A FAILURE OF UNITY

COMMUNIST PARTY-CCF RELATIONS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

1935-1939

by

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ABSTRACT

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discusses the attempt to implement the decisions of the Communist International in British Columbia during the latter half of the decade of the 1930's. These decisions required that Communist Parties around the world attempt to form alliances with all other left wing or progressive groups to combat the growing menace of fascism. In British Columbia, by far the largest of such groups was the CCF, a recently formed social democratic party which had rapidly gained a powerful position in the province. By gaining this prominence, the CCF made itself the leading candidate for such an alliance.

This thesis undertakes a chronological review of the development of relations between the two parties. It briefly discusses the early years of the two parties, and attempts to make clear the hostility with which the Communist party greeted the birth and early growth of the CCF. It then notes the drastic about face that the Communists were forced to make to be in line with the new Communist International policy of 1935 and after. The largest section of the text is concerned with the events of 1936 and 1937 when the pressure for united action with the Communists, along with other tensions and rivalries within the CCF, forced a series of confrontations, all of which related to the Communist Party and unity. The climax of this period came at the 1937 CCF convention when, after a bitter struggle, the forces of unity were decisively defeated. The sixth

chapter of the essay is concerned with the fortunes of popular front agitation in 1938 and 1939, until World War II put an end to such matters. The fifth chapter is concerned with the alleged presence of Trotskyites in the CCF, while the seventh examines selected personalities and competing political groups, especially those considered of sufficient merit by the Communists to be potential members of the popular front.

The concluding chapter of this thesis attempts to discuss the two parties in terms of their structure, composition and manner of operation. In this manner it is hoped that it can be demonstrated that the very nature of the two parties precluded sincere cooperation.

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INTRODUCTION

Communism and social democracy are the two socialist forces which emerged from the breakup of the Socialist International during World War 1. This split proved to be permanent, with revolutionary and reformist socialism from that time on in different, usually hostile, camps. The effects of this event were world wide, and neither Canada nor British Columbia escaped them. Canadian socialism, which was barely established at the end of World War 1 underwent the same rupture.

While events during and following the First World War created two "camps" of socialism in Canada, they did not create two unified blocs with stable positions, least of all in relation to each other. The Communists got off to a slow and weak start in attempting to organize a new party, while the non-Communists were scattered among a collection of small and shifting socialist parties across the country. In relation to each other there was no uniform position, as social democrats differed in their assessments of the Communists, and the Communists varied in their response to social democracy.

One thing was decisively clear from the earliest years however, and this was that the Communist Party was a new kind of socialist party, with a radically different structure from previous types. This new party attempted to embody in the Canadian context the organizational and theoretical principles of V.I. Lenin, who had led the Bolshevik Party to triumph in Russia. The crucial tenet of this new type of party was its centralized character. Command was to be exercised by the leadership, with activists carrying out orders, without time consuming debate. The

object of this radical departure from the loose mass parties, traditional for socialists, was to create a flexible, disciplined instrument for revolution. This centralization was carried beyond national boundaries as the national Communist Parties were expected to act in conformity with the policies of the Communist International, set up in the wake of the Bolshevik victory in Russia.

The fact that supreme command of a party is located outside the country that it operates in would be significant in any study, but in the case of the Canadian and British Columbian Communist Parties, it assumes great importance. Canadian Communism was a tiny party in a small nation, and had virtually no influence on the decisions taken by the International. As a result, it was forced to attempt to implement policies which had been made without reference to the environment in which it operated. The situation of the British Columbia party in relation to the Canadian party was similar, with the added disadvantage that it was a step farther from the centre.

This thesis will be concerned with the attempts of the Canadian and British Columbian Communist Parties to implement one of the decisions which was made by the Communist International. The policy which was handed to them was that of the popular front, an alliance of all "progressive" groups, which was a Communist response to the rise of fascism during the 1930's. The prime targets for membership in this popular front around the world were the social democratic parties, and again Canada was no exception. The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), itself a product of the 1930's, was consistently wooed by the

Communists in the period after 1935 up until the start of the Second World War.

The CCF had been formed in 1932 under the pressure of the economic depression which had begun in 1929. It was an attempt to create a national social democratic party, and unlike previous efforts, it was able to put down roots in the Canadian environment. In British Columbia in particular, its early growth was extremely vigorous and it quickly became a major force in the province's political life. The boisterous rise of the party concealed problems however, as it contained elements with widely divergent goals and methods. The party contained opinions ranging from reform liberalism to revolutionary marxism, and the raucous, public struggles over control of the party were the antithesis of the united and disciplined image of the Communists.

Under these circumstances, it was only to be expected that the Communist efforts to woo the CCF would provoke a noisy and lengthy debate. Partisans of an alliance with the Communists remained a minority, but they were able to keep the issue alive until the outbreak of the Second World War.

The discussion in this thesis will be concerned with the repeated efforts by the Communist Party to forge links with the CCF and that party's persistent refusal of such links. Within this discussion there will be an attempt made to explain the failure of the Communist efforts at unity in a variety of ways. The differences between a party of the democratic centralist model and one with the particularly loose type of structure which the CCF had, will be examined not only in terms of their

contrasting behaviour, but also as a possible source of mutual incomprehension. It may be that neither party was able to interpret the other correctly. In terms of the Communist Party, its unique structure will be examined to some extent, with emphasis on the problems of imposing its centralized structure on the Canadian setting. Other causes more directly related to the unity policy will be explored, such as the effect that the disparity in strength between the two parties had on CCF willingness to consider an alliance.

In an attempt to provide a comparative framework for this paper, the experience of one of the successful attempts to create a popular front will be briefly examined. The popular front in France was an electoral and organizational alliance which ultimately encompassed the Communist, Socialist and Radical parties. This grouping of socialist and non-socialist forces was to achieve a decisive victory in the 1936 elections in France. The origins of this alliance and its successes and failures are both interesting and instructive in terms of the British Columbia situation.

CHAPTER I

THE RADICAL BACKGROUND AND THE FIRST YEARS OF COMMUNISM

British Columbia's tradition of political radicalism dates back to before the turn of the century. Independent Labour candidates were returned to the provincial legislature as early as 1898.[1] These were soon followed by the first socialist elected in the coast province, James Hawthornthwaite, elected in 1901 in the constituency of Nanaimo, where the coal miners formed a solid, embattled community.[2] From this time until the period this thesis is concerned with, almost all provincial elections would return one or more representatives from among a variety of socialist and labour groups. A peak of sorts, to this continued left wing presence in the province came in the election of 1912 when, due to the total collapse of the Liberal party, two socialists formed the sole opposition to the triumphant Conservatives.[3] Although the left was never able to capture 15% of the provincial vote prior to the First World War, it remained a force in British Columbia which could not be totally ignored, as it usually was in the rest of Canada.

While it is outside the scope of this paper to examine the sources of the relative success of socialism in the British Columbian setting, a short discussion of the background will aid in the understanding of later events.

British Columbia was settled by whites relatively recently, and in common with other such groups, the new arrivals brought much of their pre-existing ideological baggage with them. Part of this baggage was

trade unionist and potentially or actually socialist. Two large groups carried these attributes most clearly; the first was made up of the British workingmen who came to work the Vancouver Island coal fields, the second was a wave of Americans who crossed the frontier to work the new metal mines of the Kootenays.

Both groups brought with them radical traditions, although these differed widely. The British miners brought with them the beginnings of the organized class consciousness which in Britain would later flower into the "New Unionism" and the Labour Party. Almost from the first this group was strongly trade unionist and, constantly frustrated in their trade union activities, began to move towards political action in a fashion similar to Britain.

The American radical influence had quite a different content. These men brought with them experience of the great strikes of the nearby American metal mining frontier, and also brought with them the union formed out of these struggles, the Western Federation of Miners (W.F.M.). The tactics of this union in the United States were often drastic, with bloodshed a common result. Refusing any truck with parliamentarism, they preferred direct action to achieve their aims.[4]

These two traditions entered an economy which gave the Americans little cause to moderate their outlook and which encouraged the British to radicalize further. The economy of British Columbia was and remains heavily dependent on extractive industries for its prosperity. These extractive industries are, in their turn, forced to sell their products on a highly competitive and unstable world market. The insecurity for

employees implicit in such a situation was bound to be an irritant in spite of high wages.

Another aspect of the British Columbian economy is a function of its late birth. When it was beginning to develop, large scale organization of industry and the economies of scale around the world made similar development imperative here. The corporate empires of the C.P.R. and Dunsmuir set a pattern which has endured, one of sharp division of labour and often of external control. This tendency towards great social, and often physical, distance between employers and employed led to an alienation which was intensified by the isolation and one industry nature of many British Columbia settlements.

Not surprisingly, these factors combined to create a viable radical tradition which was able to take roots within this province and form a lasting impetus for confrontation and change. What was critical about this impetus was that it was neither co-opted by the existing political system nor content to remain within the limits of the trade unions.

It is unnecessary to outline the history of the various labour and radical movements in this province up until the end of the First World War. It is sufficient to note that virtually all possible methods of organizing for social change were at one time or another attempted. Orthodox "business" unionism was a steady force in the province, parliamentary labourism and socialism both retained support, cross-class reformism found expression in the abortive Provincial party and sporadically in the two traditional parties, while more or less coherent doctrines of syndicalism were proclaimed by the W.F.M., the Industrial Workers of

the World (I.W.W.) and the One Big Union (O.B.U.). Marxism largely remained the property of the Socialist Party of Canada (S.P.C.), a group which had had electoral successes but which became more and more doctrinaire and less of a viable political force.

The last months of World War One and the immediate post-war period saw possibly the most spectacular moments in Canadian labour history. The effects of tremendous inflation, war weariness, hopes and fears for the future and the example of the Russian revolution all tended to radicalize the working class and the farmers, while giving radicals a new model and inspiration. A brief period of a few months saw a qualitative change in the Canadian political atmosphere. The rise of the O.B.U., the Winnipeg general strike, sympathetic strikes in British Columbia and elsewhere, and a large general rise in trade union membership, were manifestations of a profound ferment within the country. The latter part of this period saw the beginnings of a new type of party based on Lenin's organizational methods.

The Bolshevik coup of 1917 was warmly received by the left in Canada and aroused in many a desire to imitate it.[5] However, this enthusiasm was built on little more than the fact that the Bolshevik regime existed. Hard knowledge of the doctrines of the Russians was nearly impossible to gain. Almost none of Lenin's extensive writings were available in English and effective controls on the importation of subversive literature prevented newly translated works from entering the country. The dearth of material can be gauged by the fact that Tim Buck relates that the only copies of theses and statutes of the new Communist

International available were printed by the U.S. government as anti-Soviet propaganda.[6]

In spite of the fact that radicalism had made its most visible gains in the west of Canada at this time, the first concrete steps to form a Communist Party were taken in Toronto and Montreal. Buck notes that the first efforts to form something resembling a communist party were made in Toronto early in 1919.[7] Until much later, however, Canadians had to be content with individual membership in the two American communist organizations.[8]

Propaganda and organizational efforts were not rewarded until May of 1921 when, in a clandestine atmosphere, twenty-two delegates met in a barn near Guelph, Ontario to form the Canadian section of the Communist International.[9] From the first it was clear that the new party was under foreign tutelage. A delegate from the Communist International was present to supervise the party's formation, while its program was largely modeled on that of the newly unified American party.[10] The new party also had to agree to the "Twenty-One Conditions" of admission to the Communist International. These conditions included rules for the structure of the party. The twelfth condition insisted that:

> Parties belonging to the Communist International must be based on the principles of democratic centralism. . . . the communist party will be able to fulfill its duty only if . . . the party centre, upheld by the confidence of the party membership has strength and authority and is equipped with the most comprehensive powers.[11]

The implications of this new form of organization, with its emphasis on

centralism, extended beyond Canada's boundaries. The Canadian party was bound by the decisions of the Communist International, and from the beginning received a stream of advice and directives from abroad.[12]

The Communist Party was now in existence, but faced the task of spreading their cause across the nation. This was to be no easy job:

> The new party was an underground organization; its membership was small and scattered; distances between the principal areas where party groups were active were great; resources were limited; and apart from the hard core of dedicated revolutionaries, the Canadian working class was largely apathetic and unorganized.[13]

The Communist Party as an underground organization was especially handicapped in attempting to reach the masses. The need to do something about this resulted in the formation of the Workers' Party as an above-ground counterpart in February of 1922.[14]

Before the national formation of the Worker's Party however, a British Columbian section of that party was formed late in 1921.[15] Communism in British Columbia was finally an organizational entity.

The timing of the first entry of the Communist Party into British Columbia was unfortunate. Arriving as it did in the aftermath of the great radical upsurge of the immediate post-war period, its propaganda was largely wasted on the working classes. The effects of a glimmering of prosperity, memories of past defeats and the years of intensive anti-Soviet propaganda all had a tendency to induce an apolitical quiescence. The Communist Party was not the only group affected by this trend; other radical groups and the trade unions experienced a sharp drop off in membership. However, for the communists, as a new party, struggling to

establish itself, the drop in the political temperature was especially trying.

The problem of setting up a Marxist-Leninist organization, with its stiff requirements of discipline was compounded by the opposition of other radical and labour groups. The S.P.C. local in Vancouver was split by the proposal to affiliate with the new party. The result was, that after a close referendum apparently won by the pro-unity faction, large sections of that party, including a number of prominent members, joined the communists. In spite of this, the S.P.C. remained, even if gravely weakened, as a thorn in the communists' side.[16]

Relations with the One Big Union also proved to be a disappointment. Initially prospects had seemed bright, with the 1921 convention of the O.B.U. receiving with warmth a plea to affiliate to the Red International of Trade Unions (Profintern).[17] Relations deteriorated however, largely as a result of the new Profintern interest in capturing the traditional craft unions, something which was anathema to the O.B.U.[18] By the first convention of the Workers' Party of Canada in 1922, relations had deteriorated to the point that a complete breach occurred between the two groups.[19]

So it was that the Communist Party of Canada got off to a weak start in British Columbia. Through the 1920's the party did not recover from this poor beginning. Even compared to the rest of the Canadian Party, the British Columbian section did poorly. The number of party organizations within the B.C. district of the party ranked only fourth in the country, with Ontario alone having more than half.[20] When it is considered that national membership in this period never rose above a few

thousand[21] the weakness in British Columbia becomes even more apparent.

Though the party was never able to gain serious support during the 1920's, it was not through lack of trying. The favourite technique of this period was the building of "united front" organizations which it was hoped would attract mass support, but which the Communists could effectively control. One such organization was the Canadian Labour Party (C.L.P.), a federated labour party founded by the Trades and Labour Congress in 1921 and modeled on the British Labour Party.[22] Efforts to gain affiliation for the Workers Party were successful and Communist minorities soon gained influence out of proportion to their numbers, especially in B.C. and Ontario.[23] The importance of these victories was greatly reduced by the CLP's inability to become a serious political force across the nation,[24] and because anti-communist opposition led by the Quebec section and various other leaders resulted in splits and the C.L.P's eventual demise.[25]

Another ill-fated venture in the establishment of a united front was the Trade Union Educational League (T.U.E.L.), a Canadian offshoot of an American communist organization. This group was to be the major tool to implement the policy of capturing the conventional trade unions. The T.U.E.L. spearheaded what Buck calls the "back to the Unions Campaign" of previously alienated militants.[26] While this organization achieved some success among Alberta and Nova Scotian coal miners,[27] it was unable to become a major force in the face of solid hostility from the rest of the trade union movement.

Mention should be made here of an organization which the Communists sponsored in this period which was successful, the Canadian Labour Defence

League, (C.L.D.L.). The League was formed to provide legal defence for Communists and those they supported and survived into the 1930's when it became an element in the general popular front strategy.

While the Communist Party[28] met with failure in its attempts to manipulate either trade unions or political parties, it was wracked by internal doctrinal struggles that split the party. While these disputes had serious effects on the Canadian party, their origin was from abroad and reflected the world wide struggles within communism. The first conflict in the Communist Party was over Trotskyism, and resulted in the expulsion, from the Canadian party in 1925 of Maurice Spector, one of the party's leading figures, after his pro-Trotsky position became known.[29]

The second crisis came almost immediately after and was more complex and protacted. Elements of a youth revolt, frustration at the party's continued weakness and the issue of "Canadian Independence" and "American Exceptionalism" all played a part.[30] John MacDonald, the secretary of the party, became identified with both trends as well as with the weakness of the party, and by 1930, was eased out of his position and soon after expelled.[31] MacDonald and Spector later joined forces and fostered a Trotskyist group which was to cause the party some difficulty in the future.

The last few years before the information of the C.C.F. saw a drastic change in the Communist Party's attitudes and activities. Though little had changed in the Canadian situation the party fell in line with the 1928 Comintern policy of "Class against Class", abandoned united front tactics and went it alone in a policy of revolutionary action.[32] Social

democrats were vilified and classed as capitalism's last reserve, while the policy of capturing traditional unions was replaced by the formation of revolutionary unions of the Worker's Unity League (W.U.L.).[33] Coupled with this was the growth of the world depression after 1929 and a sharp increase in persecution of the party. What degree of relative weight this factor had in the serious decline of party membership that Avakumovic notes for the first years of the depression,[34] is unknown. The arrest and conviction of eight of the party's prominent leaders in the last half of 1931, for being members of a subversive organization, further weakened the party and reduced it to a quasi-legal position.

The Canadian Communist Party had survived its first years, though it was as far from influencing the bulk of the Canadian working class as ever. Its revolutionary message had fallen on deaf ears, and its manoeuvering had gained little. The generous doses of foreign advice proved to be a little value. The Communist International body responsible for Canada, the Anglo-American Secretariat:

> . . . lacked both the expertise and time to make a significant contribution to the activities of the CPC in the 1920's. Immersed in the affairs of the American and British Communist parties, diverted by the jockeying for power within the Comintern, and increasingly forced to generalize on the basis of the experiences of the Bolshevik party, the officials of the Anglo-American Secretariat often acted as a brake on whatever attempts Canadian Communists might have made to adapt general directives to specific Canadian conditions.[35]

The party had failed to produce effective policies or tactics, and its international advisors had been of little assistance. Indeed, the party had been drawn by them into disputes and tactics which had weakened

it over issues not pertinent to the Canadian situation. The result of such a failure was that the Communist Party had reached possibly its weakest moment in history in the midst of capitalism's worst crisis. This nadir was only temporary as the continued depression enabled the party to recover and greatly expand. However, it had to compete against a new left wing rival, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER I

[1] Paul Phillips, No Power Greater - A Century of Labour in British Columbia, Vancouver Boag Foundation, 1967, p. 30.

[2] Ibid., p. 42.

[3] Martin Robin, The Rush For Spoils - The Company Province 1871-1933, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1972, p. 123.

[4] H.D. Logan, Trade Unions in Canada, Their Development and Functioning, Toronto, MacMillan Co. of Canada, 1948, pp. 158-9.

[5] Oscar Ryan, Tim Buck--A Conscience for Canada, Toronto, Progress Books, 1975, p. 54, 63. Ivan Avakumovic, The Communist Party in Canada--A History, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1975, p. 9.

[6] Tim Buck, Thirty Years 1922-1952--The Story of the Communist Movement in Canada, Toronto, Progress Books, n.d., p. 20.

[7] Ibid., p. 27.

8 William Rodney, Soldiers of the International A History of the Communist Party of Canada 1919-1929, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1968.

[9] Ibid., pp. 37-39.

[10] Avakumovic, p. 21.

[11] Robert V. Daniels, A Documentary History of Communism, V. 1, New York, Random House, 1960, pp. 98-99.

[12] Avakumovic, pp. 22-23.

[13] Rodney, p. 42.

[14] Buck, pp. 21-24.

[15] Phillips, p. 90.

[16] Avakumovic, pp. 25-27.

[17] Ibid., p. 23

[18] Ibid., p. 29.

[19] Rodney, p. 51

[20] Avakumovic, p. 33.

[21] Rodney on p. 66, puts the total at 4810 in the Workers Party and at least 702 in the Communist underground organization for late 1922.

[22] Ibid., p. 97.

[23] Ibid., p. 101. Phillips, p. 99, says the only 4 out of 38 B.C. affiliates were Communist.

[24] This is in spite of Buck's claim in Thirty Years that "marked gains" were made and that it was potentially a major force. p. 33.

[25] Rodney, pp. 104-5.

[26] Buck, p. 32.

[27] Buck, pp. 32-33; Rodney, p. 117.

[28] The name was changed in 1924, with the underground section being dissolved. Avakumovic, p. 31.

[29] Avakumovic, p. 55; Ryan, p. 118.

[30] The first was the position that the Canadian working class should unite with the bourgeoisie to fight against the continuing colonial position of Canada. The second argued that North America's economy was at least temporarily immune to capitalist crisis.

[31] Rodney, chapter 16 and Avakumovic pp. 56-60 put different weights on these causes, while Buck, pp. 66-69 and Ryan 118-21 concentrate entirely on American Exceptionalism.

[32] Avakumovic, p. 55.

[33] Phillips, p. 102.

[34] Avakumovic, p. 66.

[35] Avakumovic, p. 23.

CHAPTER II

FORMATION AND GROWTH OF THE CCF AND COMMUNIST REACTIONS 1932-1935

While the Communist Party was struggling through the 1920's, social democracy had remained in being, if little more. The return of a modicum of prosperity to Canada cut into the social democrats' constituency as well, while the Communist Party had drawn away many activists. In British Columbia three labour candidates were elected in 1920 to the legislature[1] but the highlight on the left in the immediate post-war period, was the success of Winnipeg and Calgary in electing one labour candidate each to the federal parliament in the 1921 election. This however, was a function of the period of ferment after the Great War. "That year, [1921] in which two candidates were elected, Woodsworth and Irvine, was the pinnacle of activity, and the number of candidates declined from then until the CCF was formed."[2]

The quote above describes the national parliamentary scene, in British Columbia matters were somewhat different. In the 1924 provincial election, the left, running under the C.L.P. banner managed to hold its three seats, but with a reduced share of the vote.[3] However, the breakup of the C.L.P. and the weakness of its successor, the Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.), ultimately resulted in disaster for labour political action, with only one successful candidate in the 1928 election.

After the collapse of the C.L.P. there was no national body which represented the various labour and socialist groups in Canada.[4] An effort by J.S. Woodsworth to sound out these groups in 1926 gave disappointing results and plans for meetings were shelved until 1929, when a gathering

of western radicals was finally held in Regina.[5] This was followed by conferences in 1930 and 1931 at Medicine Hat and Winnipeg, respectively. The third one was simultaneously the most radical and the most broadly based, for it included representatives of farmers' organizations.[6] A further conference was called for 1932 to be held in Calgary.

Before discussing the Calgary conference, the resurrection of the left in British Columbia should be noted. The weakness that the I.L.P. had displayed in the 1928 election continued into the first months after the Wall Street crash. In the 1930 federal election it could afford to run only one candidate, who with Liberal co-operation, was able to take the seat.[7] With the continuation of the depression, the fortunes and the mood of the I.L.P., began to change drastically. Membership began to climb rapidly, while old radicals such as Ernest Winch and Vic Midgely once again became active. In stages, the name was changed from the Independent Labour Party, to the older name of the Socialist Party of Canada.[8] It was under this title and with a more radical leadership that the organization sent delegates to the Calgary conference as the dominant left group from British Columbia.

The labour conference at Calgary brought together not only the various western working class parties, but also farmers and eastern intellectuals from the League for Social Reconstruction.[9] At this conference and at Regina a year later, the British Columbia delegates made their radicalism clear. Heavily marxist, they attempted to bring the meetings around to their interpretation of events and policy and vigorously opposed any suggestion of what they considered to be petit bourgeois

ideas.[10] Though largely stymied by the combination of urban fabian socialists and rural liberals, the federal nature of the new party allowed the British Columbians enough leeway in their actions for them (and others) to accept an only partially desirable position.[11]

The formation of the CCF was a shot in the arm for the already burgeoning Socialist Party. Large groups that had been untouched by the earlier propaganda of the various kinds of leftists were now, in the continuing depression, more than receptive to ideas of radical change. Widespread formation of CCF clubs unaffiliated to the Socialist Party were evidence of this, though they were mistrusted by long time socialists because of their middle class and allegedly opportunistic natures. This enthusiasm was encouraged by the emergence of a variety of energetic and occasionally eccentric propagandists such as Dr. Lyle Telford and Dorothy Steeves.

The resurrection of social democracy could not have come at a worse time for the Communist Party. As mentioned above, it was at a nadir of its fortunes, and little more than a small, persecuted and almost leaderless sect.[12] Though the Communist Party was beginning to expand again under the stimulus of the depression, the social democrats had gained a head start that they would never overcome.

The immediate Communist response to the CCF was hostile. The various Communist newspapers intensified their attacks on social fascism. The feeling among communists against the new leader of the CCF, J.S. Woodsworth, went back well before the formation of the Party and an attempt to unseat him had been made in the 1930 election.[13] The Canadian

Labour Defender, organ of the C.L.D.L., caricatured Woodsworth shortly before the Calgary conference as a baby in R.B. Bennett's arms.[14] During the period of the formation of the CCF, the Canadian Labour Defender used the actions against hunger marchers of the United Farmers of Alberta government in that province (which was affiliated with the CCF), to show the dishonesty of the Party's radical image.[15] By June, 1934, the paper could lump the CCF with the old parties and proclaim, "A vote for the Communist Candidate is a vote against Section 98, for the freeing of the seven Communists in Kingston, against the terror program of the Liberals, Tories and the CCF leaders! Vote Communist!"[16]

The Young Worker, produced by the Young Communist League attacked the CCF as socialist in words and fascist in deeds, and called on true socialists in the CCF's youth to join with them.[17] The Vancouver based Unemployed Worker, added its quota of venom in a crude cartoon showing "Dr." Woodsworth giving first aid to capitalism.[18]

Another response that the Communists made was to try to take over the new party. The sudden rise of CCF Clubs, composed largely of political neophytes gave an apparently golden opportunity to do this. A certain amount of infiltration did take place, but was largely a failure.[19] Though a few of the new clubs were apparently taken over,[20] they remained a minority. The failure to take over the CCF Clubs stands in contrast to the Communist Party's success in controlling the C.L.P. The reason for this failure are numerous and impossible to weigh. The first was that avowed Communists were simply not welcome in the party, thus making open domination impossible. A second was that Communists, in spite of their

organizational skills were simply swamped by the numbers of recruits. Other factors included the middle class, well educated nature of many new members who therefore had many skills of organization themselves and the personal loyalty that persons such as Telford and Woodsworth commanded.[21] In any event the Communist Party failed to capture the new party at birth and as a result was forced to accept the existence of a large and powerful social democratic party.

It may seem unlikely in view of the tactics of denunciation and infiltration previously mentioned, but there was also an attempt to secure an alliance with the CCF by the Communist Party. This was in the form of a request from the C.L.D.L. sent to the Regina Convention, to join in their campaign against the continued imprisonment of the Communist leaders.[22] This tentative offer was unceremoniously brushed aside and the Communists adopted a policy of appealing to the rank and file of CCF over the heads of their leaders. The first issue of the Canadian Labour Defender after the Regina convention contained an open letter in which the CCF membership was asked to pressure the party leadership to support the C.L.D.L.[23] A pamphlet entitled "A call to the Rank and File of the CCF", was also issued in which the "reactionary" leadership of the party was denounced and united action against Section 98 under which the Communist leaders were held was called for.[24] In spite of the rejection by the CCF, the C.L.D.L. made a further attempt to achieve a CCF alliance in the next convention.[25] A new organization, the Congress Against War and Fascism, started up late in 1934, was able to gain rather more support from the CCF including a number of prominent figures such as T.C. Douglas and

Harold Winch.[26] This group was of the same type of mass "front" organizations that the Communists have from time to time used to exploit widespread popular feelings. Both the C.L.D.L. and the Congress (later League) Against War and Fascism were active throughout the period examined in this paper and they will be mentioned in connection with other events.

While the various initial responses by the Canadian Communists to the formation of the CCF may seem to be confusing and contradictory, they reflect a fundamental confusion at this time in all of world communism. The rise of Hitler in Germany, a country which was widely believed to be ripe for communism, came as a shock to the Communist International. The "class against class" line with its slogan of "social fascism" had left Communists isolated, and there was a brief change in emphasis. Suddenly the columns of International Press Correspondence, a Communist International publication were filled with offers of common anti-fascist fronts with social democrats of various countries.[27] At the same time, the explanation used by Comintern of Hitler's success was that the German Social Democrats had sold out and allowed the victory of fascism.[28]

This dual response to Hitler lasted only a few weeks, and the basic line soon returned in the form of such comments as:

> There is no road to working-class unity save and except the road of determined and ruthless struggle against the social democracy, which is helping fascism to smash the working class and to destroy its organizations.[29]

This line lasted through 1933 and the first half of 1934, but in August of that year there was again a brief, conciliatory period before the

freeze set in.[30]

These two "thaws" towards the social democrats were faithfully reflected in the Canadian party in its efforts to ally its mass organizations with the CCF. However the Canadian Communist Party retained the basic "class against class" line which in the International continued to dominate. While both the CCF and CPC were still tentatively formulating their attitudes towards each other, the calling of a provincial election for November of 1933 focused full attention to electoral politics. For the province, the election marked perhaps the most significant political change since the formation of parties. Equally, on the left, it revealed the enormous disparity in the popular appeal of social democracy and Marxist-Leninism in the province.

The calling of the election was preceded by one of the stranger periods in this province's parliamentary history. The Conservative government of the day had revealed itself as totally incapable of dealing with the depression and floundered more and more hopelessly in the morass. Offers to form a coalition were rejected by the opposition Liberals who sensed, correctly, that full power was there for the taking. From this point on the Conservative Party was in a state of disintegration, with factions breaking off and leadership in a state of shock. By the time the election was called the central body of the Conservative Party had declined to take part and several minor factions were left to appeal to the public.[31]

The Conservative act of self destruction left the field open for a straight CCF - Liberal battle, and the two parties proceeded to make

their major attacks on each other and largely ignored the already moribund government. When the results of the election became known it was obvious that both parties had been correct. The Liberals were able to gain an overwhelming majority in the new house, but the CCF had gained a major victory. In spite of a lack of organization, minute financial resources, a hostile press and enthusiastic but often intemperate spokesmen, whose ill-judged remarks gave opponents ample ammunition, the CCF became the official opposition, with 7 seats of 48, and 31% of the vote.[32] In startling and humiliating contrast to the CCF's success, the few Communist candidates running under the "United Front" banner, gained only derisory support.[33] The stark disparity between the levels of support for the two parties was to be a continuing feature of politics in this province and was to give the CCF opponents of united action perhaps their most effective weapon.

In spite of all the sources of dissent between the two parties, there was one issue where there seems to have been no qualms about cooperation, that of the "slave camps". One of the responses of the Federal Government to the continuing problem of the depression had been the creation in 1932 of work camps for the single unemployed. These camps had been placed under the Department of National Defense, and from the beginning they were a target of agitation from the left, who were able to exploit the grievances of the occupants.

Both the CCF and the CPC were willing to lend their support to those who fought the camp system, while wages of 20 cents a day and allegations of military style discipline in the camps gave them excellent

arguments. In the course of the campaign against the camps a fairly extensive level of cooperation was achieved.

Within the CCF enthusiasm for the anti-camp cause grew through 1933 and 1934[34] as there were more and more manifestations of the discontent of the camp workers. By November of 1934, the executive of the Socialist Party of Canada[35] undertook to investigate the League Against War and Fascism to see whether it would be an appropriate body through which to protest the disenfranchisement of the relief camp workers.[36] Events travelled swiftly after this and the CPC and SPC were able to make a formal agreement to cooperate in supporting the relief camp workers by January of 1935.[37]

In the event, this alliance was soon tested, as on April 4, 1935, the relief camp strike began.[38] Ronald Liversedge's account of the strike and the "On to Ottawa" trek makes it clear that the alliance held together. In several places in his account he mentions the support, either moral or physical, which the various CCF groups in the city of Vancouver gave the strikers.[39] He also describes the May Day demonstration of 1935 in Vancouver as a flowing success of united action.

> The unity of the working people of Vancouver at that time built around the unemployed struggles, especially between the CCF and Communists, resulted in a May Day parade of colossal proportions.[40]

This unity lasted until the relief camp strikers left Vancouver bound for Ottawa.

The agreement with the CPC to aid the relief camp workers was one

of the last actions taken by the SPC. As time had gone on, pressure to form a unified provincial section of the CCF had increased. The CCF clubs themselves were enthusiastic for such a union,[41] while even in the SPC there was wide support for the idea, and one local broke away to reform itself as a CCF club.[42]

This pressure to amalgamate soon overcame the reluctance of the SPC leadership who agreed to submit the matter to the membership. When the second of two referendums passed easily, a unity convention took place in the summer of 1935.[43]

The suspicions of the SPC leaders had been shared by the Communists. The newly born B.C. Workers News viewed the merger as a plot to eliminate militants both in the clubs and the SPC.[44] In spite of these fears the new body was able to get along and the organ of the SPC could relate:

> The merger has resulted in the whole of the movement in this province swinging definitely into line with the former Socialist Party and become a revolutionary class conscious organization.[45]

The SPC and CPC alliance over the relief camp workers was only the major example of cooperation between these parties in the period discussed in this chapter. For the most part relations remained poor throughout, with the Communists continuing to snipe, occasionally bitterly, at the CCF, while the CCF devoted a minimum of time to the Communists and went after bigger game in the form of the Liberals and Tories.

Before this on again, off again relationship could have any chance of growing into a genuine popular front, the CCF and especially its

leadership would have to drop its dislike and suspicion of the Communists, while the Communists would have to cease the sectarianism of their "class against class" policy and especially their almost ceaseless attacks on the social democrats and their leaders. The initiative to break this impasse was to be taken by the Communist Party in line with the new policy of world communism.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1] Phillips. p. 89

[2] Walter Young, The Anatomy of a Party -- The National CCF 1932-61, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1969, p. 23.

[3] Phillips, p. 95.

[4] If indeed it could be said that the CLP did. Its central body was extremely weak, Rodney, p. 101; while the I.L.P. of Manitoba with Woodsworth, refused to be aligned with Communists. Avakumovic, p. 52.

[5] Young, p. 24.

[6] Ibid., p. 26.

[7] Phillips, p. 108. A further indication of the weakness of the I.L.P. was that they could afford to send only one delegate to the Winnipeg conference. Young, p. 26.

[8] Phillips, p. 108

[9] Young, p. 41.

[10] Dorothy Steeves, The Compassionate Rebel -- Ernest E. Winch and His Times, Vancouver, The Boag Foundation, 1960, chapter 7.

[11] Young, p. 34.

[12] An admission of this is Buck's comment in Thirty Years, p. 105. "The Communist Party being outlawed, bourgeois politicians and social reformists seized upon the possibility presented by the widespread radicalization of workers, farmers and urban middle-class people."

[13] Avakumovic, p. 68.

[14] Canadian Labour Defender (CLD), May, 1932.

[15] Ibid., Feb. 1933, May 1933, June 1934.

[16] Ibid., June 1934.

[17] The Young Worker, June 30, 1933.

[18] Unemployed Worker, Aug. 6, 1932.

[19] Interview with Harold Griffin, Mar, 2, 1976. Buck indirectly admits this on p. 107 of Thirty Years.

[20] For example the Tecumsah CCF club expressed itself at the 1934 CCF provincial convention in strongly pro-Communist fashion. Public Archives of Canada, (P.A.C.) CCF Papers, vol. 10.

[21] In discussing this section it is worth noting that the numbers of Communists in the CCF is impossible to ascertain. Many accused of being so were in fact, other types of "lefts" who were vehemently anti-Communist, while the Communists themselves were not about to advertise their presence or numbers.

[22] Gerald Caplan, The Dilemma of Canadian Socialism The CCF in Ontario, Toronto, McClelland and Steward, 1973, p. 38. Not surprisingly the CLD toned down its anti-CCF line in June and July.

[23] CLD, Aug. 1933.

[24] P.A.C. CCF Papers, Vol. 393.

[25] Ibid., Vol. 10 Minutes of 1934 CCF Federal Convention

[26] Young, p. 262, cites CCF Papers.

[27] International Press Correspondence (I.P.C.) Mar. 24, 31 1933.

[28] Ibid., Mar. 31, 1933.

[29] Ibid., May 19, 1933.

[30] Ibid., Aug. 3, 20, 27, 1934.

[31] See Robin, pp. 251-56 for a caustic account of this decay.

[32] Summary of Votes -- Statement of Results of 1937 Election.

[33] Ibid. Ironically, while running under the "United Front" banner, their fire was directed largely at the CCF.

[34] Ronald Liversedge, Recollections of the On To Ottawa Trek, Edited by Victor Hoar, Toronto, McClelland and Steward, 1973, p. 43. Here he claims that the CCF asked for speakers as early as 1933.

[35] Still at this time an autonomous body.

[36] R.G. Stuart, The Early Political Career of Angus MacInnis, M.A. Thesis, U.B.C., 1970, p. 133.

[37] Ibid., p. 134.

[38] Liversedge, p. xv.

[39] As examples, Liversedge, p. 64, 78

[40] Ibid., p. 70.

[41] Steeves, p. 96.

[42] Dorothy Roberts, Doctrine and Disunity in the British Columbia Section of the CCF 1932-1956, M.A. Thesis, University of Victoria, 1972, p. 31.

[43] Steeves, p. 96. The first had only failed because a two thirds majority was required. Commonwealth, Jan. 1, 1935.

[44] B.C. Workers News, (B.C.W.N.) May 31, 1935.

[45] B.C. Clarion, cited in Steeves, p. 96.

CHAPTER III

TOWARDS A PEOPLES' FRONT

The continued strength of fascism on the world stage and evidence that is was of growing significance in the western democracies called for a reappraisal of communist policy around the world. Especially worrying was that Hitler's government in Germany had not failed to collapse of its own contradictions, but was visibly growing stronger. Worse, from the viewpoint of the Soviet Union, was the combination of the rebirth of German military power and Hitler's often expressed ambitions in the east.

The culmination of this concern came at the seventh Comintern Congress in July and August of 1935. Here attention was drawn to the differences in the nature of fascist states and bourgeois democracies. The previous analysis of fascism, which had assumed it to be just another form of bourgeois reaction was modified somewhat to point out that it was a new kind of state form, one fundamentally different from liberal democracy.

Under these circumstances parliamentary democracy took on an altogether different aspect. It had suddenly become comparatively precious and efforts to preserve it were the order of the day. To do this, the united front policy which had been tentatively tried in previous years had to become the prevailing trend. Social democrats and even liberals were to be wooed, as both had good reason to fear fascism.[1]

Certainly the Canadian delegation at the Congress made its agreement with this policy clear. While giving a generally optmistic

account of the growth of the party and its resources, the delegation spokesmen claimed the most serious weakness in the party was sectarianism. Promises were made that this would be remedied. A strong hope expressed was that under the pressure of events the CCF leadership was moving leftwards, making a Popular Front a possibility.[2]

The first formal move in the new policy towards the CCF was made so nearly simultaneously with the deliberations of the Seventh Comintern Congress that it may have had an element of anticipation. It was in the form of an exchange of letters between Sam Carr, acting secretary of the Communist Party and M.J. Coldwell, National Secretary of the CCF, in July and August. Carr pointed to the rise of the Reconstruction Party, a break-off from the Conservatives, as a "crystalization of a fascist party" and urged united action against it. The suggestion was turned down by Coldwell.[3] In contrast to the sudden pro-unity enthusiasm of the central party, the full implications of the change of the international line were somewhat delayed in reaching the British Columbia party. As late as the 23rd of August, the B.C. Worker's News was explaining that the rise of Social Credit in Alberta paralleled that of Hitler's fascism, and that both grew out of soil prepared by social democrats.[4] However, this policy of blanket denunciation of the works of social democracy was to be ended. Within two weeks of the above article, another tack was taken, social democracy and especially the rank and file of the CCF were praised; and only the leaders were attacked and then in an uncharacteristically mild tone.

> The rank and file of the CCF recognize the crying need for it [unity] in the face of the capitalist offensive, the menace of fascism and the danger of war, despite the declared determination of Woodsworth to go it alone.[5]

On the national scene, by far the most dramatic effort by the Communist Party to achieve unity was a request, made in November, to affiliate the entire party to the CCF. This request was immediately rejected by Woodsworth.[6] This refusal was implicitly backed up by Angus MacInnis, M.P. for Vancouver East, in a resolution he moved at the CCF National Council Meeting of that month which called for no cooperation with the CPC.[7] Woodsworth's rationale for refusing was probably best expressed in his report to the 1936 National Convention in which he stated that the Communists wished to turn the CCF into a loose federation which their tightly organized group could dominate. He also denounced them for their changes in policy over the years and for being "incurable romanticists" who were dominated from outside.[8]

In British Columbia the major effort of the Communist Party to achieve joint action at this time was in the federal riding of Vancouver East. Newly created for the 1935 general election, this riding comprised the most heavily working class areas in Vancouver and was of obvious importance for both left-wing parties. The importance of this seat was such that a special pro-unity campaign was built around it by the Communists.

The first Communist approach to the CCF over the seat pre-dates the national effort to achieve the popular front, which of itself indicates the importance attached to this riding. At a meeting reported by the

B.C. Workers' News between unnamed Communist and CCF leaders, the CCF'ers were portrayed as sympathetic to united action, but non-committal towards the suggestion that Angus MacInnis withdraw his candidacy in Vancouver East for a compromise candidate.[9]

In spite of the optimism expressed by the paper on that occasion, Communist hopes for unity in the riding were quickly dashed. Within two weeks the B.C. Workers News had to inform its readers of the refusal of the CCF to compromise on the Vancouver East issue and reverted once more to its policy of attacking the party.[10]

A second effort to arrange cooperation with the CCF occurred in September of 1935. This took the shape of an open letter to the CCF which emphasized the importance of not splitting the labour vote in the riding. By this time the Communist Party had nominated Malcolm Bruce in opposition to MacInnis. This direct confrontation was noted in the letter, though no more than a vague offer of negotiations was made to break the impasse.[11]

Given the fact that this second offer was made only a month before the election, there was probably more electioneering than sincerity involved. The CCF appeared to consider it so, as no response was made public. In any event, both candidates remained in the field and faced the electors. The actual results of the election were as severe a defeat for the Communist Party as those of 1933. MacInnis won easily with over 13,000 votes while Bruce ran fourth with barely one tenth of that number.[12]

A post-mortem by the British Columbia section of the party was made at the Ninth Plemum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, held in November, 1935. In a speech by the British Columbia delegate, it was

considered that running against MacInnis in Vancouver was a mistake. Instead, the speaker argued, an earlier offer by the CCF of a clear run on a Vancouver Island seat should have been taken. The reason given for the failure to accept this arrangement was that the Communists "did not want to go to the sticks", preferring instead to operate near the heart of the proletariat.[13] The delegate went on to complain that the CCF leadership was using its massive win in Vancouver East to oppose unity.[14]

Only one other riding in Canada had seen a major CCF - CPC confrontation, that was Winnipeg North, where Tim Buck ran against A.A. Heaps, a leading CCF Member of Parliament. Buck's effort against Heaps was energetic, (prompting unpleasant CCF speculation as to why he was let out of prison) and gained an impressive vote, but was unable to shake Heap's hold on the riding.[15] The major effect of this battle, besides swelling the Communist vote, was presumably to make the CCF leaders even more suspicious of the Communist Party.

Throughout the rest of Canada CCF - CPC relationships were of little importance or interest. The main battle remained that between the traditional parties. The CCF was able to gain only 386,484 votes, or about 8 percent, and seven seats, while the Communists gained 31,151, less than 1 percent.[16] The Liberals, now in power, had promised the end of Section 98 under which the Communist leaders had been imprisoned, and little else in the way of change.

The popular front concept as agreed upon by the international Communist movement was not simply an arrangement between political parties,

other Communist dominated bodies were included as well. One such was the Workers Unity League and the various trade unions which it controlled. The decision was made in late 1935 to end the experiment in dual unionism and attempt once more the strategy of working within the international unions.[17]

The original plan had been that the WUL would be able to negotiate re-entry into the main stream of labour organizations. "However, a lack of sufficient bargaining power and their eagerness to apply Popular Front tactics in the trade union field, forced the Communists to disband the WUL early in 1936."[18]

The almost precipitate haste in the dissolution of the WUL was not entirely due to an eagerness to apply the popular front. Development of the labour organization had reached a point where further increase would have to come about as a result of challenging far larger and more powerful unions, both a difficult and dangerous assignment.[19] A further and probably critical reason to get back in the main body of trade unionism was the rise at this time of the Committee for Industrial Organization (C.I.O.). This new force in North American trade unionism seemed to be a chance to break the hold of the conservative craft unions of the American Federation of Labour. Certainly for the Communists, the comparatively radical CIO made dissolution more palatable, while it also seemed to offer a great opportunity to spread their influence in the labour movement. Even much later Communist writers speak glowingly of the CIO and how tidily it fit into the popular front strategy:

> The tactics indicated by the 7th Congress of the Communist International corresponded exactly with the situation created in Canada by the militancy of the new and growing CIO and its fight for industrial unionism. It was clear that the path by which Canadian workers could best make gains and strengthen their effectiveness as a class was through trade union unity.[20]

Despite some opposition from militants who refused to go cap in hand to their arch enemies, the "reactionary" union leaders, dissolution came remarkably quickly[21] and in British Columbia at least, on remarkably easy terms.[22]

So it was, that in the area of trade unions, the Communist Party was able to achieve the popular front policy which eluded it in political action, though hardly on its own terms. Still, they had managed to reenter the main stream of trade unionism and were soon able to gain positions of influence within it, both before and after the expulsion of the CIO from the Trades and Labour Congress. Though Communist success in trade unions has only minor importance during the period studied, its effect later in British Columbia was of great significance.[23]

By the end of 1935, the Communists had little to show for a half year of intensive effort to achieve the popular front in the political sphere and were achieving a popular front in the trade unions only by dissolving their organizations. If this lack of result did not bring about a change in policy, it was at least frustrating and articles of the period reflect this feeling as attacks on the CCF and its leaders became harsher than at any time since the opening of the popular front campaign. Sharp attacks on CCF leaders such as MacInnis and Irvine, who

were consistently anti-communist, replaced much milder ones, while claims of a CCF role as a capitalist party once again saw print.[24]

In the CCF camp meanwhile, the general (though not unanimous) feeling was in line with an editorial in the Canadian Forum on the matter of unity. The general argument was that discussion of unity should be shelved because any united front with the Communists would reduce the CCF to their size. It further categorized the Communist Party as a declining group of sectarians unable to reach the bulk of the people.[25]

In spite of what might appear to be a hardening of the attitude of mutual dislike, the relationship between the two parties was as yet undefined. The primary reason for this was that the British Columbia section of the CCF was as yet undefined. Conflicts of personality and ideology shook the party apart in 1936 and 1937, during which period the question of the popular front was to be a vital issue.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1] Buck, pp. 116-18 and Avakumovic, pp. 97-97, outline this change from different viewpoints.

[2] I.P.C., Oct. 7, 1935.

[3] P.A.C. CCF Papers, Vol. 393. File on Communist Party.

[4] B.C.W.N., Aug. 23, 1935.

[5] Ibid., Sept. 6, 1935.

[6] Commonwealth, Nov. 8, 1935.

[7] P.A.C. CCF Papers, Vol. 10. Minutes of 1936 CCF Convention.

[8] Ibid.

[9] B.C.W.N., Apr. 12, 1935.

[10] Ibid., Apr. 26, 1935. It was not until a month later that the Commonwealth newspaper made a public response for the CCF. On May 17, 1935 it denounced unity and expressed pleasure that the CCF had rejected it. It also printed a formal statement by the party on this matter on May 23, 1936.

[11] The Province, Sept. 13, 1935.

[12] Canadian Parliamentary Guide (C.P.G.), 193, p. 347.

[13] Towards a Peoples Front (Speeches and reports of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Canada), Nov. 1935, p. 205. MacInnis Papers box 31, file 1a. I have found no other evidence for this offer.

[14] Ibid., p. 209.

[15] C.P.G., p. 355.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Phillips, p. 110.

[18] Avakumovic, p. 132.

[19] Phillips, p. 110.

[20] Buck, p. 118.

[21] See Buck, p. 121; Avakumovic, p. 132.

[22] Phillips, p. 111.

[23] See Gad Horowitz, Canadian Labour in Politics, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1968, chapter 3, and Irving Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1973, for a full discussion of the war and post-war years.

[24] Communist Review, Dec. 1935, pp. 20-30, MacInnis Papers, box 31, file 1a.

[25] The Canadian Forum, Feb. 1936.

CHAPTER IV

CRISIS OF THE CCF 1936-37

The unification of the sections of the CCF was surprisingly effective, with former members of the SPC and the CCF clubs combining easily. This is certainly not to say that factionalism was eradicated in the party but rather that factions would now cross the lines of the old party units. These new groupings were revealed in 1936 and 1937 as the party went through a period of severe dislocation, in which the issue of co-operation with the Communists came repeatedly to the fore. The period started with a crisis prompted by the ideological and personal differences between two of the leaders of the British Columbia CCF. This crisis saw the issue of communism raised, but in a fashion which the Communists could not appreciate.

The two major figures of this dispute were Ernest Winch and the Reverend Robert Connell. Both had been elected for the CCF in the 1933 Provincial election, Winch from Burnaby and Connell from Victoria. After the election, Connell took on the role of legislative leader while Winch became party organizer.[1] It was apparent from the first that these men were quite incompatible personally without their ideologies adding to the problem.

The two men can be seen almost as caricatures of two types perennially found in socialist movements. Connell was a gentle and genteel person whose wish was to improve the lot of his fellow man. Winch on the other hand was a self-educated working-class radical who wished to make

the CCF a thorough going marxist party.

The first public note of the growing split of these two men was in the legislature in March of 1936. After a statement by Ernest Winch which he objected to, Connell made a speech in which he specifically disowned Winch's revolutionary postures, and outlined a platform for the party, which could be fulfilled within provincial jurisdiction.[2] Though Winch made a reply defending his position and his son Harold resigned as party whip, the quarrel was patched over.[3]

At first this appeared to be the end of the matter. No further outbreaks occurred. Even in the provincial convention of that year Connell refrained from attacking either Winch or a financial resolution which went far beyond provincial jurisdiction. Equally, though control of the party executive was placed firmly in the hands of the marxists and their allies, a motion of non-confidence in Connell was turned into a demonstration of support.[4]

The apparent harmony that reigned was deceptive and was soon shattered by Connell. Only a few weeks after the convention where he had had ample opportunity to make his views known, he took sensational action. Having confided his plans to only a few friends, Connell sent a letter to the President and the executive of the provincial party, which he also made public, in which he elaborated his criticism of the party and set out his reasons for rejecting the provincial platform.[5] He expanded his criticism of the party by referring to an invasion of communists in the party and to Ernest Winch's pro-communist attitude.[6] By acting in the manner that he had, and especially in publicly attacking

Winch, Connell had placed himself "beyond the pale" in relation to the party, and was expelled.

Before the drastic action of attacking Winch, it is apparent that Connell had quite significant support for his position. Among party notables, Angus MacInnis and Grant Macneil, both M.P.'s, Arnold Webster, later leader of the provincial opposition, E.A. Turner, a former executive member and William Pritchard, all actively supported his efforts to wean the party from the radicals.[7] By leaving the party he lost the support of the bulk of his rank and file support, while MacNeil, MacInnis, Webster and Turner refrained from joining him. Still, when Connell left, it was as the leader of a new grouping with three M.L.A.'s and the Commonwealth newspaper, edited by Pritchard. This group went on to form a new party called the B.C. Constructives.[8] which contested the 1937 provincial election. The new party's first election was also its last, all of its candidates were defeated overwhelmingly. In Vancouver East, for instance, Pritchard gained 464 votes, while Lyle Telford and Harold Winch for the CCF won with over 11,000.[9]

The Connell affair was watched from the sidelines by the Communist Party with interest and concern. After his initial speech against Winch's revolutionary positions, the B.C. Workers' News rebuked Connell for his attacks on "progressive" CCF'ers. However, this was just a rebuke, as they hoped that the breach could be healed for working class unity.[10] As the crisis mounted the Communists either refrained from comment in their paper or did so very mildly, presumably from fear of worsening the crisis. Certainly, noisy Communist support for Winch

would have stiffened Connell's conviction of Winch's own communism and would have aided Connell's cause by lending validity to his charges.

The matter of Communists inside the CCF which formed a part of Connell's complaints, is also of interest. Winch, of course, was the central target of his attacks, but the presence of large numbers of Communists was also alleged. While the presence of Communists within the CCF at that time is undoubtable, there is also no doubt of their status as a small minority.[11] Connell was even more mistaken in identifying Winch with them. Though a marxist and sympathetic to revolutionary solutions, Winch was generally unsympathetic to the Communist Party and within a year was to play a major role in opposing unity.

One further aspect of the Connell split which should be discussed is the defection of the Commonwealth newspaper with Reverend Connell. Pritchard the editor had very much run his own ship in the paper and had resisted any attempt by the party to influence it.[12] By the time of the split, this policy had resulted in serious difficulties with the staff, who struck the paper when Pritchard took it over to Connell. The strike, coupled with the loss of CCF advertising and circulation doomed the paper and in spite of efforts to keep it going, it soon failed.[13]

While the waves from the Connell split were settling in British Columbia, the national convention of the CCF was relaxing slightly its strictures on unity. In spite of a speech by J.S. Woodsworth[14] and a resolution by Harold Winch which read in part:

> Therefore, no good purpose can be served by any attempt to weld together political organizations, the policies and working methods of which differ in principle and practice.15

there was a sentiment in favour of cooperation on local issues. Even Harold Winch was willing to state that local cooperation with Communists was desirable.[16] In the event, the party decisively rejected any affiliation with the Communist Party, while some leeway was left for local joint action on pressing issues. Such local actions would include civil liberties and unemployment relief agitations. An amendment which would have precluded cooperation with political parties was rejected, an implicit acceptance of united action with Communists.[17] Not surprisingly, the Communist press took this partial victory for unity as a good omen, even though long term united action was rejected.[18]

Before the turmoil had died down from the Connell defection a second noisy battle arose directly concerned with the question of united action with Communists. Unlike the Connell affair, this dispute was played out largely on the left of the party and with relatively minor figures taking the spotlight. On the other hand, it once again brought the question of unity to the top of the agenda in the CCF.

The chief actor in the controversy was A.M. Stephen, a poet, fervent marxist, and a vocal advocate of united action. Stephen came from Nanaimo and in his advocacy of united action was supported by the Nanaimo constituency party. He also took his beliefs about unity to the stage of active participation in two "united front" groups, the League

Against War and Fascism and the Spanish Defence Committee.[19] Having called for united action on many occasions and taken a prominent role in unity organizations, Stephen, not surprisingly became a figure of some controversy. One enemy that Stephen made was Matthew Glenday, a fellow Vancouver Island CCF'er, who was vehemently anti-unity.

Both Glenday and Stephen had worked together in various Vancouver Island CCF matters where their serious differences had hardened into enmity. The upshot of this hostility was a letter from Glenday, in January, 1937 to the party executive laying charges against Stephen for breaking secrecy on confidential party matters and advocating unity.[20] In spite of the federal CCF's slight liberalization at the previous year's convention, the original strictures against unity remained.

In response to the charges against Stephen, counter-charges were made against Rodney Young, who was an associate of Glenday. These centred around disruptive activities in the Vancouver Centre constituency and other CCF bodies.[21]

In the face of the charges against Young and Stephen, the party executive appointed a committee to examine both cases and bring down appropriate verdicts on the two men's activities. The decision of this committee gave little cause for joy to either side in the dispute--both Young and Stephen were suspended for one year.[22] When the outcome of the trial became known,[23] the suspension of Stephen was discussed to the exclusion of Young's, while the matter of the breaking of secrecy was ignored for broader questions.

The story was given some prominence in the daily press, with the

explanation that Stephen's suspension was a result of his advocacy of unity.[24] The Communist press also took this line, but extended the argument by congratulating Stephen on his correct attitude to Trotskyism and claiming that their machinations were primarily responsible for his suspension.[25] It is interesting to note that CCF paper, the Federationist had nothing to say directly about the Stephen suspension although two editorials on April may constitute an indirect comment. The first congratulated the Nanaimo constituency, Stephen's own, for calling for greater unity against capitalism, but within the CCF. The second, was in reference to the Communists' commentaries on, and interference in, internal CCF matters, and called upon them to stop. The editorial went on to claim that the CCF was not anti-Communist, but simply non-Communist.[26]

Within the CCF membership there was considerable opposition to the Stephen suspension. An appeal asking for the lifting of the sentence was signed by a number of prominent members of the party including Dorothy Steeves.[27] However, no action was taken on the suspension and it was left to the provincial convention to decide on its propriety.

Before the CCF could meet in convention, a provincial election was called. It came at a very poor time for the party. The Connell split, with the loss of leading figures in the party, such as Midgely and Pritchard and half of the caucus, had seriously damaged the party's standing. The furor over the Stephen suspension and the evident support he had within the party could only hinder party unity in this critical struggle. A further problem was that the Conservatives, who had been all but destroyed in the 1933 election were making a strong comeback. Though

at first this would hardly seem to damage a socialist party, hopes of picking up anti-government votes were greatly reduced.

The timing of the election also caught the Communists in an unfortunate situation. By this time, they were almost totally committed to the popular front and not just with the CCF, but with "all progressive Canadians". After their original denunciations of Social Credit as fascists, they were now becoming more sympathetic.[28] At the same time the CCF leadership remained adamantly opposed to unity, as the Stephen suspension demonstrated, while the Communists were warming up a strong attack on Trotskyism in the CCF.

In spite of the embarrassments facing the CCF it had one clear advantage over the Communists. There was no question in the CCF minds as to its objective in the election. This was to take power, and to do so, it ran candidates in every riding in the province except Fernie, where there was a sitting Labour man, Tom Uphill.

For the Communists, in light of the CCF's uncompromising attitude, the question of candidates in the election was quite complex. Running against the social democrats in a large number of ridings would make a mockery of the popular front by splitting the anti-capitalist vote while further embittering relations between the parties. On the other hand, conceding the electoral field entirely to the CCF would deny the Communist Party a valuable source of publicity and a forum for its views.

The first attempt to solve the dilemma was unveiled well before the election. This policy was that, after regretting the refusal of the

CCF to work out an electoral arrangement with the Communist Party, it was announced that eight Communist candidates would take the field. These candidates would not run against legitimate CCF'ers, but would be fielded only against the Trotskyites who had gained CCF nominations.[29]

Within a few days of this announcement the situation had changed. The Reverend E.H. Baker abandoned the CCF to join the Communist Party expressing a desire to be in the vanguard of unity. While Baker was not a major figure in the CCF, he was at least fairly well known, having stood as a CCF candidate in New Westminster in 1933 and the B.C. Workers' News greeted his coming enthusiastically, the more so as his attitudes on the rise of Trotskyism in the CCF fell in exactly with the Communist position.[30]

The timely appearance of Baker appears to have changed Communist Party thinking about candidates in the election. The idea of running eight candidates was quietly dropped, with a new strategy being devised of running only Baker in New Westminster. For the rest of the province the Communists contented themselves with denouncing Trotskyism within the CCF,[31] and giving aid to its pro-unity candidates.[32]

The ploy of running only one candidate met with little success. In spite of an energetic campaign, Baker was able to gain only 567 votes to the CCF candidate's 1321. In any event, no harm was done by splitting the working class vote as the Liberal won with over 4,000.[33] The CCF studiously ignored the entire incident of Baker's defection and candidacy until safely after the election when the Federationist published a satirical article which indicated that the Communists' new-found desire

for respectability had gone too far with the placing of the Union Jack and pictures of the King and Queen in the front window of their campaign headquarters.[34]

Though the CCF could afford the last laugh in New Westminster, A.M. Stephen brought them little joy by his participation in the 1937 election. Soon after the writ was issued, Stephen made public his intention to run in Nanaimo in spite of his suspension. This action put the CCF leadership in a poor position, especially as he seems to have had the full support of the Nanaimo constituency association.[35]

The reaction of the party executive to Stephen's defiance is somewhat murky. It appears that the first response was to consider running another candidate. This idea foundered on Stephen's local support, so that an attempt at a compromise was made and the scheme was dropped. The compromise was based on Stephen's withdrawal from "united front" organizations in return for an endorsation. As it turned out, Stephen refused to leave these organizations and though the party ran no candidate against him he did not receive party assistance. So it was that a peculiar kind of unity was maintained, but in spite of running under the CCF label, the confusion surrounding his candidacy and the lack of official aid may have cost Stephen what turned out to be a close election.[36] The Stephen case did not quite exhaust the difficulties which the CCF had with supporters of the united front. This next case involved one of the united front organizations which the Communists supported. Though the incident was, in fact, minor it had the effect of inflaming relations between the two parties.

The Canadian Labour Defence League was, as previously mentioned, a Communist established and dominated legal defence organization, which had been maintained as a useful united front vehicle. In spite of its avowed purpose of uniting the broadest possible spectrum of working class opinion, it followed the Communist line closely. As a result of this, the only action which the CLDL took in the 1937 election was against alleged Trotskyites in the CCF. The CLDL's action came in the form of locking Mathew Glenday and Frank Roberts, CCF candidates for Vancouver Centre, from a hall the CLDL owned. These candidates had apparently rented the hall for an evening meeting only to discover when they arrived that they would not be let in.[37] On the same day that the Federationist announced this outrage to the CCF faithful, the CLDL issued an explanation that the lockout had been because the candidates in question had been Trotskyites, rather than legitimate CCF'ers.[38] The next day, the People's Advocate expanded the Communist position listing Glenday, Roberts and Don Smith, CCF candidate in Esquimalt, as Trotskyites. Defending the action, the paper editorialized:

> There can be no free speech for Trotskyists any more than for other fascist elements.
> Every facility should be provided CCF candidates with the exception of the Trotskyists . . . And if the CCF takes up cudgels for them it will only further tie the party to Trotskyism and discredit the whole movement.[39]

It went further and announced Communist support for Social Credit in the two ridings concerned.[40]

The Federationist was not content to let this rather minor event

go by and chose to link it to the Communists' growing friendship with the Social Credit Party. In an editorial entitled "A Despicable Action", the paper first elaborated on the infamy of the lockout, then went on to say:

> There is something rather pathetic in the spectacle of the once out and out revolutionary Communist leaders pleading for support of scattered and impotent Social Crediters, against the Socialist CCF.[41]

The paper went on to point out that the CLDL had added insult to injury by later allowing a Conservative to use the hall.[42]

In spite of the problems and embarassments facing it, the CCF did reasonably well in the 1937 election. The defection of Connell with the bulk of the provincial caucus to form their own splinter group proved to be a total electoral failure. The confusion over Stephen's candidature may have cost the party Nanaimo, but given the circumstances this probably caused little sorrow among the leadership. The presence of Baker in New Westminster and CLDL's actions in Vancouver, almost certainly had no effect except on the relations of the two parties.

It is of course conjecture whether the CCF might not have done much better if these negative events, especially the Connell split, had not occurred. One thing is reasonably certain and that is that the allegations of the communism of various CCF'ers and in particular that of Ernest Winch, do not appear to have had any effect:

> There was special satisfaction because Ernest Winch, the target of the Connell attack had increased his Burnaby vote considerably. Evidently, the Burnaby folk had been serenely unconcerned about the slur of communism which had been cast at him, for they rolled up an impressive majority for the CCF candidate.[43]

Still, the provincial election could hardly be claimed to be a complete success for the party. Although the CCF had managed as many seats and almost as many votes as in 1933, it had failed to take power and had even lost second place to the Conservatives. The 1937 provincial convention came only a month after the election, so that the memory of the setback was still sharp. The question of the Young and Stephen suspensions and united action were near the top of the agenda for this somewhat frustrated and fractious set of delegates. The first issues dealt with by the convention included the Young and Stephen suspensions. Both individuals appealed them and were given time at the convention to make their cases. Both efforts failed, but the differences in the course of their appeals are instructive.

The appeal by Young went relatively quietly. After a fairly subdued speech by him, full of apologies for his excesses and a rather more lively attack on him, outlining his persistent disruptions of party functions and warning that he was not an unsophisticated youth as he looked, the vote was overwhelming in support of the suspension.[44]

The suspension of A.M. Stephen provided a much more stormy and protracted debate. Inevitably the debate wandered from the narrow issue of the suspension to the broader one of the united front and became a vote of confidence in the party leadership.

Stephen led off the debate with an aggressive speech defending his position and attacking the leadership. He brought up the issue of Trotskyism in slightly veiled form by alleging the dominance of "renegade communists" in the party.[45] His most bitter sallies however, were

reserved for what he claimed to be the sabotage of his Nanaimo campaign in the provincial election.[46]

His supporters in the debate included Colin Cameron and Len Sheppard, both MLA's elect. Both concentrated on the question of unity rather than the suspension and urged that it be at least allowed on the local level. Dorothy Steeves and Helena Gutteridge also spoke in his support, though they did so in defense of the right to free debate within the party.[47]

The counter attack against Stephen equalled his speech in bitterness. One of the strongest attacks was made by Ernest Winch. Belying Connell's earlier attacks, Winch took a strong line against Stephen, concentrating especially on the contention that he had broken his word not to speak on matters of unity. He closed by stating that Stephen could not be trusted to keep his word. Lyle Telford and Angus MacInnis joined Winch in his condemnation of Stephen.[48]

The debate over the Stephen affair was extremely rowdy, and in Dorothy Steeves's words ". . . was a regular Donnybrook of boo's, catcalls and applause."[49] When it was finally ended and the vote taken, the suspension was upheld, though the 96-61 count was indicative of the split in the party.

One further aspect of the convention's handling of the twin suspensions appears to have arisen from a general disgust at the extent that the Stalin-Trotsky emnity was intruding into party affairs.[50] A resolution was passed with little trouble which made any supporter of Trotskyism or the Communist Party liable to expulsion. One delegate

from Vancouver South admitted to being a member of the Communist Party and was asked to leave the convention.[51]

While the ratification of the Stephen expulsion could have been taken as an implicit rejection of united action with the Communists, a further debate, addressed directly to this issue was held. In the debate on unity, the positions of its supporters varied little from those mentioned in the Stephen debate. Opposition to unity however, was now fully expressed for the first time in the convention. In contrast to the basic position on the Stephen case, which concerned his disloyalty and untrustworthiness, the attack was now directed at the Communist Party and the dire effects of unity. The attack on the Communist Party was exemplified by a particularly strong speech by Angus MacInnis. He attacked them as trouble makers and disrupters who meant no good for the CCF and concluded his speech by saying:

> If you want another year of hell, carry out the united front idea. I suggest you throw the Communists on the dungheap where they belong.[52]

The second anti-unity approach was summed up by Arnold Webster in a less violent but possibly more effective speech. He compared the strength and acceptability of the two parties and concluded that any form of united front could only damage the CCF's electoral prospects.[53]

Whether these different, though complementary attacks had an effect or whether the strength of the pro-Stephen vote had been the result of a desire for freedom of debate within party ranks is impossible to say, though the latter seems much more likely. In any event, the

resolution on united action was defeated much more decisively by a vote of 129 - 40.[54]

The 1937 convention of the CCF was probably the most decisive pre-war event in the relations between the Communist Party and the CCF. Pro-unity forces had put on their greatest effort for cooperation with the Communists and had been turned back decisively.

This was exactly the interpretation given by the Federationist in its edition following the CCF convention. Claiming that the vote indicated a desire on the part of the rank and file to turn their backs on past disruptions, the paper went on to claim that the CCF itself was the real popular front in Canada.[55] Not surprisingly the Communist press took a much more negative view of the convention. Their view was that the CCF had taken a sectarian position which could have disastrous effects. The refusal of all forms of cooperation, which included cooperation with the united front groups, was vigorously denounced. The especial target of this wrath was what the People's Advocate described as the "Socialism or Nothing" theory. This view was reviled as hopelessly sectarian and playing into the hands of reactionaries. Making reference to the Spanish Civil War, they contrasted the attitude of the CCF to that of the Spanish Socialist Party.

> If the Socialist leaders [in Spain] had taken the position of the CCF opponents to unity, the iron jackboot of Franco-Hitler-Mussolini fascism would now be on the necks of the Spanish people.[56]

Inevitably, much of the blame for the refusal of the CCF to take

a pro-unity position was heaped upon the Trotskyites, alleged to have a dominating position within that party. This contention was as we have seen, a steady refrain from the Communists. It would now be appropriate to try to examine this matter to see what justification there was for these charges.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER IV

[1] Steeves, p. 107.

[2] Roberts, p. 33.

[3] Steeves, p. 108.

[4] Roberts, p. 37.

[5] Ibid., p. 38

[6] Vancouver Sun, July 31, 1936.

[7] Roberts, pp. 34-35.

[8] Steeves, p. 111 calls them Social Constructives, Summary of Votes -- Statement of Results of the 1937 Election, lists them as the B.C. Constructves.

[9] Summary of Votes.

[10] B.C.W.N., Mar. 26, 1936.

[11] See Chapter 2 pp. 21-22.

[12] Steeves, p. 111. Interview with Harold Griffin, Mrs. 2, 1976.

[13] In spite of the newspapers split with the CCF, it did not generally attack the party. In fact, weeks after it had left with Connell, it was calling for the voters of Vancouver Burrard to elect Telford, the CCF candidate in the provincial by-election of that time. Aug. 28, 1936.

[14] See above Chapter 3 pg. 34

[15] P.A.C. CCF Papers, vol. 10.

[16] B.C.W.N., Aug. 7, 1936.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Province, Mar. 22, 1937. Steeves, p. 114, says he was president of the B.C. Section of the League Against War and Fascism.

[20] MacInnis Papers, box 31, file 5 letter dated January 21, 1937.

[21] Report of the Trial Committee, Feb. 14, 1937 MacInnis Papers, box 31, file 5.

[22] Ibid.

[23] For reasons unknown to the author, the decision apparently did not become public knowledge for a month.

[24] Province, Mar. 18, 1937.

[25] B.C.W.N., Mar. 19, 1937.

[26] Federationist, Apr. 1, 1937.

[27] MacInnis Papers, box 31, file 5. Letter dated March 26, 1937.

[28] See the discussion of the Social Credit Party below, Chapter 7, pp. 90-92.

[29] Sun, Feb. 22, 1937.

[30] B.C.W.N., Feb. 26, 1937.

[31] Peoples Advocate, (P.A.), May 7, 14, 21, 28, 1937.

[32] Morgan, Interviews, Feb. 25 and 26, 1976. He was aided in his campaign in Victoria. In this context, it is worth noting that Tim Buck the national Communist leader, endorsed the CCF in a Victoria speech. Province, May 22, 1937. P.A., May 14, 1937 lists Buck as speaking in Nanaimo, Stephen's riding on the 19th. The Sun, May 24, 1937 has a letter from a Mrs. B. Ewen, a Communist, saying that they were working for Colin Cameron.

[33] Summary of Votes.

[34] Federationist, June 17, 1937.

[35] The best indication of this is the censure placed on the association at the convention of 1937 for its support of him. Province, July 5, 1937.

[36] Stephen received 3129 to the Liberal's 3613. Summary of Votes. My source for this sequence of events is Harold Griffin. Even the Communist press which vigorously supported Stephen, does not give an account of this matter. The CCF press used the customary device for dealing with emabarrassing matters, and ignored it.

[37] Federationist, June 17, 1937.

[38] Province, May, 20, 1937.

[39] P.A., May, 21, 1937.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Federationist, May 27, 1937.

[42] Ibid. This incident was given national coverage in the Canadian Forum which repeated the Federationist line--evidently opportunities to attack the Communists were not to be passed up lightly. Canadian Forum July, 1937.

[43] Steeves, p. 113.

[44] Province, July 3, 1937.

[45] Steeves, p. 114.

[46] Province, July 3, 1937. P.A., July 9, 1937 quotes Stephen as saying: "I accuse the executive of sabotage when they refused me literature for which my committee was willing to pay, and speakers."

[47] P.A., July 9, 1937.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Steeves, p. 115.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Federationist, July 8, 1937.

[52] Province, July 5, 1937.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid. The Federationist, July 8, 1937, simply puts the result at three to one against. The P.A., July 9, 1937, claimed 40 supporters of unity.

[55] Federationist, July 8, 1937.

[56] P.A. July 16, 1937.

CHAPTER V

TROTSKYISM IN THE CCF

There are serious difficulties in examining the extent of Trotskyism within the CCF. Like the Communists, Trotskyites did not advertise their presence in the party and so any exact count is impossible. A further difficulty is the amorphous nature of Trotskyism, which has been a bewildering turnover of members and an endless series of groupings. A third difficulty was that this question was largely ignored in the CCF press, while the daily papers lacked the sophistication to discern the fine lines separating various kinds of radicals. The Communist press on the other hand, discussed the matter exhaustively, but their indiscriminate attacks on all opponents of unity, and their habit of not naming names in many of their assaults against Trotskyism, shed far more heat than light. Further problems arise out of the fact that a number of leftists within the CCF were by no means consistent in their positions and could at various times be seen as in one or another camp.

What is certain is that there was a group of leftists within the CCF who, while advocating a more revolutionary line for the party, were also bitterly opposed to unity. In Communist eyes such a combination alone was enough to condemn them as Trotskyites.

Rodney Young, Mathew Glenday, Frank Roberts and Don Smith have already been mentioned as individuals the Communists viewed as Trotskyites. The main target of the CPC attacks however, was the Federationist. This paper had been started up after the Commonwealth had joined the Connell

defection. A significant fact from the Communist point of view was that the money to start the paper came from a fund controlled by Glenday.[1] In their opinion this inauspicious beginning was aggravated by the fact that Don Smith was editor. The paper was looked upon as a stronghold of Trotskyites and bitterly denounced.[2]

Certainly the Federationist was consistently anti-unity and in the case of the Baker candidacy, was not above ridiculing the Communists. One area where the Federationist regularly took a line which infuriated the Communists was on the very principle of the Popular Front. The French Popular Front which the Communists offered as a model for emulation, was regularly attacked as weakening the forces of socialism in that country by forcing them to rely on untrustworthy, bourgeois, elements.[3] When their focus was returned to a local level, the massive disparity of CCF and Communist support was given as an added reason for opposing unity. Looking at recent electoral results the Federationist wrote;

> On the basis of the figures the fair and logical conclusion is that a "Popular Front" with the Communist Party would be exceedingly unpopular in B.C. It would be a "People's Front" minus the people.[4]

A further opportunity to denounce the idea of the Popular Front was provided in an article by J.S. Woodsworth which included a section which they reprinted, one imagines, with great glee.

> If the Communists are so keen for a united front, why not begin by having a united front of the Stalinites and Trotskyites?[5]

The evolution of Communist Party policy through 1938 towards an ever broader popular front also came under fire from the Federationist which accused them of opportunism.

> We think it is time that the Communist Party learned that pandering to patriots and imperialist governments and to exploiters in general is not communism.[6]

Though any glance at the Federationist during this period easily confirms the hostility of the paper to unity, the charge of Trotskyism is not so easily proven. One of the paper's editorials seriously damages such a case. The editorial concerned the Moscow Trials of the late 1930's. Though titled "An Amazing Affair" and skeptical of the trials' validity, the thrust of the piece was that the great socialist achievements of the Soviet Union were being obscured by these bizarre incidents and regret was expressed that Soviet prestige was down.[7]

While such a position on the trials was obviously far removed from the shouts of praise which Communists heaped on them, neither was the editorial a vicious attack. Considering that the trials were designed to prove the existence of a vast and malevolent plot by Trotsky against the Soviet Union, it is only reasonable to assume that real Trotskyites would have assailed them bitterly.[8]

In spite of the Federationist's lack of hostility towards the Soviet Union, the Communists remained convinced of the paper's Trotskyism. In the party itself the Communists professed to see an even more sinister development, an unholy alliance between the right wing leadership and the Trotskyites against unity.[9] This charge was convenient in linking their

most energetic opponents, and accurate in the sense that both were emphatically against unity. Still, a coincidental agreement on one small issue hardly constitutes an alliance, and there is no evidence that the anti-unity left and right in the CCF worked together in any meaningful manner. The suspension of Young should be sufficient indication that the right did not in any way protect or support the radical left.[10]

Though the existence of an alliance between the right and left in the CCF can be disposed of as a canard, the questions of the strength of radical left sentiment in the party and whether it was Trotskyite, remain. In answering the second question first, it can be described as a matter of definition. For the Communists, the definition of Trotskyite was simply left wing opponent of unity who was not one of the older group of "sectarians" from the SPC. This definition has rather obvious defects and is of rather more polemical than analytical value. If the definition of Trotskyism is narrowed to being a member of one or another Trotskyite group or to following the Trotskyite "line", the Trotskyites become much less numerous. For evidence of this contention one need look only at the central tenet of Trotskyism, this being that the Soviet Union was being perverted by bureaucratic distortions of the Stalin regime. On this critical issue almost no evidence was found that major factions within the CCF, or the Federationist, ever took this position.[11] While it is impossible to prove that they might not conceal such a position, its critical nature makes years of silence seem unlikely. Though it would be impossible to prove that there were no Trotskyites within the CCF at this time, the evidence above indicates that at best they were a minor

element in the radical left. Any other assertation simply distorts the meaning of Trotskyism as a political term.[12]

If the anti-unity left was not largely Trotskyite, it was still a major embarrassment for the Communists, and its strength is of great interest. Here too, evidence is indirect and rather sparse, but what there is seems to indicate that Communist claims were badly exaggerated. If we take the case of Rod Young at the 1937 convention, we are led to conclude that as an organized force, the anti-unity left was quite weak. As mentioned above,[13] the vote was overwhelmingly in favour of up-holding the suspension. It might be, given the fractious tendencies of these people, that there was fragmentation among them which prevented a full show of strength. Still this is hardly evidence of an unrevealed strength, as a failure to unite to save one of their number would seem to indicate a general inability to act in concert. Such a weakness would preclude any sustained influence on the party as a whole.

While the section above may indicate that Trotskyism and even the anti-unity left in general was largely a Communist bogey, this might be somewhat of an overstatement. The leftists, like the Communists, tended to be highly dedicated and by simple energy could sometimes gain disproportionate influence within the party. Their control of the Federationist also gave them great opportunities to spread their views which they gladly took. When it is remembered that the bulk of the rank and file of the party were not conscious ideologues, even a small ideological group could be significant.

One further role which the anti-unity left played, which may be

of significance remains to be discussed. This was the legitimization of the anti-unity position, something which the leftists were uniquely suited for. By being consistently radical, they could easily outbid the Communists, who were compelled by the necessities of their Popular Front campaign to relinquish their position on the extreme left. The advantage of having unity criticized from the left as well as from the right almost certainly aided anti-unity forces in some sections of the party, especially on those occasions when anti-capitalist, crusading speeches were the order of the day. Indeed, chagrin at being attacked from the unusual direction of the left is probably sufficient explanation of the bitterness of Communist attacks on this group.[14]

In spite of the qualifications mentioned above, the anti-unity left within the CCF remained a small if vocal minority. The party leadership remained firmly in the hands of the older radicals and the "right wing", with any influence the left having being on a personal level. For the Communists, blaming the failure of their unity efforts on the Trotskyites was convenient, as it allowed them to vent their spleen on one group in the CCF while being fairly gentle on the rest. However, the Communist claim does not stand up when examined. The claim that the decline of pro-unity sentiment after the 1937 convention was due to an increase in Trotskyite influence seems equally unfounded.[15]

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER V

[1] Steeves, p. 112.

[2] P.A. Apr. 9, 1937. This attitude had not changed over a year later, P.A., Sept. 30, 1938.

[3] Federationist, Nov. 5, 1936, Mar. 18, 1937, Apr. 29, 1937.

[4] Ibid., Feb. 25, 1937.

[5] Ibid., Apr. 29, 1937.

[6] Ibid., Oct. 6, 1938.

[7] Ibid., Jan. 28, 1937.

[8] It is worth noting that the Federationist was, over time, sympathetic to the Soviet Union in almost all articles. The editorial discussed here was about as close as it came to hostility.

[9] P.A., Apr. 9, 1937. The B.C. Workers News of Feb. 25, 1937 managed to link this alliance to the defection of Connell as well.

[10] This is not to say that individual friendships and personal influence might not in some cases be significant. Harold Griffin claims that Glenday had great influence on Telford, for instance. Interview, Mar. 2, 1976.

[11] The only exception was an incident reported in the Peoples Advocate, in which Wallis Lefeaux, CCF Privincial President, used Revolution Betrayed by Trotsky to attack the Soviet Union.

[12] This contention is supported by an interview with Harold Winch by Constantine Nikitiuk, Mar. 18, 1976.

[13] See above Chapter 4 p.54.

[14] It should be said that in view of the disruptive talents of people such as Rodney Young, (who was suspended again and resigned from the party in 1954, Young, pp. 282-84) the CCF leadership would probably have been happier to have been able to dispense with this legitimization.

[15] This was asserted by Nigel Morgan, Interview, Feb, 25 and 26, 1976. The reasons for this decline will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

DECLINE OF UNITY

FROM THE 1937 CCF CONVENTION TO THE NAZI-SOVIET PACT

The defeat of the unity resolution at the 1937 CCF convention marked the last time, prior to the outbreak of World War II, that this question was of critical importance to the party. The Federationist article which had claimed that such matters would be put behind the CCF had turned out to be prophetic. Neither in the party press nor at conventions did the years 1938 and 1939 see the discussion of unity restored to an important place in CCF eyes.

The reasons for this lack of interest are many, but were of cumulative effect. One of the great Communist advantages within the left, until this time, had been that they could bask in some of the reflected glory of the Soviet Union. The image of the first socialist state making great strides forward while the capitalist world floundered in the morass of the depression was enormously attractive. In the British Columbia CCF, the attraction was no less strong, and though the Commonwealth and the Federationist had been strongly anti-unity, they had expressed attitudes ranging from neutrality to enthusiasm for the Soviet Union.[1] The good press for the USSR began to fall off in the later thirties as some of the less savoury sides of the regime became apparent. Though the full effects of the Stalin purges did not become known at this time, the Moscow Trials were a disturbing indication that all was not well. While it would be foolish to claim that the CCF became cold

warriors at this time, enthusiasm became muted while skepticism grew. This diminished glamour could not help but affect Communist Party standing with the CCF.

Another international factor, one which began by strengthening the Communist appeal, was the Spanish Civil War. The Republican side had mass popular support in North America and Communists, by their energetic support of the Republican cause, gained both prestige and an ideal popular front vehicle.[2] This prestige began to be weakened in the latter part of the war as evidence of Communist liquidation of opponents began to mount.[3]

These external factors were matched by one source of alienation that the Canadian Communists supplied. During and after 1937 they cast the nets of unity much wider, and began courting groups that the CCF saw as enemies, such as the Liberals, New Democracy and Social Credit.[4] To CCF'ers, in day to day battle with these groups, this was opportunism of the highest order.

By 1938 all the above factors had an effect of cooling off pro-Communist opinion in the CCF, while the party had much to occupy its attention elsewhere. Besides the usual non-ideological, but time consuming, party work essential to keeping the organization going, the Liberals and Conservatives remained the stumbling-blocks to the truly fascinating prospect of power. In the ideological sphere, another matter had arisen which blocked unity from the sight of the B.C. party.

Early in 1938 the CCF lost one of its Members of Parliament from British Columbia. J.S. Taylor, the member for Nanaimo, announced late in

January, that he was leaving the party. Announcing that the party had been taken over by dogmatic Marxists, and members of the Communist Party, he stressed the need for Liberal policies in Canada.[5] In spite of his "Liberal" sympathies, he proceeded to sit as an Independent.[6]

This action brought the inevitable angry reaction from the CCF led by Angus MacInnis, whose anti-communist credentials were impeccable, as was his talent for vitrolic comment. After first denouncing him for treason to the cause, MacInnis accused Taylor of having had a dual membership for a period of time (with whom was not stated). He went on to say that Communist infiltration had to be fought instead of running away from it.[7] This echo of the Connell defection of two years before was a much smaller affair than either the Connell or unity crises. Still, it kept party attention focused to the right for the moment.

The CCF's lack of interest in the question of unity during 1938 is best demonstrated by the fate of the unity resolution at that year's convention. Though touted as a major issue for the delegates, it was quietly shelved.[8] The contrast between the 1937 and 1938 conventions on the matter of unity is sharp, but interest fell even lower in the 1939 convention, as apathy on the issue was complete.

In contrast to the CCF's waning interest in united action of any kind, the Communists became more and more enthusiastic in their unity efforts. Rebuffed by the CCF, they nonetheless kept up their courtship at a distance, though in an increasingly petulant tone. While interest in the CCF was maintained, the policy of seeking a broader alliance, which had begun earlier, came into full bloom.

The need for the widest possible unity among progressives in Canada was linked to the need for a greater respectability of the Communist Party. In spite of the growing doubts about the Soviet Union, party membership remained fairly steady at its highest historical level.[9] Still, it was far from being a major force in the country and it remained isolated. To break out of this isolation, positions were taken to make the Communists more acceptable to the Canadian political mainstream. A few years before such stands would have been considered the most craven opportunism and pandering to bourgeois sentiment.

The People's Advocate in Vancouver joined fully in this new trend. In its pre-May Day issue of 1938, the paper's lead story was entitled, "May 1 - A Day of Canadian Unity". In the story, traditional Communist heroes were dropped, and a new liberal-democratic bias was shown. The spirits of Jefferson, Montesqieu and Kier Hardy were invoked, not to mention Mackenzie and Papineau, in tribute to the democratic system.[10]

This trend towards an unexceptionable, democratic and patriotic spirit reached a remarkable peak in the second half of 1938. The continued expansionism of world fascism had brought the B.C. Communist organ to the point where it could announce:

> Communists stand with all other democrats in support of measures to protect British Columbia from fascist attacks, warning however, that arms are no substitute for foreign policy.[11]

The startling nature of such blatant "defencism" was eclipsed however, by a set of articles, even more out of character. Beginning on

July 22, 1938 the People's Advocate ran a series of page one articles which, under screaming headlines, warned of Japanese espionage and economic penetration. These stories verged on an open racist attack, under the guise of anti-fascism.

In party politics, this sudden entry into the political mainstream was reflected by a fondness for groups previously written off, at best, as ineffective reformists. A serious effort at this time was made to co-operate with the Social Credit party, earlier seen as a Canadian expression of fascism.[12] When the New Democracy movement arose in 1939 under W.D. Herridge, the Communists saw this as a genuinely progressive people's movement, and urged the CCF to ally with it and Social Credit.[13] This suggestion for unity was not the most extreme example, in the International Press Correspondence, the Canadian reporters went so far as to call for unity with Liberals and even some progressive Conservatives in the defence of democracy.

While the Communists were continually expanding the ranks of those fit to defend democracy, the CCF obstinately refused to fall into line. This fault was noted with regret by the Communist Party and a continuous stream of criticism was directed at the CCF.

This criticism remained largely muted during this period, but two related themes were discernible. These were Trotskyism and isolationism, both in the political and international sense. There is little to add to the previous chapter on Communist attitudes to Trotskyism in the CCF. Through 1938 and 1939, it was a scapegoat for continued CCF opposition to unity, with the Federationist remaining a favourite target. The incident

of Wallis Lefaux' use in a speech of Trotsky's Revolution Betrayed gave the Communists an ideal opportunity to attack this trend, and they took it vigorously. Announcing that Lefeaux had spattered the whole CCF in filth, the People's Advocate recommended a thorough purge as the party's only hope.[14]

The Trotskyites were credited with a prominent role in the other area where the Communists criticized the CCF. In an article by Tim Buck in the International Press Correspondence, a warning was given that there was a growing isolationist sentiment in the CCF. Buck felt that this turning of backs upon the international scene was highly dangerous in the present situation, and that Trotskyites were manipulating this sentiment for their own ends.[15]

If the CCF's growing apathy to international events was disturbing to Communists, their continued policy of independence from all alliances was acutely frustrating. The party's refusal to consider alliances with either New Democracy or Social Credit was routinely criticized as sectarian and foolish. One often expressed CCF hope however, was able to provoke the Communists to a frenzy of wrath. This was the opinion which welcomed the formation of a great reactionary block in Canada, which would force a polarization and allow the CFF to stand as the only alternative. The People's Advocate denounced this idea under the headline "Political Hara-Kari". Such a reactionary alliance would bring fascism and the defeat of labour rather than the realignment which the CCF desired. The paper went on to declare that such a defeatist position had to be combatted just as much as the alliance itself.[16]

While the Communists were continuing to criticize the CCF, 1939

saw their most drastic attempt yet to implement the popular front. This came in February with a call to support the King government in the next election to prevent a government of Tory fascism.[17] It is indicative of the lack of interest in the CCF for the Communist Party at this time that such a suggestion was not greeted with howls of outrage. The Federationist did not even bother to report or comment on this proposal, in contrast to the fencing matches with the Communists in 1936 and 1937. The pro-Liberal initiative of the Communists had only one response in the pages of the Federationist, a letter to the editor. The writer expressed confusion at this switch, and he was especially upset as efforts had been made to nominate CCF candidates who would be acceptable to the Communists.[18]

Through the spring and summer of 1939 the issue of united action remained dormant, though, as the above letter indicates, there was at least a residual favourable sentiment within the CCF. This state of affairs might have continued indefinitely if international affairs had not once more intruded into B.C. left-wing politics. The event referred to here is of course, the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the following outbreak of World War II.

While the Communists, after getting over their initial shock proclaimed the treaty as a giant step for peace, the CCF's reaction was instantly hostile. The first issue of the Federationist after the announcement of the treaty denounced it in the most scathing terms as betrayal of the working class.[19]

The outbreak of World War II which followed almost immediately after, was initially very confusing to both parties. The Communists at

first supported the war, but as the full implications of the new line of International Communism became obvious, they quickly changed their position. Their new analysis was that this was an imperialist war which Canada must stay out of.[20] This line was followed until the German invasion of the USSR.

For the CCF, the outbreak of the war was equally disorienting with extensive support for both pro- and anti-war positions within the party. An unsatisfactory compromise was made by calling for a limited Canadian war effort.[21] In the B.C. CCF, the anti-war position was quite strong, though on anti-imperialist grounds, rather than the pacifism of J.S. Woodsworth.[22]

While the CCF's war policy got off to a bad start, the party grew more enthusiastic as time went on, and the war years were to provide the party with its greatest successes. For the Communists, the two years until the invasion of the Soviet Union marked a return to the revolutionary policy of the early 1930's. The CCF was once again an avowed enemy, and was attacked as much as the Communists' illegal status would allow. Temporarily at least, the popular front was a dead issue.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER VI

[1] In this they were not alone, the Vancouver Sun at various times, gave favourable publicity to the Soviet Union.

[2] For instance, Ernest Winch, while busy fighting unity at the 1937 convention had still supported cooperation with the Communists in aid to the Republicans. Steeves, p. 115.

[3] George Orwell, Homage to Catalonia, is one contemporary attack on the Communist's role.

[4] See p. 75 below for the Communist endorsation of the Liberals.

[5] Vancouver Sun, Jan. 27, 1938.

[6] C.P.G., 1939. p. 233.

[7] Sun, Feb. 8, 1939.

[8] Ibid., July 4, 1938.

[9] Avakumovic, p. 115.

[10] P.A., Apr. 29, 1938.

[11] Ibid., May 30, 1938.

[12] See below Chapter 8.

[13] P.A., July 14, 1939. A more thorough discussion of attitudes to Social Credit and New Democracy is contained in chapter 8, pp. 90-93.

[14] P.A., Oct.14, 1938.

[15] I.P.C., Apr. 22, 1939.

[16] P.A., May 26, 1939.

[17] Vancouver News-Herald, Feb. 28, 1939, Clipping in P.A.C., Woodsworth Papers, file 8.

[18] Federationist, Mar. 2, 1939.

[19] Ibid., Aug. 24, 1939.

[20] Buck, pp. 160-62.

[21] Young, p. 93.

[22] Young p. 92, 104.

CHAPTER VII

PERSONALITIES AND OTHER GROUPS

While Trotskyites were the prime anti-unity bugbears for the Communists during the latter part of the 1930's, criticism of individual leaders of the CCF had been a steady current in the Communist press since the CCF was formed. As mentioned above,[1] these criticisms were by no means gentle before the popular front period. During the later period, the criticisms of CCF leaders rarely achieved the savagry of earlier days, though the occasions that they did, and the even rarer moments of praise, are of interest. An instructive contrast to the high visibility of the CCF leaders is supplied by the virtual anonymity of Communist leaders in the province.

The second section of this chapter will look at other political groups in the country and their relationship with the popular front drive. This will largely be an exercise in discussing Communist perceptions, as the CCF's attitude remained one of fixed hostility towards other groups. The evolution of the Communist attitude is of interest however, both as a source of CCF irritation and as an indication of the lengths to which the party was willing to go in its popular front policy.

1. Personalities

The first person we shall look at is not a British Columbia figure, but his prominence made his role in unity matters vital. This was J.S. Woodsworth, national leader of the CCF. Woodsworth's activity on the left pre-dates the formation of that party, dating back to before

the Winnipeg General Strike. At the time of the birth of the CCF Woodsworth had become the most prominent person on the left in Canada and was known as a consistent opponent of Communism.

If Woodsworth disliked the Communists, the feeling was intensely mutual. In the 1920's:

> Communist newspapers often attacked Woodsworth and Heaps as "fakers", "labour misleaders", and "social fascists". In private correspondence the Communists were even less gracious. They referred to the two Labour M.P.'s from Winnipeg as "bastards".[2]

The period immediately after the CCF was founded saw no softening of this attitude. As we have seen from Chapter Three, terms such as "fakers" still had currency, with the essential argument being that the CCF was the third party of capitalism.

When the Communists began pursuing the popular front they had to look again at the CCF leader. This second look revealed that Woodsworth was still an opponent of the Communists, but his respected position within the CCF made the free-wheeling slanders of the previous period too likely to produce hostility. In the interests of the popular front then, Woodsworth could not be attacked, but then neither could he be praised. The solution was found by ignoring him to a large extent.

The policy of ignoring the CCF leader was not total, but he was rarely mentioned in the Communist press in relation to the popular front. Instead, when attacks on him were made, they were in a more general form on the "right wing leadership" of the party.[3] Given the prestige Woodsworth had within the CCF, this circumspect policy was probably the only one possible if any kind of alliance was to be created with that

party.

If Woodsworth had to be treated with kid gloves during the popular front period, this was certainly not the case for all CCF'ers. One major figure who the Communists attacked venomously was William Pritchard, the editor of the Commonwealth. Pritchard was a veteran on the British Columbia left, and had been one of the leading figures in the radical upheaval of the post-World War 1 period. In this role, he had been one of the members of the Socialist Party of Canada who had opposed joining with the Communists, and had taken part in the splitting of that organization. By the time the CCF was formed, Pritchard had mellowed somewhat, was definitely on the right wing of the party and, not surprisingly, remained consistently anti-unity.

So it was that the Communists saw him as an old enemy who was once more opposing them in a matter which was of critical importance. The attacks which were made upon him fully demonstrated this attitude. The most violent attacks were made in the first half of 1935, a period when the first tentative efforts to secure unity action were being made. Though this was the period when the S.P.C. was cooperating with the Communists on the Relief Camp issue, and the first offer of a deal over Vancouver East was made, Pritchard was the object of possibly the most violent personal attacks ever made upon a CCF'er by Communists. One such assault verged on the unbelievable, with references to Pritchard's "slimy trickeries" and accusations of "whining to the Bourgeoisie", among a host of other insults.[4] Though this period still saw trenchant criticisms of the CCF in the Communist press, this attack was of a

different order of magnitude.

All through 1935 and 1936 a close, hostile watch was kept on Pritchard by the Communists, who, whenever criticising CCF policy, could rarely resist a jab at him or his paper, the Commonwealth. After he joined the Connell defection, Pritchard quickly faded from the B.C. political scene, but this did not entirely end the hostile attention. As late as April, 1937, when his candidature for the Social Constructives briefly returned him from the shadows, the Toronto based New Frontier singled him out as a man whose position was tending towards fascism.[5]

The reasons for this special animosity towards Pritchard are not to be found in the pages of the Commonwealth. That the paper followed an anti-unity line is true, but it was not uniquely anti-Communist within the CCF. The strongest anti-unity statement made by the paper was an editorial which included the lines:

> The journal has no love and little respect for the Communist priesthood and a perusal of recent Communist literature will show that the compliment is fully returned. They are an exceedingly volatile gentry, given to strange strategy and an indulgence in chameleon-like tactics.[6]

While these comments are hardly gentle, they could just as easily have been made by many other CCF'ers, who were never so stridently denounced, and such outbursts remained rare.

At the same time that the Commonwealth opposed the united front, the paper remained, like the Federationist which followed it, very sympathetic to the Soviet Union, with laudatory articles in virtually every

issue. Another interesting aspect is that the paper even allowed dissent from its position. An article appeared in early 1936, which praised both the idea of the popular front and its specific application in France.[7]

If the cause of the Communist animosity to Pritchard cannot be found in his paper's anti-Communist position, it would seem that the only explanation is to be found in personal relationships. Being a former comrade of many local Communists from SPC days and having resisted the movement to join the Communist Party, seems to have created an enormous fund of bitterness. The fact that the failure of all the S.P.C to join the Communists was one of the most serious setbacks that the party suffered in its critical early years, made this bitterness all the more intense. This personal animosity seems to have magnified any anti-unity actions by Pritchard and allowed for the unique intensity of Communist attacks.[8]

Another figure who remained fair game for Communist insults was Angus MacInnis. MacInnis, like Pritchard, came to the CCF from the Socialist Party of Canada, and was also on the right wing of the party. His anti-Communist credentials were not originally as prominent as Pritchard's but well before the CCF's formation he had brought himself to hostile Communist notice.

MacInnis gained this attention by winning the federal riding of Vancouver South in the election of 1930. This seat was the forerunner of the Vancouver East constituency, and the election proved to be an omen for all CCF-Communist election contests in the British Columbia of the 1930's. With Bill Bennett of the Communist Party and a Conservative

running against him, the results saw MacInnis victorious, with Bennett far out of the running.[9] Besides foreshadowing the result of every CCF-Communist battle in this province, it established MacInnis as a figure on the left and gave the Communists a bitter enemy.

During the rest of the Communists' "class against class" period, MacInnis was viewed by the Communist Party as a fairly minor figure among "social fascists" grouped around Woodsworth. His position became much more exalted, in Communist eyes, with the approach of the 1935 election. He chose the new riding of Vancouver East, which had been created at the last redistribution, and which overlapped his old constituency, to stand in. As noted earlier[10] however, this riding had a special attraction for the Communists. The failure of their efforts to achieve a compromise with the CCF for a mutually acceptable candidate led to a second contest between McInnis and a Communist. It also brought his second crushing victory over them. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that a national Communist publication singled him out for bitter criticism soon after.[11]

After his 1935 victory, MacInnis continued and expanded his role on the right wing of the CCF. He played a prominent role in the Stephen suspension and the subsequent motion on unity. For his consistent anti-Communist actions he appears to have gained an undying emnity,[12] but personal assaults on him were not resumed in the Communist press after 1935. Instead, like Woodsworth, he became one of the anonymous right wing leaders who were attacked as a bloc.

The case of the Communist attitude towards Ernest Winch differs slightly from that expressed towards Woodsworth, Pritchard and MacInnis.

It appears that at first he was thought to be a potential ally in the struggle for unity. Only later were the Communists disillusioned. Winch, like Pritchard and MacInnis came out of the Socialist Party, but unlike them took up a position of the extreme left of the CCF. His dogmatic marxist positions provided much of the tinder which ignited in the Connell defection and caused one of the few favourable comments which the B.C. Workers' News made about a CCF'er. This was the comment in which the paper deplored Connell's attack on progressive elements within the party.[13] Given the fact that Connell had attacked only Winch, it has to be read as a defense of him. This implicit support for Winch was quite short lived. Within a few months, the B.C. Workers' News had turned its position around, blaming the "sectarians" (again read Winch) for the CCF's weakness which followed upon the Connell defection.[14] From this time on, as Winch's anti-unity position became clearer, "sectarians" within the CCF joined the right wing and Trotskyites in a villainous, anti-people's front trinity.

The Communists paid minimal attention to other leading figures within the CCF. Dorothy Steeves and Helena Gutteridge, who had opposed the Stephen suspension and Colin Cameron, who had advocated unity at the 1937 convention, received little mention for their efforts. Harold Winch, who was rapidly rising within the CCF, was equally ignored. Even his activities during the 1938 sit-ins received no comment, hostile or otherwise.[15]

If all of these figures gained no recognition from the local Communists, two others were singled out for brief attack. The first was

Dr. Lyle Telford, whose tendency towards the monetary theories of Major Douglas and other currency reformers, was noted and attacked from afar by the magazine New Frontier.[16] The second was Wallis Lefeaux, who, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was denounced as a Trotskyite.

This chronicle of denunciations, direct or implied, of the leading figures within the CCF seems to have had remarkably little effect within that party. Certainly, none of the figures attacked in the Communist press lost prestige within the CCF as a result. The slight reaction of the CCF press to Communist attacks indicates that they were hardly taken seriously at all by the leadership, though they may have had the effect of further stiffening the already prevailing anti-Communism. Within the rank and file of the party, even this reaction seems unlikely, as very few probably came in contact with the Communist press.

One curious aspect of the Communist Party in British Columbia was its relative anonymity. Reading the pages of the Communist or CCF press during this period one is struck by the lack of prominence given to the Communist leaders in this province. Only Tim Buck and A.E. Smith were accorded any serious recognition even within the party's own press and they were, of course, national figures.

No simple and satisfactory explanation of this phenomenon is immediately obvious, though it is clearly tied in with the party's failure electorally. Wherever Communists ran in British Columbia they were crushingly defeated, which prevented their representatives from gaining the prestige of speaking from elected office. This is not

a full explanation however, as it could easily be argued that the lack of strong local leaders prevented electoral victories such as Toronto and Winnipeg witnessed.

A further possible explanation of the weakness of Communist leadership may be that the persons who would have been "natural" leaders for the party never joined it. In this group such people as Ernest Winch, Bill Pritchard and other members of the SPC come to mind. These Socialist Party members were all revolutionary marxists who, in the formative period of the Communist Party, refused to join it. This refusal on their part may have crippled Communist leadership from the start.

A second and later group who might have provided a Communist leadership were such people as Colin Cameron, Dorothy Steeves and possibly Harold Winch. These individuals were less marxists and more romantic radicals, but these kinds of persons did much to swell the ranks of Communist Parties around the world.

It could well be, of course, that if these people had joined the Communist Party, they too would have gained only anonymity. Still, it is most indicative of the fundamental unattractiveness of the British Columbia Communist Party that the social democrats ended up with all the well known marxists and radicals within the province. Such an impression gains added force when it is realized that even A.M. Stephen never joined the Communists, in spite of his rough handling within the CCF.[17]

This picture of unattractiveness is slightly marred by the fact

that there were defections from the CCF to the Communist Party in this period. E.H. Baker, Harold Griffin and slightly later, Nigel Morgan were examples, but only Baker could be said to have had any significant standing in the CCF before leaving and he was the only one which the Communist press publicized. Outside of Baker, only three Communists had any serious recognition in ths province at all. These were Malcolm Bruce, as secretary of the B.C. Party,[18] Bill Bennett, because of his journalistic efforts in the party papers and Arthur "Slim" Evans, a leader of the "On to Ottawa" trek.

2. Other Political Groups

The period of Communist efforts to achieve unity with the CFF saw dramatic efforts on their part to achieve united action by all progressive forces in Canada. The Communist Party, which had emerged from its "class against class" period in 1935 to work for an alliance with the CCF, did not stop at that. Looking around for allies in the implementation of the people's front, they began to see in other protest parties born of the depression, the progressive spirit that was needed.

This widening of the potential membership of a people's front did not come simultaneously with their new found fondness for the CCF. At first, these non-socialist groupings were trumpeted as fascist or proto-facist, making a Communist-CCF front all the more urgent. Later, the Communists were able to perceive the progressive, democratic underpinnings of such parties and called for a grand splinter alliance of these groups, the CCF and the Communists.

There are three parties which will be briefly examined here, Social Credit, Reconstruction and New Democracy. All three arose from the shock of the depression and the inability of the system to deal with it. These three parties were unanimous in rejecting the socialism of the CCF as a solution, preferring instead a revitalized capitalism based upon the small producer and trader, freed from the tyranny of trusts and banks. To oversimplify, all three prescribed approximately the same remedy and appealed to approximately the same sections of the population.

This essential similarity in content, from a socialist or communist point of view, makes the Communist Party's changing attitude towards these parties all the more arresting. Of the three, the first was denounced as fascist, the second, and longest lived, was also branded fascist, but later embraced, while the third, was from birth, extolled.

The first of these movements was the Reconstruction Party, the creation of H.H. Stevens, formerly a senior member of R.B. Bennett's cabinet. He had broken with Bennett in 1934 and proceeded to use the popularity he had gained in his Price Spreads Inquiry to form a new, reform party. This new development in the progressively more splintered party system in Canada was unwelcome to all other parties, but the Communists took the most alarmist position.

As the Reconstruction Party appeared to be gaining strength across the country, the Communist Party used this "crystalization of a fascist party" as the pretext for seeking unity with the CCF.[19] This offer was rejected, a reaction justified by later events, as this "fascist" threat proved to be a paper tiger. Reconstruction was able to elect only one

member in the 1935 election, though it did roll up a slightly larger vote than the CCF. This disaster ended the life of the party.[20]

Before H.H. Steven's hopes were crushed in the 1935 election, another new party had sprung up. This was Social Credit which arose from the desperation of depression Alberta. Led by the extraordinary figure of William Aberhart, who preached a mixture of currency reform and fundamentalist Christianity, Social Credit gained power in Alberta in one try, smashing a moribund United Farmers administration completely. Though this astounding victory was limited to Alberta, there was no guarantee that Social Credit could not repeat such a performance elsewhere. This was a spectre which was far more frightening to the left than Reconstruction.

Once again the Communists raised the cry that fascism had found a vehicle in Canada.[21] This analysis was repeated for an international audience in a post-mortem of the 1935 federal election.[22] This bitterly hostile attitude did not last long however, by March of 1936 a report to that same international audience had dropped the epithet of fascist and began to see hopeful signs within Social Credit. Still, the Communists had not yet become uncritical admirers of the party. Several months later, the Toronto Communist newspaper, the Daily Clarion was able to see from afar that British Columbia was in danger of falling victim to the pseudo-radical appeal of Social Credit in alliance with the British Israelites. The recommended riposte to this menace was united action by the CCF and Communists.[23]

In spite of the rather strange menace detected in British Columbia

by the Daily Clarion, Social Credit was unable to gain any serious following in the province in the 1930's. The lack of a leader such as Aberhart, the pre-existing channel for radical sentiment represented by the CCF and the lack of the special social conditions of the prairie grain economy, all continued to keep Social Credit a minute sect in the coast province. This was true in the rest of the nation as well, with Saskatchewan producing the only significant Social Credit movement outside of Alberta.

Though the spectacular climb to power in Alberta was not imitated anywhere else, and though British Columbia Social Credit was extremely weak, the Communist Party after 1936 rapidly warmed to it. By August of 1937, the People's Advocate could print a speech by the leader of the Alberta Communist Party in which he lauded Social Credit as a genuine progressive force and underlined the need to support it.[24]

From that time until the outbreak of the war, Communist enthusiasm for Social Credit was high. In Alberta, the party made determined efforts to secure a working alliance.[25] This effort was doomed to failure, as Avakumovic notes, because of Aberhart's disinterest and the fact that " . . . the Communists had to face the inescapable fact that the bulk of Social Crediters were and would remain hostile to the CPC, on ethical as well as on economic grounds."[26]

In British Columbia, the policy of alliance with Social Credit was also attempted. The problem remained, however, that an alliance requires that the ally exists. This was only barely true of Social Credit in British Columbia. The result of this was that efforts to work with Social Credit locally never gained any significant results.

Provincially, this effort to align a small party and a minute sect escaped the notice of all except Federationist, which denounced these efforts.[27]

The third of the non-socialist protest movements was New Democracy, founded by W.D. Herridge, a brother-in-law of R.B. Bennett and a former minister to the United States. From the very start Herridge's career as a reformer was viewed with great sympathy by the Communist Party. His first public statements on the absurdity of poverty amidst plenty were warmly greeted by the party.[28]

It was in 1939 however, that Herridge's new movement began to receive the enthusiastic support of the Communists. By March, the Canadian correspondent for International Press Correspondence was lauding this new movement, and expressing the hope that the CCF would align with it in the coming general election. In July, a "western" strategy for progressives was enunciated. This proposed joint candidates in the west to prevent vote-splitting, with the goal of ensuring that a majority of the western MP's would be progressives.[29] The groups to be included in this alliance were the Communists, CCF, New Democracy and Social Credit. Unfortunately, this plan had the same fatal flaw of all previous unity efforts, the refusal of the CCF to cooperate.[30]

In spite of their predictable failure to create a grand alliance of protest groups in the west, the Communists could still view New Democracy as possibly the most hopeful sign of the 1930's. Their analysis of it was that it represented a progressive revolt within the Liberal and Conservative parties, one which could lead to the realignment

of Canadian political forces, which they desired.[31] The great fondness for New Democracy that the Communists had was reflected in Tim Buck's book Thirty Years, which even thirteen years after the event, praised the party and condemned the CCF for not cooperating with it.[32]

Given their enthusiasm for New Democracy, it is ironic that the war broke out so soon. With the change of Communist policy that followed, the popular front was abandoned precisely at the moment that real progress began to look likely. Though their ardour had cooled slightly when Herridge made some anti-Communist remarks in August of 1939,[33] there can be little doubt that if the war had not intervened, they would have continued to follow the fortunes of New Democracy closely and with sympathy.

Both sections of this chapter give a peculiar picture of this time. The picture is overwhelmingly one of Communist activity which gave remarkably little result. The shrillest Communist denunciation of CCF leaders had not the slightest effect on their standing. Equally their enthusiasm for seeking out likely (and unlikely) allies seems to have brought, not a hostile reaction, but hardly any reaction at all. This continued, strange evolution where "progressives" could change into "sectarians" and where "fascist" parties could become "progressive", bears so little relationship to any actual changes that occurred, that they can only be explained by the Communists' tactical needs of the day. The lack of success that these maneuvers received indicates that at best, these tactics were faulty.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER VII

[1] See above, Chapter 2, p. 20-21.

[2] Avakumovic, p. 68.

[3] I.P.C., Oct. 7, 1935; Nov. 23, 1935; Aug 15, 1936; Feb. 6, 1937 Apr. 16, 1938; Jan 28, 1939. Peoples Advocate, Apr. 9. 1937; July 14, 1939.

[4] B.C.W.N., March 15, 1935.

[5] New Frontier, vol. 1 no. 12, Apr. 1937.

[6] Commonwealth, Sept. 6, 1936.

[7] Ibid., Jan. 3, 1936.

[8] Maurice Rush indicated that some Communists may have had "subjective attitudes" towards Pritchard. Interview, Feb. 19, 1976.

[9] There was no Liberal because of the electoral agreement mentioned in Chapter 2, p. 19.

[10] Chapter 3, p. 34.

[11] Communist Review, Dec. 1935, pp. 20-30. MacInnis Papers vol. 31 file 1a.

[12] Both Harold Griffin, interview March 2, 1976 and Nigel Morgan, interview Feb. 25, 26, 1976 expressed their opinion of him strongly.

[13] Chapter 4, p. 44.

[14] B.C.W.N., Feb. 26, 1937.

[15] It should be noted that both Morgan and Griffin deprecate his actions in the sit-ins.

[16] New Frontier, vol. 1, no. 7, Dec. 1936.

[17] Interview, Feb. 19, 1976 with Maurice Rush.

[18] Bill Bennett, Builders of British Columbia, Vancouver, Broadway Printers, n.d. p. 151.

[19] Chapter 3, p. 33.

[20] One interesting aspect of the Reconstruction story, is who they hurt most electorally. J.L. Granatstein, The Politics of Survival, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, p. 6 indicates the Conservatives; while Caplan in The Dilemma of Canadian Socialism, p. 76, implies the CCF. In any event, this had little effect in British Columbia where Reconstruction was weak.

[21] B.C.W.N., Aug. 23, 1935.

[22] I.P.C., Nov. 23, 1935.

[23] Daily Clarion, Nov. 21, 1936.

[24] P.A., Aug. 20, 1937.

[25] Avakumovic, pp. 109-110.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Chapter 4, p. 53.

[28] Buck, p. 128

[29] P.A. July 14, 1939.

[30] Ibid.

[31] World News and Views, July 29, 1939.

[32] Buck, pp. 129-30.

[33] Avakumovic, p. 113.

CHAPTER VIII

THE POPULAR FRONT IN FRANCE

The popular front in France can be said to originate, in contrast to the B.C. experience, in the spontaneous enthusiasm of the French working class. Its immediate spark was the apparent threat of fascism within France. The desire for peace abroad and reforms at home were other factors which helped the movement sustain itself after the internal fascist threat had receded. This great rallying on the left was not without strain, however, and a host of problems and failures largely destroyed the hopes that the alliance had raised.

Like the rest of the world's socialist movement, the Socialist party of France (Sectione Francais de l'Internationale Ouvriere, abbreviated to SFIO) had been split in the wake of the Russian revolution. The division between pro- and anti-bolshevik elements in the party came to a head in the 1920 party conference in Tours, where the majority voted to re-form as the French Communist party (PCF). A reformist rump was left with the old name.[1]

The new Communist party was able to take the majority of the old party's members with it, but this auspicious start did not guarantee a successful future. The decline of the world

wide leftist ferment of the immediate post-war years was reflected in France by a rapid decline in PCF membership, which by 1924 was barely half its 1921 membership of 110,000 and less than that of the SFIO. This decline was stopped during the 1920's, but resumed in the period of "class against class" after 1928.[3] The decline in membership was paralleled by a somewhat less drastic fall in the party's vote.[4] In contrast to the Communist party, the SFIO made a substantial recovery after the split. Its membership rose from 35,000 in 1921 to 138,000 in 1932.[5] Its vote in 1932 totalled almost two million, nearly triple that of the PCF.

In spite of the success of the SFIO in outstripping the Communists, it could not afford to ignore them. The vote that the PCF commanded was fairly small, but by no means insignificant. The importance of the Communist vote was magnified by the two-step balloting system then in use in France. If no candidate gained 50% of the vote in a given constituency, then a second election was held. This system encouraged withdrawals of candidates in favour of others in the second round, and national agreements between parties for mutual support. Traditionally, the parties of the left had tried to arrange mutual withdrawals in favour of the strongest candidate in every constituency. The PCF had refused to go along with this tradition and fought all the second round elections. The cost of this intransigence was

that; "According to one estimate, the result was the loss by the Socialist party of 20 to 25 seats in 1932, by the Radical party of about 20 seats, and by the Communist party of from 12 to 15 seats."[6]

This division and subsequent weakness on the left in France, however, came up against the economic and political realities of the early 1930's. Though France was not as severely hurt by the depression of those years as many other nations,[7] social strains did increase greatly. The initial beneficiaries of these strain were not the left parties. Instead, groupings on the extreme right were able to create a great mobilization of support with fascist and other authoritarian appeals.

The right wing agitation found an excellent focus in a minor scandal involving a shady financier named Stavitsky. The revelations of Stavitsky's activities had compromised some members of parliament who had had dealings with him.[8] With this "proof" of the degeneracy of the republic, the right was able to mobilize massive demonstrations against the government on the sixth of February, 1934. These demonstrations, which escalated into widespread fighting in Paris, created a major crisis. The Radical Daladier government was forced to resign, and was replaced by a more conservative administration.[9]

This dramatic demonstration of right-wing power brought

home the seriousness of the threat posed to the republic. It also brought out a massive sentiment in the left for unity in the face of this threat. Demonstrations called separately a few days later by both the PCF and the SFIO became "mingled in one great line of marchers",[10] in spite of efforts by the Communist leaders to keep them apart. The Communist leaders were, at this time, trailing far behind their own rank and file's enthusiasm for some kind of united front, and it was not until Comintern intervened that the PCF began to shift its basic position.[11]

Once the Comintern had prompted the new position, the PCF rapidly became the most enthusiastic supporters of a popular front. The SFIO was divided on the question, and the leadership came around to agreement only after much hesitation. The electoral cooperation of the Radical party was also obtained, and the popular front was a parliamentary as well as an extra-parliamentary reality.

The municipal elections of 1935 and the national elections of 1936 both demonstrated a shift towards the popular front, and also a shift to the left within the front. The Communist party was able to greatly increase its vote, and received a spectacular increase in parliamentary representation. On the other hand, the SFIO made only moderate gains, while the Radicals actually suffered a fairly serious decline in their support.[12]

The decline of the Radicals left the SFIO as the largest party in the National Assembly, and their leader, Leon Blum, as the natural choice as the head of a coalition government. The new government did not, however, contain all elements of the popular front coalition, the Communist party, apparently in hopes of maintaining their freedom of maneuver, declined to participate in the cabinet.[13] The new Socialist-Radical government came into office at a moment of great crisis in French society. In one of the greatest mass movements in French history, the working class began a series of massive, spontaneous sit-down strikes just before the popular front came to power. This movement was neither led nor expected by any of the popular front partners, nor were they or the unions able to immediately control the situation.[14]

This sudden upsurge of the working class forced the government to act immediately upon taking office. In an agreement hammered out at Matignon between government, employers and the unions, a package of reforms and pay increases were negotiated to end the immediate confrontation.[15] In a sense, this first, emergency act by the government, was an indicator of the future, where the government was constantly reacting to a series of crises, rather than producing orderly reform.

The popular front government's initial reform impetus was soon lost in an effort to keep its head above water in a series of political and economic crises. Soon after the government

took office, it was faced with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. The question of the government's attitude to this struggle was obviously critical, but ultimately unsolvable. To support the Republic with anything more than words was unacceptable to large segments of the Radical party, while the Communists and large sections of the SFIO demanded actions to aid it, especially with arms.[16] The result was a series of half measures, such as the secret transfer of arms to the loyalist forces and the attempts to end all foreign intervention, a policy that merely allowed the rebels to continue receiving German and Italian aid, while the loyalists were starved of arms. Other crises arose at home in the economic field. A flight of capital and burst of inflation forced the devaluation of the franc, an act which the popular front had promised to avoid.[17] The economic crisis forced the government to follow more conservative policies in order to shore up the economy, while the wage gains made as the result of the great strike wave evaporated in inflation and devaluation.

The continuing crisis drastically shortened the life of the Socialist led government. It had taken power in June 1936, and resigned in June of 1937.[18] The immediate cause of resignation was the inability of the government to pass a new financial law in the upper house,[19] but in reality the government had been impotent for months before. The replacement government was more conservative than the first, being dominated by the Radicals.[20]

Further changes in government included the formation of a second Blum government in 1938, which attempted to impose a new series of reforms, but it again proved impossible to get the new laws past the upper house, and the Blum government fell within a month.[21]

The collapse of the second Blum government can be taken as the death of the popular front as a political force in France. Though on paper it continued to exist down to the beginning of the war, cooperation between the parties of the front had, in reality, ceased. The Socialists ceased to participate in cabinets, and the Radical cabinets were dominated by the most conservative elements in that party.[22] Politically, there can be no doubt that the popular front had failed to give either stable government, raise the living standards of the population or provide a coherent response to the external fascist threat. Even the reforms such as the forty hour work week had been either revoked or diluted before the start of the war.[23]

It seems futile to apportion out the blame for this failure among the parties of the popular front. The activities of all of the allies had had negative effects on the viability of the front. The Socialists appeared to be vacilliating and weak, the Communists played a double game of supporting the government while continuing to exploit popular grievances against the same government,[24] and the Radicals, after the first weeks of Blum's first government, were a consistently conservative element, acting as a drag on all efforts at reform.

That the parties of the popular front all, in their own way, helped to destroy the front, should come as no surprise. The Socialists, like the CCF in British Columbia, were an extremely loose coalition of forces covering a wide spectrum of opinion. There was also a very strong pacifist tradition in the party which made extremely reluctant to face up to the necessity of rearmament, an overriding issue in the late 1930's.[25] The Radicals were a bourgeois party that had long since outlived the meaning of their name. Large sections of that party had never been comfortable in the popular front, and these became dominant as time went on. If any party had gained from participation in the popular front, it had been the Communists. Their gains in the 1936 elections had been spectacular, as had been their rise in membership.[26] Still, their support of the government had its price, as the rapid rise of Trotskyist and Anarchist movements,[27] who were able to make an appeal further to the left, shows. It is probable that this threat from the left, rather than deliberate perfidy, was the cause of their continued agitation for strikes and other mass actions which embarrassed the government.

In discussing the popular front in France in comparison to the efforts to form one in British Columbia, two points can be made. The first concerns the factors which made the front possible in France, factors which were largely lacking in

British Columbia. The second concerns the probable fate of such an alliance if it had been possible in the province.

The forces which were working to make the popular front a reality in France were of an entirely different order than those in British Columbia. It is clear that the fascism in France was an immediate threat, rather than a distant bogey. In 1934, the fascist and semi-fascist groups were a genuine mass movement, capable of bringing down a government. The contrast with British Columbia could hardly be more complete. The Communist efforts to portray Reconstruction or Social Credit as equivalent[28] seem, in comparison, to be absurd.

Even without the fascist threat, there were a variety of factors working for some kind of joint action by the parties of the French left. The vote of the Communist party was large enough to be a prize for an alliance, while the two-step balloting system gave their vote a critical strategic value. The further fact that cooperation was traditional in the French left made the popular front seem a return to the past rather than a new departure. All of these factors were lacking in British Columbia, the difference between the Communist and CCF votes was far greater than in France, and the single ballot system eliminated the necessity of the coalition building required for success in French politics. Equally, in British Columbia there was virtually no tradition of uniting all left

wing parties. The effort to create left wing unity in the Canadian Labour Party of the 1920's[29] had been both brief and acrimonious, and hardly represented an appealing model to recall.

As an indication of what would have happened if some form of popular front had been created in British Columbia, the French model is necessarily imprecise. The fundamental differences in political situations makes any estimations largely guesswork. However, assuming some form of popular front was created, possibly including the CCF, Communists and various non-socialist reform groups, the French experience provides a bleak picture for anyone but the Communists. By bringing the Communists into the spotlight, the alliance would, probably, greatly increase their stature. On the other hand, the CCF, as the dominant partner of the coalition, would bear the brunt of the failures and disappointments of the exercise of power in the provincial setting. In such circumstances, a serious decline of the CCF and an increase of Communist strength would seem inevitable. Further, the experience of the French coalition indicates that non-socialist elements would vitiate the radical thrust of the CCF. All of this forces the conclusion that the Federationist was completely correct when it attacked the French popular front as weakening the forces of socialism, and as a model emphatically not to be adopted.[30]

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER VIII

[1] Joel Colton, Leon Blum: Humanist in Politics, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1966, pp. 36-54.

[2] Ronald Tiersky, French Communism, 1920-1972, New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1974, p. 28.

[3] Daniel R. Brower, The New Jacobins: The French Communist Party and the Popular Front, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1968, p. 15.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Tiersky, p. 36.

[6] Brower, p. 16.

[7] Franz Borkenau, European Communism, London, Faber and Faber Ltd., 1953, p. 116.

[8] Brower, pp. 27-28.

[9] Borkenau, p. 115.

[10] Brower, p. 37.

[11] See "The Moscow Origins of the French 'Popular Front'" by C. and A. Vassart in M.M. Drachkovitch and Branko Lazitch, eds. The Comintern: Historical Highlights, New York, Federick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1966, pp. 234-252.

[12] Tiersky, p. 58.

[13] Borkenau, p. 159. Brower indicates that the Communists had a hand in starting it, but that it got out of control. p. 148.

[14] Borkenau, pp. 161-62.

[15] Colton, p. 186.

[16] Brower, p. 161.

[17] Colton, p. 186.

[18] Borkenau, p. 208.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., pp. 210-11.

[21] Brower, p. 215.

[22] Ibid, pp. 216-17.

[23] Borkenau, p. 216.

[24] Ibid., p. 207.

[25] It was not until Blum's second government in 1938 that a serious rearmament program was proposed by the socialists. Colton, pp. 301-04.

[26] Borkenau, p. 202.

[27] Colton, pp. 151-54.

[28] see above Chapter 7, pp. 89-90.

[29] see above Chapter 1, p. 12.

[30] see above Chapter 5, p. 63.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

The efforts of the Communist Party to gain an alliance with the CCF were a failure. Though here and there, generally in minor matters, united action occurred, they merely emphasize the general failure. Even in 1937 at the height of the Communists' agitation, in a period when fascism, on the world scene at least, was a real menace, with enough time having passed for the CCF memories of the vilifications of the "class against class" period to fade and at the time of the French Popular Front, a unity resolution could only gain one quarter of the vote at the British Columbia CCF convention. Even more striking is the fact that continued Communist efforts in 1938 and 1939 gained even less response. This failure was all the more humilating when it is remembered that with the exception of 1937, the CCF paid relatively little attention to the question of unity.

The inability to gain any kind of alliance with the British Columbia CCF was repeated all across Canada. This was more than a setback, as all Communist hopes for the period 1935 to 1939 were based on such an alliance. With the CCF refusing an alliance, the Communists were unable to take even the first step to their goal of a people's front. It remains for this chapter to discuss the reasons for this failure and to draw conclusions from it.

Before looking at the immediate causes of the failure of the unity policy, it would be useful to compare the two parties and to note

their differences. This may aid in the explanation of the underlying causes of the failure. It may also determine the causes of the vast disparity in the support enjoyed by the two parties.

In looking at the Communist Party, one is struck by how different it is from all other parties in Canada. This difference was deliberate, as the party's structure had been copied from a particular foreign model. The model was, of course, the Bolshevik party of V.I. Lenin, which seized power in Russia in 1917. This example was copied exactly in the Canadian context but the implementation of such a structure was far from a total success.

The Bolshevik Party and its imitators around the world was based on the principles of democratic centralism. This type of party had been developed in Russia to cope with the illegality of socialist activity in that country. The major feature that set it apart from social democratic models was its extremely centralized and hierarchical structure and its conditions of membership. The first feature was a result of the requirement that the party be able to act and react in the shortest possible time, without time consuming discussion and debate. In terms of membership the Bolshevik Party was also radically different from social democratic models. Instead of the mass parties of Europe, which had huge, largely passive memberships, the Bolsheviks were to be composed only of activists, who could truly be considered the vanguard of the proletariat.[1]

In principle then, and in Russia to a large extent in practice, the Bolshevik type of party was a relatively small, but highly disciplined body of activists. The party was to be a flexible and versatile

instrument in the hands of a leadership which could use it to exploit changing political situations and opportunities with a minimum of delays and debate.

It was this supple political weapon which Communists tried to recreate within the Canadian context. Unfortunately for them this ideal proved impossible to attain. The reasons for this proving to be impossible are legion, but in Canada they centre around geography, numbers, sectarianism, leadership and ethnicity.

The first of the two factors are closely linked in the Canada of the 1930's. If transport and communications have always been a critical problem for this nation's scattered population, the problem was magnified for the Communists. With a membership which never reached twenty thousand,[2] perpetually weak finances, due both to the poverty of the times and of their membership, the Communists were never able to build the tightly disciplined, flexible party desired. Communicating a change of line to an outlying area such as British Columbia seems to have been a chronic problem. The best example of the effects of such difficulties mentioned in this paper was during the shift towards the popular front line. Here, as was noted above,[3] the B.C. Workers' News was continuing the denunciation of social democracy as the percursor of fascism, weeks after the central party had switched to a policy of active alliance with the CCF.

The delayed response to the change of line towards the CCF raises another aspect of the Communist Party in British Columbia however, one which might eliminate communications as an explanatory factor. This

was the alleged sectarianism of the British Columbia Communist Party, a fault which can, in part at least be traced to the implications of the Bolshevik type of party. The sectarianism of the British Columbia party in this period was singled out in a contemporary national party document,[4] and was also mentioned retrospectively in an interview.[5]

In the context of the Communist Party in the 1930's, sectarianism was primarily a matter of party members refusing to go along fully with the full application of the popular front. As was seen in the discussion of the liquidation of the Workers Unity League[6] militants who had bitterly opposed the established unions, balked at the sudden reversal of strategy. Equally, it seems at least possible that the delay in implementing a full popular front policy in British Columbia was the result of a natural reluctance of leading militants to suddenly swallow all their utterances of years past. However, the two accounts above indicate clearly that this sectarianism did not disappear once the local party press and leadership had taken the new message to heart. This too is hardly surprising, as the accumulated grudges and habits of many years could not be shed instantly. To this it might be added that the continued failure of the unity policy would, over time, add a quota of frustration which would be taken out on the prime anti-unity villains, the CCF.

From the preceding paragraph, it is clear that sectarianism in the Communist Party was the product of a refusal or inability to make the drastic alteration of outlook required in the leap from a revolutionary to a popular front strategy. When the enormity of the leap is considered, it is remarkable that there was so little of this sectarianism, a

reflection of the basic solidarity of the Communist Party. Still, it seems clear that sectarianism was a serious problem in the British Columbia party. The unnecessary violence of the denunciation of various CCF'ers, even when depersonalized under phrases such as "right wing leadership" and the provocative nature of much of the assault on Trotskyism, both indicate an emotional willingness to continue the denunciation of social democracy while technically upholding the principal of unity. This attempt to "have the cake and eat it too" can be seen in Communist writings through the entire popular front period.

While the results of this sectarianism were serious, its cause is of great interest. Class conscious revolutionaries became sectarians overnight because of the drastic shift which the party took. If it is remembered that one of the virtues of the Bolshevik type of party was its flexibility, it can be assumed that the leadership considered that the effects of such a switch would be cushioned by the superior nature of their party. In this it can be said that they were partially correct. The party did make the switch without a drastic upheaval. However, the undercurrents of dislike for recently reviled enemies nullified this success by helping to maintain the tension existing between the CCF and the Communists.

The actions of the party leadership in moving it to the popular front and this creating sectarianism, brings up the question of the general quality and effect of leadership within the Communist Party. In this the Communists were unique among Canadian political parties.

Leadership was not confined to Canada, as the international Communist movement had in effect, a general directing role in determining party strategy. It was in effect democratic centralism on an international scale:

> The "democratic centralism" practiced within the Communist parties had logically to be complemented by its implementation in the Comintern. As a local party organization had to abide by the decisions of the national party leadership, so a member party in the Comintern had to submit to the governance of the latter's Executive Committee.[7]

This external leadership has the effect of obscuring specifically Canadian actions, but is in itself revealing of some of the difficulties faced by Canadian Communism. Leadership is of extreme importance both in the theory and practice of a Leninist party. The party itself is, after all, a flexible instrument, which requires sophisticated and canny direction to exploit its qualities. It is in a context of the party requiring excellent leadership that any shortcomings assume a critical importance.

Communism in Canada during the 1930's did produce one genuine hero, Norman Bethune, and two nationally known, and to a degree respected leaders, Tim Buck and A.E. Smith. However, the party had no other figures well known to the general public. Certainly, as noted above[8] the British Columbia party was incapable of producing figures of any major stature in this period. The fact that the British Columbia leaders were not well known does not necessarily indicate that they had no weight in party councils, but British Columbia leaders were certainly unable to bring the prestige of a large following and famous name to bear.

If the relative obscurity of provincial as compared to national leaders within Canada is obvious, the position of the Canadian to the international Communist movement is far more disparate. Canadian Communism was, in the eyes of the International with its millions of members, very much a minor party in a minor nation. Such a tiny group could, and did, have only the most trivial influence on the international body, while it was expected to obey the line set down by its larger and more successful allies. Considering the extent that Communism and the International were identified in the eyes of both friends and enemies with the Soviet Union, the first socialist state, any attempt by Canadian membership to defy International policy would have been perceived by the Canadian membership as treasonous. The fact that during this period there was no attempt to rebel against the International, either indicates the leadership's recognition of this, or the fact that they possessed this loyalty.

If the supremacy of the International vis a vis the Canadian party and the Canadian party over the British Columbia section is granted then the effects are enormous. The channels of communication between the various levels were essentially one way, with directives from the International being passed on to the subordinate units, while feedback in the form of criticisms and realistic assessments of the results of their implementation were lacking. The result of such a one sided relationship was that any uniquely Canadian problems or opportunities were ignored, as the Canadian party merely attempted to impose imported formulas on Canadian reality. The switch from the "Class against Class" period to the

"Popular Front" stance is an excellent example of this. There had been no changes within Canada during 1935 to justify such a radical departure in policy, the impetus for the change came from outside and as a response to European conditions.

The effect of this distant and alienated leadership upon the fortunes of the Canadian Communist Party was of great importance. As mentioned the Bolshevik party model required skilful leadership. With much of the effective direction of the Canadian Party being vested in a distant body which made its decisions with little or no reference to the Canadian scene, there could be little hope of skilled maneuvering. If we switch to Canadian-British Columbia party relationships the same tendency is noted in relation to Social Credit. A policy of alliance with that party may have been useful in Alberta or Saskatchewan, however, in the coast province, such an alliance could gain the Communists nothing while it alienated CCF opinion. The sectarianism noted in the B.C. party was another example, a reaction against arbitrary changes of tactics imposed at the center.

Such attempts to impose conformity, both on a national and provincial level without taking specific conditions into account, are the exact opposite of the Bolshevik ideal of leadership. However, such an irony seems almost inherent in such a hierarchical type of party. Successive layers of leaders deferred to their seniors until when the level of effective direction is reached, the required sensitivity to a local situation is lacking.

The last of the problems of Canadian and British Columbian

Communism listed above, that of ethnicity, is unique in that it is not related to the problems of the Bolshevik form of party. This problem arises from the fact that at all times a large part of support for the Communist Party came from Eastern Europeans and Jews.[9] This concentration of support provided a persistent difficulty for the national party and a specific explanation of the weakness of the British Columbia section of the party compared to that in some other provinces.

For the national party, the support of the East Europeans and Jews was, of itself, obviously welcome. This section of the population provided a hard core of activists and money and voting strength that gave an invaluable base. However, this base concealed a profound weakness among Anglo-Saxons and especially French Canadians. Worse, the fact that so many activists had foreign accents or spoke no English or French did much to isolate the party from the vast majority of the population and create an image of foreignness. This effect of the party's ethnic composition did much to prevent a breakthrough to a significant level of support across the nation.

Within British Columbia, much the same situation held, with the added disadvantage of the small size of these groups in the most Anglo-Saxon of provinces.[10] The province especially lacked the concentrated pockets of such ethnic groups which gave the Communists impressive voting strength in parts of Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg. The lack of such a base could not be made up for by any amount of activism, and it prevented the party from gaining even the meagre stature it had within Ontario and Manitoba.

A catalogue of the difficulties of the Communist Party such as the above, is not complete, as such matters as official repression and the poor start that the party made in its first years are of importance. However, they do comprise the difficulties unique to the Communist Party. What they make clear is that the Bolshevik party model did not and probably could not work in Canada. The reliance of this model upon skillful leadership had the ironic result of delegating this function upward to levels where it was exercised without the requisite knowledge of the local situation. This resulted in the mechanical carrying out of directives which had limited relevance, with predictably limited benefit. Such an operating method had a further drawback that vast distances and scattered populations made the communication of orders delayed and sporadic.

The ethnic composition of Communist support had the effect of partially isolating the party from the bulk of the population and helping to create a negative image. This ethnic support may however, have masked the failings of the Bolshevik model by providing a base, without which the party may have disappeared. Whatever the net effect of ethnic support in propping up or isolating the party, there can be little doubt that the party's methods militated against dramatic success in the Canadian context.

If the CCF is examined in comparison with the Communist Party the contrast is startling. Electorally, of course, the gulf between the two parties is so extreme as to need no recapitulation. However, other differences, such as organization and composition are almost equally sharp.

Such contrast may go far to explain the CCF refusal to ally with the Communists as well as the general relations between the two parties. Organizationally, the CCF had been created and was largely maintained in a radically different form from the Communists. Originally, the party had been a federation of separate and differing groups, with decentralization and autonomy being a basic principle.[11] While in the years following the formation of the party, this decentralization was gradually abandoned for a more conventional structure, provincial parties were allowed great latitude. Equally, the amount of debate over even basic principles that took place stands in sharp contrast to the disciplined formation which the Communists strove to create.

The organizational looseness of the CCF was a direct result of the party's nature as a coalition. To a large degree the CCF, in British Columbia at least, was the embodiment of the popular front for which the Communists campaigned so hard. It was composed of the most disparate elements ranging from the mildest of reformers to the most doctrinaire of marxists. Such a party could not be and was not, run in the tightly disciplined fashion that the Communist Party was. Basic differences in principle had to be accepted or the party would fly to pieces; as a result, discipline was used quite lightly. Connell was expelled only after the most drastic provocation, while Young and Stephen were only suspended after acts that could have justified expulsion.

The loose structure and diverse composition of the CCF prevented that party from speaking with one voice to the public. As a result, events such as Connell's disavowal of Winch in the Legislature[12] or the

presence of pro-unity candidates in the 1937 election could occur. On the other hand, the enforced toleration of factions within the party made the drastic changes of policy in which the Communists engaged an impossibility. Thus, the party's very disunity was a factor in the maintenance of a general consistency over time.

An organization which tolerated long, acrimonious debates on principle and which allowed candidates to stand for public office on opposite sides of an issue which was greatly exercising it, had an obvious problem of inconsistency when it was attempting to gain general support. However, the fact that the CCF spoke with many voices had compensations. Unlike the Communists who had to try to fit directives from above into the political situation, the CCF in British Columbia was under no constraint in choosing what issues and tactics it used. Even the lack of agreement among CCF candidates on the hustings may have had positive aspects, as anyone from a mild reformer to the most furious radical could hear a speech in which he was in full agreement.

Of CCF organization and structure, it might be said that its looseness was necessary to prevent the party from flying apart. In competition with other parties, the existence of so many groups within the party crying their wares was a disadvantage, especially when the opposition picked up on intemperate remarks. When compared to the Communists though, the CCF had the advantage that at least they were reacting to the local scene, rather than directives from afar.

In comparing the two parties, one is struck by how radically different they were, not only in principle but in practice as well.

Moreover, it is striking to see in both cases how closely practice followed principle. The Communists never abandoned their Bolshevik party model, in spite of the difficulties implicit within it. The CCF, on the other hand, did formally abandon its federated structure on the provincial level, but its internal frictions made this formal change superfluous, as the organization remained quite loose. Behavior within the organizations also remained consistent. The Communists had a minimum of debate over issues, and once a line had been established public questioning of it was non existent. The endless debates within the CCF, of which the unity question was only one, and in which standing policy was often challenged, present a spectacle which is both directly opposite to the Communists, and in line with the nature of the party.

The differences between the two parties were so drastic as to in themselves pose a serious barrier to unity, even mutual comprehension. The Communist tactic during the popular front period of picking out specific sections of the CCF to attack seems to be an example of this. The idea that one specific group, such as the alleged Trotskyites, could be attacked without affecting relations with the rest of the party, would seem to indicate that the Communists felt that the CCF tendency towards noisy debate revealed much deeper splits than there actually were. Equally, it would seem that large sections of the CCF were unable to understand the switches in the Communist line or their sources. The plaintive letter about Communist support for the Liberals mentioned above[13] is an example of this.

It would seem from the above that the way the two parties were structured and functioned was in itself a barrier to unity. However, the

inherent problem of having radically different types of parties was reinforced by other factors which made unity unlikely. Most of these factors had little to do with ideology or policy, but rather operated on a more mundane level. The first of these was the simple point of electoral strength. No amount of propaganda or activism could erase the fact that the CCF was overwhelmingly more powerful than the Communists. The few head on contests between the parties only confirmed this fact. In an election the Communists had nothing to offer the CCF, and as that party was, during the entire period under discussion, near provincial office, elections were its prime interest. The marches and demonstrations at which the Communists excelled, were consequently of much less interest to the CCF. Here too, the two parties can be sharply distinguished, CCF engrossed in electoral matters, while the Communists went to the streets.

Another factor which is somewhat of an imponderable are CCF memories of Communist insults from previous years. No precise calculation can be made of such sentiments, but some prominent CCF'ers had unpleasant memories of the Communists dating back to the early 1920's. On the whole the Communists gave them little reason to forget. The tendency of the Communists to announce that groups bitterly opposed by the CCF were progressive and potential allies was another negative factor.

The above elements all played a role in buttressing anti-unity sentiment within the CCF. Other influences played a negative role for particular groups in the party. The stringent discipline of the Communists probably played a role in repelling the more youthful radicals, while their rightward swing during this period alienated both young and old radicals.

More problematic factors might include the Communists lack of respectability and the effect of this on middle class CCF'ers. The image of Godlessness which surrounded Communism could be another influence on elements within the CCF.

The above list of multiple sources of the unwillingness of the CCF to adopt the popular front program which the Communists so eagerly offered contains a seed of exaggeration which must be noted. While all the points are accurate in themselves, the list could give the impression that members of the CCF were paying continuous, serious attention to the Communists, and elaborating their points of disagreement. This was not the case. Even in the crisis years of 1936 and 1937, the attentions of the party were overwhelmingly on the prime enemies, the Liberals and Conservatives. When attentions were turned elsewhere, they were usually on internal party matters, where, as in the Connell affair, Communism was more of an insult than a debatable matter.

A comparison of the British Columbia experience with that of the French popular front only emphasises the unlikeliness of the coalition which the Communists agitated for. As chapter eight demonstrates, the French popular front came about as a result of factors which simply did not exist in British Columbia. Neither the relative strengths of the two parties, the immediacy of the fascist threat, nor local political traditions were comparable to those in France. Seeing how poorly it worked in

France, where the circumstances were much more favourably, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the CCF's refusal to accept the various unity proposals was wisdom on their part.

This section can be concluded by trying to sum up the general view the two parties had of each other. Here, as in most other matters, they differed dramatically. The Communists maintained an intense, love-hate, attitude towards the CCF, an attitude composed of ardent courtship followed by petulant sniping upon rejection. The intensity of the emotions which Communists had towards the CCF are a product of the critical role that the CCF had in Communist strategy in this period. Without that party, any hope for a genuine popular front in British Columbia was a delusion.

The attitude of the CCF towards the Communists was somewhat more complex, as a result of the factional tendency of that party. Still, while there were pro-unity elements, and while different groups may not have had the same reasons for opposing unity, a majority sentiment can be described. This sentiment may have been unique in the CCF across Canada in its low estimation of the Communists. Describing Ontario for instance, Gerald Caplan could write that the CCF "always retained a kind of terrified awe of Communist Party members for their utter dedication and cool amorality."[14] In France too, the Communists were taken seriously at all times as a rival of the SFIO. Such attitudes,

were hardly typical of the British Columbia CCF of this period. A better description would see the CCF as a quarrelsome, but basically united family. The Communists in this metaphor would be an unsavory, disavowed and highstrung cousin who kept barging into family affairs long after it had been made abundantly clear that he was not welcome. To make matters worse, this cousin continued to hector and plea in a semi-hysterical style, for the most dubious get-rich-quick schemes. While this cousin could divert attention from other matters, and even influence minorities to accept his ideas, in the main he was greeted as an embarrasment to be ignored if possible.

One comment made to the author may do much to sum up the whole relationship between the two parties. This point was that in relation to the CCF, the Communist Party was in a kind of "no-win" situation--if they ran candidates against the CCF, they were accused of aiding reaction, while if they endorsed the CCF, they were repudiated.[15] While this does not cover all attitudes that the CPC took, there is much truth in it. The problem is that the CCF would have preferred the Communists not to exist at all. On the other hand, the CCF could reply that the CPC almost invariably ran in areas where the CCF had a good chance of winning, attacked them vitriolically, and that in the Communist scheme of things the CCF was to have only a temporary existence.

Ultimately the problem was that two very different kinds of organizations were appealing to the same constituency for different purposes. Any attempt to cooperate faced the problem that the success of one party required the failure of the other. If, as was the case, both parties were largely aware of this, sincere co-operation is impossible.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER IX

[1] All mention of the Bolshevik type of party in this chapter is based on V.I. Lenin, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1969, chapters i. j, and q; George Lichtheim, Marxism--An Historical and Critical Study, London, Rutelege and Kegan Paul, 1964, Part V, Chapter 8; and B. Lazitch and M.M. Drachkovitich, Lenin and the Comintern, vol. 1, Stanford California, Hoover Institute Press, 1972, pp. 324-25.

[2] Avakumovic, table p. 115.

[3] See above Chapter 3, p. 33.

[4] Towards a Democratic Front, cited in Avakumovic, p. 119.

[5] Interview with Harold Griffin.

[6] See above Chapter 3. p. 37.

[7] Lazitch and Drachkovitch, p. 325.

[8] See above Chapter 7, pp. 86-87.

[9] Avakumovic, pp. 120-22.

[10] Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Census of Canada, vol. 4, Ottawa, King's Printer, 1936, pp. 16-17, lists only 130,000 as not being of British descent in the province out of 694,000.

[11] See above Chapter 2 pp. 19-20.

[12] See above Chapter 4, p. 43.

[13] See above Chapter 6. p. 75.

[14] Caplan, pp. 82-83.

[15] Interview with Maurice Rush.

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A FAILURE OF UNITY

COMMUNIST PARTY-CCF RELATIONS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

1935-1939

Author [redacted]

PATRICK GEORGE HILL

August, 1976