

Prairie Populism and the Reform Party of Canada (平原州のポピュリズムとカナダ改革党)

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SUMMARY IN JAPANESE: 本稿ではポピュリズムという概念を西部カナダの政治に適応して考察している。ポピュリズムはまさしく「両刃の」剣のような機能を持ち、革新主義の方向性も有する一方、大衆文化に妥協したり誤った地域中心主義に流された場合には保守的な政治活動を助長する。

その意味では改革党がまさに典型的な代表例である。その基本理念には、自由市場への「絶大なる懐旧の念」が強調されている。すなわち、西部カナダにおける中央政府の圧力や重税から脱却して、自由市場を助長することを支持している。この新保守主義の様々な主張のなかには、例えばカナダの重要な構成メンバーとしてのケベックを無視する態度がある。改革党のいう「特権の廃止」という思想が、ケベックの主張する「独自の社会」という考えに反するが故にである。改革党は最近の総選挙で躍進を遂げ、西部で反ケベック・反オタワ感情を煽動する「右翼勢力」となり、連邦政府に対立する勢力となっている。こうした政治思想の影響は今後暫くは続くことと思われる。

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Introduction

Finally, the conception of transition proposed is “populist” rather than proletarian or elitist in the sense that it assumes that the ultimate locus of the creative imagination required for an epochal breakthrough is preserved and rekindled in groups and communities whose everyday life experience has not been fully incorporated into the ethos of the dominant civilisation.

Ray Morrow, *The New Canadian Political Economy* (1982).

Following this lead quotation, the purpose of this essay is to examine the limits of populism as a “counter-evolutionary” strategy in Western Canadian culture. After dealing with the general concept of populism, I will explore the “progressive” case of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) populist party in Saskatchewan and the development of the right-wing Reform Party from a regionally-based movement to a national party. My conclusion will be that populism as a political force can have a “counter-evolutionary” force for affecting social change both on the left and right of the political spectrum. However, the hegemonic limits that are placed on a left-wing populist party are much more significant than that which would face a party of the “right.” The hegemonic limits are not simply capitalist responses to socialism and social democratic parties, but conservative “popular culture” ideas that have become part of public discourse in Canada.¹ As such these “populist cultural” ideas have often been used to create a sense of regional “false consciousness” to disguise the political, economic and social problems that local populations face in Canada. The federal Reform Party is the latest populist organization to perpetuate a false sense of regional consciousness for political gain. This political gain is made all the more so in the absence of social-democratic populist alternatives in the West. Richards has written:

In the absence of a left populist response, there is in Canada a growing right populist reaction, one illustration of which is popular support for Western separatism. Resurgent right populism in Canada is inspired by American precedents, organizations in opposition to “big government” and in defence of traditional family virtues and evangelical Christianity. The “New Right” is undeniably populist in organizational style and ideology.²

As a category, populism “allows for such imprecise and seemingly contradictory use” that it “is among the more exasperating expressions of political discourse.”³ One must therefore be quite specific in the use of the term. Populism in this thesis refers to political movements, ideas, individuals and ideologies that are so integral to traditional Western Canadian economic life that they have become part of the popular culture. Prairie populism is, in large measure, “a cultural celebration” through “a resurfacing of economic resentments” which cry out for further elaboration.⁴ Indeed, it is difficult to spend any amount of time travelling through the West without listening to a litany of alleged “crimes” that Eastern Canada has committed against the West. Political movements emerged as a reaction to the lack of economic power in the Prairies as “an internal colony.”⁵ Prairie populism is used to describe the ideas and supporters of particular political movements such as Social Credit or the CCF. Party leaders were, for the most part, rural people, i.e. farmers, small-town merchants and clergymen. Many “populist” movements could be identified as mainly ideological; coming from Conservative, Marxist, Socialist and Fascist variants.⁶ Populism is supposedly something more, however, than a mere carrier of a particular ideology. That is a spirit of the people and of the land that makes them into such a powerful force.

There are, however, various economic and cultural shadings to populism in the West. Laycock points out that economic exploitation per se, does not account for the diversity and richness of the oppositional forces that have developed in the West.⁷ Rather one must look to “the people,” “participatory democracy,” “co-operation,” “the state,” “the good society” and “technocratic decision-making.”⁸ These six dimensions account for much of the contradictory “impulses” that one can find in examining specific Prairie populist party histories in the West.

The fundamental strategy of populism as an organising principle is to mediate the impact of universal civilisation with elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular grouping. Populism may find its governing inspiration in such things as the range and quality of its environment, or in an effect from a peculiar structural mode, or in the decisions of the people and classes of a given site.⁹

When one looks at Western Canadian populism for example, one sees movements which were and are for the most part vague and undefined in terms of clearly articulated, overall political strategies. And while the leaders of such

movements were able to whip their supporters into a feverish pitch of emotion in order to carry them to power, a number of internal and external contradictions have limited them to only brief periods of hegemony. Those brief periods have, however, left an indelible mark on the Canadian body politic for all to see.

When one examines Western Canadian populism and episodes such as the “Crow Rates,” one sees an example of what Raymond Williams refers to as a residual culture. The term residual “means that some experiences, meanings and values, which cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of residue cultural as well as social—of some previous social formation.”¹⁰

There are two good examples of this in the history of Western Canadian populism. First, there was the partial use of religion as a signifier in the early rise of the Social Credit Party in Alberta, under such people as William Aberhart, which later lost this locus within a secular dominant system. Secondly, there was the question of origins, which provided the populist nature of Social Credit and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation to a great extent.

The great problem is that the members of such movements have usually been skeptical of political organizations, including their own, to the point where they have been limited to a few brief periods of hegemony. In his seminal article, “Populism: A Qualified Defence,” John Richards (1981) argues that the “fragility of support may be explained by the traditional populist mistrust that differentiation within mass organizations, while potentially conducive to efficiency, transforms leaders into privileged elites with discretionary power.”¹¹ So while not only facing the threat of a hostile federal system, populist parties of Western Canada also contained their own seeds of destruction.

Historically the main limits to populism in Canada have come through the power of an increasingly sophisticated communications network. It is here that Williams again makes an important contribution in examining the way culture has been “made over” in a selective fashion as part of the market mechanism. Williams understood that the means of communication, both as produced by a system and as a means of production, are directly subject to historical development.

The push in Canada has traditionally been for a more centralised form of government with less power to the provinces as a way of establishing a more equitable system for all and as a way of resisting the onslaught of the United

States. I think that these two objectives are an example of the selective cultural reproduction of certain myths in Canada. It is the provinces that have sometimes been at the forefront of socially progressive programs in Canada while the federal government, after making sure that such programs were struck down as illegitimate, followed up with some minimal concessions at a much lower level and at a slower pace. As for the myth that provinces are an obstacle to the cultural resistance of a strong central government, historical evidence has pointed to a different conclusion.

A case in point is that of the CCF in Saskatchewan which came about as an attempt of organised farmers to get into politics during the depression. It may be safely assumed that for organised class protest to develop there must be some widespread experience of deprivation. For prairie farmers this has always been related to the problems of income security. Given this, there must be adequate means of communication among those who are subject to deprivation or exploitation in order that they develop some feeling of common identity.

Robert J. Brym's study of the failure of the United Farmers of New Brunswick in New Brunswick provides strong testament to this point. And although interaction in Saskatchewan was limited by geographical factors until telephones, radios and cars became numerous, agrarian problems were listed in farm journals, such as *the Grain Grower's Guide*. Political ideas, as John Conway pointed out, were also promoted through co-operative associations and grain Grower's associations which emerged after the turn of the century.¹²

These organizations were the training ground for protest leaders among the farmers; the roots of the CCF and Social Credit populism live there; it was the depression of the thirties which stimulated a more radical expression of populism than was found in the Progressive movement or in provincial Liberal parties.

In assessing the CCF's ideology as populism, it is necessary to come to understand that many leaders of the CCF saw it as a socialist party in opposition to capitalism. The *Regina Manifesto* adopted by the CCF as its program at the first national convention seemed to point in that direction—at least on the surface. It began with the statement:

We aim to replace the present capitalist system, with its inherent injustice and inhumanity, by a social order from which the domination and

exploitation of one class by another will be eliminated, in which economic planning will supersede unregulated private enterprise and competition, and in which genuine democratic self-government, based upon economic equality, will be possible.¹³

The economic policy of the *Manifesto* contained, as Richard and Pratt pointed out, “all the traditional left populist demands—security of terms for farmers against their creditors, stable agricultural prices, no economic protectionist measures to hinder possible farm exports, socialisation of all the natural resource industries.”¹⁴ What distinguished the *Regina Manifesto* was the emphasis placed upon the role of the state in economic planning. But such ideas were for the most part vague and undeveloped.

By 1934, the Saskatchewan CCF was in the process of dropping its socialist programme for the state ownership of land and was becoming a party of populist reform. The elements of socialism in the CCF’s programme did not challenge the dominant form of economic production in Saskatchewan (the family farm) but rather provided for its continuation. That such a policy might involve government control, or even ownership, of the forces which were affecting the farmer was consistent with traditional agrarian populist ideology. The Saskatchewan CCF was also influenced by the urban labour background of some of its leaders and by association with the rise of the national party, which was not farmer dominated. Therefore, the party enacted legislation which was more favourable to the rights of labour than elsewhere in the country. Yet, as Lipset pointed out, this was a trade union programme, not a socialist one. Even in the CCF’s state enterprises, there was no commitment to worker’s participation in management.

In the late thirties, public reference to socialism was usually in CCF speeches and literature. When T. C. Douglas became the party leader, the concept of socialism reappeared, but it now meant either opposition to monopolies or extension of the cooperative movement. In this, the CCF contained the tradition of pragmatic agrarian populism under the label. The cooperative commonwealth is still based on capitalist property relations. One can therefore question the CCF’s statement about the relationship between co-operation and socialism, namely that “their fundamental principles and objectives are the same.”¹⁵ This, as many people have pointed out since, can only be true if socialism can be defined to exclude a social revolution. In 1945, legislation was passed to

allow the establishment of collective farms in Saskatchewan but only 29 were set up. This was the limit of the socialisation of agriculture.

C. B. Macpherson and Prairie Populism

In the preceding paragraphs, I have tried to show the populist character of the Saskatchewan CCF but why did populism develop in Western Canada? One possible explanation has to do with the influence of a person's class position or his political action. One important attempt to analyse the class basis of prairie politics is found in C. B. Macpherson's *Democracy in Alberta* (1962) in which the author argues that the most useful way of categorising people in order to understand political action is based on the relationship to the productive process—in particular, “how much freedom they retain over the disposal of their own labour, and how much control they exercise over the disposal of others' labour.”¹⁶

Macpherson argued that the mixture of “radicalism” and conservatism which dominated so much of Western political life stemmed from an increasing class-based reliance upon the mechanisms of capitalism. For example, acceptance of cabinet government and the party system by the UFA in 1921 and 1931 as well as the Social Credit's concessions to capital were a good illustration of the limits to populist reform under “radical” movements. Both the UFA and the Socreds preached against the evils of “big business” civilisation without actually changing the relations between exchange and production.

This was why, according to Macpherson, Alberta remained a quasi-party system. Democracy had become embedded in the shifting ideas of social equality in the “new frontier.” The nature of liberalism combined with the economy, however, rendered a working class that was non-assertive and inward looking. Any ideological attempts at oppositional policies to capital fell away once the populist parties were elected and stood “in the maelstrom.” From this perspective, the farmers of Western Canada are a good illustration of the aforementioned point. Their ideological consistency has been uneven and probably has not yet ended oscillating between radicalism and conservatism.

Farmers form part of the petite bourgeoisie, a concept which points to a class of small-scale entrepreneurs who are self-employed and employ little or no labour outside the family. In Canada, they would form the transitional mar-

ginal remnants of a past era.¹⁷ The various sections of the class were united by their belief that they are independent. But as Macpherson pointed out, their independence was illusionary, because they were still under the thumb of large-scale labour utilising capitalists, who controlled the price system. The small producer would, however, still be able to decide for himself when and how to use his own labour. This concept is well summed up in Macpherson's work on property. The concept of property is fully applicable only to an autonomous market society. That is the right to exclude others from the use or benefit of something. It is not that Western Canada forms the basis of an autonomous market society but rather its inhabitants perceive it to be as such.

A number of writers ranging from S. M. Lipset to William Leiss have criticised Macpherson's analysis of Western Canadian and particularly Albertan society as sociologically flawed. Leiss, in particular, argued that Macpherson's "conceptual apparatus" was flawed because "his concepts of class and class consciousness could not adequately represent events."¹⁸ Specifically, the notion that populist "false consciousness" accounted for a series of non-traditional parties becoming governments that charted a course between authoritarianism and more participatory democracy in Western Canada was heavily criticised. The result was a failed attempt to unite political theory with the "empirical" detail needed to flesh the class populism of the quasi-party system.¹⁹

One of the most detailed responses to Democracy in Alberta is Alvin Finkel's study of the history of the Social Credit movement in Alberta. While taking issue with Macpherson's oversimplifications of Prairie society, Finkel does clearly point to the limits of radical policies in an underdeveloped region which relied heavily on mostly foreign private resource companies to help drive the economy.²⁰ The charismatic speeches of an Aberhart to a citizenry brutalised by depression circumstances may have set the stage for a radical policy agenda. The problem, however, was how to govern with the same agenda when business, labour and the media could consistently provide more "real" pressure than disaffected voters. When Aberhart's own constituency association attempted to use recall measures to remove the Premier for his perceived callous attitudes towards the poor and unemployed, the government introduced legislation to do away with the recall mechanism. How then did Social Credit hold on to power for so long? Finkel argues that the progressive elements that supported the party were abandoned along with the party's doctrine in favour of a conservative social, economic and political perspective. The business commu-

nity and major media organizations eventually embraced the party as a result. The result was the development of a mainstream party that maintained the fiction of radical populism as a political marketing tool.

Prairie Alienation

Another possible explanation for the development of populism in Canada is the concept of what has been called prairie economic alienation. Although the idea of alienation has deep roots within western intellectual thought, it was Marx, building from the works of Rousseau, Smith and Hegel, who propelled the term into the lexicon of social sciences.²¹ In the rise of the industrial state, Marx saw the alienation of man as arising from the changing labour process of capitalism. With the rise of mass democratic states, alienation came to be considered a political as well as an economic phenomenon, and thus political alienation emerged as a subject of concern.

Prairie economic alienation has often surfaced as a major issue on the Canadian economic political scene. Two points seem to come up again and again: first, the belief that Western Canada is badly treated by the electoral system that is unbalanced because of demographics in favour of Ontario and Quebec. A case in point was the 1974 national election where the Liberal Party came within a seat of forming a majority government before the polls had closed West of the Ontario border. But, the West's all but total rejection of the Liberal Party had little impact on the national results.

A second point is that as a result of such political domination, the national economy has been created to serve the financial and manufacturing interests of Eastern Canada at the expense of Western Canada in general and of Western producers in particular. This theme finds expression in so many ways that it has become as self-evident as the West's unique physical landscape.

Prairie economic alienation also embodies a sense of cultural estrangement from the heartland of Canada. As a creed, it dates from the early European settlements on the prairies and Archer's description of it could as easily have been written in the early 1900's as in the late 1990's:

In the West the seeds of alienation were planted early. The roots were deep. The West believes that Central Canada—Eastern Canada in

Everyman's language—was the real beneficiary of Confederation. The Prairies are not grateful for the colonised heritage... there is a widespread feeling in the West that Eastern politicians, financiers, and businessmen have no real understanding of conditions in the West and have no desire to learn.²²

The belief content of Western alienation has not been static. For example, traditional agrarian protest through historical episodes such as the "Crow Rates" has given way to more urban-based political concerns as evidenced by the policies of the latest right-wing populist movement, the Reform Party. The Reform Party will be dealt with in detail in the latter section of this chapter. However, changes in the demographic, religious, economic or political make-up of the West have not affected the response to perceived Eastern "slights." Each "slight" only adds further fuel to a fire kept glowing through a mixture of dissatisfaction with the fate of a small region in an era of neo-conservative economic policies and unhappiness with the political distortions in such a system that are tolerated by the federal government.

It is easy to understand why populism, as an ideology predicated upon the worth of the common people, could find such fertile soil in advocating a political response to Eastern/Federal Government "oppression." Within the CCF and to a lesser extent Social Credit, a close identification with the citizenry was always seen as natural. As Tommy Douglas stated, "This is more than a political movement, it is a people's movement, a movement of men and women who have dedicated their lives to making the brotherhood a living reality."²³ The CCF developed a form of delegate democracy which provided institutional means for the mass membership to retain control over its representatives. The party leader had to be elected at least on a formal basis by convention each year and policy resolutions were not considered binding until passed by the annual convention.²⁴ One should not overstate such direct democracy mechanisms in a movement which ran according to the will of usually charismatic leaders. But it is important to understand the influence of progressive populist ideals on the formal organization.

The CCF stayed in power in Saskatchewan by appealing to economic and social concerns rather than stressing doctrinaire policies and theoretical considerations. The legislative program of the government, as well as its annual budgets, from 1948 onward reflected this fact.²⁵ There were no new experi-

ments in public enterprise and the government allowed future resource developments to be carried out by capital. The decision was motivated by a deep political doubt of how the increasingly politically conservative electorate in Canada was going to accept public ownership beyond essential services. The commitment to public ownership of resource development was therefore dropped, and not picked up again until the initiatives of the NDP government in the 1970's under Edward Schreyer.

The moderation of the CCF signalled a quieting of protest in the West. The movement had begun by advocating an aggressive restructuring of capitalism, and of Confederation, in favour of the farmers they represented. The federal government helped subdue the expressions of discontent through a series of gradual concessions and the threat to use force to counter "radical" political protests. Unemployment insurance, old age pensions, family allowances all became federal responsibilities. Regular federal equalisation payments to needy provinces established a guaranteed minimum provincial base. Federal support and aid to agriculture through the Canadian Wheat Board and the Crow statutory rate further assisted the development of the West.

The election of the Diefenbaker government in 1957, and his sweep in 1958, rooted partly in his populist appeal, helped end the governance of the CCF. Diefenbaker promised he would redress Western problems with concrete action in Ottawa. His "northern vision" foresaw an era of growth and prosperity which would not only diversify the Western economy but elevate the West to its proper place in the nation.²⁶ His rhetoric denouncing the federal Liberal Party as well as its "eastern backers," spoke to Western alienation. As a result the populism of CCF fell into general decline.

The West's structural problems remained. Modifications were developed in response to the West's appeals, but only on federal government terms, i.e. what could be given could be taken away. Western diversification was not really advanced any further although the list of resource exploitation grew. No concessions were made to what Vernon Fowke called the political and economic terms of "national integration." The structure of Confederation and the economic role of the West in the national economy remained roughly in the same place as when Clifford Sifton called for the exploitation of "the wealth of the field, of the forest and of the mine... in vast quantities."²⁷

Poised on the edge of national destruction in the late 1950's: the CCF was not able to refocus its national agenda and so gave way to the formation of the

NDP; although not without significant bitterness. This agrarian populist movement had, however, contributed to significant change both provincially and federally to the point where Western alienation seemed to be in decline. In Saskatchewan, the “vigorous consciousness of common interests” to which Macpherson referred was no longer experienced by the members of the petty bourgeoisie. It is doubtful whether “agrarian class unity will emerge out of economic conflict to the extent that we can talk about united class action.”²⁸

Differences based on the type of agriculture had been pointed out by John Bennett, who found that ranchers in southwest Saskatchewan enjoyed greater economic security than grain growers and were also more inclined to oppose government intervention in economic affairs. Such differences have often gone unnoticed in the history of the CCF because enough farmers combined with urban labour in Saskatchewan to elect the left-populist government to the provincial legislature. Today they are no longer the largest and most influential class in Western Canada; the era of agrarian populism has declined in proportion to the class that supported it.²⁹

I have argued that any class-conscious action is likely to take a populist form in Western Canada. The mass support base of populism is usually petty bourgeoisie. Although the CCF began as a socialist party in 1932, it became more of a reformist, regionalist force in relation to the Canadian Federal system and advocated policy measures to protect Westerners. The same can be said for Social Credit which originally benefited from left-wing as well as right-wing support. The form of class-based populism that fostered the CCF is largely absent from Western Canadian politics as a result of the declining agrarian class as well as prevailing neo-conservative economic theory. The populism that launched the Social Credit phenomenon in Alberta has been altered somewhat and supposedly transferred to what is regarded as an important beneficiary of modern urban-based Western alienation, the Reform Party.

The Reform Party

There is little doubt that the Reform Party has ridden a wave of popular opposition to the ruling government which has been portrayed along with its leader as serving Eastern interests. While many Westerners have whole heartedly supported the Progressive Conservative Party through some historically and

politically difficult times, there was widespread revulsion over the Mulroney government which was no better than Trudeau's Liberals in "using federalism" against the West. Indeed, some Westerners have argued for nothing other than deep institutional change in the federal system through such mechanisms as a Triple "E" Senate. This perspective is often followed up with a general denunciation of mainstream federal parties. For example, the Progressive Conservatives will promise the West support while in opposition but change priorities in response to Quebec and Ontario's electoral strength once in office. With this type of analysis, nothing less than radical change is needed at the federal level to protect the long term interests of the West short of separation.

The Reform Party promises a "new Canada" which would no longer be based on the "old left/right" political dichotomies of our federal party system. The *New Canada* (1992), which is the title of the leader's current biography, is "remarkably reminiscent of nostalgic versions of the old Canada" and therein lies the attraction. As the Republican Party was able to capture electoral success under the Reagan neo-conservative banner by appealing for a return to a "golden age" that never was, the Reform Party hopes to do the same for English Canada.³⁰

The Reform Party emerged in the late 1980's in Alberta to ride a regional populist wave of discontent over such issues as the awarding of a federal government military contract, the introduction of a national consumption tax, new constitutional proposals and cuts in transfer payments to the provinces. This new party also benefited from traditional sources of "Western angst" such as official bilingualism, anti-Quebec sentiments, central Canadian CBC "type culture" as well as fears regarding immigration and "forced population growth."³¹ In response, the Reform Party promised a mixture of radical social change and nothing less than a new realignment of federal politics through social conservatism and a "different attitude" towards Quebec.

The important question for us to consider in the light of this essay, is whether the Reform Party is populist in character or more of a cadre-style organization which draws on a modern urban-class based form of populism. The preliminary evidence provided by the Reform Party as well as through the work of various writers on Reform and its closely defined predecessor, Social Credit, is that this is a case of the latter more than the former. The Reform Party seems to have touched all the right electoral buttons in condemning the practices of old-time federalist parties but this positioning is more strategic than radical. Let us

now consider the history of the party in greater detail along with the ascendancy of its leader Preston Manning.

Preston Manning is the son of Ernest Manning, the late Social Credit Premier of Alberta during the period 1943 to 1969. A lot of the younger Manning's life was spent absorbing the politics of the day through his father. One can argue that a "carbon copy" syndrome occurred in the process as Preston acquired not only the same neo-conservative perspective as his father but also has largely displayed the same physical appearance and mannerisms. This manifestation was apparently not lost on Socred supporters and Preston Manning became heavily involved in the party during the middle and late 1960's. He ran for the position of an Alberta MP and regularly counselled his father on new ways to keep Social Credit alive by injecting new ideas. Most of these "new" ideas were contained in a now famous book written by Ernest Manning, entitled *Political Realignment: A Challenge to Thoughtful Canadians* (1967) and an accompanying government white paper on "Human Resource Development."

Using the engineering-inspired doctrine of systems theory, which can be traced to such politically-inspired texts as Mackenzie King's *Industry and Humanity* (1918), both Mannings proposed a shift in federal Canadians politics away from pluralism into the creation of one right-wing party called the Social Conservatives and the development of a left-wing alternative. The party name of "Social Conservatives" was chosen to reflect the idea that if conservatives could shift their focus on how to bring private sector solutions to the social problems of society, the appeal of left-wing parties would wither and eventually die leaving an invigorated private sector in place. Otherwise what could possibly be the appeal of the left beyond certain economic frustrations to be found within the poorer sections of society.

From the period where Ernest Manning resigned his Premiership to the founding of the Reform Party, the theory of social conservatism remained paramount in the work of both Mannings. This period is vividly chronicled in detail by Murray Dobbin.³² After attempting to link Manning with the Central Intelligence Agency in order to establish the Reform Party leader's ultra-conservative early credentials, Dobbin moves on to discuss the formation of the "M and M Systems Research Limited"; a consulting firm began by Ernest Manning with the research assistance of his son to continue along the path of social conservatism.³³ While concentrating on doing work for resource and energy

firms as well as the new Tory Government, "M and M Systems Research Limited" would follow "the broad objective of defending capitalism from the socialist threat," in order to advance social conservatism.³⁴ It is in this consulting firm position that Manning is able to attract Canadian elite public attention by the further use of publications calling for most if not all government services to be privatized. According to Dobbin, Manning is able to translate this support into corporate sponsorship (particularly from oil interests) for a national political force that is based on the virtues of an unfettered free market and social conservatism.

One should remember that it is during this period that so much conservative populist antipathy is created in response to federal-provincial tensions between Alberta and Ottawa. Trudeau's Liberals bore the brunt of this anger and Manning became involved with a number of right-wing political groups such as "the Movement of National Political Change."³⁵ While there appeared to be little public support for Manning in terms of a new national party, Dobbin argues that regional business and political people began to look for some party alternative to dealing with the federal Liberals and the Conservatives under "Red Tories" such as Robert Stanfield and Joe Clark. It was with regional corporate disappointments with the Mulroney Government, however, that Manning is supposedly viewed as the leader who can "put everything together." Invited to address "a group of lawyers and oil men" in Calgary who were looking for a federal conservative party alternative Manning found unsurprising support for his philosophy of social conservatism and free-market economics. What is interesting to note is how little of a change in Manning's philosophy seems to have occurred over the years since Social Credit ruled Alberta. For most of what appears as Reform Party Principles and Policies in 1991 is quite in line with Manning's ideas in the late 1960's and early 1970's. This ideological consistency supposedly included populism.

With the subsequent success of the founding Reform Party assembly in May of 1987 where Manning is chosen as the leader, the groundwork for a serious conservative alternative party began in earnest. Disenchantment with the Mulroney Government is fed into a populist framework of regional aspirations, fiscal conservatism and social resentments. This is a necessary process because of the obvious problem in how to differentiate the conservative policies of Reform with those of the Progressive Conservatives when very little policy differences exist except as a matter of degrees.

To the extent that the Mulroney Government was elected on the strength of specific issues in 1984, certain positions had been carefully crafted and promoted. The new government said it would consult Canadians about the leading issues of the day on an ongoing basis. A pro-business, "friendly American" policy perspective would be developed as Canada was declared open for business again. In the course of two consecutive mandates, a free trade agreement was reached, a tax "reform" package was passed, deficit reductionism had been preached and a general "business led" agenda has been followed.

While capitalising on a lot of political anger over some of the above mentioned policies, the Reform Party agenda largely mirrors that of the Progressive Conservatives. Reform, however, would carry forth such an agenda in a much speedier and decisive manner through the "grass roots" support of its membership.³⁶

Even where major differences do not exist, a more successful approach must be applied. The Reform Party's solution is to engage in and up-date the same types of populist measures that Social Credit and the CCF had used to wrest political power away from the respective ruling parties of the day. For example, the Reform Party advocates the use of local constituency resolutions to decide party policy and provides prospective candidates with a long document in which personal details must be provided and judged along with a "job description" that is provided to explain the duties of an MP. A prospective candidate for Reform would seek the position in much the same way he or she would try to gain employment with a corporation.

The theory is that those citizens who see politicians as inherently corrupt individuals will find the professional nature of a Reform Party candidate as inspiring confidence. Moreover, a number of mechanisms such as recall procedures for an MP, more free votes in the party caucus and Parliament, and the increased use of referenda and other plebiscites is advocated for all future members of a federally elected Reform Party. Also, the party discipline which frustrates people into believing that the average MP is largely the captive of his or her party is de-emphasized under the rubric of Reform in favour of following constituency wishes. In such a fashion these populist endeavours tie in quite nicely with popular opinion in Canada.

A cursory glance at most opinion pieces in Canadian newspapers over recent history would confirm such trends. As a new entrant in the federal field of politics, Reform is also able to project its leader in the Canadian populist tradi-

tion as a “church going, born again” individual of unimpeachable qualities. Preston Manning is the first politician in a number of years to link his religious fundamentalist views on issues such as social welfare, unemployment medicare and daycare with the individual’s relationship to God. Government should not, as is argued by many of the fundamentalist right, interfere with how a person must struggle through his or her life. A person can hope for a better life and God might help provide it through Christian charity. Government, however, should not intervene. If Government does intervene, it can become the secular equivalent of the anti-Christ. Free enterprise equals religious morality in this sense.

The idea is that if the leader is “sound,” then so should be his or her policies. In an age where political gossip often passes for informed public policy discussion and televised imagery dominates the political landscape, Manning would seem to have an advantage. A biography on Brian Mulroney and the contrived personal scandals affecting Bill Clinton in the US and Paddy Ashdown in the UK attest to this problem.

Preston Manning is able to use a populist approach in his criticisms of the three main federal parties by arguing for more participation from “the people” who need to be consulted much more. The Reform leader often quotes the Abraham Lincoln–Steven Douglas American political debates as part of his own “pioneering effort” to rebuild Canada into a more participatory society based on social conservatism. Indeed, in a number of interviews Manning defines populism as a right of the people to be consulted as to the general policy direction of government.³⁷

However, Manning also makes it clear when questioned about the historic political “instability” of such mechanisms as recall procedures and the problem of trying to form “a really genuine democratic party,” that the Reform Party leadership would do whatever it thought was best if consensus could not be reached.³⁸ Since consensus is very hard to reach, especially regarding complex economic issues, the same discretionary political power wielded by the mainstream political parties would be available to the Reform Party. To paraphrase the now famous political slogans of Mackenzie King, the Reform Party would follow a strategy of “Populism if necessary, but not necessarily populism” if and when the party became the government of the day.

The populist strategy is primarily composed of Preston Manning’s past experiences with his father’s Social Credit regime. It has enabled the Reform

Party to ride the wave of anti-Mulroney conservatives into a by-election federal victory in Alberta. But it seems to have decided limits in keeping with the Party's evolution. In analysing the Reform Party it becomes evident that their brand of populism can be easily jettisoned in accordance with the leader and his executive. Reform Party critics such as Dobbin have supplied a number of examples in arguing that the Party's populism is "skin deep" and quite deceptive. The most "flagrant" example that is cited by Dobbin has to do with the input of constituency associations in creating party resolutions that would form the basis of party policy. In theory, each constituency association is supposed to provide a number of resolutions that could eventually end up as part of the up-dated "Blue Book."

In the case of the 1991 party convention, the overwhelming number of resolutions were creations of the Party Policy Committee (PPC), an executive organ, rather than from the rank and file.³⁹ The rationale for this seemed to lie with some of the Reform membership who were looking towards alternatives to the Mulroney Government's policy agenda. Accordingly, the Reform Party Executive rejected a number of policy resolutions on conservative ideological grounds. The convention which was supposedly a foregone conclusion because of tight control by Manning and his party associates became a test as a number of controversial PPC resolutions squeaked through the vote process against some scattered resistance.

What seemed to matter most to delegates, however, is that they were being consulted in some very specific ways regarding public policy resolutions. For example, the GST was strongly opposed by the Party coming into the convention and attempts by the executive to favour some similar type of consumption tax were opposed and eventually defeated. In the end and in true populist or true demagogic fashion, Manning had to defend his positions and his executive against charges of authoritarianism by appealing for solidarity against established political interests. The Reform membership gave in and supported almost all the resolutions including an anti-agrarian policy which pushed for consumer based food policies at the expense of stable-subsidized prices for farmers. The idea that agrarian populism had been superseded by more urban based fare was substantially validated.

The outcome of the convention was the 1991 "Blue Book" which was supposed to spell out Reform's policies and principles as democratically debated and voted on. One is left in a quandary, however, in terms of the deliberate

vagueness of the various party policies and principles. Some critics have suggested that such vagueness is proof positive of what Manning himself refers to as “the dark side of the Moon” of populism.

Manning’s reference is apparently made in answer to the often reactionary nature of populism as an exclusionary, ethnocentric project. A “random walk” through the Reform “social reform” 1991 “Blue Book” bears witness. After dispensing with “government run” (meaning wasteful and inefficient) programs such as unemployment insurance, medicare, child care and other social services, the focus switches to certain cultural concerns that a segment of Western Canadians consistently respond to. Under the subsection heading, “RCMP,” the party supports the traditional role of the RCMP as a police force in Canada. This is hardly a controversial statement.⁴⁰ An adjoining clause, however, calls for the protection of the RCMP’s 19th century dress code to the point where “Changes should not be made for religious or ethnic reasons.” Anyone aware of the ongoing controversy surrounding opposition to Sikh RCMP officers who wear their turbans as a religious duty while in uniform could interpret the Reform Book clause as a thinly veiled racist response to what has occurred.

The intent of the RCMP section matches well with the Reform positions on immigration in Canada. While making it clear that the “Reform Party opposes any immigration policy based on race or creed” in clause three on “Immigration,” some interesting linkages follow.⁴¹ Sponsorship privileges for Canadian citizens and landed immigrants are to be restricted to immediate family members and immigration policy should not be used “to solve the crises of the welfare state through forced growth immigration policy.” It could be suggested that Reform supporters fear, as some Canadians generally do, a flood of minority immigrants overwhelming white English Canada as a result of either large minority family sponsors or a federal government program which favours minority immigrants over more traditional (white) immigrants. While the Reform Party is very careful to discount any membership cultural or racial bias, it is rather more than coincidental that various party clauses tend to mirror the general reactionary discontent in the West and elsewhere on these issues. The only difference is type of language employed.

Official bilingualism has always stirred considerable anger on the part of some English Canadians who feel that they are being denied federal government jobs because they do not have a working knowledge of the French language. Other people will argue that since French-speaking individuals lag de-

mographically behind other ethnic groups in the West, why should not people speak Cantonese, German or Ukrainian as the “second” language? In the “Official Languages” section of “Social Reform,” the Reform Party opposes “comprehensive language legislation, whether in the nature of enforced bilingualism or unilingualism, regardless of the level of government.” Instead, Reform supports “asking the people” through a referendum, “to create a language policy that reflects both the aspirations of Canadians and the demographic reality of the country.”⁴² Relevant statistics aside, it is not hard to understand how the myth of “bilingualism today, French tomorrow” has been propagated to fit this sense of false regionalism. Premier Don Getty’s January, 1992 anti-bilingual statements in response to Reform Party potential electoral pressure only added fuel to this reactionary fire.

In a dinner speech at McGill University (Quebec), with Scottish bagpipe music sometimes wafting through the corridors, Preston Manning tried to argue that “official bilingualism” could not be sold to Westerners because of widespread negative perceptions. He went on to argue that a “new Canada” had to be created out of the old federalist structure which was now disintegrating. Manning proclaimed with reference to the “Blue Book” that Canada should no longer be based on “a meeting of two founding races, cultures, and languages...”⁴³ Cleverly, Manning was able to make it appear that the position of the Reform Party was such that multiculturalism was really the order of the day. After all, who could be opposed to a Party that did not privilege any ethnic group over another? Indeed, one francophone dinner guest, after arguing that “everyone is a racist,” urged English Canada to protect its cultural manifestations. Manning nodded his understanding of this position. If there is one area where populism is “alive and well” within the Reform Party, it seems to be at the level of culture.

Conclusion

This essay has explored the concept of populism as it applies to Western Canadian politics. It is clear that populism is a “double edged” sword. It can cut from a progressive or a conservative direction. It can promote progressive politics or it can promote conservative politics in the form of popular culture and false regional consciousness. The Reform Party is a case in point. Con-

tained within the Blue Book is a powerful form of “nostalgia for the absolute” magic of the free marketplace which calls forth a Canadian West no longer over-governed or over-taxed. This neo-conservative mixture also successfully unglues Quebec as part of the founding partner of Canada, because the “distinct society” goes virtually unrecognised in the Reform Party’s call for an end to “special powers” for any province. The fruits of this mixture “burst forth” in the most recent federal election in Canada whereby the Reform Party was able to become the “official federal opposition” by playing on anti-Quebec/anti-Ottawa sentiments in the West. The repercussions of this strategy will be felt for some time.

Notes

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- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 4 Michael A. Dorland, “A Thoroughly Hidden Country: Ressentiment in Canadian Culture,” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 12 (Spring 1988): 130-164.
- 5 Robert J. Brym, “Regional Social Structure and Agrarian Radicalism in Canada: Alberta, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick,” *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 15 (1978): 341.
- 6 Richards, “Populism: A Qualified Defense,” p. 6.
- 7 David Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 7.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 9 Brym, “Regional Social Structure and Agrarian Radicalism in Canada: Alberta, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick,” p.340.
- 10 Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso Editions, 1983), p.112.
- 11 Richards, “Populism: A Qualified Defense,” p. 15.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p.16.
- 13 Brym, “Regional Social Structure and Agrarian Radicalism in Canada,” p.342.
- 14 John Conway, *The West: A History of the Region in Confederation* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company Publishers, 1992), p.127.
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- 16 John Richards and Larry Pratt, *Prairie Capitalism: Power and Influence in the New West* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 1979), p.94.
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- 18 *Ibid.*, p.31.

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- 27 Vernon Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), p.93.
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- 31 Preston Manning, *The New Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan Canada, 1992).
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- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
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- 36 Tom Flanagan, *Waiting for the Wave: The Reform Party and Preston Manning* (Toronto: Stoddard Publishing Co, Ltd, 1995).
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- 40 Ibid.
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