

The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in British Columbia

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In the first years of the twentieth century, British Columbia became the dynamic centre of the socialist movement which was emerging across Canada. Beginning in 1898 the institutional and doctrinal foundations of the provincial movement were laid by eastern Canadian, British and American socialists. Five years later a socialist party with an almost unique ideology and extraordinary power in the labour movement had emerged; nowhere were the socialists more doctrinaire or influential. The purpose of this essay is to examine the institutional and ideological development of British Columbia socialism during its critical formative years.

The socio-economic circumstances of the workers lives made British Columbia particularly fertile ground for Marxist propaganda. The predatory instincts which were characteristic of the North American free enterprise system at the turn of the century seemed to have been reinforced and sharpened in a province unusually confident in its future and committed to the exploitation of its resources. This was the time that Dr. Margaret Ormsby has aptly called "The Great Potlatch." Economic growth was regarded by many British Columbians and their government as an absolute good, a good which was to be achieved at almost any cost.

Great numbers of workers came to believe that they were being forced to bear the cost of the province's economic expansion when they perceived bitter paradoxes in provincial and federal development policies. Anxious to promote growth, provincial governments gave every encouragement and assistance to capitalists, but the same governments provided scant protection for the workers. Labour standards legislation was slow to be passed and seldom adequately enforced.¹ At the federal level the

¹ Edith Lorentsen and Evelyn Wollmer, "Fifty Years of Labour Legislation in Canada," in A. E. Kovacs, ed., *Readings in Canadian Labour Economics* (Toronto, 1961), 95-101; H. F. Underhill, "Labour Legislation in British Columbia," (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Berkeley, 1935), *passim.*, and 277. For an expanded discussion of the socio-economic basis of BC socialism see A. R. McCormack, "The

tariff provided capitalists with protection from foreign competition, but immigration schemes produced a large pool of surplus labour which tended to pull down wages. To many workers the operation of the National Policy seemed to demonstrate the essential bias of Canadian government; the Vancouver trades council charged, "it is neither the duty nor the function of a government which pretends to represent fairly all interest and all classes to interfere in the way it is doing in the matter of labor supply."² The workers' perception of British Columbia's growth seemed to be sustained by the most fundamental of criteria. Although around them they could see evidence of prosperity — galas, automobiles, stately houses — it was not a prosperity in which the workers shared.³

The great economic empires, created in the late eighties and early nineties when expansion-minded governments ceded vast tracts of land to capitalists, were most important in the development of socialism. These empires, particularly in mining, became the power-base of the movement. In the isolated camps of Vancouver Island and the interior the division between mine managers representing absentee owners and the working men seemed stark indeed, a condition which was intensified by the absence of any large, relatively neutral business or professional class.⁴ The men engaged in unhealthy and dangerous work. Accidents were not uncommon in the metal mines, but in the coal mines of the Island and the Crow's Nest Pass, which were among the most dangerous in the world, disasters occurred with fearsome frequency. And this mainly because safety legislation was not enforced.⁵ To improve their working conditions the miners attempted to establish unions, but the operators regarded these as illegitimate, restrictions on their freedom, and did not

Origins and Extent of Western Labour Radicalism: 1896-1919," (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1973), Chap. 1.

² University of British Columbia, Vancouver Trades and Labour Council Minutes, March 21, 1907 (hereafter cited Vancouver TLC Minutes).

³ W. C. Pentland, "A Study of the Changing Social, Economic and Political Background of the Canadian System of Industrial Relations," prepared for the Task Force on Labour Relations (Privy Council Office, 1968), 72 and H. D. Woods and S. Ostry, *Labour Policy and Labour Economics in Canada* (Toronto, 1962), 398-400.

⁴ University of British Columbia, International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers' Records, Vol. 158, O'Neal to Shilland, May 5, 1902 and *Western Clarion*, October 6, 1906.

⁵ Canada Dept. of Labour Library, R. C. Clute, "Royal Commission on Mining Conditions in British Columbia: Evidence," (typescript, 1899), 108, 331, 693 (hereafter cited Clute, "Evidence"); A. D. Orr, "The Western Federation of Miners and the Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes in 1903 with Special Reference to the Vancouver Island Coal Miners' Strike," (unpublished M.A.

hesitate to use the most direct means — blacklists, spies, thugs, police and militia — to break the men's organizations. In the Crow's Nest Pass union men were forced to hold their meetings in the woods; in the Kootenays the operators placed spies in the Western Federation of Miners (WFM); and on the Island the militia was a common feature of coal strikes.⁶ Their experience in the class-polarized camps produced among the miners an attitude toward the state and society which conformed, if only in a vague way, to basic Marxist doctrines.

The economic and social conditions which fostered the growth of socialism did not spring into existence at the turn of the century but had been part of the worker's life for decades. As a result, radicalism⁷ was an aspect of the labour movement almost from its inception, with trade unionists running for office as early as 1882.⁸ By the beginning of the nineties, an independent political tradition was firmly established among the workers of Vancouver and the Island. When the workers took political action, their platforms were reformist in character. The conventional planks were asiatic exclusion, labour standards legislation, land reform, the single tax and direction legislation, all measures which, while they looked to more or less sweeping changes in society, stopped far short of revolution.

For radical movements in eastern Canada, the United States and, to a lesser extent, Britain, the 1890's marked an ideological transition from the reformism which had characterized the 1880's to the socialism which would characterize the new century. Because it had direct and important links to each of these movements, the ideology of British Columbia radicalism, to the extent that it can be said to have developed an ideology, was changing in these years. The radicals' progress away from their early

University of British Columbia, 1968), 29, 53; C. J. McMillan, "Trade Unionism in District 18, 1900-1925: A Case Study," (unpublished M.B.A. thesis, University of Alberta, 1969), 79; and Underhill, "Labour Legislation in BC," 26-42.

⁶ *Miners' Magazine*, March 1901; May 1901; Sept. 1901 and Oct. 1902; *American Labor Union Journal*, Jan. 15, 1903 and Orr, "Vancouver Island Coal Miners' Strike," *passim*.

⁷ Throughout this essay the term radicalism is employed to describe a general category which subsumes all forms of political insurgency associated with the labour movement, from the most moderate labourites on the right to the most revolutionary socialists on the left.

⁸ No attempt is made here to discuss pre-socialist political initiatives; for a detailed account see T. R. Loosmore, "The British Columbia Labor Movement and Political Action, 1879-1906," (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1954), 19-87.

doctrines was neither direct nor rapid, however, and as a result, reformism remained the basic ideological force in the movement during most of the decade. Still by the second half of the nineties external influences were at work which would ensure that the province's radical vanguard would be socialists.

With the beginning of the boom, many of the workers in the province, certainly the vast majority of trade unionists, were recent immigrants from the United Kingdom. They had come into contact with the Marxist doctrines which were becoming increasingly important in the British labour movement, and some had been members of the various socialist parties. The new breed of British labour leaders like John Burns, Tom Mann, Keir Hardie and Robert Blatchford had strong followings in the province.⁹ The ideas and experience of these immigrants were of essential importance in the development of socialism in British Columbia because they provided the personnel for the new movement.

A more immediate influence came from the United States. The ease with which men and ideas moved across the border ensured that propaganda from the American West would have a significant impact in British Columbia. Socialism made significant early progress among the unions of the Kootenays because of the presence of large numbers of miners from the Mountain States.¹⁰ More important the two prophets of western socialism, J. A. Wayland and Eugene Debs, led many of the province's workers to the new doctrine. Wayland's *Appeal to Reason*, which preached a highly eclectic and emotional brand of socialism, circulated widely among western radicals, but it was in British Columbia that the paper had its greatest number of Canadian subscribers.

In the late nineties the *Appeal's* correspondence column frequently contained letters from enthusiastic radicals in Vancouver, Victoria and the Kootenays describing their efforts to propagate the gospel or renewing subscriptions. Such support caused Wayland to conclude that British Columbia was "fine country" for socialist propaganda.¹¹ Debs became known in the province as a result of the formation in 1894 of locals of his militant American Railway Union (ARU) in Revelstoke and Van-

⁹ *The B.C. Workman*, July 1, 1899 and Paul W. Fox, "Early Socialism in Canada," in J. H. Aitchison, ed., *The Political Process in Canada* (Toronto, 1963), 81-2.

¹⁰ *Appeal to Reason*, July 29, 1899 and October 20, 1900 and R. C. Clute, "Royal Commission on Mining Conditions in British Columbia," (typescript, 1899), Appendix D.

¹¹ *Appeal to Reason*, March 31, 1900. For Wayland see Howard H. Quint, "Julius Augustus Wayland, Pioneer Socialist Propagandist," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXV (1949), 585-606.

couver. He lectured in the latter city at the invitation of the trades council, in which the ARU was influential, in 1896 and again in 1897. Even after the collapse of the ARU, Debs continued to be highly regarded in the province. In the summer of 1899 the Vancouver trades council honoured the American socialist by inviting him to dedicate the city's new Labour Temple.¹²

By the late nineties British immigration and American propaganda had set the stage for the emergence of an institutional socialist movement. During the summer of 1898, readers of the *Appeal to Reason* in Vancouver began to discuss the formation of a socialist party.¹³ Arthur Spencer, a Brantford member of the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), who had determined to undertake a mission for socialism, learned of these discussions and secured a transfer to Vancouver to organize for the revolution.¹⁴ Spencer was appalled by the reformism he encountered on the coast, and he set about to change the direction of the province's radical movement.¹⁵ In December 1898 his efforts brought twenty-two men together to form the province's first permanent local of the SLP.¹⁶

In both the United States and Canada the Socialist Labour Party was dominated by the brilliant but doctrinaire Marxist theoretician Daniel De Leon, and the Vancouver party rigidly adhered to the master's revolutionary line.¹⁷ The local stood "firmly on the everpresent [sic] fact of the class struggle and for the complete union of the proletarian forces, for the conquest of the political powers and the socialist reconstruction of society." SLP propagandists told the workers that victory could only be achieved through political action. Yet, ironically, the party was never in a position to afford the proletariat the opportunity to take political action; its meagre resources prevented it from fielding candidates.¹⁸

In 1895 De Leon had decreed that the SLP must have an economic

¹² William Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia* (Vancouver, n.d.), 38-9; Vancouver TLC Minutes, June 2, 1896 and July 16, 1897 and Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1967), 31. For Debs see Ray Ginger, *The Bending Cross* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1949).

¹³ *Appeal to Reason*, June 4, 1898 and June 18, 1898.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Sept. 17, 1898 and State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Socialist Labour Party of America Papers, National Executive, Incoming Correspondence, Moore and Kuhn, Sept. 29, 1898 and Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, 135.

¹⁵ *The People*, Jan. 1, 1899 and Nov. 12, 1899.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, April 9, 1899 and Nov. 12, 1899.

¹⁷ D. K. McKee, "Daniel De Leon: A Reappraisal," *Labor History*, I (Fall, 1960), 264-297 and Charles M. White, "The Socialist Labor Party, 1890-1903," (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Southern California, 1959), *passim*.

¹⁸ *The People*, Feb. 19, 1899; May 7, 1899; Nov. 12, 1899 and June 30, 1900.

arm and proceeded to found the Socialist Trades and Labour Alliance (STLA), an organization which made unceasing war on the American Federation of Labour (AFL) and conventional trade unions. In accordance with party policy, Spencer established a local of the STLA in Vancouver in June 1899, because "the old forms and spirit of labour unions are almost impotent to resist the oppressions of concentrated capital."¹⁹ Founded as a general labourers' union, the local never had more than a handful of members, and though it did make an abortive attempt to organize CPR employees, it seems never to have functioned as a conventional trade union. Essentially an educational club which required prospective members to take an examination in socialist theory, the STLA's main functions were to support the SLP in its political activities and to attack the business unionism of the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress (TLC).²⁰ As a result relations with the trade unions could be stormy. For example, when an STLA speaker told a New Westminster audience, in the charged atmosphere of the fishermen's strike, that successful action by unions was an "impossibility," the meeting broke up in a brawl.²¹

It was not only with the trade unions that relations were strained. De Leon insisted on a complete and unquestioning acceptance of his revolutionary creed and hurled invective at any who deviated from his line. Because they followed their leader in all things, prominent members of the Vancouver local adopted this dogmatic and sectarian approach to labour politics. They denounced all those whom they perceived as enemies of the militant working class, but their special target was the "fakirs" of other competing embryonic socialist parties who were leading the proletariat away from the De Leonite path to salvation. For example, when Debs spoke in the city in the autumn of 1899, Spencer sneered, he "talks to the middle-class."²²

Despite its poor relations with trade unionists and other radicals, during 1899 the local tripled in size and became sufficiently optimistic to make some attempts to organize on Vancouver Island and in the interior. A good deal of this growth was the result of the efforts of Will McClain, who had had many years experience in the British socialist movement

¹⁹ SLP Papers, Socialist Trades and Labour Alliance, Local No. 250, Vancouver, Minutes, June 4, 1899 and *The People*, April 9, 1899.

²⁰ SLP Papers, Vancouver STLA, Minutes, July 26, 1899; Aug. 9, 1899; Aug. 16, 1899 and Sept. 27, 1899.

²¹ SLP Papers, Vancouver STLA, Minutes, Feb. 25, 1900 and *The People*, March 4, 1900.

²² *The People*, Jan. 28, 1900.

before he "jumped" ship at Seattle and went to Vancouver.²³ McClain's less doctrinaire approach to socialism and his dynamic appeal encouraged many to join the party. But his British experience made it difficult for him and others, like Frank Rogers, to co-operate with the ideologues, and by the autumn of 1899 real tensions had developed between the two factions in the local.

The tensions soon erupted into open strife. By 1899 considerable opposition had developed to De Leon's dogmatic and autocratic leadership in the US, and in the summer of that year the SLP was disrupted by the exodus of members, the "Kangaroos," who eventually joined with other radicals to establish the Socialist Party of America. Joining the American struggle, the Vancouver ideologues, led by Spencer, hurled violent abuse at the "Kangaroos" and attempted to place the local solidly in the De Leonite camp.²⁴ This McClain and his followers would not tolerate, and late in the autumn they bolted the SLP to form a socialist club, which became the United Socialist Labour Party (USLP) in April 1900.²⁵ In reading McClain and his followers out of the party, Spencer perceptively told De Leon that USLP was composed of "the same canaille that the SLP has pushed aside recently."²⁶ It was no coincidence that the rebellion in Vancouver had occurred after the bolt of the "Kangaroos" in the United States. The socialists who established the USLP, dissatisfied with De Leonite dogmatism and the policy of war upon the trade unions, saw that the rebellion in the United States resulted from these very causes and followed the American lead. They were "Kangaroos."²⁷

After the spring of 1900 the USLP became the socialist party in Vancouver, and the SLP became an inconsequential, though noisy, sect. The new party adopted a different line from that pursued by the De Leonites. From the beginning it attempted to co-operate with the city's unions, and the nature of the USLP's leadership allowed it to implement this policy without difficulty. McClain, president of the machinists'

²³ Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, 137.

²⁴ *The People*, Sept. 17, 1899 and Oct. 15, 1899 and *The Daily News-Advertiser*, May 15, 1900.

²⁵ *Citizen and Country*, Dec. 2, 1899; *Appeal to Reason*, Feb. 3, 1900 and *The People*, May 20, 1900.

²⁶ *The People*, May 20, 1900.

²⁷ This view is well supported by contemporary opinion; for example Ernest Burns and Frank Rogers, who took part in these events, believed that the USLP was a "Kangaroo" party. [University of British Columbia, Angus McInnes Collection, Vol. 53-1, Interview with Ernest Burns and *The Daily News-Advertiser*, May 15, 1900.]

local, Frank Rodgers, president of the fishermen's union, and other leading socialists were active in the trades council. In addition, while the party insisted on the maintenance of its independence and the integrity of its propaganda, the USLP did not make war on other radical organizations.²⁸ Certainly the new direction appeared to be a sound one. Within weeks of its foundation, the party, under McClain's able leadership, had made impressive organizational gains, built a hall, formed a brass and string band and enrolled a paper membership of two hundred and fifty.²⁹

The USLP also made a respectable run in the provincial election of 1900 when it nominated McClain as British Columbia's first socialist candidate.³⁰ The nature of McClain's 1900 campaign represented a new departure in the development of BC radicalism. His platform was cluttered with reformist planks, and his campaign focussed on the conventional issues of corporate domination of the province and oriental immigration. However, he sounded a revolutionary call when he pledged to fight for "a true democracy of happy workers, freed from the abuse of greedy corporations."³¹ Significantly, McClain had the active support of the trades council.³² He also had the active opposition of his former comrades in the SLP who set out to disrupt McClain's campaign; one meeting ended in "a grand rough and tumble on the side walk in front of the Hall" involving twenty men.³³ In the end McClain polled 684 votes, a result about which the socialists felt "pretty good," particularly in view of the fact that two labourites were also in the field competing for the workers' votes.³⁴

By 1900 there had also been significant socialist developments outside of Vancouver, and these were associated with Christian socialism. Its most interesting manifestation in the province was the communitarian movement. Although it had its roots in the British Protestant reform tradition, the movement was immediately inspired by the last great wave of utopian colonies in the United States during the nineties. In 1896 a group of British Columbia progressives inspired by the Ruskin-Co-operative in Tennessee, began to plan a colony, and two years later they

²⁸ *Citizen and Country*, July 13, 1900 and *The Independent*, July 7, 1900.

²⁹ *Citizen and Country*, July 13, 1900.

³⁰ Bennett [*Builders of British Columbia*, 137] claims that McClain was the first socialist to contest a Canadian election; in fact other candidates had been nominated earlier by the SLP in Ontario.

³¹ *The Independent*, May 26, 1900; June 2, 1900 and June 9, 1900.

³² *Citizen and Country*, June 15, 1900.

³³ *The People*, July 14, 1900.

³⁴ *The Independent*, June 16, 1900 and *Appeal to Reason*, June 30, 1900.

established their own Ruskin, "for the purpose of spreading the grand truths that were taught by our Lord Jesus Christ." Ruskin began as a handful of men engaged in co-operative logging operations near Port Moody, and later attempts were made to make agriculture the basis of the colony. After a short probationary period, a prospective member was admitted to the fellowship "simply for his manhood's sake"; upon joining he contributed all he had, which in most cases appears to have been very little, to the co-operative. At its height Ruskin was the home of 80 people.³⁵ Ruskin had been plagued by difficulties from the outset, and by the end of 1899 problems of personality and economics resulted in its collapse.³⁶ The colony was by its very nature utopian, escapist and short-lived, and in the new century a different intellectual force would inform the socialist movement.

When Ruskin collapsed, its members did not give up the fight for socialism; many became active in the Canadian Socialist League (CSL). The League had emerged in the East during the summer of 1899 and was dominated by George Wrigley, editor of its organ *Citizen and Country*. A long-time radical, Wrigley based his indictment of capitalism upon a moral indignation at poverty and on an evangelical promise of a better world. His Christian socialism pervaded the League, and the organization's propaganda emphasized reformism and public ownership while it rejected the doctrine of the class struggle.³⁷ Such a program naturally appealed to the former members of Ruskin, and Port Moody, which had a CSL local by January 1900, became "the centre of activity in British Columbia."³⁸

The propaganda of the Canadian Socialist League made rapid progress in the province. The secretary of the CSL told a metal miner, "the labor unions are doing well by us especially those in British Columbia." By early 1900 British Columbia accounted for 15 per cent of *Citizen and Country's* total subscriptions.³⁹ The tradition of political action in the British Columbia labour movement facilitated the gains made by the League; it was but a short step from the reformism which was a basic part of that tradition to the platform of the CSL. This was demonstrated

³⁵ *The Coming Nation*, May 27, 1899; *Citizen and Country*, July 8, 1899 and *The People*, Nov. 12, 1899.

³⁶ *Appeal to Reason*, Jan. 28, 1899; *The Coming Nation*, May 27, 1899 and *The People*, Nov. 12, 1899.

³⁷ McCormack, "Western Labour Radicalism," 54-56.

³⁸ *Citizen and Country*, Feb. 2, 1900.

³⁹ Mine, Mill Records, Vol. 157, Kelly to Shiland, Aug. 21, 1901 and *Citizen and Country*, May 13, 1899; April 6, 1900 and May 4, 1900.

by the quick conversion of the Revelstoke Reform League into a CSL local.⁴⁰ The CSL's brand of socialism clearly distinguished it from the SLP in the minds of the workers. And the League quickly moved to reinforce this distinction. For example, in line with League policy, John M. Cameron, a former member of Ruskin who had become the CSL's organizer in British Columbia, petitioned the provincial government for labour standards legislation.⁴¹

Socialists were encouraged by developments in the province during 1900; R. Parmeter Pettipiece, who had inaugurated the socialist press when he began publishing the *Eagle* in Ferguson, predicted that, "British Columbia will be the first to feel the chaos." So it was natural that they should respond positively to Wrigley's call for them to establish a provincial organization.⁴² There already had been co-operation between the USLP and the CSL in October when delegates from Vancouver, Nanaimo, Victoria and several interior points met in the terminal city to hold the province's first socialist convention. The red flag flew defiantly over the socialist hall for the duration of the meetings despite police efforts to have it hauled down.

Consistent with the new direction of the movement, the convention called upon all socialists to "assist in building up and strengthening the trade union movement [but also] to educate your fellow unionists on questions of socialism." The delegates agreed to establish a provincial federation within the CSL, with Cameron as organizer, and fashioned a platform. While this document was largely reformist in character, it did go beyond the League's platform in that it made the collectivization of the means of production its basic demand.⁴³ The momentum generated at the convention was not, however, conveyed to the new provincial organization, the first in Canada, and the federation never got off the ground. Cameron soon left the province to take up a position as organizer with the Washington state socialist organization.⁴⁴

Cameron's appointment demonstrated the significant and increasing influence of American socialism on the British Columbia movement. Debs and Wayland continued to be highly regarded, but in 1900 a new

⁴⁰ *Citizen and Country*, Dec. 2, 1899.

⁴¹ Mine, Mill Records, Vol. 157, Circular from Kelly, June 1901; G. Weston Wrigley, "Socialism in Canada," *International Socialist Review*, I (May 1901), 687, and *Lardeau Eagle*, June 27, 1900.

⁴² *Lardeau Eagle*, Sept. 19, 1901 and *Citizen and Country*, June 1, 1900.

⁴³ *Citizen and Country*, Aug. 17, 1900; Oct. 5, 1900 and Oct. 12, 1900 and Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, 137.

⁴⁴ *The Independent*, March 2, 1901 and *The Socialist*, July 14, 1901.

and important influence was at work, that of the socialist party in the state of Washington. Herman Titus, editor of the Seattle *Socialist*, encouraged by what he considered the revolutionary potential of the province, took a great interest in his northern comrades. He opened the columns of his paper to British Columbia socialists and sent Washington organizers into this province.⁴⁵ But patrons can be patronizing, and Titus and his associates adopted a decidedly didactic attitude toward the Canadians. British Columbia's socialists were often criticized for not being sufficiently advanced to satisfy their doctrinaire neighbours. For example, the Seattle editor set out to save them from the CSL. When Wrigley called upon the province's socialists to reject the revolutionary Washington line and build a broad-based labour party in co-operation with the unions, Titus charged that the Toronto editor "stood for capitalistic thought, for compromise and for pasturage on both sides of the fence."⁴⁶

Titus' concern for the doctrinal orthodoxy of British Columbia socialism clearly grew out of his belief that it was part of the larger American movement. He considered the USLP to be a Kangaroo party. And during a visit to Vancouver he wrote, "socialism knows no national boundaries; . . . this province is so close to the states and its interests so closely allied to those of the state of Washington, that it will be a natural and easy step for the Socialists to organize as locals in the great Socialist movement of America." He went on to suggest that after the upcoming American unity convention, British Columbia socialists would probably affiliate with the Socialist Party of America (SPA). There is reason to believe that some in the British Columbia movement found this notion attractive; after the SPA was founded at Indianapolis, a Victoria man called upon Canadian socialists to form "one gigantic body" with their American comrades.⁴⁷

The impact of the American movement on British Columbia was most markedly demonstrated by the 1901 provincial convention. In the summer of that year Vancouver socialists began efforts to breathe new life into the dormant provincial organization. Leading the campaign was Ernest Burns, a city shop-keeper, who had known Eleanor Marx, the master's daughter, and had been active in the Social Democratic Federation in England. Despite his one-time membership in that doctrinaire organization, Burns' socialism had been tempered, probably by his participation in the Populist movement in Washington, and he now

⁴⁵ *The Socialist*, July 7, 1901 and Aug. 18, 1901.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, June 30, 1901; July 21, 1901 and Sept. 29, 1901.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, June 30, 1901 and Sept. 8, 1901.

believed that "we have to grow into Socialism . . . laying the foundation for the temple of industrial democracy wherever we can find chance to work."⁴⁸ The convention, somewhat smaller than that of the previous year, revived the provincial organization giving it the name Socialist Party of British Columbia (SPBC). In line with the wishes of Ontario socialists who had collected \$150.00 for the purpose, the delegates recalled Cameron from the Washington party and named him provincial organizer. But most significant was the adoption of the revolutionary platform of the Socialist Party of America which had been hammered out at the Indianapolis unity convention only three months earlier.⁴⁹

The adoption of the American document was only achieved after "some very warm discussions," and an executive committee headed by Burns, the provincial secretary, had been instructed to draft an additional set of immediate demands which would tend to temper the platform.⁵⁰ The controversy between the gradualists and the impossibilists⁵¹ had begun. It would rack the party for years. The gradualists contended that while the coming of the revolution was assured by history it was only practical for socialists to work for the relief of the working class under capitalism. The impossibilists argued that not only was the reform of capitalism impossible but that efforts to achieve reform could only delay the advent of the Co-operative Commonwealth by diverting the proletariat from the class struggle.

What resulted from the deliberations of the executive committee was "a composite platform which would represent the average ideas of the membership." It had three parts, the preamble of the SPA platform, a set of "general demands" which represented all planks of a national character from the CSL platform and a set of "provincial demands"; the latter two sections were distinctly reformist in character. In the *Eagle* Pettipiece appealed to socialists to stay in the party, even if their "pet ideas" did not appear in the platform, and fight for these at the next convention.⁵²

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Sept. 29, 1901 and Jan. 12, 1902; *Western Socialist*, Feb. 14, 1903; *Western Clarion*, Jan. 12, 1907 and Interview with W. A. Pritchard, Aug. 16-18, 1971.

⁴⁹ Wrigley, "Socialism in Canada," 686 and *The Socialist*, Oct. 20, 1901.

⁵⁰ *The Socialist*, Oct. 20, 1901.

⁵¹ Because it was at times a pejorative term of combat in a controversy not yet finished, "impossibilist" was used only reluctantly in this essay. It is, nonetheless, a term which seems to characterize particularly well a major tendency within the socialist movement, and is employed descriptively and without any prejudicial connotation.

⁵² *Lardeau Eagle*, Feb. 13, 1902.

Criticism of the revised platform came from several quarters, but the opposition to the addition of immediate demands was led by Nanaimo socialists. Conditions in the coal fields, which every day seemed to demonstrate the validity of the doctrine of the class struggle, had already driven some miners to a revolutionary line.⁵³ The watering-down of the provincial platform caused the Nanaimo party to re-assess its position in the SPBC and to begin to consider the formation of a separate organization. Before taking this step, however, the miners, prominent among whom were British socialists like James Pritchard and Samuel Mottishaw, felt the need for a first-rate propagandist.⁵⁴ And in acquiring that propagandist, they took a step of fundamental importance to the development of socialism in British Columbia.

The Nanaimo party called E. T. Kingsley to the Island. An industrial accident in California had resulted in the amputation of both Kingsley's legs, and while recuperating in hospital he read Marx. He joined the SLP and became an active propagandist in Oakland and several times the party's nominee for Congress.⁵⁵ Kingsley, however, did not gain real prominence in the SLP until the rebellion of the "Kangaroos." He remained loyal to De Leon, taking an active role in the purge of insurgents and as a reward was named state organizer.⁵⁶ De Leon at this time began to move away from his exclusively political orientation and toward the syndicalism which would lead him into the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905. But Kingsley was not prepared to make this shift, and after a bitter "face to face" confrontation with De Leon, he left the SLP.⁵⁷ The socialism, then, that Kingsley brought with him to British Columbia was that of the pre-1900 Socialist Labour Party. It consisted in its essentials of a denial of the utility of economic action through trade unions, a rejection of reforms as counter-revolutionary and a reliance on political action as the only viable weapon available to the working class. The Nanaimo socialists originally engaged Kingsley for only a brief propaganda tour, but his impact on the Island was such that they retained him permanently, setting him up first as a fish seller and later

⁵³ *Ibid.*, and *The Socialist*, Sept. 1, 1901.

⁵⁴ *The Socialist*, Jan. 19, 1902 and W. A. Pritchard to the author Sept. 26, 1971 and Feb. 24, 1972.

⁵⁵ *The Voice*, May 29, 1908; *The People*, Dec. 25, 1898 and June 25, 1899 and SLP Papers, National Executive, Incoming Correspondence, Everett to Kuhn, May 19, 1899.

⁵⁶ *The People*, Oct. 8, 1899; Oct. 15, 1899 and Aug. 25, 1900.

⁵⁷ McKee, "De Leon: A Reappraisal," 275; Interview with Pritchard, Aug. 16-18, 1971; and Pritchard to the author, Sept. 26, 1971.

as a printer.⁵⁸ Kingsley was not responsible for the introduction of impossibilism to British Columbia; this had its roots in the SLP, the British Socialist Democratic Federation, the Washington state organization and the realities of life in the mining camps. He did, however, provide that doctrine with a coherent rationale and a dynamic leadership, and as a result, had a profound influence on the development of British Columbia radicalism.

When the Nanaimo socialists left the SPBC in the spring of 1902 to establish the short-lived Revolutionary Socialist Party of Canada, Kingsley's influence was already apparent. The party's platform, undoubtedly the most revolutionary drafted in Canada up to that time, simply called for the destruction of capitalism and announced, "the pathway leading to our emancipation from the chains of wage slavery is uncompromising political warfare against the capitalist class, with no quarter and no surrender."⁵⁹

By the beginning of 1902 British Columbia socialism had passed beyond its formative stage, and with a province-wide if precarious organization, its own newspaper and an energetic organizer, it was ready for expansion. Conditions in the province during the first years of the century were highly conducive to the expansion of the movement. The prevailing political confusion arising from the transition from personal to party government encouraged workers to take politically innovative action. If the instability of political conditions encouraged workers to make new departures, social and economic conditions persuaded many that a radical solution was the only one.

Everything seemed to point to the triumph of capitalism in the province. From June 1900 to November 1902 James Dunsmuir, the Island coal baron who was the very epitome of repressive capitalism, was premier, and as if to dramatize his position in the province a large number of miners were killed at his Union collieries during his incumbency. Whatever his motives for assuming office, the labour movement was convinced that his intention was the further debasement of the workers.⁶⁰ Of even greater significance were several large and violent strikes which rocked the province in these years. In two dramatic confrontations all the coercive powers of a repressive capitalist state seemed to be employed in breaking the resistance of a united working class. The struggles between the Fraser River fishermen and the canneries in 1900 and 1901 had all

⁵⁸ *Lardeau Eagle*, March 20, 1902 and Pritchard to the author, Sept. 26, 1971.

⁵⁹ *The Socialist*, May 18, 1902.

⁶⁰ *The Independent*, Oct. 5, 1901 and Nov. 9, 1901.

the features of the most notorious American strikes, armed thugs, Pinkertons, provincial police and, finally and most dramatically, the Militia. In both years, the strikes were broken by Japanese.⁶¹

In 1901 a violent strike began at Rossland as a result of efforts by the large mining companies to drive the WFM out of the camp. The operators systematically violated the *Alien Labour Law* by importing large numbers of scabs from the United States, but while the most important miners' union in the province was beaten and broken, the federal government refused to enforce its own legislation.⁶² These spectacular defeats in which government complicity seemed to play an important part, made an aroused and bitter labour movement listen more readily to appeals from the socialists. The provincial vice-president of the TLC observed that, because of their employers' ruthless approach to industrial relations, the workers were "embracing socialism more than [they have] ever done before."⁶³

Certainly this tendency was demonstrated in the Kootenays when Cameron began organizing there at the end of 1901; the miners, "fed up" with unsuccessful strikes, appeared to be "ripe for socialism."⁶⁴ The SPBC organizer met with such success in the interior that Pettipiece became convinced the province had reached "the beginning of the final stage of capitalism." By the end of January 1902 the *Eagle* was able to report officially that the party had fourteen of its eighteen active locals in the metal camps.⁶⁵ Some of these locals were clearly mushroom growths, however, and within a year had collapsed. This points to an important problem for British Columbia socialism. It had a power base among the metal miners, but the uncertain and transient nature of their occupation made them highly unstable supporters.⁶⁶

Socialism was also making progress on the coast and the Island. In Vancouver, energetic work in the trades council, where the socialists continued to have some power, and persistent propaganda created such

⁶¹ H. K. Ralston, "The 1900 Strike of Fraser River Sockeye Salmon Fishermen," (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1965), 105-75, and Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 34-7.

⁶² McCormack, "Western Labour Radicalism," 110-19.

⁶³ Canada *Sessional Papers*, 1904, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 13-36A, "Evidence Taken Before the Royal Commission to Inquire into Industrial Disputes in the Province of British Columbia," 209.

⁶⁴ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, Jan. 12, 1902 and *The Socialist*, Dec. 1, 1901.

⁶⁵ *Lardeau Eagle*, Nov. 21, 1901; Jan. 23, 1902 and Jan. 30, 1902.

⁶⁶ *Western Socialist*, April 17, 1903 and *American Labor Union Journal*, Nov. 12, 1903.

an interest in socialism that at the end of 1902 the SPBC had to move its Sunday night meetings to greatly expanded quarters.⁶⁷ In Victoria, regular rallies, on such issues as “the ulcerating sore of rampant Mongolianism,” and frequent visits by American lecturers, resulted in what G. Weston Wrigley called “wonderful progress.”⁶⁸ In the coal fields the early autumn saw J. H. Hawthornthwaite, the independent labour MLA for Nanaimo, who had been flirting with the socialists for some time, join the Revolutionary Socialist Party. Then in November the socialists nominated a miner by the name of Parker Williams to contest a provincial by-election; though defeated, he polled 40 per cent of the vote.⁶⁹ Such developments caused T. H. Twigg, who conducted the labour department in the *Victoria Colonist*, to observe, “the growth of socialism in British Columbia during the past year has been phenomenal.” Early in 1903 Burns estimated that 50 per cent of the party’s membership had been socialists for less than two years.⁷⁰

The new socialist strength was dramatically demonstrated by their ability to cripple the first province-wide labour party established in British Columbia. The WFM in British Columbia already had considerable experience in labourite politics when the Rossland disaster caused many miners to conclude that only through united action at the polls would their grievances be resolved. Events in the United States facilitated these developments; in May 1901 the international convention of the union passed a resolution advocating independent political action.⁷¹ Late in October 1901 the CSL local at Slocan City informed the miners’ union that there was an “urgent need” for a workingman’s political party and suggested that District No. 6 hold a convention of unions and socialist bodies to establish such a party. This proposal was quickly taken up by socialists within the Slocan City union, and late in November the

⁶⁷ Vancouver TLC Minutes, April 17, 1902; July 17, 1902 and Aug. 1, 1902; *The Independent*, April 12, 1902; *Canadian Socialist*, July 5, 1902 and *Western Socialist*, Jan. 17, 1903.

⁶⁸ *The Socialist*, Oct. 27, 1901 and *Western Socialist*, Jan. 3, 1903.

⁶⁹ Loosmore, “BC Labor Movement and Political Action,” 173-6; *Western Socialist*, Oct. 18, 1902 and Feb. 21, 1903 and *Western Clarion*, Jan. 12, 1907.

⁷⁰ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, March 2, 1903 and *Western Socialist*, Feb. 7, 1903.

⁷¹ For the WFM in the US see Vernon H. Jensen, *Heritage of Conflict: Labor Relations in the Nonferrous Metals Industry up to 1930* (Ithaca, 1950), 1-159; John H. M. Laslett, “Syndicalist Socialism and the Western Federation of Miners,” *Labor and the Left: A Study of Socialist and Radical Influences in the American Labor Movement, 1881-1924* (New York, 1970), 241-286 and Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago, 1969), 19-87.

District secretary was requested to convene such a meeting.⁷² Initially the District executive refused to consider socialist representation, but under pressure of a campaign mounted by the Slocan City local the question was submitted to a referendum of the locals.⁷³ Then socialists, both outside and inside the union, began a campaign to have the District pass the referendum and thus to push the WFM toward class action.⁷⁴ The referendum resulted in a small majority in favour of the socialists, and the call for the Kamloops convention went out.⁷⁵

In April 1902 approximately sixty representatives of socialist, labour and reform organizations met in convention at Kamloops to establish the Provincial Progressive Party (PPP). One third of the delegates were socialists, and these, after caucusing, made a concerted effort to have the convention adopt a revolutionary platform. But the socialist offensive was beaten back and, in the words of a comrade from the interior, "the result was that every vital issue to labour was either ignored or straddled and, the platform finally adopted was of a weak and indefinite description."⁷⁶ It was clearly understood by the workers that the convention had been a contest between the socialists and the labourites, and the adoption of a reformist platform represented a set-back for the socialists.⁷⁷

All socialists could agree on the principle that only their party, or at least a labour party committed to the destruction of capitalism, could lead the proletariat to emancipation, and that any other party claiming the allegiance of the workers could only impede progress. Consequently they immediately initiated a campaign to reverse the decision taken at Kamloops. It was declared unconstitutional for SPBC locals to affiliate with the new party; the PPP "is no more entitled to special consideration at our hands than either the Liberals or Conservatives," announced Burns. And the *Canadian Socialist* charged that the PPP's platform aimed merely at "patching up the present capitalist system."⁷⁸

⁷² Mine, Mill Records, Vol. 158, Lipsett to O'Neal, Oct. 23, 1901 and Vol. 157, O'Neal to Parr, n.d. and Foley *et. al.* to Shilland, Nov. 21, 1901.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 156-3, O'Neal to Parr, Dec. 27, 1901 and Wilkes to Parr, Jan. 7, 1902 and Vol. 157, O'Neal *et. al.* to Shilland, Nov. 28, 1901 and Parr to Shilland, Jan. 10, 1902.

⁷⁴ *Miners' Magazine*, Feb. 1902.

⁷⁵ Mine, Mill Records, Vol. 157, Wilkes to Shilland, March 6, 1902.

⁷⁶ *The Independent*, April 19, 1902 and May 10, 1902 and Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, 138.

⁷⁷ *The Independent*, April 19, 1902 and *Victoria Daily Colonist*, April 20, 1902.

⁷⁸ *Canadian Socialist*, July 19, 1902; and Aug. 2, 1902. In the spring of 1902 Pettipiece sold the *Eagle*, and G. Weston Wrigley moved *Citizen and Country* to Vancouver where they jointly edited a new party organ. First called the *Canadian*

Again developments in the United States were to have an impact on British Columbia. One month after the Kamloops meeting the international convention of the WFM had met at Denver. Under the urging of President Ed Boyce and Eugene Debs, the delegates endorsed the platform of the SPA.⁷⁹ Socialists had for some time been prominent in the WFM in British Columbia, and now the international executive of the union began a campaign to ensure that they would become the paramount political force in the union. To bring the WFM, and the provincial labour movement, into line, Debs carried the new gospel to British Columbia directly from the Denver convention. The ever-popular American condemned the PPP platform as "a tissue of contradictions . . . well calculated to confuse and muddle the situation" and called upon the workers to reject that "middle class movement." At the same time, he told his audiences the SPBC's "clear-cut and uncompromising" platform made it the "party of the future."⁸⁰ Charles H. Moyer, the newly-elected president of the WFM, also joined the fight. In June, he issued a circular calling upon the miners to take up the class struggle, and the following month he travelled to the province to proselytize for socialism.⁸¹ The campaign had a great impact on the metal miners who had been potentially the backbone of the PPP, and when they responded to the appeals of the international executive, the party collapsed. Conversely, the SPBC made important gains; in January 1903 Pettipiece, rhapsodized, "in the Kootenays a miners' union meeting is converted into a socialist meeting without turning out the lights."⁸²

The growth of socialism encouraged the two wings of the movement to hold a unity convention in the autumn of 1902, and the implications of this step for the direction of British Columbia socialism were most important. During the summer and early autumn the gradualists, led by Burns, and the impossibilists, prominent among whom was Kingsley, debated the question of the inclusion of immediate demands in the platform. At the convention the delegates replaced the previous platform with its American preamble and immediate demands with a document very similar to the clear-cut revolutionary statement of the Nanaimo

Socialist, the name was changed to the *Western Socialist*, when Wrigley dissolved the partnership in the autumn. In the spring of 1903 the latter paper merged with the *Clarion*, a Nanaimo socialist paper, to become the *Western Clarion*.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, June 20, 1902.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, July 12, 1902 and July 26, 1902 and *Miners' Magazine*, Aug. 1902.

⁸¹ Mine, Mill Records, Vol. 157, circular from Moyer, June 14, 1902 and *Miners' Magazine*, Oct. 1902.

⁸² *Western Socialist*, Jan. 24, 1903.

party. This was clearly a victory for the impossibilists led by Kingsley. Indeed, the *Western Socialist* observed that the latter had become "a power in the movement" whose work "had a clarifying effect" on British Columbia socialism.⁸³ The convention did not mark, however, the beginning of the ascendancy of Island impossibilism over all lesser doctrines, as party historians would later claim. The delegates re-affirmed their "sympathy and interest" in trade unions and lifted clauses of the re-united party's constitution verbatim from the Washington state platform.⁸⁴ More important, the methodological controversies continued to plague the party.

British Columbia socialists in general agreed on the basic principles of Marxism; they were revolutionaries. For example, the gradualist George Dales could say, "there can be no intelligent or logical conception of socialism apart from a revolution."⁸⁵ But if socialists could usually agree on basic Marxist principles, they seldom could agree on tactics. How could the destruction of capitalism best be achieved? That was the enduring socialist dilemma which divided the SPBC, and despite the impossibilist victory at the 1902 convention, the dilemma was never reconciled during the life of the party. A discussion of two issues will demonstrate the nature of controversy.

The issue of doctrinal orthodoxy was always one which could generate much heat, because upon it turned the question of whether the SPBC was to be an exclusive sect or an inclusive party. Alex Lang of Vancouver, who had succeeded Burns as provincial secretary, began an exchange early in 1903 when he argued that it had become necessary, with the growth of socialism, to ensure that persons not fully acquainted with Marxism be barred from the party. The "scientific" nature of the doctrine necessitated the utmost caution: "let those who do not understand the ethics of the class struggle serve their apprenticeship on the outside of the Party." Only in this way could the revolutionary character of the SPBC be assured. This was too much for Burns. He condemned such "intolerant bigotry," which impeded the growth of the movement and claimed that socialism could only be considered scientific "when we find the leaders of socialist thought in complete agreement as to principle and tactics, in the same manner as mathematicians are agreed upon the multiplication table." The gradualists taunted Lang

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Oct. 11, 1902.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, and *The Socialist*, Oct. 26, 1902.

⁸⁵ *Sessional Papers*, 1904, "Evidence Royal Commission on BC," 645.

with the charge that he was following the disastrous policies of the SLP, a ploy favoured by critics of the impossibilists; he replied, significantly, that the SLP's concern with doctrinal orthodoxy was valid and only De Leon's "bossism" had hurt the party.⁸⁶

An even more explosive issue, because it affected so many workers intimately, concerned the party's relations with trade unions. As members of the SPBC, socialists were committed primarily, if not exclusively, to political action; the corollary of this commitment was a necessary criticism of economic action in order to turn the workers to the ballot box. By their very presence in the party, all socialists accepted this policy, but controversy arose over the question of what form this criticism should take. Kingsley was the most prominent anti-union spokesman. And by the beginning of 1903, he had become the epitome of impossibilism in the minds of the workers; one defined "a revolutionary" as "a Kingsley socialist."⁸⁷ Early in 1903 Kingsley, now the party's organizer on the Island, spoke to a Victoria meeting about trade unions. While he admitted that unions provided some workers with relief under capitalism, he denied that they played any role in the class struggle and condemned them as "reactionary products of the present competitive system." He went on to describe the resolutions in support of unions passed at the party's recent convention as "foolish" and worthless. Weston Wrigley was quick to condemn Kingsley for making such statements in an official capacity, because, the former argued, the vast majority of party members disagreed with the impossibilists' position. Joining the controversy, Burns argued that, although political action represented the only hope of the proletariat, "trade unions, strikes and boycotts are all incidents in the class struggle [which] afford transient and partial relief." The Revelstoke local of the party made a formal complaint against Kingsley's statements, and the Victoria local demanded he be relieved of his post as organizer.⁸⁸

Despite this persistent controversy, the party continued to enjoy good relations with the unions. Hawthornthwaite gained the gratitude of organized labour by working sedulously in the provincial House for improved labour legislation. In Vancouver, through what Pettipiece called a "policy of permeation," socialists continued to play a role in the

⁸⁶ *Western Socialist*, Jan. 24, 1903; Jan. 31, 1903 and Feb. 7, 1903 and *Western Clarion*, May 28, 1903; June 4, 1903 and July 3, 1903.

⁸⁷ *Sessional Papers*, 1904, "Evidence Royal Commission on BC," 315.

⁸⁸ *Western Socialist*, Feb. 7, 1903; Feb. 28, 1903; March 27, 1903 and April 24, 1903 and *Western Clarion*, July 10, 1903.

trades council and succeeded in having the body endorse the *Western Clarion* when it emerged.⁸⁹

The socialists enjoyed particularly good relations with affiliates of the militant American Labour Union (ALU). Founded by the WFM at Denver in 1902 and officially committed to socialism, the ALU was a federation of industrial unions which sought to wrest control of the western labour movement from the American Federation of Labour.⁹⁰ By the autumn of 1902 Charlie O'Brien, a socialist miner, was making real progress organizing unskilled workers in the Kootenays, the region which became the stronghold of the new federation. Early in 1903 the ALU moved into Vancouver and Victoria. There it fired the imagination and inspired the confidence of workers as only an organization of the dispossessed can, and it became the motive force behind a spectacular, if ephemeral, revolt against the TLC and eastern craft union domination.⁹¹

The socialists threw themselves whole-heartedly into the industrial union crusade. That Samuel Gompers' business unionism was essentially reactionary had become an article of faith among party members, and from the beginning they gave active support to the ALU viewing it potentially, as a vehicle by which the labour movement could be radicalized. In addition they favoured the federation's industrial unionism which, their reading of Marx told them, was "the next evolutionary step." Large industrial unions, like those organized by the ALU, were a necessary response to the growing concentration of capital. The socialists also encouraged industrial unionism as a means of increasing class consciousness among the workers; nor were they concerned about the incipient syndicalism which was inherent in the ALU's commitment to proletarian solidarity.⁹²

Socialist support of the ALU in British Columbia resulted in socialist domination. All the federation's organizers in the province were prominent party members, Cameron and Wrigley in Victoria, Ben Bakes in Vancouver,⁹³ and O'Brien in the interior. The growth of the ALU in

⁸⁹ Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 42; *Western Socialist*, Jan. 24, 1903 and Vancouver TLC Minutes, Feb. 19, 1903 and May 7, 1903.

⁹⁰ Laslett, "Syndicalist Socialism and WFM," 253-57 and Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 71-6.

⁹¹ McCormack, "Western Labour Radicalism," 126-7 and 141-6.

⁹² *Western Socialist*, March 13, 1903 and April 10, 1903 and *Western Clarion*, May 19, 1903.

⁹³ It is interesting to note that Bakes was the only Canadian ever to attend a convention of the Second International; he represented the Vancouver trades council at

British Columbia was facilitated by the dynamic leadership provided by the socialists and the general enthusiasm among the workers of the province for socialism. But if the ALU initially derived more benefit from the relationship, by mid-1903 the expansion of the SPBC was as much dependent upon the federation as the growth of the ALU was dependent upon the party. They had become parallel and complementary developments. ALU organizers and propagandists from across the border consistently proselytized for the SPBC.⁹⁴ There was a dimension to the industrial union revolt which was even more important to the socialists. It was easier for a worker to join a union, no matter how radical, than the socialist party; but once a member of an ALU local, he immediately became subject to Marxist indoctrination. In July 1903 Bertha Merrill, the province's first female socialist leader, surveyed the rapid expansion of the party and wrote, "the effect the A.L.U. has had in setting this 'wave' in motion can hardly be estimated; union men, who have long 'shyed' at the word 'Socialism', . . . have been taught by the ALU to look the dubious sign-post squarely in the face, only to find it pointed out a short cut to the very Mecca they wished to gain."⁹⁵

During the first half of 1903, a series of pitched battles between ALU affiliates and large employers helped to provide the continuation of a climate excellent for the expansion of socialism.⁹⁶ Consequently members of the SPBC were in an exhilarated and confident frame of mind when they entered the provincial election campaign, nominating ten candidates in constituencies from the Island to the Crow's Nest Pass. It was an energetic campaign; after witnessing one election rally in Vancouver, Adam Shortt wrote, "outside of the hysterical revivalist, we have nothing that quite equals it in the east, either for noise, absence of argument, mixture of metaphor or psychological effect."⁹⁷ The socialists received valuable assistance from ALU affiliates which played a prominent role in the contest. In the Kootenays, the WFM was the basis of the socialist campaign; the union mobilized the miners as never before, even encouraging some Americans at Greenwood to secure Canadian citizenship so that they

the 1904 session. [Vancouver TLC Minutes, June 16, 1904 and Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, 139.]

⁹⁴ *The Independent*, Feb. 21, 1903; *Western Socialist*, March 20, 1903 and May 1, 1903 and Mine, Mill Records, Vol. 158, O'Brien to Shilland, Dec. 21, 1902.

⁹⁵ *American Labor Union Journal*, April 23, 1903 and July 30, 1903.

⁹⁶ McCormack, "Western Labour Radicalism," 130-8.

⁹⁷ *The Voice*, July 3, 1903.

could vote.⁹⁸ But the SPBC's greatest effort was made among the miners of the Island. Because they perceptively recognized that a long, bitter strike against Dunsmuir had put the workers "in a particularly good mood for digesting . . . the principles of modern socialism," all the party's leading members campaigned in the region.⁹⁹

The election, early in October, indicated the progress which socialism had made in the province. The SPBC's ten candidates received 9 per cent of the poll; in Vancouver the socialists averaged over 1,100 votes each, the standard-bearer in Greenwood failed of election by only a narrow margin, and on the Island Nanaimo and Newcastle returned Hawthornthwaite and Parker Williams respectively. Elected as a WFM candidate in Slocan, William Davidson soon joined the party. The troubled times had clearly resulted in a socialist break-through. The *Clarion*, which significantly pointed to "the remarkable uniformity of the vote throughout the province," found the results "deeply encouraging."¹⁰⁰ The socialists were elated with the results, and the chiliasm inherent in their analysis of society was reinforced and began to emerge as the dominant component of their thought.

The provincial election of 1903 was a landmark in the ideological development of BC socialism. As a result of their impressive showing, the socialists gained an entirely new self-concept. In the years since its formation the party had become strong and confident, but in the minds of its members the development had been more than one to maturity. They were convinced that in recent months their movement had been transformed from a weak client of established socialist parties to the revolutionary vanguard. The most important statement of this new self-concept was an article published by Weston Wrigley in the *International Socialist Review*. He wrote, "marvelous as has been the growth of the Socialist vote in many of the United States, the most western province in Canada, British Columbia, has by its recent election campaign, taken a foremost place in the American class struggle." Using a complex and dubious set of formulae, he argued that the party's vote represented, in fact, 13 per cent of the total poll, the highest ever gained by socialists in a North American jurisdiction. Now it was the turn of Canadians to be didactic. The gains came, Wrigley explained, because the SPBC platform was "the shortest

⁹⁸ Mine, Mill Records, Vol. 155-4, Dougherty to McDonald, June 26, 1903 and Vol. 158, Dougherty to Shilland, June 13, 1903.

⁹⁹ *Western Socialist*, April 10, 1903 and *Western Clarion*, May 26, 1903 and June 26, 1903.

¹⁰⁰ *Western Clarion*, Oct. 8, 1903 and Oct. 29, 1903.

and most uncompromising statement of the principles of revolutionary socialism that has ever been drafted in any country."¹⁰¹

British Columbia socialists now claimed the leadership of the Canadian movement which, in fact, had been theirs for at least a year.¹⁰² In addition, both the British movement and the Second International were officially criticized by the party for being insufficiently revolutionary.¹⁰³ But most instructive was the new attitude toward the SPA. The party which had had such an important influence on the development of the movement in British Columbia was now criticized for doctrinal laxity. Comment began immediately after the election, but it was left to Kingsley to fire the major salvo. When the SPA convention of 1904 made slight revisions in the party's platform, he sneered, "the clear-cut and uncompromising attitude of the Socialist Party of B.C. stands out in striking contrast to the halting or confused attitude of the Socialist Party in the U.S." Burns was quick to criticize this new attitude toward the American party.¹⁰⁴ But events were passing the leading gradualists by; the majority of party members embraced the new self-concept and its full implications.

The new self-concept clearly had ideological implications in that it entailed a new responsibility for British Columbia socialism. Because the highly developed nature of capitalism in the province had produced the continent's most advanced socialist movement, Pettipiece told his comrades that they must guard their doctrinal orthodoxy: "fate has decreed this position in the world's history to us, and we should prove to the workers of the world that we can rise to the occasion; let us stand firm; keep our organization iron-clad, aye 'narrow' and see that we shy clear of the rocks of danger which have wrecked so many well-meaning movements."¹⁰⁵ Such an attitude, of course, certainly implied a shift to the more doctrinaire line of the impossibilists, and as a result of the election, the party was prepared for this. The electoral gains had come after the adoption of the revolutionary platform in 1902. And more important, success had been achieved in the very centre of the revolutionary propaganda, the Island coal fields where socialism meant impossibilism. Consequently, the SPBC turned to impossibilism because the doctrine appeared to have been vindicated by events, and E. T. Kingsley emerged as the

¹⁰¹ G. Weston Wrigley, "Another Red Spot on the Socialist Map," *International Socialist Review*, IV (December 1903), 398-400.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 401 and *Western Clarion*, Oct. 8, 1903.

¹⁰³ *Western Clarion*, Sept. 17, 1903; Oct. 8, 1903; Dec. 19, 1903 and July 2, 1904.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Oct. 8, 1903; June 18, 1904; June 25, 1904 and Sept. 10, 1904 and *Miners' Magazine*, Oct. 22, 1903.

¹⁰⁵ *Western Clarion*, Oct. 15, 1903.

party's leading theoretician. Former critics, like Weston Wrigley, became his supporters. The party's 1903 convention adopted one of his basic doctrines when it explicitly rejected immediate demands as "liable to retard the achievement of our final aims." And, most important, late in 1903 the provincial executive, which now controlled the *Western Clarion*, named Kingsley as editor.¹⁰⁶

Immigration by British trade unionists, determined propaganda by American radicals, violent and dramatic confrontations between capital and labour, these factors had, in the space of five years, acted on the basic socio-economic circumstances of the workers' lives to produce an almost unique revolutionary movement in British Columbia. By the end of 1903 the socialists had achieved a position of extraordinary power in the labour movement. The party would never control the province's trade unions, but in the future socialists would always hold positions of real authority in those unions. More important, the destruction of the PPP had been disastrous for labourism, and it would be fifteen years before another viable, province-wide labour party emerged. In the intervening time the socialists became the political spokesmen for organized labour in the province, and, because of a power-base in the mining camps, a force in the politics of British Columbia. The doctrines of this unusually powerful party would also give it a special place in the North American radical movement. By the end of 1903 the impossibilists had not gained complete control of the party, but recent events, particularly the provincial election, ensured that their power would soon become virtually exclusive. When this occurred they were able to make their interpretation of Marxism the ideological base of the Socialist Party of Canada which emerged late in 1904.

¹⁰⁶ Wrigley, "Another Red Spot on the Socialist Map," 400-1 and *Western Clarion*, Sept. 11, 1903; Nov. 28, 1903 and Dec. 12, 1903.