Regional social structure and agrarian radicalism in Canada: Alberta, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick*

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Ce document suggère que les variations dans les idéologies populistes canadiennes dépendent largement de l’organisation sociale des agriculteurs. Les éléments importants de cette connexion sont (a) le degré des rapports sociaux parmi les agriculteurs; (b) le degré auquel les agriculteurs sont capables de maintenir leurs positions de producteurs indépendants; et (c) la densité des liens de classe entre agriculteurs et diverses classes. On a tenté de conclure, à travers une étude sur l’organisation agraire et le malaise sociale en Alberta, en Saskatchewan et au Nouveau-Brunswick que (a) plus le degré des rapports sociaux était élevé, plus le degré de radicalisme (droite ou gauche) était élevé; (b) plus le degré d’indépendance était élevé, plus il y avait de chance que le radicalisme s’oriente à droite; (c) plus la densité des liens entre agriculteurs et travailleurs urbains était élevée, plus il y avait de chance qu’un populisme de gauche émerge; (d) plus la densité des liens entre agriculteurs et groupes urbains extérieurs à la classe travaillante était élevée, plus il y avait de chance qu’un populisme de droite émerge.

In this paper it is suggested that regional variations in Canadian populist ideologies are largely a function of variations in the social organization of farmers. Of particular importance in this connection are (a) the degree of social connectivity among farmers; (b) the degree to which farmers are able to retain their position as independent commodity producers; and (c) the density of interclass ties between farmers and others. It is tentatively concluded through an examination of agrarian organization and unrest in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick that (a) the greater the degree of social connectivity, the greater the degree of radicalism (left or right); (b) the greater the degree of independence, the more likely it is that radicalism will take on a right-wing colouring; (c) the greater the density of ties between farmers and urban workers, the more likely it is that left-wing populism will emerge; and (d) the greater the density of ties between farmers and non-working-class urban groups, the more likely it is that right-wing populism will emerge.

The study of agrarian protest movements is by no means a neglected area of Canadian social scientific research. Over the past 25 years or so, tens of excellent book length studies and scores of challenging articles have been produced on the subject. Yet, for all this effort, our investigations continue to display some serious weaknesses which limit our understanding of agrarian radicalism in this country. My purpose in this paper is to discuss one such area of difficulty: the problem of regional variations in Canadian populism. The first half of this century witnessed the electoral successes of a left-wing populist party in Saskatchewan (the CCF)

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and a right-wing populist party in the neighbouring province of Alberta (the Social Credit). Meanwhile, in the Atlantic provinces, there was little agrarian radicalism at all. Why this should have been the case is not immediately apparent.

Nor has much attention been devoted to the problem. Seymour Martin Lipset was therefore prompted to remark in 1968 that there has been no "adequate explanation, or even a detailed descriptive account of the factors involved that resulted in such different reactions from two quite similar social units [i.e., Saskatchewan and Alberta]" (Lipset, 1968 [1950]: xxii). And in the past decade no research can be said to have contributed significantly to a sociological understanding of either this issue or the related one of why populism made little headway in Atlantic Canada.

In this paper I shall seek to demonstrate that regional variations in Canadian populism may be explained in terms of variations in the type of social organization and class structure typical of different parts of the country. Specifically, I have been led to ask (a) how the structures of the wheat, ranching, and subsistence farming economies differ from province to province and within provinces; and (b) what kinds of coalitions are formed between farmers and other segments of the population in different regions. I shall suggest that answers to these questions enhance our understanding of why certain ideologies took root in one place rather than another; and why in certain regions large parts of the farming population were successfully mobilized for protest while in other regions they were not. One case of successful left-wing protest (Saskatchewan), one of successful right-wing protest (Alberta), and one of largely unsuccessful protest (New Brunswick) have been selected for comparison. The time period on which the analysis focuses extends from the early 1920s, when agrarian radicalism met with its first substantial wave of electoral success, to the mid-1940s, when agrarian radicalism met with its second – and last. Particular attention will be paid to the provincial elections of 1920 in New Brunswick (when the farmers' movement made its best showing ever in that province), 1935 in Alberta (when the Social Credit party first came to power), and 1944 in Saskatchewan (when the CCF won its first provincial election). Let us first compare New Brunswick with the Prairies.

II

It has long been recognized that the settlement of Saskatchewan and Alberta was of critical importance to the formation of the Canadian nation state. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Montreal and Toronto based financiers

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1 The distinction between left- and right-wing populism may be drawn partly in terms of economic principles (the left tends to favour the nationalization of at least large property holdings more than the right), partly in terms of political principles (the left tends to favour popular political sovereignty more than the right). For discussion of this point, see Cauté (1966).

2 Two qualifications are in order. First, one does come across remarks in the literature which attribute regional variations in populist movements to different cultural orientations on the part of different population groups. Thus, the predominance in Saskatchewan of British and European immigrants who had been exposed in their countries of origin to socialist ideologies is sometimes said partly to account for the appeal of the left-wing CCF in that province; the predominance in Alberta of American settlers who had been exposed in the United States to the American populist tradition is said to have been causally related to the spread of Social Creditism there; and the predominance of conservative groups of Loyalist and Acadian stock in the Atlantic provinces is sometimes associated with the failure of populist movements to have met with much success in that region (Grant, 1937b: 289; Morton, 1950: 83; Naylor, 1972: 253; Young, 1969a: 15-16; 1969b: 5). In an earlier version of this paper I sought to demonstrate through the use of census data and election returns that the posited differences between the national origins of Saskatchewan's and Alberta's populations were so slight that they cannot account for the relevant political differences; and that in some parts of Atlantic Canada with putatively conservative populations, populism was relatively successful. I have not discussed this point in any detail here because several readers of the earlier paper convinced me that I had transformed some passing remarks which may be found in the literature into a full-blown argument, and thereby erected something of a straw man.

Second, a convincing political-historical explanation for the divergent developments in Alberta and Saskatchewan has been proposed by Peter Sinclair (1975), who, in common with Lipset, Walter Young (1969b: vi), and others, appears to have assumed the absence of major social differences between the two provinces. The present paper may thus be regarded as an attempt to explore some of the social foundations underlying these unique political histories.
and industrialists were faced with the uncomfortable prospect of a United States no longer prepared to engage in free trade, and the reality of an England convinced that the protected Imperial market was an anachronism. It was in large measure in response to these exigencies that a "national policy" was formulated: by uniting the colonies of British North America and settling the west with the surplus population of Europe it was hoped that an internal market capable of replacing the United States and Britain would be created (Fowke, 1957; Mackintosh, 1964 [1939]; Smiley, 1963 [1940]; Tucker, 1964 [1936]). In execution, the settlement of southwestern Alberta provided beef for the domestic market. The settlement of Saskatchewan and eastern Alberta provided wheat for both domestic and foreign markets. And the settlement of the Prairies as a whole provided a market for the manufactured goods of the east.

C.B. Macpherson (1962 [1953]) has aptly referred to the Prairies as an "internal colony" of Canada. High tariff barriers on manufactured goods protected eastern industrialists but forced Prairie farmers to pay inflated prices for their implements. Freight rates were arranged so as to discriminate against the West. The entire marketing infrastructure was monopolized by eastern interests who could therefore to some degree set the prices paid for wheat and beef. Credit was controlled by eastern banking houses which charged seemingly exorbitant interest rates. It was largely in reaction to these facts of western life that populist political movements emerged.

Several forces had welded farmers into a solidarity group and thereby enabled them to participate in such movements. Because the West produced only a few basic goods, farmers were affected more or less uniformly by fluctuations in the prices of these commodities. They also faced similar marketing and production problems. And they were all compelled to come into often acrimonious contact with eastern business interests and their local agents. Before the farmers had ever conceived of entering the realm of radical politics, their common class situation had in fact prompted them to form cooperative associations as a means of partially eliminating the profits of middlemen (Colquette, 1957; Wright, 1956). Marketing and consumer cooperatives not only functioned as schools for collective action, but led in turn to the blossoming of other voluntary associations. As late as 1950 the average Saskatchewan farmer belonged to four or five cooperatives (Lipset, 1968 [1950]: 54). And in a typical municipality there was more than one voluntary organization for every 21 persons (Willmott, ND [1964]: 5, 66). Political protest was greatly facilitated by the pre-existing dense network of ties which bound western farmers together.

All this stands in sharp contrast to the history of agriculture in the province of New Brunswick, which is a history of social isolation. The reasons are several: political, economic, and geographical. The pattern was already set in the eighteenth century. Loyalists fleeing the American revolution were granted large tracts of land by the British regime in what is today eastern Canada — so large that, instead of living in communities, the settlers lived alone and apart in the bush. As the doyen of New Brunswick historians, the late W.S. MacNutt, wrote: "There was nothing to compel a man to live in proximity to and in emulation of his neighbours. . . . The isolated way of life bred a spirit of individualism" (1963: 88). Agriculture languished until the mid-nineteenth century, partly because powerful lumber merchants and shippers profited from a scarcity of agricultural goods in the province and therefore sought to suppress its development (1963: 278), partly because the booming timber trade employed the vast majority of people (1963: 182). Only in the 1850s, when the industrial revolution in Britain prompted the construction of steamships and therefore hastened the decline of the market for New Brunswick square timber, were settlers driven to subsistence agriculture (Easterbrook and Aitken, 1956: 243; McClelland, 1965). The farm population thus rose until the 1890s. But New Brunswick, unlike the Prairies, did not to any great extent have its agricultural sector directly underdeveloped by large-scale capital, in consequence of which few farmers ever got past the subsistence level and farm population decreased from the 1890s on.4 By the 1940s

3 Willmott’s data are from the early 1960s, so one would assume, given the preceding waves of rural depopulation, that the ratio was considerably higher in earlier decades.

4 For the distinction between direct and indirect capitalist underdevelopment, and their differential impact on social movement growth in the Atlantic Canadian context, see Sacouman (1977); Brym and Neis (1978); Brym and Sacouman (forthcoming).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>New Brunswick</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
<th>Alberta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of work force</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employed in agriculture</td>
<td>(n = 44,515)</td>
<td>(n = 197,009)</td>
<td>(n = 148,617)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income from farm products/farm</td>
<td>$883</td>
<td>$1,431</td>
<td>$1,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment/farm</td>
<td>$2,534</td>
<td>$6,460</td>
<td>$7,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgage debt/farm</td>
<td>$171</td>
<td>$1,127</td>
<td>$959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-operators as percentage</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of total farm operators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenant- and part-tenant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>operators as percentage of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total operators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of farm as percentage of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grain and hay</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>livestock</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subsistence and part-time</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mixed, other</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Farmers ceased to be the largest single group in the province’s labour force (Government of New Brunswick, 1955: 44; Priscepowka, 1963: 85). But even from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, when agriculture in New Brunswick was at its height in terms of the number of persons it employed, the land was far from propitious. Sharply contoured terrain and generally low fertility soil allowed some farmers to prosper only in scattered areas in the river valleys and along the coastline (Brookes, 1972; Morse, 1959-60; Putnam, 1939; Saunders, 1939: 60).

These then appear to have been the principal factors which produced a farming economy largely of the subsistence type in New Brunswick. Table 1 provides several indices of the degree to which farming was divorced from the market. In 1941 some 67 per cent of farms in the province were marginal (i.e., subsistence or part-time) operations, compared to only 18 per cent in both Alberta and Saskatchewan. Average cash income per farm was substantially less than on the Prairies; so was average capital investment per farm.

The preponderance of subsistence farming meant that there was no need in New Brunswick for the kinds of cooperative ventures which blossomed in the West, and therefore no social mechanism within which a collective spirit could be generated. Why form an organization to market crops when there are no crops to be sold on the market? For that matter, why come into contact with other farmers at all? Already in 1924 Louis Aubrey Wood noted that the “[cooperative] movements in the Maritime Provinces are now in a dormant state except in certain localities.” He was certainly overly optimistic to add that they “undoubtedly will flourish again” (1975 [1924]: 304). Fifteen years later there were only 32 shareholders and members of farmers’ cooperative business organizations per 1,000 rural residents over the age of 14 in New Brunswick. The comparable figure for Alberta was 326, for Saskatchewan, 789.5

Several American researchers have also demonstrated that one's degree of involvement in commercial farming is directly proportional to one's propensity to join farm organizations (Jacobsen, 1969). If it is kept in mind that the propensity of farmers to join such organizations is indicative of the degree to which farmers are welded into solidary groupings, the political significance of this relationship becomes clearer: as we shall see shortly, levels

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5 Calculated from data in Government of Canada (1941: Vol. 7, 296-320); Richards (1940: 38). While the population data are from the 1941 census, figures on cooperative memberships are for the year 1939. The latter do not include cooperative insurance companies, credit societies, telephone cooperatives, and farmers' institutes; if they did, one would expect the differences among the provinces to be even greater.
of social solidarity on the one hand and levels of political mobilization and class consciousness on the other tended also to vary in direct proportion, as they have in many other social movements (cf. Brym, 1978; Brym and Neis, 1978; Duncan, 1965; Moore, 1966; Paige, 1975; Spinrad, 1960; Tilly et al., 1975; Wolf, 1969).

But for the moment it must be emphasized that New Brunswick farmers were not only more atomized that farmers in the West, they were also less proletarianized. James McCrorie (1971), R.T. Naylor (1972), and Peter Sinclair (1973) have recently emphasized that Prairie farmers were not, despite what they may have thought of themselves, workers (in Marx's sense of persons who are divorced from the means of production and therefore forced to sell their labour power on the market); rather, they were members of the petite bourgeoisie (persons who own and operate their means of production). And if forced to categorize Prairie farmers either as wage labourers or independent commodity producers, the argument is sound. The problem is that this categorization is unnecessarily rigid: it fails to take sufficient account of the fact that classes are historically developing sets of social relations; that a class may be in the process of decomposition and transformation (e.g., from petite bourgeoisie to proletariat); and that, at any given time, some groups within a class may have advanced further along the path of transformation than others.

This more dynamic view of class is particularly helpful when it comes to analysing the structural roots of ideological divergence between Prairie and New Brunswick farmers. As Maurice Dobb (1963 [1947]) has shown for the European case, and as Max Hedley (1976) has more recently demonstrated for central Alberta, the process of proletarianization is often marked by the growing indebtedness of independent producers - a process which culminates in the loss of control over means of production. The data in Table 1 indicate that this process had in the 1940s hardly begun in New Brunswick but had advanced considerably in the West. Thus, the average mortgage debt per farm was much lower in New Brunswick than in the other two provinces. So was the percentage of tenant and part-tenant farm operators. New Brunswick farmers were not, then, reliant to any great extent on others for employment or credit, and were in this sense less proletarianized than farmers in the West. 6

The only exceptions to this general pattern in New Brunswick were the counties of Carleton and Victoria. If, as I have argued above, the average money income of farmers is a good measure of the degree to which a farming region consists of economically self-contained units or, at the other extreme, of farms unified by market forces, then it is of some significance that Carleton and Victoria farmers had considerably higher average incomes than farmers in the rest of the province. And if indebtedness of independent producers is a good measure of proletarianization, then these same two counties again stand out as those containing by far the most proletarianized farming population (see Table 11).

In an often quoted passage in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Karl Marx (1971: 130) explained the conservatism of the mid-nineteenth century French peasantry by likening the small isolated peasant holdings of that country to so many sacks of potatoes. Nothing really held the potatoes - or the French peasantry - together. Ironically, it was precisely the potato which bound farmers in Carleton and Victoria counties together and therefore distinguished them from most farmers in New Brunswick. According to one geographer, the "most extensive and easily cultivable soils of the entire Atlantic region" are to be found in these two counties (Brookes, 1972: 31) and, especially after the First World War, the export of upper St. John river valley potatoes to the United States market became a major provincial industry (Morse, 1959-60: 476 ff.) and the biggest money earner of all agricultural sectors (Blanchard, 1938: 14, 50). Carleton and Victoria were the two biggest potato-producing counties and two of the three fastest growing (see Table 11).

Did the greater solidarity and proletarianization of farmers in Carleton and Victoria produce greater radicalism among them than among farmers in other parts of the province? Very much so. The United Farmers of New Brunswick originated in Carleton county; the

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6 This does not mean that growing indebtedness per se is the same thing as proletarianization. It is only when growing indebtedness occurs in the context of alienation of productive resources from independent producers that it may be considered an index of this process.
TABLE II
SELECTED STATISTICS ON NEW BRUNSWICK AGRICULTURE AND UFNB VOTE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Victoria and Carleton counties</th>
<th>Thirteen other counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mortgage debt/farm, 1931</td>
<td>$524</td>
<td>$157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income from sale of farm products, 1921</td>
<td>$1,949</td>
<td>$1,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potato acreage, 1910</td>
<td>8,785</td>
<td>31,648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potato acreage, 1921</td>
<td>21,584</td>
<td>41,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage UFNB vote, 1920</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provincial election</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCES: Chambers (1921: 415-16); Government of Canada (1921: Vol. 5, 96-8, 176-82; 1931: Vol. 8, 154-5, 159-61); Government of New Brunswick (1962: 39); Hyson (1972: 201-4)

NOTES: (a) Data on mortgage debt were not collected by the government in 1921. (b) The constituencies of Saint John City and Moncton City have been omitted since they are urban constituencies. (c) Hyson (1972: 203-4) indicates that in three constituencies the party affiliation of third party candidates is unknown but was probably UFNb. I have consequently registered the third party vote in these constituencies as UFNb. In two other constituencies two losing candidates may have been, according to Hyson, either UFNb or Conservative. I have consequently divided the total vote for these candidates by two in order to estimate the UFNb vote for these constituencies.

only federal third-party candidate ever elected in New Brunswick history – T.W. Caldwell, a Progressive candidate in 1921—represented the constituency of Victoria-Carleton; most of the seven to nine successful UFNb candidates in the 1920 provincial election came from the "potato belt;” and in 1920 an average of 61 per cent of the vote went to the UFNb in Carleton and Victoria counties, compared to an average of only 11 per cent in the rest of the province (see Table II). This suggests that the more similar a subregion in New Brunswick was to the West in terms of the two structural variables discussed above — levels of solidarity and proletarianization of farmers — the more similar it was politically.

But for the province as a whole populism was much less of a force to be reckoned with and its life much shorter. It would in fact not be too much of an exaggeration to claim that agrarian radicalism in New Brunswick was stillborn. The UFNb had nearly 10,000 registered members in 1921 (Canadian Review Co., 1922: 731) but its strength soon failed. In the 1925 provincial election the party lost all the seats it had picked up five years earlier (Stuart, ND). The fact that size itself is often an important determinant of a group’s power (Bierstedt, 1974) clearly manifested itself in New Brunswick. In absolute terms there were only about a quarter as many farmers in New Brunswick as in Saskatchewan and Alberta by 1941, and farmers comprised only 28 per cent of the labour force, compared to 48 per cent in Alberta and 58 per cent in Saskatchewan. By the 1940s New Brunswick alone of these three provinces could claim that its farmers did not represent its largest occupational group. When in the middle of that decade the CCF made major advances throughout the country, New Brunswick voters, too, moved left. But the gains registered in New Brunswick were well below the national average. And workers in Saint John and Moncton, not farmers dispersed throughout the province, were largely responsible for the party’s gains (Hyson, 1972: 215-18; Thorburn, 1961: 102). The farmers’ movement in New Brunswick thus dissipated along with the erosion of its power base.

Even if the farmers had remained a vigorous political force in New Brunswick, it is an open question whether their allegiance would have remained with the left. For although some initial attempts had been made to unite farmer and labour political organizations in the 1920s (United Farmers’ Guide, 24 November 1920),

7 Reports concerning the number of successful UFNb candidates vary, probably because some of the Independent candidates who were farmers by occupation are considered by some writers to have been UFNb candidates. See Chambers (1921: 114, 403-5, 409, 413); Hyson (1972: 45); Scarlow (1962: 206); Trueman (1975: 29); Woodward (1976: 48).
they did not meet with great success (Trueman, 1975: 72-3; Woodward, 1976: 46). By the 1940s CCF candidates spoke of their party as a union of “labour, farmers, small businessmen” (Moncton Daily Times, 5 August 1944, quoted in Woodward, 1976: 63), but in rural ridings many of the party leaders were in fact small businessmen. Even if there had been more organized farmers in the province, they may well have moved to the political right, as they did in Alberta.

This leads neatly into my next theme: the social basis of ideological divergence between Saskatchewan and Alberta farmers. By now it has become something of a sociological commonplace that the texture of political life in communities, regions, and nation states is in considerable measure a product of the inter-class coalitions which predominate and compete within given settings (Moore, 1966; Tilly, 1976 [1964]). It is of considerable importance that careful attention be given to this fact in the present context, for farmers represent an intermediate social group with ideological views far less cohesive, homogeneous, and unambiguous than those of workers or entrepreneurs (Macpherson, 1962 [1953]: 221-30). Farmers are quite malleable ideologically, and therefore particularly susceptible to being swayed politically by other social groupings with which they may coalesce. Much like C. Wright Mills’ “white collar” strata, they are “up for sale; whoever seems respectable enough, strong enough, can probably have them” (1951: 354). Neither the Social Credit nor the CCF parties were supported exclusively by farmers, and in order to understand why some farmers backed one party rather than another it is necessary to examine which non-farming groups were aligned with farmers in the two provinces.

The Social Credit party in Alberta had been preceded in office for fourteen years by a more left-wing populist party, the United Farmers of Alberta. Before the Depression the UFA had rigorously excluded from its ranks small town merchants and other middle-class townspeople, since it regarded them as the exploiters of the farmer. But the years following 1929 brought about a marked change in this antagonistic relationship. Jean Burnet notes in a report on field work conducted in the area around Hanna, Alberta, that during the Depression “farmers and merchants became more aware of their interdependence through the business failures which marked years of little rain and low prices,” and agrees with one local businessman’s observation that the drought “brought the farmers and townspeople closer . . . the store would give the farmer credit when the banks wouldn't give him a loan.” Simultaneously, “the farmers began to lose confidence in their own strength and ability; it became increasingly apparent that neither as individuals nor in concert could they attain a secure social and economic position without the co-operation of townspeople” (Burnet, 1947: 403).

It is of more than passing interest that the meteoric rise of the Social Credit party paralleled – more accurately, was a manifestation of – this growing coalition between farmers, on the one hand, and small town merchants, teachers, professionals, and preachers, on the other: the “rise of Social Credit represented a new political bond between farmer and small town man” (Burnet, 1947; cf. Irving, 1959: 99, 232, 241 ff.) In fact the Social Credit party did not originate in rural Alberta but in the city of Calgary. It next spread by means of a massive organizational campaign to the small towns of southwestern Alberta, and only then penetrated the countryside. As the data in Table III on the social composition of the party leadership clearly demonstrate, Social Credit was first and foremost a party led from the town, not the farm.

It was otherwise in Saskatchewan, where various labour parties had had a relatively harmonious relationship with agrarian radicals for at least fifteen years prior to the CCF victory of 1944 (Lipset, 1968 [1950]: 99-117; Young, 1969a: 13-36). The provincial election of that year saw urban and small town workers give overwhelming support for, and the urban and small town middle class register overwhelming

8 Interview with Professor Murray Young (6 December 1976, Fredericton), in the 1940s a CCF activist and candidate in New Brunswick.

9 The UFA also displayed a certain willingness to cooperate with workers, but not with workers’ parties (Young, 1969a: 17-18, 33).
opposition to, the CCF. This, too, was reflected to some extent at the leadership level (Lipset, 1968 [1950]: 197-243). One notes from Table III that the CCF leadership consisted of over 53 per cent farmers and about 17 per cent workers; this compares with just over 24 per cent farmers and no workers in the leadership ranks of the Social Credit party of Alberta in 1935.10 Also, some 20 per cent of the Social Credit group consisted of small businessmen and over 55 per cent of persons from various white-collar strata; the comparable figures for the CCF group were just over 5 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>CCF (n = 34)</th>
<th>Social Credit (n = 45)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clergyman</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Normandin (1936: 377-94; 1945: 628-42)
**Notes:** (a) If more than one occupation was listed for an individual, that person’s score was divided proportionately among the appropriate categories. (b) The occupations of nine representatives in each of the parties were not given.

These data are especially significant if they are placed in the context of what is known about various groups’ typical patterns of political behaviour in situations which generate large-scale social unrest. Members of most intermediate strata, such as farmers and independent professionals, have been known to fall either on the left or the right of the political spectrum. Small businessmen are prone to participate in right-wing extremist movements. And workers are inclined to become left-wing extremists.11 This being the case, it may be suggested that what pushed farmers in Alberta to the political right was, at least in part, the small town petit bourgeois element with which they coalesced; while part of the reason for the Saskatchewan farmers’ left-wing orientation was the fact that they coalesced with urban and small town workers.

But this is not the whole story. The Social Credit party’s influence did not stop at the Alberta border; the party was also making very significant inroads among the Saskatchewan non-rural middle class by the time of the 1938 election in that province. Why then did the Alberta pattern not repeat itself? Or, stated otherwise, why did Social Credit in Alberta capture most of the farm vote while in Saskatchewan it failed to do so? Unfortunate timing probably had something to do with the party’s lack of success in Saskatchewan. No political bond between farmer and small town businessman had been forged by the end of the Depression, and since the return of prosperity witnessed the resumption of antagonism between these two groups there was little chance for any such union to be effected (Lipset, 1968 [1950]: 199). Also significant was the fact that the Social Credit party in the late 1930s suffered from a “crisis of legitimation,” having failed to implement many of the most important reforms it had promised on its way to power in Alberta (Sinclair, 1975: 13). But quite apart from these two factors, it may be tentatively suggested that there was a deeper structural reason for the Social Credit party’s success in rural Alberta and its lack of success in rural Saskatchewan. This had to do with provincial differences in the social organization of agriculture.

In Saskatchewan 65 per cent of farms grew wheat for their principal source of revenue in 1941 and 3 per cent raised livestock. The corresponding figures for Alberta were 47 per cent and 13 per cent. The political significance of these differences can best be appreciated by referring to the ethnographic work of John Bennett (1969) on ranchers and farmers in a typical Prairies subregion.12

According to Bennett, ranching on the Prairies was characterized by relatively low

10 The Social Credit party in Alberta also had some working-class support in 1935, but mainly among unemployed and unorganized workers (Grayson and Grayson, 1974: 308-9; Irving, 1959: 244 ff.).
11 The literature which could be cited to support these statements is voluminous. Aside from several of the works referred to above, the reader’s attention ought to be drawn to Nolan and Schneek (1969), a study of political attitudes among small businessmen and branch managers in Wetaskiwin, Alberta.
overhead costs, high profitability, and small fluctuations in the price of beef – factors which contributed to the relative economic security of ranchers. Wheat farming, on the other hand, required greater capital investment, returned lower profits and was subject to relatively wide price fluctuations. Two important consequences followed. First, wheat farmers were less secure economically, a fact which contributed to the greater social instability of that group. This was well demonstrated during the drought and depression of the 1930s, when ranchers were considered such good credit risks that bankers happily sustained them while “many farmers were foreclosed or simply went broke and departed” (Bennett, 1969: 180). Second, the relative lack of investment and the stability typical of ranching led to “continued individualistic operation, and a rejection of cooperative and collective organization” (Bennett, 1969: 181). In contrast, the high overhead costs for land and equipment typical of wheat farming necessitated more cooperative ventures: by pooling resources investment costs of individual farming operations could be kept to a minimum. The contrast between rancher and farmer is well summarized by the following insightful remark of a Prairie farmer:

There’s quite a difference between the farmer and the rancher, or any stockman. I suppose it has something to do with the fact that the farmer trades with the world. He sells grain to the world, and he buys machinery and a great amount of supplies from all over the world. Now compare this to the rancher, who gets his lease land for practically nothing, and buys little more than a fistful, at least until recently. He needs little and can afford to be completely independent (quoted in Bennett, 1969: 212).

The divergent cultural and ideological consequences of these two forms of agricultural adaptation should be apparent. Ranchers tended to feel that they were “romantic, isolated entrepreneurs” and developed an “elitist” outlook on life. The pattern of culture associated with farming, on the other hand, emphasized “egalitarianism” and a “collective spirit” (Bennett, 1969: 185, 213). The fact that there were considerably more wheat farmers and fewer ranchers in Saskatchewan than in Alberta may help to explain why the CCF took root so easily in rural Saskatchewan and Social Credit met with such success in the Alberta countryside. The CCF, by emphasizing the necessity of redistributing wealth for the collective good, cooperatively organizing the marketing and consumption of goods, and collectively attending to the welfare of the population appealed to a set of values grounded in the very work situation of the farmer. Social Credit, by attacking what Thorstein Veblen called the “vested interests” and simultaneously defending the virtues of capitalism, and by favouring rule by “experts,” appealed to the more independent, entrepreneurial, and elitist bent of the rancher. This argument is supported by John Irving’s observation that the Social Credit party first spread from the city of Calgary to the surrounding area of southwestern Alberta – where ranching is a more important part of the agricultural economy than in any other part of the province – and only later found less enthusiastic support in other areas (Irving, 1959: 60-1). Moreover, if we compare (a) the single census division in which livestock sales represented the highest proportion of agricultural revenue of all census divisions and (b) the single census division in which the sale of grain and hay represented the highest proportion of agricultural revenue of all census divisions, we find that in 1935 the Social Credit vote in (a) exceeded the Social Credit vote in (b) by 8.3 per cent. If the five top census divisions of each type are compared, the Social Credit vote was 5.2 per cent higher in divisions of type (a)

12 The need to recognize the social heterogeneity and consequent political diversity of North American farmers has recently been underscored by Michael Rogin (1967: 267-8 and passim). He masterfully criticizes those American social scientists who argue that right-wing McCarthyism and left-wing agrarian radicalism were both supported by farmers and were therefore similar ideologically (see Bell, 1963; cf. in the Canadian context, Naylor, 1972) by demonstrating that different types of farmers supported the two movements. Of particular interest in the present context is his discussion of wheat farmers (who manifested high levels of social solidarity and dependence and tended to support left-wing agrarian parties) and corn farmers (who were more independent, less solidary, and tended to support McCarthy). For discussion of this point, see Rogin (1967: 97-9, 107-9, 140-2, 162-5).

13 To the best of my knowledge it was only in 1977 that the first beef marketing board was being seriously considered in Canada (actually, in the province of Manitoba). According to the CBC national television news of 17 March 1977, small ranchers supported this development while large ranchers opposed it.
than in divisions of type (b). The relationship between Social Credit vote and relative predominance of ranching is not strong – largely, I would suggest, due to measurement problems – but it does indicate that the ranchers, with lower levels of solidarity and proletariatization, had a greater propensity to vote Social Credit than the wheat farmers.14

IV

Essentially, my argument concerning the three provinces boils down to these propositions: (a) high levels of solidarity and proletariatization, combined with strong ties to the working class and weak ties to the urban petite bourgeoisie, facilitated the emergence of left-wing populism among Canadian farmers (as in Saskatchewan); (b) moderate levels of solidarity and proletariatization, combined with weak ties to the working class and strong ties to the urban petite bourgeoisie, facilitated the emergence of right-wing populism (as in Alberta); (c) low levels of solidarity and proletariatization hampered the emergence of populist movements (as in New Brunswick).

I would hasten to acknowledge the tentativeness of this argument. A great deal more work aimed at both broadening the basis of comparison and extending the range of evidence is needed before we can hope to arrive at an adequate sociological explanation of regional variations in Canadian populist movements.

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14 These percentages were calculated from data in Government of Canada (1931: vol. 8, 675-7); Normandin (1936: 395-400). Census divisions had to be matched with constituency boundaries through the use of maps – a hazardous task, but probably not a source of systematic error. The much more serious problem with the calculations (and probably the reason that the posited relationship between relative predominance of ranching and Social Credit vote did not show up more strongly) has to do with the size of census divisions in Alberta. On the average, each of Alberta’s seventeen census divisions is very roughly half the size of the entire province of New Brunswick. Within a given division one can therefore probably find both considerable ranching and wheat farming. My argument about the political consequences of ranching versus wheat farming cannot, in other words, be adequately tested until calculations are made using much smaller units of analysis.
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