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"A Very Conservative Radical": Reverend Robert Connell's encounter with Marxism in the BC CCF

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Abstract:

The historiography of the British Columbia Cooperative Federation differs from that of other provincial CCF groups for its lack of attention to the participation of religious reformers in shaping the party's early history. Yet the first CCF House Leader in the province, Reverend Robert Connell, was a fervent believer in the social gospel and in the goals of ecumenism. His attempts to bring "Christian principles" into politics resulted in a battle between reformers and radicals in the party, ultimately resulting in his departure from political life. The division of the BC CCF in 1936 as a result of what has become known as the "Connell Affair" created a loss of momentum for the party which lost its status as Official Opposition in the 1937 provincial election. This event presents a unique opportunity to study the interaction of a social gospel inspired Christian reformer with firmly irreligious supporters of Marxism.

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