

M. Beck and D. J. Dooley

ABOUT PARTIES, NEW AND OLD

We aim to replace the present capitalist system, with its inherent injustice and inhumanity, by a social order from which the domination of one class by another will be eliminated, in which economic planning will supersede unregulated private enterprise and competition, and in which genuine democratic self-government, based upon economic equality will be possible

No C.C.F. Government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full programme of socialized planning which will lead to the establishment in Canada of the Co-operative Commonwealth.

THIS WAS THE RINGING DECLARATION of the 131 delegates who attended the first national convention of the CCF Party at Regina in 1933. The Regina Manifesto stated unequivocally the party's intention to establish a socialist utopia in Canada.

Over the years the CCF has had its electoral successes. At the peak of its fortunes in 1945, it polled 812,836 votes in a federal election and returned twenty-eight members to the House of Commons. At the same time it controlled the government of Saskatchewan and constituted the official opposition in the legislatures of Ontario, Manitoba, British Columbia, and Nova Scotia.

Yet its triumphs were for the most part of short duration, and since 1945 the course of its fortunes has generally been downhill. The decline has been blamed on such various reasons as rifts within the party, faulty leadership, and bad strategy. Far more fundamental, however, have been the unfriendliness of the environment within which it has had to operate and public indifference to the ideology for which it has tried to gain support.

Parties based on ideas always have to struggle for their existence in Canada. In a nation so widespread and composed of such heterogeneous elements, there are very few ideas that will not give offence to some significant group. As their platforms illustrate, the Liberals and Conservatives learned this lesson many years ago. The CCF, on the other hand, started out with an unequivocal ideology, and an im-

portation from England at that. This second factor was important, for, as Professor John A. Irving has shown, "the Canadian people distrust profoundly a creed that is not indigenous to their country."

At first the CCF had considerable appeal as a protest movement. In the thirties, many of those suffering from the inequities of the capitalist system turned to it as a new source of hope. Later, in the wake of the dislocation and discontent caused by the war, it again attracted followers: in 1945 more than one-quarter of the 59.6 per cent of the electorate which voted against the King government voted CCF. But in the boom years following the war the situation altered completely. There was so little to protest about, or that the public considered it worthwhile to protest about, that the CCF lost much of its *raison d'être*. That part of its programme which was most attractive to the Canadian people was gradually adopted by its opponents, and the voters continued their practice of electing one of the old-line parties, usually with an immense majority.

While the CCF leaders no longer fulminated against capitalist oppression in the way they had done earlier, the Regina Manifesto and its emphasis on "class domination" still stood. In a country which is largely middle class and which possesses a high degree of social mobility, the appeal to class interest was of dubious value. Furthermore, the other parties capitalized, sometimes not very scrupulously, on this aspect of the CCF ideology. At their worst they labelled the CCF Party as Marxist and then proceeded to equate it with the Communist Party. For many members of a none-too-discriminating public, the CCF was composed not of Liberals in a hurry but of Reds in slight disguise. Over the years, the CCF had not been able to build up an attractive picture of itself in the minds of the voters, while its opponents had been able to fasten a repellent image upon it. For many Canadians, it was a party that seized fussily upon small details of parliamentary procedure or upon minor questions of civil rights while threatening to take away a major right from all citizens, the right to call their property their own. It called up suggestions of inhibiting government interference and regimentation.

Finally at its national convention in Winnipeg in August of 1956, the party recognized the facts of political life. Over the opposition of a few die-hards, it decided that in a co-operative commonwealth there would be an important role for private as well as for public and cooperative enterprise. Its statement said in part,

The C.C.F. has always recognized public ownership as the most effective means of breaking the stranglehold of private monopolies on the life of the nation and of facilitating the planning necessary for economic security and advance.

At the same time, the C.C.F. also recognizes that in many fields there will be a need

of private enterprise which can make a useful contribution to the development of our economy.

On this occasion, a visiting British Socialist, R. H. S. Crossman, said to J. B. McGeachy, "This is the same kind of re-thinking as we are doing at home." The tone of the Winnipeg Declaration was certainly very different from that of the Regina Manifesto. Gone was the old crusading fervour, gone were the denunciations of capitalism and vicious exploitation. Now Mackenzie King's description of the CCFers as Liberals in a hurry had added point.

But was the change evident to the ordinary voter? Evidently not; to him the post-1956 CCF Party looked very like the pre-1956 model. The admission by the party leaders of their past failure to conform to the demands of practicality and their announcement that the party was taking on a new look did nothing to create a more favourable image. In fact, as a new star rose on the political horizon, the repellent image became even more dominant. On March 31, 1958, the CCF elected only eight members to the House of Commons and polled only 9.5 per cent of the popular vote.

Eighteen months later, on October 6, 1959, its British counterpart also found that the road it had taken did not lead to success. Now both are conducting agonizing reappraisals. What is the most effective method, each asks, of creating a favourable image in the public mind? But, strangely, the new labour party which is in process of formation in Canada does not seem to be profiting by the experience of the Labour Party in Britain, on which it is avowedly modelled.

Even before that fateful day in October, some British observers were calling attention to the fact that, while the term *Conservative* had lost many of its former unfavourable connotations, the term *Labour* summoned up an unattractive image in the minds of many people. On the day following the election, the *London Times* pointed out that Toryism no longer suggested the sun never setting on the Empire or Britannia ruling the waves. The Conservatives had been successful in creating the impression that they were a party of young people, and that they favoured the enterprising and the ambitious. In contrast, Labour presented an image of a party excessively rigid in doctrine, out of date in its economic policies, and stultifyingly *dis-conscientious*.

In the inquests into Labour's failure that immediately began, some of Mr. Gaskell's intimate associates warned that the party could never again be successful unless its policy were re-shaped. Douglas Jay, for example, proposed that nationalisation be dropped from the new programme, that the working-class image be got

rid of, and that the party's name be changed, possibly to "Labour and Radical" or "Labour and Reform." Gordon Walker attributed the party's defeat to its alienation of the new working class, "workers in the true sense, but with a new social attitude because of their possession of cars, washing machines and the like." Just before the Labour Party conference at Blackpool in late November, the *Economist* called on Mr. Gaitskell to prepare his party for the long process of "building up a total impression that will commend it to the British public." Above all, it had to convince the country that it hoped to liquidate, not prosecute, class warfare, and, in addition, that it wished to "provide a climate that is hospitable to the by no means negligible technocratic and managerial element among the left-minded members of the middle class."

In his speech opening the convention, Mr. Gaitskell made it clear that Labour needed to re-think its position. While it should not abandon the principle of nationalization of industry it should not regard public ownership as "the be-all and end-all, the ultimate first principle and aim of Socialism." The party's constitution, he thought, was out of date and needed revision; some of the terms and concepts appropriate to conditions forty years before had been rendered meaningless by time. The typical worker of the future, he said, "is more likely to be a skilled man in a white overall, watching dials in a bright modern factory, than a badly paid cotton operative working in a dark and obsolete nineteenth-century mill."

Subsequently, in an interview with the political correspondent of the *Observer*, Mr. Gaitskell said, "I agree that recent changes in the social structure have created a problem for left-wing parties, even when in power, because it has meant the erosion of some of the automatic support which they formerly enjoyed. That is why they must make a much more deliberate and positive appeal to the new social groups which are emerging."

Therefore at least some members of the British Labour Party now recognize that the Party's emphasis on the desirability of extending public ownership has not helped it; that the old-style class antagonisms have to be dropped; and that the social picture has changed radically since the time when the Party first became a major force in British politics. Douglas Jay has declared that the party must realize that some of its problems spring from its own success in breaking down class barriers; it must now represent people in every section of society who want real social advances and a fairer distribution of wealth. Alan Fox has written:

The starting point for any consideration of the future of the Left must be the technological changes and a sharp rise in living standards are causing the proportion of

the manual wage-earning group to the total occupied population to decline, and substantial sections among the manual wage-earners themselves to feel diminishingly proletarian in their outlook and inclinations. In political terms, this means the proletariat is a wasting asset. It also means that any party which has, or appears to have, a primarily proletarian base is doomed to waste away likewise.

In other words, the Labour Party in Britain is discovering that a party whose primary emphasis is on working-class hardship no longer has much chance of success. In fact, some of its supporters are now maintaining that the party has suffered from being identified with the trade unions; the connection with the trade unions, from which Labour has received so large a proportion of its support in the past, is now a hotly debated issue. It is somewhat ironic to find the New Party in Canada trying to look like the old Labour Party in England, just when the Labour Party has come to the decision that it needs to have its face lifted.

Is the New Party going to be very different from the CCF? Is it going to present a new face? The answer, as far as we can determine at present, would certainly appear to be "No". It proposes to extend public ownership, but only where necessary for economic planning or for breaking the power of private monopoly. Otherwise, it would give private enterprise the opportunity to function normally and to make a fair rate of return. This is simply the Winnipeg Declaration all over again. It proposes an all-embracing social-security programme to be financed by heavier levies on corporations and individuals with high incomes, and a far-reaching system of economic planning and control through boards responsible to Parliament. But again, except for a special emphasis on guarding against the dangers brought by an inflow of foreign capital, there is nothing new here. We are left with a major question: if the voters' distrust of the CCF ideology was a basic cause of that party's failure, will the New Party appear in a more favourable light?

The only real differences between the New Party and the CCF seem to be its name and organization. The mere adoption of a new name, however, can hardly contribute to a party's well-being. As for organization, the attention of the ordinary Canadian is likely to be drawn to the larger role of the trade unions. In his *British Political Parties*, R. T. Mackenzie has shown that the British trade unions have not abused their power in the running of the Labour party. But in an article, "Labour's Need for Surgery", which he wrote following the October elections, Mr. Mackenzie stated that the system of block votes by unions is grossly inappropriate to a system of Cabinet and parliamentary government. He described the Party's constitution as a "hydra-headed monster" which must be destroyed if the Party is to gain strength in succeeding elections. Yet it is something like this system that the

new Canadian party intends to adopt. This party will be financed to a large extent by the trade union movement, and there is an old saying that he who pays the piper calls the tune. Certainly the critics of the New Party will seek to create the impression that it is the instrument of trade-union bosses, and at a time of widespread criticism of some unions the label may stick.

One further complicating factor is that, to be successful, the New Party must be a Farmer-Labour party. While the CCF always maintained that the interests of farmers and trade unionists were not contrary, it never succeeded in making a satisfactory reconciliation. Farmers are likely to be suspicious of a party dominated by the trade unions, especially since the farmers are caught in a price-cost squeeze which they feel is made worse by every round of wage increases secured by industrial workers.

To all appearances, then, the New Party faces considerable difficulties in its attempt to present a favourable image of itself to a broad cross-section of the Canadian people. Created on the analogy of the British Labour Party, it would seem to be accepting a pattern of organization that the older party is thinking seriously of discarding. But, tempted as we may be to describe its platform as old-fashioned or even reactionary, we must remember that the economic climate and the climate of political opinion have been known to change almost overnight. In altered circumstances, who knows whether its fortunes will wax or wane?