

**“A VERY CONSERVATIVE RADICAL”: REVEREND  
ROBERT CONNELL’S ENCOUNTER WITH MARXISM IN  
THE BC CCF**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The historiography of the British Columbia Cooperative Commonwealth Federation differs from that of other provincial CCF groups for its lack of attention to the participation of religious reformers in shaping the party's early history. Yet the first CCF House Leader in the province, Reverend Robert Connell, was a fervent believer in the social gospel and in the goals of ecumenism. His attempts to bring "Christian principles" into politics resulted in a battle between reformers and radicals in the party, ultimately resulting in his departure from political life. The division of the BC CCF in 1936 as a result of what has become known as the "Connell Affair" created a loss of momentum for the party which lost its status as Official Opposition in the 1937 provincial election. This event presents a unique opportunity to study the interaction of a social gospel inspired Christian reformer with firmly irreligious supporters of Marxism.

**Keywords:** British Columbia Cooperative Commonwealth Federation; Christian social reformism; Marxism; political ideology; religion; ecumenism; 1930s

## **DEDICATION**

To all my wonderful friends near and far.

To my fellow travellers in academia who shared their victories and frustrations and listened to mine.

To my family all across Canada for their encouragement and support.

To Mackenzie for being my eternal ray of sunshine, whose hugs and kisses made the toughest moments easier and rare rages brought me back to reality. You are my very special little boy whom I love unconditionally.

Most importantly, to Scott, whose undying faith and strength perpetually lifted me up, who knew when to praise and when to criticize, but ultimately loved. Without this support, and his technical expertise, I would be lost. You are the most important and influential person in my life.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Approval .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Dedication .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>“A Very Conservative Radical”: Reverend Robert Connell’s Encounter with Marxism in the BC CCF .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>54</b>

## **“A VERY CONSERVATIVE RADICAL”: REVEREND ROBERT CONNELL’S ENCOUNTER WITH MARXISM IN THE BC CCF**

On Friday, 13 March 1936, Reverend Robert Connell – Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Victoria and house leader of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the Official Opposition in the British Columbia Legislature since 1933 – presented the first agenda for a potential CCF government that the Legislature or the public had heard. His action was a response to the party’s critics who asserted that the CCF had no plan should it be fortunate enough to form the government. But Connell’s speech was more than a response to external critics. It also reminded those CCF members on the left that the 1933 statement of principles for the national and provincial parties, the Regina Manifesto, promised to enact changes only by constitutional methods and rejected revolutionary tactics. In keeping with this message, his tone was not bombastic, and he did not directly challenge the actions of Premier Duff Pattullo’s Liberal government. Instead, as he did with most of his speeches in the Legislature, Connell spoke calmly with a tone of reasonableness. His speech infuriated many on the left wing of the party, including Ernest Winch, who had attended the CCF’s 1933 conference in Regina where he had voted against the removal of revolutionary language from the Regina Manifesto.<sup>1</sup> Winch, a member of the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) since 1918, had long supported a revolution to overthrow capitalism and was distinctly impatient with those who supported reform by constitutional means. However, Connell believed that while

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<sup>1</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, “Leader of the CCF Lays Out Plans,” 14 March 1936.



Winch's views had some support they were unpalatable to the majority of the population and would likely hurt the BC CCF's electoral success.

But instead of finding electoral support for his vision of Christian socialism, or rescue the party from its descent into Marxism, Connell's speech was his first step into political exile and it hurt the BC CCF in the next election, when it lost its status as the official opposition.<sup>2</sup> When he died in late 1957, Connell left behind a more dubious political legacy than that of his adversary, Ernest Winch, who had died earlier the same year. The work on the BC CCF concentrates on the actions of the left wing in guiding the party during the economically polarized era of the 1930s.<sup>3</sup> Where Winch is described as "the compassionate rebel" always fighting for the underdogs in society, the historiography of the BC CCF has not been kind to Reverend Connell.<sup>4</sup> Unlike Winch, no biography has been written about Connell. Further, in the few times when he is mentioned, he has been characterized as an intellectual dabbling in politics "to spiritualize the social order," a political neophyte with no ability to negotiate his way through the partisan nature of left wing politics, and a man happiest alone with his studies of

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<sup>2</sup> In October of 1936, Liberal MLA George Murray predicted that Connell would become "...a specimen of political fossilization rather than a useful force in political life." *Times*, "Vancouver Scored by Member," 30 October 1936.

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas Michael Sanford, "The Politics of Protest: the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and Social Credit League in British Columbia," (Ph.D. diss., University of California: Berkeley, 1961); Ronald J. Shaw, "Organized Labour in the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in British Columbia, 1932-1937," (BA graduating essay, University of British Columbia, 1973); Judith Jane Carle, "Analysis of Membership Education: A Study of the CCF Party in BC, 1933-1961," (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1982); Carlos Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Dorothy G. Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel: Ernest E. Winch and His Times* (Vancouver: Evergreen Press, 1960).

botany and geology.<sup>5</sup> Political scientists and historians have concluded that he could not leave the comfort of the church and, accustomed to the respect afforded to a clergyman, was ill-equipped to deal with those who challenged his authority.<sup>6</sup>

Yet little evidence supports this harsh historical assessment of his actions and intentions. Instead, scholars such as Walter Young and Gordon Stanley Wickerson rely heavily on the commentary found in Dorothy Gretchen Steeves's hagiography of Winch. In giving Steeves's work so much credence, they ignore her political biases. Even though her first political engagements came from her involvement with the moderate League for Social Reconstruction (LSR) and she was familiar with Connell from his involvement in the Victoria branch, her understanding of socialism came from a decidedly Marxist perspective and not that of the Christian socialism advocated by Connell. Furthermore, Steeves's election as MLA for North Vancouver in 1934 was the beginning of her close alliance with the Winch faction. In listening to one part of the historical record and not developing a more nuanced picture, Young and Wickerson fail to understand Connell's actions and mar our understanding of the different elements that made up the CCF.

The recent turn to religious history demonstrated by historians such as Lynne Marks has opened a door in understanding the significance of religion in

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<sup>5</sup> Gordon Stanley Wickerson, "Conflict in the British Columbia Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and the 'Connell Affair'" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1973), 51; Walter D. Young, "Ideology, Personality, and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia," in *British Columbia: Historical Readings*, eds. W. Peter Ward and Robert A.J. McDonald (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1981), 567, 572.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Young, "Ideology, Personality, and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia," 572.

identity construction particularly as it appears in the public sphere.<sup>7</sup> The case of Robert Connell and the BC CCF is more than just a conflict of personalities and ideology. At the heart of the “Connell Affair” lies an uneasy encounter between Marxism and Christianity’s social gospel movement. While some scholarship refers to the religious values of key national leaders in the CCF, no detailed studies exist on the influence of religion on BC’s political history.<sup>8</sup> However, as demonstrated by Robert Connell, Christian social reformers did attempt to present their alternate vision.<sup>9</sup> Failing to analyze the nature of Connell’s Christian faith and its influence on his political ideology misses a key element at play in the “Connell Affair” and ignores the presence of Christian social reformism within the party.

This study will examine Robert Connell’s life before and after his involvement with the CCF, especially his career with the Anglican Church, his political philosophy, and his actions within the CCF. It will draw on a recently discovered collection of his political material, primarily his radio speeches, and from newspaper articles documenting events. In so doing, I will demonstrate how Robert Connell’s reformist approach to socialism, shaped by his Christian values, dictated his actions as provincial leader of the CCF, especially in 1936, and,

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<sup>7</sup> Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> E.A. Pulker, “We Stand on Their Shoulders:” *The Growth of Social Concern in Canadian Anglicanism* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1986), 108. For more information on the social gospel, see Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971); Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); Brian J. Fraser, *The Social Uplifters: Presbyterian Progressives and the Social Gospel in Canada, 1875-1915* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988); Ted Reeve, *Claiming the Social Passion: the Role of the United Church of Canada in Creating a Culture of Social Well-being in Canadian Society* (Toronto: Moderator’s Consultation on Faith and the Economy, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Norman Knowles, “New Perspectives on the History of Religion in British Columbia,” *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society*, vol. XXXVIII (1996), 5.

contrary to the left-wing historiography, how his message attempted to appeal to the electorate. It will show how the CCF executives' lack of support for his platform, the internal party power struggles, the left-wing rigidity of the Winches, the message of "socialized capitalism" from the Liberals, and Connell's constant watering down of the BC Constructives' electoral goals led to his departure from provincial politics. This will provide a new understanding of the "Connell Affair" and start to reassess the influence of Christian social reformist thought on the actions and direction of the early BC CCF.

To understand how Robert Connell came into conflict with the Marxists in the BC CCF, it is important to look at his life before 1933 and after 1937. From this, we gain insight into his character, his areas of interest, and the nature of his career with the Anglican Church. In addition, we can trace the rise and fall of his support of politics as the most useful way to enact his vision of the social gospel.

Born during his Scottish parents' visit to Liverpool, England in 1871, Connell was raised in the area around Glasgow.<sup>10</sup> Connell completed some schooling, likely into his early teen years but no further, and he worked for a shipping company in Glasgow before his journey to Canada at age 17. Despite his lack of higher education, Connell's love of reading – he would spend money earned from his work at the shipping company to buy cheap or second-hand

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<sup>10</sup> Daisy Webster, *Growth of the NDP in BC, 1900-1970: 81 Political Biographies* (Vancouver: New Democratic Party 1970), 24. See *Vancouver Sun*, "Rites Held for Former CCF Leader," 16 November 1957; *Times*, "Funeral Saturday for R. Connell Once CCF Leader," 14 November 1957; *Vancouver Daily Province*, "Former CCF Head to be Buried Today," 16 November 1957. See also [R.H. Connell?] "Robert Connell – 1871-1957: Cleric, naturalist, writer, scholar, Leader of the Opposition in the Provincial Legislature 1933-37," Reverend Robert Connell personnel folder, Diocese of British Columbia Archives, Victoria; "Connell, Robert 1871-1957," Pamphlet Collection, UBC Fine Arts Library, Vancouver, 1979.

books – furthered his education and later earned him the opportunity to teach art and science in various schools in Canada.<sup>11</sup>

It is unclear why Connell made the decision to come to Canada but, like other immigrants in his era, he likely believed this country presented more opportunities for a young man of seventeen than staying in Britain.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps caught with the spirit of adventure or faced with sheer necessity, he opted to immigrate and for the first five to six years worked at a variety of jobs in the Canadian west as a bookkeeper, a teacher, and a farm worker, rather than immediately seeking training with the Church of England in Canada.<sup>13</sup> Such varied work provided him with broad exposure to the people and problems in the region.

After seven years of varied employment, never firmly established in either teaching or farm work, Connell moved to Calgary to begin his training to become a Church of England clergyman.<sup>14</sup> Having witnessed the daily frustrations experienced by prairie settlers, Connell believed they needed to be reminded that there was more to life than just material concerns. Becoming a minister was, at the time, the best way for him to help people. Christianity provided a meaningful spiritual existence, optimism, long term salvation, and fellowship: all things that

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<sup>11</sup> "Robert Connell – 1871-1957." Later, the author states that Connell's love of second hand bookstores continued into his later years. "A bookplate that he once designed for himself portrays him standing before [a second hand bookstore] perusing a book." 4.

<sup>12</sup> John Belshaw argues that coal miners in British Columbia could expect a higher standard of living than those in Britain. See John Belshaw, *Colonization and Community: The Vancouver Island Coalfield and the Making of the British Columbian Working Class* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Barry Mather's biography on Connell was compiled, along with his other biographical sketches of notable individuals within the early CCF and illustrations by Fraser Wilson, into a book entitled *Pertinent Portraits: CCF 1934* (Vancouver: Boag Foundation, 1978), 11. These portraits originally appeared in *The Commonwealth*, the unofficial CCF newspaper, in 1934.

<sup>14</sup> Biographical card file, Archives of the Diocese of New Westminster, Vancouver School of Theology.

he felt were missing from settlers' lives. This desire to help people conflicts with the image of him as a man most comfortable with rocks and plants presented in the historical literature.

At this time, it was an anomaly for a Church of England clergyman in Britain not to have an education from a theological college or a university.<sup>15</sup> However, the increased settlement in western Canada and the lack of academically trained clergy meant the Church of England in Canada had to apprentice suitable candidates to an ordained member rather than wait for the arrival of a college or university trained minister.<sup>16</sup> The path to ordination typically began with a layman's position, either as a reader or lay-deacon. Having proven his interest and suitability in becoming a minister, the candidate began his apprenticeship. Likely Connell worked his way up in this fashion. He was ordained as a deacon, an assistant to the priest in charge, in Calgary in 1895 and was sent to do mission work at Beaver Lake, Alberta, responsible for serving a wide area.<sup>17</sup> From his ordination in 1895, Connell rose to being a priest in 1896 and then an incumbent, the clergy licensed by the bishop to take charge of a specific parish. With this promotion came a transfer to Innisfail, Alberta, in 1897, and his marriage to Janie Hodson in 1898. They moved to Vancouver Island in

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<sup>15</sup> Alan Haig, *The Victorian Clergy* (London & Sydney: Crook and Helm, 1984), 122-123. Haig comments that those known as "literate," those found to have a good knowledge of religious texts but who lacked formal qualifications, were accepted because bishops believed in their personal worth but "...opinion in the Church and in society at large would no longer tolerate such men as other than exceptions." In the nineteenth century, it was preferable that ordinands have a university education but the Church had to develop theological colleges to provide enough clergy to match the increase in Britain's general population.

<sup>16</sup> In 1955, the Church of England in Canada officially changed its name to the Anglican Church of Canada.

<sup>17</sup> This area can be found 230 kilometres north of Edmonton, in what is known as the Lac la Biche region. The key historic spot in the area is the Catholic Oblate Mission, established in 1853. See Lac La Biche-Lakeland County Economic Development Partnership, "Lakeland County – Lac La Biche," <http://cd.laclabicheregion.ab.ca/Living.htm>.

1901. After his years in rugged Alberta, the move to Victoria presented a welcome opportunity for a less rigorous lifestyle.<sup>18</sup>

Connell's initial posting in the city in 1901 was as vicar, a position also known by the title "incumbent", for the parishes of St. Luke's in Cedar Hill, St. Michael's in Royal Oak, and to the Indian mission at Colquitz where he remained until late 1908. His time at St. Luke's was financially trying because, on occasion, the debt load of the parish was such that he could not be paid. Part of his ministerial responsibility was to make his church financially solvent, which he did by 1907, when the church reported its first credit balance.<sup>19</sup> In 1909, the family moved to California where Connell served as a minister in the Episcopal churches in Gilroy and Hollister. Upon his return to British Columbia in early 1911, he became incumbent of St. Saviour's in Victoria West, present-day Esquimalt. He remained with this parish until his retirement from the pulpit in 1923. However, Connell did not remain strictly within the confines of his own parish. Rather, he attempted to influence church policy and practice by participating in church committees at local, provincial and national levels. For instance, from 1907 to 1925 he was diocesan representative to the General Synod, a meeting of church executives, ministerial representatives, and lay

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<sup>18</sup> "Robert Connell – 1871-1957" states: "In 1901 we moved to British Columbia, probably to get away from the prairie winters and enjoy the more temperate climate of the Pacific coast." Connell's children would have been very young when they moved west as Samuel Gore Connell, was born 1899 and Robert Humphrey in 1900. I found no information regarding the birth date of his third son, J.H. Connell. The vital statistics information for the province of British Columbia held by the provincial archives is limited by government legislation and at the time of my research had yet to incorporate the year in which J.H. Connell was born.

<sup>19</sup> *A History of St. Luke's Anglican Church, Victoria, BC 1860-1992* (Victoria: Diocese of British Columbia, 1992), 18-19.

people to establish church guidelines.<sup>20</sup> Overlapping this time frame were the years in which he was a delegate to the provincial synod, 1913-1927, serving as its secretary from 1923 to 1926. Other positions where he had some influence included his time as editor of the diocesan gazette, 1917-1920, and as the diocesan representative on the Anglican Theological College Board of Governors, 1913-1927. Just two years after quitting political life, in an act that signified the trust of the bishop in Connell's theological knowledge and familiarity with contemporary issues, he was named Canon Lecturer at Christ Church Cathedral. Moreover, his appointment as archdeacon of Comox in 1940 afforded him a higher level of influence within the workings of the church.<sup>21</sup> He served the Church well.

Nevertheless Connell's presence within the Victoria area was not limited to his position as a clergyman and would intensify upon his retirement from the Church. He was very involved in the Victoria Ministerial Association, an

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<sup>20</sup> While sources largely agree that Connell did serve in the positions listed, they conflict over time frame. For example, "Connell, Robert 1871-1957," the folder of biographical information found in the UBC Fine Arts Library states that Connell sat as secretary of the Provincial Synod from 1922-1928, but the document "Robert Connell 1871-1957" claims that he served in this position only from 1923-1926. Also, they disagree over his role as diocesan Clerical Secretary with the UBC file asserting that he was in this position from 1921-1928, while Connell's son notes it was from 1921-1927. Lastly, they dispute his time spent as Rural Dean, one claiming his term lasted from 1916-1923 while the other believes it was only from 1916-1920. These differences, however, are minor and do not affect my argument. For further information on the structure and operation of the Church of England in Canada, see Alan Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada: Controversies and Identity in Historical Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Sheila Flynn, "One Priest's Interpretation of 'Anglican Order,'" *Anglican Topic*, May 2003. This article outlines the classification of ministers and hierarchy of responsibility within the Anglican Church, including the role of parishes, bishops, and ecclesiastical provinces. The archdeacon, she writes, is "...appointed by the bishop, gives spiritual and pastoral care, encouragement, support, and when necessary, admonition, to the clergy and laity within the archdiaconal boundaries. Except when given the authority by the bishop, however, the archdeacon generally does not hire, fire, or similarly act within the life of the parish." In other words, the archdeacon is the bishop's right hand man in the affairs of the Anglican Church in a given geographic area but the bishop holds authority. Connell likely could never have become bishop given his lack of formal education.



organization that brought together ministers from the various Protestant denominations to work together on issues of common concern, at one time serving as its president. His involvement with the Victoria Library Board began in the early 1920s and he was named chairman in 1926. He taught art at St. Michael's, a private boys' school, and occasionally taught botany at Victoria High School. He wrote a weekly column on nature and geology for the *Victoria Daily Times* throughout the early 1920s and mid-1930s before moving to the *Victoria Daily Colonist*. This hobby prompted him to be a founding member of the Natural History Society of British Columbia. In addition, from at least 1913 until the early 1940s Connell was a member of and active participant in the exhibits of the Vancouver Island Arts and Crafts Society, serving as president and later as first vice president.

Connell's professional life and personal passions allowed him to meet a cross-section of local society. His association with the working class through his ministerial work gave him direct insight into the injustices of their daily conditions yet, unlike James Shaver Woodsworth, did not convince him of the merits of class-based politics.<sup>22</sup> His familiarity with local socialists, especially those belonging to the SPC, is unknown.

Instead, Connell represented the Christian social gospel wing of the CCF. Within the British Columbia CCF, unlike other provinces, this position was

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<sup>22</sup> Evidence of Connell's early ties to the working class can be found in a *Victoria Daily Colonist* article on the CCF's response to the health insurance bill brought before the legislature by the Pattullo government's health minister, Dr. Weir. Connell states that he appeared before the Oliver government in 1919 or 1920 with a trades and labour delegation promoting provincial health insurance. See *Victoria Daily Colonist*, "CCF Opposition Endorses Weir Bill in BC Legislature," 25 March 1936.

contested by the secular Marxism of the SPC and its adherents within the party.

The social gospel, while not necessarily seeking an end to class division or to the overthrow of capitalism by workers which the SPC desired, submitted that Christianity was the most useful way of destroying economic inequity by reminding Christians of Jesus' social vision.

The social gospel movement developed towards the end of the nineteenth century with the influence of Darwin's theory of evolution and the development of higher criticism, a form of literary criticism used to discover the historical origins of a text but in this era was specifically identified with criticism of the Bible. Further, societal changes resulting from capitalism including increased immigration, growth of cities, harsh working conditions, demands for housing, and more leisure, all challenged prevailing attitudes about the Church's role in society.<sup>23</sup> Many questions were asked. Was Christianity a communal faith concerning itself with the welfare of all, including non-believers, or was it an individualistic faith? Should the focus be on gaining converts or on creating the kingdom of God on earth? How could the church remain socially relevant? Deliberation over these questions and others occurred not just between different denominations but within them as well.

These considerations generated varied responses including what became known as fundamentalism. More importantly, for our purposes, it saw the

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<sup>23</sup> Marguerite van Die, *An Evangelical Mind: Nathaniel Burwash and the Methodist Tradition in Canada, 1839-1918* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989); Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); William H. Katerberg, *Modernity and the Dilemma of North American Anglican Identities, 1880-1950* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001). See also Cook, *The Regenerators*.

development of the social gospel. Richard Allen, in his study of the Canadian social reform movement, provides a useful definition:

The social gospel rested on the premise that Christianity was a social religion, concerned...with the quality of human relations on this earth. Put in more dramatic terms, it was a call for men (and women) to find the meaning of their lives in seeking to realize the Kingdom of God in the very fabric of society.<sup>24</sup>

In essence, God was not conceived as a distant, unknowable entity; His kingdom could be built on earth. This contrasts deeply with evangelism where its emphasis on regeneration was significant in the realm of life after death instead of life in the here and now.<sup>25</sup> Further, evangelism's primary concern was saving individual souls so people could enjoy the rewards of heaven, whereas adherents of the social gospel believed that when people's material concerns were met then they would be more open to receiving God's message.<sup>26</sup> Unlike the radical socialism of the SPC, the social gospel called for a more gradual, religious approach built upon Jesus' teachings of loving and caring for one another. By reinterpreting the life of Jesus to highlight his advocacy for the poor and downtrodden, He became a model for Christian social reformers wanting to make the church more relevant and more responsive to the impoverished material conditions created by capitalism. Shining the light of Jesus on the dark corners of injustices in society, so the social gossellers believed, would lead to their end.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Allen, *The Social Passion*, 4. Although this book is now over thirty years old it still remains the best study of the social gospel in Canada.

<sup>25</sup> Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Allen, *The Social Passion*, 356.

<sup>27</sup> Eleanor J. Stebbner, "Young Man Knowles: Christianity, Politics, and the 'Making of a Better World,'" in *Religion in Public Life in Canada: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Marguerite van Die (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 223.

In Canada, supporters of the social gospel movement advocated temperance, researched public housing and health concerns, and exposed working conditions as ways of implementing Christianity's social side. One notable contribution from social gospel supporters was the creation of the Moral and Social Reform Council of Canada in 1907, later the Social Service Council of Canada after it distanced itself from its church roots.<sup>28</sup> This body served as the foundation of Canada's modern social work system. Many supporters came from the Methodist and Presbyterian churches but others came from the Church of England in Canada too.

However, some social gospellers were unsatisfied with church related social work, believing that real reforms could not be affected in this context. J. S. Woodsworth, whom Connell admired, is the best known of Canada's social gospel supporters to have left the pulpit for politics. Feeling constricted by the bounds imposed upon him by the Methodist Church, Woodsworth quit the church and initially turned to the labour movement as the arena in which he would make his contribution to social reform. His activities led to his arrest for sedition during the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919. After the charges were dropped, he joined William Ivens, who had also abandoned the Methodist Church, in expanding the new, creedless church which Ivens had founded. Their Labour Church incorporated class politics more than any other Protestant Church in Canada at

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<sup>28</sup> Allen, *The Social Passion*, 8, 13. However, most of his analysis centres on the Methodist and Presbyterian churches with less detail on the response of the Anglican Church. One scholar has tried to correct that oversight. See Edward Pulker, "*We Stand on Their Shoulders*." It is important to note that the Catholic Church also responded to the changing social situation but a discussion of its response is beyond the scope of this study. See Gregory Baum, *Catholics and Canadian Socialism: Political Thought in the Thirties and Forties* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1980).

the time.<sup>29</sup> But Woodsworth was still dissatisfied and he turned to politics, running as the federal independent Labour candidate for Winnipeg Centre in 1921, an election that he won handily. He held that seat and its replacement, Winnipeg North Centre, until his death in 1942.<sup>30</sup> The values of the social gospel can be found in his promotion of old age pensions, unemployment insurance, racial equality, and adequate housing.

Political social gospellers held that the evolution towards a “cooperative commonwealth” was a less harmful approach than violent class revolution.<sup>31</sup> Opposed to violence, this particular strain of social gospel adherents knew that in order to convince the general populace of the rationality of their calls for reform, they had to find justification within the Bible. American Baptist minister Walter Rauschenbusch and Canadian church ministers Salem Bland and Woodsworth often interpreted the Lord’s Prayer as support for their position as this passage clearly states that God’s will was to be enacted on Earth, not just in heaven.<sup>32</sup> In addition, they held that educating people on the inherent problems of the existing system and the wisdom of planning would be more beneficial as a long term project even in the turmoil of the depression. As for Marxism, while it deserved

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<sup>29</sup> Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 137.

<sup>30</sup> For electoral information about Winnipeg Centre, see Parliament of Canada, “History of Federal Ridings Since 1867 – Winnipeg Centre, Manitoba,” <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/process/house/hfer/hfer.asp?Language=E&Search=Det&include=Y&rid=821>.

<sup>31</sup> McNaught, *Prophet in Politics*, 95.

<sup>32</sup> The King James Bible was the version commonly used in the time of Bland, Woodsworth, and Rauschenbusch. See University of Michigan’s Humanities Text Initiative, “Bible: King James Version,” <http://www.hti.umich.edu/k/kjv/browse.html>. For our purposes, the significant section of the Lord’s Prayer is “... Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven...” This can be found in Ma 6:9-13 KJV. See Salem Bland, *The New Christianity or the Religion of the New Age* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1920), 120; Reverend Robert Connell, “The Cooperative Commonwealth – What Does it Mean?” text of radio address by Rev. Robert Connell, 9 June 1935, (Vancouver: The Commonwealth Press, 1935).

praise for presenting ideas on social reconstruction, it was rejected because it was "...too steeped in pessimistic fatalism to be acceptable in Christian lands."<sup>33</sup>

This reasoning was a key irritant to the Marxist members of the SPC. That it developed from people who were largely middle class and religious made it much worse. Many SPC members of the CCF disputed the efficacy of religion, especially Christianity, as being a useful means of obtaining reform. They took their cue from the well-known comment by Karl Marx, "religion is the opiate of the masses."<sup>34</sup> But his assertion that clergy were used by capitalists to acquire submission from the working class proved most popular.<sup>35</sup> In writing on the growth of the Oxford group -- a non-denominational evangelical Christian group focused on bringing about true fellowship through adherence to the four absolute principles of love, purity, honesty and unselfishness -- "Spartacus," a writer for the *BC Clarion*, advised "Let us never lose sight of the fact that Organized Religion is the right hand of the Capitalist State and its mightiest force in holding

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<sup>33</sup> Salem Bland, "Reconstruction Without Bitterness," *Toronto Star Weekly*, 25 February 1933. Also found in G. Pierce, "Socialism and the CCF," (Montreal: Contemporary Publishing Association, 1934), 90. The Contemporary Publishing Association was the publishing arm of the Communist Party of America.

<sup>34</sup> "Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction," in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 72. This comes from an article in which Marx begins a criticism of German philosophers by arguing that any discussion of their philosophy must begin with religion. However, this remark is often taken out of context, missing the important qualification that he makes in the statements preceding it where he does legitimize religious practice. "Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering," he argued. "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless circumstances." Yes, Marx writes, in certain contexts religion has merit although it ultimately cannot demystify the world.

<sup>35</sup> Marx's understanding of the operation of churches came from his exposure to Lutheranism in Germany and the Church of England in Britain. It was common practice with the latter group for their clergy to seek a benefice from a wealthy patron thus securing their employment and personal welfare. See Alan Haig, *The Victorian Clergy*, 215. Marx made a particularly strong criticism of the Church of England. "The English Established Church, e.g., will more readily pardon an attack on 38 of its 39 articles than on 1/39 of its income." Karl Marx, "Preface to the First German Edition," *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol.1, (1867, reprint, New York: International Publishers, 1967) 10.

in subjection the enslaved masses upon which it maintains its unholy existence.”<sup>36</sup> Peter Campbell observes that all of the Canadian Marxists whom he studied were atheists since they believed that “religion was irrational, and [fought] against it tooth and nail because it was a major element in the bourgeoisie’s efforts to pacify the working class.”<sup>37</sup> Even SPC members such as A.M. Stephen and Jack Logie, devout followers of Theosophy, still were critical of mainstream religions like the Anglican Church.<sup>38</sup>

Many early SPC members were fervent supporters of “scientific socialism,” a term originating with Marx and Engels, who saw their theories as scientifically provable given their foundation on observed events in the material world. Typical was the SPC’s publication of J.H. Burroughs’s *Religion Thy Name is Superstition* in 1912.<sup>39</sup> This pamphlet describes recent developments in science, with particular emphasis on how technology was being used to direct nature. Burroughs applauds the progress of human creativity in controlling nature, disdaining early man’s assumption that natural disasters were caused by a god. Progress was leading humanity away from God as a plausible answer to the question of the cause of human existence, he concluded.

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<sup>36</sup> “From the Watchtower,” *British Columbia Clarion*, June 1933. The Oxford group, not to be confused with the nineteenth-century Anglican based Oxford Movement, was an easy target for radical socialists during the Depression as many of its members were part of the economic elite. A key supporter in BC was former Liberal MLA, MP, and mayor of Vancouver, Gerry McGeer.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999), 81. See also Young, “Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia,” 557; Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: the Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

<sup>38</sup> Samuel Wagar, “Theosophical Socialists in the 1920s Okanagan: Jack Logie’s Social Issues Summer Camps,” (MA project, SFU, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> J.H. Burroughs, “Religion Thy Name is Superstition,” (Vancouver: Socialist Party of Canada, 1912). In his essay on William Pritchard, Peter Campbell notes that John Henry Burroughs was Pritchard’s guide and mentor in the SPC. See Campbell, *Canadian Marxists*, 80.

Similarly, in 1919, the SPC republished the detailed essay by the noted French socialist, Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, who, using historical materialism, analyzed the factors from the existence of primitive societies to the capitalist era that generated belief in God.<sup>40</sup> Bourgeois religiosity, which he termed the "Biblical brain-destroyer," was just another means by which capitalists controlled the workers by insisting that they attend sermons on Sunday, thereby preventing them from having significant time to create class consciousness. But for all the attempts of the bourgeois to destroy their brains, Lafargue asserted, workers were neither interested in nor shared any commonality with the bourgeois definition of God.<sup>41</sup> Besides, conditions were changing to the point where God and religion would no longer be necessary. Above all, he wondered, why would workers believe in the unjust bourgeois God when He has decided that they should live a life of bare existence while others lived in luxury off the product of their labour?<sup>42</sup>

The continuity between this early version of the anti-religious SPC and the one that later amalgamated with the CCF Clubs in 1935, is found in the notable memberships in the two parties of Ernest Winch and Wallis Lefeaux, both very

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<sup>40</sup> Paul Lafargue, *Causes of Belief in God* (Vancouver: The Whitehead Estate, ca. 1919). See also Lafargue, "Clericalism and Socialism," *Social Democrat*, November 1903. Lafargue's decision to become an atheist at a young age was inspired by his admiration of the anarchist, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and revolutionary socialist, Louis-August Blanqui. See Leslie Derfler, *Paul Lafargue and the Founding of French Marxism, 1842-1882* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 24.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.



influential organizationally and ideologically.<sup>43</sup> According to Winch's son, Harold, also a CCF politician, while Ernest was raised in a very religious Church of England household, he lost his faith as a young man. Ernest, Harold noted, abandoned his faith "...because no matter where he went or what he saw he found that the best people in the world were the best of Christians and the best of church goes on Sunday [but] the rottenest sons-of-bitches all the rest of the week."<sup>44</sup>

A pamphlet entitled *The Abyss*, published by the SPC in the early 1930s, presents an intense disdain for the religious language used to explain the Depression by both the Christian churches and the bourgeoisie:

Then came the slump, and the owners, wizards, and politicians, looking out over the oceans of wealth produced by the workers and farmers, and quite unable to eat any more themselves pronounced it an act of inscrutable Providence, to be borne patiently until such times as the Divine Powers should ordain. This was the simplest way to dispose of the questioning of the people.<sup>45</sup>

The left-wing members of the BC CCF tended to despise Christianity for the way in which it diffracted challenges to bourgeois power. They were both suspicious and contemptuous of the efforts of Christian social reformers in trying to effect

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<sup>43</sup> Ernest Winch was raised in a conservative Anglican household in England and, according to his biography, upon witnessing an injustice became a socialist. His first political activities in British Columbia began with the Social Democratic Party, a spin-off of the SPC. However, Winch left the SDP to join the SPC because he preferred the latter group's rigidity in interpreting Marx. Steeves asserted that he switched parties in 1918 but historian Gordon Hak claimed he did so in 1917. See Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel*, 14, 29; Gordon Hak, "British Columbia Loggers and the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, 1919-1922," *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 23 (Spring 1989), 74.

<sup>44</sup> Harold Winch, interview by Peter Stursberg, December 28, 1979, transcript, Peter Stursberg fonds, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, 52.

<sup>45</sup> "*The Abyss (How to Avoid it)*," pamphlet, (Vancouver?: [1932?]), 2-3. The fourth page of the document has another revealing assessment. "We have assimilated the theory that God put the coal under the ground for the Dunsmuirs, the iron ore for the Steel Trust, that all the possibilities of nature were created to be administered for the benefit of the few." Here the writer accuses the Church of promoting the idea that God, in His wisdom, has chosen the capitalists to receive great economic advantages.

change, convinced that they were not interested in dramatically restructuring society and were unconsciously working to support capitalism.

Connell's challenge to the direction of the BC CCF in 1936 confirmed their assessment. His support of socialism, they claimed, was contingent upon negative economic conditions. In a letter in the *Victoria Daily Times*, former SPC supporter and CCF member, T. Guy Sheppard articulated this suspicion. "The plain truth of the matter is that with the improvement in economic conditions Mr. Connell's 'Socialism,' as ephemeral as the morning mist, faded away with the rising sun of his own political ambitions."<sup>46</sup> Essentially, he argued, Connell's support for socialism disappeared once the economy seemed to improve. But this judgement, built on a stereotype of Christian ministers, was wrong.

Connell's entry into politics was the culmination of nearly two decades of personal exploration and action in the areas of economics and social justice and not from a sudden awakening to the extreme unemployment of the 1930s. Further, his socialist path was shaped by the thoughts of Jesus, John Ruskin, and G.D.H. Cole, quite unlike the radical CCF members for whom Marx was the key theorist. Connell's political views centred on a social gospel perspective, enhanced by his support of pacifism and ecumenism, and were sharpened by the seeming lack of action taken by his church in acting as a moral guide in industrial society. His support of the CCF also came through the provincial Liberal party's inability to grasp the serious impact of the depression. Assessing the key components of his thought provides a rationale for his motivation in both

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<sup>46</sup>T. Guy Sheppard, letter to the editor, *Times*, 2 October 1936. The title of his letter, 'Similia Similibus Curantur,' is a Latin phrase that means "like cures like" in English. It was used to suggest that improved economics cure feelings for socialism.

becoming a political figure and in seeking a political voice outside of the two traditional parties.<sup>47</sup>

Although he claimed to have become a socialist before the outbreak of World War I, when BC was in the midst of an economic depression, it was the war itself that led Connell to research economics in depth and to lend a public voice to the cause of pacifism.<sup>48</sup> In 1918 he published a few articles in *The Week*, a Victoria journal interested in socialism and the question of government, edited by W.E. Peirce.<sup>49</sup> However, it was in a talk at St. Andrew Presbyterian in 1920 where one finds his most coherent condemnation of war and capitalism. Responsibility for the war rested on the shoulders of capitalism, he argued, which allowed much death and destruction to occur for the ownership of world markets.

While he shared with Marxists a critique of the inhumanity of capitalism, he did not advocate revolution to establish a compassionate economic system. Instead he argued, "The best we can do is try to get a little nearer the ideal."<sup>50</sup> As the newspaper reporter covering the speech wrote, Connell was neither a "wild theorist" nor an "impractical idealist." The speech also signalled his support of guild socialism, which he described as "the most comprehensively praiseworthy

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<sup>47</sup> *Times*, "Citizens Meeting Records Protest on Special Powers Act," 24 March 1934. Connell stated "... for years my heart was with the Liberal party."

<sup>48</sup> C.M.R., "A Very Conservative Radical," *Province*, 17 March 1934, magazine section. It is important to note here that Connell's form of socialism at the outbreak of World War I differed from the socialism espoused by members of the SPC at that time since they were a group known for being "impossibilists." Ironically, one of Connell's most vocal supporters in the 1930s, Bill Pritchard, was a dedicated possibilist member of the early SPC. See "William Arthur Pritchard: The Marxist as Worker Intellectual," *Canadian Marxists*, 80.

<sup>49</sup> The emphasis of the paper under Peirce's editorship was the promotion of "... good government, temperance, single tax and sane socialism." Peirce would become one of Connell's supporters within the CCF. Copies of this journal can be found in the BC Provincial Archives on microform. See B.C. Archives, "Newspapers on Microfilm," [http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/sn-220309D/library/newspapr/bcarch/arch\\_v.htm](http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/sn-220309D/library/newspapr/bcarch/arch_v.htm).

<sup>50</sup> *Colonist*, "No Panacea for Social Sufferings", 25 February 1920.

of the progressive social systems offered just at the present time.”<sup>51</sup> This was a form of socialism very popular in Great Britain during the 1910s, which advocated state ownership of industry controlled by workers who would be organized into guilds. Notable advocates included economist G.D.H. Cole and Bertrand Russell. Several aspects appealed to Connell, particularly its capacity for individual liberty as it left “room for man to work out his own individuality – as opposed to the old system of Marxian socialism.”<sup>52</sup> He credited the rise of the trade union movement for inhibiting additional abuses by capitalism. In addition, while he did see parallel models between guild socialism and the Soviet Union, he rejected the latter’s approach for Canada observing “that the conditions in Russia were not the same as in [Canada], and therefore the same remedies might not apply.”<sup>53</sup> The consistent socialism that he believed in was moderate Christian socialism.

Later in 1920, the Social Service Council of Canada’s journal, *Social Welfare*, published Connell’s article on economics and Christianity.<sup>54</sup> In it he argued that capitalism dehumanized people and treated men and women as “machines.”<sup>55</sup> For Connell, this was a moral problem, not an economic one, in which case the solution was Christianity for it insisted “upon the supreme value of the human being as against the world of things.”<sup>56</sup> Christianity had rejected the idea of slavery based on race but had yet to object to slavery based on economics. The task of the Church “...is not the reconciling of Capital and

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<sup>51</sup> *Colonist*, “No Panacea,” 25 February 1920.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Robert Connell, “Economics in the Light of Christianity.” *Social Welfare*, vol. II, no. 11, 1 August 1920, 299-300.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

Labour, but the making [of] Capital subservient to human life.”<sup>57</sup> Capital should not be God. Christianity, he argued, could continue to play a reforming role in industrial society by reminding people of their moral purpose. As when he was a new minister, Connell believed positively in the ability of faith to raise people’s spirits and in the role of the Church to position itself as a moral guide in the public sphere. He found evidence to support this theory at a Christian cooperative community in Sooke. The subsequent article that he wrote offered a positive endorsement of the community’s way of life and he was clearly impressed by the apparent happiness, comfort and equality experienced by the inhabitants.<sup>58</sup> He positively noted the inhabitants’ equal access to medical care, education, and rotation in assigned jobs.

But Connell’s optimism about the Church’s ability to act as a moral guide was not uncritical. Significantly, he embraced the criticism levelled by Marx and Lafargue, that capitalism was buying the support of the Church of England, and other denominations as well, with its donations. One instance of this is in the records found in the Diocese of British Columbia archives that document the donation of two lots of land in the town of Ladysmith by James Dunsmuir, son of the late coal baron, Robert Dunsmuir, for the construction of a church.<sup>59</sup> The following year, however, Bishop William Wilcox Perrin expressed concern over some of the wealthy church members commenting that “the few who have

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Connell, “A Visit to the Standfast Bible Students at Sooke,” *Times*, 12 September 1925, magazine section.

<sup>59</sup> *Thirty-fourth Report of the Columbia Mission, from February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1900 to January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1901*, (Victoria: Diocese of British Columbia Archives).

become rich have yet to learn the responsibility of wealth.”<sup>60</sup> Connell observed that capitalists who gave money to the Church often received more support for their causes than did the working class, thereby making the Church a useful tool in capitalism’s fight against “bolshevism.” The Church seemed incapable of recognizing, as he did, the profound spiritualism and Christianity of the labour movement.<sup>61</sup>

While Marxists uniformly upheld the nobility of the working class, they were not successful in uniting the left-wing and often were divided on various points of Marxist theory. But if society were to be remade with mankind at its centre, Connell believed that the ecumenical movement, which aimed to unite Christians worldwide, provided a positive example of how to overcome historic divisions to find common ground. He demonstrated this ideal by serving as president of the Victoria Ministerial Association and delivering sermons in churches of varying denominations. Yet this seemingly positive and progressive view opened still another venue of criticism against the church. As one of Connell’s sons commented, “...he had a truly ecumenical outlook not always in accord with his pastoral betters. This sometimes brought him into conflict with those of less tolerant views, but he never backed away from a Christian principle or conviction which he knew to be right.”<sup>62</sup> The merger of the Methodist and Congregationalist churches with many of the Presbyterian churches into the

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<sup>60</sup> *Thirty-sixth Report of the Columbia Mission, February 1, 1902 to January 31, 1903*, (Victoria: Diocese of British Columbia Archives), 11-12.

<sup>61</sup> *Colonist*, “No Panacea,” 25 February 1920.

<sup>62</sup> “Robert Connell – 1871-1957.”

United Church in 1925 likely provided Connell with a modicum of hope for the future of society.<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, another organization that provided Connell with hope for the future was the birth of the League for Social Reconstruction in 1932.<sup>64</sup> Organized as a response to the depression mainly by middle class intellectuals in Toronto and Montreal in 1932, with smaller branches across the country, the LSR proposed that government should look after the interests of workers and farmers instead of protecting the wealth of capitalists.<sup>65</sup> Public ownership of key industries, the nationalization of financial institutions, a greater role for workers in their industry, and the promotion of peace and international cooperation were ways in which government could better serve the people.<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, where the SPC predicted the imminent division of society into two classes, the demise of capitalism, and the coming of a violent revolution, the LSR took a gradualist approach, maintaining that education and participatory democracy of all citizens were the best methods of achieving their aims.<sup>67</sup> Connell embraced these ideas as rational responses to the existing situation and joined the League.

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<sup>63</sup> Some Presbyterians agreed to join but others did not. Merger discussions, which began in the late 1800s, also included the Baptist and Anglican churches neither of which agreed to participate in unification. See E. Lloyd Morrow, *Church Union in Canada: Its History, Motives, Doctrine, and Government* (Toronto: T. Allen, 1923).

<sup>64</sup> Michiel Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada, 1930-1942* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

<sup>65</sup> Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction*, 7. The author states that prior to the 1930s "Canadians were obliged to look after themselves as best they could and to look to the state reluctantly and only as a last resort." This was, he argues, a result of the "pioneer mentality" predominant in urban and rural areas. See The Research Committee of the League for Social Reconstruction in Canada, *Social Planning for Canada* (Toronto: T. Nelson, 1935; reprint, Toronto: University of Toronto, 1975).

<sup>66</sup> "Manifesto of the League for Social Reconstruction." *Social Planning for Canada*, x-xi.

<sup>67</sup> Horn, *League for Social Reconstruction*, 79.

But the national organization's emphasis on education above political participation was not satisfactory to many of its members in British Columbia. Where the national body desired to remain free from political connections, the Victoria and Vancouver branches decided to actively engage in the political process through the establishment of the Reconstruction Party in December 1932 with the aim of offering candidates for the upcoming political election. Connell heartily participated in this venture.<sup>68</sup>

The Reconstruction Party was short-lived largely because the goals of the party and the LSR duplicated those of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, which was born in Calgary in August 1932. The similarity of the LSR and CCF is hardly surprising since two founders of the LSR, Frank Underhill and Frank Scott, helped draft the statement of principles for the CCF Regina Manifesto. Moreover, J.S. Woodsworth, the honorary president of the LSR, became the national leader of the new political party.<sup>69</sup> Voters now had the opportunity to support a party that advocated the same ideas as the LSR, predominantly the importance of economic planning as the key to building the "cooperative commonwealth." The BC Reconstruction Party agreed, and joined the Associated CCF Clubs of BC.

In the midst of his participation in the newly created, democratic socialist organization, Connell found a more pressing and immediate factor guiding his

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<sup>68</sup> This should not be confused with the Reconstruction Party created by the minister for Trade and Commerce in the R.B. Bennett government, H.H. Stevens, after his removal from the Conservative party in 1935.

<sup>69</sup> The most comprehensive overview of the party remains Walter Young's *Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF, 1932-1961* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), and is essential reading to understand why members distinguished the federation as a movement instead of a party. Other LSR members who joined the CCF were Frank Scott, Eugene Forsey, Graham Spry, and King Gordon.



ideology - his personal income. Left-wing critics in the CCF attributed his moderate ideology to the privileges derived from his ministerial work, arguing that workers, unlike Connell and other ministers, could not wait for panaceas. However, ministerial work was only financially rewarding so long as the church had money, and the churches Connell worked at were not blessed with vast donations. While his work brought him into contact with a wide range of social classes, neither his church salary nor his pension allowed him to have a life freed from paid employment after his retirement.<sup>70</sup> Aside from his weekly newspaper column, only short periods of employment working as a science teacher – he was known as a competent, if self-trained botanist and geologist – or occasional art teacher for various Victoria schools, including St. Michael's School and Victoria High School, kept him financially afloat.<sup>71</sup> His impoverished financial status even affected his decision to agree to stand as a CCF candidate in the provincial election of 1933. He only revealed his pecuniary problem just a few months before the November election day in a letter to a Mr. A.B. Sanders, one of the petitioners for his candidacy. Connell bluntly stated:

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<sup>70</sup> W.P. Sweatman, "Our Underpaid Clergy," (speech to Diocese of Rupert's Land Synod, June 1906) CIHM microfiche no. 87577. This document, though written by the treasurer for the diocese of Rupert's Land 17 years before Connell's retirement, is useful for its description of the fiscal limitations experienced by Anglican clergy in Western Canada. It observes that the Church's expectation for the clergy to pay for their own moving costs when asked to locate to a new area was a tremendous expense to endure. In addition, the author articulates a desire for the financial status of the clergy to be high enough to establish themselves as genteel members of society. For example, he wished they could have enough money to allow their children to go to the best schools in the community.

<sup>71</sup> Unfortunately, no information could be obtained regarding his remuneration for this work.

The difficulty is simply this: that at the present time my financial position is such that I cannot assume any expenses outside my domestic ones, dependent as I am wholly on my work as writer. It would therefore be necessary if I were accepted that the [Victoria CCF] Council take sole responsibility for any expenses incurred on my behalf; I should certainly incur none myself.<sup>72</sup>

Clearly he was not a man living a comfortable retirement. Yet the historiography of the CCF presents him as bourgeois and reduces his ideology to his class position.<sup>73</sup> Although he cannot be seen as working class due to his work as a minister and educator, he was not bourgeois as he did not own capital. At best, he could be classified as petit-bourgeois.

Ironically, this was a class position he shared with his most ardent critics, Ernest and Harold Winch. Modelling themselves as depression-era, working-class, socialist role models, the Winches would later speak proudly about being on relief at the time they won elected office in 1933. This is ironic given that Ernest's most consistent paid employment was as a worker-intellectual, that is as a paid organizer for the SPC and as secretary of the Lumber Workers Industrial Union.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, he had attempted to make his fortune in the real estate market. Harold was a well-paid electrician, earning \$1 per hour in 1929, a very respectable wage that placed him in the higher echelon of workers.<sup>75</sup> At the time of his election, he was precariously employed as the editor of the SPC's *BC Clarion*. If Harold and Ernest were members of the working class, they were

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<sup>72</sup> Rev. Robert Connell to A.B. Sanders, 12 August 1933, Robert Connell Papers, Simon Fraser University Library Special Collections and Rare Books.

<sup>73</sup> Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel*, 91.

<sup>74</sup> Hak, "British Columbia Loggers and the Lumber Workers Industrial Union," 74.

<sup>75</sup> Harold Winch, interview by Peter Stursberg, 4 January 1980, Peter Stursberg fonds, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa.

privileged ones with at least one foot in the petit-bourgeois.<sup>76</sup> Once elected to the BC legislature, they were removed from any ties to the working class they may have once had as their new occupation, which lasted until their retirements, was firmly outside proletarian labour.<sup>77</sup> Yet their circumstances in 1933 have been used to construct an image of the CCF as the voice for the working class of society. In this view, a minister, assumed to be in a privileged position, fails to fit into that paradigm.

But the CCF was more than a working class party. As the name made clear, the CCF was a federation unifying diverse groups such as farmers, labourers, socialists and church ministers, with broadly similar goals. Essentially, it was a political form of ecumenism. Therefore, the national CCF declined to create a strong centralized organization where the central office dictated policy to the provincial branches. The provincial branches controlled their own affairs even to the point of determining which parts of the national body's agenda would be adopted in their province. For example, Saskatchewan had a large agrarian population so the party there targeted farmers.

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<sup>76</sup> For further reading into the division of workers from working class representatives, please see Mark Leier, "Workers and Intellectuals: The Theory of the New Class and Early Canadian Socialism," *Making Western Canada: Essays on European Colonization and Settlement*, eds. Catherine Cavanaugh and Jeremy Mouat (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996), 133-153.

<sup>77</sup> Ernest Winch died while still a sitting member of the BC Legislature in 1957. Harold Winch retired from federal politics due to medical reasons in 1972. See Elections BC, "Electoral History of British Columbia 1871-1986 Elected Candidates," [http://elections.bc.ca/elections/electoral\\_history/part1-22.html](http://elections.bc.ca/elections/electoral_history/part1-22.html).

BC had both farmers and reform-minded church ministers but dominated by the SPC, the provincial CCF aimed its message largely at the working class.<sup>78</sup> At the time of the Western Labour Conference, the precursor to the Regina conference, when talk of organizing a national movement was underway, the only representatives from BC came from the SPC. Therefore it was the group designated to organize the CCF in the province. In keeping with its longstanding position, the main focus of the BC CCF's efforts was on the working class. This, however, created problems. In the early days of organizing the party, the SPC required potential members to pass a test on Marxist theory. As Walter Young notes, the SPC was known for its pedantic debates on finer points of Marxism.<sup>79</sup> But for those who were interested in the gradual, reformist message of the national CCF, potential membership in the SPC as a first step in becoming a member of the CCF was not appealing. Therefore they created the Associated CCF Clubs of British Columbia. This tension between Marxists and reformers would only be superficially resolved with the merger of the SPC to the Associated CCF Clubs in 1935.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> A brief example of this comes from a profile on Vancouver Centre candidate, W.W. Lefeaux, in *The Commonwealth*. The piece does record that Lefeaux was a lawyer, hence not a member of the working class, but strongly emphasizes "...his strict adherence to working class economics." See *The Commonwealth*, "Wallis W. Lefeaux," 25 October 1933.

<sup>79</sup> Young, "Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia," 557.

<sup>80</sup> This division between reformists and radicals within the party would again come to the fore in the 1950s when ardent socialists, dismayed by the success of reformists in gaining influence in the provincial and national parties, formed the Socialist Fellowship as an internal group within the party. Notable members included D.G. Steeves and former MPs Grant McNeil and Rodney Young; the latter was expelled from the party in the early 1950s because of his defiant support of socialism and had nearly been expelled from the party in the 1930s for his support of the "popular front" movement advocated by communists. When Harold Winch resigned as leader in 1953, moderate Arnold Webster was chosen as his successor. See Elaine Bernard, "The Rod Young Affair in the British Columbia Cooperative Commonwealth Federation," (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1979).

Connell became a member of the BC CCF through the reformist Reconstruction Party's affiliation with the Associated CCF Clubs and assumed the provincial party would follow the gradualist policies set out in the Regina Manifesto. These included a call for a planned economy to efficiently develop natural resources and equitably distribute the national income. All forms of finance from banks to insurance and credit would be "socialized," meaning that they would be controlled with the interest of the people, not profit, as the prime consideration. Other policies called for social ownership of communications, transportation, and electricity, economic protection for agricultural producers, encouraging the creation of cooperatives for consumers and producers, universal health care, stronger rights for workers entrenched in a new labour code, and the guaranteeing of freedom of speech.<sup>81</sup> None of these measures required or called for revolution or Marxism, and Connell could easily support them.

While control of the BC CCF was weighted in favour of the former SPC faction, Connell's career as a minister offered the provincial party a gloss of respectability that appealed to other constituencies beyond the working class. This proved valuable when the media demonized the CCF as a communist front. In most of Connell's public speaking engagements leading up to the election of 1933 he explained the connection between socialism and religion.<sup>82</sup> Utilizing arguments from the social gospel, he argued that modern Christians should set aside their individualist pursuits to focus on aiding the unfortunate. Salvation was

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<sup>81</sup> An online version of the original Regina Manifesto is available. See Saskatchewan New Democratic Party, "The Regina Manifesto," <http://www.saskndp.com/documents/manifest.pdf>.

<sup>82</sup> *Times*, "CCF is Urged as Christian Move," 5 October 1933. In this article Connell draws an analogy between the actions of Christ and those of the CCF.

to be found by helping everyone, not just helping oneself. In addressing the changes the CCF wished to make, he noted publicly that Jesus, in His day, was charged with blasphemy. "And the people who sat in high places in those days," Connell wrote, "who are the same as the capitalists to-day, said He was a blasphemer, in just the way that the [*Victoria Daily Colonist*] talks of the CCF."<sup>83</sup> According to Connell, the Regina Manifesto suggested how to build a Christian community with its emphasis on brotherhood.<sup>84</sup>

The appeal of Connell's moderate politics and demeanour was soon made clear in the 1933 election when Connell was the only CCF candidate elected as MLA for the multi-member riding of Victoria – well outpolling any of the SPC-backed CCF candidates – and one of just seven CCF MLAs sent to Victoria by an electorate that gave the Liberal party an overwhelming majority.<sup>85</sup> The success of the vaguely reformist Liberal party, under Duff Pattullo, indicated that the electorate was tired of the lack of response to the Depression by the Conservatives but was not ready to take the dramatic action the radical members of the CCF advocated.<sup>86</sup> Due to the collapse of the Conservative party through insider fighting and lack of support from the electorate, the CCF had enough

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<sup>83</sup> *Times*, "CCF is Urged."

<sup>84</sup> Unfortunately for the likes of Connell and other Christian socialists, just as their message seemed to be hitting a receptive audience, the Oxford Group arrived in Canada with an appealing Christian individualist message. Popular with the well-heeled, its "house parties" were often held in luxurious settings by people who implied that their success in life had come from living a "pure" existence. Even hardworking minister of the poor, Rev. Andrew Roddan, was won over by this group. See Sam Roddan, *Batter My Heart* (Vancouver: United Church Conference of Canada, 1975), 83; Todd McCallum, introduction to *Vancouver's Hoboes*, by Andrew Roddan (originally titled *God in the Jungles*, Vancouver? [1931?]; reprint, Vancouver: Subway Books, 2005).

<sup>85</sup> Connell received 5607 votes. The closest SPC-backed candidate, Thomas Guy Sheppard, received 4111. The Liberals won 34/47 seats. See Elections BC, "Electoral History of British Columbia 1871-1986: 18<sup>th</sup> General Election 1933," [http://www.elections.bc.ca/elections/electoral\\_history/18ge1933-3.html](http://www.elections.bc.ca/elections/electoral_history/18ge1933-3.html).

<sup>86</sup> Robin Fisher, *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

MLAs to become the Official Opposition.<sup>87</sup> In late November 1933, in a move not anticipated by Connell, who one newspaper reported laughed at the very idea, all of the CCF MLAs, except Ernest Winch, who voted for himself, agreed that Connell would be their House Leader and so Leader of the Official Opposition.<sup>88</sup> His public profile as someone who had “long been known as an advocate of the cause of the masses,” was an obvious factor in the decision to name him leader.<sup>89</sup> Another consideration was that other more radical candidates such as Lyle Telford, Wallis Lefeaux, and William Pritchard had failed in their attempt to win a seat in the provincial election.

While Connell reasonably presumed that his selection as leader meant his Christian social reformist position had been sanctioned by the party, the SPC members instead envisioned his role as leader to be one confined to the boundaries of the Legislature. Furthermore the BC CCF insisted that the House Leader should act according to the wishes of the membership, rather than those of the caucus or his own conscience. This hampered Connell’s ability to present his moderate ideas as those of the party. When the radicals’ pushed to socialize the finance and credit industries in BC Connell feared that the left-wing and the Communist Party were trying to take control of the CCF. This was not an

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<sup>87</sup> Infighting within the Conservative party prior to the 1933 election saw candidates running under different party names ranging from simply listed as independents, to Independent Conservatives, Non-Partisan Independent Group, or the Unionist Party of British Columbia. See Elections BC, “Electoral History of British Columbia: 18<sup>th</sup> Session 1933.”

<sup>88</sup> *Colonist*, “Will Select House Leader,” 30 November 1933.

<sup>89</sup> *Times*, “Connell as CCF Leader,” 29 November 1933. This article also comments that, as a minister, Connell was known “...as a forceful preacher of eloquent sermons quietly but effectively delivered.” Another article, regarding the debate on the Pattullo government’s health insurance bill, quotes Connell as saying that in the 1920s he worked with representatives from the Trades and Labour Council in appealing to the Oliver government about enacting similar legislation. This demonstrates he did have some contact with labour. See *Colonist*, “CCF Opposition Endorses Weir Bill in BC Legislature,” 25 March 1936.

unreasonable fear. The Ontario CCF had dreaded such an infiltration and reorganized itself in 1934 to remove its Communist members. Ernest Winch was also known to speak positively about communism. For example, at the Regina conference in 1933, he moved an amendment that would have struck out a clause in the Manifesto that explicitly stated the movement's unwillingness to support violence to enact change.<sup>90</sup> In addition, CCF party stalwart and later the influential chair of the BC CCF's speakers' committee in 1936, A.M. Stephen, was an active participant in the Communist-led League Against War and Fascism. Furthermore, Nigel Morgan, a member of the Victoria CCF in the 1930s, became an open member of the Labor Progressive Party by 1945, and his trajectory obvious before then.<sup>91</sup>

Connell's moderate reformism was based on his belief that polarizing workers from capitalists was not helpful. Maintaining his argument from the 1920s, Connell held in 1933 that communism could not work in Canada because the conditions were different from Russia and that the populace was more educated.<sup>92</sup> However, he was not an unprincipled or dogmatic anti-communist, as a strong supporter of personal liberty he stoutly disagreed with Section 98 of the Criminal Code, a clause which made the Communist Party illegal in Canada due

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<sup>90</sup> See Gerald L. Caplan, *The Dilemma of Canadian Socialism* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 1973), 37-38.

<sup>91</sup> Having been banned by the War Measures Act in 1940, the Communist Party re-emerged in 1943 in the guise of the Labor Progressive Party, a name that it held until 1959. The national leader was Tim Buck. Nigel Morgan was the head of the provincial branch of the party. See University of British Columbia Library, "Ubysey, October 25, 1945," [http://www.library.ubc.ca/archives/pdfs/ubyssey/UBYSSEY\\_1945\\_10\\_25.pdf](http://www.library.ubc.ca/archives/pdfs/ubyssey/UBYSSEY_1945_10_25.pdf).

<sup>92</sup> Times, "Says Bloodshed Not Necessary," 3 October 1933. Connell's sentiment here echoed the rationalization made by Rev. Salem Bland in Toronto. By the 1930s, Connell changed from supporting guild socialism to that of Fabian socialism. Frank Underhill, architect of the Regina Manifesto, stated that in writing this document he had borrowed heavily from the Fabians. See G.W. Brown, ed., *Canadian Democracy in Action* (Toronto: Dent, 1953), 375.



to its advocacy of violence to overthrow capitalism and justified police arrests of communists or anyone possessing Communist literature.<sup>93</sup> He opposed the imprisonment of Tim Buck and seven other Communists and the RCMP raids on the homes of key interior CCF members looking for “subversive literature.” Furthermore, while Connell feared left CCF dominance and Communist infiltration in the BC CCF and of their support of revolution, he did not reject Marx’s ideas altogether. His Christian socialism allowed him to see the inherent humanistic concern in Marx’s writing as compatible with “Christian ideals” though devoid of religious language.<sup>94</sup>

The left CCF members instead found Marx’s writing held a practical solution to the problems in modern society that made no use of the church or reformism. They were prepared to defend their “scientific socialism” from a reformist like Connell in the province where they believed they were most influential. To preserve and advance this form of socialism, the SPC members were open to working with other groups such as the CPC-dominated League Against War and Fascism that shared their perspective. Connell was willing to work with those of different interests, but for him this included members of the Liberal and Conservative parties and excluded the Communists. This position horrified the SPC members of the CCF who fervently believed that the traditional parties worked hand in hand with the capitalists and blamed them for generating

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<sup>93</sup> These raids were rumoured to have been conducted under the direction of then Attorney General, Gordon Sloan. See *Times*, “Solid Support is Given Government,” 28 February 1936.

<sup>94</sup> For reference to Connell’s support of John Ruskin, see *Times*, “Lack Policy for Province,” 21 November 1933.

the economic devastation of the depression. Like the Winches and other left CCFers, the Communists agitated for profound economic change.

But Connell's willingness to work with Liberals and Conservatives should not have come as a shock to members of his party. Connell's position contrasted greatly from that of the most influential Christian socialist in the party, J.S. Woodsworth. Woodsworth's dislike for the Conservatives and Liberals was so strong that he once remarked "although we do not see eye to eye with them I would rather see one more Communist elected to the House of Commons than another Liberal or Conservative."<sup>95</sup> Connell's reformism and rejection of class warfare stemmed from an ecumenical outlook in the ability of humanity to work cooperatively in resolving the social and economic disparities generated by capitalism. In the beginning of his leadership, Connell insisted that the CCF would not be a hindrance to the governing of the province. For him, this meant offering both criticism and support where needed. An example of the former is the creation of the Special Powers Act in 1934 -- an act that gave the Liberal government the power to decree law and to borrow on the credit of the province in between sessions of the legislature-- and the decision to construct what became known as the Pattullo Bridge in 1936.<sup>96</sup> He refrained from engaging in protracted debates on socialist theory in the Legislature merely to score points with leftist supporters. Nor did he advocate disrupting parliament or engaging in divisive extra-parliamentary tactics. As a result, he was soon challenged by the left in the CCF. In 1934, ardent socialist and defeated SPC-backed CCF

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<sup>95</sup> *Sun*, "National Convention Opens at Toronto," 3 August 1936.

<sup>96</sup> *Colonist*, "Test Vote on Dictatorship Bill Supports Government," 21 March 1934.

candidate in Victoria, T. Guy Sheppard, attacked Connell's refusal to call for a province-wide general strike when the Liberals put forth the Special Powers Act. Where the Pattullo government rationalized that this Act was necessary in case a situation arose in between house sittings where money needed to be spent, opponents argued that the legislation transformed the governing of the province from a democracy into a dictatorship.<sup>97</sup> Sheppard argued that in not calling for the general strike, Connell was ignoring the desires of his constituents, contrary to CCF policy.<sup>98</sup> What Sheppard wanted Connell to do was to follow the direction of the left CCFers in the riding and no other group. But he was mistaken in assuming that Connell acted alone in not calling for a general strike. All of the CCF MLAs had agreed not to support the call until they could read the proposed legislation.<sup>99</sup> But before they could do this, a massive public protest had been organized and there Sheppard levelled his criticism against Connell.

Connell weathered this storm and continued to balance the CCF's criticism with support for government bills that he felt were reasonable or useful. For example, aside from some small debate on certain clauses, the CCF voted for the passing of the Health Insurance Bill, which provided health insurance coverage to many provincial residents.<sup>100</sup> Connell recognized that the Liberals held power and that the CCF did not. He believed that confrontation by the CCF

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<sup>97</sup> Pattullo "...asked the Legislature to trust the good intent and the capability of the Ministry to deal with such increased powers only in the public interest." See *Colonist*, "Test Vote on Dictatorship."

<sup>98</sup> *Colonist*, "Repudiation of CCF Leadership Widens Split Within Party," 22 March 1934.

<sup>99</sup> Even Connell's secretary, Victor Midgely, supported the call for a general strike. But after the legislation was tabled, no general strike occurred. See *Colonist*, "Repudiation of CCF Leadership."

<sup>100</sup> CCF MLAs were quick to point out that they had only supported it only as a starting point. See *Province*, "'Good Start' Says CCF," 25 March 1936.

MLAs against the actions of the Pattullo government would neither bring reforms nor establish the reputation of the CCF as a party offering a constructive alternative to the Liberals “work and wages” program; it would instead alienate those moderate voters who Connell believed made up the majority of the population.

Instead Connell preferred to act positively. One way to do that was to clarify what the CCF planned to do if it formed a government. From their initial election as the Opposition in 1933 until the spring session of 1936, neither the MLAs nor the CCF executive offered the public a concrete plan for governing. In early 1936, tired of criticism from the Liberals over this lack of a platform, Connell, instead of responding to the new Liberal budget, chose to articulate the aims of a CCF provincial government.<sup>101</sup> Twenty-three items, ranging from a promise for honest and open government to the establishment of a public utilities commission to regulate the production of utilities such as energy and water, encouraging the establishment of cooperatives, increasing tax paid by higher income earners and decreasing it for those with low incomes, health benefits for entire BC population, and extension of educational benefits were outlined in his platform.<sup>102</sup> He succeeded in moving the party away from simply criticizing the actions of the Liberal government to forcing the CCF and the electorate to think about what it would offer the people of the province. But, this action along with his criticism of Ernest Winch for speaking positively on the merits of communism in an earlier speech, opened him up to even more antagonism from SPC

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<sup>101</sup> *Times*, “Leader of CCF Lays Out Plans,” 14 March 1936.

<sup>102</sup> *Times*, “Leader Lays Out Plans.”

members who then accused him of dictating his agenda to the rest of the party.

Open criticism of him had begun the year before when Connell came under attack in the April 1935 edition of the SPC newspaper, *BC Clarion*, which wrote:

The apostles of this wing [the non-Marxists in the CCF] announce loudly that the Marxists are dominated by their sense of inferiority. One new St. Mark [Connell], over in Victoria, who says that we should both preach and practice *brotherhood*, illustrated practical brotherhood in a curious way. "Show me a man who believes in class struggle," shouted this new guide to Jerusalem, "and I'll show you a man who can't manage his own affairs."<sup>103</sup>

Connell's subsequent speech in the legislature intensified the criticism even more and the 1936 provincial convention in Vancouver, held from Friday 3 July until Monday 6 July, gave the disgruntled radicals the opportunity to strike back.<sup>104</sup> Having nearly three years of experience in Opposition, and thereby demonstrating to the electorate that the party would not be short-lived, the radical members of the CCF believed they no longer needed the cover of respectability and conciliatory reformism that Connell provided. Dominating the party executive and convention resolutions committees, they blocked his efforts to have his recently announced platform voted on at convention due to his lack of presence on the resolutions committee either through his personal participation or through that of supporters. If he had had some level of influence within this committee, then his agenda might have been put forward to convention.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, some of his supporters at convention got into trouble for anonymously circulating a list of suggested candidates for the party executive. Although this is a common practice in modern political conventions, including the New Democratic Party, the

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<sup>103</sup> See *Clarion*, "Two Conceptions," April 1935.

<sup>104</sup> *Province*, "Telford Named New Provincial Leader of CCF," 6 July 1936.

<sup>105</sup> Two of Telford's supporters were on the committee - A.M. Stephen, a known supporter of the Popular Front, and Matthew Glenday. *Times*, "Reply for Mr. Connell," 5 August 1936.

successor of the CCF, this shocked the radicals at the convention as an inappropriate act. They believed that all were equal in running for office and that having such a list gave those mentioned in it a better chance of obtaining office than a general member nominated straight from the floor of convention. They observed that such an action happened at Liberal and Conservative conventions but was inappropriate at a CCF convention since the party was more democratic than the other two parties.<sup>106</sup> This action originating from Jack Price and Victor Midgley, two of Connell's key supporters, conveyed a degree of desperation in trying to have their supporters and platform put before delegates. Where the radicals within the party had greater name recognition, moderates were less well known. The outrage sparked by this list resulted in no moderate being voted onto the executive. However, as move clearly aimed at disciplining Connell, the convention gave the party executive the power to discipline MPs and MLAs.<sup>107</sup> The one positive moment for the reformists came when the radicals attempted to remove Connell as leader or, at least, censure him by calling for a non-confidence vote not once, but twice. Demonstrating his personal popularity, Connell succeeded in each vote by a margin of 138-76.<sup>108</sup> Nonetheless, the left-wing successfully dominated the rest of convention, even having their favoured candidate, Dr. Lyle Telford, chosen as party president.

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<sup>106</sup> A.M. Stephen, J. Round, and Herbert Gargrave were appointed to investigate the originators of the sheets. Both Stephen and Gargrave were supporters of the radicals. MLA Jack Price, secretary to the House Leader, Victor Midgley, and a moderate former member of the SPC, Robert Skinner, were blamed. Convention chairman, W.W. Lefeaux, did not seek discipline of the involved members. *Province*, "Telford New Provincial Leader of CCF," 6 July 1936.

<sup>107</sup> *Province*, "Telford New Leader."

<sup>108</sup> There were 138 votes in favour of Connell and 76 opposed. However, the convention also decided that in the future the leader would be chosen by convention or temporarily appointed by the provincial executive until convention could be held. See *Colonist*, "CCF House Leader To Be Chosen Each Annual Convention," 5 July 1936; *Province*, "Telford New Leader," 6 July 1936.

In his address to convention, Telford positioned himself as a supporter of the radicals by pointing to the party's new socialized finance plank. The plank proposed that a CCF government in BC would "issue currency against the wealth of the province" to create a greater economic balance amongst people.<sup>109</sup> Telford argued that the plank fit within the goals of the CCF as the Regina Manifesto articulated "socializing" finance. Essentially, this plank promised to have government assume control of the means of production and then distribute wealth in the form of provincial receipts for products.<sup>110</sup> The executive rationalized that producers continued producing regardless of economic highs and lows and therefore should be paid for their efforts. But the plank ignored the separation of power between the federal and provincial government, as set out by the British North America Act. Critics, including Connell, believed that its advocates were cynically using it to try and replicate the electoral success of the Social Credit Party in Alberta and maintained that it was a false promise to dangle before a desperate electorate. Others decried this idea of giving "credit" claiming that it would lead to inflation.<sup>111</sup> Telford, however, responded to the criticism by painting Connell and long-time socialist Angus MacInnis, as "saboteurs."<sup>112</sup>

Harold Winch continued the assault on party moderates at the convention. In response to a comment from Armstrong CCF member Ron Wood, who had

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<sup>109</sup> *Province*, "Telford New Leader."

<sup>110</sup> *Colonist*, "Rev. R. Connell Repudiated by CCF Clubs of Island," 4 August 1936.

<sup>111</sup> *Province*, "Explains Position," 5 August 1936.

<sup>112</sup> *Sun*, "Telford Acclaimed President of the CCF," 6 July 1936; *Colonist*, "CCF House Leader to Be Chosen Each Annual Convention," 5 July 1936. CCF MPs Angus MacInnis and Grant McNeil publicly disagreed with this move and had their objections recorded.

stated that the call for socialized farming was not politically practical at this time, Winch submitted a stinging rebuke claiming "...that the ultimate goal of the CCF was complete socialization of the land."<sup>113</sup> This minor episode from convention serves as further evidence of the different agendas that the radicals and reformers had. The new agenda for the party reflected a less moderate stance through its proposed takeover of the moderates' newspaper, *The Commonwealth*, and the introduction of a new labour code mandating that physically fit people had to register and be categorized in order to work.

At the end of July 1936, just three weeks after the convention had ended, Connell revoked his support for the new BC CCF agenda, but did not renounce his membership, in a statement directed to the CCF executive but released to the media. He outlined five issues that divided him from the party. These included his refusal to endorse the radical platform adopted at convention, the party's apparent desire to move beyond the boundaries of reformism established in the Regina Manifesto, the lack of support for MPs and MLAs from the party membership, the direct criticism from some over his unabashed belief in God and outspoken loyalty to the King, and his opposition to affiliation with Communists.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, Connell stated that the socialized finance plank was "fantastic and impracticable."<sup>115</sup> He disliked Ernest Winch being named chair of the organizing committee, a position of influence and power that let him select representatives to run clubs at a local level as well as influencing the tone of CCF

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<sup>113</sup> *Colonist*, "CCF House Leader to be Chosen."

<sup>114</sup> *Commonwealth*, "Open Letter from Robert Connell to CCF Executive," 31 July 1936; *Times*, "Connell Breaks With CCF Group," 30 July 1936.

<sup>115</sup> *Times*, "Connell Breaks."



propaganda, citing Winch's "pro-Communist" attitude as wrong. The move to be heard through the mainstream media stemmed from Connell's inability at convention to have his voice heard despite the level of approval he had been given there.

The BC CCF executive was embarrassed by this public airing of internal division. Their response to Connell's broadside is yet another example of how the radicals and reformers interpreted the Regina Manifesto from their own vantage points. The left leaning executive ignored Connell's comments about communists making gains in the CCF and utterly disregarded his comment about being called a "traitor" by radical party members because of his loyalty to the King and continued belief in God. Instead, they made the socialized finance plank their key riposte, accusing Connell of not having read the Regina Manifesto, which stated that socialized finance was a goal of the CCF should it form a government.<sup>116</sup> Connell responded that he did not have a problem with socialized finance at the national level as written in the Manifesto. The national party understood the delineation of federal/provincial powers as established in the BNA Act.<sup>117</sup> Calling for the socialization of finance at a provincial level would, in Connell's opinion, require constitutional reform and would isolate British Columbia from the rest of Canada. A public relations battle, which lasted into early September, began with each side trying to position themselves as having the best knowledge of the

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<sup>116</sup> Socialized finance is the second policy listed in the Regina Manifesto. If read in total, it becomes quite clear that the contributors to this document believed the workings of the economy, particularly finance and credit, should fall within the realm of a national, not provincial, government.

<sup>117</sup> A series of letters between Connell and the BC CCF executive covered the pages of the four main daily newspapers during the summer of 1936. See *Times*, "Reply for Mr. Connell," 5 August 1936. Connell was correct that the Regina Manifesto envisioned socialized finance as a national policy.

goals of the movement and with each claiming that it knew the hearts and minds of the electorate. For instance, in responding to Connell's charge about the impracticality of the party's platform, the radicals asserted that:

the platform is sound. It enunotates [sic] the principle that the first consideration must be the production of commodities and that when that has been done, it will be necessary to issue some form of government receipt to facilitate the exchange of those commodities within the province.<sup>118</sup>

Later comments from the CCF executive claimed that the 1936 provincial socialization of finance plank was both the same as the 1933 BC CCF finance plank and that it was also intended to parallel that of the Regina Manifesto.<sup>119</sup> In his response to this, Connell compared both planks, noting how the earlier version solely addressed the creation of provincial credit whereas the latter one called for a BC CCF government to socialize all of the financial machinery within the province.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, he stressed that the 1933 plank worked in accord with the Regina Manifesto "...and is a perfectly feasible [sic] and necessary proposal, for only Canada as a whole can abolish the existing system and set up the socialized system of finance necessary for the proper functioning of a fully socialized system of national planning of production and distribution."<sup>121</sup>

Rumours abounded that Connell planned on starting his own political party. However, he withheld a move to create his own organization until the CCF federal executive made it clear that it upheld the BC executive's decision to expel

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<sup>118</sup> *Colonist*, "CCF Executive Gives Answer to Leader's Protest," 1 August 1936.

<sup>119</sup> *Times*, "New Reply to Connell," 15 August 1936.

<sup>120</sup> *Province*, "Connell Still Thinks Platform is Fantastic," 21 August 1936.

<sup>121</sup> *Sun*, "Connell Hits Back at Executive," 21 August 1936.

Connell from the party.<sup>122</sup> Membership in the provincial party meant one automatically became a federal member and therefore expulsion from one usually meant expulsion from the other.<sup>123</sup> However, given how communication between British Columbia and Ontario travelled at a much slower pace than today, there would have been a delay of at least a few weeks before the BC executive would have received confirmation that the national executive upheld their decision to expel Connell. The national executive may have chosen not to interfere in the affairs of this provincial organization because of the problems it encountered when it reorganized the provincial party in Ontario in 1934.<sup>124</sup> Concerned about the growing involvement of communists in the Ontario CCF, the national body dismantled the provincial party and reorganized it to be more acceptable to the national executive. But such direct involvement from the national party sparked controversy from members who accused the executive of paying lip service to the idea of the provincial organizations being self-governing.

Faced with this lack of support from the national CCF, Connell and his associates formed a new organization known as the Social Constructives. The

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<sup>122</sup> The newspapers reported that the BC executive voted for his expulsion at an executive meeting held on Saturday, August 8. However, Bert Gargrave, a spokesperson for the executive claimed that the executive had not made the decision to expel Connell that weekend as they were one person short of quorum. The formal announcement of the expulsion of Connell and his supporters, R.B. Swailes and Jack Price, was published in the papers on August 13. Bruce Hutchinson observed that on the weekend when the provincial executive was allegedly deciding his fate, Connell had gone on a botany field trip suggesting his utter lack of concern or interest in their decision. See *Sun*, "Connell Expelled by CCF," 8 August 1936; *Province*, "Connell Plans Parley in City Next Tuesday," 10 August 1936; *Colonist*, "CCF Plank is Ridiculed," 13 August 1936; Bruce Hutchinson, "Politicians Watch Mr. Connell as he Goes A-botanizing," *Province*, 8 August 1936.

<sup>123</sup> *Province*, "Connell Won't Fight Burrard," 14 August 1936; *Sun*, "CCF Disavows Connell," 1 August 1936; AB Sanders, letter to editor, *Province*, 5 August 1936; *Times*, "New Reply to Connell," 15 August 1936; *Sun*, "Connell Still Thinks Platform is Fantastic," 21 August 1936; *Province*, "CCF Issues Letter Airing Breach," 26 August 1936; *Province*, "Connell Concludes CCF Controversy," 31 August 1936.

<sup>124</sup> Caplan, *The Dilemma of Canadian Socialism*, 61-62.

late summer and early fall had political observers abuzz with speculation as the split raised the question of who would form the Official Opposition. This was the first time in both provincial and national history when such a question needed to be asked.<sup>125</sup> The crucial questions were how many of the original seven CCF MLAs would remain with Connell and whether the six independent MLAs, all former members of the Conservative party, would put their differences aside to regroup under the Conservative banner and become the Official Opposition. Supposition ended when three former CCF MLAs, R.B. Swailes, Ernest Bakewell, and Jack Price, announced they would remain loyal to Connell thereby giving him a one person advantage over the remaining three CCF MLAs- Ernest Winch, Harold Winch, and Dorothy Steeves – barely allowing Connell to hold on to the title of Leader of the Official Opposition.

Now free from the internal threats and pressures under which he laboured in the CCF, Connell gradually began to build his moderate left of centre political organization. The CCF and Social Constructives often supported each other on motions in the Legislature. In addition, Connell received strong support from former Conservative turned Independent Rolf Bruhn, an MLA representing Salmon Arm, and the two of them embarked on a speaking tour of the interior in the spring of 1937. Bruhn was not the only non-CCF politician to speak favourably of Robert Connell. Other independent MLAs and even some Liberals applauded Connell's efforts to transform politics by advocating honesty in

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<sup>125</sup> *Times*, "CCF Split Opens Leadership Problem," 3 August 1936. For information on past federal elections, see Statistics Canada, "Members Elected in Federal Elections, by party and province, from 1867 to 1974," [http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/11-516-XIE/sectiony/Y199\\_210.csv](http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/11-516-XIE/sectiony/Y199_210.csv).

government, greater openness in financial and economic matters, and the removal of highway construction and the civil service from direct political influence.<sup>126</sup> Even today such goals are considered laudable if not actually possible.

Connell's call to develop a non-partisan bureaucracy was one that he had been making since his initial election to the legislature. He deplored the political system that viewed the public purse as a trough for governing MLAs to enrich themselves and their friends. His ecumenism expressed itself in his willingness to work with MLAs from the traditional parties in order to achieve his proposed reforms. He fervently believed that his new movement would be able to remain as an independent party outside of the sway of the traditional parties or the CCF.<sup>127</sup> While unwilling to return to the inaction and incomprehension of the two old parties, Connell was convinced that neither did the electorate want a party as radical as the CCF had become. His group, he boldly proclaimed, would best speak for the desires of the electorate.

Despite his optimism and opportunity, the Social Constructives had to face certain realities of their own. Organizationally, they did not compare with the CCF or the Liberals in strength or numbers. They hoped for much support but could not ensure themselves of this before the next provincial election. Connell had hoped to run Social Constructives in every riding but this soon dwindled to having candidates in just 14 of the 48 ridings. The party's policy on nominations also

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<sup>126</sup> *Province*, "Some CCF Sponsors Rattlesnakes – McGeer," 29 August 1936; *Times*, "Planta Will Back Connell," 10 September 1936; Editorial, "Sincere Always," *Times*, 30 October 1936.

<sup>127</sup> *Colonist*, "BC Constructives Ask Temperance and Honesty in Politics," 30 May 1937; *Times*, "Constructives Will Go on After Polls," 31 May 1937.

created problems. They refused to hold nominating conventions, arguing that these could be controlled by powerful groups within the party. Their alternative was to invite people whom they thought would be suitable candidates to run for the party -- not the most efficient, democratic, or active way of choosing candidates.<sup>128</sup> The lack of candidates led Connell to hold that the Constructives did not need to form government but could act as a political and moral guide to whichever party formed the government, a tactic now used by the federal New Democratic Party, the successor to the CCF. However, his party's inability to field enough candidates meant supporters were asked to vote for a political body with no hope of attaining any serious degree of influence within the Legislature. His dilution of the party's goals, combined with the Liberals new slogan of "socialized capitalism," the growing strength of the newly unified Conservatives, and the persistent anti-capitalist message from the CCF did not heighten the appeal of the BC Constructives as the Depression deepened in 1937. His appeal as a "conservative radical" was lost signifying Connell's inability to distinguish his party from the Liberals.<sup>129</sup>

Given these difficulties it was not surprising that the British Columbia Constructive party failed to elect a single candidate.<sup>130</sup> Former SPC member Harold Winch and radical supporter, Lyle Telford, soundly defeated BC Constructive candidates Bill Pritchard, a former labour leader in Vancouver as well as a popular reeve in Burnaby, and Jack Price, former member of both the

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<sup>128</sup> *Province*, "Nominating Conventions Attacked By Connell," 1 May 1937.

<sup>129</sup> C.M.R. "A Very Conservative Radical," *Province*.

<sup>130</sup> The party changed its name to the BC Constructive party due to the similarities its former name had with the Social Credit party. *Times*, "Connell Party Changes Name," 17 April 1937.

SPC and the Vancouver and New Westminster Trade Council, in Vancouver East. The decision to run Pritchard and Price in that riding was deliberate as the Constructive Party believed the two candidates had much support in the riding. If Pritchard and Price had won in Vancouver East they would have shown up the CCF executive and Ernest Winch in particular.<sup>131</sup> In most ridings, the CCF greatly outpolled the Constructives. The exception was the multi-member riding of Victoria, where Connell topped the nearest CCF candidate by just 4 votes, giving him the most votes of any left-leaning candidate.<sup>132</sup> However, it was not enough to earn him a seat in the Legislature as he placed ninth out of eighteen candidates.<sup>133</sup>

The Liberals were returned for a second term, electing 31 members, three seats less than previously held. The CCF again won 7 seats in the Legislature but the newly reorganized Conservatives had 8, thereby stripping the left of its precious mantle of Official Opposition.<sup>134</sup> Overall, the BC Constructives won only 8086 votes to the CCF's 119,400.<sup>135</sup> Immediately after the election, Constructive party members, including Connell, bravely said that they would carry on and fight for their more tempered brand of reform. But this bravery withered away as the realities of the election sunk in. Connell gathered his belongings at the Legislature and bade his friends and associates there adieu. He told the media that he was through with politics and that he now realized the only way change

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<sup>131</sup> *Sun*, "Price, Pritchard May Run in Vancouver East," 23 April 1937.

<sup>132</sup> Ironically the CCF candidate to earn the most votes in Victoria was Nigel Morgan who later became a leader in the provincial Communist party.

<sup>133</sup> See Elections BC, "Electoral History of British Columbia 1871-1986: 19<sup>th</sup> General Election 1937," [http://elections.bc.ca/elections/electoral\\_history/19ge1937-2.html](http://elections.bc.ca/elections/electoral_history/19ge1937-2.html).

<sup>134</sup> Elections BC, "Electoral History of British Columbia: 19<sup>th</sup> General Election 1937."

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

would occur was in working with the two mainstream parties and not through a third party. This was not intended as a disparaging comment against the CCF so much as it was an observation that the electorate was not yet ready to allow a third party to form a government.<sup>136</sup> But the CCF worked to transform itself into a second party, eventually becoming the perpetual second choice for voters, behind first the Liberal party and then the Social Credit party led by W.A.C. Bennett. This move proved Connell to be accurate in his theory that moderate reformism was the means by which the BC CCF would become a serious political party within the province.

Connell continued to write his column on local geology and flora and fauna for the *Victoria Daily Colonist* until the late 1940s. In late 1937 he informed the Victoria Public Library Board of his intent to resign as chairman, a position he held from before he was leader of the Official Opposition. One year later the Bishop for the Anglican Diocese of British Columbia, Harold Sexton, named Connell to the respected post of Canon-Lecturer at Christ Church Cathedral in Victoria. He was chosen because he was senior priest in the diocese, was thought to be a suitable candidate, and because the position entailed spreading the knowledge of Christianity especially "...the relation of religion to science and contemporary thought."<sup>137</sup> In March of 1940, the Church named Connell Archdeacon of Comox, a more senior position that oversaw the operations of the

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<sup>136</sup> *Province*, "Career in Politics Ended by Connell," 11 June 1937. By the election of 1952, the electorate no longer supported the traditional parties as they had before but were divided between two "third-party" alternatives, the CCF and the Social Credit.

<sup>137</sup> Connell's position did not include parochial responsibilities. See *Colonist*, "Bishop Makes Appointment", 12 August 1939.



church in that area. He also renewed his involvement in the Victoria Ministerial Association. He died in 1957, the same year as his key CCF rival, Ernest Winch.

What can Reverend Connell's adventures in the CCF teach us? On an elementary level, it demonstrates one man's experience in the cutthroat battleground that is BC politics. More importantly, Connell illustrates that, contrary to a popular theme in the history of the CCF, not all Christian reformers of a social gospel persuasion were able to find a suitable outlet for their social concerns within that party. The BC CCF was in fact far less tolerant than the national party and other provincial CCF bodies. The superior organization of the founding SPC ensured its dominant position within the BC CCF during the 1930s but their radicalism and theoretical dogmatism kept the CCF as a third party with the election of 1937 until 1941 when the party's more moderate message returned them to Official Opposition status.

Walter Young and Gordon Wickerson wrote detailed histories of the origins of the BC CCF and yet both lacked a nuanced understanding of who Robert Connell was and how he perceived the problems of the 1930s. By castigating him as nothing more than a political innocent, a minister dreaming idealist dreams, they discredit his religiously based moderate world view. Yet it is important to understand how people in churches other than the very socially active members of the Methodist and Presbyterian churches acted in a political setting at a time when the capitalist system seemed set to collapse. Connell may not have had the direct working class experience that a person like Ernest Winch did but his work as a minister in Canada and the United States, his

comprehensive knowledge, and his ecumenism provided him with a broader perspective than the polarized nature of working class activities.<sup>138</sup> He wished to affect change in a manner that was beneficial to all, by reengaging capitalists with a sense of humanism and by improving the material conditions of the workers.

Also, the story of Reverend Robert Connell's experience within the BC CCF demonstrates that the history of the party is not just about radical Marxists. Despairing of the lack of social consideration and action exhibited by capitalists and the provincial government, Connell entered politics hoping to remind people of their responsibility to take care of each other. Having ministered to some of BC's wealthiest people as well as to some of the poorest, he believed that he could unite both and regenerate society into one where everyone had an equal voice. The Regina Manifesto, for him, articulated the most noble and rational ideals he had seen from a political party. Unfortunately, his religiously-infused political idealism conflicted greatly with the advocates of "scientific socialism" for whom religion no longer had anything to offer. Likely he would have been more at home in the BC CCF of the 1950s than that of the 1930s and certainly would have been a better fit with the CCF MPs elected in 1935.<sup>139</sup>

Connell was more than a clergyman comfortably looking down at the public from the pulpit. He was a left-wing politician who found the abstract discussion of class moot in the face of immediate economic crisis and whose

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<sup>138</sup> For all of the snide comments made by the radicals in the party that Connell did not truly understand the problems of the depression or of the workers due to his status as a minister, it is interesting that similar remarks were not made about Dr. Lyle Telford or W.W. Lefeaux, a lawyer.

<sup>139</sup> Federally, Victoria was known as a Conservative riding.

concern for people derived from his experiences as a Christian minister. This led to a personal struggle in trying to find the best vehicle to put his beliefs into action.<sup>140</sup> His assessment that the cause of the Depression and the resulting problems facing society was moral rather than economic did not match the vision put forth by his more radical comrades in the CCF. Ultimately, he would rediscover that his actions were best suited to the work of the Church of England in Canada.

Connell's observation in 1937 – that the only way to enact reforms was through the two traditional parties – proved to be an apt statement on the mood of the electorate. The CCF was never able to form a government in BC. It came close in 1952 but W.A.C. Bennett convinced the Lieutenant-Governor to recognize the Social Credit party instead of the CCF. Harold Winch resigned the mantle of leadership he had held since 1938 because he had failed to bring electoral victory to the party. He was replaced as leader by long-time moderate, Arnold Webster. It was not until 1972 that the electorate of the province voted in a left-leaning party, the New Democratic Party, formed by the 1960 merger of the CCF with Canada's labour movement. It failed to be re-elected three years later.

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<sup>140</sup> Although much has been written on the political involvements of key Protestant social gospel supporters, it is important to remember that "fundamentalist" Christians, such as Ernest C Manning and William Aberhart, also saw political action as an extension of their faith. See David Marshall, "Premier E.C. Manning, 'Back to the Bible Hour', and Fundamentalism in Canada," in *Religion and Public Life in Canada: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, 237-254.

In light of the events of the 1930s, it is ironic to hear new BC NDP leader Carole James talk in 2006 about building a “new” form of politics, one based more on constructive criticism and mutual cooperation. The adversarial political style so common in the last sixty years, and especially popular with the left-wing in the CCF, seems poised to disappear. Robert Connell would approve.

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