

The Alternative Vote in British Columbia:  
Values Debates and Party Politics

by

Stephen Harrison  
B.A., University of Victoria, 2008

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## Supervisory Committee

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## Abstract

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This thesis provides a detailed account of the introduction, use, and repeal of the alternative vote (AV) in British Columbia in the 1950s. It argues that British Columbians, familiar with polarized, two-party politics, were dismissive of majority representation. Conversely, the public expressed a strong preference for local representation during discussions of redistribution. While the Liberal and Conservative Coalition parties introduced AV to keep the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation from forming a government, party members were often stronger proponents of electoral reform than their leaders. Nevertheless, the system was debated in terms of democratic values. This was true of electoral reform debates across Canada, including federal debates on proportional representation. Contrary to histories that focus solely on the 1952 and 1953 AV elections and W.A.C. Bennett and Social Credit, this project traces the origins of the alternative vote in BC from the 1940s forward, including ongoing discussions of the single transferable vote (STV) and a points system. The history of BC's provincial party system in the twentieth century is included in order to establish how polarized politics affected British Columbians' attachment to the idea of local representation. This thesis contends that the public's preference for plurality voting contributed to its dismissal of AV: even those who ranked multiple candidates did not necessarily endorse the system. This project also looks at the alternative vote debates in the 1970s and redistribution commissions in BC, particularly the 1978 Eckardt Commission, in order to better understand British Columbians' attachment to local representation and first-past-the-post, and their dismissal of a preferential system that encouraged them to rank candidates. Social Credit favoured regional representation over representation by population during the redistribution process, and the theme of local representation has consistently framed discussions of electoral reform in British Columbia, including the 2004 BC Citizens' Assembly's STV proposal.

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## Acknowledgments

I was first drawn to British Columbia's history with electoral reform when I read a 2005 *Times Colonist* article on the use of the alternative vote in the 1950s. The article did not equate the system with the single transferable vote, which was put to a referendum in the 2005 election, but it nevertheless noted that electoral reform in BC was actually old news. This information was new to me, however, and in 2007 I wrote a short paper on the subject for an undergraduate course with Dr. Richard Rajala. For his enthusiastic response to my work, and his insistence that our class make a trek down to the BC Archives, I am forever grateful. I am also appreciative of his more recent comments on my thesis, as well as those of Dr. Dennis Pilon, whose own research helped bring this work to life.

This project was just getting underway in early 2009, which coincided with BC's second referendum on the single transferable vote. I must therefore thank my colleagues, friends, and family for tolerating untold acronym-heavy discussions of voting systems with good humour and minimal yelling. I would also like to thank Lisa Pasolli, Lee Blanding, and Amber Ayers for their comments on an early version of my first chapter. I subjected Ryan Tervo to multiple inane complaints over the past two years, and I thank him for his alleged moral support and his assistance with a problem sentence. Finally, I am most indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Penny Bryden, for providing encouragement and insightful feedback throughout the research and writing process. I cannot imagine having written this thesis with anyone else.

## **Introduction – Electoral Reform in Historical Context: The Importance of Democratic Values**

The voting system in Canada is often taken for granted. Under plurality voting, or the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, voters cast a single vote for a candidate, and the candidate with the most votes in a district represents that constituency. FPTP and constituency representation are both well-established practices. The voting system does not have to remain constant, however, and indeed in Canadian history it has not.

Electoral reform was a frequent subject of discussion in Canada during the first half of the twentieth century. Governments, opposition parties, politicians, independent reformers, and voters all debated the prospect of changing the voting system. Voting systems determine how votes are translated into seats, and the distribution of seats determines who governs. Changing how ballots are marked and candidates are elected will invariably affect the composition of government. In 1952, the Liberal and Conservative parties in British Columbia abandoned FPTP in favour of the alternative vote (AV), which allowed voters to rank candidates on their ballots. The Liberals and Conservatives had governed as a coalition from 1941 to 1952, and the adoption of AV was driven by their desire to stay in power. They needed the public to engage with the system for it to have its desired effect, however. Faced with the public's familiarity with FPTP and two-party politics, which encouraged a single vote for a single candidate, the old-line parties launched a campaign focused on the democratic fairness of the new voting system. Only AV could ensure candidates were elected by a majority, they said, and it would keep the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), which was supported by a minority of voters, out of office. Many British Columbians used AV to vote the way they always had, ranking a single

candidate; others ranked only ideologically similar candidates. Both of these mindsets perpetuated the divided political system and encouraged the abolition of AV and a return to FPTP in 1953. Examining the ingrained traditions of plurality voting can go some way to explaining the function of the party system in BC, the necessity of the alternative vote, and the ultimate rejection and abolition of the system.

The 1952 election marked the emergence of the Social Credit party as a political force in British Columbia. The party rose to prominence in Canada with the election of a Socred majority government in Alberta in 1935. The fractious BC wing of the movement took its message of monetary reform into the 1937 provincial election with little success, and wartime prosperity shifted the organization's focus from alleviating poverty to advocating freedom for the individual.<sup>1</sup> W.A.C. Bennett, a former Conservative MLA and a frequent critic of the Coalition government, was sitting as an independent in 1951 when he threw his support behind Social Credit. In the 1952 election, the party campaigned on a platform of "less government interference in business, an increase in essential health and social services, encouragement of co-operatives, larger old-age pensions and a pay-as-you-go approach to government spending."<sup>2</sup> The party offered voters a non-socialist and non-Coalition option, and the Socreds formed a minority government on the strength of voters' alternate preferences, narrowly beating out the CCF and relegating the Liberals and Conservatives to a diminished presence in the Legislature. Bennett became the leader of Social Credit while the ballots were being counted, and as premier he took his party into a second election in 1953 and emerged with a majority.

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard B. Kuffert, "Reckoning with the Machine": The British Columbia Social Credit Movement as Social Criticism, 1932-52," *BC Studies* 124 (Winter 1999/2000): 17-8, 20-1, 33.

<sup>2</sup> David Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1983), 155.

Voting systems are usually discussed in terms of their democratic merits and what each would mean for representative government in Canada. Because altering the voting system could affect a party's chances at the polls, this democratic rhetoric often masked the motives of politicians who argued for or against change. To better understand the impact of voting systems of all kinds, historians and political scientists alike have examined various attempts at reform, as well as the theoretical effects of electoral systems.<sup>3</sup> The driving force behind the adoption or dismissal of electoral reform is more often than not the needs of ruling parties and the political elite.<sup>4</sup>

Contemporary discussions of voting systems are often based on what people “value” in elections and representative government. Politicians defend the apparent stability of the majority governments produced by FPTP, for instance, and Canadians are characterized as favouring such a system.<sup>5</sup> This brand of rhetoric about representational democracy appears when politicians are both suggesting or attacking new systems. While idealistic electoral reformers guided some of the earliest discussions of reform, Canada's experience with the

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<sup>3</sup> Some key works on voting systems include Gary W. Cox, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); David M. Farrell, *Electoral Systems: A Comparative Introduction* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2001); Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); and Dennis Pilon, “Why Voting Systems Change: Electoral Reform in Western Industrialized Countries” (Ph.D. diss., York University, 2005). Two important works on the history of voting system reform in Canada are Dennis Pilon, “Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada, 1874 to 1960,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 40.3 (Fall 2006): 135-61; and H.C.J. Phillips, “Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974” (Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario, 1976).

<sup>4</sup> Referenda on electoral reform, such as those recently held in BC, Ontario, and New Zealand, entail a large amount of participation by both reformers and the electorate. Additionally, in the early twentieth century plebiscites were held at the municipal level in many western Canadian cities on the adoption or abolition of proportional representation. These referenda are the exceptions in a debate shaped primarily by political elites. Where votes have been held, politicians were certainly still involved, whether they were introducing, backing, or opposing the proposed changes. For information on the early municipal plebiscites on proportional representation, see Dennis Pilon, “The Drive for Proportional Representation in British Columbia, 1917-23,” (M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1994); and J. Paul Johnston and Miriam Koene, “Learning History's Lessons Anew: The Use of STV in Canadian Municipal Elections,” in *Elections in Australia, Ireland, and Malta under the Single Transferable Vote: Reflections on an Embedded Institution*, ed. Shaun Bowler and Bernard Grofman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 205-47.

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Pilon, *The Politics of Voting: Reforming Canada's Electoral System* (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2007), 43, 138.



voting system has been a story of political pragmatism: parties' desire to form governments, not a belief in democratic values, has shaped the electoral system.<sup>6</sup> Parties agitated for a new system on its democratic merits when they felt threatened by plurality voting and it was in their interests to embrace reform. Ignoring these overarching values debates, however, would obscure the fact that politicians frequently and publicly engaged in this discussion of representational values, a debate in which voters were active participants. Traditional notions of democracy included local constituency representatives and plurality voting, and attachments to these ideas restricted the public's willingness to accept certain types of reform. Modern political scientists and reformers may question the merits of these values, particularly the appeal to majority governments, but that does not make them any less important to the story of electoral reform in Canada.<sup>7</sup> Applying a historical lens to electoral reform can enhance our understanding of Canadians' views on the voting system and representation, and of the roots of these values debates. To provide a more complete picture of Canadians' views on representation, one can look to discussions of the redistribution of electoral districts. Here one finds voters and politicians praising local representation and defending FPTP, which had informed their understanding of representational democracy. Electoral reform has always been about parties' needs, but voting systems have consistently been framed in a manner intended to appeal to the representational values of Canadians.

### **Electoral Systems Defined**

In order to examine how politicians and the public understood the representational properties of different voting systems, it is important to understand the mechanics of the systems in question. The system currently used in Canadian federal and provincial elections

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>7</sup> For a direct criticism of a values approach to electoral systems and reform, see *ibid.*, 8-9.

is single member plurality. Each constituency elects a single member, the candidate receiving the greatest number of votes (i.e., a plurality of votes). Canada and its provinces have not always used single member districts, however. Historically, cities were often drawn as large constituencies that elected multiple members under plurality rules.<sup>8</sup> Between 1920 and 1928, for instance, the riding of Vancouver City in BC's provincial elections was a six-member district, while Victoria elected four members.<sup>9</sup> Voters in multi-member districts had "as many votes as seats to be filled," and the top vote-earners were elected.<sup>10</sup> These urban districts were an important point of contention during debates on electoral reform and redistribution in British Columbia, and therefore I will refer to plurality voting as first-past-the-post rather than single member plurality, in recognition of the presence of multi-member districts.

The alternative vote employs the same ridings as FPTP, but voters are allowed to rank the candidates on the ballot in order of preference, marking a 1 beside their first choice, a 2 beside their second choice, and so on.<sup>11</sup> If no candidate receives 50 per cent of the votes (plus one) on the first count, the candidate with the fewest votes is dropped, and the second preferences on those dropped ballots are counted. This transfer process is repeated until one candidate has a majority and is declared elected. Politicians advocating this change tout its

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<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that the single-member constituency principle was not a long-standing British tradition. The British Parliament only moved away from the representation of boroughs and dual-member territories to the more familiar single member plurality in 1884. It was believed that this redistribution would equalize voter representation in Parliament, but many feared that traditional community or regional representation would be lost by moving to single member districts. Michael Steed, "The Constituency," in *Representation and Electoral Systems: Canadian Perspectives*, ed. J. Paul Johnston and Harvey E. Pasis (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1990), 191-3.

<sup>9</sup> Howard A. Scarrow, *Canada Votes: A Handbook of Federal and Provincial Election Data* (New Orleans: Hauser Press, 1962), 225.

<sup>10</sup> *Elections BC*, "Electoral History of British Columbia 1871 – 1986," 5  
<[http://www.elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/1871-1986\\_ElectoralHistoryofBC.pdf](http://www.elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/1871-1986_ElectoralHistoryofBC.pdf)>.

<sup>11</sup> AV is also known as instant-runoff voting, majoritarian-preferential voting, optional preferential voting (to distinguish it from Australia's system, where voters must rank every candidate), and, particularly in primary sources, the single transferable ballot. AV almost always applies to single-member ridings, but BC adapted its multi-member ridings to work under AV in 1952 and 1953.

ability to elect candidates who represent the will of the majority. The most obvious political advantage of this system is that two ideologically similar parties can use it to avoid splitting their votes. For example, under plurality rules, a leftist candidate with the support of only a minority of voters could win a riding against two centre-right candidates. The alternative vote could strengthen the position of the similar parties by amalgamating voters' preferences on the more popular of their two candidates in each riding.

The final system that features heavily in Canada's history of electoral reform is the single transferable vote (STV), which is a form of proportional representation (PR). STV elections by design will elect a number of members from each party that is roughly proportional to the percentage of votes cast for those parties, hence its categorization as a type of PR. Under STV, existing ridings are combined to form multi-member districts that elect several members. Unlike multi-member districts operating under plurality rules, however, rather than marking multiple X's, voters can rank the candidates in order of preference, much like AV. Candidates with more than enough votes to be elected on the first count have their ballots re-examined, and the second preferences on these ballots are transferred at a fraction of their original value to the indicated second choices. The number of votes required for election is based on the number of votes cast and the number of candidates to be elected in each multi-member riding.<sup>12</sup> If, after the transfer of surplus votes, there are still more candidates to be elected, then the individual with the fewest votes is dropped, and those ballots are transferred at full value to the voters' next preferences. Both of these transfer processes continue until the specified number of members is elected from each district. Though STV is one of many systems that can provide for proportional

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<sup>12</sup> There are multiple methods for determining this quota. The Hare quota is the total number of votes cast divided by the number of members to be elected, which can be expressed as  $V/M$ . The Droop quota can be expressed as  $[V/(M + 1)] + 1$ . Cox, *Making Votes Count*, 57.

representation, it was the primary type of PR under discussion in Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More often than not, politicians and the media in this era used the term proportional representation as shorthand for STV. STV is the primary form of proportional representation I will be discussing here, and I will be using the terms interchangeably unless otherwise specified. There is another form of historical shorthand that I will not be using, however, one which drew the ire of PR enthusiasts. Politicians, the media, and the public often referred to AV as the “single transferable ballot,” or even the “single transferable vote.” This was largely due to the fact that STV was simply known as “PR.”<sup>13</sup> Apart from quotations from primary source materials, the alternative vote will always be referred to by its proper name to avoid confusion.

### **Democratic Principles, Political Pragmatism, and Electoral Reform**

The values attached to electoral reform and representation have remained fairly constant despite a shifting political landscape, but it would be impossible to discuss Canada’s historical voting systems without using the framework of party politics.<sup>14</sup> Politicians’ arguments about representational democracy masked the fact that they were often motivated by “pedantry, indifference, naivete, opportunism and fear,” usually in response to the rising threat of the left.<sup>15</sup> The changing party system at the federal and provincial levels and the political pragmatism driving the debates provides a necessary backdrop to discussions of electoral reform. While parties’ needs were always paramount in these debates,

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<sup>13</sup> Here is a typical example from a Vancouver newspaper: “The single transferable vote [AV] is employed in one-member constituencies. The P.R. system [STV] is used in the cities returning several members.” “Voting System Model for B.C.,” *Vancouver News-Herald*, 18 August 1948, 5.

<sup>14</sup> H.C.J. Phillips and Dennis Pilon have written thorough accounts of Canada’s history with electoral reform as told through the lens of party politics. Phillips, “Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974”; Pilon, “Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada, 1874 to 1960.”

<sup>15</sup> Pilon, “Why Voting Systems Change,” 84; Pilon, “The Drive for Proportional Representation in British Columbia, 1917-23,” 138.

understanding how politicians and the public spoke about representation can nevertheless help to explain why electoral reform failed to take hold in British Columbia. The public's rejection of municipal STV in the 1920s and provincial AV in the 1950s provided a pretext to repeal both systems, even though there were political motives for doing so. Changes that moved the voting system away from FPTP and the apparent representational principle of one person, one vote, did not meet with voters' expectations of equality of representation and a unique constituency representative.<sup>16</sup> These preconceptions about democracy both prompted resistance to change and allowed governing politicians to argue for the majoritarian AV and against PR as needed. Additionally, two-party politics under FPTP encouraged voters to engage with an all-or-nothing idea of local representation, one that AV was designed to perpetuate.

Local constituency representation was a key part of plurality voting — a democratic value insisted on by both politicians and voters. In a deconstruction of FPTP, Dennis Pilon argues that elections are not about a “better ombudsperson” and a local representative, but about “the direction of government policy.”<sup>17</sup> It is true that people often vote for parties first and local representatives second. The candidate attached to the most popular party in a riding will typically take that riding, because voters put more weight on campaign issues and party platforms than they do individual candidates.<sup>18</sup> It may follow that an argument

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<sup>16</sup> Note that one person, one vote has always been an “apparent” principle at best: due to Canada's geography and population distribution, constituency populations necessarily deviate from total equality, thereby changing the weight of votes from constituency to constituency. The size of the deviations during this time period was always in flux, but they were particularly egregious in British Columbia, and the media and public were certainly aware of them. Redistribution and representation in BC will be discussed in detail in chapter four. W. E. Lyons, “Legislative Redistricting by Independent Commissions: Operationalizing the One Man-One Vote Doctrine in Canada,” *Polity* 1.4 (Summer 1969): 433; Harvey E. Pasis, “The Inequality of Distribution in the Canadian Provincial Assemblies,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 5.3 (September 1972): 433.

<sup>17</sup> Pilon, *The Politics of Voting*, 34, 142-3.

<sup>18</sup> In a 1984 study by Harold Clarke et al., they state that “in all of the elections for which national survey data are available local candidate effects are found to be very small in comparison with those of issues and leaders.” Their conclusions are based on data from 1965 to 1980. Harold Clarke et al., *Absent Mandate: The Politics of Discontent in Canada* (Toronto: Gage Publishing, 1984), 134, 3-4. As a mild counterpoint, John Meisel finds that

predicated on voters' desire for local representation is illogical, if changing party policies and voters' desires determine election outcomes. Regardless of the importance of local candidates come election time, however, politicians and voters have always spoken in terms of the constituency representative when addressing democratic representation in Canada. A local representative is a tangible and relatable aspect of government that has been of particular importance to discussions of voting systems, which revolve around what constitutes fair representation.

Bound up in the value placed on constituency representation was the principle of "majority representation," which came to dominate the discussions of the alternative vote. Politicians portrayed the fact that a minority of voters could elect MLAs or MPs as a defect of plurality voting in need of reform. The majority principle was a part of voting inside parliaments, and it could be applied elsewhere. "The basic premise behind simple majority rule," writes Anthony Downs, "is that every voter should have equal weight with every other voter. Hence, if disagreement occurs, it is better for more voters to tell fewer what to do than vice versa."<sup>19</sup> For a minority to rule the majority, especially an undesirable minority, contradicted this fundamental principle. Politicians endorsing AV hoped that voters would subscribe to the philosophy of majority representation. Majority representation and majority rule were intended to be palatable concepts to an electorate comfortable with winner-take-all plurality voting.

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in the 1957 Canadian election, "the median loss suffered by the Liberal party was smaller in constituencies contested by sitting members than by newcomers." Liberal cabinet ministers, however, suffered greater losses, perhaps due to an anti-government backlash. He concludes that "the personal experience and characteristics of candidates have some effect on the outcome of the contest, even in an age in which centralization and mass media of communications enhance the roles of the national leaders." Popularity, notoriety, and, in Quebec, ethnicity, all played a role in the results in some ridings. The impact of individual candidates on the results, however, is secondary, as Clarke et al. have shown. John Meisel, *The Canadian General Election of 1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 258-62.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony Downs, "Problems of Majority Voting: In Defense of Majority Voting," *Journal of Political Economy* 69.2 (April 1961): 192.

## **Electoral Reform in British Columbia**

The centrepiece of this thesis is the history of the alternative vote in BC, including its adoption, its use in the 1952 and 1953 elections, and its subsequent abolition. I have used the party system to contextualize both the choice of AV and the democratic values ascribed to the voting system. To establish the principles of majority and local representation that dominated electoral reform debates, chapter one begins with a consideration of electoral reform at the federal level. Both the alternative vote and proportional representation were debated in the House of Commons in the early twentieth century, though ultimately no action was taken. These primarily value-oriented debates, focusing on majority and constituency representation and majority governments, share striking similarities with those that occurred in BC. This chapter also considers electoral reform at the provincial and municipal levels. When paired with the details of federal inaction on electoral reform, these cases establish the self-interested politics that both drove and limited the prospects for change, as well as the public's preference for FPTP.

The aforementioned electoral reform debates took place when the federal two-party system was altered to the point where the Liberals or Conservatives saw change as an advantage. Politics in 1950s' British Columbia can be understood within the same framework: since the importation of the federal party structure in 1903, BC had alternated between Liberal and Conservative governments. The CCF emerged as a viable third party in 1933, and its growing strength was a key factor in the maintenance of the Liberal and Conservative Coalition following the Second World War. BC's party system and the origins of the alternative vote in BC are the focus of chapter two. More voting systems were considered than typically has been documented, including STV and a points system. The

details on the run-up to AV are intended to act as a corrective to histories that gloss over its adoption in passing, and the consideration of these alternate systems demonstrates the extent to which the political parties were focused on maximizing their success at the polls via electoral reform. In order to maintain their privileged position as the two main parties, prior to the 1952 election the Liberals and Conservatives adopted the alternative vote to keep the CCF from forming a government under FPTP.<sup>20</sup> The history of two-party politics before this point (including some important interludes) encouraged a single-issue split, which the Coalition parties pushed as a left-right divide between free enterprise and socialism. The familiarity of two-party politics had important ramifications for how the public approached AV, with many voters ultimately treating the elections as if they were FPTP contests. The Liberals and Conservatives, on the other hand, praised AV as providing majority representation, while the CCF countered by calling it a denial of democracy designed specifically to hurt its chances.

Chapter three details the 1952 and 1953 elections under the alternative vote, including the parties' varied approaches to AV and the public's reaction to the system. The widespread emphasis on plumping — that is, ranking only a single candidate as if the elections were being conducted under FPTP — demonstrated a continuation of the partisanship found in previous years. Despite an extensive public education campaign, many voters did not embrace the system and ranked a single candidate, while others endorsed only the Liberals and Conservatives, or Social Credit and the CCF. Obtaining true majority representation would have required that all voters ranked all candidates. The Coalition

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<sup>20</sup> All evidence suggests that AV was adopted by the Coalition to keep the CCF from forming a government, and this is an accepted part of the literature on the period. See, for example, Martin Robin, *Pillars of Profit: The Company Province 1934-1972* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), 120-1; Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 126-7; David Elkins, "Politics Make Strange Bedfellows: The B.C. Party System in the 1952 and 1953 Provincial Elections," *BC Studies* 30 (Summer 1976): 8; and Pilon, "Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada, 1874 to 1960," 152-3.



parties hoped that AV would maintain the single-issue divide between free enterprise and socialism, but their unpopularity brought about a Social Credit victory, with the CCF close behind and the Liberals and Conservatives soundly defeated. Waiting for absentee ballots delayed the final results for weeks, which did AV no favours. This negative experience, coupled with the public's inclination towards plurality voting, caused many British Columbians to back a return to FPTP. Socred premier W.A.C. Bennett was happy to oblige, because plurality stood to benefit his party in the future. The idea that AV provided majority representation had not resonated with voters, who were comfortable with simple plurality voting. Bennett used the popular opposition to the system to justify the abolition of AV.

Chapter four looks at the redistribution of electoral districts in BC from the 1950s to the 1970s in order to better understand the values British Columbians ascribed to representation. The principles of representation by population and the representation of specific regions were continually in conflict. The Social Credit government favoured the latter for its own partisan interests, making adjustments accordingly. Concerned citizens and politicians who made presentations at public hearings also favoured local representation; this concept was in many ways associated with FPTP. AV could ostensibly strengthen constituency representation by providing for a degree of majority representation, but voters distinguished the presence of a local representative from how they wished to elect that representative. Many British Columbians saw the maintenance of the constituency tie and representation in the Legislature as the most important parts of representation. The polarized politics familiar to voters worked well under FPTP, and there seemed to be little sense in using a form of preferential balloting that strayed from this concept. Both constituency representation and plurality voting were valued, or at least understood and accepted, as integral parts of representation in British Columbia.

In contrast to the more common structure, this thesis ends with a historiographical discussion of electoral systems literature, rather than beginning in a similar fashion. The advantage of this arrangement is that BC's experience with electoral reform is clarified in the preceding sections, leaving the final chapter to situate British Columbia within the broader literature on both electoral systems and the alternative vote. It is clear that a "seat-maximizing model," wherein politicians look out for their best interests when it comes to electoral systems, is readily applicable to BC's case.<sup>21</sup> Looking at reform literature that praises AV, and examining the system in other contexts, can help to establish what AV was and was not in British Columbia. Additionally, the 2004 BC Citizens' Assembly provides evidence of a continuing emphasis on local representation, which was advocated at the redistribution commission hearings in the 1960s and 1970s. This final chapter reinforces the importance of drawing out the details of the British Columbian case specifically. A comparative approach is useful, and chapter one begins at the federal level for this very reason. However, while British Columbia's trial with the alternative vote evokes common patterns found elsewhere, I believe the events warrant their own definitive retelling, which I have attempted to provide here.

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<sup>21</sup> The phrase "seat-maximizing model" is borrowed from Kenneth Benoit, who writes the following: "A change in electoral institutions will occur when a political party or coalition of political parties supports an alternative which will bring it more seats than the status quo electoral system, and also has the power to effect through fiat that institutional alternative." This is based on the premise that "seat shares are generally the most immediate political objective among parties contesting elections." Kenneth Benoit, "Models of Electoral System Change," *Electoral Studies* 23 (2004): 373-4.

## Chapter 1 – Proportional Representation and the Alternative Vote in Canada

In order to contextualize changes to the party and electoral systems in British Columbia, this chapter addresses federal party politics and debates on the voting system and representation across Canada. Because early considerations of proportional representation (PR) established the principles that politicians debated when talking about the alternative vote (AV), I will begin with an assessment of the values that were associated with PR. Using the debates in the House of Commons, I will argue that electoral reform in Canada was approached not just as a matter of representation, but of local and majority representation. These concepts shaped all such debates in Canada and they are immediately relevant to the British Columbian context.

The importance of the party system to electoral reform in Canada has been addressed elsewhere, and my particular focus is on the democratic values that framed these debates, regardless of their motivation.<sup>1</sup> Details on the party system are included, however, because parties drove electoral reform. Additionally, the federal party system shared clear similarities with party politics in British Columbia. Using the shifting party system as a guide, I will show that partisan politics and politicians' ties to a two-party first-past-the-post (FPTP) system motivated these debates, thereby shaping voters' ideas about representation and fostering resistance to preferential voting. Getting voters to accept the importance of majority representation hinged on their willingness to treat a multi-party system as if it were

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<sup>1</sup> The best example of this is Dennis Pilon, "Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada, 1874 to 1960," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 40.3 (Fall 2006): 135- 61. The debates found in this chapter are present in Pilon's article, which provides an excellent history of electoral reform in Canada. Both Pilon's work and H.C.J. Phillips's dissertation have been invaluable in providing dates and context for the federal electoral reform debates. H.C.J. Phillips, "Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974" (Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario, 1976).

a two-party system; a left-right party divide and majority representation were intended to make AV palatable to the public. However, the electorate's ties to FPTP and representation under a two-party system contributed to its rejection of voting system reform. Espousing democratic values such as majority representation could mask politicians' partisan motives for advocating change, a theme that reoccurs in debates on the voting system at all levels. The constant appeals to representational values indicate that politicians believed voters had internalized traditional aspects of representational democracy in Canada, such as constituency representation. The importance of these long-standing values in the rejection of the alternative vote in BC will be the focus of later chapters.

### **Early Electoral Reform Discourse in Canada: Representation and the Party System**

Beginning in the late 1850s, electoral reform advocates Thomas Hare and John Stuart Mill argued for proportional representation for British Parliamentary elections, in the form of the single transferable vote (STV).<sup>2</sup> Hare believed that his proposal would attract a better quality of candidate, decrease candidates' deference to their parties by forcing them to broaden their appeal, and increase voters' interest in politics by providing them with an effective vote and greater options.<sup>3</sup> Mill argued that PR would ensure parliamentary representation for the one third to one half of the electorate that voted for losing candidates.<sup>4</sup> Arguments about the benefits of proportional representation quickly made their way to Canada. The Liberal and Conservative parties were the two dominant forces in Canadian politics in the late nineteenth century. The Conservatives won six out of seven

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<sup>2</sup> The initial proposal was quite unlike STV as we now know it, but the basics of the quota system and the counting process were present. Hare's 1857 proposal involved a single district with a thousand or more candidates, which he believed would offer something for all voters. Jenifer Hart, *Proportional Representation: Critics of the British Electoral System 1820–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 26-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

elections from 1867 to 1891, before an extended period of Liberal rule began in 1896.<sup>5</sup>

During a period of Liberal government in 1874, Liberal MP Edward Blake said, “[W]e have not representation by population unless the population has a representation in the Legislature equivalent to its strength at the polls.”<sup>6</sup> He suggested Canada could achieve this through STV:

I believe Mr. Hare’s system or some modification of it—a system by which each voter may vote for any one he pleases, and give his vote should it not be required for his first choice, to second, third, or fourth candidates, in the order of his preference—would result in the return . . . of men having the confidence of those constituencies, and of just so many men on each side as the strength of that side at the polls would justify.<sup>7</sup>

His words carried weight, because representation by population was a foundational principle of the Canadian electoral system. The British North America Act of 1867 reads:

There shall be assigned to each of the other Provinces such a Number of Members as will bear the same Proportion to the Number of its Population . . . as the Number Sixty-five bears to the Number of the Population of Quebec.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Conservatives’ position was solidified in 1864 when George Brown’s Reform group joined them in a Union government to assist in “redividing the Canadas on some sort of federal basis.” Brown withdrew from the coalition after it accomplished this goal, prompting Conservative leader John A. Macdonald to distribute patronage appointments to his Reform colleagues to ensure their continued support and strengthen his own party. Gordon T. Stewart, *The Origins of Canadian Politics: A Comparative Approach* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), 65-6; John McMenemy, “Parliamentary Parties,” in *Political Parties in Canada*, ed. Conrad Winn and John McMenemy (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976), 11, 17. During the late nineteenth century, the Liberals and Conservatives were divided on such issues as protectionism and reciprocity, with the Conservatives initially favouring the former, and the Liberals the latter. Courting French Canada was also a concern for the parties, and the Conservatives’ position in Quebec was weakened with the execution of Louis Riel in 1885. *Ibid.*, 12, 15-6.

<sup>6</sup> “*A National Sentiment!*” *Speech of Hon. Edward Blake, M.P., at Aurora* (Ottawa: E. A. Perry, 1874), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Blake stated that MPs would thus be backed by “unanimous constituencies,” which is perhaps an overstatement, given that STV would provide representation to different groups within a constituency. “*A National Sentiment!*,” 18. Blake was not motivated by democratic ideals alone: he was planning “to lead the English nationalist Canada First group as a distinct political party,” and PR would help with its representation. Pilon, “Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada, 1874 to 1960,” 140.

<sup>8</sup> *British North America Act, 1867*, 51.2. In a report issued more than a century after Blake’s speech at Aurora, Elections Canada wrote that, despite its evolution, “the principle of representation by population remains at the root of the electoral system.” Elections Canada, “Representation in the Federal Parliament,” in *Representation and Electoral Systems: Canadian Perspectives*, ed. J. Paul Johnston and Harvey E. Pasis (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1990), 221. Rep-by-pop had also been an important issue prior to Confederation. English Reformers in Canada West argued for representation by population in the 1840s, which would have negatively affected the French in Canada East. Consequently, French Canadians were driven towards the Conservatives. John McMenemy, “Parliamentary Parties,” in *Political Parties in Canada*, ed. Conrad Winn and John McMenemy (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976).

This provided for equality of representation across the provinces on the basis of population, but it did not demand an equal number of voters in each constituency, a meaning that would be ascribed to rep-by-pop in provincial debates on redistribution. Blake's revised definition of representation required that the number of MPs elected from each party be proportionate to its share of the vote. The link between representation and the voting system was a key factor in all debates on electoral reform.

A desire for equality of representation drove Quebec Conservative MP Frederick Monk to initiate the first major PR debate of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> In 1909, Monk moved that a select committee study different kinds of PR, arguing like Mill that voters would lose interest in an unrepresentative House. "[T]he adoption of an improved method of proportional representation," he said, would refashion the House of Commons as "the faithful expression of the will of the electors as manifested in their votes," thus correcting distortions of representation found under FPTP.<sup>10</sup> Just as Blake had done 35 years earlier, Monk argued that fair representation required proportionality. Under FPTP, parties with large numbers of dispersed supporters can have a difficult time electing members, because the winner-take-all system discards votes cast for losing candidates.<sup>11</sup> Monk cited international examples touting PR's simplicity, and he called for Canada to "fall in with this great democratic movement all over the world"; his resolution for a committee on proportional representation passed.<sup>12</sup> Of particular interest here was Monk's endorsement of

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<sup>9</sup> Evidence of the importance of Monk's motion can be found in 1922. When Progressive MP W. C. Good moved that Parliament adopt AV and conduct a test of STV in multi-member constituencies, he started his speech with what he termed "a brief statement of what consideration has been given to this question by previous parliaments," and he began with Monk's 1909 resolution. House of Commons, *Debates* (hereafter HCD), 10 May 1922, 1634.

<sup>10</sup> HCD, 15 March 1909, 2598.

<sup>11</sup> For the seminal work on the effects of the distortions of FPTP in Canada, including the federal Conservative party's under-representation in Quebec and its effect on Canadian politics, see Alan C. Cairns, "The Electoral System and the Party System in Canada, 1921–1965," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 1.1 (March 1968): 55-80.

<sup>12</sup> HCD, 15 March 1909, 2623.

majority representation. Under FPTP, a minority of voters could elect a government, leaving “the majority ... without any recourse whatever.”<sup>13</sup> To Monk, majority representation entailed a Parliament representative of the political views of all Canadians, and he criticized “small-membered constituenc[ies],” calling them “the root of the whole evil of our system” and the cause of distorted representation.<sup>14</sup> He believed PR would provide a political voice for dispersed minorities and create a Parliament that represented a majority of Canadians.

Later that year, Governor General Earl Grey visited BC and spoke “on the test of good government,” which he declared to be “the representation in parliament of the community rather than the individual.” Like Monk, “[t]he remedy named by Lord Grey for the evils of the present system was the application to the electoral system of the principle known as proportional representation.”<sup>15</sup> Representation would still be tied to a constituency under STV, but it would also ensure political representation for a majority of the population. This line of argument was taken up by most of the early advocates of alternate systems. In later discussions of AV, majority representation was modified to apply only district by district, turning Monk’s principle on its head by obscuring the wishes of a large number of voters in favour of a simple majority of votes. Despite this inversion, constituency representation was privileged in both cases, regardless of how it was achieved.

Monk championed the idea of the local representative, attacking the suggestion that MPs from other regions might speak for voters who found themselves without the local political representative they desired. Outsiders, he argued, could not hope to represent a group of people that they had never seen.<sup>16</sup> This was likely an allusion to the uniqueness of his native Quebec, where the Conservatives received only eleven seats in the 1908 election.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 2600.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 2608.

<sup>15</sup> *British Colonist*, “Earl Grey Visits Inland Capital,” 30 September 1909, 1.

<sup>16</sup> HCD, 15 March 1909, 2609.

Conservatives from Ontario or other parts of the country could not presume to speak for Quebec's interests. Had the results been approximately proportionate to the percentage of votes cast, Monk's Conservatives would have received around 26 seats in that province.<sup>17</sup> When Monk reintroduced his motion in November that same year, Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier complained that the Liberal minority in Toronto could elect no candidates under FPTP.<sup>18</sup> He thereby affirmed the importance of local political representation, suggesting that it was absent when voters found themselves in ridings controlled by their political opponents.<sup>19</sup> Laurier's statement was openly partisan, for expanding the Liberal base was obviously a desirable prospect. However, "[f]rom what little attention [he had] been able to give to the subject of proportional representation," he questioned its adaptability to countries using "the British system of parliamentary and responsible government," though both he and Conservative leader Robert Borden believed that a study of PR was warranted.<sup>20</sup> Later politicians who defended FPTP also held local representation in high regard, a value that was particularly influential in redistribution committees. Monk cited the British Proportional Representation league as "promot[ing] the idea that every man should have one vote," albeit a transferable one, and though he attacked FPTP as "the cause of the evils" and abuses in politics, the tenets of local representation remained intact in his arguments for

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<sup>17</sup> Estimate made using election return data found in Howard A. Scarrow, *Canada Votes: A Handbook of Federal and Provincial Election Data* (New Orleans: Hauser Press, 1962), 26. Robert Borden feared that PR could make governing difficult by producing small majorities, but he also noted that PR would have returned more Conservative MPs from Quebec. HCD, 17 November 1909, 140.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>19</sup> The idea that local representation should align with one's own political party was a trope common to debates on proportional representation. During discussions of the redistribution of electoral districts, local constituency representation was often a nonpartisan demand based purely on regional interests. This will be discussed in chapter four.

<sup>20</sup> HCD, 17 November 1909, 139-40.



PR.<sup>21</sup> The principles of one voter, one vote, and a local member informed much of the discussion.

The central arguments against electoral reform also took shape at this early stage. Borden expressed his concern that “proportional representation ... [might] possibly lead to a difficulty in carrying on government by party where the popular vote [was] pretty nearly equally divided.”<sup>22</sup> PR could result in unstable, bare majority governments, but majorities nonetheless, because at the time there was no significant party presence in the House beyond the traditional two.<sup>23</sup> The difference in popular vote between the Liberals and Conservatives had been less than 4 per cent in the 1908 election.<sup>24</sup> Had representation been determined proportionally, however, any potential Conservative government might have been subject to the whims of a few renegade MPs, because the gap in seats between the parties would have narrowed significantly. This was a legitimate concern for Borden, because the Quebec contingent of the Conservative party (and Monk in particular) disagreed with him on issues of policy.<sup>25</sup> A narrow Conservative majority would have been tenuous indeed if it lost the support of French Conservatives. Concerns about governability were also linked to the fear that STV might encourage a multiplication of parties that would irreparably fracture the House. Borden’s Conservatives were in opposition at this time, and the prospect of forming a majority government under FPTP was very real; indeed, they succeeded in 1911. Though

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 141, 138.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>23</sup> Indeed, R.K. Carty notes that from 1867 to 1917 the Liberals and Conservatives took 95 per cent of the vote. R.K. Carty, “Three Canadian Party Systems,” in *Canadian Political Party Systems: A Reader*, ed. R.K. Carty (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1992), 565.

<sup>24</sup> Scarrow, *Canada Votes*, 26.

<sup>25</sup> In 1910, for instance, tensions were high because French Conservative MPs (including Monk), opposed the Liberals’ Naval Service Act, which they believed would lead to conscription. Monk wanted a plebiscite on the issue and did not want to contribute to Britain’s defence in any respect, but Borden supported the motion while being needled by other splinter groups within the party. He initially planned to retire as a result of the division. Robert Craig Brown, *Robert Laird Borden: A Biography*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975), 166, 170-3; John English, *The Decline of Politics: The Conservatives and the Party System 1901-20* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 56.

both party leaders could endorse a study of proportional representation, Borden equated majority representation with majority governments. Proportional representation might have helped the Conservatives in Quebec, but it could just as easily help the Liberals in other regions. Better, then, to trust FPTP to return a majority government when public opinion turned against the governing Liberals.

There was a rift between the democratic rhetoric driving PR proponents and those who spoke openly about the realities of the party system. While leading the Unionist government a decade later in 1919, Borden said that more accurate representation had to be sacrificed in exchange for governability, since PR “would lead to instability.”<sup>26</sup> FPTP helped to create lopsided single-party majorities and functional two-party politics, and thus change held little appeal for the governing party. It is therefore unsurprising that the committee formed to investigate PR in 1909, which consisted of four Liberal members and three opposition Conservatives, brought forth no changes.<sup>27</sup> The merits of electoral reform and majority representation were both considered with a partisan eye, and governing parties could tout FPTP’s ability to produce stable governments and a functional House of Commons while ignoring the system’s distorted results. The same would be true of the alternative vote, which was designed to provide majority representation at the expense of third parties.

Altruistic reformers did exist, primarily outside of government, but voting system reform was less a political ideal than it was a political tool. For example, the federal government’s 1919 Royal Commission on Industrial Relations concluded that one of the central causes of the period’s ongoing labour unrest was a “[j]ack of confidence in

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Borden, HCD, 5 July 1919, 4620, quoted in Phillips, “Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974,” 137.

<sup>27</sup> HCD, 25 November 1909, 429; Pilon, “Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada, 1874 to 1960,” 140.

constituted government,” proposing “a system of proportional representation from grouped constituencies” as a solution “by which the worker could secure better representation in Parliament.”<sup>28</sup> Two commissioners, Smeaton White, a former Conservative senator and the manager of the Montreal Gazette Publishing Company, and Frank Pauzé, a representative of the lumber industry, issued a dissenting supplementary report.<sup>29</sup> STV and proportional results would all but guarantee labour representation, but they argued that “the present system of election [did] not limit the representation to any one class,” and “if organized labour [were] sufficiently strong it might elect a House of Commons representing 100 per cent of its own views” under FPTP, with the distorted results working in its favour. They were unconvinced of the merits of PR, claiming that “the present constitution gives every part of the community an equal voice in the selection of representatives.”<sup>30</sup>

White and Pauzé’s defence of the distortions of plurality implies a belief in the fairness of the voting system as it stood. A shifting political landscape did not mean that politicians would abandon their conceptions of representative government, which typically included both FPTP and some measure of local representation. According to the Royal Commission’s report, federal PR could function in the same way as municipal PR (discussed below), by giving labour groups a place in government and discouraging extra-political action. Regardless of this potential benefit, White and Pauzé’s praise for FPTP likely masked their private fears. Given their position as businessmen, granting representation to labour groups and altering the entrenched party system was perhaps an unappealing prospect, causing them to dismiss electoral reform as an unnecessary measure. Reformers could argue

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<sup>28</sup> The commission cited municipal PR as an example of this process, one that will be discussed in this chapter’s next section. Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, *Report of Commission* (Canada: Labour Gazette, July 1919), 6, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-28* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 134.

<sup>30</sup> Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, *Report of Commissioners White and Pauzé* (Canada: Labour Gazette, July 1919), 26.

that “the cure for the ills of democracy [was] more democracy,” but FPTP favoured the parties in power in most every circumstance, and their ideas of what representation should entail limited the prospects for PR.<sup>31</sup>

### **Municipal Electoral Reform: Activists and Voter Apathy**

PR enjoyed a brief period of success at the municipal level, particularly in BC. Both its implementation and abolition showcase the democratic rhetoric behind electoral reform and provide important evidence of the public’s reaction to PR. The post-war period brought a shift in “the discourse of electoral reform ... from ideal-driven reformism to the importance of a specifically class form of representation,” as politicians offered representation through PR to diminish the chances that leftist groups would take extra-political action through strikes or other means.<sup>32</sup> Setting aside the reasons driving the adoption of proportional representation, STV’s use in municipal elections provides a concrete example of British Columbians’ response to a non-FPTP voting system, and it is useful to explore how it challenged their representational values.

In the early twentieth century, PR activists traveled from city to city, lecturing local politicians on the democratic benefits of PR and stirring up interest in the subject. It was a popular enough topic to merit its own publication, the American-based *Proportional Representation Review*, and PR societies were active around the world.<sup>33</sup> In 1915, the secretary of the British PR Society, John H. Humphreys, visited Victoria. Speaking to local aldermen, he criticized FPTP for depriving minorities of representation, and he pointed out that the

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<sup>31</sup> George H. Hallett, Jr., *Proportional Representation—The Key to Democracy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: National Municipal League, 1940), 3.

<sup>32</sup> Pilon, “Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada, 1874 to 1960,” 144-5.

<sup>33</sup> Dennis Pilon, “The Drive for Proportional Representation in British Columbia, 1917-23,” (M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1994), 26-7.

Liberals had elected no members in the previous provincial election despite their significant share of the popular vote.<sup>34</sup> Interest in PR was high, and it was adopted in 19 cities in western Canada, almost exclusively in the first two decades of the twentieth century, with Calgary being the first to do so in 1916.<sup>35</sup> The impact of the traveling reformers may have been secondary to the influence of traditional politicians who wished to “avert revolution” by awarding unruly labour interests and returning veterans with representation, all while ensuring their own continued place in politics.<sup>36</sup> It should be noted, however, that labour and veterans’ groups were truly enthusiastic about the prospect of representation under PR, even if the old-line politicians only intended to limit their power both in and out of politics.<sup>37</sup>

Though it was not a requirement in BC, plebiscites were often held to determine the introduction or repeal of proportional representation.<sup>38</sup> Buoyed by the promises of reformers and the support of the media, STV passed with a comfortable majority in both Victoria and Vancouver in 1920. STV was usually repealed quite quickly, however, lasting only until 1921

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 27; “Proportional Representation,” *Victoria Daily Times* 29 December 1915, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Pilon lists St. Vital and Transcona as adopting STV circa 1931-34 and circa 1941-44, respectively. Both of these municipalities lay on the outskirts of Winnipeg, and the city’s concurrent use of STV in provincial elections likely inspired their late adoption of STV. Dennis Pilon, *The Politics of Voting: Reforming Canada’s Electoral System* (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2007), 80-1; Pilon, “The Drive for Proportional Representation in British Columbia, 1917-23,” 27. For more on early twentieth-century plebiscites on STV, see J. Paul Johnston and Miriam Koene, “Learning History’s Lessons Anew: The Use of STV in Canadian Municipal Elections,” in *Elections in Australia, Ireland, and Malta under the Single Transferable Vote: Reflections on an Embedded Institution*, ed. Shaun Bowler and Bernard Grofman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 205-47.

<sup>36</sup> Pilon, “Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada, 1874 to 1960,” 141, 144; Pilon, “The Drive for Proportional Representation in British Columbia, 1917-23,” 4.

<sup>37</sup> Vancouver veterans’ organizations and the Trades and Labor Council had “gone on record as being wholeheartedly in favor of the introduction of proportional representation in all elections, civic, provincial and federal.” City of Vancouver Archives (hereafter CVA), Garfield King Collection, 512-G-2, file 2, Add. Mss. No. 135 (hereafter Garfield King Clipping Book), “P.R.’ System Given Support,” *Vancouver Daily World*, 19 September 1919.

<sup>38</sup> The legislation allowing municipalities to adopt PR required either three-fifths council support or a plebiscite before making such a change. A plebiscite would allow the council to gauge the public’s initial opinion of STV. If it proved wildly unpopular, then the city could choose not to act to avoid upsetting the public. As it was, in the cities considering PR the reformers had done an excellent job of selling people on the system as an improvement to democracy. Pilon, “The Drive for Proportional Representation in British Columbia, 1917-23,” 34.

in Victoria and 1923 in Vancouver.<sup>39</sup> Reformers had promised that PR would bring with it “[a]n assurance of majority rule” while maintaining the principle of “[o]ne voter one vote,” both key representational values in Canada under FPTP.<sup>40</sup> Vancouver alderman J. J. McRae believed that PR could eliminate apathy in voters, caused, he said, “when they saw they could not secure representation.”<sup>41</sup> PR advocates had pledged to conduct an education campaign to ensure that “electors [would] understand the ballot, how to handle it, and the way the votes [were] counted and work[ed] out.”<sup>42</sup>

The standard public reaction to STV mirrored a criticism cited by PR opponents in the House of Commons: the counting process was too complicated, and the results changed little from the first count to the last.<sup>43</sup> Newspapers attempted to make the election transparent by printing the complete results, including transfers.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, prominent Vancouver Liberal Garfield King, secretary of the city’s PR society, demonstrated the ways a ballot might have been used to elect candidates in Vancouver’s 16-round count election in 1921.<sup>45</sup> The BC Liberals had committed to electoral reform following their failure to elect any members in 1912, and motivated by Humphreys’ tour King became a PR activist.<sup>46</sup> Despite attempts by King and others to address voters’ concerns, nothing could alleviate the complaints. Said one voter, “what I don’t like about it is that I don’t know what goes on

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<sup>39</sup> Pilon, *The Politics of Voting*, 81.

<sup>40</sup> CVA, Garfield King Clipping Book, “‘P.R.’ Means,” *Vancouver Weekly World*, 3 January 1920.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., “Board of Trade Favors P.R. Idea,” *Vancouver Sun*, 19 November 1919.

<sup>42</sup> “Victoria to Have New Voting System, But Council Stays,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 16 January 1920, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Johnston and Koene, “Learning History’s Lessons Anew,” 224, 229.

<sup>44</sup> CVA, Garfield King Clipping Book, “Complete Series of Counts in Aldermanic Election,” *Vancouver Daily World*, 15 January 1921.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., “How Each Vote Was Made to Work In Civic Elections Under New System,” *Vancouver Daily World*, 15 January 1921.

<sup>46</sup> The Liberals received more than a quarter of the popular vote in 1912, but no seats. Pilon, “The Drive for Proportional Representation in British Columbia, 1917-23,” 33. The Conservative party ruled BC under Richard McBride from 1903 to 1915, losing the 1916 election under his successor, W. J. Bowser. During their period of dominance, the Conservatives offered “stability and growth” for the province and British Columbians. Martin Robin, “British Columbia: The Company Province,” in *Canadian Provincial Politics: The Party Systems of the Ten Provinces*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Martin Robin (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1978), 43.

between times, and I don't think there are 10 men in Vancouver who do know."<sup>47</sup> Majority representation as provided by STV did not appear to be worth the trouble. Garfield King said of STV's repeal elsewhere that "where it had been dropped it had been dropped by the politicians," but if STV was designed to improve representation *and* voter participation (and in practice it could secure the former), voters did not engage with this seemingly complex system of representation.<sup>48</sup> According to Ronald Hooper, an honorary secretary of the PR Society of Canada, following the successful plebiscite on STV the Vancouver activists had decided to "sit back and do nothing."<sup>49</sup> The lack of a proper public education campaign "to get the people to understand the advantages of P.R." allowed the system's opponents to organize and ensure its abolition.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the activists' message of PR as true representation and majority rule had not resonated with everyone. Plurality voting was seen as both just and simple, making the abolition of STV a natural choice.

### **Electoral Reform for Practical Gain**

The federal and municipal PR debates provide important context for the discussions of majority representation and the alternative vote that preceded AV's adoption in British Columbia in the 1950s. Despite the differences between the two systems, in particular the use of multi-member ridings under STV and single-member ridings under AV, the

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<sup>47</sup> CVA, Garfield King Clipping Book, "Many Electors Have Knocks for the P.R. System," *Vancouver Sun*, 15 January 1921.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, "Board of Trade Favors P.R. Idea," *Vancouver Sun*, 19 November 1919. Examples of the increased efficacy of votes in STV elections abound. For sheer scale, PR reformer George Hallett claimed that New York City's 1937 PR elections meant that 500,000 more votes were used to elect candidates than would have been the case under plurality rules. Hallett, *Proportional Representation*, 149. At the other end of the spectrum, PR was not needed in locations where there were no set divisions. In municipal elections in Nelson, STV provided no representational benefits. Johnston and Koene, "Learning History's Lessons Anew," 221.

<sup>49</sup> Clarence Gilbert Hoag and George Hervey Hallett, Jr., *Proportional Representation* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1926), 190; Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Special Committee on Franchise and Elections Acts: Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence* No. 6, 28 April 1936, 129.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

arguments for and against PR shaped the discourse surrounding AV. The two systems were invariably discussed in tandem during debates on electoral reform.

In 1922, Progressive MP W. C. Good called the House's attention to the report of the Special Committee on Proportional Representation, which endorsed the alternative vote and was favourable towards PR. Good asserted that if MPs had "any regard for the principle of democracy" then they must ensure that they represented a majority of their constituents.<sup>51</sup> He suggested first adopting the alternative vote "where three or more candidates [were] running in a single member constituency" as well as "trying out ... proportional representation" in one or more urban centres.<sup>52</sup> He used examples of FPTP's distorted election results in Canada and elsewhere, mentioned that Winnipeg and foreign countries had employed PR to great effect, and argued against Borden's worry that PR would produce "small government majorities." Now that there were more than two parties in the House, a two-way, nearly 50-50 split was impossible.<sup>53</sup> The party landscape in Canada had changed substantially after the First World War. A Unionist Government had been formed in 1917, dividing politicians on the conscription issue, but it split in 1920, and the Liberals and Conservatives ran separately in the 1921 election.<sup>54</sup> As the Unionist government faded, active provincial farmers' movements began electing candidates in federal by-elections in 1919; T. A. Crerar left the Unionist government to become the leader of the Progressives in the House in 1920.<sup>55</sup> In order to avoid three-way contests, the Liberals and Progressives tried to

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<sup>51</sup> HCD, 10 May 1922, 1637.

<sup>52</sup> Good referred to AV as "the alternative, or transferable, or preferential, or contingent vote." Ibid., 1635.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 1644.

<sup>54</sup> Both the Unionist government and the War-time Elections Act were implemented in part to counteract the low levels of support for Borden's Conservatives in western Canada, while also meeting the war effort with a united front. Wilfrid Laurier opposed conscription, and he led a group of Liberals who remained outside the Unionist government. English, *The Decline of Politics*, 136-60, 213-20; W. L. Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada* (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 99-102.

<sup>55</sup> J. Murray Beck, *Pendulum of Power: Canada's Federal Elections* (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1968), 150-1; Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada*, 82-3, 106, 119.



keep from campaigning against each other in 1921, though they eschewed the possibility of coalition. Following the election, the Conservatives found themselves outnumbered by the Progressives in Parliament.<sup>56</sup> PR could help to ensure the Progressives' future success, given FPTP's tendency to limit the representation of third parties.<sup>57</sup> Liberal MP Andrew McMaster pointed out that both the Liberals and Progressives were over-represented on the whole, and that "accurate representation or reflection of the different strains of public opinion in the constituency" was crucial to representative government.<sup>58</sup> Constituencies remained at the core of the discussion: committees and MPs did not give much credence to list systems that would do away with local representatives, and STV was considered the "Anglo-American" form of PR because it maintained constituency representation.<sup>59</sup> Prime Minister Mackenzie King observed that "any measure that will help to make Parliament more truly representative of the public ... must necessarily be furthering responsible government rather than in any way limiting it."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> More Liberals ran against Progressives than had initially been planned, due to a low level of control over local constituency organizations and the desire of "moneyed interests" to back Liberal candidates, rather than Conservatives. Ibid., 122, 126-7. Christian Leithner describes the Progressives as "perhaps the most important third party in the country's political history" for breaking the two-party system, influencing Liberal policy, and acting as the precursor to the CCF and Social Credit. Christian Leithner, "The National Progressive Party of Canada, 1921-1930: Agricultural Economic Conditions and Electoral Support," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 26.3 (September 1993): 435.

<sup>57</sup> Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada*, 159. The Progressives were actually over-represented in 1921. Had the results been approximately proportional, the Progressives would have received 54 seats, rather than 64. Beck, *Pendulum of Power*, 158. Harold Jansen suggests that progressive party movements experienced more success provincially because they escaped the bounds of "third party" status. Though the Progressives outnumbered the Conservatives federally, they would not do so for long. Harold J. Jansen, "The Single Transferable Vote in Alberta and Manitoba" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1998), 31.

<sup>58</sup> HCD, 10 May 1922, 1650.

<sup>59</sup> Pilon, *The Politics of Voting*, 119, 121. Pure list PR has voters cast their ballots for a political party rather than an individual. Prior to the election, parties prepare ordered lists of their candidates. Once the election results are known, each party receives a share of seats equal to its percentage of the popular vote. Candidates are elected based on their position on the party list, starting at the top and working down. There is no constituency representation under such a system. The 1936 Special Committee on Franchise and Election Acts was told that the two main systems of PR were list PR and STV, but the discussion focused on distinctions between STV and the alternative vote. Canada, *Special Committee on Franchise and Elections Acts: Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence* No. 2, 6 March 1936, 24.

<sup>60</sup> HCD, 10 May 1922, 1655.

Actual reforms were seldom made for “high-minded” reasons, but for practical ones instead.<sup>61</sup> McMaster stated the obvious in saying that Liberal and Progressive voters would likely rank the two parties first and second under AV or PR. He walked the House through a hypothetical AV election, and observed that in a constituency where the Progressives finished third, “naturally all the Progressives would ... giv[e] their second choice to the Liberal.”<sup>62</sup> This would limit the prospects for the Conservative party and halt the possibility of a Progressive surge under plurality rules. The potential partisan advantages of AV aside, it was portrayed as benefitting voters by providing for majority representation. The following day the *Globe and Mail* wrote that McMaster “said proportional representation gave a chance to those of similar ideas but different parties, such as the Liberals and Progressives, to get nearer together.”<sup>63</sup> Cloaking the partisan politics of electoral reform with democratic idealism could make the idea more palatable.

At the provincial level, the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) recognized the possibility of using the voting system to ensure its future electability. The UFA was designed

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<sup>61</sup> This was clear in Australia, the first country to implement AV. A reformer and mathematician had pushed for AV's introduction on representational grounds in the early 1900s, but his proposal was ignored until the Labour party began to defeat the parties to its right under plurality rules, which prompted the Liberals to introduce alternative voting in 1918. As of 2010, Australia still uses AV to elect its House of Representatives. Ben Reilly and Michael Maley, “The Single Transferable Vote and the Alternative Vote Compared,” in *Elections in Australia, Ireland, and Malta under the Single Transferable Vote*, 39-42; David M. Farrell and Ian McAllister, *The Australian Electoral System: Origins, Variations and Consequences* (University of New South Wales: UNSW Press, 2006), 32.

<sup>62</sup> HCD, 10 May 1922, 1649. This may have been an overstatement, but given the presence of a group of Progressives headed by T.A. Crerar, “who wished to liberalize the Liberal party,” and his attempts to form “a national party of reform” through negotiations with the Liberals, it is likely accurate. In the 1921 election, the Liberals informed voters of “the agrarian record of the party.” The Liberals’ policy on tariffs was unclear during the 1921 election, but it differed from that of the Conservatives. The legacy of the Conservatives’ protectionist National Policy had the effect of imposing “oppressive taxation” upon both “primary producers and ... consumers,” thereby driving agrarian interests towards the Liberals. The Progressives criticized the Liberals when they did not satisfactorily fulfill their apparent low tariff commitments. Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada*, 159, 161, 122-4, 101, 183-4. Mackenzie King believed Progressive voters would rank Liberals second, and he made this point in his diary in 1924. “The Tory party,” he wrote, “is wakening up to the fact that [AV] means their loss in event of 3 cornered contests in which Liberals & Progressives are also concerned.” His party’s interests were always at the front of his mind, and he endorsed PR when the Liberals were out of power in the 1930s. Library and Archives Canada, *The Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King*, 2 April 1924, 3980 <<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/king/index-e.html>>.

<sup>63</sup> “Two Party Leaders Favor P.R.,” *Globe and Mail*, 11 May 1922, 2.

to act as “a pressure group for farm interests,” rather than a political party, but it made the leap and formed a government in 1921.<sup>64</sup> Farmers’ movements had advocated STV because it would guarantee “at least minority representation in Canadian legislatures,” but the UFA took 58 per cent of the seats in 1921 with 29 per cent of the vote (compared to the Liberals’ 25 per cent of the seats with 34 per cent of the vote); consequently, the UFA modified its promise for reform and legislated STV for urban districts only, while adopting AV for rural ridings.<sup>65</sup> The UFA had not run candidates in Edmonton and Calgary in 1921 and stood to gain from proportional results in the cities, whereas AV would not hurt its chances in rural Alberta.<sup>66</sup> The UFA succeeded in using electoral reform to strengthen its prospects while ostensibly providing the electorate with candidates that represented a majority of voters in single and multi-member districts alike. Majority representation was a malleable concept, and though the UFA had argued for PR when it stood to gain from it, once in government it stood to lose from PR and the party revised its stance.<sup>67</sup>

Reform legislation appeared to follow a different path in Manitoba: a 10-member STV district was created in Winnipeg in 1920, from which the governing Liberals stood to gain little in terms of seats.<sup>68</sup> However, this move also reduced the chance of a rout at the

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<sup>64</sup> Bradford James Rennie examines the UFA organization and the “movement culture” that took the UFA from a pressure group to a politicized entity, choosing to focus on the grassroots nature of the movement, rather than its leadership. Carl F. Betke provides a brief treatment of the UFA’s politics and electoral success. Bradford James Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy: The United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta, 1909 – 1921* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Carl F. Betke, “The United Farmers of Alberta, 1921-1935,” in *Society and Politics in Alberta: Research Papers*, ed. Carlo Caldarola (Toronto: Methuen, 1979), 14-32. See also Anthony Long and F. Q. Quo, “Alberta: Politics of Consensus,” in *Canadian Provincial Politics*, 3-4.

<sup>65</sup> The Liberals had also promised PR prior to the 1921 election. David Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 41.

<sup>66</sup> Phillips, “Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974,” 226; Jansen, “The Single Transferable Vote in Alberta and Manitoba,” 58.

<sup>67</sup> The electoral system was not enough to keep the UFA in power, however. C.B. Macpherson writes that the UFA’s “cherished principle of delegate democracy” was subordinated to “cabinet supremacy,” which “left the U.F.A. not resilient enough to serve as the political instrument of the Alberta farmers under the shattering blows of the depression in the early 1930’s.” Social Credit replaced the UFA in the 1935 election. C.B. Macpherson, *Democracy in Alberta: Social Credit and the Party System*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 92.

<sup>68</sup> Jansen, “The Single Transferable Vote in Alberta and Manitoba,” 36-7.

hands of labour under FPTP, which was a pressing concern in light of the Winnipeg General Strike the previous year.<sup>69</sup> Going into the 1922 election, both the Liberals and the United Farmers of Manitoba (UFM) had endorsed AV, and the UFM returned a strong majority government.<sup>70</sup> When the alternative vote replaced FPTP in rural ridings in 1924, Conservative leader Major Taylor accused the opposition Liberals of supporting the measure “to make sure the minority [i.e., the Conservative party] gets nothing”; reform was seldom without partisan advantage.<sup>71</sup> Taylor’s explicit support for minority representation under STV was not surprising, given the Conservatives’ position as the third party in a three-party province. The wavering pro-PR stance of the UFA, Mackenzie King, and other sometimes-reformers “typified the normal pattern of being more determined when out of government office.”<sup>72</sup> For parties that were out of office, electoral reform looked like a viable means to improve their seat count at the next election; however, once they formed a government and gained the ability to enact change, parties tended to favour the electoral system that would give them the best chance of continuing to form governments, be it FPTP or AV.

At the federal level, Parliament endorsed AV when Good raised the issue again in 1923, nine months after his initial motion.<sup>73</sup> Good’s proposed test of PR in urban centres was debated separately, however, and it did not succeed. Amongst other complaints, a BC MP said adopting STV federally would create large multi-member rural districts, making campaigning difficult; Ireland was used as an example to show that multiple counts under STV made little difference in the final result; and it was suggested that STV would fracture

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<sup>69</sup> Phillips, “Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974,” 142; Pilon, “Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada,” 145.

<sup>70</sup> Jansen, “The Single Transferable Vote in Alberta and Manitoba,” 45. The UFM was the politicized version of the Manitoba Grain Growers’ Association, and it agitated for agrarian interests. The business-minded John Bracken was named leader following the UFM’s 1922 election victory. Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada*, 97, 228-30; Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945*, 53-4.

<sup>71</sup> Jansen, “The Single Transferable Vote in Alberta and Manitoba,” 45-6.

<sup>72</sup> Phillips, “Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974,” 398.

<sup>73</sup> HCD, 19 February 1923, 389.

the House by electing minority groups with low quotas.<sup>74</sup> Labour member J. S. Woodsworth took up the 1919 Industrial Relations Commission's argument for PR, warning that if labour sympathizers were denied representation "it is inevitable that sooner or later they shall try to express themselves in some other way," as was their custom in the post-war era.<sup>75</sup> H. H. Stevens, at the time a Conservative, argued that MPs elected with a plurality spoke for their entire constituency, making AV unnecessary.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, Stevens feared that STV would result in "group government" and instability; despite his opposition, he was more amenable to a trial of AV than PR.<sup>77</sup> Majority representation and the tradition of a local representative (who just happened to be a political one) were privileged under AV, which was less threatening than proportional representation.

Conservative leader Arthur Meighen was also opposed to PR, and in a free vote the measure was defeated, 90 to 72.<sup>78</sup> Had the Liberals stood to make considerable gains under STV, party discipline likely would have been in effect and the measure might have passed. Mackenzie King voted in favour of the resolution, but he said he was "inclined to think that as a result of an election under proportional representation the House [would] take on more of the complexion it had under the old party system," since he believed that second

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 393, 395.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 398. While Woodsworth favoured PR, he also advocated "occupational representation and group government," wherein the various economic interests would have representation in Parliament, but he ultimately abandoned the idea. Group government would have done away with partisanship and the traditional party system, and it was supported by UFA president Henry Wise Wood. Some witnesses before the 1919 Commission had suggested a similar type of proportional representation, arguing that "parliament should be elected in three parts: one-third representing labour, one-third representing agriculture, one-third arts, science, professional and other elements." Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945*, 151, 161; Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), 167-8, 224, 275; Walter D. Young, *Democracy and Discontent: Progressivism, Socialism and Social Credit in the Canadian West*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978), 26-7; Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, *Report of Commissioners White and Pauzé*, 25.

<sup>76</sup> HCD, 19 February 1923, 416. William McQuarrie, Conservative MP for New Westminster, cited STV's abolition at the municipal level as evidence that all British Columbians were opposed to STV. Ibid., 401.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 417, 420.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 407; Pilon, "Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada," 147.

preferences would go to one of the traditional parties.<sup>79</sup> He believed that Progressive voters would rank Liberal candidates second, and that Conservatives would choose to rank Liberals over Progressives. King's desire to maintain a two-party system was a theme that carried throughout the electoral reform debates of the 1950s. Despite Parliament's endorsement of AV, Canada has never conducted a federal election under the system: the Progressives were folded into the Liberal party without the need for reform, be it proportional or majoritarian.<sup>80</sup> The Progressives had long been divided into two camps, one favouring political organization and the other class representation, and the party contained former Liberal MPs who were looking to "bring the Progressives into firm support of the government."<sup>81</sup> The Liberals encouraged the rift in the Progressives by accepting the group in the House of Commons and courting its leadership, and ultimately the party collapsed.<sup>82</sup> Electoral reform was one way to control the party system, but it was only a last resort.

The party landscape had changed again by the 1940s with the rise of the CCF, but in a way comparable to the previous situation with the Progressives.<sup>83</sup> Given that a Liberal-Conservative split could help elect CCF members with a simple plurality, arguments for majority representation and electoral reform appealed to federal politicians more and more

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<sup>79</sup> HCD, 19 February 1923, 422-3. Maurice Duverger wrote that "in no country in the world [had] proportional representation given rise to a two-party system or kept one in existence." King's expectations for PR may have been misguided and were more applicable to AV, but they show a strong belief in a workable two-party system. Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*, trans. Barbara and Robert North (London: Methuen & Co., 1954), 45.

<sup>80</sup> Phillips, "Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974," 195-6; Pilon, "Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada," 147.

<sup>81</sup> Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada*, 200.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 199-203.

<sup>83</sup> The CCF, an amalgam of farmer and labour groups, came together in 1932, issuing its statement of principles (that is, the replacement of the capitalist system with socialism) in the Regina Manifesto of 1933. Their elected members advocated civil rights and the welfare state. The CCF was successful provincially, forming a government in Saskatchewan in 1944; the party was also on the rise in both British Columbia and Ontario. Anti-communism hampered the party's possibilities for growth following its 28 seat showing in the 1945 federal election. Young, *Democracy and Discontent*, 58-75; Alan Whitehorn, *Canadian Socialism: Essays on the CCF-NDP* (Toronto: Oxford University Press), 38-45; Walter D. Young, *The Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF 1932-61* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 112; Norman Penner, *From Protest to Power: Social Democracy in Canada 1900-Present* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1992), 86-9.

by the late 1940s, particularly to the opposition Conservatives. Arguing that CCF supporters should not be able to elect candidates with a minority of votes fit in nicely with the Conservative party's anti-CCF rhetoric. AV became a rather explicitly anti-CCF measure, and it was proposed as such both provincially and federally. An Ontario study concluded that CCF support would be at its peak on first ballots, whereas Liberal and Conservative voters, preferring free enterprise to socialism, would rank the other traditional party second, thereby ensuring one of the non-CCF candidates came out on top.<sup>84</sup> The ideological argument for AV remained the same, and it came from both Liberals and Conservatives: it was necessary "to ensure majority representation in parliament."<sup>85</sup> CCF MP Angus MacInnis agreed that the governing party should "be elected by, and represent a majority of the people," but he noted that the Liberals and Conservatives did not want "a proper electoral system that [would] give proper representation to the people of this country," but one that would "keep the C.C.F. out of office or out of parliament." "Proper representation," he said, included the representation of "large minorities," and he favoured either PR or an AV-STV hybrid.<sup>86</sup>

Due to the CCF's apparent rising good fortune, the narrative of a growing socialist menace fueled discussions of AV and the maintenance of a left-right divide at the federal level: FPTP elections were dangerous because the non-socialist parties were not united. The CCF's success in by-elections leading up to the 1949 federal election lent credibility to this

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<sup>84</sup> "Vote Reform under Survey by Mr. King," *Globe and Mail*, 3 January 1945, 3. Due to the vagaries of FPTP, the CCF struggled in the 1945 provincial election, triggering a decline in party support. Young, *The Anatomy of a Party*, 117-9.

<sup>85</sup> HCD, 15 June 1948, 5266; "Committee Considers Transferable Votes For Federal Election," *Globe and Mail*, 27 April 1948, 3. Liberals and Conservatives were not unanimous on this point. For example, one Conservative MP did not believe in AV as a solution. Rather than focusing on AV's potential to stifle minority groups (such as CCF voters), Thomas Church, member for Broadview, Ontario, claimed it would result in "a system of minorities" in government, an argument typically leveled against STV. Though his argument was flawed, his fear that fringe parties (presumably leftist ones) would overtake the House was similar to the broader Conservative fear that the CCF would continue to grow in strength under plurality. HCD, 15 June 1948, 5267.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 5271, 5273.

fear.<sup>87</sup> BC Conservative MLA W.A.C. Bennett had left provincial politics to run for federal office in the BC district of Yale in 1948. It was initially thought that the Liberals would abstain from running in Yale, a favour the Conservatives would return in another by-election, but these plans fell apart.<sup>88</sup> In a letter to a fellow campaigner, Bennett wrote:

There is no question about it, the Liberals have no chance of winning this by-election, but word has come from Ottawa to split our vote as much as possible and they would rather let the C.C.F. in than let us carry this seat, as this by-election is very important as a forerunner to the coming general election.<sup>89</sup>

A split vote helped to elect the CCF in Yale and in Vancouver Centre on a minority of the votes cast.<sup>90</sup> “There is a new party division in Canada — Socialism and non-Socialism,” said one commentator, “and the sooner the old-line parties give us a chance to vote that way the better for themselves and the better for us.”<sup>91</sup> The predicted CCF surge did not come to pass in the 1949 election, however, and talk of electoral reform subsided.<sup>92</sup> AV was rejected again in 1951 when a committee studying the Elections Act concluded that for AV to guarantee true majority representation (that is, 50 per cent plus one), voters would have to rank all candidates, and such compulsory voting was considered antithetical to Canadian ideas of democracy.<sup>93</sup> This was yet another interpretation of majority representation, one that admitted to an inherent representational deficit in FPTP while insisting on the status quo.

The committee dismissed AV because it could not guarantee majority representation unless

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<sup>87</sup> Pilon, “Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada,” 152.

<sup>88</sup> David Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1983), 90.

<sup>89</sup> Simon Fraser University Archives (hereafter SFU-A), W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-43, W.A.C. Bennett to Bert Johnston, 15 May 1948.

<sup>90</sup> While it is possible that the Liberals could have seen CCF by-election victories as beneficial to a future election fought on an anti-socialist campaign, simple Liberal-Conservative squabbling, and not wanting to appear the weaker of the two free enterprise parties, is more likely. In the 1949 federal election the Liberal party campaigned primarily on its own economic record, rather than anti-socialist rhetoric. See Beck, *Pendulum of Power*, 264.

<sup>91</sup> “Liberals Lose Two Seats,” *Vancouver Province*, 9 June 1948, 1.

<sup>92</sup> Pilon, “Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada,” 152; Whitehorn, *Canadian Socialism*, 76-9.

<sup>93</sup> “Alternative Voting System Rejected,” *Globe and Mail*, 16 November 1951, 3. John Diefenbaker was one prominent figure that favoured mandatory voting and had no problems with compulsion, though one CCF MP tried to provoke him by suggesting that he might have to rank a communist under AV. HCD, 15 June 1948, 5270, 5272.



50 per cent of registered voters endorsed a candidate, but it was even less likely that FPTP would produce that outcome.

While Parliament under FPTP did not account for the politics of all Canadians, it was characterized as representing all Canadians in politics because every voter had an MP. In 1948, the federal discussion of AV was simply a tangent in a debate on redistribution. “No electoral reform is superior to the one man, one vote majority system,” said Conservative MP John MacNicol. “What we want ... is equal voting strength for every voter.”<sup>94</sup>

Canadians’ comfort with FPTP appeared to limit their voting practices: when given the opportunity to rank candidates in Alberta and Manitoba’s rural AV ridings, approximately half of all voters expressed only a first preference, as if voting in a plurality election.<sup>95</sup>

MacNicol told the House of Commons: “Anybody going in to vote does not want to be pestered with one, two, three, four choices.” He went on, saying: “I always know for whom I am going to vote. ... The people should know for whom they are going to vote.”<sup>96</sup> The two-party politics that federal and provincial governments sought to protect encouraged this sort of partisanship. Voters, tied to the ideal of a local political representative, were largely unwilling to suggest that another party could adequately represent them. Though PR might have solved this problem by granting political representation to all, in a 1948 survey

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 5274. MacNicol had served on the Special Committee on Franchise and Elections Act in 1936, where he argued that “our troubles are largely the result of redistribution, and the fact that there is not always [a] reasonable relationship between the number of voters or population in one riding, as against another riding.” Canada, *Special Committee on Franchise and Elections Acts*, No. 5, 6 April 1936, 86.

<sup>95</sup> Jansen, “The Single Transferable Vote in Alberta and Manitoba,” 167. AV and STV were used in these provinces for over 30 years, so it would be unwise to claim that the electorate did not understand preferential voting and ranked a single candidate for that reason. Indeed, spoiled ballots in Manitoba under AV never rose much higher than 2 per cent. In Alberta, spoiled ballots under AV ranged from a low of just over 2 per cent in 1944 to a high of just over 6 per cent in 1952. Harold J. Jansen, “The Political Consequences of the Alternative Vote: Lessons from Western Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 37.3 (September 2004): 658. BC voters’ experience with AV will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

<sup>96</sup> HCD, 15 June 1948, 5276. Before becoming an MP, MacNicol had led the British Representation Society, which “had been established to counter the influence of the ‘P.R.’ Society and resist endeavours to introduce both ‘P.R.’ and the alternative vote for Ontario and Dominion elections.” Phillips, “Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974,” 164.

conducted by the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion, only 24 per cent of respondents expressed a desire to list a second preference at the polls.<sup>97</sup> The importance of constituency representation remains implicit, however, because one member was to represent the whole district on relatively equal terms, as per the principles of FPTP and representation in Canada. MacNicol's single vote reasoning spoke to many voters' approach to preferential voting, and redistribution schemes responded more directly to popular conceptions of representation. In the words of Ronald Hooper, honorary secretary of the Canadian PR Society, "you can take a man to the polls, but you cannot make him vote."<sup>98</sup>

## Conclusion

Looking at the values ascribed to voting systems and electoral reform, a process that has indisputably been "influenced by political interests, not values," can still be an instructive exercise.<sup>99</sup> For a reformer or a political scientist looking to outline the state of elections and representative government, it is natural to question the importance of value-laden ideas such as local representation. Indeed, an emphasis on values may be "a barrier to change," distracting from "an analysis of the real workings of our institutions and their political implications."<sup>100</sup> However, the reality is that historical debates on voting systems have taken a values approach to electoral reform. The fate of STV and AV in Canada and British Columbia depended on the needs of the party system, but the arguments for and against change were always couched in the importance of majority and constituency representation. These ideas converged in public discussions of the redistribution of electoral districts,

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<sup>97</sup> Phillips, "Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974," 267.

<sup>98</sup> Canada, *Special Committee on Franchise and Elections Acts*: Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence No. 6, 28 April 1936, 120.

<sup>99</sup> Pilon, *The Politics of Voting*, 135.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

wherein voters argued vehemently in favour of either equality of representation or their need of a unique local representative. Proportional representation was dismissed in this period due to the needs of parties and partly, at least at the municipal level, due to its failure to meet voters' expectations for simple ballots that offered a familiar variant on majority representation.

Values debates also converge when considering the nature of the party system and the emphasis on two-party politics in this time period. The antagonistic politics encouraged by the two-party system undermined opportunities for electoral reform: proportional representation was out of the question for parties looking towards future majorities, and the majoritarian alternative vote, designed to maintain a two-party divide, presented its own hazards. W.A.C. Bennett, one of the strongest advocates of AV, reflected that the system would “ordinarily ... defeat any government, because the people that unite against the government unite on the transferable vote against the government, no matter what government it is.”<sup>101</sup> By looking at the Canadian party system and the values debates surrounding electoral reform at the federal level and in other provinces, one finds that British Columbia fits into a similar mold. The principles of plurality voting informed the political debates on representation and shaped the views of the voters who had to deal with the realities of the different electoral systems. At both the federal and provincial level, two-party politics and the attempt to maintain such a system drove discussions of electoral reform and the alternative vote.

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<sup>101</sup> British Columbia Archives, T1675:0020-1, David Mitchell, “Bennett Interview,” 8 October 1976, 4-5.

## Chapter 2 – Reconsidering the Voting System: Two-Party Politics in British Columbia

The introduction of the alternative vote (AV) in BC was the end result of years of two-party politics. The Liberals and Conservatives had gone to extraordinary lengths to maintain a two-party system without resorting to electoral reform, continuing a wartime coalition in response to surging CCF support. Only the Coalition's impending collapse drove the parties to adopt the alternative vote, but choosing AV as a solution was not an easy decision. The viability of first-past-the-post (FPTP), AV, the single transferable vote (STV), and a points system were all considered, indicating that the parties were looking to maximize their seat counts should they adopt a new system. Both coalition and AV were used to maintain two-party politics with the claim that they would provide for stability and majority representation. The provincial electoral reform debates invite comparison with their federal counterparts in this respect, and the 1952 and 1953 BC elections under AV also provide clear examples of the values debates attached to the voting system.

While the story of BC's party system in the early twentieth century has been told previously, the impact of BC politics on the voting system beyond the Liberal-Conservative Coalition era (1941 – 1952) and the following elections (1952 and 1953) merits additional consideration.<sup>1</sup> Discussions of proportional representation (PR) took place in BC in the first part of the century, and the lack of changes prior to 1941 can also be explained by looking at the party system. FPTP's distorted results and majority governments proved attractive to the old-line parties, and the long-standing emphasis on two-party politics encouraged the

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<sup>1</sup> For information on these periods, see in particular Thomas Michael Sanford, "The Politics of Protest: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and Social Credit League in British Columbia" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1961); Alan C. Cairns and Daniel Wong, "Socialism, Federalism and the B.C. Party Systems 1933–1983," in *Party Politics in Canada*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Hugh G. Thorburn (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1990), 468-85; and David Elkins, "Politics Make Strange Bedfellows: The B.C. Party System in the 1952 and 1953 Provincial Elections," *BC Studies* 30 (Summer 1976): 3-26.

maintenance of a plurality system.<sup>2</sup> The ideal of a two-party system informed the Coalition's approach to AV, and voters engaged with the system on the same level. This chapter begins with a history of BC's party system in the early twentieth century, exploring the origins of the antagonistic two-party politics of the Coalition era. Party politics can explain the rejection of various voting systems and give additional context to the associated values debates.

Following an account of the BC party system, this chapter closely traces the history of the alternative vote in BC leading up to the 1952 election. This is intended to act as a corrective to histories that focus on the elections themselves while not accounting for AV's origins and the other systems under consideration.<sup>3</sup> W.A.C. Bennett played a key role in the adoption of AV, and his dream of leading a revitalized Conservative party or a united Coalition contributed to his advocacy of the alternative vote. Alternate voting systems were portrayed as offering democratic benefits that would improve upon FPTP, but the Liberal and Conservative executive were more reluctant to embrace reform than their membership base. The increasingly fragile structure of the Coalition in the late 1940s drove discussions of voting system reform, and ultimately the Liberal and Conservative parties settled on the alternative vote as a tool that could keep them in office in a post-Coalition world. Publicly, they praised AV for providing majority representation by keeping candidates from being elected with a minority of votes. Rampant anti-socialism made it clear that there was more

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<sup>2</sup> Robin Fisher and David Mitchell lament the reduction of BC politics to "catchwords such as 'polarization' and 'volatile' as substitutes for careful analysis of political developments." While I have taken two-party politics as my focus, I hope to show that this sort of polarization, encouraged by FPTP, held sway with the public. Robin Fisher and David J. Mitchell, "Patterns of Provincial Politics Since 1916," in *The Pacific Province: A History of British Columbia*, ed. Hugh J. M. Johnston (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996), 254.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Robin finds the origins of AV in provincial party conventions, but his commentary proves problematic for reasons that will be discussed later. Martin Robin, *Pillars of Profit: The Company Province 1934-1972* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973). Dennis Pilon provides a comparatively excellent, albeit brief, account of the origins of the alternative vote in BC. He begins in 1946 and includes the debate on proportional representation for urban ridings and Liberal leader Byron Johnson's opposition to reform in 1948. Dennis Pilon, "Democracy BC-Style," in *British Columbia Politics and Government*, ed. Michael Howlett, Dennis Pilon, and Tracy Summerville (Emond Montgomery Publications, 2009), 93-5.

political expediency than altruism behind the legislation, and it was often publicly acknowledged that AV was intended to limit the CCF's chances on election day. Pro- and anti-AV sentiments did not always fall along party lines, however. Examples of CCFers who believed in the democratic merits of AV demonstrate the weight placed on the principles of representative government in BC. As the 1952 election approached, the rise of the Social Credit party in British Columbia altered the party system and threatened the Coalition's plans. The Socreds' presence had important implications for the AV elections, and consequently this chapter will conclude with a discussion of the party's origins and Bennett's thoughts on the alternative vote.

### **A Note on Two-Party Politics**

The BC Legislature has typically been composed of two to three main parties, depending on the era, but voters were rarely so limited in their choices. Other parties and independents ran in the provincial elections and received votes. The low number of parties in the Legislature is a side effect of FPTP: obtaining a plurality of votes as a fringe candidate is a difficult undertaking. This distortion encouraged the major parties to maintain FPTP, because it ensured their continued dominance. Two-party politics in BC has often been more perception than reality, but the larger parties operated under these norms and many voters were drawn into their camps due to their prominence and the low chances of electing alternate candidates. The idea of a two-party system, as shaped by FPTP, informed BC politics, which necessitated the re-evaluation of the party or electoral systems whenever viable third parties emerged.

## The BC Party System and the Prospects for Electoral Reform, 1903 – 1941

Federal party politics came to British Columbia when Richard McBride's Conservative party won the 1903 election; the BC Liberals and Conservatives had held founding conventions the previous year.<sup>4</sup> His party believed that a stable Legislature would be good for industry and attract potential investors.<sup>5</sup> A decade earlier, labour interests in Victoria had organized a Progressive party, which encouraged unity amongst the liberal and conservative groups — acting to stymie the left was a common theme in party politics.<sup>6</sup> The party system functioned as expected and provincial elections under FPTP returned relatively stable governments until 1941. The Liberal party, however, was dissatisfied with the early election results: in 1912 it elected no members to the Legislature despite receiving 25 per cent of the popular vote. This disastrous result can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the popularity of the Conservatives, gerrymandering by the government, and socialist candidates who divided the left, thereby allowing the Conservatives to obtain plurality victories.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of the cause, the Liberals did not want to be shut out of politics, and at their 1914 convention they endorsed PR. Proportional results would have

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<sup>4</sup> Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, rev. ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 176-7; George Woodcock, *British Columbia: A History of the Province* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990), 176.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Robin, "British Columbia: The Company Province," in *Canadian Provincial Politics: The Party Systems of the Ten Provinces*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Martin Robin (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1978), 42.

<sup>6</sup> Edith Dobie, "Some Aspects of Party History in British Columbia, 1871–1903," *Pacific Historical Review* 1.2 (June 1932): 247; Robin, "British Columbia," 42-3. The Socialist party had a minor presence in the legislature beginning in 1903, but it never elected more than three members. In her biography on Ernest Winch, Dorothy G. Steeves also writes about the rise and transformation of socialism and the CCF in BC, from the 1910s forward. Following the 1912 election, "defections and disarray ... reduce[d] opportunities for election under the socialist banner." Dorothy G. Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel: Ernest Winch and the Growth of Socialism in Western Canada* (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas, 1960); Barman, *The West Beyond the West*, 217. Donald E. Blake says the divided left diminished its own chances for electoral success. Many leftists were committed to extra-political action, fearing "co-optation" of their movement should they participate in politics. Donald E. Blake, "The Politics of Polarization: Parties and Elections in British Columbia," in *Politics, Policy, and Government in British Columbia*, ed. R.K. Carty (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996), 69.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis Pilon, "The Drive for Proportional Representation in British Columbia, 1917-23," (M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1994), 28.

made the Liberals a strong opposition presence in 1912, and it made good sense to publicly endorse electoral reform.<sup>8</sup>

The Liberals were willing to embrace electoral reform if it meant representation in the Legislature, but the 1916 FPTP election swept the Liberals into power with a large majority.<sup>9</sup> Because 50 per cent of the votes had given the Liberals 77 per cent of the seats, it was clear that the distortions of FPTP could cut both ways, and provincial PR received little traction from then on. Though the Liberal push for PR faded with time, legislation allowing municipalities to use STV passed without difficulty in 1917, and Liberal premier H. C. Brewster believed that it could be a first step towards broader reforms.<sup>10</sup> He did not want to link himself too closely with PR reformers, however, lest he not seem impartial when discussing voting system legislation. He therefore declined an invitation from Garfield King to become the Honorary Vice-President of the PR Society. Regardless, he told King that his “sympathies ... [were] with a practicable Proportional Representation electoral system.”<sup>11</sup> This may well have been true, but his successor, John Oliver, doubted the potential for PR in provincial or federal politics.<sup>12</sup> This was likely due to the Liberals’ fear of the burgeoning labour movement in BC: between 1919 and 1921, BC’s Labour and Socialist parties were on the rise.<sup>13</sup> Increasing labour’s political representation via STV would only give the movement a legitimate public platform. For his party’s sake Oliver was right to avoid PR, because the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 31. Pilon observes that the Liberals’ endorsement of PR was in keeping with its image as a progressive party of reform. Pilon, “Democracy BC-Style,” 88-9.

<sup>9</sup> The Liberals had campaigned against Conservative corruption and in favour of “clean and open government, and the idea of governing in the interests of all British Columbians rather than just the privileged few.” The Liberals were able to enact a good deal of progressive legislation. Robin and Mitchell, “Patterns of Provincial Politics Since 1916,” 256-7.

<sup>10</sup> Pilon, “The Drive for Proportional Representation in British Columbia, 1917-23,” 34.

<sup>11</sup> Brewster noted that his colleague, Conservative party leader W. J. Bowser, also supported PR; King had offered the honorary title to Bowser as well. British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), Premier’s Records, GR-441, box 186, file 5, H. C. Brewster to Garfield King, 6 July 1917.

<sup>12</sup> H.C.J. Phillips, “Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974” (Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario, 1976), 178.

<sup>13</sup> Oliver called the One Big Union “a Bolshevik plot,” and it was unlikely that he would willingly hand these groups political representation. Barman, *The West Beyond the West*, 222-3.



Liberals formed the government in four of the next five elections, allowing them to comfortably forget their previous passion for electoral reform. At the local government level, all British Columbian municipalities using PR ultimately abolished the system. West Vancouver was the last to do so, in 1930, and the act allowing city councils to implement PR was eliminated the same year, having become “obsolete.”<sup>14</sup>

The lack of discussion on voting systems between the 1920s and 1930s in BC, as compared to the ongoing federal debates, is attributable to the lack of a significant and long-lasting third party.<sup>15</sup> This is not to say that the party system in this period was stable. On the contrary, the Conservative party imploded in spectacular fashion not once, but twice. In 1923, Conservatives who were tired of the leadership and corruption of W. J. Bowser and their party’s failure to form a government created the anti-Bowser Provincial Party.<sup>16</sup> The Provincials campaigned against the apparent corruption of Bowser’s leadership, thereby splitting the conservative vote. The Provincial Party elected only three candidates in the 1924 election, but it cost the Conservatives numerous seats, including Bowser’s.<sup>17</sup> Without the

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas R. Berger, “A City of Neighbourhoods: Report of the 2004 Vancouver Electoral Reform Commission,” *City of Vancouver*, 90 <[http://vancouver.ca/erc/pdf/verc\\_report.pdf](http://vancouver.ca/erc/pdf/verc_report.pdf)>.

<sup>15</sup> The CCF’s influence on the party system and electoral reform became more apparent in the 1940s. Pilon notes two instances of failed reform and one major change during the 1920s and 1930s. In 1928, Vancouver Liberals sympathetic to PR pressed for its adoption provincially, “fearing that labour candidacies would split their vote,” but changes were not forthcoming. At the municipal level, Vancouver moved to at-large plurality voting from the ward system in 1935 in an attempt to keep the CCF from establishing a base of labour support, but the CCF elected candidates nonetheless. Finally, a 1939 Vancouver plebiscite on municipal PR failed to pass. The CCF mayor had hoped it might halt his party’s declining representation. Pilon, “Democracy BC-Style,” 91-3; Dennis Pilon, “Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada, 1874 to 1960,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 40.3 (Fall 2006): 148. Barman also comments on the move to at-large plurality voting in Vancouver. See Barman, *The West Beyond the West*, 255.

<sup>16</sup> The Provincial Party was a marriage of both anti-Bowser Conservatives and the United Farmers of British Columbia, which gave the party a large support base. Benjamin Isitt describes the Provincial Party as “a BC equivalent of the federal Progressives.” The Oliver government’s mismanagement of the Pacific Great Eastern Railway, including a donation scandal involving railway officials and the Minister of Mines, was one of the Provincial Party’s targets. Pressure from the Provincials resulted in a Royal Commission on the PGE’s finances. They also attacked the government’s ties with liquor interests. Ian Parker, “The Provincial Party,” *BC Studies* 8 (Winter 1970): 18, 23-4; Benjamin Isitt, “Elusive Unity: The Canadian Labor Party in British Columbia, 1924-1928,” *BC Studies* 163 (Autumn 2009): 33, 40.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret A. Ormsby describes the Provincials as the embodiment of “the ‘Put Oliver out and don’t let Bowser in’ movement,” and their presence cost Oliver his seat as well. Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A*

divide, the Conservatives may have formed a government.<sup>18</sup> Tensions subsided by 1926 and the Provincial Party disappeared, with Simon Fraser Tolmie uniting the Bowser and anti-Bowser groups.<sup>19</sup> In the 1928 election the united Conservatives formed a majority government, but this was not the end of the Conservatives' internal problems.

In the 1933 election there was no Conservative party. Tolmie led a group of candidates under a Unionist banner, Bowser headed the Independent Non-Partisans, and other Conservatives ran as capital 'I' Independents; Duff Pattullo's Liberals returned a large majority government.<sup>20</sup> What had become of two-party politics in British Columbia? The BC experience differs from the federal case in this respect, because prior to 1933 no Progressive or labour party had won enough seats to establish a significant third party presence in the BC Legislature. While a serious rift had motivated the 1933 split, the Conservatives could afford to sort out their disputes at the polls on the assumption that there was no concrete threat to their place in provincial politics. Buoyed by the division of the Conservatives, however, the BC CCF elected seven candidates and became the official opposition.<sup>21</sup> The socialist CCF demonstrated that it was a political threat, but this could be dismissed as an

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*History* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1964), 487; David Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1983), 420-1, 423. The Provincial Party's failure to replace the old-line parties prompted discussions of merging with another group, but Bowser's resignation opened the door for reunification. Ian Parker cites the party's inability to court labour votes and the lack of "the expected mass defection of Liberals and Conservatives" as the reasons for its failure. Parker, "The Provincial Party," 26-7.

<sup>18</sup> John Gordon Terpenning, "Maitland and the British Columbia Conservative Party: The Struggle for Political Identity and Survival" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1988), 46, 48.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 41, 59.

<sup>20</sup> Tolmie had proposed coalition with Pattullo's Liberals as a response to the Depression, hence his Unionist label. The *Vancouver Province* had argued that the parties were essentially the same and that they should unite, thereby ending the party system as it had been understood in BC. Pattullo, a staunch Liberal, opposed the idea, believing that Tolmie's Conservatives were on their way out and were looking for any means to maintain power. It should be noted that the Independents were not disconnected independent candidates, but a leaderless group of Conservatives. Ormsby, *British Columbia*, 448-9, 451-2; Robin Fisher, *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 224-8; Terpenning, "Maitland and the British Columbia Conservative Party," 105.

<sup>21</sup> When the Liberals elected zero members in 1912, two Socialist MLAs were the opposition in the Legislature, though Parker Williams declined the title of Leader of the Opposition. Legislative Library of British Columbia, "Leaders of the Opposition in British Columbia 1903-," 4

<[http://www.llbc.leg.bc.ca/public/reference/leaders\\_of\\_the\\_opposition.pdf](http://www.llbc.leg.bc.ca/public/reference/leaders_of_the_opposition.pdf)>.

anomaly due to the divided Conservative organization.<sup>22</sup> Once the CCF's support crystallized in the 1940s, its presence informed future Liberal and Conservative election campaigns and spurred discussions of electoral reform. Voters were encouraged to choose between either free enterprise or socialism.<sup>23</sup>

It is interesting to consider the lack of electoral reform discussion in the fractured Conservative years. Granted, these were relatively brief interludes, but multipartism has typically been associated with discussions of electoral reform, and this was certainly true in the case of the federal response to the Progressives and the CCF.<sup>24</sup> It is likely that AV could have united the split Conservative vote, for instance, but this possibility was not entertained for obvious reasons. First, the Conservatives' internal strife was primarily a matter of leadership and party policy: while it was a party divided, it was not a divided party looking to unite. Bowser and his supporters were not an adequate second choice for the anti-Bowser Provincials, and proposing a preferential system would have made little sense. The breakup *was* the change the anti-Bowser group was looking for. Indeed, the Provincial Party passed a resolution "requiring all candidates to swear they would enter no coalition with any other party," including the Conservatives.<sup>25</sup> If the division had continued to a point where AV was considered — the Provincials, after all, had "split the anti-Liberal vote" — the Liberal

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<sup>22</sup> Blake, "The Politics of Polarization," 70.

<sup>23</sup> Barman says that "[t]he CCF's visionary socialism was unable to meet the challenge offered by Pattullo's practical promise to expand government services," but it was still relatively successful, polling over 30 per cent of the popular vote. Dorothy Steeves, who served as a CCF MLA, says the CCF had "undeniable appeal ... in a society which had broken down." It enjoyed the endorsement of the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, which issued an anti-capitalist memorandum. Barman, *The West Beyond the West*, 254-5; Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel*, 88-90.

<sup>24</sup> The body of literature dealing with party systems' impact on electoral systems, and vice versa, will be addressed in the conclusion, along with a consideration of where BC fits in the context of this theory.

<sup>25</sup> Parker, "The Provincial Party," 24. The resolution was as follows: "[T]he Provincial Party, in the event of its being in the minority in the House after the next election, will not unite with either the Conservative or Liberal Party." The party's platform made no reference to voting system reform. The closest it came was a proposal to reduce the number of MLAs in the Legislature via redistribution, "in the interests of economy and electoral reform." BCA, NWp 329.9711 P969p, Provincial Party of British Columbia, *Platform and Policy*, 4-6 December 1923, 5, 4.

government would have provided an immediate roadblock, because it had no reason to bring in a system that would unite its opponents.<sup>26</sup> The temporary nature of these cracks in the Conservative party and their origins in issues of party direction and leadership meant that they had to be resolved internally; therefore, electoral reform was not entertained as a solution.

The BC CCF provided a viable political front for the left in British Columbia following its initial success in the 1933 provincial election. As the official opposition it spoke for labour concerns, agitated for the welfare state, and advocated public ownership to rein in business interests.<sup>27</sup> The entrenched urban and working populations in BC contributed to the party's popularity in the province.<sup>28</sup> In 1937 the CCF received nearly as many votes as the Conservatives, electing seven MLAs to the Tories' eight. The Liberals formed a strong majority government in spite of the split "non-left vote," and consequently BC politics remained a two-party, or "two-party plus" system.<sup>29</sup> In 1941 the CCF won the popular vote, receiving 33.36 per cent of all votes cast. Federally, the CCF became a threat in the post-war period as workers looked to hold onto the prosperity they had experienced during wartime.<sup>30</sup> The CCF was endorsed by the Canadian Congress of Labour as the "political arm of labour" in 1943, and its provincial counterparts made substantial gains in that year's Ontario election and formed a government in Saskatchewan in 1944.<sup>31</sup> The familiar choice of either the Liberals or Conservatives was certainly gone in BC, and three-party politics appeared to be the new norm. This proved problematic, because playing up a left-right divide threatened to

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<sup>26</sup> Parker, "The Provincial Party," 26.

<sup>27</sup> Gordon Hak, "Populism and the 1952 Social Credit Breakthrough in British Columbia," *Canadian Historical Review* 85.2 (June 2004): 290.

<sup>28</sup> Walter D. Young, *Democracy and Discontent: Progressivism, Socialism and Social Credit in the Canadian West*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978), 104-5.

<sup>29</sup> Blake, "The Politics of Polarization," 70.

<sup>30</sup> Young, *Democracy and Discontent*, 70-1.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-5.

eliminate the distinction between the two traditional parties, thereby allowing the CCF to win plurality victories against the parties to its right. The Provincial Party and the Conservatives had delivered the 1924 election to the Liberals in a similar fashion.

Despite the CCF's success at the polls, the 1941 FPTP election returned more Liberal MLAs. This result is attributable to "rural over-representation" in British Columbia: the CCF may have received the most votes, but due to the emphasis on local representation, rural districts were afforded a disproportionately high number of representatives.<sup>32</sup> The CCF became a strong advocate for redistribution that could right this wrong, and it received more traction with the media on this front than it did with its forthcoming criticisms of the alternative vote. Redistribution became a common theme at Liberal conventions, for example, and a 1950 editorial in the *Vancouver Sun* stated that the Legislature "should attempt a redistribution of seats in the House in line with the principle of representative government."<sup>33</sup> Electoral reform as redistribution spoke to voters' traditional ideas of representation and was met with broad-based interest, because as a concept it was both tangible and apolitical.<sup>34</sup> The politics of redistribution will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

### **Coalition and Two-Party Politics**

FPTP worked well when the Liberals and Conservatives were the only two viable options, but with the CCF's rising good fortune they risked losing future contests.

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<sup>32</sup> Sanford, "The Politics of Protest," 261.

<sup>33</sup> "Misrepresentation by Population," *Vancouver Sun*, 17 February 1950, 4. Rep-by-pop and local interests were the two central themes in discussions of redistribution. For example, in 1938 it was suggested that the rural portion of the Burnaby riding be returned to Dewdney, as appropriate, noting that Burnaby's population was "quite large enough to justify a separate seat." BCA, Legislative Assembly Committee Proceedings and Reports 1883 – 1949, GR-2016, Mflm B-1415, G.M. Phillips, Registrar of Voters, *Suggested Changes in Boundaries of Electoral Districts*, 31 October 1938, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Local, geographically based representation, an MLA, and rep-by-pop may have been apolitical concepts, but the practice of obtaining them was anything but nonpartisan.

Fortunately for their political futures (particularly the Conservatives), the Second World War provided the parties with a pretext to form a coalition in 1941, following the election of what would otherwise have been a minority Liberal government.<sup>35</sup> This decision was not without its opponents, the most notable being Liberal premier Duff Pattullo. He believed that association with the Conservatives might drive Liberal voters to the CCF, while also aiding the flagging Tories.<sup>36</sup> Conservative leader Robert Maitland initially floated the idea of a three party grand coalition, in the hopes that the CCF would be marginalized within the group,<sup>37</sup> but CCF leader Harold Winch declined the invitation for this very reason.<sup>38</sup> Maintaining a distinct identity from the old-line parties could only help the CCF's cause, and entering into a coalition would have been antithetical to CCF party doctrine. The CCF was "out for the complete reformation and overthrow of the capitalist system," Winch said, "and [the Liberals and Conservatives] stood for it."<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the CCF had doubled its number

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<sup>35</sup> In fairness, stability during wartime was billed as the selling point of the Coalition, even if the Liberals' dissatisfaction with Pattullo's anti-coalition stance and concerns over the CCF's success played a role in bringing it to life. Barman, *The West Beyond the West*, 262; George Malcolm Abbott, "The Formation of the Liberal-Conservative Coalition in 1941" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1978), 17. Donald E. Blake writes that "the coalition was not designed as an instrument to contain the left." Indeed, the CCF had offered to support a minority Liberal government if the Conservatives refused to cooperate. The Coalition transformed into a decidedly anti-socialist entity with the passage of time. Blake, "The Politics of Polarization," 70-1. The Liberals' 1947 provincial convention included a draft resolution noting that the "Convention consider[ed] the interests of the people of the Province could best be served at this time by the maintenance of a unified front against Communism and Socialism through a Coalition of the Liberal Party and the Progressive-Conservative Party in the Government of the Province of British Columbia," though it also acknowledged the necessity of maintaining the Liberals' unique identity. University of Victoria Archives and Special Collections (hereafter UV-ASC), Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 1, file 4, B.C. Liberal Convention, "Resolution No. 5 -- Resolution on Coalition," 10 December 1947.

<sup>36</sup> By refusing to discuss the coalition issue and choosing to continue as a minority government, Pattullo helped fuel pro-coalition sentiment within his own party. Abbott, "The Formation of the Liberal-Conservative Coalition in 1941," 34, 45. For more on Pattullo's anti-coalition sentiment, see BCA, NWp 329.9711 L695p, "Whither the Liberal Party?," T.D. Pattullo, 28 July 1942, 4. Pattullo was opposed to a coalition from the beginning, and he faced opposition from his cabinet, including John Hart. The party president called a convention for December 1941 to discuss coalition, two days before the Legislature was set to open. Many Liberals were wary of minority government and future elections, and Byron Johnson's resolution in favour of coalition passed. Pattullo resigned as premier after the Legislature opened, and he recommended Hart as his replacement. Fisher, *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia*, 344-51. See also Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 52-62.

<sup>37</sup> Abbott, "The Formation of the Liberal-Conservative Coalition in 1941," 65.

<sup>38</sup> University of British Columbia Special Collections (hereafter UBC-SC), Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 46, file 7, Harold Winch to John Hart, 5 December 1941.

<sup>39</sup> BCA, Glen Jenkinson, T0148:0003, "Harold Winch Interview," 1973.

of MLAs and outpolled both the Conservatives and the Liberals, giving them little practical reason to join in a coalition.<sup>40</sup> The CCF opened itself up to criticism that it was working against the war effort, but it had chosen wisely in maintaining the left-right division.

The Coalition made BC politics a two-party affair once again, essentially reducing voters to a choice between either a Coalition or CCF candidate.<sup>41</sup> The CCF's status as the sole opposition party strengthened its position and heightened the free enterprise versus socialism divide.<sup>42</sup> FPTP functioned best for the old-line parties when there was a clear two-way split; however, as evidenced by the large number of votes for the Provincials in 1924, voters were willing to latch on to alternatives.<sup>43</sup> The Liberals' 1941 minority government gave the Conservatives an opportunity to attach their struggling party to a stronger one to avoid becoming obsolete, which they risked if voters considered the Liberals the only electable alternative to the CCF. By removing the Liberal option for voters in some constituencies, the Conservatives would still be able to elect candidates in predominantly non-CCF ridings, albeit under the Coalition banner. Coalition thus superseded the need for electoral reform. Mackenzie King had accomplished a similar feat when he brought the Progressives into the Liberal fold and cast aside talk of proportional representation.

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<sup>40</sup> Abbott, "The Formation of the Liberal-Conservative Coalition in 1941," 75.

<sup>41</sup> While only the Coalition or CCF could reasonably be expected to succeed at the polls, in 1945 eleven other groups, including independents, received a combined 6.53 per cent of the popular vote. Of these alternatives, the Labor Progressive Party polled the highest, receiving 3.52 per cent of the popular vote. *Elections BC*, "Electoral History of British Columbia 1871 - 1986" <[http://www.elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/1871-1986\\_ElectoralHistoryofBC.pdf](http://www.elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/1871-1986_ElectoralHistoryofBC.pdf)>.

<sup>42</sup> Blake, "The Politics of Polarization," 71.

<sup>43</sup> Duverger argued that FPTP could reduce elections to a two-party contest at the district level, wherein voters would be compelled to cast their ballots for a viable candidate. Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*, trans. Barbara and Robert North (London: Methuen & Co., 1954), 223. That FPTP "functioned best" when there were two parties running is a political judgment, not a representational one. In a race with only two candidates in a plurality riding it is possible for nearly 50 per cent of voters to be without the political representative they desired, though they would still have a constituency representative. This representational shortcoming was a key factor driving the PR debates, and it is not addressed by AV. For a breakdown of Canadian elections at all levels that demonstrates that they are never reduced to pure two party affairs, see Brian J. Gaines, "Duverger's Law and the Meaning of Canadian Exceptionalism," *Comparative Political Studies* 32.7 (October 1999): 835-61.

Refashioning the political landscape as a two-party system without resorting to electoral reform was ideal. A thorough re-evaluation of the voting system was far more common when the government was worried about an upcoming plurality election.

In addition to the Coalition itself, anti-socialist rhetoric was also used in an attempt to diminish the CCF and insist on a two-party, left-right divide.<sup>44</sup> Herbert Anscomb, who became Conservative party leader and the Coalition's finance minister in 1946, was a vociferous anti-socialist. Anscomb believed "there [was] no difference between socialism and communism," and he said the Coalition was formed to stop "the menace of socialism, or ... communism" in its tracks; in terms of policy, he called "[t]his coddling [social welfare] business" both "disgusting" and "utterly unnecessary."<sup>45</sup> Conservative election strategy portrayed the CCF as not just a menace to the party, but to businesses and British Columbia as a whole. Rhetoric of this sort did not amount to political promises, and voters could ignore the droning call to arms,<sup>46</sup> as they did in the late 1940s by-elections. The old-line parties were liable to lose if they offered the same policies or rhetoric while going it alone

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<sup>44</sup> Another response, certainly noticeable in the BC Liberals, was to adopt leftist policies as their own. The 1947 constitution of the BC Liberal Association "recognize[d] that the general interest [was] sometimes better served when the state undert[ook] the economic tasks in which individual enterprise no longer function[ed] for the greatest common good." While this could blur the lines between the left and the right, the free enterprise and socialist divide did not fade. BCA, NWp 329.9711 L695Bc 1947, British Columbia Liberal Association, "Constitution of the British Columbia Liberal Association," 10 December 1947. Donald Alper lists the following policies as co-opted CCF reforms: "labour-management relations, social reform such as mothers' allowances and old age pensions, control (but not take over) of private power systems, increased allocations for education and the raising of teachers' salaries, and expansion of public works programs." Donald Keith Alper, "From Rule to Ruin: The Conservative Party of British Columbia, 1928-1954" (Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1975), 217.

<sup>45</sup> BCA, T1947:0001, Martin Robin, "Herbert Anscomb Interview," 1967. Anscomb's reference to social welfare was, at the time of the interview, an attack on Social Credit policy, but his views on the CCF had been the same. His rhetoric was not always logically consistent, and he once said that the Coalition parties had "joined together to save the country from the same kind of socialism that Hitler gave Germany." Quoted in Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 82. The CCF was cautious about the endorsement of the communists (the Labor Progressive Party), declining to cooperate with the BC Federation of Labour's 1945 resolution recommending that only one labour candidate run in each riding. Furthermore, the CCF denounced the principles of dictatorial communism in favour of democratic socialism in 1952. Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 72-3, 85-6; UBC-SC, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 62, file 3, B.C. Provincial Council, "CCF Statement of Principles," 3.

<sup>46</sup> Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 75.



against the CCF, hence their decision to form a Coalition and their gradual move towards the alternative vote.

### **The Conservatives, W.A.C. Bennett, and the Rise of the Alternative Vote**

The mechanics of the Coalition can go some way to explaining the eventual necessity of AV. Though its candidates were branded Coalition members at the polls, the Coalition was far from a unified entity. In the 1941 election the Liberals and Conservatives had received a similar share of the popular vote, the former receiving nearly 33 per cent, and the latter nearly 31, but the parties elected 21 and 12 members, respectively. Liberal leader Duff Pattullo had stepped down over the coalition issue, and his replacement, John Hart, did not grant Maitland's request for equal representation in cabinet on the basis of the popular vote. Hart based his decision on the Conservatives' smaller numbers in the Legislature, and consequently the cabinet was composed of five Liberals and four Conservatives.<sup>47</sup> This set a tone of inequality that would last throughout the Coalition's days.

While the Coalition arrangement was initially successful, some objected to its composition. Chief among the detractors was Conservative MLA W.A.C. Bennett. He was "convinced," he said, "that what [was] wrong [was] not the Coalition, but the lack of coalition," and he argued that "a genuine coalition in the constituencies" would result in

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<sup>47</sup> Abbott, "The Formation of the Liberal-Conservative Coalition in 1941," 66; Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 65. Because the parties were not united, this necessitated an inventive strategy for nominating candidates for future elections. The Hart formula, or Coalition formula, worked as follows. The Liberal and Conservative parties ran candidates in ridings they had won in the previous election, unopposed by their Coalition partners. Joint nominating conventions were held in non-Coalition ridings to determine a satisfactory candidate. Both parties ran candidates in dual-member ridings where they would "not be opposed in the election by either the Progressive Conservative Party or the Liberal Party." Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 83; Simon Fraser University Archives (hereafter SFU-A), W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-45, "Coalition Formula," 1949. Nominations under the Hart formula presented some difficulties in 1945, with party loyalists occasionally refusing to back Coalition candidates that did not originate from their party. Cooperation in the nominations process had improved by the 1949 election. Alper, "From Rule to Ruin," 246, 295.

“sounder policies and a feeling of permanency.”<sup>48</sup> Bennett had agreed with the formation of a coalition during wartime, but he believed the Liberals and Conservatives needed to go further and merge into a single entity. Beginning in 1943, he lobbied for the formation of a United Progressive Party. True coalition would avoid an otherwise inevitable breakup, provide a united front against the CCF, clarify the political landscape for voters, and allow for consistent, long-term policies.<sup>49</sup> The provincial Conservative association president also advocated unity, as did some Liberals, but Maitland and Hart both abandoned the idea by 1945, despite expressing some initial interest.<sup>50</sup> Bennett remained adamant that only a true coalition could prevent “chaos in this Province.”<sup>51</sup> He did his part in the South Okanagan riding by spearheading the formation of a permanent coalition organization in 1946, the first of its kind in BC.<sup>52</sup> He continued to agitate for a permanent coalition, and in a 1947 speech he again suggested that “the Coalition Government should have a permanent organization on a democratic basis,” adding that it had strayed from its 1941 origins, which were to provide unity in wartime. It was now “operating to meet the threat of the C.C.F.” Continuing the coalition partnership for this reason, he said, was “a very negative policy,” one that would result in the government’s eventual collapse.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-32, Bennett to H. G. T. Perry, 24 April 1946.

<sup>49</sup> Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 71, 75-9. Mitchell’s biography is an excellent source, and his extensive interviews with Bennett provide invaluable insight into how the former premier perceived BC’s history and his own role in BC politics. However, it should be approached with at least one caveat. By Mitchell’s own admission, through the interview process he developed “sympathy and respect for Bennett.” This is not altogether unexpected, but Jeremy Wilson suggests the book borders on sycophantic hagiography, giving Bennett too much credit for events that may have been beyond his control. Wilson does, however, praise Mitchell’s account of the origins of Social Credit in BC and his history of the 1952 election. Though it post-dates the initial publication of the biography, Mitchell’s personal politics should also be mentioned. He served as an MLA from 1991 to 1996, stepping down as Liberal house leader in 1992 to become an independent. Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, viii, 463; R. Jeremy Wilson, review of *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, by David J. Mitchell, *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 18.3 (September 1985): 613-4.

<sup>50</sup> Terpenning, “Maitland and the British Columbia Conservative Party,” 196-9.

<sup>51</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-31, Bennett to C. G. Beeston, 16 March 1946.

<sup>52</sup> Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 83.

<sup>53</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-36, “Note Changes in the Government since the Coalition,” 14 February 1947, 16.

Bennett's views on coalition can be linked to his leadership aspirations. A united coalition party would have been a stronger one, a desirable goal for a man looking to lead the then-flagging Conservative party. In the event that a united coalition did not come to pass, AV could have strengthened the Conservatives' position by ending Coalition and granting the party autonomy. Bennett was also an advocate of the alternative vote, and given his strong views on both Coalition politics and AV, his interaction with both the party and electoral systems provides a useful backdrop for a discussion of the events leading up to the 1952 election.

The alternative vote became a part of Conservative policy at its party convention in June 1946.<sup>54</sup> The Fort George Progressive Conservative Association submitted the original resolution, which read, in part:

WHEREAS the basic principle of democracy is government by a majority of the governed, and ...  
 WHEREAS government by a minority usually results in instability and a government policy based on political expediency rather than the public welfare, and  
 WHEREAS this undesirable feature of our existing political set-up would be eliminated by the adoption of the alternative vote in our electoral system, thereby making it impossible for a member of the legislature to be elected by less than a majority of the recorded votes.  
 THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the policy of the Progressive Conservative party in British Columbia include an amendment to the Elections Act providing for the alternative vote in all provincial elections.<sup>55</sup>

This was a year after the Ontario Liberals reported that the CCF's support would be at its apex on the first count under AV, thereby allowing Liberals and Conservatives to exchange preferences and emerge victorious.<sup>56</sup> The resolution adhered to the conventions of majoritarian reform advocacy seen at the federal level. It characterized majority

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<sup>54</sup> Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 92-3.

<sup>55</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-36, Fort George Progressive Conservative Association to Bennett, 24 February 1947.

<sup>56</sup> "Vote Reform under Survey by Mr. King," *Globe and Mail*, 3 January 1945, 3. The federal Conservatives had committed to a study of voting systems at their 1942 leadership convention. Pilon, "Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada, 1874 to 1960," 151.

representation as true democracy and criticized the election of candidates on a minority of votes cast, concluding that the alternative vote was the only way out. In the 1945 provincial election the CCF had received 37.62 per cent of the popular vote, compared to the Coalition's 55.83 per cent.<sup>57</sup> Given these numbers and the potential for distorted results under FPTP, preparing for the Coalition's breakup by adopting a majoritarian system was of particular importance. The partners, who came together to provide for stability in wartime, and stayed together to hinder the CCF's electoral chances, became obsessed with the latter; their final years together have been described as "a divorce forestalled by shotgun," with the CCF poised to seize power on a split Liberal and Conservative vote.<sup>58</sup>

The Coalition's problems with internal inequality hastened its decline. Following the resignation of John Hart in 1947, a Conservative convention insisted that Herbert Anscomb be given the premiership. The Liberals were still the largest group in terms of both MLAs and the popular vote, however, and the premier's post fell to Byron Johnson. Many Conservatives were dissatisfied with their diminished role "in the general conduct of government."<sup>59</sup> AV was an appropriate solution to the Coalition's troubles, and the Conservatives had likely looked to its use in Alberta and Manitoba for reference. In the 1944 Alberta election, the Social Credit party turned 55 per cent of the vote into 100 per cent of the rural seats under AV, and it was hoped that a united Liberal and Conservative vote in BC could produce similar results. According to the resolution, preferential balloting would encourage majority representation and, by implication, keep the CCF from forming a minority government under FPTP.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Elections BC*, "Electoral History of British Columbia 1871 - 1986."

<sup>58</sup> Edwin Robert Black, "The Progressive Conservative Party in British Columbia: Some Aspects of Organization" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1960), 40.

<sup>59</sup> Alper describes the Conservatives' stance as a "bluff," since they did not intend to go it alone and trigger an election. Alper, "From Rule to Ruin," 284-9.

<sup>60</sup> "Pro-Con Parley Asks B.C. Preferential Vote," *Vancouver News-Herald*, 17 June 1946, 2.

The Coalition government's decision to jump from first-past-the-post to the alternative vote took time. In fact, legislative committees studying the electoral system either did not consider AV or rejected it outright. A committee appointed in 1946 to work on "revising the present electoral system" consulted broadly with thousands of people and organizations in BC.<sup>61</sup> An advisory committee that included the Registrar-General of Voters, two constituency registrars, and Chief Clerk Fred Hurley, aided the MLAs.<sup>62</sup> Notable committee members included Harold Winch and Liberal William Straith, who served as Provincial Secretary from 1950 to 1952. On 14 February 1947, the Elections Committee issued its report, which consisted of 37 recommendations. It suggested that some of the racial restrictions on the franchise be eliminated, that the absentee ballot be protected, and that "a system of compulsory voting be instituted with appropriate penalties."<sup>63</sup> The extension of the franchise was a significant act, but the only suggestion that would fundamentally alter the voting process itself was compulsion, and nothing came of it.<sup>64</sup> The Conservatives had expressed their disagreement with compulsion in 1946.<sup>65</sup> Bennett also opposed the idea. "[T]he suggestion of compulsory voting or compulsory registration," he told the Legislature, "would be undemocratic in peacetime." He added that the Elections Act "should be amended so that no Member would be elected by a minority in any Constituency," and that multi-member ridings should be abolished. He said these goals

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<sup>61</sup> British Columbia, *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia* (hereafter BC Legislative Journals), 19 February 1947, 15.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 March 1946, 59.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 February 1947, 16-8. H.C.J. Phillips's dissertation deals with Canadian debates on compulsory voting in detail. See, for instance, Phillips, "Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974," 30-53.

<sup>64</sup> BC Liberal Senator John Farris and BC Liberal MLA D. J. Proudfoot both continued to push for compulsory voting. The latter did so in the context of AV, which he said would only be fair if voting were compulsory. "Urge Voting Be Compulsory," *Daily Colonist*, 17 February 1949, 7; "Compulsion to Make Vote Fair," *Victoria Daily Times*, 9 February 1951, 3. A 1952 Liberal resolution committed the party to the AV legislation as it stood, despite that fact that "there [had] been some agitation that *all* names on a ballot must be marked." UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 1, file 7, Executive Committee Meeting, "Resolution No. 39. Alternative Vote," 8-9 January 1952. Emphasis in original.

<sup>65</sup> Phillips, "Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974," 317.

could be accomplished through redistribution and by “establish[ing] the principle of the single transferable vote.”<sup>66</sup>

The *Legislative Journal* does not indicate what voting systems the committee discussed, but in 1950 Winch recalled that the past two committees on the provincial elections act had “over-whelmingly turned down the suggestion of the single transferable ballot [AV].”<sup>67</sup> Some insight can also be gleaned from Garfield King, who had been a strong proponent of municipal STV. In a letter to Bennett, King criticized the committee’s proposals. He had misunderstood Bennett’s statement about AV, and he praised his “reference to the Single Transferable Vote” in the Legislature as if he had been advocating proportional representation.<sup>68</sup> King said he found it “strange” that “the Special Committee on the Provincial Election Act [had] ... made no reference to the advantages of this accurate and democratic method of securing a true reflection of political opinion.”<sup>69</sup> PR may not have been given serious consideration, but in light of Winch’s words the alternative vote was certainly discussed. However, the Fort George Progressive Conservative Association, which had introduced the AV resolution at the 1946 convention, remarked that press reports did not indicate “that the Progressive Conservative [committee] members [had] made any mention of the alternative vote.”<sup>70</sup> The Fort George Conservatives sent a letter to all

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<sup>66</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-36, “Note Changes in the Government since the Coalition,” 14 February 1947, 9.

<sup>67</sup> “Transferable Vote Trick, Says Winch,” *Vancouver Sun*, 25 October 1950, 11.

<sup>68</sup> Recall that when politicians or the media of the time used the terms “single transferable ballot” or “single transferable vote,” they were almost always referring to AV, and Bennett was doing so here; STV was more commonly known as proportional representation. The difference was usually quite clear, and the focus of discussion at this time was typically AV. However, there was some lingering confusion over the matter. Prior to the 1952 election, the *Vancouver Province* called AV “one of about 300 forms of proportional representation,” only to have the differences explained by the Research Secretary of Britain’s PR Society. She wrote that “The proportion of wasted votes is reduced from 49 percent to 16 percent [under STV] and any party or similar group larger than one-sixth of the voters is assured of representation.” Enid Lakeman, Research Secretary, Proportional Representation Society, London England, “It’s Not ‘Proportional Representation,’” *Vancouver Province*, 9 June 1952, 4.

<sup>69</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-36, Garfield A. King to Bennett, 20 February 1947.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, Fort George Progressive Conservative Association to Bennett, 24 February 1947.

Conservative MLAs, reminding them of the unanimous adoption of the AV resolution at the party's 1946 convention, and asking them to "make every effort to give effect by legislation to the party policy in the matter of electoral reform."<sup>71</sup> AV's absence in the final report suggests that compulsory voting was perhaps considered an alternate means to keep candidates with limited support from being elected, by ensuring that all right-minded citizens made it to the polls. Liberal Gordon Wismer, at the time a former and future Attorney General, had advocated compulsory voting in 1944 to curb the success of the CCF, but the public did not favour such a measure.<sup>72</sup> It was not a popular policy, and the Kelowna and District Liberal Association wrote Bennett to both "strongly endors[e] [his] stand on the matter of the Transferable Vote" and express its opposition to compulsory voting, which it termed "an infringement of the rights of individuals."<sup>73</sup> Freedom in the franchise was paramount.

### **The Liberal Party's Path to AV**

In order for the alternative vote to become law under the Coalition government, it would of course require the support of the dominant Liberals. In many ways AV was better suited to the Conservatives than the Liberals, because they had been on the losing end of FPTP elections prior to Coalition and were in greater need of a voting system that would boost their representation in the Legislature. While the Liberals ultimately endorsed AV, they followed a different path than their partners. Historian Martin Robin, working from newspaper accounts, says the Liberals followed the Conservatives' lead and endorsed AV in

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Phillips, "Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974," 312-3.

<sup>73</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-37, Kelowna and District Liberal Association, H.F. Chapin to Bennett, 1 March 1947; *ibid.*, F-55-18-0-34, Resolutions adopted by the Kelowna & District Liberal Association, 27 February 1947.

principle at their 1947 convention.<sup>74</sup> This is demonstrably untrue. The Liberals' resolution began with the same majority representation premise as the Conservatives', as they lamented "the election of members by a minority vote ... who therefore did not represent a majority of the voters," but the details of the parties' proposals quickly diverged. Rather than praising AV as a viable solution, the Liberal resolution found that both AV and PR had "been introduced elsewhere and [had] demonstrated that these systems [did] not prevent one party from gaining power by the will of a minority."<sup>75</sup> By way of explanation, former Liberal Minister of Education Harry Perry said "the alternative system of voting in Manitoba and Alberta [was] a great failure as far as giving democratic representation [was] concerned," because it did not require voters to rank every candidate on the ballot.<sup>76</sup> Instead, the Liberals favoured "an Alternative Point System of voting," an idea that had been discussed by the House of Commons Special Committee on Electoral Matters in 1936. The convention called for "a study of all systems of voting and the enactment of appropriate legislation that [would] more effectively ensure the election of members representing the truer choice of the majority of voters."<sup>77</sup> While the Liberals endorsed electoral reform in principle, there was clear opposition to AV.

The "Alternative Point System" lauded by Perry warrants a detailed explanation, because it has heretofore been omitted from discussions of BC's history with electoral

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<sup>74</sup> Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 96.

<sup>75</sup> UBC-SC, British Columbia Liberal Party fonds, box 1, file 3, "B.C. Liberal Association Convention Proceedings," 9-10 December 1947, 47.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 49. Perry had previously served as the mayor of Prince George and the Deputy Speaker and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, and he had been a proponent of Coalition government in 1941. He lost his Fort George riding to the CCF in 1945. In 1951, Perry criticized Johnson for making unpopular amendments to the hospital insurance scheme without consulting the party membership, and for bowing to pressure from Anscomb and the Conservatives. Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 66, 61, 87, 118.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 48. Robin's apparent sources include an article from the *Vancouver Sun* that reiterated the call for a study of "all systems of voting." It also noted the criticisms of AV and STV in Alberta and Manitoba, and the Liberals' preference for a points system with compulsory ranking. Robin has perhaps read backwards from the final AV legislation to search for its origins, thereby overlooking the points system and the Liberals' criticism of AV. "Liberals Stand Firm for Coalition," *Vancouver Sun*, 10 December 1947, 3.



reform. The proposed system would maintain the existing ridings and require voters to rank candidates in order of their preference, just as under the alternative vote; however, ranking all candidates would be compulsory. Candidates would be awarded points depending on their position on voters' ballots: in a three-way contest, first preferences would be worth three points, second preferences two, and final preferences would be worth a single point.<sup>78</sup> While the resolution referenced the 1936 federal committee's deliberations on the Elections Act, that committee's proceedings ended with the declaration that "neither proportional representation nor the alternative vote ... should be adopted by the Parliament of Canada" unless "conclusive evidence [could] be adduced showing that the adoption of either or both of the systems ... would be conducive to good government."<sup>79</sup> One witness had mentioned the points system in passing, quoting from reformers Clarence Hoag and George Hallett, but Conservative MP John MacNicol brushed it aside, saying there were too many systems to discuss.<sup>80</sup> H. H. Stevens, then the leader of the Reconstruction Party, said that it should not be ruled out, and an appendix was attached to the day's proceedings, but no suggestion was ever made to follow up on the points system in particular.<sup>81</sup> One of the witnesses suggested

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<sup>78</sup> It was not referred to as such during the convention proceedings, but this type of point allocation system is known as the Borda count, though the system does not have to use compulsory ranking. Peter Emerson, *Designing an All-Inclusive Democracy: Consensual Voting Procedures For Use in Parliaments, Councils and Committees* (New York: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2007), 16.

<sup>79</sup> Canada, *Special Committee on Franchise and Elections Acts: Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence* No. 13, 11 June 1936, 254.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 2, 6 March 1936, 22-3.

<sup>81</sup> The two-page appendix explained the system and decried the minority representation of both FPTP and the alternative vote, since winning candidates under AV often did not have majority support on the first count. The appendix was written by W. L. Eddy and S. M. Spidell of Saskatchewan, and it was titled "Re-Arm the Electorate!" Hoag and Hallett credited them with inventing this particular points system. While they may have come up with the idea independently, there was little unique about it. *Ibid.*, No. 3, 10 March 1936, 57-8, 69-70. Stevens had been a member of the federal Conservative party and the Minister of Trade and Commerce under R.B. Bennett. The platform of the Reconstruction Party called for a federal trade commission to curb "unethical business practices and unfair competition." Stevens promoted fair prices, intending to provide "an alternative to socialism for those who rejected the old-line parties." The Reconstructionists received 8.7 per cent of the popular vote in the 1935 election, but they had disappeared by 1940. Alan Cairns says the Reconstruction Party "provides dramatic illustration of the futility of party effort for a minor party which lacks a sectional stronghold." Making gains under FPTP certainly would have been difficult. While electoral reform could have fit nicely into the party's platform, Stevens told the committee that he was "not ... dogmatically

that “some kind of a point system with the system of transferable votes” and multi-member constituencies might be ideal, but this was lost in the discussion of STV and AV.<sup>82</sup>

A points system, coupled with compulsory ranking, would have dealt an enormous blow to the CCF. Consider, for the sake of argument, a three-candidate race between the Liberals, Conservatives, and CCF, with 100 voters. Using the 1945 popular vote as a base, in this hypothetical riding the Liberals and Conservatives would have combined for 60 votes, with the CCF receiving the remaining 40.<sup>83</sup> Assuming a fairly even Conservative-Liberal split in the votes, under FPTP the CCF would obtain a plurality and win the riding. Under AV, assuming Liberal and Conservative voters ranked their free enterprise counterparts second, one of the parties’ candidates would win the constituency. Because a lack of compulsion under AV allowed voters to rank a single candidate, however, the CCF could still theoretically win out. Consider, then, the effects of a compulsory points system: the Liberals who championed the system likely believed that ballots from Liberal supporters would read L-C-CCF; Conservative ballots C-L-CCF; and CCF ballots CCF-L-C.<sup>84</sup> At the time, the

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advocating” a points system, simply that he believed it should not be so quickly dismissed. If Liberal, Conservative, and CCF voters had preferred the Reconstruction Party as a second choice, it might have benefitted from a points system. J. Murray Beck, *Pendulum of Power: Canada’s Federal Elections* (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1968), 150-1; W. L. Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada* (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 209-11, 221; Alan C. Cairns, “The Electoral System and the Party System in Canada, 1921–1965,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 1.1 (March 1968): 59; Canada, *Special Committee on Franchise and Elections Acts*, 57.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence* No. 8, 1 May 1936, 175.

<sup>83</sup> The popular vote percentages have been scaled up to account for the omission of additional parties. Note that because of the disparity between the CCF’s success in urban and rural ridings, this hypothetical riding is exaggerated and purely speculative. Additionally, Coalition was still in effect in 1945, and voters may have broken off in different directions had the parties split. Furthermore, it might be reasonable to assume that the fourth largest party, the Labor Progressives, who received 3.52 per cent of the popular vote, would have ranked the CCF second. Had they not existed (as in this example), those votes might have gone to the CCF. Regardless, they have been eliminated from this exercise, which is intended to show the system’s effects on the parties that were given consideration when debating the voting system in BC.

<sup>84</sup> Under AV in 1952 this would not always be the case, and the presence of Social Credit further complicated matters — this will be discussed in chapter three. In his analysis of BC’s AV elections, David Elkins writes that Liberal and Conservative voters typically ranked the other party second in 1952. In 1953, the left-right, protest-establishment vote ran CCF-L-C-SC. The abbreviated formatting indicating preference order is borrowed from Elkins, though he favours the full title of “Progressive Conservatives,” or PC. Elkins, “Politics Make Strange Bedfellows,” 12-4, 25.

Liberals and Conservatives both expressed disagreement “with the socialist in his desire to institute a rigid state control of industry,”<sup>85</sup> and they believed that voters, if presented with a preferential system, would vote as if the CCF and Conservatives were at opposite ends of a socialist-free enterprise spectrum. Under a points system in this hypothetical 100 voter riding, the ballots would result in 230 points for the Liberal candidate, 190 for the Conservative, and 180 for the CCF. The Liberals stood to gain from both CCF and Conservative second preferences, whereas under the alternative vote the Liberal could be eliminated first, helping to elect the Conservative.

The alternative points system would have necessitated the redefinition of majority representation as a broader, consensus-style majority. This could have been portrayed as the only route to proper democratic representation, just as AV was in the early 1950s. This would justify any instances where a candidate with a majority of first preferences was defeated, which was a possibility under the points system. Because the resolution at the 1947 Liberal convention merely called for a study of various systems, it was considered “a resolution which [was] impossible to vote against.” “If this resolution is passed,” said the delegate from Esquimalt, “it [would] create the impression that this convention favours such a transferable vote or such a system as advocated.”<sup>86</sup> The alternative vote was characterized as breaking down when there were multiple parties, and it was clear that those discussing the resolution favoured a points system.

The aforementioned Liberal convention took place in December 1947, and the committee studying the Elections Act had reported ten months earlier. There were three

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<sup>85</sup> BCA, NWp 329.9711 L695Bc 1947, “Constitution of the British Columbia Liberal Association,” British Columbia Liberal Association, 10 December 1947.

<sup>86</sup> The Esquimalt delegate, P. Strachan, was the nephew of Ronald Hooper, whom Strachan described as having “inflicted upon [Alberta and Manitoba] the proportional representation and alternative vote systems under which they now suffer.” UBC-SC, British Columbia Liberal Party fonds, box 1, file 3, “B.C. Liberal Association Convention Proceedings,” 9-10 December 1947, 50-1.

Liberal members on the committee to the Conservatives' and CCF's two apiece, and it is possible that the Liberals had pushed for a points system, only to be shouted down. Any test cases like the example provided here would have quickly drawn fire from the Conservatives and the CCF. The resolution could also explain the committee's rejection of the alternative vote, even though it was Conservative party policy. With only the Conservatives favouring AV at the time, while the Liberals and CCF were staunchly opposed, it is not surprising that there was no AV recommendation. On the other hand, the Liberals' insistence on compulsion at the convention corresponds with the committee's recommendation to implement such a change, and the points system may have been taken up because it fit the compulsion criterion. Because the convention resolution only called for a study of all voting systems, this gave the party executive incredible leeway. They were certainly not duty-bound to introduce electoral reform legislation.

The Liberals would never have been able to convince their Conservative partners that a points system could perpetuate the Coalition in the same way as AV — recall that the Conservatives were also opposed to compulsion — and they eventually came around to the alternative vote. In December 1948, Fred Hurley, the Chief Electoral Officer for BC, met with his Albertan counterpart to “investigate the workings of the proportional representation system used in Alberta’s multiple-member ridings and the single transferable vote used in single-member rural constituencies.”<sup>87</sup> The Young Liberal Association was calling for an end to Coalition, which it believed hampered the party’s ability to take “the middle way” between the CCF and the Conservatives.<sup>88</sup> When the Liberal executive convened in December it

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<sup>87</sup> “Hurley to See Poll Officer on Vote Plan,” *Daily Colonist*, 9 December 1948, 2.

<sup>88</sup> “Fiery Young Liberals Cool Heels in Lobby,” *Daily Colonist*, 18 December 1948, 1. Martin Robin describes the Young Liberal Association as “a restive group of business and professional insurgents who had earlier seceded from the Vancouver Centre Constituency Association.” They were interested in seeing new blood in the Liberal executive. Arthur Laing, who became the Liberals’ party president in 1947, and would later become

endorsed electoral reform as a compromise, but earlier in the proceedings Johnson refrained from answering when asked by the Young Liberals if the government intended to change the Elections Act.<sup>89</sup> On 18 December it was decided that the coalition issue would be left until the next full provincial convention, but in the meantime the Liberals pledged to study and enact “the alternative system of voting, either by the point system of counting, or the single transferable vote.”<sup>90</sup> This was similar to the study proposed at the 1947 convention, though instead of being cut down in favour of the points system, AV now appeared alongside it on relatively equal terms.<sup>91</sup>

An AV-STV hybrid was not out of the question, as suggested by Hurley’s trip to Alberta.<sup>92</sup> In August 1948, the *Vancouver News-Herald* called Alberta’s rural AV and urban STV electoral system “one of the best in Canada,” though it favoured STV because “[t]he majority party receives a majority of seats” and it would not exclude “important minorities.” Such a reform would allow the Liberals and Conservatives to differentiate themselves while continuing to “tak[e] common action against a common foe.”<sup>93</sup> Alberta’s Socred Minister of Municipal Affairs, C. E. Gerhart, told one correspondent that his fellow cabinet ministers and premier Ernest Manning had called PR “the fairest and most democratic of all electoral

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party leader, played a key role in its foundation. Laing, writes Robin, was a “declared enemy of [Gordon] Wismer.” Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 96, 323.

<sup>89</sup> “Fireworks May Explode When Liberals Convene,” *Daily Colonist*, 12 December 1948, 1.

<sup>90</sup> “Liberals Back Eleven Points; Board Jubilant,” *Daily Colonist*, 18 December 1948, 1.

<sup>91</sup> Some Liberals believed that AV had been endorsed at the 1947 convention, but this was not the case. See, for instance, UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 1, file 5, T. W. Christie, Member BC Advisory Council, to James Mowat, 2 March 1949.

<sup>92</sup> Prior to the proposed study of the points system and AV, the *Daily Colonist* said “[s]ome party members believe[d] it would be a good idea if the Province adopted proportional representation and the single transferable ballot.” “Fireworks May Explode When Liberals Convene,” *Daily Colonist*, 12 December 1948, 1.

<sup>93</sup> “Voting System Model for B.C.,” *Vancouver News-Herald*, 18 August 1948, 5. The parties did feel a need to differentiate themselves, and the CCF’s accusation that the differences between the Liberals and Conservatives were “superficial” was not without basis. Such a similarity would have been problematic during an election. UBC-SC, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 33, file 3, *CCF News*, 25 October 1950, 2.

methods,” though his government continued to use AV in rural districts.<sup>94</sup> Federally, the Conservative party went on record in October as “stand[ing] for ... majority vote,” and electoral reform was generally trending towards AV in light of the CCF by-election victories; Boards of Trade were pro-free enterprise and anti-CCF, and unsurprisingly endorsed AV.<sup>95</sup> Despite all this support, the speech from the throne on 9 February 1949 gave no indication that the government planned to introduce AV, though the investigation into the points system and AV or STV was still ongoing.<sup>96</sup> Johnson’s reluctance to answer a direct question on electoral reform at the 1948 executive meeting suggests that he may have overruled his party on the issue. Arthur Ash, the Coalition member for Saanich, “regretted” the omission of AV from the speech. Ash said that because many people chose not to vote, “a minority of the people could control the destinies of the Province.” Reporting on Ash’s remarks, the *Daily Colonist* noted that while both the Liberals and the Conservatives had endorsed AV, “[o]bservers were saying ... that the Government [had] no intention of bringing in the new system of voting.”<sup>97</sup>

The rank and file of the Liberal party was quickly up in arms. Ronald M. Howard, provincial secretary of the BC Liberal Association, contacted Liberal riding associations across the province to insist that their presidents hold meetings on the voting system and send letters to Johnson “urging the adoption by the Provincial Government of proportional or alternative voting at the present Session.”<sup>98</sup> Given Howard’s ties to the Young Liberals

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<sup>94</sup> Of course, it is not surprising that the Alberta government would defend the system that elected it. BCA, Premier’s Records 1953 – 1972, GR-1414, box 8, file 1, Charles Burbridge to W.A.C. Bennett, 13 February 1954, copy of a letter from C. E. Gerhart, Minister of Municipal Affairs, Alberta, to Burbridge, 10 May 1951.

<sup>95</sup> UBC-SC, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 38, file 15, “Resolutions Adopted at the Progressive Conservative National Convention,” 30 September – 2 October 1948, 20; “Nanaimo Board Suggests Alternate Vote System,” *Daily Colonist*, 21 January 1949, 24.

<sup>96</sup> E.S. Woodward, “The Point System of Voting,” *Vancouver News-Herald*, 11 February 1949, 9.

<sup>97</sup> “Ash Hits Government Failure to Bring in Transferable Vote,” *Daily Colonist*, 10 February 1949, 13.

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Reid, the Liberal MP for New Westminster, assumed that Howard was speaking without the authorization of the party president or executive, and he asked that either Johnson or Laing reprimand Howard

and party president Arthur Laing, who opposed the Coalition, it is likely that Howard was acting on Laing's behalf and pushing AV as a means to speed the Coalition's breakup.<sup>99</sup> Many followed through on Howard's request, and the president of the Kamloops and District Liberal Association gave a typical response. His telegram said the association "favour[ed] [the] principle of the single transferable vote," and that AV would "act as an effective roadblock to socialism"; they requested its implementation at the present session.<sup>100</sup> In private, then, it was clear that AV was less about majority representation and democracy than it was about keeping the CCF from electing a government. Deluged with requests to implement AV from riding associations and Chambers of Commerce alike, the premier's office issued the following response to the criticism of the Parksville Liberals: "It was stated ... that every Liberal member of the House was in favour of the single transferrable vote and that the Premier was holding out against the counsel of the caucus. Such is not the case."<sup>101</sup> This statement did little to clarify his position, but regardless of Johnson's true opinion on the matter, no AV legislation was forthcoming, and the Coalition continued apace. Given the outpouring of pro-AV sentiment, it is odd that at their April 1949 convention the Liberals again endorsed the "Alternative Point System of voting," using the same anti-AV resolution

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for acting out of turn. UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 1, file 5, Tom Reid to Byron Johnson, 11 March 1949.

<sup>99</sup> Laing was president of the Young Liberals when they endorsed Johnson over Wismer at the 1947 convention. See Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 94-5. Howard, a resident of North Vancouver, had been a prominent member of the Young Liberals. He was named secretary of the BC Liberal Association by Laing in January 1948, and he assisted in Johnson's leadership bid at the 1947 convention. "Howard New Secretary of B.C. Liberals," *Vancouver Sun*, 20 January 1948, 11.

<sup>100</sup> UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 1, file 5, R. W. Kennedy to Byron Johnson, 28 February 1949. T. W. Christie, of the Comox-Alberni Federal Liberal Association, said AV would be "a painless method of testing the need of the Coalition with out actually [sic] breaking with the conservatives." Christie believed that the officers of the Liberal association had been pushing for AV "in the hope that the party [would] have an opportunity to better [its] position in the Coalition or perhaps elect enough candidates to go alone." Ibid., "Re: Single Transferable Vote," T. W. Christie to Byron Johnson, 2 March 1949. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce had recently surveyed its membership on the issue, and 72 per cent of responding Boards of Trade and Chambers of Commerce "favoured the adoption of the single alternative method of voting"; the organization paired this figure with a statistic on the number of MPs "elected by 'minority' votes." Ibid., "Official Release from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce," 21 February 1949.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., "It was stated...", n.d.

moved in 1947.<sup>102</sup> An election was called shortly after the convention, to be held in June under FPTP rules.

The Conservatives may have been “tired of playing ‘second fiddle’ in government,” but they were stuck with the Coalition and FPTP until the partnership crumbled enough to compel the Liberals to act.<sup>103</sup> Bennett’s leadership aspirations and his support for a true coalition party had continued unabated, though his stance on coalition may have hurt his bid for the Conservative party leadership in 1946 when he lost to Herbert Anscomb, who had spoken against a united party.<sup>104</sup> Bennett’s foray into federal politics in the 1948 Yale by-election was similarly unsuccessful, due to a split vote with the Liberals, and he failed to obtain the federal nomination in 1949.<sup>105</sup> He still believed that “only one candidate should be put up to oppose the socialists,” which would give voters “a clear opportunity to chose [sic] under which system they wish to live.” Because Conservative voters might not want to vote for Liberals, and vice versa, Bennett suggested that “a straight independent” should be nominated who would get the support of all but “the straight socialists”; the half-hearted coalition arrangements in BC only served to breed “suspicion and jealousy.”<sup>106</sup> For a man with designs on the premiership (and, though he never made it to the House of Commons, the prime minister’s post), either a single party or the alternative vote made sense.<sup>107</sup> The Conservatives within the Liberal-dominated Coalition were “emasculative in the House and

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., “Resolution No. 6, as passed by the Resolution Committee,” 6 April 1949.

<sup>103</sup> “Is Transferable Vote the Easy Cure for Frustrations of Coalition Parties,” *Vancouver News-Herald*, 27 January 1949, 9.

<sup>104</sup> Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 86. A motion at the 1946 Conservative convention, suggesting an end to Coalition to keep the party from “being absorbed by the Liberals,” had been defeated. Alper, “From Rule to Ruin,” 276.

<sup>105</sup> Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 91, 93.

<sup>106</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-45, Bennett to V. H. Stephens, 28 January 1949.

<sup>107</sup> In a 1976 interview, Bennett said he thought “if [he] had been elected federally [he] would have been Prime Minister of Canada.” BCA, T1675:0015-1, David Mitchell, “Bennett Interview,” 8 October 1976, 8.



non-productive,”<sup>108</sup> but breaking the Coalition without AV would have reduced their party to obscurity.

Given the frequent discussion of voting systems in the 1940s and the impending collapse of the Coalition, electoral reform likely seemed a foregone conclusion. Indeed, though the Coalition had no concrete policy on the voting system at the time, in May 1950 Harold Winch said that because “the Socialists poll 35 percent of the vote of the province, and the Coalition marriage is unhappy, they sanctimoniously trot out the transferable ballot.”<sup>109</sup> The “sanctimony” of AV was a direct reference to the ideas of majority representation that framed the discussion. In a radio panel discussion on AV in September, for instance, the president of the BC Young Conservatives claimed AV was democratic because “no candidate can be declared [a] winner unless acceptable in first or second degree to all voters concerned”; the secretary of the BC Young Liberals added that AV would not result in the multiplication of parties found under STV; and the Mission City CCF candidate, W. L. Hartley, replied that AV would “mak[e] a mockery of democracy.”<sup>110</sup> When addressing the matter of electoral reform in a public setting, the necessity of majority representation always led the discussion. The Conservatives reaffirmed their pro-AV stance at their October convention by going on record “as being in favour of the adoption of the Single Transferable Vote.”<sup>111</sup>

In July 1950, Johnson and the Coalition caucus decided to form a committee “to study the single transfer of the vote.”<sup>112</sup> It was to consist of Conservatives Bennett and A. R. MacDougall, and Liberals S. J. Smith, Maurice Finnerty, and J. G. Gould. The first clear

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<sup>108</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-10-0-6, “Hospital Insurance Administrative Aspects...,” 1950.

<sup>109</sup> UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 5, file 9, “Winch Finds B.C. Coalition Breaking Up,” *Vancouver Daily Province*, 31 May 1950.

<sup>110</sup> “New Vote System Rapped at Meeting,” *Vancouver Sun*, 23 September 1950, 7.

<sup>111</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-54, “Resolutions Passed at Provincial Convention of Progressive Conservative Association,” October 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, 1950.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, F-55-21-0-20, Byron Johnson to Bennett, 24 July 1950.

statement on the Liberals' electoral reform policy came in October from Attorney General Gordon Wismer. He told the convention of the BC Young Liberals' Association that the government would introduce AV during the 1951 session of the Legislature.<sup>113</sup> The *Province* characterized the decision to adopt AV as a response to mounting pressure from the province's Liberal and Conservative organizations.<sup>114</sup> It did not mean the Coalition was through — Wismer said that the Coalition had “a mandate from the people” that would stand until “instructions [were] given to return to the separate party system” at a convention — but the announcement seemed to imply that it was drawing to a close.<sup>115</sup> Wismer had previously advocated compulsory voting as a means to stop the socialists, and he likely embraced AV for the same reasons. It is unsurprising, then, that he may have been speaking out of turn. According to the *Vancouver Daily Sun*:

It is fairly clear that the ... announcement by Mr. Wismer was not a carefully planned government declaration. The Attorney-General took a good healthy kick at a ball which has been dribbled around here without getting anywhere, in the expectation it will now get somewhere.<sup>116</sup>

Wismer amended his original statement, adding that it was “by no means definite” that AV legislation would be forthcoming. Responding to claims that he had “jumped the gun,” however, he said, “We need that type of vote. ... If we are not going to get it now we are never going to do it.”<sup>117</sup> This reads like a man who had personal hopes for electoral reform and decided to force the issue, invigorated by support for AV from the Conservatives, district Liberal associations, and groups such as the Young Liberals.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 5, file 9, “B.C. Govt. To Seek Transferable Vote,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 20 October 1950.

<sup>114</sup> “New Vote System Accepted,” *Vancouver Province*, 2 April 1951, 1.

<sup>115</sup> UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 5, file 9, “Transferable Vote Not Coalition End,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 21 October 1950.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., “Wismer ‘Jumped Gun’ on New Voting Plan,” *Vancouver Daily Sun*, 21 October 1950.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., “Wismer Defends Hospitals,” *Vancouver Daily Sun*, 15 November 1950.

<sup>118</sup> In a 1973 interview, Winch said that “as far as [he was] concerned, the mastermind behind [AV] was Gordon Wismer.” BCA, T148:0003, Glen Jenkinson, “Harold Winch Interview,” 13.

Following Wismer's announcement, Anscomb said "the people are ready for it," but he expressed some doubts as to whether it would "meet the problem."<sup>119</sup> Like Johnson, Anscomb did not immediately embrace his party's AV resolution. Speaking to the executive of the BC Liberal Association on 11 November 1950, Wismer attempted to dispel any rumours of dissent within the Liberal party by saying that he worked closely with the premier and that he had no designs on the premiership.<sup>120</sup> He said the Liberals were "honor bound" to continue Coalition for the remainder of the term, but it could not last forever, and Anscomb had been hinting at a breakup.<sup>121</sup> It was "only the part of prudence," then, that he had suggested AV. He went on to criticize FPTP elections, because "under certain conditions of the public mind, a pressure group can take power in this Province, and that is not true democracy." To reinforce the idea that AV was about democracy, and not political pragmatism, he added that the Liberals were "not worrying about the C.C.F."<sup>122</sup> All the Liberals allegedly wanted was the assurance that MLAs could not be elected with only minority support; however, the idea that Wismer had a minority "pressure group" in mind other than the CCF is absurd.

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<sup>119</sup> "Voting Plan's Effect Doubted," *Vancouver Sun*, 23 October 1950, 5.

<sup>120</sup> UBC-SC, British Columbia Liberal Party fonds, box 2, file 4, "Transcript of Proceedings of Executive Meeting of the Liberal Association of B.C.," 15 November 1950, 27. Wismer had been narrowly defeated by Johnson in a 1947 leadership bid, receiving 467 votes to Johnson's 475. "Boss' and Family Rest After Turbulent Day," *Vancouver Province*, 11 December 1947, 5. Johnson was seen as a more acceptable leader to the Coalition as a whole, because he was "less partisan" than Wismer. S. W. Jackman, *Portraits of the Premiers: An Informal History of British Columbia* (Sidney, BC: Gray's Publishing, 1969), 247.

<sup>121</sup> UBC-SC, British Columbia Liberal Party fonds, box 2, file 4, "Transcript of Proceedings of Executive Meeting of the Liberal Association of B.C.," 15 November 1950, 38. The federal Conservatives believed Coalition was hurting their chances in national elections because of its crippling effect on the provincial organization. The provincial parties were also reluctant to assist in partisan national campaigns, for fear they would undermine the Coalition. Federally, the Conservatives were criticizing the socialistic tendencies of the Liberals, and the existence of a provincial Coalition was not consistent with these accusations. Alper, "From Rule to Ruin," 302-3; Blake, "The Politics of Polarization," 71.

<sup>122</sup> UBC-SC, British Columbia Liberal Party fonds, box 2, file 4, "Transcript of Proceedings of Executive Meeting of the Liberal Association of B.C.," 15 November 1950, 39.

The Coalition's 1950 electoral reform committee was anything but transparent in its deliberations.<sup>123</sup> Despite the closed nature of the committee, AV was clearly on the horizon, and Winch made an appeal to representational values: "The single transferable voting system is designed to still further reduce the representation of minority groups," he said. "The question of the single transferable ballot should be examined as a matter of principle and not one of tactical strategy in the hopes of maintaining legislative power."<sup>124</sup> The Coalition claimed that the principles of democracy were on its side, in the form of majority representation, but both groups had a clear stake in what voting system was used.

By January 1951, Harry Perry, now president of the BC Liberal Association, had abandoned the points system and declared that "the Alternative Vote would help to ensure the election of a member with a majority and not a minority vote of the riding." He also claimed that the Liberal Association's previous conventions had "advocated the Alternative Vote ... and a study of all systems of voting."<sup>125</sup> The conventions did propose to study different voting systems, but the first statement is a departure from Perry's virulent anti-AV stance at the 1947 convention. Wismer had similarly abandoned his past insistence on compulsory voting. While some argued that compulsion was necessary to establish true

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<sup>123</sup> The anti-CCF motives driving the reform process had likely dissuaded the Coalition from forming an all-party legislative committee on the issue. It is unfortunate that the premier's confidential papers were not archived: the letter register for the premier's office indicates that Johnson received information from the committee on the "Investigation on Electoral Reform" and their final "Preferential Ballot Report" on 23 and 31 January 1951, respectively, but the documents do not appear to be part of the records. These reports, both sent by the Provincial Secretary, likely would have indicated which systems were being debated or dismissed at this final stage. BCA, Premiers' Papers 1917-1952, GR-1222, box 275, file 3, Letter Register, 1948-1952. As the BC Archives finding aid for GR-1222 notes, "Originally ... the Premiers' papers also included a substantial number of confidential files. Few of these files were among the records transferred to the Provincial Archives in 1982." "GR-1222," *BC Archives* <<http://tinyurl.com/BCA-GR1222>>. A copy of a *Times* article on "Proportional and Other Voting Systems," received on 10 January 1952, is also listed as confidential — clearly the Coalition's plans for electoral reform were considered a sensitive matter — but it appears in Johnson's papers at the University of Victoria. UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 1, file 7, "Proportional and Other Voting Systems," *Times*, 27 March 1950.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, box 5, file 9, "Transferable Vote Unfair Says Winch," *Victoria Daily Times*, 25 October 1950.

<sup>125</sup> Harry G. Perry, "Alternative Vote Is Best Method of Securing Political Democracy," *Vancouver Sun*, 30 January 1951, 4.

majority representation, since “die-hard[s]” would plump, “government leaders” concluded that compulsion “would not be the democratic way.”<sup>126</sup>

It is apparent that proportional representation was still being considered for urban centres at this point. The hybrid AV-STV system found in Alberta and Manitoba made sense, because AV was intended for single-member districts only. Shortly after Wismer spoke in favour of the alternative vote in October 1950, Anscomb replied that the Attorney General could not presume to speak for the government. He added that further examination was necessary, because “[s]ome ridings might have to have proportional representation.” “I doubt if any of you know what that means,” said Anscomb, joking with a group of Oak Bay Conservatives. “I know I don’t, but it will be a terrible jumble, and will require a lot of working out.”<sup>127</sup> Using STV in the cities was a concern, because it could potentially elect even more CCF candidates, exactly the outcome Coalition and electoral reform were supposed to prevent.<sup>128</sup>

It was understood that multi-member ridings typically used STV, not AV, and consequently it was suggested that the current multi-member ridings should be made into single-member districts. Bennett added that separate nominations might be held for “first member, second member and third member,” allowing people to vote for three different

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<sup>126</sup> “‘Compulsion’ Issue Looms in Transferable Voting,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 4 January 1951, 13.

<sup>127</sup> UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 5, file 1, “Anscomb-Wismer Split Over Ballot,” *Vancouver Daily Sun*, 2 November 1950.

<sup>128</sup> “City Ridings Touchy Problem,” *Vancouver Province*, 7 November 1950, 9. This was a legitimate fear, at least in Victoria. Take the 1949 election returns for the three-member Victoria City riding. Voters were permitted to vote for up to three candidates, and three Coalitionists were elected. The most popular CCF candidate received 5,900 votes, and the most popular Coalitionist received 16,021. Assume, for the sake of argument, that in a Coalition breakup these ballots would split evenly along Liberal-Conservative lines (this would not actually be the case, because with the Conservatives trending downwards, the Liberals were the more popular party in the 1952 election). Depending on the formula used to determine the election quota, after ballot transfers the CCF’s leading candidate would have been either over the quota or close to it, and thus with STV the CCF would have been more likely to elect a candidate in the city than before. *Elections BC*, “Electoral History of British Columbia 1871 - 1986.”

seats.<sup>129</sup> This was a departure from his stance in 1947, when he advocated the abolition of multi-member ridings on the grounds that it was undemocratic that any voter should have more representation than another.<sup>130</sup> Without redistribution or PR, however, there were few options remaining. One might have expected the CCF to come out in favour of STV, but the party leadership was hesitant to suggest proportional representation as a democratic alternative. “[O]n the surface [PR] would give the CCF greater representation in the legislature on present analysis of votes,” said Winch, but “there [was] grave danger it could be a future hindrance.”<sup>131</sup> The party leaders were all concerned with their parties’ electability, and they approached the voting system from a practical standpoint. Winch recognized that the CCF’s best chance of forming a government was under FPTP, and the Coalition partners knew that they needed AV to survive.

Bennett was making his own moves in the meantime, which would have important ramifications for AV’s impact in the 1952 election. Unsuccessful in his second bid for the Conservative party leadership in 1950, after speaking out against the Coalition’s unpopular compulsory hospital insurance scheme and the Coalition itself, he crossed the floor to sit as an independent on 15 March 1951.<sup>132</sup> “Timing,” he said, looking back, “is everything.”<sup>133</sup> The AV bill was not finalized at this point, and more than twenty years later Bennett offered an

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<sup>129</sup> UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 5, file 1, “Wismer ‘Jumped Gun’ on New Voting Plan, Victoria Hints,” *Vancouver Daily Sun*, 21 October 1950.

<sup>130</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-36, “Note Changes in the Government since the Coalition,” 14 February 1947, 9.

<sup>131</sup> UBC-SC, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 33, file 3, Harold Winch to Violet Cameron, 24 January 1951. If the CCF’s 35.1 per cent of the vote were “distributed on a ratio basis,” Winch told the 1951 CCF convention, the CCF would have had 17 seats in the Legislature. *Ibid.*, box 62, file 1, 1951 Provincial Convention, “Legislative Report,” H.E. Winch, 18-20 May 1951, 64.

<sup>132</sup> Ormsby, *British Columbia*, 99, 102. Bennett’s 1950 leadership bid laid the groundwork for his defection from the Conservatives in 1951. He campaigned on the premise that the public wanted an “alternative honest and competent free enterprise party.” Additionally, he wanted to revitalize the Conservatives to provide “an alternative to the present socialist opposition,” a message in keeping with the single-issue politics practiced in the coming elections. Quoted in Alper, “From Rule to Ruin,” 307-8. Hospital insurance involved mandatory payroll deductions and a per diem fee during hospital stays. The policy will be discussed in chapter three.

<sup>133</sup> Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 102.

interesting take on the introduction of the alternative vote. He said the coalition “knew nothing about the single transferable ballot” or “proportional representation and the different ways you could handle [it],” and therefore Anscomb and the Conservatives asked him to four meetings before having him explain it to the Liberals.<sup>134</sup> This likely occurred while Bennett was sitting on the Coalition committee on electoral reform in 1950. He had long been an advocate of AV, and it is plausible that the Conservatives would ask him to explain in detail the system that had been discussed at their party conventions.<sup>135</sup> If Bennett addressed the various ways the system could be used, this also gives context to Anscomb’s public suggestion later that year that some ridings “might have to have proportional representation.” Bennett had been making speeches to the effect that AV would “restore the freedom of choice to the electors and protect our political freedom against the socialists being elected through a minority split vote,” while the Conservative party could be “revitalized and re-organized” away from the faltering Coalition.<sup>136</sup>

### **The CCF, Values Debates, and the Run-up to the 1952 Election**

In response to the push for AV, the CCF attempted to reframe the Coalition’s claims about majority representation and democracy as “political tactic[s]” designed to deny the minority socialist party “its proper representation.”<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, Winch argued that with two major free enterprise parties and a single socialist party, CCFers had fewer options on a

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<sup>134</sup> BCA, T1675:0015-1, Mitchell, “Bennett Interview,” 8 October 1976, 12. Bennett’s claim appears elsewhere: in a 1975 letter he told H.C.J. Phillips that he was “personally ... responsible for convincing the Liberals and Conservatives to put it into effect.” Phillips, “Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974,” 283.

<sup>135</sup> It is unclear exactly what time period Bennett was referring to, but his account would only make sense if he were referring to an occasion prior to the 1946 Conservative convention, wherein he introduced AV to the Conservatives for the first time, or to the period when he was sitting on the electoral reform committee. The former scenario is unlikely.

<sup>136</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-51, Bennett, “Conservative Action Club...,” 17 March 1950, 3-4.

<sup>137</sup> “A Political Stratagem,” *CCF News*, 25 October 1950, 2.

transferable ballot.<sup>138</sup> He had opposed coalescing with the Liberals and Conservatives because it would compromise his party's beliefs, and having the CCF's supporters endorse free enterprise candidates was similarly undesirable. The *B.C. Financial Times* responded to Winch's complaints by saying a CCF government would in turn deny capitalist minority rights, because to the CCF "there are no rights except Socialist rights."<sup>139</sup> The democratic spin was tilting in the Coalition's favour. The *Daily Colonist* reported that AV was "obviously to give the electorate, in the event of a [Coalition] split, a clear-cut choice between free enterprise government ... and socialism." It dared the CCF to challenge the principle of majority representation, saying it "could have small cause for resentment over ... let[ting] the voter name his second choice and enabl[ing] the wish of the majority to prevail," because that was "the essence of democratic government."<sup>140</sup>

The CCF's relationship with AV is an interesting one, because some party members embraced the system, regardless of what it would mean for the party's chances at the polls. While these individuals were only exceptions, their presence is indicative of the intensifying debates on the democratic merits of the system. At the CCF's 1945 convention, the Saanich Club introduced a resolution on AV that read, in full, "That this convention go on record as approving the principle and use of a preferential ballot in provincial elections."<sup>141</sup> The matter was referred to a research committee, and came under study at both the provincial and national levels; however, it was not a serious issue until the Coalition government made it one.<sup>142</sup> In January 1951, the Port Renfrew CCF Club declared its support for AV, calling it "more democratic than present 'X' Ballot," and adding that it was similar to the CCF's multi-

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Quoted in "Inherently Totalitarian," *Vancouver News-Herald*, 28 November 1950, 4.

<sup>140</sup> "Transferable Vote Plan Fair to All," *Daily Colonist*, 22 October 1950, 4.

<sup>141</sup> UBC-SC, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 60, file 2, CCF: British Columbia and Yukon Section, "Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Provincial Convention," 1945, 20.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., box 33, file 3, Harold Winch to Violet Cameron, 24 January 1951.



round nomination procedure, which involved dropping the candidate with the fewest votes before re-voting.<sup>143</sup> The Port Renfrew Club approached AV and majority representation on the altruistic grounds that the Coalition had been pushing. “[A]s socialists we cannot sacrifice democratic principles in the political sphere,” said the Club. “[P]olitically it would be unwise and inexpedient to oppose any measure affording greater democracy because people can see through the selfish motives which are behind such opposition.”<sup>144</sup> This is exactly how the Coalition and the media portrayed the CCF’s opposition to AV, though the Coalition’s motives for promoting AV were no less transparent or selfish. Indeed, one letter in the *Province* accused the Coalition of altering “the most valued inheritance of free men,” the franchise. The author objected to “ANY tampering whatsoever in the interests of ANY party.”<sup>145</sup>

Despite the existence of a few AV proponents within the CCF membership, in the Legislature the party was united in its opposition to AV. The CCF research department issued a circular on AV to its clubs in January 1951, ostensibly to inform its members about the system, not “to convey conclusions as to whether or not the principle should be endorsed or opposed.” However, in setting forth the official party line on AV, the report said the system provided “disproportionate representation”; that AV was designed to be an anti-CCF measure; and that it would do away with absentee ballots, “depriv[ing] many thousands ... of their right to the franchise,” including much of the CCF’s labour support base.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., CCF Port Renfrew Club to Provincial Executive (BC Yukon), 18 January 1951.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., “Re Transferable Vote,” Violet Cameron to Jessie Mendels, 20 February 1951.

<sup>145</sup> Douglas P. Fraser, “Leave Voting System Alone,” *Vancouver Province*, 3 February 1951, 4.

<sup>146</sup> UBC-SC, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 33, file 3, CCF Research Dept., “Single Transferable Ballot,” 1951, 1-3. D. R. Jaeger, a CCF supporter, and Jack Scott, who was heavily involved in the Communist Party and the Canadian labour movement, both criticized the research department’s “one-sided picture” of AV. Amongst other complaints, Jaeger said AV would not necessarily do away with absentee balloting, and he noted that FPTP provided “disproportionate representation,” too. He also objected to the circular’s

The final details of the AV bill were debated right up to its introduction. Initially candidates from the premier's party were to appear first on the ballot, but this clause drew fire from Anscomb, and it was revised so that the candidate from the incumbent Coalition party would appear first, when applicable.<sup>147</sup> Anscomb was clearly looking towards a post-Coalition party system. Wismer and others insisted that AV did not mean the end of the Coalition partnership, and AV did not become law until after the Coalition broke up in 1952, but it was clear that the parties were preparing for this eventuality.

The AV bill, introduced on 11 April 1951, was passed on 18 April. FPTP was to remain in place until the government proclaimed AV via order in council, perhaps on the off chance that the Coalition carried on into the next election. Rather than using STV in multi-member ridings, the incumbents would be placed on separate ballots and the other candidates would be spread across the ballots by party in alphabetical order.<sup>148</sup> The CCF response to the bill was immediate and harsh: Winch brought a dictionary and some choice adjectives with him to the Legislature. Calling the AV bill weird, fantastic, shameful, “perfidious, infamous, ignominious, [and] contumelious,” he argued that it devalued the franchise for CCF supporters, because they could not in good conscience rank a free

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unsubstantiated assertion that the CCF in Alberta and Manitoba opposed AV, speculating that they, “like some of B.C.’s members, [were] more concerned with winning seats or holding jobs than with democratic principles.” Ibid., D. R. Jaeger to Jessie Mendels, 25 January 1951; *ibid.*, Jack Scott, “Re: Single Transferable Voting,” n.d. Jaeger was essentially correct. William Ivens, of Manitoba’s labour movement, said AV had “been advocated in Canada ... NOT to insure equitable representation in legislature or parliament, *but to prevent the CCF gaining governmental power*” and stifle minority representation. Elmer Roper, the leader of the CCF in Alberta, also criticized AV’s effect on minority parties. He called the system “a barrier against young, growing parties” that “would help to keep the CCF out of office.” Ibid., William Ivens, “The Single Transferable Vote in Manitoba,” *CCF News*, 11 October 1950. Emphasis in original; *ibid.*, Elmer Roper, “Alberta’s Voting System,” *CCF News*, 18 October 1950.

<sup>147</sup> This would exclude Bennett and fellow Conservative expat Tilly Rolston. James Nesbitt, “Fine Art of Politics in Election Act,” *Vancouver News-Herald*, 5 April 1951, 4. CCF ridings would have the Liberal and Conservative candidates placed at the top of the ballot in alphabetical order, though listing the government candidate first was in keeping with tradition. “New Ballot System Aired in Legislature,” *Vancouver Sun*, 2 April 1951, 36.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

enterprise candidate.<sup>149</sup> Wismer said the Coalition was putting democracy first, and that they had “thought for a long time that it [was] a bad principle that a man or even a government, [could] take power on 30 percent or 35 percent of the vote.” Winch replied that the bill “would have meant much more if brought in as a matter of principle, instead of at a time when the Liberals and Conservatives [were] trying to break up, but keep the Socialists out.”<sup>150</sup>

Branding AV a move of “political expediency,” CCF MLAs responded to the Coalition’s equation of majority representation with democracy by declaring that the government had ripped democracy from the hands of the people. They demanded a plebiscite on any changes to the Elections Act.<sup>151</sup> The CCF’s provincial convention in May 1951 included a resolution calling on the party to “impress upon the public ... the necessity of defeating any political party at the polls, which contemplates changing the voting system of this province without first submitting proposed changes to a public plebiscite.”<sup>152</sup> There was also a resolution insisting on the maintenance of absentee ballots, which allowed British

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<sup>149</sup> UV-ASC, British Columbia Legislative Assembly Sessional Clipping Books: Newspaper Accounts of the Debates, Section III: 1941 – 1961, February 1950 – March 1953, accession no. 597 (hereafter Sessional Clipping Book), “Transferable Vote Bill Under Fire,” 17 April 1951; “Election Act Changes Raise Storm in House,” *CCF News*, 18 April 1951, 1. The Sessional Clipping Book is an attempt to make up for the lack of a *Hansard* in BC prior to the 1970s. It is a relatively chronological compilation of BC newspaper articles reporting on the proceedings of the BC Legislature. While it is an invaluable resource, it is only occasionally apparent what newspaper any given clipping was taken from. Bennett thought a *Hansard* would discourage MLAs from attending, because “[t]hey [could] read it all in the morning.” He believed this would stifle debate. Sessional Clipping Book, “Legislature Wants No Hansard,” 1 March 1956; BCA, T1675:0041-1, Mitchell, “Bennett Interview,” 28 March 1978, 3-6.

<sup>150</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, “Transferable Vote Bill Under Fire,” 17 April 1951. In the 11 FPTP elections from 1903 to 1941, governments were elected with more than 50 per cent of the popular vote on only three occasions. The Conservatives accomplished this feat in 1909, 1912, and 1928. The Coalition did as much in 1945 and 1949. The Liberals fell short of the mark in 1916 by just 10 votes. *Elections BC*, “Electoral History of British Columbia 1871 - 1986.”

<sup>151</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, “People’s Vote Urged On Election Changes,” 17 April 1951. “Political expediency” was something of an anti-reform catchphrase. The words, or variations thereof, appear numerous times concerning both the adoption and abolition of AV. See, for instance, “Transferable Vote Trick, Says Winch,” *Vancouver Sun*, 25 October 1950, 11; Sessional Clipping Book, “Day in the House,” 16 April 1951; *ibid.*, “Alternate Vote Faces ‘Death,’” 16 September 1953.

<sup>152</sup> UBC-SC, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 62, file 1, CCF: British Columbia and Yukon Section, “Eighteenth Provincial Convention,” 18-20 May 1951, 32.

Columbians who were absent from their polling division or electoral district to cast their vote from anywhere in the province.<sup>153</sup> Advance voting also allowed voters to cast ballots from any polling station within a constituency, and both of these provisions were of particular importance to labourers whose work kept them away from home on election day. The CCF's final resolution on the matter "condemn[ed] the action of the Government in making changes to the Elections Act which ... [might] den[y] parliamentary representation to substantial minority opinion" while not guaranteeing the election of candidates by a majority vote. The resolution concluded that it was "in the public interest that no major changes in the system of conducting elections should be made without being approved by the electorate."<sup>154</sup> The BC Federation of Labour made a similar plea regarding absentee ballots and the necessity of a plebiscite.<sup>155</sup> Reframing the debate as democracy stripped from the hands of the people was a logical move. The Coalition was increasingly unpopular, and playing off the public's familiarity with FPTP was a reasonable tactic.<sup>156</sup> To determine the public response to the system, however, one must look at how the voting played out in the 1952 election.

## Bennett and Social Credit

AV might have worked as the Coalition intended were it not for the emergence of a

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<sup>153</sup> For information on absentee voting, see Terence H. Qualter, *The Election Process in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Company of Canada, 1970), 30-5.

<sup>154</sup> UBC-SC, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 62, file 1, CCF: British Columbia and Yukon Section, "Eighteenth Provincial Convention," 18-20 May 1951, 93.

<sup>155</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-26-0-8, BC Federation of Labor, "Legislative Proposals Submitted to the Honorable Byron Johnson, Premier of British Columbia and Members of the Cabinet," 16 February 1951.

<sup>156</sup> The plebiscite issue is interesting because the 1952 election actually featured two non-binding plebiscites, one on daylight saving time and the other on the sale of liquor by the glass. H. F. Angus suggests that these votes may have been designed "to attract to the polls indifferent voters who could be expected to vote against socialism if they voted at all." Liquor by the glass could bring in urban voters, while daylight saving time could attract the rural population. H. F. Angus, "The British Columbia Election, June, 1952," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 18.4 (November 1952): 587; "Transferable Vote Will Be Used in B.C. Election," *Vancouver Sun*, 20 March 1952, 1.

viable non-CCF, non-Coalition option in Social Credit.<sup>157</sup> In 1932, William Aberhart had combined his religious radio program in Alberta with sermons on social credit, which offered financial assistance to the public.<sup>158</sup> The province was reeling from the Depression, and many Albertans latched on to this promise of a better way.<sup>159</sup> Social Credit returned a sizable majority government in 1935, ousting the United Farmers of Alberta, and the party began contesting federal elections in 1935 as well, winning 17 seats in Alberta and Saskatchewan.<sup>160</sup> Dropping literal social credit as party policy, the Socreds came to represent a populist movement more generally, with religious and moral overtones.<sup>161</sup> Social Credit spilled over into British Columbia, with the first study group appearing in 1932.<sup>162</sup> Socred candidates contested the 1937 and 1945 provincial elections, but they did poorly at the

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<sup>157</sup> The unexpected success of Social Credit is quite rightly accepted as having destroyed the Coalition's chances of holding onto power through AV. See, for instance, Cairns and Wong, "Socialism, Federalism and the B.C. Party Systems 1933–1983," 474; Hak, "Populism and the 1952 Social Credit Breakthrough in British Columbia," 279; Pilon, "Democracy BC-Style," 95; Patricia E. Roy and John Herd Thompson, *British Columbia: Land of Promises* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2005), 150.

<sup>158</sup> The basic tenets of the "social credit" can be attributed to their originator, Scottish engineer Major Clifford Douglas. The key to his plan was the "A plus B theorem." 'A' represented the wages a factory paid to its employees, and 'B' represented the costs of all goods and additional charges that went into the production of a product. Since the final cost of a product was "A plus B," and workers were only paid their wages, 'A,' they could never afford to purchase the goods produced. Distributing additional money via a social credit could make up the difference with 'B.' Douglas also believed that matters of policy should be left to experts, rather than elected representatives. Bennett recognized that handing off policy issues to experts and the "A plus B" theorem were little more than "exotic relics" in Alberta when he joined the party in 1951. C.B. Macpherson, *Democracy in Alberta: Social Credit and the Party System*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 108; Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 107; Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 172.

<sup>159</sup> Macpherson, *Democracy in Alberta*, 144-5; Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 108-10.

<sup>160</sup> Beck, *Pendulum of Power*, 211, 216-20. The 1950 manifesto of the Social Credit Association of Canada included a passage on AV: "The Social Credit Association of Canada proposes as a necessary electoral reform, the introduction of the single transferable ballot in order that the will of the majority may be reflected in Canadian elections." This is not surprising, given Social Credit's success in Alberta under the alternative vote. SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-13-0-1, Social Credit Association of Canada, "The Manifesto of the Social Credit Association of Canada: Canada's Charter of Freedom," 1950, 18.

<sup>161</sup> In Alberta, monetary reform legislation was ruled *ultra vires*, and nothing would ever come of it. Macpherson, *Democracy in Alberta*, 178; Anthony Long and F. Q. Quo, "Alberta: Politics of Consensus," in *Canadian Provincial Politics*, 6. The BC Social Credit League portrayed monetary theory as a federal question, and it did not engage with the other parties' accusations about monetary reform. Barman, *The West Beyond the West*, 272-3; Sanford, "The Politics of Protest," 208.

<sup>162</sup> Leonard B. Kuffert, "'Reckoning with the Machine': The British Columbia Social Credit Movement as Social Criticism, 1932-52," *BC Studies* 124 (Winter 1999/2000): 13.

polls.<sup>163</sup> The BC Social Credit movement was initially divided between monetary theorists and those who were interested in political organizing.<sup>164</sup> The organization evolved over time, and in the 1952 election the Socreds typically avoided monetary theory, instead espousing “Christian principles, Alberta-style fiscal management, and individual freedom,” a campaign that appealed to voters and independent businessmen alike by providing an alternative to the traditional parties, including the CCF.<sup>165</sup>

Sitting as an independent in 1951, Bennett saw a new party where he could effect change as a possible route to power.<sup>166</sup> His attempt to form a united coalition party, his bids for the Conservative party leadership, and his foray into federal politics had all failed. Rumours about his forming a new party began immediately after his dissociation from the floundering Coalition. One of his constituents suggested he “turn Social Credit” and embrace their “better managing honest government”; another letter writer implored him to offer “Democratic Government” and an alternative to the fascism of the Coalition and the

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<sup>163</sup> Social Credit candidates received 1.15 and 1.42 per cent of the popular vote in 1937 and 1945, respectively. Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 120; *Elections BC*, “Electoral History of British Columbia 1871 - 1986.” Leonard B. Kuffert says the dominant literature on the history of the Social Credit party in BC commits a grievous error in that it typically begins shortly before Bennett joined the party. Kuffert believes that “the movement’s eventual electoral victory was the result of organizational and intellectual development as much as political opportunism or a quest for authority.” He argues that the movement in BC shifted from its monetary reform origins towards “a profound sense of the individual’s sovereignty, and a conventional, free-enterprise agenda, all promoted in the name of democracy,” based on the strength of BC’s natural resources. Leonard B. Kuffert, “Easier to believe than to reflect: The British Columbia Social Credit Movement, 1932-1952” (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1994), 6, 14-5.

<sup>164</sup> In particular, Major A. H. Jukes, who led the BC wing of the Social Credit Association of Canada, adhered to Douglas’s theories and opposed organizing the movement into a political party. Kuffert notes that while Jukes believed in monetary reform, he also “articulated the individual rights arguments that served as a foundation for Social Credit’s later championing of free-enterprise economics.” Monetary theory faded from the limelight when it was ruled *ultra vires* in Alberta in 1948, but it had not completely disappeared by the 1950s. The BC Social Credit movement began to focus its political efforts following the divided organization’s poor showing in the 1949 election. Social Credit had “de-emphasized monetary reform by 1952” because its platform had evolved. Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 120-2; Kuffert, “Easier to believe than to reflect,” 84-9, 110, 12.

<sup>165</sup> Hak, “Populism and the 1952 Social Credit Breakthrough in British Columbia,” 292. These ideas were central to Bennett’s conception of Social Credit, which he described as being “in favor of free enterprise but opposed to monopolies, in favor of social reform but opposed to state socialism, and “a Christian movement [which] represents no particular sect.” Sessional Clipping Book, “Bennett Predicts Victory,” 8 March 1952.

<sup>166</sup> Robin, “British Columbia: The Company Province,” 51; BCA, T1675:0016-1, Mitchell, “Bennett Interview,” 8 October 1976, 2.

socialism of the CCF.<sup>167</sup> The latter, non-specific call for an alternative was a common theme: many voters turning away from the Coalition were hesitant to consider the CCF.<sup>168</sup> Bennett did not make any early commitments to Social Credit, despite meeting with both Lyle Wicks, the president of the BC Social Credit League, and vice-president Eric Martin.<sup>169</sup> While some Social Crediters did not want to hand the reins of their party to Bennett, he needed Social Credit. If he formed a new party, the Socreds' growing presence would likely threaten its success. Given his leadership aspirations, however, he felt it was worth trying his hand at an organization of his own.<sup>170</sup> The death of the Coalition member for Esquimalt gave Bennett a chance to prove his cachet with the voters and the viability of a non-CCF, non-Coalition candidate.<sup>171</sup> With his commitment to Social Credit still up in the air, Bennett backed an independent candidate, drafting Esquimalt alderman and retired naval officer Commander Wurtele for the October 1951 by-election.<sup>172</sup> Wismer criticized Bennett's efforts to establish a new party. "[T]he history of such 'splinter' parties," he said, was to "invariably pass into the limbo of forgotten things, having accomplished nothing and having made no contribution to the public welfare."<sup>173</sup>

Working alongside the Social Credit League, which did not nominate a candidate, Bennett wrote and gave speeches, hired staff to assist with organizing and advertising, and generally led the campaign. While the CCF candidate won, Wurtele placed a close second and the Coalition candidate finished third, thereby demonstrating the loosening grip of the

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<sup>167</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-59, D. Krenzler to Bennett, 21 March 1951; *ibid.*, John P. Clement to Bennett, 16 March 1951.

<sup>168</sup> One woman speculated that the CCF could "surely ... do no worse" than the Coalition; a postcard to Bennett compared Johnson to Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini, calling them "[f]our of a kind." *Ibid.*, F-55-18-0-58, J. Jaggard to Bennett, 10 March 1951; *ibid.*, F-55-18-0-60, postcard to Bennett, 10 April 1951.

<sup>169</sup> Paddy Sherman, *Bennett* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), 91-2.

<sup>170</sup> Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 130-2.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 133; Sherman, *Bennett*, 92.

<sup>172</sup> Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 128-9.

<sup>173</sup> BCA, Premiers' Papers 1917-1952, GR-1222, box 260, file 2, Wismer Radio Address A-20-D, 14-5.

Coalition parties, the threat of the CCF, and the potential for a new party.<sup>174</sup> The CCF's Frank Mitchell had campaigned against the implementation of the hospital insurance scheme, which was branded "a callous coalition betrayal," and he was elected on the strength of the split vote.<sup>175</sup> AV was only meant for the post-Coalition era, and despite passing the legislation in April, the Coalition had yet to bring it into effect, likely believing that in a two party by-election their candidate would coast to victory under FPTP. This assumption did not take into account the presence of a strong independent candidate, however. In a letter to Wurtele after the election, Bennett remarked that "if the new system of voting had been in effect, [he] would have been the member elect for Esquimalt."<sup>176</sup>

Following the by-election, a member of the Victoria chapter of the Social Credit League suggested Bennett join up with the Socreds and vie for the party's leadership.<sup>177</sup> Bennett responded by praising the accomplishments of the party in Alberta, but he was hesitant due to the existence of "different elements within ... Social Credit"; he said he was simply interested in "a good government" that was not invested in "the monopolies of the Right nor State Socialism of the Left but [would] give the people in British Columbia a better deal."<sup>178</sup> Though Bennett did not publicly commit to Social Credit at this point, he wrote president Lyle Wicks to thank him for his assistance in the by-election. Bennett said that under the alternative vote Wurtele "would have been elected easily," and the by-election "show[ed] very clearly what could happen in the general election if we [were] all working

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<sup>174</sup> Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 129-31.

<sup>175</sup> UBC-SC, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 17, file 17, "Hospital Insurance," Frank Mitchell campaign pamphlet.

<sup>176</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-62, Bennett to Cmdr. A.C. Wurtele, 5 October 1951. Bennett also expressed his faith in AV when he explained his undetermined status to a man who would rather he remained independent than "ad[d] more bastard parties to divert the people." Ibid., Bennett to O.R. Baxter, 12 October 1951; *ibid.*, Baxter to Bennett, 2 October 1951.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., F-55-18-0-62, E.O. Duke to Bennett, 15 October 1951.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., Bennett to E.O. Duke, 16 October 1951. In the 1940s, Social Credit in Alberta moved away from its reformist roots to become "a born-again reactionary party supporting monopoly capitalism in the name of free enterprise" on the strength of its oil wealth. The province's financial success prompted Bennett's praise. Alvin Finkel, *The Social Credit Phenomenon in Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 215.



closely together.” He believed the next election would be held in June 1952, which he said “only le[ft] about six months to prepare,” perhaps implying that he would be working in concert with Social Credit.<sup>179</sup> Bennett had initially envisioned AV as a means to ensure the Conservative party’s continued electability, but it could be a useful tool for a strong new party.

Pleased with the by-election results, Bennett requested a meeting with Wicks; he was certainly hoping to be accepted by the Sacred camp. In a letter to Harry Perry, Bennett lamented the fact that the government “had [not] had the nerve to proclaim the new preferential ballot,” but he believed, based on his reading of the electorate, that “it would be impossible for the two Parties in Coalition to make any real showing in a Provincial election under their own banners.” The people, he said, “seemed to be looking for something else to vote for besides either of the two old line Parties or the C.C.F. Socialism,” and he believed one could meet this problem simply by “supply[ing] the alternative to fill this political vacuum.”<sup>180</sup> Bennett joined the Kelowna Association of the Social Credit Party on 6 December 1951, but the influential Albertan Sacreds in the organization, worried he was little more than an opportunist, denied him the party leadership. Bennett decided not to stand in the race for the position of temporary campaign leader in April 1952, the job falling to Ernest Hansell, a reverend from Alberta.<sup>181</sup> Bennett defended his affiliation with Social Credit by pointing to Alberta’s prosperity and proclaiming its Social Credit government the

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<sup>179</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-62, Bennett to Lyle Wicks, 5 October 1951. In his reply, Wicks said he would be happy to meet with Bennett. Ibid., Wicks to Bennett, 18 October 1951.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., Bennett to H.G.T. Perry, 5 November 1951. One voter wrote to the *Daily Colonist* to express his disagreement with this line of reasoning. His reading of the by-election was of a divided free enterprise vote electing the CCF. “[T]hat naive device commonly known as the single transferable vote,” he said, would allow socialists to plump for their candidates against a further divided non-Socialist vote. Robt. D. Harvey, “The Transferable Vote,” *Daily Colonist*, 12 October 1951, 4.

<sup>181</sup> Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 133-5.

best in Canada, but he would not commit to a leadership contest until assured of victory.<sup>182</sup> Bennett clearly posed a threat in the coming election. Johnson received a report that described his past as “the most tortuous road of political infidelity ever trod by one individual,” referencing Bennett’s push for both permanent coalition and AV.<sup>183</sup> Bennett’s political promiscuity had put him in an excellent position to fill the vacuum of power between the Coalition and the CCF.

### **Conclusion**

Plurality voting served both the Liberals and Conservatives very well within the confines of a two-party system. The formation of the Liberal-Conservative Coalition in 1941 was designed to maintain this structure, and the Coalition came to stand for an anti-socialist organization by cultivating a single-issue political divide with the opposition CCF. Policy disputes between the Liberals and Conservatives drove the parties apart, but the spectre of FPTP and the socialists waiting in the wings held them together. W.A.C. Bennett, spurred by his own leadership aspirations, advocated a united coalition party and the alternative vote as solutions to the Coalition’s problems.

After some self-interested debate regarding the type of voting system to be used, which included the dismissal of compulsion, a points system, and STV, the Coalition partners agreed on the alternative vote as the best means to stay in power. The principle of majority representation was always at the forefront, obscuring the political expediency behind electoral reform with a debate on the democratic necessity of the alternative vote. In order for AV to work as intended, however, voters would have to accept the idea of majority representation and rank more than one candidate. Because representative government in BC

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<sup>182</sup> Robin, “British Columbia,” 51; BCA, T1675:0016-1, Mitchell, “Bennett Interview,” 8 October 1976, 2.

<sup>183</sup> UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 2, file 2, “I have been studying...,” n.d.

had long been understood in terms of two-party contests, the electorate was not predisposed to engage with this revised form of majority representation. Furthermore, the emergence of Social Credit allowed the public to choose between two groups of parties as if it were still a two-party, single-issue election. The emphasis on two-party politics, which the Coalition had encouraged, ultimately fueled the public's rejection of AV and helped defeat the Liberals and Conservatives.

### Chapter 3 – The Alternative Vote in the 1952 and 1953 Elections: The Persistence of Plurality

The Liberal-Conservative Coalition broke up in January 1952. Herbert Anscomb, having just returned from Ottawa, contacted the press with the details of his tax-rental agreement negotiations before he informed his Coalition colleagues, and Byron Johnson demanded his resignation over this apparent breach of protocol. Anscomb obliged, taking the Conservatives with him from both the cabinet and the Coalition caucus.<sup>1</sup> He believed Johnson ended the Coalition “[b]ecause he was convinced and assured by other people that he could win British Columbia.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, with 23 of the 48 seats in the Legislature, the Liberals had every right to be confident.<sup>3</sup> After an initial delay, Johnson said that without Coalition the government no longer had a mandate, and he would go to the polls to seek clarification from the electorate.<sup>4</sup> Both parties recognized the necessity of the alternative vote (AV) for their political futures, and the AV legislation was proclaimed via order-in-council

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<sup>1</sup> David Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1983), 141.

<sup>2</sup> British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), T1947:0001, Martin Robin, “Herbert Anscomb Interview,” 1967. The federal Liberal and Conservative parties had also pushed for the breakup. Having the provincial parties working in concert made it difficult to emphasize the differences between the two parties nationally. Additionally, Anscomb had never agreed with Johnson’s ascension to the leadership, and they frequently clashed on matters of policy. The Hart-Maitland era had been far more harmonious and stable. Donald Keith Alper, “From Rule to Ruin: The Conservative Party of British Columbia, 1928-1954” (Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1975), 329-30. The CCF’s weakened performance in the 1949 election had also reduced the external pressures from BC businesses to keep the Coalition together. Thomas Michael Sanford, “The Politics of Protest: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and Social Credit League in British Columbia” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1961), 155.

<sup>3</sup> Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 95; David Elkins, “Politics Make Strange Bedfellows: The B.C. Party System in the 1952 and 1953 Provincial Elections,” *BC Studies* 30 (Summer 1976): 8.

<sup>4</sup> University of Victoria Archives and Special Collections (hereafter UV-ASC), British Columbia Legislative Assembly Sessional Clipping Books: Newspaper Accounts of the Debates, Section III: 1941 – 1961, February 1950 – March 1953, accession no. 597 (hereafter Sessional Clipping Book), “House Dissolution ‘At Earliest Date,’” 20 February 1952. Anscomb and the Conservatives had called for an election immediately after the Coalition collapsed. Johnson chose to stay on as a “coalition administration,” since his Liberal caucus had been elected as coalitionists. Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 141.

on 20 March. Absentee balloting would be included, necessitating a three-week delay in the second count while waiting on additional ballots.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter examines the parties' portrayal of AV and the public's assessment of the system before and after the 1952 election. AV was a response to the needs of the traditional parties, and it was presented in the Legislature and to the public as a system that provided majority representation and allowed the electorate to safely vote for the free enterprise parties.<sup>6</sup> A province-wide education campaign stressed the necessity of majority representation, but British Columbians' preference for first-past-the-post (FPTP) was evident during their brief experience with AV in the 1950s. The public's failure to embrace electoral reform at the provincial level can be attributed to the old-line parties' continued emphasis on an outdated two-party system. Voters' consequent desire to cast anti-party votes limited their acceptance of fully-ranked preferential ballots and majority representation, while simultaneously uniting an anti-Coalition majority. The Liberal and Conservative plan was intended to work by "stress[ing] a single cleavage appropriate to a two-party system," but the single issue in the minds of many voters was ousting the Coalition, and AV allowed for large exchanges of CCF and Social Credit preferences.<sup>7</sup>

"Plumping" — that is, the practice of voting for only a single candidate on a preferential ballot — was a common topic for both politicians and the public. The arguments made for and against the practice show the divide between the democratic rhetoric espoused by the old-line parties and the self-interested politics behind their words.

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<sup>5</sup> "Transferable Vote Will Be Used in B.C. Election," *Vancouver Sun*, 20 March 1952, 1. Though it was widely reported, not everyone understood the delay. On voting day one man praised AV, calling it "a fair system," but he was unsure why the second count would not be held for three weeks. "Victoria Citizens Sharply Divided on Alternative Vote System," *Daily Colonist*, 14 June 1952, 23.

<sup>6</sup> Harold J. Jansen, "The Political Consequences of the Alternative Vote: Lessons from Western Canada," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 37.3 (September 2004): 654.

<sup>7</sup> Alan C. Cairns and Daniel Wong, "Socialism, Federalism and the B.C. Party Systems 1933–1983," in *Party Politics in Canada*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Hugh G. Thorburn (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1990), 476.

Ranking candidates was antithetical to the two-party, single-issue politics of the CCF-Coalition era, and voters who did rank more than one candidate did so within their comfort zones, typically voting CCF and Social Credit first and second, or vice versa, or Liberal and Conservative. The maintenance of a single-issue divide indicated a familiarity with and a preference for FPTP elections, and a rejection of the new mode of majority representation; one voter called AV “the culture of an alien idea contrary to the democratic way.”<sup>8</sup> As for the system itself, absentee votes delayed the final count by over a month, which did not do AV any favours. Public opinion polls indicated that voters were eager to return to FPTP following the 1952 contest.

The 1953 AV election results led to the system’s abolition by Social Credit. W.A.C. Bennett had obtained his coveted majority government, and he believed he could do the same under FPTP. Furthermore, vote transfers had helped to defeat two key Socred candidates in the 1953 election, which did not endear the system to Bennett. The Liberals and Conservatives complained about the “political expediency” of AV’s abolition, just as the CCF did when the system was implemented, but Bennett used the public’s opposition to the system to justify the return to FPTP. While he had previously pushed for AV, Bennett was now in a position of power where it was no longer needed. He used the popular opposition to AV to dismiss any previous arguments that it enhanced democracy through majority representation. By examining vote transfers and survey results, it is clear that the public at large was undeniably opposed to AV, regardless of how many candidates they ranked on their ballots. I believe the high rate of plumping and votes that were exhausted after both of the old-line or protest parties were eliminated indicate a preference for FPTP. Finally, the

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<sup>8</sup> She also feared that AV would result in a multiplication of candidates and elect a minority to power. These criticisms were more commonly leveled at the single transferable vote (STV), but they do indicate a level of discomfort with electoral reform and a preference for FPTP. Ellen Hart, “Transferable Vote?,” *Daily Colonist*, 17 August 1951, 4.

abolition of AV under Bennett's premiership marked a shift in the focus of electoral reform from the voting system to the redistribution of electoral districts. Local representation under FPTP enjoyed far more voter support than the majority representation of AV, because it did not entail a revision of representation as it was understood.

### **The Value of the Franchise: Amendments to AV**

Before AV was finalized, there was some discussion about how its details would affect the franchise and voting equality. These issues, primarily raised by the CCF, are representative of the debates that would carry into the election campaign. The use of AV in multi-member ridings was a particular point of contention. Previously, voters in the Victoria and Vancouver area ridings had as many votes as there were seats, and they could cast their ballots for any candidates they chose. Under AV, however, constituents could be robbed of their desired preference order if more than one of their top three choices appeared on a single ballot. While this would assume voters were willing to abandon a straight party ticket, Harold Winch nevertheless called it "a denial of democracy" that would strip voters of a full range of choice.<sup>9</sup>

Social Credit favoured AV, but its platform on electoral reform included the reorganization of electoral districts "to eliminate multiple-member representation."<sup>10</sup> Bennett took this stand in 1947, telling the Legislature that it was "unfair that any citizen should have more than one representative."<sup>11</sup> Equality of representation and equality in voting — that is,

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<sup>9</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, "Dual-Member Ridings," 23 February 1952; "Winch Attacks New Act," *Vancouver Province*, 23 February 1952, 15. Following the election, the BC Chamber of Commerce also called for either the abolition of multi-member ridings or the establishment of "a new system of proportional representation in multiple ridings." "B.C. Chamber of Commerce Likes New System of Alternative Vote," *Daily Colonist*, 31 July 1952, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Fraser University Archives (SFU-A), W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-13-0-3, "What Social Credit Will Do For British Columbia: Provincial Program of the British Columbia Social Credit League," 1952.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, F-55-18-0-36, "Note Changes in the Government since the Coalition," 14 February 1947, 9.

that those in multi-member ridings should be allowed to choose from all available candidates, just as if they were in single-member ridings — were related points.<sup>12</sup> Following the 1952 election, one letter writer expressed Winch’s old concerns, saying that he “fe[lt] entitled to vote for the ... best representatives in the House, rather than for the party to which they belong.”<sup>13</sup> By deciding against proportional representation (PR) in multi-member ridings, the Coalition partners opened themselves up to the charge that they were undermining democracy. Furthermore, multi-member AV districts increased the chance for confusion and spoiled ballots from people who engaged in “horizontal voting” by placing a 1 on ballot ‘A,’ and a 2 on ballot ‘B.’<sup>14</sup> Once the numbering sequence was broken, ballots were no longer counted, and in this instance only the first preference would be valid.

There were two additional points of contention regarding the ballot, and both were intended to ensure fairness for the electorate. There was some question as to whether ballots marked with an *X* for the first preference, instead of a 1, would be rejected. Provincial Secretary William Straith said that because voters were used to FPTP they might be inclined to mark an *X*, but he believed their ballots should not go to waste.<sup>15</sup> In Alberta, prior to a 1944 amendment, ballots “with a marking other than a numeral [were] rejected,” whereas

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<sup>12</sup> Arguably voters in multi-member ridings had more representation than their single-member counterparts. However, because those with three votes did not have the same freedoms on the ballot as voters did elsewhere, this could still be portrayed as a form of inequality akin to deviations from the principle of representation by population. There were ongoing plans to engage in redistribution, which might have included the abolition of multi-member districts and an increase in the representation of under-represented urban districts, but nothing was done prior to the June election despite years of editorial and political discussion. See “Misrepresentation by Population,” *Vancouver Province*, 17 February 1950, 4; “Before the Election,” *Vancouver Province*, 23 January 1952, 4; “Hope Rekindles Old Political Fire, Representation By Population Urged,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 27 February 1952, 5.

<sup>13</sup> BCA, Premiers’ Papers 1917-1952, GR-1222, box 236, file 1, Bud Day to Ronald B. Worley, 8 September 1952.

<sup>14</sup> BCA, Premier’s Records 1953 – 1972, GR-1414, box 4, file 5, “Re Alternative vote system,” W.E. Jopp to Bennett, 12 August 1953, enclosed letter from Jopp to *Victoria Times*, 19 May 1953.

<sup>15</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, “‘X’ Will Equal Number One Under New Voting System,” *Vancouver Province*, 7 March 1952.



Manitoba had permitted ballots to be marked with an *X* since AV's inception.<sup>16</sup> The AV legislation in BC was amended to permit voters to use an *X* instead of 1 (i.e., ballots could be marked simply *X*, or *X*, 2, 3, etc.). Despite the apparent advantage to voters, Conservative MLA Allan McDonnell “spoke for several members when he said he thought the government was unwise to mix the old system with the new”; he believed it would increase confusion rather than decrease the number of spoiled ballots.<sup>17</sup> The amendment indicated that the government thought voters might not engage with AV as they hoped, whether through ignorance of the system or an unwillingness to rank any other parties. One final issue raised by the CCF concerned the counting of ballots. Arthur Turner proposed that any blank spaces on voters' ballots be marked out, to avoid manipulation by returning officers. Turner's implicit accusation was that the Liberals and Conservatives might resort to shady means to stay in power, but the proposed amendment was designed to protect voters' expression of their true preferences, much like the *X* as 1 amendment. In this case, however, the change was deemed unnecessary and defeated.<sup>18</sup>

### **Educating the Public on Majority Representation**

The *X* as 1 amendment and the discussion of multi-member ridings were both related to politicians' fears that AV would confuse voters. If the majority of voters treated

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<sup>16</sup> Jansen, “The Political Consequences of the Alternative Vote,” 658-9. When AV was initially under consideration in Manitoba, Labour MLA William Ivens argued that rejecting *X* ballots would discriminate against lower educated voters. Harold J. Jansen, “The Single Transferable Vote in Alberta and Manitoba” (Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1998), 42.

<sup>17</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, “‘X’ Will Equal Number One Under New Voting System,” *Vancouver Province*, 7 March 1952.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Concerns about fraud did not disappear. One woman wrote the *CCF News* to suggest that it advise readers to mark a 1 or an *X* for the CCF candidate and a 2 for every other candidate, thus exhausting the ballot after the first count and ensuring it could not be tampered with. Jessie Mendels, editor of the *CCF News* and the party's provincial secretary, agreed that this would work in principle, but to publish such advice “would only serve to confuse further an already extremely confused electorate.” Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 18, file 1A, Eunice Stupich to Editor *CCF News*, 28 April 1952; Jessie Mendels to Eunice Stupich, 5 May 1952.

the 1952 election as an FPTP contest, then the efforts of the Liberals and Conservatives would have been for naught, since they knew the CCF could defeat them in a straight three-way race. Anscomb joked that the system confused even him, and that a significant public education campaign was necessary; indeed, the government announced a publicity campaign to familiarize voters with AV, consisting of film, radio, and newspaper advertising, as well as informational pamphlets.<sup>19</sup> Chief Electoral Officer Fred Hurley saw that a pamphlet on AV was sent to every household in the province months before the election.<sup>20</sup> It explained the counting procedure and answered a variety of potential questions, such as how the system applied to multi-member districts and how to effectively mark a ballot. The pamphlet acknowledged the possibility of plumping but discouraged the practice, saying that “[s]uch a voter simply deprives himself from fully participating in the contest.” It also explained that there would be a three-week delay in the counting procedure, owing to the fact that all absentee ballots were needed to establish an accurate first count. The “purpose” of the alternative vote, as set out in the pamphlet, was “[t]o prevent the election of a candidate on a minority vote.” This would be established via the counting process, which would transfer ballots “until an absolute majority [was] obtained by one of the candidates.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 5, file 1, “P-C Party Revolt Against Drew Seen,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 30 May 1951; Sessional Clipping Book, “Transferable Vote Due For Next Election,” 21 February 1952; Sessional Clipping Book, “Publicity Planned to Clarify Ballot,” 7 March 1952. The 1952 film advertising included the commissioning of a “one-minute playlet explaining and demonstrating [the] new voting,” which was distributed in 35 mm. to all commercial theatres and in 16 mm. to rural regions. The company that produced the film believed it “told the story more effectively than any of the other mediums.” Presumably the film demonstrated how to properly fill out an AV ballot. BCA, Premier’s Records 1953 – 1972, GR-1414, box 1, file 3, J. Howard Boothe, Audio Pictures Limited, to Bennett, 9 April 1953. According to the *Daily Colonist*, all told the advertising campaign cost \$100,000. “Voting System Explained: Alternative Balloting Not Too Complicated,” *Daily Colonist*, 11 June 1952, 1.

<sup>20</sup> UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 1, file 5, Chief Electoral Officer, “Alternative Voting: An Explanation of the Procedure of Alternative Voting as It Applies to the ‘Provincial Elections Act.’”

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. The 1951 AV bill defined an absolute majority as follows: “The term ‘absolute majority’ shall mean, as respects any count made, the next whole number greater than one-half of the total number of ballot-papers reckoned at the closing of that count; no account being taken of ‘exhausted ballot papers.’” British Columbia, *Statutes, 1951*, 81.

Print advertising also stressed the democratic benefits of AV.<sup>22</sup> One ad sanctioned by the Chief Electoral Officer explained how to rank candidates and described the system as “fair” and “as simple as the voting system used before.” Voters would have more choices, it said, which would prevent candidates from “being elected on a minority vote.”<sup>23</sup> Stressing the inherent fairness of AV and majority representation at all times, without directly criticizing FPTP, AV was portrayed as a superior system and one that voters should be able to understand. Indeed, Gordon Wismer said that his fellow MLAs “were underestimating the intelligence of the electorate”; ranking candidates was straightforward, “and anybody who couldn’t understand it probably shouldn’t vote.”<sup>24</sup> This reduced the individual’s participation to the act of voting itself, implying that understanding the marginally more complex counting process was unnecessary. In a similar vein, a pamphlet from Vancouver’s Board of Trade urged voters to rank a free enterprise slate and asked, “of what value is a man’s vote if he can’t mark 1 - 2 - 3?”<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the BC Federation of Labour had asked the government not to adopt AV on the grounds that it would “create confusion and lead to thousands of spoiled ballots,” because it was “completely foreign to the method the citizens of this province have been accustomed to”; it recommended compulsory voting

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<sup>22</sup> Phillips says this supplementary advertising was necessary because “[i]t was probably appreciated that such a long and quite technical publication [Hurley’s] was not likely to be carefully studied.” While the question and answer section of the pamphlet begins relatively simply, certainly a newspaper advertisement showing numerals on a ballot could readily convey the idea behind AV without getting mired in details. H.C.J. Phillips, “Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974” (Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario, 1976), 274.

<sup>23</sup> Fred H. Hurley, Chief Electoral Officer, “Alternative Voting will be used in the coming Provincial Election,” *Fisherman*, 15 April 1952, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, “‘X’ Will Equal Number One Under New Voting System,” *Vancouver Province*, 7 March 1952.

<sup>25</sup> This pamphlet was part of the 1953 campaign, after Social Credit had established itself as a viable free enterprise party. City of Vancouver Archives (hereafter CVA), Vancouver Board of Trade fonds, 527-A-2, file 2, Add. Mss. No. 300, Lawrence G. Ecroyd, Vancouver Board of Trade, “What About B.C.’s Alternative Voting System? Questions and Answers that will interest you...,” 1953.

as a compromise.<sup>26</sup> The Socreds' official position on electoral reform, that "[c]onfusion impedes democracy," referred to using AV in multi-member ridings, not the system as a whole.<sup>27</sup>

Ranking candidates under AV is ostensibly quite simple, but given decades of FPTP it was unclear how voters would respond in June 1952. Voters dismissed the single transferable vote for municipal elections in the 1920s as accomplishing little and being unnecessarily complicated, so prepping them for AV was important. Newspapers assisted in readying voters for the election. The *Victoria Daily Times*, for instance, conducted a mock AV election using comic strip characters. The paper printed the full results, including transfers, talked about plumping, and explained the counting process. In the end, Dick Tracy defeated Orphan Annie 317 to 291, on the strength of a "last minute surge." There was only one spoiled ballot, indicating that voters who took an interest in the system were certainly quite capable of ranking candidates.<sup>28</sup> A random phone poll conducted by the *Vancouver Province* obtained a more varied sampling of respondents, however. Most participants said they "frankly ... did not understand the system," and that they preferred FPTP. Many indicated that they would plump. Of the comments printed in the *Province*, four voters said they understood AV but that they either did not "think very much of the system" or preferred FPTP; one person said AV was yet another move "to stop the CCF from getting in"; others said they did not understand some aspects of the system. Those who did not understand it "expected to study the system and become familiar with it before June 12."<sup>29</sup> This, after years of discussion, months of print advertising, and with only a week to go before the election, is

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<sup>26</sup> BCA, Premiers' Papers 1917-1952, GR-1222, box 236, file 6, B.C. Federation of Labour, "Legislative Proposals," 20 February 1952; "Labor Opposes Change," *Daily Colonist*, 5 February 1952, 3.

<sup>27</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-13-0-3, "What Social Credit Will Do For British Columbia: Provincial Program of the British Columbia Social Credit League," 1952.

<sup>28</sup> "Dick Tracy Wins Times Poll on Fifth Count: Overtakes Orphan Annie," *Victoria Daily Times*, 9 June 1952, 1.

<sup>29</sup> "Few Understand New Voting," *Vancouver Province*, 5 June 1952, 1.

perhaps indicative of the general public response. The day before the election, the *Daily Colonist* again explained the system in detail and included samples of marked ballots, one ranked fully and another ranked partially.<sup>30</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that most voters understood that they would be allowed to number candidates on the ballot, even if they did not understand the counting process.<sup>31</sup> However, a winner-take-all approach to majority representation carried over into the election, rather than an altruistic desire to rank all candidates and participate in the election to the maximum extent possible. How voters ranked the available parties in the election demonstrated an attempt to solidify a two-party structure.

### **Anti-Socialism, Coalition Backlash, and Plumping**

David Mitchell believes “most voters were looking forward to the new method of exercising their democratic rights” in 1952.<sup>32</sup> This seems like an overstatement, in light of the preference for FPTP indicated by the *Province’s* poll and the lingering confusion over the counting process and voting in multi-member districts. However, in an election-day survey conducted by the *Daily Colonist*, 70 per cent of those casting ballots said they would give AV “a chance to prove itself,” whereas only 30 per cent would abolish the system immediately.<sup>33</sup> Voters were apparently willing to wait on the results to decide what they thought of the system, and the 1952 election had a lot to offer. Many people perceived the Socreds as a “real democratic (anti-red) party,” filling the gap between the Coalition and the CCF and

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<sup>30</sup> The *Daily Colonist* noted that on the partially marked ballot, which ranked two out of four candidates, “the voter [had] not made full use of his voting privilege.” “Voting System Explained: Alternative Balloting Not Too Complicated,” *Daily Colonist*, 11 June 1952, 1.

<sup>31</sup> There was still some lingering confusion over the issue of plumping, which will be discussed in the next section. One man wrote to the Chief Electoral Officer to confirm “the legality of so-called ‘plump’ voting,” indicating that the extensive advertising campaign had not clarified the situation. Ads typically discouraged plumping, but they often discussed it. Hubert Savage, “Plump Voting,” *Daily Colonist*, 11 June 1952, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 154.

<sup>33</sup> “Victoria Citizens Sharply Divided on Alternative Vote System,” *Daily Colonist*, 14 June 1952, 23.

allowing them to safely cast out the Liberals and the Conservatives.<sup>34</sup> In addition to providing a non-CCF, non-Coalition option, Social Credit also offered a second choice for CCFers, and for Liberal or Conservative voters who were disgusted with their former partners. While designed to perpetuate two-party politics between the Coalition parties and the CCF, AV could just as easily unite the non-Coalition vote, in effect maintaining a two-party divide in a four-party system.<sup>35</sup> Social Credit and the CCF both met the needs of voters “alienat[ed] from the old-line parties” by Coalition policies, hence their categorization as “protest” parties: a vote for the Socreds or CCF was also a vote against the Coalition.<sup>36</sup> AV could perhaps “prove itself” to any given individual in part by providing a satisfactory government. However, given that AV proved unpopular despite the eventual Socred victory, voters clearly separated the alternative vote from the government it provided. While the arguments for AV were based on the idea that FPTP could elect a CCF government, FPTP remained the preferred voting system.

The government-run hospital insurance scheme was a focal point of the 1952 campaign, and it had been a source of controversy since its inception in 1948. Anscomb’s 1950 budget speech criticized the Liberals’ welfare state proclivities and the use of government funds for social services, particularly hospital insurance, which entailed mandatory payroll deductions and cost an enormous amount of money.<sup>37</sup> These types of ideological rifts between the parties contributed to the Coalition’s collapse. While hospital insurance was widely hated, Anscomb was instrumental in introducing the similarly unpopular 3 per cent sales tax in 1948. One man wrote to the Minister of Labour to say that

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<sup>34</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-57, Dr. F.E. Dorchester to Bennett, 1951.

<sup>35</sup> Robin takes issue with the idea that the CCF and Social Credit’s replacement of the Liberals and Conservatives as the two main parties established a “protest party system,” as Thomas Michael Sanford argues, because Social Credit filled the role of a conservative party. Sanford, “The Politics of Protest,” xiv; Elkins, “Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows,” 25-6; Robin, “British Columbia,” 50.

<sup>36</sup> Sanford, “The Politics of Protest,” 162.

<sup>37</sup> Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 96.

“the choice in B.C. [was] becoming difficult,” because while he could not support the CCF, the governing MLAs “seem[ed] to forget that ... the representative owe[d] the electorate everything.”<sup>38</sup> The Liberals responded to the hospital insurance deficit by increasing premiums and introducing the highly unpopular “co-insurance” in 1951, involving a \$3.50 per day charge for the first ten days of a patient’s hospital visit.<sup>39</sup> In the 1952 election, the Conservatives and the CCF campaigned against co-insurance, with the latter promising socialized healthcare; Johnson believed co-insurance was necessary, though Wismer disagreed; and the Socreds promised to replace co-insurance with “a dollar-a-day” plan, claiming that the mandatory hospital insurance scheme hurt British Columbians financially and interfered with their freedom to choose.<sup>40</sup> All of this is to say that many British Columbians were dissatisfied with the Coalition parties, and with just cause.<sup>41</sup> The Conservative and Liberal parties had disagreed on matters of policy for some time. Winch said that because the Coalition had broken up “on the basis of enmity rather than amicability, ... [t]here [would] be very few Liberals who [would] vote for Conservatives, and few Conservatives who [would] vote for Liberals.”<sup>42</sup> While this was not the case, the presence of the free enterprise Socreds nevertheless diminished the chances that AV could work as intended. “[I]t was ... not the voting system but the voters that caused the defeat of

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<sup>38</sup> BCA, Premiers’ Papers 1917-1952, GR-1222, box 213, file 1, North Vancouver to J.H. Cates, Minister of Labour, 1950.

<sup>39</sup> Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 158.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 159; Leonard B. Kuffert, “‘Reckoning with the Machine’: The British Columbia Social Credit Movement as Social Criticism, 1932-52,” *BC Studies* 124 (Winter 1999/2000): 24.

<sup>41</sup> It is impossible to overstate just how unhappy British Columbians were with hospital insurance. A sizable amount of Johnson’s incoming correspondence consisted of complaints about hospital insurance, and in April 1951 a petition with 205,770 signatures was presented to the Legislature, protesting co-insurance and rising hospital insurance premiums. The Legislature voted 34 to 9 against debating the petition. Paddy Sherman, *Bennett* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), 77; Ronald B. Worley, *The Wonderful World of W.A.C. Bennett* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 58.

<sup>42</sup> “Transferable Vote Could ‘Backfire,’” *Vancouver Sun*, 28 January 1952, 15.

the Liberal and Conservative Parties,” Donald Alper notes, as dissatisfied British Columbians deserted the parties in droves.<sup>43</sup>

The antagonistic two-party politics that dominated BC’s electoral history continued under AV, and this was apparent in the persistence of anti-socialist rhetoric. The Coalition parties made free enterprise versus socialism a central campaign issue, indicating a penchant for the single-issue FPTP-style elections familiar to the electorate, and a desire to divert attention from their past policy gaffes. Anscomb reminded his constituents that the Conservatives were “the final and only source left that guarantee[d] SECURITY and FREEDOM for our people”; his party was “the bulwark against Communism and Socialism in British Columbia.”<sup>44</sup> The Labor Progressive Party’s endorsement of the CCF in the 1949 election had allowed the Coalition “to claim that the CCF was ... a communist front organization,” a particularly damning accusation in the context of the Cold War.<sup>45</sup> The Coalition believed that voters would embrace AV because of their fear that “a minority of the people” could elect the CCF and “change their entire way of life and bring ruination to the province.”<sup>46</sup> Socialism was in direct opposition to Liberalism, which “opposed ... a condition of Society under which all means of production, distribution and exchange are owned by the State.”<sup>47</sup> Bennett later described Social Credit as “a crusade against socialism,”

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<sup>43</sup> Alper, “From Rule to Ruin,” 346.

<sup>44</sup> UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 12, file 6, Herbert Anscomb, Letter to Constituents No. 17. Emphasis in original. Social Credit also promised the security of “enough material wealth for everyone” along with freedom from “the grasping hand of collectivism.” The party did not run an anti-CCF campaign, however, claiming instead that the Coalition’s hospital insurance scheme interfered with both of these goals. Kuffert, “Reckoning with the Machine,” 36.

<sup>45</sup> Christina J. Nichol, “In Pursuit of the Voter: The BC CCF, 1945-1950,” in *Building the Co-operative Commonwealth: Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1984), 133.

<sup>46</sup> “Preferential Vote System Under Fire,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 17 April 1951, 2.

<sup>47</sup> The Liberals, attempting to court the middle-of-the-road vote, remained open to adopting “social control wherever and whenever the public welfare so require[d].” BCA, NWp 329.9711 L695Bc 1952, British Columbia Liberal Association, “Constitution of the British Columbia Liberal Association,” 24 April 1952.



because it was the only party that could defeat the CCF; this was clearest following the election, when he adopted anti-CCF rhetoric as his party's own.<sup>48</sup>

It is possible to determine to what extent the parties believed in the democratic value of AV by looking at their stance on plumping. Winch believed that CCF supporters could not consistently rank free enterprise candidates, and many of the party faithful agreed. In 1951 the *CCF News* suggested that voters might rank a second candidate "to have some say" as to their local representative.<sup>49</sup> Angus MacIsaac, the CCF candidate for Yale, pleaded with the provincial party secretary not to repeat this mistake: "class-conscious voters" should "[g]o for plumping," he said, "and nothing else."<sup>50</sup> Quite tellingly, the CCF received multiple queries about the practice. One man asked if it was acceptable "to vote 1 for C.C.F. & nothing more," because "no liberal conservative or Social Credit [did he] wish to vote for"; another man asked for "advice re 2nd & 3rd choice."<sup>51</sup> Both men were told that it was "quite permissible to vote for only one party."<sup>52</sup> A resolution at the CCF's provincial convention in April denounced AV in favour of FPTP, and suggested working closely with trade unions to advise voters "to disregard the alternate voting, and 'plump' in protest."<sup>53</sup> One individual called the CCF the only "working men's party" in BC, and said that ads telling voters to rank their ballots "for free enterprise" indicated that "the present politicians and big business [were] afraid."<sup>54</sup> If the CCF's supporters plumped, it could benefit from vote transfers while

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<sup>48</sup> BCA, T1675:0016-2, David Mitchell, "Bennett Interview," 8 October 1976, 5; Gordon Hak, "Populism and the 1952 Social Credit Breakthrough in British Columbia," *Canadian Historical Review* 85.2 (June 2004): 295.

<sup>49</sup> "Preferential," *CCF News*, 25 July 1951, 8.

<sup>50</sup> Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 18, file 2, Angus MacIsaac to Jessie Mendels, "C.C.F. News," 9 March 1952. For a similar complaint, see *ibid.*, file 1A, E.V. Glass to Gladys Webster, 5 March 1952. MacIsaac was writing from Smithers to discuss the nomination of a CCF candidate in his district, because he believed many CCFers would not vote otherwise. "With this new system of voting [he could not] see any sense in a CCF'er voting for more than his own candidate."

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, T.T. Kermode to The C.C.F., 3 June 1952; *ibid.*, Leonard I. Bentley to C.C.F., 6 June 1952.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, Grace Rideout, Assistant Provincial Campaign Manager, to T.T. Kermode, 6 June 1952; *ibid.*, Rideout to Leonard I. Bentley, 7 June 1952.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, box 62, file 4, "CCF Nineteenth Provincial Convention Resolutions: Provincial Affairs," 1952, 4-5.

<sup>54</sup> W. S. Herlihy, "Advocates Vote for CCF June 12," *Fisherman*, 3 June 1952.

not returning the favour, thereby maintaining the purity of its anti-capitalist and anti-Coalition stand and denying assistance to whichever party came closest to its seat total.

As the Chief Electoral Officer had noted, voters gained nothing at the constituency level by plumping, because ranking only one candidate meant they would no longer have a say in the choice of their local representative if their number one choice were eliminated.<sup>55</sup> Anscomb initially advised people to “[v]ote Conservatives first and Liberal second,” because “nothing could be more disastrous than the election of the Socialists,” and plumping “would not be of any avail.”<sup>56</sup> Immediately before the election, however, he told a Conservative audience that “[i]n many cases, if you show good judgment, you will mark your ballot ‘one’ and go home”; other Conservative candidates continued to suggest ranking the Liberals second.<sup>57</sup> Uniting the Liberal and Conservative vote to defeat the CCF had been the goal of AV, and Anscomb was going dangerously off-message. He believed that “no other parties ... deserved support from genuine Tories.”<sup>58</sup> Telling supporters not to consider the Liberals would have made sense in FPTP elections prior to 1945, but if his ultimate goal was to keep the communist hordes from forming a government at any cost, then discouraging the use of second preferences was a foolhardy stratagem. Anscomb’s advice was indicative of the existing policy rift between the Coalition partners. Furthermore, his party continued to be less popular than the Liberals at the polls, and he likely resented the idea that his supporters

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<sup>55</sup> Newspapers also reminded voters of this point: “If your man is the least wanted, you don’t lose your vote. It still goes to help the second man on your list.” “B.C.’s New Ballot Has Plenty of Bounce,” *Vancouver Province*, 21 March 1952, 8. One man called the CCF’s plumping advocacy “the most foolish advice that could be given.... Those who are giving it are confusing this type of election with ordinary civic elections, held under the straight count system. By plumping in this election the plumper’s [sic] are simply playing into the hands of those who do not plump.” Elmore Philpott, “Foolish to Plump,” *Vancouver Sun*, 9 June 1952, 4.

<sup>56</sup> UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 5, file 1, “P-C Party Revolt Against Drew Seen,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 30 May 1951; “Anscomb Affirms Break-Up to Wait,” *Daily Colonist*, 30 May 1951.

<sup>57</sup> “One Vote Enough, Anscomb Suggests,” *Vancouver Sun*, 11 June 1952, 12.

<sup>58</sup> Martin Robin, *Pillars of Profit: The Company Province 1934-1972* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), 142.

might give his former allies their second choices. His strong stance on plumping demonstrates a preference for FPTP-style campaigning and elections.

For both the CCF and Conservative leadership to advise plumping suggests that the majority representation of AV did not have their support. Both groups realized that they ostensibly needed more than 50 per cent of the votes to take a riding, but the CCF said that it would rather have done as much under FPTP, and the Conservatives did not want to imply that anyone but a true Conservative could represent British Columbians' best interests.<sup>59</sup> If everyone ranked only a single candidate this would do nothing to alleviate the minority representation that the Conservatives had campaigned against. The CCF, of course, had opposed AV from the beginning, including the majority representation that was intended to hurt its chances. Privileging party politics over individual constituency results was a mistake, because with four parties these divisions were blurred: there were two protest choices and two former Coalition options, and voting along those lines to ensure desirable local representation made sense. Indeed, Liberal voters were advised to vote "1-2 ... for free enterprise."<sup>60</sup> Johnson told his supporters "not [to] be afraid to use your alternative vote ... so that the people of British Columbia [might] be assured of having a government that [was] really representative of the majority of the people."<sup>61</sup> If AV had worked as originally planned, the Liberals would have dominated the Conservatives in the Legislature once more, given that they were the more popular of the two parties. Johnson could therefore recommend that voters use AV to keep the CCF's numbers down more easily than Anscomb, whose Conservatives had long occupied the number two spot for the old-line parties. The internal

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<sup>59</sup> The anti-AV resolution at the CCF's 1952 convention said that under FPTP, in order "to govern effectively a CCF government must be elected by better than 50% of the electorate." Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 62, file 4, "CCF Nineteenth Provincial Convention Resolutions: Provincial Affairs," 1952, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Robin notes that this usually meant ranking the Conservatives second, but Wismer included Social Credit when discussing the ranking of free enterprise parties. *Vancouver Sun*, 23 May 1952, quoted in Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 141.

<sup>61</sup> BCA, Premiers' Papers 1917-1952, GR-1222, box 260, file 2, "Extra Sets. Election Speeches," June 1952, 15.

squabbling of the Coalition and anti-socialist (or anti-capitalist) rhetoric did not encourage ranking multiple parties, however, but Social Credit stood to benefit as a viable alternative with little baggage.

All of the parties campaigned for first choice votes, of course, including Social Credit.<sup>62</sup> Bennett received the same questions on plumping from voters asking “which way to vote,” and “if it would be alright to ... vote *just for one*,” but the party had no official stance on the issue.<sup>63</sup> Wesley Black, the Socred candidate for Nelson-Creston, kept a list of voters’ stated preference order, and he made a point of looking for second choice votes.<sup>64</sup> Politicians were well aware of the importance of second or third preferences, even if they did not want their supporters giving them out. Independent Labour member Tom Uphill, the longtime MLA for Fernie, asked Bennett if he would speak with the Social Credit Association in his district “to give [him] their second choice,” as another member of Social Credit had intimated they would. Uphill felt the race was between him and the Liberal, and he had not attacked Social Credit in his campaign. He believed Socred supporters “could not give [their second preference] honest[ly] to either of the other candidates.”<sup>65</sup> It is not clear if Bennett followed through on Uphill’s request, but the Socreds’ lack of a plumping policy meant that they could enjoy broad secondary support.<sup>66</sup> If the party had suggested plumping

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<sup>62</sup> A CCF pamphlet for Vancouver-Burrard, for instance, told voters to “[g]ive your First Choice on each Ballot to the CCF.” A stock Socred pamphlet for Mackenzie said “For Good Government Vote 1st Choice for Your Social Credit Candidate.” Most candidate-specific ads in the 1952 and 1953 elections listed the candidate’s name as it would appear on the ballot next to the numeral 1. Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 19, file 5, “In Vancouver-Burrard”; SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-13-0-3, “What Social Credit Will Do For British Columbia: Provincial Program of the British Columbia Social Credit League,” 1952.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, F-55-18-0-69, Armstrong to Bennett, 6 May 1952. Emphasis in original.

<sup>64</sup> Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 154-5.

<sup>65</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-69, Tom Uphill to Bennett, 19 May 1952; *ibid.*, Tom Uphill to Bennett, 25 May 1952. Mitchell also notes this correspondence and Uphill’s strategy of courting second preferences. See Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 155.

<sup>66</sup> Whether or not Bennett endorsed Uphill, he certainly did him no wrong. Uphill wrote Bennett following the election to say that he “sure hope[d] [Social Credit] beat out the C.C.F. in numbers,” and Bennett presented one of Uphill’s letters to the Lieutenant Governor to show he had Uphill’s support in forming a government.

for Socred candidates it might have conveyed the message that it was not as ideologically close to the CCF, Liberals, or Conservatives as supporters of those parties liked to believe.<sup>67</sup>

The majority representation required by AV was ideal for a party trying to fill a vacuum of power, and fixing Social Credit's position on the ideological spectrum made little sense.

Winch summed up the Socreds' success at the polls:

[T]here [were] people who felt they just couldn't vote socialist. That's all there was to it. But they were darned if they were going to vote Liberal, and they were darned if they were going to vote Conservative, therefore on their second and third choices there was only one thing to do and that was to vote Social Credit, and that's what they did.<sup>68</sup>

Social Credit was a safe first or second choice for many voters who were dissatisfied with the government but wary of the CCF.

### **The Public and the 1952 Election: Delayed Results and FPTP Bipartisanship**

British Columbians' apparent willingness to rank other parties did not correspond with John MacNicol's assertion in 1948 that the public did not want to endorse additional candidates.<sup>69</sup> However, as shown above, the parties were essentially divided into two camps, allowing for two-party FPTP-style voting when marking a second choice. In this respect the 1952 election functioned like an FPTP contest: people could vote for the local political representative they wanted while dismissing candidates outside their comfort zone. Because ranking ballots fully was not an attractive option, and in light of Anscomb's plumping advocacy, majority representation was both a failure and a fraud. When the final results were tallied in 1952, 23 of the 48 MLAs elected did not receive majority support on the basis of

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SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-70, Tom Uphill to Bennett, 28 June 1952; Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 172.

<sup>67</sup> H.F. Angus also suggests that a lack of instruction on second preferences by the major parties was because they were "unwilling to appear the intimate allies of one other group." H.F. Angus, "The British Columbia Election, June, 1952," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 18.4 (November 1952): 520.

<sup>68</sup> BCA, T0148:0003, Glen Jenkinson, "Harold Winch:," 1973, 15.

<sup>69</sup> HCD, 15 June 1948, 5276.

first count numbers.<sup>70</sup> If one accepted the compulsion advocates' view of majority representation, wherein voters would be compelled to vote and to rank all candidates to establish a true majority, these numbers were off even further: only 68.53 per cent of registered voters cast ballots, down 5 per cent from 1949.

On election day the Liberals and Conservatives did not fare well. The CCF and Social Credit took 30.78 and 27.2 per cent of the popular vote on the first count, respectively; the Liberals received 23.46 per cent of the vote, and the Conservatives 16.84. All told, the CCF led in 21 ridings, Social Credit in 14, the Liberals in 9, the Conservatives in 3, and Tom Uphill led in Fernie. Because voters were "habituated" to FPTP, it may be reasonable to assume that their first preferences were indeed voters' number one choices.<sup>71</sup> It is possible that under AV voters were more willing to give their first choice to a party that they did not believe was viable under FPTP, and that the results would have been markedly different without the alternative vote, perhaps negatively affecting Social Credit.<sup>72</sup> Many scholars have suggested that under FPTP the CCF would have won the election, but there is no way to be certain that the first count results would have been the same or skewed in the CCF's favour; a hypothetical decline in Social Credit support is only speculation.<sup>73</sup>

Hypothetical scenarios aside, the Liberals and Conservatives had cost themselves numerous

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<sup>70</sup> In 1953, 22 MLAs were elected with minority support. Phillips, "Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974," 282.

<sup>71</sup> Sanford, "The Politics of Protest," 162. Voters were also liable to vote for their true preferences because of the difficulties of strategic voting under AV. In order to vote strategically, one would need accurate information on how other voters were planning to rank candidates in a riding. See Gary W. Cox, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 95. For a similar assessment of STV, see Shaun Bowler and Bernard Grofman, eds., *Elections in Australia, Ireland, and Malta under the Single Transferable Vote: Reflections on an Embedded Institution* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 268.

<sup>72</sup> Angus, "The British Columbia Election, June, 1952," 522.

<sup>73</sup> Of the 1952 election results, Winch observed: "had we had the X vote then we were the government because we had the majority of members elected." BCA, T0148:0003, Jenkinson, "Harold Winch Interview," 13. Phillips suggests that the AV legislation itself sparked resentment in the voting public, and if one accepts that logic then conceivably more ballots might have been cast for Liberal and Conservative candidates under FPTP. Phillips, "Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974," 276.

“issue-oriented voters” who were frustrated with hospital insurance.<sup>74</sup> The Liberals claimed to offer stability, but their history of bickering with the Conservatives did not help their cause.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, they made no real attempt to enact progressive legislation and court leftist votes, increasing the public’s flight to the CCF and Social Credit.<sup>76</sup>

Alternate preferences indicated that voters were indeed divided into two camps: when Liberal and Conservative candidates were eliminated, the largest number of votes went to the other party in 40 out of 41 possible cases; the Socreds and CCF similarly exchanged blocs of votes 31 times out of 32.<sup>77</sup> In a detailed analysis of vote transfers, David Elkins demonstrates that Social Credit and CCF voters saw the parties as running CCF – Social Credit – Liberal – Conservative on an ideological spectrum, with the caveat that without the actual ballots there is no way to be certain of this pattern.<sup>78</sup> However, a study of voting returns published in the *Daily Colonist* supports his findings. The *Colonist* reported that the average CCF voter placed the Socreds second, the Liberals third, and the Conservatives fourth.<sup>79</sup> Preferences were liable to go to ideologically similar parties, be they protest or ex-Coalition candidates.<sup>80</sup> While Liberal and Conservative voters ranked their free enterprise

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<sup>74</sup> Sanford, “The Politics of Protest,” 173.

<sup>75</sup> Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 151.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>77</sup> Elkins, “Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows,” 12. Angus suggests that some CCF voters may have taken the name Social Credit to mean that it was a socialist party, thus explaining the large transfer of second preferences to Social Credit. CCF MLA Robert Strachan agreed. “The word ‘social’ in there was a fooler, it was a joker, it led them to think it was a progressive, reformist party.... [T]hat ... probably affected the outcome of the election and gave them the extra seat.” H. F. Angus, “The British Columbia Election, June, 1952,” *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 18.4 (November 1952): 588; BCA, T528:0003-2, David Mitchell, “Robert Strachan Interview,” 26 April 1978, 15. Any name-based confusion likely operated on a small scale. A united anti-Coalition vote is a perfectly satisfactory explanation for this transfer of preferences.

<sup>78</sup> David Elkins also notes that in both the 1952 and 1953 elections, Liberal and Conservative voters perceived Social Credit as a right-wing party. Elkins, “Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows,” 5, 7.

<sup>79</sup> It confirmed the other patterns as well, reporting that Liberal ballots placed “P.C. 2, S.C. 3 and C.C.F. 4”; Conservatives went “Liberal 2, S.C. 3, C.C.F. 4”; and Socreds put “C.C.F. 2, Liberal 3, P.C. 4.” “Voters’ Preference Pattern Clarifies,” *Daily Colonist*, 5 July 1952, 1.

<sup>80</sup> Jansen, “The Single Transferable Vote in Alberta and Manitoba,” 191. Some voters saw a link between the Conservatives and the CCF and ranked the other party second. Thomas Michael Sanford says this phenomenon is attributable to the Conservatives “in B.C. and elsewhere ... cultivat[ing] an image of

partners first and second on the whole, many endorsed Social Credit, owing to the policy disputes and mutual distaste that contributed to the Coalition's collapse.<sup>81</sup> Because the Conservatives "ran weakly, [and] plumped amply," they contributed little to their Liberal partners; plumping and Socred support diminished the benefits of Liberal transfers to the Conservatives as well.<sup>82</sup> In total, approximately 33.5 per cent of voters plumped their ballots.<sup>83</sup> This means that one in three voters had no interest in ranking another party, and they certainly did not buy into the idea of majority representation that required they rank multiple candidates. This suggests that a substantial number of British Columbians preferred FPTP and disliked the other parties to the point that they opted out of preferential balloting, even when it could not hurt their first choice, at least at the riding level. CCF voters plumped more than others, but many ignored Winch's directions and endorsed Social Credit.<sup>84</sup> Had all CCF voters plumped, their ballots could not have been used to help elect a Social Credit government. The Socreds successfully occupied the non-socialist, non-Coalition void and benefitted from all sides.<sup>85</sup>

Without the original ballots it is impossible to tell what percentage of voters plumped when looking past the first party that was dropped. While the vote totals for each count are available, once multiple candidates have been dropped it becomes unclear whether voters plumped or ranked previously eliminated parties, thereby exhausting their ballots. The incidence of plumping in BC was placed at 33.5 per cent using second count numbers only

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progressivism since the thirties, and propaganda supporting that image was apparent in the 1952 B.C. campaign." Sanford, "The Politics of Protest," 177.

<sup>81</sup> Jansen, "The Single Transferable Vote in Alberta and Manitoba," 11.

<sup>82</sup> Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 147-8.

<sup>83</sup> Jansen, "The Political Consequences of the Alternative Vote," 664.

<sup>84</sup> Phillips, "Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974," 278-9; Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 147.

<sup>85</sup> When queried about the role of AV in the Socreds' 1952 election victory, Bennett replied, "That wasn't a fluke; I'd arranged that." BCA, T1675:0017-2, Mitchell, "Bennett Interview," 8 October 1976, 6. This was Bennett at his immodest best. AV certainly helped Social Credit, but between his early advocacy of AV and his defection from the Conservatives in 1951, Bennett had made multiple bids for the party leadership. Therefore, there is no reason to suggest that his advocacy of electoral reform in the late 1940s was looking toward his defection from the Conservatives.



(i.e., by examining what percentage of the first eliminated candidates' ballots were transferred).<sup>86</sup> It is still possible to draw some tentative conclusions based on the number of ballots exhausted on the second relevant transfer — that is, instances where the second of the four main parties was dropped in a constituency.<sup>87</sup> On average, 34.8 per cent of ballots were not transferred on these counts.<sup>88</sup> This number is similar to the initial plumping total. It includes voters who had plumped for the party being eliminated; those who had ranked the previously eliminated party second and gone no further; and voters for whom the eliminated party was their second and final choice. There is a noticeable difference, however, when looking at ridings where the first and second major parties eliminated were ideological partners, in the protest or old-line sense. In cases where both the Liberal and Conservative candidates were dropped, or the Social Credit and CCF candidates, 39.24 per cent of ballots were exhausted for the second relevant transfer.<sup>89</sup> This suggests the presence of a group of voters who only ranked the two parties that they saw as linked. With the other party eliminated, the number of exhausted ballots rose. Some of these voters' ballots were already on their second preference, and they had not made a third choice; others, whose first choice was just now being eliminated, had ranked their already eliminated ideological partner second and gone no further. It is impossible to know just how large this group of 1, 2 voters was. Candidates who led on the first count did not have their ballots transferred at all, for

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<sup>86</sup> Jansen, "The Political Consequences of the Alternative Vote," 663-4.

<sup>87</sup> The term "relevant transfer" is borrowed from Elkins, who observes that minor parties and independent candidates typically polled only "a tiny proportion of the vote" in 1952. Elkins, "Politics Make Strange Bedfellows," 8.

<sup>88</sup> Data on transfers and exhausted ballots has been compiled using data from Elections BC. *Elections BC*, "Electoral History of British Columbia 1871 - 1986" <[http://www.elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/1871-1986\\_ElectoralHistoryofBC.pdf](http://www.elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/1871-1986_ElectoralHistoryofBC.pdf)>.

<sup>89</sup> The numbers were similar for all scenarios. There were seven cases of Liberal candidates being eliminated after the Conservatives, resulting in a ballot exhaustion rate of 39.09 per cent. In the two ridings where the Conservatives were eliminated after the Liberals, the exhaustion rate was 40 per cent. When Social Credit was eliminated after the CCF in two ridings, 39 per cent of the ballots were exhausted. The second relevant transfer exhaustion rates for unpaired eliminations were as follows, in the format first eliminated-second eliminated: 13 C-SC (34.27); 9 C-CCF (34.3); 4 SC-C (36.05); 2 CCF-L (26.29); 1 SC-L (21.11); 1 L-SC (23.01). For these unpaired eliminations, an average of 33.17 per cent of ballots were exhausted.

instance, and there are only eleven cases of this paired double elimination scenario.

Regardless, both the plumping and 1, 2 ballot exhaustion numbers show that many voters had no interest in fully ranking their ballots.

While a majority of voters did rank multiple candidates, that does not mean they were fond of the system. The plumping numbers, for example, do not take into account the 45,649 spoiled ballots, up from 9,891 in 1949.<sup>90</sup> Around 7.3 per cent of ballots were rejected in multi-member AV districts, compared to 3.5 per cent in single-member ridings.<sup>91</sup> Ranking candidates across ballots, by marking a 1 on ballot 'A,' a 2 on ballot 'B,' and going back to ballot 'A' to mark a 3, for instance, would invalidate all but ballot 'A,' which would be exhausted after the first count. Each ballot was independent, and when the numbering sequence was broken, preferences were no longer counted. Additionally, at least one voter complained that "two of [his] first choices happened to be on the same ballot paper," the very situation Winch had warned against.<sup>92</sup> Voters reported chaos at the polls. Election officials seemed unprepared to handle the counting procedure, and one Saanich man described the voting conditions as "disgusting" and disorganized.<sup>93</sup> Confusion, it seems, had gone some way to impeding democracy. Those who were baffled by AV to the point that their ballots were rejected were likely not enamoured with the system, despite their attempts to rank multiple candidates.

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<sup>90</sup> Note that this is the total number of rejected ballots, taking into account multiple ballots per voter in the Victoria and Vancouver area ridings. It does not represent the number of voters who cast an invalid ballot or ballots, though it is nonetheless indicative of a substantial increase in spoiled ballots. It is also interesting to note that many ballots for the liquor and daylight saving time plebiscites were spoiled when voters wrote a 1 or a "yes" beside their choice. This hypercorrect alternative voting invalidated the ballots, which had to be marked with an X only. "Up to 10 Per Cent Of Ballots Spoiled," *Daily Colonist*, 13 June 1952, 2.

<sup>91</sup> Jansen, "The Political Consequences of the Alternative Vote," 659. Voting in multi-member ridings was clearly an issue; however, the *Daily Colonist* attributed the high number of rejected ballots to the government's decision to allow "either 'X' or the numeral '1'" to represent a first preference. Mixing the systems in voters' minds "was folly of the worst order, if not downright stupidity," and may have contributed to confusion, the *Colonist* reported. "Disgraceful Incompetence," *Daily Colonist*, 14 June 1952, 4.

<sup>92</sup> S. Martin, "The Triple Ballots," *Daily Colonist*, 13 June 1952, 4.

<sup>93</sup> W.A. Dumsday, "Voting Confusion," *Daily Colonist*, 15 June 1952, 4; Phillips, "Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974," 278; "Voting System Criticized By Maritimer," *Daily Colonist*, 13 June 1952, 2.

Compounding any ill will towards the system was the built in delay in the results: the second count had to wait until 3 July to accommodate the absentee ballots.<sup>94</sup> No one knew what BC's government would look like when the final count was completed. One man told Bennett that the "three-week dangling o'er griddle of ballot uncertainty, with head in noose, [would] be purgatory skidway to political extinction for all Anscorbites and other gentry of Coalition ilk."<sup>95</sup> Florence Gresty, the losing Social Credit candidate from Mackenzie, said she was "thrilled ... at the success of the 'alternative ballot.'" She was confident that the Socreds would obtain a majority on the second count and that Bennett had "saved [them] from socialism."<sup>96</sup> Despite the optimism of Bennett and the Socreds, whether the CCF or Social Credit would come out on top was unclear.<sup>97</sup> Jessie Mendels, provincial secretary of the CCF, noted on 13 June that while the CCF led in 21 ridings, "[t]he outcome of the election [was] still very much in doubt."<sup>98</sup> The delay contributed to the public's frustration, and returning officers were no less frazzled on subsequent counts than they were on the first: the second count for the Cowichan-Newcastle riding took a full twelve hours.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Though the absentee ballot had never really been in danger, it had been a key sticking point for the CCF, given its support base. Prior to the election, however, concerned voters were informed of where and how they could vote. The *Fisherman* advised its readers that even if they would "not be ashore on election day," they did not have to lose their vote. They could cast a ballot from 5 to 7 June at advance polls. Additionally, those who would not be in their home riding on election day could vote absentee. "How to Vote June 12 If Away From Home," *Fisherman*, 20 May 1952, 2. In total, 26,538 absentee and 4,698 advance ballots were cast, accounting for 3.84 per cent of all votes. The CCF received the most first preference absentee votes in 17 ridings, Social Credit and the Liberals in 15, and the Conservatives in 1. A total of 4,262 absentee ballots were rejected, which amounted to 9.34 per cent of the 45,649 ballots rejected province-wide. In 1949, British Columbians cast 24,985 and 3,190 absentee and advance ballots, respectively, amounting to 3.95 per cent of the total. Totals and percentages have been taken or compiled from British Columbia, *Statement of Votes, General Election, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1952* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1953); and British Columbia, *Statement of Votes, General Election, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1949* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1949).

<sup>95</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-18-0-71, T.A. Love to Bennett, 14 June 1952.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, F-55-18-0-70, Florence Gresty to Bennett, 16 June 1952.

<sup>97</sup> Legislative reporter Jim Nesbitt wrote Bennett after all the results were in to offer his congratulations, but he added that he "thought [Bennett's] pre-election supreme confidence was quite unwarranted." *Ibid.*, F-55-18-0-72, Jim Nesbitt to Bennett, 22 July 1952.

<sup>98</sup> Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 62, file 3, Jessie Mendels, Provincial Secretary, to Executive and Council Members and District Executive Secretaries [sic], 13 June 1952.

<sup>99</sup> BCA, Robert Strachan Papers, MS-1291, box 2, file 1, *Diary, 1952*, 3 July 1952.

By 9 July, both the CCF and Social Credit had 16 seats locked up; Bennett won his party's leadership on 15 July.<sup>100</sup> On the final count the Socreds had 19 seats, the CCF 18, the Liberals 6, and the Conservatives 4, while Tom Uphill was re-elected in Fernie. Anscomb and Johnson were both defeated, the victims of vote transfers. A frenetic discussion ensued about whether the Lieutenant Governor should send for Bennett or Winch. Winch argued that the CCF was due, and that he had the support of Uphill (he did not), but he was not willing to coalesce with the Liberals. After much wrangling, and with Johnson having advised the Lieutenant Governor that he favoured the Socreds, Bennett swore in his cabinet on the first of August.<sup>101</sup> In a sense, AV had accomplished its stated goal: the transfer of ballots had kept the CCF from office. The CCF's 30 per cent of the first count vote might have allowed Winch "to inaugurate socialism against the declared will of the people" under FPTP, but not so under AV.<sup>102</sup> If one applies a straight free enterprise-socialist divide to the results, then by adding the Liberal and Conservative vote totals to the Socreds' it is clear that the public favoured free enterprise, even though Social Credit received fewer votes than the CCF and formed a minority government. Of the two protest parties, Social Credit drew its support from the broadest spectrum.

The popular perception of elections and representative government in BC did not change in 1952. The *Ottawa Journal*, commenting on the alternative vote, said the following:

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<sup>100</sup> Sherman, *Bennett*, 110; Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 164. Complete details of the vote transfers riding by riding can be found elsewhere. Apart from the detailed information provided by Elections BC, and Elkins's unfolding of the data, Robin provides an excellent account of the vote transfers in 1952. See Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 146-50; *Elections BC*, "Electoral History of British Columbia 1871 - 1986," 221-40; Elkins, "Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows," 3-26.

<sup>101</sup> Mitchell provides a good narrative of these events. See Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 166-74. See also Angus, "The British Columbia Election, June, 1952," 521-4. There had also been talk that the premier might "asser[t] his right to dissolve the assembly before it met," which prompted "a long and vigorous public discussion of the Lieutenant-Governor's position and responsibilities." Nothing came of this, however, and there was no request for dissolution. John T. Saywell, *The Office of the Lieutenant-Governor: A Study in Canadian Government and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 151.

<sup>102</sup> "B.C. Rejects Socialism," *Victoria Daily Times*, 19 June 1952, 4. This was a common sentiment, but it is an exaggeration. It is impossible to know what sort of legislation a minority CCF government would have been able to pass.

Parliamentary government, if it is to function properly, must have a two-party system with each party having its own policies and principles and an organization to promote them. Any other system or no system at all breeds inevitably the chaos of British Columbia.<sup>103</sup>

Despite the “chaos” of voting and the delayed results, two-party politics were still apparent in 1952. The Coalition parties hoped that the public would keep to the socialist-free enterprise issue, which would ensure their re-election, but the emergence of a protest-establishment divide allowed another bloc of voters to approach the AV election from an additional direction, still as if it were a single issue contest. The composition of government was what mattered to voters at the end of the day. Plumpers who believed that only their chosen party could represent them cast ballots that were no different than those found in an FPTP election.<sup>104</sup> Instead of embracing majority representation, in their first AV election many British Columbians exercised their ballots only as far as their political preconceptions allowed.

Rather than legitimizing representative government in BC, the only apparent change that AV brought with it was an element of uncertainty. AV may have “worked” in the sense that transfers kept the CCF from power, but it was certainly open to criticism on democratic grounds. True majority representation, as advertised in the public information campaign, had not come to pass due to exhausted ballots and extensive plumping. Additionally, the CCF’s pre-election criticism was still valid: AV hurt minority parties. The Liberals amassed over a quarter of the popular vote on the final count, but they received a paltry 6 seats out of 48. With the benefit of hindsight one can see that the Liberals and Conservatives would have doubled their seat count had they instituted province-wide proportional representation, but

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<sup>103</sup> Quoted in “Hare-Brained Election Law Says Ottawa Paper,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 14 June 1952, 1.

<sup>104</sup> No different, perhaps, apart from the superficial change of those ballots marked with only a 1 instead of an X.

with only three parties in 1950 and 1951, PR had not been an attractive option.<sup>105</sup> Following the election, Bennett was queried on whether he would consider PR for multi-member ridings, but nothing came of it.<sup>106</sup> Criticism of AV may have diminished slightly in light of the fact that the vote transfers ultimately hurt the CCF, but the “gross underrepresentation” of the Liberals and Conservatives was still apparent.<sup>107</sup> The voting public was able to treat AV as if it was FPTP, but that does not mean they were satisfied with the system.

### **The 1953 Election and the Road to Abolition**

Bennett’s Social Credit government inherited a surplus from the outgoing Coalition, and his party ordered numerous public works projects while actively supporting small business owners.<sup>108</sup> The hospital insurance program itself had run a surplus in the dying days of the previous government, but the Socreds acted on their promise and replaced the \$3.50 a day co-insurance scheme with a dollar-a-day plan.<sup>109</sup> Bennett hoped to obtain a majority government, and his party had proven itself capable in the eyes of many British Columbians. He therefore allowed Social Credit to be defeated on a piece of education legislation known as the “Rolston Formula” in 1953.<sup>110</sup> The Legislature dissolved on 27 March, with the

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<sup>105</sup> With proportional results, the seat breakdown would have been as follows: CCF 14; Social Credit 13; Liberals 12; Conservatives 8; Independent Labour (Uphill) 1. H. F. Angus, “Note on the British Columbia Election in June 1952,” *Western Political Quarterly* 5.4 (December 1952): 589.

<sup>106</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-27-0-36, Sam Ross to Bennett, CKWX interview questions, 17 July 1952.

<sup>107</sup> Charles Burbridge, “Alternative Vote Drawbacks,” *Vancouver Province*, 15 September 1952, 4. Burbridge also notes that the over-representation of rural BC was key to Social Credit’s victory.

<sup>108</sup> Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 175-6.

<sup>109</sup> Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 184, 163-4.

<sup>110</sup> The Rolston Formula was designed “to restructure the financing of education in favour of rural areas at the expense of urban school districts.” Mitchell writes that it was simply a matter of Bennett “choos[ing] the issue upon which the government would be defeated.” However, in an interview with Mitchell, former Minister of Public Works Philip Gaglardi insisted that the education bill was not introduced “with the idea of being defeated,” but out of “necessity.” He did not recall it being discussed as the issue the government would go down on. Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 196-7; BCA, T1644:0005-1, David Mitchell, “Phil Gaglardi Interview,” 15 August 1978, 6.

election to be held on 9 June.<sup>111</sup> The campaign was fought on similar grounds to 1952, though hospital insurance and ousting the Coalition were no longer the central issues for frustrated voters. Free enterprise or socialism was at stake once more: the Vancouver Board of Trade ran ads in Vancouver and Victoria “with a free enterprise theme, indicating the desirability of voting 1-2-3.”<sup>112</sup> It accused the CCF of “try[ing] to put public fears at rest by talking moderate policy” while also promising “state-ownership of the means of production which would result in an all-powerful state—the stuff dictatorships are made of.”<sup>113</sup> Arthur Laing, the new leader of the Liberal party, said free enterprise in BC was not in danger, because “80 percent of British Columbia [was] of Liberal mind.” By putting forward “the finest people ... of Liberal inclination” his party could get, he believed they could defeat the Socreds, who were no longer unknowns.<sup>114</sup>

“The issue in the coming Election,” said Bennett, “is whether or not B.C. is to have a Government with a working majority. In other words the issue is clear. Social Credit or Chaos.” A majority would offer much needed stability in a time of economic growth, he argued.<sup>115</sup> Bennett obtained his majority: his party received 37.75 per cent of the votes on the first count and 45.54 per cent on the final count, taking 28 out of 48 seats in the Legislature.<sup>116</sup> The CCF elected 14 MLAs, the Liberals 4, the Conservatives 1, and Uphill was

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<sup>111</sup> Winch believed he had the support of the three Conservative MLAs and Tom Uphill, and he thought he had a right to form a government. The Lieutenant Governor and Bennett disagreed, however. Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 198-200.

<sup>112</sup> CVA, Vancouver Board of Trade fonds, 527-A-2, file 2, Add. Mss. No. 300, Vancouver Board of Trade, Minutes, Council Meeting, 7 May 1953.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, Vancouver Board of Trade, “About What Will Be Socialized: Another Timely Question Socialists in B.C. Should Be Asked To Answer.”

<sup>114</sup> BCA, SD177:439, CKWX, Vancouver, Arthur Laing, “1952 B.C. Liberal Convention Speech.”

<sup>115</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-27-0-46, “Premier’s Statement,” 1 April 1953.

<sup>116</sup> Social Credit led in 30 ridings on the first count, and the CCF led in 17. Uphill, of course, led in Fernie. Elkins writes that those “looking for a point of stability” would have been drawn to Social Credit, since the leadership of the other major parties had changed. Arnold Webster had replaced Harold Winch, Arthur Laing took over the Liberals, and Deane Finlayson headed up the Conservatives. Elkins, “Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows,” 10-1. Harold Thayer, provincial secretary of the CCF, thought his party might obtain 23 seats if they got “55 to 60% of the Liberal second choices.” He was not confident this would occur, but he said “most

again re-elected in Fernie. Because the impending Social Credit victory was more immediately apparent than it had been in 1952, there were fewer complaints about the delayed final count.<sup>117</sup> All was not well with AV, however: Bennett lost two of his star ministers to vote transfers. Einar Gunderson, Minister of Finance, lost in Oak Bay on the third count when over 70 per cent of Conservative transfers went to the Liberal candidate. Tilly Rolston, Minister of Education, was also defeated; she had been with Bennett since his defection from the Conservatives. Rolston was leading on the fourth count in Vancouver-Point Grey by 460 votes, but she received only 30 per cent of all CCF transfers on the fifth count and lost to Liberal leader Arthur Laing.<sup>118</sup> Both Rolston and Gunderson led on the first count and might have been elected under FPTP, and Bennett allegedly lamented not having abandoned AV earlier.<sup>119</sup> Reflecting on the events years later, he said he would have abolished AV prior to the election had the Socreds returned a majority in 1952, but there was “[n]o way” the other parties would have agreed to the change otherwise.<sup>120</sup> This seems disingenuous. The CCF certainly would have voted in favour of AV’s abolition, having pushed for a return to FPTP in March 1953 to no avail.<sup>121</sup> Bennett and Social Credit were content to continue with the alternative vote. A resolution at the November 1952 convention of the BC Social Credit League had suggested amendments to the Elections Act to address the “difficulties and anomalies” that led to “delays and confusion” in the election; however, the convention also endorsed the 1950 National Social Credit Manifesto, which

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people seem to think that a majority of Liberal second choices [would] go to the CCF.” Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 19, file 7A, Harold E. Thayer, Provincial Secretary, to Lorne Ingle, 13 June 1953.

<sup>117</sup> Phillips, “Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974,” 282.

<sup>118</sup> *Elections BC*, “Electoral History of British Columbia 1871 - 1986.”

<sup>119</sup> Worley, *The Wonderful World of W.A.C. Bennett*, 125-6.

<sup>120</sup> BCA, 1672:0020-1, Mitchell, “Bennett Interview,” 8 October 1976, 4.

<sup>121</sup> The media believed the Liberals felt obligated to vote in favour of AV’s retention because they had introduced the system. Sessional Clipping Book, “CCF Member Asks Alternative Vote System Abolition,” 6 March 1953.



included a passage in favour of AV.<sup>122</sup> Because transfers were no longer working reliably in Social Credit's favour in the 1953 election, and since the Liberals and Conservatives had been diminished to the point where Social Credit was the only viable alternative to the CCF, a return to FPTP was an attractive option. Bennett had "reoriented Social Credit as an anti-socialist, anti-union party," and CCF voters, their party coming so close to government in 1952, no longer saw Social Credit as a centrist alternative but as an establishment party of the right.<sup>123</sup> Out of twenty opportunities, in only two instances did the bulk of CCF or Socred transfers go to the other party.<sup>124</sup>

It is unsurprising, then, that the speech from the throne contained a reference to "a bill to amend the present elections act," which Bennett said "need[ed] many changes."<sup>125</sup> In his policy speech in September 1953, Bennett promised a redistribution of electoral districts in response to the province's expanding population.<sup>126</sup> He also said that the two-party system worked best, which he believed consisted of Social Credit and the CCF.<sup>127</sup> Bennett said he would abolish AV, and he acknowledged that the CCF also wanted to return to FPTP; at the same time, he could not help but point out that the Liberals and Conservatives would not have won any seats were it not for vote transfers.<sup>128</sup> CCF MLA Randolph Harding said the elimination of AV would mean the end of the Liberals, which he called "one of the main objectives of the bill."<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-50-0-1, British Columbia Social Credit League Convention, 28-9 November 1952; *ibid.*, F-55-13-0-1, Social Credit Association of Canada, "The Manifesto of the Social Credit Association of Canada: Canada's Charter of Freedom," 1950, 18.

<sup>123</sup> Hak, "Populism and the 1952 Social Credit Breakthrough," 295; Elkins, "Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows," 25-6; Sanford, "The Politics of Protest," 223.

<sup>124</sup> Elkins, "Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows," 14.

<sup>125</sup> In particular, Bennett said lowering the voting age was a priority. SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-27-0-46, W.A.C. Bennett, Policy Speech – Session Sept 1953, 18 September 1953, 14.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>127</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, "Jim Nesbitt on Politics," 20 September 1953.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, "Voting Rights Set For 19-Year Olds: Alternative Ballot on Way Out, Redistribution To Be Started," 19 September 1953.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, "Bennett Backs Voting System, Says Change 'Will of People,'" 15 October 1953.

The promise to abolish AV met with objections on familiar democratic grounds. One editorial said the CCF was “anxious to . . . inaugurate socialistic policies which a large majority of the people reject,” and that it could “win a legislative majority on a minority of the popular vote.” It went on to say that FPTP worked “[w]hen only two strong parties [were] contending for office,” but not with three or four parties running. To gauge the true opinion of the electorate and elect consensus candidates required AV.<sup>130</sup> Another article claimed Bennett’s decision “demonstrate[d] a disregard for the will of the majority in favor of political party expediency,” saying he intended to present the Socreds “as the only alternative to the CCF” in future contests and elect his defeated ministers.<sup>131</sup> AV was defended because it had successfully kept the CCF from forming a government in 1952.<sup>132</sup> One Liberal called the proposed revisions to the Elections Act “the Gunderson Benefit bill,” because presumably he would be elected in an upcoming FPTP by-election.<sup>133</sup> The potential ramifications for the parties’ future under both FPTP and AV were clear. Indeed, one paper observed that the BC Liberals were clinging to AV “on the principle of true democratic representation, while federally they [would] have nothing to do with it” because the party had benefited from the distortions of FPTP at the national level.<sup>134</sup> Just as the CCF had been accused of selfishness when it attacked the adoption of AV, Social Credit and the CCF were now criticized for eliminating the system.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., “The Alternative Vote,” 22 September 1953.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., “Party First,” 10 October 1953.

<sup>132</sup> “Alternative Vote Reconsidered,” *Vancouver Sun*, 28 September 1953, 4.

<sup>133</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, “Premier Indicates Early By-Election To Seat Gunderson,” 15 October 1953.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., “No Wonder Voters Get Cynical,” 16 October 1953.

<sup>135</sup> The major newspapers were traditionally Liberal and Conservative, and they did not hesitate to critique Social Credit policy. In the 1952 election, the *Vancouver Sun* endorsed the Liberals, whom the *Sun* believed were “the only [party] that could form a majority government.” “Election Logic,” *Vancouver Sun*, 11 June 1952, 4. Ian Parker called the *Victoria Colonist*, circa 1922, “the self-appointed conscience of the Conservative party,” and little had changed by the 1950s. “[T]he Liberals have had their chance and they have failed,” read the *Colonist’s* pre-election editorial. “It is time that the Conservatives were given the opportunity.” Ian Parker, “The Provincial Party,” *BC Studies* 8 (Winter 1970): 18; Sherman, *Bennett*, 100; “B.C. Needs Steady Hands,” *Daily*

Apart from the old-line parties, BC business associations were also up in arms. They had been strong supporters of using AV to unite the free enterprise vote and stop the CCF. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution at its convention proposing the extension of AV to all provinces, having obtained the “grass-roots opinion” of its membership. The BC delegates were “amazed,” therefore, to learn that Bennett planned to return to FPTP.<sup>136</sup> The Victoria Chamber of Commerce asked the government to reconsider, saying “socialists, in particular, would welcome the change.” The Chamber suggested that a legislative committee should study the electoral system, because “there [was] a great necessity of ensuring that minority parties do not gain control of the legislative assembly.”<sup>137</sup> The Vancouver Board of Trade also urged the government “to defer action until a full study of election procedures had been made by the members of the Legislature,” specifically regarding absentee ballots.<sup>138</sup> The Board recognized that the delayed voting results, which stemmed directly from the need to count absentee ballots, contributed to widespread frustration with the system. Addressing this issue was perhaps one means to sway public opinion, and referencing the dangers of minority representation and the democratic benefits of AV positioned the system on the right side of the values debate.

AV’s implications for political representation were misunderstood even after the election. The *Province* said the “[p]rime purpose of the alternative ballot, of course, is to give representation to minorities.”<sup>139</sup> This was based on the fact that the Conservatives and Liberals received seats despite having led in no ridings on the first count. To call minority

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*Colonist*, 11 June 1952, 4. The *Province*, on the other hand, said it had long advocated the abolition of AV. “B.C. To Abolish Alternative Vote,” *Vancouver Province*, 16 September 1953, 1.

<sup>136</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, “Chamber to Oppose Old Ballot System,” 23 September 1953.

<sup>137</sup> City of Victoria Archives, Victoria Chamber of Commerce fonds, 32 A 2 – 2, 1953 – 58, Minutes, Board of Directors Meeting, 2 October 1953.

<sup>138</sup> CVA, Vancouver Board of Trade fonds, 527-A-2, file 3, Add. Mss. No. 300, Minutes of a meeting of the Council, 24 September 1953, 85.

<sup>139</sup> “Should We Abolish the Transferable Vote?,” *Vancouver Province*, 16 September 1953, 6.

representation the “prime purpose” of AV is to miss the point of the system entirely. The public education campaign had been highly critical of the idea that a minority of voters could elect a candidate under FPTP, and AV advocates touted its capacity to provide majority representation. The article criticized AV because unintentionally spoiled ballots meant that some people wound up with “no representation at all.” “Elections,” said the *Province*, “are confusing enough.”<sup>140</sup> One letter writer lambasted the *Province* for confusing AV with proportional representation. The goal of AV, he said, was to “reduce the representation and, if possible, to eliminate minorities. . . . Everyone knows that the Coalition expected Liberals to vote ‘2’ for Conservatives and vice versa in order to eliminate the CCF.”<sup>141</sup> Because the Coalition and the Chief Electoral Officer had sold AV to the public as a more democratic system than FPTP, to justify its abolition the focus of the representational arguments had to change.

In order to reframe FPTP as the more democratic system, Bennett claimed “the people want[ed] it” when defending his decision to eliminate AV. He said he personally favoured the alternative vote, but surveys purportedly indicated that 75 per cent of the public opposed the system. Percy Wright, Socred MLA for Victoria, said AV would work if it was “properly and fully understood and used,” but there was “evidence on all sides that the alternative vote was not acceptable to the people of B.C.”<sup>142</sup> Liberal leader Arthur Laing asked if the Socreds had studied how many voters had plumped their ballots, apparently suggesting that those who ranked more than one candidate favoured AV.<sup>143</sup> Laing said, seemingly without irony, that he would “hate to think the government [was] using the voting system as a convenience to suit political whims and expediency.” CCF leader Arnold

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Charles Burbridge, “Not Like P.R.,” *Vancouver Province*, 23 September 1953, 6.

<sup>142</sup> “B.C. To Abolish Alternative Vote,” *Vancouver Province*, 16 September 1953, 1.

<sup>143</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, “Bennett Backs Voting System, Says Change ‘Will of People,’” 15 October 1953.

Webster supported Bennett. “B.C. didn’t take to alternative voting because it questioned the motive of those who introduced it,” he said. “There was so much plumping and spoiled ballots that the system fell into disrepute.” Indeed, the premier also cited a radio station poll that indicated 90 per cent of the public opposed AV.<sup>144</sup>

There is little reason to suspect that Bennett drew these numbers out of thin air, though it is unclear what polls he was referencing. He certainly received letters from voters who wanted to return to FPTP, because AV was “confusing to a lot of people,” and FPTP had “always been O.K.” and could drive the Liberals and Conservatives from the Legislature.<sup>145</sup> At least one detailed public opinion poll from before the 1953 election does exist, however, and it is useful in determining the public’s opinion of AV. Bennett was approached by a marketing research firm in April 1953 about conducting a “political attitude stud[y]” to determine where Social Credit should concentrate its efforts.<sup>146</sup> They chose the ridings of Vancouver-Burrard, Cowichan-Newcastle, and Yale, “as being representative of three different types of provincial areas.”<sup>147</sup> Apart from asking respondents’ voting preferences and opinions on the parties, the survey included the following question: “Do you favor the Alternate Voting System which will be used in the provincial election?” An average of 66.5 per cent of respondents said “No,” they did not favour AV, while only 26.1 per cent said it had their support.<sup>148</sup> Additionally, 31.1 per cent of respondents indicated that

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., “Election Day School Holiday, Bands Urged to Bring Vote Out,” 15 October 1953.

<sup>145</sup> BCA, Premier’s Records 1953 – 1972, GR-1414, box 6, file 2, C.A. Swanson to Bennett, 16 September 1953.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., file 7, W.B. Watts, Watts Marketing Research, to Bennett, 16 April 1953.

<sup>147</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-28-0-1, Watts Marketing Research, “A Political Attitude Study of Sampled Electoral Districts in British Columbia: Parts 1, 2 and 3 of Initial Study,” May 1953. The pages of the study are not numbered. A total of 329, 310, and 98 registered voters were interviewed from Vancouver-Burrard, Cowichan-Newcastle, and Yale, respectively. The Yale numbers are low due to “circumstances which developed during the conducting of the survey, the adverse publicity which ... made it increasingly difficult to complete the interviewing.”

<sup>148</sup> Results were obtained by averaging the percentage of respondents for and against from each riding. They do not take into account the disparity in the number of respondents in Yale and the other ridings.

they were going to plump, and 51.3 per cent said they would not make a third choice.<sup>149</sup>

Many people were undecided as to how they would vote beyond their first choice, with 17.7 and 21.4 per cent being unsure about their second and third preferences, respectively.

These survey results disprove Laing's hypothesis that those who ranked multiple candidates favoured AV.<sup>150</sup> While around 50 per cent of respondents did not answer the question about their second preferences, were undecided, or said they would plump, that still left about half who knew where their second preference was going. However, only 26 per cent of all those surveyed favoured AV. Ranking multiple candidates, therefore, cannot be taken as an implicit endorsement of the alternative vote. Though many were willing to work within the system they were given, two-thirds preferred straight FPTP. In 1952, 33.5 per cent of voters plumped, and 27.9 per cent did so in 1953.<sup>151</sup> When coupled with the fact that over 6 per cent of all ballots cast in the 1953 election were rejected, it is clear that even though many British Columbians chose to rank more than one candidate, they did not necessarily understand the system, let alone approve of it.<sup>152</sup> Embracing the electorate's appetite for FPTP and two-party politics could benefit Social Credit, and given that an overwhelming majority of the public supported the move, framing the abolition of AV as a democratic measure was simple. W.N. Chant, a Socred MLA from Victoria, reluctantly supported the bill, and only because it had the public's support; he did not think much of

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<sup>149</sup> The 51.3 per cent number includes all respondents, not just those who indicated they would make a second choice. Voters in Vancouver-Burrard had the lowest commitment to plumping, at 23.4 per cent. Voters in Cowichan-Newcastle and Yale said they would plump at a rate of 30.9 and 39 per cent, respectively.

<sup>150</sup> It is unlikely that the respondents' opinions on AV would change substantially prior to the election. It is interesting to examine how the vote transfers played out in the election compared to how voters said they would rank candidates at the time of the survey. In Vancouver-Burrard, the bulk of Conservative votes went to the Liberal candidate, not the Socred as predicted. In Cowichan-Newcastle, Liberal votes did go to Social Credit, and Conservative votes to the Liberal, as predicted. In Yale, both CCF and Conservative voters chose the Liberals, not Social Credit as the survey indicated.

<sup>151</sup> Jansen, "The Political Consequences of the Alternative Vote," 664.

<sup>152</sup> The rate of spoiled ballots in multi-member districts was higher than that of single-member districts in both 1952 and 1953. In 1953, 6.6 per cent of ballots in multi-member districts were rejected, compared to 4.5 per cent in single-member districts. *Ibid.*, 659.

FPTP. “The X-ballot system has the effect of balkanizing political parties,” he said. “The alternative ballot, though premature, is the only democratic way.”<sup>153</sup> His description of FPTP was accurate, and his praise of AV shows that some people still believed it could function on its democratic merits. Unfortunately for Chant’s democratic altruism, balkanized two-party politics was exactly Bennett’s objective.<sup>154</sup> The Liberal MLAs voted to keep AV — without it, they would not have elected a single representative<sup>155</sup> — but the Socreds and CCF carried the day.

Einar Gunderson, Bennett’s Minister of Finance, lost by 90 votes in a by-election conducted under plurality rules. The Liberal candidate won with 41.33 per cent of the vote to Gunderson’s 40.89, and less than 1 per cent of ballots were spoiled.<sup>156</sup> The Victoria City constituency was traditionally a non-CCF riding, making the Liberal candidate a viable option for voters. Bennett was disappointed, but this was far from an indicator that he should have maintained AV, and indeed Gunderson could have just as easily lost on transfers. Social Credit had captured a substantial 45.54 per cent of the popular vote on the

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<sup>153</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, “Bennett Backs Voting System, Says Change ‘Will of People,’” 15 October 1953.

<sup>154</sup> Chant led the first count in 1953 by a wide margin, and he certainly did not need AV to win the election. Nor did he particularly benefit from ballot transfers: Chant received only 1,199 of 6,946 possible votes from eliminated candidates.

<sup>155</sup> This of course assumes that the first preference AV votes would have stayed the same in an FPTP contest. When politicians are asked to evaluate voting systems, “personal electoral success” is the key factor in determining whether or not they favour the present system. The Socreds, however, were looking toward their future success. Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan, and Jeffrey A. Karp, “Why Politicians Like Electoral Institutions: Self-Interest, Values, or Ideology?,” *Journal of Politics* 68.2 (May 2006): 441. Dr. Larry Giovando, the Conservative MLA for Nanaimo, said “[h]e believed in alternative voting, ... because it elected him.” Sessional Clipping Book, “Election Day School Holiday, Bands Urged to Bring Vote Out,” 15 October 1953.

<sup>156</sup> Gunderson was a well-respected man. Former Liberal MLA John Groves Gould, who had lost in the June election, argued that the Liberals should not run anyone against Gunderson, because he was “undoubtedly the most valuable man from the point of view of possible good government that [could] be had in the Buildings,” and the majority Socreds were not in any danger. Following the Liberal victory, Gould retracted his remarks and called the win “the most significant event in Provincial Liberalism since the debacle of 1952, but ... significant in the other direction.” Gunderson had been important to Bennett and Social Credit. Along with Attorney General Robert Bonner, he was appointed to the cabinet in 1952 despite not having run in the election. Both men were elected in by-elections with a first count majority. He had “served as acting premier at official functions,” but he was not a good campaigner or a wholly willing politician. UV-ASC, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 2, file 8, John Groves Gould to Johnson, 5 November 1953; *ibid.*, 26 November 1953; Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 203-4.

final count in the June election. While Bennett was strongly committed to rural BC, of the nine new Socred seats in 1953, seven were in Vancouver and Victoria.<sup>157</sup> The alternative vote and majority representation had been abandoned in light of Social Credit and the public's preference for FPTP, and the Socreds were poised to carry their strong numbers forward and enjoy an extended period of dominance against their CCF opponents. Active discussion of voting system reform lay dormant for several years, but the ongoing democratic values debates simply changed focus: the redistribution of electoral districts rose to a position of prominence. Local representation and representation by population engendered the same types of values debates found in discussions of the voting system, but they fit more comfortably within the bounds of FPTP.

### **Bennett and Representative Government: Local Representation and Rural BC**

Bennett had a very definite view of the purpose of elections. While of the opinion that “[i]n a democracy, our greatest privilege, right and duty is to exercise our franchise,” he believed the role of the electorate went no further.<sup>158</sup> “A government is elected to govern,” he said, “and must not, after the election, be governed by the electorate. ... [A]fter the election if the electorate govern, you get anarchy.”<sup>159</sup> This is in direct contrast with a statement made by the Social Credit constituency association for Peace River, which argued against the abolition of AV. “In government affairs, the bosses should be the people,” it said, and returning to the single choice of FPTP would impinge upon their democratic

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<sup>157</sup> Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 184; Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 204-5.

<sup>158</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-27-0-46, “Premier’s Statement,” 1 April 1953.

<sup>159</sup> BCA, T1675:0041-1, Mitchell, “Bennett Interview,” 28 March 1978, 16. This appears to have been a stock line for Bennett, and similar phrasing can be found elsewhere. See Sherman, *Bennett*, ix; and Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 182.



rights.<sup>160</sup> The majority representation of AV no longer concerned Bennett, because the life of his party was not at stake as it was in 1947 when he first championed AV in the Legislature. He believed the franchise was intended to produce a representative government that could then enact legislation on the strength of that mandate. Given that Bennett had made few election commitments and was surrounded by novice MLAs, he would wield a good deal of personal power.<sup>161</sup>

Bennett's approach to elections and government may seem odd, given that he cited public opinion when legislating a return to FPTP. The divergence between his words and his self-interested politics is representative of how most politicians approached voting systems. In the federal debates on AV and PR, politicians were certainly aware of the implications for their own party when they praised or criticized a system. Local or regional representation mattered to Bennett in the sense that he believed all regions should have a say in the composition of government, but he did not want the government's direction to be bound by continuous referenda or elections on unpopular issues. Indeed, with a majority government it could not be. Liberal House Leader E. T. Kenney, while suggesting his party would back a CCF government if the Socreds were defeated in the Legislature in early 1953, said elections should not be held "for the glorification of political parties, but to give the people a chance to express their opinion."<sup>162</sup> This sentiment accorded with Bennett's views, despite the premier's insistence upon the "[f]reedom of the executive to guarantee public order and a continued capital flow" without being hampered by the will of the people.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-27-0-27, Peace River Social Credit Constituency Association to Constituency Presidents and MLAs, BC Social Credit League, 26 February 1954.

<sup>161</sup> Hak, "Populism and the 1952 Social Credit Breakthrough," 299.

<sup>162</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, "Liberals Favor CCF Gov't If Socreds Seek Dissolution," 7 February 1953.

<sup>163</sup> Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 188.

Though the constituency-by-constituency majority representation of AV was abolished, Bennett ostensibly privileged individual voters and local representation in another respect. Ignoring AV, he took an active role in the redistribution of electoral districts. The Vancouver and Victoria newspapers had lamented the under-representation of the cities and the comparative over-representation of “the mountains, the lakes and the forests” for years, and they pushed for redistribution prior to both AV elections.<sup>164</sup> Increasing the number of representatives could immediately improve the connection of specific regions of BC with the Legislature. Bennett was not openly partisan when advocating the creation of new ridings, but the benefits for Social Credit were usually clear. He said redistribution was important to ensure “that people are properly represented,” but his rep-by-region approach would later be derided as a “one mountain, one vote” policy.<sup>165</sup>

Future Socred governments debated and enacted various redistribution schemes, drawing enthusiastic support from their beneficiaries and derision from those whose under-representation went uncorrected. Increased local representation sparked public interest in ways that the majority representation of AV never did: whether they cried under- or over-representation, voters could agree on the basic principle at stake. Bennett’s insistence on majority government and rep-by-region was directly linked to the values British Columbian voters ascribed to representative government: local representation spoke to a familiarity with single-issue, two-party politics.<sup>166</sup> Whereas AV appeared to offer little change, allowing

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<sup>164</sup> “Before the Election,” *Vancouver Province*, 23 January 1952, 4. In 1953, one editorial said “[i]t would be nothing short of iniquitous to have an election without redistribution.” Sessional Clipping Book, “Representation Gone ‘Cockeyed,’” 25 February 1953.

<sup>165</sup> BCA, 1672:0041-1, Mitchell, “Bennett Interview,” 28 March 1978, 7, 9; Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 368.

<sup>166</sup> Bennett’s regional approach to government was presented on a larger scale at the 1969 Canadian constitutional conference. He proposed that “in the interest of economic realities,” Canada’s provinces and territories should be abolished and merged into five distinct regions: the Atlantic provinces; Quebec; Ontario; the prairies; and British Columbia. The latter was to include the Yukon Territory, and the prairies would include the Northwest Territories. He believed the only problem with his idea, which he said would cut

voters to simply continue in an FPTP-mindset, it also had the negative connotations of increasing the rate of spoiled ballots and delaying the election results. Single-issue politics and majority representation under FPTP fit with voters' expectations, as did the emphasis placed on local representation in redistribution schemes. Redistribution evoked a far-reaching response from British Columbians and the media alike because it appealed to the idea of winner-take-all FPTP representation.

## **Conclusion**

The Coalition offered up AV as an improvement to democracy and representative government, portraying constituency-by-constituency majority representation as a just measure that had the added benefit of denying the minority CCF the chance to form a government. The public education campaign stressed AV's benefits for the voter in terms of increased choice and an end to candidates being elected by a minority vote; majority representation was intended to play into the free enterprise versus socialism divide that the Liberals and Conservatives could no longer maintain through Coalition. Majority representation proved to be more political posturing than reality, however, and the long-standing emphasis on two-party politics and FPTP elections in BC worked against the increasingly unpopular Coalition parties. Harold Winch and Herbert Anscomb's endorsement of plumping indicated their belief in plurality-style representation, and voters treated the system in a similar fashion. Rather than ranking all parties in an attempt to embrace majority representation, voters consciously cast both anti-government and anti-socialist votes.

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wasteful expenses, was that it was "too logical." He recalled that his fellow premiers and Pierre Trudeau reacted to the proposal with incredulity, which is perhaps an understatement. *Ibid.*, 393-5.

This brand of single-issue, antagonistic two-party politics was exactly what the Coalition had hoped to perpetuate with AV. In this sense, AV was an unneeded reform, and voters would have proceeded quite happily with an FPTP election. While constituency representation remained an all or nothing contest, AV added confusion at the polls and a three-week delay in the counting process; popular disdain was another strike against the system. Indeed, Bennett used the public's opposition to AV to justify its abolition. Because of rampant anti-Coalition sentiment and the rise of Social Credit, AV had not functioned as the simple anti-CCF measure the Coalition had intended. Nor did the majority representation of AV resonate with voters, due to the long history of antagonistic two-party politics in BC. Local representation, on the other hand, provided apolitical ground on which voters could argue in favour of representation by population and a constituency representative, familiar political values associated with FPTP. Redistribution itself was never apolitical, but voters treated it as if it should be. In light of the failed experiment with the alternative vote, electoral reform in British Columbia can be better understood by looking at how voters engaged with redistribution. FPTP was an ingrained political value, and constituency-by-constituency majority representation did not connect with voters to the same degree as local representation. Accepting the polarized nature of two-party politics, voters were content to throw their lot in with a particular party, or pair of parties, and cast an X or 1, 2 vote. Discussions of electoral redistribution were incredibly heated, because they could affect not just the identity of one's representative, but the very existence of constituency boundaries that aligned with perceived local interests. The value placed on local representation and the history of polarized FPTP politics diminished the chances for AV's acceptance and smoothed the restoration of plurality voting. Legislating a return to FPTP was a partisan decision, but it was also a popular one.

## Chapter 4 – Electoral Redistribution and Local Representation in British Columbia

In the debates over electoral reform in BC, the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system had tradition on its side. At a 1978 public hearing on the redistribution of electoral districts, one man said he had “never seen anything better than the system we’ve got that is workable.”<sup>1</sup> Apart from the simple marking of ballots, the plurality system was linked with two other key aspects of representation, namely the constituency and the constituency representative. To better appreciate the public’s ties to FPTP and contextualize the dismissal of the alternative vote (AV), I believe one can look to instances of electoral redistribution. Constituency boundaries are periodically readjusted to account for population growth and changing representational needs, and many people believed “the aim of electoral reform should ... be to produce as near as possible equality among all the voters of B.C. in respect to their individual impact upon the Legislature.”<sup>2</sup> If constituency populations are equal, then every person’s vote will carry the same weight when electing an MLA. The reality of representation strayed from this principle of representation by population in consideration of the need to represent under-populated regions. Local representation was a traditional part of FPTP, one that British Columbians and politicians alike associated with representational democracy. Regardless of MLAs’ practical importance, British Columbians valued local representation and politicians cited it as a compelling reason to both stray from rep-by-pop and to avoid a proportional representation (PR) system that would diminish the predominance of constituencies.

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<sup>1</sup> British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 3, file 13, Royal Commission on Electoral Reform, Proceedings at Public Hearings (hereafter Public Hearings) Volume 30, Vernon, 10 May 1978, 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, box 2, file 2, Public Hearings Volume 1, Vancouver, 16 March 1978, 57.

Discussions about redistribution and the alternative vote often overlapped under the broad heading of electoral reform, and the two ideas shared many similarities. The ongoing values debates surrounding redistribution and AV — that is, discussions based on what British Columbians and politicians desired in their electoral process — both concerned constituency representation. AV could allegedly provide majority representation, which the Coalition parties portrayed as an improvement to FPTP. Threats to ridings' unique representation have always provoked debate, but even though AV could ostensibly elect a more agreeable representative, it was readily dismissed. Over the course of this chapter, I will argue that this divide existed because the public approached the presence of local representatives and the manner in which they were elected as separate issues. Having unique constituency representatives was seen as essential, but electing them via plurality drew upon existing democratic traditions and BC's polarized politics. The true importance of local representation is questionable, because most people vote for parties rather than individual candidates, and MLAs are expected to toe the party line, not "to vote on behalf of their constituencies."<sup>3</sup> However, by looking at the content of redistribution commissions' public hearings, I will show that the self-interested politics of local representation held sway with voters, and that local representatives were privileged over representative Legislatures. Any attack on constituencies provoked commentary from the media and concerned citizens alike.

The redistribution process was often viewed with skepticism due to the government's involvement.<sup>4</sup> Because the constituency occupied a privileged place in

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<sup>3</sup> Dennis Pilon, *The Politics of Voting: Reforming Canada's Electoral System* (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2007), 127; J. Terence Morley et al., *The Reins of Power: Governing British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1983), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Beginning in 1903, the redistribution of federal electoral districts was turned over to select committees of the House of Commons, which were invariably ruled by the governing party. W. E. Lyons, "Legislative Redistricting by Independent Commissions: Operationalizing the One Man-One Vote Doctrine in Canada," *Polity* 1.4 (Summer 1969): 432. The committee process became the norm in British Columbia in 1938. Norman

Canadian politics, any apparent gerrymandering by the governing party was seen as an affront to the principles of democracy. Just as the CCF had framed AV as taking democracy from the hands of the people in 1952, the media accused Social Credit of acting improperly when it readjusted electoral boundaries to its own ends shortly thereafter. While “even the fairest readjustment by a House committee ... would supply the Opposition with plenty of ammunition,”<sup>5</sup> the Socreds’ redistribution schemes of 1955, 1966, and 1978 were egregious enough to be immediately and obviously open to criticism. The NDP’s attempted redistribution in 1975 could be subjected to similar scrutiny. Although redistribution was placed in the hands of an independent commission in 1966, which was a potentially crucial step “in removing both the fact and the appearance of the gerrymander,”<sup>6</sup> W.A.C. Bennett refused to be bound by the commission’s decisions and redistribution remained a highly partisan issue. Voters treated redistribution as if it should be an apolitical process, and I believe the submissions made to the independent commissions provide invaluable insight into how British Columbians perceived representation.

The 1978 Royal Commission on Electoral Reform (Eckardt Commission) hearings are particularly useful for comparing the values ascribed to representational democracy and the voting system, because the commission was tasked with considering both electoral boundaries and the alternative vote. The BC Liberal party reopened the issue of AV in the 1970s, arguing for the principle of majority representation, an idea that was linked to redistribution via the common theme of the constituency. An insistence on FPTP and “one person, one vote” dominated the Eckardt hearings, and the commission dismissed alternate

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Ruff, “The Cat and Mouse Politics of Redistribution: Fair and Effective Representation in British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 87 (Autumn 1990): 55.

<sup>5</sup> Norman Ward, “The Redistribution of 1952,” *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 19.3 (August 1953): 359.

<sup>6</sup> Terence H. Qualter, *The Election Process in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Company of Canada, 1970), 115.

voting systems as confusing and antithetical to British Columbians' desires for representational democracy. FPTP may have suited a Social Credit government looking to stay in power, but it was also in keeping with many voters' personal beliefs about democracy. Even though local representation was placed on a pedestal, preferential voting, which allowed voters a greater say in their representative, did not gain traction. The Eckardt Commission, which was predisposed to FPTP for partisan reasons, argued that voters only wished to cast a single vote for their preferred party. This was true for some witnesses, but many more brought no opinion to the hearings, having attended only to defend their regions' local representation. Simply having a representative at all was key, and electing that representative could be accomplished via FPTP, thereby preserving the constituency-member tie even if the candidate did not belong to a voter's preferred party. The concept of adequate local representation was in many ways disconnected from the voting system for those who took FPTP as a given, even though redistribution and voting system change were discussed under the same heading of electoral reform. Local representation was an established norm to the point that many reform advocates lauded the constituency representation of their proposed voting systems while deriding FPTP.

This chapter begins with a brief history of the redistribution process in British Columbia leading up to the 1950s in order to set up the issues of local representation and representation by population. In the 1950s and 1960s, redistribution in British Columbia was subject to the whims of the Social Credit party. The Socreds appealed to the principle of regional representation to strengthen their position in the Legislature at the expense of rep-by-pop, even though the media and the opposition had insisted on the latter. By using the reports and hearings of BC's independent redistribution commissions, I will illustrate British Columbians' and politicians' continued insistence on local representation. This chapter ends



with a detailed look at the Eckardt Commission hearings, wherein it is clear that for a significant number of politicians and voters alike, local representation was equated with FPTP, and both principles were valued more than the majority representation of the alternative vote.

### **Balancing Local Representation and Rep-by-Pop in British Columbia**

The two issues that dominated discussions of redistribution were local, or regional representation, and representation-by-population. It was well established that because of Canada's geography, "strict equality of population, however desirable in theory, was impossible to achieve in practice."<sup>7</sup> This issue necessitated some leeway for a rep-by-region approach in BC's provincial districts. Equalizing the population across all districts would have negatively affected geographically large but under-populated regions with unique interests. Citizens in over-represented rural districts often pointed to their regions' economic importance, while defending their right to a unique representative on the grounds that MLAs or MPs were to act primarily as ombudsmen who listened to constituents' complaints.<sup>8</sup> Representation by population was a consideration for all redistribution schemes, but its importance varied depending on the commission or complainant. BC's urban newspapers frequently lamented their cities' lack of representation on these grounds, and commissions were often required to return districts that fell within a certain population quota.<sup>9</sup> While it remained an ideal, representation-by-population had been sidestepped as early as

Confederation. Regional representation was necessary to ensure the representation of the

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<sup>7</sup> Qualter, *The Election Process in Canada*, 87.

<sup>8</sup> David M. Greer, "Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978," *BC Studies* 38 (Summer 1978): 44-5.

<sup>9</sup> The independent provincial commissions in the federal redistribution of 1964, for instance, were bound to return districts that deviated by no more than 20 per cent from the electoral quota, which was "the province's population divided by its number of seats." Norman Ward, "A Century of Constituencies," *Canadian Public Administration* 10 (1967): 114.

English minority in rural Quebec, and Manitoba and BC received more seats than their population warranted when they joined Canada.<sup>10</sup>

Acknowledging the need for regional representation that deviated from rep-by-pop was the norm in British Columbia, but both principles remained in conflict. Conservative premier Richard McBride commissioned an independent review of BC's electoral districts in 1914, and the appointed judges took into account regional interests and the potential for future growth, eschewing any commitment to representation by population.<sup>11</sup> Liberal premier John Oliver, on the other hand, tackled redistribution by himself in 1923, considering "population, community of interest and geographical situation."<sup>12</sup> Part of his plan was to fold Esquimalt into the Victoria City riding, ostensibly decreasing Victoria's over-representation in comparison to Vancouver.<sup>13</sup> Esquimalt was a Conservative district, but residents of all political affiliations protested Oliver's decision on the grounds that it would "interfer[e] with the historic constituency of Esquimalt."<sup>14</sup> Commenting on the city's potential loss of representation, the *Victoria Daily Times* said it was "notorious ... that population figures [were] used as a guide in provincial redistribution only with the widest reservation," since there would be "many constituencies of less than two thousand electors per member" under Oliver's proposal. Population, district size, taxes paid to the province, and "influence upon the welfare and development of the province generally" should all be taken into account, the paper argued; the editorial concluded that Victoria was only losing representation because it was a Conservative district.<sup>15</sup> Oliver ultimately reversed his decision

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<sup>10</sup> Kent Roach, "Reapportionment in British Columbia," *University of British Columbia Law Review* 79 (1990): 80-1.

<sup>11</sup> At this time there were no Liberals in the Legislature who might have sat on a Legislative committee. Ruff, "The Cat and Mouse Politics of Redistribution," 52-4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 54; "Tells How City Can Hold Seats," *Daily Colonist*, 14 December 1923, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Vancouver had three times the population of Victoria but only six members to the capital's four. Ruff, "The Cat and Mouse Politics of Redistribution," 54-5.

<sup>14</sup> "Electors Register Vigorous Protest," *Daily Colonist*, 6 November 1923, 1.

<sup>15</sup> "Unjustifiable," *Victoria Daily Times*, 23 November 1923, 4.

on Esquimalt in light of the demands for local representation and accusations of gerrymandering, charges that coloured future redistribution schemes as well.<sup>16</sup> In 1938, redistribution was handed over to a Legislative committee, bringing “some vestige of openness” to the process.<sup>17</sup> The committee took into account “the number of voters per Member” with respect to equalizing representation in the Vancouver region.<sup>18</sup> It also considered whether cities within a constituency truly shared “common interests” with the rest of the district.<sup>19</sup> Redistribution remained a highly charged issue, however, because it could mean the difference between sitting as the government or the opposition.

Redistribution was a frequent subject of discussion — but no action — in the final years of the Liberal-Conservative Coalition. The 1949, 1950, and 1952 BC Liberal conventions all included resolutions urging the party to take steps “to correct the present inequality of representation,” and newspapers believed redistribution would occur before the next election.<sup>20</sup> These calls to action were motivated by vast disparities in constituency size. In 1950, Conservative Coalitionist Alex Hope protested the fact that he was the only representative for his 35,000 Delta constituents, whereas Victoria City had 32,000 voters and three MLAs. Bringing Vancouver’s representation in line with Victoria’s, said Hope, would require 18 to 20 members instead of 9; the *Vancouver Sun* echoed his call for redistribution.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ruff, “The Cat and Mouse Politics of Redistribution,” 55.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> BCA, Legislative Assembly Committee Proceedings and Reports 1883 – 1949, GR-2016, Mflm B-1415, G.M. Phillips, Registrar of Voters, *Suggested Changes in Boundaries of Electoral Districts*, 31 October 1938, “Vancouver-Point Grey,” 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., “Vancouver Island,” 1; “Victoria,” 6.

<sup>20</sup> University of Victoria Archives and Special Collections, Byron Johnson Papers, 73-10, box 1, file 7, Executive Committee Meeting, “Resolution No. 8. Redistribution,” 8-9 January 1952; “And No Gerrymandering, Please,” *Vancouver News-Herald*, 20 February 1950, 4.

<sup>21</sup> “Misrepresentation by Population,” *Vancouver Sun*, 17 February 1950, 4. A favourite example of the disparity in BC’s representation was the northern district of Atlin, which had 1,700 registered voters and a single MLA, whereas Burnaby, for example, had the same representation with 41,000 voters. University of Victoria Archives and Special Collections, British Columbia Legislative Assembly Sessional Clipping Books: Newspaper Accounts of the Debates, Section III: 1941 – 1961, February 1950 – March 1953, accession no. 597 (hereafter Sessional Clipping Book), “Give Us Real Representation,” 7 February 1953. While both districts were represented by one

He was still clamouring for an adjustment in 1952, but the election put serious discussions of redistribution on hold until 1953.<sup>22</sup> Bennett may have been reluctant to revise the seats in 1952 given Social Credit's narrow victory over the CCF.<sup>23</sup>

The CCF had a vested interest in correcting the under-representation of urban ridings, attributing the party's 1952 election defeat in part to its failure to win seats in BC's over-represented rural regions.<sup>24</sup> A special redistribution committee was formed in early 1953 to address the issue, though the CCF had pushed for an independent commission.<sup>25</sup> A resolution at the party's April convention observed that past redistributions handled by Legislative committees had resulted in gerrymandering.<sup>26</sup> At least one newspaper agreed, saying "[t]he temptation to make the redistribution of seats answer the strategical needs of the party [was] one hard to resist."<sup>27</sup> Bennett stood firm, and his September 1953 policy speech promised a new redistribution committee "to work out a satisfactory solution" before

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member, Atlin was over 60,000 square miles larger than Burnaby. British Columbia, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Redefinition of Electoral Districts* (British Columbia, 1966), 158 (hereafter Angus Report).

<sup>22</sup> "Hope Rekindles Old Political Fire, Representation By Population Urged," *Victoria Daily Times*, 27 February 1952, 5. It is not surprising that Hope believed his under-represented constituency warranted additional members. In redistributions, "every member of Parliament ... has a vested interest in one constituency." Ward, "The Redistribution of 1952," 341.

<sup>23</sup> Greer, "Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978," 26-7.

<sup>24</sup> "[T]he CCF missed becoming the government last year only because it failed to pick up more of the rural ridings," read one party report. With no end to rural over-representation forthcoming, the CCF hoped to address the issue by making a stronger appeal to rural voters. University of British Columbia Special Collections (hereafter UBC-SC), Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 62, file 7, David Stupich, Chairman, "Report of Agriculture Committee," 1953. Thomas Michael Sanford also attributes the CCF's 1952 loss in part to the dominance of rural ridings. Thomas Michael Sanford, "The Politics of Protest: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and Social Credit League in British Columbia" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1961), 261.

<sup>25</sup> Liberal House leader E. T. Kenney disagreed, noting that Legislative committees had filled this role in the past. "CCF'er Turner Advocates End of Multi-Member Ridings in B.C.," *Victoria Daily Times*, 23 February 1953, 1. The CCF asked for either a judicial committee or one composed of political scientists. Elizabeth Kerr, "Gallery Rail," *CCF News*, 2 February 1955, 6.

<sup>26</sup> UBC-SC, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, box 63, file 1, CCF: British Columbia – Yukon Section, "Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Provincial Convention," 10-12 April 1953, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, "Test of Sincerity," 24 March 1953. The Victoria and Vancouver papers argued for both an independent commission and "some approximation of representation by population." Greer, "Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978," 26. The federal CCF had called for an independent review of electoral districts in the 1940s. Ward, "The Redistribution of 1952," 347.

the next election, “with fairness both to cities and rural areas.”<sup>28</sup> The CCF restated its call for an independent committee and demanded a return to FPTP; Arthur Laing, the new Liberal leader, supported the idea of an independent review.<sup>29</sup>

In spite of the opposition complaints, the special committee, composed of five Socreds, three CCFers, Arthur Laing, and Larry Giovando, the lone Conservative in the Legislature, continued as planned.<sup>30</sup> In August 1954, with the committee still working, Bennett told a Peace River audience that its constituency should be split in two in recognition of the region’s potential for growth.<sup>31</sup> The *Vancouver Sun* accused Bennett of circumventing the work of the committee, adding that the province needed “redistribution on the basis of population,” not “representation ... based on ‘potential.’”<sup>32</sup> In a series of correspondence with the Peace River Socreds in 1952, Bennett had agreed “that the Constituency of Peace River [was] extremely large and [was] growing in importance every day,” promising to draw any future redistribution committee’s attention to the matter.<sup>33</sup> He had not guaranteed that the riding would be split in two, and he was on solid ground when he denied this accusation; he also recommended that the under-represented Burnaby and Delta receive additional seats.<sup>34</sup> One North Vancouver man said it would be “a sad, unjust

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<sup>28</sup> Simon Fraser University Archives (hereafter SFU-A), W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-27-0-46, W.A.C. Bennett, Policy Speech – Session Sept 1953, 18 September 1953, 13. The committee was a continuation of the previous group’s work. Its members had asked to continue working at the next session, because redistribution was “a task of such magnitude” that it required extended consideration. BC Legislative Journals, 24 March 1953, 136.

<sup>29</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, “CCF Asks for Change In B.C. Ballot System,” 17 September 1953; *ibid.*, “Independent Commission Asked on Redistribution,” 1 October 1953.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Parker, the Socred MLA for the Peace River district, was one of the committee members. BC Legislative Journals, 1 February 1955, 20. The initial committee had consisted of four Socreds, three CCFers, two Liberals, and a Conservative. *Ibid.*, 9 February 1953, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Greer, “Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978,” 27.

<sup>32</sup> “Legislature’s Rights Ignored in Peace River Deal,” *Vancouver Sun*, 18 August 1954, 4. In an interview with Bennett, David Mitchell said “representation by regions” was “a radically different theory of democracy,” to which Bennett replied, “Certainly it’s different, but my whole government was different.” BCA, T1675:0041-1, David Mitchell, “Bennett Interview,” 28 March 1978, 12.

<sup>33</sup> SFU-A, W.A.C. Bennett fonds, F-55-27-0-27, Bennett to Philip Bjorkgren, Peace River Social Credit Constituency Association, 20 September 1952. See also *ibid.*, Bjorkgren to Bennett, 8 September 1952; *ibid.*, F-55-27-0-28, Charles W. Parker to Bennett, 15 September 1952; *ibid.*, Bennett to Parker, 22 September 1952.

<sup>34</sup> “No Second Peace River Seat Promised—Bennett,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 20 August 1954, 1.

and extremely undemocratic hour when the provincial legislature sanction[ed] a second Peace River seat,” given the deviation from rep-by-pop, the apparent gerrymandering, and Vancouver’s comparative under-representation.<sup>35</sup> Essentially the only sound argument in favour of the motion was that the region would now return two Socred MLAs.<sup>36</sup> Bennett’s “representation by future population” idea existed somewhere between rep-by-region and rep-by-pop, a reasonable approach to the Peace River region from the perspective of Social Credit.

In February 1955, the government added another Social Credit member to the committee to give the party a six to five majority.<sup>37</sup> The committee could now recommend Bennett’s Peace River split to the Legislature with ease.<sup>38</sup> The papers again said “the question of redistribution [was] one where every effort should be made to keep petty politics out,” because politicians were “just too close to the picture to do the job.”<sup>39</sup> Taking advantage of two Socred absences, the opposition committee members ruled that Bennett would have to explain his statements about the Peace River constituency.<sup>40</sup> He wrote to the committee and restated his belief that the region’s growth warranted consideration of “the advisability and desirability of creating out of the present Peace River constituency two ridings.”<sup>41</sup> The *Vancouver Sun* countered that the same case for future growth could be made for Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland, adding that Manitoba’s recent independent redistribution

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<sup>35</sup> E. D. Bodwell, “Opposes Two Seats for Peace River,” *Vancouver News-Herald*, 26 August 1954, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Greer, “Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978,” 30. The Socred candidate for Peace River had led the CCF by nearly 10 per cent on the first count in 1953 and over 15 per cent on the final count, a result that could be replicated in an additional riding. *Elections BC*, “Electoral History of British Columbia 1871 - 1986” <[http://www.elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/1871-1986\\_ElectoralHistoryofBC.pdf](http://www.elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/1871-1986_ElectoralHistoryofBC.pdf)>.

<sup>37</sup> BC Legislative Journals, 1 February 1955, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, “Socreds Win 2-Day Redistribution Battle,” 2 February 1955.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, “Don’t Make a Farce of Redistribution,” 17 February 1955; *ibid.*, “Bleak Prospect For Redistribution,” 23 February 1955.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, “Socred MLA Just Too Late To Block Vote,” 23 February 1955.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, “Premier Urges New Seat For Peace River District,” 1 March 1955.

had allotted Winnipeg more MLAs “at the expense of the rural people.”<sup>42</sup> While true rep-by-pop was impossible, said the *Sun*, “regional representation” was “contrary to the western liberal-democratic tradition and should not be encouraged in this province.”<sup>43</sup>

The committee’s Socred majority recommended that North Vancouver, Delta, and Burnaby be given additional seats, as dual-member districts. The Socreds also asked that Peace River be split in two, even though on population alone the region did not merit even a single MLA.<sup>44</sup> The Lower Mainland subcommittee on redistribution had recommended that Vancouver’s representation be increased to eleven MLAs, from nine, and that it be divided into single-member districts. The Social Credit recommendations, on the other hand, were “not based on any subcommittee recommendations or prior discussion.”<sup>45</sup> The CCF members and Arthur Laing resigned from the committee in protest. The committee’s report to the Legislature said it did “not feel favourably disposed to altering the historical boundaries of any other electoral districts in the Province”; it also recommended that the Legislature continue studying the issue of redistribution.<sup>46</sup>

The *Sun* called the decision “a shameful denial of the franchise to thousands of Vancouver voters,” and it said the maintenance of multi-member ridings was “deplorable.”<sup>47</sup> The committee had initially favoured “the abolition of multi-member seats,” which one CCF

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<sup>42</sup> “What the Premier Overlooked,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 March 1955, 4. Rand Dyck credits Manitoba with “pioneer[ing] an independent redistribution process” beginning in 1950, which addressed the issue of rural over-representation. The province refined its process over the years. In 1958, Manitoba’s standard was a seven to four ratio of urban to rural voters; in 1968, the criteria for redistribution included a 25 per cent limit in variance from the average constituency population. Rand Dyck, *Provincial Politics in Canada: Towards the Turn of the Century* (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice Hall Canada, 1996), 388.

<sup>43</sup> “‘Rep by Pop’ at Stake: Move to Re-Shuffle Seats Threatens Democratic Ideal,” *Vancouver Sun*, 9 March 1955, 4.

<sup>44</sup> David Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1983), 236.

<sup>45</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, “CCFers, Laing Quit Redistribution Group,” 10 March 1955.

<sup>46</sup> BC Legislative Journals, 9 March 1955, 143.

<sup>47</sup> “City Members’ Betrayal: Anti-Vancouver Bids Shown by Socred Gerrymander Plan,” *Vancouver Sun*, 12 March 1955, 4.

MLA called “a violation of democracy,” but it had abandoned this stance by 1955.<sup>48</sup> The Socreds’ commitment to the “historic boundaries” of existing constituencies was dismissed as “bunk” by the media, given Vancouver’s significant growth since the Second World War.<sup>49</sup> The *Sun* was willing to concede that Atlin and Grand Forks-Greenwood could not be easily merged with other ridings because of their size, but when Vancouver voters had one MLA for every 27,500 voters, compared to the provincial average of 15,421, something was clearly amiss.<sup>50</sup> Bennett said future growth would be most prominent in the districts surrounding Vancouver, rather than the city centre, which the *Sun* called “utter nonsense,” citing a recent paper on BC population trends.<sup>51</sup> George Gregory, a Liberal member for Victoria City, also criticized the committee’s report. Even at the risk of his own seat he did not believe Victoria was entitled to three members while Vancouver’s representation remained so slight.<sup>52</sup> Despite the outrage from the opposition parties and the media, Bennett and his Social Credit majority had their way with redistribution. The urban appeal for rep-by-pop was based on the logic of numbers, but it was certainly a regionally motivated request. Both urban and rural regions believed they should have representation, and whether their arguments were based on population or an appeal to uniqueness or economic importance, local interests were at stake.

The battle between party politics, rep-by-pop, and rep-by-region continued in the coming years. The CCF became the New Democratic Party (NDP) in 1961, and it was

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<sup>48</sup> Sessional Clipping Book, “Separate Victoria Seats Likely in Redistribution,” 9 October 1953; *ibid.*, “Socreds Win 2-Day Redistribution Battle,” 2 February 1955.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, “This Is NOT Redistribution,” 11 March 1955.

<sup>50</sup> “City Members’ Betrayal: Anti-Vancouver Bids Shown by Socred Gerrymander Plan,” *Vancouver Sun*, 12 March 1955, 4.

<sup>51</sup> “‘Sold Out,’ He Says: Reminding Mr. Bennett that Gerrymandering Is No Joke,” *Vancouver Sun*, 15 March 1955, 4. The *Sun*’s extensive criticism can perhaps be attributed in part to its status as a Liberal paper. The *Sun* had backed the Liberal party in the 1952 election. “Election Logic,” *Vancouver Sun*, 11 June 1952, 4.

<sup>52</sup> “Socreds Gerrymander B.C. Constituencies: Scrap of Paper Carries Premier’s Orders; Two Years Work Ditched; CCF Members Resign Committee,” *CCF News*, 16 March 1955, 1.



loudly critical of the representational divide between urban and rural BC.<sup>53</sup> Bennett spoke against multi-member ridings when he was a Coalitionist arguing for AV, but he was their strongest proponent by 1965. His new plan for redistribution was to adopt BC's 23 federal ridings for use as dual-member provincial districts, though the already over-represented Peace River region would be allotted four representatives.<sup>54</sup> "[P]eople would feel better represented," he said, and "[d]emocracy would be better served," if BC got "away from partisan politics" and used dual-member ridings.<sup>55</sup> Some Socred MLAs feared using the federal boundaries would diminish the importance of rural BC, which had brought their party to power, and Bennett's proposal was rejected.<sup>56</sup> He backed off, instead appointing political scientist H. F. Angus to lead an independent commission on redistribution that included Chief Electoral Officer Fred Hurley. Non-partisan committees had conducted the most recent federal redistribution, in 1964.<sup>57</sup> Bennett later played up the independent nature

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<sup>53</sup> Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 259. The shift from the CCF to the NDP was national in scope. Jean Barman says the following about the change: "Unlike the CCF, the NDP was consciously intended to appeal to organized labour as well as to farmers and an educated middle class. Its vision of the future was more moderate, concerned to strengthen social policies, lessen foreign ownership, and exercise state control over public utilities and the exploitation of natural resources." Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, rev. ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 278. The party made a conscious appeal to urban voters, because at the federal level seats in their traditional prairie strongholds were decreasing as a result of redistributions. Alan Whitehorn, *Canadian Socialism: Essays on the CCF-NDP* (Toronto: Oxford University Press), 51.

<sup>54</sup> Greer, "Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978," 31.

<sup>55</sup> BCA, T1675:0041-1, Mitchell, "Bennett Interview," 28 March 1978, 13. Adopting the federal boundaries for dual-member provincial districts was one of the cost-cutting recommendations made by the 1932 Kidd Report on BC's financial situation. In 1932, the proposal would have reduced the number of MLAs from 35 to 28. Ruff, "The Cat and Mouse Politics of Redistribution," 55. The Kidd Report suggested cutting services to reduce costs for the province during the Depression. This included cutting back on public education and selling the Pacific Great Eastern Railway, or cutting off its service if this proved impossible. The report was not well received. Barman says the CCF, which became the opposition in 1933, offered the opposite of the Kidd Report proposals. Barman, *The West Beyond the West*, 254-5. The report argued that "[m]ost of the present difficulties ... arose from the multiplication of government positions, the inefficiency of the Civil Service, and the excessive public expenditures—all of these the inevitable outcome of the party system." Margaret A. Ormsby calls the report an indictment of Simon Fraser Tolmie's Conservative government and of "representative and responsible government" more generally. Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1964), 448.

<sup>56</sup> Greer, "Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978," 31.

<sup>57</sup> Ruff, "The Cat and Mouse Politics of Redistribution," 57.

of the commission, calling Angus “a brilliant man in the university” who also happened to be “a strong Liberal” and a known “enemy of the Socreds.”<sup>58</sup>

The Angus Commission was instructed to “take into account where feasible historical and regional claims for representation”; to keep districts above 7,500 registered voters; to keep the Legislature between 48 and 52 members; and to “give consideration to the provision of multiple member ridings.”<sup>59</sup> The commission was also instructed to hold public hearings on electoral redistribution, thereby allowing British Columbians to voice their opinion on population criteria and regional representation. In total, 476 people attended 34 public hearings.<sup>60</sup> While this was not a terrible turnout, any analysis of public opinion based on these or other hearings should be approached with caution. First, only sufficiently motivated citizens were likely to appear before the commission, and the final report notes that the 476 attendees cannot be considered “an extensive or even a representative sample of public opinion.”<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, these people had typically come to defend their local, regional interests. Even if rep-by-pop enjoyed broad popular appeal, those making presentations were more likely to take a regional approach to representation. Testifying at the hearings nevertheless offered an excellent opportunity for the public to speak on redistribution to a receptive, government-sanctioned body, and the hearings illustrate important themes in how these British Columbians perceived political representation.

Not surprisingly, the Commission found that in rural regions “the demand for disproportionate representation in the Legislative Assembly appeared to be inspired in part by fear of the dominance of the Province by the Lower Mainland,” whose residents were

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<sup>58</sup> BCA, T1675:0041-1, Mitchell, “Bennett Interview,” 28 March 1978, 17.

<sup>59</sup> Angus Report, 5.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

seen as “economic parasites.”<sup>62</sup> This insistence on representation based on economic contribution or potential was similar to the case Bennett had made for the division of the Peace River district. The final report said “the emphasis on uniqueness in the over-represented regions [had] been ... excessive,” and that the rep-by-region perspective “over-emphasize[d] the ‘Ombudsman’ character of an M.L.A.”<sup>63</sup> Even MLAs portrayed themselves as ombudsmen to the commission, and voters in under-represented urban districts occasionally argued for the retention of a single member to act as the sole voice for their regions’ interests.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, “there were very few complaints by [under-represented] voters that they were being denied a basic right of citizenship.”<sup>65</sup> These constituencies still had representatives, and rep-by-region appeared to trump rep-by-pop. Witnesses were occasionally “shocked” to hear that “the Commission’s assignment was to provide for the proper representation of people and not of municipalities or acres.”<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, “concessions to geographical minorities” and deviations from rep-by-pop were required.<sup>67</sup> While the commissioners did not believe in “slavish adherence to the doctrines of democracy,” they acknowledged that “the basic principle in a modern democracy [was] that every voter should have an equal share of political power and that, therefore, he should have a vote equal in value to every other vote.”<sup>68</sup> The Angus Report recommended changes that would bring the under-represented Lower Mainland and Victoria from 24 MLAs to 31, while the over-represented rural regions would go from 28 members to 21.<sup>69</sup> The report also recommended putting an end to multi-member districts. No convincing arguments were

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 16. Norman J. Ruff has also commented on the theme of local representation that dominated the submissions to the Angus Commission. See Ruff, “The Cat and Mouse Politics of Redistribution,” 59-60.

<sup>63</sup> Angus Report, 18.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 20-1.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 50, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 25.

made in their defence, and several MLAs from multi-member ridings called for their abolition. The report noted that there was “a strong emotional dislike of multiple ridings and that there [was] no corresponding emotional dislike of single ridings.”<sup>70</sup>

The NDP endorsed the Angus Commission’s 1966 report, and the *Vancouver Sun* believed the proposals were a necessary step towards correcting the representational disparity in the province.<sup>71</sup> Both the NDP and the *Sun* were naturally more concerned with rep-by-pop than rep-by-region, given their urban connections, but the Socreds were not comfortable with the proposed changes.<sup>72</sup> The Social Credit MLA for Skeena had previously called rep-by-pop “a myth” perpetuated by the urban press, and eight Socreds aired their opposition to the report in the Legislature.<sup>73</sup> Despite the independent nature of the commission, Bennett “was not prepared to risk the possible political consequences of actually accepting [its] recommendations.”<sup>74</sup> He decided to ignore many of the commission’s proposals on the grounds that it was only intended as an advisory body:

[A] government appoints a commission to investigate something and bring all the information out. But you don’t have to accept that report one hundred per cent, fifty per cent or ten per cent. . . . It must be that way. If not, these commissions would be the government instead of the government.<sup>75</sup>

Multi-member ridings were retained, abolished northern ridings were restored, and additional representation was given to the Columbia River region. Rural BC was inarguably important to Social Credit’s political success, and the government was accused of

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>71</sup> Greer, “Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978,” 35.

<sup>72</sup> Following the 1963 election, only 5 of the NDP’s 14 seats were outside of Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland.

<sup>73</sup> Greer, “Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978,” 33, 35.

<sup>74</sup> Qualter, *The Election Process in Canada*, 109.

<sup>75</sup> W.A.C. Bennett, quoted in Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 367-8.

gerrymandering.<sup>76</sup> Bennett defended his actions by citing a lack of municipal politics in rural regions and the consequent necessity of MLAs, as well as the difficulty of representing an overly large riding.<sup>77</sup> Many of the recommendations of the Angus Report survived, however, bringing BC closer to rep-by-pop.<sup>78</sup> The injection of a post hoc rep-by-region approach may have been politically motivated, but at least superficially the values converged with the public's approach to representative government. Despite the principles of rep-by-pop found in the Angus Report, there is ample evidence that the public was more interested in the idea of local representation.

### **Redistribution and Voting System Reform in the 1970s**

The next formal examination of electoral districts in BC did not take place until 1975, under Dave Barrett's NDP government.<sup>79</sup> Discussions of representation in BC in the 1970s concerned both redistribution and the alternative vote, which at their core were matters of constituency representation. The NDP's February 1975 speech from the throne included a pledge "to reform our electoral system and provide greater opportunity for

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<sup>76</sup> Greer, "Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978," 35-6. It was believed that dual-member Vancouver ridings might elect additional Socred members on the backs of the ministers who sat in those districts, which may have contributed to their retention. Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 259.

<sup>77</sup> Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 368.

<sup>78</sup> Greer, "Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978," 36. The report made numerous small boundary adjustments in addition to the more sweeping suggestions. One notable change was the reduction of Victoria's representation from three members to two. For details on the commission's major recommendations, see Angus Report, 25-45. Even after the government adjusted the report's proposals, representation was improved to the extent that electing a majority government now required, at a minimum, the support of ridings accounting for 39.6 per cent of registered voters, compared to the 27 per cent it had taken previously. Qualter, *The Election Process in Canada*, 97-8.

<sup>79</sup> The Social Credit party had been in decline in 1970 and 1971, as "discontent grew among the grass roots over inflation, unemployment, and the necessary curtailment of expectations." The consequent revitalization of the Liberal and Conservative parties contributed to the election of the NDP in 1972. Barman, *The West Beyond the West*, 294-5. David Anderson led the Liberals in the 1972 election. According to Mitchell, the party's campaign consisted of advocating "such nonemotional issues as parliamentary reform and the extension of the right to sue the crown" in order to take an inoffensive middle-way and attract voters. Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 414.

people to exercise their rights in a democracy.”<sup>80</sup> The resulting 1975 Norris Commission was instructed “to take into account where feasible and necessary historical and regional claims for representation.”<sup>81</sup> While it acknowledged the importance of regional claims over mathematical precision, particularly noteworthy was the importance placed on the idea of majority representation.<sup>82</sup> Specifically, the commission drew from political scientist Terence Qualter in praising the Dauer-Kelsay index.<sup>83</sup> Qualter explained that the index determined “the population of the minimum number of districts, counting from the smallest, necessary to elect the majority of the legislature”; this number was then “expressed as a percentage of the total population of all districts.”<sup>84</sup> In an ideal scenario, only districts making up 50 per cent of the province’s population would be able to elect a majority of the Legislature.<sup>85</sup> This idea is similar to the constituency-by-constituency majority representation of AV. Using this index as a guide kept the commission from focusing on the most extreme cases of inequality in favour of a workable provincial solution.<sup>86</sup> A malleable concept, majority representation could encompass anything ranging from AV to FPTP and rep-by-pop.

AV had enjoyed something of a political resurgence in the 1970s, with the Liberals in particular agitating for its return on the grounds that it would provide majority representation. NDP MLA and former CCF leader Robert Strachan joined in the debate, saying W.A.C. Bennett had abolished AV because transfers would have eventually conspired to defeat Social Credit; in early 1953, Strachan had argued the opposite, saying the Socreds

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<sup>80</sup> British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, *Debates of the Legislative Assembly* (hereafter DLA), 26 February 1975, 208.

<sup>81</sup> British Columbia, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Redefinition of Electoral Districts under the Public Inquiries Act British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1975), i (hereafter Norris Report). T. G. Norris had been a judge and a member of the Conservative party. He defeated W.A.C. Bennett for the Conservative nomination in South Okanagan in 1937, and he had nominated Herbert Anscomb at the party’s 1946 convention. Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 54-5, 86.

<sup>82</sup> Norris Report, 8-9.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-1; Greer, “Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978,” 38-9.

<sup>84</sup> Qualter, *The Election Process in Canada*, 90.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*; Greer, “Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978,” 38-9.

<sup>86</sup> Qualter, *The Election Process in Canada*, 90.

were retaining AV simply because it had elected them.<sup>87</sup> In 1973, Liberal Garde Gardom said BC had “been ruled by a minority” for too long, and that AV would elect representatives who were endorsed by a majority of voters. He believed the public would back this motion on principle.<sup>88</sup>

In 1975, J. V. Clyne, who had until recently served as the CEO of MacMillan Blodel, told the North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce that “in a truly democratic society the will of the majority should prevail.”<sup>89</sup> The divided non-socialist parties had helped elect the NDP “on the basis of only 39% of the total vote” in 1972, and Clyne advocated AV as a solution.<sup>90</sup> As a temporary measure, he suggested the parties collaborate to nominate one candidate per riding to defeat the NDP, setting their political interests aside “in order to maintain the economy of British Columbia on the basis of the wishes of the majority of voters.”<sup>91</sup> The Majority Movement, a group of anti-socialists who believed the free enterprise parties should unite into a single entity to oppose the NDP, promoted this very cause.<sup>92</sup> The organization was not endorsed by any of the party leaders, however, and Social Credit filled the role of an anti-NDP party instead.<sup>93</sup> Clyne certainly had his own business interests and political vision in mind when he spoke of electoral reform, and for these same reasons it is not surprising that the NDP’s Norris Commission had not been tasked with considering AV.

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<sup>87</sup> DLA, 14 March 1972, 804; Sessional Clipping Book, “CCF Member Asks Alternative Vote System Abolition,” 6 March 1953.

<sup>88</sup> DLA, 26 February 1975, 209.

<sup>89</sup> BCA, MS-1124, “An Address by the Honourable J. V. Clyne to the North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce,” 17 April 1975, 1. Clyne had been a BC Supreme Court judge from 1950 to 1957, before serving as the CEO of MacMillan Blodel from 1958 to 1972. *British Columbia Who’s Who: 1981* (Edmonton: L.U.L. Publications, 1981), 169. Clyne described himself as an active speaker on “parliamentary reform.” In particular, he believed the Senate “should be ... elected on a provincial basis.” J. V. Clyne, *Jack of All Trades: Memories of a Busy Life* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 295.

<sup>90</sup> BCA, MS-1124, “An Address by the Honourable J. V. Clyne to the North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce,” 17 April 1975, 2.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-5.

<sup>92</sup> Morley et al., *The Reins of Power*, 88.

<sup>93</sup> Scott Wallace, the leader of the BC Conservatives, had endorsed a temporary coalition in lieu of a unified party, but much like the Majority Movement this plan went nowhere. *Ibid.*, 88-9.

Ensuring majority representation by adhering to the Dauer-Kelsay index could help the NDP in future elections, whereas AV might hurt its electability.

The Norris recommendations were doomed when Barrett called a surprise election just five days before the report was due.<sup>94</sup> Prominent Liberal and Conservative MLAs had defected to Social Credit to form “a new anti-socialist coalition” under W.A.C.’s son, Bill Bennett, and the revamped Social Credit party defeated the NDP.<sup>95</sup> Had the election been delayed and the Norris Report’s recommendations implemented, the NDP might have taken an additional five seats, though Social Credit still would have won the election.<sup>96</sup> Bennett dismissed the Norris Report, saying it was foolish to adopt any changes with an election coming in the next three to four years.<sup>97</sup> He appointed another commission in 1978, which would use newly available census data that rendered the previous report obsolete.<sup>98</sup> The commission was led by L. S. Eckardt, a retired judge who had run as a Social Credit candidate in the 1966 election. Eckardt’s appointment reflected poorly on the alleged independent nature of the commission,<sup>99</sup> and the partisanship of the Eckardt Commission was more insidious than the Social Credit government’s obvious late-stage interference in 1966 and 1955. Indeed, geographer Dennis Rumley used previous election returns to show how the commission’s proposed boundary changes stood to benefit the Social Credit party

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<sup>94</sup> Greer, “Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978,” 40. The report was ordered to be kept secret, even from the NDP, until the election results were finalized. Lorne J. Kavic and Garry Brian Nixon, *The 1200 Days: A Shattered Dream: Dave Barrett and the NDP in BC 1972-75* (Coquitlam, BC: Kaen Publishers, 1978), 246.

<sup>95</sup> Barman, *The West Beyond the West*, 324. Bill Bennett was perceived as being “closest to the centre” of the Socred leadership candidates, which helped bring Liberals and Conservatives into the fold. His goals were “to demonstrate that Social Credit was the only alternative to the NDP,” and “to make the party a vehicle for the middle-class, middle-of-the-road voter.” Morley et al., *The Reins of Power*, 97-8. Overspending and a recession plagued the NDP government. It had also come under fire from organized labour for ordering striking pulp, paper, and retail employees back to work. Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 441-4.

<sup>96</sup> Kavic and Nixon, *The 1200 Days*, 235.

<sup>97</sup> Greer, “Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978,” 40.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 41; Ruff, “The Cat and Mouse Politics of Redistribution,” 62.

<sup>99</sup> Greer, “Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978,” 46.



in almost all instances.<sup>100</sup> The NDP considered the Eckardt Report a “disgusting” measure “designed to try and wipe [them] out.”<sup>101</sup> The new boundaries did away with the NDP ridings of Vancouver-Burrard and Revelstoke-Slocan, while adding three seats outside of Vancouver, one in northern BC, and one on northern Vancouver Island; the recommendations were quickly implemented.<sup>102</sup> Emery Barnes, one of the NDP MLAs for Vancouver Centre, called the selection of Eckardt and the redistribution proposals “a political game deliberately contrived to protect the government” and eliminate the NDP. He also attacked AV, which “[s]ome had suggested ... in order to ensure that the Social Credit Party or its friends got the second choices.”<sup>103</sup>

In addition to revising electoral boundaries, the commission had been tasked with “giv[ing] consideration to alternative methods of voting to those presently used within the Province and elsewhere.”<sup>104</sup> This commitment was due to the newfound Liberal presence in

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<sup>100</sup> Dennis Rumley, “Geography and Electoral Representation in British Columbia,” in *Geography and Society in a Global Context*, ed. Richard B. Le Heron, Mike Roche, and Mike Shepherd (Wellington, NZ: New Zealand Geographical Society, 1987), 162-7. The most egregious apparent gerrymander was known as “Gracie’s Finger.” An unusual extension of the Vancouver-Little Mountain riding into Vancouver-Point Grey brought accusations that Provincial Secretary and Vancouver-Little Mountain MLA Grace McCarthy had influenced Eckardt. The accusations resulted in an investigation, which “found no evidence of wrongdoing.” Subsequent inquiries were dropped by 1984. *Ibid.*, 164-6; Ruff, “The Cat and Mouse Politics of Redistribution,” 62-3. Attorney General Allan Williams claimed that Eckardt was not corrupt, and that the judge had in fact been “outraged” when the Social Credit campaign manager, Dan Campbell, allegedly attempted to influence his report through improper channels. Bob Plecas, *Bill Bennett: A Mandarin’s View* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2006), 137.

<sup>101</sup> DLA, 23 June 1978, 2603.

<sup>102</sup> Greer, “Redistribution of Seats in the British Columbia Legislature, 1952-1978,” 46; Dave Barrett and William Miller, *Barrett: A Passionate Political Life* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1995), 122-3. Bob Plecas notes that the report was tabled immediately in order to keep the NDP from accusing Social Credit of revising Eckardt’s recommendations. Plecas, *Bill Bennett*, 134.

<sup>103</sup> DLA, 23 June 1978, 2607.

<sup>104</sup> British Columbia, Royal Commission on Electoral Reform, *Interim Report on the Redefinition of Electoral Districts for the Province of British Columbia* (June 1978), 5 (hereafter Eckardt Report). The Eckardt commission hearings took place alongside the Task Force on Canadian Unity’s investigation of representational disparities at the federal level, including Liberal under-representation in the West. The final report, *A Future Together*, recommended a top-up system that would maintain “the current single-member constituency system because of the direct links it establishe[d] between the voter and his MP.” It would add 60 list-based seats allocated either provincially or nationally on the basis of the parties’ share of the popular vote. Appealing to the tradition of constituency representation was a common theme in discussions of electoral reform in Canada. Canada, Task Force on Canadian Unity, *A Future Together: Observations and Recommendations* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1979), 105-6.

Social Credit. Conservative MLA George Wallace alleged that former Liberal leader Pat McGeer, now the Social Credit Minister of Education, had insisted the Socreds commit to bringing in the alternative vote before he agreed to join the party. McGeer, said Wallace, had previously described AV as being “in the best interests of the voter and the best interests of British Columbia.”<sup>105</sup> Lending credence to Wallace’s claim is the fact that McGeer’s Liberal partner and fellow AV advocate, Garde Gardom, had joined Social Credit at the same time.<sup>106</sup> It appeared that McGeer and his fellow Socred converts had abandoned their strong line on AV since joining the party; however, Wallace still believed it was something British Columbians wished to see investigated.<sup>107</sup> The resurgence in the discussion of AV was a direct response to a split vote having elected the NDP in 1972.<sup>108</sup> With Social Credit growing stronger and the Liberal and Conservative organizations depleted, AV proved less attractive to the Liberal Socreds than it had from the outside looking in. Gordon Gibson, the new Liberal leader, called for a return to AV in 1977 along with a host of other democratic reforms. There would be better representation, he said, if MLAs were backed by a majority of voters.<sup>109</sup> Bill Bennett was willing to have the Eckardt Commission study AV, but he said there was a “[b]ig difference” between committing to study the system and implementing it wholesale.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> DLA, 30 June 1976, 3325-6.

<sup>106</sup> Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, 437. J. Terence Morley et al. note that the multiple Liberal and Conservative conversions were stage-managed and staggered to leave “the impression that there was a massive flood across party lines to Social Credit.” Regardless of the independence and timing of other conversions, McGeer and Gardom had quite likely requested AV as a concession. Morley et al., *The Reins of Power*, 98. In reply to the 1975 NDP throne speech, which included a commitment to electoral reform, Gardom said the alternative vote would improve democracy. He had made similar claims in 1972. DLA, 26 February 1975, 208; 14 March 1972, 803.

<sup>107</sup> DLA, 30 June 1976, 3326.

<sup>108</sup> Dennis Pilon, “Democracy BC-Style,” in *British Columbia Politics and Government*, ed. Michael Howlett, Dennis Pilon, and Tracy Summerville (Emond Montgomery Publications, 2009), 95-6.

<sup>109</sup> DLA, 18 January 1977, 89-90.

<sup>110</sup> DLA, 18 February 1977, 1084.

An investigation into AV fulfilled Social Credit's promise to the Liberal converts while withholding any actual change. The commission's public hearings nevertheless provide insight into what the commissioners, local and provincial politicians, and concerned members of the public thought about both electoral redistribution and the voting system.<sup>111</sup> Commission witnesses were encouraged to speak on the varied terms of reference, and it is apparent that the values ascribed to redistribution and the voting system overlapped. Those who attended the hearings were asked to fill out a survey, which included the following question:

Do you favour retaining the one person-one vote concept (as opposed to adopting the alternate or preferential method of voting or the repeated ballot concept)?<sup>112</sup>

“One person, one vote,” is a term more typically associated with redistribution and representation by population, but the language used here suggests a connection between FPTP and rep-by-pop.<sup>113</sup> If rep-by-pop was considered a foundational principle of Canadian democracy, then surely “one person-one vote” was the expression of this rule. By conflating preferential voting with a departure from one person-one vote, the commissioners were perhaps driving at their predetermined answer: FPTP was both in keeping with democratic traditions and it was able to consistently provide majority governments, an appealing prospect for Social Credit.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Despite the public hearings, the NDP questioned the openness of the commission. Said Emery Barnes, MLA for Vancouver Centre: “[R]epresentation ... is something that should be taken to the people, ... not decided by a one-man commission. ... [U]nless there is an open public forum ... in the same way we elect an ombudsperson and an auditor-general, we can't ever be satisfied with this problem.” DLA, 23 June 1978, 2609.

<sup>112</sup> Eckardt Report, 488. In a repeated ballot, or run-off system, after an initial X ballot the top vote-getters face off against one another in a second round of voting. This system was used in France and at party conventions.

<sup>113</sup> For an immediate connection between redistribution and “one person, one vote,” see, for instance, W. E. Lyons's work on the federal Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act of 1964. W. E. Lyons, *One Man — One Vote* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Company of Canada, 1970).

<sup>114</sup> The Liberals and Conservatives had combined for 11.1 per cent of the popular vote in the 1975 election. Social Credit and the NDP had received 49.25 and 39.16 per cent of the popular vote, respectively. Liberal and Conservative transfers might have elected additional Socred candidates under AV, but six of the past seven FPTP elections had returned Socred governments anyway, and the system appeared to be working. *Elections BC*, “Electoral History of British Columbia 1871 - 1986.”

Colonel Clive L. Rippon, Commission Counsel, frequently portrayed AV as a “complicated” system where little changed from the first count to the last.<sup>115</sup> When attacking AV he drew on the work of Terence Qualter, who noted the low number of trailing candidates who were elected on vote transfers in Alberta and British Columbia’s AV elections. AV, Rippon argued, was a waste of time.<sup>116</sup> People who were unaware of alternate systems were not likely to object to the commissioners’ criticisms of AV.<sup>117</sup> The complex survey question also ignored the possibility of proportional representation. PR came up during the public hearings, but the final report said a list system was inappropriate because British Columbians wanted to vote for an individual “who [would] represent their territorial interests”; STV was also off the table because it “suffer[ed] the drawback of minimal territorial representation.”<sup>118</sup> The necessity of representing resource-rich regions and the perception of the MLA as ombudsman were primary issues, though most witnesses thought rep-by-pop mattered to a degree. The commission concluded that “the geographic uniqueness of this Province” meant that “population should not be regarded as the only factor.”<sup>119</sup> The emphasis on a local representative did not in any way conflict with AV, which

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<sup>115</sup> BCA, Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 4, file 9, Public Hearings Volume 43, Lower Post, 7 June 1978, 3; *ibid.*, box 3, file 11, Public Hearings Volume 28, Penticton, 9 May 1978, 20.

<sup>116</sup> In the five provincial elections in Alberta between 1940 and 1955, only seven candidates who were trailing on the first count went on to win the rural AV contests, out of a total of 237 elected candidates. Qualter, *The Election Process in Canada*, 131, 137; BCA, Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 4, file 4, Public Hearings Volume 40, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 57. One witness protested that AV did make a difference, since it had elected Social Credit over the CCF in 1952. Rippon replied: “That was a change in three seats out of fifty,” to which the man said it was a significant change nonetheless. *Ibid.*, box 2, file 18, Public Hearings Volume 17-A, Victoria, 20 April 1978, 81-2.

<sup>117</sup> People could pass on the question if they wished, though they typically did not. *Ibid.*, box 4, file 8, Public Hearings Volume 42, Atlin, 7 June 1978, 16. In the written surveys one respondent erased an initial “YES” answer in favour of retaining FPTP and wrote “EXPLAIN.” Two other respondents noted which systems they favoured in lieu of AV when answering in the negative. One called it an “[a]mbiguous question” and favoured a two-round run-off system; another favoured proportional representation. Yet another respondent endorsed AV only if there was to be a “computerized voting system.” *Ibid.*, box 8, file 11, Opinion Poll, Kamloops, 9-1; *ibid.*, file 12, Opinion Poll, Penticton, 14-10; *ibid.*, file 14, Opinion Poll, Vancouver.

<sup>118</sup> Eckardt Report, 160. For similar assessments of list PR, see Qualter, *The Election Process in Canada*, 136; and F. A. Hermens, *Democracy or Anarchy? A Study of Proportional Representation* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1941), 54-5.

<sup>119</sup> Eckardt Report, 12.

applied to single-member districts; however, AV was presented in terms that conflicted with the values of witnesses who were primarily interested in talking about the importance of regional representation. Whether it was seen as confusing or a violation of democratic tradition, AV was readily dismissed. Because AV was only one aspect of the committee's investigation, it is not surprising that many people were not prepared to talk about it. There was still a lively debate on the issue, however, which shared many similarities with the values debates of the 1950s.

The anti-AV discourse at the public hearings was reminiscent of the charges made against the system in the 1950s. Some politicians at the time had worried that ranking candidates would confuse voters, and witnesses now volunteered that this was true. "We had it before," read a letter from a 92 year-old woman, who said AV was as complicated and unnecessary as the metric system. "The old people have enough problems now. Please leave as is. I vote for one party."<sup>120</sup> FPTP had "worked very well for a long time," said another brief, whereas AV had "an unsavoury reputation."<sup>121</sup> One of the Socred MLAs for Vancouver South agreed that it would confuse voters.<sup>122</sup>

Proponents of AV were quick to respond to these accusations. Former leader of the BC Liberals and ex-MLA David Anderson told the commission "[t]here [would] always be some people who [were] too stupid to understand it," but allowing for plumping would alleviate the problem.<sup>123</sup> Many witnesses acknowledged the failure of the system in 1952 and 1953, but argued that this need not be the case any longer. With the media of the 1970s the

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<sup>120</sup> BCA, Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 2, file 2, Public Hearings Volume 1, Vancouver, 16 March 1978, 32. An abridged version of her remarks can be found in the report. See Eckardt Report, 164.

<sup>121</sup> BCA, Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 2, file 2, Public Hearings Volume 1, Vancouver, 16 March 1978, 34.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., box 4, file 6, Public Hearings Volume 40-B, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 175. Harold Merrick, president of the Penticton Social Credit Constituency Association, said "a lot of things confuse [people over 50 years of age]." Ibid., box 3, file 11, Public Hearings Volume 28, Penticton, 9 May 1978, 45.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., box 2, file 17, Public Hearings Volume 17, Victoria, 20 April 1978, 37.

public education campaign could be much more effective than it had been in 1952, thereby addressing concerns about ballot spoilage and voter confusion.<sup>124</sup> Another man said AV could easily be taught in schools, familiarizing voters with the system before they cast their first vote.<sup>125</sup> J. V. Clyne also appeared before the commission. The delays of the 1952 election would be a thing of the past, he said, if ballot counting were turned over to computers.<sup>126</sup> He went on to say that Canadians were just as intelligent as voters who used non-FPTP systems around the world; calling AV confusing, he said, was “an ignorant criticism.” Pressed by Clyne, Rippon elaborated on this point:

[A voter] could undoubtedly mark [a ballot] 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 but I question whether he could make up his mind where to put his 2s, 3s, 4s and 5s. — with [the first choice] he can cope, he can put X there but when it gets down to choosing the second, third, fourth and fifth, your voter as he has represented himself to us, says he questions that.<sup>127</sup>

Clyne found it “incomprehensible ... that somebody would not be sufficiently intelligent to exercise a second vote,” but Rippon was giving voice to the public’s partisan approach to elections and representation.<sup>128</sup> AV was confusing not because the ranking process baffled voters, but because they wanted a single party to represent them, and a winner-take-all FPTP contest facilitated this process. High levels of plumping and the clear division between the old-line and protest parties in the 1952 election demonstrated voters’ ties to polarized politics. Eckardt said compulsion was necessary to make AV’s “absolute majority” workable, and he concluded that there was not “sufficient justification to interfere with a citizen’s right

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., box 3, file 15, Public Hearings Volume 33, Merritt, 12 May 1978, 41-2.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., box 4, file 6, Public Hearings Volume 40-B, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 199.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., file 4, Public Hearings Volume 40, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 57. Another man raised the same point at an earlier hearing. There was “no reason why that vote couldn’t be out in one night with computers,” he said. He called AV “the fairest way to vote.” He suggested it could unite right wing parties against a single left wing entity, just as it had done in 1952 and 1953. Ibid., box 2, file 13, Public Hearings Volume 13, Gabriola, 13 April 1978, 25.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., box 4, file 4, Public Hearings Volume 40, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 58-9.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 59.

to indicate that he considers only one of the candidates to be worthy of his vote.”<sup>129</sup>

Compulsion remained as unpopular as ever, and it was easy to dismiss AV by framing it in this light.<sup>130</sup> In the end, a full 77.19 per cent of those polled at the public hearings favoured the retention of FPTP over AV or a run-off system.<sup>131</sup>

The idea that AV would obscure minority representation had been the CCF’s main talking point in the 1950s, but it was not prevalent at the Eckardt hearings. In fact, Anthony Gargrave, who had served as the CCF/NDP MLA for Mackenzie from 1952 to 1966, said the first AV election was evidence that it “appear[ed] to favour small minority parties.”<sup>132</sup> This was certainly a revised impression of AV. He called “the principle of one man with one vote for one candidate in single-member ridings ... (1) simple; (2) direct; (3) prompt; (4) predictable; and (5) stabilizing.”<sup>133</sup> The Vice President of the BC Federation of Labour agreed with Gargrave, saying AV in 1952 had been “an undemocratic ruse” that allowed “a minority party, clearly and substantially in second place, ... to form the government.”<sup>134</sup> This memory was obviously influenced by the CCF’s loss to Social Credit on vote transfers, and it omits the fact that AV was known to limit minority representation. AV was intended to hurt the CCF in that regard, not to hand the election to a minority party of any kind.<sup>135</sup> To

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<sup>129</sup> Eckardt Report, 167-8.

<sup>130</sup> While W.A.C. Bennett did not make a presentation to the commission, he did maintain that “a person should have the right to vote or not to vote.” Additionally, he said he favoured “[j]ust a straight vote with an ‘x,’ and whoever [got] the largest vote in a riding would be declared elected.” BCA, T1675:0041-2, Mitchell, “Bennett Interview,” 28 March 1978, 9.

<sup>131</sup> Only 73 respondents opposed the retention of FPTP over AV or a run-off system, while 247 were in favour of retaining plurality voting. Eckardt Report, 167, 488.

<sup>132</sup> BCA, Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 2, file 2, Public Hearings Volume 1, Vancouver, 16 March 1978, 75.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. Gargrave had also spoken in favour of FPTP in 1953. He said he did not “think enough scorn [had] been heaped on the old-line parties for changing the rules of the game in the middle of the game.” Sessional Clipping Book, “Alternative Voting Held ‘Skulduggery,’” 23 September 1953.

<sup>134</sup> BCA, Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 4, file 5, Public Hearings Volume 40-A, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 80.

<sup>135</sup> Some witnesses criticized AV and FPTP’s effects on minority representation. One man’s brief accused majoritarian systems of “penaliz[ing] minorities,” and another individual borrowed from Alan Cairns to speak about the under-representation of “minority parties such as the N.D.P.” under plurality voting. The man citing Cairns favoured a mixed-member proportional system that would combine list PR and constituency

Rippon's mind, AV's proponents were predominantly supporters of the opposition parties, including the Liberals, Conservatives, and NDP.<sup>136</sup> Certainly Social Credit was doing fine without change. Any NDP support for AV may have been misguided, though, at least in terms of its potential effect on the party's seat count. Social Credit had returned to power in 1975 by bringing in prominent Liberal and Conservative members to oppose the NDP, and transfers may have repeated the free enterprise versus socialism pattern of 1953.

The alternative vote's effects on minority parties received little traction at the public hearings because most people were content to praise FPTP, rather than attack AV on any specific grounds. Commentary could be as brief as calling AV "a bunch of garbage," or saying "one person, one vote [was] the way it should be."<sup>137</sup> Others chose to ignore AV and speak about their pet voting systems. Frank Hollins, for example, of the NDP's Chilliwack Provincial Constituency Association, said there must be room for "minority groups, no matter how far they are out to left or right." While he was pleased with the election of an NDP government in 1972, he despised the system that elected it and favoured a mixed-member proportional system in the manner of West Germany.<sup>138</sup> The commission had placed PR and its ilk outside the realm of possibility, however. Liberal leader Gordon Gibson also favoured some form of PR, but he realized there was a better chance of

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representation. Ibid., box 2, file 16, Public Hearings Volume 16, Sidney, 19 April 1978, 6; *ibid.*, file 4, Public Hearings Volume 4, Chilliwack, 31 March 1978, 11, 14-6. For Cairns's main work on the subject, see Alan C. Cairns, "The Electoral System and the Party System in Canada, 1921-1965," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 1.1 (March 1968): 55-80. The mayor of Houston, BC, also questioned the distortions of FPTP, which had given the NDP a majority government in 1972 with a little over 39 per cent of the popular vote, but only 18 seats in 1975 with a comparable percentage. Ibid., box 3, file 4, Public Hearings Volume 21, Smithers, 27 April 1978, 12-3. At the hearings the man had said the difference was only 0.2 per cent, but in reality the drop off was 0.43 per cent of the votes cast. *Elections BC*, "Electoral History of British Columbia 1871 - 1986."

<sup>136</sup> BCA, Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 4, file 2, Public Hearings Volume 38, Courtenay, 24 May 1978, 32.

<sup>137</sup> David Stewart, who called AV "a bunch of garbage," subscribed to the confusion angle. "[P]eople can screw up the one vote easy enough," he said. "[D]on't give them any more." He was the chairman of the Squamish Chamber of Commerce. Ibid., box 2, file 14, Public Hearings Volume 14, Squamish, 14 April 1978, 32, 43.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., file 4, Public Hearings Volume 4, Chilliwack, 31 March 1978, 48-9, 46.



adopting AV or a run-off system, because PR was “further from our traditions.”<sup>139</sup> This emphasis on constituency representation was logical for a commission primarily focused on redistribution.

While talk about obscuring minorities was largely absent from the alternative vote discussion, praise for AV followed the same logic of majority representation espoused by the Liberals and Conservatives in the 1940s and 1950s. “[P]eople feel that a democracy means majority rule,” said one man, and “an MLA should represent the majority in his constituency and not simply the largest or most vocal minority.” He recalled that many British Columbians felt the NDP government had not represented them.<sup>140</sup> The BC Chamber of Commerce had passed a resolution in May 1977 based on the same argument. The organization feared that a minority of voters might elect a government, and it therefore “protest[ed] the [past] elimination of the alternative voting system.”<sup>141</sup> Another witness criticized both the NDP and Social Credit for their willingness “to rule as though they represent[ed] the majority,” despite never having won more than 50 per cent of the popular vote.<sup>142</sup> Even one avowed Socred found the idea that “a minor group of the people” could elect a government to be “morally wrong and destructive.”<sup>143</sup> J. V. Clyne told the commission that in the past seven elections a majority of MLAs had been elected with a

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., file 5, Public Hearings Volume 40-A, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 131.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., box 3, file 10, Public Hearings Volume 27, Kamloops, 5 May 1978, 28.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., box 2, file 2, Public Hearings Volume 1, Vancouver, 16 March 1978, 37.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., file 4, Public Hearings Volume 4, Chilliwack, 31 March 1978, 4. Harold Clarke et al. write the following on this issue: “When an election results in a government with a minority of the seats in Parliament, a mandate is generally viewed as having been denied by the voters. ... [M]ajority governments in Canada also often lack a mandate. They normally lack a majority of the total votes cast, and those they do get are usually heavily concentrated in certain regions of the country—so a *national* mandate is absent.” By this time Social Credit was well established in both rural and urban BC, so it cannot be said that it lacked a provincial mandate in the same sense, but it had certainly not obtained more than 50 per cent of the vote. It had come close, though, receiving 49.25 per cent of the popular vote in the 1975 election. Harold Clarke et al., *Absent Mandate: The Politics of Discontent in Canada* (Toronto: Gage Publishing, 1984), 182. Emphasis in original; *Elections BC*, “Electoral History of British Columbia 1871 - 1986.”

<sup>143</sup> BCA, Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 4, file 6, Public Hearings Volume 40-B, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 149.

minority of votes. These representatives “may not have been satisfactory to the majority of the voters ... as an alternative to the candidate for whom they voted,” he said.<sup>144</sup>

Ruling that AV improved representation could have fit nicely with the mandate of a commission focused on that very subject, but this was not the case. All of the above arguments for majority representation played into the commissioners’ anti-AV stance. Their report noted that majority representation under AV would not be possible without compulsion, but compulsion would have the undesirable effects of increasing the rate of spoiled ballots and robbing voters of the opportunity to plump.<sup>145</sup> Portraying AV as an affront to the franchise and traditions of democracy bolstered the idea that democratic representation in Canada meant plurality voting and a constituency representative. Majority representation had been a shaky argument at best in the 1950s, because there had been an expectation that many voters would plump, and AV was intended to improve democracy only in the sense that it would shut out the CCF. With the Eckardt Commission dismissing the case for AV as majority representation, choosing instead to focus on its limited impact on the final results, the arguments in favour of the system fell on deaf ears.

### **Local Representation and Plurality Voting in the Eckardt Commission**

FPTP was not immune from criticism during the hearings, and a common complaint was the polarization caused by plurality voting. Polarization was a recognized feature of politics in BC. The CCF-Coalition era of the 1940s had been replaced by a Social Credit-CCF divide in the 1950s with little viable middle ground. Gordon Gibson summed up the issue as follows: “the first past the post system pretty well forces people who may have views

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<sup>144</sup> Clyne listed the number of MLAs elected by a minority of the popular vote as follows: 31/50 (1956); 42/50 (1960); 40/50 (1963); 28/55 (1966); 36/55 (1969); 40/55 (1972); 28/55 (1975). *Ibid.*, file 4, Public Hearings Volume 40, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 63.

<sup>145</sup> Eckardt Report, 164-7.

that are shades of gray or different colours ... to choose between ... black and white.”<sup>146</sup>

This left little room for the Liberals in the Legislature.<sup>147</sup> Gibson lamented the opposition’s limited role in the governance of the province. FPTP and majority governments meant BC’s elections resulted in “a four-year elected dictatorship,” he said, and voters had gotten in the habit of casting votes against parties, which did not result in a proper mandate.<sup>148</sup> One man commented that FPTP “was designed for the days when basically there were only two parties.” FPTP forced people to vote for extremes, even if “their instincts [were] to vote for somewhere in the middle,” which they could do safely under AV.<sup>149</sup> One pro-FPTP witness said “the alternative ballot did more to polarize British Columbia than the coalition.”<sup>150</sup>

Polarization was certainly apparent in 1952, as those who did not plump often fell in with either the old-line camp or the protest parties; voters who plumped were wholly committed to polarized politics. While AV certainly did not create polarization, the preferential ballots had allowed polarized politics to continue unabated. Witnesses and Rippon agreed with Gibson, observing that people at present were “voting against [parties] rather than for [them],” but voters had also cast anti-Coalition and anti-CCF votes under AV.<sup>151</sup> “One of the big arguments in favour of the system as it is now,” said Rippon, “is that it provides a stable government in that there’s only two parties.”<sup>152</sup> One could argue about whether a two-party

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<sup>146</sup> BCA, Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 4, file 5, Public Hearings Volume 40-A, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 124.

<sup>147</sup> British Columbians did not limit themselves to two choices, and the Liberals consistently polled between 16 and 20 per cent of the popular vote from 1956 to 1972. Voters looking for a viable candidate, however, may have chosen not to cast a vote for the Liberals, even if that was their preferred party. This is the polarization Gibson was referring to, and this practice will be discussed in detail in the conclusion.

<sup>148</sup> DLA, 18 January 1977, 88, 90. Gibson also favoured citizen involvement in democracy, through the initiative, the referendum, and the recall. *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>149</sup> BCA, Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 3, file 1, Public Hearings Volume 18, Duncan, 21 April 1978, 17, 20.

<sup>150</sup> Eckardt Report, 163.

<sup>151</sup> BCA, Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 4, file 4, Public Hearings Volume 40, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 70; *ibid.*, file 5, Public Hearings Volume 40-A, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 90.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, box 3, file 8, Public Hearings Volume 25, Prince George, 3 May 1978, 7.

system truly provides stability, but it was certainly the norm in the BC Legislature.<sup>153</sup> While it was possible to envision a scenario under AV wherein the opposition parties united to defeat Social Credit in an anti-government campaign, under FPTP a divided opposition increased the likelihood of Socred victories.<sup>154</sup> Plurality voting had lasted so long, said Gibson, because “the gate keepers to reform, namely the government of the day, are the very people that would be most injured by a change in the electoral system.”<sup>155</sup>

Politicians defended both FPTP and constituency representation. When criticizing PR, Rippon asked whom voters would look to as their MLA in such a system.<sup>156</sup> A Prince George alderwoman said she was “very, very concerned about regional representation in the province,” which made a mixed constituency and list system out of the question.<sup>157</sup> Another witness defended a mixed system because it maintained a degree of constituency representation. “[L]ocal MLAs,” he said, were “absolutely essential to people who live in small communities.”<sup>158</sup> A PR advocate said that in a multi-member STV district, “all those 4 to 7 members would be local representatives.”<sup>159</sup> There was no shaking the attachment to local representation, regardless of its importance (or lack thereof) come election time. The NDP MLA for Rossland-Trail said FPTP was “patterned ... after the British parliamentary system,” and “any deviation from this tradition [was] likely to be short lived, confusing,

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<sup>153</sup> The replacement of one party with another in subsequent majority governments may result in “policy swings” that are, in fact, a mark of instability. The three-year NDP government of 1972 would be one such example. Pilon, *The Politics of Voting*, 139.

<sup>154</sup> At the time, AV would have had little effect. Following the exodus to Social Credit, the Liberal party only ran five candidates in the 1979 election and polled 0.47 per cent of the popular vote. The Conservatives received 5.06 per cent of the votes. The NDP and Social Credit were close enough in the popular vote that transfers could have made a difference, but the impact would not have been as large as it might have been in previous years. *Elections BC*, “Electoral History of British Columbia 1871 - 1986.”

<sup>155</sup> BCA, Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 4, file 5, Public Hearings Volume 40-A, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 123.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, box 3, file 4, Public Hearings Volume 21, Smithers, 27 April 1978, 30.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, file 8, Public Hearings Volume 25, Prince George, 3 May 1978, 7.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, box 2, file 4, Public Hearings Volume 4, Chilliwack, 31 March 1978, 16.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, box 4, file 2, Public Hearings Volume 38, Appendix “B,” Exhibit 144, W. H. Hooper, “Is there a Better System of Voting?” 7.

expensive to administrate and of demonstrable benefit to no one.”<sup>160</sup> FPTP and constituency representation enjoyed the privilege of tradition, which imparted value. After the Eckardt recommendations came to light, Kenneth Mair, the Socred MLA for Kamloops, lamented the fact that his riding would become the second largest in terms of both size and population. The Okanagan was “entitled to another seat,” he said, but on the whole “it [was] a fair, unbiased and balanced report.”<sup>161</sup> Diluted local representation was a practical concern for anyone looking to advance a region’s interests, and the MLA-as-ombudsman line of reasoning prevailed, alongside the voting system that brought those members to power.

Dual-member ridings were an interesting exception to the idea of a single local member. Indeed, a self-described political scientist told the commission that dual-member ridings violated the principle of representation by population by giving some urban voters more votes than their rural counterparts.<sup>162</sup> They were nonetheless defended at the public hearings on the grounds that breaking them up would fragment areas with “a strong community feeling.”<sup>163</sup> While 56.75 per cent of those polled at the public hearings favoured the abolition of multi-member ridings, the commission concluded that this was not a mandate to move to single-member districts province wide. It recommended that Victoria’s boundaries simply be extended to bring it in line with the average population of 44,000 per member; Surrey was to become a dual-member district as a means of addressing its high population.<sup>164</sup> Dividing urban ridings into single-member districts risked making them “of a postage stamp type” and deviating from the idea of community representation.<sup>165</sup> There were

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., box 3, file 18, Public Hearings Volume 36, Rossland, 18 May 1978, 23.

<sup>161</sup> DLA, 23 June 1978, 2605-6.

<sup>162</sup> BCA, Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 4, file 5, Public Hearings Volume 40-A, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 95-6.

<sup>163</sup> Eckardt Report, 13.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>165</sup> The commission considered why Canada and other provinces had abolished or retained dual-member ridings, but it concluded that British Columbia’s concerns were unique. Canada had abolished its last dual-

logical arguments leveled against dual-member ridings, however. The Vice President of the BC Federation of Labour called for their elimination, because a split riding might elect candidates from different parties, thereby producing “a more democratic result”; another man agreed that they could obscure the representation of minorities.<sup>166</sup> The Saanich Conservative Association also endorsed single-member ridings and FPTP.<sup>167</sup> Defending the presence of dual-member ridings, however, was a simple matter of the commission citing a rep-by-region approach and adjusting the boundaries to better suit rep-by-pop.

At the public hearing in Atlin, the attendees called out “[o]ne person, one vote” in turn when asked about their feelings on retaining FPTP.<sup>168</sup> Plurality voting was bound up with the principle of constituency representation, to which AV would add nothing. The primary purpose of the hearings, for a number of witnesses, was to argue for the necessity of their unique local representation.<sup>169</sup> While one brief in Vancouver advised the commissioners to “assist the province in moving towards representation by population,” another man said BC “should move along” from rep-by-pop in order to address northern fears of Lower Mainland dominance.<sup>170</sup> Citizens and politicians defended the principle of local representation in the Legislature, but how that representative was chosen, and whether or not he or she represented the political beliefs of the constituents, was secondary. For those who saw MLAs as ombudsmen, simply having an MLA for their region was the primary

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member federal ridings in 1966. Nova Scotia, which had two dual-member ridings, was said to be responding to “religious, economic and ... language” concerns, just as New Brunswick had been when it had used dual-member ridings. PEI, with all dual-member ridings, was also called “unique.” Ibid., 79-80.

<sup>166</sup> BCA, Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 4, file 5, Public Hearings Volume 40-A, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 80; *ibid.*, box 2, file 2, Public Hearings Volume 1, Vancouver, 16 March 1978, 32-3.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, box 8, file 3, Barbara Butler, President Saanich and The Islands Provincial P.C. Association, to Royal Commission on Electoral Reform, 13 April 1978.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, box 4, file 8, Public Hearings Volume 42, Atlin, 7 June 1978, 32-3.

<sup>169</sup> The NDP MLA for Atlin, Frank Calder, said “there [was] no way one [could] achieve an equitable redistribution when the population in the province [was] concentrated between the 51<sup>st</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> parallels.” He believed the 60,600 square miles of his constituency warranted a representative. *Ibid.*, file 6, Public Hearings Volume 40-B, Vancouver, 210, 204.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, box 2, file 2, Public Hearings Volume 1, Vancouver, 16 March 1978, 33; *ibid.*, box 4, file 6, Public Hearings Volume 40-B, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 202.

concern. Elections, which determined what party would represent the region, were a separate issue. Rep-by-pop and rep-by-region may have been fundamentally different approaches, but redistribution commissions' desire to balance these principles showcased the importance of electoral representation itself, an idea many British Columbians tied to a working plurality system.

## **Conclusion**

British Columbia's redistribution schemes provide a window into the partisan machinations of government, but they also allow an examination of the values ascribed to political representation. The Angus, Norris, and Eckardt commissions all focused on both rep-by-pop and local representation. The importance of constituency representation was at odds with the ideal of representation by population, and it dominated these commissions' public hearings. A number of voters equated first-past-the-post with fairness and representative government, dissociating the presence of a representative from how that member was elected. At the Eckardt Commission hearings, "one person, one vote" encompassed not representation by population, but plurality voting. The commission did not rely on active resistance to reform to advance its agenda, but rather comfort with the status quo. The cognitive gap between local representation and the voting system demonstrates that the value of majority representation was trumped by constituency representation and FPTP. Just as the alternative vote was summarily dismissed following the 1952 and 1953 elections, AV was not seen as a substantial improvement to representative government in the 1970s.

## Conclusion – British Columbia and the Alternative Vote in Context

It is clear that the alternative vote (AV) was introduced and abolished for partisan reasons in British Columbia, against the backdrop of a public that favoured first-past-the-post (FPTP) and local representation. While the exact details of AV's history in British Columbia are unique, using relevant theory and external cases of electoral reform to situate the BC example within a broader context is a useful exercise. Looking at BC's use of the alternative vote, one finds strong evidence to back up a party-centric approach to voting system change, a common theme in the secondary literature. On the other hand, there appears to be little correlation between modern arguments in favour of AV and the realities of its trial in BC.

An important part of electoral reform literature has been the long-running debate over the effects of the party system on the electoral system, and vice versa. These systems are in fact linked, and neither dominates, but the debate can help to explain under what circumstances a government might move towards AV. When looking at an individual instance of reform, such as AV in British Columbia, historical details prove far more informative than attempts to claim that either the electoral or party system was the catalyst for change. FPTP helped sustain the two-party system in BC, but the CCF's threat to that system spurred electoral reform; neither the voting system nor the party system should be privileged to the exclusion of the other. Rational choice theory and a "seat-maximizing model," proposed by Kenneth Benoit, can be used as a general framework for actual electoral system changes.<sup>1</sup> Politicians and political parties interact with the system they are given, and they may seek change if it is no longer serving their best interests.

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Benoit, "Models of Electoral System Change," *Electoral Studies* 23 (2004): 373-4.



A historical look at elite-centred change contrasts sharply with recent reformist literature. A resurgence in activism in the 1990s has gone hand in hand with a growing body of work that extols the virtues of alternate electoral systems and criticizes, at least in the Canadian context, plurality voting. Canada is one of the few remaining large democracies to use FPTP, and as such treatises on proportional representation (PR) are numerous. The focus of this thesis has been the alternative vote, a majoritarian system that was not intended to improve proportionality, but electoral reform debates share common themes, and to discount the vast body of PR literature would be short-sighted.

In modern AV literature, it is often claimed that the system can result in centrist, coalition-building politics. While this may have been true elsewhere, this was not the case in BC. AV was nevertheless designed to counteract changes to the party system by uniting ideologically similar groups, and it is also worth examining the related process of literal coalition building from a rational choice perspective. Rationality in this sense assumes that political parties will make choices that will allow them to operate effectively within a government. Changing the number of parties through coalition was a means to hold onto power while leaving the electoral system intact, and the available literature on coalition formation is useful in explaining the Liberal and Conservative parties' manipulation of the party system. Rationality can even be seen in the early decisions to adopt the single transferable vote (STV) in western Canadian municipalities, and in more recent referenda on voting systems in Canada and abroad.

This chapter will conclude by looking at more recent attempts at electoral reform. Of particular interest is the BC Citizens' Assembly of 2004, which decided that STV fit best with British Columbians' political values. These values included local representation, which

demonstrates the persistence of this idea in BC. Even within the bounds of proportional representation discourse, FPTP's tradition of constituency representation has endured.

Politicians deal in their own brand of rhetoric regarding FPTP and representational democracy, and in BC the alternative vote and other systems were discussed in terms of democratic values, most notably majority and constituency representation. These values debates can be criticized as obscuring the true motives of electoral reform, because that is exactly what they were intended to do. In order to convince the public that the alternative vote was just, politicians appealed to representational ideals and often glossed over the ramifications of a system for parties' seat counts, on the grounds that majority representation was fair. The BC CCF opposed AV, and it was attacked for wanting to be elected on a minority vote. This possibility had always been a troubling feature of FPTP, and it was now portrayed as an undemocratic one. It is apparent that the weight placed on principles such as local representation obscured the fact that these issues were less important than is often claimed; preserving the established two-party system was the governing parties' end goal. Throughout this chapter, I borrow from existing electoral reform literature to argue that Benoit's seat-maximizing model is applicable to BC's adoption of the alternative vote. The themes of seat-maximizing and local representation have remained consistent throughout British Columbia's history with electoral reform.

### **Party and Electoral Systems**

Maurice Duverger's *Political Parties* has had an incredible impact on electoral systems literature. Duverger's conclusion that plurality and majoritarian voting may create two-party systems became known as "Duverger's Law." He hedges his arguments by saying that party systems and electoral systems impact upon each other, and that FPTP simply "*tends* to the

creation of a two-party system inside the individual constituency,” but many scholars have taken his hypothesis and applied it to national systems to examine its validity.<sup>2</sup>

Canada holds a special place as an alleged exception to Duverger’s Law, given that it is an FPTP nation with, at present, a multi-party system. Scholars have responded by claiming that Canadian elections are two-party contests at the provincial or constituency level, where Duverger’s principles are more easily applied.<sup>3</sup> It seems logical that individual races could become two-party affairs, because voters may not wish to “waste” their votes on losing candidates. This was BC Liberal party leader Gordon Gibson’s concern in the 1970s: he believed voters would gravitate towards Social Credit and NDP candidates because those parties could more conceivably win ridings and form a government.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the BC Liberals managed to take between 16 and 20 per cent of the popular vote from 1956 to 1972. Indeed, Brian Gaines, in a thorough analysis of voting returns, conclusively demonstrates that Canadian elections have been multi-party contests at every level.<sup>5</sup> Legislatures have often been essentially bipartisan, but this is typically due to the distortions of FPTP.

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<sup>2</sup> Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*, trans. Barbara and Robert North (London: Methuen & Co., 1954), 243, 223. Emphasis added. The corollary to this law is that PR tends to be affiliated with multi-party systems. William H. Riker observes that Duverger “distinguished sharply between the law and the hypothesis,” the latter being PR’s association with multipartism. They “had often been mistakenly interpreted as duals of each other.” Riker also points out that “Duverger’s Law” was nothing new, as Henry Droop had made the same argument in 1881. “[T]he two opposing parties into which we find politicians divided in each of these countries [United Kingdom, United States, etc.],” said Droop, “*have been formed and are kept together by majority* [i.e., plurality] *voting*.” William H. Riker, “The Two-Party System and Duverger’s Law: An Essay on the History of Political Science,” *American Political Science Review* 76.4 (December 1982): 758, 756. Emphasis Riker’s.

<sup>3</sup> This argument has been a common one. In their article on how to predict the number of parties in a given system, for instance, Rein Taagepera and Bernard Grofman mention this explanation of Canada’s exceptionalism without criticism or evidence. Rein Taagepera and Bernard Grofman, “Rethinking Duverger’s Law: Predicting the Effective Number of Parties in Plurality and PR Systems—Parties Minus Issues Equals One,” in *Representation and Electoral Systems: Canadian Perspectives*, ed. J. Paul Johnston and Harvey E. Pasis (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1990), 302.

<sup>4</sup> British Columbia Archives, Commission on Electoral Reform, 1978, GR-0564, box 4, file 5, Royal Commission on Electoral Reform, Proceedings at Public Hearings Volume 40-A, Vancouver, 26 May 1978, 124.

<sup>5</sup> Brian J. Gaines, “Duverger’s Law and the Meaning of Canadian Exceptionalism,” *Comparative Political Studies* 32.7 (October 1999): 842, 847.

Though electoral systems may not reliably determine the number of parties, FPTP nevertheless assists in maintaining a two-party system nationally, but not in the sense of effective parties, of which there are more than two.<sup>6</sup> Rather, FPTP has helped to limit the possibility of forming a single party government to the Liberals and Conservatives. A federal variant of Gibson's complaint about two-party politics is that FPTP has inflated the representation of the Liberals, Conservatives, and Bloc Québécois, while under-representing the NDP and the Greens. Alan Cairns addresses this idea in his seminal work on FPTP's consequences for the regionalization of Canadian parties.<sup>7</sup> Far too much effort has been expended in finding examples that prove or disprove Duverger's Law, when the most important lesson is perhaps not whether the party system has shaped the electoral system, or vice versa (Cairns privileges the latter), but to look at how they act upon each other in a given circumstance. Considering the pre-existing party landscape and the mood of the electorate is important if one is concerned with the change itself. Neither the alternative vote nor proportional representation was ever used at the federal level, but voters were able to interact with PR in western municipalities, and with AV in Alberta, Manitoba, and British Columbia. In BC one finds that a familiarity with two-party politics and FPTP dissuaded voters from engaging with an alternate system. Municipal PR was introduced and dismissed

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<sup>6</sup> The number of effective parties is usually based on each party's seat share and the possibility of that party participating in a governing coalition. Various formulas all consistently put the number of effective Canadian parties over two, but less than the four that one currently finds in the House of Commons. Arend Lijphart, for example, calculates Canada's mean number of effective parties between 1945 and 1996 as 2.37. Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 65 ff., 77.

<sup>7</sup> To cite one of Cairns's examples, in 1945 the CCF received over 100,000 more votes in Ontario than it did in Saskatchewan, but it elected zero and eighteen candidates in those provinces, respectively. This regionalization has limited the prospects of parties that have national support but are unable to obtain a plurality of votes outside of certain regions or urban centres. Alan C. Cairns, "The Electoral System and the Party System in Canada, 1921–1965," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 1.1 (March 1968): 61. Cairns has been accused of being too critical in his related allegation that FPTP has failed to provide effective governments; however, he is in good company with his arguments on the regional distortions inherent in the system. See, respectively, J.A.A. Lovink, "On Analysing the Impact of the Electoral System on the Party System," in *Representation and Electoral Systems*, ed. Johnston and Pasis, 338; and Dennis Pilon, *The Politics of Voting: Reforming Canada's Electoral System* (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2007), 36.

for political reasons, but not before voters had a chance to agree that it was complicated and accomplished little. AV, too, provoked a similar negative response.

A hybrid model portraying the electoral and party systems as inherently complementary is a logical conclusion. Josep Colomer argues that the number of parties in a given system may dictate what electoral system it gravitates towards (with large parties favouring FPTP-style systems, for instance), but at the same time he acknowledges the impact of the electoral system on the number of parties: the two are forever intertwined.<sup>8</sup> This idea is already present in Duverger, who stated that “the party system and the electoral system are two realities that are indissolubly linked and even difficult sometimes to separate by analysis,” and that, “although the electoral system influences the organization of parties, this in its turn influences the system.”<sup>9</sup> His attempt to separate the two properties and posit a “law” provoked much debate, but straining to conclude that either the electoral system or the party system exerts more influence on the other is a pointless exercise. The electoral system helps determine what parties are elected, the parties typically choose systems that will keep them in power, and those systems determine what parties are elected, ad infinitum. Giovanni Sartori made strides in this respect by departing from quantitative variations on Duverger in favour of qualitative rules: FPTP cannot create a two-party system, he argues, but it can maintain one.<sup>10</sup> This is an appropriate reading of how the party system and FPTP

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<sup>8</sup> Josep M. Colomer, “The Strategy and History of Electoral System Choice,” in *Handbook of Electoral System Choice*, ed. Josep M. Colomer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> Duverger, *Political Parties*, 204, 243. Pilon notes this same waffling while pointing out that Duverger’s section on voting systems amounts to a “brief treatment” within his larger study of political parties. He adds that Duverger did not believe voting systems were a “driving power” unto themselves, but could only act as a “brake” or “accelerator” when it came to influencing the number of parties, with “ideology and socio-economic structure” being far more important. Dennis Pilon, “Why Voting Systems Change: Electoral Reform in Western Industrialized Countries” (Ph.D. diss., York University, 2005), 7. H.C.J. Phillips also notes Duverger’s argument about voting systems acting as brakes or accelerators, an idea that is in keeping with the general thrust of his dissertation. H.C.J. Phillips, “Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974” (Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario, 1976), 22-3.

<sup>10</sup> Giovanni Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry into Structures, Incentives and Outcomes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (London: MacMillan Press, 1997), 48, 40.

have interacted in Canada. Given AV's close ties to FPTP, Sartori's conclusion is an important one, because the alternative vote can also be employed to maintain an essentially two-party contest in response to a burgeoning multi-party system.

The party system remains an important part of any discussion on voting systems. In his history of the rise of the CCF and Social Credit in British Columbia, Thomas Sanford neatly summarizes the development of the party system in BC in the 1940s and 1950s. He describes it as a one-time three-party system, with the Liberals, Conservatives, and the CCF in competition, prior to the emergence of a two-party system in 1941, with the CCF sitting in opposition to the Coalition.<sup>11</sup> The party system dynamic prior to 1952 was clearly divided between the free enterprise Liberals and Conservatives and the socialist CCF. The interplay between the party and electoral systems in BC is therefore quite clear: with the breakup of the Coalition in the offing, the Liberals and Conservatives believed that the CCF could form a government with a minority of the votes. In a true two-party system the CCF's numbers would not have been enough to carry an election, but with the Conservatives and Liberals running on their own under FPTP, the odds of a CCF victory in 1952 were high.

The Liberals and Conservatives had continued their partnership to stop the CCF from forming a government, but the altered party system eventually necessitated a revised electoral system, and AV was introduced to stand in for the defunct coalition. The plan worked in the sense that the CCF lost, but the Coalition could not prevail due to the presence of Social Credit. Years of two-party politics encouraged voters to take a polarized approach to elections. When coupled with the Coalition's internal problems and the public's dissatisfaction with the old-line parties, this meant that many voters were not interested in ranking multiple candidates. Majority representation was intended to appeal to the public,

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Michael Sanford, "The Politics of Protest: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and Social Credit League in British Columbia" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1961), xiv.

especially voters of an anti-socialist persuasion, but a sizable portion of the electorate chose to rank a single candidate, or only two. Familiarity with two-party politics under FPTP dissuaded voters from ranking multiple candidates, and it was clear that they preferred plurality voting. The electoral system could not change the actual number of parties, but it may have determined the government, because Social Credit won on transfers in 1952. W.A.C. Bennett used the popular opposition to AV, which was also fueled by the system's built-in delays and voter confusion, to justify its abolition.

The events described above fit neatly with established theory. Harold Jansen concludes that AV in BC was “a response to, not the cause of, the changing nature of the party system.”<sup>12</sup> This can be taken as a simple inversion of Duverger, with the party system influencing the electoral system, but it proves more useful as Jansen does not dismiss Duverger, but rather fills a gap in his work.<sup>13</sup> Jansen argues that voters can vote honestly for third parties under AV knowing that their votes will count on transfers, and consequently there is not the same downward pressure on the number of parties that exists under FPTP.<sup>14</sup> AV's ability to work with multipartism could help to explain the first count successes for Social Credit in 1952: even if voters did not expect a sweeping Socred victory, they could still allocate their second preferences to an established party, typically the CCF.<sup>15</sup> In their history

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<sup>12</sup> Harold J. Jansen, “The Political Consequences of the Alternative Vote: Lessons from Western Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 37.3 (September 2004): 654.

<sup>13</sup> Duverger does not address the alternative vote in *Political Parties*. He says AV in Australia is “more like a two-ballot system” than FPTP, “by allowing a regrouping of the scattered votes.” Duverger, *Political Parties*, 218. This is not a wholly accurate comparison, because there are obvious differences between the systems, in particular the re-voting process in a true run-off election. “[T]o argue that the double ballot is a variant of the alternative vote,” writes Sartori, “is like arguing ... that an eagle is a variant of a fly.” Run-off voting “requires only a plurality,” does not involve ranked ballots, and “allow[s] voters to change their vote.” Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering*, 63.

<sup>14</sup> Jansen, “The Political Consequences of the Alternative Vote,” 651-2.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Gaines speculates that some of Canada's multipartism can be attributed to its experiments with AV and STV. However, Jansen shows that even though AV did not limit the number of parties, during the period it was used in Alberta and Manitoba there was a general rise in the number of parties elsewhere. Therefore, this increase cannot be attributed to electoral experimentation alone. Gaines, “Duverger's Law and the Meaning of Canadian Exceptionalism,” 858; Jansen, “The Political Consequences of the Alternative Vote,” 653-4.

of the party system in BC, Alan Cairns and Daniel Wong observe that AV's success hinged on the Liberals and Conservatives getting the public to accept a two-party division in a multi-party landscape.<sup>16</sup> This was a logical strategy, but the emergence of Social Credit upset their election plans. AV thus responded to the changing party system *and* helped to shape it by facilitating a Socred victory. Neither the electoral nor the party system should be privileged.

### **Rationality in Electoral Reform and Coalition Formation**

That politicians and political parties will act to ensure their electability is not surprising. It might follow that a discussion of rationality in electoral reform would be pointless, but recent events suggest that it is not. The BC Liberal government's 2003 commitment to turn over the discussion of voting systems to a Citizens' Assembly — and to twice put the matter to a referendum — hardly seems rational, especially in light of the Assembly's unexpected STV proposal. Elsewhere, New Zealand's 1993 referendum and the introduction of a mixed-member proportional system also seem illogical at first glance, since neither major party wanted change. In both scenarios the governing parties arrived at referenda due to campaign promises, born out of Liberal dissatisfaction with FPTP in BC and two-party brinksmanship on electoral reform in New Zealand, which had been growing in popularity.<sup>17</sup> In neither case did the parties expect their referenda to pass.<sup>18</sup> A bottom-up, direct democracy approach to politics, one out of the hands of politicians, would complicate the issue of electoral reform. Putting changes to a public vote is not a new concept, and

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<sup>16</sup> Alan C. Cairns and Daniel Wong, "Socialism, Federalism and the B.C. Party Systems 1933–1983," in *Party Politics in Canada*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Hugh G. Thorburn (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1990), 476.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon Gibson, ed., *Fixing Canadian Democracy* (Vancouver: The Fraser Institute, 2003), 56; Jack H. Nagel, "New Zealand: Reform by (Nearly) Immaculate Design," in *Handbook of Electoral System Choice*, 534.

<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the BC Liberals took steps to ensure STV would not pass, imposing a super-majority requirement of 60 per cent support. See British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, *Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 30 April 2003, 6357; 13 May 2004, 11098.



plebiscites on STV were standard practice in the early twentieth century in western Canadian municipalities.<sup>19</sup> Putting the electoral system in the hands of the people seems inherently dangerous for parties interested in self-preservation, so reaffirming elite domination and rationality in the reform process is a worthwhile exercise.

George Tsebelis has dedicated an entire book to irrational actions in politics. His thesis, naturally, is that seemingly irrational actions are in fact entirely rational. He concludes that apparently “suboptimal” choices only appear as such because politicians and parties are working on more than one level at a time, operating within government and engaging with the electorate simultaneously. Tsebelis begins by introducing and defending an assumption of rationality: “human activity is goal oriented,” he says, and “individual and institutional actors try to maximize their goal achievement.”<sup>20</sup> Tsebelis’s logic can be applied to the referenda cited above, both of which were the fulfillment of campaign promises designed to pay dividends with a portion of the electorate while not changing the governmental process.

If acting rationally in politics entails maximizing one’s potential gains, then changing the rules of the electoral system is certainly one way to accomplish this. Josep Colomer depicts politicians as “risk averse” actors who will change the electoral system to keep from being shut out entirely, which is a consistent theme in the literature.<sup>21</sup> This process was certainly evident in the adoption of AV in BC. Politicians who are out of office, however, are

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<sup>19</sup> See Dennis Pilon, “The Drive for Proportional Representation in British Columbia, 1917-23” (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1994); and J. Paul Johnston and Miriam Koene, “Learning History’s Lessons Anew: The Use of STV in Canadian Municipal Elections,” in *Elections in Australia, Ireland, and Malta under the Single Transferable Vote*, ed. Shaun Bowler and Bernard Grofman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 205-47.

<sup>20</sup> Tsebelis’s work is based around game theory, and he refers to the multiple levels that politicians must engage with as “nested games.” George Tsebelis, *Nested Games: Rational Choice in Comparative Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 4-7.

<sup>21</sup> Colomer, “The Strategy and History of Electoral System Choice,” 7. See also Patrick Dunleavy and Helen Margetts, “Understanding the Dynamics of Electoral Reform,” *International Political Science Review* 16.1 (January 1995): 12.

typically more eager for change than those in office.<sup>22</sup> This observation has been confirmed through a survey of politicians from a variety of nations, the results of which show that elected members, and members of the governing party more specifically, are more likely to prefer the system that elected them, whereas losing candidates are more likely to favour change.<sup>23</sup> A practical example of this phenomenon is the BC Liberals' abandonment of their PR platform after they elected a government in 1916. Kenneth Benoit also favours an active image of political parties. He draws on Tsebelis's thoughts on rationality to argue that parties will change institutions in order to "transfor[m] their strategies into outcomes."<sup>24</sup> He is critical of scholarship that examines the effects of systems that are already in place, which tends to portray elites as motionless while ignoring their ability to reshape institutions as needed. Benoit privileges the individual circumstances behind any given change in lieu of an all-encompassing theory, but after presenting a variety of different situations under which systems might change, he argues that a "seat-maximizing model" is fitting. The electoral system will typically not change unless the parties in power stand to improve their seat share under a different system.<sup>25</sup>

The seat-maximizing model is an excellent summation of politicians' rational approach to electoral institutions. Benoit accounts for the possibility of coalitions enacting such changes, but the actual formation of coalitions within a given party system falls outside the scope of his analysis. Manipulating the party system is another means to hold onto power outside of electoral reform. Because AV in BC was designed as a means to achieve

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<sup>22</sup> Phillips, "Challenges to the Voting System in Canada, 1874 – 1974," 226; Harold J. Jansen, "The Single Transferable Vote in Alberta and Manitoba" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1998), 398.

<sup>23</sup> Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan, and Jeffrey A. Karp, "Why Politicians Like Electoral Institutions: Self-Interest, Values, or Ideology?," *Journal of Politics* 68.2 (May 2006): 441-2.

<sup>24</sup> Benoit, "Models of Electoral System Change," 364.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 367-74.

coalition results without the traditional formalities of cooperation, a discussion of coalition formation is warranted.

In 1977, Arend Lijphart declared “consociational democracy” the best solution to provide effective governance in divided societies. At the centre of his proposal was the grand coalition, which would involve elite cooperation, majority decision-making, proportionality of representation within the coalition, and a mutual veto.<sup>26</sup> Lijphart believed his ideal coalitions would “depoliticize segmental divergences” (class, religious, or language divides) after perhaps initially exacerbating a nation’s divisions.<sup>27</sup> Rationality can be seen in coalition building when parties compromise in order to take part in government, rather than remaining in opposition. BC Conservative party leader Robert Maitland’s 1941 grand coalition proposal likely would not have approached Lijphart’s ideal due to the inclusion of a potentially uncooperative CCF. Indeed, the CCF had no interest in joining a grand coalition for fear of losing its independent, alternative voice.<sup>28</sup> Lijphart’s mutual veto stipulation is intended to encourage compromise and keep parties from being subsumed by the dominant forces of the coalition, but it is doubtful that a coalition including the CCF would have been functional.

Lijphart gradually reworked his consociational democracy vision into the more all-encompassing and idealistic notion of “consensus democracy,” wherein he attempts to account for the existence of larger than necessary coalitions. In order to maximize governing power, a “minimal winning coalition” — one with just enough seats to hold a majority — appears to make the most sense from the perspective of the largest party involved. However, Lijphart finds that larger than necessary coalitions are the norm, and he attributes this to

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<sup>26</sup> Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 25, 31, 38.

<sup>27</sup> He held out particular hope for this model in third world democracies. *Ibid.*, 238, 71, 228.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Robin, *Pillars of Profit: The Company Province 1934-1972* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), 64-5.

parties aligning based on policy concerns, rather than simply out of a desire to maximize one's power.<sup>29</sup> The 1941 Liberal-Conservative Coalition was of the "minimal-winning" variety in the sense that the Conservatives were the smallest party that could join with the Liberals to form a majority government. Regardless, its relatively long life was made possible by the parties' similar ideologies. The CCF was quite content to serve as the opposition, and Independent Labour member Tom Upphill also remained outside of the government. Larger coalitions, for Lijphart, imply greater cooperation and perhaps more centrist policymaking. Aligning with like-minded parties to enact policy is in keeping with a rational choice model, despite the abandonment of a strict winner-takes-all approach in favour of more cooperative politics. Coalition politics offer greater opportunities for more parties to affect policy than the single party majority and minority governments common in Canada.

Giovanni Sartori describes Lijphart's consensus democracy ideal as "a roundabout power-massacre," with dispersed responsibility and minority vetoes exacerbating tensions rather than increasing cooperation.<sup>30</sup> Lijphart's suggestions also assume proportional representation which, when coupled with his other proposals, Sartori believes would result in unworkable and unstable governments. In light of Sartori's criticisms, Lijphart's proposal does appear extreme. Minority veto, wherein the smallest group in a multi-party coalition can nullify a proposal, seems to promote conflict with its larger partners rather than encourage mutually agreeable compromise. The Liberal and Conservative Coalition had enough internal problems near the end of its life, and entering into a grand coalition as proposed by Lijphart and Maitland would have increased the potential for division. If the driving force behind seat-maximizing is to set policy, then coalition as defined by Lijphart was not an attractive option for the CCF: it would not have been able to advance socialist policies within a free

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<sup>29</sup> Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, 90-103.

<sup>30</sup> Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering*, 71-2.

enterprise coalition. Duverger was critical of supposedly centrist politics, which he described as “nothing more than the artificial grouping of the right wing of the Left and the left wing of the Right. The fate of the Centre,” he said, “is to be torn asunder.”<sup>31</sup> Not all coalitions are located at the centre of a left-right spectrum, but a good compromise can make for unhappy politicians regardless.

Coalitions are not the norm in Canada due to the nature of FPTP, two-party politics, and the expectation of a return to majority governments. They are more common in countries that use PR, where parties must work within a different set of norms. While there is always the possibility that joining a coalition could create animosity between parties, especially when they harbour fundamental differences, a voting system that encourages both electoral and governmental cooperation could resolve this issue. Proponents of the alternative vote believe it would accomplish this goal. They argue that it produces centripetal, unifying politics, because parties can enter into transfer agreements and instruct their supporters on how to rank their preferences. This can be done for policy concessions, or in exchange for the reciprocal withdrawal of candidates in different districts.<sup>32</sup> Tsebelis’s governmental and electoral games would both continue under AV, but in this idealized scenario they would be overtly linked, because the public could be made aware of party negotiations and possible coalitions prior to voting.

While AV’s use has been limited, Australia has employed the system since 1918.<sup>33</sup> Benjamin Reilly finds clear evidence of collaboration in Australia’s party agreements, and he concludes that AV has resulted in centrist and cooperative politics, with AV’s centripetal

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<sup>31</sup> Duverger, *Political Parties*, 215.

<sup>32</sup> C. Sharman, A.M. Sayers, and N. Miragliotta, “Trading Party Preferences: The Australian Experience of Preferential Voting,” *Electoral Studies* 21 (2002): 548.

<sup>33</sup> AV is also used in Papua New Guinea and Fiji. While Australia uses AV to elect its lower chamber, it uses STV to elect its senate.

effects being more important than its majoritarian ones.<sup>34</sup> The Liberal and National parties, for instance, have a long-standing agreement wherein they instruct their supporters to exchange preferences at the expense of their Labour opponents. Politicians may also campaign for second preferences from the supporters of smaller parties. In one remarkable case of cooperative politics, the major parties instructed their supporters to rank candidates of the One Nation Party last in the 1998 election, causing its leader to be defeated on transfers.<sup>35</sup> Reilly's history of preferential voting in Australia convincingly demonstrates that the country practices centripetal politics through preference exchange. However, the Australian use of AV is not immediately comparable to other electoral contexts. AV has been in place in Australia since the early twentieth century, and transfer agreements have been worked out over the course of 90 years. Moreover, there is a tradition of parties handing out "how-to-vote" cards at the polls, something not evident during AV's use in Canada.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, voters are required to rank all candidates, and they can opt to vote "above the line" and accept a party's preference order without numbering the candidates.<sup>37</sup> These processes make it easier for the parties to collaborate via preference exchange.

One would not expect transfer agreements to arise overnight or to be as clearly communicated to voters in any given situation. In BC, the parties lacked a consistent message: voters were encouraged to rank a single candidate, only free enterprise parties, or all parties, depending on the source of information. Having studied the actual rate of transfers in the prairie provinces, which was typically very low, Jansen concludes that most voters approached the elections as if they were conducted under FPTP rules, ranking only a

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<sup>34</sup> Benjamin Reilly, "Preferential Voting and Its Political Consequences," in *Elections: Full, Free & Fair*, ed. Marian Sawyer (Annandale, Australia: Federation Press, 2001), 79, 94.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-90.

<sup>36</sup> Reilly acknowledges this and says that the cards have "institutionalise[d]" preference exchanges. *Ibid.*, 85. However, "how-to-vote" cards did not become standard until 1984, 66 years after the introduction of AV.

Sharman, Sayers, and Miragliotta, "Trading Party Preferences," 547.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 551-3.

single candidate.<sup>38</sup> If AV is to have centripetal effects it is reasonable to expect that parties and voters would need an adjustment period, but these effects never appeared during AV's use in Alberta. Collaboration was not evident until 1955, when the Liberals and CCF joined forces in an attempt to defeat Social Credit. Having lost four ridings on transfers, the Socreds abolished AV to quash the collaborative possibilities of preferential voting.<sup>39</sup> AV's majoritarian effects may have become secondary in Australia, but in Canada they were its defining feature, where it operated much like FPTP. In BC, not only did AV fail to deliver a government to the former Coalition parties, but it also failed to forge lasting bonds: in 1953 the CCF and Socreds no longer exchanged preferences at the same rate, because Social Credit's position in government had changed its relationship with the CCF.<sup>40</sup> While AV is a majoritarian system at heart, and it may fail to live up to its theoretical promise — at best, it is unreliable — it is still endorsed not just by politicians, but by some electoral reformers as well. Looking at how politicians and activists have approached the voting system, clear connections are apparent between these recent values debates and the alternative vote's use in 1950s' British Columbia.

### **Electoral Systems and Democratic Values**

The early history of electoral reform was one of political scientists, mathematicians, and activists peddling democratic improvements to uninterested politicians. Major discussions of electoral reform in Canada, as well as actual change, occurred when a party stood to benefit from a revised voting system. Politicians' stated democratic beliefs differed from their seat-maximizing motives, which were intended to stifle third parties and maintain

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<sup>38</sup> Jansen, "The Political Consequences of the Alternative Vote," 664.

<sup>39</sup> Jansen, "The Single Transferable Vote in Alberta and Manitoba," 167-8, 225.

<sup>40</sup> David Elkins, "Politics Make Strange Bedfellows: The BC Party System in the 1952 and 1953 Provincial Elections," *BC Studies* 30 (Summer 1976): 25-6.

a two-party status quo. Regardless of whether changes have been implemented, voting systems and reform have remained common subjects of discussion. Canadian reformist literature, which can be categorized as such because it advocates abandoning first-past-the-post, typically follows a set pattern when arguing for change. These articles and books begin by addressing FPTP's failure to provide adequately representative government: a minority of voters can elect candidates in any riding, and majority governments often do not enjoy the support of a majority of the electorate.<sup>41</sup> These observations are nothing new, nor are they strictly Canadian concerns.<sup>42</sup> Pilon calls FPTP's distortions and "phony majority government[s]" indefensible, and early twentieth-century American reformer George Hallett referred to representative democracy under FPTP as "a sham."<sup>43</sup> Writing over 60 years apart, Pilon and Hallett both describe votes cast for losing candidates under FPTP as "wasted votes."<sup>44</sup> Both of their books are intended to make a case for reform that is accessible to a wide audience, and they begin by highlighting the shortcomings of FPTP.

Pilon identifies the insertion of value judgments into the debate on electoral systems as an intrinsic problem in PR literature, a criticism that can be extended to scholarship on majoritarian systems as well. He argues that debating values distracts from how voting

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<sup>41</sup> Henry Milner has compiled two collections of articles proposing possible changes for Canada, and Gordon Gibson, who has remained an active proponent of electoral reform, has similarly provided transcripts of reform-minded individuals debating voting systems. Henry Milner, ed., *Making Every Vote Count: Reassessing Canada's Electoral System* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1999); Henry Milner, ed., *Steps Toward Making Every Vote Count: Electoral System Reform in Canada and Its Provinces* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2004); Gibson, ed., *Fixing Canadian Democracy*. Nick Loenen has written a book-length treatise making the case for PR and collaborative and accountable government. Nick Loenen, *Citizenship and Democracy: A Case for Proportional Representation* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1997). Dennis Pilon's *The Politics of Voting* also fits into this school.

<sup>42</sup> For early reform literature see, for example, George H. Hallett, Jr., *Proportional Representation—The Key to Democracy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: National Municipal League, 1940); and Thomas Hare, *The Election of Representatives, Parliamentary and Municipal: A Treatise*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1873). Apart from Britain, New Zealand has a rich history of debate over FPTP and PR. See Geoffrey Palmer, *Unbridled Power? An Interpretation of New Zealand's Constitution & Government* (Wellington, New Zealand: Oxford University Press, 1979); New Zealand, Royal Commission on the Electoral System, *Royal Commission on the Electoral System: Towards a Better Democracy* (Wellington, New Zealand: V.R. Ward, Government Printer, 1986); and Jack Nagel, "New Zealand: Reform by (Nearly) Immaculate Design," in *Handbook of Electoral System Choice*, 530-43.

<sup>43</sup> Pilon, *The Politics of Voting*, 48; Hallett, *Proportional Representation*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 14; Pilon, *The Politics of Voting*, 34.



systems actually function in creating governments.<sup>45</sup> For instance, one of the most common tropes cited in defence of FPTP is the “citizen and member” principle (that is, local, constituency representation, with MLAs acting as ombudsmen). According to a 1985 Canadian commission, this principle is a cherished tradition.<sup>46</sup> Pilon rightly points out, however, that the vast majority of Canadians vote for parties, not candidates.<sup>47</sup> Despite this fact, politicians and FPTP proponents can easily argue against PR and appeal to the electorate on the basis of an idealized attachment to local members. Looking at local representation, one finds a strong public preference for FPTP. The constituency is a long-standing part of plurality voting, and voters like the presence of local representatives. BC’s redistribution debates and the 1978 Eckardt Commission hearings both focused on the importance of a local member, disregarding the candidate’s diminished significance when voters went to the polls, and MLAs’ limited representative capabilities in caucus. The perception of MPs and MLAs as ombudsmen may have been misguided, but voters and politicians consistently argued for their need for unique local representation. This attachment manifested itself as a rep-by-region approach, which shaped the mandates of redistribution commissions in spite of the underlying principle of representation by population. Reform advocates can be equally guilty of engaging in these values debates, praising the presence of constituency representatives in STV or mixed-member proportional systems, for instance, based on their perceived importance.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 6-9.

<sup>46</sup> “[S]table majority governments” are also cited as a key benefit of FPTP. Majority governments are equated with effective governments, and they are certainly the most attractive means to implement policies. Electoral reform has always been a last resort, and federal and provincial politicians have continually shied away from PR, which would limit the chances of returning a majority. Canada, Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada, *Report*, vol. 3 (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1985), 84-5.

<sup>47</sup> Pilon, *The Politics of Voting*, 56, 127.

The appeal to majority representation in 1950s' BC was steeped in democratic principles, but it fell far short of anything an advocate of proportional representation would have desired. While individual reformers can initiate discussions of voting systems, as the PR advocates did at the Eckardt hearings, they cannot implement these changes alone. Pilon considers three explanations for the rise of PR at the municipal level: "public choice by informed citizens," which he terms a "naive" interpretation that ignores the issue of power in favour of an "uncritical acceptance of the sincerity of the political system"; PR as a tactical measure and "elite brokering mechanism"; and his thesis, that PR's rise was a part of "a much larger class struggle over the meaning of democracy," a means through which elites could appease labour interests and prevent a swing to all-labour or predominantly labour councils.<sup>48</sup> Pilon identifies the rise of leftist movements as the principal catalyst for electoral system change the world over, an argument that holds up in numerous cases, certainly in BC.<sup>49</sup> He has revisited these arguments more recently and they remain essentially unaltered: labour movements and working class interests have had their governing potential curbed by old-line parties via electoral reform.<sup>50</sup> In British Columbia, this process can be read as an example of a seat-maximizing model, wherein the parties took action to avoid becoming "absolute losers" under FPTP.<sup>51</sup>

Pilon includes idealist municipal reformers when he talks about a naive public choice model of reform. Though he argues that ultimately it was council members who decided what was better for their future, Canadian reformers in the early twentieth century pushed hard for proportional representation. Responding directly to Pilon, J. Paul Johnston and

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<sup>48</sup> Pilon, "The Drive for Proportional Representation in BC, 1917-23," 17-9, 87-8.

<sup>49</sup> Pilon's dissertation deals with voting system change in a variety of western democracies. Pilon, "Why Voting Systems Change."

<sup>50</sup> Dennis Pilon, "Explaining Voting System Reform in Canada, 1874 to 1960," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 40.3 (Fall 2006): 137-8.

<sup>51</sup> Colomer, "The Strategy and History of Electoral System Choice," 7.

Miriam Koene cite municipal examples where Pilon's labour thesis does not hold in either the adoption or repeal of STV, including Nelson, Winnipeg, Calgary, and Edmonton.<sup>52</sup> In some instances PR had no discernible effect on who was elected and it was simply not needed; in these cases reformers had sold PR as a cure-all that would attract better candidates and improve municipal politics.<sup>53</sup> Pilon's thesis may fall apart in some instances, but the broader idea of old-line parties wanting to maintain the status quo is sound, and reform was quite often a response to increasing support for the left. While the importance of reformers and grassroots organizations in actual voting system change has often been secondary to the needs of politicians, reformers still have an opportunity to facilitate and steer debates through position papers and the like. Individual activists are not necessarily required to initiate discussions when reform is taken up by governments or marginalized parties, but their presence ensures that voting systems remain an issue.

There has been some commentary about who *should* be guiding electoral reform, just as there was during the Coalition's adoption of AV and the push for independent redistribution commissions in the 1950s and 1960s. Such questions have been raised more recently in light of BC's Citizens' Assembly on electoral reform in 2004, and the resulting referenda on STV. Dennis Thompson states what might seem obvious: politicians are probably too close to the system to effectively evaluate it in terms of democratic, representative principles.<sup>54</sup> Appointed commissions, he adds, are even less accountable and more removed from the electorate.<sup>55</sup> Looking at Canada's history with commissions that have addressed electoral reform, one finds suggestions designed to diminish regionalism —

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<sup>52</sup> Johnston and Koene, "Learning History's Lessons Anew," 214-5.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 221-2.

<sup>54</sup> Dennis F. Thompson, "Who Should Govern Who Governs? The Role of Citizens in Reforming the Electoral System," in *Designing Deliberative Democracy: The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly*, ed. Mark E. Warren and Hilary Pearse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 23-5.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

such as a top-up system or an elected Senate — that retain FPTP in some form. These commissions spoke in terms of familiar democratic values, including local representation and majority governments, and they used low public support for change as a compelling reason to either maintain the status quo or propose only mild reform.<sup>56</sup> Despite the BC redistribution commissions' public consultation process, Thompson's accusation still holds: they largely adhered to their own guiding principles. For instance, the Angus Commission was committed to some measure of rep-by-pop, and the Eckardt Commission held a strong bias against voting system reform. PR has not been given much credence in federal reform commissions, in part because it would undermine the ability of the Liberals or Conservatives to form a majority government. Unlike these appointed commissions, the BC Citizens' Assembly was a panel of randomly selected British Columbians.<sup>57</sup> It was intended to represent the electorate, and its members committed themselves to the value-laden issues of "proportionality, local representation, and voter choice," at the expense of the likely ramifications of STV for the representation of the Liberals and the NDP.<sup>58</sup> Constituency representation's place as an esteemed democratic principle has been remarkably consistent. While political parties had appealed to such values in the past to justify their resistance to

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<sup>56</sup> Canada, Task Force on Canadian Unity, *A Future Together: Observations and Recommendations* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1979), 105; Canada, Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada, *Report*, vol. 3 (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1985), 84-5; Canada, Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, *Reforming Electoral Democracy*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1991), 19-21.

<sup>57</sup> Two individuals, a man and a woman, were selected from each electoral district. Two aboriginal members were added to the Assembly to make up for this representational deficiency. In total, the Assembly was made up of 160 members, plus the chair. For more information on the selection process, see Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, *Making Every Vote Count: The Case for Electoral Reform in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, 2004), 31-40.

<sup>58</sup> Thompson, "Who Should Govern Who Governs?," 35. Pilon says the following about the Assembly's STV proposal: "Because there would be larger multi-member ridings in urban areas and smaller multi-member ridings in rural areas, this would mean that the system would be most proportional in areas of strength for the NDP (thus allowing the Liberals to gain more representation where they were weaker) and least proportional in areas of strength for the Liberals (thus denying the NDP any advantage where they needed it)." Therefore, the NDP could not back the proposal. Pilon, *The Politics of Voting*, 101.

change, failing to consider the effects of the voting system on parties' representation is also problematic, and Pilon has criticized the Assembly on these grounds.<sup>59</sup>

The BC Citizens' Assembly provides an interesting example of public consultation on electoral reform that invites comparisons with the Angus, Norris, and Eckardt commission hearings. The central difference, of course, apart from its composition, is that the Citizens' Assembly was focused on the consideration of voting systems, and it was far more accepting of PR than the Eckardt Commission. Indeed, the existence of the Citizens' Assembly "may have predisposed members ... against the status quo."<sup>60</sup> The Assembly held 50 public hearings, which were attended by 2,851 people. It also solicited online submissions, which tended to be short and frequently partisan in nature.<sup>61</sup> Of the 1,603 submissions sent to the Citizens' Assembly, over 40 endorsed AV in one form or another, including the same AV-STV, rural-urban hybrid that Manitoba and Alberta had used from the 1920s to the 1950s.<sup>62</sup> Petitions in favour of AV included a familiar appeal to majority representation: "MLAs elected with half the vote [would] have more of a democratic claim

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. André Blais, R. Kenneth Carty, and Patrick Fournier argue the opposite: "Few electoral system experts would dispute the appropriateness of the criteria [the Assembly] considered, few could dispute that their decision [STV] was appropriate given the priorities they assigned to the criteria they applied." Local representation, for instance, became a priority as a result of the "deliberative process" which revealed "that there was a significant minority for whom local representation was very important." André Blais, R. Kenneth Carty, and Patrick Fournier, "Do Citizens' Assemblies Make Reasoned Choices?," in *Designing Deliberative Democracy*, 138-9.

<sup>60</sup> Thompson, "Who Should Govern Who Governs?," 34.

<sup>61</sup> Many submissions were simply adaptations of the Green Party's request for a mixed-member proportional system. The public consultation process was supposed to grant the Assembly legitimacy, but its members found that their internal debates were far more productive. Ian Ward, "An Experiment in Political Communication: The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 43.2 (June 2008): 305-12.

<sup>62</sup> Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, "List of Submissions and Abstracts," HEBBERT-0611, *Submissions from the Public*

<<http://web.archive.org/web/20071028022558/http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/resources/submissionsguide/SubmissionsID-Abstract2.xls>>. The number 40 is based on the categorization of submissions as AV-related by the Citizens' Assembly. Other submissions may have advocated AV in some form, without being labeled accordingly. See also Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, "Guide to Longer Submissions," *Submissions from the Public*

<<http://web.archive.org/web/20071028022558/http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/resources/submissionsguide/SubmissionsLong.pdf>>.

to the seat,” and would be “the [candidates] who [were] most acceptable to the most people,” they said.<sup>63</sup> Another recurring theme was local representation, for which Assembly members from northern BC were outspoken advocates.<sup>64</sup> This pattern was evident during BC’s earlier attempts at redistribution. One common suggestion was a mixed-member proportional system, because it combined list PR with constituency representation, and it could “giv[e] people a vote for a local representative,” which some British Columbians believed was key.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the Assembly said that “each community needs the opportunity to choose the people who speak for it in the legislature,” and that “[e]ffective local representation [had] long been a principle of our democratic tradition.”<sup>66</sup> The Assembly concluded that STV could satisfy this need while improving proportionality and voter choice.

Tom Flanagan proposed AV as a suitable system for Canada in the 1990s to unite the Progressive Conservative and Reform vote without uniting the parties. Taking a similar framework to Pilon’s, he said “[t]he real test of an electoral system is its impact upon the larger political system in specific circumstances of time and place.” Proportionality, he believed, should not be an end goal in itself.<sup>67</sup> In Flanagan’s terms, proportionality was yet another value-laden issue to be approached with caution, though he made his own appeal to

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<sup>63</sup> Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform, “List of Submissions and Abstracts,” KARJALUOTO-0861, LAW-0949, *Submissions from the Public*.

<sup>64</sup> Pilon, *The Politics of Voting*, 100. Between the first and second referenda on STV in BC, the Electoral Boundaries Commission issued proposed boundaries for BC’s constituencies under both FPTP and STV. During its public hearings, the commission was presented with “a wealth of detailed information about regional history and community interests.” As part of its mandate, the commission had to take into consideration “geographical and demographic realities, the legacy of our history and the need to balance the community interests of the people of British Columbia.” British Columbia, Electoral Boundaries Commission, *Amendments to the Preliminary Report* (Victoria: Electoral Boundaries Commission, 2008), 7.

<sup>65</sup> Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform, “List of Submissions and Abstracts,” EUSTACE-1130, *Submissions from the Public*.

<sup>66</sup> Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform, *Making Every Vote Count*, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Tom Flanagan, “The Alternative Vote: An Electoral System for Canada,” in *Making Every Vote Count*, 85.

values by discussing Canadians' familiarity with majority governments.<sup>68</sup> Proportionality is at the centre of the modern electoral reform debate, but it is not always politically saleable to parties in power. Parties threatened by rising leftist movements may consider PR or other changes, but seat-maximizing is the end goal for politicians, just as improved proportionality is the goal for PR reformers. Proportional representation at the federal or provincial levels, free from a reliance on rural AV, has yet to appear as a viable solution in Canada to any party looking to hold onto power.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to look back at the 1952 BC election results and ask of the Coalition, "Why not PR?" The former Coalition parties would have greatly improved their representation had their share of the seats matched the popular vote. AV was designed to limit the potential of the CCF, however, and it was believed that the Liberals and Conservatives could maintain power without resigning themselves to minority governments and a large CCF presence in the Legislature. Centripetal politics and coalition building are some of the modern selling points of AV, but the Canadian context demonstrates that centripetal politics are far from a guaranteed result. Voters came together to favour the old-line or protest parties in BC, but nothing was formalized before the system was abolished. While it is seldom suggested that AV will improve proportionality, it is worth stating that it had no such effect in BC.<sup>69</sup> Having failed to create lasting centripetal politics or improve

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>69</sup> By my own calculations using the Gallagher disproportionality index, AV did not improve proportionality by any means. The 1949 election exaggerated the distortion between votes and seats due to the presence of the Coalition, and therefore proportionality increased in the first AV election, but looking at the 1941 contest for a more realistic, multi-party comparison, the amount of distortion is similar to that found in 1952. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that AV did not have proportional side effects in BC. The Gallagher disproportionality index is calculated as follows: "[T]he differences between the vote percentages ... and seat percentages ... for each party are squared and then added; this total is divided by 2; and finally the square root of this value is taken." Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, 158. Results for BC were as follows, with larger numbers indicating a greater degree of disproportionality: 1941: 13.11; 1945: 19.15; 1949: 20.21; 1952: 13.98; 1953: 18.33. Election returns data were taken from *Elections BC*, "Electoral History of British Columbia 1871 - 1986" <[http://www.elections.BC.ca/docs/rpt/1871-1986\\_ElectoralHistoryofBC.pdf](http://www.elections.BC.ca/docs/rpt/1871-1986_ElectoralHistoryofBC.pdf)>.

proportionality, AV in British Columbia did not offer the representational benefits that reformers past or present have looked for in an electoral system.<sup>70</sup>

Nor did the alternative vote succeed in living up to the Coalition's promise of majority representation. Though the majoritarian AV was presented as a democratic reform to the electorate, it functioned primarily as a political tool to ensure the government's re-election. Appeals to majority representation as an intrinsic part of democracy counted on British Columbians believing that the two ideas should go hand in hand, but central to representational democracy in Canada was the idea of constituency representation. Simply having a constituency representative was enough to satisfy people's desire for unique representation with the reassurance that they had the ear of government, whether MLAs were acting as ombudsmen in reality or not. In 1952, AV served its purpose by facilitating the continuation of a two-group divide between the old-line Coalition parties and the protest CCF and Social Credit. AV was introduced in BC so that the Coalition could continue to govern, and it was abolished in 1953 because Bennett believed his party could win under plurality rules. The Australian example demonstrates that AV can function in other ways that may benefit political parties, and its appeal is understandable, but in terms of political function and democratic values it was unneeded and unwanted in British Columbia after 1953. Despite the continued presence of the Liberals and Conservatives through the early 1970s, there was a strong feeling that governments would be either NDP or Social Credit. With only two viable parties, majority representation in the form of AV was unnecessary. FPTP further satisfied the self-interested desires of the NDP and Social Credit by reducing the Legislature to an essentially two-party affair and facilitating majority governments.

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<sup>70</sup> Only PR activists were liable to question AV's implications for proportionality. See, for instance, Charles Burbridge, "Not Like P.R.," *Vancouver Province*, 23 September 1953, 6; and Enid Lakeman, Research Secretary, Proportional Representation Society, London England, "It's Not 'Proportional Representation,'" *Vancouver Province*, 9 June 1952, 4.



The alternative vote is not a form of proportional representation, but it can serve the same purpose as PR systems. There is consensus in the literature that an electoral system may change when it will improve the governing party's seat count in the next election, and both PR and majoritarian systems can achieve this goal in different circumstances. The value-laden debates over electoral reform, from a government's perspective, serve to justify its self-interested actions or inaction to the electorate. Governments are spurred to make changes when their futures become uncertain, and under such circumstances changing the voting system, or revising the party system through a coalition, are both viable options.

The alternative vote would not be a popular choice with many reformers past or present, but it can be a rational choice for parties looking to ensure their continued representation. An elite-centred approach to electoral reform may not be a comforting prospect to reformers, but systems typically do not change when the parties in power do not stand to benefit. In countries using FPTP, a politically expedient brand of electoral reform could very well entail a majoritarian system such as AV, rather than PR. This has been the case in Canada, where governing parties consistently preferred AV to proportional representation. AV in British Columbia was a rational choice for the Coalition, but the Liberals and Conservatives could not overcome the dissatisfaction of the electorate, and the importance of these local circumstances should not be forgotten when considering electoral reform. Value judgments of electoral systems can be rightly discarded when considering their rational or political merits, but they are crucial to understanding how systems are perceived in specific circumstances. Only the concrete realities of the party system in a given situation, coupled with the public's disposition towards the electoral system, can determine whether seemingly rational political actions will translate into the desired results.

There is no denying the importance of the values debates that framed electoral reform in British Columbia and Canada, and they should not be dismissed as irrelevant principles that clouded discussions of reform and democracy. How and why these arguments have and have not worked has determined the public response to the systems in question. Even as Liberal and Conservative politicians attempted to convince voters that AV was what was best for democracy, the public fell back on ideas of two-party politics and FPTP. The Liberals, Conservatives, and CCF engaged in these values debates in the 1950s in an attempt to convince voters that their parties were on the right side of democracy in advocating or resisting change. Majority representation was undeniably intended to hurt the CCF, but it was also meant to appeal to voters. The fact that it did not do so, while FPTP and local representation did, is a crucial part of the story of electoral reform that should not be ignored.

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