

DUFF PATTULLO AND THE COALITION CONTROVERSY OF 1941*

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THE PROVINCIAL ELECTION OF 21 October 1941, initiated a chain of events which led to enduring changes in the political landscape of British Columbia. Liberal leader Duff Pattullo, Premier since 1933, sought a third mandate for his government. To his disappointment, the Liberals were reduced from thirty-one to twenty-one seats, four short of a majority in the forty-eight seat legislature. In wartime B.C., the disappearance of Pattullo's Liberal majority in the face of strong electoral gains by the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) prompted calls for a new political alignment. A staunch opponent of such realignment, Pattullo soon found himself deposed from office by a combination of Liberals and Conservatives led by John Hart.

Pattullo did not go willingly. He warned Liberals that if their party coalesced with the Conservatives it "will start downhill, and never again within a generation will it be the power it has been in British Columbia. In a year or two at most, it will be so weak it will not be able to dis sever, but will be forced to go to the people as a union party."¹ Coalition continued for over a decade, and its acrimonious break-up prior to the 1952 election fostered the rise of the Social Credit party and the decline of the Liberal party as a major force in provincial politics — a decline which has only recently been reversed.

The coalition controversy of 1941 revealed sharply divergent views of the purpose of partisanship. To Pattullo, coalition was a betrayal of both party and principle; to proponents of coalition, it was a triumph of principle over narrow partisanship. Few Liberal coalitionists anticipated a permanent union with the Conservatives; most saw it as a

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¹ *Vancouver Sun*, 3 December 1941.

sensible temporary measure given the threat of fascism internationally and, in a different sense, of socialism provincially. Although perceptions varied in regard to the permanence of coalition, all coalitionists were concerned with the possibility of an early election and a CCF victory. From their perspective, the need to protect and preserve private enterprise transcended all partisan considerations.

Pattullo believed that coalition would destroy the Liberal party and thereby heighten, rather than diminish, the threat of socialism. Coalition, he predicted, would ultimately lead reformist Liberals to desert the party and support the CCF. Pattullo was totally convinced of the dangers of coalition and had neither sympathy nor understanding for those who did not share his conviction. As Robin Fisher notes in his recent biography of Pattullo:

If political survival were the objective, the coalescing of forces demanded some flexibility and willingness to negotiate and listen to others. But that was not Pattullo's way. Determination and single-mindedness had served him well in the past and he assumed they would again.²

Pattullo was reluctant to discuss the coalition issue with his cabinet, caucus, and party executive. He distrusted the motives of Liberal coalitionists and ignored their concerns; ironically, his insensitive and dictatorial handling of the question contributed much to the outcome he sought to avoid. However, despite his heavy-handed tactics the coalition movement was not, with a few possible exceptions, an anti-Pattullo movement.

Some accounts trace Pattullo's downfall to his spirited defence of provincial autonomy at the Dominion-Provincial Conference of January 1941.³ This paper argues that dissatisfaction with Pattullo's leadership stemmed from his actions after, rather than before, the 1941 election. It also argues, again in contrast to some previous accounts,⁴ that John Hart's split with Pattullo was a result of differences over

² Robin Fisher, *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 345.

³ See Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958), 478; Ormsby, "T. Dufferin Pattullo and the Little New Deal," *Canadian Historical Review* 43 (December 1962): 297; John Neil Sutherland, "T. D. Pattullo as a Party Leader" (M.A. thesis, U.B.C., 1960), 103; Donald K. Alper, "From Rule to Ruin: The Conservative Party of British Columbia, 1928-1954" (Ph.D. dissertation, U.B.C., 1975), 199-200.

⁴ See Ormsby, *British Columbia* . . . , 471; Alper, "From Rule to Ruin," 165.

coalition, and was not inspired by unfulfilled leadership ambitions or disagreement over the conduct of dominion-provincial relations.

THE 1941 ELECTION RESULTS

The coalition controversy was prompted by, and shaped by, the results of the 1941 election. The Liberal share of the popular vote dropped more than four points from their 1937 level of 37.3 percent, reducing the governing party from thirty-one to twenty-one seats. While the Liberals were reduced from majority to minority status, their opponents made healthy gains. The Conservatives led by R. L. Maitland, Pattullo's official opposition prior to the 1941 election, rose from eight to twelve seats and increased their vote by two points over 1937 to 31 percent. The CCF, led by Harold Winch, enjoyed the most substantial gains, doubling their representation from seven to fourteen seats. As well as winning the right to form the official opposition, the CCF also won the largest share of the popular vote in the province.⁵

Although the Liberals had the largest legislative caucus, the potential options were clear. Should Pattullo's government meet the House and be defeated, Lieutenant-Governor W. C. Woodward would have little choice but to grant the Premier a dissolution, precipitating another election, or invite Winch as Leader of the Opposition to form a government.⁶

Neither of these options held broad appeal among non-socialist forces, who had earlier been shocked by the surge to prominence of the CCF in 1933. The CCF had lost its status as official opposition in 1937, but the socialists were now poised once again as the alternative government.

THE COALITION IDEA

Although a coalition government had never been formed in British Columbia prior to 1941, the idea of coalition and, more broadly, the ideal of non-partisanship had been an element in provincial and federal politics for many years. As G. L. Kristianson notes, "Appeals to politi-

⁵ Government of British Columbia, *Statement of Votes: October 21, 1941* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1942) and Elections British Columbia, *Electoral History of British Columbia* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1988), 193. The CCF received 33.36 percent, the Liberals 32.94 percent and the Conservatives 30.91 percent of the popular vote.

⁶ These options were thoroughly discussed in correspondence from Senator J. W. de B. Farris to Ian Mackenzie, 17 and 20 November 1941. *J. W. de B. Farris Papers*, Special Collections, University of British Columbia (hereafter SC, UBC).

cians to abandon party lines and unite in the face of some obvious threat are a common political phenomenon."⁷ War, economic depression and fear of a socialist electoral victory have all induced such appeals.

A prominent example of non-partisanship was the Union Government of Liberals and Conservatives during World War One. While the tenure of this government was brief, its legacy persisted for decades. For example, the Kidd Committee in its 1932 report on the sources of British Columbia's economic problems claimed that "the party system has been the instrument by means of which these difficulties have been created."⁸ In September 1932 and again in March 1933, Conservative Premier Simon Fraser Tolmie invited Pattullo as Leader of the Opposition to join him in "a Union Government." These invitations, which were largely inspired by the Kidd report, were quickly rejected by Pattullo.⁹

The cause of non-partisanship was resurrected by the federal Conservative party in the general election of 1940, this time under the banner of "National Government." The Conservatives continued to advocate non-partisanship despite electoral defeat and Prime Minister Mackenzie King's resolute rejection of it.¹⁰

Manitoba provided a recent and striking example of non-partisanship at the provincial level. The cabinet of John Bracken which took office in November 1940 included Liberal-Progressives, Conservatives, a Social Crediter and, perhaps most surprisingly, the leader of the provincial CCF.¹¹ In British Columbia, calls for non-partisanship faded after the defeat of Tolmie but never entirely disappeared. The ideal of non-partisanship was most frequently and most forcefully expressed by R. W. Bruhn, a former Tolmie minister as well as a future coalition minister. In accepting the Conservative nomination for Salmon Arm in July 1941, Bruhn argued:

. . . it is no time for narrow bickering, sectional promotion or partisan horse-trading, and I want to make it clear that although I have

⁷ G. L. Kristianson, "The Non-partisan Approach to B.C. Politics: The Search for a Unity Party — 1972-1975," *BC Studies* 33 (Spring 1977): 13.

⁸ *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Government to Investigate the Finances of British Columbia* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1932), 16, cited in Kristianson, "The Non-partisan Approach. . .," 14.

⁹ Dr. S. F. Tolmie to Pattullo, 9 September 1932 and 27 March 1933, and Pattullo to Tolmie, 13 September 1932 and 28 March 1933. *Thomas Dufferin Pattullo Papers*, British Columbia Archives and Records Service (hereafter BCARS), Add MSS 3, vol. 47, file 19.

¹⁰ J. L. Granatstein, *The Politics of Survival: The Conservative Party of Canada, 1939-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 61.

¹¹ Nelson Wiseman, "The CCF and the Manitoba 'Non-partisan' Government of 1940," *Canadian Historical Review* 54 (June 1973): 175-193.

rejoined the Conservative Party . . . I have in no way changed my opinion in regard to the evils of the Party System as it has been practiced in the past, and I still fail to see why in this, the greatest trial of our country, those men holding the most responsible positions in Public Life, cannot for the time being follow the example of real statesmen such as Bracken of Manitoba and Winston Churchill and many others, and rise above narrow partisanship, select the best men available from all parties as a Government, and concentrate our united efforts on winning the war. . . .¹²

Bruhn's ideal of non-partisanship became the official position of the provincial Conservative party after the 1941 election, but was soon challenged by the idea of a Liberal-Conservative coalition.

The leading proponents of a Liberal-Conservative coalition in the days following the 1941 election were Harold Winch and the *Vancouver Sun*. Winch made it perfectly clear from the start that the British Columbia CCF, unlike its Manitoba counterpart, would have no part of an all-party union government. He argued that "in the present war crisis" it would not be in the public and national interest to have a new election: "It therefore seems imperative and inevitable that the Liberal and Conservative parties, being based on the common principle of private enterprise should coalesce to form a government."¹³ This position was confirmed by a meeting of CCF Members-elect on 24 October.¹⁴

Winch believed that a non-socialist coalition would demonstrate to the public what had always been obvious to him: that there was no real difference between the Liberal and Conservative parties. Winch was privately convinced that the CCF's drive to electoral victory would be aided in the long term by the submergence of Liberal and Conservative party identities in a coalition government. "Coalition was the best way for us to eventually make it," Winch noted in a 1977 interview. "We would eventually be there if they stayed forever and ever by the fact the Opposition eventually makes it. But if they split, then fine, we'd go up the middle of them."¹⁵

While rarely a political bedfellow of the CCF, the *Sun* shared with Winch a common view of the merits of a Liberal-Conservative coalition. However, while Winch saw coalition as the key to the future electoral triumph of socialism, the *Sun* saw coalition as the key to

¹² *Salmon Arm Observer*, 17 July 1941.

¹³ *Vancouver Sun*, 22 October 1941.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24 October 1941.

¹⁵ Interview with Harold Winch, Vancouver, 31 January 1977.

keeping the socialists outside the gates of government. The *Sun* first proclaimed its advocacy of coalition on 8 October, two weeks prior to election day:

If the election should fail to give the government a working majority, then we would doubtless see a union of Liberals and Conservatives, believing in the same social system, against the supporters of socialism. That . . . would be entirely logical. But the present arrangement splits the vote, confuses the issue and returns men to the Legislature with the support of a minority in many ridings.¹⁶

These themes emerged frequently in *Sun* editorials during the coalition controversy. Between 22 October and 3 December, the *Sun* devoted fifteen editorials to promoting the idea of a Liberal-Conservative coalition and/or attacking Premier Pattullo for his reluctance to embrace this idea. These attacks grew more virulent as the controversy intensified. As the controversy neared conclusion, for example, Pattullo was described as a "sawdust dictator" who "must be dethroned as a menace to British Columbia democracy."¹⁷ The extent to which the *Sun* led rather than reflected public opinion is unclear,¹⁸ certainly it was instrumental in focusing public attention on the coalition issue.

The *Vancouver Province* proposed a different solution than the *Sun* to British Columbia's political dilemma: a union government comprising all three parties. The *Province* claimed:

When the electors of British Columbia went to the polls . . . they went not as politicians and partisans supporting this political party or that but as shareholders in the great corporation of British Columbia Unlimited interested in the proper and efficient conduct of British Columbia's affairs.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Vancouver Sun*, 8 October 1941. In response to events in Manitoba, the *Sun* in an editorial of 5 November 1940 called for the abandonment of party lines for the duration of the war, a proposal it termed "coalition" but which was, more precisely, a call for "union government."

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15 November 1941.

¹⁸ Of "Letters to the Editor" in the *Sun* between 24 October and 8 December, 10 of 227 (or about 5 percent) were related to the coalition controversy. Of the ten related letters, three favoured an all-party government, three favoured a Liberal-Conservative coalition and one thought either form of realignment acceptable; two opposed a Liberal-Conservative coalition and one opposed an all-party government. In short, editorial writers were apparently more excited about coalition than editorial readers.

¹⁹ *Vancouver Province*, 28 October 1941.

According to the *Province*, all Members of the Legislature — “the board of directors” — needed to consolidate their efforts in a union government. This notion of “business government” was a long-standing theme in British Columbia politics, articulated most frequently by the Conservative party.²⁰

THE CONSERVATIVE POSITION

Conservative leader R. L. Maitland was an early advocate of union government. “The present situation,” he said, “demands of all three parties a united endeavour to achieve the maximum war effort.”²¹ Unlike Pattullo, Maitland called together his Members-elect and defeated candidates to discuss the question of party realignment. Maitland’s notes from this meeting of 7 November indicate that five of the twenty-five Conservatives present were adamantly opposed to any form of realignment. Among the remainder, there was broad consensus in support of three-party union government, at least as an interim position, but far less unanimity with respect to coalition with the Liberals alone.²²

Despite the CCF’s prompt and unequivocal rejection of his plea, Maitland continued to promote union government until 6 December, two days before the coalition agreement was finalized. Maitland’s stand reflected, at least in part, divisions within Conservative ranks on the question of coalition with the Liberals alone. Although Maitland refused to comment publicly on this question, his private correspondence indicated reservations in this regard.²³ These reservations were not shared by Herbert Anscomb, Conservative MLA for Oak Bay and a powerful rival to Maitland for the leadership of the party. Anscomb publicly advocated a Liberal-Conservative coalition on 22 October, one day before Maitland’s initial appeal for union government.²⁴ Russell Walker, a prominent Conservative official at the time of the

²⁰ See Robert Groves, “Business Government: Party Politics and the British Columbia Business Community, 1928-1933” (M.A. thesis, UBC, 1976), 53.

²¹ *Victoria Daily Times*, 23 October 1941.

²² Maitland notes, n.d. *Royal L. Maitland Papers*, BCARS, Add MSS 781. Press reports indicate a meeting of Conservative Members-elect and defeated candidates was held on 7 November. According to Maitland’s notes, four of the seven Members-elect present supported coalition, while three others, excluding Maitland, supported union government. For a full account see George M. Abbott, “The Formation of the Liberal-Conservative Coalition in 1941” (M.A. thesis, University of Victoria, 1978), 53-74.

²³ In a letter to his son on 1 December 1941, Maitland noted: “The Liberal machine is not very stuck on a coalition with us. I am not stuck on it myself, but if it is to be — it is to be.” Cited in Alper, *From Rule to Ruin . . .*, 198.

²⁴ *Vancouver Sun*, 22 October 1941.

coalition controversy, later offered this assessment of the event: "Pattullo was faced by 12 Conservatives . . . a party hopelessly divided into the Maitland and Anscomb factions."²⁵ Maitland realized that coalition was an issue which could split his party and threaten his leadership. For the Conservative leader, union government was not only a noble ideal but also a safe middle ground to occupy until the Liberals resolved their differences over coalition.

CONTROVERSY WITHIN THE LIBERAL GOVERNMENT

Premier Pattullo faced serious problems in the wake of the 1941 election. Two of his senior cabinet ministers, George Pearson and K. C. MacDonald, openly advocated partisan realignment as the way to avoid another war-time election. Liberal party President Dr. W. J. Knox tendered similar advice in confidence immediately after the election.²⁶ Such unwelcome advice from powerful officials, in combination with a flurry of editorials in the same vein, led Pattullo to conclude that demands for coalition were a kind of "hysteria."²⁷ He regarded union government simply as a ruse to mask the real objective of coalition with the Conservatives, and he was convinced that the latter posed a grave danger to the Liberal party. Despite this conviction, Pattullo chose not to confront the issue immediately and directly.

There is considerable divergence between Pattullo's public comments on coalition and his private thoughts on the subject as expressed to Prime Minister Mackenzie King. By his own subsequent account, Pattullo made up his mind against coalition immediately after the election. In a letter to the editor of the *Vancouver News Herald* in 1952, Pattullo noted that after the 1941 election "I had no intention of forming a coalition government [and] I at once proceeded to Ottawa to confer with Mackenzie King as I did not want to take a course of action that might embarrass his situation."²⁸ Pattullo's contention that he opposed coalition from the beginning is almost certainly true, given his opposition to Union government at the federal level in 1917,²⁹ and his rejection of Tolmie's overtures in 1932 and 1933 (albeit under markedly different conditions than existed in 1941). Pattullo's opinion of coalition was reflected in a letter to King on 3 November: "I am not as pessimistic [about the outcome of another

²⁵ Russell R. Walker, *Politicians of a Pioneering Province* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1969), 45.

²⁶ Knox to Pattullo, 19 November 1941. *Pattullo Papers*, BCARS, vol. 63, file 1.

²⁷ Pattullo to W. J. Knox, 22 November 1941. *Ibid.*

²⁸ Pattullo to the Editor of the *Vancouver News Herald*, 10 June 1952. *Ibid.*

²⁹ Fisher, *Duff Pattullo . . .*, 172

election] as some advice I have received, nor would I like to feel there could be sufficient deserters to carry out nefarious designs. . . .”³⁰ There was never any indication that Pattullo would reverse his stand on coalition. “No matter what happens,” Pattullo told King on 14 November, “I am going to stand my ground.”³¹

Pattullo’s public comments prior to 15 November do not reflect such resolve. He undoubtedly realized that demands for coalition could not be quickly or easily dismissed, regardless of his personal feelings on the issue. “Even before the election returns are complete,” Pattullo complained on 24 October, “attempts are being made to do the ‘rush act’ and precipitate some action by myself in the way of coalition administration.” However, Pattullo refused any further comment on the possibility of coalition, saying only that he and Finance Minister John Hart would soon leave for Ottawa to conclude a fiscal agreement with the federal government.³² On 27 October, Pattullo told a *Sun* reporter that “I have never been happier in the 25 years of my public life” but added, in response to a question on coalition, “I do not know what I am going to do.”³³ Two days later Pattullo opined that the future of his government was in “the hands of the gods”; however, he shed no further light on likelihood of coalition, stating that “The King’s government must go on in orderly fashion and that’s what I’ll try to do.”³⁴ Pattullo was no more forthright upon his return from Ottawa on 8 November, prompting a new round of editorial speculation.³⁵ His strategy was to ignore the issue and wait for it to fade away. Unfortunately for Pattullo, the issue could not be ignored for long.

At a cabinet meeting on 10 November Pattullo “intimated,” to use Labour Minister George Pearson’s term, that he intended to carry on with a minority government. Pearson’s support for coalition, coupled with dissatisfaction over a pending cabinet shuffle, led to his resignation on 14 November. In his letter of resignation, Pearson argued that “steps should have been taken to bring about an arrangement with the Opposition Parties in the House for the carrying of Government for the duration of the War without the necessity of another appeal to the electors. . . .” Pearson also complained that cabinet ministers and Liberal MLAs “should have been given greater opportunity to express

³⁰ Pattullo to King, 3 November 1941. Ibid.

³¹ Pattullo to King, 14 November 1941. Ibid.

³² *Vancouver Sun*, 24 October 1941.

³³ Ibid., 27 October 1941.

³⁴ Ibid., 29 October 1941.

³⁵ Ibid., 12 November 1941.

their views upon the very critical situation that exists, before a new cabinet was formed.”³⁶

Pearson’s resignation prompted Pattullo to air his views on coalition publicly. “Not one of the three parties in the House has a mandate from the people to coalesce. The people elected us as we are and I believe that they expect us to carry on during this war period.” Pattullo saw no reason for party realignment “merely because vicious and powerful minority interests wish to accomplish their own purposes.”³⁷

Pattullo’s declaration, in combination with Pearson’s resignation, precipitated a wave of cabinet resignations. Finance Minister John Hart resigned at Pattullo’s request after publicly stating his belief in the need for some form of coalition government.³⁸ Agriculture Minister K. C. MacDonald resigned on 19 November, again at Pattullo’s request, after openly expressing his support for coalition.³⁹ Attorney-General Norman Whittaker resigned the same day of his own volition, stating that “I feel that any attempt to carry on under the present setup might very well result in another Election, which must be avoided at all costs.”⁴⁰

Pattullo had no intention of discussing coalition with his caucus prior to the first sitting of the Legislature. His first communication with his caucus after the 1941 election came in a telegram on 17 November: “House sits December fourth. Would like all Members to arrive morning December third. Suggest you commit yourself in no way to coalition.”⁴¹ Pattullo also rejected a request, tendered shortly after the election, from Liberal party officials for a meeting to discuss the question of coalition.⁴² Pattullo refused to discuss coalition with his caucus, cabinet, and party executive because he feared they might adopt a position on coalition which would conflict with his own. “Some of our Members would like to continue their service in the Legislature,” Pattullo told King, “and have no difficulty reconciling their public duty with personal considerations.”⁴³

Pattullo undoubtedly believed he was protecting the interests of the Liberal party by blocking the road to coalition. Robin Fisher explains Pattullo’s conduct as a deep commitment to principle:

³⁶ Pearson to Pattullo, 14 November 1941. *Pattullo Papers*, BCARS, vol. 66, file 15.

³⁷ *Vancouver Sun*, 15 November 1941.

³⁸ Hart to Pattullo, 17 November 1941. *Pattullo Papers*, BCARS, vol. 66, file 8.

³⁹ MacDonald to Pattullo, 19 November 1941. *Ibid.*, vol. 66, file 2.

⁴⁰ Whittaker to Pattullo, 19 November 1941. *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Pattullo to E. T. Kenney, 17 November 1941. *Ibid.*

⁴² *Vancouver Sun*, 8 November 1941.

⁴³ Pattullo to King, 14 November 1941. *Pattullo Papers*, BCARS.

. . . he had set a course based on his political principles and commitment to Liberalism, and now he was merely following it through to its conclusion. While such determination may have seem [*sic*] abnormal to those who thought it better to bend with the prevailing wind, for Duff Pattullo it was the only way to respond to the situation.⁴⁴

If there is a fine line between determination and dictation, between commitment to principle and insensitivity to the concerns of others, Pattullo clearly crossed that line in his political behaviour during the post-election period. To borrow Fisher's metaphor, Pattullo refused to face the winds of change; instead he turned his back to them in the hope that they would pass.

Some Liberals were clearly offended by Pattullo's failure to consult them on an issue as momentous as coalition. This was reflected, for example, in one Liberal MLA's response to Pattullo's telegram of 17 November: "Regret that I cannot from information received endorse your attitude or actions. I am of firm opinion had caucus been held of elected members much of present impossible situation would have been eliminated."⁴⁵ Senator J. W. de B. Farris, a prominent Vancouver Liberal, was also disturbed and angered by Pattullo's handling of the coalition issue. In a confidential letter to a federal cabinet minister, Farris argued that "Everything he [Pattullo] has done has been wrong and indicates a mentality not normal."⁴⁶ Pattullo's political behaviour was neither normal nor acceptable. Harold Winch stated publicly what many Liberals must have thought privately: "The most astonishing thing in British Columbia politics for years, I think, was that in this Legislative crisis the Premier did not even take the trouble to confer with his own executive colleagues."⁴⁷

Pattullo's refusal to discuss coalition made him appear oblivious to the dangers of minority government. Pattullo had a plan to "appoint a Committee of the House composed of all parties for the purpose of considering the war effort."⁴⁸ However, he did not unveil his plan until the convention of 2 December, by which time attitudes in regard to coalition had hardened. Pattullo does not appear to have anticipated

⁴⁴ Fisher, *Duff Pattullo . . .*, 347.

⁴⁵ Kenney to Pattullo, 18 November 1941. *Pattullo Papers*, BCARS.

⁴⁶ Farris to Mackenzie, 17 November 1941. *Farris Papers*, SC, UBC.

⁴⁷ *Vancouver Sun*, 15 November 1941.

⁴⁸ See "Report of the Proceedings of a Meeting of the British Columbia Liberal Association Held at the Hotel Georgia, Vancouver, B.C., December 2, 1941" (hereafter "Report . . ."), *British Columbia Liberal Association Papers*, SC, UBC.

the possibility of formal party consideration of coalition without his consent. On 14 November he advised Mackenzie King that "Nobody wants a new election, but if my Government is defeated in the House an effort will be made to effect a coalition with the Tories."⁴⁹ Pattullo was surprised and angered when, on 18 November, Knox called a party convention for 2 December, two days before the opening of the House. "I am afraid I have come to the conclusion," Pattullo wrote Knox, "that you must have been consorting with the Babes in the Woods."⁵⁰ The calling of the convention extinguished Pattullo's hopes of dictating the outcome of the coalition controversy.

When the Liberal convention met in Vancouver a resolution calling for "the formation of a Coalition Government of the three parties, or, failing that, by a coalition of two of them" was approved by 60 percent of the delegates.⁵¹ After the vote, Pattullo informed the delegates that he would still have nothing to do with coalition and then left the convention; shortly afterwards, John Hart was elected the new Liberal leader. Two days later Pattullo announced his intention to resign as Premier effective 9 December, clearing the way for a Liberal-Conservative coalition government.

The sequence of events leading up to the formation of the Liberal-Conservative coalition is relatively clear; why these events occurred is far less clear. For example, did the coalition controversy reflect a deeper rift within the Liberal party over dominion-provincial relations? Was the coalition movement also an anti-Pattullo movement? Why did Pattullo take a dictatorial approach to the coalition issue rather than a conciliatory approach which might have soothed the fears of his colleagues? And what role, if any, did Mackenzie King play in the outcome of the coalition controversy?

THE DOMINION-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE

A persistent theme among previous accounts of the coalition controversy is the supposed rift between Premier Pattullo and his Finance Minister John Hart arising from the Dominion-Provincial Conference of 1941.⁵² This conference was called by Prime Minister King to discuss the Rowell-Sirois *Report*, which recommended in its

⁴⁹ Pattullo to King, 14 November 1941. *Pattullo Papers*, BCARS.

⁵⁰ Pattullo to Knox, 22 November 1941. *Ibid.*

⁵¹ "Report . . .," *B.C. Liberal Association Papers*, SC, UBC, and *Vancouver Province*, 3 December 1941.

⁵² See Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia . . .*, 471; Alper, "From Rule to Ruin . . .," 165; and Peter Murray, *From Amor to Zalm* (Victoria: Orca Book Publishers, 1989), 107-08.

"Plan 1" that the provinces surrender control of income taxes in exchange for broad financial aid from the federal government. Most of British Columbia's newspapers strongly supported the *Report*; the *Province*, for example, claimed the *Report* promised "a new understanding between the central authority and the junior governments and a new era of Canadian unity."⁵³ These great expectations were dashed when Pattullo, along with Premiers Aberhart and Hepburn, refused to debate the details of a plan which they opposed in principle. Pattullo rightly argued that Plan 1 would have condemned British Columbia to "turn the treadmill of mediocrity in perpetuity"⁵⁴; however, editorials bitterly denounced Pattullo as a "wrecker" and a "saboteur" and wildly speculated about cabinet dissension in the wake of the collapse of the conference. For example, the *Sun* stated that "we refuse to believe for a moment that Mr. Hart agreed with his leader's refusal to confer. That Mr. Hart and all the other cabinet ministers regretted Mr. Pattullo's stand seems to be knowledge in Ottawa."⁵⁵ Available evidence calls this view into question.

As Finance Minister, Hart was author of British Columbia's financial rebuttal of the Rowell-Sirois *Report*.⁵⁶ If Hart was dissatisfied with the way in which Pattullo presented the provincial position, his dissatisfaction was not reflected in his actions or statements. Hart did not resign from the cabinet, as one might expect if he was genuinely dissatisfied with Pattullo's leadership. Furthermore, Hart's press statements defending the Premier's stand in Ottawa were lengthy and detailed, and gave not the slightest hint of dissatisfaction with Pattullo's leadership.⁵⁷ Hart hoped, as he noted in a letter to Pattullo, that his statements would "have the effect of changing the wrong impression that was placed in the minds of the people through press reports."⁵⁸

There is no evidence to suggest that Pattullo's stand in Ottawa led to a rift between him and Hart, or that it influenced Hart's decision to support coalition after the 1941 election. According to Hart, "When the Premier and myself separated, we were very close. The only point on which he and I disagreed was the matter of coalition government, after the electorate had given no clear decision at the polls."⁵⁹ This view is further underlined by Hart's later rejection of R. L. Maitland's

⁵³ *Vancouver Province*, 15 January 1941.

⁵⁴ *Victoria Daily Times*, 15 January 1941.

⁵⁵ *Vancouver Sun*, 27 January 1941.

⁵⁶ *Victoria Daily Times*, 30 January 1941.

⁵⁷ *Vancouver Sun*, 25 January 1941. Hart made a further statement defending Pattullo on 29 January.

⁵⁸ Hart to Pattullo, 24 January 1941. *Pattullo Papers*, BCARS, vol. 68, file 8.

⁵⁹ *Vancouver Province*, 4 December 1941.

demand for a commitment to a further Dominion-Provincial Conference on the Rowell-Sirois *Report* as a condition of coalition.⁶⁰

Pattullo had at least one critic within his ranks. Liberal MLA Harry Perry (Fort George), speaking to the Prince George Board of Trade ten weeks after the Dominion-Provincial Conference, criticized the “undemocratic attitude of those three premiers . . . who refused to deliberate or discuss the Sirois *Report* recommendations.”⁶¹ We cannot say conclusively whether Perry’s view was widely shared among provincial Liberals, but available evidence suggests that it was not. With the exception of Perry, who had a well-established reputation as a maverick,⁶² provincial Liberals were uniformly supportive of Pattullo in their public comments. Cabinet ministers Hart, Pearson, George Weir, and Gordon Wismer, all of whom accompanied Pattullo to the conference, repeatedly and vigorously defended the Premier.⁶³

COALITION AS AN ANTI-PATTULLO MOVEMENT

Harry Perry was the first Liberal MLA to publicly express support for coalition after the 1941 election. He attributed Liberal election losses

partly to a protest against its [the Liberal government’s] refusal to go into conference and deliberate upon the Sirois Report; partly to a rebuke to the premier for his affectation of a dominant leader; and to the failure of the government to offer positive policies for extended measures of social security. . . .⁶⁴

Personal animosity may also have contributed to Perry’s dissatisfaction with Pattullo’s leadership,⁶⁵ but if other Liberals shared Perry’s view then the coalition movement might accurately be described as an anti-Pattullo movement.

⁶⁰ See Maitland to Hart, 6 December 1941 and Hart to Maitland, 7 December 1941. *Maitland Papers*, BCARS, vol. 2, file 9, and vol. 4, file 2.

⁶¹ *Victoria Daily Times*, 28 March 1941.

⁶² See Fisher, *Duff Pattullo* . . . , 162 and 339, and Ormsby, *British Columbia* . . . , 414-15.

⁶³ For cabinet support of Pattullo, see *Victoria Daily Times*, 25 and 30 January 1941; 1, 20, 21 and 23 February 1941; and 1, 15 and 21 March 1941. For examples of other support see *Victoria Daily Times*, 23, 24 and 31 January 1941.

⁶⁴ *Vancouver Sun*, 29 October 1941. Perry’s criticism was a minor point in a lengthy article in favour of coalition. Perry claimed that his first preference was a Liberal-CCF coalition, but most of his article detailed how a Liberal-Conservative coalition could undermine CCF support in the province. He argued that if a Liberal-Conservative coalition implemented measures of social reform, the CCF would be forced further to left. Perry also argued that a coalition government should introduce the single transferable ballot to ensure electoral victory for the free enterprise majority.

⁶⁵ See Walker, *Politicians* . . . , 126-27.

Interviews with two Liberal MLAs of the period, Norman Whittaker (Saanich) and W. T. Straith (Victoria), indicate that Perry's view was his own and not that of the Liberal caucus. Although Whittaker and Straith supported coalition in 1941, both denied that there was any thought of changing leaders prior to Pattullo's rejection of coalition. Whittaker argued that many Liberals who favoured coalition also hoped to retain Pattullo as leader, "but he refused to have anything to do with coalition."⁶⁶ According to Straith, "We were quite happy with Mr. Pattullo as leader. We thought of him as a very strong leader. . . . We regretted very much when he took the position [on coalition] that he did."⁶⁷ This was not a case of the heart growing fonder over time. Straith told a *Victoria Daily Times* reporter at the height of the coalition controversy that he "believed Premier Pattullo was the greatest leader British Columbia had ever had but on this occasion he [Pattullo] had made a grave error in judgment."⁶⁸

Pattullo had clearly won much respect and loyalty during his twenty-five years as a cabinet minister, Leader of the Opposition and Premier. While his stand against coalition was supported by only 40 percent of the delegates at the 2 December convention, this was by no means a reliable measure of support for Pattullo as party leader. Indeed, evidence suggests that many Liberals were caught in a painful conflict between a belief in the need for coalition and a desire to be loyal to their leader.

In some cases, Liberals who favoured coalition argued against it at the convention in hopes of retaining Pattullo as leader. C. S. Leary, Minister of Mines in Pattullo's post-election cabinet, argued on 26 November that a coalition government was necessary "for the war period to provide a responsible form of government and to avoid an election the people do not want."⁶⁹ Leary did not resign from the cabinet, however, and later reversed his position, eventually opposing the coalition resolution at the convention. Leary described Pattullo as "the greatest Leader this Province has ever had" and argued that coalition should only be considered after a minority Liberal government faced certain defeat.⁷⁰

Thomas King, Minister of Public Works, also spoke against the coalition resolution. He emphasized his intention to be loyal to Pattullo because, he said, "there was no man in Canada who was a

⁶⁶ Interview with Norman Whittaker, Victoria, 12 February 1977.

⁶⁷ Interview with W. T. Straith, Victoria, 27 January 1977.

⁶⁸ *Victoria Daily Times*, 26 November 1941.

⁶⁹ *Vancouver Province*, 26 November 1941.

⁷⁰ "Report . . .," B.C. Liberal Association Papers, SC, UBC.

better leader than the present Premier. . . .”⁷¹ King stated that he “more or less” favoured coalition but that it would “break his heart to vote for coalition and so go against the Premier.”⁷²

Liberal backbencher Dr. J. J. Gillis (Yale) favoured coalition,⁷³ but not without Pattullo at the helm. In a letter to Pattullo on 3 January 1942, Gillis stated that “I want you to know that I was opposed to the holding of any Convention at this time and at no time was I ever consulted.” He added that “I do not know whether I will ask the Speaker to give me a seat on the Opposition or not. I have not made up my mind.”⁷⁴

Former cabinet ministers K. C. MacDonald and John Hart, while steadfast supporters of coalition, were clearly unhappy that circumstances had brought them into conflict with Pattullo. According to the *Province*, “Dr. MacDonald plainly showed that the severance of association with his chief for whom he has a strong personal attachment was a painful one.”⁷⁵ Hart told convention delegates that “I feel this party is in somewhat of a mix-up, especially when you find our good Premier and myself separated.”⁷⁶

The most remarkable aspect of the coalition controversy was not that Pattullo lost the support of some of his colleagues, but rather that he retained the loyalty and support of others despite the widespread attraction of coalition. When one considers Pattullo’s actions after the 1941 election, this loyalty and support seems particularly remarkable.

PATTULLO’S CONSPIRACY THEORY OF COALITION

Pattullo’s reluctance to discuss the coalition issue reflected a deep distrust of the motives of his colleagues, particularly John Hart. Pattullo was convinced, as his correspondence with Mackenzie King reveals, that demands for coalition were part of a conspiracy aimed at removing him from office.

On 3 November, Pattullo stated that “some powerful interests are trying to get me out of office by the formation of a combination of Liberals and Tories under another leader.”⁷⁷ He noted on 18 November that “agitation for a coalition with the Tories has continued. This

⁷¹ Loc. cit.

⁷² *Victoria Daily Times*, 3 December 1941.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 26 November 1941.

⁷⁴ Gillis to Pattullo, 3 January 1942. *Pattullo Papers*, BCARS, vol. 63, file 4.

⁷⁵ *Vancouver Province*, 20 November 1941.

⁷⁶ *Victoria Daily Times*, 3 December 1941.

⁷⁷ Pattullo to King, 3 November 1941. *Pattullo Papers*, BCARS.

is all part of a plot, started long before I had decided upon holding an election. From the time we passed legislation controlling the price of gasoline, there has been a constant underground agitation against myself personally.”⁷⁸ In a letter four days later, he added that “this plotting has been in progress for many months, the press constantly boosting Hart and depreciating myself. If Hart had been loyal, he would have squelched this himself.” Pattullo also claimed that Hart and George Pearson had favoured coalition in 1933, although there is no evidence from the period, in correspondence or elsewhere, to support this claim.⁷⁹

Pattullo’s casting of Hart in the role of Judas was completely unjustified. After the 1941 election, Pattullo was criticized for going to Ottawa instead of staying in Victoria and resolving the “political confusion” in British Columbia.⁸⁰ Although Hart may have agreed with this criticism, he did not split with Pattullo, and instead accompanied the Premier to Ottawa. On the morning of 14 November, Hart met with Pattullo and suggested a meeting of the Liberal executive “or failing that a meeting with the leaders of the two parties with a view to obtaining cooperation from them in forming a stable government for the period of the war.”⁸¹ Pattullo rejected this advice and informed Hart of his decision to “go it alone” and reorganize his cabinet. According to Hart, “I pleaded with him not to because it would show by his actions that he would have none of coalition,” but to no avail. Hart nevertheless offered to continue, at least temporarily, as Finance Minister in a minority government, and promised to resign if his views on coalition proved embarrassing to the Premier.⁸² Later the same day, Hart heard that Pearson was planning to resign from the cabinet over the coalition issue. Hoping to prevent a cabinet rift, Hart tried unsuccessfully “to arrange some kind of agreement” between Pearson and Pattullo.⁸³

⁷⁸ Pattullo to King, 18 November 1941. Ibid. For a detailed account of the Pattullo government’s battle with the petroleum industry see Robin Fisher, “Regulating Fuels in the Depression: The Coal and Petroleum Control Board of British Columbia,” *B.C. Studies* 66 (Summer 1985): 3–27.

⁷⁹ Pattullo to King, 22 November 1941. Ibid. There is evidence of inconsistency in the treatment of Hart and Pattullo by the *Sun*. In its editorials on Hart’s 1941 budget and on the collapse of the Dominion-Provincial Conference, the *Sun* portrays Pattullo as the villain and Hart as a more heroic figure. While there is no evidence that Hart encouraged this treatment, it was undoubtedly irritating to Pattullo. See the *Vancouver Sun*, 30 November 1940 and 27 January 1941.

⁸⁰ Editorial in *Vancouver Sun*, 24 October 1941.

⁸¹ *Vancouver Sun*, 3 December 1941. Hart was quoted at the Liberal convention.

⁸² Loc. cit. Hart also offered to accompany Pattullo to another scheduled meeting in Ottawa.

⁸³ Loc. cit. According to Hart, “I did not see him (Mr. Pattullo) until Monday morning when he asked for my resignation. I want to say to you that I then shook hands with the Premier and wished him luck.”

Hart's actions were not those of a man who supposedly aspired to be Premier. The premiership, said Hart, "was an office to which I never aspired, because the Premier and others knew my aspirations were away from the province of British Columbia altogether."⁸⁴ Additional evidence confirms that Hart hoped to be appointed to the Senate.⁸⁵ Prior to the coalition controversy, he was not regarded by his colleagues as a successor to Pattullo. "John was a fine fellow but a quiet retiring sort of fellow, though he had a mind of his own," W. T. Straith noted in a 1977 interview. "No one had ever thought of Hart as Premier. He enjoyed Finance and he was Minister of Finance for Pattullo and he was all for him."⁸⁶ Hart's support for coalition was not motivated by political ambition; Hart did all he could, short of abandoning his belief in the need for coalition, to keep Pattullo in the Premier's chair. Pattullo's distrust of Hart was clearly not warranted.

THE FEDERAL CONNECTION

Although Pattullo distrusted most if not all of his provincial colleagues, he confided in Mackenzie King throughout the coalition controversy. In letters to King, Pattullo pointed out similarities between the federal and provincial situations and argued that coalition in British Columbia could adversely affect Liberal fortunes federally.

In the federal election of 1940, R. J. Manion and the Conservatives campaigned under the banner of "National Government." Though badly defeated, the Conservatives did not abandon the concept of federal non-partisanship. In June 1940 R. B. Hanson, Leader of the Opposition after Manion's defeat, called for the formation of a national government.⁸⁷ In the autumn of 1941, a movement urging the return of Arthur Meighen — "the one man whom Mackenzie King both loathed and feared"⁸⁸ — to the leadership of the federal Conservative party gained prominence. The aims of this movement were the implementation of full conscription and the formation of a national government. Meighen advocated both aims in accepting the leadership on 12 November 1941. Meighen's strategy, according to J. L. Granatstein, was to forge an alliance of Conservatives and conscrip-

⁸⁴ *Victoria Daily Times*, 3 December 1941.

⁸⁵ Tom Reid to Byron Johnson, 27 May 1941. *Byron I. Johnson Papers*, Special Collections, University of Victoria (hereafter SC. UV). Reid also aspired to the vacant Senate seat and sought Johnson's support.

⁸⁶ Interview with W. T. Straith. *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ J. L. Granatstein, *The Politics of Survival* . . . , 61.

⁸⁸ J. L. Granatstein, *Canada's War: the Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), 205.

tionist Liberals with the purpose of forming a national government under his leadership.⁸⁹

In a letter to King on 14 November, Pattullo explained that "in light of developments at Ottawa, I feel that I should advise you of developments here, in order that you may be informed as to conditions which may very considerably in the not distant future affect the Federal situation." After noting that Hart was in favour of coalition, Pattullo argued that "coalition with the Tories would, in my opinion, result in a tremendous deflexion [*sic*] of Liberals to the C.C.F. . . . Once these Liberals start voting for the C.C.F., they will, I think, continue to vote C.C.F., even in a Dominion election."⁹⁰ In another letter four days later, Pattullo told King that "at the Convention I propose to point out to them the situation as I see it affecting the Liberal Party in the future, and particularly since Meighen has announced his programme it seems to me that it would be very detrimental to the Liberal Party in a Dominion way for us Provincially to join in a Coalition Government."⁹¹

Pattullo asked King for advice on two occasions, but he never explicitly requested, and perhaps never expected, the Prime Minister to take a public stand on coalition in British Columbia. Nevertheless, Pattullo was apparently disappointed by federal inaction in that regard. His disappointment showed in a letter to the editor of the *News Herald* on 10 June 1952, a few months after the break-up of the Liberal-Conservative coalition and two days before the 1952 provincial election:

In your editorial of today's date, speaking of the present political situation, you state "we have to go back 12 years and recall that Ottawa warned of just what has now happened. The Ottawa politicians at least have that satisfaction." Whom did the politicians warn and who were the politicians that warned whom [?] This is the first I have heard of it.⁹²

Neither King nor his ministers offered any public comment on the coalition question; privately, however, the Prime Minister shared Pattullo's views in that regard. King noted in his diary of 31 October that:

⁸⁹ J. L. Granatstein, *The Politics of Survival . . .*, 83-95.

⁹⁰ Pattullo to King, 14 November 1941. *Pattullo Papers*, BCARS.

⁹¹ Pattullo to King, 18 November 1941. *Ibid.*

⁹² Pattullo to the Editor of the *Vancouver News Herald*, 10 June 1952. *Ibid.*

Pattullo came to lunch. . . . He said he had wanted particularly to get my view as to what he should do before taking any step. My advice was without hesitation to tell the people and the Legislature to decide as to who should lead the government. To go right ahead with his session; tell the members frankly that he was in a difficult position; ask for their cooperation. Under the Constitution having the largest party, it was his duty to carry on.

King added that Pattullo "said he had the same views himself but was immensely relieved to have them confirmed by me."⁹³

King was tempted to become directly involved on one occasion. Advised by Pattullo that Hart had come out in favour of coalition, King noted in his diary that "my first thought was of appointing Hart to the Senate to save that situation. If, however, he is prepared to go to the Tory party, I doubt if he has any right to recognition from the Liberal Govt [*sic*]."⁹⁴ King also provided advice, via Pensions and National Health Minister Ian Mackenzie, to Lieutenant-Governor Woodward on dissolution and constitutional propriety.⁹⁵ However, King carefully avoided taking a public position on coalition, an approach which was consistent with his political style. As R. M. Dawson notes, King "avoided taking risks, and he would postpone action, if by doing so he could ensure a greater degree of safety."⁹⁶ If he had openly aligned himself with one side in the coalition controversy, he would obviously have risked alienating the other. The safest course for King was to steer clear of the controversy and this was the course that he followed.

FACTORS IN THE RISE OF COALITION

Although prominent federal Liberals followed King's lead and refrained from public comment on coalition, there was at least one private proponent of coalition among them, Senator J. W. de B. Farris. Farris feared the consequences of another election which would probably follow the defeat of a minority Liberal government: "Pattullo's leadership for another month might so destroy the morale of

⁹³ *W. L. Mackenzie King Papers*, diaries, 31 October 1941. National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), MG 26 J13.

⁹⁴ *King Papers*, diaries, 17 November 1941. NAC, MG 26 J13.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 November 1941.

⁹⁶ R. M. Dawson, "King, Meighen and Approaches to Political Leadership," in T. A. Hockin, ed., *Apex of Power: The Prime Minister and Political Leadership in Canada* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1971): 92-95

the Party that a large portion would, in disgust, swing to the C.C.F. The rest would probably vote Conservative."⁹⁷ Farris did not envision a permanent union of Liberals and Conservatives to fight socialism. He believed that the chances of a minority Liberal government surviving, particularly after the resignations of Pearson and Hart, were very slim. Consequently, a coalition was essential if another election was to be avoided.

Farris's attitude toward coalition was shared by Norman Whittaker. Whittaker entered the Pattullo cabinet as Attorney-General on 14 November believing that the Liberals could carry on as a minority government. Whittaker changed his mind, however, following the resignations of Pearson and Hart. "With them in, I felt we could survive for a considerable period of time," Whittaker noted in a 1977 interview, "without them, I thought it was very doubtful."⁹⁸ Like Senator Farris, Whittaker believed that another election posed a greater threat to the Liberal party than did coalition with the Conservatives.

In their public pronouncements, Liberal coalitionists typically argued that another election was not "in the public interest." The real concern of many coalitionists was reflected in Hart's convention warning that "if there was another election forced upon the electors there would only be a handful of Liberals returned."⁹⁹

Liberal coalitionists generally avoided references to socialism and the CCF in their public pronouncements. Their official position called for "the formation of a Coalition Government of the three parties, or, failing that, by the coalition of two of them." By the time of the convention, Harold Winch, the CCF caucus, and the CCF Provincial Council had all rejected the idea of CCF participation in any form of coalition. While Liberal coalitionists privately assumed that if a coalition were formed it would be with the Conservatives alone,¹⁰⁰ they did not admit publicly that coalition with the CCF was out of the question. They did not want to give the impression that coalition was aimed at keeping the CCF from power, that the Liberals were anti-socialist, or even that the Liberals had more in common with the Conservatives than with the CCF. Most importantly, they did not want the convention to become a contest between minority government and coalition with the Conservatives. To have come out explicitly in favour of a Liberal-Conservative coalition would have

⁹⁷ Farris to Ian Mackenzie, 17 November 1941. *Farris Papers*, SC, UBC.

⁹⁸ Interview with Norman Whittaker. *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ "Report . . .," *B.C. Liberal Association Papers*, SC, UBC.

¹⁰⁰ Farris to Mackenzie, 17 November 1941. *Farris Papers*, SC, UBC.

provided Pattullo with political ammunition for the convention. He could have accused the coalitionists of opportunism while reminding delegates of past battles with the Conservative foe. By publicly clinging to the idea of a three-party coalition, Liberal coalitionists were able to advance their case as one of principle rather than one of expedience.

Most of those who spoke in favour of the coalition resolution at the convention emphasized the need for stable government in wartime. Among these speakers was George Weir, Provincial Secretary prior to his defeat in the 1941 election. Weir presented the coalitionist case in its most eloquent form:

In the face of this all-pervading threat to the existence as a free people, to the survival of things of the spirit as well as of the body, surely the time has come to lay aside partisan considerations. The clarion call is for unity, unity of purpose and of action. The public interest demands it and nothing less will suffice.¹⁰¹

The war against Nazi Germany was not going well in 1941, and speeches such as Weir's undoubtedly stirred the emotions of convention delegates. Weir implied that it was selfish and unpatriotic to continue fighting party battles in the legislature while others were fighting real battles against tyranny overseas. The war, according to Norman Whittaker, was "a factor in inducing a great many Liberals to favour the idea [of coalition]."¹⁰² The war was not the only factor, however; fear of another election, and the possibility of a Liberal defeat or a CCF victory, also contributed to Liberal support for coalition.

Some Liberals were drawn toward coalition by a fear of the CCF, though they did not say so publicly. Whittaker described the Liberal mood after the 1941 election:

The CCF was coming along and a great many people thought they were a menace, being a socialist party . . . and a lot of free enterprisers were worried about a socialist, or semi-socialist, government.¹⁰³

The case of Byron Johnson, a prominent Vancouver Liberal in 1941 and Coalition Premier from 1947 to 1952, is revealing. Johnson, in introducing the coalition resolution at the convention, argued that

¹⁰¹ "Report . . .," *B.C. Liberal Association Papers*, SC, UBC.

¹⁰² Interview with Norman Whittaker, *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Loc. cit.*

stable government was necessary in wartime. He said he saw no difference between the three party leaders in regard to the war effort and therefore called for the formation of a three-party coalition.¹⁰⁴ However, Johnson's correspondence reveals a distinctly anti-socialist bent. In a 1943 letter regarding the growing electoral strength, provincially and federally, of the CCF, Johnson declared:

Apparently we are on the eve of a Dominion Election and naturally anyone who has the interests of Canada at heart is very much concerned. It does not make much difference as far as the continuance of private enterprise goes whether a Liberal or a Conservative Government is elected but should the C.C.F. be returned not with a majority but even with the largest group, private enterprise will receive a blow from which it will take many years to recover. . . . Can we afford to see a death struggle between the Liberal and Conservative parties to see which one will survive when the one thing they have in common is at stake, private enterprise [?]

Johnson left no doubt as to how he would answer this question. "The greatest danger to private enterprise today," he wrote, "is that those who believe in it are divided in [*sic*] two camps, Liberal and Conservative."¹⁰⁵ Johnson believed that coalition, because it protected private enterprise from the threat of socialism, was a triumph of principle over narrow partisan interests.

To Pattullo, coalition was a betrayal of principle which would ultimately heighten, rather than diminish, the threat of socialism. Pattullo saw the Liberal party as a distinct middle road between conservatism and socialism, a party which could advance social reform without imposing socialistic limitations on economic freedom. In his view there were "three isms' from which the public may make choice [*sic*]: Liberalism, Toryism and Socialism. You will never beat Socialism by attempting to unite Liberalism and Toryism."¹⁰⁶ Pattullo believed the strength of the Liberal party lay in its centrist approach. If the party were to stray too far to the right or to the left, it would fall from power. Coalition with the Conservatives would, he believed, move the Liberal party too far to the right. He warned convention delegates that "I predict 66 percent of the Liberal party will go over to the C.C.F. if you have a coalition."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ "Report . . .," *B.C. Liberal Association Papers*, SC, UBC.

¹⁰⁵ Johnson to Frederick K. Morrow, 18 October 1943. *Johnson Papers*, SC, UV.

¹⁰⁶ Pattullo to the Liberal Associations of British Columbia, 9 September 1943. *Pattullo Papers*, BCARS.

¹⁰⁷ *Vancouver Province*, 3 December 1941.

In *British Columbia: A History*, Margaret Ormsby claims that "above everything, he [Pattullo] was certain that a political vacuum had been created into which a completely new party could move."¹⁰⁸ This was not the case. Pattullo had no inkling that a new party might surface as a result of coalition. He believed that coalition would cause the electorate to polarize on left-right lines. Without the Liberal party at the centre, reformist Liberals would desert the party for the CCF. As a result, the Liberal base of support would be eroded and the party would be incapable of winning power on its own.

Pattullo combined remarkably clear vision in assessing the consequences of coalition with remarkably poor judgement in his handling of the issue. By ignoring calls for coalition after the 1941 election, he appeared oblivious to the apparent dangers of minority government. Rightly or wrongly, many of his colleagues feared the consequences of another election. Pattullo recognized these fears but did nothing to soothe them. Because he distrusted the motives of his colleagues, he refused to discuss the coalition question with them. As a result, Liberal coalitionists were forced to publicly challenge him on the issue. Had Pattullo called his elected Members together and explained his views on coalition, he might have persuaded them to follow a different course of action. This was not to be, however, and Pattullo's suspicions led in the end to his defeat.

¹⁰⁸ Ormsby, *British Columbia* . . . , 478.