

The Drive for Proportional Representation in British Columbia, 1917-23

by

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Abstract

The drive for proportional representation [PR] was an international event that swept through most of Europe, England, Australasia, and North America in the period between 1900 and 1920. Liberal theorists have typically explained its success or failure either in terms of an inevitable unfolding of democratic progress or the product of a competition between plural groups for scarce democratic resources. Both explanations suffer from a lack of attention to the historical emergence of the reform and an unnecessarily constrained and ahistorical definition of democracy. This thesis argues that PR can only be understood with reference to the historical relationship of democracy to capitalism. The struggle to determine what democracy meant in the period surrounding World War I was judged primarily by what democracy might do. Expanding or limiting democracy's incursion into private economic decision-making represented a class struggle where PR might help or hinder the project depending on the balance of class forces.

From 1917 to 1920 eight municipalities across British Columbia adopted a proportional system of voting for their civic elections. Yet by mid-1923 nearly all had rescinded their adoption of the reform. Explaining the rise and fall of PR in North America has often been a story of earnest reformers, scheming ward bosses, and the time-consuming intricacies of the system itself. In B.C. PR's success was described as the victory of some "hardworking, public spirited citizens," its failure the responsibility of the darker elements of politics and a lack of public education efforts on the part of the reformers themselves. Yet the success of PR in B.C. had everything to do with the larger upheaval occurring in Canadian society during and after World War I. As labour and soldiers became more militant, as new third parties like the farmers captured power in other provinces, and as business split over issues like taxation and how to respond to labour militancy, PR reformers adapted their rhetoric to address the situation.

During the social upheaval of 1919 elements of the business elite and government came to see PR as a way to accommodate "reasonable" labour men by assuring minority representation and marginalizing the militants and their calls for more substantive social change. Yet elements of organized labour supported PR as well, seeing it as an effective strategy in the pursuit of their broader goals while avoiding the extra-legal character of direct action. But cross-class support for PR lasted only so long as the threat of successful militant or electoral action on the part of labour and others could be sustained. PR's election to the status quo in Europe rested on the continuing vitality of organized labour. PR's demise in BC then can be explained in terms of the defeat of all challenges to the established order in the early 1920s.

This work is dedicated to my grandparents, Thomas and Vera Samuelson.

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This thesis grew out of a number of related projects so I have quite a varied group of people to thank for their help. My friend Bill Chadwick first got me interested in PR, and encouraged me to explore it as a political and academic subject. Bob Webster saw it as an important issue for the New Democratic Party and helped me attempt to raise the issue there. Alan Alvare gave tireless editorial advice on my initial submission on PR to the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. Howard Cherniak argued with everything I proposed in our joint projects for electoral reform and proved to be a great guy to work with. Over the years I have also received much encouragement and research help from the British Electoral Reform Society and recently from the American Center for Voting and Democracy as well.

In the research for this thesis I received a great deal of help from academics across North America. William Winter sent me a copy of a paper he prepared on PR in Boulder. Bernard Grofman gave me some excellent suggestions for reading matter I had somehow overlooked. And Kathleen Barber kindly sent me a copy of her book before it was published. Librarians and archivists were also a constant source of illumination. Thanks to the SFU Interlibrary Loans Department, particularly Nancy Blake, for taking a special interest in my topic and keenly pursuing arcane volumes across many continents. Thanks as well to the Vancouver Archives, Special Collections at the University of British Columbia, West Vancouver Museum and Archives, and Mrs. Shawn F. Lamb at the Kootenay Museum for her help with the Nelson Liberal party minutes and the Newton Wolverton biographical information. Others who helped considerably include Rupert Harrison, former city clerk of West Vancouver, who gave generously of his time in filling in the details of the experience of PR in that municipality, and Harold Wolverton who lent me some important biographical material on his grandfather and responded enthusiastically to my calls and notes.

I have benefited from working with a very talented and diverse committee. Tina Loo, Michael Fellman, and Mark Leier all contributed to making this thesis better with their prodding critiques and helpful editorial suggestions. Thanks also to Bob McDonald of the University of British Columbia for agreeing to be the external examiner and for his helpful comments. Of course, all the responsibility for any mistakes or problems herein are entirely my own. Particularly I would like to thank my supervisor, Mark Leier, for encouraging me to do this work in history and for showing an interest in my topic when few others did. I also enjoyed many discussions with other members of the SFU History Department, particularly Professors Andrea Tone and Allen Seager, as well as fellow

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents but I would also like to draw attention to the support I have received from my parents, Tom and Peggy Pilon, as well as my brothers, sisters, and sister-in-law, all of whom have endured many hours of speech-making over the years on this and other causes. Thanks also to my friends Nancy Smith, James Koester, David Pehota, Mihaela Yeung, Graham Peat, Jim Walker, Theresa Kiefer, Peter Schneider, Don Profili, and David Curnick. Finally I must confess that I could not have completed this project without the love and irreverence of my partner, Dann Hoxsey. He has made all the difference in my life and my work.

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Chapter 1: Locating Proportional Representation in Democratic Theory and History

On January 8, 1920 Vancouver's electorate supported a citizen-sponsored plebiscite to establish proportional representation [PR] for the city's elections.¹ Social reformers, community groups, business leaders and organized labour had all played a role in this effort to further democracy. Throughout the campaign its proponents claimed that PR would end corruption, help bring better candidates forward for election, create more effective representation of business and labour, and deliver sound, efficient administration of the people's affairs. On election night Vancouver PR activist Garfield King spoke confidently to newspaper reporters declaring a new era of good government had arrived.² Others were not so sure.

The city's three major newspapers, while careful not to second-guess the wishes of the electorate, nonetheless remained skeptical about the claims made for PR. The *Sun* congratulated the reformers but reminded them they were "not out of the woods yet." Theoretical schemes of electoral perfection had to translate into practical results and on this point, the editor suggested, "the prospects cannot be described as anything but dubious." The *Province* appeared more neutral claiming that the "proportional representation experiment in Vancouver should have a fair trial." Still, it was quick to remind its readers that PR could, and should, be replaced if it were found "cumbersome and inconvenient," or did not serve its intended purpose. Finally the *World* suggested that the poor City Clerk would have to take a course in higher mathematics to handle all the "vulgar fractions" that might accompany a PR count.³

¹ Proportional representation is a generic term that describes any electoral system that translates votes into seats in a proportional manner. Between 1900 and 1925 nearly all democratic countries established proportional voting for elections. Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom have been the exception using a non-proportional electoral system known as first-past-the-post or the district-plurality system. Reformers have complained that this system creates unfair outcomes as it distorts the results of the largest parties upward, allowing them to dominate the political arena while making the possibility of minority representation extremely difficult if not impossible. Some reformers have sought to replace it with the transferable ballot (also known as the alternative vote), a majoritarian voting system often mistaken for the proportional single transferable ballot. Majoritarian systems seek to assure that winners in single member ridings enjoy a majority of support in terms of votes. By contrast, proportional representation attempts to ensure that parties, constituent groups, or bodies of opinion receive their due proportion of seats in line with their percentage of the vote. In other words, if a group were to receive twenty per cent of the votes under a PR system it should get twenty per cent of the seats. In practice, different PR systems vary as to how closely vote totals and seat totals are proportionate. For a brief, if biased, explanation of the various majoritarian and proportional voting schemes see Robert A. Newland, *Comparative Electoral Systems*, (London: Arthur McDougall Fund, 1982).

² *Province*, January 9, 1920, p. 14.

³ The three major papers of the period were the *Vancouver Daily Province*, the *Vancouver Daily World*, and the *Vancouver Daily Sun*. For brevity they will be referred to simply as the *Province*, the *World*, and the *Sun* except in circumstances where the inclusion of location, as in *Vancouver Sun*, would

Nor were the papers the only voices less than sanguine about the reform possibilities of the new voting system. W.J. Conway, a prodigious letter writer and activist in both the veterans' and PR movements, wrote to the *Sun* shortly after the plebiscite victory to suggest that the introduction of PR was only the first step in reforming city hall. "PR is not an end in itself," he declared, "it is only a means to an end." For Conway, civic reform could only be achieved through effective community organizing. Groups like merchants, labour, soldiers and other civic bodies had to take it upon themselves to draft suitable lists of candidates. To do otherwise with PR was akin to "inviting a blind man to a picture show."⁴ Indeed, at a luncheon of retail merchants two days earlier, Conway's message led to a successful resolution to establish a committee to put together such a list of candidates.⁵

Part of the concern stemmed from the reasonable observation that PR would be a significant departure from the traditional methods of electing members to the city council. Most cities in this period either used a ward or at-large system of voting. Voters marked an X or series of X's next to the name or names they preferred; the candidates with the most votes won. They were easy systems to understand and administer. Under this new form of voting neighborhood wards were to be abolished as was the traditional X that marked the ballot. PR voting occurred city-wide, not unlike the at-large system, but voters would now number their choices 1, 2, 3, and so on, in order of preference. Successful candidates had to do better than just get more votes than everyone else; they had to obtain an adequate percentage, or quota, of the total vote. For instance, on a ten-member council one would need approximately ten per cent of the total vote to win. Some candidates might win outright, but others would benefit from the complex transferring process that accompanied this version of PR.⁶ The transferring process was designed to make sure that no-one wasted their vote. If a candidate did not have enough support then they were eliminated and the ballot was redistributed to the second choice

eliminate confusion. For the newspapers' reactions to PR see the *Sun*, January 10, 1920, p. 6; *Province*, January 13, 1920, p. 6; and the *World*, January 10, 1920, p. 1.

⁴ *Sun*, January 14, 1920, p. 6.

⁵ *World*, January 12, 1920, p. 9.

⁶ In the period between 1880 and 1960 only one form of proportional representation was seriously pursued in the English speaking world: the single transferable vote (STV). In the early twentieth century it was more commonly known as the Hare System, named for its founder Thomas Hare, a British barrister and contemporary of John Stuart Mill. For the purposes of this thesis, unless otherwise stated, all references to PR will refer to this system. In fact, that was the custom of the day in newspapers and by reformers as the continental systems of party list PR were never popular in English-speaking countries. In studying the drive for PR in British Columbia I could find only one exception: in Victoria a man involved in local labour circles once forwarded a party list system; see *Victoria Daily Times*, February 9, 1921, p. 16.

marked and so on. In the end, the reformers claimed, council would be a true reflection of the city.

Despite the reformers' rhetoric PR did not ultimately lead to a substantial change in the quality of civic government or any dramatic improvement in citizen participation at city hall. By 1923 Vancouver's PR voting system was quietly done away with in a poorly attended summer plebiscite. Nor were efforts to introduce PR in other parts of the province notably more successful. New Westminster, Mission and Nelson all introduced PR by resolution of council in 1917 - all attempted to reverse their decision after only one trial. Port Coquitlam followed suit in 1921. Victoria, like Vancouver, adopted PR by plebiscite in 1920 but newspaper opposition to the scheme led to its removal by plebiscite after its first use in 1921. South Vancouver, stalled in its use of PR by the provincial suspension of the municipality's council until 1923, nonetheless used it without fuss until the area was amalgamated into Vancouver in 1929. West Vancouver, one of the earliest users of PR, was also the last, only rescinding its adoption in 1930.

The story of the drive for proportional representation in British Columbia is a complex one, replete with intrigue, moral fervor, and colourful reformers. But it is primarily of interest for the opportunity it affords to better understand the nature of social change in democratic capitalist society. Recent Marxist work on democracy and the state highlights how class struggle keenly affects the balance of class forces in any given state formation. In other words, while it is germane to capitalist social relations that the state act to buttress and, on occasion, enforce the expropriation and subsequent exploitation of workers by capitalists, state action is affected by working class engagement and resistance. I propose to apply this analysis to the historical manifestation of PR in the period between 1915 and 1923.⁷ Particular attention will be

⁷ Contrary to post-structuralist assertions, Marxist work on democracy and the state continues to pose the most dynamic critique of modern capitalist social processes and institutions. For a long time the debate within Marxism involved two influential works: Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, (London: Quartet Books, 1973); and Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, (London: New Left Books/Sheed and Ward, 1973). For a Canadian interjection see Leo Panitch (editor), *The Canadian State: Political Economy and Political Power*, (University of Toronto Press, 1977). An excellent starting point for more recent contributions is the collection of essays in Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). While it is fashionable presently to cast struggle of any kind in wholly discursive terms, the product of a multiplicity of narratives, historians fascinated with post-structuralism continue to merely assert rather than demonstrate the superiority of their radical, irrealist epistemology. A number of works have emerged recently, not all explicitly Marxist, that call into question the dislocation of the signifier from the signified, or, put more plainly, the severing of the perception of reality from reality itself. For a defence of what he calls "realist" philosophy, see Roy Bhaskar, *Plato Etc.*, (New York: Verso, 1994). The difficulty of establishing social values or determining what might constitute "exploitation" under conditions of complete contingency is discussed by post-structuralists and their critics in Judith Squires (editor), *Principled Positions: Postmodernism and the Rediscovery of Value*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart Limited, 1993). For a careful exploration into many of the bald

paid to the historically changing relationship of democracy to capitalism. It is important to remember that long before there was liberal democracy there was simply liberalism, a loose set of ideas about property and the state that served to justify the proletarianization of the masses and the primitive accumulation of the capitalists. Only later would democracy be appended to liberalism, and even then a struggle ensued to denude the former of all its historically significant equiitarian meaning.⁸ The shifting fortunes of PR in the period after World War I will effectively demonstrate how struggles over the meaning and form of democracy can be emblematic of a larger class struggle.

Specifically the argument will be cast in the following manner. PR emerged, like many progressive reforms, around the turn of the century in the hands of middle class reformers who were attempting to understand the rapidly changing urban landscape around them, and the vice and social problems that accompanied such dramatic social dislocation. The reformers, armed with a faith in science and progress, saw themselves as moderates, cast between the "bourbonism" of those attempting to defend aristocratic or financial privilege, and extremists of the socialist left and organized labour. The reformers' hard work was rewarded with a few municipal conversions to PR by 1917, but these successes proved difficult to replicate on a provincial or federal level, or even maintain on the municipal ones. By early 1919 the drive for PR appeared to have lost steam with most locales attempting to repeal their earlier adoptions. Then, within a few months, PR regained its momentum, first nationally and then locally. By 1920 a fresh spate of cities adopted the reform as well as a provincial government.

It will be argued here that the resurrection of PR in the latter half of 1919 had less to do with the efforts of reformers and everything with the dramatic escalation of class struggle in the form of soldier and labour militancy, the pervasive dissemination of radical ideas, and the general strikes. The renewed drive for PR emerged from a complex interaction of class forces, one where a number of groups made difficult decisions about how best to act collectively based on their class position, historical experience of struggle, and their perceptions of the state of the class struggle at that historical moment. Some elements of government and business in 1919 feared that labour and soldier militancy had yet to peak, despite the defeat of the general strikes, and saw PR as a strategic concession to help dissipate radical energies. Other business and government leaders were less impressed by militant behavior and continued to pursue the traditional

assertions contained within post-structural claims about knowledge, see Peter Dews, *The Limits of Disenchantment: Essays on Contemporary European Philosophy*, (New York: Verso, 1995).

⁸ This is explored with particular clarity in Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The demos versus 'we, the people': from ancient to modern conceptions of democracy," in Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, pp. 229-37.

paths of repression and coercion. Some elements of the labour movement thought that the remarkable degree of strike success in the latter years of the war meant that direct action was a more effective tactic in achieving labour's political goals than running for election. Others had struggled hard to put together a labour party and saw little to convince them to give up on that work in favour of more direct interventions in political affairs. To those elements of business and labour that wished to avoid further militant behavior, PR appeared a reasonable compromise. To those committed to further militancy, be it strikes or police action, PR appeared either unnecessary or counterproductive. As the balance of class forces tipped back in favour of the traditionally dominant ones with the recession of the early 1920s, these divisions within the ranks of business and labour either diminished or were eliminated. Cross-class support for PR waned. This says less about the individual motivations of reformers, labour, business, or government - they may have been genuine or disingenuous in their support for PR - than it does about their individual and collective responses to perceptions of class power.

To say that PR emerged from class struggle, however, should not necessarily conjure up images of workers and capitalists directly confronting one another over matters of electoral reform. While this may have occurred in a few unique circumstances, such as when workers and capitalists agreed to explore PR at the National Industrial Conference in Ottawa in the Fall of 1919, electoral reform's intersection with class struggle was usually more sophisticated, and interlopers like the professional and merchant middle-class played a key role. In Vancouver these latter groups would figure more prominently in the debates over PR than capitalists mostly because the nature of civic power in this period did not require direct capitalist involvement in governing to see that their needs were met.⁹ But this admission does not diminish the idea that the struggle over PR was class struggle. In capitalist society, middle class managers and entrepreneurs do not entertain fundamentally different ideas about private property and profit than powerful industrialists and financiers. As Ralph Miliband notes, the middle class as much as the capitalist class seek to "preserve and strengthen the private ownership and control of the largest possible part of society's resources, and ... enhance

⁹ For an historical example of the separation of direct capitalist involvement from Vancouver city council by 1900 see Norbert MacDonald, "The Canadian Pacific Railway and Vancouver's Development to 1900," in Peter W. Ward and Robert A. J. McDonald (editors), *British Columbia: Historical Readings*, (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1981), pp. 396-425. The absence of capitalist representatives from various levels of government is not unusual. As Leo Panitch points out, the nature of capitalist influence is rarely instrumental and obvious. The state's dual function of facilitating capitalist accumulation and legitimating these rules only requires intervention by those it serves when challenged by other forces wanting to change it. See Panitch, pp. 4, 8.

to the highest possible point the profits which accrue from that ownership.”¹⁰ In promoting PR some middle class professionals and merchants operated to defend values and privileges indistinguishable from those held by capitalists. Again, Miliband is instructive when he suggests that differences about strategy may divide the dominant classes but this does “not preclude a basic consensus in regard to the crucial issues of economic and political life.”¹¹

Clearly then, voting system reform is not as simple as 1, 2, 3. How a polity votes is almost as important as what it votes for. Which is precisely why PR was unique among the progressive-era reforms: it was usually the last considered, the most heatedly debated, and the first removed.¹² Despite this, few histories of electoral reform have been written. Political scientists have typologized voting systems, sociologists have explained them in terms of functions such as representing social cleavages, but historians have mostly neglected to explain why and how they emerged when they did. There seems to be a tacit agreement among scholars that as the act of voting itself appears unproblematic, its mechanics must be hopelessly dry, technical, and of little interest.¹³ In exploring democratic reform historians have tended to ignore PR completely, gloss over it as an unimportant footnote, or uncritically lump it in with the various progressive or municipal

¹⁰ Miliband, p. 44.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² This can be supported by comparing the fate of other progressive-era reforms with PR. Both the council-manager plan and PR were promoted by the National Municipal League and figured prominently in their influential model city charter. Yet between 1912 and 1950, the council-manager plan had been adopted by 1,200 cities across North America while PR was limited to less than fifty. By 1954 only 51 cities repealed the council-manager plan; nearly everywhere had repealed PR. What was particularly extraordinary was how PR in American cities was subjected to repeated repeal referendums in the 1940s and 1950s but, despite the evenness of the forces for and against, was never the subject of a reinstatement referendum. The first attempt would only come in the 1980s. For an overview of the PR events see Kathleen Barber, *Proportional Representation and Electoral Reform in Ohio*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1995). For council-manager background see Arthur W. Bromage, *Manager Plan Abandonments*, (New York: National Municipal League, 1954).

¹³ As a rule, historians have greatly underestimated the complexity involved in interpreting voting data and the implications of different voting rules on voting outcomes. For a general discussion of some of these issues see Harold Clarke, Jane Jensen, Lawrence Leduc, and Jon Pammet, *Absent Mandate*, (Toronto: Guage Publishing, 1984); Russel Dalton, Scott Flanagan, and P. A. Beck, *Electoral Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Vernon Bogdanor (editor), *Representatives of the People?* (Cambridge: Gower Publishing, 1985). The fine points of voting theory are worth exploring, if only to discover just how complicated “simple” voting systems like first-past-the-post really are; see Douglas Rae, *The Political Consequences of Electoral Law*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Robin Farquharson, *Theory of Voting*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); Douglas Rae, Victor Hanby, and John Loosemore, “Thresholds of Representation and Thresholds of Exclusion: An Analytic Note on Electoral Systems,” *Comparative Political Studies*, January 1971, pp. 479-487; Michael Dummett, *Voting Procedures*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); and Arend Lijphart, “The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws, 1945-85,” *American Political Science Review*, v. 84, n. 2 (June 1990), pp. 481-496.

reforms of the era.¹⁴ David Laycock, for instance, in examining prairie political thought from 1910 to 1945, holds that while PR may have been successful there for a short time it was never as popular as direct democracy or other progressive reforms, and thus remains uninteresting.¹⁵ In the end, most observers simply have taken the failure of PR as a given, unworthy of exploration.

To begin exploring PR is to attempt to situate it in the historical literature. Democratic, structural, or government reforms that occurred in the period between 1890 and 1920 are usually considered part of the progressive-era reform movement, a subject blanketed by both Progressive and urban history, and, to a lesser extent, Canadian social reform literature.¹⁶ A cursory glance at the rhetoric of PR reformers would explain why it has been so tempting to focus on purely municipal explanations of the adoption of PR by cities in the early twentieth century. With their calls for “greater efficiency” and an end to “ward-heeling” they seem to echo the by-now standard canon of municipal reform themes: corruption at city hall, the negative affect of the “machine” or party politics, the proper scope of civic authority and services, and the sorting out of the sticky problems of municipal taxation, utility monopolies and social issues like prohibition and “vice.” Indeed, Canadian and American work on PR utilizes this very approach.¹⁷ There is

¹⁴ For general histories of Canada in the period see Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974); and John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-39 Decades of Discord*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985). For British Columbia history see Margaret Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History*, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958); Martin Robin, *The Rush For Spoils: The Company Province, 1871-1933*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972); and Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991). For Vancouver see Alan Morley, *Vancouver From Milltown to Metropolis*, (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1961); Eric Nicol, *Vancouver*, (Toronto: Doubleday and Company, 1970); and Patricia E. Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History*, (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1980).

¹⁵ David Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 41. Laycock’s book is the best example of how a reform can be lost or under-appreciated when periodized improperly or cast in with the wrong crowd. With such a wide time-frame as Laycock uses, PR naturally appears insignificant; it flourished for only seven or eight of his thirty-five year focus. But if we narrow our scope to 1915-23, PR is definitely ascendant over “direct democracy” like referendum and recall.

¹⁶ It may be considered controversial but I have focused most of my attention in this chapter on American Progressive historiography and seemingly arcane volumes on voting system reform instead of explicitly Canadian work. I have done this for a couple of reasons. In Canada, work relevant to this thesis is located in urban history, a field that borrows heavily from the theoretical paradigms of American Progressive historiography. As my concerns with both are primarily theoretical it made more sense to focus on the original source of the theory. The other focus on voting system literature results from my conviction that this work is less as a contribution to a geographically specific sub-branch of Canadian history than an addition to the history of democracy and democratic reform.

¹⁷ For Canadian work on proportional representation see John Gall Glashan, “Proportional Representation in Canada” (master’s thesis, University of British Columbia, 1951); and Harry Charles John Phillips, “Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874-1974” (Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario, 1976). For American PR work see Clarence Hoag and George Hallet Jr., *Proportional Representation*, (New York: Macmillan, 1926); Joseph P. Harris, “Practical Workings of Proportional Representation in

certainly enough evidence in Vancouver's experience to confirm some of these trends. Municipal campaigns conducted alongside the PR issue included challenges to the British Columbia Electric Railway's monopoly of streetcar and electric service to the city, the seemingly unfair differentials in property assessments throughout the city, the parochial tendencies of the city's aldermen toward their own wards, and accusations of vice aimed at the mayor and mayoralty candidates.¹⁸

Yet simply adding PR to the pantheon of progressive reforms is more difficult than it may first appear. PR peaked in Canada alongside the general strikes and upheaval of 1919. Progressive history is curiously silent about the social unrest that emerged after World War I. The debate within the Progressive historiography has mostly concerned who the progressives were - middle class liberals or business corporatists - and what motivated them: principled reform, status anxiety, or control over the economy.¹⁹ This

the United States and Canada." *National Municipal Review*, v. 19, n. 5 (May 1930), pp. 337-83; George H. McCaffrey, "Proportional Representation in New York City," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 33 (October 1939), pp. 841-852; George Hallett Jr., *Proportional Representation: The Key to Democracy*, (1940: reprint, Westport: Hyperion Press, 1979); Belle Zeller and Hugh A. Bone, "The Repeal of P.R. in New York City - Ten Years in Retrospect," *American Political Science Review*, 42 (December 1948), pp. 1127-1148; Ralph A. Straetz, *PR Politics in Cincinnati*, (New York: New York University Press, 1958); Joseph Zimmerman, "A Proportional Representation System and New York City School Boards," *National Civic Review*, October 1974, pp. 472-474, 493; William O. Winter, "The Long Unhappy Life of the Hare System in Boulder," Paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Denver, September 2-5, 1982; Leon Weaver, "Two Cheers for Proportional Representation in Cambridge: A Preliminary Report on Research in Progress," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Denver, September 2-5, 1982; Leon Weaver, "Semi-Proportional and Proportional Representation Systems in the United States," in Arend Lijphart and Bernard Grofman, *Choosing an Electoral System*, (New York: Praeger, 1984), pp. 191-206; Leon Weaver, "The Rise, Decline, and Resurrection of Proportional Representation in Local Governments in the United States," in Arend Lijphart and Bernard Grofman, *Electoral Laws and their Political Consequences*, (New York: Agathon Press, 1986), pp. 139-153; Dennis M. Anderson, "Proportional Representation Elections of Toledo City Councils, 1934-1949," *Northwest Ohio Quarterly*, vol. 59, no. 4 (Autumn 1987), pp. 153-177; Douglas Amy, *Real Choices/New Voices: The Case for Proportional Representation Elections in the United States*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); and Kathleen Barber, *Proportional Representation and Electoral Reform in Ohio*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1995).

¹⁸ The January 1918 civic election in Vancouver showcases this nicely. See coverage in the *World and the Sun*.

¹⁹ Progressive historiography is a massive field of inquiry. As a result, any list of key works must be selective. The defining treatments include Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.*, (New York: Random House, 1955); Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of the American History, 1900-1916*, (1963; reprint, New York: The Free Press, 1977); Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 55 (October 1965), pp. 166-82; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); and James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968). Weinstein paid tribute to Martin Sklar's unpublished work in *The Corporate Ideal of the Liberal State* though the latter's effort broke little new ground when published in 1988; see Martin Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For a comprehensive review essay on Progressive historiography see Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History*, v. 10, n. 4 (December 1982), pp. 113-131. Recently some Progressive historians have given up attempting to elucidate the motivations or identity of the reformers in favour of assessing the reforms

discussion has seen so many twists and turns that one observer suggested giving up the generalization “progressive” altogether.²⁰ If the term is still useful, Progressive history falls wide of the mark in its characterization of democracy, for the false sense of continuity it creates for the period between 1890 and 1920, and for its lack of attention to class struggle. Furthermore, I would argue that these problems are inter-related and, ultimately, insurmountable.

Modern Progressive historiography began in 1955 with Richard Hofstadter’s *The Age of Reform*. Hofstadter’s great novelty was to challenge the sincerity of the progressive reformers themselves by rejecting their claim that they represented “the

themselves. They suggest that the reforms did not eradicate vices like machine politics or ward heeling but that they disappeared for other reasons; see Harvey Boulay and Alan DiGaetano, “Why Did Political Machines Disappear?”, *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 12, no. 1, November 1985, pp. 25-49; and Alan DiGaetano, “Urban Political Reform: Did It Kill the Machine?”, *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 18, no. 1, November 1991, pp. 37-67. Coming full circle, some scholars have attempted to recast the reformers as genuine “progressives” concerned with bettering the community. For a rehabilitation of a local business elite along these lines see Judith Sealander, *Grand Plans: Business Progressivism and Social Change in Ohio’s Miami Valley*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988); and for a critique of Sealander and others see Fred W. Viehe, “Almost Progressives: The Continuing Odyssey of Urban Reform,” *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 19, no. 1, November 1992, pp. 102-110. For an effective summary of the issues dealt with by reformers and the basic contours of their historical application see Dennis R. Judd and Todd Swanstrom, *City Politics: Private Power and Public Policy*, (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1994). Urban history has long had a close relationship with Progressive historiography borrowing heavily from its theoretical paradigms. This is particularly true of Canadian work on municipal reform. For a representative sampling see Paul Rutherford, editor, *Saving the Canadian City, 1880-1920*, (Toronto, 1974); John Weaver, *Shaping the Canadian City*, (Toronto: Institute of Public Administration, 1977); Paul Rutherford, “Tomorrow’s Metropolis: The Urban Reform Movement in Canada, 1880-1920” in G.A. Stelter and A.F.J. Artibise, *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 369-392; John C. Weaver, “‘Tomorrow’s Metropolis’ Revisited: A Critical Assessment of Urban Reform in Canada, 1890-1920” in G.A. Stelter and A.F.J. Artibise, *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 393-418; James Anderson, ‘The Municipal Reform Movement in Western Canada, 1880-1920,’ in A.F.J. Artibise and G.A. Stelter, editors, *The Usable Urban Past*, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1979), 73-111; Bruce M. Stave, “A Conversation With Gilbert A. Stelter: Urban History in Canada,” *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 6, no. 2, February 1980, pp. 177-209; John C. Weaver, “Elitism and the Corporate Ideal: Businessmen and Boosters in Canadian Civic Reform, 1890-1920” in Michael S. Cross and Gregory S. Kealey, *The Consolidation of Capitalism, 1869-1929*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983), 143-168; Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, *Monopoly’s Moment: The Organization and Regulation of Canadian Utilities, 1830-1930*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986); and C.R. Tindal and S. Nobes Tindal, *Local Government in Canada*, Third Edition, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1990). In a very broad way Rutherford utilizes Wiebe while Weaver and Anderson owe more to Hayes and, to a lesser extent, Weinstein. For Vancouver civic reform see William C. McKee, “The Vancouver Park System, 1886-1929: A Product of Local Businessmen,” *Urban History Review*, no. 3, 1978, pp. 33-49; John C. Weaver, “The Property Industry and Land Use Controls: The Vancouver Experience, 1910-1945” in W. Peter Ward and R.A.J. McDonald, *British Columbia: Historical Readings*, (Vancouver: Douglas And McIntyre, 1981), 426-448; Robert A.J. McDonald, “The Business Elite and Municipal Politics in Vancouver 1886-1914,” *Urban History Review*, vol. XI, no. 3, February 1983, pp. 1-14; Margaret Andrews, “The Emergence of Bureaucracy: The Vancouver Health Department, 1886-1914,” *Journal of Urban History*, v. 12, n. 2, February 1986, pp. 131-155.

²⁰ Peter G. Filene, “An Obituary for The Progressive Movement,” *American Quarterly*, 22 (1970), pp. 20-34.

people” in a fight against “the interests.” Instead he suggested that the progressives themselves were as much an “interest” as those they opposed. The idea that progressives, labour, business, or any other group were all “interests” that competed to control society was then a novel understanding of democracy. Traditionally democracy had been seen as an equalitarian method of decision-making and had been resisted by those defending aristocratic or financial privilege against any incursion by “the people.” With the decline of aristocracy and the unceasing critique of wealth into the twentieth century, critics of democracy turned to deconstructing the category of “the people” itself, suggesting that no such body existed. Instead there were only rival groups of competing interests all of whom sought to control the democratic polity to the exclusion of others. Hofstadter’s book represented the debut of this pluralist democratic theory in Progressive historiography.²¹ All subsequent work - despite the heat of the debates - has retained this understanding; only the composition of forces has changed. That is, for Hofstadter progressive reforms gained their impetus from the status anxiety of the middle class, for Samuel Hays it was the product of the upper class, for Kolko and Weinstein it was the business class, and so on.

The internalization of pluralist values by progressive-era historians has had a number of effects that have hindered our understanding of both PR and progressive reforms generally. In redefining democracy as simply interest-group competition these writers have de-historicised the struggle over democracy itself. With definitional certainty they glide over conflict between labour and capital as merely an example of group competition for scarce resources.²² The period between 1900 and 1920 exhibits a remarkable continuity in their work because the social upheaval following World War I

²¹ As a number of commentators have noted, pluralism has various meanings that are not always clearly distinguished. Most readily conflated are the two most familiar positions, one that holds that pluralism is a description of the reality of democratic process, and the other that suggests it stands as moral directive to the way in which a democracy should function. Robert A. Dahl’s *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961) is generally agreed to be the classic text of the genre though Seymour Martin Lipset’s *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1960) was arguably as influential. Yet the consolidation of pluralist theory in the early 1960s should not be mistaken for its emergence. The work of Dahl and others merely codified and tested what had been handled less systematically elsewhere. While the origins of pluralism may be difficult to trace, a number of important works emerged in the 1940s that gave this new concept of democracy shape. See Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, (1943; reprint, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1976), see particularly chapter XXII, “Another Theory of Democracy,” pp. 269-283; Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, (1944; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956); Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light, the Children of Darkness*, (1944; reprint, New York: Scribner, 1960).

²² Indeed, as Daniel T. Rodgers notes in his “In Search of Progressivism,” Hofstadter incorrectly described the period as one of “sustained and general prosperity”; by contrast, Rodgers notes how the new labour historians of the 1970s exposed the progressive era as one cast “against a backdrop of acute labour crisis.” See Rodgers, p. 120.

can be interpreted as just another example plural group competition. The antagonistic relationship between democracy and capitalism, like class struggle itself, is simply defined out of existence. Pluralism has also led to an uncritical coupling of liberalism to democracy in a way that conflates the two. This effectively makes impossible any genuine alternatives to liberal democracy by defining all phenomenon as variants within it. Thus farmer and labour discontent with the political system in Canada between 1910 and 1930 can be characterized as a challenge within the liberal paradigm rather than a challenge to it.²³ With this approach the radical implications of non-partisanship, anti-partyism, and constituent representation have also been blunted. Finally, pluralist-influenced progressive history has stalled over its inability to explain why change occurs in the first place.²⁴

Of course, if the functionalist ahistoricism of pluralism could be extracted from Progressive history it is not clear that the latter would be any more useful in explaining the rise and fall of PR in BC. As liberal historians, progressive writers have not lacked for a theory of change, though in its broad outlines theirs borrows from the same market analogy as pluralism - a competition among choices. By this understanding the failure of social movements would be interpreted primarily as a history of their own shortcomings and tactical mistakes. For instance, historians long suggested that there was no socialism in the United States because Americans were "exceptional," culturally individualistic, and provided with a bounty of opportunity.²⁵ So too would the failure of PR, by this logic,

²³ Despite claiming to have distinguished "four distinct variants of democratic thought" from amongst the many competing versions of Canadian farmer populism in the first half of the twentieth century (p. 267), Laycock's *Populism and Democratic Thought*, upon closer inspection, appears to have simply divided everything into four strands of liberalism. In other words, Laycock's characterization of the farmers, despite the divisions into crypto-liberal, social democrat, etc., has all the hallmarks of a liberal political theory and its concomitant conception of human nature: a commitment to methodological individualism and primacy of the individual in a community setting. It is only then, from this acknowledgment of society as a collection of individuals, that he suggests the farmers pose the possibility of co-operation as a new human ethic. Laycock's own commitment to the pluralist form of constrained democracy is betrayed in his description of the farmers' critique of political institutions as "chiliastic" (p. 269) or that their proposals for public democratic participation and citizenship were "very demanding" (p. 82). For an alternative, more open approach see Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). Goodwyn suggests America's farmers possessed and were defending a collective identity as opposed to the familiar description of a land of individuated rural capitalist proprietorship.

²⁴ Rodgers makes this point in his overview of the Progressive historiography suggesting that explanations like "modernization," the linchpin of the organizational synthesis of Hayes and others, turned out to explain little. The next logical question concerned just "Why was society modernizing?" and so on into infinite regress. Attempts by Kolko and Weinstein to introduce a type of hegemonic argument, that the business class needed to reform the state for its own purposes, led to similar questions to those previous: why at this particular historical moment? See Rodgers, pp. 118-121.

²⁵ For an overview of the debate see Eric Foner, "Why is There no Socialism in the United States?" *History Workshop*, 17 (Spring 1984), pp. 57-80.

reflect its inadequacy, public unpopularity, and a surfeit of better opportunities. But this is not necessarily the whole story.

Recently a number of works have emerged to challenge these “choice” models.²⁶ All involve coming to grips with unequal power relations. The neo-institutionalist school focuses attention on the powerful, suggesting that the failure of socialism in the United States, for instance, had more to do with the combined might of capitalists in the US as opposed to their counterparts in Europe than with the failure of the efforts of socialists themselves.²⁷ Similarly the success and failure of PR may have had less to do with the actions of reformers, or the public’s perceptions about the reform’s efficacy, and more to do with the needs of the powerful. PR gained the spotlight in Canada against a backdrop of rising labour strife, general strikes, soldier demobilization, and the increasing pressures brought to bear by suffragists, prohibitionists and a host of other social reformers. In this light PR could be seen as an essentially conservative tactic by the powerful to preserve as much of the status quo as possible.

Yet PR was not merely the weapon of powerful conservative interests. It had gained support from a wide array of groups precisely because they saw it as a means of breaking down the conservative monopoly of institutional power. In this sense PR could be interpreted as a strategy by disenfranchised groups in their struggle to make democracy substantively meaningful. This suggests some limitations with the neo-institutionalist approach. While it goes far in challenging the choice explanations of liberal history, it would appear to do little better in explaining how social results emanate from struggle. This is where a Marxist appraisal of capitalist democratic reform is essential. Here the story is not a cumulative, evolutionary march of progress from oligarchy to the full suffrage described by liberal theorists and historians, nor one of an imposed victory by the more powerful as suggested by neo-institutionalists, but an

²⁶ By “choice” I refer to the pervasive idea in liberal capitalist society that things happen simply because people want them. Here bourgeois economic ideas about individual goal satisfaction are projected onto society as whole; the absence or presence of anything then can be interpreted as representing some kind of collective choice for or against something. Despite its ubiquitous, though implicit, presence in liberal history, this idea of “choice” has been seldom theorized. That there is little problematic in the relationship between public want and its satisfaction has been explored extensively in a related body of work known as public choice theory, which proposes that the decision-making apparatus of the market should be introduced alongside, or substituted for, democracy as a way of governing. For a liberal overview and critique of this work see Peter Self, *Government by the Market? The Politics of Public Choice*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

²⁷ See Kim Voss, *The Making of American Exceptionalism: The Knights of Labor and Class Formation in the Nineteenth Century*, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1993); and Sanford Jacoby, *Masters to Managers: Historical and Comparative Perspectives on American Employers*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

ongoing struggle over the substantive *meaning* of democracy. And that struggle was emblematic of the larger class struggle underway.²⁸

Proportional Representation was more than just another North American progressive reform at the turn of the century, it was part of a world-wide effort to reconfigure the shape and meaning of democracy itself. This struggle, largely papered over by pluralist-inspired historiography, must be recovered to make sense of PR in B.C. What “democracy” meant in the period surrounding World War I was fluid and uncertain. Against a backdrop of increasing worker militancy, revolution in Russia, and disunity in the ranks of the business class, democracy began to enjoy a new prestige. Writing in 1920, Britain’s Lord Bryce noted, “Seventy years ago the word ‘democracy’ awakened dislike and fear. Now it is a word of praise.”²⁹ That democracy was a bad thing that had become good in a relatively short period of time has been noted by scholars from right to left.³⁰ Explanations of why or how this change occurred have enjoyed less consensus. Liberal historians, seeing democracy as the crowning achievement of liberalism, cast the conversions to it in terms of individual enlightenment and social progress. But they do so by reducing democracy to little more than a mechanical process. In reviewing two centuries of American “self-rule,” Progressive historian Robert Wiebe would have us believe that democracy “is not a set of social outcomes.” For him, democracy makes no promises to deliver anyone anything specific: good health, equality, a decent standard of living, or an equalization of rewards. Democracy is simply “one among competing ways to conduct public affairs.”³¹ This is pluralist thinking *par excellence*. Yet it appears at

²⁸ By class I refer to E.P. Thompson’s influential, though brief, articulation of the concept in his preface to *The Making of the English Working Class*, (1963; reprint, London: Penguin, 1980), pp. 8-10. Class struggle is the missing ingredient of Progressive historiography. Even leftist work like James Weinstein’s *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900-1918* takes little notice of the labour upheaval during WWI or after, preferring instead to describe progressive reforms as the result of competition within the business elite. Neo-institutionalist work focuses on the power of the business elite as well but with an eye on the organization of labour and the threat it may pose. Thus Voss suggests in her study of the Knights of Labor in the U.S. that the failure of that group has been too quickly dealt with by historians, who consequentially have lost sight of how the struggle played out and what we can learn from it. However Voss’ work shows up the limitations of the neo-institutionalists as well. While declaring that American workers were not exceptional in their class consciousness during the lifetime of the Knights of Labour, she nonetheless suggests that America’s infamous “exceptionalism” did begin with the dawn of the twentieth century. This ignores the success of the Socialist Party in America up to WWI, and the labour upheaval and organizing that occurred during and after the war. On the continuing currency of these ideas into the twentieth century see Ray Ginger, *Eugene V. Debs, A Biography*, (1949; reprint, New York: Collier Books, 1962); and Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States*, (New York: Verso, 1987).

²⁹ Anthony H. Birch, *The Concepts and Theories of Modern Democracy*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 63.

³⁰ See Anthony Birch note above and C.B. Macpherson, *The Real World of Democracy*, (1965; reprint, Concord: House of Anansi Press, 1992), p. 1.

³¹ Robert Wiebe, *Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 9-10.

odds with a great deal of evidence from the nineteenth and early twentieth century that suggests that outcomes were the primary means by which both elite and masses judged democracy.

Put plainly, elites feared democracy because they feared what might result from it. American founding father James Madison wrote that “democracies have ever been found incompatible with personal security, or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths.” Mainstream scholars are clear enough about the distaste of early American elites for democracy. Their purpose was to create a representative republic, not a democracy.³² In Britain, liberals like John Stuart Mill feared democracy because they thought it might lead to the political domination of society by the working class.³³ The conception of democracy at the time was one of popular participation and popular sovereignty. In the British franchise debates of 1867, democracy’s opponents were free and straightforward with their complaints. With the extension of the franchise, however, many of the same politicians ceased attacking democracy directly. To do so might have affected their ability to gain working class votes. Some scholars have suggested that this indicated a grudging acceptance of the democratic principle. Others have simply forgotten that the democracy might have ever represented more than quinquennial visits to a ballot box.³⁴

Evidence of mass discontent with the outcomes of parliamentary democracy in the nineteenth century is also fairly strong. The popularity of works like Henry George’s *Poverty and Progress*, or Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* point to some level of agreement with the authors’ prescription for democracy’s ills: both called for a kind of democratic political economy. The socialist William Morris felt that political democracy could mean little if it were not accompanied by economic democracy.³⁵ Marx and Engels’ disdain for parliamentary “talking shops” was predicated on a belief that in capitalist society, real power was not in the legislature. And certainly the increasing organization and militancy of labour, if still in its infancy, was a more explicit example of working class dissatisfaction with the outcomes of democracy.³⁶

³² Birch, pp. 45-6.

³³ Anthony Arblaster, “Liberal Values and Socialist Values,” in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (editors), *Socialist Register 1972*, (London: Merlin, 1972), pp. 92-3.

³⁴ Anthony Arblaster, *Democracy*, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987), p. 49

³⁵ Jon Roper, *Democracy and its Critics: Anglo-American Democratic Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 98-99, 101, 105, 186-89.

³⁶ For a sampling of Canadian work see Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens’ University Press, 1979); Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980; rev. ed. 1991). For American labour a good overview may

The rancorous dissatisfaction with democracy voiced by working class critics, along with the unstable social and economic conditions of the late nineteenth century, ultimately forced a split in liberal ranks. Led by T.H. Green in Britain and John Dewey in the United States, a type of reform liberalism emerged which eschewed the atomistic individualism and strictly negative liberty of the utilitarian liberals. Whereas utilitarian ideas had been preferable to earlier discourses about the natural rights of man, Green and Dewey now argued that true freedom and individuality could only be secured in a society that did something to assure it. Here were the beginnings of a justification for a positive intervention by government in the affairs of the people.³⁷ Dewey called for a democracy that was industrial, as well as civil and political, though he was never clear what that might entail.³⁸

Why democratic process could not seem to adequately address the social and economic problems of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the subject of a number of explanations. For some, the answer lay in the process of industrialism, which contributed to an increasingly unequal distribution of wealth, one that threatened the republican ideals of the state. This was essentially the analysis of Henry George and Edward Bellamy. For others the answer lay in an emerging plutocratic regime of corporate monopoly, a theme explored by later writers like Upton Sinclair and Jack London.³⁹ A substantial critique of the party system also emerged at this time where parties were seen to come between “the people” and the effective resolution of social problems by government. Finally, many progressive-era reformers saw the problems as technical, requiring new forms to manage the democratic polity.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, why a system which claimed to be democratic could lead to so much social inequality and injustice in the first place was seldom clearly or convincingly explained. The search was

be found in David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

³⁷ Birch, pp. 103-8.

³⁸ Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 49.

³⁹ See Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*, (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1906), and Jack London, *The Iron Heel*, (1907; reprint, New York: Sagamore Press, 1957).

⁴⁰ In Canada, where the discourse of democracy was neither as strong nor as entrenched in the political system as in the United States, the question was often posed in a less direct way. As Canada's early Tory historians continually pointed out, Confederation in 1867 established responsible government, not democracy. Nevertheless representatives in Parliament, mostly of a Liberal persuasion, quickly began to use the word democracy to describe Canada's representative system. It was with this ambiguity that Sanford Fleming made his call for a new voting system in 1892 based primarily on a critique of the evils of party in a democratic system. The Tory disdain for democracy and their support for a property-based system of representation would continue well into the twentieth century. See Sanford Fleming, *An Appeal to the Canadian Institute on the Rectitude of Parliament*, (Toronto: Copp Clarke Company, 1892).

often for an explicit cause - plutocracy, party, voter apathy. Indeed, in the absence of any obvious prohibitions against free speech or organization many liberals proclaimed the critiques of democracy unfounded, or at best, unproved. To be convinced, they demanded a clear demonstration of how a majority of voters were frustrated in their attempts to radically change the political system by, for instance, the constraints of the economic system. From this high standard of proof Anthony Birch could proclaim, "There is no evidence that this has been true of any established democratic system in a western industrial society."⁴¹

The inability to sustain an effective critique of democracy as practiced in capitalist societies has often been the product of a lack of attention to what is primarily capitalist about them. Ellen Meiksins Wood argues that capitalism is distinguished by its effective separation of the economic from the political, or rather the privatization of formerly political decisions over production to a purely "economic" sphere. As a point of comparison, under feudalism decisions about production and resource allocation were explicitly political decisions. The lord extracted economic surpluses from peasants because he wielded effective military and political power, though he was constrained by rules of custom, duty and obligation, and the peasants' opposition to increased exploitation. By contrast, capitalism separates military and judicial power from the power to control production, assigning the former to the state and the latter to the capitalist.⁴² What occurs in the state is public, what occurs in the factory is now private.

With this in mind it is easier to understand why democratic outcomes can be at such variance with the formal claims of democracy in liberal capitalist states. Under capitalism status differentiation is no longer a basis of privilege. All are formally equal as citizens, free to enter into contracts or not. But this equality is of a substantively different quality if one is a worker or one is a capitalist. This is because the power of the capitalist does not rest on any privileged social status but on the propertylessness of the workers, a fact that leaves them powerless to resist the wage relation and the imperatives of competition and profit maximization. And with so much formerly public decision-making privatized in the workplace, little is left for a democracy to affect. Thus economic inequality and exploitation can coexist with claims of a formal freedom and equality of citizens within the narrow definitional settings of capitalist democracy.⁴³

It must be remembered that there is nothing deterministic in the "fit" between democracy and capitalism. The historically particular form of democracy found in

⁴¹ Birch, p. 194.

⁴² Wood, pp. 29-30.

⁴³ Wood, p. 201.

capitalism was worked out over time and not without struggle. As Wood is quick to note, “That capitalism could survive democracy, at least in this ‘formal’ sense, was not ... always obvious.”⁴⁴ This explains the often slow extension of suffrage through the nineteenth century into the twentieth. Nor was it always clear that the capitalist separation of the economic from the political could be sustained. The unanimity of disdain for democracy by the ruling elites in the nineteenth century gave way to general approval only through a long and difficult process of denuding the term of any substantive meaning. Meanwhile, if the working class were clamoring for “democracy,” it was not to merely gain a symbolic vote, or be present at the deliberations of the powerful, but to accomplish some verifiable outcomes. Thus it is necessary to plot the historical relationship of capitalism and democracy if we are to understand the intersection of class struggle with turn of the century reforms like the drive for proportional representation.

From this perspective the struggle to change the voting system in BC can be cast in a new light. PR can be seen to emerge alongside the long-term struggle to reunite the economic with the political in a bid to create a substantive version of democracy. For some PR was seen as a way of preventing this from happening; for others it was seen as a way of securing it. However, it should be clear from the previous discussion that class struggle and efforts for reform must not be seen as necessarily separate processes. This can be illustrated through a critical examination of the literature on electoral system reform. This will also make clear that PR appears not just in this context but for other reasons as well, the most notable being its capacity to accommodate elite divisions. Essentially, there are two traditional explanations of the rise of PR: a public choice by informed citizens, and an elite brokering mechanism. Now I would add a third with the suggestion that the reform was part of a much larger class struggle over the meaning of democracy. The literature embracing electoral system change may then be categorized into three corresponding groups: the naive, the tactical, and the hegemonic. It will be useful to outline some of their general characteristics before reviewing specific examples from each category.

Work of a “naive” disposition includes that of most of the reformers themselves and elements of American historiography since the reform era. It is characterized by a focus on the principled aspects of the discussions around whether or not to adopt proportional voting systems, at the expense of any systematic discussion of power. It usually includes many uncritical assumptions about the process of Western democracy and often explains

⁴⁴ Wood, pp. 202-3

success or failure in “choice” terms. In these narratives opposition to PR is mostly the product of ignorance or avarice, though the latter extends only to the extent of explicit corruption. Naive interpretations dominated the historical accounts of PR well into the 1960s, the result of academic indifference to the subject.⁴⁵ Since that time however the great majority of modern work examining PR has been of the tactical variety. Here electoral system change is the product of political horse trading and elite accommodation; principle, while not totally absent, is of secondary importance. In these descriptions power is more to the fore, though it is often cast in pluralist democratic terms, and in a decidedly elite configuration. PR is usually taken as the price of conservative acquiescence to suffrage extension or the establishment of responsible government. Tactical analysis also does a better job of explaining the absence of PR in a number of settings, particularly Britain. Hegemonic approaches share a number of assumptions with the tactical variety but are distinguished by a more carefully articulated analysis of power. Here power is not pluralist - that is, an essentially level playing field of competing fractions of business, labour, and special interests groups - but one of dominant versus subordinate values. The hegemonic analysis of democratic change incorporates a substantial critique of capitalism, including Marxist ones, and recognizes the importance of mass struggle and alternative realities in affecting elite decision-making. PR in the hegemonic narrative might be explained as a concession designed to bolster flagging allegiance to the parliamentary system or to undercut more radical proposals for social change.⁴⁶

The use of the term “naive” should not be misconstrued to mean “simple” or “uninformed” as many of the works in this category show remarkable sophistication and erudite research. They fail miserably however in one important area: causation. Even academic reformers like John Commons were guilty. Commons, an influential economic and labour historian, was an early proponent of PR in the United States, eventually

⁴⁵ I should point out that while professional historians have been indifferent to PR, political scientists have not. For an influential treatment see Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties*, (1954; reprint, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1963), particularly pp. 228-54 on the role of the voting system in the determination of the number of parties. The difficulty with political science treatments of PR again involve the internalization of pluralist definitions of democracy and functionalist explanations of change. The very question of interest here - why electoral change occurs and under what conditions - has typically been explained away in terms of a “fit” between voting systems and political problems.

⁴⁶ Despite the difficulties that many have raised with the recent over-use of the term “hegemony,” I still think it is a useful shorthand for explaining the sophisticated way in which dominant ideas gain wide public acceptance. In this I refer to the usage popularized from Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (New York: International Publishers, 1971). For a brief summary of Gramsci’s views and the neo-Marxist debate surrounding them, see A. S. Sassoon, “Hegemony,” in Tom Bottomore, *The Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 201-3.

writing a book on the subject and accepting honorary positions in a number of reform organizations on two continents. But in *Proportional Representation*, even in the revised edition, Commons fell foul of the classic naive trappings. In his lead-up Commons sounded like a tactical analyst, calling for PR to accommodate more fluid parties and effect a type of responsible government in the US that could campaign in a more policy-oriented way.⁴⁷ But deep in the book, when he began to discuss the success and failure of PR in the nineteenth century, the naive analysis emerged: PR arose because there was a principled need, not an expedient one; its failure was the product of fear, ignorance, prejudice, or American exceptionalism, particularly American ideas about the proper size of government, the permanence of government jobs, individual corruption, and the like.⁴⁸ And Commons was among the most sophisticated of this genre. Naive analysts are hobbled by their fundamentally uncritical acceptance of the sincerity of the political system. That democracy may be broken is just a matter of technical adjustment; one need simply clear the individual evil out of the way and everything can again be ship-shape. George Hallett and F.A. Hermans spent half a century debating the merits of PR - yet both believed its acceptance or rejection would be an unproblematic public choice.⁴⁹ A number of works in this tradition admit that the call for PR may have emerged as a result of conflict between capital and labour. But PR's effect was that of a tranquilizer, soothing labour trouble and restoring "reasonable" discussion. The assumption was that all problems ultimately have a solution if the right mechanism can be put in place.⁵⁰

The tactical approach, by contrast, assumes irresolvable conflict, but borrows its understanding from mainstream economics. Here plural groups of labour, capital, farmers, or other special interest groups all compete in the political arena for scarce political representation. The contrast between the naive and the tactical can be seen most clearly in two treatments of the near adoption of PR in Britain in 1918. During World War I Britain's Coalition government established a Speaker's Conference to hammer out changes to the Representation of the People Act; plural voting, the extension of the vote to women, days of polling, and other concerns were to be discussed along with possible

⁴⁷ John R. Commons, *Proportional Representation, 2nd edition*, (1907; reprint, New York: Augustus Kelley Publishers, 1967), pp. 132-3, 185.

⁴⁸ Commons, pp. 236-62.

⁴⁹ See George H. Hallett, Junior, *Proportional Representation - The Key to Democracy*; and F.A. Hermans, *Democracy or Anarchy? A Study of Proportional Representation, With a New Supplement by the Author*, (1941; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Company, 1972). See also their respective articles in Grofman/Lijphart, *Choosing an Electoral System*.

⁵⁰ See Joseph P. Harris, "The Practical Workings of Proportional Representation in the United States and Canada", *National Municipal Review*, v. XIX, n. 5 (May 1930), p. 373; or Enid Lakeman, *How Democracies Vote: A Study of Majority and Proportional Electoral Systems, Third Edition*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 253.

changes to the voting system. To everyone's surprise the Conference was a success; members reached agreement on a number of contentious issues including a unanimous vote in favour of adopting proportional voting. But when the package of reforms was translated into a bill and brought to the House, PR was left to an open vote and was defeated. Why the government singled out PR for a free vote and not any other aspect of the package mystified and angered reformers at the time. In the 1950s J. F. S. Ross attempted to unravel the mystery. Ross argued that the success of the all-party conference was due to "the solemnity of the hour, the sense of widespread and tragic bereavement, and the awareness of impending military crisis..."⁵¹ The war encouraged politicians to set aside petty party differences and act in the best interests of the country. That Prime Minister Lloyd George did not insist that government members support the PR clause is attributed by Ross to the PM's ignorance on the subject and the nefarious influence of party managers who might be financially put out by the changes.⁵² Overall, it would appear that Ross accepted at face value the assertions of politicians: the Conference itself was established to address its ostensible purpose, and the objections raised by politicians were matters of principle.⁵³

By contrast, Martin Pugh argued that the reforms of 1918 had little to do with war and everything to do with the unfinished business of Edwardian politics. In *Electoral Reform in War and Peace 1906-18*, Pugh weaved a fascinating narrative of power politics, of trade-offs, brinkmanship, and good old fashioned political back-stabbing. Here the Speaker's Conference was hyper-politics, an example of mutual concessions made by well-informed political groupings, all designed to lower the risks involved with either preserving with the status quo or changing it. But a prisoner's dilemma emerged when the bill reached Parliament, as all parties realized they could benefit by altering parts of the deal as long as the bulk of it still passed. The question then became, how much could be changed without bringing it all crashing down?⁵⁴

In Pugh's treatment, principle was mostly absent. Here the Conference was not designed to accomplish much more than buy time for Asquith's Coalition government by removing contentious issues from its direct responsibility. No one expected it to actually report anything, given the high partisan feeling in the House at the time.⁵⁵ Ironically,

⁵¹ J. F. S. Ross, *Elections and Electors: Studies in Democratic Representation*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1955), pp. 316-7.

⁵² Ross, pp. 307-8.

⁵³ Ross, pp. 296-7, 301.

⁵⁴ Martin Pugh, *Electoral Reform in War and Peace 1906-18*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. ix, 85-6.

⁵⁵ Pugh, p. 69.

Asquith's government failed anyway but the Conference managed to iron out some of the most difficult and long-standing political issues in Parliament's history. This was not the product of good feeling brought on by wartime conditions, but hard-nosed political realism. Here were politicians inspired by their own desire to be re-elected, and to keep power, or get power, in the right hands. Pugh's work was an impressive unraveling of the tactical considerations that concern any political reform and he was right to take issue with the romantic accounts of the war's influence on parliamentary activity. But in resisting the naive account he went too far the other way; now the war was of no importance. In illuminating the smoke-filled backrooms of Parliament, Pugh made a mistake common in the tactical accounts of electoral reform: he became seduced by the elites. Pressure brought to bear by working class organizing seemed to have had no impact on the events. Indeed, he claimed that the public was indifferent to the reform initiative.⁵⁶ Yet evidence of working class dissatisfaction with the war and the necessity of the government to establish workers' councils suggests a power not reckoned with in Pugh's account.⁵⁷ It did not occur to Pugh that PR might have been a tactic to relegitimize conventional electoral politics. This despite the fact that in this period issues like "direct action" had become a divisive subject even within the Labour party.⁵⁸

The refusal to take mass activity seriously, particularly workers' organization and struggle, is a common thread in tactical works. Their assumptions tend to support a view of society as controlled by elites with power trickling down from the top. While new elites may emerge, even an elite that appeals to worker support, it is the tactics of the elite that are important. Thus Andrew Carstairs suggested in *A Short History of Electoral Systems in Western Europe* that changes in European voting structures were primarily brought about as a result of "practical compromises between divergent political interests, or in pursuit of the aims of a particular political party" even while acknowledging an accompanying existence of widespread street violence and general strikes.⁵⁹ Only in situations of explicit revolutionary sloganeering, as in Sweden after WWI, did Carstairs appear to accept electoral change as a reaction to mass activity.⁶⁰ The work of Carstairs

⁵⁶ Pugh, p. 183.

⁵⁷ For a brief overview see Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 149-182; or James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1973).

⁵⁸ *Labour Gazette*, August 1919, pp. 921-3. After three days of debate on the issue at the annual party conference the resolution to use "direct action to force certain policies on the government was passed by a card vote of 1,893,000 to 935,000."

⁵⁹ Andrew McLaren Carstairs, *A Short History of Electoral Systems in Western Europe*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980), pp. 4, 49.

⁶⁰ Carstairs, p. 104. For instance in the following passage Carstairs is fairly frank about the relationship between electoral reform and the fear of mass action: "In the turbulence and unrest which accompanied

and others in this vein offer valuable insights into the complex process of electoral reform. He was right to remind us that changing the voting system often involves balancing ethnic, religious and geographic concerns with the particular historical configuration of the state and its constitutional and political institutions. Indeed, no two electoral systems in Europe are exactly the same for precisely this reason.⁶¹ But many of these practitioners miss an obvious point in the debates around electoral reform: the coincident rise of PR and working class organizing, both in parliamentary and extra-parliamentary terms.⁶²

Part of this blind spot is the result of the internalization of the pluralist school of democratic theory by tactical writers. Emerging after WWII, pluralist theorists suggested that the rise of fascism and communism was the product of a lack of vigilance on the part of democrats. The easy going openness of democracies was abused and sometimes overthrown by those willing to be undemocratic in their opposition. The “fragile flower of democracy” needed a tougher housing if it were to survive the blackshirts’ onslaught, the yellow peril, or the red menace. In this version, democracy was severely curtailed to mean merely a choice of rulers. Too much mass participation was deemed a bad thing, lest it lead to extremism. That democracy had ever intimated something else was effectively erased from historical memory.⁶³ This was an impressive achievement for, as Anthony Arblaster notes, it was only in the twentieth century that anyone had attempted to define democracy to render public participation an undesirable or cause for suspicion: “This represents a fundamental departure from the traditional understanding of what democracy is, or was. Whether it was approved or not - and

the end of the First World War, especially after the revolution in Russia, it was possible to rush through further constitutional reforms, since there was a fear, partly justified, and partly exploited by the reformers, that the alternative to substantial reforms in would be revolution in Sweden. The Social Democrat leader, Branting, had become a strong opponent of revolution and supporter of reform, and his influence was important at this time.”

⁶¹ Carstairs, p. 4. For other works with a similar approach see S.E. Finer (editor), *Adversary Politics and Electoral Reform*, (London: Anthony Wigram, 1975); Vernon Bogdanor and David Butler (editors), *Democracy and Elections: Electoral Systems and their Political Consequences*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983); David Kavanagh (editor), *Electoral Politics*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁶² Not that this point has been lost on everyone. Lipset and Rokkan referred to pioneering work on the emergence of proportional representation in Europe by Karl Braunias who described the post-World War I escalation of PR conversions as the product of an “anti-socialist” sentiment. But to Lipset and Rokkan this was merely more pluralist competition. See Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, “Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction,” in Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan (editors), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross National Perspectives*, (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 32. Braunias’ work is in German; see Karl Braunias, *Das parlamentarische Wahlrecht*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1932).

⁶³ For a discussion of the dominance of pluralist theory in American history beginning in the 1950s and beyond see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), particularly section III, Objectivity Reconstructed, pp. 281-414.

usually it was not - it was understood on all sides that democracy meant ... popular power, popular sovereignty, popular participation.”⁶⁴

Hegemonic analysis of electoral change rejects the pluralist school and views with suspicion the idea of incremental democratic progress. Electoral change is more likely to be the product of threats to a particular system’s existence combined with elite trade-offs and tactical maneuvering. While not specifically addressing PR, radicals like Benjamin Ginsberg have argued that the extension of the formal aspects of democracy was less the product of enlightened progress through bourgeois reform than a response by government and the powerful to an unstable situation. Voting represented a recognition by elites that they must at least appear to consult the governed. It also represented a strategy designed to channel spontaneous assertions of public discontent into routine expressions of candidate preference. It was a process, he added, that served to refocus and split collective identity. At the same time mass education and state subsidies to mass communication were dual strategies in what he called an overall “domestication of mass belief.”⁶⁵ In this account democracy was clearly a concept seen by elites to be in need of taming, of restricting in scope and possibility; however this was at the same time a process engineered in the face of struggle and organizing by the working class.

Yet for all his critique, Ginsberg left unexplored the role of capitalism in this process. A few years earlier Marxist Göran Therborn had argued in a seminal article in the *New Left Review* that capitalism was a key part of the story of democracy, though he struggled to say just what that part was. Therborn was struck by a number of anomalies in the typical evolutionist story of democracy, not the least of which was the fact that none of the bourgeois revolutions established it.⁶⁶ But his main concern was to discover more precisely the relationship between capitalism and democracy. Did capitalism tend toward democracy as result of its own internal contradictions, or was the convergence of the two merely an accident of history? In this task he could glean little from the tomes of neo-Marxism. Since Lenin’s dictum that democracy was nothing but “bourgeois democracy” which needed to be smashed in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Marxists had often dismissed the notion of democracy itself as just another bourgeois swindle. Indeed, Lenin saw the emergence of democratic forms as a mechanical process,

⁶⁴ Anthony Arblaster, *Democracy*, p. 63.

⁶⁵ Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Captive Public: How Mass Opinion Promotes State Power*, (New York: Basic Books, 1986), pp. 11-12, 31-37, 48-49.

⁶⁶ Göran Therborn, “The Rule of Capital and the Rise of Democracy,” *New Left Review*, n. 103 (May-June 1977), p. 19.

accompanying the various stages of capitalist development.⁶⁷ In the end, Therborn's conclusions did not represent a radical departure from the traditional Marxist reliance on a mechanical metaphor: capitalism's "internal contradictions" gave rise to democracy, though he noted that the "strength and fighting capacity of the working class" had played a role.⁶⁸

With the shift away from the more mechanical formulations of Marxism in the 1970s and 1980s, a number of historians attempted to follow E. P. Thompson's lead in putting the "struggle" back into class struggle. For instance, when Ellen Meiksins Wood unravels the relationship between capitalism and democracy her focus is primarily an historical one. She suggests that there is nothing in the "logic" of capitalism that creates democracy. As Hal Draper notes, if there is any tendency in capitalist society toward democratic as opposed to non-democratic forms of government it may only be that despotism is less a bargain than democracy. More specifically, the machinery of social coercion under authoritarian rule ties up resources in non-surplus extracting and thus non-capital expanding activity. Democracy may then be simply a more efficient form of social control.⁶⁹ But that this would turn out to be so was only discovered historically, through a process of struggle over the meaning of "democracy" itself, a struggle judged primarily by democracy's results. Draper suggests that Marx always saw democratic institutions and rights as a double-edged phenomenon, possibly just an elite method of obtaining the consent of the exploited, but also just as plausibly a site of popular struggle to extend democracy to all facets of everyday life. In just the same way, PR may have been a tool to blunt and contain the radicalism of soldiers and labour after World War I, but it may just as well have been seen to serve in aid of that radicalism. It is with this approach to Marxism that PR will be cast in a hegemonic analysis of electoral reform.

As a whole, this thesis attempts to demonstrate that PR succeeded and failed in BC as a result of class struggle. This will be accomplished by plotting the course of both the reform and the class struggle between 1915 and 1923. Essentially there were two major drives for PR in BC: one in 1917 which failed, and another in 1919 which succeeded. While the players and their resources remained much the same in both attempts, the state of class struggle was decidedly different, a factor often obscured by the apparent continuity in reform rhetoric and democratic discourse over the whole period. Yet it will be argued here that class struggle, or more specifically, perception of the class struggle

⁶⁷ For a brief summary of Marxist views on democracy see Steven Lukes, "Democracy," in Bottomore, *The Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, p. 114.

⁶⁸ Therborn, pp. 35-6.

⁶⁹ Hal Draper, "Marx on Democratic Forms of Government," in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (editors), *The Socialist Register 1974*, (London: The Merlin Press, 1974), p. 119.

was the decisive factor. To accomplish this Chapter Two will review the reformers' initial efforts to secure PR between 1915 and 1917. Despite hard work and substantial public support, their success was limited to a few small towns. Chapter Three continues to follow the exploits of the reformers, reviewing their ineffectual efforts to promote PR as well as chronicling their decline. At the same time the emerging conditions of explicit class struggle are explored by highlighting the divisions in the ranks of business and labour. At this point PR was taken over from the reformers by organizations of soldiers and labourers attempting to avoid fragmenting over tactical disagreements. This was only heightened with the advent of the general strikes. Chapter Four attempts to demonstrate the intersection of class struggle and PR in the aftermath of the strikes. Elements of labour and business pursued PR for different reasons; the former to secure political representation, the latter to undercut support for more radical and militant options. Other elements of labour and business resisted PR but for different reasons too; the former because they thought that direct action would accomplish more than parliamentary politics, the latter because they thought that a concerted effort by business and government could crush militancy without granting concessions. Yet by late 1919, radical labour organizations like the One Big Union were still expanding, and a farmer and labour government had been elected in Ontario. Despite the defeat of the strikes, the perception of a continued class threat from labour, soldiers and now farmers persisted. Out of this uncertainty, as opposed to crediting victory to the reformers' rhetoric, came the decisive shift in favour of PR. Chapter Five follows up on the ultimate fate of PR in BC attempting to show that the decline of the reform had less to do with a "dissipation of the reform impulse" or a "choice" by workers and soldiers to pursue their individual self-interest, than with the decisive shift in class power that occurred in the early 1920s. The end of the chapter contains an overall conclusion to the work by drawing together the arguments made throughout thesis.

Chapter 2: The Limits of Reform 1915-17

The story of the rise and fall of proportional representation in North America has often been explained as the result of earnest reformers, scheming ward bosses, and the time-consuming intricacies of the system itself. PR was ushered in with the usual progressive fanfare of justice to all. It was scuttled with excuses of public apathy and inconvenience. In British Columbia PR's success was described as the victory of some "hardworking, public spirited citizens"; its failure the responsibility of the darker elements of politics and a lack of public education efforts on the part of the reformers themselves. While there is an element of truth in this morality tale, there is much more that needs explaining. This chapter will explore the emergence of PR in British Columbia in detail, noting both its advocates and opponents, and the reasons for their various positions, as well as charting the success and failure of the reform up to the defeat of the Vancouver PR petition in December 1917. Much here will appear to confirm the standard accounts of electoral reform; the reformers themselves appear genuinely committed to an extension of liberal democracy, while ranged against them the "bourbons" of city council and the civic bureaucracy attempt to foil their every move. The limits of this reformer-focused approach will only become more apparent when contrasted with the more class-based understanding to be developed in later chapters.

John H. Humphreys, secretary of the British Proportional Representation Society, arrived in Victoria December 22, 1915 on the Canadian leg of his world tour.¹ Humphreys' travels had already taken him to Tasmania, where PR was in use, Australia and New Zealand, where it was being considered, and to a number of stops along the western seaboard of the United States. Over a number of years British interest in PR had been sustained by the Irish Home rule debates, and the increasing electoral pressure brought to bear on the ruling Liberals by the Labour Party. Yet like many reformers before and after him, Humphreys did not focus on the needs of parties in his pitch for PR. This new way of voting was simply the embodiment of justice and "true democracy." Only ignorance could prevent right thinking citizens from concluding thus.

Humphreys' efforts coincided with a much broader effort worldwide to consolidate the disparate energies for electoral reform. PR societies were springing up across the British empire, in places like South Africa and New Zealand. In North America, the PR League had existed for two decades out a desk in Toronto where Robert Tyson answered letters and prepared a section on PR for the quarterly *Equity* magazine. Then, in late

¹ *Victoria Daily Times*, December 22, 1915, p. 13.

1914, the apparently wealthy Clarence Gilbert Hoag had taken over the league, set up offices in Philadelphia, and re-established the *PR Review* as an independent journal. Hoag too traveled constantly to stir up support for PR. American and British reformers could not help but be impressed with the ever-increasing success of PR in Europe. As country after country embraced the reform, its inevitability across the Channel and the Atlantic seemed all but assured.²

Humphreys spent a week in Victoria attending meetings and meeting local notables, often giving demonstrations of PR in people's homes. One instance was reported in the *Victoria Daily Times* where Humphreys addressed a large gathering of gentlemen at the home of Dr. Ernest Hall, a local reformer of note.³ In attendance were former mayors and aldermen, along with current representatives of the city council. As well as demonstrating the mechanics of the system, he underlined PR's ability to do justice to minorities in need of representation and to give voters a liberty of choice they did not enjoy under the current system. But Humphreys did not restrict himself to the realm of municipal representation. He also noted that the multi-member ridings used in Victoria and Vancouver for elections to the provincial legislature could easily be converted to PR. Then with a vote of thanks from those in attendance, he caught the midnight ferry to Vancouver and prepared begin the process all over again.

Humphreys' tour across western Canada was credited with sparking many of the organizational drives for PR.⁴ Perhaps it was only coincidental that after his visit in Calgary a group of supporters successfully lobbied the province of Alberta for permissive legislation to allow for PR at civic elections. This led to the city being the first in Canada to adopt PR in 1916. More clear was Humphreys' role west of the Rockies where his appearance was certainly not the only factor in the drive for PR. While it was true that Humphreys spoke in many of the centers that eventually adopted PR - Vancouver, New Westminster, Nelson - he later admitted that his arrival in BC was met with an already

² Internationally PR adoptions began attracting attention in 1899 with Belgium, continued slowly and sporadically in the period between 1900 and 1914 throughout Europe and in Central and South America, and escalated sharply in Europe between 1915 and 1923. By 1926 it was easier to list the countries that didn't use PR in Europe than those that did.

³ *Victoria Daily Times*, December 29, 1915, p. 13. Described as a "well-known Liberal" by the *Canadian Annual Review* Hall nonetheless ran against a Liberal cabinet member in a by-election in June 1917. Defections of principled reformers like Hall from the Liberal ranks would increase steadily as the government's term wore on and it became apparent that, while a degree of reformism was possible, there would be no fundamental remaking of politics. Hall also ran successfully for a police commissioner position in Victoria in February 1921. For the by-election see J. Castell Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review 1917*, (Toronto: Canadian Annual Review Limited, 1918), p. 814; and for the police commissioner elections see the *Colonist*, March 4, pp. 1,6.

⁴ C.G. Hoag and George Hallett, *Proportional Representation*, p. 190; Glashan, "Proportional Representation in Canada," p. 18.

organized force for PR.⁵ Indeed, some British Columbians had already corresponded with Humphreys and the British Society as well as the American PR League. In Nelson the president of the local Liberal party constituency association, Newton Wolverton, was active on the issue. Organized labour and some of the more reform-minded newspapers had also debated PR.⁶

The romance of reform literature, which often reflects the accomplishments of colourful figures or leaders who exude conviction and a commitment to principle, tends to obscure the collective interests sustaining those reformers in their efforts. BC's early PR advocates were both colourful figures and organization men. The organization in question was the provincial Liberal Party. With the provincial election of 1912 Liberal party fortunes had sunk to an all-time low: a mere twenty-five per cent of the vote and no seats in the house. Since party labels had been introduced into BC politics in the 1903 election, the Conservative machine of Premier Richard McBride and his lieutenant William Bowser had ruled the province with ever increasing success. The Conservative vote continued to climb: forty-six per cent in 1903, forty-nine per cent in 1907, fifty-two per cent in 1909 and a whopping sixty per cent in 1912. Of course, control over rural patronage and the gerrymandering of electoral boundaries aided the Tory cause. The Liberals were increasingly caught between the structural privilege of the ruling Conservatives and the nibbling success of socialists and labour candidates, whose combined ten to fifteen per cent of the vote each election defeated many Liberals.⁷ The defeat of the federal Liberals in 1911 left BC party members in desperate straits. In a political system where patronage was still the grease that kept things moving they were a party with none to dispense. The provincial debacle of 1912 only made it more clear that a process of renewal was required.

From 1905 onward, PR had become something of a multi-purpose panacea, with applications ranging from addressing corruption in American cities to the insecurity of the Liberal government in Britain against the rising strength of the Labour Party. In the case of BC, Humphreys' 1915 visit reinforced the sense of injustice local Liberals were still feeling with the results of the 1912 provincial election. Despite substantially more support for the Liberal party, a small labour contingent comprised the official opposition

⁵ *PR Review*, n. 37 (January 1916), p. 25.

⁶ Proportional representation sparked a lively debate on the front pages of the *BC Federationist* in 1913 when socialists used the principle to block the formation of a labour party; see the *BC Federationist*, February 21 and 28, 1913, p. 1. Humphreys was also given the front page of the paper to expound his views during his 1915 visit; see the *BC Federationist*, December 31, 1915, p. 1.

⁷ Elections British Columbia, *Electoral History of British Columbia, 1871-1986*, (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1988), pp. 91, 99, 109, and 115.

in the legislature. With PR, the party arguably would have gained eleven members, but without it they had nothing.⁸ Thus, contrary to the wisdom of the usual reform canon, PR gained entry to BC politics primarily to address provincial problems; the municipal focus would only come later. Indeed, given the division of powers specified in the British North America Act, the possibility of municipal action on any civic reform in Canada has usually depended on a friendly reception at the provincial level.⁹

Consequentially, "reform" became increasingly respectable in provincial Liberal circles. Put simply, many party members began to realize that to win power the party would need to appeal to a broader coalition of voters. The arena to begin attracting new allies would be the 1913 Liberal convention in Revelstoke. Resolutions in favour of a host of progressive causes flooded the Liberal party headquarters. The drive to include proportional representation in the Liberal platform was primarily the work of two men - E.S. Woodward of Victoria and Newton Wolverton of Nelson. Wolverton was a reformer with a long pedigree. He had fought on the Union side in the American civil war and had personally met Lincoln a number of times. He had also been instrumental in the evolution of Ontario's education system. Late in life he decided to move with his family to the Kootenays in British Columbia to race horses and dabble in real estate.¹⁰ E.S. Woodward's origins were less glamorous. In an interview in 1959 he claimed that upon arriving as a penniless immigrant from England in 1909 he "naturally" joined the local Liberal association.¹¹ As political parties were more exclusive then this was no mean feat.

Local party associations had more diverse purposes and responsibilities in the first decades of the century than they would have later. They did not simply organize electoral campaigns. Historians have long noted how local party executives made recommendations as to who might be suitable for local government jobs and sought to assure that the spoils of office went to good members of the party.¹² Local associations also sent policy advice to their party leaders on issues under public discussion. Members

⁸ Elections BC, p. 115.

⁹ This is so because municipalities are the creatures of the provincial governments. The provinces set the legal parameters for their existence through various forms of city charters and municipal acts. Unlike the United States, there are no provisions for "home rule."

¹⁰ Kootenay Museum Association and Historical Society - Nelson Museum (hereinafter KMA), A.N. Wolverton, *Dr. Newton Wolverton, An Intimate Anecdotal Biography of one of the Most Colorful Characters in Canadian History*, (no publishing information).

¹¹ Special Collections, University of British Columbia, (hereinafter Spec. Col. UBC) E.S. Woodward, Box 1, clipping of *Columbian* newspaper May 13, 1959.

¹² See Gordon Stewart, "Political Patronage under Macdonald and Laurier, 1878-1911," *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 10 (Spring 1980), pp. 3-26. For an appraisal into the 1920s see Robert A. Campbell, "Liquor and Liberals: Patronage and Government Control in British Columbia, 1920-1928," *BC Studies*, no. 77, Spring 1988, pp. 30-53.

often debated policy, voted on positions, and directed their secretary to forward their deliberations to the federal or provincial leader.¹³ For all these reasons membership in an association was controlled. An applicant's Liberal credentials had to be checked or vouched for and nomination for membership was by an already existing member. Newton Wolverton was nominated to be a member of the Kootenay Liberal association in July 1908. He quickly established himself as a leader with a substantial knowledge of issues and general history. Wolverton often led discussions on a wide range of topics, from "direct democracy" to the "negro question." By 1912 he was elected president of the association.¹⁴

The reasons for Wolverton's interest in PR remain ambiguous. The *PR Review* would later suggest that he had been impressed with a visit to Nelson in 1909 from Canada's Governor-General, Earl Grey, who supported PR as a staunch Liberal and as a step toward establishing an Empire parliament.¹⁵ In the Anglophilic orchards of the west Kootenays, a land teeming with British immigrants of upper class pretensions, Grey's was no doubt a popular message.¹⁶ On the other hand, party considerations may have been foremost in Wolverton's mind. For whatever reasons, at the monthly meeting of the executive on May 13, 1913 Wolverton called for the insertion of PR into the Liberal party platform for the coming provincial contest. The meeting concurred and the resolution was dispatched to the Liberal party headquarters for consideration at the upcoming yearly convention in Revelstoke later that month. Wolverton was also elected a delegate to the event.¹⁷ While the convention ultimately decided against inserting PR into the platform, a committee was formed to investigate PR and direct democracy and report back in a year's time. E.S. Woodward and Wolverton were both appointed to the committee as secretary and chairman respectively.¹⁸ Perhaps to aid the project Wolverton also joined the platform committee. In the year that followed the committee corresponded with all known PR societies, gathering information and meeting at regular intervals to review the material. Ultimately a report with recommendations was forwarded for discussion at the

¹³ For an example see KMA, Nelson Liberal Party Minute Book, p. 97.

¹⁴ KMA, Nelson Liberal Party Minute Book, pp. 48, 103, 174.

¹⁵ *PR Review*, n. 45 (January 1918), p. 42; for Earl Grey's views see unidentified, undated clipping in City of Vancouver Archives (hereinafter CVA), Garfield King Scrapbook, Add. Mss. 135.

¹⁶ For more on this see Jason Bennett, "'The True Elixir of Life': Imagining Eden and Empire in the Settlement of Kelowna, British Columbia, 1904-1920," (masters' thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1996).

¹⁷ KMA, Nelson Liberal Party Minute Book, May 13, 1913, p. 134.

¹⁸ *Equity*, October 1913, p. 231 and April 1914, p. 107.

1914 Liberal convention in Victoria. Leaving little to chance, the Nelson Liberals also re-submitted their PR resolution from the previous year for reconsideration.¹⁹

Reform forces had slowly been gathering to the Liberal train. The corruption of the McBride/Bowser regime was becoming more obvious over time. And social issues like prohibition and women's suffrage were ripe for adoption by a political party.²⁰ Yet PR still had an uphill climb with the Liberals. Despite four election defeats and their complete exclusion from the legislature, some Liberals remained leery about changing the electoral rules of the game. Wolverton's report sparked a four hour debate among the 450 delegates. Opponents complained that PR was a "new and untried scheme," "too complicated," and that "the people are not demanding it." The report's supporters battled back by pointing out the anomalies of the existing system, and the successful operation of the PR in other lands. In the end PR passed by a margin of four to one, though the direct democracy recommendations had to be put aside for lack of time.²¹ PR emerged from the convention an official part of the Liberal party's reform platform, a perfect example of the mixture of high principle and tactical self-interest that would characterize much of the drive for PR in BC. The hesitation of later Liberal governments to introduce PR for provincial elections, however, suggests that many Liberals may have viewed the reform more as a means of getting votes than as a novel way to count them. PR if necessary, they seemed to say, but not necessarily PR.

Meanwhile PR reformers could remain cocooned in their reform journals, clubs, and conferences, indifferent to the practicalities of more conventional political concerns. That they did not suggests an opportunity not usually available to "principled" reformers. Wartime only seemed to encourage an outburst of principled movements whose organizing threatened to spill over into electoral politics. Like prohibition and women's suffrage, PR reformers thought the time would come soon when their ideas could no longer be ignored. Confirmation seemed to lie with the bustle of PR activity that occurred during 1915 in British Columbia and beyond. Particularly encouraging was the first adoption of PR by any locality in North America. Quite by accident the American Proportional Representation League's C.G. Hoag found himself in the tiny town of Ashtabula, Ohio and in chatting with some locals about PR managed to spark enough interest in the subject to eventually have it adopted.²² This early victory in the United

¹⁹ KMA, Nelson Liberal Party Minute Book, January 12, 1914, p. 150.

²⁰ Diane Crossley, "The B.C. Liberal Party and Women's Reforms, 1916-1928," in Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess (editors), *In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in B.C.*, (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980), pp. 229-253.

²¹ *Equity*, April 1914, pp. 107-08.

²² *PR Review*, n. 36 (October 1915), pp. 3-7. See also Hoag, pp. 193, 196-200.

States, however, proved difficult to follow. Boulder, Colorado only adopted PR two years later in October 1917, with Sacramento, California a distant third in 1920. No wonder American PR enthusiasts would increasingly look to the north for inspiration; the success of PR in Canada during the same period must have seemed meteoric by contrast - nineteen Canadian cities adopted PR by 1920. Yet Hoag had a hand in the Canadian story as well. In the spring of 1915 he visited Ottawa under the auspices of a reform group called the "People's Forum." After presentations on PR to the House of Commons, the Ontario provincial legislature, the Ottawa municipal council, and many public meetings, Hoag left town. But his visit galvanized the reform forces of the capital city and led to a successful plebiscite on the issue in January 1916. Ottawa appeared set to become the first municipality in Canada to adopt PR.²³

PR continued to maintain a high profile throughout 1916. The success at Ottawa buzzed through reform circles across the nation. When the Ontario provincial government later scuttled the Ottawa plan by refusing to pass enabling legislation the reformers remained undaunted. A series of meetings between Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa resulted in the consolidation of a Canadian PR Society, a group that hoped a more permanent organizational structure would systematize the work and impress the impressionable.²⁴ Meanwhile, at the annual convention of the Union of Canadian Municipalities in Montreal that summer, PR stood alongside such well-known reform themes as municipal ownership of utilities, city manager and commission forms of municipal government, and daylight savings. Montreal PR enthusiast Howard S. Ross stood shoulder to shoulder with such reform luminaries as W.D. Lighthall and H.L. Brittain.²⁵ Organizing drives also continued. Following the establishment of the Canadian PR group Vancouver reformers organized their own chapter with Dr. William McConkey as president and the former reeve of Point Grey, Athelstan G. Harvey, as secretary.²⁶ Vancouver's PR group was decidedly Liberal in complexion. This might explain the meagre effort expended organizing for the reform locally in the summer of 1916 - many were probably too busy preparing for the much-rumoured provincial election.

²³ See *PR Review*, n. 34 (April 1915), pp. 39-42; *PR Review*, n. 35 (July 1915), pp. 60-1; and *PR Review*, n. 37 (January 1916), pp. 24-5.

²⁴ The Canadian PR Society had actually been formed the previous year but serious organizing efforts, sponsorship, and the like only began in earnest in 1916. See *PR Review*, n. 35 (July 1915), pp. 60-1; *PR Review*, n. 36 (October 1915), pp. 12-3; and *PR Review*, n. 39 (July 1916), pp. 61-2.

²⁵ CVA, City Clerk's Records, v. 59, loc. 13-C-6, 1916, file T-Z. Mayor Malcom McBeath and New Westminster Mayor A. Wells Gray were two of the BC officers of the UCM in attendance.

²⁶ *PR Review*, n. 39 (July 1916), p. 65.

In the September 1916 election, a contest the Liberals were set to win with or without PR, the Conservatives staggered to the polls. The affable McBride was gone and only Bowser remained to rally the wartime discontents. He failed. With a reform for every occasion the Liberals won the provincial election in what one contemporary called a "political avalanche."²⁷ The future of PR seemed assured. Excited party stalwarts began agitating at the municipal level for the change even before the Conservatives ceded power. In discussing proposals for amendments to the Vancouver city charter in a finance committee meeting of October 23, 1916, Liberal MLA-elect and city alderman Dr. William McIntosh suggested the inclusion of PR. The Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, hoping a change in the rules of the electoral rules of the game might aid in the election of a labour representative, wrote the council also requesting PR. Shortly after a deputation from the PR society addressed the aldermen on the merits of the reform and provided each with pamphlets.²⁸ But on November 1 city solicitor Edward Jones put the brake on these developments. He thought the charter was the wrong place to start. Instead he suggested simply petitioning the government to enact a law applying to the whole province, implying that this was the government's wish as well. McIntosh and fellow reform councillor Walter Hamilton dutifully sponsored a new motion calling for the province to establish legislation allowing any municipality to introduce PR by plebiscite.²⁹ This was echoed by other municipalities, most notably New Westminster and South Vancouver.³⁰

As these early calls for PR were put off awaiting the organized efforts of the new government when it took office, reformers eagerly anticipated the establishment of the Liberals in power. When Bowser and the Conservatives finally gave up office in late November, after clinging to power for more than two months on a series of technicalities, the new government was faced by many wishing to call in their markers. One was Garfield King, a young lawyer, Liberal, and the new secretary of the Vancouver PR Society. King too had been impressed with John Humphreys tour of 1915 and in short order had become expert in the intricacies of proportional representation. Early in 1917 King obtained an interview with the new Premier to remind him of the Liberal promise of PR; he was assured that enabling legislation to allow municipalities to adopt the reform was in the works.³¹ King found the corridors of power crowded in Victoria. A labour

²⁷ J. Castell Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review 1916*, (Toronto: Canadian Annual Review Limited, 1917), p. 778.

²⁸ CVA, City Clerk's Records, 120-B-6, file 112.

²⁹ CVA, City Clerk's Records, 120-B-6, file 112.

³⁰ CVA, South Vancouver Council Minutes, MCR 49, reel 2, December 12, 1916, minute book p. 207.

³¹ Glashan, p. 18.

delegation also pressed the government for PR, among other demands.³² On April 12 the Municipal Committee of the House recommended that PR be handled in a wholly separate PR bill.³³ King worked with others to draw up the legislation which finally was tabled in the House May 18. The bill allowing municipalities to adopt PR by a vote of three-fifths of council or by plebiscite was passed the next day.³⁴

Premier Brewster himself introduced the debate claiming “there has been an ever growing demand for up-to-date methods of election in municipal matters, and the bill provides an avenue for this under the proportional scheme..” Yet he went on to say that, personally, he believed that “the time was not too far distant when some good plan would be adopted throughout the country.” Echoing the sentiments of many PR enthusiasts, Brewster suggested that the municipal application of the reform was akin to an “educational institution,” an opportunity for the public to become better acquainted with the future of democracy.³⁵ One could forgive the unbridled optimism - these were heady days for PR supporters. A bill embodying radical franchise reforms including PR had entered the British House of Commons, and noises from the Canadian House were also being heard.³⁶ But at the same time the Liberal government said little publicly about any provincial application of the measure. Behind the scenes, reformers were encouraged to be patient and make use of the municipal opportunity first.³⁷ Over the objections of Conservative R.H. Pooley and others, BC’s municipal PR act passed though the House without amendment.³⁸

In the summer of 1917 the PR forces mustered their strength for the coming municipal work. When William McConkey stepped down as president of the local PR league, he was replaced by another doctor, Robert Telford. Here was a major find for the reform forces as Telford was a well known and highly respected surgeon of international reputation. He had built one of the city’s first modern medical facilities, the Burrard Sanatorium, in 1903. He also had a hand in a number of other reform movements, most notably prohibition.³⁹ Others active in the society included Dr. T. Procter Hall, and W. J.

³² Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review 1917*, p. 830.

³³ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, April 12, 1917, p. 7.

³⁴ *PR Review*, n. 43 (July 1917), p. 59.

³⁵ *Victoria Daily Times*, May 19, 1917, p. 7.

³⁶ *Victoria Daily Times*, May 15, 1917, p. 11. For the substance of the lengthy discussion on PR in Parliament, see House of Commons, *Hansard*, April 30, 1917, pp. 902-917.

³⁷ Glashan, p. 23. See also King’s comments in the *World*, January 12, 1920.

³⁸ *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia*, May 18, 1917, pp. 175-6.

³⁹ Telford came from a family of doctors with three of his brothers in the profession. Robert Telford’s younger brother Lyle was active in the prohibition movement with him but later would go to become a public figure in his own right in the provincial CCF and as mayor of Vancouver in 1939. Incidentally, the latter Telford would also be involved in a municipal campaign for PR when as mayor of Vancouver

Conway of the hardwood flooring trade. McConkey too remained involved for a time. And the indefatigable Garfield King held everything together as secretary of the group. In all these men were many of the trademark "progressive" qualities: a faith in science, a belief in expert control, and an essentially Millsian liberalism.⁴⁰

These were not the only reformers. An anxious councillor in South Vancouver attempted to give notice of motion to adopt the PR in early July, only weeks after the act was passed. He subsequently re-introduced the notice September 3.⁴¹ Vancouver alderman Walter Hamilton was also keen to get the reform adopted. His council had called on the provincial government in 1916 to introduce the legislation allowing for the adoption of PR. As such Hamilton thought they should lead by example and introduced the requisite notice of motion for adopting the system at a council meeting September 26.⁴² His efforts were aided by letters of support from the Trades and Labour Council, and the PR Society, who in turn claimed the support of women's organizations, Rotary and various ratepayers groups.⁴³

he would initiate an unsuccessful reconsideration of the reform for the city in 1939. See CVA, Mayor's Papers, loc. 33-F-1, file: proportional representation. For biographical information on the Telfords see CVA, Telford, M9302.

⁴⁰ While few concentrated explications of these reformers' views are available, inferences may be drawn from the many scattered references to them in the papers, and from their own letters to the editor. The efforts A. G. Harvey and T. Proctor Hall can give a representative sense of the reformism entertained by the PR advocates. Harvey was a dedicated letter writer and as a political office holder it is perhaps not surprising that he supported many of the more technical proposals to improve the body politic. In addition to supporting PR, he wrote letters advocating the adoption of a civic board of control and in defence of zoning regulations. Harvey was a member of the Shaughnessy Liberal Association, and unsuccessfully contested the Liberal nomination for Richmond in 1915, losing to Gerry McGeer. He was instrumental in arranging the amalgamation of Point Grey and South Vancouver with Vancouver and sat on the latter's council for two terms in the early 1930s. In 1935 he unsuccessfully attempted to have Vancouver reconsider PR. After his death, a contemporary, S. T. Frost, wrote to the *Province* describing how as reeve Harvey would not accept a free streetcar pass from the BCER because he did not want to be obligated to them. T. Proctor Hall's progressive concerns were more socially-oriented than Harvey's but still concerned with government. Hall supported the single tax and prohibition movements, and sat on the executives of a number of civic reform groups. He wrote letters calling for the extension of government planning beyond the war as a way to a more rational organization of industry, and for the hiring of a civic psychiatrist to evaluate the city's "mental defectives." He and Robert Telford were often called upon to preside over public meetings. At one they oversaw a debate on the role of literature in the progress of society, and at another the role of labour. For the Harvey references see (in order) *World*, January 8, 1915, p. 6; *West Vancouver News*, November 23, 1928; *World*, March 17, 1915, p. 2; *World*, March 20, 1915, p. 18; *Province*, January 19, 1950; CVA, PD 1935-98 "PR as a help in obtaining a representative city council" by A. G. Harvey; *Province*, January 30, 1950, p. 4. For the Hall references see (in order) CVA, City Clerk's Records, loc. 13-D-6, file: petitions (1917); *World*, September 22, 1916, p. 16; *World*, September 26, 1916, p. 6; *World*, June 3, 1916, p. 15; *World*, May 22, 1916, p. 16; and *World*, April 6, 1923, p. 4.

⁴¹ CVA, South Vancouver Council Minutes, MCR 49, reel 3, July 9, 1917, and September 6, 1917, minute book p. 8.

⁴² CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, September 26, 1917, minute book p. 702.

⁴³ CVA, City Clerk's Records, 13-D-4, file V.

The months of delay between the act's adoption in May and any organized efforts to have it enacted might suggest a degree of indifference to the reform on the part of any but the most committed. But the delay can best be explained by the absence of any detailed counting rules for the proportional voting. The act specified only that the Lieutenant-Governor's office was responsible to establish counting procedures. No doubt, many a reformer was put off or cautioned to wait until the details were worked out. King's involvement with the drafting of the act led to the PR Society working closely with the provincial government to set out the rules for the complex procedures of proportional voting. Over the summer the Society drew up provisional rules and circulated them to the American PR League and the British Proportional Representation Society for comment. Whatever recommendations King and the PR Society gave to the Attorney-General would probably stand, as nobody else in the province knew the intricacies of the voting scheme as well. Finally, in early October, Garfield King and the Society's second Vice-President, T.P. Hall, traveled to Victoria to meet with A.W. Pineo of the Attorney-General's office to submit their recommendations. As the *Victoria Daily Times* noted, "In the main, the suggestions submitted to Mr. Pineo this morning will in due course go to the Attorney-General and subsequently to the Lieutenant-Governor for his action as provided by the Act."⁴⁴ The hard work of the Society and their excellent Liberal credentials no doubt alleviated the government of a tedious responsibility. They were probably more than happy to give way to the experts in this case.

With the counting rules established, the PR Society could focus its attentions on organizing the reformers, providing resources, and raising public awareness. On October 16 Garfield King appeared before the regular monthly meeting of the Vancouver Board of Trade in their rooms atop the Molson Bank building downtown. Fragmentary evidence of King's appearances, charts and diagrams in hand, exists for many meetings in different locales around the lower mainland. At this one the Board's secretary noted how he "addressed the meeting with the aid of diagrams which were hung up on the wall and which exemplified to a great degree the explanations made by him." The minutes suggested that board members were "greatly interested" in King's presentation and asked many questions dealing with the mathematical intricacies of the count - all of which were "satisfactorily answered." Even Vancouver's notoriously contrary alderman Thomas H. Kirk seemed pleased, seconding the "hearty vote of thanks" given King for his address.⁴⁵

King must have felt confident that everything was going according to plan. Two days after the Board of Trade meeting he dropped in on Vancouver's city clerk William

⁴⁴ *Victoria Daily Times*, October 4, 1917, p. 17.

⁴⁵ CVA, Vancouver Board of Trade Minutes, Add. Mss. 300, v. 46, October 16, 1917.

McQueen for an informal chat. A day later he dropped off a few pamphlets and a recommendation of John Humphreys' *Proportional Representation*, a book in the public library. Trying to be helpful, he noted that the book was "considered the standard work on the subject" and that it would give the clerk "a grasp of the whole subject which you will not be able to get at first glance from a perusal of rules." Yet King's note contained more than a hint of arrogance. To him, adoption of PR by the city appeared to be a foregone conclusion. "I am confident that it will not be long before you will be [the] leading expert," King summed up, "as indeed you will require to be as Returning Officer, in the principles of a system which so successfully ensures the objects of democracy." He closed with an offer of service.⁴⁶

Arrogance seemed to be a character trait in the PR movement. The burden of explaining the "truth" about the problem of democracy and its solution made for advocates that either dripped with condescension toward the unconverted or could not suffer fools gladly. Both Robert Telford and King appeared to fall into the latter category. On one occasion King called his critics "childish," and an "anvil chorus," while dismissing their comments as "piffle and bunk."⁴⁷ It was his usual response. Politically, King was a Liberal of sorts. He definitely moved within the progressive circles of the provincial Liberals, and while many progressives left the party in the early 1920s disgusted with the Oliver administration, it appears he stayed. King's direct involvement as a member of the party seemed to diminish after 1915, but he was still called on to do party tasks well into the late 1920s.⁴⁸ Later King would move to the left, defending strikers during the depression, and the civil rights of Ukrainian and Japanese-Canadians during World War Two. He was also involved in progressive theatre and with the formation of the province's first civil liberties association.⁴⁹ King's thirty-year career in activism was characterized by a concern for fair process, though how he came to

⁴⁶ CVA, City Clerk's Records, 13-D-2, file K.

⁴⁷ *Province*, January 19, 1921.

⁴⁸ For King's Liberal credentials see the *World*, March 16, 1915, p. 7, where he was listed as a delegate to the party's Vancouver nominating convention for the coming provincial election. His later involvement must be discerned mostly by inference from his many addresses to the city and progressive Liberals into the 1920s. His later activity is harder to trace. In 1952, in a letter to the *News Herald* commenting on the province's transferable balloting system, King noted that he was once called on to prepare similar legislation for the McLean Liberal government in the late 1920s but it was never introduced. See the *News Herald*, June 16, 1952, p. 9.

⁴⁹ For King's defence of unions see the *Province*, July 30, 1938, p. 5; for Ukrainians and Japanese see the *Sun*, May 7, 1943, p. 5, and *Province*, October 4, 1945, p. 2; for his work on behalf of the civil liberties union see *Province*, November 28, 1945, p. 24; and for his involvement with progressive theatre see Bonita Bray, "Against All Odds: The Progressive Arts Club's Production of *Waiting for Lefty*," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 29 (3) (Fall 1990), pp. 106-122. Other biographical information on King is scarce. The *Sun* published a death notice when King died in 1975 but it was, unfortunately, riddled with inaccuracies.

understand “fair” changed with the times. As the first of his many efforts, the drive for PR would be punctuated by the bluster, impatience, and certainty of a “true believer,” qualities only experience might change. Yet if he were guilty, so were many of his compatriots, and they did not necessarily have age as an excuse.

PR activists saw their activities overshadowed in October by the emergence of the federal Union government. Newspapers crowded out municipal reform to fill their columns with rumours of a national election. Still, over the next few weeks the organized activity around PR increased. Hugh Norman Lidster of the New Westminster PR Society convinced that city’s Board of Trade to solicit a speaker on the subject.⁵⁰ South Vancouver councillors again attempted to formally give notice of motion to have the council vote on PR.⁵¹ The city of Victoria appeared set to discuss it, and an energetic PR Society there, under the stewardship of E.S. Woodward, had gained the support of a number of members of council.⁵² Meanwhile, the wider notion of reform gained a boost with the dramatic re-organization and expansion of Vancouver’s Board of Trade under a banner of “progress.”⁵³ The *Sun* framed the event with a sense of moral urgency: “No progressive businessman can afford not to be a member of the Board of Trade and no businessman can afford not to be progressive.”⁵⁴ Just what the paper or the Board of Trade meant by “progressive” was a bit murky, but evidence suggests that it extended beyond the traditional city boosterism to a more active interest in policy and planning. New committees included one devoted solely to civic affairs.

With a sense of “progress” in the air, the PR Society let Vancouver’s aldermen know that they wished them to consider adopting PR by a vote of council rather than a plebiscite. Finance chair T. H. Kirk contacted the city solicitor E. F. Jones for his opinion, which to the surprise of the reformers, was negative. In a letter to Kirk dated October 17, Jones claimed that the PR act contradicted the city charter, contradicted itself, and was just the sort of change that required public input. Specifically, Jones pointed out that the PR act would eliminate wards but not provide for the number of alderman to be elected. An amendment to the city charter in the previous year gave the council the power to fix the number of representatives on council from time to time, but for unspecified reasons he did not think it would apply in this situation. He also took issue with the PR act’s stated intention to “ensure the will of the majority of the electors

⁵⁰ CVA, New Westminster Board of Trade Minutes, Add. Mss. 440, microfilm M8, reel 2, October 16, 1917, p. 2.

⁵¹ CVA, South Vancouver Council Minutes, MCR 49, reel 3, October 15, 1917, minute book pp. 57, 59.

⁵² *Daily Colonist*, October, 21, 1917, p. 7.

⁵³ *Sun*, October 15, 1917, p. 4.

⁵⁴ *Sun*, October 16, 1917, p. 6.

shall take effect.” To Jones’ way of thinking, the counting rules would assure just the opposite. Whether PR represented or denied the majority would remain a point of confused debate throughout the drive for proportional representation. Reformers thought of majorities in terms of the constitution of the council as a whole; their critics spoke of majorities in terms of the election of individual members. However, Jones’ final point was clear, and for many, compelling. He argued that a change “of such gravity” required direction from the electors. Kirk agreed but kept Jones’ letter to himself until the October 23 finance committee meeting. Members then present agreed that copies should be forwarded to the PR society and all members of council.⁵⁵

Despite Vancouver’s power and prestige their city solicitors’ fears concerning the PR act did not spread. The next day the reform’s enthusiasts scored their first victory. Port Coquitlam became the first municipality in British Columbia to adopt PR October 24. After a demonstration of proportional voting conducted by Dr. Robert Telford, alderman Denis Campbell moved adoption of the new system, which passed unanimously. Emboldened by their success, the PR Society increased their pressure on the Vancouver city council to allow them to give the aldermen a demonstration of PR. The reformers were convinced that opposition to the reform could only be the product of ignorance or ignobility, nothing education and an appeal to do the honourable thing could not alter.⁵⁶ As Walter Hamilton’s motion to vote on PR was to come up November 5, the PR Society was keen to address council before the vote.

Vancouver’s Mayor Malcom McBeath seemed to embody wartime reform: he was staunchly anti-drink, friendly to the provincial Liberals, and all for “cleaning up the town.”⁵⁷ On October 30, he reminded council of his promise to allow PR supporters to address them. As the *Sun* noted, while all the aldermen “professed to be anxious to hear the workings of the proportional representation plan outlined” they all seemed too busy with other things to commit to any more “special meetings.” Desperate, the Mayor reminded them that, as the issue was to come before council in just five days, something had to be done. Brushing aside the Mayor’s suggestion of Friday, November 2 - “the aldermen simply couldn’t think of it that near the week end” - the meeting was scheduled

⁵⁵ For Jones’ letter and a summary of council minutes dealing with PR see CVA, City Clerk’s Records, Series 40, Reports 1887-1977, 120-B-6, file 112, Proportional Representation 1916-40.

⁵⁶ That reformers were convinced that education was all that was needed succeed with their plans is apparent from even a cursory glance at the reformers’ own journals and statements in the papers. See *Equity* and the *PR Review* particularly.

⁵⁷ McBeath twice attempted to secure a Liberal nomination for the 1916 election, losing in Richmond to Gerry McGeer, and then again two weeks later in the multi-member riding of Vancouver. See the *World*, March 20, 1915, p. 18; and the *World*, March 31, 1915, p. 5

for the afternoon of November 5, just hours before the motion was to be debated.⁵⁸ As a result, the PR Society had to postpone a similar demonstration they had planned for the South Vancouver Council by a few days.⁵⁹ The preference given Vancouver clearly reflected the reformers' priorities. As the province's largest city, many thought a successful municipal experiment with PR there would presage the inevitable adoption of the system for provincial purposes.

During this maneuvering newspaper coverage ranged from neutral to mildly positive. The *World* had long championed progressive reforms, both under the ownership of erratic reformer and perennial mayoralty candidate Louis D. Taylor, and the subsequent owner, prohibition supporter John Nelson. Perhaps more surprising was the moderate praise of the *Sun*, ostensibly a Liberal paper but hardly a reliable one.⁶⁰ Besides generous coverage of ratepayer meetings that endorsed civic reform and PR, the *Sun* featured a positive assessment of New Zealand's recent municipal experiments with proportional voting just one day before the special council meeting was to discuss the reform. Indeed, said the *Sun*, the meeting was the very reason New Zealand's experience was of interest. After a brief explanation of PR and the results the *Sun* declared that "it was obvious" that had the New Zealand election been conducted under the "majority" system, many would have been denied representation. A better endorsement could not have been written by the PR reformers themselves.⁶¹

The PR Society set out to achieve two goals with their presentation to council. First they wanted to emphasize the aldermen's ability to introduce PR by a vote of council. They had to counter the impressions of the city solicitor that PR was a "change of gravity" that required public approval. Which led to their second theme: an attempt to spur the aldermen to action by subtly underlining the class issues at stake. Both the carrot and the stick put in an appearance. The muted opposition to PR from some of the members, the sense of indifference, betrayed the essentially business conservatism of the balance of Vancouver's council. Three members were Liberals with varying degrees of commitment to reform. These included Mayor McBeath, and aldermen Robert Henry Gale and Walter Hamilton. Two other Liberals from the previous year's council, James Ramsay and William McIntosh, had been elected in the provincial contest and moved on

⁵⁸ *Sun*, October 31, 1917, p. 5.

⁵⁹ *Sun*, November 2, 1917, p. 3.

⁶⁰ For a more substantial appraisal of the newspapers in this period see D.A. McGregor, "Adventures of Vancouver Newspapers: 1892-1926," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, vol. X, no. II, pp. 89-142; and Marjory Lang and Linda Hale, "Women of *The World* and Other Dailies: The Lives And Times of Vancouver Newspaperwomen in the First Quarter of the Twentieth Century," *BC Studies*, no. 85, Spring 1990, pp. 3-23.

⁶¹ *Sun*, November 4, 1917, p. 2.

to the legislature in Victoria. The rest of council comprised what might be described as an independent business orientation, though both T. H. Kirk and Frank Woodside had toyed with Conservative nominations at one time or another.⁶² With this latter group of aldermen the PR Society wanted to plant the idea that a continuation of the status quo could possibly lead to untenable results, perhaps even to a dramatic over-representation of labour candidates sometime in the future.

PR dominated much of council's time Monday, November 5 with both a special meeting on the subject in the afternoon and a procedural wrangle over Alderman Hamilton's notice of motion to adopt the system in the evening.⁶³ The afternoon meeting consisted of presentations by members of the PR Society and questions from the aldermen. Representatives of Rotary, the Trades and Labour Council, the Central Ratepayers, and "various women's organizations" were in attendance to show their support. Dr. Robert Telford opened the meeting with a demonstration of the evils of the ward system. With charts and diagrams he explained how the present system disenfranchised minorities by preventing their representation and how PR would do better. As the *Sun* noted, Telford declared that with PR the "influence of corporations, cliques, and machines would be eliminated" and "plugging" made practically impossible. PR would help the "best types of men" find their way into politics and the "true political aspirations of the people" would be expressed effectively in legislatures and city councils. He also suggested that because PR would eliminate wards and elect members from the city as whole, aldermen would have a chance to be "statesmen instead of merely politicians," thus avoiding the petty "wardheeling" of the past.

Telford's speech was the usual grab-bag of progressive reform rhetoric. A good speaker could recombine them effortlessly to address any situation. But here Telford's essentially provincial interests were exposed by his uncritical use of arguments and illustrations more applicable to other circumstances. Telford's focus on bossism and party representation was ill-placed: Vancouver had neither machine politics nor political parties, a point that would be emphasized later on by his opponents. But at this meeting Telford's comments were received with polite interest, if not enthusiasm. In closing, Telford attempted to counter the city solicitor's views of the gravity of the change to PR. "We are not asking for any great reform," claimed the speaker, "nor anything that would bring about any great upheaval. We are simply asking to perfect the existing system."

⁶² For Woodside and the Conservatives see the *World*, March 5, 1915, p. 14. Kirk was long courted by the provincial Conservatives, finally deciding to run for them in 1924. Though he lost that election, he was successful on his second try in 1928. See Elections BC, *Electoral History of British Columbia*, pp. 154, 164.

⁶³ A detailed account of the meeting is contained in the *Sun*, November 6, 1917, p. 6.

The theme of PR as an “improvement” on the current system was a strategy introduced to address the specific debate in Vancouver. All subsequent speakers reinforced it.

Garfield King spoke next, countering the idea that PR itself was a novelty. By contrast he pointed out that PR had been in use for over twenty years in Tasmania, and had recently been given a successful trial in the New Zealand municipality of Christchurch. Shifting to Vancouver, King pointed out the unfair distribution of votes between the various wards. Currently, the smallest ward had four times the voting power of the largest. King’s solution was not simply to abolish wards and introduce a “one-ward” scheme like the one suggested by alderman Owen. That voting at-large scheme might allow a popular minority to capture all representation on council. Perhaps in a bid to convince some of the more conservative members of council, King suggested that the beneficiaries of a block voting system at large might be an organized clique, perhaps even a contingent of popular labour men. King’s comment appeared as little more than an aside, for he had to be careful not to alienate his labour allies, but the point was made. Finally King made a pitch for the council to introduce PR as opposed to putting it to plebiscite.

But here an alderman piped up with a comment that drew some laughter from the audience. He asked King “what saving would be effected under the PR system” and what would be the cost to get elected under the new system. King had few answers, betraying his unfamiliarity with the more pragmatic side of politics. T. P. Hall asserted that he did not think it would be as expensive as the current system. In his own presentation Hall again played down the innovative features of PR, stressing that it was only an improvement on the present system. But Hall spent most of his time attempting to convince the aldermen that the conversion to PR was just like a lot of other council business and, as such, did not require a plebiscite. Indeed, in granting city councils the ability to vote in the reform, it was clear, Hall argued, that provincial legislators intended council to have the power, if the members wished it. The effort to convince the aldermen to adopt PR by a council vote rather than a plebiscite had little to do with any elitist fear of public involvement; a plebiscite was less attractive to the reformers simply because it would mean PR could not be used in the upcoming election. Overall, council kept quiet during the afternoon session. In the end, Mayor McBeath thanked the participants for the “exhaustive manner” in which they had explained PR and then adjourned the meeting.⁶⁴

Just a few hours later council re-convened for their regular meeting at seven-thirty.⁶⁵ As the *Sun* noted, there was a “large gallery of people” present with advocates

⁶⁴ *Sun*, November 6, 1917, p. 6.

⁶⁵ CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, November 5, 1917, minute book p. 733.

of PR turning out in such numbers that by the time council broached the subject there was “standing room only” in the chamber. PR ended up last on the agenda as the motion’s mover, Walter Hamilton, was late. Hamilton had gone east at the request of national food controller W.J. Hanna to attend as the city’s representative to the milk and dairy products enquiry.⁶⁶ Telegrams received at city hall assured the city clerk that Hamilton would arrive in time for the discussion, but as the events dragged on it became apparent that the itinerant alderman was not going to show. What to do with Hamilton’s motion turned out to be the evening’s great debate. With the crowd pressing in, city solicitor Jones suggested somebody else move it and postpone the debate. Alderman Gale took this up but not before a number of audience members complained that they had come to speak on behalf of PR. Grudgingly, council allotted anyone who wanted to speak five minutes. Delegates of organizations who then endorsed the system included Mrs. J. A. Clarke of the New Era League, Mrs. R. L. Craig for the Women’s Forum, Mrs. Cecil Cotton of the Local Council of Women, D. H. Kent of Rotary, and W. R. Trotter of the Trades and Labour Council. T. P. Hall appeared in a double capacity as representative of both the PR Society and the Central Ratepayers’ Association.⁶⁷

As it happened, the next meeting of council was set for the following day but supporters of PR were to be disappointed - Hamilton still had not returned from Eastern Canada. As a result, on the motion of Gale, council “gave another hoist” to the question of PR, putting off a decision on adopting the system until the next regular meeting of council November 19. Another two weeks of suspense would elapse before reformers could be sure their efforts would be rewarded.⁶⁸ At the same meeting council also considered a letter from A.G. Harvey requesting that if PR could not be instituted, perhaps a trial election could run at the same time as the usual city election merely to demonstrate the system. Harvey was perhaps more politically astute than many of the PR reformers. With council experience himself as the former reeve of Point Grey, Harvey probably interpreted the aldermen’s apparent lack of enthusiasm for the reform as a stalling tactic and sought to make sure that a fallback position was established in negotiating with them. In any event, his letter was filed with no further action taken.⁶⁹ Overall the meetings of the past few days had been less than productive. The PR Society stepped into the public arena with great confidence, believing their truth had only to be

⁶⁶ *Sun*, November 13, 1917, p. 2.

⁶⁷ *Sun*, November 6, 1917, p. 6.

⁶⁸ *Sun*, November 7, 1917, p. 11.

⁶⁹ See CVA, City Clerk’s Records, 13-C-7, file B for Harvey’s letter; Vancouver City Council Minutes, p. 746 for council’s actions; and the *Sun* of November 7 for an overview.

broadcast to be convincing, only to be shown up as lacking the answers to some key questions and the requisite political savvy.

In the two weeks before the Vancouver council decision the reformers were not idle. In Burnaby, where the ward system had been challenged many times, a discussion on PR broke out at a regular meeting of council.⁷⁰ The *Sun* reported November 6 that PR had “received a generous discussion” with some favouring the plan, and some suggesting it might “work a hardship in some ways.” Alderman P.W. Fau Vel ended the discussion by promising a resolution on the issue for the next meeting.⁷¹ The PR Society responded by making preparations for a public meeting to be arranged to be held somewhere in the municipality.⁷² Organizing in South Vancouver continued unabated with council establishing November 26 as their date to decide on the system.⁷³ Discussion of the reform also emerged in the North Vancouver council, again with a promise of a PR vote sometime in the next month.⁷⁴

PR organizing was not restricted to councils. Mary McConkey, wife of the Vancouver PR Society founder Dr. William McConkey, was well known in the women’s circles of Liberal party and for her organizing efforts on behalf of women’s suffrage.⁷⁵ But it was as a member of the Vancouver Council of Women that McConkey addressed the Vancouver Institute on proportional representation November 8. The Council had long taken an active interest in issues concerning civic improvement. At the annual meeting of the National Council of Women the previous summer they discussed PR “as providing for the representation of minorities...”⁷⁶ Locally the Council had close ties with the Vancouver Institute, a “town and gown affair” of highbrow patrons who organized lectures for the public on themes of culture and civic improvement.⁷⁷ With

⁷⁰ Louise McTague, “Burnaby’s Ward System, 1902-1927: A Cartographic Essay”, in L.J. Evenden (editor), *Suburb of Happy Homes, Burnaby, Centennial Themes*, (Burnaby: Simon Fraser University, 1995), p. 71.

⁷¹ *Sun*, November 6, 1917, p. 2. Fau Vel would appear to be a correct rendering of this alderman’s name as it appeared consistently in the civics columns of the papers in this form.

⁷² *Sun*, November 22, 1917, p. 3.

⁷³ *Sun*, November 10, 1917, p. 2.

⁷⁴ *Sun*, November 13, 1917, p. 5.

⁷⁵ For biographical information on McConkey see F.W. Howay and E.O.S. Scholefield, *British Columbia, from the Earliest Times to the Present*, (Vancouver: S.J. Clarke, 1914), under “Dr. William A. McConkey,” pp. 800-3; Linda Louise Hale, “Appendix: Votes for Women: Profiles of Prominent British Columbia Suffragists and Social Reformers,” in Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess (editors), *In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women’s History in B.C.*, (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980), p. 296; and in Irene Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice: Helena Gutteridge, The Unknown Reformer*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), pp. 56, 63, 77, 84, 87, 88, and 93.

⁷⁶ Spec. Col. UBC, Vancouver Council of Women. See box 5, file 5 for materials on civic improvement, and box 5, file 12 for the annual national convention scrapbook.

⁷⁷ Spec. Col. UBC, Vancouver Institute, box 4, file 5, pamphlet “The Vancouver Institute, Session 1917-18.”

Judge Helen MacGill in the chair, McConkey “referred to the prevailing dissatisfaction with the present conduct of public affairs” and the “failure of the ballot to prevent corruption and class legislation and give effect to the citizen’s desires with regard to government.” By contrast, she claimed PR would be the “great liberating force, setting free the ideals and intelligence of our people.”⁷⁸ Other activities included a highly successful public meeting in West Vancouver conducted by King and Telford, and further endorsements from the Women’s Forum of South Vancouver, and the Citizens’ Electoral Association of Vancouver.⁷⁹ In Victoria too organizing continued with a public meeting conducted by the local PR Society.⁸⁰

While progress in suburban areas was no doubt encouraging, the situation in Vancouver, and to a lesser extent Victoria, was undoubtedly first in the minds of the PR organizers. The absence of PR in Vancouver, the province’s largest city, would weaken and possibly upset the whole plan to jump from the civic to the provincial scene. Yet council’s intentions were deliberately vague, though that is not to say that all members were. Mayor McBeath declared his fidelity to PR in the *Sun* November 15 not just for civic contests, but for provincial and dominion elections as well. Gale also appeared in favour, as did Walter Hamilton. The rest of council was anybody’s guess. The *Sun* felt that there was no direct opposition on council to the PR plan. Any misgivings really had to do with the fact that a few aldermen thought the issue should go to a vote of the people.⁸¹ As the date approached, what Vancouver would do was still unclear. The PR Society held another public meeting November 16, no doubt to sharpen themselves as a prelude to the main event.⁸²

The November 19 council meeting was packed. As the *Sun* observed, “In expectation of a decision on the question every available inch of space outside the rail in the council chamber was occupied.” As to the question of PR itself the paper described the debate on PR as “lengthy and unusually warm.”⁸³ Alderman Hamilton opened the proceedings by giving the formal notice of motion that council adopt the system. He spent some time recounting the merits of PR and reminded council that nowhere that it had been adopted, had it been repealed. Then the debate began. Alderman Fred Rogers

⁷⁸ *Sun*, November 9, 1917, p. 4.

⁷⁹ For West Vancouver see the *Sun*, November 13, 1917, p. 5; for the Women’s Forum see the *Sun*, November 14, 1917, p. 5; and for the Citizens’ Electoral Association see the *Sun*, November 14, 1917, p. 6. For the Citizens’ actual letter of endorsement see CVA, City Clerk’s Records, 13-D-4, file V.

⁸⁰ *Victoria Daily Times*, November 16, 1917, p. 7.

⁸¹ *Sun*, November 15, 1917, p. 12.

⁸² *Sun*, November 16, 1917, p. 12.

⁸³ *Sun*, November 20, 1917, p. 3.

admitted that PR was probably suited to provincial or federal elections but complained that in civic elections it would give too much power to the tenants at the expense of the property owners. At this point alderman J. J. Miller introduced an amendment to the motion, seconded by alderman Kirk, to the effect that PR was too serious a change for the council to effect and that a plebiscite should be taken. However, this would only occur if a petition of ratepayers were presented to council asking for it.

This attempt to subvert the motion brought an immediate protest from Mayor McBeath who objected that there was no petition before council. Ignoring the interjection, the aldermen continued to press the idea that the loss of ward representation was too great a change to take responsibility for in one council motion. Alderman Woodside thought the agreement with the Hastings Townsite to bring them into the city's jurisdiction would make eliminating wards impossible and thus he could not support PR. Alderman Gale admitted he was not "well posted" on proportional representation but what appealed to him was the argument of organized labour that their vote was too dispersed across the city to gain a representative. He did not think that PR had to mean the elimination of the ward system. Alderman Owen thought a plebiscite was essential for a change of this nature while alderman Kirk suggested PR appealed to him but he still had problems with it. Indeed, while "it struck him as practically ideal," he thought it "not exactly practical in some respects."⁸⁴

Clearly unhappy with the direction of the discussion, Mayor McBeath intervened declaring that if PR meant the continuation of wards then he would vote against it. He described the ward system and ward rivalry as the "curse of the city" and reasserted his commitment to eradicating it. Here alderman Rogers took offence insisting that his own ward got no more than its share and he demanded the mayor be more explicit in his criticisms. The discussion continued for a while longer but eventually the question was called on the amendment with only Gale and Hamilton voting against. Now the aldermen were to consider the amended motion recommending that the question of PR be handled in a plebiscite but only if a petition asking for such a vote were brought before council. The motion did not offer anything that was not already possible under the strictures of the PR act. Still, a positive vote at this stage might have been better than nothing. Yet in returning to the amended motion for a vote the surprise result was that it mustered only three yeas: Hamilton, Gale and McBeath. Thus the council declined both to introduce PR or encourage a petition for a plebiscite.

⁸⁴ *Sun*, November 20, 1917, p. 3.

At this point the meeting nearly broke down amidst high passions and procedural pandemonium. Aldermen Hamilton and Gale attempted to rush through a motion having the council “heartily endorse” PR and encourage voters to support the reform in a plebiscite. The mayor ruled the motion out of order for lack of proper legal notice. Alderman Kirk demanded a special meeting to discuss PR. The mayor also ruled this motion out of order.⁸⁵ With no great satisfaction to anyone, the meeting then moved on to the early closing of grocery stores and the fate of a derelict old building. Whether in consultation with one another, or simply through a process of finding out each others views in the meeting, the six opposing aldermen had succeeded in defeating all moves for PR. Yet there would be some confusion about the council’s stance as a number of papers and attendees misconstrued the results as an endorsement of the plebiscite option by council.⁸⁶ In fact, by the voting record, council had voted in favour of doing nothing. The PR Society gave up its hopes to have Vancouver voting proportionally by the January elections; the focus now would be to secure a plebiscite on the issue.

Up to this point only the PR supporters were a coherent, visible group; those opposed were quiet, possibly waiting to see how far the whole exercise could be taken on reformer effort alone. With the battle lines drawn, the phony war over PR in Vancouver could finally be replaced by more conventional political tactics. Sometime after the meeting a group of aldermen, undoubtedly the same that sabotaged PR November 19, sent the mayor an official request for a special meeting to discuss it. The requesters complained that the proponents of the reform had been heard on a number of occasions but that so far council had not had the opportunity to hear any opposing views. “We are of the opinion,” the document stated, “that the arguments advanced of the said system, so far as we can judge, are purely theoretical and academical....” With some sarcasm the petitioners claimed a desire to be enlightened by the mayor as to how PR would “eradicate the evils your Worship has suggested now exist.” Specifically, the mayor’s claim to have “carefully gone into the question of PR” was called into account. The petitioners wanted to know in what practical ways PR would eradicate the problems of the ward system without necessarily introducing any new ones. In calling for a special meeting November 23 they suggested that more than population required representation and that the rights of those represented under the current system were legitimate and should not be ignored.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, November 19, 1917, minute book p. 760.

⁸⁶ *Sun*, November 20, 1917, p. 3.

⁸⁷ CVA, City Clerk’s Records, 13-D-4, file: petitions. Unsigned, undated.

The identity of these petitioners is in little doubt; they were the six aldermen opposed to PR. They would become an effective anti-PR group in the weeks to come, though, at this point, their collaboration was in its early stages. A special meeting indeed occurred November 23 convening at 215 in the afternoon. Mayor McBeath began by taking great pains to recast his previous remarks about wards in a more positive light. His criticisms were aimed at the evil of the ward system itself he said, not any aldermen in particular. Once again the system of proportional representation was discussed at great length, with Garfield King permitted to address council on behalf of the system. Doctors Telford and Hall were also in attendance. What else was discussed at the meeting is unclear from the minutes.⁸⁸ If any critics of PR attended their contributions were not recorded. Meanwhile the *Sun* applauded the council's decision to secure the consent of the people on PR, thus contributing to the confusion surrounding the council's intentions as to the reform. The editorialist concluded by suggesting that there seemed no particular reason why PR should not be tried out in the city. "The people here do not hold that a thing must be bad because it is new," the editor suggested with just a hint of civic pride. "Even if it did not measure up to expectations," he continued, "it could not possibly do any serious harm. At least it would allay the sense of grievance that now exists among a proportion of the electorate."⁸⁹

As December approached the first tentative steps in the new year's municipal election campaign were being taken. Every year rumours of the formation of a business slate abounded, though this time a popular former Tory member of the legislature, Charles Tisdall, was touted as a potential mayoralty candidate. Alderman Kirk hinted he might run for mayor, and the *Sun* suggested that the Central Ratepayers would field civic candidates on a platform of civic improvement and PR.⁹⁰ Meanwhile the Civic Electoral Association endorsed Mayor McBeath for another term and voiced support for the PR Society's petition for a plebiscite on PR that was making the rounds.⁹¹ Since the council's decision to forego PR by a vote of the aldermen, the PR Society had been busy collecting signatures on a petition calling for a plebiscite on the issue. Little controversy accompanied this exercise possibly because the Society's members thought, mistakenly it would turn out, that they were operating with the council's blessing. The *Sun* contributed to the confusion with its headline "Will Allow Plebiscite" in reporting the receipt of the petition by council December 3. In fact, council merely instructed the city clerk to

⁸⁸ CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, November 23, 1917, minute book p. 764.

⁸⁹ *Sun*, November 25, 1917, p. 6.

⁹⁰ *Sun*, November 25, 1917, p. 27.

⁹¹ *Sun*, November 27, 1917, p. 5.

“check up and report.” The petition rolled into the evening meeting of council with 1,454 names in favour of voting on PR, not quite the five per cent legally necessary. It was understood between King and the city clerk that more petitions were to follow.

Up to this point the efforts of Vancouver’s aldermen over the PR issue amounted to little more than swatting at an annoyance. They needed to make little effort outside of council meetings to frustrate the reformers. But the arrival of the petition changed things. By appealing to a higher power - a provincial statute - the reformers tried to force council’s hand. Alderman Kirk, seemingly ambivalent on the topic of PR, now came out decidedly against it, decrying its weaknesses and offering his own reform solution. Thomas H. Kirk seemed a natural leader for the anti-progress forces. Despite being elected in a 1915 city by-election on a platform of “honest and progressive methods,” Kirk represented a reactionary conservatism particularly at home in civic politics.⁹² Kirk was big on business methods, efficiency, and any economy drive that might involve lowering the number of civic workers. Kirk and his allies were the “bourbons” of council, keen to keep civic decisions in the hands of those who “had an interest in the city” - the property owners. They were determined to protect plural voting, or the “property vote,” from any of the reformers’ leveling ideas like “one man, one vote.” Their problems with PR were many, including an aversion to reform in general, but its impact on plural voting would catch their attention again and again.

Kirk’s allies could agree to resist PR but not on what to put forward in its stead. Prior to the receipt of the PR petition at the evening session of council, the aldermen had already put in a number of hours listening to an alternative scheme from their new leader. Kirk began by declaring that his opposition to PR stemmed from its threat to majority rule and the fact that it would substitute in its place “government by an aggregation of minorities.” Besides, he had read in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* that PR was considered “largely theoretical and not practical.” By contrast, his proposal was to introduce the alternative vote plan. It was one, he suggested, that would secure all the benefits of PR, such as preferential voting, but still enable the majority to rule. Kirk proposed a four ward system where two aldermen would be elected from each on alternating years. Voters would rank their choices to assure that winners had a majority of support instead of a simple plurality. But council was not impressed. Despite the *Sun*’s assurances that his was an “eloquent and lucid exposition of the scheme,” Kirk did not convince his fellow aldermen that his ideas would be an improvement on PR or the status quo. While the mayor attempted to simply defer any consideration of Kirk’s plan until the evening

⁹² *World*, March 13, 1915, p. 10.

session to see if a PR petition was received, the council went further, voting to adjourn without taking any action on Kirk's plan at all.⁹³

The PR Society's petition said a great deal about the commitment, organization, and class position of the reformers. It went beyond the pale of ordinary petitions of the day. Not only was it printed as opposed to being hand written, each page was comprised mostly of printed text explaining the rationale for the petition and the reasons to support PR. In point form the Society began: "The City Council desires YOUR opinion on Proportional Representation. They wish to hold a plebiscite as to its adoption. The law, however, REQUIRES that a petition be presented first. This is the petition." Signers were assured that much discussion would occur about PR before the actual plebiscite. Naturally, potential petitioners were told that "PR is a great instrument of reform," that it had been a success in "other parts of the Empire and in Europe" and that it had been approved by the Imperial Parliament. Indeed, "all the leading municipalities in the province are moving toward PR" and all shades of political opinion supported it. If this were not enough, the reformers tacked a moral exhortation onto the bottom of the page from H.G. Wells: "It is the substitution of Right for Wrong." Petitions continued to dribble in after December 3, sometimes signed by only one supporter, right up until the consideration of the whole issue December 18.⁹⁴

Perhaps worried by the organizing efforts of the PR supporters, Kirk's opposition took a new turn at the meeting of council December 6. On the same day that the city clerk declared he was not yet in a position to report on the PR petition, Alderman Kirk moved a motion that would have the council officially request the repeal of the whole PR act as it applied to Vancouver. In an eight part motion Kirk blasted the act for its inconsistencies with the Vancouver Incorporation Act and its own internal incoherence. For Kirk, the act simply left too many questions unanswered. How would the city clerk verify the plebiscite petitions? Property owners in Vancouver had long enjoyed casting plural votes, as many as they had deeds of title. Would plural voting apply to the PR plebiscite? How many aldermen would be on a PR council? Why would it take a three-

⁹³ *Sun*, December 4, 1917, p. 5.

⁹⁴ After rooting through the Vancouver city clerk's petition files for the years 1916 - 1924, the PR Society's petition definitely stands out as the only printed one submitted, all others being written out by hand. Curiously, only one page of the 1917 or the 1919 petitions is on file. The absence of the 1917 one is easily explained; Robert Telford collected it when the petition was withdrawn. But the whereabouts of the 1919 petition is a mystery; by all accounts it should be in the 1919 petition file of the City Clerk's Records. A plausible explanation of its absence might be that it was lost when many of the PR-related documents were amalgamated into an information file during the city's second official consideration of PR in 1939. The information file with the sample petition page can be located in CVA, City Clerk's Records, Series 40, Reports 1887-1977, 120-B-6, file 112, Proportional Representation 1916-40.

fifths vote to change the city to one ward under the city charter but only one-half to switch to PR? If all these could be considered minor points, then Kirk also suggested the act failed in its prime intention - to assure majority rule. Election by PR would mean a council of "factions" and party politics. Kirk accused the counting rules of being incomprehensible and open to manipulation by a "dishonest Returning Officer or his deputy." And finally, Kirk raised the difficulty that the act did not provide any means to get rid of PR once installed.

Despite protests from Gale and Hamilton, Kirk's anti-PR motion passed. The council was now on record as utterly opposing the introduction of PR. At the same meeting Kirk gave notice of motion to have his four ward scheme put to a plebiscite. For the first time the reformers met a direct, sustained, and well-organized effort to frustrate their plans. Other developments in the suburbs may also have suggested a slackening of the reform impulse and inertia for PR. After a prolonged effort to give notice of motion for the council to adopt the reform in South Vancouver, a vote was finally taken November 26 and PR defeated. Mary McConkey and the South Vancouver Women's Forum arrived too late to convince the councillors to support PR. Instead, council promised to put the issue to plebiscite. In Burnaby too the issue of adopting PR ended in defeat for PR supporters, though councillor Fau Vel promised to introduce a motion to have a plebiscite there as well.⁹⁵

With Kirk and the PR Society squared off to fight the PR battle to the end, both kept up their organizing activities in the period before the council's final assessment of the PR petition. On December 6 Kirk appeared before the executive of the Vancouver Board of Trade with his own charts and diagrams in an effort to demonstrate the inherent unfairness of PR and the superiority of his own proposal. In the end he was offered fifteen minutes to speak at the next meeting of the full council.⁹⁶ Meanwhile the PR Society attended meetings in West Vancouver and New Westminster to generally positive reviews.⁹⁷ And both Kirk and the PR forces were represented on the new Civic Bureau of the Board of Trade which held its first meeting December 10.⁹⁸

The halt in the forward march for PR turned out to be a detour. Garfield King informed the papers December 8 that he had received word of Nelson's adoption of

⁹⁵ *Sun*, December 7, 1917, p. 5.

⁹⁶ *Sun*, December 7, 1917, p. 14.

⁹⁷ For West Vancouver see *Sun*, December 9, 1917, p. 10; for New Westminster see *Sun*, December 9, 1917, p. 12.

⁹⁸ CVA. Vancouver Board of Trade Minutes, Civic Bureau Minutes, v. 49, December 10, 1917.

proportional representation.⁹⁹ As early as December 11 positive reports of Canada's first experience of municipal PR voting in Calgary began appearing in the local papers.¹⁰⁰ But undoubtedly the major success was the conversion of New Westminster's council to the cause on December 13. After a series of public meetings, including an appearance by King before the New Westminster Board of Trade, the aldermen decided to adopt PR by a three-fifths vote of council. The two aldermen who voted against the proposal apparently supported PR as well, but simply thought it should go to a plebiscite.¹⁰¹

On December 18, Vancouver's city clerk reported to council that the PR petition contained 2,183 valid names, more than five per cent of the total names on the voter's list, and thus was in compliance with the strictures of the Municipal Proportional Representation Act. The reform forces present were jubilant - a plebiscite on PR was at hand. But the city clerk also possessed a note from six of the alderman revealing that they had sought the unofficial opinion of the city solicitor on the irregularity of some of the petitions and also the inconsistencies between the PR act and the city charter.¹⁰² They now asked that the confidential letter be read and made a record of council. City solicitor Jones had consulted the retained legal council of municipality, George McCrossan, and together the two of them found many potential legal problems for the city. In the six page letter Jones re-iterated a number of points that were made previously by Kirk in his motion to have council request the repeal of the PR act, and then added a few new ones.

Jones declared that he and McCrossan were of the opinion that the PR act was "very loosely drawn" and "apparently without much thought or consideration of its relation to the Vancouver Incorporation Act." Jones, like Kirk, questioned the schism between the rules for mandatory plebiscites under the charter and the PR act, and its lack of specificity on the issue of plural voting. Jones cautioned council to consider some of the problems that might result from hasty action: "We think that in view of the radical change in the system you should proceed very cautiously, for, if, there is any doubt as to the legality of bringing such an Act into force, the opponents to the system might ... succeed in annulling any election held under the same...." As to the petitions themselves, Jones

⁹⁹ *Sun*, December 8, 1917, p. 12. Curiously, Nelson had adopted PR more than two weeks previously though King offered no indication of this in his announcement to the press. See also the *Nelson Daily News*, November 20, 1917, p. 8 for more details.

¹⁰⁰ *Sun*, December 11, 1917, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ *Sun*, December 14, 1917, p. 3. For King's New Westminster Board of Trade appearance, see CVA, New Westminster Board of Trade Minutes, Add. Mss. 440, microfilm M8, reel 2, November 20, 1917, p. 2.

¹⁰² The six aldermen were Kirk, J. J. Miller, W. C. Marshall, W. R. Owen, F. E. Woodside, and F. P. Rogers. See CVA, City Clerk's Records, 120-B-6, file 112.

raised doubts as to the propriety of the Wells quote, and the many pro-PR statements appearing on the document. But most seriously, he suggested that the assertion that council had desired the opinion of the electors was false, and as such may have contributed to people signing the petition under false pretences. In conclusion, Jones advised extreme caution and reminded council that the PR act made no provision for repeal once adopted.¹⁰³

With Jones' letter read into the record, Kirk then moved that council reject the PR petition. The motion sparked a three hour debate. Sometime after midnight alderman Gale put the essential question to the Mayor: was it legal for the council to over-ride the provincial PR act, or should they ignore the opinions of the solicitor and enact the bylaw for the plebiscite even if inconsistencies existed in the provincial legislation? McBeath considered the question for awhile, admitting he was inclined to find against the legal council, but then begged off answering. The question was too important to give a "snap judgment." Instead, the mayor announced his intention to take the matter under advisement for a time and give his ruling at a special meeting designated for that purpose.¹⁰⁴ The next day Gale had the city clerk send McBeath a note reminding him of his promise. In the meantime council set the special meeting to hear the mayor's verdict for the following Saturday, December 22, at eleven in the morning.¹⁰⁵ Despite the ferocity of the attack, the PR forces were not cowed. Before the meeting had wrapped up December 18, Alderman Hamilton had given notice of motion for a bylaw to allow for a plebiscite on PR, clearly assuming that the petition would indeed be accepted.

The latest actions of council, Kirk in particular, raised the ire of a number of PR supporters. Robert Telford was furious. At a meeting of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council two days later Telford threatened legal action if the council attempted to quash the petition. "Alderman Kirk has developed a very autocratic spirit," Telford complained bitterly, "He has outkaisered the Kaiser." Telford suggested that Kirk wanted the issue laid over until the legislature met again in a bid to have the PR act repealed and his own system approved. As for Kirk's supporters on council, it was obviously just a case of self-preservation. W. R. Trotter commended Telford's efforts but suggested he had been too kind in criticizing the calibre of some of the men on council. It was clear that they simply wanted to retain "petty ward politics." As for Kirk, Trotter assured his audience that he was "absolutely against the working class" and was in general

¹⁰³ CVA, City Clerk's Records, 120-B-6, file 112. It would appear that the aldermen had also asked Jones to comment on whether the PR act should be repealed. He refused to express an opinion officially suggesting that it was an issue for council to decide.

¹⁰⁴ *Sun.*, December 19, 1917, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ CVA, City Clerk's Records, loc. 120-B-6, file 112.

“humbugging the people.” Telford encouraged the VTLC to reject the legal arguments of the city council’s solicitor against PR. As Telford ungenerously put it, Jones was the kind of man who would give whatever opinion Kirk asked for. The VTLC’s business agent, Victor Midgely, could not resist insulting Vancouver’s council, calling them the “greatest aggregation of peanut politicians he had ever seen.” He recommended that the executive of the VTLC support the League in any possible legal proceedings against the council. In support, delegate George Hardy presented a lengthy resolution for adoption in which the VTLC reminded the city council of its support for PR in 1916 and the hypocrisy of its current stand. Furthermore the document reiterated the VTLC’s determination to resist attempts to alter the PR act, restrict its scope, or block its implementation in Vancouver. With rousing approval, the resolution was directed to be sent to the city council, and the Attorney General of the province.¹⁰⁶

On Thursday, December 20, West Vancouver became the fourth municipality to join the ranks of those set to try PR in BC. After a number of public meetings and the enthusiastic efforts of city aldermen, the council adopted the reform unanimously.¹⁰⁷ Celebration by the members of the PR Society, however, was shortlived. On the same day Vancouver city clerk William McQueen wrote a curious letter to council about the PR petition. McQueen efforts could be construed as simply attempting to clarify himself in the increasingly sticky legal environment of the petition battle, or it could reflect pressure brought to bear upon him by others. In any case, he wrote that the petition of December 3 arrived incomplete, though “it was understood at that time that I was to receive any further petition on this matter pending the checking up of the petition.” This appeared to support the PR Society. However, he then suggested that “If it is contended that the words ‘received and referred to the City Clerk to check up and report’ as inserted in the minutes of the Council of the 3rd inst. mean that the Council at that date are in any way bound as accepting the petition, the petition at that time was not sufficiently signed.” McQueen seemed to be saying that depending on when council saw itself as accepting the petition would affect the legitimacy of the petition itself.¹⁰⁸ The city clerk’s hedge reflected the taut balance between the factions and the difficulty in choosing the winning

¹⁰⁶ *British Columbia Federationist*, December 21, 1917. See also CVA, City Clerk’s Records, 13-D-3, file: petitions; and *Sun*, December 21, 1917, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Sun*, December 21, 1917, p. 3. Incorporated in 1912, West Vancouver initially used an at-large voting system but switched to a ward system in 1913. Ratepayers and members of council called for the abolition of wards in the fall of 1915 but were informed by the mayor that a plebiscite would be necessary. See West Vancouver Museum and Archive (hereinafter WVMA), Central Ratepayers Minute Book, October 1, 22, and November 12, 1915, pp. 67, 69, and 72. For PR notice and adoption see West Vancouver City Hall (hereinafter WVCH), West Vancouver City Council Minutes, November 6, 20, and December 20, 1917.

¹⁰⁸ CVA, City Clerk’s Records, 120-B-6, file 112.

side. At stake were possible court proceedings regardless of which side won. As the *Sun* pointed out, the council risked mandamus proceedings if they ignored the legal request of ratepayers to vote on PR, but they also risked a challenge if they went ahead with the requested plebiscite and a ratepayer successfully attacked what the city's legal council called "irregularities" in the petition.

Saturday's *Sun* announced that the mayor "Will Give Ruling Today," warning that the meeting "was liable to develop another wordy debate over PR before it is over."¹⁰⁹ But in this, the most reasonable of predictions considering the recent discussions of PR, the *Sun* turned out to be wrong. Instead T. P. Hall handed the Mayor a handwritten note asking to withdraw the PR Society's petition from further consideration: "To avoid further trouble, and since the municipalities that have already adopted PR are sufficient to give the Act a fair trial, the PR Society at its meeting last evening by resolution asked leave to withdraw the petition now before you."¹¹⁰ Aldermen Hamilton and Gale reluctantly moved acceptance of the request and the council agreed. On Monday, December 24, Robert Telford called on the city clerk and signed a receipt for all the petitions.¹¹¹

Why the PR Society decided not to fight remains unclear. Perhaps McQueen's letter suggested a rougher legal road than they had anticipated. Or perhaps they were thinking of other battles going on simultaneously. As the *Sun* noted, the withdrawal of the petition alleviated Mayor McBeath of the responsibility of making a "delicate" decision. In the months previous the relationship between McBeath and his apparent Liberal ally Gale had deteriorated sharply, to the point of name calling and personal accusations. Indeed it was Gale who put McBeath on the horns of the PR dilemma in asking him for the ruling, perhaps to embarrass him. It was no secret that Gale was intending to seek the mayoralty himself. Yet a number of PR Society members were supporting McBeath's re-election. T. P. Hall was part of a ratepayers' delegation urging the Mayor to stand again.¹¹² Perhaps they saw McBeath as a stronger reform politician. Certainly his strong stand against drink would have appealed to such staunch prohibition supporters as Hall, McConkey and Telford. Ironically, the *Sun*'s editorial for December 22 again seemed to endorse PR. In noting the strong labour vote in the dominion election, the editor called attention to the fact that labour remained unrepresented. It was situations like this, the editor suggested, that gave credence to schemes like proportional

¹⁰⁹ *Sun*, December 22, 1917, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ CVA, City Clerk's Records, 120-B-6, file 112.

¹¹¹ *Sun*, December 22, 1917, p. 21.

¹¹² *Sun*, December 22, 1917, p. 3.

representation.¹¹³ The battle over PR in Vancouver had taken up this theme and would only expand on it in the years to come.

If the PR Society did not get all it wanted, neither did its opponents. Alderman Kirk's four ward scheme was referred to committee instead of being forwarded by council to a vote of the ratepayers. Council would continue to explore a more equitable division of the wards, perhaps spurred on by their close brush with PR, and consider Kirk's proposals in the new year.¹¹⁴ As for the PR Society, it could look forward to four municipalities voting by PR in the new year, and at least one referendum on the issue coming up as well.

During World War I PR emerged as an issue in British Columbia in the service of the Liberal party. Yet their overwhelming success at the polls meant that the Liberal government could afford to be both generous and indifferent to its many supporters. PR advocates were kept busy with a municipal application of the reform; provincial experiments were put off for the time being. As one part of a broad reform coalition, PR supporters could not at this point demand the spotlight in the way that prohibition or women's suffrage could. Many thought the civic exercise would be the thin edge of the wedge. In the lower mainland reformers were extensively organized, highly motivated and apparently of the class where reform concerns could be pursued nearly full-time. They were supported by many of the "outs" of the period: women seeking the vote, prohibitionists attempting to end the liquor trade, and a labour movement still united on political action through elections. Yet the success of the foes of PR in thwarting the attempt to adopt the reform municipally says a great deal about the resources of entrenched power over those of reform. Certainly in Vancouver there is evidence of collusion between some members of council and the city solicitor to kill the reform. In exploring the failure of the PR initiative in 1917, it seems clear that much of the reformers' analysis of these events was ostensibly correct. Earnest reformers and scheming politicians were the main forces at work. The limitations of this approach emerges when reformers attempt to apply the same explanation to the events of 1919. To understand the factors that would lead to PR's victory over the civic politicians and bureaucracy will require us to look beyond the individual reformers and their opponents, and examine the changing landscape behind them.

¹¹³ *Sun*, December 22, 1917, p. 6.

¹¹⁴ CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, December 28, 1917, minute book p. 803.

Chapter 3: War, Peace and Class Struggle 1918-19

At a glance, the drive for proportional representation in British Columbia might appear primarily a story of slow and methodical progress. Reformers in 1917 organized but failed; then, by keeping at it and with a little luck, they later organized and won. Understood within these assumptions a remarkable sense of continuity emerges, despite the postwar upheaval. But the narrative of PR is not continuous. In this chapter the transformation of PR from a theoretical scheme of electoral perfection to a practical tool in the class struggle will be demonstrated. As will be seen, the PR reformers continued to focus mostly on the principled aspects of their case amid waning public enthusiasm for the reform and the incipient revolt of the converted. By early 1919 the reformer-driven campaign for PR reached its nadir. Yet alongside these developments were increasing class tensions that threatened to divide organizations of business, labour and soldiers; here PR became a practical means of holding them together. The ability to sustain some level of public consciousness around PR in 1918 and 1919 then did not represent a cumulative victory for the same old ideas of reform and principled progress, but a recognition by some groups that proportional voting could serve new needs and purposes. Thus we must examine both the continuing efforts of reformers to promote their scheme and the changing constitution of class forces over this period if we are to understand the shifting status of the reform itself.

Throughout 1918 and 1919 the staid demeanor of the previous years' genteel reformism was slowly overtaken by a more intrusive militancy. Groups opposed to the status quo pushed their claims to the bounds of acceptable dissent, and then kept pushing. The combined effects of a tight labour market and the unbending requirements of a wartime economy gave organized labour new opportunities to strike and to succeed by doing so. Returned soldiers also contributed to the emerging instability by quickly outgrowing the role of a conservative counterbalance to radicalism that the government had hoped for them. Veterans' unrest was fueled by spiraling inflation, insecure employment, the pervasive sense that war-profiteering was rampant, and the belief that government was not doing enough to aid the country's defenders. Some even wanted to form a soldiers' party, free from control or servility to either the Liberal or Union groupings. Farmers too increasingly spoke of independent political action. Women, having struggled for the vote, were determined to use it. And business, frustrated with government involvement in the economy, ever-increasing taxation, and the success of union strikes, reinforced Boards of Trade and formed employers' associations to combat labour demands. The state worked both sides, smiling to groups like organized labour in

the hopes of placating them while plotting to undermine their efforts with spies and repressive, one-sided legislation. PR would emerge as a key part of this struggle from all sides, both within groups, as a way of settling on strategy and securing representation of differing opinions, and eventually as a concession between groups like business and labour.

That PR would occupy such a privileged position in the coming struggles was not immediately apparent from its debut performances in British Columbia. Reformers' energies throughout the first months of 1918 were mostly spent trying to manage public opinion about the reform while still continuing to promote its use and interpret its results. The PR Society kicked off the new year by organizing a mock PR federal election in concert with the Vancouver daily newspapers. Utilizing techniques fine-tuned by their partners to the south, the American Proportional Representation League, the Vancouver PR Society hoped to showcase the workings of the system and educate the public before the first municipal applications of PR a few weeks later. Education, they thought, was all that stood between the converted and unconverted. Reformers in Ottawa had used the same exercise to great effect two years previously before their successful plebiscite on PR.¹

Both the *Sun* and the *World* enthusiastically promoted the poll, encouraging voters to "vote early and vote often." In this case all readers were considered voters.² The list of nineteen competitors for the eight positions included Conservatives, Liberals, soldiers, labour representatives, prominent reformers, and women. On the mock-election day, January 5, the papers printed a ballot that readers were to mark and mail in or drop off at the newspaper offices.³ On the following Monday, the *World* enthused that 2000 returns had already come in with more on the way.⁴ The count was to be held at the Vancouver School Board Offices the following week-end, just one week before the real municipal elections. On January 11, Garfield King wrote to council requesting their attendance and that of any staff members who might be interested.⁵

On Saturday morning January 12, King, Telford and others from the PR Society met a crowd of observers at the VSB offices on Hamilton street to begin the count. Only 1227 ballots were collected, well below the *World's* wild projections. Still, the number of ballots was in line with that of the real voting numbers of many municipalities and as

¹ Daniel G. Whittle, "P.R. Activities in Ontario," *PR Review*, no. 34 (April 1915) pp. 39-40.

² See *World*, January 3, 1918, p. 1; January 4, p. 9; *Sun*, January 4, p. 6.

³ *World*, January 5, 1918, p. 4; *Sun*, January 5, p. 2.

⁴ *World*, January 7, 1918, p. 4.

⁵ CVA, City Clerk's Records, 13-B-7, file K.

such would make for a reasonable comparison. Surprisingly, given the system's first trial run, only three ballots were marked incorrectly. The low number of spoilt ballots must have given reformers some satisfaction against those that claimed the system was too complicated for voters.

If the voters did not find participating in the election too wearying, the journalists soon did. In referring to the actual count the *World* complained that the system was "tedious," though it admitted that the returning officers lacked the specialized counting tables necessary to speed up the work.⁶ In the end, the papers considered that a balanced mix of political views had been attained. Borden and Laurier topped the list with Nellie McClung not far behind. Yet the impact of PR on this result was uncertain. As was pointed out by every paper, the final PR count hardly differed from the first tally. Whether the hours and hours of counting was worth such a minor alteration in the results was not taken up by the papers, but then neither were they particularly enthusiastic about the results.⁷ Overall, the demonstration election seemed anti-climactic.

While the mock election gave little to reformers or their critics to chew over, the real elections certainly did. "Municipalities Expect Very Quiet Elections" declared the *Sun* a week before voting day.⁸ Indeed, where things were quiet, they were very quiet. In a number of municipalities all or many of the council members were returned unopposed. This included small centres like Surrey and Richmond, but also larger areas like Point Grey and North Vancouver. But where elections were heated, things did not remain quiet for long.⁹ Many of the areas that had considered PR entertained divisive campaigns for mayor and council. The *Sun* noted many "keen contests in parts of Burnaby," and the long-simmering public debate over the financial future of South Vancouver carried over into the election. Aside from the lopsided coverage of the contest in Vancouver where Gale was defeating McBeath, the remaining reporting mainly concerned the experimental application of PR. Of course some centres received more attention than others. The results in Mission and West Vancouver were by all accounts unproblematic, no doubt due to the small numbers of voters, and they received little in the way of coverage. The *World* declared that Mission's experience with PR was "apparently satisfactory to the electorate."¹⁰ More problematic for the reformers were the performances of PR: in neither election did results differ between first choice support and

⁶ *World*, January 12, 1918, p. 4.

⁷ *Sun*, January 13, 1918, p. 18.

⁸ *Sun*, January 13, 1918, p. 12.

⁹ For civic election results see the *World*, January 18, 1918, p. 9; *Sun*, January 18, p. 1; *World*, January 21, p. 11.

¹⁰ *World*, January 21, 1918, p. 11.

the final results. Reformers had made great claims for the system; without any dramatic departure in terms of the results, these experiences would only make further conversions a more difficult sell.

As returns started rolling in for some of the bigger centres, newspaper editors quickly forgot their pre-election warnings about the delays inherent in the PR count. Results from the aldermanic elections in both Nelson and New Westminster were said to be delayed by “complications in the proportional representation system.”¹¹ The “complications” were simply the workings of the system. While journalists knew that the numbering process meant that some kind of transferring would take place, few were prepared for the labourious process of counting and recounting that was required. When the polls closed the first task of the returning officers was to count all the ballots to determine the quota, the number of votes required to win a seat. Originally the quota had been easy to determine; in Hare’s formula it could be calculated by simply dividing the total vote by the number of seats. With 10,000 votes and ten places to be filled the quota would be 1000 votes. But decades of debate in Europe had determined that Hare’s version was too kind to small parties, a sticking point when advocates were trying to convince governments, usually sustained by big parties, to adopt the system. In its stead came the Droop formula where the quota would be derived by dividing the total number of votes by the number of places to be filled plus one, with the resulting quotient increased to the next higher whole number to eliminate the possibility of a tie. With a ten-member council and 10,000 votes cast the quota would now end up to be 910 votes.¹² Then the returning officers turned to the first choices marked on the ballots and counted them up for the different candidates; if any had more than the quota they were declared elected and any surplus vote over the quota redistributed. When nothing more could be redistributed, then the low vote-getter was dropped from the running and their votes redistributed to the next choices marked on the ballot and so on. This would continue until all the positions had been filled. It was a process that could involve ten to fifteen separate counts and take anywhere from hours to days to complete depending on the voter

¹¹ *Sun*, January 18, 1918, p. 1.

¹² A lower quota worked against smaller parties, counterintuitive as this may seem, because they often did not actually win seats by achieving the quota, but were elected by what were called “remainders.” The Hare formula, with its higher quota, would tie up a larger party’s potential transferring surplus thus allowing less popular parties to elect candidates with less than a quota. The Droop formula, with its lower quota, allowed a party’s total strength to spread out more quickly from more popular candidates to less popular ones, and assured that most successful candidates were close to or had achieved the quota. For a fuller explanation of the implications of this substitution, see Newland, *Comparative Electoral Systems*, pp. 39-42.

turnout. To a press and public accustomed to an evening of counting at the most, PR's time-consuming process came as shock.

New Westminster had been heading for an election by acclamation before the adoption of PR but the new system encouraged members of the Trades and Labour Council to run.¹³ Perhaps that helped to explain the impatient response by many to the delays in announcing the results. As the morning paper, the *Sun* could give few details in their issue following election night other than to say that many of the politicians were still in suspense. However, as an evening paper, the post-election day *World* had a complete reproduction of the transfers and results of the election.¹⁴ As their charts made plain, PR did make a difference, if a small one, in the composition of the New Westminster council.

According to the *World*, the New Westminster count proceeded with little confusion, the "ordinary checking staff dealing with the ballots as naturally as if they had always used the system." Spoilt ballots were also low; at three per cent the total was no higher than under the old system. Telford, Hall, and King were in attendance as were many of the candidates and a number of New Westminster luminaries. To the *World's* reporter, the observers appeared fairly friendly to PR, with Mayor Gray looking on "approvingly" and others noting New Westminster's leadership in political affairs. One political oldtimer predicted the demise of the professional politician if "patronage, booze and the old majority system are to disappear." After an exhaustive explanation of the intricacies of the count, the *World* summed up by calling their readers attention to how under PR the first and final counts differed radically. In this the paper certainly overstated the case. In fact, the only change to emerge in all the transfers was for the last position where a candidate with one more vote than another in the first count ultimately lost out by the final tally.¹⁵

The *World's* assessment of the event did not go unchallenged. Indeed, the *Sun's* coverage of the next day was headlined, "Opinion Varies on 'Prop Rep' System." Here Mayor Gray's response to PR was characterized as "non-committal." Ironically, many of the successful aldermen spoke out against the PR claiming it "did not get us anywhere" while those defeated were often still supporters. New Westminster's MLA David Whiteside claimed to have heard nothing but adverse comment. Yet many of the critics were quick to temper their complaints against PR with an endorsement of its use for provincial and federal elections.¹⁶ In explaining their problems with PR it appeared that

¹³ *Sun*, January 11, 1918, p. 3.

¹⁴ *World*, January 18, 1918, p. 14.

¹⁵ *World*, January 18, 1918, p. 14.

¹⁶ It would become a common theme of Canadian politicians with regard to PR to recommend it for use in any jurisdiction but one's own. Harry Phillips notes how B.C. federal MP Leon Ladner resisted PR

many participants were confused about the system's purpose, claiming that it would have worked better with a ward system or a three-cornered fight. Many apparently thought PR would guarantee majority results and thus misunderstood the proportional aspects of the voting. No confusion existed in the mind of the New Westminster Trades and Labour Council representative William Yates however. He claimed that everybody he had talked to was in favour of the system, noting, "This year labour has made a better showing than it ever would have under the old system." But the results were hardly spectacular for labour either. The NWTLC ran three candidates but elected only one; the same one, in fact, that had been already re-elected a number of times. With opinion divided, suggestions floated around that the municipality should have a plebiscite on the issue, if that were possible.¹⁷

PR's lukewarm reception had many analysts casting about for an explanation. A few pundits suggested that the New Westminster results confirmed that experiments with PR municipally were hampered by the lack of politics and organized parties at the civic level. One of the defeated alderman, E. Goulet, took his farewell address to council as an opportunity to challenge this notion. "No politics in city elections?" he queried rhetorically, "Why they are permeated with it." Goulet explained two of the defeats on council and the poor showing of another as the result of their collective public support for the Liberal party against the Union government in the recent federal election. It was the courage of their convictions, not PR, that was responsible for their circumstances. By contrast, it was PR that finally exposed the politics that had always been a part of city elections, though it had gone unnoticed "under the camouflage of our old voting system." Even in defeat Goulet continued to support PR as did another defeated alderman.¹⁸

The reformers were quick to join the debate. Both Garfield King and Newton Wolverton wrote to the papers to counter the view that PR had caused any "complications." By contrast they asserted the counts had gone "like clockwork," with no difficulties encountered.¹⁹ King's assertion that BC's municipal experiment with PR was an "entire success" was allowed to stand, for the time being. No serious opposition arose, no editorialists took up the issue or attempted to interpret the events. Overall, the reformers had little to complain about. The elections had gone off with few hitches, few spoilt ballots, and no controversial results. They had even been rewarded with a bonus

federally but supported its use municipally; and that B.C.'s Premier John Oliver felt the same as concerned a provincial application of the reform; see Harry Phillips, p. 178.

¹⁷ *Sun*, January 21, 1918, p. 2.

¹⁸ *World*, January 22, 1918, p. 11.

¹⁹ For King letters see the *Sun*, January 23, 1918, p. 6, and the *World*, January 24, p. 6; for Wolverton see *Sun*, January 28, p. 4.

when South Vancouver voters supported the introduction of PR for future elections by a wide margin in their plebiscite on the issue.²⁰ But the results did not inspire any new enthusiasm for the system, or convert its opponents. More importantly, the reformers' faith that education and demonstration were all that was needed to bring about greater support for the reform was seriously challenged.

Over the next few months PR weaved in and out of a larger public debate about the state of democracy and its future. Mary Ellen Smith, wife of late provincial Liberal cabinet minister and longtime labourist Ralph Smith, campaigned in a provincial by-election as an independent candidate, though she was unopposed by any government nominees. Contesting the seat as "a free woman doing my best to secure the best possible legislation for women and children," Smith represented both the new respectability of nonpartisanship and a commitment to constituent representation, in this case the female constituency. PR figured prominently in her eight point program.²¹ As the tone of Smith's candidacy showed, the victory of the federal Union forces was not merely a product of the submergence of party competition to meet the exigencies of wartime, but was perceived by many as the culmination of reform thinking about democracy.²² "The people are sick of politics," declared New Westminster's Mayor Gray at a meeting in Vancouver to effect a more permanent organization for the local Union forces. Renegade Tory Sir Charles Tupper agreed suggesting that the usefulness of the old party associations was gone. At a number of meetings, speakers bashed the party system and praised the nonpartisan commitment to ending patronage and "cliques."²³

Aside from these related local developments, PR enthusiasts were aided in their efforts by the struggle for the reform overseas. A novel Speaker's Conference of the British parliament had been struck in 1917 to iron out some of the long-standing issues of

²⁰ *World*, January 21, 1918, p. 11. The results on the South Vancouver PR plebiscite were 1095 for, 390 against.

²¹ J. Castell Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review 1918*, p. 730.

²² Brown, pp. 294-5. Nonpartisan reform rhetoric has been poorly handled by historians, many of whom simply equate it with the successful efforts by business elites in the 1930s and beyond to resist working class representation on city councils. While this was certainly one manifestation of nonpartisanship, it was not the whole. In progressive circles nonpartisanship was another way to "perfect" democracy by eliminating the corruption that was thought to flow inevitably from party rule. Parties, it was believed, stood in the way of the "people" and effective government. For the farmers, women's groups, and some elements of labour, nonpartisanship was the key to a new type of representation based on constituent groups. With everyone representing themselves parties would no longer be needed and problems could be more readily solved. Thus the anti-partyism of nonpartisanship had radical implications even if later it would be reduced to a conservative anti-labour strategy. See Sanford Fleming, *An Appeal to the Canadian Institute on the Rectitude of Parliament*, for a general overview of late nineteenth century anti-partyism, noting particularly Fleming's address to Queen's University as their Chancellor in 1891: "Parliamentary versus Party Government," pp. 127-36. For non-partisanship in the first decades of the twentieth century see Laycock, pp. 46-51, 74-99.

²³ *Sun*, February 14 and 15, 1918, p. 12.

electoral reform in the country. Few expected much of it given the highly partisan feeling that dominated the British house, despite the existence of a wartime all-party coalition government. To much surprise, the conference managed to reach consensus on a host of delicate matters including plural voting and PR. Yet despite the all-party support for the omnibus bill of measures, PR was singled out in the parliamentary debates for exclusion. Only intervention by the House of Lords re-inserted it back into the bill.²⁴ "It is perhaps a little rough on the radicals," the *Sun* dryly noted, "to find themselves thus dependent upon the House of Lords for the vindication of justice. It may even compel them to admit that the peerage sometimes has its uses."²⁵ With Royal Assent given a few weeks later, the bill contained the Lord's compromise to experiment with PR in 100 constituencies. Under the headline "A Progressive House of Lords," the *World* enthused that this was the "thin edge of the wedge. As soon as Proportional Representation makes itself more widely understood its general adoption will not be delayed."²⁶

Noting that the movements for PR in Vancouver and Victoria were given an "impetus" by the recent British adoption, the papers announced further support was coming with the imminent arrival of C.G. Hoag, general secretary of the American PR League.²⁷ Hoag, like Humphreys before him, traveled extensively to give support to local PR groups, gain public attention for the reform, and raise the issue where organization seemed weak. Hoag's agenda in Vancouver was full. Arriving Wednesday February 27, he was to speak at the University in the afternoon, the Board of Trade in the evening, to the Retail Bureau of the Board of Trade at lunch the next day, the city Liberals that evening, and then to a meeting in Victoria on Friday.

Besides the usual themes of better representation and PR as democracy's next evolutionary step, Hoag spent some time on specifically local difficulties.²⁸ The recent provincial by-election to fill the seat made vacant by the death of Ralph Smith highlighted the difficulties and expense of electing Vancouver's MLA's at-large. In fact, the Attorney General had earlier promised legislation in the next session to divide the city into six separate wards.²⁹ In speaking to the city's Liberals Hoag poured scorn on this plan suggesting instead that the time was ripe for the introduction of PR for province's

²⁴ See Martin Pugh, *Electoral Reform in War and Peace 1906-18*.

²⁵ *Sun*, January 24, 1918, p. 5.

²⁶ *World*, February 7, 1918, p. 6. The bill promised to establish a Royal Commission to come up with the constituencies for the experiment. When it came time to establish which constituencies would be affected PR was again debated with an eye to excising it from the bill. In the end the final application was reduced to the plural voters in a number of university seats. See Pugh, pp. 164-6.

²⁷ *Sun*, February 20, 27, pp. 12, 3.

²⁸ *World*, March 1, 1918, p. 16.

²⁹ *World*, January 15, 1918, p. 1.

cities. Let B.C. be a leader, Hoag urged, and thus contribute to the complete provincial and federal application of the measure.³⁰ Not everyone was moved by his plea. The *Sun* complained that PR advocates were all talk. The current system, the paper claimed, more than allowed for effective government and criticism. The editor noted that even “the class of elector who refuses to stay on the range,” no doubt referring to the province’s socialists, “has at least one of his own kind in the house.” Besides, asked the *Sun* rhetorically, “[m]ight not Proportional Representation produce a parliament in which so many members would want to talk that nothing much would ever be done?”³¹ Hoag’s visit and the rapid responses it elicited capped off an unspectacular few months of local reform activity where it seemed reformers could accomplish little but manage what gains they had already made.

Close attention to reformer rhetoric and activity can lead the historian far from the forces actually making for social change. To listen to the BC’s reformers would be to find irresponsible politicians, apathetic voters and general ignorance to blame for the slow progress of PR throughout 1918, and possibly a reversal of these factors to explain the change in the reform’s fortunes in 1919. But the revival of PR would not be the product of a renewed burst of reformer zeal. Instead the change of fortune would flow from the dislocations and divisions rooted in the exigencies of the wartime economy and social organization. By 1918 business was becoming hopelessly divided while labour was learning new ways to be united. With the end of the war soldiers too would find new allies away from the conservative politicians. These radically new conditions of instability would lay the foundation for the re-emergence of PR. When the labour revolt struck, the divisions in the business community would mean that they could not agree how to respond; some called for concessions, others for the militia. Some of the origins of these divisions were starkly manifest in the 1918 battles over municipal finance in Vancouver.

“Aldermen Speak For Own Wards” declared the *World* March 7, 1918 as the politicians squabbled over how much money was being spent in various wards by the public works committee. While some agreement had apparently been made that city works should proceed on a need basis, the aldermen began to fidget as the issue came to a vote. Alderman Joe Hoskins complained that another ward, the chairman of the works committee’s ward in fact, was to receive \$17,000 of the \$50,000 designated for street improvement. Eventually, the *World* noted, every alderman in turn, “that is, when two or

³⁰ *Sun*, March 2, 1918, p. 8. The article refers to the meeting that occurred February 28.

³¹ *Sun*, March 1, 1918, p. 6.

more were not speaking at once,” called for an improvement in their own allocation.³² A few weeks later, Hoskins repeated his performance quite unrepentantly insisting that he was elected to represent the interests of his ward; he was not going to stand by while his constituents’ interests were being “passed over.” While his colleagues at the meeting argued that the interests of the city as a whole should prevail, it was a sentiment that all had difficulty actually observing.³³

PR may have taken a backseat to other developments as 1918 wore on, but the issues that reformers claimed promoted its rise did not. In the United States PR was one of many progressive measures designed to break “boss” hold over cities. Essentially, reformers from all over North America had characterized “ward-heeling” in the same way: the interests of the city as a whole were always secondary to the immediate need for aldermen to supply their own wards with the fruits of office, be it city works, improvements, or lower taxes. While many Vancouver reformers readily admitted that the city in no way resembled the machine politics of American cities like Chicago or New York, the ward system still came under heavy criticism for its tendency to encourage local rivalry and prevent city-wide issues from being considered. Alderman Kirk had leapt to the defence of the ward system during the PR petition debate, claiming that many of the city’s problems were unrelated to it. But that a problem definitely existed was confirmed early in 1918 with newspaper headlines that read like many a civic reform textbook.

Nor was consensus any more apparent on the issue of civic property assessments. By early March, the city faced 400 appeals, the most in its history. What property was actually worth seemed anyone’s guess, as the market had not really stabilized from the combined effects of the pre-war property crash and the wartime conditions of continued stringency and limited outside investment. Applicant after applicant complained that their assessments greatly exceeded what they could expect to recover from the sale of their property. Others noted how rental income on their building was not enough to cover even half the tax.³⁴ Still others attacked the city’s method of taxation, complaining that the “single tax” placed an unfair burden on some property owners at the expense of others.³⁵ Here too the aldermen quickly gave up their city-wide outlook in favour of a

³² *World*, March 7, 1918, p. 20.

³³ *World*, April 5, 1918, p. 8.

³⁴ Property owners were put in the position of paying taxes based on the previous boom-market prices when their own incomes were possibly seriously reduced with the general economic decline. This hit working-class property owners particularly hard. See J. Harvey Perry, *Taxes, Tariffs, and Subsidies: A History of Canadian Fiscal Development*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955), pp. 178-80.

³⁵ *Sun*, March 1, 1918. Henry George’s single tax plan to remove land from the profit system by taxing away rental income manifested itself in a number of curious ways in practice. Some efforts were made

more parochial view. Even the Board of Works chairman, Alderman Woodside, who had shown the least patience with ward politics, could not resist "getting into the game himself" as the revision of assessments continued into mid-March. The court only finished its business a month later by introducing a blanket reduction of five percent to all properties across the city, and this measure was only intended to forestall Alderman Kirk's late efforts to revise the entire assessment of the West End.³⁶ In a way Kirk had been right: the difficulties over assessments and city works were not simply the problem of the ward system, but indicative of a much larger and longstanding problem.

Cities across the country were facing similar problems. The economic slump of 1912-1913 had exposed the false prosperity that had been sustained by dramatically inflated property values. With the war, and the provincial and federal incursion into the municipal arena of direct taxation, the problem only worsened. Nor were these higher levels of government sympathetic to the municipalities' plight. A civic delegation to B.C.'s new Premier John Oliver in March 1918 were told to "work out their own salvation, produce more and spend less."³⁷ But without provincial or federal relief the situation just worsened and more and more property owners simply stopped paying their taxes. The municipal adoption of regressive tax measures like the single tax in the boom years only compounded the problem by treating a vacant lot and a city skyscraper as the same entity for city tax purposes. Shortfalls were initially covered with loans that would be paid off with tax sales if necessary. Yet with so many men at the front, tax sales became almost unpatriotic. No one wanted the responsibility of selling off a soldier's lot for back taxes. As more and more cities faced maturing debentures it was clear that some new radical measures had to be considered.³⁸

to translate this proposal into an "unearned increment tax," a kind of property sales tax, that would reclaim for the government any upward increase in the value of the land. In Britain, Lloyd George's "People's Budget" of 1910 featured this proposal, though it was never carried out in practice. It was passed however in Australia and New Zealand, and, for a short time, in Alberta. More generally the single tax transmuted into a regressive property tax where land was assessed at its site value regardless of the improvements upon it. As a "single" tax it was very popular in booming towns attempting to attract property speculation but as the "single tax" it bore little relationship to the intent of George's proposal to transfer wealth from the landlord to the community at large. Vancouver exempted improvements to 50 percent in 1896, 75 percent in 1906, and finally 100 percent in 1910. On the above see Perry, pp. 128-131. For a more recent, though insufficiently critical treatment, see G. J. Levine, "The Single Tax Movement in Montreal and Toronto, 1880 to 1920: Successes, Failures and the Transformation of an Idea," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, v. 52, n. 4 (October 1993), 417-32; Levine suggests that both business and working-class property owners benefited from the single tax but this glosses over who systematically benefited more.

³⁶ *World*, April 16, p. 13.

³⁷ Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review 1918*, p. 728.

³⁸ Under a heading "Rude Awakening for the Cities" Perry deftly outlines the intricacies of the problem of municipal finance in the period between 1912 and 1919. See chapter 12 of his book, pp. 178-90.

Here Alderman Kirk also had strong opinions. On January 26 he released to the press his plans for a business tax, just one of nearly thirty charter amendments that the city was hammering out for final approval in Victoria at the upcoming session of the legislature. As property taxes were not meeting the city's obligations, Kirk insisted the money had to come from somewhere - why not from those who were actually making money? Kirk proposed to charge businesses a tax based on the amount they paid in rent, with various classifications depending on the type of business. Distilleries would pay the highest percentage, followed by banks and other financial institutions, then retail merchants and so on.³⁹ Kirk's proposal raised a furor that raged for most of 1918. With opposition emerging from all quarters, the business tax debate in Vancouver is a window into the larger issues that divided the business class during wartime.⁴⁰

Particularly in the first half of 1918, the business community in British Columbia could neither agree on what was happening nor adequately address what to do about it. Of course, some efforts had been made previously, most notably the expansion of Boards of Trade and a widening of their interests to concerns of municipal and social reform. And the solid business backing of the victorious Union forces in the 1917 federal election suggested a unanimity of opinion enviable to any elite in wartime or not. But the overwhelming victory of the federal Union government with widespread business support

³⁹ *Sun*, January 20, 1918, p. 8.

⁴⁰ While much attention has been given to the activities of labour during and after World War I, little focus has been directed toward the organizational efforts of business in the same period. Most general business histories that embrace the period skip over the years 1917 - 1919 in their hurry to shift from wartime production to post-war recession; see Graham D. Taylor and Peter A. Baskerville, *A Concise History of Business in Canada*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1994), and Michael D. Bliss, *Northern Enterprise: Five Centuries of Canadian Business*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987). Bliss gives the period little more attention in his biography of Joseph Flavelle: *A Canadian Millionaire, The Life and Business Times of Sir Joseph Flavelle*, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1978). Vancouver has seen a great deal of study on its business community prior to 1914 but little after; see particularly R.A.J. McDonald, "The Business Elite and Municipal Politics in Vancouver, 1886-1914," *Urban History Review*, v. XI, n. 3 (February 1983), pp. 1-14. Exceptions include Patricia E. Roy, "Regulating the British Columbia Electric Railway: The First Public Utilities Commission in British Columbia," *BC Studies*, no. 11, Fall 1971, pp. 3-20; and Roy's "The British Columbia Electric Railway and Its Street Railway Employees: Paternalism in Labour Relations," *BC Studies*, no. 16, Winter 1972-73, pp. 3-24. Norbert MacDonald covers the period in his *Distant Neighbors: A Comparative History of Seattle and Vancouver*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987) but presents business responses to labour militancy as unproblematic in what little space he accords the topic; see pp. 106-9. Mark Cox zeroes in on the subject matter of interest to us here but does so from an "organization synthesis" approach in "Innovation Denied: The Board of Commerce of Canada and the Problem of Expert Authority 1919-20," Peter Baskerville (editor), *Canadian Papers in Business History, Volume One*, (Victoria: Public History Group, 1989), pp. 189-212. For Cox, working class organizing and pressure seem to play no role in the Board of Commerce's rise and fall. Closer to the mark is Andrew Yarmie, "The Right to Manage: Vancouver Employers' Associations, 1900-1923", *BC Studies*, n. 90, Summer 1991, pp. 40-74, who achieves a delicate balance of the larger class factors with local conditions. Of course while the employer associations shed fascinating light on employer attitudes toward organized labour, they tell us little about business divisions on issues like taxation and government regulation of the economy during wartime. Probably the best treatment of this topic remains Perry's *Taxes, Tariffs, and Subsidies*.

had papered over many divisions in the business ranks, particularly with regard to the actions of the federal government. The imposition of profits and income taxes drew the ire of many of the propertied set, and the nationalization of the railways in 1917 seemed to strike at the heart of the sanctity of private property. Many business leaders complained that not all businesses were enjoying great wartime profits. Medium to small businesses, the very kind usually represented on Boards of Trade, claimed to be squeezed between increasing taxation and government induced scarcities and restrictions of raw materials in aid of war production.

While debate may have been stifled by the Union movement at the federal level, divisions in the business class could not be suppressed at the provincial and municipal level. Indicative of this division was the rapidity with which opposition to Kirk's business tax emerged with members of the Board of Trade, the Retail Grocers Association, and some of his own fellow aldermen condemning the plan.⁴¹ The aldermen were particularly sore at finding out the details of the plan in the newspaper. Alderman Hamilton complained that he was unable to answer public enquiries about the plan as he had not received any details. Kirk remained unapologetic; he would discuss his legislation with anyone and at any time he wished. Kirk's brusque charm would hinder his efforts outside the council as well. In attending a meeting of the Retail Bureau of the Board of Trade the alderman noticed the knives were out for his plan even before he had risen to speak to it.⁴² That Kirk did not have the skills to navigate the passage of an unpopular measure only became clearer as time went on. As the *Sun* noted, Kirk "does not seem to be gifted with the power of making men feel good while their money is being taken away from them."⁴³ Yet if Kirk floundered he was not alone: in proposing his business tax, Kirk was met by many opponents whose various proposals could not raise a consensus either.

From January through March 1918 Kirk made the rounds of civic meetings to gain support for his unpopular business tax; others attempted to raise support for different measures too. The single tax system came under a great deal of criticism.⁴⁴ At one assessment hearing in Vancouver, F.C. Wade declared that graduated taxes on improvements would eliminate the financial problems of the city.⁴⁵ Mayor Gale got into the act by springing a civic income tax proposal on council at the meeting that was

⁴¹ For business opposition and council criticism see the *Sun*, January 29, 1918, p. 10, for grocer complaints see the *Sun*, January 31, 1918, p. 10.

⁴² *Sun*, February 9, 1918, p. 2.

⁴³ *Sun*, February 10, 1918, p. 6.

⁴⁴ *Sun*, March 13, 1918, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Sun*, March 1, 1918, p. 3.

supposed to confer approval on Kirk's scheme, extending the proceedings to well past midnight.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the council of the Board of Trade at first endorsed a tax sale to meet the city's financial obligations, only to reverse itself ten days later after protests from its general membership.⁴⁷ In the end, Kirk's proposal was passed by city council, though just barely, and joined the list of charter amendments to be pursued in Victoria.

At the provincial Legislature, former Conservative minister of public works, and much-rumored candidate for Vancouver city council, C.E. Tisdall, appeared before the private bills committee of the House and opened fire on Kirk and council, charging the city with having "flung money around like water." Vancouver, he claimed, had never been run on principles of business efficiency, or even wartime economy. The business tax "savoured" of class legislation; moreover, Tisdall suggested, it was taxation without representation because it did not permit those who paid it to have a vote on money bylaws. Instead he called for a tax on improvements. The city advocates responded and other business representatives joined in, proving once again that no consensus position could be agreed on.⁴⁸ As the private bills committee ruminated, the Board of Trade vowed to carry on its opposition to the business tax, to the legislature if necessary.⁴⁹ Kirk's tax passed the committee stage but was ultimately killed in the legislature, the result of successful lobbying by the retail merchants of Vancouver.⁵⁰ In amending the charter legislation to strike out the business tax, Richmond MLA Gerry McGeer claimed that business was already carrying too heavy a burden for the war.⁵¹ The member's sentiments were a truism to the business class but did little to resolve the problem of where the money was to be found.⁵²

While business remained divided on who should pay, their opponents were of one mind about responsibility for government finances. Organized labour pressed the theme

⁴⁶ *Sun*, March 19, 1918, p. 3.

⁴⁷ *Sun*, March 16, p. 12 and March 26, p. 2

⁴⁸ *World*, April 3, 1918, p. 1.

⁴⁹ *World*, April 3, p. 3 and April 12, p. 15.

⁵⁰ *World*, May 3, 1918, p. 15.

⁵¹ *World*, April 22, 1918, p. 2.

⁵² In failing to establish a business tax Vancouver was the exception to a post-war Canada-wide trend, only joining the mainstream in 1948. Vancouver enjoyed both the best of times and the worst of times with its taxation problems. When compared to municipalities across western Canada the city appeared to emerge from the 1913 property crash nearly unscathed. In 1914 property assessments were \$150 million, by 1917 they dipped to \$140 million, and in 1918 to \$133 million. But in Victoria in the same period assessments had dropped from \$89 million to \$46 million, nearly 50 percent. Things were even worse in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Yet if the problem seemed more manageable for Vancouver it nonetheless still proved difficult to solve. The city commissioned municipal expert Horace L. Brittain to submit a report on taxes in 1920 and the province sponsored a Royal Commission on Municipal Taxation in 1934. See Perry, p. 139 for business tax; pp. 180-1 for assessments; and pp. 240-1 for reports.

that a more effective “conscription of wealth” should precede the conscription of men for the war. As organized labour was not the only group complaining of “rampant war profiteering,” the federal government responded by increasing the rate of income taxes on the country’s wealthiest citizens and extending the business war profits tax in the May 1918 budget. Still, widespread suspicion that the rich were still not paying their fair share remained despite the media fanfare that the wealthy had now finally been conscripted to the war effort.⁵³ Cynicism about government and employer intentions was rife among British Columbia’s organized workers. As spring gave way to summer and the cost of living continued to rise, civic workers, policemen, street railwaymen, local merchant seamen and postal workers all struck for better wages.⁵⁴ Talk of sympathetic strikes increased with the successful effort of city workers to see their gains extended to workers on the parks board as well.⁵⁵ Yet the actual use of a general strike in BC would introduce an innovation in union tactics - the use of the strike to achieve political as well as economic goals.

As James Conley has demonstrated, the rising level of labour militancy and radicalism of BC’s organized workforce was a product of a confluence of wartime contingencies such as the inelastic demand for the products of war industries and a tight labour market, and the longer term historic development of the province’s working class. From 1915 on union membership began a steep upward expansion, strike activity multiplied, and the success of direct action was notable. The years 1916-17 represented a

⁵³ *World*, May 3, 1918, p. 4. Subsequent study only confirmed the suspicions. As Perry notes, indirect taxes on commodities and services accounted for almost 90 percent of tax revenues during wartime; personal income tax, which only really affected the rich, produced less than one percent of the total, with the business war profits tax making up the rest. By doubling customs and excise duties between 1915 and 1920 the government drove up prices, fueled inflation, and hit those hardest that had the least ability to pay. Meanwhile conditions for Canadian business were exceptionally good with wartime fueling a high demand for war materials and agricultural products. Workers were right to complain about profiteering; wartime taxation was regressive and systemically designed to benefit the rich. See Perry, pp. 163-5. Econometric work has only confirmed the assessment that real wage rates declined during the war; see Eleanor A. Bartlett, “Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Vancouver, 1901-1929,” *BC Studies*, no. 51, Autumn 1981, pp. 3-62. However, for an account more sympathetic to the government’s efforts, see Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review 1918*, “The Problem of Prices in Canada,” pp. 571-5.

⁵⁴ Information on Vancouver strikes was culled from the *World*. For information on the civic workers’ strike see May 4, 1918, pp. 1, 2; May 6, p. 5; and May 7, pp. 9, 16. Police union discussions are to be found June 18, p. 1; June 19, p. 3; and June 21, p. 2. For the B.C.E.R. Street Railwaymen’s strike see June 21, p. 5 and July 10, p. 5. The shipping strike is covered July 10, p. 5 and the postal workers strike vote is recounted July 20, p. 11.

⁵⁵ As Greg Kealey has noted repeatedly there was nothing regional about the emerging militancy. A month long strike by civic workers in Winnipeg led to victory in May 1918, followed by the national strike of postal workers, and the blossoming of police unionism in cities across the country. See Gregory S. Kealey and Douglas Cruikshank, “Strikes in Canada, 1891-1950,” in Gregory S. Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), pp. 370-1.

high water mark for a militant approach by labour - seventy-five per cent of the strikes launched were successful.⁵⁶ Nor were these simply local developments. As the federal government began extending its controls over war industries to limit work stoppages, more and more unions across the country began to see strikes as means to achieve political ends.⁵⁷ Calls to resist the enforcement of conscription with a general strike were passed at a special convention of the BC Federation of Labour as early as September of 1917. Delegates also passed resolutions in favour of labour contesting elections.⁵⁸ 1918 witnessed an acceleration of these tendencies with the formation of the Federated Labour Party and numerous calls for a general strike.⁵⁹

Soldiers too were a constituency finding their way amid a rapidly shifting set of alliances in 1918. Initially, returning soldiers were easily recruited to Conservative and Union ranks with promises of jobs and the most rapid execution of the war. Soldier candidates were nominated and elected in British Columbia with the help of the Conservative party. The soldiers' support for conscription would eventually bind them to the political conscriptionists, though soldiers were not shy in taking credit for the Union government's victory at the polls in December 1917.⁶⁰ But a split in the ranks emerged with the provincial by-election of January 1918 when a substantial number of soldiers decided to publicly support Mary Ellen Smith's independent campaign despite the candidacy of the Great War Veterans Association [GWVA] vice-president Walter Drinnan for the Conservatives. Smith's victory, due in part to veterans, showcased how the political objectives of soldiers were split. Soldiers were caught between interests in common with labour - better wages and working conditions - and those opposed - like the enactment of conscription to expedite the war. The gulf separating them would widen before it would be bridged.

The death of Albert "Ginger" Goodwin at the hands of a policeman attempting to arrest him for draft evasion sparked the province's first general strike on August 1, 1918. The distance between soldiers and labour could be readily apprehended here. Soldiers

⁵⁶ James R. Conley, "Frontier Labourers, Crafts in Crisis and the Western Labour Revolt: The Case of Vancouver, 1900-1919," *Labour/Le Travail*, 23 (Spring 1989), p. 32.

⁵⁷ Kealey, "Strikes in Canada," pp. 368-9.

⁵⁸ Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia*, (Vancouver: B.C. Federation of Labour/Boag Foundation, 1967), pp. 68-9.

⁵⁹ See Phillips, pp. 66-77; and Conley, pp. 19-20. Calls for a general strike were forwarded in January in support of jailed draft resister Duncan Kerr, and in July to support striking street railwaymen and later post office workers. The longshoremen also struck for political reason in March when military police arrested one of their members on the docks. See Conley, p. 23.

⁶⁰ Desmond Morton and Glen Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 7.

bristled at what they considered an unpatriotic agenda.⁶¹ Business and community groups condemned the strike and called on labourers to repudiate the leaders who called it.⁶² Mayor Gale declared the strike “un-British” and “unfair to the citizens of Vancouver.” In a newspaper proclamation Gale appealed to “Organized Labour of Vancouver” to “abandon the proposed twenty-four hour strike on the ground that, whatever the rights and wrongs of the matter in which it has originated, it can serve no useful purpose and do no good whatever.”⁶³ But in this assertion Gale was to be proven incorrect.

While never directly admitted, the general strike led to a profound shift in tactics on the part of employers and the government and decided alteration in the nature of the class struggle. The longshoremen had stood their ground against the bullying tactics of the soldiers. And union members refused to repudiate their leaders’ actions.⁶⁴ Faced with such intransigence, a number of BC business leaders began to give more serious attention to accommodationist labour strategies like the British Whitley schemes and the experiments in labour/management relations conducted by the Rockefellers in the United States.⁶⁵ To “accommodate” meant to distinguish between the “radical” or “Bolsheviki” and the “reasonable” element of the labour movement and their demands.⁶⁶ The Whitley idea was meant to appeal to the latter by providing a type of industrial council where

⁶¹ *World*, August 2, p. 2.

⁶² *World*, August 3, pp. 1, 11; August 7, p. 15.

⁶³ *World*, August 2, 1918, p. 1.

⁶⁴ Phillips, p. 74.

⁶⁵ Of course these ideas had been discussed somewhat in Vancouver newspapers earlier in the year and the city’s Board of Trade had attempted something along accommodationist principles with its “get together” efforts to unite the interests of business, farmers and labour. For a discussion of the Whitley scheme see the *World*, May 28, 1918, p. 3; the efforts of the Board of Trade’s ‘get-together’ approach are recounted May 29, 1918, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Here I use “accommodationist” to describe a loose grouping of ideas all of which posit that some permanent balance can be achieved in the relations between capital and labour. Most suggest that some mechanism for communicating between the two sides is all that is needed. In this they share the reformers faith that education and discussion will bring forth the most objectively fair and reasonable result. Here accommodationists are different from pluralists who would say that no “reasonable” position ever exists to be uncovered, there is only competition between opposed groups. It is important to note that accommodationist thinking could be both genuine and disingenuous. The opposite number to accommodationist rulers and bosses are those workers generally characterized as labourist or even social democratic. For an introduction to Canadian accommodationist thinking see W.A. Mackenzie King, *Industry and Humanity*, (1918; reprint, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); for Canadian accommodationist practice see Paul Craven, *‘An Impartial Umpire’: Industrial Relations and the Canadian State, 1900-1911*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); and for a history of the Whitley report see H.A. Clegg, *The Changing System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979). To explore the mindset of those labourers who responded to accommodationist appeals see Craig Heron, “Labourism and the Canadian Working Class,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), pp. 45-76; and Allen Mills, “Single Tax, Socialism and the Independent Labour Party of Manitoba: The Political Ideas of F. J. Dixon and S. J. Farmer,” *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 5 (Spring 1980), pp. 33-56.

employees could participate in decisions affecting the workplace and employment in general. A reconstituted Vancouver Employer's Association emerged in the aftermath of the strike hailing the Whitley plans. They also called for the recognition of workers' right to organize and a commitment to arbitrated disputes. No longer could employers simply put up a united front against unions; that had only seemed to contribute to worker solidarity. Instead, the Association would pursue the new progressive tactics of co-operation and conciliation to diffuse union militancy.⁶⁷ Secretly however, the association was as committed as ever to weakening unions and limiting their power. The conversion to progressive accommodationist rhetoric represented a change in style, not substance.⁶⁸

Accommodationist strategies demonstrated the intersection between class struggle and the struggle to shape the meaning of democracy. While they would ultimately prove to benefit capital over labour, the many proposals for a type of industrial democracy had something of a radical ring to them. At the annual meeting of the western branch of the Canadian Mining Institute, a speaker read a prepared address on the Whitley proposals that characterized industrial conflict as "a continuation, possibly the final phase, of the struggle, centuries old, for democratic freedom." In politics, he claimed, people had achieved some measure of freedom, but in economics they were still mostly subordinated. "This half-slave, half-free condition of society," he maintained, "could not be permitted." According to him, the full application of democracy to industry would end the clash of capital and labour, which was really only the battle of many individual wills, and lead to immense increases in productivity and efficiency. The audience's responses were not reported.⁶⁹ The notion of "industrial democracy" was a concept worked out by labourers themselves but, as Andrew Yarmie notes, in the hands of employers "democracy" was often replaced with the more euphemistic "co-operation."⁷⁰ Four months later the Canadian Reconstruction Commission's Sir John Willison came to Vancouver to address the Vancouver Canadian Club on the theme of "labour and reconstruction." He was greeted by a large turnout. Willison suggested that labour extremism could only be met by recognizing the "human rights of labour," by establishing "mutual co-operation and consultation" between capital and workers, and by

⁶⁷ Yarmie, pp. 62-3.

⁶⁸ Yarmie notes how in public the Association forwarded the idea of a fair deal for labour but in confidential meetings actively plotted how to roll back the closed shop where it existed and otherwise resist any structural manifestation of organized labour's power; see pp. 63-4.

⁶⁹ *World*, May 28, 1918, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Yarmie, p. 67.

following the lead of Britain in establishing workmen's committees. The *World* reported that his "thoughtful address" was well received.⁷¹

The PR reformers were a bit slower to adapt their rhetoric to these new conditions of class struggle. At the height of the labour unrest in July, PR Society member W.J. Conway wrote to the *World* suggesting that a number of improvements could be made, indeed needed to be made, to the city council if it were to continue in what appeared to be its new role as "an arbitration court for the settlement of labour disputes." He called for the introduction of voting at-large, a board of control, and stipends for aldermen so as not to exclude "the genuine working man" from running for council. Curiously he did not mention PR.⁷²

As class tensions bubbled over in the summer of 1918, different organizations began reaching for PR as a practical tool to solve problems. Debates over tactics in the labour movement and the GWVA led to the intensification of factions, all of whom had to be represented if the different groups were to avoid breaking into a number of fragments. The national level of the GWVA almost split in half over the issue of a separate political party for soldiers; only the adoption of PR stifled the cries of secession. The Vancouver Trades and Labour Council used PR to elect their executive for the first time in late July.⁷³ That PR was being utilized in a tactical manner represented the beginning of the shift for the reform from a theoretical indulgence to a practical necessity. Meanwhile the PR Society seemed oblivious to the struggle all around them. Perhaps convinced by the results of the previous fall's campaign that the people were already on their side, they saw their immediate goal as a focused assault on the obstructionist tactics

⁷¹ *World*, September 23, 1918, p. 12. Some fascinating background on the Canadian Reconstruction Association is available in the *Canadian Annual Review* of 1918 and 1919. Willison was a newspaper editor with longstanding and intimate connections to the Liberal party. Given his leadership and the curious platform of the organization, the Canadian Reconstruction Association appears to have been a vehicle attempting to find some new consensus position between labour, farmers and business in aid of the federal Liberals. Formed in March of 1918, the group's platform included a commitment to a "tariff adequate to develop Canadian industries and to ensure employment for Canadian workers," to "increase agricultural production and improve rural conditions," "to improve the relations between capital and labour," and to "improve the economic and industrial position of women," among other planks. At an international conference of Reconstruction Associations in December 1918, the Canadian delegates called for the "immediate revoking of all war-regulation of industry," and the denationalization of all railroads, while continuing to support the "Rockefeller creed as to Labour and industry." In 1918 the organization published 600,000 pamphlets, leaflets, bulletins, and other printed matter. By 1919 this increased to over 7,000,000 items focusing on such various topics as anti-Bolshevism, a "buy Canadian" policy, and a defence and explanation of the Canadian tariff. See Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review 1918*, pp. 550-2; and 1919, pp. 443-4.

⁷² *World*, July 19, 1918, p. 4.

⁷³ *World*, July 19, 1918, p. 9. Why the VTLC chose to adopt PR at this time is unclear; it may have simply have represented an extension of the work of the B.C. Federation of Labour who presented PR as one of several demands to the provincial government in March. See Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review 1918*, p. 341.

of the politicians. For the rest of 1918, the reformers remained wedded to their evolutionary reform explanation despite the scattered class upheavals.

If the PR Society scored one victory in 1918, it was defeating alderman Kirk's plan to replace PR with his own reform scheme. Blocking the PR plebiscite was not enough for Kirk; he also wanted to forestall the forces of reform with one of his own, the majoritarian alternative vote. Unlike PR, this system would retain wards but use a transferring mechanism to ensure that winners enjoyed a majority of support in terms of the vote cast. It says something of the general support for reform at the time that Kirk could not simply ignore the reformers but had to attempt to redirect their energies. His own scheme was not unusual or unheard of; the alternative vote was often discussed in British reform circles as an alternative to proportional representation. When Kirk travelled to Victoria in March of 1918 his voting scheme was one of the thirty amendments proposed for the city's charter.

On March 22, 1918, Kirk met emissaries of the PR Society in the private bills committee - what followed was described by the *World* as a "heated and somewhat technical argument." Robert Telford complained that Kirk's proposal had no support in the community and simply amounted to a stalling tactic. "Alderman Kirk went so far as to tell me on one occasion," Telford confessed, "that the council would not accept PR to go before the people because it was a case of self-preservation with at least four of the aldermen." Vancouver's legal consultant, G.E. McCrossan, defended the council, reiterating many of the points in his and city solicitor Jones' letter against PR of the previous December. When both Kirk and Garfield King launched into "lengthy and involved descriptions of their respective systems," the committee members finally "threw up their hands in despair" and tossed everyone out to complete the meeting *in camera*. Kirk, it seemed, had few friends in Victoria either. While the *World* noted that the committee had not reached a decision either way, it suggested there existed a "strong feeling" among members that a plebiscite on PR should not be confused by the introduction of other systems. Clearly Kirk and the council representatives faced an uphill battle for the alternative vote.⁷⁴ By March 31, twenty-four of the twenty-eight amendments to the city charter had been passed by the committee, but the alternative vote was one of the four remaining.⁷⁵

On April 11 the private bills committee delivered its verdict: the alternative voting scheme would not be recommended to the legislature.⁷⁶ While undoubtedly pleased with

⁷⁴ *World*, March 22, 1918, p. 1.

⁷⁵ *Sun*, March 31, 1918, p. 13.

⁷⁶ *World*, April 11, 1918, p. 1.

their efforts to quash Kirk's "improvement" on PR, all was not good news for the members of the PR Society. In just the week previous the *World* reported the vocal opposition of a number of New Westminster aldermen to their new voting method and their desire to revert to the "ancient" system. Only the lack of any legislative mechanism to get rid of PR was restraining them.⁷⁷ Another blow came in May when a provincially appointed commissioner replaced the elected council in South Vancouver, the price of a provincial bailout of the municipality's debts.⁷⁸ When there might be a PR election in South Vancouver was now anyone's guess.

At the fracas in the private bills committee in March, Robert Telford had claimed that a new petition calling for PR which was already in circulation would soon be ready to force the council's hand on the issue. No petition appeared in 1918. Instead, on December 16th King and others from the PR Society delivered a letter to the Vancouver city council from Premier Oliver addressing their declared concerns about the inadequacy of the PR act. At the private bills committee meeting the previous spring, McCrossan had repeated his written concerns conveyed to council about the contradictions between the PR act and the city charter and the inconsistencies within the act itself. King wrote to the Premier asking him to respond to these concerns. Oliver replied, stating plainly that if Vancouver voters wanted PR his government would clear up any of the legal technicalities.⁷⁹ Alderman Hamilton then moved a motion calling for a plebiscite on PR but Kirk successfully intervened to have the issue laid over until the following day.⁸⁰

Why the PR Society did not deliver a petition is unclear. That one was not really in the offing in the spring could simply be put down to the zealous determination on the part of some of the reformers. Telford himself was not above bluffing; many times in the previous fall's campaign he had over-stated the success of PR or the extent of its use in Canada. But that a campaign was not organized for the fall of 1918 is mysterious. It may have been that the end of the war greatly overshadowed all else - a petition for PR could hardly compete as a topic of general discussion. More practically, actual organization may have been substantially hindered by the dramatic effects of the Spanish influenza outbreak. Indeed, the provincial cabinet had placed a ban on public meetings in Vancouver commencing the afternoon of October 18, thus cutting into the prime

⁷⁷ *World*, April 6, 1918.

⁷⁸ *World*, May 3, 1918, p. 15.

⁷⁹ CVA, City Clerk's Records, 13-E-1, File O.

⁸⁰ CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, December 16, 1918, minute book p. 336.

organizational time in the run-up to the civic elections in January.⁸¹ The situation had not improved weeks later when even Mayor Gale took to his bed with the flu.⁸²

In the end it may have been that trying to reason with Vancouver's city council was all that the reformers could do. Or perhaps the PR Society really thought that if they just dealt directly with all of the declared concerns of council over their reform, British fair play would animate the proceedings. Either way they were to be disappointed. At the council meeting December 17th, the vote on proceeding to a plebiscite on PR was simply reported as "lost," thus ending the discussion for another year.⁸³

PR appeared to have stalled. Discussion of it had disappeared from the papers. No major conversion to it had occurred in the past six months. And in another six months the provincial government would amend the PR act to allow municipalities to repeal the reform. New Westminster and Nelson would hardly hesitate in using their new power. The reformers were slow to refashion their rhetoric to address the wildly unstable conditions of demobilization and increasing worker militancy that existed in British Columbia in early 1919. In this they were not alone - few commentators could articulate anything concrete about the pervasive sense of uncertainty. State security services had highlighted Vancouver - not Winnipeg - as their main site for potential trouble.⁸⁴ The combination of increasing labour radicalism and the possibly wavering "loyalty" of the returning soldiers made for a difficult call. Nor would leadership emerge from Victoria as the Liberal reform coalition unraveled amid deaths, resignations, and lost by-elections.⁸⁵ Only the cataclysmic events of the general strikes would re-invigorate the accommodationist class response to labour and soldier militancy, a cause in which PR would figure prominently.

As the PR reformers floundered, and business continued to argue about taxes and labour problems, the collective ranks of labour, soldiers, and farmers began to awake to

⁸¹ *World*, October 18, 1918, p. 1.

⁸² *World*, October 31, 1918, p. 11.

⁸³ CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, December 17, 1918, minute book p. 338-9.

⁸⁴ Norman Penner, *The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis*, (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1977), p. 70.

⁸⁵ Robin, *Rush*, pp. 177-9. A good history of the provincial Liberal party in the period between 1918 and 1925 is still unavailable; as a result, following the splits in the Liberal ranks in this period is sketchy at best. Some indication of the fragmenting of the Liberal's reform coalition can be gathered from the *Canadian Annual Review* which referred on a number of occasions to the activities of what Martin Robin called the "purity squad," a group of Liberal MLA's that consistently pushed issues like electoral reform, prohibition, social reform, and other concerns. The *Review* reported that J. S. Cowper was so zealous in criticizing the government over some of its questionable campaign practices in 1917 that he was kicked out of the Liberal caucus, though he refused to acknowledge it. By March 1919 estranged Liberals Dr. J. W. McIntosh and G. S. Hanes declared to the Legislature that they had "little confidence in the Leader of the Administration and less in the leader of the Opposition." Many would leave the government benches to sit as independents. See Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review 1917*, p. 821 for Cowper, and *1919*, p. 794 for McIntosh and Hanes.

the potential of untraditional political strategies. Farmers moved beyond considering independent political representation to organizing for it. Labour continued to debate the general strike as a political tool. And soldiers too would confound their Conservative would-be masters simply by entertaining unConservative ideas. Vancouver was a popular choice among soldiers for demobilization, a fact that business had hoped to exploit. Soldiers were thought to be just what business needed to break the unions of “slackers” and knock heads with the alien “Bolsheviki.” Certainly the responses of soldiers to the August 1918 general strike encouraged many in the business community. Many commentators have noted how soldiers returned to find jobs available, with post-discharge pay tiding over those that found difficulty.⁸⁶ Government agencies and concerned citizens made a great show of finding jobs for the boys. And Vancouver’s business elite got into the act, contributing the old headquarters of the Vancouver Club to the Great War Veterans Association.⁸⁷ But a closer inspection reveals that newspaper and business campaigns to give preference to soldiers were mostly thinly-disguised efforts to split the ranks of labour and re-ignite now-dormant ethnic tensions. Elizabeth Lees suggests that veterans were generally used to lower wages and break unions. For their efforts they were rewarded with harsh work, often being paid less than the “coolies” they replaced.⁸⁸

Efforts to direct veteran discontent with wages and living conditions toward ethnic groups and labour initially appeared quite successful; anti-alien riots broke out early in 1919 in both Winnipeg and Calgary. This would seem to confirm Desmond Morton’s assessment of the veterans as a conservative force, one that having earned a “stake in their country” returned to clean up the home front of “foreigners and profiteers.”⁸⁹ Yet within Morton’s own works on Canada’s veterans is much evidence of a more complex reality. The first national veterans’ conference in Winnipeg in April 1917 called for both the conscription of bodies *and* wealth, a position that paralleled labour’s view. Two months later, the fledgling GWVA attempted to gain a federal charter by suggesting that agitators might be able to exploit soldier discontent with ideas of a “Soldiers’ and Workingmen’s Party with Soviet overtones.” And soldiers consistently responded enthusiastically to proposals for progressive taxation, free medical care, pensions, price controls, and interest-free loans for home building.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ See Morton, p. 115; and Elizabeth Lees, “Problems of Pacification: Veterans’ Groups in Vancouver, 1919-1922” (master’s thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1985), p. 25.

⁸⁷ Lees, p. 33.

⁸⁸ Lees, pp. 23, 25, and 37.

⁸⁹ Morton, pp. 118-19.

⁹⁰ Morton, pp. 70-1, 72, 79.

A great deal of evidence suggests that a conservatism on the part of the soldiers was not universally assumed at the time. The end of the war only served to lessen what conviction remained. With conscription no longer dividing soldiers and workers, the possibility of some kind of labour/veterans alliance worried many in the Canadian business and governing elite. In their February 1919 report the security service of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police [RNWMP] admitted some doubt about the continuing loyalty of the soldiers in the event of any trouble. "If we can only keep the returned soldiers with us," the report suggested, "... there are enough good loyal people who will stand behind the troops to make the outcome certain. On the other hand, if the disturbing elements win over a large number of returned men then the situation will become very serious."⁹¹ The fear that soldiers and labour might make common cause prompted government to step up surveillance of labour and veterans organizations, planting secret agents in the audiences of meetings and even instructing them to join the groups.⁹² At the same time, conservatism had to be promoted in the press and through the influence of veteran leadership. Rank and file veterans themselves had remarkably similar ideas about what they wanted to accomplish, but differed primarily on how to get it.⁹³ This is where conservatism manifested itself. It was a fact made clear the previous summer when the largest soldiers' organization - the GWVA - nearly split in two over the question of independent political action. At the group's national convention in Toronto delegates from the west would not agree to the formation of veterans' political party. For their efforts they had to endure the "hoots and jeers" of the Ontario members. They were also outvoted on most issues as Ontario delegates outnumbered those from the west even though the bulk of the organization's membership was located beyond the Ontario border. Only the adoption of PR healed the rift.⁹⁴

Labour too had achieved a remarkable unanimity of purpose by 1919. Ethnic solidarity had emerged from wartime experiences of organizing and continued after the war's end.⁹⁵ Socialism had become respectable in labour circles.⁹⁶ And the long-standing craft-exclusiveness gave way to a type of organized co-operation in bargaining

⁹¹ Lees, p. 52.

⁹² Lees, p. 12.

⁹³ Lees, p. 3.

⁹⁴ *World*, August 1, 1918, p. 2.

⁹⁵ See Gillian Creese, "Exclusion or Solidarity? Vancouver Workers Confront the 'Oriental Problem'," *B.C. Studies*, no. 80, Winter 1988-89, pp. 24-49; and Donald Avery, "*Dangerous Foreigners*": *European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932*, (Toronto: 1979), pp. 80-1.

⁹⁶ See Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour*, (Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre, Queen's University, 1968), p. 118.

that Craig Heron argues represented the industrial unionism to come.⁹⁷ Yet like the soldiers, labour was divided over tactics.⁹⁸ Over the years many national conferences of the Dominion Trades and Labour Council had spent interminable hours debating the appropriate political strategy and ideology for labour.⁹⁹ Should labour seek favours from the established parties, or should it seek its own representatives? Was socialism the future for the working class, or was a Gompers-style, labour-friendly capitalism the best one could hope for? Then, suddenly, decades of discord gave way, no doubt aided by the election of a Union government committed to instituting conscription. In January of 1918 the BC Federation of Labour Annual Convention, in a manner described by one delegate as akin to a revival meeting, embraced independent political party activity. The Federated Labour Party was soon established. Nor was this conversion limited to British Columbia. In the months that followed, labour party organizations took root across the country.¹⁰⁰

Yet the new consensus for an independent political party proved illusory. At just the point that some elements of organized labour committed to it, others despaired of its limitations. Longtime VTLC member Victor Midgely had run as a labour candidate in the 1917 federal election and, like nearly all the labour candidates, had lost. He would come to typify the transition underway at the radical end of labour. To aid the labour party project he, George Hardy, and others had supported PR. But the successful strike wave of the spring and summer of 1918 convinced Midgely that the political objectives of labour could be better achieved with direct as opposed to electoral action. Meanwhile Hardy would continue to see political party activity as the most effective route to power for organized labour. Given general developments of this kind, a conflict over tactics was inevitable. An uproar broke out at the September 1918 TLC convention in Quebec over the issue of the general strike. Midgely declared that the threat of a general walkout by labourers in his city had been successful in reinstating disciplined union members - he recommended its use elsewhere. But the majority of delegates were unprepared to commit the organization to a Canada-wide general strike and doubted the ability of the

⁹⁷ Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement, A Short History*, (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1989), p. 54.

⁹⁸ An immense literature has debated the essence of the split that occurred in the labour movement in Canada between 1919 and 1923. Martin Robin characterized it as syndicalism versus political action; A. Ross McCormack and David Bercuson as a division between radicals and reformers. Recently a number of scholars have re-interpreted this as more of a debate about tactics than substantive politics. See Kealey and Conley particularly.

⁹⁹ For an overview of the period on this issue from both a national and provincial perspective see Martin Robin, *Radical Politics*.

¹⁰⁰ Robin, *Radical Politics*, pp. 147-9. For an in-depth treatment of Ontario see James Naylor, *The New Democracy*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

body to call for such an action.¹⁰¹ Dissatisfaction with the actions of the federal body over their caving in on conscription and the seeming inability of the radicals at the convention to successfully pass their motions or elect their representatives led some delegates to call for a separate conference of western labour representatives. This came to pass in March 1919.

Yet western labour delegates were not of one mind either. Division in the BC labour movement was in evidence throughout 1918 over the increasing tension surrounding the use of a general strike. Put plainly, a substantial number of union members consistently pushed for its use, while another large group resisted. The introduction of PR for the elections to the provincial labour body in July 1918 may have indicated the evenness of the split between these groups and the increasing gulf between them.¹⁰² In any event, the divisions would be starkly represented at the Calgary convention of the BC Federation of Labour in March 1919, and at the Western Labour Conference that immediately followed it. Here, supporters of a general strike were clearly the majority. While a number of delegates attempted to defend the long sought after goal of an independent political party for labour, they were outnumbered by those fed up with lobbying and elections.¹⁰³ The manipulations of the Wartime Election Act, and the repressive tactics of the federal government and the police, not to mention the successful socialist revolution in Russia, had convinced many that only a show of strength by the strike accomplished results. BC's Jack Kavanaugh spoke for many when he declared parliaments "gashouses," they were not places where the working class could emancipate itself. Only the formation of a One Big Union [OBU] could educate and agitate for a massive general strike, one that would overthrow the capitalist system.¹⁰⁴ Vancouver's William Trotter called the OBU and the general strike "utopian," but his was a minority voice; in the end the Western Labour Conference overwhelmingly endorsed the OBU.¹⁰⁵ Organizers ambitiously set themselves to work creating their new union with a potential general strike date already considered: June 1.

Business and the federal government were not unaware of the shift in the balance toward more radical labour tactics. It was what to do about it that concerned the elites. Government of course had been pursuing a double-dealing approach to the labour "problem" for a number of years, offering showy but ultimately empty reform with one

¹⁰¹ *World*, September 18, 1918, p. 5.

¹⁰² *World*, July 19, 1918, p. 9.

¹⁰³ Robin, *Radical Politics*, pp. 170-1.

¹⁰⁴ Robin, p. 176.

¹⁰⁵ Robin, p. 173.

hand, while dealing out repressive measures with the other. The government's War Labour Policy of July 1918 guaranteed workers the right to organize and bargain collectively while banning strikes and lockouts for the duration of the war. But as Paul Phillips notes, "government was not prepared to enforce its request for fair treatment of unions so employers did nothing to moderate their bitter opposition to bargaining collectively."¹⁰⁶ Later, in September, the government unveiled the second part of its labour policy which included the suppression of a number of radical papers and organizations. Jail sentences and fines could be levied for simply being in possession of banned papers or anything from the catalogue of the American-based socialist publishing house, Charles H. Kerr and Company.

The formation of the One Big Union and the apparent support it was gaining must have raised some doubts for the government about the effectiveness of its repressive tactics. Instead of cowing the labour movement, repression seemed to be acting as a catalyst for even greater militancy. In late March 1919, just a few weeks after the Western Labour Conference, Borden's Union government struck a Royal Commission "to enquire into industrial relations in Canada," headed by Manitoba Chief Justice T. G. Mathers. As Greg Kealey has recounted, the commissioners were unprepared for the militant and radical tone of the workers and union representatives who appeared before them, despite the fact that many so-called radicals boycotted the process as another empty government gesture.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile the federal government's attention remained focused on Vancouver as the potential site of trouble; by April the cabinet's hysteria over Bolshevism in the city led them to twice request that Borden get a British cruiser for backup.¹⁰⁸ Elements of the Vancouver business elite seemed less concerned. In his Annual Address to the Board of Trade in early March the president of the Board pooh-poohed the doomsayers in the press, government, and business circles. By contrast, he proposed a cautious optimism, exhorting his members to, above all, keep on doing business:

Nor is there ground for withholding our reasonable business operations because of apprehension of the relationship between employer on the one hand and employed on the other. True there is proceeding in our midst a readjustment of the relationship between brain, brawn and what is termed capital, but this is evolutionary, and, as history bears testimony, each unit as it becomes perfected will be absorbed into the Anglo-Saxon system without any violent upheaval. The

¹⁰⁶ Phillips, p. 74.

¹⁰⁷ See Gregory S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," in David J. Bercuson and David Bright (editors), *Canadian Labour History, Selected Readings*, (Toronto: Copp Clark Longman, 1994), p. 194-6; for the Vancouver labour leader boycott see Conley, pp. 9-10.

¹⁰⁸ Penner, p. 70.

Anglo-Saxon race had accomplished many reforms, but chiefly by peaceful persuasion, and will continue to do so by these successful methods.¹⁰⁹

The president turned out to be wrong - but so did the federal cabinet. When the general strike came it began in Winnipeg, not Vancouver. Nor did it operate under the auspices of the One Big Union. Winnipeg's strike broke out May 15, two weeks before the OBU's tentative strike date. From the beginning other urban centres began considering and organizing sympathetic strikes. But possibly most alarming to the authorities was the soldier support for the strikers in Winnipeg and later Calgary. Vancouver eventually staged its own general strike beginning in early June. As Elizabeth Lees notes, the preparations for the strike led to a sudden rediscovery of soldier grievances by Vancouver's politicians. Council voted to give money to soldier organizations and on the eve of the strike Mayor Gale himself chaired the first meeting of the Repatriation and Community Service League, a body committed to "...discharge our full duty to veterans and their dependents...."¹¹⁰ Local soldiers did remain distant from the strike, neither joining nor repudiating it. Yet even this was a major shift from the previous summer's violent encounter over the Ginger Goodwin walkout. The motivation of council in these pro-veterans initiatives was fairly transparent. One alderman suggested that the grant to the soldier organizations might keep the soldiers interested in law and order. As for the hastily assembled new league, it vanished shortly after the crisis passed.¹¹¹

Winnipeg's strike carried on for six weeks, a model of restraint and intelligent organization - its demise the result of deliberately provocative and violent actions on the part of the city and the state.¹¹² Throughout its month long existence it had been decried as a nascent revolution and its organizers as Bolsheviks, despite the presence of very moderate labour leaders in the front ranks - men like William Ivens, A.A. Heaps and Fred Dixon. On the other hand, the strike did represent a challenge to claims that the state was the only representative of its citizens and the legitimate arbiter of their disputes.¹¹³ Most

¹⁰⁹ CVA, Board of Trade, Add. Mss. 300, v. 208, Board of Trade 1918-19 Annual Report, p. 28, transcript of president's speech to annual meeting, March 11, 1919.

¹¹⁰ Lees, pp. 54-5.

¹¹¹ Lees, p. 55.

¹¹² Heron, pp. 60-1.

¹¹³ The debate on this point has been somewhat counter-productive. A number of scholars have claimed that the strikers made a grave error with the general strike as it challenged the basis of constitutional government. The effect of this work has been to cast the actions of the government and the international unions in a more positive light by suggesting that in challenging constitutional authority, government had little option but to answer with force. In answering this, many works have underlined the bread and butter goals of the strikers, and stressed their lack of revolutionary intention or consciousness. While a necessary correction to the distortions of earlier work on the motivations of the strikers, this effort has tended to downplay the very real challenge to the elite understandings of the state and its role that this

sympathetic strikes lingered on for a few weeks longer but ultimately collapsed through piecemeal disintegration. Vancouver's strike lasted for most of June, petering out in early July. Yet the end of the strikes did not signal victory to government or business forces; indeed, many saw these events as the "first steps" of a much broader and longer conflict.¹¹⁴ B.C.'s business and governing elite were deeply disturbed by the scale of the upheaval. Early on in Vancouver's strike Premier Oliver had declared the turmoil a deliberate attempt to "overthrow constitutional government and substitute ... a dictatorship" and insisted it was the work of "Bolsheviks."¹¹⁵ Many agreed with his assessment. As late as September Commissioner Perry of the RNWMP warned against complacency on the labour question, suggesting that the unrest was still prevalent and that the "revolutionaries" had only received a setback.¹¹⁶

Of course there was good reason to believe that the struggles between labour and capital were far from over. With sympathetic strikes dwindling in early July, the OBU was the main beneficiary of the displaced radicalism. The enthusiastic response to the organization's first formal convention June 11 was quickly followed by promises of funding from both the Vancouver and Victoria labour councils, among others. In the months ahead the OBU would build on this strong start. Continuing labour strength was also in evidence in Winnipeg itself. Far from being defeated and dispersed by the actions of the Citizens' Committee and the military, labour bounced back. Besides organizing to defend the imprisoned strike leaders, labour won half the seats on the Winnipeg city council later that fall, a phenomenal breakthrough. With unity in labour ranks and the support of many middle class voters disgusted with the violence of the authorities, the inherent bias of the electoral system appeared to be on the verge of finally rewarding labour with the over-representation that the status quo had long enjoyed.

direct action represented. Our options in understanding the impact of the strike are not limited to a confirmation of Bolshevism or labourism. The strike sparked the diverse responses it did because it did represent much more than just union recognition issues, its existence provided a model for future labour/capital discord. For a view that describes the government intervention as inevitable for the reasons outlined above see D.C. Masters, *The Winnipeg General Strike*, (1950; reprint, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 112; for an opposing view see Charles Lipton, *The Trade Union Movement in Canada, 1827-1959*, (1967; reprint, Toronto: NC Press, 1973), pp. 205-8. For more recent work taking up the idea that the strike did indeed pose a challenge of a kind to the state system see Chad Remer, "War, Nationhood and Working Class Entitlement: The Counter-Hegemonic Challenge of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike," *Prairie Forum*, v. 18, n. 2 (Fall 1993), 239-56; and Tom Mitchell, "'To Reach the Leadership of the Revolutionary Movement': A. J. Andrews, The Canadian State and the Suppression of the Winnipeg General Strike," *Prairie Forum*, v. 18, n. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 239-56.

¹¹⁴ Lees, p. 67. The quote is from the *Vancouver Citizen*, the organ of the anti-labour Vancouver Citizen's League.

¹¹⁵ Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review 1919*, p. 789.

¹¹⁶ Kealey, p. 216.

Much has been written about the decisive actions of business and government against the general strikes. Military intervention and brute force brought swift results in Winnipeg and other cities. The state acted decisively in reinforcing the police system, authorizing the search and seizure of labour organization offices and records, and arresting, charging, and convicting some labour leaders of sedition. However, in the face of an unrepentant working class, cracks emerged in the hardline policy. Significant elements in the ruling elite blamed the working and living conditions of the strikers, and suggested that government and employer indifference was at least partially responsible. The most stunning example of such “reformism” was the federal government’s conversion to international unionism. To marginalize the OBU, the government intervened in a miners’ strike in the Crow’s Nest Pass region, actively supporting the United Mine Workers to establish a closed shop and extending aspects of the War Measures Act beyond their expiration date to accomplish it.¹¹⁷ Significant sections of the business community also warmed to the international unions. The Vancouver Employers’ Association claimed that it was “desirable to support these men who have retained their affiliations with Unions in good standing with the Internationals.” The lumber and shipbuilding industries along with the RNWMP also called for a government-sponsored public works program to undercut support for the radicals like the OBU.¹¹⁸ Despite the hurried passage of a federal law in early July making illegal any organization that sought to bring about “government, industrial, or economic change” by force, the end result of the general strikes was the revitalization of a rhetoric keen to accommodate labour.¹¹⁹

As Craig Heron has noted, many employers “slipped a velvet glove over their iron fist” in the period following the strike.¹²⁰ Yet the revival of accommodationist tactics was not without its critics. Some employers and commentators were outspoken in their desire to simply “crush” the labour agitators. In an analysis of the international industrial conflict for the Sunday *Sun* in mid-July, E.W. Howe complained of the weakness and cowardice of the Americans, British, Russians, and indeed, Canadians, in facing the labour revolt. “Arbitration has failed, moral suasion has failed,” he complained, “we must fight. We must fight to the finish.”¹²¹ Howe’s views did not go unanswered. The PR Society’s T.P. Hall wrote calling Howe’s utterances “treasonable” and the author a

¹¹⁷ Robin, *Radical Politics*, pp. 190-1.

¹¹⁸ David J. Bercuson, “Labour’s Civil War,” in David J. Bercuson and David Bright (editors), *Canadian Labour History, Selected Readings*, (Toronto: Copp Clark Longman, 1994), p. 182.

¹¹⁹ For details on the anti-sedition law see Brown, p. 314

¹²⁰ Heron, p. 59.

¹²¹ *Sun*, July 17, 1919, p. 6.

“red-hot advocate of civil war.” “If Mr. Howe thinks that the wrong ideas are to be overcome by a ‘fight to the finish’; if he thinks that gunpowder and bombs are the proper weapons with which to combat the onrushing flood of democratic ideas;” then Hall suggested, “he is a proper person to reside behind bars, for the safety of the neighboring republic.”

Aside from a shift to recognizing those “respectable” elements of the labour movement, another strategy of both elites and middle class reformers involved attempting to reign the revolt within an acceptable discourse of democracy. For some this would mean a genuine commitment to moderate labour’s stated aspirations, for others it would involve a complex process of both disarming and watering down the substantive aspects of labour demands such as shorter hours, better wages, and control over production, while reinforcing the formal structures of the democratic institutions to somehow assure the election of a “labour man.” It was here that proportional representation re-emerged with a new sense of urgency. Yet the priority given finding some way to accommodate labour within the current institutional channels of representative democracy was not limited to the business or reformer elite. Substantial sections of organized labour were uneasy with the extra-legal character of direct action and harboured doubts about its potential for long-term success. They stood by - some eagerly, some warily - to see what deal might be on offer.

Proportional representation emerged in British Columbia as part of a reform coalition to elect the Liberal Party, though it was sustained subsequently by the zeal of middle-class reformers to “perfect” democracy. Yet it would have amounted to little if it had remained in their hands. Reforming civic government proved more difficult than they imagined. While small towns might be converted, Vancouver and Victoria resisted efforts to persuade them to adopt PR, the product of the entrenched power of the politicians. And even the small towns proved difficult to keep reformed. Very quickly many of them were seeking to escape the yoke of their new voting method. By early 1919 PR appeared a dead letter, yesterday’s reform. Only the escalation of class struggle by labour in the form of general strikes, and the threat to move beyond the acceptable parameters of democratic discourse, resurrected the reform. PR appealed to both those in the business elite seeking to accommodate labour and thereby extinguish labour radicalism, and those elements of organized labour unsure of the continuing efficacy of direct action. Vancouver’s PR Society, after having been fairly quiet for over a year, lunged back into action in an autumn campaign that would embody these newly urgent sentiments for labour accommodation.

Chapter 4: PR and the Accommodation of Labour 1919-20

In the aftermath of the general strikes perceptions of class power varied wildly. Both business and organized labour split in half, some hoping the worst was over, others anticipating the worst to come. The rest of 1919 was a waiting game. What was the strength of organized labour? Could the state continue to simply put down organized challenges to the status quo? Did the world-wide upheaval following the war really represent a social revolution of sorts? Each social or political event of the autumn was turned over and examined for how it might confirm or disprove any of these and other questions. PR re-emerged amid a pervasive uncertainty about the balance of class power. Elements of business and labour supported it because they had had quite enough of uncertainty; PR would stabilize the game by assuring that no wild fluctuations would occur in terms of labour or business representation at election time. Some elements of business and government cared little about what PR might do itself, they were more concerned to use it as a concession that might knock the wind out of the radicals. Still others opposed or were indifferent to PR, mostly because they were still committed to militant action, whether it be of the union or police variety. The reformers tagged along, echoing the dominant themes and reiterating their usual “progress” litany. But the decisive factors were those events that signalled a class advantage to players accustomed to second place: farmers, veterans, and organized labour. Despite the defeat of the strikes, the perception of a continued class threat from labour, soldiers, and now farmers persisted. Out of this uncertainty, as opposed to crediting victory to the reformers’ rhetoric, would come the decisive shift in favour of PR.

The Mathers Royal Commission on Industrial Relations made its report in late June 1919; very quickly it became the blueprint of a distinctly Canadian accommodationist strategy toward labour.¹ Struck by a worried federal government in March, Manitoba Chief Justice T.G. Mathers and his commissioners had traveled the country since April witnessing the labour upheaval firsthand. Like the Whitley proposals in Britain and the various scenarios being tried out in the United States, the Commission’s recommendations focused on democratic management in the form of industrial councils. While very little of the Mathers report was subsequently put into practice its contribution to the class struggle of the period was immense. In calling for minimum wages, the eight hour day, collective bargaining rights, unemployment insurance, and pensions, the report offered the hope of substantially more gains for labour than had ever been achieved, a

¹ *Labour Gazette*, July 1919, supplement, pp. 1-28.

factor that would deepen divisions in the ranks of labour.² Given its timing, not even a month after the enthusiastic response by much of organized labour in the west to the One Big Union and that organization's denunciation of parliamentary politics as "begging favours," it seems clear that the report was intended to re-legitimize the conventional paths of politics through at least the appearance of offering a new working class "partnership." This stance would characterize most of the rest of 1919.³

The commissioners utilized much that was current in contemporary discussions of the "new democracy." Their report quoted from the Whitley proposals that "... economic and business considerations will be influenced and corrected, and it is hoped will eventually be controlled, by human and ethical considerations," as well as excerpting from the Labour Declaration in the Peace Treaty that "... labour should not be regarded merely as a commodity or as an article of commerce." The conditions of wartime had "given rise to a desire on the part of workers generally to secure positions for themselves in a comparatively short period of time," the commissioners noted, "which otherwise might have been the result of evolution during a long period of years." While some workers might be prepared to demand immediate change, the commissioners were convinced that the majority of labourers held moderate views more inclined toward a "gradual process of evolution" in labour-management relations.⁴ In the months ahead, this evolutionist discourse around the "new democracy" would spread, attracting the stalled energies of municipal reformers, business, and the "respectable elements" of the soldiers and organized labour.

The Mathers report also underlined the pervasive cynicism of workers throughout the country concerning the supposed neutrality of the government in the struggle between labour and capital. "The belief appears to be entertained," the commissioners noted, "that the Governments, both Local and Federal, are largely controlled by the financial interests, and that their influence was manifest not only in legislation but in the executive action of the several governments." Despite the opposition of two commissioners, the majority report of the other six suggested that the remedy might be a system of proportional representation; at the very least it proposed that PR was "well worth serious study by a

² The commission could not come to a unanimous opinion on the eight hour day and the closed shop, among other issues, and submitted a majority and minority report. While no comprehensive historical account of the National Industrial Conference is available, a comparison between the American and Canadian events can be found in Larry G. Gerber, "The United States and Canadian National Industrial Conferences of 1919: A Comparative Analysis," *Labour History*, v. 32, n. 1 (Winter 1991), pp. 42-65.

³ See Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt" for a general overview and a similar appraisal of the role of the Mathers' Royal Commission.

⁴ *Labour Gazette*, July 1919, supplement, pp. 5-9

committee of Parliament.”⁵ Though pitched at a federal audience, the Mathers’ recommendations trickled down to other levels of government. Manitoba’s provincial government began looking into PR; municipal reformers seized on the report as a new inspiration for their efforts.

In Vancouver, little had been heard from the local PR advocates since their encounter with Alderman Kirk at the private bills committee the previous spring, aside from their rather halfhearted effort to win over the city council in December. The reformers had not ceased entirely to push for their reform in the interim. The PR Society’s secretary Garfield King had continued to correspond with reformers around the world, gathering data and comparing strategies.⁶ But that the reform had lost its inertia by the spring of 1919 was unmistakable. In New Westminster the city aldermen were determined to be rid of PR and sought an amendment to the provincial act which would allow them to repeal it. New Westminster MLA David Whiteside carried the municipality’s case to the provincial legislature and accomplished their goal with little fuss in late March 1919.⁷ That Whiteside, a Liberal, aided the anti-PR forces only confirmed the distance the government had traveled from its taking power as a force of reform. Vancouver MLA and estranged Liberal Dr. William McIntosh, a longtime PR supporter, moved quickly to regain some ground by attempting to have PR adopted for provincial elections, but he got no further than one brief debate in the spring session.⁸ Shortly thereafter New Westminster did repeal PR, followed later by Nelson.⁹

Yet these municipal setbacks of late spring would prove to be temporary. By late summer PR was back in the public limelight. The shift in the treatment of the reform in the pages of the *Vancouver Sun* reveals much. The paper started out finding only fault with the reform; by the summer’s end it would find some redeeming qualities as well. PR re-emerged amid controversy as one of the items the Mathers commissioners could not agree on. When queried about it shortly after the report was made public, Prime Minister

⁵ Ibid, pp. 12-3.

⁶ CVA, Garfield King Scrapbook, Add. Mss. 135, Humphreys to King, April 28, 1919. It appears that King only submitted a sample of his correspondence with his scrapbook when he donated it to the City of Vancouver Archive in 1959. While intimations of a voluminous correspondence are scattered throughout the scrapbook only three letters from different PR organizations are included.

⁷ *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia*, 1919, adopted March 13, p. 170; given royal assent March 29, p. 287.

⁸ *Journals*, March 28, 1919, p. 282; March 29, p. 285. King’s papers include a seven-page typescript entitled “The Present Legislature” which outlines the state of representation in the House following the 1916 election and the problems with it. It ends with a recommendation to amend the Provincial Elections Act to include PR. It is possible that McIntosh may have used or prepared this document for the legislative debates. See CVA, Garfield King Scrapbook.

⁹ Hoag and Hallet, p. 228. See also the *PR Review*, n. 70, April 1924, pp. 78-85.

Borden protested that PR would make the country ungovernable by preventing the election of a majority government. The *Sun* agreed. "The undesirable element ... would be in a position to hold up the administration for almost anything," the editor complained. PR would only create "confusion."¹⁰ Reformers in Vancouver and elsewhere spent the summer responding to such opposition by recasting their rhetoric in light of the social upheaval. While not convincing everyone, the idea that PR could soothe industrial conflict would take root with some sections of business, labour, soldiers and the professional middle class, giving rise to renewed organizing drives in August.

In the interim, the shift in the *Sun*'s position would be telling. The paper had begun by dismissing PR as unnecessary, and possibly detrimental to the body politic. "Men with knowledge of public life," the editor suggested, "...have recognized the dangers involved in trying to run a government with a small majority such as proportional representation is liable to produce. It does not make for honesty in public affairs." For the *Sun*'s editors, PR would give special interests and members of parliament with an axe to grind too much power. Besides, an editor suggested, had not New Westminster tried the scheme and found it wanting?¹¹ Later in the month, when the Manitoba legislature was considering PR for its urban constituencies, the *Sun* protested that it already possessed labour members. Labour representatives F. J. Dixon and R. A. Rigg had both been elected under the traditional rules. "If the chief object of proportional representation be ... to secure for the industrial class an adequate voice in public affairs," the editor complained, "is not this purpose already sufficiently accomplished in Winnipeg?" The *Sun* could not see the purpose of fixing the unbroken: "While the existing system continues to yield the desired result, what useful purpose will be served by introducing a complex method of voting which even its advocates can hardly ever explain clearly?"¹²

The reformers sprang into action. Initially they approached their opponents in much the same way as they had for the previous two years; answering their criticisms point for point. Garfield King wrote to challenge the *Sun*'s views on majority government suggesting that British wartime experience had shown that a government could rule with only a slim majority and that the loss of one vote did not necessarily mean a loss of confidence in the administration. Both Asquith and Lloyd George, King suggested, had refused to see the occasional adverse vote as an official vote of no confidence. "We must not assume that the present conditions of parliamentary business are eternal," he wrote, "anymore than that they are the best possible..." But the *Sun*

¹⁰ *Sun*, July 7, 1919, p. 6.

¹¹ *Sun*, July 8, 1919, p. 6.

¹² *Sun*, July 17, 1919, p. 6.

remained unconvinced, accusing him of simply rushing to the defence of his panacea.¹³ More directly, Hugh Norman Lidster, now the president of the New Westminster PR Society, wrote to refute the idea that the reform's repeal in his city was due to its supposed defects. Lidster claimed that no public opposition to PR had emerged and that no public body had called for its repeal. By contrast, he suggested that it was only by a "bare vote of three to two" that the city council had managed to revive the "archaic" system.¹⁴ The *Sun* did not choose to comment on Lidster's testimony.

Perhaps the most interesting letter came not from a local reformer but from out of province. In a missive on Manitoba's consideration of PR, Ronald Hooper, Honorary Secretary of the Canadian PR Society, put the issue of class up front. For him, the *Sun*'s observation that PR was primarily a device to make possible the representation of labour was only half the story. PR would also provide an effective check on the over-representation of labour that might occur under the current rules. This was in fact a very real fear being raised in Britain at the time. He noted that Lord Selbourne had complained to the *London Times* that in future British elections it was Labour that looked set for "gross over-representation." Nor was England alone in these concerns; elites in Australia and New Zealand raised similar complaints. Hooper claimed that it was actually the non-industrial classes in many locales that were seeking PR. For these reasons, he was quick to point out that any call for PR by organized labour should be answered affirmatively to help substitute "evolution for possible revolution." Hooper ended with an extensive quote from an article by American PR reformer George Hallett Junior. Hallett's rhetoric captured the new approach PR enthusiasts would cultivate in the coming months:

The importance of PR now can hardly be over-emphasized. More and more, radicals are realizing the futility of our present political machines as a means of carrying out the popular will. Unless better machinery is provided, the legitimate yearning of the worker for industrial freedom may bring us also a catastrophic overturn which may destroy much that all would wish to preserve.¹⁵

Hooper's letter followed only a week after the exchange between E.W. Howe and T.P. Hall over the correct tactics - repression or reconciliation - in responding to the militancy of labour. The solidarity of denunciation directed toward the ranks of labour was giving way to a debate; the Mathers Royal Commission report and the announcement of a labour/employer conference only confirmed the trend. August would represent a

¹³ *Sun*, July 8, 1919, p. 6.

¹⁴ *Sun*, July 14, 1919, p. 6. Confirming Lidster's assessment is an unidentified newspaper excerpt from June 12 in Garfield King's scrapbook describing a GWVA meeting, attended by Lidster, protesting the council's decision and calling for a petition to get PR reinstated. See CVA, Garfield King Scrapbook.

¹⁵ *Sun*, August 2, 1919, p. 6.

grope toward some kind of accommodationist strategy of which PR would become a part. So too did the *Sun*'s position shift in this new climate. As early as July 10 their editors had been willing to admit that PR might be necessary or even desirable for elections to the House of Commons from some of the larger cities. By August 15, they were positively recommending that the upcoming National Industrial Conference give the reform "something more than perfunctory consideration."¹⁶

Labour accommodation would not be the only factor in PR's comeback. The farmers, many of whom were still smarting over the Union government's betrayal in conscripting farms hands during the war, now became increasingly restless on the government benches. Farmer grievances over the tariff finally acted as a catalyst for their defection. Minister of Agriculture T.A. Crerar left the government June 6 and he was soon followed by others. That farmers might become an independent threat was foreshadowed in the Ontario provincial by-election victory of a United Farmer candidate in February, and by the extensive organizational work of prairie farm organizations like the Grain Growers to prepare constituencies to run members for Parliament.¹⁷ Farmers were strongly for PR because they felt it would increase their influence in the political arena. Further support for PR also came from a surprising quarter: the federal Liberal party. Like many commentators at the time, the Liberals fully expected a return to politics as usual after the Union experiment, with themselves as the beneficiaries of public discontent with the current government. Fear that the Liberal party might not be able to absorb or deflect the new political constituencies of labour and farmers moved them in late August 1919 to elect a labour-friendly leader, Mackenzie King, and adopt a platform bursting with reform enthusiasm, including measures to address farmer grievances and a commitment to PR.¹⁸

The actions of the Union government also served to bolster the forces for PR, though indirectly. In legitimizing and aiding the international unions against the

¹⁶ *Sun*, August 15, 1919, p. 6.

¹⁷ J. Castell Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review 1919*, (Toronto: Canadian Annual Review Ltd., 1920), pp. 384-5.

¹⁸ Brown, pp. 328-9; Harry Phillips, pp. 135-6. The surprise was that the federal Liberals adopted PR, but not that they discussed it. Harry Phillips notes that PR was discussed in two issues of the *Canadian Liberal Monthly* in 1918, and that a representative of the Canadian PR Society was invited to speak at the convention. But Liberal consideration of PR stretched farther back; a meeting of the National Liberal Advisory Committee appointed Raoul Dandurand, A. R. McMaster and W. S. Jacob to look into the advisability of adopting PR as a plank in the Liberal party platform in July of 1916. See the *PR Review*, n. 40 (October 1916), p. 8. PR also appealed to the "outs" on the provincial scenes as well. Quebec's provincial Conservative party included a commitment to enact PR in its policy declaration of May 24, 1919. Ontario's provincial Liberals were so keen on PR they adopted it in two separate resolutions at their June 1919 convention. For both references see Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review 1919*, pp. 689-90 and 651-3.

organizing efforts of the OBU, the government indirectly supported those factions of organized labour most interested in PR, the supporters of a labour party. This group had been the primary loser at the Western Labour Conference back in March, winning neither resolutions nor executive representation. With the OBU now controlling the VTLC and a majority vote at the BC Federation of Labour, there was little for the political party supporters to do but lay low. But in the aftermath of the general strikes, the legitimacy of the OBU leadership was increasingly called into question by the representatives of the international unions. In the last week of July, their organizers swept into the province and, with tacit federal approval, set up rival organizations. The new Vancouver Trades and Labour Council (International), with its focus on “moderate” demands and traditional political action, would become a prime player in the drive for PR in the coming months.¹⁹

Splits in veterans ranks would also have an impact. As Elizabeth Lees notes, the GWVA often has been spoken of in a manner that focuses on continuity rather than division. The summer of 1919 was the turning point in the organization’s history; both the peak of its influence and the beginning of the endless hemorrhaging of its membership to other soldier associations. Lees takes issue with characterizations of the GWVA that portray it as an egalitarian group of many views, none of which dominated, suggesting instead that “in Vancouver the state and the economic elite used the GWVA as an agent for the political manipulation of veterans.”²⁰ In 1919, the leadership of the GWVA served this purpose in number of ways. Lees suggests that soldier indifference to the general strike in Vancouver was not accidental but deftly reinforced by the conservative leadership of the GWVA who, having learned from the mistakes in Winnipeg, successfully frustrated efforts to have a public soldier forum on the subject.²¹ The organization’s elite next focused on containing the rapidly expanding demands for a soldier gratuity or cash bonus, a proposal decidedly unpalatable to the federal government. The showdown would come with their provincial and national conventions in July, both to be held in Vancouver.

These meetings of soldiers took place against a backdrop of RNWMP concern that many veterans were on the verge of running out of their post-discharge pay. In their reports to Ottawa they called on the government to create work for the soldiers to temper the influence of Bolshevism, underlining their belief that the soldiers would be the crucial constituency in averting more upheaval.²² At the conventions conflicts between the elite

¹⁹ Bercuson, pp. 180-1.

²⁰ Lees, p. 31.

²¹ Lees, pp. 63-4.

²² Lees, pp. 68-9.

and some of their more vocal opponents broke out over the anti-labour bias in the veteran papers and, of course, the cash bonus issue. In the end, the leadership of the GWVA succeeded in watering down the cash bonus resolution and another proposal to seize the assets of war profiteers. But the victory was bittersweet. A substantial number of members ultimately voted with their feet by leaving the organization to join the more cash-bonus friendly Grand Army of United Veterans and other less government-influenced organizations.²³ The effect of these manipulative efforts by the leadership of the GWVA at the July conventions was to increase the conservatism of the organization in the latter half of 1919. As if to showcase its new conservative compromise, the national convention declared both its aversion to Bolshevism and its support for the “reasonable demands of labour.”²⁴

At the same time, AFL representative Alfred Farmilo was in town forcing local unions to choose between affiliation with the OBU controlled VTLC or a new council chartered by the Dominion Trades and Labour Congress. While most remained with the old council for the time being, Farmilo convinced enough unions to join his new VTLC (International) to make it look respectable. These “reasonable” elements of the soldiers and labour organizations were making a tactical decision to take the suddenly proffered carrot of government and business and avoid the stick being aimed at the OBU and other radical organizations. Yet they were not passive in steering their “moderate” course. They made many demands of their new found friends, one of which was proportional representation; a strategy designed to assure that they could not be simply forgotten when the crisis passed. On the whole though, moderate leaders had no grand plans other than thinking that, after years of struggling to be recognized by governments as legitimate participants in public affairs, it seemed foolish not to work with the authorities now that an opportunity had arrived. Moderate leaders appeared perplexed and unable to explain the new divisions in soldier and labour ranks. Major C. W. Andrews, a federal MP for Winnipeg and GWVA leader in Manitoba, declared for PR at the veterans’ conventions in Vancouver because he felt that no matter what he did, someone was unhappy with him. Clearly exasperated, he told one reporter, “A man needs seventeen faces and a rubber neck to represent all classes of his constituents.”²⁵

In mid-August local members of these conservative strands of the soldier and labour movements organized themselves into the United and Public Service Council [UPSC], a body dedicated to influencing municipal affairs. Their first priority was to establish

²³ Lees, pp. 70-1; Morton, pp. 123-4.

²⁴ *Sun*, July 9, 1919.

²⁵ *Sun*, July 9, 1919.

proportional representation for civic elections in Vancouver. Since the last concerted push for PR in the city in 1917, little had been heard of the many alternative reforms that had sprung up at the time. The need to redraw the ward boundaries seemed to be less urgent without the weight of the PR reform behind it. Yet in early 1919, Alderman Owen re-floated his one-ward plan, eventually gaining the support of the Civic Bureau of the Board of Trade in May.²⁶ Now he was pushing for a September plebiscite on the issue to coincide with a money-bylaw vote, a fairly routine non-election measure. The UPSC complained that the Owen plan was simply an attempt to scuttle PR, by far the more popular option in their opinion, before the voters had a chance to pass judgment on it. In a letter to council dated September 2, 1919, Captain W.J. Conway warned that any attempt to “push the Owen plan through” would be seen “as a deliberate flouting of the soldier, labour, and other supporting organizations of the City.”²⁷ The city council did change its mind, though the *Province* suggested the UPSC had little to do with it. More to the point, with many aldermen out of town, acting Mayor Owen simply lacked the requisite number of votes.²⁸ Still, the effort seemed an auspicious start for a new public pressure group.

The UPSC was a grand-sounding organization with a similarly impressive organizational structure. It was a federation in terms of the wholly-independent groups that comprised it and the weak executive that headed it, yet it nonetheless mirrored the committee structure of the older, more austere and respectable civic groups like the Board of Trade. Committees existed for economic, social, educational, and electoral reform purposes among others. By late September, they claimed to represent 10,000 residents. Whether the organization equalled its claims is unclear as none of its own records have survived. For a time the UPSC received a great deal of coverage in the press which described them as a coalition of “[m]ost, if not all, of the veterans’ organizations in the city, as well as the Trades and Labour Council...”²⁹ But the UPSC did not represent everyone; both the more radical Grand Army of United Veterans and OBU were conspicuous by their absence. Vancouver newspapers exposed their bias by leaving radicals out of their coverage, often creating the impression that one or two moderate groups comprised the totality of organizing efforts in any given social concern.³⁰ By

²⁶ CVA, Vancouver Board of Trade, Civic Bureau Minutes, v. 96, May 22, 1919, p. 49.

²⁷ CVA, King manuscript; see also CVA, City Clerk’s Records, loc. 13-D-7, File: Mayor.

²⁸ *Province*, September 3, 1919, p. 14.

²⁹ *Province*, September 18, 1919. For other coverage see *Sun*, September 25, p. 3, *Province*, September 25, p. 22, September 27, p. 17

³⁰ This is Elizabeth Lees’ point about the almost exclusive coverage given the GWVA and the Army and Navy Veterans by Vancouver papers despite the existence of many other groups. She suggests this was particularly true in the summer of 1919; see p. 39.

focusing on “reasonable” players, the newspapers sought to undermine support for the radical alternatives. Casting the UPSC as the respectable face of all soldiers and workers accomplished this purpose. This also helps explain the extensive coverage given the main accommodationist event, the labour/employer “get-together” in Ottawa, the National Industrial Conference.

The National Industrial Conference was a recommendation of the Mathers Royal Commission, one of the few acted on by the federal government. Newspaper coverage of the Conference focused on the “get-together spirit” that emerged, the many points of unanimity and the statesmanlike behavior of the representatives of labour. That a degree of harmony resulted was not left to chance. Borden’s cabinet had made sure that all labour nominees for attendance were funneled through the international unions, thus excising the possibility of radical outbursts. Even then those gathered could not agree on either minimum wages or the eight hour day. Not surprisingly, the Conference’s big story was the unanimous support for a British-style parliamentary Speaker’s Conference on proportional representation.³¹

The conference convened in the Senate chamber of Parliament with the representatives of business occupying the government benches and labour the opposition. As R.C. Brown has noted, the symbolism could hardly have been missed.³² Sir John Willison, long a guiding light of labour accommodationist rhetoric in the Liberal party, opened the deliberations on the PR resolution in the final days of the conference. Willison’s command of purple passages was impressive. He cast the drive for PR as part of a grand movement for progress: “I am bound to say that I covet for my country the leadership in the forward march toward the upland.” Yet in declaring that “Proportional Representation [was] not particularly or peculiarly ... a concession to labour” he betrayed the discomfort that many felt about the origins of the event.³³ Speaker after speaker tried to dodge the labour-accommodating purpose of the Conference with a posture of denial somewhere in their speech. The main mover of the motion, Victoria’s E.S. Woodward, was no exception. In wrapping up a long and convoluted presentation Woodward tried to seize the higher ground by claiming that PR was a matter of justice, not expediency.³⁴ Yet no serious PR reformer could fail to see that expediency was the prime reason for the

³¹ For coverage of the National Industrial Conference in BC papers see the *Daily Colonist*, September 19, pp. 1,4; *Province*, September 19, pp. 1, 3, September 20, pp. 1, 6; *World*, September 19, pp. 1, 18.

³² Brown, p. 324.

³³ Spec. Col. UBC, E.S. Woodward, box 1, printed copy of Canada, National Industrial Conference of Dominion and Provincial Governments with Representative Employers and Labour Men, at Ottawa, September, 1919, Official Report of Proceedings and Discussions, p. 168.

³⁴ Spec. Col. UBC, Woodward, p. 175.

reform's sudden rise in popularity. The "evolution or revolution" theme of Woodward's and others' talks directly appealed to the expediency of the reform under the current conditions of class struggle. And reformers spent as much time underlining the "PR or else" side of their message as they did waxing philosophic over principle. Woodward warned that "an electoral system which operates so unequally and unjustly, and which hampers the workers in their efforts to find a constitutional remedy for their wrongs, is a standing incentive to the adoption of unconstitutional weapons."³⁵ The world was watching, he suggested, in the hope that the conference would restore the confidence of the working masses in constitutional authority. Principles were fine but Woodward made certain that his main point was not misunderstood by the conference: PR was the key to easing labour unrest.³⁶

The Conference's approval of PR raised the stature of the reform for local elites and helped contribute to a building sense of momentum. Even so Conservative a paper as the *Province* was forced to admit, amid a great swathe of qualifications, that perhaps PR should be considered.³⁷ Alongside these developments, Vancouver's civic PR supporters continued to organize, their close brush with the Owen one-ward plan spurring them on. On September 16, Garfield King attended a meeting of the Civic Bureau of the Board of Trade. There he and Alderman Owen debated the merits of their respective schemes. The result was the establishment of a committee of three to look into the reform of Vancouver's municipal government.³⁸ Just a week and a half later they recommended the Owen plan, a board of control, and PR.³⁹ Owen's plan called for the city's aldermen to be elected a large; PR too called for election at large. As a result, many of the uninitiated could find little contradiction in recommending them both. But the two systems differed on the mechanism by which members were elected, a fact well known to the more experienced reformers. Owen was not pacified with this compromise and remained dubious about the council's reaction to the proposal.⁴⁰

Recommendations of the various bureaus of the Board of Trade were often forwarded to the main body for a general vote; this was to be the fate of the Civic Bureau recommendations for PR and a board of control. However, in the interim PR's opponents were not idle. Alderman Kirk quickly resurrected his 1917 scheme to double up the city's representatives into four two-member wards, a measure he suggested would both

³⁵ Ibid, p. 170.

³⁶ Spec. Col. UBC, Woodward, p. 169.

³⁷ *Province*, September 20, 1919, p. 6.

³⁸ CVA, Vancouver Board of Trade, Civic Bureau Minutes, v. 96, September 16, 1919, p. 81.

³⁹ CVA, Vancouver Board of Trade, Civic Bureau Minutes, v. 96, September 25, 1919, p. 82.

⁴⁰ *Province*, September 26, 1919, p. 23.

equalize the current differentials between wards and address the criticisms of the old ward system.⁴¹ The *World* was quick to see Kirk's plan as an effective compromise between those forces that would keep wards and those that would do away with them.⁴² Yet not everyone saw Kirk's proposal as guided by a spirit of compromise. The reformers balked at this re-entry of a plan that had lain dormant for two years. While Kirk's timing had everything to do with the re-emergence of PR as a serious reform threat, his opportunism was obscured in the public arena by the general civic reform-mania of the period. Vancouver seemed always to be considering some reform or another and Kirk's sounded little different from any other in its general shape or the promises made on its behalf. But to those in the know, like the members of the PR Society, Kirk's plan had only one goal - to kill the drive for PR.⁴³

These familiar adversaries renewed their acquaintance October 14 at the regular monthly meeting of the Board of Trade. Up for discussion were the recommendations of the Civic Bureau that the Board propose to city council the adoption of a board of control and PR. The evening's debate would illustrate nicely the cross-cutting set of alliances for and against the various reforms. C.E. Tisdall, who chaired the meeting, suggested early on a clause by clause discussion of the report, and those present approved. The discussion of the board of control exposed indifference toward the proposal on the part of most present. It appeared to have only one strong advocate in the person of the chair himself, who, when pressed to declare what benefits it would deliver, claimed it would "mean the elimination of the ward system and its attending evils."⁴⁴ Despite the chair's protests, the meeting laid over the board of control recommendation. Where Tisdall's dislike of the ward system typified much of the general sentiment of the time, he also demonstrated how often reform forces were divided on just what reform to pursue. For instance, Tisdall did not support PR. Indeed, in shifting the meeting to the next order of business he declared his "disbelief in the efficacy of PR" and was careful to suggest that he moved the recommendation only as the chair of the Bureau. Tisdall's opposition mattered little to most present; the real point of the meeting had arrived, and the two camps were ready to face off. The minutes report the discussion of PR as "lengthy." In the end, Kirk and a number of other aldermen managed to have the decision put off until

⁴¹ *Sun*, October 10, 1919, p. 2.

⁴² *World*, October 16, 1919, p. 4.

⁴³ In a letter to the editor of the *Province*, October 16, 1919, King described Kirk's four-ward scheme as a "red herring proposal." See also King's more extensive comments in an article for L. D. Taylor's small paper, *The Critic*, in CVA, Add. Mss. 135, Garfield King Scrapbook, excerpt from *The Critic*, no page number, no date.

⁴⁴ *Province*, October 15, 1919, p. 4.

a special meeting of the Board could address the question in more detail, one where the mayor and others could be present. The date was set for November 18.⁴⁵

The tactical machinations of the various participants at the meeting were telling. With the exception of J. J. McRae, the city aldermen present were opposed to PR. Yet they were not united in their opposition. Alderman Owen still wanted his one-ward plan to replace the ward system, while Kirk was as opposed to voting at-large as he was to PR. Returned soldier and alderman J. E. Elkins would have no truck with any reforms, and asserted that the city would take little notice of any recommendations. On the other side, many Board of Trade members supported PR as part of a general critique of civic government. But each found the problem in a different place. Former Board of Trade President Nichol Thompson supported PR to end partyism. Others supported the reform to end corruption, or localism. While hostile to PR, Tisdall was not uncritical of the city's government either. The chair's support for a Board of Control stemmed from his belief that it would encourage better, more business-minded citizens to run for office. Curiously, not all reformers simply bashed the city. The PR Society's W.J. Conway, a member of Board of Trade, UPSC, and GWVA, defended the city's politicians, claiming that they were doing their best.⁴⁶ Perhaps Conway hoped to leave some room for the politicians to change their minds.

As the Board of Trade argued over PR, the theme of labour accommodation continued to resonate in the papers. "Radical Agitators Eager To Secure Political and Economic Control in U.S." trumpeted the *Province* front page October 16, though a smaller line suggested that the industrial conference underway in Washington was "damming the flood." The article claimed that radicals and their propaganda were behind the wave of strikes and warned that the collapse of the conference at the American capital might lead to a national upheaval of dire proportions. The conference, like the Canadian equivalent that preceded it, seemed to be stalled on the question of collective bargaining rights. The message between the lines of the newspaper coverage was not terribly subtle: concessions to the moderate elements of labour might be the best way out; collective bargaining might be the price to pay.⁴⁷ While labour accommodation had struck a chord with a number of newspaper owners, many employers remained unconvinced, preferring instead the tried and true approaches of coercion, strike-breaking, or starvation. They were gambling that North America was not another Russia.

⁴⁵ CVA, Vancouver Board of Trade Minutes, Add. Mss. 300, v. 46, October 14, 1919, minute book p. 138.

⁴⁶ *Province*, October 15, 1919, p. 4.

⁴⁷ *Province*, October 16, 1919, p. 1.

In the month before the next Board of Trade meeting, PR remained a topic of public discussion. Questions were raised in the House of Commons as to when the promised Speaker's Conference on the subject would begin.⁴⁸ Organized labour affiliated with the international unions re-affirmed their support for it. And the PR Society continued to collect signatures on their petition for a civic plebiscite on the issue. The *Province* even reviewed the case for PR when editorially pondering the fate of the farmer party in Ontario in their upcoming provincial election, suggesting that their rising support would probably not be rewarded with any seats, or worse, might skew the results for the larger parties.⁴⁹ As it happened, the Ontario election results did heighten the interest in PR, but not for the reasons outlined by the *Province*.

The results of the Ontario provincial election of October 20, 1919 were like a godsend to PR supporters, particularly the PR Society. For some time it had been an article of faith among reformers that PR would not just represent minorities but also prevent them from being over-represented. Certainly this point had been reinforced since the general strikes of the past summer. Now the warnings had come true. The United Farmers of Ontario, with fewer votes than either the Conservatives or the Liberals, formed the provincial government with twenty more seats than its nearest rival.⁵⁰ Even adding in the vote totals of its coalition partner, the Labour Party, they still had less popular support than the Tories.⁵¹ Yet they had more seats. The timing of a third party breakthrough could not have been more perfect. As the newspapers chewed over the injustice of the results, the victory of the farmer and labour forces served as a dire warning to those resisting the labour accommodation strategy and PR.⁵² Doing nothing while preserving the status quo might end up a costly strategy. As if to underscore the message, only days later farmer candidates in Saskatchewan, Ontario, and New Brunswick won federal by-elections by wide margins in formerly safe Liberal and Tory seats.⁵³

⁴⁸ House of Commons, *Hansard*. October 16, 1919.

⁴⁹ *Province*, October 15, 1919, p. 6.

⁵⁰ James Naylor, *The New Democracy, Challenging the Social Order in Industrial Ontario, 1914-1925*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 127.

⁵¹ *World*, December 3, 1919, p. 4.

⁵² For some of the local newspaper discussion of the election see the editorial in the *World*, December 2, 1919, p. 4, and King's response December 3.

⁵³ Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review 1919*, pp. 387 and 610. Despite many indications of a difficult and possibly risky campaign, Ontario's Conservative Premier William Hearst had remained confident of victory and even warned those farmers considering independent action that "If the farmers seriously enter politics as an independent political party it will prove fatal to themselves and will be demoralizing to the whole structure of government." See *Canadian Annual Review 1919*, pp. 650-1.

The Ontario election did not end the curious goings-on. On the same day as that event, Vancouver alderman J. E. Elkins gave the requisite one-month notice of motion for the city to adopt PR.⁵⁴ The alderman's about face on the issue seems inexplicable given his vociferous opposition to the scheme at the Board of Trade offices less than a week before. Perhaps he was convinced by the soldier delegates to the UPSC. At a September meeting of the organization, soldier representatives complained bitterly that Elkins, himself a returned soldier, was resisting PR; they promised to remind him of his constituency.⁵⁵ Or perhaps Elkins sought to undercut the reform forces with a premature vote. While Elkins' motives remain unclear, his actions may simply have reflected the increasing organization of PR forces within the soldier ranks. After all, it was sometime in October that the GWVA themselves voted to adopt PR for their own elections to be held in January. However, in the end, Elkins' motion was never brought forward.

Into November, the plans for the Board of Trade special meeting on PR continued, as did the debate that gave rise to it. The Board's secretary sent a formal invitation to the city council to attend, while the Retail Bureau worked to see that all opinions on the issue would be represented adequately.⁵⁶ Meanwhile alderman Kirk continued to promote his four-ward scheme and denounce PR to the press.⁵⁷ As the date approached, the evening came to assume the format of a formal debate with Kirk and King cast as the main protagonists, with Owen and Conway as seconders. Each speaker was to outline his argument in thirty minutes with his seconder to get fifteen minutes. Questions from the audience and the board would eat up the rest of the evening. Both King and Kirk arrived at the meeting with diagrams with which they proceeded to adorn the walls and "every available place." By the time the meeting began a capacity crowd had settled in for the debate. They were not to be disappointed.

King opened by comparing the merits of PR with the deficiencies of the ward system. Wards divided the city and its people, its outlook, and its powers of co-operation. By contrast, he suggested, PR would "draw the community together," increase civic unity, and guarantee that every vote would count. "Anyone who distrusted PR," King declared, wrapping up, "distrusted his fellow citizens." In light of the year's upheaval King's message was clear - only PR could offer a better way than strikes and social unrest. Kirk, his opponent, referred to his five years' service on council as evidence that the quality of civic government had less to do with systems of voting than

⁵⁴ CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, October 20, 1919, minute book p. 639.

⁵⁵ *Province*, September 18, 1919.

⁵⁶ CVA, City Clerk's Records, Loc. 13-E-2, File: Board of Trade; Vancouver City Council Minutes, November 3, 1919, minute book p. 643; Vancouver Board of Trade Minutes, November 6, 1919, p. 175.

⁵⁷ *World*, October 22, 1919, p. 20.

with the individuals elected. Kirk was doing double duty here both trying to kill the enthusiasm for PR as well as throw water on his seconders' alternative plan, election at-large. Both, he declared, would encourage partyism and "threaten the ratepayers' interests, setting aside all consideration for properties to the one consideration of the human factor alone." No doubt Kirk thought this his *coup de grace*, topped off as it was with an affirmation of business principles and efficiency. The appeal to property rights had been a key theme of the successful anti-PR forces in the fall of 1917. But in the fall of 1919 Kirk seriously misjudged the crowd.

W.J. Conway opened his address by urging an end to the property question and representation. "Property w[ill] take of itself," he suggested, "It's time now to think of the man." Echoing the season's theme of labour accommodation, he underlined this point with a warning that if this was not done "then the man would look after himself." In this sentiment he was supported by a number of other speakers. Predictably Conway also underscored the principled aspects of the cause. PR was, in his opinion, the only fair and just method of securing electoral representation. Alderman Kirk's only real problem with the system, he suggested ungenerously, was that he didn't propose it first. Alderman Owen's seconding speech paled by comparison, amounting to little more than an advertisement for his one-ward scheme. Kirk and Owen were clearly hindered in their efforts to rebut the PR supporters by their own rivalry over the alternatives. By contrast, the PR forces seemed focused and united on the course of action - PR for the city's government. Other speakers included representatives of Rotary and Kiwanis, and former VTLC executive member George Hardy as a voice of labour, as well as various members of the Board of Trade - all spoke in favour of PR. By the time the vote was taken the result must have been clear, a nearly unanimous endorsement of PR.⁵⁸

That the Board of Trade had decided on the issue did not end the debate. Undeterred, alderman Kirk simply moved on to other venues.⁵⁹ However, the drive for PR in 1919 should not be seen simply as a replay of the efforts of 1917. Now PR appeared less in the company of its nearly-professional reformer exponents and more often pressed into the service of various public bodies. PR figured strongly in UPSC discussions of a joint soldier/labour ticket for the civic elections.⁶⁰ Captain William McIntosh represented that body as a delegate to the United Farmers of BC convention to speak on behalf of the reform as a way to coordinated efforts between farmers, soldiers

⁵⁸ Accounts of the meeting are from the *Sun* and the *World*, November 19, 1919, pp. 6 and 3 respectively. Hardy was a member of the VTLC before it split into two rival groups, one supporting the OBU and the other the international unions.

⁵⁹ *World*, December 2, 1919, p. 13.

⁶⁰ *World*, December 5, 1919, p. 16.

and labour.⁶¹ In Winnipeg the moderate labour leaders made PR a key plank in their civic party platform. And the GWVA, unable to decide upon a soldiers' party, nonetheless committed to PR for elections both within and without their organization.⁶² Meanwhile, the PR Society concentrated its efforts on getting the Vancouver petition in order. No effort was made to resurrect PR in any of the outlying municipalities, nor were many new conversions attempted. Point Grey appeared to toy with the idea of a plebiscite on PR for a time but nothing came of it.⁶³ Only Victoria witnessed a similar level of activity, but it was the product of an entirely different crew of PR reformers.

In late November, Winnipeg's labour contingent scored a stunning breakthrough in the city's civic election, winning half the seats on council. Far from being beaten or "exhausted" by the general strikes, organized labour appeared feisty as 1919 drew to a close. Electoral victories in Winnipeg municipally and Ontario provincially were mirrored by the increasing success of the OBU in signing up members: over 40,000 by the year's end.⁶⁴ The trial of the strike leaders backfired on the government by further publicizing labour's grievances and creating more sympathy for them. Amid all this Vancouver's newspapers could still not decide who PR might serve. When Calgary's second trial with proportional voting took place in December, Vancouver papers gave it special attention. Initially the papers focused on the supposedly stultifying effects of PR on civic politics. The *World* suggested that PR took the excitement out of elections because as different groups could be assured of electing their representatives they now had little interest in other candidates or campaigns.⁶⁵ But as the results began rolling in the focus shifted. Despite sub-zero temperatures voter turnout reached record highs. And now PR, far from assuring group representation, was held responsible for the labour contingent's defeat.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, in Edmonton, labour gained control of council and won the mayoralty under an at-large voting system.⁶⁷ Possibly spurred on by these results, Alberta's provincial government commissioned a study into the applicability of PR to Edmonton shortly after.⁶⁸

⁶¹ *World*, December 6, 1919, p. 1; and *World*, December 24, 1919, p. 3.

⁶² *World*, December 1, 1919, p. 24; and *World*, December 5, 1919, p. 16.

⁶³ *World*, December 12, 1919, p. 15. In later November Garfield King attended a meeting of the Marpole Ratepayers and suggested they urge the municipality to have plebiscite on the issue at the January elections; they agreed. See *Point Grey Gazette*, November 22, 1919, pp. 1, 4.

⁶⁴ Phillips, p. 82.

⁶⁵ *World*, December 8 and 10, 1919, pp. 3, 9.

⁶⁶ *World*, December 11, 1919, p. 19. Later Garfield King would refute many of the paper's observations with evidence from Calgary; see *World*, December 19, 1919, p. 4.

⁶⁷ *World*, December 9, 1919, p. 1.

⁶⁸ *World*, December 26, 1919, p. 2. Earlier in the month Saskatchewan's provincial government floated the idea of making PR optional for civic elections; see the *World*, December 10, 1919, p. 9.

On December 15, 1919, Garfield King submitted the PR Society's petition for a plebiscite to the Vancouver city council.⁶⁹ Remembering their last experience, this petition arrived complete with 3500 names attached, well over the five per cent required, and a note from King to let them know he had already checked 2186 against the voters list himself and found them valid.⁷⁰ Only that the rest of the voters' lists were at the printers prevented him from checking all of the names. At the council meeting that afternoon a large delegation turned out to urge council to act quickly on the petition so that voters could decide on the question at the January elections. Representatives like Captain Whittaker from the GWVA, W.R. Trotter from the VTLC (Int.), Darryl Kent from Rotary, Captain Conway from the Board of Trade, and Garfield King of the PR Society all spoke briefly on behalf of the petition. Council committed to little but to direct the city clerk to check up on the signatures.⁷¹ Meanwhile a letter of support for PR from the Board of Trade was delivered to council the next day.⁷²

Despite the apparent crumbling of the status quo and rise in the political fortunes of labour, the majority of Vancouver's city council were still actively hostile to PR. It was one thing to agree that PR was an acceptable concession to labour, it was another to decide who should suffer the conceding. The politicians were loathe to change the rules that had put them in power. A scribbled note on King's letter in the city clerk's hand reminded him that alderman Rogers particularly wanted every name on the petition checked and rechecked. But if most of council could agree that PR was bad they could not seem to settle on what was better. And unlike 1917, they were not going to be able to rely on obfuscation, stalling or simply throwing out the petition. This time there were no irregularities with the petition's format or signatures; the PR Society had seen to that. Additionally, changes to the PR act earlier in the year had blunted many of the council's previous criticisms. With the force of a provincial statute behind them, the PR forces were confident that a plebiscite would be forthcoming. Therefore the aldermen in opposition would have to find a different strategy. That a petition was coming had been no secret and there is some evidence that contingency plans by the anti-PR forces were in the works. A week before the petition was delivered, alderman Owen again raised the possibility of a plebiscite on his one-ward plan.⁷³ Kirk too continued to push for his four-ward proposal.

⁶⁹ CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, December 15, 1919, minute book p. 690.

⁷⁰ CVA, City Clerk's Records, Loc. 13-E-4, File: petitions.

⁷¹ For coverage of the meeting see *Sun*, December 16, 1919, p. 5; and *World*, December 16, 1919, p. 3.

⁷² CVA, City Clerk's Records, Loc. 13-E-4, File: Petitions.

⁷³ *World*, December 9, 1919, p. 9.

On the same day the petition was delivered, council debated the alternatives to PR. The *World's* headline exposed the divisions in the anti-PR forces: "One Ward Bylaw Has Hard Going." Alderman Owen's voting at-large proposal drew "adverse and critical views" from most of council; Woodside opposed it because it eliminated wards, Elkins because it eliminated plural voting. When asked if the one-ward plan would mean one man-one vote Owen replied yes, though he added that each voter would vote for eight aldermen.⁷⁴ Kirk's proposal was only slightly more popular, mostly because it retained wards. With little enthusiasm, council passed both proposals the next day to become plebiscite questions alongside PR in the January elections.⁷⁵ Kirk could simply have had council vote on his proposal and seen it in use for the elections in less than a month. That he did not is also a telling piece of strategy on his part. He explained his decision with the rationale that if PR were successful his proposal would only be used for one election, hardly enough of a trial.⁷⁶ But perhaps Kirk had another strategy in mind. By forcing a public vote on his proposal too he would have the same moral authority as the PR forces, especially if his plan got more votes. From that position he could then more successfully fend off the drive for PR.

On December 18 the city clerk confirmed the petition as being in accordance with the provisions of the Municipal Proportional Representation Act.⁷⁷ Council resigned itself to its fate and passed the appropriate enabling bylaw for the plebiscite.⁷⁸ Now the official battle over the systems could begin. From the beginning it appeared that Kirk's scheme had an edge - at least in the newspapers - a fact that caused no end of annoyance to Garfield King. On the same day as the petition confirmation, the *Sun's* editorial page stated authoritatively that PR belonged to the "theoretical category" of civic reforms, only alderman Kirk's proposal embodied the "spirit of compromise" so necessary in civic affairs.⁷⁹ Later that week, the Sunday *Sun* again gave over much of its discussion of the upcoming plebiscites to a glowing and detailed exposition of Kirk's four-ward plan.⁸⁰ King was not slow in responding, pointing out that although Kirk and Owen's plans were not new, neither had garnered any public support in the two years they had been on offer. PR, by contrast, had many public bodies supporting it.⁸¹ In a much longer piece

⁷⁴ *World*, December 16, 1919, p. 13. See also CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, December 15, 1919, minute book p. 705.

⁷⁵ CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, December 16, 1919, minute book p. 706.

⁷⁶ *World*, December 17, 1919, p. 8.

⁷⁷ CVA, City Clerk's Records, Loc. 13-E-2, File: City Clerk.

⁷⁸ CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, December 18, 1919, minute book p. 708.

⁷⁹ *Sun*, December 18, 1919, p. 6.

⁸⁰ *Sun*, December 21, 1919, p. 5.

⁸¹ *Sun*, December 20, 1919, p. 6.

published in L.D. Taylor's small paper, *The Critic*, King lashed out at the members of council, accusing them of blindly following Kirk's lead. In examining Kirk's scheme ward by ward, King attempted to show how each alderman was at risk under the four-ward plan. King suggested that Kirk was pulling a fast one on the aldermen in saddling them with his system, especially when it was rumored that he might possibly avoid the aldermanic contest altogether by running for mayor.⁸² Sure enough, Kirk did declare for the mayoralty December 29.⁸³

With the election campaign officially begun on January 1, 1920 it became apparent quickly that PR was an issue that cut across campaigns and political party designations. As candidates for mayor, Gale and Kirk could be loosely identified with Liberal or Conservative leanings but, upon examination, their supporters could not be so easily labelled.⁸⁴ In fact, PR was not often a topic engaged by the candidates who spent most of their time arguing over the business tax, what to do about the soldiers, and deflecting *ad hominem* attacks. However, at most meetings, whether for Kirk or Gale, a representative of the PR Society appeared urging support for the PR plebiscite.⁸⁵ The reform was also discussed at non-campaign meetings; a Civic Retailers' luncheon promoted the reform to its members by staging a mock PR election.⁸⁶ The major papers had little to say, though some of the local weeklies, like the *Kitsilano Times*, came out in support.⁸⁷ PR supporters also managed to publish a series of ads recounting the virtues of PR and reminding voters to cast a ballot against the "red herring" proposals of Owen and Kirk.⁸⁸ One labour writer wondered aloud if Vancouver's citizens would remember the promises made during the labour crisis "not many months ago" to change the "elective system" so as to include labour.⁸⁹ As if to sum up all these efforts, Garfield King wrote a substantial article for the *Sun* two days before the election outlining the arguments for PR and against the other systems. "Will PR win on ... election day?" asked King rhetorically? He and the PR Society were confident it would.⁹⁰ On January 8, 1920 his estimation

⁸² CVA, Add. Mss. 135, Garfield King Scrapbook, excerpt from *The Critic*, no page number, no date.

⁸³ *World*, December 29, 1919, pp. 1, 12.

⁸⁴ For Gale's supporters see *World*, January 2, 1920, p. 10; for Kirk's see *World*, January 3, 1920, p. 16.

⁸⁵ See *World*, January 3, 1920, p. 3; *World*, January 7, 1920, p. 8.

⁸⁶ *Province*, January 11, 1920.

⁸⁷ Excerpt of the *Kitsilano Times*, January 2, 1920, in CVA, Garfield King scrapbook.

⁸⁸ For examples of the ads see *World*, January 3, 1920, p. 16; *World*, January 5, 1920, p. 14; *World*, January 7, 1920, p. 9; and see also "Vote For PR" box in Millar and Coe China ad, *World*, January 8, 1920, p. 11. Short articles also appeared in the *BC Federationist* urging support for PR; see December 28, 1919, and January 2, 1920.

⁸⁹ *BC Federationist*, January 2, 1920.

⁹⁰ *Sun*, January 6, 1920, p. 7.

proved correct - the PR plebiscite succeeded by a margin of three to one while both the Owen and Kirk plans went down to defeat.⁹¹

It has been conventional wisdom to see Vancouver's adoption of PR as the product of a determined effort on the part of an energetic crew of reformers.⁹² However the resurrection of PR in the fall of 1919 had everything to do with the larger class struggle underway. As workers and returning soldiers increasingly turned to more militant and radical options, as farmers and the international unions turned away from their traditional allegiance to the main political parties, politicians and the business community sought solutions in the status quo while casting about for other options. Throughout the western world opinion was divided as to how best to respond to the upheaval. For the first time a substantial body of society's "respectable" citizens opted for a type of labour accommodation; a recognition of the moderate elements in organized labour as a means of marginalizing the radicals. Proponents may have been acting with genuine or tactical concerns about labour's difficulties but either way the new priority given these grievances was clearly a response to class power, the threat of a force for change that could not be contained within familiar boundaries. In this PR became a valuable concession that both legitimated the system by allowing minority representation while containing dissent within an acceptable discourse of institutional democracy.

⁹¹ *Sun*, January 9, 1920, p. 9. The official results for the various schemes were as follows: for the Owen at-large plan: 3,793 for, 4,558 against; for the Kirk four ward plan: 3,420 for, 4,983 against; and for PR: 6,044 for, 2,790 against. The results were confirmed by city solicitor Jones in a letter to the city clerk William McQueen January 16, 1920; see CVA, City Clerk's Records, loc. 13-F-2, file 10 (the letter was misfiled under "soldiers").

⁹² See Hoag and Hallett, *Proportional Representation*; Enid Lakeman, *Power to Elect*; John Glashan, "Proportional Representation in Canada".

Chapter 5: Conclusion - The Slow Death of PR 1921-23

Historians have attempted to explain the decline of both radicalism and reform in BC in the early 1920s as the product of a “dissipation of the reform impulse,” or a “weakening of the spirit of social reform.”¹ Jean Barman suggested that labour’s post-war efforts, particularly the OBU, failed because they “did not comprehend the reality of working people’s lives.” Barman relies on testimonials of workers imbued with visions of upward mobility: “They sought to rise in status, possibly becoming employers themselves. Carpenters wanted to become contractors, skilled workers the owners of their own small businesses.”² Yet explaining the decline of reform as the product of individual choices is hardly less problematic; the perception of opportunity, individual or collective, can just as much reflect class forces. Another view of the decline of reform in BC has less to do with its “dissipation” or a “choice” by workers and soldiers to pursue their individual self-interest than with the decisive shift in class power that occurred in the early 1920s. Business and government came to a new understanding free from the divisions engendered by wartime planning. Labour, hard hit by the recession and their opponents’ new unity, continued to strike and organize but found themselves increasingly defeated. Under these circumstances, increasing “choices” to act individually as opposed to collectively should not be surprising. The slow death of PR then represented not simply the retraction of a concession by the powerful from a no longer useful ally, but an indication that the forces and conditions that led to the reform’s emergence - labour, soldier and farmer militancy - could no longer sustain themselves. Yet this would only become apparent in hindsight, long after the piecemeal dismemberment of the scattered victories for PR.

In the aftermath of the plebiscite victory in Vancouver however, future defeat seemed a remote possibility. Instead, PR enjoyed a honeymoon of sorts with the elites and press of British Columbia that lasted most of 1920. For a time the reform lacked no end of supporters. With both Manitoba and Ontario’s provincial governments mulling over the prospect of PR for legislative elections, reformers spoke enthusiastically about their plans for provincial electoral reform.³ Even before the civic campaign was over Garfield King addressed the Progressive Liberal Association and the Vancouver area

¹ Robin, *The Rush for Spoils*, p. 212.

² Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West, A History of British Columbia*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 223.

³ *World*, January 12, 1920. King told the *World* that he hoped the provincial government would redeem its pledge to try PR out in the cities.

MLA's about the need for PR provincially.⁴ The city's Liberals shortly thereafter declared for PR.⁵ A week after the plebiscite win, the GWVA used PR for their own elections to rave reviews. The event went so smoothly that even the *Province*, a paper consistently unfriendly to PR, was forced to concede that the results "confound[ed] the woeful prognostications of members of the association who opposed the new system of voting."⁶ All the newspapers were initially reticent to endorse PR, but many enjoyed later what could only be described as a conversion experience. The Vancouver *Sun* led the pack now convinced that proportional voting was the only way to elect the province's members from the cities. "Why not PR?" demanded a *Sun* editorial in late February.⁷ The paper had been impressed with the ease with which the GWVA had used PR and the manner with which PR had marginalized Sinn Fein in the recent Irish elections. For the *Sun*, PR was now a matter of "fair play and common sense," a far cry from their position two months earlier that the reform belonged to the untried and theoretical category.⁸

Yet for all this new-found support, the drive for PR in British Columbia was already peaking. Arguably, it had already begun its decline even before the citizens of Vancouver had their first chance to try out the system in the January 1921 municipal election. To begin unraveling the demise of PR in B.C. requires attention to the same elements of class struggle that contributed to its rise. By late 1920, all were rapidly shifting position. Organized labour across Canada continued in its militancy but met with increasingly successful resistance from employers and the state, who had quickly patched

⁴ For the meeting notice see the *World*, January 3, 1920, p. 13; for an account of meeting see *Sun*, January 6, p. 7; or *World*, January 6, p. 7.

⁵ *Sun*, February 28, 1920, p. 14.

⁶ *Province*, January 16, 1920.

⁷ *Sun*, February 28, 1920, p. 6.

⁸ The change in the *Sun*'s position emerged with the first returns of the Irish civic elections January 20, 1920. Even with PR, the radical Sinn Fein won over half the representation in the cities; any other system would have given them all. In blunting their victory, the *Sun* declared that PR had been "proven capable of delivering the goods." Between March 10 and May 31, 1920 the *Sun* hammered away at the provincial government in seven different editorials demanding PR for legislative elections from the cities. When the issue was raised for debate in the Legislature March 24, it was clear that many of the city Liberals were having second thoughts about PR, fearing that it might cut into their strength in caucus. The motion for PR was eventually ruled out of order. Ignoring the legislative indifference, the *Sun* continued to harangue the government editorially. "Proportional representation is the next logical step in the evolution of our legislative institutions..." pronounced the editors in the last of their series at the end of May. By then the *Sun*'s editorials and the PR reformers' rhetoric were indistinguishable. For the Sinn Fein coverage see the *Sun*, January 20, p. 6; for the pro-PR editorials see March 10, 12, 24, 26, April 1, 24, and May 31 (all editorials appear on p. 6); for coverage of the legislative debate see March 23, p.1; and for support of the *Sun*'s position see a letter from Robert Telford, March 27, p. 6. The official record that a discussion took place in the Legislature can be found in the *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia*, March 24, 1920, p. 136. Throughout all this the *Province* remained unmoved. In an editorial in April, possibly in response to the *Sun*'s lobbying tactics, the paper claimed it was still unconvinced about the merits of PR; see the *Province*, April 27, 1920.

up their differences with the federal government's withdrawal from economic regulation. The end of war taxes eased up on the pressures dividing the business community, which could then focus more effectively on driving down wages and eliminating the closed shop.⁹ While the overall number of strikes in 1920 exceeded that of the previous year, the number of successful ones from the point of view of labour declined dramatically.¹⁰ This situation only worsened for labour with the coming years.¹¹ The OBU, for a time a radical alternative to the status quo, was ultimately quashed by an "unholy alliance" of the state, employers and the international unions.¹² The end of 1920 also marked the beginning of the post-war recession, a factor that further fractured the labour forces.

In Vancouver, these shifts could be readily perceived in the decline of the UPSC. This alliance of the more conservative elements of the soldier and labour organizations was ultimately only successful on PR. They began with expansive hopes to be a force in municipal politics, yet right from the start they had difficulty holding their coalition together when it came to substantive issues. In September 1919, they had attempted to rally a winning vote on a money bylaw question to increase funding to the city's schools. The ratepayers' groups were the first defectors and the bylaw failed.¹³ In December 1919, the soldier and labour members did manage to agree on a joint slate for the municipal elections, but attempts to maintain the coalition for the provincial election the following year failed.¹⁴ It seemed that to agree to *be* reasonable was one thing, to agree *what* was reasonable was another. In 1920, they attempted an alliance with the United Farmers of BC but little came of it.¹⁵ By 1921, they limped along, mostly ignored, PR their only issue.¹⁶ The eradication of the OBU and other radical possibilities increasingly muddled what it meant to be a "reasonable" representative of labour. The rapid

⁹ 1920 marked both the final year of the Board of Commerce, an agency designed to control prices, and the business profits tax; see Brown, pp. 323-4; and Perry, p. 199. For employer anti-union activity in BC see Yarmie, pp. 69-72.

¹⁰ Kealey and Cruikshank, "Strikes," p. 357.

¹¹ Bryan D. Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992), pp. 220-221.

¹² BC Federation of Labour, 1920, *Proceedings*, p. 9, as cited in Charles Lipton, *The Trade Movement of Canada, 1827-1959*, pp. 221-2.

¹³ *Province*, September 25, 1919, p. 22.

¹⁴ For the municipal joint slate see the *World*, December 5, 1919, p. 16, and December 11, p. 1; for the breakdown in joint political action see Lees, p. 86.

¹⁵ *World*, January 31. See also Margaret Ormsby, "The United Farmers of British Columbia - An Abortive Third-Party Movement," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, vol. XVII, nos. 1 and 2, pp. 53-73.

¹⁶ During the latter half of 1920 and beyond the UPSC's only appearances in the press and various organizations' minutes concerned little else but the preparation of educational materials for the PR elections. See CVA, Vancouver Board of Trade Minutes, v. 4, September 9, 1920, p. 297.

absorption of soldiers into civilian life and concomitant decline of veteran organizations only accelerated UPSC's decline.

On one level the drive for PR looked healthy enough even between 1920 and 1923. Manitoba adopted it for provincial elections in their urban areas, both Alberta's main parties supported its introduction there, and Ontario's farmer/labour government formed a committee to study how to implement it.¹⁷ The 1921 federal election witnessed two of the three major parties running endorse PR.¹⁸ With the Progressives firmly for it and the Liberals committed to it as party policy, it seemed only a matter of time before Canada would follow the European trend toward proportional voting. But as it became apparent early in the minority Liberal administration that the forces that gave rise to the farmer and labour militancy were already dissipating, many Liberals and most Conservatives decided to stick with the current voting system and count on re-absorbing the discontented. When a federal vote on PR finally came in February 1923, it was closer than many thought it would be, but enough Liberals and nearly all the Tories combined to defeat it.¹⁹ PR never regained its post-war popularity. Farmers began to rethink their commitment to it, benefiting as they were from over-representation under the current system, with labour

¹⁷ For an extensive overview of the Manitoba and Ontario deliberations see Harry Phillips, "Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874-1974," pp. 139-157 for the former, pp. 157-164 for the latter. Phillips says little of Alberta, Saskatchewan or BC's provincial efforts for PR however. Alberta's experience is handled briefly in Jack Masson's *Alberta's Local Governments and Their Politics*, (Edmonton: Pica Press, 1985), pp. 326-329. Alberta's Liberal Party declared its support for PR on the eve of its electoral loss in 1921; see Laycock, p. 41. The province's farmers declared for PR in the same year at the United Farmers of Alberta convention in January; see Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review 1921*, pp. 850-1.

¹⁸ For the party platforms of the Liberals and the Progressives see C.P. Stacey, *Historical Documents of Canada*, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 36, 40.

¹⁹ House of Commons, *Hansard*, February 19, 1923, p. 434. With his government a minority, and PR a controversial issue within his own party despite a pro-PR policy, Mackenzie King wisely called off the whips. The vote, which concerned only a trial application of PR in one or more metropolitan areas, was defeated with 90 votes against to 72 for. Prominent supporters included the Prime Minister Mackenzie King, J. S. Woodsworth, and the Progressive's W. C. Good, the member who had led most of the debate. The party breakdown was as follows: 20 Liberals for, 53 against; 2 Conservatives for, 35 against; 44 Progressives for, 2 against; while all 6 labour and independent members voted for the resolution. The bulging anti-PR vote from the Liberals, a party ostensibly committed to PR in its party platform, can be explained by the decisive antipathy to the measure on the part of the Quebec members. As the Liberals had won all sixty seats in the province in the 1921 election their attitude on PR was perhaps not surprising. The Progressive ranks on the issue were only broken by two BC members. See Phillips, pp. 176-182.

²⁰ As concerns the farmers, Harry Phillips notes that Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie King reported in his diary in May 1926 that the Progressives were willing to drop their demands for electoral reform in return for government support on a Grain Act; see p. 196. The Dominion Trades and Labour Congress included PR in its list of demands to the federal government every year from 1920 to 1929. See the *Canadian Annual Review 1920*, p. 471, *Labour Gazette*, September 1921, p. 1135; March 1922, p. 264;

following suit in the 1930s.²⁰ By the end of the 1920s, the old line parties' gamble paid off, with many of the Progressives and independents drifting back to the major parties.²¹

PR did remain a force precisely in those areas where a farmer or labour threat remained beyond the early 1920s. PR was extended beyond its municipal application to provincial constituencies in Alberta because the farmer government elected in 1921 was weak in the cities and sought to reinforce their labour allies in Edmonton and Calgary. Later, Alberta's Social Credit kept PR in place because they too were weak in the cities but hoped to weaken their opponents where they were strong.²² In Manitoba, labour had been emerging as a political force before the general strike in 1919 and the adoption of PR in 1920.²³ While a number of commentators have suggested that PR was designed to "dispel the bitterness" of the confrontation, its real purpose was clearly to contain labour where it was strong.²⁴ As *Manitoba Free Press* editor, J. W. Dafoe, later admitted, under

February 1924, p. 126; April 1926, p. 337, December 1927, p. 1313; January 1928, p. 39; and January 1929, p. 37. While no reason for its disappearance was recorded at the time, a left/labour anti-PR rhetoric emerged in the mid to late 1930s that was wrapped up with the electoral strategy of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. Left liberals like F. R. Scott and Frank Underhill traditionally represented the pro-PR views typical of a marginalized constituency. This changed with the consolidation of the CCF. Not unlike the Labour Party in Britain, the left in Canada decided that the rules as they existed offered the best hope of securing a majority government. The debate was finally decided against PR with the election of the CCF in Saskatchewan. For Underhill's views see F. Underhill, "O Canada," *Canadian Forum*, v. 10 (May 1930), pp. 277-278; and "Our Fantastic Electoral System," *Canadian Forum*, v. 15 (November 1935), p. 355. For the beginnings of an opposite view see H. Orliffe, *Canadian Forum*, v. 17 (February 1938), pp. 388-90. For a British view see Herman Finer, *The Case Against PR*, (London: Fabian Society, 1935).

21 The events leading to the reabsorption of the political dissidents is told succinctly in John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-39 Decades of Discord*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), chapter 6, "Patching Up the Old Political Order," pp. 104-137.

22 Anticipating an election sometime soon, the UFA introduced PR for the province's urban constituencies and the alternative vote for the rural ones in 1924; see Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review 1924-25*, pp. 429-30. The relationship between labour and the farmer government in Alberta is discussed in Finkel, "The Rise and Fall of the Labour Party in Alberta," *Labour/Le Travail*, 16 (Fall 1986), pp. 61-96. While historians have corrected the myth that Social Credit had always been a rural phenomenon with evidence of their early appeal in the cities, the stereotype does hold for later periods; on Social Credit and the cities see Larry Hannant, "The Calgary Working Class and the Social Credit Movement in Alberta, 1932-35," *Labour/Le Travail*, 16 (Fall 1985), pp. 97-116; Alvin Finkel, "Social Credit and the Cities," *Alberta History*, v. 34, n. 3 (Summer 1986), pp. 20-6; Edward Bell, "Class Voting in the First Alberta Election," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, v. 23, n. 3 (September 1990), pp. 519-530. After the oil boom of the mid to late 1940s Social Credit did come to rely heavily on rural support while challenges to its power emerged sporadically from the cities. Indeed, it was only the beginnings of a challenge to their rural power base that motivated them to abolish PR and the alternative vote in 1956; see Bob Hesketh, "The Abolition of Preferential Voting in Alberta," *Prairie Forum*, v. 12, n. 1 (Spring 1987), pp. 123-143.

23 See A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), chapter five, "A case study in labourism: Winnipeg 1899-1915," pp. 77-97.

24 On "dispelling the bitterness" see Hoag and Hallett, p. 230, and Enid Lakeman, *Power To Elect*, p. 117. For a more sophisticated analysis of reformer rhetoric on PR and "dispelling bitterness" see Phillips, p. 143. Phillips also notes the motivation of the Norris government to install PR as a means of containing labour but does not explore the implications of it; see p. 142.

the old voting rules labour would probably have won every urban seat in Manitoba in the provincial election of 1920.²⁵ With PR, however, labour ended up slightly under-represented.²⁶ The same story applied to municipal applications of PR. Both Calgary and Winnipeg sustained a cohesive labour vote well after the decline of labour militancy in the early 1920s. As a result, PR was a means of assuring that labour would remain a minority until such time that they could actually command more than fifty percent of the vote.²⁷ Vancouver's organized labourers, by contrast, seemed to pose little political threat. In fact, in the first PR election of January 1921 they elected one representative, and only one more in the next year.²⁸

The well-wishers for PR in 1920, however, could foresee nothing but the progressive unfolding of a democratic future. By contrast, hard-nosed politicians had little time for such romanticism. King's speech to the Progressive Liberals and members of the city's Liberal caucus in January 1920 may have been sprinkled with the usual platitudes about "democracy's future," but the politicians present mostly heard a means to hold on to their seats. The provincial government was due for an election, and many Liberals were worried about the impact of labour, soldier, and disaffected reform candidates - just the constituency that usually voted Liberal.²⁹ Would these factors cut

²⁵ Phillips, p. 150.

²⁶ Compare the results in Winnipeg with those in Vancouver's multi-member at large ridings in the 1916 and 1920 provincial elections. In Winnipeg the labour forces achieved forty-two per cent of the vote and secured four seats out of ten. Their opponents, the Liberals and Conservatives, did better, gaining six seats between them with the same percentage. Under at large rules, however, the latter two would have been lucky to elect anyone. In examining the results of BC's elections at large in Vancouver, one can see how at large greatly exaggerates the victory of the highest vote getter. In 1916 the Liberals in BC obtained forty-nine per cent of the vote in Vancouver and won five of the six seats. In 1920 they repeated this performance with only thirty-nine per cent. While other factors play a role the broad tendencies of the different voting systems can be seen at work here. For the Winnipeg results in the 1920 Manitoba provincial election see Phillips, p. 147; for BC elections data see Elections BC, *The Electoral History of BC*, pp. 127, 144.

²⁷ Indeed, the eradication of PR in Manitoba and Alberta for both provincial and municipal elections coincided with the nadir of organized labour's political fortunes in the late 1950s/early 1960s. For work on Winnipeg's municipal labour representatives see J. E. Rae, "The Politics of Class: Winnipeg City Council, 1919-1945," in Carl Berger and Ramsay Cook (editors), *The West and the Nation: Essays in Honour of W.L. Morton*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), pp. 232-249; and J. E. Rae, "Political Parties and Civic Power: Winnipeg, 1919-1975," in Alan F.J. Artibise and Gilbert A. Stelter (editors), *The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City*, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 155-166. For Calgary see Masson, pp. 296-299, and 304-309; and a general overview of labour in Alberta politics can be found in Alvin Finkel, "The Rise and Fall of the Labour Party in Alberta, 1917-42," *Labour/Le Travail*, 16 (Fall 1985), pp. 61-96.

²⁸ In 1921 labour was hindered by its inability to strike upon a common electoral strategy and the unwillingness of some labour candidates' supporters to number other labour candidates as their subsequent choices. Still, even with effective organizing, it is not clear that labour could have elected more than one or two members; see election results in citations listed below. Similar problems persisted in 1922, though to a lesser degree.

²⁹ Robin, *The Rush for Spoils*, pp. 177-9.

into the Liberal vote to the point of electing the Tories? Many members of the Legislature from the city did not want to wait and find out. PR seemed an attractive option in the wake of endless political fragmentation. Yet a provincial experiment with PR had long remained the unfulfilled promise of the Liberal elite to the reformers. Garfield King told the *World* in January 1920 that with the civic victory he hoped the government would finally redeem its pledge to try out PR provincially.³⁰ He was to be disappointed. Years later King would blame Premier John Oliver as a man who “believed in the principle of PR, but feared its political results...”³¹ Oliver was not the only fearful one. The previously committed city Liberals began backing off PR when they realized it might dramatically reduce their caucus strength from the cities.³² When the issue was raised in the House in March 1920, the Speaker ruled it out of order as anticipating forthcoming legislation.³³ No legislation ever came. As it happened, the Liberals emerged with a majority in the December 1920 provincial election, despite the fact that nearly as many people voted for independent candidates as for the government or the opposition.³⁴ The inability of the government’s opponents to coalesce around a threatening alternative allowed the Liberals to forget their promise of PR.

Vancouver’s first PR election was accompanied by a great deal of anxiety and last minute planning. Despite persistent calls from the UPSC and the Board of Trade to prepare some educational material for the electorate on how to vote by PR, council only authorized an expenditure in mid-December.³⁵ At the eleventh hour, the city decided to

³⁰ *World*, January 12, 1920.

³¹ Glashan, p. 23. King made this observation to Glashan in an interview for latter’s masters’ thesis in 1951.

³² *Sun*, March 23, 1920, p.1

³³ *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia*, v. XLIX, March 24, 1920, p. 236.

³⁴ In this assessment, the *Canadian Annual Review* considered “independents” to be any candidates not with the Liberals or Tories, thus lumping the Federated Labour Party and Socialist Party results in with all others. Following this breakdown, the *Review* found 136,939 votes for the Liberals, 94,903 for the Conservatives, and 123,314 for the “independents.” The official results according to Elections BC were slightly different: Liberals 134,167, Conservative 110,475, and “independent” 109,446. See the *Canadian Annual Review 1921*, p. 859; and Elections BC, *Electoral History of British Columbia*, p. 139.

³⁵ For UPSC letter to the Board of Trade on PR educational materials see CVA, Vancouver Board of Trade Minutes, v. 4, September 9, 1920, p. 297; the Board’s Civic Bureau then endorsed the recommendation, see CVA, Vancouver Board of Trade, Civic Bureau Minutes, v. 96, October 14, 1920, p. 90; next the Board of Trade sent the city council a letter October 29th calling for PR voting instructions to be prepared and distributed free to the voters, see CVA, City Clerk’s Records, loc. 13-E-6, file: Board of Trade; finally the city endorsed the idea, see CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, November 1, 1920, minute book p. 222. However it was over another month before any money or final approval was granted; see CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, December 13, 1920, minute book p. 269. Meanwhile Garfield King and Captain Conway headed a committee of the Civic Bureau of the Board of Trade to prepare the instructions to voters and “to carry on until the civic elections are finished.” See CVA, Vancouver Board of Trade, Civic Bureau Minutes, v. 96, p. 94. For the rough draft and finished versions of the instructions see CVA, Garfield King Scrapbook.

request the services of Ronald Hooper, the Canadian PR Society's honorary secretary, who had supervised all aspects of the Manitoba vote the previous summer.³⁶ He was unavailable. Garfield King offered his services but the city clerk seemed on poor terms with him and King ended up running a losing campaign for the school board.³⁷ Still, the papers devoted much space to explanations of the system, its purpose, and its proposed goals. And the election itself went remarkably smoothly. There was only one problem - PR did not seem to make much difference in the results. After days of counting, eliminating candidates, and transferring fractions of support from one aspirant to another, there was little difference between the first choice results and the final tally.³⁸

Public opinion appeared mixed. The *Sun* solicited the opinions of "barbers and clubwomen" to gain an insight into the public's mind on PR.³⁹ Voters complained of being confused and annoyed by the intricacies of proportional representation. The candidates, both winners and losers, condemned the system.⁴⁰ One alderman called PR "the concentrated essence of mathematical insanity" while another suggested that rolling dice would be as effective.⁴¹ "Extremely fair and highly moral, but deadly dull, is what is the matter with proportional representation," carped the *Sun*.⁴² The *Province* remained

³⁶ CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, December 13, 1920, minute book p. 266. Recorded here is receipt of the report of the finance committee meeting which met December 8. See also *Sun*, December 9, 1920, p. 6.

³⁷ CVA, Vancouver Board of Trade, Civic Bureau Minutes, v. 96, December 6, 1920. Mayor Gale, Garfield King, Captain Conway and others were present. It was suggested at the meeting that Garfield King be made a deputy returning officer for the upcoming election; Gale agreed that this could be arranged. While the meeting's other suggestion - to contact Ronald Hooper - was immediately taken up, no further word of King's possible participation in the election in any administrative capacity appeared in the papers or the city clerk's records.

³⁸ *World*, January 15, 1921, p. 15. The *World* reproduced the count transfers from the election. In examining the chart any reader could see that the candidates with the largest vote totals on the first count were - even after 16 separate counts - nearly the same leaders at the end. The only impact PR had was to rearrange the order of some of the winners and alter the candidate in the eighth and final council position; P.C. Gibbens, eighth on the first count, gave way to Frank Woodside, who was ninth initially. For coverage of the election see the *Province*: January 14, pp. 1, 21; *World*: January 14, pp. 1, 2, 10; January 15, p. 1; January 17, p. 10; January 26, p. 3; and the *Sun*: January 14, p. 1, 3; January 15, p. 1, 3; January 17, p. 14.

³⁹ *Sun*, January 15, 1921, p. 14.

⁴⁰ *World*, January 17, 1921, p. 2. With a headline declaring the aldermen to be "Kindly toward all but PR" at the farewell meeting of the old council, failed candidate Gibbens threatened legal action to get the justice "denied" by the voting system. Much public discussion would center around the fairness or unfairness of Gibbens' plight. Ironically, Gibbens was the only alderman to complain about the expenditure for the free PR voting instructions that were mailed to every home; see the *World*, December 4, 1920, p. 16.

⁴¹ *Sun*, February 18, 1921, p. 6. Here the *Sun* was reprinting an opinion piece from the *London Free Press* about Vancouver's election.

⁴² *Sun*, January 17, 1921, p. 6. Two days earlier the paper had hedged on its previously firm conviction for PR by suggesting that party contests were the real testing ground for the reform and a provincial setting would be more suitable than the municipality; see the *Sun*, January 15, p. 6.

unimpressed.⁴³ Surprisingly, others were willing to give the experiment some leeway. “Let the public suspend judgment,” cautioned the *World*.⁴⁴ Many were willing to do just that.⁴⁵ With no mayoralty contest and poor weather, the turnout had been much lower than expected. Garfield King attempted to rally the PR supporters declaring, “The people of Vancouver are not going to be stampeded by the hasty and ill-informed opinion of a ‘jury of political matrons’ - with a barber for a foreman - into a decision they would regret the day following.” To his mind PR had stood the test.⁴⁶

Not everyone was feeling generous. Victoria had adopted PR at the same time as Vancouver, but its first trial was decidedly more controversial. When the leading candidate for a police commissioner position was eliminated on subsequent transfers the city’s papers cried foul. Nothing could convince the editors that everything had gone according to the rules and that the result was just the sort of thing the reformers had promised. The papers claimed that votes were being transferred to candidates not marked and that the whole process was riddled with irregularities.⁴⁷ Local PR stalwart E.S. Woodward challenged the editors by offering a reward to anyone who could prove that

⁴³ *Province*, January 14, 1921, p. 6. Another editorial critical of PR appeared January 18 on p. 6.

⁴⁴ *World*, January 15, p. 4. The *World* consistently defended PR against the post-election attacks with supportive editorials January 14, 17, 18, and 27 (all editorials appeared on p. 4). For positive coverage of West Vancouver’s second experience with PR see the *World*, January 17, p. 12.

⁴⁵ *Sun*, January 15, 1921, p. 14. Despite a headline that read “Many Electors Have Knocks for the PR System” not all opinions reported simply “knocked” PR. Some respondents felt PR had not been given a fair trial.

⁴⁶ *Province*, January 19, 1921.

⁴⁷ For the newspaper campaign against PR see the *Colonist*, January 9, 14, 16, 18, 20, and February 11; as well as the *Times*, January 18, 19, and March 2 (editorials in both papers appear on page 4). For coverage of the election itself see the *Colonist*, January 14, pp. 1, 13; January 15, p. 1; January 16, pp. 1, 32; and the *Times*, January 17, p. 7. For the reformers’ responses see the *Times*, January 22, p. 20; January 27, pp. 3, 4; and February 18, p. 15. For council efforts to repeal PR see the *Colonist*, January 20, p. 1; the *Times*, January 29, p. 9; and February 9, pp. 1, 6. The debate was further intensified by the news that the school board members elected under PR might be unseated because the voting system contradicted the instructions in the provincial School Act - this was later worked out in favour of the supremacy of the PR Act; see the *Colonist*, January 27, p. 9; for Vancouver’s legal response to same question see the *World*, January 27, p. 2. Then for reasons never made clear the successful candidates for the police commissioner positions resigned February 7; see the *Times*, February 8, p. 14. Another curiosity involved the new police commissioner elections themselves which were conducted under the alternative vote rules as opposed to the PR rules used in the first election, though no commentator seemed to notice this at the time, not even the reformers themselves. It may have been that they were overwhelmed. Woodward himself was under challenge as his opponents attempted to unseat him over irregularities in his property qualifications for office. He eventually triumphed, but had to hire three lawyers to do so; see *Colonist*, February 3, p. 4. See the police commissioner election results and the results of the PR plebiscite in the *Colonist*, March 4, pp. 1, 6, editorial, p. 4; and the *Times*, March 4, p. 1, editorial, p. 4. A number of letters supporting the editors anti-PR position appeared; for a representative sample see one from a John Pickenshovel in the *Colonist*, January 18, p. 18.

the votes had been tampered with, but he was ignored.⁴⁸ With the hysteria created by the papers, a number of aldermen, many of whom were never fond of the plan, quickly gathered enough signatures for another plebiscite and less than a month later PR was voted out.⁴⁹

Debate over PR in Vancouver lacked the heat generated in the capital city but nonetheless continued well into 1921. The reformers and their adversaries kept busy arguing the fine points of the PR experience in the newspapers, at luncheons of the retail merchants' association, and at meetings of their own.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, in a confidential letter to the city's MP S. J. Crowe, city clerk McQueen confessed his disdain for the system and his desire to see it removed. He intimated that a petition was already afoot to rescind the adoption.⁵¹ Crowe, a former alderman, had inquired as a member of parliamentary committee examining PR for federal elections. He agreed with McQueen, and submitted the city clerk's letter without submitting his name to the committee.⁵² But Ronald Hooper of the Canadian PR Society, who was on the committee as well, quickly guessed what was up. In a letter to Garfield King in April 1921, he suggested he could submit material from the Vancouver PR leader in the same manner. But, in an aside, he also warned that some labour leaders were awaking to the possible limitations imposed on them by proportional voting. He complained in particular that Manitoba labour MLA John Queen was resisting any further extension of electoral reform. "It is rather amusing

⁴⁸ Woodward had a pamphlet published and distributed at his own expense that matched the vitriol of the newspaper editors word for word. See CVA, Garfield King Scrapbook, "To the Householder Pamphlet."

⁴⁹ The threat of PR emerged again with the re-election of Woodward to council in December of 1921 and the election to the mayoralty of W. S. Marchant, the other main PR activist in the city. At the same time many of PR's opponents on council were defeated. Woodward raised the issue at the first meeting of the new council but left it at that; see the *Colonist* December 18, 1921, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Most of the letters opposed to PR were from aldermen and angry citizens; institutional support for the reform from the Board of Trade and the VTLC among others appeared constant. Exceptions included the District Eight Ratepayers whose chair D. W. F. MacDonald was previously a strong supporter of PR, and Mrs. J. A. Clarke of the Local Council of Women who had appeared on behalf of PR at the city council. The ratepayers would eventually sponsor an attempt to have PR repealed while Mrs. Clarke suggested in an interview shortly after the election a desire to return to the old system. For labour support see the *World*, January 21, p. 8; for Clarke's comments see the *Sun*, January 15, 1921, p. 14; for the Ratepayers' opposition to PR see the *Sun*, February 3, 1921, p. 3. For a sample of letters against PR see the *Sun*, January 18, February 5, 10, April 9 (all letters appear on p. 6). The *Sun*'s sudden turn against the reform included mis-labelling a letter about provincial voting "Mistakes Under PR"; see February 2, p. 6. One critic of PR wrote implying that the PR Society was funded with Bolshevik gold; see the letter from W. G. Rogers in the *Sun*, February 10, p. 6. Letters in favour of PR were either written by citizens or the reformers, mostly Telford and Conway; see the *Sun*, January 20, p. 6; *World*, January 27, p. 4; *Sun*, February 4, 8 (both letters appear on p. 6). PR was debated at a Retail Merchants' Association luncheon January 24; for the notice see the *Sun*, January 22, p. 7. Disturbed by what it considered a campaign of misinformation by some of the aldermen, the PR Society announced its own meeting to defend PR and invited its opponents to attend; see notice in the *Sun*, January 18, p. 14.

⁵¹ McQueen to Crowe, April 15, 1921; CVA, City Clerk's Records, loc. 13-F-4, file C.

⁵² Crowe to McQueen, April 22, 1921; CVA, City Clerk's Records, loc. 13-F-4, file C.

to find Col. John Currie and John Queen, the convicted strike leader, both opposing any suggestion to tamper with the present electoral laws,” wrote Hooper laconically. “Bourbonism and Bolshevism walking hand in hand, one opposing electoral reform because he doesn’t understand it, and the other because he understands it too well.”⁵³ Confidential correspondence offers another view of the reformers away from their official posture as non-partisans. Hooper’s suggestion that Queen understood PR “too well” could lend support to the less generous interpretations of the labour accommodation thesis. In the end neither Queen nor the local critics of PR got very far. An effort to rid Vancouver of PR in the summer of 1921 failed for lack of signatures on the petition requesting another plebiscite.⁵⁴

Vancouver’s second PR election in January of 1922 was certainly more exciting. Suddenly the transferring process seemed to matter for something. When W. R. Trotter was eliminated on the twelfth count, 300 of his votes went to fellow labour candidate R.P. Pettipiece, enough to launch him past longtime alderman F. P. Rogers and onto council. King claimed that PR had been vindicated. “It may seem a lot of work to go through to make in the end only a difference in one case,” noted the *Sun* in its analysis of the results, “but the PR advocates point to this as the virtue ‘par excellence’ of the system.”⁵⁵ Not everyone was convinced. The *World* complained that PR lacked the “drawing power” and excitement of the old ward fights. W. J. Conway responded reminding the editor that PR was designed specifically to “obtain fair representation ...

⁵³ Hooper to King, April 27, 1921, CVA, Garfield King Scrapbook.

⁵⁴ The Ward Eight Ratepayers and the Central Ratepayers Association consistently attacked PR throughout 1921. After their first complaints in February they submitted an anti-PR resolution to council March 18; see CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, March 18, 1921, minute book p. 444. They submitted their petition to call for a plebiscite to rescind PR June 20 and were granted another three weeks to add to their list; see CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, June 20, 1921, minute book p. 480. The petition itself stated that PR was too slow a method of tabulating results, “expensive beyond reason,” and benefited the “thickly populated areas” against the outlying regions of the city; for the petition see CVA, City Clerk’s Records, loc. 13-F-7, file: petitions. The press had noticed the increased cost of the PR election as compared to the previous system shortly after the election, though it was suggested that the higher costs had more to do with the increased number of voting districts rather than PR itself; see the *Sun*, February 1, p. 9. Despite their extension, the city clerk reported to council July 18 that the petitioners failed to meet the five percent threshold required by the PR act to call for a plebiscite to rescind. The ratepayers needed 2014 valid signatures; they had only 752. On the petition’s rejection see CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, July 18, 1921, minute book p. 487; also CVA, City Clerk’s Records, loc. 13-F-7, file: petitions. Yet this did not end the scuffle. In August the ratepayers began organizing to gain more signatures at an upcoming money bylaw vote in September. They planned to wait at the voting locations and solicit support from people as they passed by on their way in to vote. The PR Society sent a swift and direct letter pointing out the no loitering clause in the elections section of the city charter and threatened an injunction if the city did not enforce it. Council directed that the law be enforced. No more was heard of the ratepayers in 1921. For the PR Society letter see CVA, City Clerk’s Records, loc. 13-F-5, file K; for council’s direction see CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, August 26, 1921, minute book p. 528.

⁵⁵ *Sun*, January 15, 1922, p. 23.

and so to prevent any considerable section of the community resorting to 'direct action'."⁵⁶ But few others seemed impressed with this line of reasoning anymore, surprisingly not even labour's successful candidate Pettipiece.⁵⁷ Possibly because he topped the poll in the next election he did little to defend PR once it came under attack. In what would prove PR's final election in December 1922, the attacks turned to ridicule. Coverage of the PR side of the election shrank to insignificant proportions and what did appear mostly lampooned the whole process.⁵⁸ Early in 1923, the aldermen themselves began casting about for some way to be rid of PR. When a petition finally arrived later that spring it was found to be duly signed.⁵⁹ In a poorly attended summer vote, all questions put before the voters were defeated except the request to repeal PR.⁶⁰

Curiously few of the longtime PR activists were present at the moment of defeat. King's last letter on the subject had appeared in 1922. Telford and Hall had long dropped out of the work. The PR Society itself seemed defunct. Only W. J. Conway wrote a letter to the paper decrying the attempt to roll back progress by rescinding the PR act.⁶¹ In a post mortem for the *PR Review* in August 1923, King claimed the defeat of PR was the product of a "limited and very selfish group" and that "a general feeling of apology and shame [existed] for the spirit of reaction which is at the present time victorious."⁶² In their 1926 volume *Proportional Representation* Hoag and Hallett were more cheerful, suggesting that "British Columbia proportionalists regard their reverses as only temporary." For them, the setbacks encountered were merely the product of a lack of diligence and educational efforts on the part of the reformers. A better informed public, the authors implied, would certainly have kept PR.⁶³

⁵⁶ CVA, Garfield King scrapbook, typescript of Conway letter to editor entitled "P.R. or Jazz."

⁵⁷ Pettipiece's indifference was surprising because elsewhere "moderate" labour representatives would continue to underline how the absence of PR was aiding the radicals for some time. J. A. P. Haydon, a representative of the Dominion Trades and Labour Congress to the federal Special Committee on voting reform, told the members May 4, 1921 that "The lack of proportional representation has given the ... revolutionaries one of the greatest weapons that is known. They claim that under our present system, and rightly so, large minorities are deprived of their representation." See Harry Phillips, pp. 140-1.

⁵⁸ See the *Province*, December 14 and 16, 1922, p. 6; for election results see the *Sun*, December 16, 1922.

⁵⁹ For alderman actions see CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, April 9, 1923, minute book p. 386; and April 13, 1923, minute book p. 389. For petition details see CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, May 9, 1923, minute book p. 430; and May 21, 1923, minute book p. 435. Petition results can be found in the *PR Review*, n. 70 (April 1924), p. 80. Where 6,044 people voted for PR in 1920, against 2,790 opposed, only 1,705 voted to keep it in 1923, against 3,809 for getting rid of it.

⁶⁰ For the official record of the results of the plebiscite, see CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, June 18, 1923, minute book p. 478.

⁶¹ *World*, April 19, 1923, p. 16

⁶² *PR Review*, n. 70 (April 1924), p. 83.

⁶³ Hoag and Hallett, p. 229.

By the late twenties only two municipalities in B.C. continued to use PR: South Vancouver and West Vancouver. Nelson and New Westminster abandoned the system in 1919, with Port Coquitlam and Mission following two years later. In the case of the smaller centres, all complained that the complicated counting seemed to make little difference in the results. In the end it was simply too much trouble.⁶⁴ South Vancouver made good their PR adoption when they reclaimed self-government in 1923 and used it without complaint until the municipality merged with Vancouver and Point Grey in 1929.⁶⁵ West Vancouver seemed to forget just why they had adopted such a convoluted voting system. Initially, the municipality elected four alderman at once, but at some point in the early 1920s they adopted split elections where only two members would be up for election in any given year. With just two positions to be filled, PR ceased to be meaningful as a proportional system. One ratepayer group was so confused they asked W.W. Lefeaux to address them on the intricacies of the system. Though he was nattily attired in the picture that adorned the cover of the *West Vancouver News*, and those present thanked him profusely for his presentation, the ratepayers still wanted to be rid of PR in the end.⁶⁶ Finally, after a number of complaints following the 1930 election, the city decided to end the PR experiment. West Vancouver had been one of the first to adopt; now they were the last in BC to rescind.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Hoag and Hallet, p. 228. See also the results of a North America-wide survey conducted by the American Proportional Representation League with PR municipalities in the *PR Review*, n. 70 (April 1924), pp. 78-85. Reports that Port Coquitlam was having "some trouble" with PR and was probably going to do away with it before the next election surfaced in the *Sun*, Jan 15, 1921. Additional information may be found in excerpts from the *Sacramento Bee* in CVA, Garfield King Scrapbook. In the run-up to that city's plebiscite on PR November 30, 1920, the *Bee* attempted to solidify its case against the reform by featuring interviews with the mayor of New Westminster and the editor of the *Nelson Daily News* in which both complained that the system was too complicated, too confusing for voters, and took too long.

⁶⁵ No efforts were made to have PR rescinded in South Vancouver between 1923 and 1928. In fact, it would appear from the index of the minutes that PR was never discussed by council. See CVA, South Vancouver Council Minutes Index, 1923-8. It is possible that PR was ignored in South Vancouver and nearly so in West Vancouver in the mid to late 1920s because both areas focused a great deal of structural reform energy on various amalgamation proposals; South Vancouver with Point Grey and Vancouver, and West Vancouver with both the district and city of North Vancouver. For the latter see *West Vancouver News*, May 7, 1926.

⁶⁶ Why Lefeaux, a prominent Socialist Party of Canada member, was asked to give the demonstration was not made clear in the newspaper coverage; see *WV News*, November 11 and 18, 1927. It is possible that the Lefeaux connection with PR had something to do with his business relationship with W.C. Thompson, the alderman responsible for sponsoring the bylaw for PR in 1917. Lefeaux, Thompson and John Lawson ran the first ferry service between Vancouver and the north shore into the 1920s; see the *Province*, June 15, 1945, and November 27, 1972.

⁶⁷ West Vancouver did not use PR without complaint in the 1920s. The Central Ratepayers passed a resolution December 30, 1921 to have wards reinstated but to keep the numbering aspect of PR; they were essentially calling for a switch from proportional to majoritarian voting, though it is not clear they understood this; see WVMA, Central Ratepayers' Minute Book, December 30, 1921, p. 162. An assessment of any further public discussion of PR in the period is hindered by the absence of any local

PR emerged in North America out of the reform movements often labeled “progressive.” Promising to clean up corruption and bring better men into politics, reformers and their activities have dominated the work on progressive reforms at the expense of a more thorough explication of key concepts like democracy and capitalism, and the historical relationship between the two. The pervasive and often implicit use of pluralist understandings of democracy have cut off these essential questions before they could be asked. An historical account of the emergence and struggle over democratic forms of government supports the contention made here that under capitalism, democracy is not pluralist. Membership in this or that class is not voluntary, nor the product of choice, but the result of one’s relationship to the means of production. Here different collective groups are not equal, nor is their inequality the accidental or temporary result of competitive pressures. Inequality in capitalism is the systemic result of property and social relations that benefit capitalists at the expense of workers. This logic is reinforced by the system’s historically unique divorce of economic and political considerations. Capitalist democracy must be understood as an historical construct where maintaining the separation of economic from political decision-making has been the basis of struggle.

Democratic reform as the product of class struggle has not been the usual explanation of PR. A common thread runs through both the early naive reformer-based accounts of electoral reform and the pluralist-inspired tactical versions that appeared later. Where the former cast the problem as a struggle between good and bad, and the latter refused to take sides declaring all just as apt to be either, both understood social change to be the product of choice and the role of capitalism in the process of choosing to

papers between 1923 and 1925. The weekly *West Vancouver Courier* folded in 1922, as did the *West Vancouver Guard*; the *West Vancouver News* only started publishing as a weekly in 1926. The *North Shore Press* had a page dedicated to West Vancouver between 1915 and 1930 but space limitations meant little but the most pressing issues were given coverage. The move to dislodge PR appears to have begun in the fall of 1928 despite the apparently unproblematic results of the previous two PR elections; for elections see *WV News*, January 13, and 20, 1928; for ratepayer and newspaper opposition to PR in 1928 see *WV News*, November 16 and 23, 1928. In 1929 the election again went smoothly with no complaints from newspaper editors or letter writers. Only one candidate for council was reported speaking in favour of abolishing PR. For elections results see *WV News*, January 25, 1929; for the candidate’s views see *WV News*, January 18, 1929. The final move to rescind PR was sparked by a close race for council positions in 1930 where one candidate, seemingly on his way to election on the third count, lost on the fourth count. Despite the close vote his request for a recount was denied by the courts. At this point the *West Vancouver News* and letter writers began demanding the system be repealed. But even with the will to do it, council found removing PR difficult. West Vancouver had adopted PR by a vote of council; the same could eliminate it. But voting out PR would automatically bring in a ward system, something council and public opinion were against. Eventually the voters were asked to speak against wards in a plebiscite in the fall of 1930. They did, and council quickly rescinded the PR act. For the 1930 election controversy see *WV News*, January 2, 24, 31, and February 7, 1930. For newspaper opposition to PR and the ward dilemma see *WV News*, March 3, 21 and September 26. See WVCH, bylaw 4527, 1930 for the abolition of wards and WVCH, West Vancouver City Council Minutes, November 17, 1930 for the repeal of the PR act.

be unproblematic. The efforts of BC's PR reformers in 1917 could appear to confirm any or all of the above. Simply put, the reformers' efforts on behalf of PR were successfully met by aldermanic opposition in the major cities of the province. A discourse of democracy's future and a relentless organizing drive were not enough to succeed where political interests were many and council resources equal or superior to middle-class time and money. But the drive for PR did succeed in 1919. Here the naive or tactical accounts of social change are less convincing. PR did not succeed because the reformers' rhetoric was suddenly more appealing, or because the reform forces simply outmaneuvered their opponents on council. If reformer rhetoric did alter in 1919, then it followed rather than advanced any dynamic new understanding.

The force driving PR in 1919 was the continuing vitality of challenges to the status quo of the party system and to the state's role in managing conflict. Some of this involved struggling to broaden what democracy could mean, while other aspects concerned the threat to slip beyond the discourse of institutional democratic representation. Marxist theory concerning the role of the state in capitalism is extensive and instructive here. That the state is not a neutral arbiter of competing interests, but an actor that enforces exploitation in the service of capitalists is, to Marxists, hardly debatable. Both in terms of the juridical protection to private property the state affords, and the military power it possesses to back it up, the state is a formidable component of both the "base and superstructure" of capitalism. Yet recent work has underlined how class struggle helps to shape different manifestations of the state and the use of its power. Understanding class struggle means coming to grips not only with overt manifestations of class power like strikes and state repression, but also perceptions of class power, and the means by which individuals and groups come to understand their own position in the struggle.

Throughout 1918 and into 1919 business and labour, along with farmers, soldiers, and individual members of the government, were attempting to understand their shifting class position and those of others. Business found itself increasingly divided on the financing of the war and the burden of taxation, but could come to little consensus about what to do. Labour witnessed a dramatic increase in strike success accompanied by a commensurate increase in state power over union activities - the nature of state power never appeared so obvious. But what to do about it - direct action or increased electoral activity - sparked heated debate. The general strikes of 1919 only further hardened the lines of division within the ranks of business, government, soldiers, and labour. In this period of great uncertainty and seeming social instability, when few could be certain if militancy was rising or falling, a host of positions emerged to address the situation, one of

which was PR. Elements of business, government, and labour spoke of accommodation to one another, while other elements in all the groups continued to press for militant and decisive action. Events that occurred in the fall of 1919 - the election of a farmer-labour provincial government in Ontario, the success of organized labour in raising support for the imprisoned strikers, and the increasing success of the OBU - convinced many that accommodation was a tactical necessity. PR reformers accommodated this message in their rhetoric but were hardly decisive in the reform's resurrection. The successful drive for PR resulted from the larger class struggle and the perceptions of class power prevalent at the end of 1919.

The subsequent decline of PR in the early 1920s can be understood by reference to the reversal of many of the above conditions. As labour and others were increasingly unable to sustain the appearance or reality of ever-increasing class power under conditions of economic recession and renewed militancy by government and business, concessions to labour like PR began to appear cumbersome and unnecessary. For some commentators, that workers, farmers and soldiers were eventually beaten meant that the accommodationist elements in these groups were more correct in their assessment of the events than their militant compatriots.⁶⁸ But this overlooks the fact that determining what is "reasonable" often depends on what is tangibly "unreasonable" at any given historical moment. Groups like UPSC appeared reasonable because the OBU represented a graver threat to the powerful than independent political representation. PR appeared reasonable in an environment where the traditional political elites began to fear their own marginalization in the electoral arena. And so on. This analysis gains some confirmation by the fact that where labour remained a force, such as in Winnipeg or Calgary, the rationale for PR remained clear and unchallenged for almost forty years. Again, the demise of PR in both locales was coincident with the decline of the electoral challenge posed by organized labour.

PR seldom emerges because it is a good idea or the right thing to do. Nor does it get implemented because it might be functional or necessary, even in situations where it might contribute in encouraging non-violent considerations of public welfare in deeply divided societies. Neither can PR be characterized as essentially progressive or conservative, reactionary or liberatory. The question is of class and class struggle. Social change in liberal democratic capitalist society is often cloaked in a discourse of democracy, at times representing merely an elite competition, but at other moments

⁶⁸ See Bercuson, "Labour's Civil War," and David Bright, "'We Are All Kin': Reconsidering Labour and Class in Calgary, 1919," in Bercuson and Bright's *Canadian Labour History*, pp. 166-92 and 223-40 respectively.

concealing a more profound class struggle. Yet to say that social change is the product of class struggle is not much more illuminating unless the process is conceptualized and demonstrated in some concrete manner. In exploring the drive for PR in BC between 1915 and 1923 it has been suggested that class struggle must be understood in both its overt and perceptual manifestations. In historical moments of crisis, the traditional class positions of the players become unhinged and the emergence of reforms and repression depend on the both the results of overt struggle and the perceptions of the different classes themselves to changes in the balance of class power.

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