

History of the Socialist Party of Canada

By J. M. Milne [1973]

Background

Socialism in Canada had its origin in Ontario, the industrial heart of the country. It came to the fore in the 1890s.

The Socialist Labor Party, an offshoot of the SLP of the United States, appeared in the early 1890s, established several sections in the eastern provinces, in Winnipeg and Vancouver and contested elections after 1898 in Ontario constituencies. The party is still active, with membership mainly in Ontario, and taking part in election campaigns.

In 1898 the Canadian Socialist League was formed by former members of the Socialist Labor Party, with a branch in Montreal. By January 1902 over sixty branches existed in various parts of the country, including New Brunswick, Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, [1] but mainly in Ontario and British Columbia. Out of this movement grew the Socialist Party of Ontario, the Socialist Party of Manitoba and the Socialist Party of British Columbia.

Socialism to this point was a mixture of reformism, Christian brotherhood and not much else, and only at the turn of the century did the studies of Marx and Engels show noticeable influence. The influence was meager but at times brought surprising clarity.

Journals

Among the early founders of Socialism in Canada was G. W. Wrigley who helped to establish in Toronto in 1897 the *Citizen and Country*, a social reform weekly “which gradually developed into an avowed Socialist paper” (*Western Clarion*, July 3, 1903). As organizing secretary Wrigley helped to expand the Socialist League. He then moved west and became active in Vancouver and Victoria in the newly founded Socialist Party of British Columbia. Returning later to Toronto his activities continued as a member of the Socialist Party of Canada.

In 1902 R. P. Pettipiece, who had been publishing a miners’ journal in the BC interior, the *Lardeau Eagle*, expressing the views of the Socialist League, disposed of the *Eagle* and bought an interest in the *Citizen and Country*. He moved this journal to Vancouver and published it, starting July 1902, with Wrigley’s assistance, as the *Canadian Socialist*. In October he changed the name to *Western Socialist*, later purchasing a Nanaimo paper, *The Clarion* and merging the two together with a *Strike Bulletin* of the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees, as the *Western Clarion*, which made its first appearance on May 8, 1903.

The United Brotherhood of Railway Employees was at that time on strike through the west. Explaining the inclusion of the *Strike Bulletin* in the merger “it was felt that an overlapping of work existed, and the UBRE possessing no mail privileges was shortened in its range of influence”. It was also hoped “to establish in the *Western Clarion* a labor paper that will do full justice to the labor movement industrial and political”. A circulation of 6000 copies three times a week was guaranteed.

The *Western Clarion* and its several forerunners was not owned or in any way controlled by the Socialist Party. They were, like many workers’ journals during the period, privately owned. The *Western Socialist*, for example, “Published weekly in the interests of the Socialist movement in Canada”, was owned by Pettipiece and “Endorsed by the Socialist Party of British Columbia, Fisherman’s Union of BC, American Labor Union, Western Federation of Miners, with which is affiliated every miner’s union in BC” (*Western Socialist*, January 3, 1903).

Similar endorsements were recorded in the *Western Clarion*. The two journals however expressed broadly the views of the Socialist Party of BC and its successor the Socialist Party of Canada, except that all sides of theoretical controversies within the Party were usually reproduced, often in explosive terms.

The Socialist Parties of Ontario and Manitoba were not as fortunately situated in the matter of publications. There was no journal giving either its exclusive support. In Ontario there were journals that sometimes favored the Party and in Manitoba the Party was assigned a column in *The Voice* (published weekly in Winnipeg by A. W. Puttee), which otherwise supported all efforts to establish a labor party. The Ontario and Manitoba parties therefore turned gradually to the BC journal as their official organ, a condition that helped to bring some uniformity in the views of all three parties.

Socialist Party of Ontario

The Socialist Party of Ontario was born at a convention of the Ontario Socialist League held on Thanksgiving Day 1903, at which the League changed its name to the Socialist Party of Ontario. The new Party got off to a good start numerically, the convention being attended by about fifty delegates from Toronto, St. Thomas, London, Guelph, Galt, Paris, Preston, Orillia, Manitoulin Island and Mt. Forest. It also started well ideologically, a convention resolution reading:

“We, delegates of the Socialist League of Ontario, and comrades unaffiliated throughout the province, in convention assembled, affirm our belief in the materialist interpretation of history ‘that in every historical epoch the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch’ and declare our allegiance to the program of international revolutionary socialism as the only class conscious

movement, to attain this desired end we declare our aim to be the organization of the working class and those in sympathy with it into a political party, with the object of conquering the power of governments and using them for the purpose of transforming the present system of private distribution into a collective ownership by all the people.”[2]

The convention came to the conclusion:

“While accepting many so-called reform measures, such as direct legislation, proportional representation, public ownership of public utilities, etc., as democratic and therefore Socialist, we recognize the fact that when administered by a capitalist government they can at best be but palliatives and, therefore, set our faces rigidly against any alliance or fusion with any independent or so-called reform party advocating any or all of those or other demands that do not include the aims and purposes as herein declared, but shall pledge our representatives to vote for any and every measure that shall be for the betterment of the working class in field and factory.”

The continued acceptance of reform measures, though “rigidly” qualified, would come into conflict with the aim of collective ownership and give the Party some troubled times, an experience not unknown to other parties aiming to end and mend the existing form of society.

Socialist Party of Manitoba

The Socialist Party of Manitoba was founded in 1902. Its program and constitution appeared in *The Voice* of November 7 of that year. The program reads:

“Object

The Socialization of the means of Production, Distribution and Exchange, to be controlled by a Democratic State in the interests of the entire community and the complete emancipation of Labor from the domination of Capitalism.

Platform

1. All Organizers and Administrators to be elected by Equal Direct Adult Suffrage, and to be maintained by the community.
2. Legislation by the People in such wise that no project of law shall become binding till accepted by the majority of the People.
3. The abolition of Standing Armies and the establishment of National Citizen Forces: The People to decide on Peace or War.
4. All Education to be compulsory, secular and industrial, with full state maintenance for all children.
5. The administration of Justice to be free to all.
6. The means of Production, Distribution and Exchange to be declared and treated as Collective or Common Property.

7. The Production and Distribution of Wealth to be regulated by the Community in the common interest of its members.

Immediate Demands

1. The public ownership of all industries controlled by monopolies, trusts and combines. No part of the revenue of such industries to be applied to the reduction of taxes on property, but to be applied wholly to the increase of wages and shortening of the hours of labor of the employees and to the improvement of the service.
2. The education of all children up to 16 years of age, and state and municipal provision for books, clothing and food. The establishment of Provincial Colleges for the education of both sexes.
3. No child to be employed in any trade or occupation until 16 years of age. The penalty for infringement by employers to be imprisonment.
4. Eight hours or less to be the normal working day, or not more than forty-four hours per week and a minimum wage to be fixed in all trades and industries by legislative enactment. Imprisonment to be the penalty for employers and employees infringing the law.
5. The establishment of a public employment bureau. The provision of useful work for all unemployed at current wages.
6. The establishment of adequate pensions for aged and infirm workers.
7. Equal civil and political rights to men and women. Abolition of financial and property qualifications for candidates and electors at all elections. Canvassing to be made illegal. Election days to be legal holidays.
8. Abolition of the Senate, establishment of initiative and referendum, proportional representation, and right of recall of representatives by their constituents.
9. The establishment of an exclusively national currency and the extension of the Post Office Banks so that they shall absorb all private institutions that derive a profit from operations in money or credit. All fire, life and other insurance to be operated in the interests of the whole people.
10. No further alienation of Dominion or Provincial lands. Grants to be revoked when conditions of grant have not been fulfilled. Land to be leased only until such time as it is utilized by the community.
11. All revenue to be raised by taxation on land values, by cumulative income taxes, and by inheritance taxes.
12. Municipalization and public control of the liquor traffic.
13. The establishment of free public hospitals, convalescent homes, medical services and dispensaries.”

The Party in Manitoba clearly had some distance to travel on the road to Socialist understanding, evidenced further by the Party candidature in the Winnipeg civic election at the time, the candidate being referred to as a “Labor Candidate”, who supported his campaign without reference to Socialism and was endorsed by a Labor Representation League. But unlike the labor parties of later years, which evolved free from Socialist thought, the Manitoba party struggled towards knowledge and produced some serious lecturers and writers, among the latter being George Dales,

who became editor of the *Western Socialist*, John T. Mortimer and J. G. Morgan (“Geordie” in the *Western Clarion*). Dales had been the candidate referred to above. Both he and Morgan later served as Dominion Secretary of the Socialist Party of Canada. All three of these members wrote frequently in the Party column in *The Voice*, as well as in the BC journals.

The Socialist Party of Manitoba did not have a widespread membership. The province being largely agricultural the Party at this time was confined almost entirely to Winnipeg.

Socialist Party of British Columbia

The transfer of the *Citizen and Country* from Toronto to Vancouver, despite the size of the Ontario Socialist League, was a recognition of the movement of Socialist virility from the east to the west coast. BC like Ontario was an industrial area embracing some of the country’s harshest industries – mining, logging, fishing – and there was hardly a mining town in the province that did not have its union and Socialist locals, often in the same headquarters, usually expressing the same ideas. The *Western Socialist*, January 24, 1903 noted that “The Western Federation of Miners . . . Has unequivocally declared for Socialism as their politics, and will mail it to their ballots”.

The Socialist Party of British Columbia came into existence in 1901, emerging from the Socialist League in Vancouver and, as in Ontario, getting off to a good numerical start by absorbing most League branches in the province. But discussions arose as to the “potency” of the Party’s program, which follows:

- “1. Direct legislation.
2. Proportional representation.
3. Abolition of property qualification for voters and candidates at municipal elections.
4. Abolition of system of cash deposits for candidates at provincial elections.
5. Adult suffrage.
6. A minimum wage law, fixing wages at not less than \$2 a day for adults.
7. Reduction of hours of labor in all trades to 44 a week.
8. All coal mines to be owned and operated by the province, in the interests of the people.
9. Graduated land tax, similar to New Zealand law.
10. Free medical attendance to all needing such.
11. Scientific and practical management of fisheries, forests and waterways, in the interests of the province.
12. Employment of unemployed labor on useful productive work.
13. Extension of powers of municipalities.
14. The education of children under 14 years of age to be free, secular and compulsory. Text books, meals and clothing to be supplied to children out of public funds when necessary.

15. Municipalization and public control of the liquor traffic.
16. Abolition of poll and personal property tax.
17. No more bonusing private individuals or corporations, with land grants or cash subsidies” (*Western Clarion*, January 12, 1902).

The differences existing within the Party became sufficiently strong to cause the Nanaimo members to withdraw and establish themselves as a separate organization, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, with branches at Northfield, Ladysmith and Vancouver, obtaining the Nanaimo *Clarion* as its official publication. In the fall of 1902 a candidate of the Revolutionary Socialist Party, Parker Williams, gained 40 percent of the vote in a provincial by-election. During the same year a candidate of the Provincial Progressive Party, a short-lived labor party, J. H. Hawthornthwaite, was elected to the provincial legislature. He tried to reconcile the conflicting Labor-Socialist differences, failed and joined the RSP. These indications of the electoral strength of the Nanaimo party caused further discussions with the Socialist Party of British Columbia, the result being the joining of the two parties, the scrapping of the reform program of the SPBC and the adoption of the advanced program of the RSP. A convention held on September 8, 1903 confirmed this action in a resolution carried unanimously:

“Resolved that this convention place itself on record as absolutely opposed to the introduction of palliatives or immediate demands in propoganda work, as being liable to retard the achievement of our final aims, and that the Socialist Party of British Columbia henceforth stands firmly upon the one issue of the abolition of the present system of wage slavery as the basis for all political organization” (*Western Clarion*, September 11, 1903).

The program of the Party, and the platform on which Party candidates of the SPBC, then the SPC, was expected to take their stand in political campaigns, was reproduced regularly in Party journals: [3]

“We, the Socialist Party of British Columbia, in convention assembled, affirm our allegiance to and support the principles and program of the international revolutionary working class.

Labor produces all wealth and to labor it should justly belong. To the owner of the means of wealth production belongs the product of labor. The capitalist system is based upon private or capitalist ownership of the means of wealth production, therefore all the products of labor belong to the capitalist. The capitalist is master; the workman is slave.

So long as the capitalists remain in possession of the reins of government all the powers of the state will be used to protect and defend their property rights in the means of wealth production, and their control of the product of labor.

The capitalist system gives to the capitalist an ever-swelling stream of profits, and to the worker an ever-increasing measure of misery and degradation.

The interest of the working class lies in the direction of setting itself free from

capitalist exploitation by the abolition of the wage system. To accomplish this necessitates the transformation of capitalist property in the means of wealth production into collective or working class property.

The irrepressible conflict of interests between the capitalist and the worker is rapidly culminating in a struggle for possession of the powers of government – the capitalist to hold, the worker to secure it by political action. This is the class struggle.

Therefore, we call upon all wage-earners to organize under the banner of the Socialist Party of British Columbia, with the object of conquering the public powers for the purpose of setting up and enforcing the economic program of the working class, as follows:

1. The transformation, as rapidly as possible, of capitalist property in the means of wealth production (natural resources, factories, mills, railways, etc.) into the collective property of the working class.
2. Thorough and democratic organization and management of industry by the workers.
3. The establishment, as speedily as possible, of production for use in lieu of production for profit.

The Socialist Party, when in office, shall always and everywhere, until the present system is utterly abolished, make the answer to this question its guiding rule of conduct: Will this legislation advance the interests of the working class and aid the workers in their class struggle against capitalism? If it will, the Socialist party is for it; if it will not, the Socialist Party is absolutely opposed to it.

In accordance with this principle the Socialist Party pledges itself to conduct all the public affairs placed in its hands in such manner as to promote the interests of the working class alone.”

On October 8, 1903 the *Western Clarion* commemorated the anniversary of the Party:

“The Socialist Party of British Columbia just two years old – one in the ‘reform’ and one in the ‘revolutionary’ stage – and stands upon the clearest and most uncompromising platform in the world.”

Earlier in the same year the January 3 issue of the *Western Socialist* urged the workers to “Vote just the same as tho your candidate was behind what you want. Mark ‘Socialism’ across your ballot”. Some weeks later the Party issued an election manifesto during a by-election in which there were three candidates, a Liberal, an independent and an “alleged labor candidate”. The manifesto declared:

“No consistent Socialist can support or vote for any of the three and this Party recommends all voters in sympathy with the principles of the BC Socialist Party to go to the polls and register there a PROTEST against capitalism by marking their ballots thus; ‘I WANT SOCIALISM’” (*Western Socialist*, January 5, 1903) [4].

This attitude was generally taken by the SPBC and the SPC over the years, to the consternation of aspiring office holders and trade unions which often sponsored or

endorsed labor candidates. That the Party held strong support in the unions was due less to developing Socialist consciousness than to the dominating position and aggressiveness of Party members in the unions. Many of the union officers were members of the Party.

Reforms

However, the Party attitude towards reforms was always a subject of discussion. The opinion existed that the Party should have nothing to do with reforms: that is, should oppose them at all times, on the ground that support for reforms helped preserve the belief that capitalism could serve the workers' interests and wasted time that should be spent in advocating Socialism. Another view was that general propaganda should consist entirely of Socialist educational work but that members in parliament should examine reforms and support those approved by the Party. The official attitude was a mixture of these in line with the Party Platform affirming that the Party would support legislation advanced in the interests of the working class. In practice this meant that, while opposing the reformism of other political parties, its own members, in legislatures and at public meetings, could discuss measures considered to be in the interests of the workers. But the Party did not advocate reforms exclusively, nor place reforms before Socialism; and it did not advocate reforms and call them revolutionary. Reforms to the early Socialists were regarded as necessary and often looked upon with contempt. The Party was revolutionary and regarded all of society's phenomena from the standpoint of Marxian science, avowing its findings though showered with anathema from those it sought to convert. But the extent to which it supported reforms added to its members and its problems [5]. The members elected to governing bodies were not elected by Socialists.

Towards merger

The views of the Socialist Parties of Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia were becoming sufficiently uniform through 1903 that pressures developed favoring the merger of the three Parties and the formation of a national organization. In the *Western Clarion*, May 9, 1903 appeared an Executive Committee report on the prospects:

“The matter of forming a national Socialist Party was discussed, and it was considered that no benefits would accrue to the Party in the meantime from affiliation with other Socialist organizations in the Dominion, as the expense of sending delegates to national conventions would be too heavy for the Party in its present stage, considering that we have more work in this province than we are able, financially, to carry on. It was decided therefore to leave the matter to the next Party convention.”

The third annual convention of the Party was held on September 8 and heard the report of the Provincial Treasurer Burns:

“It was decided that at this juncture the time was hardly ripe for national organization, but it was declared advisable that at a later date arrangements be made to send Organizer Kingsley on a tour through the eastern provinces in order to ‘educate’ the inhabitants thereof in the philosophy of real Socialism. It was also suggested by Com Burns that it might be wise to invite Com Simpson, of Toronto, to tour this province, in order that he might be ‘wised up’ along the same lines. No definite recommendations were made in regard to National organization” (*Western Clarion*, September 11, 1903).

It is unlikely that theoretical limitations in the Ontario and Manitoba Parties caused reluctance to merge with them. The BC Party during this period frequently invited and admitted to membership groups whose Socialism must at best have been acquired overnight. An item in the *Western Clarion*, October 8, is pertinent:

“ . . . there was evident a bond of sympathy between ‘labor party’ supporters (in the campaign just ended) and Socialists, yet this was because the majority felt that next time we would be fighting unitedly under the banner of the SPBC, and not because of any fusion.”

A provincial election was held in 1903, and SPBC nominating 13 candidates: Victoria, J. C. Watters and O. Lee Charlton; Newcastle, Parker Williams; Nanaimo, J. H. Hawthornthwaite; Alberni, George Taylor; Cumberland, David H. Halliday; Vancouver, A. R. Stebbings and Ernest Burns; Revelstoke, J. W. Bennett; Kaslo, Samuel Shannon; Fernie, J. L. McPherson; Grand Forks, John Riordan; Greenwood, Ernest Mills. This number was reduced to ten on nomination day. Hawthornthwaite and Williams were elected. A labor candidate was also elected, William Davidson, who associated himself with the Party representatives in the legislature.

The year 1903 was a successful one for the SPBC, from an electoral standpoint, but not for the *Western Clarion* which at the end of the year suspended publication until June 1904, then again in October until January 1905. This was attributed to a treasury depleted by election activity and insufficient support by the members. [6]

Socialist Party of Canada

Although handicapped in this way the influence of the Party continued to grow, as also did the interest in a national Party. The SPBC’s fourth convention was held during the last two days of 1904 at which delegates were advised:

“Owing to resolutions passed and representations made by Locals in Winnipeg, Toronto and Fredericton NB, besides correspondence from comrades scattered throughout the Dominion, it will be necessary for this convention to consider the advisability of organizing the nucleus of ‘The Socialist Party of Canada’, noting carefully the action already taken by eastern comrades and their acceptance of our platform and program as at present constituted.”

A resolution dated December 11, 1904 and signed by H. B. Siemon, Winnipeg Local Secretary read:

“Comrades: I am instructed by the Socialist Party of Manitoba to forward to you a copy of a resolution passed at today’s meeting, as follows: ‘We, the Socialist Party of Manitoba, endorse in its entirety the present platform, pledge and general construction of the constitution of the Socialist Party of British Columbia, and we pledge ourselves, in the event of the BC party inaugurating a movement to organize a Socialist Party of Canada on same lines, to join this party. Further, that this resolution be forwarded to the executive of the SPBC, The Ontario SP and that it be sent to the *Voice*, *Western Clarion* and Port Arthur *Standard* for publication.”

Letters from H. H. Stuart, Secretary-Treasurer of the Fredericton Socialist League, and G. W. Wrigley, Toronto, were read. From Stuart:

“We are glad that the SPBC have the discussion of the advisability of organizing a Canadian Socialist Party . . . I mailed the members of the Fredericton Socialist League, on the 9th and 19th instant a referendum, of which two sections were: 1. Shall the Fredericton Socialist League adopt the platform of the SPBC? 2. Shall the League, in case the SPBC organize a Canadian Socialist Party, affiliate itself with said Socialist Party of Canada?”

The letter from Wrigley was unofficial:

“The Ontario Socialist Party had, in convention assembled on Thanksgiving Day, adopted the platform, pledge and program of the SPBC and were ready to affiliate with the SPBC.”

A resolution was submitted to the convention by J. G. Morgan and E. T. Kingsley,

“That the party name be changed to the Socialist Party of Canada and that the party proceed with organization.”

The resolution was adopted, to be balloted upon by the general membership (*Western Clarion*, January 28, 1905).

During the next few weeks the SPC was accepted by all concerned, including a newly-formed Socialist Party of the Yukon Territories and a group in Edmonton. The *Clarion* noted on April 15 that the application of the Yukon group had 21 names. According to the secretary, A. Douglas, there were fifty members in Dawson “but the greater number are out on the creeks”.

The first meeting of the Dominion Executive Committee met on February 19,

“Present: John E. Dubberley (Chairman), Alf Leah, W. H. Flowers, G. Peters, A. J.

Wilkinson, Charles O'Brien, R. P. Pettipiece. Officers: Pettipiece, Organizer; Wilkinson, Treasurer; Kingsley, Organizer" (*Western Clarion*, February 25).

The Socialist Party of Canada was in business.

With the formation of the national Party the controversies of the years behind continued in the years ahead. Mention has been made of the differences on the proper attitude to reforms. The subject was not in the early days regarded as vital, the members at best drawing a vague distinction between reforms and reformism, the deciding view being that it was permissible to further reforms so long as this was done by a revolutionary party. Years later ideas on reforms clashed substantially.

Differences existed in a number of other directions: religion, immigration, labor unions and the position of the farmer being among these.

Unions

Labor unions were regarded as associations of workers to protect and improve wages and working conditions, their struggles forming no part of the class struggle which was a conscious struggle to end capitalism and could only be fought on the political field. Unions took part in the buying and selling of labor power and were in much the same position as those who took part in the buying and selling of other commodities, union activities often being referred to as commodity struggles. It was sometimes said that unions were engaged in a losing conflict, as indicated by the defeats they were at that time suffering in strike action. E. T. Kingsley, speaking in Victoria, is quoted:

"A great mistake is made in considering labor strikes as parts of the class struggle. Strikes are battles between two sections of the workers, the unionists and the non-unionists, the job holders and the job hunters . . . Trade unions are products of the competitive system of industry and as the Socialist Party is organized to abolish this system (it) is not concerned in the trade union question" (*Western Socialist*, February 7, 1903).

G. W. Wrigley contested Kingsley's view:

"Trades unions are purely economic organizations aiming to improve the economic conditions of the members here and now. As organizations they have no business in politics beyond teaching their members the necessity of voting for their class interests and the absurdity of the 'community of interests' between capital and labor" (*Western Socialist*, February 28, 1903).

Others at different times got involved in these discussions, an editorial some years later insisting:

"If then the struggle over the purchase and sale of the commodity labor power is a

part of the class struggle, logically, so also is the struggle over the purchase of any and all commodities a part of the class struggle, and we have a class struggle going on every time we dicker over a pair of socks” (*Western Clarion*, July 24, 1909).

Another contributor to the discussion, W. Griffiths of Vancouver, made a brief but pertinent comment on the class struggle:

“The struggle for existence is a part of and included in the class struggle. This economic struggle exists independent of the class consciousness or unclassconsciousness of men. Because the rising bourgeoisie had no knowledge of Marxian concepts and economic class struggles, did not prevent the overthrow of feudalism, and the existence of that class struggle, even if unknown to the participants” (*Western Socialist*, February 21, 1903).

Keir Hardie of the British Labor Party, lecturing in Canada at the time, got into the act: “Trade union movement was the class movement, political movement not a class movement: trade unions composed of working men entirely, some capitalists in the political movement” (*Western Clarion*, August 3, 1907).

Yet, despite the Party’s dim view of unions, these were the main sources of its membership and support. All five of its members elected to legislatures (three in BC, one in Alberta and one in Manitoba) were elected by trade union votes. In turn, the Party was influenced by the unions. Its elected members furthered legislation favored by the unions. The *Western Clarion* devoted nearly all its space during its first several issues to the rail strike in the west [7]. And the Party stand on immigration reflected trade union concern.

Oriental

Trade unions in the west, particularly on the coast, as early as the 1870s had clamored against oriental immigration, race riots occurring in Vancouver in the 1880s and later. Oriental workers were entering the province encouraged and assisted by the employing class, becoming established in the logging and fishing industries and partly in mining, moving from these into other industries. The Canadian Pacific Railroad expanded into BC in 1880 and employed thousands of Chinese in construction. The orientals worked for lower wages and longer hours than the white workers, which tended to depress or prevent improvements in the general conditions of life. The white workers fought against this by trying to have the orientals excluded from the country. The Socialist Party became involved in this activity.

The *Western Socialist* stated the Party view:

“The Chinese and Japanese have as much right to be here as we ‘civilized Christians’ have to be in Asia. The ‘cheap labor’ problem is a product of our competitive system of industry and until the working class capture the reins of power and establish the

cooperative commonwealth, there will be 'profits' for the capitalists by importing Chinese, Italians, etc. To prevent the lowering of the environment of the working class in Canada, and thus making the work of the Socialist educator harder, it would be well to secure restrictive immigration laws requiring a certain educational standard from all immigrants, but while the capitalist government might pass such legislation it would not be enforced unless the working class were showing their political power intelligently by 'striking' at the ballot box and vote for the world-wide working class Socialist Party" [8].

This attitude was expressed by Party writers and speakers all through the Party's early years, some doubt showing in 1907:

"While there will be white men who will resent the intrusion of the Japs into this 'white man's country', and will endeavor to vent their spleen upon the Jap worker himself, those who understand the game of capitalist rule will see in the little brown men only others of its victims used as pawns upon the chessboard of world-wide robbery and rapine" (*Western Clarion*, July 27, 1907).

And in the jeering some time later by M. Baritz: "Workers of the world unite, except Asiatics" (*Western Clarion*, January 28, 1911).

Religion

Religion had a mixed reception in the Party. In its earliest years religion and Socialism were considered by many to have much in common and Party meetings were often addressed by travelling preachers lecturing on "Christian Socialism". Some regarded religion as a private matter and that Socialists should leave it alone; others that Socialists had no quarrel with religion but a serious one with the church. Then there was the view that religion was an enemy of science and the working class. All of these views went into the columns of the Party journals.

One of the contributor to the subject, R. Baker, attacked both theism and atheism:

"The atheist and the church man occupy in the religious world the same relative positions that the bogus socialist parties do on the political. Henchmen of the capitalist class, they kick up a controversial dust to blind the worker while he is being plundered, then meet on a common platform in defence of the present degrading rotten social and political system, whenever they scent rebellion in the working class" (*Western Socialist*, February 21, 1903).

Ernest Burns, one of the founders of the BC party, wrote:

"Commercialism is the all-powerful force in the industrial and political world. Commercialism subsidises the press, perverts our educational system and determines the actions and public utterances of many trade union officials into sane and

conservative channels. Such being the case it is futile to suppose that the church, the capitalist church, the church of mammon, whose edifices are built and whose preachers are paid by contributions almost exclusively from wealthy donors, will remain neutral in the mighty struggle between the forces of vested interests and those of industrial freedom” (*Western Clarion*, August 27, 1904).

The same writer, in a lecture earlier on ‘Socialism and Religion’, indicated the distinction between religion and the church:

“ . . . religion in its best sense wants nothing more nor less than a system of principles that bound men and women together for the common good, and in a manner Socialism supplied these high aims and noble principles for the betterment of the human race; it followed as a logical necessity that Socialism was a religion” (*Western Clarion*, May 9, 1903).

“Gurrock”, an occasional writer in the *Clarion*, put the distinction more bluntly:

“Socialism, as such, is not opposed to any religion, as such. Let the churches get out of our way and confine their energies to purely spiritual matters” (*Western Clarion*, January 15, 1910).

In 1910 the Socialist Party of Great Britain published a pamphlet, *Socialism and Religion*, consigning religion, the churches and all their trappings to the scrapheap. The pamphlet was reviewed favorably in the *Clarion* except for the comments:

“We cannot agree that one cannot be a Christian and a Socialist. It is true that a man cannot be consistently both, but man is so thoroughly schooled in inconsistency that he can even be honestly inconsistent. We do know that a man can be a Christian, as Christians go, and be a most excellent and trustworthy Party member, for we know of some of whom there are none better. So there you are. Where are you? To sum up: Let us never forget that wage slavery is our theme in season and out of season. Other things are side issues. These, including religion, while they should be dealt with truthfully and dispassionatelessly when the occasion arises, yet they should never be given the prominence that would for an instant tend to distract from the main issue” (*Western Clarion*, October 1, 1910).

A storm blew up over all this, the Maritimes executive resolving that Baritz, a strenuous upholder of the SPGB pamphlet, would not be allowed to speak on religion in the Maritimes, the Toronto Local on the other hand refused to distribute the *Clarion* “on account of the utter confusion of the editor on the religious question” and doubling its order for the *Socialist Standard*, the journal of the SPGB (*Western Clarion*, October 22 and December 17, 1910).

In 1912 the pamphlet *Socialism and Religion* was referred to again:

“This is the second edition of this pamphlet and should be read by every Socialist as it gives the only correct stand any Socialist can take on the subject of religion” (*Western Clarion*, September 21, 1912).

The arguing continued.

The Farmer

Canada at the beginning of the century was mainly agricultural, the prairie provinces overwhelmingly so. To bring about the conquest of political power, which the early Socialists saw rapidly approaching, the position of the farmer had to be considered, since the farmers could be a substantial stumbling block to the Socialist aim unless they threw in their lot with the workers.

To many Socialists the farmer was a capitalist, a small one, true, but trying to become a big one. He owned means of production (land and machinery) and he employed wage workers, paying the “going wage” which, customary to capitalist practice, was the lowest wage possible.

That many in the farming population were desperately poor proved only that they were far down in the ranks of exploiters and could be readily shaken into the ranks of the working class. They were in the meanwhile part of the exploiting class, inclined to think and behave as exploiters.

But it was also believed that the farmers were destined to continue, with limited exceptions, an existence in poverty and must, to improve their lot in life, set aside their own class interests, adopt the Socialist case and work for the ending of capitalism.

Together with this interpretation of the farmer’s position in society, there grew another set of ideas which disagreed that they were capitalists. The farmer’s position was essentially the same as the worker’s: he was a wage slave. This attitude became the general one in the Party and was detailed in a pamphlet, *The Slave of the Farm*, written in 1914 by a prairie member, Alf Budden, published by the Party. Quotations here are from this pamphlet [9].

The farmer, it was reasoned, was a capitalist in name only. He owned the farm and machinery but this ownership was “a grim joke”. He owned neither. “The benefit of capital came to its owners . . . The beautiful things of the earth are theirs, the choicest of labor’s creations, the servility of the courts, the subservience of the press; the parliaments are but their executive committees; the soldiery, police and judge, their obedient slaves” (p. 19).

The farmer neither shares in the bounties nor benefits from the subservience. His means of production had outgrown the limited tools of earlier times, have grown into

the great machines needed in increasingly competitive production which he must have to remain in production. But he gains nothing from the greater amounts of goods produced, for he obtains his machine only by placing himself at the mercy of the mortgage companies, machine companies, etc. "The larger the machinery grows the longer he must toil to obtain it, until the point is reached where the last vestige of independence drops off him, and he reaches the status of a wage slave, or at best, manager for a machine company" (p. 33).

There was no escape for the farmer other than the Socialist one, for the greater his production by improved methods the greater the tendency for prices of farm products to go down, the greater the need for even more improved production methods and the greater the hold of the capitalist class on his farm and home. The Socialists carried this message across the plains and locals appeared in farming communities.

Elections

The Socialist Party in the years following its formation carried on electoral activities in BC, Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario, and sent lecturers and soap boxers through Saskatchewan, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Three of its members were elected to the Legislature in BC (J. H. Hawthornthwaite, P. Williams and J. McInnis), one in Alberta (C. M. O'Brien) and one in Manitoba (G. Armstrong). Hawthornthwaite and Williams were first elected before 1905 but were reelected as candidates of the SPC. Federal elections were contested without success. James Pritchard in Nanaimo 1903 was the first Socialist candidate in a federal campaign. He was the father of W. A. Pritchard who became widely known in later years. In Ontario the Party ran candidates in civic elections and had one member (J. Simpson) elected several times to the Toronto Board of Education. There were locals in all the provinces except Prince Edward Island. In each of the larger centers there were several locals, made up of different language groups. Four such locals existed for a time in Montreal, as many in Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver.

Propaganda

The Party's travelling propagandists received little financial aid from the Party. Mainly they "lived off the land", fed and helped in their travels by locals, groups and individuals, workers and farmers, a dearth of plutocrats, anxious to help in spreading the Socialist message. They did not live luxuriously. Life was abundant only in ideas and poverty. But they were a sturdy breed, stimulated by the interest around them and the conviction that a new day was dawning.

One of these propagandists, E. T. Kingsley, had lost both legs in a railway accident, did much to clarify thinking in Nanaimo and Vancouver, became owner, printer and editor of the *Clarion*, and lectured regularly in Vancouver when he was not on his

frequent organizing tours across the country.

Literature

At the time of its founding the *Western Clarion* was published three times a week. When the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees strike ended a few weeks later this was changed to once a week. In the years to follow the paper became published once a month, twice a month, at times not at all, depending on the changing fortunes of the Party. Its circulation fluctuated usually between 4000 and 6000 and reached a high of 10,000 during an election campaign. At a convention in 1908 the Party resolved to become owner of the journal, but this was not accomplished until years later.

Over the years a number of pamphlets were published, one on Socialism disowned in later years as “unscientific”, existing stocks being destroyed. A legacy from a member, George Whitehead, resulted in the “Whitehead Library”, a series of pamphlets several by Marx and Engels, their publication intended to offset depleted supplies of Socialist works caused by the banning of Kerr publications in Canada [10]. The Party’s most widely favored pamphlet was the *Manifesto of the Socialist Party of Canada*, published first in 1911, five editions appearing by 1920, a further edition many years later.

Free Speech

The banning of the Kerr publications was neither the first or the last official harassment of Socialist activities. Socialism was much to the fore. Not only was the Socialist Party preaching Socialism. Trade unions, which today concern themselves with the details of their current wage agreement and publish journals with nothing in them about social problems, nothing, frequently, about trade unionism, stormed against existing society and resolved in favor of Socialism [11]. Labor parties, today guided by university-trained professional reformers, demanded them, unfortunately ultimately, the ending of capitalism [12]. The Industrial Workers of the World, the One Big Union and other groups added to the expanding pressure for a new society. Fear often brought officialdom tearing in, armed with the logic of its kind.

The following are notes from the *Western Clarion*, except as indicated from *The Voice*:

“French speaking members of the Socialist Party of Manitoba, Pettit et Louie, tried twice to hold outdoor meetings in St. Boniface, a French speaking suburb of Winnipeg. Prevented by police” (September 17, 1903).

“Arthur M. Lewis, well known US lecturer on Socialism, arrested in Vancouver for ‘obstructing the street and interfering with traffic’” (October 14, 1905).

“Members arrested in Toronto for holding a meeting. Fined \$1.00. Served notice of appeal” (*The Voice*, May 25, 1907).

“*Appeal to Reason*, a US radical paper refused mail in Canada. Order revoked” (*The Voice*, May 25, 1906).

“Lengthy resolution presented by a Party delegation to the Toronto police commission condemning police use of clubs ‘in brutal Russian Cossack style’ to break up a street meeting, declaring ‘determination to fight for the rights of free speech on the Toronto streets and guarantees the financial backing for the employment of competent lawyers, as well as the wages of speakers arrested and for the time spent in jail’” (June 27, 1908).

“Outdoor meeting in the North End of Winnipeg, 1000 attending, Kingsley one of the speakers. Another meeting at the corner of Market and Main stopped by police” (*The Voice*, July 31, 1908).

“A member of the SPC and IWW members appeared before a Vancouver judge ‘for the usual offence of saying things about the master class on the streets and not acceding to the lawful demands of the police, etc., etc.’ adjourned until April 13, ‘the court opining that the offenders would undertake not to repeat the offence in the meantime; Lawyer Bird for the defence assuring him they would do no such thing’” (April 10, 1909).

“Comrades Matthews and Hemmings, Winnipeg, spent seven days in one of His Majesty’s state drawing rooms rather than hand over a dollar fine” This arising from a ban on street meetings (July 24, 1909).

“Organizer O’Brien (the Party’s MLA) ‘jerked up’ for speaking on the streets of Regina, refused to move, arrested, refused to pay fine or be bound over to hold the peace for twelve months, serving seven days in jail” (August 21, 1909).

“Comrade English’s refusal to either move or give his name seems to have confronted the police department with a problem, the solution of which promised to try their phenomenal intellectuals to the limit. The press informs us that the chief of police does not know whether there is any other legal method of finding out Comrade English’s name except by asking him, and without legally finding out his name, how can he be served with a summons?” (May 28, 1909).

Police Riots

Although the SPC looked dubiously at times at the parliamentary road to Socialism, it was never an advocate of violence. It recognized that those who held control of the government held control of society’s most effective agencies of violence. But it was often accused of sponsoring disorder, its determination to hold open air meetings in

spite of official orders against them being interpreted in this way and made the excuse for officially-inspired disorder and violence. In many parts of the country its meetings were broken up, its lecturers and their listeners mauled and arrested by police. Vancouver during 1912 was probably the scene of the worst pre-1914 police riots. The *Western Clarion* reported events at the time through several issues:

“A meeting was held on Powell Street grounds on the last Sunday in January addressed by several members of the SPC, including Pettipiece and Lestor. The meeting was broken up by police, ‘Cossacks’ running wild even through surrounding streets as far away as the luxury Vancouver Hotel where ‘two capitalists’ were beaten up. Twenty-five arrests were made, including several members of the SPC and several members of the IWW who took part in the meeting. Three of the IWW members, charged with obstructing police, were sent to jail for three months for refusing to swear by the Bible” (February 3).

Attempts were made in early February to hold street meetings “but the soap boxers were clubbed off the box”. A large meeting was again attempted on Powell St grounds, 5000 to 6000 onlookers. This was also broken up. “Five arrests were made and a couple of dozen got broken heads” (February 10).

Another meeting was held on Powell St grounds with “several thousands” present. The *Clarion* of February 22 reported: “The riotous and plug-ugly element that for the preceding three Sundays indulged in violence and brutality . . . Were conspicuous on Sunday by their meekness, docility and generally good behavior”. The suggestion was made that the good behavior was caused by the proximity of a provincial election. [13]

The “war for democracy” to which Canada became committed in 1914, and its “victory” in 1918, were accompanied by government encroachments on democracy at home. These will be referred to later.

Second International

In 1909 discussions developed on the advisability of affiliation with the International Socialist Bureau (the “Second International”). These discussions reflected the Party’s clashing attitudes towards reforms, a subject that had never been finally settled. The ISB was made up of organizations avowing support for Socialism but insisting on the “urgent need” for something less in the meantime, or working for something less all the time and sometimes calling this Socialism. The British Labor Party was one of the latter type. The SPC had a substantial number of members who favored the ISB kinds of organization. They were in the SPC because they had no place else to go. J. A. McDonald made this point in a letter to a correspondent in England:

“This was always a formidable section of the SP of C. It naturally flowed from the

lack of examination of the applicants . . . (They) were never enamored of the Party platform. They accepted it tentatively due to the fact that they had nowhere else to go. But at meetings of the locals, and particularly at Party conferences they were most articulate in supporting every motion that veered to the right of the Party position” [14].

The Party’s existence hampered the emergence of a party in which they would have been more at home [15]. They campaigned strongly in favor of affiliation but without success. The Dominion Executive Committee resolution of August 2, 1909 follows:

“Whereas, the International Socialist Bureau has seen fit to admit to membership and representation certain non-Socialist bodies, particularly the British Labor Party;
“And whereas, such parties are not only ignorant of the principles of Socialism, but practice openly the most shameless policy of fusion and compromise with capitalist parties, advocating at most a number of petty and in many cases reactionary reforms;
“And whereas, such endorsement by the ISB can only result in the encouragement and fostering of ‘Fake’ Labor and pseudo-Socialist parties to the detriment of the Socialist Party proper, and the misleading and betrayal of the working class;
“And such action also affords encouragement and justification for that element, existing to a greater or less extent in all Socialist Parties which is in favor of opportunistic methods and compromise;
“And whereas, this committee considers that the Party funds can be expended more usefully for the purpose of propaganda and organization than in a way which has little more than sentimental value, if any;
“For these reasons, this committee declines to consider any affiliation which entails the slightest suspicion of fusion or compromise. Such action would, moreover, be a direct violation of the Constitution of the Party, which expressly forbids any such action.
“This resolution, in the above terms, to be forwarded to the International Socialist Bureau, to the affiliated Socialist Parties, and to the Provincial Executive Committees. In point of fact, to be given the widest possible publicity” (*Western Clarion*, August 7, 1909).

Among those favoring affiliation was the Toronto local. Among those supporting the DEC decision was the Winnipeg local. The Toronto attitude was not surprising. The local consisted of several branches: an English branch with 80 members, a Jewish branch with 50 members, a Finnish branch with 180 members and an Italian branch with 10 members, these figures being approximate (*Western Clarion*, August 7, 28 and September 4, 1909). In general the foreign language groups across the country favored affiliation. Winnipeg also had a large foreign language membership and was to run into trouble before long. The issue was not at that time decisive and there were no major ructions. These were not far away.

Perfumed Slavery

The months ahead brought increasing pressure in favor of a program of reforms. The Provincial Executive Committee of Ontario found its position untenable and resigned, asking the DEC to administer the province's affairs "until such time as the Locals in Ontario shall have demonstrated by useful, united action, and sound progress, to the satisfaction of the SPC as a whole their fitness for organization provincially" (*Western Clarion*, April 9, 1910). A Winnipeg member, "WHS", wrote:

"Not only was it necessary that a fight be carried on against our common enemy, but also against the reactionaries inside the party who were bent on a plan of making the movement attractive and, above all, respectable. The same guerilla warfare is being carried on now, in Ontario and Manitoba and spasmodically in every other province. It is nothing more or less than an attempt to create a 'perfumed slavery', aping the morals of respectable bourgeois society, or trying to compete with capitalist politicians in election buffoonery.

There is only one way out of the difficulty as far as the opportunists are concerned, and that is to form a party of their own and embody the reforms in their platform which they think necessary to catch the workers' votes" (June 4, 1910).

The foreign language locals (although probably not aware of this advice), influenced more by the "social-democracy" of their homelands than by the revolutionary thinking of the SPC, whose language they did not yet fully understand, took the lead in breaking away from the Party. In October 1910 the Manitoba Ukrainian locals gathered in Winnipeg and formed the Social Democratic Party of Canada, adopting a program heavy with reforms. In April 1911 the Ontario Finnish branches convened in Toronto, broke away from the Party and formed the Canadian Socialist Federation. Later in the same year both parties got together, adopting the Manitoba name.

The foreign language members did not all desert the SPC. Some held to the Party views. Nor did all the English speaking reformers tumble into the SDP. Most at this time remained within the Party but not for the Party's good. They still hoped to water down its "dogmatism" sufficiently to gain acceptance of aims more palatable to the electorate. So the conflict within the Party continued.

In October 1911 a provincial convention was held in BC at which the Party principles and attitude toward reforms came under heavy attack, the convention deciding in favor of a reform policy. The *Western Clarion*, December 2, 1911, reported the resignation of D. G. McKenzie from the offices of *Clarion* editor and Party secretary. In the issue of December 16 McKenzie gave as the reason for his resignation the "utter vapidness and futility" of the convention. Owing to the negligence of "real SPC Locals" the majority of delegates at the convention had been members "out of sympathy with the platform and principles of the SP of C". Of this majority, he said, "a number of them are ostentatiously leaving the party, the wisest thing they have yet done and certainly the best thing they have ever done for the party".

The DEC taking office on January 1, 1912 rejected the right of a provincial

convention to make changes affecting the Party as a whole and insisted on past practices continuing.

In February 1912 a provincial election was held in BC, Parker Williams being reelected and J. T. Place, a former member who had joined the Social Democratic Party, gaining the vacancy left by Hawthornthwaite who had decided to try for election to the dominion parliament. Williams joined the SDP shortly after and, McInnis having lost his seat in the election of 1909, the Party was for the first time without representation in the province.

It was a gloomy period for the SPC. The *Western Clarion* was forced to cease publication for several months, from November 1912 until the following March, meanwhile being assigned space in the *BC Federationist*, the journal of the BC Federation of Labor. The SDP was establishing itself across the country more solidly than had been possible to parties of the kind previously. It issued unity appeals to the SPC which were rejected. One of these from *Cotton's Weekly* caused McKenzie to comment:

“Anything we might gain from combination would be more than offset by internal strife. The way we are now, we don't scrap because we don't get together, and so we devote to propaganda what energy we devote to anything. But joined, we would devote a great deal of that energy to scrapping, and would do it very well, but the propaganda would lose out. The SDP elements would work hard to have their pet reforms incorporated in the Platform and the SPC elements would work hard to keep them out. Now we each have a platform that at least does not get on our nerves, though it is quite clear that the worst of our platform does not belong to us and the best of theirs does not belong to them. We got the worst of ours from the SDP which joined us once and neglected to take it with them when they left. We won't say how they got the best of theirs. And that, by the way, was an experiment in suppositious unity. What a merry hell of a time we had while we were together . . .” (*Western Clarion*, May 1, 1913).

Election in Alberta

C. M. O'Brien was elected to the Alberta legislature in 1909. O'Brien had been associated with the Party from 1903, most of the time as an organizer in the mining camps of BC and Alberta, then in the cities and towns of the prairies as far east as Winnipeg, bringing the message of Socialism to workers and farmers who had never heard it before. Following his election he set off across the plains on an organizing tour, addressed scores of meetings, some with police interference and spending a few days in jail. When the legislature was in session a Liberal member rose to a “point of order” complaining that O'Brien who was then in the midst of a lengthy address, was not speaking to the question but giving a lecture on Socialism (*Western Clarion*, May 14, 1910).

The Party during this period and for some years after was examining Socialist Party of Great Britain interpretations, articles from the *Socialist Standard* appearing regularly in the *Clarion*. The strengthening of its anti-reformism reflected SPGB thinking. But the Party was not moving away from reformism fast enough for some of its members and early in 1911 the Toronto Local seceded and formed the Socialist Party of North America, damning the Party's lingering "reformism". The Toronto members were strongly influenced by an SPGBer resident in Canada, Moses Baritz, previously mentioned, an aggressive, tail-twisting exponent of SPGB views, who spent much of his time in Toronto. The Socialist Party of North America did not grow and dissolved after a few years, its members, or some of them, returning to the SPC feeling that their differences did not justify separate existence. But the SPNA had the distinction of being the first group in Canada to accept in entirety the principles of the SPGB.

Members

Something has been said in these pages about some of the better known members of the Party; Wrigley, Pettipiece, Kingsley, Mortimer, Morgan, O'Brien and others being mentioned, sometimes in more than passing terms. These were admirable propagandists, lecturers, writers, educators. They were more or less affected by the influences of their day: reformism, asiatic exclusion, religion, trade unionism, anti-trade unionism, etc. But they gradually subdued the carryovers from the past and struggled to raise the Party to a greater level of Socialist understanding. Little in this way can be said for the Party members in the BC legislature, who were legacies from the miners' unions interested more in retaining the support of the miners than in furthering Socialism, to which they gave bare, often vague service. McDonald, in the letter already quoted, wrote:

"All these members represented mining constituencies. While there was a local of the Party in each division, there were very few in possession of Socialist knowledge. The result was that whoever got elected considered it to be his constituency rather than that of the Party. In fact it became his. He it was who voiced the needs of the miners as unionists seeking reforms in mining laws and living conditions. At times the PEC, perturbed by the actions of its legislators, did its utmost to correct their procedure but it had no effect. The miners union had the votes and it was these things, and not education, that were required for election. Ultimately the three members had to be disowned. It was a contradictory and ludicrous situation".

D. G. McKenzie wrote, "It is generally unsafe to write in praise of anyone except it be on his tombstone". A few words about McKenzie are overdue.

McKenzie became a member of the Party in 1904. He was not a lecturer but it was not long before articles signed "Mc" appeared in the *Clarion*. He soon became recognized as the Party's finest writer and was editor of the paper from 1908 to 1911. His writings, sometimes gentle, humorous, sometimes forceful, biting, were widely

reprinted, a brief editorial in 1911, 'Stupidus and Sapiens', appearing many times in other journals, even in recent years. He wrote the *Manifesto of the Socialist Party of Canada* and a Preface to its Fourth Edition that was often quoted. He was remembered by members long after he died in 1918. Even in his own day members urged that a book made up of his writings be published.

Alberta Again

Through 1913 Party affairs continued generally without special developments. Alberta was the setting for the greatest activity. The Alberta Provincial Executive Committee reported during the last half of 1912 there were 26 locals in the province with 362 members and seven organizers (*Western Clarion*, March 15, 1913). Four candidates contested the 1913 Alberta provincial election, one being O'Brien who sought reelection. J. H. Burrough, editor of the *Clarion* at the time, wrote that the Party as a whole was afflicted by "the general malady of 'laissez faire'" (March 8, 1913), but the members in Alberta engaged in high speed electoral activity, stimulated by the campaign. C. Lestor, on the scene and taking part in the activity, wrote, "The movement in Alberta is superior to the movement in BC. There is more energy, more vitality to it" (May 10, 1913). The Party candidates, including O'Brien, were all defeated.

War

War came in 1914. The tensions among the nations, building up during the months and years before, launched at last a destruction of man and his works on a scale vastly greater than humanity had ever before known. Hatred against the "enemy" was brewed in official places, and it wasn't safe for anyone born in Germany to let this be known. Nor was it safe to be less than wholly committed to the allied "cause".

The DEC of the SPC met on August 6, 1914 and agreed a 'Manifesto to the Workers of Canada':

"In view of the European situation, and the efforts of the capitalist press and politicians to stir up a war fever in Canada, to the end that Canadian workingmen will be induced to take up arms in defence of the interests of their masters, the Socialist Party of Canada, instead of passing futile resolutions of protest, would call your attention to the following facts:

"(1) Inasmuch as all modern wars have their origin in disputes of the international capitalist class for markets in which to dispose of the stolen products of labor, or to protect themselves in the possession of markets they already have, the motive of the anticipated struggle in Europe is of no real interest to the international working class. "(2) Further, as the struggle, if materialized, will claim as its victims countless thousands of the members of our class in a quarrel that is not theirs, it behoves the workers not to be carried away by the frenzied clamorings of the blare of martial music. In no conceivable manner, shape or form could the interests of the workers of

any of the nationalities involved be furthered or protected by their participation in the conflict.

“(3) Since the international working class produces all the wealth of the world, and still possesses nothing, receiving in the shape of wages but sufficient to maintain a slavish existence, and since the international capitalist class occupies the position of a social parasite, producing nothing and possessing everything, which position it is able to maintain by virtue of its control of the powers of State – the only struggle that can be of vital interest to the working class of all nations, is that which has for its object the wresting of this power from the hands of the master class, and using it to remove all forms of exploitation and servitude. To this struggle the Socialist Party of Canada calls you. The only barrier standing in our way is ignorance in the ranks of our own class. As an International Working Class we have but one enemy – the International Capitalist Class.

“WORKERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE! YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT YOUR CHAINS: YOU HAVE A WORLD TO GAIN.’

“Issued by the Dominion Executive Committee, Socialist Party of Canada, Vancouver, August 6, 1914” (*Western Clarion*, August 15, 1914).

War at Home

Officialdom wasted little time prosecuting the war at home. As early as September 12, 1914 the *Clarion* reported:

“The Winnipeg Police Commission, according to the *Free Press*, has prohibited ‘the holding of public meetings in the streets or the use of incendiary or inflammatory language in any place’. Controller Midwinter expressed the belief that the ‘indiscriminate speech-making on the Market Square was an abuse of the privilege of free speech, so universally enjoyed in the British Empire’.”

The holding of public meetings, particularly outdoor meetings which had always been the Party’s main propagandist outlet, became increasingly difficult. Interference by the police was frequent, charges more vile and sentences more vicious. J. Reid and W. Gribble in 1916, in widely separate parts of the country, were both “proven” guilty of “sedition” and imprisoned (*Western Clarion*, March 1916). In May the same year Organizer Connor in Vancouver said street meetings had to be discontinued, the secretary explaining, “Opposition of a violent and vicious character has lately developed, apparently engineered from ‘higher up’.” (May 1916).

Near the end of 1914 W. A. Pritchard became Party secretary and editor of the *Clarion*, taking over from J. H. Burrough who had resigned from these offices because of opposition among the members to an editorial regarded as contrary to Party views on the war. The hostility of the Party to the European conflict was not lessened by its troubles with the authorities. It continued on the road to Socialism and allowed no misunderstandings of its attitude to the war.

The *Clarion* tended to become the principal outlet for Party views, but meetings were held to the extent that these were possible and three elections were contested during the war. In the Dominion election of 1915 George Armstrong represented the Party in Winnipeg. In the 1916 provincial election in BC W. A. Pritchard, J. A. McDonald, J. Harrington and A. Goodwin were Party candidates. In the 1917 Alberta provincial campaign J. R. Knight, J. Reid, G. Paton, S. R. Keeling and H. Thomas represented the Party. No members were elected.

Conscription

In 1917 the supply of volunteers for the armed forces had declined to the point where the government declared its intention to introduce compulsory military service. The trade union movement announced its opposition. In the east the opposition rested in the unwillingness of the government to consult “labor’s chief representatives”. French Canada carried on its own war against the capitalist war and was a headache to the government from beginning to end. Trade unions in the west, still influenced by the SPC, favored a general strike. The Party expressed itself in this way:

“Thus we protest emphatically against the proposed Act to enforce Military Service upon us. Our masters’ quarrels do not arouse any enthusiasm in us. Our quarrel has ever been, since we realized our position as slaves, and ever will be, until our status as slaves is abolished, one against the master class the world over. The International Working Class has but one REAL enemy, the International Capitalist Class” (*Western Clarion*, July 1917).

In June the Military Service Act was passed by parliament and put into effect. This released a new bundle of trouble for all those evading or helping evasions of the new law. Tom Cassidy went to the Quebec woods where the police could get no assistance in locating him. Sid Rose disappeared in Manitoba but was caught and, refusing to put on a uniform, went to jail. Dave Aitken and Joe Naylor were arrested and charged with assisting draft evaders. “Ginger” Goodwin was shot and killed by a police constable who was charged with his murder and acquitted. Roy Devore went to an Alberta hideaway used by other evaders and known as “Defaulters Camp”. So it went.

Some members went to the United States, Alaska and Mexico, but this was not helpful in all cases. The United States was now in the war and not less relentless in pursuing opposition. Alex Shepherd walked across the border at North Dakota but was arrested in Seattle some months later and returned to Canada. Chas. Lestor was sentenced to a year in jail and \$1000 fine in Fairbanks, Alaska charged with seditious utterances. Moses Baritz was arrested in Seattle and charged with being an anarchist and IWW member. Both the US and Canadian governments seemed satisfied that any charge was good so long as it ensured that the ensnared either went to war or to jail.

Workers Socialist Party

Members who reached Detroit helped to organize the Workers Socialist Party of the United States which issued a manifesto on the war reproduced November 1917 in the *Clarion*. The statement was essentially the same as that of the SPC and an arrangement was made assigning the new party a page of space in the *Clarion*. Exigencies of war shortened the life of this arrangement but a good start was made in May 1918 with three pages of material including a lengthy article by W. H. Camfield and one by James Conlan. The Workers Socialist Party was the forerunner of the World Socialist Party with which the SPC is today associated.

Bolshevism

The Bolshevik party rose to power in Russia in October 1917, proclaiming the world's first proletarian revolution. Workers all over the world calling themselves Socialist were filled with enthusiasm and hope. At last the society they had struggled for was coming into being over a sixth of the earth's surface! Studies of the Bolshevik success became widespread to determine what lessons could be learned from Russia and applied elsewhere. New names appeared in working class publications: Lenin, Trotsky, Radek, Zinoviev, Bolsheviks who all had things to say intended to show the way from Russian revolution to world revolution.

In January 1918 an article by Trotsky, reprinted from another journal, appeared in the *Clarion*. From then on articles by Russian revolutionaries became frequent in its pages. The April issue carried a letter by the DEC to the Central Committee of the Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates, Petrograd, expressing pleasure at the progress of the revolution. The same issue had an editorial supporting the Bolsheviks. The Provincial Executive Committee of the Party in Manitoba published as a leaflet the preface to Trotsky's *Bolsheviki and World Peace*; also one by Lenin, *Ideas on Russian Revolution*.

But one writer, noting the talk of the formation of a third International, wrote:

“We venture the assertion that the nucleus of a new International . . . is today in the making, composed of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, the Workers Socialist Party of the United States and the Socialist Party of Canada” (*Western Clarion*, August 1918).

Hysteria

Working class rebels were not the only ones affected by events in Russia. The government saw bomb-throwing Bolsheviks in all directions and took measures against the “menace”. By order in council September 1918 more than a dozen organizations were banned, mostly foreign language groups, the ban in addition being intended to apply to

“Any association, organization or corporation which, while Canada is engaged in war,

should have for one of its purposes the bringing about of any governmental, political, social, industrial or economic change within Canada by the use of force, violence or physical injury to person or property, or threatened such injury in order to accomplish such change” (Thesis etc G. R. F. Troop, 1922).

The SPC was not suppressed but it received attention in other ways, encouraged by the authorities and often reported even by the daily press. The following is from the Winnipeg trades council journal, *Western Labor News*, January 31, 1919:

“On Sunday last returned soldiers said to number from 1800 to 2000 men, with perhaps 700 in uniform, marched from their headquarters to the Market Square and broke up the meeting of the SP of C.

Whenever a foreigner ‘squarehead’ is seen on the street his papers are demanded and he has to run for his life or get a bad mauling.

In scores of cases men were seriously hurt, homes entered and upset, buildings raided and demolished, etc. Among the latter was the headquarters of the SP of C on Smith St. The work of destruction here was complete.”

This kind of conduct was not surprising, continued the report, considering the advice of the *Free Press*. “This paper openly incited violence.”

The *Western Clarion* was banned in November 1918. On December 18 a new journal appeared, *The Red Flag*. An editorial in its issue of January 11 said:

“The official organ of the Party has been suppressed and representations to Ottawa are so far without results. Leaflets mailed have been confiscated and complaints ignored. Almost every letter . . . bears unmistakable signs of having been tampered with, though no censorship mark to that effect is on them.”

The editorial spoke of extensive interference with mail coming to and going from the Party office, adding, “The mail of individual members of the Party also suffers from the same despicable secret censorship”.

The Red Flag continued twice a month until October 11, then was suppressed. On October 18 Volume 1, Number 1 of the *Indicator* appeared. In January 1920 the ban on the *Clarion* was lifted and the paper appeared again on January 15 containing this note:

“When the *Clarion* was banned and after several attempts to get the ban lifted had failed, the *Red Flag* was issued. This name was under pressure, later changed to the *Indicator* which we have continued to publish as a weekly to this date. The *Indicator* is now discontinued.”

The war had been over for more than a year and only now were wartime restraints becoming relaxed. In some ways they were strengthened. The Kerr publications had

been banned and it was an offence to even possess a book or pamphlet published by the Kerr company. Possession of other books or papers could also be an offence. The Canadian government, which had embarked on an independent campaign of oppression early in the war now seemed to be influenced by the United States government, then engaged in a massive witch hunt. O'Brien, in the land of the free, wrote:

“Three of us were taken in a nation-wide raid and were allowed bail on New Year’s eve . . . We were charged with criminal anarchy. As usual, they accuse us of that which they are guilty of themselves” (*Western Clarion*, February 2, 1920).

Winnipeg General Strike

The fright engendered by the Russian revolution gave fuel to the terror activity.

Nearly every action of an industrial or political character engaged in by workers to protect or improve their conditions of existence was seen as evidence of an overall plan to impose Bolshevism on the country. This attitude blanketed the cause and purpose of the Winnipeg strike of 1919.

There was undoubtedly an overall plan operating in the country, but it had nothing to do with Bolshevism. With the ending of the war and the return of tens of thousands of soldiers to civilian life, the employing class saw in the resulting clamor for jobs an opportunity to destroy the trade union hold established on industry during the war years. The strike started in the metal trades, the workers struggling to protect the right of collective bargaining. The general strike was a sympathy strike, the workers in other industries believing that what was happening to the metal workers would soon be happening to them. The employers used the Bolshevik bogey to weaken the workers’ position and increase official concern, actual and fraudulent. The strike, so went the pretence, was not a strike but a revolution.

The crusade was so successful that the strike was soon broken, a large number of those favoring or taking part in it being arrested, the eight “strike leaders” sent to prison on charges that included “seditious conspiracy to overthrow the state”.

At this point an interesting comparison may be noted. W. A. Pritchard, one of the “conspirators”, said at the trial:

“As I stand here before you in this court, my mind travels to the 17th of February, in the year 1600, when Giordano Bruno offered his life, bound to the stake in the flower market of Rome, because of his scientific analysis of the then known world; because he followed his intellectual master Copernicus and had declared in certain writings that the earth was not geocentric; that the earth was not the center of the solar system, but the sun. Of course, he had taken these findings and levelled them against the superstition and ignorance of his day, and because of that fact we find him bound to a

stake on the 17th of February, in the year 1600, in the flower market of Rome” (*W. A. Pritchard’s Address to the Jury*, Winnipeg, p. 4).

R. B. Russell (another of the “conspirators”) said:

“A torch applied to a green field may not be likely to cause a fire, yet when the grass is ripe and dry a spark may cause a conflagration. Just so, words spoken in privacy or during a quarrel, or in the heat of the moment, or in normal times, may be unlikely to have a seditious effect, and may be overlooked; yet when spoken in times of stress and in more public places, may be likely to cause such discontent, hostility and disturbance as to be seditious. If the words spoken or published are seditious, it is no defence that they are true, and evidence to prove the truth is inadmissible” (*The Winnipeg General Sympathetic Strike*, Winnipeg, p. 238).

The Socialist Party was in no way involved in the strike. Yet five of the eight imprisoned were members of the Party [16] and numerous quotations from Party literature and correspondence were used in the trials to establish that the strike was the work of the devil. The onslaught against collective bargaining was not considered.

On July, 1920 the *Western Clarion* reported Armstrong’s election to the Manitoba legislature. Russell also ran and was eliminated on the 37th count.

As noted earlier, the Party had never been an advocate of violence. It look to the soap box in numerous elections and never mistook broken bricks for political power. In the free speech police riots before the war more police were injured falling over their own feet than from counter-attacks by their victims. The nearest the Party came in concession to violence was stated in the *Manifesto*:

“Political action we define as any action taken by the slave class against the master class to obtain control of the powers of state, or by the master class to retain control, using these powers to secure them in the means of life. In one country it may be the ballot, in another the mass strike, in a third insurrection. These matters will be determined and dictated by the exigencies of time and place” (*Manifesto of the Socialist Party of Canada*, p. 39, 1920 edition).

But violence was all around: the slaughter in Europe, the persecution at home, the Russian upheaval and the war against Bolshevism, all these and revolts exploding in one country and another caused many to believe a reassessment of Party views was necessary. Particularly was it felt that a parliamentary transition from capitalism to Socialism was no longer believable. The rapid road of civil war, which the Bolsheviks claimed was imminent throughout the capitalist world and which, with the proper leadership, would end in victory for the workers, appealed to them. They became converts to the Bolshevik road to revolution.

The concern of Lenin and his associates with events outside Russia was quite clear.

They believed the victory in Russia could only be maintained by the rise to power of the workers of other countries and they devoted much time encouraging the workers to travel the Bolshevik road. This led to efforts by them to gain control of the workers' movement.

Bolshevik theory and the "need" to establish a "dictatorship of the proletariat" patterned after the one in Russia, became regular fare in the *Western Clarion*. But the discussion was not one-sided. There were those in the Party who, though strongly sympathetic to the revolution in Russia, were not sold on the idea that a dictatorship of the proletariat was either necessary or desirable. They insisted that the course followed by the Party was still proper in a country where, they insisted, the proletariat had not reached revolutionary consciousness. In this vein J. A. McDonald wrote:

"Instead of hollering ourselves hoarse about the virtues of mass action that can do something spectacular, and not understand why we do it, let us work in the sphere in which we find ourselves and teach Socialism to others of our class" (*Western Clarion*, November 16, 1920).

Third International

In July 1920 a document was presented to the Second Congress of the Third International by its executive committee. This document contained the "Conditions for Joining the Communist International", also known as the "Twenty-one points". It soon spread around the world, intensifying reappraisals and emotional, even violent, conflicts. The "twenty-one points" [17] required that all affiliated parties subject themselves to the decisions of the executive committee of the Communist International; war against reformers "of all shades and color", "social patriots", "social pacifists", etc; establish illegal organizations even where legal activity was permitted; permeate and carry on propaganda in the armed forces; support colonial "liberation movements"; further the "international unification of the Red Labor Unions"; "render all possible aid to the Soviet Republics", etc; these being its salient features.

Referendums on affiliation occurred in organizations throughout the world, many of these organizations joining the new International. But it did not matter greatly what the outcome of a referendum was, Communists were instructed to take over where the vote was favorable and to break away and establish new organizations where the vote was unfavorable. They gained both ways. A referendum occurred in the SPC. The Party survived, but large numbers of members supported affiliation and the Communist breakaway policy depleted Party ranks, even properties being lost where local votes favored affiliation.

Near the end of 1920 the Workers Party of Canada (later the Communist Party) was formed, the Russian government moving deeper into the world political arena sponsoring a "workers revolutionary movement" whose main function was to further

the foreign and domestic policies of the Russian government.

Decline

The Party had taken a battering. The pre-war formation of the Social Democratic Party had lessened the areas of internal friction but also the Party's numbers. The wartime persecutions had driven members to far places from which many did not return. The Russian revolution brought uncertainty and turmoil and a further loss of numbers. The Party continued its support of Bolshevism, but rejected the opportunism and slavishness of its foreign legion, an armed camp situation developing which was indeed a situation growing between the followers of Lenin and all organizations they could not control.

The reassessment theme came up again. The election of Armstrong to the Manitoba parliament was less an evidence of increasing Socialist activity than trade union compensation for his prison term; in the following election the trade unions turned in other directions. Two Party candidates contested the BC provincial election of 1924: Pritchard and Harrington, a substantial change from the numbers in previous campaigns. The Party was declining and members faced the growing forces of reformism, face-lifted by transformation into the "revolutionary demands" of the Third International. The *Clarion*, formerly enlivened by controversy exuberant and forward reaching, became depressed by weighty theses now turning backward.

The tendency met resistance. C. Stephenson and E. McLeod, editors of the journal when Pritchard drew government attention, remained with the paper through the 1920s and came under fire. McDonald objected to the reform articles of Stephenson, the "pussy-footing" of the *Clarion* and the accompanying disintegration in the Party. Ross, Lestor and others tried to keep the Socialist objective to the fore. But Party activity approached vanishing point and the circulation of the *Clarion* declined steadily, its expenses now being met in part by the remains of the Whitbread estate. The issue dated July-August 1925 was its last, consisting largely of nostalgia and glimpses into a future that would or would not, according to different views, follow the road the Party had travelled.

New Beginning

Several years passed. A Proletarian Club came into being in Vancouver, a Science Study Club in Winnipeg, similar groups elsewhere, as some of those who had been the Socialist Party of Canada sought ways of keeping alive the purpose for which the Party had existed. In June 1931 the Socialist Party of Canada began again in Winnipeg.

At this time Russell was secretary of the One Big Union, Lestor the editor of its weekly *OBU Bulletin*. Between them a room for preliminary meetings was arranged, free of charge, in the OBU's Plebs Building, free publicity being provided in the

Bulletin. Among those taking part in the founding meetings were Armstrong, Lestor, Neale, Breeze and Kaiser, Shepherd arriving from Chicago to join them. The Party soon rented a hall and started holding public meetings.

Almost at once the members adopted the Declaration of Principles of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, deciding that this was a clearer statement of principles than had been the Platform of the SPC. This began an association with the SPGB that has never been shaken.

Cooperative Commonwealth Federation

The labor parties were now much to the fore. They had been gaining support since the days of the Social Democratic Party, although the SDP only briefly survived the war. In the Ontario provincial election of 1919 eleven labor and five labor-farmer candidates were elected. In December of the same year three labor candidates were elected to the Winnipeg city council, which continued afterwards to have labor representation. Similar successes occurred in other provinces.

In 1932 there were numerous labor, farmer and “progressive” groups spread across the country sharing a common desire to make capitalism a better society. There were even “socialist” parties ready to postpone Socialism in any cause they considered worthy. These groups came together during the year and formed the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. Canada now had a national party of sorts intended to serve the underdog.

In the years that followed the new party did not make great headway but it gained representation in the federal and several provincial parliaments and formed a government that held office for many years in Saskatchewan.

Nor did the SPC make great headway. Propaganda meetings were held, indoor in the winter, on the Market Square and some street corners in the summer. And some contacts were made with former members in other centers, including Vancouver.

Western Socialist

There had been discussions on the desirability of a Party journal. In 1933 a local started shaping up in Vancouver, the members there hoping to contest the provincial election to be held in BC that fall. It was agreed that if a journal were produced in time for the campaign this could give helpful publicity to the new local, to the election activities and to the journal. The new *Western Socialist* was launched in October of that year.

The Vancouver Local ran four candidates who were, of course, not elected.

The first issue of the new paper analysed the CCF and found it wanting. The second

issue gave similar treatment to the Communist Party. The Party never afterwards found reason to change its attitude toward the two main exponents of a reformed capitalism. It had become strengthened in the conviction that reforms could not deal effectively with working class problems, but could at best bring limited relief often cancelled by other problems or by new problems equally urgent. Capitalism could not end social evils.

Clarity on Russia

Russia also came in for more serious examination. During the days of pro-Bolshevik enthusiasm there had been members who insisted that the Bolsheviks could not build Socialism in a country predominantly peasant and barely emerging from feudalism, but their voice had been buried in cheers for the revolution. The cheers were now becoming subdued and many who had followed the Bolshevik dictum to “throw away their books, the time for action had come”, were gathering in their books again, realizing they had been living in a world of wishful thinking, that the Bolsheviks, whatever their original intentions had been, were not interested in world revolution but in a sufficient amount of world turmoil to aid the growth of a Russian state capitalist economy, hiding perforce behind Marxian phrases. The passing years made this more apparent as the Russian government became increasingly involved in the world of capitalist affairs.

So too the Marxian phrase “dictatorship of the proletariat”, long recognized as having no resemblance to any situation to which Marx and Engels applied the term, but justified on the ground that a revolution was not a tea party, was rejected as a brutal fraud, the Russian dictatorship being in fact a dictatorship over the proletariat and others in Russia as ruthless as any dictatorship in the capitalist world. Socialists opposed the society of Lenin – now Stalin – just as they opposed capitalism in other countries.

Communists and Another War

The Communists remained loyal and obedient to the dictatorship, continuing with deceit and violence to pressure others into the Bolshevik mold and to wreck all who could not be ruled. Free speech fights on the Market Square, formerly carried on against the police, were not carried on against the Communists, Party speakers being forced from the soap box. Violence was frequent where Stalin’s forces had the greatest numbers.

In 1939 the world was again at war and the Communists, having carried on an intensive propagandist “war against fascism” rushed into the allied armies to fight against Hitler and Mussolini. But they had not sufficiently taken into account the non-aggression pact just signed between Hitler and Stalin. When its significance was brought to them a change occurred:

“The new change was interpreted by many to be one of opposition to the war. This is not correct. The Communists did not adopt the Socialist attitude towards the war; they campaigned for an acceptance of Hitler’s peace terms. The Moscow-Berlin pact required that they changed sides, a feat which they accomplished without hesitation, despite all their years of raving against Hitler.” [18]

In mid-1941 Hitler and his advisers decided that the pact with Stalin was no longer of service to the German ruling class and it was scrapped. The German military machine rolled into Russia:

“Shrieks arose from Communist camps everywhere. Out of their hiding places came the Communists, flag-flapping and pledging undying allegiance to the cause of peace and democracy and the struggle against Fascism. They pointed to their supporters who had donned uniforms during the first pro-war policy and had not been able to get them off again, and they declared that here was evidence of the sincerity and devotion of Communism in the struggle for freedom . . . The war was once more a just war.”

For years the Communists had proclaimed their readiness to lead the workers through smoke and flame to the new world. Now they were hanging to the tail of one section of the ruling class then another, supporting each in turn against the other and urging the workers to follow. Their record since then has not been better.

Socialist Party and the War

The SPC attitude to the war was one of opposition, a manifesto similar to the one in 1914 stating the Party conviction that no interest was at stake justifying the shedding of working-class blood. At the same time discussions within the Party resulted in the *Western Socialist*, which had continued as a monthly journal since its founding, being sent to Boston, to be continued by the Workers Socialist Party as a joint WSP-SPC publication. It was felt that only in this way was there hope for its continued existence. The journal survived and is still being published.

Activities continued through the war. “Enemy aliens” were put into concentration camps, Communists went from concentration camps to recruiting platforms, Japanese were moved inland from the west coast, the SPC was “investigated” but not otherwise troubled. The Party held meetings, even outdoor meetings, without interference. Presumably the authorities considered that its numbers were not great enough to warrant special attention. The press and clergy were also better behaved, refraining from their coarse viciousness of the first world war.

Labor in Two Wars

The trade union movement had been divided in its attitude to the first war. In the east it supported the war, its main complaint being that labor’s leaders were not consulted on government labor policy and not included on government boards. In the west the

unions said harsh things about the war, often expressing opposition to it. Of the workers' reform parties the Social Democratic Party, the principal one of its kind, issued a manifesto fully as hostile as that of the SPC.

Attitudes were not the same in the second war. The trade unions, embittered by Hitler's treatment of unionism in Germany, regarded the war against Hitler as necessary to the preservation of democracy and the protection of trade unions. The main political movement of the "underdog" was the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and being guided by "intellectuals" (regarded affectionately by the CCF as a "brains trust") it had no knowledge of what the war was about. J. S. Woodsworth, who had long preferred sentimental to sound treatment of social evils, yet took a position on the war much like that of the SPC and shook the CCF from coast to coast. The party rallied however and M. J. Coldwell, later to succeed Woodsworth as party leader, stated the official war position: economic assistance to the allied powers; no military participation; troops to be used only for the defence of Canada and the preservation of democracy at home. In a couple of weeks this sturdy declaration was supplemented: "Before a single Canadian is asked to give his life, voluntarily or otherwise, to fight for his country, the profit should be taken out of war". Angus McInnis, west coast MP, conceded a bit more when he grumbled on an aging theme, "One thing struck me very forcibly . . . Labor representation is almost entirely lacking". Then came the report, "Mr. Coldwell again reiterated the CCF stand that the only rational way of financing the war is by the country taking over the complete ownership of the banks and other financial institutions". So the CCF inched along the road to war.[19]

New Democratic Party

The trade unions had long been interested in political action. As early as the 1870s John A. MacDonald, Canada's first prime minister, took part in the business of manoeuvring trade union votes to Conservative Party advantage, and the unions frequently gave ear to the siren calls of hard case politicians. They also made attempts to organize or take part in the organization of political parties, without lasting success. After the turn of the century unions in the west supported mainly the SPC, but as the Party turned away from reformism the unions turned away from the Party to support those looked up as "the friends of labor", finally the CCF.

In the 1950s the feeling grew among trade unionists that they should not simply support the party they favored but also have a voice in its affairs. This led to negotiations between the Canadian Labor Congress and the CCF, ending in 1961 with the formation of the New Democratic Party, "a broadly based people's political movement which embraces the CCF, the labor movement, farmer organizations, professional people and other liberally-minded persons interested in basic social reforms . . ." This is today's Canada's substitute for a labor party.

There are a number of other political parties now appealing to the workers for

support. Some are chips off the Communist Party, such as the Trotskyists and Maoists who, like the parent body would lead the workers to “Socialism”, a hodge-podge of reformism, anti-Americanism and Russian, Chinese or Canadian nationalism. Other political groups, with their own panaceas, offer leadership and wisdom, more of the former than the latter, and nothing of merit.

Conclusion

The SPC from its earliest days could never manage to enthuse over leaders and today wouldn't change a word in the comment of D. G. McKenzie back in 1908:

“The Poor Scotchman is willing to trot alongside of any old plug that is going his way, but must decline with thanks to be led anywhere by anybody, lead he ever so wisely, and absolutely refuses to be saved by a saviour, any saviour, political, economic, industrial, ethical, moral or spiritual. It is a case of welcome, earth-born comrade, but to Hell with the Heaven-sent” (*Western Clarion*, February 8, 1908).

The Party has carried on with the message of Socialism through the years, exploring all avenues available in spreading its views. Meetings indoors and outdoors have been held. Radio talks have been arranged. On rare occasions it has managed to be on Television. It has contested elections, funds permitting, in Winnipeg, Vancouver and Victoria. It has steadily circulated the *Socialist Standard* and *Western Socialist*, and published some pamphlets, including a sixth edition to the *Manifesto of the SPC*, the name changed to *The Socialist Manifesto*. It has also published many leaflets, a series of these during 1957 to 1959 being produced in hundreds of thousands by the SPC and the WSP, some later produced in pamphlet form by the SPGB. In recent years the head office was moved from Winnipeg to Victoria.

The Party today is small in numbers and lacking in the glamour of the old Party. But since its adoption of the SPGB Declaration of Principles in 1931 it has been associated with a movement that has spread around the world and now consists of companion parties in seven countries, groups in several others and journals in Britain, the United States, Austria, New Zealand, Jamaica and two in Canada (one in French). Some of these journals are modest and occasional, but there has never been a time since Marx and Engels raised Socialism from utopia to science when Socialist thinking was as constant, consistent and widespread. The movement's numbers are small but growing, and its influence is growing, as it must. It has a world to win.

[1] Saskatchewan and Alberta did not become provinces until 1905.

[2] *Western Clarion*, October 29, 1903. The inserted quotation is from Engels' Preface to *The Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels.

[3] The removal of the word “justly” in the 2nd paragraph and changes in wording later occurred.

[4] The “alleged labor” candidate, Chris Foley, was defeated, attributable in part, according to *The Voice*, February 6, to the campaign of opposition on the part of the “irreconcilable Socialists”.

[5] In the dominion election of 1904, J. T. Mortimer, a Party candidate in BC polled 752 votes. “In the provincial election one year ago, nearly twice as many voted for him. On that occasion the trade unionists supported him, but in the last contest he asked only those to support him who could do as Socialists” (*The Voice*, November 11, 1903).

[6] “Publishers’ Notice: After a year of ‘blind staggers’ and gasping for breath the *Western Clarion* with this issue resumes publication upon a sound basis”. E. T. Kingsley and L. T. English named as “owners and publishers”. (*Western Clarion*, January 28, 1905).

[7] It needs to be remembered that the *Western Clarion* was privately owned.

[8] *Western Socialist*, January 24, 1903. In Winnipeg *The Voice* became aware that Chinese had arrived on the prairie: “At the beginning of last week the cooking staff and some of the kitchen assistants at the General Hospital were dismissed and their places filled by Chinese . . . The dismissal of white help and the substitution of Chinese in a public institution is preposterous” (*The Voice*, April 28, 1905).

[9] Another pamphlet on the subject was published by the Party and occasional articles in the *Clarion*, a lengthy article ‘Socialist Movement and the Farmer’, appearing in the issue of April 4, 1908.

[10] Chas. H. Kerr and Co., Chicago, were the publishers of a large number of Socialist books. The ban covered their entire list, brought on by the panic in governing circles during and after World War I.

[11] “The second annual convention of the BC Federation of Labor flatly endorsed Socialism as being the only truly effective weapon in the hands of the working class” (*Western Clarion*, February 17, 1912).

[12] “The object of the Social Democratic Party is to educate the workers in Canada to a consciousness of their class position in society, their economic servitude to the owners of capital, and to organize them into a political party to seize the reins of government and transfer all capitalistic property into the collective property of the working class.” (Quoted from Thesis for MA Degree, McGill University, by G. R. F. Troop, March 1922.)

[13] It did not go unobserved that religious organizations, notably the Salvation Army, were never charged with obstructing the street or disturbing the peace when they held forth outdoors. They did not, of course, favor a new world, except hereafter.

[14] This letter was written on April 5, 1959. McDonald became a member of the Party in 1909 and remained an active Socialist lecturer and writer until he died some sixty years later.

[15] *Cotton’s Weekly*, a journal established about this time in eastern Canada, at the outset supported the SPC, but when the Social Democratic Party was formed and showed signs of becoming solidly established, *Cotton’s Weekly* became the official organ of the SDP.

[16] G. Armstrong, R. Bray, R. J. Jones, W. A. Pritchard, R. B. Russell.

[17] The original document, in the *Western Clarion* January 1, 1921, contained 18 “points”. The three others, examined elsewhere, added nothing significant.

[18] This quotation and the one following are from pages 31-32 of a pamphlet, *The Russian Revolution*, published by the SPC in 1948.

[19] References to the CCF in the war, including quotations, are from the CCF journal, *Manitoba Commonwealth*, issues of Sept 15 and 29, 1939, August 30, 1940, and February 28, 1941.