

The Effects of Partisan Political Stripe on Provincial Labour Policy Orientation in Canada

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

This paper aims to answer the question of how partisan political stripe affects provincial labour policy. It does so by examining labour policy legislation passed from 1997 to 2024 in British Columbia and Saskatchewan. These cases were chosen on the basis of differences in the partisan stripe of their governing parties both across the two cases and over time within each. Over the period of study, British Columbia transitioned from right-wing governments with labour-negative policy to left-wing governments with labour-positive policy. Saskatchewan instead began with left-wing governments with labour-positive policy, while right-wing governments with labour-negative policy followed.

If parties adhere to different ideological orientations regarding labour policy, one should expect differences in labour policy orientation under governments of different partisan political stripes. If these policy differences are significant, they should manifest themselves in differences in unionization rates. However, as provincial governments are both regulators of collective union bargaining and employers themselves, it seems crucial to examine their behaviour in both roles and to consider unionization rates in both the public and private sectors.

Unionization rates in each province, as an indicator of labour power, have varied in the public sector, but consistently decreased in the private sector, providing an example of the effects of change in labour policy orientation. These patterns can be connected to those of government party. However, the conclusion speculates that this effect is limited in the private sector realm given similarities in the patterns of private sector unionization rates in both provinces over time which might be explained by the adherence of both left- and right-wing provincial governments in their roles as labour policymakers to neoliberal economic principles following a belief in the

efficacy of the free market which is distinctive from their behaviour in their roles as public sector employers where partisan political stripe does seem to correspond to distinctive policy approaches.

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Introduction

Establishing and upkeeping labour policy is one of a government's core responsibilities, one which is especially integral in a society driven by the markets. In theory, the ability of labour to organize and advocate for itself is an important democratic right in a market-based society, allowing workers to negotiate with employers as a participant in the market. Therefore, responsibility lies with the government to protect the right to strike and its efficacy (while also balancing that right with other interests, such as the ability of citizens to access necessary services like healthcare). When it comes to the private sector, with neoliberalism as a primary ideological influence, government policy has clearly tended towards deregulation and reduced striking power. However, in the public sector, where the government itself is the employer, complexities emerge. The government becomes both a party and the arbitrator in any public labour negotiation, entrusted with the responsibility of making decisions that best benefit citizens. How do different governments address that responsibility, given variation in their partisan political stripe (i.e., what do they believe is most important?), and does this have a significant impact on public or private sector policy?

This paper will be taking the position that it is crucial for governments to support organized labour (and labour as a whole) to ensure the proper functioning of democracy. Beyond the necessity of labour negotiating its position, one of the base functions of government is to care for its citizens. This is almost especially so in a democracy, where citizens elect leaders in agreement with what they believe is their best interest. According to social contract theory, broadly, citizens enter into such a contract with the government (that of "society") because it

provides benefits not to be found in the state of nature. Given the state of the neoliberal, capitalist market society present in Canada, where the majority of the people are not owners of large corporations, it stands to reason that policy should be developed in a way that benefits workers, at least providing safe working conditions, adequate compensation, and the ability to negotiate rather than be dominated. Therefore, this paper considers “labour-positive” policy to be a measure of success. Of course, there is room for a reasonable balance between labour and business rights—many Canadians also own small businesses, and their rights should be considered. However, some degree of labour-positivity is necessary to ensure workers’ rights and labour’s ability to assert them.

In Canada, given the country’s federalist political structure, labour policy is not only a responsibility of the federal government, but also of the provinces. Federalism theoretically encourages the provinces to compete, developing policies with differing approaches and end states. However, we may also see policy convergence, especially with similar influences on government function across the country (for example, the presence of capital). What can we learn, then, by putting the provinces in comparison with one another and examining which governments are associated with which patterns over time? Does partisan political stripe play a role in the sort of labour policy we see provincially?

In this paper, two provinces will be studied: British Columbia and Saskatchewan. Labour policy over the period of 1997 to 2024 will be examined in connection to different periods of partisan leadership in each province. Each period of leadership will then be given a partisan label and a labour policy orientation label for clarity in analysis. These provinces experienced different patterns of partisan leadership over time, so if the hypothesis holds, then we should expect to see differences in patterns of labour policy orientation over time between the two provinces. We may

also gain insight into which types of partisan provincial governments tend to select which approaches to labour policy.

The key element of labour policy that I wish to focus on is whether different partisan governments actually choose to address, regulate, or protect the role of organized labour in the Canadian economy in different ways. In this paper, rates of unionization will be used as a point of reference for the power of labour in a province, as they represent the ability of labour to properly negotiate its own position (if more workers are unionized, it becomes easier to bargain). If shifts in labour policy orientation are significant, we should therefore expect to see them reflected in rates of unionization. Low rates of unionization can mean that negotiation does not even occur in many sectors, employees engaging in the market far more often almost solely on the terms of the employer. High rates of unionization do not ensure a healthy working culture for employees in a location, but suggest that workers generally have some leverage over their employer and some say in their working conditions, rather than the employer exclusively having leverage over the employee.

Examining how partisan political stripe affects labour policy should give us insight into whether certain partisan governments are more labour-positive or -negative, and therefore which might be preferred by workers seeking a healthy provincial labour culture. Evaluating provinces both within Canada and across time permits us to examine cases that are similar, but which follow different trajectories, allowing space for comparison.

Chapter 1: Organizing Theories of Political Economy

To better understand and analyze patterns within the political economies of each province, it will be beneficial to examine theories of political economy. These theories may provide us with insight into why we observe certain trends in certain contexts. Furthermore, partisan political stripe can often be tied to theoretical perspectives which influence action. The primary theory studied within this paper is that of neoliberalism, which is majorly influential in Canadian contexts. This section argues for the relevance of neoliberalism while studying provincial labour policy, and provides a method of categorization for governments assessed within the paper. It also asserts the value of unionization data for studying labour policy orientation.

Neoliberalism in the Political Economy

Canada's political economy has undergone a number of transformative changes within the preceding decades, most notably the shift from a Keynesian state with moderate government intervention and a strong social safety net to a neoliberal state with (in theory) a more hands-off governing of the economy and a reduction in welfare funding. As a result, a study of the past twenty-five years will have the backdrop of dominant neoliberalism and necessitate a definition for its purposes. What is neoliberalism, particularly in the Canadian context?

Colin Hay provides a strong definition of the phenomenon with a number of criteria. At its core, he argues, neoliberalism is a "liberalism" in that it provides "advocacy for liberty" generally, and "neo-" in its advocacy for the free market "as a means to attain, guarantee, or

better achieve liberty”.¹ Hay’s definition is as follows: first, “a confidence in the market as an efficient mechanism for the allocation of scarce resources, allied to a normative conviction that this efficient allocation is also just if, and to the extent to which, it is efficient”, second, “an associated belief in the desirability of a global regime of free trade and free capital mobility (on the basis that if the market is a good, then the market should be expanded in terms of its scope and scale as much as is possible)”, and finally, “an, again, associated belief in the desirability of a limited role for the state as a facilitator and custodian—rather than as a substitute for—market mechanisms”.² A neoliberal state, then, develops policies that support these ideological principles: for example, it decreases public spending in the belief that private spending will appropriately supplement it (both in quantity and in purpose), expands its markets globally and engages in trade with other states, and relies upon market distribution for resource allocation rather than utilizing social services to regulate it.

In the Canadian context, provinces have significant policymaking autonomy, which is significant to the study. The Canadian state has adopted a neoliberal approach to political economy, and this is relevant to the operation of the provinces, but each may choose, to a degree, the extent to which they implement neoliberal policy within their jurisdiction. One complication is that provinces compete for power within broader Canadian politics, meaning that each faces pressure to adopt neoliberal policies in order to become economically competitive, a crucial end state of neoliberal ideology.³ The federal government’s transition to neoliberal policies such as the expansion of free trade (NAFTA/CUSMA) and extensive privatisation has not only shifted the landscape of policy norms, but also affected party politics—examples set by prime ministers

¹ Colin Hay, “Brexit and the (Multiple) Paradoxes of Neoliberalism”, *Destabilizing Orders*, accessed June 5, 2025, pp. 15, <https://sase.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/1-Hay-15-21.pdf>.

² Ibid.

³ Bryan M. Evans and Charles W. Smith, *Transforming Provincial Politics: The Political Economy of Canada’s Provinces and Territories in the Neoliberal Era*, University of Toronto Press, 2014, pp. 3-4.

such as Jean Chretien and Paul Martin have entrenched neoliberalism within the Liberal party with perhaps the most dramatic transformation, though the Conservative party and others have also experienced significant change.⁴ These shifted norms and agendas have impacted the provinces in Canada's interconnected and cooperative political system as they 'trickle down' and transform policymaking environments. Neoliberal norms have also changed what voters look for in elected officials: there is increased emphasis on 'balanced budgets', reductions in public spending rather than reallocations, and the need for Canada to engage in economic partnerships with other nations. Other issues such as labour rights and functioning welfare systems have been subsequently de-emphasized with the prevalent belief that the free market will determine what is most economically viable or profitable, and that which is most economically viable or profitable is preferable, functional, and efficient.

Through the frame of neoliberalism, we gain a greater understanding of the government in its role as a regulator. Neoliberalism as an ideology severely de-emphasizes this part of government functioning, making the argument that the free market will become the regulator of labour activity in the absence of another. Therefore, we might expect to see decreasing action from the government in its role as the regulator of the economy if its leading parties subscribe to neoliberal beliefs. Labour policy, especially in the private sector, should decrease in impact, especially with regard to worker protections, environmental regulations, and other restrictions. A belief in the supremacy of the markets, when informing policy, means removing as many barriers as possible to its unrestricted function, eliminating both 'supportive' (benefits) and 'restrictive' legislation (regulations). This deregulation is associated with all parties, but may not be equally so. Neoliberalism certainly has an impact on provincial labour policy, but how? Knowing that it

⁴ Ibid.

is an ideological constant between parties, neoliberalism could be used to explain some similarities in the cases, especially deregulatory patterns.

When discussing ‘labour policy’ in this paper, the term refers to the collection of legislative action that a government takes regarding work and workers. This includes the regulation of unionized labour, compensation paid to workers for a variety of reasons, and standards placed upon employers or certifying bodies. However, it also refers to action taken regarding socially reproductive labour, meaning that legislation surrounding the home and private sphere may still be applicable. Such legislation will be considered labour policy where it has express economic intent or where it has a direct effect on labour markets, which will be explained on a case-by-case basis.

Given connecting lines between federal and provincial parties, we should expect to see some level of influence and similarity between them. At the federal level, the party most associated with ‘labour-positive’ policy action (a term to be explored in greater detail further) is the NDP, who has historically supported trade unions and other forms of organized labour.⁵ Financial contributions from unions to political parties, which were permitted until the passing of the *Canada Elections Act* in 2000, were largely provided to the New Democrats, emblematic of an alliance that extended to policymaking.⁶ Authors Jansen and Young suggest that this alliance was more than a financial relationship, instead a “shared ideological commitment” that could persist beyond the cessation of these financial contributions.⁷ Their conclusion that this ban “weakens, but does not mute, the influence of labour within the New Democratic party” has held true in following decades: the NDP typically expresses increased concern for labour issues

⁵ Harold J. Jansen and Lisa Young, "Solidarity Forever? the NDP, Organized Labour, and the Changing Face of Party Finance in Canada", *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 3 (2009): pp. 657-678, <https://proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/solidarity-forever-ndp-organized-labour-changing/docview/204608864/se-2>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, pp. 657.

compared to the Conservatives and Liberals, though there is often a lack of decisive action (often due to a lack of significant federal power).⁸ Jansen and Young argue that this will continue so long as both unions and the NDP are able to “derive some benefit” from the relationship, meaning that either losing influence in political or labour relations could lead to its decline.⁹ If this is the case, then recent years should have proved tenuous for the pair: unionization is near its all-time low, the power of labour unions having been eroded significantly, and the NDP has lost influence on the federal stage following a dramatic loss of seats in the 2025 election.

Neither the Conservative nor the Liberal party has the same sort of relationship with labour as the NDP, which is already in decline. The Conservatives in particular rely upon corporate donors, and lobbying is significant across the entire political spectrum.¹⁰ With labour’s power decreasing and bans on contributions from unions, businesses and corporations find themselves with near-exclusive access to politicians and their parties, exercising enormous influence via capital.¹¹ According to Peters, right-wing parties “have outspent all competing parties combined by at least a two to one margin”, and business donations to the Conservatives are “typically fifteen times the sums that unions provide to the New Democratic Party”.¹² Given this imbalance, it is unsurprising that labour laws have largely been written in favour of business and deregulation. As a result, income inequality is at a historic high, and the rights of workers have been systemically eroded.¹³ This phenomenon is self-reinforcing, since unions were largely responsible for significant labour victories of the past—now that they have lost influence, deregulation and ‘labour-negative’ policy faces less organized opposition. Alongside this labour

⁸ Ibid, pp. 658.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 658.

¹⁰ John Peters, “Provincial Governments and the Politics of Deregulation”, *Canadian Labour Policy and Politics*, 2022, pp. 89-106.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, pp. 95.

¹³ Ibid.

power decline, ideology has been weaponized so as to prevent it from strengthening once more. Right-wing parties have convinced many of the necessity of some perceived individual liberty pertaining to the markets, and have successfully transformed the issue of wealth inequality into a supposed conflict between the ‘middle class’ and the poor.¹⁴ Anti-union propaganda has also been highly effective, spreading the idea that unions, broadly, are an expensive waste of money.

Partisan political stripe clearly has an impact upon labour policy at the federal level, but is that the case at the provincial level? Furthermore, what differences exist between the regulation of public and private sector labour? The two provinces studied within this paper are British Columbia and Saskatchewan, selected because of their differing patterns in unionization after time. Examining these two provinces, then, allows us to assess what led to these differences. What is their history of government leadership? What kind of labour-related legislation was passed during these periods of time? What patterns exist in unionization, both public- and private-sector? How is and was ideological rhetoric utilized in both cases? All of these considerations will be taken together in order to develop a complete picture of labour legislation and partisan political stripe across time.

Categorizing Governments

In order to compare different political parties and periods of leadership, we might envision two tables, where one is a descriptor of the overall attitude of labour policy established under the government, and the other is a descriptor of the party’s overall partisan political stripe at the time.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Figure 1.1

<i>Partisan Stripe</i>	<u>Left-wing</u>	<u>Mixed</u>	<u>Right-wing</u>
<i>Government</i>			

Figure 1.2

<i>Policy Approach</i>	<u>Labour-positive</u>	<u>Mixed</u>	<u>Labour-negative</u>
<i>Government</i>			

Left-wing parties are typically those who identify (or formerly identified) as social democrats, such as the NDP, or at times the federal Liberals. These parties operate within capitalism rather than advocating for a left-wing alternative, but do implement policy that increases government intervention in the economy and would be appropriate in a more mixed-ideology economic system. Their platforms often suggest a return to a Keynesian economic state with a strong social safety net, while continuing to facilitate a market economy. Egalitarianism is a core part of their beliefs: the idea that everyone in a society should be treated equally or fairly (though interpretations vary significantly). These parties may or may not

increase taxes in middle-class brackets, but traditionally call for increased taxation on the wealthy in order to fund public services. They also behave with more sensitivity towards issues of racism, homophobia, ableism, colonialism, and more, though their policy on these issues varies wildly in quality, and garner critique from activists for the underlying (or obvious) ways in which they perpetuate discrimination.

Right-wing parties are typically those who identify as conservative, most prominently the federal Conservatives in Canada. These parties are strong advocates for capitalism and the free market, even if they employ a fair amount of government involvement in the markets to achieve their desired policy. While in the past, conservative governments may have provided more of a social safety net, with the advent and continuing prominence of neoliberalism, they have largely pivoted to a program of cutting services and public expenditures whenever possible as a proposed solution to alleviating deficits. These parties prefer to lower taxes for all citizens, including the wealthy, despite this decision removing a major source of government revenue. Generally, conservative parties show significantly less concern for the social issues of marginalized groups, especially in recent years, oftentimes actually opposing related social movements.

“Mixed” parties in this case does not refer to any specific Canadian political party (though it comes closest to describing the federal Liberals)—instead, this category is used to describe parties during a period of time where their rhetoric differed from its usual, adopting ideas typically associated with other parties and orientations. This can mean a “centrist” party, or a party that adopts both conservative and liberal policy or rhetoric in significant quantities. This can occur for a number of reasons—parties may lean towards the centre in order to secure more voters, ideological variation may occur between leaders, or specific individuals (especially those

in positions of power) may espouse ideas that do not align with the party at large for specific campaigns.

The goals and outcomes of labour policy are somewhat more straightforward. Labour-positive refers to policy that is supportive of workers and the power of collective bargaining—this can involve social services, enshrining the powers of labour in law, and providing appropriate support (parental leave, workers’ compensation, etc.). Labour-positive policy ultimately seeks to improve the lives of workers by helping them to gain the proper skills to enter the workforce, to get a job that treats them properly, and to extend a safety net where necessary.

Labour-negative refers to policy that prioritizes the desires of business and capital over the needs of their workers. This can involve eroding existing support (decreasing leave, compensation, or vacation days, for example), minimizing the power of organized labour in the bargaining process, permitting employers to treat workers poorly, or even simply allowing issues that face workers to go unaddressed. Labour-negative policy harms workers by placing the desire for profit at the forefront of policymaking and can cause workers to suffer as a result.

“Mixed” labour policy refers to a mixture of these two approaches in significant quantities. It is otherwise expected that there will be no collection of policies by a government that is fully labour-positive or -negative, and that a small number of labour-negative policies present in a labour-positive era does not change its placement, and vice versa.

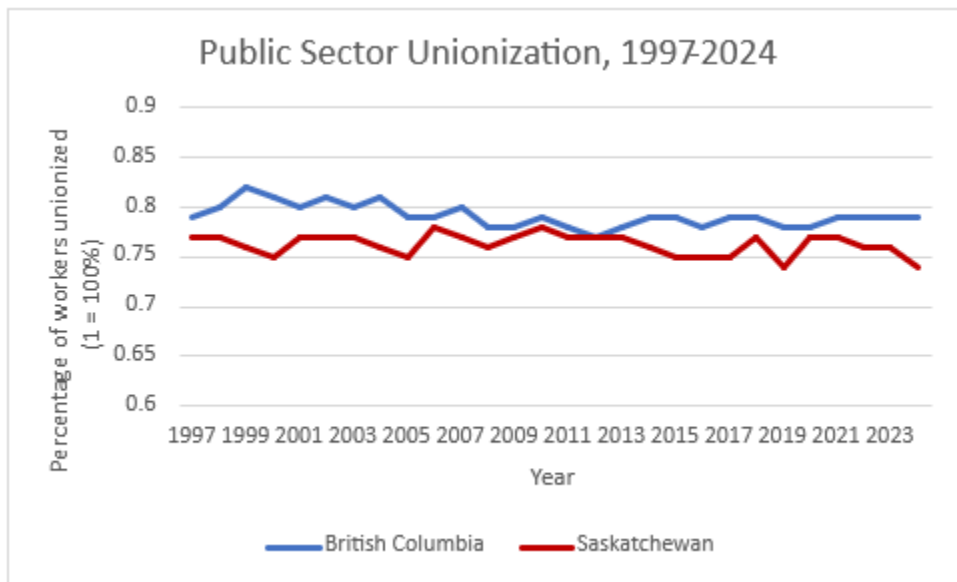
Finally, it is once again important to note the dominating presence of neoliberalism and capitalism in politics, and the degree to which it has influenced modern political parties. While I have categorized certain parties here as “left-wing”, the window has been shifted such that even social democrat parties in Canada accept a certain form of right-wing economic politics as a

given. The automatic assumption, brought on by neoliberal thought, of a capitalist “free market” as the best or correct form of market organization causes an artificial truncation in the political spectrum of Canada’s largest parties. Therefore, I use “left-wing” to describe parties that may not be traditionally “left-wing” in all matters, but which occupy the more left-wing position in mainstream Canadian political discourse.

Unionization Within the Provinces

As a point of reference for the effects of changes in labour regulation, I have selected rates of unionization within each of the provinces. Collective bargaining is an indication of labour’s power, and representative of the ability of workers to advocate for themselves, as opposed to being employed holding only one’s personal leverage, the majority of cases in which one must bend to the demands of the employer or face replacement. While a government hostile towards labour is not a requirement for low or falling rates of unionization, the latter is a strong indicator of the former. Labour policy that disadvantages workers inevitably seeks to reduce their ability to bargain successfully, especially as it results in increased costs for employers (most notably including the government itself, who is essentially always trying to reduce its budget). For the purposes of this study, I will be looking at the period of 1997 to 2024, as this is the period of Statistics Canada’s most recent data on union coverage, and provides us with enough space to examine the potential effect of several different provincial parties and governments.

Figure 2

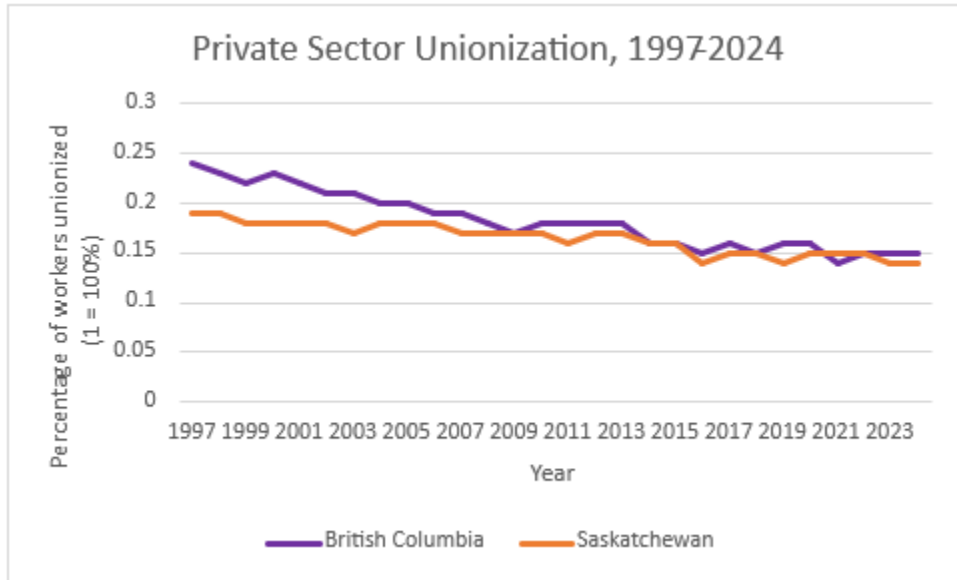


Data retrieved from “Table 14-10-0070-01. Union coverage by industry, annual (x 1,000)”, Statistics Canada, January 24, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.25318/1410007001-eng>.

This graph presents an intriguing picture of the two provinces in comparison. From the period of 1997 to around 2009, British Columbia’s public sector unionization was in decline, while Saskatchewan’s was slightly increasing. From around 2009 to 2013, the two converged, but after these years, and until the end point of the data, British Columbia’s unionization has risen again, while Saskatchewan’s has declined. In this case, British Columbia’s rate seems slightly more consistent than Saskatchewan’s, which has many more peaks and valleys. Looking at this data, a number of questions arise. What differed between British Columbia and Saskatchewan that caused one to increase and the other to decrease during 1997 through 2009? Is there any particular reason why they converged at the time that they did? Furthermore, what set

them on their path of divergence once more? What connections do these patterns have with partisan politics? What other circumstances could explain the patterns seen in this graph?

Figure 3



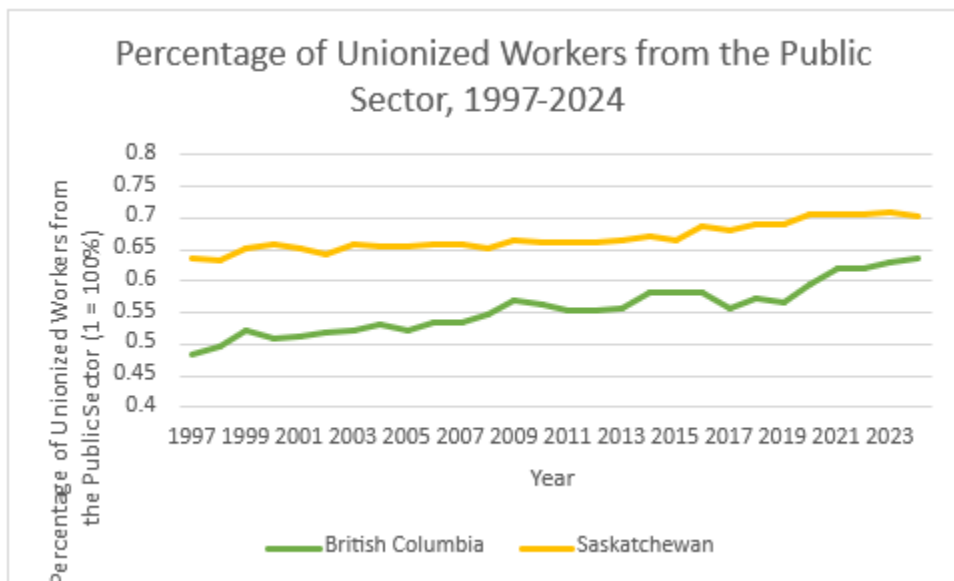
Data retrieved from “Table 14-10-0070-01. Union coverage by industry, annual (x 1,000)”, Statistics Canada, January 24, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.25318/1410007001-eng>.

This graph presents us with a different angle with which to compare the provinces. In both, private sector unionization is on the decline. British Columbia began with a significantly higher percentage of unionized workers, but this number decreased steadily, converging with Saskatchewan around 2009 and continuing that trajectory up until the end point of the data in 2024. Once again, the date of 2009 is a relevant turning point in the data. What happened in 2009 that slowed the decrease in private sector unionization in British Columbia? How and why has Saskatchewan remained fairly consistent in its progression? Just as in the last graph, does this

pattern have anything to do with provincial partisan stripe, and are there any other factors that could explain it?

Examining the two graphs together, another pattern emerges. Compared to British Columbia, Saskatchewan's rates of unionization have remained more stable over time. There is clear fluctuation in Saskatchewan's data, but not to the degree that British Columbia has experienced change. In Figure 2, both of the provinces are fluctuating, but BC is almost entirely responsible for the convergence in Figure 3, SK undergoing a more even decline. What could cause one province to undergo a more dramatic change than the other? BC's slightly increasing trajectory in Figure 2 is also interesting, as it is the only such sustained "rebound" of sorts present on either of the graphs. In a time of decreasing unionization nearly everywhere, what could be responsible for that sort of recovery? Finally, there is the significance of the year 2009 to the data, especially in Figure 2. What occurred around that time that could be reflected in the data?

Figure 4



Data retrieved from “Table 14-10-0070-01. Union coverage by industry, annual (x 1,000)”, Statistics Canada, January 24, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.25318/1410007001-eng>.

This graph illustrates that British Columbia has experienced significantly more change in its data than Saskatchewan. The percentage of unionized workers is decreasing overall in both BC and SK, but the number of unionized workers is decreasing more rapidly in the private sector than in the public sector, as evidenced by the increasing percentage of unionized workers from the public sector. What is causing British Columbia, however, to increase more rapidly? Looking at figures 2 and 3, it appears to be a combination of a somewhat increasingly unionized public workforce, and a significantly decreasingly unionized private workforce. But why is this occurring? What is responsible for this pattern? These questions, and those previous, will be

explored as the case studies are examined, and the partisan political history of each province is evaluated in detail.

Chapter 2: British Columbia

The first of two cases to be examined in this paper is that of British Columbia, a province typically considered to be somewhat labour-positive in policy orientation overall. However, its history of governance over the past twenty-seven years has hardly been consistent, transitioning from NDP leadership to BC United, then returning to the NDP once more. Though there has been variation in the province's rates of public sector unionization, its private sector unionization has consistently declined. Its more left-wing governments tended to have more labour-positive policy, while its more right-wing governments tended to have more labour-negative policy.

British Columbia has had many shifts in provincial leadership over the years of 1997 through 2024. The power of premier rested with the NDP from 1997 to 2001, shifting to the Liberals (now BC United) for a long period of time, from 2001 to 2017, and then returning to the NDP once more, from 2017 to present. Over the past twenty-seven years, the percentage of both public and private sector workers unionized has decreased, though the former only did so by less than a single percentage point, while the latter experienced nearly ten percentage points' worth of decrease.¹⁵ Both public and private sector employment has increased nearly consistently (to no surprise, as the province is growing in population), and union coverage in the public sector has increased nearly proportionally (looking only at the beginning and end points of the data, from 77% to 74%), but private sector unionization has indeed decreased (by percentage of employees unionized) quite dramatically.¹⁶ In fact, the *number* of unionized employees in the private sector has been reduced from 1997 to 2024 by over 10,000 individuals, despite around 700,000 more

¹⁵ "Table 14-10-0070-01. Union coverage by industry, annual (x 1,000)", Statistics Canada, January 24, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.25318/1410007001-eng>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

employees becoming part of the private sector, nearly doubling its workforce.¹⁷ This number's decline, with a low of around 14% of all workers in 2021, has been very consistent (with some degree of fluctuation), increasing to 15% in 2022 and remaining there until the end of the data set in 2024. Throughout this period, the amount of people employed in the private sector has increased, with the exception of a decrease in 2009.¹⁸ Given that unionization increased during the same year, this decrease could potentially be attributed to the ongoing global financial crisis at the time.

The British Columbia NDP is affiliated with the federal party of the same name, and espouses many of the same ideals, such as an increase in spending on welfare programs and a shift away from non-renewable sources of energy. The party is considered centre-left, and is typically associated with ideas of a Keynesian state rather than purely following neoliberal doctrine. However, in British Columbia, the NDP performs a similar role to that of the federal Liberals, being described by one as “a band-aid for the capitalist state”—according to authors Carroll and Ratner, the party has routinely “compromised social democratic principles” in favour of pursuing that neoliberal agenda which prioritizes profit over the workers who produce it.¹⁹ The party and its politicians have been criticized by the right for failing to balance the budget, and by the left for failing to commit to its rhetoric of improving conditions for those who are struggling to survive.²⁰ In their article specifically discussing the period of NDP governance from 1991 to 2001, overlapping with this period of study, Carroll and Ratner describe the party as one which sacrificed the aspirations of its many activist politicians and civil servants in favour of

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ William K. Carroll and R.S. Ratner, “The NDP Regime in British Columbia, 1991-2001: A Post-Mortem”, *The Canadian Review of Sociology* 42, no. 2 (2005): 167–96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-618X.2005.tb02460.x>.

²⁰ Vaughn Palmer, “Brar welfare experiment just rhetoric, past suggests”, *The Vancouver Sun*, December 6, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120206154439/http://www.vancouversun.com/business/Brar+welfare+experiment+ju st+rhetoric+past+suggests/5816919/story.html>.

fiscally-oriented state management.²¹ Indeed, the NDP premiers within this study from this time period had histories of work in the labour movement, but pivoted as politicians to reduce the scope of the welfare state. Later premiers, those coming after the governance of the BC Liberals, have returned to form somewhat, perhaps hoping to differentiate themselves from the former conservative leaders.

The BC Liberals, renamed to BC United in 2023, are the province's centre-right party, and are not affiliated with the federal Liberals in any way. They have pursued an aggressively neoliberal policy program, similar to other provincial conservative parties as well as the federal Conservatives. When in power during the period of this study, BC United has cut personal income taxes, diminished the role of unions, slashed wages of government workers, and attempted to implement reform including an increased number of provincial referenda and fixed election dates.²² In many ways, this is not altogether dissimilar from the policy of the BC NDP, as both parties tend to conform to neoliberalism, but their rhetoric varies significantly, operating on a socially conservative platform with significantly less concern for issues such as Indigenous rights and robust forms of welfare. However, both parties have used a veil of social progressivism in order to push through policy that reduces public spending and increases the private sector's share of profits.²³

In 1997, at the beginning of this paper's period of study, the province's premier was Glen Clark, a man with a history of work in the labour movement.²⁴ One of his primary implementations during his time in office was the continuation of the preceding Harcourt government's work, the B.C. Benefits welfare reform package.²⁵ Despite Clark's history of

²¹ Carroll and Ratner, "NDP Regime".

²² Evans and Smith, *Transforming Provincial Politics*, pp. 298-300.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "MLA: Glen Clark", Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://www.leg.bc.ca/members/36th-Parliament/Clark-Glen>.

²⁵ Palmer, "Welfare experiment".

pro-labour work, these reforms were not all positive for the province's workers. They featured tightened restrictions on eligibility and cuts in earnings exemptions for most recipients of welfare, as well as increased privatization in administration and program delivery.²⁶ Under the Harcourt government (which began these reforms), there had been growing concern about welfare fraud, with as much as 10% of the province claiming some form of social assistance—after two years in office, the then-premier declared that there needed to be crackdowns in order to reduce “cheats, deadbeats and varmints” in the system.²⁷ These changes mirrored policy shifts in other provinces (like Ontario) and within the United States, and may have been more indicative of global neoliberal trends or the circumstances of the province than the ideological particularities of Clark or Harcourt's respective parties.²⁸ Indeed, Harcourt's rhetoric in this circumstance was almost identical to ideas espoused by figures such as Ronald Reagan, those which had become heavily integrated into policymaking in the global North during the preceding decades. During Clark's tenure, representatives from his party condemned the reforms in motion, but were swiftly shut down by a soon-to-be infamous quote: “No, we have a deficit”.²⁹ This conflict is illuminating in that it demonstrates a disconnect between Clark's cabinet and the British Columbia NDP—the premier's ideology was inconsistent with party ideals, even at the time, and can therefore more likely be attributed to his own personal political program as well as the era's global trends. Clark later wrote that some parts of this program were

²⁶ Chris Schafer and Jason Clemens, “Welfare Reform in British Columbia: A Report Card”, *Public Policy Sources* no. 63 (2002), <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/WelfareReforminBC.pdf#:~:text=In%201996%2C%20the%20government%20intro%2D%20duced%20a.without%20dependents%20who%20were%20deemed%20employ%2D%20able.>

²⁷ Palmer, “Welfare experiment”.

²⁸ Schafer and Clemens, “Welfare Reform”.

²⁹ Palmer, “Welfare experiment”.

“misdirected”, but largely stood by most of the policy measures and claimed they were effective at achieving their aims.³⁰

The BC Benefits package was labour policy intended to push more people into the workforce and reduce what is called ‘welfare dependency’. In other words, it was meant to reduce the budget in areas of social assistance and create a larger workforce, which not only provides labour value to the economy but also generates taxable income. During the first session of Clark’s parliament, several parts of this package were read and passed, including those regarding childcare, income assistance, and disability benefits. The preamble to these acts identifies the aims of “preserving a social safety net that is responsive to changing social and economic circumstances” and “shared responsibility” among families and communities as well as the government for economic security.³¹ Examining the content of these acts, they provide the framework for the continuation of existing welfare structures (such as income assistance and disability benefits, mentioned previously), but otherwise focus upon implementing stronger consequences for listed offences, for example, providing false or misleading information.³² The Disability Benefits Program Act is particularly restrictive, including regulations such as limiting support following a failure “to accept or pursue income, assets or other means of support that would, in the minister's opinion, enable that person to be completely or partly independent of the disability allowance or benefit”.³³ It also outlines a number of regulations (in this case, nearly all rules and potential tightenings) that may be made by the Lieutenant Governor in Council at a later date.³⁴ While many of the restrictions in these acts are logical and necessary from an

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “BC Benefits (Youth Works) Act”, Government of British Columbia, July 16, 2002, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/consol7/consol7/96028_01.

³² Ibid.

³³ “Disability Benefits Program Act”, Government of British Columbia, November 15, 2001, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/consol6/consol6/96097_01.

³⁴ Ibid.

administrative standpoint, they feature much room for future interpretation, and pull back on welfare regimes that were benefitting many—they cannot be said to be pro-worker. They permit the provincial government and its representatives to make further subjective decisions about who can and cannot receive support, and include provisions that further limit the autonomy and material holdings of those who are more likely to already be vulnerable.

Beyond the BC Benefits package, private sector labour also experienced something of a loss through the discontinuation of the 1991 Job Protection Act via the Job Protection Amendment Act of 1997. The former was intended to reduce job loss and increase local economic competition via assistance to qualifying businesses and industries.³⁵ Under the Clark government, this act was amended to entirely eliminate any such assistance, permitting no further agreements beyond early 1999.³⁶ Another piece of legislation passed was the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, which did not change the existing act beyond creating “Employment Termination Standards” for the public sector.³⁷ These standards were not for the benefit of workers, but appear to be further cost-cutting measures implemented to decrease the budget. For example, the act limits the circumstances under which notice periods and severance may be provided, and also places limits upon the content of these benefits.³⁸ Once again, this is somewhat standard legislature, but taken as part of the broader picture, where the significant majority of labour-related bills passed under this government involve restrictions on worker benefits without providing additional protection or job market preparation (in fact, the Job Protection Amendment Act ended various forms of government-led training and coaching), it

³⁵ “Job Protection Act”, Government of British Columbia, December 5 1994, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/94consol18/94consol18/91004>.

³⁶ “Job Protection Amendment Act”, Government of British Columbia, 1997, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/lc/billsprevious/2nd36th:gov06-1>.

³⁷ “Public Sector Employers Amendment Act”, Government of British Columbia, 1997, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/lc/billsprevious/2nd36th:gov20-1>.

³⁸ “Employment Termination Standards”, Government of British Columbia, March 11, 2021, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/11_379_97.

paints a telling portrait of the state of provincial labour regulation at the time.³⁹ During this period, the Worker’s Compensation Act (regarding health and safety in the workplace) was also amended, featuring a number of repeals (including the Workplace Act) but largely replacing them with a new section.⁴⁰

The Labour Relations Code was also amended while Clark was in office, but this time to the benefit of workers in both the public and private sectors. It allowed for the creation of a single-person bargaining unit in some circumstances, and also established standards for collective bargaining and labour relations in the construction sector.⁴¹ From some perspectives, certain strike regulations may be viewed as limiting, but the text of the act also contains many regulations which bind employers to fair bargaining processes, and creates a centralized Labour Relations Association that employers can join, ideally making it simpler for employees to take the appropriate steps for collective bargaining.⁴² In the years following the passing of this bill, unionization in both the public and private sectors continued to decrease, including in the field of construction.⁴³ When it came to those already employed or unionized, the Clark government did not rock the boat, so to speak, primarily adding to legislation that already existed and adjusting its implementation. Where it garnered the most critique was the decision to slash welfare across the board, especially as training and business support programs also received cuts—many could not afford to survive, but also lacked the skills to fully participate in the job market.⁴⁴ As mentioned previously, this neoliberal approach was not popular within the British Columbia NDP, but it failed to attain broader support as well, partially due to critiques of Clark himself.

³⁹ Government of BC, “Job Protection Amendment Act”.

⁴⁰ “Workers Compensation (Occupational Health and Safety) Amendment Act”, Government of British Columbia, 1998, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/lc/billsprevious/36th3rd:gov14-3>.

⁴¹ “Labour Relations Code Amendment Act”, Government of British Columbia, 1998, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/lc/billsprevious/36th3rd:gov26-1>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Union Coverage”, StatsCan.

⁴⁴ Palmer, “Welfare Experiment”.

Referring back to Figures 2 and 3, Clark's time in office corresponds with a period of time when both public and private sector unionization were in decline overall, but there was variation within that decrease. During the first half of his tenure, public sector unionization increased and private sector decreased, while in the second half these changes were almost mirrored. This may indicate a lack of significant change while Clark was premier, or simply regular variation, as the change evens out over the period of time. This may also be reflective of the Clark government's general strategy, which did not act strongly in favour of or against labour. More left-wing critiques emphasized a lack of action regarding various social issues, whereas those more right-wing sought a stronger reduction in "welfare dependency". This sort of indecisiveness, or perhaps ideological confusion, could theoretically lead to the sort of middling trajectory described previously over time.

After resigning following a scandal in 1999, Glen Clark was replaced by Dan Miller for a brief period of time (less than a year). He was succeeded by Ujjal Dosanjh, who was premier for just over a year, until mid-2001. Dosanjh was also involved in labour issues prior to becoming premier, and was known for human rights advocacy, the latter becoming a significant part of his tenure as premier.⁴⁵ No significant changes relevant to the subject occurred during this period of time, apart from the continuation of some legislation put forth during the Clark government.

Following Dosanjh, the next premier was Gordon Campbell from the Liberal party. The NDP had become exceedingly unpopular after the scandals and subsequent resignation of Glen Clark, and the province clearly desired a change.⁴⁶ The defeat was decisive, and Dosanjh resigned before the election had even concluded. Campbell remained premier for ten years, the

⁴⁵ "MLA: Ujjal Dosanjh", Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, accessed May 13, 2025, <https://www.leg.bc.ca/members/36th-Parliament/Dosanjh-Ujjal>.

⁴⁶ Kristin Eberhard, "The Brief and Frustrating Story of the 2001 Election in British Columbia", *Sightline Institute*, November 1, 2018, <https://www.sightline.org/2018/11/01/2001-election-ftp-british-columbia-frustrating-story/>.

longest out of any premier in British Columbia within the scope of this study. One of the first acts passed under this government was the Health Care Services Continuation Act, a piece of back-to-work legislation which expired in the summer of the same year, intended to end an ongoing strike.⁴⁷ During the next parliamentary session, it passed the Health and Social Services Delivery Improvement Act, which required healthcare authorities to contract out services and positions where they could create savings, and unilaterally amended agreements made with labour unions.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the act prevented public sector unions from exercising the right to negotiate around the decisions made by the government, limiting worker autonomy.⁴⁹ The Campbell government pursued a strongly neoliberal approach in this realm which could be described as anti-worker, responding to crises in the budget by reducing spending on public sector jobs and wages. These actions prompted a strike of over 40,000 healthcare workers—a strike which was ended only five days later by a piece of emergency legislation, the Health Sector (Facilities Subsector) Collective Agreement Act.^{50 51} Not only did this act force a return to work, it also imposed a pay cut of up to fifteen percent, resulting in outrage from unions and a suit brought to the Supreme Court.⁵² Later, the Supreme Court would rule that the act was unconstitutional, as the right to collectively bargain is protected under the Charter, and would remove most of its contents.⁵³ Given this context, it is difficult to describe the Campbell

⁴⁷ “Health Care Services Continuation Act”, Government of British Columbia, accessed May 13, 2025, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/hstats/hstatspsl/1101328197>.

⁴⁸ “Health and Social Services Delivery Improvement Act”, Government of British Columbia, February 7, 2008, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/consol18/consol18/00_02002_01.

⁴⁹ “Big win for unions as ruling says bargaining protected”, CBC News, June 8, 2007, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/big-win-for-unions-as-ruling-says-bargaining-protected-1.632216>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “Health Sector (Facilities Subsector) Collective Agreement Act”. Government of British Columbia, April 29, 2004, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/hstats/hstatspsl/774446464>.

⁵² Jane Armstrong and Mark Hume, “Back-to-work legislation imposes 15% pay cut on health-care staff”, *The Globe and Mail*, April 29, 2004, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/back-to-work-legislation-imposes-15-pay-cut-on-health-care-staff/article18281516/>.

⁵³ Ibid.

government's actions in this case as anything but anti-worker, taking a page from the prevailing neoliberal playbook. Author David Camfield writes that this was part of a broader neoliberal "state restructuring" from a strong welfare state to one whose primary objective is to compete in the global economy, sacrificing the needs of employees in order to increase shareholder value.⁵⁴ In 2004, the health care sector experienced a small increase in unionization despite a slight decrease in total workers, possibly as a result of the ongoing dispute with the government.⁵⁵

The healthcare sector was not the only one affected by the Campbell government's legislation regarding unionization, as in 2001 it also passed the Education Services Collective Agreement Act, which placed a number of new provisions upon unionized education workers in British Columbia.⁵⁶ This act may force collectively bargaining employees into arbitration after a sufficiently long strike (sixty days), and this arbitration will use a mediator "appointed by the minister" rather than jointly decided upon.⁵⁷ Decisions made by this arbitrator are final and binding—this structure clearly provides the government with a significant advantage in the bargaining process, diminishing the role and purpose of unions striking to begin with. Furthermore, this act includes provisions for the minister to appoint a commission to undertake a review of "collective bargaining structures, practices and procedures": this commission can make inquiries and recommendations to the minister, which is not noteworthy in and of itself.⁵⁸ However, the listed factors that the commission must take into consideration are disproportionately focused upon strike-ending, reducing disruption, "expeditious settlement of

⁵⁴ David Camfield, "Neoliberalism and working-class resistance in British Columbia: the hospital employees' union Struggle, 2002-2004", *Labour*, March 22, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20070930213041/http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-15195675_1_TM.

⁵⁵ "Union Coverage by Industry", StatsCan.

⁵⁶ "Education Services Collective Agreement Act", Government of British Columbia, May 1, 2005, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/lc/psl/02001_01.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

disputes”, and “efficient structures”.⁵⁹ Not listed among these are considerations about employee wages, safe work environments, and any other legitimate concerns that a union may have. As a result, this legislation continued to cement the advantage of the government as an employer in the bargaining process, reducing the effectiveness of bargaining for unionized public sector employees. The Labour Relations Code Amendment Act of 2002 underlined the same aims of quick settlement of disputes and minimizing strike effectiveness by limiting impacts on uninvolved citizens.⁶⁰

The Campbell government continued to provide social services, but added more restrictive provisions, much like the preceding Clark government. In the 2002 Employment and Assistance Act, recipients of BC Benefits assistance became required to enter into “employability plans”, further emphasizing the role of such social assistance as something temporary, provided only until a person can become employed.⁶¹ The Employment Standards Act was amended to provide more specificity, and the Workers Compensation Act also received amendments: while compensation could be more than it was previously, this amendment reduced inflation adjustment, and benefits became reduced if paired with a disability pension (previously, both could be received in full).⁶² In addition, pensions were reduced by shifting to a lump sum, and those receiving a disability pension became required to have their case reviewed when passing the age of 65.⁶³ These amendments are another example of the Campbell government reducing expenditures on workers whenever possible.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ “Labour Relations Code Amendment Act”, Government of British Columbia, 2002, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/lc/billsprevious/3rd37th:gov42-1>.

⁶¹ “Employment and Assistance Act”, Government of British Columbia, May 20, 2025, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/02040_01.

⁶² “Workers Compensation Amendment Act”, Government of British Columbia, 2002, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/lc/billsprevious/3rd37th:gov49-1>.

⁶³ Ibid.

Ideologically, the Liberal (BC United) plan at the time was clearly anti-labour inasmuch as the vast majority of its labour-related policy decisions worked to reduce both the power of organized labour and money spent to support workers and the general population. Shortly after Campbell became Premier in 2001, he established the BC Progress Board as a way of “improving British Columbia’s [economic] performance”.⁶⁴ Indeed, the Campbell government had come to power at a time of economic turmoil—British Columbia had just become eligible for equalization payments from the federal government, making the province’s decline apparent.⁶⁵ The recovery that this government wanted to build was not necessarily that of a healthy, long-term sustainable economy that would improve living conditions for the people of British Columbia, but instead a “thriving private-sector economy” that would theoretically provide more jobs for citizens.⁶⁶ This is another appearance of contracting out—the government reducing public expenditure in the hopes that private funding will fill in the gaps. As explored previously, this manifested as many public sector workers either losing their jobs or taking a pay cut. In the view of the Progress Board, these were acceptable outcomes and side-effects of British Columbia becoming more economically competitive, especially in comparison with other provinces and even certain American states.⁶⁷ This was very in-line with the BC Liberals’ ideology at the time and even at present, an aggressive neoliberal strategy with prevalent austerity and reduced public funding.

Campbell’s first term represents a period of time (in Figure 2) where public sector unionization was in decline, especially near the end of his second term as premier (approaching 2009). This is not particularly surprising if we intend to connect partisan political stripe with the

⁶⁴ Michael J. Prince, “Measuring Whose Progress? The BC Progress Board and the Politics of Social Indicators”, *Canadian Review of Social Policy* no. 57, pp. 2, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45407554>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

effect of labour policy, as much of his government's related policy reduced the effectiveness of unionization, including prominent attacks on public sector workforces (like that of the healthcare sector). Small peaks did occur during this time, but were always followed by significant drops that not only eliminated any increase but constituted an additional decrease. In the private sector, unionization was in decline for the entire period of Campbell's premiership. From the neoliberal perspective employed by the BC Liberals and other conservative parties, the obvious choice would be to outsource labour to the private sector, as less unionization typically means lower costs (workers are paid less on average, for example).⁶⁸ Unionization was generally in decline prior to Campbell's time in office, but his government's anti-labour approach to policymaking eroded the power of unions further and thus made it less desirable to be part of one (especially when accounting for union dues, which members will not want to pay if they feel they are not getting their money's worth). Thus, the government should have been able to save money on labour costs with this approach, and the party's ideology with greater emphasis on privatization and increased profit should have been satisfied.

Campbell was elected for a second term, and then a third. During these following terms, significantly less labour-related legislation was passed when compared to the first term, though some changes were certainly made. In 2005, the Workers Compensation Act was amended with small changes (to clarify the meaning of "disease" in certain cases, for example), as was the Teachers' Collective Agreement Act.⁶⁹ In 2006, the Employment and Income Assistance Statutes Amendment Act was passed, implementing some additional specifics as well as harsher consequences for supplying false information or otherwise taking advantage of the system.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Adam D.K. King, "The Union Wage Premium Remains Strong Across Canada", *The Maple*, January 22, 2024, <https://www.readthemaple.com/the-union-wage-premium-remains-strong-across-canada/>.

⁶⁹ "Workers Compensation Amendment Act", Government of British Columbia, 2005, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/lc/billsprevious/1st38th:gov11-1>.

⁷⁰ "Employment and Income Assistance Statutes Amendment Act", Government of British Columbia, 2006, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/lc/billsprevious/2nd38th:gov21-1>.

Beyond some of these adjustments, a number of changes were made to education, especially in 2007. The Campbell government removed class size limits, changed curricula, and generally deregulated instead of the more concrete but “one size fits all” approach previously taken by the NDP.⁷¹ Of course, this also came with budget cuts, including those such as the pay reductions forced upon education workers in 2004. Once again, this eroded working conditions for many public sector employees, and once again this was in-line with the party’s ideological direction, perhaps hoping to encourage some degree of privatization into schooling, or simply wishing to reduce the budget in order to reallocate money to somewhere more “profitable” (leaving aside the role of a well-educated population in creating profit).

Returning to the graphs, public sector unionization continued to decline for the second half of Campbell’s tenure (aside from a small increase in 2010), reaching its all-time low within this set of data in 2012, just after his resignation and the appointment of the next premier (also a part of the BC Liberals), Christy Clark. Private sector unionization also continued to decline, though not so steeply as the public sector. This aligns with the multitude of evidence demonstrating the Campbell government’s willingness to attack and erode the rights of public sector workers in particular, which was discussed previously.

Finally, when it comes to Campbell’s time as premier and his economic governance, it is important to acknowledge the role of the 2008 financial crisis, which impacted Canada significantly going into 2009. Austerity in economic policy became increasingly relevant in this time of crisis as it was touted as a way to save money for the nation’s necessities—despite this, however, it was generally unsuccessful and destroyed a plethora of social safety networks that

⁷¹ Black Press Media Staff, “Editorial — Blame Gordon Campbell for current teachers' impasse”, *Langley Advance Times*, September 15, 2014, <https://www.langleyadvancetimes.com/opinion/editorial-blame-gordon-campbell-for-current-teachers-impasse-2476166>.

were once integral to the functioning of the state. Austerity was adopted in a multitude of states across the globe, becoming a broad policy pattern, but it was still ultimately an ideological choice. There were many potential options to “solve” (or at least weather) the financial crisis, many of which involved injecting significant capital into the market. The BC Liberals chose to take the route of austerity, knowing that it would be viewed as a reasonable decision during a crisis while also permitting them to embed their beliefs into policy and achieve some of the party’s ideological goals.

Christy Clark, appointed after Campbell’s resignation and elected two years later, remaining premier for six years, was also a member of the BC Liberals (or BC United). Following the Campbell government’s aggressive and extremely direct neoliberal conservatism, the new Clark government (henceforth referring to the government led by Christy Clark unless specified) took a somewhat softer approach, perhaps to secure more undecided voters after negative responses to Campbell’s policy. One of the acts passed during Clark’s first parliamentary session was the Teachers Act, aimed at increasing educator standards and improving general conduct by establishing a Teachers’ Council and Conduct Board.⁷² This could easily have been a purely government-led initiative, but these bodies involve significant membership and input from teachers and representatives, indicating that this government may be more willing to work with educators than its predecessor.⁷³ Clark’s government also quickly amended the Workers Compensation Act once again, expanding the definition of “mental disorder” in order for coverage to be expanded to more workers and updating the dollar values in the act according to inflation.⁷⁴ These were slight improvements, but improvements nonetheless.

⁷² “Teachers Act”, Government of British Columbia, May 20, 2025, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/11019_01.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ “Workers Compensation Amendment Act, 2011”, Government of British Columbia, 2011, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/lc/billsprevious/4th39th.gov14-3>.

During this same period of time, the Clark government made Family Day a public holiday, another very small gain providing workers with one more paid day off during the year.⁷⁵ These changes are not significant to workers' rights, but indicate a potential shift in tone, even if only temporary. Later, in 2015, the Workers Compensation act was amended once again, providing the government with stronger powers in the case of violations and including more general changes to how it investigates employers and enforces compliance.⁷⁶ These were useful changes, but stand out in a period of time where there were very few directly labour-related acts being passed.

One of the most significant changes to labour that Clark made while in office was to finally but gradually increase the province's minimum wage, which sat at \$8.00 an hour prior to her time as premier. It was first increased to \$10.25 an hour, then \$10.85, then to \$11.35 in two stages, changing six times total between 2011 and 2017.⁷⁷ This change was long overdue, advocates for labour having been calling for a fifteen-dollar minimum wage for over a decade by the time these changes were introduced.⁷⁸ Certainly, the increases made by the Clark government were welcomed, but they weren't doing enough—more than 500,000 “low-wage workers” across the province continued to live in poverty, the new minimum wage not yet close to a living wage and leaving many full-time workers unable to afford basic necessities.⁷⁹ Advocates such as Irene Lanzinger, then-president of the BC Federation of labour, accused the provincial government of “[promoting] a low-wage economy”, widening the gap of inequality that causes many of their

⁷⁵ “Family Day Act”, Government of British Columbia, May 31, 2012, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/00_12024_01.

⁷⁶ “Workers Compensation Amendment Act, 2015”, Government of British Columbia, 2015, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/lc/billsprevious/4th40th:gov09-1>.

⁷⁷ “B.C.’s minimum wage increases on Sept. 15, 2017”, Government of British Columbia, accessed May 23, 2025, <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2017JTST0037-000411>.

⁷⁸ “Christy Clark’s minimum wage announcement: 10 cents an hour more than planned won’t lift 500,000 BC workers out of poverty”, BC Federation of Labour, February 27, 2017, <https://bcfed.ca/news/releases/christy-clark%E2%80%99s-minimum-wage-announcement-10-cents-hour-more-planed-won%E2%80%99t-lift-500000>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

constituents to suffer in the interest of maximizing private profits.⁸⁰ This aligns with the hypothesized line-toeing conservatism briefly explored in earlier paragraphs, the Clark government making small and unsubstantial changes to labour regulation to appear as if there is progression in workers' rights even though very little has meaningfully changed. In reality, the minimum wage was merely adjusted from a poverty wage to a slightly less devastating poverty wage—the burden upon low-wage workers, their struggle to survive, was in no way alleviated.

When looking at public sector unionization as depicted in Figure 2, British Columbia's "turning point" at which rates began to increase was in 2012, and therefore during Clark's time as premier. It does not appear as though any particular legislation was passed that could or would have changed this trajectory, but we may be able to hypothesize given the surrounding circumstances. During the 2008 financial crisis, public sector unionization was brought to its next lowest point—this is not altogether unexpected, as the government likely chose to lay off workers in a cost-effective manner. With unionized workers being paid more on average, highly unionized sectors would find themselves much more at risk of cuts and reductions.⁸¹ By 2012, the economic situation had improved significantly, but had not yet entirely recovered. The Clark government continued to utilize the preceding Campbell government's program of austerity, attempting to fix budgetary issues by reducing government spending.⁸² As a matter of fact, significant public sector layoffs *did* occur from 2012 to 2013 as part of a larger series of layoffs beginning in 2008 and intending to end in 2015.⁸³ These layoffs reduced the public sector by a full 18%, eliminating thousands of workers: 5,300 jobs were set to be eliminated from 2012 to 2013, and another 2,000 between 2013 and 2015.⁸⁴ Sectors affected included education, parks,

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ King, "Union Wage Premium".

⁸² The Kelowna Courier, "B.C. budget reaction: Public workers, teachers, fear layoffs and cuts", February 22, 2012, https://www.kelownadailycourier.ca/news/article_9b48eee7-8cee-5a34-afd0-45b27d2aa224.html.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

and the public service generally.⁸⁵ This major spike in layoffs could certainly be responsible for the reduction in unionized public sector workers, although it is difficult to prove definitively. Knowing that the government could reduce costs and lose fewer workers by laying off a greater percentage of unionized workers, it appears a valid hypothesis that these layoffs were responsible for the significant decrease and low point we see in Figure 2 during 2012. After 2012 (and after these layoffs), the percentage of public sector workers unionized did return to some form of “normal”, increasing and then fluctuating steadily. This is in line with the fact that the Clark government did not pursue much labour legislation during the latter half of Clark’s time as premier, though economic recovery and strengthening of unions very likely played a role in this return to form. It is not necessarily indicative of any pro-labour legislation or improvements in workers’ rights that this occurred, as it was not so much a significant increase as it was a slight reversal of severe damage.

The picture of private sector unionization during this time is somewhat different. After a low point in 2010, the decrease that had been consistent for most of the time presented in the graph (Figure 3) stops with a slight raise and then a four-year period of sustained rates. Once again, it is difficult to determine exactly why this occurred, but it is worth noting that the Clark government did not exactly take a broadly anti-labour stance—their action was targeted towards the public sector, following the lead set by the Campbell government. Given that the Clark government took a slightly less aggressive position (perhaps harming labour by inaction, given the state of the economy), the private sector, being left to its own devices, could feasibly undergo a small increase in unionization.

Following over fifteen years of leadership by the BC Liberals, the BC NDP came into power in 2017 with John Horgan as its leader and premier. Horgan did not possess the same

⁸⁵ Ibid.

history of activism as former NDP leaders Clark and Dosanjh, coming from a more traditional background as the founder of a research and management consulting company for both public and private sector organizations.⁸⁶ However, he was known to be active within the community, and his time as premier involved concern for various social issues: for instance, he implemented “a range of affordability policies” and signed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act into law during his tenure.⁸⁷ After many years of conservative leadership, Horgan and the NDP set themselves apart by putting forward a socially progressive face. This is something the preceding Clark government attempted to differentiate themselves from the Campbell government, but was significantly weakened by the presence of the party’s backing conservative stripe, necessitating a degree of walking the line that caused the overall approach to lack decisiveness.

Like the Clark government before it, the Horgan government implemented a raise of the minimum wage beginning in 2018 and ending in 2021 with a rate of \$15.20 per hour by its completion.⁸⁸ While the labour goal of fifteen dollars was (and is) no longer a proper living wage, this was a significant improvement over past wages and would help many to survive more comfortably. This increase’s implementation, however, left much to be desired by political advocates coming from both left- and right-wing traditions. Labour representatives found the transition too slow—those living in poverty needed an increase in wages as soon as possible to survive.⁸⁹ Other critics felt that the changes were too hasty for small businesses, who often

⁸⁶ “MLA: John Horgan”, Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, accessed May 26, 2025, <https://www.leg.bc.ca/members/41st-Parliament/Horgan-John>.

⁸⁷ Akshay Kulkarni, “Former premier John Horgan remembered at memorial service for his dad jokes, humility and love of B.C.”, *CBC News*, December 15, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/john-horgan-memorial-service-1.7410915>.

⁸⁸ “B.C.’s move to raise minimum wage to \$15.20 by 2021 too slow says B.C. Federation of Labour”, *CBC News*, February 8, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/minimum-wage-bc-1.4526320>.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

operate on very slight margins.⁹⁰ Here, the NDP fell into a common pitfall of centre-left parties in the era of dominant neoliberalism: they attempt to take a path socially liberal but fiscally neoliberal (tending towards conservatism) to please as many voters as possible, but find themselves critiqued by the left-wing for doing too little, and by the right-wing for doing too much. This increase finally put British Columbia's workers on "the same pay scale" as workers in other provinces like Ontario and Quebec, and was largely viewed as a necessary undertaking, though it did have its detractors, especially with political polarization on the rise.⁹¹

Another major improvement for labour made under the Horgan government came with the Employment Standards Amendment Act of 2018, which significantly increased provincial maternity leave standards, allowing individuals to better recover after giving birth rather than rushing them back to work.⁹² Paid maternity leave rose from a mere six weeks to seventeen, and additional unpaid leave nearly doubled from thirty-seven weeks to sixty-two.⁹³ This act was a proper step to extend care to the workers of British Columbia and provide space for them to thrive, and went against the neoliberal grain of slowly but surely reducing expenditure on the people.

Though not directly pertaining to labour, the Horgan government implemented a number of policies intended to assist those in poverty and to provide support to citizens in need during 2018. These policies fall under the umbrella of "taking care of" labour, assisting workers who require it for a dual purpose: both to care for them as citizens and to keep employees happier and healthier. Not only are they beneficial to individuals as people, but they are (theoretically) better for the growth of a sustainable economy. One such act was the Local Government Statutes

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² "Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2018", Government of British Columbia, 12 April 2018, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/lc/billsprevious/3rd41st:gov06-3>.

⁹³ Ibid.

(Housing Needs Reports) Amendment Act of 2018, which required local governments to take into consideration housing needs reports when “developing a regional growth strategy”.⁹⁴ Ideally, this would lead to increased affordable housing development in areas in-need to allow for healthy growth and reduce homelessness. Furthermore, increased housing availability allows for greater movement within the workforce, eliminating long commutes when possible and reducing emissions. The Child, Family and Community Service Amendment Act was also passed, providing increased Indigenous-led government-funded childcare and family services to Indigenous communities.⁹⁵ In addition, 2018 saw the passing of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Act, which instituted a plan to reduce poverty in British Columbia including commitments to affordable housing, employment, eliminating systemic issues, and considering the needs of Indigenous people in the community.⁹⁶ This final act did not lay out any specific plans for this strategy, but signalled a change in the government’s approach to poverty reduction, which previously amounted to easing people off of welfare after significant budget cuts.

A handful of acts were also passed which addressed and regulated labour directly. One such act was the Advanced Education Statute Repeal Act, which repealed the Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act, a bill passed under the Campbell government. The repealed bill allowed for unbounded class sizes in schools, removed restrictions on how public education employers could determine working hours or vacation time for employees, and completely defanged the Labour Relations Board by stating that “[an] institution exercising or purporting to exercise a right under this Part must not be restrained by injunction, prohibition or stay of

⁹⁴ “Local Government Statutes (Housing Needs Reports) Amendment Act, 2018”, Government of British Columbia, May 14, 2018, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/bills/billsprevious/3rd41st:gov18-3>.

⁹⁵ “Child, Family and Community Service Amendment Act”, Government of British Columbia, 2018, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/lc/billsprevious/3rd41st:gov26-1>.

⁹⁶ “Poverty Reduction Strategy Act”, Government of British Columbia, November 18, 2018, [https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/18040/search/CIVIX_DOCUMENT_ROOT_STE M:\(poverty%20reduction\)?2](https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/18040/search/CIVIX_DOCUMENT_ROOT_STE M:(poverty%20reduction)?2).

proceedings” when involved in disputes with trade unions.⁹⁷ The Advanced Education Statute Repeal Act prevented this act from remaining in force any longer, a step towards improving the working conditions of public education employees.⁹⁸ The Workers Compensation Act was amended once again as part of regular proceedings, resulting in many changes, but notably improved health and safety investigations, increased maximum insurable earnings, and expanded on the implementation of “mental disorders” into the act.⁹⁹ This act was amended twice more during Horgan’s tenure, resulting in the addition of provisions for protecting workers against asbestos and various adjustments for worker’s compensation as a whole (changing how benefits are indexed for inflation, for example.^{100 101}

2022 also saw the passing of the Skilled Trades BC Act, a monumental change in how skilled trades and the need for more skilled workers were addressed within the province.¹⁰² The Industry Training Authority became a government corporation under the name of SkilledTradesBC, having the goal of increasing apprenticeship and training in the province.¹⁰³ This corporation centralized a number of processes such as training program accreditation, awarding various credentials to trainees, and managing various apprenticeship programs.¹⁰⁴ The healthcare profession, having a somewhat tenuous relationship with the provincial government, received new regulation under the Health Professions and Occupations Act with the goal of

⁹⁷ “Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act”, Government of British Columbia, January 28, 2002, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/consol15/consol15/00_02003_01.

⁹⁸ “Advanced Education Statute Repeal Act”, Government of British Columbia, November 8, 2018, [https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/18043/search/CIVIX_DOCUMENT_ROOT_STE M:\(Residential%20Tenancy%20Act\)%20AND%20CIVIX_DOCUMENT_ANCESTORS:statreg?80](https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/18043/search/CIVIX_DOCUMENT_ROOT_STE M:(Residential%20Tenancy%20Act)%20AND%20CIVIX_DOCUMENT_ANCESTORS:statreg?80).

⁹⁹ “Workers Compensation Amendment Act, 2020”, Government of British Columbia, 2020, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/bills/billsprevious/5th41st:gov23-1>.

¹⁰⁰ “Workers Compensation Amendment Act, 2022”, Government of British Columbia, 2022, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/bills/billsprevious/3rd42nd:gov05-3>.

¹⁰¹ “Workers Compensation Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2)”, Government of British Columbia, 2022, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/bills/billsprevious/3rd42nd:gov41-3>.

¹⁰² “Skilled Trades BC Act”, Government of British Columbia, March 10, 2022, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/22004#part2>.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

reducing racism and discrimination in the healthcare system.¹⁰⁵ However, this act proved somewhat controversial, receiving criticism over its lack of clarification on certain issues (for example, what constitutes “misleading information”, which could be a criminal offense) and the increased bureaucracy instituted to extend government control over healthcare (without input from workers).^{106 107}

One of the most notable pieces of legislation from this era is the Temporary Foreign Worker Protection Act. As an increasing percentage of Canada’s workforce is made up of foreign workers, and these migrant workers face some of the most severe labour exploitation in the country, legislation was (and still is) desperately needed to address issues relevant to the cause.¹⁰⁸ The Horgan government passed the aforementioned bill in order to lay the groundwork for the safeguarding of migrant workers and prevent exploitation where possible. The act is large in scope and has many subsections, including those pertaining to employer obligations, appropriate settlement of disputes, and recruiter licensing.¹⁰⁹ It gives migrant employees better grounds to stand on when reporting unfair practices, where previously they could face the loss of their job, homelessness, or even deportation.¹¹⁰ Migrant worker rights are a significant aspect of labour rights, though they apply to non-citizens—holding employers responsible in this manner demonstrates that the purpose of labour regulation is to protect the people involved, rather than purely to maximize profit.

¹⁰⁵ “Health Professions and Occupations Act”, Government of British Columbia, November 24, 2022, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/22043#section14>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ York N. Hsiang, “Physicians need to read and understand the Health Professions and Occupations Act”, *BCM/J* 66, no. 8 (2024): 282, <https://bcmj.org/letters/physicians-need-read-and-understand-health-professions-and-occupations-act>.

¹⁰⁸ “Abuse is systemic in Canada’s Temporary Foreign Worker program, Amnesty International finds”, Amnesty International, January 30, 2025, <https://amnesty.ca/temporary-foreign-workers-report/>.

¹⁰⁹ “Temporary Foreign Worker Protection Act”, Government of British Columbia, November 8, 2018, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/18045>.

¹¹⁰ Japreet Lehal, “The Temporary Foreign Worker Protection Act”, *KSW Lawyers*, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://www.kswlawyers.ca/blog/temporary-foreign-worker-protection-action-step-in-right-direction-to-protect-migrant-workers>.

Referring back to Figure 2, the period of time during which Horgan was in office (from 2017 to 2022) corresponds with a relatively stable point in public sector unionization. There was a small slump from 2018 to 2021, but the entirety of this decrease was recovered from 2021 to 2022, meaning that there was overall very little change in public sector unionization during this period of time. Private sector unionization, depicted in Figure 3, is somewhat different. Its percentage decreased from 2017 to 2018, increased to recover what it lost, remained stable for about a year, then decreased once again. Despite the Horgan government's general labour positivity, it seems that organized labour did not experience much of a recovery. While public sector unionization remained somewhat stable for the first time in many years, private sector unionization continued to decrease, following the trajectory that began from the very first year on the graph.

The final British Columbia premier to be included in this study is David Eby, the current premier at the time of writing. Eby, another member of the BC NDP, was appointed following the stepping-down of Horgan, and was elected in the subsequent election. An acclaimed human rights lawyer, Eby has advocated for the rights of unhoused people through the legal system, and is also the president of the British Columbia HIV/AIDS Legal Network.¹¹¹ His background involves much social activism, but primarily involves the use of legal institutions and organizations rather than grassroots methods, continuing to reflect the balancing game between activism and “respectability” within candidates from the NDP.¹¹²

As Eby has been premier for a far shorter time than the rest of the premiers discussed in this study, there is less legislation to cover when discussing the Eby government's policy. One of the very first bills passed during this short period of time was the Public Service Labour

¹¹¹ “MLA: David Eby”, Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://www.leg.bc.ca/members/41st-Parliament/Eby-David>.

¹¹² Ibid.

Relations Amendment Act of 2023, which allowed lawyers and articled students “employed in the Criminal Justice Branch of the Ministry of Attorney General” or the Office of Legislative Council to finally be considered “employees” under the Public Service Labour Relations Act, affording them additional protections under the law.¹¹³ The legal sector also received legislation under the Legal Profession Act, which instituted a single regulator for a number of legal professions, including lawyers and paralegals.¹¹⁴ Like the Horgan government’s Health Professions and Occupations Act, this act was also controversial with the profession it regulated, in this case due to the “intrusion” of government on the law, which could be said to undermine democratic principles.¹¹⁵

Pensions received some changes in British Columbia under the Pension Benefits Standards Act of 2023, which permitted workers more flexibility with regards to pension selection and eligibility.¹¹⁶ Collectively-bargained multi-employer plans received the same sort of flexibility, which could be a boon to employees with less traditional work schedules.¹¹⁷ Another improvement occurred with the Social Development and Poverty Reduction Statutes Amendment, which changed some legislation from previous premiers including Campbell. The previous “employment plans”, which focused purely on getting those in poverty into the workplace, were replaced with the “client needs assessment” and “employability plan”.¹¹⁸ These are improvements, given that the broader scope of a person’s life and needs are being addressed

¹¹³ “Public Service Labour Relations Amendment Act, 2023”, Government of British Columbia, 2023, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/bills/billsprevious/4th42nd:gov05-1>.

¹¹⁴ “Legal Profession Act”, Government of British Columbia, May 27, 2025, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/98009_01.

¹¹⁵ Christine Tam, “Law Society announces legal action to challenge Legal Professions Act”, *Law Society of BC*, May 16, 2024, <https://www.lawsociety.bc.ca/news-and-engagement/news/law-society-of-bc-announces-legal-action-to-challenge-legal-professions-act/>.

¹¹⁶ “Pension Benefits Standards Amendment Act”, Government of British Columbia, 2023, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/bills/billsprevious/4th42nd:gov33-1>.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ “Social Development and Poverty Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2024”, Government of British Columbia, March 12, 2024, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/bills/billsprevious/5th42nd:gov07-3>.

in some way. However, this piece of legislation is far from perfect. During its reading in parliament, MLA Adam Olsen of the Green Party argued that the bill was “entrenching poverty” by discussing its reduction and not elimination.¹¹⁹ Affordability for Canadians also went unmentioned—the rising cost of living is not considered the object to be fixed but instead the poverty of individuals in specific cases.¹²⁰ Furthermore, the bill was plagued by the same excess of bureaucracy that is a frequent critique of the NDP and other left-wing parties.¹²¹ There was progress in this bill, but not near enough to make it monumental by any metric.

Despite this, there has been some significantly positive labour-related legislation under the Eby government. One such bill was the Pay Transparency Act, which required all “provincially regulated” employers to include pay information in job postings and forbade them from asking employees about pay history.¹²² It also included protections against employers who attempt to “dismiss, suspend, demote, discipline, harass or otherwise disadvantage” an employee for discussing their pay.¹²³ A number of amendments occurred during this time as well: the Labour Statutes Amendment Act included “online platform workers” among “employees” in labour-related acts, meaning that a number of protections and regulations now applied.¹²⁴ The Employment Standards Act also received a notable amendment: this raised the province’s minimum wage, first to \$16.75, then \$17.40, indexing the wage to inflation via a yearly

¹¹⁹ Adam Olsen, “Bill 7: Social Development and Poverty Reduction Statutes Amendment Act (2024): Entrenching poverty”, May 7, 2024, <https://adamolsen.ca/2024/03/bill-7-social-development-and-poverty-reduction-statutes-amendment-act-2024-entrenching-poverty/>.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² “Pay Transparency Act”, Government of British Columbia, May 11, 2023, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/23018>.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ “Labour Statutes Amendment Act”, Government of British Columbia, November 28, 2023, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/bills/billsprevious/4th42nd:gov48-3>.

adjustment.¹²⁵ ¹²⁶ As of June 1, 2025, the minimum wage has risen to \$17.85 due to the provisions set out within this act.¹²⁷ A minimum wage that is forced to change and respond to current economic circumstances rather than remaining stagnant is a significant boon to low-income workers. Beyond this, other workers and unions may be able to leverage this wage increase to acquire a raise in wages for themselves. Labour advocates and left-wing activists have called for a minimum wage indexed to inflation for many years, and it is therefore difficult for this amendment to be seen as anything but a success on labour's behalf. In April of 2025, the Eby government proposed another amendment to the Employment Standards Act which would prevent employers from requiring sick notes from employees for "short-term" health-related absences (which has yet to be properly defined).¹²⁸ ¹²⁹ If this bill passes, it would help workers by allowing them to simply rest when ill, rather than being forced to jump through hoops to prove their poor health. This is currently the case with provincially mandated sick days, but not for those provided by employers—this bill would change that.¹³⁰ A number of questions remain at this time: how many days would be covered by this bill? What would be the consequences for an employer failing to follow the law? This bill is worth watching as it proceeds to move through parliament, as it would no doubt be another positive for labour if it passes.

Thus far, the Eby government has defined itself by a more traditional NDP platform, one that lifts up the position of workers to a degree. Looking at Figures 2 and 3 from the period of

¹²⁵ "Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2024", Government of British Columbia, 7 March, 2024, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/bills/billsprevious/5th42nd:gov02-3>.

¹²⁶ "Minimum wage", Government of British Columbia, May 31, 2025, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/employment-standards-advice/employment-standards/wages/minimum-wage>.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ "Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2025", Government of British Columbia, accessed June 2, 2025, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/bills/billscurrent/1st43rd:gov11-1>.

¹²⁹ Daniel W. B. Heath, "BC Government Introduces Legislation to Prohibit Sick Notes for Short-Term Absences", *Harris*, May 5, 2025, <https://harrisco.com/bc-government-introduces-legislation-to-prohibit-sick-notes-for-short-term-absences/>.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

2022 to 2024 during which it has governed, we may note an intriguing pattern: both public and private unionization have remained extremely stable during this period of time, which is uncommon for British Columbia on both graphs. Additionally, both have done so after a brief increase recovering from a small decline. Where they differentiate is their relative positioning: public sector unionization is at one of its highest points in the last fifteen years, whereas private sector unionization is close to the lowest it has ever been. This government's record will be worth revisiting once Eby is no longer premier, since it can then be more properly compared to the records of previous governments.

Categorizing BC's Provincial Governments

BC's provincial government and its parties have undergone many changes from the beginning of the study period to its end. To make greater sense of the variation comparatively, we can categorize each government according to the chart in Figure 1. In this section, I will be excluding the Miller and Dosanjh governments, as their respective leaders' tenures were short and had little effect on the overall policy trajectory.

The Glen Clark government was NDP-led, but did not display the typical partisan ideological plan of NDP governments for the most part. Though the BC NDP's ideology remained fairly constant at this time, the party continuing to be proponents of social welfare and policy for the working class, Clark was elected at a time where a magnifying glass was placed upon welfare policy, and there was severe pressure to reduce the number of citizens utilizing these benefits. As a result, the Clark government's labour policy was restrictive and

austerity-driven, and the elected NDP adopted very conservative rhetoric. Thus, it will be categorized as mixed-ideology and labour-negative.

The Campbell government was traditionally conservative and continued the policy trajectory set out by the G. Clark government and its predecessor. Campbell's tenure was characterized by dramatic cuts to government programs and public sector wages, in addition to very one-sided labour policy that disregarded the position of unions entirely. These policy decisions were in line with the general platform and ideology of the BC Liberals in the early 2000s, reflecting the continuation of neoliberal austerity's prominence. Therefore, the Campbell government will be categorized as right-wing and labour-negative.

The C. Clark government carried much of the same partisan ideology as its predecessor, but also possessed a more socially-progressive angle that differentiated it. A number of significant public sector job cuts occurred during this time, and other labour issues were completely disregarded despite the clear need for assistive policy. At the same time, however, positive changes were made, such as multiple increases to the minimum wage and helpful changes to workers' compensation. The Clark government displayed traits of both the conservative BC Liberals' ideological stripe and more left-wing, socially liberal ideology (to a degree, at least in rhetoric). As a result, it will be categorized as mixed-ideology and mixed-policy (though leaning conservative and labour-negative).

The Horgan government represented a return to traditional NDP ideology, though it did not come without significant concessions to neoliberal capitalism. That being said, it certainly implemented a number of policies beneficial to the province's working class, including further minimum wage increases, a significant expansion of maternity leave, and a focus on expanding the skilled trades. It also repealed or reduced the effects of a number of previous governments'

labour-negative policies. Many argued that these policies did not go far enough, however, a common critique of “progressive” governments. The Horgan government can be classified as left-wing and labour-positive.

Thus far, the Eby government has taken a very similar partisan stripe and policymaking orientation to the Horgan government. It has particularly improved upon labour legislation, indexing the minimum wage to inflation, demanding increased transparency from employers, and even potentially improving the application of sick days. Once again, though, its policy lacks the transformative nature that many on the left-wing desire. Eby’s tenure is not yet complete, but thus far, it can also be described as left-wing and labour-positive.

Figure 5.1

<i>Partisan Stripe</i>	<u>Left-wing</u>	<u>Mixed</u>	<u>Right-wing</u>
<i>Government</i>	Horgan & Eby	C. Clark & G. Clark	Campbell

Figure 5.2

<i>Policy Approach</i>	<u>Labour-positive</u>	<u>Mixed</u>	<u>Labour-Negative</u>
<i>Government</i>	Horgan & Eby	C. Clark	Campbell & G. Clark

British Columbia's case demonstrates provincial labour policy affected by many forms of partisan leadership, and appears to display some sort of correlation between partisan political stripe and labour policy orientation. Thus far, the more left-wing governments tend to enact more labour-positive policy, and the more right-wing governments tend to enact more labour-negative policy. By examining a second province, we can compare and contrast these patterns, discovering consistencies or contradictions.

Chapter 3: Saskatchewan

The second case to be studied in this paper is that of Saskatchewan. This province was once an NDP stronghold, but transitioned to conservative leadership within the period of study. Similarly to British Columbia, the province's rate of public sector unionization has experienced fluctuation, while its rate of private sector unionization has consistently decreased. Its more left-wing governments, which were actually mixed-ideology, tended to have mixed policy orientation, while its more right-wing governments tended to have labour-negative policy orientation.

Saskatchewan's provincial leadership has followed an intriguing pattern over the past couple of decades, with the NDP holding the position of premier for over fifteen years (until 2007), and then the Saskatchewan Party (conservatively aligned) doing the same until the present. Similarly to British Columbia, over the past twenty-seven years, the percentage of both public and private sector workers unionized has decreased.¹³¹ Both have declined slowly but significantly, with public sector unionization experiencing three percentage points of decrease and private sector unionization experiencing five.¹³² Just like in British Columbia, the number of total employees in the province has increased, but the number is far fewer in this province, an increase of about 50,000 workers as compared to an increase of about 200,000.¹³³ Unlike in British Columbia, the total number of unionized workers has increased despite the percentage

¹³¹ "Union Coverage by Industry", StatsCan.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

decrease, but only very slightly, only about 5,000 individuals in the case of the private sector.¹³⁴

Public sector unionization ends the set of data in 2024 at one of its lowest points with 74% of the workforce in a union, the same low point that it reached five years previously, in 2019.¹³⁵ Private sector unionization also reached its lowest point at the end of the graph, with a paltry 14% of the workforce in a union.¹³⁶ There are decreases occurring at the same time as the 2008 financial crisis, similarly to British Columbia, particularly in the public sector.¹³⁷

The Saskatchewan NDP is affiliated with the federal New Democrats, though they are considered fairly distinct due to their significance in shaping regional development as the Farmer-Labour Group and the Saskatchewan CCF.¹³⁸ This party, considered left-wing, was responsible for the creation of many crown corporations and was at the forefront of many welfare developments in the Canadian state, including being the first province to implement universal healthcare.¹³⁹ It also became one of the first governments in the country to involve itself in the economy significantly, utilizing a model that restricted the ‘free market’ to regulate employment, cost of living, and more.¹⁴⁰ The province was unable to provide a full range of properly staffed social services until equalization was introduced in the late 1950s, allowing an interpretation of the Keynesian state to properly emerge.¹⁴¹ Rather than ‘socialist’, however, the party is best described as ‘social democratic’, as though it has strongly supported the public sector, it has also always supported the private sector where it believes it can best do the job.¹⁴²

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Jocelyne Praud and Sarah McQuarrie, “The Saskatchewan CCF-NDP from the Regina Manifesto to the Romanow Years”, *Saskatchewan politics: into the twenty-first century*, University of Regina, 2001, pp. 143-168, <https://archive.org/details/saskatchewanpoli0000unse/page/n7/mode/2up>.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

“Social planning”, as it is described, is viewed as highly important by the party, but not such that it significantly disrupts capitalist development.¹⁴³ The Saskatchewan NDP were once viewed as Saskatchewan’s dominant party, but that changed in 2007: after a historic loss, they were replaced by the Saskatchewan party at the helm. However, in recent years, they have been regaining power, seeing the best election results from the past twenty years during the recent 2024 provincial election.¹⁴⁴

The Saskatchewan Party, one of the province’s centre-right parties, formed in 1997 by a coalition of former Conservative and Liberal party members. This party, though supposedly founded upon nonpartisan principles, has run its platform consistently on opposing the policy principles of the Saskatchewan NDP, utilizing “libertarian logic and social conservative rhetoric”.¹⁴⁵ By engaging with rural voters who felt neglected by the policies of the SK NDP, especially with regards to agricultural issues, the Saskatchewan Party (also known as the SP) was able to rise to power, reducing state spending significantly, keeping taxes low, and calling for “equal opportunity” rather than “equal condition”.¹⁴⁶ The SP is described as “top-down” as opposed to the SK NDP being “grassroots”, originating amongst politicians and gaining popularity via organized campaigning.¹⁴⁷ Though the SP is ‘liberal’ in as much as it advocates for free-market policy, it is undoubtedly conservative in other areas, utilizing “common sense” rhetoric to justify right-wing populist ideology.¹⁴⁸ The party once occupied a more balanced position, but in recent years has been significantly affected by polarization, increasingly relying

¹⁴³ Ibid, pp. 149.

¹⁴⁴ Sean Previl, “Saskatchewan NDP sees best election result in almost 20 years despite loss”, *Global News*, October 29, 2024, <https://globalnews.ca/news/10835982/saskatchewan-election-ndp-gains/>.

¹⁴⁵ Kevin Wishlow, “Rethinking the Polarization Thesis: the Formation and Growth of the Saskatchewan Party, 1997-2001”, *Saskatchewan politics: into the twenty-first century*, University of Regina, 2001, pp. 169-198, <https://archive.org/details/saskatchewanpoli0000unse/page/n7/mode/2up>, pp. 169.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 175.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 187.

upon its social conservatism and engaging in ‘culture war’ issues such as opposing transgender rights.¹⁴⁹

The first leader during this paper’s period of study, elected in 1991 and continuing to lead until early 2001, was Roy Romanow of the SK NDP. Prior to his position as premier, Romanow was a member of the Legislative Assembly for many years, achievements including the creation of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission and the introduction of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code.¹⁵⁰ The Romanow government, though distinctly NDP in its pursuit of improvements to provincial healthcare, operated on a program of reducing social assistance spending much like many of the other governments in this paper.¹⁵¹ Though most of these policies were implemented prior to the period of study, their impact on Saskatchewan and Romanow’s tenure is worth discussion, especially as they relate to labour issues, and continued to do so after Romanow was no longer premier.

Under the banner of “Building Independence”, the Romanow government’s welfare policy reform consisted of a plan to move as many families off of social assistance programs as possible via the Transitional Employment Allowance (TEA) and other supplemental benefits including childcare support for low-income households.¹⁵² Not only did this program cut back on social assistance for families that needed it, but even its supposed successes did not necessarily result in a sustainable reduction in poverty. One of this program’s most significant points of

¹⁴⁹ Drew Postey, “Sask. Party leader promises to swiftly introduce school changeroom policy if re-elected”, *CTV News*, October 17, 2024, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/regina/article/sask-party-leader-promises-to-swiftly-introduce-school-changeroom-policy-if-re-elected/>.

¹⁵⁰ Sean Riley, “Introduction of the Honourable Roy Romanow”, *St. Francis Xavier University*, February 19, 2003, <https://www.sfx.ca/departement/political-science/introduction-honourable-roy-romanow>.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Bill Carney, “Building Independence Initiative Helps Low-Income Families”, *Government of Saskatchewan*, March 26, 1999, <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/1999/march/26/building-independence-initiative-helps-low-income-families>.

critique was the decision to gatekeep various forms of welfare behind employment status (requiring employment), including the aforementioned childcare benefits.¹⁵³ By “compelling [individuals] to undertake low wage employment” in order to obtain financial supplements necessary for their families’ survival, the province could be said to be “[trapping] them in a cycle of poverty”.¹⁵⁴ This program certainly reduced welfare caseloads, but could not be said to eliminate poverty in any meaningful way—it is another example of the neoliberal policy trend of the late 1990s and early 2000s that preferred to cut social assistance regardless of cost to citizens, and considers any form of employment a solution to poverty. Another controversial policy decision came with the government’s approach to health reform in the early 90s, which centralized care by designating around thirty different health regions in the province and resulted in a dramatic reduction in rural availability: over fifty acute-care hospitals in rural areas closed within a year of this act’s passage.¹⁵⁵ This decision is cited as one of the most prominent reasons that rural voters abandoned the SK NDP, as they felt abandoned by the party’s focus on urban areas within the province.¹⁵⁶

In the later part of Romanow’s tenure, the bulk of labour-related legislation passed consisted of smaller amendments to labour-related acts rather than anything truly transformative. For example, the Municipal Employees’ Pension Amendment Act of 1999 consisted of adjustments to pensions for the province’s full-time municipal employees, changing how pensions were calculated and outlining specifics for years of service required for various

¹⁵³ Garson Hunter and Kathleen Donovan, “Poor need more than T.E.A.: Saskatchewan’s Building Independence Program forces people into “low wage” traps”, *Saskatchewan Notes* 4, no. 3 (2005), pp. 1-4, https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Saskatchewan_Pubs/2005/Poor_Need_More_Than_TEA.pdf.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ W.A. Waiser, “Our Shared Destiny”, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, Fifth House, 2006, pp. 457-478, <https://archive.org/details/saskatchewannewh0000wais/page/n11/mode/2up>.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

benefits.¹⁵⁷ The Farm Financial Stability Act also received an amendment in 2000, the bill increasing the province's role in the relationship between producers, lenders, and various producers' associations.¹⁵⁸ Firstly, the Ministry of Finance acquired the ability to act as a guarantor for loans between lenders and producers' associations.¹⁵⁹ Then, provincial supervisors gained powers particularly in the case of associations with loans, including those that would typically be the responsibility of the associations (such as confirming inventory).¹⁶⁰ This amendment could be seen as positive for farms and their workers as they encouraged lending and investment, but also featured increased oversight that many rural employers did not desire, especially originating from the NDP. Finally, the Public Employees Pension Plan Act was amended in 2000 to lower the eligibility age to 69 (previously 71), allowing individuals publicly employed to begin collecting their pensions slightly earlier.¹⁶¹

More consequential legislation passed during this period of time includes the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act of 1999, which established the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission.¹⁶² This act, in short, had the goal of fortifying skilled trades within the province, the Commission responsible for “the regulation and training of apprentices, tradespersons and journeypersons and the qualifications necessary for certificates, permits, endorsements and identification cards”.¹⁶³ Centralizing regulation in this manner permitted the government greater control over trade standards, but could be said to be

¹⁵⁷ “Municipal Employees’ Pension Amendment Act, 1999”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2000, <https://www.legassembly.sk.ca/media/1128/progress-of-bills-1999-2000.pdf>.

¹⁵⁸ Farm Financial Stability Amendment Act, 2000”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2000, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/astat/ss-2000-c-44/latest/ss-2000-c-44.html>.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ “Public Employees Pension Plan Amendment Act”, Government of Saskatchewan, May 26, 2000, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/astat/ss-2000-c-4/latest/ss-2000-c-4.html>.

¹⁶² “Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act, 1999”, Government of Saskatchewan, 1999, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/stat/ss-1999-c-a-22.2/latest/ss-1999-c-a-22.2.html>.

¹⁶³ Ibid, pp. 3.

stifling growth. Next, in 2000, an amendment to the Medical Profession Act was passed that permitted the practice of medicine through a corporation, a significant development in the province which pioneered public healthcare in Canada.¹⁶⁴ Though not outright detracting from public healthcare, introducing private healthcare into the province as a method of improving efficiency in healthcare delivery can be rhetoric later used to decrease public funding in favour of the private sector (such as is the case in Ontario at the time of writing). The act expanded the choice of employment available to members of the healthcare sector in a neoliberal manner: there is more freedom of choice, but that freedom is highly susceptible to becoming a ‘race to the bottom’ on the part of employers.

The Health Labour Relations Reorganization Act, part of the Romanow government’s plan to change provincial healthcare, was revisited in 2000 with the Health Labour Relations Reorganization Amendment Act. The original act, passed in 1996, appointed a commissioner “to examine the organization of labour relations between health sector employers and employees in the Province”, following which a number of new regulations were made.¹⁶⁵ The 2000 amendment repealed a section of the original act and substituted it with a section which made it such that no changes to those regulations would be permitted by the Labour Relations Board until 2003.¹⁶⁶ This act essentially locked the new regulations in for a period of time despite the aforementioned discontent (particularly in rural areas). The Department of Health Amendment Act, also passed in 2000, adjusted the health districts slightly as well: the two largest districts by area, a pair in the rural north, gained new Health Boards to hold authority and implement the new laws and

¹⁶⁴ “Medical Profession Amendment Act, 2000”, Government of Saskatchewan, June 21, 2000, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/astat/ss-2000-c-15/latest/ss-2000-c-15.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board, “Labour Relations Annual Report, 1999-2000”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2000.

¹⁶⁶ “Health Labour Relations Reorganization Amendment Act, 2000”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2000, <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/5401/bill-3.pdf>.

regulations.¹⁶⁷ The centralization of healthcare in Saskatchewan continued, as did the pattern of rural citizens feeling neglected by the Romanow government.

Referring back to Figures 2 and 3 and examining patterns of unionization during Romanow's tenure, his time as premier corresponds with a time of relative stability in the data. Public sector unionization endured a significant drop between 1998 and 2000, but spiked back upwards to its previous high in 2001. Private sector unionization, while generally on the decline and experiencing a decrease between 1997 and 1999, remained stable between 1999 and 2002. During the period of study, the Romanow government, while not necessarily pro-labour, did not undertake an assault on labour in the way many other governments in this paper have, aside from its complete restructuring of healthcare. Thus, it seems to make sense that unionization experienced somewhat regular fluctuation during this period of time.

Following Romanow, the next leader in Saskatchewan's history was Lorne Calvert, the final New Democratic leader of the province until the present. Calvert played the role of a slightly more conservative NDP premier, which is possibly the reason he was appointed: at the time, the NDP was losing traction, especially with the aforementioned disenfranchised rural voters. He undertook various "social initiatives", but was "cautious" with finances, investing in the province carefully while taking budget-balancing issues into consideration.¹⁶⁸ His background in religion, which reportedly influenced his focus on social issues, may have also made him more appealing to conservative voters.¹⁶⁹

The first labour-related bill passed under Calvert was the Registered Nurses Amendment Act of 2001. This amendment expanded the scope of possible bylaws pertaining to nurses,

¹⁶⁷ "Department of Health Amendment Act, 2000", Government of Saskatchewan, June 21, 2000, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/astat/ss-2000-c-11/latest/ss-2000-c-11.html>.

¹⁶⁸ Jocelyne Praud, "Calvert, Lorne Albert (1952-)", University of Regina, accessed June 10, 2025, https://esask.uregina.ca/entry/calvert_lorne_albert_1952-.html.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

especially those regarding licensing.¹⁷⁰ Another bill pertaining to healthcare labour, this act was relatively standard, but continued to give the government increasing control over the healthcare sector. The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Amendment Act of 2002 did something similar for the skilled trades: it necessitated various forms of license or certification in order to work under an assortment of circumstances.¹⁷¹ It appears that, during this period of time, the government was updating older legislation in order to implement new regulations, which could be labour-positive or -negative contextually.

2003 was a significant year for labour legislation in Saskatchewan, many relevant bills being passed in the 24th parliament's 4th session. The Teachers' Superannuation and Disability Benefits Amendment Act was passed, specifying conditions for these payments further.¹⁷² The Municipal Employees' Pension Act also received an amendment, primarily to adjust the meaning of certain terms as they pertain to municipal workers with involvement in "educational services".¹⁷³ The act also clarified eligibility for various forms of pension, and expanded upon the duty of the Municipal Employees' Pension Commission.¹⁷⁴ Next, the Registered Nurses Act was amended to clarify the application of bylaws and implement the "continuing competence program", which held the "purpose of reviewing and improving the quality of nursing care provided by members".¹⁷⁵ Finally, the Workers Compensation Act was amended, but only for a specific case: the bill specified a number of conditions (such as bladder cancer, kidney cancer,

¹⁷⁰ "Registered Nurses Amendment Act, 2001", Government of Saskatchewan, 2001, <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/5645/bill-4.pdf>.

¹⁷¹ "Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Amendment Act, 2002", Government of Saskatchewan, 2002, <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/8002/Bill-5.pdf>.

¹⁷² "Teachers' Superannuation and Disability Benefits Amendment Act, 2003", Government of Saskatchewan, 2003, <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/8441/Bill-5.pdf>.

¹⁷³ "Municipal Employees' Pension Amendment Act, 2003", Government of Saskatchewan, June 27, 2003, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/astat/ss-2003-c-31/latest/ss-2003-c-31.html>.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ "Registered Nurses Amendment Act, 2003", Government of Saskatchewan, May 27, 2003, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/astat/ss-2003-c-10/latest/ss-2003-c-10.html>.

and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma) as “occupational diseases” of firefighting, meaning that firefighters with such diseases have since been able to receive compensation.¹⁷⁶ This collection of amendments changed the state of labour within the province in minor ways, but did not lead to any significant, dramatic shifts.

2004 through 2005 also contained a plethora of smaller labour-related changes contained within amendments to pre-existing acts. To begin with, the Municipal Employees’ Pension Act was amended in order to lay out provisions for receiving excess contributions and allocated pensions after the recipient’s death.¹⁷⁷ Pensions were also changed for the broader population with the Pension Benefits Amendment Act of 2004, which allowed those with pension and benefits plans to provide additional contributions for “optional ancillary benefits”.¹⁷⁸ Additionally, provisions were laid out for pre-retirement survivor benefits, allowing spouses of the deceased to claim the deceased’s pension if their date of death occurred on or after the first day of pension collection eligibility.¹⁷⁹ Next, the Labour Standards Act was amended to continue the appointment of a Minimum Wage Board responsible for investigating matters related to the minimum wage and its recipients in order to provide recommendations to the minister regarding change.¹⁸⁰ At the time, the minimum wage was \$6.65, no doubt a low wage, but in fact higher than over half of the provinces and territories.¹⁸¹ In addition to responsibilities regarding the wage itself, the Board became responsible for recommendations to the Lieutenant Governor in

¹⁷⁶ “Workers’ Compensation Amendment Act, 2003”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2003, <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/8467/Bill-18.pdf>.

¹⁷⁷ “Municipal Employees’ Pension Amendment Act, 2004”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2004, <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/12217/Bill-4.pdf>.

¹⁷⁸ “Pension Benefits Amendment Act, 2004”, Government of Saskatchewan, June 17, 2004, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/astat/ss-2004-c-42/latest/ss-2004-c-42.html>.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ “Labour Standards Amendment Act, 2004”, Government of Saskatchewan, June 17, 2004, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/astat/ss-2004-c-40/latest/ss-2004-c-40.html>.

¹⁸¹ “General Hourly Minimum Wage Rates in Canada since 1965”, Government of Canada, accessed June 12, 2025, <https://minwage-salairemin.service.canada.ca/en/since1965.html>.

Council to make regulations regarding various labour issues (including transportation, wage statements, hours of work, and more).¹⁸² This Board could be considered another layer of bureaucracy preventing issues affecting workers from being resolved quickly, but could also be considered necessary insight into the condition of minimum wage workers in the province. The Labour Market Commission Act was also passed in 2006, a bill establishing a commission with a similar role to the former, researching labour issues and advising the government.¹⁸³ Finally, in 2005, the Workers Compensation Act was amended once more to once again better incorporate potential occupational diseases for firefighters, this time including lung cancer (for non-smokers) and testicular cancer, among others.¹⁸⁴

In 2006, a new version of the Teachers' Federation Act was passed, repealing its prior form and including a number of new regulations. Within Saskatchewan, the Teachers' Federation is a significant trade union representing the province's public sector teachers. This act continues to respect the role of the Federation in representing teachers, providing benefit and pension plans, and establishing high standards of teaching.¹⁸⁵ Notably, the newer version of the act (as compared to its predecessor, passed in 1978) includes a section on teachers' collective interests, which primarily contains provisions for disciplinary action if a teacher is found to be engaging in conduct "contrary to the collective interests of teachers".¹⁸⁶ The section also solidifies the role of the Federation as the sole representative of public sector teachers, stating that no local association shall attempt to bargain with the government regarding teaching matters.¹⁸⁷ The new

¹⁸² "Labour Standards, 2004", Government of Saskatchewan.

¹⁸³ "Labour Market Commission Act", Government of Saskatchewan, 2006, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/stat/ss-2006-c-l-0.11/latest/ss-2006-c-l-0.11.html>.

¹⁸⁴ "Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2005", Government of Saskatchewan, December 2, 2005, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/astat/ss-2005-c-46/latest/ss-2005-c-46.html>.

¹⁸⁵ "The Teachers' Federation Act, 2006", Government of Saskatchewan, 2006, <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/18396/T7-1.pdf>.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, pp. 21.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 21.

act also features a much larger focus on teaching “ethics and standards of practice”, including appointing a council to oversee related matters.¹⁸⁸

The Labour Standards Act was amended once again in 2006, this time to implement Family Day as a provincial holiday.¹⁸⁹ As was the case in British Columbia, this change did not alter working conditions for employees, but an extra paid holiday is certainly a slight improvement. In 2007, the Labour Standards Act was amended for the last time under Calvert, requiring employers to give employees an unpaid leave of absence if they are serving as a member of the reserve force for a period of time.¹⁹⁰ In terms of legislation meant to actually change working standards, the 2007 Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act had the goal of improving the handling of harassment in the workforce, including a clear definition of harassment, provisions to help workers reporting or experiencing it, and outlines for the procurement of mediators or adjudicators.¹⁹¹ Notably, the bill does not include mention of protections for workers being harassed, though these matters may be covered by a different piece of legislation. Finally (in this category of changes), the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code received an amendment: the definition of “age” in the Code was changed to include those 65 and over, meaning that employers could no longer utilize mandatory retirement policies.¹⁹² This legislation is beneficial to both workers and the broader economy: the ageism of these mandatory retirement policies was eliminated, allowing older employees to continue working as long as

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 15.

¹⁸⁹ “Labour Standards Amendment Act, 2006”, Government of Saskatchewan, December 6, 2006, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/astat/ss-2006-c--41/latest/ss-2006-c--41.html>.

¹⁹⁰ “Labour Standards Amendment Act, 2007”, Government of Saskatchewan, April 26, 2007, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/astat/ss-2007-c-14/latest/ss-2007-c-14.html>.

¹⁹¹ “Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act, 2007”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2007, <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/-/media/news-archive/2007/april/23/province-strengthens-workplace-protection-for-saskatchewan-people/bill66.pdf>.

¹⁹² Andrew Dismore, “Legislation to End Mandatory Retirement Receives Royal Assent”, Government of Saskatchewan, May 17, 2007, <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2007/may/17/legislation-to-end-mandatory-retirement-receives-royal-assent>.

they desire, and more workers are available to fill necessary positions. This is a sign of change both positive and negative, expanding the expertise in the workforce and reducing discrimination, but indicative of an aging population that will lead to structural economic difficulty in the future.

A handful of other bills were passed in 2007 that were related to labour, but more limited in scope. The Municipal Employees' Pension Act was amended, primarily to include a section on new spouses of "retired members" and their ability to request a recalculation of pension entitlements.¹⁹³ The Public Employees' Pension Act also received an amendment, discussing the handling of pension benefits for employees who hadn't retired by the age of 65 and "amounts payable to persons who cannot be located".¹⁹⁴ Finally, the Regional Health Services Act received an amendment allowing for regional health authorities to "enter into a written agreement respecting the provision of health services with a health care organization that is not a designated health care organization".¹⁹⁵ Presumably, this bill was to be utilized in concert with prior legislation permitting private healthcare practices, meaning that private healthcare could officially become a part of regional healthcare.

During Calvert's tenure, public sector unionization went through many spikes and declines. Its lowest point was in 2005 following a short period of stability, immediately followed by a spike in 2006 to one of its highest points in the entire data set (matched only by the rate in 2010). In fact, the change between 2005 and 2006 is the most drastic to be found in either figure, constituting a difference of three percentage points in one year alone. Private sector unionization remained remarkably consistent, rising to its prior levels after a small decrease in 2003, and

¹⁹³ "Municipal Employees' Pension Amendment Act, 2007", Government of Saskatchewan, 2007, <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/18923/Bill-31.pdf>.

¹⁹⁴ "Public Employees Pension Plan Amendment Act, 2007", Government of Saskatchewan, May 17, 2007, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/astat/ss-2007-c-35/latest/ss-2007-c-35.html>.

¹⁹⁵ "Regional Health Services Amendment Act, 2007", Government of Saskatchewan, 2007, <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/18923/Bill-31.pdf>, pp.1.

remaining stable until another slight decrease in 2007. Calvert's time as premier was mostly characterized by smaller changes to labour, but there were some significant pieces of legislation: the amendment to the Human Rights Code, for example, and attempting to improve the minimum wage. The healthcare sector also continued to undergo dramatic changes during this time, especially with the entry of private healthcare practitioners into the province (and eventually into public healthcare, to a degree). The great deal of fluctuation in unionization could be normal variation, but it is important to note that Calvert's time as premier brought with it considerable economic change, even though direct labour policy was not his government's focus.¹⁹⁶ Policy the Calvert government implemented, such as corporate and income tax cuts alongside investments in energy and other sectors, was later considered to be responsible for the economic growth within the province that helped it weather the global financial crisis.¹⁹⁷

With the Saskatchewan NDP's reign coming to an end, Brad Wall of the Saskatchewan Party became the province's next premier, holding the position for a total of almost fifteen years. His roots are in rural Saskatchewan, making him an excellent choice of leader on the Saskatchewan Party's behalf, given the two preceding governments' controversies with those in rural parts of the province.¹⁹⁸ His entry into provincial politics came after many years of political experience more generally: high school politics, a university degree in politics and public administration, and a job as a staffer for a Conservative MP.¹⁹⁹ Wall later became a leader in a

¹⁹⁶ John Gray, "Saskatchewan: A "Have" Province At Last", *The Globe and Mail*, December 29, 2009, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/rob-magazine/saskatchewan-a-have-province-at-last/article4297269/>.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Robin Sears, "From Inside Policy: Robin Sears profiles Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall", *Macdonald-Laurier Institute*, November 20, 2014, <https://macdonaldlaurier.ca/inside-policy-robin-sears-profiles-saskatchewan-premier-brad-wall/>.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

group of activist “free-trade enthusiasts”, an interest that would define his economic policy broadly when he became premier.²⁰⁰

The very first bill passed by the Wall government was the Growth and Financial Security Act, an act which made the government’s neoliberal aspirations for the province clear. This bill implemented extremely tight budget-balancing regulations, including the requirement that a year of deficit must be followed with a year of surplus.²⁰¹ The relative rarity of surplus indicates that the government would have had to incorporate quite severe cost-saving measures in order to achieve it: an indication of this, relevant to the subject of labour, is included within the bill, that being a limit on the size of the “public service”.²⁰² This, naturally, resulted in a reduction of public sector jobs, hundreds of civil service workers losing employment.²⁰³ Any money resulting from a surplus was to be put into the “Growth and Financial Security Fund”, to be spent on programs “promoting or enhancing the economic development” of Saskatchewan.²⁰⁴ At this point in time, the government’s plan was not to invest in improving the lives of citizens directly through the delivery of social service programs, but to increase economic growth, believing that increase in the market, then, would improve the lives of citizens. This reliance on the market to provide, and belief that its distribution is just, is extremely neoliberal in nature. To the Wall government’s credit, the 2008-2009 fiscal year in Saskatchewan resulted in the “highest-ever surplus in provincial history”, helping the province endure the financial crisis.²⁰⁵ This surplus permitted the government to introduce tax cuts which likely assisted many during the crisis.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ “Growth and Financial Security Act”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2008, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/stat/ss-2008-c-g-8.1/latest/ss-2008-c-g-8.1.html>, pp. 4.

²⁰² Ibid, pp. 10.

²⁰³ “Civil Service Cuts (2008-01-15)”, CBC News, January 15, 2008, <https://distributionarchives.cbrc.ca/en/items/8f75b3da-296e-41a7-9bcc-7d04753a46a5>.

²⁰⁴ “Growth and Security”, Saskatchewan.

²⁰⁵ “2008-09 Public Accounts Show Stellar Year For Saskatchewan”, Government of Saskatchewan, June 25, 2009, <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2009/june/25/200809-public-accounts-show-stellar-year-for-saskatchewan>.

However, a reduction in welfare spending likely meant that those in poverty bore the brunt of the crisis, often an acceptable sacrifice in neoliberal policy plans.

The next piece of relevant legislation to be passed was the Public Service Essential Services Act. This bill, with the purpose of delineating “essential” services and workers, placed restrictions upon striking in certain sectors and at certain times. The act designated all public sector workers as essential, then required all public sector unions to “begin negotiations [with the provincial government] with a view to concluding an essential services agreement” if their current collective agreement had 90 days or less before expiry.²⁰⁶ These essential services agreements required the establishment of provisions determining employees required to work during strike action or “work stoppage”, and permitted the provincial government to make the final decision on who is essential if the two sides could not come to an agreement.²⁰⁷ While the bill claimed to be for the good of Saskatchewan’s citizens by ensuring certain important services remained available at all times, it served another important purpose: defanging public sector unions and ensuring government advantage in the bargaining process. With an essential core of employees performing work at all times, the government would not experience significant pressure during strike action, which holds the express goal of being disruptive in order to achieve its aims. Directly following this act was another pertaining to labour, the 2007 Trade Union Amendment Act, which made union certification much more difficult (requiring 45% of employees to support an application rather than the previous 25%) and de-certification much easier.²⁰⁸ The two bills were described by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) as

²⁰⁶ “Public Service Essential Services Act”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2008, <https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/stat/ss-2008-c-p-42.2/latest/ss-2008-c-p-42.2.html>, pp. 5.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ “Trade Union Amendment Act, 2007”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2008, <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/31321/Bill-6.pdf>.

“rooted in ideological opposition to organized labour”, a description which generally aligns with the Wall government’s immediate and well-organized implementation of anti-labour policy.²⁰⁹

After the two bills’ passing, the SFL brought the matter to the Supreme Court, arguing that it was constitutionally invalid given its infringement on the right to free association.²¹⁰ The Supreme Court agreed: in a 5-2 ruling in 2015, it recognized the right to strike as a part of the right to free association and struck down the Public Service Essential Services Act in its then-current state, a ruling impacting workers across the entire country.²¹¹ As a result, the original legislation was amended, changes including the removal of the definition of essential workers (allowing the parties to decide together what qualifies), the establishment of a third-party body for resolving disputes, and requiring advance notice when essential services are to be maintained.²¹² The Growth and Financial Security Act was also repealed in 2016, ending its official hold on the direction of labour policy.²¹³ Within its first six pieces of legislation, the Wall government passed three acts that were prevalently anti-labour, one so much so that it was deemed fundamentally unconstitutional. This set the tone for the Wall government’s treatment of labour issues going forward, and led to multiple years’ worth of labour action that would eventually force the government to make these changes to legislation—a success that would be called “the Big Win”, indicative of its significance.²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ “The Big Win: A Timeline”, Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, January 15, 2025, <https://sfl.sk.ca/news/remembering-the-big-win>.

²¹⁰ “Saskatchewan fixes essential services law after Supreme Court ruling”, Saskatoon StarPhoenix, October 15, 2015, <https://thestarphoenix.com/news/saskatchewan/saskatchewan-fixes-essential-services-law-after-supreme-court-ruling>.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² “New Essential Services Legislation Takes Effect January 1, 2016”, Government of Saskatchewan, December 31, 2015, <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2015/december/31/essential-services-leg-take-effect>.

²¹³ “Growth and Financial Security Repeal Act”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2016, <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/28L1S/Bill28-21.pdf>.

²¹⁴ “The Big Win”, SFL.

A number of other changes to labour legislation were made in the following decade, though none were nearly as significant as those previous. In terms of smaller changes, first, the 1998 Public Service Act received an amendment, which allowed permanent ministry heads to demote or dismiss any employee (formerly only permanent employees) if they determined it to be “in the interest of the public service”.²¹⁵ ²¹⁶ The amendment also includes provisions for reinstating employees who were found to be wrongly dismissed via commission.²¹⁷ Next, the Construction Industry Labour Relations Act received an amendment centered on unionization: the new bill allowed for the creation of smaller unions within workplaces (for example, restricted to specific trades), theoretically allowing for more freedom of choice, but also potentially dividing the workforce and making strike action more difficult to coordinate.²¹⁸ Finally, the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code was amended to include gender identity as a protected category, relevant as a legal backing against workplace and hiring discrimination.²¹⁹

Beyond these and the previous ‘bombshell’ pieces of legislation, some larger changes did occur. The Labour Market Commission Act was repealed, the bill which enacted a program to examine labour market issues and advise the government on solving them via a diverse commission.²²⁰ ²²¹ Ending this program signalled the government’s general lack of concern for labour issues, prioritizing business interests. The Workers’ Compensation Act received a small amendment in 2011, covering esophageal cancer as an occupational hazard for firefighters, but

²¹⁵ “Public Service Amendment Act, 2008”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2008, <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/31947/Bill-18.pdf>.

²¹⁶ “Public Service Act”, Government of Saskatchewan, 1998, <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/1224/P42-1.pdf>, pp. 12.

²¹⁷ “Public Service Amendment Act”, Saskatchewan.

²¹⁸ “Construction Industry Labour Relations Amendment Act, 2009”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2009, https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/3_26/Bill-80.pdf.

²¹⁹ “Saskatchewan Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2014”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2014, <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/27L4S/Bill27-171.pdf>.

²²⁰ “Labour Market Commission Repeal Act”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2011, https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/3_26/Bill-106.pdf.

²²¹ “Labour Market Commission Act”, Saskatchewan.

the far greater change to workers' compensation under the Wall government came in the form of the 2012 Workers' Compensation Act, a complete overhaul of the 1979 legislation.²²² The new bill increased the maximum wage rate for injured workers, indexed that maximum wage for future claims, and introduced penalties (including fines) for employers who failed to meet their described obligations.²²³ This new act updated legislation that was in need of modernization, and was generally positive for workers in the province. Finally, the Occupational Health and Safety Act received a large amendment with many changes: it clarified several terms, expanded the duties of involved parties such as supervisors, contractors, and suppliers, and added two new sections (discussing notices of contravention and progress reports).²²⁴

The seven years of Wall's leadership are associated with a fairly even point in public sector unionization, referring back to Figure 2. At a low point of 76% when Wall took office, that percentage rose to 78% by 2010, then followed a slow pattern of decrease until 2017, at which point the percentage was 75%, and finally peaked in 2018 at 77%. Private sector unionization during the same period experienced the same slow, fluctuating decrease that has been the consistent pattern thus far. By the end of Wall's leadership, the percentage of private sector workers unionized was 14%, down from 17% when he took office. One curious aspect of this data is that public sector unionization actually *increased* in the wake of the Wall government's anti-labour policies implemented in 2008, despite legislation making it more difficult to unionize.²²⁵ One potential explanation, given Saskatchewan's history of organized labour involvement in provincial politics, is that the province has a 'core' of strong unions that held its

²²² "Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2011", Government of Saskatchewan, 2011, https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/4_26/Bill-174.pdf

²²³ "Workers' Compensation Act, 2012", Government of Saskatchewan, 2012, <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/27L2S/Bill27-58.pdf>

²²⁴ "Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act, 2011", Government of Saskatchewan, 2011, <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/27L1S/Bill27-23.pdf>

²²⁵ "Trade Union Amendment Act", Saskatchewan.

position and campaigned for workers' rights in the wake of this legislation (evidenced by the long fight leading up to the "Big Win"). More workers may have unionized after becoming aware of the government's anti-labour stance, particularly in the public sector, where the government themselves is the employer.

The next premier of Saskatchewan, who is still premier at the time of writing, is Scott Moe. Moe grew up on a farm in rural Saskatchewan, and received his bachelor's degree in agriculture.²²⁶ Generally, his policy has focused on export and trade, with an emphasis on "diversifying [Saskatchewan's] markets worldwide".²²⁷ Moe has been involved in several scandals, some personal, but the majority policy-related: examples include involvement in an illegal irrigation project (as the Minister of Environment), support for anti-vaccine misinformation movements, and the threatened use of the notwithstanding clause to pass anti-trans legislation in schools.^{228 229 230} His tenure has been characterized by a right-wing political stripe in both rhetoric and policy. Upon taking office, his government announced a 3.5% reduction in public sector wages, aiming to reduce the deficit by paying workers less, (despite increasing the budget for health and social services).²³¹

The Moe government's first piece of labour-related legislation was the 2018 Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act. The bulk of amendments made to the act involve

²²⁶ "Honourable Scott Moe", Government of Saskatchewan, accessed June 18, 2025, <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/government-structure/cabinet/honourable-scott-moe>.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Adam Hunter, "Premier says he doesn't recall many details of meeting with former MLA Bill Boyd over irrigation project", *CBC News*, May 15, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/moe-doesn-t-recall-details-of-bill-boyd-meeting-irrigation-1.4664739>

²²⁹ Jason Warick, "Political scientists say Sask premier's stance on vaccines is unprecedented", *CBC News*, February 4, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/political-scientists-moe-stance-covid-19-vaccines-1.6339636>.

²³⁰ Dylan Robertson, "Keep notwithstanding clause out of school pronoun policies: justice minister", *CTV News*, September 14, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230916000751/https://regina.ctvnews.ca/saskatchewan-considers-notwithstanding-clause-to-keep-school-pronoun-policy-change-1.6561193>.

²³¹ Adam Hunter, "Sask. budget 2018: PST stays at 6%, government projects \$365M deficit", *CBC News*, April 10, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/saskatchewan-budget-main-1.4612862>.

implementing a new appeals process, the former commission discontinued, and a registrar of appeals position created.²³² This would reduce bureaucracy in many decision-making processes, but also eliminate a government-led program of insight into apprenticeship and trades issues. As a result, the Foreign Worker Recruitment and Immigration Services Act was amended in several sections, largely to implement the new adjudication and appeals process with regard to workplace issues such as unpaid wages, particularly in the case of foreign workers, who routinely face exploitation.²³³ Next, a handful of general provincial employment-related amendments were passed, the first of these being the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act of 2018. This amendment again introduced more coverage for firefighters, and also established clearer definitions of what information related to workers' compensation and its cases was protected personal information.²³⁴ After this came the Saskatchewan Employment (Paid Interpersonal Violence and Sexual Violence Leave) Amendment Act of 2019. As indicated by its title, this bill implemented paid leave for any employee who experienced an incident of interpersonal violence outside of the workplace, up to ten days a year.²³⁵ The bill had some limitations, particularly in its requirements for proof from a third party—the inclusion of social workers and medical professionals is good, but it's often very difficult to prove such violence—but it is still a useful piece of legislation that could help workers experiencing something difficult.²³⁶ Finally, the Saskatchewan Employment Act received a very large amendment in 2019 which applied a lot of small or specific updates, but also included a

²³² “Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act, 2018”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2018, <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/28L3S/Bill28-136.pdf>.

²³³ “Foreign Worker Recruitment and Immigration Services Amendment Act, 2018”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2018, <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/28L3S/Bill28-139.pdf>.

²³⁴ “Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2018”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2018, <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/28L3S/Bill28-165.pdf>.

²³⁵ “Saskatchewan Employment (Paid Interpersonal Violence and Sexual Violence Leave) Amendment Act, 2019”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2019, <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/28L3S/Bill28-172.pdf>.

²³⁶ “Victims of Interpersonal Violence Act”, Government of Saskatchewan, 1994, <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/1495/V6-02.pdf>.

significant change in parental leave, expanding the combined leave between parents from 63 weeks to 71.²³⁷

With 2020 came the pandemic, and all governments had to quickly put in place many forms of legislation, much of it pertaining to labour. In Saskatchewan, a public health emergencies act was passed and lockdowns occurred, but by the pandemic's second year, restrictions were being loosened, and the Moe government found itself embroiled in several controversies. Amid calls for greater protective measures, Moe claimed that most advocates were people who already worked from home, implying that their concerns were unfounded while ignoring the thousands of essential workers who were regularly being exposed to COVID-19.²³⁸ The comment was puzzling given the province's then-current position as having the highest rate of active cases per capita in Canada.²³⁹ The president of the SFL blamed Moe directly for this mismanagement, stating that "the numbers of people dying and becoming sick every day from COVID-19 [were] a direct reflection on the lack of action from [their] provincial government".²⁴⁰ Indeed, Saskatchewan's public health restrictions continued to be light, and the province had "some of the worst outcomes, hospitalizations, [and] per capita deaths" in the country.²⁴¹ Furthermore, in 2021, new legislation was proposed via an amendment to the Saskatchewan Employment Act requiring employers to provide ten paid sick days to employees (fourteen during a public health emergency such as COVID-19), but this bill was unanimously voted down

²³⁷ "Saskatchewan Employment Amendment Act, 2019", Government of Saskatchewan, 2019, <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/28L4S/Bill28-200.pdf>.

²³⁸ Stephanie Taylor, "Premier Moe says he didn't mean to disparage with work from home comment", *CBC News*, February 10, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/premier-moe-says-he-didn-t-mean-to-disparage-with-work-from-home-comment-1.5909825>.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ "Union leader says Sask. death toll is direct result of 'lack of action' from premier", *CBC News*, February 10, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/premier-covid-divisions-sfl-1.5908077>.

²⁴¹ Caitlin Brezinski, "Looking back: Five years after COVID-19 arrived in Saskatchewan", *CTV News*, March 12, 2025, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/regina/article/today-marks-5-years-since-saskatchewan-reported-its-first-case-of-covid-19/>.

by the Saskatchewan Party, meaning that workers had to proceed without any provincially-mandated sick leave.²⁴² ²⁴³ The Moe government’s blatant disregard of the health and safety of workers in the province had consequences, but economic growth and recovery was given precedent over citizens’ lives.

The Saskatchewan Employment Act was amended in 2021, but not regarding sick days: it clarified that sexual conduct in the workplace was harassment and made changes to the structure of supervisory employee involvement in unionization.²⁴⁴ The bill also included a section to protect employees making a “good faith effort” regarding COVID-19 measures, even if they were mistaken.²⁴⁵ In 2022, this act was amended again, with three main points of change. More provisions were included to protect workers from violence on the job (for example, the duty of workers and supervisors to ensure a lack of violence in the workplace was clarified), and changes to the Hazardous Materials Information Review Act were accommodated.²⁴⁶ Unfortunately, the bill also ended compensation for workers who lost wages due to discrimination, though it required workers discriminated against to be reinstated to their former positions if applicable.²⁴⁷ Also noteworthy to general employment in the province, the minimum wage received its largest increase in well over a decade, raising from \$11.81 to \$13.00 an hour.²⁴⁸ The wage would be increased to \$15.00 an hour in 2024, but in both cases, this would be the lowest

²⁴² “Saskatchewan Employment (Paid Sick Days) Amendment Act, 2021”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2021, <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/131259/Bill-606-2021.pdf>.

²⁴³ Connor O’Donovan, “Sask. government shoots down opposition paid sick leave bill”, *Global News*, May 12, 2022, <https://globalnews.ca/news/8831556/sask-government-paid-sick-leave-bill-fails/>.

²⁴⁴ “Saskatchewan Employment Amendment Act, 2021”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2021, <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/29L2S/Bill29-60.pdf>, pp. 3.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ “Saskatchewan Employment (Part III) Amendment Act, 2022”, Government of Saskatchewan, 2022, <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/29L3S/Bill29-91.pdf>.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ “Minimum Wage”, Government of Canada.

minimum wage in all of Canada, behind by over a dollar compared to the majority of provinces.²⁴⁹

Throughout 2023 and 2024, little other employment amendment acts were passed, one exception being the Workers' Compensation (Extending Firefighter Coverage) Amendment Act of 2023. This bill updated workers' compensation for firefighters yet again, expanding the definition of "worker", adding more conditions to the list under presumptive coverage, updating language, and increasing various allowances.²⁵⁰ Given the lack of legislation to improve the poor condition of workers (especially low-wage workers) in the province, the NDP put forth the Saskatchewan Employment (Fairer Workplace, Better Jobs) Amendment Act in 2023. This bill would have implemented the previously referenced sick day provisions, limited non-disclosure agreements, and included much stronger workplace violence preventions, but it failed to pass, lacking votes from the Saskatchewan Party once again.²⁵¹

Returning back to our graphs, it seems that Moe's time as premier was associated with a fairly even decrease in unionization in the private sector, but a somewhat unique pattern emerges when looking at the public sector. In 2017, when Moe became premier, public sector unionization was at a high point of 77%, but the next year it dropped sharply to one of its lowest points in the data set, 74%. What could have caused this decrease? There was a change in leadership, but both leaders came from the same party, and occupied similar ideological positions. It is possible that the reduction in public sector wages was associated with an increase in unionized public sector workers leaving the field, or that the government laid off more unionized workers in order to decrease expenditure more effectively. However, the next year, in

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ "Workers' Compensation (Extending Firefighter Coverage) Amendment Act, 2023", Government of Saskatchewan, 2023, <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/29L4S/Bill29-138.pdf>.

²⁵¹ "Saskatchewan Employment (Fairer Workplace, Better Jobs) Amendment Act, 2023", Government of Saskatchewan, 2023, <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/29L4S/Bill29-613.pdf>.

2020, public sector unionization rose back to 77% once more. Unfortunately, with 2020 came the pandemic, and the next four years are associated with a fairly steady decrease, dropping down rapidly approaching 2024 and reaching the low point of 74% once more. In the private sector, unionization began at 15% when Moe took office, and experienced some slight fluctuation as it decreased, eventually hitting its all-time low of 14%. In both cases, the Moe government's pandemic policy may have played a part, the overall mismanagement causing a backslide in labour rights as it did in many places across the globe.

Categorizing SK's Provincial Governments

SK's provincial government went through one major shift during the period of study, that being the NDP's loss of power and the rise of the Saskatchewan Party (or SP). However, there was variation between governments even within the same party, and we can make greater sense of this variation by categorizing each government according to figures 1.1 and 1.2.

The Romanow government, first of the two NDP governments, utilized left-wing rhetoric in many regards, but its policy was deeply affected by global neoliberal policy trends. In general, its economic policy was quite conservative, consisting of budget cuts, plans to move more people off of welfare (for cost-saving, not actually reducing poverty in the province), and introducing privatization into the healthcare system. Romanow was in favour of "social planning", but also supported the private sector where he thought it would be most effective, much like the policy and rhetoric of the federal Liberal party. As a result, the Romanow government can be classified as mixed-ideology and mixed-policy.

The Calvert government, the most recent NDP government in the province's history, 'walked the line' in many ways, not committing to a direction that was quite liberal or conservative in full. Much of this government's labour policy consisted of small amendments rather than implementing any sort of significant change. Some of these shifts were labour-positive (such as slightly improving pensions and benefits, ending mandatory retirement practices, and protecting certain strong unions), and others were labour-negative (such as continuing privatization in healthcare, though most labour-negative action in the Calvert context consisted of inaction on certain important issues). Therefore, the Calvert government can be considered mixed-ideology and mixed-policy.

The Wall government, first of the two SP governments, changed labour relations dramatically upon attaining power. This government's first few bills included multiple attacks against labour, including restrictions on striking that were eventually deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Wall's time as premier, especially in its earlier years, was characterized by a plan of eroding labour rights to increase the freedom and profit margins of business. The Wall government blended socially conservative rhetoric (contrasting with previous NDP leaders) and neoliberal free-market policy (including deregulation and an expansion of trade) to achieve its goals, making its classification as right-wing and labour-negative clear.

Finally, the Moe government, the current government leading Saskatchewan, has continued the path set out by its SP predecessor. The beginning of Moe's tenure was rather uneventful, consisting of small amendments and changes, but the COVID-19 pandemic made this government's position on labour issues clear. The Moe government was prepared to sacrifice the health and well-being of workers in the province in order to continue economic growth, reducing restrictions wherever possible. This neoliberal policy, combined with socially

conservative rhetoric (including anti-transgender and anti-vaccine talking points), means the Moe government can be described as right-wing and labour-negative.

Figure 6.1

<i>Partisan Stripe</i>	<u>Left-wing</u>	<u>Mixed</u>	<u>Right-wing</u>
<i>Government</i>		Romanow & Calvert	Wall & Moe

Figure 6.2

<i>Policy Approach</i>	<u>Labour-positive</u>	<u>Mixed</u>	<u>Labour-negative</u>
<i>Government</i>		Romanow & Calvert	Wall & Moe

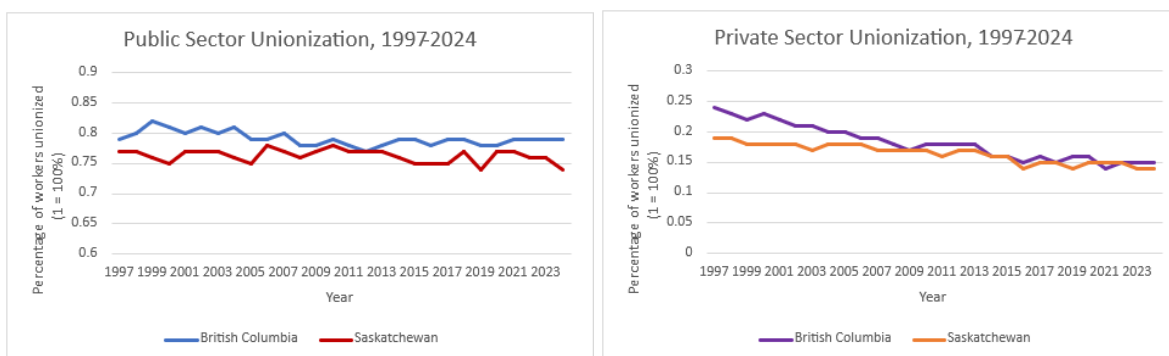
Saskatchewan’s case demonstrates provincial labour policy affected by leadership skewed in one partisan direction, and, like British Columbia, appears to display some sort of correlation between partisan political stripe and labour policy orientation. Here, the more right-wing governments tended to enact more labour-negative policy, and the mixed-ideology governments

were rather mixed-policy. Next, comparing the provinces directly may permit additional insights into these patterns and their effects on labour policy (and labour itself) over time.

Chapter 4: Comparing the Provinces

British Columbia and Saskatchewan have had similar forms of governance and rates of unionization in the public and private sector at different times, but their patterns differ, and examining both cases during the period of study together provides us with information about how the former affects the latter (and labour broadly).

Figure 7



As established previously, private sector unionization is on the decline generally, whereas public sector unionization is experiencing much more fluctuation. Rather than continuing to examine the two graphs broadly, we can now apply the information from the cases regarding government partisan stripe and labour policy to see if any patterns emerge.

Looking at public sector unionization in British Columbia, the percentage of workers decreased over the period of 1999 to 2012, and then increased slightly and retained some level of consistency from 2012 to 2024. In Saskatchewan, the pattern is nearly reversed, with a

fluctuating, over-time increase from 1997 to 2011, and a similar fluctuating decrease from 2011 to 2024. For British Columbia, the 1999 to 2012 decrease overlaps almost entirely with the tenure of the right-wing, labour-negative policy-oriented Campbell government, which lasted from 2001 to 2011. Preceding this government was the mixed-ideology G. Clark government, which also took up a labour-negative policy stance (though public sector unionization increased in its final couple of years). The following slight increase and maintained percentage is associated first with the mixed-ideology and mixed-policy C. Clark government, then the left-wing and labour-positive policy-oriented Horgan and Eby governments. The Saskatchewan case, again, is essentially mirrored, with the 1997 to 2011 increase being associated with the mixed-ideology and mixed-policy Romanow and Calvert governments, and the 2011 to 2024 decrease being associated with the right-wing and labour-negative policy-oriented Wall and Moe governments.

These results are somewhat to be expected: right-wing governments, which typically take business interests into greater consideration than those of labour, tend to implement labour-negative policy, and during these periods of time, rates of organized labour in the public sector typically decrease. Major business investments into right-wing governments, which already emphasize deregulation, curbing spending, and a decrease in the size of governing bodies, push these governments further into advocacy for neoliberal (or neoconservative) free-market ideology.²⁵² Therefore, when these conservative governments attain power, they decrease the size of the public sector where possible, laying off many unionized workers to save the maximum amount of money, and also take part in anti-union action through legislation to reduce future unionization efficacy. Their belief in the supremacy of the free-market actively conflicts with their position as public sector employer, undermining their workers both as employees and members of a democracy.

²⁵² Peters, "Provincial Governments".

What might be more surprising is the lack of sufficient ‘recovery’ during periods where left-wing, labour-positive policy-oriented governments have attained power. During the single segment with left-wing governments in power (2017 to the end of the data set in British Columbia, the time of Horgan and Eby), unionization did not increase or decrease at all over time, remaining consistent outside of some very minor fluctuation. Traditionally, we might expect these governments to support labour, especially the NDP with its well-documented past of labour involvement and advocacy.²⁵³ Their public-facing persona relies upon the image of a more equitable future, one where workers have the tools necessary to advocate for themselves and the support to remain above water when those tools fail. If the “shared ideological commitment” between labour and left-wing parties like the NDP were to continue, we would likely see some degree of increase in unionization when such parties were in power.²⁵⁴ This is not the case. Indeed, left-wing governments are less outwardly aggressive towards labour, but their policy is much less supportive than their rhetoric would indicate. We may see increases to the minimum wage, increased working standards, and a greater number of paid sick days, all of which are important programs and policies to implement in a labour-positive society, but the underlying structure and logic of capitalism remains unchanged. Capitalist ideology, especially neoliberal or neoconservative in nature, has embedded itself thoroughly within our parties and systems, serving as a baseline consideration and taken as an unchanging fact despite the power of government to shift political-economic organization. Governments like those of Horgan and Eby may help the working class achieve greater equity or quality of life, but they will not meaningfully change the economic system that subjugates labour in the first place.

²⁵³ Jansen and Young, “Solidarity Forever?”.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, pp. 7.

Mixed-ideology and mixed-policy governments occupy something more of a grey area. In both Saskatchewan and British Columbia, some of the only growth over time occurred during periods of time with this sort of government (Romanow and Calvert in SK, and C. Clark in BC). These governments came to power at very different periods of time, meaning that it was unlikely to be a global or Canada-wide trend, else one of the provinces experienced another significant event to counterbalance it. In the Saskatchewan case, the two mixed-ideology and mixed-policy leaders came from the NDP, so it is reasonable to hypothesize that the party invested enough in labour-positive policy to cause an increase despite some labour-negative policy decisions. The NDP's strong roots in Saskatchewan also could have played a role, NDP governments in the province needing to appease and support a certain group of long-time voters in the province to retain their position (especially at a time when Sask NDP power was in decline). In the British Columbia case, the C. Clark government, following immediately from right-wing and labour-negative Campbell, may have emphasized labour-positive policy in order to distinguish itself from the preceding conservative government which was viewed negatively by many working-class residents of the province. That being said, the increase over time Clark's tenure was very slight: an increase of 1%. Especially with Clark's time as premier occurring so recently after a global financial crisis, this increase may have been part of the province's general recovery rather than a particular indication of the Clark government's policy (which was not particularly labour-positive, except among more conservative governments).

The outlier in this data is the G. Clark government, which was mixed-ideology and labour-negative policy-oriented yet governed during a period of significant public sector unionization increase. Clark was a member of the NDP, and his government therefore had a connection to labour, but his ideological orientation clashed with the NDP broadly, being quite

receptive to global neoliberal policy trends and implementing a degree of austerity.²⁵⁵ The increase is not insignificant, rising from 79% to 82% in a matter of three years. It is difficult to comment fully on this increase given this paper's limited period of study: the lack of data prior to 1997 means that it is missing context, where we otherwise would be able to see the broader trend of unionization under the G. Clark government. The increase could have been part of a sustained increase, or it could be part of regular fluctuation. Therefore, while this trajectory will be kept in mind, it will not be examined to the same degree as the other periods of governance. Regardless, the rise in unionization we see at this point is by far the largest and quickest in the data, and is worth examination. One potential reason for such an increase could be this government's significant reductions to provincial benefits: this could have prompted more employees to negotiate collectively for their benefits tied to employment, requiring greater coverage as the government reduced its caseloads. The G. Clark government was not exceedingly hostile to organized labour, so more provincial employees may have seen unionization as a potential resolution for their concerns.

Private sector unionization is a much simpler matter, decreasing consistently over the long term and retaining a similar rate of change between governments in both cases. There does not appear to be any strong relation between type of government and policy and rate of decrease, though the period of time with the greatest rate of change (decreasing) was British Columbia's Campbell years, right-wing and labour-negative in policy. It appears that no form of provincial government from this study was willing to provide private sector unionization with support, allowing it to continue its trajectory of decrease fairly uninterrupted. While there certainly existed legislation that supported unionization and the collective bargaining process, very little legislation existed in either case to properly oppose extensive anti-unionization techniques

²⁵⁵ Palmer, "Welfare experiment".

utilized by private sector employers. Companies may continue to intimidate employees away from unionization by threatening to fire (or actually dismissing) workers who bring up the subject, emphasizing the cost of union dues, or even by spying on union-related gatherings. As a result, it is often very difficult for employees to unionize, especially given that provincial governments, broadly, appear ambivalent on such issues. Furthermore, it can actually be beneficial to provincial governments to keep unionization low in the private sector, particularly as private services are increasingly utilized for public projects (such as healthcare or any infrastructure tied to public-private partnerships). Governments can save money by passing off work to lower-paid private sector employees rather than those from the public sector, who are much more likely to be unionized and therefore higher-cost. Many public sector workers lose their jobs in the process, budgets decreasing in scale over time. Thus, governing bodies have little incentive to support unionization in the private sector, given how much money it saves them in the short-term.

This is a pattern consistent across all types of government examined in this study, regardless of partisan political stripe. A large reason for this trend is the prevalence of neoliberalism, which exists as a baseline consideration for the financial decisions of most governments. The pressure to reduce the budget is overwhelming in most cases, as is the influence of pro-business groups and capital. Further, neoliberalism's emphasis on the efficacy of the free market provides justification for allowing anti-union practices in the private sector, as the market should theoretically find an appropriate balance on its own. Of course, this is not the case, and workers are routinely taken advantage of. Governments rarely wish to 'meddle' in the private sector.

Public sector employment is where variation in partisan political stripe seems to truly matter. This is because the primary motivator for a government to support unionization among its own employees is ideology itself. In an economic environment where neoliberalism is the default and consequences for reducing labour rights are minimal (the role of striking being weakened, social movements related to labour of varying strength), alongside major incentives for defanging labour (lobbying and ‘donations’ from capital generally), one of the only significant reasons to support labour is the belief in the value of the human beings who perform it. Pro-labour policies tend to support the citizens of a state more so than they support economic growth, meaning that these policies are an active decision on behalf of the government to invest in its people rather than its products. There are exceptions to this, of course: pro-labour policies *can* be better for the economy in the short term (but particularly for sustainable growth), and pro-business governments may decide to enact a handful of pro-labour policies for general benefit, or even to sway more voters. In the Canadian context specifically, left-wing parties, in particular the NDP, have inextricable ties to organized labour that were foundational to their formation (at both provincial and federal levels). As a result, they may rely upon voters who value labour-positivity to retain power, providing an additional motivator for such policy. Even so, left-wing governments prefer benefits (such as better pensions and family services) that do not outright support labour power to legislation that strengthens unions.²⁵⁶

Still, the broader decision to support labour rights is an ideologically motivated choice by necessity. This is evidenced by left-wing governments implementing more labour-positive policy than mixed-ideology or right-wing governments, even alongside the neoliberal policy decisions that are a part of essentially every modern Canadian government. Governments with a left-wing

²⁵⁶ Carsten Jensen, “Two sides of the same coin? Left-wing governments and labour unions as determinants of public spending”, *Socio-Economic Review* 10, no. 2 (2012), pp. 217-240, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwr015>.

partisan stripe, who hold as one of their primary concerns social equality, are far more likely to utilize labour-positive policy than governments with a right-wing political stripe, who primarily wish to bolster the free market and private ownership.

Conclusion

Through the case studies, we have determined that provincial partisan political stripe very likely does have an impact on labour policy orientation. In the public sector, where the government itself is the employer, there is a significant degree of variation in labour policy. Public sector labour policy is more labour-positive under left-wing governments, more labour-negative under right-wing governments, and a combination of both under mixed-ideology governments. Since the public sector is not part of the ‘free market’, much less central to the policy plan of neoliberalism, we are more likely to see these differences between government partisan stripe expressed through public sector labour policy. We see variation in public sector unionization rates associated clearly with those ideological differences: it decreases over time with more right-wing governments, and increases over time with more left-wing governments. However, in the private sector, both left- and right-wing governments fail to provide support for labour, keeping private labour costs low to appease capital and to increase government profitability. With the prevalence of neoliberalism in the Canadian government broadly, governments dislike giving the appearance of ‘meddling’ in the market, which is, according to that ideology, as effective as possible when it is as ‘free’ as possible. This can explain the similarities we see in private sector labour policy, particularly the tendency for labour-negative private sector policy, and its associated decrease in private sector unionization rates.

Rather than reducing unionization in the public sector to weaken the power of labour, I speculate that governments prefer reducing costs by enacting public sector layoffs, perhaps specifically in highly unionized fields. Then, by increasing privatization in typically public-sector areas, they are able to employ more non-unionized, lower-cost workers. In a

capitalist society where neoliberal rhetoric about the market is dominant, variation in private sector labour policy is limited, particularly where the influence of capital is prevalent.

Neoliberalism as an ideology benefits business, as governments reduce regulatory action and allow labour-negativity in the market to proliferate or even dominate. In turn, capital continues to exercise its power upon the private-sector. Where the impact on the broader market is less significant (i.e., the public sector), a more left-wing government may implement some labour-positive policy if it so desires, but trends point to decreasing unionization broadly, and the “race to the bottom” prevails yet. Given that millions of Canadians are employed by the private sector, however, more change than that is needed to properly support workers and defend their rights.

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