

**THE SEARCH FOR SOLIDARITY:
THE INDUSTRIAL AND POLITICAL ROOTS OF THE COOPERATIVE
COMMONWEALTH FEDERATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1913-1928**

by

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Abstract

Born out of the industrial and political struggles of organized labour at the end of the First World War, the BC CCF was a product of organizational and ideological conflict in the 1910s and 1920s. This study explores the shift of BC socialism towards industrial action, which culminated in the One Big Union and the sympathetic strikes of 1919. It then examines the emergence of anti-Communism on the Left, shaped by the experience of political unity and disunity during the 1920s. These two factors fundamentally influenced the ideology and strategy adopted by the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in British Columbia.

The ideological and tactical divisions of the 1930s were contested during the 1910s and 1920s. The collapse of the One Big Union, combined with deteriorating relations with the Communist Party, shifted BC socialists away from industrial militancy and toward parliamentary forms of struggle.

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“Patriotism to a specific organization or to a party at the expense of class solidarity, is but a degree less detrimental than the national patriotism of our masters.”

-Jack Kavanagh,
British Columbia Federationist, 21 January 1921.

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Labour and Socialist organizations in British Columbia, 1913-1928

AFL	-----	American Federation of Labour
ACCL	-----	All-Canadian Congress of Labour
BCFL	-----	British Columbia Federation of Labour
CBRE	-----	Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees
CCF	-----	Cooperative Commonwealth Federation
CLDL	-----	Canadian Labour Defense League
CLP	-----	Canadian Labour Party
CNUX	-----	Canadian National Union of Ex-Servicemen
CPC	-----	Communist Party of Canada
FLP	-----	Federated Labour Party
FOC	-----	Finnish Organization of Canada
GEB	-----	General Executive Board (OBU)
ILA	-----	International Longshoremen's Association
ILP	-----	Independent Labour Party
ILP (Soc.)	-----	Independent Labour Party (Socialist)
IWW	-----	Industrial Workers of the World
LRC	-----	Labour Representation Committee
LSR	-----	League for Social Reconstruction
LWIU	-----	Lumber Workers Industrial Union
MLL	-----	Miners' Liberation League
NUWA	-----	National Unemployed Workers Association
OBU	-----	One Big Union
RCWU	-----	Relief Camp Workers' Union
RILU	-----	Red International of Labour Unions (Profintern)
RSPC	-----	Revolutionary Socialist Party of Canada
SDP	-----	Social Democratic Party
SLP	-----	Socialist Labour Party
SPC	-----	Socialist Party of Canada
STLA	-----	Socialist Trades and Labour Alliance
TLCC	-----	Trades and Labour Congress of Canada
UBCJ	-----	United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners
UFA	-----	United Farmers of Alberta
UFC	-----	United Front Council (Victoria)
UMWA	-----	United Mine Workers of America
Vancouver TLC	-----	Vancouver Trade and Labour Council
VTLC	-----	Victoria Trades and Labour Council
WPC	-----	Workers Party of Canada
WUL	-----	Workers' Unity League

Dedication

This work is dedicated to all those who committed their lives to the struggle for industrial and political democracy in British Columbia. In their honour, may the lessons embedded in their experiences of victory and defeat inform and inspire contemporary and future efforts toward social change.

PART I: Industrial Roots

Introduction and Historiography

At every propaganda meeting the question is asked, 'Should we organize on the Industrial or on the Political field?' Surely it is not a case of 'either' and 'or'... Very slowly the lesson of organization on the political field is being learned... Political democracy doesn't amount to much without industrial democracy but it may be a tool that may be of some use in attaining industrial democracy... We agree that political power must be based on industrial power.¹

J.S. Woodsworth, 1 October 1925
One Big Union Bulletin

If there is one constant on British Columbia's Left, it is the incessant search for solidarity, the struggle to unite working people against the common foe. The history of BC socialism in the years 1913 to 1928 demonstrates the paradoxical nature of working-class solidarity: the persistence and dedication of individuals and groups to overcome the differences that divide them; and their inability to bridge conflicts over personality, ideology and tactics. The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) represents one effort toward labour political unity in BC. Unlike other organizations, both before and after, the party survived internal and external pressures and established itself as a permanent force in provincial politics. This study will focus on the industrial and political roots of the CCF in BC, providing a pre-history of the party as a foundation for future studies.

The relationship articulated by Woodsworth at the beginning of this chapter – between the strike and the ballot box – shaped the development of British Columbia's labour movement. By the 1930s, the struggle for socialism became entrenched into the CCF and Communist camps, with the former restricting its activity to constitutional

change and the latter embracing extra-parliamentary action. It is tempting to extend this relationship backwards into the 1910s and 1920s, defining the founders of the CCF as *social democrats* and the Communists as *direct actionists*. The historical record, however, does not support this conclusion.

No clear-cut distinction existed between syndicalism and social democracy at the end of the First World War. Rather, socialist politics in the 1910s and 1920s can be characterized by experimentation with different forms of action and organization. The syndicalist belief in revolution by means of direct industrial action – symbolized by the vaunted general strike tactic – inter-mingled with sustained activity in the electoral arena. Those labeled syndicalist in 1919 emerged as the social democrats of the 1930s.² The CCF grew out of the experiences of BC socialists in their search for solidarity, their efforts to forge unity on both the industrial and political fields – between syndicalism and social democracy. During the war, a *complementary* relationship emerged between industrial and political action, between groups such as the Federated Labour Party and the One Big Union (OBU). It was only later, with the defeat of the sympathetic strike tactic, the decline of the OBU and the emergence of Russian Communism, that this relationship became *adversarial* in nature. The ideology and tactics of the CCF were imbedded in this transition, the product of conflict and change on British Columbia's Left. It was not until

¹ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 1 October 1925.

² Syndicalism can be defined as socialist revolution by means of *direct action*, through the organization of workers into industrial unions to seize control of the means of production through the vaunted general strike tactic – “building the new society within the shell of the old.” This ideology has been juxtaposed to social democracy, an amorphous category, rejected by some historians, that can be defined as evolutionary rather than revolutionary change, through the election of working-class representatives to legislative bodies. While the Bolshevik party itself was shorthand for the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party, the development of Communism and anti-Communism in the twentieth century situated “social democracy” as a moderate, constitutional, and gradual alternative to the revolutionary, insurrectionary Marxism of the Russian Communists. Neither syndicalism nor social democracy adequately describe, on their own, the forms of activism embraced by BC socialists in the 1910s and 1920s.

the 1930s that tactical categories became entrenched and militant industrial action was rejected by the ascendant leaders of social democracy.³

The founders of the BC CCF – individuals such as Victor Midgley, Bill Pritchard, Ernest Winch, Angus MacInnis, Wallis Lefeaux, Jim Woodsworth and others – drew from a rich experience of attempting to build solidarity in the industrial and political organizations of workers – in labour unions and in socialist parties. During the First World War, they were catapulted into the leadership of a working-class revolt, typified by the sympathetic strike and centred around the One Big Union. In the heat of battle in spring 1919, wide sections of workers looked to industrial action as the means of securing their emancipation. But as the crisis was contained, the leadership imprisoned, and the organizations crushed, BC's socialist movement embarked on a profound transformation. External and internal forces influenced the development of labour political action in the 1920s, and by the end of the decade socialists found themselves divided into two hostile camps: the Communist and non-Communist Left. The failure to achieve lasting solidarity, either industrial or political, determined the basis of unity around which the non-Communist Left would rally in the 1930s. When the CCF gave organizational expression to this desire for unity, action would be limited to the political

³ In this project I am indebted to the research of several historians. See Peter Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way* (Montréal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999); Dorothy G. Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel: Ernest Winch and the Growth of Socialism in Western Canada* (Vancouver: Boag Foundation, 1977); A. Ross Johnson, "No Compromise – No Political Trading: The Marxian Socialist Tradition in British Columbia." (PhD Thesis: UBC, 1975); Ronald Grantham, "Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement in British Columbia, 1898-1933." (MA Thesis: UBC, 1942); Richard Grey Stuart, "The Early Political Career of Angus MacInnis." (MA Thesis: UBC, 1970); Gerald Friesen, "Yours in Revolt: Regionalism, Socialism, and the Western Canadian Labour Movement," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 1 (1976): 141-157; Paul A. Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Boag Foundation, 1967); and Walter D. Young, "Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia," *BC Studies* 32 (Winter 1976-77): 139-162. For a discussion of CPC-CCF relations in BC in the 1930s, see Patrick George Hill, "A Failure of Unity: Communist Party-CCF Relations in British Columbia, 1935-1939." (MA Thesis: University of Victoria, 1977).

field. Defying the maxim of Woodsworth, political power ceased to be based on industrial power.

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This study will depart from existing historiography in its attention to the more ambivalent expressions of working-class solidarity during this period, with a focus on tensions and conflict *within the labour movement itself*. Many working-class histories adopt as their subject a specific organization, individual or political ideology. The subject is often portrayed as the noble protagonist, with rival organizations or personalities framed as antagonistic, often nefarious, forces. Such a method hinders our ability to understand the complex and dynamic forces involved in solidarity-building on the Left. This study, in contrast, will embrace a comparative approach, exploring the interaction within and between groups. It will explore how the clash of organizations, individuals, and ideologies shaped the programme and strategy of the BC CCF.

Both militarism and capitalism contributed toward the formation of a radical working-class consciousness in BC, which found expression in organizations such as the Socialist Party of Canada, the Federated Labour Party, the One Big Union, the Communist Party of Canada, the Canadian Labour Party, the Independent Labour Party and, in 1932, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. This work will examine organizational change and conflict on British Columbia's Left prior to, during, and in the aftermath of the First World War, providing a detailed regional study that expands upon existing historiography of the national dimensions of the 1919 labour revolt and the political organizations born out of it.

Dominated as it was by men, the early socialist movement of BC offers little opportunity for a balanced approach to the period. Women's voices are scarce in the existing source material. While women no doubt played an active role in the labour and socialist movements, particularly during and after the First World War, leadership positions remained the near exclusive domain of men. Furthermore, the historical record consists primarily of source material produced by men that was often selective and exclusive. As a result, the contributions of Helena Gutteridge, Lucy Woodsworth, Rose Henderson, and others are difficult to determine.⁴ I have endeavoured to include women's voices where I discovered them, but acknowledge that the organizations investigated and the resulting study does not adequately represent the role of women during this period. This is a potent theme that needs to be interrogated in the future, applying the methodology of historians such as Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster to the historiography of British Columbia's working class.⁵

The first three chapters of this thesis are structured around the rise and fall of the One Big Union, as this organization was at the centre of the most sustained expression of working-class solidarity in the history of British Columbia labour: the sympathetic strikes of spring 1919. The first chapter explores the origins of BC socialism and the development of industrial unionism and independent labour politics during the Vancouver Island Miners' Strike and the First World War. In an original contribution to the historiography of the period, Chapter Two will examine the OBU experience through

⁴ See Irene Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice in British Columbia: Helena Gutteridge, the Unknown Reformer* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992).

⁵ See Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women for the Cause: Women, Labour, and the Left in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989); Kealey and Sangster, eds. *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989); also Sara Diamond, *Women's Labour History in British Columbia: A Bibliography, 1930-48* (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1980).

the lens of Victoria labour. Chapter Three surveys the impact of 1919 on industrial organization in British Columbia generally and in Victoria, while the final two chapters look at the development of independent labour political action. Chapter Four focuses on the emergence of BC Communism, while the fifth chapter is centred around the Canadian Labour Party experience. Those seeking a detailed narrative of the steps culminating in the formation of the BC CCF in 1932 may be disappointed. This story has been told elsewhere,⁶ and my research had led to the conclusion that the basic contours of labour political organization – into the rival Communist and ILP-CCF camps – was firmly established following the CLP split in 1928. The relationship between these two tendencies, contested throughout the 1920s, remained essentially unchanged until the last decade of the twentieth century.

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The experience of British Columbia labour has been investigated by other historians, but an important question remains unanswered: *how did efforts toward labour industrial and political solidarity in the 1910s and 1920s influence the ideology and strategy of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in BC?*

Dorothy Steeves' 1960 biography of Ernest Winch, *The Compassionate Rebel: Ernest Winch and the Growth of Socialism in Western Canada* explores the early contours of BC socialism.⁷ Taking Winch as her subject, Steeves discusses the relationship between the OBU and the CCF, illuminating conflict internal to the political

⁶ Ross Alfred Johnson, "No Compromise – No Political Trading: The Marxian Socialist Tradition in British Columbia," (PhD Thesis (History): UBC, 1975); Ronald Grantham, "Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement in British Columbia," (MA thesis (UBC), 1942); and Walter D. Young, "Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia," *BC Studies* 32 (Winter 1976-77): 139-162.

⁷ Dorothy G. Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel: Ernest Winch and the Growth of Socialism in Western Canada* (Vancouver: Boag Foundation, 1977).

organizations of BC labour. A CCF MLA during the Second World War, Steeves entered the CCF through the non-Socialist League for Social Reconstruction, but migrated rapidly toward the left-wing of the party. Her insight fills important gaps in the existing historiography. The contours of left-wing political activism during the 1910s and 1920s are illuminated by two other works: William “Ol’ Bill” Bennett’s 1936 work *Builders of British Columbia* and Tom McEwen’s 1951 biography of Bennett, *He Wrote for Us: The Story of Bill Bennett, Pioneer Socialist Journalist*.⁸

Several works provide valuable departure points for this study. Ross Alfred Johnson’s 1975 PhD dissertation “No Compromise – No Political Trading: The Marxian Socialist Tradition in British Columbia,” stands out as the most comprehensive study into the Socialist Party of Canada. Johnson sums up the relationship between earlier political formations and the CCF: “an unbroken red thread runs through the history of the BC Left, from the Revolutionary Socialist Party of Canada, beyond the SPC through the FLP and ILP-SPC, and into the CCF.”⁹ Johnson’s dissertation built on an earlier work by Ronald Grantham, who fused his intellectual pursuits with hands-on experience in the CCF of the 1930s. Grantham, like Johnson, identified the importance of Marxism in the formation of the party:

If a Co-operative Commonwealth is finally built in British Columbia, it may well be that the biggest factor in its actual realization will have been what socialists would call the realism of the Marxists – their forecast of how capitalism would seek to preserve itself, their stern warnings, and their uncompromising devotion to their cause.¹⁰

⁸ William Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Broadway Printers, 1937); Bennett Tom McEwen, *He Wrote for Us: The Story of Bill Bennett, Pioneer Socialist Journalist* (Vancouver: Tribune Publishing Company, 1951).

⁹ Ross Alfred Johnson, “No Compromise – No Political Trading: The Marxian Socialist Tradition in British Columbia,” (PhD Thesis (History): UBC, 1975), 394.

¹⁰ Ronald Grantham, “Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement in British Columbia,” (MA thesis (UBC), 1942), 241.

Few works focus explicitly on the BC socialist experience during the First World War. The study that comes closest is Allen Seager and David Roth's "British Columbia and the Mining West: A Ghost of a Chance," a chapter in Craig Heron's compilation *1919: The Workers' Revolt in Canada*.¹¹ Other studies in Heron's book provide methodological and thematic insight into the period, but provide little detail of the BC experience. The closest approximation to the themes explored in this thesis can be gleaned from Gerald Friesen's 1977 article in the founding issue of *Labour/Le Travailleur*: "Yours in Revolt: Regionalism, Socialism, and the Western Canadian Labour Movement."¹² David Bercuson's *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* represents the most comprehensive study into that organization, but deals with the BC experience only peripherally, and Bercuson's ideological biases limit the utility of his conclusions.¹³ The same can be said of A. Ross McCormack's 1977 work, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919*, a ground-breaking study into the early socialist movement that dealt faithfully and extensively with a wealth of primary source material.¹⁴ The most recent study into the OBU, Todd McCallum's MA thesis "'A Modern Weapon for Modern Man': Marxist Masculinity and the Social Practices of the One Big Union, 1919-1924,"

¹¹ Allen Seager and David Roth, "British Columbia and the Mining West: A Ghost of a Chance," in Heron, ed., *The Workers' Revolt in Canada*, 231-267; also James R. Conley, "Frontier Labourers, Crafts in Crisis, and the Western Labour Revolt: The Case of Vancouver, 1900-1919," *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (1989), 1-37.

¹² Gerald Friesen, "Yours in Revolt: Regionalism, Socialism, and the Western Canadian Labour Movement," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 1 (1976), 141-157.

¹³ David Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978).

¹⁴ A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919*, (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

provides original insight into the role of gender in the OBU and in the labour movement generally.¹⁵

Perhaps the most relevant work for this study is Peter J. Campbell's recent book, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way*.¹⁶ Campbell's discussion of the lives of Bill Pritchard and Ernest Winch is the product of original research. While Campbell deals tangentially with the relationship between the OBU, SPC, and CCF, he does not explore this theme in depth. The study that deals most explicitly with the relationship between organizational and interpersonal conflict in the formation of the BC CCF is Walter D. Young's article "Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia."¹⁷ This work drew from original research related to his larger study of the national CCF, *The Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF, 1932-61*.¹⁸ Like historians before and after, Young's conclusions were influenced by his experiences in the power struggles of the BC CCF-NDP:

attempts had been made to establish an organization of the left that was truly national. The attempts had all met with failure, largely through the inability of any of the groups to agree on either doctrine or politics. The left in Canada at this time – post-Winnipeg strike and pre-CCF – was fissiparous, elitist, paranoid and self-centred. The chief figures in the movement in British Columbia were, without any doubt, committed socialists, but their commitment was no less self-seeking than that of any politician, however much they would lard their disagreements with pious statements of socialist dogma.¹⁹

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¹⁵ Todd McCallum, "A Modern Weapon for Modern Man': Marxist Masculinity and the Social Practices of the One Big Union, 1919-1924," (MA thesis (history): SFU, 1995).

¹⁶ Peter Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way* (Montréal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999).

¹⁷ Walter D. Young, "Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia," *BC Studies* 32 (Winter 1976-7): 139-162.

¹⁸ Young, *The Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF, 1932-61* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969).

¹⁹ Young, "Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia," 139.

British Columbia history remains a fertile field of inquiry. This is particularly true of labour and working-class history. Susan Mayse's impressive work *Ginger: The Life and Death of Albert Goodwin*, though lacking adequate notation, breathes life into the chaotic events that comprise a portion of this study.²⁰ Similar works on the experiences of Vancouver Island miners expand our understanding of BC's working-class.²¹ An important component of this historiography derives from the historical actors themselves. George Hardy's 1956 memoir, *Those Stormy Years: Memories of the Fight for Freedom on Five Continents*, is one of the only first-hand accounts dealing with Victoria labour during the pre-war period. Arthur J. Turner's political autobiography, *Somewhere – A Perfect Place*, discusses – albeit briefly – the forgotten Victoria General Strike of 1919.²² Bruce Lowther's history of the Victoria Labour Council is the only comprehensive study into the records of that organization, but lacks a unifying theme or analytical framework.²³

In terms of academic histories specific to BC, Mark Leier's *Where the Fraser River Flows: The Industrial Workers of the World in British Columbia* provides an original perspective into the contours of pre-war working-class organization, but stops abruptly at 1914, and focuses heavily on Vancouver.²⁴ With the IWW as its subject, the work invariably privileges industrial action over political action, rather than exploring the

²⁰ Susan Mayse, *Ginger: The Life and Death of Albert Goodwin* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 1990).

²¹ Lynne Bowen, *Boss Whistle: The Coal Miners of Vancouver Island Remember* (Lantzville: Oolichan, 1982); also John Norris, "The Vancouver Island Coal Miners, 1912-1914: A Study of an Organizational Strike," *BC Studies* 45 (1980): 56-72; and John Douglas Belshaw, *Colonization and Community: The Vancouver Island Coalfield and the Making of The British Columbian Working Class, 1848-1900* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

²² George Hardy, *Those Stormy Years: Memories of the Fight for Freedom on Five Continents* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1956); and Arthur J. Turner, *Somewhere – A Perfect Place* (Vancouver: Boag Foundation, 1981), 23-24.

²³ Bruce Lowther, *A Better Life: The First Century of the Victoria Labour Council* (Victoria: Victoria Labour Council, 1989).

interaction between these diverse tactical forms. Gordon Hak offers an important contribution to the historiography of British Columbia's Left, with his detailed research into industrial organization in the forestry sector and the development of labour political action in rural BC.²⁵ In his study of socialism and labourism in the province, Hak suggests that

writers have tended to focus on the more radical manifestations of the province's left-wing tradition. The concentration on the militant mining towns of the Kootenays and Vancouver Island and on the small band of articulate socialist theorists in Vancouver has obscured the broader contours of class formation in the province, leading at times to caricatures of early twentieth-century British Columbia in which confrontations between radical Marxists and the bourgeoisie define the political and social experience.²⁶

Some understanding of the emergence of the Communist Party in BC can be gleaned from Ian Angus's *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* and William Rodney's *Soldiers of the International: The First Ten Years of the Communist Party of Canada*, but the BC experience is treated as a mere footnote in the development of the national party.²⁷

One of the few historical studies that deals directly with BC Communism in the 1920s is David Akers' 1992 article "Rebel or Revolutionary? Jack Kavanagh and the

²⁴Mark Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows: The Industrial Workers of the World in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1990).

²⁵Gordon Hak, "British Columbia Loggers and the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, 1919-1922," *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (1989), 67-90; "The Socialist and Labourist Impulse in Small-Town British Columbia: Port Alberni and Prince George, 1911-33," *Canadian Historical Review* 70:4 (1989), 519-42; "On the fringes: capital and labour in the forest economies of the Port Alberni and Prince George districts, British Columbia, 1910-1939," (PhD Dissertation (History): Simon Fraser University, 1986); *Turning Trees into Dollars: The British Columbia Coastal Lumber Industry, 1858-1913* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

²⁶Hak, "The Socialist and Labourist Impulse," 518.

²⁷Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montréal: Vanguard, 1981); and William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International: The First Ten Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968).

Early Years of the Communist Movement in Vancouver, 1920-1925.”²⁸ Patrick George Hill’s MA thesis examines Communist-CCF relations in the 1930s, but provides little insight into the 1920s.²⁹ The same is true of Raymond Frogner’s thesis “‘Within Sound of the Drum’: Currents of Anti-Militarism in the British Columbia Working Class in the 1930s” and Sean Griffin’s *Fighting Heritage: Highlights of the 1930s Struggle for Jobs and Militant Unionism in British Columbia*.³⁰ The themes explored in the thesis at hand, namely, conflict internal to the Left, are the subject of Dorothy J. Roberts’ 1972 study “Doctrine and Disunity in the British Columbia Section of the CCF, 1932-1956.”³¹ Despite the promise embedded in its title, Richard Grey Stuart’s 1970 thesis “The Early Political Career of Angus MacInnis” provides only a cursory overview of 1920s labour political organization before settling into an investigation of the CCF period.³²

The best discussion of the Canadian Labour Party experience in BC is in Martin Robin’s 1968 work *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour*.³³ Yet given the breadth of Robin’s study, both temporally and geographically, the ambiguous nature of labour political organization in 1920s BC receives inadequate treatment. Furthermore, Robin’s analysis of 1919 fails to grasp the complementary relationship between the ‘industrial’ OBU and the ‘political’ FLP, and the overlap in leadership between these two organizations:

²⁸ David Akers, “Rebel or Revolutionary? Jack Kavanagh and the Early Years of the Communist Movement in Vancouver, 1920-1925,” *Labour/Le Travail* 30 (Fall 1992): 9-44.

²⁹ Patrick George Hill, “A Failure of Unity: Communist Party-CCF Relation in British Columbia, 1935-1939.” MA Thesis (Political Science): UVic, 1977.

³⁰ Raymond Frogner, “‘Within Sound of the Drum’: Currents of Anti-Militarism in the British Columbia Working Class in the 1930s.” MA Thesis (History): UVic, 1987; and Sean Griffin, ed., *Fighting Heritage: Highlights of the 1930s Struggle for Jobs and Militant Unionism in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Tribune, 1985).

³¹ Dorothy J. Roberts, “Doctrine and Disunity in the British Columbia Section of the CCF, 1932-1956.” MA Thesis (History): UVic, 1972.

³² Richard Grey Stuart, “The Early Political Career of Angus MacInnis.” MA Thesis: UBC, 1970.

The syndicalist holiday momentarily arrested the development of labour and socialist representation but it served two important functions... By proving the futility of general strike tactics it finally confirmed the ‘political actionists’ in their long-standing dispute with the ‘direct actionists.’³⁴

Robin’s explanation is less convincing in light of the fact that the Socialists who led the syndicalist strikes of spring 1919 retained a commitment to electoral action. Robin succeeds, nonetheless, in identifying “fragmentation” as the basic weakness of the labour political movement in the wake of 1919, in his political history of the province, *Rush for the Spoils: The Company Province, 1871-1933*.³⁵

To date, the one work focused on BC and spanning the 1910s and 1920s that explores both industrial and political action is Paul A. Phillips’ landmark study, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia*.³⁶ Dealing with the industrial and political organizations of BC workers from the 1860s to the 1960s, Phillips’ chapter, “The Not So Roaring Twenties,” remains the most comprehensive investigation of the period to date. This fact can be interpreted as a tribute to Phillips’ study, but also as a criticism of the existing historiography. It is evident that much work remains to be done.

³³ Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labor* (Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre, Queen’s University: 1968).

³⁴ Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour*, 199.

³⁵ Robin, *Rush for the Spoils: The Company Province: 1871-1933* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 186 and 213. Robin writes: “Labour had emerged from the desultory sleep of the pre-war years but the syndicalist explosion and deep strife engendered by the One Big Union secessionist movement prevented the emergence of a strong labour party and undercut a possible coalition with urban reformers... The Liberal ascendancy was built on labour fragmentation.”

³⁶ Paul A. Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Boag Foundation, 1967).

Chapter 1. ‘Solidarity by Necessity’: Between Syndicalism and Social Democracy, 1913-1918

Since the early 1900s, British Columbia has served as an important source of leadership in Canada’s socialist and labour movements, playing an integral role in the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC), the One Big Union (OBU), and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). The experiences of BC socialists before, during and after the First World War determined the trajectory of working-class organization in the province, both politically and industrially, for much of the twentieth century.¹ A prevailing characteristic of the years 1913 and 1918 was the phenomenon of ‘solidarity by necessity,’ where BC’s fragmented Left pulled together to resist war-time attacks on workers, their living standards, and their organizations. As will be demonstrated, expressions of solidarity were increasingly located *between syndicalism and social democracy*: labour unity manifested itself on both the industrial and political fields. The development of working-class militancy during the war established the industrial basis for future labour political gains, sowing the seeds for the CCF.

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The industrial struggle at the end of the First World War – culminating in the sympathetic strikes in Victoria, Vancouver, Prince Rupert and Winnipeg – cannot be understood in isolation. Rather, the straddling of industrial and political action and the erosion of pre-existing tactical and ideological boundaries must be contextualized within the development of labour politics in preceding decades. Radical labour in BC was

¹ I use the term ‘socialist’ broadly. Clustered into the Socialist Party of Canada, the Industrial Workers of the World and the Social Democratic Party prior the war, BC socialists fragmented into the Socialist Party, the Federated Labour Party, the One Big Union, the Workers’ Party, the Communist Party, and the Independent Labour Party in the 1920s.

profoundly influenced by three distinct political movements in the early 1900s: British socialism, American syndicalism, and – after 1917 – Russian communism.² British Socialism was transplanted into BC soil by waves of immigrants from the British Isles.³ Schooled in the industrial struggles of Britain as told through publications such as Keir Hardie’s *Labour Leader*, these workers fled their home country to escape the class system and improve their condition. What they found in BC, however, confirmed rather than undermined the Marxism they had first encountered on the other side of the Atlantic.⁴

In the coal mines of Vancouver Island, the shipyards of Victoria, the docks of Vancouver, the port of Prince Rupert, the hard-rock mines of Sandon, and in communities and dwellings across the province, these working people converged and forged an indigenous form of socialism. Their ideological origins represented departure points, rather than fixed, permanent political homes. Many workers were exposed to socialism for the first time in BC, where the resource-based economy revealed a sharp divide between employer and employed. Between the 1870s and 1920s, hundreds of miners died in the pits of Vancouver Island.⁵ The king of the coalfields was Robert Dunsmuir – granted 1,900,000 acres of Crown land and \$750,000 in cash to build a 78-

² Clearly, the ideological make-up of labour and the Left cannot easily be consigned to these three narrow categories. For analytical purposes, however, these categories offer a useful departure point for a discussion of labour political and industrial action during the First World War.

³ Tom McEwen discussed this phenomenon in his biography of Ol’ Bill Bennett, as does Peter Campbell in his study into the life of Bill Pritchard. (See McEwen, *He Wrote for Us*, 11-15; and Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way*, 76-78.

⁴ Despite the rapid transformation of the British Labour Party in the early twentieth century, Hardy’s party was rooted in the struggles of the Lancashire coal miners and in Hardy’s opposition to the Boer War. This radical strain of British Labour complemented, rather than clashed with the Marxism of the IWW. It was in the realm of tactics that the two camps disagreed. (See McEwen, *He Wrote for Us*, 11-12.)

⁵ William Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Broadway Printers, 1937), 66-68; J. Kavanagh, *The Vancouver Island Strike* (Vancouver: BC Miners Liberation League, 1913), 1. Bennett describes the Island mines as “the most dangerous coal-mines in the world.” Kavanagh, meanwhile, writes that 373 miners died on the Island in the 28 years preceding the 1912 strike.

mile stretch of the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway.⁶ Dunsmuir amassed a tremendous fortune which translated into integral influence in the political field. His son James served as Premier of BC (1900-02), and in 1906 he was appointed Lieutenant Governor. A year after James Dunsmuir became premier, the coal miners of Nanaimo elected Jim Hawthornthwaite to the BC legislature. He was joined by Parker Williams in 1903, and the Socialists wielded the balance of power to extract important concessions from the Conservative government of Richard McBride (1903-1915), including the eight-hour working day for underground miners. In 1904, several small socialist groups coalesced into the Socialist Party of Canada. A dominant figure in the party in its formative years was E.T. Kingsley, an American who insisted, “The principles of unionism and socialism are antagonistic.”⁷ The SPC’s antagonism toward trade unionism and its refusal to advocate for immediate improvements in the lives of workers contributed to the formation of the Social Democratic Party in 1907.⁸

British immigrants worked beside Americans, who identified with several radical traditions. The Socialist Labour Party (SLP) of Daniel De Leon was an important

⁶ Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, 65; McEwen, *He Wrote for Us*, 24; Martin Robin, *Rush for the Spoils: The Company Province: 1871-1933* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 22.

⁷ Johnson, “No Compromise – No Political Trading,” 161, 171-2, 187, 190-1.

⁸ Johnson, “No Compromise – No Political Trading,” 282; Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour*, 101-104; also *Daily Times* (Victoria), 5 April 1907 and *Vancouver Province*, 2 April 1907. Branches of the SDP were soon organized by dissident SPC members in Nanaimo, Ladysmith, Victoria and Vancouver. joined this group, which maintained an adherence to Marxism while advocating short-term reforms to better the condition of workers. By 1911, a unity convention in Port Arthur, Ontario led to the expansion of the SDP into a national organization. Prominent socialists James Watters of the Victoria and James Simpson of Toronto left the SPC to join the SDP. That same year, the Ladysmith local of the SPC defected into the SDP. In 1912, the entire Nanaimo local of the SPC was expelled by the Vancouver-based Provincial Executive committee, leading that group to join the SDP. Running under the SDP banner, Jack Place was elected MPP for Nanaimo, after Hawthornthwaite – mired in a land speculation scandal – decided not to contest the seat and returned to England. In the same election, Parker Williams won the Ladysmith seat under the SPC banner, despite his membership in the SDP. The SPC executive expelled him for holding membership cards in two organizations, and Williams remained in his seat as an SDP legislator. By 1914, there were 689 SDP members divided in 15 different local. One of these was Angus MacInnis – streetrailway worker and future CCF Member of Parliament for South Vancouver. The SDP

influence, offsetting the SPC's opposition to industrial struggle. To De Leon, the revolution would be achieved by means of the 'political' and 'economic' arms of labour, expressed through his SLP and its affiliated Socialist Trades and Labour Alliance (STLA).⁹ The followers of De Leon could make common cause with the industrial militancy of William 'Big Bill' Haywood and his Western Federation of Miners (WFM). An affiliate of the Socialist Party of America (SPA) headed by Eugene Debs, the WFM established a tradition of industrial militancy and Marxian socialism in the mining communities of British Columbia, Alberta, Washington State, Idaho, and Colorado.¹⁰ In the western United States, this struggle reached the point of armed warfare between militias of the miners, Rockefellers' private armies, and the American state. The WFM and SLP traditions merged in 1905 with the founding of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) at Chicago, facilitating the spread of industrial militancy to other rural workers in BC – loggers, railway construction workers, and – in Nelson, BC – civic employees.¹¹ In Victoria, Vancouver, Prince Rupert, and Nelson, Wobblies established active locals that wreaked havoc on the local craft-union leadership. Disunity between the warring factions reigned, particularly with the retreat of the IWW from political action at its 1907 convention.¹²

published newspapers in Vancouver and Victoria, and the BC section had as its secretary a rising star in the province's socialist and labour scene: Ernest Edward Winch.

⁹ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 31 July 1920.

¹⁰ Johnson, "No Compromise – No Political Trading," 145-6; also Allen Seager, "Socialists and workers: the western Canadian coal miners, 1900-1921," *Labour/Le Travail* (Fall 1985): 23-54. Eugene Debs toured the province in June and July 1902, speaking in various communities.

¹¹ Industrial Workers of the World. *The Founding Convention of the IWW: Proceedings* (New York: Merit, 1969); and Mark Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows: The Industrial Workers of the World in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star, 1990), 35-49. According to Leier, the civic workers in Nelson, BC were organized into an IWW local, which was the largest union in the city by 1910.

¹² *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 31 July 1920.

By the 1910s, the followers of Hardie, Haywood, Debs, Marx and De Leon represented a fragmented army that marshaled under the banner of Socialism and proclaimed as its goal the unification of the province's working class. But allegiance to their organizations meant that these socialists spent far more time fighting among themselves than cooperating on the political and industrial fields. This tension on the Left is evident in the memoirs of George Hardy. Future general secretary of the IWW and a Comintern official in Britain, Hardy describes his initial contact with Marxian socialism, aboard a steamer from Vancouver to Victoria around 1909:

There was a Swedish lumberjack, very friendly... He was the first Socialist I ever met to my knowledge. He told me he had been a member of the Socialist Labour Party and was now a member of the IWW... On the voyage he explained to me in great detail the principles of industrial unionism and socialism, gave me what amounted to a lecture in elementary Marxism. He said repeatedly: "We are robbed at the point of production."¹³

Hardy secured a job as a teamster, and soon joined the SPC.¹⁴ But after organizing a local of the Teamsters¹⁵ and getting a taste of industrial struggle, he left the SPC and its "warped ideas of Marxism." He complained the SPC was "too 'revolutionary'... to take part in day-to-day struggles" such as strikes, which it called 'commodity struggles' that "had nothing to do with changing the social order." Even so, Hardy confided that the SPC introduced Marxism to many workers, who later were influential in building up the labour movement in the province.¹⁶

¹³ George Hardy, *Those Stormy Years: Memories of the Fight for Freedom on Five Continents* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1956), 27.

¹⁴ Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 28.

¹⁵ From its inception, the Victoria local of the Teamsters was hostile to International headquarters. The local was chastised after its first strike for failing to provide adequate notice to the employers, and an article Hardy submitted to the union journal was rejected because it advocated the formation of a District Council for the Pacific Coast, a move interpreted by the International leadership as industrial unionism. (See Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 37-38.)

¹⁶ Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 28-29 and 36. Hardy identifies Ol' Bill Bennett as one of these SPCers.

Like many BC socialists, George Hardy was drawn toward IWW and its “special type of trade union militancy,” which “quickly cast its spell over the masses of unskilled and weakly organized workers of the province.” Lumber workers, teamsters, marine transport workers and others joined the revolutionary union: “The IWW became extremely active in Victoria and our branch members came strongly under its influence... the idea of strength in the ‘One Big Union’ popularized by the IWW drew them strongly.”¹⁷ By the end of 1911, the Victoria teamsters voted unanimously to leave their International union and join the IWW.¹⁸ Similar moves toward secession occurred in the Island coalfields when miners voted to disaffiliate from the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLCC) in 1902 and join Haywood’s WFM.¹⁹ At the 1911 convention of the TLCC, held in Calgary, delegates endorsed industrial over craft unionism and passed a resolution favouring a general strike to prevent the outbreak of war.²⁰ Victorian James C. Watters, a former SPC candidate who had defected to the SDP, was elected President of the Congress.²¹

¹⁷ Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 37-38. The growth of the IWW in Victoria followed the arrival of organizer J.B. King in the city.

¹⁸ Within months of joining the IWW, the Victoria teamsters had dwindled to a few members, their ranks divided when a member raised an anarchist critique of religion, alienating Catholic members including the French Canadian secretary of the local. From the perspective of hindsight, and likely influenced by Comintern’s ‘boring from within’ policy and Lenin’s opposition to secession, Hardy describes the turn toward the IWW as “a serious mistake, particularly on my part. I should have fought to remain inside the AF of L and maintain our contact with the rest of the British Columbia Labour movement.” (See Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 38.)

¹⁹ Johnson, “No Compromise – No Political Trading,” 164. In the autumn of 1911, American Federation of Labour president Samuel Gompers, an avowed ‘labourist’ and opponent of syndicalism, was heckled at a mass meeting in Vancouver. (See Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 50; also Robert H. Babcock, *Gompers in Canada: a study in American continentalism before the First World War* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1974).)

²⁰ Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour*, 119 and Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 50-1. That year, 4000 Vancouver building-trades workers downed tools in a general strike.

²¹ Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 51. Watters contested the Victoria riding as SPC candidate in the 1903 provincial election.

Despite tensions between industrial unionists – centred around the IWW – and craft unionists – affiliated with the American Federation and Labour (AFL), the TLCC and US-based International unions – instances of unified action exist.²² The British Columbia Federation of Labour (BCFL) was formed in 1910 to provide cohesion between urban and rural workers and between the disparate sections of organized labour.²³ When civic authorities threatened the basic liberties of speech and assembly in imposing by-laws against street-corner meetings, rival socialist groups pulled together in self-defense. The Free Speech Fights in Victoria and Vancouver demonstrate the phenomenon of ‘solidarity by necessity,’ where coalitions were formed between the IWW, SPC, SDP and local trades and labour councils.²⁴ That pattern would be replicated many times in future years: rivalries between labour and socialist groups were subordinated in times of crisis, making possible united action in response to attacks on the basic liberties of workers, their living standards, and their organizations. But as Mark Leier has suggested with the term ‘solidarity on occasion,’ these coalitions exhibited a second important pattern.²⁵ Solidarity was temporary, and partial, with component groups jealously guarding their own interests and agendas at the expense of long-term class solidarity. These jealousies inevitably contributed toward the demise of working-class coalitions. The phenomenon of *solidarity by necessity* would manifest itself on the provincial scale during the epic Vancouver Island Miners Strike.

²² Industrial unionism was not the only axis of division. George Hardy identifies Marxism as a source of tension within the Victoria Trades and Labour Council (VTLC): “In 1911 we had several sharp arguments that led to divisions between our small Marxist group and the reformist section.” (See Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 48.)

²³ Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour*, 104-105. Watters chaired the founding meeting, held 2 May 1910.

²⁴ Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 35 and 73-4.

²⁵ Mark Leier, “Solidarity on Occasion: The Vancouver Free Speech Fights of 1909 and 1912,” *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (1989), 39-67; and Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 57.

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BC Communist William ‘Ol Bill’ Bennett described the dispute as the Vancouver Island ‘War.’²⁶ This sordid tale has been recounted elsewhere and need not be repeated here.²⁷ George Hardy discusses the political dimensions of the conflict: “the aim of the Tory McBride Government was to drive the socialists out of the coalfield: the aim of the miners was to enforce the law which the colliery owners were defying.”²⁸ The strike was aggravated by the miners’ insistence that they be represented by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). Beginning in September 1912, the conflict reached its apex in August 1913 when the militia occupied the strike zone and arrested 179 miners, including Socialist MPP Jack Place, SPC militant Joe Naylor, and union leader Sam Guthrie, a future CCF MLA. Organized labour was outraged.²⁹

The BCFL joined forces with the trades and labour councils of Victoria and Vancouver, and the UMWA, IWW, SPC, and SDP in organizing the BC Miners’ Liberation League (MLL).³⁰ Funds were raised for the families of the imprisoned men,

²⁶ Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, 69.

²⁷ See J. Kavanagh, *The Vancouver Island Strike* (Vancouver: BC Miners Liberation League, 1913); Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, 65-76; Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 58-60; Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 48-54; Lynn Bowen, *Boss Whistle: The Coal Miners of Vancouver Island Remember*, (Lantzville, BC: Oolichan, 1982); and Susan Mayse, *Ginger: the Life and Death of Albert Goodwin*, 55-74. The firing of a union-appointed gas inspector in one of Cumberland’s coal mines in September 1912 snowballed into the most sustained and violent industrial dispute in the province’s history. Many of the imprisoned miners were detained in Victoria’s old prison, on the sloping ground northwest of the present-day intersection of Hillside Avenue and Quadra Street. (See Bent Gestur Sivertz, *The Sivertz Family, Book 1: Christian Sivertz*, [hereafter *Christian*] [Parksville, BC: Arrowmaker Graphics, 1984], 44.)

²⁸ Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 50. This point was elaborated by Kavanagh: “Nanaimo is represented in the Provincial Legislature by Mr. John Place, Socialist. Newcastle, which includes Extension and South Wellington, is also represented by a Socialist, Mr. Parker Williams. Cumberland polled a strong Socialist vote at the last election and indications pointed to the probability of a working-class representative being elected at the next election. The miners of these districts having elected the only opposition to the present government of B.C., this fact must be taken into consideration.” (See J. Kavanagh, *The Vancouver Island Strike* [Vancouver: BC Miners Liberation League, 1913], 1.)

²⁹ Hardy writes that, “The sentences touched off the greatest labour demonstrations of protest even seen in the Province.” (See Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 51.)

³⁰ Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, 74; also Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 59.

and the BCFL discussed a general strike to secure their release.³¹ Affiliated unions were circularized on the question of “48 hours cessation of work” to support the miners.³² In August 1914, the BCFL executive issued a call for a general strike.³³ Victoria labour held a special meeting to debate the issue, where newly elected president Albert Wells, a socialist, “made an appeal for the delegates to vote for a strike.”³⁴ This action was averted, however, by an amendment from Christian Sivertz, past-president of the BCFL and a consistent opponent of radical politics and militant action.³⁵ In both Vancouver and Victoria, leading officials in the labour movement sympathised with the Conservative government of Richard McBride and undermined efforts toward labour solidarity.³⁶ In Victoria, militants such as George Hardy – secretary of the MLL in the city – and socialist John L. Martin challenged the authority of VTLC president John Day, “a staunch Tory supporter,” who was backed by a majority of delegates on the council.³⁷

³¹ Kavanagh, *The Vancouver Island Strike*, 13-14. As the state moved against the strikers in August 1913, a mass meeting of the BCFL approved a referendum vote of all affiliated members on the question of holding a 48-hour general strike. The Vancouver Trades and Labour Council (Vancouver TLC) refused a request to co-sponsor the event, with delegate Frank Farrington denouncing the mass meeting and the referendum, claiming “that only fools who could not keep their mouths shut were in jail.”

³² UVASC, VLC fonds, 80-59, Box 3.2. “Minutes,” 21 January 1914.

³³ UVASC, VLC fonds, 80-59, Box 3.2. “Minutes,” 12 August 1914.

³⁴ UVASC, VLC fonds, 80-59, Box 3.2. “Minutes,” 12 August 1914.

³⁵ Despite the lack of success in organizing a general strike, the MLL focused on fundraising and agitation. At the same January meeting where the request for the 48-hour work stoppage was received, J.L. Martin reported for the local MLL and stated that the tag day collection had raised a total of \$681, “which was very satisfactory.” At the next meeting of Council, a delegation from the MLL was given the privilege of the floor, announcing that a procession was going to be held on Saturday, 7 February 1914 and a meeting the next day “as a protest regarding the death of one Joseph Mairs a striking miner in Burnaby jail.” Delegates were asked to convey this news to the various locals. UVASC, VLC fonds, 80-59, Box 3.2. “Minutes,” 21 January 1914 and 4 February 1914.

³⁶ Kavanagh, *The Vancouver Island Strike*, 13.

³⁷ Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 52. The day of the 1913 municipal election, the MLL hired a special train to bring the striking miners to Victoria. Donning headlamps and other mining apparel, the strikers gathered outside polling stations, “to collect funds – and to remind the people to cast an anti-Tory vote.” That night, “thousands marched through the streets.” The industrial struggle of the miners spilled over onto the political field.

The situation was inflamed when 21-year-old Joseph Mairs of Ladysmith died in his jail cell.³⁸

The MLL is an important example of solidarity building in British Columbia prior to the First World War, where rival left-wing groups mediated their differences in attempting to put forward a united front in defense of the strikers and their families. The direct assault on the liberty, livelihood and organization of workers forced the consolidation of BC's Left. Like the Winnipeg Defense Committee of 1919 and the Canadian Labour Defense League (CLDL) of the 1920s and 1930s, the MLL was an expression of labour unity in self-defense: *solidarity by necessity*. State repression provided the catalyst to unity and action. The Ginger Goodwin strike of August 1918 and the Victoria and Vancouver sympathetic strikes of 1919 conform to this trend. Furthermore, the MLL exhibited the limitations of labour solidarity: the inability of constituent groups to subordinate their self-interests, which ensured coalitions were partial and temporary. While the miners' strike was ultimately broken, the struggle attracted international attention, with labour icon Mother Jones visiting the Island in June 1914.³⁹

The MLL harnessed both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forms of action. Its street demonstrations and advocacy of a general strike were paralleled by calls for greater labour representation in the legislature. On both fronts, the fruits of this agitation were not realized until the end of the First World War. By 1918, the general strike had

³⁸ See Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 52 and University of Victoria Archives and Special Collections (hereafter UVASC), Victoria Labour Council fonds (hereafter VLC fonds), 80-59, Box 3, "Minutes," 4 February 1914.

³⁹ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 3 June 1914; also *British Columbia Federationist*, 29 January 1915. The VTLC organized a meeting for Jones on Friday, 5 June 1914. Attempts by border officials to deny Jones entry into Canada were defeated by the labour councils of Vancouver and Victoria. For a detailed

crossed the threshold between theory and practice in BC. In 1920 miners' leader Sam Guthrie, arrested in 1913, was elected to the BC Legislature. A martyr of the Island strike, industrial militancy provided the basis for political victory. Guthrie served as CCF MLA in the 1930s and 1940s.⁴⁰

Efforts toward labour solidarity were also undermined in this period by the persistent plagues of racism and sexism in the workers' movement. A proposal by John L. Martin to form a Women's Auxiliary of the VTLC in April 1914 was tabled indefinitely by delegates.⁴¹ And fears of the 'Asian menace' increased when coal bosses threatened Japanese and Chinese workers with deportation if they refused to scab on the miners.⁴² Despite the duration and intensity of the miners' struggle, the persecution of the strikers, and the military occupation of the Vancouver Island coal fields, no general strike occurred. Socialists were unable to effectively challenge the influence of moderate labour officials. Neither the leadership of the labour movement nor the rank-and-file forced the situation to a head. Economic depression and high unemployment plagued the province from 1912 to 1914, weakening the bargaining power of labour and likely eroding the confidence of workers to engage in militant action. In May 1914, the IWW local in Victoria was forced to disband, as its membership dwindled in the midst of the depression.⁴³ As well, the attention of British Columbia workers was rapidly shifting toward Europe. A week before Victoria labour rejected the call for a strike in sympathy with the miners, Britain declared war on Germany.

history of this working-class leader, see Linda Atkinson, *Mother Jones: The Most Dangerous Woman in America* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1978).

⁴⁰ See Grantham, "Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement in British Columbia," Appendix 15, p. 8.

⁴¹ UVASC, VLC fonds, 80-59, Box 3.2. "Minutes," 1 April 1914.

⁴² Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, 69-70.

⁴³ Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 45.

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With the outbreak of war in August 1914, the bold promises of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLCC) to stage a general strike failed to materialize – as did socialist and labour opposition throughout Europe.⁴⁴ That spring, TLCC president James Watters, of Victoria, had voiced his opposition to war: “Do you know of a single instance where the working class have gained by war? I never have... When the workers decide there will be no war, there will be no war, because there will be nobody left to fight in them.”⁴⁵ But when Britain declared war on 4 August 1914, all was quiet on the western industrial front. When a group of socialists attempted to hold a meeting in Victoria’s Labour Hall to protest the summons to the militia, patriotic labour leaders condemned the action:

Speaking for the unions they said organized labor will not countenance any attempt to interfere with the garrison, nor permit some irresponsible person to pass resolutions under the roof of the Labor hall deprecating men doing their duty at this time.⁴⁶

With the capitulation of the labour leadership, many British Columbia workers embraced the war effort as an antidote to Kaiserism⁴⁷ and an escape from the pre-war depression.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ The TLCC resolved at its 1911 and 1914 conventions to strike against the war. See Martin Robin, “Registration, Conscription, and Independent Labour Politics, 1916-17,” in A. M. Willms et al., eds, *Conscription 1917* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 60-1.

⁴⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 24 April 1914.

⁴⁶ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 4 August 1914; See also VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 5 August 1914; and Hardy, “Those Stormy Years,” 55. At the next meeting of the Victoria Trades and Labour Council, delegate J.L. Martin of the Labourers’ Protective Association took responsibility for having organized the meeting. (See VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 5 August 1914.)

⁴⁷ Sections of the international Left identified Kaiser Wilhelm II’s Germany as the epitome of reaction, and therefore supported the war effort in 1914 as a means of wiping out autocracy. See *Social Democrat* (Victoria), December 1914.

⁴⁸ Three days after war was declared, the *Federationist* reported that: “small groups of European laborers, who are gradually arriving from the construction camps, may be seen these days from early morn till late at night, discussing the war situation... One Austrian who spoke very good English said that he would sooner take a chance at being shot than to try to eke out an existence in British Columbia next winter. This appears to be the general sentiment among the men loafing around these quarters.” (*British Columbia Federationist*, 7 August 1914.)

One contemporary observer summed up the situation: “the outbreak of World War to the accompaniment of wholesale treachery in the leading ranks of Labour had a stunning effect on the socialist movement in British Columbia.”⁴⁹

The 1915 convention of the BCFL in Nanaimo debated the possibility of a general strike in the event of war between the United States and Britain, but prominent SPC members spoke against the motion.⁵⁰ Joe Naylor called the proposal “nonsensical in the face of the European situation to-day,” and favoured “a propaganda against militarism.” Albert Wells, president of the Victoria Trades and Labour Council and an officer of the Federation, declared:

It was all very well to talk of organizing a general strike at war time. Only a few months ago it had been sought to have a general strike in British Columbia to help the miners but it could not be done. Yet there were visionaries who thought a world strike could be raised in the face of all the jingo and flag-waving of war-time. He believed that as long as the power of the state was in the hands of those who wanted war they could defeat the general strike idea.⁵¹

Both Naylor and Wells dismissed the feasibility of “a general strike at war time.” But these SPC leaders would lead the general strikes of 1918 and 1919. How was this possible?

Over the course of the war, the labour leadership in British Columbia underwent a transformation, with the general strike being elevated from the margins to become the defining tactic of the movement. Advocates of anti-militarism and direct action displaced patriotic labour leaders. A key factor in the turn against militarism and toward the strike

⁴⁹ Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 55.

⁵⁰ The fraternal delegate from the Washington State Federation of Labour told the convention that “the idea of war between the two countries was premature and groundless... He said the big Shipping interests of the States were trying to work up an agitation to further their interests.” (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 29 January 1915.)

⁵¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 29 January 1915.

was the introduction of compulsory military service. By 1916, sections of organized labour were opposing the Borden government's registration scheme, which labour rightly viewed as a precursor to conscription. The anti-conscription forces extended their criticism to the AFL-International leadership of the TLCC for defying the decision of the 1916 convention to oppose registration.⁵²

Demonstrating the shift in power within labour's ranks, the SPC swept the elections of the BCFL executive at the Revelstoke convention in 1917, with Joe Naylor being elected president, along with Victor Midgley, Wells, Joe Taylor, and Albert "Ginger" Goodwin. The convention backed industrial and political action, calling for two separate referenda of the membership. One read: "Are you in favour of the Federation entering the political field?" and the other: "Are you prepared to place in the hands of the executive of the British Columbia Federation of Labor the power to call a general strike in the event of conscription?"⁵³ While affiliated members were divided on the first question, likely influenced by allegiances to the SPC and other political parties, they demonstrated strong support for the "down tools" policy. Of the 2417 ballots that were returned, 1841 favoured general strike action with only 576 opposed.⁵⁴ Conscription, and the corresponding threat to organized labour, was forcing the unification of the disparate sections of British Columbia's movement. This struggle took shape on both the industrial

⁵² The VTLC passed a resolution describing the TLCC decision, "that convention having gone on record as being opposed to registration, and the executive have issued a circular letter to the various affiliated bodies, urging them to sign said cards." (See UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 7 January 1917.)

⁵³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 2 February 1917.

⁵⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 7 September 1917. A total of 29 union locals voted on the political action question, with 19 voting in favour and 10 opposed. The overall result revealed a clear division on the question: 878 workers voted in favour with 966 opposed. The deciding factor in the defeat of the referendum was the 800 votes of the United Mine Workers of Gladstone, who voted 704 to 96 against the proposal. It is probable they were influenced by allegiances to the SPC. (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 1 February 1918.)

and political fields, with the socialist leadership navigating a path *between syndicalism and social democracy*. Solidarity by necessity coalesced out of the conscription crisis.

Similar events were unfolding the world over. Following the overthrow of the czar in Russia, the *Federationist* discussed the appeal of extra-parliamentary action:

The Russian revolution has everywhere heartened the foes of present-day society. It has given them a territorial focus, a base of operations, and if the ‘Reds’ overthrow the provisional government of Russia and replace the liberal leaders, Miliukov, Lvov, etc. by chiefs of really crimson hue, we shall see a wave of syndicalist unrest sweep over the whole earth.⁵⁵

With the introduction of the *Military Service Act* in the Canadian parliament, organized labour took a step in this direction. At a special convention of the BCFL held in Vancouver in September 1917, the executive – “realizing that the power of the worker is greater on the political field than on the industrial field” – won the approval of delegates to run a slate of candidates on an anti-conscription platform in the upcoming federal election.⁵⁶ Delegates voted 56 to eight in favour of the “down tools” policy, endorsing a general strike when the first man was conscripted against his will.⁵⁷ When Duncan Kerr, an engineer from the Lower Mainland, was sentenced to two-years’ imprisonment for refusing to report for military service, no strike occurred, despite a ballot of Vancouver workers on the question.⁵⁸ On 17 December 1917, the infamous ‘Conscription Election,’ the BCFL candidates – including Midgley, Wells, and Taylor – were roundly defeated. The lesson was clear: “without the organization, Labor cannot expect to gain its objectives politically.”⁵⁹ Foreshadowing the industrial struggle that lay ahead, Taylor

⁵⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 8 June 1917.

⁵⁶ *British Columbia Federationist*, 14 December 1917.

⁵⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 7 September 1917.

⁵⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 7 and 14 December 1917 and 11 January 1918. The results of the ballot were not reported in future editions of the *Federationist*.

⁵⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 1 February 1918. This statement was made in Wells’ report as secretary of the executive committee to delegates at the BCFL convention. While all five candidates were defeated,

warned voters in the Vancouver Island mining town of South Wellington: “If Borden manages to steal the election, revolution may be close, for if constitutional rights are taken away, other weapons may be used.”⁶⁰

This straddling of industrial and political action revealed itself a month later at the 1918 convention of the BCFL. Jim Hawthornthwaite, recently returned to the legislature, told delegates that “the whole province belonged to the Labor man, and there was no reason, if they would stick together, why every seat in British Columbia should not be won as easily as his.”⁶¹ The convention voted 82 to 11 to form a new political party of labour, and at a conference immediately following the BCFL proceedings, delegates decided to organize the Federated Labor Party “for the purpose of securing industrial legislation for the collective ownership and democratic operation of the means of wealth production.”⁶² Parallel to this decisive step toward independent political action, organized labour drew closer to the general strike. When a delegate at the BCFL convention suggested wiring Ottawa a resolution stating the Federation’s opposition to industrial conscription, Joe Taylor said a telegram would be a waste of time, arguing “the industrial strength of organized labor should be put to use.” Ernest Winch, representing the

Joe Taylor received strong support in the mining towns of Vancouver Island: “We polled more than twice as many votes for the workingman’s candidate, as was polled for the two capitalist representatives combined. The vote was: Bro. Taylor, 113; McIntosh (‘Win the Election’), 42; Stewart (Liberal), 9. We also contributed \$110 to the campaign fund, nearly \$1 for every vote. So that wasn’t so bad for a bunch of anarchists.” (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 11 January 1918.)

⁶⁰ *British Columbia Federationist*, 14 December 1917.

⁶¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 1 February 1918. On 24 January 1918, Hawthornthwaite won a by-election in the Newcastle district by a margin of two to one, defeating his Liberal opponent with 931 votes to 448. He returned to the Legislature after a six-year hiatus, running as an independent. (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 25 January 1918.)

⁶² *British Columbia Federationist*, 1 and 8 February 1918. Significantly, Naylor, Goodwin and Winch voted against the BCFL forming its own party. Naylor, outgoing president of the Federation, “opposed the formation of a political party suggestion, calling attention to the Socialist party being in the field, as well as other parties comprising laboring men, and saying that these would oppose the Labor party.” In his report as BCFL president, Naylor said, “I believe it is not in the best interests of our movement to fasten a Labor party to our unions.”

Longshoremen's Auxiliary of Vancouver, suggested delegates "should not stop at camouflage by threatening a general strike, like in the case of military conscription." He urged the executive to implement any course of action decided upon by the convention.⁶³

The death of Albert 'Ginger' Goodwin, a fellow socialist and leading trade unionist, pushed organized labour over the threshold between the theory and practice of the general strike. As the FLP registered rapid organizational gains across BC, the Dominion government launched a manhunt against draft evaders. At the end of July 1918, the former BCFL vice-president and SPC member was shot dead near Comox Lake by special constable Dan Campbell, a bounty hunter for the Dominion Police. On 2 August 1918, the miners of Cumberland and the workers of Vancouver downed tools in a 24-hour general strike, "as a protest against the shooting of Brother A. Goodwin."⁶⁴

A forgotten footnote to this history involves a meeting of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council held in March 1918, four months prior to the shooting. Goodwin had requested the council's support in his appeal for exemption from military service, on grounds of his trade union responsibilities. Months earlier, as he led a strike of smelter workers in Trail, he had been called, before the draft board and classed 'A,' "fit for military service." Despite his long record of service in the labour movement, the Vancouver unions refused this request for support. Jack Kavanagh, a comrade in the SPC, said "Goodwin belonged to the socialist movement, and therefore was supposed to be a revolutionist. If he did not know what to do, there was something wrong with his 'revolution' ... He should take his medicine." Another longshoremen, Delegate Thomas,

⁶³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 1 February 1918.

⁶⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 2 and 9 August 1918. See also Mayse, *Ginger: The Life and Death of Albert Goodwin*, 160-175. The circumstances surrounding the killing were never resolved, after a coroner's

said Goodwin's letter sounded "more like a 'squeal' than an appeal."⁶⁵ This refusal of organized labour in Vancouver to stand in solidarity with Ginger while he was alive likely fueled the unprecedented demonstration of solidarity over his death. When the Trades and Labour Council voted 117 to one to support the recommendation of the metal trades to "down tools," delegates had changed their tune. Kavanagh said "Goodwin forfeited his life through the Military Service Act...and ridiculed the idea that Goodwin was the aggressor." Meanwhile, Thomas "declared that if the workers of Vancouver had the courage there would be no more work in this city on account of the Goodwin shooting."⁶⁶

At 12 noon on Friday, 2 August 1918, important sections of Vancouver labour, including Street Railwaymen and workers in the shipbuilding trades, downed tools in a political strike that was ruthlessly attacked by a vigilante mob of veterans, acting at the behest of the Vancouver Board of Trade.⁶⁷ The details of the strike and subsequent vigilantism have been recounted elsewhere, but a striking congruence exists between the strike leadership and the founding leadership of the CCF in BC. Victor Midgley, as secretary of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, was beaten and forced to kiss the Union Jack when the veterans stormed the Labour Temple. Bill Pritchard and Wallis Lefeaux addressed Goodwin's funeral in Cumberland, which was organized by the

jury delivered an open verdict. Goodwin's death certificate states simply: "Shot while evading the Military Service Act." (BCARS, Death Certificates (1872-1982), Reg. No. 1918-09-058451, "Albert Goodwin.")

⁶⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 22 March 1918.

⁶⁶ *British Columbia Federationist*, 2 and 9 August 1918.

⁶⁷ See Mayse, *Ginger: The Life and Death of Albert Goodwin*, 181-185; Paul A. Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Boag Foundation, 1967); and *British Columbia Federationist*, 2 and 9 August 1918.

SPC.⁶⁸ Days before the Vancouver strike, Ernest Winch was elected president of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council.⁶⁹

In the heat of battle at the end of the First World War, political and industrial action were viewed as necessary, complementary components of the same struggle. The tactical arsenal of these socialists was not yet restricted to Parliament. In his inaugural address to labour council delegates Winch issued a call to action: “despite the fact that Labor has no parliamentary representatives, there is nothing to prevent our programme being put into operation by the powers that be, that is if we so organize our forces and educate our members to the power and efficacy of direct action.”⁷⁰ A former provincial secretary of the Social Democratic Party, Winch – “going the opposite direction from most of his comrades” – left the SDP in 1918 to join the more doctrinaire SPC.⁷¹

Organizational divisions, bitterly contested in times of peace, were being pushed aside as the state escalated its campaign against radical labour. Chief Press Censor Ernest Chambers visited the Vancouver offices of the *British Columbia Federationist* following the Ginger Goodwin strike, threatening to suppress the publication if the directors refused to sign a declaration against “objectionable material.”⁷² The editor of *The Week*, a Victoria newspaper backed by the labour council, was jailed for three months for publishing the Allies’ secret treaties.⁷³ Following the shooting of Goodwin, Joe Naylor was jailed on charges of “assisting draft evaders,” and a committee was formed to raise

⁶⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 9 August 1918.

⁶⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 2 and 9 August 1918. Valuable insight into Winch’s relationship with the labour movement can be found in Peter Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way*, 38-59.

⁷⁰ *British Columbia Federationist*, 9 August 1918

⁷¹ See A. Ross Johnson, “No Compromise, No Political Trading,” pp. 280-83, 289. For a report on Winch’s first meeting on the SPC platform, see *British Columbia Federationist*, 11 October 1918.

⁷² *British Columbia Federationist*, 9 August 1918.

⁷³ VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 7 August 1918; also *The Week* (Victoria), 20 July 1918 and 1 May 1920.

funds for his defense.⁷⁴ A month later, the Dominion government passed the infamous Order-in-Council, P.C. 2384, banning the IWW, the Social Democratic Party, and 12 other socialist groups.⁷⁵ Radicals across the country were imprisoned under this decree, and Labour's ultimate weapon – the strike – was deemed a criminal offence.⁷⁶ As the state responded to industrial militancy by criminalizing the labour and socialist leadership, disputes over doctrine were temporarily set aside. The new political arm of BC labour – the FLP – made a concerted effort to harness this dissent.

A leading spokesperson of the party was J.S. 'Jim' Woodsworth, who moved from Manitoba to Gibson's Landing, BC in early 1918 and in June resigned from the ministry of the Methodist Church.⁷⁷ Disillusioned with the faith to which he had devoted his life, Woodsworth sought greener pastures on the Pacific and was soon enmeshed in the radical socialist movement. He summed up this new spirit of 'solidarity by necessity' in an August 1918 article titled "The Dawning of Labor's Day of Economic Freedom":

The creed of the Federated Labor Party is remarkable not merely for what it says but also for what it does not say... The Labor Party leaves the "scientific orthodox" group and the revisionist groups to fight out their theories, but takes the great underlying principle stressed by Marx, viz., the collective ownership and democratic control of the means of wealth production. Men may differ widely in theory and yet unite to fight a common foe.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 16 August 1918. Cumberland miner David Aitken was arrested and charged along with Naylor.

⁷⁵ Canada, *Canada Gazette*, (Ottawa: J. de Labroqueire Taché, 1918), 1278.

⁷⁶ P.C. 2525, passed 11 October 1918, declared: "Any person who during the continuance of the present war shall incite, order or participate in a lockout or strike...in any industry [covered by the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act] or in any connection with the operation of any Railway in Canada...shall be liable upon summary conviction to a penalty not exceeding one thousand dollars (\$1000,00) or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding six (6) months, or to both fine and imprisonment." Men of fighting age were subject to conscription: "Any male... shall *ipso facto* be deemed to be a soldier enlisted in the military forces of Canada and subject to military law for the duration of the present war..." (See Canada, *Canada Gazette*, (Ottawa: J. de Labroqueire Taché, 1918.), 1444.)

⁷⁷ Woodsworth's letter of resignation to Reverend A.E. Smith, future Communist leader and President of the Methodist Conference of Manitoba, was published in the *British Columbia Federationist* on 12 July 1918.

⁷⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 30 August 1918.

At the end of the First World War, Woodsworth's politics – rooted in the Social Gospel⁷⁹ – were strongly influenced by the revolutionary Marxism of the SPC. This tradition, though diluted over the course of the 1920s, would be retained throughout his political career.

Unity between rival socialist groups was only one factor in the formation of class solidarity in British Columbia. Fundamental divisions remained along the axes of gender and race. Importantly, barriers to women's involvement in the labour movement began to corrode during the war. Vancouver socialist Helena Gutteridge, a future alderwoman and CCFer, was elected to the executive of the Vancouver TLC, and discussed the war:

If the present conditions are the best that male statecraft can accomplish, then surely the time has come for woman to take her place in the councils of the nations... as an antidote to the present false conception of man, that places property and possessions at a higher value than human welfare and life.⁸⁰

Carnage in the battlefields and increased war-time production created a labour shortage, and women entered the workforce like never before. Addressing the VTLC in 1916, Gutteridge discussed “the necessity of organizing the women workers.”⁸¹ Locals of the Garment Workers, Laundry Workers and Telephone Operators, comprised predominantly of women, were formed in Victoria in the summer of 1918, and Victoria teachers went on strike in early 1919.⁸² On the political field, the VTLC endorsed the extension of the

⁷⁹ See Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-28* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1973).

⁸⁰ *British Columbia Federationist*, 4 September 1914; See also Irene Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice in British Columbia: Helena Gutteridge, the Unknown Reformer* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), 83.

⁸¹ UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 26 April 1916. In a front-page article in the *Federationist*, Gutteridge expanded on this theme. (See “These Women Replacing Men Should Be Well Organized,” *British Columbia Federationist*, 14 January 1916.)

⁸² UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 5 and 19 June 1918; also *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 13 and 17 February 1919.

franchise to women in June 1916, and called for “free medical attention [for] the wives and children” of soldiers.⁸³ Despite these developments, continuing barriers to the participation of women – particularly in leadership positions – undermined efforts toward solidarity. Gutteridge helped form the BC Loggers’ Union in January 1919, but within months was pushed to the margins as the union severed its affiliation with the AFL and fell under the control of the secessionist OBU.⁸⁴

In addition to gains in women’s organizing, labour endeavoured to forge links with returned soldiers. In June 1918 the FLP endorsed independent soldier candidate Francis Giolma in a provincial by-election in Victoria. Commenting on Giolma’s victory, the *Federationist* declared: “the bond will be strengthened until such time as the returned men find they must fight both on the industrial and political fields with their kind in the ranks of labor.”⁸⁵

These two forms of struggle became intertwined at the end of the First World War, located *between syndicalism and social democracy*. While proponents of specific tactics existed, they could be found in virtually every labour and socialist organization. As much diversity existed *within* the Federated Labour Party and the One Big Union as *between* them. This relationship was articulated by Woodsworth:

Some of the old controversies are dying down. ‘Should we use the industrial or the political weapon?’ We find answers using both to good advantage. It is well to attack the enemy on both fronts and sometimes a flank attack is more effective than a frontal attack. The organized workers, on the other hand, have advocated the big union. Now, in the most natural

⁸³ UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 21 June 1916 and 7 September 1918.

⁸⁴ According to Dorothy Steeves, Gutteridge – an official of the Garment Workers International Union – was opposed to the OBU. The BC Loggers’ union, affiliated with the AFL at its inception in January 1919, passed out of the control of founders Gutteridge and Birt Showler. As it moved under the orbit of the OBU, it was renamed the Lumber Workers’ Industrial Union (LWIU). (See Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel*, 46-49; also Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice in British Columbia*, 127-127).

⁸⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 21 June 1918 and 5 July 1918.

way possible, the units of Organized Labor fall into line in a general strike.⁸⁶

In the last months of the First World War, the FLP played an integral role in educating and organizing the province's workers, contributing toward the industrial solidarity that would peak the following spring. A reciprocal relationship took shape, with industrial unrest fueling FLP gains, which in turn built greater solidarity in the industrial field, providing an environment conducive to the establishment of One Big Union.

At the Québec convention of the Trades and Labor Congress in September 1918, socialist delegates from BC and other points organized in opposition to the reactionary, pro-war policies of the Congress leadership. The long-standing debate between craft and industrial organization contributed to this divide, but the catalyst was the conscription crisis and the radicalization of labour – both domestic and international – in the later war years. At the western caucus meeting, Victor Midgley was elected secretary of a committee to organize a Western Labour Conference. Despite claims that this did not represent “a secessional or separatist movement,” events were clearly leading in that direction.⁸⁷ As BC labour divorced itself from the established organizations of Canadian workers, Joe Naylor declared that “the spirit of unity is growing.” Echoing the language of the outlawed IWW, he said conditions in the coal mines would be improved “if the men themselves would only join together into a progressive organization, with the principle imbued within themselves that an injury to one is an injury to all.”⁸⁸

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⁸⁶ *British Columbia Federationist*, 30 August 1918.

⁸⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 4 October 1918.

⁸⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 18 October 1918.

As the last months of fighting drew to a close on the Western Front, British Columbia labour consolidated its forces for action on both the industrial and political fields. The search for solidarity straddled the line *between syndicalism and social democracy*. Threatened with conscription, a sharp increase in the cost of living, and the criminalization of their organizations, BC workers once again pulled together in self-defense, exhibiting the phenomenon of ‘solidarity by necessity.’ The experience of BC socialists with direct action – centred around the general strike – established a base upon which future labour political victories would be secured. The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation traces its origins to the industrial struggle at the end of the First World War. The following chapter will explore the experience of industrial organization and the sympathetic strike – identified by historians as the 1919 labour revolt – through the lens of the labour movement in Victoria, BC.

Chapter 2. One Big Union: A Case Study of Industrial Solidarity in Victoria, British Columbia, 1919

In January 1919, J.S. ‘Jim’ Woodsworth told a meeting in Victoria that “the crisis was leading us to join forces to get what was due to us... The Federated Labor Party was one manifestation, the Labor unions another, the Bolsheviki another.”¹ In response to war-time attacks on working people, their living standards, and their organizations, the fragmented sections of British Columbia’s Left pulled together, preparing for battle on both the industrial and political fronts. The bold example of radical labour in Russia inspired workers in BC and elsewhere. In the spring of 1919, this inclination toward unity and extra-parliamentary tactics found organizational expression in the One Big Union and practical expression in the sympathetic strike. As the case of Victoria demonstrates, this solidarity, though manifested on an unprecedented scale,² was partial at best and subject to determined attacks from important sections of organized labour. The failure of BC workers to achieve their emancipation by means of the general strike bolstered efforts to organize on the political field – providing the basis on which the CCF would be built.

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Tempers in British Columbia reached a fever pitch in the winter of 1918-1919 with the forced departure of Canadian troops from Victoria to Vladivostok, Siberia.³ Jim Woodsworth informed an FLP meeting in Vancouver of “some disgraceful scenes” in

¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 10 January 1919.

² I have chosen to focus on the experience of Victoria labour for two reasons. First, as far as I can determine no study of the city’s experience in 1919 exists, and the following chapter therefore represents an important contribution to the historiography of the period. Second, Victoria’s ambiguous response relates closely to the theme of this study. While Vancouver and Winnipeg displayed extraordinary unity in action, tensions internal to the labour movement in Victoria prevented a unified expression of sympathy, and the events therefore provide a compelling case study in the search for solidarity.

Victoria when Canadian troops were sent to Siberia. “[It] was something new for Canada, and...for the British Empire itself, to have troops driven aboard ship by bayonet and revolver.”⁴ As a longshoreman on the docks of Vancouver, Woodsworth refused to load munitions bound for Russia.⁵ Bill Pritchard condemned Canada’s role in the Allied invasion of Russia, in a speech to a capacity crowd at Victoria’s Columbia Theatre, organized by the local labour council:

to suppress the Soviets now was a vast task, and even if they succeed in overthrowing them, they could never suppress the conditions that gave rise to the Soviets. No power on earth could give the workers of Russia more than they have now.⁶

Foreshadowing events in Calgary, the chairman “called on the meeting to show where they stood by giving three cheers for the ‘Bolsheviki’ and Spartacans, a request which was met with a ready and enthusiastic response.”⁷ Future CCF leaders such as Woodsworth and Pritchard would emerge as virulent opponents of Russian Communism by the 1930s, but in 1919 they were among its most vocal proponents.

Political unrest over the Allied invasion of Russia, censorship, and the continued detainment of political prisoners compounded with economic grievances. The war-time labour shortage was over, as men returned home from the front, triggering a fierce competition for jobs and renewed fears of unemployment and poverty. The situation was

³ See my undergraduate thesis, “Battling Bolshevism from Victoria to Vladivostok: The Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force and Class Warfare in Canada, 1917-1919,” (Honours Thesis: University of Victoria, 2001).

⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 17 January 1919. For details of FLP mass meetings in Victoria prior to the deployment of the 4000 troops, see *British Columbia Federationist*, 13 and 20 December 1918. The paper reported that hundreds of members of the Siberian force attended these meetings, and “the way those boys applauded the Labor speakers showed in no uncertain manner where their sympathies lay.”

⁵ Kenneth McNaught, *A Profit in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), 91-92; Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel*, 71. McNaught identifies the CCF founder as “the only one” of 1200 Vancouver longshoremen to take this principled stand, but fails to cite a source. Similarly, Steeves writes that “no longshoremen followed him,” but provides no notation.

⁶ *British Columbia Federationist*, 17 January 1919.

⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 17 January 1919.

aggravated with the onslaught of the Spanish Flu, the world-wide influenza epidemic that left 100 Victorians dead and another 2700 ill.⁸

The Dominion government was growing uneasy with the burgeoning radicalism in the Canadian West. In December, it extended the jurisdiction of the Royal North West Mounted Police (RNWMP) into British Columbia and opened detachments at Esquimalt and Vancouver.⁹ In March, RNWMP comptroller A.A. McLean advised the Federal Cabinet that his force was obtaining “accurate and complete information on the whole subject of Western Canada which will prove of the utmost value should vigorous prosecution be considered necessary.”¹⁰ The fears of Canada’s ruling elite were heightened in February 1919, when 60,000 Seattle workers downed tools in a general strike in sympathy with shipyard workers. Ben Nauman, chairman of the Seattle Central Labor Council’s strike committee, discussed the significance of the action: “We did something in this strike which has never been done before by the A.F.of L. We pulled off a general strike with craft unions, with iron-clad contracts, which had to be broken, and with a constitution which had to be ignored.”¹¹

⁸ According to the report of the city’s health inspector for the year 1918, 2,759 Victorians fell ill and 101 died during the influenza epidemic of late 1918. (Victoria, *Annual Reports: Corporation of the City of Victoria, 1918* (Victoria: Dikken, 1918), 89.) September and October 1918 registered the heaviest casualties for the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the First World War: 2949 Canadians were killed in action in September and this number grew by 100 the next month. 13,606 men were wounded, and an additional 967 men died of their wounds. (see H.A.C. Machin, *Report of the Director of the Military Service Branch to the Honourable Minister of Justice on the Operation of the Military Service Act, 1917* [Ottawa: J. de Labroquerie Taché, 1919], 125.)

⁹ National Archives of Canada (NAC), RCMP Collection, RG18, Vol. 1930, “Certified Copy of a Report of the Committee of the Privy Council,” 12 December 1918; also “Monthly Report,” F.J. Horrigan to The Commissioner, 13 March 1919.

¹⁰ NAC, RCMP Collection, RG18 A-2, Vol. 878, “Labour Organizations and Communism,” McLean to Rowell, 1 March 1919.

¹¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 7 February 1919 and 14 February 1919; *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 30 January 1919, 6 February 1919 and 10 February 1919; also Robert L. Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964).

The Seattle strike set an example in working-class solidarity that was observed closely in British Columbia and emulated in the months ahead. In Victoria, the Boilermakers' union voted in late January to send business agent George Penketh to Seattle to gather information on the strike.¹² The local voted to "follow the instructions of the International Organizer in regards to work coming from Seattle or Puget Sound during the strike."¹³

The example of Vancouver and Seattle reverberated on Vancouver Island, where developments in Australia were being observed closely. With its own tradition of IWW militancy and state repression, the country offered a potent example of unity as 600 different unions attempted to coalesce their forces into One Big Union: "opponents of the workers in Australia fear the workers' strength when they are amalgamated and educated into the principles of Big Unionism," the *Federationist* observed.¹⁴ This idea of One Big Union (OBU) gave organizational expression to the growing spirit of industrial solidarity in British Columbia. In February 1919, the Victoria Machinists' adopted a motion in favour of the "One Big Union abolishing Craft Unions," and the VTLC voted unanimously for a resolution that declared:

We are of the opinion that the strength of organized Labor is largely negated by the innumerable divisions and factions among workers by their representation in sectional Trades, and current events the world over are teaching us that 'One Big Union' is the ideal to be aimed at, the final aim being the 'Workers' as a class arrayed against the common enemy.¹⁵

¹² UVASC, Victoria Shipyard Workers Federal Union Local #238 (Boilermakers) fonds, Accession # 89-3, Box 1.2, "Minute Books," 28 January 1919. Penketh was also directed to go to Vancouver if necessary.

¹³ UVASC, Boilermakers fonds, "Minute Books," 28 January 1919.

¹⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 27 September and 6 December 1918; also *Red Flag* (Vancouver), 28 December 1918. The preamble of the constitution of the new One Big Union, to be called the 'The Workers Industrial Union of Australia', endorsed at a convention in Sydney in August 1918, stated that "Capitalism can only be abolished by the workers uniting in one class-conscious economic organization to take and hold the means of production by revolutionary industrial and political action."

¹⁵ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 19 February 1919 (undated, but regular bi-weekly Wednesday meeting between 11 February 1919 and 5 March 1919); also *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 20 February 1919.

This expression of working-class solidarity must be understood in relation to events that were unfolding the world over. The confluence of war and revolution infected the imagination of Victoria workers and their comrades across British Columbia. A week after endorsing the OBU, the council voted 17 to two in favour of a general strike to force the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Russia.¹⁶ The organizations of labour, influenced by socialists, were openly embracing the Russian Bolsheviks and industrial action.

When the BCFL convention met in Calgary in March 1919, SPC members directed the agenda.¹⁷ Jack Kavanagh summed up the rationale behind the new industrial organization:

A greater solidarity should be in existence than was here before...if we get action to such a scale that we can close down the entire industries of a particular point, they starve too, don't you forget that, and they feel their starvation quicker than we do because we are used to it and they are not. The question is that the old organization does not serve the purpose now, a new form is needed.¹⁸

The role of SPC members such as Kavanagh at the Calgary Conference has led some historians to conclude that the OBU was not a syndicalist organization.¹⁹ Disagreement over the ideological underpinnings of the OBU derives from the fact that no unified ideology existed. Both syndicalists and social democrats attended the Calgary Conference

¹⁶ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 24 February 1919. The motion, forwarded from the Alberta Federation of Labour, is recorded in the minutes as: "endorsing the aims of the Russian Revolution and Germany also giving the Executive authority to call general strikes, should the Allies continue to oppose same or oppose a Soviet government that may be formed elsewhere." The full text of the resolution was published in the *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 27 February 1919.

¹⁷ The convention was moved from Victoria to coincide with the Western Labour Conference.

¹⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 4 April 1919.

¹⁹ See Gerald Friesen, "Yours in Revolt" 139-140; Gregory S. Kealey. "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (Spring 1984): 37; and Mark Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows: The Industrial Workers of the World in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star, 1990), 119; for interpretations of the OBU as syndicalist, see Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour: 1880-1930*, (Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre, Queen's University, 1968), 178-198; David Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978); and A. Ross

and supported the OBU. The former rejected electoralism entirely, envisioning the mass strike as the means of social transformation; the latter retained a basic belief in securing state power through electoral means, yet supported a co-ordinated general strike to enforce immediate demands. Opposition to syndicalist theory did not prevent socialists from embracing syndicalist tactics.²⁰ The presence of diverse viewpoints within the OBU and the SPC has frustrated efforts to consign the organizations to one of the two categories.

In a debate over amending the BCFL constitution to strike out references to political action, Midgley declared: “The Federation is not a political party nor a party that places candidates in the field for election to the house so hence that clause does not properly belong in the preamble of an industrial organization.” Wells echoed this sentiment: “the BC Federation of Labor should not be linked up with any political party.”²¹ But David Rees, an organizer for the UMWA on Vancouver Island and soon-to-be opponent of the OBU, defended political action: “if the committee strikes this out from the constitution then you are going on record of course as being opposed absolutely to the working class representation on the floor of the house.”²²

The debate carried over into the Western Labour Conference two days later. Kavanagh expressed his contempt for electoral politics: “any time the workers imagine they can emancipate themselves merely through the gas houses of this or any country, they have another thing coming... it is impossible, even with a majority in the house, to

McCormack, *Reformers, Radicals and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1897-1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

²⁰ The similarities between the preamble of the IWW constitution and that adopted by the Australian OBU in August 1918 are remarkable. (See Industrial Workers of the World, *The Founding Convention of the IWW: Proceedings* (New York: Merit, 1969), 247; and *British Columbia Federationist*, 27 September 1918)

²¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 11 April 1919.

²² *British Columbia Federationist*, 11 April 1919.

get what you desire to put into operation.²³ Delegate Harry Allman, representing the BC Loggers' Union and a proponent of the IWW, had yet to see "where the workers have got anything by political action or gas houses. Anything they got was through their economic condition and strikes prove that." Delegate Broatch of Calgary, however, defended political action, arguing that "bringing all workers" within a single organization would "not eliminate the fact that law will still exist, and the chambers where law is made will still be a part of our social life... To my mind we are only storming the citadel of the enemy from one angle."²⁴ In the end, delegates voted to keep the OBU outside the political arena. Their association with pre-existing political parties, and heightened interest in industrial action, helps explain this unwillingness to tie the OBU to political action.²⁵

The 237 delegates to the Western Labour Conference met at the Labour Temple on Thursday, 13 March 1919, and unanimously declared their aims to be "the abolition of the present system of production for profit and the substitution therefore of production for use."²⁶ A resolution calling for Canadian labour to hold a referendum on severing "the present affiliation with the International Organizations, and that steps be taken for an Industrial Organization" was carried unanimously amid "ringing cheers" from the entire convention. The conference adopted a recommendation from the Policy Committee that

²³ "The Origin of the OBU: A Verbatim Report of the Calgary Conference of 1919," *One Big Union Bulletin*, 31 March 1927. Kavanagh's disdain for parliament was sustained into the 1920s, likely influencing his turn toward Communism. On 31 October 1920, he addressed a meeting of the SPC in Vancouver, and declared that "this Capitalist class will never be thrown out of business by the use of the ballot." (See Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, *RCMP Security Bulletins: The Early Years, 1919-1929* (St. John's: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1994), 283.)

²⁴ "The Origin of the OBU," *OBU Bulletin*, 31 March 1927.

²⁵ W.R. Trotter, an FLP official from Vancouver, spoke against the Broatch amendment: "I would leave it to the workers to use their own judgment as to what to do regarding political action." (See "The Origin of the One Big Union," *OBU Bulletin*, 31 March 1927.)

“the name of the proposed organization be ‘The One Big Union.’” It also passed a series of resolutions demanding the release of political prisoners, the six-hour working day, the five-day work week, and the immediate withdrawal of Allied troops from Russia, and endorsed a nation-wide general strike to take effect 1 June 1919 if these demands were not met.²⁷ Helen Armstrong, representing the Women’s Labour League of Winnipeg, raised the issue of the Canadian invasion of Russia and the forced deployment of troops to Siberia.²⁸ The convention accepted “the principle of ‘Proletariat Dictatorship,’” and sent “fraternal greetings...to the Russian Soviet Government, the Spartacans in Germany, and all definite working-class movements in Europe and the world, recognizing they have won first place in the history of class struggle.”²⁹

What began as a bold but narrow endorsement of industrial over craft unionism broadened into a scathing indictment of Canada’s political and economic system, and a whole-hearted embrace of the principles and tactics of the Russian Bolsheviks. The *Victoria Daily Times* described the adoption of the OBU at Calgary as “one of the most momentous things to have happened in the annals of the labor movement in Canada.”³⁰ The ideological make-up of western Canada’s labour leadership was undergoing a rapid and radical transformation, and a remarkable unity appeared to exist around this radical agenda. But amid the visionary statements, “ringing cheers”, and vigorous applause,

²⁶ Winnipeg Defence Committee, *Saving the World from Democracy*, 26-7. This source states that of the 237 delegates, 85 were from BC, 89 from Alberta, 17 from Saskatchewan, and 45 from Manitoba. When added up, the figures actually total 238.

²⁷ Winnipeg Defence Committee, *Saving the World from Democracy*, 27-29. The resolution stipulated that the referendum votes from points to the East and West of Port Arthur (Thunder Bay) be counted separately.

²⁸ “The Origin of the One Big Union,” *OBU Bulletin*, 10 March 1927.

²⁹ Winnipeg Defence Committee, *Saving the World from Democracy*, 30. Another resolution, passed “without a dissenting vote,” declared the Convention’s “open conviction that the system of Industrial Soviet Control by selecting of representatives from industries is more efficient and of greater political value than the present form of Government.” (See *Ibid.*, 26.)

³⁰ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 14 March 1919, 16.

Victoria Longshoreman and socialist Joe Taylor, elected vice-president of the BCFL, provided a sober voice of reason:

I have not got very much respect for the A.F. of L and all it stands for, yet I would be foolish to forget for a moment that they have a powerful organization, and have powerful machinery, and that machinery would be liable to be used against us...³¹

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As Victoria's delegates helped forge the OBU in Calgary, the *Daily Times* declared that "any fertile soil selected by the Bolshevik in which to plant his anarchist seed would be effectively policed by his most determined enemy — the reasonable workingman."³² This argument would grow louder as Canada and Victoria moved toward the general strike. Its function was clear: divide and therefore demobilize the labour movement by appealing to, and legitimizing, 'safe and sane' elements while simultaneously marginalizing and vilifying radicals. The *Daily Colonist* quoted two unnamed delegates from Winnipeg who retreated from the unanimous vote on the OBU and spoke out against the proposed industrial organization.³³ The state, meanwhile, focused its attention on the nascent organization. RNWMP comptroller McLean wrote to N.W. Rowell, president of the Privy Council of Canada, stating that the two conferences "were largely engineered from Vancouver."³⁴

The socialist credentials of the founding leadership of the OBU are clear. In elections to the Central Committee of the OBU, Bill Pritchard topped the polls with 210 votes. He was followed by Dick Johns of Winnipeg (201), Joe Knight of Edmonton

³¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 4 April 1919.

³² *Daily Times* (Victoria), 12 March 1919.

³³ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 16 March 1919. ("Look Askance at One Big Union".)

³⁴ NAC, RG18 A-2, Vol. 878, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Collection, "Labour Organizations and Communism," McLean to Rowell, 31 March 1919.

(176), Victor Midgley (161), and Joe Naylor (118).³⁵ All were members of the Socialist party, three of them from British Columbia. Although a RNWMP special agent described them as “Anarchists of the worst kind,” in reality Pritchard, Midgley and Naylor were socialists embracing the defining syndicalist tactic of the general strike.³⁶ Two of the five founding officers of the allegedly ‘syndicalist’ OBU – Pritchard and Midgley – would help found the BC CCF.

Demonstrating the perceived threat of the BC socialists, RNWMP headquarters received “a very urgent request from Gibson’s Landing” in mid-April to deploy mounted police as “the district is full of socialists, aliens and others who would need looking after.”³⁷ The presence of Jim Woodsworth and others in the town had not gone unnoticed, as the political and industrial arms of British Columbia labour fell under the watchful eye of the Canadian state. Federal Minister of Labour Gideon Robertson issued a public statement, declaring:

A movement is on foot in Western Canada, promoted by unwise and radical leaders, to discontinue the affiliation of labor bodies in the West with the Trades and Labor Congress, and to establish new and radical policies, some of which seem unconstitutional and revolutionary. The Department will not recognize any such organization as representing the sentiments of organized labor in Canada, but will continue its present policy of co-operating with the labor organizations which are promoting constructive policies.³⁸

The Dominion Government had condemned the OBU and affirmed its relationship with the conservative, eastern-based leadership of the AFL-TLCC. This relationship would be sustained during and after the sympathetic strikes, providing formidable resistance to the OBU.

³⁵ “The Origin of the OBU,” *OBU Bulletin*, 24 March 1927.

³⁶ NAC, RCMP Collection, “Labour Organizations and Communism,” McLean to Rowell, 31 March 1919.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Clements to McLean, 16 April 1918.

The decision at Calgary to limit the OBU to the industrial field did not prevent the Federated Labor Party from taking an active interest in the new organization. At one of its meetings in Vancouver, attended by W.E. Peirce of Victoria, members discussed “how soon a revolution was likely to take place in Canada.” According to a police informant, who heard talk of “arming the prospective revolutionists,” most believed the change would come on 1 June if the OBU carried out the proposed general strike.³⁹

The first signs of a fissure were emerging in the Victoria labour movement. When delegate Laundry reported back to the VTLC on the proceedings at Calgary, delegates voted 26 to five to approve the aims of the BCFL and the Western Conference.⁴⁰ President Eugene Woodward, however, narrowly elected over Joe Taylor in the executive elections of January, asked to be recorded as having voted against the motion.⁴¹ The council was placed in the awkward position of operating under a president whose views were clearly out of step with those of a majority of delegates.⁴² The effect of this tension would reveal itself as the syndicalist idea that coalesced around the OBU in March found its practical manifestation with the Winnipeg Strike in May. The leadership’s

³⁸ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 5 April 1919.

³⁹ NAC, RG18 A-2, Vol. 878, RCMP Collection, “Labour Organizations and Communism,” MacLean to Deputy Minister of Labour, 8 April 1919.

⁴⁰ UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 19 March 1919.

⁴¹ Woodward received 15 votes to Taylor’s 14. As an expression of good will, Taylor put forward a motion that the vote be made unanimous. (See UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 15 January 1919.)

⁴² At the same meeting that the VTLC voted to approve the aims of the BCFL and Western conventions, the Council received a letter from the Garment Workers’ union informing it of the local’s decision to withdraw its affiliation. Whether this resulted from the radical, pro-OBU, pro-Bolshevik stances taken by council delegates in February remains a mystery. After Taylor and delegate Dooley visited the local to inquire into their decision, they reported to Council that the “Union exhibited poor executive ability on the part of its officers, with a consequent lack of interest on the part of the members.” Taylor recommended that “they be left to wrestle with their own problems in their own way for the time being.” (UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 2 April 1919.)

estrangement from the more radical section fundamentally informed Victoria's response to the events in Winnipeg.⁴³

In the aftermath of the Calgary conference, unions across Canada polled their membership on the question of joining the OBU. The response was rapid and overwhelmingly positive, particularly in points west of Port Arthur.⁴⁴ In Victoria, Joe Taylor led a five-person committee, including Chisholm from the Boilermakers, appointed to propagate the OBU idea locally.⁴⁵ A communication was received from the central committee of the OBU, requesting the per capita tax of 2 cents from every affiliated member.⁴⁶ Joe Taylor forwarded \$70.48 to Midgley, and reported the 2200-member Shipyard Labourers would contribute directly as they were not affiliated to the VTLC.⁴⁷ The Victoria OBU committee organized a mass meeting in the Pantages Theatre on the afternoon of Sunday, 13 April 1919, which Taylor described as "a marked success."⁴⁸ Even the *Daily Colonist* reported that "the sentiment in favour of the One Big

⁴³ At the 25 April 1919 VTLC meeting President Woodward was again in disagreement with the sentiments of most delegates. An invitation had been received for the council to send a representative to the Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, headed by Supreme Court Justice Mathers, which was holding hearings at Victoria's Empress Hotel at the end of April. After a protracted discussion, council voted against participating in the hearings, confirming a decision that had been made at Calgary. President Woodward, however, declined to vote, having argued against boycotting the hearings. On 28 April 1919, he appeared before Justice Mathers, saying he had no faith in the government nor any faith in the commission, and stressed that he was speaking in a personal capacity rather than on behalf of council. He argued the present system must go and called for the nationalization of the CPR, but while it appears Woodward genuinely sought to register his grievances before the Commission, he was again out of step with the prevailing attitude of the VTLC delegates. (See UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 25 April 1919; *Daily Colonist*, 29 April 1919, 14.)

⁴⁴ See Public Archives of Manitoba (hereafter PAM), MG10 A3, One Big Union (OBU) paper, "Correspondences, 1918-1920." (Microfilm) Port Arthur would later merge with Fort William to become Thunder Bay, Ontario.

⁴⁵ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 19 March 1919 and 2 April 1919. Chisholm's union passed a vote of confidence in the OBU's provisional central committee at its meeting of 25 March 1919. (UVASC, Boilermakers fonds, "Minute Books," 25 March 1919.)

⁴⁶ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 2 April 1919.

⁴⁷ PAM, OBU papers, "Correspondence," Taylor to Midgley, 18 April 1919; and UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 2 April 1919.

⁴⁸ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 13 April 1919. A special meeting of the VTLC had been convened to pressure the management of the theatre into renting out the hall. It seems certain sections of the Victoria

Union was practically unanimous.”⁴⁹ Jack Kavanagh, the keynote speaker, said that if the 40 crafts represented on the VTLC “cut loose of the International,” the workers would have better opportunities. Referring to working-class uprisings in Europe, Kavanagh said: “There shall be no bloodshed in this country if we can prevent it. We don’t want them to riot for food but to have the change brought about as peacefully as possible. The trouble is, the employing class are so blind they cannot see the outcome of their actions.”⁵⁰

Following the speeches, the Victoria Labor Band entertained the crowd, and 245 copies of the pamphlet ‘Bolsheviks and Soviets,’ forwarded from the Vancouver labour council, were sold at ten cents a piece.⁵¹ Radical politics and the OBU were never far apart. While Kavanagh sought to prevent bloodshed, his organization was on a clear trajectory toward a confrontation with the Canadian state.

Support for the OBU in Victoria was extremely strong, but union members were divided on the question of tactics, particularly the proposal for a general strike beginning 1 June 1919 to enforce the six-hour working day. On 27 April, the Brotherhood of Boilermakers met in their new hall on Broad Street to count ballots on the OBU referendum. Of the 167 ballots cast, 124 favoured the industrial union while 39 voted against, and four abstained.⁵² On the general strike question, however, members voted 93 in favour and 54 opposed, with 21 abstentions. While majorities on both questions were strong, workers appeared more inclined to accept the OBU than the general strike tactic it

community were uneasy with the idea of One Big Unionism. (UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 9 April 1919.)

⁴⁹ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 15 April 1919.

⁵⁰ *BC Federationist*, 18 April 1919.

⁵¹ UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 13 April 1919. A special meeting of the VTLC had been convened to pressure the management of the theatre into renting out the hall. It seems certain sections of the Victoria community were uneasy with the idea of One Big Unionism. (UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 9 April 1919.)

⁵² UVASC, Boilermakers fonds, “Minute Books,” 27 April 1919.

embraced. A similar result played itself out in the Blacksmiths' union, whose members overwhelmingly endorsed the OBU with a vote of 64 in favour and six opposed.⁵³ The local, however, was equally divided on the strike proposal: 35 members voted 'yes,' while 33 were against a general strike. This lack of unity on the critical question of tactics would prove fatal when the need for action arose. The Machinists' Victoria Lodge "was unanimously in favour of the One Big Union," while 11 other unions voted to join the new industrial organization. The largest local in Victoria, Shipyard Laborers #38A, voted 2230 to 60 in favour of the OBU. The Amalgamated Carpenters Local #2651 voted 208 to 84, while the Steam and Operating Engineers voted 108 in favour with 23 opposed.⁵⁴

In localities where OBU supporters dominated the labour scene – such as Vancouver – strong sympathetic strikes paralyzed production in June 1919. In cities where AFL-International supporters retained strength and influence, action was of a limited scale and duration. Victoria fell into the latter category. Pockets of resistance existed, with two important unions forming a pillar of opposition against the OBU. The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners (UBCJ) rejected the organization by a vote of 250 to 153, while the Street and Electric Railway Employees voted 146 to 50 against the OBU.⁵⁵ This outcome foreshadowed Victoria's ambivalent response to the Winnipeg General Strike in the months ahead.

Support for the OBU, however, was stronger in the Island's mining communities. In Cumberland, the connections between working-class consciousness, labour solidarity

⁵³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 9 June 1919.

⁵⁴ UBC Special Collections (hereafter UBCSC), One Big Union Collection, "Appendix A", 1; also *British Columbia Federationist*, 25 April and 9 May 1919. One of the Machinists' locals in Vancouver had its charter revoked by the International for endorsing the OBU, leading the members to form a new organization.

⁵⁵ UBCSC, One Big Union Collection, "Appendix A", 1.

and militant industrial action were deeply rooted, stemming from decades of conflict between the coal miners and mining interests. The role of the international leadership of the UMWA during the 1912-1914 strike was still fresh in the minds of Cumberland miners. So too was the killing of Albert Goodwin and the strikes and arrests following his death. Miners' leader Joe Naylor was a Socialist Party member, a past president of the BC Federation of Labour, and a member of the Central Committee of the OBU. The miners of Cumberland, members of UMWA #2299, voted 163 to 5 in favour of the industrial union. In Nanaimo, the miners in UMWA #2153 voted 168 in favour, without a single opposing vote. The miners of nearby Extension voted 20 to three to join the OBU.⁵⁶ Naylor spent early May agitating for the organization in the district.⁵⁷

Recently returned from an organizing tour in the interior, Naylor's achievements were mirrored across the province. According to Allen Seager and David Roth, "the OBU was theoretically capable of mobilizing a majority of British Columbia unionists."⁵⁸ Across western Canada, 188 unions representing 41,365 workers polled their membership on the new organization, with roughly three-quarters of these workers casting ballots on the question.⁵⁹ A total of 24,239 ballots were cast in favour of the OBU with 5,975 opposed.⁶⁰ Central committee secretary Victor Midgley of Vancouver issued a call for a founding convention of the new industrial union to be held at Calgary's Labour Temple on 4 June 1919.⁶¹ In a matter of months, BC socialists had built the infrastructure for a new organization of Canadian workers, committed to anti-militarism and the socialist

⁵⁶ UBCSC, OBU Collection, "Appendix II."

⁵⁷ PAM, OBU papers, "Correspondence," Naylor to Midgley, 19 May 1919.

⁵⁸ Seager and Roth, "A Ghost of a Chance," 251.

⁵⁹ *BC Federationist*, 30 May 1919. Important to the outcome of the referendum was the decision of the Calgary conference to adopt the "BC Method" of ballot counting, which required locals to record abstentions as 'yes' votes. (See Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel*, 48.)

⁶⁰ *BC Federationist*, 30 May 1919.

transformation of society. But events soon spiraled beyond their control, strengthening the hand of their opponents, sealing the fate of the OBU experiment, and focusing future organizing efforts on the political arena.

As the ballots were being counted and the June 1st strike deadline approached, the SPC debated the advisability of carrying out a strike. “It is becoming quite apparent that we should first solidify the new organization before we can embark upon any strikes of any size such as would be necessary to enforce the Six-Hour Day,” Midgley wrote to Carl Berg in Edmonton.⁶² Due to a typographical error, the circular letter to union locals listed “July 1st” rather than June 1st as the strike date, pushing the Canadian action back one month.⁶³

As the OBU ballot was being taken, American workers were voting on a proposed five-day general strike, beginning 5 July 1919, to force the release or a new trial for alleged terrorists Tom Mooney and Warren Billings.⁶⁴ Bill Pritchard issued a cogent warning of the need for coordinated action:

If we move, even though it be in accord with working class principles, unless we move in relation to a thoroughly proletarian movement below the line, such movement will be premature and doomed to failure. If the working class movement below the line is not solidified, we could easily be swamped in Canada by the dispatch of militia from any single state.⁶⁵

In mid-April, Midgley and Pritchard traveled to Seattle on behalf of the OBU executive, triggering a wave of interest that would culminate in a referendum vote by the Washington State Federation of Labor on affiliation with the OBU.⁶⁶ Seattle Central

⁶¹ *BC Federationist*, 23 May 1919.

⁶² PAM, OBU papers, Midgley to Berg, 2 May 1919; also Midgley to J.R. Knight, 31 March 1919.

⁶³ PAM, OBU papers, Midgley to Berg, 2 May 1919.

⁶⁴ PAM, OBU papers, Nolan to Midgley, 23 April 1919.

⁶⁵ *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 10 April 1919.

⁶⁶ PAM, OBU papers, Midgley to Russell, 21 April 1919; and *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 22 June 1919.

Labor Council president James Duncan presented a plan for a re-organized and amalgamated AFL in response to the OBU threat.⁶⁷ As the OBU marshaled its forces on both sides of the international boundary, events in Winnipeg catapulted the British Columbia-led socialist movement into the international spotlight, and forever altered the fortunes of the fledgling OBU.

* * *

On 1 May 1919, International Labour Day, 1400 building trades workers struck to have the Building Trades Council recognized as the workers’ bargaining agent in the Prairie capital.⁶⁸ The next day, metal-trades workers struck to have their Council recognized by the various employers. The Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council voted on 6 May to request that affiliated unions hold a strike vote on the question of sympathetic action. Finally, on 15 May 1919, approximately 24,000 Winnipeg workers walked out, of whom only 12,000 were members of unions affiliated with the central labour council.⁶⁹ “We pulled a strike on Thursday morning, which tied up the entire City,” Bob Russell wrote to Midgley. “Everything has come to a complete stand-still.”⁷⁰ The *Victoria Daily Times* wasted no time in pointing the finger:

It looks as if Winnipeg’s troubles were about to begin today with a general strike, and it might not be very surprising to find that Bolshevik pedagogues were at the back of the whole business... It appears to be another case where the majority, loyal at heart to the sound principles of Trade Unionism, have been stampeded into action by a very small number of silver-tongued irresponsibles.⁷¹

⁶⁷ PAM, OBU papers, Pritchard to Midgley, 18 April 1919.

⁶⁸ Winnipeg Defence Committee, *Saving the World from Democracy*, 32-33.

⁶⁹ Winnipeg Defence Committee, 44-47. Included is a list of the initial strike vote results from the affiliated unions. Numbers of strikers vary, with the *Federationist* reporting 26,000 and the *Daily Times* reporting 27,000. I have chosen to use the lower estimate of 24,000 advanced in the strikers’ own history.

⁷⁰ PAM, OBU papers, Russell to Midgley, 19 May 1919.

⁷¹ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 15 May 1919.

Within the OBU, Midgley and the Central Committee were besieged with demands for a coordinated, pan-regional strike. C. Peacock, an official of the miners in Lethbridge, wired Midgley, advising the “OBU EXECUTIVE TO CALL GENERAL STRIKE IN WEST” if martial law was declared in Winnipeg.⁷² P.M. Christophers sent the same request from Calgary.⁷³ From Montréal, OBU organizer Dick Johns of Winnipeg expressed the same sentiment: “THINK WESTERN MOVEMENT OUGHT TO LINE UP WITH WINNIPEG BOYS IF THAT FIGHT IS WON THE PROPAGANDA FOR THE OBU HERE WILL BE EASY.”⁷⁴

Weeks later, as strikes raged across the country, Midgley described his activities to SPC comrade Joe Knight:

Everything here is balled up by the strike, and I have had a hell of a time trying to get some printing done. I have also had some trouble with local comrades who desired me to drop everything and jump into the strike work... It has caused some of my friends to look somewhat coldly upon me but I am confident in the knowledge that I am doing my duty... The strike here has been a wonderful demonstration of what the ‘Wabbly’ [sic] calls ‘solidarity.’⁷⁵

Doggedly managing the overwhelming correspondence and logistics associated with building a new organization in the heat of battle, Midgley admirably performed his duty. Concerns as to the efficacy of striking without an established organizations bore fruit. The OBU was dealt a decisive blow by the sympathetic strikes of June 1919, a victim of its rapid success. The organizational tissue that had been nurtured within the SPC and strengthened since the Québec convention of the TLCC was a necessary condition for the sympathetic strikes. While not explicitly orchestrated by the OBU, the pre-existing and

⁷² PAM, OBU papers, Peacock to Midgley, 19 May 1919.

⁷³ PAM, OBU papers, Christophers to Midgley, 19 May 1919.

⁷⁴ PAM, OBU papers, Johns to Midgley, 19 May 1919.

⁷⁵ PAM, OBU papers, Midgley to Knight, 25 June 1919.

emerging layers of organization made coordinated general strike action possible. Despite loud claims by the strike leadership that the sole issue was free collective bargaining, the strongest proponents of the sympathetic strikes were driven by goals far loftier than the conventional bargaining of labour's rights under capitalism. The revolutionary unionism of the OBU amplified, to unprecedented proportions, the 'commodity struggle' in Winnipeg.

In Victoria, organized labour embarked on an awkward dance between sympathy with Winnipeg strikers and loyalty to local employers. For a month, this debate raged within and between the city's unions, revealing a sharp divide between the proponents of militant industrial action and the 'safe and sane' labour leadership centred around VTLC president Eugene Woodward. On 21 May, the VTLC received a telegram from Calgary announcing a mass meeting "to arrange for a strike vote of all locals on Winnipeg situation, requesting this council to take action."⁷⁶ Joe Knight of Edmonton, a member of the OBU's Central Committee, made a presentation to the council, declaring the propaganda was over and, with an overwhelming majority voting in favour, "the question now was to organize and establish it." Delegate Stevenson reported that the Victoria OBU committee had visited every local in city, and that a substantial majority of the unions and an "absolute majority in numbers" had voted in favour. Stevenson was selected as the VTLC's delegate to the OBU's constituent convention in Calgary. Opponents of the OBU attempted to file without action the telegram regarding the Calgary strike vote, but supporters successfully moved an amendment that: "This Council goes on record as endorsing the Winnipeg strike and directs the Secretary [to]

⁷⁶ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 21 May 1919. A second telegram announced a strike of Toronto metal-trades workers for the eight-hour day, requesting Dominion-wide action.

communicate with Vancouver asking what action, if any, that body is taking on this question. Also that the Executive be authorized to call a special meeting should such action be deemed necessary.”⁷⁷ Victoria’s expression of tempered solidarity had begun. Rhetorical sympathy concealed irreconcilable divisions.

A reorganization of leadership at the same meeting may have fundamentally undermined Victoria’s response to the Winnipeg General Strike. After his election as President of the Pacific Coast District of the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA), respected unionist and Socialist Joe Taylor resigned from the vice-presidency of the council.⁷⁸ A strong advocate of the OBU at the BCFL and western labour conferences in Calgary, and a key organizer in Victoria’s unionization drive of 1918, Taylor had demonstrated his commitment to radical, independent politics when he organized a string of mass meetings in December 1918 and January 1919 protesting censorship, political imprisonment, and the deployment of Canadian troops from Victoria to Vladivostok, Siberia.⁷⁹ Narrowly losing the VTLC presidency to Eugene Woodward in January on a vote of 14 to 15, Taylor appears to have acted as a radical, progressive counter-weight to council officers such as Woodward and secretary Christian Sivertz, who were allied with the AFL-International branch of unionism and frequently counselled moderation.⁸⁰ Taylor’s retreat from the VLTC left the local labour movement with an Executive committee dominated by individuals hostile to the OBU and inclined toward collaboration rather than confrontation with capital and the state.

⁷⁷ UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 21 May 1919.

⁷⁸ UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 21 May 1919.

⁷⁹ See UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” November 1918 to January 1919; *British Columbia Federationist*, December 1918 to January 1919.

⁸⁰ Sivertz’ story is complex. A past president of the BCFL (1912-1913), he served as a mail censor during the war and frequently sought to water down radical and anti-militarist resolutions that delegates presented

The events after Taylor's departure and the VTLC's luke-warm expression of sympathy are difficult to reconstruct. The next regular meeting of the council referred the question of a general strike in Victoria to a "strike committee," but how and when this committee emerged remains a mystery.⁸¹ In late May, the skilled craftsmen of the Boilermakers, Moulders, and Iron Shipbuilders union voted 65 to 47 to take sympathetic strike action "to help out the Winnipeg strikers if the necessity arose."⁸² The resolution was still cautious, strongly worded but vague enough to prevent local workers from downing tools.

Forces were pressuring the VTLC to support Winnipeg only in words. A letter to the *Daily Times* published on 28 May argued that in the writer's 20 years as a union member in BC, "in no case has a sympathetic strike been justified and not one of them successful."⁸³ 'Godfrey' said members should stay at work and donate money to Winnipeg if they wished, but insisted that "to call out all the union men in Western Canada is detrimental to unionism." He called on local workers to vote against striking in sympathy "with unions in a city fifteen hundred miles distant, and for a cause which is purely local." Responding to 'Godfrey' a few days later, a 'Fellow-worker' wrote: "In a time like this, when labor is having to contest very hard against the high cost of living and many other things, it is the duty of every worker to stand shoulder to shoulder, even though we may not see eye to eye."⁸⁴

to council. While a book-length biography of this Postal Worker exists, it was authored by his son, and therefore casts Sivertz in a heroic, uncritical light. (See Sivertz, *Christian*.)

⁸¹ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 4 June 1919.

⁸² UVASC, Boilermakers fonds, "Minute Books," 30 May 1919. Three members voted against holding a strike vote, and there were 2 abstentions in the final tally.

⁸³ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 28 May 1919.

⁸⁴ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 30 May 1919.

Ambivalence reigned as Victoria unions debated their response to the Winnipeg strike. On 29 May, 200 members of the Civic Employees' Protective Association expressed their "entire sympathy with the just aims of organized labor in the city of Winnipeg," but cautioned against "too precipitate action," maintaining that the Association was "prepared to take whatever action may be necessary to protect the interests of labor." The Postal Workers took a similar position. On 30 May, the *Daily Times* ran the headline "Anticipates General Sympathetic Strike to Begin Here Next Week". VTLC president Woodward was quoted as believing a general strike in Victoria was likely. Union members were being polled on their support for the action, and Woodward said the results would be known by the night of Sunday, 1 June. "No one regrets more than I do that there should be a general strike in this city," Woodward said, comparing such action to Britain's decision in 1914 to declare war on Germany: "She had to do it." He acknowledged that some unionists were uneasy about striking against companies that had treated them fairly, but he said "they feel that it is the general principle, the very existence of unionism that is involved... The whole future of unionism in Canada is involved in the Winnipeg strike." The Metal Trades Council endorsed the VTLC's action calling a strike vote of affiliated unions, as the Teamsters, Chauffeurs and Retail Clerks prepared to vote and two emissaries from Winnipeg arrived in Victoria.⁸⁵ Meanwhile, workers in Brandon, Amherst, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Port Arthur and Medicine Hat voted for strike action.⁸⁶ James Dakers, president of the Metal Trades

⁸⁵ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 29-31 May 1919.

⁸⁶ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 19 May 1919 - 31 May 1919.

Council, declared that “the men will support the Winnipeg strikers. They feel the whole principle of unionism is involved and that the right of collective bargaining is at stake.”⁸⁷

Vested interests were alarmed by the growing mood of solidarity. “What is at stake in the Winnipeg situation is the future of the ‘One Big Union’ and its IWW aspirations,” the *Daily Times* suggested in an editorial. “There is a great future for organized labor... But that future is not on the path of the sympathetic strike and class war.”⁸⁸ Another editorial went further, raising the spectre of Bolshevism and revolution:

General strikes are never successful. Labour loses in them much more than it gains... This is what is happening in Winnipeg and what will happen in Toronto and elsewhere... It is in its essential elements an insipient revolution which, if it succeeded, would subvert the established institutions of Government.⁸⁹

The newspaper offered a thinly veiled appeal for vigilantism: “The Government should realize that the Canadian people have no intention of permitting any soviet picnic in this Dominion, and that if it does not deal with the apostles of the Lenine and Trotsky cult they will create various organizations that will.”⁹⁰ At the end of May, a Loyalty League was formed, with the ill-defined mandate to “uphold all constituted authority, to maintain law and order, and to suppress lawlessness in Victoria.”⁹¹ Its secretary, J.H. Young, denied that the League was “about strike breaking” and invited labour to name a representative to the executive.⁹² Regardless of the outcome of the present unrest, Young

⁸⁷ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 2 June 1919.

⁸⁸ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 31 May 1919.

⁸⁹ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 30 May 1919.

⁹⁰ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 26 May 1919. The spelling ‘Lenine’ was common in the press at the time.

⁹¹ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 31 May 1919. The League was an ad hoc committee formed by prominent local citizens, with power to add to its numbers, inviting all residents to take the following pledge and become members of the League: “We hereby join the Loyalty League of Victoria and we solemnly pledge ourselves to do all in our power to uphold all constituted authority, to maintain law and order, and to suppress lawlessness in Victoria and the surrounding districts.”

⁹² *Daily Times* (Victoria), 2 and 7 June 1919; also UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 4 June 1919.

said the League would remain a permanent organization in Victoria.⁹³ President Dakers of the Metal Trades Council ruled out any cooperation: “They have protested on many occasions that they are not out to break strikes, yet at their first business meeting yesterday they offered a guarantee that they will perform the work of strike breakers and unload meat in the event of a strike... Some of the members I believe, are sincere, but others, I believe, have nothing in mind but absolutely to down the unions.”⁹⁴ In anticipation of a strike, Victorians stocked up on food and other provisions.⁹⁵

By early June, nearly 30 of the city’s 41 unions had taken strike votes, with mixed results.⁹⁶ The Machinists, Plumbers, Painters and Riggers voted in favour of sympathetic action, while Telephone Operators, Policemen and Firemen declined to vote.⁹⁷

Woodward remained vague: “I maintain that Victoria labor is behind the Winnipeg strikers. The forecast I made before still holds. In my opinion there will be a strike here unless the Winnipeg trouble is settled in the meantime.” That night, his brothers and sisters in the Retail Clerks union passed a vote of full confidence in his leadership.⁹⁸ As Victoria’s strike vote proceeded, the outcome appeared to hinge on developments in Vancouver: “We intend to cooperate with Vancouver in every way,” Woodward said on 3 June. “Victoria labor, through its balloting, has declared itself solid behind the Winnipeg strikers and willing to walk out if the Strike Committee so decides.”⁹⁹

⁹³ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 9 June 1919.

⁹⁴ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 10 June 1919.

⁹⁵ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 31 May 1919.

⁹⁶ *Daily Times*(Victoria), 2 June 1919. In August, Sivertz submitted a list of 31 locals that were affiliated to the VTLC “as of June 30.” (UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 6 August 1919). Meanwhile, the *Times* reported that there were “nearly 40 locals” affiliated with the council. (*Daily Times* [Victoria], 31 May 1919.)

⁹⁷ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 2 June and 3 June 1919.

⁹⁸ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 2 June 1919.

⁹⁹ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 3 June 1919.

When the VTLC learned that Vancouver workers had voted 3305 to 2499 in favour of a strike, the Victoria Strike Committee considered a response, but the call to ‘down tools’ was never issued.¹⁰⁰ That same day, members of the Seamen’s Union in Victoria and Vancouver walked out demanding higher wages and the eight-hour day.¹⁰¹ Woodward was sent to Vancouver to assess the situation, and explained at a special meeting of the VTLC five days later that, considering the returns from local unions on the strike vote, “the committee did not feel justified in calling a strike.”¹⁰² Nevertheless, after a protracted debate that ended just before midnight, the council voted 36 to three to hold a mass meeting where a strike vote would be held and \$5000 raised for Winnipeg.¹⁰³

The event bolstered the call for a general strike. On the evening of 12 June 1919, approximately 2000 workers crammed into the Royal Athletic Park. By a standing vote they passed resolutions “favouring a general strike here in sympathy with Winnipeg and in support of the right of collective bargaining, and condemning the Dominion Government for “provoking widespread industrial war in Canada.”¹⁰⁴ When opposition was called for, “no one ventured on his feet.” The enthusiasm for a strike prompted the Strike Committee to call for a second round of balloting of affiliated locals. President Woodward told the crowd:

I am not an advocate of the One Big Union, but I am prepared to stand by it in the contention that such an organization or a dozen of them can be organized with or without the approbation of the Government. The financial interests of the country are bound together in one big union, and

¹⁰⁰ UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 4 June 1919; Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice*, 127-129 and 284. Several key labour leaders – Garment Workers’ president Helena Gutteridge among them – were opposed to the strike, influenced by their opposition to the OBU.

¹⁰¹ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 30 May 1919. The Seamen worked the passenger boats between Victoria and the Mainland.

¹⁰² UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 4 June 1919. Between these two meetings, Woodward went to Vancouver to assess the situation there. (see *Daily Times* (Victoria), 6 June 1919.)

¹⁰³ UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 4 June 1919 and *Daily Times*, 10 June 1919, 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 12 June 1919.

this union, composed of a few men, dictates the financial policy of the country. Not only that, they say how you and I must live, whether there shall be low wages or high, slums or decent living quarters. Everything is in their hands...

I never approved of a strike. I regard strikes as the last desperate, hateful expedient. But sometimes conditions become so grave that such action is absolutely necessary. That moment has arrived when it is the duty of workers to join together and tell the government that the issue is vital and to propose to fight to the bitter death... It doesn't condemn a man to call him a Bolshevist. It is much more important to determine who is responsible for Bolshevism.¹⁰⁵

Woodward's words were powerful, despite the lack of corresponding action. While the mass meeting revitalized local sentiment in favour of a sympathy strike, this enthusiasm was short-lived and the labour leadership soon reverted to a 'wait-and-see' approach. Efforts to reconstruct the events that followed are hindered by a peculiar gap in the historical record. From 9 June to 16 July, no minutes of the VTLC survive.¹⁰⁶ One can glean some information from the Boilermakers' records and from the press, but the perspective of the VTLC in this crucial period does not exist.

On 15 June 1919, the radical faction got a boost when the 1200-member Carpenters' Union, which had initially voted against a strike, endorsed sympathetic action.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps sensing a shift in tide, the Loyalty League joined forces with Vancouver's Citizen's League, and began issuing a four-page publication called *The Victoria Citizen*.¹⁰⁸ The League commissioned the airplane *Pathfinder* to drop hundreds

¹⁰⁵ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 12 June 1919.

¹⁰⁶ At least not with the collection at the University of Victoria Archives and Special Collections. The minutes of the special meeting of 9 June 1919 appear on the final page of one hand-written book, while the regular Wednesday meeting of 16 July 1919 are recorded on the first page of a new book. No pages appear to have been removed from either, but other sources suggest meetings did occur. Within the body of the 16 July 1919 minutes, there is no explanation for this hole in the record.

¹⁰⁷ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 16 June 1919. The *Daily Colonist* puts the number of Carpenters at 1,600. (*Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 17 June 1919.)

¹⁰⁸ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 16 June 1919.

of copies of the *Citizen* onto Victoria from the air.¹⁰⁹ “There has been too much compromise with sedition,” the press declared. “Unless the Government does its duty and deports or jails the preachers of red ruin, the public...will be compelled to take measures for its own protection.”¹¹⁰ On the night of 16/17 June 1919, the Dominion Government acceded to pressure from the vigilantes and decided to act. Nine leaders of the Winnipeg strike were apprehended from their homes and jailed in Stony Mountain Penitentiary, as RNWMP officers raided the Labour Hall, Ukrainian Labour Temple, and Winnipeg offices of the Socialist Party of Canada. “Red Societies Are Identical,” the *Daily Colonist* proclaimed, linking the OBU to the much-maligned IWW.¹¹¹ The developments in Winnipeg sent shockwaves through the Victoria labour movement, and appear to have produced two remarkably different outcomes.

At its meeting on the night of 17 June 1919, the Victoria Strike Committee split eight-eight on the question of calling out the city’s workers in sympathy with Winnipeg.¹¹² James Dakers, acting as chairman of the committee, refrained from voting — so he wouldn’t have “upon his head the responsibility of the committee’s action.” Having reached an impasse, the committee dissolved. “The threat of a general walkout was gone,” the *Daily Colonist* proclaimed.¹¹³ The *Daily Times* congratulated organized labour on its refusal to strike, identifying the move as a triumph “of the best elements in

¹⁰⁹ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 18 June 1919.

¹¹⁰ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 14 June 1919. The *Daily Colonist* ran an editorial titled ‘Class Hatred’: “The propagation of class hatred means the perpetuation of war and the permanence of misery. It is the outgrowth of distorted minds.” (See *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 12 June 1919.)

¹¹¹ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 17 June 1919. In Ottawa, the Dominion Government introduced amendments to the Militia Act to double Canada’s permanent army from 5,000 to 10,000 troops.

¹¹² *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 18 June 1919; *Daily Times* (Victoria), 18 June 1919. The Strike Committee consisted of 30 delegates, but multiple votes from locals were disallowed by the meeting, so the vote was paired down to 16 delegates and the chairman, which allowed for the split vote. The *Times* suggests the Electric Workers’ refusal to “pull” Victoria’s power “had a great effect on the strike committee.”

¹¹³ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 18 June 1919.

the labour movement, of the leaders of the great international organizations who have unsparingly denounced the sympathetic strikes over the Winnipeg dispute.”¹¹⁴ This dramatically anticlimactic conclusion to the month-long strike deliberations in Victoria was countered, however, by the radicalization of certain sections of workers following the arrest and incarceration of the Winnipeg strike leaders.

Indeed, state repression ultimately forced labour’s hand, and proved to be the catalyst necessary to mobilize local workers to take sympathetic strike action. Once again, *solidarity by necessity* revealed itself as the fragmented organizations of workers pulled together in self-defense. Once again, this expression of solidarity was partial and short-lived. The dissolution of the Victoria Strike Committee ended participation by more conservative unions in the debate surrounding a general strike — thereby ensuring Victoria’s expression of sympathy with Winnipeg lacked the strength and unity of other cities. Nonetheless, the leaders’ arrests motivated, rather than prevented, strike action by militant unions that had embraced the OBU and grown restless with the Strike Committee.

The day after the Victoria Strike Committee dissolved, several local unions continued the agitation for a general strike.¹¹⁵ As word reached Victoria that the arrested Winnipeg leaders and their families were facing immediate deportation with no civil trial, Woodward wired TLCC President Tom Moore to protest these “star chamber” methods and called another mass meeting for 22 June 1919 in the Royal Athletic Park.¹¹⁶ But other unions had more militant protest tactics in mind.¹¹⁷ On Thursday, 19 June 1919,

¹¹⁴ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 18 June 1919.

¹¹⁵ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 18 June 1919.

¹¹⁶ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 20 June 1919; and *Daily Times* (Victoria), 19 June 1919.

¹¹⁷ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 20 June 1919.

Longshoremen refused to unload cargo from the ship *Africa Maru*, because it was bound for strike-riddled Vancouver.¹¹⁸ They also refused to touch the mail from the Mainland.¹¹⁹ At a meeting that night, the Victoria ILA workers decided to strike in sympathy with Vancouver Seamen and Longshoremen, to protest the arrest of the Winnipeg leaders and to defend the principle of collective bargaining.¹²⁰ The next evening, the Boilermakers' Lodge held a special meeting and voted 61 to 36 to walk out immediately in support of the Winnipeg strikers.¹²¹ The meeting resolved to call the strike "at noon Saturday at the latest if the different shop committees do not call it before.," and directed the business agent to inform the different shops of the outcome of the strike vote. After the Boilermakers made their decision, the Metal Trades Council, representing three-quarters of Victoria's unionized workforce, voted to strike at 10 a.m. on the morning of Monday, 23 June 1919.¹²² The arrest of the Winnipeg strike leaders was the final straw. According to council president James Dakers:

The men were beyond control. The boilermakers and caulkers voted tonight at their meetings to strike on their own if the Metal Trades did not take action. We are out until the Winnipeg strike committee says everything is satisfactory there. Yes, the recent action of the Government was the final touch that set things off.¹²³

¹¹⁸ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 20 June 1919. Hours before the Longshoremen struck, the last troops from the Canadian-Siberian Expeditionary Force landed at Victoria's Outer Wharves aboard the ship *Monteagle*. Major-General J.H. Elmsley, commander of the Canadians in Siberia, was one of the passengers. (See *Daily Times* (Victoria), 19 June 1919.)

¹¹⁹ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 20 June 1919.

¹²⁰ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 20 June 1919; and *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 21 June 1919. The *Times* and *Colonist* offer conflicting reasons for the Longshoremen's strike. The *Daily Colonist* reported that the secretary had denied the strike was in support of the Seamen.

¹²¹ UVASC, Boilermakers, "Minute Books," 20 June 1919.

¹²² *Daily Times* (Victoria), 21 June 1919. The sentiment to strike "was very greatly intensified by the developments at Winnipeg," the *Daily Times* reported, with the metal-trades workers having been incensed over the dissolution of the Victoria Strike Committee earlier in the week.

¹²³ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 21 June 1919.

It was almost midnight when the men finally took the vote to strike.¹²⁴ According to the *Daily Times*, leaders of the Metal Trades Council claimed “that even should no outside unions join in the walkout, the strike will be almost general in character.”¹²⁵

* * *

The day after the workers took their respective strike votes, 21 June 1919 — what has been immortalized as ‘Bloody Saturday’ in the historiography of the period — 300 Victoria Boilermakers downed tools at 12 noon in sympathy with the Winnipeg strikers, who were being trampled by cavalry charge and besieged with revolver fire on Main Street in the Prairie capital.¹²⁶ Mike Sokolowski and Steve Schezerbanowes were killed, as the RNWMP and four regiments of the Canadian militia occupied the city of Winnipeg.¹²⁷ At the very moment the Winnipeg strike was being broken, Victoria’s general strike had barely begun.¹²⁸ A mass meeting at the Royal Athletic Park on Sunday, June 22 drew several thousand workers, who were admitted by union card only. Despite heavy rain, the crowd heard speakers from the Metal Trades and other unions discuss the local strike and the situation in Winnipeg; a resolution was passed calling for the resignation of the Dominion Government.¹²⁹ Longshoreman Joe Taylor was back in

¹²⁴ Ironically, six of the Winnipeg leaders were released hours after the Metal Trades Council took the vote. (Masters, *The Winnipeg General Strike*, 106.)

¹²⁵ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 21 June 1919.

¹²⁶ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 21 June 1919. The coincidence of these two events is remarkable, given the fact that the Boilermakers had no idea what would unfold that Saturday when they voted to strike the night before.

¹²⁷ Masters, *The Winnipeg General Strike*, 107-108; Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg*, 87 and 171-174.

¹²⁸ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 21 June 1919. The *Daily Times* ran the lead editorial, ‘Would Set Up a Soviet’ A large section has been torn out of the original paper prior to its transfer to microfilm. One can only speculate as to the complete contents of this article. Legible portions that remain include the statement: “Confident of their control of the machinery of organized labor in Manitoba’s capital they threw off their mask and exposed themselves as the ‘One Big Union’ movement for what they were — Red revolutionaries masquerading as champions of organized labor.” One could speculate that the source document was defaced to conceal inflammatory fear mongering on a day many remember as a tragic police riot where two innocent men died.

¹²⁹ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 23 June 1919.

Victoria, and was reportedly “highly in favour of the attitude of the local longshoremen” who were keeping a picket along the waterfront “to see that nothing is put over on the strikers.”¹³⁰ Perhaps this respected and radical labour leader’s presence played a role in Victoria’s shift from passive to active solidarity. During his absence, there were loud expressions of sympathy but little action. Still, while Taylor may have influenced the calling of the general strike, his presence in the city could have been entirely coincidental, with Victoria workers acting on their own accord to challenge the craft-union leadership and take action to avenge the arrests in Winnipeg.

Promptly at 10 a.m. on the morning of Monday, 23 June 1919, 5000 workers affiliated with Victoria’s Metal Trades Council downed tools: “industrial activity was temporarily brought to a halt.”¹³¹ The Foundation Company shipyards, employing 4000 men, ceased work on a contract of 20 wooden steamships that were to be delivered to the French government by December.¹³² “I have too much confidence in the sensible workers to believe that a strike will be possible,” company manager Alexander E. Jenkins said three weeks earlier.¹³³ His employees had proved him wrong. A vigorous picket of Seamen convinced workers on the Canadian government lighthouse ship *Estevan* to walk off the job.¹³⁴ The Loyalty League was surprisingly quiet, with the press reporting merely that it would meet that night.¹³⁵

While Victoria’s sympathetic strike was largely confined to unions affiliated with the Metal Trades Council, these 5000 workers represented over 70 per cent of the 7000

¹³⁰ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 22 June 1919.

¹³¹ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 23 June 1919.

¹³² *Daily Times* (Victoria), 23 June 1919.

¹³³ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 5 June 1919.

¹³⁴ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 23 June 1919.

¹³⁵ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 23 June 1919.

workers organized in Victoria’s 41 unions.¹³⁶ Therefore, while the strike was not ‘general’ in terms of including all sections of workers in the city — the Streetcar workers, Electrical workers, and Civic Employees represent a significant absence — the large percentage of organized labour that participated in the strike may be sufficient to categorize the action as a “General Strike.” At the height of the strike Longshoremen, Seamen, Boilermakers, Caulkers, and a wide array of trades employed at the Shipyards struck in solidarity with Winnipeg workers, and the Teamsters refused to handle goods going into or out of the shops.¹³⁷ These workers established a central Strike Committee, as well as committees charged with Law and Order, Exemptions, Transportation, Picketing, and the Press.¹³⁸ Future CCF MLA Arthur Turner served on the Strike Committee, as vice-president of the Shipbuilders Unit of the OBU.¹³⁹

Four days after the Victoria strike began, the Winnipeg General Strike was called off.¹⁴⁰ In a painful irony, that day Samuel Gompers was re-elected President of the American Federation of Labor at the organization’s annual convention in Atlanta, Georgia.¹⁴¹ While a group of radicals remained seated as the convention cheered, the stability of the reactionary, pro-war, craft-unionist leadership and the failure of post-war radicalism and militancy to bring about a transformation — or at least a changing of the guard — in the AFL must have been tremendously disheartening. However at the same

¹³⁶ See *Daily Times* (Victoria), 3 June 1919, where Victoria’s union membership is pegged at 7000.

¹³⁷ NAC, Department of Labour Collection, RG 7, Vol. 315, “Strikes and Lockouts File,” John Chrow to F.A. Ackland, 1 August 1919; also *Daily Times* (Victoria), 24 June 1919.

¹³⁸ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 23 June 1919. The Exemptions committee determined which ‘essential’ workers should remain at work. The committee would have authorized food production and distribution had the strike extended to the Cooks, Waiters, Butchers, Bakers, Retail Workers, etc.

¹³⁹ Turner, *Somewhere – A Perfect Place*, 23.

¹⁴⁰ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 25 June 1919. On the third day of Victoria’s strike, 24 June 1919, the Winnipeg Strike Committee met from 7 p.m. until 11 p.m. in the Labor Temple, and agreed to order the strikers back to work at 11 a.m. the next morning, exactly six weeks into the strike.

¹⁴¹ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 24 June 1919.

time, Gompers' re-election may have confirmed the critique advanced by the OBU: that the AFL was corrupt to the core and could not be reformed.

On Thursday, 26 June 1919, a third mass meeting was held in Victoria's Royal Athletic Park. Several thousand workers were in attendance, and after listening to speakers and discussing the merits of a continued strike, the workers voted to return to work the next morning at 8 a.m., with fewer than 100 voting to stay out.¹⁴² After paralyzing the core productive industries of the city for four days, the Victoria General Strike was over. With the exception of two workers, all the strikers were accepted back at work by the employers.¹⁴³

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The sympathetic strikes of spring 1919 represent a defining moment in the history of British Columbia's working class. Industrial action was embraced by an unprecedented spectrum of socialists and rank-and-file workers. As Victoria wavered on the question of a general strike, Jim Woodsworth made his way to Winnipeg where he assumed the editorship of the strikers' *Western Labour News*, following the imprisonment of William Ivens. Within 24 hours he would be arrested and charged with seditious libel for printing a passage from Isaiah.¹⁴⁴ A week earlier, Bill Pritchard was arrested aboard a CPR train in Calgary by an undercover RNWMP agent, *en route* from Winnipeg to Vancouver.¹⁴⁵ Vic Midgley maintained a vigorous correspondence on behalf of the OBU, while Arthur Turner sat on the Victoria Strike Committee and Ernest Winch mobilized the loggers of

¹⁴² *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 27 June 1919. The vote did not affect the Seamen's and Longshoremen's strikes, as they were not affiliated with the Metal Trades Council.

¹⁴³ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 28 June 1919; *Daily Times* (Victoria), 28 June 1919.

¹⁴⁴ Edith Fowke, ed., *Toward Socialism: Selections from the writings of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: Ontario Woodsworth Memorial Foundation, 1948), 23-28; Norman Penner, ed. *Winnipeg 1919: The strikers' own history of the Winnipeg General Strike*, 2nd Ed. (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1975), 207-212; also *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 24 June 1919.

BC.¹⁴⁶ In 1919, these individuals – founders and parliamentarians of the BC CCF – found themselves at the centre of Canada’s labour revolt. To be sure, the industrial solidarity of spring 1919 was partial, short-lived and undermined by considerable division in labour’s ranks, as the case of Victoria aptly demonstrates. But 1919 provided a potent lesson for BC socialists as they continued their search for solidarity. A decade and a half later, these same individuals would confine themselves to the narrow strategy of parliamentary democracy. The following chapters will explore this transition.

¹⁴⁵ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 21 June 1919; Penner, *Winnipeg 1919*, 178.

¹⁴⁶ Arthur J. Turner, *Somewhere – A Perfect Place*, 23-24; Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel*, 50-55.

Chapter 3: Aftershocks: 1919 and the Decline of Industrial Action

On the North American continent, the organized labour movement is with its back to the wall, facing a concerted move to smash it to impotence. In Canada, by a decision of the court, its one means of making its strength felt has been declared unconstitutional, and those who have been most bold in voicing its needs and aspirations, are in gaol, or awaiting trial. A secret census has been ordered to be taken of all those holding unorthodox economic and political views, and the military police force and the soldiery are being reinforced preparatory to we know not what...

Western Clarion, 15 January 1920

The OBU was stillborn, subjected to an unprecedented assault by the AFL-Internationals, employers, and the State. The Socialist leaders of the OBU brought the Canadian working-class the closest it has ever come to social revolution. The ruling elite spared no effort in containing this threat to its power and privilege. But external opposition was only one-half of the hazard threatening the OBU. Internal division in the socialist camp – briefly mediated in the heat of 1919 – came back into the open in 1920 and tore apart the industrial organization of BC workers. The One Big Union would not survive the shockwaves of 1919. As result, the heritage of industrial militancy bequeathed by the IWW was struck a severe blow, setting BC socialists on a trajectory that would increasingly see them limit their activity to the parliamentary field.

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June 1919 represents the high-water mark of industrial struggle and solidarity in action in the history of BC. Under the banner of the OBU, a wide section of BC workers rebelled against their union officialdom, employers, and the State. But from its inception – indeed, in the very character of the Western Caucus meeting held at Québec in September 1918 –

the OBU was paradoxically poised as both the unifier and the divider of British Columbia labour. The BC Socialists at the helm of the OBU, either by accident or by design, smashed the existing labour organizations but failed to replace them with a superior form of organization. Their motives appeared sound from the perspective of both anti-militarism and socialism: the leadership of the AFL-Internationals was too patriotic, too closely tied to the war programme of employers and their state to facilitate the forms of mass action necessary to abolish militarism and bring about social transformation. The extra-parliamentary tactics embodied by the Russian Bolsheviks could not be applied to the North American context until the 'labor fakirs' were pushed out of the way by a new, militant centre of working class industrial organization. However, as the episode of solidarity retreated and the revolutionary moment of 1919 was contained, organized labour suffered a stunning setback in British Columbia.

The dust had scarcely settled on Main Street. The bodies of Mike Sokolowski and Steve Schezerbanowes were still fresh in the ground. The OBU was prodigal in infancy yet crippled before it ever reached adulthood. In its three months of rapid expansion, the revolutionary union organized an extraordinary number of Canadian workers around an idea, and provided the coordination necessary for the most extensive expression of class solidarity in twentieth-century Canada. The suppression of the sympathetic strikes marked the opening volley in the Triple Alliance's war against the OBU.¹ The AFL-International leadership, employers and the state joined forces to crush the nascent organization. Beginning on 29 June 1919, the homes and offices of socialists

¹ *Red Flag* (Vancouver), 30 August 1919. 'Triple Alliance' refers to the coalition of the AFL-Internationals, employers, and the state in their campaign to crush the nascent OBU. It derived from the working-class Triple Alliance in Britain, consisting of 800,000 miners, 500,000 rail workers, and 300,000

from Vancouver to Montréal were targeted by the Canadian state. The next day, six plainclothes officers of the RNWMP raided the Victoria homes of socialist Joe Taylor and VTLC president Eugene Woodward.² The authorities also raided the local headquarters of the SPC, the striking Longshoremen's union, and labour's *Semi-Weekly Tribune*, and seized a quantity of paper work. While no arrests were made, Woodward accused the police of abusing their powers and considered initiating legal action, declaring that he was “not a Socialist and not a member of the party.”³ In Vancouver, the *BC Federationist* had its front door smashed in and documents seized as part of a raid on the Labour Temple. Also targeted was SPC headquarters in Vancouver and the homes of Pritchard, Midgley, Winch, Kavanagh, and Wells, among others.⁴ From Wells' home police seized the entire records of the BCFL since its formation in 1910. The *Federationist* accused the Dominion Government of conspiring, through the RNWMP, “to establish a reign of terror so far as organized labor is concerned.”⁵ The state and its security apparatus were taking no risks in containing the syndicalist threat and its socialist leadership.

transport workers, as well as the military alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy . (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 5 September 1919.)

² *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 30 June 1919. Taylor was named in a warrant issued by Alfred E. Andrews, special counsel for Manitoba of the federal Department of Justice and envoy of the Citizens Committee of 1000. The warrant read, in part, that “there is reason to suspect” that evidence “of the indictable offense of seditious conspiracy, are concealed in...the place of abode, office and premises of J. Taylor.”

³ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 2 July 1919. VTLC president Woodward, editor of the *Tribune*, returned home later in the day to find that both his front and back door had been unlocked. “He is not sure whether or not the police visited his place,” the *Daily Times* reported.

⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 4 July 1919; *Daily Times* (Victoria), 30 June 1919.

⁵ *Daily Times* (Victoria), 30 July 1919. The next issue of the *Federationist* discussed in on the police action: “some time ago it was asked what the Mounties were here for, there is now no doubt as to their functions, and that the government of this land is to establish a reign of terror so far as organized labor is concerned.” Months later, as Pritchard and others were prosecuted on charges of seditious conspiracy, a list was released revealing the primary targets of the police dragnet. Providing valuable insight into the national dimensions of labour radicalism, the list is a virtual who's who of BC's socialist movement: Midgley, Wells, Naylor, Taylor, Kavanagh, Cottrell and Bennett. (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 4 July 1919 and 30 January 1920.)

As David Bercuson has pointed out, the OBU's apparent victory over the AFL unions in the West was short-lived.⁶ Employers and Department of Labour officials eagerly cooperated with AFL officials in refusing to bargain with the OBU, paving the way for the resurrection of International unions in previously solid OBU territory. In the immediate aftermath of the Victoria strike, the *Semi-Weekly Tribune* discussed the question of tactics: "It ill becomes workers who engage in strikes to squeal at the consequences of defeat... Before engaging in industrial war the workers must consider not only the chances of victory but the chances of defeat."⁷

OBU support declined sharply following the suppression of the sympathetic strikes, but BC socialists continued their agitation for the new union. Following his release on bail from Stony Mountain penitentiary, OBU chairman Bill Pritchard made his way westward to resume organizational work. On 13 July 1919, before a crowd at Victoria's Royal Athletic Park, he forcefully advocated for the OBU:

Economic forces compel movements: the master class today is irresistibly driven into large mergers... we have or have had the One Big Union of the Allied Forces, the One Big Union of Oil Interests, the One Big Union of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association. Now we have *the* One Big Union quite a lusty infant in spite of prenatal influences and premature delivery! Parliament has shown itself, as ever, as the Executive of the Master-Class.⁸

To Pritchard, the industrial and political struggles were inseparable. His involvement in the OBU was not at variance with his future involvement in the CCF. The OBU was a

⁶ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 121-122 and 133-155; Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour*, 186. The AFL hired two envoys for Canada, Alf Farmilo of Edmonton and William Varley of Toronto. They were paid \$42.00 per week to crush the OBU, funded by a \$50,000 grant from the United Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees, which was administered by TLCC secretary Paddy Draper. In July 1919, Farmilo set up a parallel Vancouver Trades and Labour Council to rival the OBU-dominated council. Similar scenarios played out in Winnipeg and other points.

⁷ *Semi Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 10 July 1919. Edited by VTLC president Woodward, an official of the AFL-affiliated Retail Clerks International Union, the anti-OBU stance of the newspaper is to be expected.

⁸ *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 14 July 1919.

mechanism for challenging the power of both employers and their state. But already signs of disunity were evident in BC's labour movement. The *Semi-Weekly Tribune* agreed with Pritchard on the general advantage of industrial unionism, but doubted

the wisdom of wrecking the trades union movement in Western Canada by the formation of One Little Union of Industrial Workers. The idea will grow. It is destined to survive. Given time and patience it will be adopted by the Internationals without division, or secession, or internecine strife. The Tribune urges the workers to keep the ranks solid and to keep their guns trained on the foe.

The writer questioned "the necessity for splitting the workers into two warring factions."⁹

The lines had been drawn, between the proponents of the OBU and those who remained loyal to the TLCC leadership and the AFL-Internationals. On 16 July 1919, the two factions battled for control over the VTLC. Former TLCC president James Watters, now a delegate from the Carpenters' local, moved to endorse the constitution of the OBU.¹⁰ Chairman Woodward ruled the motion was out of order as it lacked unanimous consent. "The discussion waxed warm," with supporters and opponents of the OBU trading barbs.¹¹ When delegates Varney and Watters moved that "this meeting pass a vote of want of confidence in the chair," Woodward consulted the by-laws and agreed to allow a vote on whether Watters' motion was in order. Delegates confirmed Woodward's original ruling by a vote of 15 to 12. Sensing the strength of the anti-OBU faction, Watters substituted for the original motion of endorsement one stating: "That this Council recommends to the affiliated locals to register their views on the constitution of the One Big Union, as early as convenient." The resolution carried by a vote of 21 to 4.¹²

⁹ *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 14 July 1919.

¹⁰ UVASC, VLC, "Minutes," 16 July 1919.

¹¹ *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 17 July 1919.

¹² UVASC, VLC, "Minutes," 16 July 1919. See also *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 17 July 1919.

And so Victoria's labour council, by a narrow margin, remained under the effective control of the AFL-Internationals, escaping the pattern established in Vancouver, Winnipeg and other points where the central body fell into the hands of the OBU, forcing the formation of a rival AFL council.¹³ The OBU lacked the numerical strength necessary to take over the VTLC. From that point forward, the council would withstand the OBU challenge, weathering the 1919 labour revolt heavily scarred but intact. The Teamsters, Bookbinders, Steam and Operating Engineers and Printing Pressmen expressed their opposition to the OBU.¹⁴ The Civic Employees Protective Association rejected affiliation by a vote of 59 to 9, with six spoiled ballots.¹⁵ On 27 August 1919 the VTLC executive met with AFL-TLCC envoy Alf Farmilo, "with a view to ascertaining the situation in this City respecting secession from the Int. Craft union movement or affiliation with the One Big Union."¹⁶ Farmilo inquired specifically regarding the status of the Amalgamated Postal Workers.¹⁷

By the autumn of 1919, the VTLC – while withstanding the OBU threat – was severely weakened. The Garment Workers and Painters withdrew their affiliation from the council, the latter joining the OBU, and the UBCJ attacked Woodward and the council leadership, as did the Plumbers and Steam Fitters.¹⁸ A major point of contention

¹³ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 133-55. No records of the Victoria OBU exist. Sporadic references to the organization can be found in the labour press, and in the records of the VTLC, but the actual experience of the OBU in Victoria is difficult to discern. What is clear is that the overwhelming support exhibited in spring 1919, prior to and following the Calgary conference, declined sharply in the wake of the sympathetic strikes.

¹⁴ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 6 and 20 August 1919 and 3 September 1919.

¹⁵ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 20 August 1919.

¹⁶ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 3 September 1919.

¹⁷ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 3 September 1919.

¹⁸ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 6 and 20 August, 3 September, 1 October, 5 November, and 3 December 1919. In October 1919, the VTLC received a correspondence from the Painters stating that they had withdrawn their affiliation to the Council. A month later, a spokesperson for the Organization Committee stated that "he had been told that the said local has joined the One Big Union group." However

was the election of officers and Woodward's selection as a delegate to the Industrial Conference held in Ottawa, a controversial meeting, sponsored by the Dominion government, that radicals viewed as treasonous collaboration between capital and labour.¹⁹ The OBU-controlled Vancouver TLC had called for a boycott of the Ottawa conference, pending the release of the strike leaders in Winnipeg.²⁰

At the 1919 TLCC convention, held in Hamilton, AFL leaders condemned the OBU, the executive remained in the hands of anti-OBU moderates, and changes were made to the Congress' constitution, empowering the executive to take disciplinary action against renegade affiliates. In his report to the VTLC, Woodward conceded that the distribution of a 'ticket' prior to the election of officers "produced an impression of a "Machine" being operated... every person on the 'ticket' was elected to office."²¹ Even so, Woodward approved of the constitutional amendments "to discipline chartered organizations," and "pronounced himself as in full accord with the Int. craft union system."²² In response to the constitutional amendments and increased powers conferred on the TLCC executive, however, the pro-OBU leadership of the BCFL "severed its connection with the Congress and returned its charter."²³

Despite the acrimony between the OBU and AFL camps, residual unity remained under the auspices of the Winnipeg Defense Fund. At the same meeting at which they rejected endorsement of the OBU, VTLC delegates voted to send \$100 to aid in the

by December, Sivertz would report "that the Painters union were in good standing, having paid their per capita tax to the end of 1919."

¹⁹ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 20 August 1919. See also UBCSC, Eugene S. Woodward Papers, Box 1, File 2, "National Industrial Conference... Official Report of Proceedings," 168-175.

²⁰ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 6 and 20 August 1919.

²¹ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 15 October 1919.

²² UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 15 October 1919.

²³ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 15 October 1919.

defense of the strike leaders in Winnipeg.²⁴ Although united industrial action was no longer discussed, solidarity by necessity revealed itself in the broad support for the martyred men. Both AFL and OBU locals forwarded money to the fund, including the Steam engineers, Teamsters, and Printing Pressmen.²⁵ In November 1919, the VTLC endorsed a proposal from Wells and J. Ewert of the BC Defense Committee calling for ‘One Day’s Pay for Winnipeg.’²⁶ At their next meeting, delegates endorsed the Committee’s ‘Workers’ Liberty Bond’ campaign.²⁷ As Jim Woodsworth would report at an FLP meeting in February, “no other province had so loyally supported the defense as British Columbia.”²⁸ The *Clarion* commented on the Winnipeg trials:

The significance of this prosecution lies in its initiation practically at the birth, in Canada, of the OBU... The sustained effort of the Crown to lay the Winnipeg strike at the OBU door is evidence enough of the light in which it is regarded... The Winnipeg trial marks the most momentous period in the history of Canadian labor.²⁹

The historical significance of the strike and prosecution at Winnipeg lies both in the unprecedented scale of working-class militancy and its impact on the development of labour political action in subsequent decades.

Residual unity under the Winnipeg Defense Fund was overshadowed by hostility between the AFL-Internationals and the OBU. In the autumn of 1919, the AFL attempted to disband the Victoria local of the Shipyard Labourers, Riggers and Fasteners union, which was affiliated with the ILA and had voted 2230 to 60 for the OBU.³⁰ This move coincided with a general decline in industrial activity on the Victoria waterfront, as war-

²⁴ UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 16 July 1919.

²⁵ UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 20 August, 3 September, and 1 October 1919.

²⁶ UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 19 November 1919.

²⁷ UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 3 December 1919.

²⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 27 February 1920.

²⁹ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 1 April 1920.

³⁰ UBCSC, OBU Collection, “Appendix II”,

time production dried up in the large ship-building industry. The AFL ordered that the membership of the Shipyard workers be divided among the Structural Iron Workers, UBCJ, and International Hod Carriers organization, three AFL-affiliated Internationals.³¹ The membership defied this order and continued meeting in its original form. Delegates were seated by the local Metal Trades Council, among them John L. Marten, a long-time militant on Victoria's labour scene who had been prominent in pre-war agitation in support of the striking coal miners.

The dispute expanded into a fight over control of Victoria's Metal Trades Council in early 1920. The conflict was likely exacerbated by its "precarious" financial situation.³² In a letter to the *Federationist*, Marten shared his views on the dispute:

something was done that did not particularly please the meal ticket artists of the council. The main cause of displeasure was the defeat of James Dakers for president and the election of certain delegates to represent the council on the newly organized Soldier-Labor Council of the city... the election [was] declared null and void...the One Big Union movement is growing, thanks largely to the inefficiency of the Metal Trades Council. Once in a while we are visited by the paid organizers of the AF of L who, of course, tells us that the OBU is either dying fast, or is dead, buried and cremated. We over here, however, know different.³³

Within weeks, the Shipyard workers local would disband. Marten accused the Metal Trades Council of "using its resources to crush the union out of existence." He lambasted "an aggregation masquerading as Labor leaders, who not only themselves lack the capacity to learn, but throw every obstacle in the way of the progress of the workers."³⁴

³¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 27 February 1920. "Victoria Metal Trades Council."

³² UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 18 February 1920.

³³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 27 February 1920.

³⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 5 March 1920.

In January 1920 as BC delegates made their way to Winnipeg for the first semi-annual convention of the OBU, the *Federationist* offered ‘some suggestions’ for the new industrial union:

No organization can be better than the foundation on which it is built, and while those opposed to the new movement have attempted to bring about its early demise, we are inclined to think that it is more likely to be killed by the kindness of its friends than by the venom of its enemies.

Revealing the ideological ferment and questioning in the aftermath of 1919, the newspaper discussed the tension between day-to-day, ‘bread-and-butter’ trade unionism and the transformative objectives of many OBU supporters, who “hailed the new organizations as being the means whereby the workers would achieve their emancipation [and] surrounded it with a revolutionary halo that does not fit it.” The OBU was formed, the writer insisted, to deal with wages and working conditions, and carry on an educational policy in the Labor movement. “That is all it is, and all it can be... Those that claim anything else for it, such as building the new society within the shell of the old, are wandering in a maze equal in intensity to that which the average craft unionist finds himself surrounded with.³⁵ Even the *Western Clarion*, organ of the SPC which was so central to the formation of the OBU and the 1919 revolt, was distancing itself from industrial struggle. In an article titled ‘Direct Action’, a writer identified as ‘J.T.’ declared:

To say that the revolution is around the corner is ridiculous. Any sane minded man can see that for himself. We can only have Socialism when we have Socialists... The mass actionists have given the ruling class an excuse for them to crush working-class organizations. We, however, will not as Engels points out, ‘allow ourselves to be drawn into a street fight.’³⁶

³⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 23 January 1920.

³⁶ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 2 February 1920. While it is possible that ‘J.T.’ is Victoria’s Joe Taylor, the writer’s views appear to conflict with Taylor’s support for general strike action in 1919. This

Despite this widespread rejection of industrial militancy, proponents could still be found.

In February 1920, Jim Woodsworth told a Vancouver audience that “the Winnipeg strike had done more to solidify the ranks of Labor than anything else that had ever happened in Canada. Even the farmers were now accused of wanting to set up a Soviet.”³⁷ He warned that the Winnipeg trials would decide “whether the workers are going to get justice through the courts, or have to use some other means – industrial means – to bring about what they believe to be their rights.”³⁸ The future founder of the CCF had not yet dismissed militant industrial action.

The relationship between industrial and political action revealed itself with the continued collaboration between the OBU and the FLP. In April 1920, the two organizations jointly hosted a meeting in Victoria to protest the conviction of Pritchard and other strike leaders. With W.E. Pierce in the chair, the meeting passed a resolution demanding “the immediate release of the workers representatives now detained in jail through the Winnipeg strike.” A second motion affirmed “the right of all workers to organize in any way they deem best suited to their industrial needs... [and] to join such political organizations as will best give political expression to their needs.”³⁹

Pierce embodied the complementary relationship between the industrial OBU and political FLP, directing the activities of both organizations in Victoria. In May 1920, he resurrected *The Week* newspaper and revealed his confidence in transformative social change:

discrepancy may be explained, however, by his migration away from direct action following the containment of the labour revolt.

³⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 27 February 1920.

³⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 27 February 1920.

³⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 9 April 1920.

The revolution that has so long been talked of must come. It may be postponed by foolish efforts to bolster up existing conditions a little longer, but it cannot be averted. If we don't face it now our children will have to, and the longer it is delayed the worse it will be. Now is the time for change. Not ten years hence – not one year hence – but now. At this very moment the walls of capitalism are crumbling at the base. Big finance is becoming very much alarmed, and is going frantic in its effort to stem the rising tide of socialistic sentiment.⁴⁰

Pierce's emergence as CCF candidate for Saanich in the 1933 provincial election must be understood in relation to his activities in the wake of the First World War, where he retained a commitment to revolutionary socialist politics. In a debate on the merits of Bolshevism in January 1920, Pierce answered the question 'Why a Bolshevik':

Because they value humanity before dollars, because they early appreciated the fact that the late war was not for democracy, because they were Internationalists, because they were ready for peace, real peace...because their system went to the root of the trouble and found it economic, not political, and because they were not afraid to fight.⁴¹

Pierce embraced both the FLP and OBU. But the days of the industrial organization were numbered in BC. External and internal forces would soon bring about its demise.

In spring 1920, a year after the OBU was founded, the AFL-TLCC leadership dispensed with any pretense of unity, abandoned the cause of the Winnipeg strike leaders and wrote off the BCFL. In Vancouver, James McVety – who emerged as a virulent opponent of the OBU and a close collaborator with the State – attacked Woodsworth for addressing an OBU meeting.⁴² The VTLC, meanwhile, filed unread a request from the BC Defense Committee for funds to aid in Bob Russell's appeal to the Privy Council.⁴³

⁴⁰ *The Week* (Victoria), 1 May 1920. Details of the cessation of publication are provided in a front-page article, which appeared below the pithy slogan: "Destroy the Rule of Gold by Establishing the 'Golden Rule'."

⁴¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 6 February 1920.

⁴² *British Columbia Federationist*, 5 March 1920. In September 1920, the *Federationist* reported on a luncheon McVety had attended at the Hotel Vancouver as a guest of federal Minister of Labour Gideon Robertson. (*British Columbia Federationist*, 24 September 1920.)

⁴³ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 3 March 1920.

When the Victoria council discussed sending delegates to the 1920 convention of the OBU-controlled BCFL, Eugene Woodward was opposed, despite a 20-4 vote in favour of the action.⁴⁴ This decision was later reversed, and the central body of Victoria labour was unrepresented, even though the convention was held in the city. The BCFL convention opened in Victoria on 8 March 1920, with many future CCFers among the delegates: Angus McInnis, WH Cottrell and John Sidaway representing the Street Railwaymen of Vancouver; Vic Midgley representing the general workers' unit of the OBU in Vancouver; Ernest Winch representing the Loggers; W.E. Pierce representing the Shipbuilders unit of the OBU; and Jim Woodsworth, awaiting trial, who addressed delegates on behalf of the Winnipeg Defense Committee.

Hostility between OBU and AFL supporters dominated the meeting. Sidaway focused his attack on Farmilo, accusing AFL loyalists of changing "their opinions for a few dollars...backed by funds, by the government, the Trades and Labor Congress and by employers," a situation Sidaway said could not be tolerated:

We have got to show Mr. Farmilo and others that they can't get away with this any longer...these men should be taken by the scruff of the neck, if necessary, and shown where they belonged.⁴⁵

In his address, Woodsworth defended his work on behalf of the Defense Committee, denying that funds had been used for OBU propaganda, and claiming that he had "steered

⁴⁴ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 4 February 1920 and 3 and 17 March 1920. At the next meeting, delegates voted to reconsider the decision, and wrote to the TLCC regarding the status of the BCFL. Congress secretary Paddy Draper responded that the Federation had returned its charter the preceding autumn. Federation secretary A.S. Wells justified this action on the grounds "that no democratic minded man would stand for any such procedure, namely, that of giving Executive Officers of Congress power to remove the officers of Provincial Federations of Labor." Upon learning the Vancouver TLC (International) had voted to pay up per capita dues to the BCFL and send two delegates to the convention, the VTLC resolved on a vote of 12 to 9 to take the same course of action, though payment of the per capita tax was reversed at the next meeting. A requirement that convention delegates belong to unions affiliated with the BCFL limited the number of eligible nominees from Victoria. Only Longshoremen's delegate Varney was

clear of the rival factions.” Midgley, however, denounced opponents of the OBU, suggesting there was “collusion between the government and the employers and the Internationals, and...between some representatives of the Internationals and the secret police.” The convention approved, on a vote of 40 to 5, the executive’s recommendation to dissolve the Federation. A decade after its inception, the organization was retired, ostensibly deemed redundant by the emergence of One Big Union of all workers, but in reality a casualty of the struggle for control over the Federation’s property, including the coveted *Federationist*.⁴⁶

The dissolution of the BCFL removed any remaining mechanism for mediating the dispute between the OBU and AFL factions, severing the lines of communication and the means of reconciliation between the two camps. On May Day 1920, two rival events took place in Victoria: a mass meeting organized by the VTLC, and a social organized by the local unit of the OBU.⁴⁷ This moment symbolizes the divided state of organized labour in BC’s capital city in the aftermath of 1919: International Labour Day, the expression of unity of the workers of the world, required two separate events in two separate venues hosted by the fragmented factions of Victoria’s working class.

* * *

External opposition from the Triple Alliance of the AFL-Internationals, employers and the state was only one factor in the decline and collapse of the OBU in BC. In mid-1920,

elected, and when other delegates imposed a number of instructions governing his actions at the impending convention, Varney resigned as the VTLC’s delegate.

⁴⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 12 March 1920.

⁴⁶ See *British Columbia Federationist*, 12 March 1920; also Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 156-157. Following the amendments to the TLCC constitution, the prospect of a major legal fight threatened to destroy the BCFL and transfer the *Federationist* out of the hands of the OBU. According to Bercuson, BCFL officers acted preemptively to prevent this outcome.

an internal struggle came to the fore that dealt a fatal blow to the fortunes of the organization on the West Coast, setting the province's labour movement on a trajectory that would reverberate within the CCF years later.⁴⁸

At issue was a dispute between the Lumber Workers Industrial Union (LWIU) – the largest unit of the OBU – and the central headquarters of the organization. The LWIU was led by Ernest Winch; the head office of the OBU, by Victor Midgley. Both were located in Vancouver. Seasoned veterans of the general strikes and comrades in the SPC, Winch and Midgley would be influential in the founding of the BC CCF and run as candidates in the 1933 provincial election. But relations between these two socialist leaders were permanently soured over a dispute internal to the OBU. While the union could withstand attacks from its external enemies – the AFL-Internationals, employers, and the state – internal factionalism proved deadly. The industrial solidarity of 1919 was not immune from the divisive forces of ambition and personality conflict.⁴⁹

The LWIU grew rapidly from the time of its founding in January 1918, encompassing 23,000 workers by 1920. The strong contingent of IWW members who had joined the ranks, however, threatened Winch's power.⁵⁰ On 15 August 1920 an RCMP special agent reported: "There is a big fight on between Winch and Midgley. Winch wants to keep the Headquarters office open and Midgley is trying to have all dues

⁴⁷ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 21 April 1920; and *British Columbia Federationist*, 7 May 1920. The VTLC rejected overtures from the OBU to cooperate in organizing a parade for May 1st to protest the imprisonment of the strike leaders in Winnipeg.

⁴⁸ Gordon Stanley Wickerson, "Conflict in the British Columbia Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and the 'Connell Affair,'" (MA Thesis: UBC, 1970.)

⁴⁹ See Walter Young, "Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia," *BC Studies* 32 (Winter 1976-77): 139-162.

⁵⁰ Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel*, 57-59; also Kealey and Whitaker, *RCMP Security Bulletins*, 241; and Hak, "British Columbia Loggers and the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, 1919-1922," *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (1989), 67-90.

paid direct to the OBU headquarters.”⁵¹ An agent speculated that “it looks as if Winch nourishes a purpose of expanding his organization within the OBU until it absorbs it all.”

⁵² This struggle for power was cloaked by a debate over how the OBU should be organized: either on an industrial basis, with the LWIU retaining its autonomous status, or on a more closely integrated geographic basis, with district councils retaining control over all industries in a geographic area. Out of Winnipeg, a third alternative to the industrial or geographic form was advocated: class organization.⁵³ The LWIU was the financial backbone of the OBU, forwarding per capita funds for 12,589 members to the Vancouver headquarters in April 1920, but payments were suspended in June.⁵⁴

In an article in the *Federationist* in early August, Midgley played down the personal factors in the dispute: “There has been some conflict and a little ill feeling arising out of the overlapping of organizers and duplication of officers, the writer, however, is not dealing with individuals.” Midgley blamed “the separate membership receipt, the separate headquarters, and the separate executive board,” calling for the “one general executive board, one general headquarters and a common membership receipt.” He urged greater solidarity between workers of different industries: “The basis of labor organization is not the tools with which we work but our common desire for a larger share of the wealth which our labor produces, and our common need for emancipation from wage-slavery.”⁵⁵ Winch responded with a direct challenge to the supremacy of Midgley and the GEB of the OBU: “It is about time that the idea that British Columbia is

⁵¹ Kealey and Whitaker, *RCMP Security Bulletins*, 106.

⁵² Kealey and Whitaker, *RCMP Security Bulletins*, 34.

⁵³ *One Big Union Bulletin*, 30 October 1920. In an editorial, the *Bulletin* pointed to the futility of this dispute: “There is a tendency to fight and divide over the question of INDUSTRIAL vs. GEOGRAPHIC form of organization. This is pure foolishness. Both forms are needed and overlapping is bound to occur. Sensible men cannot make a fight along these lines.”

⁵⁴ UBCSC, OBU Collection, “Second Semi-Annual Convention of the One Big Union”, 15.

the centre of the industrial life of the American continent was gotten out of the heads of some of us fellows in the west.” He asserted that “the plan of organization which will fit a locality of a few hundred workers is not to be taken as the whole basis, suitable for the needs of the workers in industry as a whole.”⁵⁶ Midgley countered Winch’s attack, insisting that:

the IWW theory of organizing the working class into industrial unions and thereby ‘building up the new society within the shell of the old,’ has been proved fallacious by the experience of the Russian working class... But to come back to Canada, we are not organizing Soviets, not yet. We are organizing a new union of wage workers, so that we may be enabled to more successfully carry on the everyday fight over wages, hours of work, etc, and after all it is not Winch’s views or mine that will determine the issue. The workers will ultimately adopt the form of organization which proves to be the most effective weapon in that fight.⁵⁷

Though expressed in terms of industrial versus geographic organization, a major factor in the dispute was the personal animosity and power struggle between Midgley and Winch.

The conflict came to a head at the second semi-annual convention of the OBU, held in Port Arthur in September 1920. The credentials committee refused to sit Winch and two other delegates, leading the entire LWIU contingent to walk out of the hall in protest.⁵⁸ The *OBU Bulletin* weighed in on the split at Port Arthur:

There is a scrap on in the OBU...We know, however, that the personal factors come to the front in a scrap and cloud the issue. If an organization is going to be worth the name of a rank and file organization the members themselves will have to be the surgeons. Let the rank and file take charge of the matter. Let them try to sift the personal antagonisms and ambitions from the questions of principle and then suppress the nonsense...⁵⁹

⁵⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 6 August 1920.

⁵⁶ *British Columbia Federationist*, 13 August 1920.

⁵⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 17 August 1920.

⁵⁸ *One Big Union Bulletin*, 2 October 1920 and 30 October 1920; also Kealey and Whitaker, *RCMP Security Bulletins*, 207-208; and *British Columbia Federationist*, 8 October 1920.

⁵⁹ *One Big Union Bulletin*, 16 October 1920.

The *Federationist* agreed the trouble was caused by “the attitude of some of the delegates...and the cross-currents and propaganda carried on by one or two officials,” acting without “the consent or approval of the rank and file.”⁶⁰ The newspaper sided with the Midgley faction in calling for “One Big Union, not...a number of separate organizations such as the Lumber Workers representatives want to establish.”⁶¹

Bill Pritchard, imprisoned on a Manitoba prison farm, railed against Winch and other LWIU officials for

the freakish notions that apparently contribute much of the difficulty to the present misunderstanding... the real question is: What is the most effective form of weapon to deal with the encroachments of capital?...Whatever merit may exist in the contention of the Lumber Workers re the form of organization could provide no excuse for the deliberate sabotage of the general treasury...⁶²

Like Pritchard, Joe Naylor laid the blame on Winch, declaring: “This scrap had to come, and in my opinion, should have been tackled in earnest at the January convention.”⁶³

Joining the chorus in condemning Winch, OBU secretary Midgley charged that “responsible officials of the lumber workers’ organization have sabotaged on the One Big Union.”⁶⁴

In the next issue of the *Federationist* Winch dissected the arguments of his former SPC comrades. “Not every one who speaks most loudly of class organization and class consciousness knows what it means or practices it,” he wrote of Naylor. In a thinly veiled rebuke of Midgley, Winch declared: “if I cannot fill an official position in the labor movement by the will of the membership... I most certainly will not do so by changing

⁶⁰ *British Columbia Federationist*, 15 October 1920.

⁶¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 15 October 1920.

⁶² *British Columbia Federationist*, 22 October 1920.

⁶³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 22 October 1920.

⁶⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 22 October 1920.

my views to suit the way the wind blows.” The solidarity on the radical left that made possible the OBU experiment and the unprecedented industrial action of spring 1919 had broken down. Attempting to mediate the dispute, SPC comrade and OBU co-founder Jack Kavanagh declared that “patriotism to a specific organization or to a party at the expense of class solidarity, is but a degree less detrimental than the national patriotism of our masters.”⁶⁵

In a development that would have far-reaching implications on both industrial and political organization, this internal dispute sealed the fate of the OBU in BC. A secessionist movement itself, the OBU fell victim to secession. In January 1921, the LWIU resolved in convention to “form an Industrial organization separate from the OBU”:

The principle of One Big Unionism, based and organized upon industrial lines, is solidly supported by the Lumber Workers, but they refuse to recognize the present OBU organization, or its officials, as being representative of these principles, or of the workers who hold to them.⁶⁶

This sums up the fate of the One Big Union in BC – an idea that resonated powerfully in theory but which, in practice, could not overcome the sectarianism of the province’s labour and socialist movements.

Midgley expressed his views on the LWIU secession in a circular to OBU units: “While regretting to see the Lumber Workers creating another division in the ranks of the working class, we realize that their action is but the result of a mass of undigested syndicalist propaganda.”⁶⁷ An organization defined by the syndicalist general strike tactic found its secretary denouncing the influence of syndicalist propaganda. The power of

⁶⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 29 October 1920.

⁶⁶ *British Columbia Federationist*, 21 January 1921.

conflicting ideology and strategy proved too strong for the OBU to withstand. Months earlier, Midgley told a RCMP secret agent: “I have had four years of strain now. Labor is ungrateful, and it is a 24-hour a day fight. One is fighting the employers, and fighting the opposition element in his own organization.”⁶⁸ With the relocation of Midgley and the OBU headquarters to Winnipeg, the union’s support in BC steadily declined, creating a vacuum for the AFL-Internationals to reassert their control. Large bodies of workers were left without organization. Prior to the Port Arthur convention, an RCMP agent ominously reported: “Midgley and Winch have been hard workers for their organization. If these two men go out of its active service, it may be that it will be the commencement of ‘Disintegration.’”⁶⁹

Once the embodiment of working-class unity, the OBU in BC was in a process of sharp decline by the end of 1920, a casualty of the internecine warfare that has plagued BC’s Left since its inception. Winch could not sacrifice his unit’s autonomy to the centrifugal aspirations of the OBU leadership. Midgley could not surrender the OBU leadership’s authority over the organization’s component units, and wasn’t about to allow the leadership of one unit to dictate OBU policy. From these two irreconcilable positions, the OBU was doomed to failure. In the spring of 1921, the *Federationist* commented on the question of industrial or political action:

Workers have neither political nor economic power. They cannot exercise that which they do not possess, and until they unite on the political field with a class conscious programme they will be unable to secure the only

⁶⁷ *One Big Union Bulletin*, 5 February 1922; *British Columbia Federationist*, 21 January 1921. A rebuttal to Midgley’s letter appeared in the *British Columbia Federationist*, 25 February 1921.

⁶⁸ Kealey and Whitaker, *RCMP Security Bulletins*, 104.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 123. This view was confirmed by a special agent in late October: “In British Columbia the impression seems to be that the OBU is beginning to disintegrate.” (Kealey and Whitaker, *RCMP Security Bulletins*, 239). For a detailed history of the impact of the Winch-Midgley rivalry in the BC CCF, see Gordon Stanley Wickerson, “Conflict in the British Columbia Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and the ‘Connell Affair,’” (MA Thesis: UBC, 1970.)

power that will give them the freedom to use their energies in the production of wealth, and until they have political power to talk of economic strength is sheer nonsense. By the class ownership of the means of wealth production, the present ruling class has the economic power.⁷⁰

The failure of the OBU to overcome external and internal opposition redirected the efforts of many BC socialists toward the political field. While they did not reject militancy and strike activity out of hand, their focus was increasingly on organizing workers for independent political action.

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The OBU soldiered on in Winnipeg until 1956, with varying degrees of success, until it merged as a regional affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) following the union of the TLCC and CCL.⁷¹ Outside its nucleus in the Prairie capital, the union was rapidly overshadowed by the AFL-Internationals. In BC, the OBU retained a presence in the coal mines of Cumberland and Nanaimo on Vancouver Island, among fishers in Prince Rupert, with railworkers in Revelstoke, and among hard-rock miners in Sandon, but it would never become the mass organization envisioned by its founders.⁷² As Todd McCallum has pointed out, the OBU was weakened from the outset by its narrow, gendered interpretation of working-class identity, forging an organization that offered

⁷⁰ *British Columbia Federationist*, 11 February 1921.

⁷¹ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 249-251. After decades of separation, two waves of secessionist industrial unionism were re-absorbed into the mainstream of Canadian labour. For the first time since 1919, proponents of the OBU, CIO and AFL co-existed under once central body: the newly minted CLC.

⁷² See *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 1920-1931, for references to the OBU's presence in BC. A survey of the "OBU Directory" provides some insight into support for the union throughout the 1920s. The Nanaimo unit, and contact Tom Barnard, would cease to be listed in November 1923. In Victoria and Vancouver, the OBU maintained pockets of support, more as a political group agitating industrial organization than as a genuine economic organization of workers. Evidence confirms the presence of an active unit in Victoria in 1921, with Bill Pritchard addressing a meeting in Victoria's OBU Hall in May of that year. The last OBU presence in BC, the Revelstoke Transportation Unit, disappeared in May 1931. (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 13 May 1921, for reference to Pritchard meeting.)

little room for working-class women.⁷³ The OBU experience left BC workers dispirited and disorganized, vulnerable to attacks by employers on the wages and conditions they had secured in 1918-1919.

The 1920s were marked by a concerted, organized assault by capital against the institutions and living standards of working people. But labour was too divided to effectively resist this assault. In June 1923, the *OBU Bulletin* commented on the situation in the lumber camps: “The BC lumberbarons have perfected an elaborate blacklist, compiled after many years by stool pigeons and henchmen of the companies.”⁷⁴ This practice was prevalent across the industries, with employers systematically preventing socialists and labour activists from securing work and positions of leadership. In 1925, the OBU launched an unsuccessful drive to organize the coal miners of Vancouver Island, and in 1926 opened an office in Vancouver and appointed Charles Lestor as organizer.⁷⁵ This attempt to revive the organization in BC ended in failure.⁷⁶

Though proclaiming as its goal the unification of the working class, the OBU defined itself in opposition to the AFL-affiliated International craft unions. Wide sections of BC labour were won over to the OBU idea for a brief period in spring 1919, but the emergence of the OBU and the corresponding sympathetic strikes of June 1919 created a permanent rift within the House of Labour. Tensions over ideology and strategy predated 1919, but the secessionist movement and the general strike wave forced the solidification of an organized, non-revolutionary trade union leadership, ready and able to assume responsibilities previously carried out by militant members of the Socialist Party

⁷³ Todd McCallum, “‘A Modern Weapon for Modern Man’: Marxist Masculinity and the Social Practices of the One Big Union, 1919-1924,” (MA thesis (history): SFU, 1995).

⁷⁴ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 7 June 1923.

⁷⁵ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 9 April 1925.

of Canada. Victoria socialist James Watters lost the presidency of the TLCC to Ontarian Tom Moore at the Québec convention of 1918, signaling the end of radicalism in the upper ranks of the Congress. Moore would remain at the helm of the TLCC throughout the 1920s and 1930s, along with secretary-treasurer Paddy Draper. Identified by *The Worker* as a member of the Conservative party, Moore and other Congress leaders consistently and effectively moderated the programme and tactics of the TLCC.⁷⁷ While failing to eliminate the radical, secessionist current embodied by the OBU, TLCC leaders such as Moore and Draper succeeded in marginalizing and containing radicalism, and preventing expressions of militant industrial action from the mainstream of Canadian labour. Indeed, during the British General Strike of May 1926, Moore came under fire for refusing to express Canadian labour's solidarity with the miners.⁷⁸

In 1927, secessionism re-emerged with the founding of the All-Canadian Congress of Labour at Montréal.⁷⁹ The association of Woodsworth and other ILP leaders with ACCL president Aaron Mosher of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees (CBRE) situated the nascent CCF in opposition to the TLCC leadership. BC labour remained bitterly divided at the end of the 1920s, as the AFL-Internationals were engaged in a permanent campaign to prevent ACCL unions such as the Amalgamated Carpenters from securing gains. The *Labor Statesman* described Vic Midgley – an official of the ACCL's Vancouver Labour Council – as “possibly the most dangerous animal the labor

⁷⁶ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 15 April 1927, 22 April 1927, and 17 August 1928.

⁷⁷ *The Workers* (Toronto), 30 September 1933. “The Congress refused to affiliate with the CCF while it endorsed its principles. The fact that Moore as well as other leaders of the Congress are members of the Conservative Party has much to do with this. The Trades and Labor Congress, however, has never been a trade union centre, but merely a legislative mouthpiece.”

⁷⁸ *The Worker* (Toronto), 15 May 1926. Four years earlier, the Vancouver TLC, though affiliated with the AFL-Internationals and vehemently anti-OBU, called for the resignation of Moore after he accepted a position as Director of the Canadian National Railway. (*OBU Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 2 November 1922.)

⁷⁹ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 31 March 1927.

movement ever had to deal with.”⁸⁰ This division in the industrial organizations of workers invariably hindered labour action on the political field. Indeed, the association of CCF leaders with the renegade ACCL limited CCF inroads in the mainstream of organized labour in BC and Canada. When the matter came before the 1933 convention of the TLCC, delegates endorsed the principles of the CCF, but refused affiliation.⁸¹ The legacy of the OBU – crippled as an organization in BC since the early 1920s – continued to exert influence on both the industrial and political fields. The final two chapters of this study will explore the development of independent labour politics in 1920s BC, and the impact of a new force that coalesced out of the search for solidarity: Russian Communism.

⁸⁰ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 2 November 1928.

⁸¹ *The Worker* (Toronto), 30 September 1933; see also Gad Horowitz, *Canadian Labour in Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 61-89.

PART II: Political Roots

Chapter 4. “Enter – The Workers’ Party”: The Shifting Bases of Labor Political Unity, 1919-1924

In spite of the many mistakes in the past, we find a lack of cohesion and co-operation amongst the fighting forces of the working class. But rather dissensions, bickerings, and fighting each other, often over non-essential theoretical technicalities, often by the most pernicious methods, thereby producing disintegration. Instead of trying to make contact on those points we are in partial agreement on, the apparent policy seems to be to try to find something to disagree about. As a result, the Labor Temple in Vancouver is lost to labor, the B.C. Federation of Labor is dead...

On the industrial field but a small percentage of the workers are organized, and on the political field, it is, if possible, even worse. With the S.P. of C. adopting tactics that, to say the least, are hard to defend, even by those adopting them. The FLP is to all outward and visible signs dead from the ankles up. Now another subdivision by the recent birth of ‘The Workers Party’... While we quibble and fight, the representatives of capitalism are waging an intensifying war upon the living standards of the workers, whose confidence in those at the head of the movement is severely shaken...

One thing that must be adopted is a spirit of tolerance, a respect for if not in agreement with, the other fellow’s opinion. To drive such men as J.S. Woodsworth out of BC, where they are needed equally as much if not more than Winnipeg, is but to further weaken the fighting forces here.¹

Tom Barnard, *BC Federationist*, October 1922

By the early 1920s, both the industrial and political arms of organized labour in BC were crippled by division, unable to resist a concerted assault by employers on the living standards and organizations of workers. The rupture of the OBU in BC triggered an important shift in the structure of radical politics in Canada. Leadership shifted from SPC headquarters at 401 Pender Street in Vancouver to the OBU-ILP stronghold of Winnipeg, and, later, to Communist headquarters in Toronto. From 1920 onward, BC would

¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 20 October 1922.

increasingly operate on the margins of the Canadian political landscape. The history of BC socialism in the 1920s is rife with splits followed by renewed efforts toward unity. The SPC, WPC, FLP, and CLP all went down this path, as socialists sought a vehicle for labour political action. The dominant feature was the emergence of Communism, as articulated and directed by the Soviet Union, and the growing antagonism between Canadian Bolsheviks and other sections of the Left. This division became a permanent feature on the Left with the failure of the Canadian Labour Party in 1928. As the Communists emerged as a centre of militant extra-parliamentary action in the 1930s, their socialist opponents increasingly confined their battle to Parliament.

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The divisive influence of Russian Communism first revealed itself in January 1919 when Jim Hawthornthwaite – the pre-eminent politician on British Columbia’s Left since the turn of the century – publicly condemned the Bolsheviks and effectively divorced himself from the socialist and labour movements. In a speech to a capacity crowd at an FLP meeting in Victoria’s Columbia theatre, the MLA for Newcastle declared that Lenin and Trotsky “were snakes of the working class movement.” Albert Wells, vice-president of the BCFL and a future member of the Communist party, occupied the chair. “J.H. Hawthornthwaite, Member for Newcastle, Throws Bomb Shell into Ranks of Socialists” the *Semi-Weekly Tribune* announced.² Hawthornthwaite based his allegations on a meeting he had had in Victoria with Mme. Breshkovskaya – “the grandmother of the Russian Revolution” – a woman of some celebrity who traveled throughout North America in the wake of 1917 conducting a vigorous propaganda campaign against Bolshevism. Her representation of the Russian Revolution appears to have influenced

Hawthornthwaite, perhaps confirming views he had been gravitating toward for some time. Regardless of his motivations, the MLA's message was clear: Bolshevism offered no hope or direction to the working class of British Columbia.

This message was not well received, and the messenger had mortally imperiled his political career. Days after the incident the FLP executive in Vancouver moved decisively to contain the crisis and preserve its political credibility with radical sections of BC workers. Officers released a statement repudiating Hawthornthwaite's position, claiming it was based on no evidence "except the highly-colored and manifest misrepresentations of a capitalistic press and the agents of the old regime in Russia."³ Commenting on the dispute, the *Semi-Weekly Tribune* pointed to the lack of clarity within the FLP: "as at present conducted these Sunday meetings are tending not to federation but to disunion. They are serving to sow dissension rather than eliminate it."⁴ In the December 1920 provincial election, labour would run Ladysmith miner Sam Guthrie, a martyr of the 1912-14 strike, against Hawthornthwaite. Despite the split in the left-wing vote, Guthrie won with 615 votes, while Hawthornthwaite came third with 362 votes.⁵

Hawthornthwaite's falling out with the FLP over conflicting interpretations of the Russian Revolution foreshadowed the fundamental debate in BC labour politics for decades to come. This incident at the Columbia theatre encapsulated in embryo form the axes of division into which organized labour would fall: the 'safe and sane' (and distinctly non-revolutionary) position of Jim Hawthornthwaite was juxtaposed with the radical position that embraced Bolshevism and its commitment to transformative, extra-

² *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 20 January 1919.

³ *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 20 and 27 January 1919.

⁴ *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 20 January 1919.

parliamentary action. The latter viewpoint held sway throughout 1919, as evidenced by allegiance to the extra-parliamentary strike tactic, but the development of BC socialism in the 1920s demonstrates a steady migration from revolutionary to evolutionary forms of struggle. The radicals of 1919 were condemned as moderates by the time the CCF came into being in 1932.⁶ The *Semi-Weekly Tribune* presciently forecasted this phenomenon in an editorial two weeks after the Victoria General Strike was called off: “The workers can by political action accomplish everything attainable by direct action... It is conceivable that actual experience in the seats of power may change the viewpoint of many ultra-radicals.”⁷

In the autumn of 1919 Victoria labour had the opportunity to flex its muscle on the political field. Federal Minister of Agriculture Simon Fraser Tolmie, a future premier of BC, was challenged in a by-election by returned soldier Tom A. Barnard, who won the FLP nomination in Victoria over W.E. Pierce. A leader of the Great War Veterans Association (GWVA) from New Westminster, Barnard revealed the fluid relationship between the industrial and political organizations born out of the struggle, the OBU and FLP. At a campaign speech in the Crystal theatre, Barnard declared: “I am charged with being the nominee of the Federated Labor Party, which is controlled by men who are Bolsheviks and with being members of the One Big Union... If they are Bolsheviks or OBU’s then more than half the city [are] Bolsheviks.”⁸ Prominent FLP speakers took the platform throughout Barnard’s campaign, including Jim Woodsworth, released on bail

⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 3 December 1920. Fraser, an Independent, finished second with 462 votes while Bickle, a Soldier candidate, received 146 votes and finished fourth.

⁶ *The Worker* (Toronto), 3 September 1932.

⁷ *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 10 July 1919.

⁸ *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 16 October 1919. See *British Columbia Federationist*, 5 March 1922, where Barnard says: “revolution was on in the minds of the people...there was no such thing as going back.”

pending trial, who declared: “The strike in Winnipeg is a beginning, and I want you people to make the defeat of Tolmie another beginning.”⁹

Despite Barnard’s defeat, amid allegations of voter fraud and grave irregularities, the campaign marked an important step in bridging the gap between organized labour in Victoria and independent political action.¹⁰ Shortly after Barnard’s defeat, the VTLC amended its constitution “by striking out the provision prohibiting party politics” from its discussions.¹¹ Within weeks, labour council delegate Robert Dewar was elected a Victoria city Alderman.¹²

Throughout 1920, as the OBU lost ground to the AFL-Internationals, labour marshaled its strength in the political arena. In Manitoba, several leaders of the Winnipeg strike won election to the Legislature while confined in the provincial prison farm.¹³ Criminals in the eyes of the state, they were embraced as heroes by the electorate. Bill Pritchard contested the election as a candidate of the SPC, which refused to cooperate with the more moderate Dominion Labour Party (DLP): “To unify warring factions is to compromise their differences,” the SPC’s Winnipeg local declared in an election manifesto. “Individuals may come and individuals may go, according to the dictates of their fancy or their reason, but the organization will still fly the flag of Revolution. No compromise and no surrender.”¹⁴

⁹ *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 20 October 1919.

¹⁰ *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 30 October 1919.

¹¹ UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 3 November 1919.

¹² *Daily Times* (Victoria), 16 January 1920; UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 21 January 1920. Dewar finished fifth out of 17 candidates, with 1901 votes. Fellow VTLC candidates Woodward and Sivertz were defeated, however, finishing near the bottom of the polls with 1441 and 1370 respectively.

¹³ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 9 July 1920. George Armstrong, William Ivens, Fred Dixon and John Queen were elected MLAs while imprisoned for seditious conspiracy. “The vote recorded on that day was the greatest ever polled for labor candidates in the Dominion of Canada,” Winnipeg’s Frank Cassidy wrote in the *Western Clarion*. (See *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 16 July 1920.)

¹⁴ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 16 June 1920.

The same phenomenon revealed itself in British Columbia. Despite suggestions that the SPC, FLP and OBU form “a solid front to show to the vested interests,” socialists persisted in fighting both the capitalist parties and themselves.¹⁵ In preparing for the December 1920 provincial election, the *Western Clarion* refused cooperation with the FLP: “There are some among us who, in their zeal for the purposes of working class solidarity would have us close one eye to the defects we have hitherto detected in our supposed next-of-kin, the FLP.” The writer suggested that FLP propaganda was “not of the same order as our own,” that SPC “propaganda is devoted to eradicating the ideas they are busy in disseminating.” The editorial concluded by dismissing FLP leaders as opportunists and refusing outright any overtures to cooperation:

The FLP came into existence here some three years ago to fill the shoes of the departed SDP. If its members had desired to advance the cause of the workers from a class standpoint, they might have considered the party ‘already in the field,’ the Socialist Party of Canada. But these political infants had in their ranks a plentiful sprinkling of aspirants for office, and some of these had left the SP of C in order to give their ambitious political wings room to spread. They are spreading them now. We have found it necessary in times past to clip these wings when they needed it. Any alliance with them must lead to confusion on one issue: the class struggle and its outcome.¹⁶

In spite of FLP efforts toward unity, a solid front evaded BC workers. Hoping to form a coalition, the FLP ran only three candidates in the six-member Vancouver riding, leaving three spaces open for the SPC. The SPC snubbed this overture and ran a full slate in the city. In total, 14 FLP candidates entered the field.¹⁷ One of the three FLP

¹⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 23 January 1920.

¹⁶ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 1 November 1920.

¹⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 5 November 1920. The SPC candidates were: Jack Harrington, J. Smith, Chris Stephenson, Sid Earp, W. McQuoid, and J. Dennis. Jack Kavanagh served as SPC campaign manager. The FLP was represented by Woodsworth, T. Richardson, and WR Trotter in Vancouver; WE Pierce and JD McDonald in Victoria; Dr. WJ Curry in Dewdney; Barnard in Nanaimo; George Casey in Atlin; A.H. Smith in Slocan; R.H. (Harry) Neelands in South Vancouver; Charles Cassidy in Richmond;

candidates for Vancouver was Jim Woodsworth, who commented on the absence of Bill Pritchard from the field – “a prominent Labor exponent... whom conditions prevented from being in the present fight.”¹⁸ In his opening campaign speech, Woodsworth declared “that only radical changes will prevent chaos. Revolutions grew out of the misery of the common people.” He called for the social ownership and operation of the means of wealth production, and declared that “the whole social and economic political system must be changed.”¹⁹

Despite its fading industrial strength in BC, the OBU was prominent in the campaign. Tom Barnard was nominated by the FLP in Nanaimo, and W.E. Pierce was one of two FLP standard bearers in Victoria. In the OBU Hall in Prince Rupert, SPC member J.H. Burroughs was nominated by a convention of various labor groups, and was subsequently endorsed by the FLP.²⁰ In an address to Prince Rupert electors, Burroughs declared:

Labour organizations that refuse to be pliant tools in the hands of the employing class are permeated with hired stool pigeons, spies and agents... All wild talk of ‘bloody revolution’, ‘streetfighting’, ‘picking up the gun,’ etc., emanates from the frothy brains of enthusiastic idiots or from treacherous provocateurs.²¹

and George W. Dingwall in Rossland. The independent Labour candidacies of Guthrie in Newcastle and J.H. Burroughs in Prince Rupert were endorsed by the FLP.

¹⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 19 November 1920. Having returned to BC following the Crown’s decision not to pursue the charges of seditious libel, Woodsworth resumed his activities with the FLP. In a *Federationist* column titled “Unconventional Sermons,” Woodsworth wrote that: “A certain class in society is able to enact certain laws which will be advantageous to itself... property laws – laws which some day will be considered as unjust as the laws which supported slavery.” (*British Columbia Federationist*, 1 October 1920.)

¹⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 19 and 26 November 1920.

²⁰ The status of Burroughs’ candidacy remains unclear, with both the SPC and the FLP claiming him as their standard-bearer. Following Burroughs’ nomination by a convention of various labour groups, Jack Kavanagh was sent by the Dominion Executive Committee to assist his campaign. (See *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 16 November 1920.)

²¹ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 11 November 1920.

On 31 October 1920, Sam Guthrie was unanimously chosen as the independent Labour candidate in Newcastle. Of the numerous left-wing candidates nominated by the FLP and SPC, the *Federationist* endorsed only Guthrie, “not because of his personality, or his knowledge, but in order that we can oppose another candidate who poses as a working class representative...J.H. Hawthornthwaite.”²² At his nomination meeting, held independently of either the FLP or SPC, Guthrie declared that “he was a Socialist, and that if elected, he would work for the farmers and the workers.”²³ He was subsequently endorsed by the FLP. When asked whether he belonged to any labour organization, Guthrie responded: “Yes, I belong to the OBU.”²⁴ In Fernie, the FLP nominated Labour mayor Tom Uphill, whom the *Federationist* described as “a strong and consistent supporter of the OBU. He has gained the confidence of the workers of the district, in spite of the fact that there are quite a number of divergent views with regard to working class action.”²⁵

Notwithstanding the fragmentation of the OBU into the Midgley and Winch camps, the organization commanded the allegiance of wide sections of BC workers, particularly in the mining towns of Vancouver Island and the Kootenays, and in the deep-sea port of Prince Rupert. The factional infighting that hastened the decline of the union in Victoria and Vancouver was blunted in the hinterlands. Of the three labour candidates

²² *British Columbia Federationist*, 12 November 1920. In justifying this course of action, the *Federationist* cited Hawthornthwaite’s “denunciation of the Soviet regime in Russia in January, 1919, in the City of Victoria,” and a speech delivered in Ladysmith on 15 February 1920, in which he “again condemned the Soviet regime, and gave his audience the false impression as to the Winnipeg strike... This action was most contemptible when it is remembered that at that time the appeal in the cases of the convicted workers was being prepared.” Guthrie’s nomination, according to the *Federationist*, demonstrated that Hawthornthwaite “has lost the confidence of the workers.” (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 5 November 1920.)

²³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 5 November 1920. A director of the United Farmers in the area, Mr. Perry, addressed the meeting and “urged the farmers and the industrial workers to get together.”

²⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 5 November 1920.

²⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 26 November 1920. See also Robin, *Rush for the Spoils*, 185.

elected to the BC Legislature, two were avowed supporters of the OBU. Sam Guthrie and Tom Uphill drew their political base from the industrial struggle of the miners in their respective districts, and for the 18 months before the election the OBU was at the centre of this struggle. The pattern established in the 1920 Manitoba election was replicated in BC, albeit on a less decisive scale.²⁶ The relationship between industrial and political action, though undermined with the assault on the OBU, remained *complementary*, with the OBU's industrial strength fueling FLP gains in the political field.

Prior to the election, sober voices of reason pointed to the limitations of socialism being achieved through the ballot box:

No doubt there are a number who will have the idea that with a labor or working class party in power in this province, the millennium would be immediately introduced. That this is a fallacy will be seen by a study of the conditions that prevail in those places that have Labor governments.²⁷

The *Federationist* dismissed outright the revolutionary potential of electing working-class candidates: "It will not bring the present system to an end." Even so, the newspaper implored workers to "cast a working-class ballot."²⁸ The LWIU also offered a critical perspective on the prospects of change coming about through parliament: "The main instrument of working class emancipation will be a strong united militant economic organization," based on the inherent conflict between workers and employers:

Economic power is the source and basis of all other forms of social influence. Consequently if the working class seeks to rise to political (parliamentary) control of the governmental institutions of the country it must first build upon a basis of solidly organized economic power... Workers of the World, Unite on the Economic and parliamentary field."²⁹

²⁶ An additional factor influencing the strong socialist and labour vote in Manitoba was the introduction of a proportional representation system of voting. (See *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 26 June 1920.)

²⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 5 November 1920.

²⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 26 November 1920.

²⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 19 November 1920.

This call met with a ready response, with the LWIU-organized logging camps of the province donating \$270 toward the FLP campaign.³⁰ On 1 December 1920, independent Labour candidate Sam Guthrie of Newcastle, and FLP candidates Tom Uphill of Fernie and Harry Neelands of South Vancouver were elected to the BC Legislature. FLP candidate George Dingwall of Rossland was defeated by a mere 14 votes. In the multi-member Vancouver riding, Jim Woodsworth received 7,451 votes, 4000 fewer than was required to secure election.³¹ Woodsworth soon left BC to take the helm of Winnipeg's Labor Church.³² But his exposure to industrial and political forms of struggle set him on a path that would have far-reaching implications in the years ahead.

While many BC workers were heartened by the victory of Guthrie, Uphill and Neelands, the *Federationist* was unforgiving in its interpretation of the election result:

British Columbia, and Vancouver particularly, has for a long time been looked upon as the reddest territory in the Dominion. After the provincial election, one can only wonder where the reds were... Taken in all, the election has proven without doubt that the tactics of the working class political movement in this province are a failure... We look for action from now on on the part of the militant working class movement.

Defeated SPC candidate Sid Earp also articulated the sectarianism that likely contributed toward the ambivalent returns for the Left: "A labor vote is not a Socialist vote, neither is a labor candidate a Socialist candidate: and there is not one thing in common between them... To charge the Socialist party with holding personal animosity against the FLP is but a further display of class ignorance."³³

³⁰ *British Columbia Federationist*, 26 November 1920.

³¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 3 December 1920. He trailed WR Trotter, an official of the FLP and Typographers' Union, by 151 votes, ranking second among nine FLP and SPC candidates in Vancouver.

³² The circumstances surrounding Woodsworth's departure remain unclear. I have been unable to substantiate the claim advanced by Tom Barnard in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, that Woodsworth was "driven" out of BC. (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 20 October 1922.)

³³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 3 December 1920.

In the heat of the election, the *Federationist* had taken a bold departure from its usual plea for unity in celebrating the fragmentation of BC labour:

The working-class movement is in a state of flux. In fact it is in the melting pot... The right wing is going further to the right, and the left is going still further to the left, or in other words, to scientific Socialism... There are many who deplore these splits in working-class ranks, but instead of their being a matter for regret, they are one bright hope in working class circles, and demonstrate that the movement is drawing away from the old shibboleth of a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, and is reaching out for fundamentals. They demonstrate that the workers are slowly but surely realizing that under capitalism there can be nothing but misery for the working class.³⁴

Here is a clear indication of the political migration of the newspaper and its editor. By the end of 1921, Albert Wells would join Jack Kavanagh and others in breaking off from the Socialist party and forming the Vancouver branch of the Communist-affiliated Workers' Party. Following the 1920 provincial election, BC's labour movement entered into a fundamental debate on its relationship with Russian Communism, a process that left the SPC bitterly divided and on a trajectory toward its demise. At issue was the question of affiliation to the Third International.

The rift, foreshadowed in the Hawthornthwaite affair of January 1919, became an entrenched feature on British Columbia's Left for much of the twentieth century. One's attitude toward the Soviet Union emerged as the defining characteristic of labour political organization in BC and Canada. One of the first battlegrounds following the formation of the CPC in the barn outside Guelph in May 1921 was the Socialist Party of Canada.³⁵ If Bolshevism was to secure a vanguard in Canada, the old vehicle of socialist education and organization would have to be won onside or pushed out of the way. Many SPC

³⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 26 November 1920.

stalwarts were unwilling to relinquish their identity to Moscow, and the CPC entered into a pitched battle for the allegiance of BC socialists.

On 1 January 1921, the *Western Clarion* ran the front-page story: “Conditions for Joining the Communist International.”³⁶ The debate over accepting or rejecting these 21 points of affiliation consumed the party for the next year.³⁷ With the very first point, conflict on the Left was inevitable:

The daily propaganda must bear a truly Communist character... On the pages of newspapers, at popular meetings, in the labor unions, in the co-operatives, in every place to which the partisans of the Third International have access, they must denounce not only the bourgeoisie, but its assistants, the reformists of all shade and color.

Other points insisted on the formation of a parallel illegal apparatus in every country, the adoption of the name “Communist Party,” and the removal of “all reformists and partisans of the ‘centre’... from all responsible posts in the Labor movement.”³⁸

Emanating from debates in the Second International, the policy of the Comintern was uncompromising toward reformism and individuals and organizations of the ‘centre.’

This theoretical commitment to a revolutionary politic fit uneasily with the practical need for working-class unity in the diverse communities of BC. It was all very well to reject

³⁵ Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 37. “Deep conspiracy characterized the birth of the Canadian Communist Party,” Rodney writes in his description of this historic meeting, which convened in secret at the farm of Fred Farley on 23 May 1921.

³⁶ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 1 January 1921. The article, consisting of the Theses of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (Comintern), adopted at the Second Convention of Comintern in July 1920, was published with an Editor’s Note that declared: “At the instigation of Local (Winnipeg) No. 3 of the SP of C, the Dominion Executive Committee has decided to place the matter of affiliation with the Third (Communist) International before the Party membership by referendum... Those who wish to do so may now state the case as they see it, for or against. We hope in this way to acquaint the Party membership with the nature of the question to be decided, which is – ‘Shall the SP of C affiliate with the Third (Communist) International on the terms herein laid down.’ The date of referendum will necessarily depend upon the discussion that arises, relevant to that question. Send in your argument.”

³⁷ While 18 points appeared in the original *Clarion* story, this was later expanded to 21, after readers inquired into the discrepancy between the Canadian conditions and those published in countries such as France, Germany, Latvia and Britain. (See *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 1 January 1921 and 1 March 1921.)

reformism out of hand in theory, but where did individuals such as Woodsworth, Pritchard and Midgley fit into this equation? Persecuted by the State and the AFL-Internationals for their actions in connection with the Winnipeg strike and the OBU, they were far from the political centre, but their commitment to improve the conditions of workers under capitalism deemed them enemies from the perspective of the Communists.

Point Seven declared explicitly: “Parties desirous of joining the Communist international shall be bound to recognize the necessity of a complete and absolute rupture with reformism and the policy of the centrists.”³⁹ From this irreconcilable position, the supporters of the Comintern committed themselves to a permanent fight against all non-revolutionary sections of British Columbia’s Left, as well as anyone who deviated from the CPC’s specific brand of revolutionary Marxism. Despite future overtures for a United Front, the die was cast with the publication of the 21 points. The rejection of a United Front by the CCF must be contextualized within the Comintern’s initial declaration of war against reformism. BC socialists would remain divided along the axis of Russian Communism for decades.

Following the publication of the conditions for affiliation, a heated debate unfolded in the pages of the *Western Clarion*. Fred Kaplan of Winnipeg fired the opening volley in forcefully advocating affiliation with the Comintern: “This is no time to split hairs. Let me urge you, comrades, to strive for an affirmative vote in the name of the Revolution.”⁴⁰ However, in the next issue, Jack Harrington argued against the proposal, in part because its demand for rupture “would immediately involve us in a series of bitter

³⁸ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 1 January 1921.

³⁹ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 1 January 1921.

⁴⁰ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 16 January 1921.

struggles that would hamper and in the end nullify our educational work.”⁴¹ The leading lights of the SPC were embroiled in the fray. Jack Kavanagh came out early in favour of affiliation, countering Harrington’s argument:

Present economic and social conditions, together with recent events in local history, demonstrate the need of obtaining a foothold wherever power is wielded. To leave Labor Unions and Municipal Councils in the unchallenged control of reactionaries, in view of the part played by these organizations in moments of a revolutionary character, not to speak of the everyday struggles of the workers, is to assess the overthrow of capitalism as a mechanical process.⁴²

Harrington’s reply to Kavanagh provided insight into the personal dimensions of factionalism in BC’s labour and socialist movements:

In these ‘bitter struggles’ rarely are principles the chief issue; very often it is purely a question of personalities, and not infrequently the result of a bar-room wrangle, or a convention, or some other ‘plum’ as recent local, and remote universal history painfully records. The members, then, take sides, from reasons devious and wonderful, spite, policy, friendship, jealousy, but unless thoroughly grounded, and animated by principle, seldom upon class needs.⁴³

In Winnipeg, where the debate began the previous fall, Local No. 3 came out against affiliation.⁴⁴ In Vancouver Local No. 1, the debate would rage throughout the year. From spring 1921 on, the exchange of viewpoints is broken by gaps in the newspaper, with large sections having been literally torn out of the historical record.⁴⁵

In May, Sid Earp, SPC candidate for Vancouver the previous December, argued against affiliation, suggesting the viewpoint of those in favour was “determined more by

⁴¹ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 1 February 1921.

⁴² *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 16 February 1921.

⁴³ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 16 March 1921.

⁴⁴ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 1 March 1921.

⁴⁵ The first evidence of manipulation appears on the front page of 16 March 1921. Three quarters of the page has been removed prior to microfilming. It bears the headline: “The S.P. of C. and the Third International.” Similar damage to the original newspapers occurs throughout the spring and summer of 1921, provide an incomplete picture of the SPC’s deliberations on affiliation. (See *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), March-August 1921.)

enthusiasm for a Cause, rather than a close study and correct appreciation of existing conditions.”⁴⁶ Chris Stephenson, former editor of the *Clarion*, also opposed the proposal:

I get an impression of the Executive Committee as a General Staff marshalling revolutionary forces in the field of action. However that may be, I count it folly and to the disadvantage of the movement for an E.C., while sitting so far away from the scenes of political activity in all parts of the world, to lay down set regulations to cover widely varying social situations.⁴⁷

In the midst of the SPC debate over affiliation, Russian Bolshevism provided another wedge that further divided BC workers: Lenin’s 1921 thesis, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. Forming the basis of the Comintern’s opposition to industrial secession, the work offered a direct challenge the OBU and its supporters: “To refuse to work in the reactionary trade unions means leaving the insufficiently developed or backward masses of workers under the influence of the reactionary leaders.”⁴⁸ When Wells serialized the work in the *Federationist*, both he and The BC Federationist Ltd. were charged with sedition.⁴⁹

Adhering loyally to the teachings of Lenin – “a master of working-class tactics” – former OBU stalwarts such as Kavanagh and Wells were forced to reverse their positions and return to the fold of the AFL-Internationals.⁵⁰ “There is far too much of a proneness on the part of the active workers in this country, to take the happenings in Russia and the

⁴⁶ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 2 May 1921.

⁴⁷ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 16 May 1921.

⁴⁸ V.I. Lenin, “*Left-Wing*” *Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1965), 44.

⁴⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 18 February 1921; *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 1 October 1921; *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 16 October 1921 and 1 November 1921. The issue of the *Federationist* featuring the first excerpt of ‘*Left-Wing*’ *Communism*, contained an editorial titled ‘Governments and Stool Pigeons’: “there is not a capitalist government that has any feeling of security. They do not understand the basis of the movement which they fear and consequently they have become like a child that is afraid of the dark: panic stricken, hysterical and consequently very liable to the very things that weaken their power and undermine their position.” The outcome of Wells’ trial was never reported.

⁵⁰ See the Note by Editor, appearing above the first installment of *Left-Wing Communism*. (*British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 18 February 1921.

statements of Lenin in regard to tactics, as an unquestionable line of action,” the *OBU Bulletin* declared.⁵¹ To those still struggling to build up the OBU in the province, such a move was tantamount to treason. But to the advance guard of BC Communism, the world struggle for socialism, as interpreted by the Comintern leadership, was paramount.

In May 1921, socialists from across Canada had met secretly outside of Guelph to adopt the constitution of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC).⁵² Kavanagh was the sole delegate from BC, one of two SPC members invited to the meeting by Comintern representative Caleb Harrison. He travelled under the code name ‘Strong’ and was appointed Communist organizer for District 6, British Columbia.⁵³ The CPC convention blamed the secession of the OBU on “industrialist propaganda,” “AFL sabotage” and “war-time repression by the state,” but concluded that “this separation of a body of advanced workers from the main body” had left “the greater part of the organized working masses more nakedly at the mercy of the AF of L officialdom than ever.”⁵⁴ The

⁵¹ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 21 May 1921. On the question of unity, the *Bulletin* declared: “That unity in the ranks of the working class is a very desirable thing, only a fool would deny, but it is equally foolish to prate of unity and to deplore the divisions in our ranks, when the widely divergent concepts which occasion for the ‘disunity’ are still very much in evidence and are continually widening the gulf that exists between the factions...Unity of concept (at least upon fundamentals) must precede unity of action...The A.F. of L. and other reactionary organizations work from the premise that the interests of Capital and Labor are identical.” (*One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 3 September 1921.)

⁵² *The Communist* (Toronto), 1921. The Communist experience in British Columbia is a scarcely documented historical subject. The two most prominent works were penned CPC members themselves: William Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Broadway Printers, 1937); Bennett’s biography was penned by a fellow Communist in BC: Tom McEwen, *He Wrote for Us: The Story of Bill Bennett, Pioneer Socialist Journalist* (Vancouver: Tribune Publishing Company, 1951); For the national contours of Canadian communism, see Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montréal: Vanguard, 1981) William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International: The First Ten Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968); and Tim Buck, *Canada and the Russian Revolution: The Impact of the World’s First Socialist Revolution on Labor and Politics in Canada*. (Toronto: Progress Books, 1967); Of related interest see Patrick George Hill, “A Failure of Unity: Communist Party-CCF Relation in British Columbia, 1935-1939.” MA Thesis (Political Science): UVic, 1977; J. Kavanagh, *The Vancouver Island strike* (Vancouver: B.C. Miners' Liberation League circa. 1913).

⁵³ Akers, “Rebel or Revolutionary,” 30-31; Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 36-37. The second SPC member to attend the secret convention was William Moriarty, secretary of the SPC Toronto Local.

⁵⁴ *The Communist* (Toronto), June 1921; also Akers, “Rebel or Revolutionary,” 30. Interesting, in light of the CPC’s shifting attitude toward the AFL-Internationals and the TLCC, was the statement: “The

OBU was the expression of “a doctrinaire desire for a more perfect form of union,”
utopian as it would repeatedly be referred to by the Communists:

Syndicalism advocates the Utopian plan of direct seizure of industrial plants when the majority of the workers are organized into industrial unions or a ‘one big union’ entirely ignoring the power of the capitalist state. Only after the conquest of political power, after the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship, can the revolutionized industrial unions become the starting point for the Communist reconstruction of society.⁵⁵

Conflicting visions of the socialist transformation of society, and conflicting allegiances – to the OBU and to Moscow – were pulling apart the radical section of British Columbia’s Left.

The same CPC convention that rejected the OBU endorsed the 21-points of affiliation to the Third International, and adopted “a program of mass-action as the vital form of proletarian activity, armed insurrection, civil war as the decisive, final form of mass-action for the destruction of the Capitalist state.” Here the party made a clear break from the general trend of socialist politics in BC, which was strengthening its focus on the parliamentary field. “Bourgeois democracy,” according to the Program adopted at Guelph,

is nothing but the concealed dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Bourgeois democracy, with its parliamentary system, defrauds the masses of participation in the administration of the state... This work in the parliaments must be fully subordinated to the objects and tasks of the mass struggle outside of the parliaments.

Communist Party will not hesitate before a split in the trade unions, if a refusal to split would mean the abandoning of revolutionary work in the unions and giving up the attempt to organize the most exploited part of the proletariat. If such a split should become necessary, it must be carried into effect only when the Communists, by incessant agitation against the reactionary leaders and their opportunist tactics, and by their active participation in the economic struggle, have succeeded in persuading the masses that the split is occurring not because of some remote and as yet incomprehensible aim of the revolution, but on account of the concrete, immediate interests of the working class in the development of its economic struggle. The Communist Party will (in case the necessity for a split arises) continuously and carefully consider the question as to whether such a split might not lead to isolation from the working masses.”

⁵⁵ *The Communist* (Toronto), June 1921. Here we find an echo of Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968).

Increasingly, the CPC would stand out as the lone proponent of militant industrial struggle, a factor which contributed toward a narrowing of tactics by the FLP-ILP-CCF tendency. In BC, the emergence of the CPC was particularly divisive, as it intruded directly on territory the SPC had occupied for almost 20 years: “The Communist Party, the organized vanguard of the working class, must direct the struggle of the entire class on the economic and political fields, and also in the field of education.”⁵⁶ The *Western Clarion* condemned the new party and its organ, *The Communist*. “Rather than making for Communist unity in this country [it] will tend to disrupt the movement.”⁵⁷

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In late February 1921, Bill Pritchard was released from prison after serving his sentence for sedition in connection with the Winnipeg strike. He returned to a hero’s welcome in Vancouver, with thousands crowding the platform and spilling over into the streets as his train pulled into the Main Street Station. The working-class solidarity characteristic of 1919 appeared to return for one brief instant. The next day, an estimated 12,000 people attended a meeting in the Cambie Street Grounds, where speakers including Woodsworth, Kavanagh, Harrington, and Pritchard took the platform. The emerging factions within the SPC and the FLP came together to celebrate the release of one of their own. “We’ve got a dictatorship of a very few financiers,” Woodsworth declared. “Some of those in authority have sensed a menace to the existing order; that we intend to control the conditions under which we live.”⁵⁸ Weeks earlier he “confessed that he was somewhat of an anarchist – that is, that though state control might be an intermediate

⁵⁶ *The Communist* (Toronto), June 1921.

⁵⁷ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 1 June 1921.

⁵⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 1 April 1921.

stage, the end was self-determination – that each man was able to express his own life in his own way.” As for Russian Communism, he argued: “A benevolent working-class dictatorship is the superior to a callous bureaucratic dictatorship, but it is by no means a cooperative commonwealth.”⁵⁹

The euphoria of Pritchard’s return was short-lived, and by summer he was embroiled in the Comintern debate. He came out solidly against affiliation, siding with comrade Chris Stephenson, former editor of the *Clarion*, who criticized “the sewer-pipe revolutionists” – “our friends of the rat-hole persuasion” – who published *The Communist* and attacked the SPC from its pages:

As one who has reason to know a little of the highly developed espionage system in existence today...I protest against the insipid, yet insidious, attacks of noisy unknowns against those who are known to the agencies of authority, as outspoken protagonists of the Class Struggle.⁶⁰

A writer identified as O. Mengel responded to Pritchard, arguing in favour of affiliation and declaring contemptuously: “How the mighty have fallen!”⁶¹

The solidarity of 1919 had broken down. With industrial organization severely weakened, conflict was threatening to destroy the political organizations of BC labour. That became apparent in the December 1921 federal election. Representatives of the emerging SPC factions stood for election: Pritchard in Nanaimo and Kavanagh in South Vancouver, where he was challenged by FLP candidate and former British Labour MP Tom Richardson.⁶² SPCers Jack Harrington and T. O’Connor contested Burrard and

⁵⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 4 March 1921.

⁶⁰ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 16 July 1921.

⁶¹ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 16 August 1921.

⁶² *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 1 and 16 December 1921. RB Russell ran in Winnipeg North, where he was narrowly defeated by Liberal lawyer E.J. McMurray after Jacob Penner split the labour vote when he ran under the Workers’ Alliance, a Communist front.

Vancouver Centre respectively.⁶³ Addressing a crowd at the Columbia Theatre in Victoria, Pritchard stated: “The issue in this election is not between any candidate but between your masters and yourselves.”⁶⁴ The *Federationist* echoed this sentiment in an editorial titled ‘The Lessons of 1919’: “A vote in the coming election cast by a worker for either of the old political parties is a demonstration that the lesson of Winnipeg has not yet been learnt.”⁶⁵ On election day, Bill Pritchard polled 3,995 votes, compared with 4,143 Liberal votes and 6,903 for the Conservative.⁶⁶ A strong showing, no doubt, but victory evaded him. A majority of workers remained ignorant of the ‘lessons of 1919’, refusing to break from the old-line political parties. The *Federationist* attributed the lack of success to the divided state of the movement:

Split into numerous factions, the workers are, politically, like a ship without a rudder or compass. Industrially they are in much the same position. With a world torn by war and privation, and the class struggle ever becoming more and more intense, the Canadian workers are floundering in doubt and indecision.⁶⁷

Tom Barnard accused the “so-called intellectuals” of the SPC of being “more willing to fight those who are actually in the class struggle than they are those defending the present system.” He hoped for “a more united effort towards our common goal, i.e., replacing the present system of exploitation by a system of co-operation for the common good.”⁶⁸

The SPC affiliation debate had loomed large throughout the federal campaign. In the autumn of 1921, the CPC issued a circular to all SPC locals in the country, calling for members to demand a party convention to settle the question of affiliation: “Should this

⁶³ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 16 December 1921.

⁶⁴ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 1 December 1921.

⁶⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 16 September 1921.

⁶⁶ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 16 December 1921.

⁶⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 9 December 1921.

⁶⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 23 December 1921.

demand not be complied with, we hereby instruct all militants to leave the S.P. of C. and align themselves with the International of the World Revolution, through the Communist Party of Canada.” Foreshadowing the unease with ‘Communist tactics’ that would later consume BC’s Left, the *Clarion* declared: “efforts made to override our judgment by the C.P. or its agents, real or alleged, in no way tend to drive us to hasty action.”⁶⁹ Even so, the next edition of the newspaper issued a call from the Dominion Executive Committee of the SPC for a vote “on unconditional affiliation, based on the twenty-one conditions laid down by the second congress of the Third International, Moscow, August 1920.” The executive made no recommendation to party members.⁷⁰

The results would never appear in the pages of the *Clarion*. But the *Federationist* reported in January 1922 that “the vote went decidedly in favour of affiliation.”⁷¹ Several locals voted unanimously in favour, and while the results cited by the newspaper were partial, they listed 79 for affiliation compared with 69 opposed. In Victoria, members voted 11 to six for affiliation. Vancouver, meanwhile, registered the strongest ‘No’ vote: 37 opposed with 24 in favour. According to at least one historian, Pritchard and Kavanagh – shoulder to shoulder for the OBU at Calgary in 1919 – nearly came to blows at a meeting in Vancouver in late 1921, as their Socialist Party disintegrated on the divisive question of Russian Communism.⁷²

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⁶⁹ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 1 November 1921.

⁷⁰ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 16 November 1921.

⁷¹ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 27 January 1922.

⁷² Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way*, 99. Campbell credits David Akers with directing him to this source: NAC, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Kavanagh File, *RCMP Report*, 30 December 1921. For a discussion of the SPC referendum on affiliating to the Third International, see Johnson, “No Compromise – No Political Trading,” 357.

As the SPC split at its base of operations in Vancouver, the election of Jim Woodsworth as MP for Winnipeg Centre provided labour with a parliamentary base in Ottawa.

Recently returned from Vancouver to assume the position of organizer and general secretary for Winnipeg's Labour Church, Woodsworth defeated his nearest rival by 3,592 votes.⁷³

Several months earlier, Woodsworth delivered a lecture on Socialism to a group of students at the University of British Columbia, organized by the Kiwanis Club. He inflamed Vancouver's *Empire Weekly*, which described him as "the same Mr. Woodsworth who took a prominent part in the disturbances in Winnipeg not so very long ago" and went "hand in hand with one surnamed Pritchard... We consider every person connected with that society a menace to the welfare of Vancouver, a danger to British Columbia, and an enemy to Canada."⁷⁴ Five years later, this 'enemy to Canada' would force the Old Age Pension Act out of Mackenzie King's Liberals.⁷⁵ He would establish, through the skilled application of parliamentary procedure, the right to divorce for the men and women of Canada.⁷⁶ In the next decade, he used his political foothold in Ottawa, secured through the OBU's industrial base in Winnipeg, to lay the groundwork for the national organization of the non-Communist Canadian Left. Dismissed as an 'enemy to Canada' a month prior to his election in 1921, Woodsworth achieved what no other Canadian has ever done: he organized a national, mass-based political organization with a

⁷³ *One Big Union Bulletin*, 8 December 1921. In total, Woodsworth received 7,886 votes. For details of Woodsworth's first speech following his return to Winnipeg, see *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 11 June 1921.

⁷⁴ "Socialism in the University," *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 29 October 1921.

⁷⁵ Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A biography of J. S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), 215-220.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 294-295.

socialist orientation that was able to survive external attacks from the institutions of capital, and internal conflict over ideology, strategy and personality.⁷⁷

“In the whole Dominion only one straight labor candidate, J.S. Woodsworth, has been elected,” the *OBU Bulletin* declared in December 1921.⁷⁸ It interpreted this as “a damning indictment” of the AFL-Internationals: “They have failed to function on the economic field and they have also left the worker’s mind so befogged that he does not recognize his class interests on the political field. Their influence has been a damnable one from every angle.”⁷⁹ Similarly, Tom Barnard commented that if “the workers used some common sense in the last election, we would not be in the deplorable position of having J.S. Woodsworth acting the role of John the Baptist in the wilderness of Ottawa.”⁸⁰ When Parliament convened, Woodsworth was seated on the far left of the opposition benches, furthest removed from the Speaker, and next to Calgary MP William Irvine: “Beyond me there are a number of unoccupied desks; in imagination, I try to picture these in future years filled with Labor members.”⁸¹ Not until 1930 did the first reinforcement arrive from BC. In the interim, Woodsworth exposed the evils of capitalism in the House of Commons and gained valuable insight into the functioning of capital and its state: “Undoubtedly one of the greatest advantages of the labor man in parliament is that he can see just how the machine operates. Either a man must succumb

⁷⁷ Despite profound changes in the CCF-NDP programme and structure in intervening years, and despite certain tactics employed to maintain what the leadership considered to be the sanctity of the organization, JS Woodsworth’s contribution to Canadian Socialism is unparalleled in the history of the country.

⁷⁸ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 15 December 1921. A total of 32 labour and socialist candidates contested the election. Along with Woodsworth, William Irvine was elected for Calgary. The *OBU Bulletin* made no mention of him, while the *Federationist* described Irvine as “of the lighter shades, and far from being a revolutionist.” (*British Columbia Federationist*, 9 December 1921.

⁷⁹ *One Big Union Bulletin*, 8 December 1921.

⁸⁰ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 20 January 1922.

⁸¹ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 24 March 1922.

to the official opinion or he will be inevitably driven to a position of greater radicalism.”⁸²

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The year 1922 opened with the emergence of a new party on the labour political scene in BC: “Enter – The Workers’ Party,” the *Clarion* proclaimed in an editorial.⁸³ Leading lights in the SPC, including Albert Wells, editor of the *Federationist*, LWIU general secretary J.M. Clark, and Jack Kavanagh rapidly migrated into the Workers’ Party of Canada (WPC), the public face of the clandestine CPC.⁸⁴ A key factor influencing their decision was the ambivalent stance of the SPC to action in the industrial field:

The doctrinaires in the Socialist movement have, by their neglect... hindered this most necessary development... While it would be folly to underestimate the value of the activities of the individual Socialists in the labor movement, there has, to date, been no real effort to unite the class-conscious workers in a political organization which could give a lead to the workers in all phases of the class struggle.⁸⁵

In January 1922, the *Federationist* published “An Appeal to Left Wing members of the SP of C,” signed by the provisional organization committee of the WPC: “A split is now inevitable. The educationists will reorganize and continue their philosophical wailings. But you – the Left Wingers – who stood out clearly for the Third, what will you do?”⁸⁶

The WPC issued a manifesto in Vancouver, and the *Federationist* ran the headline:

‘Lumber Workers to Affiliate with the Red International.’⁸⁷ Organizational unity with the

⁸² *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 3 May 1923.

⁸³ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 6 January 1922. The writer played down the impact of the WPC on the fortunes of the SPC, but the split set the latter organization on the path to political obscurity: “we gathered the idea that all that was needed to the success of the Communists was the death of the S.P. of C. But somehow or other we kept on breathing.”

⁸⁴ For a concise explanation of the relationship between the CPC and WPC, identified by the party leadership as “Z” and “A”, see Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 53.

⁸⁵ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 30 December 1921.

⁸⁶ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 6 January 1922.

⁸⁷ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 13 January 1922.

Russian Bolsheviks, discussed throughout 1921, became a reality for sections of British Columbia's Left in 1922.

However this unity with the Third International alienated BC Communists from their former comrades in the SPC, who maintained a connection with the OBU: "After all the bluster of the new leadership, self-appointed to lead the workers hither and thither, in and out, the result to date of the order to turn to the international unions and 'bore from within' has not met with an enthusiastic response," the *Western Clarion* commented.⁸⁸

Bill Pritchard took a jab at the WPC: "The need of the time is not new righteous leaders, no melodramatic calls for 'upsurges,' but the spreading of a knowledge of Socialism amongst the masses."⁸⁹ This perspective foreshadowed the perpetual battle between rival socialists that would characterize the decade. As signatories of the document 'A Parting of Ways,' Kavanagh and J.G. Smith were formally expelled from the SPC in 1922.⁹⁰

Several months later, the *Clarion* commented on an appeal to unity from the Workers' Party:

We know very well that the cry for unity meets a widespread response in working class ranks. Class sentiment invites it. Unity is strength, the basis of organization and the principle of its advocacy. But by counting noses you do not prove the strength of a Socialist organization. The war demonstrated that...⁹¹

Tom Barnard repeatedly called for a truce between the warring factions. Listed as contact for the Nanaimo Unit of the OBU, Barnard looked toward the day when

the labor movement would have something to do besides quarrel between themselves. It might tend to solidify them to fight their common enemy

⁸⁸ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 15 April 1922.

⁸⁹ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 1 May 1922.

⁹⁰ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 1 November 1922. In April 1925, Kavanagh moved to Australia, where he remained active with the Communist party until his death in 1964. (See David Akers, "Rebel or Revolutionary? Jack Kavanagh and the Early Years of the Communist Movement in Vancouver, 1920-1925," *Labour/Le Travail* 30 (Fall 1992), 42-43.)

⁹¹ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 1 November 1922.

and the words of Karl Marx, “Workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains,” might become something more than a tinkling symbol, or a parrotised paraphrase.⁹²

As former comrades in the SPC battled over the mantle of BC Marxism, extra-parliamentary struggle shifted from the workplace into the streets, and from employees to the burgeoning ranks of the unemployed.

In the wake of the war, BC’s economy plunged into depression. The mythic Roaring Twenties were characterized by varying degrees of poverty and privation for many BC workers. Prior to their split from the SPC, proto-Communists were actively organizing the jobless in Vancouver and Victoria. These efforts foreshadowed the achievements of the CPC’s Workers’ Unity League (WUL) and Relief Camp Workers’ Union (RCWU) in the 1930s. Importantly, the depression of the early 1920s established the realm of unemployed organization and militancy as Communist territory.

Deteriorating relations with other individuals and groups on the Left marginalized supporters of the ILP-CCF from this form of extra-parliamentary activism. Jack Kavanagh and others played an active role in organizing Unemployed Councils in Vancouver and Victoria.⁹³ On 20 February 1921, 5000 workers attended a rally at Vancouver’s Cambie Street Grounds, organized by the council and featuring Kavanagh and Woodsworth as speakers.⁹⁴ “Did they who were fortunately owning a job recognize how essential it was to line up with the unemployed if they expected to hold said job?” a speaker asked at an FLP meeting in Vancouver, chaired by Lucy Woodsworth.⁹⁵

⁹² *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 26 January 1922.

⁹³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 11 February 1921.

⁹⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 25 February 1921. Attempts by city authorities to prevent Kavanagh from speaking were unsuccessful. A similar event in December drew a crowd of 2000. (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 14 December 1920.)

⁹⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 25 February 1921.

Demonstrations by the unemployed and their supporters represented one of the only forms of extra-parliamentary action in BC following the split in the OBU and the corresponding decline in trade-union militancy. In December 1920, the *Federationist* reported the presence of 10,000 unemployed in Vancouver.⁹⁶ In BC's capital city, organization would take longer to develop, but by the end of 1921 the Victoria Council of the Unemployed was holding daily meetings of 300 to 500 workers, and at one rally "invaded the Parliament Buildings."⁹⁷ Speaking in the BC Legislature, Sam Guthrie issued a warning to Liberal and Tory legislators: "You have taught the soldiers, many of them now unemployed, to use machine guns. Be careful they do not turn them to other use."⁹⁸ Both inside and outside the provincial legislature, socialists were challenging government and capital, on unemployment and other issues.

Despite rampant factionalism on the Left, the post-war assault on workers' organizations, wages, and living conditions forced a temporary rapprochement between rival groups. In March 1921, Tom Uphill told the Legislature that wages had been cut \$1 to \$1.50 per day, while living costs had declined by only 12 cents.⁹⁹ With their unions severely weakened in the aftermath of 1919, British Columbia workers looked to other forms of action to resist the employers' assault. On May Day 1921, a coalition of groups came together in Vancouver to resist moves by civic authorities against the right to

⁹⁶ *British Columbia Federationist*, 17 December 1920. Along with parades and open-air meetings, the Councils organized Tag Days and sent deputations to lobby municipal and provincial officials for relief and jobs.

⁹⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 16 December 1921.

⁹⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 4 March 1921. Premier Oliver rose on a point of order, citing a rule barring intimidating language from the legislative chamber. Guthrie declared his statement was not meant to intimidate, but repeated the point that anything was possible "when men were hungry and needed food for their families." This was met by an applause from the public gallery. The Speaker declared that demonstrations of any kind "might lead to the privileges of the gallery being denied the public." Tom Uphill, Labour member for Fernie, defended Guthrie, saying, "I do not believe in giving cake to anyone until all have bread." Harry Neelands also addressed the subject.

assemble.¹⁰⁰ Solidarity by necessity revealed itself in widespread support for a demonstration called by the Workers' Council, a group which had the backing of the SPC, FLP, Longshoremen, Lumber Workers, Pile Drivers, Street railway men, Sailors and Canadian National Union of Ex-Servicemen (CNUX). Bowing to pressure from the mayor and chief of police, the leadership of the Council attempted to call off the action, but the rank-and-file met and reversed this decision. A march took place, followed by a series of meetings addressed by Pritchard, Harrington, Tom Richardson and Winnipeg's George Armstrong.¹⁰¹

Jack Kavanagh was at the centre of this agitation. At the founding meeting of the Workers' Party in Vancouver, he identified a concerted attempt "to create a psychology of non-resistance to wage reductions... There had been unemployment before as widespread, but never as permanent as today." Kavanagh condemned organized labour for its silence and refusal to take action: "In the face of this serious menace to the general standard of living, they failed to realize the principle at stake." He called on workers to "resist reductions... which would put them in such a position that they would lose every vestige of resistance." Explaining the split from the SPC, he said the Workers' Party was committed "to resist further encroachments... and eventually to take over the machinery

⁹⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 25 March 1921.

¹⁰⁰ *British Columbia Federationist*, 29 April 1921. A meeting at Vancouver's Dominion Hall in late April 1921 – featuring Sinn Fein leader Lindsay Crawford on tour from Ireland – was threatened by a vigilante mob, with a group of workers and members of the Canadian National Union of Ex-Servicemen (CNUX) constituting themselves "custodians of law and order" to defend the meeting. This experience likely influenced the decision to defy efforts by city officials to prevent a May Day Parade and Demonstration.

¹⁰¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 29 April 1921 and 6 May 1921. The use of the Cambie Street Grounds was refused by the Chief of Police, ostensibly to prevent disturbances such as those at the Crawford meeting. When the executive of the Workers' Council called off the parade, the rank and file met and decided to reverse the decision of their executive. An effort by the Chief of Police to smooth over the dispute, in attempting to shake hands with Kavanagh, was refused, and the workers held an impromptu march through downtown Vancouver, followed by a several indoor meetings at the Pender, Loggers, and Longshoremen's halls. Organizers complied with a new City By-Law, however, and consented to display the Union Jack at the head of the march.

of production and operate it for the common benefit.”¹⁰² In Victoria, a convention of the employed and unemployed decided “to form a council of workers with delegates from every organization interested, so that a united front can be put to any further encroachment by the master class on the present low standard of living of the worker.” The VTLC and its president Ben Simmons and secretary Eugene Woodward, both city aldermen, were subjected to heavy criticism, for their absence from the convention, their refusal of co-operation with the unemployed, and their support on City Council for a reduction in relief payments.¹⁰³ Demonstrating the changing nature of labour solidarity, delegates pledged “to further the organization of women of the working class.”¹⁰⁴

In the midst of the First World War, the exclusion of women from the labour and socialist movements began to break down. During the 1920s, the Left in BC made a concerted effort to reach out to youth, women, and the much-feared Asian worker. Vancouver’s Junior Labour League, formed in 1919, was active throughout the 1920s, enlisting young people for the socialist cause, and Women’s Labour Leagues were organized throughout the province.¹⁰⁵ The presence of prominent socialist Rose Henderson on the Pacific coast in the early part of the decade raised the profile of women in the socialist movement.¹⁰⁶ While still heavily dominated by men, BC’s Left was

¹⁰² *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 22 January 1922.

¹⁰³ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 3 March 1922. Following defeat in the 1920 municipal election, Woodward was elected in 1921, serving as Alderman until 1930, when he moved to Vancouver. (See UBCSC, Eugene S. Woodward papers, various files; also UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 1921-30.)

¹⁰⁴ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 3 March 1922.

¹⁰⁵ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 11 March 1921; Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, 151. A Women’s Labour League was formed at Ladysmith in early 1921. In the Fraser Valley farming community of Mount Lehman, Helena Gutteridge was active in the government-sponsored Women’s Institute, serving as president in the early 1920s. (See Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice*, 143-144.)

¹⁰⁶ Jim Woodsworth described Henderson “as the one woman who has thrown herself heart and soul into the labor and progressive movement of Canada.” (*BC Federationist*, 26 September 1924.) A notable setback in this challenge to gender roles was a Queen Contest organized by the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council in mid-1923. Labor’s equivalent to the Miss Vancouver pageant was a fundraiser for the trades council’s Building Fund. (See *British Columbia Federationist* [Vancouver], 3 March 1922.)

challenging its traditional composition, foreshadowing more significant inroads for women in future decades. The Communist Party was particularly strong in this area, with Beckie Buhay touring BC on behalf of the party in 1927 and joining other women in the national leadership of the party.¹⁰⁷ Within the FLP and later the ILP, Lucy Woodsworth demonstrated leadership in her own right, writing in the labour press, chairing meetings, and playing an active role in the BC socialist movement while her husband nurtured a national organization from the House of Commons in Ottawa. During the 1921 federal election campaign, Lucy Woodsworth took the FLP platform in Vancouver.¹⁰⁸ Over time, Solidarity came to mean more than simply a struggle to forge links between rival labour and socialist groups. The inclusion of all sections of the working class – women, youth, and Asians – into the organizations of workers revealed itself during the First World War and into the 1920s.

The ‘Asiatic question’ offered the most divisive and persistent obstacle to working-class unity in BC. Decades of racism, complicated by the low wages, long hours and substandard living conditions of Chinese and Japanese workers, created a deep division. Gillian Creese has explored this dynamic in her research into Vancouver’s labour movement.¹⁰⁹ Inspired by Marx’s dictum – ‘workers of all lands unite’ – the Socialists in BC slowly worked to corrode ignorance and racism. In a *Clarion* article in mid-1918, reprinted in the *Federationist*, Pritchard articulated this view of class solidarity: “Let the day come when they will see clearly that the interests of ALL workers, irrespective of race, sex, or color, are one against ALL masters.” Such unity

¹⁰⁷ *The Worker* (Toronto), 15 January 1927.

¹⁰⁸ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 9 September 1921.

¹⁰⁹ Gillian Creese, “Exclusion or Solidarity? Vancouver Workers Confront the ‘Oriental Problem’,” *BC Studies* 80 (Winter 1988-89): 24-51.

offered the only means of achieving the ultimate goal: “the overthrow of capitalism and the inauguration of ‘The Co-operative Commonwealth.’”¹¹⁰

Rooted in the ideology of the SPC, transplanted into the OBU, and expanded upon by the CPC, the vision of class solidarity developed in the early decades of the twentieth century.¹¹¹ By the 1920s a section of BC workers, though clearly a minority, were determined to overcome age-old hatreds that they believed distracted workers from their genuine rivals. Moderate leaders of the Vancouver TLC, however – typified by secretary Percy Bengough – played an active role in the Asiatic Exclusion League.¹¹² In September 1921, a mass meeting of Vancouver workers rejected calls for ‘Asiatic Exclusion,’ unanimously endorsing a resolution that declared: “we have no enemies except the capitalist class of all countries,” placing itself on record “as being opposed to any legislation or action that will tend to exclude any workers from Canada.”¹¹³ Angus McInnis, representing the FLP, addressed the meeting, concluding “that if the worker did not or could not consider the color of his boss, neither should he trouble about the color of the man he worked with, and that it was the duty of the workers to find the real cause of the trouble, which was capitalism.”¹¹⁴

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¹¹⁰ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 20 May 1921. Emphasis is in the original.

¹¹¹ Clear distinctions between these organizations existed, but they were linked by the common thread of Marxian socialism. The Marxism of the SPC fundamentally influenced the ideology of the OBU and CPC in BC.

¹¹² Patricia E. Roy, “The Oriental ‘Menace’ in British Columbia,” In S.M. Trofimenkoff, ed. *The Twenties in Western Canada: Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference, March 1972* (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1972), 249; “Robin, *Rush for the Spoils*, 213; Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 88. Gordon Hak suggests calls for Asian exclusion were a feature of leftist politics in the Alberni Valley. (See Hak, “The Socialist and Labourist Impulse,” 541.)

¹¹³ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 16 September 1921.

¹¹⁴ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 16 September 1921.

Throughout 1922 and 1923, the search for labour solidarity, both industrial and political, continued. The emergence of the Communist movement in BC forced a reconfiguration of radical politics. Former comrades in the SPC became bitter enemies, and one of the key axes of division remained the question of secession and the OBU. The Communist ‘boring from within’ strategy – while alienating Albert Wells and others from the SPC – made possible a rapprochement with more moderate sections of the Left.

In April 1922, the *Federationist*, edited by Wells, commented on the industrial situation and the need for unity: “Mistakes have been made in the past. Tactics which were detrimental to the workers may have been adopted, but this is no time for recrimination.” The editorial called for “common action,” suggesting “the mistakes of the past should point the way to future action and cohesive effort.”¹¹⁵ Rejecting the OBU, the paper declared that “the Central Labor Council is the only organized body in the city which can carry on this work.”¹¹⁶ Unfortunately, those in positions of authority within the Vancouver TLC were of an entirely different stripe than the class-war fighters of 1919. Bengough, Neelands and others were neither willing, nor perhaps able, to lead Vancouver workers in industrial action. The *Federationist* called for a superior form of AFL-International unionism, “a concerted move to secure the amalgamation of all crafts in one industry into industrial unions.”¹¹⁷ This about-face in the editorial stance of the

¹¹⁵ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 14 April 1922. The same sentiment was expressed a month later: “The labor movement has been split, and will be split again, because of the necessity for clarification, but there are splits that are not only unnecessary, but due to the fact that certain groups of workers become so impregnated with the idea that the views they hold, or the organization they belong to, is the only way to working class freedom...as a result, the class viewpoint is overshadowed by the partisan outlook of those who have become patriotic to their own views or organization and have lost sight of the class struggle and all that it entails.” (See *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 5 May 1922.)

¹¹⁶ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 14 April 1922.

¹¹⁷ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 16 June 1922.

Federationist elicited the wrath of the *OBU Bulletin*, triggering a plea for realism over idealism:

Realities count in the class struggle, and if three magic letters would emancipate them, then they would have been freed long ago...All those who understand the fight before the workers must...go where the masses of the workers gather, and endeavour to build up those organizations into fighting machines.¹¹⁸

An appeal for solidarity coincided with an OBU organizing drive among rail workers in the west: “The need is unity, not dissension...It is not a question of OBU or AF of L, but it is a class issue...those who trot out specious nostrums and others formulas for the future are but playing the ruling-class game.”¹¹⁹

The anti-secessionist stance of the CPC and the *Federationist* made possible a temporary coalition with the non-revolutionary Left. Albert Wells and other BC Communists were able to collaborate with labour activists who rejected outright calls for revolution yet who welcomed the WPC-CPC position on industrial unity. In mid-1922, the Vancouver TLC endorsed the *Federationist* as its official organ, and the paper absorbed the short-lived *BC Labor News*, established in the wake of 1919 to counter the secessionist threat.¹²⁰ The merger offered a reprieve for the cash-strapped *Federationist*, but did not solve its financial difficulties. Furthermore, the coalition of Communists and AFL-International unionists – based solely in opposition to the OBU – severely moderated the socialism of the consistently Marxist *Federationist*:

¹¹⁸ *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 14 July 1922.

¹¹⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 11 August 1922.

¹²⁰ *British Columbia Federationist*, 5 June 1922, 21 July 1922 and 11 August 1922. David Akers identifies this move as emanating from a decision of the Central Committee of the CPC, an action resented by Kavanagh (see Akers, “Rebel or Revolutionary,” 35-36.) Following endorsement by the Vancouver TLC, Wells’ name was dropped from the editorial roster of the *Federationist*, yet he kept his job with the newspaper. A month later, the editorial board of the paper, appointed by the Vancouver TLC appeared: Bengough, Neelands, J.M. Clark, and Bartley. (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 18 August 1922.)

We will be accused of ‘pandering’ to certain interests in the ranks of the working class. It is true that things which are looked upon by the immaculate Socialists have been ‘sacrificed’ and new departures made, but new times need new measures, and new ideas... The BC Federationist recognizes that the needs of the working class must be served, no matter what the measures adopted to that end. Idealism has had its day. It has not produced the results expected.¹²¹

This sentiment was summed up succinctly: “men must of necessity, like children, be taught to walk before they can run in the class struggle.”¹²² A correspondent celebrated the shift: “a change is taking place in the attitude of the warring factions in the labor movement of this city...sanity is once again returning to the ranks of labor.”¹²³

But this support was far from uniform. The *OBU Bulletin* dismissed the newspaper – once “the mouthpiece of radical labor” – following its passage into the hands of the moderates:

When they secured part control, it became a crime to print anything which was calculated to offend the officialdom of the reactionary unions and it was the unpardonable sin to speak a good word regarding that mass of workers who had broken from the A.F. of L. and had joined the One Big Union... The Fed is really a waste of effort.¹²⁴

The *Bulletin* offered a thinly veiled critique of Communist tactics: “it is becoming more apparent every day that with a certain aggregation of workers there is no difference between the sensible application of the dialectic to tactics and the chameleon like tactics of the super opportunist.”¹²⁵ Even Jack Kavanagh, a founding member of the WPC, condemned Wells and the ideological shift of the paper: “some members of the Workers’ Party gave the control of the Federationist into the hands of the reactionaries under the guise of tactics, and have camouflaged the morass of opportunism into which they have

¹²¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 2 June 1922.

¹²² *British Columbia Federationist*, 28 July 1922.

¹²³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 21 July 1922.

¹²⁴ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 8 November 1923.

sunk with the cloak of an United Front.”¹²⁶ When Wells toured Vancouver Island boosting support for the newspaper, he was challenged by members of the SPC, who “were still imbued with the fatalistic philosophy which has stultified the working class movement on the coast.” Wells replied “that revolutionary action did not consist of talk.”¹²⁷ As the early experience of BC Communists demonstrated, organizational reconfiguration offered no panacea for left-wing unity.

The most important development following the SPC split, the emergence of BC Communism, and the shift in stance at the *Federationist* was a renewed effort for a political united front.¹²⁸ In October 1922, the Vancouver TLC organized a unity convention to revitalize the trade union movement and make it “a fighting force.” The *Federationist* described the conditions underlying this meeting: “Western Canada was at one time looked upon as being the home of the militant trades unionists. Today it is not living up to its reputation. Split as it is in many ways, divided by reaction and leftism.”¹²⁹

¹²⁵ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 27 July 1922.

¹²⁶ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 16 May 1923. For a discussion of Kavanagh’s tenuous, ‘on-again-off-again’ relationship with the CPC/WPC prior to his emigration to Australia in 1925, see David Akers, “‘Rebel or Revolutionary,’” 35-41.

¹²⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 20 October 1922. The SPC and its members were further maligned in an editorial on ‘Intellectuality and Action’ in the *British Columbia Federationist*, 10 November 1922. This conflict between the SPC and WPC revealed itself in May 1923. Maurice Spector, editor of *The Worker*, was in Vancouver on an organizing tour. At the corner of Cordova and Carrall Streets he encountered Charles Lestor, who was holding a street-corner meeting for the SPC. The two socialists entered into a vigorous debate on the nature of the Soviet Union, with Lestor insisting that the Bolsheviks represented “a dictatorship of a relatively small clique over the whole Russian working class.” This prompted Spector, recently returned from Russia, to challenge Lestor to a public debate on the merits of the Third International. The old horse that refused to die reared its head once again in Vancouver. At the appointed hour, Lestor failed to appear. (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 11 and 18 May 1923.)

¹²⁸ In January 1923, the BC district of the Workers’ Party held its first convention. Delegates representing 12 branches and 439 members were present, and discussed the distinct situation in BC, where “Ultra-Marxism has left a pernicious impression that only revolutionary Marxism can eradicate.” A week later, Tim Buck – future secretary of the CPC – addressed a WPC meeting and argued for the amalgamation of the craft unions. At the end of February, the second annual convention of the WPC met in Toronto and restated its opposition to secession, condemning “in scathing terms, the attempts of the OBU to still further split the forces of the railroad workers by establishing a western shopmen’s committee.” (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 2 and 9 February 1923, 16 March 1923.)

¹²⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 22 September 1922.

Of the 64 union locals in Vancouver at the time, ten were ineligible for affiliation with the trades council, because they were considered ‘dual’ to affiliated AFL unions. Of the remaining 54 locals, only 22 were affiliated with the central body of organized labour.¹³⁰ The *Federationist* offered a stark prognosis on the situation: “of one thing we are certain, and that is that if the workers of this province do not get together they will be bled white in the near future. They can take their choice.”¹³¹ This was painfully demonstrated that summer when 18 miners were killed in an explosion at the Number Four mine in Cumberland.¹³² The October unity convention was followed up in December by a meeting organized in Vancouver by the Workers’ Party, “to bring about a political united front.” Twenty organizations were in attendance, including the FLP, the WPC and 18 unions. “From the very start a spirit of harmony prevailed, and at no time during the meeting was there any decided antagonism,” the *Federationist* reported.¹³³ Wells acted as secretary of the meeting, which endorsed the formation of a Labour Representation Committee.¹³⁴

Despite this move toward unity, the legacy of the OBU re-emerged in early 1923, exposing deep divisions in the ranks of Vancouver labour. Future CCFer Vic Midgley was at the centre of the controversy. On 20 February 1923, the Vancouver TLC held its

¹³⁰ *British Columbia Federationist*, 13 October 1922.

¹³¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 6 October 1922.

¹³² *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 10 November 1922 and 15 December 1922. Guthrie and Neelands raised the matter in the provincial legislature, maintaining a vigorous agitation for safer conditions and for the eight-hour working day across BC.

¹³³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 15 December 1922.

¹³⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 15 December 1922 and 20 April 1923. An important influence behind the second meeting appears to have been the electoral success of Parm Pettipiece, official of the Typographers’ union and former *Federationist* editor, who ran as the official FLP candidate in the Vancouver municipal election. Backed by the labour council and several Vancouver unions, Pettipiece topped the polls in his ward, securing a seat as Alderman on City Council. In April 1923, the Labour Representation Committee contested the South Vancouver municipal election, an action endorsed by the Vancouver TLC.

“stormiest” session since the year 1919.¹³⁵ Several affiliates were inflamed by an earlier decision to seat the former OBU secretary as a delegate to the AFL-controlled council. When the executive recommended the matter be reconsidered, a debate ensued, “lasting the better part of two hours.” Some delegates called for Midgley’s expulsion while others argued the Council should include members with conflicting views, provided they belonged to an International union. It was noted that Midgley’s organization counted 1200 members, out of a total of 3000 to 4000 workers affiliated with the council. A proposal from Parm Pettipiece to table the matter was rejected on a vote of 37 to 17.¹³⁶ J. Flynn of the Steam and Operating Engineers then called for a referendum vote of affiliated members. Delegates Showler, Herrett, and Hutchinson said their unions had instructed them to oppose the seating of Midgley. Cory, Rankin, Hardy, Ross, and Flynn, meanwhile, spoke in Midgley’s defense. Secretary Percy Bengough denied there was an organized move to unseat Midgley, arguing the initiative was coming from the rank and file.

The arguments favouring Midgley centred on the need to rebuild the labour movement, citing the trend across North America toward amalgamation. Opponents of the former OBU secretary rested their critique on his association with the secessionist organization, citing, among other issues, the confiscation of the property of the old trades council, which had not been returned despite the disbanding of the OBU unit in Vancouver. Pettipiece rounded off the debate, saying he had “had enough of warfare, and that internecine strife in the Labor movement never got it anywhere.” He stressed “that

¹³⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 23 February 1923.

¹³⁶ *British Columbia Federationist*, 23 February 1923.

no man who every tried to do anything got by without making mistakes.”¹³⁷ When the question was put, delegates voted 27 to 25 to expel Midgley, and he, along with his co-delegates, left the hall. The debate persisted, however, with Midgley’s remaining supporters insisting that a referendum of the membership be taken.¹³⁸ In the end, delegates grudgingly accepted this course of action. Division – emanating from the OBU experience – was papered over, and a semblance of unity maintained in Vancouver’s House of Labour.

The electoral coalition between the WPC and FLP under the auspices of the Labour Representation Committee was holding together: “why not make it the vehicle by which Labor may eventually organize politically throughout the country?” the *Federationist* suggested.¹³⁹ Victoria workers took a tentative step toward unity in the summer of 1923 by staging a ‘red picnic’ at a local beach, designed “to bring home to the workers the necessity of closing up the gaps; that a united front is necessary to achieve our objective.”¹⁴⁰ A similar endeavour was launched by Jim Woodsworth with the inauguration of a one-week summer school of social sciences in Summerland, BC, with classes in industrial history, Marxian and Fabian socialism, communism, social reform, and social welfare. Expenses for the camp were “borne on a communal basis.”¹⁴¹ This spirit of unity was expressed in an *Federationist* editorial extolling Woodsworth for his work in Parliament “as the most competent representative of the working class in Canada in the year 1923”:

¹³⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 23 February 1923.

¹³⁸ I have been unable to determine the results of this referendum.

¹³⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 11 May 1923.

¹⁴⁰ *British Columbia Federationist*, 13 July 1923.

¹⁴¹ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 10 May 1923.

‘Jim’, the man who had courage enough to refuse to load munitions to be used against Soviet Russia in the City of Vancouver... He may not be as red as some people wish, but at least he has the courage and has shown to the workers of this country the value of a working class representative in the legislative halls of the country.¹⁴²

Woodsworth’s parliamentary base in Ottawa, and his sustained commitment to the educational focus of BC socialism, were looked upon with increasing interest, and envy, by important sections of British Columbia’s Left.

The year 1923 was marked by a final foray in industrial action. The outcome of this struggle focused the attention of BC socialists squarely on the political field. In February, 33 workers were killed in an explosion in Cumberland’s Number Four mine, the second such incident in seven months. The workers downed tools in protest, and struck for 11 days, but failed to form a union. The *Federationist* repeated its call for organization: “Organize or be destroyed.”¹⁴³ Later that spring, Tommy Roberts launched an OBU organizing drive in the Interior, while workers in Victoria struck the Esquimalt Dry Dock project.¹⁴⁴ The Federated Seafarer’s Union launched a protracted dispute

¹⁴² *British Columbia Federationist*, 15 June 1923.

¹⁴³ The disaster occurred on 8 February 1923. Lacking organization, the miners returned to work on Feb. 19, 11 days after they went on strike. Sam Guthrie, a miner himself, immediately made his way to the scene to ascertain the cause, as company officials were maintaining absolute secrecy. Indications suggested that safety regulations under the Coal Mines Regulation Act had not been observed. “The laws...are not enforced except in the interests of profit, as the miners only too well know,” the *Federationist* declared. Without organization since the Big Strike of 1914, the miners of Vancouver Island lacked any mechanism to force an improvement in their condition. While Nanaimo miners applied for a charter from District 18 of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), no lasting organization appears to have been achieved. By autumn 1924 they would be described as “unorganized.” (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 16 February 1923, 23 February 1923, 20 April 1923, 19 September 1924; *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 1 March 1923.)

¹⁴⁴ UVASC, VLC fonds, 84-63 Box 1 File 4, “Correspondences,” 11 June 1923; *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 10 May 1923 and 5 July 1923. Roberts, who lived in Sandon, signed up 50 per cent of Hedley miners and elicited the wrath of the mine bosses at Ainsworth and Kaslo. Later that year, OBU organizer Ben Legere embarked on a speaking tour in BC, following his arrest in Calgary for his OBU activities. His final destination was the AFL convention in Portland. While in BC, he visited Revelstoke, Sandon, Nakusp, Rossland, Nanaimo and Victoria, among other points. (*One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 6 September 1923 and 20 September 1923 and 27 September 1923.)

against the Canadian Government Merchant Marine ships on the Pacific Coast.¹⁴⁵ At a meeting in Vancouver, delegate Allman of the IWW spoke of the fallacy of the workers trying to accomplish anything in small organizations: “his remedy to [the] strike is strike one strike all.”¹⁴⁶ Commenting on the climate in the province, the *Federationist* declared: “the two phases of the labor movement – industrial and political – are exactly in the same position in regard to the organization of the masses; either might succeed if the workers unitedly backed its demands. Neither can fully succeed until a majority do so.”¹⁴⁷

In the fall of 1923, BC labour entered into a decisive battle on the industrial field. Its defeat resulted in a decline in the militancy and confidence of workers for much of the 1920s. In October 1923, after several years of hazardous work, ‘speed up’, and declining wages, members of the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) struck against the Shipping Federation in the ports of Vancouver, Victoria, Chemainus, Alberni, Nanoose, Prince Rupert, and several other points along the coast.¹⁴⁸ In Victoria, Asian workers refused to scab on the men.¹⁴⁹ Two weeks into the dispute, the Shipping Federation declared its intention to institute the ‘Open Shop’ on the waterfront, seeking to break the back of the ILA, which had succeeded in securing regular hours, increased wages, and a standardized hiring system since it was organized in Vancouver in 1912.¹⁵⁰

A year earlier, the *Federationist* issued a warning to BC workers:

¹⁴⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 6 July 1923. A group of strikebreakers, appalled with poor food and unsanitary conditions, disembarked at Port Alberni and fled to Nanaimo, only to be apprehended by police and placed in leg-irons until the vessel was out at sea. (See *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 23 August 1923.)

¹⁴⁶ *British Columbia Federationist*, 24 August 1923.

¹⁴⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 7 September 1923.

¹⁴⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 12 October 1923 and 26 October 1923. The refusal of the employers to bargain with the ILA was the immediate cause of the dispute.

¹⁴⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 26 October 1923.

¹⁵⁰ *British Columbia Federationist*, 19 October 1923 and 26 October 1923.

Should the Longshoremen be compelled to accept open-shop conditions it would be a general setback for labor on the coast. Other workers would soon be faced with similar conditions... The time for action is now, not when the employers make their move. Unity of all waterfront, seafaring and transport workers must be secured...¹⁵¹

Unfortunately, organized labour failed to heed this warning.

When the Shipping Federation moved against the ILA, BC workers proved unable or unwilling to marshal their forces against the attack. A motion to endorse the strike was tabled by the Vancouver TLC.¹⁵² The *Longshoremen's Strike Bulletin* – edited by ILA business agent Bill Pritchard – declared that “every working man of Vancouver will back them up to the limit,” but this hope was dashed.¹⁵³ A general sympathetic strike was advocated within the Vancouver TLC and affiliated locals, but labour – influenced by the moderate leadership typified by Bengough and dispirited from the experience of 1919 – refused to act.¹⁵⁴

Six weeks into the strike, the Shipping Federation told a deputation from the Vancouver TLC it would accept back “former employees” (i.e. strikers) as needed, but refused to enter into negotiations with the ILA.¹⁵⁵ A company union was established in its place.¹⁵⁶ In total, the Shipping Federation spent \$100,000 to defeat the longshoremen and their demand for a five-cent bonus on the handling of lumber.¹⁵⁷ On 7 December 1923, after nine long weeks on the picket lines, ILA members in Vancouver voted 584 to 337 to

¹⁵¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 14 April 1922.

¹⁵² *British Columbia Federationist*, 19 October 1923.

¹⁵³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 26 October 1923.

¹⁵⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 7 December 1923. To be sure, pockets of sympathy existed: UBCJ Local 452 refused to work on the waterfront until the strike was called off, as did the International Hod Carriers and the Pile Drivers. And considerably funds were raised for the strikers. But these expressions of solidarity were hardly general in character. (See *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 1 November 1923.)

¹⁵⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 23 November 1923.

¹⁵⁶ *British Columbia Federationist*, 7 December 1923. In February 1926, the *Labor Statesman* would report: “The economic supremacy of the Shipping Federation is for the time being absolute.” (See *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 26 February 1926.)

return to work.¹⁵⁸ Their union broken, and the Open Shop established on the waterfront, the defeat of the ILA strike had a devastating effect on industrial action in BC. Already crippled by the OBU experience three years earlier, the strike represented the last gasp of the radical unionism that had flourished in Vancouver at the end of the First World War. Not until the onset of the 1930s depression and the organizing drives of the WUL and the CIO did industrial militancy return on a large scale to BC.¹⁵⁹

In the aftermath of 1923, BC socialists increasingly confined their battles to the political terrain.¹⁶⁰ Defeated in the 1923 Vancouver civic election, which coincided with the Longshoremen's strike and featured Parm Pettipiece as Labour's candidate for mayor, the movement prepared for the approaching provincial election. Accusations of gerrymandering surrounded a move by the governing Liberals to divide the Newcastle district, which was represented by outspoken Socialist and miners' leader Sam Guthrie.¹⁶¹ Even those forms of labour activism that followed the rules of bourgeois democracy and conformed to 'constitutional methods' were quashed by the elite: when workers made inroads in parliament, capital simply changed the rules.

An important development emanating from the ILA strike was the decision of the Vancouver TLC to withdraw its financial support and endorsement from the *Federationist* and back a new publication: the *Labor Statesman*. Born out of the *Longshoremen's Strike Bulletin* and edited by Bill Pritchard, the *Labor Statesman* symbolized reconciliation

¹⁵⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 7 March 1924.

¹⁵⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 14 December 1923.

¹⁵⁹ See Sean Griffin, ed., *Fighting Heritage: Highlights of the 1930s Struggle for Jobs and Militant Unionism in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Tribune, 1985).

¹⁶⁰ To be sure, this process was by no means immediate or uniform. The first months of 1924 witnessed a large-scale strike of lumber workers in south-eastern BC, demanding the 8-hour day. And in June, Vancouver shipwrights struck for higher wages. But the experience of the Longshoremen's strike struck a blow to the proponents of industrial action and strengthened calls for united labour action on the political field. (See *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 7 and 21 February 1924, 12 June 1924.)

between OBU and AFL forces in Vancouver. In late December 1923, the ILA re-affiliated to the Vancouver TLC.¹⁶² Less than a month later, the council voted unanimously to break from the *Federationist* and endorse Pritchard's publication.¹⁶³ A martyr¹⁶⁴ of the Winnipeg strike, Pritchard appears to have escaped the hostility directed at Midgley. In a bitter editorial, the *Federationist* described this move as a shift toward radicalism, a reversal on the mandate given to the present publishers:

it was mutually understood...that the policy of the paper must be changed from that of a radical propagandist, championing the cause of soviet Russia, etc., to one of straight progressive international trades unionism. This course has been followed to the letter. Now, however, the local leaders in control – if not the rank and file of the membership – apparently do not want a trades union publication, but one run on the lines of the One Big Union Bulletin of Winnipeg, the Toronto Worker, the Chicago Worker, Butte Bulletin, etc., which serve the militant communist movement so well.¹⁶⁵

The Vancouver TLC appears to have shifted left-ward after the ILA strike, and moved closer to Pritchard, who continued to subscribe to the radical Marxism of the SPC.¹⁶⁶ His

¹⁶¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 21 December 1923.

¹⁶² *British Columbia Federationist*, 21 December 1923.

¹⁶³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 18 January 1924. According to the *Federationist*, the unanimous vote concealed disagreement among delegates. The Vancouver TLC debated the matter in April: "A lively discussion ensued, the trend of which showed that labour was by no means united on the advisability of issuing a newspaper along the lines of the Longshoremen's Strike Bulletin." Despite the opposition of some delegates, a committee was authorized to proceed with publication of the paper, with Pritchard acting as part-time editor. (*British Columbia Federationist*, 4 April 1924.)

¹⁶⁴ Pritchard himself rejected this label: "The working class needs neither leaders nor martyrs. Leaders can lead one up, and then down again; and martyrs go to their martyrdom like sleepy men to their beds." (See Harry and Mildred Gutkin, *Profiles in Dissent: The Shaping of Radical Thought in the Canadian West* (Edmonton: NeWest Publishers, 1997), 125.)

¹⁶⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 18 January 1924.

¹⁶⁶ In an address in Vancouver in February 1924, Pritchard defended the Russian Revolution, declaring that the Russian workers "had become a beacon light of freedom by accomplishing a revolution. This in the unpardonable crime in the eyes of the rulers." The dictatorship was necessary, Pritchard argued, to discipline their own people and hold back the counter-revolution. He attributed the complications in the country to the transition period between capitalism and socialism: "There must be the long twilight and dawn before there can be the full-orbed day of peace and plenty, under industrial democracy and universal cooperation... Revolution is but the bursting of the dam, which fools and knaves build of bayonets and superstitions, to keep back the river of life." (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 29 February 1924.)

views contrasted sharply with those of *Federationist* editor George Bartley.¹⁶⁷ The financial difficulties of the latter publication intensified and the paper steadily lost ground to the *Labor Statesman* over the course of 1924. Its demise was delayed in March 1924 when the FLP adopted the *Federationist* as its official organ. While “primarily a political organization,” the party pledged that “whatever assistance can be given to the trades union movement will be given without reservation... having as our objective the idea of the industrial and political unity of every wing of the labor and socialist movement.” Reaching out to political rivals on the Left, the FLP paper declared: “There will be differences of viewpoint and opinion among us. It is to be expected, but that is not incompatible with unity of purpose.”¹⁶⁸ This final phase of the historic *British Columbia Federationist* coincided with a crucial stage in the development of independent labour politics in BC: the unification of socialist and labour groups under the Canadian Labour Party.

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By 1924, several important trends were afoot in the socialist movement of British Columbia. Old radicals like Bill Pritchard and Vic Midgley, estranged since the OBU split of 1919, were being reabsorbed – albeit unevenly – into the mainstream of the Left. The SPC declined in importance while the Workers’ Party – and the clandestine CPC that

¹⁶⁷ The *One Big Union Bulletin* discussed the transformation of “the moribund BC Federationist, which, after 15 years of excellent service to the Labor movement of western Canada, fell into financial difficulties and passed from the hands of the Labor group to the control of a printing concern which publishes it to pay the printer’s bill.” (*One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 10 January 1924.) Weeks before the Vancouver TLC withdrew its support, an ad appeared on ‘Why the Federationist Gets Results’, declaring that the paper “looks upon the optimistic side and lets the hammer rust.” Gone was the critical Marxist perspective that previously defined the newspaper. (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 4 January 1924.)

¹⁶⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 14 March 1924.

directed it – emerged as the centre of revolutionary Marxism in the province.¹⁶⁹ The FLP maintained its presence in the BC Legislature with Guthrie, Uphill, and Neelands, but stagnated organizationally and was rapidly being usurped by the unifying spirit embodied in Vancouver's Labour Representation Committee. The defeat of the ILA strike dealt a fatal blow to the proponents of industrial militancy, and strengthened support for united political action. The mood was set for the emergence of yet another political party on the Left in BC, as socialists continued their search for solidarity and the Co-operative Commonwealth.

¹⁶⁹ The Communists dispensed with the two-party structure at the third annual convention of the WPC, held in April 1924 in Toronto's Labour Temple. The party formally changed its name to the Communist Party of Canada, while the underground organization was liquidated. (See Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 74-77; Akers, "Rebel or Revolutionary?" 41.)

Chapter 5. ‘Boring from Within’: Communism and the Canadian Labour Party, 1924-28

‘Stabilization’ means that by hook or by crook, by force, by bribery, by corruption, by terror, by the mobilization of economic resources, by social-democratic betrayals, the capitalist class has managed to stave off the threat of world-wide revolution it faced after the Great War. Soviet Russia alone was left behind as the state-incarnation of the workers’ historic aims in the class-struggle. The working class for the moment no longer confronts the problem of the immediate struggle for power, but the problem of fighting to maintain minimum living standards against the exploitation of capitalism...

This so-called period of stabilization faces the revolutionary party with the tasks of the organization and education and the unification of the working class in preparation to the next big push on capitalism.

- *The Worker*, 27 February 1926

Since 1913, leadership of British Columbia’s working class had shifted between various political and industrial organizations – the IWW, SPC, FLP, OBU, WPC, and LRC, to name a few. The defeat of the OBU and the 1919 sympathetic strikes focused the attention of BC socialists on the political arena. The SPC had directed the syndicalist revolt, and its fragmentation in 1921 with the emergence of BC Communism fundamentally influenced the development of labour politics in the 1920s. The decade was marked by perpetual experimentation, organizational gains, bitter setbacks, and – as always – a constant striving for solidarity within and between rival labour and socialist groups. The experience of the Left during this period, centred around the BC section of the Canadian Labour Party, left the socialist movement permanently divided into two hostile camps. The experiences of BC socialists in the 1920s determined the basic contours of labour political organization for much of the twentieth century, and resulted

in the permanent exclusion of Communists from future efforts toward left-wing political unity, including the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation.

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In April 1924, a meeting was held in Vancouver to organize the BC section of the Canadian Labour Party (BC CLP).¹ The recent term in government of the British Labour Party, while brief, bolstered calls for the formation of a similar organization in Canada. The idea for such a party had circulated for decades with varying degrees of support.² The formation of CLP sections in other provinces – Alberta, Ontario, and Québec – in the early 1920s led to a decision at the TLCC convention of September 1923, held in Vancouver, to form a BC section of the party.³ According to Angus MacInnis, the TLCC leadership resisted this move, but BC activists, acting under the auspices of the Labour Representation Committee and its Communist secretary Albert Wells, persisted.⁴ These efforts coincided with the emergence of the Provincial Party,⁵ an unlikely alliance of farmers and businessmen, and a decision to change the name of the Workers' Party to the

¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 2 May 1924; see also Akers, “Rebel or Revolutionary,” 41.

² Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour*, 239-253.

³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 21 March 1924.

⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 15 December 1922, 21 March 1924 and 3 April 1925.

⁵ Founded at Vancouver in December 1923, the party represented a BC equivalent of the federal Progressives, and was led by millionaire lumber baron Major-General Alexander D. McRae, a renegade Tory. Going the same route as the Progressives (who rejoined the Liberal party they had left), McRae and the three other Provincial Party MLAs were soon re-absorbed into the Conservative fold. Prior to the 1924 election, the *Labor Statesman* declared: “Industrially and politically organized men and women have entered the present political campaign as the Canadian Labour Party, representing over five thousand workers after having realized that the old line political parties and the new provincial party cannot and dare not legislate in the interest of the toiling masses.” (See *Labor Statesman* [Vancouver], 13 June 1924; *British Columbia Federationist*, 1 February 1924; Robin, *Rush for the Spoils*, 197-210; also Foster J.K. Griezic, “The Honourable Thomas Alexander Crerar: The Political Career of a Western Liberal Progressive in the 1920s,” in S.M. Trofimenkoff, ed. *The Twenties in Western Canada: Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference, March 1972* [Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1972]: 107-137.)

Communist Party of Canada.⁶ In mid-April, the Victoria Trades and Labour Council endorsed the idea of a provincial Labour party.⁷

On 29 April 1924, delegates from the FLP, the CPC and many Vancouver unions attended a founding meeting to form the BC CLP. The constitution of the Ontario section was provisionally adopted, and a convention called for 31 May, to nominate candidates for the upcoming provincial election. Provisional officers were also chosen: former OBU organizer Harry Cottrell was elected president and FLP MLA Harry Neelands vice-president.⁸ “At last it would seem that the various forces of the labor movement are making an earnest attempt to co-ordinate their efforts for the purposes of presenting a united front in the political arena,” the *Federationist* commented optimistically.⁹

The organization formed out of this meeting stands out as the last example of organizational unity between the Communist and non-Communist Left in BC. The experience of socialists in the BC CLP ensured the exclusion of Communists from the mainstream of BC labour, and from the unity effort that coalesced into the CCF in the 1930s. Prior to the founding convention of the BC CLP, the *Federationist*, expressing the attitude of the FLP, explored the question of tension internal to the movement:

Shall we allow differences of opinion to hold us back from our rights?... Difference of opinion is largely a matter of degree. Those of us who are extreme in our ideas will one day see them materialize after a gradual and persistent effort... every step we take, every institution we found, can be made to serve their purpose. Unity is needed, however, if we are to remain, as a movement, free from the bigotry and narrowness which have characterized other great movements and eventually brought about their downfall.¹⁰

⁶ Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 77-78. This CPC decision was taken at the Third convention of the WPC, held in Toronto, 18-20 April 1924. According to Rodney, six of the 42 delegates were from BC.

⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 18 April 1924.

⁸ For a report of Cottrell’s organizing work, see *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 24 July 1920.

⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 2 May 1924.

¹⁰ *British Columbia Federationist*, 14 March 1924.

The mood of solidarity and desire to dispense with sectarian divisions extended to the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council (TLC), when former OBU renegades Jack Kavanagh and Vic Midgley were seated as delegates without controversy, after presenting credentials from the Hod Carriers and Lathers' respectively.¹¹ The wounds of the OBU were healing as labour consolidated its forces in the political arena.

In spite of the optimism surrounding the formation of the BC CLP, the *Federationist* offered a stern warning that "sinister influences" would attempt to "disrupt the ranks": "If...any group or faction endeavors to gain control of this body in an effort to make it serve their own ends, it will be a dismal failure, and will do more to retard the Labor movement than all the intrigue of capitalism combined."¹² From the outset, the CLP was marked by a clear divergence of ideology and strategy, within and between the constituent organizations. In a letter to the *Federationist*, Vancouver unionist Alf Taylor expressed his belief that the labor movement was "not the vested privilege of labor officials, to be traded here and there for personal favors or to aid personal ambitions." He reminded leaders who felt they were "the 'whole cheese' in the labor movement," that it had "existed long before they were born" and would "continue to function in spite of them long after they are all under the sod."¹³ As the provincial election approached, and the CLP prepared for battle in its first contest in BC, the *Federationist* echoed this advice: "The labor mind is fast growing for a united front... The only weakness... is that until men of position are willing to be nothing in order that the great cause may win, labor will

¹¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 9 May 1924.

¹² *British Columbia Federationist*, 9 May 1924.

¹³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 16 May 1924.

always be vanquished and lose the support of its oft professed friends and supporters.”¹⁴

John L. Martin issued a call to arms: “The master class has kept us divided for long enough. Now that we have it divided, let us unite and rule.”¹⁵

The perennial conflict between the remnants of the SPC and rival socialist groups was less pronounced in the 1924 provincial election. Jack Harrington and Bill Pritchard were the only two SPC candidates in the field, representing Vancouver and Nanaimo respectively. The BC CLP endorsed both of their campaigns, and nominated some of its own, including MacInnis and Cottrell in Vancouver, and Neelands in South Vancouver.¹⁶ One woman, Priscilla Janet Smith, ran in Vancouver for the CLP, and Mrs. J.H. Graves was one of two CLP candidates in Victoria. The *Federationist* was hopeful following the CLP nominating convention, which was marked by a great “spirit of unity” and an “earnest desire to further the cause of labor” in BC: “Although all the parties present were not agreed as to the ways and means...to accomplish the desired end, yet they were in agreement on this one important feature, that the capitalist parties must be defeated wherever and whenever possible.”¹⁷ The convention proved the possibility of overcoming sectional differences and building a United Front.

One of the few controversies in the campaign was the last-minute decision of Tom Barnard to withdraw in Comox. Despite a CLP nomination and encouragement from the Labour party group on Valdes Island and in the Comox Valley, Barnard claimed he had received little support from Cumberland, “the largest industrial centre in the constituency,” and suggested that “the miners on the political field were like they are on

¹⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 20 June 1924.

¹⁵ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 13 June 1924.

¹⁶ *British Columbia Federationist*, 2 and 30 May 1924.

¹⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 30 May 1924.

the industrial field, viz., not yet desiring any organized political expression of their views, at least in sufficient magnitude to warrant me contesting the seat.”¹⁸ Barnard’s erstwhile supporters on Valdes Island, meanwhile, accused him of cowardice, and worse, of collusion with the Liberal party machinery.¹⁹

On 20 June 1924, British Columbians went to the polls, and the lofty hopes of the CLP were only partially fulfilled. The Liberal party, though weakened by the PGE railway scandal, was returned to power on a platform that included a general Eight-Hour Day.²⁰ Sam Guthrie lost his seat by a mere 64 votes, a victim of poor organization and alleged gerrymandering by a government intent on silencing the voice of labour.²¹ Pritchard received strong support in Nanaimo, coming within 500 votes of victory. The CLP candidates in Vancouver all registered a strong showing, but not one was returned. Tom Uphill was re-elected, however, in Fernie, as was Neelands in South Vancouver, and they were joined by CLP candidate Frank Browne in Burnaby.²² This three-member Labour contingent would expand to four in the ensuing months, as Major R.J. ‘Dick’ Burde, who ran as an independent Liberal in Alberni, joined the voting bloc of the

¹⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 6 June 1924; *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 6 June 1924.

¹⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 4 July 1924. “There are many supporters of the labor party in the Comox riding who contend he got cold feet, ran out and left us in the air!” FLPer William Law wrote.

²⁰ See Robin, *Rush for the Spoils*, 202-209. For a discussion of the Eight-Hour-Day provision and efforts by organized capital, such as the Timber interests, to prevent its implementation, see the *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 4 September 1924 and 25 December 1924.

²¹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 20 June 1924. A writer in the next issue, Murphy, attributed the Newcastle defeat to “local incompetence.” Pritchard countered this claim, arguing many potential Guthrie supporters were prevented from voting, having been added to an auxiliary voters’ list for the 1921 dominion elections but excluded from the provincial list. Murphy responded with some compelling evidence: “A thousand loggers on Cowichan Lake and seventeen labor votes at the polling station...Newcastle [gave] a majority against labor for the first time since 1909.” (*Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 27 June 1924, 11 July 1924, and 1 August 1924.)

²² A fury took place in September 1924 when Burnaby council refused to grant Frank Browne a leave of absence to attend the legislative session, in a bid to prevent him from assuming his seat in the legislature. (*British Columbia Federationist*, 12 September 1924 and 19 September 1924.)

Labour MLAs.²³ Since the Liberals under John Oliver were returned with 24 seats out of 48 in the Legislature, Labour held the balance of power.²⁴

The election was characterized by vehement personal attacks against the CLP from the Liberal and Tory campaigns, as well as the emergence of the Provincial Party, which secured four seats but was soon reabsorbed into the Conservative fold.²⁵ Several prominent labour personalities turned their backs on the CLP by running as Provincial Party candidates. These included Birt Showler and Victoria TLC secretary and ‘labour’ Alderman Eugene Woodward. Neither was elected. In Victoria, outcast independent candidate Jim Hawthornthwaite found himself near the bottom of the poll, between Labour standard-bearers Mrs. H.W Graves and future CCFer W.E. Pierce.²⁶ Despite these ambivalent results, the *Federationist* was optimistic: “the future of the labor political movement is an assured success.”²⁷

Behind this electoral united front, however, the CLP was threatened with dissension from several quarters. A year-long battle between the privately-owned *Federationist* and the Vancouver TLC-owned *Labor Statesman* stifled efforts to expand the new organization. The editor of the *Labor Statesman* charged that efforts to unite the two publications “were laughed at by the owners of the *Federationist*.”²⁸ Another source of controversy was the decision of the Vancouver TLC to send Birt Showler – recent Provincial Party candidate for Vancouver – to the founding convention of the CLP

²³ Burde attended the 1926 convention of the CLP as a representative of the Port Alberni branch of the ILP. First elected in the post-war upheaval, he would steadily migrate leftward. (See Hak, “The Socialist and Labourist Impulse,” 532-535; also *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 28 May 1926.)

²⁴ Martin, *Rush for the Spoils*, 209.

²⁵ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 13 June 1924.

²⁶ Graves received 1304 votes, with 960 for Hawthornthwaite, and 822 for Pierce. J. Hinchliffe, a Conservative, topped the polls with 6928 votes. (*British Columbia Federationist*, 27 June 1924.)

²⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 27 June 1924.

²⁸ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 27 June 1924.

district council for Greater Vancouver. The *Federationist* called his acceptance of the appointment “a brazen effrontery.” At the meeting, delegates voted three to one against seating Showler; the newspaper commended their action as “a lesson to others who may feel a little inclined to ‘wobble’” and expressed the hope that the CLP would not “become a plaything for politicians.”²⁹ The *Federationist* suggested some “would-be leaders” of the party were “not, altogether, in the business for the good that they can do their fellows, but rather are trying to have it serve as a stepping stone for themselves.”³⁰ Mrs. C. Lorimer – who described herself as “a class-conscious worker” – denounced several CLP candidates in the Vancouver municipal election: “keep out of our way; no weak-kneed variety can carry the banner of the worker.”³¹

Tension within the CLP also centred on the role of Communists in the organization. A writer described “the futility of carrying the Socialist load along,” pointing to the outcome in the election, and suggested the British Labour government had “shown us the way to unload the communists; they are useless, all they advocate is disruption, destruction, and chaos. Their leaders’ only claim for glory is all the unions they have destroyed.”³² The District Executive Committee of the CPC responded that it was “in the CLP for the purpose of keeping it on class lines, and preventing it from

²⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 8 August 1924. At the same time, delegates agreed to sit Walter Scribbens, who was accused of belonging to the Conservative party. The same convention, held 1 August 1924, that voted against seating Showler voted to form a Vancouver council of the BC CLP. An executive committee was elected, which included MacInnis, W Dunn, J Flynn, Mrs. Dolk and Mrs. C Lorimer.

³⁰ *British Columbia Federationist*, 13 September 1924.

³¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 2 January 1925. During this campaign, Vic Midgley re-emerged in the labour political movement, serving on the publicity committee of the Greater Vancouver Central Council of the CLP. In January 1925, he narrowly missed election as a Trustee of the Vancouver TLC. Another prominent CCFer also appeared at this time: Dr. Lyle Telford, who served on the Legislative Committee of the CLP as a member of the FLP. (See *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 22 August 1924 and 23 January 1925.)

³² *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 18 July 1924.

becoming merely a vote catching apparatus to be used by political opportunists.”³³ A correspondent commented on the situation:

I have yet to notice that the two most advanced bodies are any nearer to the ‘united front’ than they were, and apparently the united wisdom of the two bodies seems unable to formulate a common basis for action against the common enemy, namely, the abolition of capitalism.³⁴

While both ‘opportunists’ and their Communist opponents would remain within the CLP tent for the time being, latent tensions would ultimately tear the organization apart.

Solidarity within the CLP was also threatened by a move, in the immediate aftermath of the election, to organize a Labor Party of New Westminster. The FLP-controlled *Federationist* cautioned against such a step, asking whether “the Labor movement is going to persist in breaking itself up into a myriad of small groups without any common objective... If they cannot agree among themselves, it might appear to the public that they would not be a very safe body to be allowed to control the government.”³⁵ Arguing that the CPC was in the field “for those who hold more radical views upon our economics problems” and the FLP existed for those who want “to follow in the footsteps of such a party as we have exemplified in England today,” the writer declared bluntly: “Forming new parties is no solution for the many difficulties that are confronting the movement... Nothing will so delight the old-line parties as to see the Labor movement divided into various groups.”³⁶

Angus MacInnis also warned that efforts to unify and broaden the labour party could blunt its ideological strength: “there is a danger that in our efforts to form a party that will be acceptable to all shades of thought, or lack of thought, in the labor movement

³³ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 1 August 1924.

³⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 16 January 1925.

³⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 11 July 1924.

we shall bring into being a party that will be useless as an instrument for effecting the emancipation of the working class.” Providing insight into his views on Russia, MacInnis raised the issue of industrial versus political action:

What has happened in Russia in 1917 and since has had an influence on the minds of many in the ranks of the working class here as elsewhere. At one time this belief in industrial and mass action, as it was termed, had become as much of a fetish with some members of the working class, that it took considerable courage to assert that anything could be accomplished by the customary political methods. The contention was that what had happened in Russia could be duplicated in any part of the world regardless of what particular conditions in that country happened to be... However, the pendulum is now sweeping back in the opposite direction, influenced to a great extent, no doubt, by what has happened in Great Britain in the past year.³⁷

Here we find MacInnis clearly privileging political over industrial struggle. Influenced by Ramsay MacDonald’s Labour government of 1923 and a sharp increase in the party’s vote in the November 1924 elections, MacInnis and others were embracing the Fabian socialism and parliamentary gradualism of the BLP.³⁸ The next week, MacInnis expanded on this point: “Certain things happened in Russia in certain ways. Their methods of getting rid of their ruling class was very effective.” But what had happened in Russia “could not have happened in another country in the same way and by the same methods...because of differing conditions.” MacInnis suggested it was futile, therefore, “for any group to expect, or even hope for, a revolutionary change by sudden or violent methods... As capitalism develops the chances grow less.” He declared the FLP’s position on ‘unconstitutional methods’: “We believe it an error to hold that the social

³⁶ *British Columbia Federationist*, 11 July 1924.

³⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 25 July 1924.

³⁸ The ideological orientation of the FLP is suggested by a front-page article on “The Fabian Society,” which appeared in the *Federationist* immediately prior to the founding meeting of the BC CLP. (See *British Columbia Federationist*, 18 April 1924.)

revolution can take place only in a certain way [and] to expect the complete collapse of capitalism.”³⁹

A clear distinction between the insurrectionary, revolutionary politics centred around the CPC and the gradualism of Angus MacInnis and many in the FLP had emerged. And yet a week later, he qualified his earlier article, and made clear that Communism was not the only danger facing the labour political movement: “we have not only the ultra-radical, but also the ultra-conservative,” which was “more of a detriment to the advancement of the Labor movement than the radical wing”:

The one underrates the power of the state to suppress movements that are inimical to its existence, and the other does not understand the purpose of government. The ultra-conservative puts his faith entirely in parliamentary action – politics as carried on by the bourgeois parties. They have the outlook of the trade unionist and mostly belong to that school. Their politics has its beginning and end in the election of members to the legislature or parliament.⁴⁰

While ‘actions speak louder than words,’ in this article, at least, MacInnis acknowledged the validity of extra-parliamentary action, having not yet divorced himself from the industrial struggle. This was confirmed in a September 1924 article in the *Federationist*: “the working class must do everything in their power to strengthen their position so that they may demand and get a larger share of that which they have produced.”⁴¹

Even in the bleakest years of the 1920s, extra-parliamentary tactics were never completely abandoned, despite the steady march of the non-Communist Left toward “constitutional methods.” Nanaimo miners, still without a union, struck for one-hour in

³⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 1 August 1924. MacInnis went on to assert that while “the sudden breakdown of capitalism” would not occur, “That it is slowly disintegrating is everywhere apparent, but how long it will take before it fails to fulfill the needs of society in any manner is a question for speculation.”

⁴⁰ *British Columbia Federationist*, 8 August 1924.

⁴¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 19 September 1924.

October 1924 to successfully defeat a wage reduction, and a demonstration of the unemployed was held in Victoria. In Vancouver, the unemployed stormed City Hall demanding relief.⁴² Rose Henderson discussed the issue of unity between the diverse organizations of workers: “When will the industrial and the political organizations, both arms of the one body, of the labor movement, unite.”⁴³ Jim Woodsworth, meanwhile, urged political action in a speech at the First Congregational Church in Vancouver, declaring that workers were beginning to realize that “to gain their own emancipation they must, themselves, enter into the political arena and deal with the social problems in the light of socialism.”⁴⁴

The question of ‘constitutional methods’ was brought into focus in autumn 1924 when Burnaby municipal council attempted to prevent FLP MLA Frank Browne from assuming his seat in the Legislature. Employed as an accountant by the municipality, Browne was repeatedly refused leave to serve in Victoria. Once again, the anti-democratic bias of vested interests revealed itself. The *Federationist* discussed the question of political versus direct action:

Workers have been urged at all times to adopt only constitutional methods in their endeavour to gain their emancipation. The BC Federated Labor Party is founded on that principle. If they succeed in rendering labor’s efforts to accomplish anything on their own behalf by constitutional methods of no avail, then, we ask in all seriousness, what method would they have us adopt? Are they tempting labor to become radical so that they might have something to rave about, and something to call the police and militia out for.⁴⁵

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⁴² *British Columbia Federationist*, 3 October and 5 December 1924; *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 25 December 1924.

⁴³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 26 December 1924.

⁴⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 24 October 1924.

⁴⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 3 October 1924.

Factionalism was growing rampant in the BC CLP. When the Vancouver executive committee of the party voted to endorse the *Labor Statesman* as its official organ, the *Federationist* responded with a bitter editorial: “To put this labor newspaper out of business, if they could, would give them more pleasure than the success of the movement itself.”⁴⁶ The festering fight between the FLP and its political rivals, waged in the respective pages of the *Federationist* and the *Labor Statesman*, came out into the open in an April 1925 article by Angus MacInnis: “When an underground campaign is carried on because the FLP refused to drop its official organ, The *Federationist*, it is time that it should be known.” Reviewing the history of labour political organization in BC, MacInnis discussed the formation of the FLP and its relations with other groups on the Left: “The S.P. of C refused to co-operate with the FLP at elections, and the situation was still further complicated by the split in the S.P. of C. and the formation of the Workers Party.” Sections of the labour movement, centred around the TLCC BC Executive committee, had resisted efforts to organize the CLP in the province, and had approached the FLP as “an underhanded way of getting control, or trying to get control, of the political labor movement.”⁴⁷

Since the inception of the BC CLP, a constant tension had existed on whether or not the organization would be a federation of affiliated groups or a party in its own right, with individual members. The FLP favoured the former structure, the group centred around the *Labor Statesman* and the TLCC officialdom, the latter. The constitution of the CLP explicitly forbade the formation of branches. This naturally favoured the FLP, which secured organizational gains from CLP electoral campaigns, and represented the public

⁴⁶ *British Columbia Federationist*, 5 September 1924.

⁴⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 3 April 1925.

face of the labor political movement between elections. The anti-FLP group was agitating to have this provision amended. In late March 1925, the *Labor Statesman* declared its position: “Let the CLP constitution be changed and the province organized.”⁴⁸

Before any such change occurred, a South Vancouver branch of the CLP was formed by the Vancouver Central Council, a move the FLP described as a direct violation of the party’s constitution.⁴⁹ Dave Rees defended the South Vancouver labour group, where “the words unity and harmony” were “not merely prattled, the group having practiced comradeship and co-operation” and set aside “the acrimony and personal animus characterizing so many labor meetings in the past.” Rees suggested that more than 40 labour MPs could be elected “if we quit acting like spoiled kids”:

Just imagine three or four men working hard in the shop or factory to get the workers into a political party. One has CLP cards, the other FLP, another Workers’ Party, S.P. of C., or perhaps IWW... Surely we have wasted sufficient time thus... We must be prepared to forget some party name if we are to be in one party in Canada.⁵⁰

As the second convention of the BC CLP approached, *Labor Statesman* editor H.W.

Watts claimed the CLP had succeeded in organizing South Vancouver and New

Westminster where the FLP had failed.⁵¹ The FLP, meanwhile, warned of the dangers of allowing violations of the constitution to continue unchecked.⁵² A writer identified as I.L.

Peer called for the transformation of CLP and FLP branches into local ‘Labor Parties’ –

⁴⁸ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 27 March 1925.

⁴⁹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 3 April 1925.

⁵⁰ *British Columbia Federationist*, 10 April 1925; *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 3 April 1925.

⁵¹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 10 April 1925. Watts replaced Bill Pritchard as editor of the *Labor Statesman* in October 1924, “because of increased work and sickness.” (See *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 17 October 1924.)

⁵² *British Columbia Federationist*, 17 April 1925.

such as an East Burnaby Labor Party, a Victoria Labor Party, etc. – all of which would be affiliated to district councils and to the provincial CLP.⁵³

On 2 May 1925, the BC CLP convention opened in Vancouver. Delegates from the renegade CLP branches were seated, following a heated debate. The question of party structure was the main issue of the convention, and delegates adopted a compromise measure: they did not empower the CLP to form local branches, but agreed that workers in any locality could form their own organization and affiliate to the CLP. In the election for the presidency, Angus MacInnis lost to W.H. Cottrell on the third ballot by a vote of 34 to 15. The convention declared its desire to field a complete slate of candidates in both the provincial and federal constituencies. While the *Federationist* anticipated “much less friction” than there had been in preceding months, tension still festered between opposing factions.⁵⁴

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The summer of 1925 represented a moment of transition in BC’s labour and socialist movements. Both the *British Columbia Federationist* and the *Western Clarion* published for the final time. Reborn as the *Canadian-Farmer Labor Advocate*, soon to be known as the *Canadian Labor Advocate*, the final issue of the *Federationist* revealed the factionalism that persisted on the provincial labour scene, and raised the issue of interpersonal conflict, as it criticized the “personal greed and personal ambition” that were “the outstanding feature in many of our local labor circles.” Discussing the conflict with the *Labor Statesmen*, it claimed that

⁵³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 24 April 1925 and 1 May 1925. As the debate over the CLP’s structure continued, the concept of unity was expanded to include a key coalition in the Canadian political landscape: ‘Farmer – Labor: The time has come when these two great groups must unite.’

a few officials were desirous of having control of their paper so that nothing would be said or done that would be injurious to their own personal aims and ambitions. Upon this rock, all too often, many labor movements are wrecked, for a time at least.⁵⁵

A fixture since 1912 and official organ of the FLP, the historic *Federationist* ceased publication. But before departing it addressed an important concept on the North American Left, declaring itself for “the complete elimination of industrial profits and the introduction of the Co-operative Commonwealth.”⁵⁶

This idea of a Co-operative Commonwealth gained strength throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, embodied in BC by the Canadian Cooperative Commonwealth (CCC) colony of Ruskin at the turn of the century, and linked to the growing Rochdale cooperative movement.⁵⁷ SPC member Charlie Lestor considered the matter in the pages of the *Labor Statesman* in 1925.⁵⁸ While the socialist and labour movements shared the vision of the Co-operative Commonwealth, they were divided on the proper means of realizing this vision. The *Labor Statesman* was a vocal advocate of political action, declaring that the worker “can remedy his condition only by rewriting the Law... if he must rewrite it in blood.”⁵⁹

A month after the *Federationist* ceased publication, the 21-year-old *Western Clarion* followed the same path, and with it, the Socialist Party of Canada disappeared from the political landscape. The demise of the *Federationist* and the *Western Clarion*

⁵⁴ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 8 May 1925. This would appear to reflect the relative strength of the anti-FLP group, associated with the BC Executive of the TLCC.

⁵⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 5 June 1925.

⁵⁶ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 17 July 1925.

⁵⁷ See Johnson, “No Compromise – No Political Trading,” 67; *Western Clarion* (Vancouver), 3 July 1903, Ian MacPherson, “The Co-Operative Union of Canada and the Prairies 1919-1929,” in S.M. Trofimenkoff, Ed. *The Twenties in Western Canada: Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference, March 1972* (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1972), 50-74.

⁵⁸ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 30 January 1925.

⁵⁹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 24 July 1925.

triggered a brief flurry of introspection and nostalgia in the pages of the labour press. A rambling, impressionistic article by long-time SPCer and future CCFer Wallis Lefaux illuminates the ideological milieu at the time: “IWW, OBU, AF of L, Syndicalists, Socialists, Anarchists, Communists and Christians... each hold forth on their special road and solution of man’s ills. The Federation of the World – The Parliament of Man – not yet.” The war and the Bolshevik revolution had “jarred the preconceived notions somewhat,” and “the recovery is not yet.”⁶⁰ CLP vice-president John Sidaway commented on the SPC and the demise of the *Western Clarion*:

Its philosophy was suitable and successful in an era of prosperity when the IWW and the AF of L were flourishing locally. But with the loss of the miners’ union on Vancouver Island and industrial stagnation the power of these organizations waned and with it the SP of C and its mouthpiece. The Clarion represented an era in the socialist movement which culminated with the Russian Revolution... Its circle of friends narrowed with the years until of late only a few of the faithful were on hand to prepare its funeral.⁶¹

The most bleak prognosis appeared in the *Western Clarion* itself, and was reprinted in the *Labor Statesman*. Jack Harrington, one of the few SPC faithful in 1925, summed up the waning fortunes of the organization: “From the prophetic preaching of capital’s collapse and exhorting to the revolution, we have passed through and beyond back to a period, void and empty to any revolutionary outlook.”⁶² The *OBU Bulletin*, for its part, spared little energy eulogizing the SPC and its mouthpiece: “The passing of the Clarion seems to forecast the burial of the party. There is little regret at the passing of either.”⁶³

⁶⁰ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 24 July 1925.

⁶¹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 6 August 1925.

⁶² *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 6 August 1925.

⁶³ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 13 August 1925. A few months earlier, the *Bulletin* declared that the “S.P. of C. is a back number and that the worker are no longer interested in what he and his fellow members of the party have to say.” (See *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 26 March 1925.)

Usurped by the WPC-CPC as the centre of revolutionary Marxism and industrial militancy in BC, the SPC was a stagnant force by the mid-1920s. Once the electoral and ideological vehicle of BC socialists, by 1925 it failed to serve either function. Plagued from its inception by an excessively rigid and deterministic interpretation of Marxism – and a destructively sectarian attitude toward other left-wing organizations – the greatest contributions of SPC members such as Pritchard and Midgley occurred when they defied party orthodoxy and embraced industrial struggle. As George Hardy wrote, the SPC “introduced many working men to Marxism.”⁶⁴ What they did with this ideology varied widely. As an educational force, the SPC served an integral role in the formation of British Columbia’s Left, but organizational achievements – both industrial and political – were realized by socialists who left the party to embark on more earthly pursuits.

* * *

In 1925, unemployment was still widespread in British Columbia.⁶⁵ The temporary respite of the late 1920s had not yet begun, and bread lines plagued the larger cities in the province. In Victoria, the unemployed were refused relief when the lumber interests opened an employment bureau in the city to secure cheap labour. Dan Campbell, who as a Dominion Police officer had shot Ginger Goodwin, was hired to run this bureau.⁶⁶ In the BC Legislature, the Labour caucus held the balance of power, but was criticized by the *Labor Statesman* for failing “to wield it to any effect.” The newspaper suggested that if the Labour members thought

⁶⁴ Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 36.

⁶⁵ See *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 4 September 1924, 4 December 1924, 5 February 1925, and 9 April 1925. The 9 April 1925 newspaper raised the issue of prosperity: “The much-heralded prosperity in the Pacific north-west is further off than ever so far as unemployment is concerned.”

⁶⁶ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 30 April 1925.

it was not good policy to defeat the government and open the way for the Conservatives...the quicker the organizations responsible for their nomination and election settles that question better... Labor doesn't want rubber stamps in the house, it wants fighters like Woodsworth in the present Federal House.⁶⁷

BC labour was preparing for a federal election. Wallis Lefeaux, John Sidaway, and Alfred Hurry were nominated by the CLP to contest three seats in Vancouver, while Rose Henderson ran for the CLP in New Westminster. They were joined by Dr. W.J. Curry, the 'Red Dentist' of Vancouver and an active Communist, who carried the CLP banner in North Vancouver.⁶⁸ On the campaign trail, Dr. Curry affirmed his "belief that Socialist sentiment, and revolutionary tendencies" were rapidly advancing and that unity of "understanding and organization on the political, and industrial field" would "bring freedom, and power to the workers."⁶⁹ Lefeaux, meanwhile, discussed the short-term and long-term utility of the CLP experiment as "a common meeting ground for AFL, OBU, IWW, SPC, FLP, WP," an effort to determine whether

it is possible to unite the various sects of the labor movement and organize them to at least the extent of their common interests and so anticipate and smooth the inevitable clashings and confusion that will take place when the workers in some future contingency are forced to take action to preserve society from chaos.⁷⁰

Lefeaux reveals in this statement his commitment to the socialist transformation of society, and his search for solidarity in the CLP.

On election day, 29 October 1925, the BC CLP candidates were defeated. Rose Henderson had the strongest showing, with 3315 votes to 7774 for the Conservative

⁶⁷ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 21 August 1925. This stance directly contradicted advice the newspaper had extended to Neelands, Browne and Uphill eight months earlier: "While the tactics of the Liberal government are far from favourable to the workers and the so-called Labor legislation not enforced in the interests of the masses, the question arises whether or not it would be good tactics to defeat the government at the present time." (See *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 5 December 1924.)

⁶⁸ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 23 October 1925.

⁶⁹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 9 October 1925.

victor.⁷¹ The *Labor Statesman* attributed the CLP defeat to a lack of volunteer campaign workers.⁷² Woodsworth, meanwhile, was re-elected in the reconfigured riding of Winnipeg North-Centre, and he was joined by Abe Heaps in North Winnipeg, another martyr of the Winnipeg strike. The *OBU Bulletin* took full credit: “There is an old saying that ‘the proof of the pudding is in the eating’ and the results of the election give concrete proof of the correctness of the OBU position, i.e., that clarity on the industrial field will reflect itself on the political field.”⁷³ With the defeat of Calgary’s William Irvine, Labour maintained two seats in the House of Commons.

In mid-November 1925, weeks after his re-election, Woodsworth was back in BC. He issued a call for ‘reinforcements’, a theme he would repeat frequently in the years ahead. His political achievements in Winnipeg and Ottawa provided a model to be emulated by his former comrades in BC. Woodsworth told a crowded house in Vancouver’s Royal Theatre of “the effort of the small group in the House made up of two Labor members and a few farmers” who called themselves “the ginger group.” They would hold the balance of power in the next session and “were prepared to use that power to the best possible advantage for the interests of the farmer and the industrial worker.” Woodsworth stressed that “what they were out for was the introduction of a new social order.” Regretting that Vancouver had not yet elected a Labour MP, he suggested contesting municipal offices “with the object of developing men who could be instructive in advancing the best interests of the movement.” In Woodsworth’s estimation, “Too

⁷⁰ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 18 September 1925.

⁷¹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 6 November 1925.

⁷² *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 30 October 1925.

⁷³ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 5 November 1925.

much propaganda and not enough organization and administrative had been detrimental to the movement on the Coast.”⁷⁴

In December 1925, Woodsworth’s prognosis proved prescient when Angus MacInnis was elected Alderman for Ward Eight in Vancouver. He received 776 votes to 556 for his nearest rival.⁷⁵ “It shows that seats can be captured, but to do so means plenty of spade work and a constant attention to small details that have a bearing on such contests,” the *Labor Statesman* concluded. “It’s time we set about preparing for the next election.”⁷⁶ MacInnis, too, attributed his victory to hard work “by voluntary workers in the ward. And the most of this work was done by women.”⁷⁷ From this foothold in municipal office, MacInnis would secure election to the House of Commons five years later, the first of Woodsworth’s coveted reinforcements from BC. Within the decade, he would marry Jim Woodsworth’s eldest daughter, Grace. Following the election of MacInnis in Vancouver, four CLP candidates were victorious in the January 1926 municipal elections for South Vancouver and Burnaby.⁷⁸

Electoral victories spurred organizational change. In February 1926, discussions between the Labour parties of South Vancouver and New Westminster, as well as FLP branches in the Vancouver area, resulted in the formation of the Independent Labour Party of BC.⁷⁹ Provisional officers were elected and a constitution was adopted, which stipulated that all branches must affiliate with the CLP. Importantly, the SPC – for years characterized by a self-righteous refusal to co-operate with other groups – was

⁷⁴ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 20 November 1925.

⁷⁵ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 11 December 1925.

⁷⁶ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 11 December 1925.

⁷⁷ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 18 December 1925.

⁷⁸ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 22 January 1926.

⁷⁹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 12 February 1926.

considering joining the ILP. “The FLP is to be congratulated on sinking its identity for the general good,” the *Labor Statesman* commented. “The benefits of this amalgamation will be more pronounced in the outside districts where the difficulties of carrying on effective work are obvious... Up to now it has been too much Vancouver and practically nothing from the rest of the province.”⁸⁰ On 15 February 1925, an ILP branch was organized in Port Alberni.⁸¹

But organizational reconfiguration failed to provide a panacea for solidarity. In February 1926, criticism of the Labour members of the BC Legislature re-emerged in a letter from F.T. McElhoes to the *Labor Statesman*:

If ‘Honest John’ and his cohorts can flourish a toy pistol at the Labor group and subdue them...the workers might just as well concentrate their activities on the Industrial Action and forget the political. We know the corrupting influences of politics, but we would not like to believe that ‘Labor’ has been corrupted so early in the game.⁸²

The *Labor Statesman* defended Neelands and Browne, and warned correspondents “to confine their remarks to the facts and use more dignified language to express their ideas.”⁸³ Neelands defended his record in a speech to delegates of the Vancouver TLC, arguing that private members were prevented from introducing any legislation involving the expenditure of money.⁸⁴ The record of Labour members in BC was contrasted with the achievements of Woodsworth in Ottawa. In early 1926, he was offered a Cabinet portfolio in the government of Mackenzie King and turned it down, saying he could achieve more as a private member.⁸⁵ Woodsworth and his Ginger Group effectively

⁸⁰ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 19 February 1926.

⁸¹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 19 February 1926. For details of the development of left-wing politics in Port Alberni in the 1910s and 1920s, see Hak, “The Socialist and Labourist Impulse,” 519-542.

⁸² *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 12 February 1926. ‘Honest John’ refers to Liberal premier John Oliver.

⁸³ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 19 February 1926.

⁸⁴ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 19 March 1926.

⁸⁵ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 26 March 1926.

wielded the balance of power and secured the Old Age Pension Act from the governing Liberals.⁸⁶ But within months, King's government lost a vote in the House and the BC CLP found itself in the midst of a federal election.⁸⁷

In the lead-up to the 1926 election, the BC CLP considered entering into an agreement with the Liberal party to refrain from running candidates in three Vancouver ridings in exchange for the Liberals leaving South Vancouver open for the CLP. The *Labor Statesman* strongly supported the idea as "political expediency," but the CLP turned down the Liberal offer.⁸⁸ A template had been set, however, for the 1930 election, which secured MacInnis' election to Ottawa. Another feature of the 1926 election was a concerted attack by the press on Labor and Progressive MPs and on the 'group' form of government, blaming the parliamentary crisis on independent political action and urging a return to the two-party system.⁸⁹ Despite these obstacles, the BC CLP fielded five candidates: Dr. Curry in Burrard, Wallis Lefeaux in North Vancouver, Alfred Hurry in South Vancouver, James Sims in East Kootenay, and Bill Pritchard who was nominated by the ILP in New Westminster. Jim Woodsworth attended the nominating meeting,

⁸⁶ Woodsworth discussed the question of compromise: "We believe in opportunism and compromise in securing practical reforms, but never when they involve the abandonment of the hope of attaining the ultimate goal, or sacrifice of vital principles. Without losing sight of our ultimate object, we believe in taking advantage of every opportunity to better our conditions. In this way we attain a stronger position from which to carry on the fight." (See Harry Gutkin and Mildred Gutkin, *Profiles in Dissent: The Shaping of Radical Thought in the Canadian West* (Edmonton: NeWest Publishers, 1997), p. 282.)

⁸⁷ The parliamentary crisis of 1926 saw Governor-General Lord Byng refuse a request from Mackenzie King for a dissolution of parliament. Arthur Meighen and the Conservative party assumed power for five days, until the majority of MPs voted against the government and Byng's high-handed measure. The Governor General then granted Meighen's request that parliament be dissolved, a request he had refused to King days earlier. This elicited accusations that Byng – "Canada's \$50,000-per-year hired man" – had used his influence to favour one political party over another. In the ensuing election, Mackenzie King campaigned against the Governor General and his collusion with Meighen, and secured a majority in the House. Labour's representation increased slightly to three members, while the Ginger Group expanded to 17. (See *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 9 July 1926 and 17 September 1926.)

⁸⁸ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 16 July 1926; also 30 July 1926 and 13 August 1926. "While the Labor party generally adopts an attitude of 'no political trading,' a situation might arise where it would be political expediency, on the part of the Labor party, to consider such an offer."

⁸⁹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 2 July 1926.

where he declared that Ottawa can be used “as a great broadcasting machine for working class education.”⁹⁰

On 14 September 1926, British Columbians returned to the polls for the second time in ten months and while no CLP candidate was elected, Pritchard increased the labour vote in New Westminster from 3305 to 4268. A.W. Neill, Independent candidate in Comox-Alberni, was re-elected, having been endorsed by the Port Alberni ILP.⁹¹ Woodsworth and Heaps were returned in Winnipeg, along with Agnes MacPhail representing the farmers of Ontario, Henri Bourassa of Québec, Labor candidate H.B. Adshead in East Calgary, and 11 members of the United Farmers of Alberta. Rather than resurrect the two-party system as vested interests had hoped, the parliamentary crisis of 1926 and the ensuing election strengthened the basis for a socialist-oriented, third party in Canada. Despite the election of a King majority government, Labour’s representation increased slightly to three members, while the Ginger Group expanded to 17.⁹²

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The feverish activity of municipal races and consecutive federal elections failed to resolve divisions within the ranks of the BC CLP. Robert Skinner – writing under the pen name ‘Spud Tamson’ – described how for the past year the party had “labored principally at internal affairs,” arguing over the proper methods of organization, the party press, and the question of individual membership: “These arguments produced two schools, each actively hostile to the other. Each trying to justify their obstructionist tactics.” Skinner encouraged discussion, “rather than argument,” and called for the CLP to deal with substantive matters such as how best to increase its membership, to “show the Trades

⁹⁰ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 6 August 1926.

⁹¹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 20 August 1926.

Unionists the necessity for combined industrial and political action,” and offer a constructive programme to the electorate.⁹³

Developments in Eastern Canada foreshadowed conflict in the BC CLP. In November 1925, the Québec section of the party voted in convention to expel the Communists.⁹⁴ The estrangement of the CPC from the broader Left followed different paths in different provinces, but the outcome was same: the permanent division of labour political organization into the Communist and non-Communist camps. In Québec and Alberta, Communists were expelled from the CLP. In Ontario and BC, rival socialists were unable to wrest control from the Communists, and ended up abandoning the organization. As this process unfolded, the Canadian Labour Party experiment proved an abject failure, and left the labour political movement permanently divided.

Tensions on the Left were brought into the open in November 1926 when J.T. Walton Newbold – a former British MP and Communist who had evolved into a virulent anti-Communist – spoke in Vancouver. When several local Communists heckled Newbold, “the speaker became riled and almost precipitated a riot.”⁹⁵ The Englishman explained his views on Communism in a letter to the *Labor Statesman* after the incident:

Those who lend their services to the Communist International must not expect that, knowing their philosophy that the end justifies the means, and their methods from a point of observation far closer than any of them have ever been, I am going to be so naively tolerant as they urge me, in the cause of an entirely fictitious unity.⁹⁶

⁹² *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 17 September 1926.

⁹³ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 24 September 1926.

⁹⁴ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 19 November 1925; *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 4 December 1925.

⁹⁵ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 12 November 1926.

⁹⁶ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 19 November 1926.

In an rebuttal, titled “The Right Versus the Left Wing of Labor,” Dr. W.J. Curry defended the CPC and contextualized BC within the historic fight for socialism: “In Germany there is the patriotic Social Democrats versus the Communists or Sparticans... In Russia there was Korinsky [sic], the class-collaborator versus Lenin of the Bolshevist party, and in Britain, in Canada, and even in Vancouver we find similar divisions.”⁹⁷

This incident demonstrated the slow but steady emergence of anti-Communism on British Columbia’s Left, and the gradual division of socialists into the Communist and non-Communist camps, with their respective ideologies and strategies. Despite the looming split, the BC CLP registered significant gains throughout the winter of 1926-27. In December, MacInnis was returned as Alderman in Vancouver, while CLP running mate A.V. Lofting was elected to school board.⁹⁸ Seven CLP candidates were elected in South Vancouver, North Vancouver and Burnaby.⁹⁹

When the CLP held its third annual convention in Vancouver in February 1927, secretary John Sidaway reported a total membership of nearly 4000, including affiliated union members. Signaling a shift in power within the party, left-leaning J.R. Flynn defeated W.H. Cottrell for the presidency on a vote of 28 to 23. Cottrell and MacInnis, BC delegates to the national CLP convention in Montréal in September 1926, came under fire from Communist delegates at the BC convention for voting against a resolution “requesting the Quebec Section to reinstate the Communist Party.”¹⁰⁰ While no definite action was taken against Cottrell and MacInnis, conflict was evident within the BC CLP.

⁹⁷ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 10 December 1926.

⁹⁸ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 10 December 1926.

⁹⁹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 21 January 1927.

¹⁰⁰ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 4 March 1927.

A similar rift revealed itself in the Ontario Section with the formation of a ‘Socialist section’ within the party.¹⁰¹

Prior to the split of the BC CLP in 1928, the festering tension revealed itself in a seemingly benign debate over the best strategy for the next provincial election. More important than the specific ideas behind the dispute was the conflict between the two opposing camps: the ILP and the CPC. The tenor of the dispute was amplified by the looming battle for control of the organization. In July 1927, the Greater Vancouver Central Council of the CLP considered a recommendation from the executive to reduce the number of candidates in Vancouver from six to two. Following a heated debate, the matter was referred back to the affiliated organizations for endorsement or rejection.¹⁰² This debate – “two or six” – formed the basis of the dispute in the ensuing months.

The *Labor Statesman* had earlier suggested this shift in tactics: “With six candidates in the field from each party, Vancouver is hopeless for Labor. Why should the Labor Party insist on putting up a full ticket without the chance of electing any, when it can elect at least one out of two?”¹⁰³ The opposing viewpoint interpreted the refusal to run a full slate as treasonous collusion with the Liberal Party, motivated by the *Labor Statesman* and its editor H.W. Watts.¹⁰⁴ The Vancouver Central Council of the CLP was clearly divided on the matter. The ILP locals and nine unions lined up in favour of the two-candidate proposal, while Communist affiliates – “who were there in full strength” –

¹⁰¹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 10 June 1927.

¹⁰² *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 5 August 1927.

¹⁰³ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 5 August 1927.

¹⁰⁴ *The Worker* (Toronto), 19 November 1927.

and five other unions “were able to outvote the rest of the organizations” and maintain the six-candidate position.¹⁰⁵ This prompted the Electrical Workers’ Local 213, which supported the ILP position, to call for a referendum vote of the membership.¹⁰⁶ The *Labor Statesman* agreed that the decision could be rescinded, that the Communists could not “logically oppose a referendum vote,” and urged every authorized delegate to attend the next meeting.¹⁰⁷ But at the end of September, the Vancouver Central Council defeated the two-candidate proposal for a third time. J. Flynn, president of the BC CLP, addressing a meeting of the Vancouver TLC, expressed his hope “that the question is now at an end.”¹⁰⁸ Vancouver Communist H. Harris denounced the *Labor Statesman* and its editor Watts, in a letter reprinted in *The Worker*: “you are an acknowledged disrupter. You would expel the Communists. You would break up the unity of the CLP, no doubt to serve your Liberal masters.”¹⁰⁹ Behind the ‘two-or-six’ debate was the looming battle for control of the organization.

In the midst of this debate, the question of a split in the CLP was brought into focus, as several unions considered withdrawing their affiliation from the party. The *Labor Statesman* cautioned against such a move: “This movement can be made a strong, peppy, sane and worthwhile organization even though some of its members retard its progress with wild actions and foreign ideas. They will stick till they break us, or we will

¹⁰⁵ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 16 September 1927. The union breakdown was as follows: the Trades and Labor Council, Brotherhood of Carpenters 452, Typographical Union, Electrical Workers 213, Hotel and Restaurant Employees, Dairy Employees, Tailors, Machinists 692, and Blacksmiths favoured two candidates, while the Amalgamated Carpenters, Civic Employees, Pressmen, Upholsterers, and Engineers local 844 favoured running six.

¹⁰⁶ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 16 September 1927.

¹⁰⁷ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 16 September 1927. Jack Chapple of the Upholsters Union, local 26, took issue with this editorial, stating he had been instructed by his local to vote for six candidates, despite the fact that not a single member was a Communist. (*Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 23 September 1927.)

¹⁰⁸ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 7 October 1927.

¹⁰⁹ *The Worker* (Toronto), 19 November 1927.

have to stick till we drive them out.”¹¹⁰ The battle had been joined. The ‘two-or-six’ debate left the BC section of the CLP clearly divided into the ILP and CPC camps. The anti-Communists were unable to establish control over the organization and dictate its strategy. Their patience was wearing thin. It was only a matter of time until the warring factions abandoned, in the words of Walton Newbold, “fictitious unity.”

Jim Woodsworth, writing in the *Labor Statesman*, commented frankly on the situation in BC:

Ten years has made a great change in the Labor world. The loggers’ union, once a strong militant organization, has gone by the board... The longshoremen’s union has been smashed and replaced by submissive company organizations... The Communist group, small in numbers but active in various organizations controls the policy of the Canadian Labor Party and seems likely to wreck the organization. In spite of one’s desire for a ‘united front,’ one cannot but ask in the words of the old proverb: ‘Can two walk together except they be agreed?’¹¹¹

A year earlier, the CPC lambasted the Labour MP in a *Worker* editorial: “the position he takes is more and more that of a class-collaborationist Social Democrat.”¹¹² Maurice Spector labeled Woodsworth “a middle-class democrat.”¹¹³ Tension between the CPC and the ILP increased throughout the 1920s. Once an outspoken defender of Bolshevism and the Soviet Union, Jim Woodsworth condemned Russian Communism by the end of the decade. When the final conflict between the contending CLP forces manifested itself

¹¹⁰ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 23 September 1927. The *Statesman* elaborated on this point: “This is no time to break away. We who desire to make the Canadian Labor Party a worthwhile organization are holding the forts, we who desire to make the Canadian Labor Party an active efficient and sane auxiliary to the industrial movement are asking those who are becoming disgusted with some of the affiliations of the party, to have one good try at putting it into shape to carry on the political needs of those who toil.”

¹¹¹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 28 October 1927. Hostility toward the CPC was evident throughout the autumn of 1927, as evidenced in an article in the same issue of the *Labor Statesman*, titled “Communists to Blame For Defeat of Workers,” discussing the “demoralizing influence of Communists in the labor movement” of Australia and Ireland. In November, an article appeared defending Woodsworth from Communist attacks. (*Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 11 November 1927.)

¹¹² *The Worker* (Toronto), 20 March 1926.

¹¹³ *The Worker* (Toronto), 17 July 1926.

in early 1928, it centred around a perennial debate on British Columbia's Left, the "Oriental problem."

As discussed earlier in this study, racism within BC's working class was being challenged by the 1910s and 1920s, in particular by Socialists who called for the unity of workers of all races. The definition of Solidarity was expanded beyond rival factions, to include women, youth and Asian workers. At its inception, the CLP conformed to this shift away from Asian exclusion and racism. In the 1924 provincial election, the party openly called for the enfranchisement of Orientals. Attacked by Liberal, Conservative and Provincial Party candidates who opportunistically fanned the flames of racism, the CLP defended its position:

Labor says that if these men and women are fit to come to this country, and we see fit to accept their money, allow them to work in our homes, and associate with the children... then not only is it right, but it is essential that these people be given the full rights of citizenship and everything possible done to raise their economic standard of living on a par with ours.¹¹⁴

Following the same argument, Mrs. C. Lorimer, an officer of the CLP, declared that "all workers, irrespective of color, are living under a system of human slavery."¹¹⁵ The racism that had plagued BC labour for decades was at last breaking down, but the old bogey of Asian Exclusion was not yet ready to die. Running for alderman in the 1924 Vancouver elections, Parm Pettipiece raised the issue of the "Oriental menace."¹¹⁶ Lorimer again railed against this line of thought: "Let the workers refuse to be spoon fed on 'oriental

¹¹⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 20 June 1924

¹¹⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 18 July 1924

¹¹⁶ *British Columbia Federationist*, 2 January 1925.

menace.’ The time is ripe for them to think, and think seriously of the condition they find themselves in.”¹¹⁷

In August 1924, Chinese and white mill workers in Victoria struck in solidarity against a wage reduction at the Canadian Puget Sound Lumber Mill, and a union was organized out of this strike.¹¹⁸ The next year, Japanese and white workers in Vancouver cooperated in holding a Tag Day for the striking Nova Scotia miners and raised \$1,319.73 in one day.¹¹⁹ This growing solidarity revealed itself again when members of the Federated Seafarers’ Union in Vancouver refused to replace striking Chinese workers on the CPR’s ‘Empress’ ocean liners.¹²⁰ Members of the Japanese Workers of Canada donated \$257 to the CLP election campaign in 1926, and a year later, in October 1927, the Vancouver TLC sat five Japanese workers as delegates of the Mill and Camp Workers’ Union No. 31.¹²¹ By the late 1920s, it appeared that European and Asian workers were overcoming age-old hatreds and efforts by employers to divide them. On both the industrial and the political fields, solidarity was being forged between these diverse sections of the working class. Indeed, Jim Woodsworth wrote in the *Labor Statesman* in October 1927 that “anti-Oriental feeling is much less strong now among the Labor people.”¹²² But, like efforts toward solidarity in other areas, unity was not to be.

In February 1928, the CLP met in convention and, acting on a resolution from Communist delegates, re-affirmed its support for Oriental enfranchisement.¹²³ While the

¹¹⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 30 January 1925.

¹¹⁸ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 15 August 1924.

¹¹⁹ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 28 May 1925.

¹²⁰ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 30 June 1925.

¹²¹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 17 September 1926 and 7 October 1926.

¹²² *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 28 October 1927.

¹²³ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 2 and 23 March 1928. The resolution read: “Resolved that Orientals (British subjects, Canadian born Orientals and naturalized Canadians) be enfranchised on the same terms as

party had uniformly backed this measure in 1924, by 1928 it became the issue that destroyed the BC party.

It is difficult to disentangle the CPC-ILP rivalry from the issue of racism. To be sure, racist propaganda, characterized by the newspaper *White Canada* and centred around proto-Fascist Tom MacInnes, was promulgating hatred among BC's working class.¹²⁴ In countries across the globe, capital responded to the threat of revolutionary labour by discarding the veil of liberalism and democracy, endorsing violence and terror as practiced by the Italian *fasci* and the German Brownshirts. The rise of the Ku Klux Klan in North America – Vancouver and Victoria included – revealed the intersection of race and class.¹²⁵ Strike-breaking and racially motivated violence went hand in hand, and harkened back to the vigilantism and thuggery that accompanied the 1918 and 1919 sympathetic strikes. With the retreat of the *Western Clarion* and the dilution of Marxian class-based politics in the province, it is possible that anti-Asian hatred gained currency among BC workers. At the same time, individuals and organizations who supported equal rights in principle may have opposed the Oriental enfranchisement plank either out of an opportunist desire to 'catch votes,' or from a strategic standpoint that resisted any initiatives that bore the Communist stamp. Regardless of the motivating factors, the outcome was clear: the ILP and the affiliated unions declared themselves against extending the franchise to Asians, and pulled out of the CLP.

other nationalities and that a copy of this resolution be sent to the Provincial Secretary, Victoria, BC." The motion also stipulated that this position be included in the election platform of the CLP.

¹²⁴ *White Canada* (Vancouver), 1928.

¹²⁵ References to the Ku Klux Klan are frequent in the labour press of Canada and BC from 1922 onward. See the files of the *BC Federationist* (Vancouver), 1922-1925; *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 1924-1933; *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 1922-1933; and *The Worker* (Toronto), 1922-1933. See also Martin Robin, *Shades of Right: Nativist and Fascist Politics in Canada, 1920-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

The CLP convention was marked by palpable acrimony between the ILP and CPC camps on a variety of issues. A heated debate accompanied a Communist resolution condemning the British Labour Party and its leader Ramsay MacDonald for their position on India. Though endorsed by delegates, the *Labor Statesman* dismissed the measure as “just another attempt to throw mud at an organization that refuses to be ruled, goaded, or crushed by the Communist Party.”¹²⁶ Two weeks later, Tom Saunders attacked the CLP: “The opposition to Oriental labor is so great in this province that it is a good club for the old parties.” An editor’s note supported this viewpoint: “We cannot see how the mass of organized labor can support this action.”¹²⁷ Wallis Lefeaux defended the decision of the CLP convention, declaring that

one of the greatest obstacles to the progress of Labor is the curious superiority complex exhibited by various sections of the workers which is fostered and encouraged by all those who are combating the advance of the workers.... The only solution to that [Oriental] problem is the solution of the workers’ problem as a whole.¹²⁸

Editor H.W. Watts, however, weighed in against Orientals: “we are not going to be party to strengthening their position by placing them on the voter’s list.”¹²⁹

The matter triggered a heated debate in the Vancouver TLC that culminated in the question being referred to affiliated locals. Delegates attacked the CLP decision, citing labour’s long-standing demand for Oriental exclusion and warned it would “turn the election campaign into a battle royal against the Labor Party.”¹³⁰ As a result of the convention decision, the Typographical Union and Civic Employees withdrew their affiliation from the CLP. In the months that followed, this would snowball into a

¹²⁶ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 2 March 1928.

¹²⁷ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 16 March 1928.

¹²⁸ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 23 March 1928.

¹²⁹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 23 March 1928.

wholesale exodus of organized labour from the party. Lefeaux challenged the actions of Vancouver labour:

So long as we are content to be orthodox and advocate nothing more radical than advanced Liberal measures we have the approbation (and very little more) of a certain section of Labor officialdom, but when we take up a position directly representing the working class as a whole we seem to open the floodgates of wrath.¹³¹

In May 1928, organized labour in Vancouver lined up against the CLP and the policy of extending the vote to Orientals. Only four unions – the Bookbinders, Camp & Mill Workers, Mental Hospital Attendants, and Port Mann Railway Carmen – supported the measure. A total of 36 unions were opposed.¹³²

At the same meeting where the results from the locals were announced, the Vancouver TLC debated withdrawing its affiliation from the CLP. The Pile Drivers' delegate, acting on instructions from his local, raised the matter. Carpenters' delegate Wilkinson then moved a motion to that effect, arguing "the CLP was controlled by the Communist Party" and predicting there would be "no peace in the political movement

¹³⁰ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 6 April 1928.

¹³¹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 6 April 1928. The Typos also cited the outcome of the "6 or 2" debate and an increase in the per capita tax as contributing factors in their departure. At a meeting of the Vancouver Central Council on 5 April, Bartlett, Deptford and Skinner argued against the enfranchisement plank. An election of officers took place at the same meeting, with the left-wing retaining control over the council: Communists Flynn and Mengel were among those elected, along with Lefeaux.

¹³² *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 4 May 1928 and 18 May 1928. The following unions were opposed:

Bricklayers	Engineers 882	Plasterers
Barbers	Engineers 844	Sheet Metal Workers
Boilermakers	Hotel and Restaurant Employees	Tailors
Beverage Dispensers	Milk Salesmen Motion Picture	Taxi Drivers
Blacksmiths	Projectionists	Teamsters Union
Building Laborers	Musicians	Typographical
Brewery Workers	Machinists 182	Upholsters
Carpenters Union 452	Machinists 692	Plumbers & Steamfitters
Carpenters Union 1251	Molders	Pile Drivers
Civic Employees	Millwrights	Point Grey Fire Fighters
City Fire Fighters	Painters	Railway Carmen (Vancouver)
Electrical Workers 213	Printing Pressmen	Theatrical Stage Employees

until the movement here did the same as they did in the British movement – clear out the Communists.” Delegates Sorley of the Port Mann Railway Carmen, Cottrell, and MacInnis voiced caution, though MacInnis “could not see why the Communists should belong” to the CLP. Delegate Scribbens, announcing the withdrawal of the Civic Employees from the CLP, said “members of his union believed in political action, but the ‘United Front’ has proven a failure and was only damning the Political Labor Movement.” The debate closed when delegate Moodie of the Carpenters moved an amendment to refer the matter back to affiliated locals, arguing it was too important to be decided as that meeting.¹³³ In the weeks ahead, two of the largest unions in Vancouver – Carpenters local 452, with 1200 members, and Electrical Workers local 213 – pulled out of the BC CLP.¹³⁴

As the conflict reached its apex, the *Labor Statesman* identified the ideological dimensions of the dispute: “From the time that the Marxian theory took hold in British Columbia, Labor has been divided into two well defined groups.” This “pale pink group” and “ultra red group” had “very little in common, other than a lack of confidence in the old political parties.” The writer suggested nothing had occurred “to justify the idea that Labor has shortened by one inch its objections to the Asiatic. Though expressed in the terms of Asiatic Exclusion, the determining factor in the collapse of the BC CLP was conflict between the Communist and non-Communist Left:

¹³³ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 4 May 1928. At the same meeting, George Drayton, a Communist and delegate of the Bricklayers, came under fire for criticisms he had levelled against officers of the council in the columns of *The Worker*. An ultimatum was issued: if Drayton refused to withdraw the statements, his local was requested to withdraw his credentials. Drayton held his ground, and following a special meeting of his union Drayton was withdrawn as delegate: “This union wants men that will build up our organizations and not men that are continually striving to create dissension,” the Bricklayers stated in a letter to the Vancouver TLC. (*Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 18 May 1928.)

¹³⁴ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 1 June 1928.

because we do not shout for a revolution from the house tops we are called traitors by the Communists. We are abused and vilified and our efforts obstructed because they think that shouting for a revolution and ignoring all social legislation is going to bring about the desired change quicker... That is where we of the Labor Party differ, and will undoubtedly continue to differ from the Communist Party, hence under these conditions there cannot be a United Front. We are not united on revolution and we are not united on social reform....

When the Labor Party – Independent or Canadian – makes up its mind to put outside their ranks, and go about their work unhindered by the “boring from within” policy, the conflict will be greatly reduced.¹³⁵

In late May, a joint meeting of ILP branches in Vancouver went on record as being opposed to the Oriental franchise plank in the election platform of the CLP. When a special convention of the BC CLP voted 32 to 25 against rescinding the contentious resolution, the fate of the organization was sealed.¹³⁶

On 5 June 1928, delegates to the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council voted 56 to 30 to withdraw their affiliation from the CLP, ending “four years of disagreements on an alleged United Front.”¹³⁷ On Sunday, 17 June 1928, a special mass convention of all BC ILP branches met in Vancouver and members voted to break from the CLP “and carry on independent political action.”¹³⁸ MacInnis pointed the finger squarely at the CPC: “Continuous disagreement with the Communist Party tactics has brought about this split, and the Independent Labour Party will now proceed to carry on its political activities unhampered by the Communists boring from within.”¹³⁹

¹³⁵ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 18 May 1928.

¹³⁶ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 1 June 1928.

¹³⁷ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 8 June 1928. Thirty-four of 64 unions affiliated to the Vancouver TLC expressed themselves on the matter, with 14 voting for the council to remain affiliated with the CLP, while 20 voted against.

¹³⁸ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 22 June 1928. The constitution was amended to allow this course of action. (See *Labor Statesman* [Vancouver], 1 June 1928.)

¹³⁹ *One Big Union Bulletin*, 28 June 1928.

That summer, British Columbia's labour movement contested a provincial election, bitterly divided. Tom Uphill was the only Labour member returned to the BC Legislature, as Simon Fraser Tolmie and his Conservative Party registered a resounding victory.¹⁴⁰ The *Labor Statesman* feigned confidence, in an editorial 'On with the Fight': "the Independent Labor Party is not going to shed any tears over the results, but will gird on its armour for a further and stronger attack upon the present system of wealth production."¹⁴¹ From that point forward, however, the organizations of BC workers would remain permanently divided on the axis of Russian Communism.

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At every propaganda meeting the question is asked, 'Should we organize on the Industrial or on the Political field?' Surely it is not a case of 'either' and 'or'... You may not like to work in Capitalist industry but you must work or starve. You may not like the Capitalist State but you bump up against it every day and sometimes pretty hard when it is a case of 1919 legislation... Very slowly the lesson of organization on the political field is being learned... Political democracy doesn't amount to much without industrial democracy but it may be a tool that may be of some use in attaining industrial democracy... We agree that political power must be based on industrial power.¹⁴²

Conflict between the Communist and non-Communist Left in the BC CLP strained the relationship between industrial and political forms of struggle. The onset of economic Depression in 1929 and the emergence of the Communist-controlled Workers' Unity League (WUL) established unemployed organizing and industrial militancy as CPC

¹⁴⁰ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 6 July 1928 and 27 July 1928. The ILP candidates were as follows: MacInnis and Skinner in Vancouver; Neelands in South Vancouver; Uphill in Fernie; Sam Guthrie in Newcastle; William Law in Comox; Tom Barnard in Alberni; and Jack Place in Nanaimo. Uphill was the only ILP candidate returned, with incumbents Neelands and Brown losing their seats. Guthrie and Place, past Labour MLAs, were also defeated. Tolmie's Conservatives secured 32 seats, with eight for the Liberals and one for Labour.

¹⁴¹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 27 July 1928.

¹⁴² *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 1 October 1925.

territory.¹⁴³ The Hunger Marches, relief camp strikes, occupations and On-to-Ottawa Trek of the 1930s were directed by Communists, rather than supporters of the ILP-CCF. As BC socialists marshaled their forces behind the Western Conference of Labour Political Parties, the struggle was confined to Parliament.

The inability of Communists and non-Communists to maintain a United Front under the auspices of the Canadian Labour Party left the two groups permanently divided in BC. The ILP's break from the organization was a reflection of a general trend, which manifested itself on the local, provincial, national and international level. To be sure, efforts toward unity in BC, such as the League Against War and Fascism of the 1930s, provided a common forum for socialists from the rival political tendencies. But from 1928 onward, organizational unity would evade British Columbia's Left. The conflicting ideologies and strategies within the movement lacked a mechanism for communication, mediation, and joint action, as BC socialism became ossified into the Communist and non-Communist camps. The Canadian Labour Party experiment in BC left the socialist movement bitterly divided and ensured the exclusion of Communists from the next effort toward labour political unity: the CCF.

¹⁴³ Griffin, ed., *Fighting Heritage: Highlights of the 1930s Struggle for Jobs and Militant Unionism in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Tribune, 1985).

Conclusion

CCF activist and historian Ronald Grantham offered a warning to the movement in 1942

that is compelling in light of later developments:

The goal of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation must not only be kept in sight, it is felt, but must be approached by means of concrete constructive steps to be taken as rapidly as circumstances permit. To undertake to do no more than to administer capitalism would be fatal to the party and to its cause.¹

Current thinking within the CCF-NDP tendency, at the leadership level at least, clearly deviates from the ideology of its founders. In his 1977 introduction to Dorothy Steeves' biography of Ernest Winch, Tommy Douglas posited: "The only value in learning about the past is to equip ourselves to cope with the present and plan for the future."² At the time, Douglas was Member of Parliament for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands. The first Socialist leader of any jurisdiction on the North American continent, and the founding leader of the federal New Democratic Party, Douglas occupies a key position in the compendium of socialist politics in Canada. His insight into the application of historical knowledge should be digested and harnessed by contemporary social movements.

The socialist founders of the BC CCF – Jim Woodsworth, Vic Midgley, Bill Pritchard, Ernest Winch, and Angus MacInnis, to name a few – brought with them into the new organization a wealth of experience building solidarity on both the industrial and political fields. The experiences of these individuals in the 1910s and 1920s shaped the ideology and strategy of the BC CCF. While many of the founders of the party maintained a commitment to the socialist vision of society, their dealings with the Communist party in the 1920s – combined with their dashed hopes of social

transformation by means of the OBU in 1919 – forced them away from industrial militancy and extra-parliamentary forms of struggle. In the 1930s and in the decades that followed, the political arm of BC labour became increasingly estranged from, and hostile towards, industrial action. The retreat of ‘world-wide revolution’ in the aftermath of 1919 created an upheaval on British Columbia’s Left, triggering organizational reconfiguration throughout the 1920s. The CCF was a product of this transition. The last concerted attempt to forge unity between the various socialist factions occurred from 1924 to 1928 under the aegis of the Canadian Labour Party. From that point forward, Communists and their front organizations would be permanently excluded from organizational unity with the broader Socialist movement. When the CCF was organized in 1932, an important national organization was born. But it lacked the participation of a crucial element: Communists, with their Marxian approach to politics and their commitment to industrial and other extra-parliamentary forms of action. Woodsworth’s maxim – “political power must be based on industrial power” – was contradicted by the practice of the BC CCF.

The period 1913 to 1928 represents a defining era in the development of socialist politics in British Columbia. The period spanning the Vancouver Island Miners’ Strike and the First World War was characterized by the experimentation of BC socialists with industrial forms of action. This took shape prior to the war under the aegis of the Miners’ Liberation League, and found expression in the August 1918 ‘Ginger Goodwin Strike’, in the One Big Union, and in the 1919 sympathetic strikes. The repression of the labour revolt by the Canadian state and vested interests, and the subsequent containment of the OBU, redirected socialist forces toward the political arena. The same individuals who

¹ Grantham, “Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement,” 241.

² Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel*, x.

embraced industrial action in 1919 went on to build the labour political movement. The defining feature of the 1920s was the emergence of BC Communism. The interaction of socialist and labour groups with the Communist Party determined the basic contours of left-wing politics for the duration of the twentieth century.

An important conclusion to be drawn from this study is that the socialist founders of the BC CCF – Woodsworth, Midgley, Pritchard, Winch, MacInnis – had no disagreement in principle with industrial militancy. Indeed, they played important roles in the syndicalist revolt of spring 1919. Woodsworth worked closely with the One Big Union and acknowledged the necessity of industrial organization and action.³ The significance of these individuals in the working-class history of BC is their contribution to both the industrial and political organizations of workers. The second major point that should be retained is that these individuals were committed to the revolutionary transformation of Canadian society. While rejecting the armed overthrow of the capitalist state, they subscribed to the goal of a cooperative, socialist society where workers would receive the full product of their toil and the scourges of war and poverty would be eradicated from the earth. They fit uneasily into the simplistic debate between reform or revolution. The hostility between the leadership of the CCF and the Communist party should not be interpreted exclusively as an indication of ideological divergence between the two camps. As Peter Campbell has discussed, a strain of revolutionary socialism was present in BC that neither acceded to the authority of Moscow nor accepted the supremacy of capitalism. The nature of this form of politics offers a potent lesson to contemporary generations.

³ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 1 October 1925.

Official histories of the CCF-NDP are prone to celebrate the party and defile Communism. Communist histories attack the ‘social fascism’ and moderation of the CCF-NDP while failing to grasp the complexity of this tendency. It is hoped that the preceding study has helped to illuminate some aspects of the development of socialism in British Columbia, in both its industrial and political forms, and has provided connective tissue between the disparate organizations and individuals on the Left. This project is by no means conclusive. Important questions remain unanswered, in particular, the role of women in the socialist and labour movements throughout this period; the impact of First Nations in the political debates of the 1910s and 1920s; the personal stories of individuals such as Vic Midgley; the IWW, SPC, OBU, FLP, ILP and CPC experience in specific communities across the province; the contours of industrial action in the 1920s. As stated in the introduction, this thesis is designed as a departure point for future studies, illuminating facets of the socialist experience that have been forgotten or concealed by the traditional historiography. History is always partial and tainted by the biases of its author. This writer makes no claim to objectivity. From the outset, this project has been guided by a commitment to socialist ideology and a desire to learn from the efforts of previous generations in attempting to organize for transformative social change. Its readership is intended to extend well beyond the Ivory Tower. It is hoped that the preceding historical study into the formative influences of the BC CCF-NDP has made some contribution in this regard, and that it will be instructive for those struggling for social change in the present.

Epilogue

As the Canadian Labour Party was being torn apart by the CPC-ILP split, Jim Woodsworth was back on the Coast. He addressed a meeting in Vancouver and repeated his call for reinforcements to the House of Commons: “not until these are sent will there be anything accomplished of real value to the working class other than what they can do by means of their economic power.”¹ Within a week, the first Old Age Pension cheques were issued by the BC government, a product of Woodsworth’s parliamentary efforts.² Jim Woodsworth’s record – on the docks of Vancouver, in Stony Mountain penitentiary north of Winnipeg, in the meeting halls of the FLP, and in the House of Commons in Ottawa – earned him the respect and confidence of many workers in British Columbia. As his Ginger Group moved outside parliament with the Western Conference of Labour Political Parties in autumn 1929, many in British Columbia were willing to take part.

Untethered from the CLP orbit, the BC ILP struggled on as unemployment and poverty – permanent features of the 1920s – deepened with the onslaught of Depression in 1929.³ In July 1930, Angus MacInnis was elected to the House of Commons as Labour member for South Vancouver, the beneficiary of an arrangement with the Liberals that had been turned down in 1925.⁴ The Communist Party branded him an opportunist and

¹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 14 October 1927.

² *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 21 October 1927. The timing was purely coincidental.

³ Despite improved economic conditions in the latter part of the 1920s, unemployment prevailed throughout the decade and the plight of working people improved little. The fruits of prosperity were unevenly distributed, and joblessness, though partially alleviated, persisted. (See files of *The Worker* (Toronto), 1922-1930; *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 1920-1930.)

⁴ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), October-November 1925, 25 July 1930, and 1 August 1930. The post-election report declared: “During the last few days of the election everything was done to convince the electors that Labor was supporting the local Liberal candidates and that the Liberal voters in Vancouver South were solidly behind the Labor candidate, and this undoubtedly paved the way for the victory on Monday.”

fielded ‘Ol Bill’ Bennett in the same riding, but MacInnis won handily.⁵ MacInnis’ election to Ottawa gave the BC ILP a crucial political victory, but simultaneously removed a leading figure from the local scene.⁶ At its December 1931 convention, the ILP re-invented itself into the ILP (Socialist), influenced by the emergence of an old – and notorious – figure on British Columbia’s Left: Ernest Edward Winch.⁷ The party called for unity with all groups that had a “Marxian basis,” but Communists were peculiarly absent.⁸ In the spring of 1932, the ILP (Soc.) resurrected a relic from the past and changed its name to the Socialist Party of Canada.⁹ In July 1932, the SPC was the only organization from BC at the Western Conference of Labour Political Parties at Calgary, and therefore became the founding section of the CCF in BC.¹⁰

Vic Midgley remained a controversial figure in the political labour movement.

With the founding of the All-Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL) at Montréal in 1927, opposition to the AFL-TLCC once again found organizational expression.¹¹ It was out of

⁵ *The Worker* (Toronto), 9 August 1930; and *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 1 August 1930. The Communist organ attacked MacInnis: “Along with Woodsworth and Heaps, he is going to bring about a revolution that will be ‘constitutional’ and orderly, in which there will be no bloodshed, no civil war, no riot, no disorder, no noise, not even as much as will wake the baby. This is his line of talk, but it is talk to fool the workers, to prevent them from fighting back when their blood is being spilled by ruthless agents of the merciless ruling class. And when they follow the militant leadership of the Communist Party and fight back in spite of his Labor Party, he will be found with the Ramsey MacDonald’s, the Mussolinis, the Pilsudskis and the Noskes, an active agent in the suppression and murder of militant workers.”

⁶ Backed by the local Liberal party machinery and endorsed by the *Vancouver Sun*, MacInnis won election to Ottawa with 16,000 votes. *The Worker* was outraged: “MacInnis was elected, not on the basis of a socialist programme, but by the full and complete support of the Liberal machine and the Liberal capitalist press.” See *The Worker* (Toronto), 7 October 1933; *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 1 August 1930; Stuart, “The Early Political Career of Angus MacInnis”; and Young, “Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia,” 143.

⁷ Young, “Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia,” 144.

⁸ Young, “Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia,” 144; Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, 154-157.

⁹ Johnson, “No Compromise – No Political Trading,” 368; Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel*, 77.

¹⁰ Grantham, “Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement in BC,” 197.

¹¹ Founded at Montréal in March 1927, the All Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL) was a conglomeration of independent Canadian unions representing 75,000 workers at its inception. A total of 107 delegates attended the Montréal convention, representing: the OBU, Canadian Federation of Labour, Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees (CBRE), Mine Workers Union of Canada, Electrical

these independent Canadian unions that the CCF developed its industrial base. In November 1928, the *Labor Statesman* attacked Midgley and the ACCL, saying he had “helped to smash up so many organizations that he is possibly the most dangerous animal the labor movement ever had to deal with... the history of union smashing in Vancouver has been largely connected with the history of Victor R. Midgley.”¹² The OBU defended its founding secretary, stating there were

few men in the movement who have displayed executive ability equal to that shown by Midgley... He has, on more than one occasion, been the means of uniting various sections of the workers on the Coast. Midgley has always been a builder, never a smasher... We have every confidence in Vic because he has, on a dozen different occasions, stood his ground unflinchingly when to do so meant being the victim of discrimination and all that it implies.¹³

Midgley’s life has yet to be adequately explored. Though central to the working-class history of the period, no biography of the man exists. Marginalized by labour officialdom in Vancouver, Midgley relocated to Vancouver Island.

In June 1930, he was seated as a delegate of the Victoria Trades and Labour Council (VTLC), representing the Wood Workers and Metal Lathers union.¹⁴ A year and a half later, he was elected president of the VLTC, and embarked on a concerted

Communications Workers of Canada, Canadian Electrical Trades Union, Amalgamated Carpenters, Bricklayers, Masons and Plasterers’ Federation of Québec, Printers and Pressmen’s Union of Canada, Street Railway Union of Toronto, Railway Laborers and Helpers’ Union, and the Theatrical and Stage Employees’ Union. Headed by the CBRE’s Aaron Mosher, it provided an important counter-weight to the TLCC, which was initially cold to Woodsworth’s efforts to form a national political organization. (*One Big Union Bulletin*, 31 March 1927.)

¹² *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 2 November 1928. The *Labor Statesman*’s wrath was triggered by a resolution, moved by Midgley, at a meeting of the renegade Vancouver Labour Council (ACCL) which placed the body on record “as being opposed to the All-Canadian Congress of Labor issuing any more charters to craft unions, as such, and recommending that the entire membership be REORGANIZED on an industrial basis.” (emphasis in the original)

¹³ *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 15 November 1928.

¹⁴ UVASC, VLC fonds, “Minutes,” 4 June 1930; 6 August 1930; 5 November 1930; and 13 November 1930. Gone were the defiant calls to arms embodied in his OBU correspondences a decade earlier. Midgley’s actions were more measured: sitting on the Legislative Committee, organizing a People’s Forum, and striking a committee to meet with City Council regarding the plight of the unemployed.

organization drive, launching the short-lived *Labour Review*.¹⁵ While he declined to stand for re-election, Midgley was assisting in efforts to reinvent the labour political movement. On 15 June 1933, an important convention was held in Victoria's Labour Hall.¹⁶ Tension was clear from the outset, when Midgley challenged a ruling of the chair, H. Owen – the Conservative president of the VLTC – regarding the seating of delegates without credentials. On a vote of 14 to 4, delegates overturned Owen's ruling and everyone in attendance was seated. A motion was then considered: "That this convention of Trades Unions affiliate with the C.C. Federation." Midgley spoke in favour of the motion, which was endorsed by a vote of 13 to 5.¹⁷ Vic Midgley was at the centre of Victoria labour's endorsement of the CCF. That November, Midgley ran as CCF candidate for Victoria.¹⁸ Though defeated, he was appointed secretary of House Leader Rev. Robert Connell. His association with Connell and deeply rooted rivalry with Winch – emanating from the OBU – led to his departure from the BC CCF in 1936 and emigration to New Zealand.¹⁹

Bill Pritchard was elected Alderman in Burnaby in January 1928, and Reeve in 1930.²⁰ Facing personal tragedy and financial difficulty, he followed the peculiar path of

¹⁵ UVASC, VLC fonds, "Minutes," 20 January 1932, and "Executive Minutes," 21 January 1932; also *Labour Review* (Victoria), April-September 1932.

¹⁶ UVASC, VLC fonds, 84-63 Box 1 File 9, "Correspondences," "Convention of Trade Unions, Labor Hall, June 15th 1933."

¹⁷ *Ibid.* For information on Owen efforts to deliver the labour vote to the Liberal machinery of Bowser, see *One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 3 August 1933.

¹⁸ *The Commonwealth* (Vancouver), 1 November 1933.

¹⁹ See Gordon Stanley, Wickerson, "Conflict in the British Columbia Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and the 'Connell Affair,'" (MA Thesis (Political Science): UBC, 1970); and Jeremy Mouat, "Vic Midgley Writes Home: A Letter from New Zealand, 1939," *Labour/Le Travail* 30 (Fall 1992): 210. Midgley moved to New Zealand, and found work as a school teacher. In a letter to MacInnis in February 1939, he wrote: "There is not as much class-consciousness manifest here as in Western Canada, but that is accounted for by forty years of compulsory arbitration. Neither is there the same degree of bitterness and personal abuse indulged in here."

²⁰ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 20 January 1928, 24 January 1930, and 23 January 1931. Pritchard's Aldermanic victory in 1928 was extremely close: he won by 13 votes in Ward 4, with 316 votes to 303 for

many a labour activist in selling life insurance in the late 1920s.²¹ His life has been explored – though by no means conclusively – by Peter Campbell.²² As Reeve of Burnaby, Pritchard was ruthlessly attacked by Communists for what they considered to be inadequate relief payments for the unemployed.²³ The 1930s witnessed the rise of a militant, Communist-led movement of the unemployed and their supporters in BC, with an inclination toward extra-parliamentary tactics.²⁴ Bill Pritchard's experience with the CPC in the failed CLP, combined with the personal abuse he suffered as Reeve, forced him away from the tactics he had embraced in 1919.²⁵ By 1933, he was president of the Reconstruction Party, an affiliate of the BC CCF, and a CCF candidate for Vancouver-Point Grey. Pritchard also served as Editor of *The Commonwealth*, the major CCF newspaper. The day before the 1933 election, the paper declared:

his opponent Rogers. In the same election, Frank Brown was defeated in the contest for Reeve by the incumbent McLean, who polled 2,226 votes to 1,517 for Brown. On 18 January 1930, Pritchard was elected Reeve by a narrow margin, with 2579 votes to 2350 for his rival, a former Reeve. In 1931, however, he won re-election with precisely 3000 votes more than his opponent Councillor Sherbrooke: 4846 to 1346 votes.

²¹ *Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 27 May 1927. That same month, an ad appeared for FLP MLA Frank Brown's Life Insurance services. (*Labor Statesman* (Vancouver), 13 May 1927.) Pritchard's family life deteriorated in the 1920s, with his wife Eleanor spending time in a hospital for the mentally ill. (See Campbell, *Canadian Marxists of the Third Way*, 104-105.)

²² Campbell, *Canadian Marxists of the Third Way*, 73-123.

²³ *The Worker* (Toronto), 9 July 1932; 10 September 1932; 31 December 1932. As unemployment soared and revenues declined in the depths of the depression, Pritchard and the Burnaby council made the decision to pay relief workers with funds not designated for that purpose. A group of local citizens took the Reeve to task, and in December 1932 a BC Supreme Court judge appointed a commissioner to oversee the affairs of the municipality. (See Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way*, 108-109.)

²⁴ Communist leader Arthur E. Evans, an organizer for the Workers' Unity League in BC, was convicted to a year in prison for his role in a strike of Princeton miners. (See *The Worker* (Toronto), 23 September 1933; Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, 147-152; Gordon Hak, "Red Wages: Communists and the 1934 Vancouver Island Loggers Strike," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 80 (1989), 82-90; also Griffin, ed., *Fighting Heritage: Highlights of the 1930s Struggle for Jobs and Militant Unionism in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Tribune, 1985).)

²⁵ Writing to the *One Big Union Bulletin* in September 1933, the CCF candidate for Vancouver declared: "we have passed the machine age and entered the power age – all this tends to render increasingly impotent the effective operation of an industrial union." (*One Big Union Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 14 September 1933.) Peter Campbell cites the Barnet Mills strike of 1931-32 as an example of the conflict between Reeve Pritchard and the Communist controlled-LWIU. (See Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way*, 106-108.)

November 2nd may well be a momentous day, not alone in BC nor even in Canada, but in the English-speaking world. Results of the election on that day will go far to demonstrate whether or not political democratic forms can in the future be relied upon to bring into being that economic democracy... We have our hot-heads, who, with minds centred on but one facet of the great problem, think that all could be accomplished in short order by one master stroke...

The methods advocated and so far adopted by the CCF, while envisaging root changes, are designed to bring about those changes with the least possible disturbance of the social life of the people. This may be thought compromise by some.²⁶

Like Midgley, Pritchard's opposition to Ernest Winch's machine-like control over the CCF – aggravated by the OBU experience – situated him on the right wing of the BC party. Though his political origins were unquestionably Marxist with a clear inclination toward industrial militancy, Pritchard's location within the CCF power structure juxtaposed him with the declared ideology of the two Winches, who successfully identified themselves as the standard-bearers of BC Marxism.

On 2 November 1933, the CCF elected seven MLAs to the BC Legislature, forming the Official Opposition. While rival socialists were able to co-exist under the federal structure of the BC CCF, the unification of the constituent organizations in 1935 led directly to a clash for control, marking an important step in the transition from movement to party.²⁷ The Winches succeeded in convincing the CCF membership they were defending the party from centrist interlopers associated with the politically

²⁶ *The Commonwealth* (Vancouver), 1 November 1933. Commenting on a 1936 Burrard By-election, the newspaper declared: "What is necessary is a realistic grasp of the psychological content of the electorate... a readiness to compromise so as to ensure a forward advance." This marked a clear departure from the 'No Compromise' stance embodied by the SPC. See *The Commonwealth* (Vancouver), 4 September 1936; also Johnson, "No Compromise – No Political Trading."

²⁷ Young, *Anatomy of a Party*, 3-11; see Grantham, "Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement in BC," 208-209, for a discussion of the merger of the SPC and the Associated CCF Clubs.

moderate Rev. Connell.²⁸ Both Pritchard and Midgley defected from the party they helped found following the Connell Split of 1936. By the end of the 1930s, Pritchard, like Midgley, had abandoned BC, relocating to California where he died in 1981.²⁹

“Convinced socialists, gifted with brilliant powers of expression or organizing ability, Pritchard, Midgley and others – these were lost to the CCF,” Dorothy Steeves wrote.³⁰

Confirming Walter Young’s theory of the role of personality in left-wing politics, Steeves concluded that the split “was not simply the result of differences of opinion between a right and a left wing of the CCF. It was a clash between personalities, a matter of ancient rivalries, of bitter words written and spoken which had rankled throughout the years.”³¹

Though weakened, the CCF continued to register organizational gains. Having formed the Official Opposition in the BC Legislature in its first electoral contest, the party received the highest percentage of the popular vote in the 1941 general election, forcing the unification of the Liberal and Conservative parties into a war-time coalition government.³² The collapse of this Coalition in 1951 raised hopes that the CCF would form the next government, but this was narrowly averted by the implementation of the controversial preferential ballot system.³³ The Social Credit party under W.A.C. Bennett

²⁸ Gordon Stanley, Wickerson, “Conflict in the British Columbia Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and the ‘Connell Affair,’” (MA Thesis (Political Science): UBC, 1970).

²⁹ Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way*, 117-123. Later in life, Pritchard appears to have returned to Marxian socialism, remaining an active member of the World Socialist Party of the United States until the time of his death.

³⁰ Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel*, 112.

³¹ Ibid., 107; Young, “Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia,” 139. Even Jim Woodsworth grew estranged from the party he helped found, retreating from the leadership in the last years of his life after the CCF National Council voted in favour of Canada’s declaration of war in September 1939. (See Fowke, *Toward Socialism*, 42-46; and McNaughton, *A Prophet in Politics*, 305-312.)

³² John Neil Sutherland, “T.D. Pattullo as a Party Leader,” (MA Thesis: UBC, 1960), 122. The CCF received 33.01% of the vote, with 32.59% for the Liberals and 30.58% for the Conservatives. The province’s imperfect electoral system gave 21 seats to the Liberals, 12 to the Conservatives, and 14 to the CCF.

³³ David J. Elkins, “Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows: The B.C. Party System in the 1952 and 1953 Provincial Elections,” *BC Studies* 30 (Summer 1976), 3-26. Securing a strong majority in a general election

retained power for the forces of ‘free enterprise’, ruling the province for the next 20 years. In the interim, the CCF expelled Trotskyists and others accused of Communist sympathies.³⁴ Re-inventing itself as the New Democratic Party, the party was elected to government in 1972, as anti-socialists fragmented into the Social Credit, Liberal and Conservative camps. Pursuing an aggressive and far-reaching legislative agenda, Dave Barrett’s government incurred the wrath of opponents and supporters alike, and was defeated in 1975 by a renewed Social Credit party led by Bennett’s son Bill.³⁵ A strong contingent of Opposition MLAs was retained, however, bolstered by a wave of extra-parliamentary action centred around the Solidarity coalition of 1983.³⁶ The NDP returned to power in 1991, governing until 2001, when it was reduced to two seats in the BC Legislature. This marked the nadir of socialist representation since the CCF was formed in 1933.

The search for solidarity continued.

a year later, Bennett dispensed with the peculiar electoral mechanism and won subsequent elections with the conventional ‘first-past-the-post’ system.

³⁴ Roberts, “Doctrine and Disunity in the BC CCF”; and Elaine Bernard, “The Rod Young affair in the British Columbia Co-operative Commonwealth Federation,” (MA Thesis (History): UBC, 1979).

³⁵ See Lorne J. Kavic and Garry Brian Nixon, *The 1200 Days: A Shattered Dream: Dave Barrett and the NDP in BC 1972-75* (Coquitlam, : Kaen, 1978); Dave Barrett & William Miller, *Barrett: A Passionate Political Life* (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1995), 50-112. Bob Williams, Resources Minister in the Barrett government and a close confidant of the premier, had the interesting distinction of being the grandson of Bill Pritchard. (See Gutkin, *Profiles in Dissent*, xiii.)

³⁶ See Bryan D. Palmer, *Solidarity: The Rise & Fall of an Opposition in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star, 1987); and Magnusson, Warren, et al. eds. *The New Reality: The Politics of Restraint in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star, 1984).

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