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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Résumé de l'article

Dans l'époque qui suit la deuxième guerre mondiale, le gouvernement creditiste de l'Alberta légiférait plusieurs lois qui avaient pour but la restriction des syndicats dans leurs tentatives d'organiser et de déclencher des grèves. La mise en vigueur des lois concernant le travail également réfléchissait un préjugé contre les syndicats. Cet essai soutient que les creditistes, qui appuyaient toujours sur théories conspiratrices, songeaient que le militantisme syndical provenait d'une conspiration communiste mondiale. Par conséquent, ils projetaient des lois concernant le travail qui mettraient un échec aux projets de la conspiration en Alberta, tout en rassurant des investisseurs potentiels, surtout dans le secteur pétrolier, que l'Alberta leur offrait un milieu sécuritaire pour gagner des bénéfices. Mais la voie qui menait à telles lois se faisait plus facile grâce au conservatisme d'une aile du mouvement syndicaliste de la province et la peur d'être étiquette communiste de l'autre aile. À tout prendre, l'expérience albertaine met en cause la théorie qu'une dose de la démocratie industrielle se produisait au cours de la période après-guerre.

The Cold War, Alberta Labour, and the Social Credit Regime

Alvin Finkel

THE EXPLOSION OF LABOUR MILITANCY and union organization during World War II and its immediate aftermath forced both the federal and provincial governments to take the presence of trade unions seriously in the drafting of labour laws. Federal government order-in-council PC 1003, which came into effect 17 February 1944, prescribed rules of the game for the organization of unions and required employers to deal with unions which met the rules for certification. It was followed in the post-war period by federal and provincial legislation which was modelled on the path-breaking order-in-council.

But the provisions of PC 1003 occasioned contemporary debate that is mirrored in the scholarly debate regarding the goals and the impact of this decree and subsequent legislation which followed its spirit. Laurel Sefton MacDowell, in a seminal article in *Labour/Le Travail*, provided a strong statement of the assessment that the wartime period produced "a degree of democracy in industry." According to MacDowell, "the restrictions on the previously unfettered authority of management and the resulting changes in the status of employees on the shop floor were permanent." She notes further regarding PC 1003:

It guaranteed the right to organize and bargain collectively, established a procedure for the certification and compulsory recognition of trade unions with majority support, recognized the exclusive bargaining agency principle, defined unfair labour practices, provided for remedies, and outlawed company unions. It established an administrative tribunal (rather than a court) to enforce the order. It incorporated the basic principles of the American Wagner Act but also continued the distinctly Canadian policy of compulsory conciliation prior to a legal strike.... Again, in contrast to the American legislation, the parties were not entitled to strike or lock

¹Laurel Sefton MacDowell, "The Formation of the Canadian Industrial Relations Systems During World War Two," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 3 (1978), 196.

Alvin Finkel, "The Cold War, Alberta Labour, and the Social Credit Regime," *Labour/Le Travail*, 21 (Spring 1988), 123-152.

out during the term of the agreement. The collective agreement, itself, however, was now legally enforceable. The government's primary concern had been, and continued to be, the elimination of industrial conflict, and the concessions to labour contained in the new legislation were primarily designed to accomplish that purpose. Nevertheless, the legislation was welcomed by labour, since both trade union organization and collective bargaining were accorded protection and a clear legal status. Recognition strikes were no longer necessary in order to initiate bargaining. The aspirations of employees were sanctioned by law, and could no longer be regarded as illegitimate. Employer opposition to trade unionism was not eliminated but many of its manifestations became illegal.²

MacDowell's conclusions are echoed in Desmond Morton's *Working People* and in much of the current industrial relations literature.³ No doubt, if one concentrates on whether legislation makes the formation of a union easier and whether it requires the employer to negotiate with union representatives, PC 1003 was indeed an important step forward. But an emphasis on other aspects of the order-in-council and the legislation it has spawned places in doubt whether it went very far to strengthen the position of workers and their unions. H.D. Woods, in a generally conservative text on Canadian labour economics in 1973, commented:

Looked at from the point of view of the right to strike, it becomes apparent that this instrument, as well as the lock-out, was severely curtailed. In the broad classification of dispute areas, strikes formerly took place over issues involving jurisdiction as between unions, recognition of unions by employers, negotiating new agreements or re-negotiating old ones, and the interpretation or application of agreements in force. Strikes had now been rendered unlawful over jurisdictional issues, recognition issues, and application or interpretation issues. Only in the negotiation area were they left, and even there they were to be held in suspension during compulsory conciliation. It is this system, with some exceptions and modifications, which carried over into the post-war decentralized labour-relations policy in Canada.⁴

From a left-wing perspective, Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz, while conceding that "the post-war settlement between capital and labour," both in terms of labour and social legislation, "entailed real gains for working people," emphasize with Woods the restrictive character of labour legislation. Indeed they claim that federal and provincial labour acts in the 1940s created "one of the most restrictive and highly juridified frameworks for collective bargaining in any capitalist democracy."⁵ Where MacDowell sees the beginnings of industrial democracy poking through, Panitch and Swartz see instead "a new hegemony for capital in Canadian society" in which the con-

²*Ibid.*, 194.

³Desmond Morton with Terry Copp, *Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Labour Movement* (Ottawa 1984), 184. Examples of recent editions of labour-relations texts which concur with MacDowell's views are: Alton W.J. Craig, *The System of Industrial Relations in Canada* (Toronto 1983), 113-15; and John A. Willes, *Contemporary Canadian Labour Relations* (Toronto 1984), 73-9.

⁴H.D. Woods, *Labour Policy and Labour Economics in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto 1973), 93-4.

⁵Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz, "Towards Permanent Exceptionalism: Coercion and Consent in Canadian Industrial Relations," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 140.

sent of workers, via their unions, to capitalist hegemony replaced arbitrary physical coercion:

Coercion in capital-labour relations became less *ad hoc* and arbitrary because as the state rationalized and institutionalized workers' freedoms of association, so coercion too became more formalized. What before had taken the appearance of the Mountie's charge, now increasingly took the form of the rule of law by which unions policed themselves in most instances.⁶

The view that the state was refashioning the tools which gave hegemony to the capitalist class rather than weakening that hegemony is supported by several recent pieces of research. Jeremy Webber, in an essay on compulsory conciliation, demonstrates that this feature of federal wartime labour law, which was incorporated into most of the post-war legislation, had its origin in the government's desire to prevent work stoppages without giving in to demands to force concessions from employers that might obviate the need for a strike.⁷ Meanwhile, Peter Warrian's doctoral thesis, which evaluates closely the discussions leading to PC 1003, the Industrial Relations Investigation Act of 1948, and parallel Ontario provincial legislation, presents strong evidence in favour of the Panitch-Swartz thesis.⁸

The revisionist view of labour legislation fits in with the literature of the Cold War in Canada which suggests that after World War II (and during that war as well), the Canadian government was determined to smash home-grown radicalism on all fronts, including the union front.⁹ The struggle against Soviet subversion became a pretext both for the state and for anti-

⁶*Ibid.*, 140-1.

⁷Jeremy Webber, "The Malaise of Compulsory Conciliation: Strike Prevention in Canada During World War II," *Labour/Le Travail*, 15 (Spring 1985), 57-88. An abridged and edited version appears in Bryan D. Palmer, ed., *The Character of Class Struggle: Essays in Canadian Working-Class History, 1850-1985* (Toronto 1986), 138-59.

⁸Peter Warrian, "Labour is not a Commodity:" A Study of the Rights of Labour in the Canadian Postwar Economy, 1944-1948," Ph.D thesis, University of Waterloo, 1986.

⁹On the repression of Communists during the war, see Reg Whitaker, "Official Repression of Communism During World War II," *Labour/Le Travail*, 17 (Spring 1986), 135-66; William and Kathleen Repka, *Dangerous Patriots* (Vancouver 1982); and Merrily Weisbord, *The Strangest Dream: Canadian Communists, The Spy Trails and the Cold War* (Toronto 1983), 97-112. Post-war anti-Communism is discussed in Reginald Whitaker, "Origins of the Canadian Government's Internal Security System, 1946-1952," *Canadian Historical Review*, 15:2 (June 1984), 154-83; Weisbord, *The Strangest Dream*, 139-203; and Alvin Finkel, "Canadian Immigration Policy and the Cold War, 1945-1980," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 21:3 (Autumn 1986), 53-70, among other sources. The impact on the labour front of the anti-Communist crusade by the state and by the Communists' competitors for trade union leadership is dealt with in Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party and the Canadian Congress of labour, 1935-1956* (Toronto 1973), Charles Lipton, *The Trade Union Movement of Canada, 1827-1959*. 2nd ed. (Montreal 1968), 280-300; John Stanton, *Life and Death of the Canadian Seamen's Union* (Toronto 1978); and Howard White, *A Hard Man to Beat: The Story of Bill White, Labour Leader, Historian, Shipyard Worker, Raconteur* (Vancouver 1983), 158-66.

communist elements in the unions to violate democratic norms in order to create communist-free unions.¹⁰ Obviously, the state, at the same time that it accepted the reality that Canadian workers regarded as illegitimate attempts to prevent them from being represented collectively in the workplace, was anxious to shape the character of that representation such that class relations were not dramatically changed in Canada.

The literature on the Cold War, including the Cold War impact on the unions,¹¹ has largely been separate from the literature on labour legislation and its impact on the unions. This essay, dealing with a single province, attempts to link the two, demonstrating how the Cold war environment was used not only to delegitimize communist ideology and communists but also to justify restrictive labour laws without incurring a significant union backlash. Indeed, it is suggested here that the conservative behaviour of the unions, as much as the determination of the government, allowed Ernest Manning to create an increasingly reactionary climate for labour relations in the province without political penalty.

II

ERNEST MANNING, PREMIER of Alberta from the death of William Aberhart in June 1943 to his own retirement from the job in December 1968, was, like his predecessor, an evangelical radio preacher. He was also an ardent Cold warrior who ran a provincial election in 1944 on a campaign of vilification of his opponents as stooges of a worldwide conspiracy of communists and bankers. After his retirement, he made clear in an interview his lingering belief in the communist conspiracy and the integral part within it played by labour unrest. It was a belief that had guided his government in its establishment of labour laws during the 25 years he led Alberta.

There is no doubt in my mind at all, that world communism operates in a very definite program designed to extend communist philosophy and the communist concept into every nation of the world and particularly to undermine the democratic nations by communist propaganda. And one of the methods which they use is to agitate industrial unrest which, because of its effect on the productivity of a nation, produces public discontent. And socialism and communism, and this we said earlier is really largely a matter of degree, has a vested interest in social unrest

¹⁰This has been generally recognized in the literature regarding trade unionism in Quebec in the Duplessis era, beginning with Herbert F. Quinn, *The Union Nationale: A Study in Quebec Nationalism* (Toronto 1963), 91-7, 126-7.

¹¹With the notable exception of the Quebec literature. The Communist Party's shadowy existence in Quebec, during the era of the Padlock Law (1937), which declared most activities of the party and its front groups illegal in that province, is discussed in Robert Comeau and Bernard Dionne, *Les communistes au Québec, 1936-1956* (Montreal 1980).

because they always exploit the hardships and the poverty of unemployment, and adverse social conditions, to the attainment of their political objectives.¹²

The Social Credit movement, as has been noted elsewhere, was at its inception neither especially right-wing nor anti-labour.¹³ Rather, it served as a mass movement of discontent which united individuals and groups of a variety of viewpoints. While the monetary theories of the right-wing and racist Major C.H. Douglas supposedly underlay the movement, in practice neither the membership nor much of the leadership of Alberta Social Credit understood clearly the writings of the British theorist of social credit.¹⁴ In any case, the personality of the charismatic radio evangelist, "Bible Bill" Aberhart, rather than specific economic theories, proved to be the rallying point of the early party. By 1938, when the party had been in office for three years, it boasted a paid-up membership of 41,000 in a province with a population of slightly over 700,000.¹⁵ These people represented a variety of reformist views ranging from Douglasite monetary perspectives to moderate socialism. The latter perspective was sufficiently strong among urban and mining-area Social Crediters to encourage alliances with communists and CCFers in municipal elections and in several federal and provincial by-elections.¹⁶

As the Social Crediters failed to deliver on their initial promises to pay Albertan adults "social dividends" of 25 dollars a month and to control prices, the party's mass membership slipped away with only about 3,500 paid-up members being counted in 1942, the year before Aberhart died.¹⁷ But war-time prosperity followed by an oil boom beginning in 1947 allowed Aberhart's religious and political protégé, Ernest Manning, to fend off all

¹²Dennis Groh, "The Political Thought of Ernest Manning," (M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1970), 60-1.

¹³Alvin Finkel, "Populism and the Proletariat: Social Credit and the Alberta Working Class," *Studies in Political Economy*, 13 (1984), 109-35; and "Alberta Social Credit Reappraised: The Radical Character of the Early Social Credit Movement," *Prairie Forum*, 11,1 (1986), 69-86; David Elliott, "William Aberhart: Right or Left?" in *The Dirty Thirties in Prairie Canada: 11th Western Canada Studies Conference* (Vancouver, 1980), 11-31.

¹⁴C.B. Macpherson, *Democracy in Alberta: Social Credit and the Party System* (Toronto, 1962), 149.

¹⁵"Alberta Social Credit League membership," 4 April 1938, Premier Aberhart Papers, Provincial Archives of Alberta, File 1124.

¹⁶Finkel, "Populism and the Proletariat," 125 and Finkel, "Alberta Social Credit Reappraised," 77; Ben Swankey, "Reflections of a Communist: 1935 Election," *Alberta History*, 28, 4 (1980), 36.

¹⁷"Alberta Social Credit League membership," 18 May 1942, Premiers' (Aberhart) Papers, File 1117A.

political challenges for a quarter of a century.¹⁸ The Socreds remained in office in Alberta until 1971.

While the Aberhart government enjoyed widespread working-class support, especially in the early years, it was initially regarded suspiciously by the leaders of organized labour. They feared that Social Credit's promised control of prices would also include control of wages, thereby threatening the collective bargaining process.¹⁹ They also resented the mass defection of workers from support of the reformist Labour Party which garnered considerable electoral success before the advent of Social Credit.²⁰ Though Aberhart's government was the first in Canada to pass legislation enshrining the right of workers to organize, the labour leaders regarded the legislation as too weak to be meaningful. They also found, as did the leaders of the chambers of commerce and other organizations, that the authoritarian Aberhart was hostile to them and regarded their suggestions for legislative changes as presumptuous meddling in the government's affairs.²¹ Some leaders of the trade union movement, however, had changed their minds by the time of Aberhart's death in 1943 and the accession of Manning to the premiership. The Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) claimed increasing satisfaction with the workings of the Board of Industrial Relations, set up in 1937 to administer the maximum hours and minimum wages legislation and later given the power to certify bargaining agents for workers. They also praised the Tradesmen's Qualification Act which restricted new entrants into the trades.²² The AFL grouped most of the craft unions, as well as some industrial unions, municipal workers' unions, and the Civil Service Associa-

¹⁸Social Credit's strategy of using energy industry royalties to finance social services and education while leaving major economic decisions to the marketplace is discussed by Ed Shaffer in "The Political Economy of Oil in Alberta," in David Leadbeater, ed., *Essays on the Political Economy of Alberta* (Toronto 1984), 174-93; and "Oil, Class and Development in Alberta" in Larry Pratt, ed., *Socialism and Democracy in Alberta: Essays in Honour of Grant Notley* (Edmonton, 1986), 112-30.

¹⁹Carl Berg, an executive member of the AFL, expressed labour's fears of Social Credit wage controls in *Edmonton Bulletin*, 8 August 1935. AFL secretary-treasurer Alfred W. Farmilo expressed the organization's continuing fears in this regard in his outline of a meeting between labour leaders and government officials: "A meeting with Messrs. Glen L. MacLachlan, Powell, Byrne," 9 July 1937, Alfred Farmilo Papers, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Item 44.

²⁰On the history of the Labour Party in Alberta, see Alvin Finkel, "The Rise and Fall of the Labour Party in Alberta," *Labour/Le Travail*, 16 (1985), 61-96. Working-class support of Social Credit is detailed in Larry Hannant, "The Calgary Working Class and the Social Credit Movement in Alberta," *Labour/Le Travail*, 16 (1985), 97-116.

²¹Aberhart's attitude to the labour leadership is reflected in a blistering attack in Aberhart to A. Orlando, secretary, Cambrian Local Union #7330, District 18, United Mine Workers of America, Wayne, Alberta, 3 March 1939, Aberhart Papers, File 1227.

²²"Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Convention of the Alberta Federation of Labour," 21-24 February 1944, 7-10. The Social Credit labour legislation to 1944 is outlined in *Today and Tomorrow* (official organ of the Social Credit League), 9 August 1944.

tion, the organization which represented provincial employees. It was the largest labour federation in the province and thus it was useful for Manning to be able to cite support of its leaders in election literature in the provincial election of 1944, an election in which the government faced its only significant electoral battle with the Left (the CCF, and to a lesser extent, the Communist Party).²³

One piece of election literature, for example, quoted long-time AFL official Carl Berg, who had become vice-president of the Trades and Labour Congress, as follows:

Alberta is singularly fortunate in having a government that has done more to work for and with labor than any other government in Canada. We are pleased to say the relationship between our organizations and the government have been very pleasant. The door is always open for consultation with this government.²⁴

Berg had personally followed a political trajectory since 1919 which reflected, in exaggerated form, the changes within the labour movement in the province as a whole. An OBU organizer, he later became an organizer for the Labourers' Union and a left-wing Labourite before becoming an AFL official and right-wing Labourite. A bitter opponent of Social Credit in 1935, he had become, by the early 1940s, a staunch supporter of the Alberta regime and would not sway from that support even when, later in that decade, the government began passing legislation that clearly limited the abilities of unions to represent their members.²⁵

AFL President, Alfred W. Farmilo, addressing the AFL's provincial convention in 1944, seconded Berg's observation on behalf of the Federations's executive. While admitting that much of the province's labour legislation was inadequate, he indicated that government officials were open to labour's suggestions for changes.²⁶ Also, taking a leaf from its United Farmers of Alberta predecessor, the Social Credit government had begun to name AFL officials to government boards such as the Workmen's Compensation Board.²⁷ The result was that the Alberta Workmen's Compensation Act was "one of the best pieces of Workmen's Compensation legislation in existence in Canada," according to Farmilo, a member of the Board.²⁸

The AFL's happiness with the government and particularly with the Workmen's Compensation Board was not shared by its industrial-union competi-

²³See Alvin Finkel, "Obscure Origins: The Confused Early History of the Alberta CCF," in J. William Brennan, ed., *"Building the Cooperative Commonwealth: Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada"* (Regina, 1985), 99-122.

²⁴*Today and Tomorrow*, 8 August 1944.

²⁵Warren Caragata, *Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold* (Toronto, 1979), 64.

²⁶"Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Convention of the Alberta Federation of Labour," 21-24 February 1944, 7-11.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 7.

²⁸*Ibid.*

tors allied with the Canadian Congress of Labour. The province's largest union, the United Mine Workers of America District 18, had called in 1942 for the removal of both Dr. Victor Wright and Farmilo respectively as chairman and labour representative on the Compensation Board. Farmilo, they charged, "represents only a minority of the organized workers in the province of Alberta" and his appointment "has failed to bring about a fair and sympathetic administration for injured workmen."²⁹ District 18, at that time, it might be noted, while not Communist-led, did include Communists on its executive and had several Communist-led branches.³⁰ The Communists indeed enjoyed influence throughout the CCL unions in Alberta in the early 1940s,³¹ and much of the Social Credit anti-communist attack would be directed against this federation.³²

In 1944, however, the CCL unions had no wish to take on Social Credit and divisions between Communists and CCFers in these unions prevented them from following the national CCL's lead in endorsing the CCF as labour's political arm. Only a handful of union affiliates, representing about 500 workers, had joined the CCF by the time of the 1944 election. The CCF leader, Elmer Roper, was a printer and former executive officer of the AFL as well as editor of its official organ from 1920 to 1935; he attempted to remain neutral in the CCL-AFL battles but appeared to gain little public support from the leaders of either federation.

While Social Credit attacks on the CCF and the Communists during the 1944 election did not include broadsides against the labour movement, there was much in their character that presaged the Socred line on militant unionism once the election was over. Socialists of all types were lumped together with Germany's National Socialists as conspirators working together, with the aid of bankers, to achieve world domination. Manning wrote one CCF supporter: "It is an insult to suggest to the Canadian people who are sacrificing their sons to remove the curse which the socialism of Germany has brought to the world that their own social and economic security can be attained only by introducing some form of socialism in Canada."³³ More ominously, he warned a Social Credit supporter who proposed a Socred-CCF alliance:

...finance is today seeking to strengthen its dictatorship by subtly [sic] advocating the doctrine

²⁹UMWA District 18 resolutions. President R. Livett and Secretary-Treasurer A.J. Morrison to Aberhart, 21 January 1942, Aberhart Papers, File 1227.

³⁰Gilbert Levine, "Patrick Lenihan and the Alberta Miners," *Labour/Le Travail*, 16 (1985), 167-78.

³¹Caragata, *Alberta Labour*, 139-40.

³²In late June 1944, only two months before the provincial election, the CCF could claim only 367 members in affiliated unions in Calgary and Edmonton combined. William Irvine, CCF provincial secretary, 28 June 1944, CCF Records, Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Box 5, File 42.

³³Ernest Manning to J.B. Hayfield, 3 February 1944, Premiers' (Manning) Papers, Provincial Archives of Alberta, File 1242.

of a supreme state. In other words it is determined to strengthen its now shaky [sic] position by augmenting its present control by the establishment of dictatorship in another field, namely that of Government. That is the ultimate end of all forms of socialism including the CCF.³⁴

It would not be long before elements of the labour movement were also identified by Social Credit with this financial-socialist alliance against the supremely-reigning individual of liberal theory, an individual whom Manning increasingly with time confounded with multi-national corporations.

III

RE-ELECTED IN 1944 WITH a resounding majority of seats, the Manning administration devoted itself to an anti-socialist crusade. In 1946 it extended film censorship laws to cover 16 mm. films "in order to prevent the showing of what it termed communist propaganda films."³⁵ It thus hoped to "eliminate communist thought from Alberta-shown movies."³⁶ Within a year, it had banned several films, including a British Information Office film which warned against race hatred and supported unreservedly the United Nations, a *bête noire* in Socred conspiratorial demonology.³⁷ Over the years the Alberta Board of Censors would ban several films which featured mild social criticism, including "The Wild One" and "The Blackboard Jungle." The government decried the CBC's decision in the early 1960s to air both of these subversive movies.³⁸

Real-life subversives, however, seemed to enter the province despite controls over film propaganda. In 1946, the Alberta Farmers' Union, whose founders and rank-and-file included many Social Crediters, attempted to pressure the federal government to increase wheat prices by means of a non-delivery-of-grain strike. The strike increased AFU membership from 20,000 to 30,000. Manning, however, successfully ran the political risk of denouncing the strike as Communist-inspired. Any activity, he announced, that interfered with post-war productivity could not be countenanced.³⁹

³⁴Manning to William Wray, 30 June 1943, Manning Papers, File 1113.

³⁵Donald G. Wetherell, "Some Aspects of Technology and Leisure in Alberta, 1914-1950," *Prairie Forum*, 11, 1 (1986), 55.

³⁶Quoted in *Ibid.*

³⁷*People's Weekly*, 3 February 1945.

³⁸Manning Papers, Box 40, File 405. The CBC was alleged by Social Credit to have been infiltrated by Communists as early as 1945. "As for the Communists, they have infiltrated the CBC as they have every other organization," reported Socred MP Norman Jaques in *The Canadian Social Crediter*, 22 March 1945.

³⁹*People's Weekly*, 28 September 1946; 5 October 1946. A thorough account of the 1946 delivery strike, which relates the strike to the desperate situation of small farmers on the Prairies from the Depression onwards, is provided in David Monod, "The Fight for Farm Parity in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1935-48," *Labour/Le Travail*, 16 (Fall 1985), 117-43.

Labour strife, of course, could interfere with production. But, in 1944, there had been no strikes, in 1945 only one strike involving thirty workers striking for two days, and in 1946 only three short work stoppages.⁴⁰ In 1947, however, a national packinghouse workers' strike, led by a CCL affiliate, the United Packinghouse Workers of America, closed down the major packers in Alberta from late August to late October. The reaction of the Cabinet was vociferous. Workers were urged to cross their union's picket line.⁴¹ Premier Manning told a large audience that "expanded and uninterrupted production of goods in this country is being deliberately sabotaged by industrial and distributing combines and by those who deliberately are fomenting industrial unrest in furtherance of those philosophies which make capital of distress."⁴²

The view that strike leaders did not represent rank-and-file workers was also expressed by Public Works Minister W.A. Fallow, who described union members as "helpless men and women browbeaten by a few," whose activities formed part of "an effort to impose labour totalitarianism."⁴³ Socred MLA James Hartley, echoing Manning's view of a conspiracy, claimed: "In days gone by Labour organizations were run to benefit working men, today they are operated for anti-Christian organizations."⁴⁴

CCF leader Elmer Roper no doubt correctly pinpointed the reason for this outpouring of anti-labour sentiment in a province whose recent strike record was rather feeble. The Leduc oil strike took place in 1947 and the Manning government was obsessed with the need to assure American oil companies that Alberta was a safe place to invest. "It is to give assurance to the big business interests to which the Alberta government is now irrevocably committed" that the blasts against labour were launched, claimed Roper. At the same time, according to Roper, the government hoped to persuade the farmers that labour, "not the fifty big shots," who Aberhart once exorciated, was the enemy.⁴⁵

The labour movement, however, appeared unable to react defiantly or even in concert to the government's charges, charges which proved to be the precursors of anti-labour legislation. Restricting itself to a letter of protest from its leading provincial officials to Manning, the CCL stressed its anti-communism even more than its control by its members and suggested that

⁴⁰"What Has Been Done for Labor?" (Social Credit pamphlet), 1948, Manning Papers, File 1762.

⁴¹"Report on the Proceedings of the Canadian Congress of Labour Unions and Labour Councils in Alberta," 13-15 November 1947, Canadian Congress of Labour Papers, Public Archives of Canada, Volume 178, File 15.

⁴²*Edmonton Bulletin*, 15 October 1947.

⁴³*People's Weekly*, 18 October 1947.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

the government was misinformed rather than deliberately lying, as the CCF had charged. The letter read in part:

It is our opinion that you have endeavoured to convey to the public of the province the impression that all labour unions are wrapped up in one inseparable parcel and led by professional fomentors of industrial unrest, and by inference take their orders from foreign countries — even as far distant as Moscow. We feel that you, as the Honourable Premier of this province, should be better informed. Only last week, our organization, the CCL, and its Canadian CIO affiliated unions has by convention denounced Communism in all its forms. We further feel that you should be aware of the democratic means provided by CCL-CIO unions in respect to the calling of strikes.⁴⁶

This letter seems to have been the extent of the CCL response. The AFL, for its part, did not respond at all. It did not wish to jeopardize its good relations with the government and, in any case, some of its leaders shared Manning's view of strikes as, above all, an impediment to production. Vice-president Carl Berg, for example, told the Calgary Trades and Labour Council in August 1946:

In spite of the many blunders made by Governments, the many inequalities and injustices that do now exist, and while not in any way condemning those who have been forced to resort to strike action, I cannot, now any more than I did in War-time, agree that this is the time to throw our industrial machine and economy out of gear, and into complete chaos through strikes ... strikes will only further retard our building, housing and reconstruction programs, increase the scarcity of commodities, and thus increase prices as well as decrease the flow of supplies to a suffering world.⁴⁷

With the AFL in its pocket and the CCL fresh from a purge of Communists and concerned with establishing a respectable image, the Manning administration feared little political penalty in translating its tough anti-labour talk into legislation. It was given fresh incentive to do so when a coal miners' strike, affecting mines in Alberta and British Columbia, was launched in January 1948. Seven thousand Alberta miners of a work force that numbered less than 9,000, along with 2,000 of their union brethren in British Columbia, participated in the strike. While most miners had returned to work by the end of February, some mines did not settle until the end of July. This one strike accounted for 30 percent of all time lost in Canada to strikes in 1948. In Alberta it accounted for well over 99 percent of all person-days lost due to strikes that year.⁴⁸ Miners had chafed throughout the war at federal wage controls which prevented them from sharing, to their satisfaction, in the wartime mining boom that had turned an industry long plagued by over-

⁴⁶C.W. Dean, General Organizer, CCL; J.E. Henderson, General Organizer, CCL; and J. Hampson, Alberta Representative, United Packinghouse Workers of America; to Manning, 27 October 1947, Manning Papers, File 1905.

⁴⁷"Proceedings of the 1946 Convention of the Alberta Federation of Labour," 48-9.

⁴⁸Canada, Department of Labour, *Strikes and Lockouts in Canada During 1948* (Ottawa 1949), 5, 8, 15, 17.

production into one that could not meet demand.⁴⁹ This strike represented their attempt finally to have wages increased and the miners' welfare fund fattened; it netted gains, though as we shall note later, these proved to be short-lived.⁵⁰ In the meantime, however, their strike, like the packinghouse workers' action, served as a reminder that union militancy had not been extinguished in Alberta.

The government made its move in March 1948 to limit the likelihood of militant action in the future. It tabled in the legislature a sweeping re-write of the Alberta Labour Act, an act passed only one year earlier and the purpose of which was mainly to consolidate existing labour legislation in one act. The 1947 act retained existing restrictions regarding workers' right to strike but drew little fire from either the AFL or the CCL unions because on the surface it made union organizing easier: in line with PC 1003, employer interference in the formation or administration of a union was strictly forbidden.⁵¹ Also in the act was a reduction of the maximum hours of work for all workers to eight per day and 48 per week; previously, the 8-and-48 had applied only to women while men could be worked nine hours per day and 54 per week without overtime pay. Nevertheless, the Board of Industrial Relations continued to retain the right to exempt employers from the maximum-hour law. As for the anti-strike provisions in the 1947 legislation, they were carried over from the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1938, an act which imposed conciliation and compulsory (but not binding) arbitration when requested by either party to a dispute. No strike could occur while the conciliation and arbitration processes dragged on and a still-defiant AFL had denounced the 1938 legislation as a gift to employers who would use the conciliation-arbitration procedure to stall for time to hire scabs.⁵² In practice, however, unionists often defied the law because, as the *Edmonton Bulletin* complained, "labour unions are not within the reach of these penalties (penalties for individuals who defy the Conciliation Act) and that is the weakness, the lamentable and tragic weakness of all labour legislation."⁵³

It was not a weakness of the 1948 legislation. The amendments to the Labour Act that year made clear the corporate responsibility of unions and the individual responsibility of unions and the individual responsibility of

⁴⁹United Mine Workers of America Papers, Glenbow Archives Institute, Box 9, particularly files 60, 65, 66. There had even been a UMWA strike in 1943 but the miners' leaders had accepted Ottawa's offer of a Royal Commission which would have the power to settle the strike. The Commission gave the miners only half the pay increase they had demanded.

⁵⁰*Strikes and Lockouts*, 17.

⁵¹*Statutes of the Province of Alberta*, Chapter 8, 1947.

⁵²*Statutes of the Province of Alberta*, Chapter 15, 1938 and *People's Weekly*, 12 March 1938.

⁵³*Edmonton Bulletin*, March 1947, in Secretary's Files, Department of Labour, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Box 2, File 470.1.

union leaders for the actions of union members. In the amended act the penalties for violations were steeply raised and existing collective agreements were made null and void in cases where a judge ruled that an illegal strike occurred with the authorization of the union. Organization of unions was made more difficult by a provision that no union representative could attempt to persuade individuals to join a union while on the employer's premises without the employer's permission. Finally, to insure that any future meat packing strikes could be forestalled, meat packing was added to coal mining as an industry which the Cabinet could, at any time, remove from the provisions of the act and place under the provisions of the federal Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, which had built-in stalling mechanisms even harsher than those of the Alberta Labour Act.⁵⁴

The union movement was virtually unanimous in its opposition to the proposed changes, with even the AFL indicating its disapproval to the premier.⁵⁵ But, with demonstrations and political strikes having gone out of fashion, the union movement restricted itself to presentations to legislators. They were able to sway five of six members of the opposition groups in the legislature and won the support of three Social Credit MLAs against proclamation of the amendments.⁵⁶ But this was hardly a telling blow to a government with a caucus of 51 members in a 57-seat legislature.

The AFL unions do not appear to have considered either campaigning against the legislation or supporting political opponents of Social Credit in the provincial election which followed the passage of the amendments by three months. Their rivals, the CCL unions, on the other hand, which later that year would form the Industrial Federation of Labour of Alberta (IFLA), called on the national CCL for help in getting "this retrograde labour legislation recalled."⁵⁷ The CCL advised a political campaign on behalf of the CCF at the upcoming election and provided an organizer to help this party defeat Social Credit.⁵⁸ And a special conference of the CCL, called to plan a united response by the industrial unions affiliated to the CCL, endorsed the CCF as the political arm of labour.⁵⁹

In practice, however, the new labour laws were barely an issue in the 1948 election. Social Credit claimed the issue at stake was the future development of the province's oil industry, which had experienced a boom since the February 1947 Leduc oil strike. While the CCF, as noted, claimed that Social

⁵⁴*Statutes of the Province of Alberta*, Chapter 76, 1948.

⁵⁵Telegrams from labour groups to Manning are found in Manning Papers, File 1759.

⁵⁶*Journals*, Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 31 March 1948.

⁵⁷Jack Hampson, secretary-treasurer, Provincial Committee of CCL, to Pat Conroy, secretary-treasurer, CCL, 5 April 1948, CCL Papers, Volume 178, File 15.

⁵⁸Pat Conroy to Fred Dowling, District Ten Director, United Packinghouse Workers of America, Toronto, 26 July 1948, CCL Papers, Volume 37, File 16.

⁵⁹*People's Weekly*, 15 August 1948.

Credit's anti-labour laws were largely motivated by a desire to impress oil industry investors, Social Credit took advantage of the province's new prosperity to castigate CCF calls for public ownership of much of the oil industry.⁶⁰ With the development of the oil industry at stake, Social Credit's questionable civil rights record, including its anti-labour laws, received little attention. The CCF, in any case, had been dispirited by its failure in 1944 to turn its large vote into more than two legislative seats; it was poorly organized in 1948 and the eleventh-hour aid of CCL leaders made little difference. Its popular vote dropped six percent from its 1944 performance to 19 percent; since the Communists contested only two seats and received few votes, the total Left vote was down by 11 percent in four years.⁶¹ Electioneering alone appeared to offer labour little hope of reversing the reactionary Alberta Labour Act amendments. Yet it would remain for several decades the only tactic used by labour leaders to try to effect changes.

The amendments to the Labour Act proved effective in intimidating both workers considering organizing a union local and organized workers negotiating a contract. Still loyal to the government, the AFL leadership nonetheless mentioned the impact of the amendments in the Federation's 1949 submission to the premier and cabinet. For example, the ban on union organizing on an employer's premises had led to a situation in which not only were union organizers kept off an employer's property (a situation which the AFL claimed it could accept) but also "employees have also been forbidden to talk union business during their lunch and rest periods." It was a near certainty that unions would not dare to strike while conciliation and arbitration dragged on, and this had led to "some pre-arranged plan" by employers to resist settlements and force almost every contract negotiation to go through the laborious machinery provided by the government for disputes resolution. The AFL's solution to this employer offensive was perhaps unsurprising from a conservative federation whose leaders extolled continuous production though even these leaders admitted their proposal was "something out of the ordinary to be coming from the Labour movement."

It is the suggestion of our Federation that amendments should be written into the Labour Act to provide that decisions of Boards of Arbitration would have to be implemented within fourteen days of their being rendered....

We make this proposal, keeping in mind what has been going on this year. Again we say it appears as if a pre-arranged plan is being carried out by employers to place the onus on wor-

⁶⁰ *People's Weekly*, 21 August 1948.

⁶¹ The CCF's decline is indicated by the fact that, despite a membership of 12,000 at the time of the election in 1944, the party's goal in election year 1948 was a mere 4000 members. *People's Weekly*, 24 April 1948.

In 1949, provincial party president Nellie Peterson implied in a letter to national secretary Lorne Ingle that the party was in disarray in Alberta. Peterson to Ingle, 20 May 1949, CCF Papers, Box 43.

kers to take strike action to bring about their desires or to bring about what they have rightfully won through the Board of Arbitration.⁶²

A labour federation, prepared to surrender the right to strike in favour of compulsory arbitration, could hardly present a threat to a conservative government — though, in any case, the government did not accede to the AFL's unusual demand. So it was left to the Industrial Federation of Labour to provide whatever continuing campaign labour might launch against the 1948 amendments. But the IFLA continued to be paranoid about government attacks against alleged subversives within the unions. Early in 1951, for example, C.F. Gerhart, Alberta Minister of Municipal Affairs, asserted, in McCarthy-like fashion, in the legislature that there were between 500 and 600 spies planted among Alberta's working people. This statement was "very much resented" by the IFLA "particularly when we have gone to great lengths to eradicate from our organization any subversive elements," the leaders told Manning.⁶³ When Manning gave any indication that the CCL unions might be regarded as legitimate, the IFLA was jubilant, as this excerpt from a 1952 letter from the Federation to Manning indicated:

The Federation is honoured that your government extended to the President of the Industrial Federation of Labour of Alberta, Canadian Congress of Labour, an invitation to attend the State Dinner at which their Royal Highnesses were present. We wish to thank you for the opportunity to have representation at this important event, realizing that your government recognizes this labour organization as a responsible, loyal and essential part of our society.⁶⁴

The moderation of the industrial union movement was encouraged by the malaise of its once-most militant section: the coal miners. After the 1948 strike, markets for Alberta coal began to dry up. It was in 1948 that the CPR began its policy of "dieselization," which the CNR soon followed. "A 13,000-ton market had disappeared."⁶⁵ While the Alberta government pressed the federal government unsuccessfully for a national coal policy to wrest the Ontario and Quebec markets from American producers, it balked at UMW and IFLA proposals to encourage the establishment of new industries in the coal-mining areas so as to save these communities. It also ignored UMW warnings of the impact on the coal industry of natural gas exports and even the members for the seats which included coal mines - Drumheller, Edson, Rocky Mountain House and Crow's Nest Pass - voted in favour of gas exports. Coal-mining employment fell from 8865 in 1948 to 3443 in

⁶²Submission of Alberta Federation of Labour to Premier Manning, 1949, Manning Papers, Volume 1764.

⁶³Robert Atkin, president, and Roy Jamha, secretary-treasurer, Industrial Federation of Labour of Alberta, to Manning, 8 February 1952, Manning Papers, File 1905.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵A.A. den Otter, "Railways and Alberta's Coal Problem, 1880-1960," in A.W. Rasporich, *Western Canada Past and Present* (Calgary 1975), 97.

1956.⁶⁶ The Manning government did little to help the affected miners. "Not until April 1954 did the provincial Coal Miners' Rehabilitation Act authorize the expenditure of \$100,000 to meet the transportation costs of miners who had found work in other areas, but little was done for those without jobs."⁶⁷ Though no one in the government said so publicly, it seemed there was little desire to maintain communities that grouped some of the province's most militant workers. Far better to humble and scatter them.

IV

THE TIMIDITY OF THE unions did not endear the Manning government to them. This is rather obvious when one considers that Manning clung to the view of a link between organized labour and a worldwide communist conspiracy until the end of his days in office. His government's willingness to fight that conspiracy, even though it had left Alberta virtually strike-free in the 1950s was particularly evident in its support of company unions. Indeed the company union issue, because it brought into question the legitimacy of labour's right to organize, eroded AFL support for the government in the 1950s and provided a rallying point for the expanded Alberta Federation of Labour which resulted from the AFL-IFLA merger in 1956.⁶⁸

The merger movement in North American labour was seen by Social Credit as one more episode in the unfolding of the famous conspiracy. The *Canadian Social Crediter*, reporting on the fusion of the American Federation of Labor with the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1955 (the latter led by Walter Reuther and once headed by John L. Lewis), claimed:

With the recent amalgamation of the two great branches of the labour movement in the States, Reuther's power makes John L. Lewis look like a ballet dancer. When the situation is consolidated, we'll see a corporate state south of the border with all its vast potential for evil. Men and women by the millions will be subject to blanket directives from "The Boss." Indeed liberty as we all want it can become a tinkling cymbal ... tinkled only on May Day.⁶⁹

The government-appointed Board of Industrial Relations appeared to share this dim view of big unions. It demonstrated hostility to union "inflexibility" regarding collective agreement provisions and appeared sympathetic towards the free-and-easy pattern that seemed to apply when company un-

⁶⁶Caragata, *Alberta Labour*, 132-3; "Brief of Industrial Federation of Labour of Alberta (CCL) to Government of Alberta," 7 February 1950, Manning Papers, File 1759; Harry Douglas Trace, "An Examination of Some Factors Associated with the Decline of the Coal Industry in Alberta," M.A. thesis, University of Alberta, 1958, 45, 70.

⁶⁷den Otter, "Railways," 97.

⁶⁸David Leadbeater, "An Outline of Capitalist Development in Alberta," in David Leadbeater, ed., *Essays on the Political Economy of Alberta* (Toronto 1984), 61.

⁶⁹*The Canadian Social Crediter*, October 1955.

ions sat on the other side of the table from management. It proved particularly happy to certify and support company unions in the growing energy sector.⁷⁰ A day in the life of the Board illustrates the unions' problems in their dealings with the government's arbiter on labour matters.

At its 11 January 1957 meeting the Board heard union complaints that management of a Calgary foundry were requiring employees to work overtime despite a clause in the collective agreement which forbade compulsory overtime. The foundry's lawyer insisted that the workers had voluntarily consented to work overtime. But the union representative noted that workers who refused overtime had been threatened with loss of their jobs if they did not change their minds. Management did not wish to hire extra workers for a new shift. In the opinion of Board chairman Kenneth Pugh, the union attitude was incomprehensible. The agreement required only an individual's consent that he or she work overtime and not the union's; and as for the question of an employer being forced to hire more workers because of a condition in a contract:

Are you suggesting the company should employ a third man and have the three of you sitting around doing nothing until some machinery wants repairing? When the employees refuse to do what the employer wishes, it impairs collective bargaining.⁷¹

Unsurprisingly, with this view, the Board chose not to intervene in this case. But the same day it heard from a certified bargaining agent and its employer, the two of whom never worried about the fine print in the collective agreement. Despite having been certified for eight years, the Louis Petrie-Jenkins Groceteria Employees Association, representing 42 workers, never secured a written agreement. "We have always settled matters on a verbal basis," R.H. Jenkins noted cheerfully to the Board on behalf of the company. This state of affairs however was threatened by the Teamsters who had signed up 28 of the 42 employees. A union representative claimed that employer intimidation on three earlier occasions had resulted in defeat of a union certification vote. On this occasion, two union activists had already been laid off and, in the union's opinion, the calling of a vote by the Board of Industrial Relations would occasion more employer interference. Nevertheless, a vote was called.⁷²

Such a pattern was common in the Board's deliberations. It regarded union complaints of intimidation by management in company union cases as unfounded and union calls for strict enforcement of the letter of agreements as unduly restrictive for employers. Even when management admitted to firing union activists, the Board was unmoved. In one case, for example, where

⁷⁰Caragata, *Alberta Labour*, 133-6.

⁷¹Minutes of 11 January 1957 Meeting of Board of Industrial Relations, Board of Industrial Relations Papers, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Box 4, File. 427.

⁷²*Ibid.*

five workers in a 55-person unit had been fired, the employer indicated: "I was compelled to fire a man with eighteen years service for solicitation during working hours." The union representative indicated that such action was part of a campaign of intimidation, but the board ruled that despite the fact that 40 of the 55 workers eligible to do so had signed cards, a vote should be held before certification. It also judged that no further investigation of management's behaviour was required.⁷³

The AFL charged that in 1957 and 1958, the certification of company unions by the Board had become an epidemic, in some cases without even a vote being held.⁷⁴ But, as the Federation complained to Labour and Industries Minister Raymond Reiersen in May 1958, workers' votes in favour of a company union were often a mockery:

In very few cases, if any, have we known of an employee association being born where a legitimate trade union was not involved in organizing. In one case during the past year, the Trade Union Movement went to great pains to produce evidence to prove that the Association was only interested in keeping out a legitimate Trade Union, that a great deal of intimidation and coercion had been used within the Employees' Association, that the so-called "Employee Association" was Company dominated through Company supervisory staff personnel, and Company witnesses even admitted these facts. Yet the Association was certified without a vote, and our evidence completely disregarded.⁷⁵

The pro-company-union stance of the government was quite a blow to a Federation which had once failed to understand the consequences of the government's paranoia that labour unrest bore a relationship to an alleged communist conspiracy sometimes connected with international finance. They had chosen to ignore the anti-union statements of Manning and others and to accept the reassurances of the former Minister of Labour and Industries, John Robinson, who claimed in 1948, that despite the anti-labour content of the 1948 amendments, the government stuck by the words of the 1947 act which ensured worker autonomy from employers in collective bargaining. Said Robinson: "Only trade unions and organizations can be certified as bargaining units. Thus an individual who might be subject to the influence of the employer cannot be appointed as a bargaining agent."⁷⁶

By the end of the 1950s, the labour leaders no longer believed that friendly persuasion would win better labour laws and more even-handed enforcement of discretionary laws by the Board of Industrial Relations. A memorandum to the Cabinet in 1960 called for the Labour Act to include a definition of

⁷³Minutes of 8 March 1957 Meeting of Board of Industrial Relations, Board of Industrial Relations Papers, Box 4, File 432.

⁷⁴*Calgary Herald*, 29 March 1958.

⁷⁵Alberta Federation of Labour to Hon. Raymond Reiersen, 12 May 1958, Secretary's Files, Department of Labour, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Box 5, File 481.2.

⁷⁶Labour Day speech, 1948, of John Robinson, Secretary's Files, Department of Labour, File 481.2.3.

a trade union that would conform with Robinson's claim in 1948 of the government's understanding of the act's intention. It was obvious, noted the AFL, that company unions with no treasuries were hiring expensive legal counsel for ALRB hearings whom the international and national unions could never dream of affording. But the AFL appeared to expect little action from the government. It noted that the section of the law which prohibited employer interference with the formation of a union "has become a big joke." "There are very few cases today where employers do not interfere, coerce, intimidate and discriminate against employees, yet in every case so far, no penalties have been enforced."⁷⁷ Penalties against unions, on the other hand, had been granted on several occasions where the Alberta Labour Act was said to have been infringed upon.

But while the Federation, which in 1960 represented 35,000 workers, was increasingly exasperated by the government's attitude, it appeared helpless in fighting it. Throughout the 1950s, the labour movement had continued to eschew demonstrations or other extra-parliamentary activity to place pressure on the government; and even the electoral participation by the former CCL unions had become fairly token. While the IFLA appreciated the efforts on labour's behalf by the two CCF MLAs, it became increasingly reluctant to be associated with a party whose image was too left-wing for a union movement seeking respectability.⁷⁸ Social Credit, for example, never tired of branding the CCF as crypto-communist.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, key CCL officials such as Roy Jamha and Jack Hampson stood as unsuccessful CCF candidates in the 1950s. In general, the merger-produced AFL proved supportive of the creation of the New Democratic Party less because it would broaden

⁷⁷"Memorandum for Alberta Federation of Labour to Premier and Cabinet Members," 25 January 1960, Manning Papers, Box 81, File 879 b.

⁷⁸Federation president Robert Atkin told the 1952 IFLA convention:

During the last session of the Alberta Legislative Assembly I noted with interest that the two CCF members of the legislature, Mr. Roper and Mr. Liesemer, presented our labour program with a great deal of vigour, and I was hopeful that Labour would reciprocate by increasing the CCF representation in the legislature during the recent provincial election, and the fact that the workers did not do so indicates to me that Labour does not yet realize its potential political strength, and is the "Sleeping Giant" politically. One of our tasks is to awaken labour as to its political responsibility and emphasize to the workers that the economic advantages they have gained could be wiped out by their failure to exercise full political rights.

Minutes of Fifth Annual Convention of Industrial Federation of Labour of Alberta, 30 October - 1 November 1952, CCL Papers, Volume 178, File 17.

⁷⁹Jack Masson and Peter Blaikie, "Labour Politics in Alberta," in Carlo Caldarola, ed., *Society and Politics in Alberta: Research Papers* (Toronto, 1979), 275; Larry Pratt, "Grant Notley: Politics as a Calling," in Larry Pratt, ed., *Socialism and Democracy in Alberta: Essays in Honour of Grant Notley* (Edmonton, 1986), 5. Social Credit's association of the CCF with Communism is found in many issues of the party paper, *The Canadian Social Crediter*, e.g., in an article entitled "CCF ... Communism in Short Pants," April 1955.

the base of the old CCF than because it would marginalize and perhaps exclude the leftists in the CCF whose programs, in labour officialdom's view, stood in the way of electing a moderate reformist government which would accede to labour's modest demands for specific legislative changes — a ban on company unions, a guarantee of union security, and a better regime of maximum hours-minimum wages along with better enforcement in general of laws to protect workers.⁸⁰

V

WHILE LABOUR WAS RETHINKING its political non-partisanship in the wake of CCF-Canadian Labour Congress national talks aimed at the creation of a new party, the Manning government was preparing a fresh assault on union rights. After losing a great deal of support to a resurgent provincial Liberal party in 1955, the Socreds crushed their opposition in 1959, winning 56 per cent of the popular vote and 61 of 65 seats in the legislature. No other party or group won more than a single seat; the CCF was wiped out.⁸¹ During the election, Manning credited the development of the energy industry in the province to his government's policy of creating a climate of trust for investors.⁸² It was presumably to maintain this climate that the government tightened the screws on labour in 1960 with the first major amendments to the Alberta Labour Act since 1948. The government did not launch a fresh campaign of linking labour with communism as it had in 1948, preferring to quietly push its pro-employer amendments through a legislature without labour supporters. Labour was left to protest its shock that, in an almost strike-free province, the government was so determined to make unions impotent.⁸³

One amendment prohibited information picketing outside an employers' premises for the purpose of organizing employees and denied certification to a bargaining unit which had signed up any members as a result of such picketing. Another amendment prohibited all members of professions related to the medical, dental, architectural, engineering, and legal fields from

⁸⁰Masson and Blaikie, "Labour Politics," 275.

⁸¹*Canadian Parliamentary Guide*, 1960.

⁸²"Premier Manning telecasts," 1959, in Alberta Social Credit League Papers, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Box 1, Item 8.

⁸³In part, labour was caught unawares because, only months before the 1960 amendments were introduced, Labour Minister Raymond Reiersen, speaking against a Social Credit convention resolution which opposed the closed shop, claimed Alberta had Canada's best labour-management relations. "We have the best strike-free and reconciliation record," the convention minutes quote him as saying. "Minutes of Alberta Social Credit Convention," 24-26 November 1959, Alberta Social Credit League Papers, Box 3, Item 5.

unionization while another gave the Board of Industrial Relations the power to exclude from unionization those who it believed performed supervisory functions or enjoyed a confidential relationship to management. Those few workers still allowed to join unions would be forbidden from taking job action to protest hirings of non-union employees and from engaging in secondary picketing. The Minister of Labour received the right to declare an emergency to end a strike where "life or property [emphasis mine] will be in serious jeopardy" otherwise.

The AFL, noting that Alberta had been virtually strike-free in 1959, asked in vain that the legislation be reconsidered or at least that if severe restrictions were to be placed on the unions that some action also be taken on labour's long-time grievance against company unions.

These proposed amendments are the restrictive sections of the British Columbia Bill Number 43, the Newfoundland Labour Bill, the Taft-Hartley Bill and the Landrum-Griffin Bill, without incorporating any of the protection given to Labour in these bills, such as severe penalties against Employers for unfair Labour practices, the right for a supervised vote on Union Shop and strict enforcement in administration of the Act. During the years our Labour Board has not taken the initiative in pressing charges of unfair Labour practices against Employers such as they do in other Provinces. In fact at the present time, anti-union Employers can and do, with the assistance of legal advisors, just about everything to stop their Employees from being represented by a legitimate bargaining agent.⁸⁵

Within two years the AFL could assure the government that if its intention had been to slow down the pace of organization of the unorganized, it had succeeded. In several cases, manual workers, arbitrarily labelled managers by employers, had been stripped by the Board of their union membership. In other cases, supervisory staff attempting to organize were turned back by the Board, for example, an attempt by the supervisory staff of the City of Red Deer to achieve representation by the National Union of Public Employees. Members of groups such as nurses, lab technicians, and X-ray technicians, who had considered unionization, learned that the law excluded them from the right to unionize.⁸⁶

VI

FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S OWN employees, meanwhile, the right to unionize had never existed. Saskatchewan's CCF government gave its civil servants the right to unionize in 1944 and in 1945 it certified two unions, one affiliat-

⁸⁴*Statutes of the Province of Alberta*, Chapter 54, 1960.

⁸⁵R. Scott, executive secretary, AFL to all members of the Legislative Assembly, 1 March 1960, Manning Papers, Box 46, File 468 b. The "boxed" Manning Papers are the papers from 1960 to 1968.

⁸⁶"Submission of the Alberta Federation of Labour to the Premier and Cabinet members," 22 January 1962, Manning Papers, Box 46, File 464.

ed with the TLC, the other with the CCL, to represent its workforce.⁸⁷ One might reasonably question whether the Alberta government, in framing its labour legislation, was not as interested in forestalling union-minded members of the public service as it was in attracting investors and satisfying its own right-wing ideological proclivities.⁸⁸ But, in practice, before the 1960s, no significant organized sentiment favouring unionization existed within the Civil Service Association (the CSA), the voluntary organization of provincial public servants. The CSA established itself in the 1940s as one of the most conservative elements within the overall rather conservative AFL. When its leaders heard talk that progressive elements within the Federation sought to achieve a measure of unity with the CCL unions on some issues, they immediately indicated their total disapproval of such a direction to the AFL leadership. Not content to leave the matter within the union movement, CSA president A. Peart sent Manning copies of the CSA correspondence with the AFL and TLC so that the premier could rest assured that it remained association policy "to abstain from affiliation or collaboration with any organizations having political affiliation."⁸⁹ It was disingenuous of Peart to describe the CSA as non-partisan. In 1944 the organization had publicly commended the Social Credit government for maintaining better relations with the CSA than any previous government despite the fact that the government refused to accede to a CSA request for the appointment of a Civil Service Commission which would hire employees on grounds of merit rather than partisanship.⁹⁰ Social Credit had packed the public service with its own supporters, and this had led to a compliant organization of public servants. Aberhart believed firmly enough in partisan hiring to reject opponents of the government from even such posts as truckers, stenographers, and labour-

⁸⁷Labour relations between Saskatchewan governments and their civil servants are explored in Glen Makahonuk, "Masters and Servants: Labour Relations in the Saskatchewan Civil Service, 1905-1945," *Prairie Forum*, 11:2 (Fall 1987).

⁸⁸One reviewer of this paper for *Labour/Le Travail* suggested this possibility and it certainly has a commonsense validity.

⁸⁹A. Peart, president, Civil Service Association, to Manning, 7 March 1947, Manning Papers, File 1334. The letter to Manning encloses letters from R.A. Harrison, general secretary of the CSA to the president of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada and the secretary-treasurer of the AFL.

⁹⁰[CSA Associate President William] "McGruther thanked the Premier and pointed out to the assembled delegates that at no time in the history of the Association had relations with the Government been on a better footing." "Proceedings of the 24th Annual Convention of the Civil Service Association of Alberta, December 1 and 2, 1944," A.A. Farmilo Papers; and President, Civil Service Association, to A.J. Hooke, 20 October, 1943, Manning Papers, File 782.

ers.⁹¹ Manning's government, at least until the 1960s, was no better. In the late 1950s the government, after losing a large bloc of seats to opposition parties in 1955 because of rumours of scandals, passed a variety of laws which swept aside, at least on the surface, the casual character of past practices of tendering contracts and hiring staff. The new Director of Personnel, reporting to the Provincial Treasurer in 1961, described the existing civil service, assembled before the new legislation regarding appointments was passed in 1959, as riddled with patronage and indeed suggested that Alberta had proportionately more civil servants than other Canadian provinces because of the "past poverty of our employee recruitment and selection efforts." His overall assessment was:

In the absence of proper standards and procedures for measuring ability, the weight of personal influence tended to dominate appointments and it frequently made itself felt, not only through the medium of the Ministers and MLA's but also through departmental officials from Deputy Ministers to those of much lower rank who knew how to pull the proper strings in order to help their friends and relatives who wanted to enter the provincial service.⁹²

Such a pattern was common in the Board's deliberations. It regarded union complaints of intimidation by management in company union cases as unfounded and union calls for strict enforcement of the letter of agreements as unduly restrictive for employers. Even when management admitted to firing union activists, the Board was unmoved. In one case, for example, where five workers in a 55-person unit had been fired, the employer indicated: "I was compelled to fire a man with eighteen years service for solicitation during working hours." The union representative indicated that such action was part of a campaign of intimidation, but the board ruled that despite the fact that 40 of the 55 workers eligible to do so had signed cards, a vote should be held before certification. It also judged which was "dedicated to securing collective bargaining rights for public employees."⁹⁴

But the CSA leadership remained friendly with the government. Roy Harrison, the executive secretary, wrote the premier in 1963 that the "Joint Council has operated successfully in the Province of Alberta mainly because both parties have made every endeavour to negotiate in good faith and meetings

⁹¹In a letter to a Calgary activist who was making recommendations for positions as teachers, labourers, and stenographers, Aberhart advised that members of certain groups be excluded. For example:

In my experience or should I say so far as I have been able to ascertain neither the Single or Married Men's Associations have been favourable to their Government in any way and in fact have stood back of friend Andy (Andrew Davison, Independent MLA for Calgary).

⁹²J.H. Holloway to E.W. Hinman, Provincial Treasurer, 26 June 1961, Manning Papers, Box 10, File 121 b.

⁹³*Statutes of the Province of Alberta*, 1954, Chapter 86, "Public Service Act."

⁹⁴A 1964 CSA pamphlet indicates the Association's membership in the Federation and states the Federation's objectives. Manning Papers, Box 10, File 120 (c).

have been held regularly with full attendance.”⁹⁵ Whether Harrison was aware of it or not, Manning used this testimony to a company-union arrangement to explain to Premier Jean Lesage why Alberta, unlike Quebec, was not considering full-scale union rights for its employees.⁹⁶

In 1968, the rewritten Public Service Act declared the CSA the sole bargaining agent for government employees. But though the CSA was now claimed to be negotiating for its members rather than consulting the government on their behalf, its real powers were no greater than under the Joint Council arrangement. The Minister of Labour had final authority regarding what issues were negotiable, and if disagreements between the parties could not be resolved by mediation, the Cabinet would impose settlement on issues in contention.⁹⁷ It was dismal legislation but the CSA had not fought to achieve a better deal. The CSA would soon rename itself the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and rejoin the AFL which it had left in 1958 because the AFL convention that year had been too critical of the government in the view of Association leaders.⁹⁸ But its attempts in the 1970s and 1980s to earn the status of a real union would always be dogged by the legacy of collaborationism which had insured that the government felt no compulsion to grant meaningful rights to its employees.

VII

STRIKES BECAME MORE COMMONPLACE in Alberta in the 1960s than in the 1950s, if only because national strikes such as those on the railways and in the post office could not be prevented by the provincial government.⁹⁹ But, for the most part, it would appear that the labour movement was successfully beaten back by anti-union legislation and the hostility of the government and the Board of Industrial Relations. The union movement had become, in turn, openly hostile to the Social Credit government and the AFL supported the New Democratic Party, whose first provincial leader, Neil Reim-

⁹⁵Roy Harrison to Russ Sheppard, executive secretary to Manning, 14 August 1963, Manning Papers, Box 17, File 184 (a).

⁹⁶Manning to Jean Lesage, 16 August 1963, Manning Papers, Box 17, File 184 (a).

⁹⁷*Statutes of the Province of Alberta*, 1968, Chapter 298, Sections 26-43, “Public Service Act.”

⁹⁸Caragata, *Alberta Labour*, 144.

⁹⁹Only in 1947 and 1948, when the packinghouse workers' strike and the miners' strike resulted in large numbers of work-days lost, did the Social Credit years witness significant strike activity relative to the pre-1935 period. The greatest number of work-days lost in the 1960s was 64,000 in 1969 when fifteen disputes affecting 2,221 workers produced strikes. This was a rather puny figure against the 966,842 days lost in 1922 and 1,002,179 days lost in 1924, mainly to coal strikes. But it was a significant increase over the 1,625 days lost in 1955 or 2,085 in 1957. Leadbeater, “An Outline,” 61.

er, was a long-time labour official.¹⁰⁰ Labour's hostility however must have appeared to many Albertans, including many unionists, as personal feuding between labour leaders and the government. Certainly there was no mobilization of union members in the various attempts to change the Labour Act or to fight pro-management decisions by the Board of Industrial Relations. Workers supported Social Credit even more solidly than Albertans as a whole.¹⁰¹

Working-class support of Social Credit, understandable during that party's radical phase under Aberhart, appears surprising during the Manning period with its assault on the unions. But the wealth of the province allowed Social Credit to establish an impressive array of health, educational, and social services which seemed to appease most workers. Oil royalties provided more than half of all provincial revenue by the mid-fifties. The result was that while the per capita receipts of all provincial governments combined in the fiscal year 1955-1956 amounted to \$125, for Alberta the figure was \$225. In 1957, while the provinces as a whole spent \$60 dollars per capita on education, Alberta spent \$90 dollars per capita.¹⁰²

Also working in Social Credit's favour was the political apathy which overtook the province in the post-war years. After the excitement of the early years of the UFA and the Labour Party, followed by more excitement when those two movements were swept away by the Aberhart movement, Alberta workers and farmers retreated from active politics. Social Credit, outside of election years, was a party with few active members;¹⁰³ the CCF, meanwhile, as noted earlier, succumbed to defeatism. The NDP might have injected new life into working-class politics in the 1960s. But its leaders were leery about a frank class-based pitch and afraid of alienating farm voters if they appeared too pro-union. In the 1967 provincial election, for example, they emphasized alleged corruption on the part of the government over

¹⁰⁰Robin Hunter, "Social Democracy in Alberta: From the CCF to the NDP," in Larry Pratt, ed., *Socialism and Democracy: Essays in Honour of Grant Notley*, 73-5, 80-2.

¹⁰¹Owen Anderson, "The Alberta Social Credit Party: An Empirical Analysis of Membership Characteristics, Participation and Opinion" PhD thesis, University of Alberta, 1972, 46. A detailed analysis of the basis of this party's support is provided in "Opinion Poll Report, Alberta Province, November-December 1956," Alberta Social Credit League Papers, Box 1, Item 7.

¹⁰²Province of Alberta, *Report of the Royal Commission on Education in Alberta*, 1959, 43. The figures were provided to the Commission by economist E.J. Hanson, who had been hired to prepare a special study on educational finances in Alberta.

¹⁰³Social Credit had boasted 41,000 paid-up members in 1937. By contrast, in 1951, it had fewer than 4000 members and in 1954, only slightly above 3500. Even in election years, when prospective candidates sold memberships to their friends and relatives, party memberships never approached the 1937 figure (and 1937 was not an election year). In 1959, for example, when Social Credit scored a big victory, it had fewer than 11,000 paid-up members. Reports of Social Credit conventions in Alberta Social Credit League Papers, Box 3.

all other issues. On economic questions, claims Larry Pratt, they were guilty of "consciously taking up positions to the right of the avowedly capitalist parties in the vain hope of winning over small business and conservative voters."¹⁰⁴

It was not that the wealth available to the Social Credit regime had allowed the government, however temporarily, to solve all economic problems. Instead, notes Pratt:

There were in Alberta many social and economic issues crying out for the NDP's attention. The appalling scandal of the province's mental health system, the degradation of Alberta's large, neglected native population, the impact of rapid urbanization on housing, land prices, education and social services, the growth of the public sector and the need to unionize white-collar workers, the impact of farm mechanization and agribusiness on rural Alberta, the underpricing of the province's natural gas and low oil royalties, and the need for an independent industrial strategy - these were the issues of the day which the NDP neglected in its obsession with corruption in high places.¹⁰⁵

The timidity of the NDP campaigns of the 1960s reflected the pessimism within the labour movement, which had built that party regarding the chances of overthrowing Social Credit in favour of a radical party. But the strategy did not work; the Progressive Conservatives, led by Peter Lougheed, proved ultimately to be the beneficiaries of the NDP mud-slinging campaign and, after a strong performance in the popular vote in 1967, the Tories emerged victorious in the provincial election of 1971.

VII

PRATT AND RICHARDS HAVE located the rise of the Conservatives and the eclipse of Social Credit in the growing class consciousness of an Alberta bourgeoisie and upper middle-class tired of Social Credit's slavish devotion to multinational oil companies and to its negative views on the government's role in promoting industrial development within a capitalist setting.¹⁰⁶ The working class, however, except as voters, played no role in the Lougheed coalition and the union leadership seemed largely outside the debate, symbolized by the personalities of Peter Lougheed and Pierre Trudeau, in which Alberta's internal class divisions were submerged in the language of provincialism and regionalism.

Nonetheless, with the Alberta economy particularly buoyant after the rise in oil prices which began in 1973, the unions did seem to lose their timidity

¹⁰⁴Larry Pratt, "Grant Notley," 26.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰⁶John Richards and Larry Pratt, *Prairie Capitalism: Power and Influence in the New West* (Toronto 1979) outlines the rise to power of the Tories and the economic strategies of the Lougheed Government during the seventies oil boom.

about striking, and the number of workdays lost to strikes was seven or eight times as high in the late 1970s as it had been a decade earlier.¹⁰⁷ The Conservative government, anxious that its own employees not join the trend, passed the Public Service Employee Relations Act in 1977. This act removed the Cabinet's final say in disputed matters between AUPE and the government-employer, but it installed a regime of compulsory and binding arbitration, totally banned civil service strikes, and prescribed steep penalties for the union and for individuals who violated the Act.¹⁰⁸ This was a blow to AUPE, which had been campaigning for the right to strike, but the history of that union and its CSA predecessor was hardly one to cause a conservative government to fear a militant reaction to a restriction of workers' rights.

On the whole, the Conservatives appeared happy to leave the labour laws crafted by Social Credit in place. After 1982, when the price of oil began to fall, taking Alberta's economy with it, the weakness in the protection these laws afforded workers became increasingly clear. The details of the 1980s government-employer assault on unions and working people generally and the resurgence of union militancy in response to the economic crisis and to ruling-class repression go well beyond this article. But an outline of the key events of the period demonstrates the legacy of the Social Credit period.

In 1983, the Alberta Federation of Labour, at its annual convention, by a narrow margin, chose David Werlin, an open Communist, as its president over a candidate of the AFL establishment. Werlin, a regional representative for CUPE then stationed in Calgary, pledged to build a more militant Federation. His election occurred less than a year after the Alberta economy began its long-term crisis with the announcement that proposed energy mega-projects had been shelved, and no doubt AFL delegates accepted his view that unions were in for a tough time.¹⁰⁹

The Alberta government shortly thereafter announced that arbitrators of government-public service union salary and benefits awards must be guided not only by the arguments presented by the two parties but also by consideration of government fiscal policy of the day. This was almost a backdoor return to the pre-1977 situation when government workers not only lacked

¹⁰⁷The greatest number of days lost to strikes and lockouts in the 1960s was 64,000 days in 1969 when fifteen disputes involving 2,221 workers resulted in work stoppages. In 1978, by contrast, 447,340 days were lost in 51 disputes involving 21,685 workers. In 1980, 538,680 days were lost in 43 disputes taking in 24,269 workers. David Leadbeater, "An Outline of Capitalist Development," 61.

¹⁰⁸*Statutes of the Province of Alberta*, 1977, Chapter 40, "The Public Service Employee Relations Act."

¹⁰⁹Werlin's views on unionism in Alberta are summarized in an interview conducted with Werlin and AFL secretary-treasurer Don Aitken by Barry Johnstone in "Labour," a "special supplement of Athabasca University Magazine," (Athabasca 1987), 16-23.

the right to strike but were also denied an impartial arbitration procedure. Under Werlin's urging, the AFL launched a campaign against the new restrictions on public service workers, though constant in-fighting within AUPE reduced the effectiveness of the fight and gave the government added reasons for regarding organized labour in the province as a paper tiger.¹¹⁰

In December 1983, it was the turn of workers in the private sector to learn just how little protection Alberta labour law afforded them. Alberta Court of Queen's Bench ruled that month in "Alberta Roadbuilders versus Operating Engineers" that an expired contract did not remain in effect until a new contract was negotiated between an employer and unions. An employer was within his legal rights in locking out his unionized employees whose contract had expired and then rehiring the same staff or a totally new staff the next day under conditions dictated by the employer.¹¹¹ The Alberta government, pressed by the labour movement to pass legislation that would continue the past custom of "bridging" contracts - keeping an old contract alive until a new one is reached - flatly refused. The government also refused to stop the practice, which had become widespread in the construction industry, of establishing "spin off" firms: non-union firms operated by contractors who also ran unionized shops. Such firms had been established solely for the purpose of doing end-runs around unions at a time when construction jobs were scarce, and the companies believed correctly that desperate workers would accept half or less the union wage in order to get some work. In early 1983, the government even proposed legislation to give a clear legal sanction to the spin-off firms. It withdrew the legislation under union protest but did nothing to stop the practice in the province. In the construction industry, employers turned to the formation of spin-off companies while at the same time keeping up a show of bargaining with their unions in the idled unionized firms. Once the contracts ran out, workers were locked out for 25 hours and then rehired as non-union workers.

As the AFL explained in its brief to the Labour Legislation Review Committee, established by the government in 1986:

In the case of spin-offs, a construction company simply sets up a new company (non-unionized) which then takes all new contracts. In a slightly more sophisticated mode, the two companies may establish a third to operate as "employment broker" for the second. Taken in combination with the 25-hour lock-out, and with the effects of registration, the results have been calamitous, allowing contractors to unilaterally replace established terms and conditions of employment in the construction industry with some of the most primitive in any sector in the Province.¹¹²

The success of the construction companies in eviscerating their unions gave encouragement to employers in other sectors. Peter Pocklington, a benefac-

¹¹⁰ *Edmonton Journal*, various issues, 1983.

¹¹¹ Alberta Federation of Labour, "Submission to the Labour Legislative Review Committee," 12 December 1986, 27.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 34.

tor of the Alberta boom who had used successful financial and real estate deals to build a financial empire that was considerably reduced during the post-1982 crisis, took particular heart. Pocklington was the owner of Gainers Meats, the only remaining large packing plant in Edmonton, which once had boasted a large concentration of meatpacking plants. A simplistic anti-communist in the Manning tradition, Pocklington made little distinction between unions and communists and enjoined his workers to accept lower pay so that he could capture a larger portion of the American market for processed meats without cutting his profit margins. Pocklington allowed his union contract to expire and hired strikebreakers to replace his former unionized employees. With "the protection of court injunctions, large contingents of police, and, even dogs and riot squads" Pocklington kept his plant open during an eight-month strike which ended with the unionized workers receiving their old jobs back but making no real economic gains.¹¹³ The strike did, however, rally Alberta working people as no cause had since the Depression, but the combination of reactionary labour laws and an economic crisis limited what could be achieved even when ten thousand people marched in a rally of strikers' support and lawns throughout the city sprouted signs in support of the boycott of Gainers products. Gainers, along with the militant "Dandelion" movement of construction workers formed in 1985, and the NDP provincial election sweep of working-class (and some middle class) Edmonton seats in the 1986 provincial election, indicated that things were changing in Alberta. But the years of reactionary provincial administration and labour timidity in opposing governments and employers head-on would not be so easily swept aside.

VIII

FOR ALBERTA WORKERS, at least, Laurel Sefton MacDowell's claim that the post-war period witnessed "a degree of democracy in industry," thanks to labour legislation, appears rather hollow. Arguably, with labour shortages in the province, the union movement in the province might have organized more people and negotiated, particularly with the aid of strikes, better contracts had labour legislation modeled at least in part on PC 1003 not restricted labour's right. An absence of labour law, that is, might have been more beneficial than legislation which, in its tone and in its implementation, was pro-employer. In practice, conciliation procedures were used as stalling mechanisms by employers, to a point where the AFL at one point embraced compulsory arbitration as a solution to labour's legal woes; the legal guarantees for union protection were used to legitimize company unions, and the

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 29.

government's use of its power to determine which groups could be unionized and under what legislation removed the right to unionize from some groups and placed others - chiefly, government employees - in an inferior bargaining position to unionized private-sector workers. While "thou shalt nots" in the labour legislation were present for both employers and unions, prosecutions under the Act were almost exclusively of unions and unionized workers. "Both trade union organization and collective bargaining were accorded protection and a clear legal status," as MacDowell says of PC 1003. But what of it when that bargaining was strait-jacketed and the legal status was used to restrain the unions' ability to fight for their members' rights?

In Alberta, as elsewhere in Canada, trade unions had purged Communists and fallen in line with the Cold War rhetoric of the period. But, as unionists learned at their expense, governments and employers had rather elastic definitions of communism and the bogeyman that conservative union leaders had willingly embraced could easily be embraced by those who would shackle all unionists. The passive strategy pursued by union leaders in the face of Social Credit's Cold War rhetoric and anti-labour legislation justified as necessary to the war against communism proved disastrous. It assumed that a right-wing government would make its peace with the unions if they maintained a respectable public image rather than one of angry mobs of women and men marching through the streets. Instead, Social Credit reacted by concluding that there was no political penalty in currying investor favour by passing anti-labour legislation.

Over all, in post-war Alberta, the Cold War rhetoric of the government produced a situation in which an intimidated labour movement felt the need to devote itself to presenting briefs to government and the Board of Industrial Relations protesting existing legislation and the biases in its enforcement. But the pro-business, anti-union climate created by the government rendered such activities largely futile. Both the government and the unions themselves were simply too aware that the labour movement posed no threat to Social Credit ascendancy.