

# The Non-partisan Approach to B.C. Politics: The Search for a Unity Party — 1972-1975

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Appeals to politicians to abandon party lines and unite in the face of some obvious threat are a common political phenomenon. Both the economic depression of the 1930s and the Second World War prompted demands for the formation of "national" governments in British Columbia and elsewhere. Fear of a socialist election victory has been another stimulant to non-partisanship in this province. Elements of this can be found as early as 1906. It has been a regular and persistent feature for British Columbia politics since 1945.

Non-partisanship has a venerable history in British Columbia. Until the turn of the century conventional party lines did not exist at the provincial level. Most candidates stood as independent individuals. The successful ones manufactured ministerial coalitions after election. The system eventually proved unstable and was abandoned in 1903 when both national parties ran candidates in the general election of that year. The change brought new stability to British Columbia politics but also prompted periodic denunciation of the evils of partisanship.

In 1906, during the campaign leading up to the 1907 election, the Liberals and Conservatives in one Vancouver constituency decided to run a single candidate against the Socialist incumbent. This action caused the *Western Clarion*, a Vancouver Socialist newspaper, to predict "the complete abandonment of so-called party lines in every part of the province where the labour vote threatens to follow the lead in Ladysmith and Nanaimo."<sup>1</sup> The paper lamented that this result would make more difficult "the easy victory of Socialist candidates in three-cornered contests."

During the 1920s anti-socialism was not a conspicuous issue although appeals to traditional party supporters to abandon party lines occupied a prominent place in the rhetoric of the Provincial Party. These demands were based on more traditionally patriotic grounds, as was the case in 1933, when Premier Tolmie called for a union government of Liberals

<sup>1</sup> *Western Clarion*, Vancouver, 14 July 1906.

and Tories. This followed the Kidd Committee's claim that many of the province's problems were the fault of partisan greed. "... the party system has been the instrument by means of which these difficulties have been created,"<sup>2</sup> said B.C.'s businessmen as they advocated substantial constitutional changes.

In 1941 coalition became a fact. With the excuse of wartime expediency, the Liberal minority dumped its leader, Premier Duff Pattullo, and united with the Tories to form a government. As the years passed this coalition became more specifically anti-socialist. It also developed internal problems of its own. As the strain increased, electoral reform was seized upon as a means of allowing competition between the old-time parties while keeping the socialists out of office. In the end, of course, the real beneficiary of preferential voting was Social Credit, which, after a slim victory in 1952, was confirmed with a substantial majority the following year. From 1953 it became the party of anti-socialist unity.

In 1972 Bennett's anti-socialist coalition finally failed. Social Credit popularity across the province fell from 46.8 per cent in 1969 to 31.6 per cent and a total of ten legislative seats. The Liberals captured 16.4 per cent of the vote (a slight decline) and five seats, while the Progressive Conservatives (who had run only one candidate in 1969) received 12.67 per cent and two seats. The NDP moved up from 33.9 per cent in 1969 to 39.59 per cent and became the government, with thirty-seven seats.

These statistics are important because they became the focus of a debate that was to dominate opposition politics for the next three years. The many reasons for the Social Credit decline and the NDP success were forgotten, as attention focused on the fact that 60 per cent of the province's voters had not supported the NDP. It was claimed that the will of the majority had been frustrated and opposition politicians were urged to put aside their differences to ensure a non-socialist victory in the next election. The fact that former Premier W. A. C. Bennett had never received an absolute majority was overlooked or explained away on the grounds that Liberal and Conservative votes against him were still "non-socialist."

### *The Majority Movement*

Exhortations to party loyalists to put aside their traditional differences in favour of a united stand against the NDP began soon after the 1972

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Government to Investigate the Finances of British Columbia* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1932), p. 16.

election. A variety of people began to look for a simple and certain way of preventing a repetition of the events of 1972. There was some talk of electoral reform (and particularly a return to the preferential ballot) but most interest centred on the desirability of combining the three opposition parties into a single force against the NDP. This, the argument ran, would ensure a "free-enterprise" 60 per cent majority against the NDP's 40 per cent.

One organization, the Majority Movement, soon came to dominate this discussion. Its growth and activities are worth examining in some detail.

Early in 1973 a number of people met in the Kamloops home of Jarl Whist, a self-made millionaire lawyer and sometime Liberal. Whist, who said he had come to Canada because "he could see no future for himself under Norway's socialists,"<sup>3</sup> became leader of S.O.S. — the movement to "Stamp Out Socialism." Publicity about the new organization struck a responsive chord. Whist claimed afterwards that within a week he had received membership applications from 50 other smaller but similarly oriented groups throughout the province.

Despite the obvious acronymic advantages of the original choice, the group soon changed its name to the "Grass Roots Society." "Now any politician who talks about representing 'the grass roots' immediately identifies himself in the public mind with us," said Whist.<sup>4</sup> It purchased quarter-page advertisements in papers throughout the province stating its intention "to restore free-enterprise government in British Columbia" by "unifying the three free-enterprise parties or, failing that, the free enterprise vote."

This message was the primary theme of the Majority Movement, founded shortly afterwards under the joint leadership of Whist and Burnaby lawyer Arnold Hean. Hean had begun a series of public speaking engagements in late March urging unity to defeat the NDP. On 1 May 1973, in a speech to the Rotary Club of Vancouver, he called upon all British Columbians to "... organize now into a single, non-socialist force so that private, individual enterprise can use the strengths it has laboured so long to develop."<sup>5</sup> Under his and Whist's guidance the Majority Move-

<sup>3</sup> *Star*, Toronto, 25/4/73. The group included Rafe Mair, who later became the first Social Credit candidate nominated for the 1975 election. Mair is now Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Duplicated typescript issued by Hean, p. 25.

ment began its activities by issuing a series of pamphlets calling on British Columbians to unite for freedom and private enterprise.

"In the last few months we have reached a turning point in the history of our province," said a tabloid-sized handout issued in mid-1973.

For the first time we have found ourselves together, on the same side, in the political arena. Most of us now realize that what differences we had were small, and what unites us in common is very large and very important.

The Majority Movement has been formed to offer a non-political alternative which goes beyond party differences. It is open to concerned British Columbians who value personal freedom above all else. The Majority Movement exists to unite the thousands of voices, from every part of our province, who realize that we are powerless as long as we are divided.<sup>6</sup>

Memberships were solicited at a cost of \$2 with a special rate of \$1 for students and pensioners.

The Movement seems to have made little headway through the summer of 1973 and did not play a role in the Kelowna by-election. In the fall, however, it began an active public relations program and initiated contact with the legislative representatives of the three opposition parties. Beginning in October, Hean, who was now chairman, began corresponding regularly with the politicians in Victoria.

The letters stressed that the Movement was not in competition with the established parties and did not intend to nominate candidates. "The Majority Movement does not ask you to abandon your federal political association . . ." said Hean on 12 October.

. . . but rather, for the good of the people of this province, and of yourself, to Unite with other politically-minded, non-socialist persons who are desirous of bringing to British Columbia a competitive, individual enterprise, social reforming government, for the sole purpose of creating a non-coalition United Party to form the next government of this province.<sup>7</sup>

The October 23rd resignation from the legislature of D. M. Brousson, Liberal MLA for North Vancouver-Capilano, gave the Movement its first practical opportunity. Efforts were made to persuade the opposition parties to agree to run a single candidate against the NDP. Despite the fact that the NDP had little chance of winning (it had never received more than 20 per cent of the vote in Capilano and had run fourth, by a narrow margin, in 1972) Hean's group argued that a split vote could occur and said the time had come for B.C.'s politicians to demonstrate

<sup>6</sup> Undated Majority Movement pamphlet.

<sup>7</sup> A. Hean to David Anderson, 12/10/73.

their willingness to "... begin acting on behalf of all British Columbians."<sup>8</sup> The politicians were urged to arrange "... that this contest be fought out between one non-socialist candidate and one NDP candidate."<sup>9</sup>

The parties refused to co-operate, demonstrating vividly the obstacles to the creation of a united front. The Liberals, who had polled nearly 40 per cent of the popular vote in 1972 (compared with about 20 per cent for each of the other parties) said that the way to ensure that the NDP did not win was to support their candidate, Gordon Gibson. The Liberal leader, David Anderson, argued that efforts to manipulate the outcome of the election were anti-democratic. In a speech to UBC law students, on 28 November, he described the Majority Movement as "Fascist in content."<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Scott Wallace, the Progressive Conservative leader, also refused to co-operate. He described the leaders of the Majority Movement as "naive businessmen" and supported the nomination of Peter Hyndman, Conservative Party president, as the Tory candidate.

Social Credit also ignored the pleas of Mr. Hean. The official opposition party nominated Mayor Ron Andrews (who had attempted earlier to get a joint endorsement from the Liberals and Socreds) and mounted a strong campaign using Bill Bennett's Kelowna by-election slogan of "Unity."

The messages were clear. The Liberals were hoping to build on their traditional strength in the riding and reinforce Anderson's claim that they were the real opposition to the NDP. The Tories were praying for a win which would revive hopes dashed by the 1972 results and Derril Warren's successive defeats in North Vancouver-Seymour and Kelowna. The Socreds wanted a victory to reinforce their traditional claim to be the real alternative to the NDP.

The Majority Movement was undeterred by the party leaders' lack of interest. General support and membership were growing and the organization's first public meeting, in West Vancouver on 29 November 1973, was attended by Liberal MLA Allan Williams. Speakers at the meeting included hotliner Pat Burns (who said he could "... feel the shackles of socialism"<sup>11</sup> closing in), the Reverend Desmond Kimmitt (who had flirted briefly with the idea of contesting the Liberal nomination), and former Socred MLA Herb Capozzi (who had tried to arrange for himself a

<sup>8</sup> *Letter to the Editor*, by Brian Tracy, Chief Co-ordinator, the Majority Movement, 5/12/73, as circulated to the party leaders.

<sup>9</sup> Brian Tracy to David Anderson (and all party leaders), 13/12/73.

<sup>10</sup> *Sun*, Vancouver, 30/11/73.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* (Allan Fotheringham).

Liberal-Socred joint endorsement for the North Vancouver by-election). Burns was using his hotline show to promote both the Movement and the idea that he be endorsed as a single candidate to contest Coquitlam against Premier Barrett in the next general election.

Hean's group toyed with the idea of endorsing one of the party candidates but in the end restricted its by-election activity to a public meeting in North Vancouver on 10 January. The three non-NDP candidates were invited, but Gibson and Andrews declined to attend. In his reply to the invitation Gibson told the organizers:

I disagree with the fundamental premise of the "Majority Movement" as expressed in your literature and public statements. . . . let us suppose your stratagem were successful. Would we not then have in B.C. a one-party state? And under your logic, if that one-party situation were divided up, would not the socialists sweep back again? . . . the people wouldn't buy it. They would properly be most suspicious of a group that attempted to remove their voting options and, in effect, restrict competition in the political arena. . . . We would be much better to revert to the solution, developed in many parts of Canada, of three parties — one of the centre, one of the right, and one of the left. In a fundamentally non-socialist province such as British Columbia, the voters can then, if they choose, alternate between the centre and the right in forming governments, as is the case on the national scene.<sup>12</sup>

The absence of the key politicians put the Movement at a disadvantage. The 700-seat theatre they rented was not full and the meeting was disrupted by candidate Norman Dent of the Christian Democratic Party. *Sun* columnist Allan Fotheringham attended and continued a series of savage columns describing the Movement as "goofy" and its steering committee as "dabblers and dilettantes, short-cut artists who won't take the time or trouble to get into a legitimate political party but who want to be the anti-socialist manipulators from the outside." He also claimed that coordinator Brian Tracy had been ". . . a soldier with the Congolese white mercenary army for \$900 a month."<sup>13</sup> One ray of hope for the organization was that Liberal MLA Pat McGeer, who had made a pro-unity speech in November, was present.

Gibson squeaked through the by-election with a fifty-seven vote plurality over Andrews and the Majority Movement turned its attention back to the general political scene. It now claimed 3,000 members, 1,500 of whom were in Vancouver and 400 in Victoria. It began sponsoring a series of public meetings to discuss a plan ". . . to assure the DEFEAT of

<sup>12</sup> Gordon Gibson to Arnold Hean, 31/12/73.

<sup>13</sup> *Sun*, Vancouver.

the NDP government at the next election . . . worked out with the help of some of the best brains in British Columbia.”<sup>14</sup> These meetings urged supporters to organize petition and letter campaigns aimed at the opposition MLAs, all of whom started receiving a growing volume of pro-unity mail. The standard letter urged the politicians to “. . . work toward the . . . formation of a united opposition with sitting members of the opposition parties in B.C.” and stated that the writer believed that “. . . the return of a free-enterprise government to British Columbia is more important . . . than a party label.”

Typical, if more detailed, was a letter sent on 19 April 1974 to Bill Bennett and David Anderson. It suggested an arrangement whereby Socreds and Liberals would not oppose each other in ridings they held at that time, and would divide equally other ridings between them. The Conservatives would be “convinced” that they would best serve British Columbians by withdrawing from the next election.

I very strongly believe that if two or more candidates oppose each NDP candidate in the next provincial election that there is every likelihood that the NDP will be re-elected. . . . British Columbia and your political parties cannot afford the luxury of a split “Free Enterprise” vote. . . . *We cannot afford another term of Socio-Communism.*<sup>15</sup>

A postscript asked that the writer’s name not be publicized as “I am presently employed by the Provincial Government and . . . jobs in B.C. in my profession are becoming quite scarce.” It added that “if, however, you need a candidate with a good mining background for the next election please let me know.” Bennett took the writer seriously. T. M. Waterland was subsequently elected and appointed Minister of Mines and Petroleum Resources and Minister of Forests.

The Movement supplemented these letters with further personal appeals by its chairman to the opposition MLAs. In a letter dated 18 March, Hean lamented the fact that “. . . there can be no certainty that the NDP will be defeated” and offered to “convene a meeting, or meetings, to help in the formation of the strong, purposeful united force to which I have referred.”<sup>16</sup>

In another letter, on 3 May, his view of politics was clarified further. “. . . we can no longer enjoy the ‘luxury’ of party politics,” he wrote.

<sup>14</sup> Majority Movement “Special Notice,” 27/2/74.

<sup>15</sup> T. M. Waterland to David Anderson and W. R. Bennett, 19/4/74. Emphasis in original.

<sup>16</sup> A. Hean to David Anderson, 18/3/74.

There is one cause, and one cause only. That surely must be to make certain the defeat of the socialists and to guarantee the election of a government strong enough to undo the tragic damage and restraints of marxian economic philosophy. . . . the battle lines between the philosophies of socialism and capitalism in British Columbia are now formed. The people are demanding that politicians pay attention to the real issues and put aside the concept of a number of "party" loyalties, the fight for which can only weaken the total effort necessary to defeat socialism.<sup>17</sup>

He asked the party leaders to arrange a meeting to discuss unity "no later than June 15 next."

The reason for the deadline soon became clear. The Movement had decided to organize a rally against Bill 31, the Mineral Royalties Act, and to use this event as a focus for unity efforts. Opposition MLAs were to be invited to address the meeting. Clearly, a unity declaration by the party leaders would be a substantial achievement.

The results were more modest. As a protest against the bill it was a failure. There were as many "Howe Street" miners as "Hard Rock" miners and the demonstrators did not begin arriving in Victoria until 20 June, the day the bill was receiving third and final reading. The main day of the rally took place after the legislature had adjourned for the summer.

On the other hand, four MLAs — Allan Williams, Pat McGeer, Scott Wallace and Hugh Curtis — used the occasion to pledge publicly their willingness to abandon their parties for a new organization to fight the NDP. These declarations were partly a result of the efforts of the Majority Movement. More specifically, however, they were the culmination of a series of parallel events. The Movement may have contributed to these developments but it was only a reflection of other forces that were causing individual politicians to re-examine their traditional positions.

### *The Politicians*

The opposition was thoroughly demoralized in the months immediately after the NDP came to office. The Socreds, who had expected to win, found their ranks decimated. The two Tories, both converts from other parties (Wallace from the Socreds, Curtis from the Liberals via Action Canada), had entertained fond hopes, only to have them dashed and their leader defeated in his bid for a seat. The Liberals were the gloomiest. Except for newcomer Anderson, they had all hung on the barbed wire of minority party politics for many years. They had received fulsome praise

<sup>17</sup> A. Hean to David Anderson, 3/5/74.



for their prowess in the legislature but had been unable to transform this acclaim into votes. The Liberal share of the popular vote had declined steadily with the party unable to break out of its urban enclaves.

The 1972 victory of the NDP was the last straw. They were profoundly depressed about the Liberal Party's and their own political chances. The decline of the federal party's position in the fall election deepened their gloom as did the new Premier's frequent references to the need to make the job of MLA a full-time occupation. All were in the midst of successful careers and not eager to spend more time in Victoria except as cabinet ministers. McGeer was fond of saying that he would not go back after another election to sit in opposition.

During the fall session the Liberals had received good press. "Liberals Sparkle in Opposition Role," said the headline of a 25 October 1972 Vancouver *Province* column by Peter McNelly (soon to become an assistant to the NDP Premier). New to the provincial scene and still hopeful, Anderson delegated to McGeer and Williams the job of sounding out the Socreds for potential defectors. None appeared, although this was not surprising in view of the poor Liberal showing in the fall federal election. The party lost twelve of its sixteen seats in B.C. and did not look strong in the province or nationally.

By the end of the year Williams was beginning to talk about the formation of a new party. In mid-January he issued a public appeal for the formation of a new "B.C. Party" appealing to "free-enterprise voters." The press asked other party leaders to comment. Progressive Conservative Leader Derril Warren and Socred House Leader Frank Richter expressed their willingness to sit down with the Liberals and discuss the matter. "I certainly feel there has to be a new approach to getting back to the two-party system with free enterprise on one side and the socialistic philosophy on the other," said Richter.<sup>18</sup>

The appeal by Williams referred to the division of votes in the 1972 election and pointed out that "... the opposition parties received 61 per cent of the popular vote but won only 17 seats in the 55-member legislature." In a reference to the activity which would result in the formation of the Majority Movement he said that people "all over Vancouver" were working for a union of private-enterprise supporters.<sup>19</sup>

Williams' pronouncements led to some difficult Liberal caucus meetings. Eventually he agreed to refrain from public comment in order to let

<sup>18</sup> *Courier*, Kelowna, 18/1/73.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

Anderson have a chance to try and build some Liberal momentum. This proved a difficult task. Williams was not the only caucus problem. D. M. Brousson began talking of resigning from the legislature during the spring session. He found the demands of the longer sessions detracted from his business interests. His enthusiasm was not revived when the Liberals ran a poor fourth in the Kelowna by-election. Brousson's first action upon meeting with the caucus at the opening of the fall session was to announce his intention to resign. He pointed out that he would not be able to attend most of the session because of a trip to the USSR. He was persuaded to withhold his announcement until after his return. The resignation took place 23 October 1973.

When the fall session ended events began to move. Pat McGeer made a speech espousing unity, and at a caucus meeting in Vancouver soon afterwards Allan Williams announced that he would not be going back to Victoria for the next session. This caused some consternation on the part of Gordon Gibson Jr., who had just decided to contest the nomination for the North Vancouver-Capilano by-election. Williams finally agreed that he would delay his announcement until after election day.

Williams, McGeer and Gardom were all finding themselves under substantial pressure from the advocates of unity. It was the current mania of the Vancouver establishment, the primary message being that no politician could expect any corporate campaign fund donations until unity was an accomplished fact. It was symptomatic of the times that Brousson's speech to the convention which nominated Gibson contained a unity appeal! McGeer and Williams not only appeared at Majority Movement meetings during this period, but gave little help to Gibson in the campaign. They were convinced the Liberals could not hold the seat. Their lack of enthusiasm was demoralizing to the party faithful. Just before the by-election Anderson made one of his many efforts to pull the group together. The results were typical. Short-run success and long-run failure.

The night before the Liberals' North Vancouver nominating convention, Anderson called a special meeting of the provincial executive of the party. It was held in conjunction with the annual dinner of the West Vancouver-Howe Sound Liberal Association. Gardom was absent, but the other caucus members came and were asked to declare their positions. McGeer indicated that as far as he was concerned the unity issue was dead. He had made the effort in good faith and failed. "The other parties have said they aren't interested. That settles the question, doesn't it?"<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Sun*, Vancouver, 6/12/73.

He added that he appeared to be “. . . the best flyer of lead balloons in the party’s history.” Williams told the group, in an emotion-filled speech, that it was up to the members to give their elected representatives more support. That was the way to win as Liberals. He went on to say that he had met Liberal Party members who suggested it might be better to join Social Credit than stay split and keep the NDP in power. “I fought the Social Credit for seven years,” he said. “It’s an insult to suggest we should join the Social Credit party.”<sup>21</sup> The Vancouver *Sun* headline for the following day’s story said “No Interest in Coalition. Liberal Big Guns Shoot Down Merger.” The headline was premature.

The Liberals won the by-election narrowly. Williams shelved his resignation plans, and as the new legislative session got underway he and McGeer embarked on a series of discussions with other opposition MLAs about the possibility of a new political alliance. Although still convinced that a merger was impossible, Anderson was aware of (and unable to prevent) the talks, as was Bill Bennett. Having undergone a sudden transformation since the poor Tory showing in the by-election, Scott Wallace was taking a leading role, as was his colleague, Hugh Curtis. In retrospect there appears some chance the negotiations might have been successful (two Social Credit members joining the five Liberals and two Conservatives would have replaced Social Credit as the official opposition) had not other political events intervened.

On 25 February 1974, as a result of information provided by *Province* reporter Malcolm Turnbull, Anderson asked Premier Barrett a series of questions about a meeting between Barrett and members of the B.C. Egg Marketing Board on 26 October 1972. The discrepancy between the Premier’s reply and the sworn statements of two of the participants led to Anderson’s public charge that the Premier was lying. The “chicken and egg war” had begun. This is not the place to canvass the specifics of the issue; what is important is that the government was in trouble and Anderson was the opposition hero of the moment.

Within a few days the legislature was in chaos. Anderson was ejected several times. The government had lost control, as had the Premier, who revealed the strain he was under by shouting obscenities at the *Sun*’s legislative reporter Marjorie Nichols in the corridor outside the legislative chamber.

In an effort to salvage the situation, Highways minister Graham Lea rose in the House on 7 March, as discussion began for the fourth day on

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

the Premier's estimates, and alleged that the "chicken and egg" debate was a smokescreen to cover "... secret meetings behind the backs of their leaders ... by some members of this House who desire to have power at any price."<sup>22</sup> He said that "this entire debate ... has been a cover-up to the most vicious political game of all, and it's called 'Carve Up Your Leader'." The allegation was met with laughter and derision from the opposition benches and Lea's facts were just inaccurate enough that denials and professions of loyalty could be made by all concerned.

The whole thing might have blown over, and the negotiations continued, had it not been for Tory leader Scott Wallace, who immediately called a press conference. While asserting that no conspiracy was taking place behind the backs of the other party leaders, he revealed that he had spoken with eight other MLAs about the possibility of forming a new party. He said he now favoured the idea of a united opposition party and "... was trying to find out in a preliminary way if the MLAs were ready to put B.C. first and step away from the labels ... to form a united party for B.C."<sup>23</sup> He named Socred Bob McClelland as one of the participants in these discussions.

Faced with Wallace's revelations, Allan Williams admitted that he had been involved but said that Anderson knew of the discussions. "There has never been any discussion on my part that would lead me to the position that I would desert David Anderson."<sup>24</sup> He said he had been thinking about opposition politics since the 1972 provincial election because "the opportunity to really bear down on the government was being diminished" by the opposition split. The emergence of the Majority Movement had led to fear that a four-way division was about to occur and as a result he had started "man-to-man discussions" with his own caucus and with members of the two other opposition caucuses. He said he saw three alternatives for a new opposition movement "but two of them — coalition or everyone joining one of the three parties — are not acceptable." Personally, he favoured the third option, forming a new party, "but there is certainly no consensus to that being a possibility."

The revelations had one important immediate effect. They put a temporary halt to the unity negotiations. Wallace, said Marjorie Nichols on 12 March, had "... single-handedly and without concern for his own party ... succeeded in destroying any immediate opportunity for coalition

<sup>22</sup> *Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 4th Session, 30th Parliament, vol. 2, p. 879.

<sup>23</sup> *Province*, Vancouver, 8/3/74.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 9/3/74.

amongst the opposition parties in the legislature. . . . He has further, through apparent betrayal of one confidence, succeeded in alienating himself from at least a dozen MLA colleagues."<sup>25</sup> Wallace was called on the carpet by the directors of his own party but succeeded in getting a vote of confidence when he threatened to resign. He emerged from the meeting unshaken, saying " . . . he was determined to continue to build a 'grass roots' organization to restore free enterprise as the government policy of British Columbia."<sup>26</sup> He added that he had sent letters explaining his stand to all members of the party and had received 299 replies, 216 of them favouring the unity stand.

Informal discussions between members of the three opposition caucuses continued. Williams, McGeer, Wallace and Curtis were determined to go the unity route, and even drafted and signed a manifesto to that effect. They made no real headway with the Socreds but they were attracting public support. Mail continued to flow in and their efforts were a favourite open-line topic. On 25 March, the Hon. J. V. Clyne wrote to Scott Wallace urging him to continue his efforts. "Unless some way is found of unifying the non-socialist vote it would appear that socialism will continue to remain in power in B.C. for the foreseeable future on the strength of the minority vote."<sup>27</sup> He also wrote to David Anderson on 17 May urging " . . . the non-socialist parties to unite on a temporary basis . . . to achieve unity of purpose in rescuing B.C. from becoming a socialistic state. . . ."<sup>28</sup> John Ellis, the Bank of Montreal's head man in B.C. and chairman of the Canadian Development Corporation, also got involved, hosting dinners at which the unity message was prominent.

All of the opposition MLAs were receiving a great deal of mail on the subject. Pat McGeer replied to his with the statement that "To be successful . . . there has to be a commitment by almost everyone to work together. So far no one from Social Credit has expressed any public interest. That remains a problem which I hope may be overcome in the future."<sup>29</sup> Wallace told people that " . . . since a majority of people are seeking a United Party, I am interested in helping in any way possible to bring about the creation of such a party."<sup>30</sup> He encouraged people to have their

<sup>25</sup> *Sun*, Vancouver, 12/3/74.

<sup>26</sup> *Victorian*, Victoria, 1/4/74.

<sup>27</sup> *Province*, Vancouver, 30/3/74.

<sup>28</sup> J. V. Clyne to David Anderson, 17/5/74.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Dr. P. McGeer, 25/3/74.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Dr. Scott Wallace, 26/3/74.

friends write to other MLAs so that "opposition members know very clearly the extent of feeling which exists in all the communities. . . ."

As the legislative session drew to a close the unity efforts became more frantic. Mail from supporters of the Majority Movement was flowing in and Liberal caucus members were meeting frequently in their efforts to find some basis for a new party. Anderson was in trouble, torn between efforts to keep his caucus together and the need to remain a party loyalist during a federal general election.

Finally, Scott Wallace did it again. In a speech in Courtenay, the night before the Majority Movement rally, he pointed the finger at Bill Bennett as ". . . the only obstacle to formation of a united opposition party in B.C."<sup>81</sup> He claimed that "several" Social Credit MLAs had expressed interest in the formation of a new party but that ". . . the move has been blocked by the rigid and self-interested, fixed position taken by Bill Bennett." The result was further hardening of the Socred position. In a joint statement the Social Credit caucus branded Wallace's words as "malicious mischief-making." They said he was transferring his "vendetta" against W. A. C. Bennett onto the younger Bennett "in the cheapest possible way."<sup>82</sup>

Wallace's timing was unfortunate. While it might have made no difference in view of previous events, the enmity he aroused ensured that when Wallace, Curtis, McGeer and Williams stood on the steps of the Legislative Buildings to tell the Majority Movement rally on 21 June that they were ready to leave their individual parties for the sake of unity, no Socreds joined them. The official opposition was represented, bitter speeches condemning Bill 31 and the NDP were made, but mention of unity with the other parties was carefully avoided.

The efforts continued but the outcome was now clear. A new party was not going to be formed. The Socreds were not going to break ranks. Bennett, aided by Wallace's mis-timed statements, was beginning to get his hands on the reins of his party. His control over his caucus was increasing and the organizing drive spearheaded by Grace McCarthy a year earlier was beginning to pay dividends. Social Credit was attracting both members and money at an increasing rate. In July 1974 they had reached the take-off point. Bennett had carefully maintained a neutral position during the federal election and while Allan Williams tried to force the pace of unity on 9 July by announcing that a unity party would be formed within 30

<sup>81</sup> *Times*, Victoria, 20/6/74.

<sup>82</sup> *Province*, Vancouver, 21/6/74.

days, Bennett had no intention of co-operating. Williams' announcement became meaningless within a few days when his old nemesis Peter Hyndman bolted the Tories and joined Social Credit. Mayor Bill Vander Zalm of Surrey followed Hyndman, Hugh Curtis changed sides, and the stampede to Social Credit began. Scott Wallace underwent a sudden reconversion to Conservatism.

The three Liberals found themselves in an untenable position. The logical step was to join Social Credit but they were reluctant to make the move. In fact, on 13 August 1974 Allan Williams told a reporter that the real target of unity had not been the NDP.

Defeat of the Social Credit Party was the main motive behind the unity movement. Everybody said we wanted to defeat the NDP . . . but what we really wanted was to defeat the Social Credit Party . . . that's why Bill Bennett didn't join in. . . . If Unity had got going Social Credit would have disappeared entirely . . . and the NDP may have been swept away in the process.<sup>33</sup>

They were convinced that the Liberal Party could not make any substantial gains and their actions were helping to ensure that this prophecy came true. The party was demoralized and Anderson was forced to devote most of his energy to efforts to hold it together. Demands that Williams and McGeer be expelled from the caucus were growing.

Periodic efforts were made to heal the breach. Just before Christmas, 1974, the caucus met with the party executive. Gardom, Williams and McGeer expressed in fairly strong terms their intention to fight on as Liberals. Williams announced on the television program "Capital Comment" that he would be seeking nomination again as a Liberal.

It was not to be. None of the problems which had prompted their initial interest in unity had disappeared. With the opening of the spring session of the legislature the whole process began again.

The parameters had changed somewhat. It was now a question of whether some arrangement could be made with Social Credit. Discussions began in earnest and by 22 April had reached the point where Anderson felt he had no choice but to join his MLAs in accepting a dinner invitation from Bill Bennett — since they would have attended anyway. Within a few days Allan Williams was repeating his calls for free-enterprise "unity," Anderson was calling him "dishonourable," and the game was over. On 9 May, Williams and McGeer resigned from the Liberal caucus to sit as independents. Gardom followed them on 20 May. All three

<sup>33</sup> *Times*, Victoria, 14/8/74.

expressed their high regard for Anderson as Liberal leader, but said they believed change was necessary. Said Williams: "... the need for a free-enterprise grouping capable of replacing the present government is no longer merely desirable. It is an absolute necessity."<sup>34</sup> McGeer added that the situation "requires that people put the over-all good of the province ahead of party politics."<sup>35</sup> Gardom stressed that unless there was "public solidarity" behind one party, or some "unifying or coalition concept," "the socialists will win the next election."<sup>36</sup>

They sat as independents for the remainder of the session but made it clear a further step was inevitable. McGeer had told the press when he resigned from the Liberal caucus that he would seek re-election only if he thought the NDP could be beaten. "I don't want to spend another Parliament in opposition."<sup>37</sup> On 30 September he and his colleagues indicated they thought the end for the NDP was near. At a press conference at the Hotel Vancouver they pledged support to Bill Bennett and confirmed Social Credit as the unity party.

The results of the election, with Social Credit increasing its share of the popular vote from 31.6 per cent to 48 per cent, the NDP holding firm at 40 per cent and the Liberals and Conservatives declining substantially, confirmed both the relevance and irrelevance of the unity movement. On the one hand it became clear that a contrived coalition of the sort advocated by the Majority Movement was not an essential ingredient to defeat the NDP. On the other hand, it also was clear that the politicians who had been calling for unity were responding to a very real public demand. Their assessment of the political situation in the province proved to be more realistic than that of the defenders of multi-party competition.

It is also interesting to speculate on why Barrett did not do more to prevent coalition behind Social Credit. Clearly, it was in his interests to keep the non-socialist ranks divided. He made some efforts at the legislative level. By giving the minority party leaders financial assistance he helped keep them in the game through difficult times. But he failed to take the most obvious action of introducing a party and election financing bill which would have bolstered multi-party tendencies and helped to destroy Social Credit momentum. While none of the non-socialist parties received much corporate money during the hey-day of the Majority Movement —

<sup>34</sup> Allan Williams to David Anderson, 9/5/75.

<sup>35</sup> Pat McGeer to David Anderson, 9/5/75.

<sup>36</sup> Garde Gardom to David Anderson, 20/5/75.

<sup>37</sup> *Sun*, Vancouver, 10/5/75.



when overt efforts were being made to force the party leaders into a coalition — Social Credit became virtually the sole recipient of significant contributions after mid-1974. In retrospect it is difficult to understand why the NDP did not introduce disclosure requirements, spending limits, and partial public funding of campaign costs before going to the polls.

But this is historical speculation. The more interesting questions concern the future. Many ardent advocates of unity, including some of the primary political actors, are concerned about a future in which there is only a socialist alternative to Social Credit. Each time the new government takes an unpopular action, some of the people who supported it as the only alternative to the NDP wonder what they will do next time.

An obvious step would be a general movement to either the Liberals or Tories as a non-socialist alternative. Such a step is difficult as long as they retain their federal affiliations. Furthermore, the success of one provincially seems to require the disappearance of the other, and this is unlikely to happen.

Electoral reform seems a more likely possibility. "Preferential" or "alternative" voting, Gordon Wismer's panacea of 1951, still appeals to many people. In a speech just after the election, J. V. Clyne told the Chilliwack Rotary Club that return of the NDP to office was inevitable unless preferential voting was introduced. It would, he said "give effect to the combined will of the majority of voters" and would be "the best system of voting for British Columbia."<sup>38</sup> The idea was supported by Liberal leader Gordon Gibson during the 1975 election and has been espoused in the past by Pat McGeer. It is interesting, although perhaps not surprising, that some of the enthusiasm with which Bennett, McGeer and others used to talk of election reform seems to have disappeared now they are in government. Bennett has, however, promised a commission of enquiry into the whole subject.

A final question which emerges out of the unity affair of 1972-1975 is whether the NDP can hold its 40 per cent share of the electorate. If it can build on this base, then political observers in B.C. may soon have another opportunity to watch a resurgence of the unity theme.

<sup>38</sup> "Electoral Reform," an address by J. V. Clyne to the Chilliwack Rotary Club, 16 January 1976. Mimeographed.