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MACKENZIE KING AND THE PRAIRIE WEST

BY

Robert Alexander Wardhaugh

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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ISBN 0-612-13554-3

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a history of the relationship between Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King and the Prairie region of Canada. It offers insight into the career of Canada's longest serving prime minister and his handling of one of the most politically complex regions in the nation.

Mackenzie King entered the leadership of the national Liberal Party in 1919 with a remarkably sympathetic attitude toward the Prairie West. This attitude translated into federal policies directed at regaining Liberal support in the region during King's early administrations. By the time of his retirement in 1948, his attitude had undergone dramatic transition and the region responded in kind. The roots of the decline in Prairie Liberalism are buried within the Mackenzie King era and a study of this phenomenon helps explain the place of the West in Canada.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Endeavouring to write political history in the age of 'the new social history' is a daunting task indeed. The history of 'dead white males', we are told, has been overdone and energy should be directed elsewhere. In an ironic and hypocritical twist, the profession treats political history in the same condescending manner that social history was treated in the past. In the same tradition of ironic twists, I would like to thank the profession, particularly my fellow graduate students, for this opposition. The criticisms aimed at my topic in the last four and a half years have only heightened my determination.

My list of acknowledgements to historians is long. I must thank J.R. Miller for providing my first contact with Mackenzie King, and T.D. Regehr and W.A. Waiser for heightening the interest into a fascination. Ron Love deserves a special thanks for guiding me towards the historical profession. I owe gratitude to Gerry Friesen for an unforgettable seminar on western Canada along with a wealth of inspiration and advice. My advisor, J.E. Rea, has long been a bastion of political history. His strength in the face of the adverse climate has always been highly appreciated. I owe John Kendle an inexpressible amount of gratitude and above all else, respect. His guidance, patience, and talent cannot

be overemphasized.

Amid difficult economic times, I am grateful for funding from a University of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship and travel expenses to Ottawa that were generously provided by the Ewart Memorial Fund. The archivists at the Alberta Provincial Archives, Saskatchewan Archives Board, Manitoba Provincial Archives, University of Manitoba Archives, Queens University Archives, and the National Archives of Canada were most helpful. The efforts of the staff working at the University of Manitoba inter-library loans are appreciated. In particular, I would like to follow in the path of so many historians who have used the Queens Archives in paying tribute to George Henderson. More than most, however, I owe a special thanks to this archivist, whose shared fascination with Mackenzie King has forged a lifelong friendship.

Last, but not least, I must thank my loved ones. My parents have always been a constant source of comfort and inspiration. To my wife Paula, I owe thanks for allowing me to see so many other sides of life, outside of my own narrow vision.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------|---|
| Debates | <u>Debates of the Canadian House of Commons</u> |
| FP | <u>Free Press</u> |
| GGG | <u>Grain Growers' Guide</u> |
| NAC | National Archives of Canada |
| PAA | Provincial Archives of Alberta |
| PAM | Provincial Archives of Manitoba |
| QUA | Queens University Archives |
| SAB | Saskatchewan Archives Board |
| UMA | University of Manitoba Archives |
| UML | University of Manitoba Libraries |

PREFACE

Mackenzie King, the most studied Canadian politician, is often considered an exhausted topic of historical inquiry. But there are problems with much of this previous work. Books by Hardy, Hutchison, and Ferns and Ostry were written soon after the prime minister's death and suffer from extreme partisanship and inaccessibility of sources.¹ The official biography by Dawson and Neatby, and the detailed study by Granatstein, offer an impressive account of King's life but cannot be expected to provide detailed analyses of the vast array of issues emerging from such a lengthy career.² The sensationalism surrounding the opening of King's diaries and the full emergence of his private life in the late 1970s created a renewed interest as reflected in works by Stacey and Esberay, but the nature of the interest added little to an understanding of King the politician.³ The relatively recent work by Craven would seem to indicate that the necessary time has passed since King's death to allow a new generation of

¹Reginald Hardy, Mackenzie King of Canada, Bruce Hutchison, The Incredible Canadian, H. Ferns and B. Ostry, The Age of Mackenzie King.

²R. MacGregor Dawson, William Lyon Mackenzie King: A Political Biography, 1874-1923, H. Blair Neatby, William Lyon Mackenzie King: The Lonely Heights, 1924-1932 and The Prism of Unity, 1932-1939, J.L. Granatstein, Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945.

³C.P. Stacey, A Very Double Life: The Private World of Mackenzie King, Joy Esberay, Knight of the Holy Spirit.

historians to produce a revised account of Canada's longest-serving prime minister. Craven's efforts, however, stand alone.⁴

One of the topics that the official biography did not engage in any detail was Mackenzie King's handling of the Prairie West. Reginald Whitaker has produced an impressive book on the organizing and financing of the Liberal party from 1930 to 1958 but, as he admits, there is "a wealth of information on Ontario and Quebec" while "there is less detailed information available" regarding the Maritimes and the West. The Prairies posed "an additional problem of space" for Whitaker because while it must be regarded a region, "each of the western provinces is politically unique."⁵

There are good reasons for focusing on Mackenzie King and the Prairie West. An analysis of King's initial view of the region can be incorporated within his social, religious, economic, and political philosophy, as well as the dominant perceptions of the period. The resulting work explains how the area fit into his conception of nation and demonstrates its importance at the beginning of his career. King's policies on key western issues such as tariffs, railways, freight rates, natural resources, and wheat marketing are explored to explain the treatment of the region as well as any

⁴Paul Craven, 'An Impartial Umpire': Industrial Relations and the Canadian State, 1900-1911.

⁵Reginald Whitaker, The Government Party: Organizing and Financing the Liberal Party of Canada, 1930-58, p.268.

marked changes that occurred as his career progressed.

King's leadership style included a reliance on regional lieutenants. The elusive search for a suitable Prairie advisor receives considerable attention as does the prime minister's use of cabinet representation to reward, punish, and control the West. King's relationship with his riding of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan receives special emphasis and becomes a revealing microcosm for his rapport with the region.

The study also helps explain the political development of the Canadian West. Prairie Liberalism has been ably treated by David Smith in his works on the Saskatchewan Liberal party but the emphasis remains solely on this one province. Smith discusses Liberalism in the region in a later work but focuses on the period after 1957.⁶ There is a distressingly small amount of work available on Prairie politics outside the third-party phenomenon. Mackenzie King developed perceptions and strategies to deal with the West as one homogenous region and made little room for provincial differences. A regional study of Prairie Liberalism, with particular attention to the provincial parties, allows these sharp contrasts to emerge fully, and it is within this context that the overall development of party fortunes in the region must be understood. As Whitaker notes, "in the Canadian case, national parties do not seem to have built bases on municipal

⁶David Smith, Prairie Liberalism, The Regional Decline of a National Party, and with Norman Ward, Jimmy Gardiner: Relentless Liberal.

political office, but rather on provincial office...any study of national party organization in this country must include provincial party organizations as an essential element."⁷

The work is intended to make a contribution to an understanding of the Canadian political system and particularly of the place of the Prairie West within the nation. It demonstrates the difficulties in governing such a country of diverse interests and alludes to the resulting inequalities in the Canadian Confederation. As Smith points out, an explanation of the record of the Liberal party in the West is essential if the consequences for region and nation are to be understood.⁸

⁷Ibid., p.xvi.

⁸Smith, The Regional Decline of a National Party, p.17.

CHAPTER ONE
IN SEARCH OF THE NEW JERUSALEM, 1874-1919

I believe so strongly that the interests of all classes in Canada depend primarily on the extent and prosperity of agriculture and in this connection the moral fibre no less than the material well being of the nation, that I do not think it is possible for the agricultural interests to receive too much consideration from Parliament or placed in too strongly a position to compel consideration of their demands.

-W.L.M. King to H.B. Cowan, April 23, 1914.

It is doubtful that the Prairie West played any significant role in the early life of Mackenzie King. When he was born in 1874, the distant interior of the continent awaited transformation. White settlements were appearing across the region more frequently but it was still a vast expanse of rolling plain and rugged parkland that seemed better suited to the aboriginal tribes and the wandering buffalo herds. The march of 'progress' and 'civilization' so long anticipated by central Canadians was slowly making its impact. Canadian interest in the North West had prompted the British Crown in 1870 to purchase Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company and after the tension surrounding the Red River Resistance, it was incorporated into the Dominion. The settlement of this 'unbridled wilderness' was gradually proceeding but it offered great potential for growth. Waves of Ontario immigrants swelled the population of Manitoba. The institutions and ideas of European capitalist society had come to stay and Native groups were forced to suffer the

consequences. Indian and Metis groups were pushed further west in search of the declining buffalo herds. By the end of the 1870s, "the Indians were on reserves, the Metis in disarray, the whites in control."¹ By the 1880s the frontier-settlement communities of the trading post, the parish, and the hunting group had given way to commercial agriculture carried across the Prairies by the railroads and serviced by a burgeoning Winnipeg.

The Ontario of William Lyon Mackenzie King's birth was a world away from the events occurring in the Canadian West. While he grew up far removed from the distant western frontier, King's world was also undergoing considerable transformation. A new stage of capitalism was ushered in with the ever-expanding innovations in technology. The traditional rural lifestyle was being replaced by a new industrialization and accompanying urbanization. Dramatic increases in poverty, crime, prostitution, gambling, and alcoholism were viewed as social vices associated with urban life. The modes of production changed and the new industrial capitalism brought class conflict.

To those searching for a new order the Prairie West offered hope. The region seemed to be vast, open, and empty, a perfect place to build a new society. The interior was not only undergoing cultural, political, and economic change, but was also becoming more attractive to eastern Canada.

¹Gerald Friesen, The Canadian Prairies: A History, p.92.

Mackenzie King's initial views of the West were formed by this popular imagery and its impact would become apparent when the young man made his first visits to the area.

Since before Confederation the Canadian West had been perceived as a separate region. Initial experiences and expectations were placed against the contemporary intellectual mindset to form a dominant perception of region. This "state of mind"² then became the perceived version of reality. "Our pictures of the world," one historical geographer has written, "are highly selective versions of reality that are influenced, not so much by the quality of our vision, as by the visions we have in mind."³

As early as the 1850s a consensus was taking shape that the West was a land of opportunity- a beckoning agricultural frontier. It offered an escape from the constraints of industrial society and the pressures of an increasingly urban, old world. By the 1870s it was transformed in Canadian writings into a "fertile garden well adapted to agricultural pursuits."⁴ It was generally believed the potential of Canada lay in the potential of the developing interior:

These forces raised the image of the West to new

²Gerald Friesen, "Studies in the Development of Western Canadian Regional Consciousness, 1870-1925", (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1973), p.18.

³D.W. Moodie, "Early British Images of Rupert's Land", Man and Nature on the Prairies, p.1.

⁴Douglas Owram, Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900, p.5.

heights and shattered the last qualifications in the Canadian myth of the garden....The result was an image of the North West that was more idealistic and optimistic than anything that had gone before, or, for that matter anything that has existed since.⁵

By the early 1880s expansionist writers were viewing the region as "something approximating an utopia."⁶ The frontier was able to produce its share of heroes to dramatize the new society. From the pioneer to the North West Mounted Police, images praised and glorified the rural life amid the continuing onset of eastern urban industrialization. Despite the hardships of the pioneering West, the myth of the frontier survived and prospered in the popular imagination.

Eastern industrialization and urbanization united the western imagery of Garden of Eden and Utopia in the years from 1880 until World War One. The new society offered an escape from the transforming world. In this period the popular image of the West was dominated by the search for a "new and better society- the promised land, a garden of abundance in which all material wants would be provided and where moral and civic virtues would be perfected."⁷ In the early years of the twentieth century the nation was being discussed in terms of a "New" and "Old" Canada, of an "East" and a "West".⁸ Images

⁵Ibid., p.149.

⁶Ibid., p.165.

⁷R. Douglas Francis, Images of the West, p.107.

⁸Gerald Friesen, "Studies in the Development of Western Canadian Regional Consciousness, 1870-1925", p.1.

in art and literature⁹ described the Prairies as a new society, the symbolic land "wherein the heavenly city might yet be founded."¹⁰ It was pure and filled with hope far from the inherent evils of the "Old East". The Prairies remained an untrammelled wilderness that represented nature as God had intended, a Garden of Eden, a paradise to be lost or won depending on the inhabitants. The dominant qualities of the young region were described as "youthful", "manly", and "rugged".

The West was also portrayed as a 'liberal' society. It represented the last frontier¹¹ and according to western images offered an equality of opportunity.¹² As a frontier it offered the potential for prosperity which could only be obtained through the hard work of the individual. Yet, in the popular imagination

the emphasis upon the individual and his opportunities did not create a society of hard-bitten competitors. Everyone started out equal, according to the ideas of the day, and faced similar tasks. Although material prosperity accrued in private accounts, the social wealth of

⁹Journalists, novelists, and poets such as P.G. Laurie, Ralph Connor, Robert Stead, Robert C. Edwards, and J.W. Dafoe, for example, encouraged these images. For a full discussion see Friesen.

¹⁰Ibid., p.109.

¹¹The West was a 'liberal' frontier relative to the East, but was a 'conservative' frontier relative to the American frontier. This led to a "duality of conservatism and reform" that came to characterize Prairie political thinking. Owsam, pp.138, 144-5.

¹²Friesen, "Studies in the Development of Western Canadian Regional Consciousness, 1870-1925", p.121.

co-operation and friendliness was shared by all.¹³

Also attached to the symbols of liberalism and individualism was the idea of progress, necessarily inherent in reform: "The development of the West, expansionists had promised, would ensure Canada's economic prosperity, enhance its political power, and even allow moral improvement."¹⁴

Mackenzie King never directly revealed his early perceptions of the region; but set within the context of the imagery, his intellectual development, and his experiences, they can be re-constructed. Such a process allows an understanding of how Canada's future and longest-serving prime minister initially viewed the Prairie West.

Conventional interpretations of King indicate his perceptions of the Prairies had little effect on his policies and he only followed the path of political expediency. Such an argument assumes he had no fixed principles which guided his actions but the reasons for this assumption lie in the failure of historians to construct an adequate picture of King's philosophy. He was a practical politician and expediency certainly dominated his career, but it would be simplistic to assume that there was no philosophical base to his actions.

Historians have also been confused by King's ability to

¹³Ibid., p.123.

¹⁴Owram, p.219.

shape his perceptions to coincide with reality.¹⁵ They do not realize that in most cases he sincerely believed he was acting according to his principles. His critics were cynical and assumed he was an insincere hypocrite moving on the whims of expediency. As Neatby notes, "they could not believe he was deluding himself." To a large extent historians have fallen prey to the same assumption.¹⁶ Ironically, H.S. Ferns and Bernard Ostry, probably King's most strident critics, indicated one of the most fundamental truths about the politician: "In studying the activities of Mackenzie King it is always necessary to distinguish what he persuaded himself he was doing; what he persuaded others he was doing; and what he actually did."¹⁷ Regardless of the action, however, all three were based on an established philosophy.

Reg Whitaker and Paul Craven have been the first historians to break away from the "broadly accepted view" that King had no philosophy. Craven agrees with Neatby's claim that while, "to put it bluntly, Mackenzie King was incapable of any coherent presentation of his political philosophy...it is possible to have ideas without expressing them...King's political ideas were not articulated but he was human- he had

¹⁵Neatby's two volumes of the official biography do not adequately expand this fundamental point.

¹⁶H.B. Neatby, William Lyon Mackenzie King, 1924-1932: The Lonely Heights. pp.204-6, 311.

¹⁷H.S. Ferns and B. Ostry, The Age of Mackenzie King: The Rise of the Leader, pp.64-5.

ideas." As Craven indicates, it is more helpful to employ Gramsci's analytic view of the place of the intellectual in the system of social relations. "All men are intellectuals...but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals." King was well educated and highly intelligent. He had formed a distinct philosophy, some of which could be altered, developed, and even transformed, and some of which was set:

In Mackenzie King's case, it is possible at least to say that the ideas he used were not formed after the fact. What King thought about society in the abstract had been put in place, to all intents and purposes, before he realized the opportunity to act on a particular society....After all, even the most rank of opportunists must frame his acts according to some organized perception of what is likely to be opportune.¹⁸

The idea of reform that was coming to dominate the social, economic, and political language of the day was particularly influential in the formation of King's philosophy. The youth was always romantically aware of his maternal grandfather's role in the reforming of Canada's political system through the rebellions of 1837-38. As R. MacGregor Dawson has indicated, "from his earliest years Willie lived in a political atmosphere, for William Lyon Mackenzie and the Liberal tradition were integral parts of the family environment."¹⁹

¹⁸Paul Craven, 'An Impartial Umpire': Industrial Relations and the Canadian State, 1900-11, p.15, pp.17-8.

¹⁹R. MacGregor Dawson, William Lyon Mackenzie King: A Political Biography, 1874-1923, p.13.

King's undergraduate years at the University of Toronto in the 1890s furthered these sentiments and saw him wavering between a career in the Christian Ministry and politics, his devout piety and his dream of following in his grandfather's footsteps. The intellectual environment provided by the University offered an additional impulse. Mackenzie King's generation was becoming increasingly concerned with the search for the roots of social order. The old socio-economic system seemed on the verge of crumbling. King observed his changing world and was troubled by the obscurity of the future. He was developing a social conscience aimed at the evils of industrialization and urbanization, and he embraced the movement towards social reform that had been evolving for over a century. He was demonstrating an interest in labour problems and a sympathy for the worker.

King found a shared sympathy for the labouring classes in his work at Hull House in Chicago and an inspiration in the writing of Arnold Toynbee. Only through a union of education and religion could the economic system come to terms with the changing conditions and allow for social reform and ultimately progress. Toynbee argued that the hopes for a new, stable society, free from class conflict, lay in the formation of a new moral order.

During these formative years King felt a strong desire to carry on the work of his grandfather, "to better the condition of the poor, denounce corruption, the tyranny of abused power,

and uphold right and honoured principles."²⁰ Despite his rhetoric of philanthropy, the realities of social work at Hull House were simply too gruelling and disheartening. His ambition again turned to academe and a possible career as a professor or university president.

King's liberal economic beliefs were strengthened while working towards the doctoral degree at Harvard and his ideas were conditioned by the theoretical debate that transformed political economy at the end of the nineteenth century. Like Toynbee, he saw society's arduous but enlightened pilgrimage along the road of liberal capitalism being assailed by the vices of class conflict. The rise of trade unionism and working-class political movements were threatening the social order. A debate was provoked by the question of whether class co-operation or conflict would prevail. Dissociating themselves from the laissez-faire orthodoxy of the past, the new political economists prescribed a positive role for the state. There was an endorsement of trade unionism and social reform movements.

The movements called for a regeneration of society, a cleansing of the old order, and the formation of new perspectives. King's blending of Calvinism and social reform produced what has been called a "religious liberalism".²¹ His

²⁰William Lyon Mackenzie King Diaries, June 22, 1895.

²¹Ramsay Cook, The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada, p.169.

faith was imbued with the spirit of individual and social moral reform that was in accord with the popular images depicting the West.

The social gospel and social reform in Canada were movements rooted in the search for a new interpretation of religion. From the 1890s through the 1930s this spirit was abroad in Canada.²² The movement couched its objectives in the language of the Kingdom of God on Earth, the New Day, the New Birth, the New Jerusalem. In large measure the popular images of the West as the progressive, pristine wilderness spawned a reforming ideal for the social gospel. In Canada it was the Prairie West that supported the strongest and most active movement:

Progress was an inclusive philosophy in Victorian Canada, and therefore, was the foundation for the extraordinary prairie confidence in personal and social improvement....Moral improvement and more good works figured prominently in generalizations about the West."²³

The social gospel was also a dominant feature of King's philosophy. From his early youth he advocated his religious convictions adamantly. On numerous occasions he seriously contemplated entering the ministry and always believed God had a mission for him to fulfil. What he believed to be his genuine concern for 'the people' and the progress of humanity

²²Richard Allen, The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-28, p.3.

²³Friesen, "Studies in the Development of Western Canadian Regional Consciousness, 1870-1925", pp.133-4.

led him into the arms of the social gospel. He agreed with the movement's search for a reformed faith, "the renaissance of a pure religion."²⁴ He was constantly searching for the golden path to Salvation and Redemption, for the gates of the Celestial City, for "the New Jerusalem."²⁵ The influence of Christianity was to serve "as a motive power in social reform"²⁶ and the union of religion and reform resulted in the search for this new society. The old order was being transformed but King was frustrated that the people were not taking full advantage. He could not understand "how men are looking into all corners of the earth creating literally a new heaven & new earth & yet nothing new under the sun."²⁷ It was, he believed, possible to find the Kingdom of God on Earth: "I am bound to overcome my besetting sin, it wd. close me out of the Garden of Eden which still exists in this world if it gained the mastery."²⁸ He saw himself as the Questing Galahad in search of the elusive Grail: "It comes back to the truth of the scriptural saying 'Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, & all these things shall be added unto you' that is what I am striving to do."²⁹

²⁴King Diaries, June 19, 1898.

²⁵Cook, p.211.

²⁶King Diaries, February 22, 1900.

²⁷Ibid., August 24, 1897.

²⁸Ibid., February 14, 1898.

²⁹Ibid., October 31, 1911.

Mackenzie King was aware of the strong influence that the social gospel was having on the Prairies and this coloured his perceptions of the region. His initial impressions were inevitably affected by the prevailing popular imagery and these were reinforced on his first journey across the Prairies in 1903 as deputy minister of labour. It became immediately apparent that King was prepared to see the West as a new society closer to the Kingdom of God. While travelling he was struck by the sublimity of an otherwise ordinary gesture. A man on the train lent his coat to King and this act conjured up an idealistic and symbolic response: "He lent me his coat, to wear & was as kind as could be. I thought of Christ's words 'I was a stranger & ye took me in, naked & ye clothed me.' Surely those who will be first in the Kingdom of Heaven are such men as these."³⁰

The geographical traits of the Prairie West took on an element of the sublime for King. The symbol of Nature represented the power of God in that it reflected the purity, regeneration, and rewarding and punishing power of the Garden of Eden. King searched for what he called "the great pure world of Nature" because, he wrote, "all Nature seems to me a manifestation of the Divine."³¹ Whenever King's early political career as minister of labour in the Laurier government or as labour consultant for the Rockefeller family

³⁰Ibid., April 28, 1903.

³¹Ibid., March 5, 1899; February 13, 1904.

took him to the West, he always remarked upon the powerful force of Nature in terms that were saturated with religious imagery. While he could not help but notice the "monotony" of the Prairie landscape, more often he commented on the "presence of trees, & water with hills in places" affording

many glimpses of beautiful landscape. The presence of many blue flowers on the prairies during the afternoon, of fires at night, and of the brightness of the stars & the vastness of the open spaces were the most attractive features of the day's journey.³²

Working on the Lethbridge Strike in 1907, King commented on changes he perceived in the region: "The Indians seemed to be disappearing and the stations and small towns have a different class of settlers than appeared a few years ago." The result, however, was still a land of opportunity where one noticed "the great prosperity in this country and of the exceptional opportunity it afforded to all classes who were willing to work."³³ 'Civilization' was coming to the region but in Mackenzie King's eyes it was creating a new and better society.

The young man was also impressed by the emphasis on 'labour', 'the people', and 'humanity' that he perceived in the new region. He was an 'intellectual' supporter of what he termed 'the working classes' and believed that his mission in life was "to make for labour- vs. all tyranny and oppress'n &

³²Ibid., April 26, 1903.

³³Ibid., April 22, 1907.

effort to gain better life for the toilers."³⁴ As a young boy King remembered reading his grandfather's words: "Well may I love the poor, greatly may I esteem the humble and the lowly."³⁵ As one of his contemporaries has written, "Mackenzie King was not only on the side of the poor and humble; he believed he was spiritually one of them."³⁶ His graduate career at Harvard, his position with the Labour Gazette, his service with the department of labour, and finally his work with the Rockefellers developed King's political thinking to the point where he saw himself as a strong advocate of labour. He believed he was the 'impartial umpire' maintaining the balance between industry and humanity and if anything, being more sympathetic to the plight of the worker.

The same form of 'idealistic' sympathy he felt with labour was also applied to the Prairie region and he viewed the farmers essentially as labourers. The western farmers were employers of labour and independent operators, and did not identify themselves with the working classes. 'The interests', however, were generally associated with the manufacturing East. In the overall struggle between labour and management King's ignorance of agriculture led him to

³⁴Ibid., September 24, 1897.

³⁵William Lyon Mackenzie as quoted in E.K. Brown, "Mackenzie King of Canada," Harpers, January, 1943, p.193.

³⁶J.W. Pickersgill, "Mackenzie King's Political Attitudes and Public Policies: A Personal Impression" in John English and J.O. Stubbs, ed., Mackenzie King: Widening the Debate, p.16.

equate the West with 'the masses'. Reflecting on the Lethbridge strike of 1907, he wrote that "the most enlightening experience of those years was that which arose out of a strike in the coal mines of Lethbridge in the Province of Alberta." The impact of the Prairie strike would remain with the young politician: "What I saw, at the time, of the desperate plight of a large portion of the Prairie population made an indelible impression on my mind."³⁷ King received widespread acclaim for having 'solved' the strike from such western leaders as Saskatchewan Premier Walter Scott, and as one correspondent put it, "the people of a great province will be saved this winter from disaster and suffering."³⁸

In the mind of Mackenzie King the plights of the worker and farmer in struggling against the established interests were similar, and both deserved sympathy. This sympathy could only be offered, however, as long as the movements did not exceed the bounds of moderation. His attitude toward socialism is therefore crucial in understanding his later views toward the radicalization of the Farmer's movements in the West.

Dawson makes note of King's sympathy for labour but his

³⁷King, introduction to Industry and Humanity [1947], pp.xviii-xix.

³⁸National Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King Papers, Primary Correspondence Series, reel 1905, volume 6, pp. 5414-5, King to Walter Scott, December 11, 1906; reel 1906, p.5609, W.G. Walker to King, December 12, 1906.

apathy for socialism: "For one whose paramount desire was to help the working man, King still proved singularly impervious to the appeal of socialist arguments directed to the same end."³⁹ He admired "the emphasis...upon the spirit which the Socialist movement is intended to express" but he could not embrace a movement that was "the opposite of that which admits of private property, and of individuals pursuing, under voluntary association, their own interests in their own way."⁴⁰ He acknowledged Marx's contribution and objective, but could not accept his means or his analysis of change. The answer to society's social and economic ills lay in reform not revolution. As a 'liberal democrat' he could not swallow the notion of class conflict and distrusted all schemes which threatened to abolish private property and curb individual initiative and freedom. Within the desire for social reform there remained the fundamental principles of nineteenth-century liberalism: "I find myself", King wrote,

becoming ever stronger against govt. action, except for making restrictions, regulat'ns etc. chiefly because of the deteriorating effect it tends to have on human character, giving wider scope for favoritism leading to idleness etc. in those employed, & a favouring sycophancy on the part of those seeking it.⁴¹

Six months later he indicated that "while my love is

³⁹Dawson, p.85.

⁴⁰W.L.M. King, Industry and Humanity: A Study in the Principles Underlying Industrial Reconstruction. [1919], p.11.

⁴¹King Diaries, July 11, 1899.

mostly for the wkg. classes, I am inclined to believe that it is better for public bodies to leave the matter of ownership etc. alone- I am on the whole opposed to 'Socialistic Schemes'."⁴² For King, state regulation was beneficial only to check the abuses of private enterprise. In England he had been "immensely taken" with the Co-operative Movement as having "all the virtues claimed for Socialism without its defects."⁴³ He shared Toynbee's emphasis on moral improvement rather than economic change as being the key to social reform: "Till the heart of man & his morality has[sic] changed, external changes whatever they be will neither end corruption or misery."⁴⁴ Mankind was not morally prepared for the responsibility of creating an idealistic society of equals and socialism, therefore, was too idealistic:

How impossible it would be, against the ignorance of the age, & the weakness of human nature as it is constituted, to expect men to be governed in their dealings by...honor only a spur to exertion, or all to govern themselves without external function or external corruption. Human nature changes slowly, but until men have changed greatly from what they are today anything like a regime of Socialism is entirely a mistake & impossibility.⁴⁵

The radicalism of labour caused an internal struggle for Mackenzie King where his personal sympathies had to coexist with his desire to play mediator. The dilemma would mirror

⁴²Ibid., July 11, 1899; January 23, 1900.

⁴³Ibid., January 27, 1900.

⁴⁴Ibid., July 11, 1899.

⁴⁵Ibid., July 12, 1899.

the situation with his perceptions of the Prairies. The increasing radicalism of the Farmers would clash with his personal sympathies, and he would often find it necessary to fall back on his desire to balance regional interests.

By the early years of the twentieth century the utopian images of the Prairie West were being tempered by the realities of a region being pulled into the political and economic framework of a growing nation. In the face of East-West antagonism and the increasing sentiments of western alienation, particular 'Prairie' issues emerged. Mackenzie King found himself to be in sympathy with these western concerns.

As late as 1896 the great expectations of the Canadian West were as yet unfulfilled. The area between Lake Superior and the Rocky Mountains remained largely as it had in the era of the fur trade. Manitoba was gradually expanding but further west lay only isolated stretches of settlement. The general depression of 1873-96 hindered the hopes of western prosperity even more. "The empty West was testimony to the failure of the great hopes of Confederation."⁴⁶

The roots of western alienation went back to the region's absorption into Confederation. The anger over the purchase of Rupert's Land which culminated in the Red River Resistance became symbolic of the region's relationship to Ottawa. Manitoba's entry into Confederation was also reason for

⁴⁶W.L. Morton, The Progressive Party in Canada, pp.1-4.

conflict. The control of the province's natural resources remained in the hands of the federal government to foster western development. Manitoba would receive a subsidy in lieu of the resources but this could not replace the control that was, by British tradition, an inherent right of responsible government. In the meantime, when British Columbia entered Confederation in 1871 and Prince Edward Island in 1873, they received full control of their public domain, yet when Saskatchewan and Alberta were created in 1905, they received the same treatment as Manitoba. Westerners justifiably felt they were not on a par with the other sections of the nation.

Mackenzie King found it easy to sympathize with the western desire for control of its natural resources. The Dominion Lands policy was always seen as a short-term measure to deal with the rapid expansion of the region. It was generally accepted that the Prairie provinces were deserving of their resources and that their claims had a "moral" basis.⁴⁷ The issue fit into King's belief that the West had genuine grievances against Ottawa that only a sympathetic government could properly manage.

The means by which Ottawa had fostered development was the National Policy of Sir John A. Macdonald and the Conservative party. The three elements of the policy- transportation, immigration, and tariff protection- all became sources of western discontent and augmented the belief that

⁴⁷King Diaries, April 20, 1922.

the Prairie West was being exploited and manipulated for the benefit of central Canada. The protective tariff was the heart of the National Policy and came to rest at the center of the discontent.

The tariff was a customs duty levied on imported goods and generated about 60 per cent of Ottawa's revenue in the 1870s.⁴⁸ By the end of the decade the tariff for government revenue had been converted to a tariff for protecting the manufacturing interests, the majority of which were in the East. The westerner viewed the so-called 'national' policy as protection for eastern manufacturers against American competition and an assurance that the Prairie community of consumers would remain a profitable market for east-west trade. The 'Nationalist' arguments of having to protect a young, small, and vulnerable manufacturing sector meant little to the Prairie farmer whose produce received no such protection on the international market. Protective tariffs for the farmer meant that while the price and profits of his produce were left to the whims of the marketplace, the costs of supplies and the necessities of life were guaranteed to remain high. Goods that could be purchased cheaper in the United States were artificially more expensive.

King's views on such traditionally liberal ideas as freer trade were strengthened by his graduate work at Harvard. Professor Frank William Taussig was particularly influential.

⁴⁸Friesen, The Canadian Prairies, p.188.

Dawson argues that "to Taussig must be given the credit for conforming and consolidating King's belief in the theory of free trade."⁴⁹ After listening to a lecture by Taussig he wrote:

I feel more convinced than ever. In fact convinced for the first time of the truth of the theory of free trade. We must have regard for conditions in practice. I see the side against protect'n more clearly than ever. This has been a day, if not of political convers'n, at least of conviction.⁵⁰

Journeys into the West further convinced King of the soundness of this issue. "To my mind," he wrote in 1907, "the people have much to gain, by a reduction in tariffs all round."⁵¹

Transportation and freight rates also became bitter sources of western controversy. Since the early 1880s Prairie residents claimed they paid higher transportation costs than eastern Canada because of a discriminatory rate structure that had become publicly labelled as fair discrimination.⁵² The railways, on the other hand, argued that because of competition from other rail lines, cheaper water routes in eastern Canada, and the additional costs of carrying the freight north of Lake Superior across the Prairies and through the mountains, the extra financial burden should be carried by the region. Westerners viewed the industry as a private

⁴⁹Dawson, p.73.

⁵⁰King Diaries, December 13, 1897.

⁵¹Ibid., April 22, 1907.

⁵²Friesen, The Canadian Prairies, p.191.

monopoly that received constant government assistance and then consistently exploited the populace. The answer, they believed, was nationalization or at least regulation of the railways and a national equalization of rates. In 1897 the West did receive freight rate concessions in the form of the Crow's Nest Pass Agreement. The line of rich mineral deposits in the Kootenays led the CPR to build a spur from its line at Lethbridge to Nelson, British Columbia, via the Crow's Nest Pass, to forestall American competition. The expensive undertaking would require additional government assistance and on the Prairies such support was palatable only if freight rate concessions were offered in return. As a result, the CPR agreed to reduce its rates, including the rate for grain eastbound from Regina to Thunder Bay and the rates on westbound settlers' effects, by approximately twenty per cent. The agreement would itself become a continuing source of Ottawa-Prairie debate and a bellwether in freight rate debates.

The Macdonald Conservatives had held office during most of these difficult years and consequently felt the sting of western resentment. Political and economic disputes over land boundaries, provincial status, federal financial assistance, railway concessions, and denominational schools dominated the debate. In Manitoba the issue of federal disallowance of railway charters to protect the 'monopoly' clause had fueled the provincial rights sentiment which was appropriated by the

Liberals.

The period that followed 1896 reawakened much of the original optimism that the West would play a significant role in national development. The price of wheat was rising steadily and as more settlers entered the area, the West was leading Canada into the age of the wheat economy. The election victory of Wilfrid Laurier and the Liberals in 1896 ensured that it would be the Grits who would reap the political benefits. When Laurier dubbed the new era 'Canada's Century', the optimism so evident in the rhetoric was founded largely on the potential of the Prairie West. Whereas the region had been "the repository of hope in the Macdonald years," it was to be the "source of wealth in the Laurier era."⁵³

From 1896 until 1911 the Liberals held power and built a national organization that could rival that of the Tories.⁵⁴ The western population quadrupled and two new trans-continental rail lines were constructed. The creation of Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905 under the auspices of Laurier's government turned both provinces into Liberal strongholds. The period of economic prosperity ensured that the West would be a bulwark of Liberal support. But the optimism and prosperity of the 'Golden Years' was not a

⁵³Friesen, "Studies in the Development of Western Canadian Regional Consciousness, 1870-1925", p.133.

⁵⁴Morton, p.5.

realistic reflection of the West's national importance and was to be shortlived. Even during its most prosperous period the West continued to suffer from numerous sectional handicaps. A growing reliance on the wheat staple made the region increasingly vulnerable.

The West was becoming aware of its political weakness as well. Across North America, farmers' movements were reacting to the dominant position of the industrial sector. The Grange, the Patrons of Industry, and the Non-Partisan League were populist movements that entered the Canadian West from the United States. Locally, after 1901, the farm discontent coalesced in the Grain Growers' Associations. In working to improve the plight of the farmer, the agrarian movement confronted the economic and political system that so directly controlled its fate.

The western Liberal parties were conscious of the growing discontent with the federal parties and the increasing influence and popularity of the agrarian movements. Survival would necessitate immediate action. By 1910 Manitoba Liberals had adopted most of the leading proposals of the organized Farmers and the reform movement. In Saskatchewan the Liberal base was stronger but the government still emphasized its efficient and progressive nature through the language of agrarian reform.⁵⁵ Alberta differed economically and ethnically from Saskatchewan. The "weakness of old Canadian

⁵⁵Ibid., p.35.

elements" in Alberta diminished the influence of the traditional two-party system and introduced the philosophy of American populism.⁵⁶ Sentiments of western alienation were increasing more rapidly in Alberta. The province "was not only subject to more intense sectional feeling than its eastern neighbours but was developing a more radical spirit than the leaders of the organized farmers had yet invoked."⁵⁷

In 1909 the Grain Growers of the West joined the Grange and the Farmers' Association in Ontario to form the Canadian Council of Agriculture. The movement thereby assumed a national character and began to speak for agriculture as an organized interest. The Grain Growers' Guide voiced the farmer's creed: faith in democracy, hatred of corporate wealth, and distrust of the political system. The Farmers had not yet entered politics but their frustration was mounting: "The time is ripe," the Manitoba Free Press trumpeted in 1916, "for Western Liberals to decide that they will rely upon themselves--and do their own thinking, formulate their own policies and provide their own leaders."⁵⁸

Mackenzie King was in sympathy with the reformist cries emerging from the West and he agreed with their complaints that the system had become too oppressive. He had no doubt

⁵⁶Ibid., p.38.

⁵⁷Ibid., p.40.

⁵⁸As quoted in Friesen, "Studies in the Development of Western Canadian Regional Consciousness, 1870-1925", p.164.

the West should be a liberal region but Prairie voices were warning King that unless the Liberals made some move to accommodate the region's desire for reform, the increasing sentiments of radicalism would continue. "Here in the West," journalist J.A. Stevenson wrote,

we have all the materials for an efficient Liberalism....But I tell you frankly, the Western Liberals will not be prepared to work with any enthusiasm for the modern Whiggism which has characterized the party's policy for the last years....It may be invidious to talk of class distinctions but I believe Carl Marks[sic] was true when he insisted on the development of class consciousness as a necessity for political evolution.⁵⁹

King agreed that a New Liberalism was required to deal with the new order: "I agree entirely with you that a radical policy which will, if carried, mean something of real value to the great mass of the people is what the Liberal party must adopt, and be prepared to advocate as strongly as possible."⁶⁰

Between 1906 and 1910 the western demand for a lower tariff increased. In 1909 the world price for wheat began a downward trend while the costs of transportation and supplies continued to rise. The farmer turned to the governing Liberals, whose rhetoric had always championed lower tariffs, but in office had accepted the National Policy. Forgotten was Laurier's 1894 Winnipeg declaration: "I denounce the policy of protection as bondage- yea, bondage; and I refer to bondage

⁵⁹King Papers, reel 1918, volume 21, pp.19538A-2, J.A. Stevenson to King, June 25, 1913.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp.19538A3-7, King to Stevenson, July 4, 1913.

in the same manner in which American slavery was bondage."⁶¹

The Liberals had to face the political realities of office and the sectional interests of the nation. Governing Canada involved a series of compromises among the Maritimes, central Canada, and the West. In 1907 the Liberal tariff comprised the British preferential, intermediate, and maximum set of rates; but after 1909 the Republicans in the United States began to raise their tariffs. King's Ontario roots, his desire to play impartial umpire, and his growing sense of political expediency made him aware of the benefits the tariff provided the East. He was wrestling with the difficulties of somehow combining his sympathies with his need to play mediator among regions:

I must frankly confess I see great danger in whole tariff negotiations at this time....The West just now is affording a good market to Eastern mffrs. We are building up an internal development, trade east & west, mffr. development, getting capital from U.S. & other lands & well enough had better be left alone....We could meet the farmers by tariff reductions in agric. implements. This has been the view I have taken, it is the Ont. view I believe, & is in national interest, as well as interests of Govt.- If we can get a few national products free each way well & good, [but] it is questionable the touching mffrs to any extent.⁶²

Under pressure from agrarian interests across the country the Liberals managed to negotiate the Reciprocity Agreement with the United States in 1911. The fact that later in the same year the Liberals were staking their future and an

⁶¹As quoted in Morton, p.20.

⁶²King Diaries, January 18, 1911.

election on the issue returned King to his philosophical base and the western position:

Agreed the party should think of the consumer primarily, not look to the mffr'r, get after the combines & trusts, not look to them for support. Go in for increase of the British Preference & show up the selfishness of those who were waving the flag as a pretext in the Reciprocity campaign. Look to the West & not a few interests in Montreal & Toronto for results.⁶³

In reaction, the railway and manufacturing interests argued that the deal would destroy the growing system of east-west trade. Led, ironically, by the former western lieutenant, Clifford Sifton, a group of Liberals took up the nationalist arguments, bolted the party, and moved to support the Conservatives. Laurier went to the polls in the election of 1911 but the Tories, wrapped in the flag and calling for 'No truck or trade with the Yankees', were victorious. The West had been advocating freer trade for years but the nationalist appeals were not without effect. Manitoba gave the majority of its support to the Tories. In general, however, this blow was instrumental in breaking the West's faith in the two traditional parties. "The defeat of reciprocity in 1911 was the first act in the agrarian revolt of Western Canada."⁶⁴

The West realized that Laurier and the Liberals had gone down to defeat fighting for a western policy, but while it could appreciate the effort, the result was the same. The old

⁶³Ibid., February 29, 1912.

⁶⁴Morton, p.26.

parties would suffer a loss of influence and prestige throughout the region but it would be the Conservative party that had defeated reciprocity and would have to pay most heavily. The Liberal party could, on the other hand, pose as the "martyr of reciprocity and the pose was to be rewarding."⁶⁵

Western spokesmen made it clear that for the Prairies to become a "Gibraltar of Liberalism within ten years" the party must become "the advocate of a low tariff, the opponent of the trade combines, and the regulator of big corporations such as railways and banks." The Liberals were warned not to give up on lower tariffs:

There are some issues which a political party can manufacture, try out on the electorate, and quietly shelve if they don't work. The issue of a larger measure of trade with the United States is not one of these...it would be followed by the formation of an advanced Western Liberal group which would formulate a very radical fiscal policy.⁶⁶

Laurier and the Liberals learned their lesson from the defeat of 1911. The national parties were often forced to function less as formulators of policy than as brokers of sectional interests. "Our best course," Laurier informed King,

is to follow as we have commenced- a revenue tariff- appealing to the common sense of both producers and consumers...we must convince every class of the community- farmers, manufacturers, consumers and producers- that we are enemy to none, friend of all and that we want justice for every

⁶⁵Ibid., p.25.

⁶⁶University of Manitoba Libraries, Dafoe Papers, box 3, file 5, Dafoe to W. Laurier, November 18, 1912.

one.⁶⁷

The young King was also coming to terms with the sectional nature of the country and studying the art of brokerage politics that would later become his trademark. A politician could pursue policies based on personal philosophy but when the situation demanded, the ability to compromise was necessary. Such an ability was crucial to mediate among the many divergent interests in Canada. King was personally sympathetic to the plight of the Prairie populace and the liberal principle of freer trade, but he could understand the tradition of protecting the manufacturing interests and more importantly its expediency. It was admirable to stand on an issue but as the election of 1911 had shown, rarely was it worth defeat. He still remained convinced that there should be "a reduction of duties...on all commodities which form part of the necessities of life"⁶⁸ and if the opportunity arose he would act. By 1914 King had wrestled with the conflicting political and economic interests and was articulating a more comprehensive position:

The declaration on the part of the Liberals for free implements and for free wheat which means free flour, as well, and the abolition of protected duties on milling and also the declaration for a change in the tariff with a view to reducing the high cost of living are surely evidences sufficient that the Liberal party has no desire to see

⁶⁷King Papers, reel 1920, volume 23, pp.21394-4, Laurier to King, April 24, 1914.

⁶⁸Ibid., reel 1918, volume 21, pp.19538A3-7, King to J.A. Stevenson, July 4, 1913.

retained privileges which are disadvantageous to the people as a whole. One has also to remember that Canada has had a protective tariff now for a number of years and is alongside of a Nation whose industries are very similar and which have been built up by the aid of protection. To alter a fabric of this kind without injuring legitimate vested interests is a difficult task, and changes as radical as those suggested by some of the members of the Canadian West...if put into force would only retard in the long run the attaining of the goal to[sic] freer trade which is their ultimate aim and which may come in time, though not for many years.⁶⁹

Eastern pressure on the Liberal party to maintain the tariff increased after 1911. Laurier had made Quebec the main bastion of Liberal support and his successor would have to appeal to this stronghold. "I had a feeling, while in Quebec," King wrote,

that certain of our friends there were likely to be more concerned about keeping the tariff where it is than effecting any modifications of it. Under the circumstances it has seemed to me the part of wisdom not to be involved in any discussion of this subject just at this time.⁷⁰

Political expediency and the balancing of sectional interests demanded that King refrain from publicly advocating tariff modifications but he continued to believe that "the West is right in wanting freer trade."⁷¹ To Prairie residents this meant the usual sacrificing of their interests to the East. The Grain Growers' Guide demonstrated the strength of

⁶⁹Ibid., reel 1920, volume 24, p. 21794, King to J.H. Munro, April 27, 1914.

⁷⁰Ibid., reel 1935, volume 44, p.38933, King to Sydney Fisher, April 13, 1919.

⁷¹King Diaries, May 15, 1917.

the western low tariff sentiment and the necessity of revision in return for support: "Unless the Liberals can be depended upon to reduce the tariff very considerably there is no advantage in returning them to power."⁷² It was becoming evident that the Liberals were going to have difficulty maintaining their Prairie support.

King's contemplation of taking a western seat in Parliament as early as 1911 can also be seen as an example of the natural bond he believed existed between himself and the region. The power of the Liberals in Saskatchewan made the province particularly alluring and King's early years in politics had demonstrated the difficulty of finding a safe seat.⁷³ The fact that Laurier had contested a Saskatchewan riding added to the appeal. King wrote after the election defeat of 1911 that if he could not win a seat in Ontario he would "go to Saskatchewan."⁷⁴ Western leaders, however, had mixed views on having him take a Prairie seat. "I received today a letter from Martin of Regina," King recorded,

offering me his seat there, but expressing doubt as to the wisdom of opening it or transplanting an eastern man west. The latter prejudice I think I could overcome, by getting around among the people....More & more Saskatchewan seems to me the best province for my purpose.⁷⁵

⁷²Grain Grower's Guide, volume 9, p.5, August 2, 1916.

⁷³In 1908 King won the seat of North Waterloo but lost it in 1911.

⁷⁴King Diaries, October, 13, 1911.

⁷⁵Ibid., October 26, 1911.

The mediator could not accept the notion of being specifically an 'eastern man' but believed his philosophy and sympathy would make him a suitable western representative. Western Liberals were reinforcing this perception that there should exist a strong relationship between himself and the region. "Your ideas," one correspondent wrote, "on national subjects [reciprocity, prohibition, freight rates] are much [more] in accordance with the spirit of the West than of old conservative Ontario." He also suggested that King should represent a constituency in Saskatchewan.⁷⁶

Mackenzie King's romantic view of agriculture and rural life also coloured his perceptions of the Prairies. "I am convinced," he wrote in 1914, "we must consider what is going to help to keep the people on the land first of all. It is sound economics & helpful to the morality and character of a nation."⁷⁷ King's idealistic views of agriculture fit into his utopian image of the West and his search for moral reform:

I believe so strongly that the interests of all classes in Canada depend primarily on the extent and prosperity of agriculture and in this connection the moral fibre not less than the material well being of the nation, that I do not think it is possible for the agricultural interests to receive too much consideration from Parliament or placed in too strongly a position to compel consideration of their demands.⁷⁸

⁷⁶King Papers, reel 1916, volume 19, pp. 17468-70, Sydney Fray to King, January 6, 1912.

⁷⁷King Diaries, January 13, 1914.

⁷⁸King Papers, reel 1919, volume 22, pp.20268-9, King to H.B. Cowan, April 23, 1914.

The First World War had a marked impact on the development of the West and the career of Mackenzie King. It forced the Canadian economy into high gear and increased the demand for wheat. The importance of the western farmer also increased but the situation was only temporary. As W.L. Morton points out, "the Canadian West entered a second period of forced growth, which quieted its sectional grievances momentarily but which, in the long run, was to aggravate them intensely."⁷⁹ Fluctuating price levels were set against rising costs and the war situation forced more drastic action than the establishment of a government regulatory agency and Farmers' co-operative movements which had come earlier. The open market and free enterprise system were temporarily replaced by government intervention and control. In early 1917 Canada created a Board of Grain Supervisors to control the marketing of wheat which in 1919 was replaced by a Wheat Board. The government intervention reflected the emergency conditions of wartime and by the opening of the 1920 crop year the open market system was restored. Disgruntled farmers would not forget the experience, however, and many would associate the prosperity of wartime sales with government control of marketing.

Mackenzie King spent the war in the United States working as a labour consultant for the Rockefeller family. These years also gave him the opportunity to write what would serve

⁷⁹Morton, pp.40-1.

as his Ph.D. dissertation. Industry and Humanity appeared in 1918 and is the most comprehensive account of King's early philosophy. The treatise laid out his plan for social reconstruction in the post-war era and emphasized the avoidance of industrial disputes. Its rhetoric was shaped by the ideology of reconstruction and the "swelling currents" of the social gospel.⁸⁰ With the proper co-operation between the social groups, "it is not alone a new dawn Labor and Capital may summon forth; they can create a wholly new civilization."⁸¹ The work demonstrated King's radical brand of liberal philosophy. The emphasis on individual freedom had to be tempered by the concern for all humanity: "In the conflict between the temporary interests of selfish individuals and the permanent welfare of nations, the latter alone is entitled to consideration," for "if Progress worthy of the name is to be achieved, it will never be through gains reaped by some at the expense of others. It will be in the sacrifice and the advance which have regard for the well-being of the whole."⁸²

Mackenzie King spent most of the war outside Canada but an issue emerged that would have disastrous effects on the Liberal party. The division caused by the conscription crisis of 1917 not only widened the gap between French and English in Canada, but also split the party. According to Morton, "the

⁸⁰Craven, p.38.

⁸¹King, Industry and Humanity, p.528.

⁸²Ibid., p.331, p.11.

war blew up the old party structure of Canada already groaning under the stresses which the particularism of Quebec and the agrarian sectionalism of the West had imposed upon it."⁸³ Laurier's refusal to accept conscription and join the Union government, as offered by Conservative leader Robert Borden, maintained French-Canadian support for the Liberal Party in the long run but lost the immediate support of English Canada. Western Liberals jumped aboard the Union bandwagon to ensure Canada implemented a policy of conscription and maintained a 'united' war effort. The controversy and debate over Union government did not single-handedly destroy the Liberal fortunes on the Prairies, but did serve to widen the breach between eastern and western Liberals and became the final straw for many Prairie Grits. "I told Sir Wilfrid himself," one western spokesman wrote as the election approached,

...that the course he was taking meant defeat at the polls and the absolute ruin of the party...If we had an ordinary party fight in Western Canada the Liberals would easily have carried 45 out of 57 seats. As it is, there are strong probabilities that when the final returns are available it will be found that there is not a single supporter of Sir Wilfrid Laurier elected west of the great lakes. This is what happened to the party in that portion of Canada in which, before the question of compulsion arose, Liberal opinions were most strongly held.⁸⁴

The Prairie West returned 41 Unionists and only 2 Liberals. The Liberal party emerged from the war divided, and after

⁸³Morton, p.59.

⁸⁴Dafoe Papers, box 1, file 6, Dafoe to T. Cote, December 18, 1917.

Laurier's death early in 1919, leaderless.

King remained loyal to Laurier and observed the Prairie Liberals' desertion with anger. The ethnic division in the meantime was leading to a negative appraisal of Laurier in the West. King noted that his leader had come to the conclusion

that Manitoba was decided that no Frenchman should lead the party....Calder said they had come to tell him that the West would not support a French Canadian Leader, that there wd. have to be a change in leadership or they could not win...no hope of victory with Sir W. longer at the head.⁸⁵

J.W. Dafoe had been expounding these sentiments since 1915: "This is one Canadian province in which the name of Sir Wilfrid Laurier has never been one to conjure with."⁸⁶ There was less support for the idea of Union government in Alberta and Saskatchewan⁸⁷ and these divisions in Prairie sentiment troubled Dafoe:

I was surprised...to find...western hostility developing towards the project of a union government....There was some pro-Laurier sentiment....After studying matters pretty closely I came to the conclusion that the real source of the trouble was in Saskatchewan...there developed in the province a type of extreme liberal partisan not to be found in the other provinces.⁸⁸

The national and regional divisions in the Liberal party would

⁸⁵King Diaries, October 3-6, 1917.

⁸⁶Dafoe Papers, box 2, file 5, Dafoe to Sydney Fisher, August 20, 1915.

⁸⁷"Langley and Motherwell have both declared openly for Laurier...In Alberta...opposition to Union Government is out in the open.", Sifton Papers, University of Manitoba Libraries, reel 735, Dafoe to Sifton, December 6, 1917.

⁸⁸Dafoe Papers, box 1, file 4, Dafoe to Borden, September 29, 1917.

become a festering wound for years to come. As one Prairie historian has written, "the rift...was never bridged completely and contributed to the decline of federal Liberal fortunes on the Prairies."⁸⁹

The crisis of 1917 also dealt a destructive blow to the Liberal press in the West. The Manitoba Free Press was the most influential newspaper on the Prairies throughout the first half of the century and its attitudes toward Mackenzie King and the federal government were usually indicative of western sentiment. As early as 1897 Clifford Sifton was complaining that "the Liberal party in Manitoba, involving myself, feel that under present circumstances the Free Press Newspaper is about the worst enemy we have."⁹⁰ Sifton corrected the situation by purchasing the paper and hiring J.W. Dafoe as editor. The owner and editor quarrelled over the proposed reciprocity agreement and election of 1911, but there was no cause for dispute when it came to the formation of the Union government.

The Manitoba Free Press led the western Liberals in their support for conscription and coalition. There was no question, Dafoe wrote, "that the Free Press had something to

⁸⁹Friesen, "Studies in the Development of Western Canadian Regional Consciousness, 1870-1925", p.308.

⁹⁰Sifton Papers, reel 401, pp.635-6, C. Sifton to John Mathers, January 28, 1897.

do in making a union government possible."⁹¹ As far as he was concerned, "the entire strength of Western Liberalism, with exceptions hardly worth mentioning, went solidly into the Union government when the coalition government was consummated." When there was an attempt in 1917 at a Western Liberal Convention to determine the position of Prairie Liberals and consider coalition, Dafoe and the paper argued that the "Liberal machine" in the West went out and "captured" the delegates with the result that the Convention was "strongly pro-Laurier." In reaction, "the Free Press turned all its guns upon the convention as not representing Western Liberalism."

Throughout the war and even after peace was signed, the newspaper continued to support the Union government. Dafoe had been impressed by Borden's pursuit of Canadian autonomy at the peace talks in Versailles and was prepared to maintain faith in the coalition "if the Union movement could retain its Liberal elements and produce an economic and taxation policy acceptable to Western opinion."⁹² In the meantime the federal Liberals looked helplessly upon the positions taken by the paper and complained about the lack of a Liberal press in the West. As A. McLeod expressed:

We have lost everything in the West except our principles and honour....But the worst of all in

⁹¹Dafoe Papers, box 1, file 2, Dafoe to J.A. Aiken, October 15, 1917.

⁹²Ibid., file 4, Dafoe to Augustus Bridle, June 14, 1921.

Manitoba was the lack of a newspaper to express the Liberal view....The Free Press simply sold out the Liberals to the Big interests....We must have an exponent of Liberalism in Winnipeg.⁹³

The ending of the war began a return to traditional partisanship but the breach of 1917 left the western Liberals directionless. Despite the hopes of Dafoe, Sifton, and other prominent Prairie Liberals that the Union government could maintain its coalition nature, the dominant Tory elements were making their presence felt. They viewed the Unionist party as being

in control of old Conservatives who could not bring themselves to realize that it was a coalition government. They considered it as a continuation of the old Borden government and they looked upon their Liberal colleagues as brands plucked from the burning who were thereafter to be good Tories like themselves.⁹⁴

They were attempting to re-create "the conservative party under camouflage, virtually with old policies." Regardless, Dafoe argued, "such a party will not get very far in the west."⁹⁵ With the Unionists showing themselves as true blue Tories, and the Liberals as loyal to the French-Canadian Rouge tradition of Laurier, the disgruntled western Liberals looked for new alternatives.

The Union government was faced with the need for revenue in the post-war economy and had to satisfy the protectionist

⁹³As quoted in Ferns and Ostry, p.316.

⁹⁴Dafoe Papers, box 1, file 4, Dafoe to Augustus Bridle, June 14, 1921.

⁹⁵Ibid., box 3, file 4, Dafoe to C. Sifton, July 21, 1919.

desires of its eastern representatives and Tory ideologues. It had little to offer the West and not surprisingly the tariff issue broke the coalition. After the budget speech of 1919, minister of agriculture, T.A. Crerar, and eight other western Liberals bolted the government and crossed the floor of Parliament to the cross benches. The coalition was disintegrating, the government was returning to its Conservative roots, and Crerar saw the writing on the wall:

Privately I am convinced that there is nothing to hope for from the Union Government in the way of any real progressive measures, especially on the tariff. The old Tory influences dominate and I see little prospect of any change on their part from the protectionist policies of the past.⁹⁶

Crerar's stand was heralded by Liberals across the Prairies as "the barometer of Western opinion."⁹⁷ The region had been awaiting tariff reduction for many years and had lost faith in the promises of the two traditional parties.

Crerar's exit from the Union government once again brought about increased pressure for a "new party, national in its scope and drawing its main strength to commence with from Western Canada." But differences of opinion were already emerging among Prairie leaders, demonstrating that while there existed a regional desire for a western response, there were varying provincial attitudes as to its nature. The

⁹⁶Queens University Archives, Crerar Papers, series II, box 63, Crerar to J.A. Glen, June 19, 1919.

⁹⁷Dafoe Papers, box 1, file 4, Dafoe to Augustus Bridle, June 14, 1921.

organization of the Farmers in Alberta was proceeding along the lines of an occupational movement. In Saskatchewan it had a broader appeal while in Manitoba there was little organization.⁹⁸ By July of 1919 the Farmers' movement in every constituency of Alberta and Saskatchewan had passed resolutions calling for the nomination of candidates before the next general election. The hopes of electing a government with a strong majority were rapidly slipping away. "How," Dafoe asked, "are we going to get out of this mix-up a government that can steer the ship through the storms of the future?"⁹⁹

The demand for a Farmers' movement to take direct political action continued to mount. In the new, modern society of the post-War era urbanization and industrialization were a dramatic counterpoint to rural life. The agrarian revolt reflected the diminishing role of the farmer on the national scene and while the process would be gradual, the decline was inexorable. The defensive reaction of the agrarian classes would be to take the offensive. It was argued that a 'New National Policy' was required that would call on the government to adopt measures designed to stimulate agriculture. In November of 1918 the Canadian Council of Agriculture, representing the organized Farmers, drew up a

⁹⁸Crerar Papers, series II, box 64, Crerar to Clark, July 18, 1919.

⁹⁹Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to Sifton, July 21, 1919.

platform. It proposed the abolition of the tariff on many raw materials, on all foodstuffs, and on certain machinery; a reduction in the tariff generally; the acceptance of the old reciprocity agreement with the United States; an increase in the Imperial preference; direct graduated taxation on personal and corporation income; inheritance taxes; assisted land settlement for veterans; extended organization of co-operatives; public ownership of coal mines and public utilities; and a number of miscellaneous political reforms, such as the initiative, referendum, and recall, proportional representation, abolition of patronage, reform of the Senate, and the repeal of the War-time Elections Act.¹⁰⁰ In general the platform reflected western concerns.

The agrarian revolt was aimed at a system dominated by the industrial and financial interests of central Canada and represented by the old-line parties. Expectations that the war had seen the old order finally collapse to be replaced by a new era of hope and progress were quickly dispelled by the onset of a post-war recession. Particularly in the West where expectations for the new order had been greatest, the seeds of radicalism were fermenting: "Reform in the labour and industrial field...seemed to be the next step towards the new Jerusalem."¹⁰¹ Labour turmoil erupted in May of 1919 as the Winnipeg General Strike indicated that class conflict was

¹⁰⁰Dawson, p.277.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p.301.

indeed part of the Canadian fabric. The Canadian Labour movement was divided on regional lines with western unions tending to be more radical, more interested in independent labour politics, and more militant than their eastern- and central-Canadian counterparts. There may have been a smaller working-class movement in western Canada but it was more radical in pushing for reform and even revolution.¹⁰² The concepts of class conflict and class consciousness were more prevalent in the West, where in "a land of company towns...the theory of class conflict received daily confirmation in practice."¹⁰³

Mackenzie King had come to admire the organization of international unionism as reflected in the American Federation of Labour but he disliked its tendencies toward agitation. Instead King emphasized the importance of moderate leadership.¹⁰⁴ He had been in England at the time of the Winnipeg General Strike but his brief comments upon the event did reflect his sympathies:

I think fundamentally the right of collective bargaining was at the basis of the strike, and that the greater readiness on the part of some of the employers to meet with representatives of Organized Labour some time ago would have prevented the growth of feeling of which advantage was taken when the strike came on...so far as the Government was

¹⁰²See Gerald Friesen, The Prairie West: A History, and Ross R. MacCormack, Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919.

¹⁰³Craven, pp.117-8.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pp.133-4.

concerned, its action was belated and of little real help in the situation.¹⁰⁵

The failure of the strike and the urban labour movement shifted the emphasis onto a burgeoning agrarian protest movement. To King, both the labour and Farmer movements were liberal.

The death of Sir Wilfrid Laurier in January, 1919 forced the Liberal party to contemplate its future leadership and direction. The National Leadership Convention of the Liberal Party scheduled for August 5-7, 1919 was the first of its kind in Canadian history. It was organized by Laurier Liberals who were determined to maintain party control but were also aware of the need to recover the Unionist Liberals. An appeal was made to the organized Farmers to send representatives.¹⁰⁶ With the arrangements and machinery firmly in the hands of Laurier Liberals, however, the reconciliation of the Unionists was not very probable. As Dafoe mournfully noted,

my personal sympathies are pretty much limited to the Unionist Liberals...who are in a very dangerous position. They are virtually debarred from taking part in the Liberal Convention because their allegiance is on the other side of the house until the deal is called off; and they are not numerous enough to force a reconstruction...The result is that they may be isolated and slaughtered.¹⁰⁷

The uncommitted delegates came mainly from the provincial

¹⁰⁵King Papers, reel 1934, volume 43, p.37626, King to G.E. Brown, September 26, 1919.

¹⁰⁶Morton, p.78.

¹⁰⁷Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to Sifton, July 21, 1919.

organizations which had given support to the Union government during the war. "These Laodiceans," Dawson notes, "were mostly from the West, where it will be remembered, the support for Union Government had been overwhelming."¹⁰⁸ Some western leaders such as Crerar refused to attend but were cautiously hopeful that the convention would avoid "the old reactionary spirit, that has for years largely pervaded the Liberal Party, and stifled the national aspirations for real Liberalism." This would be difficult because they were "still strong in the Councils of the Party." If such could be accomplished, however, it was believed the West could "remake" the party.¹⁰⁹ There would be a union of the liberal elements and the reactionaries would be forced out.

Manitoba's Liberal forces were most divided over the crisis of 1917. The provincial delegation led by Premier Norris came as an uncommitted group free to dissociate itself from the party if it adopted an undesirable platform. The sentiments of Dafoe, who supported Fielding and a revitalization of the party "with an advanced radical programme," reflected much of the provincial sentiment. Fielding was a protectionist but he seemed "the only man in sight" who could lead a reunited Liberal party because there was little chance of anyone who opposed conscription being

¹⁰⁸Dawson, p.299.

¹⁰⁹Crerar Papers, series II, box 63, Crerar to F.S. Jacobs, June 28, 1919.

successful in the West. Dafoe and Crerar did not "regard Mackenzie-King[sic] as a possibility."¹¹⁰ If Fielding was selected and a platform drafted that was "so radical" it would "drive out of the party all those eastern...reactionaries" the Liberals would gain the support of the Farmers' movement and have a chance in the next election. Otherwise, "nothing could prevent the inauguration of a western radical party."¹¹¹ The convention was a testing ground for the Liberal Party and observers like Crerar were watching closely. The choice for the West seemed clear:

If the Liberal Convention grasps the opportunity it will stand out strongly for sane, progressive policies, and select a leader in whom the people have confidence, and the situation will take definite form. On the other hand, if the time servers (and there are several of them still with some influence in the Liberal Party) succeed in having a meaningless, Platform brought in, then it seems to me there is only one course to follow, and that is for the West to take its own line of action.¹¹²

Saskatchewan, on the other hand, sent a delegation that would split on the vote. Crerar was under the impression the Saskatchewan representatives would also oppose the Laurier Liberals¹¹³ but those who had remained loyal to the chief, such

¹¹⁰Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to Sifton, July 21, 1919.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Crerar Papers, series II, box 63, Crerar to A.B. Hudson, June 21, 1919.

¹¹³Ibid., box 64, Crerar to Clark, July 18, 1919. "The Saskatchewan people" were "out practically for the Farmer's[sic] Platform, and it is significant that all the local conventions,

as W.R. Motherwell and J.G. Gardiner, would support King. "Fielding wasn't going to live long anyway," Gardiner explained, "and the leader was only going to lead the opposition---so this was a chance for the young people....I supported King and I told Motherwell that he was going to win....I felt he would come back full of new ideas for the party."¹¹⁴ In Saskatchewan and Alberta the Liberals made a strong effort to bring about unity in the western delegation in order that a low tariff plank might be implemented.¹¹⁵

Four candidates contested the party leadership. D.D. McKenzie and W.L.M. King were Laurier Liberals while G.P. Graham's loyalty was questionable and W.S. Fielding was a Unionist. Premier W.M. Martin of Saskatchewan had initially been considered a contender for the leadership, "chiefly because of a vague desire that the Liberal party should seek its new leader from the West,"¹¹⁶ but in the end had not run.

where the selection of delegates in Saskatchewan has taken place...have given what might be termed almost a definite instruction to their delegates as to the course they are to follow... several members of the Saskatchewan Government have stated to Hudson that in the event that the Ottawa Convention does not adapt a real Liberal policy with a leader who will inspire confidence, the only course left to the West is to lead the way by creating a real Liberal Party that would in effect be a Western Party. Such a movement would, they say, sweep the prairie provinces from one end to another."

¹¹⁴As quoted in Samuel Peter Regenstreif, "The Liberal Party of Canada: A Political Analysis", (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1963), p. 343.

¹¹⁵Morton, p.79.

¹¹⁶Dawson, p.292.

King conceded Martin's appeal to the region but understood that he had little chance due to his loyalties during the war: "Martin will have a strong influence and is a practical politician. But he was a 'unionist'. If it comes in the Convention to Unionist Liberals versus Laurier Liberals, the choice will be Laurier."¹¹⁷ King's three opponents were all over sixty (Fielding being seventy), and only Fielding seemed to have the experience and charisma to be prime minister. The old veteran, however, was lukewarm about the leadership. The anti-conscriptionist sentiment in his home province of Nova Scotia, along with that of Quebec, as well as his protectionist views, made him question his potential to reunite the party. It was also highly unlikely that Fielding would offer the "radical" program desired by Dafoe and Crerar. There was, in reality, little possibility of the convention selecting a leader who could stave off the agrarian revolt.

The proposed platform of the convention reflected the general political uncertainty and the need to conciliate and attract the many wavering elements both within the Liberal party and the nation. For the Liberal party to be successful, the West had to be won. Tariff proposals were aimed directly at inducing the Prairie West and rural Ontario to return to their Liberal allegiance. The tariff resolution called for the lowering of duties on the necessities of life and supplies used in natural resource industries. The British preference

¹¹⁷King Diaries, February 18-22, 1919.

was to be increased to fifty per cent of the general tariff and Liberal support for the reciprocity agreement of 1911 was reaffirmed. Resolutions on Canadian autonomy, and in particular on labour and industrial questions¹¹⁸, were in accord with the spirit of reform and showed "the hand of Mackenzie King" in their framing.¹¹⁹ To critical westerners, however, the much-anticipated tariff resolution did not go far enough. It called for reform but did not repudiate the principle of protection.¹²⁰

It quickly became evident that the convention could not select a leader suitable to the discontented Prairies. In the two main contenders the region saw contradiction. Fielding was a Unionist who had held to his conscriptionist convictions in the face of Laurier's refusal to join the coalition but he was also a protectionist of the old guard. King, on the other hand, was a member of the youthful New Liberal Party advocating reform but he had conveniently been in the United States during the sacrifices of war and had supported the position of Laurier and Quebec. Regardless of the convention's choice the western Liberals, dominated by the Unionists and the increasingly influential Grain Growers'

¹¹⁸Such as the right of association; a living wage; an eight-hour day; a weekly day of rest; the abolition of child labour; the principle of representation of labour; an adequate system of insurance against unemployment, sickness, maternity, dependence in old age, and other disabilities.

¹¹⁹Dawson, pp.299-302.

¹²⁰Morton, p.80.

Associations, were going to be disappointed. Many in the West had already made up their minds as to the nature of the federal Liberals. To westerners like Dafoe, the party was in a divided, chaotic state with little hope for the immediate future. Eastern Liberalism was concerned only with the financial and manufacturing interests and was "not very easily distinguishable from Conservatism." The Quebec brand was largely clerical and merely waited "to come upon the stage at an opportune moment." The western Liberals were not in sympathy with either form but were seeking "a policy that will absorb all the radical elements in the west and Ontario, thus heading off the third party which is in sight." Dafoe's view as to the outcome of the convention was therefore pessimistic. There was no result that would have pleased the West and still produced any hope of rebuilding party unity:

I do not see how these various tendencies can be merged into a single party. If apparently common ground upon which they all can stand is discovered at Ottawa, will the resulting party be anything more than an organized hypocrisy dedicated to getting and holding office?¹²¹

Dafoe had asked Crerar whether in his judgement it was possible for the Liberals to draft a platform which would head off the third party movement in western Canada and in Ontario. Crerar answered that "it would be difficult." The editor concluded, therefore,

that regardless of what the liberals do at Ottawa,

¹²¹Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to Sifton, July 21, 1919.

there will be a farmer's[sic] movement in western Canada which neither Crerar nor any body[sic] can control....I do not see how, whatever may happen within the next two months, there can be any reasonable prospect that out of the existing chaotic conditions, there will come a political line-up which will give this country any certainty of stable and efficient government along party lines.¹²²

The roots of western alienation were running so deep that unless the Liberal Party satisfied every important Prairie demand, discontent was inevitable, and the agrarian revolt would be underway. "Such a movement," Crerar remarked, "with the three Provincial Governments behind it, would carry...practically every seat in the three Prairie Provinces."¹²³

There is disagreement among historians in analyzing the convention voting. Dawson argues that while "all the facts concerning these votes are not known," it "is generally agreed that...the West split fairly even[sic]."¹²⁴ W.L. Morton, on the other hand, quotes the Globe that King received only a following of the "Old Guard" from Alberta, while Saskatchewan "almost solidly", and Manitoba and Alberta in part, gave Fielding their vote.¹²⁵ It seems more likely that the western Liberals, like the others, voted mainly according to their stance in 1917. On the first ballot King received 344 votes,

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Crerar Papers, series II, box 64, Crerar to Michael Clark, July 18, 1919.

¹²⁴Dawson, p.307.

¹²⁵As quoted in Morton, p.81.

Fielding 297, Graham 153, and McKenzie 153. On the second ballot King received 411 votes, Fielding 344, Graham 124, Mackenzie 60. Graham and McKenzie then withdrew, and on the third ballot King was selected leader with 476 votes while Fielding received 438.¹²⁶

Mackenzie King was selected leader of the Liberal party for several reasons. His loyalty to Laurier was the main factor and the rumours that the chief had personally handpicked King as his successor, whether accurate or not, aided King's bid. Despite his questioning of Laurier's strategy during the 1917 division over the referendum idea and Union government, when it came time for the leadership convention he was sure to remind Quebec delegates of this loyalty. King's relative youthfulness and his apparent commitment to a more radical philosophy needed to rejuvenate a New Liberalism also added to his success. Bruce Hutchison has argued that "fortunately nobody seemed to have grasped the meaning of Industry and Humanity. Few Liberals realized King's inner thinking."¹²⁷ To a large extent this was true. He was not well known to the convention and few would have known the full tilt of his intellectual leanings. The main consideration remained his stance in 1917. He was still, however, the party's best hope of winning the Prairie West.

¹²⁶John. W. Lederle, "The Liberal Convention of 1919 and the Selection of Mackenzie King", (Dalhousie Review, XXVII (1), April, 1947), p. 1.

¹²⁷Bruce Hutchison, The Incredible Canadian, p.4.

King inherited a divided Liberal party in 1919 and he sought to lead an equally divided nation. The task ahead would be formidable. J.W. Dafoe made a remarkably accurate prophesy:

I think any person who holds office now or any time during the next five years is entitled to a measure of sympathy. It is going to be demanded of him that he do things that cannot be done; things that are mutually contradictory and destructive; and whatever he does he will have more critics than friends....After the election is over I rather expect a House of Commons so divided that no party will be strong enough to carry on the government and that as a necessity to keep the country going, there will have to be some kind of coalition.¹²⁸

By the time he was selected as the leader of the National Liberal Party at the age of forty-five, Mackenzie King's perceptions of the Prairie West had developed to the point that he saw himself as particularly suited to represent the region. The Prairies fit into what he saw as his divine mission to reform the nation. "A political leader", King wrote, "who will be a true servant of God helping to make the Kingdom of Heaven prevail on Earth. This is what I love politics for."¹²⁹ Above all, he saw the Prairie West as a natural bulwark of the new socially and morally reforming liberalism, and himself in the vanguard of these ideals. Canada had produced a Liberal Party that showed signs of regional division in the past but the West's affinity with his

¹²⁸Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to Sifton, July 21, 1919.

¹²⁹As quoted in Cook, p.213.

own thinking allowed the Liberal leader to understand the region's political concerns that were spawning regional discontent. King believed he was sympathetic to western concerns and the rightful defender of their interests.

The Liberal party was still dominated by older politicians such as Fielding and Gouin and the new leader intended on using his western sympathies to oppose these easterners whom he believed held too much influence. He remained convinced that the region was essentially liberal despite its tendency to take reform one step too far to the boundaries of radicalism. It was discontented with its treatment by the eastern-based federal government but, as far as King was concerned, it was the party of Laurier that had always defended its interests. The division created by the Union government had taken the Liberal Party to the verge of destruction, largely due to the West's decision to support conscription and the coalition. King believed that it was time to bridge the gulf of 1917 and bring the West home to its Liberal roots.

King did see himself as the successor to Laurier who would carry on the struggle for national unity, and therefore the sympathetic representative of all Canada's regions; but he posited a unique connection with the Prairie West. He viewed the Maritimes as a part of Canada's past and much to the region's frustration, it would largely be ignored throughout his career. Personal defeat in his home province left King

with a bitter view towards the Tory stronghold of Ontario. Quebec was the secure Liberal bastion that had been carefully constructed by Laurier but it was a cultural, religious, and linguistic mystery for King best left to the care of a regional lieutenant. The Prairies had become the second Liberal stronghold under Laurier and the policies of the Tories left little chance of the region turning Conservative. If Mackenzie King and the Liberal party wished to have political success, their best hope lay in regaining the West.

In 1919 Mackenzie King was convinced he was the man for the job. His perceptions of the Prairies may have been naive and based on romantic idealism but they were sincere and as a result did influence his politics. They also conveniently disguised the immediate need to gain the region's support in order to unite the party and stave off Quebec domination. Once in place as Liberal leader, King would have to convince the Prairie West that his western sympathies were more products of sincerity than of expediency.

CHAPTER TWO
FOLLOWING PHANTOMS, 1919-21

Mr. King was very discreet in his references to the political movements in the West which are outside the old party lines....He may have had hopes that some kind of an official alliance could be entered into by which there could be a division of constituencies in Western Canada, but, if so, he will by now have abandoned them if he has the faculty so necessary to a successful political career of seeing things as they are and refusing to follow phantoms.

-Dafoe to Sifton, November 10, 1920.

The struggle to maintain national unity has come to characterize Mackenzie King's career but it is usually associated with the continuation of Laurier's quest to maintain Quebec support and harmony between French and English Canada. In the early years of King's leadership Quebec was firmly in Liberal control. The threat to national unity came from the Prairie West.

Upon acceding to the leadership of the National Liberal party, King was forced to bring his idealistic perceptions of the Prairie West in line with the political realities of regaining the region's support. The obstacle was the agrarian revolt. But one of King's most remarkable political skills was patience and it would be invaluable in winning back the frustrated Prairies. He was certain, however, the quest would be his: "I have not the slightest doubt that it will be mine to link together Liberals, Farmers & Labor, and form a really

progressive party in Canadian affairs."¹

Reaction from the West after the convention seemed to indicate to King that it was possible to overcome the sectional barriers to national unity. Optimistic westerners seemed prepared to give him a chance to show his mettle:

Young Canada is looking for someone to trust, for an appeal to heroism for the sounding of a high note of idealism + purity in politics....You may safely trust yourself to the great moral current which has set in all over the world.²

King was seen as succeeding the "grand old leader" but his selection resulted in the emergence of a "new Liberal Party" that would, as one correspondent wrote, carry "with it much that was best in the old party" and divest "itself very largely of those features which hampered its progress in the past."³ King agreed heartily with these sentiments and saw his relative youth as an essential attribute in breathing new life into the party and nation. Laurier had opened the West and King believed it was his task to develop it. "There are many," the Grain Growers' Guide announced,

who hold the view that the choice of Mr. Fielding as leader would have given the Liberal party a better hope of success in the next Dominion general elections. On the other hand, it is to be remembered that the Conservatives greatly underrated Laurier when he was chosen Liberal leader; and the Liberals made the same light

¹King Diaries, October 21, 1919.

²King Papers, reel 1933, volume 42, p.37089, W.W. Andrews to King, August 10, 1919.

³Ibid., reel 1936, volume 45, pp.39751-2, F.C. Hamilton to King, August 28, 1919.

indeed, of Borden when he was chosen Conservative leader. In regard to Mr. King, there is undeniably one thing which appeals to the imagination in the fact that he is the grandson of William Lyon Mackenzie, who was four score years ago for democracy in Canada, which its spirit had so much in common with the movement of the organized farmers today as a fight against privileged interests for justice and for equal rights.⁴

The reaction of the western Laurier Liberals was obviously positive. "The Convention and your election to the leadership has been received with very general satisfaction here [Manitoba] except by what I call the Tory element of the Liberal Party."⁵ Unfortunately for King, this 'Tory element' consisted of the Unionist Liberals who dominated the western Liberal party. Their response would not be as positive.

Mackenzie King's view of the Farmers' movement demonstrated his ignorance of western conditions and ensured the shattering of his idealistic perceptions. He sympathized with the ideological sentiments producing the movements and believed they were "a peoples' movement & as such the truest kind of Liberalism."⁶ But he also believed they had become radical manifestations of discontent that could only be tempered by conciliation. He saw the political involvement of the Farmers as unnecessary because the nation's politics were determined by the Liberal and Conservative parties which

⁴Grain Growers' Guide, volume 12, p.1741, August 20, 1919.

⁵King Papers, reel 1933, volume 42, pp.36890-1, J.E. Adamson to King, August 25, 1919.

⁶King Diaries, October 27, 1919.

already espoused the two fundamental philosophies of Western democratic thought. "There is an attitude," King wrote, "which is the direct opposite of Liberalism, and that is Conservatism. Liberal and Conservative forces will always be opposed in the nature of things." A third party had no place and would inevitably pull support away from one of the groups. Because the Farmers were liberal in philosophy, the losses would be suffered by that party:

Be assured that once a third party is formed...instead of any group being able to count upon the support of a great party to ensure the reforms and desires of the armies of progress, we will see a number of factions destroying each other in the face of a common hereditary foe.

The result would be either the destruction of the movement or its eventual return to its roots:

they will become sooner or later a Liberal or a Conservative organization; or they will remain what in reality they are, class organizations under false characterization. If the latter, you may be perfectly sure that it will be a matter of only a very short time before...they...encounter a formidable opposition, which will either destroy their influence altogether or drive them for refuge back into the arms of the parties to which they naturally belong.⁷

King's attitude towards socialism and the concept of class struggle shaped his opposition to the third party's tendency toward radicalism. Classes existed but he believed that liberalism and the Liberal party as its vehicle had to represent the interests of all groups. Liberalism had to

⁷King Papers, reel 1937, volume 47, pp.41398-400, King to T. Mcmillan, November 26, 1919.

transcend the concept of class. When the Farmers considered themselves a class, they were referring to an occupation rather than a mode of production in the Marxist sense. Nevertheless, King rejected the notion that his party could not represent them regardless of how they defined their position. He opposed the formation of class groupings because the result would have one inevitable consequence: "No class organization ever was formed which did not from the moment it began to succeed raise formidable organizations in opposition to itself."⁸ The result would be a system of diametrically opposed groups in which there could be no conciliation or constructive government. Class conflict occurred because class consciousness and organization furthered the potential for conflict by highlighting divisions, widening them, and then creating an atmosphere of antagonism. King's career as labour mediator had trained him to work to bridge the growing divisions between labour and management.

Mackenzie King believed the Farmers were being deceived and blinded by regional alienation and short-term success. Their overwhelming popularity was producing optimistic jubilation. "Today the farmers may seem to have it all their own way," he wrote,

...it will not be long, however, before the farmers will come to realize that as a class organization it is going to be impossible for them to succeed, and that their real hope lies in maintaining a

⁸Ibid., reel 1936, volume 46, pp.40101-2, King to A.E. Hill, November 25, 1919.

close alliance with the political party which is broad and progressive enough to promote principles and policies similar to their own.⁹

The advice King received from Western Liberals reinforced his views that the Farmers had to be convinced the Liberals were a new party with a new leader that could represent Prairie interests. He would bring the errant Party back to its roots: "The Liberal party all along has been fighting the battle of the farmers. That will remain an essential part of its work through the years to come, so long as it remains a Liberal party. It is well, I think that the farmers should never lose sight of this."¹⁰ The past had to be forgiven so the divisions could be bridged.

If a new party and new leader were not enough, as far as King was concerned, all the Farmers had to do was look at the convention platform. It was not mere coincidence that the Liberal platform coincided to a remarkable extent with the Farmers' platform adopted by the Canadian Council of Agriculture. This perception was reinforced by the Grain Growers' Guide which praised the Convention for redrafting the party programme in "the new progressive spirit of our day." In its "outstanding features, and especially those which most vitally affect the well-being of the rural classes it is well nigh impossible to distinguish between the platforms."

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., reel 1937, volume 47, pp.41398-400, King to T. Mcmillan, November 26, 1919.

Indeed,

a reading of the two together would seem to show the Liberals, in framing their platform, had been so anxious to meet the wishes of the farmers wherever it was possible so to do, that they had adopted the very wording of some of the planks in the farmer's platform.¹¹

The Liberal program would serve as a chart to guide the party in the future and "interpreted in the spirit in which it was framed, admits of no attitude other than one which is wholly sympathetic to what is fundamental in these new movements."¹² The new Liberal leader was learning to use the 1919 platform as a useful device to fall back upon whenever he needed proof of his conciliatory attitude. "They do not seem yet to have fully realized," one Liberal wrote King,

the policies of the real Liberal party led by yourself, and their own are almost identical, both as to lower tariffs and also as to honest administration, and the divorcing from our Government of the big business influences which are so prevalent today. They cannot get any place in my estimation except by coming back to the fold where they belong.¹³

The Liberal leader was in full accord:

'United we stand; divided we fall' acquires exceptional significance when applied to the forces against which Autocracy and Privilege are arrayed. The Liberal Party has fashioned a programme in which the Farmers have every reason to believe. It

¹¹Ibid., reel 1933, volume 42, pp.36791-806, "The Liberals and the Farmers", Article for the Grain Growers' Guide, November 22, 1919.

¹²Ibid., volume 48, pp.41761-2, King to Martin, December 4, 1919.

¹³Ibid., volume 47, pp.41382-4, N.T. Macmillan to King, November 6, 1919.

is their battle, in no small measure, that Liberalism has undertaken to wage. The enemy's only hope lies in creating divisions between those who should be rallying around the one standard.¹⁴

The western journalist, J.A. Stevenson, continued to represent King as favourable to Prairie interests. "Considering that the convention contained no manual workers and very few farmers," Stevenson wrote, "its programme was very radical" and the agrarian movement "will have to recognize the fact." The journalist did make one observation that King was not willing to concede: "He is singularly ignorant of the extent and power of the agrarian movement and I told him he ought to take a course of education upon it."¹⁵ Indeed King had little real understanding of the region. The West was a farming region and King knew little about agriculture or handling agrarian discontent. In his typical fashion of self-deception, he placed his faith in the reaction of western Liberals to his leadership and platform. As would soon become apparent, this reaction was not indicative of western sentiment.

The reconciliation of the Liberal party with the Prairie region would take time. Western alienation had been fermenting for years and there would be no instant solution. The Prairie distrust of the traditional political system had been deepened by the experiment of Union government and now

¹⁴Ibid., p.41393, King to T. Mcmillan, August 16, 1919.

¹⁵Queen's University Archives, Norman P. Lambert Papers, series I, box 1, Stevenson to Lambert, August 16, 1919.

the Liberals would have to join the Tories in facing the brunt of the reaction. Just as there was nothing King could have done at the convention to bring the Farmers back on-side, he had no chance of immediately winning their support as leader. "There is no question," a western Liberal wrote, "but that the farmers are going to be in the saddle for the next three or four years."¹⁶ Westerners unanimously echoed the same sentiment. While there may have been hope for the future, the present was determined: "The people of the West...have completely lost confidence in the old political parties, and...nothing that the Liberal party can do, at least in the immediate future, can restore that confidence."¹⁷

A strategy had to be formed in the meantime to deal with the agrarian revolt. The plan would encompass King's idealistic perceptions of the Prairies, his fundamental disagreements with class movements and third parties, and his overriding goal of national unity. Compromise and conciliation always remained at the core of this strategy and would be employed whenever possible:

I hope that our Liberal friends will not lose heart in consequence of any cross currents which may be in evidence at the moment, but, by showing every sympathy to the farmers in the aims which we have in common, do their part in enabling the farmers themselves to see the wisdom of maintaining the friendliest relations with the party which, ever

¹⁶King Papers, reel 1938, volume 48, p.41858, E.S. Miller to King, November 25, 1919.

¹⁷Ibid., reel 1936, volume 46, pp.39951-2, Hugh Mackenzie to Andrew Haydon, December 31, 1919.

since it has been formed, has been the one to champion their cause.¹⁸

Patience was King's considered reaction: "Time will have its effect on these 'sectional' movements. Two parties in the end will be necessary & I shall win the Leadership of the Liberal & other radical forces, thru being true to Liberal principles."¹⁹ He was confident the Union government was "doomed completely" in the West and "whether the Liberal party will survive the Farmer Labor combination depends on our conciliatory attitude."²⁰

The first practical problem to be resolved was the threat of three-cornered contests. King had to decide whether to oppose the nomination of Farmers' candidates by running Liberals against them, or to treat the Farmer as a species of Liberal and not contest the riding. The first approach would be one of fighting the Farmers to force them back to their Liberal roots but the danger lay in dividing the 'progressive' vote and allowing the Conservative to win. The latter would mean compromising with the rebels to draw them back into the ranks but this could lead to the short-term disappearance of the Liberals on the Prairies. The choice was between the sugar or the cane. Either way failure would mean further alienating the region. Both alternatives posed risks and in

¹⁸Ibid., pp.40101-2, King to A.E. Hill, November 25, 1919.

¹⁹King Diaries, October 27, 1919.

²⁰Ibid.

the opening months as leader, King pondered each carefully. He would not have long to decide, however, as a series of by-elections demanded immediate action.

The Liberals sought candidates who had the support of both groups. The representative need only declare his opposition to the Union government and approval of the Liberal platform. In the event he went to Parliament, he was to support appropriate resolutions on the tariff, agriculture, reciprocity, and taxation. He was to make it clear the Grain Growers and Liberals were united on these matters of western concern. The strategy, of course, was to have only one candidate contest the riding. If the Grain Growers' candidate was the first in the field then it was not to be contested by a Liberal.²¹ King could not have it appear, however, that Liberals were merely succumbing to the Farmers. "You speak...of my policy being not to oppose any Farmers' candidates," he wrote to a Manitoba Liberal. "There has evidently been some misunderstanding of my attitude, if such an impression has gone abroad....I have as a matter of fact, been urging our friends to get Liberal candidates into the field before any other candidates were put up."²² King was pushing to have Liberals nominated before the Farmers could act in an attempt to avoid the dilemma. The western Liberals

²¹Ibid., reel 1935, volume 44, pp.38962-3, "Document discussing policy to avoid three-way contests."

²²Ibid., reel 1937, Volume 47, p.41379-80, King to N.T. Macmillan, September 25, 1919.

had to remember that the platforms of the two groups were similar and that a three-cornered fight could not prove "other than detrimental to the interests of both. Its only effect...would be to create such division in the forces which are naturally opposed to the reactionary policy of the Government."²³

The federal by-election for the Saskatchewan constituency of Assiniboia in October of 1919 became the symbolic testing ground for Liberal support in the West after the rupture of the Unionist coalition and King's selection as Liberal leader. King wanted to have it appear that he was not intervening in provincial affairs. When he learned the Grain Growers had called a convention to select a candidate for Assiniboia to be held on September 25, he urged Premier Martin to have a Liberal who was acceptable to the Farmers nominated as quickly as possible. The precedent of the Glengarry-Stormont by-election in Ontario had shown that if the Farmers selected their candidate first, the opportunity of having an acceptable Liberal nominated had passed: "Had it been possible for our friends to hold their convention [in Glengarry-Stormont] first, there appears to be no doubt whatever that the Farmers would have been agreeable to allowing the Liberal nomination to stand and not enter the field." The importance of the Assiniboia election was not lost on King: "I think the

²³Ibid., reel 1935, volume 44, pp.38960, King to C.H. Cline, August 18, 1919.

country, not less our Party, will regard the by-election in Assiniboia as the most significant of any of the eight elections which are being held."²⁴

King's immediate plan was to have a convention called and a Liberal candidate placed in the field but he was prepared if necessary to compromise. His utmost concern was "not to alienate any of those who at heart are really our friends, and who have been temporarily estranged through the very perplexing and difficult situations which we have all had to encounter in recent years."²⁵ Martin echoed these concerns and reflected the position of provincial Liberals dependent on Farmer support:

It will never do for the Liberal party in this province to get into conflict with the Grain Growers organization. Speaking generally, the Liberals and the Grain Growers stand on a very similar platform and there is no doubt in my mind but that the majority of the Grain Growers are friendly disposed towards the Liberal party.

The premier advised King to take his conciliatory approach one step further and refrain from opposing the Farmers even if they placed a candidate in the field after the Liberals. The result of a contest could have only one outcome: It would "ruin the chances of the Liberal party in the province for several years to come."²⁶ He attempted to demonstrate the

²⁴Ibid., reel 1937, volume 48, p.41739-41, King to Martin, September 5, 1919.

²⁵Ibid., p.41731, King to W.M. Martin, August 11, 1919; pp.41734-5, King to Martin, August 15, 1919.

²⁶Ibid., p.41736, Martin to King, August 16, 1919.

"serious character" of the situation and have King avoid "a very serious mistake." For Martin there was only one path to follow. "The main thing in Assiniboia," he wrote, "is to see that someone is elected who is opposed to the present Government- whether he calls himself a Grain Grower or a Liberal makes very little difference."²⁷

While King was being advised by the provincial Liberals in Saskatchewan not to oppose the Farmer candidate at any costs, the federal Liberals in the province reacted by calling their convention for September 11. At the meeting they went against King's desired strategy and postponed nominating their candidate until after the Grain Growers' convention so they could react to the Farmers' choice. The day after the Farmers' meeting on September 25, the Liberal convention reconvened and W.R. Motherwell accepted the nomination. Motherwell was the most influential of all western Liberals at the time. He had served as minister of agriculture in Laurier's cabinet and remained loyal during the division of 1917. As a founder of the Territorial Grain Growers' Association he admitted to being "naturally sympathetic" to both the Liberal and Farmers' platforms. But Motherwell had become the type of "extreme Liberal Partisan" that Dafoe described as characteristic of Saskatchewan. Some Liberals in the province even suggested King should run in Assiniboia

²⁷Ibid., p.41742, Martin to King, September 8, 1919.

against the Farmer candidate.²⁸ Motherwell favoured the strategy of opposing the Farmers to force them back into the fold. He believed that allowing them to stand unopposed was an admission of surrender and defeat. "I, in common with thousands and tens of thousands of Canadians, fought for these Liberal principles long before there was a Grain Growers organization hoped or dreamed of."²⁹ Motherwell agreed with the logic of Martin and King that to have three-cornered fights was to divide the Liberal vote and possibly allow a Unionist Tory the victory. They differed, however, on whether this sacrifice was justified. "There would appear," Motherwell argued,

to be nothing but an actual object lesson in such an eventuality that would help to drive home to the farmers of this province the unfortunate results that were bound to follow their advent into the political arena at this time. Therefore it would be better in the end, and for the future, for us to fight in Assiniboia and lose out, to even a Tory, than not to fight at all.³⁰

Premier Martin immediately wrote King to denounce Motherwell's nomination since O.R. Gould, the Grain Growers' candidate, would have been acceptable to the Liberals. Martin had no doubt as to the outcome of Motherwell's candidature:

²⁸Attorney General Turgeon made the suggestion to Andrew McMaster, Ibid., volume 47, p.41357, Andrew McMaster to Charles Murphy, August 8, 1919.

²⁹Ibid., reel 1938, volume 48, pp.41983-4, W.R. Motherwell to W.M. Martin, August 25, 1919.

³⁰Ibid., pp.41991-4, Motherwell to Martin, September 10, 1919.

I have no hesitation at all in saying that this is a most serious mistake. It is most embarrassing as it is contrary entirely to what we think should be done and I do not think that Mr. Motherwell has any chance at all of being elected; in fact, from information we have, I am quite satisfied that he will be hopelessly defeated. You can readily understand what a serious effect this will have on the future of the Party in this Province....There is no ground upon which we can fight him[Gould].

The premier understood the negative consequences of Liberal-Farmer contests for his provincial administration even at the federal level. He claimed to be voicing "the view of every member of the Provincial Government."³¹ Martin continued to lobby King to avoid the impending disaster: "There is only one course to pursue and that is to use every endeavour to get Mr. Motherwell to retire from the field." In October King conferred with J.A. Robb and T.A. Crerar and agreed with the "unwisdom" of the situation. He would attempt to have "the withdrawal of Motherwell from present campaign."³² If so, Crerar agreed the Grain Grower's candidate should make a declaration that he was against Union government and in favour of certain planks in the Liberal platform. This action would gain the support of the Grain Growers and Motherwell could be nominated in his home riding of Saltcoats.³³ These plans were scuttled when Motherwell refused to withdraw. King did not fully recognize the severity of the impending defeat and was

³¹Ibid., reel 1937, volume 48, pp.41748-9, Martin to King, September 30, 1919.

³²King Diaries, October 7, 1919.

³³Ibid., October 8, 1919.

not prepared to push the issue. Instead, he admired Motherwell's fighting spirit: "Motherwell has put some of his own money into the fight & is ready to sell a flock of sheep & use proceeds for the cause if necessary." It was decided he was "too good a friend not to help, even if defeat certain." Financial aid was sent and Liberals went West to participate in the campaign.³⁴

The results of the by-election proved Martin correct and served as a valuable lesson on the political dangers of the agrarian revolt. They also demonstrated King's weakness in Prairie affairs. Motherwell was defeated by a majority of over five thousand votes and lost his deposit. "The party has suffered seriously from the ill-advised fight," Martin wrote. Three-cornered contests simply had to be avoided. The party would often be obliged to surrender the field to the Farmers but such a course, in the long term, would be less destructive. The Grain Growers' Guide had noted King's previous attempts to avoid a three-cornered contest in Stormont-Glengarry and mistakenly placed the blame solely on Motherwell:

Mr. Motherwell, however, and his organization in Assiniboia, have no such scruples as the leader of their party. They have repudiated Mr. King absolutely and entered the field against the farmer's candidate....It is quite evident that the leader of the Liberal party cannot be a supporter of Mr. Motherwell, in Assiniboia, because Mr. Motherwell is doing just exactly what Mr. King

³⁴Ibid., October 9, 1919.

declined to do.³⁵

The Assiniboia by-election also demonstrated that Saskatchewan's position as a Prairie Liberal stronghold was no more. King was advised that Premier Martin was under increasing pressure to support the Grain Growers and was beginning to bend. The disaster at Assiniboia undoubtedly made matters worse. "Premier Martin has thrown in his lot with them as he is convinced that in them lies the hope of the West," a Saskatchewan Liberal wrote.³⁶ King's relationship with Martin indicated a growing breach between provincial and federal branches of the Liberal party. Martin had been proposed as a western candidate to oppose King at the leadership convention and many believed that had he accepted, he would have won. When King turned to the premier for aid in strengthening the federal party's organization in Saskatchewan, Martin was evasive. Any federal attachment, even in the traditional stronghold of Saskatchewan, was becoming a political handicap. Martin indicated that divisions in the party were preventing the provincial Liberal organization from selecting the six members of the National Liberal Committee to be formed in December. In an attempt to have Martin involved in federal organization King requested that he personally appoint some of the Saskatchewan

³⁵Grain Growers' Guide, volume 12, p.5, October 15, 1919.

³⁶King Papers, reel 1935, volume 45, pp.39442-3, W.G.A. Gourlay to C.M. Goddard, September 27, 1919.

representatives. Martin refused. At the very least King assumed the premier would represent the province on the National Council of 54, but he continued to evade King's advances. While some attempts were made to form a provincial committee, Martin indicated he was having difficulty finding Liberals to serve. He informed King several times that he did not want to be considered for the committee but the objections were ignored until his refusal was made clear: "I have intimated to you on two previous occasions that it was impossible for me to remain a member of the Liberal Executive and I am today forwarding you my resignation."³⁷

King resented Martin's refusal and, as was so often the case, justification was found in the 1917 division. "Martin...would have been satisfied only with Fielding's selection as Leader," King sulked in his diary.³⁸ "Clearly the Liberal Unionists do not wish to coalesce with the Laurier Libs if it can be avoided." When the two Liberal leaders met in the early months of 1920, relations were tense. "Felt from his attitude that there was little in the way of friendliness towards me," King recorded. "He intimated frankly his attitude wd. be to keep out of Dominion politics. He went so far as to say his govt. might find it necessary to come out &

³⁷Ibid., reel 1937, volume 48, p.41738, Martin to King, September 3, 1919; p.41746, Martin to King, September 29, 1919; p.41747, King to Martin, October 8, 1919; p.41750, King to Martin, October 8, 1919; p.41759, Martin to King, November 17, 1919; p.41764, Martin to King, December 11, 1919.

³⁸King Diaries, February 25, 1920.

support the Farmer's party....I felt I could not trust him"³⁹
It was becoming abundantly clear that King would receive little co-operation from the Liberal governments on the Prairies, and while this fact seemed unavoidable, he refused to accept its inevitability. The situation was also indicative of King's lack of understanding of Prairie politics. Given the strength of the Farmers, it would have been political suicide at the time for Martin to oppose the movement directly.

The campaign for the third party began in earnest with the Assiniboia by-election and continued with the startlingly unexpected election of the United Farmers of Ontario later the same month. The victory demonstrated that the agrarian revolt would no longer be content to pressure the traditional parties for particular policies but was going to participate directly in the political process. If the Liberals and Conservatives harboured any notion of avoiding political battle with the Farmers, the UFO victory was sobering indeed. At the same time, the entry of the Ontario Farmers into politics forced the Prairie organizations to reconsider their own strategy. Suddenly the sectional revolt against eastern exploitation was broadened to a reaction of the agricultural industry. The Farmers could now raise their sights to the possibility of a more national campaign.

The Farmers were under considerable pressure to enter

³⁹Ibid., February 28, 1920.

politics in Saskatchewan and the provincial Liberals sought desperately to demonstrate they could represent agrarian interests. Martin answered the suspicion that his government was friendly toward the federal Liberals by publicly announcing in May of 1920 that henceforth his activities would be confined solely to provincial matters. He would have no "responsibility for the organization nor[sic] for the policies of any Federal political party."⁴⁰ As long as the Martin group was in control the Saskatchewan Liberals were intent on reaping the political harvests of not being attached to a federal party. "It is plain the Martin Govt has capitulated completely to the Grain Grower's," King wrote, "it is all a matter of treachery."⁴¹ King's myopic and self-centred reaction was typical of his attitude toward Liberals who did not follow him completely. It is not difficult to see why Martin would not resist the Grain Growers but to King it was one more sign of the premier's resentment.

King also had to deal with the Motherwell Liberals in Saskatchewan who continued to advocate opposition to the Farmers and were represented in the new generation of Liberals by J.G. Gardiner. The promising politician had supported King at the convention but disagreed with his handling of the Farmers. Gardiner refused to acknowledge the validity of the agrarian movement or that it could represent western interests

⁴⁰As quoted in Morton, p.98.

⁴¹King Diaries, April 23, 1920.

better than the Liberals. Instead he argued that Liberal difficulties in the region were due to "the inactivity" and poor organization of the party. The Grain Growers, he believed, were "backed" by the Conservatives and he called for the Liberals "to carry the banner against all opposition." He criticized the "so called leaders" in Saskatchewan for "standing aside" because "fear of the enemy can never win a victory."⁴² Gardiner echoed Motherwell's complaint that in the West "loyalty to party + principles seem to be taking an extended holiday" and as a result "Liberal prospects are not very flourishing."⁴³

The situation in Manitoba was even more depressing. "You invite me to be frank in stating my views," a despondent Liberal wrote. "To be frank one must be brutal. Your question implies that there is a Liberal party here. There isn't."⁴⁴ The election of 1917 had cut the people of Manitoba adrift from their traditional political affiliations and long after King's selection as party leader the division in the Liberal party remained. The breach aroused controversy and bitterness in Manitoba, more so than in any other province.

⁴²King Papers, reel, 1941, volume 54, pp.46504-6, J.G. Gardiner to King, March 1, 1920.

⁴³Ibid., reel 1943, volume 55, Motherwell to King, February 26, 1920. For a full discussion of Gardiner's attitude toward the Progressives see Ward and Smith, Jimmy Gardiner: Relentless Liberal.

⁴⁴Ibid., reel 1936, volume 46, pp.39951-2, Hugh Mackenzie to Andrew Haydon, December 31, 1919.

Those who had remained loyal to Laurier never stopped believing they were the "stalwarts of Liberalism",⁴⁵ while the Unionists had shown their Tory blue colours. After 1919 the 'Diehards', as they were becoming known, viewed all the other groups in the province as disguised Conservatives.

Politically the province had become riddled by division and suspicion and "the game" was "being played, by suggestion and innuendo rather than in the open." The Farmers were not seen as the vanguard of a genuine agrarian revolt but rather as one more 'plot' hatched by the traitorous Unionists. "They are steadily and effectively getting control of the Grain Growers Associations," one paranoid Diehard wrote King. "Conservatism, standing on its own legs is dead in the West, but travelling under some other euphemism it is a very lively corpse, indeed it is running the west in every particular."⁴⁶ King was warned not to expect support from the provincial party that was supported by the Unionist Liberals. Sentiment was so hostile to the federal parties that any connection to the Mackenzie King Liberals would only prove harmful to the Norris government that was "scared stiff of the farmers". When he went West, King was told to expect the provincial Liberals to ignore him even to the extent of refusing to

⁴⁵Ibid., reel 1944, volume 57, pp.49472-3, A.N. Bannerman to King, April 29, 1921.

⁴⁶Ibid., reel 1937, volume 47, pp.41349-53, A.M. McLeod to King, November 28, 1919.

extend the usual social courtesies.⁴⁷ While the Unionists were in favour of co-operating with the Farmers, the Diehards were advocating opposition and were pushing King to come West as soon as possible. Rather than reuniting the Liberals, they hoped his presence would "draw out from the crowd who are our real friends; who we can depend on and entrust with men's jobs to do, and any pussyfooting Liberals can be located."⁴⁸

The Free Press had become the voice of the Unionist Liberals in Manitoba. The paper, which exerted "an immense influence in the west," was hostile to both the Diehards and King. The end result was that King faced a province with its Liberal party bitterly divided and its most influential newspaper in opposition:⁴⁹ "The one absolute necessity is to get liberal papers into the homes of the electors of the west. That is the essential of all organization, the very foundation of it." Prairie Liberals pointed to the press as key to the Liberals regaining control of the region. Its influence could not be overemphasized:

The provincial governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan are...afraid of the Unionist press and they may well be afraid. The Winnipeg dailies and the Grain Grower's Guide could knock the props from under the Norris Government in one month, and the urban press of Saskatchewan and the Guide could do

⁴⁷Ibid., reel 1936, volume 46, pp.39951-2, Hugh Mackenzie to Andrew Haydon, December 31, 1919.

⁴⁸Ibid., reel 1937, volume 46, p.41386A-A1, N.T. Macmillan to King, November 26, 1919.

⁴⁹Ibid., reel 1936, volume 46, p. 40100, A.E. Hill to King, November 18, 1919.

the same to the Martin Government.⁵⁰

The press, it was argued, was "sedulously cultivating this Grain Grower ferment."⁵¹

King recognized the lack of a Liberal press in the region as a "most serious want".⁵² He had no doubt the Free Press should be Liberal. Indeed its owner and editor were prominent liberals, yet along with the Grain Growers' Guide, it was doing everything in its power "to prevent any accommodation being reached by the Grain Growers and the liberals."⁵³ The Free Press, like the region, would have to be brought back to its roots.

King was aware that the Liberal situation in Saskatchewan and Manitoba was chaotic but he had no real idea what to expect from Alberta. He lacked a reliable western lieutenant, but at least in the other two provinces there was an array of Liberals to whom King could look for information and advice. Very little was heard from the most westerly of the Prairie provinces. At the meeting of the National Liberal Organization Committee the Alberta representation indicated their province would not be able to raise the required funding

⁵⁰Ibid., reel 1937, volume 47, pp.41349-53, A. McLeod to King, November 28, 1919.

⁵¹Ibid., reel 1942, volume 55, pp.47586-8, A.M. McLeod to King, March 27, 1920.

⁵²Ibid., reel 1936, volume 45, pp.40101-2, King to Hill, November 25, 1919.

⁵³Ibid., pp.47586-8, McLeod to King, March 27, 1920.

until King had come to the province and "served to arouse and revive Liberal interest." Even after the tour in December of 1920, however, King would have to concede that "thus far, nothing has come from the province of Alberta."⁵⁴ Such misinformation as to the situation would quickly become indicative of the relationship between King and Alberta.

The strategy of Alberta Liberals in dealing with the Farmers reflected the particular nature of the province's agrarian movement. There was never opportunity for co-operation. The Farmers had become divided between the Manitoba wing of crypto-Liberals led by T.A. Crerar⁵⁵ and the Alberta wing of radicals led by H.W. Wood. The latter emphasized non-partisanship and group government, and claimed to be representing the agricultural 'classes'. The 'class' nature of Alberta Farmers made co-operation with the Liberals highly unlikely.

It was only a matter of time before King would have to attempt to calm the tempest and make a western tour. The Prairies were moving into open revolt against the party system and he was confident a speaking tour would alleviate the problem. Western voices were more cautious and sent mixed messages. King's lack of a Prairie lieutenant denied him a clear indication of the situation. While some Liberals told

⁵⁴Ibid., reel 1941, volume 53, pp.46140-1, King to L.G. de Veber, December 6, 1920.

⁵⁵See David Laycock, Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945.

him to come West as quickly as possible because he would have "immense influence in quieting the unrest," others claimed the results would not be very tangible.⁵⁶

King was angered by this response. Prairie Liberals were indicating the tour would have to be shaped around the sensibilities of the provincial governments and he was disturbed that his presence could somehow jeopardize their popularity. He was informed that Alberta support for the United Farmers was on the wane and therefore he should wait until the late summer of 1920. Both the Saskatchewan and Manitoba Liberals wanted King to wait until their elections were over.⁵⁷

King's ignorance of the western situation along with his confidence that the region would warm to him once it realized his sympathies pushed him to an immediate trip West, but in the end he allowed caution to prevail. After pondering the tour late in 1919, he conceded the majority western opinion and delayed the journey until 1920. This way he could satisfy the bulk of Prairie Liberals and also follow his own strategy of avoiding being drawn into possible controversy with the Farmers.⁵⁸

⁵⁶King Papers, reel 1936, volume 45, p.39797, Arthur C. Hardy to King, August 19, 1919; volume 46, pp.39951-2, Hugh Mackenzie to Andrew Haydon, December 31, 1919.

⁵⁷Ibid., reel 1941, Volume 53, pp.45426-9, J.R. Boyle to King, June 28, 1920.

⁵⁸Ibid., reel 1937, volume 47, p.40768, King to Rodolphe Lemieux, December 20, 1919.

By the end of 1919 King was articulating a more concrete policy on handling the West that reflected valuable lessons learned from his first months as party leader. He may have been sympathetic to the West's concerns but this did not reflect much understanding of regional issues. The divisions in the party prevented him from having any reliable and influential western lieutenants, such as Laurier had in Clifford Sifton and Frank Oliver. As he admitted himself, when it came to the West he was "completely in the dark as to what is best."⁵⁹ Motherwell was the senior-ranking western Liberal but did not have the political mettle to help the party through the troubled waters. He was highly respected throughout the region but as one western Liberal indicated, "his political sagacity is not equal to his administrative ability."⁶⁰ The former premier of Saskatchewan, Walter Scott, reinforced these views: "A splendid man, but was always a mere infant regarding elections or political management."⁶¹ The Prairies could be considered a geographic and economic region from a distance but King was learning that political differences were very real.

The Liberal leader was also coming to realize that the agrarian revolt was not a passing phenomenon that could

⁵⁹Ibid., volume 48, King to Martin, September 5, 1919.

⁶⁰Ibid., reel 1938, volume 48, pp.41860-1, E.S. Miller to King, December 24, 1919.

⁶¹Ibid., reel 1939, volume 51, p.43829, Walter Scott to King, November 3, 1919.

quickly be absorbed with a little compromise. The conciliator was already beginning to show signs of frustration. While it would be a mistake to exhibit any antagonism to the Farmer movements, he wrote that, "it would be equally a mistake to allow the banner of Liberalism to be trampled upon."⁶² He still advocated a "strong progressive national party" but was not prepared to allow the Liberal party "to lose aught of its identity."⁶³ Liberal candidates in the West would be endorsed if the Farmer candidate was not satisfactory. King was not in favour of merely "leaving the field open" to the Farmers, "as it is at the present time."⁶⁴

King hoped for improved Liberal prospects in the West in 1920 but early indications were not favourable. The National Liberal Organization Committee was indicating that the West was in a "tempest tossed condition." Manitoba had no organization and the Grain Growers were growing stronger. Saskatchewan also had an influential Grain Growers' organization and attempts to revive or create active Liberal riding associations was seen as "unwise". Alberta was in such an uncertain state that little information was available to

⁶²Ibid., reel 1937, volume 48, pp.41761-2, King to Martin, December 4, 1919.

⁶³Ibid., reel 1941, volume 54, pp.46412A2-A3, King to Fleming, January 21, 1920.

⁶⁴Ibid., reel 1942, volume 55, pp.47589-90, King to McLeod, April 6, 1920.

even produce an evaluation.⁶⁵ When Haydon went to Winnipeg in November of 1920 to discuss the organization of Manitoba, he described much of his effort as "wasted in idle argument". The lack of finances further hindered the party's prospects.⁶⁶

In the meantime Prime Minister Borden was replaced by Arthur Meighen as head of the Conservative party and Union government. The change in leadership and the protectionist budget of 1920 reinforced the administration's Tory nature. The organized Farmers led by Crerar committed themselves to independent political action and became the National Progressive Party.

Mackenzie King's romantic glorification of agriculture and the rural lifestyle continued to be demonstrated in Parliament in 1920. The Liberal leader lamented that industrialization and urbanization were forcing the people from the country to the city and were producing "a great plutocracy and aristocracy combined on the one side, and men decaying and villages and rural life deserted on the other." Agriculture was directly associated with the morality of the nation. "What we want," King argued, "is a bold peasantry; what we want is men who love the soil, who love contact with nature. We need them...if we are to maintain our human

⁶⁵Ibid., pp.46728-30, Haydon to Locke, March 9, 1920; pp.46761-2, Memorandum of the National Liberal Organization Committee, May 12, 1920.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp.46812-3, Haydon to King, November, 1920.

society in a proper degree of strength and vigour."⁶⁷ The solution lay in defending the agricultural interests. "I am determined," he wrote in his diary, "the Liberal Party shall stand true to the farmer's interests for it is only by developing our agricultural wealth that Canada will ever become a great & prosperous country."⁶⁸

The uncertainty of King's leadership gave him an extra incentive and a more pragmatic reason to win western support. He had won the convention narrowly. The Unionist Liberals doubted his abilities: but the Laurier Liberals from Quebec who had seen to his victory had little more confidence. The most powerful of the Quebec members, Sir Lomer Gouin, had supported Fielding. The young Liberal leader was forced to work closely with older easterners who disagreed with much of his 'radical' thinking. In particular, the two most influential Liberals, Fielding and Gouin, were protectionists who also opposed the western stance on railway regulation, freight rates, and the natural resource transfer. They accepted King's leadership only grudgingly and it was generally recognized that Gouin's attitude was "not far removed from open contempt and defiance."⁶⁹ King concluded that Gouin's Montreal group was prepared to "fight the

⁶⁷Debates of the Canadian House of Commons, volume CXLIII, pp.2981-2994, King, June 1, 1920.

⁶⁸King Diaries, January 18, 1920.

⁶⁹Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to Sifton, November 10, 1920.

farmers" and did not "think much of Crerar." They wanted "as little said on the tariff as possible," in the House, and were "hoping for an alliance of Ont & Quebec against the West."⁷⁰

King disliked and distrusted the politics and powerful influence of these party veterans. He had no choice but to recognize their importance to party unity but western support would be one way of offsetting their influential positions. Once again he would have to be patient and bide his time until Gouin and Fielding were gone and he could advance his own positions more strongly. Already he was looking to the younger members from Quebec, led by Ernest Lapointe, to become his French-Canadian advisors. Many westerners doubted that King would have the strength to weather the storm and believed the party would split into conservative and radical fragments. "In this way we shall get back to a two party basis, with the division on lines of reality,"⁷¹ Dafoe wrote.

The western antagonism toward the East, and Quebec in particular, hindered King's attempts to entice Prairie Liberals back into the fold. The Laurier years created the notion that Quebec controlled the party; and the selection of King as leader with heavy support from Quebec along with the influence wielded by Gouin and his group, only furthered the impression. King was seen as too weak to control these forces

⁷⁰King Diaries, January 18, 1920.

⁷¹Sifton Papers, reel 735, Dafoe to Sifton, January 20, 1920.

and "terrified lest the French-Canadian majority in his party may throw him overboard." As a result it was believed he would go to any lengths "to placate" the "Quebec reactionaries" even if this meant sacrificing western interests. J.A. Stevenson was quickly losing faith in King partly for this reason:

The Liberal party led by him is now sunk to the level of a localized faction. It has ceased to be a nationwide party and its hopes for a recovery of that status are dim. It lives on the memory of dead and departed heroes, it allows its elder statesmen too much influence.⁷²

The performance of the Liberal party in the budget debate of 1920 demonstrated the difficulties King faced in appeasing Prairie scepticism while at the same time maintaining support in the rest of the nation. The primary issue of concern for the West remained the tariff. Fielding moved an amendment indicating there should be an immediate lightening of the burdens of taxation on food and on the implements of production necessary to the development of Canada's natural resources, but it was not enough. If the region was to judge the new Liberal leader on his performance in the first year, he would receive a failing grade. Promises of tariff reduction were "much more guarded than ever before."

It seemed that once selected as leader, King was following the path of his predecessors and sacrificing his principles by catering to the whims of central Canada and its

⁷²Grain Growers' Guide, volume 13, pp.8, 10-11, J.A. Stevenson, "Parties and Leaders at Ottawa", July 21, 1920.

manufacturers: "No Liberal leader ever makes a public speech now without announcing that he is not a free trader, never has been and never expects to be." Gone were the "savage onslaughts on protection made by Sir Richard Cartwright." Westerners were weary of a "Liberalism full of apologies" and no longer put any stock in the justification that the party had defended Prairie interests in the past so they were deserving of support in the present and future: "That is perhaps a tribute to their memory, a sort of tribute generally paid to the dead." If King was a new leader, new initiatives were expected. The West was already pointing to inconsistencies between Liberal action and the platform. Fielding's speech on the budget was seen as "a defense of bounties and protection." He avoided anything definite and produced a "mealy mouthed" speech that was "so vague and uncertain that it might be canonized by the Pope and prove acceptable to the Devil at the same time."⁷³

King defended the party's position by pointing to the support that Fielding's amendment received, not only from the Liberals in Parliament but also from the Farmers and even some of the western members of the government side. He was satisfied with the co-operation of the two groups⁷⁴ and

⁷³King Papers, reel 1941, volume 53, pp.46104-6, R.J. Deachman to King, June 16, 1920; pp.46140-1, Deachman to King, July 23, 1920.

⁷⁴Ibid., reel 1943, volume 55, pp.47768-70, King to Violet Markham, December 29, 1920.

believed they had been "drawn closer together than we had reason to expect they would be when the session opened." The Farmer groups had come under strong attack from Meighen and the Tories and King believed this made them recognize "their lot is necessarily with the Liberals". He informed Prairie critics that as party leader he had no choice but to consider the interests of his colleagues. If the West was so anxious for the party to represent its interests, there was one certain way to ensure results:

When it is remembered that so far as representation of the West in Parliament is concerned, practically all of those who are men of Liberal thought and feeling have for the time being either identified themselves with the Unionist Party or withdrawn themselves into a separate group, is it perhaps not to be wondered at that you fail to hear the note of Western Liberalism as clearly sounded from the Liberal benches in Parliament as is to be desired.⁷⁵

In the autumn of 1920 Mackenzie King prepared for his much delayed western tour. He was intent on using the trip to begin convincing the region to return to its Liberal faith. Since becoming leader he had learned that the process would be gradual but he still believed the West was liberal. The record of the unpopular Union government would be emphasized during the tour but the central plank would be co-operation between Liberals and Farmers.⁷⁶ He decided to have a smaller party accompany him that included younger Liberals who were

⁷⁵Ibid., reel 1941, volume 53, pp.46108-9, King to Deachman, July 8, 1920.

⁷⁶Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to C. Sifton, November 10, 1920.

not so associated with the bitterness of the past.⁷⁷ The tour would demonstrate, however, the sceptical nature of Prairie opinion toward the King Liberals, and the continuing bitterness caused by the 1917 division.

King found a state of "discord" in Manitoba where the breach of 1917 was widening rather than closing. The struggle between the 'Diehard', and 'Unionist' or 'Free Press' Liberals, was so divisive that they were in reality two parties. The groups could not co-ordinate any schemes of organization and continually bickered over which one represented the 'official' party. The Diehards claimed the Unionist Liberals were "usurping the authority" of the party in the province by refusing to acknowledge the Diehard representatives and calling their own conventions.⁷⁸ The planned convention to be held in 1921 was designed to reunite the two factions but the divisions only deepened. Neither side was willing to make any substantial move to bridge the gap. The Unionists were demanding party affairs be taken out of the hands of "the coterie in Winnipeg." They conceded the Diehards "considerable credit" for maintaining an organization throughout the difficult years but argued they possessed "in too strong a degree the Bourbon characteristic of not forgetting. They cannot forget 1917," one Unionist claimed,

⁷⁷King Papers, reel 1942, volume 55, pp.47270-2, King to Lemieux, September 3, 1920.

⁷⁸Ibid., reel 1944, volume 57, pp.49472-3, A.N. Bannerman to King, April 29, 1921.

"and I admit it is hard to do. But we have not only got to forget, but to forgive a lot, in the interests of the party."

The Diehards were completely uncompromising. They opposed not only the Liberal Unionists but also the Progressives, the Free Press, and the Norris Government. When Norris began to court the Farmers' Party after the victory of the UFO in 1919, the Diehards displayed their opposition. They were furious when the premier arranged to have Crerar restrain his followers in the provincial field in return for Liberal support at the federal level. Crerar tried to keep the Farmers out of the provincial field but failed. In June of 1920 the Norris government went to the polls and despite the separation from the federal party it was denied a majority by the Farmers: "Practically every Laurier Liberal in the province voted against Norris for his unfaithfulness." By 1920 frustrated Liberals were calling for a complete reorganization of their forces and strong leadership. There was no Manitoba Liberal to command the respect of both groups and pull them together, and as a result they were "as sheep having no shepherd."⁷⁹

King could not have agreed more. "Here in Winnipeg," he wrote, "one feels that politically the people are without a

⁷⁹Ibid., reel 1951, volume 67, pp.57978-9, Lewis Stubbs to Haydon, January 17, 1921.

shepherd."⁸⁰ The loyalty of the Diehards was admirable but their refusal to compromise was fatal to Liberal fortunes. Their personnel, King noted, also left much to be desired: "The Liberal cause is in the wrong hands. Many of those most prominent are discredited citizens. It grieved me to see the class of men." He could find little cause for optimism: "The whole atmosphere is other than encouraging....Organization all gone to pieces."⁸¹ These impressions were reinforced when King left Winnipeg to tour the province. "No one turned up to greet us[at Dauphin] and we only met two or three real Liberals through the day. There had been little or no organization of any kind....Manitoba is far from encouraging, neglect, dissatisfaction & indifference everywhere."⁸²

While in Manitoba King did have the opportunity to meet with the Progressive leadership. Topics of discussion included Liberal-Progressive co-operation in the upcoming election or even fusion to be conducted before the contest. Crerar agreed to the wisdom of co-operation but was anxious to learn what form it would take. Once again King reiterated his willingness to form a "union of progressive groups" and according to his account, Crerar agreed that generally it was better to have an open alliance before the elections, as long

⁸⁰King Diaries, October 31, 1920.

⁸¹Ibid., November 2, 1920.

⁸²Ibid., November 3, 1920.

as western issues would be paramount.⁸³

The former Liberal stronghold of Saskatchewan offered such a cold reception that King was shocked. As part of their attempt to win the support of the Grain Growers and keep them out of politics the provincial Liberals refused to greet the federal leader publicly in Regina. King was incensed that the party was going to such lengths to win Farmer support. "What a miserable type of Liberalism," he responded in his diary.⁸⁴ When called upon to speak at the Assiniboia Club in Regina with the premier in attendance, King "opened up pretty strongly" against Martin for his public behaviour. "Altogether," he recorded, "it was an outburst & a bomb, but while it made Martin a little incensed, did good. It cleared the air."⁸⁵

King wanted to use the tour to win back wavering Liberals who had lost faith in the party's sincerity and ability to defend western interests. His strategy in dealing with the Farmers had shifted slightly as Liberal prospects for victory in the upcoming general election improved. Rather than stressing the need for Liberals to avoid conflict with Farmers, he was now suggesting that it was in their interest "not to antagonize Libs if they wished represent'n in

⁸³Ibid., November 2, 1920.

⁸⁴Ibid., October 22, 1920.

⁸⁵Ibid., October 25, 1920.

Cabinet."⁸⁶

Division also plagued Alberta Liberalism but King believed his tour was helping. "There are some jealousies here over Unionist control from Edmonton vs Liberal from Calgary, but all agree that this visit is helping to lessen feeling."⁸⁷ The organization was "in poor hands,- everything disorganized" but he was confident the Liberal forces were "reuniting". By the time he left the province he had deluded himself into believing that the "Provincial govt now completely won over."⁸⁸ Time would show just how out of touch with Alberta sentiment King remained.

The western tour also demonstrated that while King was learning some lessons in handling the West, his romantic perceptions persisted. The rhetoric in his diary was filled with symbolic and religious imagery that reached its zenith when he reached Alberta. The West had become the manifestation of the New Jerusalem that contained the hope for progress, reform, and salvation:

Looking out of the window just as the train left Calgary I saw the most glorious sun rise I have ever seen in my life- nothing like it have I ever seen. The horizon was like a sea of liquid gold with a wonderful light all over it. The richest colours blazed forth in all directions across the sky. There were liquid greens & violets & azure colours, but a golden glory thro' all. I thought of the New Day, the New Social Order. It seems

⁸⁶Ibid., October 23, 1920.

⁸⁷Ibid., October 8, 1920.

⁸⁸Ibid., October 21, 1920.

like Heaven's prophesy of the dawn of a new era, revealed to me.⁸⁹

Upon returning through Manitoba King found Crerar and A.B. Hudson co-operative and this increased his optimism: "They agree we should coordinate & promised to aid toward that end...but emphasized need of going slowly, as following too difficult to handle." King emphasized his "being true to Lib'l Tariff policy as outlined by Convent'n" and believed he had made a good impression on Crerar: "He was emphatic on his standing for real liberalism & liked the line I had taken thro' the West." By the time he left Manitoba King was certain he had made considerable progress: "This means we have concluded our trip by the leaders of the progressive forces coming together & planning a joint campaign. What greater triumph or finer ending could there be to the Western trip....It has been successful beyond all anticipations."⁹⁰

Dafoe's account of the meeting differed in tone and substance. Crerar, according to Dafoe, placed King in "the Liberal end of the Liberal party" and believed his sympathies and outlook were progressive, but he had "no belief in King's capacity for the successful leadership of a party." Dafoe believed that if he was hoping for "some kind of an official alliance" by which there could be a division of constituencies in western Canada "he should now have abandoned them if he has

⁸⁹Ibid., October 12, 1920.

⁹⁰Ibid., November 9, 1920.

the faculty so necessary to a successful political career of seeing things as they are and refusing to follow phantoms." Dafoe was certain there would be no alliance before the election. Any proposed coalition would alienate a large number of the Farmers who were formerly Tory and also those who were radically inclined. In other words the agrarian movement was not a group of Liberals in a hurry as King believed. Dafoe was confident a fusion after the election was more practical. This would allow the Farmers to know the election results and deal with the Liberals from a position of power. A fusion would be necessary for the formation of a government. Once the coalition began to articulate its liberal policies, the Tories and radicals would be forced from the party and a truly "Farmer-Liberal Government" would be in power. Dafoe believed that Crerar and Ontario premier E.C. Drury would be able to command the support of the liberal Farmers and turn the movement into "the Liberal party of the future."⁹¹

Not surprisingly, King received congratulations after the tour from his admirers. He was told it was "successful beyond expectation" and had "rejuvenated" the energies of the young Liberals while giving confidence to the older ones.⁹² With complacent self-delusion, King heralded the western tour as a

⁹¹Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to Sifton, November 10, 1920.

⁹²King Papers, reel 1942, volume 54, pp.46545-6, L.A. Giroux to King, November 10, 1920.

"triumph." He was confident the region would already have been won if it were not for the strength of the Farmers' movement.

The reviews of King's tour from the agrarian movement were inevitably more critical and relayed a more important reaction. Dafoe indicated that, overall, the tour had aided King's fortunes on the Prairies:

King had very large meetings everywhere and he got an attentive and careful hearing. I should say that he has improved his personal position considerably because, whereas he was previously just a name, he is now known personally to a very considerable number of Western people who have heard him speak....He is regarded pretty generally as a capable platform speaker with pretty liberal and progressive ideals.

In the politically difficult context King had done well but the results were not as "triumphant" as he believed. "I find no traces of any wild enthusiasm over his platform performances," Dafoe continued. "So far as putting the official Liberal party back upon the political map is concerned, the trip, if it was designed for this purpose, was a failure."⁹³ The West welcomed King's message but not his leadership nor his party: "Liberal views were never so universally held in western Canada as they are today;" the Free Press indicated, "and official Liberalism was never so weak. There is Mr. King's problem."⁹⁴

⁹³Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to C. Sifton, November 10, 1920.

⁹⁴University of Manitoba Libraries, Free Press, "Mr. King and the West", November 3, 1920

Mackenzie King had also left the impression that he favoured "a Liberal Farmer coalition" as the "only chance for sure future."⁹⁵ On three separate occasions between November 1920 and February 1921 King proposed an open coalition to Crerar and Drury to be worked out before a general election. He was anxious that "Farmers & Liberals should combine & bring on elections at once," and at one point considered offering Crerar "a 50:50 deal" if he could get his forces to combine openly and "divide" the seats with the Liberals.⁹⁶ "I have been seeking to make that alliance a feature of the relations of the parties in the country," he wrote at the end of 1920, "I think we are not very far apart." King did not believe it was necessary for either group to sacrifice their status. In the meantime close relations had to be maintained "so that the certainty of a coalition, either before or after a general election may not be impeded."⁹⁷ The same desire was reiterated in the early months of 1921. King was already pondering a possible name for the alliance, and in February made the suggestion once again to Crerar: "I asked how Liberal-Progressive wd do for a coalition name....Crerar clearly was impressed with my suggestion of a Progressive Liberal

⁹⁵King Diaries, November 22, 1920.

⁹⁶Ibid., February 5, 1920.

⁹⁷King Papers, reel 1943, volume 55, pp.47768-70, King to Violet Markham, December 29, 1920.

alliance."⁹⁸ The Progressive leaders were not prepared to entertain a coalition, however, until after the election results were known. They did not wish to risk their movement when it was still in the ascendancy.

When Liberal Premier of Alberta, A.L. Sifton, died in 1921 the federal seat for Medicine Hat became vacant and another by-election tested Liberal support in the West. Provincial Liberals immediately announced their opposition to putting up a Liberal against the Farmer candidate. The Farmers were boasting that Medicine Hat housed their largest organization of any constituency in the province. Later in February King received contradictory information from the same Liberals advising an exact opposite strategy. They argued that conditions had changed in the province and a Liberal candidate should now be nominated.⁹⁹ The lesson of Assiniboia loomed large and with King's approval the Liberals refrained from entering the election.

In the contest held on June 27, 1921, the Progressive candidate won the seat by an unparalleled majority of 9765 votes. The landslide demonstrated just how out of touch the Alberta Liberals, and the rest of the nation, were with provincial sentiment. There was little chance of Liberal co-operation with the "radical" Farmers of Alberta. The Medicine

⁹⁸King Diaries, January 12, 1921; February 21, 1921.

⁹⁹King Papers, reel 1944, volume 58, pp.49485-6, J.R. Boyle to King, February 21, 1921.

That result made it clear that Liberal fortunes were in decline on the Prairies. "The Liberal party's chances rest in Quebec, the Maritime provinces and British Columbia, together with what can be accomplished in Ontario,"¹⁰⁰ J.R. Boyle advised King. Even Crerar was shocked by the magnitude of the victory. "It was more like a crusade than like an election," he wrote A.K. Cameron.¹⁰¹

In July the Liberal government of Charles Stewart called an election and the United Farmers of Alberta found themselves swept into office under Herbert Greenfield. The UFA victory was an even greater shock to King who was almost completely ignorant of the province's affairs. The victory gave the Farmer movement "an impetus...greater than it has had anywhere else," he recorded. King had denounced "the shortcomings and fallacies of class and group movements" and now a party based on these principles had been elected to provincial office.¹⁰²

The approach of the 1921 general election along with pressure from his eastern colleagues forced a change in King's strategy with the Farmers. His conciliatory attitude was being tempered and emphasis was being redirected from coalition toward preserving the identity of the party. King justified his shifting ground by harping on the "selfishness"

¹⁰⁰Ibid., pp.49863-6, J.R. Boyle to King, August 13, 1921.

¹⁰¹Crerar Papers, series III, box 97, Crerar to A.K. Cameron, July 2, 1921.

¹⁰²King Papers, reel 1946, volume 60, pp.51857-8, King to F. Ford, October 10, 1921.

of the Farmers which had made them "more disliked by many of the Liberals than the Govt."¹⁰³ He refused to admit he was bowing to eastern pressure. The two groups, he argued, should unite to defeat the government but there would be no "sacrificing the principles for which Liberalism and the Liberal Party stand." King was now pointing to situations where the two groups could not co-operate:

Wherever, however, the Farmers continue to insist upon separate action on their own part, on a class basis, it will be the clear duty of Liberals and the Liberal Party to place in the field candidates who will stand as Liberals representing no one class, but all classes alike.¹⁰⁴

The reversal of King's stance on coalition stunned Crerar and left him "at a loss."¹⁰⁵ Three-cornered contests were still to be avoided if possible and the way for accommodation left open, but Liberals were to be nominated in as many ridings as possible. "I have been trying in Saskatchewan, Alberta & Manitoba," King indicated, "to have candidates put in the field for moral reasons if for no other- to make the front of Liberalism strong across the continent."¹⁰⁶ Just prior to the election, as a result of Quebec pressure, King denied any intention to unite with the Progressives.

¹⁰³King Diaries, September 13, 1921.

¹⁰⁴King Papers, reel 1944, volume 57, p.49724, King's Private Secretary to J.J. Bildfell, September 20, 1921.

¹⁰⁵Crerar Papers, box 107, Crerar to Lyon, December 9, 1921.

¹⁰⁶King Diaries, November 14, 1921.

Another feature of Liberal strategy in the election campaign was to avoid commitments on tariff policy. Pressure from eastern Canada, and the powerful Montreal-wing of the party in particular, was strongly advising King to leave the tariff alone. "I shall keep sympathetic with farmers, but adopt a middle course as between Protect'n & Free Trade,"¹⁰⁷ he decided.

To my mind it is not only utter folly, but quite wrong, to talk of Free Trade in Canada with conditions what they are at the present time. Our annual expenditures are six times what they were in Laurier's day. How is it to be possible to raise the revenue required without a tariff, I fail to see. I also fail to see why a tariff for revenue, properly adjusted, cannot give all the incidental protection which may be necessary to the best interests of our industries and the country.¹⁰⁸

The campaign of 1921 would follow the lines of the Laurier-Fielding tariff meaning a revenue tariff with incidental protection. King did not believe the nation could do away entirely with the raising of revenue through the customs tariff and raise all the required revenue by direct rather than indirect taxation. Throughout the campaign it would be emphasized that neither the Liberals nor the Farmers were actually advocating free trade: "They stand for freer trade, not for free trade...they aim at freedom rather than at restriction in matters of trade...they would reduce rather

¹⁰⁷Ibid., September 6, 1921.

¹⁰⁸King Papers, reel 1946, volume 59, p.51198, King to George De Buse, August 10, 1921.

than increase the burdens of taxation."¹⁰⁹ Meighen was attempting to use the Liberal platform of 1919 to persuade the eastern manufacturers that the Grits were pushing free trade. King had been defending himself and the party against these charges since the opening of Parliament in 1920 and the debate continued throughout the campaign. "The issue, so far as the Liberal party's attitude on the tariff is concerned," he argued, "is not and never has been in this country, between free trade and protection; it has been between a tariff imposed primarily for purposes of protection, and a tariff imposed primarily for purposes of revenue."¹¹⁰

J.A. Robb bolstered King's confidence in his strategy by arguing that the West would "throw the tariff to the winds" if the government introduced "satisfactory pool arrangements" and "control and operation of Railways".¹¹¹ King had to avoid a railway policy that might be construed in the West "as our looking with favour upon a possible C.P.R. Monopoly" but "friends in Ontario" were most anxious that the question of government ownership be avoided.¹¹² The Montreal Liberals seconded this concern. King's western sympathies were losing

¹⁰⁹Ibid., J5 Speeches, reel 1985, volume D3, pp.1502-9, King's speech at Edmonton, October 6, 1920.

¹¹⁰Debates, volume CXLIX, pp.3613-4, King, May 19, 1921.

¹¹¹King Papers, reel 1950, volume 66, p.56904, Robb to King, October 3, 1921.

¹¹²Ibid., reel 1948, volume 63, pp.54180-1, King to Lemieux, September 9, 1921.

out to eastern pressure.

The question of the Wheat Board was also an issue in the West but because the region itself was so divided on how to proceed, King could avoid making any promises. The federal government had created the first Canadian Wheat Board to dispose of the 1919 crop but in 1920 the act creating the board was not renewed. Saskatchewan was pushing for some form of either national marketing of the western grain crop or national support of a co-operative plan while Manitoba, and Alberta to a lesser extent, were advocating the free market. These differences, however, existed among western Liberals and the Progressives alike so the issue, at present, would cause King little harm.

Instead the Liberal leader attempted to avoid cleavages by turning the emphasis onto the Union government's record. He attacked the use of orders-in-council as unconstitutional and argued that Meighen's administration had been without a mandate since the end of the war. But the western electorate was more interested in the tariff issue and King was unable to avoid regional division.

The Liberal situation in Alberta during the campaign mirrored the pessimism of the Medicine Hat by-election. "The prospects are not very bright," J.R. Boyle wrote King. The Liberals were in a better position than the Tories but it would not be "wise" for King to expend very much money or energy attempting to win the West. Conditions across the

Prairies were depressing, Boyle warned, but "in so far as Alberta is concerned, I would not think that we have a fighting chance."¹¹³ There was little hope for King's strategy of co-operation. Alberta Liberals did not view the majority of Farmers as Liberals and wanted King to avoid coalition and fight them in every constituency.¹¹⁴ Soon they would see the "folly" of their ways and "the lost sheep" would all be "back in the fold."¹¹⁵

The party was suffering, Alberta Liberals argued, because there was no organization and they blamed the state of affairs on the division of 1917. When A.L. Sifton was premier the party was kept strictly under his control and when he "turned traitor" in 1917 the organization which had "fattened at the liberals' trough went over to the enemy and left the party helpless."¹¹⁶ During King's tour of the province he had witnessed almost as much division in the party as between the progressive groups. "There is a regular feud here, & no forgiveness,"¹¹⁷ he recorded. The view that Alberta was on the verge of returning to Liberalism was continually put forward

¹¹³Ibid., reel 1944, volume 58, pp.49869-72, Boyle to King, September 9, 1921.

¹¹⁴Ibid., reel 1947, volume 61, pp.52673-83, George Hagle to King, September 21, 1921.

¹¹⁵Ibid., reel 1945, volume 58, pp.50103-4, Buchanan to King, December 10, 1921.

¹¹⁶Ibid., pp.51038A-A17, O.E. Culbert to King, December 12, 1921.

¹¹⁷King Diaries, November 14, 1921.

to King and just as continually proved wrong. He never really understood the characteristics that made Alberta unique among the Prairie provinces. The province's shunning of the Liberals gradually came to poison Mackenzie King's opinion of Alberta.

In Saskatchewan the Liberal leader decided to take a more offensive approach to the Progressives. According to Motherwell, the premier was still not to be trusted: "Martin will continue pussyfooting, until he is quite convinced which of the two opposition parties are going to have the ascendancy in Canada."¹¹⁸ His government was "desperately afraid" to antagonize the Farmers and was attempting to appease them by co-operating in the coming federal contest. Martin made it clear he would not take part in the campaign and would "regard himself as a Western man." He advised King to "forget all about the West."¹¹⁹ The lack of federal-provincial unity within the party incensed King: "Thus we are handicapped if not betrayed by our own friends."¹²⁰

Motherwell did not fully support the compromises being offered the Progressives but he had learned his lesson in Assiniboia and was now prepared to co-operate in "looking for some honourable basis upon which we can get + fight

¹¹⁸King Papers, reel 1950, volume 65, pp.65868-71, Motherwell to King, July 1, 1921.

¹¹⁹King Diaries, September 3, 1921.

¹²⁰Ibid., November 13, 1921.

together."¹²¹ Gardiner, on the other hand, continued to urge King to have Liberals oppose the Progressives in every constituency. He pointed to the experience of 1917 as evidence of what happens when "Liberal sentiment is cast aside in order that some preconceived idea of what is best might ride triumphantly over everything else."¹²² King hoped to find some middle-ground between the Martin and Gardiner groups.

By the end of the campaign Liberals and Progressives were quarrelling openly in Saskatchewan and the provincial Liberals were beginning to resume their support of the federal party. "The man in Saskatchewan that the Progressives are after hot foot these days is Premier Martin," Dafoe wrote.

He realized that he had 'cooked his goose' and that there was nothing left for him but to get out at the first opportunity, turning the premiership over to Dunning who may be able to placate the Progressive following of the Martin Government.

Progressivism in Saskatchewan was proving less durable than in either of the other two Prairie provinces. The stronger Liberal base had survived the first Progressive offensive and it seemed that many in the movement had been disarmed by the compromising attitude of the Martin government. Saskatchewan was enroute to returning to its position as the nation's second most powerful Liberal stronghold and was the only optimistic sign for a Liberal resurgence on the Prairies.

¹²¹King Papers, reel 1950, volume 65, pp.55862-5, Motherwell to King, January 17, 1921.

¹²²Ibid., reel 1946, volume 60, pp.52172-3, Gardiner to King, September 5, 1921.

The inter-party battle raged on in Manitoba throughout the campaign. The 'Free Press' faction headed by A.E. Hill of Brandon and the 'Diehards' headed by John Knott of Winnipeg remained at each others' throats. The latter were adamant in fighting the Progressives on every front and were placing candidates in as many constituencies as possible. The "tangled situation" was made even worse when they refused to concede a seat to the popular Progressive, Robert Forke, despite the fact that he was "an old and tried Liberal of the highest standing."¹²³ The Free Press group was following King's co-operative strategy and as a result had been recognized by the national organization as the official party. Dafoe viewed the Diehards as "of no political significance, excepting that it makes the Liberal impotence still more marked."¹²⁴ King was advised to take both Unionist and Laurier Liberals to Winnipeg during the campaign. It was essential to maintain the appearance of balance and "not allow either faction to take possession of the party."¹²⁵ King had been a Laurier Liberal but he found the Diehard attitude too extreme.

Manitoba proved to be a hostile environment. Many of the Free Press Liberals did not even want King to visit the

¹²³Ibid., reel 1948, volume 62, pp.53755-6, J.F. Kilgour to King, December 10, 1921.

¹²⁴Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to Sifton, October 14, 1921.

¹²⁵King Papers, reel 1950, volume 66, pp.56907-8, Robb to King, October 17, 1921.

province because "the feeling generally" was towards "Liberal administration, but not exactly Mckenzie[sic] King." He described it as "the worst mix-up of any place in Canada."¹²⁶ Despite the bitterness, he met with both "factions" and "tried to pour oil on troubled waters." He "succeeded in not offending friends of either faction but did little to heal breach, which runs very deep...factions as irreconcilable as in Ireland."¹²⁷ It furthered King's belief that the Manitoba Liberals were "a poor lot".¹²⁸

The reaction of the western press to King's campaign tour was indicative of Prairie opinion. "Mr. King showed what Liberalism ought to be," the Grain Growers' Guide reported,

what, theoretically, it is, and it is just because the official Liberal Party failed to measure up to the very standards set by Mr. King that it finds itself very largely a discredited political body. What Mr. King has to say about Liberalism is interesting, and to some extent important, but both the interest and the importance are modified by the degree to which reasoned assent is given to the principles and policies he laid down, by the principal men in his party.¹²⁹

Dafoe was convinced that the Liberal party had no strength in the region: "Laurier had destroyed it in 1917 and Mr. King

¹²⁶Ibid., pp.56911-2, Anonymous to Robb, October 13, 1921; p.56914, King to Robb, October 22, 1921.

¹²⁷King Diaries, November 11, 1921.

¹²⁸Ibid., September 3, 1921.

¹²⁹Grain Growers' Guide, volume 13, p.5, November 10, 1920.

has not been able to revive it."¹³⁰ J.A. Stevenson continued to emphasize Quebec domination: "What we are going to be in for is pseudo-Liberal administration, of which King may be the nominal head but Gouin will be the moving spirit."¹³¹

In the general election of December 6, 1921, the government of Arthur Meighen fell. The electorate returned 116 Liberals, 65 Progressives, 50 Conservatives, 3 Labour, and one Independent. There would be no majority government but the Liberals were in the best position to form an administration.

If there had been any doubt as to Quebec's domination of the party before the election, there was none after. For the first time since Confederation the Liberals won all 65 seats in the province. This posed distinct problems for King. While he certainly appreciated the strong support, his distrust of the Montreal Liberals had only grown during the campaign. They had exerted pressure which had altered King's policy on coalitions, tariffs, and railways. He had taken seriously the rumours that Gouin and several others of his group were considering an alliance with the Conservatives and he had gone so far as to request public expressions of loyalty

¹³⁰Dafoe Papers, box 1, file 4, Dafoe to Augustus Bridle, June 14, 1921.

¹³¹Sifton Papers, reel 735, Stevenson to Dafoe, September 16, 1921.

to his leadership.¹³² On the other hand, not a single Liberal was elected in Alberta, while Motherwell was the sole representative of Saskatchewan and Manitoba returned only one. The Progressives had swept the Prairie provinces, winning 39 out of a possible 43 seats. They denied King the opportunity to form a majority government with national representation. Still, the battle had been won and King would now have to divide the spoils among his generals. The cabinet negotiations were the most difficult of King's lengthy career and severely tested his leadership.

The volatile and unprecedented situation forced the new prime minister to turn to the Progressives for support but the pressures from within the party prevented him from even contemplating coalition: "I had thought this out carefully & felt a coalition was not in interest of country...better to face the inevitable at once." King believed the Liberals had won enough seats to proceed without sacrificing control and sharing power: "We Libs were a little stronger than at first thought & Progressives perhaps not quite so strong."¹³³ If the Progressives wished to be represented in cabinet, it would only be on the "same basis as representation from ranks of Liberals, namely on policies as announced on faith in

¹³²Frederick W. Gibson, "The Cabinet of 1921", Cabinet Formation and Bicultural Relations, p.74.

¹³³King Diaries, November 26, 1921.

personnel of administration."¹³⁴ He assumed the Progressives were fully aware that there could be no coalition and prepared to negotiate upon this basis: "Progressives have given up hope of coalition & are beginning to think of principles as I first advised."¹³⁵

Despite the refusal to offer a coalition, King believed his stance was still one of compromise. His frustration with the Progressives, however, had increased throughout the campaign as he demonstrated in a letter to his brother twelve days before the election:

This wretched Progressive movement will alone be responsible for the failure to secure a really effective democratic government in the next parliament, should such prove to be a consequence of the divisions in the three-cornered contests. You will observe that I am beginning to deal a little more sharply with this aspect of affairs.¹³⁶

His frustration was mounting but until he won the Progressives back to Liberalism, the position of the party and his leadership would remain precarious. An alliance with the Prairies was essential for political success in the future. He claimed to be determined not to allow "the West to become isolated," that he would maintain his "alliance with the rural elements as the solid foundation of the Liberal party through the years to come. Not count on 'the interests' but the

¹³⁴King Papers, reel 1947, volume 61, p.53105, King to Haydon, December 13, 1921.

¹³⁵King Diaries, December 10, 1921.

¹³⁶As quoted in Dawson, p.355.

people- and not have any East and West."¹³⁷ These sentiments did reflect King's idealistic goals but they also served his expedient needs of having to gain Prairie support to offset Quebec domination.

King invited the Progressive leaders into his government but the invitation had to reflect the consideration of his eastern colleagues. Ontario Liberals had been engaged in provincial and federal battles with the Farmers' movement and were in no mood for generous treatment. The Quebec district group, led by Lapointe, Bureau, and Beland, was flexible in its attitudes on the tariff and were in favour of accommodating the Progressives. The Montreal Liberals, on the other hand, led by Gouin, Mitchell, and Lemieux, were associated with financial, transportation, and industrial enterprises, and were much less compromising.¹³⁸

The preliminary cabinet list drawn up by King and Haydon was undoubtedly an attempt to reach out westward and listed Crerar, Hudson, Motherwell, and/or Marshall to represent the Prairies. It leaned heavily toward the agrarian interests and low-tariff Liberals. King wanted to convince the Progressives that the presence of the strong protectionists- Gouin, Dandurand, Kennedy, and Fielding- would be countered.

On December 9 King believed he was prepared to make his first overtures to the Progressives and Crerar was invited to

¹³⁷King Diaries, December 8, 1921.

¹³⁸Gibson, p.74.

meet Haydon in Winnipeg three days hence. Before the meeting took place, King met with Ernest Lapointe who indicated that Gouin would be hostile to the idea of bringing in the Progressives and the only way to succeed would be to provide the Montreal group with more influential posts than first intended. The essential absorption of the Progressives, therefore, had to include accommodating the Montreal Liberals. King wished to strike a deal with the agrarian leaders as quickly as possible to strengthen his position with the Gouin group.

Four meetings took place between Haydon and Crerar and Hudson. Crerar had been surprised by King's recent hardening of attitude toward the Progressives. Haydon made it immediately clear that the Progressive leaders were needed in cabinet to "free" the government "from the domination by the Montreal interests and any reactionary influences" within the Liberal party. Cabinet positions, however, would not be enough to placate the West and Crerar and Hudson indicated that 'measures' were more important than 'men'. The discussion then turned to matters of policy and the Manitobans put forward a list of conditions that reflected the usual western concerns- tariffs, resources, freight rates, and railways. Crerar wanted four cabinet positions given to the Prairies including one Progressive from Alberta. In the following meeting Crerar proposed that Hudson should receive the influential justice portfolio. Motherwell was

unsatisfactory and C.W. Hamilton should be the Saskatchewan representative. Charles Stewart was acceptable from Alberta. Before any deal was finalized, however, Crerar indicated that he would have to meet with his western followers on December 20 in Saskatoon.

On December 14 Haydon received King's reply to the proposals. The prime minister indicated he was prepared to adjust the tariff according to the Liberal amendment of the 1921 Budget that repudiated the principle of protection and called for a reduction in the costs of living and implements of production. Negotiations for the resource transfer would be commenced but the discontinuance of the annual Dominion subsidy in lieu of the resources would be part of the settlement. The question of freight rates, reciprocity, and railways would be considered but no commitment was given. King was not prepared to consider more than one minister for each of the western provinces.¹³⁹ Motherwell would have to represent Saskatchewan and both Hudson and Crerar could enter the cabinet if the Alberta Progressives would give one of them a seat.

After consulting with the Progressives a third time Haydon informed King that they were not satisfied. The tariff amendment was "altogether too indefinite to make progress". Substantial general reductions and a free list of agricultural

¹³⁹King Papers, reel 1947, volume 61, p.53105, King to Haydon, December 13, 1921.

implements extended according to the Liberal platform, were needed. The freight rates remained a "burning question" and were of "vital importance".¹⁴⁰ The resource question would require a transfer and settlement to replace the subsidy. The Prairies deserved four positions because future redistribution would provide the region with more seats.

King believed "Crerar was making a mistake and asking too much...that he should have faith in men proposed not exact conditions."¹⁴¹ There would be no further concessions. "Can only consider taking representation from Progressive party into cabinet on same basis as representation from ranks of Liberals," King wired Haydon.¹⁴² The Liberal leader was under immense pressure from the Quebec members and time was running out.¹⁴³ He advised Haydon, Crerar, and Hudson to come to Ottawa immediately. Crerar agreed but indicated he first had to receive the support of the Saskatoon gathering. King responded that he could not wait until December 24 when Crerar would arrive and he arranged for Hudson to come without delay. Premier Drury would also come to Ottawa and he and Hudson would receive the telegraphed report of the Saskatoon proceedings from Crerar.

Mackenzie King was confident the western negotiations

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p.53120, Haydon to King, December 14, 1921.

¹⁴¹King Diaries, December 14, 1921.

¹⁴²As quoted in Gibson, p.81.

¹⁴³See Gibson.

were proceeding well but before any Progressive delegation could depart for Ottawa, pressure was exerted on Crerar, Drury, and Hudson that would alter their negotiating position dramatically. On December 17 Crerar met with Dafoe to review the week's developments. The Free Press editor had been confident that unless King offered coalition there would be no chance of the Progressive leaders even contemplating entering the cabinet. Sifton agreed with Dafoe that the Progressives would have to refuse King's attempts at absorption and leave him to "the Liberal antiquies who are now congregating at Ottawa." They were jointly suspicious of the new prime minister's overtures because the result would be an eastern-dominated government: "The Liberal party would in effect be a Quebec and Nova Scotia party with a Rump from the rest of the Provinces...they should sit at the head table and the Farmers organization should take whatever crumbs that are offered to them."¹⁴⁴ By refusing to join the cabinet without coalition the Progressives would maintain their identity and soon become the vanguard of liberal ideas. Dafoe was consequently surprised to learn the Progressive leaders were in fact considering entering King's cabinet without the guarantee of a coalition.¹⁴⁵ He immediately set out to follow Sifton's advice of forming a "straight front" and warning them

¹⁴⁴Dafoe Papers, box 12, file 4, Sifton to Dafoe, December 8, 1921.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., box 4, file 4, Dafoe to Sifton, December 19, 1921.

of the dangers. "Once they are in without anything more definite than that," Sifton wrote Dafoe, "the Progressive party as a political force comes to an end."¹⁴⁶ Without a coalition he predicted,

the Progressives will share the fate of the Liberals who went into the Union Government, with the absolute certainty that if the Progressive movement stays alive the followers will turn upon the leaders who have gone into the Government and regard them as having betrayed their principles.¹⁴⁷

The pressure on Crerar mounted when Drury indicated in a telegram that he had come to the same conclusion and did not believe his following would allow him to enter the cabinet:

Am of opinion that for sake of future progressives should guard against absorption by liberals. If alliance or coalition formed should be conditional on King professedly accepting fundamental parts of progressive platform and leaving Gouin bloc out of Cabinet. This I think he is prepared to do-political continuity of progressives should also be assured. Fear I cannot accept invitation.¹⁴⁸

The Progressive strategy once again turned to gaining a coalition and Hudson set out to convey the terms to King. On December 20, at the same time Crerar was meeting with his supporters in Saskatoon, Hudson would be arriving in Ottawa.

The pressure on Mackenzie King in the meantime was not so much to refuse the Progressives' entry as it was to alter the cabinet slate first proposed in terms of eastern

¹⁴⁶Ibid., box 12, file 4, Sifton to Dafoe, December 14, 1921.

¹⁴⁷As quoted in Gibson, p.86.

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

representation.¹⁴⁹ There was less resistance to the Progressives than at first anticipated.¹⁵⁰ The problem for King was that such changes would alter the initial low-tariff complexion of the cabinet and jeopardize the Progressive negotiations. He would have to find places for some of the "reactionaries" if he was to hold Quebec support. As Dawson notes, there was

a very real danger that the original 'purity' of this body which had seemed so attractive to Western eyes, would become gravely compromised and the Progressive leaders would then find it increasingly difficult to enter the Cabinet themselves or to justify their entrance to their followers.¹⁵¹

King wanted to cement an agreement for the entry of the Progressives before his bargaining position was placed in jeopardy by eastern pressure. Prior discussions with Drury had indicated a strong interest in joining the cabinet and that Crerar was probably prepared to accept. The question of a coalition had been raised by Drury but turned down by King: "Once he spoke of Progressive-Lib. alliance, but I was

¹⁴⁹High protectionists from Ontario and the Maritimes such as George Graham, D.D. McKenzie, and E.M. Macdonald were being proposed. The Gouin group was advocating six ministers for Quebec including the protectionists Rodolphe Lemieux and J.A. Robb. See Gibson for a full discussion of the negotiations.

¹⁵⁰Only Kennedy of the Ontario Liberals remained opposed and Fielding was strongly endorsing the alignment. Beland, Lemieux, and Gouin preferred Ontario to Prairie Progressives and favoured Drury over Crerar, but they were all prepared to give the plan support.

¹⁵¹Dawson, p.364.

emphatic in saying that it must be straight Liberal Govt."¹⁵² The question, as far as King was concerned, had been laid to rest.

On December 19 Haydon arrived in Ottawa and, ignorant of the changes in the Progressive position, provided an optimistic report. The Prairies would have to be given four ministers, though Motherwell could probably be included in this number. Even if Crerar refused to enter the cabinet it appeared Hudson would come in. There was no knowledge that the coalition proposal would reemerge as a factor or that Drury had decided to stay out. The situation looked positive and King was proud of his efforts to battle the eastern interests and ensure Prairie representation: "Haydon says my attitude was a surprise to the Western men, they never really believed I could be other than with the 'big interests'."¹⁵³

On December 20 Hudson arrived in Ottawa and the coalition question was thrust to the forefront of the negotiations. Crerar had received the support of the Saskatoon meeting as long as a coalition was formed. King was surprised and disconcerted by the sudden reemergence of the issue: "I told Hudson [I] cld not think of coalition...could not hold supporters by taking in except as Libs....Admitted seriousness of having West unrepresented-better accept the verdict of the

¹⁵²King Diaries, December 14, 1921.

¹⁵³Ibid., December 19, 1921.

people than 'bastardize' the Liberal Party."¹⁵⁴

King met Alberta Liberals Frank Oliver and Charles Stewart later the same day and they were emphatically opposed to coalition. The next day the Liberal-Progressive negotiations were further threatened when E.C. Drury arrived from Toronto to inform King that his followers had refused to release him from provincial responsibilities until after the next election. The Ontario premier reaffirmed his support for coalition but also suggested that Crerar and Hudson should enter the cabinet regardless.

By noon of December 21 it appeared that King's desire to bring the Progressives into cabinet was on the verge of failure but the situation improved when a telegram arrived from Crerar that provided his version of the Saskatoon meeting. The western Progressive members had decided unanimously to retain their identity and organization as a party and to give independent support to progressive legislation, but the meeting had also given "tacit approval" to any Progressive member, "entering Government as individuals providing policy and personnel satisfactory."¹⁵⁵ Crerar would meet with the Ontario members on his way to Ottawa. King was optimistic "the Rubicon has been crossed and that the gulf between East and West has been bridged." He was further relieved when Hudson indicated that the tariff should not

¹⁵⁴Ibid., December 20, 1921.

¹⁵⁵As quoted in Gibson, p.88.

present any obstacles and the issues of main concern were the railway rates and the natural resources: "I don't think the latter will be difficult of solution, the former may be hard to do in terms but can be done in Council.- Hudson said Tariff was a matter of attitude."¹⁵⁶

On December 24 the leaders of the Liberal and Progressive parties met for the first time since the election. King was confident he deserved western support due to his refusal to bow to Montreal pressure.¹⁵⁷ The offer was presented to the Progressive leaders to join his cabinet as Liberals:

I said that to promote national unity & inspire confidence and good will....I was willing to consider taking into the cabinet representatives of the movement, himself and others he might name, but would be prepared to do so only on the understanding that they came into a Liberal Government on the same basis as others invited. I would not discuss coalition, nor on line of policy.

Crerar refused. Once again the situation had changed. The stopover in Toronto had changed his mind. Crerar had met with the Progressive members from Ontario and had found them to be unanimously opposed to the entrance of any of their group. "Crerar met me quite frankly," King recorded,

by saying that he would like to come in, he thought it would be the right thing to do from one point of view...he had met with such decided and unanimous opposition to the thought of any Progressive entering the Govt. at this time that he now felt he was not free to come for the present at least....He hoped that it would be possible to come in a little later, that if I would keep this in mind he also

¹⁵⁶King Diaries, December 21, 1921.

¹⁵⁷See Gibson, pp.91-2.

would & would do all he could to bring the Lib's & Progressives together in the House.

Crerar's party, however, did not intend to become the official Opposition. He read King the Saskatoon resolution indicating the Progressives would be prepared to maintain their identity as a party and give the government independent support so long as the legislation was progressive. King argued that the West would be left out of the councils of government and while policy would not change, in the absence of the Progressives it would be more difficult to go as far as the West wished:

I emphasized the possible loss to the West thro' not having adequate representation in the Cabinet in the shaping of policies, the need for Western men....I believe tho' his cause will suffer, and we shall gradually see the falling away of his followers into our ranks.¹⁵⁸

With Crerar's refusal, western representation was left to Motherwell and Stewart but neither were capable of filling the role of western lieutenant. Stewart had lost in Alberta and would have to be found a seat in the 'safe' province of Quebec. King would have preferred a Manitoban representative to Stewart, leaving Alberta isolated for its refusal to elect any Liberals: "We were under no obligation to give Alberta representat'n. She must accept situation as she had made it."¹⁵⁹

Crerar was not pleased to learn that since the Winnipeg

¹⁵⁸King Diaries, December 24, 1921.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., December 20, 1921.

negotiations the cabinet slate had been altered. Low-tariff men such as Marshall, McMaster, Drury, Hudson, and himself were out and Graham, Lemieux, and McKenzie were in. Sifton was under the impression that King had been more prepared to adhere to Crerar's advice but "the Montreal element had got to work on Thursday and Friday and practically put the pistol to Mr. King's head, forcing an alteration of King's proposed list of Members."¹⁶⁰

The cabinet negotiations with the Progressives failed but in reality they were doomed from the beginning:

It would appear now that the Ottawa negotiations were doomed to failure, and that blame cannot be fairly placed on the head of Mr. King or Mr. Crerar. On the Evening of Friday, December 23, while the Ontario Progressives in their meeting in Toronto were telling Mr. Crerar in plain language that he would be regarded as a traitor to the Progressives if he joined with Mr. King, Sir Lomer Gouin, Senator Dandurand, Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Lemieux, I believe, were in Ottawa telling Mr. King that he would be a traitor to the Liberals if he had anything to do with Mr. Crerar and the Progressives.¹⁶¹

While both King and Crerar believed the other should have been more compromising and stronger in commanding his following, both were negotiating from positions of weakness. If not for eastern pressure King would have been prepared to accept a coalition before the election to ensure victory. When this appeared unacceptable to the Progressives, King worked to win

¹⁶⁰Dafoe Papers, box 12, file 4, Sifton to Dafoe, December 30, 1921.

¹⁶¹Lambert Papers, series I, box 1, Lambert to Atkinson, December 31, 1921.

a straight Liberal government. He sought to have Progressives in the cabinet after the election but there would be no further consideration of coalition. Likewise, the Progressives were not prepared to surrender their position after the election. It was Sifton and Dafoe who correctly analyzed the Progressive reaction. Crerar, Hudson, and Drury were all prepared to enter the cabinet as Liberals. Crerar interpreted the meeting at Saskatoon as giving him "tacit approval" to enter the government but it is doubtful if he could have carried the Alberta group. The attitude of the Ontario Farmers toward King and co-operation, never mind coalition, had been manifest as early as the Stormont-Glengarry by-election: "We intend to fight every election that comes across. The farmers here have nothing whatever to do with the aspirations of Mackenzie King as representative of the farmers."¹⁶²

The negotiations had demonstrated, however, that the Progressive leadership was prepared to enter King's cabinet as Liberals if western issues were addressed. While King had failed to absorb the movement in the present, the opportunity certainly existed and could be pursued in the future. The new prime minister believed he had demonstrated his sympathies with the Prairie West and gone as far as possible to have the region represented in government. His administration would be

¹⁶²Grain Growers' Guide, volume 12, p.12, September 3, 1919.

dependent on Progressive support and this would ensure that these sympathies remained.

The failure of the negotiations also left the West dissatisfied and at the mercy of Quebec. From Montreal Kirk Cameron wrote Crerar: "The general opinion here is that our friend King has delivered himself into the hands of the Montreal crowd that from now on, they will control the whole situation." The western response to King's efforts was mixed. He had demonstrated the "attempt at a rapprochement" but had "not had the courage and strength to carry it through."¹⁶³ If King had offered a real coalition and policy assurances to the Progressives, he would have largely solidified the West. He would have lost the Gouin group but it is highly unlikely that Quebec would have abandoned the Liberals altogether because there was nowhere else to turn. The province certainly would not have turned to Meighen's Tories. It would have been a difficult move on King's part but not an impossible one. Until Mackenzie King rid his government of the Laurier leftovers and demonstrated he was not the puppet of Quebec, his position in the West would remain weak.

¹⁶³Crerar Papers, series III, box 97, Cameron to Crerar, December 28, 1921.

CHAPTER THREE
BELLING THE CAT, 1922-24

Those members of the Liberal party who found themselves more or less in sympathy with the views held by the Progressives...told King, so I am informed, that if he did not "get" Sir Lomer it was only a question of time until Sir Lomer would "get" him. They told King that it was quite obvious that Sir Lomer Gouin regarded himself as the real head of the administration...there is a possibility of a definite understanding being reached between the Government and the Progressives...Gouin's disappearance from the government and from parliament is, I understand, the first essential...I don't think King has the courage to "bell the cat".

-Dafoe to Sifton, July 11, 1922.

As prime minister, Mackenzie King's western sympathies would be put to the test and he would be expected to turn rhetoric into action. It would not be enough to point to the platform of 1919 as evidence of Liberal concern for western conditions. He would have to walk the political tightrope and find the path of least resistance between his eastern and western bases of support. What this had meant thus far was a catering to Quebec while at the same time maintaining at least the possibility of gaining western support. He had to convince the region that its interests would not always take second place to central Canada. The easterners were his hope for the present but the westerners were his hope for the immediate future. "The hope of the future of Liberalism in Canada," King wrote J.R. Boyle, "lies in the West....It is inevitable that we should lose some of our following in Eastern Canada as the years go by and what is lost in the East

must be more than overtaken in the West."¹ He would quickly learn that until the 'reactionary' influences were removed from government there was little chance of wooing the region.

King was now prime minister of Canada but his position was far from secure. The schism of 1917 remained a divisive legacy for the unity of the party and nation.² Most importantly, he had failed to bring the western Progressives on side and the government rested largely in the hands of 'the eastern reactionaries' who viewed the Progressives with a mixture of distrust and contempt. The westerners had refused the mantle of opposition but they held the balance of power in parliament. They viewed the eastern Liberals with suspicion. "It is going to be a pretty difficult if not an impossible task to revive the Dominion Liberal party in Western Canada," a sceptical Dafoe wrote, "while so large and influential a section of it in Eastern Canada constitutes without doubt the most 'Conservative' political influence which there is at the present time in Canada."³

The young prime minister would have to exert more of an influence in his own party if he was to show the West there

¹King Papers, reel 2242, volume 70, pp.59825-7, King to Boyle, December 18, 1922.

²Dawson, on the other hand, argues that under King's brief leadership the Liberals had made "a remarkable recovery: the schism of 1917 had been in large measure repaired and the results of the election had given clear confirmation of the restoration of party unity." Dawson, p.377.

³Dafoe Papers, box 1, file 4, Dafoe to W.A. Buchanan, November 30, 1923.

was no Quebec domination. The situation was aptly summed up by Haydon:

The Party cannot live in the long future unless it can hold the West. It will continue to hold the East. The holding of one end of the country and losing the other is just the opposite to a national viewpoint and real Canadianism, which after all is the only thing worth fighting for. I know how strongly you feel this way. I take the liberty of suggesting that you might show a bit of "the big stick" in some of these things. Macdonald was Master of his Administration. Laurier was very much so. You have to be also.⁴

Crerar did not doubt King was sympathetic to the West. He was "well meaning" and if surrounded by the "right men" would move quickly in the "right direction." The problem was that the new prime minister appeared to lack the "strength of purpose" to persevere in the face of obstacles. He did not seem prepared to risk losing some of his eastern support to make western gains. "To my mind," Crerar noted,

Gouin is the boss of the administration. He gives the impression of having great reserve power...he sits in his seat, with his square head and determined jaw, alert and keen, he impresses you as a man of strong purpose and determined will. His outlook on public life is the outlook of the Montreal financial transportation and manufacturing interests....It seems certain that the situation cannot last any great length of time. The Government is divided and there are evidences of a cleavage behind it.⁵

Mackenzie King had been irritated by the refusal of the Progressives to join his cabinet but the failure to woo the

⁴King Papers, reel 2245, volume 76, pp.63127, Haydon to King, March 27, 1922.

⁵Crerar Papers, section II, box 79, Crerar to H.B. Mitchell, June 10, 1922.

group was mainly attributable to the pressure mounted by his eastern colleagues.⁶ It was questionable whether his leadership could withstand the test of time needed to bring the West fully on side and thereby counter the eastern influences. But Prairie support would be necessary to maintain the Liberals in office and King in the leadership, and this could possibly serve as an additional expedient motive to match his regional emphasis with his philosophical sympathies. As long as this remained the case, the West would continue to wield considerable influence in the nation. That influence would be exerted on King to live up to his promises and supposed sympathies, and carry out western policies.

But the greatest threat to King's western appeal came from within his own party. The movement to overthrow the Liberal leader had temporarily subsided and Gouin issued a declaration early in the parliamentary session that "the Liberal party has one chief and one chief only."⁷ The statement of loyalty was belated but certainly appreciated by a nervous King whose political survival was coming largely to depend on outlasting the older, reactionary elements. The prime minister would have to tolerate Gouin's influence and patiently deflect his threats to resign when he did not get his way. King hoped Gouin's following would gradually decline

⁶Dawson argues instead that King "had been defeated by the hostile attitude of the Progressives." Dawson, p.377.

⁷As quoted in Dawson, p.387.

and be replaced by the younger and more liberal members from Quebec including Lapointe, Power, McMaster, and Cannon. Still, there were many in the Liberal party who remained unimpressed with King's leadership and were suspicious of his sympathy to the Progressives.

The Progressives did at least believe King had been sincere during the negotiations: "I believe Mr. King acted in entire good faith and showed evidences of good statesmanship that I did not heretofore give him credit for," Crerar wrote.⁸ He had demonstrated some western sympathy but not the courage or strength to follow it through. The Progressives also had an expedient motive for giving their support to King. They certainly preferred the Liberals to the Conservatives and would go to considerable lengths to prevent Meighen's party from gaining power.

King's problems were not confined to the divisions between eastern Liberals and western Progressives. Even after the election the Laurier and Unionist Liberals across the Prairies remained bitterly divided and were quarrelling over control of the party organizations. The prime minister recognized the Hill faction of the Manitoba Liberals as the official party and continued to show his distaste for the Diehards. "I regret that some of our friends in Manitoba," he wrote, "do not seem to appreciate that by divisions in our

⁸Crerar Papers, section II, box 79, Crerar to A.B. Hudson, March 14, 1923.

ranks we may never expect to make any progress. We have come to a day when reconciliation and not recrimination must be the rule."⁹ Premier Norris, in the meantime, was advising King that the provincial convention held in April was "a wonderful success". He naively indicated that "it was the best get-together meeting that the Liberals have had in many years and...successfully ironed out any difficulties that may have developed between the two wings of the Liberal party."¹⁰ The defeat of the Norris government a short time later came as no surprise to anyone familiar with Manitoba Liberalism and glaringly demonstrated the chaotic state of the party. Manitoba Liberals, in their attempts to walk the line between the federal party and the Farmers, had ended up alienating both.

In Alberta co-operation between the Liberals and Progressives remained impossible. The Liberals refused to believe the Progressives could be absorbed and instead awaited their anticipated disintegration. They blamed the Progressives for the miserable showing of their province in the general election: "The farmers were simply fanatical on class representation and have succeeded in isolating the West." Already Liberals were claiming to have noticed "a

⁹King Papers, reel 2246, volume 78, pp.64171, King to Landry February 6, 1922.

¹⁰Ibid., reel 2248, volume 82, p.66921, Norris to King, April 28, 1922.

great accession to the party ranks since Election Day."¹¹ They attempted to assure the new prime minister that the region could be won back and feared he would give up on Alberta. "'Father Forgive them, they know not what they did.'," H.H. Christie wrote. "The western farmer is driven to almost any insane act...he is unaccountable for his actions at present."¹²

Prairie Liberals continued to look for evidence that the West should be voting Liberal. The western immigration booms fostered under Laurier had given the party a strong base in the resulting Prairie communities. The disfranchisement of enemy aliens by Meighen and the Union government had only increased this sentiment. "There is no doubt at all that the large foreign elements in Western Canada are and ought to be Liberal;" E.J. McMurray informed King, "more Liberal in the true sense of the term than any other section of the country....These elements are the first to be won to us and gradually we can win the West over."¹³ They were "by instinct" Liberal and "deeply attached" to Laurier whom they looked upon "as the Moses who brought them out of the wilderness to the

¹¹Ibid., reel 1945, volume 58, pp.51038A-A17, O.E. Culbert to King, December 12, 1921. "I think the so-called Progressives are going back rather than forward in public favor. There are notes of dissatisfaction cropping up here and there and the enthusiasm seems, to a great extent, to have worn off."; reel 2242, volume 70, pp.59799-800, J.R. Boyle to King, June 9, 1922.

¹²Ibid., reel 1945, volume 58, pp.50666-7, H.H. Christie to King, December 9, 1921.

¹³Ibid., reel 2247, volume 80, pp.65673-4, McMurray to King, June 29, 1922.

land of promise."¹⁴

The western parties also continued to point to the lack of a Liberal press, and more emphatically, to the lack of a Liberal organization. In Saskatchewan, where the Progressives had been kept at bay and neutralized as an effective alternative, Liberals blamed the poor electoral showing on internal party divisions and inefficient organization. "The destructive force has come from within ourselves;" J.G. Turgeon wrote King, "...it is the result of decay, which in return is the result of lack of activity." Liberal organization had never been strong in the West but the creation of the Union government had led it to be "absolutely cut off."¹⁵ The prime minister listened to the western calls for a Liberal press, and while he agreed with its necessity, he too believed "organization is our real weakness." Finances to establish western papers could not be contemplated when there were not enough funds to support the national headquarters of the party.¹⁶ King blamed the western "lack of organization" on the region's "looking to Ottawa" and Ottawa in return hoping for "something in the nature of self-

¹⁴Ibid., reel 2268, volume 116, pp.88760-2, McMurray to King, May 28, 1924.

¹⁵Ibid., reel 2250, volume 86, pp.69600-02, J.G. Turgeon to King, March 4, 1922.

¹⁶Ibid., reel 2242, volume 70, pp.59825-7, King to Boyle, December 18, 1922.

organization".¹⁷ King would become infamous for his constant desire to shift the burden of organization on others and then blame them for its failings.

For King's government to survive, the Liberal overtures to the Progressives had to be resumed immediately. Long before the House met the prime minister and his party worked to gain indirect assurances of support from the Progressive members. Less than a fortnight after being named minister of finance, Fielding wrote to Crerar requesting the western position on the government's programme. Crerar replied with a list of western concerns: reductions in the tariff and freight rates, reforms in the banking system, transfer of natural resources to the Prairie Provinces, reciprocity with the United States, economy, consolidation of the government-owned railways, and others. Fielding's "desire for co-operation" would prove to be a token effort.¹⁸ The two men differed to such an extent on the tariff issue that the possibility of the gesture having any substantial impact on ensuing policy was highly unlikely.

When Parliament opened on March 8, 1922 the Progressives sat on the Speaker's left, providing a fair indication of

¹⁷Ibid., reel 2251, volume 89, pp.70781-4, King to G. Bell, July 16, 1923.

¹⁸Dawson praises Fielding for this initiative and argues "it also showed that this desire had not been advocated merely as an aid in the elections but had become a continuing element in Liberal policy." Fielding's actions in the House in regard to the tariff would seem to indicate that the gesture lacked any real commitment. Dawson, p.383-4.

their political leaning. Mackenzie King was fairly confident he had their "good will"¹⁹ but continued support would depend upon the government's record, and in particular its adherence to the platform of 1919. One thing the prime minister could not expect from the Progressives was patience. Their distrust of party politics led them to have no time for King's need to maintain a balance in cabinet. They had written evidence of Liberal promises in the platform. King had been selected leader advocating these promises and had expounded them throughout the West during his speaking tour and campaign. The Progressives expected the Liberals to falter and King to justify the failure through having to satisfy the protectionist wing of the party. Many wished to see such a crisis divide the Liberal party and purge it of these eastern influences. Such a division would allow the Progressives to join the more liberal members and form a truly progressive party. "Governments often become more conservative in office, but I never knew one which became more radical," Dafoe mused, "and the Liberal Government at Ottawa has got to move a long distance to the left before it can make any worthwhile appeal for support in Western Canada."²⁰

It was not long before King's difficulty in having to appease both the Montreal Liberals and western Progressives

¹⁹As quoted in Dawson, p.387.

²⁰Dafoe Papers, box 1, file 4, Dafoe to Buchanan, December 6, 1923.

surfaced. In April, 1922 Andrew McMaster introduced a motion to prevent cabinet ministers from holding directorships in business corporations. The policy would find sympathy with the Progressives who wished to see politics purged of its corporate interests, as well as many Liberals who had initiated the same motion a year earlier while in opposition. The chief offender this time, however, was Sir Lomer Gouin who held directorships in fourteen major corporations.²¹ The King government voted against the motion and found itself in the uncomfortable position of being aligned with the Tories against the Progressives.

The incident confirmed western suspicions that the Liberals were just as subservient to business interests as the Conservatives. It also demonstrated that when forced to choose, King would cling to his Quebec supporters and sacrifice his professed principles. For the prime minister it was a no-win situation:

I seem to have run counter to or offended the Montreal group at practically every turn, first one then another, the very men I must do my utmost to placate. I have little hope of being able to hold them, they do not belong to the Liberal Party, but I do not want to give them cause for complaint or offense.²²

His sympathies pushed him in one direction, and his concern for survival in another. If he could weather the storm at

²¹Peter Regenstreif, "The Liberal Party of Canada: A Political Analysis", (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1963), pp.346-7.

²²King Diaries, February 5, 1922.

present, he believed he could consolidate his position in the future. Such a consolidation would have to include controlling Gouin's influence. Dafoe doubted that King had the courage to "bell the cat".²³

Many of the major issues in the new government's programme directly affected the Prairie West but also indicated the Liberals' inability to go far enough to satisfy the region. The government was able to introduce enabling legislation which allowed the Prairie provinces to establish their own wheat board but Manitoba rejected the proposal. Initiatives taken by King when he was minister of labour had indicated he was not averse to seeing the state play a role in the economy.²⁴ The idea of a wheat board also played into his sympathy for the individual farmer as opposed to the speculators, such as the Winnipeg Grain Exchange. "There is no doubt that Western farmers at the mercy of speculators & it is a national duty to save them from such a crisis," he recorded.²⁵ Despite this sympathy, however, King knew nothing about the wheat business and was not prepared to pursue an aggressive policy that would ensure the re-establishment of the Board. As Charlie Wilson aptly notes, "For the next ten years, however, the government's role in the grain industry

²³Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to Sifton, July 11, 1922.

²⁴See Craven.

²⁵King Diaries, March 15, 1922.

was played in low key."²⁶

Legislation was also introduced to urge the United Kingdom to lift the cattle embargo and to propose a cautious immigration policy, both of which found support with the Progressives. The King administration could not, however, adopt a satisfactory course on the crucial issues of the natural resources, railways, and tariffs.

In April and November delegations from the Prairie provinces met with the prime minister to discuss the natural resources situation. The prime minister admitted he saw "a certain moral claim" on behalf of the provinces, "in that lands were given to C.P.R. & tax exempt'n etc. just before provinces came into being, all Canada benefiting thereby at expense of Sask. & Alb." There was no doubt the provinces should control their natural resources: the problem was in ironing out a compensation package. As far as the federal government was concerned such a deal would have to consider that Alberta and Saskatchewan had also benefited by previous Dominion expenditures.²⁷ King met with the provincial delegations in April but by November he realized each would have to be handled separately. Over the course of his career King would grudgingly learn what few easterners would ever understand: the Prairie West could be considered one region, but it consisted of three distinct provinces, each with its

²⁶C.F. Wilson, A Century of Canadian Grain, p.183.

²⁷King Diaries, April 20, 1922.

own peculiar characteristics.

Premier Norris of Manitoba reached an agreement with the federal government that provided for negotiation of an adjustment by mutual consent, and failing such adjustment it provided for arbitration. But here agreement ended. There could be no "ignoring the transactions of the past" as King had suggested; the accountability of the Dominion would not be discharged merely by balancing receipts and expenditures from Crown lands. Much of Manitoba's lands had already been used by Ottawa and Norris argued "the Dominion moreover obtained indirectly abundant fiscal returns from its immigration and free homestead policy."²⁸ The province submitted a basis of adjustment that included the return of the unalienated resources and the continuance of the subsidy in compensation for lands already alienated for Dominion purposes. The proposal was rejected by King and the Dominion then advanced several methods of adjustment. These included the return of the unalienated resources; discontinuance of the subsidy; and a cash payment possibly totalling two or three years of subsidy or alternatively the return of the unalienated resources with an accounting of receipts and expenditures in respect of Dominion Lands, as well as a consideration of certain alienations of land made for purposes outside the province. None of these proposals was acceptable to Manitoba.

²⁸King Papers, reel 2248, volume 82, pp.66914-8, Norris to King, March 10, 1922.

There was not even enough common ground to go to arbitration, so the possibility of referring the question to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council was raised.²⁹

Saskatchewan Premier Charles Dunning praised the government for its precedent in even meeting with the Prairie delegations, and more importantly, in admitting the subject had to be settled without reference to the eastern provinces. "This conclusion," he noted, "marks a distinct advance inasmuch as when the subject has been approached before the Prairie Provinces have been placed in the position of, in reality negotiating with the other Provinces of Canada." In the past, transfer negotiations had been complicated by claims that any new conditions offered the West would entitle the East to compensation. This claim arose because the Prairie provinces wanted their resources as well as the subsidy. King hoped this could be avoided, thereby eliminating eastern opposition and a major stumbling block. As an aside he indicated that whatever sums the Dominion government had received from the western lands were fully balanced by the costs expended in their management.³⁰ Dunning disagreed by countering that some compensation had to be made for resources already alienated. Prince Edward Island had entered Confederation with its public domain already alienated and as

²⁹Ibid., reel 2242, volume 70, pp.59842-4, J. Bracken to King, November 1922.

³⁰Ibid., reel 2245, volume 76, pp.62707-12, King to Herbert Greenfield, February 20, 1922.

a result received a subsidy as well as its unalienated resources. The Prairie provinces were receiving a subsidy that increased with population to a set maximum. Dunning argued these terms offered a conservative subsidy at best for the lost land.³¹ He did admit the Dominion was paying more for the administration of Saskatchewan's resources than it was receiving in revenue. "That is the serious part of the whole situation," King wrote. "The Dominion is being taxed in perpetuity, a subsidy which will continue to increase, & has reached the point where it is costing more to administer than to give up control."³² The Saskatchewan delegation, therefore, was not as anxious for the transfer as Alberta and Manitoba.

Premier Greenfield of Alberta agreed with the general positions taken by Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The value of the alienated resources, including that prior to 1905, could not be overlooked. Instead an accounting from the beginning by an independent tribunal would be necessary.³³ King responded by offering the equivalent of three years subsidy but Brownlee suggested ten years.³⁴

The prime minister was relatively sympathetic to the

³¹Ibid., reel 2244, volume 73, pp.61639-46, Dunning to King, April 10, 1922.

³²King Diaries, November 17, 1922.

³³King Papers, reel 2245, volume 76, pp.62717-8, Greenfield to King, April 15, 1922.

³⁴King Diaries, November 16, 1922.

Prairie positions but opposition came from Gouin and Fielding who resisted providing the West with any form of compensation whatsoever. "We took up National Resources matter," King recorded, "but could get nowhere with Fielding who is like a dog in the manger, when it comes to making any allowance on an equitable basis. You would think Alberta was out to rob N.[ova] S.[cotia]." ³⁵ The prime minister was becoming "exasperated" that members of his government had discussed matters of compensation with the provincial delegations in April and were now going back on their positions in November. Gouin, King wrote, was "obdurate" and "all for postponing, doing nothing etc....I pointed out their attitude was putting me in a false light and I was unwilling to be 'humiliated' by any going back on what had already been agreed." When it became clear the cabinet was making light of King's leadership and refusing to follow his guidance, the first breach appeared:

I opened fire pretty strongly, taking exception to colleagues being absent, and entering on discussions with which they were not familiar, embarrassing a situation & going back on what was already agreed upon. I said I wd not stand for procedure of that kind, would follow out pledges given the electorate in good faith or leave it to others to carry on the Government, if individuals could not agree with policy decided upon they could withdraw from Government. It was the farthest I have gone at any time. ³⁶

The old problem of railways also became an obstacle in

³⁵Ibid., April 28, 1922.

³⁶Ibid., November 16, 1922.

King's path to gaining western support. During the war a number of rail lines had been threatened by bankruptcy and as a result the government was forced to take over thousands of miles of railway. Legislation had been passed in 1919 authorizing the operation of these roads as one system but when the Meighen government left office, no action had yet been taken. The Liberals had endorsed nationalization of the Grand Trunk in their platform but hesitated taking action. The public generally favoured nationalization but support was strongest on the Prairies. The CPR feared the competition of a government-backed rival and had placed its confidence and powerful support in the Quebec block of the Liberal party. King, however, was determined to use the railway issue to distance himself from the domination of the CPR and the Gouin group, to demonstrate his own convictions and sympathy towards the Progressives, and to indicate his adherence to his platform pledges. He hoped that by forming one large system under one management the national railway could be competitive. But the cabinet gave only acquiescent approval to proceed with nationalization and support in the House was lukewarm at best. In the end Parliament passed the desired legislation and a government-owned, transcontinental rail system was formed.

The other rail issue of concern to the West was the fabled Hudson Bay line. Prairie farmers dreamed of a direct link to the Bay as a shorter and cheaper route in moving their

goods to port. Proponents of the scheme, including W.R. Motherwell, argued that it would mean a saving in transportation costs, elimination of monopoly evils, avoidance of losses accrued in shipping grain over foreign rail from Buffalo to New York, encouragement of rural immigration, development of resources, and a hastening in the return of prosperity to the West. The desire for the rail link went back to the earliest days of settlement. When the Dominion Lands Act was originally drawn up it contained a provision for a grant to ensure the construction of such a line. Laurier had pledged his support to the project in 1908 and construction was started, only to be suspended in 1911 when the Tories came to power. An investigation into the feasibility of the route was commenced and construction was started again. The demands of war in 1917 once again halted the process and the project had remained on hold ever since. The King government was voting yearly amounts to be spent on maintaining and repairing the existing track but no new construction was being undertaken.

The tariff policy of the new government flew directly in the face of the western opinion. The Prairies had little cause for optimism with Fielding's appointment to finance and their judgement proved correct as he continued to guide policy along the path he had set in the Laurier government from 1896 to 1911. Despite King's belief that "protection itself [was]

mistaken policy in nat'l interest,"³⁷ Fielding clung to conventional fiscal principles and espoused balanced budgets through increased revenue from tariffs and new taxes. He did sound out possibilities for reciprocity with the United States and opened trade negotiations with a number of countries but changes to the tariff were to be insubstantial.

The free trade Liberals were forced onto the defensive when Fielding brought down his budget of 1922. "If the Budget is to be regarded as the final attitude on the trade question of the Liberal party," McMaster searched for justification, "it is absolutely unsatisfactory. If it is to be regarded merely as the first movement towards lower tariffs, to be followed without undue delay by other movements in the same direction, it can be accepted and defended." Fielding's budget reflected the dominant position held by the high-tariff Liberals. "We must frankly recognize the fact," he wrote King, "that in matters relating to the tariff there is much difference of opinion, I might even say conflict of opinion, within the ranks of our own friends." The influence of the protectionist wing was clearly revealed to the suspicious Progressives with Gouin's statement in the House that he advocated "a reasonable measure of protection" and Fielding's indication that he had never approved of the tariff section of the 1919 platform in the first place.³⁸ The divisions within

³⁷Ibid., April 26, 1922.

³⁸As quoted in Dawson, p.392.

Liberal ranks and the deviations from the platform forced King to argue that the convention of 1919 did not bind the party to an immediate set of pledges but served as a chart which set the direction. Once more, the Progressives were witness to the Liberal party wavering on clearly outlined promises and as usual it seemed these broken promises concerned western issues.

Freight rates also remained a central issue for the West in 1922, especially in the face of declining wartime prices and the return of Australia and Argentina to the market. The urgency of the issue as it faced the King government arose from the need for a declared policy on the Crow's Nest Pass Agreement. The special rates on grain and flour passing from western Canada through Fort William eastward, and on a number of miscellaneous commodities passing from the eastern provinces through Fort William westward, had been suspended in 1919 for three years by order-in-council. They would become automatically operative again on July 7, 1922 unless Parliament intervened. The issue would produce inevitable controversy. It was readily apparent that a more equitable rate structure was required, but to do this and not jeopardize the financial position of the railways was next to impossible. Any reductions on rates would also reopen rate grievances in the Maritimes and British Columbia.

King was quite ignorant of railway issues, and freight rates in particular, and carried into the issue only his

sympathy for the westerner and his distrust of the CPR. After discussing the issue with Sir Clifford Sifton on April 8, he became convinced the Crow's Nest rates should be restored. The situation seemed to be one more example of eastern financial interests manipulating the Prairie producer and King realized a settlement of the issue would improve his standing in the West and disarm the Progressives: "I believe in letting the Railway lose some of their profits & help along the consumers. I favour the Crow's Nest agreement coming into effect and will work to that end."³⁹ This sentiment was voiced in Parliament on May 4:

I have been through the Canadian West on two or three occasions of late, and I may say frankly that I have been impressed with the absolute necessity for a reduction in freight rates if that part of our Dominion is to develop as it should.⁴⁰

Western Liberals pleaded with King to solve the issue and provide them with some political ground to stand on:

The Crow's Nest Agreement was the first fruits of a Liberal Government elected in 1896. It brought immediate relief to prairie agriculture....It would have seemed to be good politics for a new Liberal Government to have taken this, its own child, up again, revived and defended it, and made sure that no foster parent should prove more attentive than they.⁴¹

The divided state of the party induced the prime minister to avoid the controversial issue as long as possible. The

³⁹King Diaries, April 8, 1922.

⁴⁰Debates, King, May 4, 1922, p.1435.

⁴¹King Papers, reel 2256, volume 98, pp.76587-91, Duncan Marshall to King, February 21, 1923.

Speech from the Throne barely mentioned the rate question. Like so many others, the issue divided the Liberals into two camps with the Quebec bloc generally favouring the CPR position and the others supporting reimplementing of the agreement. The cabinet decided to ask the House to refer the question to a Special Committee which could hear testimony from the railroad executives and other interested parties. King was confident enough to expect the committee to recognize the unfairness of the situation and recommend a restoration of the rates even though he himself had allowed several Liberals to be placed on the committee who favoured the CPR position.⁴² Dafoe reflected western scepticism. "I expect the Crow's Nest Pass business to put a chasm between the Liberals and the Progressives which will never be bridged," he wrote Sifton. "I thought King's speech in Parliament supporting the motion for a committee rather significant as indicating his preference for what he calls a broad national view, but which is in reality nothing but acceptance of the C.P.R. contention."⁴³

The committee rejected the Progressive proposal for a revival of the rates and approved a report favourable to the railways. King's preference for the western position lost out to eastern appeasement and the Liberal caucus became the

⁴²King Diaries, April 8, 1922.

⁴³Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to Sifton, May 6, 1922.

battleground between the two factions. The committee was called together on the pretext of receiving new evidence and the result was a reconsideration of the former decision and an amended report. The agreement was to be suspended for another year with the exception of the section on grain and flour rates, and the suspension could be extended by the Governor-in-General for one more year if it was found desirable. The Railway Commission in due course ordered a reduction in rates on a number of basic commodities. Despite this victory Mackenzie King soon learned that what had been gained for the West had quickly been given to the credit of the western Progressives. The "impression" was that the partial acceptance of the Crow's Nest rates had been done "reluctantly", and only on the struggle put forward by the Progressives. As a result "Mr. Crerar" was able "to successfully claim all the glory."⁴⁴ The simple fact was that until King could demonstrate a stronger influence in cabinet, he had little chance of winning the Prairies.

One of the western grievances had been temporarily quieted but Liberal-Progressive co-operation had proven weak when strained. Above all, the session did not bode well for King's need to restore Prairie faith in the Liberals. The Progressives came away from Parliament with an even greater suspicion of the power that Montreal and its interests wielded

⁴⁴King Papers, reel 2256, volume 98, pp.76587-91, Duncan Marshall to King, February 21, 1923.

in Liberal councils, and the sentiment was not confined to the third party. As one western Liberal wrote:

We are such good Liberals that we are unwilling to continue compromising with those who call themselves Liberals but are quite as Tory in their real views as Arthur Meighen and we would welcome a split which would take a considerable section of the Montreal and Toronto Liberals over where they belong.⁴⁵

Mackenzie King could offer the alienated westerner little hope. "Any Government in office can never satisfy its friends," he wrote T.C. Norris, "and because of its necessary assertion of authority whether farmer or Liberal is bound to come to be viewed by many of the more radical elements in the community as conservative, if not reactionary in character."⁴⁶

The possibility of having Progressives enter the government was never abandoned by King but conditions in the first several years forced him to bide his time. Discussions took place with Crerar in the summer of 1922 but the same obstacles to union remained. The prime minister could not put any more strain on his support from the Montreal bloc and Crerar could not consider entering a cabinet with such a group in the dominant position.

In the meantime an issue in foreign affairs served to bring the Liberals and Progressives closer together. In September, 1922, the situation around the Turkish Straits had

⁴⁵Ibid., reel 2247, volume 80, pp.65759-60, R.F. McWilliams to King, September 1, 1922.

⁴⁶Ibid., reel 2248, volume 82, pp.66926-9, King to Norris, July 25, 1922.

become critical. The Treaty of Sevres had been signed in 1920 by the Allied Powers and Turkey but had not been accepted by either side. By 1922 the Turks had defeated the Greeks and the French had withdrawn. The British remained the sole defenders of Constantinople, Chanak, and the neutralized zone about the Straits. The advance of the victorious Turk army seemed imminent. British Prime Minister Lloyd George desired an effective display of Imperial Unity and expected support from the Dominions. A message was sent informing them of the situation and requesting support but before the Canadian government received any communication, the British government informed the press of the invitation. Much to Prime Minister King's annoyance, he only learned of the invitation when a journalist asked what response Canada would offer.

The prime minister viewed the presumptuous attitude of the British government as one more example of "the imperial game", designed "to test out centralization vs. autonomy as regards European wars. Singularly enough," King wrote, "remote as the connection may appear, the Near East situation seems to me to illustrate in the clearest possible manner the need for the closest kind of union between the Progressives and ourselves."⁴⁷ He was "confident" the Progressives would be "opposed almost to a man....It is the time now to bring

⁴⁷Ibid., reel 2246, volume 79, pp.65205-6, King to McCullach, October 17, 1922.

them into the Government."⁴⁸ At a meeting of the cabinet all except Gouin agreed to King's suggestion to invite Crerar to Ottawa for consultation.⁴⁹

The two leaders met on September 22-23 and Crerar demonstrated his complete agreement with the prime minister's stand. The question of a European war was paramount in importance and there could be no difference of opinion between the Liberal East and the Progressive West. Crerar indicated that the crisis necessitated co-operation but also that he and Hudson could not enter a government with Gouin. King did not see any hope of "crowding" Gouin out because he needed his "good will", and "his word with big interests would be helpful."⁵⁰

The Chanak Crisis was alleviated by an armistice signed with Turkey on September 29 and the urgency for a Liberal-Progressive union passed. King viewed the Crisis as a rare issue upon which Quebec and the West could agree and one which could bring unity to all the liberal elements in the nation:

It has demonstrated...that in matters of real fundamental concern our interest is a common one, and that unity of action is essential to secure our common end in the face of our common foe, the jingo-tory-militarist. I believe we have found the basis on which the Progressives of Western Canada may be brought into real accord with the Liberals

⁴⁸King Diaries, September 17, 1922.

⁴⁹Ibid., September 18, 1922.

⁵⁰Ibid., September 22, 1922.

of the Province of Quebec and other parts of the Dominion.⁵¹

The Progressive support served to forestall criticism that the government's policy was solely a reflection of the isolationism and anti-imperialism of Quebec. Conservative criticism of the Liberal policy along with Meighen's 'ready, aye ready' speech indicated the alternative to the Liberals. The crisis gave a crucial boost to King's leadership. But the issue also demonstrated that even in the realm of international relations, the regional division would thwart co-operation. King could harp on about the issue bringing the Progressives closer to the Liberal party as a whole, but nothing would bring Crerar and Gouin together. King had been forced to side again with Gouin.

Several weeks after the Chanak Crisis Crerar gave up the leadership of the Progressive party primarily to devote more time to his business interests. Robert Forke, another crypto-liberal from Manitoba, was chosen as successor. King saw Crerar's resignation as a sign of the disintegration of the Progressive party and welcomed Forke's leadership: "This is beginning of end of Progressive work- as a separate party."⁵² Forke was a weaker personality than Crerar and more willing to co-operate with the Liberals: "Was delighted to hear tonight that Robert Forke has been chosen leader of Progressives.

⁵¹King Papers, King to J.R. Boyle, October 3, 1922.

⁵²King Diaries, November 11, 1922.

This means complete co-operation."⁵³ In the last two months of the year, two Ontario Progressives joined the Liberals and gave King a majority in the House but the defeat of the Liberal government in Manitoba by the United Farmers demonstrated the continuing strength of the Progressive movement.

Negotiations over the resource transfer continued between Ottawa and Alberta throughout 1923 while discussions with the other two Prairie provinces remained stalled. A stalemate had been reached with Manitoba while Saskatchewan was not as interested in the issue. Both Alberta and Manitoba hoped the transfer would prove profitable through the control of such unalienated resources as minerals, timber, and water power sites. The proposed replacement of the subsidy with the resources did not provide Saskatchewan with the same financial incentive.

To avoid a lengthy arbitration and accounting Premier Greenfield of Alberta requested the transfer of the remaining resources, the waiving of the present subsidy with compensation for alienated resources, as well as compensation for land alienated just prior to 1905 to subsidize the railways outside of the province. King refused to consider conditions before the province was formed and reiterated his offer of the unalienated resources plus a continuation of the subsidy for three years. Greenfield warned King that Alberta

⁵³Ibid., November 12, 1922.

was asking for considerably less than what it would receive if a complicated accounting took place. The province would only consider the Dominion offer if a subsidy continuance of ten years was offered.⁵⁴

The Progressive pressure on King's government continued into 1923. The prime minister personally favoured such Progressive reforms as the use of the alternative vote in single-member districts and the proposal for proportional representation as a means to avoid three-cornered fights but Quebec opposition proved formidable. The divisive issue once again proved to be the budget.

In cabinet discussions in early March King proposed a flat increase of 10 to 15 per cent in the British preference on goods entering Canada through Canadian ports and his views seemed to have acceptance. In the weeks that followed, however, Gouin, Beland, Low, Robb, and J.H. King put steady pressure against significant tariff reductions of any kind. The prime minister's low-tariff ministers were not proving forthright enough to stand by their principles and fight for the issue. Motherwell and Stewart in particular were proving inadequate to defend Prairie interests. King was in danger of once again being forced to bow to eastern domination. "I urged for a discount of at least 20%" off existing preferential duties, he wrote on April 4.

⁵⁴King Papers, reel 2253, volume 93, pp.73599-600, Greenfield to King, January 2, 1923; pp.73658-61, Greenfield to King, December 29, 1923.

Mr. Stewart was not equal to backing up the suggestion with vigour, Lapointe said practically nothing & Graham was silent....It was difficult therefore to expect much....I spoke out strongly against increase of duties & need to introduce legis'n that wd. help people on the land. It always comes back to where we receive our support.⁵⁵

When King picked up the issue again two days later he could secure only a few supporters and found himself out of sympathy with most of his cabinet. But he was not prepared to precipitate a crisis. The tariff came before the Liberal caucus on April 12 and it was clear the party was going to "stand pat."⁵⁶ The protectionist wing had successfully blocked King's advances and in the third week of April took the offensive by pressing for specified increases in the tariff. This time King stood his ground:

I spoke out strongly against considering any increases, unless Br. preference conceded. Sir Lomer fought against the latter, also Low, but I carried my point, tho' not for a large amount. Sir Lomer talked of resigning etc. Murdock was very outspoken about the big interests. I let the Cabinet see I was determined to head in the right direction.⁵⁷

Five days later Fielding made an attempt to win support for a tax on food. King was strongly opposed and carried with him all his other colleagues except Gouin. He still found it necessary to justify the "stand pat" position of his government on the tariff:

⁵⁵King Diaries, April 4, 1923.

⁵⁶Ibid., April 12, 1923.

⁵⁷Ibid., April 21, 1923.

No one appreciates more keenly than I do the ills and evils of protection....I confess, however, that the more thought and study I give to these problems the less I find in the way of helpful constructive suggestion, despite all the criticism and denunciation of conditions as they exist. The trouble with our whole economic order is that the minute one attempts to alter established institutions in some fundamental particular one discovers consequences wholly unforeseen, and often more serious in their possible outcome than the evil it is being sought to remedy.⁵⁸

When the budget was announced, Fielding left the tariff virtually untouched and added insult to injury by intimating that the existing tariff was as fair and reasonable as circumstances would permit. The Progressives were united in opposition and were joined by McMaster and Hudson in voting for Forke's amendment which demanded implementation of the Liberal and Progressive platforms.

The damage to Liberal fortunes in the West could hardly have been greater. "It would be folly for me to attempt to minimise the effect of Mr. Fielding's statement regarding stability contained in the Budget Speech," Dunning wrote King.

Lowering of the tariff has been the principal basis upon which Liberal organization has been built in Western Canada. The charge of the Progressives is that we have never been sincere in regard to the matter and now they point to the 1919 platform and to Mr. Fielding's statements regarding it on several occasions as proof of that insincerity...in order to remain a factor in Canada, and particularly in Western Canada with its growing electoral power, the Liberal party must demonstrate that it is sincerely a low-tariff party and give

⁵⁸As quoted in Dawson, p.455.

evidence of that by performance when in power.⁵⁹

King could plead for tolerance and ask what alternative he had in the face of the dominant position held by the protectionist element in the councils of the party, but westerners scoffed at such justifications. Even those Liberals who had supported King's leadership were beginning to lose faith and western opinion was aptly summed up in a letter from one of the disgruntled:

I am a Liberal- one who supported you in the Convention at Ottawa....We went to Ottawa in 1919 to reconstruct the Liberal party....We had read your books- we were proud of your heredity and thought we would see a renaissance of the Liberal party under a new man of Liberal outlook and one who would stand for the principles of true Liberalism against its enemies within the party....You chose for your Finance Minister the same man in the same position who helped betray the party under Laurier. You chose as Minister Mr. Gouin who was not in sympathy with the platform laid down by the Convention which elected you to your responsible office....You at best gave us a two and a half per cent performance of a one hundred per cent promise.⁶⁰

If King believed in the Liberal platform; if he had any sympathy for the West or genuine liberal ideals; if he was the undisputed leader of the party; the policies of his government scarcely reflected it.

Any possibility of the Progressives sympathizing with King's predicament was further banished with the decennial

⁵⁹King Papers, reel 2252, volume 92, pp.72531-6, Dunning to King, July 27, 1923.

⁶⁰Ibid., volume 91, pp.72012-4, S.K. Colquhuon to King, April 26, 1923.

revision of the Bank Act. They seized the opportunity to urge federal assistance in scaling down debts and obtaining easier credit, and when the revision was referred to a Standing Committee, they brought forward an array of proposals for reform. A combination of Liberals and Conservatives quickly countered the radical ideas and received support from the moderate wing of the Progressive party. Despite the division in the Progressive ranks, once again the Liberal government emerged with the image of being just as conservative as the Tories.

If there was any bright spot on the Prairies for King, it was in Saskatchewan. The Liberal party had weathered the Progressive assault and emerged united. Premier Dunning was the first to admit, however, that the western situation was pessimistic. Defeat in the Moose Jaw by-election along with Fielding's budget statement had done the federal government "great harm", and the King administration was at "a lower ebb" in Saskatchewan than ever before. But the fact that the provincial Liberals were restoring their ties with the federal party at such a time was reason for hope. The premier had advised King to defer the Moose Jaw by-election as long as possible: "We were very much surprised here when the bye-election[sic] was called so quickly without reference to us in any way." Nevertheless, the provincial Liberals went into the constituency to help the federal candidate and now shared "the stigma of defeat."

Dunning was restoring the link between the provincial and federal administrations and in return expected to be kept fully informed as to King's western plans. He wanted to "guide" the federal party "in relation to matters affecting the West." The only hope for Liberal success lay in securing more support in the region so the premier strongly advised King to direct his actions accordingly. If the goal was to absorb or even destroy the Progressives, Liberal policies had at least to make a campaign on the Prairies possible.

The prime minister was more than pleased to accept Dunning's criticism and have him serve as a western advisor. Experience had proven both Motherwell and Stewart incompetent to serve such a function and Liberal prospects in the West were suffering as a result. Dunning was popular among Liberals and Progressives alike and he was well thought of in the other two Prairie provinces. The premier was not ready, however, to openly embrace the King administration. A close relationship between Ottawa and Regina, Dunning argued, would "at this time mean our defeat Provincially."⁶¹ Even Jimmy Gardiner agreed that it was becoming increasingly difficult to defend the policies of the King government. If King was emphasizing "the isolation of the West" as a result of the region's showing in the last election, "self preservation, if nothing else, should now dictate a policy favourable to the

⁶¹Ibid., volume 92, pp.72531-6, Dunning to King, July 27, 1923.

West. If the Government is going to remain in office, it must do so by winning the confidence of the West."⁶²

Mackenzie King attempted to atone for his miserable western record. He appointed a Royal Commission on the marketing of grain and obtained a Select Committee of the House to study agricultural conditions and look into the question of ocean freight rates. The Prairie farm organizations had become reconciled to the fact that the campaign to revive the wheat board had failed. Instead they were attempting to determine whether a pooling system would provide a suitable recourse: "For a span of six years while the pools remained viable, the Federal government enjoyed a respite from direct marketing responsibility."⁶³ King also promoted the consolidation of the national railways, agreed to complete the Hudson Bay Railway, and submitted a construction program of branch railway lines. These proposals produced few tangible results and in large part meant more stalling. In the meantime King was receiving complaints from the Maritimes and British Columbia that the government was already too concerned with Prairie issues. He was facing the threat of having his hold on the East weakened while having no gains in the West to show for it.

Early in 1923 King offered Forke the portfolio of immigration but he refused. The Progressives remained highly

⁶²Ibid., pp.73084-5, Gardiner to King, December 18, 1923.

⁶³Wilson, p.229.

dissatisfied with the cabinet composition and these doubts increased when King took in the protectionist E.M. Macdonald to satisfy the Maritimes. As Dafoe indicated, the Progressives believed the government was continuing to fall under the influence of the interests and becoming indistinguishable from the Tories.⁶⁴ Haydon warned King that he was alienating the West:

Circumstances are tending in the direction of putting you in a somewhat reactionary position. I know how much your own view is the other way....The run of Cabinet changes is tending to give in the Country a further idea of reaction. The addition of E.M. McD. brings in a capable man, but his bringing serves to divorce the West further than from where it is now.⁶⁵

He recommended appointing Hudson but in an unexplained move King filled the Manitoba vacancy by making E.J. McMurray Solicitor General.⁶⁶ McMurray had mediocre political ability and was one of the leaders of the Diehard Liberals in Winnipeg. The appointment would only further antagonize the Progressives and prevent unity among Manitoba Liberals, while still not strengthening Prairie representation in cabinet.

The 1923 Imperial Conference offered King a reprieve from domestic problems and another opportunity to use foreign affairs to improve his position. He moved to have the Liberal

⁶⁴Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to Sifton, March 12, 1923.

⁶⁵As quoted in Dawson, p.450.

⁶⁶King provides no explanation for this strange decision. It seems to have been a patronage move that more than anything else points to his ignorance of the region.

position more fully represented in the press and on the advice of Sifton, selected Dafoe to accompany the Canadian delegation. Although the editor's dislike of King was apparent, Dafoe had been impressed by his stand on the Chanak, Lausanne, and Halibut Treaty issues. Still, he remained sceptical: "I must say that I have very little confidence in King. I am afraid his conceit in his ability to take care of himself is equalled only by his ignorance and I should not be surprised if he should find himself trapped."⁶⁷ King did not accept the suggestion that he should take a Progressive with him to London, but he did make an arrangement with Forke that he would give advice to the prime minister if cabled.

The result of the conference would become one of the crowning glories of King's career. Not only did the autonomists thwart the advances of imperial centralization, but Mackenzie King played a leading role in the defence. Dafoe's view of the prime minister markedly improved:

As for King, my regard for him has perceptibly increased by what I saw of him in London. He is an abler man than I thought; he has more courage than I gave him credit for; and he could be a very much better speaker than he is if he would cut out the platitudes and "get down to brass tacks." He really made some excellent speeches in London. While I agree that he has many excellent qualities for public life I am by no means sold on the proposition that he has the equipment for leadership for times such as these. In fact, I am rather convinced to the contrary. At the same time, in the event of a fusion [between the western and eastern bloc of liberals]...it is quite on the

⁶⁷Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to Sifton, September 12, 1923.

cards that King might continue to lead this party. In the right setting and with the right men behind him, King would be a not unacceptable party leader.⁶⁸

The praise was by no means glowing but it was an improvement. If the prime minister could get Dafoe and the Free Press on-side, or at least make substantial moves in this direction, his position in the West would improve. He would be able to kill two birds with one stone by gaining the support or at least removing the opposition of an influential westerner and the region's most powerful newspaper. "As you know Mr. Dafoe has not been friendly either to your Government or to yourself, so that his praise is all the more valuable," R.F. McWilliams reminded King. "He is undoubtedly the greatest individual force in this Western country and has at his hand an unrivalled instrument for moulding public opinion in the West."⁶⁹ The importance of winning Dafoe's approbation was not lost on the prime minister:

Since Dafoe's visit to London, the "Winnipeg Free Press" has been much more friendly, and indeed Dafoe himself has lost no chance of referring in the highest terms to my own part at the Conference. The new attitude on the part of the "Free Press", and the friendliness of Sir Clifford Sifton which lies behind it, will, if it continues, doubtless go far to bring the Progressives and ourselves together in one strong Liberal Party.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Ibid., box 1, file 4, Dafoe to W.A. Buchanan, December 6, 1923.

⁶⁹King Papers, reel 2256, volume 97, p.76319, McWilliams to King, December 10, 1923.

⁷⁰Ibid., reel 2266, volume 113, pp.86689-94, King to Peter Larkin, January 25, 1924.

But King's fine showing in London did little to improve his immediate situation in domestic affairs. He had reluctantly opened the Halifax constituency in a by-election, only to have the seat lost to the Conservatives. He looked with even more determination to the West to strengthen his position:

I am inclined now to take the bold course and link up at once with the farmers....Besides the agricultural point of view needs developing in our country. It will probably mean a break in our own party, but the gradual getting back to party lines. I am convinced we need to unite the East and the West, taking in of Crerar is a means to that end....This good may come of it, it may force a union with the progressives sufficiently strong to give us a substantial majority on which we can count. For this I am grateful.

King had been persuaded to allow the seat to be contested while he was in London. The incident further convinced him of the need to strengthen his role in cabinet. "I was strongly opposed to its being opened, and refused to take the responsibility....Hereafter I shall be firmer and assert my own view more firmly."⁷¹ He chastised his colleagues at the next cabinet meeting for not following his advice but his criticisms were aimed mainly at the old guard. He outlined his plans to pursue his own policy of appealing to the moderate Progressives, bring them closer to the government's side, and make more serious attempts to bring Crerar in as a possible minister. King's "firmer" stance was greeted by the silent assent of his colleagues.

⁷¹King Diaries, December 5, 1923.

Fielding suffered a paralytic stroke on December 4 that would remove him from politics permanently. After the cabinet meeting Gouin came to King and indicated that his physician insisted he too give up public life. Regenstreif is probably correct, however, in arguing that Gouin resigned from cabinet due to disagreement with King over fiscal policy.⁷² The prime minister was becoming more adamant in pushing his own positions and the influence of Fielding and Gouin was bound to decrease as the need to win the West became more imperative.

In one instant the composition and posture of the cabinet, the government, and of King's leadership were altered. The opportunities for gaining Liberal support in the West markedly increased. "It is apparent that the Liberal party in Canada has come to the parting of the ways," G.W. Sahlmark commented to King.⁷³ The effects of these two retirements could not be overemphasized. The government would lose two of its ablest parliamentarians and the cabinet two of its sharpest minds, but King would be rid of the thorns in his side. The protectionist wing of the party would be severely weakened. King's leadership would be strengthened and the West's most formidable obstacles would be removed from government:

As you probably know since Mr. Fielding's budget

⁷²Regenstreif, "A Threat to Leadership: C.A. Dunning and Mackenzie King", Dalhousie Review, XLIV, Autumn, 1964, p.274.

⁷³King Papers, reel 2269, volume 120, pp.90994-000, G.W. Sahlmark to King, January 7, 1924.

speech last year the stock of the Liberal party has been at a low ebb in the prairie provinces....The physical breakdown of Hon. Mr. Fielding has given hope to the Liberals recently that something might be done to compromise with Western opinion and re-establish the Liberal party in the West.⁷⁴

Two cabinet positions would be opened and the Progressives could no longer demur on the basis of Gouin's presence. When the Liberals lost the by-election in Kent, New Brunswick in mid-December, the urgency of the situation for King increased:

I think the time has come now to cut the Gordian knot to sever this [Montreal] connection and bring the Liberals and the Farmers together. Fielding & Sir Lomer have both gone. It remains to readjust...consolidate the Liberals & Progressives to make a strong party now with two years of office to prepare for appeal & to get back to two party lines. I do not want to lose Quebec support, much less incur active opposition of powerful financial & mffg. interests, they are against us anyway at heart, & we might as well have the fight in the open. If I can be sure of a straight alignment that will bring strength, I shall endeavour to reconstruct at once.⁷⁵

By this time western Liberals were desperate. Mackenzie King had been unable to win Progressive support and now even the 1917 loyalists were feeling alienated:⁷⁶

⁷⁴Ibid., reel 2262, volume 106, pp.82425-31, J.R. Boyle to King, January 4, 1924.

⁷⁵King Diaries, January 3, 1924.

⁷⁶"Unfortunately there is a feeling on the Prairies that no effort is being made to retain the support of those Liberals who stayed by the Party when the Farmer wave was at its height. Those are very largely the same people who stayed in 1917; that is, they stayed with us on two occasions when remaining firm meant more or less local disgrace." King Papers, reel 2260, volume 105, pp.81054-6, J.G. Turgeon to King, December 11, 1923.

I fear we have been busier over post-mortems than anything else...it will require not a little attention, cultivation and stimulation, hitherto lacking on the part of Dominion leaders, to reanimate our valley of dry bones. Liberalism as an organized fighting force is inert, if not dead....To revive Liberalism in the West our own people must be convinced, as I am sure they can be if the task is taken seriously, that therein their hopes rest, and that it is not as many of them been led to think, a will-o'-the-wisp.⁷⁷

The Progressives had received credit for any minor concessions gained for the West. The result, J.G. Turgeon indicated, would be political disaster. Policies designed to please the Prairies had not been forthcoming and now the party faithful pinned their hopes on the reconstruction of the cabinet. It had become obvious that King did not have the confidence of the West and needed an effective Prairie lieutenant. The time to be frank was at hand and Turgeon did not hold back:

I now suggest that you consider the advisability of making one of your Western Ministers entirely responsible for the political fortunes West of the Great Lakes....I am very afraid that in the Prairies the hold of the Liberal party upon the minds of the people has been so weakened as to be in serious danger of breaking altogether. This may sound far fetched, but I know that you will realise it is true.⁷⁸

A.M. McLeod of Manitoba echoed the same dismal sentiments:

There has grown up, as I think you well know, a feeling here that the administration is dominated or at least influenced by Eastern men who are not

⁷⁷Ibid., reel 2266, volume 113, pp.86271-4, J.F. Kilgour to King, February 26, 1924.

⁷⁸Ibid., reel 2260, volume 105, pp.81054-6, J.G. Turgeon to King, December 11, 1923.

in sympathy with the aspirations of the west, and it is a common thing to hear liberals express the opinion that the position of liberalism in the west is hopeless and that it is not worth fighting for. Now I am quite sure that the interests of the west and of liberalism are interwoven and that there is nothing plainer in politics than that the future of liberalism is dependent upon the west and that the future of the west is bound up with liberalism....In a word, we are losing a golden opportunity to make the west liberal, an opportunity which if it passes may not recur again in a generation.⁷⁹

It remained uncertain at the end of 1923 whether the "cat" had been "belled" in time to save the fortunes of the King government in the Prairie West. The first two years in office had seen the Liberals continue the Laurier precedent of making sympathetic noises while remaining committed to Quebec. Mackenzie King had not proven master of his administration and western offerings were meagre at best. The region had reason to doubt the prime minister's Prairie sympathies but even these seemed irrelevant if they did not translate into action. If the prime minister had struggled for western policies against "eastern reactionaries", the failure to produce tangible results only meant King was a weak leader. It was not enough to use western positions to balance the influential East. The prime minister would be expected to maintain the balance and then demonstrate his sympathies by implementing policies satisfactory to the region. The weakening of the protectionist wing provided just the opportunity, and King's

⁷⁹Ibid., reel 2267, volume 116, pp.88629-37, A.M. McLeod to King, January 1, 1924.

reservations were now gone. The path was clear to bring the West on side.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE ANGELS ON SIDE, 1924-26

The angels are certainly on the side of Willie King. He has a finer opportunity now than he had in 1921, and I hope he will be equal to it. I am beginning to think that probably he will measure up to his opportunities this time. It was certainly a Mr. King that I knew nothing about who has been performing in the last two months.

-J.W. Dafoe to John Willison, September 17, 1926.

With Gouin and Fielding gone, King immediately moved to shore up his position in the West. If the Liberal party was to be successful, there would have to be a shift in emphasis away from Quebec and the East, and toward the Prairies. Once again westerners cautiously waited to see if the policies would match the rhetoric. The prime minister was given one further chance to prove his mettle but with an election approaching, it was not known whether the "angels" would come to King's side.

T.A. Crerar and Charles Dunning were invited to Ottawa at the beginning of 1924. Despite Crerar's resignation from the Progressive leadership, he remained the most influential, promising, and friendly member of the movement. Dafoe believed Crerar had a "good deal of confidence in King as a man of fundamentally sound principles who wants to do right."¹ The prime minister also had, from his 1921 talks, Crerar's implied willingness to enter the cabinet when conditions

¹Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to Sifton, March 12, 1923.

became favourable. Dunning, in the meantime, had been rapidly rising in political popularity since he had succeeded Martin as Liberal premier of Saskatchewan. King was aware of the impotence of his present two western ministers and recognized the value of both Dunning and Crerar.

The prime minister met with the two westerners early in January, 1924 and discussed the possibilities of closer Progressive-Liberal co-operation. Crerar reiterated the traditional list of western concerns and more specifically requested the finance portfolio for himself with Dunning replacing Motherwell from Saskatchewan and Hudson replacing McMurray from Manitoba. Dunning was more interested in western policies than cabinet reconstruction as a means of disarming the Progressives since it was this strategy that had allowed Liberal survival in Saskatchewan.

Prime Minister King never showed any awareness of the rivalry that had developed between the two men from their careers in the politics and institutions of the wheat economy, but he did favour Dunning. "I confess," King recorded,

I formed a high opinion of him, of his mind & attitude. He is a stronger saner & sounder man than Crerar. He does not think C. good for finance, not a good administrator, too visionary....I do not like Crerar's bargaining spirit. This I will not meet.²

Dunning was the abler administrator, Crerar the better politician. King told Crerar his proposed cabinet changes

²King Diaries, January 10, 1924.

could not immediately be met and for the present session it would be better to have Fielding's place filled by an easterner. Changes could not be so drastic as to alienate eastern support but King did consider Dunning the better choice for an eventual change in the finance portfolio and would act when the time was right.³ Crerar was frustrated that the prime minister was not prepared to move faster:

I am afraid that one of King's difficulties is that he is not able to distinguish between good advice and poor advice, and that he has scarcely anyone whom he can take into his confidence, and whose advice he seeks. He has a lot of faith in his own star, but keeps his eye so intently on it that he may miss seeing the pitfalls at his own feet.⁴

Dunning was hesitant to abandon his secure position as head of the Saskatchewan government to join a battered federal ship but he did indicate his interest in eventually moving to Dominion politics. For the moment, changes were made to cabinet personnel that reflected not so much a shift in influence from East to West but rather from the Montreal to the Quebec city faction. The danger for the West was that these changes in the low-tariff composition of the cabinet might serve sufficient and King would no longer have as much need to placate the region. James Robb took over as acting minister of finance and Ernest Lapointe replaced Gouin as minister of justice. Rodolphe Lemieux was passed over despite

³Ibid., January 11, 1924.

⁴Crerar Papers, series II, box 79, Crerar to J.A. Glen, January 29, 1924.

the urgings of the Montreal wing and P.J.A. Cardin took over marine and fisheries. No changes were made to western representation. King discussed the issue with Lapointe and stressed the need for Dunning. It was hoped he could curb the region's radical tendencies:

The people of the three Prairie Provinces are undoubtedly naturally Liberals....My view is that permanent Liberalism in Canada must eventually include the Western Farmers. Liberalism has a right to them and that is where they surely belong, but I personally am without much hope of a successful and happy Liberal Family until this breach is healed. It is no doubt true that the Westerners have in some ways gone to extremes and have forgotten that they must, in a country of such varied interests as ours, be ready to compromise....I believe that if Mr. Dunning were there it would inspire almost universal confidence among the rank and file of the Westerners...I believe they would have confidence that Mr. Dunning with his experience and recognized sagacity would have a very steadying and perhaps restraining influence on any unduly radical tendencies in the West.⁵

Negotiations on the natural resources question were resumed in January, 1924. Premier Bracken requested that Manitoba receive a portion of the resources pending a final solution and transfer. He was after the unsold school lands and monies from the sale of the lands which the Dominion was holding in trust for educational purposes. King immediately rejected the offer, annoyed that Bracken was now attempting to depart from the previous negotiations and solve the dilemma "piecemeal". The whole question, King argued, had to be

⁵King Papers, reel 2266, volume 113, pp.86562-3, King to Lapointe, May 30, 1924.

resolved and then submitted to the Dominion and provincial Parliaments.⁶ He realized that dealing with the controversial issue serially would only allow eastern opposition more opportunities to block the legislation. More importantly, such a process would raise the ghost of the Manitoba School Question. There would be an instant debate over what share the Catholic schools would receive.⁷ King may have been annoyed but Bracken was frustrated: "After five years of almost continuous negotiation upon the Natural Resources Question absolutely no tangible results have yet been achieved." If the School Lands question could not be resolved through discussion, Bracken concluded, "there would seem to be no hope of settling anything by that method." Arbitration would be necessary.⁸

The Alberta negotiations were more successful. In January, Premier Greenfield offered to accept the transfer without an accounting if the Dominion would pay six years of the subsidy rather than the three offered by Ottawa and the ten suggested by the province. King once again refused. He did not want to pay more than three years subsidy; but he also wished to avoid the accounting, which would take at least two

⁶Ibid., reel 2261, volume 107, pp.82450-1, King to Bracken, January 29, 1924.

⁷King Diaries, January 4, 1924.

⁸King Papers, reel 2268, volume 116, pp.88705-9, Bracken to King, January 1924.

years and probably end up costing more.⁹ At the end of May, Greenfield informed the prime minister that the provincial legislature was authorized to accept the Dominion's offer for the transfer on the basis of an accounting since 1905. A fixed sum in lieu of an accounting could be accepted but only if the King government offered a better settlement than its proposed three year subsidy. Provincial estimates were indicating that this was not sufficient compensation.

In private correspondence the prime minister was using the same reasoning for his own benefit to disarm eastern opposition to the transfer. There would be no reason to reconsider eastern claims, he argued, because the Dominion was not giving up an "asset" but was being relieved of a "liability". In the case of Alberta, the administration of the natural resources in the last ten years had cost substantially more than the total revenue received. In the other two Prairie provinces the deficits were even greater. "So far therefore from the Western lands having been profitable to Canada from the point of view of money return, it has been quite the reverse."¹⁰

As the possibility of some form of agreement loomed closer, the two levels of government began to discuss the responsibility for services such as forest reserves,

⁹King Diaries, January 3, 1924.

¹⁰King Papers, reel 2294, volume 164, pp.118748-51, King to Taschereau, March 26, 1926.

protection of watersheds, control of rivers and streams, and administration of National Parks.¹¹ King responded to Greenfield's offer of an accounting by immediately pushing ahead and hiring J.S. Ewart as the Dominion legal adviser.¹²

But the resource issue remained unsettled and the cabinet had not been satisfactorily reconstructed according to western wishes. The region had yet to see any of the expected changes from the departure of Fielding and Gouin. The reasoning that it was their influence that had prevented King's western sympathies translating into policy now seemed highly suspect. In February King did attempt to take advantage of his own strengthened position in cabinet by outlining his ideas in a draft of the Throne Speech. The results of the cabinet changes, to an extent, began to appear. "We had a quite warm discussion in Council on whether or not we should include a special reference to the Tariff," King recorded. He worked out a paragraph referring to a reduction of taxation on implements of production which the "Western friends wanted & rightly so."¹³ The cabinet "swallowed" the tariff references: "We would never have secured this with Fielding & Sir Lomer."¹⁴ King was hopeful the first steps had been taken and "the west

¹¹Ibid., reel 2265, volume 111, pp.85386-7, Greenfield to King, December 16, 1924.

¹²Ibid., reel 2266, volume 113, pp.86562-3, King to Lapointe, May 30, 1924.

¹³King Diaries, February 26, 1924.

¹⁴Ibid., February 25, 1924.

is now coming our way." He admitted to feeling "a greater freedom with Gouin and Fielding gone, will be able to take my own natural course."¹⁵ The West, however, remained sceptical. "I do not see a chance in the world in Western Canada for the Ottawa government at the next election," Dafoe argued. "Meighen, simply by virtue of being in opposition will probably stand better in the West than King."¹⁶

The prime minister's optimism was increased when he attempted to ensure Progressive support. On February 27 King met with Forke and explained the situation:

Talked with him of the line I was intending to take, of my desire to get East & West united, to go in for taking the duties off of Agric. implements, etc. if the Progressives would be half decent in their support. I explained that the length I would be able to go would depend on how outspoken they were in coming our way. That we might lose some of our own men, but I did not intend to fall between two groups. He was wholly sympathetic & friendly & promised to do all he could.¹⁷

The Progressives voted solidly with the Liberals on the address and King was elated. "The first time in prlt.," he trumpeted, "a great victory a splendid beginning."¹⁸

As usual the real test would be the budget and King continued to meet frequently with the Progressives to ascertain their views. Progressive strength was not going to

¹⁵Ibid., January 6, 1924.

¹⁶Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 5, Dafoe to Sifton, February 13, 1924.

¹⁷King Diaries, February 27, 1924.

¹⁸Ibid., March 18, 1924.

disappear completely before the next election but there was the possibility it could be transformed into an element of the Liberal party. The problem was separating the moderates from the radicals. "If some magician could only make the necessary shift for them," Dafoe wrote, "they would be quite content to serve as a sort of Western wing; but the stream divides them and no one is able to throw a bridge over it."¹⁹

As budget day approached King grew increasingly apprehensive but was hopeful his gamble would pay off. He told Forke he "wd. not go on trying to meet the West unless they meant to help me."²⁰ Western support would have to be counted upon because eastern losses were expected:

I feel we have gone pretty far-farther than the country or members expect on the reduction of duties on agric. & other implements. It will make a cleavage. Our Ont. members will be aggrieved for the most part. We may lose three or four of them-Montreal M.P.'s too....I think the Progressives will respond, but will be critical.²¹

The government's financial position was aided by the general improvement in economic conditions and Robb was able to announce a surplus for the first time since 1913. Tax reductions, such as the lowering of the sales tax, naturally increased the budget's popularity but interest was centred around the tariff. Customs duties were reduced or abolished

¹⁹Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 5, Dafoe to Sifton, April 3, 1925.

²⁰King Diaries, March 22, 1924.

²¹Ibid., April 10, 1924.

on equipment used in primary industries and on material used to manufacture that equipment.²² The West was witness to the first moves by the King government towards freer trade and the prime minister was delighted by the budget's reception:

We have done the right thing. The House have responded. It was splendidly rec'd at the close by all our party & the progressives....The Progressives have been surprised in that it goes farther than they had anticipated....I believe that rural Canada will now respond. I really feel that coming at this moment when the farmers party is not only disintegrating but is being discredited in Ontario, we have constructed a bridge which will help to unite East and West, and to bring the Progressive party across into our ranks....I really believe it will be, as I wrote Robb, an epoch making budget in the history of the Liberal party. It may bring us back into power by getting the Progressive forces and ours united.....I am happy that I have been true to Liberal tradition, true to the platform of 1919 Convention, true to the pledges I gave the electors in 1921 and true to the people-the producers and consumers. Had Fielding or Sir Lomer both or either remained in the Cabinet we could never have done what we have done. I have had my own way from the start, and have carried every point for which I have fought.²³

The nature of opposition to the budget ensured it would receive western support. Four protectionist Liberals voted with the Conservatives against the government, and Mitchell, who was not in the House, resigned his seat in protest. Many of the Progressives wanted more substantial reductions on tariffs for the necessities of life and J.S. Woodsworth introduced an amendment accordingly. His amendment to the

²²H. Blair Neatby, William Lyon Mackenzie King: The Lonely Heights, 1924-1932, pp.17-18.

²³King Diaries, April 10, 1924.

budget widened the breach within the movement. A month later ten of the Ontario and Alberta radicals broke away and with two Labour members became known as the Ginger Group. But King had won the confidence of the moderate Progressives. "Our Liberal friends thro' Western Canada are put once more at the head of the procession," King crowed, "& we are in a position where the two groups can be brought together."²⁴ The Progressives would attempt to convince the West "that every good done by the Government is done as a result of their putting a pistol to the head of the Government," Dunning wrote King, and "...the appetite of Western Canada for tariff reduction is almost insatiable." On the whole, however, there could be no doubt that King's government had "increased its stature" in western Canada and Dunning's commentary on the budget performance differed markedly from that of 1923:

So far as one can gather the policy of the Government has put new heart into a great many Liberals and has had an effect upon former Liberals who in the past few years have been Progressive...the general condition, therefore, is much more hopeful than when I saw you last.²⁵

Meighen and the Conservatives had been forced to attack the budget and affirm their position as the party of protection.

The new direction set by the government would only proceed so far. King was rid of Gouin and Fielding but he remained unwilling to take any drastic steps along western

²⁴Ibid., April 13, 1924.

²⁵King Papers, reel 2264, volume 110, pp.84315-6, Dunning to King, April 23, 1924.

lines. His position in the cabinet was certainly stronger but he still had to contend with his eastern members. This caution slowed the pace of new initiatives. Senate and electoral reform in 1924 came to nothing and the proposal to proceed with the Hudson Bay Railway met with the usual eastern opposition. The prime minister had met with a western delegation advocating the rail route on April 9, and while he had been favourably impressed, the results were intangible:

One forgets that the early explorers made their way to the Canadian West by the Straits & Hudson's[sic] Bay, that the waters that touch the northern part of Manitoba are Atlantic Ocean waters, that the Middle West of U.S. as well as Canada may find a profitable water route there. The fact that there is so much propaganda against it, by Montreal interests make me feel C.P.R. fears that competition.²⁶

The branch line programme that had been defeated by the Senate in 1923 once again ground to a halt. The 1924 budget was a positive sign for the West but against so many setbacks, it would not be sufficient to produce instant results.

The West anxiously awaited the postponed Crow's Nest Pass rates decision to judge the changes in the government's character. King did nothing. The Crow's Nest Pass Act was allowed to come into effect on July 7, 1924 and the railway companies retaliated by restoring the rates only for those points which were on the lines of the Canadian Pacific in 1897 when the original agreement was made. The rates were highly discriminatory when applied to conditions existing a quarter

²⁶King Diaries, April 9, 1924.

of a century later. King knew intervention in any direction would be unpopular in some quarter, so he delayed. He preferred to leave the initiative to the provincial governments which could appeal to the Board of Railway Commissioners and if necessary the Supreme Court:

I am quite sure that the discriminations which the railway companies have permitted as a consequence of the restoration of the Crow's Nest Pass Agreement cannot long continue. The many injustices they entail in different parts of Canada are all too obvious. It is altogether probable that they will lead to an early consideration by the Railway Commission of the effect of the Crow's Nest Pass Agreement upon railway rates as a whole. With what consequences it is difficult at the moment to say...The Prairie Provinces are the most concerned. They wanted the restoration of the Crow's Nest Pass Agreement in full. They are feeling the effects of the discriminations involved. If they occasion the reference they may be expected to acquiesce in the findings whatever they may be. I am not sure they will be as ready to fall in line with consequences which might grow out of any action of ours.²⁷

In August the Board of Railway Commissioners began hearings on the discriminatory rates and in October issued its judgement. The commission asserted that it had authority under the Railway Act to override the Crow's Nest Pass Act of 1897. It revoked the Crow's Nest rates on all commodities except grain and flour moving east from the Prairies. The rates in effect before July 7 were restored.

The judgement was declared while King was beginning a western tour to convince the region of Liberal sincerity and sympathy. The western meetings were well attended and

²⁷Neatby, p.26.

naturally the prime minister pointed to the tariff reductions and their consistency with the 1919 platform, while playing down Progressive claims for credit. In the early speeches he claimed credit for the restoration of the Crow's Nest rates, and discussed the opening of the Peace River district in Alberta, the construction of the Hudson Bay Railway, and the development of natural resources: "Indeed all these so-called Western policies appeal very strongly to me, and I believe we can sweep the country on them."²⁸ Crerar believed King was regarding the West "as a sort of sulky child that will soon get over its sulks." He was receiving his information from western ministers, "mostly syncophants" who were "looking for jobs". King is on "Olympus, looking upwards," Crerar wrote, "...and a person in this position is often in danger."²⁹

In Manitoba the prime minister was courted by both wings of the Liberal party. He was successfully improving his relations with Sifton, Dafoe, and the Free Press, much to the disgust of the Diehards. "To-day it hates the Liberal party, including yourself, with an implacable hatred," A.M. McLeod informed King,

and its aim is to destroy your government and to smash you. It has no principles, but its guiding prejudice is hatred of Liberalism and Liberals, and it is moving Heaven and earth to get you and your government in its power- simply to use you both for its own purposes and then to throw you in the

²⁸King Diaries, October 21, 1924.

²⁹Crerar Papers, series II, box 79, Crerar to A.K. Cameron, August 1, 1924.

discard.³⁰

King obviously disagreed and believed the tone of the paper indicated "a sort of preparation to come over."³¹ The Diehards were equally adamant that he end his courting of the Progressives: "The Progressives are intensely jealous and temperamentally they are a good deal like our western broncos. We will never get anywhere till the progressive movement comes to an end."³² King had grown tired of the bickering and the uncompromising attitude of the Diehards. Throughout the province he met with leading Liberals of the "Unionist persuasion" and privately wished they controlled the party organization, rather than the Diehards who had once again been recognized as the official branch of the party under E.J. McMurray:

They [the Free Press group] represent many influential & powerful interests in Winnipeg & West. I confess I wish with my heart that they were the controlling element in the city today not because of their influence only but because of their being an entirely different stamp than those who have gained control. There are two distinct groups, McMurray's following is not a good one, indeed, I feel ashamed of many of those who are around him. Fortunately the gulf is not as wide as it was, & we are meeting under favourable auspices men of all groups.³³

³⁰King Papers, reel 2267, volume 116, pp.88645-56, McLeod to King, February 23, 1924.

³¹King Diaries, October 3, 1924.

³²King Papers, reel 2267, volume 116, pp.88658-60, McLeod to King, August 8, 1924.

³³King Diaries, October 4, 1924.

The prime minister spoke of the necessity of sinking differences and getting together but as Dafoe noted, "unfortunately there is no machinery which can make his views operative. They remain pious aspirations."³⁴ King could not help noticing that the presence of McMurray in the cabinet was injuring his attempts to win the confidence of the Free Press group. Hudson refused to appear on the prime minister's platform with the Diehard leader.³⁵

In Saskatchewan King was reassured that when a successor could be found, Dunning would enter the government and take the portfolio of railways. The premier was less friendly in public and neither he nor any of his ministers took part in the official reception tendered the prime minister or appeared on the platform at the Regina meeting. King was angered by the slight but swallowed his pride to keep good relations with Dunning. He continued to urge Progressive and Liberal co-operation and argued that the timing was even more crucial with the resurgence of the Conservatives and the approach of an election. Such co-operation, however, was not going to be found in Saskatchewan. With Dunning looking to make an exit to Ottawa, Gardiner would be the likely successor and his antagonism to the Progressives had become common knowledge. "There is only one attitude to take toward the Western

³⁴Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 4, Dafoe to Sifton, April 3, 1925.

³⁵Crerar Papers, series III, box 97, Crerar to Cameron, October 15, 1924.

Progressives," he reiterated to King,

and that is to recognize in them the real opposition to your Government. If I had to make a choice tomorrow between voting and working for Progressive or Conservative candidates, I would have no hesitation in saying I would support the Conservative.

To Gardiner it was the Progressives who were denying the King government a working majority, who were reaping any harvests sown by the federal Liberals, and who were opposing the Grits in the West. He believed his party was in a position "to clear the Progressive movement from this province and elect Liberals in practically every seat."³⁶

Westerners viewed the absence of provincial Liberals on King's platform as evidence of continuing party division. In Alberta Charlie Mitchell, the leader of the provincial party, refused to go to a banquet for King in Calgary.³⁷

Then the Railway Commission delivered its decision and all eyes turned to the King government. If the prime minister hoped for any credibility in the region, westerners believed there would be no hesitation in the federal government intervening to overturn the decision. They were to be disappointed and King was forced to come up with his usual justifications:

Personally I feel strongly like suspending the decision, but with difference of view in the

³⁶King Papers, reel 2265, volume 110, pp.84871-3, Gardiner to King, November 15, 1924.

³⁷Crerar Papers, series III, box 97, Crerar to Cameron, December 11, 1924.

cabinet, and the ministers scattered, think it on the whole wiser to accept situation as it is and await the 'justice' of it till a more favourable moment.

By October 27, the prime minister was still searching for an escape. He pondered meeting with the full cabinet on his return to restore the Crow's Nest Agreement and then hearing the appeal. The agreement would be judged out of date and a new rate structure would be devised by the Railway Commission, favourable to the West. He would go to the country on this policy and win a government dominated by westerners that would "ensure stability & security for the next five years." The government would be able to move away from the tariff issue and make the issue a fight of "people vs. special interests...other classes will be with us vs. the Railways, as they are purely selfish in the last resort." King found himself turning to a theme that would become a future favourite: "Supremacy of Prlt. must be maintained even over the Courts of the land."³⁸

The cautious, mediating King prevailed as usual while the bold, aggressive King was confined to the pages of his diary. Western scepticism was confirmed by the tactics of evasion and claims that the issue would require study before action was taken. "Any good impression King may have made during his early speeches in the Prairie Provinces," Crerar noted, "has been entirely dissipated by the judgement on the Crows Nest

³⁸King Diaries, October 24, 1924; October 27, 1924.

Pass rates....The Premier, and rightly, has been a stickler of the preeminence of parliament, and this judgement brings him face to face with that problem."³⁹ An appeal to the Supreme Court was once again left up to the provincial administrations.

Western reaction was immediate. The budget had seemed to indicate "a most desirable strengthening of the Government's hold upon the confidence of the West," a Manitoba Liberal wrote.

This has been disastrously shaken by the Government's apparent acceptance of the C.N. Pass abrogation....The feeling that is arising in the West is causing grave concern to all who have seen its temper....The conviction grows that this is due to the acquisitive and parochial spirit of the East....The Budget of 1924 aroused hopes and bettered the prospects of the party; but one swallow does not make a summer.

Calls went up again for a "Western lieutenant, say of the calibre of Dunning."⁴⁰ King could only fall back on his pleas for an understanding of his situation:

The situation as I saw it in the West is one thing, and the situation as we face it in our Parliament is another. Both have to be considered, though I can well see that what may serve best in one direction may be the more costly in the other. Like all difficult situations which politics present there must be a point somewhere at which a proper balancing can be effected.⁴¹

³⁹Crerar Papers, series II, box 79, Crerar to A.K. Cameron, October 23, 1924.

⁴⁰King Papers, reel 2264, volume 109, pp.84057-9, Fred L. Davis to King, November 28, 1924.

⁴¹Ibid., reel 2265, volume 110, pp.84875-7, King to Gardiner, December 31, 1924.

At year's end Mackenzie King pondered his past record and future prospects. "Our party has reached a high point in the confidence of the country," he recorded. "We are I think just at the parting of the ways. We can go on & up if we do the right thing on the Freight Rates case, or we can give the Progressive Party a new lease on life."⁴² Western concessions would certainly cause controversy in the cabinet. Gouin and Fielding were gone but King still had to deal with a strong, albeit less influential, eastern contingent. After a meeting in December he recorded that he could "not recall a stormier session in Council, more division of feeling strongly expressed."⁴³ The issue was whether it should be left to the Supreme Court to decide if the Railway Commission had the right to upset Parliament's restoration of the rates. The prime minister remained insistent and on Christmas Day the cabinet authorized an Order-in-Council for restoration: "It has been the most difficult question in the cabinet thus far. I can feel that my judgement for better or for worse has prevailed, I believe it is for the better."⁴⁴ The rates would be in effect until the Supreme Court ruled on the decision of the Board of Railway Commissioners.

The prime minister was proud of his accomplishment and believed he should be rewarded with Prairie approval. "I hope

⁴²King Diaries, December 6, 1924.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., December 18, 1924.

our reinstatement of the Crow's Nest Pass rates though belated to a degree which I personally greatly deplore," he wrote Gardiner, "may not be without its effects in depriving our Progressive friends of any kudos." The defender of Parliament's supremacy was now attempting to convince his western supporters that he had gone as far as possible:

I should like to have gone further and compelled the removal of all discriminations, but I can see where there is a real doubt as to the right of the power of the Governor-in-Council to take so far-reaching a step, which amounts in reality to assuming in its entirety the functions of the Railway Commission in matters of rate making.⁴⁵

The question could not be avoided. The Order-in-Council restoring the rates of 1897 had only been an interim measure and the decision of the Board of Railway Commissioners to override the Crow's Nest Agreement had been challenged before the Supreme Court. In February of 1925 the judgment was announced. The court ruled the Railway Commission had no power to ignore the Act. The rates restored by the Order-in-Council were confirmed and the way was open for a comprehensive national revision of rates with an amendment of the Crow's Nest Pass Act as a central feature. The railways wanted the commission to provide the revision while the Prairies were much less trusting. King did not believe the commission alone should carry the task of a comprehensive revision.

⁴⁵King Papers, reel 2265, volume 110, pp.84875-7, King to Gardiner, December 31, 1924.

In May, 1925 the government brought down its proposals. The commission was directed to make a complete investigation of freight rates with equalization as its guide. It was instructed, however, that the maximum rates on grain and flour then in force under the Crow's Nest Pass Act should not be exceeded and should be applicable to all points on all western lines, both present and future. The Conservatives opposed the special treatment for the West while the Progressives claimed the region had not been provided enough security. It was evident that King's settlement flew in the face of equalization by giving special consideration to the West but past pledges, he argued, could not be ignored:

The government has felt that it is dealing with a condition, not a theory. Theoretically, I do not believe it can be disputed that the only basis on which freight rates can properly be fixed is that of allowing to the railway commission an absolutely free hand. That is unquestionably the sound, theoretical position. On the other hand, in the endeavour to make effective that policy, the government, as I have said, is confronted with an existing condition that at the present time and for many years past the middle west has had a certain degree of protection in its maximum rates....The government has had to consider the circumstances under which that agreement came into being, the position of western Canada to-day as contrasted with the time when the agreement was entered into, and also what would be the effect at this moment, having regard to the sentiment of the middle west and to other considerations, of the complete removal of any security to the middle west respecting maximum rates on the important commodities of grain and flour.⁴⁶

The commission ruled in September that only the Crow's

⁴⁶Debates, King, p.4438, June 18, 1925.

Nest rates on grain and flour moving eastward would be enforced and it later extended these rates to grain and flour moving to parts of British Columbia. The West lost its preferred rates on other commodities but the Crow's Nest rates on the two most important items had been confirmed and they now applied to all railway lines on the Prairies. The rates question was a victory for King but while he believed it should produce electoral rewards, the West viewed it as a grudging concession that was becoming characteristic of his government. The region was not confident that Mackenzie King was intent on defending or advancing Prairie interests.

The budget of 1925 added to this sentiment and contained only minor changes. An Advisory Tariff Board announced a year before was again promised. Robb had concluded a trade agreement with Australia but King was surprised to discover that it contained tariff increases as well as decreases. He flatly refused to accept the agreement as it stood and none of the changes were included in the budget. "The more one sees of the affect & workings of a protective tariff," he wrote, "the more one sees the extent to which it is an evil and a curse."⁴⁷ He blamed Robb for the blunder because he was "too Tory and protectionist by instinct and not a big enough man for the position."⁴⁸ The agreement came into effect in October but not until further negotiations and bungling had altered

⁴⁷King Diaries, February 27, 1925.

⁴⁸Ibid., March 7, 1925.

its form including tariff concessions on additional items.

The cabinet would still have to be strengthened before an election if there was to be any chance of turning the western tide in the Liberal direction. "I am tired," King wrote in March, "of trying to keep the two groups in the Cabinet true to Liberal policy."⁴⁹ He continued to indicate his lack of confidence in his ministers as a group or as individuals: "There is need of new strength and blood." By the summer his doubts were increasing: "In Council this afternoon I stressed the gloomy side again, testing the metal of our men. I felt that Cabinet was very weak, lamentably weak in fact- really nothing to grip to. Many like barnacles rather than fighters."⁵⁰ In July he was again contemplating cabinet changes to strengthen the western appeal. Stewart could go to the Senate and Motherwell to the Lieutenant Governorship of Saskatchewan.⁵¹ "We really need a lot of younger and abler men," the prime minister noted, "the Ministers do not know their own minds and are unequal to the tasks at hand." The growing corruption within the department of customs and excise that had been brought to King's attention and its inept handling by the minister, Jacques Bureau, indicated the extent of the cabinet's weakness.

The results of the Saskatchewan election in June brought

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid., August 18, 1925.

⁵¹Ibid., July 9, 1925.

renewed optimism. The Dunning Liberals won fifty-two of the sixty-three seats. Mackenzie King depended upon Quebec and Saskatchewan as the Liberal strongholds and saw the victory as evidence that his brand of national Liberalism could appeal to diverse constituencies:

It seems to me that in the circumstances of Quebec and Saskatchewan being alike so largely Liberal, we have one great essential to national unity. If we can find the things which the men of French Canadian descent have in common with the settlers of the plains, and base our policy upon this common ground, we need have no fear as to what the result will be at the extremities or near the heart as I assume Ontario would like to consider itself.⁵²

This was proving far more difficult than it first appeared.

King scanned the western horizon when he considered cabinet changes. "We can only hope to win as we carry the West," he echoed in July, "and we can only carry the West as we are a Liberal party in name and fact."⁵³ In May the discredited E.J. McMurray had been asked to resign when his law firm owed money to the Home Bank at the time of its failure. When the government decided to compensate depositors for their losses, it was obvious that McMurray's personal affairs made his position in the government an embarrassment and King jumped at the opportunity to prepare his exit. McMurray had posed difficulties in cabinet since his entry and his presence hindered any chances of unifying the Manitoba

⁵²King Papers, reel 2279, volume 136, pp.101049-51, King to I.A. Mackay, November 23, 1925.

⁵³King Diaries, July 9, 1925.

Liberals. King's decision in appointing McMurray in the first place can only be explained through an ignorance of Manitoba Liberalism. When the pressure began to mount for his resignation, the Manitoba minister began to make an "exhibition" of himself, "talking about being 'assassinated', a conspiracy of 'Crerar, Hudson, Dafoe' etc." The whole episode further convinced King that the organization had "got into the hands of the wrong lot in Winnipeg." It was little wonder, he wrote, "the best thinking Liberals want little or nothing to do with them."⁵⁴ The exit of the Diehard brought immediate reaction from his following who saw the gesture as one more example of King betraying the loyalists of 1917. "I feel that you have served notice on the old guard that our work is not appreciated," N.T. Macmillan wrote, "and perhaps we should fade away and let others take on the fight."⁵⁵

Charles Dunning was prime cabinet material, and an obvious choice for western lieutenant. He was fresh from victory in Saskatchewan and was popular in the East as well as the West. When Dunning met with King in August, the premier displayed interest in joining the cabinet and seemed pleased with the offer of the railway portfolio, as well as room to be made for Crerar and Brownlee. Crerar's popularity had been damaged by his former involvement in the failed Home Bank, but

⁵⁴Ibid., February 25, 1924.

⁵⁵King Papers, reel 2279, volume 136, pp.101344-7, N.T. Macmillan to King, May 23, 1925.

he was still the most effective choice from Manitoba. The prospects of the upcoming election were by no means secure and Dunning preferred to await the results before leaving his post in Saskatchewan. He explained that popular opinion in the province was pressuring him to stay and the solidarity of the provincial party would be impaired.⁵⁶ King concluded he was "a safety first man in politics."⁵⁷

Once again western representation in the cabinet was not to be strengthened before the election. Dunning would wait, Brownlee was too involved in provincial politics, and Crerar was undecided as to his future. King could rely on the support of Dunning in the general election and indicated he would look to the premier as his "chief lieutenant in the West". It was questionable whether it would be enough.

As Neatby notes, Mackenzie King's "obsession with the west had weakened the party in the east"⁵⁸ but with no western cabinet changes he had no choice but to look East. The result would be more protectionists in the cabinet and a further weakening of the government's image on the Prairies.⁵⁹ Despite King's misgivings, Robb was raised to full status as minister of finance.

⁵⁶Ibid., reel 2275, volume 129, pp.97167-71, Dunning to King, August 22, 1925.

⁵⁷King Diaries, October 23, 1925.

⁵⁸As quoted in Neatby, p.66.

⁵⁹Herbert Marler, Vincent Massey, and W.E. Foster were brought in. G.H. Boivin replaced Bureau.

In the 1925 election campaign Mackenzie King hoped the record of the government would be enough to secure victory. He pointed to reductions in taxation, the national debt, and the tariff, increases in the British Preference, and the balancing of the budget. He promised that the Liberals would push for a tightening of railway expenditures and a balanced road on the tariff. In Ontario, he indicated:

I say what I said in other provinces, that nothing in the nature of free trade would be possible, for however it might appeal to some men in the west, it would breed discouragement and discontent in this part of the Dominion, and therefore would make for divisions, instead of harmony. Similarly, I said, speaking in the west, that neither can a policy of higher and higher protection keep this country united.⁶⁰

In the West the prime minister again gave the Hudson Bay Railway a cautious endorsement and warned the region to send members to Ottawa if it wanted action on western concerns. King ignored the fact that no action had been taken in 1925 on such promises as Senate reform and the alternative vote in single-member constituencies. The latter would have been very useful to the Liberals in three-cornered contests on the Prairies but Quebec was opposed.

Mackenzie King was urged by westerners to delay an election until 1926. It was still too soon, they argued, and what recent gestures had been made toward the West, had not yet countered the effects of the previous several years. The party had "struck bottom" on the Prairies and was just

⁶⁰As quoted in Morton, p.237.

beginning to move "on the upward grade."

Manitobans were arguing that if the government had some constructive legislation it should be introduced and the election postponed until the following year.⁶¹ King was warned that if an election was held, it was doubtful Crerar or Hudson would be candidates. Dafoe believed King now had a much better chance in the West than Meighen, but the Progressives remained the competition. "If Mr. King is allowing himself to be lulled by these stories of Progressive disintegration and the certainty of Liberal triumph," he warned, "he is preparing a disaster for himself."⁶² The Liberals in the province did not appear to be pulling together sufficiently to ensure anything like an effective organization, despite their indications to the contrary.⁶³ King pleaded with them to form a strong organization that would place party affairs into the hands of those "not blinded by the passions of the past." He

⁶¹King Papers, reel 2274, pp.95864-8, volume 127, T.A. Burrows to King, August 14, 1925.

⁶²Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 5, Dafoe to Sifton, April 3, 1925.

⁶³King Papers, reel 2275, volume 129, pp.97167-71, Dunning to King, August 22, 1925. Manitoba Liberals attempted to convince King that the breach was healed: "At no time since the War have the various factions of the Liberal Party been in a more harmonious attitude than at present, and can say without any hesitation whatever, that the Party stands as a unit today without any split whatsoever within its ranks." Outside observers, however, told the prime minister of the actual state of affairs: "Manitoba Liberals are still fighting 1917 election, deny it as they may." Ibid., reel 2284, volume 146, pp.107709-11, M.G. Walker to King, August 1, 1925; reel 2285, volume 147, pp.108202-3, A.M. Young to King, December 5, 1925.

increasingly optimistic. Premier Dunning campaigned vigorously for the federal Liberals and King was impressed by his contribution: "He agreed I might speak of needing him in Ottawa. This I did to all intents & purposes indicating to the country he was to be counted upon as a Western Minister."⁶⁷ The differences in Liberal support among the Prairie provinces could not have been more pronounced. The question was whether King would finally recognize the differences as legitimate reflections of Prairie diversity or merely assume that with better leadership, organization and candidates all three provinces would soon follow Saskatchewan's lead.

Despite King's support for Progressive-Liberal co-operation across the Prairies, there were still thirty-two three-cornered contests. The Progressive threat was diminishing but in 1925 they remained enough of a force to play a critical role in the results.

In the election, Liberal representation fell from 116 to 101 seats in a House that now contained 245 members. To make matters worse King, along with eight other ministers, lost their seats.⁶⁸ The Tories increased their representation by an impressive gain of 67, giving them 116 seats, seven short of a majority. Only 24 Progressives were returned as compared to 65 in 1921. Two independents and two Labour candidates

⁶⁷King Diaries, September 29, 1925.

⁶⁸King had sat for North York (the constituency that had defeated him in 1917) since December, 1921.

completed the list.

"Eastern Canada had punished King for his preoccupation with the prairies," Neatby concludes.⁶⁹ Quebec returned 60 of 65 Liberals, but the Maritimes sent only 6 of 29, with Ontario sending an embarrassing 12 of 82. The party did better in the West, winning the same number in Manitoba, 15 as compared to 1 in Saskatchewan, and 4 as compared to 0 in Alberta. The Liberals made no gains in British Columbia, maintaining their 3 seats. The Tories gained 7 seats in Manitoba, remained shut out in Saskatchewan, and gained 3 in Alberta, for an overall gain of 10 Prairie seats.

The decline of the Progressives was one of the few bright spots for the prime minister: "The progressives have killed themselves, thank God for that, they have bought their own rope, and put it around their own necks and tightened it themselves, they are done for now."⁷⁰ The radical group of the Progressives was now stronger than the moderate wing. The strength of the movement had declined markedly but their power in the new House of Commons was greater. They held the balance of power and no government could stay in office without their support. King would have to remain fixed on appeasing the region. "If we can now arrange to unite in Parliament the forces which have been divided either there or in the country we will at least have succeeded in forming a

⁶⁹Neatby, p.74.

⁷⁰King Diaries, October 30, 1925.

party strong enough to make its principles and policies prevail," King wrote Hudson.

That has been the idea which, as you know, I have cherished from the outset and which we have held in common. There should be no difficulty in meeting Forke on all points he has raised. My one concern is as to whether or not he will be able to command the entire Progressive following.⁷¹

In the face of the uncertain political situation and the very real possibility of the Meighen Conservatives being allowed to form a government, the Progressives were anxious to find reasons to support the Liberal program. Governor General Byng advised King to resign and did not believe the Progressives had any role to play in the situation. The Tories had the most seats and were therefore entitled to an opportunity to govern the country.

The confused situation renewed speculation about King's leadership. His popularity, even among his own party, reached an all-time low at the end of 1925. Liberals were remarking to one another that there was "very little confidence" in the prime minister's ability as a leader and he received much of the blame for the election results. "If last Thursday's vote carried with it any measure of chastisement," R.J. Cromie wrote, "that chastisement was directed, not at Liberalism, but at the inaction and vacillation that have characterized

⁷¹King Papers, reel 2277, volume 132, pp.98707-8, King to Hudson, November 19, 1925.

Mackenzie King's exposition of Liberalism."⁷² Many noted the prime minister's low stock in western Canada. Some remained desirous of the western party uniting with the low tariff members of the party in the East and such an amalgamation, it was commonly believed, would best be led by Dunning.⁷³ The Saskatchewan premier had deftly handled the Progressive situation in his province and had led a resurgence of the Grits in both federal and provincial affairs.

It has been argued that Crerar, Dafoe, Hudson, Lambert, F.O. Fowler, and H.J. Symington, often referred to as 'the Winnipeg Sanhedrin', set out to replace King with Dunning: "In the back of the minds of the Winnipeg group," Peter Regenstreif claims, "was the notion of a Dunning-Lapointe joint leadership somewhat on the order of the Baldwin-Lafontaine Reform ministry of pre-Confederation days."⁷⁴ If this was the case, Dafoe was not indicating such. He believed King was not necessarily the "right man for the present emergency" but recognized "an attempt to swap horses at this

⁷²Sifton Papers, reel 598, p.164649, D.N. Cooper to Sifton, October 24, 1925; p.164650, Sifton to Cooper, October 30, 1925; pp.164664-5, R.J. Cromie to Sifton, excerpt from editorial in Vancouver Sun, November 14, 1925.

⁷³Cameron wrote Crerar suggesting that King should resign the leadership, have George Murray replace him, and accept the High Commissionership in London. Murray would gain eastern support while Dunning would provide support from the West. Lapointe and Cardin would have to push such action. Crerar Papers, series III, box 97, Cameron to Crerar, November 3, 1925.

⁷⁴Regenstreif, "A Threat to Leadership", p.353.

moment would probably be fatal."⁷⁵ It is likely that this 'plot' against King never left the realm of angry grumblings in the face of the poor election results. T.A. Burrows echoed Dafoe. It would be a "dangerous policy to swap horses crossing a stream," he wrote, "...they had better see who they were going to get for leader before they started any agitation against King."⁷⁶ Crerar was in complete accord.⁷⁷ Regenstreif argues that Dunning was aware of the discussions and agreed "King was a terrible load and that he should go," but he would only act if the initiative came from the Quebec wing. He wanted to avoid "even the appearance of a conspiracy."⁷⁸ In the end the episode which "scarcely merited the dignity of being called a plot" never left the realm of rumours. Dunning himself refused to play Brutus. As Neatby notes, "palace revolutionaries must be made of sterner stuff."⁷⁹

For King to secure a majority when the House met, he would need the support of all the Liberal members as well as

⁷⁵Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 5, Dafoe to Sifton, November 20, 1925.

⁷⁶Sifton Papers, reel 598, pp.164633-8, T.A. Burrows to Sifton, November 20, 1925.

⁷⁷"I agree with you that King has shown grave defects in leadership; I agree with you that his leadership today is probably the heaviest liability the Liberal party has, but I come back again to the question,- what is the alternative?" Crerar Papers, series III, box 97, Crerar to Cameron, February 26, 1926.

⁷⁸As quoted in Regenstreif, pp.353-4.

⁷⁹Neatby, p.88.

twenty others. They would have to come from among the twenty-four Progressives and two Labour members. The most partisan of Liberals throughout Canada could not deny the necessity of courting the Progressives. Cabinet reorganization, King informed the eastern members, "will necessarily depend, amongst other factors, upon the views of our friends in the West....If we are to continue in Office we shall have to count very largely on their support."⁸⁰

Reports from the Progressives were mixed. Forke was indicating that the Progressives were anxious to avoid another election and was confident he could hold the support of those from Manitoba and Saskatchewan while Alberta remained uncertain. According to Dafoe, however, Forke hoped Dunning would soon take over the leadership of the Liberal party because the Progressives had little confidence in King as a politician and little regard for him as a man.⁸¹ Alberta Liberals were informing the prime minister that the nature of the Progressives in their province made it impossible for anyone to deliver their support: "Any Progressive joining your Government would automatically cease to 'belong'." Wood personally believed the King government should be supported as long as highly controversial measures were avoided.⁸²

⁸⁰As quoted in Neatby, p.89.

⁸¹Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 5, Dafoe to Sifton, December 5, 1925.

⁸²King Papers, reel 2281, volume 140, pp.103712-4, C.W. Peterson to King, November 27, 1925.

Forke and Dafoe pushed for coalition as the only possibility of keeping the Conservatives out of office. They did not, however, believe King would even contemplate such a fusion because he did not understand the seriousness of the situation and was deluded in believing the strategy of co-operation used in the last sessions would be sufficient.⁸³ King was anxious to avoid coalition, especially now. The time of greatest Progressive strength had passed and coalition had been avoided. Now, when the movement had "all but completely disappeared in every province of the Dominion but two," was not the time for coalition.⁸⁴ The election ensured that priority would once more be given to winning support from the West.

Cabinet reconstruction remained a necessity after the election. "The more I think of the Ministers I have had round me," King noted, "the less I find them worth ought as 'generals'."⁸⁵ Dunning had informed King a few days after the election that he was now willing to enter the federal government. He had reversed his earlier decision to stay in Saskatchewan, finally providing King with a strong western minister. Stewart informed the prime minister that Dunning

⁸³"I think," Dafoe wrote, "he is of the same mind as he was in the last parliament, that if a couple of Progressives would come into the government everything would be lovely." Dafoe Papers, box 2, file 5, Dafoe to Forke, November 16, 1925.

⁸⁴As quoted in Neatby, p.90.

⁸⁵King Diaries, November 16, 1925.

was offended because he had not been invited into the cabinet immediately after the election. An apologetic King quickly wrote Dunning, indicating his own enthusiasm and that of his colleagues to having the Saskatchewan premier enter the government. Dunning was expected to aid the West and usher in a new era of low tariffs:

As you may well imagine, there has been much searching of hearts in the endeavour to frame a tariff policy in a manner which will serve to unite the country, and at the same time to keep united the forces opposed to high tariffs.⁸⁶

Mackenzie King welcomed the westerner's arrival with "immense relief". The fear of any threat to his leadership posed by Dunning was surpassed by his desire for a western lieutenant. The time was opportune and as he informed Dunning, "it would almost look so far as you are concerned, as though the gods had staged the proceedings."⁸⁷ The Saskatchewan premier would be the centre-piece for a new Liberal administration and Liberal hopes. King was now even more adamant in refusing Dafoe and Sifton's arguments for a coalition: "I thought of Crerar & Dunning's talks of a Western Party and threw out the idea of bringing all Western Libs & Progs together on that basis. Let Dunning be leader of a Western party-that wd. give its support to Govt."⁸⁸ He would

⁸⁶King Papers, reel 2275, volume 129, pp.97221-8, King to Dunning, December 19, 1925.

⁸⁷King Diaries, November 4, 1925.

⁸⁸Ibid., November 13, 1925.

come into the cabinet as a Liberal and also as the western lieutenant that King had never before possessed: "I have thought it well to regard Mr. Dunning as the keystone of the arch in the West about rapprochements and consultations between[sic] the three [Prairie] provinces." His relations with Brownlee and the Progressives of Manitoba would make him of "utmost service,"⁸⁹ and western opinion reinforced the decision:

Premier Dunning in this western country is hailed by Liberals and Progressives alike as the future hope of the Liberal Party for the Prairie Provinces at Ottawa; one meets this hope expressed in every quarter. He has proved himself in Saskatchewan and if he goes to Ottawa he may accomplish something like what Sifton did after 1896.⁹⁰

The loyal Haydon was sent West to discuss details with Dunning. The Saskatchewan premier would call a provincial session immediately and come to Ottawa as soon as it prorogued, probably late in January. He would take the portfolio of railways and canals because he felt he lacked the federal experience necessary for finance. Dunning approved of King's suggestions to reorganize the western representation in the cabinet by bringing in Progressives including Premier Bracken of Manitoba and Attorney-General Brownlee of Alberta. He doubted, however, if King could get the two men.

King also wanted Saskatchewan minister of highways Jimmy

⁸⁹King Papers, reel 2280, volume 137, pp.102179-80, King to C.R. Mitchell, November 26, 1925.

⁹⁰Ibid., reel 2292, volume 160, pp.115939-41, A.H.S. Murray to King, February 12, 1926.

Gardiner for immigration and colonization. This would give the province three cabinet ministers but Motherwell would be pressured to accept the Lieutenant-Governorship. Dunning had received most of the credit for the Saskatchewan success but it was Gardiner who was master of the organization. King blamed much of the party's misfortunes on poor organization and naturally saw a wealth of possibility in the young Gardiner:

I should not like to let a longer time slip by without saying to you just how very much I feel the Liberal party owes to your helpful generalship for the success attained in the Middle West. Everyone concedes that to your successful organization more than to any other single cause we owe the number of seats which have been carried in Saskatchewan....If the day has been saved to Liberalism in Canada it is becoming increasingly apparent that it is Saskatchewan that has saved it....I am looking forward as you know, to seeing you enter the larger sphere of politics and to your cooperation in the work of organization of adjoining Provinces as well as your own.⁹¹

The antagonism between Dunning and Gardiner would inevitably pose problems and King had to tread carefully. Haydon discussed the possibility of Gardiner's entry into the cabinet. He was invited to come to Ottawa and in discussions with King indicated his willingness and desire to become a federal minister. "The day's conversations," King wrote,

have disclosed an unfortunate bitterness between Dunning & Gardiner, over the possibility of both going to Ottawa....Dunning is agreeable to G. going to Ottawa, but wd prefer to have G remain at present, come later....Gardiner is determined if he

⁹¹Ibid., reel 2276, volume 130, pp.97661-3, King to Gardiner, December 3, 1925.

does not go to Ottawa to be Premier & has the organization and the members of the Legislature behind him. He thinks Dunning is very ambitious, and that he wd conspire against myself for the Leadership of the Liberal Party.⁹²

In the end King had little choice but to keep Gardiner in Saskatchewan. Dunning was presently the most suitable western politician to serve as regional lieutenant and Gardiner still had too many counts against him. He was a Motherwell man and too antagonistic toward the Progressives whom King needed to placate. Gardiner was disgruntled at having his ambitions checked but he quickly consolidated his new position. As premier he was determined to end any remnants of the federal-provincial breach commenced under Martin and at times fostered under Dunning. He would eventually go to Ottawa but in the meantime his new position would be used to aid the fortunes of Liberalism at all levels.⁹³ Vincent Massey reckoned that Dunning wanted to keep Gardiner in Saskatchewan. "This is selfishness on Dunning's part," King responded, "desire to get the stage for & credit to himself."⁹⁴ If Dunning faltered as the best choice for western lieutenant, King would have Gardiner waiting in the wings.

In contrast to the abundance of cabinet material in Saskatchewan, Alberta posed problems. As Dunning suspected,

⁹²King Diaries, January 31, 1926.

⁹³King Papers, reel 2288, volume 153, pp.111770-1, Gardiner to King, March 8, 1926; See Wardhaugh, "Region and Nation: The Politics of Jimmy Gardiner", (Fall, 1993).

⁹⁴King Diaries, January 2, 1926.

Brownlee replaced Greenfield as premier of the UFA government in November. Dunning had no desire to "knife" Stewart so the Alberta minister would remain the unsatisfactory representative. "My thought is get rid of Motherwell & Stewart," King wrote in November, "& have their places taken by men who have confidence of Progressives in West....Neither Stewart or Motherwell can ever organize West."⁹⁵ Like Motherwell, Stewart remained steadfastly opposed to a merging of the Progressive and Liberal forces or to the entrance of Progressive representation into the cabinet. Stewart was confident the Progressives would disappear in time and therefore should be offered no encouragement.⁹⁶ To their credit Motherwell and Stewart understood what King did not. All the Progressives were not crypto-Liberals to be handled with compromise and co-operation as in Manitoba. The three provinces had distinct brands of Progressivism that required distinct treatment. For the present King decided Alberta was to be "left to D.[unning] to do as he thinks best and he will set about finding the way."⁹⁷ The prime minister would make this same mistake repeatedly. He could not send an influential westerner who had won success in his own province into the other Prairie provinces and expect him to have equal

⁹⁵Ibid., November 10, 1925.

⁹⁶King Papers, reel 2280, volume 137, pp.102187-8, Mitchell to King, December 16, 1925.

⁹⁷Ibid., reel 2276, volume 131, pp.98530-5, Haydon to King, November 23, 1925.

success, or even a friendly welcome.

Manitoba also posed difficulties for cabinet representation. Bracken was not willing to come to Ottawa and King would gradually learn the premier was not the Liberal he assumed. Crerar was still too involved with his business affairs to re-enter politics. The Alberta Progressives would take exception to either Crerar or Forke entering the cabinet but both were prepared to do so in the future.⁹⁸ Forke was inadequate as a politician, however, and commanded little influence with his Progressive following. Dafoe's views of King were gradually changing and he was moderately impressed by the moves to provide the West with cabinet representation: "There is a good deal more readiness to listen to the West than formerly- Quebec has come off the high horse under the whip of necessity; and I have no doubt a united West could get terms worth-while in the event of a show-down."⁹⁹

King attempted to have the Progressives participate directly in the preparation of the Throne Speech but they were too divided. While Forke offered his support as long as the speech did not contain anything offensive, rumours persisted that cast doubt on his ability to deliver the support of the Alberta group. The prime minister collected suggestions from Haydon who had discussed the speech with Dunning and Dafoe on

⁹⁸Ibid., reel 2289, volume 154, pp.112575, A.B. Hudson to King, February 10, 1926.

⁹⁹Dafoe Papers, box 2, file 5, Dafoe to Forke, November 16, 1925.

his western trip. The section on tariff policy provoked little controversy and reductions were becoming a less persistent issue. No increases could be tolerated and reductions were desired, but not expected. Improving economic conditions had weakened the argument that the post-war depression had been caused by high tariffs and both Dafoe and Dunning now suggested a policy of tariff stability. King continued to see the tariff issue as central to maintaining Progressive support. If the Meighen Tories could be pressured into a high-tariff stance, it would be that much easier to convince the West of Liberal sympathy. A Tariff Advisory Board was again promised. In this way the tariff would remain a visible issue while much of its damaging political consequences would be removed. The board would offer suggestions to the government but the administration would be under no obligation to act upon them.

The support of the Alberta Progressives was essential and the speech promised generous availability of rural credits. The Hudson Bay Railway was to be completed "forthwith" and it was announced that the natural resources would be returned to Alberta. Now under pressure, King took action on the agreement which had sat moribund since 1924. The province was having financial difficulties and the return of the natural resources, which included mineral resources, would provide control over coal and oil deposits. Just before the opening of the session King agreed to the transfer and to refer to it

in the Speech. He was pleased with the effects: "Our policies as outlined in the speech from the Throne have evidently made a strong appeal to Western Canada. From now on we should continue to gain strength in that part of the Dominion."¹⁰⁰

But the position of the Progressives remained uncertain. Forke was willing to support or even join the administration to keep it in office and was agreeable to the suggestion that the Progressives sit on the government side of the House. The UFA members, on the other hand, were still concerned with asserting their independence of both major parties and using their strategic position to pressure the government in power. They insisted the Progressives sit on the opposition side. Once in Ottawa the Progressives asked King and Meighen for outlines of their legislative programs and drafted a letter referring to issues of special interest. They remained ambivalent in their support but Meighen's unwillingness to 'purchase' their votes pushed them toward the Liberal camp.

After surviving the first division in the House on Meighen's amendment to the Throne Speech, King moved to consolidate his position. He met with Forke and a delegation of his party, and suggested they name a committee to meet with the cabinet to agree on a plan of co-operation.¹⁰¹ The prime

¹⁰⁰King Papers, reel 2289, volume 156, pp.113308-13, King to Larkin, February 17, 1926.

¹⁰¹"We decided in Council we would seek open cooperation with Progressive Labor & Indept, who have given us support."

minister indicated he did not intend to carry on without an "assurance of cooperat'n & a plan that was open & above board."¹⁰² He was willing to have this co-operation recognized by agreeing to Forke's suggestion of having two Progressives come into the government. When King told Dafoe the Progressives would probably not come into the government, the Free Press editor answered that if they refused his paper would not give them much support. King was under no illusions. He did not expect the Progressives to enter the cabinet and was actually counting on their refusal. The cabinet was "not keen" on the idea but were prepared to follow their leader if the Progressives agreed. Either way King would emerge smelling of roses: "By having made the offer and having it declined we are in the best of positions."¹⁰³ Forke was willing but once again the Alberta Progressives refused to have any of their members enter the government.

At the beginning of the session Mackenzie King still had no seat. Some twenty Liberals had offered their constituencies but few of these suited his requirements.¹⁰⁴ Ideally, he was looking for a safe Prairie riding to strengthen Liberal fortunes in the region and considered

King Diaries, January 15, 1926.

¹⁰²Ibid., January 18, 1926.

¹⁰³Ibid., January 19, 1926.

¹⁰⁴King briefly pondered a seat in Quebec but knew he would be embarrassed in not being able to speak French. Ibid., January 11, 1926.

running in Long Lake Saskatchewan and Athabaska or Wetaskiwin, Alberta.¹⁰⁵ "The West having so long refused to come to King," Morton wrote, "King was at last going to the West."¹⁰⁶

The day after the first division in the House, the sitting member for Prince Albert resigned his seat to make way for the prime minister. The constituency lay in the Saskatchewan parkland on the edges of the western fertile belt. After the initial setback of the CPR choosing its southern rather than its northern route across the Prairies in 1881, Prince Albert had overcome these economic handicaps by becoming a major lumbering centre for the province. Fishing, trapping, farming, and ranching made up the area's list of industries.

The constituency seemed a perfect choice. "In deciding on P.A.," he wrote,

the safety of seat & possibility of acclmt'n were deciding factors, also that it was preferable not to run in Prov. of Quebec.- This, too, might help to unite East & West & with other 2 leaders in West wd better ensure our keeping our hold there.¹⁰⁷

The organization of the provincial Liberals in Saskatchewan was particularly impressive. "With an organization approaching this in other provinces," he commented, "we could sweep the country."¹⁰⁸ Gardiner had promised victory and was

¹⁰⁵Ibid., January 7-8, 1926.

¹⁰⁶Morton, p.247.

¹⁰⁷King Diaries, January 15, 1926.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., February 3, 1926.

allowed to put his organization to work in winning the riding.¹⁰⁹ The local Conservatives decided to abstain from entering the contest and the Progressive organization agreed to support the Liberal program. Some members of both parties refused, however, to abandon the field to the Liberals and a Tory farmer, D.L. Burgess, was nominated as an Independent. Mackenzie King won a resounding victory on February 15 with a vote of 7925 to 2299:¹¹⁰ "In the twenty-five years during which I have had more or less intimate association with the politics of our Dominion I recall nothing so splendid as the effectiveness of the organization in Saskatchewan."¹¹¹ He viewed the victory as one more step in winning the Prairies. "Undoubtedly your candidature there is good strategy," one westerner wrote, "for it will unquestionably get the three Western Provinces...in closer touch with you."¹¹² The prime minister had long pondered a constituency in the province and it suited his Prairie sympathies. The seat in Saskatchewan along with the strong western representation in the cabinet allowed him to feel he was forming a close bond with the region and becoming a 'spiritual' westerner. "I need not say

¹⁰⁹Neatby, p.113.

¹¹⁰G.W.D. Abrams, Prince Albert: The First Century, 1866-1966, pp.268-9.

¹¹¹King Papers, reel 2288, volume 152, pp.111164-5, King to Dunning, February 16, 1926.

¹¹²Ibid., reel 2285, volume 147, pp.108202-3, P.M. Anderson to King, January 22, 1926.

how delighted I am to now enjoy the more intimate contact with Western Canada....," he wrote Dunning. "Your coming to Ottawa will be another close bond, and I really believe that working together we should be able to accomplish a great deal for the Canadian West, and Saskatchewan in particular."¹¹³ He was immensely proud to hold the same seat held by Laurier¹¹⁴ and believed it was a symbolic step in continuing Laurier's work in developing the region.¹¹⁵

In his victory speech to the constituency King spoke of "Quebec & Saskatchewan being as the supporting structure, of a great bridge making for unity in the Dominion."¹¹⁶ He met with a Mennonite minister who

said his people voted for me not only for political reasons but because they 'loved' me for what I had done for them. It was a very beautiful beginning in my new relationship- I should like above all else to be of real service to these pioneers of Western Canada....This majority will have real results. The majority so large speaks of strength of Liberalism in the West, of what united forces of Liberals and Progressives can achieve.¹¹⁷

The magnitude of the victory along with the fact that Charles McDonald, the former member for the constituency, had

¹¹³Ibid., reel 2288, volume 152, pp.111164-5, King to Dunning, February 16, 1926.

¹¹⁴Laurier had been elected for the district of Saskatchewan which included Prince Albert in 1896.

¹¹⁵Ibid., volume 153, pp.111764-5, King to Gardiner, February 16, 1926.

¹¹⁶King Diaries, February 15, 1926.

¹¹⁷Ibid., February 16, 1926.

surrendered the seat without asking anything in return, caused King to wax romantic about the Prairie populace. McDonald had shown himself to be a "knight errant full of good cheer, delighted with shewing...happier than if the conquest had been made by himself."¹¹⁸ At a dinner of the Saskatchewan members given in honour of McDonald and Darke (who had given up his seat for Dunning), King felt a previously unknown sense of belonging: "Spoke of what Macdonald's[sic] & Darke's part wd mean in the light of history, of the place being given Saskatchewan in Dominion affairs." He described the members as

a fine lot of men, with high ideals & noble purpose, very different to the selfish easterners...the consequence of their having learned the spirit of sacrifice & service in helping each other in earlier days, being thankful because their hearts had learned the secret of happiness.¹¹⁹

The prime minister may have had ulterior motives, cloaked in self-deception, for representing P.A. but the constituency also had motives of its own. T.C. Davis, the local Liberal member, immediately informed King of the riding's "shopping list" including rail connections, road construction, and a national park.¹²⁰ By May King was attempting to use his influence to reap rewards for his new constituency. A

¹¹⁸Ibid., February 20, 1926.

¹¹⁹Ibid., February 22, 1926.

¹²⁰W.A. Waiser, Saskatchewan's Playground: A History of Prince Albert National Park, p.26.

national park had been proposed for the Prince Albert area in 1921 and the prime minister was determined it would now be delivered. He announced his desire to establish the park at a cabinet meeting on May 12: "If I can bring this about and I will- that will be a real achievement for Saskatchewan & particularly Prince Albert, a fine memorial for years to come."¹²¹ The official word was sent to Davis ten days later.¹²²

Back in Parliament Meighen again attempted to defeat the government by proposing an amendment regretting that the policy of protection had not been adopted to increase employment in Canada and benefit farmers and other primary producers. In the division on February 1 even the Progressives who had voted for Meighen's first amendment voted against the second.

King's troubles, however, were multiplying. H.H. Stevens' attack on the administration of the customs department put the government immediately on the defensive. The corruption and smuggling that had come to characterize the department had not been cleaned up with the banishment of Jacques Bureau to the Senate. Despite King's urgings, the new minister George Boivin, had done little to improve the situation. The Progressives were about to be placed in a situation of having to decide whether to support a more

¹²¹King Diaries, May 12, 1926.

¹²²Ibid., p.28.

favourable government in the face of the Customs Scandal, or to condemn government corruption and defeat the Liberals, thereby allowing the Tories to form an administration. When the House adjourned on February 5, the Progressives supported the government pledge to investigate the charges. That same day King and a Liberal committee met with the Progressives. The prime minister was "delighted to see the closeness of the relationship." He believed the perilous situation had brought both groups "to a consciousness of our nearness to defeat in the face of a common enemy."¹²³

The budget of 1926 received western applause but its benefits were credited to the vulnerable position of the King government. The administration was winning increasing western support but the fear of the Tories gaining office was the most influential incentive. If western Liberals wished to avoid the fall of the government and the handing over of power to the Meighen Tories, they had little choice but to advocate the path of least resistance. This reasoning was altering western opinion toward the King government. As Crerar so aptly put it, "a Tory party in power in Ottawa would mean a discontented West."¹²⁴ The former Progressive leader found himself defending his apparent reversal of opinion. "The thing that comes into my mind is 'What is the alternative?' he wrote

¹²³Ibid., February 6, 1926.

¹²⁴Crerar Papers, series III, box 97, Crerar to Cameron, February 26, 1926.

Cameron. "Every place I went I found the people very much impressed with the Budget," T.A. Burrows wrote in search of justifications. "You have certainly struck the popular idea as far as the West is concerned." Crerar echoed the same sentiment: "The Budget presented yesterday, viewed as a whole, is an excellent one and I am sure will produce a very excellent effect on opinion in the country. I wish to sincerely congratulate yourself and the Government upon it."¹²⁵ A.M. McLeod described it as "the best we have had since 1897. It is not only good statesmanship but good politics and it faces the rising sun of liberalism."¹²⁶ The fear of Meighen was certainly stampeding the Manitobans into the King camp.

The reaction in Alberta was not so positive. Once again the province was forced to await the promised transfer of its natural resources. This time the issue was used to challenge the King government. The transfer agreement had been announced and the legislation drafted, but the Autonomy Acts of 1905 had included certain guarantees for separate schools. The resources to be transferred would include lands set aside to finance schools in the province. Both governments hoped to leave religious sensitivities undisturbed by not drawing attention to this aspect of the agreement. When Lapointe

¹²⁵King Papers, reel 2286, volume 149, pp.109487-91, T.A. Burrows to King, May 29, 1926; reel 2287, volume 151, pp.110566-8, Crerar to King, April 16, 1926.

¹²⁶Ibid., reel 2291, volume 158, pp.114591-2, A.M. McLeod to King, April 24, 1926.

decided it would have to include a statement that the separate schools would continue to be administered in accordance with the original federal act, Brownlee at first agreed, but then changed his mind. To avoid the old school issue reappearing, King had to have the original guarantee for separate schools put to the courts.

In mid-June the resource issue served as the first threat to Liberal-Progressive co-operation. A western Conservative proposed the motion that the government had lost the confidence of the House by its failure to transfer the natural resources to Alberta. The Alberta Progressives tried to persuade King to introduce the legislation without waiting for the decision of the courts but he refused on the inevitable opposition of the French Canadians. When it came time to vote he threatened that if he did not receive the support of the House, he would ask for a dissolution and an immediate election. The Alberta Progressives had given their support to the Saskatchewan members on the Hudson Bay Railway so King was worried the "free lances" would return the favour on the Alberta resources issue. The government carried the division by five votes. "The Progressives certainly did nobly and saved the day for us," King wrote. "We have made a slip over the resources matter & justly open to criticism."¹²⁷

The next day, on June 16, it seemed possible that the Senate would defeat a Grain Act amendment and a Farm Loans

¹²⁷King Diaries, June 15, 1926.

bill, but far more serious was the fact that on this day the Special Committee on the department of customs and excise finally completed its long-awaited report. The department was riddled with corruption and what was worse, members of the government had known of the situation but done nothing. Jacques Bureau was the main target and the Tories attempted to loosen the already tenuous support of the Progressives. King could argue he had already replaced Bureau with Boivin, so the efforts of Stevens and the Conservatives became centred on exposing the faults of the present minister.

The fate of the government depended on the Progressive, D.M. Kennedy, who was a member of the reporting committee. If he supported the motion that included a censure of Boivin, the official Parliamentary report would censure a member of the government. King used the very real threat of an election and a probable Conservative victory in coercing the Progressives to pressure Kennedy not to support the motion. Kennedy voted against and defeated the motion, but then introduced a motion of his own which described Boivin's conduct as "unjustifiable". This was almost as damaging for the King government. Kennedy's motion also criticized four members of Parliament, one of whom was a Conservative. After considerable negotiation with Progressive members, King managed to have the motion defeated.

As the time approached for a vote on the final report King found the French-Canadian Liberals ready to defend Bureau

and Boivin, even if it meant calling an election. "Much was said of not sacrificing Boivin & there was a 'damning' of Progressives and Kennedy in particular."¹²⁸ In cabinet King argued that the government would have to concur in the report of the Customs Committee because any attempt at rejection would drive the Progressives into opposition and defeat the government. The French Canadians were reluctant. "All this," King commented

because of its reflection on Bureau. The Fr. Can. wd do anything for one of their number. This mentality on these matters is wholly diff't from the Anglo Saxon. There is something fine in its chivalrous side, but from the point of view of morality it is open to question.¹²⁹

King blamed Bureau for the predicament of the government and thought he might have to resign from the Senate. The prime minister was perceptive enough to understand Parliament was "determined to have a scapegoat"¹³⁰ and was willing to placate it by providing an offering. The Progressives "all professed their desire not to see the Govt. defeated, but need of some action being taken to 'save their faces'."¹³¹

On June 22, the Chairman of the Special Committee on Customs reported officially to the House. After considerable debate, a Conservative-backed amendment was moved by a

¹²⁸Ibid., June 18, 1926.

¹²⁹Ibid., June 19, 1926.

¹³⁰Ibid., June 21, 1926.

¹³¹Ibid., June 18, 1926.

Progressive to have Steven's criticism of the government combined with Woodsworth's recommendation of a judicial inquiry. The result of such a vote would once again censure the government. The debate ended prematurely when King was able to get an adjournment to consider tactics. He believed he would be given a dissolution and an election, but was shocked when he went to the Governor-General and learned that Byng would not comply. The Governor-General had thought it improper for King to hold on to power in 1925 when the Conservatives held more seats. He now believed that Meighen had at least earned the chance, and had the constitutional right, to form a ministry.

On June 28 King resigned to avoid censure and a stunned Meighen was invited to form a government. The difficulty for Meighen was that if any of his members accepted a portfolio in the new government which involved accepting a minister's salary, he would automatically have to vacate his seat and contest a by-election before returning to the House. Meighen himself, by becoming prime minister, had to vacate his seat. If he named his ministers, the government would be deprived of its best debaters and, equally important, deprived of votes needed to maintain the government. He avoided this by the unusual expedient of not assigning any portfolios. Seven ministers without portfolio were appointed to serve as acting heads of the government departments. These men would not receive a minister's salary and so would not have to resign

their seats and contest by-elections.

King found unexpected success when attacking Meighen's 'shadow cabinet'. When the vote came on a motion of non-confidence by Robb, it was carried by one vote. The Conservative administration collapsed and Prime Minister Meighen asked for a dissolution and received it, thereby setting the stage for the Liberals to campaign on the 'Constitutional Issue'.

Mackenzie King did his utmost to make the Constitutional Question the central issue of the election. Boivin's death during the campaign weakened the Tory assault against the Liberals and the Customs Scandal. Western Canada showed no great interest in either the Constitutional Issue or the Customs Scandal. The tariff, freight rates, and the Hudson Bay Railway still dominated the hustings; but with the very real threat of a Conservative victory, the Prairies were a much more hospitable environment for the Liberals. "All agree," King recorded, "that outlook in West is entirely different from what it has been for many years past."¹³² The Progressive party had been weakened by the session and only the most loyal and dedicated followers would stick to their guns. The crypto-Liberals would return to the fold.

In Manitoba the Conservatives had elected seven members in 1925. This time Liberals and Progressives co-operated to defeat Conservative candidates. J.W. Dafoe was crucial to the

¹³²Ibid., August 3, 1926.

alliance and his public editorials and private influence set the pattern. The fear of a Conservative victory prompted him to action.¹³³ Liberals were relieved to see Dafoe and his paper finally on side: "I might say that the Winnipeg[sic] Free Press is the strongest political factor in Western Canada...[it] is looked upon as the great Tribune of the western people."¹³⁴ Political differences and personal animosities were suppressed. No constituency in Manitoba nominated rival Liberal and Progressive candidates and in six constituencies the Liberal and Progressive associations nominated a joint candidate. Robert Forke, who had resigned as leader of the Progressives after the party had split over the customs committee report, was one of these. In the event of a majority victory, however, the prime minister was warned not to ignore the Progressive element. Hudson advised King to take Forke into the cabinet.

Mackenzie King was delighted by the co-operation in Manitoba. It seemed the culmination of all his efforts to rebuild the Liberal party, not only in the province, but in the West. He found "a great change from 1925 & still greater from 1921. I take much pride in the fact that the party is as

¹³³"I may say that I have been able to understand and to some extent sympathize with the insurgent Progressives. Like them I have only been able to bring myself to give the Government a hand by contemplating the probabilities of the Conservatives coming into power." Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 5, Dafoe to Sifton, February 19, 1926.

¹³⁴King Papers, reel 2286, volume 149, pp.109487-91, T.A. Burrows to King, May 29, 1926.

united as it is today, the Progressives Labour & Liberal groups working together as they are."¹³⁵ Manitoba Liberalism had suffered from the split of 1917 and the Progressive surge of 1921. The King government had been unable to bridge the gulfs and the election of 1925 had been the first contest in which Liberal candidates had reappeared in many constituencies. The reorganization process was slow but was becoming effective by 1926. Crerar noted:

The Liberal campaign has been infinitely better handled all around than it was a year ago; that is certainly true of Manitoba for there could not have been fuller cooperation between Progressives and Liberals than has existed in this fight. As you know, I have always believed that Western Canada, especially the prairie provinces, could be made a stronghold for Liberalism for the next twenty-five years and I think that very substantial progress in this direction has been made in this campaign.¹³⁶

But King was deceiving himself if he believed Manitoba was a model of western sentiment.

There was one particular note of dissatisfaction in the province. Manitoba Liberals were growing tired of hearing the federal party praise the wonderful state of the organization in Saskatchewan. After finally winning in 1926, the last thing they were going to swallow was Saskatchewan receiving credit for the Manitoba success. "There appears to be some heartburning here over the apparent tendency at Ottawa to treat Manitoba as the 'little brother' of Saskatchewan,"

¹³⁵King Diaries, August 18, 1926.

¹³⁶King Papers, reel 2287, volume 151, pp.110574-6, Crerar to King, September 14, 1926.

Hudson wrote. Manitoba had a stronger Progressive and Tory base with which to contend. The province had not been "placed under the direction" of neighbouring Liberals. Organizers had spoken with those from the neighbouring province but it was found that nothing could be done other than having Dunning and Gardiner make some speeches. Any outside interference in the present or future, Manitoba Liberals argued, would only disrupt the unity that had finally developed.¹³⁷ They also suspected that King was already moving to replace Dunning with Gardiner as his western lieutenant. They believed the latter was "carrying on a knifing campaign against Dunning, both at Ottawa and in Regina" and "he is encouraged in this attitude by King, who is apparently also jealous of his new lieutenant."¹³⁸

In Saskatchewan the ever-partisan Gardiner continued his battle to defeat all non-Liberals. King tried to convince the premier to avoid fighting the Progressives but Gardiner could justify his stance by pointing to his record in electing both federal and provincial Liberals. In addition King was painfully aware that while only six Progressives had been elected in Saskatchewan in 1925, three of these had supported the Conservatives during the session. He was, however,

¹³⁷Ibid., reel 2289, volume 154, pp.112366-7, Hamilton to King, September 22, 1926; pp.112622, Hudson to King, September 20, 1926.

¹³⁸Dafoe Papers, box 4, file 5, Dafoe to Sifton, October 26, 1926.

overjoyed with his own constituency. "These are real people," he wrote while campaigning in P.A., "& it is a joy to work for them. They are the makers of Canada & I have tried to have them realize this and that they are writing Canadian history."¹³⁹ King gave a speech in Prince Albert on August 5 in which he denounced Meighen as a dictator. He then departed on a national tour and "left the local Liberals to manage the rest of the Prince Albert campaign." J.G. Diefenbaker was nominated as the Conservative candidate and attacked Liberal corruption throughout the campaign, as well as the Liberal failure to complete the Hudson Bay Railway.¹⁴⁰

Alberta remained the black spot. The provincial election that summer had aggravated the differences between the Liberals and Progressives. When C.R. Mitchell resigned as leader of the provincial Liberals to be replaced by J.T. Shaw, the party moved to heal the wounds that divided the two groups. The Liberals hoped the precedent of co-operation set in the federal house would allow a closer association. Premier Brownlee discouraged any such rapport, leaving the Liberals to suspect that the UFA favoured the Tories and was out to destroy Liberalism in Alberta.¹⁴¹ "Brownlee pretends to be liberal in his leanings and friendly to you and the Liberal

¹³⁹King Diaries, August 6, 1926.

¹⁴⁰Abrams, p.270.

¹⁴¹King Papers, reel 2287, volume 151, pp.110718-9, W.M. Davidson to King, April 28, 1926.

Party," one Albertan wrote King. "He is the most unblushing hypocrite in political life to-day in Canada."¹⁴²

The doctrinaire attitude of the Alberta Progressives made co-operation unlikely. They went so far as to sever their connection with the federal Progressive caucus during the campaign. Charles Stewart had no influence with the UFA candidates and little control over the Liberal organization. "My first impression of the talk with him was a sort of helplessness on his part in the whole situation," King noted, "...It is clear Mr. Stewart is not equal to the task of organization. He has not [a] grip on the Province."¹⁴³

The UFA nominated candidates in all of the twelve rural constituencies and Liberals were nominated in only five. King was constantly being informed the Alberta Progressives were either radical or conservative in nature, but by no means Liberal. This opinion contradicted his belief that the Prairie West was a liberal region, but he refused to accept that the situation was anything more than a result of lack of organization and leadership: "It is tragic to see a great province like Alberta go by the boards for lack of leadership. It is really solidly liberal in the true sense of the word."¹⁴⁴ He had little choice but to continue working towards gaining

¹⁴²Ibid., reel 2293, volume 163, pp.118326-8, G.P. Smith to King, April 19, 1926.

¹⁴³King Diaries, August 10, 1926.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., August 16, 1926.

the province's support to hold his government in office. At the very least he had to prevent the UFA from becoming allies of the Federal Tories.

Liberal hopes centred on Ontario and King spent more than two weeks in the province. He would have extended his time here by omitting Alberta and British Columbia from his itinerary but he was persuaded to visit all the provinces. People seemed less absorbed with the tariff issue than in previous campaigns and overall he noted a much improved situation in the West.

On election day the Liberals won 116 seats, a gain of 15 over the year before but still theoretically short of a majority in the House. The Conservatives elected 91 members. The 10 Liberal-Progressives, however, were Liberal in all but name, and King could rely on the support of the 2 Independents and the 3 Labour members, as well as the 12 Progressives. Even the 11 UFA candidates were not unfriendly. In Manitoba the Liberals added 3 seats and the Liberal-Progressives 7 for an increase of 10; not one of the 7 Conservatives was re-elected. Saskatchewan returned one more Liberal and one Liberal-Progressive. King defeated Diefenbaker by only 131 votes in the city of Prince Albert but by a total of 8933 to 4838 in the overall riding.¹⁴⁵ In Alberta the Liberals lost 2 rural constituencies to the UFA but both a Liberal and a Labour candidate won urban seats from the Tories. "The angels

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p.270.

are certainly on the side of Willie King," Dafoe remarked.

He has a finer opportunity now than he had in 1921, and I hope he will be equal to it. I am beginning to think that probably he will measure up to his opportunities this time. It was certainly a Mr. King that I knew nothing about who has been performing in the last two months.¹⁴⁶

In explaining their victory to King the jubilant Manitobans paid little attention to the Constitutional Issue. According to A.B. Hudson, the work of the Free Press was the most important single factor in achieving complete success, followed closely by the harmony between the Liberals and Progressives:

the issues in the campaign in Manitoba in the end came down to the Crows Nest Pass rates, the Hudson's[sic] Bay Railway and the low tariff. Probably the freight rate question influenced more votes than anything else. The Customs Scandal did not seem to have much influence.¹⁴⁷

The near reality of facing a Tory government brought an unending flow of praise for King. His speeches in the West were seen to have made a much better impression and his campaign had been "vigorous and dignified". All agreed he emerged from the fight much stronger than when he entered.¹⁴⁸ "Personally," Crerar announced, "I think that the Liberal party today is closer to the standard of real

¹⁴⁶Dafoe Papers, box 5, file 5, Dafoe to John Willison, September 17, 1926.

¹⁴⁷King Papers, reel 2289, volume 154, pp.112619-21, Hudson to King, September 18, 1926.

¹⁴⁸Crerar Papers, series II, box 80, Crerar to A.K. Cameron, September 2, 1926; Crerar to Dunning, September 15, 1926.

Liberalism...than it has been at any time in fifty years."¹⁴⁹

King strengthened his cabinet before the end of the year but as usual had to be satisfied with a less drastic reconstruction than originally intended. The only change in the representation from the Prairie West was the inclusion of Robert Forke from Manitoba as minister of immigration and colonization. Dunning advised the prime minister to consider additional representation for Manitoba but King did not see this as possible. He met with Forke on September 20 to offer the portfolio of immigration and colonization and ensure that he could bring the support of the Liberal-Progressives of Manitoba.

The prime minister felt that because the province was receiving only one portfolio, and it was going to the leader of the Farmers' party, it should probably be agriculture. He had also heard that Forke privately preferred this department. "If the matter is pressed forward I shall probably have to ask Motherwell to take another Department," King admitted. Dunning was suggesting Gardiner be brought to Ottawa in Motherwell's place but it was decided that the change would be made at a later date. The elderly Motherwell was being kept on "out of a desire to further Gardiner's wishes." When King informed him that Motherwell would possibly have to take another portfolio so Forke could have agriculture, the Saskatchewan Premier's ingrained hatred of the Progressives

¹⁴⁹Ibid., Crerar to J.C. Lewis, August 4, 1926.

surfaced. He demonstrated his disfavour of bowing to a Progressive and pushed King to have Forke accept either immigration or the interior. Gardiner was gradually replacing Dunning as the western lieutenant and King was now describing him as "the ablest and best of all the men in the West." At present, however, it remained the best strategy to keep the feuding Dunning and Gardiner in separate spheres so they could move in their own "orbits".¹⁵⁰ King knew Stewart from Alberta was inadequate but saw no alternative.

The doubts about Mackenzie King's leadership had quickly faded. "King is now strongly entrenched," Crerar noted.¹⁵¹ If the sceptical Dafoe was in any way representative of Prairie sentiment, the prime minister had finally succeeded in winning the cautious support of the region. "My regard for King has gone up a good deal since July 1st," the Free Press editor wrote.

The way he handled himself in the House and the admirable campaign which he has carried on suggest to me that there is more to him than I have been inclined to think there was. He certainly now has a magnificent opportunity and if he fumbles it his blood be on his head.¹⁵²

By 1926 there could be little doubt that Mackenzie King had achieved considerable success in winning the Prairie West.

¹⁵⁰King Diaries, September 20-October 4, 1926.

¹⁵¹Crerar Papers, series II, box 80, Crerar to Cameron, September 15, 1926.

¹⁵²Dafoe Papers, box 2, file 8, Dafoe to W.D. Gregory, September 17, 1926.

The agrarian revolt had largely run its course and its political manifestation had all but disintegrated. Most of the original Liberals within the Progressive movement were back on side, whether it was due to King's strategy, the failure of the third party, or the fear of the Conservatives. Yet the region was demonstrating it was not a homogeneous unit. Saskatchewan remained the bastion of Liberal strength while Manitoba's apparent unity disguised deeply entrenched divisions. Liberal hopes remained fixed on the eventual return of 'radical' Alberta but the signs were bleak.

The Prairie West had played a central role in the political life of the nation that went back to the golden days of Laurier. As early as World War One this position was being diminished as economic and geo-political factors shifted the emphasis back to central Canada. Increasingly, the West found itself pressed to maintain its influence. With the disintegration of the Progressive reaction and the weakening of the agrarian revolt, the region was reluctantly returning to the traditional parties. While the revolt was strong and the West held the balance of power, the region was assured the attention of these parties. After 1926, however, it would no longer hold this advantage and it now became a question as to how much its role and influence in the nation would diminish.

MACKENZIE KING AND THE PRAIRIE WEST

BY

32

Robert Alexander Wardhaugh

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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CHAPTER FIVE
LEAVING THE PLOUGH IN THE FURROW, 1927-30

I felt a good deal of exasperation over King's performance in leaving the plough in the furrow, when there was a great need for it to be ploughed through to the end, and going off on a political adventure.

-J.W. Dafoe to D.A. McArthur, October 7, 1930.

By 1927 the agrarian revolt seemed to have run its course and the West seemed to be securely in place, back where it belonged in the Liberal party. The crucial tests to Mackenzie King's leadership and to his very political survival had passed. In the process he had been forced to rely heavily on western support and had profited from the decline of the Progressives. This emphasis on neutralizing the Progressives was not at an end in 1926 but rather shifted from the federal to the provincial realm, and in particular to Manitoba. King believed that the province was the crucial theatre in the war against Progressivism and essential in returning the region to the two party system. This emphasis also guaranteed that his government would continue to pay attention to the West and its concerns. The onset of economic prosperity would further enhance Liberal fortunes in the region and ensure that western issues were dealt with.

But despite recent successes in the region, the West was not yet firmly in Liberal control. The crypto-Liberals had retreated to the safety of the King government when a Conservative administration threatened and they would continue

to do so with the approach of the 1930 election, but the durability of western support was problematic. What King and other easterners failed to recognize was that Prairie faith in the traditional parties had not returned and never would. If times proved difficult, there was no guarantee the region's support would not again go elsewhere and his dream of a Liberal West would once again be placed in jeopardy.

King's career had demonstrated the naivety of his Prairie perceptions and even his own personal experience made it clear that while he had ample sympathy for rural life, he had no real knowledge of farming pursuits. The prime minister had developed a series of properties at Kingsmere in the Gatineau which he used as a retreat from Ottawa. "In 1927," Neatby sarcastically notes, "he still maintained the illusion that Kingsmere was a farm." An attempt to raise sheep quickly turned to failure and he was "perturbed" to learn the difficulties and challenges attached to livestock farming. The 'farm' was assailed by threats of fire, prowling dogs, livestock diseases, and fencing and grazing problems. By the end of March he had become doubtful about continuing with livestock and thought it better to confine himself to gardening.¹ "The farm has been a mistake, a costly experiment," he wrote in November, "with more worry than pleasure & undue publicity."² The "lovely pastoral scene" of

¹King Diaries, March 31, 1928.

²Ibid., November 4, 1928.

his grazing flock had to be abandoned and "the gentleman farmer gave way to the country squire."³

By 1927 Mackenzie King was no longer a political novice. He carried himself with the air of an experienced parliamentarian, "even amid the complexities of freight rates or tariffs." Most importantly, "within his Cabinet he spoke with authority," and for the first time he commanded a stable majority in the House.⁴ There seemed to be no major difficulties ahead, at least relative to what had already been faced. The Liberal party was united and securely in office.

The nation also seemed prosperous. The post-war recession had finally ended and each successive year was offering increased national production and income. King's government had kept its expenditures to a minimum and reduced tariffs and taxes. The policies of fiscal restraint and balanced budgets were working and there seemed no reason to alter them. "It is the most prosperous period of our history as a country," King recorded. "Even the 'golden' era of Sir Wilfrid's day...is not to be compared with the present for prosperity."⁵

The Prairie West would never again see the golden years of Laurier but after 1924 rising wheat prices did at least

³Ibid., April 29, 1927; Neatby, p.200.

⁴Neatby, p.196.

⁵King Diaries, July 28, 1928; see also George F. Henderson, "Mackenzie King the Farmer", Up the Gatineau, (volume 20, 1994), pp.15-21.

give reason for optimism. Many farmers became caught up in the frenzied period of speculation and borrowed from the banks to expand their operations. The West reaped the rewards of this prosperity in the attention finally given to the Hudson Bay Railway. Impressive yearly finances were voted to the project by the House and the line was extended to the newly-constructed Fort Churchill terminal.

The budget was brought down in February of 1927 and passed with little opposition. The usual controversy over the tariff was avoided by postponing any changes until the Tariff Advisory Board had conducted its investigations. Income and Sales taxes were reduced and other minor taxes were either reduced or eliminated.

The appointment and report of the Duncan Commission also reflected the prosperous times and received careful scrutiny from the West. In studying Maritime grievances the commission pointed to the inequalities of Confederation and recommended the federal government subsidize the less prosperous areas of the nation. Maritime subsidies were to be increased by more than one and a half million dollars and freight rates were to be reduced by 20 per cent with Ottawa carrying the weight of the railway losses. The commission's report naturally spurred a response from the Prairies. If Maritime grievances were to be treated so sympathetically, and times were so good, it seemed only proper that Ottawa should also settle long-standing Prairie complaints.

By 1927 Prince Albert, and Saskatchewan in general, was sharing these economic benefits along with the advantages of having the prime minister as their member of parliament. Despite some delays, plans for a national park in the constituency were proceeding, and King's influence served to speed the process along and ensure success.⁶ On March 24 the park was established by order-in-council. King knew that such a project would bode well for the party and his own fortunes in the province and region. "The Park is going to be a grand thing for Prince Albert;" Davis wrote King,

but, the benefits to be derived therefrom are going to be of greater benefit to the Province as a whole than to Prince Albert alone. It is going to preserve in perpetuity a great playground for the people of Saskatchewan....The people of Prince Albert and the people of Saskatchewan as a whole, will bear an eternal debt of gratitude to you for the great interest that you have taken in this Park.⁷

Charles Stewart, the minister of the interior, had the proposed park superintendent visit King at Kingsmere to receive the prime minister's 'blessing'. The appointment of James A. Wood was agreed to and with Davis' advice King began to distribute park patronage.⁸

The construction of the Shellbrook-Turtleford branch line was seen as one more example of what the prime minister could

⁶For a full discussion, see Waiser, pp.25-30.

⁷King Papers, reel 2295, volume 167, pp.121019-22, T.C. Davis to King, June 17, 1927.

⁸Waiser, p.31.

offer the constituency. There had been talk of an eastern line to Hafford instead, which would link the area to Saskatoon but the people had long been pushing for the western line to open up transportation into the area and connect it with the city of Prince Albert. It would also serve as a connection to the Edmonton line and an adjunct for the Hudson Bay railway.⁹ "I venture to say," King wrote, "that there will be difficulty in discovering any constituency in Canada which from the point of view of public works, has received as much in a little space of time as Prince Albert. This, of course, is as it should be."¹⁰ He was confident he was doing his best for the constituency and the region at large, and expected western gratitude.

The Liberals were not alone in attempting to catch the eye of the western voter. In October, 1927 the Tories chose a new leader in Winnipeg at their first leadership convention. Not only was the convention held on the Prairies in an attempt to revive party fortunes, but the new leader, R.B. Bennett, "had the advantage of being a westerner." He had been the only Conservative elected on the Prairies in 1926 and "was the only hope for restoring the fortunes of the party in a region where it seemed almost bankrupt."¹¹ Western Liberals viewed

⁹King Papers, reel 2296, volume 168, pp.121580-1, H.J. Fraser to Moyer, February 26, 1927.

¹⁰Ibid., reel 2298, volume 171, pp.123580-4, King to Macdonald, June 11, 1927.

¹¹Neatby, p.231.

the selection of the millionaire protectionist as a gift-horse and a guarantee that Conservative hopes would remain unfulfilled: "King surely must have horseshoes and rabbits' feet hanging all round his person," Crerar remarked.¹² King dismissed any notion that Bennett could gain western support or even that he was a westerner. He was transplanted from New Brunswick and would fail to gain support from a liberal region. Of course the prime minister rejected any notion that he was equally if not more unqualified to call himself a western representative.

When King looked West, his attention focused on Manitoba.

Western success at the federal level, as the election of 1926 had demonstrated, resulted from a union of Liberal and Progressive elements in that province. Now securely in power, the prime minister continued his efforts to promote fusion at the provincial level and ensure long-term Liberal support. This meant dealing with the Progressive government of John Bracken.

The provincial Liberal party was still dominated by the Diehard faction who remained opposed to the federal Liberal-Progressive coalition. The Free Press Liberals were pushing for a similar coalition at the provincial level. Serious discussions with Bracken were initiated in March of 1926 through Ralph Maybank, president of the Manitoba Federation of

¹²Crerar Papers, Series III, box 97, Crerar to Cameron, October 12, 1927.

Young Liberal Clubs. Bracken believed he might lose the Tory support within his party and was searching for a new coalition. He considered asking prominent Liberal Judge H.A. Robson to enter the government as Attorney General and possibly even discussed the matter with him, but nothing definite materialized.¹³ The Diehards refused to accept the concept of coalition and saw it as a sure way of having the Liberals absorbed and controlled by the Progressive group. At a convention of provincial Liberals in November, the course to be taken with reference to the Progressives "caused a very sharp difference of opinion."¹⁴

From Saskatchewan, Premier Gardiner continued to side with the Manitoba Diehards. He used his influence to have Robson selected as the new leader of the Liberal party in March¹⁵ and immediately set about convincing him that "there is only one way to eliminate the Progressives, and that is by defeating them....Bracken is traditionally a Tory and not a

¹³John Kendle, John Bracken: A Political Biography, pp.63-4; Crerar Papers, series II, box 80, Crerar to Cameron, July 4, 1927.

¹⁴King Papers, reel 2298, volume 172, p.123861, R.F. McWilliams to King, January 14, 1927.

¹⁵Ibid., reel 2296, volume 168, pp.121702-3, Gardiner to King, April 11, 1927. According to Kendle, Robson's name was put forward for the leadership just fifteen minutes before nominations closed. The Liberals favouring coalition believed Robson also desired fusion and he swept the floor. Kendle, p.64.

Liberal."¹⁶ The reaction of the Free Press group was initially favourable to Robson but this quickly changed.¹⁷ The new Liberal leader issued a statement to the press indicating his party was "entirely free from alliances" and that both class and group government were unacceptable in Manitoba.¹⁸ He immediately began complaining to King that the federal party remained too friendly with the Progressives: "I do not like the way our Dominion members fraternize with the members of the Manitoba Farmer Government."¹⁹

Gardiner recognized the influence that Crerar and the Free Press Liberals were wielding in Ottawa and that they had the sympathetic ear of the prime minister. "It is too big a price to pay for the friendly attitude of the Free Press,"²⁰ he argued. If the party was going to "lower the banner of Liberalism in the West," it would be in opposition for the next generation. Gardiner mistakenly believed that the Progressive party was no stronger in Manitoba than it was in Saskatchewan and that it could be beaten with the same

¹⁶Gardiner Papers, reel 5, pp.8312-3, Gardiner to Robson, September 21, 1927; Gardiner was aware that Bracken came from a Tory family and this augmented his belief that most Progressives were disguised Conservatives.

¹⁷Kendle, p.65.

¹⁸As quoted in Kendle, p.65.

¹⁹King Papers, reel 2299, volume 174, pp. 125555-7, Robson to King, April 23, 1927.

²⁰Gardiner Papers, reel 5, pp.7719-21, Gardiner to Motherwell, April 10, 1926?.

uncompromising tactics. Progressives existed because the Liberal party lacked leadership: "This country from one end to the other...is absolutely tired of anything that savours of coalition or compromise."²¹ The Saskatchewan premier used the weak-willed Robson to interfere in the Manitoba situation and create obstacles to the proposed fusion. Three days after the leadership convention Robson wrote to his mentor: "I do not want the slightest slip in our connection....We understand each other and know the situation...please don't hesitate to do or suggest anything you see fit and don't wait for us."²²

The Manitoba provincial election of the following summer only exacerbated difficulties. Robert Forke was warning King that the antagonistic activities of the Liberals would have an unfortunate effect on the Dominion situation because the Diehards were "more anxious to defeat Bracken than to defeat Conservative Candidates."²³ Crerar agreed: "I think that Gardiner is giving evil counsel to Robson and his friends."²⁴

Even when the division between the Diehard and Free Press groups resulted in the Conservatives gaining seats in the provincial election, the former were still prepared to defend

²¹Ibid., pp.7765-8, Gardiner to Stewart, March 17, 1926.

²²As quoted in Gordon Unger, "James G. Gardiner: The Premier as a Pragmatic Politician, 1926-1929", (M.A. Dissertation, University of Saskatchewan, 1967), p.51.

²³King Papers, reel 2296, volume 168, pp.121506-7, R. Forke to King, August 20, 1927.

²⁴Crerar Papers, box 97, Crerar to Cameron, May 18, 1927.

their stance. Robson admitted that "avowed" Tories had gained seats due to the division but argued that the Bracken party also had "disguised" Conservatives contesting ridings. The Diehard opposition had accordingly deprived the Bracken group of "what would be too much Tory influence." As far as the Manitoba Liberals were concerned, "that we have helped to elect Tories is not a serious matter compared with the curbing of the Progressive undercurrent. We can handle the Tories any time but Progressivism is dangerous." Robson noted that the provincial Liberals were in a "bad mood" because prominent members of the federal party had worked towards co-operation.²⁵ The division, he warned King, "will make it hard to get the elements together federally."²⁶

According to Crerar the Liberal party in Manitoba was at an all-time low. Robson's stance against coalition along with the "invasion" of Saskatchewan workers and Gardiner's "die hard attitude" had produced the election results.²⁷ After these "disastrous results", the Free Press Liberals began to advocate the appointment of Robson to the Chief Justiceship as "as a means of getting rid of him." The Diehard group went to the opposite extreme by urging the appointment of E.J.

²⁵King Papers, reel 2299, volume 174, pp.125575-8, Robson to King, June 30, 1927.

²⁶King Papers, reel 2299, volume 174, pp.125575-8, Robson to King, June 30, 1927.

²⁷Crerar Papers, series II, box 80, Crerar to Cameron, July 4, 1927.

McMurray to the position, "on the strictest of party grounds."²⁸

Gardiner openly admitted that his Saskatchewan Liberals had participated in the fight against the Bracken government and claimed to be proud to have reduced the Progressive majority. He denied that this opposition had cost the Liberals votes and instead countered that it was due to Ottawa's surrendering attitude that more Liberals had not been elected. "Had we had the unqualified support of the Federal Liberals," he remarked, "Bracken would not be in power in Manitoba today without a union with the Liberals in control." The Saskatchewan premier was annoyed that his "Regina influence" with Manitoba was being undermined from Ottawa. He went so far as to charge that members of the Manitoba and Alberta governments were attending Tory conventions in Saskatchewan "to make trouble." It was only in "self defense", he claimed, that both Progressive governments had to be defeated. If Ottawa was planning on continuing to "line up against" the Diehards, Liberalism would be defeated on the Prairies. Gardiner could not resist the temptation, in the midst of his complaints, to throw in an attack on Dunning. "I am growing tired of having the political situation in the west," he wrote King, "in the hands of a man who treats us like a group of school boys." It would be much better, he

²⁸Ibid., reel 2298, volume 172, pp.123864-5, R.F. McWilliams to King, September 3, 1927.

concluded, to have the situation back in the hands of Stewart.²⁹ The fragmented Prairie situation was continuing to pose problems for the federal Liberals.

Prime Minister King was not pleased with the western situation, nor with its leaders. Not only was Gardiner creating obstacles for Liberal-Progressive co-operation, he also remained at odds with Dunning. King believed his attitude was "unfair & bitter & the Western situation is anything but a happy one. Jealousies are at the bottom of it." Charlie Stewart still had "little decision & no grip on his province," and Manitoba had "no leadership in Forke."³⁰

King admitted to being surprised by the bitterness of the attitude taken against the Progressives. He could not understand why the Diehards did not realize the benefits to be gained through co-operation; indeed he assured Gardiner that the Liberals would not be in power at Ottawa if not for the two groups working together. Robson had been to Ottawa where, according to King, he admitted a mistake had been made that would be corrected. The prime minister would not go so far as to suggest that Gardiner did not understand the political situation in his own province but rather that the Progressives in Manitoba and Saskatchewan were different and required different treatment. The Manitoba Progressives were "Liberal

²⁹Ibid., reel 2303, volume 181, pp.129730-6, Gardiner to King, January 17, 1928.

³⁰King Diaries, February 27, 1928.

at heart" while in Saskatchewan the opposite was true. When it suited his purposes it seemed King was prepared to argue that the Progressives differed from province to province. Those who came from Alberta and Saskatchewan were either "uncertain quantities" or "really opposed", while those from Manitoba could be relied upon for support. He was also surprised by Gardiner's attitude toward Dunning. King was under the impression that "all past differences had been wiped out" and informed Gardiner that Dunning had no intention of controlling the West contrary to the premier's wishes. In fact, Gardiner was wanted in Ottawa "for that very purpose."³¹ The Saskatchewan premier's ascendancy to the position of western lieutenant was continuing despite his disagreement with the prime minister over the handling of the Progressives. He would not be brought into the federal cabinet, however, until King was certain that Liberal-Progressive co-operation was no longer crucial and until he seemed more valuable as a western advisor than Dunning.

In August of 1927 Premier Gardiner was warning King that a new force had arrived in Saskatchewan that could threaten not only the provincial Liberals but the federal party as well. The Ku Klux Klan had come West from Ontario to spread propaganda and discredit the Liberal party for what it

³¹King Papers, reel 2303, volume 181, pp.129737-41, King to Gardiner, March 5, 1928.

perceived as its close relationship with Roman Catholics.³² The klan was also able to take advantage of discontent aimed at the federal Railway Agreement of 1925. The act had allowed the CNR and CPR to recruit European immigrants and transport them to Canada without fulfilling the usual government regulations. For example, the requirement that migrants from the "non-preferred" nations of southern and eastern Europe could only enter Canada with guaranteed permanent employment as domestic servants or farm hands, was being ignored.³³ As a result, the agreement, and the King government, were blamed for the high numbers of 'foreign' immigrants still entering the West, including many Catholics. T.C. Davis indicated that the KKK was "breeding dissension" in Prince Albert.³⁴ The prime minister demonstrated his ignorance of Saskatchewan society and shrugged off the attacks. "It is rather interesting to discover," he mused,

that at a moment when our Government is being attacked in a by-election in North Huron through the medium of an anonymous pamphlet entitled

³²Ibid., reel 2296, volume 168, pp.121723, Gardiner to King, August 23, 1927; For a full discussion see the following MA theses at the University of Saskatchewan: William Calderwood, "The Rise and Fall of the Ku Klux Klan in Saskatchewan" (1968); Patrick Kyba, "The Saskatchewan General Election of 1929" (1964); Gordon Unger, "The Premier as a Pragmatic Politician, 1925-1929" (1967); see also Patrick Kyba, "Ballots and Burning Crosses- The Election of 1929" in Ward and Spafford, Politics in Saskatchewan.

³³John Herd Thompson, Allen Seager, Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord, pp.130-1.

³⁴King Papers, reel 2302, volume 180, pp.129007-8, T.C. Davis to W.D. Euler, January 25, 1928.

"Mackenzie King and the anti-Catholic Alliance" an active propaganda such as that to which your letter refers should be gaining headway in Saskatchewan on the nature of our alleged Roman Catholic affiliations and sympathies. What you are face to face with is, I think, only the spreading to Western Canada of the influence of the Orange Order as the electioneering nucleus of the Tory Party.³⁵

Meanwhile, the interest in dominion-provincial and federal-regional affairs indicated by the Duncan Commission was continued by the first Dominion-Provincial Conference in 1927. Delegates were forced to grapple with the growing problems associated with increasing provincial services. The premiers came prepared to advance the financial causes of their individual provinces but Prime Minister King did not take their concerns seriously enough. His preoccupation remained balancing budgets and reaping the political rewards from reduced taxation and the federal debt. As in the case of the Duncan Commission, the Maritime and Prairie delegates found themselves allied in their attempts to gain concessions from Ottawa. The western premiers supported the contention that the Maritimes deserved more in the way of subsidies. In return the Maritime premiers agreed that the Prairie provinces deserved their natural resources as well as the subsidy. In the midst of economic prosperity, the central provinces now put up no serious objection and King agreed. The path to resolving the long-standing issue was cleared at last.

The one issue of contention for the western premiers was

³⁵Ibid., reel 2296, volume 168, pp.121728-31, King to Gardiner, August 30, 1927.

the growing problem of unemployment. Relief payments traditionally handled by the municipalities and provinces were rising and the decline of seasonal employment was becoming serious. As farm labour was replaced by machines, the Prairie unemployment rolls lengthened. While the other premiers discussed the economic causes of unemployment such as immigration, Premier Bracken of Manitoba went so far as to suggest that the tradition of poor-law relief was inadequate and Ottawa would have to take some responsibility. The federal government had provided assistance in the past but only as a measure to meet conditions arising out of the war and the re-establishment of returned men to civilian life. As far as King was concerned, circumstances had not arisen which would justify federal contributions to either the provinces or municipalities for unemployment costs. He maintained the traditional belief that responsibility rested with the local authorities and in this way also hoped to avoid any expense to the federal treasury. The claim that the 1925 Railway Agreement was only adding to the problem fell on deaf ears. In fact, the agreement would be renewed by Parliament in 1928.³⁶

Overall, King was pleased with the events of 1927 and the West seemed to be sharing his optimism. The Grain Growers' Guide had taken on a new, positive tone when discussing the merits of the prime minister. The King government has "done

³⁶Thompson and Seager, p.131.

well" the western journal noted at the year's end. It had "gained prestige" and King was exhibiting "rare political sagacity, a skill in handling men and events."³⁷ Throughout the year his stock had moved up tremendously: "The outstanding fact is that Mr. King is a success. His position never looked surer than it does today."³⁸ The public had come to accept Macdonald and Laurier as 'great' prime ministers but King's lack of charisma, it was now contended, did not prevent him being put in the same category. After eight years, his critics were coming to see their mistake in underestimating the prime minister.³⁹ The praise, however, reflected the western situation and compliments were certainly more likely when times were good. Liberal stock also had to remain high to prevent any Conservative inroads into the region.

The optimism of the West was increased even further when the 1928 Speech from the Throne referred almost exclusively to Prairie issues. The Hudson Bay Railway was progressing well and a settlement of the natural resources question seemed imminent. King announced to the House that the Dominion would now negotiate on the basis of returning the resources and continuing the subsidies. It was claimed that steps were being taken to handle the administration of immigration in a more effective manner to avoid the criticism that it was

³⁷Grain Growers' Guide, volume 20, December 1, 1927, p.11.

³⁸Ibid., volume 21, March 1, 1928, p.8.

³⁹Ibid., June 1, 1928, pp.15;17.

increasing unemployment.

Three weeks after the new session began Robb presented his budget. The finance minister boasted of a surplus of more than fifty million dollars, again as a result of increased revenues and restricted expenditures. There was no doubt it was a prosperity budget. Prime Minister King saw a problem, however, in continuing to reduce income and sales taxes. The federal government would be forced to rely increasingly on the tariff for revenue and this would threaten his desire to offer reductions. As Neatby notes, "this would be the more truly Liberal policy."⁴⁰ King believed major reductions in the tariff would come with increasing prosperity but in 1928 he was anxious to at least provide minor reductions as a sign of what was to come. The Tariff Board had recommended increases as well as decreases but the prime minister insisted in cabinet discussions that only decreases should be contemplated: "My idea is to hold the big reductions on tariff to near the elections, get the larger industries out of the way meanwhile, so they have nothing to fear in the way of further reductions, the trend downward meanwhile."⁴¹

As usual King privately complained about Robb's protectionist nature. The cabinet had agreed in principle to tariff decreases but the prime minister noted that some of Robb's tariff changes were "more protectionist than they

⁴⁰Ibid., p.245.

⁴¹King Diaries, February 16, 1928.

appear."⁴² The budget debate seemed to justify King's suspicions. The finance minister was forced to admit that in the complicated reclassification of tariff items some of the rates had been increased. The UFA members in particular went after the tariff changes as inadequate and the Grain Growers' Guide reflected the same sentiments:

Careful scrutiny of Mr. Robb's fifth budget during the past few weeks finds it less attractive than at the time of its introduction. It is not so much the actual provisions of the budget as what it portends for the future that is ominous. Tariff changes were so few and so complicated that no one yet can estimate their effect.⁴³

King was disturbed and promised "some real concessions to the lower tariff group" in the future. At the end of the session he was planning on framing the next budget to "compel all the West to vote with us."⁴⁴ King remained concerned with holding Prairie support but this concern rarely translated into concrete results.

Throughout the session the immigration problem was the main issue for the Prairie representatives. For many, it was at the root of the unemployment problem which was causing considerable unrest. Premier Bracken was arguing that new immigrants and out-of-province workers were taking the jobs of Manitobans. Immigration was a joint federal-provincial responsibility, therefore Ottawa should help cover the costs

⁴²Ibid., February 11, 1928.

⁴³Grain Growers' Guide, volume 21, p.7, March 15, 1928.

⁴⁴King Diaries, March 17, 1928; May 16, 1928.

of resulting unemployment. King agreed that "the problems of immigration and unemployment are so interlocked that they are incapable of separation" but the eastern parts of Canada would oppose direct aid for western unemployment. The Maritimes had always complained that they had received little benefit from money expended by Ottawa on immigration purposes. They argued that since the West had received the benefits of immigration they must also assume its obligations.⁴⁵ The department of immigration attempted to reassure the House that it was working closely with the provincial governments to ensure excessive immigration was not taking place and increasing unemployment problems.

Throughout 1928 King also continued to make gains for his western constituency. Prince Albert was characterized as experiencing "a period of development unequalled even in the so-called boom days." The value of construction in the city as well as the number of homesteads being claimed reached new heights. A second period of intensive exploration of mining was also underway. The prospects were so bright that the Prince Albert Herald announced that the city seemed to have "crossed the threshold into a new era of progress and expansion." It had at last become the "the Gateway of the North".⁴⁶ In May the prime minister wrote Davis to inform him

⁴⁵King Papers, reel 2303, volume 179, pp.128328-9, Bracken to King, January 24, 1928; pp.128332-5, King to Bracken, February 20, 1928.

⁴⁶As quoted in Abrams, p.271.

that the House had just passed a vote for the construction of three public buildings in the constituency. "At least 1/2 of what goes for Sask. was in my riding...", he admitted proudly. "I have done my 'duty' by the riding."⁴⁷ In addition to the railway and park appropriations, King reminded Davis that this was "doing pretty well by the constituency of Prince Albert." He was "most anxious" to have his "interest in the matter turned to as much advantage as may be possible." The laying of the buildings' corner stones should be made to coincide with his coming visit to the constituency to open the National Park. On second thought, King believed this might be overdoing things and could possibly "attract the attention of other constituencies to the fact that so many appropriations have been made for a constituency all at once."⁴⁸ The Liberals of Prince Albert responded to his efforts. To show their "appreciation for the great things" the prime minister had done for the Dominion and "this constituency in particular," the riding would present him with a cottage in the National Park.⁴⁹

In the summer, progress was also made on the question of the natural resources. The prime minister was anxious to finalize the transfer agreements: "I confess I felt ashamed

⁴⁷King Diaries, May 4, 1928.

⁴⁸King Papers, reel 2302, volume 180, pp.129018-21, King to Davis, May 14, 1928.

⁴⁹Ibid., reel 2305, volume 186, pp.133080-1, T. Robertson to King, June 17, 1928.

of our side of the record, the continuous procrastination."⁵⁰ Premier Bracken of Manitoba was anxious to foster economic growth during the prosperous times by exploiting provincial resources, especially the mineral deposits being developed around Flin Flon. He had expected prompt action after the Dominion-Provincial Conference of 1927 but by January of 1928 had become impatient. Nearly a year ago, he argued, it had been conceded that all attempts to reach a settlement by mutual consent had failed. After two formal conferences, numerous informal interviews, and continuous correspondence, King had pointed to arbitration but still no action had been taken. In the meantime the claims of the Maritime provinces had been dealt with by the Duncan Commission "in the most prompt and generous manner." Manitoba, Bracken indicated, was not requesting special bonuses, subsidies, and freight rates, but merely the arbitration of its case under an agreement made nearly six years ago.⁵¹ King explained that arbitration was the necessary route but that there were objections in sending the question to the Privy Council. "No one wanted school question as issue raised," he admitted.⁵² Before arbitration could take place, Ottawa wished to reach an agreement on the terms of reference and the tribunal to which the matter would

⁵⁰King Diaries, July 3, 1928.

⁵¹King Papers, reel 2302, volume 179, pp.128324-5, Bracken to King, January 10, 1928.

⁵²King Diaries, July 3, 1928.

be referred. Bracken came to Ottawa in July on the invitation of King to make one last effort to settle the issue, and if this failed, to agree on the terms of arbitration⁵³.

Neatby argues that one reason for King's procrastination was the political situation in Manitoba.⁵⁴ By this time the situation of the Liberal party in the province was being described as "a deplorable state of disintegration and division...with no apparent prospect of extraction therefrom."⁵⁵ King could not ignore the provincial divisions: "National parties in Canada are federal in structure and local disputes would affect federal fortunes in Manitoba."⁵⁶ According to Neatby, King was hesitant in negotiating a resource settlement with Bracken because any concessions to the Progressives would be resented by the provincial Liberals. Kendle presents a more convincing argument. The continued unwillingness of the federal Liberals to settle the question was also damaging the provincial Liberals and therefore Robson was equally anxious to see the matter solved:

Our relations with the Bracken Government are satisfactory and Liberals and Progressives should present a united front when occasion demands. But there must be progress in the resources matter or this amalgamation will fail to prevent heavy Tory

⁵³King Papers, reel 2302, volume 179, pp.128326-7, King to Bracken, February 28, 1928.

⁵⁴Neatby, p.251.

⁵⁵King Papers, reel 2307, volume 189, p.134839, L. Stubbs to King, March 2, 1928.

⁵⁶Neatby, p.252.

inroads.⁵⁷

The question was becoming "a very great impediment to Liberalism" in Manitoba and Robson was having to support Bracken to keep the premier from attacking the Liberals federally.⁵⁸ Bracken was also using the argument that coalition would have a much greater chance of success with the issue settled.⁵⁹ With Robson siding with the Progressives in pushing for an agreement, King "took up the resources question in cabinet."⁶⁰

For Mackenzie King Manitoba had become the crucial battleground against the Progressives and his western attention was centred almost exclusively on this one province. He seemed to feel that if Manitoba was won over, Progressivism would be dealt the final blow and the West would forever return to the two-party system. The liberal region would then naturally support Mackenzie King. He believed his efforts were finally being rewarded when coalition was advocated after the provincial election. He was careful to maintain the guise of neutrality but his movements were becoming increasingly interventionist. A committee representing both wings of the

⁵⁷As quoted in Kendle, pp.69-70.

⁵⁸King Papers, reel 2306, volume 186, pp.133146-51, Robson to King, May 18, 1928; pp.133139-42, Robson to King, April 21 and May 1, 1928; pp.133143-5, King to Robson, May 19, 1928.

⁵⁹Ibid., reel 2302, volume 179, pp.128340-2, Bracken to King, June 15, 1928.

⁶⁰Kendle, p.70.

provincial Liberal party was established to recommend federal patronage until the internal division was healed. By appointing former Liberal premier T.C. Norris to the Board of Railway Commissioners, the prime minister removed a bitter Diehard from the scene while appeasing the demands of the group. Ever since Norris had been manipulated and defeated by the Free Press Liberals at the beginning of the decade, the Diehards had been pushing for some form of compensation.

In the spring of 1928 the road to co-operation and the settlement of the resource question seemed open when Liberal leader and staunch Diehard, H.A. Robson, admitted to "a change of attitude,"⁶¹ and "agreed absolutely" that he and Bracken were prepared for coalition. "Robson seemed a most agreeable man," King noted. The Diehard obstacles to fusion seemed completely removed when Gardiner received a lecture from the prime minister and promised to toe Ottawa's line by ceasing to influence Robson.⁶² By April King was even more hopeful. A Liberal was to go into Bracken's government "as a sort of lynch-pin" to unite the two groups. "It is a difficult matter to settle," King wrote. "We will never have Western Canada till Libs and Progs are together as one party."⁶³

The atmosphere of the meeting on natural resources in

⁶¹King Papers, reel 2306, volume 186, pp.133117-8, Robson to King, January 4, 1928.

⁶²King Diaries, March 22-3, 1928.

⁶³Ibid., April 20, 1928.

July between Bracken and King was friendly and increased the prime minister's optimism regarding the Manitoba situation. Both leaders were anxious for an agreement and both supported a provincial coalition. They agreed the unalienated resources would be transferred to the province and the subsidy in lieu would be continued, but there remained the question of compensation for resources alienated prior to the granting of the subsidy. Prime Minister King proposed a Royal Commission, not only to settle the issue of compensation, but to educate the public and justify the method of agreement. In reality the commission would be guided by an agreement already made between Bracken and King as to the amount of compensation. The schools question, however, remained a bogey. Both sides agreed the provincial government would continue the schools system as before but the problem was in announcing the policy to the public. The Roman Catholics would possibly object to there being no specific guarantee of the existing system when the school lands were transferred along with the resources. There could possibly also be a public outcry in the province if a special mention of a guarantee was made. In the end no mention was made of the school lands.

The Manitoba delegation was so pleased with the conference results that King felt "a bit nervous & agitated" that perhaps he "had gone too far" in satisfying the province. He anxiously admitted he

had not known the subject as well as I should and have been acting more in accordance with what has

seemed to me the right & fair thing....My whole guiding principle in this matter has been to get free of technicalities & right what seems to me a wrong situation existing at present. It is a mistake for Ottawa to be controlling & administering western lands, & it is a losing & costly business as it stands and we should get rid of it all just as soon as we can.⁶⁴

The protestations of Ernest Lapointe furthered King's misgivings that he had been too generous. Lapointe argued that Ottawa should have avoided any declaration on the resources even belonging to the province and inserted a clause making the settlement subject to the interests of the eastern provinces.⁶⁵ Disturbed by Lapointe, the prime minister became worried once again that after Bracken had returned to Manitoba, controversy over the school issue would still erupt.⁶⁶ Lapointe's pressure to "hold back & do nothing, postpone the whole matter," served in the end to convince King he had done the right thing. He had disagreed with the eastern opposition from the outset and saw it as a greedy self-interested ploy to withhold what rightly belonged to the West. Any further delays would only injure the Liberal party. The resource issue was being used to bring the Liberals and Progressives in Manitoba together and a settlement would take the wind out of the Tory sails in the region. King was

⁶⁴Ibid., July 4-5, 1928.

⁶⁵Ibid., July 6, 1928; Lapointe continued to represent the eastern contention that any gains made by the West had to receive the support of the other provinces who may also wish to put forward claims of their own.

⁶⁶Neatby, pp.254-5; King Diaries, July 10, 1928.

hopeful that he would win all three western provinces on the issue.⁶⁷ After rereading the proceedings and correspondence on the matter he returned to his original stance and again confessed "to feeling humiliated at the way we have procrastinated in this matter."⁶⁸

In August Mackenzie King journeyed to Prince Albert to open the National Park. There was little doubt he viewed it as a product of his influence: "What a privilege to be able as P.M. to make a gift of this kind to one's constituency, to a Province & to one's country."⁶⁹ All of his notions of the connections between Nature and the Divine, of the West housing the New Jerusalem, came flooding back. Only this time he was playing a direct role in the process. "It was a great & beautiful surprise," he recorded on viewing the Park, "like walking into a golden land of promise."⁷⁰ The citizens' committee, chaired by Harold Fraser, presented King with a cottage overlooking Lake Waskesiu in which the prime minister spent his first and only night. The cabin would become a patronage tool placed at the disposal of distinguished guests and even when King visited the constituency, he would stay elsewhere. He never concerned himself with the cottage's upkeep and one of his most loyal constituency workers, Jack

⁶⁷Ibid., July 7, 1928.

⁶⁸Ibid., July 8, 1928.

⁶⁹Ibid., August 5, 1928.

⁷⁰Ibid., August 10, 1928.

Sanderson, ended up being burdened with the maintenance costs. King would later at least compensate Sanderson for his efforts by bequeathing him the cottage.⁷¹ The prime minister left the region feeling that "the West was never so prosperous, so full of promise."⁷²

Meetings with the Alberta and Saskatchewan representatives on the resource transfer took place on December 12 and 13. Premier Brownlee was anxious to avoid an appeal to the Privy Council in the fear of giving rise to a schools question and instead suggested the possibility of maintaining the school lands in trust in Ottawa until the agreement was finalized. He asked for the present subsidy and resources, as well as the right to appeal if Manitoba received additional compensation. King answered that he could not legislate on a contingency.⁷³

The Saskatchewan delegation asked for the transfer of the lands, including the school lands, the continuation of the present subsidy, and for the Dominion to appeal to the Privy Council on the decision of the Supreme Court.⁷⁴ King was able to have cabinet agree to the terms and the same proposal was then put forward to Alberta. The Dominion would transfer all

⁷¹Waiser, pp.34-5.

⁷²King Diaries, August 11, 1928.

⁷³Ibid., December 13, 1928.

⁷⁴An appeal would be made to the Supreme Court on the issue of whether the provinces were entitled to compensation for the loss of revenue from lands before 1905.

natural resources except those areas set apart for park purposes but mineral rights inside the parks would also go the province. Alberta would continue to receive the present annual subsidy in lieu of lands with the understanding that increases, pending the administration of the resources, would cease.⁷⁵ In the end Saskatchewan declined the proposal.⁷⁶

Mackenzie King believed that in general, his western policies were deserving of support but Alberta's reaction remained a mystery. Liberals in the province continued to indicate that their breakthrough lay just around the corner and that the federal government was indeed popular on the Prairies; King's performance at the 1926 Imperial Conference along with the yearly reductions of the national debt and taxation were ensuring Liberal success. At the same time the Alberta population was growing dubious as to the merits of Farmer government.⁷⁷ But a more accurate picture of Alberta affairs was that painted by Joseph Clarke for Andrew Haydon. "All is not well with this party in Alberta," he wrote, "and that if something different to what is now being done is not undertaken, we will fare worse in the next election than we did in the last, and God knows that was bad enough, in fact too bad." Reports indicated that the long-term suspicions of

⁷⁵King Papers, reel 2302, volume 179, pp.128478-80, King to Brownlee, December 29, 1928.

⁷⁶King Diaries, February 22, 1929

⁷⁷King Papers, reel 2305, volume 186, pp.133241-2, G.H. Ross to King, March 29, 1928.

the UFA being closer to the Tories than the Liberals were proving true. A "working alliance" was being discussed and even King had no doubt that the Alberta Progressives were anything but Liberal.⁷⁸ The confusing situation only furthered his notion that he needed a reliable western advisor.

The 1929 budget offered few tariff reductions in the face of American threats to increase duties against Canadian agricultural goods. Despite King's apparent intentions of the previous year, there were only minor reductions to placate the low tariff groups but nothing dramatic which might embarrass the government if the American tariff was raised. James Robb once again reported increased revenues and a record surplus, and the sales tax was again reduced. The reaction of the West was echoed in the words of the Grain Growers' Guide: "In its tariff features the budget is strictly of the stand pat variety."⁷⁹

The Prairie West always reacted to tariff changes so King spent the autumn of 1929 concentrating on western problems. He wished to avoid another tariff issue erupting which he believed would give new life to the Progressive movement. The prime minister had the support of the Liberal-Progressives federally but the groups continued to quarrel in the three provinces. King believed the real problem lay in western

⁷⁸Ibid., reel 2308, volume 191, pp.136625-7, Joseph A. Clarke to Haydon, May 8, 1929.

⁷⁹Grain Growers' Guide, volume 22, p.8, March 15, 1929.

leadership. It seemed the time had come to press harder for co-operation and if necessary to use veiled threats. "The situation in all the Western provinces is far from what it should be....," he warned Crerar.

It would appear that we are again at one of those critical junctures when a right attitude on the part of the electors in the Western provinces towards a Liberal programme will let us get much further along the way of having Liberal policies prevail than will be possible by divisions in the ranks of those in the West who are opposed to the Conservative Party and its policies. Lapointe and I, and for that matter, practically all of the Cabinet are most anxious not to yield to the protectionist sentiment of Ontario and other parts in dealing with the situation which the revision by the United States of its tariff may occasion.⁸⁰

The prime minister echoed the same concerns to Gardiner. Tariff revision, he attempted to argue, hinged on Liberal-Progressive co-operation in the West.⁸¹ This reasoning must have seemed shaky to westerners, particularly after co-operation at the federal level had only produced the budgets of 1927 and 1928. But King's attempts to gain fusion at the provincial level would involve more than veiled threats. Federal pressure would include such incentives as a generous settlement of the natural resources question, changes in western cabinet representation, and direct intervention into the coalition negotiations in Manitoba.

Apart from his brief visit to Prince Albert in the

⁸⁰King Papers, reel 2308, volume 192, pp.136727-8, King to Crerar, September 23, 1929.

⁸¹Ibid., reel 2309, volume 194, pp.137771-3, King to Gardiner, April 22, 1929.

previous year King had not been west since the last election campaign. The prosperous times, both economically and politically, provided the prime minister with an unnerving sense of complacency that sometimes even led to worry: "I really feel terrified at what is ahead of me for I seem to be quite out of the political atmosphere and current political problems."⁸²

In Manitoba the situation was in its usual muddled state. The Royal Commission on the Natural Resources, which included Crerar, had reported in May, recommending the agreement reached between the two parties as well as additional compensation for the resources alienated prior to 1905. Complicated calculations by the commission produced a figure of four and half million dollars. Both Bracken and King were prepared to accept the report. An additional issue, however, was now bedeviling provincial politics.

In 1928 the federal cabinet had agreed to return water powers to the western provinces as part of the transfer agreements. Premier Bracken was urging the federal government to take responsibility for deciding between public and private ownership of a lease on the Seven Sisters Falls in the province. He favoured private ownership and had asked the federal government to issue a lease for a waterpower site in Manitoba to a private company. The federal government had already agreed to administer the resources in accordance with

⁸²King Diaries, October 25, 1929.

the wishes of the provincial government and the lease was issued. Public power supporters had denounced the project and the Conservatives claimed the Bracken government had been bribed by the private power corporation. A provincial commission found no evidence of corruption but its admission that the provincial ministers had acted thoughtlessly, and the resignation of two ministers, damaged the reputation of the government.

The provincial Liberals had supported the Bracken stand on the Seven Sisters project and the transfer of the resources but now they sensed an opportunity to finally defeat the Progressives. Bracken's government, on the other hand, was now in a weakened state and was seriously considering fusion and taking Robson into the cabinet as Attorney General.⁸³ On March 6 the premier made a direct offer.⁸⁴

The Free Press group feared Robson would refuse and immediately warned King that any hope of a coalition might slip away. If the Bracken government was defeated in the Legislature by Liberal votes, the province would be lost to the party both provincially and federally. Dafoe sensed a willingness on behalf of the Diehards to "knife" the government regardless of the consequences. The Free Press editor appealed for King's support suggesting that the

⁸³Kendle, p.94.

⁸⁴Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Bracken Papers, box 4, folder 1929, file coalition 1929-36, Bracken to Robson, March 6, 1929.

situation in Manitoba was the federal situation of 1926, only reversed.⁸⁵ Dafoe feared that the advice of the Diehards was having an effect on King. It had to be made clear that the Liberals had no chance of winning provincial office even if the Bracken government fell. The Diehard view was "hopeless nonsense", Dafoe indicated, "expressed strongly by a small but dwindling minority." The group had not profited by the experiences of the past. After ten years and five elections in Manitoba, the record spoke for itself. In four out of five political campaigns the Liberals had run candidates against the Progressives and all had been disasters.⁸⁶

Mackenzie King began to exert all his influence to convince Robson that the time for the final push for coalition was at hand. With the Bracken government shaken, King believed that the time was opportune to gain a fusion on Liberal terms.⁸⁷ He was informed that Robson was willing but not with Bracken as premier. "This is the temper that presages disaster," Dafoe warned.⁸⁸

Rivalry between the two groups seemed to be increasing rather than subsiding. King was informed that as long as

⁸⁵King Papers, reel 2309, volume 193, pp.136831-5, Dafoe to King, February 23, 1929.

⁸⁶Ibid., pp.136837-8, Dafoe to King, March 2, 1929.

⁸⁷King Papers, reel 2323, volume 201, pp.142074-80, King to Robson, March 4, 1929.

⁸⁸Ibid., reel 2309, volume 193, pp.136831-5, Dafoe to King, February 23, 1929.

Robson remained Liberal leader, there was no hope for co-operation or party prospects.⁸⁹ The Diehards were refusing to follow Ottawa's suggestions and were now opposing the Bracken party in by-elections. The prime minister found it necessary to write very direct letters to those involved:

I believe that in every sense of the word it marks the parting of the ways as to the future of Liberalism in your province. We are in power in Ottawa today because I have from the beginning refused to listen to those who told me that the Progressives should be fought rather than won to our side....Federally...we shall need the Progressives as never before, and no where will they be needed--if the tariff is to be shaped in accordance with the wishes of the West--than in Western Canada. As a matter of fact, we at Ottawa are really fighting the battle of the West in the matter of trade policy. I think our friends in the West owe it to us to help us in that endeavour.⁹⁰

The Diehards jumped at the opportunity to show King that his strategy of co-operation was a failure. The Liberals had supported the Progressives on Seven Sisters and were now tainted by the same scandal.⁹¹ The Bracken government might remain in power temporarily but without a coalition, its future seemed tenuous.

In early March the intervention of the federal Liberals reached its zenith. Immense pressure was exerted upon Robson to form a coalition and serve as Attorney General in the

⁸⁹Ibid., reel 2308, volume 191, pp.136082-3, E. Brown to King, March 2, 1929.

⁹⁰Ibid., pp.136263-9, King to D. Cameron, March 13, 1929.

⁹¹Ibid., reel 2311, volume 198, pp.139944-9, E.J. McMurray to King, March 27, 1929.

administration. Such an amalgamation had the support of Hudson, and Dafoe promised the full backing of the Free Press. King had Thomas Taylor, the "party trouble shooter",⁹² working in Winnipeg for the federal party. Taylor was to report directly to Senator Haydon and use the code name 'Longbury'.⁹³

When Taylor met Robson, the importance of coalition for both federal and provincial party fortunes was emphasized. The Liberal leader seemed willing to move towards coalition if he could receive the support of the provincial convention later that month. In discussions with Bracken, the premier indicated a willingness to take Robson and another Liberal into cabinet and to call the new party the Liberal-Progressives. When Taylor again met with Robson, however, the Liberal leader had been in consultation with his own group and now indicated hesitancy and a desire to check in with Gardiner. "I thought the only thing to do," Taylor informed King,

was to tell him that if he had anything to do with Gardiner during the negotiation for a union, it would not be to his advantage and I also told him frankly that it appeared that every time Robson and Gardiner had conversations upon Manitoba politics, it was to the disadvantage of the Liberal Party....it is quite pitiful to think that Mr. Robson really seems considerably afraid of what Gardiner will think if he goes in with Bracken.

Taylor hurriedly journeyed to Regina to speak with

⁹²Kendle, p.68.

⁹³Ibid., p.96.

Gardiner and urge the necessity of coalition. The Saskatchewan premier was set in his views and could not be convinced to support a union but his loyalty to Liberalism could be employed to remove his influence. When he met with Gardiner, Taylor was disappointed but not surprised to find him 'diehard' in his stance against coalition. "You cannot trust James G. Gardiner in his attitude upon Manitoba politics," Taylor warned King, "although he feels that he, better than anyone else in Canada, knows the situation here." In the next several days the weak Robson was further influenced by the Diehards. Taylor attempted to 'protect' the Liberal leader from any further undesirable influences. "Robson is a vacillating character," he noted,

and although at times he is stubborn, his general makeup is one of extreme weakness and almost anyone can sway him to any point of view whatsoever, so I propose to be with him as closely as possible between now and the convention so that no more people will get to him to make him any more pessimistic than he is.

By March 12 all the efforts of the Dominion Liberals to convince Robson to go into a Liberal-Progressive government under Bracken with the support of the Diehards had "fallen to the ground." Robson had been turned against fusion and believed Ottawa was "interfering" and "exaggerating" its importance. He charged that the federal party was "using him as a tool." Attempts had been made to keep Taylor's presence and mission secret but by this time the Diehards were aware of Ottawa's actions. With Robson's refusal to co-operate, the

federal Liberals could only place their hopes on the up-coming convention. There was a chance that the Free Press Liberals could sway the moderate and undecided portion of the party to push for coalition regardless.

In the days immediately before the convention even Gardiner was pressured by King into sending a letter to Robson asking him to become the Attorney General under Bracken.⁹⁴ Gardiner had been warned not to intervene and divert Robson from the path.⁹⁵ The Saskatchewan premier demonstrated the trait that Mackenzie King valued most: loyalty. He ardently disagreed with the manner in which King and the federal party were handling Manitoba but would keep his opposition to their private correspondence rather than have it public knowledge. He did not, however, cease his attempts to convince the prime minister that he was mishandling the situation. His judgement, according to Gardiner, had been "so magnificently justified by time on every occasion that it has been put to the test" that he would not ponder, "even in the face of opposite views," of taking "any course other than [that] which you have decided upon."⁹⁶ The prime minister acknowledged Gardiner's diehard views, content in the knowledge that the

⁹⁴King Papers, reel 2309, volume 194, pp.138016-36, Thomas Taylor to King, March 15, 1929.

⁹⁵Ibid., volume 193, pp. 136839-42, Dafoe to King, March 9, 1929.

⁹⁶Ibid., volume 194, pp.137767-70, Gardiner to King, March 20, 1929.

premier would sound off and then follow party directives.

The convention approved the principle of amalgamation but only after a platform was formulated by a joint committee which would be submitted to a further meeting.⁹⁷ In the meantime the Liberals would support Bracken in the legislature. It seemed King's pressure had been effective and he was delighted:

First word received tonight the Liberal Convention at Winnipeg has fulfilled our highest hopes in bringing together Liberals & Progressives in that province, in other words a fusion of the two parties. It has taken a lot of manoeuvring, but Gardiner has played his part well and the pressure put on from Ottawa has worked like a charm. If only the same result could be effected in Ontario & Alberta we would be back to the two old parties with gain to the liberal cause. I am greatly pleased at this result.⁹⁸

He was informed that such Diehards as E.J. McMurray remained opposed to amalgamation but in view of the prime minister's attitude, he agreed to remain silent. The situation, however, was still "of a highly explosive nature and must be handled accordingly."⁹⁹

But co-operation proved illusory and within a short time King was again receiving antagonistic correspondence from both sides. Bracken and Robson met but the premier's prestige was recovering and the idea of fusion was again put on the back

⁹⁷Ibid., reel 2315, volume 205, pp.144878-81, J.W. Wilton to King, March 20, 1929.

⁹⁸King Diaries, March 19, 1929.

⁹⁹King Papers, reel 2308, volume 191, pp.135823-6, E.D.R. Bisset to King, March 23, 1929.

burner.¹⁰⁰ It was reported that the attempts at fusion had created "more bitterness in the Liberal ranks than anything that has occurred in the Party since the schism of 1917." The Diehards claimed to be "the root and stem" of the party and accused King of watering "the leaves" but allowing "the roots...to dry up."¹⁰¹ The intervention of the King Liberals had been so blatant that even the most ardent of the Diehards could not help feeling betrayed: "The Free Press like the Prodigal Son came back home. There are some of us who feel very much like the elder son in that famous parable."¹⁰²

Throughout the coalition discussions Prime Minister King, not surprisingly, maintained a guise of neutrality and the principle of non-intervention in provincial affairs. "As you will readily understand," he wrote B. McBean, "I personally have had little or no concern in the Provincial situation apart from its possible bearings on the future of our Party in the Federal arena." Yet, even this claim was hollow and contradicted by the poorly veiled threats that followed:

What I have always felt, and what I feel more keenly than ever now that the tariff question is certain to come more prominently than ever to the fore is the great importance of keeping combined all the forces in Western Canada which are opposed to Toryism. We can keep Eastern Liberal opinion in accord with moderate Liberal opinion in the West if

¹⁰⁰Kendle, p.98.

¹⁰¹King Papers, reel 2307, volume 190, pp.135233-5, Manitoba Liberals to King, date ?.

¹⁰²Ibid., reel 2315, volume 205, pp.144885-8, J.W. Wilton to King, April 19, 1929.

that opinion appears to be the general opinion of the anti-Conservative forces. If, on the other hand, our Eastern friends were to have reason to feel that Progressive and Liberal forces through fighting themselves were delivering the West over to a common political foe, I doubt if we would be able to gain for Western sentiment the measure of support which some of us are anxious it should always receive.¹⁰³

Within cabinet King did not find it so necessary to temper his attitude or actions. While he "hesitated" saying anything which might be "interpreted" as interference, it was true that provincial and federal politics were "inextricably interwoven so far as the Province of Manitoba is concerned, and in the interests of the Liberal Party of Canada as a whole." The prime minister also noted that "little by little" the federal Liberals had been regaining the invaluable support of the Free Press.¹⁰⁴

Meanwhile on June 26, 1929 the Dominion and Manitoba delegations met and agreed to the Commission's report on the natural resource transfer. The province's sixtieth anniversary, July 15, 1930, was agreed upon as the official date of transfer. In Saskatchewan the partisanship of Premier J.G. Gardiner had always made King's task in dealing with the province, and the resource issue in particular, easier. Gardiner had been prepared to accept the continuation of the federal subsidy as ample compensation but under pressure had

¹⁰³Ibid., reel 2311, volume 197, pp.139433-4, King to B. McBean, April 22, 1929.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., reel 2313, volume 201, pp.142074-80, King to Robb, March 4, 1929.

asked that the subsidy increase as the population of the province increased. The prime minister had pointed out in February that the Alberta agreement did not include this provision but he did hint that it could be changed. Gardiner was finding that the flames of religious animosity being fanned by the KKK were also influencing the resource situation. It was alleged that there was an understanding between the federal and provincial governments whereby the sale of school lands was intended to benefit the Roman Catholics. It was an attempt, Gardiner charged, "to create a feeling that the Liberal party is controlled absolutely by the Province of Quebec."¹⁰⁵ By the fall of 1929, however, the situation had changed. Gardiner was no longer premier.

In the election that summer the Saskatchewan Liberal machine had been surprisingly defeated and would be replaced by a Progressive-Conservative coalition under J.T.M. Anderson. In the aftermath, observers agreed that the desire for change and criticism of the partisan 'Gardiner machine' had been partly responsible for the defeat but the main cause had been the infusion of religion into the campaign. In the midst of increasingly heated debates on the merits of immigration, a potentially dangerous issue emerged. The Liberal government had long been accused of deliberately trying to populate Canada with Roman Catholic immigrants. It was argued that the

¹⁰⁵Ibid., reel 2309, volume 194, pp.137758-9, Gardiner to King, January 3, 1929.

provincial government was catering to Roman Catholics on the schools issue and the federal Liberal reliance on Quebec support only made the charges more difficult to avoid. As with all who opposed him, Gardiner did not hesitate in taking the podium and doing battle with the KKK, but to the public it seemed the premier was defending the Catholics.

King believed that the Gardiner-Dunning feud had also injured the Saskatchewan campaign. Gardiner brought on the election despite the advice of Dunning and the federal Liberals who were still in session in Ottawa and could not lend their aid. "Gardiner was too cocksure," King noted.¹⁰⁶ The victory of Anderson's "Co-operative" government led provincial Liberals to advise King to stay away from the province for the time being. It would be best to allow religious animosities that had been "fanned to fever heights in June" to "cool off".¹⁰⁷

When King went to Saskatchewan in the fall, he avoided the resource question and made no effort to see the new premier. He was assured that the election result in the province was not a revolt against Liberalism nor would it influence a federal election: "There is no 'uprising of the people' against your government, no matter WHAT the Opposition

¹⁰⁶King Diaries, June 7, 1929.

¹⁰⁷King Papers, reel 2309, volume 193, pp.136952-5, T.C. Davis to King, September 9, 1929.

may say."¹⁰⁸ He was warned, however, that a Farmers' movement centring around the Pools was "in process of birth" and many Liberals were "more afraid of it than of anything that has appeared upon the horizon for a long time."¹⁰⁹

The resource question posed no difficulties for King in Alberta. He maintained his previous offer and was now ready to increase the subsidy with increases in the provincial population as Gardiner had suggested. A final conference in Ottawa was arranged for the end of the year.

Also on the Alberta agenda was the issue of cabinet reorganization. King had been largely ignoring Saskatchewan and Alberta because he believed the former was secure and the latter a write-off. The prime minister was still hopeful he could secure Brownlee for the federal cabinet, the only one from the province who could "bring any strength."¹¹⁰ Premier Brownlee was at odds with Charles Stewart, who had fought the UFA as Gardiner had fought the Progressives in Saskatchewan, but by November King was hopeful that Brownlee and Stewart were coming to some form of agreement.¹¹¹ After meeting the Alberta premier, however, King was less optimistic. "He is a dour sort of person, wrapped in mystery, not too frank," King

¹⁰⁸Ibid., reel 2313, volume 201, p.141715, G.C. Porter to King, September 19, 1929.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., reel 2314, volume 204, pp.143888-90, G. Spence to King, July 18, 1929.

¹¹⁰King Diaries, October 23, 1929.

¹¹¹Ibid., November 6, 1929.

noted. Brownlee was approached on the subject of joining the federal cabinet and while he indicated he was a Liberal and did not wish the Tories in power, he intimated that he was not politically ambitious. The prime minister was not impressed when Brownlee added the condition that if he did join, he would want the right to resign if he disagreed with policy. "This is a poor sort of beginning," King recorded, "it shews a wrong attitude."¹¹² The prime minister decided to wait until after the provincial election the following year before possibly trying again.

The state of Liberalism in Alberta remained weak and disorganized at both levels. All the party could do to justify its miserable condition was follow the traditional path of harking back to the schism of 1917.¹¹³ Any steps toward amalgamation between Liberals and Progressives would be "most disastrous", both federally and provincially, and the party was furious when, during their public appearances, King and Stewart hinted that a coalition should be formed. The provincial Liberal executive had responded by naming a committee to investigate the possibility and this action caused further division and resentment. At a large meeting held in Edmonton the party repudiated any notion of coalition. According to W.R. Howson, Brownlee had no intention of co-

¹¹²Ibid., November 7, 1929.

¹¹³King Papers, reel 2313, volume 201, pp.141873-6, J.E. Reilly to King, January 23, 1929.

operating with Liberals at any level but was exploiting the situation. Howson refused to "sell out the faithful Liberals merely for a promise of an immediate advantage which will never be realized."¹¹⁴ Liberal leader, J.W. McDonald, pointed to the "confusion" that obviously existed in the minds of federal Liberals in regard to the relationship between the UFA government and members of the Progressive group at Ottawa. King tried to convince Alberta Liberals that his references toward fusion were only to the federal situation, "and in no particular, to provincial politics." The prime minister was quick to inform Howson, however, that the attitude of the provincial party would have a bearing on the federal result but that, of course, was beyond the control of federal politicians.¹¹⁵

Alberta Liberals had to convince King that the Progressives could not be treated the same throughout the Prairie West. The prime minister had learned this lesson by this time but was burying its implications beneath the practical desire to avoid three-cornered contests. More importantly he could see no alternative strategy in dealing with the Alberta situation. Co-operation between Liberals and a Tory-leaning UFA government was still preferable to having straight Conservatives gain seats.

¹¹⁴Ibid., reel 2318, volume 212, pp.149349-52, Howson to Stewart, February 3, 1930.

¹¹⁵Ibid., pp.149360-2, King to Howson, October 24, 1930.

James Robb died while King was touring British Columbia. The loss would certainly be felt by the cabinet but it also simplified western reorganization. King was often at odds with Robb's economic philosophy and was waiting to have Dunning become the successor to the finance portfolio. Neatby indicates that King "did not like Charles Dunning," but this is an exaggeration. The westerner had been spoken of as the likely replacement to King but his value as a Prairie lieutenant had overshadowed all threats, and King would never forget the chance Dunning took by joining the weakened government in 1925. The prime minister complained about Dunning's arrogance, vanity, self-pity, and concluded he was a hypochondriac, but it was not unlike King to criticize those around him. In 1929 he was very aware of Dunning's merits as finance minister, including his ability, energy, experience, and most importantly, his low-tariff views.

It is important to note that King was already beginning to think of replacing Dunning with Gardiner as the main Prairie advisor. The necessity of placating the Progressives was diminishing so Gardiner's presence would not cause as much division. The prime minister was well aware that as finance minister, Dunning would have increasing difficulty representing and organizing the West. The finance portfolio was seen more as a 'national' department and its preoccupation was largely with the eastern business interests. King was also much more impressed by Gardiner's organizational

skills.¹¹⁶ Dunning's popularity had diminished in the West and he was being seen less as a Prairie representative. If Dafoe had contemplated Dunning as a replacement to King previously, his view had now changed.¹¹⁷ On his return through Regina the prime minister discussed cabinet changes with Dunning. When he was sworn in as finance minister on November 26, King was relieved "to have him with his ability & his Western (free trade) point of view."¹¹⁸

The efforts at cabinet reorganization were followed up when King reached Winnipeg. Robert Forke had brought no substantial strength to the party in Manitoba and criticisms against the department of immigration had only diminished his reputation. The prime minister was hoping T.A. Crerar would return to politics and finally join the cabinet. Crerar had expressed interest when King passed through Winnipeg on his way west but wanted a more important portfolio than immigration.¹¹⁹ With Dunning going to finance, the prime

¹¹⁶Saskatchewan Archives Board, James G. Gardiner Papers, reel 10, pp.17610-2, King to Gardiner, October 29, 1929.

¹¹⁷Dafoe was angered with Dunning's drive to have the Hudson Bay terminal at Churchill rather than Nelson. "There is a great big question mark in my mind against the said Mr. Dunning. I am beginning to wonder if...in getting Dunning he [King] was getting the biggest double-crosser in the business." Dafoe Papers, box 2, file 2, Dafoe to G. Dexter, August 4, 1927; "Charlie will have to get over this idea that he can play the drill-sergeant; and make everybody perform the evolutions that he desires; or he will suffer complete political shipwreck." Dafoe to Dexter, April 12, 1927.

¹¹⁸King Diaries, November 26, 1929.

¹¹⁹Ibid., November 4, 1929.

minister could now offer the department of railways and canals. Crerar indicated he wished a "free hand" with party organization in Manitoba and King responded that he would want him "to take hold & be responsible for the province."¹²⁰

The portfolio choice had been discussed with Crerar but King hesitated making an official offer until he returned to the East and discussed the matter with his colleagues. Crerar was annoyed by the delay and he remained suspicious that King might try to go back on his previous discussions and have the Manitoban accept a minor portfolio:

In my conversation with you...I clearly got the impression that Railways and Canals was open for me and that you preferred I would take that, and I recall saying to you that that was the portfolio I wished to have....I wish to make it perfectly clear that the thought furthest from my mind is to cause any embarrassment for you; but I have a feeling that the chief battleground in the next Federal election is to be in Western Canada.¹²¹

King responded quickly by assuring Crerar that he had never contemplated any other portfolio. The reason for the delay was that the Quebec members were presently "a little sensitive" over having "lost" the finance portfolio to the West. While King did not doubt their willingness to have the department of railways retained for the Prairies, it would still ease the tension if he made the decision after consulting them. The prime minister was still awaiting the

¹²⁰Ibid., November 22, 1929.

¹²¹King Papers, reel 2308, volume 192, pp.136736-40, Crerar to King, November 30, 1929.

return of Lapointe to discuss the matter. The other Quebec members were prepared to have Crerar come in with the railway portfolio but they were "a little concerned lest Quebec, which gives us a very strong support, may be edged out of the picture in the matter of portfolios of importance."¹²²

The cabinet changes pleased King. He would be sorry to see the gentlemanly Forke go but the strength of Dunning in finance and Crerar in railways would more than offset the loss. "This will all help to hold the West," he concluded. King also noted proudly that Crerar was the only member of the former Union government in the cabinet: "It should mark the end of non-recognition on that score in the minds of all."¹²³

In mid-December the final agreement for the transfer of the natural resources to Manitoba was signed. King was disappointed when Brownlee of Alberta hesitated to accept the subsidy in perpetuity as full compensation for alienated lands since 1905 and asked for investigation by a Royal Commission on this last matter.¹²⁴ Manitoba had been provided with over four million dollars in cash as a result of the commission's ruling and Brownlee believed Alberta should receive cash compensation also. It was explained that the money offered Manitoba was to put the province on par with the other two Prairie provinces at the time of their entering Confederation

¹²²Ibid., pp.136742-5, King to Crerar, December 3, 1929.

¹²³King Diaries, December 30, 1929.

¹²⁴Ibid., December 9, 1929.

but Brownlee argued that since Confederation much more of Alberta's lands had been alienated by Ottawa, particularly for the railways. According to King, the Alberta premier indicated he "really wanted to help not to make things difficult" and did not want to "have it appear to [the] outside" they "were not getting along." Bennett had told Brownlee that Alberta deserved more and Bracken suggested to King that Ottawa settle on Alberta's demands.¹²⁵ Despite Brownlee's resistance, King still hoped he would soon enter the cabinet: "Brownlee strikes me as knowing his subject & his province, and as such being superior to Mr. Stewart."¹²⁶

Premier Anderson of Saskatchewan proved even more unco-operative. King had been warned that with the Liberals out of office, the dominion-provincial co-operation maintained by Gardiner was at an end. Anderson would want to have a commission established "to make the people believe that they are going to get more," and create an issue for the next election. The best thing would be to get agreements signed with Alberta and Manitoba and then pressure Anderson to come to terms.¹²⁷ The Saskatchewan premier came to Ottawa soon after King's return and refused the Dominion's claim that the

¹²⁵Ibid., December 11, 1929.

¹²⁶Ibid., December 13, 1929.

¹²⁷King Papers, reel 2309, volume 193, pp.136974-5, Davis to King, December 12, 1929.

province would be dealt with on the same basis as Alberta. The purchase of Rupert's Land and the North West territory gave the Dominion administrative powers, he argued, not control of the western lands. They were instead held in trust and an actual 'transfer' was therefore not necessary. When the provinces were created in 1905, the issue should have been settled according to the dictates of the 1867 BNA Act and not the 1872 Dominion Lands Act which was assumed to have converted the trusteeship into ownership.¹²⁸

Anderson demanded compensation for all the resources alienated by the federal government since 1870. "Anderson is here to make trouble, not to make an agreement," King concluded. "I feel annoyed at Gardiner's letting his province get into such hands."¹²⁹ The prime minister refused to treat the constitutional position of Saskatchewan as "the subject of general misconception for more than half a century." Despite Anderson's arguments that his province could not be treated the same as Alberta because the latter's land alienations were less, the oil and coal development and revenues more, and the agricultural land larger, King pushed for equal terms.¹³⁰ "He is a rough diamond & the men with him of a type of low cunning

¹²⁸Ibid., reel 2315, volume 206, pp.145230-4, J.T.M. Anderson to King, January 17, 1930.

¹²⁹King Diaries, December 9, 1929.

¹³⁰King Papers, reel 2315, volume 206, pp.145235-40, King to Anderson, February 7, 1930.

in a way," King recorded in his diary.¹³¹ His suggestions for two of the Royal Commissioners were rejected by Anderson even though they were sitting on the Manitoba commission.

After further negotiations with the other two premiers, King suggested that Anderson's claims for compensation for the years prior to 1905 be referred to the Supreme Court and if necessary the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. The appointment of the Royal Commission for Saskatchewan would have to be postponed until the courts gave their decision but if they agreed that the province had a right to additional compensation, the amount would be decided by the commission. King was confident, however, that the province would lose its case in court. He would meet again with the Anderson delegation in March, 1930 but it would be a token effort.¹³² With the agreements for Manitoba and Alberta signed, King was confident Saskatchewan had been put in the seeming position of procrastinator, "where the present Govt. can do us no harm and only bring reaction upon itself."¹³³ The prime minister hypocritically advised Gardiner to play the same partisan game and use Anderson's position to show

that he came to the East to play the party game and to make trouble politically, not to settle the resource's question, and that if the province has been saved from losing everything, it has been due to the moderate attitude of our Administration here

¹³¹King Diaries, December 10, 1929.

¹³²Ibid., March 6, 1930.

¹³³Ibid., December 11, 1929.

and the ground laid by your own Administration in previous discussions.¹³⁴

The agreements with Manitoba and Alberta were signed on December 14, 1929. King was pleased: "This completes the real autonomy of these two Western provinces and gives them a fresh start, with additional assured financial assistance." Saskatchewan still had not signed an agreement but the prime minister was hopeful that by signing with the other two, renewed pressure would be brought upon Anderson. "Had Gardiner been in office, or Anderson come with a desire to get the resources of his Province...the Sask resources would also have been transferred," he noted. King was also pleased the agreements had been signed with two Progressive governments: "It should help to bring closer Lib & Prog forces."¹³⁵

Neatby notes that "these agreements were probably the major achievement of King's third administration."¹³⁶ But the problem was that the resource issue had been such a drawn out process that the final settlement was accepted with a sigh of relief rather than accolades. The principle of the transfer was never in dispute so an agreement was expected. As far as the Prairie West was concerned, Ottawa deserved no praise for finally providing the region its due.

While Premier Bracken was in Ottawa to complete the

¹³⁴King Papers, reel 2317, volume 209, pp.148238-40, King to Gardiner, January 30, 1930.

¹³⁵King Diaries, December 14, 1929.

¹³⁶Neatby, p.298.

resource agreements, King had used the opportunity to discuss the Manitoba situation. The two men had agreed Robson was an obstacle to any form of fusion. Any sense of Liberal-Progressive co-operation had been ended in November, 1928 with a letter from Robson to Bracken, and by the end of December the Liberal leader had been appointed by King to the Bench.¹³⁷ "That ends him as leader of Lib. Party in province," he wrote, "& with Crerar in here means Progs & Libs become one in Manitoba. That is an achievement."¹³⁸ It also ended any notion of fusion for the next several years.

Meanwhile Mackenzie King had not seemed worried by the Wall Street Crash of October 29, 1929. Difficulties in the Prairie West were seen as minor setbacks in the cyclical pattern of boom and bust, and the prime minister was certain his western record guaranteed support. More wheat had been planted in 1929 than ever before but a drought in June had reduced the yield to little more than half the record crop of 1928, and to less than the average for the decade. Furthermore, the price of wheat in 1928 had been the lowest in five years and even at this price some of the crop was still unsold when the 1929 crop was harvested. Within months of the October crash the Winnipeg wheat market was depressed to the point that the credit of the pools was also placed in jeopardy and the pool representatives turned to the premiers of the

¹³⁷Kendle, p.105.

¹³⁸King Diaries, December 31, 1929.

three Prairie provinces for financial support. When the pools failed in 1930, their collapse would catch the provincial governments, the chartered banks, and the farmers in the debacle.¹³⁹ The pool alternative was suddenly disappearing and the federal government could be forced back into grain marketing. But King had no doubts that the problems would be shortlived and the same policies of fiscal restraint and balanced budgets would provide the nation with the prosperity it had enjoyed in recent years.

The problem of unemployment was increasing in severity but as King had explained as early as 1922, it was

a matter for individuals in the first instance; between municipalities and the people living within their bounds, in the second instance; next between the provinces and the citizens of the respective provinces; and only finally a matter of concern [but not responsibility] in the federal arena.¹⁴⁰

Until such a state of emergency developed that individuals, municipalities, and provinces could not cope with the situation, unemployment would not be a moral issue for which Mackenzie King felt any responsibility.¹⁴¹ When a deputation on unemployment arrived from the West on February 26, 1930, he immediately concluded it "was clearly a Tory device to stir up propaganda."¹⁴² In April he found himself in the House

¹³⁹Wilson, p.239.

¹⁴⁰Debates, King, April 24, 1922, p.1073.

¹⁴¹King Papers, reel 2316, volume 207, pp.146026-8, King to Bracken, January 8, 1930.

¹⁴²King Diaries, February 26, 1930.

refusing demands for Ottawa to accept some of the responsibility and claiming there was "no evidence in Canada today of an emergency situation which demands anything of that kind."¹⁴³ Under pressure from Tory attacks, King felt increasingly that the demands for federal intervention were mere partisan ploys and so he answered with an equally partisan response. For "these alleged unemployment purposes, with these [Tory, provincial] governments situated as they are today, with policies diametrically opposed to those of the government's," he answered, "I would not give them a five cent piece."¹⁴⁴ For the usually cool and calculating King such a partisan statement was out of character and the opposition took full advantage. The 'five-cent speech' would become a rallying cry for the upcoming federal election and glaring evidence that Mackenzie King had become complacent in office.

The 1930 budget was delayed until after the Easter recess to serve the election needs of the Liberal party. The American tariff threat was also a factor in the decision. The prime minister had already decided to reply to any increase in the American tariff by increasing the Imperial preference but he did not wish to provoke the United States until he was able to analyze their legislation. The Smoot-Hawley tariff bill had been held up by the American Senate in 1929, but by March, 1930 the highest duties ever imposed against Canadian

¹⁴³Debates, King, April 3, 1930, p.1225.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p.1228.

agricultural goods had been passed. Once the House of Representatives had agreed to details, the final bill would virtually place an embargo on many agricultural imports. If King's tariff legislation was to follow that of the United States, the general election could not come before 1931. Another advantage in delaying would be to allow him to attend the Imperial Conference scheduled for the fall of 1931.

If an election was postponed, however, the Liberals would be vulnerable to criticisms that their tariff policies were dictated by Washington. The King government could gain a step on the Conservatives by anticipating the passing of the American bill and raising duties against the U.S. as well as increasing the British preference. The lowering of the tariff on British goods would also smooth the path toward the Imperial Conference. The fear of the worsening economic situation and the results this might have finally propelled King into an early election. By February 11 he told Dunning "to get a real budget in readiness."¹⁴⁵ A week later he learned of the world wheat surplus and the gloomy prospects for western Canada as a result, but he was convinced that the budget would more than compensate for any dissatisfaction on the Prairies. "When our budget comes down almost all else will be forgotten save the Government's record," he confidently mused.¹⁴⁶ Some Liberals, however, feared that

¹⁴⁵Ibid., February 11, 1930.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., April 11, 1930.

Dunning and Crerar were also becoming complacent in office and less prone to continue the battle for western issues. The result would be the westerners turning "away in silence with another illusion destroyed." The influence of the two regional lieutenants would "vanish" and the field would be "left to the extremists."¹⁴⁷

Western opinion cautioned King to delay the election. If a contest was held, the Liberals "are itching to get out of office," T.P. King wrote. They would receive "one of the worst trimmings in the West...that they ever received."¹⁴⁸ The Diehards in Manitoba believed King's recent interventions in the province meant trouble. The Liberal party was heading into the next campaign "weaker than it has ever been in its history- weak because there is no driving, vital organization of fighting Liberals behind it." Instead there were crypto-Liberals, such as Crerar, in positions of influence. The compromising alliances had served their purpose but the Liberals were going to have to pay for them in an election contest.¹⁴⁹ King also received correspondence from Dafoe advising against an election but instead of noting its contents the prime minister was more impressed by its "fine

¹⁴⁷King Papers, reel 2318, volume 212, pp.148988-9, A.E. Darby to R.J. Deachman, as quoted in Deachman to Haydon, March 17, 1930.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., reel 2319, volume 213, pp.149952-4, T.P. King to King, February 5, 1930.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., reel 2320, volume 215, pp.151189-94, N.T. Macmillan to King, March 11, 1930.

spirit" and "truly friendly & complimentary" character. "A very great change over a few years ago," he noted proudly.¹⁵⁰

On May 1 Dunning brought down his first budget. He reported a large surplus and another reduction in the sales tax. The government's lack of confidence in the economic situation, however, was becoming apparent. No estimate was given regarding revenues or expenditures for the coming year. A tariff war with the United States was certainly undesirable but the government would not remain idle while American duties were raised. As a result, countervailing duties were threatened against the United States while duties levied on British imports were reduced. The prime minister was jubilant: "Switch trade from U.S. to Britain, that will be the cry & it will sweep the country I believe. We will take the flag once more out of the Tory hands."¹⁵¹ If the West expected a budget that reflected Dunning's Prairie background, it was to be disappointed.

Mackenzie King expected to win the election of 1930 based on his past nine years of Liberal administration. The difficult years seemed over and he felt confident, despite the signs of economic turmoil. He miscalculated badly by underestimating his bases of support, particularly the West; and both the severity of the coming depression and his

¹⁵⁰King Diaries, April 25, 1930.

¹⁵¹Ibid., April 9, 1930.

opponent, Richard Bedford Bennett.

The weaknesses in the Liberal party's organization were glaring. The National Committee had not met since 1921 and the prime minister had demonstrated little capacity for organization. "Most of its functions, I take it," King commented in 1928, "have been superseded by the Ministers themselves."¹⁵² Discussions usually consisted of King complaining about the lack of organization, which he referred to as a "crime", and placing the blame on those around him.¹⁵³ As Neatby points out, the prime minister did not enjoy this side of politics and found it "undignified and almost sordid."¹⁵⁴ In practice the federal party depended on the provincial organizations and federal ministers working through these bodies.¹⁵⁵

The problem was that the Liberal party in western Canada was in a state of "confusion". The federal Liberals had spent all their energies on the Manitoba situation to little effect. The provincial parties, meanwhile, were out of office and still quarrelling with the Progressives. King had brought the two most obvious candidates for regional lieutenant into the cabinet but the divisions had not been bridged. As the prime minister was forced to admit himself, "much remains to be

¹⁵²Neatby, p.328.

¹⁵³King Diaries, May 12, 1930.

¹⁵⁴Neatby, p.328.

¹⁵⁵See Whitaker, The Government Party.

done."¹⁵⁶

In Manitoba the Liberals were reported to be "in open revolt against the attempt from Ottawa to merge them with the Progressives." The Diehards were further incensed that they had not been consulted when the two former Progressive leaders had been given new positions in Ottawa. Forke had gone to the Senate and Crerar into the cabinet. The group felt dominated by the "Ottawa Liberal Machine" and "on the surface everything seems smooth sailing, but a short way beneath the surface there is only a smouldering revolt."¹⁵⁷ The situation was no better in the other two Prairie provinces. Alberta still remained without an effective federal minister and Stewart was at "6's and 7's" with Brownlee.¹⁵⁸ In Saskatchewan the Gardiner and Dunning factions were squabbling and even the usually confident Gardiner was worried about the situation. He admitted there would be "a real fight in the West" and the region would require "considerable attention" to prevent the Tories from making a breakthrough: "Everyone coming in reports the Conservatives as having the most complete organization ever built up in Saskatchewan." The danger had to be realized in sufficient time to avoid the mistake of the

¹⁵⁶King Diaries, May 12, 1930.

¹⁵⁷King Papers, 2319, volume 213, pp.149952-4, T.P. King to King, February 5, 1930.

¹⁵⁸King Diaries, May 12, 1930.

provincial election- "overconfidence".¹⁵⁹

By June King's confidence in the West was actually increasing. Dunning was "much more hopeful" of the outlook in Saskatchewan and the situation throughout Manitoba seemed to be improving. Crerar, it was reported, was having success bringing the different groups together.¹⁶⁰ By July 1 the prime minister was under the impression the Manitoba situation had finally been "ironed out" and the two factions were working closely together.¹⁶¹ "From all that we can gather from surface indications and reports of organizers," King wrote O.D. Skelton, "the western situation is well in hand." It was estimated that Tories could gain three seats in Saskatchewan and one or two in Alberta.¹⁶² In Prince Albert everything seemed secure. Northern Saskatchewan would suffer from the fall in grain prices but would initially manage to escape the worst effects of the drought. John Diefenbaker had run against T.C. Davis in the provincial election so the federal organization nominated George Braden to oppose King. Diefenbaker, however, still remained the most powerful Conservative weapon in the riding. The Liberal executive informed King that the Conservative efforts were "useless".

¹⁵⁹King Papers, reel 2317, volume 210, pp.148246, Gardiner to King, May 19, 1930.

¹⁶⁰King Diaries, June 28-30, 1930.

¹⁶¹Ibid., July 1, 1930.

¹⁶²King Papers, reel 2323, volume 221, pp.155148-50, King to O.D. Skelton, July 14, 1930.

There was a growing feeling of "acquaintance the people have with you," C.H. McCann wrote the prime minister, "as being a benefactor of the district."¹⁶³

During the campaign King stood on the record of his government as the main issue. Sound economic administration had brought prosperity and the Dunning budget would ensure the continuance of security in the difficult times ahead. With another Imperial Conference approaching, the electorate would surely rather have the experienced King carry on his mission of 1923 and 1926. The Conservatives and their energetic leader, however, were having success in attacking the government's neglect. The Liberals, Bennett argued, had paid too little attention to the signs of economic difficulty and its resulting manifestation of unemployment. This argument would have particular force in the West. The tariff concessions of the Dunning budget were hypocritical in their attempts to steal traditional Tory ground and would not be pursued by a Liberal administration. Bennett's promises were unending- a session to provide jobs, protection for Canadian industries, security for agriculture, and an increase in imperial trade: "Mackenzie King promises you conferences; I promise you action. He promises consideration of the problem of unemployment; I promise to end unemployment. Which plan do

¹⁶³Ibid., reel 2319, volume 214, pp.150539-45, C.H. McCann to King, February 6, 1930.

you like best?"¹⁶⁴

The New Zealand butter issue¹⁶⁵ and the problem of unemployment were obviously hurting the Liberal campaign on the Prairies. According to Neatby, King did not realize the extent of the unemployment problem or its strength as an issue until he reached the West.¹⁶⁶ The prime minister expected the Dunning budget to bring western rewards but instead he found himself continually being heckled and having to defend himself on the unemployment question and the 'five cent speech'. King shrugged off the hecklers as "Tory organizers".¹⁶⁷ He answered by indicating that no provincial government had yet asked for aid and by attempting to show that his past career had demonstrated a sympathy for people out of work. Western Liberals attempted to inform King that his strategy was not working against Bennett's direct promise to relieve the situation. "This argument does not appeal to men with empty stomachs or empty pockets," A.M. McLeod wrote.¹⁶⁸

In Manitoba Crerar at least managed to prevent Liberal candidates from running against Liberal-Progressive and Labour

¹⁶⁴Neatby, p.334.

¹⁶⁵Canadian dairy producers now competed with products from New Zealand. The Conservatives criticized the admission of New Zealand butter and claimed it was destroying Canada's dairy industry.

¹⁶⁶Neatby, p.336.

¹⁶⁷King Diaries, July 3, 1930.

¹⁶⁸King Papers, reel 2320, volume 215, pp.151152-5, A.M. McLeod to King, June 20, 1930.

candidates in all but two constituencies.¹⁶⁹ Co-operation was less easily arranged in Alberta yet even here one labour and five UFA candidates had no Liberal opponent, and of the ten Liberals nominated only six had farmer candidates opposing them. None of the leading members of the Ginger Group had Liberal opponents.

The problem in Alberta was that there was still no effective organizational work and Liberals complained about the lack of propaganda.¹⁷⁰ Regenstreif notes that the Liberal situation in the province was always a "confused one." Sometimes the organization would handle arrangements for both federal and provincial elections while at other times individual candidates were left on their own.¹⁷¹ As it became increasingly apparent that Brownlee was not going to be persuaded to join the federal government, King's opinion of the premier continued to deteriorate. He is "a queer dour sort of man" he remarked while in the province. No progress could be made with the premier on the matter of unemployment and King accused him of trying to shift the onus onto Ottawa. After touring Alberta King noted the province would remain one of the party's worst spots. The complaints against the lack of organization and the failings of Stewart continued

¹⁶⁹Ibid., reel 2317, volume 209, pp.147112-4, Crerar to King, June 10, 1930.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., reel 2316, volume 208, pp.146664-7, K.A. Blatchford to King, September 12, 1930.

¹⁷¹Regenstreif, "The Liberal Party of Canada", p.245.

throughout:¹⁷² "Organization in Alberta is terrible. Stewart is worse than useless, is like an old woman, with no real control of situation. Things are much at 6's & 7's & we may lose in this province though thank Heavens there are not many seats to lose."¹⁷³

In Saskatchewan the Progressives were supporting the provincial Conservative administration and Liberals contested all but one of the twenty-one seats. The unemployment problem continued to plague King and he responded with indications that the federal government would pay dollar for dollar on public works but "it was work & many who are talking don't want work."¹⁷⁴ Even though the western tour had dampened his confidence, on the eve of the election he still believed Manitoba Liberals would probably lose one or two seats, while in the other two provinces the party would maintain its present standing. He was sure Bennett was making no appeal in the West and remarked that there may even be "a real Liberal sweep."¹⁷⁵

In the general election of 1930 the Liberals lost almost 40 seats with only 87 Liberals and 3 Liberal-Progressives elected. The Conservatives, on the other hand, increased

¹⁷²"Stewart is no good as a minister, or organizer...He has no suggestion as to what is best to do. He himself should have arranged it all." King Diaries, July 3, 1930.

¹⁷³Ibid., July 10, 1930.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., July 11, 1930.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., July 28, 1930.

their representation by 47 seats, giving them a total of 138 members. The farmer and labour groups elected 15 with 2 re-elected Independents completing the total. The Conservatives now outnumbered all other groups by a comfortable majority of 30 and had adequate representation from each province. On the Prairies Liberal and Liberal-Progressive representation dropped from 32 to 18 seats; the Conservatives now had 23 members where they had only 1 before. King won his seat in Prince Albert by a majority of 1192 votes but the Conservative candidate received 2310 to 1673 votes in the city and made heavy gains in the traditionally Liberal districts.¹⁷⁶ Both Crerar and Dunning were defeated.

The result in Quebec came as the greatest shock to King but next in line were the numbers from Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Searching for the bright side, he claimed to be "glad" to see the Quebec and Saskatchewan "blocs" broken and the party with a more even national distribution, but noted the Saskatchewan result had spelled destruction for the Liberals in the West.¹⁷⁷ "Nothing could have saved the general result," he consoled himself, "except organization." The causes of defeat, he believed, lay in the lack of organization and propaganda, followed by the New Zealand butter issue and the problem of unemployment. He confessed the 'five-cent speech' was a poor beginning "because so contrary to my whole

¹⁷⁶Abrams, p.312.

¹⁷⁷King Diaries, September 20, 1930.

nature & spirit & action."¹⁷⁸ The loss of Crerar and Dunning would be a severe blow to the Liberal party on the Prairies and it was "perfectly terrible to have Stewart alone representing the West of our former colleagues."¹⁷⁹ Dunning's defeat would injure western party fortunes but his position in the region had only further declined since taking the finance portfolio. His budget had not been popular or effective on the Prairies. Now that he was out of office, Dunning planned on accepting a post with the Canadian Pacific Railway and turning to his eastern business interests. Dafoe could not see how he would draw pay from the CPR and ever sit for a western constituency again: "Whether he realizes it or not he has made his choice for the present and perhaps all time."¹⁸⁰ Dunning had become an easterner.

On the Prairies, agitation against the Liberal immigration policy, with all the overtones of racial and religious prejudices, had left a residue of mistrust. The frustration from falling prices had found an outlet in the issue of unemployment and a scapegoat in the government's responsibility for bringing in too many people through such means as the Railway Agreement. Half of the Liberal losses in the West were in urban ridings where most of the unemployed

¹⁷⁸Ibid., July 29, 1930.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., August 2, 1930.

¹⁸⁰Dafoe Papers, box 2, file 2, Dafoe to Dexter, November 3, 1930.

had drifted. By November 700 unemployed men would register in Prince Albert and a flood of destitute people would continue entering the city from the country districts.¹⁸¹ New Zealand butter had also been the catalyst for fears in the dairying areas. As Buchanan noted, "undoubtedly unemployment and a certain amount of depression operated more against the Government out here than anything else. It seemed impossible to keep the Budget and the record of the Government in the foreground."¹⁸² King agreed but also shifted much of the blame onto the party's organization.¹⁸³

Crerar concluded that the budget could not have aided the Prairie campaign in the first place and ended up being "more of a handicap than a help." It contained too many protectionist features. On the other hand, he did believe Bennett had "made the tariff issue" for the Liberal party. By taking such a protectionist stance the Liberals would find it easy to capture the low-tariff votes. He noted a "pretty definite reaction already setting in against Bennett in the West" that would "gain in momentum" until his government became "the most unpopular that we have ever had in this country."¹⁸⁴ King agreed and could not see how Bennett "can

¹⁸¹Abrams, p.312.

¹⁸²King Papers, reel 2316, volume 207, pp.146160-1, Buchanan to King, August 5, 1930.

¹⁸³Ibid., pp.146162-3, King to Buchanan, August 19, 1930.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., reel 2317, volume 209, pp.147162-9, Crerar to King, November 7, 1930.

hold the West & East together with tariff the main issue."¹⁸⁵ F.C. Hamilton tried to put an optimistic outlook on the situation that would become prophetic: "I really think that you will have a much more pleasant time in opposition until this period of depression passes over."¹⁸⁶ Not surprisingly, Gardiner voiced the sentiments of the Diehards when he informed King that much of the result was due to the past compromises: "Today we are in opposition both Federally and provincially largely because Liberal doctrines could not be advocated as such in large areas without offending those upon whom we depended for support."¹⁸⁷

According to Neatby the election of 1930 was a continuation of the trend back to the two-party system: "Mistrust of the federal government had not disappeared from the prairies but Mackenzie King's efforts to placate the Canadian farmers had not been in vain. Regional dissatisfaction had been dissipated to the extent that no regional party had any vitality."¹⁸⁸ Buchanan noted this trend in Alberta. The Conservatives who had been associated with the UFA since 1921, moved back to their former allegiance and this seemed to provide hope once again for a Liberal

¹⁸⁵King Diaries, August 3, 1930.

¹⁸⁶King Papers, reel 2318, volume 211, pp.148673-4, Fred Hamilton to King, August 2, 1930.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., reel 2317, volume 210, pp.148268-71, Gardiner to King, November 10, 1930.

¹⁸⁸Neatby, p.341.

resurgence.¹⁸⁹ To aid in this endeavour W.R. Howson even requested federal help in regaining the province. The provincial Liberals had been opposed to coalition and the futility of such attempts had been demonstrated by the election. According to Howson, "it surely was demonstrated in the last Federal Election that Mr. Brownlee and his friends cannot be depended upon so far as the Liberals are concerned when we found him and his Ministers speaking all over the Province for candidates opposing the Liberals." Nothing had done the Alberta Liberals more harm, Howson claimed, than the widely circulated report that the Ottawa Liberals were opposed to the provincial party fighting the Brownlee government. Now that both parties were in opposition he called for a new era of dominion-provincial harmony.¹⁹⁰ King was fed up with hearing the same notes of hope emerging from Alberta only to be drowned out by a chorus of defeat. He was forced to admit an ignorance and helplessness when it came to Alberta affairs: "I confess I know so little about what is going on in Alberta at the present time that I hesitate to express any opinion as to the existing political situation." All he could do was fall back on his traditional call for unity and moderation.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹King Papers, reel 2316, volume 207, pp.146160-1, Buchanan to King, August 5, 1930.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., reel 2318, volume 212, pp.149358-9, Howson to Stewart, September 9, 1930.

¹⁹¹Ibid., reel 2316, volume 208, pp.146683-4, King to J. Clarke, December 30, 1930.

A return to the two-party system in the West would seem to indicate that King had succeeded in the region but this certainly was not the case as the results of the election demonstrated. The West may have given much of its support to the Tories but in 1930 there was no real alternative. Politics on the Prairies were in an uncertain, unsettled state and the Depression was to ravage the West more than any other region. "The farmer of the West," J.G. Ross warned, "is becoming somewhat red and I am afraid if the wrong lead happens to be given to him in the near future that most anything might happen."¹⁹² The return of the two-party system may have seemed evident in that the contest was fought between the two traditional parties but it was to be shortlived, and already signs of a new third party appeared on the horizon. Mackenzie King continued to fear the revival of the Progressive movement but by the end of the year Crerar was noting a different threat in the form of a Labour-Farmer combination. "This I look upon as a sort of call to the Proletariat...", he wrote King, "and, in the present temper of the West an appeal of this kind might get a considerable response."¹⁹³ Gardiner also noted that there was "some talk of a third political party in the west," but his usual confidence

¹⁹²Ibid., reel 2321, volume 219, pp.153990-1, J.G. Ross to King, November 27, 1930.

¹⁹³Ibid., reel 2317, volume 209, pp.147162-9, Crerar to King, November 7, 1930.

in the Liberal creed convinced him that it was not a real threat. The Farmers were "unsettled in their opinions" and lacked leadership. If Liberal remedies were offered to handle the difficult times, the "new fangled political ideas" would be ignored.¹⁹⁴ According to Dafoe, King still did not understand western mentality if he believed the anti-Bennett sentiment would eventually merge with the Liberal stream:

The radical agrarian element is bewildered and disillusioned but I don't think many of them are saying 'Hereafter the Liberal party for us.' On the contrary many of them appear to think that they have been destroyed politically because they did not adhere to their original plan of making war on both old parties. The spirit of 1921 may revive wilder than ever....the Liberal party will have to swing pretty far to the left if it is to pick up the West.¹⁹⁵

In the months after the election the severity of the Depression along with the protectionist stance of the Bennett government convinced western Liberals that the Tories were in for difficult times. Dafoe was intent on having the Free Press as an opposition paper and to "carry on our own brand of warfare against Bennett."¹⁹⁶ The region was already becoming "alarmed and perturbed at Bennett's performances" and there was "nothing to do but wait and let the mills grind." But Dafoe was once again also down on King:

¹⁹⁴Ibid., volume 210, pp.148268-71, Gardiner to King, November 10, 1930.

¹⁹⁵Dafoe Papers, box 2, file 2, Dafoe to Dexter, November 3, 1930.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., August 8, 1930.

I felt a good deal of exasperation over King's performance in leaving the plough in the furrow, when there was a great need for it to be ploughed through to the end, and going off on a political adventure...Mr. King's political sagacity all through the campaign and its antecedents was a minus quality but I rather look to him to show up well in Opposition. He may keep the party ship steering a straight course to a well-defined goal but I doubt whether he appreciates the magnitude of his task. I do not think his chances again of being Prime Minister are very good.¹⁹⁷

Mackenzie King has received consistent acclaim for defeating the Progressives and returning the West to the Liberal fold but this interpretation must be questioned. Certainly his political talent was largely responsible for wooing the crypto-Liberals at the federal level but internal problems within the movement and the threat of a Tory regime loomed just as large. More importantly, the fact that the West to a significant extent was willing to turn to the Conservatives by 1930 can be seen as nothing other than evidence of King's failure. There is little doubt that he underestimated the Depression and nowhere was its impact more strongly felt than on the Prairies. In truth, King has overestimated his hold on the region. The security he felt after the election of 1926 had proven illusory.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., box 3, file 7, Dafoe to D.A. McArthur, October 7, 1930.

CHAPTER SIX
THE STIFFER THE APPLICATION THE SWIFTER THE CURE, 1931-35

Bennett has been sent to us as a scourge and the stiffer the application the swifter the cure. The deflation of Bennett stock throughout the West is remarkable.

-J.W. Dafoe to Grant Dexter, January 20, 1931

The Depression brought the Prairie West to its knees and hastened the region's decline. Falling grain prices, diminishing yields, and collapsing markets were met head-on by drought, crop disease, and insect plagues. In urban areas the economy was beset by unemployment, the likes of which had never before been witnessed. The area had been able to wield the balance of power within the nation through much of the 1920s but by 1935 it would be a debtor region, and political ramifications were inevitable. As leaders such as Mackenzie King grappled with broader 'national' issues, the emphasis on region diminished. The revamping of federalism and the constitution, the crisis in capitalism and the beginning of a new economic order, and the lengthening shadows of dictatorship and the threats of world war pushed Prairie concerns into the background. The crude political reality was that as the region became less influential, King's focus turned elsewhere and the West would never again receive the same attention from Ottawa.

The expectation that the Conservatives would be ejected from office in the next election and the Liberals returned led

to the rise of third parties and a renewed search for alternatives. The nature of these third parties along with the changing relationship between the King government and the West ensured them more longevity than enjoyed by the Progressives.

In the period from 1926 until 1930 Mackenzie King's western attention had been centred on Manitoba. Therein lay the crucial battle with the Progressives and he believed the province was the key to winning the region. But this emphasis now turned to Alberta. "No one deplores more than I do the political situation as it affects the Liberals in Alberta," King wrote. "It seems to me there is more need of a searching diagnosis of causes and the application of the necessary remedies in Alberta than in any other province of Canada."¹

In the months after the general election Alberta Liberals were quick to inform King that they had been correct all along as to the political leaning of Brownlee and the UFA government. The Brownlee-Stewart antagonism had shown itself when the UFA helped defeat the Liberals while many of the latter had followed Ottawa's advice and withheld opposition to UFA candidates.² J.W. McDonald had been chosen leader of the provincial party but W.R. Howson, who was "elected to the House, on the supposition that he had promised certain anti-

¹King Papers, reel 2326, volume 227, pp.158592-4, King to Howson, December 19, 1931.

²Ibid., reel 2324, volume 224, pp.156843-4, K.A. Blatchford to King, March 10, 1931.

Charlie Stewart Liberals that he would not take part in Stewart's election," was the most vocal and influential of the group.³

Many in the provincial party remained puzzled as to the lack of Liberal success. Traditionally, a party could take advantage of being in opposition to remove itself from the critical public limelight and build up a formidable organization. "Not so in Alberta," J.A. Clarke admitted. "The party here has disintegrated and has become a bunch of Kilkenny Cats, worse than ever in its history."⁴

The vocal Howson had no difficulty assigning blame for party fortunes. The federal Liberals had never understood Alberta politics and only worsened the situation with their intervention. Howson was not, however, demanding that Ottawa remove its influence from the provincial scene. On the contrary, he was annoyed that there was not enough intervention of a beneficial nature. The 1930 general election weakened federal-provincial Liberal relations because Ottawa had been courting the Brownlee government while the provincial party had been battling it. In the provincial election of June, 1930, Howson argued, the federal Liberals remained aloof and the favour was inevitably returned in the federal campaign. Now he was calling for a closer

³Ibid., reel 2325, volume 225, pp.157290-3, J.A. Clarke to G.P. Graham, November 13, 1931.

⁴Ibid., pp.157290-3, J.A. Clarke to G.P. Graham, November 13, 1931.

relationship with Ottawa. He was also pushing for a more radical Liberal platform, even if its planks could not be carried out. This seemed to have a special appeal in Alberta where the UFA had entered government on a concrete program but carried through few of its promises. The people of Alberta, Howson argued, needed a "rallying cry and the spirit and energy of evangelists." He would soon learn that his words carried a particular note of prophecy.⁵

For King the Alberta Liberals were of the same cast as the Diehards of Manitoba and the Gardinerites of Saskatchewan. He went on advancing the cause of compromise and the belief that the Alberta group was just being stubborn in refusing to forget past differences. It had been demonstrated repeatedly that the UFA was not Liberal and co-operation, never mind fusion, was impossible. But King had little respect for any advice from Albertans and stubbornly maintained his own convictions. When Robert Gardiner was appointed federal leader of the UFA, King heralded the decision because he believed "at heart Gardiner is a sincere Liberal" and recognized the necessity of joining battle against the

⁵Ibid., reel 2326, volume 227, pp.158588-91, W.R. Howson to King, December 13, 1931. The same sentiments for a more radical platform were voiced by most Alberta Liberals who sensed the mood of the province. "I sometimes feel that it would be to our advantage as a party to take a rather pronounced stand a little more to the leftward," Buchanan wrote. Reel 2328, volume 231, pp.161640-1, Buchanan to King, July 7, 1932.

Conservatives.⁶

The urgency of a Liberal-Progressive coalition in Manitoba, on the other hand, seemed to diminish after 1930. All previous attempts had failed and it had to be accepted that a coalition encompassing the Bracken Progressives, the Diehards, and other Liberal groups was not a possibility. Fusion was still desirable but the determined pressure from Ottawa had ended. At the Liberal convention of 1929 a negotiation committee had been formed but done little. The committee finally recommended that the Liberals should formulate a platform, choose a leader, and fight as a separate party. In May of 1931 even Crerar was indicating the impossibility of the situation and that it would be a "mistake" to throw the Liberal lot in with Bracken.⁷ By the following month, however, he had altered his opinion.

The 1931 Liberal convention was fragmented by the old rivalries for and against coalition and Dr. Murdoch Mackay was chosen leader. The convention and resulting reemergence of the old debate led Crerar once again to take a stand on the issue. If a choice had to be made, he was for coalition. Crerar was pleased with the selection of Mackay and believed Bracken was anxious to co-operate.⁸ As usual King maintained

⁶Ibid., pp.161216-7, King to G.H. Webster, January 28, 1931.

⁷Ibid., reel 2325, volume 225, pp.157341-4, Crerar to King, May 4, 1931.

⁸Ibid., pp.157351-3, Crerar to King, June 29, 1931.

his opinion that co-operation against the Tories was desirable.⁹ Several months later Crerar was disgruntled with the Manitoba government's handling of the Depression and believed it was losing credibility with the populace. Unless a reorganization that included Liberals could considerably strengthen the administration, he concluded that coalition was undesirable. It seemed the Brackenites were in trouble and with no federal election in sight there was little to be gained. Coalition with a declining administration would only react poorly on the Liberals.¹⁰

At the same time, Mackenzie King was becoming increasingly conscious that his absence from the Prince Albert constituency was a handicap and source of ammunition for his opponents in Saskatchewan. He attempted to offset such criticism by demonstrating the rewards of having the prime minister as representative. Amidst the pessimism and scepticism of the Depression, criticism of King's absence from P.A. only increased: "Just how I am going to be able to have the good people of Prince Albert feel that I can represent them as effectively as one who may be living in the West has already begun to cause me some concern." He explained to his campaign workers that the role of the party leader made it difficult to devote time to his constituency. His loyalty to

⁹Ibid., reel 2326, volume 227, pp.158975-8, King to W.J. Lindal, April 19, 1931.

¹⁰Ibid., reel 2325, volume 225, pp.157363-6, Crerar to King, October 7, 1931.

his constituents was overborne by his duty to the nation. Already he was fearing that a third party might pose a threat in the riding. More than anything else he feared the psychological impact of again being defeated.¹¹ When he had become the member for P.A. in 1925 "King was well on his way to becoming one of the most travelled members in parliamentary history." According to Gardiner, even Laurier had assessed King as one who would not get elected in the same constituency twice.¹² In the federal contest of 1930 the Conservatives had run a particularly aggressive campaign against King in P.A. and while he won the seat, the overall defeat had come as a shock to his confidence. The Tories had boasted that King could not be re-elected twice in the same constituency and called for his defeat to strike a powerful blow against the governing Liberals.¹³

The situation in the West did not bode well for the Liberals but comfort was found in the miserable state of Tory fortunes. The Depression undercut any possibility of a long-term Conservative breakthrough on the Prairies. When the government brought its budget down in 1931, the contrast with the preceding year was obvious. "A very difft. scene than a

¹¹Ibid., reel 2326, volume 228, pp.159154-6, King to Charles McDonald, January 14, 1931.

¹²Smith and Ward, Jimmy Gardiner: Relentless Liberal, p.55.

¹³Ibid., reel 2328, volume 231, pp.161107-12, W.A. Tucker to King, January 1, 1931.

year ago on the Dunning Budget," King recorded, "with drought in the West, there is a serious time ahead."¹⁴ He was becoming aware just how fortunate the defeat of 1930 had been: "The nemesis that is following Bennett & his promises is amazing. Oh how grateful I am we went to the country when we did & are not in office today."¹⁵

A wave of reports from the West confidently predicted disaster for the Tories at the next election and a letter from T.C. Davis was typical:

At the present time there is a terrific amount of ill will in this Western Country against the Bennett Government and wherever you go you meet a continuous stream of people who voted for that Government last year but who openly express their regret for so doing and who publicly state that they will never do it again.¹⁶

The Depression would destroy the Bennett government and the Liberals would have to do little other than sit discreetly by and observe the destruction. "Bennett has been sent to us as a scourge," J.W. Dafoe wrote, "and the stiffer the application the swifter the cure." If the threat of a Conservative victory had done a great deal in bringing Dafoe and the Free Press back to the Liberal side, the reality of Bennett's administration secured their support. The editor admitted that he was leading the paper into full-scale war with

¹⁴King Diaries, June 1, 1931.

¹⁵Ibid., June 24, 1931; July 1, 1931.

¹⁶King Papers, reel 2325, volume 225, pp.157586-8, T.C. Davis to King, July 16, 1931.

Bennett. "We never did a better stroke of work," he proudly claimed, "than when we made war on him from the day he took office making it clear to the world that we had no confidence in him or his programme."¹⁷

King could not help feeling smug. The Liberals had governed Canada through an age of prosperity and now a Conservative administration was beset by Depression. While in Winnipeg briefly in January, 1932, he used the opportunity to remind the westerners that they were partly responsible for the election of Bennett: "It was an immense satisfaction to be able to shew & tell the West where we as Liberals had been in the right in our policies & to demonstrate the wrong of Bennett's policies & methods alike."¹⁸

Westerners were quick to remind the Liberal leader, in turn, not to be carried away by the same wave of confidence that had led to the 1930 defeat. The Depression was making the Bennett Tories extremely unpopular but the result was not a dramatic rise in the popularity of the Liberals or of Mackenzie King. Dafoe noted that while King was the most suitable leader, "it would not be correct to say that there is much enthusiasm for him." Any achievements to his credit did not stand out in the public mind and he had little personal following. To those on the political left, Dafoe remarked,

¹⁷Dafoe Papers, box 2, file 2, Dafoe to G. Dexter, January 20, 1931.

¹⁸King Diaries, January 12, 1932.

King was in an even worse situation. Although he spoke the language of reform and claimed to be sympathetic with left-wing movements, there was a feeling "he had at heart a strong dislike for them, and cherished the hope that the Liberals would be able to put them out of business."¹⁹

King was also advised to avoid partisanship. The economic crisis had deepened Prairie scepticism and distrust of political parties. He should stay clear of addresses "filled with political attack" and instead concentrate on economics. Crerar reminded him that the region was not populated by the "political partisans" found in the East.²⁰

For his part, Mackenzie King refused to believe that the Depression could not be solved by the same economic principles that had served in the past. He was aware of the crisis in capitalism²¹ and the debates surrounding ideas of inflationary spending and deficit financing but he would only experiment with new ideas once success was reasonably assured. For as long as possible King would hang on to the belief that past prosperity could be recreated through the old measures of fiscal restraint and balanced budgets. The economic situation, however, was making the West more than prepared to

¹⁹Dafoe Papers, box 3, file 9, Dafoe to V. Massey, December 7, 1931.

²⁰King Papers, reel 2325, volume 225, pp.157341-4, Crerar to King, May 4, 1931.

²¹"The capitalistic system to-day is under fire, it is on trial, it is being investigated; and I hope, indeed I believe, it is being modified." Debates, King, p.2668, June 16, 1931.

experiment with new ideas.

One of these economic principles that King clung to throughout and even after the Depression was the need for lower tariffs.²² Neatby notes that "for two years he would continue to argue that the tariff encompassed most of Canadian politics"²³ but King was not the only one hanging on to this policy. Bennett also decided to wield the tariff as the cure to Canada's economic woes. The Liberal leader had little doubt the Depression and its recovery were inextricably bound to tariffs. Markets for farm products had contracted and the consequent agricultural depression had in turn depressed domestic trade and industry. Tariff decreases could aid farmers by enhancing trade and lowering costs of production. Not surprisingly King was shocked when Bennett brought in his tariff bill. The Tariff Advisory Board had been dismissed and a series of increases were instituted the likes of which had

²²It has at times been assumed that the tariff disappeared as an issue after 1930. It would be correct to argue that the issue declined in importance throughout the 1930s and J.E. Rea offers a convincing explanation as to the reasons, but the opinion of Esberrey, for example, that King "persevered with it even into the early 1930s when low tariff no longer had popular appeal" because he "had put a great deal of time and effort...and he was reluctant to abandon it merely because it was not longer returning an obvious dividend," ignores the importance of the issue throughout Bennett's administration. Nor does it give enough respect to King's political skills. He did not hang on to the issue because of the time and effort invested. If an issue no longer produced political dividends, King was sure to let it go. The truth of the matter was that King believed the issue was still of essential importance to the West. See Joy Esberrey, Knight of the Holy Spirit, pp.196-7 and J.E. Rea's 1991 Presidential Address to the CHA.

²³Neatby, p.344.

not been seen "since the days of John A. Macdonald's National Policy."²⁴ In the debate that followed King was disgusted that his colleagues would not stand up against the increases: "There are not enough of them ready to talk. It is disgraceful but a fact that some are so fearful of protests etc. that they will not speak."²⁵ The continuation of the Depression into 1931 further convinced King that the high tariff approach was failing and was, in itself, justification for past Liberal policies.

Many Liberals also agreed that Bennett's tariff policies were sealing his fate: "The Tories have given us the key to the Citadel- it remains only for us to occupy the fort." There was a feeling in the West that the last Liberal budget had surrendered liberal principles on lower tariffs and aided in Bennett's victory. King was again reminded that the region would not "swing into the Liberal columns" out of mere opposition to the Tories. There had to be constructive action, and this meant substantial tariff reductions.²⁶ Buchanan informed King that the tariff would become the essential issue in the West because the UFA was neglecting it and emphasizing banking and currency problems.²⁷

²⁴Ibid., p.350.

²⁵King Diaries, September 17, 1930.

²⁶King Papers, reel 2325, volume 225, pp.157642-6, R.J. Deachman to King, May 5, 1931.

²⁷Ibid., reel 2328, volume 231, pp.161640-1, Buchanan to King, July 7, 1932.

One of the main issues facing King during his period in opposition was party unity. With the tariff as a major issue, controversy and division were inevitable. The challenge was to form an effective strategy to oppose Bennett's high tariff policies without furthering the Liberal divisions. The Depression was making the situation even more difficult and "the high and low tariff sections within the party were becoming more divided than ever."²⁸ King decided to follow a cautious line of opposition. He did not immediately call for a return to the Dunning budget because "to try to go that length today would be a great mistake- the country has not yet seen the evils of the protectionist measures already put thro'."²⁹ Bennett's most dangerous enemy would be time, and the continuing ravages of the Depression would damage the Tory tariff policies while a less vocal opposition would maintain Liberal unity. If King was now refusing to take an aggressive stance on the western issue with which he had always claimed the most sympathy, there was little chance of his pursuing other Prairie concerns.

Gardiner's ascent to Prairie lieutenant markedly increased during the period of opposition. After 1930 Dunning left politics and pursued his eastern business interests. His previous position as minister of finance, coupled with the move, weakened his reputation as a westerner and ensured he

²⁸Neatby, pp.356-7.

²⁹King Diaries, June 2, 1931.

could never again be considered for the role of Prairie advisor. Western Liberals recognized the dilemma and informed King accordingly: "Mr. Dunning cannot continue to live in Montreal and work for the C.P.R. and retain his hold on the mass of people in Saskatchewan, it simply cannot be done."³⁰

He was soon "more at home on St. James Street than in a prairie village," Neatby muses. "By the time he felt he could afford to return to politics Dunning would no longer be considered a western Liberal."³¹

The latter half of 1931 was spent by King attempting to clear his name, and that of the Liberal party, in the aftermath of the Beauharnois Scandal.³² The Depression played a large role in mitigating the political effect of the scandal, particularly in the West. The populace was so intent on demonstrating its opposition to the Bennett Conservatives that less attention was paid to the implications of Beauharnois. The scandal did increase western convictions about the corruption of the traditional parties but in 1931 there had not yet appeared a strong enough third party movement to capitalize on Prairie discontent. Anger aimed at the Tories would still benefit the Liberals.

³⁰King Papers, reel 2328, volume 231, pp.161349-51, A.M. Young to King, March 14, 1931.

³¹Neatby, pp.357-8.

³²The details of the scandal are discussed in T. Regehr, The Beauharnois Scandal: A Story of Canadian Entrepreneurship and Politics.

Crerar, on the other hand, had no doubt that the damaging disclosures of the committee investigating the Beauharnois project had left their impression on the public mind and that the Liberal party had suffered considerably. He did not believe, however, that the Tories had made any consequent gains. The opposition to the Conservatives continued to pressure western Liberals into supporting Mackenzie King. His personal integrity had not and would not be challenged.³³ After hearing rumours in October that King was pondering resignation, Crerar attempted to soothe the leader's wounded pride. "The unfortunate Beauharnois incident is fading into the background in the swiftly moving events around us," he wrote.³⁴ To Cameron he remarked that "no men, perhaps least of all leaders, because of the spotlight that plays upon them are perfect." King did not have all the qualities of strong leadership but he had many of them.³⁵ For Dafoe, King was still "the inevitable, and upon the whole the best leader for the next battle."³⁶ Similar sentiments were being heard from Alberta. The UFA was attempting to use the scandal to revive the movement but the rural population had too many other

³³King Papers, reel 2325, volume 225, pp.159357-62, Crerar to King, September 2, 1931; Crerar Papers, series III, box 98, Crerar to Cameron, August 31, 1931.

³⁴Ibid., pp.157363-6, Crerar to King, October 7, 1931.

³⁵Crerar Papers, series III, box 98, Crerar to Cameron, November 2, 1931.

³⁶Dafoe Papers, box 2, file 2, Dafoe to G. Dexter, November 20, 1931.

things to worry about. Despite the revelations and implications of the scandal, in the "final analysis" Beauharnois was proving "pretty much of a dud."³⁷

The scandal furthered King's distaste for organizational work and in November a meeting of the National Liberal Organization Committee was held in Ottawa. A temporary National Liberal Association was planned with Senator Andrew Haydon as Chairman. During the next year a central office was established with a permanent staff to make the separation between the party leader and party finances more formal. On November 25 and 26, 1932 the founding meeting of the National Liberal Federation was held. Haydon had died earlier that month and Vincent Massey was appointed president with Norman Lambert secretary.

The fear of the third party on the Prairies never left Mackenzie King. From the onset of the Depression he carefully observed the western reaction watching for any sign of discontent leading to political action, and from the beginning he saw signs that were reinforced by westerners:

At the present time the farmers of the West are just milling around and if they happen to find a leader with a good personality, ability and courage, to jump into the front ranks and take hold of the job I believe they will follow him, should they be successful it will mean our death-blow so far as the prairie west is concerned.³⁸

³⁷King Papers, reel 2329, volume 234, pp.163385-6, J.Boyd McBride to King, June 3, 1932.

³⁸Ibid., reel 2328, volume 231, pp.160889-92, J.A. Stevenson to King, January 19, 1931.

From Prince Albert King was informed that sentiment was against Bennett but not necessarily for the Liberals. The party feared a revival of the Progressive movement in that western farmers felt they were being "bled to help the eastern manufacturers."³⁹ The Liberal leader tried to comfort himself that any third party movement appearing at this time was merely a confession on behalf of the West that the region had been wrong in supporting Bennett in the first place.⁴⁰ It was an outstanding fact, he noted in his Winnipeg speech of January, 1932 that third parties always came into being under Tory rule and always vanished under Liberal government. There had been no third parties under Mackenzie or Laurier, but they had appeared under Macdonald, Borden, and Meighen.⁴¹ He still could not believe, however, that after all his efforts in defeating the Progressives, the region would once again turn to a third party. If it did, King would be much less prone to demonstrate the same patient and conciliatory attitude.

As usual the "ultra-radical element" was reported to be strongest in Alberta. Proposals for banking reform and "some foolish declarations for managed currency" by the UFA were receiving a sympathetic ear. The Albertan radical fringe had

³⁹Ibid., pp.161096-97A, A.F. Totzke to King, February 4, 1931.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp.161098-100, King to A.F. Totzke, February 9, 1931.

⁴¹Ibid., J5 Speeches, reel 2799, volume 33D, pp.19258-61, January 12, 1932.

long been a thorn in King's side but more emphatically he was being warned about the possibility of a "Labor-Radical Farmer alliance" that was "making a strong appeal".⁴²

King's reaction to the foundation of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in 1932 differed markedly from his attitude to the Progressive Party of the early 1920s. Although he was opposed to socialism and did not see the new movement as a group of misguided Liberals, he also did not treat them as an enemy of the same ilk as the Tories: "Their heart was in the right place," Neatby argues, "...even if their solutions were unacceptable." King was contemptuous of Bennett but he admired the idealism of Woodsworth.⁴³

When the CCF took up the inflation issue, the Liberals found themselves ill-prepared. Monetary policy had long been an issue with the Alberta Progressives, and the Ginger Group in particular, and the United Farmers had played a leading role in the formation of the CCF. The desire for an inflationary policy was now being voiced across the Prairies. For many westerners monetary policy had displaced the tariff as the central issue in politics.⁴⁴ The price of wheat had dropped to its lowest point, below forty cents a bushel, yet while production and profits had declined, the policies of the

⁴²Ibid., reel 2328, volume 232, pp.161946-7, Crerar to King, January 4, 1932.

⁴³Neatby, p.29.

⁴⁴Ibid., p.30.

banks had remained stable. For a debtor community inflation offered hope. If more money was put into circulation, it was argued, prices would rise.

Mackenzie King's economic thinking was too orthodox to ponder inflationary measures. He understood their appeal on the Prairies but feared they would cause disruption within party ranks. "I fear we are going to have a difficult time in reconciling the views of some of the members of our party on currency and credit problems," he wrote Crerar.⁴⁵ He would be prepared to consider a central bank as a means of satisfying both eastern and western sentiment in regard to inflationary policy but he did not personally like the idea.⁴⁶ King was gradually finding himself out of tune with most western concerns.

The old issue of coalition in Manitoba came to the forefront again early in 1932. Since September, 1931 Bracken had been advancing the cause of a union government to include even the Conservatives to deal with the province's financial situation.⁴⁷ The premier joined with Crerar and Joe Thorson at the beginning of the year to draft a letter to the provincial Liberals requesting they form a coalition government. The Liberals were agreeable and negotiations commenced immediately. As Kendle notes, the Diehards were

⁴⁵King Papers, King to Crerar, January 24, 1933.

⁴⁶King Diaries, February 1, 1933.

⁴⁷Kendle, pp.115-8.

better organized than in previous years and reacted by appointing a central committee of sixty. They intended to reject the proposal, elect their own officers, and push for the replacement of Mackay as leader. If they failed to carry the upcoming convention, they would form their own party.

In conjunction with the convention Mackenzie King came to Winnipeg. At the meeting on January 12, the Liberals voted by a majority of approximately three to one to accept Bracken's invitation to unite with his party for the purpose of the upcoming provincial elections.⁴⁸ King asked Crerar to take a hand in provincial affairs temporarily to aid the prospects of co-operation. The Liberal leader was pleased with the state of affairs in the province. "Everywhere I hear only satisfaction expressed," he noted. "How different the whole welcome & interest from first time I went to Winnipeg after becoming leader."⁴⁹

The Bracken government was reorganized immediately after the first session of the House in 1932. A joint organizational committee was established but division still plagued the process. The Diehards refused to accept the decision of the Liberal Association and took counter measures. The Liberal League, headed by E.J. McMurray and Fred Hamilton, was organized with the declared objective of running its own

⁴⁸Ibid., pp.120-2.

⁴⁹King Diaries, January 14, 1932.

candidates in all constituencies.⁵⁰

Despite King's optimism, the break in the Manitoba Liberal party had finally occurred and coalition acceptable to all had failed. By June Crerar was informing King that although the coalition had not worked out as well as either of them hoped, the greater part of the Liberal party was at least linked with the Brackenites. According to Crerar the support of the Liberal League was negligible in Winnipeg and even weaker in the rural areas. The situation, however, was embarrassing. King went so far as to suggest that Crerar consider entering the new coalition government in Manitoba, but he declined.⁵¹

The victory of Bracken's party in the election led Crerar and King to herald a successful conclusion to Liberal-Progressive division: "This means that if we can keep Progressives & Liberals united we will sweep Western Canada at next elections."⁵² The co-operation, however, did not go far.⁵³ Fusion had only been gained through an elimination of the Diehard element and the all-encompassing coalition long sought by King had not come about. The reality of the

⁵⁰King Papers, reel 2328, volume 231, pp.161954-5, Crerar to King, March 8, 1932.

⁵¹Ibid., volume 232, pp.161959-61, Crerar to King, June 6, 1932.

⁵²King Diaries, June 18, 1932.

⁵³King Papers, reel 2328, volume 232, pp.161963-7, Crerar to King, August 22, 1932; reel 2329, volume 233, pp.162605-13, King to Gardiner, September 10, 1932.

situation was more aptly summed up by Norman McKay:

The Liberal party here in Manitoba is divided...The [Diehard] actions...were a disgrace to Liberalism. Their tactics were more malevolent, contained more bitterness and expressed more vindictiveness, than ever the Hon. leader of the opposition here, brought to bear upon the situation...What are we going to do with these outlaws?...Are we going to nurture this asp in our political bosom?...They are certainly a miserable lot. "A real thorn in the flesh."⁵⁴

King had never accepted the Diehard attitude but he was not comfortable being at odds with the group. The Bracken coalition could prove beneficial in the next federal campaign but the Liberal leader found himself harbouring doubts similar to those long expressed by the Diehards. Despite the coalition, he pushed to have the Liberal Association in the province remain a "separate entity". It would be "fatal" he warned, to have the Liberal identity eliminated.⁵⁵

A provincial convention was also to be held in Alberta and the party faithful were quick to tell the Liberal leader to forget any notion of beginning a renewed push for fusion in their province. The "experiment" in Manitoba was interesting but the same could not be accomplished in Alberta. The upcoming convention was seen as important for other reasons. It would bridge the divisions in the party and capitalize on the unpopularity of Bennett and Brownlee which seemed to open

⁵⁴Ibid., reel 2330, volume 235, pp.163609-11, Norman McKay to King, July 4, 1932.

⁵⁵Ibid., reel 2331, volume 237, pp.164854-7, King to J.T. Thorson, August 22, 1932.

the way for a Liberal revival.⁵⁶ The party had long felt the federal Liberals were not providing their "full support" and to offset this sentiment and bring the two branches closer together, a request was made that King, for the first time, attend a provincial convention in Alberta.⁵⁷ As usual he found excuses to prevent his attendance. King defended his handling of the province by accusing the party of not adequately dealing with its own organization and finances, and instead relying on Ottawa.⁵⁸

The rise of the CCF continued to bother Mackenzie King and in February, 1933 he gave a speech in the House outlining the Liberal reaction. Whereas the Tories attacked the new movement, King pointed out that his party agreed with the CCF on many points. Their aims were the same but their solutions differed. Certainly the Depression was pointing to "defects and maladjustments in the system" but the answer was not an entirely new order. King echoed the views he had been expounding since his youth. The crisis was largely a product of morality, of "the weaknesses and faults of human nature...the greed of individuals...if we get down to the root cause of the depression we shall find that it is a man-made

⁵⁶Ibid., reel 2329, volume 234, pp.163385-6, J.Boyd McBride to King, June 3, 1932.

⁵⁷Ibid., reel 2331, volume 237, p.164896-7, G.H. Van Allen to King, May 23, 1932.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp.164898-9, King to Van Allen, June 1, 1932.

Depression."⁵⁹ In reaction to the new left wing movement the Liberals would become a middle-of-the-road party. The problem for western members, however, was that the Prairie populace was prepared to give radical solutions a try. "A good many decent people think the Liberal party have followed too much of a 'middle of the road' policy," Crerar informed King.⁶⁰ The West had little tolerance for the Liberal leader's argument that the Depression reflected a crisis in morality.

The tone of CCF opposition toward the Liberals convinced King that the movement differed markedly from the Progressives and had to be treated accordingly. Many westerners wished to see the Liberals take a sympathetic approach to the CCF so as not to alienate the disgruntled looking for quick solutions. King believed he had shown ample sympathy with the movement's aims but the CCF had responded with hostility:

To expect the leader of the Liberal party to support all the policies of another party which is doing what it can to undermine Liberalism, but has really nothing to give in return, would be carrying the idea of sympathetic co-operation too far.

Leading members of the CCF had declared that their antagonism to the Liberal party was as strong as that to the Tories and both had to be destroyed. "In the circumstances," King noted, "they cannot be regarded in any sense as allies."⁶¹

⁵⁹Debates, King, pp.2492-2512, February 27, 1933.

⁶⁰King Papers, reel 2328, volume 232, pp.161946-7, Crerar to King, January 4, 1932.

⁶¹Ibid., reel 3672, volume 195, pp.166036-8, King to C.A. Dunlop, July 8, 1933; pp.166041-2, King to E.L. Dunn, October

Western frustration was also manifesting itself in Prince Albert. Mackenzie King was under increasing scrutiny for the lack of attention given to his own riding and critics would often point out that he only showed interest at election time. When the constituency was about to be redistributed by the Bennett government in 1933, however, King had no choice but to get involved.⁶² A Redistribution Bill was introduced in the House of Commons by Bennett on October 13, 1932 and a committee was struck to determine constituency boundaries. In January, 1933 T.C. Davis reported that D.L. Burgess, former Tory opponent to King in Prince Albert and present private secretary to federal agriculture minister Robert Weir, had come to the riding to discuss its redistribution. Due to shifts in Saskatchewan's population patterns the northern part of the province would gain one seat at the expense of the southern part. Burgess indicated that the boundaries of P.A. were to be altered by excluding the "predominantly Liberal" western section and adding a Tory eastern section. This eastern area had previously been part of the constituency of Robert Weir and the redistribution would therefore bring Weir and King into competition over the new riding. The constituency would suddenly offer the Conservatives "a fair chance of success." To counter the redistribution Davis suggested that if this move to defeat King went forward, he

5, 1933.

⁶²Neither Neatby nor Abrams discuss the issue.

should instead consider running in the new western riding of Rosthern. The fact that King was a non-resident in P.A. would "result unfavourably" in a contest with Weir.⁶³

King responded in an expected manner and called the move an obvious gerrymander. Nothing would please him more than a battle with Weir, whom he described as "a hateful viperous sort of character," but as party leader he claimed not to have the necessary time. He attempted to make light of the situation by arguing that personal defeat would not injure his own position as much as it would be embarrassing for the party. He did add that his "heart" was "very much in the problems of the West," and to have to seek a seat elsewhere would be unfortunate.⁶⁴

King believed that the Tories intended "to take away enough Liberal Portions" of his constituency to put the riding in "jeopardy". The redistribution, he argued, should have been handled by a commission of judges. The proposed change would reduce the population of the riding from 50 896 to 38 469. According to King's calculations from the last election, if the changes had been made they would have resulted in his defeat by 618 votes rather than his victory by 1192 votes.⁶⁵

In May the Tories offered to return some of the Liberal

⁶³King Papers, reel 3672, volume 195, pp.165802-3, T.C. Davis to King, January 28, 1933.

⁶⁴Ibid., pp.165804-5, King to Davis, February 2, 1933.

⁶⁵Debates, King, pp.5276-7, May 22, 1933.

areas to P.A. and make other adjustments including the sacrifice of Motherwell's seat in Melville. When King was informed of the second proposal he immediately seized the high moral ground and indicated he would "not consent to bettering my own position where it involved a sacrifice of others." The Liberal members from Saskatchewan seemed prepared to sacrifice Motherwell's seat on the "score of his years, & of his not likely having long to live." Charlie Stewart referred to the fact that Motherwell was no longer fit for a cabinet post and would prove an "encumbrance" after the next election. King refused to "be party to anything of the kind," or to "make the slightest move on my own behalf." When the Conservative committee was informed of his decision, "the die was cast" and it seemed the original proposal would be used. Bennett then approached the Liberal leader privately and asked him what he would like done with the Prince Albert seat. Once again he refused to offer advice and argued that if he could not win honourably, he did not wish to win at all. At this point King seemed confident that he would win the seat and he doubted Bennett would "dare" gerrymander the constituency and face public scrutiny with such "a dastardly trick."⁶⁶

King's anxiety increased in the next several weeks and he began to fear that redistribution would probably mean his defeat. If such was the case, he attempted to reassure himself, it would be "resented by the people of Canada" or

⁶⁶King Diaries, May 12, 1933; May 17, 1933.

there was no such thing as public opinion left in the nation. The Liberal leader had never recovered from his earlier losses in North York. Personal defeat at this point of his career could threaten his position as party leader but more importantly it threatened his fragile ego. The issue was very perplexing and his doubts continued: "I believe I shall win whatever they do, (tho' I may not)."⁶⁷ The situation became so stressful that he attempted to convince himself that all he could do was accept the result:

I feel that there is little I can do, & indeed feel as if I might as well not care what happens, but trust whatever happens being best in the end. The strain of public life is very great & this kind of ingratitude, of downright brutality- makes one feel like dropping out & devoting time to Literature. But for the Voices, & knowing it is their wish that I keep on, I wd be tempted to be indifferent.⁶⁸

The battle over redistribution was fought in Parliament but in the end King claimed that despite his best efforts the Tories were determined to have two new constituencies created and to "gerrymander Prince Albert". By May 17 it was apparent Motherwell's seat would be left alone. King met with the elderly politician and suggested he let Melville go and run somewhere else. The member for Last Mountain, Harry Butcher, would stand aside for Motherwell, probably be taken into Gardiner's cabinet until Motherwell died, and then return to the seat. Motherwell refused to let his seat go but was

⁶⁷Ibid., May 12, 1933.

⁶⁸Ibid., May 17, 1933.

prepared to accept the Tory map which joined a portion of Butcher's constituency with Melville.⁶⁹

King failed to have this map accepted by Bennett. "Motherwell has been a great disappointment this last few weeks," King claimed. "He has been selfish, exceedingly so."⁷⁰ The Liberal leader's ego took a further blow when he became convinced the Saskatchewan members had not gone far enough in defending his position to the House.⁷¹ It seemed that A.F. Totzke and Charlie Stewart had been discussing the P.A. redistribution without consulting him:

What tires me most is the way our own men keep bartering to save themselves, regardless of principles which shld govern in a redistribution....Totzke on our side promised too much at the outset, & Stewart was conceding too much, he is becoming a machine man.⁷²

According to Motherwell, Totzke had designs on the new seat of Rosthern himself. As John Courtney notes, the federal redistribution of 1933 "provides a good instance of how King, feeling betrayed by colleagues and sensitive to the attacks of his opponents, imagined himself alone in fighting the good fight."⁷³

⁶⁹Ibid., May 18, 1933.

⁷⁰Ibid., May 27, 1933.

⁷¹Ibid., May 22, 1933.

⁷²Ibid., May 23, 1933.

⁷³John C. Courtney, "Mackenzie King and Prince Albert Constituency: The 1933 Redistribution", Saskatchewan History, XXIX(1) Winter, 1976, pp.1-13.

The debate drew to a close on May 27. King once again protested the treatment of Prince Albert and Bennett offered a compromise. The proposed northern boundary of Rosthern would be reduced and left in P.A. while the southeastern corner of the riding would become part of Melfort. The compromise would maintain a block of Liberal votes for King while providing Conservative votes for Weir. King accepted the proposal although he believed it had not gone far enough.⁷⁴ The first Conservative proposal would have "left us without a fighting chance" but the resulting changes, he argued, left little more than that. He was proud to have refused any deals and fought the situation "in the open," stressing "the lack of chivalry."⁷⁵ Bennett had made his determination clear, as far as King was concerned, to destroy his influence in P.A., Saskatchewan, and the West.⁷⁶

By the time the redistribution was complete the Liberal leader was prepared to abandon Prince Albert and run in the new constituency of Rosthern where victory appeared more likely. Justification for such an abandonment was easy to come by. "It wd serve the Tories right," he told himself, "for such a contemptible piece of work,- a deliberate effort

⁷⁴Ibid., p.11.

⁷⁵King Papers, reel 3674, volume 198, p.168541, King to Robertson, June 14, 1933.

⁷⁶Ibid., p.168541, King to Robertson, June 14, 1933.

to defeat me."⁷⁷ It would also teach Totzke a lesson. Davis suggested that King run in Rosthern⁷⁸ but was reassuring him by July that regardless of any redistribution he would have no problem winning P.A. The riding executive was observing the upcoming provincial election in Saskatchewan as an indicator of popular sentiment and would advise King on the probability of victory.⁷⁹ A provincial by-election in Kinistino, which contained parts of all three of the proposed federal constituencies, provided further evidence that the Liberals would win regardless of redistribution.⁸⁰

King tried to make it appear that his personal concerns were secondary to those of the party and the constituency but his ego could not be denied. With reports that the Liberals would win the ridings, he now claimed to be prepared to contest P.A., "even if it seems probable that...I will be encountering certain defeat, and I would like our friends in Saskatchewan to understand that fully."⁸¹ He indicated a debt of appreciation to the riding.⁸² By the end of the summer,

⁷⁷King Diaries, May 27, 1933.

⁷⁸Ibid., June 14, 1933.

⁷⁹King Papers, reel 3672, volume 195, pp.165855-6, Davis to King, July 14, 1933.

⁸⁰Ibid., volume 196, pp.166338-9, Gardiner to King, May 24, 1933.

⁸¹Ibid., volume 195, pp.166346-7, King to Gardiner, June 10, 1933.

⁸²Ibid., reel 3674, volume 198, pp.168542-3, King to Robertson, June 14, 1933.

however, he was again contending that if the executive could not guarantee his victory, it should inform him and he could be nominated by the Liberals of a constituency in which there would be "no doubt" as to his return. He claimed to feel a special bond with P.A. and would prefer this riding to all others, but the "interests of the party" had to be the first consideration. On the other hand, if the executive wished him to run in the redistributed constituency of Rosthern that contained the Liberal sections of the old riding, and if it could not be "construed" as "leaving the constituency...for one entirely different and new," King would accept the nomination for Rosthern.⁸³ As late as March, 1935 King was still expressing doubts about running again in P.A. His tolerance for constituency workers daring to ask for financial contributions for his campaign was always low but when Davis made such a request, King wrote immediately to Gardiner. He wished to show "the kind of creature Davis is, also that I am prepared to let P.A. go if that is the spirit of the electorate there."⁸⁴ King was never prepared to help finance his own campaigns and believed it was a party obligation to the leader.

With redistribution out of the way, King prepared a western tour. He agreed with a growing western feeling that

⁸³Ibid., reel 3672, volume 196, pp.166219-22, King to Fleury, August 29, 1933.

⁸⁴King Diaries, March 23, 1935.

"the important task of the Liberal party is to convince the people of its good faith."⁸⁵ The Depression was destroying the Tories but also enhancing western scepticism toward the party system. King had wished to go West as early as the summer of 1931 to ensure the regional base he had been fortifying since 1919 was not about to disintegrate. "Will go West this year. I should be sure to go West this year- the West holds the key to the situation. Will be strong there all my life," he nervously told himself.⁸⁶ He had delayed a tour in 1932 and awaited the Regina convention of the CCF before departing in the summer of 1933.

It had to be shown that "the Liberal party is prepared to go just as far in a radical programme as any other party in Canada, along lines which are practical and in the interests of the country as a whole."⁸⁷ King was being advised that the CCF had become the "plaything and experimental ground of pseudo-intellectuals, monetary cranks, advocates of 'Socialism in our time' and faddists who want to reconstruct the world and make over human nature." The field of practical alternatives had been left as a monopoly to the Liberals due to Bennett's disastrous showing. The agricultural populace and the tariff were now awaiting King. "The tariff issue,"

⁸⁵King Papers, reel 3672, volume 195, pp.165688-9, Crerar to King, June 30, 1933.

⁸⁶King Diaries, August 21, 1931.

⁸⁷King Papers, reel 3674, volume 197, pp.168087-8, King to H. Moyle, June 26, 1933.

Dafoe assured him, "can easily be made next time the decisive issue in western Canada."⁸⁸

The farmers had to be shown that Mackenzie King and the Liberal party cared for their plight and had developed policies to deal with the crisis. The Liberal leader toured the rural sections of the Prairie West avoiding unemployment and radical labour unrest and attempting to abate any enthusiasm rising for the CCF. But his frustration with the radical tendencies of the region were showing through. "I can understand the resentment of the people against the action of the present administration and present intolerable conditions," he admitted, "but just why the swing against this sort of thing should be towards the C.C.F. rather than towards the Liberal party, which has consistently fought special privilege and autocracy, I fail to see."⁸⁹ King pointed to Industry and Humanity as a prime example of his commitment to social measures and that he had been pushing for these issues long before the CCF: "In a way I see this so strongly as almost to feel that I am but at the beginning of what I all along hoped might be my real life's work."⁹⁰

The years in government had diminished any popular notion

⁸⁸Dafoe Papers, box 3, file 3, Dafoe to King, June 15, 1933; box 4, file 2, Dafoe to Rowell, July 28, 1931.

⁸⁹King Papers, reel 3672, volume 195, p.165119, King to H.A. Allen, June 9, 1933.

⁹⁰Ibid., reel 3674, volume 198, p.168680, King to Rogers, March 18, 1933.

of King as the reformer. "King does not know the people;" Buchanan commented, "does not really understand them, and then he seems also to have lost whatever he had at one time of the quality of fighting for the underdog."⁹¹ The decline of the Conservatives and rise of the CCF was causing the fear that the Liberals would become the party of the right. "To my mind," King wrote, "that would be fatal to anything deserving of the name of Liberalism. We must continue to occupy the centre of the stage and the middle of the road as a people's party."⁹² The Liberals would sail between "Scylla and Charybdis".⁹³

The Manitoba situation, in the meantime, pleased the Liberal leader. The atmosphere seemed more "congenial" than ever before and King spoke of Winnipeg "as a sort of barometer of feeling towards party and myself."⁹⁴ He was pleased with Crerar's report that the CCF was not making substantial headway. Banking problems, however, were increasingly holding the public spotlight.⁹⁵ Dafoe applauded the vigour of King's rejection of the CCF as a variant of Liberalism similar to the

⁹¹Dafoe Papers, box 6, file 6, Buchanan to Dafoe, July 11, 1934.

⁹²King Papers, reel 3673, volume 197, pp.167631-3, King to Ian Mackenzie, November 14, 1933.

⁹³Ibid., reel 3674, volume 197, p.167879, King to A. Massey, March 31, 1933.

⁹⁴King Diaries, July 21, 1933.

⁹⁵King Papers, reel 3672, volume 195, pp.165979-80, Crerar to King, May 15, 1933.

Progressives. He did advise him that in repudiating socialism he should make it clear that the CCF did not have a monopoly on "programmes of social betterment and collective action." There was a danger that in taking the middle-of-the-road, Canadian Liberalism would appear an "arid political faith without works, subscribing to some kind of a nineteenth century conception of the policy of laissez-faire."⁹⁶

Not surprisingly Gardiner confidently claimed that the Liberal stronghold of Saskatchewan would be the last Prairie province where the CCF would gain inroads. Other Liberals were more cautious and warned King to be wary.⁹⁷ He was soon receiving indications from both Saskatchewan and Manitoba that the CCF was indeed gaining ground. A federal by-election in Mackenzie constituency was seen by King "as likely to have more significance than anything else which may happen between now and the time of a general election," since a win "would set the West...on fire with C.C.F. enthusiasm."⁹⁸ When Gardiner led the Liberals to victory, King was elated.

In Alberta the Liberal leader was informed that the radical movement was not abating and there was a very real threat of the CCF simply taking over the UFA representation. Unless conditions improved, "there is not likely to be much

⁹⁶Ibid., pp.165726-7, Dafoe to King, August 8, 1933.

⁹⁷Ibid., reel 3674, volume 198, pp.168526-31, Robertson to King, June 8, 1933.

⁹⁸Ibid., reel 3672, volume 196, p.166327, King to Gardiner, March 25, 1933.

alteration in the representation from this province."⁹⁹ On the other hand, the growing union between the UFA and CCF was forcing many supporters to return to their original affiliations. With the Tory popularity tainted by the Bennett regime, it seemed logical that the Liberals would finally regain their strength in the province.¹⁰⁰ The Liberal party was gradually deluding itself into the belief that its strength in the West was genuinely increasing.

Throughout 1934 King maintained the parliamentary tactics he had been employing since the beginning of Bennett's term. The administration's unpopularity made vocal opposition largely unnecessary and helped King avoid controversial issues dividing his caucus. The Liberals spoke out only when they were either united or had no other alternative. He continued to oppose the extension of Bennett's Relief Bills on the line that they were financially irresponsible and providing the government with a blank cheque. The Conservatives by this time had done a reversal on banking policy and were now introducing legislation to establish the Bank of Canada. In caucus King remained opposed to the idea of a national bank. He agreed that government should have a control in business but individual initiative had to be safeguarded. When pressured on the bank question, he told his members that as

⁹⁹Ibid., volume 195, p.165436, W.A. Buchanan to King, July 4, 1933.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., reel 3674, volume 198, pp.168472-3, D.E. Riley to King, March 2, 1933.

leader he could not support "state ownership of a bank," and "those who favoured State Socialism ought to be with the C.C.F." The Liberals would stake out the "middle of the road- with no quarter to Tories or State Socialists."¹⁰¹

The Prairie West reacted to King's opposition tactics by pressing for more radical action. Faced with the rise of radicalism, Liberals in the region pushed for more than mild criticism of government action. The strategy of the federal party was to maintain unity but as usual this also injured Liberal fortunes on the Prairies. King would have to return to his earlier ideas of reform and press for action through positive, aggressive leadership if he wanted to refortify his western position.¹⁰²

One issue that was constantly of importance to the West but on which King was largely ignorant and had demonstrated little interest in the past was wheat marketing. In 1930 the pools had faced bankruptcy when the price of wheat crashed and the banks were dealt heavy losses. Bennett agreed to guarantee the banks against any loss and John I. McFarland was appointed manager of the Central Selling Agency to dispose of its wheat holdings at the lowest possible loss to Ottawa. As the government became increasingly involved, McFarland held back wheat from the market while waiting for prices to rise.

¹⁰¹King Diaries, March 1, 1934.

¹⁰²King Papers, reel 3677, volume 201, pp.171956-9, G.G. McGeer to King, June 21, 1934; pp.172163-4, E.J. McMurray to King, January 27, 1934.

When they did not, Bennett authorized him to buy futures to strengthen the market. By 1935 the total wheat and wheat futures held by the agency exceeded two hundred million bushels. The government had assumed a huge financial liability with no legislative authority and had acquired a monopoly of the marketing of Canada's major export.

Throughout 1934 Crerar educated King on the wheat issue. Despite failing crops in Canada, there was still a glut on the world market. According to Crerar the pools had made the first mistake in holding back wheat to await better prices. He opposed the idea of a compulsory pool but saw it gaining popularity, particularly in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. It was, he believed, an idea that would become popular with the CCF.¹⁰³

On June 19 the Gardiner Liberals wiped out the Anderson government in Saskatchewan and not a single Tory was elected. Relations between Anderson and King had always been poor and the Liberal leader was pleased to see the loyal Gardiner back in the premier's office. Dunning's absence from the House and doubts as to his willingness to return even after the next election, coupled with the loss of his western influence, led King to continue laying the ground for Gardiner's advancement to federal politics. He came to Ottawa at the end of July and the Liberal leader's intentions were made clear:

¹⁰³Ibid., reel 3675, volume 199, pp.170109-12, Crerar to King, January 8, 1934.

I told him I regarded him as the one with whom I wished most to share confidence re Saskatchewan. I asked him if he would like to come to Ottawa in the event of our winning. He said he felt he would owe it to Saskatchewan to keep on there for a while at least- that was his present feeling.¹⁰⁴

W.R. Howson, in the meantime, continued his efforts to form a stronger relationship between King and Alberta. He was confident that the province was finally returning to Liberalism. A provincial election would be held either in the fall or the following June,

and everything looks exceedingly promising for success. The swing is very definitely toward the Provincial Liberal party and if it continues as at present nothing can prevent us winning. It is just a matter of actively increasing the momentum of the present movement.

If the Liberals won at the provincial level, the federal situation could finally become what King had always desired and expected. Of course, Howson noted, his party would need a great deal more support from the federal forces than had been received in the past: "This is not a complaint; it is merely a statement of fact. I am convinced that if Alberta were well organized from a federal standpoint you could obtain a majority of the seats in this Province." The federal CCF members would have to be opposed more strenuously to aid in the final destruction of the UFA. Howson was fearful that King would handle the CCF in the same conciliatory manner as

¹⁰⁴King Diaries, July 31, 1933.

he had handled the Progressives.¹⁰⁵

Part of Howson's strategy in restoring Liberal strength in Alberta involved the creation of a more unified Prairie Liberalism. The western parties had been divided in the past first by the Union government then by the Progressives. Both threats to unity had now passed. The time was at hand not only to secure the future of the party in Alberta but in all of western Canada. He called on the creation of a western Liberal policy to battle the growing Douglas Social Credit forces "as well as a number of other 'isms' that Alberta breeds annually in abundance."¹⁰⁶ Late in the summer Howson began working to organize a gathering of western Liberals.

Mackenzie King was pleased to see such energy and enthusiasm from the Alberta Liberals but he disagreed with Howson's strategy. He feared that reaction to a western conference in other parts of the Dominion would be "unfortunate". The West had always vocally opposed the dominance of the "Quebec bloc" and the creation of a "Prairie bloc" would receive equal opposition in the East.¹⁰⁷ In truth King did not trust sectional gatherings in any part of the country and believed they only bred national division. His control of the party was stronger when the regions were

¹⁰⁵King Papers, reel 3676, volume 200, pp.170835-6, Howson to King, June 2, 1934.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., pp.171050-1, Howson to King, August 30, 1934.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., pp.171054-6, King to Howson, August 30, 1934.

represented by loyal lieutenants who willingly accepted directives. There was nothing wrong with Liberals from the same region sticking together but to meet separately from the rest of the party was potentially dangerous.

The Albertan at least expected his idea to receive a warm welcome from J.G. Gardiner who had always championed harmonious dominion-provincial relations among Liberal governments. Howson was wrong. Instead, Gardiner also viewed the scheme as potentially divisive: "As a matter of fact, it is my opinion that it is always a mistake to have Liberalism divided either into East or West, or by names which indicate divided opinion, whether they are applied to the East or to the West."¹⁰⁸ He agreed with King that the western party should be controlled by a regional lieutenant subordinate to the national leader.

Howson was angered by the response and saw the opposition as one more example of the lack of co-operation offered by the federal party. It was symptomatic of the state of Liberalism in Alberta. He assumed that King was concerned the conference would embarrass the party by passing radical resolutions: "Just because Alberta in the past eighteen years has been the hot-bed of fool ideas is the real reason why a concentrated effort on the part of our party should be made now." When it became apparent King would not sanction the conference, Howson

¹⁰⁸Ibid., volume 199, p.170745, Gardiner to King, October 9, 1934.

made it clear he planned on proceeding regardless.¹⁰⁹ King was annoyed that the Alberta party continued to disregard his wishes. He would not give a provincial party direct orders but he did expect it to follow his advice. He disapprovingly wrote Howson that if the Alberta Liberals were going to proceed with a conference, it must be made known that it was strictly an inter-provincial affair and "in no way authorized either directly or indirectly from Ottawa, and that its proceedings are without reference to federal affairs." He could not help warning him one more time that a conference of the western provinces would be a "fatal mistake".¹¹⁰ The relationship between King and Alberta remained dismal.

Howson stuck to his guns and the conference was held on December 1, 1934. He reported that the event was "a magnificent success" (even though it was attended only by Alberta Liberals) and despite his poor relationship with King, he continued to push for federal-provincial harmony. More interest had to be shown in Alberta than in the past: "The general impression is that so far as Alberta is concerned the Federal Liberals are very little interested." King's fear of third parties was played upon to spur him to pay more attention:

This province, as you are aware, has been the breeding ground of new movements, all of which have

¹⁰⁹Ibid., volume 200, pp.171057-9, Howson to King, September 19, 1934.

¹¹⁰Ibid., pp.171060-1, King to Howson, September 24, 1934.

been detrimental to Liberalism. We originated the U.F.A., the C.C.F., the Farmer's Unity League, and are the protagonists in no small way of Socialism, Communism, and Social Credit. It is necessary to have an outstanding Liberal victory in both fields to cure this situation, and we need more definite assistance from Ottawa.¹¹¹

King was annoyed at Howson's criticisms that the federal party was not doing enough. He fell back on the reasoning that was characteristic of his handling of the province. Alberta would receive the same assistance given the other provinces "in proportion to the size of its representation" in the federal House.¹¹²

Despite Howson's assurances of success, the approach of the provincial election in Alberta began to augur ill portents. The desperate situation was causing "sound" people to listen "to all these fairy tales of economic reform."¹¹³ The Douglas system of Social Credit "which no one understands" was stirring up strong agitation and the province was remaining true to its tradition of being "a hot bed for the propagation of new political ideas, especially anything connected with monetary reform."¹¹⁴ Social Credit, led by 'Bible' Bill Aberhart, was described to King as a fanatical movement whose opposition to everything dubbed as 'special

¹¹¹Ibid., pp.171065-6, Howson to King, December 27, 1934.

¹¹²Ibid., p.171072, King to Howson, January 2, 1935.

¹¹³Ibid., reel 3678, volume 202, p.173573, Stewart to King, August 9, 1934.

¹¹⁴Ibid., pp.173582-3, Stewart to King, September 28, 1934.

interests' was solidifying the people's support. It appealed to those who associated religion with politics. "Aberhart is somewhat of a Hitler," Buchanan reported.¹¹⁵

By December, 1934 King was receiving reports that the "political pot is beginning to boil in the province." People were more interested and active than had ever been seen before in a political campaign. Social Credit was sweeping the province "like a prairie fire".¹¹⁶ By May, 1935 the federal Liberals were receiving conflicting views. There could be no question that Social Credit was a "dangerous factor" in Alberta. In fact if an election was held immediately, it could gain a majority of the seats. The movement was completely destroying the UFA and in most instances replacing it. Still, reports indicated that "everything is up in the air." Provincial Liberals were hopeful that the more time people had to consider Social Credit the more they would abandon it.¹¹⁷ Charlie Stewart was reporting that "the lunatics were riding strong" but there were evidences of "a falling away". The best one can say about Alberta, Crerar concluded from the conflicting reports, is that it was in a

¹¹⁵Ibid., reel 3679, volume 204, pp.174836-8, W.A. Buchanan to King, May 4, 1935.

¹¹⁶Ibid., reel 3677, volume 202, pp.173904-6 D.E. Reily to King, December 11, 1934.

¹¹⁷Ibid., reel 3679, volume 204, pp.174836-8, W.A. Buchanan to King, May 4, 1935.

"state of utter confusion."¹¹⁸ By June reports were indicating that the movement was beginning to decline because people were realizing that the proposed schemes were unworkable.¹¹⁹ In reality Liberals in the province had waited so long to see the disintegration of the UFA that with the disastrous state of the Tories at present they could not believe that another upstart radical movement could suddenly emerge onto the scene and steal away office.

Late in the summer King was being warned that the Social Credit movement might well reflect negatively on the federal party throughout the West. The provincial Liberals were not fighting the movement strenuously enough and were instead "playing" with it in the hopes of getting the second choice votes.¹²⁰ They had even added a plank in their platform to study the concept of Social Credit.¹²¹ King would have to fight the movement and not consider any idea of co-operating with it or its leader. Much of Aberhart's appeal was based on opposition to the old parties and it was contended that he would turn to H.H. Stevens' Reconstruction party for a federal ally rather than the Liberals.

¹¹⁸Crerar Papers, series III, box 98, Crerar to Cameron, May 18, 1935.

¹¹⁹King Papers, reel 3979, volume 204, p.174844, Buchanan to King, June 25, 1935.

¹²⁰Ibid., volume 202, p.174849, Buchanan to King, July 23, 1935.

¹²¹Ibid., reel 3684, volume 211, pp.182661-3, G.H. Van Allen to R.J. Deachman, April 15, 1935.

The provincial election in August saw King's worst fears become reality. William Aberhart's Social Credit party swept to power. In his usual custom King congratulated Howson and the Alberta Liberals for their efforts. He attempted to raise their dampened spirits by pointing to the fact that the Liberals had been the only party to increase its vote over that recorded in 1930. The Liberals had little real chance against such a "sweeping tide" that mingled religion with politics, offered immediate solutions to desperate problems, and possessed such an effective organization. Howson would have to take comfort in the fact the Liberals had maintained their identity and kept their forces intact for the upcoming federal contest.¹²² Privately, however, King was frustrated. He saw the Alberta situation resulting from the same condition that had plagued Liberalism in the province since he became party leader: "The result in Alberta is due to absence of real leadership on the part of Liberals."¹²³

The defeat also brought the frustrations of Howson and the provincial Liberal party to the surface. "He was a 'Man sent from God,'" the Liberal leader wrote King. "What chance had any mere politician?" For fourteen years the UFA had painted the old-line parties as corrupt and villainous:

Brother Aberhart put the last touch on that talk.
He just included the U.F.A. in the old-line

¹²²Ibid., reel 3680, volume 206, pp.177284-6, King to Howson, August 29, 1935.

¹²³King Diaries, August 23, 1935.

parties, and then drew a picture from the Bible and put horns and a tail on all of us, so the U.F.A., Liberals and Tories were now in Alberta the direct descendants of His Satanic Majesty.

Howson warned King to beware of Aberhart after the Liberals were returned to power in the upcoming federal election. The Social Credit premier would ask the King government for friendly co-operation: "Get a picture of it- Premier Aberhart with large white wings, a harp and the Bible opened at the Prophecies, chatting with Premier King with black horns and a long graceful tail with an arrow on the end." Howson realized his strongly worded letter would be somewhat of a shock to King but he could not curb his sarcasm: "Possibly this is a new type of political letter for you to receive, but remember it comes from Alberta and we are different."¹²⁴

Federal hopes in Alberta were once again thrown into "confusion". Less than a year ago organizers reported that a large number of seats would have gone Liberal. Now they would not be justified in calling any federal seat in the province safe.¹²⁵ King was thankful Alberta's "weird business" and its "fanatical flame" was being kept within the bounds of the one province. He admitted it would likely spread to the other Prairie provinces but would not have much influence before the

¹²⁴King Papers, reel 3679, volume 206, pp.177287-91, Howson to King, September 4, 1935.

¹²⁵Ibid., reel 3681, volume 207, pp.178280-2, J.B. McBride to King, August 26, 1935; reel 3683, volume 210, pp.181039, J.H. Brown to King, July 10, 1935.

general election.¹²⁶

In 1935 King described the wheat problem as "by all means the largest question that Canada has to face."¹²⁷ With the support of the pool representatives, Bennett was now attempting to pass the Grain Bill which would create a permanent Grain Commission with sweeping powers. The problem was that the Liberals would have difficulty attacking Bennett's bill because it was popular with much of the farming community. Any opposition would be seen as a lack of sympathy for the western farmer. The Liberal leader, however, agreed with Crerar in opposing the bill because its compulsory features contradicted 'sound liberal principles'.¹²⁸ He pushed for the "Liberal attitude" of regulation and control of business by the state rather than participation in business. Examples such as the railways and banks, where private and state ownership worked side-by-side, were used to demonstrate the consistency of this approach.¹²⁹ Dafoe was also in agreement and reminded King that opposing the bill would be popular in Manitoba where "the pool has never been strong." Alberta should not be a concern because it was in such a "bedeviled" state. Saskatchewan was prejudiced against the

¹²⁶King Diaries, August 23, 1935.

¹²⁷Ibid., June 7, 1935.

¹²⁸King Papers, reel 3679, volume 205, pp.175499-505, Crerar to King, June 19, 1935.

¹²⁹King Diaries, June 12, 1935.

Grain Exchange and would pose a problem.¹³⁰

The Liberal strategy was not to oppose the bill but merely its permanent and compulsory nature. King could accept the board as a temporary measure but many western Liberals were pushing for a permanent board. He was confident that if he could get these members to agree to his desired policy, the rest of the caucus would fall in line¹³¹: "Lapointe and the Eastern members will be very strongly against a Board having compulsory powers. In fact, most of Canada, other than the western provinces will be."¹³² He was relieved that Gardiner, Dunning, Crerar, and Dafoe opposed the compulsory features also. "It was inconceivable," he argued, "that the prairie provinces would wish to isolate themselves in the general election from the Liberals of Canada generally, who had always espoused the western cause."¹³³

In an attempt to delay the matter until agreement in caucus had been reached, King suggested that the government refer the bill to a special committee. If Bennett agreed and the bill still went to a vote, the Liberals would then vote "unitedly against a permanent compulsory Grain Board."¹³⁴ If

¹³⁰King Papers, reel 3679, volume 205, pp.175622-4, Dafoe to King, June 29, 1935.

¹³¹King Diaries, March 2, 1935.

¹³²Ibid., June 10, 1935.

¹³³Ibid., June 19, 1935.

¹³⁴Ibid., June 13, 1935.

the prime minister refused, the Liberals would have to openly state their position and risk division. King knew the situation could become even more embarrassing seeing that his own government had passed enabling legislation for the three Prairie provinces to create a wheat board in 1922. The Liberals would have to support a board along similar lines but not to the point of advocating a compulsory wheat pool. King wanted the board to become a necessity arising out of the Depression rather than a permanent fixture.

Bennett was pressured into appointing a committee. This solved the problem for King when it was decided that the powers of the bill were too broad and the compulsory features not necessary. The Wheat Board would offer a minimum price to the producer, leaving farmers with the choice of selling their wheat to the board or to private grain dealers.

In the meantime, the On-to-Ottawa Trek received the same cautious reaction from King and the Liberals as had all the other controversial issues in the last five years. Liberal opposition to Bennett's handling of the Trek and resulting riot could foster the impression in Quebec that the party was sympathetic to communism. King found it "preferable" to have Woodsworth introduce the subject. The delay also allowed him to obtain the correspondence between Gardiner and Bennett to become better acquainted with the issue. Throughout the debate King avoided taking an active part. Privately, he noted that there was a sort of "Nemesis" in the fact that

Bennett had "incited" the riot in Gardiner's province. The incident disclosed

the complete failure of his government to provide work and solve the unemployment problem, which was the ground on which they obtained office. The whole five years summed up, is the bitter incident in 1930, and police helmets and tragedy of 1935- a record of incompetency and tragedy pretty much all along the way.¹³⁵

In caucus King placed the blame squarely on the Bennett government and argued that its policies and not communism were the problem.

In the federal election campaign of 1935 King stressed co-operation and conciliation rather than policies, King rather than chaos. The one promise he did make involved tariffs. He assured the populace that a Liberal government would have a reciprocity agreement with the United States by the end of the year. The Liberal tariff policies were thrown into doubt, however, when King made a speech in Halifax on September 4. Western Liberals were shocked to hear their leader indicate he would remove Bennett's tariffs only "gradually", and that a Liberal government would "not injure any legitimate industry" by lowering tariffs, or take away from industry any of the protection provided prior to 1930.¹³⁶ The campaign in the West could not avoid issues. Unemployment, banking and currency, railways, and wheat had to

¹³⁵Ibid., July 2, 1935.

¹³⁶King Papers, reel 3679, volume 205, pp.176387-8, F.O. Fowler to King, September 7, 1935.

be addressed.

Financing the campaign in the West also posed difficulties. As Whitaker points out, "the greatest difficulty experienced by Massey and Lambert in the funding of the campaign was in securing Toronto and Montreal money for the western provinces." The explanation, he argues, lies in the fact that Alberta was a "write-off in the eyes of the national party," and the Saskatchewan machine was very expensive to fund.¹³⁷ The federal party was also simply not as concerned with winning the region as it had been in the past.

During the campaign King distanced himself further from the Manitoba Diehard group. In March he had been warned that both E.J. McMurray and J.W. Wilton had made public addresses in which they called for a national convention to reconsider the question of leadership.¹³⁸ In July King wrote R.F. McWilliams asking him to attempt to persuade Dafoe to run in the contest. He knew the Diehards would be furious at such a suggestion and requested it be kept quiet in the meantime.¹³⁹ Premier Bracken, on the other hand, gave the Liberals his full support throughout the campaign.¹⁴⁰

In 1935 King was continuing to feel out the intentions of

¹³⁷Whitaker, pp.68, 73.

¹³⁸King Papers, reel 3679, volume 205, pp.175684-5, T.C. Davis to N. Lambert, March 1, 1935.

¹³⁹Ibid., reel 3682, volume 208, pp.179621-2, King to R.F. McWilliams, July 15, 1935.

¹⁴⁰Bracken Papers, box 2549, file 1, October 8, 1935.

Gardiner and Dunning to prepare the way for his next western advisor. Dunning indicated that he wished to reenter politics but with his present financial opportunities, such a step would be too much of a sacrifice. He admitted the West would probably object to his affiliation with eastern interests and Gardiner would expect to come in as the western advisor. King suggested that Dunning run in the East thereby opening the way to have both influential men in cabinet. He was already concluding that "Gardiner will be just as good as Dunning, and probably will demand [sic] a larger following. Moreover, there will be no question in the mind of anyone as to his loyalty in all directions."¹⁴¹

The Saskatchewan premier was approached again in July. King noted that he was "keener" than before and "seemed willing to come at once, leaving Davis as his successor....Gardiner is easily the best informed and ablest of the Liberals in that Province. He would be a real strength to me, & his claim to recognition could not be disputed." Dunning, as far as King was concerned, had supported the offer and now his life would be committed to "money-making".¹⁴²

The Depression years diminished the influence of the West in the nation and caused a parallel decline in the attention King gave to the area. His idealistic and naive perceptions had been tempered but the fact that he was the sitting member

¹⁴¹King Diaries, June 10, 1935; see also Ward and Smith.

¹⁴²Ibid., July 23, 1935.

for Prince Albert maintained some of his romantic attachment to the region. While speaking in the constituency he had a vision:

I seemed to see Prince Albert as one of the great cities of the future, and the vision of a statue of myself in one of its thoroughfares, as the one who had been its member for ___ years in the parliament of Canada. It seemed to me men might come to speak of me as Mackenzie King of Prince Albert, just as they speak of Chamberlain of Birmingham etc etc....¹⁴³

The Depression was ensuring King's victory in P.A. and allowing him to wax romantic about his attachment to the riding, but it could not disguise the danger signs. Jubilant Social Creditors, fresh from victory in Alberta, "poured" into the constituency for the federal contest. The Social Credit cause in P.A. was strengthened by an unofficial alliance with the Reconstruction party of H.H. Stevens.¹⁴⁴

But the campaign was demonstrating that the West obviously did not feel the same attachment to Mackenzie King, whether it be romantic or real. He knew that his cautious opposition had not been popular on the Prairies at a time when the people were desperately seeking concrete solutions. The Depression had allowed the formation of the CCF, the Reconstruction Party, and the Social Credit as alternatives to traditional politics, all of which were based in the West. "I confess the situation does not look certain here," he

¹⁴³Ibid., September 24, 1935.

¹⁴⁴Abrams, pp.320-1.

admitted. "There is a sort of apathy- an uncertainty in the minds of our own people of how things are going.- The people seem to forget & seem to want promises. Their new theories have bewildered them & they can't see a way out." Instead of accepting any of the blame he placed the onus on the region's lack of leadership: "We really need leaders (as a party) through the West, except Gardiner of Saskatchewan there is no one outstanding. The people are like a sheep without a shepherd."¹⁴⁵

The tour of Alberta only increased King's criticism of western leadership. His first impressions of Aberhart left him no doubt that the most effective leaders were certainly not being drawn into Liberal ranks. The reaction to the charismatic Social Credit leader was similar to his first meeting with Adolf Hitler. Aberhart was described as "most cordial" and his impression on King "could not have been more favourable: "He has a clean look- looks like a good man- has substantial proportions, pleasant manner, etc., he appreciated my calling." When meeting Aberhart, King stressed that regardless of the Social Credit victory Alberta would be treated the same as the other provinces. Aberhart assured King that he could work within the limits of the constitution and the Liberal leader responded by inviting him onto the speaking platform that evening. The premier declined.

As if to contrast the good impression of Aberhart,

¹⁴⁵King Diaries, September 19, 1935.

Stewart informed King as they were leaving the premier's office that Howson could not be located. "Think he may be drunk somewhere," King recorded,

....Here is the whole story in a nut-shell. The Liberal Leader is a drunken unreliable lawyer of a blustering bull-dozing type, the Social Credit Leader, kindly, persuasive, clean living, most presentable etc- is it any wonder he won & the Liberals lost. The story I pray may be different in the federal field.

King then went on to meet the Liberal candidates. He concluded they were "not a good average- no wonder we do not win." When Howson presided over the platform that evening King was not impressed by his "many rough jokes & references to drinking etc." He concluded that it was "that gang that ruins the party here."¹⁴⁶

On October 14 the Liberals won a majority of historic proportions with some 178 members being elected. Manitoba and Saskatchewan together returned 30 of 36 constituencies, while only one was elected among 17 in Alberta. The Social Credit party elected 15 in Alberta and 2 in Saskatchewan while the CCF elected only 7, all of whom were in the West. The Reconstruction party managed to elect only its leader, H.H. Stevens. The Conservative contingent was reduced to 40 with one from each of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta. In Prince Albert King was re-elected with 9087 votes.¹⁴⁷ Neatby argues that the two-party system, almost re-established in

¹⁴⁶Ibid., September 25, 1935.

¹⁴⁷Abrams, p.321.

1930, was once again disrupted.¹⁴⁸ In truth it had never returned.

According to Gibson the most striking feature of the cabinet formed in 1935 was that King's authority and confidence were much greater and as a result the operation was smoother and faster.¹⁴⁹ When King looked to western representation he had to consider the main Prairie Liberals: Gardiner, Dunning, Crerar, and Stewart. He was confident that if the first three were in the government, the farming interests would be "pretty safely protected."¹⁵⁰

The Alberta situation did not pose much difficulty. King admitted to feeling "anxious" about Stewart not winning but there would be no finding a safe seat outside the province for him this time: "We could not repeat this year what we did in 1921." King was pleased "not to have to consider him for the cabinet." Stewart had only grudgingly been accepted in the cabinet previously due to the lack of choice from Alberta. King had remained hopeful that by giving the province cabinet representation, despite its refusal to support his party, the Liberals would eventually regain their foothold. By 1935 these hopes were dashed. The Social Credit victory along with his own recent tour led him to the conclusion that the province was hopeless. "Alberta will have to go unrepresented

¹⁴⁸Neatby, pp.122-3.

¹⁴⁹Gibson, "The Cabinet of 1935", p.105.

¹⁵⁰King Diaries, October 17, 1935.

for a while & work out her own salvation," he noted angrily.¹⁵¹ Alberta had "isolated itself...It is the only way to teach that province a lesson."¹⁵² Albertans had long warned the Liberal leader not to give up on the province, that such action would only further isolate the area from central Canada, the federal government, and the Liberal party. After 16 years, he was fed up with listening to this advice. Mackenzie King had given up on Alberta.

There was no doubt in King's mind that Gardiner would come to Ottawa and serve as the main Prairie advisor. Since 1919 King had been striving to groom a suitable western lieutenant but had failed to find a loyal and effective general to fill the same role that Lapointe filled for Quebec. To King the result was largely responsible for the Liberal record in the West. He never fully understood that the Prairies were not homogeneous and one western Liberal could not command a following from all three provinces. At times he seemed to have come face to face with this reality but the implications never set in. Motherwell and Stewart had been completely inadequate and King had never liked Crerar. During the 1920s Dunning had emerged as the probable candidate for the role but his exit from politics in 1930 and ensuing move into the Montreal business community put an end to these plans. Even before 1930 King had his eye on Gardiner but his

¹⁵¹Ibid., October 14, 1935.

¹⁵²Ibid., October 17, 1935.

diehard attitude toward the Progressives and feud with Dunning had held him back. During the years in opposition King made substantial efforts to smooth his path. The quest for a Prairie general would finally come to an end in 1935 and King would never search again. With Gardiner in command of the region, western concerns would be left largely within his control. The result would lead Mackenzie King to pay even less personal attention to the Prairie West.

The Gardiner-Dunning feud was the main issue to be handled in the cabinet negotiations. King noted that Gardiner's antagonism might create difficulty but "by Dunning's getting a seat somewhere in the East, rather than in the West, we will overcome that score." If Dunning agreed, it was likely that a seat could be found in the eastern townships and he could serve as the English-speaking minister for Montreal.¹⁵³ His removal would avoid the issue and leave Gardiner control of the West.

As soon as King met with Gardiner the issue of Dunning's entry into the cabinet was raised. "Gardiner's countenance at once took on a very strong and defiant look," King noted. The Saskatchewan premier went over Dunning's career indicating that he had always "taken the easy course, had got in by by-elections, and had been pretty selfish generally." He was annoyed that Dunning had entered the recent campaign in the late stages "as a saviour of the situation in western Canada,

¹⁵³Ibid., October 17, 1935.

when the battle itself had been won; that Dunning always waited to see how things were going to go before he would take any part." Financial help had been provided to western candidates without informing Gardiner so as "to have a string on these men." His loyalty was also questioned and Gardiner claimed he had "inspired" articles in the press. The premier claimed he would have to "think pretty carefully" over whether he would enter a government alongside his antagonist.

King realized Gardiner was going to "fight with his back to the wall" and use his own entry into cabinet to keep Dunning out if possible. Dunning's loyalty was defended on the score that although he had been approached to challenge King's leadership, no overt moves had been taken. Instead he had taken risks that proved he was not as selfish as Gardiner contended. King pointed to the uncertain aftermath of the 1925 election when Dunning had risked his secure position in Saskatchewan and come to Ottawa. If he was to be considered, King argued, attempting to "ease Gardiner's mind," it would be on the definite understanding that he found a seat in the East; "that so far as the west was concerned, the field would be left clear." In private, King and Lapointe agreed there was "justification" for Gardiner's views and that "Dunning had been selfish, and was very ambitious...that he had not always played the game as he should." King was annoyed that Dunning had left politics in 1930 for the business world and had not thrown himself into helping the party during the recent

campaign. If Gardiner "held out" he would ponder not seeking further to secure Dunning.

When it came to portfolio choices, Gardiner immediately reminded King of an earlier conversation when he had indicated more of an interest in financial matters than agriculture. Neatby argues that King actually considered him for finance if Dunning was not to return to politics but this is unlikely.¹⁵⁴ King had witnessed Dunning's loss of western appeal when he stepped up to the finance portfolio and he was not going to have the same occur with Gardiner. The Saskatchewan politician was pushing for the influential finance portfolio but King needed to keep him oriented toward a 'western' department. National revenue was suggested because it involved tariff regulations, customs, and taxes. King was confident Gardiner would be drawn to the portfolio because it "really controlled the tariff situation." The premier was hoping for a more influential department, however, and used the argument that he would not like the portfolio's dealings with the liquor business. A consolidated department that included immigration, colonization, forests, mines, parks, Indians, and territories was then suggested. King thought this department would have appeal because it concerned "the matters of most concern to western Canada" but once again the premier was unenthusiastic. King began to see "more clearly" what he had in mind. His college training and experience in

¹⁵⁴Neatby, pp.130-1.

party organization and finance made him feel "just as able as Dunning" for the finance portfolio. When asked if he enjoyed the confidence of the eastern business interests, Gardiner answered that he did, "even more than Dunning." By the end of the discussion, he demonstrated his loyalty to King by indicating that he would accept the party leader's decision. If he believed it necessary to bring in Dunning, it would not please Gardiner but he would accept it. His choices for a cabinet position in order of importance were finance, national revenue, immigration and resources. "The others would not interest him as much."¹⁵⁵

Crerar was the expected representative from Manitoba but King was disappointed with his showing in the province. He believed Crerar had "little hold" on Manitoba and had become "ineffective". He justified the criticism by pointing to his attachment to the "old prejudice" of the Union government, the Home Bank fiasco, and the Grain Exchange, all of which in King's eyes would make him unpopular with the farmers. Lapointe agreed. They even went so far as to consider W.G. Weir over Crerar, but the former had run as a Progressive-Liberal against a straight Liberal. The possibility of bringing Crerar into the cabinet and then replacing him by Weir after a short length of time was also discussed. King knew Crerar would want the finance portfolio but preferred to

¹⁵⁵King Diaries, October 18, 1935.

have him for agriculture.¹⁵⁶ When Gardiner was asked about Manitoba representation, he indicated that although he did not like Crerar, he was still the best choice.

The Saskatchewan premier was found to be more sympathetic to the Free Press than in the past because the paper had been very helpful in Saskatchewan. When Lapointe suggested Dafoe for a cabinet position, King answered that he "would be the very man" and while there was no hesitation in asking him, it was doubtful he would accept. If Dafoe would not enter the cabinet, King was hopeful he would become the minister to Washington. The editor was reached by telephone and invited to join the government. He claimed to be "touched" by the offer but could not accept. Dafoe did not wish to hold a cabinet post but he was also under the impression the prime minister was merely making a "courtesy offer". He probably underestimated King's willingness to have him in the cabinet, and King probably underestimated Dafoe's willingness to join: "I am sure that Mr. King also expected me to decline and he made no objections when I said that I had no desire to be a member of the Canadian Government."¹⁵⁷ King pushed Dafoe to accept the Washington post to help gain a reciprocity agreement, "to help towards securing what we have all striven for so long." He promised to consider the proposal but later

¹⁵⁶Ibid., October 17, 1935.

¹⁵⁷Dafoe Papers, box 2, file 1, Dafoe to Wallace Dafoe, November 26, 1935.

turned it down.¹⁵⁸

The following day Mackenzie King decided to take a stronger position in the negotiations. The difficult times demanded a government of the best possible men, regardless of personal animosities. If Dunning could be convinced to enter the cabinet, he would be brought in. Although he may have been selfish and difficult to handle, King still believed he had impressive abilities and held "great confidence" throughout the country. While Gardiner had financial skills, "he was not yet known as a financial man by the country generally." The finance portfolio was traditionally an eastern position and although Dunning had held it, he was now regarded as an easterner. If Gardiner took finance he could not serve as the western advisor because he would be in an awkward position when it came to dealing with the debt situation of the Prairie provinces. Dunning, on the other hand, "would be in the position to act more independently in all these relationships."

Gardiner indicated that he would raise no objection to Dunning's entry as finance minister. His main problem was not their personal relationship but that Dunning was "always intriguing to get his own following in Saskatchewan; that he would be interfering in the administration of other people's affairs." King assured him "there would be none of that; if Gardiner was in, he would be the western minister, and Dunning

¹⁵⁸King Diaries, October 18, 1935.

would only be permitted to come in by an eastern door."

The discussion then returned to portfolio choices. King discussed the advantages of Gardiner taking immigration and resources, "that it was a department with great patronage, would keep him in touch with western Canada." National revenue was not really a possibility because the work would "tie him down to Ottawa...there was little patronage, and it might draw him away from the West." It was a more influential portfolio and dealt with tariffs but would hamper the prime minister's intentions of having Gardiner serve as his western advisor. King was pleased when the premier seemed to see the "wisdom" of the suggestion, "particularity when I pointed out it would keep him in the West and master of an empire there, while Dunning would be in the east." It was becoming evident, however, that Gardiner was willing to surrender his western influence to gain a more powerful portfolio. King sensed in his general attitude "a desire to get closer contact with big interests, realizing a sort of political power in that connection. I think, too, has the instincts of a political boss, and rather likes having a machine he can control." In an attempt to keep Gardiner's eyes focused on his western power base, King promised to "back his wishes on western matters" and that Dunning would be thus informed.¹⁵⁹

Gardiner planned on taking over Motherwell's constituency. It was understood by both King and Motherwell

¹⁵⁹Ibid., October 19, 1935.

that his age prevented him from again being considered for cabinet. The position of Lieutenant-Governor of Saskatchewan seemed a good position but he had indicated a determination to advance agricultural legislation and was now hesitant about retirement from federal politics.¹⁶⁰ In return for surrendering his constituency, Motherwell expected Gardiner to take the portfolio of agriculture and prevent it falling into Crerar's hands. At the end of the day Gardiner made another attempt to gain a more powerful portfolio by suggesting railways. Once again King responded that this would weaken his position as a western advisor. Railways was to be with canals and water systems and kept in eastern hands.¹⁶¹

When Crerar met with King, the railway portfolio was immediately requested. King admitted to being "abrupt" when he refused the offer on the basis that, with the exception of Dunning and Lapointe, no minister was to be returned to his previous department. He attempted to further justify the refusal on the weak reasoning that he needed a western minister for agriculture. The truth was that King disliked Crerar. When the Manitoban indicated he was entitled to a "major" portfolio and agriculture was a "minor" one, King's patience diminished even further:

I felt a little nettled at this as he was the first one to make a demand, and I replied that I looked upon Agriculture as a major portfolio, but apart

¹⁶⁰Ibid., October 18, 1935.

¹⁶¹Ibid., October 19, 1935.

from that, I would be encountering a good deal of opposition in taking him into the government at all; that he had not been in Parliament the last session. (I did not mention he had failed to carry his own seat in Brandon)....I said that I had encountered much opposition in taking him into the government previously, on the score that he had been a member of the Union Government, and then Leader of the Progressive party, which had fought the Liberal party. I said nothing, though I might have, about the Home Bank affair.

When King argued that Gardiner on the other hand deserved "a special obligation" due to his organizing work and service as premier of his province, Crerar disagreed. He had been "of no help but rather a hindrance" to the Liberals in Manitoba. It was quickly made clear that both Gardiner and Crerar would be expected to take "western" portfolios, and these included agriculture and the consolidation of interior and immigration. Crerar continued to push for railways but indicated a preference for the department handling natural resources. "The truth of the matter is," King noted, "he has been more exacting than I expected he would be, and I feel more determined not to give him Railways." After the meeting was over King admitted to being too rash and not prepared for the discussion, yet in his characteristic style by the end of this confession, the justifications were already taking shape:

I feel my sudden approach with Crerar was a mistake, and that the way should have been felt out in advance. Clearly, he does not realize how near the mark to not taking him in at all he has come. Men do not see their own limitations as others see them. I did not tell him, but it is true that all present had regarded him as most ineffective as the Minister of Railways when he held that portfolio.

When asked if there was any way of "causing" Gardiner to

take agriculture, Crerar suggested having Motherwell apply pressure from Saskatchewan. He was reached by phone and King indicated that a letter had just arrived from Gardiner suggesting other portfolio possibilities. "It seemed to me that he really did not know his own mind," King told Motherwell, and it may therefore be best if he was urged to take agriculture. When Gardiner was reached, he continued his efforts for a more influential portfolio and pushed again for trade and commerce. Motherwell had contacted him and applied the pressure King had requested. He would hesitate surrendering his seat if Gardiner was going to "leave the grain business to the eastern people." The premier, however, saw a way around this threat. He could take trade and commerce and handle the grain business from this department. King now had to apply his own pressure: "I told him that I had difficulties in getting an eastern man for Agriculture, and I thought some of the former ministers would expect to get the portfolio of Trade and Commerce." It was made clear that this department would be kept for Ontario. Gardiner did not want the consolidated department and "referred to the Natural Resources suggestion as a sort of glorified Parks commission."

But he had no choice. Pressure was coming from Motherwell and now King had put his foot down. The first concern was having Gardiner as the main western advisor and this meant accepting a western portfolio. The premier's

ambitions were leading him beyond this role but King was adamant. Gardiner was annoyed at having his ambitions checked: "If they only wanted him for Agriculture in the east, they could not think much of him, or did not want him very badly here." King had been surprised that Gardiner and Crerar would dare barter for more powerful positions and not merely accept his directives. "The truth is," he wrote of Gardiner, "the little beggar is angling for one of the more important portfolios, and running the danger of getting out of his depth."¹⁶² If he was going to be forced into taking agriculture, Gardiner requested that the Board of Grain Commissioners be transferred from trade and commerce. Dunning did not believe this would be possible as agriculture had to do with production, and trade and commerce with distribution of sales. It was agreed, however, that the supervision of the Wheat Board's operations would be put under a sub-committee of council with Gardiner as a member. He would also at least be able to push for the transfer of the Board of Grain Commissioners and this way appease Motherwell.

Crerar was called again for one last discussion. King pushed the importance of the western portfolios but Crerar

¹⁶²Ibid., October 21, 1935. "As I came back to my room I picked up a copy of "Animal Life"...and felt it had something of significance for me. When I looked at its cover there was a picture of two peacocks on the limb of a tree, a large and a small one. The magazine was for October 1935...these two birds mean Crerar & Gardiner, with their respective vanities, each ambitious for high & higher office." Ibid., October 23, 1935.

continued to advocate the railway department. "I told him I simply could not give the matter further consideration;" King recorded, "that I had reached the point where he must either take the portfolio or let someone else have it, but that I could not offer him anything else." Crerar accepted the situation "fairly philosophically and pleasantly, but was very tenacious." He requested more time but King's mind was made up.¹⁶³

The cabinet negotiations pointed to future difficulties King would have with his western representation. He had made it clear that Gardiner was to serve as regional lieutenant but there would be little possibility of his having any influence in Manitoba. Crerar was to be the provincial minister and he would not view Gardiner in any way as representative. Gardiner's influence in Saskatchewan would be unquestioned as long as Liberal fortunes remained strong but the antagonism with Dunning would pose problems. Alberta was now being left to Gardiner and King's hopes were pinned on the province not rejecting the outside interference as Manitoba had done previously. "The antipathy of both Crerar and Dunning to Gardiner is an unpleasant feature," King wrote,

and may make difficulties later on. Gardiner's loyalty to Liberalism and myself, and his organizing ability, are the strongest factors in his favour. He is not large-minded, and he has ambitions to be in touch with the big interests, and to create a machine. I can see this, and it is not in his favour. However, he is the man to get

¹⁶³Ibid., October 22, 1935.

Alberta, as well as Saskatchewan, into line.¹⁶⁴

The new Liberal government had to deal with the wheat situation immediately. A cabinet wheat committee was formed that consisted of the ministers of trade and commerce, agriculture, interior, and finance. Crerar and W. D. Euler made it clear they favoured eliminating the Board and while Gardiner was not yet in Ottawa, King believed he would be of the same opinion. Dunning on the other hand favoured keeping the board until the price of wheat increased. This way it would have to carry the responsibility rather than the government. The wheat committee was to discuss the situation and report to cabinet. King argued that the caucus had previously agreed that the board would not be permanent but would serve to "tide over an emergency situation."¹⁶⁵ Such a decision would not please the West.

Advice from Alberta in the meantime continued to warn King not to trust William Aberhart. During the federal campaign the premier had supported Bennett in his Calgary riding and had urged a Social Credit candidate to oppose King in Prince Albert. He was pushing Ottawa for financial assistance to refinance provincial debts but it was argued that after receiving little, he would use his radio broadcasts to blame King. When Aberhart could not deliver on his electoral promises, such as the \$25 dividend, he would blame

¹⁶⁴Ibid., October 21, 1935.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., October 28-31, 1935.

Ottawa for obstructing his program. He would then probably move into the federal field in an attempt to achieve the necessary power to implement Social Credit.¹⁶⁶

At the Dominion-Provincial Conference in December, 1935 King believed Aberhart was prepared to co-operate and work within the constitution. "Aberhart's expression was a pleasing feature of the evening" King reported after a dinner party. The prime minister even told Crerar that the Alberta premier should be brought into the Liberal camp and confidently prophesied that "the next year or two will see the end of social credit."¹⁶⁷ King spent much of the conference talking with Aberhart whom he "liked personally" and for whom he "felt real sympathy."¹⁶⁸ He admitted to being "quite pleasantly surprised by the friendly and forthcoming attitude of the Alberta representatives." Their independent approach to their creditors for the conversion of the interest charges on the provincial debt was "timed inadvertently" but was "not intended to make trouble here." The prime minister was pleased to have "heard very little of Social Credit throughout the week."¹⁶⁹ So far, he was prepared to give Aberhart the benefit of the doubt.

¹⁶⁶King Papers, reel 3684, volume 211, pp.181650-2, G.H. Ross to King, December 4, 1935.

¹⁶⁷King Diaries, December 9, 1935.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., December 13, 1935.

¹⁶⁹King Papers, reel 3684, volume 211, pp.181654, King to Ross, December 23, 1935.

The years in opposition reflected a change in Mackenzie King's attitude toward the West. The Progressive challenge and threats to his leadership no longer forced him to pay special attention to Prairie concerns. The Depression reduced the region's influence in the nation both economically and politically. By 1935 King was realizing that he had never understood the West in the first place and this realization was being reflected in his changing attitude and diminishing sympathy. What affinity he had felt with the region prior to the 1930s had now all but disappeared and while in 1935 his attitude was clearly changing, the following years in office would make it final.

CHAPTER SEVEN
THE RADICAL HAS LEFT US, 1936-40

Gradually I see a re-alignment coming. The conservative party in the West is no longer a party. The radical has left us and is on his own in a third party. Those most anti-liberal in the conservative party will go into the third parties. I am alarmed about the future out here.

-T.C. Davis to King, April 7, 1940.

The period after 1935 demonstrated just how much King's attitude toward the Prairie West had changed. Gone were the western sympathies so commonly espoused, gone were the hopes of establishing a new, progressive society in the West, gone was the idea that he was a spiritual westerner who had finally found a home. When Mackenzie King looked west, he did not see the hopes of the nation; he saw an area stricken by drought and depression unable even to pay its debts and constantly begging the federal government, already in a serious financial crisis, for relief. King no longer needed the West, not as he had in the past at any rate. But now the West needed the federal government. Throughout the remainder of his career King would demonstrate little more than frustration and a general sense of impatience toward the region. This attitude would become manifest in his handling of westerners and even his Prairie advisor. World War II would further shift the emphasis away from western issues.

As the continuing ravages of the Depression swept across the Prairies, the region increasingly looked to the federal

government for aid. Only Ottawa could tax the more prosperous regions to help the others; only Ottawa could guarantee provincial loans and prevent default or even bankruptcy. But King's orthodox views kept him to what Neatby calls "limited objectives". He was uncomfortable with the new demands placed upon the federal government and while he had been a leader in the movement towards a more interventionist state in his early career, the Depression forced the issue further than he was prepared to go. Increasingly, Mackenzie King would become a conservative among radicals. He was disdainful of Bennett's last-ditch efforts at increased federal intervention: "King had interpreted the promises as irresponsible demagoguery, the new government's activities as encroaching dictatorship, and the New Deal as unconstitutional."¹ His primary concern was securing the financial position of the federal government. The demands of the West would threaten these efforts.

Mackenzie King planned on pulling Canada from the Depression through international trade and the co-operation of the provincial governments. He would receive neither. Other countries insisted on maintaining their trade barriers while the unco-operative attitude of the provinces indicated a serious crisis for dominion-provincial relations.

The Dominion-Provincial Conference of December, 1935 had increased federal relief grants as an interim policy and set the wheels in motion for a National Employment Commission to

¹Neatby, p.155.

establish a more efficient relief administration. King had become convinced that Bennett's grants-in-aid to the provincial governments had encouraged extravagance and waste. By spring Dunning was warning that the deficit for the fiscal year would be higher than expected, yet still more relief was needed. The prime minister responded by reducing federal aid below even what was agreed to at the conference.

The meeting had also agreed to discuss procedures for establishing a loan council and amending the British North America Act to increase provincial revenues while protecting the federal treasury and credit. In January Dunning met with the provincial treasurers to discuss the proposals and the possibility of allowing provincial governments to levy some indirect taxes. They were met by unanimous agreement and in May a resolution was introduced in the House to amend the BNA Act along these lines.

The loan council would allow the Dominion to guarantee loans for provinces which were poor credit risks. It included the federal minister of finance and the provincial treasurers, and would have the authority to accept or reject provincial requests for money. The premiers wanted assurances their loans would be guaranteed but King was not likely to offer any. Whereas Premier Duff Pattullo of British Columbia could turn to private sources and avoid the necessity of turning to the council, Aberhart had no choice. An Alberta debenture issue of three million dollars would fall due on April 1,

1936.

Alberta requested a federal loan in March but King persuaded his colleagues to insist the province first agree to the loan council. Aberhart refused the ultimatum. "If they [the provinces] apply for loans," King argued in cabinet, "they should be refused further advances even if it means their defaulting....It seems to me we have to face in Canada the possible default of provinces and municipalities & might as well do so sooner rather than later."² Gardiner, and to a lesser extent Crerar, disagreed. In the end, however, the cabinet decided to allow Alberta to default unless it came under the council. "Aberhart has fallen out with Douglas," King noted, "and has been preaching the second coming of Christ in 1943. His own reign is rapidly coming to a close."³

Dunning requested Alberta's position and intention. The premier answered that his province had not received enough details on the loan council to proceed but hoped "the views of Alberta and the Dominion can be reconciled."⁴ The finance minister saw through Aberhart's delaying tactics and indicated he could not "conceive that there would be any controversy over details." The matter had been discussed previously and

²King Diaries, March 18, 1936.

³Ibid., March 25, 1936.

⁴King Papers, reel 3687, volume 215, p.185287, Dunning to Aberhart, March 20, 1936; p.185288, Aberhart to Dunning, March 21, 1936.

everything had been clearly outlined.⁵ The provincial treasurer had raised no objections to the council when it was first proposed but to Aberhart it was a vehicle for federal domination and a way for Ottawa to interfere with Social Credit financial policies. If the loan was guaranteed first, the council could be discussed later. He proposed a means of refinancing the loan without consulting the council but this would provide the Dominion no means to effectively control its own credit. Dunning explained that there was no existing constitutional authority under which Dominion subsidies could be pledged in this manner. "Aberhart hopes, undoubtedly," King remarked, "to find a way out of government altogether by making an issue with the Dominion over its attempt to interfere with the autonomy of the provinces."⁶

Dunning's patience was growing thin as the premier continued to stall and the deadline for default approached.⁷ When asked again if he would agree to the loan council, Aberhart argued that he could not allow the future borrowing of the province to be controlled by Ottawa.⁸ The Dominion then refused his proposed refunding programme that would use

⁵Ibid., p.185289, Dunning to Aberhart, March 23, 1936.

⁶King Diaries, March 17, 1936.

⁷King Papers, reel 3687, volume 215, p.185293, Dunning to Aberhart, March 26, 1936.

⁸Ibid., p.185294, Aberhart to Dunning, March 27, 1936.

provincial bonds to meet the loan obligations.⁹ When the premier suggested having the federal government meet the obligations and then allow Alberta to reimburse the Dominion from the natural resources settlement, Dunning again refused because the settlement was already being used to offset debts presently owing.¹⁰

King did have some doubts about allowing the province to default. He feared that the bankruptcy of Alberta might allow Aberhart to "escape" from his "obligations" and place the "onus of failure" on the federal government. It would also set a bad precedent for the other Prairie provinces.¹¹ It was a no-win situation. King sought to have financial interests advance Aberhart the necessary funding to maintain the province's credit rating but the scheme fell through.¹²

On April 1 the province became the first to default and by the end of the year it had defaulted on yet another maturing loan and arbitrarily reduced interest rates on all provincial bonds by one-half. Aberhart came to Ottawa in May to discuss the financial situation of the province. King was certain the premier had no intention of co-operating with the Dominion to find solutions but merely wished to stir up

⁹Ibid., p.185295, Dunning to Aberhart, March 30, 1936.

¹⁰Ibid., p.185296, Aberhart to Dunning, March 30, 1936; p.185297, Dunning to Aberhart, March 30, 1936.

¹¹King Diaries, March 28, 1936.

¹²Ibid., March 30, 1936.

trouble. Premier Patterson of Saskatchewan, in the meantime, was prepared to accept a loan council. Gardiner and Crerar were again opposed to the scheme, "on score Western provinces shld be left free to borrow."¹³ Aberhart would be sure to observe King's handling of the neighbouring province and its Liberal government for any sign of preferential treatment.

Despite Ottawa's stance on the issues, King was never comfortable with the loan council, the transfer of indirect tax powers from federal to provincial jurisdiction, or the BNA Act amendment.¹⁴ The Senate was of the same mind and voted down the amendments. The West was being forced to push for increased government intervention and an increased federal role in the nation. King resisted both trends and this brought him into conflict with the region. A federally-sponsored Unemployment Insurance scheme was popular in the West but went directly against King's philosophy:

Pointed out that we were not a Tory party, nor a Socialist party, but a Liberal party, which stood for individual freedom and encouraging individual initiative and thrift. With respect to unemployment, we intended to meet it by getting men back to work, not to have in the State a trough for idle or worthless people to feed out of.¹⁵

By the end of the term, however, the scheme was in place.

Aberhart's refusal to co-operate with the federal government caused a rapid revision in King's opinion of the

¹³Ibid., April 25, 1936.

¹⁴Ibid., May 14-15, 1936; June 23, 1936.

¹⁵Ibid., April 22, 1936.

Alberta premier. "My opinion of him lessened considerably in conversation," he recorded during the May meetings, "with the twists and turns he was taking and obviously unfair tactics."¹⁶

What a pathetic and, indeed tragic picture it portrays of the management of the people's affairs in what ought to be one of the banner provinces of the Dominion. I greatly fear that the pathos and the tragedy of the situation is only beginning to reveal itself.¹⁷

With a premier who was determined to face-off against Ottawa on almost every issue, the relationship between King and Alberta could only worsen.

The prime minister would have to decide quickly on an Alberta strategy. Letters from the disgruntled continued to pour in complaining about the 'confused' situation. For twenty years the province had been suffering from "exceedingly poor leadership" but it was argued that if only proper command were provided, Alberta would somehow rise from its present "morass". The provincial organization could not be counted upon and the federal party would have to "take the lead in this move."¹⁸ All seemed agreed that "someone with authority" had to "take hold of the Alberta situation" and create a central organization.¹⁹ King sought to convince himself that

¹⁶Ibid., May 19-22, 1936.

¹⁷King Papers, reel 3687, volume 215, p.185748, King to Deachman, April 11, 1936.

¹⁸Ibid., reel 3689, volume 220, pp.189002-3, P.M. Lee to King, January 18, 1936.

¹⁹Ibid., reel 3687, volume 215, pp.185438-9, J.S. Courper to King, May 7, 1936.

federal intervention was a necessity and found no difficulty comparing Aberhart to the leaders emerging in western Europe:

In the province of Alberta, a dictatorship of a kind no less dangerous to individual and collective liberty is rapidly gaining ground...Unless the Liberal Party in the Province rises to its obligations as well as its opportunity...no one can say how soon the last vestige of individual and collective freedom may disappear in Alberta.²⁰

With no cabinet ministers from the province, King turned to Gardiner as planned.

As the relationship between Mackenzie King and the West changed, so also did the rapport he held with his constituency. Complaints filed in the riding office were forwarded to the prime minister in a subdued version. Prince Albert was being treated no better by the King government than the Bennett administration and the advantages of having the prime minister as representative seemed insignificant. Federal relief aid was continually refused. "It is not surprising" Abrams notes, "that the patience of the citizens had worn thin, and the city unemployed were showing signs of serious unrest." King demonstrated little concern for the plight of the unemployed in his home riding who had to suffer the additional burdens of particularly cold winters in 1936 and 1937. It was even claimed by relief workers that conditions in Prince Albert were the poorest in Saskatchewan.²¹

²⁰Ibid., reel 3694, volume 228, pp.196086-8, King to W.W. Sharpe, November 14, 1936.

²¹Abrams, pp.321-3.

Constituents felt that the prime minister avoided the area and that he was no longer concerned with advancing their interests. Liberal organizers continued to complain that he did not take an active enough interest in financing his own campaigns. Increasingly during the next four years P.A. constituents demonstrated a preference to have a local representative who understood and voiced their concerns.

For the first time accusations that P.A was being used only as a political convenience were hurled directly at the prime minister. "I might state," J.W. Sanderson, a long-time constituency worker, wrote,

there are some would-be trouble makers who are continuously trying to undermine you and the Liberal Party, with the statement that your only concern is to get elected and the only time this constituency sees you is when an election campaign is in progress.²²

King held little patience for these criticisms and expected the riding to understand his obligations.²³ T.C. Davis had long looked after constituency affairs for the prime minister and as usual attempted to explain the reaction: "You are the Prime Minister of Canada and are representing Prince Albert,

²²King Papers, reel 3729, volume 242, pp.207718-9, J.W. Sanderson to King, October 21, 1937.

²³"My position can only be linked to that of a captain of a ship on a strong sea. I can leave my post here, and travel to other parts for personal or political reasons, but cannot do so without the certain knowledge that some matter of peace or war necessitating an immediate decision, which the Prime Minister alone can give in the name of the country, may come up in the course of that absence." Ibid., pp.207720-1, King to Sanderson, October 30, 1937.

and naturally, your constituents have a rather exaggerated view of what you can do or should do for the constituency."²⁴

The early gains made for the riding were long forgotten and it was becoming evident that the prime minister was simply no longer as concerned with P.A., Saskatchewan, or the West. He had first contested the constituency because representation of a Saskatchewan riding allowed him to become familiar with western concerns at a critical time. That time had passed and concern now seemed primarily focused on international issues. Events such as the signing of the Reciprocity Agreement, the meeting of the League of Nations, the Royal Coronation, and the Imperial Conference were all given as reasons King could not devote more time to Prince Albert.²⁵

Western issues did occupy much of the cabinet discussions in 1936 but Mackenzie King, more often than not, now found himself opposed to the Prairie position. When it came to the drought situation, the federal guarantees for loans, and the fixing of wheat prices, the prime minister sided with his eastern colleagues.

The growing breach between King and the West was particularly evident in his persistent belief that the tariff could still win Prairie support. Tariffs remained a crucial issue and international trade was his chosen route out of the

²⁴Ibid., reel 3687, volume 215, pp.185702-3, T.C. Davis to King, April 15, 1936.

²⁵Ibid., reel 3742, volume 266, pp.226044-7, King to Omer Demers, July 3, 1939.

Depression. The trade agreement with the United States was, he believed, a major offering of reductions and King intended to offer more. He was confident the budget of 1936 demonstrated his good intentions and that "the party has kept its promise in the matter of reducing duties on the instruments of production, and taking off the excess tariffs which Bennett had imposed."²⁶ He could still advocate reductions but failed to realize that the tariff was no longer the central issue in the region. It remained a source of contention between East and West but for the Prairies, efforts now had to be concerned with rehabilitation. "The 7th year of drought, or less from some other cause," King wrote, "It is part of U.S. desert area- I doubt if it will be any real use again."²⁷ The romantic aspirations of the Prairies housing the New Jerusalem had all but disappeared.

The interest western Liberals did show for King's tariff policies was steeped in suspicion. After years of unfulfilled promises and vacillating policies they had come to question Dunning's stance and even wondered whether he still held a "western viewpoint" or if he was "playing with the interests".²⁸ With eastern lobbyists constantly besieging Dunning and King for tariff increases, and the prime

²⁶Ibid., April 30, 1936.

²⁷King Diaries, August 19, 1936.

²⁸King Papers, reel 3693, volume 225, J.G. Ross to King, April 20, 1936.

minister's patience for the West deteriorating, Crerar was not convinced King would hold to reductions.²⁹

Nationalization of the Bank of Canada was another issue that produced distance between King and his Prairie members. The prime minister had never liked the idea of a national bank but the Liberal party had been pressured into promising to amend the Bank of Canada Act in favour of government control. Some western Liberals were still convinced that majority control was not enough and argued vehemently in caucus for full government ownership. When they threatened to vote against the proposed amendment, King was annoyed and made it clear that caucus was the place for debate, not the House.³⁰ In March, 1938 the government nationalized the bank.

The plaguing problem of the Wheat Board also had to be handled and once again it threatened division between King and the region. The board had been named in the summer of 1935 and already held over two hundred million bushels of wheat. The Conservative government had established a price of 87.5 cents a bushel which was above the open market price so the board could acquire the bulk of the 1935 wheat crop. The Liberals had little choice but to accept the board until the crop had been sold but it was seen only as a temporary measure. King wanted the wheat to be sold and government

²⁹Dafoe Papers, box 7, file 5, Crerar to Dafoe, March 4, 1936.

³⁰King Diaries, April 26, 1936.

intervention ended. Pressure was mounting in Saskatchewan, in the meantime, for the continuation of the board.³¹

Poor crops in other parts of the world allowed the Wheat Board to increase its sales without depressing international prices with its surplus. By August, 1936, when the new crop had to be considered, the open market price was higher than the board price. King and Gardiner agreed that "this was the time to get out....if we do not get out of the price fixing now, we shall never be able to." Dunning was also opposed to price fixing but he reminded King that to eliminate the board may provide the CCF with a potent issue in the West. King was annoyed that the finance minister would disagree with him but blamed it on his

regulation attitude...Dunning does not like being over-ruled.- He has beneath all a nature that is 'hostile', aggressive, & which causes antagonism. He also has a way of taking things in his own hands, and "telling" others what to do. Gardiner in most things has better judgement.³²

The prime minister would continue to favour Gardiner as long as he agreed with his opinions. When Dunning released a government relief plan to the press, his feud with Gardiner resurfaced. King noted that the action was "very wrong" and that Dunning was "stealing credit" from Gardiner.³³ The fact that King was unsympathetic to western concerns, however,

³¹King Papers, reel 3689, volume 219, pp.188201-2, J.F. Johnston to King, July 14, 1936.

³²King Diaries, August 19, 1936.

³³Ibid., August 27, 1936.

would soon put Gardiner's influence also in jeopardy.

Price fixing and a minimum price for wheat were debated in caucus and the issues ended up splitting the cabinet into eastern and western factions. Gardiner was now supporting the general western stand alongside Crerar and Dunning on a minimum price. King believed it was best not to approve any price at present but leave the issue until the next session. In the meanwhile, the government would work towards ending price fixing.³⁴ The majority in cabinet decided not to approve the minimum price. Dunning and Crerar were "greatly disappointed" and believed "a terrible mistake had been made." Gardiner was opposed but was prepared to "face the situation." When Murray of the Wheat Board was summoned to answer questions he made a convincing argument that fixing the price would indeed probably help wheat sales abroad while ending it would depress the market.³⁵

At King's suggestion the cabinet adopted a compromise. The Wheat Board would maintain 87.5 cents as a floor price but would not accept any wheat unless the open market price fell below 90 cents. A statement would also be issued that the government had appointed a Royal Commission to study the question of marketing. By not making use of the fixed price King hoped the argument for the necessity of the board would disappear. "I felt we had better avoid unrest on the prairies

³⁴Ibid., August 25, 1936.

³⁵Ibid., August 26, 1936.

at this time," he recorded. "...I said to Council it is what we prevent, rather than what we do that counts most in Government." It was not the time to "take chances on the West."³⁶

But the compromise was met on the Prairies by "surprise, if not outright shock." The executive of the pools issued a statement that the government had denied the grain grower the right provided by the Wheat Board to deliver grain unless prices fell below 90 cents. The efforts of organized agriculture to place the industry on a footing of economic equality had sustained "a major reverse". There would not, however, be an attempt to resume the marketing role of the provincial pools. Western Liberal backbenchers were under pressure from their constituents and the issue began a rift between Motherwell and King. The prime minister reacted by sending Gardiner and Crerar on western speaking tours to defend the policy.³⁷ The concerns of Mackenzie King and the Prairie West were clearly no longer in accord.

In the early months of 1937 the prime minister noticed a new difficulty: "Because the federal political parties provided no outlet for the grievances a new pattern was emerging in which the provincial governments were becoming the major critics of the federal administration."³⁸ The threats

³⁶Ibid., August 27, 1936.

³⁷Wilson, p.529.

³⁸Neatby, p.186.

were emerging from all over the Dominion but for King, "Alberta becoming isolated, and Manitoba and Saskatchewan emphasizing sectional interests through financial embarrassment," were topping the list.³⁹ O.D. Skelton advised King that early and definite action had to be taken by the federal government to control the developing chaos. The "disintegration" of the nation was proceeding and provincial governments were adopting "an arbitrary and semi-Fascist attitude." The "increasing distrust of the East on the part of the Western provinces" had to be handled.⁴⁰ Mackenzie King felt the federal authorities had been doing all that was possible to deal with the malaise and the provincial governments were neither showing patience nor understanding. Ottawa's attitude toward the Prairie region would further harden.

The complaints, so often heard, that King discriminated against Alberta were now not only confined to the Social Credit party. By January, 1937 Liberals from the province were voicing their discontent and indicating that the Alberta populace was joining the chorus of criticism. A solution, they argued, could be found by appointing an Albertan to the cabinet. The province had remained relatively quiet when the cabinet had been formed in 1935 but by 1937 it seemed almost impossible to argue that Ottawa was not being discriminatory.

³⁹King Diaries, January 20, 1937.

⁴⁰As quoted in Neatby, p.187.

"Everywhere I go in this Province," W.C. Barrie reported, "I meet the criticism, that Premier King, and Eastern Liberals are no longer interested in the liberal cause in Alberta, because this province has been ignored in Cabinet appointment."⁴¹ Some Liberals were turning away from the party because of King's punishing tactics. "When we get recognition from Ottawa for some of our well known Liberals I am all for organization," one Liberal wrote. "Until we do our organization will not be touched."⁴² The notion persisted that King was "thinking more about a monument for himself, than he is for legislation that is helpful to human welfare."⁴³

For King the situation would be remedied when Alberta voted Liberal.⁴⁴ He told J.A. Mackinnon, the only Liberal elected in the province, that Stewart had been treated favourably and brought into the position of Alberta representative "via Quebec" but such action would "never occur again in any Ministry I might form." Alberta would be left "entirely to herself....It was the only way to get the situation in that province speedily cleared up."⁴⁵

⁴¹King Papers, reel 3723, volume 231, pp.198513-4, W.C. Barrie to King, January 5, 1937.

⁴²Gardiner Papers, reel 21, pp.48573-5, C.F. Connolly to Barrie, August 16, 1936.

⁴³Ibid., pp.48877-80, Barrie to Gardiner, July 31, 1938.

⁴⁴King Papers, reel 3723, volume 231, p.198514, King to Barrie, January 13, 1937; King Diaries, December 18, 1936.

⁴⁵King Diaries, December 2, 1936.

A renewed effort was made in 1937 to reorganize both the provincial and federal Liberal parties in the province. The usual question surfaced over whether the provincial party should fight as a straight Liberal movement or co-operate with other groups. Previously, the option had been co-operation with the governing UFA. Now, it considered co-operation with all groups opposed to Social Credit. The People's League had been formed as a vehicle for Social Credit opposition and called on all groups to unite against Aberhart. It claimed to represent the farmers but with little co-operation from movement leaders, it was more active in the urban areas. The sweeping victory of Aberhart gave the coalition movement extra incentive. Senator Buchanan began advising King that the only chance of defeating Social Credit lay in co-operation among all the remaining forces. But the straight Liberal group had opposed co-operation with the UFA in the past because of its Tory leanings and there would certainly be opposition to fusion with the Conservative party itself.

Mackenzie King's solution was to send Gardiner into Alberta to organize the Liberal party at both levels. He would not be given authority over patronage positions but was expected to lend his organizational talents and energy. The prime minister viewed the intervention as a last resort but there had been "great difficulty" in the past finding efficient leaders: "The necessary alternative would be the sending of men in from the outside." According to King, he

was even contemplating "entering the arena" himself.⁴⁶

J.G. Gardiner was fully prepared to wield his influence in Alberta. The prime minister had denied him a more influential cabinet post and manoeuvred him into the position of main Prairie advisor. Once in place he intended taking full advantage. The difficulty for the West in the last fifteen years, he told Buchanan, his advisor for the south of the province, was that only Saskatchewan had stood up for Liberal principles while other Liberals had "been playing with every other wild organization that came along." If there was not sufficient strength within the Alberta Liberal party "to do the job that is obviously in front of them, the quicker they get out of the way and let someone else do it the better for everyone." Outside leadership of the province in the long run was impossible but something had to be done with the present situation.⁴⁷ Gardiner's northern Alberta advisor, W.C. Barrie, reported that organizational work had "gone to seed" and "the decks had to be cleaned."⁴⁸

Gardiner told King that he was being "very strongly urged" by both Saskatchewan and Alberta Liberals to attend the Alberta provincial Liberal convention to be held on June 4 and

⁴⁶King Papers, reel 3730, volume 243, pp.209007-8, King to H.L. Stewart, October 2, 1937.

⁴⁷Gardiner Papers, reel 21, pp.49729-30, Gardiner to Buchanan, August 31, 1936.

⁴⁸Ibid., reel 20, p.48504, W.C. Barrie to Gardiner, January 18, 1936.

5. He would discuss rehabilitation work and debt adjustment but would also attempt to play an influential role in the selection of a new leader. E.L. Gray seemed the most promising candidate, despite his inexperience. Gardiner noted that he was acceptable to all factions of the Liberal party but was also "a consistent Liberal". His victory would provide "the nearest thing to United Liberalism in Alberta that we have ever had in that Province, and should be able to win back many of those who left the Party some years ago."⁴⁹

The minister of agriculture immediately set to work to end any talk of coalition, fusion, or co-operation. As far as he was concerned the Liberals would constitute the only opposition in Alberta and there would no chance of losing their identity:

A coalition in Alberta might result in the out-turn of the Aberhart government but it will break up of the necessary inherent weaknesses of this type of government and once again the province will be back into a worse mess than it is at the present time.⁵⁰

Barrie was to work towards bringing Alberta out of the "wilderness of isms" and to have the people "cease building their hopes on the sands, and go back to something permanent."⁵¹ T.C. Davis was sent into the province where he

⁴⁹King Papers, reel 3725, volume 234, pp.201362-6, Gardiner to King, May 28, 1937.

⁵⁰Gardiner Papers, reel 19, pp.41333-5, Gardiner to T.D. Leonard, October 8, 1937.

⁵¹Ibid., reel 21, p.48572, Barrie to C.F Connolly, August 18, 1936.

reported to have "knocked" the idea of coalition "into a cocked hat."⁵² Gardiner was prepared to accept the support of other parties for the Liberal candidate to avoid splitting the anti-Aberhart vote. Any further co-operation would be "foolish and futile".⁵³ He warned King that the People's League was using the rumour of an early election in the province to "stampede everyone" into its ranks. The League, he argued, was a Tory scheme that would attempt to use Gray and then "deal with him later."⁵⁴ He disagreed with Alberta Liberals who contended that the main thing to be done was to defeat Aberhart. For Gardiner the most important thing was to "establish Liberalism firmly in this country."⁵⁵

Complaints against this overt intervention were not long in coming. Those advocating Liberal support of the People's League were angered when Gardiner visited the province and "laid down the law to the effect that loyal Liberals should have nothing to do with this League." Straight Liberalism, they argued, had no chance against Social Credit and they pleaded with King to call off the Saskatchewan minister.⁵⁶

⁵²Ibid., reel 19, pp.41285-7, Davis to Gardiner, October 3, 1936.

⁵³Ibid., pp.41333-5, Gardiner to T.D. Leonard, October 8, 1937.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp.43125-7, Gardiner to King, November 17, 1937.

⁵⁵Ibid., reel 21, pp.49801-5, Gardiner to Buchanan, November 17, 1937.

⁵⁶King Papers, reel 3730, volume 243, pp.208974-6, G.H. Steer to King, March 25, 1937.

Gray may have been touted by Gardiner as "a consistent Liberal" but he did favour co-operation against Aberhart. In a sense he represented a change in the direction of Alberta Liberalism. Under the circumstances he was prepared to accept a middle ground between the groups and claimed the situation was "greatly misunderstood by many people in Eastern Canada....Alberta is a Liberal province at heart." The province had turned against Liberalism in 1921 and the campaign against partyism had prevented its return. Partyism would still exist but it seemed appropriate at present to camouflage labels. After his selection as leader, Gray worked to have all the people who believed in Liberal principles work together but this could not be accomplished by having them support the "straight" Liberal party. Success could be achieved by having them support Liberal principles "through other friendly groups". He advocated co-operation not fusion or unity, and he was annoyed that the press was misinterpreting his intentions: "Considerable misunderstanding has resulted. At the moment the political situation in the Province is quite confused."⁵⁷

The discussions over an anti-Social Credit coalition began an immediate power struggle. Buchanan was quickly becoming opposed to Gardiner's intervention and noted that a few Liberals of the "extreme view" were attempting to control

⁵⁷Ibid., reel 3725, volume 234, pp.201711-2, E.L. Gray to King, December 1, 1937.

the process of selecting candidates. It seemed possible, he claimed, to have all the parties brought together under Gray, "one of the most promising men that has come into public life in Alberta." The danger, however, lay in "drawing the party line too tight."⁵⁸ The Conservatives were co-operating with the People's League and were advocating fusion while many Liberals saw the League as a Tory ploy to control the opposition movement. Gray was prepared to advocate co-operation but not fusion.⁵⁹

On October 7 Gray was elected to the provincial legislature in an Edmonton by-election with the support of the Liberal party, the People's League, the Conservative party, and the remnants of the UFA. To those advocating co-operation, it was an example of what could be achieved with united opposition to Social Credit. To those opposed, Gray's declaration for "an end to party politics" tolled the death knell for Liberalism in the province.⁶⁰ Gardiner had different ideas. He had tolerated Gray's compromising attitude but now that the Edmonton by-election was over, he informed Barrie that "activities in Alberta can be proceeded with in a little different manner from that followed recently....We might just

⁵⁸Ibid., reel 2724, volume 232, pp.199503-4, Buchanan to King, August 26, 1937.

⁵⁹Ibid., reel 3725, volume 234, pp.201711-2, E.L. Gray to King, December 1, 1937.

⁶⁰Ibid., reel 3724, volume 233, pp.199676-7, C.E. Campbell to King, October 12, 1937.

as well get down to our maximum number of liberals and start from there."⁶¹

King congratulated Gray on the victory. He demonstrated his characteristic tendencies for compromise and agreed that any effective opposition to the troublesome Social Credit movement was a step forward: "Those who are opposed to the government's policies should leave no stone unturned in the effective organization of their forces."⁶² He was particularly pleased to see a politician of Gray's calibre finally emerge in Alberta. Gray was inexperienced but he seemed to possess the potential for a strong leader. "What the Liberal Party has needed, above all, in Alberta has been leadership in the Province itself."⁶³ Gardiner, in the meantime, gave no indication that he knew King was encouraging Gray toward coalition, but would probably not have been surprised. The two politicians had long disagreed over the matter but it was Gardiner who had now been given the chance to direct the party in the province.

King was also pleased with the federal budget of 1937. The economy was showing some improvement with farm revenue and prices for farm products increasing in Alberta and Manitoba.

⁶¹Gardiner Papers, reel 21, pp.48747-8, Gardiner to Barrie, October 9, 1937.

⁶²King Papers, reel 3729, volume 241, pp.206923-4, King to D.E. Riley, October 12, 1937.

⁶³Ibid., reel 3725, volume 235, pp.201713-4, King to Gray, December 10, 1937.

The deficit forecast had decreased and the prime minister was certain his policy of balanced budgets was working. He was not so pleased, however, with the reaction of many of his colleagues. His ministers continued to push increases for their departments.

King found the session more tiring than usual and the constant complaints of his colleagues bothered him. Neatby notes that

Western Canada seemed to have become more radical and that even western Liberals no longer seemed prepared to defend national policies or liberal principles. King found himself forced to temporize, to give way to pressures, to make concessions which were inconsistent with his views of sound administration but which seemed necessary to prevent an even more serious revolt.⁶⁴

The desperate condition caused by the Depression may have increased the radicalism of the Prairie West but King was certainly not making more concessions to the region now than in the 1920s. It was not only the West that had undergone the essential change, it was also Mackenzie King. He did not have to worry so much about the region leaving the Liberal party because at present it had nowhere to go. Rather, he was annoyed by the area's incessant requests for attention that threatened his desire for financial security. Because the requests were obstacles, they became examples of the region turning its back on Liberal principles. The threat of a "western revolt" differed in 1935 because the Prairie West was

⁶⁴Neatby, p.195.

acting from a position of weakness. It had less to offer Mackenzie King so Mackenzie King had less to offer the region.

As the prime minister's patience with the West dwindled, so too did his patience with his western advisors. Although first conceived by the Bennett government in April, 1935, the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Program was embraced by Gardiner as the only workable solution to the problem of Prairie drought. Its immediate task was to promote the conservation of surface water resources on farms and to encourage the use of practices designed to combat soil drifting. Not only did Gardiner embrace the program but he also took full advantage of the patronage powers of the PFRA to create the 'western empire' King had promised. As a result, he became one of the most 'troublesome' ministers that the prime minister was continually complaining about. While Lapointe was given an almost free reign in Quebec, it seemed the more Gardiner worked to fill his role of 'Prairie defender', the more his reputation in the eyes of King diminished. Gardiner, it must be noted, certainly did nothing to help the situation. His aggressive and quarrelsome nature furthered the prime minister's impatience with his western minister and the region he was serving. King was involved in a bitter feud with Ontario Premier Mitch Hepburn and Gardiner's relations with the premier only injured his position further. After campaigning for Hepburn in the provincial election of October, 1937, doubts were raised about Gardiner's loyalty. King felt

confident that he would remain loyal but did believe the minister of agriculture was the kind of politician to hedge his bets on a winner.⁶⁵

In the meantime western problems seemed to be multiplying. The prime minister feared that the Social Credit experiment in Alberta would spread to Saskatchewan and Manitoba.⁶⁶ Since the landslide election that brought Aberhart to power in 1935, the Liberal party feared that the movement would not only spread into the other Prairie provinces, but that it would enter the federal sphere as well. "My greatest alarm over the present conditions in Alberta," W.M. Davidson wrote Buchanan, "is that Mr. Aberhart, failing to make headway in the province, may turn his entire campaign into the federal arena. With his power of organization and his present backing, that would be a serious threat if even present day depression continues."⁶⁷ The provincial press was strenuously opposing the Social Credit administration and Aberhart was already threatening to place it under license. The opposition did not seem to be affecting the movement's appeal and the premier merely explained the criticism away as one more tool

⁶⁵King Diaries, October 3, 1937.

⁶⁶"If false political theories and doctrines continue to be applied and remain unexposed in Alberta, they may sweep over into other provinces more rapidly than we expect." King Papers, reel 3694, volume 228, pp.196086-8, King to W.W. Sharpe, November 14, 1936.

⁶⁷Ibid., reel 3686, volume 214, p.184539, W.M. Davidson to W.A. Buchanan, April 2, 1936.

of the capitalist system. Eastern Liberals were advised not to be lulled by reports that Social Credit was weakening; in fact it was probably gaining strength.⁶⁸

King disapproved of such Social Credit legislation as the Reduction and Settlement of Land Debts Act but to intervene in any way would only prove Aberhart correct when he attempted to taint Ottawa with the same criticism used against all the banks and moneyed interests. Some Alberta Liberals continued to warn King that the premier may as well be confronted sooner than later. A "firm stand" was required and no matter "however soft and honeyed Aberhart's words may be now he is prepared to knife the Federal Government on any and every possible occasion."⁶⁹ Others believed that federal intervention at this stage would prove "suicidal" and give Aberhart the "boost" he needed.⁷⁰

Western Liberals were anxious that the spread of Social Credit be halted and believed an opportunity had arisen early in 1937. The issue of allowing the governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan to go bankrupt surfaced but King had set a precedent by previously refusing a loan to Alberta. The cabinet, he wrote, "was practically united in opposition to more loans as simply sending good money after bad money,

⁶⁸Ibid., pp.184569-70, Buchanan to Gardiner, September 2, 1936.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp.184551-2, Buchanan to King, May 16, 1936.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp.184569-70, Buchanan to Gardiner, September 2, 1936.

continuing the error made by Bennett." Dunning had been opposed to the previous loans but was now more concerned with the refunding of three hundred million dollars of federal bonds. Much would depend on the credit rating of the federal government and he preferred not to have provincial governments default at this time. Graham Towers, the Governor of the Bank of Canada, agreed. King argued in council that the nation's credit rating would be strengthened by showing the international financial community "that we were ceasing to try to bolster up impossible situations."⁷¹ Western Liberals, on the other hand, were anxious for the provincial governments to receive aid to provide ammunition against the spread of Social Credit.

In the end the cabinet agreed with Dunning and Towers, and decided to allow the banks to save the situation. King reversed his stand and supported the measure to avoid the increase of unrest:⁷² "I think, it would be unfortunate to have repudiation become general throughout the West, and there is no saying where it might end."⁷³ Dunning would lend money to Manitoba and Saskatchewan until his refunding operations were completed but he still believed that in the longrun the provincial administrations had to balance their own budgets. Part of the problem, he claimed, continued to be waste and

⁷¹King Diaries, December 15, 1936.

⁷²Ibid., January 4, 1937.

⁷³Ibid., January 8, 1937.

extravagance. Gardiner, in the meantime, was pushing for an actual increase in the annual federal subsidies to the Prairie provinces.⁷⁴ "This has been the most difficult decision which I have had to make this year," the prime minister concluded.⁷⁵ Gone were the days when Mackenzie King stood against the cabinet in defense of western concessions; now, he stood against his western members.

To counter inevitable charges of discrimination against Alberta, financial assistance was also promised the most westerly Prairie province following an investigation of its financial situation by the Bank of Canada. Not surprisingly the prime minister was still immediately subject to accusations of discrimination, regardless. The press reports alleging discrimination were "wholly unfounded" he informed Premier Aberhart. "There has been and there is now no desire to discriminate between Alberta and other provinces. The principles applied in the case of Manitoba and Saskatchewan are equally applicable to Alberta."⁷⁶ Privately, however, King noted that he had manoeuvred Aberhart "into a sort of cleft stick" by having him ask for an investigation of Alberta's finances: "This will enable us to show wherein his methods

⁷⁴Neatby, pp.198-9.

⁷⁵King Diaries, January 8, 1937.

⁷⁶King Papers, reel 3723, volume 231, p.198154, King to Aberhart, February 19, 1937.

have been different from those of the other two Provinces."⁷⁷ The apparent crisis in dominion-provincial relations was leading King to contemplate a Royal Commission to study the matter. The grant to Manitoba and Saskatchewan had become the deciding factor.⁷⁸

If the prime minister hoped the demands and protests of the West would diminish, he was to be disappointed. Canada was recovering from the Depression but the spring and summer of 1937 were the driest on record. The drought on the Prairies continued. "The disastrous conditions in the west," Neatby argues, "coming at a time when the end of the depression had seemed in sight, would almost certainly amplify the political protests from a region that was already bitter and disillusioned."⁷⁹

King awaited the return of 'common sense' to Alberta but desperately wished to avoid any confrontation with the populist Social Credit and its charismatic leader: "Social Credit was Alberta's problem and King did not intend to interfere."⁸⁰ By September, 1937, however, Aberhart was being pressured into more drastic action that would make confrontations with Ottawa inevitable. The crop failure was augmenting difficulties and the premier had promised his

⁷⁷King Diaries, February 23, 1937.

⁷⁸Ibid., February 16, 1937.

⁷⁹Neatby, p.225.

⁸⁰Ibid., p.226.

electorate Social Credit measures within eighteen months. The session of 1936 had left many Albertans disillusioned and Aberhart's leadership became increasingly ambivalent.

With the aid of an appointed Social Credit Board and advice from Major Douglas himself, three bills were drafted to introduce Social Credit to the province. The first would require all bank employees in Alberta to be licensed but no licenses would be issued until an employee had signed an undertaking not to interfere with the property or civil rights of Alberta citizens. Because credit was a civil right according to Social Credit, the obvious implication was that licensed bankers would be obliged to lend money on terms which reflected the popular will. The bill also authorized the Social Credit Board to set up citizens' committees to supervise local bank operations. The other two bills were designed to prevent the courts from interfering; one denied unlicensed bankers any recourse to the courts and the other ruled out any attempt to challenge the validity of these acts in a court of law. The bills were quickly passed by the legislature.

The two acts which denied recourse to the courts were clearly invalid and would certainly be ruled ultra vires. The licensing legislation, entitled the Credit of Alberta Regulation Act, was an infringement on federal jurisdiction over banking. The problem for King was that the courts would take at least a full year to rule on the legislation and in

the meantime the banking system would be in chaos. Aberhart would be able to implement his policies successfully and gain popularity by facing off against Ottawa. The alternative was federal disallowance. The provincial bill could be vetoed and there would no recourse for appeal.

The use of disallowance had obvious political ramifications. It would allow Aberhart to argue that Ottawa was demonstrating its dictatorial powers in denying his government a chance to fulfil its promises. "I fear disallowance of the Banking legislation will be helpful to Aberhart," Buchanan warned King, "...Political consideration however must not be overlooked."⁸¹ The prime minister did not have to be reminded. The legislation was "unquestionably ultra vires," he was convinced, "but it is by no means certain that for us to disallow it would help matters in the long run."⁸² Aberhart would be able to make "political capital" out of the controversy. The threat to the federally chartered banks and the fact that Aberhart had thrown down the gauntlet left King little choice. He would not surrender to the provincial challenge:

It was perfectly clear to me that the Dominion could not afford to allow any legislation to close the courts to its citizens...this was going back prior to the days of the Magna Carta; that above all else we should prefer freedom and liberty- also not permit the federal jurisdiction to be invaded.

⁸¹King Papers, reel 2724, volume 232, pp.199498-9, Buchanan to King, August 6, 1937.

⁸²King Diaries, August 5, 1937.

Mackenzie King was personally opposed to such strong-arm measures as disallowance but he found it his "duty".⁸³

The prime minister attempted to avoid the dilemma by informing Aberhart that disallowance was being contemplated and advising him to refer the legislation to the Supreme Court before taking action. Aberhart responded by attacking the 'demagoguery' of the Canadian system. If the federal government wished to take the side of these tyrannical interests, the implications were obvious. He used King's stance on Canadian autonomy against him. The trend in statesmanship throughout the Commonwealth was towards greater freedom and responsible government.⁸⁴ King refuted the premier's attempts "to confuse the issue involved by references to financial tyranny or plutocratic opposition," even though he was using similar charges of 'tyranny' against Aberhart.⁸⁵

The Act was disallowed and Aberhart immediately called another special session of the provincial House. Disallowance, he argued, was an outdated power. The people of Alberta would continue to advance Social Credit regardless of Ottawa's defense of the financial system. King was the servant of the moneyed interests and was "usurping" the

⁸³Ibid., August 6, 1937.

⁸⁴King Papers, reel 3723, volume 231, pp.198191-3, Aberhart to King, October 12, 1937.

⁸⁵Ibid., pp.198162-5, King to Aberhart, August 17, 1937.

province's right to an appeal.⁸⁶ A slightly modified Credit of Alberta Regulation Act was passed but it would also be disallowed. A Bank Taxation bill was introduced, designed to punish the banks for their opposition by imposing a special levy on their paid-up capital and reserve funds. Convinced the press was opposing his measures as the agent of the tyrannical interests, Aberhart formulated the Accurate News and Information bill which would require every newspaper in Alberta to divulge its source for any news item on request and to publish every official government statement in full.

Now Buchanan, a newspaper owner, was pleading with King for federal intervention. "I know the problem is difficult," he wrote, "and yet I feel Alberta is deliberately defying Ottawa and seeking to place the eyes of the world upon it in the hope that it can win the battle with a superior power and thus give Social Credit a status that it would not otherwise be able to obtain."⁸⁷ King did not hesitate in using the veto on this new "confiscatory" legislation but he recognized that the timing of the disallowance might create an issue for the upcoming Saskatchewan election.⁸⁸

The Lieutenant-Governor took action first by reserving the bills for the consideration of the federal government.

⁸⁶Ibid., pp.198171-2, Aberhart to King, August 17, 1937.

⁸⁷Ibid., reel 3724, volume 232, pp.199508-10, Buchanan to King, October 2, 1937.

⁸⁸King Diaries, May 18, 1938.

When the government would not give its explicit approval within a year, the bills would not become law. King met with Gardiner and MacKinnon to discuss the Alberta situation. He was informed the Lieutenant-Governor wished to dismiss the Aberhart ministry and ask Gray to form a government. The prime minister was strongly opposed to the Lieutenant-Governor wielding such power: "It is sheer madness. Action of the kind would almost certainly have repercussions in Saskatchewan which would cost the Liberals the election there, and might bring on a sort of civil war in Alberta."⁸⁹ This time Aberhart took the initiative by having the powers of disallowance and reservation tested before the Supreme Court.

Social Credit members in Parliament continued to levy their charges that King was discriminating against Alberta: "This discrimination is resented by the people of Alberta all the more because it comes as a culmination of many previous acts of discrimination against their province by this government." King had disallowed Alberta's legislation but had refused to disallow Quebec's controversial Padlock Law.⁹⁰ He defended his position by indicating that while he disapproved of the Padlock Law it did not invade federal jurisdiction.⁹¹ The justification was weak, however, and it was only too clear that the main difference was that one act

⁸⁹Ibid., May 19, 1938.

⁹⁰Debates, Victor Quelch, pp.95-100, February 1, 1938.

⁹¹King Diaries, July 6, 1938.

had been passed by a government on the Prairies and the other by a government in Quebec.

Aberhart was now confronting the prime minister at every turn. He opposed the formation of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations and its personnel, particularly J.W. Dafoe, because they were harsh critics of Social Credit. The commission's absolute powers to recommend constitutional changes were seen as one more example of federal domination. Ottawa had usurped Alberta's constitutional power and was now seeking to formally augment its powers through the commission. "Both the personnel and terms of reference of the Commission," Aberhart argued, "rendered it useless for all practical purposes."⁹² Changes, he claimed, should only come through consultation with the provinces.⁹³ "I may say," King responded, "that there is no ground whatever for your implication of a connection between the announcement of the Commission's appointment and the disallowance of your recent legislation."⁹⁴

By 1938 the interference of Gardiner in Alberta affairs had also caused a major stir for federal Liberals and a federal by-election in East Edmonton had become the battleground. King had met with Gardiner to discuss the

⁹²King Papers, reel 3731, volume 245, pp.209894-5, Aberhart to King, September 9, 1938.

⁹³Ibid., reel 3723, volume 231, pp.198182-5, Aberhart to King, August 26, 1937.

⁹⁴Ibid., pp.198187-9, King to Aberhart, September 2, 1937.

Alberta situation and despite the bitter reservations of the secretary for the National Liberal Federation, Norman Lambert,⁹⁵ he had left the matter to his Prairie lieutenant: "I agreed to keeping to strictly party lines." Liberal identity would be maintained but co-operation where advisable would be stressed. The prime minister knew Gardiner had a tendency to be "rightly Liberal" but believed that in this situation he "was right on the whole."⁹⁶ His role in Alberta was discussed in cabinet and some members took exception to the interference. King "reminded them of what had been decided previously, and the reasons which had caused us to back Gardiner in the matter."⁹⁷ When he received advice from the province to have his minister of agriculture fall in line with the coalition movement, he refused and answered that Gardiner "was on the right line". Attempts at fusion, he argued, were controlled by the Tories and were attempting to get rid of Gray as provincial leader.⁹⁸

Gardiner called his political machine from Saskatchewan into the fray and attempted to keep Gray's provincial forces out of the campaign. Just prior to the by-election, however, Gray gave an address in which he attacked the People's League,

⁹⁵Lambert handled federal party finances and this function brought him in conflict with Gardiner in both Saskatchewan and Alberta.

⁹⁶King Diaries, September 10, 1937.

⁹⁷Ibid., October 28, 1937.

⁹⁸Ibid., December 21, 1937.

and the provincial Conservative leader, D.M. Duggan,⁹⁹ and pushed a straight Liberal platform. This action along with Gardiner's intervention and attitudes against co-operation led the Conservatives to oppose the Liberal candidate in the last week of the campaign. The split in the anti-Social Credit vote allowed Aberhart's party to win the federal seat. The Liberals in Alberta emerged from the campaign quarrelling over fusion and Gardiner was pleased that the defeat had at least finally placed the Liberals as the real opposition to Social Credit. The fight had not been against Aberhart but against coalitions. "It very definitely kills the Unity idea."¹⁰⁰

W.C. Barrie continued to argue that Gardiner had "rendered a splendid service to the Liberal cause," that he "stirred enthusiasm and confidence in the breasts of the discouraged Liberal." If he could only spend more time in the province, Liberalism "would have little to fear." Criticism against Gardiner, he claimed, was only coming from enemies and the misinformed.¹⁰¹

Buchanan, on the other hand, argued that the Saskatchewan minister's presence was widely resented and had played an important role in the by-election defeat. Gardiner's machine-

⁹⁹King Papers, reel 3735, volume 254, pp.216353-6, C. McLaurin to King, April 26, 1938.

¹⁰⁰Gardiner Papers, reel 21, pp.48793-4, Barrie to Gardiner, March 29, 1938.

¹⁰¹King Papers, reel 3731, volume 245, pp.210145-6, W.C. Barrie to King, April 2, 1938.

style politics, he claimed, would not work in Alberta.¹⁰² The province was being punished by the King government for not voting Liberal and left to "stew in her own juice". If this had to be the prime minister's position, many Albertans were annoyed that he was not following suit and instead allowing Gardiner "to exercise the most vicious influence." If he did not back off, they warned, Social Credit would have little trouble staying in power.¹⁰³ If he had stayed away in the first place, the Conservatives would probably have "given way" and supported the Liberal candidate. While those opposed to the intervention agreed that previous attempts at fusion had been orchestrated by the Tories, it was not, however, sufficient reason to surrender all efforts at co-operation and allow Gardiner complete control.¹⁰⁴

The by-election left King uncertain as to whether Gardiner had helped or hindered the Alberta situation. He believed a fusion was preferable to the continuation of "incessant strife" but blamed the Conservatives for ending any hopes of co-operation. In the contest, he argued using Gardiner's logic, the Conservatives should have "made way" for the Liberal candidate. The problem, according to King, was that the movement toward union was "a disguised effort on the

¹⁰²Ibid., reel 3732, volume 247, pp.211260-2, Memorandum for King, June 23, 1938.

¹⁰³Ibid., reel 3734, volume 251, pp.214536-9, J.B. Howatt to King, March 23, 1938.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pp.214542-6, Howatt to King, April 4, 1938.

part of the Conservatives in the Province to get an ultimate control." This charge had been exaggerated but "there were grounds for the belief."¹⁰⁵ He thought Gardiner's efforts had increased the vote but had to admit that having the campaign run by outsiders probably operated against the Liberals.¹⁰⁶ The majority of correspondence coming from Alberta seemed to confirm this verdict.

The by-election and bitterness over Gardiner's role as provincial representative revived demands for an Albertan to be taken into cabinet: "We were disappointed when Mr. Mackinnon was not included in the cabinet of 1935; our disappointment has grown since." Gardiner was associated with "machine politics" and Albertans would not accept having someone from out of the province being considered their spokesman.¹⁰⁷ It was breeding a "feeling of apathy and resentment" and would "eventually result in the obliteration of the Party."¹⁰⁸ Even Barrie was now indicating that popular resentment had reached the point where Alberta had to have its own cabinet minister even if this meant him working alongside

¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp.214540-1, King to J.B. Howatt, March 29, 1938.

¹⁰⁶King Diaries, December 21, 1937.

¹⁰⁷King Papers, reel 3734, volume 251, pp.214713-5, D.R. Innes to King, February 5, 1938.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., reel 3735, volume 253, pp.215430-2, E. Litchfield to King, April 5, 1938.

Gardiner.¹⁰⁹ The minister of agriculture told Barrie he would have no problem with Mackinnon joining the cabinet but noted that Alberta could hardly expect 'preferential' treatment. He added that "it might be the proper thing to let them express themselves once more [in the next federal election], before giving them Cabinet representation."¹¹⁰ By the end of the year J.A. Mackinnon was taken in as minister without portfolio. Mackenzie King had relented to the pressure grudgingly and given Alberta representation.

Once again it had been shown that Gardiner's interference in any province other than Saskatchewan would only prove destructive and that the dynamics of Prairie Liberalism differed from province to province. King persistently refused to accept these differences or that Gardiner could not play the same role for the Prairies as Lapointe played in Quebec. When he learned that Social Credit could threaten the upcoming election in Saskatchewan, he was "distressed" and now prepared to admit it was a "mistake to let Gardiner go in there [Alberta] - better to let others there try everything out under Mackinnon. I am perhaps most to blame for that."¹¹¹ From 1919 until 1935 King had advocated co-operation in Alberta to revive Liberal fortunes. The strategy had failed. In 1935 he

¹⁰⁹Ibid., pp.215993-4, J.P. McIsaac to King, August 8, 1938.

¹¹⁰Gardiner Papers, reel 21, pp.48774-5, Gardiner to Barrie, January 13, 1938.

¹¹¹King Diaries, April 15, 1938.

sent diehard Gardiner into the province but this had also failed. "I have been more disappointed with the efforts put forth in relation to political matters in Alberta during the past two years," Gardiner wrote, "than with any previous experience I have had."¹¹²

In the meantime the federal budget of 1938 marked "a new and very different approach to fiscal policy."¹¹³ The deficit was increasing mainly due to the Prairie drought and the cabinet was quarrelling over departmental estimates. Despite the prime minister's desire to reduce the deficit and have his ministers reduce their expenditures, departmental budgets would have to be increased. The cabinet moved towards deficit financing despite the bitter resistance of King and Dunning. The federal government would actually increase expenditures during a recession and King had been forced to pull away from his desire to balance budgets: "John Maynard Keynes had come to Canada."¹¹⁴ It is doubtful King fully recognized the significance of the budget at the time, and instead claimed it to be "featureless".¹¹⁵ He had hoped to include the tariff reductions that were part of the trade negotiations with Great Britain and the United States but these would not be ready in time. Once again he promised the next budget would include

¹¹²As quoted in Ward and Smith, p.220.

¹¹³Neatby, p.249.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p.255.

¹¹⁵King Diaries, June 8, 1938.

tariff reductions.¹¹⁶

Changes were also occurring within the Conservative party by 1938. In July Bennett retired and R.J. Manion became the new leader. The decision would certainly not help the Conservatives on the Prairies but it was hoped Manion could revive Tory fortunes in Quebec.¹¹⁷ The concerns of both traditional parties had become focused on central Canada. King was still confident that the Bennett legacy would haunt the Tories for a long time: "Liberalism should be able to retain power in Canada for some years to come."¹¹⁸

The judgements of the Supreme Court on the Social Credit legislation were issued in March, 1938 and they all favoured the federal position. The Alberta government did not appeal the judgments but Aberhart was now challenging King on another issue. His earlier legislation to cancel all interest on farm mortgages since 1932 had been blocked by the courts in 1937. He now introduced legislation to establish a one-year moratorium on all debts, to prohibit foreclosures on private homes, and to prevent any legal action to collect debts contracted before July, 1936. In addition there was to be a provincial tax levied on the principal of any mortgages held by non-residents of the province.

¹¹⁶Ibid., June 22, 1938.

¹¹⁷Manion was a Roman Catholic and married to a French Canadian.

¹¹⁸Ibid., July 7, 1938.

These measures were also designed to extend the Social Credit movement to the other Prairie provinces and particularly Saskatchewan where a provincial election was to be held in June. The federal Liberal party took an active role in the election campaign and countered by rallying behind the Patterson government with Gardiner directing the offensive. King was convinced the new Social Credit legislation would have to be disallowed but he had to await the election results. He was keenly interested in the contest because it posed as the advance line in the war against Social Credit. "To defeat Aberhart solidly in Saskatchewan at this time," he noted, "would do more to steady the whole of Canada than anything that has happened since our general election."¹¹⁹ In the provincial contest only 2 Social Credit candidates were elected and the Liberals won a stable majority. The result gave King renewed confidence that disallowance was justified and Social Credit could be confined to Alberta.¹²⁰

Western antagonism toward the Liberal government was increasing and Charles Dunning was becoming a prime target. In June, 1938 the finance minister was under "bitter" attack and Saskatchewan Liberals were charging that he was out to change the Liberal tariff policy. They accused him of becoming a Tory, yielding to his Montreal interests, and sacrificing his western principles. King appealed for party

¹¹⁹Ibid., June 8, 1938.

¹²⁰Ibid., June 9, 1938.

unity but was now quick to come to the defence of Dunning. He argued it had been "the extreme action of Western men" that had defeated reciprocity in 1911.¹²¹ Dunning even threatened resignation on August 1, 1939. He told King that the "thing which had gnawed at his soul" in the last few years were the constant statements, "which he attributed to Gardiner," that he was "standing in the way of the West receiving the assistance they should." King was coming to alter his stance again regarding Gardiner and Dunning. As he became increasingly impatient with the West, he reacted the same way to his western lieutenant. He was also finding himself in agreement with Dunning's fiscal policies. Gardiner's relentless ambition made him an easy figure to dislike and as he pressed for more influence in the cabinet and increased finances for his department, western issues increasingly pitted him against King: "I really feel about Gardiner that he is more and more of a machine politician, and that Dunning was perhaps right in his estimate of his tendencies in that direction. My opinion of him is not what it was some time ago."¹²²

There was supposed to be an election in 1939 but the war intervened. In western Canada the Liberal party was on the defensive but domestic issues would be overshadowed by events in Europe. "It is difficult to maintain an interest in

¹²¹Ibid., June 22, 1938.

¹²²Ibid., August 11, 1939.

politics during the war," C.D. Howe admitted, "but I will endeavour to see that our national organization is kept up to a point where it will be ready for action when required."¹²³

Meanwhile, the issue of the Wheat Board was rapidly becoming the main issue of disagreement between the federal government and the West. By the summer of 1938 the board had disposed of its holdings but world wheat production was high and it was expected that prices would fall sharply. Motherwell repeated his embarrassing charges in the House that the government had 'sterilized' the Wheat Board and opposition members smugly acknowledged his courage in denouncing his own party's position.¹²⁴ Despite the growing chorus of western criticism, King and Gardiner still wished to eliminate the board and the fixed price but were finding it impossible.¹²⁵ The problem was convincing the West. When the cabinet, led by Euler, began pushing for an even lower fixed price of 70 cents, Gardiner was forced to the defence of the Prairie farmer. King, on the other hand, felt the present price was too high and that it was, in effect, taxing the rest of the country to support the Prairies. Once again the threats of economic and political chaos were such, however, that he believed a higher price than Euler's suggestion had to be

¹²³King Papers, reel 4570, volume 289, p.244458, C.D. Howe to King, July 30, 1940.

¹²⁴Wilson, p.558.

¹²⁵King Diaries, June 23, 1938.

maintained.¹²⁶ An 80 cent minimum price agreed to by King and Dunning was adopted.

Since 1935 the King government had been pursuing a wheat policy that would dispose of the inherited surplus and restore marketing to the pools, thereby terminating the Wheat Board. The Turgeon Royal Commission had recommended a return to the open market but Depression conditions had made it impossible. Gardiner had decided to attempt a strategy of persuading the pools to revert to co-operative marketing under government guarantee.¹²⁷ The cabinet authorized his co-operative marketing proposal but it was not long before he was also pushing King to have the matter placed in the control of his department. Gardiner and Euler had previously clashed over the department of trade and commerce's promoting exports of farm products. "While I do not want to press the matter unduly," the minister of agriculture wrote King,

I am inclined to think the matter could be much more satisfactorily handled if the legislation were being prepared in the Agriculture Department where the production as well as the marketing of wheat is thoroughly understood and where the Minister happens to be the only one representing a section of the country where wheat is the outstanding product, and where wheat is our whole political background.¹²⁸

On February 16, 1939 Gardiner brought down his major policy statement in the House which called for the government

¹²⁶Ibid., July 26, 1938.

¹²⁷Wilson, p.582.

¹²⁸As quote in Wilson, pp.586-9.

to remain out of the grain trade, for the grain exchange to be supervised by the government, and for encouragement to be given to the creation of co-operative marketing associations or pools. The statement, however, touched off such a massive protest by resolution and petition in the West against the demise of the Wheat Board that Gardiner backed down. He advised King that he was now prepared to recommend the continuation of the Wheat Board, but in amended form.¹²⁹ These amendments would include a 60 cent initial payment and an acreage subsidy in areas of low yield. The western members were having difficulty defending Prairie concerns while still maintaining peace with an unsympathetic prime minister.

The minister of agriculture's proposals for a revised Wheat Board came before the cabinet on March 16. He was also pushing for the transfer of the Canada Grain Act from the department of trade and commerce to agriculture and managed to have some success in convincing King. The prime minister was being informed by western members that if the government did not ensure a 70 cent minimum price for wheat "the West would forget all we had done for them, and we could not hope to carry any seats there." His response was a fair indication of the diminishing importance of western support: "Personally, I fear more and more that doing anything for the sake of winning at the polls is the utmost folly unless what is being done is, in itself, the right and the proper course to take

¹²⁹Wilson, pp.592-4.

regardless of political consequences."¹³⁰

The cabinet was split over the wheat policy but nowhere was division more evident than within the wheat committee. "I frankly confess that while I thought I understood the problem at one time," King admitted, "I had now come [sic] so confused as to not be able to say what the consensus of view was, or to give any decision that seemed to be at all representative." In the end it was decided to give Gardiner's amendments a chance. They would probably be defeated by the Senate and the Wheat Board would be continued. The cabinet did want a guarantee on the price of wheat to be provided above 60 cents but King agreed with Gardiner that "having given the farmers 80 cents guarantee, to cut that down to 60 while the election is on, would mean a pretty certain loss." He reluctantly decided to rely on the advice of Gardiner who "knows the West as well as anyone."¹³¹

The cabinet agreed to the 1939 legislative program, including a 60 cent initial payment for that year's crop and an acreage subsidy in areas of low yield. The western reaction to the announcement was just as pronounced as when Gardiner introduced his co-operative proposal. The Saskatchewan wheat pool circulated petitions urging the retention of the 80 cent payment. The reports of western dissatisfaction caused the issue to emerge again in cabinet

¹³⁰King Diaries, March 20, 1939.

¹³¹Ibid., March 21, 1939.

and King reacted by informing caucus that the matter would have to be resolved in the wheat committee or abandoned. He was losing faith in his western advisor:

I am far from sure that Gardiner is right in believing that we can get Western Canada to accept favourably legislation which will reduce price to be guaranteed farmers for wheat from 80 cents as it is now under the Wheat Board to 60 cents. I am afraid this legislation if it carries will cost us many seats in Western Canada.¹³²

King agreed with decreasing the fixed price but saw it as "a sort of suicide" for Liberalism on the Prairies. In the end the cabinet decided to accept Crerar's compromise suggestion of a 70 cent minimum price. The passing of the Prairie Farm Assistance Act to stabilize farm income, it was hoped, would also help alleviate western discontent.

The change in King's western sympathies was becoming even more evident during his meetings with Prairie delegations. He was unbudging when Premier Bracken of Manitoba led groups of westerners to Ottawa with grievances. The prime minister had seemed sympathetic during a meeting on March 1 but the gathering on April 24 indicated a hardened attitude. As long as the delegations heaped glowing praise upon the government's record and demonstrated heart-felt gratitude for saving the West from the Depression, King was receptive. When criticism and requests for more aid were put forward, he quickly lost his patience. He pointed out that his government had to consider the interests of the entire nation, not just one

¹³²Ibid., April 5, 1939.

region, that he would go "just as far" as he could "in an effort to meet Western Canada...but not a step further." Westerners would have to appreciate the record of his past governments to satisfy their region and the efforts of Gardiner and himself as members for western constituencies: "This should be sufficient guarantee of our desire to meet the West without seeking to drive us into an impossible situation."¹³³

The western difficulties led King to monitor the provincial situation closely for signs of what to expect in a federal election. For the March, 1940 provincial election in Alberta, the Liberal, Conservative, and independent Labour parties merged and ran under the banner of independents. The CCF refused to join the movement. J.A. Mackinnon reported that while Social Credit had been weakened, this would probably not translate into more Liberal seats. Instead the gains would probably go to the CCF. The war, however, did seem to be boosting Liberal fortunes federally: "I too wish that this [federal] election could be held almost immediately. I am keeping talking war and Canadian unity. There is a definite shift here to Mr. King as a sound, reliable and dependable leader in these troubled times."¹³⁴ Additional reports provided similar indications. King and his government

¹³³Ibid., April 24, 1939.

¹³⁴King Papers, reel 4571, volume 297, p.246090, Mackinnon to A.D.P. Heeney, March 5, 1940.

were apparently "held in greater respect and higher esteem in Alberta than for many years past." It had taken the crisis to "impress" upon the people "the immeasurable value of wise and courageous leadership and able and sound administration."¹³⁵

The war would dominate the federal election of March 26, 1940 and as a result King was fairly confident about western prospects. Saskatchewan representation was not likely to change and there would be no major alteration in Manitoba. The Alberta situation could only improve particularly if Social Credit was indeed declining and the CCF rising.¹³⁶ J.L. Granatstein notes that "the Prime Minister no longer had any doubts about the outcome of the election after his Western trip."¹³⁷

Since his appointment as minister without portfolio, J.A. Mackinnon had been reporting to King that prospects in Alberta were improving.¹³⁸ It had been wise to delay the election until 1940 because the previous wheat legislation had been viewed more as a measure to aid Saskatchewan than Alberta. High prices and unemployment were continuing to pose problems,

¹³⁵Ibid., reel 4575, volume 297, pp.252062-3, J.H. Sissons to King, October 11, 1939.

¹³⁶Ibid., reel 3743, volume 267, pp.227063-5, Gardiner to King, July 15, 1939.

¹³⁷J.L. Granatstein, Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945, p.90.

¹³⁸King Papers, reel 3746, volume 272, pp.230681-2, J.A. Mackinnon to King, July 31, 1939; reel 4571, volume 291, p.1246085, Mackinnon to King, February 23, 1940.

however, and Alberta would have to rely completely on outside help to fund the campaign.¹³⁹ King was informed by outside organizers that reliable information about Alberta prospects, as usual, was difficult to obtain. Aberhart would certainly be returned provincially and the fact that federal and provincial issues had become indistinguishable would provide Social Credit an influence in the general election.¹⁴⁰

Prospects in Manitoba seemed hopeful. A good crop was producing optimism and grievances remained in the background in the midst of war. Some seats could be lost but with such a large majority, losses had to be expected. Normal Lambert had gone so far as to describe the province as a political model.¹⁴¹ But the CCF was now seen as an active and dangerous threat.¹⁴² Saskatchewan seemed politically sound but the machine was extremely expensive to maintain. Gardiner informed King that at least one-third of the election funds "will have to be provided by the central office, or in other words by Senator Lambert."¹⁴³ The prime minister expected to

¹³⁹Ibid., reel 4751, pp.230675-7, MacKinnon to King, July 18, 1939.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., reel 3748, volume 276, pp.233608-12, C.G. Power to King, July 18, 1939.

¹⁴¹J.E. Rea, draft chapter of biography of Crerar.

¹⁴²King Papers, reel 3748, volume 276, pp.233608-12, C.G. Power to King, July 18, 1939.

¹⁴³As quoted in Whitaker, p.118.

lose some ground on the Prairies, but not much.¹⁴⁴

Mackenzie King was more worried about his own seat in Prince Albert than ever before. The constituency had seen the worst years of the Depression in 1937 and 1938 and northern Saskatchewan had finally been assailed by the drought. The crop in 1939 was much improved but the effects of nine years of Depression would not be easily forgotten.¹⁴⁵ The prime minister admitted the people of the riding had been very considerate in not making any demands on his time. During the campaign he knew he should make a trip to the constituency, which he had not visited since the last election, but was preparing justifications to stay away: "On the other hand, not to go there, would allow the public to see that I am perfectly indifferent as to losing my own seat." He did end up launching a brief western swing at the end of February and made it to Prince Albert. King's doubts about being re-elected along with guilt for his long absence became quickly evident in his diary's record of the speech. He told his constituents

how it had not been possible for me to visit the constituency when I was [last] elected as its member or at any time through the entire 18th parliament. To have held the confidence of the entire party in these circumstances is a tribute not less to their intelligent interest in public affairs or the obligations of my position, as it was a tribute to the confidence I have won in the 14 years I have represented the

¹⁴⁴King Diaries, February 29, 1940.

¹⁴⁵Abrams, pp.329-32.

constituency....Made the meeting a sort of intimate personal one which helped to bring my constituents and myself closer together.¹⁴⁶

The attempt at self-delusion was transparent.

The King government was returned with 181 seats while the Conservatives won only 40, the CCF 8, Social Credit 10, and independents and others 6. Only in the Prairie West and British Columbia, however, did the government fail to win a majority of the popular vote. Still, the Liberals won 15 of 17 seats in Manitoba, 12 of 21 in Saskatchewan, and 7 of 17 in Alberta. Both Crerar and Gardiner had still proven very effective in their home provinces.

King was again elected in Prince Albert but his majority was noticeably reduced. "It has been by a miracle that I did not lose the election [in P.A.]" he admitted when the results were known.¹⁴⁷ The urban areas now supported him while the rural district vote fell heavily. Davis informed the prime minister that the causes were "first and foremost lack of proper organization" and the "second reason was the unholy alliance" between the Social Credit and the Conservatives. "This combination nearly proved disastrous." The Tories were dead in the West and all the anti-Liberal forces were moving into third parties. "I see a re-alignment coming," Davis warned "...The radical has left us and is on his own in a

¹⁴⁶King Diaries, February 29, 1940.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., May 15, 1940.

third party....I am alarmed about the future out here."¹⁴⁸ As usual he chose not to mention that King's lack of attention to the riding was markedly injuring his support.

Some cabinet reorganization did take place after the election. W.D. Euler was appointed to the Senate and J.A. Mackinnon was given the portfolio of trade and commerce. He would now chair the wheat committee. The committee would lose another member when C.A. Dunning was replaced in finance by Ralston. J.L. Ilsley would become minister of finance in July and Ralston would move to the defence portfolio.

In May of 1940 the Rowell-Sirois Commission reported its findings. The strain on dominion-provincial relations that had emerged from the Depression and was continuing into the war had to be handled with more power being provided the federal government. While Aberhart had been obstructing the progress of the commission, Bracken of Manitoba had been pushing for the immediate implementation of its report. For King, the report was essential to the war effort and post-war reconstruction. A revamping of the dominion-provincial relationship would be necessary for sound financial policies.¹⁴⁹

The years from 1935 to 1940 demonstrated the changes in the relationship between the West and the Liberal party of Mackenzie King. "After 1935," Whitaker notes

¹⁴⁸King Papers, reel 4568, volume 286, pp.242326-7, T.C. Davis to King, April 7, 1940.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., reel 4566, volume 283, pp.238968-70, King to Aberhart, November 2, 1940.

the Liberals never regained the level of electoral support which they had enjoyed after the [first] war. They were generally weaker in the West than in any other part of the country. Yet in the period of Liberal domination of national politics from 1935 to 1957 the party did manage to maintain a presence in the West which was by no means inconsiderable.¹⁵⁰

This presence, however, disguised the actual nature of diminishing Liberal support.

The Depression was the main catalyst for this change. The crisis had increased the pace of relative western decline and consequently the region's willingness to turn to radical alternatives. It had also highlighted the political and economic weaknesses of the region and this in turn led to changes in the way King handled the area. When the same old Liberal party returned to power, with the same old politicians, they found themselves increasingly out of tune with western concerns. Mackenzie King could continue to harp on about the tariff, Jimmy Gardiner about diehard Liberalism, Tom Crerar about open market conditions, and Charles Dunning about fiscal responsibility, but these no longer constituted the major concerns of the Prairie West. Gardiner and Crerar could at least remain in accord with western sentiment on some issues and alter their positions on others, but King was now completely out of step. He found himself opposed to the West at every turn.

¹⁵⁰Whitaker, p.346.

CHAPTER EIGHT
VIEWING THE MOUNTAINS WITHOUT SCALING THE HILLS, 1941-50

Intensive organization has placed the C.C.F. in a very commanding position in Western Canada....It is freely admitted from all schools of thought that you have carried on a war effort of a very high order, but western opinion views the mountains without seeming to realize the necessity of the regimentation required to scale the hills...

-F. McRae to King, July 14, 1944.

The war years marked the zenith of Mackenzie King's career. He entered the conflict as the doubtful war leader and emerged the successful head of a united country that had doubled its gross national product and increased its budget ten-fold in five years. Military and economic success were confirmed by political victories as the Liberals won two more elections under his leadership. He would be heralded for implementing major steps toward the welfare state and for preserving French-English unity in the face of a conscription crisis that had smashed the Liberal party in 1917. J.W. Dafoe demonstrated a complete reversal in his opinion of the prime minister. "My relations with King have never got to the point of warm friendship," he wrote in 1943, "but they have been close enough to give me an impression, which grows with every contact, that there is more to this man than I have thought." In reaction to critical press reports, he informed J.A. Stevenson: "I may say that the systematic disparagement and belittlement of everything he has done has vexed me to the point that I have become somewhat of a partisan on his behalf-

something I never was previously."¹

The years from 1941 to 1950 were Mackenzie King's finest hours and tended to overshadow the decline of the Liberal party in the Prairie West. Granatstein makes passing mention of "the new electoral strength of the CCF...the manoeuvring of politicians poised unhappily on the crest of a wave."² Canada was changing and so too were politics on the Prairies. The transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy continued and highlighted a shift in political emphasis from the rural West to urban Quebec and Ontario. The government was focused on the war and party matters were neglected. Any interest that did exist was increasingly focused on central Canada.

Mackenzie King was old by the end of the war and so was his party, but it was not just the prime minister who had lost touch with the West. The Liberals in each of the Prairie provinces had failed to pass on the torch to a new generation. The influence of Gardiner and Crerar in the region and even in their own individual provinces would begin to decline. King had been remarkably successful in adapting to the changing times, remaining abreast of political transition, and holding on to office. But his politics no longer appealed to the West.

¹Dafoe Papers, box 1, file 4, Dafoe to E.K. Brown, January 12, 1943; box 5, file 5, Dafoe to J.A. Stevenson, February 12, 1942.

²Granatstein, p.vii.

As the nation entered its third year of war the domination of the federal government continued. The recommendations of the Rowell-Sirois Commission had been delivered in the middle of February, 1940 but were withheld until after the general election. They called for the Dominion to assume the burden of provincial debts, relief, and income taxes. Aberhart of Alberta had refused to submit a brief to the commission or to accept its recommendations, while Bracken of Manitoba petitioned the prime minister to implement the findings and call a conference to discuss the report. Mackenzie King preferred to wait until the war was over and then employ the findings in post-war reconstruction. The matter, however, could not be delayed. The wartime need for increased federal control particularly in the areas of direct taxation, pushed the cabinet to consider the findings immediately. Ottawa needed increased revenue and a Dominion-Provincial Conference was called for January, 1941. King was personally suspicious of the financial interests pushing the implementation of the report and was alarmed by the increase in federal control, but the situation created by the war demanded action.³

The conference erupted into the expected battle between Ottawa and the more affluent provinces. Hepburn of Ontario, Aberhart of Alberta, and Pattullo of B.C. attacked the federal government's efforts while Bracken of Manitoba advanced them

³Ibid., pp.167-8.

in an effort to press the claims of the poorer provinces. Godbout of Quebec, Macmillan of Nova Scotia, and McNair of New Brunswick remained sceptical while Campbell of P.E.I. and Patterson of Saskatchewan were prepared to accept change in the federal-provincial relationship. Mackenzie King failed to win co-operation in implementing changes but he would undertake them nevertheless. Ottawa would impose heavy wartime taxes and in compensation provide any province agreeing to surrender its own income, corporation, and succession taxes an annual payment equal to its previous revenue from these fields. The cabinet accepted the scheme and the Dominion-Provincial Taxation Agreement Act became part of the 1942 budget.⁴

Amid continuing discord in dominion-provincial relations, the war did seem to cause a change in Aberhart's attitude toward King. The premier claimed to desire a new spirit of co-operation between Alberta and Ottawa and promised to aid fully in the war effort. The complaints of discrimination continued but they were surrounded by a superficial aura of wartime unity. In October, 1941 he complained that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation was discriminating against himself and Social Credit in regulating radio broadcasts. King and the Liberals, in the meantime, were being allowed more freedom. Aberhart pointed out that "it is my friendship for you that impels me to write this" and signed the letter,

⁴Ibid., pp.173-4.

"your friend in Alberta."⁵ In March, 1942 he requested that King pursue the matter of extending Alberta's boundaries northward. The matter had been discussed between the two men in January, 1941 and King was reminded of Alberta's co-operative efforts of late.⁶ After years of frustration and poor relations with the province, the prime minister was unlikely to respond in kind.

The relationship between Mackenzie King and his western ministers reflected the prime minister's deteriorating rapport with the entire region. Disputes over financial control, for example, were extending beyond the realm of dominion-provincial relations and into the cabinet. The trend toward increased federal control and restriction was continued with the organization of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board and the Foreign Exchange Control Board. King was noticing that Gardiner's relations with most of his colleagues were strained and that he was bitterly fighting all of finance minister Ilesley's attempts to take responsibility for controls on agricultural products away from his department. King was also alarmed by Ilesley's sweeping proposals for price control and the effects of a freeze, and felt many of the finance officials were too close to the 'big interests'. When the government's price and wage control policy was announced,

⁵King Papers, reel 4860, volume 299, p.253557, Aberhart to King, October 6, 1940.

⁶Ibid., reel 6804, volume 321, pp.271872E-E1, Aberhart to King, March 26, 1942.

agriculture was provided a "special promise". The price ceiling would be applied but total agricultural income would be supported, where necessary, by government action.⁷ Despite his reservations about the controls, however, King fell in line with the dominant cabinet position.

Gardiner's amassing of power in the PFRA and the PFAA, his battles with WPTB over ceilings, and his manoeuvring over the Wheat Board all served to bring him into conflict with cabinet colleagues, and eventually the prime minister. Public opinion was growing anxious about the increased powers of the government and King often complained about his minister of agriculture's selfish handling of his portfolio and strong-arm dealings with fellow ministers. "Jimmy has been desperately unpopular with the cabinet at large for some time," Free Press reporter Grant Dexter told his editor. "Ralston once remarked to me that Jimmy was the most difficult colleague he had ever known."⁸ As King's frustration with Gardiner increased, his attitude toward western issues would also stiffen. This was, of course, exacerbated by the war. Agricultural matters, for the prime minister, "if not peripheral, were secondary...and their importance decreased as the war dragged on and military questions grew more pressing."⁹ Gardiner's relentless

⁷Granatstein, pp.180-1.

⁸Dafoe Papers, box 8, file 2, G. Dexter to Dafoe, January 3, 1941.

⁹Ward and Smith, p.265.

ambition made matters worse and the fact that he found himself a minor minister only increased his aggressiveness and consequently King's disfavour.

The prime minister's relationship with Crerar was not diminishing but the Manitoba politician had taken on such an important role during the war that the prime minister could not help but view him as more than a regional politician. Crerar's experience in the First World War made him the only federal minister to serve in both wartime cabinets. He was deputy chairman of the all-powerful war cabinet and had been considered for the defence portfolio in 1939. When the British government had requested a Canadian minister travel to London to discuss the Dominion's capacity to provide money and resources, King sent Crerar. His traditional belief in open markets for wheat was altered when he realized the very real threat of a Europe dominated by Germany and he began to consider a long-term contract with Britain. The proposal, however, was rejected by cabinet. With the fall of France, Crerar's estimation was proved correct. Continental markets closed, futures prices declined, and the wheat surplus increased.¹⁰

The war also gave Gardiner a chance to rise above the label of regional politician as new responsibilities distracted the government from previous concerns and all efforts were centered on an efficient war effort. Prime

¹⁰J.E. Rea, draft of chapter for biography of Crerar.

Minister King asked Gardiner to consider the portfolio of national war services and surrender agriculture. The Prairie politician was not King's first choice for the new department but his impressive organizational skills and appetite for work made him a suitable candidate. The position was still not "high in the ministerial pecking order," but did offer "a broad national constituency rather than a particular regional bias." It would also entail a position on the influential cabinet war committee that was coming to run the nation through orders-in-council. As the minister of mines and resources, and senior privy councillor, Crerar was the only westerner on the committee. Although King wanted Gardiner to relinquish agriculture, and the Saskatchewan minister was prepared to do so, an alternative could not be located and by the fall of 1940 he held both portfolios.¹¹

Cabinet friction quickly arose as Gardiner attempted to expand the influence of the new ministry. He now made a direct bid to have responsibility for the Wheat Board and the Agricultural Supplies Board transferred from trade and commerce to national war services. The request was denied by an advisory committee on economic policy. King became increasingly dissatisfied with his juggling of the two positions and after being scolded in January, 1941, Gardiner threatened to resign if he did not get his way on matters

¹¹King suggested Patterson but Gardiner was opposed because the Saskatchewan premier did not have an agricultural background. Ward and Smith, p.238.

within his jurisdiction. The prime minister believed he had "got his head turned" from holding both portfolios:

He is really falling in between the two. He is adopting Euler's tactics of being unpleasant with every colleague who disagrees with him and trying to get his way by a ruthless forcing of the situation, sometimes in a very underhanded manner.¹²

A difference of opinion over the co-ordination of the department's publicity caused a breach that led to further misunderstanding and finally to Gardiner's resignation. The experience with the department of national war services was "his first failure of the kind." The loss of the portfolio was a "clear demotion" and certainly injured the reputation of the Prairie lieutenant.¹³ He would be removed from the influential war committee. "Gardiner's run in a Hepburn-Hitler direction," King recorded. "What he does not see is extent to which he is prejudicing his own future in the eyes of his colleagues who will have some say on the ground of who is to succeed myself."¹⁴

Gardiner may have failed in war services but his achievements as wartime minister of agriculture were impressive, and as David Smith argues, he succeeded in raising the industry from "poor relation" to "basic industry". The administration and policies of the Wheat Board remained with the department of trade and commerce but the quagmire of

¹²King Diaries, January 9, 1941.

¹³Ward and Smith, pp.237-46.

¹⁴King Diaries, January 9, 1941.

agricultural marketing and King's ignorance on the subject did at least allow the minister to maintain a particular status in cabinet. As usual he would make the best of the situation and employ his energies to enhance his influence, but his absence from the war committee injured his prominence. He had largely lost the confidence of King and it would never be fully regained. The importance of agriculture in wartime was indisputable but also disguised the very real decline of the West and its basic industry: "It was to be his [Gardiner's] experience that while agriculture assumed greater political visibility as a result of his efforts, it declined in relative importance in the Canadian economy."¹⁵ Gardiner's career paralleled the declining fortunes of the Liberal party in the West and he was forced to fight even more aggressively to defend regional interests.

In March, 1941 the cabinet was discussing the need to have western farmers decrease their wheat acreage and grow alternative grains to avoid a surplus. King was not comfortable with limiting produce but Prairie income had to be maintained "to avoid the Western situation getting completely out of hand at the time of war."¹⁶ Crerar was also opposed on the basis that the reduction would only cause a myriad of other problems and increase surpluses in other areas.¹⁷

¹⁵Ward and Smith, pp.248-9.

¹⁶King Diaries, March 11, 1941.

¹⁷J.E. Rea, draft chapter of biography on Crerar.

Gardiner battled to increase the income of wheat farmers against what he perceived as the biases of other ministers toward his department. A compromise was reached that involved the introduction of delivery quotas, maximum quotas, and wheat acreage reduction payments. "Gardiner is so set in his own way," King remarked, "that he is almost without a supporter in the Cabinet, but is terribly tenacious."¹⁸

The wartime restrictions and controls were particularly damaging to Liberal fortunes on the Prairies. The war was going poorly in the first several years and morale was low. In 1941 westerners appealed to the prime minister to come to the region and stay as long as possible. Aside from any political gains to be made, King's presence was required to aid morale and the recruiting campaign. He was told not to "shrink at this time from allowing yourself to be dramatized a bit, more conspicuously and picturesquely as Canada's wartime leader. There is a feeling...that you have somewhat lost your touch with the people of the west."¹⁹ King blamed the opposition press and the conscriptionist movement for his declining popularity and reiterated the usual argument that national obligations prevented him from going west more than he would personally like.

He did manage to make a western tour in the summer of

¹⁸King Diaries, March 6, 1941.

¹⁹King Papers, reel 4865, volume 311, pp.262507-10, D.A. McNiven to King, June 28, 1941.

1941 to promote the government's recruiting drive and stave off the demands for military conscription. The hostile reception he received was alarming. According to Granatstein, King "knew that he would face hostile audiences in much of the West" because "organized opinion in the West seemed to be all out for conscription and all out against Mackenzie King."²⁰ He continued to blame the opposition on "the movement that is rapidly getting underway in Western Canada for conscription."²¹

In Saskatchewan the government's wheat policy continued to come under fire in 1941. The primary features of the policy at the outbreak of war had been the Wheat Board's guaranteed initial payment of 70 cents, plus acreage payments in circumstances as defined in the Prairie Farm Assistance Act. The problem was that the acreage payments were proving insufficient compensation and western wheat producers were not keeping in step with the rest of the economy.²² The price freeze only furthered difficulties for the wheat farmer. W.R. Motherwell had become increasingly sceptical of Ottawa's handling of the West since his retirement from cabinet in 1935. It was a further demonstration that the government was losing touch with the region. Gardiner received reports that he was attending Wheat Pool meetings and claiming the government's agricultural policies were only to "clutch the

²⁰Granatstein, p.203.

²¹King Diaries, June 27, 1941.

²²Wilson, p.719.

throat" of the voter at election time.²³

Reports from Prince Albert were also becoming more pessimistic. Since 1939 complaints had been circulating that a few prominent Liberals in the constituency were "being permitted to become rich out of the War." Criticism of the King government had become commonplace but the party could always point to election time when the battle was always won. By 1941, however, Saskatchewan Liberals were genuinely worried about the riding. "The campaign of slander" had "become intensified to an almost unbelievable extent."²⁴ Support for the war effort had been particularly enthusiastic in the riding and when the department of transport had taken over the Prince Albert municipal airport in January, 1940, the mayor had predicted that 100 aircraft and more than 1000 Royal Canadian Air Force personnel would be stationed in the city. These prospects were deflated soon after the federal election when the government announced that only an elementary flying training school comprising 217 people would be established.²⁵ King reacted by attempting to demonstrate a concern for constituency matters. Prince Albert became a link in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan and in March, 1941 an Air Observer School was opened. In November Jack Sanderson

²³Gardiner Papers, reel 20, pp.43713-6, D.A. McNiven to Gardiner, October 17, 1941.

²⁴King Papers, reel 4871, volume 319, pp.270862-6, Walter Tucker to King, April 15, 1941.

²⁵Abrams, pp.332-3.

paid the prime minister a visit and requested he push to have runways and additional air training schools constructed in the riding. King agreed that "Prince Albert is entitled to both" and later that day took up the matter with the minister of national defence for air, 'Chubby' Power, "who also promised to go into it carefully." The prime minister noted that the constituency was pressing to be recognized "as a military district" and claimed to be doing what he could "to have its interests fully concerned."²⁶

The search for the salvation of the Liberal party continued in Alberta but the war only confirmed King's lack of disinterest. The occasional call went up for another attempt at federal intervention but the provincial party was left to deal with the hopeless situation largely on its own. It was conceded that "no amount of overhauling of the Liberal organization will be sufficient" and that a fusion of all the anti-Social Credit forces was the only alternative. The fear was that unless some form of union took shape, the CCF would take over when Aberhart was finally defeated.²⁷ "I do not know what can be done," J.B. Howatt wrote,

but surely to God there is somebody in Ottawa that has some sense enough to size this situation up to realize we shall either be a Social Credit Government or what is worse, a C.C.F. Government after the next election if somebody does not beat some sense into the damn fool Liberal executive of

²⁶King Diaries, November 5, 1941.

²⁷King Papers, reel 6804, reel 321, pp.272177-8, B. Avxier to Mackinnon, September 24, 1942.

this Province.²⁸

Liberal prospects in Alberta were left to J.A. Mackinnon. His ignorance of agricultural issues diminished his influence and much of Alberta's organization was still left to Gardiner. This ignorance on the part of the minister of trade and commerce also allowed Gardiner to exercise more influence on the wheat committee.

A provincial election was held in Manitoba on April 22, 1941 and even though the CCF withdrew, the coalition won 50 of 55 seats. By this time Bracken had been premier for almost nineteen years and his recent stand in favour of implementing the Rowell-Sirois report had pushed his popularity to new heights. His 'non-partisan' government swept the contest on a platform of post-war planning and agriculture. He had emerged from the Depression as "the recognized spokesman and leader of the West....the voice of western Canada, the one man who best represented the needs, interests, and ambitions of the prairie provinces."²⁹

John Bracken had always been viewed by King as a typical westerner. He disliked partisan politics and had found the Progressives a suitable alternative. The prime minister was certain that while he had come from a Tory family, the Conservatives were so weak on the Prairies that there was

²⁸Ibid., reel 6807, volume 325, pp.278873-4, J.B. Howatt to Mackinnon, September 23, 1942.

²⁹Kendle, pp.181-3.

little chance of him joining their ranks. As a Progressive, King believed, he was in reality a disenchanted Liberal like the rest of the Manitoba group. The prime minister had sought to have Bracken accept a cabinet position and become a Liberal of the same brand as Crerar, Dafoe, and Hudson. The support he had given the federal Liberals in 1935 seemed an indication he was coming King's way. But Bracken was disenchanted with the Prairie situation and, as Kendle points out, by the late 1930s he also "had become disenchanted with King's protracted style."

When Arthur Meighen was defeated by the CCF candidate in the York South by-election in February, 1942, the former prime minister's attempted return to politics came to a quick end. The desperate Tories were again searching for a leader and turned to John Bracken. The party needed someone who was associated with agriculture and could attract the rural vote, someone who could draw disaffected Liberals away from King and offer a firm alternative to the CCF, someone who could do what Bennett had accomplished in 1930. Bracken had no real desire to enter federal politics or become associated with either of the traditional parties. King's anti-conscriptionist policies and the Tory party's appeal to his sense of duty, however, finally convinced him to accept the leadership. The party agreed to his condition of acceptance and changed its name. John Bracken became the leader of the Progressive-Conservative

party in December of 1942.³⁰

Gardiner was not surprised. He prided himself on his ability to detect disguised Conservatives and had always claimed Bracken was Tory blue. He did, of course, levy this charge against most of the Progressive movement. Mackenzie King was surprised but pleased nonetheless. The change in party labels was nothing more than absurd hypocrisy and Bracken's selection had been the "worst choice" possible.³¹ The Tories might make gains in the West but they would suffer in the rest of the nation. King was prepared to sacrifice some western support.

There was good reason to believe that the Tories would take Prairie seats away from the Liberals. By 1942 King's concern about western conditions had increased. Farmer delegations had been descending on Ottawa to such an extent that the situation was "reminiscent of the seige of 1910."³² The prime minister had met with the delegations to discuss wheat policy and realized that his reputation had been severely damaged. He was careful to note how westerners were reacting to him and made a token effort to convince himself that he was still fighting to defend their interests in "considering the rights of the producers before those of the

³⁰Ibid., pp.183-6.

³¹King Diaries, December 9-11, 1942.

³²Wilson, p.732.

trade."³³ He claimed they still held his "sympathies".³⁴ On March 9, 1942 it was announced that the initial payment for wheat would be increased from 70 to 90 cents.

King claimed not to be surprised that the CCF, on the other hand, was gaining ground in the West. Meighen's defeat in South York "was bound to be looked upon as prophetic as well as significant." Any government at a time of war, he argued, was almost certain to suffer defeat in the post-war period due to wartime taxes and restrictions. The only way to avoid such a fate was through proper organization. The Liberals were suffering, he claimed in a desperate search for justifications, because while the government was concerned with winning the war, the CCF was concerned with grooming an effective organization.³⁵

The CCF upsurge seemed to indicate that Gardiner was losing his political base, even in his home province, and there was uncertainty as to whether he could withstand the "wave spreading over the western provinces." The next election in Saskatchewan would, at the very least, be a "battle"³⁶ and if the province fell, the Liberals would lose their traditional bastion of strength in the region.

³³King Diaries, March 5, 1942.

³⁴Ibid., February 26, 1942.

³⁵King Papers, reel 6805, volume 323, pp.273958-60, King to W.R. Davies, September 3, 1942.

³⁶Ibid., reel 6806, volume 324, pp.275661-2, H.R. Fleming to King, September 4, 1942.

According to Gardiner there were two matters which were making it "impossible" to gain western support: wartime controls, especially price levels on grain, and the national war services board which in 1942 had drafted "almost everyone off the farm."³⁷ It would be one of the rare occasions when the Diehard Gardiner and the former Progressive leader, Robert Forke, were in agreement. There was a growing discontent among the farmers, Forke informed King, "because of the arbitrary manner in which your Government was dealing with farm problems without consulting the people who produce the agricultural wealth of this country."³⁸

Bracken's departure to federal politics, in the meantime, left the Manitoba Liberals in the lurch. The party had been "too long submerged in Brackenism" and was without direction from its federal ministers. "The old guard" had almost entirely disappeared, and the survivors were no longer in tune with provincial sentiment or wielded any influence. There was no "new blood" to replace the previous generation of Liberals. "New names and new faces won't help if they spring from a generation outdated, with a philosophy outmoded in the popular mind," L.A. Mutch informed King. The party had been declining in Manitoba since 1935. The two previous federal elections had been won due to the weakness of the Tories under Bennett

³⁷Ibid., reel 7037, volume 340, pp.292875-6, Gardiner to King, August 14, 1943.

³⁸Ibid., pp.292908-9, Forke to King, February 1, 1943.

and Manion, rather than the strength of the Liberals under King. The CCF was now emerging as an apparent alternative to the two traditional parties. It was the only alternative that seemed attuned to the people's temperament and concerned with western issues. "Your personal place is secure in history," Mutch bluntly wrote the prime minister. "Your place in 1945 is not."³⁹ King admitted to being "terribly worried about the Manitoba situation" and the threat of the CCF.⁴⁰

By 1943 Mackenzie King and his party were showing the strain of war and the many years in office. The prime minister feared that the political scene would again become dominated by minority governments and coalitions. The wave of popularity that had surrounded the Liberal government in the election of 1940 had dissipated: "Canada's record in the war was highly creditable, but it had not been dramatic."⁴¹ The populace was uncertain about the post-war world, it was argued, and if King's government went to the polls at present, it would be "hopelessly defeated". Liberalism in the West was in the "doldrums, helplessly being sniped at by every political adventurer who covets the office of Government."⁴²

On the bright side, the Prairie provinces produced a good

³⁹Ibid., reel 7042, volume 347, pp.299730-46, L.A. Mutch to King, August 27, 1943.

⁴⁰King Diaries, October 6, 1942.

⁴¹Granatstein, p.250.

⁴²King Papers, reel 7034, volume 337, pp.289610-8, J.J. Bench to King, September 23, 1943.

harvest and the wheat crop was just under the historic yield of 1929. Wartime demand was increasing and the fixed price would rise to \$1.20. The year also marked the final phase in the Liberal alteration in wheat policy. After years of resisting the pools and demands for government intervention, the King government surrendered to the creation of a compulsory, monopoly wheat board. By autumn, 1943 the concern about surpluses that had forced government action in 1941 was replaced by "a scramble to meet rising demand." To avoid an increase in wheat prices as well as threats to the treasury and wage and price policies, the government gave the Wheat Board a monopoly. Crerar returned to his position as defender of the open market and argued that the action was too drastic, but the cabinet was against him.⁴³ It was doubtful whether the Liberal reversal on wheat marketing or the improving conditions could produce a parallel reversal in party fortunes on the Prairies.

The CCF was prepared to take advantage of the nation's sagging morale and need for security. The party had been pressing for increased social services for years and was now campaigning on preparation for post-war reconstruction. The Tories were also changing with the times. John Bracken officially committed the party to social security, full employment, collective bargaining, and medical insurance.

"Only the Liberal Party seemed left out of the trend to

⁴³J.E. Rea, draft chapter of Crerar biography.

reorganization and to advanced policies."⁴⁴ Critics argued that the party was too concerned with running the war and while the Marsh Report indicated a willingness to study social problems and even ponder solutions such as increased social security, the demands of war were too pressing for attention to be yet focused on reconstruction. Instead King turned critics to Industry and Humanity as evidence of his reforming spirit, written at a time when few others were pondering such radical action: "It would begin to look as if the principles therein set forth, as a basis of reconstruction, are coming to be more generally recognized, and may yet be increasingly applied."⁴⁵

The need for a change in party direction was pressed on the prime minister when the CCF went from zero to 34 seats in the Ontario provincial election of 1943. The Canadian Institute of Public Opinion added to the shock by reporting that at the national level the party had the support of 29 per cent of the population while the Liberals and Tories trailed with 28 per cent each.⁴⁶ The popularity of the government had fallen from its 1941 high of 55 per cent.⁴⁷ W.A. Buchanan did not want to be "alarmist" but he admitted to being very

⁴⁴Granatstein, p.252.

⁴⁵King Papers, reel 6811, volume 332, p.284020, King to A. Roebuck, October 29, 1942.

⁴⁶Granatstein, p.265.

⁴⁷Regenstreif, "The Liberal Party", pp.139-40.

concerned. "From all that I hear and all that I sense...if an election was to be held now or in the near future, the C.C.F. might very well sweep all the western provinces."⁴⁸

The Liberal party had to be reorganized and redirected. The machinery was in poor condition and after the 1940 campaign the National Liberal Federation had virtually ceased to exist.⁴⁹ Organization on the Prairies was in an even worse state. "The Liberal position in Western Canada is becoming more hopeless every day," J.G. Campbell reported. There was a dominant impression that many involved in organization were only out to make personal gains.⁵⁰ The miserable situation, more often than not, was explained by the war and this became the justification for the party's decline in the region. "There is only one reason for the decline in the liberal fortunes," Gardiner's son wrote King, "and that is the people are beginning to feel that the liberals have no more interest in them, that they haven't even the will to get out and fight for their principles any longer and when a party gets that lazy they cannot expect to be elected."⁵¹ Intensive organization had placed the CCF in "a very commanding

⁴⁸King Papers, reel 7034, volume 337, p.289975, W.A. Buchanan to King, August 31, 1943.

⁴⁹Part of the difficulty lay in the poor state of relations between King and Lambert. See Whitaker.

⁵⁰King Papers, volume 338, p.290176, J.G. Campbell to King, November 9, 1943.

⁵¹Ibid., reel 7037, volume 340, pp.292896-7, J.W. Gardiner to King, October 23, 1943.

position." It was readily admitted that King had carried on an admirable war effort "but western opinion views the mountains without seeming to realize the necessity of regimentation required to scale the hills."⁵²

The rise of the CCF prompted King to act on his reforming impulse that had been dormant since 1919. He had to journey into the realm of social security and seriously ponder such schemes as health insurance, family allowances, old-age pensions, and veteran's allowances, to go along with unemployment insurance implemented in 1940. According to King, the Liberals had to keep in touch with the working classes and farmers to avoid the danger of the party being eliminated altogether and the CCF stealing "our ground".⁵³ "I feel very strongly that these are some things we cannot delay," Ian Mackenzie indicated.⁵⁴ "From a party in power, promises are useless...", Pickersgill added. "The voters know that a government in office has the power to act and they are going to judge it largely on the concrete, tangible evidences of action."⁵⁵ Crerar, however, was holding the traditional Liberal fort in espousing individual initiative and King was

⁵²Ibid., reel 7054, volume 366, pp.317852-3, F. McRae to King, July 14, 1944.

⁵³King Diaries, February 11, 1944.

⁵⁴As quoted in Granatstein, p.266.

⁵⁵Ibid., p.267.

annoyed at his refusal to follow party direction.⁵⁶

On January 11, 1944 the cabinet approved the establishment of three new departments: reconstruction, national health and welfare, and veterans affairs.⁵⁷ Granatstein calls the Throne Speech of 1944 "a landmark in the development of the social-security state in Canada." The government pledged itself to social insurance and promised family allowances, health insurance, old-age pensions, and a floor price for farm staples.⁵⁸ In the midst of labour unrest across the country the Liberal party reprinted King's Toronto Speech of 1919- "The Four Parties to Industry".⁵⁹ But they were still just promises from a government in power with a large majority and King had become infamous in the West for making empty promises. The Liberals might be able to steal away the CCF thunder in the rest of the nation but the party's strength would not be so easily diminished on the Prairies.

Senator J.J. Stevenson, in the meantime, had been closely watching Prince Albert for the prime minister since June of 1943. King seemed uncertain about running in the riding again because he had failed to provide either time or money to the organization. He had provided neither in years past but

⁵⁶J.E. Rea, draft chapter of Crerar biography.

⁵⁷Granatstein, p.274.

⁵⁸Ibid., p.276.

⁵⁹King Papers, reel 7048, volume 354, pp.308078-83, J.J. Bench to King, August 25, 1943.

conditions had never been so dismal since his election in 1926. Stevenson was requested to study the constituency and report frankly whether the seat could be won. He had quickly replied that while the majority would be reduced, King would still be elected.⁶⁰

The prime minister searched for a scapegoat for the P.A. situation.⁶¹ He noted that "the constituency has really been allowed to drift so far as the party is concerned since the last general election." Robertson had died, T.C. Davis had gone to Ottawa in 1940 as Gardiner's deputy minister in war services, and prominent Liberals such as Jack Sanderson had been accused of profiting from government contracts. King hoped that "it may be that in some way I shall come through in the end."⁶²

Gardiner blamed much of the problem in Saskatchewan on the unofficial political truce created by the war and the way it had disrupted Liberal organization. The CCF threat made efficient organization and hard work even more necessary but local Liberals seemed to be abandoning the field. The Saskatchewan party "jumped at the chance to call a halt to politics." Partisanship was distasteful during the crisis of war and the party was "exhausted" after a decade of drought, depression, bankruptcy, and third-party challenges.

⁶⁰King Diaries, June 9, 1943.

⁶¹Ibid., March 2, 1944.

⁶²Ibid., March 4, 1944.

Gardiner's successor, W.J. Patterson, had even suggested a Union government. The provincial leaders obviously did not share the federal minister's passionate belief in the Liberal cause.⁶³ "Everybody has gone on a holiday since you and Mr. Davis left the Govt.," one correspondent wrote.⁶⁴

As the war dragged on, Ottawa's interventionist policies and multitude of wartime regulations continued to damage the Liberal cause in western Canada. The wheat pools had turned against the Liberals and the CCF was taking full advantage of this shift. As the Liberals lost by-elections in Saskatchewan, such as the one in Humboldt in 1943, Gardiner noted that the provincial party was apathetic while the CCF was "coming of age". He was disgusted when local Liberals joined the criticism of federal policies.⁶⁵ As Smith notes, "the administrative response to wartime needs" was upsetting the "'perfect organization' Gardiner had spent two decades tuning."⁶⁶ He shared the western attitude toward boards and commissions but recognized their necessity, and would stand by his party and leader. He had become part of the 'Government Party' that was so unpopular in his region and he would stand or fall by its side.

On June 15, 1944 the CCF won office in Saskatchewan with

⁶³Ward and Smith, pp.269-72.

⁶⁴As quoted in Ward and Smith, p.272.

⁶⁵Ward and Smith, pp.274-5.

⁶⁶Ibid., p.278.

47 of 52 seats and two-thirds of the overseas vote. The results were "enough to frighten even the sturdiest of Liberals."⁶⁷ R.J. Deachman wrote that no other election in which he participated "was quite so disturbing...in which reasoned arguments were so futile and facts so useless." This was no temporary upsurge of a third party that would just as quickly disappear.⁶⁸ The CCF had been particularly successful in the Prince Albert provincial riding.⁶⁹

It was hoped, and even expected, that Gardiner would withstand the CCF tide and maintain the province for the Liberals. The minister of agriculture could only attribute the result to Liberal apathy. The party had done "nothing between elections" and never went "near the public."⁷⁰ The Liberals were now perceived as the defender of big business and no longer concerned with the common people. The Patterson government had "proved worse than useless as an ally" to his efforts at organizing the province.⁷¹ "For once I think that even Mr. Gardiner's analysis leaves much to be desired," J.E. Doerr wrote King providing a more penetrating argument. The Liberal machine had become old and the demand for change was

⁶⁷Granatstein, p.284.

⁶⁸King Papers, reel 7049, volume 358, pp.310586-7, R.J. Deachman to King, June 23, 1944.

⁶⁹Abrams, p.346.

⁷⁰As quoted in Ward and Smith, p.284.

⁷¹Ward and Smith, p.285.

overwhelming. The candidates who had appeared "time and time again" were the same men who had been before the electors for the past thirty-four years. This, "gradually dampened the enthusiasm of other ambitious men" and "the rulers had...lost touch with the people." Patterson's government, it was argued, was filled with "autocrats" and held "in contempt" by the public.⁷² The Liberal party of Mackenzie King no longer appealed to its one-time banner province.

King claimed not to be surprised and blamed Hepburn for augmenting the problem by providing the CCF a chance for success in Ontario. Patterson had added to the dilemma, the prime minister recorded, by prolonging his term in office "unduly". He was "heavy, lethargic and less idealistic" than the CCF leader, Tommy Douglas, who was "a man of high ideals...a better leader in the minds of the rural people."⁷³ Saskatchewan had "lost the kind of active leadership" provided by T.C. Davis and "the Liberals have gone a little to seed there. I think too Gardiner has lost a certain hold, and is looked upon too much as a machine politician."⁷⁴ As usual, Mackenzie King placed the blame everywhere else but on his own

⁷²King Papers, reel 7050, reel 358, pp.310891-3, J.E. Doerr to King, June 30, 1944.

⁷³King's first meeting with Premier Douglas reflected his desire to see younger men emerging as Liberal leaders in the West: "I confess I was very pleased to see Douglas looking so young and enthusiastic about his work." King Diaries, July 24, 1944.

⁷⁴Ibid., June 16, 1944.

shoulders. When the cabinet discussed the results and some blame was aimed at federal policies, King protested by defending his record on Prairie issues:

Pointed out that in the [federal] campaign, I would go to Saskatchewan myself and ask the people whether anyone had done more for agriculture than I had in getting the reciprocal agreements with the United States, reducing to 7 1/2%, duties Bennett had put up to 25%. Did they think anyone else would be in a better position to negotiate with Roosevelt than myself. If they did, by all means to choose him. That kind of talk would very soon show where the people in the Prairies stood.⁷⁵

He had still not learned that the tariff alone could not win him elections in the West.

King could at least be optimistic that while the victory spelled trouble for the Liberals in the West, "it was a major catastrophe for Bracken." The attempt to refashion Tory hopes with the choice of Bracken as leader was obviously failing.⁷⁶ The election made it "crystal clear" that while the Saskatchewan electors wanted a change, they did not want the Progressive Conservative party, "even when it came before them with the ablest and best candidates nominated by any party."⁷⁷ Crerar remarked that while the result was not surprising it was more "emphatic" than expected. The eastern interests who had pushed Bracken into the Conservative leadership because he would carry the Prairies, "must be feeling rather blue," he

⁷⁵Ibid., June 29, 1944.

⁷⁶Kendle, p.211.

⁷⁷King Papers, reel 7050, volume 358, pp.310891-3, J.E. Doerr to King, June 30, 1944.

noted.⁷⁸ King could tell himself that the result did not cause "much concern for Federal politics," but in truth, the loss of the province was a critical blow to Prairie Liberalism,⁷⁹ and reflected the dire state of his relationship with the region. At the dinner celebrating his 25th anniversary as leader, the prime minister made it clear that if the five-year life of Parliament permitted, there would be no election until after the war. Despite the Saskatchewan defeat, he stated his intention to run again in his constituency of Prince Albert.⁸⁰

Many in the Liberal party, however, believed that the time had come for the prime minister to abandon his western riding. There seemed no need for the captain to go down with the sinking ship. On July 13, 1944 Gardiner was approached by some of the other cabinet ministers to persuade King to run in Ottawa East. The prime minister responded that Prince Albert had offered its seat in a time of need and returned him on many occasions. The executive had always been free to choose another candidate due to his absence but had pressed the nomination. He would accept it win or lose: "I let him know definitely that I would not consider another constituency. I said if I were defeated, I believed the day would not be far distant when both constituency and the country would regret

⁷⁸Crerar Papers, series III, box 105, Crerar to G. Dexter, June 17, 1944.

⁷⁹King Diaries, June 16, 1944.

⁸⁰Granatstein, p.287.

it."⁸¹

Organizers in the riding were not so confident. "Over optimism," they reported, "...is a dangerous thing." The CCF had built up a powerful political machine and it was in full operation throughout the province. The outlook was not very bright. In the opinion of the executive the situation would be "hopeless" if an election were held in 1944. King was asked again to visit the constituency and aid in bolstering his own prospects.⁸² Senator Stevenson was now equally pessimistic. He had spent three weeks travelling throughout the riding and had not met a single person who believed King could be elected.

There is a terrible change in the West and now with the C.C.F. in power in Sask. they are all up on their toes and rearing to go....I would strongly advise you to take a seat in Prince Edward Island as this is rotten here and I am afraid cannot be saved....I am sorry to have to report this but I am telling you exactly how I find things and I want to see you run in a sure seat as it would be a calamity for the country if you were defeated...to say the least the situation here looks dark.⁸³

Despite Stevenson's warnings, King intended on running in P.A. "come what may."⁸⁴

The executive was prepared to support the prime

⁸¹King Diaries, July 13, 1944.

⁸²King Papers, reel 7051, reel 361, pp.313115-7, M.I. Humphries to King, July 20, 1944.

⁸³Ibid., reel 7059, volume 375, pp.326443-6, J.J. Stevenson to King, July 14, 1944.

⁸⁴King Diaries, July 26, 1944.

minister's candidacy and he expressed gratitude for the "unbroken loyalty and confidence." He reiterated his belief that he "had constantly in mind the needs of the constituency and the wishes of its electors, and have sought as opportunity afforded to further the latter to the utmost." It had not always been possible, he admitted, to achieve some of the constituency's goals, but in general he had rendered a more impressive service than would have been possible for any other representative. Any claims that his absence from the riding had injured its prospects or that it could be better served by someone who resided there were rejected, and he was pleased the executive had realized that "we are members one of another."

King was aware of the pressure on the executive to nominate a candidate from within the riding but at the same time pressure was mounting from within the federal party to have him nominated in an eastern constituency: "I personally have not felt that the results in the recent provincial election in Saskatchewan should cause me to retract any understanding given to the Liberals of Prince Albert constituency." Almost out of habit he provided his usual apologies for again having to decline the invitation to visit the riding.⁸⁵

Privately, King sulked about the situation and placed

⁸⁵King Papers, reel 7051, reel 361, pp.313122-6, King to Humphries, September 2, 1944.

most of the blame on local party organizers. He pointed to reports that members of the executive had been profiting from war contracts.⁸⁶ While he was obliged to sacrifice all his time to winning the war and could not "cultivate" his own political interests, others were profiting from personal greed. Now comfortably placed on the higher moral ground he claimed that to try and do more than he had done would be "attempting the impossible". If his constituency could not be looked after by others, he sulked, then he would just have to face defeat. The party would have to deal with the consequences because such a defeat would certainly mean his retirement from politics.⁸⁷ The prime minister was beginning to fear possible defeat but told himself that he was taking "the right course" in not abandoning a constituency that had stood by him and "not being afraid to tackle a seemingly lost cause."⁸⁸

Some signs of optimism did at least emerge from Manitoba. When Crerar reported on Liberal prospects in July, he could now offer a more hopeful report. This was not because the Liberals had made gains, however, but because the Tories and CCF had lost ground. Bracken's personal prestige had "distinctly waned" and the fact that he was not yet holding a

⁸⁶King Diaries, June 9, 1943.

⁸⁷King Papers, reel 7060, volume 377, pp.328519-20, King to T.W. Wood, March 26, 1944.

⁸⁸King Diaries, September 3, 1944.

seat in Parliament was diminishing his impact as Progressive-Conservative leader. The CCF success in Saskatchewan had attracted considerable notice but its failures in Alberta, Quebec, and New Brunswick had set the movement back. As a result, the stock of the government had increased in the last six months. It was generally conceded that the government's war record was commendable but there was too much of an impression that Quebec was being favoured over the western farmers.⁸⁹ King was pleased in October that Douglas and the CCF would not support military conscription without 'conscription of wealth'. "The feeling was not against conscription in Quebec alone," he attempted to convince himself, "it was equally strong in the West."⁹⁰ The wartime restrictions had caused damage but the populace was now looking to reconstruction policies, and the move into the realm of social services was proving successful.⁹¹

King pushed for a changing of the guard in Manitoba. The province would need new representation and he was convinced Crerar's "political usefulness" was "completely gone".⁹² He was annoyed that the Manitoba minister had not offered more support during the conscription crisis. He had sided with

⁸⁹Ibid., July 24, 1944.

⁹⁰Ibid., October 25, 1944.

⁹¹King Papers, reel 7049, volume 357, pp.310003-10, Crerar to King, September 18, 1944.

⁹²King Diaries, January 14, 1944.

King in 1942 but reluctantly opposed him in 1944, and this opposition would almost cost him his promised Senate appointment. His "day was passed [sic]," King noted, and he "was quite unpopular with the members from Manitoba and had no real influence in the province."⁹³ He had his "set of friends" but they now belonged "to a past generation."⁹⁴ In fact, most of them were dead. By February, 1945 King decided that "Crerar will have to be dropped," but the minister had already indicated that he did not wish to run again regardless.

There was a possibility that the condition of the Manitoba Liberal party could receive a substantial boost if it was injected with youth and vitality. Bracken had been replaced at the head of the provincial government by Stuart Garson and the coalition again won power in the election of 1945 with 43 of 55 seats. The new premier was a known Liberal and since Bracken's exit, Crerar had been attempting to convince him to abandon the coalition label and make his government a straight Liberal administration.⁹⁵ Garson had to maintain the non-partisan nature of the coalition, however, by indicating it would not involve itself with either federal party.⁹⁶ King doubted whether either Crerar or Glen would be

⁹³Ibid., January 1, 1945.

⁹⁴Ibid., February 1, 1945.

⁹⁵Manitoba Provincial Archives, Stuart Garson Papers, box 2358, file 9, Crerar to Garson, January 5, 1943.

⁹⁶Ibid., box 2356, file 6, Garson to J.W. Pickersgill, November 12, 1945.

elected again and was being informed that the party was favouring the younger Liberals such as Maybank, Campbell, and Garson.⁹⁷ He decided he wanted the new premier for the cabinet.

The problem was convincing him to come to Ottawa. Garson felt he could make a "larger and better contribution" by maintaining his position, J.A. Glen informed the prime minister. In leaving Manitoba he would be accused of being a "time server" and the example of Bracken provided no incentive to abandon the secure position of premier. Garson had "fallen heir...to a legacy of a Coalition Government" and his leaving could prove disastrous to the Liberal party in Manitoba.⁹⁸ With the present state of Liberal popularity in the West, the move to Ottawa was of doubtful advantage.

In Alberta the Liberals continued to petition the prime minister for federal aid and, in particular, the help of federal cabinet ministers. Social Credit had campaigned against the abuses of capitalism and was now maintaining office against the threat of socialism. The Liberal party did not know where to turn. King offered no solutions but one thing was clear: Alberta could not turn to the federal party.

The long-delayed federal election was to be held immediately following the conclusion of the war in Europe.

⁹⁷King Diaries, October 11, 1944.

⁹⁸King Papers, reel 7050, volume 360, pp.312260-1, J.A. Glen to King, December 20, 1944.

The theme of the campaign would be clear: Mackenzie King was the only man with sufficient experience to lead the nation through the troubled times ahead.⁹⁹ It was remarkably reminiscent of previous campaign themes but it seemed logical to expect the victory in the war to provide the Liberals with a substantial boost. Westerners, however, were not so certain it would be enough to salvage the party in their region: "People seldom vote out of gratitude," one western Liberal wrote. "Therefore, although the war record does not condemn the present Government, neither does it assure their re-election. The war record if it were bad could alone defeat them- but being good it alone cannot re-elect them."¹⁰⁰

According to Abrams, "the return of Prime Minister King in Prince Albert seemed virtually assured until election day" but this was obviously not the case.¹⁰¹ The approach of the campaign caused all of King's anxieties about his own seat to resurface. His private thoughts were the scene of a constant battle between duty and expediency. Reports from Senator Stevenson continued to indicate that there was "no hope of winning." King admitted it was probably "inadvisable...to court defeat" and began to prepare a justification in the case of his abandoning the constituency. His endangered position

⁹⁹Granatstein, p.403.

¹⁰⁰King Papers, reel 9874, volume 382, p.342203, S. Hansen to Gardiner, February 21, 1945.

¹⁰¹Abrams, p.349.

would surely be used as a campaign issue and the Tories would ask the electorate whether it wished to support a party with a defeated leader: "The outside world might never understand my being beaten by thousands possibly in Prince Albert and Bracken elected by a correspondingly large majority....It would hardly be a fitting close to my career." Defeat would also deny him the opportunity to deal with post-war reconstruction. He claimed to have been "indifferent so far" and prepared to "welcome an honourable exit from public life," but the general position of the party had to be considered.

King now indicated that "it would be better that I should run in some other constituency." General McNaughton had recently been defeated in Grey North, Ontario, when an attempt had been made to bring him into cabinet during the conscription battle. The result had seriously hampered his political credibility and aroused King's fears concerning his own possible defeat. It was argued that part of the reason behind the result lay in McNaughton's inability to give more time to the constituency. The general would now contest Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan, and this provided King with another possible escape route. "With McNaughton running in Saskatchewan, there would be three Ministers running in that one C.C.F. province. It would be reasonable that this should not take place." He considered Prince, P.E.I., the riding he had briefly represented in 1919. The riding of North Waterloo, where King had first been elected, was a

possibility, but so many years had passed that his ties to the area had been severed: "Practically all of those with whom I was associated are either very far advanced in years or have passed away. It would be a heartbreak to be among another generation who neither know me or our family before me and most of whom I do not know myself." Russell County and Ottawa East were ridings that posed possibilities and their proximity would eliminate the same criticism that had plagued the Saskatchewan seat. But the nagging guilt of abandoning Prince Albert, the only constituency which he considered his own, bedeviled the prime minister. He tried to convince himself that he was not "going back" on his friends even though "they have kept up no organization."¹⁰²

King was aware that the chance of success in Prince Albert was remote but hoped the situation could improve during the campaign, particularly amid the jubilation of victory. Early in the year reports indicated that the situation was indeed improving. Gains were being made in the northern part of the province due to the provincial government's regulations in the lumbering, fishing, and fur industries. Gains were not so much in evidence in the southern part of the riding but prospects were looking brighter. The urban area would have to improve and it seemed headway was being made. It was reported that King could be re-elected, as long as the Conservatives nominated a candidate. "It would be next to impossible at

¹⁰²King Diaries, February 8, 1945.

present for Mr. King to win on a straight party fight" against the CCF.¹⁰³

Gardiner had been urged by his eastern colleagues to convince King to seek election elsewhere but personally, he wished to see the prime minister contest the Saskatchewan seat. Liberal fortunes in the West, and Saskatchewan in particular, were in dire straits and bailing out could prove the deathblow. Defeat in the riding would not cause any more damage to King or the party than abandoning it. In fact, the Liberals would win more seats in the province if he stayed to fight. Three ministers for the province were perhaps too many but such over-representation could only help. The riding could be carried, Gardiner told King, and explained that even his own seat would be a close battle. To an extent the Prairie politician felt responsible. King's representation of a seat in his province had always provided the agriculture minister with a particular status and sense of pride. As King noted, he had "always tried to have me feel he himself was looking after the constituency....The truth is Gardiner has lost a certain hold on Saskatchewan."¹⁰⁴ King was annoyed that many of his ministers did not seem as concerned with his chances of success. MacKinnon,

no doubt like others, took it for granted that I might be defeated in P.A., but would find a

¹⁰³King Papers, reel 9874, volume 382, pp.343199-200, G.J. Matte to Gardiner, February 19, 1945.

¹⁰⁴King Diaries, February 13, 1945.

constituency elsewhere immediately after. I told him on no consideration would I seek a seat elsewhere if I were defeated; that would mark the completion of my life in Parliament.¹⁰⁵

On February 17 Stevenson met with the prime minister to update the condition of the riding. The Senator admitted he had found the situation "hopeless" but now that organization was underway there were signs that things were beginning to "roll" King's way. The people were "already beginning to find dissatisfaction with the C.C.F." It still, however, was not enough. The Tories would almost certainly combine with the CCF in an attempt to defeat the prime minister. Stevenson advised King to run in Russell and not risk personal defeat.¹⁰⁶

The chief Liberal organizer for the riding along with Senator Stevenson met with King on March 21 to provide a fuller picture of the situation. M.I. Humphries explained that the outlook was brighter but there were still real possibilities of defeat. The rural vote seemed to be swinging toward the Liberals but the urban vote was solidly CCF. The CCF candidate had a long-standing reputation among the local farming community. With the aid of the effective provincial organization, he was playing on the impatience of the working classes toward wartime wage controls and the CCF promises of social security, medical care, and a national housing plan.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵Ibid., February 15, 1948.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., February 17, 1945.

¹⁰⁷Abrams, p.349.

The large number of "foreigners" had now turned to the CCF and were making the result in the city uncertain. Some of the former leading Liberals had joined the CCF but were now returning. "That, however," King admitted, "is a weak kind of limb to lean on for security." Humphries indicated that if the prime minister could just spend a few days in the riding "they would feel very sure." This, the prime minister explained, was "out of the question." He would have to go to San Francisco for the meeting of the United Nations and would be absent for almost a month. He would not be able to attend the nomination meeting nor would he be able to make more than one speech in the constituency throughout the campaign. The cabinet and the party were pushing him to change ridings and King decided that they would have to make the final decision. Once again he reiterated his threat that defeat would end his career in public life.¹⁰⁸

The choice lay between contesting the seat and facing possible defeat along with the damaging consequences to his own prestige and that of the party, or moving to a safe eastern riding and facing the accompanying accusations of having abandoned the constituency, the province, and the region. The desperate Saskatchewan Liberals pleaded with the prime minister to remain and fight for the party in what had always been the western stronghold. "If you were to leave Prince Albert," Wilfrid Gardiner wrote,

¹⁰⁸King Diaries, March 21, 1945.

the death blow would be signed for the present and also perhaps for the future....Half my faith in the Liberal Party would go if I felt the Leader would forsake those who have helped him in the past for the province of Ontario which has continually knifed him in the back.¹⁰⁹

T.H. Wood advised King the following day to run in an Ontario seat because the P.A. situation was too uncertain. A poll done in 1944 indicated that the Liberals would receive 900 fewer votes in the city of Prince Albert than in 1940. King's majority in the entire constituency in 1940 had been only 750 votes.¹¹⁰

By the beginning of April King decided not to run for re-election in Prince Albert and was preparing to have matters arranged to be nominated for Russell. Gardiner demonstrated his disappointment and worry but agreed that the chances in P.A. were slight.¹¹¹ King discussed his decision in a gathering of the Liberal members. Led by Walter Tucker, who made a "passionate, powerful and deeply moving speech", the Saskatchewan members indicated their disappointment and attempted to have King reconsider. They argued that the move would be used against the party in the West, particularly since he was sacrificing a Prairie seat to be returned "by French votes." The Tories would claim the prime minister was

¹⁰⁹King Papers, reel 9874, volume 382, pp.342232-3, Wilfrid Gardiner to King, April 5, 1945.

¹¹⁰Ibid., reel 9887, volume 397, pp.359631-2, T.H. Wood to King, April 6, 1945.

¹¹¹King Diaries, March 29, 1945; April 3, 1945.

"afraid to run in Saskatchewan" and had abandoned the West.

King confessed that the matter had caused "a real physical pain in my heart at the thought of severing a connection with a constituency of which I had been the member for nearly 19 years." The meeting had a considerable impact and by its close he had again changed his mind. "In the light of what had been said...it was quite clear that I should not leave P.A....the Tories would make the most of my leaving the West as a sign of lessening the party's chances there." It was one of the rare occasions where duty won out over expediency and King was prepared to face probable defeat rather than abandon the only riding he could ever call his own. An elated Humphries was reached by phone and informed of the decision. He felt there would be a battle but believed victory could be won. The Conservatives had now withdrawn their candidate in order not to split the opposition vote. King was confident the Tories would not be able to bring themselves to support the CCF.

The prime minister could now relax a little. The decision was no longer weighing on his mind and the course had been set. He congratulated himself on his resiliency and determination to fight to the end:

It ought to put the metal into the men who will be responsible for my running in P.A....I believe my readiness to run in Saskatchewan will help the party tremendously and certainly the public will appreciate it. If I am defeated there will be pretty much a tremendous revulsion of feeling against defeating a P.M. who has been as faithful to his task and carried the country through the war

as I have these last 5 or 6 years.¹¹²

On May 7 the P.A. executive was informed that he would allow his name to go before the nominating convention.¹¹³ The decision would, he told himself, "cause the people there to respond to what is a chivalrous attitude toward the constituency and the faith that I have in them."¹¹⁴

King's anxieties about the constituency continued throughout the campaign. When the trip to San Francisco seemed to end any possibility of spending several days in the riding, his concerns increased. Early on he had claimed that to go to P.A. "was my last hope and last straw for success there." Failure to do so would "almost certainly...mean that I could not be elected in Prince Albert."¹¹⁵ But with war's end, King's optimism for the overall election result increased and so did his hopes for the riding. "I have felt today for the first time that I might win," he wrote on May 5: "Tonight I believe I shall win that constituency. This victory in Europe is going to help immensely in the campaign."¹¹⁶ He did manage to make one speech in P.A. and believed he would now carry the riding. His opponent, E.L. Bowerman, did not seem

¹¹²Ibid., April 5, 1945.

¹¹³King Papers, reel 9875, volume 384, p.343949, King to M.I. Humphries, May 7, 1945.

¹¹⁴King Diaries, April 7, 1945.

¹¹⁵Ibid., April 12, 1945.

¹¹⁶Ibid., May 5, 1945; May 7, 1945.

to be a strong candidate and he believed many Conservatives would support him over the CCF:

I find, too that the people have been following my work and career with interest and that they have in mind the service that I have rendered during the period of the war. Indeed there has been nothing seen or heard today which makes me feel that there is not a decidedly friendly feeling toward myself, and a certain sense of pride in my representation of the constituency.¹¹⁷

In the general election of June 11, 1945 Mackenzie King believed the Liberals would gain in Alberta, maintain their position in Saskatchewan, and lose a couple of seats in Manitoba.¹¹⁸ He expected a majority and he received it, but by the barest of margins. The Liberals won 127 seats, the Conservatives 68, the CCF 29, and the Social Credit 13. The Liberals won 41.3 per cent of the popular vote, the Conservatives 28.5, and the CCF 14.7. The prime minister was not prepared, however, for the outcome on the Prairies.

The frustration aimed at wartime constraints, the uncertainty of post-war reconstruction, and the discontent over conscription probably affected the western result but the gulf that was growing between the Liberal party and region could not be disguised. The Liberals held on to 19 seats in the region, a drop of 25: "Nowhere was the slide more precipitous however than in Saskatchewan."¹¹⁹ General

¹¹⁷Ibid., May 19, 1945.

¹¹⁸Ibid., June 9, 1945.

¹¹⁹Ward and Smith, p.286.

McNaughton lost in Qu'Appelle and Gardiner barely saved one of only two seats in the province by a majority of 28 votes.¹²⁰ The Liberals lost 10 of their 12 seats while the CCF won 18. "The results in Saskatchewan are still much of a mystery to me," King admitted. "I did not expect that we would do much more than retain the seats in Saskatchewan which we had won in the previous election. I was, however, far from prepared for so general a defeat."¹²¹ The Liberals had been dealt a critical blow in the West, but "Gardiner, especially, sustained permanent injury to his political reputation and prowess."¹²² The western results would quickly and routinely be blamed on poor organization,¹²³ but those who had worked the region indicated that the situation was much more serious. "It would be easy to say that better organization and a little more work would have changed the result," a Manitoba Liberal wrote. "I do not believe that this is true....I think we polled all the support we had."¹²⁴ Manitoba produced 10 of 17

¹²⁰The CCF levied accusations of vote tampering and an inquiry eventually confirmed the charge. The tampering had been done, however, with the intent of discrediting Gardiner. Ibid., p.286.

¹²¹King Papers, reel 9783, volume 380, pp.340720-1, King to W.L. Davies, July 6, 1945.

¹²²Ward and Smith, p.287.

¹²³"Nothing could better illustrate the effect of organization and propoganda than the position of the Prairie provinces." King Diaries, June 18, 1945.

¹²⁴King Papers, reel 9174, volume 111, pp.370705-9, L. Mutch to King, October 26, 1946.

Liberal seats but King was furious that Garson and the Liberal members of his government had not identified themselves openly with the federal party.¹²⁵ Mackinnon and one other Liberal had retained their seats in Alberta and the minister claimed it was the "conscriptio feeling" that worked against the Liberals in the province. Except for MacKinnon's efforts, King admitted, "the province has been left alone." Other than Gardiner, the same had been true of Saskatchewan.¹²⁶

The results in Prince Albert were unclear. On election night King learned that the CCF was leading and he prepared to face defeat. He began to alter his victory address accordingly: "When I really felt I was defeated, I felt a little outbreak of perspiration for the moment, but that was hardly noticeable and soon passed away. It was like a tiny shock." Humphries phoned later to report that he was now leading by anywhere from 300-500 votes. The soldier vote was still to come in and the CCF would wait before conceding defeat.

King was "fairly well assured of having been returned."¹²⁷ The military results would not be known for at least a week but he tried to convince himself that after winning the constituency he could not possibly lose to the service vote.¹²⁸

¹²⁵King Diaries, May 24, 1945.

¹²⁶Ibid., June 12, 1945.

¹²⁷Ibid., June 11, 1945.

¹²⁸Ibid., June 16, 1945.

Obviously he hoped reaction to the conscription crisis had been lost amid the victory celebrations: "It is literally true that no man in Canada has done more or as much for members of the service as I have. This is the irony of the situation." He hoped the result would "disclose to the country the need for some other way of giving a certain degree of certainty and protection to one who holds the office of Prime Minister."¹²⁹

On June 19 Mackenzie King was informed that he was defeated. He held a majority of 263 votes in the civilian canvas but the CCF had a majority of 392 in the service vote, and this gave E.L. Bowerman a majority of 129. The war was used to rationalize the result:

Throughout the period of the last Parliament, my time was given unreservedly to the work of government- to the problems of war, to preparation for the period of transition from war to peace and to the meeting of postwar problems....I was not seeking to win elections at a time when I regarded the winning of the war as the first duty of every citizen, myself most of all. This made it impossible for me to be in the constituency on more than one or two occasions in the course of the past five years.

He comforted himself that the near victory was remarkable in light of the general defeat in Saskatchewan.¹³⁰ In thanking the executive for the hard-fought battle and the years of service, King indicated that he wished to make it out to

¹²⁹Ibid., June 18, 1945.

¹³⁰King Papers, reel 9875, volume 384, pp.343962-4, King to M.I. Humphries, June 19, 1945.

Prince Albert to personally thank his organizers. The severance with the constituency, he promised, would prove "more apparent than real." But the truth was not long in coming. The prime minister was invited to open the P.A. Fair but declined due to the upcoming Dominion-Provincial Conference.¹³¹ Mackenzie King became the member for Glengarry, Ontario.

In the aftermath of war Gardiner continued in his role as primary wheat policy formulator¹³² and he sought ways to stabilize the post-war situation. But the breach between the West and the Liberal party was glaring. During the war the minister of agriculture had been successful in contractual negotiations with the British ministry of food and he saw no reason why similar contracts could not be negotiated for wheat. A Canada-United Kingdom Wheat Contract was pursued in the summer of 1946 with Gardiner aggressively leading the efforts. He had conducted negotiations with the British during the war on the basis of 'gentlemen's agreements' and believed the trend could continue. Mackinnon's acquiescence was obtained and Gardiner had exploratory talks with the British before seeking authority from cabinet. He even broke away from his usual precedent of discussing wheat policy

¹³¹Ibid., pp.343984-7, King to Humphries, July 7, 1945.

¹³²Wilson argues that while Gardiner was "de facto wheat policy maker" the influence of his fellow ministers served to counter his "sanguine incursions" against the treasury. Wilson, pp.788, 846.

initiatives with the western farm producers.¹³³

The minister of agriculture managed to negotiate a four-year contract that would see a fixed price for wheat set at \$1.55 for the first two years, and floor prices of \$1.25 and \$1.00 for the third and fourth years. He took matters almost completely into his own hands but opposition began to develop over the contract's implicit assumption that wheat prices would fall in the next several years. The deal also flew in the face of planned agreements with the United States and tied Canadian wheat exports to the British market. On June 19 King claimed that the contract had "advantages with regard to stabilization for the farmers" but "has nevertheless elements which are in the nature of a great gamble." It could also "destroy the multilateral plan which lies at the basis of the U.S. policy for freer trade among nations and an ultimate world price of wheat." Amid the reservations, King admitted that Gardiner had proceeded in such an arbitrary fashion that "no one knows what he is saying." The prime minister's role remained what it had become in the last decade; that of cabinet arbitrator.¹³⁴ T.A. Crerar was in the Senate but also demonstrated his opposition to the deal.¹³⁵

Despite the opposition, the agreement was announced on July 25 and was to work in conjunction with a five-year pool.

¹³³Ibid., p.867.

¹³⁴King Diaries, June 19, 1946.

¹³⁵Wilson, p.864.

The debate over the contract did not end, however, but would continue raging over the next four years, particularly between the pools and grain exchange. In the end, it had to be admitted that the contract cost the government money when farmers were reimbursed due to the rising price of wheat on the international market. Gardiner always claimed in his defense that the British had not kept to the spirit of the agreement and that a 'have regard to' clause for the last two crop years should have ensured that they take into account any discrepancy between the world price and what they paid after 1945.¹³⁶ But the justification could not repair the damage done to his reputation. The fiasco was symptomatic of what had become the relationship between King's government and the farmers of western Canada.

In the years after the election Gardiner would desperately seek "to recoup the losses of 1944 and 1945"¹³⁷ and revitalize Liberalism in the West. As the population of the Prairies declined, he worked to reorganize the weakened structure and restore life to the dying party. In 1946 Patterson stepped down as provincial leader and was replaced by Walter Tucker. Gardiner combed the province for potential candidates and leaders but few emerged, and it was apparent the old generation of Liberals would not be replaced. King confessed to reading reports about the situation in the

¹³⁶Ward and Smith, pp.266-7.

¹³⁷Ward and Smith, p.287.

province

with feelings of dismay. I had not realized that our fortunes in Saskatchewan were at so low an ebb. There can be little doubt that the active leadership of younger men like Douglas in Saskatchewan, and Manning in Alberta...has had its effect...the party's situation is really tragic.¹³⁸

The signs continued to indicate that King's party would not reappear on the Prairies. Saskatchewan Liberals became increasingly opposed to Gardiner's control of federal patronage positions within the province and by June, 1947 the federal minister was almost a political liability in his home province. The foundations of the Liberal fortress in the West had completely collapsed. Premier Tucker was even anxious to prevent Gardiner from making one of his partisan speeches at a provincial convention because he did not want it to appear that the minister of agriculture was directing policy:

Walter [Tucker] is incensed. He doesn't know how to meet it. He doesn't want to go to King and demand that Gardiner be told to keep his mouth shut. He says that everybody without any exception whatever in the party in Saskatchewan is dead against Gardiner.¹³⁹

The CCF was able to take advantage of the federal-provincial breach and harp on the issue of Gardiner's intervention and his machine-style politics.

In the Saskatchewan election of 1948 the Liberals went from 5 seats to 19 but their popular vote decreased to an all-

¹³⁸King Papers, reel 11045, volume 433, p.395344, King to Wood, March 7, 1947.

¹³⁹Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Ralph Maybank Papers, box 5, file 90, Diary, June 29, 1947.

time low, dropping from 35 to 31 per cent. The CCF maintained power. Gardiner was pleased with the increase in seats and criticism temporarily abated. King believed the result had "put a militant spirit into the Party of which it has been in great need."¹⁴⁰ The federal election of the following year seemed to heighten the possibility of a Liberal resurgence. The party would win 14 seats in Saskatchewan and its popular vote climbed to 44 per cent, the highest since 1930. But it was a lull in the storm. As Smith notes, it "marked the end, not the beginning. The political world Gardiner had controlled for so long was about to change and would pass from view in the fifties."¹⁴¹

Mackenzie King was disillusioned with the state of Liberalism on the Prairies. Organization continued to receive blame for much of the problem and he did not see how it would be rectified when there were no younger Liberals emerging to carry the torch: "None of the young Liberals are prepared to put time or money into an organization or to seek to find the latter. The older Liberals have lost or are losing their interest in the future of the party."¹⁴²

King's dealings with Premier Stuart Garson of Manitoba in October, 1946 were an attempt to gain young blood from the West. "He would be a real strength to the government," the

¹⁴⁰King Diaries, June 25, 1948.

¹⁴¹Ward and Smith, p.291.

¹⁴²King Diaries, October 21, 1946.

prime minister noted.¹⁴³ But Garson was in no hurry to break his coalition and enter a government that was not strong on the Prairies. King did not believe he would consider coming in "before a year or more and might not even then." Federal by-elections in the West "do not lend encouragement to anyone....It makes me sad to see the Liberal party begin to disintegrate and that for no reason other than the apathy of the men who comprise the present Ministry and its following in the House."¹⁴⁴ In December King again approached Garson to enter the cabinet but could "see clearly from the way he spoke that he is not at all sure about the wisdom of transferring."¹⁴⁵ The provincial Liberals had become trapped in a coalition and to return to a straight party ticket would have been political suicide. The King government, in the meantime, would not be a selling point in the West. The coalition idea had been strengthened by Bracken and the illusion was maintained that politics were being kept out of provincial government. According to Ralph Maybank, Garson's move to the federal field "would turn out to be a distinct disadvantage" to the King government.¹⁴⁶ It was not until November, 1948, after King had retired, that Garson entered

¹⁴³Ibid., October 17, 1946.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., October 22, 1946.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., December 16, 1946.

¹⁴⁶Maybank Papers, box 5, file 91, Diary, January 27, 1948.

the federal cabinet as minister of justice but the appointment would have little overall effect on party fortunes in the region. King's party, with or without Garson, had little western appeal.

In February, 1947 Gardiner learned that the Glengarry constituency might be eliminated in redistribution and he suggested that King again consider running in Prince Albert, that the executive was "anxious" for him to do so and the "constituency could be made perfectly secure." The prime minister did not hesitate in responding: "Nothing would induce me to run in Prince Albert again."¹⁴⁷ When M.I. Humphries asked him to use his influence for an increase in the number of customs offices, an enlargement of public buildings, and the construction of a dam and bridge, the response was revealing: "I pointed out to him, I could hardly be expected to help to further the riding when it had defeated me but indicated I was not letting that influence my judgement." King promised to do what he could but his lack of interest in the affairs of his old riding was all too apparent.¹⁴⁸

After much delay Mackenzie King finally announced a leadership convention for August, 1948 and his retirement for November 15. Louis St. Laurent was the unofficial hand-picked successor. He was not an enthusiastic candidate and according

¹⁴⁷King Diaries, February 11, 1947.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., March 18, 1948.

to Dexter was being carried along on the enthusiasm of Quebec after King had "practically told those people that St. Laurent was the natural man to succeed him."¹⁴⁹

The prime minister was annoyed and even angered when he learned Gardiner would seriously contest the leadership. As Whitaker points out, the minister of agriculture was "in the view of the prime minister, an outsider, a man from the hinterlands in a party which to this day never had a leader from outside central Canada."¹⁵⁰ Throughout the decade King had been aware that Gardiner coveted the position but swore "he will never be P.M."¹⁵¹ When Dexter reported that Gardiner had threatened to make it difficult for anyone to stand in the way of his winning the leadership, King became even more determined to oppose him. He was working against the prime minister's own wishes and what King considered the tradition of succession: "It is amazing to me that any man should be working toward securing the position of leadership for himself. I doubt if Gardiner would ever get the support of the Party."¹⁵² King agreed with his eastern colleagues that Gardiner did not have the "sort of presence and manner which would win the position of leadership for him," and that he was

¹⁴⁹Queen's University Archives, Grant Dexter Papers, series I, box 5, Diary, June 2, 1948.

¹⁵⁰Whitaker, p.177.

¹⁵¹King Diaries, May 30, 1946.

¹⁵²Ibid., October 17, 1946.

"too autocratic".¹⁵³ A strategy was developed to have a number of leading cabinet ministers including Howe, Abbott, Claxton, Martin, Chevrier, and Garson, enter the contest and then withdraw while making known their support for St. Laurent.¹⁵⁴

Throughout the leadership campaign King maintained the stance that he was neutral and would play no role in choosing a successor. He never believed Gardiner would carry the convention but thought "he might make serious division in the ranks of the Party."¹⁵⁵ His organizational skills and ambitious drive did cause some members of the party hierarchy to consider his candidacy a threat.¹⁵⁶ It was estimated that Mackinnon would deliver Alberta to Gardiner. Manitoba would mainly support St. Laurent (although Crerar would second Power's nomination) but Glen and Weir would deliver some following to the agriculture minister. Saskatchewan would go solidly Gardiner. Ilsley was the most popular Liberal in the Maritimes but Gardiner would place second while some sections of Ontario would also support him. Quebec would be solidly for St. Laurent and B.C. would give half its support to Gardiner.

The prime minister was annoyed to learn that Walter Tucker would support Gardiner because he "did not want to

¹⁵³Ibid., March 13, 1947.

¹⁵⁴Whitaker, p.177.

¹⁵⁵King Diaries, March 23, 1948.

¹⁵⁶Dexter Papers, series I, box 5, Diary, July 27, 1948.

create a war in Sask." Tucker admitted that Gardiner had treated him poorly in the past and that only St. Laurent could hold a national government together. "He was not courageous enough," King complained, "to come out and follow his own conscience." When Colin Campbell came out for Gardiner, King claimed it was "the same combination that some years ago met with Hepburn to which Gardiner was a party and were going to try to oust me. A machine group." Such "an exceedingly dangerous" prospect was conveniently enough to force him into making his position known:

It would be difficult for me if matters got too far to refrain from letting the party know for whom I stand...the interest of the country may demand a final word. I am letting it be known through other sources just how I feel about the importance of St. Laurent being chosen.¹⁵⁷

Gardiner's appeal to the delegates at the convention led King to break his own rule of 'neutrality' and he voted on the first ballot in full view of the press.¹⁵⁸

When it came time to choose a new leader, St. Laurent won on the first ballot with 848 votes, while Gardiner received 323 and Power 56. "Thus Gardiner learned at first hand," Smith notes, "what the statistics of the Department of Agriculture had revealed for some time: there were more Canadians who were not farmers than who were."¹⁵⁹ King

¹⁵⁷King Diaries, August 4, 1948.

¹⁵⁸Whitaker, p.178.

¹⁵⁹Ward and Smith, p.298.

admitted that "the fact that the West is so strongly Gardiner will operate against him in the other provinces."¹⁶⁰ When speaking to the delegates, he had difficulty even alluding to the strength Gardiner had always brought to the party. In a spirit of vindictiveness strong even for Mackenzie King, he recorded that "somehow or another something kept saying to me he had been really shameful in his whole behaviour. I did not think there was any need to mention his name at this time. I thought he quite deserved the lesson he was getting."¹⁶¹

World War II had renewed the Canadian obsession with French-English relations and despite Gardiner's attempt to challenge what King considered party orthodoxy- that the leadership should alternate between French and English candidates- the domination of central Canada won out. The Prairie West "was neither populous nor powerful enough to allow him to seriously challenge the entrenched might of central Canada."¹⁶² The result leads Smith to ask the fundamental question: "How long and by what means could the Liberals keep the farmers' allegiance, once the party had signalled a shift in interest away from its agrarian base outside of central Canada?"¹⁶³

The 1948 convention was supposed to make some form of

¹⁶⁰King Diaries, August 5, 1948.

¹⁶¹Ibid., August 7, 1948.

¹⁶²Whitaker, p.178.

¹⁶³Ward and Smith, p.296.

recommendation to restore Liberal organization across the nation but "like most of the proceedings of the convention it then disappeared from history."¹⁶⁴ King had told St. Laurent "that unless there was some evidence of radicalism from our party in Western Canada we would lose the whole West."¹⁶⁵ The words were taken advice and King knew there was little chance of 'Uncle Louis' responding. The party would revert to cabinet control and continue the trends of the previous decade: "The St. Laurent years were not merely years of extreme centralization in Canadian federalism; this centralism was also mirrored in the centralism of the Liberal party itself."¹⁶⁶ The shift that had been gradually occurring for decades was now evident in the details. Gardiner was not consulted on much of the reconstruction work centered on dominion-provincial relations. When a shuffling of office space took place on Parliament Hill, agriculture was moved from the hub of administration. It was "indicative of Agriculture's displacement in the galaxy of federal portfolios."¹⁶⁷

Jimmy Gardiner returned to his post as minister of agriculture in St. Laurent's new government and to his political base in Saskatchewan. In the federal election of

¹⁶⁴Whitaker, p.179.

¹⁶⁵King Diaries, June 14, 1945.

¹⁶⁶Whitaker, p.179.

¹⁶⁷Ward and Smith, p.297.

June 27, 1949 St. Laurent won a resounding victory and the Prairies fell in line with the national trend by returning 31 of 53 seats. The situation, however, was becoming increasingly clear: "The decline of the Liberals in Saskatchewan presaged...a decline of national Liberalism even if the federal party continued to win a majority of the seats in Parliament."¹⁶⁸ Gardiner feared political indifference toward the West on the part of the federal party and he saw an equally dangerous sentiment increasing in Saskatchewan. A concern with constituency rather than party matters was replacing the partisan enthusiasm where it had once been strongest. The party system no longer functioned with grass root organization, partisan press, and accepted patronage. The federal and provincial organizations would no longer cooperate. The quagmire of leadership that had long plagued Alberta and Manitoba was appearing in Saskatchewan by 1952. In the last decade of his career as a minister, Gardiner's supremacy in organizational matters was seriously challenged.¹⁶⁹

It was perhaps inevitable that with world war, the King Liberals would not pay as much attention to regional grievances and it was perhaps equally inevitable that the Prairie West would finally abandon any remaining faith it held in the Liberal party. It may have become a more 'national'

¹⁶⁸Ibid., p.300.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., p.305.

party by 1950 but for the West the party was national in the same sense as Macdonald's policy had been 'national'. The emphasis was placed clearly on central Canada.

Mackenzie King would not live to see the final collapse of the Liberal party in the Prairie West. He died on July 22, 1950. Louis St. Laurent held the party in office until 1957 but the transition of power to 'Uncle Louis' reflected 'the Government party' that had become complacent in office. The Prairie West, traditionally viewed as a Liberal region, was the first to abandon the party. Ironically it would be King's longstanding opponent in Prince Albert, John Diefenbaker, who would orchestrate the Conservative revival in the West and sweep the Liberals from office as the 'Prairie native son' in 1957.

EPILOGUE

According to Reginald Whitaker, "the Diefenbaker transformation of the electoral map in 1957-8 had a much more deadly effect upon the Liberals in the West than in any other region of the country."¹ This was undoubtedly the case but the roots of the decline of the Liberal party on the Prairies stretch back much further than the defeat of 1957 or the selection of St. Laurent as leader in 1948. These events were merely the final stages in a process that had been ongoing at least since 1935, and to a considerable extent, well before.

The decline of Prairie Liberalism can be found in 'the Age of Mackenzie King'. From the beginning of his career King worked to maintain Liberal strength in what was perceived as a liberal region. He failed. The main reason lay in Canada's transition from a rural-agricultural to an urban-industrial nation. The progressive transition of political influence from the Prairies to central Canada, along with the entrenchment of the Liberals as the 'Government Party' in Ottawa ensured that emphasis would move away from the West.

As the West diminished in political importance, so did the initial emphasis and sympathy Mackenzie King placed on the region. His perceptions of the Prairies proved idealistic and altered accordingly as time passed. The Depression and war intensified and confirmed this change in attitude. If the

¹Whitaker, pp.379-80.

Liberal party was to hold power after 1926, it would do so by maintaining its strength in central Canada. The West had been essential prior to 1926 and King's sympathies, efforts, and even some policies reflected this reality. After this time the region became increasingly expendable. The decline of Prairie Liberalism paralleled the decline of the West in Canada.

The assertion that King initially held favourable perceptions of the West is controversial. The sceptical pragmatist will argue that King's views were convenient justifications constructed to disguise political expediency. When King became party leader, he needed western support and became 'the spiritual westerner' to gain that support. He played this off against Quebec to gain the party national representation and himself a stronger hold on the leadership. He worked to placate the region when its political influence was at its height, and succeeded in keeping it within Liberal reach just long enough for the Depression to force it back to the party in a desperate state. A weakened, less influential West would not receive the same attention from Mackenzie King, particularly with the centralization demanded by a world war, and any remnants of Liberal strength in the region would disappear. He returned to his favourite role as 'Laurier's successor' and, with another conscription crisis, to the necessity of placating Quebec. All of these arguments are valid. Beneath all the rhetoric and justification lay

political expediency but early in his career King did feel an attachment to the Prairies. It was naive idealism, as well as subconsciously expedient, but he believed the sympathy and attachment to be real and allowed it to influence his policies. As the realities of governing a nation of diverse regions and the necessities of a brokerage strategy emerged, and the political influence of the West declined, Mackenzie King shed his western sentiments accordingly.

The handling of the Prairie West can be studied in numerous microcosms. The relationship of the prime minister to his constituency of Prince Albert, his handling of the diverse array of western issues such as the tariff, freight rates, Hudson Bay Railway, natural resources, and the wheat board, and his dealings with western leaders along with his search for a western advisor are especially revealing. They all demonstrate that after the threat of the agrarian revolt had passed, King's attention was less directed to western concerns. The onset of Depression and then world war pushed Canada into a new era of federalism that would further this trend. The continuing transition of the nation from an agricultural to an industrial base cemented King's interests in central Canada.

The traditional belief held at the time that the Prairie West was a Liberal region must also be questioned. The early Laurier years did lay a strong Liberal foundation in the region, particularly in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and a

comparison of avowed Liberal principles and western demands does point to a logical affinity. "The Liberals", Whitaker admits however, "had always been weaker here than anywhere else since the rise of the third-party politics at the end of the First World War."²

Saskatchewan Liberals such as Martin, Dunning, and Gardiner would use opposing strategies in battling Progressivism in their province, but would prove ultimately successful. The result was that through the first half of the century Saskatchewan ranked second only to Quebec as the Liberal stronghold in the nation. But perhaps this, in itself, is revealing. It was questionable how long King and the party could appease such contrasting bases of support. Choices would have to be made and the ramifications were inevitable. Saskatchewan would remain loyal to King and the Liberals until the alternative offered by Tommy Douglas and the CCF proved too attractive. With the collapse of Saskatchewan, Prairie Liberalism was doomed.

Manitoba had a strong Liberal base but would never become a one-party province like its neighbour. The breach of 1917 took decades to heal and remained a festering wound for the province's Liberalism. King would be quite successful at absorbing Manitoba leadership into his cabinet and destroying federal Progressivism, but coalitions and supposed non-partisanship would further complicate the situation and

²Ibid., pp.379-80.

prevent a Liberal break-through.

Alberta could not have been more politically different from Saskatchewan and the story of the Liberal party in this province is nothing less than dismal. Mackenzie King never gained any ground in Alberta and instead met with an unending series of failures. The province refused to support the Liberals from the beginning of King's career and was always more prepared to show its resentment against the two traditional parties and its deep-rooted sense of western alienation by taking chances on radical alternatives such as the UFA and Social Credit. King always put the blame on local Liberals and was highly critical of party organization and leadership. He reacted by 'punishing' the province with inadequate cabinet representation. The poor state of organization and leadership did merit the prime minister's criticism but the situation reflected party fortunes. The lack of Liberal advisors from the province led King to be more ignorant of Alberta affairs than with either of the other two Prairie provinces. His attempts to treat it with the same strategy used with either Manitoba or Saskatchewan failed. Punishing Alberta, however, only served to further convince the province to send its support elsewhere. Whitaker is correct when he notes that a comparison of the Liberal parties in the Prairie provinces reveals a "somewhat bewildering kaleidoscope of differences."³ Mackenzie King never fully

³Ibid., pp.379-80.

understood this essential fact.

One thing was certain. The West may not have been a Liberal region but it certainly was not Conservative. The Tories never held an affinity with western aspirations and every attempt to gain Prairie support from the choice of Meighen, to the rise of Bennett, to the selection of Bracken, resulted in failure. Any move by the region toward the Conservatives can be explained by the desire for an alternative to the Liberals. Likewise, nothing could do more to turn the West back to the Liberal fold than a stiff dose of Toryism. It is the failure of the two traditional parties to meet western demands that explains the region's tendency toward radicalism. Western alienation or what W.L. Morton called, "the bias in Prairie Politics", sent the West in search of alternatives.

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