-Byng Affair.<sup>92</sup> The Liberals proposed a “saw-off” with the BC CLP, offering to refrain from running a candidate in South Vancouver

<sup>85</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 20 November 1925.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 December 1925.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 December 1925.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 January 1926.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 February 1926.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 February 1926.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* See also Hak, “The Socialist and Labourist Impulse,” 519-42.

<sup>92</sup> See Roger Graham, *The King-Byng Affair, 1926: A Question of Responsible Government* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1967). In early 1926, King had invited Woodsworth to join his Cabinet as minister of labour. The Winnipeg MP refused, saying he could achieve more as a private member. Effectively wielding the balance of power, Woodsworth and Heaps secured the Old Age Pension Act from the governing Liberals. See *Labor Statesman*, 26 March 1926; McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics*, 215-28.

TABLE 3  
*Party Support in BC Federal Elections, 1921-1926*

PARTY	1921			1925			1926		
	NO. OF CANDIDATES	ELECTED	% OF VOTE	NO. OF CANDIDATES	ELECTED	% OF VOTE	NO. OF CANDIDATES	ELECTED	% OF VOTE
Canadian Labor Party	-	-	-	4	0	6.3	6	0	6.4
Conservative Party	13	7	47.9	14	10	49.3	14	12	54.2
Independent	4	0	3.5	1	1	2.6	2	0	2.3
Labour	3	0	6.8	-	-	-	-	-	-
Liberal Party	11	3	29.8	11	3	34.7	45	1	37.0
Progressive Party	6	3	11.7	3	0	6.1	-	-	-
Socialist Party of Canada	-	-	-	1	0	1.0	-	-	-

Source: *Canadian Parliamentary Guide, 1924-1926*.

if the CLP left the three Vancouver ridings open for the Liberals. The *Labor Statesman* strongly supported the deal as “political expediency,” but the CLP turned down the offer (which provided a template for a 1930 saw-off that propelled MacInnis into Parliament).<sup>93</sup> In the September 1926 election, the CLP fielded five candidates: Dr. Curry in Burrard, Lefeaux in North Vancouver, Hurry in South Vancouver, James Sims in East Kootenay, and Bill Pritchard, who was nominated by the ILP in New Westminster. Woodsworth attended Sims’s nominating meeting, where he declared that Ottawa could be used “as a great broadcasting machine for working class education.”<sup>94</sup> The ensuing campaign was marked by press attacks blaming the Labour and Progressive MPs for the parliamentary crisis and urging a return to the two-party system.<sup>95</sup> While no BC CLP candidate was elected, Pritchard increased the Labour vote in New Westminster from 3,305 to 3,533 (finishing third behind the Conservative and Liberal, respectively). A.W. Neill, Independent candidate in Comox-Alberni, was re-elected with the endorsement of the Port Alberni ILP.<sup>96</sup> Despite the election of a King majority government,

<sup>93</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 16 July 1926. See also 30 July 1926; 13 August 1926. The newspaper elaborated on the benefits of such an offer: “While the Labor party generally adopts an attitude of ‘no political trading,’ a situation might arise where it would be political expediency, on the part of the Labor party, to consider such an offer.”

<sup>94</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 6 August 1926.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 July 1926.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 August 1926.

Labour's representation increased to three members (as Woodsworth and Heaps were joined by H.B. Adshead of Calgary), while the Ginger Group expanded to seventeen.<sup>97</sup>

The flurry of federal and municipal campaigns did not resolve disunity in CLP ranks. Vancouver activist Robert Skinner lamented that the party "labored principally at internal affairs," arguing over the proper methods of organization and the party press, which "produced two schools, each actively hostile to the other. Each trying to justify their obstructionist tactics."<sup>98</sup> Another writer, F.T. McElhoes, repeated criticism of the Labour caucus in the Legislature:

If "Honest John" and his cohorts can flourish a toy pistol at the Labor group and subdue them ... the workers might just as well concentrate their activities on the Industrial Action and forget the political. We know the corrupting influences of politics, but we would not like to believe that "Labor" has been corrupted so early in the game.<sup>99</sup>

In a speech to the Vancouver TLC, Neelands defended his record, reminding them that private members could not introduce legislation involving the expenditure of money.<sup>100</sup>

#### COMMUNIST "TACTICS"

Developments in eastern Canada foreshadowed the BC CLP's demise. In November 1925, the party's Quebec section voted to expel the Communists. This process followed different paths in different provinces, but the outcome was the same: the permanent division of labour politics into Communist and non-Communist camps. In Quebec and Alberta, Communists were expelled from the CLP; in Ontario and British Columbia, where non-Communists were unable to wrest control, they abandoned the organization.<sup>101</sup> Divisions were apparent in a November 1926 speech in Vancouver by J.T. Walton Newbold – the first British MP elected as a Communist and who, by the mid-1920s, had evolved into a virulent anti-Communist. When local Communists heckled Newbold,

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 17 September 1926.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 24 September 1926. Skinner wrote under the pen name "Spud Tamson."

<sup>99</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 12 February 1926.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 19 March 1926.

<sup>101</sup> *OBV Bulletin*, 19 November 1925; *Labor Statesman*, 4 December 1925; Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour*, 256–67. Tension in the Ontario CLP in 1927 spurred the creation of a "Socialist Section" of the party. See *Labor Statesman*, 10 June 1927.

“the speaker became riled and almost precipitated a riot.”<sup>102</sup> He later defended his views:

Those who lend their services to the Communist International must not expect that, knowing their philosophy that the end justifies the means, and their methods from a point of observation far closer than any of them have ever been, I am going to be so naively tolerant as they urge me, in the cause of an entirely fictitious unity.<sup>103</sup>

Dr. W.J. Curry issued a rebuttal (entitled “The Right versus the Left Wing of Labor”) defending the Communist Party and locating British Columbia in the world struggle for socialism: “In Germany there is the patriotic Social Democrats versus the Communists or Sparticans ... In Russia there was Korinsky [sic], the class-collaborator versus Lenin of the Bolshevist party, and in Britain, in Canada, and even in Vancouver we find similar divisions.”<sup>104</sup>

The debate reflected local and international developments – notably, the Communist International’s growing sectarianism as it moved from a “boring from within” strategy to “Third Period” denunciation of non-Communist workers as “social fascists.” Tied to the struggle against Trotskyists and “left oppositionists” in Russia and beyond, the shift had Canadian incarnations.<sup>105</sup> In 1926, a *Worker* editorial attacked J.S. Woodsworth: “the position he takes is more and more that of a class-collaborationist Social Democrat.”<sup>106</sup> Despite growing strains, the BC CLP registered gains in the winter of 1926–27. In December, MacInnis was re-elected as a Vancouver alderman, while CLP running mate A.V. Lofting was elected to the school board. Seven CLP candidates were elected in South Vancouver, North Vancouver, and Burnaby.<sup>107</sup> When the CLP held its third annual convention in Vancouver in February 1927, Secretary John Sidaway reported a total membership of nearly four thousand, including affiliated union members. Signalling a shift in power, left-leaning J.R. Flynn defeated W.H. Cottrell for the presidency on a vote of twenty-eight

<sup>102</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 12 November 1926; *The Worker* (Toronto), 4 December 1926.

<sup>103</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 19 November 1926.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 December 1926.

<sup>105</sup> John Manley, “Moscow Rules? ‘Red Unionism’ and ‘Class against Class’ in Britain, Canada, and the United States, 1928–1935,” *Labour/Le Travail* 56 (Fall 2005): 9–50; Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal: Vanguard, 1981).

<sup>106</sup> *The Worker*, 20 March 1926; 17 July 1926. In November 1927, the *Labor Statesman* defended Woodsworth from Communist attacks. A month earlier, the labour newspaper had discussed the “demoralizing influence of Communists in the labor movement” of Australia and Ireland. See “Communists to Blame for Defeat of Workers,” *Labor Statesman*, 28 October 1927; 11 November 1927.

<sup>107</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 10 December 1926; 21 January 1927.

to twenty-three. Cottrell and MacInnis, BC delegates to the national CLP convention in Montreal in September 1926, came under fire from Communists for voting against a resolution “requesting the Quebec Section to reinstate the Communist Party.”<sup>108</sup> While no definite action was taken against Cottrell and MacInnis, the breach was apparent.

Over the course of 1927, conflict between Communists and non-Communists was channelled through a proxy war, a seemingly benign debate over the appropriate strategy for the next provincial election: whether the CLP should run two candidates in the six-member Vancouver City riding or a full slate of six candidates. This “two-or-six” debate demarcated the rival factions and reflected the looming power struggle. In July 1927, the CLP’s Greater Vancouver Central Council considered reducing the number of Vancouver candidates from six to two, its view being that “plumping,” or concentrating votes around fewer candidates, was more likely to result in victory. After a heated debate, the matter was referred to affiliated organizations. The *Labor Statesman* had earlier proposed the shift in tactics, suggesting “Vancouver [would be] hopeless for Labor” with six candidates in the field: “Why should the Labor Party insist on putting up a full ticket without the chance of electing any, when it can elect at least one out of two?”<sup>109</sup> The opposing camp saw the refusal to run a full slate as treasonous collusion with the Liberal Party.<sup>110</sup>

The Vancouver Central Council was clearly divided: ILP locals and eight unions favoured the two-candidate proposal, while Communist affiliates – “who were there in full strength” – and five other unions “were able to outvote the rest of the organizations” and maintain the six-candidate position. This prompted Electrical Workers’ Local 213, which sided with the ILP, to demand a membership referendum. The Communists could not “logically oppose a referendum vote,” the *Labor Statesman* believed, urging every authorized delegate to attend the next meeting.<sup>111</sup> But in September, the Vancouver Central Council defeated the two-candidate proposal for a third time. BC CLP president J. Flynn expressed hope “that the question is now at an end.”<sup>112</sup> Communist H. Harris, however, denounced *Labor Statesman* editor H.W. Watts: “you

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 4 March 1927.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 5 August 1927.

<sup>110</sup> *The Worker*, 19 November 1927.

<sup>111</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 16 September 1927. Jack Chapple of the Upholsters Union, Local 26, took issue with this editorial, stating that he had been instructed by his local to vote for six candidates, despite the fact that not a single member was a Communist. See *Labor Statesman*, 23 September 1927.

<sup>112</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 7 October 1927.

are an acknowledged disrupter. You would expel the Communists. You would break up the unity of the CLP, no doubt to serve your Liberal masters.”<sup>113</sup> The conflict grew increasingly acrimonious in tone as Communists tapped their tight organizational network to maintain control of the CLP. The more diffused ILP elements railed against these “Communist tactics.”<sup>114</sup>

In the midst of the “two-or-six” debate, several unions considered withdrawing their affiliation from the party. The *Labor Statesman* cautioned against such a move: “This movement can be made a strong, peppy, sane and worthwhile organization even though some of its members retard its progress with wild actions and foreign ideas. They will stick till they break us, or we will have to stick till we drive them out.”<sup>115</sup> J.S. Woodsworth, writing in the *Labor Statesman*, commented frankly on the situation in British Columbia:

Ten years has made a great change in the Labor world. The loggers’ union, once a strong militant organization, has gone by the board ... The longshoremen’s union has been smashed and replaced by submissive company organizations ... The Communist group, small in numbers but active in various organizations controls the policy of the Canadian Labor Party and seems likely to wreck the organization. In spite of one’s desire for a “united front,” one cannot but ask in the words of the old proverb: “Can two walk together except they be agreed?”<sup>116</sup>

The final split in the CLP centred on a perennial debate on British Columbia’s left, the “Oriental Problem.”

#### THE “ORIENTAL PROBLEM” AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE CLP

Anti-Asian racism was endemic among Anglo-Saxon workers in British Columbia until deep into the twentieth century, as exploitation of Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian workers on the resource frontier and in the cities contributed to demands for “Asiatic Exclusion.”<sup>117</sup>

<sup>113</sup> *The Worker*, 19 November 1927.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 June 1928.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 September 1927.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 October 1927.

<sup>117</sup> David Goutor, *Guarding the Gates: The Canadian Labour Movement and Immigration, 1872-1934* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007); Gillian Creese, “Exclusion or Solidarity? Vancouver Workers Confront the ‘Oriental Problem,’” *BC Studies* 80 (Winter 1988-89): 24-51; Gillian Creese, “Class, Ethnicity and Conflict: The Case of Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1880-1923,” in *Workers, Capital, and the State in British Columbia*, ed. R. Warburton and D. Coburn (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), 55-85; Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man’s Province: British Columbia Politicians*

Both race and class fuelled deep cleavages in BC society.<sup>118</sup> The harsh economic climate of the 1920s, in which employers established the “Open Shop” and all workers suffered declines in wages and bargaining power, aggravated the situation. Marxists in the SPC sought to counter racist views, urging class solidarity. “Let the day come when they will see clearly that the interests of ALL workers, irrespective of race, sex, or color, are one against ALL masters,” W.A. Pritchard had urged during the war.<sup>119</sup> However, other prominent labour leaders, such as Percy Bengough, secretary of the Vancouver TLC, played an active role in the Asiatic Exclusion League, formed by Vancouver unions, veterans’ organizations, and merchants during the economic slump of 1921.<sup>120</sup> This viewpoint contributed to the notorious Chinese Immigration Act, 1923, at a time when Liberal premier John Oliver expressed the widely held aim “to prevent the peaceful penetration of Asiatics into British Columbia.”<sup>121</sup> In the late 1920s, the debate over the “Oriental Problem” debilitated, and ultimately destroyed, the BC section of the CLP.

At its inception, the CLP was aligned with the progressive wing of British Columbia’s working-class movement, resisting calls for Asian exclusion. In the 1924 provincial election, the party openly called for “Oriental enfranchisement.” Attacked by Liberal, Conservative, and Provincial Party candidates who opportunistically fanned the flames of racism, the CLP defended its position:

---

*and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989); Patricia E. Roy, *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man’s Province, 1914-41* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003); Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy toward Orientals in British Columbia*, 3rd ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002); Richard A. Rajala, “Pulling Lumber: Indo-Canadians in the British Columbia Forest Industry, 1900-1998,” *BC Historical News*, 36, 1 (2002-03): 2-13.

<sup>118</sup> W. Peter Ward, “Class and Race in the Social Structure of British Columbia, 1870-1939,” *BC Studies* 45 (Spring 1980): 17-35; Rennie Warburton, “Race and Class in British Columbia: A Comment,” *BC Studies* 49 (Spring 1981): 79-85; W. Peter Ward, “Race and Class in British Columbia: A Reply,” *BC Studies* 50 (Summer 1981): 52.

<sup>119</sup> Reprinted from *Western Clarion* in *Federationist*, 20 May 1921 (emphasis in original).

<sup>120</sup> W.E. Willmott, “Approaches to the Study of the Chinese in British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 4 (Spring 1970): 45-48; Patricia E. Roy, “The Oriental ‘Menace’ in British Columbia,” in *The Twenties in Western Canada: Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference, March 1972*, ed. S.M. Trofimenkoff (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1972), 249; Creese, “Exclusion or Solidarity?” 41; Robin, *Rush for the Spoils*, 213; Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 88; Hak, “The Socialist and Labourist Impulse,” 541.

<sup>121</sup> As quoted in Patricia E. Roy, “Educating the ‘East’: British Columbia and the Oriental Question in the Interwar Years,” *BC Studies* 18 (Summer 1973): 51. See also Chuen-Yan Lai, “Chinese Attempts to Discourage Emigration to Canada: Some Findings from the Chinese Archives in Victoria,” *BC Studies* 18 (Summer 1973): 33-49; Mary E. Hallett, “A Governor-General’s View on Oriental Immigration to British Columbia, 1904-1911,” *BC Studies* 14 (Summer 1972): 51-72.



Labor says that if these men and women are fit to come to this country, and we see fit to accept their money, allow them to work in our homes, and associate with the children ... then not only is it right, but it is essential that these people be given the full rights of citizenship and everything possible done to raise their economic standard of living on a par with ours.<sup>122</sup>

CLP officer Mrs. C. Lorimer of Vancouver insisted that “all workers, irrespective of color, are living under a system of human slavery.”<sup>123</sup> When Vancouver aldermanic candidate Parmeter Pettipiece warned of an “Oriental menace,” Lorimer railed against this line of thought: “Let the workers refuse to be spoon fed on ‘oriental menace.’ The time is ripe for them to think, and think seriously of the condition they find themselves in.”<sup>124</sup>

In 1924, Chinese and white mill workers in Victoria had gone on strike against a wage reduction at the Canadian Puget Sound Lumber Mill, leading to a victory for the workers and the formation of a multi-ethnic union in the plant.<sup>125</sup> Roughly half the workforce in British Columbia’s sawmills and shingle mills were of Asian ethnicity.<sup>126</sup> The next year, Japanese and Anglo-Saxon workers in Vancouver jointly organized a tag day for striking Nova Scotia coal miners, raising \$1,300.<sup>127</sup> This growing solidarity was revealed again when members of the Federated Seafarers’ Union in Vancouver refused to replace striking Chinese workers on the Canadian Pacific Railway’s “Empress” ocean liners.<sup>128</sup> Members of the Japanese Workers of Canada donated \$257 to the CLP election campaign in 1926, and a year later, in October 1927, the Vancouver TLC accepted credentials for five Japanese delegates from the Mill and Camp Workers’ Union No. 31.<sup>129</sup> By the late 1920s, it appeared that European and Asian workers were overcoming age-old hatreds and efforts by employers to divide them. The introduction of the Male Minimum Wage Act, 1925, had blunted lumber workers’ fears of “cheap” Asian labour.<sup>130</sup> On both the industrial and political fields, solidarity was being forged between

<sup>122</sup> *Federationist*, 20 June 1924.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 July 1924.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 January 1925; 30 January 1925.

<sup>125</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 15 August 1924; Canada, *Labour Gazette* 24, 8 (August 1924): 649.

<sup>126</sup> Audrey Kobayashi and Peter Jackson, “Japanese Canadians and the Racialization of Labour in the British Columbia Sawmill Industry,” *BC Studies* 108 (Autumn 1994), 57.

<sup>127</sup> *OBV Bulletin*, 28 May 1925.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 June 1925.

<sup>129</sup> Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, 115–20; *Labor Statesman*, 17 September 1926; 7 October 1927.

<sup>130</sup> See Canada, *Labour Gazette* (September 1928), 970–72; Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 137.

diverse sections of workers. Indeed, J.S. Woodsworth wrote in the *Labor Statesman* in October 1927 that “anti-Oriental feeling is much less strong now among the Labor people.”<sup>131</sup> However, unity was not to be.

In February 1928, the CLP convention, acting on a resolution from Communist delegates, reaffirmed its support for Oriental enfranchisement.<sup>132</sup> While the party had uniformly backed this measure in the previous provincial election, it became the issue that destroyed the CLP. At the same time that unity was developing between some Anglo-Saxon and Asian workers, the intervening years saw a spike in racist propaganda and organizing, which promulgated hatred within British Columbia’s working class. In 1927, the *Vancouver Sun* had published *Oriental Occupation in British Columbia*, a collection of inflammatory newspaper columns by proto-fascist Tom MacInnes (son of a former lieutenant-governor). The Ku Klux Klan surfaced in Victoria and Vancouver, alongside a newspaper called *White Canada*. A study commissioned by the provincial government, *Report on Oriental Activities within the Province* (1927), reflected fears of an “Asian menace.” About one-fifteenth of British Columbia’s population was of Asian descent, with 23,532 Chinese and 15,006 Japanese.<sup>133</sup> Early in 1928, Vancouver businesspeople lobbied the provincial government to restrict the operations of Chinese merchants, giving rise to the Trades Licences Act.<sup>134</sup>

This was the backdrop to the “Oriental enfranchisement” debate in the BC CLP. However, it is difficult to disentangle resurgent racism from deep rivalry between Communists and non-Communists. Historian Paul Phillips asserts that Oriental enfranchisement “was not the real issue” in the split.<sup>135</sup> Workers and organizations who supported equal rights in principle may have opposed the Oriental enfranchisement plank

<sup>131</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 28 October 1927.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 and 23 March 1928; Creese, “Exclusion or Solidarity?” 42. The resolution read: “Resolved that Orientals (British subjects, Canadian born Orientals and naturalized Canadians) be enfranchised on the same terms as other nationalities and that a copy of this resolution be sent to the Provincial Secretary, Victoria, BC.” Delegates also stipulated the policy’s inclusion in the CLP platform.

<sup>133</sup> British Columbia, *Report on Oriental Activities within the Province* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1927), as cited in Jorgen Dahlie, “The Japanese in BC: Lost Opportunity?” *BC Studies* 8 (Winter 1970–71): 3–16; Tom MacInnes, *Oriental Occupation of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Sun Publishing Company, 1927); *White Canada* (Vancouver), 1928; Martin Robin, *Shades of Right: Nativist and Fascist Politics in Canada, 1920–1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 134–36.

<sup>134</sup> See Paul Yee, “Business Devices from Two Worlds: The Chinese of Early Vancouver,” *BC Studies* 61 (Summer 1984): 44–67; Timothy J. Stanley, “Schooling, White Supremacy, and the Formation of a Chinese Merchant Public in British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 107 (Autumn 1995): 3–29.

<sup>135</sup> Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 100.

either out of an opportunist desire to “catch votes” or from a strategic standpoint that resisted any initiatives bearing the Communist stamp. The CLP convention was marked by palpable acrimony between ILP and Communist delegates. A Communist resolution condemning the British Labour Party and its leader Ramsay MacDonald for their stance on the independence of India provoked heated debate; like Oriental enfranchisement, it exposed tensions over race and colonization. Though endorsed by delegates, the *Labor Statesman* dismissed the measure as “just another attempt to throw mud at an organization that refuses to be ruled, goaded, or crushed by the Communist Party.”<sup>136</sup> As delegate Saunders insisted, “the opposition to Oriental labor is so great in this province that it is a good club for the old parties” – a view that was supported by the *Labor Statesman*: “We cannot see how the mass of organized labor can support this action.”<sup>137</sup> Wallis Lefeaux defended the decision taken at the convention:

one of the greatest obstacles to the progress of Labor is the curious superiority complex exhibited by various sections of the workers which is fostered and encouraged by all those who are combating the advance of the workers ... The only solution to that [Oriental] problem is the solution of the workers’ problem as a whole.<sup>138</sup>

Editor H.W. Watts, however, weighed in against Orientals: “we are not going to be party to strengthening their position by placing them on the voter’s list.”<sup>139</sup>

The matter triggered a tense debate in the Vancouver TLC that culminated in the question’s being referred to affiliated locals. Delegates attacked the CLP decision, citing labour’s long-standing demand for Oriental exclusion, and warned that it would “turn the election campaign into a battle royal against the Labor Party.”<sup>140</sup> As a result of the convention decision, the Typographical Union and Civic Employees Union withdrew their affiliation from the CLP. In ensuing months, this snowballed into a wholesale exodus of organized labour from the party. Lefeaux challenged the actions of Vancouver labour:

So long as we are content to be orthodox and advocate nothing more radical than advanced Liberal measures we have the approbation (and very little more) of a certain section of Labor officialdom, but when we

<sup>136</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 2 March 1928.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 March 1928.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 March 1928.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 6 April 1928.

TABLE 4

*Vancouver Unions For and Against Oriental Enfranchisement, May 1928*

IN FAVOUR	OPPOSED
Bookbinders	Barbers
Camp and Mill Workers 32	Beverage Dispensers
Mental Hospital Attendants	Blacksmiths
Port Mann Railway Carmen	Boilermakers
	Brewery Workers
	Bricklayers
	Building Laborers
	Carpenters Union 452
	Carpenters Union 1251
	City Fire Fighters
	Civic Employees
	Electrical Workers
	Engineers 844
	Engineers 882
	Hotel and Restaurant Employees
	Machinists 182
	Machinists 692
	Milk Salesmen
	Millwrights
	Molders
	Motion Picture Projectionists
	Musicians
	Painters
	Plasterers
	Pile Drivers
	Plumbers & Steamfitters
	Point Grey Firefighters
	Printing Pressmen
	Railway Carmen (Vancouver)
	Sheet Metal Workers
	Tailors
	Taxi Drivers
	Teamsters Union
	Theatrical Stage Employees
	Typographical
	Upholsters

Source: *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 4 May 1928 and 18 May 1928.

take up a position directly representing the working class as a whole we seem to open the floodgates of wrath.<sup>141</sup>

In May 1928, Vancouver unions lined up against the CLP and its policy of extending the vote to Asians. Only four unions – the Bookbinders, Camp and Mill Workers, Mental Hospital Attendants, and Port Mann Railway Carmen – supported the measure. Thirty-six unions were opposed (see Table 4).<sup>142</sup>

The response from affiliated locals prompted a debate within the Vancouver TLC over withdrawing its affiliation from the CLP. The Pile Drivers' delegate, acting on instructions from his local, raised the matter first. Carpenters' delegate Wilkinson then moved a motion for disaffiliation, arguing that "the CLP was controlled by the Communist Party" and predicting that there would be "no peace in the political movement until the movement here did the same as they did in the British movement – clear out the Communists." Delegates Sorley of the Port Mann Railway Carmen, Cottrell, and MacInnis voiced caution, though MacInnis "could not see why the Communists should belong" to the CLP. Delegate Scribbens, announcing the withdrawal of the Civic Employees, said that "members of his union believed in political action, but [that] the 'United Front' ha[d] proven a failure and was only damning the Political Labor Movement." The debate closed when delegate Moodie of the Carpenters moved an amendment to refer the matter back to affiliated locals, arguing it was too important to be decided at that meeting.<sup>143</sup> In subsequent weeks, two of Vancouver's largest unions – Carpenters Local 452, with 1200 members, and Electrical Workers Local 213 – pulled out of the BC CLP.<sup>144</sup>

As the conflict reached its apex, the *Labor Statesman* identified the ideological dimensions of the dispute: "From the time that the Marxian theory took hold in British Columbia, Labor has been divided into

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. The Typos also cited the "six-or-two" debate and an increase in the per capita tax as influencing their departure. At a meeting of the Vancouver Central Council on 5 April 1928, Bartlett, Deptford, and Skinner argued against the enfranchisement plank. The same meeting saw the left keep control with regard to election of officers: Communists Flynn and Mengel were among those elected, along with Lefeaux.

<sup>142</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 4 May 1928; 18 May 1928.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 4 May 1928. At the meeting, George Drayton, a Communist delegate from the Bricklayers, came under fire for criticizing vTLC officers in the pages of *The Worker*. An ultimatum was issued: if Drayton refused to withdraw the statements, his local would be requested to withdraw his credentials. Drayton held his ground, and, following a special meeting of his union, he was withdrawn as a delegate: "This union wants men that will build up our organizations and not men that are continually striving to create dissension," the Bricklayers informed the council. See *Labor Statesman*, 18 May 1928.

<sup>144</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 1 June 1928.

two well defined groups.” This “pale pink group” and “ultra red group” had “very little in common, other than a lack of confidence in the old political parties.” Nothing had occurred “to justify the idea that Labor has shortened by one inch its objections to the Asiatic.” Though expressed in terms of Oriental exclusion, the deciding factor was conflict between Communists and non-Communists:

Because we do not shout for a revolution from the house tops we are called traitors by the Communists. We are abused and vilified and our efforts obstructed because they think that shouting for a revolution and ignoring all social legislation is going to bring about the desired change quicker ... That is where we of the Labor Party differ, and will undoubtedly continue to differ from the Communist Party, hence under these conditions there cannot be a United Front. We are not united on revolution and we are not united on social reform ... When the Labor Party – Independent or Canadian – makes up its mind to put outside their ranks, and go about their work unhindered by the “boring from within” policy, the conflict will be greatly reduced.<sup>145</sup>

In late May, a joint meeting of ILP branches in Vancouver went on record opposing the CLP’s Oriental franchise plank. When a CLP special convention narrowly voted thirty-two to twenty-five against rescinding the contentious resolution, the fate of the organization was sealed.<sup>146</sup>

On 5 June 1928, Vancouver TLC delegates voted fifty-six to thirty to withdraw affiliation from the CLP, ending “four years of disagreements on an alleged United Front.” Thirty-four of sixty-four affiliated unions had weighed in, with fourteen wanting to maintain affiliation and twenty favouring a split.<sup>147</sup> On Sunday, 17 June 1928, a special mass convention of all BC ILP branches met in Vancouver, where delegates voted to break from the CLP “and carry on independent political action.” MacInnis pointed the finger squarely at the Communists: “Continuous disagreement with the Communist Party tactics has brought about this split, and the Independent Labor Party will now proceed to carry on its political activities unhampered by the Communists boring from within.”<sup>148</sup>

That summer, British Columbia’s labour movement, bitterly divided, contested a provincial election. Tom Uphill of Fernie was the only Labour candidate returned to the BC Legislature, as Simon Fraser Tolmie’s

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 18 May 1928.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 1 June 1928.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 8 June 1928.

<sup>148</sup> *OBV Bulletin*, 28 June 1928; *Labor Statesman*, 22 June 1928.

Conservatives registered a resounding victory (the party's last, history would record, as Tolmie's Depression-era fiscal ruthlessness inflamed voters and set his party down a path to the political wilderness). ILP candidates Robert Skinner and Angus MacInnis together captured ten thousand votes in Vancouver, denying victory to the Liberals.<sup>149</sup> In an editorial entitled "On with the Fight," the *Labor Statesman* feigned confidence: "The Independent Labor Party is not going to shed any tears over the results, but will gird on its armour for a further and stronger attack upon the present system of wealth production."<sup>150</sup> From that point forward, however, the organizations of BC workers remained divided along the axis of Communism. British Columbians of Asian descent, meanwhile, did not win the vote until the late 1940s.<sup>151</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The inability of Communists and non-Communists to maintain a united front under the auspices of the BC section of the Canadian Labor Party left the two groups permanently divided. The ILP's break from the CLP reflected a trend with local, provincial, national, and international manifestations. In British Columbia, this experiment in electoral unity faltered over the question of Asian enfranchisement and a broader malaise associated with "Communist tactics." A decline of working-class living standards and "Open Shop" conditions in industry had impelled BC workers towards fusion politics; however, old divisions proved to be more durable than faith in unity, and the experiment failed. The CLP had produced limited gains in provincial and municipal politics, but persistent racism among Anglo-Saxon workers and growing ideological strains precluded more far-reaching solidarity. To be sure, efforts towards unity resurfaced in later years, in the League against War and Fascism of the 1930s and the Communist-Labour Total War Committees of the 1940s, providing a common forum for socialists from rival political

<sup>149</sup> Robin, *The Rush for the Spoils*, 230-31; British Columbia, *Statement of Votes* (1928); *Labor Statesman*, 6 July 1928; 27 July 1928. The ILP candidates were MacInnis and Skinner in Vancouver; Neelands in South Vancouver; Uphill in Fernie; Sam Guthrie in Newcastle; William Law in Comox; Tom Barnard in Alberni; and Jack Place in Nanaimo. Incumbents Neelands and Brown lost their seats, while former MLAs Guthrie and Place also suffered defeat. Tolmie's Conservatives took thirty-two seats, with eight Liberals and one Labour MLA.

<sup>150</sup> *Labor Statesman*, 27 July 1928.

<sup>151</sup> According to Patricia Roy, the "Oriental Question" was not central to the 1928 election itself, with "Oriental planks" second from the bottom of the Liberal and Conservative platforms. See Roy, "Educating the 'East,'" 60L. See also Carol F. Lee, "The Road to Enfranchisement: Chinese and Japanese in British Columbia," *BC Studies* 30 (Summer 1976): 44-76.

tendencies.<sup>152</sup> However, from 1928 onward, organizational unity evaded British Columbia's left. The CLP experiment left the socialist movement divided into Communist and non-Communist camps, and it ensured the exclusion of Communists from the next effort at labour political unity: the CCF.

---

<sup>152</sup> George Hill, "A Failure of Unity: Communist Party-CCF Relations in British Columbia, 1935-1939" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1977); Raymond Frogner, "Within sound of the drum': Currents of Anti-Militarism in the British Columbia Working Class in the 1930s" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1987).