5.9/5.10 Politics in the Great Depression

People were very uncertain about their futures during the Great Depression. People were desperately looking for someone to solve the country’s problems and get them out of this situation. This also applied to the political scene. When the political leaders were not able bring about a recovery, the people started looking for other options.

- 1930. Early in the Depression King’s Liberals were voted out of office for not making any major effort to correct the depression or to provide aid to the provinces.

- 1930-1935. After not being able to bring recovery R.B. Bennett’s Conservatives were not very popular. Bennett’s government got the reputation for most of the troubles.
  
  Ex: Newspapers were called Bennett blankets
  Horse drawn cars were called Bennett buggies
  Roasted wheat was called Bennett Coffee
  Hobo shantytowns were called Bennetttburgs

- 1935. King’s Liberals were voted back in, after denouncing Bennett’s reforms as being unconstitutional and beyond Federal powers.

- King was only able to reclaim control however because the voters were split among many new political parties. Many people were thinking that neither traditional party was serving the people’s needs and they were looking for alternatives.......


The Communist Party

- The message of sharing equally for all people became very popular during the depression, making the Communist Party gain more influence in Canada.
- There was always the fear by many people and the government that the Communist party was controlled by Russia and was out to overthrow the Canadian way of life. This held back the party from really gaining power.
- Communists elected some municipal officials and a few provincial leaders and then from 1931-1936 the communist Party was outlawed in Canada.

"Slave Camps," a stylized depiction of relief camps from the Communist Party organ, The Worker, 11 November 1932
The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF)

- There were many Socialists in Canada who believed that the Depression was caused by greedy businessmen and the Capitalist System.
- In 1932 and 1933 leaders from the United Farmers and other socialist and labour groups met to form a united national movement.
- Their platform of beliefs was called the Regina Manifesto, and they formed the CCF with their first leader J.S. Woodsworth (former Methodist Preacher and leader with Winnipeg General Strike).
- The Regina Manifesto included:
  - Banks, insurance, transportation, and communication should be publicly owned (run by the government)
  - Government should provide health care for all
  - Unemployment insurance, crop insurance
  - National minimum wages, old age pensions, family allowances
- People were suspicious that the CCF was a Communist Party and so they did not get a lot of support. They got only 7 members elected in the 1935
- Although they had small numbers, with the other major parties very unpopular, the CCF had a strong influence in Parliament. Their ideas for unemployment insurance, legal rights for trade unions, and rights for workers were adopted by the mainline parties and passed into law.
Social Credit

- The Social Credit party started in Alberta with William Aberhart; a teacher and Christian Preacher.
- They wanted to change the way that banks were run, and that they needed to provide more money for the people to spend.
- Each month the government was to give every citizen $25 in their own prosperity tickets. This would get money flowing in the economy, creating purchasing power and leading to production of goods and jobs.
- The Social Credit party won the 1935 election in Alberta. They were not allowed to change the banking system and didn’t give out their prosperity tickets because banks are under Federal law.
- Social Credit kept control in Alberta until the 1960’s. They even formed a national party and took most of Alberta’s Federal seats in 1935.

A sample of the prosperity tickets that the Social Credit party printed for distribution

William Aberhart, leader of the Social Credit government in Alberta, was a gifted speaker and knew the importance of radio and mass media in communicating with the people.
The West was not the only region of the country unhappy with Federal Politics

Union Nationale

- A growing resentment was growing in Quebec because most economic growth was coming from English investors from Canada, Britain and America. French Quebecois saw this as the English domination of the province.
- The Union Nationale was formed as a French-Canadian Nationalist Party, led by Maurice Duplessis.
- The party claimed that all problems in the Depression were caused by English Canadian businessmen and politicians. This focused the resentment of the people and gave the Union Nationale the province in the 1936 election.
- Once in power, rather than solve the worker’s needs they focused on anti-federal propaganda, staying in power until 1959.
- They developed a strong distrust of Quebecois for the Federal Government, leading to the current relationship between Quebec and Canada which has even seen two votes for the province to leave the country.
Recovery

- The changes in politics throughout the decade had very little effect on the economy of the depression.
- By the mid 1930’s businesses had started to recover from the crash and were gradually able to provide more jobs. Unemployment dropped from a 26% high to 15% in 1938.
- The true recovery came in 1939 when Canada entered the second world war. Most unemployed were able to get jobs in the newly started war industries or by enlisting.