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CHANNELING HATE: BELIEF SYSTEM FACILITATION OF EGO-DEFENSE MECHANISMS IN THE 1935 RISE OF SOCIAL CREDIT IN ALBERTA

I. Introduction

When the Reverend William Aberhart successfully combined the financial notions of Major Douglas with dispensationalism and the Holy Ghost to inspire the majority of Alberta voters to support the new Social Credit movement, disbelieving commentators throughout Canada blamed the "hysteria" of the masses on Aberhart's demagoguery. But are the masses thrown into hysteria by successful demagoguery, or is successful demagoguery dependent upon the social context of the masses and their consequent susceptibility?

The conversion of voters to Aberhart's Social Credit doctrine in 1935 resulted from the convergence of a number of factors. These included socio-economic circumstances which promoted various forms of anxiety; Aberhart's appeal was effective because it triggered and/or facilitated numerous unconscious ego defence mechanisms used to protect the individual from overwhelming anxiety. Once invoked, the ego defences in turn facilitated the acceptance of the belief system: conversion to the ideology.

Aberhart's appeal was charismatic, but too often his charisma has been thought of as simply a function of a dominant personality. This paper argues that charisma is a function of identification and projection, it is a function of the audience as well as the orator. Aberhart and his Social Credit belief system needed the stresses of the Depression and the reactions that they induced in order to gain wide popularity. These stresses made some individuals more susceptible to Aberhart's claims, because Social Credit ideology activated both defensive and expedient functions of the ego.

Social Credit ideology served all three aspects of the psyche: the id, the ego and the superego. The desires of the primitive id were fulfilled by justifying the release of aggressive impulses onto offered objects of hate. The framing of the object of hate as a threat to the individual placated the superego—the conscience—allowing the projection of hate without guilt, given the resonance of the explicit ideology with extant elements of the superego. This protective process of projection also allowed the ego relief from moral anxiety. Individuals unconsciously attracted to the belief system because of its fit with their ego defence mechanisms consciously chose it as the apparent way out of the economic problems of the Depression.

After a review and critique of the literature, I discuss the unconscious psychological processes that explain part of the appeal of ideological mass movements and then apply these concepts for an understanding of the success of Social Credit and Aberhart.

II. Explaining Alberta, 1935

The summer 1935 election in Alberta saw the surprising victory of the new Social Credit party, which obtained 54% of the popular vote, winning 56 seats

out of 63. Social Credit had existed as a social movement only since 1932, and as a political party only since January 1935. However, the new premier, William Aberhart, had been well known in Alberta since the late 1920s as a fundamentalist Protestant religious leader. In fact, through his radio sermons from the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute, he had become the foremost popularizer of the theology of fire and brimstone dispensationalism. Aberhart defeated the United Farmers of Alberta, which had governed since 1921 but was expected to lose (all UFA candidates lost in this election), and the Liberal party, which was expected to win.

Various interpretations of the success of the Social Credit movement have been advanced but offer only partial or incomplete explanations. C.B. Macpherson suggested that the colonial status of the western independent commodity producers generated an ideology antagonistic to eastern Canada and its political parties.[1] On this basis alone, however, Macpherson could not explain why Saskatchewan, in a very similar economic situation, supported the Liberal Party until 1944. Maurice Pinard attempted to explain the success of Social Credit in terms of his theory of one-party dominance,[2] claiming that the long reign of any political party may cause the atrophy of the major opposition party, allowing the rise of a third party as a more viable alternative. Pinard correctly perceived an institutional situation with the propensity to produce a new party, but as Gad Horowitz pointed out, the institutional approach cannot explain the rise of a third party of a particular type.[3]

R.T. Naylor attempted to account for the existence of Social Credit in Alberta and the Social Democratic CCF in Saskatchewan as a function of the economic interests of the farmers in these provinces.[4] Indeed, farmers perceived their economic interests to be advanced through their support of Social Credit and the CCF, but why did they have this perception? Social Credit in Alberta and the CCF in Saskatchewan were not the only parties attempting to appeal to the large farm constituency, which had long supported the Liberal party. If the actual pursuit of the class interests of farmers is sufficient to explain the success of a western party, then the UFA should never have lost power in Alberta. Indeed, one of the weaknesses of the UFA was that it appealed mostly to farmers.

Naylor seems too willing to explain ideology as a direct function of class relations, assuming that the ideological level of society is epiphenomenal. Such an approach cannot account for sustained ideological differences in societies with the same economic organization. Despite similar agrarian economies in the 1930s, Alberta and Saskatchewan had different political cultures due to the Albertans' "particular affinity for American political ideas".[5]

Wiseman's point illustrates the useful corrective to the reductionist view offered by Louis Althusser, according to whom the ideological level of any social formation is relatively independent of either the political or economic level. He argues for the necessity of conceptualizing each level of a social formation in relative independence, although each is causally connected.

Althusser uses the concept of overdetermination to explain the causality at work in social formations and within an individual. Through this concept of

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[1] Crawford Brough Macpherson, *Democracy in Alberta Social Credit and the Party System* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).
[2] Maurice Pinard, *The Rise of a Third Party* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 253.
[3] Gad Horowitz, *Canadian Labour in Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 49.
[4] Thomas R. Naylor, "The Ideological Foundations of Social Democracy and Social Credit," in *Capitalism and the National Question in Canada*, ed. Gary Teeple, 125 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 253.
[5] Nelson Wiseman, "The American Imprint on Alberta Canada," *Great Plains Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (2011): 39.

overdetermination, Althusser tries to establish a theoretical compatibility between Marx and Freud wherein both explain reality, not in terms of 'actors', but rather in terms of multiple structural determinations.[6] Some of these determinations involve the ideology within which we think. We will see below that ego psychology does not have the same view of overdetermination.

In stark contrast to Althusser's process without a subject, rational choice theory starts with a rational actor and assumes that an individual's self-interest is an objective category.[7] However, it is tautological to say that an ideology appeals to a person because of that person's self-interest. Political ideologies appeal to the economic interests of people, but, in fact, the appeal is to the perceived interests of people, which may be determined by a variety of ideological and personal factors. One's self interest is the realization of one's desires, with desire a subjective category: one might desire anything. That which a person desires is a function of the total personality of the individual; if a political ideology satisfies the desires, especially the unconscious desires, of its followers, it appeals.

There are some scholars who have recognized the importance of attempting to understand irrational mass hysteria. Under the influence of Hadley Cantril, a colleague when John Irving was at Princeton, Irving's 1959 study attempts to explain the irrational basis of support for Social Credit in dire socio-economic circumstances.[8] Having studied and rejected Freud, Cantril came up with his own set of concepts to attempt to explain behaviour.[9] However, his ideas of 'ego enhancement' or 'ego frustration' as examples of 'ego involvement', while well-meaning, are insufficient. Irving uses the Freudian-inspired ideas of "ego-enhancement"[10] and "ego displacement', but they are inadequate to conceptualize what needs to be explained. He states that "Owing to the economic distress created by the depression, thousands of people in Alberta were experiencing ego displacement to a greater or less degree. They were not merely oppressed by serious financial difficulties; they were also suffering from feelings, often deep-seated, of guilt or of personal inadequacy for being unemployed or on relief".[11]

I agree that the effect of guilt is an important element in an explanation of the behaviour of the Alberta voters in 1935. However, the guilt needing explanation is unconscious guilt, derived from the superego. Cantril's perspective does not distinguish the concept of the superego from that of the ego. As a result, there is no theoretical possibility of the ego requiring defence against the superego. In his study of why Alberta voters were so eager to accept Social Credit, Irving also does not distinguish between the reality anxiety arising from the Depression's dire socio-economic circumstances and the moral anxiety derived from the conscience.

This paper offers the conceptual framework required for understanding the psychological dynamics at play. Since 1959, when Irving, using inadequate concepts, at least attempted to conceptualize the irrational, there has been a hiatus in the development of explanatory political theory that adequately addresses the problem of irrational political behaviour in Canadian social movements. Three recent books illustrate this point. The first, edited by

[6] Louis Althusser et al., *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
[7] Edward A. Bell, *Social Classes and Social Credit in Alberta* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 158.
[8] See the Preface to his 1959 book: John Irving, *The Social Credit Movement in Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), xi.
[9] Hadley Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movements* (New York: J. Wiley, 1941); Hadley Cantril and Muzafer Sherif, *The Psychology of Ego-Involvements: Social Attitudes and Identifications.* (New York: J. Wiley & Sons, 1947).
[10] Irving, *The Social Credit Movement in Alberta*, 246.
[11] Ibid., 263.

Miriam Smith,[12] and the second, by Ramos & Rodgers,[13] do not mention Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud, psychoanalysis, the unconscious, ego defenses or anyone connected to the school of ego psychology. The same is true of Maurice Pinard's 2011 book on social movements, although he goes so far as to agree with those that feel the need to dispense with "the old baggage of irrationality and social pathology".[14] Leo Rangell discusses the splits, defections and disagreements within the American psychoanalytic movement, especially in the 1960s and 70s, that may help account for the decline in the influence of psychoanalysis within the social sciences.[15]

Contemporary politics, nevertheless, needs an understanding of the irrational, the unconscious and the pathological which the defense mechanisms allow us to explain. Without an appropriate conceptual framework to capture the irrational and unconscious, how are scholars to explain irrational political behaviour? While most contemporary sociologists have rejected Freud and the unconscious, not all have done so. While making his own insightful use of the idea in "The Elephant in the Room: Notes on the Social Organization of Denial",[16] Eviatar Zerubavel alludes to the ego defence mechanism of denial. In unconscious perceptual denial, either one cannot see what exists, or reality is modified and misconstrued.[17] According to criminologists from Cambridge University, prisoners with very long terms of confinement invoke the ego defense mechanisms of denial, suppression and sublimation.[18] In discussing the Nazi threat to European Jews, Ervin Staub, a psychologist, shows how the defence mechanisms of denial and rationalization might explain reaction to the danger and then the escape from reality for those caught in the camps.[19] Although not all scholars explicitly deny the importance of the irrational or pathological in politics, only some have the available conceptual tools with which to explain political phenomena resulting from unconscious motivations.

While Cantril and Irving did try to conceptualize the irrational factors at work in social movements, most subsequent work to explain the appeal of Social Credit has been unable, or unwilling, to do so. The dominant paradigms in political science use rationalist assumptions, and, so far, most political scientists have not been convinced of their insufficiency. As examples of this rationalist approach to the explanation of behaviour, the work on Social Credit by Alvin Finkel, Bob Hesketh, Clark Banack and Nelson Wiseman does not attempt to conceptualize the part of Aberhart's appeal that was irrational and unconscious.

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[12] Miriam Catherine Smith, ed., *Group Politics and Social Movements in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).
[13] Howard Ramos and Kathleen Rodgers, eds., *Protest and Politics: The Promise of Social Movement Societies* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015).
[14] Maurice Pinard, *Motivational Dimensions in Social Movements and Contentious Collective Action* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 25 quoting: William Gamson, "The Social Psychology of Collective Action," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
[15] Leo Rangell, "Epilogue," in *Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*, ed. Otto Fenichel, 50th Anniversary (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996).
[16] Eviatar Zerubavel, "The Elephant in the Room: Notes on the Social Organization of Denial," in *Culture in Mind: Toward a Sociology of Culture and Cognition*, ed. Karen A. Cerulo (New York: Routledge, 2002).
[17] Phebe Cramer, *Protecting the Self: Defense Mechanisms in Action* (New York: Guilford Press, 2006).
[18] Serena Wright, Ben Crewe, and Susie Hulley, "Suppression, Denial, Sublimation: Defending Against the Initial Pains of Very Long Life Sentences," *Theoretical Criminology* 21, no. 2 (2017): 225–46.
[19] Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 162–63.

Further, accepting the popular view of charisma, Banack,[20] Finkel,[21] Hesketh[22] and Wiseman[23] implicitly use, or accept the use of, the concept of charisma, which assumes that which needs to be explained: leaders are charismatic primarily because of the processes of projection and identification, not because of their innate personal characteristics. From my point of view, in 1933, Adolf Hitler was not charismatic primarily because of his demagogic abilities but rather as a result of projection and identification – psychological processes that work unconsciously. The same holds for Aberhart in 1935, and, for that matter, Donald Trump in 2016. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau was charismatic in the Trudeaumania election of 1968 but not so much in 1972 when he obtained a minority government. Winston Churchill was charismatic for most of the World War II but lost an election before it ended. Benito Mussolini was charismatic to begin with but not by the time he was hung from a meat hook in Milan in April 1945. The unconscious psychological processes of ideal projection and identification, not just a political leader's "demagogic style",[24] are necessary to explain the charismatic attraction of Aberhart and other 'charismatic' politicians. Max Weber anticipated Freud in this respect when he stated that charisma is "an extraordinary quality of a person, regardless of whether this quality is actual, alleged, or presumed [my emphasis].[25] According to Weber, "charisma is an attribution of the audience";[26] it is a function of the "perception" of the leader's followers;[27] it is a "reciprocal relationship".[28] Here, audience presumption and perception result from unconscious processes. The subjective emotional state of the audience regarding a leader determines the success or failure of a political or religious appeal, not just the leader's actual or alleged qualities. The acceptance of a charismatic leader is in large part an emotional, irrational affair that cannot be explained using rationalist assumptions about individual or group behaviour. Aberhart was, as Nelson Wiseman describes him, a "bombastic crusader"[29] but why were people so attracted to his crusade, his "charismatic campaign"?[30] Why did so many people accept his putative, widely satirized solutions to the problems of the Depression?

One of the ways that Aberhart was able to provide his followers with what John Irving calls charismatic leadership[31] was by effectively playing the political dramatist: an orator who knew how to manipulate a crowd while giving a performance. "Aberhart is again unusual in the degree to which he advises his students to concentrate on the non-rational, impulsive and unconscious drives of the audience".[32] Taking his own advice, he built up his own cult of personality with emotional appeals that resonated with voters. Other politicians might try the rational approach, but in the 1930s, Aberhart had joined Mussolini and Hitler in a conscious appeal to the unconscious and

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[20] Clark Banack, *God's Province: Evangelical Christianity, Political Thought, and Conservatism in Alberta* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 154.
[21] Alvin Finkel, *The Social Credit Phenomenon in Alberta* (Toronto, Ont.: University of Toronto Press, 1989), xii.
[22] Bob Hesketh, *Major Douglas and Alberta Social Credit* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 68.
[23] Nelson Wiseman, "Introduction," in *Democracy in Alberta Social Credit and the Party System* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).
[24] Finkel, *The Social Credit Phenomenon in Alberta*, 30.
[25] Quoted in Charles Lindholm, *Charisma* (Cambridge, Mass., USA: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 25.
[26] Ibid., 201 fn#11.
[27] Duncan McDonnell, "Populist Leaders and Coterie Charisma," *Political Studies* 64, no. 3 (2016): 719–33.
[28] Paul W. Fox, "Psychology, Politics, and Hegetology," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 13, no. 4 (1980): 675–90.
[29] Wiseman, "Introduction."
[30] Reginald Whitaker, "Introduction," in *The Farmers in Politics*, ed. William Irvine (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976), xxix.
[31] Irving, *The Social Credit Movement in Alberta*, 340.
[32] Moira Day, "William Aberhart: The Evangelist as Subversive Political Dramatist," *Theatre Research in Canada* 11, no. 2 (June 6, 1990).

irrational. Hitler "well before coming to power practised rhetorical gestures in front of a mirror".[33] Aberhart was convinced of his own prophetic mission, of his having received the "gift of grace," as Weber would say, so he would not see himself as a shrewd, cynical manipulator. He believed his own political message even as opponents ridiculed as propaganda his "funny money" notions.

The best treatment of charisma, Weber and Aberhart as an evangelical populist, is by Trevor Harrison. "Weber argued that charismatic authority arises during periods of crisis when traditional leaderships and authority structures have been 'de-legitimated'. Charismatic leaders are viewed (at least by their followers) as divinely gifted with extraordinary insights that allow them to show the people 'the way' out of the current crisis. The Rev. William Aberhart was considered a charismatic political leader".[34] Even nonevangelical supporters of Aberhart had faith that he would find a way out of the Depression. When Stewart and Archer say that "the massive Social Credit victory in 1935 must be attributed at least in part to the charisma of Aberhart and his ability to inspire faith on the part of ordinary Albertans"[35] they seem to imply that part of the explanation of the success of Aberhart must rely on nonrational factors. Faith is not based wholly on reason. Whether it is the religious conviction described by Weber or the faith of the secular voter, Freud allows us to explain that which rationalist explanations cannot.

An exception to the exclusively rationalist approach, and in a sense allied with John Irving, is the work of David Laycock, who, in addition to using Cantril's terms "ego-involvement"[36] and "ego-enhancing"[37], relies heavily on Ernesto Laclau's conception of populism. "Laclau's approach gives sufficient recognition to the subjective dimensions of social and political conflict while recognizing the role of class forces in these conflicts".[38] Like Cantril, Laclau knows Freud, but unlike Cantril, he attempts to stay within a particular version of Freudianism defined by Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser.[39]

Lacan greatly influenced Althusser, who took his side against Anna Freud and the ego psychologists after Lacan was expelled from the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1953 for heresy. The overt disdain poured on Anna Freud's conception of the ego and its defence mechanisms by Lacan[40] and Althusser[41] has meant that, for certain influential schools of thought, sympathetic discussion or use of the ego defence mechanisms was and is discouraged. This has had profound intellectual ramifications, since post-modernism is in part based on Lacan and those influenced by his work.[42] While Lacan and post-modernists celebrate "the death of the subject", ego psychologists promote a program of self-consciousness to deal with psychic challenges. "Lacan's perverse attempt to stand it on its head notwithstanding, Freud's dictum that 'where id was, there shall ego become' is the motto for this

[33] Roger Eatwell, "Charisma and the Revival of the European Extreme Right," in *Movements of Exclusion: Radical Right-Wing Populism in the Western World*, ed. Jens Rydgren (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2005), 109.
[34] Trevor Harrison, "Populist and Conservative Christian Evangelical Movements: A Comparison of Canada and the United States," in *Group Politics and Social Movements in Canada*, ed. Miriam Catherine Smith (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 208.
[35] David Stewart and Keith Archer, *Quasi-Democracy? Parties and Leadership Selection in Alberta* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 13.
[36] David H. Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 217.
[37] Ibid., 218.
[38] Ibid., 16.
[39] Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2007).
[40] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).
[41] Althusser et al., *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*; Louis Althusser, *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).
[42] Alfred Tauber, *Requiem for the Ego: Freud and the Origins of Postmodernism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013).

Enlightenment program".[43]

Freud died in 1939, three years after the publication of The Ego and Its Defence Mechanisms by his youngest daughter and intellectual collaborator, Anna Freud. From at least 1923, Freud had recognized the importance of ego defence mechanisms as the ego's protections against overwhelming anxiety: "psychic life involved drives and defenses above all".[44] Despite the fact that this part of Anna Freud's work had the mature Freud's blessing, Lacan and Althusser disparage and satirize the work of ego psychology, which they see as advocating individual adjustment to an exploitative, conformist capitalist society by helping individuals understand their unconscious use of various ego defenses. For Lacanian post-modernists, a psychoanalytic "cure" for an individual in an oppressive, capitalist society is a "myth".[45] To Lacan, the focus should be on unconscious "desire" and not the priority of the ego. For this, followers of Lacanian psychoanalysis "have been the victims of relentless persecution … by a psychoanalytic establishment keen on reproducing its banalised version of Freudianism".[46]

Reliance on Ernesto Laclau by David Laycock and others leads away from the connection between belief systems and their resonance with ego defence mechanisms and therefore away from the use of the school of ego psychology to understand the appeal of ideologies. When Lacanians such as Laplanche and Pontalis do refer to defence mechanisms, they do so without accepting the concept of the ego used in ego psychology, separating the "ego" from the "I", as Octave Mannoni puts it. In this respect, despite their other formidable contributions, Laclau, Althusser and Lacan have created an intellectual barrier to progress since their academic followers cannot use, with theoretical consistency, the incompatible concepts of the ego defense mechanisms developed by the "psychoanalytic establishment," as in this paper.

The result of this situation in explanatory theory in the case at hand is that although Laycock[47] recognizes the importance of the emotion of 'anxiety', he has no conceptual framework for its complete understanding. He states that "Aberhart appealed to many relatively prosperous workers and middle-class people whose fortunes had declined precipitously with the Depression and who therefore were experiencing anxiety (my emphasis) about status, financial security, and the inability of 'average folk' to influence public life".[48] But in addition to anxiety about practical matters of reality, there was also moral and neurotic anxiety; Laclau did not provide Laycock with the conceptual tools for an understanding of the psychological effects of moral anxiety stemming from the superego or neurotic anxiety derived from the id. The content of the latter two forms of anxiety remains unconscious and enters consciousness only in a distorted form.[49] Even reality anxiety may be dealt with by the ego in a nonrational manner because "reality has subjective and intersubjective aspects and is pervasively influenced by unconscious fantasy".[50] What needs to be explained is how the three types of anxiety, by invoking the defense mechanisms of the ego, resulted in a belief in Social Credit and the promises of Aberhart. For this, we need a theory which explains the irrational and the

[43] Joel Whitebook, *Freud: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 392.
[44] Dagmar Herzog, *Cold War Freud: Psychoanalysis in an Age of Catastrophes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 192–93.
[45] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1981), 283.
[46] Yannis Stavrakakis, *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 24.
[47] Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945*.
[48] Ibid., 210–11.
[49] Sigmund Freud, *The Problem of Anxiety* (New York: The Psychoanalytic Quarterly Press and W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1936), 62.
[50] Joseph Fernando, *The Processes of Defense: Trauma, Drives, and Reality: A New Synthesis* (Lanham: Jason Aronson, 2009), 14.

unconscious, to complement existing scholarship.

While there has been major work in cognitive political psychology examining why people "are attracted to belief systems that resonate with their own psychological needs and interests",[51] my approach suggests that most of this resonance happens unconsciously when ego defenses have been invoked, especially in dire socio-economic circumstances. In addition to thinking that "...the identification of 'elective affinities' between cognitive-motivational processes and contents of specific belief systems is essential to the study of political psychology",[52] we need the identification of unconscious affinities between psychoanalytic processes and specific belief systems to explain the irrational in politics. "Psychoanalysis is important to political scientists ..." a former president of the Canadian Political Science Association once said.[53]

III. Psychological Processes Related to Ideological Mass Movements

Ideology has a definite relationship to personality and may fulfil expressive, adaptive, and/or defensive functions for persons attracted to it.[54] Indeed, individuals may be attracted to an ideology precisely because they require the fulfilment of certain psychological functions. Thus, the ideology which best fulfils the individual's psychological desires will appeal the most. When these desires change, the demands placed upon the ideology also change. An ideology which is unable to fulfil new psychological demands placed on it may be replaced by a new ideology better able to fulfil the required functions. The greater the emotional disturbance of the individual, the greater the probability of a need for a totalistic ideology which can be incorporated with the individual's personality.[55] If the psychological problems are large and dominate the individual's personality, then a more all-encompassing ideology may be necessary in order for individuals to maintain their equilibrium. Once accepted, a deep-seated ideology will not be rejected until it fails to fulfil the psychological functions demanded of it. The functions an ideology must fulfil are determined by the demands of the id, ego, and superego at the same time as perceptions and behaviour resulting from these demands are influenced by the accepted belief system.

According to Freudian theory, there exists a complex interdependence between the two topographical levels of the mind. The agencies of the id, ego and superego on the one hand, and the conscious, unconscious, and preconscious on the other, while existing in relative independence, nevertheless reciprocally influence each other. That which affects an agency of one level will also affect agencies of both levels.[56] A large external threat to the ego, such as that posed by the Depression, also affected the id and superego—the conscience—all of which in turn affected the ego's response. Freud termed such complexly motivated response as "overdetermination." As stated, Althusser uses the concept of overdetermination to explain the causality at work both in social formations and within the psyche, but not in a manner

[51] John T. Jost, "Ideological Asymmetries and the Essence of Political Psychology: Presidential Address," *Political Psychology* 38, no. 2 (2017): 167–208.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Fox, "Psychology, Politics, and Hegetology."
[54] Daniel Levinson, "Idea Systems in the Individual and in Society," in *Explorations in Social Change*, ed. Walter Hirsch and George K Zollschan (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1964), 299; see also Willy Baranger, "The Ego and the Function of Ideology," *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 39, no. 2–4 (1958): 191–95; and Harold D. Lasswell, "The Triple-Appeal Principle: A Contribution of Psychoanalysis to Political and Social Science," *American Journal of Sociology* 37, no. 4 (1932): 523–38.
[55] Kris Ernst and Nathan Leites, "Trends in Twentieth Century Propaganda," in *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences*, ed. G. Róheim, vol. 1 (New York: New York: International Universities Press, 1947).
[56] Octave Mannoni, *Freud: The Theory of the Unconscious* (London: New Left Books, 1971), 140.

compatible with ego psychology.

Any external threat too great for the rational capacity of the ego will create ego anxiety.[57] Ego anxiety derived from external threats may also be combined with anxiety derived from the id and superego. Id anxiety stems from the internal threat to the ego posed by strong id impulses which the ego finds difficult to control. Superego anxiety, or moral anxiety, is experienced by the ego due to the individual's guilt feelings, which result from an individual's actions or desires that are prohibited by his superego, or from failure to do that which is prescribed by the ego-ideal. Guilt causes moral anxiety, but can also heighten aggressive and/or self-destructive id impulses. The combination of ego, id and moral anxiety may cause an individual to experience psychic disequilibrium. The relative importance of one form of anxiety as opposed to another will depend upon the strength of the sources of the anxiety. Although the sources of anxiety may differ from case to case, the psychological reactions to them rely on the same mechanisms.

In order to protect itself against anxiety that can produce psychic pain, the ego, as "the mediator between the organism and the outer world",[58] invokes certain defense mechanisms against objectionable drives, feelings and external realities.[59] The function of anxiety is to operate "as a 'signal'[60] for warning purposes".[61] When received by the ego, this signal anxiety triggers the defense mechanisms. The greater the perceived external or internal threat, the greater the anxiety experienced by the ego, and therefore the greater the need for protective defense mechanisms. Empirical evidence supports the thesis that "the use of defences will increase under conditions of stress".[62] Of the many defense mechanisms which individuals employ, repression, projection, displacement, denial, rationalization and regression are particularly important for the understanding of ideological mass movements. Defense mechanisms come into play automatically and unconsciously, and are not within an individual's rational control, because they are not conscious coping strategies.[63] To ensure that this ego defense process remains unconscious, there are also defenses "that defend against a conscious awareness of defenses".[64] "The function of the defense mechanism is twofold: to protect the individual from excessive anxiety, and to protect the integration of the self".[65]

The defense mechanism of repression operates to submerge anxiety-producing impulses, desires, perceptions or memories in the unconscious or preconscious

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[57] Freud, *The Problem of Anxiety*; Franz L. Neumann, "Anxiety and Politics," in *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State: Essays in Political and Legal Theory* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1957).

[58] Otto Fenichel, *Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*, 50th Anniversary (New York: WW Norton & Co., 1945), 16.

[59] My discussion of defence mechanisms relies on Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*. (London: Karnac Books, 1936); Fenichel, *Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*; Cramer, *Protecting the Self: Defense Mechanisms in Action*; and Fernando, *The Processes of Defense*. I use the term ego psychology in a broad sense to refer to all the psychoanalysts that accept the unconscious use of ego defense mechanisms despite their other differences. Only some of the defence mechanisms are discussed in this paper. Others include splitting, distortion, isolation and reaction-formation. For empirical evidence supporting the existence and use of defence mechanisms of the ego see Phebe Cramer, "Defense Mechanisms: 40 Years of Empirical Research," *Journal of Personality Assessment* 97, no. 2 (March 4, 2015): 114–22. and Uwe Hentschel et al., *Defense Mechanisms* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2004).

[60] Freud, *The Problem of Anxiety*.

[61] Ernest Jones, "Fear, Guilt and Hate," *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 10 (1929): 392.

[62] Cramer, *Protecting the Self: Defense Mechanisms in Action*, 159.

[63] Ibid., 8.

[64] Fernando, *The Processes of Defense*, 71.

[65] Cramer, *Protecting the Self: Defense Mechanisms in Action*, 7.

of the affected individual.[66] A quantum of psychic energy, called a cathexis, which is associated with an anxiety-producing stimulus, will be opposed by a counter-cathexis in order to prevent it coming to consciousness.

As long as an anxiety-producing stimulus can be held behind the veil of the unconscious, then anxiety (which may be understood as fear) will not be consciously experienced, although other problems may result. The greater the strength of the anxiety-producing stimulus cathexis, the greater the need for a strong defensive counter-cathexis. Energy of the ego employed for defensive functions reduces the energy available for cognitive functions. The reduction of cognitive ability in persons forced to employ a large degree of energy in defense mechanisms is accompanied by an increase in emotional responsiveness. Political belief systems that appeal to the emotions but are full of logic contradictions are more easily accepted by persons whose unconscious defensive functions have arisen to protect the ego.

Any political ideology which speaks directly to the repressed unconscious is likely to overwhelm the defense mechanism of repression. If this ideology can provide relief from the anxiety-producing stimulus, then individuals will be motivated to accept it. If, for some reason, acceptance is resisted, then another defense mechanism will be employed by the ego to alleviate the anxiety experienced, because the defense of repression was overwhelmed. Ego defences may be invoked in combination.

A second defense mechanism available to protect the ego is projection, wherein the ego rids itself of anxiety-producing stimuli by attributing them to external objects comparatively unprotected by the superego. In projection, there is a substitution "for an internal instinctual danger an external perceptual one".[67] An external threat, real or perceived, which causes frustration will also heighten aggression and increase the strength of id impulses. The energy of the ego previously used to suppress id impulses is required for defense mechanisms to relieve the ego's frustration-produced anxiety. The defense mechanisms themselves may promote aggression by increasing the propensity for extreme emotional responses. Although, as Freud said, the id murders for trifles in imagination, the impetus to act on aggressive impulses activates the prohibitionary function of the individual's ego and superego. If an object at which an id impulse is directed is protected by the evaluation of the superego, then moral anxiety will result, unless the impulse can be kept in the unconscious. Continued external frustration thus weakens the ego forced to invoke defense mechanisms and increases pressure on the ego to relieve the aggressive instinct in a way that will not involve superego reprisal. For some individuals, the aggression that results from frustration will be turned inward. Such an individual "may react with emotions of guilt and remorse and tend to condemn himself as the blameworthy object" (Murray 1938:587). An individual experiencing impulses of aggression and/or self-deprecation may project these feelings onto another person who is then perceived as aggressive and hateful regardless of the reality of the situation: 'I hate myself' becomes 'he hates me therefore I hate him'. Projection is typically aimed at the perceived object of frustration, which may not be the actual cause of frustration, or at least not the only or main cause. Displacement can change the perception of reality so that there is a substitution for the actual object of frustration, while denial can result in the misperception of reality.

Political ideologies can manipulate a perceived object of frustration on the part of those to whom they are attempting to appeal because ideologies "imply

[66] The term 'unconscious' in my usage includes the concepts of both the unconscious and the preconscious. The term superego includes the concepts of both the superego which is the embodiment of paternal proscriptions, and the ego-ideal which is the embodiment of maternal prescriptions.
[67] Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence.*, 62.

distortion".[68] An ideology can structure the world "by the distribution of spotlights, shadows and darkness".[69] An ideology which morally justifies the projection of self-hate and aggression onto a particular object will appeal to the extent that two conditions are satisfied. First, individuals must be under sufficient pressure from anxiety-producing stimuli that projection is experienced as real relief. Second, the objects which the ideology condemns must be those which are not protected by the superego, since the condemnation by an individual of an object protected by his superego will evoke more guilt and moral anxiety.

The narrower the focus of projection, the greater the intensity of emotion that can be directed against the object of projection. The greater the emotional intensity of this psychological response, the greater the susceptibility of people to the emotional appeal of a political ideology. Even under conditions of psychological equilibrium, perception is largely governed by projection. When psychic disequilibrium occurs, the role of projection, influenced by ideological appeals, is accentuated.

Another ego defense mechanism, regression, occurs when a person suffering from anxiety returns to some earlier stage of psychological development as a means of anxiety avoidance. Regression accentuates the importance of parental figures whose predominance over the personality increases the further a person regresses. The dependence of the child on the parents is relived in the dominance of parental figures.

For individuals experiencing regression and negative projection, the relation of the image of the political leader to the parental figures, and of the political ideology to the superego and ego ideal, determines one part of its appeal. This results from the operation of the psychological mechanisms of identification and projection of idealizations.

In the process of identification, an external object is incorporated into the superego and ego-ideal and a cathexis attached to it. This is a process similar to that of falling in love. However, as Freud said in Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, in distinguishing love from the process of identification, "In the former case, the ego has enriched itself with the properties of the object . . . In the second case, it is impoverished, it has surrendered itself to the object; it has substituted the object for its most important constituent".[70] Identification is the main unconscious psychological process that Lacanians typically use to explain the appeal of populist leaders.[71]

Representation of a parental figure is only one reason why identification with a political leader may occur. Fritz Redl lists different types of identification based on love and hate, and id, ego, and superego functions.[72] Narcissistic identification may occur when an individual is able to perceive his own image in that of the political leader. "For the sake of those parts of the follower's narcissistic libido which have not been thrown into the leader image, that remain attached to the follower's own ego, the superman must still resemble the follower and appear as his enlargement".[73]

Once identification has occurred, then the activity of an individual on behalf

[68] Joseph Barnett, "On Ideology and the Psychodynamics of the Ideologue," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 1, no. 4 (1973): 384.
[69] Göran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (London: Verso Books, 1982).
[70] Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (New York: Bantam Books, 1960).
[71] See Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 54–55.
[72] Fritz Redl, "Group, Emotion and Leadership," *Psychiatry* V, no. 4 (1942): 575–85.
[73] T.W. Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," in *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences*, ed. G. Róheim, vol. 3 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1951), 290.

of the object of identification becomes a satisfying activity in itself. Just as effort expended on behalf of a loved object is intrinsically satisfying,[74] action on behalf of a political ideology with which there is close identification may provide satisfaction, especially where few other sources of satisfaction are offered by the external environment.

Apart from love, fear may also result in what Irvine Schiffer calls "subversion of the will." Fear can result in "a recoil that may produce a subversion of the will, sometimes in the form of a charismatic rescue operation that heightens the intensity of the idealizations that we unconsciously project onto an outside heroic agent".[75] Schiffer, troubled by what his insights into group psychology may mean for liberal democracy, worried "lest a romantically inclined public figure with a 'cause' emerge upon the public scene, there to incite the kind of barbaric and savage racial hatreds that marked some of the dark days of recent history".[76] President Trump fits the bill only too well.

A political ideology which facilitates identification and ideal projection must resonate with the ego ideals and superegos of those whom, as a result, it attracts. "By resonance we mean the engagement of feeling and thought by any organized ideology or social movement. The fit between the individual's own loosely organized ideas and feelings…and the more tightly organized ideology or social movement need not be a very close one to induce resonance".[77] For Freud, it is this type of identification that produces the charismatic effect.[78] It is more than charisma, however, that explains ideological conversion.

The literature on religious and political conversions suggests that conversion to a new ideology fulfils the needs of personality reorganization and of submission to authority. According to C.W. Christensen, the religious conversion experience traces the following pattern, which may also hold true for conversion to political ideologies:

1. There are predisposing factors of specific unconscious conflict, religious belief and adolescence.

2. There is a conscious conflict which is related to the unconscious conflict producing guilt, anxiety and depression.

3. An acute reaction is precipitated by intensification of the above through participation in a religious meeting.

4. There is a withdrawal from others with a sense of estrangement and often a feeling of unreality.

5. This is followed by a feeling of submission—of giving up or giving to.[79]

An examination of the extent to which conversion to Social Credit adheres to this pattern of experience follows.

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[74] Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 47.
[75] Irvine Schiffer, *Charisma: A Psychoanalytic Look at Mass Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 180.
[76] Ibid., 178.
[77] Silvan Tomkins, "The Psychology of Commitment," in *Affect, Cognition and Personality*, ed. Silvan Tomkins (New York: Springer Publishing, 1965), 169.
[78] See Lindholm, *Charisma*: chapter 5, especially page 60.
[79] Carl W. Christensen, "Religious Conversion," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 9, no. 3 (September 1, 1963): 210.

IV. The Rise of the Social Credit Party in Alberta

In attempting to explain the rise of the Social Credit movement, I present socio-economic, political, and ideological factors in terms of the psychological category that assigns them significance. The wide acceptance of Aberhart's motivating, mobilizing ideology depended on its resonance with his audience's defense mechanisms, engaged to protect their egos against reality and moral anxiety.

Sources of Reality Anxiety

The Depression of the 1930s struck the wheat economy of the prairies unexpectedly and with great force. The similarity of the social structures of the western provinces meant that sources of reality or ego anxiety for people in Alberta differed little from those in Saskatchewan, both primarily agricultural populations.

Wage labourers were affected differently by the Depression than were farmers or the merchant bourgeoisie.[80] Wage labourers faced unemployment and the threat of unemployment, increased competition for available jobs, restricted mobility, and salary cuts. Albertan teachers and civil servants had their salaries reduced. Young wage labourers were particularly hard hit because few new jobs were being created. The wage reductions of provincial employees were provocative for their insult as much as for their economic discomfiture. In the moral climate of the times, the threat of losing one's job was as much a threat to one's social status as to one's economic security.

Town merchants found themselves with customers whose buying power was much reduced and who therefore needed credit. Small-town merchants gave farmers credit when bankers would not, but the inability of many to repay threatened the merchants' financial stability.

The many economic problems affecting Albertan farmers during the Depression included reduced demand for agricultural goods and a decline in their prices. Increased tariffs resulted in the loss of the American market, while drought and grasshoppers resulted in the loss of the crops themselves. Farmers' much-reduced income was often not enough to cover costs of production, meaning that farmers had to live off their capital or off credit. Much of the capital invested in farms was often borrowed, and both principal and interest had to be repaid. Even if credit or further loans could be obtained, these only added to the immense burden of debt that most farmers had to carry. Farmers unable to pay interest charges, let alone the principal, faced the threat of expropriation—and many in fact were expropriated. As the Depression wore on, both debt and the threat of expropriation increased. Fear of losing their independent status through proletarianization and/or unemployment made many farmers increasingly desperate.

The debts were owed largely to eastern-controlled banking institutions, so foreclosures increased hostility to these banks and the loan companies.[81] As a result, "the dominant political issue was the clash of interest between a class of debtors who lived in the midst of economic ruin and a class of creditors, most of whom did not".[82]

Since the financial squeeze affected both town merchants and farmers, their common interests tended to overcome their previous antagonism. When the

[80] Martin Robin, *Canadian Provincial Politics: The Party Systems of the Ten Provinces* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972).
[81] Howard Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982), 123–24.
[82] James Mallory, *Social Credit and the Federal Power in Canada*, 5 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1954), 60.

UFA had first come to power it had been instrumental in setting up farm cooperatives to buy and sell agricultural products so that farmers would not be dependent on town merchants. The UFA had consciously excluded other members of the bourgeoisie from its political appeal, a decision which worked against it when the Depression threw the economic interests of farmers and merchants together. Social Credit ideology appealed to this common interest, providing Aberhart with a broader electoral base than that of the UFA.

Sources of Moral Anxiety

Moral anxiety results whenever an individual fails to adhere to the dictates of his superego or when frustration-induced aggression is turned inward. According to Freud, "every impulse of aggression which one omits to gratify is taken over by the superego and goes to heighten its aggressiveness (against the ego)".[83] Whether aggression is turned inward or outward may depend as much on superego factors as upon character types. The lack of violence or aggression in Canada and Britain compared to the United States indicates that cultural patterns may determine whether frustration leads to violence or moral anxiety. The comparative lack of violence in Canada and Britain might be explained by the organic component in the ideology derived from Whig or Tory influences.[84] This ethical ideological component, while preventing violence, could increase the importance of moral anxiety in a frustration-inducing situation such as that of the Depression.

The ideological superstructure in Alberta had as an organic component, in the sense used by Gad Horowitz, Calvinist, Puritanical and fundamentalist ideas, so that, secular or religious, these moral factors were at work on the province's citizens. Calvinism would tend to direct aggression inward by placing the blame for failure and frustration on the individual. Since an individual experiences moral anxiety when his action is at variance with the directions given by his superego, Calvinist-influenced superegos were a double source of moral anxiety during the Depression. Calvinism condemned those who could not find work or who could not succeed in the work they had. Those whose superego contained Calvinist influence would be more likely to blame themselves for their failure. "Thousands of people were suffering from deep seated feelings of guilt or personal inadequacy for being unemployed or on relief".[85]

A second source of guilt derived from failing to adhere to the dictates of the superego, again resulting from the significance of religion in Alberta. In the latter 1920s, rural Albertans had drifted away from the established churches, which found a large gap between themselves and their rural congregations. Added to the class, status, and educational differences of the eastern-trained clergy was their enthusiastic espousal of modern theology.[86] Uneducated country people found what might be called 'the metaphorical interpretation' of the Bible rather bewildering, especially when pronounced by ministers with whom they had no cultural affinity. Modern theology and a lack of interest in rural parishes on the part of the established churches contributed to declining church attendance in the years immediately prior to the Depression.

For those with a religious imagination, the privations of the Depression symbolized God's punishment of his wayward followers. The burden of debt was the external manifestation of a sinful soul. God required atonement for the high living of the Roaring Twenties and for falling away from the church.

The stronger the significance of religion in the superegos of Albertans, the

[83] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (London: Hogarth Press, 1949), 114.
[84] Horowitz, *Canadian Labour in Politics*.
[85] John Irving, "The Appeal of Social Credit," *Queen's Quarterly*, January 1, 1953, 152.
[86] Jean Burnet, *Next-Year Country: A Study of Rural Social Organization in Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), 144.

greater the potential for guilt reactions if people could not live up to religious dictates, whether or not they had drifted away from the churches. An indication of the strength of the religious superego in Albertans is provided by the strong attraction for fundamentalist sects that preached a literal version of the Bible.

Fundamentalist doctrine emphasized precisely those aspects of Protestant Christianity that modern theology no longer held important. "Fundamentalist sects launched bitter and at times violent attacks upon modernism" which "shifted the emphasis from personal salvation and a conversion experience to social problems…it weakened belief in human sinfulness and it denied the literal infallibility of the Bible and ridiculed fundamentalist biblical prophecy".[87]

The fundamentalist religious message of Aberhart may be summarized as follows:

- All men are sinners and are guilty of disobedience to God. They have no power of themselves to overcome sin.
- They are saved through faith in the substitutionary death of Christ. This death wipes out the guilt.
- Through the resurrection of Christ there is assurance of everlasting life.
- Faith in Christ comes as an experience of conversion which is a dramatic self-surrender to God. Conversion gives assurance of salvation.[88]

This religious message has structural similarities to the political message of Social Credit as espoused by Aberhart:

- All men have failed to overcome the problems of the Depression which derive from power beyond our control. Individuals by themselves have no power to overcome these problems.
- These problems can be solved through faith in the Social Credit message. This faith will allow Social Credit to dispel the 'illusion' of the Depression.
- Through the election of a Social Credit government, prosperity will be restored.
- Faith in Social Credit is accompanied by a dramatic conversion to the Social Credit philosophy (which Aberhart considered a 'style of life' more than simply a set of principles). Conversion gives assurance that one's problems will be solved.

Aberhart merged his dogmatic version of Social Credit with the "tone, language and tenor" of his evangelical religion, conveying his new-found political ideas through "religious imagery".[89]

According to the psychological framework developed above, the following

[87] William Mann, *Sect, Cult, and Church in Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955), 53.
[88] Ibid., 54.
[89] Paul A. Taggart, *Populism* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000), 71.

parallels can be understood:

- People experience anxiety they may interpret as "sin" if they are religious, or wrongdoing if they are not. Reality and moral anxiety increase as people find themselves without the power to solve their problems.

- People accept fundamentalism or Social Credit because it relieves them of anxiety. Once accepted, people can better resist the sources of anxiety.

- Both ideologies 'reassure' people by restoring their psychological equilibrium.

- Acceptance of Aberhart's ideology is accompanied by a psychologically intense conversion experience.

Given this unique merger of the religious and the political, we examine the reasons Aberhart's Social Credit ideology touched the psychological needs of the people with the effect of relieving anxiety. This merger of ideas captured the interest of religious and secular individuals on the psychological level and appealed to members of a wide variety of Christian denominations, not solely fundamentalist sects.[90] While it has been argued that Aberhart's electoral success had some religious foundation but owed more to promised material benefits,[91] why did so many have faith that Aberhart would provide?

It was more than faith that encouraged acceptance of the propounded belief system.

V. The Defense Mechanisms of Repression, Projection, Denial and Displacement

The sources of reality and moral anxiety were sufficient to bring the defense mechanisms described into play as protection for the ego. Aberhart's simplified interpretation of the Social Credit notions of Liverpool's Major C.H. Douglas appealed to people burdened by ego defenses.

The Douglas doctrine "was reduced to a few stereotypes of high emotional and low intellectual content, suitable for proselytizing. …The cultural heritage, 'A plus B', the unearned increment, the basic dividend, and the just price became the dogmas with which converts were made".[92]

Other than the general idea that the nature of the financial system always left consumers with insufficient purchasing power and that the state must intervene to right this injustice, most Albertans did not know what a Social Credit system would look like once in power. Aberhart told the people that if they had faith in him, he would have experts come up with monetary reforms that would solve the riddle of "poverty in the midst of plenty." Many Albertans thought they would really receive a 'basic dividend' of $25 per month if Aberhart came to power.

If the people most susceptible to persuasion were not sure of the esoterica of the Social Credit doctrine, they were absolutely sure of some things about Aberhart. They were sure that 'this man of God' was for Christ, for private property, for monetary reform, and for them, despite what the many critics might say. They were also sure that Aberhart was against the financiers, against the UFA, and against the devil in all his forms.

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[90] David Raymond Elliott and Iris Miller, *Bible Bill: A Biography of William Aberhart* (Edmonton, Alta., Canada: Reidmore Books, 1987), 177–78.
[91] Banack, *God's Province*, 104.
[92] Macpherson, *Democracy in Alberta Social Credit and the Party System*, 149.

"Aberhart was extremely sensitive to criticism, responding with ridicule to his critics, often using vituperative language. He labelled those critics as crooks, scheming politicians, insincere office seekers, and the like. He branded one person, whom he did not name, as being guilty not only of fornication, but also of grafting and hypocrisy. He described the arguments of his opponents as the ravings of henchmen serving high finance. He compared these men to those who had betrayed Christ".[93]

In the fanaticism of Aberhart's dogmatic worldview, there were few subtle distinctions: the world was either black or white. If you had faith in him you were on the side of the angels, but if you were on the far side your sins could never be forgiven. As had John Calvin himself, Aberhart constructed an indisputable conception of the world.[94] As Calvin had merged theology and politics in his dominance of 16th-century Geneva, so Aberhart combined his own version of religious and political ideas to dominate the thinking of the majority of Alberta voters, religious or not.

Aberhart claimed that men had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and they would surely burn in Hell if they did not confess their sins and accept Jesus Christ as their saviour. For persons attempting to repress moral anxiety, this doctrine had a telling effect, because such people did feel as if they had sinned. Their burden of debt weighed upon their consciences. By releasing the repressed feeling of guilt and accepting Christ, people could experience freedom from the pressure of moral anxiety. By releasing their repressed guilt feelings and accepting Social Credit, they could have the same experience.

In his fundamentalist radio sermons, listened to by thousands of people, Aberhart directly attacked the ego defense of repression by openly expressing usually repressed unconscious thoughts. Irving quotes an Alberta farmer who recorded the effects of Aberhart's radio broadcasts:

> The paradox of 'poverty in the midst of plenty' was unfolded to them and tears would come into the eyes of some as they realized that here was a man who understood they were not dishonest because they were not paying their debts or their taxes.[95]

Aberhart could evoke tears in hardened farmers because he spoke to the repressed unconscious of their superegos. Tears are often an indication of repressed thoughts breaking through defenses into consciousness.

When the defense of repression was not sufficient for protection of the ego against anxiety, the defense mechanism of projection could be employed. Aberhart facilitated the use of the ego defense of projection by focusing aggression upon the monetary system as opposed to the capitalist system as a whole. The capitalist system had much greater protection from the superego of Albertans than did its monetary aspect alone. By accepting most elements of the capitalist system, Social Credit ideology allowed individuals to attack one part of it with psychological impunity.

That the monetary system was poorly protected by the superego of Albertans can be discerned from previous attacks upon it. The American supporters of both William Jennings Bryan and the American populist movement had been influenced by attacks on the monetary system in the United States.[96] The large number of Americans who moved to Alberta, about eight per cent of the province's population, brought this 'prejudice' against the monetary system

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[93] Timothy C. Byrne, *Alberta's Revolutionary Leaders* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1991), 107–8.
[94] Manuela Utrilla Robles, *Fanaticism in Psychoanalysis: Upheavals in the Institutions.* (London: Karnac Books, 2013), 41.
[95] Irving, *The Social Credit Movement in Alberta*, 239.
[96] Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 1978), 6.

with them. Influence by American populist movements was thus an ideological factor that affected the perceived interest of those to whom Social Credit appealed.

Another element of prejudice was anti-Semitism associated with Social Credit rhetorical attacks on the alleged conspiracy of international bankers that included the Bank of Canada.[97] This particular type of accusatory vilification was peculiar to Social Credit and, significantly, not part of the thinking of the UFA.[98] Being made to feel that powerful outside forces were persecuting people to get what they wanted could only have increased anger at the purported perpetrators. That Albertans in 1935 were the victims of an international financial conspiracy was part of Social Credit ideology and something that Aberhart really believed, even if he was "ambiguous," as Stingel put it,[99] on the conspiratorial anti-Semitism that Major Douglas made explicit. In his first campaign speech, Aberhart compared Alberta "to a deep-sea diver struggling for life in the tentacles of the money octopus".[100] To his audience, in his own words: "We still have one hand free with which to strike – to mark our ballot on election day. Let us strike then, with all our might at this hideous monster that is sucking the very blood from our people!".[101] Having amplified the perceived threat, Aberhart offered his Social Credit belief system as the people's political saviour against this malevolent, persecutory, financial "monster."

From a psychoanalytic perspective, what is most important is the perception and reception of the political message on the part of the audience. If Aberhart's conspiratorial message was ambiguous on who was supposedly behind the financial machinations, there was much less ambiguity or ambivalence among Social Credit supporters. An ideology's offered object of hate works best as an object of projection of negative affect if its reputation is successfully tarnished so that its superego protection is reduced or eliminated. Given the prejudices of the time, audience perception of an implicit addition of this ethnic component to the purported financial conspiracy against Albertans would facilitate the projection of hate without superego retaliation against the ego. This dynamic would operate regardless of Aberhart's actual intentions.

While most of Aberhart's opposition pointed to the Social Credit offer of a basic dividend of $25 a month as the main reason for his voter support, Irving found that many wanted reform of the monetary system rather than "handouts" or a just price for their goods.[102] From the banks, farmers wanted more credit, lower interest rates, longer loan periods and fair foreclosure proceedings,[103] all of which were considered insufficient in the 1930s. The unreformed monetary system was the problem and not just for farmers. However, Aberhart carefully framed the Depression's difficulties so that they appeared "accentuated [my emphasis] in Alberta by the machinations of bankers and financiers, the 'Fifty Big Shots' who controlled financial credit".[104]

Ideas of reforming the financial system had prevailed among one section of the UFA but were never championed as vociferously as by Aberhart.[105] However,

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[97] Janine Stingel, *Social Discredit: Anti-Semitism, Social Credit, and the Jewish Response* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 4.
[98] Ibid., 11.
[99] Ibid., 21.
[100] L.P.V. Johnson and Ola MacNutt, *Aberhart of Alberta* (Edmonton, Alberta: Institute of Applied Art, 1970), 132.
[101] Quoted in Johnson and MacNutt, *Aberhart of Alberta*.
[102] Irving, *The Social Credit Movement in Alberta*, 233.
[103] T.D. Regehr, "Bankers and Farmers in Western Canada, 1900-1939," in *The Developing West: Essays on Canadian History in Honor of Lewis H. Thomas*, ed. L.H. Thomas and J.E. Foster (University of Alberta Press, 1983), 306.
[104] Irving, *The Social Credit Movement in Alberta*, 233.
[105] Paul Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada: A Survey Showing American Parallels* (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), 114.

some UFA supporters felt that by having discussed monetary reform in their critique of capitalism they had opened the door to Social Credit. "We often said later that we sharpened the axe that cut off our own head".[106] Despite this sentiment, it was still the case that the United Farmers did not allow all negative affect to be directed against the monetary system alone, since, as David Laycock has noted, they saw their interests opposed to commercial capital as well as to finance capital—to the merchants as well as the bankers.[107] Given this difference, the organizational takeover by Social Credit of many UFA locals discussed by Mildred Schwartz as a type of informal merger,[108] also entailed a shift in ideological perspective and a narrowing of focus.

While it is true that Social Credit stood for more than "a reform of the financial system",[109] it is also true that Social Credit channelled negative affect at precisely this target. However, the banks were not Aberhart's only target.

After Aberhart had offered his program of Social Credit reform to the UFA convention and been refused by CCF-influenced delegates, he broke with them completely. After January 1935, Aberhart facilitated the swift transformation of the United Farmers of Alberta and its leadership into negative objects of projection through heated attacks upon both. The inability of the UFA to deal with the Depression was interpreted as an unwillingness to act. This allowed the UFA to become another perceived object of frustration.

From an object of frustration, Aberhart framed the UFA as an object of hate with the help of two very public sexual scandals. First, Premier Brownlee of the UFA was forced to resign when a jury found him guilty of seducing an 18-year-old stenographer whom he had befriended. Then UFA cabinet minister O.L. Macpherson lost his position as the result of a sensational divorce case.[110] Seduction of the innocent stimulated the repressed sexual urges of religious Albertans, whose repressed guilt feelings, to which sexual urges contributed, were projected onto the UFA. These sexual scandals weakened the superego protection of the UFA as a whole, allowing morally unobstructed negative affect to be directed at it by individuals projecting hate encouraged by Aberhart. Although the UFA was not the enemy of the citizens of Alberta, displacement, denial and projection facilitated by Social Credit rhetoric helped turn the UFA into a perceived enemy of the people.

The court case in which UFA Premier Brownlee unsuccessfully tried to defend himself against the salacious charge of seduction had consumed and divided the province. Brownlee's all-out attack on Social Credit only served to justify Aberhart's condemnation. The UFA government had sinned sexually. Furthermore, growth of the public debt while it was in office was more evidence of its sin. In the war of perceptions, it mattered little that all governments in Canada were in debt.

Aberhart found fertile ground for whipping up righteous indignation against the UFA, and the fact that one of their most effective leaders, Henry Wise Wood, had retired as president in 1931 left the UFA without a leader to match him. While the UFA organization had its own Christian preachers, none could rival the drama and power of Aberhart's radio or in-person performances.[111]

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[106] Quoted in Olenka Melnyk, "Dreaming a New Jerusalem in the Land of Social Credit: The Struggles of the CCF in Alberta," ed. Larry Pratt, *Essays in Honour of Grant Notley: Socialism and Democracy in Alberta*, 1986, 43.
[107] Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945*.
[108] Mildred A. Schwartz, "Continuity Strategies among Political Challengers: The Case of Social Credit," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 30, no. 4 (2000): 455–77.
[109] Edward A. Bell, "Prairie Politics: Why 'Right' in Alberta but 'Left' in Saskatchewan?," in *Political Sociology: Canadian Perspectives*, ed. Douglas Edward Baer (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2002), 207.
[110] Harold J. Schultz, "Portrait of a Premier: William Aberhart," *Canadian Historical Review* 45, no. 3 (September 1964): 108.
[111] Day, "William Aberhart."

Aberhart was especially effective in his use of the "hot medium" of radio to catch and hold the ear of the listener with his arsenal of rhetorical weapons. Aberhart appeared to admire and emulate Father Charles Coughlin, an American priest "who had built up a huge radio following with a combination of Christianity, economic reform, and denunciations of Jewish bankers during the early 1930s".[112]

Evidence that something more than a rational rejection of or a simple disillusionment with the UFA occurred during the election campaign can be discerned from the reaction of the people. In many cases, UFA speakers could not attract an audience, or if they did, were so loudly heckled they could not be heard. Meetings became impossible if the UFA criticized Aberhart, who had been idealized by his followers. The intense bitterness of the election campaign was remarked upon by a number of commentators. "In the town and cities, the people, exhilarated by the decay of the hated [my emphasis] farmers' organization, rushed en masse into the new movement".[113] One example illustrates the depth of this bitterness and antagonism. In southern Alberta, rival supporters of the UFA and Social Credit who attended the same church sat on opposite sides of the building, refusing to speak to each other before or after hearing their Christian homily.[114] No tolerance can be extended to the hated object of projection when intense guilt feelings are involved. The jury's verdict of "guilty" against Premier Brownlee created fertile ground for the emotional appeals of "Bible Bill," the accuser, and is of particular importance in understanding the demise of the UFA and conversion to Social Credit.

For Freud, the "forces of hatred" are central to what Leon Salzman terms a regressive or psychopathological conversion process, offering an individual "defensive solutions" using ego defences. Aberhart's explicit damnation of his 'evil' political opponents allowed the effective channelling of hate in the process of conversion to his Social Credit belief system. The intentional fostering of a hostile atmosphere "can mobilize the hate, resentment and unconscious destructive feelings of the person involved".[115] For Aberhart, the Depression's "financial problems and his own political opposition were inspired by the devil".[116] As reported in the Calgary Herald in February 1934, he said what he believed: "I am going to fight the Devil".[117] Aberhart, the messianic political prophet, encouraged his followers to hate as if those speaking against him were doing the devil's work: a literal demonization of the opposition.

VI. Regression and Identification

To the extent that anxiety brought on the ego defense of regression, Albertans were brought under the increased influence of parental figures; Aberhart increased his influence over regressed Albertans to the extent that he was perceived to represent a parent. The association of Aberhart with individual father figures was made easier because of the congruence of his ideology with the values of actual fathers as recorded in the superego.[118] Aberhart's "Back to the Bible" message reasserted the primacy of the older religious values and reactionary views of the father as opposed to the new modernist theology that could find little superego support. Aberhart's uncompromising, evangelical message was certainly reminiscent of older patriarchal authority.

According to a church historian, "many people on the prairies had been

[112] Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 157.
[113] Irving, *The Social Credit Movement in Alberta*, 109.
[114] Ibid., 287.
[115] Leon Salzman, "The Psychology of Religious and Ideological Conversion," *Psychiatry* 16, no. 2 (1953): 177–87.
[116] David R. Elliott, "The Devil and William Aberhart: The Nature and Function of His Eschatology," *Studies in Religion* 9, no. 3 (September 1980): 325–37.
[117] Quoted ibid.
[118] Burnet, *Next-Year Country*, 145.

disturbed by modernist preaching and were hungering for the kind of infallible Bible that Aberhart was proclaiming".[119] In psychoanalytic terms, many people looked to the security of parental authority because of their regressed condition. Submission to the father in the form of Aberhart provided relief from moral anxiety.

The success of Social Credit in Alberta was thus due in part to Aberhart's redirection into politics the religious enthusiasm that he had stirred up through the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute and his radio broadcasts. The expectation of religious salvation through a belief in the Bible was transmuted into a hope for economic rehabilitation using the (in)famous A + B Theorem.[120] Attendance at a fundamentalist church was not even required for the offered political salvation to appeal to the majority of Albertan voters. But at work was something other than a rational calculation of self-interest: the ego defense of regression helped to foster identification with William Aberhart, the charismatic leader.

T.C. Byrne, who became the founding president of Athabasca University in Northern Alberta, captures the emotion of the people in Aberhart's summer crusade in the passage below.

The election of 1935 generated the most bitter campaign in the history of Canadian politics. This was, in part, due to the polemical nature of Aberhart's radio addresses. It might also be explained by his transformation of a political battle into a type of religious warfare. It could be attributed, as well, to the despair of a people who, longing for a savior and having found him, became hostile toward anyone or anything that might prevent his accession to power.[121]

In psychoanalytic terms, many voters in Alberta's summer of 1935 were caught up in a social movement with elements of mass hysteria, fanned by the vehemence of Aberhart's fire and brimstone rhetoric, broadcast over the radio, spread in his literature and propounded in animated public meetings.

VII. Conclusion

This paper illustrates how a political belief system that facilitates the use of ego defence mechanisms when they are most needed has a compelling unconscious and irrational appeal. Without understanding the psychological processes involved, political leaders can attract followers with belief systems that resonate with the unconscious needs of the individual. Like Aberhart, leaders presenting a studied dramatic performance can be especially effective in appealing to unconscious emotions.

The conversion of a majority of Alberta's voters to Aberhart's version of the Social Credit doctrine resulted from a convergence of rational and irrational motives. Aberhart, a dogmatic, intolerant demagogue, needed the stresses of the Depression for his political views to gain wide popularity, as his charisma was mainly a function of projection and identification. Certain people were susceptible to the inducements of Social Credit ideology because it played both defensive and expedient ego functions. It was consciously chosen as the promised way out of the economic problems of the Depression; it was unconsciously attractive because of its fit with ego defense mechanisms automatically engaged to deal with various forms of anxiety threatening to overwhelm individuals in difficult circumstances.

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[119] Henry Horace Walsh, *The Christian Church in Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1956), 319.
[120] Walter D. Young, *Democracy and Discontent: Progressivism, Socialism and Social Credit in the Canadian West*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978), 84.
[121] Byrne, *Alberta's Revolutionary Leaders*, 107.

Conversion to the Social Credit ideology justified the projection of aggressive impulses built up over years of frustration onto 'appropriate' objects of hate: the Eastern bankers and the UFA. The successful encouragement of this projection also relieved Albertans of moral anxiety. It fulfilled the conditions of the superego by resonance of the explicit ideology with extant elements of the superego. For many individuals with these psychological vulnerabilities experiencing the economic and social stresses of the Depression, the appeal of Aberhart was irresistible.

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