

Introduction

The birth of new political parties or social movements is often traced back by the people who form them to a sense of alienation or disenfranchisement from mainstream society and politics. Such organizations revolve around issues – be they gay rights, the environment, the traditional nuclear family, pro-choice, or pro-life – their supporters identify as important concerns that have been ignored by the mainstream and so, by necessity, require a formal political voice.

These parties and movements have their own life cycles and degrees of success. The Green Party has become an international political icon for the environment, human rights, and equality. The Christian Coalition emerged in the United States in the 1990s as a dominant political force for the Christian right and pro-family movement, while the Feminist Party of Canada lived a short, ineffectual life in the early 1980s.

The Family Coalition Party of British Columbia (FCP) rose from the ashes of the Social Credit Party's collapse in 1991 and struggled to promote pro-life and pro-family causes in virtual political obscurity for nearly a decade. In November 2000, the FCP merged with four other conservative parties in the province to form the Unity Party of British Columbia. Through their efforts, those working for the FCP were able to have their pro-life and pro-family principles constitutionalized in this new party. With the emergence of this larger pro-life party, the life cycle of the FCP was completed. This book is about that life cycle and the ideological beliefs that drove it.

Throughout the 1990s, rigorous political mobilization took place in Canada and the United States around pro-family issues. It was a decade of increasing religious conservative activism that became gathered under the umbrella of the pro-family movement (PFM), a social movement with a sweeping agenda. Its activists support a political and social agenda that promotes traditional family values and opposes abortion and euthanasia. There is also support for the return of the single-income patriarchal family, for parental choice and control in education, for reduction of the Keynesian welfare state, and for the expansion of free-market neoconservative economics.

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The late Reform Party of Canada was arguably the most populist and well-known Canadian version of this ideology. In Canada's 2000 federal election, Stockwell Day, then leader of Reform's successor party, the Canadian Alliance, came under media fire on several occasions for his religious conservative views on abortion and creationism¹ – attacks that hinted at a realization that Reform/Alliance could become, if it wasn't already, a political sanctuary and voice for religious conservative voters. The party, however, like its Reform predecessor, downplayed its social conservatism and religious morality in favour of a platform endorsing fiscal conservatism and espousing themes of Western alienation and electoral reform. It was an effective strategy. With its sixty-six seats, the Alliance formed the official opposition in Canada, based on what is essentially a Canadian version of America's "caring conservatism" as it appeared in the Reagan administration of the 1980s and has fervently reappeared under the presidency of George W. Bush.

In 2004, Bush was carried to re-election on the shoulders of his natural constituents – Christian evangelicals and pro-family movement supporters. The striking feature of this election is that it was driven not by the usual concerns about the economy or personal security but by concerns about the moral and social fabric of the country. Pro-family evangelicals came out in force and voted for a president who shared their moral opposition to gay rights, abortion, and sex education in schools. This electorate, seen as supporting God, guns, and school prayer, made up almost a quarter of the voters in the election, and they voted overwhelmingly for one of their own and someone whom they believe will work to restore a biblically founded social contract to America.

While this result may suggest novel support for a 1950s style of economic and cultural hegemony, it is in fact the continuation of a long social and political tradition. As recently as 1996 religious conservatives in America were having a dramatic effect on presidential politics. Led by US evangelist Pat Buchanan's Christian Coalition, pro-family religious conservatives got busy that year, targeting not just Ross Perot's small Reform Party but the Grand Old Party itself, along with its Republican presidential nominees.²

As in the 2004 election, at issue for them was the future of the traditional nuclear family, one in which the married man earns the income while his wife stays at home caring for their children. For the Christian Coalition, government had become overly intrusive and humanist in its affairs, and activists were expressing visceral opposition to legislation that protected rights for gays and lesbians, access to abortion, and equal employment opportunities for women and that placed heavy tax burdens on families. Pro-family forces argued that these things and more were undermining the sanctity of the traditional family and as such threatening the very future of countries like the United States and Canada.

The pro-family argument is a straightforward one: as the family goes, so goes society. And, from their cultural vista, they saw trouble brewing. Canadian or American, pro-family activists saw the traditional family as under attack and falling into an ever-deepening crisis because of an overly intrusive state and an ever-expanding secular value system.

It is this message that the pro-family movement, primarily through the work of the Christian Coalition in the United States, has been slowly generating support for and translating into political power. By the 1996 presidential campaign, this increase in influence had reached a point where Bob Dole's chief strategist warned that, "without having significant support of the Christian right, a Republican cannot win the nomination or the general election."³ Clearly, given the results of the 2004 election, this was an accurate conclusion and one that George Bush's chief strategist, Karl Rove, obviously took to heart. And with the electoral blessing he received from his natural constituents, it seems highly probable that Bush will pursue, among other things, a constitutional amendment to protect the traditional definition of marriage as that between a man and a woman.

In its most politically pure form, this pro-family agenda calls for economic and social stability through a program of biblically informed, morally constructed, free-market-driven social policies – the sort of measures seen to be needed in a society beset by an apparent rise in social pathologies such as youth crime, teen pregnancy, and unemployment. Simultaneously, and at its tactically most vulgar, it is an agenda that argues modern society has become selfish, hedonistic, godless, man-hating, and lesbian-loving. Indeed, some Pat Buchanan supporters at the 1996 Republican National Convention could be seen sporting T-shirts that read "Intolerance is a beautiful thing."⁴

In Canada, pro-family forces are nowhere near the juggernaut the Christian Coalition has become in the US. The movement in Canada is currently a composite of scattered organizations, all moving independently towards their common goal but lacking any cohesive political unity. Like their American counterparts, organizations like Campaign Life Coalition, REAL Women of Canada, and the National Citizens Coalition are working towards the pro-family vision: a return of the traditional family to its previous position of social eminence, an end to government funding for abortion services, the promotion of free-market economic policies, and a reduction in government interference in citizens' lives.

Despite their lack of organizational unity, pro-family activists in Canada do feel there is reason to be optimistic. Culturally, this attitude is in part linked to signs that American pro-family groups have had a slow but steadily growing cross-border influence on the movement since the mid-1990s. In British Columbia, the Christian Coalition established itself in the late 1990s, and for more than a decade, Focus on the Family, James Dobson's

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multimillion-dollar pro-family organization, has been quietly carrying on the promotion of its pro-family message. Politically, religious conservatives find optimism not only in the growth of the Reform/Alliance party, but also in the persistence of other smaller political parties.

A unique feature of the pro-family movement in Canada has been the creation of federal and provincial political parties by pro-family activists. Federally, the Christian Heritage Party was formed in 1987 on an overtly Christian, pro-family platform, while in Ontario (1987) and BC (1991), independent efforts brought the Family Coalition Party to life as a pro-family party discretely espousing a Christian world view. These parties were created with the deliberate intention of providing religious conservatives, as well as pro-family and pro-life supporters, with a political vehicle through which they could directly engage in the political process on behalf of their cause. While such parties toil in virtual obscurity, activists argue that playing the role of the pebble in the political shoe of the country will eventually pay off.

These parties are also a direct product of Canadian political culture. The structural organization of the Canadian parliamentary system concentrates party and political power predominantly in the hands of party leaders and executives, and this can severely limit opportunities for political action within a party. This means that, unlike the more permeable American state, where lobbying efforts by movement activists have a greater number of strategic avenues open to them, Canadian activists have the more onerous challenge of convincing a few party executives and leaders to support their cause. Frequently, this situation results in movement activists being unable to make substantial inroads in the political decision making arenas via existing mainstream parties.

As was the case with the founders of the Green Party in Canada, pro-family activists in this country took matters into their own hands. They resorted to creating their own political parties in an attempt to create a political path down which they could march in an effort to influence an otherwise unresponsive Canadian state. The FCP was exactly this – a party of last resort for long-time pro-family activists who had become frustrated and discouraged by years of work within existing political parties that had produced few tangible successes.

When the Family Coalition Party emerged, it became part of a long tradition in Canadian political history – a tradition that includes the Progressive Party, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (later the New Democratic Party), and the Green Party. As minor political players, these organizations stand apart from typical political parties in two important ways. First, they are a clear representation of an aggrieved group of citizens. People who support these parties invariably share a concern over a single or small number of issues they believe are being ignored by the government

and other larger political parties. Second, and giving these particular minor parties their most unique feature, their supporters do not have electoral success as a primary goal.

Parties like the FCP are more interested in engaging in political education than in winning political power. The FCP was run by social movement activists, not politicians, and they believed that the key to winning public and legislative support for their agenda was a campaign of broad-based educational awareness. As all social movement supporters are apt to do, the Family Coalition Party sought to effect social change its members viewed as favourable for the betterment of society, and they believed that generating awareness through education was vital to achieving their goals. Concomitantly, they understood that consciousness raising must be accompanied with access to the institutions of political power and the formal mechanisms of government policy decision making. Years of failed efforts to gain such access led the founders of the Family Coalition Party to the conclusion that, in the face of a strong Canadian state, such political opportunities must be constructed and that this demanded the creation of a political party. What resulted was a political hybrid: like other minor parties in Canadian political history, the FCP had the form of a political party but the function of a social movement. It is best understood, in other words, as a party/movement.

The kind of form/function dichotomy exhibited by party/movements such as the FCP creates for them a number of unique challenges and tensions that arise from trying to straddle two political and organizational realities. Mobilizing resources, gaining public recognition and political legitimacy, and developing professional expertise are problems that all social movements and minor parties face. A party/movement, however, must contend with a number of other challenges, including convincing what might be called its natural constituency that form need not dictate function. That is, party/movement activists must convince potential supporters that in spite of having a party form, their organization can effectively engage in activities more commonly associated with social movements.

Despite these challenges, the activists in the FCP were firmly committed to its party/movement nature, which they recognized might never lead them to a legislative seat in the province's capital. Their acceptance of this fact may seem paradoxical, given the FCP's form as a party, but it must be kept in mind that they were working primarily towards achieving social change, not towards acquiring political power for its own sake. Like all party/movement activists, they quite simply were not motivated by dreams of strutting the corridors of legislative power. Rather, they were driven more by a sense of moral obligation and by the status frustration that social conservatives have been perceiving for the past three decades in North America.

As far back as 1964, pioneering neoconservative Daniel Bell observed

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that, “what the right fears as a whole is the erosion of its own social position” (Bell 1964, 2). In Canada, and particularly in British Columbia, social conservatives have become alarmed at the speed of this erosion. Beginning with the federal decriminalization of abortion and the liberalization of divorce laws in the 1960s, women, minorities, and other historically disenfranchised citizens have won hard-fought battles for their right to enjoy the same full political, legal, and cultural lives that Canadian citizenship is supposed to provide. In British Columbia, the new millennium continued this pattern of growing hegemonic inclusion with legislation that, among other things, permitted gay couples to adopt children and to marry.

For social and religious conservatives, these events are only more evidence of the growing fragility surrounding their historically privileged status. In efforts designed to stem these social currents, pro-family forces like the FCP have undertaken what could be called a mission of reclamation, one that seeks to return BC and Canada to what they believe is its rightful Christian heritage and its respect for life and for family. It is an attempt to stop what they see as the destructive forces of liberal individualism and cultural relativism. In this sense, the FCP was a group of pro-life, pro-family conservatives whose aim was to build consensus and support for their social issues rather than just existing as another right-wing party promising tax cuts and pro-business economics.

Certainly their platform included a belief in the free market, but the FCP was first and foremost a party based on *social*, not economic, reformation. The party in fact never came close to developing a full economic policy. Consensus always existed among the membership that the FCP could readily support or adopt the pro-business economic platforms common to any right-wing party. Instead, they expended their energies on their social movement agenda, because, for them, economic platforms were no good without sound moral principles. The relationship was a simple one for the FCP: to prosper economically, the province needed to first build a moral foundation out of pro-family, pro-life, and other social conservative ideals.

In tackling an analysis of this religious conservative organization, this book has three manifest goals. The first is to document the history of the Family Coalition Party of British Columbia, from the genesis of an idea around a kitchen table in Victoria in 1991 through to its merger with the Reform Party of BC and its re-emergence as the Unity Party of British Columbia. However insignificant small parties like the FCP may appear to be, they do shape the political landscape in which they operate, and evidence of this can be found in the details of their daily struggles. As Chapter 1 shows, this was most certainly true of the FCP.

What else emerges in this chapter is that the Family Coalition was a pro-family organization highly commensurate with the political, social, and economic ideals of the US pro-family movement and other similar movements

in Canada. It also becomes clear in this chapter that throughout its life cycle, the FCP experienced a chronic kind of identity crisis. Part social movement, part political party, the organization remained in a perpetual state of stunted development.

The second aim of this book is to trace the ideological roots and beliefs of the pro-family movement. Terms like “pro-family,” “pro-life,” “New Right,” “neoconservative,” and “neoliberal” are often associated with groups such as the FCP, but it is frequently unclear how these terms are related. Chapter 2 is about unknitting the various ideological strands that inform the pro-family movement in Canada and the United States and exposing the historical relationship between these strands. The result is the picture of a movement whose belief in the sanctity of the traditional family has deep roots in the conservative tradition of Edmund Burke and is one that is best characterized as Christian, conservative, and involved in battles over a variety of social issues. In both countries, it is also a movement sympathetic to the neoconservative economic policies to which Canada and the US have been subjected for the last two decades or so.

The final goal of this book is to understand the FCP’s dual character as social movement and political party, and the unique challenges that face a party/movement in Canada’s contemporary political climate. To this end, Chapter 3 analyzes the FCP as a social movement. Although this is not immediately apparent because of its political party form, if one separates its form from its function, the Family Coalition’s work can be recognized as that of a social movement. Specifically, it can be understood as related to the new social movements because of its focus on identity and quality-of-life issues, even though the conservative nature of the FCP is the ideological antithesis of an NSM. As the chapter will show, it is best understood as a conservative *resurgence movement* that is attempting to promote social change while at the same time resisting the changes being brought about by the efforts of NSMs such as the ecological, gay, and feminist movements. The pro-family movement industry in British Columbia, which includes the activities, roles, and mobilization efforts of the various national and provincial organizations, is also described in this chapter. Particular attention is paid here to the relationships that exist between these organizations and the Family Coalition Party, as well as the role these organizations see the FCP as playing for the pro-family movement.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the FCP as an institutionalized political party in British Columbia. Regardless of its functional activities as a social movement, the party form of the FCP imposed upon its executives all the constraints and challenges faced by other minor political parties in Canada. This chapter first explores the nature of representative politics in Canada and the chronic crisis of representation that typically besets large mainstream political parties in the country. This failure of cadre parties to

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satisfactorily represent the issues that concern the country's citizens has given rise to the long history of minor political party activism in Canada and is in very large measure the reason for the existence of parties like the FCP. The challenges faced by the Family Coalition Party are then examined. Like other minor parties, the FCP had a small and scattered constituency, a lack of political expertise, and a narrow-issue focus and it had to wage its campaigns under a majoritarian, first-past-the-post election system that favours large parties or those with strongholds of regional support.

Chapter 5 explores the FCP as a party/movement in the tradition of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in Canada and the Green parties in Canada and Germany. Fusing party form with movement function presented the FCP with a series of tensions that it would be forced to deal with if it were to become effective and politically sustainable. Not only did it have to overcome the challenges facing social movements and political parties, it also created for itself a unique set of problems that had to be deftly managed. These compounded and created challenges are discussed, as is the prognosis for party/movements as viable political entities.

The Conclusion revisits these arguments and assesses the Family Coalition Party's decision to merge and become the Unity Party of BC in terms of what risks such a decision poses to its movement principles and to the political viability of this new pro-life party.