

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Alberta Federal Politics in an Era of Socioeconomic Realignment 1953-1958

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

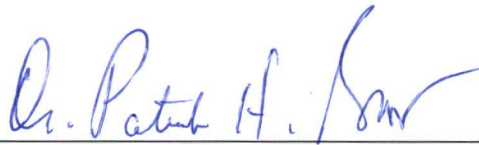
CALGARY, ALBERTA

APRIL, 2011

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Alberta Federal Politics in an Era of Socioeconomic Realignment 1953-1958" submitted by Michael E. Swanberg in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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ABSTRACT

In the mid-1950s, the province of Alberta's federal political landscape was destabilized by the economy's shift from agriculture to the lucrative oil and gas industry. The movement of people and economic clout from rural regions to urban centers prompted debates on the province's future in the North American market. The federal Social Credit party, which had long dominated Alberta's federal politics, declined as a new challenger, the Progressive Conservative party, reinvented itself to respond to the socioeconomic exigencies of the postwar era. Under federal leader George Drew and provincial leader W.J.C. Kirby, the Alberta Conservatives revitalized their grassroots organization and crafted a new platform that focused on the key issues of energy export and grain marketing policies, which were each rooted in the changing nature of Alberta's economy. This laid the groundwork for the Conservative sweep of 1958, which permanently dislodged Social Credit from its previously privileged position.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Patrick H. Brennan, for his steadfast support and insight throughout the process of producing this thesis. His willingness to mentor me first as an honours undergraduate and later as a Master's student at the University of Calgary was critical to my success, and I will miss our collaborations now that my time at the U of C has drawn to a close.

I would also like to thank the other members of my defense committee, Dr. David Marshall and Dr. David Stewart, for their insightful comments, which were instrumental in enhancing the quality of my thesis. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the Department of History at the University of Calgary and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their generous financial support which made this project possible.

Lastly, I would like to thank my wonderful parents for their love and support, without which I could not have possibly finished this project. And for Rachel, the love of my life, words will never be enough.

DEDICATION

For my parents, Chris and Doris

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
 Introduction.....	 1
Ch. 1: Party Organization and the 1953 Federal Election in Alberta.....	20
Ch. 2: Wheat Marketing, Gas Export and Alberta's Changing Economy	48
Ch. 3: Party Reorganization and Revitalization in the Mid-1950s.....	72
Ch. 4: On the Brink: Alberta's Federal Parties in the 1957 Election.....	98
Ch. 5: The Tide Turns: Alberta Politics in 1958.....	128
Conclusion.....	153
Appendix: Tables of Election Results 1949 to 1965.....	160
Bibliography.....	161

Introduction

In the spring of 1958, Canada went to the polls to render judgment on a Progressive Conservative administration that had only held office for a brief nine-month period. Prime Minister John Diefenbaker's florid rhetoric, which expounded on his vision of "One Canada," stirred the electorate in a way no politician had previously been capable of.¹ Reflecting on this campaign, Minister of Transport George Hees noted that "Everybody realized that this next election was called at the time of our choosing and we were going to be a government with a big majority... Everywhere you went in Canada, the meetings were very large, very enthusiastic."² Indeed, the enthusiasm which enveloped the country in 1958 produced the largest majority in Canadian history for Diefenbaker's incumbent Conservative government. The "Diefenbaker sweep," as the 1958 contest was colloquially dubbed by the media, stretched from coast to coast and shattered many of the partisan affinities that had characterized Canadian politics for decades.³ Nowhere was this more evident than in the province of Alberta.

In the 1958 election, the Progressive Conservatives won all seventeen seats in Alberta – fifteen of them with an absolute majority of the popular vote. The federal Social Credit party, which had dominated the province's political landscape since the Great Depression (and held thirteen of the province's seats prior to the 1958 contest), was completely wiped out. The Liberals, who had long been seen as the natural alternative to

¹ For a good example of Diefenbaker's oratorical style in the 1958 campaign, see: Library and Archives Canada (LAC), John Diefenbaker Papers, reel M9225, 123599-123604, "Diefenbaker Film 'D': Our One Canada Program." 1 March 1958.

² Peter Stursburg, *Diefenbaker: Leadership Gained 1956-62*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 97.

³ Political scientists David Elkin and Richard Simeon contend that the realignment of partisan politics in the Western Provinces is the most important enduring legacy of the 1958 election. See: David Elkins and Richard Simeon, *Small Worlds: Provinces and Parties in Canadian Political Life*, (Agincourt: Methuen Publications, 1980), 148.

the Socreds in Alberta, also failed to capture the imagination of the electorate. Many commentators speculated that this result was an aberration and was more attributable to Diefenbaker's personal popularity and the ineptness of the Social Credit and Liberal campaigns than to an enduring shift in partisan preference.⁴ A close examination of the years leading up to the "Diefenbaker sweep" indicates that this phenomenon was the product of complex political and socioeconomic forces that shaped Alberta's political culture over the course of the decade.

Two key debates raged through the middle of the 1950s that ultimately exposed the weakness of the Social Credit rump in Ottawa and discredited the Liberal government of Louis St. Laurent. The first was over agricultural subsidies and the marketing of farm produce. Farmers throughout the province felt left out of the general prosperity that animated the country throughout the postwar period, and expressed their dissatisfaction by continually electing parochially-minded Social Credit MPs to represent them in Ottawa. While agriculturalists were, in general, better off in the 1950s than they had been prior to the Second World War, a sentiment existed that convinced farmers that the federal government was indifferent to resolving some of the outstanding issues that prevented them from reaching their full potential. These included high freight rates to transport produce to market, a lack of price supports to shield farmers from drops in commodity values, and the massive amount of accumulated wheat that farmers were unable to sell due to logistical difficulties and a lack of international markets. The Progressive Conservative party benefitted from this disaffection with Liberal policies in 1958 once it established a viable organization which was capable of articulating its renewed agricultural platform addressing these key rural concerns.

⁴ "Candidates Comment; Tremendous Sweep," *Edmonton Journal*, 1 April 1958.

The second key debate focused on the future of Alberta's natural gas reserves. Natural gas export touched on the crucial issue of Alberta's emerging status as a heavyweight in the North American energy market. Ever since the discovery of extensive oil reserves in Leduc in 1947, the province's economy rapidly transformed, becoming proportionally less reliant on agricultural commodities as the energy sector increased in economic importance. In the 1950s, however, there were concerns that this resource-fuelled prosperity would be short-lived, due to uncertainties surrounding the extent of Alberta's energy reserves. Natural gas in particular became an increasingly important resource as it was a relatively inexpensive and easily distributed form of energy that could be used to heat homes. Once the full extent of Alberta's substantial gas reserves became known, debates raged over how it should be marketed and controlled, and whether it should be exported wholesale to the United States. This issue animated political discussions through the 1950s as the three main parties in the province grappled with how to secure Alberta's future prosperity without relinquishing sovereignty over its precious natural resources. Once again, the Progressive Conservatives emerged as the only party to effectively channel these concerns into a policy that struck a balance between maintaining Alberta's present prosperity while guaranteeing its sustainability into the future.

Alberta's political parties galvanized themselves to debate these two key issues over the course of the decade, leading to an intensification of political activity. Indeed, the 1950s was a rare decade in Alberta's political history where the three main federal parties were all electorally competitive.⁵ Economic diversification and modernization undermined

⁵ Alberta's party system has been described as "one-party dominant" by Canadian political scientists, where a single party commands the majority of the electorate's support with several fringe parties retaining the support of small sections of the population. For a brief period in the mid-1950s, this model did not apply. For a more thorough explanation of the "one-party dominant" thesis, see: Harold Clarke, Jane Jenson, Lawrence LeDuc and Jon Pammett, *Absent Mandate: Canadian Electoral Politics in an Era of Restructuring*,

support for the one-time dominant Social Credit party, which appeared to be increasingly anachronistic in the rapidly transforming province. The Liberal and Progressive Conservative parties sensed an opportunity to gain the support of former Socred partisans, and correspondingly increased their organization efforts. In particular, the Alberta Conservatives benefitted from John Diefenbaker's undeniable personal popularity, which helped them attract high-quality candidates and widespread support. A combination of Diefenbaker's leadership abilities, grassroots organizational renewal and socioeconomic trends conspired to undermine Social Credit support in Alberta.

Recent scholarship has emphasized that party organization is key to understanding how political actors have variously responded to changing socioeconomic circumstances and shifts in public opinion. Notably, analyzing grassroots involvement in political parties gives historians a window into how civil society and political institutions interact. It is this dynamic relationship between the public and political institutions that forms the foundation of modern democratic governance. R. Kenneth Carty and Munroe Eagles affirm that "constituencies, and the political organizations and processes that they frame, stand at the very core of Canada's political life," contending that "we must take into account the multi-level character of party activities and campaigns" to gain a complete understanding of how local conditions colour public reactions to major issues of national importance.⁶ Indeed, federal elections in Canada are little more than a series of individual local contests between locally-based candidates, given that there is no mechanism in Canada's first-past-the-post

Third Edition. (Toronto: Gage, 1996), chapter 11; Peter Smith, "Alberta: Experiments in Governance From Social Credit to the Klein Revolution," In *The Provincial State: Politics in the Provinces and Territories*, Keith Brownsey and Michael Howlett eds., (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001), 277-308; Michael Georgeson, "A One-Party Dominant Party System: The Case of Alberta," (MA Thesis: University of Calgary, 1974).

⁶ R. Kenneth Carty and Munroe Eagles, *Politics is Local: National Politics at the Grassroots*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2-5.

system to elect candidates on a basis proportional to their party's popularity. Political scientists have noted that Canada's geographic and socioeconomic diversity make it nearly impossible to ascertain a single, coherent mandate for a governing party following an election, due to the necessity of accommodating and mediating between diffuse political interests and conditions across electoral ridings.⁷ Indeed, brokerage parties have historically been forced to emphasize generalities in their philosophies and platforms due to divergent political opinions and socioeconomic realities across the country.⁸ Thus, the underlying reasons for a party's strength in one region are likely different than the reasons underpinning that same party's strength in another. This study seeks to examine the activities of local party organizers in Alberta to determine how the three main political parties interacted with the electorate to respond to changing socioeconomic realities in the province. While Diefenbaker's popularity transcended Canada's regions in 1958, the reasons underpinning his popularity in Alberta were rooted in the province's unique economic conditions and political culture.

Historically, changing socioeconomic, cultural and technological conditions have forced the party system in Canada to adapt the way it engages with the electorate and develops policy. Four distinct "party systems" have been identified, with each successive system representing an institutional reaction to conditions that rendered the previous system obsolete. Notably, political scientists agree that the 1957 and 1958 federal elections

⁷ Clarke *et al.*, *Absent Mandate*, chapter 1; See also: William Cross *ed.*, *Political Parties, Representation and Electoral Democracy in Canada*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3-8; Anthony Sayers, *Parties, Candidates and Constituency Campaigns in Canadian Elections*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), 3-12; Samuel LaSelva, *The Moral Foundations of Canadian Federalism*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), prologue.

⁸ Brokerage parties favour compromise between a wide array of political views over adherence to a strict ideology. These "big tent" parties are pragmatic by nature, and are focused on winning and retaining power over achieving ideological purity. Both the Liberals and Conservatives are historical examples of brokerage parties in the Canadian context. See: Clarke *et al.*, chs. 3 and 5.

marked a clear turning point away from the “regional brokerage” system of party organization and towards a more centralized “institutional” model.⁹ Up to the late 1950s, political parties were organized around key party representatives from each region of the country who were responsible for political organization in their respective home areas. The Liberal party, in particular, was effective at deploying powerful “regional ministers” to increase the party’s clout amongst different social groups while negotiating a consensus with other regional ministers on matters of national importance.¹⁰ Parties did not seek the input of external actors in developing party policy, leaving this job to regional representatives and their advisors, many of whom were drawn from the civil service.¹¹

With modernization, this system of regional paternalism became outmoded, as individual ministers no longer had the competency to determine policies for their increasingly complex regions on their own. This gave rise to the “third party system,” which was characterized by an increased reliance on focused policy committees to advise the leader on complex socioeconomic issues that were national in scope.¹² Powerful regional ministers and candidates were displaced in favour of an “institutionalized” system that relied on specialized committees and the civil service to advise the Prime Minister’s Office on all matters of national importance, thus increasing the importance of the party leader in setting policy priorities.¹³ Furthermore, the “policy consensus” that had characterized the relationship between the civil service “mandarinate” and regional cabinet

⁹ Cross *ed.*, 15-29; Luc Bernier, Keith Brownsey and Michael Howlett *eds.*, *Executive Styles in Canada: Cabinet Structures and Leadership Practices in Canadian Government*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 7.

¹⁰ Alain Gagnon and A. Brian Tanguay *eds.*, *Canadian Parties in Transition*, Third Edition, (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2007), 62; Dan Azoulay, *Canadian Political Parties: Historical Readings*, (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1999), 28-36; Bernier *et al.*, 21-25.

¹¹ J.L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins 1935-1957*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982), ch. 9.

¹² *Ibid.*, 64-76.

¹³ Michael Atkinson, *Governing Canada: Institutions and Public Policy*, (Toronto: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1993), 55-56.

representatives in the Liberal government broke down following the 1957 and 1958 elections, further hastening the demise of the regional brokerage system.¹⁴ Consequently, political scientists have noted that executive institutional forms have largely paralleled the development of party structures through Canadian history, and all identify an important break in organizational practice that occurred in the late-1950s. From the mid-1950s on, Canada's parties created new extra-parliamentary structures to invite local input in developing policy and crafting effective local strategies.¹⁵ In particular, both the Liberal and Progressive Conservative parties created specialized branches for women and youth to participate in party affairs. Thus, the demise of the regional brokerage system gave rise to a new form of political organization which highlighted the importance of local organizers and specific groups in setting the party's local electoral strategies and priorities. This new consultative form of party organization was in its infancy in the 1950s, however, as not all of Canada's parties readily adapted to this new reality. The degree to which the three main parties in Alberta successfully incorporated external actors into their decision-making process affected their organizational efficacy in the 1957 and 1958 elections.

Recent scholarship emphasizes that the interaction between political leaders and "grassroots" movements is not limited to activities within political parties. Social historians have utilized the "mixed social economy" theory to highlight the interdependence between all actors within civil society and the development of public policy.¹⁶ Historian Shirley Tillotsen has pioneered studies that blend social and political history in the Canadian context, demonstrating that government agencies and private

¹⁴ Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men*, ch. 9.

¹⁵ Cross *ed.*, 20-25.

¹⁶ This theory is enunciated in a paper published by Mariana Valverde, who applied international theories of the interdependence of civil society and the state to the Canadian context. See: Mariana Valverde, "The Mixed Social Economy as a Canadian Tradition." *Studies in Political Economy*. Vol. 47 (Summer 1995): 33-60.

organizations often look to each other for inspiration in structuring their programs and crafting policy.¹⁷ Likewise, another prominent Canadian social historian, Joy Parr, has investigated the interdependence of state policy and social activity by analyzing the relationship between government economic policies in the 1940s and 1950s and the activities of consumer advocacy groups which were profoundly influenced by these policies.¹⁸ Overall, these studies all demonstrate that the idea of a postwar social “consensus” is illusory, as many actors in different political and nonpolitical groups vied to influence public policy through their activities. While Tillotsen’s and Parr’s studies do not focus exclusively on political parties as a locus of state/society interaction, they do demonstrate that public policy is not created in a bureaucratic vacuum; rather, the process is often reliant on actors outside of the government to set its direction. Institutional reform within political parties reflected the importance of this dynamic relationship in crafting policies for an increasingly complex postwar world.

Most studies of Canadian politics in the 1950s discuss party leaders and national organization while relegating regional politics to the periphery. All three of the major political parties in Alberta have been analyzed extensively from this macro perspective. Historians agree that the Liberal party declined significantly in the mid-1950s due to a lack of consultation with external actors in civil society and the party’s continued reliance on powerful cabinet ministers to set policy priorities. The Liberals were slow to adopt new organizational methods to compensate for the inadequacies of the regional brokerage system. Most of these studies focus on the federal party in Ottawa, complemented by a

¹⁷ Shirley Tillotsen, *The Public at Play: Gender and the Politics of Recreation in Postwar Ontario*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 6; Shirley Tillotsen, *Contributing Citizens: Modern Charitable Fundraising and the Making of the Welfare State 1920-66*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 6-11.

¹⁸ Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral and the Economic in the Postwar Years*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 7, 64-83.

limited analysis of provincial organization. In his extensive study of federal Liberal organization, Reginald Whitaker agrees that the party “simply ran itself with very little intervention from specialized extra-parliamentary structures,” largely due to the concentration of organizational power in the hands of key ministers.¹⁹ Whitaker’s observations on the functions of the National Liberal Federation, the party’s official extra-parliamentary organ, are scathing, claiming that the NLF was:

... a small office doing rather unimportant work, barely noticed by the parliamentary party, by the provincial parties, or the media ... It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the NLF and its office were more in the way of a symbolic legitimization of cabinet rule within the Liberal party than active forces in their own right.²⁰

Indeed, Whitaker portrays the federal Liberals as a party out-of-touch with the society they so long governed, and attributes their decline to sclerotic national organization and a lack of serious consultation with the party’s grassroots. This same conclusion is reached by historian Joseph Wearing, who notes that the departure of Brooke Claxton from active politics in 1954 deprived the government of its last important link to the extra-parliamentary branch.²¹ Wearing affirms that the centralization of all major political decisions in the hands of powerful cabinet ministers during Mackenzie King’s and St. Laurent’s terms as prime minister eventually led to the decline of active grassroots interest in the party and contributed significantly to its defeat in 1957 nationally.

Christina McCall-Newman’s portrait of the Liberal establishment largely echoes the assertions made by Whitaker, despite the lack of analysis of the party in the mid-1950s. Her monograph focuses on the party leaders who rebuilt the organization following the

¹⁹ Reginald Whitaker, *The Government Party: Organizing and Financing the Liberal Party of Canada 1930-58*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 167.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 185.

²¹ Joseph Wearing, *The L-Shaped Party: The Liberal Party of Canada 1958-1980*, (Toronto: McGraw, Hill, Ryerson, 1981), 12.

1957 election. She notes that most Liberals regarded Diefenbaker's victory as "an episode" that would only temporarily disrupt Liberal hegemony.²² The rise of the "Cell 13" group during the Diefenbaker "episode" marked the beginning of the party's grassroots revitalization that transferred political authority within the party from the older generation of the King/St. Laurent era to a new generation.²³ Unfortunately, McCall-Newman's analysis is largely confined to the reorganization of the party in Toronto by Keith Davey, one of the key subjects of her book, and thus leaves out important details on why the party declined in other regions of the country in the 1950s.

Unfortunately, these three studies focus almost exclusively on federal organization, paying limited attention to organization at the provincial and local levels. In his brief section on the Liberals in Alberta, Whitaker notes that "Alberta was a dismal, irretrievable failure – the very worst the Liberals have ever suffered in any province."²⁴ Unfortunately, Whitaker's study treats the Alberta Liberal resurgence in the mid-1950s as an astonishing aberration in a long history of unremitting failure, giving no detailed account of how the party reshaped itself to become a legitimate contender nor any reason for why it failed to hold these gains. Neither McCall-Newman's nor Wearing's analyses of the Liberals touch on the situation in Alberta. Political scientist David Smith fills the gap left by these three historians somewhat in his monograph on the Liberal party in the Prairie Provinces. Smith contends that Liberal "attempts at re-organization in the 1950s to the 1970s never appealed to western Canadians" as the party's policies largely ignored regional sentiments and

²² Christina McCall-Newman, *Grits: An Intimate Portrait of the Liberal Party*, (Toronto: McMillan of Canada, 1982), 12.

²³ *Ibid.*, 17-19.

²⁴ Whitaker, *The Government Party*, 359.

ambitions.²⁵ Smith succeeds at illustrating the conundrum faced by the Liberals in the West as agrarian class sentiments clashed against the organizational imperatives of Canada's "natural governing party," which was predominantly concerned with politics in Ontario and Quebec. However, his study contends that the agricultural sector was the prime locus of political activity in the prairies, and offers few indicators on how the rise of the energy sector in Alberta shaped that province's politics differently than its two counterparts.²⁶ Additionally, the brief Liberal resurgence in the mid-fifties is given only a modicum of attention in his study. Thus, a significant gap exists in the historical literature on why the Liberal party became a more significant political factor in Alberta in the mid-1950s, but ultimately failed to secure these gains later in the decade.

Little attention has been paid to the Progressive Conservative party in the postwar period, largely due to the misguided assumption that the postwar era was marked by a political consensus that rendered partisan distinctions irrelevant. The few studies that do exist conclude that the party was hapless for much of the postwar period with little organization outside of its main strongholds. Bob Plamondon's recent study of all Conservative leaders since Confederation reserves only a short chapter for George Drew, the leader of the party from 1947 to 1956. Plamondon notes that "the party was broke [and] morale was low" in the mid-1950s, as organization was largely dominated by small groups of tired old men who lacked the requisite vision and vigour to revitalize the party at the grassroots.²⁷ Plamondon's exclusive focus on the party's leadership in the 1950s leads him to conclude that "Drew did not make much of an impression on the Conservative Party

²⁵ David Smith, *The Regional Decline of a National Party: Liberals on the Prairies*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), xvii.

²⁶ Ibid., ch. 2.

²⁷ Bob Plamondon, *Blue Thunder: The Truth About Conservatives from Macdonald to Harper*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2009), 208.

or on Canadian society.”²⁸ This conclusion unfortunately fails to assess Drew’s efforts at reviving moribund constituency associations and reinvigorating the leadership of the party’s provincial branches. Many of the assumptions underpinning Plamondon’s analysis are echoed in George Perlin’s study of Conservative leadership, where he notes that the Conservative party has been subject to “recurring crises of internal conflict over leadership” ever since the death of John A. Macdonald, leaving organization to an array of parochially-minded and ineffective elites.²⁹ Perlin argues that this same penchant for regicide undermined Drew’s effectiveness as leader in the mid-1950s, attributing the party’s success in 1957 solely to Diefenbaker’s popularity.³⁰ Like Plamondon, Perlin does not delve into a deep critical analysis of party organization itself in the 1950s, preferring to focus exclusively on the leader, leaving questions on how the party was organized provincially and locally unanswered.

A recent Master’s thesis by Robyn Gifford has attempted to investigate Conservative organization in the 1950s in more detail. Gifford claims that “in order to explain Conservative success in the late fifties and early sixties, it is necessary to understand the evolution of the party under Drew’s leadership,” as many important innovations to grassroots consultation and involvement were made while Drew was at the helm.³¹ Gifford effectively demonstrates that Drew took an active interest in organization following the 1953 campaign, and was largely responsible for encouraging more people, especially politically-active women and youth, to join the party. Heath Macquarrie, a longtime Conservative who sat as a Prince Edward Island MP from 1957 to 1979, contends

²⁸ Ibid., 210.

²⁹ George Perlin, *The Tory Syndrome: Leadership Politics in the Progressive Conservative Party*, (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1980), 1-7.

³⁰ Ibid., 53-55.

³¹ Robyn Gifford, “Lift up Your Eyes to the Grassroots: Women and Youth in the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada 1948-1956,” (MA Thesis, University of Calgary, 2009), 117.

that Drew has been portrayed unfairly as an ineffective leader despite the many important advances he made in the 1950s to put the party on a more solid footing in advance of its victory in 1957. Macquarrie notes that Drew was a “tireless” worker who sought to “emphasize the role of both youth and women” while leading the party effectively in the House of Commons.³² Grassroots organization was a largely thankless task that did not bear fruit while Drew was leader, muting his efforts in the eyes of historians. Overall, Macquarrie concludes that the economic boom of the postwar period made it difficult for Drew to campaign against the vastly better-funded Liberal party.³³ Drew’s tireless efforts to reorganize and rejuvenate his party helps to clarify why the Progressive Conservatives were in a position to make a strong appeal across the country in 1957 when they had been incapable of doing so in 1953. Further analysis of provincial and local organizational efforts is warranted to determine the extent to which Drew was successful at re-invigorating his party in the period between the 1953 and 1957 elections.

Social Credit’s rise in Alberta is one of the most thoroughly investigated phenomena in Canadian political history. Doctrinally, Social Credit was based on a series of monetary reforms published by Scottish economist Major C.H. Douglas, who believed that an international banking conspiracy prevented the flow of credit in the economy, necessitating government intervention to inject sufficient liquidity into the economy to offset this loss. The governmental prerogative of issuing fiat currency with no material backing was seen as a useful policy tool by early Social Credit reformers, who believed that the government could simply print money and distribute it to the population in the form of regular cash dividends to compensate for the lack of adequate liquidity. This

³² Heath Macquarrie, *Red Tory Blues: A Political Memoir*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 93.

³³ Heath Macquarrie, *The Conservative Party*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), 126-129.

theory received widespread support in Alberta during the Great Depression, when public antipathy towards bankers made these monetary theories attractive to the population.

However, historian Alvin Finkel notes that “from 1945 to 1960, Social Credit was transformed from a mass, eclectic movement of monetary reformers to a relatively small government party,” indicating that the party had all but abandoned these foundational theories by the end of the Second World War.³⁴ Premier Ernest Manning adopted a fiscally conservative economic outlook in the postwar period, and sustained his support due to the impression that his administration was competent and trustworthy.³⁵ Historian John Barr affirms that Manning’s pragmatism was the main factor contributing to his party’s continued electoral success, as his newfound “business-friendly outlook” attracted investment to the province’s nascent energy industry.³⁶ More recently, historian Bob Hesketh has challenged the idea that Manning turned away from Major Douglas’ monetary orthodoxies in the postwar period, arguing that while Manning and hardcore adherents of Douglas’ theories disagreed on how to implement social credit reforms, they concurred that a banking conspiracy continued to pose a threat to society.³⁷ Hesketh contends that Alberta’s newfound energy wealth “decreased the urgency of increasing purchasing power through monetary inflation,” allowing Manning to effectively implement Social Credit theory without having to radically reform the banking system.³⁸ Regardless, historians agree that the Social Credit party under Manning was a very different entity than what was seen in the party’s early history.

³⁴ Alvin Finkel, *The Social Credit Phenomenon in Alberta*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 99.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

³⁶ John Barr, *The Dynasty: The Rise and Fall of Social Credit in Alberta*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), 133-137.

³⁷ Bob Hesketh, *Major Douglas and Alberta Social Credit*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 222.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 238.

Most studies on Social Credit in Alberta focus on the provincial party with only passing reference to its federal counterpart. Finkel contends that “the provincial party’s efforts on behalf of the federal Social Credit party would be the ‘social credit’ side of its character,” indicating that the federal party was essentially a subsidiary of the provincial, and was used as a forum for provincial party enthusiasts to retain a link to the party’s founding monetary orthodoxies. Indeed, Finkel argues that Manning obtained effective control of the federal party after he expelled the most outspoken (and anti-Semitic) members from the federal organization in the late 1940s.³⁹ Barr notes that the skeletal organization that existed in the 1950s serviced both the federal and provincial parties, with most activities being sustained by the party’s indefatigable President, Orvis Kennedy.⁴⁰ Hesketh also concludes that the federal party became dependent on the Manning government for its continued survival once Manning assumed financial control over the federal party’s newsletter, the *Canadian Social Crediter*.⁴¹ Overall, a consensus has been reached by historians of Alberta’s Social Credit party that emphasizes the organizational dependence of the federal party on Manning’s provincial administration. While this was no doubt true, further investigation of how this organizational dynamic influenced electoral strategies during elections in the 1950s is warranted. Furthermore, none of these studies provide a detailed analysis of why the federal party declined while the provincial government remained popular. Therefore, despite the many studies on Social Credit’s development, further exploration of the federal party’s activities in the 1950s is essential to

³⁹ Ibid., 104-106. Historian Janine Stingel has provided a more complete analysis of Social Credit’s anti-Semitic roots. While she contends that the party retained its anti-Semitic character following Manning’s “purge,” she concurs that this event helped solidify Manning’s grip on the federal party. See: Janine Stingel, *Social Discredit: Anti-Semitism, Social Credit and the Jewish Response*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), ch. 7.

⁴⁰ Barr, 157.

⁴¹ Hesketh, 234.

gain an understanding of why Albertans chose to split their partisan allegiance between two different parties at the federal and provincial levels after two decades of supporting Social Credit at both levels.

The historiographical record on the politics of the 1950s largely focuses on party leaders and national organizational efforts. The 1958 election in particular posits that Diefenbaker's popularity and accumulated dissatisfaction with the previous Liberal government were the key factors leading to a landslide Conservative victory. While these factors were undoubtedly critical to the outcome of the 1958 contest, grassroots organization and socioeconomic trends also contributed to the shift witnessed in Alberta's political culture in the late-1950s. The issues of wheat marketing and natural gas export destabilized the decades-old political consensus in Alberta, making Diefenbaker's dramatic sweep of all seventeen of the province's seats possible. His predecessor's work in reinvigorating local constituency organizations was also important, as this improved grassroots organization allowed the Conservatives to craft and advertise a platform that adequately responded to the two key issues that animated debates in the 1950s. Indeed, each party's organizational capabilities at the local level determined the extent to which they were able to craft effective electoral strategies tailored to the unique characteristics of each region of the province. Thus, a closer analysis of local party organization and socioeconomic change is warranted to explore the complex evolution of Alberta's political culture at this important juncture in its history. A combination of national and local factors ultimately set the stage for the Conservative upset in 1958.

The analysis which follows primarily focuses on the organization and activities of the three political parties which seriously contended for votes and were successful in electing candidates in the 1950s. Two others, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation

(CCF) and the Labour Progressive (Communist) Party, also fielded candidates in Alberta's federal elections, although they were far weaker than the three main parties and failed to attract a significant percentage of the popular vote or elect any members whatsoever in the period covered by this study.⁴² Drawing on modern notions of democratic legitimacy, it is clear that the vast majority of Alberta's population chose to express their political opinions through these three parties, given that combined they attracted more than 90% of the popular vote in each federal election in the 1950s.⁴³ While it is important for historians to explore the role and function of fringe parties in Alberta's political history, such a study is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, it seeks to answer three fundamental questions: First, why did the federal Social Credit party decline over the course of the 1950s? Second, why did the Liberal party, which was long considered to be the most likely alternative to the Socreds, fail to capitalize on earlier gains? Third, why did the Progressive Conservative party come to sweep the province in 1958 and eclipse all of its competitors, a mere five years after the party placed a distant third in the 1953 election?

To answer these questions, a wide array of documentary sources has been consulted. For the Social Credit party, Solon Low's and John Blackmore's papers at the Glenbow Archives (Calgary) provided valuable insight into the party's activities in Alberta and its relationship with Ernest Manning's provincial administration. These collections included caucus meeting minutes, personal letters, reports and article clippings that all dealt with the party's campaign strategy in Alberta throughout the decade. For the Liberals, the Henry Erskine Kidd collection and the Liberal Party of Canada's papers at Library and

⁴² Political scientist Walter Young notes that socialist parties had difficulty attaining support in Alberta due to the Social Credit party's market-oriented appeal to Alberta's economic woes in the 1930s and 40s, helping to account for why the CCF and Communist parties remained at the fringes of the province's politics. See: Walter Young, *The Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF 1932-1961*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969).

⁴³ See Appendix: Tables of Election Results 1949 to 1965, pg. 160.

Archives Canada (Ottawa) and the Liberal Association of Alberta collection at the Glenbow form the foundation of this study's analysis of that party. Each of these collections contain files on individual constituencies in Alberta, giving a comprehensive view of the party's activities throughout the province in the period covered. The Louis St. Laurent papers and C.D. Howe papers were also consulted to provide additional background on the national campaign and the major issues discussed, especially the TransCanada Pipeline debate which is discussed extensively in the latter collection. Finally, for the Progressive Conservatives, the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta's papers at the Glenbow and the George Drew papers and Progressive Conservative party papers at Library and Archives Canada were instrumental in exploring that party's organization in the 1950s. The Conservatives also collected files on individual ridings, giving a comprehensive view of party activities throughout the province. Additionally, Richard Bell's and Doug Harkness' papers were consulted to provide additional commentary on organization at the national and provincial levels.

This study focuses on the three federal elections that occurred in the 1950s to explore how effective each party's appeal to the electorate was over the course of the decade. Given that parties restrict most of their activity to elections, an analysis of these three federal elections is the most effective way to determine the strengths and weaknesses of each party's organizational effort. A survey of all Alberta's daily newspapers and a sample of the province's weekly papers was completed to provide media commentary and analysis of the major events of each election campaign. Several major national newspapers were also consulted to provide an external perspective on the three federal elections in question.

On the whole, Alberta's politics were radically transformed over the course of the 1950s. Increased activity by all three of the major federal parties underscored the degree to which the significant issues of the decade resonated with the province's electorate. The key issues of wheat marketing and gas export were each rooted in the socioeconomic upheaval that defined the province in the postwar era. The appeals of party leaders and local reorganization efforts shaped the way each party responded to these two critical issues. In this way, socioeconomic upheaval drove organizational renewal within Alberta's predominant federal parties. While local economic issues and organizational efforts were by no means the only important factors contributing to the destabilization of Alberta's political culture in the late 1950s, these two related phenomena were significant to the province's political development and have hitherto received inadequate attention in the historiography on the subject. This thesis attempts to shed light on the grassroots revitalization efforts of the three main federal parties in an attempt to highlight the complexity of Alberta's political culture in the late-1950s. A combination of Diefenbaker's personal popularity, provincial socioeconomic change and grassroots revitalization led to the rise of the Progressive Conservatives and the concurrent decline of the Liberal and Social Credit parties.

Chapter 1

Party Organization and the 1953 Federal Election in Alberta

In the early 1950s, Alberta's federal partisan complexion closely resembled voting patterns at the provincial level. The Social Credit party, which had governed the province continuously ever since it assumed power in 1935, also held a majority of Alberta's federal seats. Their main opposition was the Liberal party, which retained support in the Edmonton area and in some northern rural constituencies largely by virtue of their local organizers' vitality and the substantial amounts of money the party was able to procure from national headquarters. The Progressive Conservative party was virtually non-existent in Alberta outside of the city of Calgary, where they had historically obtained support from the city's sympathetic business community. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Progressive Conservatives lacked even the most rudimentary of local organizations outside of Calgary, with many rural constituencies lacking any Progressive Conservative presence at all. This pattern, which had persisted from the Great Depression to the postwar era, continued to hold in the 1953 federal election.¹ That year's election serves as a useful case study to illustrate the organizational strengths and weaknesses of the major federal parties in Alberta leading into the pivotal and tumultuous latter part of the decade, when the province's political landscape was turned on its head.

As mentioned, the Progressive Conservative party was in an enfeebled organizational state prior to the 1953 election in Alberta, especially in rural constituencies

¹ As mentioned in the introduction, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and Labour Progressive Parties had a marginal presence in Alberta, largely concentrated in the province's urban centers. Their support was not sufficiently robust to seriously challenge the other three parties in any constituency.

where the party's strength was sapped due to the popularity of Premier Ernest Manning's provincial Social Credit government. Provincial meetings and tours of national Conservative organizers to the Western provinces prior to the election revealed that the party's organizational strength was at a low ebb despite past assurances from national leader George Drew that this situation would be remedied.² A report by the National Secretary of the Progressive Conservative Women's Association (PCWA), Hilda Hesson, exposed the party's organizational shortcomings in vivid detail. In the town of Vulcan, Hesson noted that the local executive virtually dissolved after the riding association president resigned, leaving it to her to coax the few party members who remained to appoint a new president.³ Difficulties were noted in the southern municipalities of Cardston and Lethbridge, where the heavily Mormon population had strong affinities with the provincial Social Credit government and a core group of Conservative party notables had refused to call a local meeting for three years while musing publicly about changing their partisan allegiance. A similar attitude prevailed in Medicine Hat and Edmonton, where few party members turned up for local meetings and a closed group of senior officials did little to encourage outsiders to join the party. While some positive signs were observed in Red Deer and Wetaskiwin, the overall situation in Alberta was charitably described as "challenging" and in need of further support from national headquarters.⁴

² Drew gave his personal assurances to prominent party organizers in Western Canada following the 1948 leadership convention that he would immediately begin to revitalize organizational efforts in the West. See, for example: Archives of Ontario (AO), George Drew Papers, RG 3-18, vol. B396817, George Drew to M.A. MacPherson, 29 October 1948; *Ibid.*, George Drew to John Diefenbaker, 27 October 1948; *Ibid.*, George Drew to H.R. Milner, 29 October 1948.

³ Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Drew Papers, series 2a, vol. 191, file 156, Hilda Hesson, "Report on Alberta and Saskatchewan," November 1950, 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-4. In both Red Deer and Wetaskiwin, Hesson noted that small but active groups of women worked hard to build interest in the Progressive Conservative party by holding regular meetings and social events. However, attendance at party meetings was small in both of these municipalities, underscoring the fact that much work had yet to be done.

Despite these warnings, Progressive Conservative organization in Alberta hardly improved prior to Drew's second federal election as leader. Senior leaders in Alberta, including H.R. Milner, Ross Henderson and Rube Ward, had been neglectful of encouraging local organizations to meet regularly and search out highly-qualified federal candidates.⁵ In 1951, the party's provincial president and sole full-time organizer, W.J. Wilde, stepped down, leaving a vacuum at the top of the Alberta organization that went unfilled for nearly two years and caused Drew and his closest advisors considerable consternation.⁶ This paucity of leadership following Wilde's departure was not remedied until W.J.C. Kirby was nominated in February 1953 to fill Wilde's vacancy and assume responsibility for provincial organization. However, Kirby's late nomination made it difficult for him to tackle the party's numerous deficiencies, despite Drew's confidence in his abilities. As he congratulated Kirby on his successful nomination, Drew expressed concern that the majority of the 1953 Alberta convention was "devoted to the discussion of high policy when the thing that needs to be discussed above everything else in Alberta is organization."⁷ Drew implored Kirby to immediately begin nominating poll captains and qualified candidates, search out local publicity opportunities, and begin holding regular political meetings across the province in advance of an expected federal election.⁸ Drew also insisted that a full-time office be opened in both Edmonton and Calgary to facilitate candidate nominations and publicity, and attempted to hastily finance this endeavour by

⁵ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2c, vol. 259, file 391.5, W.H. Kidd to George Drew, 9 November 1951.

⁶ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2b, vol. 213, file 5, George Drew to W.J. Wilde, 11 May 1951; Drew to H.R. Milner, 11 May 1951; LAC, Richard Bell Papers, vol. 3, file 25, "Minutes of a Meeting Held at National Headquarters," 23 September 1952, 4.

⁷ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2b, vol. 213, file 1, George Drew to W.J.C. Kirby, 2 February 1953, 2. Similar sentiments were expressed in a letter to Richard Bell, Drew's chief organizational advisor; LAC, Drew Papers, series 2a, vol. 181, file 18, Drew to Richard Bell, 3 February 1953.

⁸ Ibid., Drew to W.J.C. Kirby, 3.

implored wealthy party members to donate funds to this end.⁹ Ultimately, Drew's herculean efforts to build an organization out of nothing in the short months prior to the dissolution of Parliament proved futile.

As a brokerage party, the Progressive Conservatives had historically been inclined to defer serious organization, grassroots policy development and candidate nominations to election cycles, while retaining skeletal and largely dormant local organizations in the intervening periods.¹⁰ Consequently, one of the best measures of a traditional brokerage party's strength is its ability to attract strong candidates from outside the party hierarchy to run in elections. By this measure, the Alberta Conservatives were clearly lacking. Richard Bell, the national party's full-time organizer, informed W.J.C. Kirby that national headquarters desired for candidate nominations to be completed by mid-May to ensure that the party had a full slate of candidates ready to go once Parliament was dissolved.¹¹ Not only did Kirby fail to reach this target, he also encountered resistance from several rural constituencies in nominating a candidate at all. In Peace River, the nominal Progressive Conservative organization feared that the Liberal candidate, Jack Carignan, would be elected if the few Conservative votes in the riding did not support the Social Credit candidate, party leader Solon Low.¹² Consequently, they insisted that no Conservative candidate be nominated to ensure Low's re-election. This was particularly troubling to Bell and Drew, as failing to nominate a candidate against the Social Credit party's national leader would be interpreted by commentators across the country as a sign that the

⁹ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2b, vol. 213, file 5, George Drew to H.R. Milner, 2 February 1953; Drew to William Sellar, 2 February 1953.

¹⁰ This model for cadre-style brokerage parties is explained well in a chapter by Steve Wolinetz. See: Alain Gagnon and A. Brian Tanguay eds., *Canadian Parties in Transition*, Third Edition, Chapter 8.

¹¹ LAC, Bell Papers, vol. 1, file 8, R.A. Bell to W.J.C. Kirby, 14 May 1953.

¹² Ibid., W.J.C. Kirby to R.A. Bell, 2 July 1953.

Progressive Conservatives had entered into an informal alliance with the Socreds.¹³ A similar feeling existed in the ridings of Athabasca, Vegreville, Jasper-Edson, and Acadia, where antipathy towards the federal Liberals and a tacit preference for the Social Credit party moved the few Progressive Conservative organizers in these districts to recommend not nominating candidates in the federal election.¹⁴ Ultimately, despite the efforts of Drew and Kirby, the Progressive Conservatives were unable to overcome opposition to nominating candidates in these five ridings, illustrating the extent of the party's weakness in rural constituencies.

Historically, the Conservative party was strong in the city of Calgary, which can be partially attributed to the enduring rivalry between the city and its Liberal-dominated rival to the north, Edmonton. In her 1950 report, Hilda Hesson noted that this trend held true, and that "good work was being done there."¹⁵ Calgary's Conservative candidates were well known in the community, unlike many of the stop-gap candidates nominated elsewhere in the province. George Drew hailed Carl Nickle, the Progressive Conservative candidate for Calgary South in 1953, as "one of the best informed Canadians on the economies of oil and gas," due to his extensive work as a pioneer in Alberta's nascent energy industry.¹⁶ Calgary North's longstanding Conservative candidate, Doug Harkness, was a well-known high school teacher and leading military figure in the city before he was elected to Parliament for the first time in 1945.¹⁷ However, it was apparent to national headquarters

¹³ Ibid., R.A. Bell to W.J.C. Kirby, 10 July 1953.

¹⁴ Ibid., W.J.C. Kirby to R.A. Bell, 2 July 1953. Note that, in all of these constituencies, the Liberal candidates were competitive. The Liberals elected candidates in Athabasca and Vegreville by close margins, and came a close second to the Social Credit candidate in Jasper-Edson and Acadia in 1953.

¹⁵ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2a, vol. 19, file 156, "Report on Alberta and Saskatchewan," 2.

¹⁶ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2b, vol. 213, file 3, "Notes for George Drew re Oil and Carl Nickle," 3 December 1951, 2.

¹⁷ GLA, Douglas S. Harkness Papers, series M-4762, file 2, "The Pictorial Life Story of Doug Harkness," 1953.

that the local Conservative organizations in Calgary were built up around the candidates themselves and were not particularly effective at assisting adjacent ridings. Drew questioned whether Carl Nickle “was in touch with his own organization,” as Nickle persistently contradicted the party’s official policy on the export of Alberta’s natural gas to the United States during the campaign.¹⁸ Indeed, Nickle had long advocated the construction of a pipeline through the United States to Toronto as it was the most economical route possible, while Drew and the Progressive Conservative caucus supported constructing the pipeline entirely through Canadian territory.¹⁹ Nickle’s penchant for publicly contradicting his own party alienated him from national headquarters, and became a significant factor in his departure from federal politics in 1956. Doug Harkness, while having a competent organization and no visible disagreements with the party leader, did not campaign extensively outside of his riding.²⁰ Indeed, he noted that his personal appeal and the ineptness of the Liberal campaign in Calgary largely accounted for his victory on August 10, observing that the Liberals “managed to convey to the general public that they were attempting to buy the constituency by very large expenditures.”²¹ Thus, Progressive Conservative organizational strength in Alberta was largely confined to the city of Calgary, with few indications that this localized strength could be harnessed to build a larger, more comprehensive provincial organization.

The provincial Liberals were in a far better position to nominate candidates, raise funds, and generate publicity for their local campaigns than their Conservative counterparts

¹⁸ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2a, vol. 181, file 18, George Drew to R.A. Bell, 7 July 1953, 3.

¹⁹ See, for example: GLA, Liberal Association of Alberta (LAA) Papers, series M-1724, file 39, “Text of Address by C.O. Nickle,” 27 July 1951; “Nickle Chances for P.C. Cabinet Post Dim,” *Calgary Herald*, 11 July 1953, 2; “Politics and Principle in Calgary South,” *Calgary Herald*, 29 July 1953, 4; “Carl Nickle Challenged on Pipeline,” *Calgary Albertan*, 24 July 1953, 2.

²⁰ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2a, vol. 181, file 18, George Drew to R.A. Bell, 7 July 1953, 3.

²¹ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2a, vol. 436, file “Election 1953,” Doug Harkness to George Drew, 13 August 1953.

were. The Liberals focused their efforts on nominating qualified candidates, generating publicity for their record of achievement, and organizing volunteers to get out the vote and generate support for their cause. Prior to 1953, the Alberta Liberals focused on publicity and distributing literature supplied by national headquarters to different areas of the province. In 1952, the Liberal Association of Alberta reported that it had “done a great deal to promote the distribution of federal literature,” and had successfully added 2831 names to its mailing list and boasted 252 paid-up subscribers to *The Canadian Liberal*, the federal party’s official organ.²² Indeed, there were more subscribers to *The Canadian Liberal* in Alberta than in any other Western province, including the more populous province of British Columbia, indicating that the Alberta Liberals were capable at distributing literature and encouraging people to take an active interest in federal party affairs. Additionally, the federal Liberals in Alberta had the financial resources to do what George Drew and W.J.C. Kirby could only dream of in the early 1950s: operate full-time offices in Calgary and Edmonton.²³ In addition to distributing party literature, these offices also coordinated the speaking tours of prominent Liberal figures travelling to the province, which was seen by the party as the most effective method by which they could disseminate their message to the populace.²⁴ Overall, the Liberal party in Alberta was more effectively organized and possessed a more sophisticated publicity system than their Progressive Conservative counterparts, giving them a decisive edge in the 1953 contest.

²² LAC, Henry Erskine Kidd Papers, vol. 5, file 11, “Memo re: NLF and Provincial Associations,” 6 August 1952, 4.

²³ One of the primary responsibilities of these offices was to distribute literature to their respective jurisdictions. See: GLA, Liberal Association of Alberta (LAA) Papers, series M-1724, file 60D, H.E. Kidd to Helen Grodeland, 10 June 1953.

²⁴ LAC, Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) Papers, vol. 827, file “Confidential Memos re Campaign,” Duncan MacTavish, “Memo re Western Trip (Alberta),” 24 January 1953; GLA, LAA Papers, series M-1724, file 60D, Chief of the Canadian Press to Helen Grodeland, 22 June 1953. Notably, the *Canadian Liberal* featured speeches by cabinet ministers prominently in its pages, indicating the importance of these speeches to the party’s publicity strategy. See, for example: GLA, Frank Thorn Papers, series M-1229, file 3, “Third National Broadcast by the Prime Minister,” *Canadian Liberal*, 23 July 1953.

The importance of publicity was further reinforced during a meeting between Duncan MacTavish, the official organizer for the federal Liberals, and the leadership of the party in Alberta prior to the election. MacTavish recommended that the party raise awareness of the significant amount of money the federal government had spent in Alberta since the previous federal election.²⁵ This recommendation led to the publication of a speaker's guide tailored to the specific needs and concerns of Albertans. This guide gave Liberal candidates a uniform script from which they could highlight the many achievements of the federal administration.²⁶ The majority of this document examined the province's nascent oil and gas industry and provided talking points to prospective Liberal speakers on the many government policies that had played key roles in fostering this industry's development. For example, the document notes that the Liberal-created Geological Survey of Canada provided oil companies with data that encouraged them to continue exploring for oil in the province during the period when discoveries were rare. The government supplemented this with tax breaks and other financial incentives to encourage resource companies to continue their exploration efforts.²⁷ Indeed, the majority of the document highlighted expenditures made by the federal government in areas key to the development of Alberta's economy and general social prosperity.²⁸ This was used to great effect by Liberal candidates and visiting speakers alike, providing the party with a coherent message

²⁵ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 827, file "Confidential Memos re Campaign," Duncan MacTavish, "Memo re Western Trip (Alberta)," 24 January 1953.

²⁶ GLA, LAA Papers, series M-1724, file 60A, "The Federal Government and Alberta's Development," 1953.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 15-18.

²⁸ Expenditures highlighted included federal programs for social insurance, mineral development, public works, defence, post office activities, veterans benefits and assistance to natural resource companies, to name a few. All of these expenditures were summarized in an abridged document distributed along with the *Alberta Speaker's Handbook*. See: LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file "Alberta Liberal Association Campaign 1953," "Province of Alberta: Statement of Revenues and Expenditures," 1953.

to present to Albertans that emphasized the federal government's role in fostering the province's postwar prosperity.

In addition to its pre-writ publicity campaign, the Liberals also nominated a full slate of candidates several months prior to the beginning of the federal election. This gave the party an advantage over the Conservatives as they were able to begin campaigning long before Parliament had been dissolved, undoubtedly with the assistance of the party's *Speaker's Handbook*. By mid-June, all ridings had nominated a Liberal candidate, giving the party a full slate prior to the commencement of the election itself.²⁹ The Liberals attracted many local notables to run across the province. This included many prominent farmers and ranchers in rural constituencies who had longstanding ties to the local community. Arthur Day in Acadia, J.M. Dechene in Athabasca, Cliff Saville in Battle River-Camrose, W.D. Macdonald in Bow River, Jack Carignan in Peace River and John Decore in Vegreville were all successful agriculturalists who were well-known in their constituencies, giving the Liberals a solid set of candidates to advance their agenda in these areas. While John Decore and J.M. Dechene were the only successful candidates in 1953, all of the other Liberal nominees from rural constituencies placed second, with several coming close to winning their ridings.

In the cities, the Liberals also fielded a respectable slate. In Edmonton, their candidates benefitted from incumbency, including the current Minister of Mines and Technical Surveys, George Prudham, in Edmonton West, the incumbent member for Edmonton East, A.F. Macdonald, and a popular municipal politician, Richard Hanna, in the newly-created riding of Edmonton-Strathcona. In Calgary, both Liberal candidates were

²⁹ GLA, LAA Papers, series M-1724, file 34, J.P. Connors to A.M. Day, 21 April 1953; Ibid., file 44, J.P. Connors to McFarland, 5 June 1953.

well-known city lawyers who were noted for running spirited advertising campaigns against the city's Conservative incumbents.³⁰ Overall, the Liberals had the wherewithal to mount a robust publicity campaign and speaking tour, publish an informative speakers' manual tailored to the province itself, and nominate a full slate of competent candidates well before the election call, indicating that Liberal organization in the province was healthy, vigorous and effective prior to and during the 1953 campaign.

Of the three major federal parties in Alberta, the Social Credit party was the most consistently successful in the postwar period, winning a plurality of the popular vote and a majority of the province's federal seats in the 1945 and 1949 elections. This success was sustained by the enduring popularity of the provincial Social Credit government under Premier Ernest Manning, who was acclaimed for providing competent and effective leadership in a time of prosperity.³¹ Historians widely credit Manning with moving Social Credit away from its radical agrarian origins and shaping it into a pragmatic government based on a classical small-L liberal ideology.³² Pragmatism rather than ideological conviction sustained Social Credit's popularity provincially in the postwar period.

Organizationally, the federal Social Credit party was virtually indistinguishable from its provincial counterpart, and in many ways was a subsidiary of the latter. The federal party was reliant on the Alberta Social Credit League to finance its endeavours, and

³⁰ "Thanks to Mr. Riley," *Calgary Albertan*, 7 August 1953, 4; Ibid., "Southern Alberta's Representation."

³¹ In each of the 1944, 1948 and 1952 provincial elections, Ernest Manning's government was acclaimed with more than 50% of the popular vote and a commanding majority in the Legislature.

³² Historians John Barr and Alvin Finkel agree that pragmatism and small-government ideology helped sustain Manning's government provincially in the postwar era. See: John Barr, *The Dynasty: The Rise and Fall of Social Credit in Alberta*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), chapters 8 and 9; Alvin Finkel, *The Social Credit Phenomenon in Alberta*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), chapter 5. More recently, historian Bob Hesketh has put forward an alternative interpretation which claims Manning remained committed to the monetary orthodoxies of Major C.H. Douglas in the postwar era, although this theory has yet to be widely accepted by other scholars. See: Bob Hesketh, *Major Douglas and Alberta Social Credit*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), chapter 12; Alvin Finkel, "Alberta Social Credit and the Second National Policy," In *Toward Defining the Prairies: Region, Culture and History*, Robert Wardhaugh ed., (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 29-49.

the upper echelons of the federal party's hierarchy were dominated by officials from the Alberta party. Indeed, party leader Solon Low was himself the provincial treasurer from 1935 to 1944 before he assumed the leadership of the national party. As per an agreement reached in 1949, the Alberta Social Credit League underwrote the financing of the federal party's publications, including its official organ, the *Canadian Social Crediter*.³³ This announcement came after the federal party's president, Orvis Kennedy, failed to generate sufficient funding through subscriptions and advertising to sustain publicity efforts.³⁴ Similar interventions to cover financial shortfalls were common. Manning agreed to cover the salary of a full-time national organizer and of a national "education campaign" during the 1949 election, allocating \$4500 for this purpose.³⁵ The federal Social Credit party remained financially dependent on the Alberta Social Credit League in the lead-up to the 1953 contest, which further reinforced the perception that the two organizations were virtually indistinguishable in personnel and objectives.

In addition to soliciting the Alberta Social Credit party for financial assistance, the federal party also sought to align its own policy positions closely with its provincial cousin. Prior to the 1953 election, Solon Low asked that Manning send him a detailed report on the Alberta government's energy export policy, indicating that the federal caucus desired to align its position closely with the Manning government's official stance.³⁶ Solon Low also recommended that the Alberta cabinet meet with the federal Social Credit caucus to discuss

³³ GLA, Solon E. Low Papers, series M-695, file 66, Orvis Kennedy to Solon Low, 14 September 1949; Ibid., file 469, Orvis Kennedy, "Report on the State of the *Canadian Social Crediter*," September 1949; Ibid., file 291, Ernest Manning to Solon Low, 18 October 1949; Ibid., Solon Low to Ernest Manning, 24 October 1949. The financial difficulties of the *Canadian Social Crediter* are discussed in more detail in a Master's thesis by Hugh Halliday. See: Hugh Halliday, "Social Credit as a National Party in Canada," (MA Thesis: Carleton University, 1966), chapter 5.

³⁴ Ibid., file 66, Orvis Kennedy to Alberta Social Credit MPs and MLAs, 14 September 1949; Ibid., "Report on the State of the *Canadian Social Crediter*," September 1949.

³⁵ Ibid., file 291, Ernest Manning to Solon Low, 20 May 1949; Ibid., Solon Low to Ernest Manning, 25 May 1949.

³⁶ Ibid., Solon Low to Ernest Manning, 31 March 1953.

the forthcoming election. This joint meeting was primarily concerned with generating a comprehensive platform that aligned the federal party's policies with the Manning government's priorities.³⁷ Indeed, the draft platform and publicity strategy was discussed extensively by representatives of local constituency associations at the Alberta Social Credit League's Presidents Conference after the joint meeting between the federal caucus and provincial cabinet had taken place, indicating that the provincial association's role in discussing publicity and strategy was significant and was not confined exclusively to the upper echelons of the party.³⁸ Thus, unlike the Liberal and Progressive Conservative parties, which maintained separate federal and provincial organizations, the federal Social Credit party was organizationally indistinguishable from its provincial counterpart in Alberta. This fact allowed the federal party to benefit from the provincial party's undeniable popularity and organizational effectiveness.

The federal Socreds also emulated their provincial cousins' tradition of local activism and grassroots involvement. William Aberhart emphasized that Social Credit was more than a brokerage party when he launched it in 1935; it was a political movement that required the unwavering dedication and loyalty of its supporters. Manning paid lip-service to this emphasis on grassroots organization, and continued to encourage local study groups to meet and study Social Credit doctrine and teachings.³⁹ Historians agree that the "movement" character of Social Credit diminished significantly in the postwar period, as membership and involvement in party affairs declined steadily through the 1940s and 50s.⁴⁰

As Alvin Finkel notes, "the [provincial] Social Credit party was a shell that stood at the

³⁷ Ibid., Solon Low to Manning, 24 April 1953.

³⁸ Ibid., file 461, "Minutes of the Alberta Social Credit League Presidents Conference," 6 May 1953.

³⁹ Ibid. The Presidents Conference in 1953 recommended that study groups be given official representation at future meetings, although it is unclear whether this recommendation was ever put into action.

⁴⁰ See: Barr, *The Dynasty*, 157-163; Finkel, *The Social Credit Phenomenon*, 134-139; Hesketh, *Major Douglas and Alberta Social Credit*, 230-239.

base of a popular Manning government” by the mid-1950s, with party conventions becoming “little more than annual gatherings of government cheerleaders.”⁴¹ The provincial party continued to pay lip-service to the importance of grassroots organization despite the *de facto* absence of any substantive effort to this end in the postwar period.

While grassroots activism within the Social Credit movement was declining in the early 1950s, the esteem of individual Social Credit MPs was partially sustained by their reflections on this grassroots heritage. John Blackmore, a particularly colourful Social Credit MP who had represented Lethbridge since 1935, sent regular reports to his constituents to inform them of the major issues being discussed in Parliament. Many of his constituents expressed their appreciation for his consistent efforts to keep them informed of his activities.⁴² Some constituents wrote letters to the editor of the *Lethbridge Herald* to defend Blackmore’s personal integrity when unflattering stories were published in the newspaper about his effectiveness in Parliament. One of his local supporters, Fred Senior, noted that Blackmore had “always given his earnest support to any measure that would benefit the Lethbridge district in the past,” while canvassing the population to align his position more closely with theirs.⁴³ Another constituent, William MacKintosh, stated that Blackmore had “done more to advance the interests of Lethbridge in the House of Commons than anyone else could,” while commending him for informing the people of his actions in regular radio broadcasts.⁴⁴ Blackmore’s close contact with his constituents was a hallmark of the Social Credit tradition, and was widely practiced by other Social Credit MPs in

⁴¹ Finkel, 134, 136.

⁴² Blackmore’s constituents sent him letters expressing their appreciation for sending them regular updates, underscoring how important this form of communication was in sustaining Blackmore’s popularity in his riding. See, for example: GLA, John Blackmore Papers, series M-100, file 10, Mr. and Mrs. Terry to John Blackmore, November 1951; Ibid., William MacKintosh to John Blackmore, 14 November 1951.

⁴³ Ibid., Fred Senior, “Letter to the Editor of the *Lethbridge Herald*,” 17 October 1951; Ibid., Blackmore to Senior, 26 October 1951.

⁴⁴ Ibid., William MacKintosh to John Blackmore, 14 November 1951.

the province. Thus, while the movement-based local activism that had animated the party in its early years was declining, certain elements of this tradition remained central to the federal party's electoral success.

The organizational strengths and weaknesses of the three main federal parties were evident in the debates that occurred during the 1953 campaign. Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent announced the dissolution of Parliament on 13 June 1953, and Conservative leader George Drew immediately criticized the Prime Minister's decision to hold a summer election, as he believed that many voters would be away on holidays and otherwise disengaged from federal politics.⁴⁵ In many ways, the defining feature of the 1953 campaign was the lack of a clear election issue and rampant voter apathy. While this was a concern in Alberta, debates over farm supports and wheat marketing policies had a decisive effect on the outcome of the election. Another issue, the export of natural gas, was raised cautiously for the first time in Alberta's cities, although this issue was marked by a surprising degree of uniformity between the parties' positions. This consensus would prove to be short-lived; the amicable debates over gas export in 1953 served as a quiet prelude to the stormy debates over this issue that would grip the province in a few years' time. Thus, this oft-overlooked election is significant in that it set the stage for the pivotal debates that would turn Alberta's political makeup on its head later in the decade.

Nationally, the Progressive Conservative campaign focused on the apparent waste and extravagance of the Liberal administration. George Drew's initial promise to immediately cut federal income taxes by \$500 million was poorly received by media commentators in Alberta, and was derided by St. Laurent as being an unrealistic promise given other Conservative pledges to increase spending on old age pensions, social security,

⁴⁵ "Aug. 10 Election Date Set, At Once Becomes Major Issue," *Calgary Herald*, 13 June 1953, 1.

and agricultural supports.⁴⁶ Indeed, the remainder of the Prime Minister's campaign focused on the accomplishments of his government while deriding Drew's extravagant promises to cut taxes while increasing other forms of spending.⁴⁷ This strategy was emulated by Liberal candidates throughout Alberta. The incumbent MP for Vegreville, John Decore, conducted a series of radio broadcasts aired across northern Alberta that highlighted the impressive legislative record of the Liberal administration, while offering vague promises to continue along the general course followed to date.⁴⁸ Many Liberal candidates used the *Alberta Speaker's Handbook* to great effect when describing the federal government's accomplishments in the province.⁴⁹ For example, candidate Arthur M. Day in Acadia sent a mailout to his constituents that virtually copied sections and statistics from the handbook verbatim, while critiquing the "irresponsible" policies advanced by George Drew.⁵⁰ Liberal broadcasts in the ridings of Battle River-Camrose and Wetaskiwin emphasized the virtual inevitability of the Liberal government's return to power and the many benefits the area had accrued over the years due to Liberal programs.⁵¹ The overall message conveyed by Liberal candidates was that the people of Alberta had "never had it so good," so they should logically vote the Liberal party back into power to stay the course.

⁴⁶ "Drew Commits Tories to Big Tax Reduction," *Calgary Herald*, 20 June 1953, 1; "Half-Billion Tax Reduction Leads PC Election Promises," *Edmonton Journal*, 20 June 1953, 18; "St. Laurent Challenges Drew to Back Up Tax Promise," *Edmonton Journal*, 24 June 1953, 10; "The Conservative Platform," *Calgary Albertan*, 22 June 1953, 4.

⁴⁷ "PM Uses 'Cold Facts' to Dispel 'Hot Air'" *Calgary Albertan*, 13 July 1953, 1-2; "Put Price Tag on All Promises," *Lethbridge Herald*, 7 July 1953, 4; "St. Laurent Raps Drew While Hecklers Kibitz," *Medicine Hat News*, 16 July 1953, 1. Harold W. Riley, the Liberal candidate in Calgary North, was optimistic that St. Laurent's arguments against Drew's platform would be effective in Alberta. LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 653, file "Calgary North," H.W. Riley to H.E. Kidd, 18 July 1953.

⁴⁸ GLA, LAA Papers, series M-1724, file 49, John Decore to Helen Grodeland, 14 March 1953.

⁴⁹ Ibid., file 60A, "The Federal Government and Alberta's Development," 2-3. In several all-candidates debates during the election, Liberal speakers echoed St. Laurent's arguments against Drew's platform while highlighting policies already enacted by the government. See, for example: "Religion, Tory Promises, Farm Security, Topics in Campaign Speeches," *Lethbridge Herald*, 24 July 1953, 1; "Attacks PC Trade Policy," *Calgary Albertan*, 27 July 1953, 9; "Prudham Outlines Federal Spending," *Edmonton Journal*, 2 July 1953, 24.

⁵⁰ Ibid., file 34, Arthur Day to constituents, 29 July 1953.

⁵¹ Ibid., file 60A, Broadcast for Battle River-Camrose, 1953; Ibid., "C.J.C.A – C.C. Reed," 14 July 1953.

Unfortunately for the Liberal candidates in the province, the tenor of their advertisements clashed against the sentiments of large sections of the population. For the farmer who could not sell his produce due to depressed prices and a lack of markets, the assertion that their economic fortunes were better than ever rang hollow. In particular, Senator Wes Stambaugh, a senior federal organizer for the Liberals in Alberta, was critical and at times condescending towards the complaints he received from farmers. While replying to a letter from a farmer who had requested a review of the government's grain marketing policies, Senator Stambaugh expressed irritation at the farmer's insinuation that the government's grain marketing effort was a "fiasco," claiming that "it is unreasonable to expect the railroad companies to be able to move one of the largest crops in history in a few months or for the elevators to be able to buy all the grain which people want to sell."⁵² Protests from agrarian communities seemed to gain little traction with the federal cabinet during the election, as cabinet announced that the expected hike in railroad freight rates would not be voided as farmers had requested.⁵³ Calls from agricultural communities for the government to explore new options to export grain to other overseas markets were met with claims that little more could be done to this end.⁵⁴ In many ways, farmer expectations for government action were unrealistic, and did not reflect international economic realities. American farmers benefitted from heavy Congressional subsidies, allowing them to sell grains at far lower prices than the Canadian Wheat Board. Furthermore, as Senator Stambaugh noted, the bumper crops of wheat and other grains on the Prairies represented a huge logistical challenge for the railways to ship and the Wheat Board to sell. Farmer expectations that the government pay them up front for their produce and then market it at

⁵² Ibid., file 47, J.W. Stambaugh to L.A. Shearer, 8 November 1951.

⁵³ "Cabinet Expected to Refuse Plea to Void Freight Hike," *Edmonton Journal*, 18 June 1953, 6.

⁵⁴ "Gardiner Defends Liberal Policies," *Edmonton Journal*, 19 June 1953, 8.

top dollar were unrealistic given these challenges.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, perceived government intransigence on these issues sapped support from the Liberals in rural areas of the province, giving the Progressive Conservatives and Social Crediters an opening to gain the support of disaffected farmers.

George Drew recognized that rural grievances over perceived government inaction in addressing their economic problems represented an opportunity for the Progressive Conservative party to make inroads in these communities. Just prior to the election, Drew suggested that an “agricultural conference” be held in the Prairie Provinces, with W.J.C. Kirby acting as the chief organizer and moderator of this event.⁵⁶ The purpose of this conference was to gather farmers together to highlight the inadequacies of current federal wheat marketing and farm support policies and recommend possible solutions to these issues. Richard Bell noted that this was an excellent idea, and promptly recruited Kirby to organize the meeting at once, which he did enthusiastically.⁵⁷ In a separate memo, Bell expressed some concern that this conference could generate embarrassing publicity, noting that “premature announcements of any recommendations might easily be harmful” if these announcements ran counter to established Conservative principles.⁵⁸ Despite these reservations, the conference in Regina went ahead as planned, and was hailed by Drew as a success. The recommendations generated by the conference helped inform Conservative policy on agricultural issues, and Kirby was careful to ensure that they remain

⁵⁵ Historian David Smith notes that “the reality of the [farming] industry’s dependence on controlled deliveries, pooled product and shared returns allows disappointments to be easily shifted,” which helps to explain why farmers largely blamed the federal government and other industries they were dependent on for any difficulties they faced. See: David Smith, *The Regional Decline of a National Party*, 23.

⁵⁶ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2a, vol. 181, file 18, George Drew to R.A. Bell, 3 February 1953.

⁵⁷ Ibid., R.A. Bell to Drew, 9 February 1953.

⁵⁸ Ibid., R.A. Bell to Drew, 3 March 1953.

confidential.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, this insistence on maintaining strict confidentiality also limited media exposure and coverage, thus reducing the conference's potential impact.

Conservative farm policies introduced during the election reflected the concerns expressed at Kirby's Regina conference. The party pledged to adjust the freight rate structure to ease the economic burden on rural communities. Additionally, Drew promised to appoint a National Agriculture Board to set a floor price on agricultural produce to account more adequately for the cost of production, while simultaneously exploring options to expand trade to other countries (especially in the Commonwealth) to market the region's massive surplus of wheat.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, the lack of an effective Conservative organization in most rural ridings muted the potential impact of these pledges. With the exception of a newspaper advertisement highlighting Conservative agricultural policies, it appears that these points were poorly reported in Alberta's newspapers.⁶¹ When they were reported, the coverage was mostly negative and focused on the added burden price supports and other farm subsidies would impose on the federal Treasury.⁶² This can be partially explained by the traditional editorial biases of most Alberta papers, which tended to support either the Socreds or the Liberals.⁶³ Ultimately, a lack of suitable Conservative candidates and publicity in Alberta's rural ridings muted the impact of Drew's carefully crafted agricultural platform.

⁵⁹ Ibid., series 2b, vol. 213, file 1, George Drew to W.J.C. Kirby, 20 March 1953.

⁶⁰ LAC, John Diefenbaker Papers, reel M-9225, no. 123078, "Progressive Conservative Election Handbook," 1953, viii.

⁶¹ For example, see: "A Farm Policy for You!" *Red Deer Advocate*, 29 July 1953, section 2, page 7.

⁶² An editorial in the *Lethbridge Herald* noted that price supports would become untenable for the federal government to maintain if international commodity prices continued to slide. See: "Price Supports," *Lethbridge Herald*, 6 July 1953, 4.

⁶³ The *Calgary Herald* was the sole Alberta newspaper to endorse the Conservatives in the 1953 election. All rural newspapers supported either the Socreds or the Liberals, partially accounting for the lack of Conservative coverage in these papers.

Social Credit farm policies did not differ considerably from Conservative pledges, although they were accompanied by an almost gospel-like rhetoric that recalled the hardships Alberta faced during the Depression. The party's signature monetary reforms which had been largely rejected by their Alberta cousins were highlighted prominently as a possible way to alleviate economic strains on rural communities. In a letter from farmer Charles Caldwell to Solon Low, Caldwell opined that "so many of the young farm people are leaving the farms and going to the industrial centers" due to the high cost of land and machinery and the low returns received for selling agricultural produce. Caldwell proposed that the federal Social Credit party pledge to provide grants and low-interest loans to young farmers to maintain the vitality of Alberta's agricultural regions.⁶⁴ The rapid depopulation of Alberta's countryside and the corresponding explosion of the province's urban centers was a cause of concern to farmers who felt that their way of life was threatened by the changing economic tide. In these circumstances, Social Credit promises of monetary support to individuals were seen as a balm for the economic difficulties experienced by rural communities in the postwar period.

The Social Credit party exploited the rural belief that farmers were being left out of the country's prosperity to its advantage. Prior to the election, the federal party sponsored a series of country-wide radio broadcasts to publicize their concern for agricultural issues. In his first broadcast, party spokesperson Charles Bowman intoned that "those who are in charge of policy-making in our country have been absolutely unwilling to make the simple financial and economic changes that are required to ensure continued economic prosperity," implying that the end of the Korean war would usher in a second Depression which would

⁶⁴ GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 469, Charles Caldwell to Solon Low, 29 March 1950.

negatively affect all Canadians.⁶⁵ Bowman revealed his solution to this impending catastrophe in subsequent broadcasts, when he claimed that selling surplus agricultural products to impoverished countries would help avert an economic crisis.⁶⁶ Furthermore, he intentionally resurrected Major C.H. Douglas' monetary theories to claim that "what is physically possible should be financially possible," by providing cash grants and low-interest loans to small businessmen and farmers to stimulate their operations.⁶⁷ Speeches by Solon Low during the election itself and publicity materials published by the federal Social Credit party echoed this sentiment, and included further pledges to lower freight rates and provide a comprehensive system of price supports to farmers.⁶⁸ Interestingly, notwithstanding the deference paid to Major Douglas' largely discredited monetary theories, the Social Credit plan for agriculture did not differ considerably from the Progressive Conservative platform. Both parties promised to open up international markets to Canadian produce, and they both offered financial solutions to ease the economic strain on farmers.

Unlike the Conservatives, however, the Social Credit party benefitted from its strong rural organization and from receiving the endorsement of the province's popular Premier. Indeed, Ernest Manning's personal intervention in the campaign on behalf of Alberta Social Credit candidates proved to be decisive. The federal Social Credit party reprinted an editorial endorsement of Manning's government from the *Calgary Albertan* in a

⁶⁵ Ibid., file 134, "Bowman Broadcast Series no. 1," February 1953.

⁶⁶ Ibid., "Bowman Broadcast Series no. 2," February 1953.

⁶⁷ Ibid., "Bowman Broadcast Series no. 4," March 1953; Ibid., "Bowman Broadcast Series no. 9," June 1953.

⁶⁸ Solon Low claimed that the incessant cycle of war and famine could only be broken by correcting monetary imbalances through stimulative cash advances and low-interest loans. See, for example: GLA, Low Papers, series M-694, file 134, "Radio Address by Solon Low," 2 July 1953; Ibid., file 156, "Here is the Answer to Your Problems." [1953].

pamphlet that was widely distributed across the province in the 1953 election. The

Albertan's endorsement enthusiastically claimed that:

In Mr. Manning, we believe that Alberta has by far the best premier in Canada. His integrity, his talent for grasping and dealing with the great problems of state, and his way of inspiring his ministers, his legislative supporters and the people, are rarely found in leading public figures. The citizens of Alberta should reflect on their good fortune, and entrust to Mr. Manning the premiership of the province.⁶⁹

Undoubtedly, given the overwhelming mandates he received repeatedly from the electorate, Manning's popularity in the province was solid. Manning further bolstered his image as a competent administrator by stating that "the effects of the oil boom on Alberta's economy have been exaggerated," implying that the province's improved economic fortunes were more due to his administration's efficacy than to the discovery of a lucrative resource beneath the surface of the province's soil.⁷⁰ After demonstrating his credibility, Manning spoke in favour of the federal party's central message of "poverty in the midst of plenty," giving the party's reflections on its radical monetary reforms a quantum of legitimacy despite the fact that Manning had all but disowned these theories in practice. In a speech in Lethbridge, Manning argued that:

none of the old-line parties can provide a clear-cut, definite answer to these important questions: the problem of having peace without the fear of depression, the problem of reducing the crushing burden of taxation and the high cost of living, and the problem of finding foreign markets for surplus produce.⁷¹

Manning's fulminations echoed Charles Bowman's radio broadcasts and Solon Low's speeches earlier in the campaign, and were widely publicized throughout the province. Indeed, in the final weeks of the campaign, he took to the airwaves to unequivocally state

⁶⁹ Ibid., file 493, "Our Stand on the Provincial Election: An Editorial Published in the *Calgary Albertan* on Wednesday, July 2, 1952," 1953.

⁷⁰ "Manning Makes Heated Denial of Recent 'Fascist' Charges," *Edmonton Journal*, 4 August 1953, 10.

⁷¹ "Sees SC Chance for Effective Voice," *Edmonton Journal*, 30 July 1953, 1.

his support for sending Social Credit MPs to represent Alberta in Parliament, insisting that they provided the province with a strong voice to articulate Alberta's specific concerns to the "old-line parties" from the East.⁷²

Thus, while the substance of Social Credit's appeal to rural voters was similar in many ways to the Progressive Conservative position, they benefitted from Manning's high-profile endorsement. Appeals to Western exceptionalism helped undermine the Liberal and Conservative positions, as they were deemed "outsiders" to Alberta's political culture. Overall, wide disaffection with Liberal policies and the lack of an effective alternative in the Progressive Conservative party gave the Socreds a decisive advantage in campaigning for rural votes. The Liberals were successful in electing two rural MPs in 1953 (J.M. Dechene in Athabasca and John Decore in Vegreville) largely on the strength of their candidates' ties to their constituencies and the fact that they were the incumbent MPs. Rural dissatisfaction with Liberal policies led to the defeat of J.W. Welbourn, the incumbent Liberal MP in Jasper-Edson, and was the main reason for the failure of other strong Liberal candidates to win election.⁷³ While it was clear that the Social Credit party would not form the government,⁷⁴ rural voters were content to register their dissatisfaction with present government policies by electing a rump of parochially-minded MPs to represent them in Parliament.

⁷² "A Most Important Message to Every Voting Citizen," *Edmonton Journal*, 1 August 1953, 18.

⁷³ For example, Liberal candidate C.B. Carignan in Peace River was widely regarded as having a good chance to unseat Social Credit leader Solon Low in 1953, as he had come within 323 votes of defeating Low in the 1949 contest. After losing to Low by a margin of 2552 votes in 1953, Carignan argued that the personal interventions of Manning and other prominent Social Credit speakers in his riding helped undermine the Liberal message, and was decisive in defeating him by a wider margin. See: LAC, Louis St. Laurent Papers, vol. 178 file E-10-2, C.B. Carignan to Louis St. Laurent, 24 August 1953.

⁷⁴ Ernest Manning himself admitted that the Social Credit party had no chance of winning the election, although he hoped they could still be effective in influencing the policies of whichever party formed the government, potentially by holding the balance of power in a minority Parliament. See: "Manning Sees Socreds Holding Power Balance," *Calgary Herald*, 30 July 1953, 18.

While wheat marketing and ameliorative agricultural supports were the most discussed issues in Alberta's rural constituencies, the export of natural gas resources was debated in urban ridings. In 1953, these discussions were mostly hypothetical as Premier Manning had signaled earlier that gas export from the province would only be considered if sufficient proven reserves were discovered to justify export without compromising Alberta's future. As of 1953, the Alberta Conservation Board had granted licenses to Western Pipelines and TransCanada Pipelines to export a limited amount of gas from the province to Eastern Canada and to Westcoast Transmission to export gas to the Pacific coast, but the government was hesitant to allow export to the United States at the time of the 1953 election.⁷⁵

All three major parties supported this cautious approach in principle with few substantive differences between them, as they each agreed that Eastern Canada should be supplied with Alberta gas first before any export to the United States was contemplated. Lurking behind the scenes, however, was the economic reality that export to the United States was required to make an all-Canadian pipeline economically viable. This realization was championed by maverick Conservative MP Carl Nickle, who challenged the three-party consensus by pointing out that the Canadian market was not sufficiently large to cover the costs of what would become the world's longest gas pipeline. The united position of the main parties would prove short-lived, as economic realities would force the Liberals to back down on their election promises soon after the 1953 election was decided.

⁷⁵ In 1949, Manning appointed a Royal Commission to examine the feasibility of gas export to Eastern Canada and to the United States. This report recommended a cautious approach to gas export as proven reserves were limited at the time. The Commission's findings continued to guide Alberta's energy policy at the time of the 1953 election. See: "The Dinning Report," *Lethbridge Herald*, 9 March 1949, 4; "The Natural Gas Commission Report," *Calgary Albertan*, 10 March 1949, 4; GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 291, Telegram Ernest Manning to Gray Turgeon, 17 October 1949.

The Liberal party was committed to encouraging the construction of an all-Canadian pipeline to Eastern Canada. In a major speech in Edmonton, Prime Minister St. Laurent unequivocally declared that a pipeline to Ontario was necessary “to give Eastern Canadian centres the benefit of Alberta’s cheap natural gas.”⁷⁶ This position was reinforced in a speech by Minister of Trade and Commerce C.D. Howe in Calgary, who noted that the government’s preference was for a private company to take the initiative to construct this pipeline without the need to export gas to the United States.⁷⁷ Calgary’s Liberal candidates echoed St. Laurent’s and Howe’s pledges in public debates.⁷⁸ George Drew supported the government’s position on gas export, reiterating his party’s advocacy of a single all-Canadian pipeline to transport gas from Alberta to the East. In a speech at Calgary’s Western Canada High School, Drew intoned that “we must realize that unless we have one pipeline carrying natural gas through Canada to the provinces east of Alberta, we may lose control of the disposition of that gas at any time.”⁷⁹ Drew’s statement reflected a concern that the distribution of vital energy resources should be owned and controlled by Canadians to ensure that these resources are handled in Canada’s best interests. The Social Credit party also expressed its support for an all-Canadian gas pipeline controlled by Canadians, as it harmonized its policies with those of the provincial government.⁸⁰ Thus, all three of the main federal contenders agreed that an all-Canadian gas pipeline connecting Alberta to the East was desirable to ensure Canadian control over this strategic resource.

Carl Nickle was the lone dissenting voice in the province on this issue. Nickle insisted that “if Eastern Canada forces restriction of pipeline routes to more expensive,

⁷⁶ “PM Commits Liberals to All-Canadian Gas Pipeline,” *Calgary Albertan*, 14 July 1953, 1.

⁷⁷ “Howe Dashes Gas Sale Hope,” *Calgary Herald*, 30 July 1953, 1.

⁷⁸ “Albertan Political Forum,” *Calgary Albertan*, 6 August 1953, 7.

⁷⁹ “Drew Urges Canadian Route for Export of Natural Gas,” *Calgary Herald*, 3 July 1953, 1.

⁸⁰ GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 291, Solon Low to Ernest Manning, 31 March 1953.

longer Canadian territory, prices and markets for our gas could be such as to kill a large part of Alberta's present boom."⁸¹ Nickle proposed that Eastern Canada could obtain its gas more cheaply by purchasing it from eastern American fields, while Alberta would be better served exporting its gas to the large markets south of the border. As the editor of the *Daily Oil Bulletin*, Nickle publicly advocated the export of gas to the United States, despite the fact that his position was at odds with the agreed consensus.⁸² The editorial board of the *Calgary Herald* joined Nickle in his battle against the established consensus, declaring that the all-Canadian pipeline proposal was "petty nationalism run riot" that ignored fundamental economic realities.⁸³ Drew distanced himself from Nickle's statements, claiming that their disagreement was "one of detail and not principle," but the fundamental question remained: how could Canada protect its sovereignty without stifling Alberta's nascent gas industry?⁸⁴

On the whole, given the tacit consensus that had developed between the three major parties, the issue of gas export was not particularly significant in deciding the outcome of the 1953 federal election. In Alberta's urban ridings, Drew's tax-cut promise and insinuation that the Liberal government was inefficient and wasteful were more widely debated than the proposed all-Canadian gas pipeline. However, with the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the strongly nationalistic positions taken by the three main parties in 1953 set the stage for the debate on the TransCanada Pipeline a few years hence. Once it became evident that the assumptions underpinning their original positions were, in fact,

⁸¹ "Albertan Political Forum," *Calgary Albertan*, 30 July 1953, 7.

⁸² "High Time to Unscramble the Natural Gas Mess," *Daily Oil Bulletin*, 30 October 1953, 1-5.

⁸³ "Mr. Drew's Views on Gas Pipelines," *Calgary Herald*, 4 July 1953, 4; "Carl Nickle and Economic Common Sense," *Calgary Herald*, 15 July 1953, 4.

⁸⁴ "Drew Says PCs Would Expand Resources Use," *Calgary Albertan*, 3 July 1953, 1.

overly optimistic, all three parties were forced to reconcile their nationalistic positions with the economic realities highlighted by Carl Nickle in 1953.

On August 10, 1953, Albertans voted to largely preserve the status quo by opting to once again send a substantial bloc of Social Credit MPs to Ottawa. Social Credit won 40.7% of the popular vote, and increased its seat total by one to eleven of seventeen seats (by unseating J.W. Welbourn in Jasper-Edson by a margin of 701 votes). The Liberals received 35.1% of the popular vote and were reduced to four seats due to the loss of Jasper-Edson. Incumbent Liberal MP Albert Macdonald in Edmonton East was also defeated by the Social Credit challenger, Ambrose Holowach, largely due to the fact that the Social Credit vote was united under a single candidate where it had been divided between two separate candidates in the previous election. This was offset by a Liberal victory in the newly-created riding of Edmonton-Strathcona, won by newcomer Dick Hanna. The Progressive Conservatives won 14.5% of the vote and retained their two Calgary seats, with many of their rural candidates losing their deposits.⁸⁵

In surveying the results of the 1953 campaign in Alberta, the Liberals were disappointed that their efforts had failed to elect more MPs, although they were pleased with the overall federal result. In a letter to Prime Minister St. Laurent, Alberta Liberal President Wilf Edgar commented that “we feel rather badly, however, that we are not sending you more Liberal supporters from Alberta but we are happy to know that we have increased the Liberal vote in this province tremendously.”⁸⁶ The Alberta Young Liberal President, Una Maclean, expressed her confidence in St. Laurent’s leadership and noted positively that the Liberals had a strong foundation “to build on for future provincial and

⁸⁵ See Appendix: Tables of Election Results 1949 to 1965, pg. 160.

⁸⁶ LAC, St. Laurent Papers, vol. 178, file E-10-1(1), Wilf Edgar to Louis St. Laurent, 11 August 1953.

federal strength.”⁸⁷ Tellingly, provincial leader J. Harper Prowse expressed confusion at “the surprising continuing strength shown by the Social Credit party throughout the province,” indicating that the party’s leadership was ignorant of the dissatisfaction in many rural constituencies with the Liberal party’s agricultural programme.⁸⁸

The Alberta Social Credit party interpreted the results as a vindication of their efforts in the province. Solon Low expressed satisfaction that his party had resisted a strong Liberal push in many key ridings, including his own.⁸⁹ While their national ambitions were thwarted for the time being, the Socreds were content to retain their strong phalanx of MPs from Alberta with some additions from British Columbia, which had elected a Social Credit government provincially a few months previously.

In a letter to defeated Alberta candidates, George Drew expressed disappointment with the overall results, and implored his supporters to immediately begin revitalizing their local organizations “which will measure the real strength of our Party at this time.”⁹⁰ Many Conservative supporters were despondent at the unbreakable lock the Social Credit party seemed to hold on the electorate, indicating that their prime challenge in the years to come would be to preserve the two-party system in Canada.⁹¹ Provincial leader W.J.C. Kirby was undoubtedly aware of the challenges his party faced in the coming months and years as he began to focus his efforts on rebuilding the party from the ground up to avoid another disappointment in four years’ time.

⁸⁷ Ibid., Una Maclean to St. Laurent, 12 August 1953.

⁸⁸ GLA, LAA Papers, series M-1724, file 35, J. Harper Prowse to J.M. Dechene, 20 August 1953.

⁸⁹ GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 430, F.D. Shaw to Solon Low, 11 August 1953; Ibid., Solon Low to F.D. Shaw, 19 August 1953.

⁹⁰ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2a, vol. 436, file “Defeated Candidates Alberta,” Drew to Defeated Alberta Candidates,” 15 August 1953.

⁹¹ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2a, vol. 436, file “Election 1953 Correspondence – H,” Doug Harkness to George Drew, 19 August 1953; Ibid., A.C. Hardy to George Drew, 21 August 1953; Ibid., George Drew to A.C. Hardy, 26 August 1953.

Overall, the electorate in 1953 was apathetic to the direction of Canadian politics and to the platforms of the two traditional parties of Confederation. Social Credit won not on its campaign promises, but on the strength of Premier Ernest Manning's appeal and the feelings of alienation that seemed to run quietly through Alberta's rural ridings. Neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives offered a sufficiently compelling platform to divert farmers from electing a parochial and regionally-minded rump of MPs to parliament. However, as the rural response to the perceived inadequacies in federal agricultural programs suggests, the electorate was not entirely somnolent. Indeed, major debates on the future of Alberta's economy were on the horizon that would forever reshape the contours of Alberta's political landscape.

Chapter 2

Wheat Marketing, Gas Export and Alberta's Changing Economy

With the discovery of large reserves of oil at Leduc in 1947, Alberta's economy began changing rapidly as the energy sector displaced agriculture as the most significant industry in the province. The additional revenues accrued from energy royalties fattened the provincial treasury and added thousands of high paying private sector jobs to Alberta's burgeoning urban centers, leading to an age of prosperity unmatched in the province's short history.¹ However, as some of the debates witnessed in the 1953 election suggest, this prosperity was not shared equally across all regions, as many agricultural communities felt that their way of life was threatened by the rise of the energy sector. As with the 1953 federal contest, petitions to ameliorate some of the outstanding grievances of these communities were common through the mid-1950s, with federal grain marketing programs and farm support legislation being the main focus of the farmers' angst. A second issue rose in prominence following the 1953 election, as the province began to focus on the sustainability of Alberta's energy wealth and how it should market these resources to other regions in North America. In particular, natural gas became an increasingly important resource to Alberta's economy once its utility as an inexpensive form of fuel was widely recognized. However, once the full extent of Alberta's substantial gas reserves became known, people began vigorously debating how this resource should be controlled and

¹ Newspaper articles from the mid-1950s highlight the fact that Alberta's population expanded proportionately faster than that of any other province, largely on the strength of the energy industry and the increased prosperity realized through the discovery of oil. See, for example: "Alberta Government Oil and Gas Revenue Hits an All-time High," *Calgary Herald*, 15 May 1954; "Alberta Tops Provinces in Rapidity of Growth" *Calgary Herald*, 7 October 1954; "Alberta Expansion Tide Runs High," *Financial Post*, 28 May 1955.

marketed. This debate over gas export would ultimately dovetail with the continuing debates over federal agricultural programs to produce a volatile political climate that would destabilize the status quo by the latter half of the decade. In order to understand why the province's partisan complexion changed so drastically in the 1957 and 1958 elections, it is necessary to examine these two issues in some detail. Indeed, the positions taken by each of the three main federal parties on these two key issues drastically affected their political fortunes later in the decade.

Following the first victory of the Social Credit party at the polls in 1935, the administrations of William Aberhart and Ernest Manning began investigating ways to encourage oil companies to explore for oil and gas reserves in Alberta, which were relatively modest until the discovery of the Leduc-Woodbend oilfield in 1947. Indeed, Aberhart began canvassing international energy companies for their interest in exploring Alberta for energy resources as early as 1936 through his Minister of Lands and Mines, Eldon Tanner.² Tanner's efforts formed the foundation of Alberta's regulatory apparatus for the energy industry, which favoured granting attractive royalty terms to private energy companies to entice them to explore.³ These early efforts came with the implicit guarantee that the Alberta government would never consider setting up a rival government-owned company to compete directly with the private sector. This preference for private development continued under Ernest Manning, who offered favourable terms to private energy firms while setting up regulatory boards to monitor the conservation and export of these precious resources.⁴ This general philosophy emphasizing the importance of private

² John Richards and Larry Pratt, *Prairie Capitalism: Power and Influence in the New West*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979), 78.

³ *Ibid.*, 71-74.

⁴ Barr, *The Dynasty*, 140-141.

sector investment guided the development of Alberta's energy resources into the 1950s, when this preference became a flashpoint for public debate.

By the early 1950s, natural gas was widely seen as an attractive source of fuel to heat homes in North America, increasing demand for a resource that had only recently been discovered in significant quantities in the province. In 1953, Premier Manning tasked the Alberta Petroleum and Natural Gas Conservation Board to study the feasibility of exporting natural gas in large quantities to Eastern Canada and the United States. The Conservation Board concluded that Alberta could safely expect to discover new reserves of natural gas each year for the next decade, but cautiously noted that extensive gas export could imperil the province's long-term energy security if not monitored effectively.⁵ The Board recommended that the provincial government cautiously examine proposals to remove gas from the province and issue permits to this end only if it was satisfied that Alberta's long-term energy needs were secure. Despite the cautious tone of the Conservation Board's report, this marked the first time that it acknowledged that Alberta's gas reserves were sufficiently robust to warrant limited export to the east and south. Indeed, the 1953 report contrasted starkly with an earlier report published in 1949 by the Royal Commission on Natural Gas, which had speculated that Alberta only had sufficient reserves to supply the province's local needs for approximately thirty years.⁶ This abrupt turnaround signaled that a revision to the province's policy on gas export was warranted in 1953, albeit at a cautious pace.

⁵ LAC, Howe Papers, vol. 24, file 8-2-1, "Report on the Removal of Gas from the Province of Alberta," 24 November 1953, 1-13.

⁶ William Kilbourn, *PipeLine: TransCanada and the Great Debate*, (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1970), 18. Interestingly, Eldon Tanner himself criticized the Royal Commission for its "excessive caution" in 1949, signaling his early ambition to export gas from the province ahead of the provincial government's wishes. *Ibid.*, 48.

Keeping in line with past precedent in the development of the energy sector, Premier Manning immediately began to encourage the two companies that sought to export gas to Eastern Canada, Western Pipelines and TransCanada Pipelines, to amalgamate into a single, Canadian-owned company to facilitate the financing and construction of a single pipeline from Alberta.⁷ The federal government and the Manning administration agreed that it was desirable to supply Eastern Canada with Alberta gas before exports to the United States were contemplated. George Drew concurred with this sentiment, despite reservations from Ontario's Fuel Controller that the pipeline would only be financially feasible if concurrent exports to the United States were permitted.⁸ Thus, shortly after the 1953 election, the Alberta government and the three main federal parties all agreed that pursuing a west-to-east gas pipeline was desirable. At the request of the provincial and federal governments, Western Pipelines and TransCanada Pipelines merged into a single company (retaining the latter's name) and began canvassing the private sector for seed capital to build an all-Canadian gas pipeline to Ontario. On 14 May 1954, the new company received an exclusive license from the Alberta government to export up to 4.35 trillion cubic feet of gas from the province, with preferred markets in Eastern Canada.⁹ At this point, government intervention in the project was limited to shielding TransCanada Pipelines from external competition, and no direct financial contribution from the federal government was contemplated.

⁷ LAC, Howe Papers, vol. 24, file 8-2-1, Letter Alan Williamson to C.D. Howe, 7 December 1953; *Ibid.*, C.D. Howe to Gordon Osler, 17 December 1953.

⁸ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2a, vol. 440, file "Pipelines, Gas Correspondence and Memos 1953-55," "Confidential Conversation Transcript George Drew to Mr. Crozier," 1 December 1953. The Progressive Conservatives affirmed their support for federal government intervention in the pipeline project at their 1954 annual convention. See: GLA, PCAA Papers, series M-1744, file 7, "Report of the Policy and Resolutions Committee to the Ninth Annual Meeting of the Progressive Conservative Association of Canada," 16 March 1954, 1.

⁹ GLA, TransCanada Pipelines Ltd. (TCPL) Papers, series M-1599, file 301, "Suggested Statement by Eldon Tanner," March 1956.

Much of the pressure to pursue this pipeline arrangement originated with energy companies operating in Alberta. Indeed, Alberta stood to gain more than any other province from the successful implementation of this export deal. In a memo to C.D. Howe regarding the TransCanada project, federal officials noted that “some action will have to be taken in the near future because of the growing pressure from gas producers for an outlet,” indicating that Alberta producers were at the forefront in lobbying the government to advance the construction of the pipeline.¹⁰ In an interview with the *Western Oil Examiner*, the Minister of Mines and Technical Surveys, George Prudham, also indicated that such an export arrangement would be hugely beneficial to Alberta’s economy, and even suggested that the government was receptive to the industry’s desire to export gas to the United States provided that “the needs of Canada present and future [are] met.”¹¹ This stance was later commended by the Canadian Gas Association, which represented gas producers in Western Canada. In a special bulletin released early in 1956, it commended Howe’s support for a pipeline project that was “comparable in magnitude to the St. Lawrence Seaway.”¹² Thus, it is clear that Alberta’s energy sector supported government intervention in expediting the TransCanada project, and indeed all federal parties supported the concept of government support for an all-Canadian pipeline from Alberta to Ontario in principle.

Unfortunately, the tacit consensus that had developed between the major federal parties and the energy sector in Alberta vanished once the TransCanada project encountered difficulties in securing adequate financing from private sources. Eldon Tanner, who became the President of TransCanada Pipelines in 1952, lobbied the federal government

¹⁰ LAC, Howe Papers, vol. 23, file 8-2-1, “Memo re: TransCanada Pipelines,” 8 July 1955.

¹¹ “Gas for U.S. is Okay... at the End of Our Pipelines,” *Western Oil Examiner*, 14 May 1955, 3.

¹² GLA, TCPL Papers, series M-1599, file 304, “Special Bulletin from the Canadian Gas Association,” 30 January 1956.

and the Social Credit caucus extensively to garner support for a federal loan guarantee. Following Ottawa's rejection of TransCanada's application for a loan from the Federal Industrial Development Bank, Alberta's Social Credit MPs effectively acted as Tanner's lobbyists in the House of Commons to push the governing Liberals to change their position.¹³ The federal Social Credit party was motivated by the significant benefits the province of Alberta was set to accrue through the successful completion of this pipeline, and was willing to sacrifice its small-c conservative ideology to ensure that the pipeline was completed in a timely fashion. In a bid to save face, Tanner issued a statement to the press clarifying why his company was now seeking direct financial assistance from the federal government after it had repeatedly insisted this would not be necessary. Tanner noted that his company "was required to develop a project designed to further the long-range growth of this country, rather than to satisfy immediate economic and financial prerequisites," indicating that Ottawa's requirement that Ontario be serviced before exports were permitted to the United States effectively prevented TransCanada from attracting private investors.¹⁴ Indeed, it would be several years before the company expected to generate a profit – a fact which likely deterred many potential investors.¹⁵ Thus, by 1955, it was apparent that the federal government would have to directly finance the pipeline by some method for it to be successful, prompting the federal Liberals to reverse their earlier position and approve a temporary loan to TransCanada.

C.D. Howe, who had already expended a great deal of personal energy and political capital on the TransCanada project, negotiated the agreement to temporarily finance

¹³ GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 291, Letter Solon Low to Ernest Manning, 22 March 1955; Ibid., file 495, Solon Low to Eldon Tanner, 22 March 1955; Ibid., Eldon Tanner to Solon Low, 24 March 1955.

¹⁴ GLA, TCPL Papers, series M-1599, file 301, "Suggested Statement by Eldon Tanner," March 1956, 3.

¹⁵ Kilbourn, *PipeLine*, 66-68.

TransCanada's operations in the spring of 1956. In a meeting between senior cabinet ministers and TransCanada executives, Howe offered to provide a low-interest loan to the company to ensure that construction began on the Alberta to Manitoba line that summer.¹⁶ The company's executives agreed to the terms of this loan, which included a provision to allow the federal government to purchase the entire pipeline at 90 percent cost if the company failed to secure adequate private financing to repay the loan by November 1957. The most problematic section of the line, stretching from Manitoba through Northern Ontario to Toronto, was to be constructed by a new federal Crown corporation with a requirement that TransCanada lease this section of the line and eventually purchase it from the government.¹⁷ Furthermore, the federal government acceded to Tanner's request that gas be permitted to move across the international border at Emerson, Manitoba, which would allow the entire pipeline to become financially sustainable in the long run. By April 1956, the federal Liberals had committed significant financial capital to the construction of the TransCanada pipeline, implicitly linking the fortunes of the government party with this project's success.

Manning's administration (and, inevitably, the entire federal Social Credit caucus) approved of C.D. Howe's legislation. In a special joint caucus meeting between the British Columbia and Alberta cabinets and their federal counterparts, all agreed that some financial assistance was required to move the pipeline project forward.¹⁸ Manning stated unequivocally that "we must be realistic and face the fact that the present scheme may be the best way in the foreseeable circumstances," indicating that rigid adherence to a policy

¹⁶ LAC, Howe Papers, vol. 23, file 8-2-1, "Notes of Discussion re: TransCanada Pipelines Limited," 11 April 1956, 1.

¹⁷ Kilbourn, *PipeLine*, 91-92.

¹⁸ GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 477, "Notes on the Special Caucus held on Saturday, March 10th, 1956, at which Mr. Manning and Mr. Bennett were Present with Other Representatives from Alberta and British Columbia," 3.

of non-interference in the affairs of private companies would be damaging to Alberta's interests in this case.¹⁹ In a separate meeting of the federal caucus, party leader Solon Low prepared a list of "salient facts" to raise in Parliament to justify his party's support for the government's enabling legislation. Low illustrated that Alberta "desperately needed markets for its gas," a fact which made the TransCanada pipeline program essential to the future maintenance of Alberta's energy industry.²⁰ Low criticized government policy for effectively stymieing the project's financial viability with its requirement that Eastern Canada be serviced before gas was exported to the United States. Social Credit supported the government's loan to TransCanada Pipelines as a last resort to ensure that the project remained on schedule.²¹ Overall, it is clear that the federal Social Credit caucus believed in the economic necessity of the TransCanada project, and was willing to side with the federal government to secure Alberta's future prosperity.

While their intent was laudable, the federal Liberals and Social Crediters did not anticipate the negative public reaction to come. This opposition hinged on the fact that, as of the fall of 1954, a majority of TransCanada's stock was owned by American financiers. Gardiner Symonds, a wealthy American energy magnate who owned the Tennessee Gas Company, led a consortium of three American oil companies in a bid to acquire 51 percent of TransCanada's shares in exchange for purchasing steel pipe from the American Steel Company on TransCanada's behalf.²² In the mid-1950s, a worldwide steel shortage made Symonds' contacts with American steel producers an invaluable asset to TransCanada, which was forced to look to the American Steel Company to manufacture its pipe when it

¹⁹ Ibid., 5.

²⁰ Ibid., "Social Credit Caucus Minutes – Regular Caucus," 14 March 1956, 2.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Kilbourn, *PipeLine*, 96-97.

became apparent that no Canadian steel mill was capable of a project of that magnitude. After a series of intense negotiations between Symonds, the other TransCanada stakeholders, and C.D. Howe, Howe reluctantly acceded to Symonds' request provided that the company sell 51 percent of its stock on the open market once the project was completed, preferably to Canadian investors.²³

The revelation that the Liberal administration was interested in financing an American-controlled company produced a wave of revulsion across the country. Letters poured into C.D. Howe's office denouncing the government's pipeline deal.²⁴ Frances Horton of Toronto resolutely declared that "we should not stand by and let Texans pipe our gas and then charge us what they like for it," implying that American control of Canada's gas resources would lead to unfair pricing for consumers in Ontario.²⁵ A similar sentiment was expressed by Calgarian Yvon Lefebvre, who noted that TransCanada was likely to make decisions contrary to Canada's national interest, suggesting that "we should aim to keep what we have for our benefit."²⁶ A letter to the editor in the *Edmonton Journal* demonstrates that dissatisfaction with the TransCanada agreement stretched across the province. Farmer Sam Gormley opined that American control of the pipeline would allow them to "charge unfair rates to Canadians" for their own gas, clearly compromising

²³ Section VI of the agreement between TransCanada Ltd. and the federal government mandated that the company issue shares on the open market equivalent to 51 percent of the total once the pipeline had been constructed in its entirety. As there was no stipulation on who could purchase these shares, there was no guarantee that the company would fall under Canadian control. See: "TransCanada Financing," *Lethbridge Herald*, 3 April 1956, 4.

²⁴ In a memo to Eldon Tanner prior to the official announcement of the Liberals' preferred pipeline strategy, Howe acknowledged that opposition to the pipeline deal would "be concentrated on American ownership." Howe confided to Tanner that "it would be better to debate this in Committee rather than on the floor of the House" where the Liberals would be able to contain negative coverage of the legislation more effectively. See: LAC, Howe Papers, vol. 27, file 8-2-1, C.D. Howe to Eldon Tanner, 27 February 1956.

²⁵ Ibid., Frances Horton to C.D. Howe, 27 January 1956.

²⁶ Ibid., Yvon Lefebvre to C.D. Howe, 2 May 1956.

Canada's economic sovereignty.²⁷ Some veterans of the First and Second World Wars cast the Liberal pipeline legislation as an affront to the principles they fought for. Ex-soldier W.H. Pearson of Calgary contended that selling surplus gas to the United States amounted to a surrender of Canadian sovereignty, asking "how many would-be promoters of the oil business voluntarily put on the Uniform in either the First or Second Wars?"²⁸ Another concerned veteran from Bowness echoed Pearson's concern in a separate letter, arguing that "we [veterans of the Second World War] come back here to have our Country given away without even fighting for it [sic]."²⁹ A particularly creative Liberal sympathizer from Bowness recommended that, instead of directly financing an American-controlled company, the federal government might look to "swap" Western Canada's excess wheat in exchange for steel pipe from Germany, thus eliminating two problems in one stroke.³⁰ On the whole, many Albertans expressed a degree of trepidation at the thought of granting an American company the exclusive right to market the province's natural gas.

The Progressive Conservatives were scathing in their condemnation of the Liberal government's pipeline programme and became the chief proponents of alternative strategies that would not involve direct government subsidies to American-controlled corporations. George Drew announced that "financial control of companies developing and controlling Canadian resources should rest in Canada," channeling his inner John A. Macdonald to assert that the Conservatives would ensure that a new National Policy would secure Canada's economic future.³¹ W.J.C. Kirby was also adamant that the government's preferred strategy for financing the pipeline would imperil Canada's sovereignty, declaring

²⁷ Sam Gormley, Letter to the Editor, *Edmonton Journal*, 31 May 1956, 4.

²⁸ LAC, Howe Papers, vol. 27, file 8-2-1, W.H. Pearson to C.D. Howe, 12 May 1956.

²⁹ Ibid., A.J. Stanton to C.D. Howe, 11 May 1956.

³⁰ Ibid., W.J. Lockhart to C.D. Howe, 16 May 1956.

³¹ "U.S. Financial Control of Pipeline Blasted by Conservatives and CCF," *Calgary Herald*, 16 March 1956.

in a speech that the federal Liberal plan “sells out Alberta’s natural resources to benefit a group of American financiers.”³² The editorial board of the *Calgary Herald*, which was typically sympathetic to the federal Conservatives, agreed with Drew’s and Kirby’s assessment of the Liberal position. In an editorial in early April 1956, the *Herald* declared that it was necessary for the project to be owned and controlled by Canadians as it was “a nation building infrastructure project on par with the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway.”³³ It further clarified its stance in a follow-up editorial which highlighted the fact that their position was not “anti-American,” it was rather a “pro-Canadian” position emphasizing that resource companies were exceptional in their importance to Canada’s economic development, and should thus be owned and controlled by Canadians.³⁴ Thus, opposition to the TransCanada project was rooted in the sentiment that an American-controlled company would not make decisions in the best interests of Canada in this important nation-building endeavour. The Progressive Conservatives seized on public apprehension to paint C.D. Howe’s preferred course as a subsidy to wealthy American financiers. This marked a clear break from earlier in the decade, when American investment in the Canadian economy was accepted as a necessity to provide sufficient capital to maintain the country’s postwar economic prosperity. This shift provided an opportunity for the Progressive Conservatives to act as the champions of Canadian economic sovereignty, which would become an important theme in the election campaigns to follow.

³² “Kirby Raps Political Parties,” *Calgary Herald*, 6 April 1956, 1.

³³ “Cold Logic Never Built a Nation,” *Calgary Herald*, 11 April 1956, 4. Similar arguments were advanced in other editorials. See, for example: “Canada Can’t Control a U.S. Plan,” *Calgary Herald*, 27 April 1956, 4.

³⁴ “Pro-Canadian is Not Anti-American,” *Calgary Herald*, 20 April 1956, 4.

Progressive Conservative opposition to the Liberal pipeline legislation crystallized upon the revelation that alternative proposals from other energy companies had been entertained and dismissed prior to the announcement of the Liberals' preferred course. In early April, a report was leaked to the media indicating that Frank McMahon, a Calgary oil tycoon who was constructing a pipeline from Alberta to the Pacific Coast, had approached C.D. Howe with a proposal to construct the new gas pipeline from Alberta to Ontario by a Canadian-owned consortium headed by himself.³⁵ In fact, McMahon's proposal was more reliant on exporting gas to the United States than TransCanada's scheme, making it a difficult sell to the federal government.³⁶ Premier Manning took note of the McMahon proposal, and ultimately concluded that this plan was impractical as McMahon's consortium had not yet applied for a permit to export gas from Alberta and did not seem to possess the financial backing required to begin construction on the pipeline that year.³⁷ This perception was confirmed in a report to C.D. Howe in May 1956, which suggested that McMahon's proposal was unrealistic due to the fact that, unlike Gardiner Symonds, he had no access to the 34-inch pipe required for the project, and "no gas, no contracts, and no permits" to commence it.³⁸ Eldon Tanner also noted that this alternative proposal was flawed as its projections called for selling gas to the United States at overly optimistic rates.³⁹ Overall, McMahon's proposal could not be taken seriously, as TransCanada had already obtained the permits and materiel necessary to begin construction immediately.

³⁵ "McMahon Ready to Build Gas Line," *Financial Post*, 6 April 1956; "Canadian Pipeline Interests Await Policy of McMahon," *Calgary Herald*, 7 April 1956, 1;

³⁶ "New Pipeline Scheme Depends on Exports to Four U.S. Firms," *Globe and Mail*, 6 April 1956.

³⁷ LAC, Howe Papers, vol. 23, file 8-2-1, "Notes on the Discussion re TransCanada Pipelines Limited," 11 April 1956, 2.

³⁸ Ibid., "Notes for Minister re Pipeline Legislation," May 1956.

³⁹ GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 477, "Social Credit Caucus Minutes – Regular Caucus," 11 April 1956.

McMahon withdrew his offer, possibly at Howe's request, shortly after it was made public, leaving TransCanada as the sole legitimate option on the table.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, George Drew and the Conservatives continued to insist that alternative methods of financing and constructing the pipeline were possible. In a speech to the House of Commons, Drew claimed that a Canadian-owned consortium could construct the pipeline by making use of the railway right-of-way from Alberta to Ontario.⁴¹ Drew claimed that this method would significantly reduce costs, as the pipeline would be able to take advantage of the railway's existing route through Northern Ontario's rugged wilderness. The Edson Young Liberal Association sent a letter to Howe urging him to examine this alternative more closely.⁴² Howe's reply sensibly indicated that the Railway Act "does not permit installation of a gas pipeline on [a] railway right-of-way because of an explosion hazard," demonstrating that this alternative was a fantasy that could not be realistically implemented.⁴³ Additionally, other Canadian businessmen came forward with alternative plans which were even more dubious and unrealistic than the earlier alternative proposed by Frank McMahon.⁴⁴ Despite the unworkable nature of these alternatives, the Progressive Conservatives continued to stake their position on the notion that the Liberals were actively colluding with American energy magnates to the detriment of the national interest.

⁴⁰ "McMahon Drops Bid to Build Gas Pipeline," *Edmonton Journal*, 4 May 1956, 1.

⁴¹ "Drew Suggests Canuck-Owned Gas Pipeline to Eastern Canada Making Use of Railway Right-of-Way in Ontario," *Lethbridge Herald*, 11 April 1956, 1.

⁴² LAC, Howe Papers, vol. 27, file 8-2-1, Edson Young Liberal Association to C.D. Howe, 4 May 1956.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, C.D. Howe to Edson Young Liberal Association, 22 May 1956.

⁴⁴ Two additional proposals were publicized in the spring of 1956. The first, by Gairdner and Co. of Toronto, was purely financial, and did not involve acquiring gas permits from Alberta or import rights to the United States (which would presumably be done by another company). The second was made by Montreal financier Lloyd Champion, whose proposal was immediately rejected by Finance Minister Walter Harris as "impossible to take seriously." See: "Third Plan Offered to Finance Pipeline," *Globe and Mail*, 12 April 1956; "4th Gas Line Plan Cold-Shouldered," *Calgary Albertan*, 26 May 1956.

In Alberta, this debate spoke to the very core of Alberta's economic future. The enthusiasm of the energy industry's boosters clashed against the hesitance of those who saw American foreign investment as a potentially negative influence on Alberta's economic development. All Social Credit and Liberal MPs in the province spoke out in favour of the government's deal with TransCanada Pipelines as it was the most expeditious method available to finish the project. Calgary South's maverick Conservative MP, Carl Nickle, also spoke out in favour of the Liberal legislation, earning him the lasting enmity of George Drew. As early as 1953, Nickle had advocated constructing a pipeline through the United States to Eastern Canada, as this was "the most economically viable" route possible.⁴⁵ Despite the fact that TransCanada's plan differed from Nickle's suggested course, Nickle jumped to support this plan as "government assistance is the only feasible way to make an all-Canadian line possible."⁴⁶ The *Calgary Albertan's* editorial board supported Nickle's stance, claiming that while the TransCanada deal had its flaws, "it is the best deal on the table and should be passed."⁴⁷ A prominent radio commentator from Edmonton, Stan Ross, echoed the *Albertan's* support for Nickle's position, indicating that the official Progressive Conservative position was rooted more in "political expediency" than in economic reality.⁴⁸ The *Albertan*, Stan Ross, and Carl Nickle dismissed criticism that American capital had a potentially negative influence on the Canadian economy. In a television interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Nickle declared that "I am convinced that it is impossible to get the necessary risk capital for this project at parity within Canada," indicating that he believed that Canadian investors were not willing to put up sufficient

⁴⁵ See, for example: Carl Nickle, "Time to Unscramble the Pipeline Mess," *Daily Oil Bulletin*, 30 October 1953.

⁴⁶ "Nickle Backs Govt but 'I'm Still a P.C.,'" *Calgary Albertan*, 11 May 1956, 16.

⁴⁷ "The Best of a Bad Job," *Calgary Albertan*, 16 May 1956, 4.

⁴⁸ LAC, Howe Papers, vol. 25, file 8-2-1, "One Man's Viewpoint – Stan Ross," 21 May 1956.

funds to adequately finance the project.⁴⁹ Thus, American capital was filling a void in this essential national project, which Nickle believed should be recognized as a positive contribution to the Canadian economy. Notions that American companies would make decisions contrary to Canada's national interests were dismissed by Nickle and his supporters as ludicrous.

Consequently, only a single Alberta MP, Calgary North's Doug Harkness, voted against the government's pipeline legislation. However, the ensuing parliamentary debate would have a lasting impact on the province's politics. The "Great Pipeline Debate," as some contemporary commentators named it, ignited a firestorm of controversy when the Liberals moved to stifle a Progressive Conservative and CCF filibuster by invoking closure at each stage of the debate. Howls of indignation resounded throughout the country as political pundits universally condemned C.D. Howe's authoritarian tactics.⁵⁰ The pipeline debate centered more on the right of the opposition to be heard than on the actual substance of the government's deal with TransCanada – the details of which are covered extensively elsewhere, and need not be repeated here.⁵¹ Interestingly, in Alberta, the media continued to focus on the substance of the pipeline bill while the rest of the country debated the merits

⁴⁹ Ibid., "Programme – People Who Report the News," 2 May 1956, 3.

⁵⁰ See, for example: "An Issue of Democracy, Not Urgency," *Calgary Herald*, 30 May 1956, 4; "Bedlam Marks Gas Debate – Liberal Government Accused of 'Foul, Fascist Deed,'" *Edmonton Journal*, 25 May 1956, 1; "Pertinent Topics," *High River Times*, 31 May 1956, 2; "Drew Says House Opposition on Crusade for Democracy," *Lethbridge Herald*, 30 May 1956, 22; "The Pipeline Guillotine," *Montreal Gazette*, 29 May 1956, 6; "Ramming it Through," *Red Deer Advocate*, 6 June 1956, section 2, page 2; "For Better – and Worse," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 31 May 1956, 17.

⁵¹ William Kilbourn's *PipeLine: TransCanada and the Great Debate* (Toronto: Clark, Irwin and Company, 1970) provides the most comprehensive account of the parliamentary proceedings of any source in chapter nine. Donald Fleming's memoirs also include a particularly detailed account of the debate: Donald Fleming, *So Very Far: The Political Memoirs of the Honourable Donald M. Fleming*, vol. 1: The Rising Years. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), ch. 27. Other accounts include: William Kilbourn and Robert Bothwell, *C.D. Howe: A Biography*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979); John Meisel, *The Canadian Federal Election of 1957*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), ch. 1; Dale Thomson, *Louis St. Laurent: Canadian*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1967), ch. 14; Donald Creighton, *The Forked Road: Canada 1939-1957*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976); Blair Fraser, *The Search for Identity: Canada 1945-1967*, (Toronto: Doubleday, 1967).

of C.D. Howe's crude parliamentary tactics. The *Calgary Albertan* dismissed criticism that democracy was being stifled, claiming that "it will be a sorry day when the minority can thwart the will of the majority."⁵² The *Edmonton Journal*, also traditionally supportive of the federal Liberals, concurred with its counterpart to the south by insisting that "the opposition has no inherent right to debate without end."⁵³ Their support for the Liberal party's tactics rested on an unwavering belief in the necessity of the legislation's passage. To them, and some other Albertans, the Official Opposition was imperiling Alberta's economic advancement by stalling this crucial legislation, notwithstanding the government's disreputable parliamentary tactics.

Ultimately, the debates over gas export in the mid-1950s revealed public anxiety over the role of foreign capital in developing Alberta's energy industry. Letters to C.D. Howe's federal office and commentary in newspaper editorials and letters to the editor exposed how polarizing this issue could be. At a time when Alberta's future economic prosperity was far from secure, these debates reached to the heart of Alberta's political consciousness. The respective positions taken by each party on this issue played a significant role in their election campaigns later in the decade. The "Great Pipeline Debate" was one of the most important political events of the mid-1950s in Alberta, as it succeeded in eliciting debate on the province's economic future.

While the future of Alberta's energy industry was debated at length in Alberta's cities, older grievances continued to animate political discussions in rural regions. As was witnessed in the 1953 campaign, the issues of wheat marketing and agricultural supports had the potential to tip the balance in favour of whichever party responded most adequately

⁵² "Pre-Election Politics," *Calgary Albertan*, 30 May 1956, 4.

⁵³ "Foul, Fascist Deeds' Etc.," *Edmonton Journal*, 26 May 1956, 4.

to the farmers' sense of grievance and alienation from the center of power. This alienation was illustrated vividly in a 1956 *Calgary Albertan* editorial, which noted that "it is no wonder that the farmers of Canada and the U.S. are beginning to feel that they are the forgotten men ... they no longer have a powerful voice to enforce on governments what they consider their rightful demands."⁵⁴ Much like the discussions over Alberta's future as an energy power, debates over agricultural policy were existential in nature, dwelling on the declining influence of a once-mighty political bloc. While agriculturalists were aware of their declining economic importance relative to the oil and gas industry, they were also cognizant of their relative over-representation in Parliament. Rural issues carried far more weight politically than they were otherwise entitled to, due to the wide discrepancy between the populations of rural and much larger urban ridings. Thus, the three dominant federal parties continued to cater to the rural vote, even while demographic trends undermined its long-term saliency.

The situation on Alberta's farms became increasingly intolerable for farmers in the mid-1950s. While the Liberal government modestly increased aid to struggling agriculturalists, most of their central demands were left unresolved. Large sections of the international market remained closed to Canadian wheat exports, cutthroat competition from Congressionally-subsidized American farmers lowered overall prices, and the cost of farm implements and machinery continued to rise. By 1956, the Prairie Farmers' Union was reporting that "net farm income throughout Canada has dropped 50 percent since 1951, and on the prairies more than 65 percent," prompting the government to set a guaranteed minimum price for wheat and provide low-interest loans to temporarily buttress farm

⁵⁴ "The Diminishing Farm Vote," *Calgary Albertan*, 6 June 1956, 4.

incomes.⁵⁵ Ironically, the federal government's remedy inadvertently exacerbated the problem. By guaranteeing a minimum price on grain produced, farmers were encouraged to cultivate as much of it as possible, further adding to the massive grain surpluses which had depressed prices in the first place. A new international wheat agreement negotiated in London in 1956 also did little to alleviate rural concerns. The new international minimum price agreed to was lowered by five cents a bushel from the previous accord, and nothing was done to prevent American farmers from selling their surpluses at even lower rates to non-signatory countries.⁵⁶ Since Great Britain was not a formal signatory to this treaty, Canadian exporters could not rely on it to help them compete with their American counterparts in this vital market. Thus, grain marketing continued to be a sore spot for Canada's farmers, and Alberta's farmers were no exception.

Between 1953 and 1957, the Progressive Conservatives continued to build on the work started by provincial leader W.J.C. Kirby. Kirby's agricultural conference just prior to the 1953 election formed the foundation of his party's renewed efforts at crafting a comprehensive agricultural platform that thoroughly addressed rural concerns. At the national Progressive Conservative conference in 1954, a resolution was passed which lamented that "our agricultural and other primary products have been either lost or greatly curtailed as the result of the policies of the Liberal government."⁵⁷ The conference affirmed that "the recovery and expansion of these lost markets both at home and abroad is a first objective of Conservative policy," clearly indicating that increasing agricultural exports was a key concern of the Conservatives. George Drew's keynote speech echoed

⁵⁵ "1956-57 Delivery Payments," *Calgary Albertan*, 8 May 1956, 4.

⁵⁶ "The New Wheat Agreement," *Edmonton Journal*, 24 April 1956, 4.

⁵⁷ GLA, PCAA Papers, series M-1744, file 7, "Report of the Policy and Resolutions Committee," 16 March 1954, 1.

the resolution passed by the convention, entrenching the issue of wheat marketing at the center of Conservative policy.⁵⁸ This general call to increase the country's agricultural exports was supplemented by additional resolutions passed at the party's 1956 annual convention. In addition to re-stating the pledge to increase agricultural exports, the convention pledged itself in favour of:

immediate cash advances through the Canadian Wheat Board on farm-stored wheat, ... immediate sale for feed of low-grade wheat now occupying elevator space, ... recruiting top-flight salesmen to plan an aggressive selling policy for Canadian wheat, referring of the whole problem of the handling and sale of Canadian wheat to the Gordon Commission, ... [and] the full use of elevator space.⁵⁹

W.J.C. Kirby continued to probe the sentiments of Alberta's rural communities in the mid-1950s. He was particularly cognizant of the reasons underlying his party's failure in these areas in 1953. At a meeting with Conservative organizers and farmers in Lethbridge, Kirby re-iterated the importance of holding regular annual meetings, nominating a candidate well before the next election, and appointing a committee to develop Conservative organizations throughout the area.⁶⁰ Kirby was aware that the main reason for his party's failure in the last election was its inability to articulate and advertise its policies effectively to the voters. He worked tirelessly in the months and years following the 1953 contest to ensure that his party's attractive agricultural platform was more adequately advertised. In his report to Drew following the Lethbridge meeting, Kirby confided that:

⁵⁸ Ibid., "Speech by the Hon. George Drew at the Banquet During the Annual Meeting of the Progressive Conservative Party, Chateau Laurier, Ottawa," 16 March 1954, 4.

⁵⁹ Ibid., file 8, "Report of the Policy and Resolutions Committee to the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Progressive Conservative Association of Canada," 17 January 1956, 4. The "Gordon Commission" on Canada's Economic Prospects was created by the Prime Minister to examine the Canadian economy and provide recommendations on how government policy could foster prosperity in the future.

⁶⁰ Ibid., file 57, "Lethbridge Constituency – Visit to Lethbridge," 5 February 1955, 1.

I was very much impressed with the feeling, that with suitable candidates in the field early, we have a good chance in these three provincial constituencies and everyone present seemed enthusiastic about the possibilities and willing to do their part in securing such candidates.⁶¹

The farmers in Lethbridge re-iterated their longstanding concerns over federal inaction on the agricultural file, which reinforced Kirby's impression that these issues remained key to future Conservative success there. Kirby recognized an opportunity to increase Conservative support by effectively conveying his party's stance on the wheat surplus issue to the electorate.

The Alberta Liberals were also acutely aware of farmer concerns over wheat marketing policies. They were thus confronted with a challenge, as they had to assuage rural concerns over their own party's record while demonstrating that they remained the most capable of the three main parties to improve rural fortunes. Provincial Organizer John Haar sought to mimic W.J.C. Kirby's strategy by organizing a series of rural town hall meetings across the province to better understand farmer grievances. In a letter to H.E. Kidd, Haar explained that "it is hoped through thorough discussion that some of the minor irritating aspects of the grain marketing system may be clarified in the interests of more effective operation."⁶² Kidd appreciated the value of these meetings, and promised to help disseminate their findings to other Liberals once the meetings were concluded.⁶³ In a reply to Haar's proposal, Kidd also asserted that these workshops should be designed to counter misconceptions, highlighting that "the really valuable objective ... will be to indicate to the farmers of Alberta that the Liberal government and the Liberal party are interested in the

⁶¹ Ibid., 2.

⁶² LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file "Alberta Liberal Association 1954-55," John Haar to H.E. Kidd, 14 November 1955, 1.

⁶³ Ibid., H.E. Kidd to John Haar, 16 November 1955.

farmers' problems."⁶⁴ Thus, these workshops were not designed to develop new policy for the party per se; rather, their main focus was to better understand how the public viewed existing policies to determine how to counter these perceptions more effectively.

The two largest "agricultural workshops" were held in Calgary and Edmonton in December 1955. The final report assembled by the Alberta Liberals for the NLF contained numerous resolutions expressing farmers' views of the grain marketing situation, and was designed to "act as a guide to interested members of the Liberal Party."⁶⁵ Like the earlier Conservative workshops, these meetings were not publicized and their results were not reported to the press, so as to avoid any potential embarrassment to the party. Thirteen resolutions were debated, and the discussion they collectively generated pointed to a significant disconnect between the official Liberal position on grain marketing and farmer sentiment. To resolve the issue of over-production, the farmers present suggested that inferior-grade wheat be shipped to ranchers at low prices for animal feed.⁶⁶ This would help eliminate the massive accumulated surplus in the province's grain elevators while also looking after other domestic needs. Other resolutions called on the government to make advance payments to farmers for their produce, reduce the cost of transporting it to market, and continue to expand trade into new international markets.⁶⁷ The cost of these programs was to be borne almost exclusively by the federal treasury and other Canadian taxpayers, as the farmers claimed it was unfair for them to exclusively bear the burden of what they considered to be a national problem.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., "Confidential – Reports of Workshops on Grain Marketing," 5 December 1955, 1.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 2-5.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

The announced emergency loan program became a lightning-rod for criticism at these conventions. Feeling that not enough had been done to support their incomes, the farmers in attendance called on the federal government to cover 50 percent of the interest charged on the temporary loans. They justified this by claiming that “all tax payers of Canada should help in the problem of the disposal of surpluses as this is a national problem.”⁶⁸ This same dissatisfaction was evident at another Liberal meeting in Medicine Hat, where none of the farmers in attendance claimed they would apply for the loan as presented by the government (all indicated they would accept the “loan” if it were interest-free, however).⁶⁹ Una Maclean, the Liberal party secretary in Alberta, confirmed that “much of the cause of dissatisfaction had been due to the bank loan policy,” although she remained quietly optimistic that farmer disenchantment with this program was localized and not widespread.⁷⁰ Overall, the Liberal grain marketing workshops revealed that farmer expectations exceeded what the federal government was prepared to enact. The added financial burden of these proposals on the federal treasury precluded them from becoming a reality. At the core of farmer complaints was the perception that their industry continued to carry the same degree of importance to the country’s economic stability as it had decades before. On the whole, it appears that these grain marketing workshops did little to bridge the gap between farmer demands and Liberal policy, all but guaranteeing the Liberals trouble in the next federal election.

The federal Social Credit party was also aware of the widespread disenchantment with federal grain marketing policies in Alberta’s rural districts. In 1953, the Alberta Social Credit League flagged grain marketing as the number one issue their federal

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁹ Ibid., “Report on Public Meeting on Wheat Marketing – Medicine Hat,” 21 December 1955.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Una Maclean to H.E. Kidd, 2 December 1955.

counterparts should focus on.⁷¹ More specifically, the Alberta Socreds noted that the inadequate allocation of railway cars “often prevents a farmer from hauling grain to the elevator of his choice,” making it difficult for farmers to get their produce to market.⁷² This same persistent emphasis on grain marketing programs continued later in the decade. A questionnaire submitted by an anonymous delegate to the federal party’s 1957 convention ranked “agricultural assistance” as the second most important issue facing the province, with “reducing defense spending” listed as the only issue of greater urgency.⁷³ Una Maclean also speculated that the Alberta Socreds were attempting to pre-empt the federal government by announcing new support programs for farmers in 1955.⁷⁴ Maclean feared that the Manning administration would embarrass the federal government by offering more generous aid to Alberta’s farmers than the federal government was willing (and able) to provide. Ultimately, despite the fact that these rumours proved groundless, it was clear that the Alberta Socreds were cognizant of the widespread disenchantment present in rural communities, and were prepared to campaign heavily on this issue in the next election.

Overall, Alberta’s unmarketable wheat surplus presented a monumental challenge to the federal government in the 1950s. Farmers continued to insist that their industry was crucial to the country’s economic well-being, and while this was undoubtedly true to an extent, these communities greatly overestimated their economic clout. Viewed in this light, agrarian concerns over federal agricultural policies were rooted in a different understanding of the nature of Western Canadian society. To farmers, Alberta was a predominantly agrarian polity, which was true until the energy industry displaced them from their formerly

⁷¹ GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 461, “Federal Government Resolutions Passed at Annual Convention,” 18 November 1953, 1.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., file 473, “To All Delegates – Questionnaire,” 8 November 1957.

⁷⁴ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file “Alberta Liberal Association 1954-55,” Una Maclean to H.E. Kidd, 2 December 1955.

privileged economic position. While their economic clout declined, the disconnect between rural communities and the government in Ottawa seemed to widen. The Social Credit Party benefitted from this early in the 1950s, as they presented themselves as a uniquely Western voice in the federal parliament that was closely attuned to the grievances which animated rural regions. The reform of federal grain marketing and agricultural support programs was the second most hotly-debated issue in Alberta in the 1950s. The positions adopted by the three main federal parties on these issues would come to significantly affect their electoral fortunes in 1957 and 1958.

The intervening period between the 1953 and 1957 elections was marked by heated debates on the issues of natural gas export and wheat marketing programs. As has been demonstrated, these debates were, at their core, discussions over Alberta's future and the nature of the province's rapidly changing society. On the one hand, many Albertans recognized the potential of the oil and gas industry to turn their province into a North American energy powerhouse. The TransCanada pipeline debate demonstrated that the road to this prosperous future was fraught with difficulties. Likewise, farmers lamented their declining influence in the region's politics by becoming increasingly strident in their demands for increased assistance during difficult times. One of the most tangible consequences of these emotionally-charged debates was the renewal of political competitiveness in the province. All three of the main federal parties in Alberta attempted to respond to these changing socioeconomic exigencies in advance of what was expected to be a particularly lively election in 1957.

Chapter 3

Party Reorganization and Revitalization in the Mid-1950s

In the intervening period between the 1953 and 1957 federal elections, political activity in Alberta noticeably increased. For a rare moment in the province's history, there was a genuine sense of competitiveness between the province's three principal federal parties. Even the Social Credit party, which had so long rested on the laurels of its provincial counterpart's popularity, sensed that its position was unstable. This instability was partially attributable to the two key debates over natural gas development and wheat marketing policies that dominated headlines and political discussions across the province in the 1950s. Unlike the elections in 1949 and 1953, which were largely devoid of any significant issue and were thus fought on the merits of the incumbent government's record, these two issues became the focal point of all political activity in Alberta, allowing for the main federal parties to attract more attention to and interest in their positions than they were previously capable of. Political meetings became more common, newspaper coverage of political activity increased, and political advertising became more ubiquitous. Also, for the first time in Ernest Manning's long tenure as premier, the impeccable image of integrity and competence he had worked so hard to cultivate came under fire as a scandal alleging political corruption in the allocation of Alberta treasury loans put him on the defensive while his political adversaries maneuvered for advantage. The 1955 provincial election which followed saw the provincial Social Credit party hemorrhage fifteen seats to the opposition (winning 37 seats), with the Liberals winning fifteen, the Conservatives winning four, and other parties and independents winning a combined six seats. This rare moment of

weakness in the provincial administration gave the Liberals and Conservatives an opportunity to pry votes away from their Social Credit adversaries. Overall, this period of increased political activity and organizational renewal laid the groundwork for the pivotal elections to come in 1957 and 1958.

It is important to note that this period of increased activity did not affect each party equally. Indeed, increased interest in politics did not necessarily translate into increased organizational effectiveness or popularity. Each must be assessed individually to determine how effective its reorganization efforts were. Of the three principal parties, the Progressive Conservatives were the most successful at improving their grassroots organization, and ultimately succeeded in transforming themselves from an outlier in Alberta's political scene into a prominent contender within five years. George Drew and W.J.C. Kirby were instrumental in reinvigourating their Alberta Conservative brethren, as they each placed a great deal of emphasis on grassroots renewal in the months and years following the 1953 election. In a letter to a party organizer in Lethbridge following the election, George Drew intimated that "there is only one thing that emerges more clearly to me than anything else ... and that is that organization of the next election must begin immediately after the last."¹ W.J.C. Kirby reiterated Drew's sentiment, noting that nominating candidates early and holding regular meetings were "crucial" to the party's future success.² Indeed, Kirby's skill at electioneering became legendary within Conservative circles after he won a provincial by-election in February 1954. His victory in the longstanding Social Credit stronghold of Red Deer was attributed solely to the strength of his personal appeal and his hard work

¹ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2a, vol. 436, file "Election 1953 Correspondence C-D," George Drew to Erle Carr, 12 August 1953.

² GLA, PCAA Papers, series M-1744, file 57, "Lethbridge Constituency – Visit to Lethbridge," 5 February 1955, 2.

canvassing the city for support.³ Combined with Drew's fervor for organizational renewal, Kirby's strong work ethic and boundless energy helped propel the Conservative renaissance in Alberta.

To demonstrate his seriousness about rejuvenating party activity across the country, George Drew sent a questionnaire to defeated candidates in the fall of 1953 asking for their opinions on why they lost and what could be improved in the future. While the responses from Alberta were not particularly encouraging, they did point the way to how the party could potentially improve its fortunes moving forward. John Choate, who was the stop-gap candidate for the Conservatives in Red Deer in 1953, noted that "six months is a very short time to campaign" given the size of his (and other) rural constituencies.⁴ He also noted that "voluntary help was very hard to get," which was a function of the fact that the riding "had no organization at all to start with."⁵ Choate speculated that "there are too many so-called Conservatives that support the provincial Social Credit party,"⁶ which exacerbated his difficulties in recruiting quality volunteers and mounting an effective campaign. His one concrete recommendation was to work towards creating local Conservative groups in each town and municipality to increase interest in the party between elections.

Other surveys returned by defeated Conservatives echoed Choate in their assessment of the party's dismal state. While H.B. Fowler of Edmonton-Strathcona noted that the party's pamphlets and radio advertisements were "exceptionally good," this was no substitute for the "almost nil" organization that existed prior to the commencement of the

³ "A Set-Back for the Government," *Red Deer Advocate*, 17 February 1954.

⁴ LAC, Progressive Conservative Party of Canada (PCPC) Papers, vol. 558, file "Post-Campaign Survey," John Choate to W.H. Kidd, 9 October 1953, 1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, 2.

campaign.⁷ Like Choate, Fowler suggested that the party “nominate shortly after an election for the next one,” indicating that party activity could not cease following polling day.⁸ C.J. Bowie-Reed of Wetaskiwin commented that “Diefenbaker could not have won this election” due to the lack of interest in the campaign and the lack of an overriding issue.⁹ That being said, Bowie-Reed admitted that “the state of organization when nominated was next to nil,” with only a small chapter of the Progressive Conservative Women’s Association operating in the Wetaskiwin area in June 1953.¹⁰ Indeed, the PCWA was often the only functional branch of the party in rural areas. Hazel Clubine, a Conservative organizer in Peace River, was discouraged by this fact following the 1953 election, claiming that “the task before the PC party is formidable” due to the lack of any comprehensive organization in most areas of the province.¹¹ Her group of women was all that existed of the minimal Conservative presence in her area, which only served to increase her anxiety and sense of hopelessness. All of these discouraging reports alluded to the herculean task facing the party. Ultimately, the efforts of a few dedicated party loyalists in the years to follow would substantially improve this situation.

Arguably, George Drew’s most significant contribution to his party came in the years immediately following the 1953 campaign, when he made reorganization his top priority. At the party’s 1954 convention, Drew emphatically declared that “this is primarily an organization meeting and it is the duty of every organization to examine the problem which it is seeking to solve.”¹² The proceedings of the 1954 convention indicated that

⁷ Ibid., H.B. Fowler to W.H. Kidd, 12 October 1953.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., C.J. Bowie-Reed to W.H. Kidd, 17 October 1953, 1.

¹⁰ Ibid., 2-3.

¹¹ GLA, PCAA Papers, series M-1744, file 60, Hazel Clubine to Jean Robinson, 8 September 1954.

¹² Ibid., file 7, “Speech by the Hon. George Drew at the Banquet During the Annual Meeting of the Progressive Conservative Party, Chateau Laurier, Ottawa,” 16 March 1954, 2.

Drew was serious on this point, as he spearheaded an attempt to modernize the party's bureaucracy by creating a national research and publicity office. This new office was responsible for providing the party with information on key issues facing the country and formulating strategies for communicating party positions to the public.¹³ The new publicity office immediately tasked itself with establishing regular correspondence with the provincial Conservative associations in the form of monthly newsletters and policy briefs. Notably, a new quarterly pamphlet entitled "Pocket Politics" was created in the months following the 1954 convention and contained talking points and official Conservative positions on major issues. This new publication was supplemented by a monthly newsletter entitled *Progress Report*, which provided details of the leader's activities and recent developments in Ottawa. Importantly, access to these key periodicals fortified rank-and-file Conservative supporters with an increased sense of purpose.¹⁴ Overall, Drew's efforts at improving communications between the national office and Conservative supporters across the country succeeded at making the national party more accessible to its grassroots supporters.

These efforts also helped weaken the grip of old and powerful regional party notables on party organization at the local level. As was noted in Chapter One, many local Conservative organizations in Alberta were dominated by cliques of aging and unimaginative party loyalists who did more to stifle interest in their party than encourage it. In particular, one longstanding and powerful Conservative became the target of Drew's anti-establishment campaign in Alberta. H.R. (Ray) Milner, who had previously served as

¹³ Ibid., "Report of the Organization Committee to the Ninth Annual Meeting of the Progressive Conservative Association of Canada," 16 March 1954, 1.

¹⁴ Indeed, the interest of rank-and-file Conservatives in this project was integral to its success, as it was to be funded primarily through subscription dues.

President of the Alberta Conservatives and subsequently sat as an honorary Vice President, was frequently criticized by Drew for being “a drain on the party’s efforts in Alberta.”¹⁵ Indeed, he went so far as to suggest that “the best thing that could happen to us in Alberta would be to have Ray Milner openly against us,” due to his lack of effort in improving his party’s fortunes while simultaneously complaining that others were not more pro-active in doing this job for him. While these invective remarks were a response to a letter Milner wrote to W.H. Kidd to complain that Drew “made no effort” to encourage local organization prior to the 1953 election, Drew’s general sentiment towards unimaginative and lazy party notables was clear.¹⁶ Richard Bell issued a carefully-worded ultimatum to Milner, suggesting that “there are problems in Alberta that can be solved much better by those living in Alberta than they can by George Drew himself,” indicating that Milner’s future work in the party should be constructive and not designed to foment unrest in the party ranks.¹⁷ By 1956, Milner became frustrated with his marginalized position and felt alienated by the official Conservative stance on the government’s pipeline legislation (which he supported). In a short letter to George Hees, Milner intimated that “I would be glad if you removed my name as an Honorary Vice-President of the association,” thus confirming his break with the party.¹⁸ While Drew never publicly denounced Milner’s inaction as an organizer in Alberta, his unfavourable disposition towards him clearly had the desired effect. By marginalizing entrenched but ineffective members in the party, Drew made room for younger and more creative leaders. In the case of Alberta, this meant giving

¹⁵ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2a, vol. 199, file 289, George Drew to Grattan O’Leary, 25 August 1953.

¹⁶ Ibid., H.R. Milner to W.H. Kidd, 17 August 1953.

¹⁷ Ibid., Richard Bell to H.R. Milner, August 1953, 3.

¹⁸ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2c, vol. 259, file 391, H.R. Milner to George Hees, 10 August 1956. Milner apparently believed that Hees was still the President of the Progressive Conservative Association when he wrote this letter, despite the fact that Hees had resigned as President in March 1956 at the party’s annual convention.

W.J.C. Kirby the latitude he required to cultivate support in areas where the Conservatives had historically been weak.

One of Kirby's priorities was to increase his party's popularity with new immigrants, especially in the Edmonton area. He encouraged national headquarters to allocate a portion of the resources of the newly-established "Ethnic Origins" committee to pursue contacts with the Edmonton region's extensive Ukrainian population. The "Ethnic Origins Group," as it was informally known, was headed by Norman Dunn, a party organizer from Toronto, and was given an annual budget of \$12,000 in 1954 to pursue relationships with immigrant newspapers and community leaders.¹⁹ Drew and Bell noted this group's potential to have "a valuable impact on the large segment of the Canadian population with which it is concerned."²⁰ Indeed, the potential was particularly significant in Alberta, where the Conservatives lacked meaningful contact with some of the province's most prominent ethnic groups. Dunn began his work by commissioning several "social studies" of prominent ethnic communities to determine how to advertise Conservative policies most effectively to each of them.²¹ He then sought to establish personal contacts between local Conservative groups and ethnic clubs and newspapers in their areas. Kirby was particularly interested in this aspect of Dunn's work, due to the presence of several large immigrant newspapers in the province. Dunn's August 1954 progress report indicated that he had "made some good starting points" in Edmonton's Ukrainian community by fostering the creation of a Conservative Ukrainian club there.²² While Dunn noted that there were still challenges ahead in confronting "the lethargy within the party

¹⁹ LAC, Bell Papers, vol. 4, file 33, "Estimate of Expenditures – Ethnic Origin Group Activities," 1 March 1954.

²⁰ Ibid., Richard Bell to George Drew, 11 March 1954, 2.

²¹ Ibid., "Report by Norman Dunn re: Ethnic Group Activities," 1 June 1954, 1.

²² Ibid., 7.

which sometimes makes most difficult the whole undertaking,” his efforts in Alberta provided the nucleus of a renewed relationship between the Progressive Conservative party and the province’s Ukrainian community.²³ These early attempts to expand the party’s base significantly assisted in increasing its media exposure in the Edmonton area, which had long been dominated by the Social Credit and Liberal parties.

Kirby also launched an ambitious fundraising drive to create a full-time organizational office headquartered in Edmonton. This was seen as an essential prerequisite to any meaningful province-wide reorganization scheme.²⁴ Beginning in 1954, Kirby began canvassing party supporters for pledges to make this possible. He sought out one thousand party loyalists who would be willing to pledge \$10 a year to keep the permanent office functioning.²⁵ By spreading the financial responsibility among many party loyalists, Kirby noted that this effort “would have the double value of increasing interest throughout a wider group of people,” helping accomplish his goal of widening the party’s base.²⁶ While the full-time office did not become a reality until after the 1957 election, Kirby’s efforts were vindicated given the office’s important role in securing the party’s 1958 victory.

Kirby also succeeded in streamlining the party’s organizational framework, despite the lack of a full-time paid organizer to assist him in this task. Jean Robinson, the President of the Alberta Progressive Conservative Women’s Association, mobilized her supporters to spearhead organizational renewal in many Alberta constituencies, and was at the forefront

²³ Ibid., 8.

²⁴ In a letter to Drew, Doug Harkness noted that “we need a part time, or preferably full time organizer, if we are to get together anything like the kind or [sic] organization ... that would give us a reasonable chance of winning the next Election.” See: LAC, Drew Papers, series 2c, vol. 259, file 391.5, Doug Harkness to George Drew, 24 October 1955.

²⁵ GLA, PCAA Papers, series M-1744, file 54, JVH Milvain to “Mr. Smith,” 25 October 1954.

²⁶ Ibid.

of implementing Kirby's streamlined party structure. Under this new framework, each federal constituency was responsible for the provincial constituencies they encompassed, and executive committees were to be appointed in each riding to facilitate party activities and disseminate literature.²⁷ This well-defined chain of command helped streamline communications and empowered local activists to take a meaningful role in canvassing their regions for support. Local chapters of the PCWA often became the catalyst for creating new executive committees, providing organizational leadership where there previously was none. The new organizational model also seamlessly integrated federal and provincial organization under a single management hierarchy, thus avoiding the duplication that plagued the Alberta Liberals at the time. Thus, Kirby and Robinson succeeded in uniting all Conservatives under their leadership in the mid-1950s, providing a high degree of internal cohesion among their supporters.

The PCWA played an important role in reinvigorating moribund constituency associations in advance of the 1957 election. Jean Robinson and Hilda Hesson went on a tour through the province in 1955 to assess the strength of their organization. Robinson and Hesson successfully established women's groups in Peace River, Fort Macleod, Millet, Lacombe, Ponoka, Leduc, Innisfail and Carstairs, and were confident that the women in these areas would make a "very definite contribution" to future Conservative success.²⁸ Indeed, these newly-formed groups represented the first Conservative organizations in their respective areas, underscoring their centrality to the party's provincial effort. In urban ridings, Robinson was pleased to note that they "continue to report growing memberships, with regular meetings, special events and increased application to all matters pertaining to

²⁷ Ibid., file 65, "Report of the Women's Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta," 3.

²⁸ Ibid., file 65, "Report of the Women's Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta," 16 January 1956, 2; Ibid., file 59, Jean Robinson to R.E. Patterson, 22 March 1955.

the Cause.”²⁹ This was confirmed in a meeting of the Calgary North Progressive Conservative Association, which highlighted that its newly-formed women’s group was attracting members and had successfully submitted some policy resolutions to the Alberta party executive.³⁰ Jean Robinson’s cadre of enthusiastic volunteers increased interest in the Conservative party by holding social events and taking the initiative in reactivating dormant local associations, giving women an important role to play in the party’s revitalization.

Overall, the Progressive Conservatives experienced a significant increase in activity in the years between the 1953 and 1957 elections. Drew, Kirby and Robinson all worked tirelessly to establish effective constituency organizations throughout the province. The marginalization of ineffective organizers and the introduction of a new, streamlined party structure made the party more efficient and more attractive to other individuals who had an interest in politics and a Conservative bent. While it was not immediately apparent in the mid-1950s, these efforts succeeded in creating a viable political organization that could compete with the other parties.

The federal Liberals in Alberta also mounted a robust reorganization campaign following the 1953 election, although their efforts were met with mixed results. Many close races between Social Credit and Liberal candidates in 1953 convinced the Liberals that they were close to a major breakthrough. Two months after the 1953 campaign, senior organizers within the Alberta Liberal fold met to discuss what they could do to capitalize on their earlier gains. Like the Conservatives, the Liberals determined that more needed to be done to maintain party activities in-between election periods. Don Thomson suggested that “the work of supplying information to our candidates ... should in some way be carried

²⁹ Ibid., file 65, “Report of the Women’s Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta,” 2.

³⁰ Ibid., file 51, “Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Calgary North Conservative Ass’n,” 19 March 1956, 1.

on between elections,” preferably through a regular report from federal headquarters detailing government expenditures and activities in Alberta.³¹ Duncan MacTavish made it clear that “it would be difficult for the Federation to finance the publication of five or six million pieces of literature,” suggesting instead that the party focus on fewer publication updates to give the material a wider distribution.³² It was also noted that visits by cabinet ministers were particularly effective at generating media publicity. Specifically, MacTavish claimed that “Peace River is ours for the asking in the next election,” and should be regularly targeted by eminent Liberals from Alberta and other parts of the country to ensure this.³³ George Prudham was noted as being particularly useful to the party in this regard, as he was Alberta’s representative in St. Laurent’s cabinet. This early meeting established the general framework by which the Liberals renewed their organizational efforts in advance of the next election, and many of the suggestions it generated were acted upon.

The Liberals succeeded where the Conservatives failed when they appointed John Haar to act as a full-time “Co-Ordinator of Federal Liberal Activities” in Alberta. Haar was known throughout the West as “a capable and provocative speaker” for the Liberals. He had worked extensively with immigrant communities after he moved to Edmonton from Vancouver, where he had taught at the University of British Columbia.³⁴ This role was particularly important to the Liberals, who continued to maintain distinct parallel federal and provincial organizations in Alberta. Haar was to be the chief liaison between these two groups on federal matters. He immediately insisted that all external Liberal speakers who

³¹ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file “Alberta Liberal Association Post-1953 Election,” “Record of Conversation with Don Thomson, Bruce Powe, and Miss Mary Scullion,” 20 October 1953, 1.

³² Ibid., 2.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file “Alberta Liberal Association 1954-1955,” “Press Release: Liberals Appoint Federal Co-Ordinator,” 10 March 1955.

were planning on visiting the province notify his office in advance “so that we can take the necessary steps to make use of their visits, if possible.”³⁵ In particular, Haar desired to send prospective Liberal speakers to key districts to ensure their presence had the maximum effect. Duncan MacTavish had previously noted that this was a point of weakness in the party’s organization, but it appears that nothing was done to coordinate external speakers until Haar assumed his position.³⁶ He also encouraged the secretary for the federal Liberals in southern Alberta, Una Maclean, to continue updating mailing lists in each constituency to ensure the seamless flow of information between the party and its supporters.³⁷ In addition to centralizing speaking tour itineraries and party communications, Haar toured the province extensively to encourage local executives to hold regular meetings, host social gatherings, and begin planning to nominate their candidate early.³⁸ Increasing local party membership was a priority for Haar, which was rooted in his belief that greater public involvement in Liberal party activities would greatly assist in “growing the Liberal brand.”

By 1956, some reports indicated that Haar had succeeded in rejuvenating the Liberals in advance of the next election. Haar confided to H.E. Kidd that he was confident that Alberta’s situation was “improving,” noting that most ridings were active in recruiting candidates long before the election had begun.³⁹ Helen Grodeland confirmed Haar’s observation, commenting that “provincially things have never looked better,” largely due to the augmentation of the Liberal caucus in the 1955 provincial election.⁴⁰ In a detailed report to the NLF, Haar listed his many accomplishments since he assumed his position two

³⁵ Ibid., John Haar to H.E. Kidd, 27 June 1955.

³⁶ Ibid., Duncan MacTavish to Paul Lafond, 15 November 1954.

³⁷ Ibid., Una Maclean to H.E. Kidd, 14 May 1954.

³⁸ GLA, LAA Papers, series M-1724, file 37A, John Haar to R. Thomson, 9 May 1955.

³⁹ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 650, file “Alberta Liberal Association 1956,” “Report of Conversation with John L. Haar, Federal Liberal Organizer, Edmonton, by Long Distance Telephone,” 7 September 1956, 1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Helen Grodeland to H.E. Kidd, 7 May 1955.

years previously. Local organization committees were established in each provincial constituency, district poll supervisors and poll captains were nominated and local workshops on electioneering techniques had been held in each riding.⁴¹ Additionally, he placed greater emphasis on having individual riding associations pass substantive policy resolutions and forward them to their local MP or candidate, with the purpose of informing them of the sentiments percolating within the riding's population.⁴² Haar began to pressure each constituency to select a candidate no later than mid-April 1956, long before the next election was expected to be called. This was a significant break from past practice in Alberta, which prompted Haar to seek permission to pursue this course from George Prudham. While the Liberals did not nominate a full slate of candidates until the fall of 1956, Haar's efforts at creating viable campaign teams in each constituency succeeded in revitalizing Liberal activity in Alberta in advance of the 1957 election.

However, Haar failed to bridge the gap between the Liberal party's provincial and federal branches, and in some cases, his command-and-control management style exacerbated tensions between party members. George Prudham, who was one of Haar's staunchest internal allies, also alienated many members of the provincial Liberal party due to his support for Haar's centralization scheme. At about the same time that Haar centralized speaking tour itineraries in his office, Prudham lobbied H.E. Kidd to divert all communications pertaining to federal political efforts to Haar's office.⁴³ Prudham believed that this was necessary to coordinate party activities and establish a comprehensive strategy for the province, despite the protests of some prominent provincial Liberals who felt that

⁴¹ Ibid., "Re: Federal Riding Nominations in Alberta," 16 January 1956.

⁴² LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file "Alberta Liberal Association 1954-1955," John Haar to H.E. Kidd, 10 September 1955.

⁴³ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 652, file "Battle River-Camrose," George Prudham to H.E. Kidd, 25 March 1955.

they should have the right to communicate with national headquarters without utilizing the federal office as an intermediary. Haar fully endorsed Prudham's suggestion, claiming in a separate communication to Kidd that "reference has been made to the fact that our Federal Members of Parliament are not the most suitable approach to the Federal Government" due to breaches in communications protocol between the government and provincial Liberals.⁴⁴ Haar was disturbed that some provincial Liberals seemed to know more about pending federal announcements than his office, thus rendering his efforts unnecessary. He dourly predicted that "the ultimate outcome of continued breaches of this sort, can only lead to the abolition of Liberal Party representation in the Province of Alberta."⁴⁵ Senator Stambaugh disagreed with Haar's and Prudham's favoured approach to party communications, commenting that he did not feel "quite so optimistic" about federal organizational efforts.⁴⁶ Stambaugh admitted that "it is getting a little more difficult all the time for me to work with the guy [Haar]," due to his domineering managerial style and the way Haar was touring the province to "stir up" farmers against federal wheat marketing policies.⁴⁷ Evidently, while Haar's tenure as provincial organizer yielded some success in establishing viable constituency associations across the province, it also exacerbated tensions between the party's two branches. These tensions would only increase over time, and would ultimately hamper Liberal efforts later in the decade. Thus, while Liberal party activity increased in the mid-1950s, this revitalization did not entirely translate into increased effectiveness.

In the aftermath of the 1953 vote, the federal Social Credit caucus also resolved to improve its organizational position in Alberta and across the country in advance of the next

⁴⁴ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file "Alberta Liberal Association 1954-1955," John Haar to H.E. Kidd, 10 September 1955, 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid., J.W. Stambaugh to H.E. Kidd, 11 October 1955.

⁴⁷ Ibid., J.W. Stambaugh to H.E. Kidd, 25 November 1955.

election. Like the Liberals, however, the success of this effort was limited. At a National Council meeting in January 1954, Party President E.G. Hansell (the MP for Macleod) declared that “the next three years are crucial” to the development of Social Credit in Canada.⁴⁸ Orvis Kennedy noted that the party was planning to increase its efforts in Eastern Canada to expand from its base in Alberta and British Columbia. With the support of the National Council, Kennedy announced that a new national headquarters would be opened in Toronto later that month to signal that the party was planning a robust effort to expand its appeal in Ontario.⁴⁹ Further efforts at generating publicity for the party included publishing a 50-page booklet entitled “What Social Credit Would Do for Canada,” written by party leader Solon Low himself. The party’s national executive agreed that excerpts of this new pamphlet, which highlighted Social Credit pledges to increase farm supports, reform the banking system, and encourage “free enterprise,” among others, should be published in an abridged pamphlet form and in brief installments in the *Canadian Social Crediter* leading up to the next election.⁵⁰ Needless to say, the challenge ahead for the federal party to break out of its Western enclave and become a truly national organization was formidable.

This 1954 resolution did not translate into the major organizational effort envisaged by the Social Credit leadership. If anything, the establishment of a full-time office in Toronto and the halfhearted dedication of resources to party expansion in Ontario eroded the party’s solvency and made it more dependent on its benefactors in Alberta than ever before. The party’s failure to renew its political organization was partially attributable to the fact that the “old guard” refused to relinquish any authority to newer members who

⁴⁸ GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 479, “National Executive Conference,” 8 January 1954, 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

were not as concerned about the party's founding monetary theories. In a letter to F.D. Shaw (the MP for Red Deer), Low confided that, while many incumbent MPs were ailing and aging, it was impossible to consider allowing younger members to stand in their place, stating that "the new fellows are good guys, but precious few of them know anything at all about Social Credit principles."⁵¹ He derided some of his party's younger members for trying to be "all things to all people," indicating that any sort of pragmatic revision to party doctrine was out of the question so long as he was leader.⁵²

Low took this position in spite of the deteriorating health of many of his caucus' longstanding members. F.D. Shaw's wife suffered from intense back pain which required several surgeries in 1955 and 1956, keeping him away from Ottawa for much of this time.⁵³ Victor Quelch, the MP for Acadia, was approaching his sixty-sixth birthday in 1957 and strongly desired to retire. Charles Yuill, the MP for Jasper-Edson, suffered from complications "with the lower bowel on the left side," which kept him away from his parliamentary duties for much of the 1955 and 1956 sessions. Bob Fair, the MP for Battle River-Camrose, died from a stomach ailment in 1954, necessitating a by-election for his seat (which the Socreds retained).⁵⁴ Low himself suffered a major heart attack in November 1955, prompting speculation in the press on whether he would resign due to his deteriorating health.⁵⁵ To the contrary, Low refused to resign and instead actively encouraged his ailing compatriots to stand again for one more election, largely due to his perception that younger party members were not ready to take their place. This failure to

⁵¹ Ibid., file 430, Solon Low to F.D. Shaw, 16 August 1956.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., F.D. Shaw to Solon Low, 5 August 1956.

⁵⁴ Low included details on the health of his caucus in his correspondence with F.D. Shaw. See, for example: Ibid., Solon Low to F.D. Shaw, 16 August 1956.

⁵⁵ "Mr. Low's Future," *Lethbridge Herald*, 18 April 1956, 4.

inject youth into the Social Credit party's sclerotic caucus severely hampered its ability to campaign effectively against the other parties in Alberta.

John Blackmore, while in good health, nevertheless was forced to counter calls for his resignation from the media and from within his own party. The *Lethbridge Herald*, which had never been sympathetic to Blackmore or the Social Credit party, became increasingly critical of his perceived inutility in 1956. The *Herald* claimed that Blackmore was ineffective at securing federal funds for important projects in the Lethbridge region, giving the Liberals full credit for any projects completed.⁵⁶ In his defense, Blackmore sent out a letter to his constituents outlining his many accomplishments, claiming that his lobbying efforts were critical in attracting federal investment to the Lethbridge area for important infrastructure projects, including the St. Mary's Dam, the TransCanada highway (through Calgary), and control over the Waterton and Belly rivers.⁵⁷ Unfortunately for him, a significant number of younger Social Credit supporters in Lethbridge also felt that he was past his prime and should retire. Mark Spencer, a Mormon farmer from Cardston, decided to run against Blackmore for the Social Credit nomination in 1957. In an interview, he explained that he was running "because of a feeling within the party that new representation at Ottawa is needed."⁵⁸ While "admitting he was no expert on Social Credit," Spencer believed that the party should work together with other parties to "make them listen to us" – something he believed Blackmore had failed to do over his 21-year tenure as MP.⁵⁹ The nomination battle, which will be covered in more detail in Chapter Four, severely hampered Social Credit efforts in Lethbridge and attracted a great deal of negative media attention to

⁵⁶ "Blackmore Lashes Out," *Lethbridge Herald*, 25 September 1956, 1.

⁵⁷ GLA, Blackmore Papers, series M-100, file 266, John Blackmore to Mabel Freek, 12 March 1956.

⁵⁸ "Not Looking for Job, Social Credit Candidate Explains," *Lethbridge Herald*, 15 December 1956, 1.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

the accomplishments of the Alberta Socred MPs in Ottawa. Blackmore's failure to reconcile with Spencer demonstrated that the party's old guard was unwilling to renew itself and allow younger members to take a more active role in political organization.

The federal Social Credit party largely remained a subsidiary of the Alberta Social Credit League between the 1953 and 1957 elections. Solon Low continued to solicit Ernest Manning's opinion on everything from the party's draft platform to the merits of the single-transferable vote system. In a letter requesting Manning's opinion of the manuscript for "What Social Credit Will Do for Canada," Low mused that he had "seriously debated about including, namely, something about a national health program," and asked Manning whether he felt that "it would be desirable to have something said about it in the booklet."⁶⁰ The fact that Low solicited the opinion of the Alberta premier on the merits of instituting a national health program demonstrates the degree to which Manning was actively involved in setting the policy priorities of the federal party. Low's request for Manning's opinion of the federal party's draft platform for 1957 demonstrated the same level of respect for Manning's opinion on federal matters. Low specifically asked whether some of his own suggested changes would adequately "represent the fundamental views which we had as a movement for so many years," while also drawing Manning's attention to specific sections of the platform, including the party's stance on decentralization, Communism and compulsory union membership.⁶¹ While it is unclear whether Manning's suggestions were incorporated in the final document, Low's lengthy correspondence with him over the finer points of federal policy demonstrates that Manning's involvement in the federal party was far from passive.

⁶⁰ GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 291, Solon Low to Ernest Manning, 28 July 1954.

⁶¹ Ibid., Solon Low to Ernest Manning, 15 January 1957, 1-2.

Interestingly, Low and the federal Socred caucus also felt comfortable informing Manning of their opinion on provincial matters. Following the 1955 provincial election, Low suggested that Manning should “consider abolishing the single transferable vote system in the rural areas of Alberta,” as it could be used as “an instrument of conspiracy” for the opposition parties.⁶² Indeed, both the Progressive Conservatives and the Liberals benefitted from an agreement they reached to rank each other as their second preference in rural ridings in an effort to unseat incumbent Social Credit MLAs. While this strategy was far from decisive in determining the result of the election, it worried Manning sufficiently for him to warrant abolishing this system in 1959. Low’s willingness to pre-empt Manning and offer his opinion on the subject suggests that the relationship between the two was close indeed. Even more shockingly, the federal Social Credit caucus felt it was necessary to send Manning a resolution condemning one of his own cabinet appointments. Lucien Maynard, who was Alberta’s Attorney General, was one of the individuals implicated in the treasury loan scandal that plagued Manning’s government in 1955. Following the provincial election, in which Maynard lost his seat, the federal caucus sent Manning a resolution stating that “many good Social Crediters feel that it would be a dreadful mistake for you to include him in your new cabinet.”⁶³ Such suggestions are virtually unprecedented in Canadian political history, given that first ministers have the sole right to appoint and dismiss cabinet ministers as they see fit. The federal caucus’ willingness to express its opinion on cabinet appointments to Manning demonstrates that the relationship between the two branches of the party remained as close as ever.

⁶² GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 291, Solon Low to Ernest Manning, 13 July 1955.

⁶³ Ibid., Solon Low to Ernest Manning, 18 July 1955.

By 1957, little had been done to improve the federal party's organizational position in Alberta in advance of the election that year. With so many prominent Socred MPs ailing and John Blackmore fending off a nomination challenge in his riding, it was difficult for them to mount an effort to rival that of their two main challengers. Indeed, the issues that drove political debates in the mid-1950s seemed to have little effect on Social Credit organization in Alberta, as no major overhaul of organizational practice was considered nor any serious change in campaign personnel contemplated. In December 1956, a memo sent to Low indicated that it would cost approximately \$700,000 for the party to launch the ambitious nationwide program envisaged at the 1954 National Council meeting.⁶⁴ The memo noted that the party would have "to work under pressure from now on" to raise these funds. Low's response to this dire report contrasted sharply with the approach taken by his provincial adversaries when faced with similar financial difficulties. Low suggested that a single wealthy benefactor, E.M. Gunderson, was "the key" to raising over half-a-million dollars for the 1957 campaign.⁶⁵ This contrasted with the Conservative approach, which raised small donations from many people to increase the party's appeal. By January, the Social Credit party's financial situation had worsened considerably, largely due to the costly burden of maintaining the party headquarters in Toronto. Additionally, many subscribers to the *Canadian Social Crediter* failed to pay their dues in January 1957, leaving it to the national caucus to cover the outstanding costs on that account.⁶⁶ Further fundraising efforts leading up to the 1957 election remained closed-minded and restricted to small groups of people. In a last minute attempt to raise funds for a major national push, Orvis Kennedy implored Alberta Social Credit MLAs to donate as generously as possible

⁶⁴ Ibid., file 360, Peer Paynter to Solon Low, 8 December 1956, 1.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Solon Low to Peer Paynter, 10 December 1956.

⁶⁶ Ibid., file 477, "Social Credit Caucus Minutes," 23 January 1957, 1.

to the national effort while working to encourage others to take out memberships in the federal party.⁶⁷ Ultimately, as before, the federal effort was bankrolled almost exclusively by the British Columbia and Alberta Social Credit Leagues, with Alberta assuming most of this responsibility.⁶⁸ Thus, in the final estimation, the federal Social Credit party remained an inert entity that was entirely dependent on its provincial counterparts to remain a viable political force. Of the three dominant parties in Alberta, the Social Credit party found itself to be the weakest both organizationally and financially leading up to the 1957 federal election.

The 1955 provincial election serves as a useful case study to examine the organizational strengths of the three main parties. The election was preceded by a series of scandals which sullied Manning's impeccably scrupulous image. The main scandal revolved around favoritism in granting loans to Social Credit ministers and MLAs. Two sitting MLAs in particular were targeted after receiving large loans from the provincial treasury despite the fact that they lacked the necessary collateral. Rumours also circulated suggesting that Social Credit supporters were favoured in receiving public works contracts. While the opposition Liberals, Conservatives and CCFers called on the government to appoint a judicial inquiry, Manning opted to instead call a snap election for June 1955, only three years into his term.⁶⁹ The opposition parties viewed the 1955 election as an opportunity to dislodge the Socreds from their formerly unassailable position of power.

The federal Conservatives, including national leader George Drew, were intimately involved in the affairs of their provincial counterparts during the election. This election

⁶⁷ Ibid., file 461, Orvis Kennedy to Alberta MLAs and Provincial Executives, 12 March 1957.

⁶⁸ Ibid., file 477, "Social Credit Caucus Minutes," 30 January 1957.

⁶⁹ Alvin Finkel provides a good account of the events preceding the 1955 election. See: Finkel, *The Social Credit Phenomenon in Alberta*, 128-130.

helped reinforce cooperation between federal and provincial Conservatives, and served as a harbinger of future Conservative success in the province. George Drew was particularly interested in the Alberta campaign as he desired to eliminate third party contenders such as Social Credit from the national political scene.⁷⁰ Sydney Wood, a prominent Conservative organizer in Edmonton, sent regular updates to Drew as the campaign progressed. Immediately following the dissolution of the legislature, Wood commented that “for years there has been little if any organization in constituencies other than Calgary and Edmonton,” but remained confident that the party would appreciably increase its appeal due to the scandals which rocked Manning’s government.⁷¹ Wood positively exclaimed that “Conservative candidates bloomed where none had bloomed before,” indicating that W.J.C. Kirby’s efforts at creating viable constituency organizations paid dividends in the 1955 campaign.⁷² Indeed, Kirby himself was enthusiastic about his party’s chances, given the positive reception he had received at local meetings prior to the election.⁷³ Results from across the province indicated that Kirby’s earlier efforts to revitalize his party at the grassroots had worked.

Jean Robinson’s newly formed PCWA groups campaigned actively on behalf of the Conservative candidates in their ridings. Robinson herself worked tirelessly to mobilize them, framing the provincial election as an opportunity for women to voice their opinion on

⁷⁰ Drew’s disdain for Social Credit was apparent in a letter he wrote to E.W. Bickle of Toronto, where he describes Social Credit as being “just as dangerous as Socialism and could, in fact, be more dangerous.” Drew was particularly confused as to why prominent businessmen in the West supported the Socreds over the Conservatives. See: LAC, Drew Papers, series 2a, vol. 181, file 20, George Drew to E.W. Bickle, 20 July 1955.

⁷¹ LAC, Drew Papers, series 2b, vol. 213, file 4, Sydney Wood to George Drew, 6 June 1955.

⁷² Ibid., Sydney Wood to George Drew, 16 June 1955.

⁷³ See, for example: GLA, PCAA Papers, series M-1744, file 57, W.J.C. Kirby to Arthur Beaumont, 7 February 1955.

issues dear to them.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, Conservative organization was as yet incomplete in southern rural ridings, which prevented them from nominating a full slate of candidates. Nevertheless, the party tripled its share of the vote to 9%, and elected an additional MLA for a total of four in the new legislature, including party leader W.J.C. Kirby. The Conservatives had also demonstrated that they could work well together in Alberta, as they did not distinguish between separate federal and provincial organizations. While the party still had much work to do, the 1955 provincial election demonstrated that the hard work of creating viable constituency associations was beginning to pay off mid-way between the 1953 and 1957 federal votes.

The provincial Liberals mounted an effective and aggressive campaign against the Social Credit administration. Party leader J. Harper Prowse was endorsed by many of Alberta's newspapers as the best man for premier due to his strong appeal to the electorate and general media disenchantment with the Manning government.⁷⁵ Notably, Prowse placed integrity and accountability at the centre of his party's platform, and promised to appoint a judicial commission to investigate past wrongdoing and make recommendations on how to prevent future abuses.⁷⁶ Alberta party president Wilf Edgar predicted that the Liberals would not win the election, but would make substantial gains that would be sufficient to halt the Social Credit party's "On-to-Ottawa" march.⁷⁷ Una Maclean echoed these observations in commenting that "enthusiasm was high" amongst party loyalists who believed that they would make substantial gains.⁷⁸ Enthusiastic Liberal nominating conventions revealed that the party's sustained efforts to cultivate a solid provincial

⁷⁴ Ibid., file 60, Jean Robinson to P. Clubine, 14 June 1955.

⁷⁵ Finkel, *The Social Credit Phenomenon in Alberta*, 129.

⁷⁶ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file "Alberta Liberal Association 1954-1955," "The Liberal Program for Good Government in Alberta," 25 May 1955, 1.

⁷⁷ Ibid., Wilf Edgar to H.E. Kidd, 13 May 1955.

⁷⁸ Ibid., Una Maclean to H.E. Kidd, 23 May 1955.

organization had paid dividends, making the Liberal party the party of choice for most voters who wished to register their displeasure with the Manning administration.⁷⁹ Ultimately, the provincial campaign was a resounding success for the Liberals, who increased their share of the popular vote from 22% to 31% and elected fifteen members to the new legislature – the largest opposition contingent to face the Social Credit government since 1940.

However, another episode during the campaign hinted at the difficulties the federal Liberals faced in Alberta. On 1 November 1954, the Social Credit MP for Battle River-Camrose passed away suddenly, necessitating a by-election to fill his vacant seat. This by-election ended up coinciding with the 1955 provincial election, as it was held on 20 June 1955. The Liberal riding association President, Gordon Wilson, implored all Liberals in the riding to work together to achieve their common goal of taking this seat from the Socreds.⁸⁰ Early on, efforts were made to coordinate provincial and federal efforts in the riding, especially once the provincial election was underway. H.E. Kidd in particular was adamant that the two organizations work together to achieve success at both levels, recommending that Duncan MacTavish travel to Alberta to facilitate this.⁸¹ However, relations between the two organizations began to sour once Haar and Prudham commenced asserting organizational supremacy over the federal effort in Battle River-Camrose. Prudham sent a letter to Kidd near the end of the campaign requesting that “any assistance from outside of the constituency should be channeled through Mr. Haar,” despite acknowledging that many

⁷⁹ For example, the Calgary North Liberal Association reported a significant spike in membership sales and subscriptions to the *Canadian Liberal* magazine. This increased interest allowed the provincial Liberals to mount a robust campaign in Calgary due to the increased number of individuals willing to volunteer for the Liberal campaign. See: GLA, LAA Papers, series M-1724, file 37A, Richard Thomson to John Haar, 28 May 1955.

⁸⁰ Ibid., Gordon Wilson to “Friend” [Liberal supporters], 3 February 1955.

⁸¹ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 652, file “Battle River-Camrose,” H.E. Kidd to Don Thomson, 24 March 1955.

provincial organizers resented having to go through the federal office to do work on behalf of the federal Liberals in the by-election.⁸² Indeed, Senator Stambaugh, John Connors and J. Harper Prowse were all listed by Prudham as against his centralization effort, indicating that a deep rift had formed between senior officials in both branches on this issue.

Furthermore, John Haar insisted that a new federal organization office be established in Wetaskiwin to manage the federal campaign independent of the concurrent provincial one.⁸³ Consultation with his provincial counterparts was limited to informing them of when the Liberal candidate, Dr. Mac Smith, would be speaking. Haar and Prudham did not seem interested in genuine collaboration with their provincial brethren, as they sought to centralize and micromanage all aspects of the federal campaign. Ultimately, the Socreds retained the seat despite the fact that their organization was relatively poor in the area due to the party's preoccupation with the provincial contest.⁸⁴ The Liberal party's failure to coordinate their concurrent campaigns in this instance was an ill omen for the difficulties to come.

In the mid-1950s, all three federal parties embarked on different reorganization schemes in an attempt to become the dominant party in Alberta. Debates over natural gas export and wheat marketing policies focused the public's attention on federal issues and helped stimulate reorganization efforts. In the end, the results were mixed. The Progressive Conservatives succeeded at transforming themselves into a robust and tightly knit entity that could seriously compete with its rivals despite the historical weakness of the party in most regions of the province. The Liberals became a dominant force provincially,

⁸² Ibid., George Prudham to H.E. Kidd, 25 March 1955.

⁸³ GLA, LAA Papers, series M-1724, file 37A, John Haar to Pete Armishaw, 1 June 1955.

⁸⁴ Una Maclean observed that "Manning's interventions on behalf of the federal Social Credit candidate have been weaker than usual," indicating that their support seemed to be slipping. See: LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 652, file "Battle River-Camrose," Una Maclean to H.E. Kidd, 14 June 1955.

but tensions between federal and provincial organizers prevented success at one level from benefitting the other. These tensions would seriously undermine federal Liberal efforts in the 1957 and 1958 elections. Social Credit was a weakened political entity on the eve of the 1957 election, as it was run by a tired, ailing and tradition-bound band of MPs who failed to incorporate youth into their movement. The provincial party's weakness in the 1955 election anticipated similar weakness in 1957, as the two organizations were essentially the same. The reorganization efforts of these three parties in the mid-1950s were crucial in laying the foundation for their election campaigns. Indeed, the intense political atmosphere of the mid-1950s served as a prelude to the tumultuous elections to come.

Chapter 4

On the Brink: Alberta's Federal Parties in the 1957 Election

The 1957 federal election is better viewed as the first of a two part electoral battle that concluded one year later, in the 1958 federal election. The Progressive Conservatives, who had wandered haplessly through the federal political wilderness for over two decades, won a plurality of seats in the House of Commons, although they remained well short of an outright majority. These early gains were solidified in 1958, when the Tories were returned with the largest majority government in Canadian history. Many political scientists and historians have remarked that the 1957 election marked the end of an era, as the long Liberal dynasty of Mackenzie King and St. Laurent came to an ignominious end.¹ In attempting to explain the Conservative success, some speculate that it was George Drew's departure from politics and John Diefenbaker's ascendancy to the Conservative leadership which was the decisive factor which tipped the balance in favour of the party in 1957.² These historians posit that Diefenbaker's popular appeal stretched from coast-to-coast, and was sufficiently robust to overcome any regional organizational deficiencies. Others highlight the Liberal party's complacency and the unpopularity of its "ministerialist"

¹ For a more thorough discussion of how political scientists have treated the 1957 election as an epochal shift in Canadian governance, see the Introduction.

² Dale Thomson speculated that Diefenbaker's appeal was "almost entirely emotional," which gave him an advantage over his more staid opponents in the 1957 campaign. See: Dale Thomson, *Louis St. Laurent: Canadian*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1967), 513; Peter Regenstreif christened Diefenbaker's victory as a "revolution," attributing the Conservative victory to the "one man who dominated Canadian political discourse." See: Peter Regenstreif, *The Diefenbaker Interlude: Parties and Voting in Canada*, (Toronto: Longman's Canada, 1965), introduction; Denis Smith's biography of Diefenbaker likens him to a social gospel crusader, and credits his charismatic speaking style as the key reason for Conservative success in 1957. See: Denis Smith, *Rogue Tory: The Life and Legend of John G. Diefenbaker*, (Toronto: McFarlane, Walter and Ross, 1995).

management style as the key elements in its defeat.³ John Meisel's seminal analysis of the 1957 campaign synthesizes these conclusions, demonstrating that the Conservative victory in 1957 was a product of Diefenbaker's popularity, Liberal complacency and George Drew's reorganization efforts earlier in the decade.⁴ Undoubtedly, the fall of the Liberals in 1957 came as a shock to many political observers at the time, as the party's grip on power had not been seriously challenged since 1935. Indeed, those eligible to vote for the first time in 1957 had only ever lived under a Liberal administration. On the whole, this election is one of the most important in Canadian history, as it abruptly ended the rule of one of Canada's longest-running dynasties and gave way to a more unstable period marked by recurrent minority parliaments and political upheaval.

In Alberta, the results of the 1957 election masked its true significance. In terms of seats won, the Social Credit party increased its representation by two for a total of thirteen – its best ever result. The Liberals lost three, retaining only J.M. Dechene's far-flung outpost in Athabasca. The Conservatives retained their two Calgary seats and added another in Edmonton, for a total of three. Based on these results, it would appear that not much had changed in Alberta between the 1953 and 1957 elections, save for the apparent erosion of Liberal popularity. The popular vote reveals that the 1957 results represented a far more significant shift in the province's political culture. The Progressive Conservative party was the only one to increase its share of voter preference, receiving 27.4% of the vote

³ Joseph Wearing agrees that the "ministerialist underpinnings of Liberal organization became its undoing in 1957," and contrasted sharply with the dynamic Conservative campaign. See: Joseph Wearing, *The L-Shaped Party: The Liberal Party of Canada 1958-1980*, (Toronto: McGraw Hill Ryerson, 1981), ch. 2; Blair Fraser notes that Liberal support had been steadily eroded over the 1950s due to the pipeline debate, wheat marketing policies, the Suez crisis and the Defense Production Act. See: Blair Fraser, *The Search for Identity: Canada Postwar to Present*, (Toronto: Doubleday, 1967), ch. 17; Reginald Whitaker agrees that the Liberal party's failure to renew itself and respond adequately to the political crises it confronted in the 1950s led to its downfall. See: Reginald Whitaker, *The Government Party: Organizing and Financing the Liberal Party of Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

⁴ John Meisel, *The Canadian General Election of 1957*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), conclusion.

in 1957 as compared to 14.5% in 1953. The Liberal vote dropped by ten percentage points to virtually tie the Conservatives with 27.6% of the vote. Vote splitting between these parties was the main reason for Social Credit's increased seat total, as the Socred vote also declined by three percentage points to 37.5%. The Progressive Conservatives emerged as the clear winners in Alberta, as momentum was clearly on their side leading into what was likely to be a short parliamentary session in advance of another federal election.⁵ This Conservative resurgence was a product of the party's organizational efforts in the mid-1950s, the stance it took on federal gas export and wheat marketing policies, and the charismatic leadership of John Diefenbaker, who was immensely popular in the province. Indeed, the 1957 campaign in Alberta demonstrated that the consensus that had characterized the province's federal politics for years was beginning to fray.

As has been noted, George Drew's departure from politics in 1956 and the subsequent election of John Diefenbaker to the party's leadership was one of the most significant factors in the Conservative victory. Diefenbaker's popularity was strong throughout the West, and often transcended partisan lines.⁶ Alberta was no exception in this regard. The Calgary North Progressive Conservative Association led a "Diefenbaker for Leader" campaign that worked in tandem with local nonpartisan "Diefenbaker clubs" to promote his candidacy in advance of the 1956 leadership convention, an indication of the

⁵ Many commentators speculated that Diefenbaker would dissolve parliament and call another election within a year to seek a majority mandate. See, for example: "Next Moves at Ottawa," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 13 June 1957, 29; "Conservatives Triumph but Stalemate Expected," *Calgary Herald*, 11 June 1957, 1; "A Minority Government for Canada," *Edmonton Journal*, 11 June 1957, 4.

⁶ An article in the February 1957 edition of *Progress Report* highlighted the rise of "Diefenbaker Clubs" throughout the West, which were comprised of individuals from all of the main federal parties and were formed to convince him to run for the Conservative leadership in 1956. See: LAC, PCPC Papers, vol. 716, file "Progress Report 1957," "Diefenbaker Clubs," *Progress Report*, February 1957, 7.

strength of his personal popularity in southern Alberta.⁷ The Progressive Conservatives understood that Diefenbaker resonated with both rural and urban voters who were disenchanted with the incumbent administration in Ottawa and the efficacy of the province's Social Credit MPs. The party's national advertising strategy built on this perception by featuring "the Chief" prominently in all election literature and advertisements.

Of all the Conservative literature distributed in Alberta in 1957, a pamphlet entitled "Get to Know Diefenbaker" received by far the largest circulation.⁸ Five television advertisements were aired across the country, and they all featured the new Conservative leader front-and-center. Each began with Diefenbaker speaking briefly on an issue of importance and concluded with a still picture of the local Conservative candidate in the area the commercial was being shown in.⁹ While these commercials were relatively simple and lacked theatrics and overt dramatizations, they were effective nonetheless, as television had never been used as a medium for political advertisement previously.¹⁰ A study commissioned by the Conservatives just prior to the 1957 contest indicated that over 50 percent of households in southern Alberta had television sets, making these advertisements particularly useful for introducing a large portion of the electorate to the new Conservative leader.¹¹ In sharp contrast, Liberal television advertisements were poor, as the Prime Minister refused to rehearse broadcasts ahead of time or wear makeup, making him appear

⁷ GLA, PCAA Papers, series M-1744, file 50, "Meeting of the Combined Executives of the Calgary North Conservative Associations," 9 October 1956, 2.

⁸ In all, 141,000 copies of this pamphlet were distributed in Alberta in 1957, accounting for a third of all the literature distributed by the Conservatives. See: LAC, PCPC Papers, vol. 559, file "Pamphlet Distribution," "1957 General Election: Circulation of Pamphlets by Province," June 1957.

⁹ LAC, PCPC Papers, vol. 608, file "Television : Private Stations," "PC No. 1 – No. 5," 30 April 1957.

¹⁰ Prior to 1957, dramatized political advertisements for television were prohibited, and the four main federal parties agreed to restrict advertising to the radio and newspapers. This prohibition on dramatized ads was lifted just prior to the 1957 campaign, making Diefenbaker's ads possible. See: Ibid., "CBC Presentation Policies," 15 April 1957.

¹¹ Ibid., "All Canada Television CHCT Calgary and CJLH Lethbridge," 1957.

old and haggard to the unforgiving eye of the television camera.¹² Comparatively, Diefenbaker's polished and rehearsed advertisements made him appear competent and youthful. Additionally, newspaper advertisements in the provincial press de-emphasized the Progressive Conservative label in favour of claiming that "it's time for a Diefenbaker government," while highlighting his long parliamentary career and personal integrity and ability.¹³ Diefenbaker's dynamism and rhetorical flair appealed to Albertans who were tired of the uninspiring performance of Prime Minister St. Laurent and the aging Social Credit caucus. In the battle of personalities, there is no question that Diefenbaker's personal appeal to the Alberta electorate was an important factor in the Conservative victory.

However, as John Meisel noted, other factors were equally important in setting the stage for the Conservative upset. Notably, W.J.C. Kirby's yeoman effort at the ground level in Alberta paid dividends in the 1957 contest, and was an important factor contributing to his party's success. Newly formed constituency associations nominated candidates early and recruited volunteers for the Conservative campaign well in advance of the dissolution of Parliament. Notably, Peace River became the first constituency in Alberta to nominate a Conservative candidate, which was a startling contrast to the situation witnessed in 1953, when no Conservative candidate was nominated at all.¹⁴ Hazel Clubine, the head of the Peace River PCWA chapter, claimed that "our prospects of gaining this seat are very encouraging," largely due to the popularity of the Conservative standard-

¹² H.E. Kidd noted that "the Prime Minister's [television] appearance was not good," and speculated that Liberal TV advertisements were doing the party more harm than good. See: LAC, Kidd Papers, vol. 5, file 17, H.E. Kidd to Jack Pickersgill, 4 May 1957. The media also commented on the shortcomings of St. Laurent's television appearances. See, for example: "Liberals, Be Human," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 3 May 1957, 17; "Liberals Strike Unhappy Medium," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 10 May 1957, 17.

¹³ See, for example: "It's Time for a Diefenbaker Government!" *Calgary Herald*, 27 May 1957, 11.

¹⁴ GLA, PCAA Papers, series M-1744, file 60, Jean Robinson to Hazel Clubine, 29 January 1957.

bearer, local businessman G.W. Baldwin, and growing disenchantment with the federal Social Credit party.¹⁵ Baldwin himself recognized that increased Conservative fortune in Peace River was in no small part attributable to the hard work of Hazel Clubine and the PCWA, who provided the backbone for his organizational efforts.¹⁶

By the beginning of March, Conservative candidates had been nominated in Battle River-Camrose, Edmonton East, Vegreville and Athabasca, with more meetings scheduled in the other four northern ridings later in the month.¹⁷ Significantly, a prominent Ukrainian immigrant from Vegreville, William Haluschak, ran for the Conservative nomination there. While he ultimately lost the nomination to Frank Fane, the candidature of a prominent individual of Ukrainian descent for the Conservative nomination was significant as no Conservative had been nominated at all in the area since 1935. Furthermore, Kirby's persistent efforts to cultivate support amongst the Ukrainian population had clearly paid dividends by early 1957. Increased organizational effectiveness was also evident in the robust Conservative effort in Wetaskiwin, where the local PCWA chapter took the lead in generating publicity and campaigning on behalf of its candidate, James Speakman.¹⁸ Other nomination meetings in March generated a great deal of interest. The Calgary South and Macleod meetings took place on 5 March 1957, and both were well attended due to the fact that Diefenbaker was scheduled to speak at both of them.¹⁹ The Conservative campaign manager in Jasper-Edson remarked that the nomination was well attended and was extremely enthusiastic, claiming that overall prospects were "favourable" due to the

¹⁵ Ibid., Hazel Clubine to Jean Robinson, 10 February 1957.

¹⁶ Ibid., G.W. Baldwin to P.L. Pue, 3 March 1957.

¹⁷ Ibid., file 53, C.J. Bowie-Reed to P.L. Pue, 4 March 1957.

¹⁸ Ibid., file 63, Edith Gore to Jean Robinson, 21 May 1957.

¹⁹ Ibid., file 50, P.L. Pue to "Friend," 26 February 1957. The nomination meeting in Calgary South was necessary due to the retirement of Carl Nickle just prior to the election. Art Smith, a wealthy oil tycoon, became the new Conservative candidate in Calgary South.

establishment of a “formidable organization” in the area.²⁰ This again was a stark contrast to the 1953 election, when no Conservative was nominated in Jasper-Edson due to a weak leadership. On the whole, Conservative organization in Alberta was demonstrably improved in 1957, with every riding being contested. Indeed, Jean Robinson optimistically exclaimed that “nomination meetings have been the best attended ever, and in some constituencies as many as six candidates have been ready to carry the Conservative banner...,” concluding ecstatically that “the tide is with us to an extent that it has not been for over a quarter of a century.”²¹ This alone was a remarkable achievement given the poor state of the party only four years earlier.

W.J.C. Kirby’s streamlined and centralized organizational structure also paid dividends for the Conservatives. A workshop was held in February for all Conservative partisans to discuss organizational issues and determine a common strategy for the campaign. This meeting in Edmonton familiarized campaign staff with their roles in the forthcoming election, and went over some successful techniques to canvass their ridings for support.²² Much of the material covered at this workshop was taken from a comprehensive guide compiled by former party President George Hees entitled “Campaigning to Win.” The document covered every facet of the local campaign, including how to mobilize campaign workers, organize house meetings and teas, draw up the candidate’s itinerary, canvass voters lists, deploy volunteers on election day, and ensure Conservative voters actually got out and voted.²³ Specific tasks for campaign managers, poll captains, scrutineers, financial managers, canvass managers, publicity agents, and, of course, the

²⁰ Ibid., file 56, P.L. Pue to H.M. Horner, 2 April 1957; Ibid., H.M. Horner to P.L. Pue, [1957].

²¹ Ibid., file 59, Jean Robinson to Molly Milvain, 10 May 1957.

²² In an invitation to Clifford Smallwood, the Conservative candidate in Battle River-Camrose, Kirby briefly described the objectives of the forthcoming organization workshop. See: Ibid., file 49, W.J.C. Kirby to Clifford Smallwood, 29 January 1957.

²³ GLA, Doug Harkness Papers, series M-4762, file 1, “Campaigning to Win!” [1957], 2-15.

candidates themselves, were expounded upon at length. The document reflected Kirby's desire to establish clear lines of responsibility and communication between all branches of the Conservative organization. For example, Hees recommended that a single "publicity manager" be appointed in each riding to oversee the erection of billboards and the publication of newspaper and radio advertisements on behalf of the candidate. However, Hees emphasized that the publicity manager was ultimately subordinate to the campaign manager and the candidate, insisting that all designs and layouts "MUST be approved by the candidate and the campaign manager before they are proceeded with."²⁴ A central "campaign committee" was to oversee the campaign strategy itself, which involved discussing how to best "sell" the candidate to the electorate and how to market the party's platform effectively. Again, this committee was ultimately responsible to provincial and national headquarters for following the "party line" on any given issue.²⁵ This general structure was closely followed by Kirby's Conservatives in 1957, and produced a far more professional and polished campaign than had been seen in 1953.

The Liberals were successful at nominating their strongest slate of candidates yet in 1957. This was largely a reflection of the party's increased prominence in Alberta following its strong showing in the 1955 provincial election. In all, four popular mayors, including those of Calgary and Edmonton, ran under the Liberal banner. Edmonton's William Hawrelak was particularly important to the Liberal effort, as he was much admired within the Ukrainian community and was widely assumed to be St. Laurent's preferred successor to George Prudham as the political minister responsible for Alberta.²⁶ J. Harper

²⁴ Ibid., 5. Capitals are the author's.

²⁵ Ibid., 9-10.

²⁶ William Hawrelak would ultimately become Edmonton's longest-serving mayor, retaining his popularity despite a string of scandals alleging financial impropriety in the early 1960s. His popularity was sufficiently robust to allow him to win the mayoralty by acclamation in the 1953 and 1955 municipal elections.

Prowse was confident that Hawrelak would boost Liberal fortunes throughout the province, stating in a letter to the Prime Minister that “it is my opinion that [Hawrelak] could personally be elected in any one of the three Edmonton seats he might choose as his constituency.”²⁷ Prowse pressured St. Laurent to appoint Hawrelak to cabinet before the election, as he believed that this would “practically assure” his victory and would thus allow him to campaign outside of his own riding.²⁸ Senator Stambaugh, who had long chafed under the oversight of George Prudham, also suggested that Hawrelak be appointed to cabinet prior to the election to neutralize Prudham’s influence on the campaign.²⁹ Hawrelak ultimately decided that joining cabinet before the election was undesirable, but agreed to run as the Liberal standard-bearer in Edmonton East.³⁰ Hawrelak’s candidacy was central to the Liberal effort in Alberta, and demonstrated that the Liberals were sufficiently popular in the province to recruit candidates of his stature.

While not as prominent as Hawrelak, the other three municipal leaders nominated to run for the Liberals were deemed to be crucial to securing the party’s success at the local level. The gregarious mayor of Calgary, Don Mackay, had provided the Prime Minister with unsolicited advice on the political situation in Alberta following the 1953 election. In a letter to St. Laurent, Mackay noted that “there are shortcomings in all directions” with the Liberal strategy in Alberta, highlighting the party’s dismissive treatment of Social Credit as

²⁷ LAC, St. Laurent Papers, vol. 193, file O-20-9-P, J. Harper Prowse to Louis St. Laurent, 20 December 1956, 1. This view was shared by the Conservatives, who unsuccessfully attempted to recruit Hawrelak in 1955. See: LAC, Drew Papers, series 2c, vol. 259, file 391.5, “Memo: Conversation with George Hees,” 8 September 1955.

²⁸ LAC, St. Laurent Papers, vol. 193, file O-20-9-P, J. Harper Prowse to Louis St. Laurent, 20 December 1956, 2. Prowse expressed this sentiment privately to Duncan MacTavish, likely in an attempt to put more pressure on St. Laurent to appoint Hawrelak. See: *Ibid.*, J. Harper Prowse to Duncan MacTavish, 2 January 1957.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 172, file C-20-H, J.W. Stambaugh to Louis St. Laurent, 3 January 1957.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 179, file E-25-4, William Hawrelak to Louis St. Laurent, 4 February 1957.

a major reason for its inability to expand its base of support.³¹ He recommended that the party “broaden the Liberal picture both to the right and the left” to incorporate the sound ideas of its political adversaries into its own philosophy. While this letter was clearly designed to build support for his eventual run at the Liberal nomination, Mackay’s advice was sincere and likely bolstered his claim to being an adept political organizer.³² This perception was further reinforced once Liberal headquarters became aware that the Social Credit party had approached Mackay earlier to run under their banner.³³ The *Calgary Albertan* speculated that Mackay could be in line for a cabinet position should he win a seat in the election, but it does not appear that any senior official within the Liberal party confirmed these rumours.³⁴ To the Liberals, Mackay represented their best opportunity in years to wrest one of the Calgary seats from the Conservatives.

The other two mayors who ran as Liberal candidates were Harry Veiner of Medicine Hat and Fred Johns of Leduc (who was running in the Wetaskiwin constituency). Veiner was a perennial candidate for the Liberals, having run in 1949 and 1953. Like Mackay and Hawrelak, his experience in local politics was seen as an asset to the Liberal party, and was sufficient to garner him the endorsement of the *Medicine Hat News*.³⁵ While Fred Johns did not receive the same degree of publicity as his colleagues did, his experience as the editor of a local newspaper and mayor of Leduc for nine years made him well-known in the rural communities to the south of Edmonton.³⁶ The apparent strength of

³¹ Ibid., vol. 180, file P-14, Don Mackay to Louis St. Laurent, 30 December 1954, 1-2.

³² Ibid. Mackay was coy on his intentions to run for the Liberals. He claimed that “it is not my aspiration” due to the demands placed on him by his young family, but also emphasized that “I have seen nothing on the political horizon that appeals to me any more” than the advancement of the Liberal party.

³³ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 650, file “Alberta Liberal Association – 1956,” Una Maclean to H.E. Kidd, 9 May 1956.

³⁴ “Mayor Mackay’s Position,” *Calgary Albertan*, 10 May 1957, 4.

³⁵ “For Candidate, Not Party,” *Medicine Hat News*, 29 May 1957, 4.

³⁶ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 653, file “Wetaskiwin,” “Frederick Johns,” 8 March 1957.

the Liberal brand in Alberta was evident with the nomination of these four mayors, and contributed to an overall sense of optimism in the Liberal ranks. Senator Stambaugh confided that “I have never seen things looking so good ... we have the best candidates I have ever seen anywhere and they are enthusiastic, well informed, and working hard.”³⁷ The *Winnipeg Free Press*, long supportive of the federal Liberals, speculated that the party was “likely to gain seats in Alberta” due to the impressive slate of candidates it nominated.³⁸ H.E. Kidd, from his perch in Ontario, agreed that his party was “certain” to gain seats in Alberta due to the many positive reports he was receiving.³⁹ To many Liberals, the 1957 campaign represented the party’s greatest hope in years to breach the walls of Social Credit’s impregnable fortress.

The unquestionably strong slate of candidates selected to run for the Liberals was supplemented by an extensive “speaking tour strategy” concocted by John Haar. This strategy established four “speaking circuits” which each prescribed a specific five-day itinerary for prominent Liberals to target key municipalities. External party representatives would be dispatched on one of these circuits based on where Haar believed they would have the greatest impact.⁴⁰ The document describing this strategy was detailed in its assessment of the party’s strengths and weaknesses in each area. For example, for the southern Alberta circuit, Haar noted that most farmers in the Lethbridge area were “large farmers with the occasional small holder,” directing speakers to specifically highlight grain marketing policies as the community was particularly concerned about this issue.⁴¹ For

³⁷ Ibid., vol. 651, file “Alberta Liberal Association – Election 1957,” J.W. Stambaugh to H.E. Kidd, 15 May 1957.

³⁸ “Election Prospects in the West,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 10 May 1957, 25.

³⁹ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file “Alberta Liberal Association – 1957 Election,” H.E. Kidd to J.W. Stambaugh, 18 May 1957.

⁴⁰ Ibid., “Alberta: Operation – ‘Speakers’ Circuit,” 18 December 1956, 1-8.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1.

Calgary, Haar sarcastically commented that “the city ... is noted for its abundance of liberals [sic] who don’t necessarily do any work,” making “close contact with the ordinary voter” imperative for prospective Liberal speakers.⁴² For Vegreville (part of the northeastern circuit), Haar highlighted that “the population is predominantly Ukrainian with other Slavic races intermingled,” suggesting that speakers could endear themselves to their audience by speaking a few words in these languages.⁴³ The most detailed section of the document dealt with the fourth circuit, which was confined exclusively to the Peace River riding. Peace River became an important focal point of Liberal activity in 1957, as the party felt that it had a good chance to unseat the Social Credit leader and thereby decapitate and demoralize the Socred caucus.⁴⁴ Haar targeted parts of the riding where the party had been successful in the 1955 provincial election, including the municipalities of Grouard and Grande Prairie, which the Liberals won.⁴⁵ Haar’s desire to centralize campaign operations in his office can be understood in light of this document, as a great deal of coordination and control would be required to render this plan operable. Its detail in accounting for specific demographic and economic characteristics stood as a testament to Haar’s hard work over the last four years. With a detailed, centralized campaign strategy and a solid slate of candidates, the Liberals were confident that their party would realize significant gains in 1957.

Unfortunately, this false sense of security overlooked the considerable organizational difficulties they faced. Feuding between the party’s provincial and federal

⁴² Ibid., 2.

⁴³ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁴ Haar advised Prudham that “we can eliminate Mr. Solon Low from the House of Commons” by targeting Peace River with prominent Liberal speakers. Haar described St. Laurent’s trip to Grande Prairie as “historical,” and also noted his intention to send St. Laurent’s son, Jean Paul, to campaign extensively in the area. See: Ibid., John Haar to George Prudham, 5 May 1957.

⁴⁵ Ibid., “Alberta: Operation – ‘Speakers’ Circuit,’” 7.

branches continued to hamper Liberal efforts, and would detrimentally affect its ability to campaign effectively. Prudham and Haar continued to insist that all correspondence relating to the federal campaign be routed through their office. Prudham sent a letter to all Liberal organizers intimating that he was to be considered the “co-ordinating authority until after the election,” as he remained Alberta’s sole cabinet representative despite the fact that he was retiring.⁴⁶ Even correspondence sent to the southern Alberta office was to be copied and sent to Haar, “in order to dispel any doubts as to the direction of the campaign.”⁴⁷ Haar concurred with Prudham’s preferred strategy, blaming his provincial cousins for failing to coordinate their efforts with his office.⁴⁸ Evidently, similar disagreements over the centralization of federal activities in Haar’s office earlier in the decade remained unresolved. Haar’s and Prudham’s stubbornness, and the ill-will it engendered, proved to be a major stumbling block to Liberal efforts.

Members of the provincial party balked at Prudham’s imperious missive. Senator Stambaugh remarked that “[I] haven’t met anybody that likes the idea of George Prudham going to the Senate” due to his heavy-handed managerial style, and claimed that “the more I see of Haar the less I like him ... he acts like a sergeant major with a bunch of raw recruits.”⁴⁹ Una Maclean, who was now the Liberal candidate for Calgary North, felt compelled to write directly to the Prime Minister to protest Prudham’s domineering presence in the campaign.⁵⁰ By the midpoint of the election, some provincial members in northern Alberta protested Prudham’s edict by refusing to pick up campaign literature at the Federal Liberal Centre, prompting Senator Stambaugh to request that materials be sent

⁴⁶ Ibid., George Prudham to H.E. Kidd, 20 February 1957.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., John Haar to H.E. Kidd, 16 February 1957.

⁴⁹ Ibid., J.W. Stambaugh to H.E. Kidd, 12 March 1957.

⁵⁰ GLA, Una Maclean Evans Papers, series M-8419, file 32, Una Maclean to Louis St. Laurent, 22 April 1957.

directly to the provincial headquarters instead.⁵¹ Una Maclean echoed Stambaugh's frustration, requesting that campaign materials for southern Alberta be forwarded directly to her.⁵² Coordination difficulties between the federal and provincial branches had an adverse effect on the Liberal campaign, leading to delays in distributing materials, confusion over campaign events, and non-compliance with Haar's preferred speaking tour strategy.

Appalled at what was transpiring in Alberta, H.E. Kidd attempted to appeal to common sense to unite both branches against their real adversaries. In a letter to Jack Pickersgill, Kidd suggested that both branches be merged into a single entity headed by Liberal MLA Grant MacEwan, who was respected by both sides.⁵³ Far from being a stop-gap measure, Kidd insisted that this remain a permanent feature of organization in Alberta, as he believed that a unified headquarters would streamline party operations and eliminate infighting. Kidd was cautiously optimistic that "Haar can be persuaded to carry on and to co-operate with ... the provincial office," but was less optimistic that Prudham could be brought on side.⁵⁴ Kidd's suggestion came too late to heal the fissures in the Alberta party, forcing him to rely on persuasion to get both factions to set aside their differences. In a

⁵¹ Interestingly, Stambaugh declared that "the over-all picture looks pretty good at this date" despite the ongoing disagreement between the federal and provincial offices. See: LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file "Alberta Liberal Association – 1957 Election," J.W. Stambaugh to H.E. Kidd, 1 May 1957. A report from Acadia constituency indicated that "a deep rift" had developed between federal and provincial organizers there, leading the constituency president to speculate that the Liberals could not possibly win the riding. See: GLA, LAA Papers, series M-1724, file 34, "Report of D.B. Gnesko – Acadia Riding," May 1957. John Decore's organization in Vegreville had a "falling out" with Haar's office, prompting them to refuse all contact with the federal office. See: LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file "Alberta Liberal Association – 1957 Election," Helen Grodeland to H.E. Kidd, 10 April 1957.

⁵² GLA, Maclean Papers, series M-8419, file 32, Una Maclean to H.E. Kidd, 6 April 1957. Kidd acquiesced to Maclean's and Stambaugh's request, sending 100,000 leaflets to the Calgary office. See: LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file "Alberta Liberal Association – 1957 Election," H.E. Kidd to J.W. Stambaugh, 2 May 1957.

⁵³ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file "Alberta Liberal Association – 1957 Election," H.E. Kidd to Jack Pickersgill, 22 February 1957.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

letter to Haar, Kidd expressed confidence that “when the chips are down everybody out there will pull together and develop co-ordination and collaboration in every electoral district,” urging him to meet with Senator Stambaugh and J. Harper Prowse to advance the cause of unity.⁵⁵ Una Maclean proposed that C.D. Howe’s visit to Calgary could be used to encourage unity between the two branches.⁵⁶ Maclean put together a luncheon and reception for Howe to help educate her fellow Liberals “in the arts of co-operation and team work.”⁵⁷ Unfortunately, Maclean’s efforts failed to promote the spirit of unity she envisioned, as Haar was conspicuously absent from the meeting, and many rifts persisted in northern constituencies.⁵⁸ Overall, internal divisions undermined the Liberal party’s effectiveness in the 1957 campaign. Ironically, John Haar undermined his own hard work in cultivating strong local constituency organizations and crafting a solid communications strategy by fomenting discord between federal and provincial party enthusiasts.

The 1957 election represented a significant setback for the Social Credit party in Alberta, despite the fact that it actually increased its representation by two seats. The party’s failure to encourage younger members to take a more active role in the party left it in the hands of an increasingly tired and aging group of veteran MPs. The relocation of the party’s national headquarters to Toronto drained funds that were originally earmarked for a robust cross-country publicity campaign, leaving the Socreds ill-prepared to finance their pitch to the electorate. In a private letter to Ernest Manning, Solon Low conceded that his caucus “was so far behind in our organizational work that it would be hopeless to think of anything like a full roster of candidates,” suggesting that the party abandon the ambitious

⁵⁵ Ibid., H.E. Kidd to John Haar, 18 March 1957.

⁵⁶ GLA, Maclean Papers, series M-8419, file 32, Una Maclean to H.E. Kidd, 7 April 1957.

⁵⁷ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file “Alberta Liberal Association – 1957 Election,” H.E. Kidd to Helen Grodeland, 11 April 1957.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Helen Grodeland to H.E. Kidd, 10 April 1957.

plan concocted at the 1954 National Council meeting and focus exclusively on the West instead.⁵⁹ Even then, Low recognized that “significant work” would have to be done to mount an effective campaign in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Low also recommended that the Toronto office be closed and moved to Ottawa where it would be more easily accessible to the MPs themselves and save the party money. All of these were practical and realistic suggestions that took into account the party’s limitations while setting reasonable goals for growth. Perplexingly, the party did not follow this course.

Despite privately conceding that a full national effort was impossible given the state of candidate nominations and financing in the East, the Social Credit party publicly billed the 1957 contest as its big moment to break into Eastern Canada and become a truly national party. At a caucus meeting prior to the campaign, the party resolved to hold a large rally at Massey Hall in Toronto to kick off its campaign. This rally was to be the largest spectacle ever produced by the federal Social Credit party, with tropical foliage, a pipe band, a choir and thousands of posters slated to accompany the speakers at the event.⁶⁰ An ambitious advertising campaign was to precede the rally to increase public interest and generate media attention, giving the party more exposure in the national press than they normally did. Both Premier Manning and B.C. Premier W.A.C. Bennett would be in attendance, kick starting the rally with a publicized joint arrival at Toronto’s airport.⁶¹ Evidently, the federal caucus believed that gains in Ontario remained within the realm of possibility, despite the obvious organizational and financial handicaps they were burdened with. It is unclear whether Solon Low protested this course of action, although he quickly

⁵⁹ GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 291, Solon Low to Ernest Manning, 31 August 1956.

⁶⁰ Ibid., file 477, “Social Credit Caucus Minutes,” 13 March 1957, 2.

⁶¹ Ibid., file 291, Solon Low to Ernest Manning, 2 April 1957.

abandoned campaigning in Ontario following the rally and confined himself strictly to the West for the remainder of the campaign.⁶²

The Toronto rally epitomized of the fanciful aspirations of the Social Credit party, which were clearly divorced from public opinion and reality itself. The media universally panned the rally as a failure. When much of the rally focused on the party's outmoded monetary theories and paying homage to its history, the *Calgary Albertan*, which was supportive of the Alberta Social Credit League, commented that it "revealed more glaringly than ever that when it comes to federal politics the party has less than nothing to offer the people."⁶³ The *Edmonton Journal*, which was also supportive of Manning's provincial administration, contrasted the poor attendance on opening day with the optimistic rhetoric of the party's speakers, all of whom seemed confident of an imminent breakthrough in Ontario.⁶⁴ The *Calgary Herald* claimed that the "Sacred splash" was "only a ripple," due to poor attendance at the rally and poor coverage in Ontario's papers.⁶⁵ Likewise, the *Medicine Hat News* concluded that Social Credit would remain a Western "fringe party" despite the large amounts of money spent on the rally and associated advertisements.⁶⁶ On the whole, the Toronto rally served only to confirm Social Credit's inutility and listlessness, as the proceedings were dominated by aging speakers and affirmations of faith in the party's largely discredited monetary philosophy. Eastern Canadian newspapers paid little attention to Social Credit's efforts, preferring to focus on the activities of the two main federal parties in the early stages of the campaign. The *Montreal Gazette* printed only one

⁶² GLA, LAA Papers, series M-1724, file 61, "Ottawa Roundup No. 1 – For Weekend Release; Campbell McDonald Reports from Ottawa," 5 May 1957.

⁶³ "The Unanswered Question," *Calgary Albertan*, 22 April 1957, 4.

⁶⁴ "SC Invades Ontario; Results So Far Not Spectacular," *Edmonton Journal*, 18 April 1957, 1.

⁶⁵ "Sacred Splash Only a Ripple," *Calgary Herald*, 18 April 1957, 4. The official attendance of the convention indicated that only 1200 people attended the closing session. See: "Sacred 'Mammoth' Rally Proves a Flop," *Calgary Herald*, 20 April 1957, 4.

⁶⁶ "National Ambitions," *Medicine Hat News*, 25 April 1957, 2.

short article on the rally, which was relegated to page 25.⁶⁷ A small editorial in the *Toronto Star* represented the sum of its coverage of the event, dubbing it a “pie-in-the-sky” effort that only served to prove that Social Credit “can out-promise any party in Canada today” with their fanciful platform.⁶⁸ If the party intended to increase positive media exposure of their efforts in the east, they surely failed. Indeed, the great rally which was to propel them to significant electoral gains was derided across the country, becoming an albatross to the Socred campaign.

At home, Social Credit was put on the defensive, reeling at the robust efforts of its adversaries. As has been noted, Solon Low spent the majority of the campaign in his own riding, fending off surprisingly strong challenges from his Liberal and Progressive Conservative opponents. Hazel Clubine remarked that Social Credit workers were actively attempting to persuade people that they would form the next Official Opposition, indicating that people were beginning to take note of Social Credit’s general irrelevance.⁶⁹ The Conservative candidate in Peace River, G.W. Baldwin, noted that campaigning in the area was “not easy,” but was cognizant of increasing voter disaffection with the Social Credit caucus and increased interest in his own campaign.⁷⁰ These observations were confirmed by Liberal organizers in Peace River, who interpreted the heavy presence of prominent Socred speakers (including the Premier) in the area as evidence of Social Credit’s increasingly desperate state.⁷¹ Increased campaigning in the North diverted resources from southern ridings. This contributed to a general decline in campaigning enthusiasm, especially in the Calgary area where Socred rallies attracted few people and even less

⁶⁷ “Socreds Promise Two-Party System,” *Montreal Gazette*, 19 April 1957, 25.

⁶⁸ “Pie in the Sky,” *Toronto Star*, 20 April 1957, 9.

⁶⁹ GLA, PCAA Papers, series M-1744, file 60, Hazel Clubine to Jean Robinson, 10 February 1957, 2-3.

⁷⁰ Ibid., G.W. Baldwin to P.L. Pue, 3 March 1957.

⁷¹ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file “Alberta Liberal Association – Election 1957,” J.W. Stambaugh to H.E. Kidd, 24 May 1957.

media attention.⁷² On the whole, Social Credit's campaign in Alberta was characterized by desperation on the one hand and a lack of energy on the other.

As was mentioned in chapter three, John Blackmore's nomination battle in Lethbridge stands as an excellent case study of the problems confronting the Social Credit party in 1957. Mark Spencer, a farmer from Cardston, mounted a campaign to win the Lethbridge nomination after reports of John Blackmore's weakness in Parliament were circulated in the press. Franklin Smith explained Spencer's charges to Blackmore on the eve of the nomination battle. Smith affirmed that Spencer recognized the many years of good service Blackmore had given to the area, and that he wished to see Blackmore retire honorably while handing the nomination to a newer generation of Social Creditors.⁷³ Smith then listed the reasons for Spencer's opposition to Blackmore's continued presence in the federal Parliament:

he is too radical, he 'harps' on tangents, he does not talk on the topic assigned to him by his party, his own colleagues consistently turn him off till he finishes speaking so that he speaks to empty air, and he tries to keep alive or revive the long dead issues of Social Credit 'funny money doctrine'.⁷⁴

These criticisms reveal the profound disconnect that had developed between the older generation of Social Creditors which became politically active during the Great Depression and newer members who were attracted to Manning's administrative style. Spencer preferred the kind of Social Credit government offered by Premier Manning, which was stripped of its adherence to the party's founding monetary orthodoxy in favour of a small-c conservative ideology. Blackmore, who was one of the most ardent exponents of monetary

⁷² "Socred Spirit is Willing Though Only 17 Attend," *Calgary Herald*, 29 May 1957, 24; Socreds on Defensive in All Alta. Ridings," *Lethbridge Herald*, 11 May 1957, 15.

⁷³ GLA, Blackmore Papers, series M-100, file 266, Franklin Smith to John Blackmore, 14 February 1957. An anonymous letter to Blackmore confirmed that Spencer was conducting a "clean and honorable" campaign. See: *Ibid.*, [anonymous] to John Blackmore, April 1957.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Franklin Smith to John Blackmore, 14 February 1957.

reform within the party, took umbrage with Spencer's insinuation that these ideas were outmoded, setting the stage for a vicious and divisive nomination contest.

Blackmore published a series of pamphlets refuting Spencer's allegations that he was an ineffective MP. In particular, Spencer's claim that Blackmore often went off on "tangents" during parliamentary debates infuriated him. Spencer alleged that, during a debate in the House of Commons on the St. Mary's Dam, Blackmore spoke on the subject for a scant five minutes before launching into a lengthy exposition of Social Credit monetary doctrine. In response, Blackmore sent a letter to Social Credit party members in Lethbridge demonstrating that he had never gone off topic in debates on the St. Mary's Dam, providing references to the *House of Commons Debates* to substantiate this.⁷⁵ Neither narrative represented the truth in its entirety. Blackmore was correct to point out that he had not spoken for over two hours on Social Credit doctrine at any point during parliamentary debates on the Dam project. However, other instances of speaking off topic reinforced Spencer's position. For example, in a debate on 30 April 1954 on the supply estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Blackmore used his speaking time to describe Social Credit's five-point plan for agriculture, which included using monetary inflation through the Bank of Canada to improve the economy's general well-being.⁷⁶ This was a clear departure from the direct issue at hand, and reinforced Spencer's observation that Blackmore sometimes used his speaking time to preach the virtues of monetary reform. Moreover, Spencer's assertion that Blackmore frequently expounded on "the long dead issues of Social Credit funny money" was accurate, as he often acted as his party's official

⁷⁵ Ibid., series M-100, file 70, "TANGENTS? And the St. Mary Dam," 19 March 1957.

⁷⁶ Speech by John Blackmore, *House of Commons Debates*, vol. 4: 1953-54, (Queen's Printer: First Session, Twenty-Second Parliament), 4294-4298.

spokesperson on matters of Social Credit doctrine.⁷⁷ In the end, despite the fact that the Alberta government remained neutral throughout the nomination battle, Blackmore was re-nominated at a tumultuous meeting in April 1957.⁷⁸ Spencer and his supporters glumly considered “bolting” from the Social Credit party, claiming that the proceedings of the nomination contest were rigged in Blackmore’s favour.⁷⁹ While Spencer failed to accurately represent Blackmore’s actions during the Dam debate, the overall issue of whether to incorporate Social Credit doctrine into the party’s official positions remained. This generational divide was typical of the Social Credit party in general, compromising the party’s unity and overall electoral efficacy.

Wheat marketing policies and the TransCanada pipeline issue dominated debates during the 1957 election.⁸⁰ The Progressive Conservatives, in particular, effectively crafted a program that responded to the concerns aired by Albertans on these two key issues. On the wheat marketing issue, the Conservatives utilized their newly-created Research Office to examine farm income statistics in the West between 1947 and 1957. Its report on Alberta revealed that, while the average gross income of farms increased, increased costs and a great variance in income between farms mitigated these gains.⁸¹ In particular, the Research Office report noted that, while large-scale operations continued to be profitable

⁷⁷ For example, during the debate on the Throne Speech in 1955, Blackmore spoke for over an hour on Social Credit “principles,” particularly the party’s position on the free flow of credit and the use of monetary inflation to stimulate economic activity. See: Speech by John Blackmore, *House of Commons Debates*, vol. 1: 1955, (Queen’s Printer: Second Session, Twenty-Second Parliament), 208-212. A cursory scan of the index for the *House of Commons Debates* between 1953 and 1957 reveals that Blackmore often spoke on “inflation,” “price controls,” “the monetary system,” and other topics related to the party’s monetary theories.

⁷⁸ “Govt. Isn’t Taking Sides,” *Lethbridge Herald*, 15 April 1957, 9; “Political Meeting Turns into Blackmore Rally,” *Lethbridge Herald*, 3 April 1957, 1.

⁷⁹ “Spencerites Threaten to Bolt Social Credit Party,” *Lethbridge Herald*, 8 May 1957, 1.

⁸⁰ As an indication of how important these two issues were in 1957, the *Medicine Hat News* ran a cover story early in the election proclaiming that “Wheat and the Gas Pipeline” were the only two issues receiving significant attention in all-candidates debates and speeches. See: “Wheat, Gas Pipeline Prominent Topics,” *Medicine Hat News*, 2 May 1957, 1.

⁸¹ LAC, Diefenbaker Papers, reel M9267, “Alberta Farm Income,” [1957], 166616-166618.

during the 1950s, many small farms were close to bankruptcy due to unmarketable surpluses, falling prices and increased costs. Ultimately, the report revealed that the “rosy” picture painted by the Liberal government of the situation on Alberta’s farms did not reflect a grimmer reality, giving the Conservatives an opportunity to demonstrate that they were more in-tune with agrarian concerns than their main adversaries.

An aggressive publicity campaign throughout the Western provinces on the grain marketing issue portrayed Diefenbaker as a decisive leader who would swiftly remedy the many inadequacies of current marketing policies. In a speech kicking off his western tour, Diefenbaker claimed that the Liberals were “doing nothing while the United States gobbled up Canada’s wheat export markets,” implying that the Liberals had a “tin ear” to agrarian concerns over this.⁸² This was a theme that was repeated *ad infinitum* for the rest of the campaign. A thirteen-point pamphlet on agricultural policy distributed to Conservative candidates for use during speeches essentially gave farmers everything they were asking for. The Conservatives rightly identified that stability was the core issue for farmers, who felt they were perpetually dealing with factors beyond their control, including weather, American grain policy, freight rates and the unavailability of export markets.⁸³ Cash advances, price guarantees, and the creation of a series of producer marketing boards to help market produce internationally were all promised.⁸⁴ This platform was virtually identical to the one advanced by George Drew in 1953, but it received greater attention due to Diefenbaker’s popularity and increased Progressive Conservative presence in rural constituencies.

⁸² “Liberal Rule Bodes Ill for Farmer – PC Head,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 15 May 1957, 9.

⁸³ The first point in the Conservative agricultural policy document committed the party to “the maximum stability of income to Canadian farmers.” See: LAC, Diefenbaker Papers, reel M9225, “Sixteen-Point Progressive Conservative Agricultural Policy 1957,” 123261 – 123264.

⁸⁴ Ibid. The creation of the Producer Marketing Board was strongly advanced by Bow River’s Conservative candidate, Eldon Woolliams. See: “Liberal Policies Rapped,” *Calgary Herald*, 23 May 1957, 42.

Social Credit also committed itself to increased support for farmers, much as they had done in past elections. The Social Credit platform boldly proclaimed that “any national programme that ignores the needs of our farm population is inviting economic disaster.”⁸⁵ The party pledged to introduce a price guarantee for wheat while seeking out “adequate foreign markets to dispose of our surplus farm output,” and protecting farmers from future crop losses.⁸⁶ Once again, the Social Credit platform for agriculture was not substantially different from the one proposed by the Progressive Conservatives. The party attempted to counter charges that Social Credit MPs were generally ineffective at gaining concessions for farmers by publishing a series of pamphlets listing its “accomplishments” over its twenty-one years of existence. One pamphlet, written by John Blackmore, largely focused on the accomplishments of the provincial government in Alberta, implying that the same quality of governance would be delivered in Ottawa if the party were given the chance.⁸⁷ A similar strategy was employed in another widely-circulated pamphlet which highlighted the provincial government’s strong fiscal record and achievements in encouraging economic development, especially in the agriculture and energy sectors.⁸⁸ Once again, the federal Social Credit party chose to rely on the popularity of Manning’s administration to gain support for its proposed legislative agenda relating to agricultural supports, as its “record of achievement” on that file at the federal level remained conspicuously modest and poorly defined.

The Liberals remained convinced that they could persuade farmers that the government was doing everything in its power to ameliorate their outstanding grievances.

⁸⁵ GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 482, “Social Credit Manual for Candidates, Campaign Managers and Key Speakers,” [1957], 40.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, file 31, John Blackmore, “What Social Credit Has Done in the Twenty-Two and One Half Years of its Administrative Experience in Canada,” [1957].

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, file 482, “Do You Know? The Accomplishments of a Social Credit Government,” [1957].

The “cost-price” squeeze which farmers were experiencing was dismissed as a temporary phenomenon caused by Canada’s rapid economic growth.⁸⁹ Speeches in the West by Louis St. Laurent and C.D. Howe assured farmers that markets would be found for their wheat “before very long” through concerted efforts to arrange export agreements with Communist countries, including the Soviet Union and China.⁹⁰ St. Laurent, Howe and Agriculture Minister Jimmy Gardiner were all short on specifics as to how this would be achieved if efforts to enter these markets failed. This left a questioning press to speculate that perhaps Ottawa believed dry years would eventually reduce crop yields to a level where they could be consumed and exported in their entirety – hardly an imaginative solution to the problem.⁹¹ C.D. Howe became a lightning rod for critics of the government’s agricultural policy following a disastrous meeting at Morris, Manitoba which was widely publicized throughout the West. From the beginning of this town hall meeting, the crowd jeered at Howe, who was roundly criticized by the local Liberal association president for his support of the government’s weak efforts on the agriculture file.⁹² Howe further tarnished the Liberal image by appearing utterly indifferent to the farmers’ plight, repeating many of the empty phrases uttered earlier by St. Laurent. “Indifference” came to epitomize the Liberal position on agriculture, which contrasted greatly from the ambitious (and costly) programs proposed by the Diefenbaker Conservatives and the Social Credit party.

Local Liberal candidates did little to counter the negative press prompted by Howe’s disastrous meeting in Manitoba and St. Laurent’s seemingly indifferent attitude to

⁸⁹ John Meisel, *The Canadian Federal Election of 1957*, 47-48.

⁹⁰ “Mr. St. Laurent on Wheat,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 2 May 1957, 11; “Howe Claims Canada is Negotiating for Further Wheat Sales,” *Lethbridge Herald*, 16 May 1957, 2; “Pipeline Controversy Howe’s ‘Big Headache,’” *Edmonton Journal*, 14 May 1957, 35.

⁹¹ “Mr. St. Laurent on Wheat,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 2 May 1957, 11.

⁹² “Jeers, Boos, Catcalls Tear Rally to Pieces,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 20 May 1957, 1. See also: John Meisel, *The Canadian Federal Election of 1957*, 184-186.

agricultural problems. Gordon Burton, the Liberal candidate in Macleod, acknowledged that surplus wheat was “the most urgent problem” faced by farmers in 1957, but proceeded to note that the federal government had already done much to increase exports and reduce grain acreage.⁹³ Burton’s solution was to increase grain storage capacity through government subsidies, which was a far cry from the Conservative pledge to market and sell grain at guaranteed prices. Two other Liberal candidates, Asael Palmer in Lethbridge and Fred Magera in Vegreville, prominently advertised the fact that they held Bachelor’s degrees in agricultural science to demonstrate that they were sufficiently knowledgeable to address agrarian concerns, although specific plans were not enunciated in any detail.⁹⁴ Fred Magera’s campaign office issued a press release partway through the campaign which likely did more harm than good. Magera echoed St. Laurent’s claim that “farmers have never had it so good” by simply repeating Liberal assurances that much had already been done to resolve the grain marketing problem and that more would be done to ensure that “as many Canadians as possible benefit from the good times we are now enjoying.”⁹⁵ The overall tone of the Liberal position implied that little more could be done to improve the situation on Alberta’s farms, criticizing other proposals as being overly expensive and unrealistic.⁹⁶ Crawford Ferguson, the Liberal candidate in Acadia, avoided discussions of specific issues, promising only to provide “non-partisan” representation for his constituents while maintaining close contact with them.⁹⁷ John Haar’s series of agricultural conferences earlier in the decade had apparently done little to improve the Liberal pitch to rural Alberta.

⁹³ Liberal advertisement: “Be for Burton,” *High River Times*, 25 April 1957, 8.

⁹⁴ Liberal advertisement, “Palmer for Parliament!” *Lethbridge Herald*, 21 May 1957, 15; GLA, LAA Papers, series M-1724, file 49, Liberal poster, “Vote Fred Magera,” [1957].

⁹⁵ Ibid., “News Release with One Col. Out for Fred Magera,” [1957].

⁹⁶ An editorial in the *Calgary Albertan* effectively summarized the prevailing attitude among leading Liberals. See: “The Wheat Surplus and the Election,” *Calgary Albertan*, 1 June 1957, 4.

⁹⁷ “Liberal Candidate Offers Riding 3-Point Platform,” *Calgary Herald*, 25 May 1957, 17.

The party's failure to effectively respond to the grievances of Alberta's farmers was one of the main factors behind its poor showing in rural Alberta in the 1957 election.

The TransCanada pipeline debate dominated headlines from coast-to-coast in 1956, and continued to animate political discussions into the 1957 campaign. Much of the country focused on the high-handed tactics employed by the Liberals to force the pipeline legislation through Parliament. Reflecting on 1957, Donald Fleming indicated that "the general election had become one of the most urgent necessities ever felt by the nation," given the "broken" and "dishonoured" state of Parliament in the aftermath of the pipeline debate.⁹⁸ Diefenbaker mentioned the pipeline debate in almost every speech he gave, claiming that the government had forced a bad deal on the Canadian population while disrespecting democratic norms and institutions.⁹⁹ A pamphlet entitled "Black Friday" repeated Diefenbaker's allegations and was distributed widely throughout the country.¹⁰⁰ While the government's parliamentary tactics were discussed in Alberta, much of the debate on the pipeline legislation focused on the influence of American capital in the development of Alberta's energy resources. At an all-party debate in Calgary, Conservative candidate Art Smith demonstrated that the Liberal government was ignoring warnings on the influence of American capital in key Canadian industries by siding exclusively with TransCanada in the pipeline's construction.¹⁰¹ Another debate in Calgary North, which attracted a crowd of 350, focused almost exclusively on the pipeline debate. Una Maclean claimed that the Conservatives had attempted to "muzzle" former Calgary

⁹⁸ Donald Fleming, *So Very Near: The Political Memoirs of Donald M. Fleming*, vol. 1, 321.

⁹⁹ "Pipeline Debate Major PC Weapon," *Edmonton Journal*, 6 May 1957, 2; "Torrid Pipeline Debate to Become Election Issue," *Calgary Albertan*, 6 May 1957, 16; "Harkness Takes Liberals to Task," *Calgary Herald*, 25 May 1957, 23.

¹⁰⁰ LAC, Diefenbaker Papers, reel M9225, "Black Friday," [1957], 123262-123263. A memo sent out to Conservative candidates prior to this pamphlet's publication drew their attention to the importance of the pipeline debate to the Conservative election strategy. See: *Ibid.*, "Important Note," [1957], 123165.

¹⁰¹ "Four Candidates do Battle Before Round Table Knights," *Calgary Herald*, 22 May 1957, 9.

South MP Carl Nickle during the debate, which was adamantly refuted by Doug Harkness and Art Smith.¹⁰² Both Conservative candidates claimed that the Liberal legislation “sold out” Canadian sovereignty to the United States while simultaneously denigrating the integrity of the parliamentary process. Both charges resonated with an electorate that had become increasingly skeptical of the merits of foreign investment since the last election.

The Conservatives were decidedly vague on how they would deal with the pipeline issue if they were to form the next government. Their sixteen-point platform avoided mentioning the issue directly, preferring to instead focus on “restoring the supremacy of Parliament” and “[developing] all natural resources for the benefit of all Canadians.”¹⁰³ Diefenbaker promised to appoint a Royal Commission to examine the issue of energy exports in more detail to determine the best course of action to take. The Conservatives hid behind the vagueness of their position on gas export, claiming that they were not against American investment; they only desired to examine the issue in more depth before entering into binding agreements with American energy firms. This “slow-and-steady” approach was contrasted with the Liberals’ allegedly “haphazard” plan for Canada’s trade, which Diefenbaker warned would lead Canada “down the road to serfdom.”¹⁰⁴ This position allowed the Conservatives to avoid answering hard questions on how they would proceed with the TransCanada project, allowing them to appeal to widespread fears on the negative influence of foreign capital while failing to offer a viable alternative.

The *Calgary Albertan* criticized Diefenbaker’s suspicion of the motives and interests of American energy companies, noting that Canada’s oil and gas reserves were

¹⁰² “Political Crossfire is Hot – Forum Lively,” *Calgary Herald*, 29 May 1957, 23; “Maclean, Harkness in Pitched Battle,” *Calgary Herald*, 30 May 1957, 17; “Personalities Emerge as Candidates Clash,” *Calgary Albertan*, 30 May 1957, 3.

¹⁰³ LAC, Diefenbaker Papers, reel M9225, “A Sixteen-Point Pledge for Canada: General Election Manifesto of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada,” [1957], 123227-123230.

¹⁰⁴ “Diefenbaker Sees ‘Serfdom’ in Liberal Trade Policies,” *Edmonton Journal*, 23 May 1957, 9.

just as much a strategic asset as American energy reserves were.¹⁰⁵ The *Albertan* believed that the interdependence of the North American market and Canada's important role in continental defense made American investment in energy a positive boon to the continent's economy and defense. This position largely mirrored the Liberal party's belief that foreign investment was a positive stimulant to and vote of confidence in Canada's economy. St. Laurent specifically targeted Conservative apprehensions over American foreign investment in his first televised speech, claiming that "it is faith in [Canada's] future that has brought a flood of investment money from the United States and other countries."¹⁰⁶ In another speech given at a town hall meeting in Edmonton, the Prime Minister avoided discussions of foreign investment, preferring instead to focus on the benefits the pipeline would bring to Canadians from British Columbia to Quebec. St. Laurent piously informed the assembled crowd that "the present administration is, I think, entitled to claim this important new national development as largely the result of its vision and patient persistence," ignoring the fact that all of the opposition parties also supported the pipeline's construction, although by different means.¹⁰⁷ In a separate televised speech, C.D. Howe similarly claimed that the construction of the TransCanada Pipeline was a project of "national importance" that the Liberals successfully implemented to the benefit of all Canadians.¹⁰⁸ The Liberals and their supporters in the media attempted to demonstrate that foreign investment was a function of Canada's strong economic position, rather than something to be feared. Ultimately, the cautious position taken by the Conservatives was

¹⁰⁵ "Canada's Oil to the U.S.," *Calgary Albertan*, 17 May 1957, 4.

¹⁰⁶ LAC, Kidd Papers, vol. 7, file 30, "National Liberal Federation of Canada – First National Broadcast by The Right Honourable Louis St. Laurent, Q.C., Prime Minister of Canada and Leader of the Liberal Party," 29 April 1957, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., "Notes for Address by the Right Honourable Louis St. Laurent, Prime Minister of Canada – Edmonton, Alberta," 30 April 1957, 2.

¹⁰⁸ GLA, LAA Papers, series M-1724, file 61, "National Liberal Federation of Canada – Broadcast by the Right Honourable C.D. Howe, Minister of Trade and Commerce and Defense Production," 8 May 1957, 2.

more compelling to voters who were unsure of the benefits of foreign investment.

Diefenbaker was careful to avoid lampooning the pipeline project itself, implying that he would not stifle Canada's economic growth, but would merely monitor it more effectively to ensure it developed in the country's best interests. Thus, in the war of rhetoric on the TransCanada pipeline, the Conservatives emerged as the clear victors.

On 10 June 1957, John Diefenbaker led the Progressive Conservative party to its first national victory since 1930. In Alberta, the party doubled its share of the popular vote while all others saw their shares decline. They benefitted from the superb leadership of W.J.C Kirby and Jean Robinson and the significant improvements in local organization they oversaw. Diefenbaker proved to be a more popular leader in Alberta than his predecessor, which was further enhanced by the slick advertising and publicity campaign conducted by national headquarters focusing predominantly on the Conservative leader. While the Conservatives only gained a single seat in the province, they had much to be optimistic about, given that many assumed the next election would follow soon. The Liberals suffered a significant setback, losing all but one of their seats. None of their star candidates succeeded in getting elected in 1957, although William Hawrelak came within 284 votes of defeating the Social Credit incumbent in Edmonton East. Internecine squabbles between the provincial and federal wings of the party hampered publicity efforts and led to a more disorganized and decentralized campaign than the Liberals had originally envisaged. Much of the blame for this must be placed on the shoulders of John Haar and George Prudham, who stubbornly insisted on their preferred method of controlling the campaign despite significant opposition from their provincial cousins. Party policy on grain marketing and the TransCanada pipeline project also contributed to the Liberal decline, as they failed to cater to the prevailing sentiments of the times. Social Credit

appeared to be the biggest winner in 1957 as the fringe party increased its representation in Alberta by two seats. This instilled a false sense of confidence in the Socred leadership and masked the rot that threatened the foundations of their popularity. The federal Social Credit party appeared increasingly anachronistic in the rapidly developing and modernizing province, and its popularity was genuinely threatened by the Conservative resurgence. The 1957 election set the stage for the next federal campaign which occurred a mere nine months later, when the Conservative ascendancy was confirmed.

Chapter 5

The Tide Turns: Alberta Politics in 1958

The gradual shift in Alberta's electoral preferences over the course of the 1950s culminated with a climax in the federal election of 1958. John Diefenbaker's Conservatives, who had made significant gains in 1957, replaced Social Credit as the dominant party in Alberta. The "Diefenbaker sweep" was overwhelming – all seventeen of Alberta's ridings returned Conservative MPs in 1958, fifteen of them with an absolute majority of the popular vote. In fact, the Progressive Conservatives won 59.9% of the popular vote in Alberta, a dramatic and decisive victory by any account. This came at the expense of both the Liberals and Social Credits, who each hemorrhaged support to Diefenbaker's party. Its roots were laid in the years since the 1953 election. The brief minority parliament of 1957-1958 was significant in that the Conservatives moved quickly to act on the two key issues that had dominated political discourse in Alberta for the last decade. Diefenbaker appointed royal commissions to study the issues of grain marketing and gas export in more detail, which granted him the ability to avoid answering direct questions on these issues. Instead, his government broadly hinted that it was sympathetic with individuals who were concerned about Canada's economic sovereignty and her ability to market produce effectively without firmly committing to any policies before the commissions issued their recommendations. This was a sufficient contrast with the previous Liberal administration, and it succeeded in endearing many Albertans to Diefenbaker's agenda, which was seen to be more broadly focused on the issues that were important to westerners. Furthermore, the Conservative victory in 1957 attracted many new organizers and supporters to the party in advance of the 1958 campaign. This allowed

the Conservatives to mount their most ambitious effort in Alberta to date, eclipsing the waning bids of the Liberals and Socreds, whose organizational effectiveness had been considerably eroded due to internecine quarrels and poor leadership. Ultimately, all of the political trends of the mid-1950s culminated in the Progressive Conservative victory in 1958, ushering in a new era in Alberta's political history which has, with the exception of the Reform/Alliance interlude at the end of the twentieth century, endured to the present day.

On gas export, Diefenbaker appointed Henry Borden, an oil tycoon and son of former Prime Minister Robert Borden, to chair a Royal Commission on Energy which was tasked with examining Canada's energy industry and making recommendations on how it should be managed in the future. In particular, Diefenbaker strongly hinted that his government was considering the option of creating a national energy board which, by assessing each project's merits and net-benefit to the Canadian economy, would issue permits to companies on a case-by-case basis.¹ Ernest Manning spoke out in favour of the government's cautious approach towards gas export, noting that he was confident that "the government would not hold up exports of natural gas from the Prairies to the United States."² The Premier even supported increased regulation for the industry, which he agreed would assuage the concerns of those who felt that foreign investment in non-renewable natural resources was potentially harmful to the Canadian economy.³ Significantly, Canada's energy producers also conceded that increased government

¹ An article in *Saturday Night* speculated that Diefenbaker was using the Commission as a cover to silently moderate his party's stance in favour of gas export through increased regulation, as opposed to an outright moratorium on foreign ownership of energy resources. See: "Henry Borden: Probing the Pipeline," *Saturday Night*, 23 November 1957, 8-10. The *Calgary Herald* supported increased regulation while allowing gas export. See: "The Commission on Canada's Future," *Calgary Herald*, 1 February 1958, 4.

² "Manning Believes Govt. Will Allow Gas Export," *Calgary Herald*, 9 November 1957.

³ "New Gas Export Policy Called for by Manning," *Calgary Herald*, 2 March 1958.

oversight would help set a coherent national policy on energy exports, giving the country a mechanism to respond to changes in American import policies.⁴ Thus, while the Conservatives did not move to alter the TransCanada agreement specifically, their position on energy export struck a balance between economic nationalism and encouraging the industry's development.

The Borden Commission continued to hold hearings in Alberta during the 1958 election, which ensured that its proceedings would receive media attention. The decision to continue to hold hearings was unusual, as other royal commissions, including the Agricultural Price Spreads commission, suspended operations for the duration of the campaign.⁵ Furthermore, shortly after the election began, Borden announced that his inquiry was planning on releasing an interim report in the fall dealing specifically with the oil and gas industries, ostensibly for the purpose of eliminating uncertainty over the direction of government policy.⁶ Undoubtedly, the Borden commission's Alberta hearings during the election had a substantial impact on public opinion, as many groups made submissions to the committee both in favour of and against energy export. Representatives from Calgary's municipal government gave a presentation which was widely reported in Alberta's papers. The city was worried that Alberta's gas reserves were inadequate to meet future domestic needs, rendering the extensive export of these resources imprudent.⁷ Notably, even these skeptics were supportive of the Conservative government's moderate

⁴ While not related explicitly to natural gas, a report on market outlets for Canadian crude noted that the industry was, generally, reliant on "the development of U.S. import policy" in expanding its operations, making national programs and increased negotiations with American energy regulators essential to securing the industry's future viability. See: LAC, Diefenbaker Papers, reel M9219, "Market Outlets for Canadian Crude Oil: Problems and Prospects," December 1957, vi.

⁵ "Price Spreads Probe Delays Hearings Until After Election," *Hamilton Spectator*, 6 February 1958.

⁶ "Borden Plans Interim Report," *Calgary Herald*, 14 February 1958.

⁷ "An Alberta View of Alberta Gas," *Calgary Herald*, 10 February 1958, 4.

solution, as a national energy board would ensure that the province's domestic requirements were considered before contemplating any energy exports.

One week later, the Canadian Petroleum Association made a presentation which countered the city's pessimistic outlook, claiming that a "conservative" estimate of Canada's oil reserves was 30 trillion barrels, while Canada's gas reserves were estimated at 300 trillion cubic feet.⁸ The Association was confident that this energy bounty was sufficient to cover Canada's domestic needs while simultaneously allowing for the export of large quantities to south of the border. Just as the pessimists with the city of Calgary were assuaged by the Conservative government's tentative plan to create an energy board, the CPA was also satisfied that the implementation of a comprehensive national energy strategy "would certainly assist in further exploration of gas which is now almost at a standstill."⁹ Indeed, representatives from the energy industry seemed comfortable with increased government involvement in and oversight of their efforts, if for no other reason than to increase certainty in the direction of government policy.

Tellingly, the diametrically-opposed editorial boards of the *Calgary Herald* and *Calgary Albertan* ultimately agreed on the desirability of creating a national energy board. Editorially, both newspapers took contrary positions over the course of the commission's hearings, with the *Herald* arguing in favour of increased government oversight and caution in exporting energy resources and the *Albertan* arguing that the government was needlessly holding up export arrangements over unfounded fears of the influence of American capital.¹⁰ These editorials became increasingly strident in their criticism of the opposite

⁸ "Petroleum Association Urges Natural Gas Export Policy," *Calgary Albertan*, 12 February 1958.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See, for example: "The Tory View of Oil and Gas," *Calgary Albertan*, 20 February 1958, 4; "Canada's Gas Needs a New Focus," *Calgary Herald*, 20 February 1958, 4.

viewpoint by the end of the 1958 campaign. The *Calgary Albertan* asked “what is there about oil and gas that causes the jackals to yap so much?” claiming that fears over Canada getting short-changed in energy export arrangements were “unfounded.”¹¹ The *Herald* excoriated the federal Social Credit caucus for charging that the cautious Conservative approach acted “against the best interest of this province,” describing their position as “a tawdry device by a party that is nationally threadbare.”¹² After the 1958 election, both sides agreed that creating an energy board was in the national interest, with the *Herald* noting that examining export contracts was the best way to protect both producers and consumers while the *Albertan* conceded that “there is merit in the suggestion that Canada have an energy board” to provide clear direction to the industry.¹³ Thus, it is clear that the Diefenbaker government’s centrist stance on energy export successfully held the middle ground between its ardent supporters and detractors. This virtually unassailable position was one of the most significant factors which contributed to the party’s mammoth victory in Alberta in 1958.

The short-lived Conservative minority government tackled the issue of agricultural marketing programs in the same way it dealt with the energy export issue – by appointing a royal commission. The Royal Commission on Agricultural Price Spreads was convened to investigate the alleged gap between the price of agricultural implements and the income received by farmers for their produce. This was supplemented by renewed efforts to expand export opportunities. One of Diefenbaker’s closest advisors, M.W. Menzies, sent him a detailed memo on the agricultural price spreads issue shortly after the 1957 campaign

¹¹ “Has Bennett Stopped Beating His Wife?” *Calgary Albertan*, 26 April 1958, 4.

¹² “The Gas Problem in Canadian Terms,” *Calgary Herald*, 17 February 1958, 4.

¹³ “‘Politicians’ and the Gas Rates,” *Calgary Herald*, 30 June 1958, 4; “A National Energy Board,” *Calgary Albertan*, 7 May 1958, 4.

had ended. Menzies claimed that “the plan to reduce the [wheat] surplus is a simple one: increase exports by 50 million bushels a year, and hold wheat area to the present level of about 20 million acres.”¹⁴ While Menzies acknowledged that environmental factors could “help enormously” by reducing crop yields, he advised Diefenbaker to take the initiative and develop policies that would counter the issue based on “average” crop-yield expectations. This suggestion led to the creation of the Agricultural Price Spreads Commission, which investigated the issue in detail while giving the government significant publicity over its efforts.

The Conservative government was more attuned to the concerns of western farmers than the previous administration. The instructions given to the Price Spreads Commission noted that “farmers are primarily concerned with the relative, not the absolute, level of farm prices,” and with net as opposed to gross income.¹⁵ This observation contrasted sharply with the St. Laurent administration’s indifferent attitude to the way farmers measured their prosperity, having preferred to focus on gross income levels without considering the effect of increased costs on overall farm budgets. The commission termed this renewed focus on net income as “the price-cost squeeze,” which inevitably led to the expansion of their terms of reference to include index farm prices in addition to an examination of grain marketing strategies. While the commission recognized that this broadened scope “could easily grow to unmanageable proportions,” they were confident that selectively examining “a few of the more significant items entering into the farmer’s production and living costs” would not compromise the integrity of their endeavour.¹⁶ In particular, the commission sought to study the cost of manufactured agricultural implements and their impact on farm budgets.

¹⁴ LAC, Diefenbaker Papers, reel M9267, 166433, M.W. Menzies to John Diefenbaker, 23 July 1957, 1.

¹⁵ Ibid., 166511-166514, “Agricultural Price Spreads Commission,” 7 October 1957, 1.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1-2.

Ultimately, one fundamental difference was noted – agricultural commodity values were entirely governed by market and supply relations while secondary industries were more readily capable of “varying rates of production” to set prices at profitable levels.¹⁷ This observation echoed the prevailing opinion of agricultural communities, which had persistently complained about the pricing tactics employed by secondary industries for decades. The terms of reference given to the Price Spreads Commission in the fall of 1957 demonstrated to farmers that the new Conservative government was more attentive to their concerns than the St. Laurent administration, giving them hope that their grievances would finally be addressed.

As was noted previously, the Agricultural Price Spreads Commission ceased public hearings once the 1958 election was called. Indeed, it had only begun to accept submissions and hear arguments in February 1958, so the impact of its proceedings on public opinion was muted. However, farmers were genuinely impressed by the Diefenbaker government’s other efforts on the agriculture file. In particular, Minister of Trade and Commerce Gordon Churchill’s efforts to find new international markets for Canadian wheat were hailed by farmers who had been calling for decisive action on that front for years. Churchill made trips to Great Britain, the West Indies and Colombo Plan countries to encourage them to purchase Canadian wheat. His efforts were rewarded in January 1958, when he announced that the government would pay to send wheat to several Colombo Plan countries, including India, Ceylon and Pakistan, as a form of aid.¹⁸ This had the double benefit of increasing Canada’s foreign aid contributions while simultaneously reducing the grain surplus. While Churchill failed to secure stable overseas markets for

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., reel M9225, 123364-123366, “Talking Points – Wheat,” [1958].

Canadian grain, his success in temporarily offsetting the wheat surplus through government subsidies was positively received by western farmers. The government also swiftly enacted price support legislation to give farmers increased certainty on the returns they could expect to receive.¹⁹ If nothing else, the government demonstrated that it was serious about tackling agrarian issues – a sharp contrast to the consistent indifference shown by past Liberal administrations.

On the eve of the federal election, it was clear that the short-lived Conservative minority government had succeeded in fostering a great deal of goodwill in Canada's rural communities. In a memo circulated to the federal cabinet just prior to the commencement of the campaign, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture indicated that "it is a matter of great satisfaction to us that the Minister of Agriculture [Doug Harkness] could tell our annual meeting last week that the plans of your government for the next year included legislation in ... farm credit, land use and crop insurance," with further efforts envisioned following the report of the Price Spreads inquiry.²⁰ The CFA urged the government to adopt further measures to counter the price-cost squeeze as early as was practicable, but was encouraged by government efforts to date. As with the Borden Commission on Energy, the Diefenbaker government successfully increased support for its agricultural program by appointing a royal commission to examine the issue in detail. This allowed the government to defer making tough decisions on the file to a later date while appearing to be sympathetic to the concerns of agricultural communities.

Increased support for the Conservatives in Alberta translated into substantial improvements in fundraising and organization in the intervening period between the 1957

¹⁹ Ibid., 123335, "Talking Points – Agriculture," [1958].

²⁰ Ibid., 166571-166574, "Presentation to the Prime Minister and Honourable Ministers – The Canadian Federation of Agriculture," 5 February 1957, 1.

and 1958 elections. Significantly, improvements in provincial fundraising efforts allowed the party to appoint a full-time paid organizer for the province to match John Haar's role in the Liberal party. Harris Rogers, a decorated veteran of the First and Second World Wars, was appointed as the official organizer for the Alberta Progressive Conservatives in the summer of 1957.²¹ Rogers had ran as the Conservative candidate in Red Deer in 1957, and indicated his intention to do so again. In his new capacity, he proceeded to tour the province to assess the organizational state of the party. Within a month of assuming his position, Rogers had presided over a re-organization meeting in Acadia, which he claimed "now has quite a broad representation over the entire constituency," and had organized nomination meetings in Wetaskiwin, Lethbridge and Macleod.²² The Conservatives in Peace River reported that they had "met three times" over the summer, and were actively canvassing the area to raise the profile of their candidate, G.W. Baldwin.²³ In accordance with Diefenbaker's and Kirby's stated wishes, Jean Robinson assisted Rogers in organizing nomination meetings before the end of the year.²⁴ She was optimistic that "many [Social Credit supporters] who still support the Social Credit government provincially, could be induced, in these greatly changed conditions to support the Diefenbaker candidate in the next election federally," so long as the party worked hard to nominate strong candidates and recruit quality volunteers for the next campaign.²⁵ In a letter sent to Conservative supporters across the province, Rogers echoed Robinson's enthusiasm by claiming that "this is a most opportune time in Western Canadian history."²⁶ Indeed, Conservatives

²¹ GLA, PCAA Papers, series M-1744, file 58, Harris Rogers to C.W. Niblock, 31 August 1957.

²² Ibid.; Ibid., file 63, Harris Rogers to PC Supporters, 16 September 1957.

²³ Ibid., file 60, F.B. Ferguson to P.L. Pue, 16 September 1957.

²⁴ Ibid., file 50, Jean Robinson to J.C. Bigelow, 3 October 1957.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., file 63, Roger Harris to PC Supporters, 16 September 1957.

were encouraged by the positive results of the 1957 campaign, and felt confident that having a “western PM” would improve their fortunes leading into the next campaign.

By the end of the year, Rogers had succeeded in compiling several reports on the organizational state of the party in targeted ridings. Some of these reports highlighted friction between party organizers at the ground level. In Macleod, the defeated candidate from 1957, Dr. Lawrence Kindt, was at odds with the riding association president, R.C. Fraser, who he claimed was failing to give him adequate support to reorganize the constituency.²⁷ While Rogers believed Kindt was “overly self-centered,” and likely fuelled the quarrel with his abrasive personality, he was impressed with Kindt’s “strong showing” in the election and his tireless efforts to send personalized letters to people in his riding informing them of Conservative activities and policies.²⁸ Rogers adeptly moved to defuse the situation by holding a nomination meeting early in October to confirm whether or not Kindt had sufficient support to carry the nomination in Macleod. Kindt was acclaimed as the Conservative candidate at that meeting, and he subsequently moved to repair relations with Fraser. The two ultimately crafted a comprehensive strategy to divide the riding into twelve districts which would be overseen by groups of resident party workers.²⁹ While Kindt was forced to respond to charges that he had been sponsored as the favoured candidate by provincial headquarters, his work in organizing the constituency was a significant improvement on the situation that existed there prior to the 1957 campaign, putting the Conservatives on a solid foundation for the election to come.³⁰ Rogers’ success

²⁷ Ibid., file 59, “Progress Report of Provincial Organizer, Harris Rogers – Macleod Constituency,” 30 August 1957, 1.

²⁸ Ibid., 1-2. For an example of the correspondence Kindt sent to his supporters in Macleod, see: Ibid., Lawrence Kindt to “sir,” November 1957.

²⁹ Ibid., Lawrence Kindt, “Organization in the Macleod Constituency for the Coming Election,” December 1957.

³⁰ Ibid., Lawrence Kindt to Harris Rogers, 17 January 1958.

in uniting the quarreling factions in Macleod helped prepare his party for the coming campaign, as everyone ultimately agreed to set aside their differences in favour of promoting unity and winning the election.

Other reports were positive in their assessment of Conservative prospects. In Battle River-Camrose the mayors of Wainwright and Lloydminster began openly supporting the Conservatives after Diefenbaker won the 1957 election, and a significant group of individuals began organizing on behalf of the party in Camrose.³¹ Additionally, Rogers remarked that support for the Conservatives in the rural areas surrounding these three towns “seems quite high,” indicating that the party’s prospects were improving throughout the district. In Lethbridge, Rogers was optimistic that a newly-formed Young Progressive Conservative chapter would invigourate party activities in the area, despite the fact that there was no consensus on a candidate in the fall of 1957.³² In Bow River, the local PCWA chapter was active updating mailing lists and organizing publicity meetings for the Conservative candidate, Eldon Woolliams.³³ Bow River was a particularly attractive riding to the Conservatives, as Woolliams polled a close second to the incumbent Social Credit MP in the area in the 1957 contest. In his report on Vegreville, Rogers noted that it was imperative that the party select a prominent member of the Ukrainian community to act as the party’s standard-bearer.³⁴ The riding association president, Buster Shaw, worked hard to organize meetings and canvass the area for interest in the nomination, and his wife began organizing a new chapter of the PCWA to assist his efforts. Rogers was optimistic that Mrs. Shaw’s involvement would increase Conservative fortunes in Vegreville, as she was

³¹ Ibid., file 49, Harris Rogers, “Report of Harris Rogers re: Battle River-Camrose Constituency,” 19 December 1957.

³² Ibid., file 57, Harris Rogers, “Lethbridge Constituency,” 30 August 1957.

³³ Ibid., file 50, Jean Robinson to J.C. Bigelow, 3 October 1957.

³⁴ Ibid., file 62, Harris Rogers, “Report of Harris Rogers – Vegreville Constituency,” 19 December 1957.

already well-known in the community as the president of the local chapter of the International Order Daughters of the Empire. On the whole, Conservative reorganization efforts were robust in the intervening period between the 1957 and the 1958 elections. The enthusiasm shown by local volunteers and organizers was indicative of the party's improved fortunes under Prime Minister Diefenbaker, and foreshadowed its success in the 1958 contest.

Compared with the previous election, Liberal reorganization was lethargic in advance of the 1958 contest, despite the significant publicity the party received from its leadership convention in January 1958. Former Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent, who was demoralized and depressed following his government's defeat, indicated his intention to resign as Liberal leader shortly after the 1957 election results were clear. His Minister of External Affairs, Lester B. Pearson, was widely assumed to be his heir apparent. While Pearson received competition from his former cabinet colleague, Paul Martin, he succeeded in winning the leadership on the first ballot by a wide margin. In his acceptance speech, Pearson excoriated the short-lived Conservative government for its indecision on important economic issues and for "throwing the budget out-of-balance" by implementing "extravagant and contradictory promises."³⁵ Without providing specifics, Pearson promised a return to the "steady" economic stewardship of his predecessors to combat the economic recession, which he partially blamed the Conservative administration for exacerbating.³⁶ The tenor of his acceptance speech demonstrated that the Liberal appeal in 1958 would not differ substantially from the strategy it utilized time and time again under Louis St. Laurent. Thus, while the ascension of Mr. Pearson to the rarefied heights of the

³⁵ LAC, Howe Papers, vol. 108, file 75(5), "4th National Liberal Convention – Acceptance Address by the Honourable Lester B. Pearson, P.C., M.P.," 16 January 1958, 6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6-10.

Liberal leadership was met with great fanfare, it did not mark a substantive break from past practice.

Despite Pearson's assurances that reorganization was a top priority for the party, Alberta's organizational apparatus became lethargic and complacent in the months following the 1957 election. The outgoing President of the Alberta Liberal Association, Wilf Edgar, noted that "there has [sic] been a few casualties in our Party" since the election, as many local organizers resigned from their positions due to the party's disappointing showing.³⁷ H.E. Kidd was concerned by the fact that he "had not heard much from Alberta" since the campaign ended, and urged Edgar to work harder "to bring about a more satisfactory state of affairs."³⁸ What little he had heard was not particularly encouraging. K.G. Montgomery, the secretary for the Liberals in Edmonton West, informed Kidd that mailing lists for the constituency were out of date.³⁹ J.M. Dechene, the sole Liberal MP remaining in Alberta after the carnage of 1957, noted that all but one individual on his mailing list (for Athabasca) "have either left the district or have died since the list was last updated."⁴⁰ Further compounding the party's difficulties, Dechene pleaded with Senator John Connolly, the newly appointed overseer for the federal Liberals in Alberta, to allow him to retire before the next election as he was "too old."⁴¹ Dechene and his counterparts were caught off guard by the dissolution of Parliament in February 1958, however, leaving him no choice but to stand once again as the Liberal candidate in Athabasca due to the lack of a suitable alternative. While the party succeeded in meeting its fundraising target of \$15,000 in advance of the leadership convention, its preoccupation with the convention

³⁷ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 653, file "Red Deer," Wilf Edgar to H.E. Kidd, 8 November 1957.

³⁸ Ibid., H.E. Kidd to Wilf Edgar, 13 November 1957.

³⁹ Ibid., vol. 650, file "Alberta Liberal Association 1957-59," K.G. Montgomery to H.E. Kidd, 2 October 1957.

⁴⁰ Ibid., vol. 652, file "Athabasca," J.M. Dechene to H.E. Kidd, 4 November 1957.

⁴¹ Ibid., vol. 847, file "Alberta," J.M. Dechene to Senator J.J. Connolly, 6 February 1958.

stalled serious reorganization efforts in Alberta.⁴² Mailing lists, candidate nominations, and volunteer recruitment remained incomplete when the writ was dropped, leaving the Alberta Liberals ill-prepared for the campaign.

Persistent internal strife compounded these serious organizational handicaps. In fact, the divisions which had hampered Liberal efforts in the past deepened following revelations that former minister George Prudham was withholding thousands of dollars of campaign donations to protest the way the party was being managed. In a memo to Lester B. Pearson, Duncan MacTavish explained that Prudham had “pressured” the chief collector in Alberta, Victor MacCosham, to remit all donations and funds to him in 1957 since “he was the minister politically responsible for Alberta.”⁴³ As MacTavish was familiar with the amount of money raised by the party prior to the 1957 campaign, he estimated that Prudham was in possession of over \$100 000 in improperly withheld campaign donations.⁴⁴ André Dechene, the son of MP J.M. Dechene, estimated that the actual total was “in the order of \$200 000,” making the funds particularly important to the Liberal effort in 1958.⁴⁵ Prudham obtained control of these funds without anyone’s knowledge or approval, and caught the leadership of the party in Alberta completely off-guard when they realized that they lacked sufficient funds to launch their election preparations.

Prudham’s motive was to ensure that the money was directed to his own supporters in the federal party. John Haar, who was seeking the Liberal nomination in Edmonton West, and Bill Dyde, who was challenging William Hawrelak for the nomination in

⁴² LAC, Howe Papers, vol. 109, file 75(8), “Standing of Budget,” 16 January 1958.

⁴³ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 847, file “Alberta,” Duncan MacTavish, “Memo for Mr. Pearson re: Alberta – Organization – Financing,” 6 February 1958.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., J.M. Dechene, “Personal and Very Confidential,” 6 February 1958. Interestingly, Dechene implored MacTavish to destroy this memo “once it has served your purposes” to avoid potential legal repercussions. Evidently, Dechene’s request was not acted upon.

Edmonton East, were supportive of Prudham's effort to remit the funds to the federal office.⁴⁶ J. Harper Prowse and Hawrelak were opposed to this scheme, as they feared their influence over the coming election would be diminished if the funds were remitted to the federal office in their entirety.⁴⁷ At least in part, Prudham's insistence was attributable to the waning influence of his supporters within the Alberta Liberal ranks. In December 1957, the Alberta Liberal Association (the provincial arm of the party) nominated a new slate of officers which was dominated by Prudham's former detractors from the federal wing. John Decore, the former MP from Vegreville who had previously expressed dissatisfaction with Prudham's leadership, became the new provincial president. The two vice-presidents nominated were J.M. Dechene and J. Harper Prowse.⁴⁸ Prudham's influence was even threatened in the federal branch of the party. Haar was demoted from his position as federal organizer and was replaced by André Dechene, who was sympathetic to his provincial counterparts and was supportive of closer integration between the two branches.⁴⁹ It can be surmised that Prudham desired to direct the funds away from the provincial association, ensuring that the federal office retained its primacy in elections under its official jurisdiction. To his credit, John Decore refused to take sides in the dispute, preferring to leave the matter to the National Liberal Federation and Lester Pearson to resolve.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ It is unclear whether Prudham desired to influence the nomination contest in Edmonton East by remitting the funds in his possession to the federal office, although Dyde's support of Prudham's action could indicate that this was one of Prudham's motives. See: Ibid., "Notes on Senator Connolly's Call from John Decore," [February 1958].

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 650, file "Alberta Liberal Association – 1957-1959," W.C. Warwick to H.E. Kidd, 13 December 1957.

⁴⁹ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file "Alberta Liberal Association – Election 1958," John Decore to Senator J.J. Connolly, 10 February 1958.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The impasse was eventually broken by the intervention of the latter, who threatened legal action against Prudham if he refused to remit the funds without any attached conditions to Senator John Connolly, his chosen financial agent in Alberta.⁵¹ Even then, Connolly was faced with the difficult task of mediating between the two factions in Edmonton over who would receive the money, a thankless task that virtually guaranteed the enmity of one group. While the documentary record on the resolution of this issue is unclear, it appears that William Hawrelak disassociated himself from the federal party after Bill Dyde and John Haar were nominated to contest Edmonton East and West respectively, as he did not campaign on behalf of the party in 1958. Regardless, this serious breach of protocol demonstrates that relations between the two branches of the Liberal party in Alberta had reached a new low prior to the 1958 election. Combined with the organizational woes experienced by the party in the nine months between the 1957 and 1958 elections, Liberal prospects in Alberta were not particularly encouraging.

Social Credit continued its steady decline following the 1957 campaign. In fact, by 1958, Social Credit was in the worst organizational and financial shape of its short history. W.A.C. Bennett's Social Credit government became disenchanted with the federal party after it failed to repay loans the British Columbia League had given them previously to assist in the 1957 campaign, prompting him to cease all financial donations to the federal branch.⁵² Indeed, the beleaguered Solon Low stated in a letter to the B.C. party that "I am afraid it will take a little time to recover from the shock of the figures which you set out,"

⁵¹ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 847, file "Alberta," Telegram Lester Pearson to George Prudham, 10 February 1958. Prudham duly complied with Pearson's request, fearing legal action. He ultimately remitted \$105,103.32 in cash, government bonds, and treasury bills to Senator Connolly. See: Ibid., T.C. Marshall to Senator J.J. Connolly, 17 February 1958.

⁵² Halliday, "Social Credit as a National Party in Canada," 162.

which claimed that the federal party was over \$200,000 in arrears.⁵³ The split was confirmed when Premier Bennett boycotted a National Council meeting to discuss financial issues in October 1957.⁵⁴ In a further blow to the party's solvency, subscription rates to the *Canadian Social Crediter* fell to their lowest level in years following the 1957 campaign, prompting the party to issue a questionnaire to those subscribers who remained to solicit recommendations on how the publication could be improved.⁵⁵ In the interim, the party's official organ continued to be subsidized by the Alberta Social Credit League, which became even more essential to its solvency due to the ongoing dispute with the British Columbia League. These financial issues ultimately forced the Socreds to suspend activities at national headquarters and lay off their full-time national organizer, leaving federal organization and coordination to the provincial leagues.⁵⁶ Low also recommended that plans to hold a national rally in the fall of 1957 be put on hold until the party's financial issues were resolved.⁵⁷ These decisions made it all but impossible for the Social Credit party to seriously contest the 1958 campaign as a national party, making it appear even more parochial than before.

Organizationally, the federal Socreds remained beholden to the same aging leadership group that held the party back in 1957. F.D. Shaw urged Solon Low to continue as federal leader after the disappointing national results became known, claiming that "there is no one in our group or even in sight who could do as good a job as you have done

⁵³ GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 291, Solon Low to E.M. Gunderson, 21 June 1957.

⁵⁴ Ibid., file 477, "Social Credit – Regular Caucus Minutes," 12 October 1957, 2. Following this, Solon Low met with Premier Bennett in British Columbia to encourage him to re-engage with the party, ultimately to no avail. See: Ibid., "Social Credit Caucus Minutes," 30 October 1957, 1.

⁵⁵ Ibid. file 493, "We Are Not Satisfied...", *Canadian Social Crediter*, September 1957, 2.

⁵⁶ Ibid., file 70, Solon Low to A.G. MacPhail, 15 June 1957; Ibid., file 360, Solon Low to Peer Paynter, 7 August 1957.

⁵⁷ Ibid., file 477, "Social Credit – Regular Caucus Minutes," 12 October 1957, 2.

since 1945 and I am hopeful that it is your intention to carry on in your present position.”⁵⁸ Indeed, Low, Blackmore, Shaw, Hansell and the rest of the Social Credit caucus remained firmly entrenched at the top of the federal party’s hierarchy, and gave no indication of any interest in ceding power to younger party members in the aftermath of the 1957 contest. A “critical analysis” of the state of the party commissioned by Low in December 1957 confirmed that the leadership was out of touch with public opinion on important issues. In addition to addressing logistical issues such as poor coordination between provincial Social Credit leagues and the federal party and literature distribution issues, the critical analysis stated that the party “should more clearly emphasize the fundamentals of monetary reform” in their next platform, indicating that the Socred leadership remained committed to the failed orthodoxies of its past.⁵⁹ This failure to inject youth into the Social Credit movement contrasted unfavourably with the energetic efforts of the ascendant Conservatives.

Solon Low’s abortive attempts to reinvigorate his moribund party in the weeks prior to the commencement of the 1958 campaign demonstrated that Social Credit was in poor shape. In the absence of a single, large rally, Low proposed to hold a series of mini-conferences across the country to appoint new provincial organizers and kick start fundraising drives.⁶⁰ While Low succeeded at electing a new federal party President, B.R. Leboe, to assist him in his efforts, only two regional conventions had been completed before the writ was dropped.⁶¹ Indeed, Low was caught completely off-guard by Diefenbaker’s abrupt election call, noting glumly that “plans will have to be laid quickly for nomination conventions and all the rest of the rigmarole we have to go through.”⁶² The

⁵⁸ Ibid., file 430, F.D. Shaw to Solon Low, 18 June 1957.

⁵⁹ Ibid., file 479, “Summary of Critical Analysis,” 22 January 1958.

⁶⁰ Ibid., file 477, “Social Credit Regular Caucus Minutes,” 11 December 1957, 1.

⁶¹ Halliday, “Social Credit as a National Party in Canada,” 163.

⁶² GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 430, Solon Low to William Sharpe, 3 February 1958.

federal Social Credit party was in the worst organizational and financial shape it had ever been in, a dark harbinger of the party's imminent prospects.

Social Credit's poor organizational and financial position was compounded by the difficulty the party faced in countering Diefenbaker's popular image in Alberta. Indeed the party had trouble differentiating itself from the Conservative government on many important (and politically popular) issues. In a letter sent to Alberta households in advance of the 1958 campaign, Solon Low acknowledged that his party had "promised general support" of the government's legislative agenda, including measures to increase social security payments and improve agricultural support legislation.⁶³ Low's only substantive criticism of Diefenbaker's administration was that it had failed to "restore the supremacy of Parliament" to the satisfaction of the Social Credit caucus, which was a fairly minor point considering the party's almost unwavering support for the bulk of the government's legislation.⁶⁴ A speech made by Low early in the campaign confirmed his difficulty in articulating a position that was substantively different from the one advocated by the Conservative government. Low declared that Diefenbaker's administration "is a pretty good government as has been proved since October 13," while lamely attempting to demonstrate that the government's sound legislative program was a result of Social Credit influence.⁶⁵ In all, Social Credit's dramatic decline in Alberta was a product of its poor organizational state and its inability to offer a decent alternative to the resurgent Conservatives. The party effectively ceded the playing field to the government by tacitly endorsing the incumbent administration's agenda.

⁶³ Ibid., "A Message from Your Member of Parliament," 20 November 1957, 1.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁵ "Nursed by Social Credit, Tories Good Says Low," *Ottawa Journal*, 25 February 1958, 4.

The stage was set for an unbalanced contest between the surging and well-organized Conservatives and their declining opponents in Alberta. From the outset, the Alberta Conservatives recognized that Diefenbaker's popularity was an immense asset to their campaign. The party hired O'Brien Advertising to design newspaper and television advertisements, and a memo from the company to senior Conservatives revealed the rationale for their advertising strategy. O'Brien determined that emphasizing the need to make Canada "more truly self-sufficient and independent in the economic sphere" would endear Diefenbaker to a population that was becoming increasingly apprehensive of foreign economic influence.⁶⁶ The regulation of energy exports and the opening of new markets for agricultural trade were both listed as key planks that fit under the general theme of economic nationalism driving the Conservative campaign.⁶⁷ One particularly effective newspaper advertisement designed by the O'Brien group featured Diefenbaker speaking before a large audience calling the people to believe in "a Greater Canadianism," emphasizing the economic "challenge" facing the country.⁶⁸ This linkage between economic nationalism and a renewed conception of Canadian ambition and citizenship was further expounded on in the Conservative party's television advertisements, which featured Diefenbaker preaching the virtues of his government's accomplishments and future plans.⁶⁹

Ultimately, Diefenbaker distilled this multifaceted program of economic nationalism and development into his much-vaunted "One Canada" vision. Derisory remarks from the opposition attacking Diefenbaker's "quivering clichés, evangelical exhortations, oracular fervor and circus parades" failed to capture the attention of many

⁶⁶ LAC, Diefenbaker Papers, reel M9225, 123539, "O'Brien Advertising Ltd. Considerations and Recommendations," [1958]. 2.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3-9. One particularly effective ad designed by the O'Brien group and released just before polling day exhorted Canadians to

⁶⁸ "A Call for a Greater Canadianism." *Calgary Herald*, 28 March 1958, 16.

⁶⁹ LAC, Diefenbaker Papers, reel M9225, 123592-123604, "Diefenbaker Film A-D," 1 March 1958.

people who understood that Diefenbaker's occasionally ill-defined "vision" was rooted in longstanding economic grievances that demanded attention.⁷⁰ The Progressive Conservative party's bold plan resonated particularly well in Alberta, where apprehensions over American influence in the energy industry and frustration over past inaction on grain marketing and farm support issues made large segments of the population receptive to a nationalist vision of the future. Inspirational and timely rhetoric made Diefenbaker's personal appeal extremely attractive to many Albertans in 1958.

For their part, the Liberals and Social Crediters failed to counter the Conservative surge in Alberta and across the country. Lester Pearson contrasted unfavourably with Diefenbaker in television appearances, and ultimately failed to offer a compelling alternative "vision" to the ambitious Conservative platform. Pearson released his party's platform early in the campaign to widely negative reviews. Ironically, the Liberals centered their appeal on an immediate \$400 million personal tax cut, the creation of a national development board, increased investment in infrastructure and the establishment of a series of federally-sponsored scholarships for university students.⁷¹ With the exception of the scholarship pledge, this platform eerily resembled the one advanced by George Drew in 1953. "The Pearson Plan," as it was called, fell flat with voters who asked why the Liberals had not proposed such sweeping tax cuts and expansions to government agencies the year before, when they were in government. In particular, Diefenbaker's accusation that the Liberals had hidden a government report predicting an economic downturn prior to the

⁷⁰ Speech by Lester B. Pearson, [1958]. Quoted in: Heath Macquarrie, *Red Tory Blues: A Political Memoir*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 169.

⁷¹ LAC, Diefenbaker Papers, reel M9268, 167848-167853, "Statement on Policies of the Liberal Party of Canada by the Honourable Lester B. Pearson," 10 February 1958, 1-6.

previous election hurt Pearson's efforts significantly.⁷² Ultimately, the content of the Liberal platform was dismissed by the electorate as an act of desperation given that it contrasted so starkly with the party's last platform.

In Alberta, the Liberals remained ignorant of the situation they faced. In advance of Pearson's tour through the province, John Decore recommended that he speak extensively on the wheat marketing problem and the Liberal position on energy exports, as those remained the two most important issues to the people of Alberta in his estimation.⁷³ While Pearson complied with Decore's suggestion, Liberal promises to increase farm supports over and above what the Conservative government had already implemented were derided by agriculturalists who remembered St. Laurent's past indifference to their plight the year before.⁷⁴ On the energy issue, the Liberals incorrectly assumed that major oil and gas companies would publicly support them to oppose Diefenbaker's cautious approach towards gas exports. In a revealing letter to H.E. Kidd, Calgary North candidate Arthur Lane acknowledged that "the oil and gas industry was alert to the delay on gas export caused by the appointment of the Borden Commission but did nothing about it" despite the fact that Conservative policies were "inimical" to the development of the industry.⁷⁵ This sentiment demonstrates that the Liberals were fundamentally out of touch with why the energy industry and the public were both supportive of Diefenbaker's preferred approach.

⁷² The "hidden report" controversy was deemed to be sufficiently significant to warrant a detailed memo refuting the Conservative charges from H.E. Kidd to Liberal candidates across the country. See: *Ibid.*, reel M9268, 167829-167835, H.E. Kidd, "Memorandum re: Diefenbaker's So-Called 'Hidden Report,'" 15 February 1958, 1-7.

⁷³ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 651, file "Alberta Liberal Association – Election 1958," John Decore to Lester B. Pearson, 11 February 1958.

⁷⁴ In a post-election assessment of the 1958 campaign, Athabasca constituency president Joachim Renaud noted that the Conservative agricultural program was deemed to be "more credible" than Pearson's promises to farmers in his area. See: LAC, Kidd Papers, vol. 6, file 9, Joachim Renaud to H.E. Kidd, 13 May 1958. F.C. Sanville, the Liberal candidate in Battle River-Camrose, echoed this observation, noting that "our policy last June 10 in agriculture cost us this election." See: *Ibid.*, F.C. Sanville to H.E. Kidd, 13 May 1958.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, file 10, Arthur Lane to H.E. Kidd, 24 June 1958, 2.

Hearings before the Borden Commission prior to the election proved that oil and gas exporters were comfortable with increased government oversight over export arrangements, despite Lane's belief to the contrary. On the whole, the Liberals, having largely misjudged why Conservative policies were popular, failed to articulate a platform that adequately responded to the concerns of Albertans.

Social Credit ran the most haphazard campaign in its history. While the documentary record on the Social Credit party in the 1958 campaign is sparse, it is clear that the party experienced great difficulty in countering the Conservative appeal in Alberta.⁷⁶ Due to its continuing financial difficulties, the Social Credit party did not publish a complete campaign manual for its candidates in 1958, preferring instead to issue an abridged "supplement" to its 1957 manual. The supplement focused on the "economic stagnation and unemployment" witnessed in the recession that closely followed the last election, using these statistics to demonstrate that monetary reform was required to bring the country out of its "perpetual" boom-bust economic cycle.⁷⁷ This became the central theme of the Socred campaign in Alberta, which recalled the "poverty in the midst of plenty" assertion from previous years.⁷⁸ The party had articulated this position ever since its founding in the 1930s, rendering its repetition ineffective in 1958. Other platform planks included a hastily-approved policy of northern development (to echo the Conservative pledge), further farm supports over what had already been implemented by

⁷⁶ Solon Low's papers at the Glenbow Archives contain a few files of correspondence and election material from 1958, but this collection is far less extensive than what is available from the 1953 and 1957 elections. The Social Credit Association of Canada papers at Library and Archives Canada do not contain files dated earlier than 1959.

⁷⁷ GLA, Low Papers, series M-695, file 478, "Supplement to the Social Credit Manual," February 1958, 1.

⁷⁸ See, for example: *Ibid.*, file 493, Solon Low, "Mr. Low's Message!" *Canadian Social Crediter*, vol. 10, no. 2, February 1958, 1.

the government and encouraging further energy exploration and development.⁷⁹ These policies were largely recycled from the previous year and did not substantially differ from the Conservative platform. Despite Premier Manning's continued support for his federal colleagues, Social Credit was unable to counter the Conservative onslaught. The Tories had implemented popular policies in their short time in government, and the Prime Minister was an inspirational orator who easily outshone the elderly phalanx of Social Credit MPs attempting to retain their seats in Alberta.

Ultimately, W.J.C. Kirby's well-organized band of Conservative loyalists prevailed over the other parties in 1958. John Diefenbaker's forceful personality and popular program of economic nationalism proved insurmountable. Indeed, this program was widely popular across the country. Many Liberals noted that they were helpless in the face of the national Conservative onslaught, as voters desired to "give Diefenbaker a chance."⁸⁰ In this respect, Alberta was no different than the other provinces. However, the Conservative victory was also a product of years of work on the part of Kirby's Conservative partisans, who had succeeded in transforming the party from a disorganized and demoralized entity in 1953 into the most effective political force in the province. Diefenbaker's appeal was enhanced by the fact that key issues in his platform had been debated forcefully by Alberta Conservatives for years prior to him assuming the leadership of the party. The Liberals were divided by infighting and hampered by a platform that was

⁷⁹ Ibid., 2-10.

⁸⁰ Following the 1958 election, H.E. Kidd sent out a questionnaire to Liberals across the country to solicit their opinions on why they had just suffered the worst defeat in their history. One of the most common responses from Liberals in Alberta intimated that many people desired to give the Conservatives a fair chance at governing the country, in addition to a more general appreciation for the contents of the Conservative platform. See, for example: LAC, Kidd Papers, vol. 6, file 9, J.W. Stambaugh to Duncan MacTavish, 13 May 1958; Ibid., Joachim Renaud to H.E. Kidd, 13 May 1958; Ibid., F.C. Sanville to H.E. Kidd, 13 May 1958; Ibid., vol. 6, file 10, Mrs. Paul Ragan to H.E. Kidd 22 May 1958; Ibid., Dick Hanna to H.E. Kidd, 16 June 1958.

increasingly out of touch with public opinion, precluding success in 1958. The Social Credit party, which had so long benefitted from the fact that the provincial premier was more popular than the prime minister, faced an insurmountable challenge in defeating a party headed by a new prime minister who was incredibly popular throughout the province. Its failure to divest itself of out-dated monetary orthodoxies and to allow younger members an increased role in party activities slowly eroded the federal party's organizational capabilities. By 1958, many Albertans felt it was best to retire their aging Social Credit MPs in favour of a new, younger group of representatives who were more in-tune with their aspirations. Overall, the political forces that had slowly shaped Alberta's politics over the course of the decade climaxed with the 1958 contest, ushering in a new era of one-party dominance under the aegis of the federal Conservative party.

Conclusion

Following the 1958 contest, the Progressive Conservatives rapidly consolidated their gains and, over the course of the next decade, became Alberta's dominant federal party. While other regions of the country tired of Diefenbaker's vacillations and inability to effectively counter the country's economic ills, the Progressive Conservatives continued to receive over 40 percent of the popular vote in Alberta in the elections of 1962, 1963 and 1965.¹ Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for this continued success rested in the strong organization the Conservatives built over the course of the 1950s. By 1958, vibrant Conservative constituency associations were present in every region of the province, and the party was successful in attracting and retaining many young and talented individuals, including Preston Manning, the son of Alberta's premier.² While W.J.C. Kirby retired from politics in January 1960, he had left his mark on the party. The Conservatives were well-positioned both organizationally and financially to be competitive at the provincial and federal levels, which contrasted sharply with the sad situation the party faced earlier in the decade.

The Conservative ascendancy confirmed that the federal Liberals had failed to capitalize on their earlier advantage. Infighting between the federal and provincial branches of the party caused morale to sink to an all-time low in the aftermath of the 1958

¹ For a complete summary of election results from 1949 to 1965, see Appendix: Tables of Election Results, pg. 160.

² While Preston Manning initially ran as a Social Credit candidate in the 1965 federal election, he began actively supporting the Conservatives in 1967 after attending the party's "Thinkers' Conference" in Fredericton. He would eventually leave the Conservatives to form the Reform party in 1987 due to disenchantment with Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's government. See: Alfred Hooke, *30+5: I Know, I Was There*, (Edmonton: Institute of Applied Art Ltd., 1971), 222.

vote, and many provincial Liberals defected to the resurgent Conservatives.³ J. Harper Prowse, the architect of the party's remarkable ascendancy in the provincial legislature, resigned from his position one month after polling day, leaving a considerable vacuum at the top of the Liberal hierarchy that the party was unable to adequately fill.⁴ While Prowse insisted that his resignation was tendered to install a younger, more vibrant and less polarizing figure in his position, the leadership race that followed demonstrated that there were few such candidates willing to take on the job.⁵ Prowse's successor, 57-year-old Grant MacEwan, led the Liberals to a crushing defeat in the 1959 provincial election. By 1960, the Liberals no longer had sufficient funds to operate a full-time provincial headquarters in Edmonton, forcing them to run the party out of MacEwan's constituency office. The Liberals faded to the periphery of Alberta's political scene over the course of the 1960s.

Social Credit never completely regained its privileged position in Alberta's federal political landscape, despite the continuing popularity of Ernest Manning's provincial administration. Solon Low resigned as party leader shortly after the disaster of 1958, prompting the party to contemplate its future under new leadership. Social Credit's irrelevance as a political force in Canada was confirmed in a 1959 document discussing its reorganization strategy. Entitled "Operation Andrew," Social Credit's renewed effort called for a multi-million dollar publicity campaign to convince the country of the merits of monetary reform.⁶ Given the party's poor financial state, this plan was unrealistic at best,

³ LAC, LPC Papers, vol. 650, file "Alberta Liberal Association – 1957-1959," Anne Tyler to H.E. Kidd, 7 May 1958.

⁴ Ibid., J. Harper Prowse to H.E. Kidd, 8 May 1958.

⁵ Ibid., "Notice of Resignation – J. Harper Prowse," 8 May 1958, 1-5.

⁶ LAC, Social Credit Association of Canada Papers, vol. 3, file "Organization – Operation Andrew," "Operation Andrew – A Plan of Operation for the Social Credit Association of Canada," November 1959.

and was never implemented. Operation Andrew was rendered completely inoperable when its central tenet, installing Ernest Manning as federal leader, was rebuffed by the Alberta Premier himself. Robert Thompson, who assumed the leadership in his place, experienced only moderate success in Alberta, consistently winning approximately a quarter of the popular vote in federal elections in the 1960s and electing two members to Parliament.⁷

While this middling performance proved that the party was not yet dead and buried, it was surely proof that Social Credit's golden years were behind them. By the late 1960s, rank-and-file Socreds began to wonder whether the provincial government had given up on their federal cousins. Indeed, their suspicions were confirmed when Premier Manning published a book entitled *Political Realignment: A Challenge to Thoughtful Canadians*, in which he denounced the federal Social Credit party as an "inadequate organ" for the province to articulate its needs in Ottawa, throwing his weight behind the Progressive Conservatives instead.⁸ Indeed, to the shock of the few ardent monetary reformists remaining in the provincial party, Manning accepted a directorship at the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce when he retired in 1968. With the death of monetary reform in Social Credit's heartland, the Progressive Conservatives consolidated their strength and ultimately ousted Social Credit from government in 1971, leading to an era of unchallenged Conservative dominance provincially that has continued uninterrupted to the present day.

Alberta's changed partisan landscape at the federal level was a combination of several factors. The Conservatives benefitted from strong leadership and a fervent desire to build an effective and modern party to seriously contest elections. George Drew and

⁷ Thompson's leadership was overshadowed by Premier Manning from the outset. Thompson privately conceded that he would gladly decline the Prime Ministership if Social Credit were to win a federal election, deferring it instead to Manning. See: Hooke, 30+5, 255.

⁸ Ibid., 251-255.

W.J.C. Kirby were instrumental in revitalizing moribund constituency associations and drafting a new platform that addressed the major socioeconomic issues the province faced in the postwar era. The creation of a streamlined and centralized party structure that incorporated women and youth into party activities was integral to Conservative success in the 1950s. Jean Robinson and the PCWA were key to the party's resurgence in rural regions of Alberta, as women took the lead in many areas to nominate candidates and recruit volunteers to campaign effectively for the party. While the Conservative ascendancy was largely attributable to John Diefenbaker's popularity and the relevancy of his appeal, it is unlikely that his party would have experienced as overwhelming a victory in 1958 in the absence of the effective party organization that had been painstakingly constructed over the course of the 1950s. This strong organizational foundation was key to maintaining Conservative strength in Alberta long after the glow of 1958 had faded away.

The federal Liberals failed to capitalize on the gains of their provincial counterparts due to infighting between the two branches and widespread public antipathy to the federal government's legislative agenda. Federal organizer John Haar and George Prudham greatly exacerbated internal dissension by insisting that all matters pertinent to federal campaigns be channeled through their office, including personal correspondence. This internal quarrel led to difficulties in distributing literature, planning campaign events, and allocating financial resources. Internal dissension was one of the key factors behind the mass exodus of voters from the party following the 1958 campaign, as the unified and effective Conservatives appeared to be a more palatable alternative to the flagging Liberals. The vast sums of money expended by the party in federal elections and its ability to attract high-quality candidates proved inadequate to counter its organizational weaknesses.

Social Credit experienced the most dramatic decline of any federal party over the course of the 1950s. The party benefitted from the popularity of the provincial government, and many Albertans seemed content with electing a rump of parochial representatives to the House of Commons so long as Alberta's displeasure with federal policies was being heard. Organizationally, the Socreds were handicapped by their failure to reform their party structure and elevate younger members into positions of leadership. Indeed, the party seemed intent on defending its aging and anachronistic band of MPs from nomination challenges, despite their increasing ineffectiveness in the federal parliament. The party's financial deterioration rendered it a ward of the Alberta Social Credit League, and cost it a key ally in B.C. Premier W.A.C. Bennett. Ultimately, however, it was Social Credit's unwavering adherence to its founding monetary orthodoxies that sealed its fate, as the province's voters had largely rejected these radical reforms, given the widespread economic prosperity the province was now blessed with.

In the end, changing socioeconomic realities in Alberta destabilized the province's politics to a greater degree than the organizational strengths and weaknesses of the main parties did. The rise of the oil and gas industry transformed Alberta from a predominantly agrarian polity into an urbanized energy powerhouse. Many farmers viewed the population explosion in Alberta's cities as a threat to their privileged position in the province's political calculus, helping to prompt them to become increasingly strident in their demands for greater economic concessions and assistance from the federal government. In the early 1950s, Social Credit's popularity in rural constituencies was largely sustained by dissatisfaction with federal wheat marketing and farm support legislation, notwithstanding the party's organizational and financial shortcomings. The Progressive Conservatives

successfully co-opted these farmer groups by essentially giving them everything they asked for. Diefenbaker quickly moved to increase price supports for Canada's agriculturalists, and appointed a popular royal commission to examine the issue in more detail during the brief minority parliament of 1957-1958. Combined with a reinvigorated and effective Conservative campaign machine, Diefenbaker's appeal to Alberta's farmers in 1958 was nearly irresistible. Developments in federal grain marketing and farm support legislation were integral in determining the success of the main federal parties in Alberta's rural regions.

In Alberta's cities, the issue of natural gas export spoke to the core of the province's future. While many were optimistic that Alberta's substantial bounty of energy resources would generate wealth for decades to come, others were concerned that the reserves would be exhausted quickly without increased government oversight. This sentiment came to the fore in the debate over whether the federal government should subsidize an American-controlled company to export gas from the province. Ultimately, most Albertans agreed that it was better for the government to proceed cautiously with energy export instead of entering into business agreements with American firms rashly and without examining the situation in detail beforehand. Once again, the Conservatives responded most effectively to these concerns by promising to create a national energy board to regulate the energy industry. This contrasted sharply with the ad hoc policies generated by the Liberals and Social Crediters. Thus, the Progressive Conservative surge in Alberta was also partially attributable to its appealing position on energy export regulation.

Overall, a combination of factors contributed to the Conservative ascendancy in Alberta. Increased organizational effectiveness was supplemented by strong leadership and

an attractive platform to transform the Conservative party from an outlier in Alberta's political scene into a strong contender. The federal Socreds and Liberals failed to match the Conservative reorganization effort, and also lagged in setting policy priorities to successfully endear themselves to a wide swath of Alberta's electorate. In the final estimation, the "Diefenbaker sweep" of 1958 was the product of a series of developments that had undermined the stability of Alberta's political landscape over the course of the mid-1950s. This unprecedented victory was neither inevitable nor accidental; its foundation was laid through careful planning and an increased attentiveness to the needs and concerns of Albertans. The political and socioeconomic developments of the mid-1950s culminated in the installation of the Progressive Conservatives as the dominant federal preference in Alberta.

APPENDIX

TABLES OF ELECTION RESULTS 1949 TO 1965

National Federal Election Results

Party	1949	1953	1957	1958	1962	1963	1965
Liberal	50.1% (190)	50.0% (171)	42.3% (105)	33.8% (49)	37.4% (99)	41.7% (129)	39.8% (131)
Progressive Conservative	29.7% (41)	31.0% (51)	39.0% (112)	53.7% (208)	37.3% (116)	32.9% (95)	32.1% (97)
CCF/NDP	13.4% (13)	11.3% (23)	10.8% (25)	9.5% (8)	13.4% (19)	13.1% (17)	17.7% (21)
Social Credit	2.4% (10)	5.4% (15)	6.6% (19)	2.6% (0)	11.7% (30)	11.9% (24)	3.6% (5)
Other	4.4% (8)	2.3% (5)	1.3% (4)	0.4% (0)	0.2% (1)	0.4% (0)	5.8% (11)

Alberta Federal Election Results

Party	1949	1953	1957	1958	1962	1963	1965
Liberal	33.8% (5)	35.1% (4)	27.6% (1)	13.7% (0)	19.4% (0)	22.1% (1)	22.4% (0)
Progressive Conservative	16.8% (2)	14.5% (2)	27.4% (3)	59.9% (17)	42.8% (15)	45.3% (14)	46.6% (15)
CCF/NDP	10.0% (0)	6.9% (0)	6.3% (0)	4.4% (0)	8.4% (0)	6.5% (0)	8.2% (0)
Social Credit	37.4% (10)	40.7% (11)	37.5% (13)	21.6% (0)	29.2% (2)	25.8% (2)	22.5% (2)

Note: The percentage of the popular vote received by each party is listed first, with the number of seats won in brackets. "Independent" candidates who professed alignment with a political party (ie. Independent Liberals and Independent Conservatives) are included in the party total, not in the "other" column.

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