

# Why Is There No Labor Party in the United States? Political Articulation and the Canadian Comparison, 1932 to 1948

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## Abstract

Why is there no labor party in the United States? This question has had deep implications for U.S. politics and social policy. Existing explanations use “reflection” models of parties, whereby parties reflect preexisting cleavages or institutional arrangements. But a comparison with Canada, whose political terrain was supposedly more favorable to labor parties, challenges reflection models. Newly compiled electoral data show that underlying social structures and institutions did not affect labor party support as expected: support was similar in both countries prior to the 1930s, then diverged. To explain this, I propose a modified “articulation” model of parties, emphasizing parties’ role in assembling and naturalizing political coalitions within structural constraints. In both cases, ruling party responses to labor and agrarian unrest during the Great Depression determined which among a range of possible political alliances actually emerged. In the United States, FDR used the crisis to mobilize new constituencies. Rhetorical appeals to the “forgotten man” and policy reforms absorbed some farmer and labor groups into the New Deal coalition and divided and excluded others, undermining labor party support. In Canada, mainstream parties excluded farmer and labor constituencies, leaving room for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) to organize them into a third-party coalition.

## Keywords

class conflict, political parties, trade unions, organizations, social movements, labor, working class, agrarian protest

Why is there no labor party in the United States? The question anchors historic debates about the “exceptional” nature of U.S. politics (Engels 1969a, 1969b; Sombart [1906] 1976; Tocqueville [1835] 2004). For Marxists, it challenges theories that the economic contradictions of capitalism would drive workers to form their own political party (Kautsky [1892] 1910; Marx and Engels [1848] 1906). For many welfare state scholars, the lack of a U.S. labor party is key to explaining the high levels of poverty and inequality in the country (Korpi

1989; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992).

Traditional explanations for the absence of a U.S. labor party embody a “reflection” model

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of parties, whereby parties reflect preexisting political cultures, institutions, and cleavages. Such accounts contend that a combination of individualist political traditions, presidentialist electoral institutions, and intra-class divisions undermined U.S. labor party efforts (Katznelson 1981; Lipset and Marks 2000; Lowi 1984).

This article shows the limits of reflection models as applied to the U.S. case. It does so by comparing trajectories of labor party support in the United States and Canada. Despite both countries' many socioeconomic similarities, the United States has no mass-based labor party, whereas the Canadian New Democratic Party (NDP) is well established (Kaufman 2009; Lipset 1989).

Existing explanations for different levels of labor party support in these two countries also deploy reflection models of parties. These hold that, compared to the United States, Canada's parliamentary system, combined with its more British, "Tory-touched" liberal political tradition and more ethnically homogeneous working class, ensured labor party success (Horowitz 1968; Lipset 1989).

If reflection models offered an adequate explanation, we would expect to see consistent *differences* in labor party support in both countries over time: that is, lower support in the United States, and higher support in Canada. However, newly compiled data comparing vote shares for independent left third parties (ILTPs) in the United States and Canada over 140 years paint a different picture. Rather than consistent *difference* over time, we see *divergence*. Prior to World War I, ILTP support was *higher* in the United States than in Canada (see Figure 1). From the end of World War I through the early 1930s, Canadian ILTP support was volatile, whereas U.S. support remained within historical ranges.<sup>1</sup> The decisive, *divergent* shift occurred in the 1930s: ILTP support collapsed in the United States and took off in Canada.

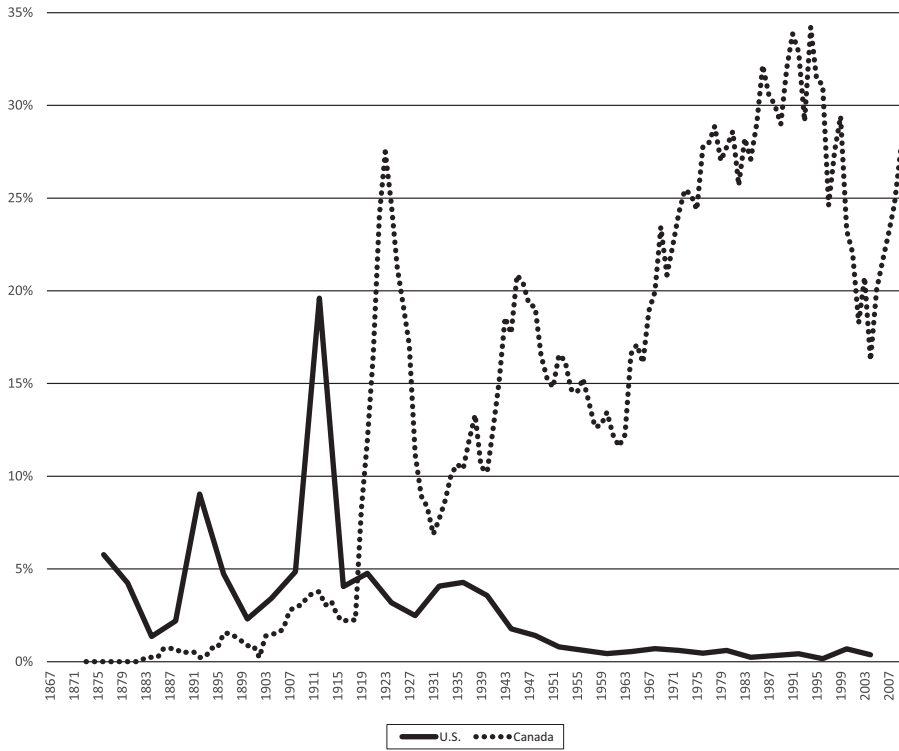
Why did ILTP support diverge in the 1930s? Even if culture, electoral systems, and class cleavages shaped possibilities for ILTP development, their effects were not fully evident until then. Before, barriers to ILTP

support in the United States did not impede ILTPs as much as would be expected. And despite conditions favoring ILTP support in Canada, such parties' efforts were largely frustrated.

I argue that a modified articulation model of parties, focused on parties' active role in assembling and naturalizing political coalitions within structural constraints, better explains ILTP divergence in the United States and Canada. Specifically, ILTP divergence resulted from different ruling party responses to labor and agrarian protest sparked by the Great Depression. Parties forged new political coalitions in both countries, but with different results. In the United States, FDR and the Democrats adopted a *co-optive* response to farmer and labor insurgency. They used the Depression to broaden their coalition with appeals to the "forgotten man" and policy offerings that absorbed some working- and agrarian-class fractions. Simultaneously, New Deal labor and agricultural policies accentuated intra-class divisions and diverted energy from ILTP organizing, leading to ILTP collapse. In Canada, the Liberal and Conservative parties shared a *coercive* response. Workers and small farmers were excluded, leaving room for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), an NDP precursor, to articulate an independent farmer-labor alliance. The result was ILTP takeoff.

## CASE SELECTION, DATA, AND METHODS

To examine the causes of ILTP divergence, I use primary sources from government, union, and employer archives, extensive secondary sources, and a unique dataset I compiled of ILTP vote shares in the United States and Canada from 1867 to 2009. I define "independent left third party" (ILTP) as any party competing for electoral votes that was (1) organizationally unaligned with mainstream parties (Democrats and Republicans in the United States, Liberals and Conservatives in Canada); and (2) had a programmatic commitment to socialism or another left-wing



**Figure 1.** Independent Left Third Party (ILTP) Vote Shares, United States and Canada, 1867 to 2009

Source: United States: Hirano and Snyder 2007. Canada: see Part B of the Appendix.

ideology, or, for agrarian parties, emphasized collective, redistributive policies, as opposed to individualist policies of self-reliance. I use the broader term “ILTP” instead of “labor party” because of the long and fluid inter-relationship in both countries between agrarian, labor, and socialist political organizing, making it difficult and analytically counter-productive to draw strong distinctions between them (Hild 2007; Kealey and Warrian 1976). This results in a less ideologically coherent analytic unit, but better captures the political spectrum to the left of the ruling parties.

Answering the question, “Why is there no labor party in the United States?” entails analyzing the “suppression of historical alternatives” (Moore 1978). It implies asserting a counterfactual scenario where a labor party *did* take root, then identifying factors that,

had they been different, could plausibly have led to that alternative outcome. Empirically, this approach advances a nondeterministic understanding of history open to “possibilities . . . obscured . . . by the deceptive wisdom of hindsight” (Moore 1978:376), while remaining sensitive to the role of past events in constraining the set of possible outcomes (Mahoney 2000). Methodologically, it offers a means of assessing competing hypotheses and constructing adequate explanations using a small number of cases. By positing counterfactual scenarios where potentially causal factors are present or absent, scholars can assess the degree to which those factors did or did not contribute to the outcome in question (Fearon 1991; Weber 1949; Zeitlin 1984).

The central challenge of counterfactual analysis involves specifying *plausible* counterfactual scenarios (Elster 1978). Comparative

cases lend plausibility to counterfactual scenarios by serving as “real counterfactuals”: similar to the case under examination, but different in terms of the critical outcome. The success of the comparison hinges on establishing cases’ initial similarity, making it easier to identify factors that contributed to the different outcomes and assess their causal significance.

Canada serves as a useful comparative case because it is similar to the United States but different in small but significant ways (Card and Freeman 1993; Kaufman 2009; Lipset 1989). Its similarity offers analytic advantages over comparisons with European countries, the traditional reference point for studies of American exceptionalism (Hartz 1955; Jacoby 1991; Sombart [1906] 1976; Tocqueville [1835] 2004; Voss 1993). Both are largely English-speaking, former British settler colonies. Both are “liberal” welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990). Both share comparable levels of economic development. Each serves as the other’s largest trading partner, many U.S. and Canadian firms operate on both sides of the border, and many of the same labor unions represent workers in both countries (Card and Freeman 1993).

Figures 2, 3, and 4 show that urban population, non-farm employment, and union density<sup>2</sup> all tracked each other closely in both countries leading up to the Great Depression. It would be difficult to argue that either country had a deeper structural base for ILTP support. Furthermore, Figure 1 shows that patterns of ILTP support were similar in both countries prior to the 1930s: generally low levels punctuated by periodic spikes. These patterns did not diverge until the 1930s, with ILTP takeoff in Canada, and ILTP collapse in the United States.

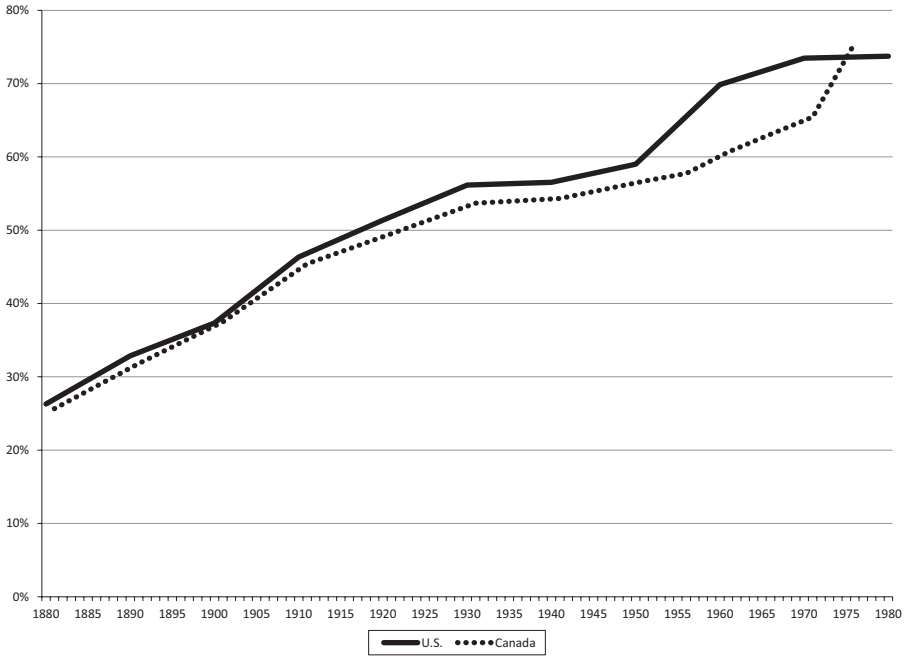
In focusing on this critical period of divergence in the 1930s and 1940s, the analysis deploys an “eventful temporality,” highlighting the role of specific, often contingent events in transforming structures. The analysis is sensitive to the importance of event order and sequence in shaping historical outcomes (Griffin 1992; Isaac 1997; Kimeldorf 1988; Sewell 1996).

## REFLECTION MODELS AND U.S.-CANADIAN POLITICAL DIVERGENCE

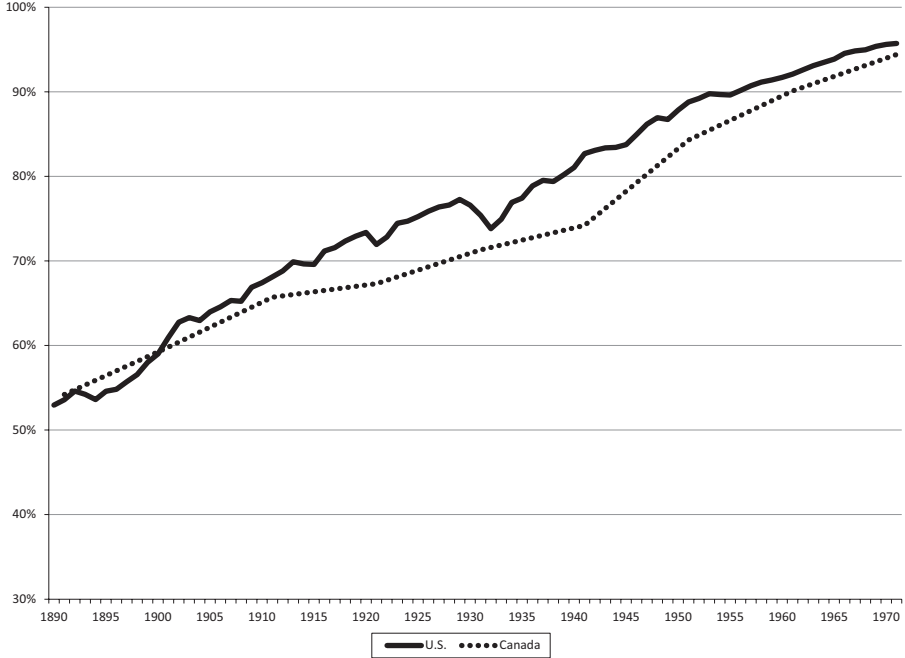
Existing explanations for differing levels of ILTP support in the United States and Canada share a *reflection model* of parties. They view party support as reflecting underlying factors, including differences in political cultures and ideologies, electoral institutions, and intra-class divisions. Without dismissing these differences, they cannot adequately explain the diverging ILTP support observed in Figure 1. Reflection models fall short on three counts. First, many focus on long-standing cross-national differences in political cultures and electoral systems, but these alone cannot explain ILTP divergence. Second, some rely on explanations that only hold in one country, not both, such as ruling parties’ ability to absorb insurgent party challengers, or the role of critical elections in realigning political coalitions. Third, some overstate cross-national differences in levels of intra-class conflict that blocked independent working-class organization.

### *Difference, not Divergence*

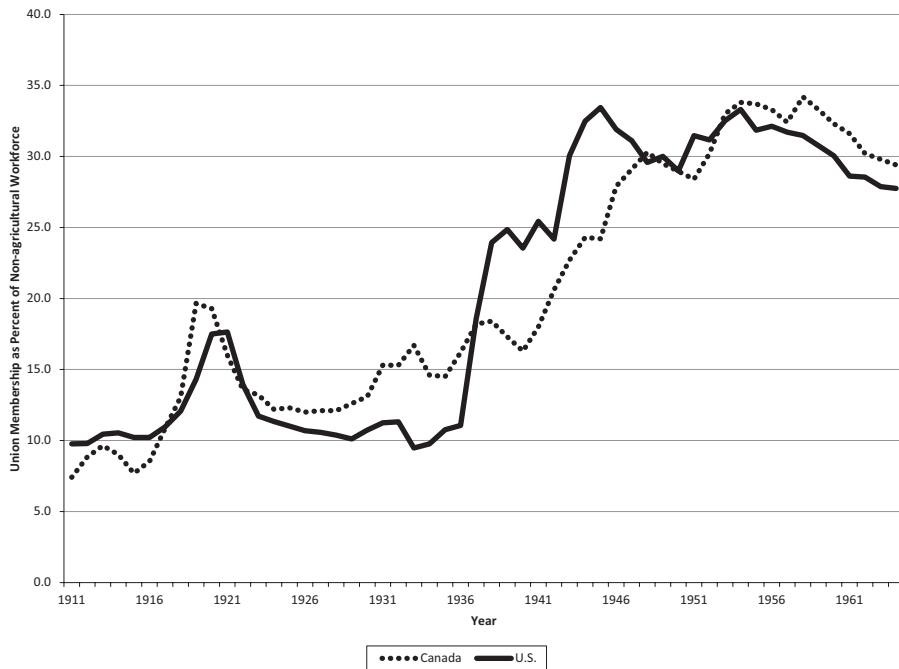
Many explanations for why ILTPs took root in Canada but not the United States point to cross-national differences in political cultures and electoral systems. Cultural explanations contrast the individualist “Lockean” liberalism in the United States with Canada’s more collectivist, “Tory-touched” liberalism, ostensibly more hospitable to socialist ideas (Horowitz 1968; Lipset 1989). Electoral systems explanations contend that the U.S. presidentialist system was more hostile to multiple parties than was Canada’s parliamentary system (Duverger 1954; Lijphart 1999; Lowi 1984), and the particularly open, ideologically flexible U.S. two-party system allowed for “full inclusion” of labor, an option not available in Canada (Lipset and Marks 2000; Vössing 2012:5). These differences subsumed the political expression of class divisions within catch-all parties in the United States but not in Canada.



**Figure 2.** Urban Percentage of Population, United States and Canada, 1880 to 1980  
*Source:* Carter and colleagues 2006; Leacy, Urquhart, and Buckley 1983.



**Figure 3.** Non-farm Employment, United States and Canada, 1890 to 1971  
*Source:* Carter and colleagues 2006; Leacy and colleagues 1983.



**Figure 4.** Union Density Rates, United States and Canada, 1911 to 1964

Source: See Part C of the Appendix.

In line with reflection models, cultural and electoral systems explanations see parties as reflecting underlying social or institutional structures. This leads each to focus on long-standing cross-national differences to explain ILTP support, but how might long-standing differences explain the divergence in ILTP support reported in Figure 1?

Defenders of the political cultures perspective might argue that Figure 1 masks a *qualitative* difference between U.S. and Canadian socialist traditions (Horowitz 1968). However, this fails to explain the timing of ILTP divergence. Did something change about the cultures of U.S. and Canadian socialism in the mid-1930s? If so, what, and especially why? Additionally, emphasizing cross-border differences ignores the extent to which Canadian ILTPs often affiliated with U.S. movements (Cook 1984; Glazer 1937; Kealey and Palmer 1982; Laycock 1990; McCormack 1977; Wiseman and Isitt 2007). Certainly, Canadian affiliates were independent from their U.S. counterparts, but the fact that they were in the

same organizations suggests cross-national differences were not as stark as cultural accounts would imply.

Similarly, although electoral system differences may have reinforced U.S.-Canadian ILTP divergence after it got underway, they cannot explain the timing of divergence. Despite presidentialism and ruling parties' flexibility, U.S. ILTPs enjoyed significantly more support prior to the mid-1930s than afterward. Likewise, despite parliamentarianism and more rigid parties, Canadian ILTPs took root only after the mid-1930s. Additionally, electoral system explanations downplay U.S. electoral structures, such as federalism, that might have provided more hospitable ground for ILTP development. The smaller scale of state-level government could have incubated nascent ILTPs by allowing them to build in areas where they enjoyed greater support.<sup>3</sup> Federalism, for example, is often used to explain policy innovation in the United States (Ikenberry and Skocpol 1987) and the success of the CCF/NDP in Canada (Wiseman

and Isitt 2007). All told, comparative arguments that rest on enduring national features cannot explain sudden changes in the direction or trajectories of individual cases.

### *Explaining One Case, Not Both*

Other explanations for differences in U.S.-Canadian ILTP support rely on factors that explain one case, not both. For example, some see the collapse of U.S. ILTP support in the 1930s as part of a broader U.S. tradition of ruling parties absorbing independent challengers. According to this argument, Roosevelt's New Deal coalition stole ILTPs' thunder by selectively adopting dissident movements' rhetoric and policies (Lipset and Marks 2000). The Great Depression exacerbated existing inequalities within Canada's more conservative, stratified class structure, which, combined with the rigidity of the Canadian party system, paved the way for the CCF (Horowitz 1968; Lipset 1963).

Again, parties here reflect underlying cultural or structural factors. Without denying the very real tradition of U.S. ruling parties absorbing independent rivals, Figure 1 challenges such explanations. First, it shows that prior to the New Deal, ruling party absorption suppressed ILTP support only temporarily. Within a few years it would rebound. Why did the New Deal put an end to this pattern? Second, although the argument assumes that a similar thunder-stealing move was impossible for Canadian ruling parties, Canada's Liberal Party had a track record of absorbing left challengers prior to the 1930s (Heron 1984, 1998; Morton 1950). Why did the Liberals fail to absorb the CCF?

One possibility is that the left political climate was more threatening in the 1930s, making an absorption strategy more risky for the Liberals.<sup>4</sup> However, the previous instance of absorption was in the aftermath of World War I, just a few years after the Russian Revolution sparked fears of communism around the world, two years after a general strike paralyzed the city of Winnipeg, and amid a major agrarian revolt (Heron 1998). Without diminishing the severity of the threat

in the 1930s, absorption strategies were also risky after World War I. Additionally, the U.S. ruling party faced a severe threat in the 1930s and *did* pursue an absorption strategy. Why did the Democrats, but not the Liberals, seek to absorb the left challenge?

Party characteristics offer an explanation. The socialist CCF was more ideologically coherent than previous left-party challengers, and thus more threatening and less open to co-optation (Smith 1975). Also, the Liberals saw better political opportunities to their right. As the ruling Conservatives collapsed in the mid-1930s, the Liberals positioned themselves not as a progressive alternative, but as the party of order against chaos (Whitaker 1977). This left space for the CCF to build.

Another common explanation for U.S. ILTP collapse focuses on the critical election of 1932 (Burnham 1970; Key 1955; Sundquist 1983). Proponents argue that this election realigned the party system to accommodate escalating social tensions, precluding the need for a new party. In this approach, critical elections reflect abrupt shifts in underlying social structures.

Critical elections certainly happen, and do reflect social and structural shifts, as the 1932 U.S. election suggests. But the explanation does not work for Canada. There, although voters decisively repudiated governing parties in 1929 and 1935, neither election triggered party realignment. Instead, ruling party intransigence left room for the CCF to develop. Why did the tensions of the Great Depression trigger a critical realignment in the United States, but not in Canada?

### *Overstating Differences*

Still other explanations for U.S.-Canadian ILTP divergence overstate cross-border differences in intra-class conflict. Scholars of the United States contend that exceptional state and employer hostility toward labor, racial and ethnic divisions, and religious and socialist sectarianism blocked independent working-class organization (Archer 2007; Hattam 1993; Katznelson 1981; Voss 1993). By contrast, scholars of Canada argue that a

more ethnically and religiously homogenous, less politically sectarian working class was better able to build ILTPs (Horowitz 1968).

Such divisions undoubtedly suppressed ILTP support in the United States, but Canadian workers were also divided along lines of craft, skill, religion, region, and ethnicity, and their organizations also experienced considerable internecine conflict (Heron 1996; Jamieson 1968; Kealey 1981; Palmer 1983). Additionally, characterizing the Canadian left as predominantly British obscures its ethnic heterogeneity (Naylor 2006).<sup>5</sup> Without denying each country's distinctive character of intra-class divisions—particularly the different structure of racial divisions—these impeded ILTP development in *both* countries up until the 1930s. What changed in the 1930s to exacerbate divisions in the United States and mute them in Canada?

In summary, the central problem with reflection models is that they predict longstanding difference in ILTP support, but the evidence shows a pattern of divergence starting in the 1930s. Differences in U.S. and Canadian cultures, ideologies, and institutions, while real, cannot explain this divergence. An adequate explanation starts from the idea that parties actively shape social cleavages and political coalitions: an articulation model of parties.

## POLITICAL ARTICULATION

Articulation models focus on parties' role in "naturalizing" certain cleavages and coalitions as the basis for political hegemony (de Leon 2014; de Leon, Desai, and Tuğal 2009, 2015; Desai 2002; Gramsci 1972, 1978; Przeworski 1985; Riley 2003; Sartori 1969). Their central premise is Gramsci's (1978:71) claim that "politically, the broad masses only exist insofar as they are organized within political parties." That is, parties actively condition the nature and degree to which different cleavages gain political salience, and which political coalitions are possible.

This scholarship offers an important corrective to reflection models, in stressing the

radically constructed nature of political identities and coalitions, but it risks overstating parties' role. Laclau and Mouffe (1985:141), for example, conceive of political identities as "floating signifiers," which parties can construct and oppose to each other discursively. For Laclau and Mouffe, the idea of agents or interests prior to politics must be discarded. Even more recent formulations of political articulation, such as that of de Leon and colleagues (2015:26), contend that no "class, religious community, [or] ethnic group . . . has an internal self-reproducing logic that would automatically bind its so-called members together." In this view, no cleavage exists outside of political articulation; any existing cleavage that might constrain political behavior is the artifact of past hegemonic projects.

Although de Leon and colleagues caution that parties rarely create identities and coalitions from whole cloth, statements like the above veer close to a voluntarist conception of parties. While emphasizing parties' centrality, articulation models must also recognize that parties' actions are constrained by prior political identities, cultures, and institutional arrangements. These establish a range of possible identities or coalitions that exist prior to parties. But there is a gap between this range and the coalitions/identities that actually develop. Parties' actions bridge the gap between possible and actual outcomes. In diminishing the importance of parties' structural constraints, recent articulation models deny that such a gap exists (Riley 2015).

My approach tempers existing articulation models by re-integrating elements of reflection models' structuralist emphasis. It recognizes the existence of identities, economic relations, and institutional arrangements prior to parties. These factors set limits on parties' scope of action, which constrain, but do not determine, the range of possible outcomes. Analyzing parties' actions as they negotiate these constraints—the process of political articulation—is essential to explaining actual outcomes.

The mechanisms involved in explaining U.S.-Canadian ILTP divergence are among the



“means of articulation” that de Leon and colleagues (2015:27) hold are uniquely at parties’ disposal: the incorporation of new constituencies, and the use of policy to reshape social divisions. Where my analysis differs from theirs is that it hinges on the prior existence of farmer and labor groups as constituencies available for parties to incorporate—or alienate. Instead of assuming these groups are solely the effects of party projects, I argue that their members had already bound themselves together in ways that limited parties’ range of options. ILTP divergence resulted from parties’ success or failure in reshaping the preexisting bonds and tying them to similarly autonomous groups in novel political coalitions.

This conception of political articulation most closely resembles that of Przeworski (1985), who frames parties’ actions within material constraints. However, Przeworski conceptualizes material constraints too broadly, including elements that are more politically malleable than he perceives. In particular, his overly restrictive conception of the relation between class structure and class identity, limiting the working class to manual laborers, underestimates parties’ capacity to articulate broader conceptions of the working class. The articulation model I develop allows for a more fluid relation between occupational structures and possible class identities.

Empirically, this conception of political articulation advances our understanding of the historical development of American exceptionalism. Theoretically, it enhances our understanding of the interplay between culture, institutions, and politics by offering a way to explain how lasting cross-national differences express themselves differently at specific historical moments. It integrates an understanding of the persistence of culture and institutions with the contingency of history and politics.

### *Political Articulation and ILTP Divergence*

Given U.S. political history, traditions, and institutions, the country was predisposed toward virtually nonexistent ILTP support.

Similarly, Canada was predisposed toward stronger ILTP support. Prior to the 1930s, however, those differences were muted, with low but significant ILTP support in both countries. This changed in the 1930s: ILTPs collapsed in the United States and took off in Canada.

How does an articulation model explain this shift? Focusing on parties’ central role in articulating political coalitions, it highlights how parties politically incorporated farmer and labor groups in both countries. “Political incorporation” refers to the process whereby workers, farmers, and their organizations switched from being a problem for the state to police, to being a constituency for the state to address and administer (Collier and Collier 1991). Incorporation differs from articulation in referring to the entry of new actors into the political arena, as opposed to the reconfiguration of existing actors. Incorporation can happen as part of an articulation process, as in this case.

In both countries, the political incorporation of workers’ and farmers’ groups occurred as a result of ruling party strategies to address labor and agrarian protest sparked by the Great Depression. Those parties had managed such challenges in the past using a mix of repression and accommodation. As a result, up until that point *both* the United States and Canada had been exceptional among capitalist democracies as countries that had not politically incorporated their respective working and agrarian classes. All others had done so three or four decades prior (Davis 1980a; Laslett 1967; Penner 1977).

Farmer and labor groups were incorporated in both the United States and Canada over the course of the 1930s and 1940s, but in different ways: U.S. farmer and labor groups were incorporated into the Democratic Party’s New Deal coalition, whereas their Canadian counterparts forged an independent alliance within the CCF. The result in both cases was a farmer–labor coalition, but in the United States, the coalition undermined ILTP support, whereas in Canada it strengthened it.

Understanding why this happened requires examining parties’ role in shaping political

alliances. In the United States, Democrats adopted a *co-optive* response to farmer and labor protest, incorporating these constituencies into the New Deal coalition. In Canada, both mainstream parties adopted a *coercive* response, leaving these constituencies politically excluded and available for an independent left coalition. The parties' different approaches manifested in two ways:

1. *The structure of partisan conflict.* In the United States, FDR used the Great Depression to reconfigure the Democratic Party coalition, creating an opening to incorporate labor. In Canada, the Liberal and Conservative parties' responses to the crisis differed only in their degree of repressiveness toward farmer and labor groups. This foreclosed the possibility of incorporation.
2. *The political use of policy.* In the United States, New Deal labor and agricultural policy offered material benefits to some farmer and labor constituencies, while also undermining their independent political power by accentuating intra-class divisions. In Canada, the Liberal and Conservative parties' repression and neglect of farmer and labor constituencies left them excluded and available for an independent left coalition.

## THE STRUCTURE OF PARTISAN CONFLICT

Articulation models hold that parties forge political coalitions by emphasizing certain issues and identities over others. At the same time, as reflection models maintain, existing cultural and institutional traits constrain parties' scope of action and possible coalitions. The case of U.S. and Canadian politics in the 1930s illustrates this interplay.

While the major social, economic, and political issue of the 1930s in both countries was the Great Depression, *how* the mainstream parties framed the Great Depression, and how they used it to mobilize voters, differed significantly. This shaped the structure of political coalitions and possibilities for ILTP organizing.

## *The United States*

Roosevelt and the Democratic Party used the crisis of the Great Depression to mobilize working-class voters. Through invocations of the "forgotten man," FDR appealed to a working-class identity and positioned the Democratic Party as the "natural" home for such voters. In turn, workers identified the Democratic Party as their party, viewed Roosevelt as their "friend and protector," and voted accordingly. The result by 1940 was "a class-conscious vote for the first time in American history" (Lubell 1941:9).

Figure 1 shows a long if limited tradition of class-conscious voting in the United States prior to the New Deal. But the real change was the *form* that class-conscious voting took. Instead of being expressed through support for ILTPs, it was expressed via support for the Democratic Party. In identifying the Democratic Party as the appropriate vehicle for expressing workers' class interests, FDR's New Deal coalition eroded ILTP support in the United States.

The link between labor and the Democratic Party was not a foregone conclusion; rather, it was a political project whose outcome was anything but certain. In hindsight, to say that the Democratic Party used the Great Depression to mobilize working-class voters seems obvious. Similarly, FDR's New Deal is often seen as a necessary response to the Great Depression. What is forgotten is the degree to which these actions were contingent outcomes of political battles, and the degree to which historical alternatives were suppressed (Davis 1980a).

At the outset of the Great Depression, the Democratic Party was *not* the obvious home for working-class voters. Groups of workers were reliable sources of Democratic Party votes, but not as labor voters. Party allegiances were based on neighborhood, ethnic, or religious ties (Katznelson 1981; Shefter 1986). Union leaders, such as American Federation of Labor (AFL) head Samuel Gompers, often supported Democratic Party candidates, but this support was instrumental, based on a voluntarist philosophy of "reward your friends

and punish your enemies” (Greene 1998). It was not uncommon for union leaders to be lifelong Republicans, as was Mine Workers head and Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) founder John L. Lewis (Dubofsky and Van Tine 1977). Labor had not yet forged the alliance to the Democratic Party that was evident in the postwar years (Draper 1989; Greenstone 1969).

Additionally, working-class voters prior to the 1930s had a wider array of political choices. Granted, some were the orthodox Marxist groups that ostensibly made socialist politics “alien” in the United States (Horowitz 1968). At the same time, many were part of a home-grown “labor republican” tradition, which drew on classic American themes of liberty and independence to argue that wage labor undermined workers’ ability to exercise their rights as citizens in a democratic republic (Gourevitch 2014). Even though that tradition had waned by the turn of the century, its imprint remained in the distinctly U.S. socialism of Eugene Debs (Salvatore 1982) and the farmer–labor parties of the early twentieth century (Montgomery 1980; Oestreicher 1988).

Such efforts were often weak and fragmented, but they represented a real alternative form of working-class political organization that enjoyed small but significant levels of support through the 1930s. U.S. labor’s absorption into the New Deal coalition suppressed this alternative, but that was not preordained.

Similarly, the idea that the Democratic Party would use the Great Depression to mobilize working-class voters was not obvious.<sup>6</sup> Much of the party leadership was politically to the right of President Hoover. They attacked Hoover’s handling of the Depression by accusing him not of inaction, but of wasteful deficit spending. Democratic National Committee chair John Raskob sought to downplay economic issues and focus on Prohibition. The party remained fractured along regional, religious, and urban/rural lines.

With Republican support crumbling amid the deepening economic crisis, Democrats knew the 1932 election was theirs to lose. But after decades of defeat, the question of how to

forge a winning coalition remained. They had to unite urban progressives, Southern conservatives, and Western populists within the existing party, while also attracting new constituencies. Some in the party thought Roosevelt could do this. In a memo from May 19, 1932, Roosevelt strategist Raymond Moley advised the candidate to present a clear alternative to Hoover by proposing to lead a party of “liberal thought” and “planned action” to fight the Depression (Moley 1932). Rhetorically, the memo built on a Moleypenned April 7 speech, in which Roosevelt appealed to “the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid” (*New York Times* 1932b). In terms of policy, it advocated a contradictory mix of centralized economic planning and budget cutting. The goal was to attract independents and progressives from all parties, while remaining vague enough not to alienate conservative Democrats.

Roosevelt did alienate some conservative party leaders, including Raskob and 1928 presidential candidate Al Smith. They rejected what they saw as Roosevelt’s class-laden rhetoric. Responding to Roosevelt’s “forgotten man” speech, Smith declared, “I will take off my coat and fight to the end against any candidate who persists in any demagogic appeal to the masses of the working people of this country to destroy themselves by setting class against class and rich against poor” (*New York Times* 1932a). Smith soon challenged Roosevelt for the presidential nomination. This made the Democrats’ stance toward the Great Depression a key point of intra-party conflict, even as some Roosevelt supporters hoped his “forgotten man” appeals would be short-lived (Krock 1932).

Roosevelt withstood Smith’s leadership challenge at a hard-fought convention, accepting the Democratic nomination with his promise of a “New Deal” for the U.S. people. Building on Moley’s strategy, Roosevelt blended social welfare liberalism with a conservative defense of states’ rights and balanced budgets in the general election. The contradictory mix confused Hoover, who accused FDR of being as changeable as “a

chameleon on plaid" (quoted in Kennedy 1999:102). However, this strategy worked, positioning the Democrats, according to a contemporary observer, as "*the* liberal party, the party which will restore the balance of power between the rich and the poor and bring prosperity to the 'forgotten man' as well as to the Wall Street banker" (Brown 1932). This created an opening for Roosevelt to incorporate labor into the Democratic Party.

U.S. labor was not yet incorporated by 1932, but the process was underway. Roosevelt's efforts to reconfigure the Democratic Party coalition created an opening for labor, but that move was not preordained. Rather, it was the outcome of factional challenges within the party that were amplified in the general election. Those challenges ensured Roosevelt's victory was perceived as a victory for the "forgotten man," creating the conditions to absorb labor into a broadened liberal Democratic Party coalition.

### Canada

In Canada, neither the Liberal nor the Conservative Party used the Great Depression to mobilize new constituencies. Both excluded farmer and labor groups, leaving political space for the CCF to establish a new party around a socialist tradition that ran deep in Canada, but had not taken root organizationally.

Key to the CCF's success was its ability to articulate an independent farmer-labor alliance. Prior to the CCF, worker and agrarian movements had foundered due to internal strife and political repression, or had been absorbed into mainstream parties. Distrust between and within farmer and labor groups had prevented an alliance of both forces (Anderson 1949; Brodie and Jenson 1988).

At the outset of the Great Depression, neither major party grasped the depths of the crisis nor proposed policy solutions. Both remained ideologically opposed to government intervention in the economy (Horn 1984; Owram 1986; Whitaker 1977). So oblivious was Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King to the magnitude of the crisis that, when his Liberals lost the 1930

election on a wave of dissatisfaction with their handling of the crash, he wrote in his diary that "the country was happy and contented, [manufacturers] & labour alike but for the election propaganda" (King 1930).

Conservative leader R. B. Bennett capitalized on dissatisfaction with King to take the Prime Minister's office, but he did not channel that dissatisfaction into a mandate for policy reforms. Instead, Bennett framed the crisis as a problem of law and order. Seeing worker and farmer protest as a communist threat, he vowed to crush it under the "iron heel of ruthlessness" (quoted in Jamieson 1968:217). He had prominent organizers jailed or deported, the Communist Party banned, radical literature censored, and meetings disrupted. Idled workers were rounded up and shipped to remote work camps (Hewitt 1995; Petryshyn 1982; Roberts 1986).

In a desperate attempt to stay in office, Bennett proposed an economic relief package in 1935 that he labeled a "New Deal." But it was too little, too late, and King's Liberals were returned to office that year. Even then, neither party sought to invoke "forgotten man"-style class appeals, or propose a new course for the country. Neither party reached out to farmer and labor groups; to the contrary, they tamped down protest. There was space for new parties to advance an alternative vision (Brodie and Jenson 1988; Brown 2007; Horn 1984; Owram 1986).

The CCF emerged in this uncertain environment. The initial 1932 Calgary meeting consisted of four groups. First were agrarians from the United Farmers movement. They had tired of ruling party inaction in the face of the farm crisis and sought an independent political voice (Anderson 1949; Lipset 1950). Second was labor, represented by rail union leader Aaron Mosher. They did not formally affiliate but remained sympathetic (McHenry 1950). Third were representatives of local and provincial labor party organizations, along with a rump "Ginger Group" of Progressive and Independent Labour MPs. They saw new opportunities to expand their numbers (Anderson 1949). Fourth was a group of

socialist intellectuals, primarily from McGill and the University of Toronto, organized as the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR) (Horn 1980). In the United States, these intellectuals would likely have been drawn to the New Deal coalition, but in Canada the ruling parties had no room for their ideas, leaving the CCF as a better option (Neatby 1972). Each group had disparate interests, but the Great Depression, and Canadian ruling parties' failure to respond to it, left them all aggrieved and politically excluded. This created the "common foe" necessary to unite them (McHenry 1950; Penner 1977; Thompson and Seager 1986).

Unlike in the United States, neither Canadian mainstream party used the Great Depression to mobilize new constituencies. Demonized by the Conservatives and ignored by the Liberals, farmer and labor groups were pushed aside, leaving them available for an independent class-based political project.

## THE POLITICAL USE OF POLICY

The articulation model holds that parties advance new policies, or leverage existing policies, to incorporate new constituencies and weaken challengers. This shapes possibilities for different coalitions, which affects levels of ILTP support.

In the United States and Canada, the structure of partisan conflict shaped *possibilities* for different political coalitions. But it was the political use of policy that *cemented* different outcomes. In the United States, New Deal labor and agricultural policy offered enough material benefits to secure Democratic Party loyalty among certain farmer and labor constituencies. Simultaneously, those policies undermined independent farmer and labor political organizing by exacerbating intra-class divisions. As a result, ILTP support collapsed. In Canada, the Liberal and Conservative parties' repression and neglect of farmer and labor constituencies left them excluded, pushing these groups toward the CCF. As a result, ILTP support increased.

## *The United States*

Roosevelt took office in 1933 amid labor and agrarian unrest, with capital in disarray (Bernstein 1970; Gilbert and Howe 1991; Milton 1982; Shover 1965). Frustrated with both major parties' response to the crisis, farmer groups were turning to independent parties. They built on a tradition of agrarian political organizing (Brody 1983; Clemens 1997; Postel 2007; Sanders 1999), but they also had promising contemporary examples. In Minnesota, the Farmer-Labor Party regularly won state and federal office throughout the 1920s and claimed the governorship in 1931 (Gieske 1979; Haynes 1984; Valelly 1989). Other agrarian populist parties were gaining traction across the upper Midwest and Pacific Northwest (Backstrom 1956; Lovin 1975; Morlan 1955). Industrial workers remained politically up for grabs. There was little sign that either major party would address labor's grievances. Roosevelt did not mention unions or collective bargaining rights during his 1932 campaign (Bernstein 1970).

FDR's initial policy solutions to the farm and industrial crises, the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) and the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), profoundly shaped agrarian and industrial class relations, along with ILTP organizing possibilities.

*Agriculture.*<sup>7</sup> The core of the AAA involved production controls in exchange for farm subsidies, financed through a tax on agricultural processors. The goal was to increase farm prices. The focus on farm prices privileged agrarian elites, consolidating a conservative agrarian bloc within the New Deal. At the same time, relief subsidies<sup>8</sup> and a farm foreclosure moratorium appeased family farmers. Reporting on an unsuccessful Farmers Holiday strike, an aide to Federal Emergency Relief Agency (FERA) head Harry Hopkins reported that "one thing that is contributing largely to its failure is the arrival of wheat allotment checks" (quoted in Lowitt and Beasley 1981:97). Groups representing smaller farmers, such as the National Farmers Union (NFU), backed away from their past

support for independent farmer–labor politics in favor of a moderate “agrarian liberalism” and integration into the New Deal coalition (Flamm 1994; McMath 1995:531). By 1938, farmer groups were wary of breaking from the Democrats. As a Wisconsin farmer leader who had previously backed independent politics editorialized, “I don’t believe the rank and file of the farmers are going to give up what they have, no matter how little it is, unless they are cocksure of something better” (Hones 1938).

AAA policy incorporated some agrarian groups but excluded others. Farm subsidies went only to landowners, leaving out tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and farmworkers. Given that Southern sharecroppers and tenant farmers, both black and white, were subject to Jim Crow-era voting restrictions, and Western farmworkers were often immigrant noncitizens, they were largely disenfranchised and could not serve as a viable base for a farmer–labor party.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, planter and grower violence and dynamics of Southern sharecropper dependency impeded class-based political organizing (Alston and Ferrie 1993; Auerbach 1966; Grubbs 1971; Kelley 1990; Southworth 2002).

Overall, FDR’s agricultural policies privileged agrarian elites, provided enough benefits to placate small farmers, and excluded tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and farmworkers. This undermined the agrarian constituency for ILTP organizing and encouraged absorption into the Democratic Party. At the same time, the AAA’s consolidation of a conservative agrarian bloc within the New Deal coalition limited the reform possibilities of the farmer–labor alliance that did emerge in the United States

*Industry.* Section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), enacted in June 1933, asserted unions’ right to organize and bargain collectively. Roosevelt resisted this provision but his advisors convinced him otherwise. Although Section 7(a) had no enforcement mechanism and employers vociferously opposed it, its symbolic value

galvanized the labor movement (Bernstein 1970; Milton 1982). When the NIRA was declared unconstitutional in 1935, Roosevelt’s advisors argued that a replacement policy “seems absolutely essential . . . if the country is not to fall into political chaos between discordant groups of extremists” (Dickinson 1935). That policy was the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), or Wagner Act, passed in July 1935. It resembled the NIRA but added enforcement mechanisms and banned company-dominated unions. Union membership exploded under the NLRA (Carter et al. 2006).

The Wagner Act’s perceived benefits drew labor toward Roosevelt. Simultaneously, business elites were abandoning him amid opposition to his proposed “Second New Deal” reforms. Deprived of business support, FDR embraced labor as a key source of funds and votes for his 1936 re-election campaign (Bernstein 1970; Milton 1982; Rubin, Griffin, and Wallace 1983).

The Wagner Act and the 1936 election strengthened labor’s ties to the Democratic Party, weakening its traditional voluntarist position (Derber and Young 1961; Greenstone 1969; Stark 1936; *Washington Post* 1936). Key labor figures, like Clothing Workers President Sidney Hillman and Teamsters President Daniel Tobin, rose to prominence as Democratic Party advisors and officials (Bruner 1936; Fraser 1991; *New York Times* 1936). Although some labor leaders continued to voice support for an independent party, the new era of government access dampened that support in practice. As Hillman<sup>10</sup> (1936) explained:

The position of our organization is known: that we are for a labor party. . . . But in the last two years things have happened. . . . We have participated in making the labor policy of this administration. . . . We know that [NIRA] meant the revival of our organization. . . . We know that the defeat of the Roosevelt Administration means no labor legislation for decades to come. . . . The reelection of Roosevelt will not solve all our problems, but it will give us a breathing spell.

As with New Deal agricultural policy, FDR's industrial policy incorporated labor constituencies into the Democratic Party coalition. At the same time, it exacerbated intra-class divisions that hampered class-based organization outside that coalition. The NLRA crystallized differences between the AFL and CIO by pitting rival federations against each other over the Act's implementation and interpretation. This drew organizational energy away from ILTP organizing and sabotaged cross-union political collaboration, particularly at the local level. Paradoxically, these divisions solidified the labor-Democrat alliance at a moment when labor seemed poised to organize for independent class politics.

Frustrated with the disconnect between Democratic Party rhetoric defending labor rights and the reality of Democratic governors using state troops to break strikes, workers began organizing local labor parties across the country in the mid-1930s (Davin and Lynd 1979). At the same time, state-level ILTPs were gaining traction, particularly across the Midwest and West (Acena 1975; Backstrom 1956; Gieske 1979; Haynes 1984, 1986; Lovin 1975; Mitchell 1992; Valelly 1989). Aiming to create a national farmer-labor party movement, Wisconsin Progressive Congressman Thomas R. Amlie organized the Farmer-Labor Political Federation in 1933, then the American Commonwealth Federation in 1935 (Lovin 1971, 1975; Rosenof 1974).

Workers backed FDR in 1936, but labor support for ILTPs grew as post-election frustration with Roosevelt set in. His overly evenhanded response to the Flint auto strikes of 1936 to 1937 and then the "Little Steel" strikes in May, 1937, prompted John L. Lewis's (1937) remark that "it ill behooves one who has supped at labor's table and who has been sheltered in labor's house to curse with equal fervor and fine impartiality both labor and its adversaries when they become locked in deadly embrace." Many also complained of Roosevelt's foot-dragging with key labor legislation in the new Congress. By that point Lewis was hinting strongly at forming

an independent farmer-labor party (Lewis 1937; Manly 1937; McCoy 1957; *New York Times* 1937).

Amid growing dissatisfaction with Roosevelt, Wisconsin Governor Philip LaFollette announced his plan for a new group, the National Progressives of America (NPA) (LaFollette 1938). But this group went nowhere, folding after the 1938 elections. Most state-based ILTPs and Amlie's organization also collapsed. Roosevelt ran with strong labor support in 1940, solidifying the labor-Democrat alliance over the course of his third term (Gieske 1979; Lichtenstein 1982; Lovin 1971; McCoy 1957; Rosenof 1974; Valelly 1989).

To understand this ILTP collapse at a moment when support for independent political action was increasing, we must examine the NLRA's role in crystallizing and exacerbating intra-class divisions. Both labor federations benefited organizationally from the NLRA, growing tremendously in this period (Tomlins 1979). However, certain provisions, particularly those granting the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) the power to determine appropriate bargaining units,<sup>11</sup> created a focal point that amplified divisions between the AFL and CIO. AFL leaders complained the Act was biased in the CIO's favor, and vice versa. In their efforts to defeat the CIO at all costs, the AFL allied with employers and conservative farm interests to weaken key provisions of the NLRA and the proposed Fair Labor Standards Act (Davis 1980b; Herrick 1946; Milton 1982).

These inter-federation attacks spurred organizational growth but hampered political organizing. Rival federations had to defend their turf, distracting from efforts to channel workers' dismay with the Democrats into ILTP support. The internecine conflict paralyzed local labor councils, one of labor's main political vehicles. The AFL purged all CIO affiliates from the councils and withdrew support from CIO-sympathetic candidates. This defunded many local and state-level labor party movements. The combination of inter-organizational conflict and resource diversion undermined the base for ILTP

support. The Democratic Party was now the only game in town, decisively suppressing ILTP organizing in the United States (Davis 1980b; Fraser 1989; Lovin 1971).

### Canada

The Great Depression radicalized Canadian workers and farmers, sparking increased labor and agrarian militancy. But unlike in the United States, increased militancy did not win concessions from the state, nor did it lead ruling parties to propose labor or agrarian policy reforms (Heron 1996). To the contrary, increased militancy provoked further state violence and harassment. Canadian ruling parties' repression and neglect of labor and agrarian constituencies foreclosed the possibility of absorbing them, and created an opening for the CCF to articulate an independent farmer-labor alliance.

*Policy of repression and neglect.* Unlike in the United States, Canadian ruling parties' response to the Great Depression excluded farmer and labor constituencies. For farmers, the National Policy<sup>12</sup> continued to aggravate. Its protective tariffs and railroad subsidies benefited Eastern industrialists, bankers, and railroad magnates, while leaving farmers indebted and vulnerable to international price fluctuations. Prime Minister Bennett's policies of increased tariffs and meager farm subsidies closed off more markets to Canadian farmers but did little to bolster collapsed farm prices (Brodie and Jenson 1988; Horn 1984; Neatby 1972).

As for labor, Bennett and his provincial counterparts offered paltry unemployment relief along with ample state repression. Police and troops broke up strikes, and provincial and federal leaders jailed and deported union organizers and seized union property. King reversed some of Bennett's most egregious anti-labor policies upon returning to office in 1935, but he rebuffed calls for a Canadian Wagner Act. Provincial and federal governments enacted some labor regulations, but nothing approaching the NLRA (Abella 1973; Fudge and Tucker 2001; Petryshyn 1982; Whitaker 1986).

*Greater organizational unity.* The Conservative and Liberal parties' policies not only excluded farmer and labor constituencies, but also unified them. Unlike in the United States, there were no policy reforms to divide agrarian and working-class fractions, creating an opening for the CCF.

While farmers' political organizing continued throughout the 1920s, agrarian radicalization accelerated in the face of the global wheat market collapse in 1929, combined with ruling parties' inability to cope with the ensuing Great Depression (Anderson 1949; Lipset 1950; Solberg 1987). Unlike in the United States, Canadian agricultural policy failed to placate any farm constituencies. Instead, farmers turned away from the ruling parties and sought an independent political voice (McMath 1995). However, past experience had shown that a farmer-labor coalition was necessary for success (Anderson 1949; Brodie and Jenson 1988).

The problem was that Canadian workers' organizations remained weak following a wave of violent state and employer repression throughout the 1920s. Union density stood at 13.1 percent in 1930, fragmented among competing federations (Labour Canada 1980; Leacy et al. 1983). As their U.S. counterparts explored new forms of political action, most Canadian labor leaders hewed to the old voluntarist model (Fudge and Tucker 2001).

The upsurge in class conflict in the mid-1930s revived Canadian labor. Inspired by the U.S. CIO, Canadian workers organized under the CIO banner, even though CIO officials were largely unaware of Canadian efforts (Abella 1973). Despite lacking any equivalent to the Wagner Act, Canadian union membership spiked by 37 percent between 1935 and 1937 (Leacy et al. 1983).

The lack of labor rights hampered Canadian unions' growth relative to their U.S. counterparts. But the struggle for state recognition also unified Canadian labor. While U.S. AFL and CIO unions traded accusations of government favoritism as they fought over implementation and interpretation of the NLRA, Canadian unionists united to protest their lack of labor rights. Leaders of the Trades and



Labour Congress (TLC), which included AFL- and CIO-affiliated unions, viewed the U.S. split with concern, even inserting themselves as mediators in an attempt to reconcile the feuding parties. The TLC only expelled its CIO unions in 1939, two years after the U.S. split, and then only under direct pressure from the AFL. Importantly, the TLC did not conduct AFL-style purges of local labor councils when it expelled CIO affiliates, allowing local councils to affiliate with the CCF.<sup>13</sup> Also, unlike in the United States, Canadian CIO unions sought reunification with the TLC from the start. The TLC rebuffed these overtures, but the Canadian CIO did increase labor unity by merging with the All-Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL) to form the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL) in 1940 (Abella 1973; Galenson 1960). The Canadian state's refusal to recognize labor rights did not dissolve inter-federation rivalries, but it did mute their political significance.

*Opening for CCF.* Ruling party intransigence to Canadian labor's demands prevented labor's absorption into the ruling party coalition, pushing supporters of political voluntarism toward official support for the CCF.<sup>14</sup> While some CCL officials, like Canadian Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) head Charles Millard, sought closer ties with the CCF, others, led by Secretary-Treasurer Pat Conroy, maintained a nonpartisan stance. The voluntarists were assisted in their efforts to resist CCF affiliation by the Communists, led by United Electrical Workers (UE) Canadian President C. S. Jackson (Abella 1973).

World War II brought the question of labor's political affiliations to the fore. Unlike in the United States, where Roosevelt's wartime labor policy successfully absorbed the labor leadership and tightened the labor-Democratic Party alliance (Lichtenstein 1982), King's wartime labor policy further alienated Canadian labor. Recognizing the need to secure labor's cooperation to ramp up production, King's war cabinet issued Order-in-Council PC 2685, stating that workers in war industries should have collective bargaining

rights. However, the order was advisory, and employers ignored it. Labor was also excluded from any wartime planning agencies, despite repeated entreaties for inclusion (Fudge and Tucker 2001).

This exclusion politicized wartime class conflict. State repression of strikes exposed the gap between the promises of stated government policy and the reality of steadfast government intransigence. At their 1941 convention, as the AFL and CIO agreed to no-strike pledges for the duration of the war, the CCL chose a different path:

The [CCL] believes in the observance of contracts, and is therefore opposed to any strike where it is clearly and definitely established that such a strike is unjustified. The Congress desires to point out, however, that the refusal of employers to accept the Labour policy of the Government with regard to the right to bargain collectively often creates situations beyond the control of the Congress, but for which the Government has the remedy through the enforcement of its stated policy. (Canadian Congress of Labour 1941:23)

Escalating industrial conflict across Canada in 1942 and 1943 created many situations beyond the control of the CCL leadership. The number of strikes nearly doubled between 1941 and 1943 (Labour Canada 1977). King's response was a series of Orders-in-Council further restricting picketing and strikers' civil liberties (Fudge and Tucker 2001; Jamieson 1968).

Spiraling class conflict spilled into the political arena, as the CCF surged in industrial Ontario. The party took 34 seats in Parliament in the 1943 provincial election, enough to form the Official Opposition (Caplan 1963). By uniting their agrarian Western base and industrial workers in Ontario, the CCF was now a much more serious threat to the Liberals (King 1943). Their success also showed voluntarist labor leaders that a class-based political party could be viable.

Declaring that he was "sick and tired of going cap in hand to Mackenzie King to get Labour policies adopted," Conroy backed a

resolution at the 1943 CCL convention recognizing the CCF as the “political arm of labour” (Canadian Congress of Labour 1943:53–56). Conroy supported the CCF reluctantly, only firmly deciding in favor of independent political organization at the 1946 convention. The Liberals’ intransigence toward labor pushed Conroy and his supporters toward CCF affiliation (Abella 1973; Canadian Congress of Labour 1946). The ruling parties’ policies of repression and neglect prevented labor’s absorption. Instead, they allowed the CCF to articulate an independent farmer–labor alliance, paving the way for ILTP support to take root in Canada.

## CONCLUSIONS

Few facts of U.S. political life appear more over-determined than the failure of a mass labor or socialist party to take root. And few political traits have been as enduring and consequential for the “exceptional” shape of U.S. politics. As a result, the question, “Why is there no labor party in the United States?” remains as relevant as when it was first posed more than a century ago.

Existing answers to this question generally adopt a *reflection* model of parties, wherein parties reflect preexisting cultures, cleavages, and institutions. In this article, I compared independent left third-party (ILTP) development in the United States and Canada to challenge reflection models. Whereas the United States has no mass-based labor party, the New Democratic Party (NDP) is well established in Canada.

Reflection models explain this difference by highlighting long-standing differences in political cultures and institutions. But an examination of newly compiled electoral data for ILTP vote shares in both countries between 1867 and 2009 shows that, instead of long-standing cross-national difference, there was a divergence. Prior to the 1930s, ILTP support was low but significant in both countries. After that, ILTP support collapsed in the United States and took off in Canada. The differences that reflection models identify are

important, but they cannot by themselves explain this divergence.

To develop an explanation of ILTP divergence that acknowledges constraints imposed by cross-country differences in political cultures, institutions, and intra-class divisions, I proposed a modified articulation model of parties, which holds that parties actively shape political conflict by “naturalizing” certain cleavages and coalitions within structural constraints. Existing articulation models often deny the possibility of identities and coalitions prior to parties, whereas my approach shows how these set limits on parties’ scope of action, which shape, but do not determine, the range of possible outcomes. Parties’ actions in negotiating structural constraints—the process of political articulation—are essential to explaining actual outcomes.

In the case at hand, the Great Depression sparked labor and agrarian militancy in both the United States and Canada. The upsurge reshaped politics, as farmers and labor forged political alliances in both countries. But those alliances affected ILTP support differently. In the United States, farmer and labor groups were absorbed into the Democratic Party’s New Deal coalition, undermining ILTP support. In Canada, the Liberals’ and Conservatives’ failure to absorb those groups left space for the CCF (precursor to the NDP) to articulate an independent farmer–labor alliance, bolstering ILTP support.

In both countries, ruling party responses to the Great Depression played central roles in articulating these political coalitions. In the United States, FDR and the Democratic Party pursued a *co-optive* approach. They used class-inflected appeals and policy offerings to incorporate certain farmer and labor constituencies while marginalizing and dividing others. In Canada, the mainstream parties pursued a *coercive* approach. Neither used the Great Depression to mobilize new constituencies, and their policies of repression and neglect foreclosed the possibility of absorbing farmer and labor protest.

These shifts in ILTP support also signaled a shift in the structure of political representation:

U.S. workers' and farmers' incorporation into the Democratic Party consolidated an interest-group form of political representation; Canadian workers' and farmers' alliance in the CCF consolidated a class form of political representation. Political articulation did not simply naturalize the link between labor, farmers, and the Democratic Party in the United States; it also naturalized the interest group as the dominant, nearly exclusive form of group political representation. Likewise, political articulation did not simply naturalize the link between labor, farmers, and the CCF in Canada; it also naturalized a system of group political representation more attuned to class divisions.

Empirically, this challenges arguments that the New Deal forged a liberal-labor alliance, in which the Northern wing of the Democratic Party served as the functional equivalent of European social-democratic parties (Harrington 1972; Mann 2012). Even if Northern Democrats and European social democrats resembled each other politically, the fact that the Northern Democrats were yoked into a coalition with racist, conservative Southern Democrats had profound consequences for their scope of political action (Katznelson 2013). Understanding the distinctive characteristics of the New Deal coalition is essential to understanding its implications for postwar politics. Instead of leading to more expansive European-style social democracy, labor's incorporation into the Democratic Party decisively blocked the possibility of a more social democratic postwar settlement, as it drew labor away from corporatist class-based negotiation toward interest-group bargaining (Lichtenstein 1989).

Likewise, the analysis shows the limits of characterizing the CCF-NDP as a Scandinavian-style farmer-labor alliance (Esping-Andersen 1990). First, the CCF-NDP has never achieved the hegemony of its European social democratic counterparts. The CCF-NDP formed governments in a few provinces, but until 2011 they retained perennial third-party status at the federal level amid Liberal and Conservative Party dominance. Second,

the CCF-NDP's claim to representing farmers and workers has often been more tenuous than that of their European counterparts. Many farmer groups remained with the ruling parties after the CCF was formed, and it took a great deal of political work to convince labor to cast its lot with the CCF. Understanding the specific non-hegemonic character of the CCF-NDP farmer-labor alliance is critical to understanding the social democratic-tinged liberalism of Canadian politics.

More broadly, this analysis enhances understanding of U.S. politics and comparative political economy. Studies of U.S. politics have long operated with an assumed pluralist model of politics, whereby the political process involves competition between narrow, overlapping interest groups. Pluralism, while at times disorderly, maintains stability by ensuring that no durable social cleavages form, and no one group can retain a dominant position (Dahl 1961; Polsby 1963). The pluralist model of politics has been extensively criticized (Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Gaventa 1980; Lukes 1974), but its basic categories have been assimilated into the assumptions of political scholarship, particularly interest groups. My analysis extends scholarship showing that interest groups, far from being the fundamental building blocks of U.S. politics, are themselves a product of the political process. Existing accounts find that interest-group politics developed out of Progressive Era protest movements (Clemens 1997; Hansen 1991), but my account suggests it was the New Deal that naturalized interest groups as the basic unit of U.S. political organization. Although ILTPs were never widespread, they were a real alternative for marginalized worker and farmer groups prior to the New Deal. ILTPs' incorporation into the New Deal coalition left narrow pluralist politics as the only option (Katznelson 2013).

For its part, comparative political economy has under-theorized the relationship between parties and classes. Whether analyzing variation in political regimes (Luebbert 1991), market economies (Hall and Soskice 2001), or welfare states (Esping-Andersen 1990),

parties either serve as proxies for cleavages and class alliances, or are virtually absent. Such analyses offer powerful and parsimonious explanations for variation across capitalist states, but critics charge that they are better suited for explaining continuity rather than crisis and change. Furthermore, the typologies at the heart of these approaches mask important cross-category similarities and within-category differences, while fitting important cases poorly (Howell 2003). My analysis suggests that integrating a more autonomous conception of parties into political economy can better explain institutional change and variation. Not only do parties forge and reshape political coalitions, but parties' actions and attributes can lend very different characteristics to the resulting coalitions.

Building off insights gained from this re-examination of a classic question in political sociology, further research could delve into the broader implications of different structures of political representation. Once parties create systems of interest-group bargaining or class representation, how does this affect subsequent policy development? What are the consequences for other political and economic actors, such as social movements, labor unions, and employers? Re-envisioning political articulation to include rhetoric, public policy, and the dynamics of political incorporation raises these and other important new questions for the study of state and society.

## APPENDIX

### *Part A. Archival Data Sources*

Archival data for this project were collected over the course of 14 months between September 2008 and November 2009, plus brief subsequent visits. Archives consulted include George Meany Memorial Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; Hagley Library, Wilmington, Delaware; Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Stanford, California; Kheel Archives, Catherwood Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York; Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario; National Archives, College Park, Maryland; Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan; and Robert F. Wagner Papers, Georgetown University Special Collections, Washington, DC.

### *Part B. Electoral Data Sources*

All data used in compiling Figure 1 are available upon request from the author. The figure presents statistical evidence from two separate sources. The first dataset comprises data on all votes cast for the U.S. House, Senate, and all statewide offices between 1876 and 2004. It was compiled by Stephen Ansolabehere, Shigeo Hirano, and James M. Snyder, Jr., and forms the basis of Hirano and Snyder's (2007) paper analyzing the decline of third-party voting in the United States. The data presented in Figure 1 comprise only vote shares for third parties that the authors identified as left-wing parties. According to the authors, "based on the historical literature and sources such as the *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, we classified each party as Left or Other (non-Left)" (p. 2). These data exclude presidential votes to better focus on third-party movements as opposed to individual candidates (p. 2, note 6). I thank Hirano and Snyder for providing access to the underlying data.

The second dataset comprises data on all votes cast in Canadian federal and provincial parliamentary elections between 1867 and 2009. I compiled this dataset from the sources listed in Table A1.

Data from British Columbia begins in 1903, the first election in which candidates were identified by party affiliation. Data for Newfoundland are excluded, as Newfoundland did not join Confederation until 1949. Data for New Brunswick are also excluded because candidates in that province did not have party affiliations until 1935; I thus could not demonstrate any shift before and after the formation of the CCF. Similarly, the Yukon and Northwest Territories are excluded because candidates only began having party affiliations in the 1970s. Nunavut is excluded because it only became a territory in 1999. Using 1951 population data from Statistics Canada, the first date that includes

**Table A1.** List of Sources for Votes Cast in Canadian Federal and Provincial Elections, 1867 to 2009

Jurisdiction	Source
Federal	<i>History of Federal Ridings Since 1867</i> ( <a href="http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/FederalRidingsHistory/HFER.asp">http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/FederalRidingsHistory/HFER.asp</a> ).
Alberta	<i>A Century of Democracy: Elections of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 1905–2005</i> (Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 2006) and Elections Alberta ( <a href="http://www.elections.ab.ca/Public%20Website/730.htm">http://www.elections.ab.ca/Public%20Website/730.htm</a> ).
British Columbia	<i>An Electoral History of British Columbia, 1871–1986</i> (Elections British Columbia 1988), <i>Electoral History of British Columbia Supplement, 1987–2001</i> (Legislative Library of British Columbia 2002), and Elections British Columbia ( <a href="http://www.elections.bc.ca/index.php/resource-centre/reports/">http://www.elections.bc.ca/index.php/resource-centre/reports/</a> ).
Manitoba	<i>Historical Summaries, 1870 to 2006</i> (Elections Manitoba 2007) and Elections Manitoba ( <a href="http://www.electionsmanitoba.ca/downloads/HistoricalSummary.pdf">http://www.electionsmanitoba.ca/downloads/HistoricalSummary.pdf</a> ).
Nova Scotia	<i>Nova Scotia Provincial Elections 1867–2010</i> (Elections Nova Scotia 2011) ( <a href="http://electionsnovascotia.ns.ca/electionsstatistics.asp">http://electionsnovascotia.ns.ca/electionsstatistics.asp</a> ).
Ontario	<i>Electoral History of Ontario, Candidates and Results, with Statistics from the Records, 1867–1982</i> (Office of the Chief Election Officer, Province of Ontario, 1984) and Elections Ontario ( <a href="http://www.elections.on.ca/en/resource-centre/elections-results/official-past-elections-results.html">http://www.elections.on.ca/en/resource-centre/elections-results/official-past-elections-results.html</a> ).
Prince Edward Island	Historical data obtained directly from Chief Election Officer Lowell Croken (e-mail dated September 8, 2010) and Elections PEI ( <a href="http://www.electionspei.ca/provincial/historical/results/index.php">http://www.electionspei.ca/provincial/historical/results/index.php</a> ).
Quebec	Drouilly, Pierre, <i>Statistiques Électorales du Québec, 1867–1989</i> (Québec: Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée Nationale 1990) and Élections Québec ( <a href="http://www.electionsquebec.qc.ca/francais/provincial/resultats-electoraux/elections-generales.php">http://www.electionsquebec.qc.ca/francais/provincial/resultats-electoraux/elections-generales.php</a> ).
Saskatchewan	Provincial Elections in Saskatchewan, 1905–1986 (Chief Electoral Office, Province of Saskatchewan, 1987), Report of the Twenty-Second General Election, October 21, 1991, Report of the Twenty-Third General Election, June 21, 1995, and Elections Saskatchewan ( <a href="http://www.elections.sk.ca/election-results/">http://www.elections.sk.ca/election-results/</a> ).

Newfoundland, the excluded provinces and territories comprise 6.4 percent of Canada's total population, meaning that, in the critical period around the takeoff of the CCF, the provinces included in the analysis represented 93.6 percent of Canada's population.

Figure 1 reports Canadian vote shares using a six-year moving average. This smooths out data from small off-year elections while preserving overall trends. The figure reports only vote shares for left-wing third parties. As with Hirano and Snyder (2007), I used historical sources to distinguish left parties from other third parties. I selected these parties based on a range of criteria. First, I included parties that explicitly identified as “labor,” “socialist,” “Marxist,” or “communist” (excluding “national

socialists”). Selecting which agrarian-based parties to include in the measure presented certain challenges, as agrarian populism had both right- and left-wing manifestations. The best-known example of right-wing agrarian populism was the Social Credit Party, which was a major presence from the 1930s through the 1980s in Alberta, British Columbia, and Quebec, as well as at the federal level. To distinguish between the two, I used secondary sources to examine the parties' platforms. I included agrarian parties in the group of ILTPs to the extent that they advocated redistributive policies and cooperative forms of economic organization. I excluded parties that primarily made appeals to religion, family, or individual self-reliance, as well as parties linked to the

Social Credit Party, either as predecessor or offshoot parties. Table A2 lists all included parties.

Table S1 in the online supplement (<http://asr.sagepub.com/supplemental>) provides the dates of the elections included in the Canadian data for Figure 1, and whether the elections were general elections or by-elections (special elections held in a single riding). Because Canada operates under a parliamentary system, general elections are not held according to a set timetable, as in the United States. Rather, general elections are held either when the leader of the ruling party calls for Parliament to be dissolved, usually every four to five years, or when the ruling party loses the confidence of Parliament, usually by losing a critical vote.

Based on my own research and consultation with data archivists, I believe this to be the first-ever compilation of electronic data regarding ILTP voting patterns in Canada and the United States at both the federal and state/provincial levels.

### *Part C: Union Density Data Sources*

Figure 4 reports union density measures for the United States and Canada between 1911 and 1964. The starting date is the earliest date for which union membership statistics are reported for both countries. I chose 1964 as the cutoff date for Figure 4, because that is the point at which union density rates in both countries diverged starkly. I examine the causes of that divergence in other writings but did not want to make that a focus of this article. For the purposes of this article, the relevant data refer to the period prior to the divergence in ILTP support in the 1930s. For both the United States and Canada, this involved combining data on union membership and non-agricultural employment from a variety of sources.

*U.S. union membership.* Data for union membership come from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' series reporting "Union Membership, 1880–1999," which can be found in Table Ba4783-4791 of Carter and colleagues

(2006) (<http://hsus.cambridge.org/HSUSWeb/toc/tableToc.do?id=Ba4783-4791>).

*U.S. non-agricultural employment.* Data for U.S. non-agricultural employment come from Carter and colleagues (2006), Table Ba470-477 (<http://hsus.cambridge.org/HSUSWeb/toc/tableToc.do?id=Ba470-477>).

*Canadian union membership.* Data for union membership come from the *Directory of Labor Organizations in Canada*, as reported in Leacy and colleagues (1983) ([http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/access\\_acces/archive.action?l=eng&loc=E175\\_177-eng.csv](http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/access_acces/archive.action?l=eng&loc=E175_177-eng.csv)).

*Canadian non-agricultural employment.* Data for non-agricultural employment between 1921 and 1964 come from Eaton and Ashagrie (1970) Table VI-A. Because Labour Canada did not start collecting data on non-agricultural employment until 1921, there is a 10-year period from 1911 to 1920 with annual data on union membership but not non-agricultural employment. To create union density statistics for this period, I used 1911 census data on "gainfully employed" persons (subtracting agricultural employment) to create a union density data point for 1911. I then generated estimates for the years between 1911 and 1921 by linearly interpolating between the 1911 data point and the first Labour Canada estimate of the paid non-agricultural workforce in 1921. I obtained the 1911 census data from *Historical Statistics of Canada*, Series D8-85.

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**Table A2.** List of Canadian Independent Left-Wing Third Parties

Abbreviation	Full Name
CLAB	Canadian Labour
CCF	Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
CPC	Communist Party of Canada
FARM	Farmer
FL	Farmer Labour
FUL	Farmer–United Labour
CCFIND	Independent Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
LABIND	Independent Labor
PROGIND	Independent Progressive
LAB	Labour
LF	Labour Farmer
LPP	Labour Progressive Party
MLP	Marxist-Leninist Party
NATLAB	National Labour
NDP	New Democratic Party
NPL	Non-Partisan League
OUVIND	Ouvrier indépendant
PDE	Parti de la démocratisation économique
POC	Parti ouvrier canadien
PATRON	Patrons of Industry
PROG	Progressive
PWM	Progressive Workers Movement
SOC	Socialist
SOCLAB	Socialist Labour
UF	United Farmers
UFA	United Farmers of Alberta
UFO	United Farmers of Ontario
UFOL	United Farmers of Ontario-Labour
UFL	United Farmers-Labour
UNPROG	United Progressive
UNREF	United Reform
UNREFM	United Reform Movement
UNITY	Unity

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### Access to Underlying Data

All statistical data used in this article were compiled by U.S. or Canadian government agencies, most of which are accessible online. Data from Figure 1 on U.S. and Canadian ILTP vote shares are available from the author upon request. Relevant archival data are available from the author upon request.

### Notes

1. Figure 1 might suggest that ILTP support diverged after World War I, but the postwar spike marked a period of volatility in the Canadian party system, not a lasting shift in ILTP support. It represents the meteoric rise of the Progressive Party at the federal level and the United Farmers movement at the provincial level. These agrarian parties' impressive electoral gains proved fleeting (Heron 1998; Morton 1950). In no case were Progressive/United Farmer parties able to establish a lasting political presence, and none survived past 1935. It was only in the 1930s with the CCF's emergence that ILTP support took hold in Canada.
2. Union density is the percentage of non-agricultural workers who are union members.

3. Many ILTPs were in fact state-level parties.
4. I thank an anonymous *ASR* reviewer for raising this issue.
5. The Canadian left overall was heterogeneous, but the CCF had distinctly British influences. This impeded CCF growth among non-British immigrant workers, particularly in Quebec (Naylor 2006).
6. Accounts of the 1932 campaign taken from contemporaneous newspaper accounts and Cohen 2009; Craig 1992; Freidel 1990; Kennedy 1999; Leuchtenburg 1963; Moley 1932; and Schlesinger 1957.
7. Discussion of New Deal agricultural policy draws on Clemens 1997; Finegold and Skocpol 1995; Gilbert and Howe 1991; Hansen 1991; Hardin 1952; McConnell 1953; Saloutos 1969, 1974; Sheingate 2000; and Young 1993.
8. Subsidies were offered through the Federal Emergency Relief Agency (FERA), not the AAA.
9. Nonetheless, Southworth (2002) shows that Southern tenant farmers and sharecroppers successfully organized to demand relief, and support for Socialist and Communist Party candidates was an important part of their protest.
10. Hillman's Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) was the primary backer of the New York-based American Labor Party (ALP).
11. A bargaining unit is a group of workers eligible to bargain collectively and be represented by the same union. AFL unions defined bargaining units by craft; the CIO defined them by industry.
12. The National Policy was the Canadian government's economic development policy from Confederation through the early twentieth century. It sought to unite the northern colonies, create a domestic market, and facilitate development of a resource extractive, export-based economy. Its key features were railroad building, settlement incentives, and a tariff on imported manufactured goods (Brodie and Jenson 1988).
13. Few local labor councils and local unions actually affiliated with the CCF (Forsey 1958). The important point is that the question of affiliation, as well as the councils' political activity, was less of a flashpoint of contention between the TLC and CCL than it was between the AFL and CIO, where conflict crippled the councils.
14. This section focuses solely on the CCL's affiliation with the CCF. The TLC remained nonpartisan, although its leaders were sympathetic toward the CCF. At the time of the 1956 TLC-CCL merger to form the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), the federations left the question to the discretion of each union and subordinate bodies. When the CCF became the NDP in 1961, the CLC officially affiliated itself with the new party (Forsey 1958; Horowitz 1968).

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