

CANADIAN WOMEN IN RADICAL POLITICS AND LABOUR, 1920 - 1950.

CANADIAN WOMEN IN RADICAL POLITICS  
AND LABOUR, 1920-1950

By

JOAN SANGSTER

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

September, 1984

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (1984)  
(History)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Canadian Women in Radical Politics and Labour, 1920-1950

AUTHOR: Joan Isabel Sangster, B.A. (Trent University)

M.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Richard Allen

NUMBER OF PAGES: vii, 521

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the role of women in Canadian socialist parties from the 1920's to the post-World War II period, by focusing on women involved in the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the primary manifestations of organized socialism during these years. Concentrating on two regions, Ontario and the West, the thesis explores three major themes: the distinct role women played within each Party, the Party's view of the woman question, and the construction of women's committees within each Party.

The thesis explains why women were drawn to the socialist movement, assesses the successes and failures of each Party's program for women's equality, and suggests how and when feminist and socialist ideas intersected within the Canadian Left.

The written history of the Canadian Left has largely neglected socialists' views of the woman question and women's role in the CPC and CCF. Although women were concentrated in less powerful positions, they did play an important, and distinctive, role in the making of Canadian socialism. Moreover, attention to women's social and economic inequality was a concern of Canadian socialists. Between 1920 and 1950, however, women's emancipation was never a priority for socialists. This thesis explains some of the reasons, both internal and external to the movement, for the secondary status of the woman question.



Because the CCF and CPC emerged from different ideological traditions, their views of the woman question varied, and this thesis contrasts the two Parties' definition of women's issues and their commitment to women's emancipation. At the same time, there were some similarities between the two Parties, such as their attempts to link women's maternal and domestic roles with their political consciousness. The thesis also suggests ways in which socialists' ideas resembled the earlier ideology of womanhood and reform termed 'maternal feminism' and how their ideas, shaped by a different class perspective and social context, differed from the earlier feminists.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was partially funded by McMaster University and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, whose support is gratefully acknowledged.

My first debt is to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Richard Allen, whose intellectual interest and moral support were essential to this dissertation. I also want to thank the other members of my thesis committee, Drs. Harvey Levenstein, Jane Synge, and Tom Willey, for their comments and encouragement, and two McMaster faculty members, Dr. Bernice Kaczynski, for an important feminist friendship, and Dr. Richard Rempel, for his unfailing faith in my academic career.

I am grateful to a few McMaster graduate students, Carolyn Gray, Tom Matthews and Francois Rioux, for helping to make the ordeal of graduate school less of an ordeal. In the early stages of my thesis, Ian Radforth offered very important academic collaboration and personal friendship, while Wayne Roberts helped me to reformulate my views of Canadian women's history. Thanks also to Karen Teeple, for her aid with oral history, and to Lynda Yanz and Debbie Field for conversations on women and the labour movement.

Many colleagues kindly offered me research advice, shared sources, or let me read their unpublished work. Thank you to: Ruth Frager, Franca Iacovetta, Linda Kealey, Janice Newton, Susan Radosovic of the UFAWU, Georgina Taylor, David Frank, Craig Heron, Greg Kealey and Nolan Reilly.

In the last stages of my thesis, Pat Gibson helped me immensely

by typing a very long thesis in a very short period of time, and Brandon friends from MACSW offered feminist conversation and good companionship.

The inspiration for my work owes a special acknowledgement to two groups of people. First, I want to thank the women whom I interviewed for this thesis. They welcomed me into their homes and generously shared their pasts with me, and although I sometimes disagreed with their political views, I respected their past activism and admired their continuing dedication to socialist causes. Secondly, I want to thank socialist and feminist friends in Hamilton, particularly women from the Women's Centre, Hamilton International Women's Day Committee and Hamilton Working Women, for their interest in my work, their questions, discussions, and personal support. They helped me to ask new questions of the past and enriched my understanding of feminism and socialism. Thanks especially to Donna Jowett, Joanna Sargent and Janet Tulloch, and to a very close feminist comrade, Maggie Fischbuch.

Last, but not least, I want to thank David Poole for his respect for my work and his emotional support. To our daughter, Katharine Sangster-Poole, I also owe a debt of gratitude. Her appearance did not hasten the completion of this thesis, but she helped me to understand better the militant mothers of the past.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	v
Introduction .....	1
Chapter I      Forefathers and Foremothers: Socialist Theoreticians on the Woman Question and Early Female Socialists in Canada. ....	15
Chapter II     The Communist Party of Canada Tackles the Woman Question .....	62
Chapter III    'Red Revolutionaries and Pink Tea Pacifists': Communist and Social Democratic Women in the Early 1930's.....	115
Chapter IV     Militant Mothering: Women in the Early CCF.....	188
Chapter V      More Militant Mothering: Communist Women During The Popular Front.....	250
Chapter VI     From 'Working for War' to 'Prices and Peace': Communist Women During the 1940's.....	334
Chapter VII    The CCF Tackles the Woman Question. ....	403
Conclusion .....	473
Bibliography .....	500

## INTRODUCTION

"The degree of emancipation of women is the natural measure of general emancipation of society",<sup>1</sup> wrote Charles Fourier, a French Utopian socialist of the 19th century. Fourier's cogent declaration was echoed in the later works of scientific socialists Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, and became a well-worn watchword of countless European and North American socialist parties. From the time of the early Utopians like Fourier and Robert Owen, the emancipation of women has been investigated, explained, debated and attempted by socialists who understood that by altering the social relations of private property, one could also transform relations between the sexes. Socialists, and later Communists have agreed that women have been accorded a different, and usually inferior political, social and economic status; they have disagreed, however, in their analyses of the causes of women's subordination and in their prescriptive strategies for change.

Also since the time of Fourier, women have played an important part in socialist movements, although these movements have not always placed women's emancipation as a central priority. Women's participation has often been essential to the socialist cause, but it has also rested on the grounds of inequality; in sheer membership numbers, but especially in the formal leadership of the movement, women have been secondary to men. Major socialist theoreticians on the origin and nature of women's subordination, or the 'woman question' were also men; after Fourier and Owen, Marx, Engels, Bebel and Lenin became the most influential thinkers on women for communists and socialists until

the women's movement of the 1960's produced a renaissance in Marxist-feminist and socialist-feminist theory.

It was these new theoretical perspectives, born from and contributing to the rejuvenated women's movement of the last twenty to thirty years, which have stimulated and shaped recent scholarship on the history of women and socialism. Before the 1960's, there was little scholarly work on women's history, let alone studies of women and socialism, save for occasional investigations of the role of women in Soviet Russia or autobiographies and biographies of 'notable' female socialists.<sup>3</sup> In the last twenty years, however, the history of feminism, of women in the labour movement, and women socialists has flourished, particularly in European historiography. Due to the limitations of sources, biographies of prominent leaders and studies of political parties and institutions have often been favoured, with historical overviews of women and socialism, biographies of less-known rank-and-filers and social histories of the women's movement more exceptional. The women's section of the German SPD, attractive both because of its size and influence, has been the subject of considerable debate, as has the role of Bolshevik women in the Russian Revolution.<sup>4</sup> In British and American history, women's role in pre-Leninist socialist movements has recently been scrutinized by historians sensitive to the complex interaction of gender and class in politics, and to the contextual backdrop of intellectual and working-class history of their period.<sup>5</sup>

In Canadian historiography, the history of women has focused largely on the period before World War I, especially on the suffrage movement and women's role in Progressivism. Since this thesis was

begun, more attention has been focused on women's work lives, women's image in popular culture, and the attitude of the Canadian state to women as workers and as mothers. Also, two articles, one limited in its time frame, the other in its conceptual perspective, have addressed the role of women in the CCF.<sup>6</sup> But still badly lacking are analyses of the lives of working-class women, particularly in the period after the Great War, and examinations of the intersection of socialist and feminist thought in the Canadian Left. The post-suffrage women's movement has gained little attention: political, organized feminism after World War I presumably faded to become a non-existent phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> No study has analyzed the continuation of women in reform politics after the Progressive movement. Some historians have argued that the women's movement compromised its early radicalism by narrowing its vision to one of 'maternal feminism'.<sup>8</sup> Whatever its limitations, did any remnants of this suffrage-era ideology of womanhood and reform persist in the socialist or communist movements of the 1920's and '30's? Did any suffragists move from feminist causes to the Labour Party or the Communist Party, and if so, did they undergo an ideological transformation in the process?

Literature on the Canadian Left has concerned itself primarily with the political evolution of the Communist Party (CPC) and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), Canada's democratic socialist party, relying especially on chronological narrative in which leadership and Party organization are stressed. Moreover, many authors assume the absolute 'correctness' of one political approach -- usually social democracy -- and portray other ideologies as "naïve, misconceived and inappropriate to Canadian society".<sup>9</sup> This determinism and emphasis on



leadership struggles mars works on both the CCF and the CPC, but the latter in particular are characterized by either excessive anti-communism or uncritical analysis.<sup>10</sup> Even 'critical' historiography of the Canadian Left has failed to address the need for studies of grass roots activities, ethnicity, and women, remaining mired instead in well-worn questions, like whether the CPC was a 'slave' to Moscow, or whether the CCF abandoned its socialist principles in the 1950's.<sup>11</sup> To his credit, Norman Penner treats the CPC seriously, endeavouring to place it in a social context of class struggle, and explaining its ideology from the vantage point of both its international and local roots.<sup>12</sup> Penner, however, treats the growth of social democracy very briefly, and like other historians, he concentrates on the 'important' areas of socialist activity, thus excluding any discussion of socialists' attitude toward the woman question. Works on Canadian Labour and the Left have concentrated primarily on 'male' resources and industrial unions, with few or no references to the specific role socialist women played in building unions, or in inter-union battles.<sup>13</sup> With the exception of one study of the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR),<sup>14</sup> which analyzes the ideological make-up and personal motivations of LSR members, socialist leadership has rarely been given critical, in-depth examination. Most personal histories concern prominent men, and the few biographies of women often reflect the hagiographical and one-dimensional approach of their male counterparts.<sup>15</sup> No studies have examined the social forces shaping women's socialism, the qualities that made female activists exceptional (and different from men), and how these female leaders interacted successfully with their own movements.

Although a few historians have openly dismissed any important contribution made by women to Canadian socialism, most literature on the Left simply treats the subject with silence -- a silence which implicitly confirms the denigration of women's role in socialist parties. Historians' reserve on the woman question may be related, in part, to the still limited acceptance of women's history as a legitimate area of historical research, or to the limited sources pertaining to women in radical politics. Written records yield more plentiful information on women's Church, professional, and middle-class reform groups than they do information on the lives of working-class women or women's role in socialist politics. Also, the history of Canadian women to date has been highly Anglocentric; sources for ethnic women, who often played a significant role in radical politics, are inaccessible to many historians without language skills.

Historians of the Left also face difficulties in locating and assessing accounts of socialist activists. One of the most valuable sources for a study of the CCF and CPC, and hence for information on female activists, is the radical press, itself a partisan, propaganda tool which must be carefully weighted for bias. Archival collections, when they exist, are usually scanty for the early years before 1940, and are often rich in administrative and organizational material which has little or no bearing on women's status in the Party. Since female socialists were most active at the local, grass roots level, and generally excluded at the leadership and higher administrative levels, their views and activities are difficult to ascertain. Furthermore, due to intermittent persecution by the state, as well as its own Leninist organizing style, Communist Party history is difficult to penetrate:

some collections are closed to outsiders, while others consist of published, propaganda material or are remnants of seizures made by the government. Oral history can provide important insights into women's radical past, particularly relating women's role in the family to their political activism, but as many interviewees are advanced in years and/or still active and partisan, their recollections are selective and must be treated with care. The reminiscences of Leftists, like all oral interviews, must be evaluated in the light of their particular world view -- both past and present; the consciousness of the interviewee "informs their particular vision of history and some attempt must be made to understand that vision and how it shapes the interview as a whole."<sup>16</sup>

Although largely hidden from written history, female socialists have been a significant force in the making of Canadian socialism and communism. Women were most often found doing grass roots support work of a particular 'feminine' variety, but a significant minority of women also moved into local and provincial leadership roles. Within the socialist and communist Left there was a sexual division of labour not unlike the one existing in Canadian society. At the local level, women cooked, sewed and knit, raising necessary funds to keep constituency budgets balanced, and provided an important social and emotional atmosphere of solidarity for the movement; their work in many ways mirrored the essential role that working-class housewives played in the family. A much smaller group of women were active in provincial leadership, and occasionally in the national leadership, but they were usually cast as educators, cultural commentators and writers, or perhaps as experts on homemakers' needs; they were more seldom known as union

organizers, theoreticians, or national spokespersons. Yet, although consistently absent at the leadership level, women comprised an indispensable army of local educators, electioneers and grass roots workers who created the foundation on which socialism could be built upwards.

While this sexual division of labour had also characterized the pre-war socialist movement, there were important differences between the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) and the Communist Party, and between the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the CCF. For one thing, women were more numerous and more vocal in the post-war parties. Perhaps the victory of the vote increased women's political interest and self-confidence, but even more importantly, women's increasing participation in wage labour, and the expansion of the Left, a natural outgrowth of the consolidation of Canadian capitalism and economic crises like the Depression, created the broadened basis and impetus for women's conversion to socialism. Secondly, the Communist Party addressed the specific subordination of women with a separate platform of women's demands, separate organizational apparatus, and more precise theoretical emphasis than had previous Marxist socialist parties. The CPC's new interest in the woman question was the product of its indebtedness to the Communist International and the Soviet Union, its own understanding of Marxism and Leninism, and its response to the social and economic situation of its membership. Although the question of women's inequality always remained secondary to more 'essential' political tasks, there was a significant increase in its importance within the CPC, compared to previous Canadian socialist parties.

The CCF, the product of a more eclectic philosophical alliance, including Fabianism and Christian socialism as well as Marxism, was less conscious of the woman question, and had a less structured approach to work among women. Until the 1940's, the Party rarely considered a platform dedicated to women's equality, although from its very inception, the CCF did address women as a specific interest group. Women were assumed, largely because of their role in the family, to have different concerns than men -- and in this view most CCF women's committees concurred. CCF women's groups were created by female Party members for a variety of reasons: 1 some women wished to perform their female support work in a comfortable social atmosphere, much like the traditional auxiliary; 2 some wished to pursue self-education; 3 and some wanted to discuss women's issues, attract more women to the socialist cause, and encourage more women to take up leadership roles within the Party. While CCF women's committees (like the CPC's Women's Commission), were overseen and shaped in part by the needs and objectives of the Party as a whole, they were also the product of women's perceived needs, women's ideas, and sometimes women's feelings of oppression. Without the essential initiative and force of women's desire for self-organization, women's committees would have remained lifeless, and the woman question almost entirely dormant.

Despite the determination of many women to rectify women's inequality both within and outside of the Party, few socialists, and even fewer communists would have willingly accepted the label 'feminist'. Some survivors of the suffrage movement did make their way into Labour Parties and later the CCF, carrying the spirit of feminism (and often feminist pacifism) with them, and consciously making links

with what existed of a women's movement. But the political worldview of most socialist women, especially those in the CPC who came almost uniformly from working-class backgrounds, was shaped by their experience of class and economic exploitation, and by a reeducation in socialist ideas which precluded any identification with the 'sexual antagonism' which it was presumed stood at the centre of feminist politics. Indeed, a significant and often vocal group in each Party questioned, and sometimes opposed any semi-autonomous organization of socialist women, objecting either to the 'feminist' implications of such organization, to the division of the class struggle, or to the ghettoization of women within the movement.

Yet, in retrospect, there was an element of feminism to the political practice of communist and socialist women's committees and commissions for many of these women felt and grieved women's subordination as 'the second sex' and in their own way, tried to expose and alter women's social and economic inequalities. After the success of suffrage and the subsequent decline of organized, liberal feminism, much of the dynamic focus of debate and activity on the 'woman question' was found on the Left. Although shy of reproductive issues, reluctant to question a central aspect of women's oppression -- their role in the family -- and hesitant to confront male prejudice within their own ranks, these women did address crucial economic and social issues left neglected and unsolved by the suffragists. Few other groups in Canadian history had the insight or concern that communists and socialists had for woman's economic exploitation as a wage-worker, and for the demand for equal pay, maternity leave, child care and other social

And while the CPC was in one sense 'marginal' to Canadian

political life, especially if measured by electoral standards, it did have influence disproportionate to its size; in the 1930's and 40's it helped to create a culture of protest, particularly in the labour movement, which had a significant impact on Canadian history. In contrast, the CCF became a 'respectable' third party in Canadian political life, although in some regions, and at the national level, it has never wielded power.

Yet, although the CCF has remained out of national office, and although the CPC never became a contender for political power, it is crucial for contemporary socialists and feminists to analyze the value and insights, the successes and failures of past attempts to connect socialist and feminist ideas. We need to know how socialist parties perceived the 'woman question', what solutions were put forward to eliminate women's inequality, and how successful they were. We need to know how women's role in society was described by socialists, and whether or not this differed from dominant social norms. We need to know what roles women assumed in socialist parties, and how this approximated the division of labour existing in society. We need to know how women's role in the family intersected with and influenced her role in politics. We need to know how women's socialist consciousness was shaped, and how women's vision of the 'New Jerusalem' was similar to, and different from men's.

It is now necessary to write Canadian women into the history of the Left, describing their crucial assistance in building movements critical of, and alternative to capitalism, and analyzing their efforts to sustain discussion and activity for women's emancipation. However partial those efforts may appear from the perspective of contemporary

socialist-feminist politics, they must be viewed with some understanding of the meaning that ideas and activity had for people in their own time and social context. We need to recover our political ancestors, in part simply because we seek "a past which does not maintain our subordination by exclusion or distortion".<sup>17</sup> At the same time, our task is not to lecture on past mistakes and make absolute 'history shows us' conclusions or to over-idealize past female leaders to remind others that we too have 'heroines'. Rather, we want to develop an ongoing relationship with the past which is sympathetic, yet critical, building a full understanding of women's history in the Canadian socialist and communist movements, however complex that may be.



## Introduction: Footnotes

- 1 Charles Fourier, quoted in Barbara Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century (London, 1983), p. x.
- 2 For example, Juliet Mitchell, Women's Estate (New York, 1973); Shelia Rowbotham, Women's Consciousness, Man's World (London, 1976); Zillah R. Eisenstein, ed., Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism (New York and London, 1979); Lydia Sargent, ed., Women and Revolution (Boston, 1981); Michele Barrett, Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis (London, 1980).
- 3 For example, Jessica Smith, Women in Soviet Russia (New York, 1928); Angelica Balabanoff, My Life as Rebel (Bloomington, 1973); Emma Goldman, Living my Life (1931), (New York, 1970).
- 4 Werner Thomnessen, The Emancipation of Women: The Rise and Decline of the Women's Movement in German Social Democracy 1863-1933 (London, 1973); Jean Quataert, Reluctant Feminists in German Social Democracy (New York, 1979); Jean Quataert and Marilyn Boxer, eds., Socialist Women (New York, 1978); Barbara Clements, Bolshevik Feminist (Bloomington, 1979).
- 5 Barbara Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem; MariJo Buhle Women and American Socialism (Urbana, 1981).
- 6 John Manley, "Women and the Left in the 1930's: The Case of the Toronto Women's Joint Committee", Atlantis, Vol. 6, No. 2, (Spring, 1980); Dean Beeby, Women in the Ontario CCF, 1940-50", Ontario History, Vol. LXXIV, No. 4, (December, 1982).
- 7 Veronica Strong-Boag does point out that, although the victory of suffrage largely dissipated the feminist movement, there were attempts by female reformers to 'complete the agenda'. By the late 1920's most women's reform efforts seem to have been spent. This is similar to the American situation described by Stanley Lemons. Veronica Strong-Boag, "Canadian Feminism in the 1920's: The Case of Nellie L. McClung", Journal of Canadian Studies, 12(4), (Summer, 1977); Stanley Lemons, The Woman Citizen: Social Feminism in the 1920's (Urbana, 1973).
- 8 Linda Kealey, ed., A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880's-1920's (Toronto, 1979).
- 9 Leo Panitch, "Connections", Canadian Dimension, Vol. 13, no. 3, (August-September, 1978), pp. 40-42.
- 10 For example, Ivan Avakumovic, The Communist Party of Canada

- (Toronto, 1975), and Gerry Van Hauten, Canada's Party of Socialism (Toronto, 1982).
- 11 For an unsatisfactory treatment of the latter, Alan Whitehorn "The Historiography of the CCF"; Paper presented at the Western Plains Conference, 'Building the Cooperative Commonwealth', Regina, June, 1983.
  - 12 Norman Penner, The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis (Toronto, 1977).
  - 13 One recent exception is Eileen Sufrin, The Eaton Drive (Toronto, 1982). Other works, like Irving Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour (Toronto, 1972), primarily discuss 'male' unions like the United Steelworkers of America and International Woodworkers of America.
  - 14 Michiel Horn, The League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada, 1930-42 (Toronto, 1980).
  - 15 Louise Watson, She Never Was Afraid: The Biography of Anne Buller (Toronto, 1976); Catarine Vance, Not By Gods But By People ... The Story of Bella Hall Gauld (Toronto, 1968); J.F.C. Wright, The Louise Lucas Story (Montreal, 1965).
  - 16 Ronald Grele, et al., Envelopes of Sound: Six Practitioners Discuss Theory, Method and Practice of Oral History (Chicago, 1975).
  - 17 Shelia Rowbotham, Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism (London, 1979), p. 58.

## CHAPTER I

FOREFATHERS AND FOREMOTHERS: SOCIALIST THEORETICIANS ON THE

WOMAN QUESTION, AND EARLY FEMALE SOCIALISTS IN CANADA

Women who joined the fledgling Communist Party in the 1920's and women who became part of the CCF in the 1930's were part of an ongoing socialist tradition in Canada. Before World War I, women joined socialist and Labour parties which addressed the 'problem' of women's inequality, and women's labour support groups attempted to mobilize working-class women in defence of wage-earning women and the trade union movement. Later Communists and socialists drew on the organizational examples of these ancestors, occasionally imitating the tactics, sometimes condemning the mistakes, of their predecessors. Yet, while some connections between the pre-war and post-war socialist movements existed, the 1920's marked a definite watershed for women and socialism in Canada. In the years following the Great War, new socialist parties more influential in Canadian political life emerged; these parties embarked on very different, and in the case of the CPC, more aggressive attempts to organize women; and lastly, women's role in the socialist movement was enlarged and altered.

Socialists' and Communists' attempts to understand women's inequality were framed within inherited ideological and philosophical traditions which explained, analyzed, and sometimes rationalized social organization and social change. These theoretical suppositions shaped, but did not determine, socialists' understanding of the woman question, for their views were also fashioned by the larger party needs and objectives, the prevailing social and economic climate, and even by women's own demands for recognition, voiced from within the Party. Ideologically, the Communist Party stood in the tradition of the

Socialist Party of Canada (SPC), and the Social Democratic Party of Canada (SDPC); it was explicitly Marxist, and drew on Marx, Engels, Bebel, Lenin and Stalin to explain social inequality, including gender inequality. Its emphasis was on class -- class inequality and class conflict -- and its ultimate aim was the revolutionary transformation of society. The CCF, a more eclectic alliance, drew in some Marxists from the SPC, but also labourites from Labour Parties, Christian socialists, Fabians and even some liberals. The Party's understanding of women's inequality emerged from this amalgam of philosophical traditions, some of which actually had little to say about women's oppression. Although it acquired a concern for women's distinct character and social role, the CCF did not inherit a conscious and consistent concern with women's oppression.

(i)

A socialist movement emerged in Canada at the end of the 19th century, as groups of working people came together to challenge the capitalist system of private ownership, and advocate an alternative social system based on cooperation and common ownership of the means of production. These early socialist organizations shared certain basic goals: "an indictment of industrial systems based on competition and private property, the need to pose a socialist alternative, and the imperative to build a movement to totally transform the capitalist system of production, distribution and exchange."<sup>1</sup> There was, however, more than one road proposed to reach these goals, and by 1919 three streams of socialist organization, with well-defined ideological

variations, and sometimes regional and ethnic differences, competed for the leadership of the Canadian socialist movement.

The Socialist Party of Canada (SPC), founded in 1903, had a Marxist orientation and its particular brand of Marxism often translated into rigid and dogmatic approaches to organizing. The Party's interpretation of Marx forecast an inevitable collapse of capitalism and in the meantime proposed only electoral and agitational work to educate working-class people about socialism. The Party soon earned the label 'impossibilist' for it generally rejected work in the trade union movement as 'counter-revolutionary',<sup>2</sup> and cut itself off from international debate by refusing to join the Second International. The Party's possibilist ideology, as well as its authoritarian, centralized structure, was opposed by large sections of its membership, and by 1911, a number of splits resulted. One small splinter group, the Socialist Party of North America (SPNA) carried on in the possibilist tradition of the SPC, but another party which grew out of the SPC became a second alternative to the possibilist version of socialism.

The Socialist Democratic Party of Canada (SDPC), formed in 1911, quickly became the largest socialist organization in the country, outnumbering the SPC everywhere but in B.C. Much of the SDPC membership consisted of former SPC Finnish and Ukrainian language locals, which had become dissatisfied with the largely Anglo (and sometimes intolerant) SPC leadership. Marxism, the new party claimed, still formed the essence of its outlook, but the SDPC allowed more flexibility in tactics, including cooperation with other socialist and labour groups. While the major difference between the SPC and SDPC was the latter's

'possibilist' approach of 'reform now, revolution later', the SDPC also allowed more leeway for regional and cultural autonomy.

In fact, the SDPC allowed a fairly broad range of socialist politics within its ranks, including socialists in the tradition of the British Independent Labour Party (ILP), who were often influenced more by ethical ideals based on Christian socialism, than by Marxism.<sup>3</sup> Many other 'labourite' socialists were found in local labour education groups or in municipal ILPs. This third ideological alternative in the socialist movement, which was peopled especially by British working-class immigrants and craft unionists, was the product of various political traditions, including Christian socialism, working-class radicalism in the Paineite tradition, and British Lib-Labism.<sup>4</sup> Their socialism stressed "a democratic and egalitarian view of government ... and their politics often revealed their craft skills expanded into politics; they were class conscious workers who believed in the dignity and worth of all wage earners."<sup>5</sup> Less hostile to the state than other socialists, labourites stressed electoral work, as well as education and lobbying within the trade union movement. Labour Parties were not centralized or nationally coordinated, but operated under local, autonomous structures, sometimes publishing influential labour papers like the Winnipeg Voice or the Industrial Banner, or successfully running local candidates for office.

Within all these three socialist organizations, the main role of women was grass roots support work, such as selling newspaper subscriptions or raising funds. Although a few notable women became better-known speakers for the movement, in general, a "sexual division of labour permeated socialist circles ... as it did the labour market

... and even the prominent women speakers accepted roles which focused on the social and educational aspects of propaganda work."<sup>6</sup> Most socialists also shared common conceptions of women's role in the family and women's wage work. They feared that women's wage labour threatened male jobs -- a view shared by most trade unionists -- and accepted the 'ideal' of the family wage and a male breadwinner. Motherhood was seen as women's 'natural' career, and "freedom of choice as to marriage partner emerged as the socialist conception of women's future economic independence."<sup>7</sup> Under socialism, it was believed, women and children would not be forced out of the home to earn wages, and maternity would be given public recognition and support. The exploitation of women wage earners did receive much condemnation from socialists, but they still tended to perceive single working women as dependents and made few, if any, attempts to organize or recruit women workers. Although working women were largely ignored by socialists, there were some exceptions to this indifference. In Vancouver, a socialist, feminist and trade unionist, Helena Gutteridge, was especially interested in the plight of women, and she participated in unionization drives of women garment and laundry workers. Gutteridge openly criticized the contradictions in the male working-class outlook, which, on one hand, urged equality for women, but on the other, called for women's exclusion from skilled, better-paying jobs. Like a few other socialist women of the day, such as May Darwin in Toronto, or Mary Cotton, a writer for Cotton's Weekly, Gutteridge illustrated the unification of socialist and feminist commitment -- a rare combination in the pre-war socialist movement.<sup>8</sup>

Despite their common views about women's social role, socialist parties did differ on the woman question. The SPC tried to encourage



women to join the Party and SPC members in the B.C. Legislature presented bills for female suffrage in 1906 and 1909. But the views of the SPC leadership about women were actually very ambivalent: in presenting the suffrage bill, MPP James Hawthornwaite downplayed its importance, cautioning that because class inequality was paramount, the bill was not "revolutionary"<sup>9</sup> and precluded the important issue, economic independence for women. Moreover, in 1909 he added that women were more conservative than men, and less qualified to vote. The latter view was expressed by other SPC leaders, and in 1908 its repetition in the Western Clarion sparked a heated debate. Commenting on, and rejecting a proposal for women's groups within the movement, the Clarion editor charged that many "women only became socialists because of a man", and he added that "women couldn't keep up the pace of a serious column, which would likely degenerate to fashion and recipes column."<sup>10</sup> Some female readers responded with anger, criticizing his "narrow-minded egotism"<sup>11</sup> and condescension towards women. B.O. Robinson reminded the editor that the paucity of women in the Party, and the SPC's lack of interest in women, was precisely the reason it needed special education for women, and Robinson soon after inaugurated her own Women's Marxist Study group.<sup>12</sup> Edith Wrigely, a Toronto member, claimed the problem was the SPC's "obsession" with electoral politics, resulting in the Clarion's single-minded concern with the working-class man, and its indifference to his wife in the home or the female wage earner.<sup>13</sup> This barrage of letters did not, however, change the editor's mind: no women's column appeared, and further discussion of the woman question refused to acknowledge any 'special interests' of women. Ruth Lestor, a prominent SPCer who gave speeches on the woman question, wrote a series

of articles on women for the Clarion, in which she repeated many of the rigidities of the SPC position. Lestor stressed class as the primary, determining factor in women's oppression; a true revolutionary, she maintained, paid no heed to age or sex for the class struggle and working-class loyalty were paramount, and the 'sex struggle' pictured by middle-class suffragists a fiction. Her last articles in 1912 revealed her total absorption of the SPC's critical view of women, whom she described as "conservative, passive and quiescent ... clinging tenaciously to religion and thus discouraging their men-folk from socialism ... and a drag and fetter to the movement."<sup>14</sup> Her views were probably considered rather extreme by other SPC women, for as Linda Kealey points out, Lestor admitted her isolation from other women in the Party.<sup>15</sup>

The SDPC shared some of the SPC's ideological orientation toward the woman question: it saw women's involvement as important to socialism, and it viewed class inequality and private property as the fundamental causes of women's oppression. But in tactics and in Party structure, the SDPC was quite different from the SPC. Indeed, discussion about tactics for organizing women played a role in the 1909 convention which previewed the split between the SPC and the later SDPC. At this convention some socialists wanted the movement to place more emphasis on the suffrage struggle, opposing those who claimed that the issue was unimportant, or even that women "had no place in the revolutionary movement".<sup>16</sup> SDPC socialists looked favourably on work to achieve immediate reforms, such as women's suffrage, and they were more sympathetic to women's organization within the Party. Finnish women had been active participants at the founding of the Toronto SPC in 1905, and

later formed a women's sub-branch, as well as 'sewing circles' which acted like trade union auxiliaries for the socialist movement.<sup>17</sup> After the split with the SPC, a Women's Social Democratic League was set up to spearhead the formation of an Ontario women's socialist group, designed to draw new female recruits into the movement.

Cotton's Weekly, a socialist paper which became allied to the SDPC in 1911, reflected the SDPC's less dogmatic, and more diverse view of the woman question. Although the paper often published several differing views on women's issues, on the suffrage question the paper had a clear and consistent stand, speaking as an adamant supporter of female enfranchisement. Women's suffrage was justified in part because it would bring working-class women's votes to the socialist movement, but also because Cotton's accepted the concept of women's moral superiority, and the necessity of bringing their maternal concerns to bear on political life. The paper thus reiterated some of the arguments of middle-class suffragists, but its stress on the exploitation of working-class women set it apart from the feminist movement. Like the SPC, the SDPC could be quite antagonistic to middle-class reformers, who were, for instance, attacked for their narrow-minded and moralistic view of prostitution -- seen by socialists as a simple example of class exploitation and the economic deprivation of women.<sup>18</sup> Despite this emphasis on class, Cotton's Weekly did entertain a women's column written by a rebellious Mary Cotton, who focused not only on class inequality, but also on the "problems of male domination in society", including the nefarious perpetuation of "female servitude in the home".<sup>19</sup> Mary Cotton's views, of course, did not go without criticism from other readers.

Like the SDPC, many Labour Parties were flexible in their methods of organization and thus allowed the establishment of womens organizations -- usually women's auxiliaries -- within the movement. Labourites seldom addressed the woman question, debating the origin and nature of women's oppression as did their Marxist counterparts, but they were well aware of class differences between women and they were concerned with the well-being of working-class women. The Winnipeg Voice was often critical of middle-class suffragists for their patronizing attitude towards women workers, and it warned that the vote for women would not abolish the wage system -- the major barrier to women's economic security. Similarly, the Winnipeg Women's Labour League was apprehensive of paternalistic middle-class reform schemes and the naive state interventionist approach of most feminists, and in Vancouver, Helena Gutteridge set up a rival suffrage organization to the middle-class suffrage group.<sup>20</sup> In Hamilton, many women in the ILP repeated the maternal feminist arguments of suffragists, and they shared some common causes, such as increased widows pensions and mothers allowances. But the ILP women's class consciousness and their primary concern with working-class women distinguished them from feminists in middle-class reform groups like the LCW.<sup>21</sup> At the other end of the labourite spectrum were newspapers and parties which expressed more sympathy towards the feminist movement. The Industrial Banner, for instance, a paper sponsored by the Labour Educational Association of Ontario and firmly set in the labourite tradition, reported on local suffrage news and even supported the limited (property) municipal franchise for women. During the first World War, The Banner urged passage of suffrage legislation; it argued the "simple democratic

justice" of female enfranchisement, lauded the patriotic war work of women, and pointed to the "higher moral standard" which women would bring to government.<sup>22</sup>

Although socialists advocated women's equality and supported female suffrage, they did not command the dominant presence in the women's movement before World War I. Rather, the primary impetus and organizational focus of the suffrage struggle came from reform groups composed of leisured and professional women. Many of these suffragists were social reformers, but with few notable exceptions,<sup>23</sup> their critique of Canadian society was not a socialist one, and their strategies for change most often advocated regulation and state intervention -- prohibition, public health reform, educational reform etc. -- rather than the transformation of the economic and political system.<sup>24</sup>

Although socialists and suffragists alike shared maternal feminist ideas, the ideology of the suffrage movement was based almost exclusively on a critique of sexual inequality, not one of class inequality, and suffragists concentrated on effecting gradual political reform rather than making structural changes in the economy, such as socializing the means of production. Despite the concern voiced by suffragists for working-class women, they made few attempts to draw them into suffrage organizations; no imitation of the American Women's Trade Union League existed in Canada. In the final analysis, the class interests of most suffragists differed from those of their working-class sisters in socialist parties, a fact made abundantly clear during the Winnipeg General Strike, when suffragists like Nellie McClung supported the employers and the Women's Labour League supported the strikers.

Still on the fringe of the socialist movement, but in the 1920's and '30's a growing constituency within it, were agrarian and farm organizations. In the pre-war period, farm organizations like the Grain Growers Association, the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) and the United Farmers of Manitoba (UFM) were strong advocates of suffrage, but women active in these farm lobby groups, and in their respective auxiliaries and women's sections, were distinct from urban feminists in their political orientation. Women in the farm movement and the suffrage movement did share some common values: they both wished to maintain Protestant, Anglo-Saxon traditions in Canadian society, and they both often relied on maternal feminist arguments in their campaigns for reform.<sup>25</sup> Yet, farm women, like their male comrades, were most concerned with the economic exigencies of farm life and their primary antagonism was towards the 'ruling class' -- that is, eastern business and its ally, the central government. As Irene Parlby succinctly put it, "tariffs, not men, were the villains and the real reason why farm women were overworked or grew old before their time."<sup>26</sup> Many farm women's organizations were suspicious of the Homemakers Clubs and Women's Institutes initiated by provincial governments and given whole-hearted support by urban suffragists, for they feared these more conservative women's groups would undermine the Women Grain Growers. Their fears of urban suffragists were sharpened even further in 1918, when eastern suffragists launched a Women's Party, supposedly designed to pursue sexual equality in the post-suffrage era, but noted for its ties to Eastern business, its imperialism and anti-labour stance.<sup>27</sup>

(ii)

In the immediate post-war years the prevailing political boundaries in the Canadian socialist movement were completely rearranged. The most significant event in this period was the founding of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC). As in Europe, the Communist Party was formed primarily of members from established socialist parties; in Canada, the majority of the SDPC, and groups from the SPC and the SPNA joined the CPC. The Canadian Communist Party was the product of two major forces: the indigenous successes and failures of Canadian socialist organizations, and the faith and hope in an international revolutionary movement.

In May of 1921, the Workers Party of Canada (WPC) was founded as the new Communist organization in Canada. It was composed of a public 'A' party, and an illegal 'Z' underground party, the latter an imperative imposed by the continuing hostility of the Canadian state towards Communism. Although the leadership of the WPC was predominantly English-speaking, its membership consisted largely of Finnish, Ukrainian and Jewish immigrants -- in that order of numerical importance. Attached to the Party in an informal alliance were the Finnish Organization of Canada (FOC), the Ukrainian Farmer Labour Temple Association (UFLTA), and the (Jewish) Workmen's Circle; all were educational and cultural organizations formally established in the 1920's, but essentially continuations of pre-war cultural groups often attached to the SDPC. Despite this link between immigrant groups and the CPC, it would be wrong to analyze the Party's existence solely in terms of ethnicity, especially ethnic stereotypes such as Europeans'

propensity to violent protest.<sup>28</sup> Bolshevism was an alternative ideology and political weapon, which for specific historic reasons, including class and culture, found political support from these immigrant groups.<sup>29</sup>

Central to the conviction of many Canadian socialists that Bolshevism was a preferable alternative to the old socialist parties was first, a commitment to the newly-formed Communist International, and second, to Leninist principles, especially the idea of a vanguard revolutionary party, operating under democratic centralism, disciplined and centralized, and exercising decisive political leadership over its members. Canadian Communists studied and accepted Leninist methods as superior organizing tools, adopting Lenin's advice, in 'Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder, of working with some flexibility in tactics, "wherever the masses are to be found".<sup>30</sup> The first program of the WPC laid out the Party's tasks in this vein:

It would enter existing labour unions and transform them into anti-capitalist weapons; it would participate electorally to make public workers' grievances and expose the sham democracy of capitalism; it would fight the day-to-day struggles of workers and broaden them to anti-capitalist demands; eventually it would overthrow capitalism and establish a workers' dictatorship.<sup>31</sup>

The WPC affiliated to the Communist International (CI), an organization founded by Russian Bolsheviks in 1919 to provide a Marxist, revolutionary International as an alternative to the older, disorganized Second International. In its early years, the CI may have encompassed an element of democratic debate and decision making, but it was indisputably led by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, whose absolute control over the CI was consolidated by the late 1920's.<sup>32</sup> Canadian Communists accepted the Twenty-One Conditions of allegiance demanded of CI member parties for they welcomed an attachment to an



international socialist movement and to a successful revolutionary party. And it was this feeling of belonging to an international movement, and the hope created by the struggles and successes of other revolutionary parties, that remained a sustaining force for the CPC throughout its history.

Through their connection to the CI, Canadian Communists acquired a new perspective on the woman question distinct from the approach of earlier socialist parties. The Canadian Party's own history, its social composition and the dominant culture in Canada also influenced the Party's approach to women's emancipation, but guidance from the CI remained a fundamental determinant of the CPC's treatment of the woman question. The International claimed to base its advice on a Marxist and Leninist analysis, and the CPC used writings by Lenin and the Marxist classics as the foundation for its education on the woman question. In its loyalty to a Marxist view of women's inequality, the CPC resembled its predecessors, the SDPC and the SPC, but the Communist Party gave new emphasis to Frederick Engel's Origin of the Family, and added crucial lessons from Lenin's writing. The suppositions of Marxist and Leninist theory used by the CPC are worth examining in order to understand the theoretical legacies and worldview inherited by the nascent CPC.

Marx's writing on women is not substantial and is scattered throughout his work, and as many writers have pointed out, it is not without some contradiction, both within his writing and in relation to his personal life. His major legacy to later socialists was his materialist analysis of women's role in capitalist social relations, which related women's status in society to the ever-changing forces of economic and social production. Marx was particularly concerned with

the role of women in the process of industrialization, and with the way the sexual division of labour evolved. In his polemical writing, Marx waxed indignant on the exploitation of women in British factories, lamenting the physical and mental toll which factory work took on the lives of women and on the welfare of the family. Marx related women's inferior status to the class system, and to illustrate his point, he often pointed to the antithetical situations of bourgeois and working-class women: while bourgeois women were treated like property, especially in the marriage contract, they still benefitted vicariously from the extraction of surplus value and the exploitation of working women. Professing disdain for the "corrupt and rotten"<sup>33</sup> bourgeois morality of the family, Marx nonetheless decried the assault on (the more idealized) working-class home by the dehumanizing forces of industrial capitalism. Fundamental to his analysis, and essential to Communists' reading of Marx, was the contention that women's entry into wage labour also held out the possibility of changing women's role in the family, involving her in the class struggle, and eventually challenging the relationship between capital and labour:

However terrible and disgusting the dissolution, under capitalism, of the old family ties may appear, nonetheless, modern industry, by assigning as it does an important part in the process of production ...to women, to young persons and to children of both sexes, creates a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of relations between the sexes.<sup>34</sup>

Marx's ideas on the family were later expanded on by his colleague, Frederick Engels, in Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, a book that became one of the most important works on women for the Communist Party of Canada. Origins of the Family, first published in 1884, initiated an important new perspective on the study of the family, for, in contrast to prevailing Victorian and Christian

ideas, it argued that the family was not 'natural' and static, but had evolved historically in response to the way that people earned their livelihood. Engels made extensive use of anthropological work by Henry Morgan which sustained Marx's ideas that primitive communism and matriarchal forms of society preceded society in which private property dominated. The emergence of private property, argued Engels, led to monogamous marriages in which men could identify their children and pass on property to them, producing a patriarchal society in which women became sexually subject to men: "the first class antagonism which appears in society coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamian marriage."<sup>35</sup> Unable to escape from his Victorian context, Engels criticized, then excused monogamy. Potentially, he added, monogamy was an advance, for it introduced the modern possibility of "individual sex love". Women's subjection, therefore, was not intrinsically tied to monogamy, only monogamy as it existed in the capitalist context.<sup>36</sup>

Like Marx, Engels argued that women's integration into social production was laying the foundation for women's emancipation, for the division of labour which relegated women to household labour and which aided their subjection was being challenged by the advent of industrial capitalism. As domestic economy was appropriated by industry, and as women entered the workforce, the conditions for women's participation in the class struggle, and thus, their eventual freedom, were created.

Engels' ideas became the cornerstone for the CPC's education on the woman question. For many socialists, Engels' analysis of women's oppression represented an important liberation from previous theories of gender inequality, for it saw women's oppression as a consequence of

history, not as a result of biology, and it placed the family, and sex conflict within the family, within a historical context of social and economic change. Anthropologists, of course, questioned and still do question, the existence of Morgan's 'primitive collective society', his notion that matriarchy preceded patriarchy, and his imprecise definition of the family. And since the 1960's, socialist-feminist theorists have questioned Engels' emphasis on male supremacy in the area of property, but not in the area of ideology and psychology, and they have extended his criticisms of monogamy and domestic labour much further.<sup>37</sup> One recent critic has even argued convincingly that Engels did not understand the role of women in primitive societies; that he did not realize that the first division of labour was a sexual -- and exploitive -- one; and that male power also derives from men's indirect role in procreation.<sup>38</sup>

Whatever the criticisms of Engels -- and there are many valid ones -- the fact of his extensive influence remains. For Canadian Communists, Engels work spawned a number of significant maxims. First, women's oppression was directly related to the system of private property and could only be addressed with the abolition of capitalism. Second, women's involvement in productive labour, outside the family, was an essential step towards their participation in the class struggle and the revolutionary movement. Lastly, Engels' work implied that with the end of capitalism, the preconditions for new sexual and family relationships were established, and that monogamy could find a more equal, loving form in a communist future.

Engels' conclusions formed an important part of August Bebel's Women Under Socialism, a text which was also used for study and

education by the CPC. Although less influential than the work of Engels and Lenin, Bebel's book was often offered for sale, recommended on reading lists, and used consistently in women's study groups from the 1920's to the '40's. The appeal of Bebel's work, which was also widely read by socialists in the pre-war period, was not necessarily in its originality, but rather because it synthesized information on working-class women and socialist ideas in a comprehensive, yet readable, and sometimes inspiring manner. Bebel, for instance, reiterated Engels' thesis regarding the supplanting of matriarchy with the rise of private property and patriarchy, and dramatically declared that "woman was the first human being that tasted bondage, woman was a slave before the slave existed."<sup>39</sup>

Bebel examined the lives of working-class and bourgeois women within capitalist society, stressing the impoverished economic conditions shaping the existence of working-class women's lives, and the irreconcilable differences between the two groups. Like Marx, he decried the exploitation of women wage earners and the destruction of the working-class home, "with the inevitable result that the little ones are neglected care ... and the further results are the degeneration of the race."<sup>40</sup> And like Marx, he could lapse into Victorian sentimentality, describing the female character as "more weak and pliant",<sup>41</sup> and shaped by maternal impulses. But Bebel also offered sympathetic insights into the socialization of women, and more than Marx, he criticized sex oppression within the working-class household and the refusal of socialist men to accept female equality.

Bebel's book was popular in part because of this sympathetic treatment of women's oppression, as well as because of its comprehensive

synthesis of material and its ultimate optimism and faith in the human future.<sup>42</sup> For Communists, Bebel's book had important lessons: it reaffirmed the historical and evolutionary approach of Marx, and the major conclusions of Engels about private property, monogamy and the family. It also reaffirmed the tenet that the woman question was inseparable from the social question of capitalism and "that only in connection with each other can the two questions reach their final solution."<sup>43</sup> And lastly, Bebel's conclusions about the bourgeois base of the women's movement substantiated that idea that a separate proletarian women's movement was the most important vehicle for women's emancipation.

Despite its optimism about a socialist future, Bebel's book lacked a strong and detailed discussion of the methods of women's participation in the socialist movement. This question of strategy was, however, taken up in the works of Lenin, especially in 'Recollections of a Conversation with Clara Zetkin', a published account of an extensive discussion on the woman question undertaken with the former German SPD leader in 1920. For Canadian Communists, Lenin's writing on women appeared to give new emphasis and urgency to the woman question; as a revolutionary leader, Lenin's attitude seemed exemplary in its dedication to eradicating women's oppression. Women's equality, he wrote, was a major priority which no communist could dispute: "we hate -- yes, hate and want to remove, whatever oppresses and harasses the working woman, the wife of the little man, and even in many respects the woman of the propertied class."<sup>44</sup> Women's freedom, he emphasized in the Marxist tradition, was possible only with the abolition of private property and the victory of communism, and the primary agent of women's

liberation, he continued, must be the Communist Party and the dictatorship of the proletariat, not a separate women's movement.

Lenin's emphasis on the primacy of class struggle and the leadership of women by a vanguard party was part of the Bolsheviks' political program. Their antipathy to separate women's organizations emanated partly from a Marxist theoretical perspective, but also from their immersion in a male-dominated culture, and a historic fear of, and hostility to 'bourgeois' feminism. The threat of feminism, however, was one reason behind the Bolsheviks' acceptance of the need to do some specific work among working-class women; this, along with other pragmatic considerations, impelled them to set up women's commissions and committees within the Party.<sup>45</sup> The Party, Lenin explained to Zetkin, "must have organs ... committees, sections or whatever they may be called ... with the specific purpose of rousing the broad masses of women, bringing them into contact with the Party and keeping them under its influences ... This is ... a practical revolutionary expediency."<sup>46</sup>

Lenin's views on the necessity of establishing women's organizations found practical expression in the Women's Secretariat established within the Communist International in 1920. This international women's group had two major goals: through discussion of women's issues it was to draw the masses of working-class women to communism, and it was to provide guidance to the national communist parties on the woman question -- a question, Lenin realized, which was often ignored. While the International Women's Secretariat was to be in constant touch with national sections of the movement, and while the Secretariat formally had a semi-autonomous existence from the CI, it

was, in the last resort, directed by the Executive Committee of the CI, and thus by Russian Bolsheviks.

Lenin's advocacy of separate agitational work among women also emanated from his belief that women, isolated in the home amidst domestic drudgery, were more politically "backward" than men, and likely to act as "a drag and fetter on their husbands' fighting spirit."<sup>47</sup> Although this idea was not uncommon among socialists, Lenin put new emphasis on the necessity of relieving women of domestic labour by socializing household work. He further stressed that legal and social reforms must be accompanied by the eradication of attitudes of male supremacy, which lingered on among many of his comrades: "scratch a communist and a philistine appears. To be sure, you have to scratch the sensitive spots -- such as their mentality regarding women."<sup>48</sup>

Despite his innovative emphasis on the socialization of housework, and his support for a wide range of social reforms regarding women, Lenin's definition of the woman question remained limited to a fairly economistic framework. On questions of sexuality and marriage, for instance, his views were circumscribed by the prudery and prejudices of his times. He supported family law reform and maternity benefits, but he had a deep suspicion of birth control and abortion, believing these issues to be 'petty-bourgeois and Malthusian' in origin, and he had great reserve about any discussion of changes in sexual conduct. Like Marx, he was contemptuous of the double standard associated with bourgeois marriage, but he also had scathing disregard for what he considered were demands for 'free love'. He chastized his mistress, Innessa Armand, for her inclusion of free love in a list of women's demands, for its "bourgeois, anti-Marxist and decadent"<sup>49</sup> implications,



and his conversation with Zetkin abounds with references to his mistrust of "sex theories which often ... spring from the desire to justify one's own abnormal or excessive sex life."<sup>50</sup> His suspicions that Alexandra Kollantai's writing on love, women and marriage advocated decadent promiscuity (revealing a distorted understanding of her ideas), further underlined his lack of sympathy for any questions of women's sexual oppression by men.

Thus, Lenin's approach to the woman question was an amalgam of established Marxist principles, Marxist ideas altered by cultural influences and by strategic considerations, and sheer political pragmatism. His views reaffirmed the emphasis of Marx, Engels and Bebel on the primacy of class struggle and the necessity of communism for women's emancipation, on the dangers and deficiencies of bourgeois feminism, and on the importance of women's participation, outside the home, in the productive process. Lastly, his prescriptions for a women's movement, finely attuned to the prevailing Russian situation, stressed the need for a working-class women's movement, as a component of the mass revolutionary movement, guided absolutely by a vanguard Party.

In his famous advice to Clara Zetkin, as well as in other writings, Lenin implied the need for Bolshevik parties to use flexibility in their tactical considerations. In Canada, the application of Leninist theory was, to some extent, modified by the historical development of the Party;<sup>51</sup> but, especially in the 1920's and early 1930's, the CPC often repeated Lenin's suggestions in the 'Recollections' verbatim and labelled these, without modification, the 'correct' methods of organizing. As a result, any weaknesses in

Leninist theory, or its inappropriateness for Canadian conditions were left unquestioned. The economist framework of Leninist strategies, for instance, was never challenged, and this economism helped to obscure issues of sexual oppression, placing unequal power relationships, except the class struggle, on a secondary level, and dismissing them as issues of 'superstructural' and secondary importance.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the limits put on women's self-organization, and Lenin's insistence that women be guided by the revolutionary vanguard meant that women never became the primary agents and architects of their own liberation; they were constantly directed by the agenda of largely-male Party leadership.

(iii)

While the Communist Party's interpretation of the woman question paid homage to the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin, the CCF's theoretical ancestry is less clear, and certainly more diverse. The CCF was a coalition of labour parties, including the Dominion Labour Party, the Canadian Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party; of progressive farmers from the United Farmers of Canada, the United Farmers of Alberta and United Farmers of Manitoba; of the League for Social Reconstruction; and of socialists from the SPC. Because the Party began as a loose federation of socialist, farmer and labour interests, of various ideological persuasions, its suppositions about the woman question are less easily defined. Nonetheless, the CCF did inherit a number of ideological traditions, and histories of previous practices, which shaped its philosophy, and thus imparted a particular tone to its understanding of the woman question.

Although many Marxist socialists joined the new Communist Party on its formation, some remained in the SPC, or in ILPs. The Socialist Party of Canada maintained a core of supporters in British Columbia, and in 1932, the Party re-emerged as an organizational entity in Ontario. In 1933, both groups affiliated to the CCF.<sup>53</sup> From the existing, incomplete evidence, it appears that these socialists brought to the CCF a traditional Marxist view of the woman question. In the post-war years, SPCers in B.C. continued to underline the need for Marxist educational work, and for a scientific socialist analysis of Canadian society, stressing historical materialism and the labour theory of value. Their interpretation of Marx's writing included an emphasis on the primacy of class struggle, and a preoccupation with the need to organize workers involved in social production. There is no evidence that the B.C. Party circulated and discussed, on a significant scale, Engels' Origin of the Family, or Bebel's Woman under Socialism. And except for one or two brief references to women's auxiliaries linked to the SPC,<sup>54</sup> there is no evidence of concerted efforts to establish women's socialist groups. The lack of such groups was probably linked to the SPC's small size, but it was likely also the result of their particular brand of Marxism which stressed the need for solidarity in the class struggle and embodied the traditional fear of imitating middle-class feminism. However, there is also no evidence that their attitude towards women's groups was static or unyielding, for as later CCFers, many Marxists were ready to accept some separate organization of women. At the time of the Regina Convention, for example, there was growing interest in Toronto in the organization of working-class housewives, an idea sponsored by SPCer Elizabeth Morton.

Marxists in the CCF were keenly aware of the economic hardships of women under capitalism; in speeches and articles they exposed the super-exploitation of women workers and the pressures faced by working-class housewives. Some were vaguely sympathetic to the USSR's attempts to transform the economic and social status of women. Many Marxists in the SPC tradition were also concerned with the strain put on the working-class family, and women's role in the family, by capitalism, and they reiterated Marx's view that the family would be reaffirmed, in a more secure and positive sense, in a future socialist society. In short, the Marxist tradition brought to the CCF a sharp awareness of, and concern for women's economic exploitation, but it did not yield a strong reflection on the woman question, a well-developed understanding of women's oppression, or a solid practice of women's self-organization.

The CCF was also shaped by a tradition of utopian socialism. ✓

CCF literature lists included readings on the history of utopian ideas and experiments, such as Robert Owen's biography, and Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward was one of the most popular books among Party members.

For the early Utopians of the 19th century, ideas about women's emancipation were part of a humanist philosophy which idealized a cooperative, yet libertarian society, created outside the definition of competitive individualism. Utopian socialists placed hope in the total reformation of men and women along spiritual and moral lines, the abolition of women's subordination in marriage, and the reorganization of social productive relations; and they looked to the collaboration of all classes to effect this ideal.<sup>55</sup> This early brand of utopian socialism, however, was overshadowed in the late 19th century by new currents in the socialist movement, primarily by Marxism, which

"replaced the utopian idea of regenerating all human relationships with an analysis of sexism as an outgrowth of bourgeois property relations."<sup>56</sup> The earlier traditions remained a distant memory for socialists in the 20th century, and it was the later utopian ideas associated with Bellamy's Looking Backward which were the most formative influence on the CCF.

The primary attraction of Looking Backward was its moral critique of capitalism and its imaginative description of a new society constructed on the spirit of cooperation and solidarity. 'The Nation' in Bellamy's future embodied collective ownership and production, rewarding all its citizens with equal wages and ensuring economic independence for all. The replacement of the greed and inefficiency of capitalism, Bellamy emphasized, had come not from the forces of class conflict and revolution, but had emerged from humanity's growing awareness of an impending crisis and its concerted efforts to cooperate and transform society. In Bellamy's nation of the future, women, like men, are members of society's Industrial Army, except for periods when their maternal functions necessitate their absence. Women, however, constitute a separate army which performs jobs suitable to their weaker physical abilities, and which operates under an entirely different discipline; their woman general-in-chief has one seat on the (otherwise male) President's cabinet. Women, in fact, exist as a 'separate but equal' citizens in The Nation, with "a world of their own, with its own emulations, ambitions and careers."<sup>57</sup>

The cornerstone of women's new equality is their economic independence; at the same time, Bellamy assured his readers, relations between the sexes have not been altered in any 'unpleasant' way for even

though household work has been socialized, romantic marriage is still the ideal and the nuclear family remains a fundamental unit of emotional security and moral guidance. Bellamy's Utopia included some very Victorian assumptions about women's personality, social role and place in the family. For all its equality, Bellamy's new society is ruled in a patriarchal and martial manner by men over 45. He is unsympathetic to feminists, whom he claimed "wished to obliterate the differences between the sexes",<sup>58</sup> and he often defined women as adjuncts and helpmates to men: "woman are a very happy race", a member of The Nation explains, "and their power of giving happiness to men has been, of course, increased in proportion."<sup>59</sup> Motherhood is seen as women's 'natural' career for women have a more highly developed moral and spiritual nature, and innate maternal instincts. Thus, only women who have been wives and mothers are allowed to occupy higher positions in The Nation, as they alone are "fully and naturally representative of their sex."<sup>60</sup>

For Canadian socialists, Bellamy's ideas appealed most fundamentally to a sense of morality -- including a reinforcement of some traditional values<sup>61</sup> -- and a belief in man's rationality. The book's legacy was its moral indictment of an inefficient and un-Christian capitalism, its rejection of Marxist ideas of class conflict and revolution, and its optimistic belief in a politics based on cooperation. In the context of its times, Looking Backward did make an innovative plea for women's economic equality and their right to work -- and many CCF women appreciated the book for this reason. But balancing Bellamy's radical views on women's economic independence, was a legacy of more traditional ideas, exalting women's more developed

moral character and her maternal inclinations, and calling for a corollary 'special sphere' for her social activity.

CCFers were also influenced by the work of British Fabians. Like Bellamy's Nation, the Fabians' ideal socialist society necessitated state planning, with considerable emphasis on centralization and efficiency. Fabian ideas in Canada were most strongly represented in the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR), a depression-born association of intellectuals which mounted a highly visible campaign against the inequalities and inefficiencies of monopoly capitalism. The LSR was not solely "a Canadian version of the British Fabian society" for it encompassed a wide variety of intellectual components, including "Fabian, Marxist, Guild and Christian socialist and reformist liberal influences, as well as insights gained from domestic sources, especially the agrarian radicals of the prairie West." Even Fabian thought itself was a compendium of ideologies, including a Marxism, which the Fabians "altered, discarding some its important elements."<sup>62</sup>

Fabian ideas were an important component of the CCF's outlook, although references to the LSR as the "brains trust" and sole creator of the Regina Manifesto are exaggerated.<sup>63</sup> The views of the LSR's professorial and professional constituency are probably best articulated in the LSR Manifesto, and in Social Planning for Canada, an LSR-researched book, which became an essential part of all CCF educational work in the 1930's and early 40's. Social Planning is, in essence, a moral censure of a wasteful, inefficient, and inhumane system of economic organization. The profit motive and the impersonal forces of materialism are at the core of the moral failure of capitalism: "the basis of privilege is wealth, the creed of privilege is a belief in the

making of money ... and the hunt for profits can ultimately justify any kind of [inhumane]...behavior."<sup>64</sup> The solution, said the LSR, was cooperative ownership with effective state planning; the LSR, like the British Fabians, shared a large measure of confidence in expertise, centralization and social engineering.<sup>65</sup> Also like the Fabians, the LSR did not accept an analysis of the inherent dynamic of class conflict; it rejected revolution for a gradual parliamentary transition to socialism, effected by a political alliance of workers, farmers and small businessmen.

Thus, Fabian ideas bequeathed a moral indictment of capitalism, a belief in state planning and faith in a politics of rationality and class collaboration. The Fabian tradition, did not however, impart a major concern with women's oppression. Some important LSR research did document -- and censure -- the exploitation of women workers, as in the Cassidy-Scott report on the men's clothing industry. But save for one or two exceptions, their publications seldom explored questions of women's inequality or women's role in the socialist movement.<sup>66</sup> In Britain, early Fabians like Beatrice Webb had been disinterested in the more "marginal and less intellectually prestigious" question of women's inequality, and were at best, ambivalent to feminism.<sup>67</sup> The Fabians lack of interest in, or programs on, women's equality was partially rectified in 1908 with the establishment of a Fabian Women's Group, which produced a number of pamphlets and influential books, detailing the lives of working-class women, and proposing two solutions -- the endowment of motherhood and women's economic independence -- to what was, they believed, an economic oppression of women.<sup>68</sup> But after World War I, this Women's Fabian Group shrank in size and activity, perhaps



one reason why their influence was not strongly apparent in the LSR. Moreover, women in the LSR comprised a minority within a fairly small membership; thus, their limited numbers, as well as the lack of an intellectual tradition of concern for women's oppression, and perhaps, in some cases, their middle-class backgrounds and successful careers, prevented a significant concern with the woman question.

In contrast to the LSR, agrarian radicals brought to the CCF a solid tradition of autonomous women's organizations, established in the pre-war Progressive movement. In this earlier period, prairie farm organizations were composed of a variety of political outlooks, although they were united by a feeling of colonial exploitation, opposition to eastern monopoly capitalism, and a commitment to a more direct democracy. The political thinking of the agrarian Progressives was informed by the writing of Henry George, Gustavas Myers and Thorstein Veblen, with strong overtones of the Social Gospel.<sup>69</sup> While it would be wrong to see these earlier Progressives as the lineal ancestors of the CCF, there were some threads of continuity, including a feeling of hinterland exploitation, and a distrust of the workings of monopoly capitalism and the two old-line parties. In the later 1920's and '30's, agrarian protest movements regrouped, and a radical current sympathetic to socialism emerged. As a result, small sections of the UFM and the UFA, and especially sectors of the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) (UFC-SS), linked up with the CCF. These new agrarian radicals brought to the CCF an antipathy to capitalism which went beyond the age-old calls for tariff reform and denunciations of political corruption, and demanded a society transformed on the basis of socialist ideas. Historians continue to debate the exact nature and

extent of the 'radicalism' in agrarian radicalism, some even questioning the application of the term socialist to the farmer element in the CCF. Although these farmers did generally accept the framework of liberal democracy and usually rejected a Marxist analysis of society, they should not be dismissed as simply frustrated petits bourgeois for they did have a critique of capitalism which rejected private ownership on a corporate and monopolistic scale. The Saskatchewan Farmer-Labour Party, for instance, was originally committed to a platform of social ownership of resources and a use-lease system of land holding.<sup>70</sup>

Agrarian radicals also brought to the CCF traditions from past political practice, including their experience in the cooperative movement, the custom of using peaceful, electoral methods, and a tradition of separate women's organizations. Women from the Grain Growers, the UFM and UFA women's sections (or auxiliaries) often attended annual conventions of the larger farm organization, but they also had a separate organizational structure and their own conferences in which they debated issues of concern to women, such as moral reform, health care and education. Women in the UFC(SS) held similar, annual Farm Women's Weeks, and they had three assured seats on the UFC Provincial Board of Directors, an explicit recognition of the importance of farm wives to the rural economy. Agrarian radicals, like the earlier Progressives, understood the shared economic and 'class' interests of all farmers, be they men or women, to be at the heart of their exploitation; yet, they also often spoke of a suitable 'separate sphere' of interest for women.

These ideas were excellently illustrated in William Irvine's The Farmers in Politics, a book written on the crest of the Progressive

movement, but still cited in later CCF educational lists. Although Irvine rejected a Marxist analysis of society, he relied heavily on ideas of British guild socialism, and he maintained that economic interests were the primary determinants of social organization, and the basis for political organization. Irvine echoed the view that economic conflict and injustice lay at the root of farm women's problems, but he added that women, because of their historic idealistic, spiritual nature, tended to "approach political problems from a different angle."<sup>71</sup> For instance, women's maternal concerns engendered a strong loyalty to the home, encouraging them to concentrate on questions relating to the young, such as health care and education. Irvine's analysis owed much to prevailing ideas of women's 'natural' character and the ideology of womanhood and reform known as maternal feminism. His idealized picture of womanhood, and his subsequent demarcation of their 'separate sphere' was also reminiscent of Bellamy's Looking Backward. At the same time, the idea of a separate sphere justified the existence of separate women's organizations, where farm women could gain political experience and confidence, and discuss issues of special interest to women. Thus, while the idea of women's natural and distinct character limited their role in the larger farm organization, it also accorded them a place of respect, as "junior partners"<sup>72</sup> in the agrarian movement.

Influential within the LSR and within prairie radicalism, was the philosophy of Christian socialism, which in itself comprised a tradition of major importance to the CCF. Christian socialism was directly related to the earlier tradition of the Social Gospel, best described in its earlier period of crest and crisis before the formation

of the CCF.<sup>73</sup> The Social Gospel, an integral part of the pre-war social reform movement was "in dramatic terms ... a call for men to find the meaning of their lives in seeking to realize the Kingdom of God in the very fabric of society."<sup>74</sup> It centred on the idea that Christianity should be directly applied and reflected in human society, that it necessitated a commitment to improve an imperfect society. Within the social gospel movement there were different strains of opinion, which although united in its rise, became antagonistic in its crest and crisis. As the movement, "in confrontation with social reality" began to disintegrate in the 1920's, the radical strain in the movement, which "saw there could be no personal salvation without social salvation", persisted as incipient Christian socialism.<sup>75</sup> For Social Gospel radicals like Beatrice Brigden, later a CCFer, the crisis in Progressivism coincided with a personal alienation from the organized church, a fact which undoubtedly aided the transfer of her energies to the secular activity of socialist party politics.

Yet, while secular by definition, the political expression of socialism was for these radicals still a religious ideal, informed by the earlier radical Social Gospel tradition. A telling expression of the early radical Social Gospel ideas which lived on as a basis for Christian socialism, was Salem Bland's The New Christianity, a book written in the midst of labour and social unrest in post-war Canada. Central to Bland's thesis was the belief that capitalist control of industry, in essence, "rapacious and heartless" must cease, for the competitive system "is the antithesis of the Golden Rule and the denial of Brotherhood".<sup>76</sup> The Christian principles of Brotherhood and democracy, he continued, were at the core of the unrest of his time,

generating a new Labour Christianity based on "the value of labour, the right of all to productive labour, to a living wage and to a union or association."<sup>77</sup> The old Protestantism, based on the hope of heavenly salvation, and the masculine ethos of competition and individualism, had to be transformed into a religion encompassing feminine values, collectivity and social salvation.

Two decades later, echoes of The New Christianity were found in the publications of the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order (FCSO), a direct ancestor of the Social Gospel and relative of the CCF. Born in April 1934, at a meeting of laymen and ministers, the FCSO described itself as an "association of Christians whose religious convictions led them to the belief that the capitalist economic system is fundamentally at variance with Christian principles, and who regard the creation of a new social order essential to the realization of the Kingdom of God."<sup>78</sup> Their program of action included study groups, social action groups, conferences and the publication of literature, as well as informal aid to the Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement (CCYM), the youth wing of the CCF. Many of the Fellowship's publications echoed Salem Bland's anti-capitalist views, as well as his idea that the contemporary social crisis was not simply economic, but also a religious crisis. Many essays in their collective effort, Towards the Christian Revolution, however, were less optimistic than The New Christianity, pointing, for instance, to the dangerous tendencies of capitalism towards fascism, to business consolidating its power and breeding international war. The tenor of the book, as one reviewer remarked was "deeper, sadder, more tragic than the old Social Gospel."<sup>79</sup> Despite these differences, the FCSO did exist on the same continuum as the radical Social Gospel, and

both imparted a moral and ethical tradition of considerable strength to the CCF. For Christian socialists, a materialistic analysis of society, and revolutionary methods were obviously unacceptable. Yet, while stressing the need for peaceful change, their outlook was often critical of piecemeal reform or the technocratic management of society, for they saw society as an organic whole, requiring a comprehensive transformation, a total alteration on Christian and socialist terms.

Although Christian socialists embraced the idea of egalitarian social relations, they were not especially interested in the origin and nature of women's oppression; like the agrarian radicals, they tended to overlook power and antagonism between the sexes, and stress principles of human cooperation and the 'Brotherhood of Man'. One of the earliest Christian socialist organizations, the Canadian Socialist League, was never widely concerned with the woman question, perhaps, suggests Linda Kealey, because Christian socialism embraced a wide variety of reforms, including one demand for sexual equality -- the vote for women.<sup>80</sup>

During the Progressive period, the Church did encourage women's interest in social reform, and thus political issues.<sup>81</sup> Social Gospel ideas, for instance, motivated feminists like Nellie McClung, who claimed that, to

✓ her, Christianity signified equality between the sexes. As a whole,

however, the Social Gospel movement remained firmly encased in a

✓ traditional view of womanhood; the movement did not question the idea

that women's nature suited them primarily for philanthropic and

missionary work; and even those who supported women's suffrage often saw

it as a means to bring women's morality (especially their

pro-prohibition views) to bear on political life.<sup>82</sup> The idea of women's

equality based on inalienable natural rights and equal capabilities was

less easily accepted by many Christians, as Nellie McClung found in the 1920's and '30's during her long fight for women's right to ordination.<sup>83</sup> Women may have been spiritually equal before God, but on earth, they were relegated to a separate sphere shaped by their biological and social roles as mothers and wives.

Later, in the FCSO there was, again, little evidence that the woman question, per se, was of major interest. Yet, while this next generation of Christian socialists was not significantly concerned with women's oppression or with a program for women's equality, they were more conscious of the need to democratize sexual relations. In the FCSO, and in the Student Christian Movement (SCM), a liberal Christian youth group established in the 1920's, women assumed more prominent and equal roles. Encouraged by their war-time experiences as participants and leaders in the student movement (before almost entirely dominated by men), women played a significant role in the creation of the SCM after the war.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps also influenced by women's new political rights, and by contemporary innovations in topics concerning sexuality, psychology and gender relations, SCM members spoke of the need to restructure male-female relations on the basis of increased equality. Thus, in the 1920's and '30's the Social Gospel idea of woman's separate sphere was modified by some increased emphasis on effecting a more egalitarian 'Brotherhood of Man'.

(iv)

The formation of the CPC, and later the CCF, marked a decisive turning point in the history of Canadian socialism. As in Europe, old

socialist allegiances were severed during the Great War and two new paths to socialism, symbolized on the one hand by the Communist International, and on the other by the Third International, emerged.

The Canadian Communist Party represented an attempt to organize on the basis of Marxist and Leninist principles, and to link the fate of Canadian socialism with the inspiration and guidance of an international organization, rooted in the successful Russian Revolution. The CCF represented an alliance of labourite, Marxist, Fabian and agrarian radicals, united in common antipathy to the social disaster and economic inequalities generated by capitalism, and generally committed to an electoral, peaceful transition to socialism.

Women's equality had long been part of the socialist agenda, but in the three decades after World War I, both the CPC and the CCF came to appreciate the need for new emphasis on the woman question, and for fresh means of integrating women, on an equal basis, into the movement. In trying to fulfill these tasks, Communist and socialist women sometimes harkened back to the pre-war socialist movement, drawing on past experiences, imitating organizational forms, or pointing to errors of past political practice. Former suffragist Laura Jamieson took her feminist experience from the suffrage struggle into the CCF, Finnish socialist women carried their practice of establishing women's sections and 'sewing circles' into the Communist Party; and both the CCF and CPC women pointed to the inadequacy of the suffragists' agenda of legal rights for women.

Both the CCF and the CPC also inherited theoretical traditions which imparted a particular tone to their view of women's social role and of women's oppression. The Communists' understanding of women's



oppression was informed by Marxist and Leninist theory, and ultimately by guidance from the first Marxist 'experiment' -- the Soviet Union. Both these influences emphasized the imperative of a revolutionary transformation of the economic and political structures of society in order to achieve any meaningful equality for women. Women's oppression was understood to be an outgrowth of class and capitalist relations; therefore, women's redemption could only evolve from the antithesis of such relations. Women's participation in social production was seen as the crucial stimulus to her involvement in the class struggle, and thus, ultimately, to changed relations between capital and labour and the creation of a more egalitarian family. Engel's Origin of the Family, perhaps the most popular book on the woman question in the CPC's educational work, introduced the question of women's inferior role and sexual oppression in the family; yet, that oppression was again attributed to the class system and to property relations. And lastly, Leninist strategies stressed the necessity of removing women from the dangerous isolation of domestic work, and urged the creation of a class-based organization of women, situated within the larger working-class movement, and guided by the vanguard of the revolutionary party.

In contrast to the CPC, the CCF inherited a number of intellectual traditions, which, amalgamated together, produced a less clear-cut understanding of women's oppression, and sometimes even differed from each other. Marxists, for instance, brought to the Party a heightened awareness of women's economic dependence and exploitation as wage labourers, but they were sometimes opposed to separate women's socialist organizations (deemed a 'division of the class struggle')

designed to explore and defend women's special interests. Yet, such organizations were already a firm part of the agrarian radical tradition. Indeed, agrarian radicalism, Christian socialism and Bellamyite ideas often portrayed women as a distinct social group, set apart by their moral character and defined by their maternal and domestic calling.

The eclectic socialism of the CCF may not have produced a coherent and precise 'theory' of women's oppression, but the Party did ✓ inherit a concern for women's equality, and tried-and-true strategies for organizing women. CCF socialists were generally aware that women were oppressed, and gender equality was seen as a mark of a truly socialist society. Like the Communists, CCFers did not believe that women were oppressed by men, but rather by an economic and social system which in turn necessitated the subordination of women; thus, only the unity and cooperation of male and female socialists could usher in ✓ women's emancipation. Moreover, neither the CCF or the CPC remained bound by the traditions they inherited or the theoretical suppositions underlaying their view of socialism and the woman question. Communists' and socialists' treatment of the woman question was also shaped by other important factors: international influences, the changing norms and values of Canadian society, and the organized actions of women within the Party. In its first decade of existence, for example, the CPC, despite its grounding in Marxist theory, paid its most important debt to the directives of the Communist International. And in its first decade of existence, the CCF, despite its lack of a strong theoretical perspective on the woman question, was forced, by socialist feminists from within the Party, to face the question of why women were less

powerful in society, and how to involve them, on equal terms with men,  
in the movement.

## Footnotes, Chapter I

- 1 Norman Penner, The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis, (Toronto, 1977), p. 2..
- 2 Although the SPC eschewed work in the trade unions, many of its members were trade unionists, and ironically its entrenchment in labour organizations like the B.C. Federation of Labour ultimately helped to guarantee its survival. Ross McCormack, Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919 (Toronto, 1977), Chap. 4. See also Tad Kawecki, "Canadian Socialism and the Origins of the Communist Party, 1900-1922" (M.A. McMaster University, 1980), p. 140.
- 3 For example, John Queen and Fred Tipping in the Winnipeg SDPC. Queen was even influenced by the British liberal, J.S. Mill. A.B. McKillop, "Citizen and Socialist: The Ethos of Political Winnipeg, 1919-1935" (M.A. University of Winnipeg, 1970), p. 109.
- 4 Craig Heron, "Working-Class Hamilton, 1895-1930" (Ph.D. Dalhousie University, 1981), p. 587.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Linda Kealey, "Canadian Socialism and the Woman Question, 1900-1914", Paper presented at the Winnipeg General Strike Symposium, March 9-11, 1981, p. 6.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Linda Kealey, "Canadian Socialism and the Woman Question, 1900-1914"; Wayne Roberts, Honest Womanhood; Feminism, Femininity and Class Consciousness Among Toronto Working Women, 1893-1914, (Toronto, 1976); Janice Newton, "Women and Cotton's Weekly : A Study of Women and Socialism in Canada, 1909", Resources for Feminist Research, Special issue 8, (Fall, 1980).
- 9 Western Clarion, February 10, 1906.
- 10 Western Clarion, August 22, 1908.
- 11 Western Clarion, August 22, 1908 and September 12, 1908.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Western Clarion, September 12, 1908 and September 28, 1908.
- 14 Western Clarion, July and August, 1911.
- 15 Linda Kealey, "Canadian Socialism and the Woman Question, 1900-1914", p. 14.
- 16 Ibid., p. 15.

- 17 Varpu Lindstrom-Best, The Finnish Immigrant Community of Toronto 1887-1913, (Toronto, 1979); Joan Sangster, "Finnish Women in Ontario, 1880-1930", Polyphony, 3, no. 2, (Fall, 1981).
- 18 Cotton's Weekly, January 28, 1909.
- 19 Janice Newton, "Women and Cotton's Weekly", pp. 59-60.
- 20 Carol Bacchi, "The Responses of Farm and Labour Women to Suffrage", in Linda Kealey, ed., A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s (Toronto, 1979), pp. 95, 97; Susan Wade, "Helena Gutteridge: Votes for Women and Trade Unions", in Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess, eds., In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in B.C. (Victoria, 1980), p. 188.
- 21 Craig Heron, "Working-Class Hamilton, 1895-1930", chap. 5.
- 22 Industrial Banner, January 28, 1916.
- 23 For example, Flora M. Denison was sympathetic to the problems of working women, Laura Hughes was involved in the Labour Party, and Beatrice Brigden was interested in socialist literature.
- 24 Veronica Strong-Boag, The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929 (Ottawa, 1976).
- 25 Carol Bacchi, "The Responses of Farm and Labour Women to Suffrage", p. 100.
- 26 Irene Parlby, quoted in Carol Bacchi, "the Responses of Farm and Labour Women in Suffrage", p. 103.
- 27 Ibid., p. 105.
- 28 Donald Avery, Dangerous Foreigners (Toronto, 1979), p. 117.
- 29 For a good attempt to rise above a simplistic analysis, see Tad Kawecki, "Canadian Socialism and the Origins of the Communist Party, 1900-1922", or Roseline Usiskin, "Toward a Theoretical Reformulation of the Relationship Between Political Ideology, Social Class, and Ethnicity: A Case Study of the Winnipeg Jewish Radical Community, 1905-1920" (M.A. University of Winnipeg, 1978).
- 30 quoted in Norman Penner, The Canadian Left, p. 79.
- 31 quoted in Tad Kawecki, "Canadian Socialism and the Origins of the Communist Party", p. 234.
- 32 Exactly when the CI became completely controlled by the USSR, is debated by historians. Gus Horowitz, "Introduction" to Leon Trotsky, The Third International After Lenin (New York), claims that it wasn't until the mid-twenties. But a contemporary participant claims Russian control from the CI's very inception. See Angelica Balabanoff, My Life as Rebel (Bloomington, 1973).

- 33 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The Communist Manifesto", in The Woman Question: Selections from the Writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin (New York, 1951), p. 34.
- 34 Karl Marx, "Das Kapital", in The Woman Question: Selections from the Writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, p. 30.
- 35 Frederick Engels, Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (New York, 1972), p. 75.
- 36 Ibid., p. 78.
- 37 Juliet Mitchell, Women's Estate (New York, 1973); Ann Lane, "Woman in Society: A Critique of Engels" in Berenice Carroll, ed., Liberating Women's History (Chicago, 1976); Rosalend Delmar, "Looking Again at Engel's Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State", in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, eds., The Rights and Wrongs of Women (London, 1976).
- 38 Varda Burstyn, "Economy, Sexuality, Politics: Engels and the Sexual Division of Labour", Socialist Studies/Etudes Socialistes, (1983).
- 39 August Bebel, Woman Under Socialism (New York, 1971), p. 9.
- 40 Ibid., p. 106.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 First published in 1883, Bebel's book became a work of international repute. By World War I, it had gone through 50 editions, and was translated into 15 languages. It was widely read by American socialist women, and discussed in the Socialist Party of America publications. Mari Jo Buhle, Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920 (Urbana, 1981). Thus, some Canadian Communists had probably already read the book before the 1920's.
- 43 August Bebel, Woman Under Socialism, p. 1.
- 44 Lenin quoted by Clara Zetkin, "My Recollections of Lenin" in The Emancipation of Women: Writings of V.I. Lenin (New York, 1975), p. 112.
- 45 Ann Bobroff, "The Bolsheviks and Working Women, 1905-1920", Radical America, Vol. 10, no. 3., (May-June, 1976) p. 63.
- 46 Lenin quoted by Clara Zetkin, "My Recollections of Lenin", p. 111, *my italics*.
- 47 Ibid., p. 118.
- 48 Ibid., pp. 118, 119.
- 49 Lenin to Inessa Armand, in The Emancipation of Women: Writings of V.I. Lenin, pp. 38-39.

- 50 Lenin to Zetkin, "My Recollections of Lenin", p. 101.
- 51 Including advice from the Communist International to essentially abandon Leninist methods of organizing during the Popular Front, and at the time of the founding of the Labor Progressive Party.
- 52 Shelia Rowbotham, Beyond the Fragments; Feminism and the Making of Socialism (London, 1979), pp. 102-111, deals with this issue at length.
- 53 The SPC in B.C. joined forces with other groups in 1925 to form the ILP, also a Marxist socialist party. Then in 1932, it changed its name back to the SPC. I have treated it as one continuing organization, as its membership and Marxist outlook remained basically the same.
- 54 A passing reference to a Women's Section of the SPC is made in Ronald Grantham, "Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement in B.C., 1898-1933" (M.A. University of British Columbia, 1943), p. 177.
- 55 Barbara Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem (London, 1983). Because of their criticisms, and sometimes attempts to abolish marriage, these utopian socialists were seen to be in favor of 'free love'. In Canada, the early Finnish socialist community at Sointula, B.C., was similarly noted for its 'free love' views because of its opposition to marriage, considered "a form of slavery for women". Donald Wilson, "Matti Kurikka and A.B. Makela: Socialist Thought Among the Finns in Canada, 1900-1932", Canadian Ethnic Studies, Vol. X., no. 2, (1978), p. 9.
- 56 Barbara Taylor, "Lords of Creation: Marxism, Feminism and Utopian Socialism", Radical America, Vol. 14, no. 4, (July-August, 1980) p. 45.
- 57 Edward Bellamy, Looking Backward 2000-1887 (Cambridge, 1967), p. 264.
- 58 Ibid., p. 264.
- 59 Ibid., p. 265.
- 60 Ibid., p. 266.
- 61 "Part of the appeal of Bellamy lies in its social conservatism, for it reinforced American values and traditions, reaffirming the belief in the American doctrine of progress and the primacy of moral reform." John Thomas, "Introduction", to Edward Bellamy, Looking Backward, p. 86.
- ✓ 62 Michiel Horn, The League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada, 1930-1942 (Toronto, 1980), pp. 209, 101.
- 63 Ibid.

- 64 Ibid., p. 79.
- 65 F.H. Underhill, "Fabians and Fabianism", Canadian Forum, March-April, 1946.
- 66 Two exceptions are found in Canadian Forum. I.M. Biss, "The Dressmakers' Strike", Canadian Forum, July, 1931; Harriet Forsey, "Will Women Win the Peace?", Canadian Forum, August, 1944.
- 67 Barbara Caine, "Beatrice Webb and the 'Woman Question'", History Workshop, issue 14, (Autumn, 1982) pp. 39-42.
- 68 Sally Alexander, "Introduction" to Maud Pember Reeves, Round About A Pound A Week (London, 1979), p. xix.
- 69 Norman Penner, The Canadian Left, p. 173.
- 70 Even the 'radicalism' of the use-lease resolution has been debated by historians. See Peter Sinclair, "The Saskatchewan CCF Ascent to Power and Decline of Socialism", Canadian Historical Review, Vol. LIV, no. 4, (December, 1973); and George Hoffmann, "The Saskatchewan Farmer-Labour Party, 1932-34; How Radical Was it at its Origins?", Saskatchewan History, Vol. XXVII, no. 2, (Spring, 1975). While Sinclair's analysis has merit, the original passage of the use-lease resolution does point to a radical point of view in the agrarian section of the Party; moreover, the CCF's repeated calls for the social ownership of resources indicated the existence of socialist ideas within the Party.
- 71 Williame Irvine, The Farmers in Politics (Toronto, 1976), p. 123.
- 72 Georgina Taylor, "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How Saskatchewan Women Reconciled Their Activities for the CCF with Traditional Roles for Women" (M.A. University of Saskatoon, 1983), p. 3.
- 73 A.R. Allen, The Social Passion (Toronto, 1971).
- 74 Ibid., p. 4.
- 75 Ibid., p. 17.
- 76 Salem Bland, The New Christianity (Toronto, 1973), p. 17.
- 77 Ibid., p. 25.
- 78 FCSO, Christian Social Action, 11, (March, 1940), quoted in Thomas Socknat, "Witness Against War: Pacifism in Canada, 1900-1945", (Ph.D. McMaster University, 1981).
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Linda Kealey, "Canadian Socialism and the Woman Question", p. 4.



- 81 Christopher Headon, "Women and Organized Religion in Mid and Late 19th Century Canada", Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society, Vol. XX, no. 1-2, (March/June, 1978), and Wendy Mitchison, "Canadian Women and Church Missionary Societies in the 19th Century", Atlantis, Vol. 2, no. 2, (Spring, 1977).
- 82 Ruth Brouwer, "The Methodist Church and the 'Woman Question', 1902-1914", unpublished paper, York University.
- 83 Mary Hallett, "Nellie McClung and the Fight for the Ordination of Women in the United Church of Canada", Atlantis, Vol. 4, no. 2, (Spring, 1979).
- 84 Donald L. Kirkey, "Building the City of God: The Founding of the Student Christian Movement in Canada" (M.A. McMaster University, 1983), pp. 49-50.

CHAPTER II

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CANADA TACKLES THE WOMAN QUESTION,

1922 - 1928

The initial objectives proclaimed by the Workers Party of Canada in its Manifesto of 1921 and founding programme of 1922 made no specific mention of woman's inequality in Canadian society or her role in the revolutionary movement. The status of women seemed not to be a burning question for the new Party. Within two years, however, the CPC had set up a Women's Department to initiate work among women, incorporated a women's column (later a separate monthly) into the CPC newspaper, and spearheaded the formation of a national organization for working-class women, the Women's Labor Leagues (WLL). The Party's growing interest in the organization of women signified important progress from the practice of the pre-war socialist movement. While the CPC's ethnic complexion and its emphasis on a class analysis of women's oppression signified continuity with the pre-war socialist movement, Communists also sought to transcend their past, embracing a new social and sexual order including the mobilization and emancipation of working-class women.

The CPC's approach to the woman question and the precise outlines of its strategies were conditioned primarily by its response to the advice of the Communist International, but the social base of the Party and its own perceptions, influenced by a Marxist analysis, of the needs of working-class women were also influential in molding ideas and tactics. Communists were affected by the stark realities of the lives of working-class women -- the realities of low wages, economic insecurity and meagre social welfare schemes -- and were motivated by the political concerns and understanding of their own membership. In

the last resort, the advice of the Communist International was, by necessity, always refracted through the prism of local traditions, needs and realities.

In the 1920's the CPC remained a fragile and weak force within the Canadian labour movement and political life; nonetheless, its view of women's oppression and agitational work on women's issues marked out new parameters of thought and action for Canadian socialism. That the woman question never became a priority for the CPC was a consequence of factors both internal and external to the Party. In the Leninist lexicon, production and economic class took precedence over sex and the family, but despite the Communists' best efforts, and their connection to the 'successful' Russian revolution, their vision of a new order remained marginal -- even within their own Party. Despite many noble convention resolutions about the need to organize women, the Party itself mirrored the formidable structures of inequality and oppression facing women in wider Canadian society.

(i)

During the 1920's, the influence of the Communist International (CI) on the Canadian Party in regard to the woman question was especially powerful, not only because the CI was generally the guiding influence on its member parties, but additionally because at this time, the reform of women's status within Russian society appeared to herald major, inspiring advances towards women's emancipation. In Russia, not only were women accorded political equality, but radical changes in Soviet family law augured the possibility of a major transformation of

Russian society. Only six weeks after the revolution, registration of civil marriage was instituted, abortions legalized and a new code of Matrimonial Law abolished the classification of "illegitimate" children, established women's equality in marriage and made divorce accessible for both partners<sup>1</sup>. In the early years, even Lenin's predictions about communal domestic work seemed a possibility as communal kitchens became a way of life in Moscow during the civil war<sup>2</sup>.

In 1919, the Soviet Communist Party set up the Zhenotdel, a Women's Section of the Party designed to encourage and organize the activities of revolutionary women. Supported by a network of local zhenotdels, paid Party staff and volunteer organizers, the Zhenotdel attempted educational and agitational work -- everything from reading classes to conferences for working women -- to draw women into political activity. The obstacles to its work were immense; on top of the economic chaos and poverty of post-revolutionary Russia and the overall male hostility (even within Communist circles) to women's political activism, Zhenotdel workers had to contend with the difficulties of communication in a geographically vast land, and firmly-entrenched cultural barriers to women's emancipation, especially in the peasant villages and in the Muslim East<sup>3</sup>. While some historians argue that many Bolsheviks only supported the Zhenotdel as it was an expedient tool to gather support for the government and consolidate the revolution, they nonetheless conclude that the Zhenotdel waged a highly successful agitational and educational campaign for women's equality, "achieving in its work, a major impact on Soviet society, especially in the cities"<sup>4</sup>.

Contemporary Bolshevik leaders, however, were sometimes less enthusiastic about the Zhenotdel's efforts; the 1923 Party Congress

warned about the danger of 'feminist tendencies' in the organization, and trade unions repudiated the Zhenotdel's recommendations for 'affirmative action'. Despite its achievements, the Party's criticisms of Zhenotdel operations increased throughout the 1920's, and in 1929, when the Central Committee Secretariat of the Party was reorganized, the Zhenotdel was effectively eliminated. The demise of the Zhenotdel, of course, was linked to the triumph of Stalinism and the liquidation of any organizations which might threaten the centralized Party-state. As well, in more general terms, the women's revolution in the Soviet Union had faltered in confrontation with social reality -- the economic chaos of the state, the nature of the New Economic Policy, and the strength of patriarchal traditions. Years later, Leon Trotsky and Wilhelm Reich advanced different theoretical analyses for the "Soviet Thermidor in the Family", explaining the failure of the U.S.S.R. to emancipate women from their subordinate status and sexual oppression. Such theoretical controversies, however, were not a part of Communist or Marxist debate in the 1920's. To North American Marxists, who had been concerned primarily with transforming the productive process and according women political equality, the Russian example appeared a beacon of hope. American socialist and liberal journalists like Jessica Smith, Anna Louise Strong, and Louise Bryant<sup>5</sup>, who visited Russia and wrote enthusiastically of the revolution in women's roles, gave further emphasis to these hopes. In Canada, reports on Soviet women were treated with interest and sympathy by a broad spectrum of the Left, not just by the Communist Party.

To the Communist Party of Canada, the Russian example gave new courage simply to expanded deliberation on the woman question.

From international journals like The Communist International and Imprecorr, Canadian Communist leaders gleaned information on Zhenotdel activities and followed discussions of the Bolsheviks on the woman question. Conference reports, theses, resolutions and directives on the mobilization of women abounded in these publications. The establishment of the Zhenotdel and the Women's Secretariat, coupled with the latter's constant advice to emulate these organizations, encouraged the attempt to establish similar networks in Canada and gave credibility to the special education and separate organization of women. Lastly, Soviet reforms in marriage, divorce and abortion laws fostered similar debate in Canada, opening up women's issues which had rarely been discussed by the pre-war Left and sparking investigation of women's oppression which was almost unparalleled in the subsequent history of the Party.

Throughout the 1920's recommendations for agitational and organization work among Canadian women were made by the International Women's Secretariat; while some of these suggestions outlined new areas and methods of work, the general priorities of Communist work -- that is, the mobilization of wage-earning women and the establishment of support groups for working-class wives -- represented traditions already part of the Canadian Left. Pressed by the Secretariat, however, organizational effort and agitational campaigns directed towards women were initiated with new vigour by the CPC. For example, after the Party decided to work openly and legally in 1922, the Women's Department was set up to spearhead the drive to organize working-class women and draw them into the revolutionary movement. The Department's first director, Florence Cushman, remains a vaguely-defined figure in Communist history, in part due to her early death in 1929. Born in England and

trained as a school teacher, Custance emigrated to Canada with her husband, a carpenter, and through him she became involved in the labour movement as a member of the Carpenters Union Wives Auxiliary.

Custance's involvement in the socialist movement can be dated from her pre-war membership in the Socialist Party of North America and her post-war leadership in the Toronto Plebs League and Ontario Labour College. Subsequent to her attendance at the Guelph Unity Convention, she sat on the Central Committee of the Party and headed the Canadian Friends of Soviet Russia.

Described as one of the "original driving forces"<sup>6</sup> of the early Communist movement in Canada, Custance also became the driving force behind the organization of the Communist women's movement. In May, 1922, shortly before Custance left for the fourth Comintern Congress, the Party's Women's Department inaugurated its work with a public meeting, attended by about 200. Despite this successful meeting, The Worker only sporadically carried news of the Women's Bureau and women's struggles until three years later, when a regular women's column, coordinated by Custance, and entitled, 'The Working Women's Section', began to give more frequent coverage to the woman question. This column became one of the Party's primary means of presenting its view of the woman question and of advertising its work among women. The activity of the Women's Department was given further focus by the creation of a Federation of Women's Labor Leagues, following the repeated advice of the International to set up a working-class women's organization guided by the Party to draw women into the revolutionary movement.

In Canada, the Communist Women's Labor Leagues followed in the footsteps of pre-war SDPC 'sewing circles' of Finnish socialist women,



and in the tradition of the Women's Labor Leagues, which were modelled on the British WLLs, auxiliaries of the British ILP. By World War I, WLLs existed in Winnipeg, Toronto, and Port Arthur<sup>7</sup>; after a period of inactivity during the post-war depression, the Leagues were rejuvenated around 1922, largely due to the efforts of Custance and CPC. In Toronto, the inaugural meeting of the revitalized League was held in 1923, and the next year a federal WLL apparatus was established at a conference in London, following that year's Trades and Labour Congress convention. The federated Leagues, maintained Custance, who was elected national secretary at that conference, would enjoy some local autonomy, although they would also be guided by the general aims of the Federation. Much to its chagrin, the Federation was denied formal affiliation to TLC, supposedly because its members, as housewives, were not "producers". Custance drew strong support from WLL delegates with her critical response to this charge:

WLL members ... are women who cook, sew, wash, scrub, and who perform duties necessary to the whole process of production. One day those objectors, who in mentality, belong to the Middle Ages, will wake up<sup>8</sup> and find themselves living in an age of social production.

The true reason for some TLC members' hostility to the Leagues may have been the inclusion of Communists like Custance on the WLL executive.<sup>9</sup> The early attempt of the WLLs to affiliate with the TLC was in keeping with the Party's United Front tactics: following this strategy, the WLLs also tried to join local Trades and Labour Councils, and to influence the Canadian Labor Party (CLP). For a short period after the 1924 TLC Convention, labourities were highly visible in some local WLLs and may have contributed to the Federation's monthly paper, The Woman Worker<sup>10</sup>, established in 1926 and edited by Custance. But by

1926-27 this alliance had largely dissolved, leaving the Leagues predominantly Communist in composition and character. Although the Federation could be called a Communist 'front' organization, it did not necessarily include only Party members, but contained women sympathetic to the Party and willing to accept guidance from the Women's Bureau on questions of policy and tactics. As the number of Leagues grew to 37 at the end of 1927 they also came to reflect the ethnic strengths of the Communist Party, with Finnish, Ukrainian, and Jewish Leagues outnumbering the English-speaking ones.

The Women's Labor Leagues, like the CPC, also tried to play a role in the Canadian Labour Party. At the Ontario Labor Party conventions of 1925 and 1926, WLLs were successful in securing passage of some of their resolutions, probably striking easy alliances on issues like 'no cadet training' which other socialists supported. Only in 1927, however, were the Leagues able to announce that most of their program had become CLP policy; but this was a shallow victory, for that same year most socialists deserted the CLP, leaving the Communists to occupy its shell. Shortly after the Convention, at the instigation of James Simpson, the Toronto Labor Council expelled the local WLL, thus reducing its visibility in the Ontario labour movement.<sup>11</sup> But not all socialists and labourites responded with such hostility to the WLLs. In the West, the WLLs were able to participate in the Western Women's Social and Economic Conferences, organized by labourite Beatrice Brigden. The Worker reported that the first Conference in 1924 was "pleasing but not much of a progressive character was accomplished as the ideas of many delegates were dominated by bourgeois respectability and fear of action".<sup>12</sup> In the next few years, the WLLs were able

successfully to sponsor motions from their own program, such as the moderate call for better Mothers' Allowances, but it was unsuccessful on other issues, such as its attempt to secure support for the CLP, (a move blocked by the Winnipeg ILP). In the late 1920's, the WLL continued to attend the Western Labour Women's Conferences, but after 1928 it became increasingly critical as it was unable to mold a majority which was Marxist and Communist in outlook.

(ii)

The preamble of the WLL constitution adopted in 1924 reiterated the theoretical and practical aims of the Party already outlined in Custance's articles in The Worker. Indicating her debt to Marxist and Leninist writing, Custance analyzed the changing role of women in capitalist society, pointing out that the home, once the centre of production, had been transformed by machines, thereby forcing women, out of economic necessity, into the area of factory production. Capitalism, emphasized the WLL constitution, had either reduced home labour to "household drudgery or converted it to wage-labour", thereby creating three groups of women -- household workers, wagelabourers, and part-time workers -- all of whom contributed essential labour to the maintenance of capitalism.<sup>13</sup> Because women are in industry to stay, said Custance, revolutionaries must fight for women's right to organize and for equal pay, as well as for the protection of mothers and children. Moreover, "working-class women must fight for their rights with the men of their own class",<sup>14</sup> on the one hand refusing to be used as wage-reducers, and on the other, remaining unswayed by equal rights issues as presented by the suffrage movement:

Sex is at this time a minor question compared to the class struggle ... we must take up the struggle against capitalist tyranny which keeps our husbands chained to uncertainty and us to worry and desperation and our children to want<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the 1920's these basic tenets -- the economic exploitation of women and the imperative of the revolutionary solidarity of both sexes -- were stressed. Pre-war socialist publications like Cottons Weekly at times had taken a similar line, but the Communist approach was distinguished by first, a new emphasis on the importance of the woman question, and second, some new measure of sympathy for women's particular exploitation and oppression within capitalism. Worker articles, for instance, emphasized the necessity of bringing the "most oppressed" group - women - into revolutionary politics to help them "work out their own emancipation".<sup>16</sup> The Woman Worker, unabashedly political, proclaimed its intention to forgo all the traditional "fashions, recipes and sickly love stories" of women's papers. It kept its promise and concentrated instead of women's struggle for "equal duties and rights with men"<sup>17</sup> and women's "fight against customs, traditions and superstitions which kept them chained to passive roles and conservatism".<sup>18</sup> In part, the Communist analysis betrayed the oft-repeated belief that women were, by nature, more conservative and fearful of social change than were men. Still, it also signified some sympathy for woman's sexual oppression and an implicit understanding that her exploitation and subordination within capitalism was unique and more complex than man's. This sympathy was given further emphasis in the issues discussed by the WLLs and by the Party's methods of organizing, particularly in its construction of semi-autonomous<sup>19</sup> structures where working-class women could organize to discuss a program of women's demands and work for women's emancipation.

The Party's approach to the creation of a women's communist movement followed two general paths: on one hand, the education, organization and unionization of wage-earning women was pursued, and on the other, the formation of political discussion and support groups for working-class wives was attempted. These two approaches were not perceived as being mutually exclusive -- in fact, they were supposed to be connected through the WLLs. In practice, however, there was some difference between the organization of women at the point of production and women in the home. Young and/or single women cadres with their greater freedom to travel, were more likely to be active as organizers for the Young Communist League (YCL) or as industrial organizers and agitators, while married 'party wives', tied closely to home and family, concentrated on fund-raising and support work associated with the WLLs. The Women's Labor Leagues, explained one woman, included women from the local Finnish community like her mother, who left the 'other' Party politics to the men while she "mainly did fund fund-raising and social affairs" although with an "important attempt at political education too".<sup>20</sup> "The WLLs were for the housewives, not the women in the factories",<sup>21</sup> was the common perception. This attitude revealed some of the barriers to political participation encountered by women with families. In keeping with predominant social norms, many homemakers might be charged, especially in the absence of their revolutionary husbands, with the difficult task of feeding and clothing the family but not with the equally difficult task of political organizing.<sup>22</sup> In Britain, one historian argues, a very sharp separation existed between the cadres and Party wives, with the latter held in some contempt by the former.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, the Canadian WLLs sometimes drew both groups

together, and their relations were not governed by hostility.

Nonetheless, subtle differences did exist, and this differentiation was probably made more explicit after 1929 when the nature of Party life made it increasingly difficult for married, non-wage-earning women to participate on the same grounds as single, younger activists.<sup>24</sup>

According to the CI, the mobilization of women in the factories was to have priority, and in order to facilitate the organization of women at the point of production, the Women's Bureau, on the suggestion of the International Women's Secretariat, studied the economic, juridical, and social position of working women. The Bureau's findings, which were published in the founding WLL leaflet and in later newspaper articles, revealed the desperate situation of many working women. The vast majority of female wage-earners laboured in unskilled jobs, often domestic work; only about 1% were unionized,<sup>25</sup> and many worked without even the protection of the Minimum Wage Laws. Substandard wage rates, along with long hours and arduous working conditions, were convincing indications of the necessity to organize working women: a Comintern directive was likely not needed to encourage the revolutionaries' disgust with the lot of women workers.

Desperate working conditions, however, do not always make unionization an easy prospect. The Women's Bureau saw four major obstacles to the unionization of women workers: the influence of religious, social and pacifist organizations like the YWCA which "pose as protectors of the working girl"; the organized welfare programs of factories; to a certain extent, the Minimum Wage; and lastly, the fact that "women do not take wage-earning seriously, but see it as a temporary necessity" before marriage.<sup>26</sup> Whatever the presumed

consciousness of working women, the structural realities of their work lives did mitigate against their organization: they worked in unskilled jobs, often alone or in small groups geographically distant from one another. Moreover, in the 1920's the expanding white collar sector had few union traditions upon which to draw. Unfortunately, women could draw little aid from the established trade union movement, for the conservative TLC, weakened by the 1921-22 depression, membership losses, and employer overtures and offensives, had little or no time for the concerns of working women.<sup>27</sup>

But the Party's trade union strategies also tended to exclude women. In the early 1920's the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), a Comintern organization, had laid out the best tactics for trade union endeavours, urging members to work within established trade unions, to build a communist and revolutionary current as a counter to the conservative trade union leadership of the AFL/TLC. The low number of unionized women and their marginal status in the union movement, however, meant that they were easily by-passed by Communist strategies which concentrated instead on recognized areas of radical support, usually in heavy industries such as mining and lumbering. Other suggestions for organizing wage-earning women were similarly inappropriate: the C.I.'s repeated advice to initiate "mass delegate meetings from the factory nuclei"<sup>28</sup> of activist and Communist women belied the Canadian reality of an extremely weak, or even non-existent, radical presence in most women's workplaces. Finally, organizing new locals of unions was a time-consuming and expensive enterprise which the small, poorly-funded Women's Bureau was ill-equipped to pursue on its own. Ultimately, if the wage-earning woman failed to take herself

seriously, so too did the CPC. In its self-criticism, the Party admitted that its efforts with working women were lacking: "the material at the disposal of the Party to carry on this work", reported Custance in 1927, "has been up to the present limited and weak. Therefore, much that could have been done has been left undone".<sup>29</sup>

Despite the low priority placed on the unionization of women, the Women's Bureau did manage to accomplish some of its other aims: it gave substantial attention to the plight of working women in its own press; it waged a visible campaign against the inadequacies of the Minimum Wage Laws; and in a few areas, WLLs were able to set up informal social and support networks for working women. The 'Working Women's Section', and later, the Woman Worker abounded with personal and second-hand descriptions of the day-to-day existence of working girls and women, and their tales of low wages and exhaustion were often followed by analyses of women's wage labour under capitalism, written by Custance or by Becky Buhay, a dedicated young organizer fast growing into the Party leadership. The problems of working women were also discussed in the CPC's language press, Kampf, Vaupaus, and Robitnysa. In 1925, for example, The Worker reprinted a letter from Kampf's Women's Section, in which a Jewish garment worker described the speed-up and unhealthy conditions in her Montreal factory. In reply, Buhay pointed out that such horrific working conditions could be effectively combatted with a union and that the 'false consciousness' of her fellow French Canadian workers in the factory should be faced squarely with honest denunciations of their frivolous ways. Indeed, sometimes advice given in the Working Women's Section lectured working-class women on their easy acceptance of 'bourgeois', trivial distractions, telling them, for



instance, to eschew "charm and personality" courses at the YWCA and "thoughts of catching Prince Charming"<sup>30</sup> and instead, educate themselves as to why they worked such long hours and faced uncertain, seasonal employment. Communist leaders clearly saw the consciousness of working woman as problematic to organizing attempts. Nonetheless, the letters of working girls were not always greeted with such paternalism. Often, they were printed simply as written or the editor gave encouraging and simple advice: keep on fighting for your rights, organize a union, and come and find support in the revolutionary movement.

A major part of the Women's Bureau agitational work in the 1920's centred on its campaign to expose the violations and inadequacies of the Minimum Wage Laws, thus "showing the ineffectiveness of government protection as compared with that of unions".<sup>31</sup> Custance and the Toronto WLL took up a number of cases of minimum wage abuse, attempting to attract the attention of the daily press to their cause. In the fall of 1924, for instance, they collected evidence that a local Chocolate Company, which had prosecuted girls for stealing 50¢ worth of candy, was falsifying its time cards, and that the Minimum Wage Board had only taken steps when the workers secured a lawyer. Even then, the Board urged no publicity -- for the sake of the Company! This Chocolate Company case was taken up by the Young Communist League and eventually, made its way into the daily press. Despite Communist and Labour Council pressure, however, public hearings did not produce a conclusive conviction of the Company.

The Minimum Wage Board, the CPC tried to show, was essentially afraid of Manufacturers, and the government was not a 'neutral' body acting to protect women's interests. The Women's Labor Leagues produced

evidence at annual Board hearings to show that the suggested 'minimum' wage could barely support a working woman, and that it often became the 'maximum' wage for women. The Minimum Wage campaign continued into the late 1920's with newly organized WLLs taking it up in cities across the country. In Regina, an Employed Girls Council was initiated by the WLL, and together, they pursued the campaign against the ineffectiveness of this law, having some limited success in pressuring the government to close the more blatant loopholes. The campaign was also highly visible in Vancouver, Montreal, and Winnipeg. Florence Custance played a pivotal role in the Ontario effort, making alliances early in the campaign with local Labour Councils and the Canadian Labour Party. Her efforts, in fact, earned her praise from the labourite paper, The People's Cause, which commended Custance for her persistence in pursuing cases of Minimum wage abuse.<sup>32</sup>

In the later 1920's a few WLLs were also able to spark the creation of organizations for young working women; these were primarily social and support groups, rather than political and economic lobbies. In Regina, the WLL helped set up an Employed Girls Council, and in Montreal, Vancouver, and Northern Ontario, Finnish WLLs aided the establishment of associations for Finnish domestics. Such organizations, however, did not achieve the status of recognized collective bargaining agents, and in the main, WLL tactics remained centred on the Minimum Wage struggle. In 1927, Custance assessed the work of the Women's Bureau on the Minimum Wage and other campaigns for working women, lamenting that while some success had been made in "breaking through the master class influence",<sup>33</sup> in general, working women remained outside the influence of the Communist Party.

The second aspect of CPC strategy was to draw working-class housewives into support groups which would act as auxiliary forces to men's struggles and concurrently would develop women's revolutionary consciousness by the discussion of political issues, particularly those of concern to mothers and housewives. Communists strongly believed that working-class women had the ability to affect the political action of their husbands and families and that their influence was often a conservative or apathetic one. They saw women, isolated amidst domestic drudgery, as easy prey for the illusory and conservative myths of capitalist society. "Women", wrote Custance in a Women's Department report, "are almost entirely under capitalist class influence, through the church, the newspapers, the media".<sup>34</sup> Working-class women, said a WLL document, "determine the fate of a strike, make or mar men's morale".<sup>35</sup> It was therefore essential, it concluded, that "wives of trade unionists in particular be brought into trade union activity, in fact should be unionized also and thus be made sympathetic and active supporters of their husbands in struggle".<sup>36</sup>

Although this view assumed women's mobilization to be secondary to the 'important' radicalization of male trade unionists, it did recognize the essential role that women played in labour struggles, as managers of the family budget, as 'tension-managers' in the working-class household, and even on the picket line. Yet, the view of women which predominated in the CPC was one which placed women at polar ends of the political spectrum: women were supposedly suspicious of social change and socialism, but when their revolutionary consciousness

was raised they became militant fighters -- sometimes more militant than the men. "Will women speed the liberation of society or be the bulwark of reaction?"<sup>37</sup> was the classic question asked of women by the Communist press. This view attributed little complexity to women's political understanding. As Dorothy Smith notes, "working-class women are portrayed either as 'backward' or as salt of the earth heroic figures; both are polar positions along a single dimension".<sup>38</sup> This linear view of women's consciousness, with the advanced women at one end of the political spectrum, the backward women at the other, may have grown, in part, from women's home-centred lives and their actual isolation from, and disinterest in politics. Perhaps too, their cynicism was misinterpreted as conservatism. But this idea may also have emerged from a generalized male prejudice which saw women as 'backward', and hence politically backward as well.<sup>39</sup>

Despite their inclination to conservatism, working-class women, it was believed, could be radicalized. Housewives were reminded of the limited material conditions of their lives, the drudgery of endless domestic labour, the meagre wages of their husbands, and the limited opportunities facing their children. In a short story published in The Worker, two working-class housewives talk over the fence about the effects of war and unemployment on their homes. The narrator's husband, a veteran, is unemployed, but "the British Vampire", his wife explains, "took his best and left him no will to fight".<sup>40</sup> Although oppressed by worry and by their poor living conditions, she is urged to carry on her fight for survival and consider the reasons for her plight. The story's message was clear: the role of a housewife was to bind her husband and family together despite and against an unjust, exploitive world.

Communist writings often assumed that women, although in one sense ignorant about politics, still "understand in a personal way issues like unemployment".<sup>41</sup> Thus, the task of the Party was to make the personal political for women.

To this end, women were frequently appealed to on consumer and peace issues. The Communist press reflected the prevailing notion that men were the 'breadwinners' in working-class households; yet, because women sometimes played an important role in supervising the family budget, the issue of high prices was used by the press as a radicalizing tool. Similarly, articles on peace, which perpetually had a high profile in the Woman Worker, tried to personalize international political issues by appealing to women on the basis of their maternal instinct for preserving life. The peace appeal did attempt to expose war as a consequence of capitalist economies and imperialist expansion, but the maternal theme always remained important to the discussion. Not only will you lose your sons, these articles pointed out, but you will lose them in a useless war which will bring you hunger and capitalists' greater profits. While the Woman Worker urged its readers to reject the liberal humanitarian pacifism represented by organizations like the United Nations Organization or the Women's International League (WIL), it shared the WIL's emphasis on maternalism, though shaping it into a class conscious mold. Associated with the anti-war cause was the campaign to remove military training from the schools, thereby eliminating the capitalist and militarist indoctrination of working-class youth. In keeping with United Front tactics, the WLLs tried to link forces with other reformers on this issue: they campaigned successfully to include this demand in the Canadian Labour

Party platform, and Custance tried to run for the Toronto School Board, including 'no cadet training' in her platform.<sup>42</sup>

As well as appealing to working-class women on issues of bread and peace, the Party attempted to encourage women's active support for the labour struggles of their husbands and brothers. Women often played a militant and crucial role in strike situations but it was sometimes difficult to sustain their involvement in ongoing political organizations. The Worker and Woman Worker used their columns both to publicize examples of wives' militance and to encourage their further political action. During a cross-country tour for the Worker, Becky Buhay found herself in the midst of a coal miners' strike in Alberta. She helped the wives organize into a support group and led them on a march and demonstration to Edmonton to publicize the just demands of the strikers. After a violent clash with the police, many of the women pickets were jailed, and some were later sentenced on charges of rioting. The Worker followed their cases, which Buhay used as evidence to show that women, when aroused, could be excellent revolutionary and working-class fighters:

The persecution and brutality of the police was answered by the women ... some of them stormed the police station and broke the windows. Their defiant attitude was the greatest surprise to the authorities who had expected tears, supplications and general weakness, but they discovered before long that women were made of sterner stuff. Women showed Edmonton that if their men were taken from them, they would fight on.<sup>43</sup>

In other labour struggles, women's militance and potential power was stressed in the Communist press; in Hamilton, the fortitude of a housewife who, when leading an unemployment parade with a red banner, was beaten by police, was described; in Nova Scotia, the militance of the coal miners' wives during the 1922 strike was chronicled, and in

Northern Ontario, the role of Ukrainian women in the struggle to unionize gold miners was lauded.

Although economic issues, especially the family wage and the workplace, were central to the Communist Party's approach to women, neither the Worker nor the Woman Worker ignored issues which touched more directly on woman's personal subordination in the family and her lack of control over her own reproductive life. Discussion of women's role in the family was not always consistent, for women's family roles were, at different times, both exalted and criticized. Some articles in The Worker, for example, commended working-class women for their selfless labour in the home and their devotion to motherhood. Yet, other commentary was critical of a society which tied women to the "trammels of household drudgery"<sup>44</sup> and argued that to be truly free, women must be relieved of the degrading labour of "providing services to others, living by the sufferance of one's husband". In fact, as late as 1925, after most Russian communal kitchens had been closed, it was suggested that communal household aid was as essential a prerequisite to women's emancipation as her participation in production. Articles in the Worker occasionally also decried the injustice of the 'double burden' held by working married women, and chastized family men for their "bourgeois sexist"<sup>46</sup> attitudes. Thus, in their discussion of women's role in the family, Communists wrestled with both old traditions and revolutionary ideas; although homage was sometimes paid to the virtues of women's domestic labour and maternal sacrifices, Communists also sought to apply new lessons, especially from Lenin, about the isolation and oppression of women within the domestic sphere. "Complete freedom is impossible as long as men are the privileged sex", explained

one such article discussing 'Leninism and the Working Woman'; women must break through the bonds of their own timidity and through self-assertion help to achieve their own emancipation.<sup>47</sup>

Within the Party and in the Communist press, there was also some discussion of divorce, birth control and abortion; this debate reflected the influence of recent reforms in the Soviet Union and secondly, the interests of Canadian Communist women. A demand for Mothers' Clinics (a euphemism for birth control information)<sup>48</sup> was included in the first WLL platform, and in 1925, the Party responded, with cautious interest, to the establishment of an Ontario Birth Control League. Addressing the League's formation, The Worker set out the Party view, placing the need for birth control within a class analysis, and carefully rejecting any eugenicist ideas often associated with the birth control movement. The CPC was influenced, in part by a long-standing socialist fear of Malthusianism, and secondly, by the example of the Soviet Union, which had legalized abortion and provided birth control clinics in the name of economic and physiological relief for women. In keeping with this influence, the CPC always stressed the economic and medical imperatives for birth control rather than arguing that such information was a basic right of any woman; this latter perspective, however, may have been the private view of some Party women.

Although Communist arguments were not based on all women's right to reproductive freedom, the Party's public support for birth control was still a crack in the wall of silence existing in Canadian society. Unlike the United States and Britain, before the 1920's Canada had not produced a birth control movement, although the pre-war Left had occasionally spoken in favor of birth control information, usually



addressing the issue of family limitation within the context of the larger question of how a smaller population would affect labour's struggle against capitalism. After the war, the issue was taken up by some writers in the One Big Union Bulletin, but in general, was even during the 'emancipated''20's, discussion of birth control was unusual.<sup>49</sup>

Although the public dissemination of birth control information was illegal, women were eager to obtain such information, and abortion was often attempted as the only known means of limiting fertility.<sup>50</sup> Thus, pressure from the rank and file may have been one impetus to the Party's discussion of the subject and its limited support for the Birth Control League. Indeed, immediately after the articles on the League, the Worker printed a long letter written by an Alberta comrade who insisted that birth control was both "essential information for working-class women in the here and now" and an indispensable psychological aid to all marriages.<sup>51</sup> Continuing, he urged the Working Women's Section to devote more space to the subject. In the columns of the Woman Worker, the birth control issue was hotly debated, and Custance later commented that the issue was a major drawing card for women's membership in the WLLs -- a clear indication of their keen desire for birth control information.

Letters to the Woman Worker indicated the wide parameters which the debate assumed. In the paper's opening issue, an article on birth control quoted an address before the B.C. WLL by Dr. Withrow, supporting his philosophy "that every woman should have the right to decide when to have children".<sup>52</sup> The responses of some readers and WLL members, nevertheless, revealed a debt to eugenicist ideas still in

vogue. Mrs. Burt, a member of the Toronto WLL, challenged religious objections to birth control, arguing for a "scientific" view of the issue, but simultaneously maintaining that "we can no longer breed numerically without thinking about intelligence and quality of offspring".<sup>53</sup> In a similar vein, another letter warned that forcing women into early marriages and childbearing might "breed race degeneracy": the writer drew proof for her contention from the 'fact' that "priest-ridden Polish, Slav and Italians had weak and sickly children". Appropriately, the author noted her debt to Marie Stopes.

Although these views were printed in the Woman Worker, Party editorials advocated the total rejection of Malthusian and eugenicist arguments. Poverty, Custance reminded her readers, was not due to the size of the population but to the distribution of wealth, and she warned that the birth control movement was too easily accepting of such Malthusian theories to justify its existence. For this reason, the CPC was always slightly equivocal about its support of birth control. Similarly, the Party rejected the libertarian, anarchist perspective personified by Emma Goldman; in 1927, her Canadian speeches on birth control were totally ignored by the Communist press. Rather, the CPC's arguments always remained grounded in a class perspective and a materialist analysis which stressed the right of working-class families to make their own decisions about family size, and the need for relief from the economic and physiological burdens of constant childbearing for working-class women. Statistics showing a high incidence of maternal and infant mortality, for example, were often used to buttress the case for birth control.

In terms of political action, the birth control issue was taken up by some WLLs which pressed local governments for the establishment of Mothers' Clinics. As with the peace issue, they lobbied the CLP to adopt resolutions demanding such Clinics. While the Leagues did have some success in making Mothers' Clinics a part of CLP policy, they were less successful in bringing it to wider public attention and totally unsuccessful in gaining any government sympathy. The issue, tersely commented one Woman Worker correspondent, "is not supported by the Establishment".<sup>55</sup> Moreover, while birth control was a consistent component of WLL platform, it was never considered a primary issue for the CPC as a whole. After the establishment of the Woman Worker, most discussion of birth control took place in its columns rather than in the Worker. This reflected, in part, a justifiable appeal to women on the basis of a women's issue, but it also meant that there was little wider Party discussion and recognition of the seriousness of the issue, a fact which mirrored the secondary nature of the woman question in the Party.

Correspondingly, the issue of abortion was dealt with by the Party in a secondary, quiet manner. Like the birth control question, abortion was analyzed by the CPC from a materialist perspective which stressed the immediate needs and social reality of working-class women. Readers were sometimes reminded of the relaxed abortion laws in the Soviet Union, and similar liberalization was recommended for Canada. But abortion was also described as an unpleasant and unfortunate practice, resorted to only in capitalist societies or a communist society in transition. The author of a rare article on abortion in the Worker, maintained that "we are for less and less abortion ... they could be reduced to a minimum with birth control information made available".<sup>56</sup>

Still, the writer argued, the laws should be changed for they are routinely disobeyed by doctors and women, to the great danger of women's health and life. His/her arguments were similar to those used in the Soviet edict liberalizing abortion laws, in which justification is based on the harsh realities of women's impoverished lives and on the danger to life posed by illegal abortionists. Although completely different in content from later feminist arguments stressing women's rights to choose, the CPC's occasional calls for liberalization were unusual, and progressive, for a time when Church, State and the medical profession all strongly opposed any discussion of abortion, let alone easing the abortion laws. This opposition may well have been one reason why the June 1927 article on abortion was the last one of its kind for many years.

Articles in the Communist press dealing with abortion, birth control and women's role in the family often drew comparisons between the lot of Canadian and Russian women. While the Communist press primarily pointed to women's new political status and economic independence in the USSR, attention also was given to women's new sexual independence and the emergence of an egalitarian family life. Marriage laws, "no longer made only to benefit men", and the accessibility of divorce were transforming relations between the sexes and destroying the patriarchal family, thereby giving "women who were housewives new self-respect".<sup>57</sup> With the disappearance of sexual inequalities, the double standard, and economic dependence, Russian women were said to "feel like they are real human beings, equal to male workers".<sup>58</sup> Reports of Soviet life were especially vocal about the new social character of Russian motherhood; with the availability of birth control,

aid to pregnant and nursing mothers and modern creches, we have abolished women's subordination, declared one optimistic author!

It is difficult to assess how thoroughly these overly optimistic and romantic views of Soviet women and the family were assimilated by women involved with the Party. Certainly, women like Becky Buhay displayed an intense admiration for the Soviet Union, even in her private letters home written during her visits to the USSR.<sup>59</sup> It is possible that these uncritical assessments served to obscure the complexity of women's oppression, and the extent to which it was imbedded in both Russian and Canadian society. On the other hand, one-dimensional Worker articles may not have reflected Communists' own personal experience of women's role in the family. Within the Party, new forms of relationships and family arrangements were discussed and accepted, although probably only to a limited extent. Some members, for instance, opted for common-law liaisons rather than legal marriages. Finnish members brought to the Party an established tradition of common-law marriage, for even pre-war Finnish socialists had made a political point of rejecting Church marriage. "We didn't believe in that religious hocus pocus", remembers one Finnish comrade: "when we were married our friends gave us a party ... or you might put an ad in the paper with your friends' greetings and congratulations".<sup>60</sup> As a result of such experimentation, some Party members may have experienced the contradictions of living out female independence in a sexist society. The rejection of marriage as a symbol of women's oppression potentially had a tragic side: dominant social norms in the 1920's saw untraditional relationships as immoral, and in their defiance of socially acceptable behavior, women could be hurt.<sup>61</sup>

Information on women in the USSR still had a substantial impact on Party members, creating a feeling of common cause and international solidarity, thereby sustaining hope in eventual revolution and maintaining Party loyalty. Press coverage of women's struggles in other countries was also used to draw lessons about women's opposition to capitalism and to encourage support for the international revolutionary movement. Building upon a long-established tradition of internationalism within the labour and socialist movements, the CPC helped galvanize anger about women's exploitation and arouse legitimacy and hope for Communist movements for resistance. Articles on female workers in colonized Asian countries, for example, provided descriptions of women's impoverished and cruel working conditions, and analyzed the economic cause -- imperialism -- and political cure -- communism -- for these societies. The struggles of Communist women in the United States and Europe also figured highly in the Communist press: the stories of American textile workers battling Southern police, and the fight of German women for bread and jobs in 1923 became rallying points for Communist loyalty, helping to forge a definition of the movement as just, militant and destined to victory.

In Canada, International Women's Day was used to enhance these feelings of international solidarity and to publicize the struggles of Canadian women. In the 1920's this day became a major annual event, celebrated in public meetings which were themselves international in character, encompassing one, two or three language groups. In the small Alberta mining town of Blairmore, Finnish women comrades cohosted the gathering with their Ukrainian friends from nearby Coleman. In both Toronto and Montreal, Finnish, Ukrainian, Yiddish and English-speaking

WLLs worked together on the organization of March 8, combining rousing political speeches, solidarity greetings and musical entertainment into an evening event. International Women's Day meetings often publicized a list of 'women's demands' coincident with the Party's program, stressing, for example, the organization of women workers, abuses of the Minimum Wage, and the need for Mothers' Clinics.

The tasks of Communist women were not only set in the framework of an international struggle, but were counterposed to the unacceptable and dangerous political aims of middle-class reformers and feminists. Organizations specifically committed to feminism -- that is, with changing women's unequal status in society -- were weak in the 1920's, as the resolution of the suffrage issue had dispersed much of the pre-war feminist movement. There did exist, however, a number of women's reform organizations, like the National Council of Women, women's Church auxiliaries, the YWCA, and cultural groups like the Daughters of Scotland; and the latter two probably had a substantial working-class membership.

The Communist leadership feared the influence of these groups on working-class women, who, they believed, might be easily patronized and swayed by their social 'betters' and thereby have their attention deflected from political and class issues. Indeed, many rank-and-file Communists shared these worries and frustrations. Woman Worker correspondent Mary North complained to the editor that working-class women in her Alberta mining town too naively accepted the opinions expressed in bourgeois women's magazines, which pandered to women, diverting them with fashions and pictures of rich movie actresses, and Glace Bay WLL activist, Annie Whitfield, bemoaned the local Church's

anti-socialist influence on working-class women.<sup>62</sup> The Party's fears were grounded, in part, on realistic observations of women's participation in non-political groups like the Daughters of Scotland, and on the numbing influence of antifeminist and antisocialist popular magazines and movies in the 1920's.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, many of the warnings about women's participation in middle-class culture embraced the old adage that women's natural deference made them easy prey to counterrevolutionary influences.

In order to counter the danger posed by middle-class organizations, the Communist press tried to expose and criticize the misguided bourgeois view of feminist and reform groups. In 1927, the Woman Worker ridiculed the NCW's efforts to have women senators appointed,<sup>64</sup> and later that year published an open letter to the Council, denouncing its attack on Socialist Sunday Schools and its resolution to "investigate communist education"<sup>65</sup> in Canada. In 1925, at a large Toronto meeting initiated by the WLL to discuss the "protection of womanhood", Florence Custance laid out the League's case for improved social conditions and unionization of women workers. Custance's comments were contrasted with those of reformers like Mrs. Huestis, a former suffragist, now with the Women's League, who voiced the opinion that social conditions alone did not cause prostitution for "these girls" had made a conscious immoral choice, having already "succumbed to the lure of commercialized entertainment and pretty clothes."<sup>66</sup> It was clear, reported the Worker, that such women were interested in moral "reform and ... protection for the feeble-minded"<sup>67</sup> but they did not understand that for working-class girls the real issues were good wages and unionization. There was little to quibble with in



the Worker's characterization of the paternalistic attitudes of middle-class women like Mrs. Huestis, but its biting comments didn't solve the CPC's basic concern that many working-class women joined either non-political, or moderate reform groups.

Hence, following the Party line of United Front tactics of limited but critical participation in non-Communist groups, the Women's Bureau occasionally included some news items on women's reform activities in the Woman Worker, and most importantly, tried to maintain contacts with like-minded socialist women in labourite, farm and peace organizations, in the hopes of drawing them into the Communist movement. The Leagues, for instance, were interested in contacts with women's farm organizations, although they were hesitant to support those bodies which were allied to local Councils of Women. The National Council of Women, the Woman Worker tried to point out to Saskatchewan women in the United Farmers of Canada (UFC), was "well-intentioned" but was basically anti-labour and patronizing to working-girls.<sup>68</sup> The Woman Worker did print a reply from the UFC arguing that the Council was its "only contact with urban women and assuring the Woman Worker that farm women still had independence of action"<sup>69</sup> but Custance had the last word, counselling once again the dangers of alliances with middle-class women. Similarly, the Women's Bureau was willing to enter into dialogue with the United Nations Society and the WIL, supporting common causes such as the campaign to remove military training from the schools, but it was also publicly critical of their brand of liberal humanitarian pacifism.

(iv)

As the Labor Leagues were slowly influenced by the Comintern Congress of 1928, their opposition to these pacifist groups sharpened and an alternative line of opposition to the 'war menace against the Soviet Union' was developed. Until 1929, however, the Woman Worker did not completely reflect the Left Turn of the Comintern, and even then, it was censured for exhibiting "bourgeois feminist tendencies"<sup>70</sup> in its outlook. Until the 'Third Period' and the immersion of the WLLs into the Workers' Unity League, the Leagues comprised a unique experiment in Canadian Communist history. Although generally controlled by the Party, they constituted an organization separate in name and identity from the Party, with a membership which went beyond Party members and a structure which allowed a degree of local autonomy.

In 1924, it was far from assured that the WLLs would grow from the ten Labor Leagues then scattered across the country. As Secretary of the Federation, Custance's task was not an easy one: although the Worker was available as a means of publicity and recruitment, she was dependent on local Party officials for on-going organizational aid, and numerous references to the low priority of 'women's work' in the Party suggested that few district organizers had time to organize Women's Labor Leagues. In 1924, Custance later noted, there was some pessimistic speculation about the WLL having any success,<sup>71</sup> and for almost two years the Leagues made very slow progress, gaining little support from "our men in the labour movement". Perhaps the Leagues failure to gain affiliation to the TLC, and thus influence in the trade union movement, made them even less important in the eyes of many Communist leaders. Despite such early apathy and pessimism, the Leagues did experience substantial growth in the '20's, expanding to 37 in 1927,

and according to the Woman Worker, to 60 in 1929. The success of the Leagues can be attributed in large part to Custance's organizational skills and hard work. The existence of a separate women's newspaper sponsored by the Federation was also important, for, as Custance herself noted, the Woman Worker both sustained and extended the Leagues with its wide selection of educational material and by sharing the ideas and inspirational reports of sister Leagues.

The high 'ethnic' character of League membership also pointed to the essential role that the CPC's sister associations, UFLTA and the FOC, played in encouraging League activity; as Mary North pointed out, the Woman Worker was sold and read concurrently with the Finnish equivalent, Toveritar. Women whose home language was Finnish or Ukrainian, found a comfortable initiation into the Leagues from the culturally and socially supportive atmosphere of the FOC and UFLTA. Finnish Leagues, in fact, far outnumbered all other Leagues, a phenomenon which may have reflected a more developed political consciousness, or at least a stronger tradition of political organization among Finnish socialist women.<sup>72</sup> During the 20's the Finnish Leagues also had access to their own organizer, Sanna Kannasto, a well-known socialist orator from the Lakehead area, who previously had worked as a travelling speaker and organizer for the SPC and the SDPC. Kannasto, a "small bit of a woman, with piercing eyes" and a "fiery" orator's tongue, was even viewed with some trepidation by the local Finnish WLLers who saw her militant style as a marked contrast to that of many women, especially the cool, "undemonstrative Finns".<sup>73</sup> Kannasto did educational work for the FOC for many years, even taking in promising young comrades for intensive study of socialist theory. One

such student spent two weeks at Kannasto's farm, trying to learn public speaking and socialist theory: "a lot of the Theory", she later commented "went right over my head".<sup>74</sup>

For the WLLs, consisting largely of housewives and so firmly structured around language groups, directives from the Comintern calling for Bolshevization of the CPC must have had little impact: the nature of League membership made groups based on factory nuclei almost impossible. During the Bolshevization debate, Becky Buhay noted that the CPC's work among women should be conducted in "purely proletarian circumstances", <sup>73</sup> perhaps a critical reference to the WLLs, and the Leagues' failure to change their structure probably reinforced organizers' disinterest in their work. Yet, the Leagues did fill a necessary purpose; based on a socially acceptable auxiliary model, they answered the needs of women who were less proficient than male Party members in English, who were not eligible for trade union membership, or welcomed as Party cell members. Descriptions of League meetings reveal the specific functions they filled for female sympathizers. Most Leagues divided their time between self-education and business meetings, with the latter largely devoted to fund-raising. The WLLs held euchres and bazaars, sponsored May Day dances, gathered used clothing for striking workers, and performed other traditional auxiliary functions, donating their proceeds to local Party causes or to organizations like the Canadian Labor Defence League (CLDL), an organization which looked after the legal defense of radical trade unionists and Communists. In fact, the WLLs were encouraged by the CPC to affiliate to the CLDL, perhaps because the CLDL was eager to use the WLLs proven fund-raising talents. (Furthermore, the affiliation of the WLLs with the CLDL was

linked at the leadership level by the involvement of both Custance and Buhay in both organizations).

Also in the auxiliary tradition, the Labor Leagues initiated annual summer camps for Communist youth. WLL camps were usually organized along language lines; Jewish, Finnish and Ukrainian women, with the aid of the local YCLs, were responsible for their own youth groups. The involvement of women in this work was partly the consequence of housewives 'free time' during summer days, but it was also linked to the strong identification of women with the maternal task of 'educating the youth for the future'. This maternal identification limited the parameters of women's political participation just as the earlier maternal feminism had circumscribed women's role in politics. Nonetheless, the task itself was an important one. A crucial necessity for the Party was the augmentation of its ranks, and the youth camps helped to counter the values taught in the public educational institutions with an alternate ideology which would both sustain the loyalty of children of Party members, and perhaps increase Communist numbers with additional recruits.

Internally, League activities were directed towards their members' own education; the women spent time reading books, discussing current events, and improving their own understanding of Communism. In Northern Ontario a travelling library of radical books was circulated between towns, and many local groups spent every second meeting in study sessions discussing books like Bebel's Woman and Socialism or works by Marx and Lenin. Some Leagues rotated their officers every three months so that all members could gain leadership experience; others planned oratory courses to develop the untapped skills of members who were

reluctant to speak in public. By meeting weekly to discuss books, commented one League member, 'we have been able to develop our own understanding and skills': "we are no longer asking our men how we should think or say aloud our thoughts".<sup>76</sup> For many women living in families where men's activities and opinions were considered of primary importance, this self-confidence in itself was undoubtedly an achievement.

Although Party officials commended League work, they frequently lamented the lack of new 'Anglo-Saxon' recruits to the WLLs, particularly wage-earning women from factories; yet, they were at a loss as to how to change the WLLs composition -- especially when the Women's Department was not high on their priority list. Party Leader Jack McDonald claimed that in the later 1920's "for two years, the Central Executive Committee never devoted one meeting to discussion of work among women ... the Central Committee gave absolutely no attention to women's work".<sup>77</sup> Ironically, the large proportion of housewives in the Leagues which so concerned Communist leaders gave some question to the idea of 'housewife conservatism' propagated by the Party. Although the WLL publication often repeated the view that housewives tended toward political apathy and conservatism, it sometimes contained alternative opinions presented by the WLLers themselves. One correspondent, for example, pointed out that women's educational opportunities -- "their opportunities to learn the truth" -- were fewer, and that conservatism was not only a female prerogative in the working-class: "working-class men are also conservative due to the influence of the press, school and church".<sup>78</sup> WLL correspondents often attempted to express their female experience of the world within a class perspective and within their

Communist politics. Although the Woman Worker did not deviate from an overall emphasis on the primacy of class struggle, it did sometimes speak for working-class housewives who felt that within their class, they were accorded an inferior status. Women, one article admitted, had been placed in forms of subjection, bound by male superstition, and treated like "toys and slaves".<sup>79</sup> Another writer suggested that housewives were sometimes the scapegoats of both class and patriarchy: "women are forced into an authority relationship with husbands who have grown to think they are the bosses in the home, and boss wives, as bosses boss them."<sup>80</sup> Women readers were proffered some sympathy for their difficult position in the family, but were counselled against misdirected anger against men. The editor of the Woman Worker undoubtedly realized sexual inequalities in marriage would be discussed -- for working-class women could not realistically escape such problems -- but in the long term, she tried to show, "there are no easy cures for sexual inequality in marriage ... we must see the basic cause of inequality -- [capitalism] ... Thus, if women want more than a truce, if they want true freedom, the struggle versus capitalism must take precedence".<sup>81</sup>

Similarly, social issues like prostitution and alcoholism were presented in the context of a class analysis, yet with some reference to the immediate experience and suffering of working-class women. Very occasionally, writers in The Woman Worker adopted the rhetoric of pre-war reformers by describing, for example, the white slave trade as an "outlet for male licentiousness".<sup>82</sup> More often though, editorials attributed the cause of prostitution and the white slave traffic to the poverty of working-class women, and correspondents decried the hypocrisy

of the Church and its bourgeois members who used prostitutes while piously speaking against such evils.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, alcoholism was portrayed as a consequence of the alienating capitalist work world, although its detrimental effects on working-class households, and in particular, the suffering of women were noted. There was not complete consistency in the Woman Worker's treatment of the liquor problem, for while some writers advised individual "self-control",<sup>54</sup> others dismissed temperance, railing especially against prohibition as a capitalist endeavour to eke increased surplus value from a more efficient workforce.<sup>85</sup> Whatever confusion existed was probably of little matter for issues like liquor were only rarely considered; they never occupied the focal position in the WLLs that they had in the pre-war feminist movement.

Although the Women's Labor Leagues generally followed the views of the CPC on both social and economic issues, they did develop a measure of autonomy, just as recommendations of the International Women's Secretariat (IWS) were modified to fit Canadian conditions. The CPC, for instance, found it relatively easy to follow the IWS's suggestions to conduct a study on working women, initiate a newspaper for women, or organize annual International Women's Day meetings. But some of the IWS's recommendations, such as its directions to assign a woman active in women's work to every leading Party organization, or to integrate women members into all areas of Party work, were more difficult to emulate, and were therefore by-passed. Moreover, the International's repeated counsel to place first priority on organizing women into factory nuclei was, given the composition of the WLLs, not feasible, so the CPC's Women's Bureau concentrated on other campaigns



for working women such as the Minimum Wage one. The International Women's Secretariat did recognize that, for campaigns like International Women's Day, each national party would develop its own slogans and demands, deciding what to give prominence to, as "demands will differ in different countries according to their phase of economic development the strength of the women's movement ... [and so on]".<sup>86</sup>

Likewise, the Women's Bureau must have conceded that, within the bounds of general Party priorities, the WLL's activism would be shaped by local conditions and needs. In the coal-mining districts of the Crows Nest Pass, for instance, WLLs existed in close alliance with the Communist-dominated Mine Workers Union of Canada (MWUC). The wives and daughters of miners made up the bulk of league membership for, as Mary North pointed out of her own Blairmore group: "naturally ... we are housewives for jobs here are only in mining and are hardly even accessible to the man".<sup>87</sup> (Although the Crows Nest WLLs had few opportunities to organize women workers, the Lethbridge WLL made one attempt to encourage local cooks and waiters to unionize). In keeping with the local possibilities for political work, the Crows Nest Leagues concentrated on union and Labour Party support work; an attempt was made to build a wives' auxiliary to the MWUC, donations were made to the Labour Party of Alberta, and some WLL delegates were sent to its convention. The Crow's Nest Leagues never mentioned lobbying efforts to secure Mothers' Clinics probably because of small and inadequate local health services, or perhaps because the issue was not deemed appropriate for public discussion. Like most other Leagues, the Alberta associations spent a good proportion of their time in fund-raising activities, designed to aid local and international labour causes. Such

social fund-raising endeavours had political as well as financial purposes, for May Day dances and union picnics were important stimulants to Communist loyalty and solidarity; the atmosphere created by the women provided a social glue which helped to cement political allegiances.

In the Northern Ontario WLLs, members were often the wives of primary resource workers or single domestic workers drawn in by the Finnish connection. Fund-raising for unions and the CLDL, self-education, and the organization of summer camps all formed an essential part of the Leagues' work. Again, birth control was not a major public issue, indicating that the Woman Worker's leadership on this issue may not have reflected the view of all the WLLs, overcoming their reluctance to address women's sexual and reproductive rights. "Our WLL members", recalled one woman, "were extremely embarrassed when Kannasto insisted on talking about sexuality and birth control to the women's meetings".<sup>88</sup> As in Northern Ontario, in B.C. the Finnish Leagues were drawn together by common ethnic ties and pursued activities from this identification: in Vancouver they tried to organize Finnish domestics, and in Sointula the League became active in the local co-op store. The B.C. Finnish Leagues, cut off by the Rockies from the rest of Canada, organized their own conventions, passing resolutions which were carried back to local Leagues, pressed on the B.C. section of the Labour Party, or lobbied at local governments. Particular ethnic and local concerns were evidenced by calls, for example, for legislation permitting civil marriage -- a reflection of the anti-Church views of the Finnish Leagues.

Alberta and Northern Ontario Leagues sometimes sponsored regional conventions as well, but this practice was often foregone by

the larger urban Leagues of Toronto and Montreal, with their higher membership numbers, and easier access to Party machinery and other Communist groups. In Toronto, the WLL had a major hand in editing the Woman Worker and, during Custance's illness in 1928-9, helped sustain the magazine's production. The Toronto League was active in union support work but without the single-union emphasis of an area like the Pass: its activities included a boycott campaign during a bakers' strike, and during 1928 a joint effort with the local YCL to organize York Knitting Mills. Although, in the latter case, the Toronto WLLs leafletting campaign at the factory gates did not work, it must be seen in the context of a very small group of women in contest with immense barriers to organizing a mobile, female labour force in times of uncertain employment opportunities. In keeping with its urban setting, the Toronto League, like those in Montreal and Regina, spent a large amount of time on the Minimum Wage campaign, and it kept up public pressure on the local government for Mother's Clinics. In addition, urban leagues had greater opportunities to join with other communist and labour organizations in United Front work, for example, co-sponsoring rallies and demonstrations such as the large defence meeting held in Montreal for Sacco and Vanzetti.

Thus, although the Labor Leagues followed the general guidelines laid down by the CPC's Women's Department, there existed some variation according to regional conditions. This local 'autonomy may have been, in part, a consequence of the Women's Bureau flexibility in approach, but it was also the result of Party disinterest and default: communication problems (especially between an English executive and language-based Leagues), geography, and disorganization were undoubtedly factors

creating the diversity of the League experience. After the 1929 CPC Convention questionnaires were sent out to the Leagues to ascertain their membership and their recent activities; the central office seemed to have both inadequate records and very little concrete knowledge of the WLL network. This may have been a consequence of disarray in the wake of Custance's death, for Custance, it was said, was compelled to run a "one-woman department".<sup>89</sup> But in the final analysis, it was also a simple reflection of the secondary nature of the woman question in the Party.

(v)

Although the woman question remained secondary to the major tasks of the Communist Party of Canada, there is no doubt that its definition had been clarified and its significance had greatly increased since the time of the pre-war Canadian Left. The CPC's agitational and organizational work among women was shaped primarily by the example of the Soviet Union and advice from the Communist International. To Canadian Communists, the impressive transformation of women's status in Russia implied both the value of the USSR's strategic suggestions and if imitated, the possibility of similar successes. At the same time, directives from the International Women's Secretariat were necessarily adapted to Canadian conditions, and thus the CPC's own understanding of Marxism, and the concerns of Canadian Communists also influenced the Party's program, giving added emphasis to the discussion of particular issues and shaping the activities of local Labor Leagues.

The Party attempted to build a Communist women's movement which was firmly rooted in the same political goals as the revolutionary movement as a whole, and which invariably stressed the primacy of class-based political activity. To this end, the most essential appeal to working-class women was made around economic issues; working-class housewives were reminded of their small family income and the limited opportunities for their children, and wage-earning women were reminded of the exploitative character of their wage-labour. In attempting to organize housewives into labour support groups, the Party was following an established tradition on the Canadian Left and in the labour movement, but the CPC's revitalized organization, the Federation of Women's Labor Leagues, had the advantage of direction and coordination from a centralized Leninist Party, as well as a feeling of close connection to an international movement. These factors stimulated the growth of the Leagues as a national movement, although the centralized Party did pose the danger of ideological rigidity and strict leadership control: decisions on program and strategy tended to flow downwards from the leadership to the membership, not vice versa.

The Women's Bureau focused its agitational efforts on the unique exploitation of women under capitalism and, while some of their efforts such as the creation of factory nuclei and the unionization of women workers, were not successful, others, like the Minimum Wage campaign, which used the WLLs small numbers yet determined militance, were more instrumental in exposing women's inequality under capitalism. To what extent these campaigns and organizing schemes drew in new recruits is not entirely clear. Women still constituted a minority of Party membership,<sup>90</sup> and although the Leagues did expand during the

1920's, the recruits tended to be relatives of CPC members and members of the FOC and UFLTA, rather than the desired newcomers from the factories -- a fact which the Party continually lamented.

Although economic issues formed the core of the Communist program, non-economic issues were not ignored, partly because of the wide range of social reforms enacted in the USSR after the revolution, but also because of the interests and needs of Canadian women. In the case of the birth control issue, the CPC's advocacy of Mothers' Clinics was argued primarily in light of the medical, health, and economic needs of working-class women and in terms of the right of self-determination by working-class families. Although quite different from contemporary feminist arguments favouring personal choice and control, the Communist case, in the context of the birth control debates of the '20's, was a progressive voice with few allies. Moreover, it is possible that women in the Party saw birth control more basically as a right for all women, but public arguments took a more pragmatic and pro-natalist direction.

In lobbying for Mothers' Clinics or by doing their auxiliary support work, the Women's Labor Leagues were involved in the Communist movement at a different level than other members and sometimes with a different rationale. Women's supportive auxiliary work was essential to the life of the movement; yet, it also placed them in sex-stereotyped roles which isolated them from power and decision-making. Except for Florence Custance, and later Becky Buhay and Annie Buller, women were not represented in the Central Committee of the Party, and even at the lower level, Party officials were predominantly men. In fact, some WLL members were not officially Party members; it was said that if only one

family member could afford a Party card, it would be the 'head' of the family unit. "Women's place", remembers one Party member:

Was in the home. It's alright to organize women, men would say, but not my wife! So, when it came to going to a meeting, the men would go. It was more important. The men were the 'brains'. The women were<sup>91</sup> in the kitchen. But they still supported so many causes.

At the same time, women's 'place in the home' was used as a radicalizing tool; the demands for bread and peace were used as rallying cries to mobilize wives and mothers. On the question of peace, women were appealed to on the basis of their maternal instincts, yet were simultaneously warned against a sentimental humanist pacifism clouding an objective, economic analysis.

Women were drawn into Party work as a consequence of their experience of working-class life, their contacts with other Communist activists, and their re-education through socialist literature. Yet, despite their primary class loyalties, women's political involvement did differ appreciably from that of men. Their political work reflected the sexual division of labour in the wider world: it was closely connected to their maternal and family roles. In the case of wage-earning women, the Party assumed that their participation in production was the key to their radicalization, but with housewives, the Party clearly saw women's personal and family concerns as crucial to their mobilization. For women who were involved in domestic labour, this perception may have been fair, although an analysis of the Left unfortunately explores what the communists thought of working-class women, not what working-class women themselves thought. Indeed, in the case of the Party's oft-repeated fears of women's conservatism, there is contradictory evidence: although women were less likely to join the Party, this was

not necessarily a reflection of their reactionary, bourgeois mentality. In labour struggles women's class consciousness was clearly articulated, but a leap into political action possibly was precluded by women's family responsibilities, by the unwelcoming attitudes of male Party members, or even by the various influences which kept working-class men from joining the Party. Also, women's politicization may have taken a different route from men's. Women, for example, may have been radicalized on the birth control issue but not on trade union concerns, while men's interests were simply reversed; however, the secondary nature of the woman question inevitably gave the latter issue the weight of importance.

Although woman's role in the family was seen as crucial to her political understanding, it was not analyzed as critically as her role in production, or judged important to her oppression. While the problems of working-class housewives were sometimes explored, in the final analysis, women's maternal role was sentimentalized. The Women's Bureau, and certainly the Woman Worker never limited themselves to a single-minded economism which rejected all issues of women's sexual subordination: these concerns were alluded to and occasionally discussed in a manner which provided a supportive and sympathetic dimension to women involved in the movement. Nonetheless, the solution to sexual oppression was always seen in class terms; the overwhelming primacy of class struggle and the necessity of working-class solidarity were of first importance, and indeed, they became of absolute and paramount importance to the organization of women during the next period of the CPC's evolution.



## Footnotes Chapter II

- 1 On the question of the Bolshevik government and abortion law, see Alix Holt, "Marxism and Women's Oppression", in Tova Yedlin, ed., Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (New York, 1980).
- 2 Although these communal kitchens were largely abolished afterwards. On the transformation of women's status in Russia in this period see Richard Stites, The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia (New Jersey, 1978); Dorothy Akinson, ed., Women in Russia (California, 1977).
- 3 Gregory Massell, The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929 (New Jersey, 1974); Barbara Clements, "Working-class and Peasant Women in the Russian Revolution", Signs, Vol. 8, no. 2, (Winter, 1982).
- 4 Richard Stites, The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia, p. 344.
- 5 Louise Bryant, Six Red Months in Russia (1918), (London and West Nyack, 1982); Jessica Smith, Women in Soviet Russia (New York, 1928); Anna Louise Strong, I Change Worlds (New York, 1937).
- 6 William Rodney, Soldiers of the International (Toronto, 1968), p. 165.
- 7 Women's Labor Leagues may have existed in other centres as well. Before the 1920's, one of the most vocal Leagues was the Winnipeg WLL, which was initiated and led by Helen Armstrong. At the Trades and Labour Congress convention of 1918, the Winnipeg WLL stated that its aims were 'the protection and organization of women workers and the assistance of the labour movement'. Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, Report of the Proceedings of the 34th Annual Convention, September 16-21, 1918, p. 108.
- 8 London Free Press, September 18, 1924; Report of the Conference of Women's Labor Leagues, September 17-18, 1924, London, Ontario.
- 9 At the 1924 meeting of the TLC, delegate Jas. Marsh objected to WLL affiliation to the Congress because, he claimed, the "League was a political body and a wing of the Workers Party". Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, Report of the Proceedings of the 33rd Convention, September 10-14, 1923.
- 10 In Hamilton, for instance, well-known ILP activists Mrs. J. Ingles and Janet Inman were on the WLL executive in 1924-25. In Regina, Mrs. Mabel Hanway, who was also a labourite, was a visible WLL leader for a time. Rose Henderson, of the Canadian Labour Party, wrote an article in 1927 commending the Woman Worker and the work of

the WLLs. Hamilton Spectator, February 7, 1925 and May 23, 1925;  
Woman Worker, July 1926, Woman Worker, January 1927.

- 11 Although the WLLs were technically expelled because of a constitutional amendment, anti-communism was the most important force behind their expulsion. The Toronto Star, November 4, 1927; The Woman Worker, December, 1927.
- 12 The Worker, April 19, 1924.
- 13 Public Archives of Canada (PAC), Finnish Organization of Canada Collection (FOC), MG 28 V 46, Vol. 141, "Program and Constitution of the Canadian Federation of Women's Labor Leagues".
- 14 The Worker, May 1, 1922.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 The Worker, June 13, 1925.
- 17 The Woman Worker, July 1926.
- 18 The Worker, June 13, 1925.
- 19 By semi-autonomous, I mean groups which were constituted separately from the Party, but which still upheld the aims and views of the Party.
- 20 Taime Davies, interview with Joan Sangster and Karen Teeple, July 14, 1982
- 21 Lil Himmelfarb Ilomaki, interview with Joan Sangster and Karen Teeple, January 30, 1983.
- 22 PAC, J.E. Rae Papers, MG 31 B11, Interview with Norman Penner, "Q. How did he (Jacob Penner) finance his family?  
A. Well, he wasn't, that was the point. He was not financing his family. My mother was struggling with that part of it and she just couldn't make ends meet."
- 23 Sue Bruley, "Women in the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1921-39", (Ph.D. London University, 1980).
- 24 For example, younger YCL activists like Lil Himmelfarb and Dora Liebovitch and single female leaders like Becky Buhay were the activists who were arrested during the free speech fights. See Chapter III for elaboration.
- 25 Report of the Conference of Women's Labor Leagues, September 17-18, 1924, London, Ontario.
- 26 University of Toronto Rare Book Room (U of T), Kenny Collection (Kenny), Box 2, "Our Tasks Among Women", Central Executive Committee Report, Fifth Convention, 1925, p. 64.

- 27 Veronica Strong-Boag, "The Girl of the New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920's", Labour/Le Travailleur, Vol. 4, no. 4 (1979); Ian Radforth, "Ontario Labour in the 1920's", unpublished paper, York University, 1978.
- 28 Imprecorr, Vol. 4, no. 71, (October 6, 1924); Vol. 6, no. 69, (October 26, 1926).
- 29 U of T, Kenny Collection, "Our Tasks Among Women", p. 63.
- 30 The Worker, November 15, 1925.
- 31 U of T, Kenny Collection, "Our Tasks Among Women", p. 64.
- 32 The People's Cause, April 26, 1925.
- 33 U of T, Kenny, "Our Tasks Among Women", p. 64.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 PAC, FOC Collection, "Program and Constitution of the Canadian Federation of Women's Labor Leagues".
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 The Worker, May 1, 1922.
- 38 Dorothy Smith, Feminism and Marxism (Vancouver, 1974), p. 34.
- 39 This view that women were 'backward' was taken to extremes by some Party members, to the exasperation of women like Becky Buhay, who complained that some Ukrainian comrades wouldn't even let their women folk join the Party: "They say a woman talks too much and can't be trusted and enuf[sic] if their husbands are in the party. In Lethbridge ... they even suspended one from the meetings ... It is very important to carry on this in the UKE [sic] press. They have the old peasant attitudes on this question." PAO, CPC Collection, unknown writer to Tom McEwen, Jan. 15, 1929 and Becky Buhay to Tom McEwen, July 17, 1929. The attitude of Ukrainian men is discussed at further length in Chapter V.
- 40 The Worker, May 1, 1922.
- 41 The Worker, November 7, 1925.
- 42 Custance was prevented from running because she couldn't fulfill the property qualification.
- 43 The Worker, February 1, 1923.
- 44 The Woman Worker, September 1927.
- 45 The Worker, November 7, 1925.

- 46 Ibid.
- 47 The Worker, March 21, 1925.
- 48 Mothers Clinics were also to include full pre-natal and maternity care.
- 49 Angus McLaren, "'What Has This To Do With Working-Class Women?': Birth Control and the Canadian Left, 1900-1939", Social History Histoire Sociale, Vol. XIV, no. 28, (Nov., 1981). McLaren's conclusions about the CPC's attitude towards birth control are, I think, too harsh, and they are marred by the fact that he makes no reference to debates in The Woman Worker. He faults the CPC for not discussing the birth control issue in The Young Worker, yet he does not criticize the assumption of other socialists that this information was for married women. It was this assumption -- understandable in the context of the 1920's -- which prevented the presentation of the birth control issue in the YCL's paper. Moreover, McLaren spends considerable time discussing the views expressed in the One Big Union Bulletin on birth control without asking who and how many people read the Bulletin. Apparently, one reason for the Bulletin's popularity was its monopoly on the British football pools.
- 50 Angus McLaren, "Birth Control and Abortion in Canada, 1890- 1914", CHR, Vol. 59, no. 3, (September, 1978).
- 51 The Worker, June 20, 1925.
- 52 The Woman Worker, July 26, 1926.
- 53 The Woman Worker, September, 1927.
- 54 The Woman Worker, December, 1927.
- 55 The Woman Worker, April, 1928.
- 56 The Worker, June 4, 1927.
- 57 The Worker, May 2, 1925.
- 58 The Worker, November 3, 1924.
- 59 Buhay's letters were written during and after trips to Russia in the early 1930's and in the 1950's. See The Worker, August 30 and Sept. 6, 1930, for a description of Buhay's first trip to the Soviet Union, and U of T, Kenny Collection, Box 41, for letters written during her stay in the 1950's.
- 60 Taime Davies interview, July 14, 1982.
- 61 For example, see references to Communists' personal lives in Lita-Rose Betcherman, The Little Band (Ottawa, 1982), chap. XI. Alan Seager, "Finnish Canadians and the Ontario Miners Movement",

Polyphony, Vol. 3, no. 2, (Fall, 1981), also points out how women could be punished by people outside the Communist movement. After the Hollinger mine disaster of 1928, the Company refused to compensate the Finnish widows because they had not been legally married.

- 62 The Woman Worker, October 1926; The Worker, November 14, 1925.
- 63 Mary Vipond, "The Image of Women in Canadian Mass Circulation Magazines in the 1920's", in Susan Trofinmenkoff and Allison Prentice, eds., The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History (Toronto, 1977); Mary Ryan, Womanhood in America (New York, 1975), chap. 6; Molly Haskell, From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies (New York, 1973) chap. 2.
- 64 The Woman Worker, October 1927.
- 65 The Woman Worker, April 1927.
- 66 The Worker, July 18, 1925.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 The Woman Worker, October 1927.
- 69 The Woman Worker, February 1928.
- 70 U of T, Kenny Collection, Box 1, Closed letter to CPC from Executive Committee of the Communist International, April 1929.
- 71 The Woman Worker, September 1928.
- 72 Becky Buhay claimed that Finnish men often encouraged their wives to become active, at least in support groups. Perhaps Finnish women also drew on past traditions of socialist activity in women's groups attached to the SDPC. On Finnish women and socialism before World War I, see Varpu Lindstrom-Best, "The Socialist Party of Canada and the Finnish Connection, 1905-1911", in J. Dahlie and T. Fernando, eds., "Ethnicity and Power Politics in Canada" (Toronto, 1981); on the political activism of American Finnish women, Carl Ross, "The Feminist Dilemma in the Finnish Immigrant Community", Finnish Americana, (1978).
- 73 Taime Davies interview, July 14, 1982.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 The Worker, August 22, 1925.
- 76 The Woman Worker, February 1927.
- 77 Public Archives of Ontario (PAO), Communist Party of Canada Collection, (CPC), Report of the Sixth National Convention, May 31 - June 7, 1929.

- 78 The Woman Worker, September 1927.
- 79 The Woman Worker, March 1928.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 The Woman Worker, April 1928.
- 82 The Woman Worker, December 1927.
- 83 The Woman Worker, November 1927.
- 84 The Woman Worker, June 1928.
- 85 The Woman Worker, November 1926.
- 86 Imprecorr, Vol. 4, no. 11, (February 14, 1924).
- 87 The Woman Worker, July 1927.
- 88 Taime Davies interview, July 14, 1982.
- 89 PAO, CPC Collection, Report from Sudbury District Executive Committee of the WLLs to Executive Committee of the Federation of WLLs, February 5, 1930.
- 90 There are no exact membership numbers for men and women from the 1920's, but later reports in the 1930's and references to Party membership in the Communist International indicate that women probably comprised about 15% of the Party.
- 91 Taime Davies interview, July 14, 1982.

### CHAPTER III

'Red Revolutionaries and Pink Tea Pacifists': Communist and Social  
Democratic Women in the Early 1930's

In the 1920's the Canadian Communist Party's ties to the Communist International, and its debt to the Russian experiment had encouraged new discussion of, and emphasis on the woman question. A communist working-class women's movement had begun to grow, nurtured and yet simultaneously restricted by the leadership and guidance of a Leninist party modeled on Soviet advice. Between 1929 and 1934, the Canadian Party underwent significant ideological changes which in turn altered the CPC's view of the woman question. Influenced by Soviet politics and foreign policies, the Canadian Party now stressed the increasing destabilization of Western capitalism, the anti-Soviet war aims of the imperialist powers, and the subsequent sharpening of the class struggle in the West. For the Women's Department, this period brought an emphatic preoccupation with the primacy of class struggle and with the organization of women workers around the productive process. The Women's Labor Leagues were restructured into more dependent, and less important Party affiliates, and the Party limited, with an economistic bias, the range of women's issues appropriate for Communist discussion. These limitations and the decline of the WLLs were balanced by some gains in the organization of women workers. Whether the latter significantly justified the former, however, is open to question.

While the Communist Party attempted to tighten its organization, and effect better control over its Women's Department, social democratic women remained separated from each other in various socialist, labourite and farm organizations. Yet, in the 1920's and early '30's, many labourite women increased their political profile and along with their



rural sisters, they accumulated political experience which they would later contribute to a new socialist party formed in 1933, the CCF.

( i )

In 1928, delegates at the 6th Congress of the Communist International were confronted with a modified analysis of Soviet and Western economic and political conditions. This Congress marked a turning point in Soviet and CI history, coming at the end of the New Economic Policy and the beginning of the first Five Year Plan, and marking the complete triumph of Stalin's interpretation of Marxism-Leninism within the International. Under the influence of Stalin's leadership, the Congress argued the presence of a 'Right' danger in Communist politics, and urged a reorientation towards class struggle and revolution. Besides calling for a new 'Left' orientation, the Congress also revealed the USSR's international isolation, and fear of an anti-Soviet war. Congress documents described a world divided into two irreconcilable camps -- the capitalist powers and the socialist Soviet Union -- with the latter increasingly menaced by the fearful and aggressive designs of anti-socialist forces.

In its examination of Western capitalism, the Congress stressed two factors: first, anti-Sovietism within imperialist countries would nourish the growth of war industries, and second, the negative effects of capitalist development were leading to contradictions of great proportions, soon to effect a profound economic crisis. At the same time, the development of cartels and fascist tendencies would lead to an increasing polarization of society and an intensification of the class

struggle. In crisis, the capitalist class would resort to violence -- against the USSR and against its own working class -- which would lead to war and to revolutions. "Little do people realize", announced Stewart Smith when he returned to Canada from the Lenin School in Moscow with the Third Period line memorized, "that in a very short time the streets of Toronto will be running with blood."<sup>1</sup>

Although the official Congress program contained an outline of principles respecting women and the family, including women's right to "legal and social equality, protection of motherhood, provision of communal household care and childcare",<sup>2</sup> much of the wide-ranging discussion on the woman question characteristic of the early '20's had disappeared from Soviet politics by 1929. Following the CPSU's devaluation of the Zhenotdel in 1929, a Central Committee decision further reduced the importance of work among women by setting up women's sections of the Soviets. This signified the relegation of women's concerns to an inferior political domain, as the Soviets, used largely for ceremonial purposes, were subordinate to the Party in all matters. In accordance with new Soviet priorities for rapid industrialization and collectivization, the 1929 keynote speech at the Zhenotdel Conference stressed that the "main thing in the work of women delegates has to be the question of productivity."<sup>3</sup> Delegates were asked to say to themselves: "the interests of productivity are my own interests".<sup>4</sup> Although the integration of women into social production had long been a goal of the Zhenotdel, this outline represented a one-sided emphasis on production alone; moreover, it reflected the government's obsession with industrialization rather than any deep concern for women's emancipation.

In keeping with the priorities of Soviet labour policy, women were drawn into the labour force in massive numbers, entering virtually every occupation, including non-traditional ones in construction and transportation. Discussion of issues such as family law reform was now replaced by exaltation of women's role in industrialization and in boosting productivity. And the government gradually made birth control and abortion less accessible to women, whose reproductive roles were increasingly valued for their potential usefulness to state and military planning.

Some of the CI's new priorities, such as the war danger against the USSR, were taken up by the Canada Party in 1928, but the full impact of the Third Period was not really felt until 1929-30. Directives to break with the International unions and set up a separate 'revolutionary' trade union centre, for instance, were delayed until early 1930, when the Party, pressured by the CI, announced the establishment of the Workers Unity League (WUL). The CPC's transition to the Third Period was not an easy one, for confusion in the Canadian Party about the directions for change, leadership resignations, and Party splits all complicated the process. The 1929 National Convention was a stormy affair in which faction fighting and disagreement were fierce. One group of Communists initially opposed the new Comintern directives, seeing them as dual unionism and a contradiction to United Front work, and leader Jack McDonald, supported by the majority of the convention, particularly the Finnish and Ukrainian delegates, was also uneasy with the new strategy. The ethnic federations feared not only for their autonomy of action, but also for their property and their memberships' precarious immigrant status, for a more 'revolutionary'

Party line might easily lead to deportations and the confiscation of property. McDonald and his followers, however, eventually accepted the Comintern analysis, as the minority group at the Convention, led by Tim Buck and Stewart Smith, already had. The convention, in fact, reproduced copious copy of self-criticism for past Right-wing mistakes, and solemn pledges to set the Party on a new revolutionary course.<sup>5</sup>

The shaky peace achieved by the end of the Convention was soon shattered: would-be dissenters were expelled, and by January of 1930, McDonald was forced to resign from the Party's Central Committee, which recently had been shaken by the loss of another prominent leader, Maurice Spector. Deep divisions between the Central Committee and the ethnic federations persisted into 1930 as charges and counter-charges filled the pages of Vaupas and The Worker, and rocked ethnic, urban strongholds like Finnish Sudbury and Ukrainian Winnipeg. After a Comintern investigation of the Finnish problem in 1930, a compromise was reached, but bad feeling smoldered for some time. Similarly, a UFLTA envoy to Moscow and a Comintern representative to Canada managed to bring the UFLTA leadership and Party leadership into a tenuous truce.<sup>6</sup> The Party, however, entered the Third Period seriously weakened by these ethnic divisions, leadership resignations and large membership losses; estimates of the numbers who deserted the CP in 1929-31 run as high as three quarters of the total membership.<sup>7</sup>

Besides these internal disagreements, the Party encountered increasing police and state harassment between 1928 and 1932. As Lita-Rose Betcherman argues, this harassment may have been, in part, provoked by Communists' combative rhetoric and tactics.<sup>8</sup> But this harassment was also the result of the government's growing fear of

social disorder, led by Communists, in a time of economic crisis. Thus, in Toronto, Chief of Police Draper established an infamous 'Red Squad' to spy on Communists, forbade meetings in any language but English, and indeed, tried to prevent Communists from speaking at all in public. In the resulting free speech fights, Communists exposed the thin veneer of civil rights existing in Canadian society, but because they rejected any alliance with socialists, labour or liberals, their fight remained a sectarian and isolated one.

In 1932, the attack on Communist politics intensified with the arrest, under Section 98, of eight Communist Party leaders by the Ontario Attorney General. With their arrest, and eventual imprisonment, part of the Party's apparatus went underground, making day-to-day business, including recruiting, more difficult. Because of the Party's militant tactics, then its illegal status, the ability of some women to participate in all Party activities was also made more difficult. Women deeply involved in the free speech fights, and those arrested under Section 98, were usually young YCLers or single Party leaders. Some young women, when convicted shunned fines and accepted jail sentences, revealing both youthful zeal for the cause, and a desire to prove 'equality of the sexes' in all revolutionary endeavours. In Sudbury, a young female YCL organizer, Taime Davies, helped organize a May Day demonstration against unemployment which the Party knew would provoke counteraction:

A by-law said that you had to carry a Union Jack in a parade. So we decided not to. We were that sectarian then ... But it was a Red Flag for the bulls! The police attacked us and beat up the guys. Some were deported. I didn't get beaten because I didn't fight back. But I got 15 days.

Understandably, women with families were not expected to take the same risks with the law (although a few did), and most simply could not take those risks, for instead of going to jail for the night, they had to be home to feed their children. The political contribution of these Party 'wives', as opposed to the 'cadres', was limited to raising funds for the CLDL and petitioning against Section 98 and the imprisonment of CPC leaders. By 1934, however, Party tactics were changing, as were government strategies for dealing with Communists. With mounting protests against Section 98, from liberals and socialists as well as Communists, the government released the imprisoned CPC leaders; at the same time, the Party was beginning to look for allies against fascism, and it engaged more warily in any provocative actions carrying the risk of arrest and imprisonment.

(ii)

Although the Comintern's new 'class versus class' line provoked internal Party dissension, Third Period tactics were not entirely out of keeping with some of the CPC's earlier work. The Party, for example, had attempted to work in the mainstream of the labour movement, but as Communist militants found it increasingly difficult to manoeuvre in the Internationals, (and were sometimes expelled for their politics) the Party helped establish new industrial unions like the MWUC and the Lumber Workers Union of Canada, and the CPC flirted with, then left the ACCL, a nationalist alternative to the TLC.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Third Period strategies could be justified with past CPC initiatives. Moreover, the CI's economic predictions of a severe capitalist crisis soon found

confirmation in the stockmarket crash of 1929, thus giving the new Party line increased prestige.

Third Period strategies could also be linked to the previous concerns of the CPC's Women's Department. In 1929, the CI chastized the Canadian Party for its neglect of women workers and the 'incorrect' (housewife) composition of the WLLs; both of these criticisms had already been voiced earlier in the decade. Also, in one sense, 1929 marked a natural dividing point in the history of the Women's Department, for Custance, too ill to make her report to the 1929 Convention, died in July of 1929. (Indeed, if she had lived, there is reason to assume that she may have also left, or been pushed from the Party leadership). Custance's absence threw the Women's Department into temporary disorder for it had operated as a "one person Department", with Custance doing the majority of the work, carefully nurturing the growth "of her beloved Labor Leagues".<sup>11</sup> Since Custance's death, remarked the Sudbury district WLLs in 1930, "the Centre has been completely paralyzed. After her death her work was totally neglected. Our organ, The Woman Worker, which did such good educational and organizational work, died with Custance."<sup>12</sup> It wasn't until 1930-31, when the Department was revived and reorganized, that Third Period strategies became completely apparent. With this new ideological direction, also came new leadership: Julia Collins, wife of Party leader Sam Carr, assumed the duties of Women's Director of the WUL, and Becky Buhay and Annie Buller, who had both grown to political prominence in the 1920's, at different times managed the Party's Women's Department. And it was Annie Buller and Becky Buhay who, more than any other women,

came to symbolize the Women's Department and female leadership of the CPC for the next three decades of Party life.

Born in 1895 to Jewish parents in Chernovtsky, Annie Buller came to Montreal as a child and attended school there until she was 14. From her first job in a tobacco stripping factory<sup>13</sup> she moved into the garment industry, and from there, joined a retail store, where her talents as an astute business woman helped her rise to the position of buyer. Active during the war in the Montreal socialist movement and the anti-conscription struggle, Buller joined her new political friend, Becky Buhay, in New York in 1919, at the Rand School of Social Sciences, a radical educational centre.

Becky Buhay, a Jewish working-class immigrant from Britain, was already versed in socialist ideas when she came to Canada in 1913, at the age of 17. Buhay had grown up in London's East End in a family sometimes solely supported by a strong-willed mother, who encouraged Becky and her brother to attend Socialist Sunday School and ILP classes. When she came to Montreal, Buhay worked as a photo refinisher, then later in the garment industry. By the time she went to New York in 1917 to study at the Rand School, Buhay was working as an organizer for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. After the war, both she and Buller became very active in American socialist politics; in fact, Buhay's activities in the Socialist Party of America earned her mention in the 1919 Lusk Commission, a fact which encouraged her hasty return to Montreal.<sup>14</sup>

On her return to Canada, Buhay, deeply affected by the Winnipeg General Strike, became active in the One Big Union and attended its inaugural convention in Port Arthur. With Buller and Bella Hall Gauld,



a former social worker, she organized the Montreal Labour College, modeled vaguely on the lines of the Rand School and the British Plebs League. By 1922, both Buller and Buhay were active in the Workers Party of Canada (later the CPC). Buller moved to Toronto in the mid-20's to take up the position of Business Manager of The Worker, while Buhay helped with Kampf, and was immersed in the Party's agitational and educational work. In 1929, Buhay succeeded Custance as Secretary of the CLDL and as director of the Women's Department. Buller, who briefly took over the Women's Department in 1930, devoted her time to The Worker and to trade union work, especially the newly-constituted Industrial Union of Needle Trades Workers (IUNTW). It was in this capacity -- as a union organizer -- that she rushed to the scene of the Estevan strike in 1931 to lead the miners and their families in the demonstration in which three miners were shot by the RCMP. In the arrests that followed, Buller was charged with inciting to riot, and despite an eloquent, self-conducted defense, she was sentenced in 1933 to a year in jail.<sup>15</sup>

Buller and Buhay joined the CPC in its youth, and by the time of the 1929 convention, they had forged strong links of identity with the new Party. Throughout the struggles of the 1920's, their loyalty to the CI and to the Party, as well as their close friendship, had been fashioned. Like many Communists, their political loyalties were reinforced by the solidarity they enjoyed with like-minded radicals, who were often beleaguered by a hostile state and treated with social disapprobation. And it is significant that the latter was often expressed in anti-Semitic terms,<sup>16</sup> for this racism may have also drawn radicals like Buller and Buhay closer together. Becky Buhay's letters to Annie during one of Buhay's Western speaking tours for The Worker

revealed the political bonds of loyalty forged in hardship and adversity, and the comforts of solidarity she felt with female comrades like Buller. Travelling by train, sometimes on a gruelling 18 hour day schedule with no money for a sleeper, billeted with poor families and often reduced to inadequate food, Buhay found reassurance in the idealism she attached to her work, and the far-off moral support of her friend Annie.<sup>17</sup> For Buller and Buhay, the tear-gas attacks, anti-Semitic denunciations, and sojourns in jail -- all of which they had experienced by 1930 -- cemented the Party loyalty, which for them, became a life-long commitment.

No other women in the Party's history occupied the central roles, nor commanded the lasting mythology that Buller and Buhay did. Buller's talents were her ability to rouse an audience, and her 'business' and organizational acumen; Buhay's were her grasp of theory and her educational talents. Both women were also determined and ambitious, and could hold their own in factional fighting. Although Annie Buller claimed to be less confident in theoretical matters than Buhay, she could be aggressively single-minded over an issue; the more critical called it 'domineering', especially if she was giving advice on their personal lives. In contrast to Custance's more intellectual, reserved approach, Buller and Buhay were "agitational leaders"<sup>18</sup> who had to sacrifice some of the comforts of a personal life for the constant rounds of speaking, travelling (and even imprisonment) associated with their political careers. Buller was married in the 1920's to Harry Guralnick, an activist in the United Jewish Peoples Order, and they subsequently had one son. These emotional attachments, Buller explained to her friend, poet Joe Wallace, were important to her, although her

more "hard-boiled comrades"<sup>19</sup> took a dim view of her emotional priorities. Since other female activists sometimes found Buller 'hard-boiled', it is hard to imagine what these comrades expected from a woman revolutionary.

Other female activists also grew to political maturity during the late 1920's, although none rivalled the pre-eminence enjoyed by Buller and Buhay. Bella Hall Gauld, a fellow organizer of the Montreal Labor College with Buller, was active on the Montreal scene from the 1920's to the 40's, but her frail health and back-room organizational abilities kept her less prominent in the Party. Brought up in a Western middle-class family with a strong religious orientation, Gauld was influenced by J.S. Woodsworth's work at All Peoples Mission, and found her early vocation in social work and the construction of a University Settlement House in pre-war Montreal. Her early liberal-humanism gave way, after her education at the Rand School, and the Winnipeg General Strike, to a belief in Marxism, and in the 1920's she joined the CPC and took a large role in the local WLL, CLDL and in the Pioneer movement.<sup>20</sup>

Bessie Schacter, a Montreal seamstress of Jewish Ukrainian origin, and Pearl Wedro, a furrier of East European extraction, also initiated a life-long commitment in the 1920's. Schacter, who was a founding member of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union in Montreal, had been part of the Montreal Labour College circle,<sup>21</sup> while Wedro was drawn to the CPC through her interest in trade unionism and connections to the Jewish socialist movement.<sup>22</sup> More prominent in the Party leadership in the early 1930's, was Jeanne Corbin, a French emigrant to Alberta, who joined the CPC at the age of 18, after working as a teacher in an impoverished school north of Edmonton, and experiencing first-hand

the mining struggles of the 1920's. "Discovered" by Becky Buhay at an Alberta Communist summer school in 1927, Corbin was persuaded by Buhay to come to Toronto to join the staff of The Worker.<sup>23</sup> Corbin was most active during the Third Period; she helped establish a French Communist paper and organized longshoremen in Montreal, then worked in Northern Ontario with the CLDL and as a union organizer for miners and bushmen. A year's imprisonment after her involvement in the Noranda strike, however, led to problems with Tuberculosis, and Corbin's retirement into a sanatorium, where she died in 1944.

( iii )

The CPC's 6th National Convention in 1929 indicated the new political course which activists like Corbin, Buller and Buhay would pursue in the following years. A Comintern letter had chided the Party for underestimating and ignoring its work with women wage-earners, and for allowing the expression of "bourgeois pacifist ideas"<sup>24</sup> by its women comrades. It urged the Canadian Party to give more attention to the organization of women workers, to correct the ethnic and housewife bias of the WLLs, and to stress the mobilization of women and youth against a war fought with the Soviet Union. These recommendations flowed from the Comintern's analysis of Western capitalism and the growth of imperialist designs on the USSR. The Comintern predicted that, in the oncoming economic crisis, rationalization, speed-up and wage-cuts would be suffered by many women workers, and more married women would be drawn into production to bolster the falling family income; in short, women would be increasingly used as cheap labour, replacing male workers.

These conditions would intensify the class struggle, radicalizing women drawn into production and angering women whose standard of living and work-pace were under attack.

Secondly, the Comintern predicted an increasing "militarization of women for war"<sup>25</sup> by capitalist states which would use women in war production, and perhaps even in active war service. An important necessity of the women's communist movement, therefore, was to mobilize working-class women in support of the Soviet Union, to oppose any embargoes against the USSR, and to counter adverse anti-Russian propaganda. In Canada, women were advised to take part in the Friends of the Soviet Union (FSU) set up in 1929, and to carry out an anti-war campaign ideologically distinct from the efforts of other women's peace organizations.

Although the Comintern's analysis of women's wage labour in the economic crisis was borne out in the Depression, their fear of a "militarization" of women was less plausible, and apparently resulted from their view of women as easily manipulated by 'reactionary' influences. While most of the Western powers were hostile towards the USSR, this period saw the increase of liberal and social-democratic pacifism in Canada, specifically the growth of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WIL). Furthermore, industrial statistics never revealed any substantial jump in the numbers of females employed in war industries.<sup>26</sup>

By the spring of 1930, the CPC's acceptance of the new Third Period priorities was reflected in Worker articles on women. Paramount importance was now given to an analysis of women and capitalism which stressed women's economic exploitation as full and part-time wage

earners. "The working woman", warned the Worker, is even more exploited than the male worker. She works for less, and she is used by the boss to lower the whole standard of living of the working class ... she is almost completely at the mercy of the boss class."<sup>27</sup>

Strategically, added Becky Buhay, working-class women must learn "to stand shoulder to shoulder with men against capitalism", rejecting the sentimental idealism of social democrats and drawing instead on a Leninist understanding which "points to the class character of the status of women ... drawing them into the class struggle".<sup>28</sup> Economic issues were emphasized to the exclusion of issues such as birth control, and women's role in the family. Although articles noted the extra-exploitation of women workers, and the difficult position of working-class housewives caught in a depression economy, they were less frequent in quantity and less insightful in quality than those in the Woman Worker. Indeed, the death of a separate newspaper for women probably further emphasized this economism; the sympathy for women's special oppression so often expressed by Woman Worker writers, was dulled, even absent, in The Worker.

Similarly, articles on women and the Soviet Union reflected the narrower concerns of the new Soviet bureaucracy, and stressed the need for Canadian women to organize in defence of the Soviet Union. While routine mention was made of the "cultural and political growth of Soviet women", and of "their liberation from prejudice and household drudgery."<sup>29</sup> (descriptions which bore little resemblance to the reality of Soviet life), what was given most emphasis was women's equal role in production, and their potential role in the army. In an article entitled 'How Revolutionary Women Prepare for Imperialist War' for

example, Tim Buck argued that a measure of the new role of women in the USSR could be drawn from a wave of militant activity of women in preparation for war: "Soviet women", he said, "are ready to stand in volunteer detachments of the Army."<sup>30</sup>

In order to implement the new 'class versus class' strategy at an organizational level, the Party drew up extensive plans to reorganize the Women's Department; their scheme was to enlarge the Department, appoint a seven member directorate, and create a network of smaller Women's Departments in various districts and cities. The Department was also to be divided into three sections to deal with trade union work, mass organizations and opponent organizations. The first area, reflecting the major priority of CPC work, essentially came to overlap with the Women's Department of the WUL, for it was concerned with tasks such as "colonizing comrades" in important factories, and the issuing of agitational shop newspapers.<sup>31</sup> The second area, referring to work in Finnish, Ukrainian, and Jewish mass organizations, was charted for a major reorientation: first, because the CPC wished to enlarge its ethnic base, drawing in English and French Canadian women, and second, because the Party wished to draw women away from their primary loyalty to parent groups like UFLTA and involve them in the economic struggles of other women workers. Lastly, the Party's work in opponent organizations was also to be transformed: instead of a United Front 'from above', the Party aimed for a 'United Front from below', basically meaning uniting the working-class under CPC auspices alone.

Rival women's organizations, whether they were conservative, liberal or social democratic in outlook were all considered dangerous, but the social democrats were, in particular, an insidious threat to

working-class women, lulling them into the false security of labourite or 'social fascist' solutions. Women's Social Democratic and pacifist groups were to be opposed at all costs; in 1931, for example, the CPC, on the suggestion of the CI, sent extensive memos to all local Party offices instructing them to stage meetings to protest the upcoming Women's British Labour Party Conference, and to publicize the contrast between this Conference and a Communist Women's gathering held in Czechoslovakia. The latter Conference, pointed out the memo, was concerned with concrete measures to organize working-class women, but the first one used reformist and pacifist phrases to disguise their support of imperialism, and deluded women by mouthing slogans like equal pay, while in fact standing for speed-up and the elimination of married women from industry.<sup>32</sup> In Canada, said The Worker, the same dangers existed: "the Macphails, Brigdens, Woodsworths" were to be exposed as "false friends of the working class."<sup>33</sup> Such denunciations could be quite detrimental to the Party, alienating working-class support and earning the CPC the undying hatred of some social democrats.

Ironically, despite the CPC's vocal opposition to social democratic women's organizations, it sometimes shared common assumptions about womanhood with its opponents. The Party, for example, always tried to distinguish itself from the WIL's "bourgeois pacifism which sentimentalizes women";<sup>34</sup> yet, the Party shared an emphasis on maternalism and peace with its ideological enemies in the WIL. Furthermore, there is evidence that Party women did put some limited energy -- at least near the end of the Third Period -- into critical participation in opponent women's organizations like the WIL. The results of the work of secret Communist factions in the WIL are,



however, difficult to measure because of the Party's silence surrounding such work, and because of the limited and sectarian coverage of events given in The Worker.

In order to correct past mistakes in its work among women, including its flirtation with 'bourgeois pacifist ideas', the Party tried to reorganize and transform the WLLs. In an attempt to reestablish contact with the WLLs after Custance's death, and set them on a new course, Alice Buck and a group of Toronto Communists sent a directive to all the known WLLs in January of 1930, trying to ascertain their numbers, composition and activities, and giving them suggestions for future action. As a National Women's Committee had failed to function since Custance's death, English and Jewish WLLs from Toronto elected an interim executive, including Alice Buck as Secretary, and probably made up of women supporting the Buck-Smith group within the Party leadership. This Toronto domination was resented by many Northern Ontario Finnish Leagues which, embroiled in battles with the Party's English-speaking leadership, were resentful of their lack of representation in decision-making about the Leagues.

Many of the responses to Alice Buck's queries substantiated the CI's contention that the Leagues were heavily dominated by Finnish and Ukrainian housewives who were primarily involved in 'reformist' auxiliary work. In order to correct the perceived isolation and conservatism of the Leagues, the CPC, on the suggestion of the CI, placed them under the leadership of the WUL. This was a major change for the WLLs; once guided by the Women's Department, the Leagues would now answer to an organization essentially concerned with trade union organization, and already overburdened with this more 'important' task.

Significantly, the WLLs were to receive strict guidance from the WUL; every district WLL convention, for example, had to have a WUL representative present. The Leagues were also requested to pay one half of their dues to the WUL, and they were to operate under a new constitution stressing their aim to "work for the general interests of the workers, the organization of women workers, against imperialist war and for common struggles of housewives and women workers against capitalist exploitation."<sup>35</sup> Some of the tasks outlined in this new constitution were similar to previous League activities: they were supposed to take part in strike support, to organize "educational activities of a working-class character for women",<sup>36</sup> and to give support to the Pioneer movement (although only when directed to do so by the Party). Their methods of work, however, were posed differently: anti-war activity was now equated with defence of the USSR and opposition to other pacifist groups, and trade union support work was limited to the 'revolutionary' unions recognized by the CPC. These changes were all designed to break down the WLL's traditional isolation by language group, bring them under closer leadership control, and to connect the Leagues with the economic struggles of workers by linking them with the "mainstream of the labour movement",<sup>37</sup> namely the Workers Unity League.

The reorganization of the Leagues did not proceed without complication. Local Leagues voiced apprehension about and disapproval of the lack of consultation involved in the order to affiliate to the WUL; some demanded to know the merits of the new plan and others requested a federal convention of the Leagues to discuss the new strategy. In The Worker, Sudbury organizer Jim Barker argued, in the

1930 pre-Plenum discussion, that the directive to place the Leagues under the WUL should be reassessed, for the WLLs, a political organization composed largely of housewives, was distinct in nature from the "economic centre" of the WUL.<sup>38</sup> Although Barker agreed that the WLLs should take a larger role in economic struggles, he suggested they could do so as an independent organization, directed by the Party and given specific suggestions for local work. The Sudbury district tried its best to resist the new approach to WLL work, informing the Central Office that there was little advantage in affiliation to the WUL, and that many local Leagues opposed it: "What are the Leagues now?", they asked, "the question was decided without knowing how this was done, in areas where there are few Party members in the Leagues, and where affiliation is not understood."<sup>39</sup>

The 1931 Party Plenum, however, gave unequivocal reaffirmation to the policy and local Leagues were told to conform. Gradually, most Leagues affiliated to the WUL, accepting a policy they did not necessarily understand or support. In the Spring of 1931, the Sudbury district WLLs acquiesced and many other districts soon followed suit, submitting routine resolutions of self-criticism for their past 'reformism' to district meetings.

Yet, it does not appear that affiliation to the WUL fundamentally altered the composition or work of the WLLs. Most Leagues remained composed, by majority, of homemakers and many remained ethno-centred. Ethnic women remained closely tied to their respective cultural groups, and little headway was made among French Canadian women, although English membership did begin to rise in the mid-1930's. In 1933, when the Sudbury area reviewed its work with the WLLs, the

meeting concluded not only that the local and district boards governing the WLLs had not worked well, but also that the Leagues, even though organized on a territorial basis, "were still essentially language organizations".<sup>40</sup> Because of their close connection to the WUL, some WLLs did increase their efforts to organize women workers, and to support labour struggles. But the frequency of contact with factory struggles was not substantially transformed, and the kind of help the WLLs gave was similar to their earlier support work. The WLLs in an area like the Crows Nest Pass, for instance, were still concerned with building union auxiliaries, while the Leagues in Northern Ontario were still preoccupied with strike support, summer camps and educational work. Some Leagues continued to pursue consumer activism; in Toronto, for example, the Jewish WLLs mounted a successful boycott of Kosher butchers who raised their prices in 1933.<sup>41</sup> And occasionally, despite attempts to supervise the Leagues work more effectively, they pursued activities unconnected to current Party priorities, such as the Vancouver WLL's public meeting demanding access to birth control information.<sup>42</sup> The barriers imposed by geography, language and indifference to women's work still allowed a measure of autonomy, but this freedom was lamented by the Party, and attempts were made to erase it. Moreover, new Party priorities further restricted the WLLs work, by insisting they were only to participate in the economic struggles of revolutionary unions, therefore effectively isolating the Leagues from working-class women involved in other trade union struggles.

Thus, although the Leagues were constituted as a 'new' entity under the WUL, their functions remained largely unchanged, garnished only by the militant rhetoric of the Third Period. In attempting to

reorganize the Leagues, the Party had placed them under the control of a trade union organization which did not see the WLLs as a priority. By 1934, the Federation of WLLs had diminished in size; some Leagues may have been lost in further Party splits in 1932,<sup>43</sup> others probably faltered due to a lack of sustained Party interest in their activities. The absence of a separate women's newspaper contributed to League problems for the Woman Worker had provided a strong communication network which was lacking in The Worker, and could not have been replaced by the one remaining paper for women, the Ukrainian Robitnysa. The inter-Party battles of 1929-30 and Custance's death had weakened the Federation, and the reorganization scheme which followed only complicated the Leagues' problems. The Party's Third Period critique of the Leagues denigrated their past auxiliary work; yet, the CPC offered few substantial (and workable) directions for change, and gave little time to the WLL's upkeep. In these circumstances, the Leagues which Custance had so carefully nurtured, receded from Party respect and diminished in strength and size.

Despite the Party's criticisms of the Leagues, the WLLs did give important support to some of the Party's (early) Third Period campaigns. In 1930, for example, the CPC decided to send a women's delegation to the USSR, which the Leagues aided by raising money and managing local publicity work. The primary purpose of the delegation was to help build support for the USSR in Canada, especially through the construction of local Friends of the Soviet Union (FSU). Because of the "consolidation of British and American imperialism against the USSR",<sup>44</sup> commented The Worker, a decision was made to send a delegation to the USSR. The delegation was also to advertise the new equality of Soviet women, and

contrast it with the continued exploitation of Canadian women: "the delegation is also a way of reaching working women, enlightening them to their own conditions, as well as the achievements of workers in the USSR."<sup>45</sup>

The Party sent letters about the upcoming trip to women's labour and farm groups across Canada, and selection of delegates, it reported, was held in "ten conferences of workers organizations across the country."<sup>46</sup> In reality, however, a Toronto committee made the final selection of delegates. And although many Leagues raised money for the delegation, some grumbled about it: a B.C. Finnish League voiced its disapproval of the entire delegation idea, maintaining that \$2,000 could be put to better use in Canada.<sup>47</sup> Ontario Finns were also disgruntled, objecting to a delegation which had been constructed without their consultation, and they complained that they had been "left aside"<sup>48</sup> as to their right to appoint a Finnish member of the delegation. In the final selection, however, deference was paid to the two major language groups, for a young Finnish domestic from Northern Ontario, Elsa Tynjala, was chosen, along with an UFLTA activist, Annie Zen, from Alberta. From the coal mining areas of Nova Scotia, the Party invited a working-class homemaker active in the WLLs, Annie Whitfield, while the two trade union representatives were Pearl Wedro, a Jewish furrier and Bessie Schacter, a Montreal tailoress. On their return, the Party hoped to escort these women on a cross country tour, "with mass campaigns, the calling of conferences and demonstrations, utilizing their witness of the USSR to build support for the FSU and the WUL".<sup>49</sup>

The Party's expectations, however, vastly exceeded the actual campaign. Although mass meetings to advertise the testimony of the

delegation about the USSR were held in a few centres like Montreal and Toronto, the project failed to give the Party the anticipated results. Annie Whitfield refused to join the planned tour after Montreal, insisting on returning home for "domestic reasons". The primary reason for her silence, however, may have been her disillusionment with Russia and/or her refusal to tow the Party line. During the delegation's stay in the USSR, Whitfield did not immediately effuse admiration for Russian socialism, and she had to be escorted out on a number of additional tours before she changed her mind. Tom Ewen (also in Russia at the time) reported to Tim Buck that Whitfield was causing problems, threatening to "tell the truth when she gets home -- whatever 'the truth' is"; Stewart Smith later reported that these problems with Whitfield "had been cleared up".<sup>51</sup>

Zen and Tynjala, most comfortable with their own cultural groups, also frustrated the Women's Department with their reluctance to write articles and speak in English, even though they had pledged to do so before leaving for the Soviet Union. Zen, complained Buhay, spoke almost entirely to UFLTA people, "using the excuse of her language" skills<sup>52</sup> to avoid other engagements, and Tynjala also resisted performing in English.<sup>53</sup> It was primarily Pearl Wedro and Bessie Schacter who fulfilled the Party's hopes and became active in the FSU and the WUL after their return. Although The Worker was able, to some extent, to publicize the delegation's favourable view of women in the USSR, the Party was probably quite accurate in concluding that they had "failed to make any concrete organizational gains"<sup>54</sup> from the delegation. Limited by Third Period strategies of working primarily within 'revolutionary' and Communist organizations, and thus lacking a

wide industrial base, the Party recruited limited numbers to the FSU. The WLLs were encouraged to affiliate to the FSU, (as they had earlier been encouraged to join the CLDL), and while this gave the FSU some financial and moral support, it did not really extend its influence over a broad segment of the working class.

Following the delegation project, the WLLs also became involved in the unemployment campaign led by the WUL and its affiliate, the National Unemployed Workers Union (NUWU). As the numbers of unemployed swelled after 1930, the Party began to delineate special forms of work to utilize WLL energies and to draw unemployed women into the NUWU. The National Women's Department made some astute suggestions for organizing unemployed women; each district was asked to mobilize groups of female activists to visit employment agencies, issue advertisements about the NUWU, and leaflet the streets in order to reach unemployed females. District organizers, however, seldom devoted considerable time to such detailed directives on women's work, and so in 1931-32, the major role of women in the unemployment campaign was gathering signatures for the CPC's unemployment petition. The petition, directed towards the federal government and calling for non-contributory unemployment insurance, was to be presented to the government with 100,000 signatures of support. In February of 1931 the National Women's Department issued a circular to all the WLLs, stressing that in the upcoming International Women's Day celebration, one of the most important tasks must be the campaign for petition signatures. The WLLs were to use all their members, doing house to house canvassing, to fulfill the Party objective, and they undoubtedly did contribute a substantial number of signatures through



canvassing work, long associated as a 'female' task in the socialist movement.

The CPC also tried to set up women's sections of the NUWU, but progress, especially in the early years, was less than promising, with optimistic Worker reports barely concealing the weakness of Communist efforts. An attempt in Winnipeg to draw unemployed women away from the Girls Commerical Club into a more militnat organization, for example, was reported in The Worker; but no mention was made of numbers attending the NUWU meeting or of any follow-up organization. Similarly, Communists in Calgary criticized the organization of unemployed women by those "concerned with training women for domestic employment",<sup>55</sup> but Communists' attempts to reach these women were not successful. Early in 1931, a women's section of the NUWU was established in Vancouver, but the organization again had problems. Consisting primarily of wives of the unemployed, the women passed resolutions calling for immediate necessities like free milk in the schools, only to be told that they should take a more "revolutionary" line!<sup>56</sup> This auxiliary to the NUWU existed in tandem with the Vancouver English WLL, and the former may have been absorbed into the latter, for the auxiliary soon disappeared from sight, until an attempt was made to resurrect it two years later.

As the unemployment crisis settled into a permanent way of life for many Canadians, the Party's unemployment campaign both expanded in concept and in strategy. The national petition campaign, while successful in gaining 100,000 signatures, had not been so successful in drawing in new activists, but burgeoning local unemployment and relief campaigns yielded more fuit. In many of the local relief struggles led by Communists, women took an active part, sometimes forming their own

semi-autonomous groups to pursue issues of importance to women on welfare. The WLLs participated in relief work, but increasingly, women either joined forces with the NUWU or created new, ad-hoc women's organizations to deal with Depression conditions.

By 1933, demonstrations before Relief authorities and local governments were becoming common occurrences across Canada. So successful were many 'relief strikes' in Alberta, that Premier Brownlee complained to federal officials that "with Communist activities in large centres, any policy of cutting off relief ... would certainly result in widespread disorder".<sup>57</sup> In the fall of 1932, Alberta Communists organized a massive Hunger March to Edmonton, advertising three demands: unemployment insurance, cancellation of farm debts, and free medical and dental aid. A contingent of women participated in the Edmonton demonstration, and like their male comrades, were caught in the battle with police instigated by frightened local government authorities. Meanwhile, a large group of Ukrainian women prepared food for the hundreds of marchers in the local Ukrainian Labor Temple, which the police had already raided searching for weapons. Finding only the women serving turkey dinners to the paraders, the police 'saved face' by announcing that the Temple contained massive quantities of food, ready to sustain a protracted battle, and thus proving that the Red Hunger Marchers were not really hungry people at all.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the March gained significant publicity, and even cautious sympathy from some social democrats embarrassed by the UFA government and by the hostile reaction of Edmonton's Labour Mayor.<sup>59</sup>

Women usually participated in relief and unemployment protests as support troops -- like the Ukrainian women -- or as part of

separately constituted women's welfare-rights groups. In East Windsor, in the winter of 1932, a delegation of wives of the unemployed presented a list of demands to City Council, arguing for the right to buy any commodity they wished, more money for clothing, and a host of other demands. Encouraged by Communist alderman Tom Raycroft, the women kept their organization intact, and continued to press for welfare reform, backing up their demands with regular deputations and demonstrations before City Hall. In Hamilton, the WLL lobbied for extra Christmas relief vouchers, staging a demonstration in front of City Hall, and protesting police barriers disallowing them access to civic authorities, and in Burnaby, the local WLL led a delegation to city officials demanding more adequate medical aid for families of the unemployed.

In some neighbourhoods, ethnic as well as class solidarity was utilized to unify opposition to relief officials or eviction bailiffs in Winnipeg, UFLTA member and Communist Kay Hladiy quickly organized support for a local family facing eviction by drawing on her UFLTA contacts. In another instance, the same neighbourhood group organized an 'eviction strike', in which all the assembled sympathizers bid 1¢ and 2¢ for an evictee's furniture, effectively stopping an eviction auction.<sup>60</sup> It was in such local struggles that Communist leadership could win occasional reprieve for victims of unemployment, and sometimes augment respect for Communist politics.<sup>61</sup>

While some local struggles proved more effective than national petition campaigns, they sometimes incurred problems inherent in Third Period thinking. Relief protests, particularly in the early years of 1930-32, could take on gestures of uncompromising sloganeering which may have confused and alienated potential supporters. Referring to Relief

Officials as "child starvers"<sup>62</sup> could be dismissed as strong rhetoric, but rejection of all labourite aldermen as "well nurtured old ladies ... who never show any courage"<sup>63</sup> was both destructive of labour support, and also sexist in tone. Not all labourites rejected Communist tactics, but for many, the Communist denunciations of socialists as 'social fascist' left a bitter taste for many years.

Furthermore, the Party never had any major successes in organizing unemployed women workers, despite stated intentions to the contrary, and numerous Women's Department directives to local Communist organizers. The primary focus of unemployment and relief work with women came to centre on the wives of the unemployed; the WLLs were more often found "organizing whist drives" and "dance raffles to fund the Hunger March",<sup>64</sup> than pamphleting women at unemployment exchanges. In 1934, when the CPC's Third Period line had been softened by a growing fear of fascism, their own experiences of Depression organizing, and Soviet hints of rapprochement, the Party initiated a new, more broadly-based organization, the National Unemployment Council. The Council, summing up the Party's view of women and unemployment, stated that "working-class women, especially the wives of the unemployed, suffer most from unemployment."<sup>65</sup> Repeating the well-established view that woman's political understanding was drawn from personal and domestic experiences, and that women, usually conservative in character, could be radicalized on this basis, the Council advised an appeal to women on the basis of their role as manager of the household budget: "women could become good fighters, especially since they are the ones who must stretch the family budget and deal with the insulting relief regulations about purchasing."<sup>66</sup> In order to augment the low number of

women involved in unemployment, struggles, the Party suggested the establishment of women's auxiliaries of unemployment associations, and it now urged a list of immediate demands geared towards working-class mothers, such as hot school lunches, better milk vouchers, adequate new clothing, special care for pregnant women, and the right of wives to receive relief orders.

Difficulties organizing unemployed women workers, of course, were objectively quite immense and the auxiliary model was an easier method of gathering female support. Besides the two major difficulties to unemployment work, state repression and the penalization of relief activists, Communist organizers had to contend with the problematic nature of the unemployed 'work-force'. Unemployment was a fluid state, with some workers drifting in and out of casual jobs, and in and out of various cities. Workers were isolated and often concerned primarily with personal and family survival. Neither did all the unemployed understand and accept their predicament as a social condition; the prevailing strength of dominant ideological maxims of individualism and self-help were crucial in reinforcing feelings of self-blame and isolation.<sup>67</sup>

For women, the pressures of the dominant social norms were even more complex. Women's wage labour was not fully sanctioned by society; in fact, some men in the labour movement persisted in seeing men as bread winners and women as 'temporary' workers. As unemployment mounted, there were public attempts to discourage married women from 'taking jobs away from men'. The depression, claimed the CPC many times, was leading to the unfortunate refrain that women should be sent back to the kitchen.<sup>68</sup> Such pressures undoubtedly hindered women from

joining organizations which proclaimed their right to jobs and equal relief. Moreover, relief discrimination against single women further hindered their organization for many women, outrightly denied relief, were forced either to move out of the city, in with family, or take up part-time domestic work. As one sociologist has said: "the plight of working women in the depression was not taken seriously...women still were not accepted as a permanent part of the labour force and it was assumed that a woman always had a man to protect and support her."<sup>69</sup>

Such assumptions, along with the structural difficulties of unorganizing unemployed women, also influenced the CPC. Despite the Party's annual self-criticism of its meagre efforts with unemployed females, its outlook essentially came to accommodate the prevailing social norms, even though, in principle, the CPC knew them to be false. Like society at large, the Party stressed the plight of unemployed men. One of their later triumphs, the On To Ottawa Trek, symbolized this very well: the few women who went on the Trek as cooks, or even occasional marchers, gave essential aid, but they were not the 'heroes' of the unemployed movement. That role was assumed by the men.

(iv)

The highest priority of the Party's work among women was its intent to organize women into the revolutionary unions of the WUL. Theoretically, the Workers Unity League had three purposes: to radicalize workers in existing unions, organize the unemployed, and direct the formation of new, mass-based, industrial and revolutionary unions. In practice, the Party's labour work stressed the third purpose

over the first and second. And although the WUL was described as a 'revolutionary' union centre, what it actually came to represent to most Canadian workers was "militant industrial unionism".<sup>70</sup> The CI instructed the Party to use the WUL to "bring the working class towards the task of revolutionary struggles for power";<sup>71</sup> this aim was not achieved, but the League did organize previously unorganized workers, building some part of the basis for future industrial unionism in Canada.

The achievements of the WUL did not emerge immediately after 1930, nor were they won easily. The League did not experience substantial growth until 1933-35, when improvements in the WUL's weak organizational structure and an economic upturn aided its organizing efforts. By 1933, the League had toned down its earlier ultra-left language stressing imminent class war, and modified its definition of revolutionary unions by moving back in the direction of a traditional Leninist stand, in which "the new WUL unions were to be mass unions, and revolutionary activities were to be conducted through the Party."<sup>72</sup> With these changes, the WUL began to score some successes despite the immense barriers to its work. Aside from the League's internal problems, such as its constant shortage of organizers, it faced two external problems: economic depression and state repression. The economic context of the early '30's meant that WUL members were often fired for their union activities, while state authorities, using a wide range of tactics -- police bullying, incarceration of union leaders and deportation of ethnic radicals -- further intimidated activists.

To the League's benefit was the fact that it filled a vacuum within the Canadian labour movement. Despite the reduction of wages and

deterioration of working conditions, the TLC made no attempts to organize workers. As income levels fell and jobs disappeared, the TLC's organizational work collapsed and strike activity plummeted, and the Internationals clung even more tenaciously to their craft mentality, trying desperately just to maintain their current membership. The WUL stepped into this breach, adding their political zeal and some innovative organizing techniques. And for some Left-wing trade unionists, already sympathetic to the CPC, the WUL signalled rescue from the caution and neglect of the International union movement. This was the case for Pearl Wedro and her fellow fur workers, who bitterly recalled the neglect of their International's head office during a strike in the mid-1920's. For women workers in particular, the WUL offered potential salvation from the long-standing neglect of the TLC. Consistently and purposefully ignored by the union movement, women now faced an alternative trade union movement, theoretically concerned with all workers, male and female, skilled and unskilled. In fact, the Party and the WUL publicly pledged to devote themselves to the doubly exploited -- women and youth.

"The main task of our work among women," said the 1931 Plenum, "is to orientate the whole of the Party towards work among women in the factories."<sup>73</sup> Initially, the Party drew its analysis of the situation of women workers and their potential for organization from the CI, which argued (largely from European conditions) that women would move to revolutionary consciousness as a result of their increasing exploitation in the economic crisis. The task of the Party was to intervene, especially in workers' spontaneous struggles, draw the necessary 'lessons' for the workers, and bring them into revolutionary unions.



The WUL was to colonize key areas of female concentration, such as the needle trades, textiles, food and rubber industries; special time was also to be directed towards women working in auto manufacturing, considered a potential war industry. Tactically, the Party advocated various methods of making contact with women workers, although in general, one strategy usually prevailed: initial contacts were made by WUL organizers, for workers rarely sought out the WUL. Communist comrades colonized in factories of union potential were to issue workplace papers, with accounts of working conditions and suggestions for organizing, and secondly, were to hold delegate conferences for the whole industry, to try and prepare the grounds for a strike. The Party further recommended that women workers initially establish factory groups based on non-threatening social, sport or recreational activities, and later introduce women's demands, such as equal pay, better sanitary facilities and the abolition of night work, to the discussion.

The WUL's blueprint for action, however, sometimes faltered in the face of problems internal and external to the League. Factory colonization was difficult as there were few comrades to take up these posts, and for some, like the YCLers attempting to organize the Silknit factory in Toronto, dismissal quickly followed their agitational activities. Shop newspapers, when they emerged, were often unspecific, unrelated to the immediate working conditions of the factory and contained slogans removed from the workers' needs (in the early years, for example, some rejected the demands of union recognition as 'reformist!'). Organizing efforts were scattered over a wide area until about 1933, when the WUL began a process of 'concentration', channelled

their organizational efforts into a few prospective factories. Nor was the WUL able to easily intervene in spontaneous struggles, as the CI advised, partly because such struggles were not plentiful, (hardly surprising in depression conditions) and partly because workers were not always amenable to CPC interference. The latter was the case in the 1929 strike at Hamilton's Canada Cottons; this spontaneous and solidly-supported strike of mill workers against speed-up measures was cited in the Party press as a key example of the CI's correct prophecy that factories would increasingly rationalize and speed up women's work processes. But the Party was unable to make any inroads with the workers, who rejected the WUL's intervention in the strike.<sup>74</sup> And even the CI's predictions sometimes fell short of women's actual work experiences. Women were not always used to replace male labour, as CI documents suggested; in fact, some employers replaced women with men to avoid Minimum Wage laws. Nor was there a significant increase in the employment of women in war-related industries, as the CI had suggested would occur.

WUL efforts also came up against structural difficulties inherent in organizing 'women's' industries. Female textile workers like those at Canada Cottons, for example, were young sojourners in the workforce, who had a high turnover rate and lacked a strong union tradition. The Depression years saw a reversal of previous trends towards female employment in service industries, and a massive increase in female employment in part-time and full-time domestic work, an occupation which was traditionally known as an organizers 'nightmare'.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, WUL organizers themselves were less concerned with these women's industries than with mass-production, heavy industry in which

men worked. Many Party organizers shared with their enemies in the TLC the understanding (if only unstated) that women were temporary, rather than permanent, wage earners and that their primary role was a domestic and maternal one. Contrary to Party suggestions, the slogan of 'equal pay' was rarely heard in WUL organizing and strike activity. Throughout the Third Period the Party often echoed the criticism voiced by Annie Buller in the very first edition of the Workers Unity that there was a "complete lack of organizational and educational work among women." Women, commented Pearl Wedro in retrospect, were often prevented from taking a leading role in union organizing:

Usually in unions, women took a backward [sic] seat. And they weren't elected, and they were kind of looked as people who paid their dues, they come and go ... even in progressive-led [CP] unions, a woman's chances are less than a man's ... if I was a man I think I would have been placed with the highest responsibility ... But that was not the case.

The ultra-left atmosphere of the Third Period and the Party's precarious legal standing reinforced the difficulties in integrating women into the Party's labour work, particularly as union organizers. Many women were unable to accommodate themselves to the imperatives of underground work and union organizing, which often necessitated separation from one's family and the possibility of jail terms. Women did not fit easily into the transient, rough-and-ready, sleep-anywhere, hard-cut revolutionary stereotype of the CPC's militant phraseology, and many women, unless graced by exceptional circumstances, had day-to-day family obligations which could not be ignored. For some young activists, the CPC's revolutionary stance was attractive; and the Third Period saw the recruitment of dynamic radicals like Dorothy Livesay and Jim Watts, and the establishment of energetic cultural ventures like the Progressive Arts Club in Toronto. Nonetheless, the Third Period style

of political work also excluded many women. As writer Dorothy Livesay wrote of her experiences in the Party during the early 30's:

The young organizer for whom I wrote pamphlets had two children; and a wife who was 'unpoliticized' and left behind in the kitchen whilst we were at meetings. Such were the dichotomies I found in male-female relationships in the thirties ... In theory, we were free and equal comrades on the Left. <sup>78</sup> In practice, our right hand was tied to the kitchen sink.

Despite all these obstacles, the WUL had some success organizing women workers. It was able to gain a foothold in the needle trades in Toronto, Montreal, and Winnipeg, and it had scattered locals of Food, Shoe, Textile and Furniture workers which included significant numbers of women.<sup>79</sup> One of the WUL's strong points, the needle trades, historically had proven difficult to organize, for it was highly competitive, it encompassed many small shops, and made extensive use of cheap, home workers. On the shop floor, female workers were confined to less skilled jobs, and even for the same tasks, received less pay than men. Still, the garment industry had a history of militancy and a union tradition, both of which included female as well as male workers.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, WUL organizers were aided by the existence of a Jewish Left subculture in the needle trades, built on the ethnic and class solidarity of East European Jewish workers.

Garment workers, however, were not only East European Jews, and WULers had to fashion alliances between various skill groups and ethnic groups to unionize one shop, or to carry out a 'general strike' of many shops. Organizers also had to combat the opposition of the ILGWU. The IUNTW's first confrontation with Toronto employers in 1931 proved a decided failure, in part because of inadequate WUL preparation and strike support, but more importantly, because its attack on the rival ILGWU proved suicidal. In the five day strike of January 1931,

organized by the WUL, about 300 dressmakers walked out demanding better pay and shorter hours, but within days, the strike had been defeated. The defeat, claimed the IUNTW, was the result of ILGWU scabs who did not honour the picket line -- not a surprising fact, when ILGWU leaders were being denounced as "fascists and gangsters".<sup>81</sup> Barely a month later, the IUNTW itself opposed the larger ILGWU strike of about 2000 workers, and in the end, the main losers were the workers who failed to gain their wage increases.

In subsequent years, however, WUL organizers increasingly directed their efforts towards the unorganized, rather than simply opposing existing International unions. By 1934, 12 IUNTW locals existed across Canada, and the WUL's successes in organizing dressmakers was causing ILGWU officials some concern, even prodding them out of their organizing lethargy. In 1933, Canadian ILGWU officials were pressing their International headquarters for more organizing funds, pointing to the IUNTW's "prestige" and their advances with workers in parts of the industry previously ignored.<sup>82</sup> In Montreal, IUNTW secretary Joshua Gershman achieved important successes in organizing garment workers of various ethnicities and in 1934 mounted a general strike of dressmakers which brought thousands of women workers into the streets to demand better wages. Although the strike had only limited successes, as some shops gave increased wages, but most would not accept union recognition, it did unite women across language barriers and disapproved the "myth" that French Canadian women were 'unorganizable', thus laying the basis for future union drives.<sup>83</sup>

The WUL had fewer successes outside of the needle trades. Often, the League mounted strikes which resulted in temporary gain, or

at least prevented wage cutbacks, but failed to gain union recognition. A WUL-sponsored strike at Mercury Mills in Hamilton focused its demands around opposition to the Bedeaux system of work organization (essentially a speed-up measure). Because the Company threatened to close its Hamilton plant and move to Woodstock, many workers returned to work, and the union was not recognized. Nonetheless, some workers remained members of the WUL union and the Labour Gazette concluded that the strike was a 'draw', for there were improvements made in piece work, and generally no discrimination in re-hiring.<sup>84</sup>

WUL strikes were not 'reckless ventures' as the TLC often claimed; in Ontario, for example, the WUL had the same rate of success/compromise (about 65%) as the Internationals.<sup>85</sup> And WUL strikes were always hindered by intense employer intimidation and Red-baiting because of the League's connection to the Communist Party. In southern Ontario, the WUL managed to set up seven locals of the Textile Workers Industrial Union of Canada, many of them in small centres like Paris, Galt and Welland, where workers could more easily be intimidated by local authorities. The CPC claimed, for example, that one of the WUL's first attempts to intervene in a strike against wage reductions at the Welland mill met with little success because the Catholic Church warned workers not to join the union. Even in large centres, this intense hostility to the WUL hindered organizers. In a strike of Winnipeg fur workers, led by the WUL's Freda Coodin, workers picketted not only the factory, but also the owner's home. Police immediately arrested Coodin on a number of charges, and she received a severe jail sentence. Already susceptible to Tuberculosis, Coodin died shortly afterward, a martyr to the movement.

WUL efforts were also limited by the seasonal and temporary nature of many women's occupations. The League outlined plans to organize women completely ignored by craft unions: women in the canning industry and female chicken pluckers were considered union potential, even if Party organizing strategies did not give them first priority. By 1934, the League had five Food and Industrial Workers affiliates, including a significant female membership. But because work in the food industry was often seasonal, unions were difficult to sustain. In 1933, Communists organized women in a St. Catharines cannery, and after a strike, the women secured an offer of increased wages. Soon after their victory, however, the employer reneged on his promise, brought in strikebreakers from nearby St. Thomas, and had police intimidate pickets set up by the original workers, thus defeating the union. In a time of economic depression, and with a labour code primarily written to defend employers interests, the WUL could only mount guerilla attacks against the industrial system, achieving minor and temporary gains, but falling short of their desired goal, mass industrial unionism.

In many labour disputes in 'male' occupations, women were drawn into strike support work; WUL organizers, ever-aware of the need to gain family and community support, often set up wives and children's strike committees. Sometimes, women's strike support was recruited through the language organizations; planning a strike in the lumber industry in 1934, for example, WUL leaders confidently reported that food for the workers would be supplied by UFLTA farmers, and it would be cooked and served by UFLTA women.<sup>86</sup> Women were often organized around specific demonstrations, or as extra picket duty. In a WUL-led strike in a Kitchener tannery, women relatives and friends maintained the picket

line, making sure that strikebreakers regretted their decision to scab,<sup>87</sup> and in the famous Stratford strike of furniture workers, the small number of female strikers were joined by wives of strikers in a parade held to protest the dispatch of troops to the city:

A few thousand protestors ... followed the route taken earlier by the troops. Some found an old boiler, put it on wheels, painted 'Big Bertha' on the side and rolled it through the streets, wearing pots and pans on their heads in mockery of the soldiers.<sup>88</sup>

In a bitterly-fought WUL strike of miners in Flin Flon, local women, aided by a young Communist organizer from Winnipeg, Mabel 'Mickey' Marlowe, organized a soup kitchen, a series of anti-scab demonstrations and picket support. Amidst a virulent anti-Communist campaign, the Hudson's Bay Smelting Company sponsored a back-to-work vote. Members of the WUL's Mine Workers Union of Canada and its women's auxiliary blocked the entrance to the Hall where the vote was being held, and pelted scabs with missiles. As one woman remembers:

We went down to the community hall and all us women were on the steps and blocked the doorway. I had two eggs in my pocket and I waited until two strikebreakers was trying<sup>89</sup> to get through and I threw my eggs -- they made a lovely mess.

Many newspapers included colourful accounts of the women's activities, but some reporters were aghast at the women's 'unfeminine' tenacity in their anti-scab campaign:

Mickey Marlowe stood on the steps singing songs with the miners wives, including 'We'll hang the scabs on a Sour Apple Tree' .... the women joined in, describing scabs in coarse terms .. and one<sup>90</sup> scab was even stripped to the waist by women at the rail depot.

Despite the active support of their families, the miners suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of a very powerful Company; in the aftermath of the strike, one local woman was charged with assault, and



Marlowe received a one-year sentence for charges of unlawful assembly and intimidation.

In many of these strike support actions, women's auxiliaries were ad-hoc organizations which disappeared after the strike, although the 1933 Stratford Furniture Workers strike did spawn a women's auxiliary which lived on for a period of time. Inbetween labour disputes, Communist women were encouraged to raise funds for the CLDL, and the Workers International Relief (WIR), a Communist-sponsored organization which gave financial support to WUL struggles. This support work did not differ markedly from the role played by women in the WLLs in the 20's; their tasks were similar, only the union affiliations had changed. Perhaps though, the isolation of the WUL from the rest of the union movement made women's strike support all the more essential.

In assessing the WUL's work among women, therefore, some continuities with the Party's trade union work in the '20's can be discerned. Yet, in contrast to the previous decade, the Third Period gave more emphasis to the unionization of women workers, and although WUL organizing often faltered in the face of economic depression and state repression, or as a result of the WUL's isolationist tactics, some important advances were made. In the needle trades, new locals of the IUNTW appeared; some female textile and food workers were temporarily organized; and three unions of domestics even survived under the WUL banner. The Party's ambitious aim of giving extra attention to the doubly exploited was, however, constantly compromised. The many areas targeted for WUL attention were continually narrowed; few organizers could be spared to organize women, and demands like equal pay -- perhaps

considered a luxury in depression times -- were almost never introduced into labour struggles. The CPC's alternative trade union movement did not have the resources to challenge the established labour movement, although, in the long run, it demonstrated the value of, and laid a basis for later industrial unionism. Women, already ignored by craft unionism, fared relatively, but not substantially better in the WUL, which shared some of the TLC's views of women as 'secondary' earners. Measured by the efforts of the TLC, the WUL was a large success in organizing women; measured by its own proclamations or even self-criticism, its efforts were mediocre.

( v )

As the Communist Party tightened its program and organization into a more rigid, 'Left' orientation, Canadian social democrats still found themselves lacking organizational unity. Since the close of the first War, there had been one major attempt to join socialists and labourites into a national, mass-based and union-affiliated party, analagous to the British Labour Party. Originally initiated in 1917 by the TLC, the Canadian Labour Party (CLP) was soon deserted to socialists and labourites who tried to strengthen and solidify existing municipal parties under the CLP's national banner. The CLP was given a loose federal structure, a practical response to strong regional loyalties, and it allowed a wide variety of groups to affiliate. By the mid-1920's, the Party was badly divided by growing Communist strength within its ranks, and most labourites abandoned their Party in 1927-28, when Communists came to dominate leadership positions. Some disgruntled

social democrats repaid their Communist foes by forcing their expulsion from trade unions and local Trades and Labour Councils; many regrouped into new local labour parties. Despite the demise of the CLP, these regional parties persisted, carrying on with educational work and involvement in municipal and provincial elections.

A small minority of activist women were noticeable in local labour parties throughout the '20's and in the early years of the depression decade. These women participated in general Party work, such as education and electioneering, and they sometimes set up their own women's labour groups, linked to, but theoretically distinct from, the larger Labour Party. Some women's groups, like the Hamilton Women's ILP, had been created before the 1920's, but continued, somewhat diminished into the next decade. Others, like the Calgary Women's Dominion Labour Party, were post-war creations which augmented their work in the late '20's. Women's labour groups, like the various labour parties, were not homogeneous in outlook, ranging in sympathy from Marxist and socialist ideas, to a more moderate labourite view. They drew on pre-war traditions of working-class women's organizations, like label leagues and union auxiliaries, but they also developed new methods of political work. Perhaps encouraged by the granting of formal political equality, and also by the slightly expanded role of women in the labour force, labourite women increased their political profile in the 1920's, trying to extend their right to vote into meaningful social and economic gains for women. Within their semi-autonomous women's organizations, they concentrated on working-class problems, often articulating their concerns from a feminist, or maternal feminist

perspective, stressing women's separate sphere and central role in the family.

In Calgary, a women's group grew from the Labour Representation Committee, a loosely-defined organization of socialists and labourites drawn together by William Irvine in 1919. In 1920, the Committee became the Dominion Labour Party (DLP), and by the end of 1920, a semi-autonomous women's section of the Party had evolved, led by women like Edith Patterson, Marion Carson, and later Amelia Turner, all of whom who were also active in the larger Party.

Edith Patterson, a Maritimer, and by profession a school teacher, was introduced to Marxism early in life by her brothers, and after moving West, she became involved in the socialist movement through Irvine's Unitarian Church. Marion Carson, also a school teacher and early member of Irvine's Church, became involved in an anti-war group during World War I, and from there entered labourite politics. After the war, Carson, and her sister Rachel Coutts founded the Calgary Women's Labor League, a group named in the British ILP tradition, and apparently unconnected to the Communist WLLs. The Calgary WLL was soon transformed into the Women's Section of the Dominion Labour Party.

In the late 1920's, these women were joined by Amelia Turner, the daughter of a large, Ontario family homesteading in the Fort MacLeod area. Turner, who was largely self-educated, moved to Calgary in her early 20's to find work, and after trying a variety of white collar jobs, became a reporter for the Western Independent, later the United Farmer of Alberta. After acquiring some newspaper skills and considerable political acumen, Turner pooled her talents and money with her husband, Walter Smith, founding the Western Farm Producer. Turner's

desire to carve out a non-traditional role for herself reflected her determination to break with the confining, secondary status she witnessed women assuming in rural political life; women's second-class citizenship, she reasoned was hardly a fair reward for their intelligence, and for the important role they played in sustaining pioneer communities.<sup>91</sup> Turner's socialism was shaped by her early rural life, her white collar work, and her later study of social conditions; her political outlook included an ethical critique of the inhumanity and waste of capitalism, and a debt to cooperative principles. Like Marion Carson and Edith Patterson, Amelia Turner combined her commitment to working-class issues with feminist sympathies, maintaining a membership in middle-class women's organizations like the United Nations Club and the Canadian Women's Press Club. Also like Carson, she took a keen interest in educational issues, entering local politics as a candidate for a School Board. Turner ran her first successful campaign at 25, when she entered the 1926 recall election, defeating the incumbent on a platform of free school books for children.

Labourite women in Edmonton, like their sisters in Calgary, maintained their own women's section of the labour party throughout the 1920's. At this time, one of the driving forces behind the Edmonton women's section was Mary Crawford, a well-educated high school teacher from the East, who was known not only for her participation in local women's organizations, but also for her militant leadership of the Edmonton Teachers Alliance through their battles for better wages and collective bargaining rights. Although little is known about the Edmonton women's group, they undoubtedly read the Alberta Labour News, which included, for a time, a regular women's column edited by Edith

Patterson. The column gave heavy emphasis to trade union news and reports from the British Labour Party, with many articles excerpted from The Labour Women. Patterson tried to interest the wives and daughters of trade unionists in DLP work, pointing out that reforms for working women, such as equal pay, could only be won with collective action. On controversial issues, such as the 1924 birth control controversy in the British Labour Party, Patterson was cautious, siding in this case with the conservative wing of the British Party, which rejected 'feminist' demands for birth control resolutions in favour of working-class and Party 'unity'.<sup>92</sup> Class conscious in outlook, Patterson's column maintained a consistent call for "working-class unity of men and women in political action."<sup>93</sup> Yet at times, Patterson expressed sympathy for the ideas of feminists like Nellie McClung and Irene Parlby, and she advocated cooperation with reform groups like the Local Council of Women. She also believed that woman's distinct maternal character conditioned her interest in issues such as peace, education of the young and health care, and she generally accepted the idea of a sexual division of labour. She supported, for example, the institution of special homemaking classes to train young girls for domestic jobs and for their later domestic life. Her political views, therefore, combined a labourite and working-class perspective with ideas drawn from maternal feminism.

Women's labourite groups in other provinces shared this political perspective. In Ontario, one of the most active organizations was the Hamilton Women's ILP, established in 1917 after women won the provincial vote. Although the Women's ILP peaked in strength in 1919, it continued its work into the next decade; in 1920, it aided the

formation of a United Women's Educational Federation of Ontario, which was allied to the Labour Educational Association,<sup>94</sup> and after 1924, Hamilton women transferred most of their energies to the Federation. In the 1920's, the Hamilton Women's ILP was given important leadership by Janet Inman, a textile worker and activist in the Workers Educational Association,<sup>95</sup> and by Mary McNab, a minister's daughter whose work in the garment industry led to her involvement in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union and in labour politics. McNab also held executive positions in the Hamilton ILP and the Canadian Labour Party, while Inman ran as an ILP candidate for the Hamilton School Board.

Besides supplying social and financial aid to the larger Party through their auxiliary work, the Women's ILP discussed and advertised issues of concern to working-class women. They pressed the government for improved legislation governing working conditions, and for increased financial aid to disadvantaged working-class housewives. The Women's ILP often used a maternal feminist rationale to urge women's participation in politics, and like many of the earlier suffragists, trusted in government as a neutral tool which could be captured by honest political work. McNab and Inman, for example, sat on government boards like the Widows Pension Board, positions other socialists and most Communists would have been wary to accept. There is also some evidence that the Ontario Labour Women's Educational Association became more conservative in outlook in the late 1920's, defending labour legislation like the Minimum Wage Laws against its more radical critics. As early as 1924, the Toronto Labour Leader, a conservative, anti-socialist labour paper applauded the women's "moderate" approach,

implying they fit into the conservative business unionism advocated by the paper.<sup>96</sup>

Women's labourite groups existed in other cities although inadequate records preclude all but a meagre assessment of their activities. In Regina, the Women's Labour League for a time offered a home to Communists and labourites. Likewise, in Toronto, the WLL included Communists and some non-Communist labour women in its early years, and this successful 'United Front' may explain the absence of a strong women's ILP or Labour Party in Toronto, although it is possible that ILP women's auxiliaries functioned in some areas of the city. In Vancouver, a Women's Labour Group was in existence in 1924, and was heavily involved in municipal elections, with many women organizing the ward campaigns. Later that year, however, a Vancouver meeting of the Canadian Labour Party ruled against the establishment of a CLP women's auxiliary. The idea was rejected as inappropriate and "segregationalist"<sup>97</sup> in a socialist party; women, it was maintained, should be part of ward organizations, doing the same political tasks as men, and only if it was absolutely necessary, should women form a committee to do special work among women. Labour Party reports in the B.C. Federationist seldom addressed women's issues, other than pointing to one "badly attended" educational at which a Mrs. Lorimer spoke to the assembled few on 'woman and the social question'.<sup>98</sup> One or two prominent women did appear as CLP candidates in the 1920's: Rose Henderson ran for federal office under the CLP banner in 1925, and Priscilla Smith ran in a number of municipal contests. Smith, who had come to Vancouver politics via the Calgary Labour Party, was a protégé of the Woodsworths. As a nurse in Winnipeg's North End before the war,



she had experienced an awakening of her social conscience, and her contact with All Peoples had led her into labourite politics.

Records of women's labourite activity in Winnipeg are more extensive, primarily because of the leadership of Beatrice Brigden and her attempts to construct a Western federation of labour and socialist women. In the post-war years, many Winnipeg labourite women congregated around a women's study and social group attached to the ILP; one of these activists, Jessie McLennan, became active in municipal politics. The women's ILP group formed the nucleus of the Western Labour Women's Social and Economic Conference, a loose federation predominantly labourite in outlook, but not officially attached to any one political party. The purpose of the Conference was to create an autonomous and self-directed organization concerned with working-class women's issues.

The Women's Labour Conference was the brainchild of Beatrice Bridgen, a woman whose political evolution linked the pre-war Social Gospel movement with post-war secular socialist politics. Brigden, one of seven children raised on a homestead near Brandon, was in her early years deeply involved in the Methodist Church, and after an education at Albert College in Brandon and the Toronto School of Expression (for training in elocution), she was employed by the Social and Evangelism Department of the Methodist Church to educate young women about the ideals of 'social purity'. After a short training period in the U.S., Brigden spent seven years crisscrossing Canada, speaking with young women about sexuality and marriage. For Brigden, her work was both a crusade to Christianize and to emancipate women, for the knowledge she brought to young women would, she thought, put an end to women's ignorance (and to the white slave traffic which played on that

ignorance), and would encourage women's wider participation in the world through their social service work.<sup>99</sup> Dedicated and sincere, Brigden still found her work fraught with difficulties, including the opposition of some clergy and her own middle-class naivete. Her lengthy reports to the Social and Evangelism Department revealed a young woman with a very sheltered upbringing; she was shocked by the behaviour of less well-mannered women who "like street girls...we might get at the Fred Victor Mission",<sup>100</sup> by tales of illegitimacy, and by what she called the ignorance and "degradation"<sup>101</sup> of some non-English-speaking immigrant workers. Yet, ignorance was relative, a fact which Brigden slowly realized. When told by one working-class woman in an Alberta mining town that her husband had worked the graveyard shift for six months, Brigden replied that she was horrified to discover the "death rate could be so high as to keep a man digging graves for six months"<sup>102</sup>. She was later embarrassed by her own comments.

Brigden's attitudes were increasingly challenged, not only by her experiences as a Church lecturer, but also by her experiences in post-war Manitoba. Disillusioned with the Church in the aftermath of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, and angered with A.E. Smith's forced resignation from his Brandon Church, Brigden withdrew from the organized Church, feeling that a "great opportunity" had been thrown aside:

After the General Conference of the Methodist Church, I always felt that the millenium had come and saw a great future for Methodism...now, I find local Churches are repudiating the General Conference...I came away ashamed and disgusted. 103

Influenced by A.E. Smith and J.S. Woodsworth, Brigden became more and more involved in secular politics; in the early 1920's, she joined the Dominion Labour Party, then later the ILP, and from her organization of

a women's study group in Brandon, grew the idea for the Western Women's Conference. In 1924, she hosted the first Conference in Brandon. About 40 women attended, from 22 different organizations; the majority were labourite in outlook, but a minority came from the more radical WLLs. The Conference, dominated by the labourites, passed resolutions on which most delegates could agree, such as protests against military training and war, and against reductions in mothers allowances; and it formed an interim executive to carry on its educational work. Brigden rejected attempts to regulate membership, pushing instead for a loose organization and open membership. The result, claimed the Communists, was that "local opinion"<sup>104</sup> (whoever hosted the Conference) dominated, but Brigden wanted above all else, a United Front of women activists, unalligned with one Party or sectarian group.

Conference resolutions did vary from year to year, but they consistently expressed concern for some of the immediate issues facing working-class women, such as better Minimum Wage Laws and more adequate Mothers Allowances. In 1930, however, the Conference took a paternalistic turn, preoccupying itself with questions of eugenics and sterilization of the unfit, in a manner reminiscent of some of the earlier suffragists.<sup>105</sup> Nonetheless, from 1924 to 1932 the Conferences provided a valuable forum in which social democrats and Communists (until 1929) could share ideas on political goals and strategy, and in some cases work together on issues of concern to working-class women. For labourite and socialist women, the Conferences provided an ongoing network of contact and communication in which women of similar politics could maintain links and learn from one another. As Conference women

later joined the CCF, this same network aided the growth of the new Party and helped establish Women's CCF Study Groups in various cities.

In the post-war years, farm women also adopted distinctive organizations to represent their political concerns, and some of these became building blocks for later CCF Women's groups. Despite the 1921 election of a female Progressive M.P., Agnes Macphail, to Parliament, farm women did not look to a national political focus, but concentrated their energies on provincial lobby groups like the United Farmers of Manitoba (UFM), United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) and the United Farmers of Canada, Saskatchewan Section (UFC). Nonetheless, because she was a lone female M.P., and someone who saw her electoral responsibilities primarily to the farming population, Macphail was often perceived as a torchbearer and symbol by other farm women.

To a certain extent, Macphail also became a symbol for Canadian feminists for in the House of Commons, she took up issues like equal pay and she was constantly asked to address the question of women's social and economic inequality in her public speeches. In the 1920's Macphail was also closely associated with the pacifist movement and as such, was an important ally for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Macphail was not eager to label herself a feminist, perhaps because on a personal level, she disliked being an isolated woman M.P., an object of curiosity, and she feared further isolation if she adopted a feminist stance.<sup>106</sup> Macphail also believed that many feminists wanted 'special privileges', an idea she thought would obscure her equal merits and abilities, and possibly prevent her acceptance by men on terms of equality. Nonetheless, Macphail's writing often betrayed a sympathy for women's oppression; her feminism, couched in liberal, humanist terms,

stressed women's equal talents, the right of women to have a career if they wished, and their right to some measure of economic independence. Women, she also argued in the tradition of maternal feminism, had stronger imaginations and intuition than men, and a maternal interest in the home and family which resulted in their fierce adherence to "human values".<sup>107</sup> From these female characteristics, she concluded, came women's unique opportunity to "elevate national morals".<sup>108</sup> Macphail understood, at best, the more complex dimensions of women's inequality, for she occasionally spoke of the embodiment of female inferiority in "a social structure resting on property and male dominance."<sup>109</sup> But most often, her speeches on women promoted a cautious liberal feminism, and reflected the lingering influence of maternal feminist ideas.

Macphail maintained a strong interest in the work of women's farm organizations, and often urged them to organize and voice their concerns on political and social issues. In Manitoba, the United Farm Women of Manitoba (UFWM) carried on in the tradition of the pre-war women's farm groups, or like the rural Women's Institutes, doing fund raising and auxiliary work, and discussing issues relating to education, public health, social welfare and peace. On issues of common concern, such as temperance, the UFWM showed an interest in working with the Local Council of Women, and it sometimes shared the latter's conservative views; it voiced an aspiration, for instance, to inspect, limit and control 'undesirable' immigrants, and to forcibly sterilize "mental defectives."<sup>110</sup>

A small minority of the UFWM was more radical, and wanted to effect alliances with the labour and socialist movements. Later rural CCF candidates Bessie Keating and Ira Thompson pointed to their early

political education in the UFWM, and Mrs. T.W. McLelland, a farm wife from Letellier, was first active in the Independent Farmers Party, then as President of the UFWM, before she joined the CCF and was elected to the CCF provincial leadership. Such women, however, were the exception rather than the rule.

Like the UFWM, the United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA) carried on with the activities of the pre-war UFA Women's Section. They organized youth groups, performed auxiliary functions, acted as a study and pressure group for health, education and social welfare issues, and from time to time, commented on women's rights, calling for example, for better property laws for married women. Also like the UFWM, the United Farm Women of Alberta was reformist in outlook, and not generally sympathetic to socialism. Like many labourite women, it was interested in peace, and some UFWA locals joined the WIL and lobbied for an end to cadet training. But the United Farm Women were also keenly interested in alliances with middle-class reform groups like the Local Council of Women, with whom the UFWA lobbied for restricted immigration. The UFWA expressed a minor interest in the birth control issue; in the early 1920's, the President used a eugenicist rationale of 'better breeding' to justify the necessity of birth control information, but by 1934, the Women's Convention had replaced this rationale with a simple call for "adequate information on family limitation ... as the right of all married women."<sup>111</sup>

In 1932, a minority group from the United Farmers met with other Alberta groups to discuss the formation of a new Party, the CCF. Women like Nellie Paterson and Alice Ness, who had their roots in the UFA and the rural cooperative movement, took their experience and rural concerns

into the new Party, but only a small number of women actually moved from the UFA into the more radical CCF. Instead, in contrast to the Saskatchewan experience, the mainstay of the Alberta CCF was built from urban Labour Parties.

Sandwiched inbetween the UFWA and UFWM was the Women's Section of the United Farmers of Canada, Saskatchewan Section (UFC), a group which showed more sympathy for labour and socialist causes. The UFC was the product of the Farmers Union of Canada, founded in 1921 to consolidate the cooperative and commercial aspects of the farm movement, and the older Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association (SGGA). In 1925 these two organizations merged, bringing a long tradition of women's separate SGGA groups together with the growing militancy of the FUC. In the new organization, women were given an assured representation of three seats on the Provincial Board. Many women who later became CCFers -- Elsie Hart, Annie Hollis, Sophia Dixon, Louise Lucas, Mrs. S. Haight -- had their political inauguration in the UFC. Some were rural teachers, who after marriage into a local farm family, maintained a strong community presence; others were farm wives whose experience in local politics, women's groups or the cooperative movement led them to the UFC.

Louise Lucas, one of the best known female UFC leaders, immigrated to Saskatchewan from Chicago with her husband and eventually settled on a farm near Mazenod. An outgoing and self-confident woman, Lucas soon found herself elected to the UFC convention from her local lodge, and within two years, who was playing a prominent role in the UFC, organizing Farm Women's Week and sitting on the UFC Executive Board. In the early years of the movement, Lucas, like many women

raising a family, was unable to take a public role and she did her organizing and writing from her kitchen table. Later, unlike many women, she was able to forgo her home responsibilities to a sympathetic family and became a travelling organizer and speaker. Like most UFC activists, Lucas was motivated by a desire to improve the farmers' lot with higher farm prices, easier access to credit and better social and community services. An intensely religious woman, Lucas' activism was also shaped by her vision of Christian cooperation and Brotherhood. Mesmerized by her first reading of Bellamy's Equality and Looking Backward Lucas felt she found the answers to:

Questions she had been asking preachers and teachers since she was twelve years old -- why people had to do a great many things contrary to the principles of Christ, just to make a living ... page after page quietly, and to her logically without hate or fever ... showed Capitalism ... revealed as the devil's own system -- the economic cause of colossal corruption and misery. The solution? Socialism -- not by violence, but by education and understanding.<sup>112</sup>

Her vision of a new economic and social order, often described in millennial terms, was equated with the realization of the Christian principles of the Brotherhood of man, and her own political work, she believed, was guided in a direct way by the hand of God.

In the first three years of the UFC's existence, the women often met before or during the annual convention to discuss issues of special concern to women, but in 1928, a new strategy was attempted with the initiation of Farm Women's Week, held during the summer months at the University of Saskatchewan. A woman delegate from each lodge attended this week-long conference of education and discussion, and the conference drew up resolutions to be sent to the later UFC convention. Although Farm Women's Week was placed before schools' end to permit women with children to come, attendance was still a difficult



proposition for farm wives hard pressed for cash. Nonetheless, solutions were found; one woman recalls "all those who carefully saved some egg money year round .. so they [could have the] chance to discuss issues and socialize with other women."<sup>113</sup>

At its inaugural meeting in 1928, the UFC women were addressed by feminists Irene Parlby and Laura Jamieson, and delegates tackled a number of contentious social problems, including a resolution calling for legal access to birth control information. When the resolution appeared again in 1929, it was tabled, but the women passed it again in 1930 and sent it to the main UFC convention. Resurrected yet again in 1931, the resolution was finally defeated, once and for all, after some UFC leaders, particularly Louise Lucas, prophesied it would alienate supporters and split the movement on religious grounds. Nevertheless, many delegates defended the resolution, including Sophia Dixon, who argued that women's health needs and personal rights -- especially precarious in a time of economic crisis -- were being sacrificed for a vague notion of Party unity. The frequency with which the birth control resolution, free of any eugenicist rationale, was brought up at Farm Women's Week indicated farm women's intense dissatisfaction with legal proscriptions against dissemination of birth control information, yet the UFC, like the UFA and UFM never placed this demand in their platforms.

In 1932, many women from the UFC were drawn into the Farmer-Labour Party, a precursor to the CCF. The UFC Women's Section and Farm Women's Week had helped to build a reservoir of talent, as well as contacts, which later would be utilized for CCF work. Lucas, for example, travelled widely when she was UFC Women's President, addressing

174 educational meetings, and she was usually transported by, and billeted with, local lodge members; as a CCF leader, she drew on these contacts, encouraging UFCers to become active in the CCF. Women's participation in Farm Women's Week and in the UFC gave them skills, a women's network and a history of political practice which was to prove useful in building a new Party. At Farm Women's Week, remembers one participant, 'we discussed resolutions, and socializing and discussing with other women created a comradely situation which we all remembered': "at Farm Women's Week every woman was vocal, they felt freer than in mixed groups ... it helped train women as leaders and gave them confidence and knowledge."<sup>114</sup>

( vi )

Thus, during the 1920's and early '30's, women in Canadian Labour Parties and prairie farm organizations accumulated important political experience, later bequeathed to the CCF. Women in Labour Parties stressed the British Labour connection and stood in the tradition of pre-war ILPs, while women's farm organizations combined an understanding of themselves as a 'producing' class with a womanly interest in health, education and social reform, much like the earlier Women's Grain Growers Association. Both groups differed in outlook from liberal feminists, for the more radical farm women stressed their class exploitation and the traditions of rural cooperation, and the labourite women expressed a primary interest in, and sympathy for the problems of working-class women.

At the same time, some of these social democrats shared certain ideas with the middle-class feminists of the suffrage era; labourite and farm women continued to articulate some of the basic premises of maternal feminism, in particular the idea that women, by nature intuitive, moral and maternal, could bring to political life their special concerns and insights relating to the family, the preservation of life and the nurturing of the young. Clearly, some of the sentiments of maternal feminism persisted beyond the suffrage victory, rooted in continuing patriarchal assumptions about women's role in the family. The precise expression of these patriarchal assumptions may have varied according to class; nonetheless, maternal feminism also represented dominant social ideas of womanhood which crossed class lines. As historians of the Progressive women's movement have pointed out, maternal feminism was not "inherently conservative".<sup>115</sup> Nor was it linked only to the Progressive movement, for maternal feminist ideas lived on in post-war politics, including within the socialist movement.<sup>116</sup>

After World War I, the degree and strength of social democratic women's organization varied by city and region; in some municipalities and in Saskatchewan, women's political awareness and organization grew and prospered. The impact of suffrage, women's increasing role in the workforce, and perhaps a growing recognition of the vital economic contribution of farm and working-class wives to the family income stimulated women's desire to extend their new political equality into economic and social life. A few labourite women, later to become CCF leaders, did come from the pre-war feminist movement. Beatrice Brigden, a pre-war Social Gospeller, found her loyalties profoundly transformed

by her experience of 1919 and the decline of the Labour Church, while Rose Henderson and Laura Jamieson, both social reformers and suffragists, also redirected their political lives towards socialism in the 1920's and early '30's. The contribution of women like Henderson, Jamieson and Brigden to the CCF indicated a small, but nonetheless important connection linking the suffrage movement, labourite politics in the '20's, and the CCF of the 1930's.

Such connections were absent from the Communist Party, which was largely working-class and ethnic in composition, and which lacked a historic link to the Progressive movement. Bella Hall Gauld, a former Social Gospeller and Settlement House activist was the notable exception to this rule. During the early 1930's, farm and labourite women also indicated a stronger debt to maternal feminist ideas than did CPC women. Although Communists did connect married women's domestic and political roles, they also gave more emphasis to women as wage earners, and to women as equal 'comrades in arms' in the revolutionary movement. This does not mean, however, that Communist women fared substantially better in terms of leadership roles, or attention to the woman question, than social democratic women. Indeed, the repeated memos from the Women's Department to district organizers, which begged local officials to 'read and follow' instructions for organizing and promoting women, rather than relegating them to the dustbin, are telling indications that the woman question was still of secondary importance to the Party.

In the early 1930's, the Party's work among women was largely shaped by CI guidelines, and secondly by the dictates of economic depression and state repression in Canada. The decisive influence of the CI on the CPC was a further contrast to the differing and disparate

women's labourite groups spread across Canada. Communist women, united by a centralized leadership and a commitment to Leninism, and inspired by precise instructions from the International, were organized more efficiently, though more rigidly than women's labourite groups, which grew up around local leadership and local experiences -- although admittedly, they too were influenced by national and international ideological currents.

After 1928, the CI, in the firm grip of Stalinist leadership, emphasized the intensification of class struggle within capitalism, and the anti-Soviet war aims of the Western imperialist powers. The woman question became synonymous with a pro-Soviet women's peace lobby, and with challenges to capitalist enterprise; the primacy of class conflict and the necessity of involving women in the economic struggles of the working class were continually stressed in the Canadian Communist press. The new Soviet line sharpened the CPC's existing concern with integrating women into social production and organizing women workers: while these had been Party aims throughout the 1920's, they assumed absolute primacy in the Third Period. The devastating impact of the Depression may have reinforced the Party's economistic view of the woman question, just as state repression had heightened their militant rhetoric, for the alarming growth of unemployment confirmed the views of Party leaders that all but the key economic issues were peripheral and superfluous to the movement. Moreover, Marxist and Leninist writing, which had always stressed women's role in production, could easily be used as justification for the new Party line.

During the Third Period, many Communist women did take an equal and courageous part in Party struggles, from the free speech fights to

underground work and union organizing. Still, women with families were not able to take the same risks, and they usually carried on with women's traditional political tasks -- fund raising, petitioning and union support work. Compared to the previous decade, during the Third Period debate on the woman question was more narrowly focused. Issues like birth control and women's role in the family all but disappeared from the Party paper; The Worker did not have an ongoing women's column; and articles on the woman question lacked the sympathy for, and attention to the complexities of women's oppression, which had sometimes been expressed in The Woman Worker.

Much to the Party's regret, many of the Women's Labor Leagues remained ethno-centred and closely linked to the language associations. The Leagues, which had once occupied centre stage, were increasingly pushed to one side, and by 1934, had diminished in size and importance. Although they had been severely criticized for their past 'reformism' and auxiliary work, the WLLs, ironically, continued to perform many of these essential functions for the Party, although now they contributed only to the 'revolutionary' WUL unions and the Party's unemployment campaigns.

Replacing the WLLs on centre stage was the WUL. Party publicity outlined an ambitious industrial strategy, and set up a Women's Department of the WUL to help spearhead the organization of women workers. Party plans were admirable, indeed in the context of the 1930's they were outstanding, for their intent to organize the unskilled and doubly exploited female workforce into militant industrial unions was far removed from the TLC's organizational apathy towards women. Some WUL efforts were successful, particularly in the mid-1930's, as the

Party developed innovative strategies and addressed unorganized workers faced with chronic underemployment and wage reductions. In the needle trades, the WUL gave essential leadership to dissatisfied workers and organized new locals of dressmakers. The League also made some valiant -- and occasionally successful -- attempts to unionize food, textile, furniture and even domestic workers.

But these successes could not obscure the fact that the CPC's work among women, even within the WUL, fell far below their stated aims. As in the 1920's, the organization of women remained secondary to more important Party tasks. The mobilization of unemployed women and unionization of working women faltered not only because of objective difficulties imposed by the economy and the state, but also because within the Party, women were considered less important to revolutionary strategy than male workers in the steel and auto industries.

The Party's recruitment of women may also have been hurt by Third Period antagonism to alliances with other trade unionists and socialists. Although Communist militancy during this time, on the one hand, attracted some young activists and could stimulate local organizations into meaningful action, it could also prove a hindrance to Communist organization and growth. These sectarian barriers, however, were being challenged as early as 1934, as the CI and the Canadian Party redirected their energies to fighting for a United Front against fascism. Socialist women like Brigden and Henderson, only recently denounced as "Pink Tea Pacifists"<sup>141</sup> soon became potential allies and comrades. Shortly after the disparate groups of labourite and agrarian women joined together in the new political experiment called the CCF, they were faced with the appeals for unity from Communist women,

emerging recalcitrant and reformed from their Party's Third Period  
excesses.



## Footnotes Chapter III

- 1 Stewart Smith quoted in Bryan Palmer, Working Class Experience (Toronto and Vancouver, 1983), p. 205.
- 2 Kermit McKenzie, The Comintern and World Revolution, 1928-43 (New York, 1964), p. 237.
- 3 Alena Heitlinger, Women and State Socialism (London, 1979), p. 62.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 For a more detailed discussion of the 1929 convention see William Rodney, Soldiers of the International (Toronto, 1968), chap. 16; Norman Penner, The Canadian Left (Toronto, 1977), chap. 4 and 5; Ian Angus, Canadian Bolsheviks (Montreal, 1981), chap. 12.
- 6 John Kolasky, The Shattered Illusion (Toronto, 1979), p. 16.
- 7 Ian Angus, Canadian Bolsheviks, p. 328. Angus' estimates may be a bit high.
- 8 Lita-Rose Betcherman, The Little Band, (Ottawa, 1981), pp. 215-216.
- 9 Interview of Joan Sangster and Karen Teeple with Taime Davies, July 14, 1982.
- 10 The Mine Workers Union of Canada (MWUC) was formed in 1925 and the Lumber Workers Union of Canada (LWUC) in 1926. An Auto Workers Industrial Union was set up in 1928, as was the Industrial Union of Needle Trades Workers. In 1927, the Mine Workers and Lumber Workers joined the ACCL. The Party's reasons for setting up separate unions were entirely pragmatic. As Tim Buck said of the Mine Workers: "just because we are opposed to secession doesn't mean we should stand by and see workers in a whole industry smashed or demoralized", quoted in Ian Radforth, "It Pays to Strike and Fight: The Workers Unity League in Ontario" unpublished paper, York University, 1980, p. 14.
- 11 Public Archives of Ontario (PAO), Communist Party of Canada Collection, RG 4 C-3, (hereafter CPC Collection), Minutes of the District Committee of the Federation of Women's Labor Leagues, Feb. 5, 1930.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Penny McRae, "Annie Buller and Becky Buhay: Working-Class Agitators", unpublished paper, Carleton University, 1979.
- 14 William Rodney, Soldiers of the International, p. 164.
- 15 S.D. Hanson, "Estevan 1931", in Irving Abella, ed., On Strike (Toronto, 1974).

- 16 Michiel Horn, "Keeping Canada Canadian: Anti-Communism and Canadianism in Toronto, 1928-29", Canada: A Historical Magazine, (Sept., 1975).
- 17 PAO, CPC Collection, Worker Correspondence, 'Becky Buhay's Western Tour, Oct. 1926-March 1927'.
- 18 Personal correspondence with Sam Carr, March 10, 1984.
- 19 PAO, CPC Collection, General Correspondence, Annie Buller to Joe Wallace, n.d.
- 20 Catharine Vance, Not By Gods But By People: The Story of Bella Hall Gauld (Toronto, 1968).
- 21 Canadian Tribune, February 22, 1980.
- 22 PAO, Abella Oral History Tapes, Interview of Elaine Mitchell with Pearl Wedro, Sept. 14-17, 1971.
- 23 Louise Watson, She Never Was Afraid: The Biography of Annie Buller (Toronto, 1976), pp. 81-82.
- 24 University of Toronto (U of T), Kenny Collection, Box 1, Closed Letter to the CPC from the Executive Committee of the Communist International, April 1929.
- 25 PAO, CPC Collection, General Correspondence, 'Memo to all Womens Departments of District Committees and Fractions of the Proletarian Mass Organizations', 1929.
- 26 The auto industry, for example, was considered by the CPC a potential war industry, but from 1930-33, the industry was in crisis, laying off workers.
- 27 The Worker (W), Jan. 4, 1930.
- 28 W, Oct. 26, 1929.
- 29 W, Feb. 23, 1929.
- 30 W, March 8, 1930.
- 31 PAO, CPC Collection, Womens Department, 'Circular to all Districts', 1929.
- 32 PAO, CPC Collection, Womens Department, 'Memo of Women's Department to all District Bureau and Women's Departments', June 10, 1931.
- 33 W, Aug. 2, 1931.
- 34 W, Jan. 18, 1930.
- 35 PAO, CPC Collection, Women's Department, WLL Constitution.

- 36 Ibid.
- 37 PAO, CPC Collection, Proceedings of the 1931 Plenum, p. 57.
- 38 W, Jan. 31, 1930.
- 39 PAO, CPC Collection, General Correspondence, Letter from 'Neuman' (Sudbury District Organizer) to CPC, Jan. 3, 1931; 'Neuman' to Tim Buck, March 26, 1931.
- 40 W, Sept. 9, 1933.
- 41 W, April 1, 1933; PAO, Abella Tapes, Interview of Elaine Mitchell with Shaska Mandel, Sept. 27, 1969.
- 42 W, Dec. 10, 1932.
- 43 A group of Sudbury Finns split with the Party in 1932; they eventually set up their own paper, Vapaa Sana, and joined the CCF.
- 44 W, Feb. 22, 1930.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 PAO, CPC Collection, Women's Department, 'Letter to all Organizations', Jan. 27, 1930.
- 47 PAO, CPC Collection, Chase River WLL to A. Cook, Feb. 6, 1930.
- 48 PAO, CPC Collection, Aino Kahti to A. Buck, March 27, 1930.
- 49 PAO, CPC Collection, Women's Department, 'Circular', Dec. 9, 1930.
- 50 PAO, CPC Collection, General Correspondence, Acting Director of the Women's Department to Annie Whitfield, Oct. 28, 1930; Buller to Buhay, Oct. 28, 1930.
- 51 Public Archives of Canada, Communist Party of Canada Papers, MG 28 IV 4, Vol. 8, Tim Buck Correspondence, Tom Ewen to Tim Buck, Sept. 2, 1930 and Sept. 25, 1930. Stewart Smith to Tim Buck, n.d. (Smith was also in the Soviet Union at this time).
- 52 PAO, CPC Collection, General Correspondence, B. Buhay to Comrade Bennett, Jan. 29, 1931.
- 53 Ibid., B. Buhay to A. Lahti, Jan. 29, 1931.
- 54 PAO, CPC Collection, Proceedings of the 1931 Plenum, pp. 55-56.
- 55 W, Sept. 12, 1931.
- 56 Workers Unity, July 15, 1931.
- 57 Warren Carogata, Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold (Toronto, 1979),

p. 102.

- 58 Ibid,, p. 105.
- 59 Alvin Finkel, "Obscure Origins: The Confused Early History of the Alberta CCF", Paper presented at the Canadian Plains Research Centre Conference, 'Building the Cooperative Commonwealth', June, 1983.
- 60 Interview with Kay Hladiy, Oct. 16, 1980.
- 61 Occasionally, social democrats even gave support to local Communist efforts. For example, in Alberta, Fred White, a Labour MLA, put his house up as bail for NUWU protestors who were in jail. Warren Carogata, Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold, p. 102.
- 62 W, Jan. 14, 1932.
- 63 W, April 14, 1934.
- 64 W, March 18, 1933.
- 65 W, April 21, 1934, my italics.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Roy Rosenberg, "Organizing the Unemployed: The Early Years of the Great Depression", Radical America, Vol. 10, no. 4, (August, 1976).
- 68 W, Oct. 17, 1931.
- 69 Marjorie Cohen, "Women at Work in Canada During the Depression", Paper presented at the Blue Collar Conference, Windsor, May, 1979.
- 70 Ian Radforth, "'It Pays to Strike and Fight': The Workers Unity League in Ontario", unpublished paper, York University, 1980, p. 2.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Ibid., p. 28.
- 73 PAO, CPC Collection, Proceedings of the 1931 Plenum, p. 56.
- 74 Craig Heron, "Working-Class Hamilton, 1895-1929" (Ph.D. Dalhousie University, 1980), p. 485.
- 75 Marjorie Cohen, "Women at Work in Canada During the Depression", pp. 24-25.
- 76 Workers Unity, July 15, 1931.
- 77 PAO, Abella Tapes, Interview with Pearl Wedro.
- 78 Dorothy Livesay, Right Hand Left Hand (Erin, 1977), p. 123-124.

- 79 This information is largely gathered from the Labour Gazette and Canada, Dept. of Labour, Labour Organization in Canada. However, it is extremely difficult to measure the WUL's precise membership, and certainly not the exact ratio of women to men.
- 80 Although it may be premature to conclude, as Wayne Roberts does, in Honest Womanhood (Toronto, 1976), that women garment workers matched their male comrades in militancy, they nonetheless had a strong union tradition, and instances of militancy can be cited in the period before 1930. Ruth Frager concludes that women garment workers were quite militant, and even if less so than men, it was largely due to their lack of skills, vulnerability and sexist attitudes of male trade unionists. Ruth Frager, "Women in the Needle Trades: The Question of Militancy", unpublished paper, York University, 1982.
- 81 Catherine MacLeod, "Women in Production, The Dressmakers Strike of 1931", in Janice Acton, et al., eds. Women at Work in Ontario, 1880 - 1930 (Toronto, 1974). For a critical view of the WUL's role see Ian Angus, Canadian Bolsheviks, pp. 284-285.
- 82 PAO, Multicultural History Society of Ontario, ILGWU Papers, Langer to Dubinsky, June 27, 1933.
- 83 Evelyn Dumas, The Bitter Thirties in Quebec (Montreal, 1975), chap. 3.
- 84 Public Archives of Canada (PAC), Department of Labour Records RG 27 V Vol. 355, file 33-59.
- 85 Ian Radforth, "'It Pays to Strike and Fight': The Workers Unity League in Ontario", p. 12.
- 86 OPP Reports of the LWIU Convention, 1934, quoted in Radforth, ibid., p. 69.
- 87 PAC, Department of Labour Records, Vol. 361, file 34-34. "Scabs were mauled by a crowd of irate girls and women, many of whom were wives of strikers. One woman was arrested for throwing rocks at scabs, a second for biting a policeman." Toronto Star, May 7, 1934.
- 88 Quoted in Ian Radforth, "'It Pays to Strike and Fight': The Workers Unity League in Ontario", p. 70.
- 89 Quoted in Meg Luxton, More Than A Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home (Toronto, 1980), p. 217.
- 90 The Northern Mail, July 3, 1934; November 10, 1934.
- 91 Public Archives of Alberta, Glenbow Institute, Smith Papers A-S663, Amelia Turner Diary.
- 92 This of course, was the interpretation of feminists like Dora Russell, not that of women in the Party leadership, like Margaret

Bondfield. Dora Russell, The Tamarisk Tree (New York, 1975).

- 93 Alberta Labor News, April 23, 1921.
- 94 The Association was a labourite organization committed to reform, and to educational work done by the labour movement. It was led for many years by Joseph Marks, editor of the Industrial Banner.
- 95 The Workers Educational Association was set up in Canada in the early '20's. It was committed to adult education for working people, and was run by a coalition of university professors and trade unionists.
- 96 Labour Leader, May 30, 1924.
- 97 The Labour Statesman, Sept. 7, 1924.
- 98 Ibid., March, 1932.
- 99 Beatrice Brigden has been greatly influenced by the Nearings' Women and Social Progress, which strongly advocated education for women and voluntary social service work for women. S. and N. Nearing, Women and Social Progress (New York, 1912), pp. 250-54, ix-xii.
- 100 Public Archives of Manitoba (PAM), Beatrice Brigden Papers, Beatrice Brigden to T.A. Moore, Dec. 1, 1915
- 101 Ibid.
- 102 Ibid., Brigden to Moore, Feb. 24, 1917.
- 103 Ibid., Brigden to Moore, July 16, 1919.
- 104 W, March 21, 1925.
- 105 While such measures were advocated by conservative suffragists, and were always rejected by Communist women as paternalistic and social darwinist, it is true that eugenicist ideas, in vogue at the time, also influenced more progressive feminists like Irene Parlby and Nellie McClung, who both voted for measure to sterilize the 'unfit', while they were members of the Alberta legislature.
- 106 Doris French and Peggy Stewart, Ask No Quarter (Toronto, 1959).
- 107 PAC, Agnes Macphail Papers MG 27 III C 4, Vol 10, "The Unique Opportunity of North America Women".
- 108 Ibid.
- 109 Ibid., "Hart House Speech", Jan. 23, 1929.
- 110 PAM, United Farmers of Manitoba Collection MG 10 E 1, Box 2, UFWM Minute Books, June 1, 1933; Box 19, UFWM 1927 Convention.

- 111 Public Archives of Alberta, Winnifred Ross Papers 71.420, Mrs. Barritt, "History of Farm Women in Alberta" and Minutes of the 20th Convention of the UFWA, Jan. 16-19, 1934.
- 112 J.F.C. Wright, The Louise Lucas Story (Montreal, 1965), p. 60
- 113 Saskatchewan Archives Board, Interview of Georgina Taylor with Elsie Hart, 1980.
- 114 Ibid.
- 115 Wayne Roberts, "Rocking the Cradle for the World: The New Woman and Maternal Feminism, 1877-1914", in Linda Kealey, ed., A Not Unreasonable Claim (Toronto, 1979).
- 116 These ideas were also used by liberal reformers. For example, Franca Iacovetta, in "A Respectable Feminist: The Ideas of Cairine R. Wilson, First Female Senator", unpublished paper, York University, 1982, argues that Wilson's liberal politics included a moderate version of maternal feminism. The persistence of these ideas also questions the argument of some historians that the women's movement declined in the 1920's because maternal feminism had never broken with women's traditional domestic roles; thus, feminists easily succumbed to the cult of domesticity and the 'retreat to the home' characteristic of the '20's. Although this may have been part of the reason, it is not the whole explanation. Many social democratic women shared certain maternal feminist ideas, but they did not retreat to the home in the '20's and '30's. Perhaps part of the reason for this contrast lies in the different class perspectives of the two groups of women. The early women's movement, says Linda Kealey, was "primarily a middle-class woman's revolt against the uselessness of a dependent existence." 'A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada 1880s - 1920s (Toronto, 1979), p. 1. By the 1920's, some of their aims -- like equal educational rights -- had been obtained. But for working-class women, social and economic equality appeared much further away.

## CHAPTER IV

### 'MILITANT MOTHERING': WOMEN IN THE EARLY CCF



At the founding convention of the CCF in Regina, in 1933, the women delegates were far outnumbered by the men in the conference hall.<sup>1</sup> Despite their small numbers, they were a determined and dedicated group, many of whom, like the men, had to improvise and economize to reach Regina that summer. Dorothy Steeves and Mildred Osterhaut Fahrni, from Vancouver, shared a bumpy car ride to Regina with frequent tire blowouts. They had feared that the car would not make it through the mountains. Lorna Cotton-Thomas, a well-educated but unemployed graduate of the University of Toronto made illegal use of a friend's CPR pass, despite the disapproval of her boyfriend, who tried to persuade her that in this case, the end did not justify the means. Elizabeth Morton, an Ontario SPCer, drove from Toronto, sharing a car with four other delegates and raising money for her expenses with speaking engagements along the way.<sup>2</sup> These women, along with the other female delegates at Regina, symbolized the important presence, although less influential and powerful role, that women were to play in this new party.

Women were drawn to the CCF from various backgrounds and with different socialist ideals, but certain common themes underscored their activism. Women already active in Left politics came into the CCF from the SPC, Labour Parties, farm groups and the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR). Many of these activists, as well as the newer recruits, were affected by the harsh experience of farm and working-class life, and by the economic upheaval of the Depression; many found answers to their questioning of the social order in socialist literature by Edward Bellamy, Karl Marx, or the British Fabians.

Once active in the Party, women tended to occupy specific political roles and dominated few political tasks. A minority of national and provincial leadership, women were more likely to be found in the necessary, but routine grass roots work, in educational work, or as local and regional organizers. Drawing on traditions of earlier labourite and farm groups, some women formed women's auxiliaries and women's committees. These 'separate' or semi-autonomous social, study and lobby groups emerged with goals ranging from fund raising to feminist social action. Like the earlier 'maternal feminists', socialist women often saw women's political interests as an extension of their domestic and maternal concerns; yet, in contrast to the earlier suffragists, the political outlook of socialist women, with its emphasis on class issues and militant action is better characterized as 'militant mothering'.

The formation of CCF women's committees was sometimes encouraged by the Party, although it did not, as a rule, see the woman question as a priority issue. Indeed, only a minority of women within the Party became involved in the CCF with feminist goals and an interest in women's issues in the forefront of their activism. For this minority, women's committees were the means for their attempts to rectify women's lower membership numbers, and women's lower profile in the Party. They recognized that, despite the egalitarian principles of the Party, in practice, women's activities in the movement were sex-segregated, and women were underrepresented in the leadership. This reflected the fact that the CCF, like the society it strove to change, upheld distinct, and sometimes unequal roles for women.

( i )

In its early years, the CCF lacked the centralization and ideological unity of its competitor on the Left, the Communist Party. The CCF was an alliance of socialist, labour and farm groups united against a common enemy: the economic inequalities of capitalism, inequalities magnified by the Depression of the 1930's. But the precise analysis of their common enemy varied among the CCF's constituent groups, as did their prospective remedies for change. At a Western Labour Conference in Winnipeg in 1931, the three groups worked out an accord to discuss a political coalition and program for reform, and at a Calgary conference in 1932, they agreed to consolidate forces under the informal leadership of Labour M.P.s, especially J.S. Woodsworth. Political differences persisted, especially between some agrarian groups and urban socialists, and occasionally between moderate labourites and Marxists. Agnes Macphail, grumbled one frustrated B.C. Marxist to an Ontario counterpart, "is congenitally incapable of understanding and assimilating socialism ... she is hopelessly behind."<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, agrarian radicals, concerned primarily with the socialization of finance and credit institutions, were suspicious of Marxist ideas which they feared might lead to land nationalization.

Despite these differences, the alliance persevered, and the following year a new Party was able to hammer out a statement of principles known as the Regina Manifesto. Considerable historical debate still reigns over the precise ideological content of the Manifesto<sup>4</sup>, but a number of general conclusions can be drawn. The Manifesto, although somewhat eclectic in character, did articulate a

clear critique of capitalism, and advocated both short-term reform, as well as long-term, fundamental social change, to alter a system geared to private property and profit, to one based on cooperation and public need. Considerable attention was given to the needs of the farm population; socialization of the financial system, for example, was proposed to combat the (eastern) monopolistic concerns which farmers saw as central to their exploitation. In compromise to the labourite constituency, it was made clear that constitutional means, rather than revolutionary violence, was to be the process for change, yet Marxists successfully included important statements of intent to socialize the means of production and "eradicate all capitalist property and social relations".

The inclusion of Marxist ideas in the Manifesto was in part a reflection of the League for Social Reconstruction's role in drafting the CCF program. LSR politics emerged from British traditions of advanced liberalism and socialism, especially Fabianism, but the LSR worldview also "included strains of Marxism, diluted from other authors."<sup>5</sup> Yet, left-wing intellectuals in the LSR did not 'create' the CCF program, or impose their Manifesto on a socialist movement; rather, the existing socialist movement responded to the LSR's Manifesto. There is no doubt that Woodsworth, an LSR member, was a key figure in this new socialist alliance, mediating many of the differing political views in the Party, and acting as a charismatic leader for the movement, but Woodsworth was better known as a Social Gospeller and Labour M.P., than as an LSR leader.

Until the increased centralization of later years, it is difficult to speak of a 'national' CCF, for each provincial party

attempted to organize in its own fashion, and had its own particular political flavour. In some provinces, the wide-ranging political views present at Regina in 1933 were reproduced at the local level, resulting in friction within the provincial parties. In Ontario, for instance, the Party was divided into three sections -- labour, club and farm -- with the last and first (which included SPCers) uneasy partners until 1934, when open rupture and UFO resignations were only patched over by Woodsworth's forceful intervention from above.<sup>6</sup> Similar differences existed in Manitoba where the ILP was reluctant for some years to give up its autonomy within the CCF, and in B.C., where the LSR clubs were viewed suspiciously as middle-class intellectuals removed from the reality of class struggle by SPCers.<sup>7</sup> Gradually, by the later 1930s and the 1940s, some of these differences and structural separations had been resolved, in part due to the national's insistence on a say in local matters. Local offices sometimes resented this interference: this was clearly the case in Manitoba, where Beatrice Brigden clashed with national secretary David Lewis in 1938. Since 1931, Brigden had devoted all her time to organizing and speaking for the ILP and CCF; in 1930, '31 and '32, she ran as a Farmer-Labour candidate in Brandon and Winnipeg ridings; she contributed columns to the Weekly News and Manitoba Commonwealth; she organized the Winnipeg Women's Labor Federation; and she acted as CCF Provincial Secretary from 1936 to 1939. In 1941, Brigden withdrew from CCF work, perhaps for financial reasons, (she had been living on a small legacy) but probably also because of differences with National Secretary, David Lewis. Lewis' advice to Brigden on how to expand her organization and how to improve Manitoba's financial picture was not always taken well, and in 1937 and '38, a

crisis between the ILP, which guarded its autonomy rather zealously, and the CCF brought these differences to a head. "I cannot see that there is anything to be done from the National Office", commented Brigden pointedly, "If folk cannot settle their differences locally, it is not likely others who are not on the ground can arrive at a clear understanding of the case."<sup>8</sup> And a year later, when Brigden was not reelected Provincial Secretary, Lewis seemed somewhat relieved.<sup>9</sup>

( ii )

Women like Beatrice Brigden made an easy and natural entry into the CCF from their previous political activities in the 1920's and early '30's: women in local ILPs and Labour Parties, left-leaning women in farm organizations like the UFC(SS), women in the Socialist Party of Canada and in the LSR found a familiar pathway from their earlier political work into the CCF. Some women were introduced to the CCF through the cooperative movement and through peace groups, or they 'inherited' a family tradition of socialist activism: parental involvement in prairie coops or in a Labour Party interested some young women in CCF Youth groups, while husbands sometimes encouraged their wives to join CCF women's auxiliaries. Hilda Kristiansen, for example, grew up in an atmosphere conducive to the development of a socialist perspective: her father was active in the local Coop, the UFC(SS), and he attended the 1933 Regina Convention, while her mother was quietly supportive of these causes.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Nellie Peterson, later a dynamic organizer and leader in Alberta, as a child witnessed her parents support of progressive causes like the UFA and the coop

movement, and in the family circle she was encouraged to "debate politics, including socialism", with her parents.<sup>11</sup>

Still, the commitment of women to the CCF cannot be explained simply by the 'inheritance' of family and Party politics, for family members could always stray from their parents' ideals and members of the ILP might have taken their activism elsewhere. What then were the motivating forces behind women's commitment to socialism? Although it is difficult to precisely weigh and measure the political motivations of any one group, certain common influences are apparent in the motivational mix that made women socialists: women's experience of working-class life or farm life, or their witness to social inequalities often combined with exposure to socialist ideas, of various types, to interest them in the CCF.

Economic insecurity and arduous working conditions were the lot of most working-class and farm women in the 1920's; the Great Depression only worsened their lot. Single and married women working for wages faced wage reductions, speed-ups and in some occupations, job loss; women workers were often forced to resort to the only alternative open to them -- despised and poorly-paid domestic work. In many cities single unemployed women found relief either impossible to obtain or impossible to live on, and their working sisters sometimes subsisted on wages equal to, or less than, the meagre relief allotments. The personal experience of wage-work might interest women in socialism. So might the mere knowledge of such working conditions, for women were also affected by the experience of friends, relatives or even strangers around them. Irene Biss, a professor at the University of Toronto and LSR activist, investigated and wrote about the conditions of Toronto

garment workers.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, B.C. judge Laura Jamieson was moved by the grim situation of women workers.

Unemployment and relief -- either experienced first hand or viewed second hand -- were also radicalizing forces for many women. In East York, a Toronto municipality hard-hit by unemployment, relief recipients, aided by existing associations and local socialists, organized collectively into a self-help and action-oriented organization, the East York Workers Association (EYWA). Women in the EYWA constructed their own women's Marxist study group as well as contributing energy to the Association's anti-eviction campaigns, its lobbying efforts and attempts at mutual aid. Some of these women subsequently joined the CCF.<sup>13</sup>

Nor was the relief experience limited to urban Canada. In the West, and particularly in Saskatchewan, Depression and drought carved out a path of destruction and poverty: income levels plummeted and some families, if not forced off their land, were reduced to the most meagre subsistence, or the 'humiliation' of relief. Letters from women to the Western Producer and later to the CCF newspapers, often included poignant descriptions of their struggle with economic adversity. The burden of rearranging the already inadequate budget or of finding immediate methods of raising petty cash to keep the family going often fell upon women. These years, according to many women who became CCFers, left an indelible mark on their memories. Women were forced to leave school early to support their families; they were faced with the fear -- and the reality -- of crop failure; they were sometimes uprooted to the city; they were given no alternative but relief; they scrimped and compromised on their family budget, and they saw brothers and



friends leave to ride the rods or head to the Relief Camps. In the midst of such social upheaval, it is hardly surprising that some women began to question the status quo. Economic dislocation led to a questioning of the system, and encouraged many people to see farm failure and unemployment as a shared social predicament.

Anti-establishment actions like the On-to-Ottawa Trek were increasingly viewed with sympathy, for women had relatives and friends who had relayed to them the intense frustration and hopelessness of life in the 'Slave Camps'. Although the Depression did not 'cause' the emergence of the CCF, it did encourage some women to reflect on the social order and it stimulated their search for an alternative system. "It seemed by 1933", recalled Sophia Dixon, "as if the capitalist system was simply crumbling before us and our task was to find and build a new system which could replace the old".<sup>14</sup>

Women's experience of inequality and their exposure to economic and social deprivation fused with their re-education in socialist ideas to become a powerful combination leading them to CCF involvement. For a significant number of early CCFers, a radical understanding of Christian teaching and their participation in progressive Christian groups like the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order (FCSO) aided their introduction to the CCF. For these people, who followed in the tradition of the Social Gospel, the CCF was the logical political extension of their belief in the need to apply Christian principles, in a pragmatic sense, to the economic and social order. Some young CCF activists, like Marjorie Mann, had their early education in the Student Christian Movement, a student organization founded in the 1920's.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Avis McCurdy, who came from a middle-class family in the Maritimes, described her path into politics:

I came straight to the CCF because I was convinced I had to be my brother's keeper. It was right out of my religious background -- CGIT and SCM. I had also worked in business in my summers, and was overcome with the injustice and inequality. But mainly, it was my moral, religious background.<sup>16</sup>

Older women like Louise Lucas, Beatrice Brigden and Mildred Fahrni also found the CCF a logical extension of their Christian belief in the brotherhood and equality of man. Brigden, despite the fact that she left the organized Church, continued to see her political vision as a Christian one.<sup>17</sup> Mildred Fahrni, who grew up in a religious household, found her eyes opened to the inequalities and waste of capitalist society during the Depression, particularly when she worked with single unemployed women in Vancouver. At the same time, her intellectual growth as a Christian and pacifist were also integral to her activism. The influence of her university studies, especially at Bryn Mawr and the London School of Economics, of her travels to Russia and later India, and of her life at Kingsley Hall Settlement House all shaped her socialism which was ethical, humanist and Christian in nature. "We CCFers were evangelists", she remembered, "out to build a new world order, out to build the Kingdom .. and we felt it could be done!".<sup>18</sup> Even CCFers who did not participate in organized Christian groups like the FCSO often described their politics, in part, as 'applied Christianity'. To many of us, commented Nellie Peterson, socialism was simply the practical expression of Christian ideas about equality.<sup>19</sup> In a society still receptive to the moral language of Christianity, many CCFers, even if unattached to the Church, culled their metaphors from traditions of radical Christian ideals such as the Brotherhood of Man -

and the Sermon on the Mount, just as earlier socialists and labour activists had drawn on these metaphors to argue their case for social justice.

For CCF women like Mildred Fahrni, Christian ideals were inextricably intertwined with pacifist ones, and indeed, for many CCFers, and particularly CCF women, the new Party was attractive because of its commitment to the principles of international peace. Behind Fahrni's pacifism lay both a materialist analysis of war as a means of economic aggrandizement, of gaining power and status, and perhaps more predominantly, a humanist belief that under no circumstances was taking a human life justifiable. Although other CCF women subscribed to different variations of anti-war and pacifist ideals, most saw some connection between their socialism, pacifism and feminism, and a great number of CCF women found common cause for their ideals in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, (WILPF) popularly known as the WIL.<sup>20</sup> In the 1920's the WIL had branches in Vancouver, Winnipeg and Toronto and was affiliated to some women's farm groups; it was given informal but enthusiastic leadership by Laura Jamieson, a former suffragist and social reformer who later became a CCFer. In the 1920's the WIL's well-publicized campaigns against militarism in the schools were supported by many socialists, and by the early 1930's, a list of the WIL leadership began to look like a list of well-known CCF women. Although the WIL membership also included many liberal pacifists, it did appeal to an important group of socialist women, with its calls for the elimination of social, economic and sexual inequalities, as well as violence, from all societies.<sup>21</sup>

For women like Rose Henderson, Laura Jamieson and Lucy Woodsworth, who had been influenced by the maternal feminism of the suffrage era, WIL principles and CCF's pacifist connection had a special attraction. Not only did the WIL's speak to the economic causes of war, but it also spoke to women's maternal aversion to violence and war. Henderson, for example, a long-time peace advocate, published a pamphlet in the 1920's which reflected these ideas. The germs of war, she argued, were economic: "they are hatched within capitalism."<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, women, the bearers of life, as well as the working-class, inevitably used as 'cannon fodder', both had the most to lose from war; thus women, in alliance with the working-class, must become the leaders in the cause for peace. It was because they were mothers, she concluded, that women best understood the value and sanctity of human life and therefore the need for peace:

Are not all mothers one people? Do not all mothers love their children? Would not all mothers die to save their children from slaughter and suffering? ... If humanity is to exist - if peace is to be a reality, the mothers of the world must become the standard bearers, martyrs in the cause. They must be prepared to suffer as much in the cause of peace as they were willing to suffer in the cause of war.<sup>23</sup>

Henderson's pacifism was a unique blend of socialist and feminist ideas which was not uncommon to other CCF women. Drawing on both a materialist analysis of imperialism, and an idealized view of women's maternal commitment to non-violence, many women came to see peace as a socialist issue and a women's issue and they turned to the CCF as a 'peace' alternative. Moreover, the tight connection between the WIL and CCF women undoubtedly aided the growth of the CCF, for some women may have learned of, or joined the CCF through the WIL connection, or vice versa.

Although Christian and pacifist ideas were strong intellectual motivations behind the commitment of many CCF women, there were also other important ideological traditions stimulating women's interest in socialism. The Marxist strain in the B.C., and to a lesser extent, in the Ontario section of the Party was the impetus behind some women's interest in socialism. Again, the immediate realities of economic inequality and class conflict -- both brought into sharp focus by the Depression -- provided the background to their radicalization. Their intellectual development as socialists, however, was shaped most distinctly by the writings of Marx and Marxists. Although the CCF did not rely predominantly on Marx and Engels in their education work, as did the Communist Party, Marxist books were offered for sale through some education and literature committees. Also, in areas where a strong tradition of Marxism existed, as in B.C., some CCF members who were well-versed in Marxist ideas attempted to share them with newcomers to the movement. For instance, a self-taught Marxist in the B.C. party, George Weaver, who often spoke at meetings and wrote a column in the B.C. Federationist, used Marx and Engels to explain women's oppression. His writings tended to stress women's primary subordination to the economic exploitation of a class society; however, he drew heavily on Engel's Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, in an attempt to construct a dialectical understanding of the class and sexual exploitation of women.<sup>24</sup>

Women whose radicalization crystallized around Marxist ideas saw Depression conditions as a sharp reminder of the inherent contradictions of a capitalist economy. The events and issues around them -- the exploitation of wage-earners, the state's response to the unemployed, the growth of

fascism - were made more understandable by their reeducation in Marxist ideas. For some women, this reeducation led them to downplay women's inequality in the movement and stress class solidarity:

My main attitude was that women shouldn't be separated from men. The problem was not a sexual one, but<sup>25</sup> an economic one, and the economic problem makes a sexual one.

But in retrospect, continues Eve Smith, my own enthusiasm may have made me tactless in some women's eyes:

At the National Convention in Edmonton (1938) the women asked me to speak to them .. I said why do you have a women's group? Why do you not have a mixed group? They said women can more easily attend day meetings, and at mixed meetings, women don't like to talk in front of the men. I said, 'well you just have to get up and talk at mixed meetings!'.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, immersion in Marxist ideas may have sensitized women to an awareness of problems ignored by others: Eve Smith, for example, was also active in the Single Women's Unemployment Association and in her brief turn as women's columnist for the Federationist, stressed some of the urgent problems of women wage-earners.

Moreover, Marxist ideas in the CCF cannot be simplified to one precise viewpoint, for Marxists themselves varied in their outlook, and some socialists included Marxist ideas with other influences in an eclectic socialist philosophy: Dorothy Steeves, for instance, combined her knowledge of Marxism with Fabian-like disgust for the waste and inefficiency of a system based on profit rather than public planning. Indeed, the socialist development of women in the CCF did not emerge only from Christian and ethical principles, or from Marxist ideas, for the intellectual traditions compromising the CCF crossed the spectrum from Fabianism to Bellamyite socialism. The large number of women who later recalled the powerful influence of Bellamy's Looking Backward on

their politicization attests to the importance of the latter tradition. To them, Bellamy's Utopia appealed as a society in which poverty and inequality, and class conflict and violence had all been planned away. Women who came to the CCF from the agrarian movement brought with them the influence of their own class analysis, which stressed the value of small producers, criticized the power of capitalist financial institutions, and rejected competitive individualism in favour of cooperative principles. Lastly, women who were schooled in the LSR brought ideas of Webbian socialism and state planning drawn from their reading of the Fabians. Moreover, none of these intellectual influences had to remain finite and absolute. Indeed, in a movement in which continuing socialist education had an important place, the intellectual options available to CCF women were continually broadened as they participated in weekly club meetings and discussion groups, in special educationals and summer camps, listening to various points of view and reading a wide range of radical literature always available through the literacy secretary or educational committee.

Thus, the involvement of women in the CCF emerged from women's immediate experience of, or witness to social inequality, combined with a reeducation in socialist ideas. Within these general boundaries, the precise way in which women's experiences and intellectual development mixed to form a radical view of the world was, to some extent, an individual process. Sympathy for feminist ideas, for instance, varied even among women with very similar backgrounds. In B.C., Dorothy Steeves had much less interest than Laura Jamieson in organizing CCF women, yet both leaders came from well-educated, middle-class family backgrounds, and both had had some contact with the suffrage movement.

The way in which women became active in socialist politics naturally varied according to region and class: farm women were most likely to come to the CCF through the UFC, UFA or UFM; middle-class urban-dwellers might make contact through the LSR or FCSO, while working-class women might be initiated through the Labour Party or a relief association. The mixture of middle-class and working-class women in the CCF contrasted to the CPC's predominantly working-class membership. One consequence of the CCF's class make-up was its weaker ✓ connection to the trade union movement; although many CCF women were sympathetic to the struggles of working women, their own lives reflected a very different social and economic reality.

( iii )

Whatever their background, once active in the Party, many women gravitated towards specifically 'female' areas of political work, revealing the existence of a political sexual division of labour within the CCF similar to that in Canadian society. Although some women like ✓ Grade MacInnis and Dorothy Steeves became well-known national Party leaders, and a slightly larger group became regional leaders, the majority of women were most active at the grass roots of the Party. Some female CCFers formed women's committees and women's auxiliaries, while others were more directly 'integrated' into Party work; the latter group, however, were still most often concentrated in electoral support work, constituency organizing and educational work, rather than policy making.



To some extent, women's grass roots work in the Party overlapped with the support work performed by some of the women's auxiliaries and women's committees. It was axiomatic that, in political parties, women were called on to 'make the coffee and lick the envelopes'; yet, this day-to-day support work was essential to the life of the Party. As one CCF woman put it: "the CCF was made in the kitchen and you didn't find too many men in the kitchen!"<sup>27</sup> It was this kind of maintenance work which occupied the time of many CCF women, partly because they were more comfortable in such 'behind the scenes' work, partly because many housewives could fit such work into their domestic schedule, and partly because the Party itself encouraged women to fulfill these roles. In an article in the Ontario New Commonwealth, one writer described 'How to Organize a Successful CCF Unit', explaining that the social committee, an essential unit of the party, should be at least two thirds women because they were "perfect jewels" at raising funds and loved "playing amateur salesladies at bake sales".<sup>28</sup> Such exhortations for women to remain the drones in the movement were not, of course, part of a conscious design to segregate women in inferior roles: it was just much easier to let women occupy traditional roles while the men proceeded with the 'important' task of policy making - an easy imitation of the male-dominated power structure existing outside the Party.

Election time usually found CCF newspapers taking note of the part women should and could play in politics. Since it was often assumed that women, isolated amidst domestic drudgery, had little time or inclination to consider politics, these articles tried to indicate ways in which government decisions affected women's daily lives, and especially the lives of their children. Politics do not simply involve

abstract principles, they would say, for government decisions decide whether your husband will work, how much you will pay for milk, what kind of education your children receive and whether your family will get adequate medical care. On the one hand, these appeals mirrored the conception that women, isolated with their diapers and dishes, were less knowledgeable and more apathetic than men, as well as the fear that indifferent women might dissuade their men from involvement in the Party. But they were also simply a reflection of the Party's logical political planning: the CCF placed important emphasis on electoral politics, and since most women were homemakers, the Party felt it must convince this large constituency of the need for socialism by speaking to the immediate, daily concerns of women in the home. And such appeals to woman's maternal concern for her family's welfare were often effective, for many women explained their attraction to socialism in terms of the humanitarian answers it offered to the problems which took up women's daily realities. As one woman put it: "the CCF may have had a special appeal to women .. the appeal of humanity, of health services, educational opportunities, and so on... because most mothers wanted the best for their children."<sup>29</sup>

Women were asked not only to vote for the CCF, but also to take an active part in the Party, and to many in the CCF, this signified a more egalitarian approach than the two older political parties. As one masculine friend commented (and not in jest), "in clubs, women not only fold and stamp literature, they also go out door to door with male comrades to distribute it ... [whereas] under the old parties, women are almost disenfranchised".<sup>30</sup> Many women did their 'door to door' work only during election times; others remained actively

*It is a pity that  
the women are so*

involved in local and provincial organizing all year round. In Winnipeg, for instance, Edith Cove was known both for her work with the Labor Women's Federation and as the efficient manager of many local election victories in Winnipeg North-Centre. In Saskatchewan, women like Gertrude Harvey, Florence Baker, Eve Pfeifer and Elsie Gorius developed respected reputations as membership and election campaign organizers: "those Saskatchewan women" remembers Grace MacInnis, "they were organizers! ... many M.P.'s were only in parliament because of the women's organizing skills."<sup>31</sup>

Women like Elsie Gorius in Saskatchewan and Nellie Peterson in Alberta were able to work as travelling organizers for the Party, not only because of their proven organizing talents, but also because of the essential aid of a supportive family, including someone to do childcare. Many other women found that long absences from home were not tolerated by their husbands who shared the community's suspicions of such

'wandering wives'.<sup>32</sup> Gorius's mother looked after her son; "otherwise", she concluded, "I wouldn't have been able to do political work."<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, Nellie Peterson, when she travelled throughout Alberta as an organizer had a sympathetic mother to help look after her son, and a politically supportive husband - an essential to the career of any woman organizer.<sup>34</sup> Many women who were active at the local level of the

Party, especially in urban areas, doing constituency work, gathering memberships and helping raise funds, had to combine their domestic work with their political activities. In a short article written for the

✓ Ontario Commonwealth, a local publicity organizer in Fort William described her 'normal' day, revealing both the kind of work women often

did, and the way in which married women integrated domestic and political labour:

Up at 8, feed family of 5, make lunch, send boy to school, do report on meetings, draw up ads, numerous phone calls. 9:00, dress baby, wash dishes, answer phone, make beds, sweep and dust, answer phone. sell potatoes donated by country CCF units. Write letters and notes for tonight's speech. Dishwashing, cleaning, calls, dress baby for outdoors, odd jobs, supper, prepare kids for bed, go to meeting.<sup>35</sup> ✓

Thus, at the local level, women often worked in elections, on membership drives and as fund raisers, and they figured as secretaries of CCF clubs and as constituency organizers. At the local and provincial levels, women were also prominently represented in educational work. Within a constituency CCF club, women were often put in charge of local libraries or acted as literature secretaries, as one Saskatchewan woman remembers:

We had a constituency library run by Mrs. Laura Dolman, with books on socialism. She was a school teacher and knew the literature used<sup>36</sup> for discussion groups and encouraged people to read the books.

In almost every province, a woman acted as Literature Secretary, and women comprised significant numbers on the provincial education committee, which took on tasks like deciding what books to order, drawing up reading lists, establishing discussion groups and organizing CCF summer schools. The predominance of women in educational work may have been, in part, a result of the widely-held notion that women were eminently suited for such 'practical tasks', as well as the fact that women did prefer behind-the-scenes organizational work. More important, however, was the duplication within the Party of occupational structures found outside it. In the 1930's the only professions truly 'open' to women were teaching and nursing; as a consequence, women's participation in education committees was seen as logical and 'natural'. Also, many

CCF women who had a university or secondary school education had worked as teachers and were probably eager to use their skills in Party work. Their roles were often justified and understood within the same circle of ideas which had earlier explained the feminization of teaching; because women were well suited to teaching the young, it was said, they could put these same talents to use in socializing new members to socialist ideas:

Women teachers worked with youth and this helped them to realize that we had to reach the younger generation. Their mind was turned to the channels of education - how to get ideas across, that is why women were involved in education ...<sup>37</sup>

Thus, the combination of women's proven skills and the easy acceptance of their traditional work roles encouraged women to involve themselves in educational work. Although women's participation in educational committees emerged from this narrow definition of women's 'proper' social sphere, there is no doubt that education also had a recognized importance in the Party. Because it was a new Party, and because it was a socialist Party which opposed the dominant social norms of competition and free enterprize, the CCF needed both an informed membership and new recruits -- both of which relied, to some extent, on educational work. As part of their mandate to foster socialist discussion and extend the knowledge of Party members, educational committees organized CCF summer camps, and again, women were prominent as camp organizers. As an educational experience, such camps aided the development of members' own politics and consolidated their allegiance to socialism in an atmosphere of camaraderie and common purpose. In Saskatchewan, Gertrude Telford, who organized the Crystal Lake Camp from 1937 to 1942, noted the extent of planning needed: "We had educational programs - lectures, speakers were brought in, we had discussions on

economics, debating and also, recreational activities, swimming, games and campfire programs".<sup>38</sup> Women's prominence as organizers of such camps resulted, in part, from their important role on education committees: it may also have been the result of the more flexible summer schedule of women who were homemakers. Camps usually lasted for a week or more and their organization and maintenance took considerable time, for besides the arrangement of educational material, the essentials of accommodation, cooking and cleaning all had to be organized. Family responsibilities could also be transported to the camp for provisions were made for children's tents and programs. Within camp life, however, women were never limited to domestic tasks: because camps were organized as a microcosm of the truly communal, socialist future, everyone shared in the dishwashing. This fact was commented on so positively by the women that one has to suspect that it was not the practice outside camp life.

Many of the women who made a significant contribution to education committees were, or became a part of, the provincial leadership. In general, of course, women were highly underrepresented in the leadership of both the national and provincial parties, with their degree of underrepresentation varying over time and by province. Women tended to gain election to provincial councils and executives more easily than national ones; in the 1930's in Saskatchewan, women comprised up to one quarter, occasionally one third, of the provincial leadership - a fairly high percentage which might be explained by established traditions of female participation in the farm movement. Similarly, in B.C. a consistent female group was represented in provincial council, a situation in part due to the existence of three

women CCFers in the Legislature. Dorothy Steeves, one of those three, rose to a position of some influence in the B.C. party, acting as Vice-President of the Party and gaining province-wide prominence, and Grace MacInnis, also an MPP, became a Party leader of some influence.

No easy generalization can characterize the qualities of women in leadership positions, for female notables differed in their politics and in their personal styles of doing politics. Steeves, for example, was known as a sharp-minded (and sometimes sharp-tongued) debater, and herself maintained that 'she was as good as any man'. Saskatchewan's Louise Lucas, on the other hand, had a very different personality; less an intellectual, but a charismatic religious-minded woman, Lucas became known as a never-tiring evangelist for the movement, and her acceptance of the title, 'Mother of the CCF', indicated a different reputation, which stressed the feminine attributes of her leadership. Although women who became leaders could be as different as Steeves and Lucas were, one wonders if women -- who held far fewer leadership positions than men -- were more easily squeezed into stereotypic roles, stressing either their maternal and feminine qualities, or their similarity to men.<sup>39</sup>

Whatever their style of politics, women shared a common experience - it was usually more difficult for them to reach leadership positions. The reason for woman's circumscribed role in the Party leadership were complex, involving both the influence of outside society, which sanctioned sexual inequality, and socialists' failure to challenge those inequalities within their own movement. The prevailing social perception of women stressed their roles as 'private' beings, whose life rotated around the family, rather than their roles as public beings whose interests should be politics and government. Women in

politics were considered an oddity: mass magazines, on the rare occasion they addressed the subject, treated women politicians as unusual deviations from the norm, and assumed a political career and family were almost incompatible. Women's separate sphere was replicated within the Party as many members (including some women) maintained that as a socialist Party, the CCF was egalitarian - and they refused to see any evidence to the contrary. Yet, evidence did indicate that women were channeled into social committees; that women's feminine character was often described as emotional and sensitive, implying a female inability to cope with the 'rational' world of politics; and that women were seen as more conservative, apathetic and politically backward than men. Moreover, perhaps most important, because women's primary responsibility for the family was never questioned, an essential barrier to women's wholehearted participation in politics remained unchallenged and unchanged.

Nowhere was women's secondary role in the Party more glaring than in the selection of candidates for election. Although the CCF often fared better than its Liberal and Conservative counterparts, women were still placed in unwinnable ridings or given inadequate support in their bids for CCF nominations. After Agnes Macphail's election defeat in 1940, Jean Laing lamented that so few women were seriously considered as candidates by the Party:

In Toronto, in all the Parties, the men were doing all the contesting as candidates and the women were doing all the work ... there was a great increase of women for R.O.'s, poll clerks, and scrutineers. We expect of the old line Parties that they will nominate all men candidates, but for the CCF we look for equal recognition of the women. Yet, in Ontario, the only woman CCF candidate was Mrs. Dymond, and she was nominated because one of the man candidates was sick.<sup>40</sup>



In Saskatchewan, shortly after this, Gertrude Telford lost a provincial nomination to a man whose attack on her candidature, she said privately, was "on her as a woman".<sup>41</sup> Telford had for years done the hard leg work in the riding and justifiably felt unhappy when an outsider (who assured her he was not going to run) threw in his hat at the last minute. Despite some unusual circumstances surrounding the nomination meeting, the case was not investigated by the Party. Telford was later considered as a potential replacement to Louise Lucas in the federal riding of Melville, but she was again bypassed. Lucas expressed her sympathy to Telford, as well as her anger that once again, women had been ignored:

There is no need to tell you how chagrined I am over B's nomination. If it had been Mrs. Baker, Mrs. Strum or you, I would have felt reconciled - in fact elated, but you know what I think of this ... I had written to Mr. J.C. from the conference pleading that he think of Christ and the women's cause in their deliberations. Replied that he agreed we need more women in the Party but said they would have to take a more prominent part. These men don't seem to be able to grasp that they are not allowed to take these prominent parts. You know what I mean.<sup>42</sup>

But, out of loyalty to the Party, Lucas' criticisms, like those of Laing and Telford, were voiced privately, rather than in the columns of the CCF newspaper. Many CCF women, dedicated to their Party and to the ideal of socialist egalitarianism, believed or wanted to believe that, within the movement, women had the same opportunities as men. Yet, in the last resort, they were often forced to admit private disappointment as they witnessed women held back from advancement into the leadership and from securing nominations.

(iv)

CCF Women's Committees emerged, in part, from these very circumstances: separate women's groups were seen as a training ground for new women activists and female leadership, as well as a medium through which women's special concerns and abilities could be expressed. In Ontario and the West, CCF women's groups emerged after the Regina Convention, either as continuations of previously existing labourite or farm women's organizations, or as new, enthusiastic responses to the formation of the Party.

In Saskatchewan, women's groups either sprang up quite spontaneously out of a neighbourhood milieu, or were coaxed into existence by the Party's provincial office. In Saskatoon, women in a neighbourhood where many families were on relief, were drawn together by common economic worries, and in 1934, they were persuaded by one local CCF supporter to form a political discussion group. Margaret Benson, an original member of the group, had been a farm wife until she and her husband, a UFC activist, were forced off their farm and onto the relief rolls of Saskatoon. Benson participated in the Women's Club's first political efforts, which were primarily fund raising through whist drives, and electioneering. The women also found time to study The Case for Socialism and Looking Backward, analyze newspaper articles, and later present their own short papers on political issues. Ridicule from other neighbours about their "red flag" meetings, says Benson, "just made us more determined ... for we were militant, unlike ladies' auxiliaries".<sup>43</sup> Benson's recollections exemplified the activities of many CCFers who participated in women's groups, based partly on an

auxiliary model, but also concerned with their own intellectual growth and with disseminating socialist ideas. Their contribution to the CCF was twofold: on one hand, they provided an important share of local funds for CCF campaigns and created the social events and atmosphere needed for a young Party's growth, and on the other hand, they developed their own understanding of socialism in a comfortable, small meeting place designed to accommodate and welcome new recruits.

The minute book of another Saskatoon CCF women's group, initiated a few years later, reveals some of the same aims and accomplishments which small women's meetings could achieve.<sup>44</sup> Aided this time by a study program prepared by the Provincial Office, this CCF women's club decided at its inaugural meeting in the spring of 1937 to hold a combined social evening and study session on The Case for Socialism. They also initiated fund raising efforts, including a bridge party with proceeds going to the MacKenzie Papineau Battalion; social events, such as a tea for all women coming to the Provincial Convention; and sewing and knitting sessions, with the products of their labour going again, to the Mackenzie Papineau Battalion. Group discussions often centred on women's domestic and maternal concerns, and how politics affected the family. Speakers were sometimes invited to address the group, but often, women concentrated on developing their own oratorical skills. They discussed current events, reviewed books, examined newspaper clippings, delivered papers and practiced their political rhetoric by initiating an innovative methods of roll call: each women responded with a short story or a new slogan pertaining to the current political and economic situation.

Again, this women's group met within the bounds of a culturally sanctioned institution -- the women's auxiliary -- but they did not limit themselves to fund raising and support work for they strove to make themselves and their neighbours more conscious of the need for socialism. In pursuing such political work, CCF women could draw on the established traditions of women's separate organization in the farm movement, and in fact many female CCF leaders, like Louise Lucas, Sophia Dixon and Pearl Johnson, were converts from the UFC(SS). In the Farmer-Labour Party, which channeled many UFCers into the CCF, the concern for women's role in the movement was raised in 1933, and a resolution was sent to the first CCF convention, demanding some assured representation for women in the new Party's leadership:

Since women under capitalism represent a class which has not had proper recognition ... and as the viewpoint of this class is vitally necessary to the new social order ... resolved, in drafting the new CCF constitution special provisions of at least two women representatives on the National and Provincial executives[be made]<sup>45</sup>... until the economic emancipation of women is secured.

Although these provisions were not accepted, the debate over women's role in the provincial leadership and the status of women's CCF Clubs in Saskatchewan continued for some time. In 1936, Louise Lucas and Gertrude Fisher suggested to their fellow CCF Executive members that women's groups be called "study clubs, not auxiliaries"<sup>46</sup> and that when ten members were paid up, they could be a CCF poll committee with the right to elect two delegates to the provincial convention. The motion was lost, perhaps because the Executive viewed these groups primarily as ladies auxiliaries, or perhaps because they saw 'special' treatment for women's groups as undemocratic. Instead, women were allowed to send two delegates to their annual constituency meeting, and were invited to

attend the annual women's meeting held prior to the provincial convention; this, however, did not allow them voting status at the convention.

The debate over women's minority status in the movement continued, and those arguing for a more concerted effort to enlist women in the CCF won a consolation victory in 1937. At the provincial convention in that year, the Party agreed to appoint a provincial organizer to "assist the constituencies, where advisable, to set up women's clubs".<sup>47</sup> A few months later, the Executive hired a part-time organizer, Minerva Cooper, to help build the women's club network. Cooper, a young activist from Saskatoon, was a British emigrant who was forced off the family homestead and onto urban relief during the Depression. A dynamic and intelligent woman, Cooper set about her task with considerable enthusiasm, writing 400 letters to all the known women's CCF clubs, female convention delegates and local executives across the province. In this first year of her work, Cooper helped bring 16 new clubs into existence, boosting the number of women's groups in the province to 42. Her aim was to orient the clubs to women's social needs as well as their political development: the assumption was again, that women needed different, and 'extra' political education geared to their more isolated domestic lives and their less knowledgeable approach to politics. Cooper suggested a common program of entertainment and education:

We can use the time-honoured custom of afternoon teas for women to have a program for the tried worker and the new rank and filer, combining business, study and social time. In the meeting we can start off with slogans and anecdotes; we should avoid dull papers on economics. We need<sup>48</sup> regular meetings, with shared discussion and a capable leader.

The problems of organizing women, Cooper soon found, were generated primarily by the vast geographical area she had to cover, and by the limited economic circumstances of the Party. Central office could not afford to hire a full-time women's organizer, nor could local clubs afford to pay transportation costs to bring Cooper in. Gas shortages prohibited some women from attending regular meetings, and study materials were expensive for the women to buy and for central office to supply. Despite such difficulties, local clubs did flourish; indeed, one dynamic activist in the North, Dorise Neilson, helped to establish six new clubs in the space of a year. Cooper believed that such local women organizers, with a feel for the community, often had the best results. It was also beneficial for the Party, she maintained, when women's clubs gradually evolved into mixed ones, for new people were drawn into the movement, and the women, already fortified with executive and speaking experience, still tended to "hold executive positions in the mixed setting, not taking a back seat"<sup>49</sup> as they did in other clubs.

Cooper was not rehired for a second term as an organizer, but she did continue to edit a 'Women's Section' in The New Era/Saskatchewan Commonwealth, and her column was used as discussion material for women's clubs spread across the province. Although it included a few household hints, the column was primarily devoted to social and political issues; Cooper suggested books to read, films to consider, relayed articles written by CCF women, and wrote short editorials on everything from the day-to-day existence of farm women to foreign affairs. Quoting from the works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Cooper urged women to replace their dissatisfaction with the economic and political situation with a determined awareness to alter and improve society. She maintained that

women, "who were practical and realistic, although perhaps not theoretically inclined", should turn their thoughts from their household tasks -- "more patching, scrimping, planning" -- to tidying up the outside world. "So who is in a better position to understand the economic system than the person who is a consumer for the family ... and to whom is the threat of war terrible and the appeal of peace and a new social order more significant?"<sup>50</sup>, Cooper asked of the homemaker. The column often focused on women's domestic and maternal concerns, just as the CCF women's clubs concentrated on family-related issues. Yet, these family-centred concerns were located in a political context qualitatively different from the thinking of the earlier maternal feminists. In the 1930's CCF women addressed social and economic issues only skirted by earlier female reformers: the struggles of farm women, women on relief, and wage-earning women were the catalysts for their politicization, and their solution to social ills was the replacement of private with cooperative ownership. Rather than patchwork reform efforts to improve the morals of society, CCF women proposed to improve family life by effecting an entire reordering of the economic system.

Women's family-centred concerns were also the focus of women's columns in other provincial CCF newspapers. In Manitoba, a women's column appeared intermittently in the Commonwealth, often as an advertisement for women's CCF clubs in Winnipeg. In Manitoba, as in Saskatchewan, existing labourite and farm groups became the basis for new women's CCF clubs after 1933. In Winnipeg, for example, women's ILP groups, already constituted on a neighbourhood basis, had been active for some time and since 1932 were federated into a city-wide Women's Labor Conference. Some of these groups transformed themselves into

women's CCF clubs, although certain ILPers, both men and women, maintained the ILP name until the late 1930's. Nonetheless, all these women's groups cooperated in various campaigns and considered themselves part of the same socialist movement.

Within the neighbourhood women's CCF groups, fund raising and political education were key activities. Besides holding euchre evenings and bazaars, women pondered important questions of the day: in the Winnipeg Centre club, Lucy Woodsworth led study sessions on Social Planning for Canada; the South Centre group investigated women's employment in the needle trades; and the St. James group voiced its approval of the accessibility of birth control information by sending letters of support to Nurse Palmer during her trial.<sup>51</sup>

At the monthly meetings of the Women's Labor Conference, delegates from all the affiliated groups discussed current issues and cooperated on certain city-wide committees, such as the Minimum Wage Committee and the Education Committee. By the late 1930's, some 36 groups were affiliated, and the Conference was becoming vocal not only on local, but also on international issues, urging the federal government to prevent the export of nickel to aggressor countries and to allow a generous immigration policy for Jewish refugees fleeing Germany. The Conference saw education as an important key to women's increased involvement in the socialist movement and to this end, study programs with books like Irvine's The Cooperative Commonwealth and Myers' A History of Canadian Wealth were set up for small group discussion. Lucy Woodsworth and Beatrice Brigden were in constant demand as speakers: Brigden often gave seminars on the art of public speaking, while



Woodsworth spoke on international affairs and peace, drawing on her connection to the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Although the women's CCF network was firmly rooted in its neighbourhood orientation, the city Women's Labor Conference was given strong leadership by Lucy Woodsworth, Beatrice Brigden and Edith Cove. Cove, a school teacher from the Maritimes who had moved to Brandon before the first war and there married a railworker, had become active in Brandon Peoples Church after the 1919 General strike. Through the Church, she met Brigden, became politically active, joined the ILP, and later the CCF. After she had moved to Winnipeg, Cove became one of the indispensable local election organizers for the CCF, particularly in Woodsworth's Winnipeg riding.<sup>52</sup>

The commitment of these Winnipeg women to the semi-autonomous organization of women emerged from their own histories and experience of women's labourite groups, as well as from their shared perception that, in the socialist movement, women's capabilities, needs and concerns were sometimes different from men's. Lucy Woodsworth, for example, brought a keen sense of women's 'moral mission' to her CCF work, and Brigden undoubtedly carried some similar ideas from her Social Gospel days, for she too saw women's primary social role as moral educator and nurturer in the family. Yet, Brigden's regular columns in the Manitoba Commonwealth also included feminist views emphasizing women's right to economic equality. She stressed women's essential contribution to the rural, farm economy and stated that all women had a right to well-paid employment. In the latter case, her arguments owed a debt to the work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and to Olive Schreiner's classic, Woman and Labour, a book which pleaded for the liberation of middle-class

Victorian women from their lives of social and economic 'parasitism'.<sup>53</sup> Brigden firmly supported the right of all women -- single and married -- to employment, and decried the depression-initiated hostility to working women, labelling efforts to push women back into the kitchen as "akin to feudalism".<sup>54</sup>

Brigden's distinct blend of socialist and feminist ideas, drawn from both "maternal and equal rights feminism"<sup>55</sup>, saw hope for women's liberation in the alliance of women with the socialist movement: "if humanity is to advance, then all must march together; no lagging behind by one group; no suppression of one sex for the benefit of the other".<sup>56</sup> Still, in the march towards socialism, separate women's groups were essential to the development of women's skills and useful to the evolution of the Party. In 1937, under Brigden's leadership, the Winnipeg women organized a conference to discuss the contribution women might make to the CCF; to decide how to organize from a 'woman's viewpoint'; and to explore the particular needs of homemakers and rural women.

Brigden had already carried these ideas to the National Convention the year before, making a long report on the activities of Winnipeg CCF women, pointing to their study of social questions, social service work and their government lobbying. She urged upon the Party a more concerted policy of recruiting women members and of establishing women's CCF groups, citing the Winnipeg Labor Federation as a model. The responses to her suggestion were mixed. Clearly, not all the delegates took these 'ladies groups' seriously, nor did much of the Party leadership see the need to discuss women's issues. Indeed, when

Brigden described how Winnipeg women had established groups to discuss birth control, her report was greeted with "chortles" of amusement.<sup>57</sup>

But a small group of women participants who identified with Brigden's crusade to integrate women into the Party were sympathetic and voiced their support for her ideas. Louise Lucas approved of the Winnipeg approach, stressing that a flexible and moderate program, which would not frighten women away, was the best tactic. We must move slowly, she counselled, through respectable women's groups: "we should use common sense... just broach the subject of women and politics in some districts and you will be boycotted ... so be sensible ... start a dramatic club or get into the Ladies Aid".<sup>58</sup> Her views essentially coincided with those of Brigden, who included social service work and cooperation with liberal female reformers in her strategies to involve socialist women in politics. Two Toronto delegates, Jean Laing and Rose Henderson, spoke even more assertively of the need to politicize women. Laing echoed Brigden's suggestions that, within the Party there should be "a place for women to meet and discuss problems ... a training ground for women to develop as public speakers".<sup>59</sup> Henderson implied that the moderate approach suggested by others was not enough: we must directly address socialist issues, she maintained, for there is no such thing as 'neutral' or non-political educational work, and we must point out to women that every aspect of their life is affected by politics.<sup>60</sup> Despite this long discussion on the organization of women, no actual resolution on women was presented to the Convention. The following year, a resolution asking National Office for a woman organizer - "as little effort has been made in the past to organize women or interest

them in the CCF"<sup>61</sup> - was presented by the Fort William CCF, but it was quickly put aside.

In Ontario, the CCF strength lay in urban areas, and it was in cities like Toronto, Fort William and Hamilton that women's CCF groups first emerged. In the Ontario Commonwealth, a women's column ran briefly from 1935 to 1936, giving some publicity to women's issues. But the author of the women's section was herself rather ambiguous about the value of a separate column for women in an 'egalitarian' movement, and she explained that, on one level, "she disapproved of women's pages ... for women should read all articles."<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, she added, "women are rather backward about expressing their ideas in print, especially in competition with the masculine point of view"<sup>63</sup> -- and hence the need for the column. She concluded her rather negative view of women with a more positive note, the hope that men too would read the column - and hence, its name, 'Fairly Feminine'. Although the column only ran for a short time it did contain informative articles on women's history, the activities of CCF women, women in the peace movement, and the situation of women on relief. Its author was sometimes daring enough to challenge some of the staples of other women's pages, such as the fashion section, with articles like one entitled 'Behind Paris Gowns - the Dressmakers Strike',<sup>64</sup> an exposé of women's bad working conditions in the fashion industry. Yet, on other occasions the column found itself reverting to these same staples. Fashion tips and recipes were included for women, and woman's political character was drawn in one-dimension proportions: readers were informed in one reprinted article, for instance, that German women's conservatism was a major

factor in the growth of fascism for "the most violent anti-feminists in Germany were women".<sup>65</sup>

In the Commonwealth, articles directed towards women usually stressed women's family-centred concerns, but the paper's coverage of major strikes involving women workers meant that the situation of single working women was not totally ignored. After the demise of 'Fairly Feminine', occasional articles and editorials on issues like birth control, divorce, and rising prices sustained some discussion of women's issues. But lacking a regular women's column, the discussion was less animated. The Commonwealth also gave some publicity to various women's organizations which included CCF women, including the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Toronto Unemployed Single Women's Association, and the Women's Council of Action, a Toronto coalition loosely modelled on the Labour Women's Federation of Winnipeg. Little is recorded of the Women's Council for Action; it probably merged into other United Front organizations, like the later Progressive Women's Association.<sup>66</sup> Much more is known of the Women's Joint Committee (WJC), a briefly constituted, but significant women's group initiated by Toronto CCF women.

Many of the activists in the WJC brought to their CCF work past experience of both feminist and socialist causes. Rose Henderson, perhaps the best known of the WJC women, came from a middle-class Dublin family, and had participated in the British ILP before emigrating to Canada. In Canada, she was involved in a number of reform causes, including the suffrage movement. After the war, while working as a social worker for the Montreal Juvenile Court, she became increasingly involved in the Canadian Labour Party, and she was a founding member of

the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WIL). Her political outlook drew in maternal feminist ideas associated with the suffrage struggle, for she saw the family as an important and valuable social institution, and she honoured women's central role in the preservation of the home. Yet, in the 1920's and '30's, Henderson's analysis of women's role in society became more radical, and she increasingly stressed women's economic subordination, as well as the deplorable suppression of women's abilities in a male-dominated society: "women", she lamented, "have been turned into cringing, timid creatures by the diabolical gospel of their sin and inferiority."<sup>67</sup>

Alice Loeb, another WJC activist, came from a middle-class background, and in the 1920's became involved in feminist causes like the WIL and the birth control movement.<sup>68</sup> Her introduction to the CCF, however, may have come through the LSR, to which her husband was attached, or through her connection to the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order. More prominent in the WJC leadership were two women of working-class origin, Jean Laing and Elizabeth Morton. Jean Laing was introduced to the labour movement through her participation in the Auxiliary of the International Association of Machinists, and in 1934, she was hired as an organizer by the ILGWU. She led the ILWU's unsuccessful strike of dressmakers against Eaton's that same year, and later, acted as a spokesperson for the Toronto Unemployed Single Women's Association.

A British emigrant with her own salient experiences of factory life, Elizabeth Morton also became involved in the labour movement through an auxiliary, the Women's Guild of the Carpenters Union. Through the Guild, she met Florence Custance and joined the Women's

Labor Leagues, although she shunned membership in the CPC for the Ontario Socialist Party of Canada. She was extremely active in the East York Workers Association (EYWA) and joined the CCF through the EYWA's bloc affiliation in 1933. Only a year later, she was expelled, along with the rest of the Ontario Labour Conference, and she flirted with the CPC long enough to attend the first conference of the League against War and Fascism in Paris in 1935. She subsequently returned to the CCF, but she remained committed to a United Front of socialists and Communists.

Despite their primary education in the trade union movement, Laing and Morton were concerned with feminist issues; both saw the need to form separate organizations of working-class women to aid their political development, and both saw the need to lobby the larger socialist movement on women's issues. Morton, for instance, helped to organize a Marxist women's study group in the East York Workers Association, and after her trip to Paris, she was a vocal advocate of women's self-organization within the Canadian anti-fascist movement.

The feminist concerns of the WJC were reflected in their stated aims: to address "social problems, particularly those of women" and to "act as a training school"<sup>69</sup> for CCF women. To the WJC, addressing the problems of women primarily meant addressing the problems of the family. As John Manley points out, it is likely that most of the WJC membership were married women, "consequently, the family and its fate during a period of intense socio-economic crisis became a central preoccupation of the WJC".<sup>70</sup> The Committee, for instance, aided the establishment of a progressive summer camp for inner-city children, even bringing old pots, dishes and towels to a meeting as donations for the camp. Although the women jokingly called this meeting "a shower for the

camp"<sup>71</sup>, they did not see their efforts as traditional auxiliary work. Rather, they believed they were taking direct action for a pressing social and political cause. The Committee also drew on other aspects of female culture, especially women's maternal concerns, in their work: they organized a Mothers Committee to visit youths imprisoned in Mimico Jail after a relief strike; planned a Mothers Day peace program with the WIL; and sponsored a conference on unemployment, focusing on relief "in relation to the home and children in the home".<sup>72</sup> As well, the Committee wrote letters protesting the plight of the single unemployed woman and expressed some interest in organizing around the birth control issue. Elizabeth Morton brought the director of the East York Parents Clinic to speak to the WJC, and in response to her talk, the Committee immediately suggested that Margaret Sanger be brought to Toronto. This plan, however, never materialized, as Brant suggested building more community support for the clinic first, and subsequently, the CCF women found that within their own movement, "the clinic idea was well received by the women ... but not by the men".<sup>73</sup>

The second aim of the WJC -- to train women for leadership -- was a less volatile issue. Explaining the function of the Committee to the Commonwealth, the WJC secretary, Miss M. Tilton wrote that:

Women are very diffident about engaging in discussion at a meeting where men are in the majority. As women in the future will play an important role in the building of Socialism and have a real contribution to make, they must be trained and encouraged to take their place.<sup>74</sup>

To achieve this end, the more experienced CCF women in the WJC eschewed some executive positions and the Committee had a rotating chair to spread leadership experience more evenly. At one meeting, Elizabeth Morton suggested widening the basis of the WJC by electing a social



committee, not from the existing executive, which would make contact with women in CCF clubs across the city, eventually augmenting the CCF 'women's network'.

But the WJC did not exist long enough to fulfill Morton's hopes: it was debilitated by its disputes with the Party leadership, primarily over United Front work with the Communists, but also over what the women called the Party's obsessive, electoral, "vote catching policies".<sup>75</sup> Some of the prominent WJC women had briefly considered an electoral alliance with other leftists in the 1935 general election,<sup>76</sup> and they continued to work with Communists in organizations like the League against War and Fascism, the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy and the Toronto Progressive Women's Association. Women like Rose Henderson and Jean Laing were not, as other historians have suggested, naive pawns of the Communists; rather, these CCFers believed that the causes they supported were more important than their differences with the CPC. Acrimonious debate over the question of working with the CPC persisted within the CCF, and finally in 1936, after a United Front May Day Parade, Jean Laing and other CCFers were expelled from the Party. The WJC's protests over the expulsions, including Alice Loeb's open letter to the Commonwealth, may have only exacerbated the differences between the WJC and the Party leadership. Although the Committee tried to visit the executive, "to explain their function",<sup>77</sup> the WJC disappeared from existence shortly afterwards and WJC members probably took their energies elsewhere, into organizations like the League against War and Fascism, and the Toronto Progressive Women's Association.

Although the WJC had a brief history and minimal impact on the CCF, its existence indicated the presence of a small group of

socialist-feminists within the Party. At the time, many women and men in the CCF were unsympathetic to the WJC; they did not attach any priority to women's issues and they did not understand why these women felt the need to organize autonomously. Lacking a stronger feminist awareness among the Party's female membership a more significant feminist revolt had to await a future date.

CCF women in the Western provinces of Alberta and British Columbia also grappled with the question of separate organizations for women. In Alberta, CCF women's organizations grew primarily from the existing Edmonton and Calgary labourite groups, although women from the United Farmers of Alberta may have been peripherally involved. In Edmonton, Labour Party women decided to constitute themselves as a CCF women's group in the fall of 1935, and by the end of that year, the Calgary Women's Labour Party had followed suit. Scattered references to these two women's groups in the Alberta Labor News indicated that they were often responsible for the Party's necessary social events and fund raising ventures. But like the earlier Women's Labour Parties led by Edith Patterson, Amelia Smith and Mary Crawford, CCF women also discussed political issues and attempted to intervene in current social causes.

The Edmonton CCF women's club was headed in 1935-36 by Mrs. Shortcliffe, but strong direction was undoubtedly given by veteran Mary Crawford, and by 1937, by Caroline Riley, who was also known as a local WIL activist. In a report to the Peoples Weekly Labor Annual in 1938, Riley described the CCF Women's Council occupying a "very definite, but not very separate place, in the Party, for although our work is along traditional feminine lines, we work shoulder to shoulder with the men in

the movement."<sup>78</sup> The Council was committed to the discussion of women's issues, and following the tactics of the earlier Women's Labour Party, of 'boring from within' other women's organizations for it sent delegates to the local WIL and Council of Women, in the hopes of "permeating them with socialist ideals".<sup>79</sup> In its first years of existence, the Council had speakers and discussions on subjects like peace, Canadian radio, juvenile delinquency and birth control. It did some preliminary research on the conditions of the unemployed 'girl' in Edmonton, jointly sponsored a Mothers Day peace program, and supported a strike of local laundry workers. Finding the pace "rather bewildering", said Riley, we reassessed our activities, and decided to concentrate on two projects: influencing other women's organizations along socialist lines, and preparing for elections. The latter project, apparently recommended by the Party, unfortunately meant that the women "had to come back to the old business of women's organizations ... that of financial aid." "Little as some of us like that", Riley concluded, "we shall probably have to put on teas, bridges, raffles, etc. to fill the treasury". Convinced that their primary aim was to "work with the men to effect a change in the economic system", and secondly, that it was "not their sex which hampered them, but their sex under capitalism",<sup>80</sup> the Edmonton women resigned themselves to following the electoral priorities of the Party.<sup>81</sup>

In British Columbia, a very active CCF Women's Council, and better historical records allow a more detailed picture of women's organization within the Party. By the Second World War, women's groups had evolved in Victoria, Saanich and some of the interior and Island resource towns. Some of these groups were devoted primarily to social

convening and fund raising; others concentrated on socialist education; and still others combined both, raising money for the Party and discussing contemporary women's concerns. The largest concentration of CCF women's committees lay in greater Vancouver, where constituency and community-centred women's CCF clubs were drawn together in a city-wide CCF Women's Council. In Vancouver, fund raising was usually the prerogative of the Party's Ways and Means Committee, which attended to the necessary bingo games, bazaars and picnics. By the mid-30's, women who were primarily interested in discussing political issues and fostering women's increased participation in the Party were active in the Women's Lyceum, which merged later into the Vancouver CCF Women's Council.

The Women's Lyceum, remembers Hilda Kristiansen, was initiated by Party leaders like Elizabeth Kerr, Dorothy Steeves and Dorothy Cameron, who were concerned with women's timid political participation, and who wished to "get women more involved in the Party".<sup>82</sup> Education and leadership training were always an important part of the Women's Council's work: women were taught, for instance, how to make resolutions, and were given lessons in public speaking. The Vancouver Council, like the Toronto and Winnipeg groups, also saw itself as a focal point for discussion of women's issues, and it sometimes tried to link up with other women's reform groups in order to create an effective women's lobby in the city. This United Front tactic could take the CCF women in directions to the Right and Left of the Party, causing debate and disagreement within the Council. Dorothy Steeves, for example, dutifully attended the Local Council of Women meetings, but privately bemoaned their conservatism, and the Liberal and Conservative

politicking within the Council.<sup>83</sup> At times, she openly challenged the usefulness of affiliation to this liberal women's group, and suggested CCF women put their energies elsewhere. On the other hand, during the Relief Camp Workers strike, CCF women ignored Party prohibitions against working with the CPC and joined Communist women in the creation of a Vancouver Mothers Council. The Council helped to "make food by the bushel"<sup>84</sup> for the striking men, and organized a massive Mothers Day demonstration calling for the abolition of the Relief Camps.

Thus, the Vancouver CCF Women's Council saw itself as a training ground for Party women, and as a socialist lobby for women's interests. Although many members of the B.C. Party saw feminism as a myopic and class-blind ideology, a few women on the Council staunchly defended their allegiance to both socialist and feminist ideals. Some maintained that women had a different viewpoint to offer socialism, perhaps even a humanizing touch:

When the provincial office on Robson moved to Hastings Street ... well, there were some in the Party who thought even saying 'thank you' was too bourgeois! But we in the Women's Lyceum thought otherwise. We set up a room with coffee and books to read in the new office ... a hospitality room for out of town visitors.<sup>85</sup>

More significantly, Party leaders like Laura Jamieson emphasized that women's family concerns gave her a distinct and important outlook to contribution to socialism, and Elizabeth Kerr suggested in the Federationist's women's column, that women, in contrast to men, might bring to socialism "a spiritual, as well as material quality."<sup>86</sup>

As it evolved in The Federationist, the women's column reflected the various perspectives on the woman question held in the B.C. Party. Written in the early years by Eve Grey Smith, the column concentrated primarily on economic issues -- women's role in the class struggle, the

relationship of worker and capitalist, the situation of unemployed women -- revealing Smith's Marxism and the strong Marxist tradition in the B.C. Party. When Elizabeth Kerr assumed responsibility for the column in 1937, it began to take a different shape: although she did not ignore economic issues, Kerr also discussed 'feminist' concerns, such as the need for increased female participation in politics, women's role in the family, the need for better divorce laws, and an issue occasionally raised by CCF MLA's, birth control.<sup>87</sup>

Kerr, a Scottish emigrant, had in the pre-war days organized her sister nurses in Calgary to demand an eight hour day and supported women's suffrage. As an aspiring writer and feminist, she joined the Women's Press Club. As a dedicated socialist, she joined the B.C. SPC. Both influences were brought to bear on her work with the Women's Council. A "prickly, determined yet generous"<sup>88</sup> woman, Kerr felt a strong bond with the silent female membership, whom she believed deferred to the male leadership, yet she was not afraid to speak out against the discriminatory attitudes of men in the Party. She was dedicated to increasing the number of women active in the CCF and was disgusted with men who feared the contamination of socialism with feminist ideas. After the 1938 provincial convention, Kerr lamented the small number of female delegates, blaming "family responsibilities and male prejudice" for their absence, and she objected strenuously to the fear, apparently expressed at the convention, that three women on the Party executive would spell "feminist control" of the inner Party sanctums:

We have not shown feminist views, but we have examined a broad range of problems from a human perspective .. but even if we were stay-at-home types, without a broader view, why shouldn't that womanly view be expressed in our movement? For a movement

boasting no difference in sex, race and creed, some of our Marxian socialists are pitifully mid-Victorian.<sup>89</sup>

Later, Kerr was to lose a CCF nomination for provincial election; while her outspoken defence of the U.S.S.R., even after 1940, was probably the primary cause of her defeat, it is possible that her feminism made her suspect in the eyes of other Party members.

Like Elizabeth Kerr, Laura Jamieson was influenced by both the feminist and socialist movements. Jamieson had an unmistakably middle-class background: educated at the University of Toronto, she worked as a teacher and social service worker with the YWCA before marrying a B.C. Judge. Widowed at forty-three, Jamieson was offered a judgeship in Juvenile Court in the 1920's, a reward for her long devotion to respectable reform causes like the Parent-Teacher Federation, the University Women's Club and women's suffrage. But Jamieson, unlike her fellow Vancouver suffragist, and later Magistrate, Emily Murphy, altered her political allegiances in the 20's, replacing her primary interest in liberal reform groups like the Local Council of Women with involvement in the WIL, and eventually the CCF. Like Rose Henderson, Jamieson witnessed class inequality first-hand in her work for the court, and during the 1920's, she widened her maternal feminist outlook to encompass a more comprehensive socialist critique of women's inequality, and a more thorough-going commitment to social change. Jamieson also related her feminism and socialism to the cause of peace; she was a founding member of the WIL in Canada, and perhaps the most important figure behind its early survival in the 1920's. Like Beatrice Brigden, another WIL supporter, Jamieson combined her 'maternalist' understanding of women's inherent sympathy for moral, family issues, with an egalitarian belief in women's equal capabilities and right to

economic self-sufficiency. Jamieson's activities in the CCF Women's Council and her work in the Legislature brought together these ideas: through the Council, she tried to involve more women in politics by emphasizing the political implications of their family concerns, and in the Legislature, she was a vocal advocate of the right of working women to economic independence.

Concern for working women was also one of the driving forces behind Helena Gutteridge's interest in the CCF Women's Council. Like Jamieson, she carried some of the "zest of the suffrage struggle"<sup>90</sup> into her later work with the CCF; yet, Gutteridge's early background contrasted sharply with that of Laura Jamieson. The product of a British working-class upbringing, Gutteridge left home at an early age to educate herself, as her father did not think any effort should be made to educate women. After obtaining diplomas in teaching, hygiene and sanitary science, and involving herself in the British suffrage movement, Gutteridge emigrated to Canada in 1911. She was soon active in the Vancouver suffrage movement and the labour movement. Before World War I, she was an executive member of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, and she worked as an organizer for the laundry workers union. Although she was committed to suffrage, Gutteridge rejected the middle-class orientation of the Vancouver Political Equality League and founded the British Columbia Woman's Suffrage League as an alternative. Her primary loyalties were to working-class women, the union movement and Labour Party principles; to her, the unionization of women and women's economic independence were the key prerequisites to women's emancipation.<sup>91</sup>



In the 1920's, Gutteridge temporarily left politics; she married and attempted to farm in the Fraser Valley, but after a divorce, she returned to Vancouver, and in 1937, ran successfully as a CCF aldermanic candidate. Defeated in the 1939 election, perhaps because of her 'disrespectful' remarks about the British crown<sup>92</sup>, Gutteridge again left Vancouver, and took a job in a Japanese internment camp. Gutteridge supported the work of the Women's Council during the 1930's, for like Jamieson, she believed that women often needed encouragement and training in a comfortable atmosphere to aid their political initiation, and secondly, that women had a special responsibility to bring family concerns into the realm of politics. Despite these feminist sympathies, says Hilda Kristiansen, Gutteridge would have rejected the label 'feminist', for she always proudly referred to herself, first and foremost, as a 'trade union woman'.<sup>93</sup>

It was not Gutteridge, however, but Dorothy Steeves who best symbolized the hesitancy of CCFers to understand and accept women's committees. A Dutch war bride, Steeves had trained in Holland as a lawyer, and was a supporter of the Dutch suffrage movement before emigrating in 1919. An intellectual, sometimes inclined towards intellectual snobbery, Steeves became one of the Party's best debaters in the provincial Legislature and a recognized theoretician and leader in the B.C. CCF. Drawn into the CCF through the LSR, her middle-class origins were at first viewed with intense suspicion by working-class Marxists like Ernest Winch; their suspicions, however, were later eradicated by Steeves' ready grasp of Marxism and her devotion to Party work. On the question of separate women's organizations, however, Steeves retained a certain ambiguity in her views. Although she often

participated in the Women's Council, Steeves concurrently wondered whether such committees were acceptable in a socialist party, and she later commented unsympathetically on:

Women who weren't involved and didn't think ... I don't think there was any discrimination against women .. some women just look for it. I'm as good as any man and I've been held to be as good as any man.<sup>94</sup>

Her uneasiness with women's groups may have stemmed from her inability to look beyond her own exceptional talents and background to understand most women's common social experiences, including their feelings of inferiority. Perhaps she also feared that the question of women's social equality would be confined to the less prestigious women's committees, and therefore ignored by the rest of the Party.

In a similar vein, Grace MacInnis supported the work of the Women's Council, but it was not one of her own primary interests. MacInnis recognized that women sometimes felt more comfortable in women's groups and that, because of their occupation - as homemakers - they often could not attend evening meetings. On the other hand, her own experience of the world had been quite different:

I was brought up with the idea that there was no difference between men and women. I never opposed women's groups ... but I didn't need them ... I always felt that when women felt more comfortable and mature, they'd leave women's groups for larger work.<sup>95</sup>

Like Steeves, MacInnis' personal history probably made her less receptive to women's groups, although she later became an advocate on women's issues, and even in the 1930's she clearly understood some of the problems women encountered in the political world. In an article in the Ontario Commonwealth in 1935, MacInnis pointedly commented on a household where the husband shared domestic labour so that his wife could be politically active. "No need to talk about equality in that

home" was her conclusion. The implication was that many other households lacked that equality.<sup>96</sup>

Although the views of Steeves and MacInnis reflected their own histories, they also symbolized a strong anti-feminist tradition within the B.C. CCF. Indeed, given the historical record of the SPC's ambivalence towards women's groups, it is remarkable that such a strong women's network was created in British Columbia before World War II. The existence of this socialist-feminist alliance can be attributed, in part, to the commitment and leadership of women like Laura Jamieson, Elizabeth Kerr and Hilda Kristiansen, who devoted considerable time and energy to the Women's Council. But more than leadership was needed: women's self organization pointed to the fact that women's groups -- of whatever ilk -- answered specific needs of Party women and spoke meaningfully to culturally sanctioned ideas about women's separate sphere. Social and fund-raising groups allowed women to participate in socially acceptable auxiliaries, a well-worn path which the Party often encouraged women to take. The Women's Council provided women with a supportive training ground for political involvement and an opportunity to discuss women's issues. In the context of the 1930's, women's issues often took on the shape of maternal and domestic concerns relating to children, education, consumer issues and peace. Nevertheless, the needs of working women were not entirely forgotten. Legislature members Jamieson, Steeves, MacInnis and Ernest Winch tried to expose the exploitation of wage-earning women and they demanded government legislation to protect women's interests. And CCF activists like Eve Grey Smith played a role in the Single Women's Unemployment Association, while CCF writers supported the unionization of women. Nevertheless,

the primary understanding of women's issues was bound up with women's domestic role and the preservation of the family. But for CCF women who marched against fascism in the Mothers Day peace parade, and who demonstrated against the Relief Camps, mothering did not have the same political meaning as it did for liberal reformers in the LCW, or as it had for their forerunners, the maternal feminists. To CCF women, their recognition of the class struggle, their fight against fascism, and their vision of a cooperative, socialist society, made theirs a 'militant mothering'.

(v)

By the outbreak of World War II, the basis for women's participation in the CCF, and a rough understanding of what comprised women's issues had been established. Unlike the CPC, the CCF did not include a list of women's demands in its platform. Indeed, the Regina Manifesto barely acknowledged the massive sexual inequalities existing in Canadian society. The woman question -- that is, the origins of and solutions to women's oppression -- was rarely considered by the Party. As a result, women's issues did not assume a place of importance in the CCF's theoretical reflections or in its appeal to the Canadian public.

This lack of concern is not particularly surprising for the CCF did not inherit from its intellectual ancestors a primary preoccupation with the question of women's inequality and women's rights. Moreover, many CCF members, including women, were drawn to the Party because of their experience of economic and social inequality in general, not because of their concern for women's inequality in particular. Their

ideas were further reinforced by common notions that women's work was secondary to the family income, and by the overwhelming magnitude of the Depression. Many women, newcomers to politics after the intense feminist experience of the suffrage movement, and principally influenced by the current economic upheaval, simply failed to see women's issues as issues at all; as one woman reflected:

The question of women just never came up. Economics and war overshadowed everything else. I never thought about the woman question ... except for resenting always being the stenographer of the group!

Despite the Party's lack of interest in the woman question, many members believed that woman's political concerns and her world view, conditioned by her central role in the family, were different than men's; hence, the Party often tried to appeal to women as homemakers and as mothers. Women wage-earners were also a subject of concern: the CCF tried to publicize women's working conditions, intervene in union struggles and alter existing labour legislation. But just as wage-earning women still constituted a minority of the population, so they figured less in CCF strategies. This approach was, on the one hand, politically practical and astute: since many women were primarily responsible for domestic labour, it was wise to appeal to women on the basis of their day-to-day experiences. At the same time, it held out the danger of confining women to a maternal and domestic stereotype. If woman's central role in the family was used to positive effect to involve and integrate women into one level of socialist politics, it also remained a central barrier to her involvement in areas of leadership and policy making. Women, underrepresented in the leadership and undervalued as candidates, had difficulties carrying the double burden of family responsibilities and political obligations; they

probably had difficulties moving from the social committees into which they were channelled to the centres of decision making; and they may have had difficulties convincing themselves and others that their 'maternal qualities' really suited them to positions of power and policy making in areas of economics and defence.

The underrepresentation of women in the leadership did not mean that women's contribution to the Party's growth was insignificant. On the contrary, women comprised an indispensable army of local educators, organizers and electioneers, who created the supporting edifice which allowed the socialist movement to build upwards. At the same time, the underrepresentation of women in the leadership supplied one rationale for the existence of semi-autonomous women's committees, auxiliaries and councils. These CCF women's groups grew organically from existing farm and labourite organizations or emerged as enthusiastic responses to the establishment of the CCF. At the local level, women's groups were created with an array of aims extending from bazaars to political lobbying. Some of these groups spoke to women's desire to pursue traditional fund raising and support work in a comfortable social atmosphere while simultaneously developing their own understanding of socialist issues. Others, like the Women's Joint Committee, became more militant feminist voices within the Party. The groups modelled predominantly on the auxiliary reflected the easy integration of women into the Party on the basis of culturally accepted norms; the more militant, like the WJC, pointed to the existence of pockets of socialist-feminism within the Party. This latter group was clearly concerned that women's concerns be more centrally addressed by socialists. Of course, many socialist-feminists, whose thoughts were

also shaped by prevailing notions of womanhood and women's central domestic duty, agreed that women's issues included the problems of wage-earning and unemployed women but were predominantly focused on women's family-centred concerns -- thus echoing the very contradiction which kept women isolated from the mainstream of the socialist movement. But at the time, neither the women's auxiliaries, or the more vocal women's committees saw their efforts as marginal or limited by a maternal mystique, for as Margaret Benson said, CCF women, in their recognition of class and socialist issues, were different: "unlike the ladies auxiliary, we were militant!" Perhaps Beatrice Brigden, who had personally travelled the route from the era of maternal feminism to the one of militant mothering, best articulated this difference:

Yes, the CCF woman does differ from others. Chiefly in this, we think, she has separated herself very largely from the prejudices and fallacies of the capitalist order. She repudiates the system of competition ... she has accepted the cooperative principle, the well-tested recipe for success in her own home-making: each giving according to her ability and each receiving according to her need. The CCF woman proposes to apply <sup>98</sup>this same kindly, enduring fundamental to the social order.

## Footnotes: Chapter IV

- 1 The Regina Leader Post, July 18, 1933, listed 21 women out of 131 delegates. This number may not be an exact count, so the number of women may have been slightly higher or lower.
- 2 Interview with Mildred Fahrni, Dec. 3, 1980; interview with Sophia Dixon, Nov. 1, 1980; Regina Leader Post, July 18, 1933.
- 3 University of Toronto (U of T), Thomas Fisher Rare Books Room, Woodsworth Memorial Collection (hereafter WMC), Box 8, Socialist Party of Canada Papers, E. Winch to B. Robinson, Sept. 8, 1933.
- 4 Some critics from the Left describe the CCF as 'liberals in a hurry'. See Gary Teeple, "'Liberals in a Hurry': Socialism and the CCF/NDP", in Gary Teeple, ed., Capitalism and the national question in Canada (Toronto, 1972). Norman Penner is more sympathetic to the CCF, seeing the Regina Manifesto as "reformist", though "anti-capitalist". Norman Penner, The Canadian Left (Toronto, 1977). Many writers also presume that the CCF changed over time, either from a "movement to a Party", or from a socialist party to a more moderate social democratic party. See Walter Young, The Anatomy of a Party: the national CCF (Toronto, 1969), for the first view, and Leo Zakuta, A Protest Movement Becalmed (Toronto, 1964), for the second view.
- 5 Michiel Horn, The League for Social Reconstruction: The Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada (Toronto, 1980), p. 101.
- 6 Gerald Caplan, The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism (Toronto, 1973), chap. 4.
- 7 Nelson Wiseman, "A Political History of the Manitoba CCF/NDP", (Ph.D. University of Toronto, 1975); Ronald Grantham, "Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement in B.C., 1898-1933", (M.A. University of British Columbia, 1942).
- 8 Public Archives of Canada (PAC), CCF Papers, MG 28 IV I, Vol. 61, Beatrice Brigden to David Lewis, Feb. 14, 1938.
- 9 Ibid., David Lewis to C. Breswick, Aug. 11, 1939. Lewis said he was "very happy" with the new appointment. The fact that Brigden was not reelected indicates that some Manitoba delegates also disagreed with her methods of organizing.
- 10 Interview with Hilda Kristiansen, Dec. 8, 1980.
- 11 Interview with Nellie Peterson, Nov. 21, 1980.
- ✓ 12 Irene Biss, "The Dressmakers Strike", Canadian Forum, July, 1931.



- 13 Patricia Schultz, The East York Workers Association (Toronto, 1975).
- 14 Interview with Sophia Dixon, Nov. 1, 1980.
- 15 Interview with Marjorie Mann, April, 1980.
- 16 Interview with Avis McCury, May 30, 1982.
- 17 Beatrice Brigden, "One Woman's Campaign for Social Purity and Social Reform", in Richard Allen, ed., The Social Gospel in Canada (Ottawa, 1975).
- 18 Interview with Mildred Farhni, Dec. 3, 1980.
- 19 Interview with Nellie Peterson.
- 20 On the WIL, see G. Bussey and M. Timms, Pioneering for Peace (London, 1965) and Tom Socknat, "Witness Against War: The Canadian Pacifist Movement, 1900-1945" (Ph.D. McMaster University, 1981).
- 21 The League's statement of purpose called for a far-reaching transformation of the social order: "We work for universal disarmament, the solution of conflicts by human solidarity ... and the establishment of social, economic and political justice for all, without distinction of sex, race, class or creed". University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Books Room, Flora M. Denison Collection, Pax Internationale, Vol. 5, no. 6, April 1930.
- ✓ 22 U of T, Rare Books Room, Kenny pamphlet collection, Rose Henderson, "Woman and War", n.d.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Examples of Weaver's articles are found in later B.C. Federationist/CCF News, June 22, 1946; July 29, 1948.
- 25 Interview with Eve Smith, July 19, 1981.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Interview with D.L., Nov. 9, 1980.
- 28 Ontario New Commonwealth (Ont N Comm), April 27, 1935.
- 29 Interview with Sophia Dixon.
- 30 Ont N Comm, Aug. 10, 1935.
- 31 Interview with Grace MacInnis, July 17, 1981.
- 32 Interview with L.M., Nov. 29, 1980. Other women also referred to social disapproval of wives who spent long periods away from home, travelling and organizing for the Party.

- 33 Saskatchewan Archives Board, Interview of Georgina Taylor with Elsie Gorius.
- 34 Interview with Nellie Peterson.
- 35 Ont N Comm, Nov. 23, 1935.
- 36 Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Interview of G. Taylor with Elsie Gorius.
- 37 Interview with Mildred Farhni.
- 38 SAB, Gertrude Telford Papers, Vol. xxxi, Typescript, "Memories", and Vol. xx, Education.
- 39 For example, see an article reprinted in the Ontario New Commonwealth, May 25, 1935 on "The Three Types of Women". The author pigeonholed women into three stereotypes -- the 'clinging vine', the 'agressive, mannish woman', and the 'normal' woman who was neither superior or inferior, but interested in children, home and career. Similar pseudo-psychological investigations of men's character types did not appear in CCF newspapers. Some oral evidence also supports my contention. See SAB, Interview of Georgina Taylor with Gladys Strum, Aug. 14, 1981.
- 40 PAC, Agnes Macphail Papers, MG 27 III C4, Vol. 2, Jean Laing to A. Macphail, March 28, 1940.
- 41 SAB, Gertrude Telford Papers, Vol. xxxii, G. Telford to C.M. Fines, June 12, 1944. Telford's italics.
- 42 Ibid., Louise Lucas to Gertrude Telford, May 5, 1945.
- 43 SAB, Interview of Georgina Taylor with Margaret Benson.
- 44 Nutana CCF Women's Club Minute Book. Held by Georgina Taylor.
- 45 SAB, CCF Papers, Minutes of the Farmer-Labour group. Provincial Executive, July 8, 1933.
- 46 SAB, CCF Papers, Provincial Executive Minutes, March 28-29, 1936.
- 47 Ibid., Proceedings of the 1937 Provincial Convention. Women who wanted voting status for CCF women's clubs failed to achieve their aim, but Cooper was hired as a 'consolation prize' to prove the Party's interest in boosting its female membership.
- 48 The New Era, May 28, 1931.
- 49 SAB, CCF Papers, Minerva Cooper to the 1938 Provincial Convention.
- 50 The New Era, Jan. 28, 1938.

- 51 Manitoba Commonwealth (Man Comm), Nov. 8, 1935; Feb. 26, 1937; Nov. 13, 1936. Nurse Palmer's case was the rallying cry for birth control advocates during the late 1930's. See Dianne Dodd, "The Birth Control Movement on Trial", Social History/Histoire Sociale, Vol. xvi, no. 32, (November, 1983).
- 52 The Winnipeg General Strike may have had an important effect on Cove's thinking. Her husband worked for the CPR and was involved in the 1919 Strike. Interview with Marion and Gordon Fines, Oct. 21, 1980.
- 53 From Brigden's papers, it is clear that she read Gilman and Scott Nearing. It is also likely that she read Schreiner, seen in Brigden's younger years as a 'feminist classic'. Some of her later articles almost paraphrased Schreiner's Woman and Labour.
- 54 Man Comm, Feb. 22, 1936.
- 55 Carol Bacchi, Liberation Deferred: The Ideas of the English Canadian Suffragists, 1880-1920 (Toronto, 1983), pp. 40, 41.
- 56 Man Comm, Feb. 22, 1935.
- 57 David Lewis, The Good Fight (Toronto, 1981), pp. 102-103. Lewis refers to the "unintended comedy" which lightened the otherwise serious atmosphere of the convention: Brigden's report on groups to discuss birth control (which, she said, were growing by leaps and bounds) was greeted with "chortles of laughter". Also, when an aging Rose Henderson spoke of the need for a United Front, and of her long fight in the mass struggle, one delegate answered "you look like it", again to the amusement of the convention. Lewis cites these as 'amusing' incidents which eased the tension on the convention floor. The latter remark about Henderson may be construed as sexist or ageist -- it was certainly in bad taste. Henderson was probably in bad health: she died only six months later.
- 58 PAC, CCF Papers, MG 28 IC I, Vol. 10, Louise Lucas to the National CCF Convention, Aug. 3, 1936.
- 59 Ibid., Laing to the 1936 Convention.
- 60 Ibid., Henderson to the 1936 Convention.
- 61 PAC, CCF Papers, Vol. 10, Resolutions presented by the Fort William CCF for the 1937 Convention, July 26, 1937.
- 62 Ont N Comm, May 18, 1935.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Ont N Comm, June 8, 1935.
- 65 Ont N Comm, Aug. 3, 1935.

- 66 The Women's Progressive Association was a United Front organization, with a significant CPC presence. See Chapter V.
- 67 Rose Henderson quoted in John Manley, "Women and the Left in the 1930's: The Case of the Toronto CCF Women's Joint Committee", Atlantis, Vol. 5, no. 2, (Spring, 1980), p. 104.
- 68 Alice Loeb was corresponding with Margaret Sanger about the birth control movement in Canada. Angus McLaren, "'What Has This To Do With Working Class Women?': Birth Control and the Canadian Left, 1900-1939", Social History/Histoire Sociale, Vol. XIV, no. 28, (November, 1981).
- 69 U of T, Rare Books Room, WMC, Box 10B, Women's Joint Committee Minutes, March 3, 1936.
- 70 John Manley, "Women and the Left in the 1930's", p. 112.
- 71 U of T, WMC, Women's Joint Committee Minutes, May 12, 1936.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Ibid., April 7, 1936.
- 74 Ont N Comm, March 21, 1936.
- 75 U of T, WMC, Women's Joint Committee Minutes, June 9, 1936.
- 76 Some CCF, trade union and CPC women formed the Women's Election Committee to rally support for progressive candidates in the 1935 federal election. It was opposed by the CCF leadership as a CPC front and died an early death, having little or no impact on the election. John Manley, "Women on the Left in the 1930's", p. 111.
- 77 U of T, WMC, Women's Joint Committee Minutes, June 9, 1936.
- 78 Peoples Weekly Labor Annual, 1938.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 The Council's change in strategy may have resulted in a toned-down activism, but it was not, as John Manley suggests, an about-face, for such fund raising activities were a part of the Edmonton Council's history. Moreover, it is unlikely that Mary Crawford, who had proven feminist sympathies, was intentionally silencing the Women's Council.
- 82 Interview with Hilda Kristiansen.
- 83 University of British Columbia Archives, (UBC), Dorothy Steeves Papers, Box 6, Diaries, Jan. 3, 1938 and Feb. 10, 1939.

- 84 Interview with Hilda Kristiansen.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 B.C. Federationist, Dec. 2, 1937.
- 87 UBC, Angus MacInnis Collection, Box 24, Legislative Scrapbooks. In 1937 Steeves advocated that the province urge the Public Health nurses to give out birth control information, and train teachers in normal schools in sex education, as "birth control is a social necessity and its availability should not be limited to the wealthy".
- 88 Interview with Grace MacInnis, July 11, 1980.
- 89 B.C. Federationist, July 7, 1938.
- 90 B.C. Provincial Archives, Laura Jamieson Papers, MSS 311, file 9, "the zest of the suffrage fight gave us the impetus to carry on with reform."
- 91 Susan Wade, "Helena Gutteridge: Votes for Women and Trade Unions", in Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess, eds., In Her Own Right (Victoria, 1980).
- 92 Gutteridge called the 1939 Royal Visit an "unnecessary circus". She objected to vast sums spent on the visit when many were still unemployed. Susan Wade, "Helena Gutteridge", p. 198.
- 93 Interview with Hilda Kristiansen.
- 94 UBC, Oral History Collection, Interview of M. Karnouk with Dorothy Steeves, #182-1.
- 95 Interview with Grace MacInnis.
- 96 John Manley, "Women on the Left in the 1930's", p. 103; Ont N Comm June 29, 1935.
- 97 Interview with D.L., Nov. 9, 1980.
- 98 Public Archives of Manitoba, Beatrice Brigden Papers, Box 7, Clippings, Labor Annual, Spet., 1934.

## CHAPTER V

### MORE MILITANT MOTHERING: COMMUNIST WOMEN DURING THE POPULAR FRONT

By the summer of 1935, Canadian Communists had charted a new course of action, and the 'pink tea pacifists' whom they had opposed a few years earlier, now became sought-after allies in the fight against fascism. Influenced by the Communist International, the Canadian Party embarked on a period of organizing known as the Popular, or Peoples Front. During this period, the CPC's fortunes rose. Membership, including female membership, increased, and the Party brought its influence to bear on some of the important progressive campaigns of the decade: the Canadian League against War and Fascism, the Canadian Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, and especially the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO). Less isolated by the sectarian rhetoric of the Third Period, Communists participated in, and helped to shape a rising tide of protest against social and economic inequality. And while some of the "organizational vehicles of social protest faded into historical memory, and none successfully transformed Canadian capitalism, they did signify important expressions of popular dissent which altered the face of the 1930's, and charted paths for later activities."<sup>1</sup>

In their organizing, Communists faced social and economic conditions still largely shaped by the Depression: unemployment remained high; some regions were chronic relief ghettos; employers were largely opposed to unions; and the state could often be called on to buttress employers' intrasigent stand. At the same time, there were minor changes. After 1936, the economy took a brief upturn; employment and consumption increased, and union membership rose, with the new CIO

unions the main instigators of union organizing. Some of this economic recovery, however, was lost in 1937, when the economy again receded, until it was 'salvaged' by the war in 1939-40.

For Canadian Communist women, the Popular Front offered new methods of organizing and encouraged new areas of activism. As a result of the Party's emphasis on peace and anti-fascism, and because of its design to organize women in and outside the workplace, women came to occupy a more central role in Party strategies. Yet, the fate of the CPC's work among women was always closely tied to the overall objectives of the Popular Front, and so the central question for the Party seemed to be 'how to draw women into the Popular Front', not 'why are women oppressed and how can we change that?'

The Party's increasing concern with women's issues did not signify a renewed theoretical or practical interest in the woman question per se, as much as an expedient means to gather force behind the Popular Front. The result was a process which put women two steps forward only to go one step back. The Party had some successes in organizing women workers and drawing women into the unemployment, anti-fascist and consumer movements. Yet it failed to emancipate women from the confines of a political sexual division of labour existing in the CPC, or from the maternal and domestic ideology which kept them ghettoized there. To do this, would have necessitated an assault on the family and gender roles which, theoretically and practically, the Party was not yet ready to make.



(i)

The Popular Front was the product of changes in Soviet foreign policy, and thus in the outlook of the CI. Faced with the debacle of Communist tactics in Germany and the ominous signs of war emanating from Germany, Italy and Japan, the CI, under Stalin's direction, turned its efforts to the construction of an alliance against fascism, an alliance which was to protect the USSR against Hitler's stated intent to annihilate Soviet Communism. The CI's new priorities immediately became evident in troubled Spain, as Communists offered to form an alliance with other socialists, and they were made 'official' at the 7th Congress of the CI in the summer of 1935, when George Dimitriov outlined the need for a world-wide anti-fascist popular front secured through unity with other socialist parties. Although admitting to past mistakes in the Communists' separatist trade union policies, the CI avoided any lengthly 'mea culpa' by adding, "today we communists do not wish to argue about the past ... the door is open to unity."<sup>2</sup>

As the Popular Front evolved, it came to signify a much broader alliance than the one described by Dimitriov. The term Popular Front was deliberately distinct from the earlier United Front, for instead of a United Front of working-class activists, the Popular Front was to be a broad alliance of working-class, petit-bourgeois and middle-class people, including Communists, socialists and even liberals. Thus, the Popular Front meant a partial break with traditional Leninist tactics, which had only prescribed United Front alliances of working-class organizations. Leninist tactics, however, still shaped much of the internal workings of the Party: the idea of a vanguard remained intact,

members were organized into small cells, and Communist fractions met regularly to decide appropriate strategies for their trade union, or other area of political activity.

For Canadian Communists, the Popular Front may have come as a welcome change from their previous sectarian mode of organizing. The extent and nature of inner Party debate on the changeover remains largely obscure, but the Workers Unity League, for one, did not reveal any major objections to the leadership's orders to disband.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, before the 7th Congress, the Party had shown some signs of modifying its Third Period rejection of social democrats as 'social fascists'. By the summer of 1934, the Party's new orientation was already taking shape: an ILGWU strike of workers employed at Eatons was neither opposed (or supported) by the Communist union, and in July of 1934, the CPC sponsored Elizabeth Morton, a SPC/CCFer, as a delegate to the Paris Conference of Women against War and Fascism.

Women, according to the CI's rationale, were a key target group to be rallied to the Popular Front, for women had a particular interest in fighting fascism: first, because it represented a misogynistic political philosophy, and second, because it was an aggressive, war-seeking ideology threatening world peace. Ironically, this new interest in appealing to women, and new areas of activism for Canadian Communist women, contrasted sharply with the narrowing political and economic options for women in Stalin's Russia. The Zhenotdel's work among women had been largely eliminated, and the Stalinist purges, launched with vociferous vengeance in the late '30's, presented women with the terror of imprisonment and death, sometimes for the mere crime of being related to another victim. It is true that, during the 1930's,

Soviet women were integrated into social production. They were employed in heavy industry and on state farms, and increasing numbers of women entered institutions of higher education. But balancing their new roles in the area of work and education was the perennial problem of the double burden: almost all women were responsible for domestic labour -- still unsocialized by the State -- and due to a shortage of essential goods, many women also spent hundreds of hours queuing for food for their families.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, under Stalin's direction Bolshevik policies on marriage, divorce and abortion were slowly dismantled; in 1936, abortion was made almost impossible and divorce was taken out of reach for all but the elite, and in 1938, maternity pay was reduced from 112 to 70 days.<sup>6</sup> Not all the policies of Stalin's government, however, were reproduced in the CI's member parties. Birth control, for instance, was barely available in the Soviet Union (and awards were given to women with many children!) but the Women's Secretariat of the International still suggested to its member parties that birth control was an appropriate issue to organize around. As in earlier years, the Russian experiment was to be defended, but not always imitated.

When the Canadian Party met in 1935 to discuss the implementation of Popular Front strategies there was little evidence of a thriving Women's Department in the Party -- a situation which paralleled the erosion of the International Women's Secretariat and other National Women's Departments.<sup>7</sup> The acting Director of the CPC criticized the past "sectarianism" of the WLLs, as well as the disinterest of local functionaries in women's work: "with the exception of one or two districts", she concluded, "the work among women get very little attention."<sup>8</sup> Repeating the problems articulated in many reports

of the Womens Department -- no matter what the year -- the Director chided comrades for underestimating women's political potential and deplored the low ratio of women in the Party: only 12% of the membership was women, and only 4% of that included factory workers.<sup>8</sup> She then went on to delineate Communist successes. In keeping with new Popular Front priorities, she lauded instances in which Communists had allied with other left-leaning women. Our alliances with socialist women in the Vancouver and Regina Mothers Committees to Aid the Trekkers, and our acceptance of ILP women into the Winnipeg Women's Labor League, she concluded, "led to valuable work."<sup>10</sup>

In order to rectify past failures, the Plenum proposed new plans to unionize women, pinpointing women in war industries as a key target, as well as campaigns to organize women against relief cuts and the high cost of living. Some Plenum proposals were not new; in fact, they were only too familiar:

To insure the carrying out of our decisions and once and for all to give the work among women the attention it deserves, we will have to do the following: establish a women's department in each district ... each district to promote women comrades to leading positions ... educational materials to be issued by the National Women's Department ... [and so on].<sup>11</sup>

What did mark the Plenum from earlier ones was its emphasis on effecting a wide coalition of middle-class and working-class women; the Women's Director, for example, recommended "united front city conferences on ... war and fascism, to which middle-class women, intellectuals and church women be invited."<sup>12</sup> These strategies were later enlarged on at the Party's 8th Dominion Convention. In the Marxist and Leninist tradition, workplace organizing was still seen as an important concern, but CPC women were also encouraged to organize union auxiliaries (and they were no longer limited to WUL unions), and urged to participate in campaigns

directed at housewives. New emphasis was given to work with domestics, for the Party suspected women's rising discontent as they were increasingly forced into low-paid domestic work, and Party members were asked to pursue the organization of professional women, such as teachers and nurses, bringing them into the trade union movement and thus "forging a link between the labour movement and the middle classes."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the range of women's groups listed as appropriate for Communist involvement marked a major deviation in the CPC's Leninist concept of organizing, for female comrades were told to become active in "social, church, cultural and philanthropic and benevolent bodies ... groups like the Women's Institutes, Parents and Teachers groups, self-help organizations, community clubs and women's sections of the United Farmers of Ontario."<sup>14</sup>

These Popular Front strategies created the possibilities of 'boring from within' many varieties of women's organization, and of drawing together alliances based on women's shared needs and goals. They encouraged Communist women to interest themselves in women's issues, an about-turn from the Party's previous denigration of feminism. In practice, of course, the Party tried hardest to construct alliances with socialist women in the CCF, farm and peace groups. And as the decade progressed, Communists' faith in the Popular Front may have been reinforced by the growing strength of socialist-feminist enclaves in the CCF and WIL. While feminism had previously been equated with middle-class (and anti-working-class) organizations like the NCW, it was increasingly apparent in the ranks of the CCF, a more attractive ally to the CPC.

The Popular Front also encouraged increased flexibility in methods of organizing. "No single blue print [on work among women] can be given as to the forms of organization and struggle to be used"<sup>15</sup> cautioned the Resolutions from the 1937 Convention. The Party did suggest organizing women around neighbourhood and social activities, rather than the unrealistic goal of attracting them to the mass meetings always proposed during the Third Period. Ultimately, we must involve ourselves directly in the life of our particular community, continued the Women's Director, taking up their issues as ours: "the success of whatever forms of struggle or organization we undertake depends on the ability of our Party women to become part and parcel of the intimate life of the women of the community and the factories."<sup>16</sup> The Director then gave a concrete example; CPC women could set up neighbourhood club rooms, with unthreatening activities like sewing lessons and lectures on health. Likewise, Florence Theodore, a Saskatchewan activist who later came to lead that provincial party, recommended participation in rural social and homecraft organizations, with Communist women cautiously introducing political subjects like peace, or the relief system, to the discussion.<sup>17</sup> Rather than denigrating the female culture of the sewing circle, as in the past, Communist women were now to immerse themselves in that culture, and politicize their sisters within these comfortable female surroundings.

In some cases, the CPC's suggestions for methods of work were simply old ideas, dressed up in new forms. Special educational programs for women, for example, were proposed to draw women sympathizers closer to the Party, and to train and develop female leadership. Such proposals had been issued for years by the Women's Department. In other

cases, ideas fallen into disrepute were resurrected. More support was given to separate women's organizations, although it was often added that "capable male comrades should be placed on women's committees to ensure that the whole Party is drawn into this vital phase of our activity."<sup>18</sup> Women's branches and women's committees were given a new lease on life; the WLLs, where they still thrived, were excused for their past sectarianism and encouraged to proceed with their work -- as long as it was not at the expense of WLL members joining other women's organizations. Special provision for Women's 'day' branches of the Party was advocated by the Women's Department in the hope that housewives, "who find day meetings more convenient for domestic reasons",<sup>19</sup> could attend. Some women comrades responded favourably to this change of events. In Discussion, an inter-Party paper, one woman wrote on "Why I have changed my mind about women's branches", explaining that the "superior political knowledge of men overawes many Party women who cannot therefore find expression for their views in mixed units", and concluded that in women's branches "we can carry on elementary education about women in society ... and eliminate forever this unhealthy, inferiority complex which so many of our women possess."<sup>20</sup> Occasionally, Lenin's advice to set up separate organizations for working-class women was used to justify women's groups,<sup>21</sup> although in the last resort, fewer references (at least in public discussion) were made to Lenin, than at any other time previous to this in Party history. The reasons for his public absence were obvious: in attempting to construct the broadest anti-fascist alliance possible, Communists downplayed their revolutionary and Leninist traditions, favouring the self-description 'progressive' rather than 'revolutionary', and

stressing their integration into the Canadian radical tradition, as much as their link to the international communist movement. How this new orientation came to shape their day-to-day politics is apparent in the CPC's efforts to reconstruct the women's column in the Communist paper; in its attempts to organize women in the factories; in its campaigns to politicize homemakers; and in its endeavours to draw women into anti-fascist work.

(ii)

The altered direction in Party work was soon reflected in the new women's column added to The Worker (later the Daily Clarion) in the summer of 1935. Edited by Alice Cooke, an older Party member who was sometimes replaced by Anne Smith, and Mary 'Ma' Flanigan, and named "With Our Women", the column appropriately introduced itself with an anti-war editorial and a call for women to join the Canadian League against War and Fascism (CLWF) -- the kind of message which was central to the CPC's Popular Front appeal to women. The column's editor urged her readers to make the women's page "the voice of its readers";<sup>22</sup> she called for information on women's organizations, suggestions for building the women's movement and household hints. As it evolved, the column maintained this balance of content: it contained news items and editorials, particularly on peace, consumer and child welfare issues and the unionization of women, and it included household hints, advice on childbearing and food preparation. In fact, in 1936, a weekly feature with food, beauty and consumer information was inaugurated by Julia Price who declared, rather fatuously, that "I am not exactly what you



would call a woman's woman ... It's the menfolk I prefer ... which I have in common with the rest of womankind. Ergo, I'm qualified to write a column for women!".<sup>23</sup>

The intent of the women's column was to appeal to many women in various degrees of politicization, but the inclusion of household hints met with at least minor opposition. One angry woman objected to the "segregation of women" into a ghetto divorced from the class struggle, and she demanded to know why the paper had "adopted one of the worst features of the capitalist press -- the woman's page."<sup>24</sup> The author may have been one of those Party women who saw work among women as less important than, or a detraction from the 'major' class problems. Yet, she did not denigrate all work among women; she primarily disagreed with The Worker's method of approach. Opposing what she labelled the "trivialization of household work",<sup>25</sup> she argued that "even if the woman in the home earns no money the social value of her labour is more important, and requires a higher degree of intelligence than mass production work and this is not recognized."<sup>26</sup> Secondly, she called for "a little Communism in action",<sup>27</sup> that is, the husband helping with domestic labour, and she concluded by suggesting a Household Hints column for husbands, with the first article recommending an equal number of evenings out for wives and husbands. Her protest letter is interesting for its claim that domestic labour is 'productive', a phrase rarely heard since Custance's day, and also for its militant message of equality in the family. Few Party women were so adamant as this rank and filer, and none matched her insightful connection between the Party's domestic appeal to women and the maintenance of men's superiority within the CPC.

Despite this protest, the column continued unchanged; in fact, the critic's letter was followed by a recipe for mustard pickles. The women's editor defended her column, maintaining there existed a difference between the women's page in the capitalist press, "meant to dull class consciousness", and that of the Communist press, which "does not perpetuate women's relegation to kitchen, children and church" but rather understands that "household aids will help women devote more time in the end to outside activities".<sup>28</sup> Admittedly, recognizing the reality of women's domestic labour was a practical political starting point, but encouraging women to do their work faster so that they might have more time for outside political activities could create a double burden for women. Moreover, an unquestioning acceptance of woman's role as domestic labourer precluded the emergence of a critical analysis of women's role in the family. Syndicated columns on recipes, childbearing and beauty did little to pose an alternative, radical image for Communist women. They could, on the other hand, reinforce the existing sexual division of labour within the Party and legitimize women's preoccupation with appearance and personal life which was stressed in 'bourgeois' women's magazines. The use of these features on the woman's page, of course, approximated other Popular Front 'mass appeal' features and gimmicks in the paper, such as the Hollywood talk column (which appeared across from the woman's page) the sports page, comics and Labor Festival Beauty Contests which were advertised in The Clarion. The Party was attempting to construct a paper of wide appeal to the working class, not just to committed socialists, but in doing so, it sometimes ran the risk of imitating rather than criticizing dominant, capitalist cultural forms.

Yet, these criticisms aside, there was some truth in the editor's analysis of the differences between capitalist and socialists' women's columns. Although women's issues were primarily placed within the feminine boundaries of children, consumer issues and peace, The Clarion did see women as political beings who should be involved in radical politics and in the Communist Party -- not something the Toronto Star advocated. Moreover, political issues did form the core of the column, and on occasion, a militant voice might even be heard through the moderation of the Popular Front, lambasting an oppressive system which "had condemned women to double drudgery in factory and kitchen, failed to provide ... birth control, thus compelling women to servitude".<sup>29</sup> And lastly, domestic and beauty hints were sometimes placed in a critical framework. Writers, for example criticized the daily press' recipe suggestions and food budgets which had no relation to working-class incomes, and they advocated "fighting for a higher standard of living"<sup>30</sup> rather than taking the advice of such papers on how to stretch the family budget. Or, an alternative beauty column suggested home remedies and 'healthful' tips to keep oneself looking healthy rather than buying cosmetics and thus fuelling the profits of big business. Even Julia Price added a modicum of political commentary by describing high fashion and haute cuisine, then pointing out that most working people couldn't consume these things.

Furthermore, some CPC women did hope that, ultimately, the radical press would develop an alternative image for women. In 1936, Beatrice Ferneyhough, a young activist in the Party, wrote that she would like to see a separate Communist women's magazine in Canada, which would describe with realism and compassion, the conditions of life for

most women -- that is, relief, low wages and unemployment -- and could therefore help them to understand that their problems were not personal and individual in nature. Such an alternative publication, she also imagined, would not instruct women in "anti-intellectual and submissive attitudes ... implying we are mentally inferior, instinctual and emotional" as do bourgeois magazines; instead, it would address "our needs ... to know about women elsewhere, understand our role in public life, receive guidance and learn from the experience of others."<sup>31</sup>

(iii)

Although Ferneyhough's dream of a separate women's magazine did not materialize, the women's page in the Clarion did signify an improvement in the Party's public presentation of women's issues. In the Clarion, considerable space was devoted to the concerns of wage-earning women; articles described working conditions, the effects of the depression on women's employment, labour disputes and unionization attempts. Indeed, the Clarion devoted a large part of its copy to the labour scene, and it consciously singled out women's militance for praise, drawing the moral that 'women workers were not necessarily more backward than men'. Much of the Clarion's coverage of working women reiterated themes present since the days of The Woman Worker, not because of a lack of imagination on the part of writers and organizers, but because these issues represented persistent social problems. Readers, for example, were reminded that only unionization would truly improve working conditions, and that Minimum Wage Laws set (and not adequately enforced) by the state, usually became "maximum wage

guidelines."<sup>32</sup> In a special series of articles, Annie Buller went over some of these familiar themes about women and work. Using a Marxist paradigm, she described women's changing role in production with the advent of capitalism, and she outlined the effects of economic depression on plant conditions and wages for women. "Women in industry must be seen as a permanent, progressive factor", she reminded her readers, and she warned fellow Communists that "every effort must be made to close wage differentials."<sup>33</sup>

For most working women in Canada, the Depression still defined their work lives and expectations -- or lack of them. Despite a slight upturn in employment in 1936-37, substantial numbers of women remained unemployed, and even those who retained jobs, feared losing them.<sup>34</sup> In the late 1930's some women were drawn into revitalized mass production industries like textiles, rubber and auto, but even here they were fixed in lower-status and lower-wage jobs. Although the unionization of women workers had lost its absolute primacy in Party strategies for work among women, it did remain an important concern, for it was woman's integration into social production, it was reasoned, which would raise her class consciousness and engage her in the class struggle. The Party, however, no longer spoke of developing women's 'revolutionary' class consciousness, and with the disbanding of the WUL, it looked to international unions as vehicles for organizing women. If this had meant only the AFL, women workers might have been bypassed, as they were in the 1920's. But the formation of the CIO, and its immediate popularity among Canadian workers, meant that more women were included in Communist organizing attempts. Moreover, some flexibility in the Party's industrial tactics allowed local CPC women and organizers to

respond to calls of many women workers whom others might have dismissed as 'unorganizable'.

Exactly how much time and effort was devoted to the organization of wage-earning women is difficult to assess. In one woman's occupation, the needle trades, the Party already had a sphere of influence, in part sustained by the existence of a Jewish Left sub-culture within the industry. The decision to merge the IUNTW into unions like the ILGWU and the Furriers diminished the concentration of Communist influence and spread it more widely over the industry, creating both the possibility of influencing more unions, and the reality of hard work in trying to influence non-Communists to the Communist viewpoint.<sup>35</sup> In the latter case, Communists occasionally found factional hostility within the union as intense as the previous antipathy between the WUL's dual unions and the AFL. In Toronto, for example, social democrats and Communists battled --- sometimes physically --- for control of Local 40 of the International Fur Workers Union. The conflict, in part an extension of political tensions from the American Fur Workers,<sup>36</sup> engendered epithets as vicious as those used during the Third Period, as Communists denounced the social democrat union president as a "gangster" and he responded by calling Communist activist Pearl Wedro a "Stalinist fish wife".<sup>37</sup>

The battle for Local 40, which the Communists temporarily won, was not, however, the 'norm' during the late 1930's. More often, Popular Front strategies were beneficial to the CPC, gaining them at least a measure of cooperation with other union activists. In Winnipeg, for example, a strike against a number of fur establishments, led by the International Furriers Union in pursuit of union recognition, was given

strong support by a citizens solidarity committee -- an occurrence not likely to have happened in the Third Period. After the strike had dragged on for ten weeks, with no sign of the employers negotiating, a women's parade was held to exhibit support for the strikers. The four hundred marchers were addressed by the Communist MLA, Jim Litterick, who reminded the gathering of the death of the local CPC activist, Freda Coodin, after her imprisonment in the last furriers' strike, and by CCFers Gloria Queen-Hughes and Beatrice Brigden. The endorsement of the march by the Labour Women's Federation and the ILP gave added emphasis to the strikers' cause, and by the end of the month the government had ordered a commission of inquiry and charged some of the employers under the Minimum Wage Laws.<sup>38</sup>

During the Popular Front, the Party continued to make some efforts to organize women, skilled and unskilled, in small workplaces and in seasonal employment considered outside the interest of most trade unionists. In Toronto, for instance, the Party organized support for a strike at the New Method Laundry, an enterprise employing less than ten women, and it promoted a boycott of Child's restaurant on Yonge Street, for its outrageously low wages and refusal to negotiate with a union. In a number of cities, aid was given to waitresses trying to organize the restaurant business; in Calgary, the Party helped organize a successful strike of waitresses, and in Thunder Bay and Vancouver, some Party women were prominent, sustaining leaders in the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union. Office workers, usually female, often badly rewarded for their skills, and definitely considered outside the pale of organizing activity by most trade unionists, were also considered union potential: in 1937, the Party assigned Beatrice Ferneyhough to the task —

of building an Office and Store Workers Union. (This interest in white collar workers probably grew quite naturally from Popular Front priorities as the Party put aside its obsession with blue collar workers and 'factory nuclei' in favour of an alliance with petit bourgeois, middle-class and working-class women.)

Such organizing efforts sometimes floundered in the face of the usual obstacles: the hostility of the employer, a ready supply of cheap female labour, fears of firings and reprisals, women's small workplaces and a lack of a trade union tradition. Moreover, every union drive was not guaranteed Party funds, (because there weren't any) or time, (because comrades were needed elsewhere). Indeed, many organizing attempts were not always part of a well-thought-out and centrally-administered Party strategy. Convention resolutions did pinpoint industries such as steel, rubber or textiles as strategic goals, and the Party's trade union committee sent members out to 'colonize', or organize these factories from within. But in the last resort, local conditions might be the determining factor in the 'who, what, and how' of organizing. Industrial organizers might respond to a labour dispute already set in motion, either on their own initiative, or at the request of local workers. Rank and file Communists, involved in their own workplace struggles or following their own political interests, might also initiate a union drive. Similarly, in the case of the CPUSA, argues Harvey Levenstein, "there was no indication that plans drawn up in Moscow and New York determined which unions were heavily CP in orientation and which were not."<sup>39</sup> Even though the

Party did have predilections, such as their well justified conviction that the steel industry was of crucial importance in unionizing American workers ... often their egalitarian impulse led them to expend inordinate energy on the organization of the



least powerful and least strategically placed and tragic cases, such as the migrant workers, "losers" such as southern textiles workers, the infinitely replaceable Macey's salesladies, or hospital workers. These people lay at the very bottom of the union ladder.<sup>40</sup>

In Canada, a good example of a spontaneous organizing initiative undertaken by local Communists was that of four Vancouver comrades, who in 1937, decided they were going to organize domestic workers -- workers who most definitely were 'at the bottom of the union ladder', if not below it. At the 1937 Party Convention the Women's Department noted with concern the growing number of unemployed women forced into low-paying domestic jobs, and some aid was given by Party organizer Joe Salsberg to a fledgling Homeworkers Union in Toronto, although little evidence remains of this effort.<sup>41</sup> In Vancouver, however, a group of four women, all domestics and all Party members, tried to create a Domestic Workers Federal Union and they kept some records of their organizing attempt. In a carefully planned campaign, they worked through Party contacts, social organizations like the YWCA, and classified columns and employment services to locate potential recruits. When they approached the local Labour Council for aid, it was quick to remind the four organizers that previous domestic unions had "always died", but the women countered that "this is different due to the loyal Communist women involved".<sup>42</sup> In establishing their union they did encounter many obstacles which had 'killed' previous unions: most domestic workers were difficult to locate, they were fearful of being fired and they had no experience with unions. Furthermore, for fear of losing new members, the four instigators felt they had to be extremely cautious about discussing their politics. In the end, however, their work did not go unrewarded, for a small union local did emerge, and

according to the women, the Party ranks also grew. Like other domestic workers' unions, the organization did not survive as a long-term entity; geographically scattered workplaces and an immense labour reserve posed a Sisyphean task for any organizer. Nonetheless, the efforts of the 'loyal Communist women' and the fleeting existence of the union indicated the possibilities which might accrue from some local flexibility and initiative, combined with a commitment to the organization of women.

The Party leadership, however, was most keenly interested in organizing industrial workers in the mass production industries, such as steel, auto and rubber. Proportionately few women were found in steel and auto, although women machine sewers comprised a number of the inside finishers in the car industry. Female auto workers in the trim room at the Oshawa plant staged a wildcat for more money in the fall of 1936, and the next year resolutely supported their fellow workers in the major Oshawa auto strike. Despite their show of militance and their ghettoization into the lower paying jobs in the industry, however, neither the women workers or Communist organizers tried to organize against the existing sexual division of labour in the plant. Instead, at the time of the 1937 strike, Communist efforts were put into the development of a wives' support committee -- a more traditional and well-trodden organizational path -- and into sustaining the strike as a whole.

Similarly, Communists who were involved in two strikes at Kitchener rubber plants were not concerned with challenging the industry's sexual division of labour. In one factory, the United Rubber Workers aim was to augment the male wage of 50¢ an hour, and the female

wage of 32¢ an hour, but not to close the gap between the two.<sup>43</sup> When workers struck Kaufman Rubber later that year, the union, again including Communists, demanded "equal pay for equal work" but at the same time added that "men's work be done by men only".<sup>44</sup> These examples indicate that Communists, like most trade unionists of the time, understood equal pay to mean equal pay for precisely the same task; they did not, in a consistent way, challenge the division of industrial tasks into male and female categories. There is ample evidence that many Communists accepted the prevailing idea of a primary (male) breadwinner and a secondary, female wage-earner. Moreover, many Communist organizers, even if they were critical of women's lower wage rates, probably saw union recognition as the crucial demand, with more 'utopian' demands like the equalization of wages, much further down the road. Whatever the reasons for ignoring the issue, it remains that a deep and persistent analysis of such sexual discrimination was not integrated into the CPC's industrial strategies at this time.

Lower wage rates were also the lot of female textile workers, a target group for Communist unionization drives since the 1920's. Pointing to the low wages and unsafe working conditions, as well as to the history of militancy in the trade, the Party argued that women in textiles should be class conscious union material. By the late 1930's, textile workers in Ontario and Quebec gave every indication that they would fulfill the Party's expectations. In the last years of the decade, but especially in 1937, an increasing number of labour disputes of protracted length in textiles indicated a growing militancy in the industry explained by one labour historian, as "the urge to 'make up' for years of wage-cutting, unemployment and deprivation, as well as

suppression of trade unionism in the industry."<sup>45</sup> In some of these struggles Communist cadre played an active role, particularly because Alex Welch, a Communist organizer with the CIO, headed many of the organizing efforts.

During August and September of 1936, a strike of over 1700 rayon workers, including 700 women, occurred at the Courtaulds Mill in Cornwall. Sparked by a protest of three women over the question of speed-up, the strike became a plant-wide bid for better wages and recognition of the United Textile Workers Union. Some Communist involvement was evident and the dispute was given extensive coverage in the Clarion and in New Frontier. The Clarion spoke of 'our girls on the picket line'; published articles written by the strikers; and relayed information on the Women's Auxiliary set up to collect funds and look after food and rationing.<sup>46</sup> Communists travelled to Cornwall to help organize support for the strike; one such supporter wrote of his experiences in New Frontier, describing conditions of work in the mill, as well as the details of strikers' battles with the Company and OPP.<sup>47</sup> Although union recognition was not ultimately secured, the wage increases and other gains made were seen as a partial victory.

Soon afterwards, a strike involving large numbers of female workers at Empire Cottons in Welland was given wide coverage in The Clarion, including a detailed account of one of the radicals leading the strike, Mary Yari. Because the Party had been trying to organize the Welland Mill, it is probable that Communists helped to orchestrate the 1936 walk-out.<sup>48</sup> Communist involvement was even more clearly evident in the 1937 Toronto Silknit strike,<sup>49</sup> the Kincardine Knitting strikes,<sup>50</sup>

d in the massive Cornwall Cottons and Peterborough Woolens strikes,

all of which were led by Communist organizer Alex Welch. In both the latter cases, Welch was labelled a Communist and CIO agitator by the employers, the Globe and Mail and Mitchell Hepburn. It was not Welch's politics, however, but working conditions and wages which fuelled the strikers militance. Women in the Peterborough mills earned an average of \$11.00 for a 59 hour week, but because of the textile industry's use of piece work to duck minimum wage guidelines, some women could earn as little as \$7.41 for an even longer week.<sup>51</sup> As Irving Abella has pointed out, Canadian workers, reacting to the conditions of their lives and their work, welcomed and pursued industrial unionism under the CIO with little encouragement from the 'outside agitators' that business and government blamed for the industrial unrest.<sup>52</sup>

Although economic need and accumulated anger were the root causes of the strike, workers' political awareness must have increased during the confrontation, as their employers quickly found useful allies in the bourgeois press and in the government - therefore confirming the efficacy of the CPC's political analysis in the Daily Clarion. And as the employers made clear their intransigence on the question of a union, the strike took on violent overtones. Only a few days after the strike began, a young woman on picket duty was struck down by a supervisor's car, causing great anger among the strikers. By early August, feelings were at a fever pitch; bolstered by the moral support of many local citizens, including one United Church group, strikers tried to close their picket line against the scabs escorted in by the police. They soon found themselves embroiled in a battle with the police who used tear gas to control the strikers. Women strikers responded with eggs and tomatoes, and according to the bourgeois press fought the police by

"clawing, scatching and screaming", or according to the radical press, by putting up a "militant defence".<sup>53</sup> Indeed, women, all the press agreed, were quite prominent on the picket line and spoke up at union meetings. Although only one woman served on the newly-elected union executive, more women were active on the strike committee.

As the Premier became more conscious of the growing support for the strikers, he tried to intervene, offering them an inquiry into the textile industry in Ontario. The strikers, however, held out for a more comprehensive agreement, a compromise eventually worked out by the Premier, Minister Heenan, Paddy Draper and some Ministry of Labour officials, giving both the Cornwall and Peterborough workers wage increases and minor improvements, but stopping short of union recognition.<sup>54</sup>

Both the CPC and the CCF took an active part in the strike from its inception; the Ontario Commonwealth sent its labour reporter to the scene, the local CCF club made sandwiches and coffee for the picketers, and Lorna Cotton-Thomas spoke at the strikers' meetings. Communists also became active; troops were sent from Toronto to organize strike support, and speakers like Harvey Murphy, President of the Unemployed Workers Association, were dispatched to speak to mass meetings of the workers. Both parties were interested not only in supporting the workers and winning union recognition, but also in augmenting their own credibility and prestige. As a result, disagreements broke out within the union between the CCF and the CPC: privately, a local Communist charged that CCFers were trying to "bring Millard into town to run Welch out of town."<sup>55</sup> Their dispute was a sad foreshadowing of the internecine warfare later to explode in the post-war labour movement,

and ironically, their battles may have discouraged the female workers they were trying to reach. "At all the union meetings", complained the local union treasurer privately to lawyer J.L. Cohen, "CPer Townsley, [opposed by the CCF] holds the floor twice as long as anyone else until some of the Bonnerworth girls walk out."<sup>56</sup>

The views of this critic can not, however, be used as a generalization to assess all Communist activity on the labour front. Although the CPC was primarily committed to the organization of male workers in key industrial sectors like steel, it did not totally ignore more 'marginal' female workers; indeed, Communists were more sympathetic to the needs of female workers than most trade unionists in the TLC, and to many trade unionists in the CIO. Given the objective problems of unionizing waitresses, office workers and domestics, Communist organizing efforts were not always successful, although in the case of garment and textile workers, long seen as organizing potential, the Party did make some gains. Exactly how many new female members the Party drew in through its workplace organizing is not clear. Some women were undoubtedly recruited on the basis of the CPC's union work, but according to Party documents, they remained a minority of Party membership throughout this period. Communists, of course, may have had an indirect influence on some women workers. In the CIO, some labour historians argue, Communist leaders earned respect from the rank and file not for their political affiliation, but for their militant defence of workers' interests.<sup>57</sup> The same may have been true of female textile workers, who were appreciative of Communist aid on the picket line, but who were not committed enough to join the Party.

(iv)

Workplace organizing comprised only one part of the Party's work among women, for the Popular Front opened up new areas of political work directed towards women in the home. The organization of homemakers included the established tradition of building union auxiliaries and ad-hoc support committees to aid the labour struggles of one's menfolk. Communist women, for instance, (along with some CCF women) were visible on the picket line during the Vancouver Longshoreman's strike in 1935, and some were participants in the 'Battle of Ballayntyne Pier'. Women were also perceived to be key contacts in campaigns around consumer issues, childcare and education, and to a lesser extent, relief and unemployment. In order to draw homemakers into these campaigns, the CPC tried to concentrate on neighbourhood and community organizing, and to work with existing non-partisan women's organizations. In 1937, the head of the National Women's Department suggested searching for an appropriate program in each locality, for example, "selecting five or six of the most outstanding needs there, issues that would appeal to women ... like medical clinics for pre-school children, birth control clinics, nursery school, or better housing."<sup>58</sup> Similarly, a year later, the Ontario CPC Convention recommended that, in order to appeal to women, Communists needed "flexible programs such as neighbourhood groups like an unemployed auxiliary remaking clothes, or an organization of women around their children's needs."<sup>59</sup> Communists were asked to join and influence organizations "where the masses of women are -- the coops, welfare groups, and home and school."<sup>60</sup> These tactics were designed to politicize women around their day-to-day experiences as wives and



mothers, as well as to maximize Communists' integration into the local scene. Indeed, when Popular Front tactics were stretched to the limit, Party members were told to "offer housewives what they want...including bridge, music, movies and bingo."<sup>61</sup> (Female Party members could also be advised by higher-ups in the Party's 'Morals Commission' to keep their home life respectable and exemplary so as not to alienate the community -- advice which tended to reinforce traditional roles for women rather than question them.)<sup>62</sup>

In Toronto, attempts to organize homemakers into neighbourhood groups resulted in the formation of a number of Progressive Women's Associations (PWA), based on the municipal ward system. Wards 1 and 4 spawned strong Associations, a reflection of the working-class, ethnic, and Communist strength in those neighbourhoods. By 1936-37, a city-wide coalition of the PWA groups was effected, and their discussion and lobbying around childcare, consumer and welfare issues earned them support from CCF women in the Women's Joint Committee.

The organization of PWA women within the ward system had the added advantage of creating an electoral machine, ready to swing into action during municipal elections -- an important concern, as Popular Front tactics favoured electoral work. As always, it was feared that women's antipathy to politics would prevent their participation in elections, but it was hoped that progressive candidates could successfully appeal to women on immediate issues like housing and prices. Before the Toronto civic election of 1935, the Clarion editorialized:

Again we are in the midst of an election and many women are bewildered to know which Party to listen to...Many have an apathetic response...many women have a weakness and lack of interest in public affairs. Thus we must point out to each

section of working-class women how our candidates will improve their lot...for example, approach housewives concretely on their problems such as the high cost of living. 63

The Party claimed some success with this approach, concluding that, in organizing housewives for the 1936 civic contest, it had brought out new women and developed untapped political skills by "using door to door canvassing, neighbourhood teas and by discussing issues of immediate importance."<sup>64</sup> Many women, the report added, "had gone canvassing with their babies and brought their babies to meetings",<sup>65</sup> an indication that such local electoral work was often done by homemakers who could integrate domestic responsibilities with door-to-door canvassing.

In some other Ontario and Western cities, CPC women attempted to construct women's associations along the same lines as the Toronto PWA, but little is recorded of these efforts, due to their smaller size and the fact that The Clarion's women's page was dominated by Toronto news. In Port Arthur, a Housewives Association, led by Communist Kate Magnussen, was set up; in Edmonton, a Mothers Council concentrated on youth issues; and in Niagara Falls, a Progressive Women's Association, similar to the Toronto one, was inaugurated in 1936. And in some areas of the country, women still operated under the auspices of the Women's Labor Leagues. In British Columbia, for instance, the Women's Labor Leagues, seemingly resilient to their subordination and neglect under the WUL, sponsored their 10th annual provincial convention in 1936, and passed resolutions vowing to tackle issues like extra relief for pregnant women, a Domestic Servants Union and a children's summer camp. In Vancouver, the WLL also organized support for a local birth control clinic.

By the late 1930's consumer issues were assuming an important place in the Clarion's women's page and in Party discussion papers, probably a sign of the slight economic upturn after 1936-37. At the National Convention in 1938, Alice Cooke chided the Party for neglecting to rally women against the rising cost of living -- "the most outstanding opportunity for organizing women during the past year".<sup>66</sup> Consumer issues, maintained Cooke, were important concerns for homemakers, for it was women who had to manage -- and juggle -- the dwindling family resources. For women, continued Cooke, the most serious aspect of the increase in living costs is the high price of food because:

The results are far reaching and bound to be harmful to women. Rent increases mean the food bill must be cut in order to meet the rent; mothers will deprive themselves of food in order to supply their children's needs; pregnant women are unable to obtain the necessary foods to maintain health at such a period.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, she concluded, women on relief will be especially concerned, for caught in the squeeze of inflation, they "are receiving 30% less food due to rising prices and their families are facing malnutrition".<sup>68</sup> Behind Cooke's speech, as well as other Communist commentary on this issue, lay the assumption that the provision of an adequate family wage to the (male) breadwinner, along with stable prices, would prevent women from either working a double day to supplement the family income, or agonizing over recurrent shortages for their families.

By 1938-39, Party women in Toronto, Vancouver, and some smaller centres were involved in the construction of new organizations, usually called Housewives Leagues, which concentrated largely on consumer issues. In 1938, the Toronto League declared its aims to be: "to stand for a living wage ... assist organized labour ... and to stand for a

raise in the standard of living for producers and consumers."<sup>69</sup>

Although it also claimed to be non-partisan and non-sectarian, the League's support of The Daily Clarion and reports of internal leadership struggles all point to a strong Communist presence in the Housewives League.

These new Housewives groups usually centred their efforts on one or two specific pricing issues: in Vancouver, the Housewives Association organized a strike against high meat costs by boycotting meat retailers for a week, and in Port Arthur, the Housewives group tried to compensate for inflation by gaining extra relief vouchers for unemployed families. In Toronto, the Housewives League's efforts included a boycott of rapidly escalating foodstuffs and a protest against rising gas prices. In the latter case, in true Popular Front style, the League attempted to draw Local Council of Women and ladies auxiliaries into the campaign, but their efforts were eventually cut short by the declaration of war. Some of their other pricing protests, however, did meet with success. In Toronto, after the price of milk was raised in the fall of 1937, the Housewives launched a price reduction campaign, by writing letters to their MPPs, and by working with Alderman Stewart Smith to press the municipal government to take a stand against the price rise. After concerted public pressure, the price was reduced by  $\frac{1}{2}$ ¢ a quart. Other local Housewives' organizations, concentrating on relief issues, also met with some small victories.

It was these kinds of local campaigns, with limited and realistic objectives, which dominated the tactics of the Housewives Associations. In the women's column in The Clarion, efforts were occasionally made to construct a wider critical analysis of

'consumerism' as it operated in a capitalist economy. Mary Flanigan, for example, mounted a convincing critique of the advertising industry and its attempts to manipulate and create consumer demands, especially its attempts to sell women "a whiter than white wash -- when most working-class women could not afford the washing machines advertised."<sup>70</sup> Fashion consumerism in North America also encountered adverse comments by some Clarion writers, although their criticisms could be unbalanced a week later by syndicated material on the women's page which exalted the frivolity of red nail polish or make-up.<sup>71</sup> Caught in the Popular Front dilemma of producing a women's column of mass appeal, the Party could not always hold the line against the excesses of capitalist consumerism.

The essential selling point of the Party's attempts to rouse women on consumer issues was its appeal to protect and defend one's home and family: "as our homes are threatened by economic crisis, we must organize a defence of our homes",<sup>72</sup> proclaimed Alice Cooke in The Clarion. Or, as the Housewives League little song put it:

Every woman should have a house  
 She can call her own  
 Decent living for every child  
 In a decent home  
 Food and shelter and clothing too  
 For the family  
 So she joins in the fight  
 For a cause that<sup>73</sup> is right  
 Sharing victory.

Again, the women's editor tried to distinguish between Communists' "defence of the home" and the design of the bourgeois press to "stress women's place in the home ... in order to divide the working class and imply an end to the problems of unemployed women."<sup>74</sup> Although the editor did assert that returning women to the kitchen was no solution to unemployment, the main part of her argument simply

reiterated the need for women, as homemakers, to be politically aware. She did not adequately explore the distinction between the Communists' and the 'bourgeois' view of woman and the family, and it was a distinction which needed to be made, for the CPC's equation of women with family issues, and its implicit support for the family wage stood dangerously close to a simple message -- that women belonged in the home, not in the workplace.

To defend one's home also meant to defend one's children; thus, child care issues were also perceived to be a key to women's politicization. Because women's primary responsibility for childcare was a given assumption, The Clarion's women's page carried tips on child health and psychology, and women's mothering role was lavished with considerable praise, sometimes even sentimentalized as women's natural urge. We must respect women, wrote one author, because as mothers, "they carry out the essential task of educating rising generations in the spirit of struggle."<sup>75</sup> "Communists", stated Anne Smith succinctly, "respect women's natural urge to motherhood",<sup>76</sup> although she added, we do not confine women only to motherhood. This theme also underscored many articles on 'Women in the Soviet Union', which outlined the Soviet's pro-natalist policies on motherhood, while arguing women's complete equality in the USSR.

As mothers, women were encouraged to fight for their children's economic and social improvement. One Clarion writer admonished Party women to link together "the women's movement and the children's movement".<sup>77</sup> Although we have neglected the latter in the past, she continued, "we must educate children to progressive ideas, help children learn to work cooperatively, and build leadership. Every women's group

... should build a children's group in connection with their organization".<sup>78</sup> Communist women were also asked to join existing school or youth groups, like the Parent Teachers Association, or even the Boy Scouts, and influence them in a progressive direction. "We must involve ourselves and make sure the Boy Scouts is not a reactionary movement",<sup>79</sup> suggested one Clarion writer, with rather cavalier indifference to labour and socialists' long-standing hostility to such imperialistic youth groups. Secondly, women were asked to set up new, ad-hoc groups on specific issues. Annie Buller, for instance, proposed city conferences "of working-class, middle-class and intellectual women, addressing question of maternity, medical and dental aid, for the health of children is a national problem and we can rally thousands of women on it."<sup>80</sup>

United Front organizations with a strong Communist presence, like the PWA, carried out some of these suggestions, holding forums on child welfare, and attempting to lobby local governments on issues like better medical care in the schools, and playgrounds for inner city children. CPC women also continued to organize progressive summer camps for Communist children. By the late 1930's, some ethnic groups in the Party had acquired permanent locations for their summer camps, which, run largely with women's labour, provided one link in the ethnic, Left network which knit Communist family and friends together and sustained Party numbers. And in Toronto, some Party women, with the aid of women in the CCF, attempted to establish a progressive camp for inner city children -- irrespective of their parents politics -- in the philanthropic Fresh Aid Fund tradition.

Maternalism also supplied one rationale for women's participation in unemployment and relief work. Because women often supervised the family budget, and in an economic crisis, suffered most keenly the sight of their children's deprivation, they would, it was reasoned, respond positively to unemployment and relief demands. And both these campaigns remained important to CPC strategies during the Popular Front, a reflection of the still soaring unemployment rates in many areas of the country. As in the early 1930's, women were encouraged to aid the Communist-backed National Unemployed Workers Association, and any Single Unemployed Women's Associations existing in their locale -- although the latter existed very precariously in few Canadian cities, and generally received minimal attention from Communists.<sup>81</sup>

After 1935, more and more energy was directed towards broadly-based women's groups organized to fight evictions or to lobby for more adequate welfare payments. In Winnipeg, for instance, the Working Women's League (WWL) which had grown, in part, from the WLL, organized a women's campaign to fight for relief money for essential household items such as pots, pans and bedding. The League organized a door to door petition and tried to draw in women from all varieties of unemployment associations and political groups, culminating their campaign with a mass meeting and parade to support their demands. Such actions, like the anti-eviction protests and relief strikes of the Third Period, grew not only from Communist leadership, but also from the readiness of angry and desperate relief recipients to join in collective action.



Communists often urged women to fight for relief allotments sufficient to guarantee their children decent food and clothing; they were constantly reminded of the relationship between adequate relief and their responsibility to maintain their family's health and happiness. In the woman's page of the Clarion, exposes on the welfare system framed the question like this: 'What of Our Children', while another article warned 'Physical Welfare of Children Cause for Concern'. Yet, despite this emphasis on women's maternal role, feminine 'passivity' was not the byword in many of the local relief protests undertaken by women. In Saskatoon, police ejected women led by Communist Anna Pashka from a sit-in in Council Chambers, dragging Pashka out the door and down the stairs, and in Lakeview, a women's relief group was commended for its original tactics: they held the relief officer and his two assistants hostage until police broke down the door to rescue the bureaucrats.

During the On-to-Ottawa Trek in 1935, and during the later B.C. Relief Camp Workers strike, the word 'Mother' was again used as an organizing catchword. During the Trek it was women from groups like UFLTA, aided by the local YCL, who often orchestrated the Trekkers welcome into town with warm food and clean bedding. In Vancouver, Communist women helped to organize a Mothers Council in support of the striking relief camp workers, and the Council sponsored a large Mothers Day demonstration in Stanley Park demanding the abolition of the relief camps. In Regina after the Riot, a Mothers Committee, led by Communist women like Florence Theodore and Josephine Gehl, was formed to visit the imprisoned Trekkers and lobby for their release. Some 'mothers' on the Committee, like Josie Gehl, were actually single unemployed women, but the Committee's name was less a statement of personnel and more an

attempt to appeal, on an emotional level, to homemakers who were concerned about the future of their children. The reason for the Mothers Committee's existence, explained Elsie Gehl Beeching, was because:

Of course, it was a 'Mothers Committee' because it was the youth of the land, unemployed youth who were the Trekkers. These women took it upon themselves to assist and "mother" them ... to give them aid, encouragement and strength -- to adopt them in a sense.<sup>82</sup> They collected food for them, even took them into their homes.

The Mothers Committee's appeals for support apparently struck a responsive chord, for many left-wing women's groups in other areas of the country soon took up the same cause, sending letters and telegrams to R.B. Bennett to appeal for the Trekkers' release, and an end to the Relief Camp system.

Although the Trek was intended to highlight the tragedy of unemployed men, a few of the marchers on the Ontario section of the Trek, (organized after the Regina Riot), were actually women. This Ontario section of the Trek contained a women's contingent of about ten, led by Ann Walters, a Party organizer involved in unionizing textile workers in Welland and Toronto. The women's contingent included a veteran of the free speech fights and former YCL organizer, Lil Himmelfarb. Himmelfarb had 'grown up' in the movement: her parents were European socialists, later Canadian Communists, and as a youngster she had joined the Young Pioneers and helped edit the Young Comrade. By 1928, when at 16, she addressed the National Convention, she was well accustomed to public speaking; in fact, she explained, "my forte was the streetcorner, and soapbox orating."<sup>83</sup> An extremely popular and effective speaker, Himmelfarb became one of the 'official' speakers on

the 21 day march to Ottawa. There were few other women on the Ontario Trek, she explained, because:

In the struggle of the unemployed, there was no definite women's movement at that time because there weren't that many women in the labour force -- especially during the Depression when there was pressure for women to leave jobs. There was not that many women in the unemployed movement ... but there were a number of women helping in the Unemployment Council with eviction fights and so on, who went along ... I was quite ready to be an initiator of the Trek idea because I was affected by the bloodbath in Regina -- as others were.<sup>84</sup>

The Trekkers also included Mary Flanigan, to most members "a sterling light ... a legend in the Party",<sup>85</sup> and Louise Sandler, the 15 year-old daughter of a Communist woman active in the ILGWU. Flanigan, who was quite elderly and acted as the cook for the Trek, went ahead of the marchers on the truck, but all the other women walked, ate and camped on equal terms with the men. Party organizers were extremely conscious that the trekkers be well-disciplined and on good behavior, and as Lousie Sandler explains, this included dispelling any notions about promiscuous co-ed living:

Lil and I were lying on a hillside in Brockville after a long day in our pants and short hair, with our heads covered, and I awoke to hear two women talking, behind us. They were horrified because they thought it was a man and woman under the same blanket. I poked Lil and said 'Sit up!' to make it perfectly clear we were women.<sup>86</sup>

This small group of female Trekkers symbolized the plight of single unemployed women, whom the Communists made some minimal attempt to organize, but who generally remained peripheral to the more 'important' task of organizing men in the Relief Camps. Secondly, the Party was interested in mobilizing the wives of the unemployed, often appealing to them on the basis of their family responsibilities. This 'maternal' appeal differed from the Third Period obsession with women as blue collar workers, although it was part of a continuing tradition

within the CPC of linking woman's political consciousness to her role as homemaker. Like many Popular Front strategies, it spoke pragmatically to women's day-to-day worries, and drew on dominant social norms and ideals to legitimate the struggle for social change. Many working-class women did play an essential role managing the household, particularly in the 1930's, before the advent of many labour-saving devices in working-class homes and in a time of economic crisis.<sup>87</sup> The CPC simply tried to politicize women on the basis of their occupation as 'household managers'. At the same time, homemaking and motherhood were sometimes sentimentalized as women's 'natural' role, and on occasion, an underlying denigration of domestic labour showed through, as one male writer said condescendingly of housework: "it's a miracle in such an atmosphere that women develop any talents at all".<sup>88</sup> And always, there was a tension between mothering as women's entrée into politics and mothering confining women to 'private' family life. The emphasis on politicizing women through the maternal appeal widened the CPC's work among women, opening up new areas of work for female comrades. But these avenues of work could turn out to be dead-ends, limiting women to gender-defined political campaigns of secondary importance to Party strategies and keeping them isolated from positions of power. Furthermore, the Party's invocation of maternalism always had an opportunistic edge to it: women's organization was encouraged, not simply for its intrinsic value to women's emancipation, but because women were seen as crucial ingredients to a successful Popular Front coalition.

( v )

Similarly, women were seen as important recruits for the CPC's anti-war and anti-fascist work. At the time of Elizabeth Morton's return from the Paris Conference of Women Against War and Fascism, in the summer of 1934, it was clear that anti-fascism was becoming a priority for CPC women. The following March, International Women's Day celebrations posed anti-fascism as one of the most crucial political issues of the day for women. The struggle against fascism, it was maintained, existed concurrently with the struggle against war, and both were essential questions for women, for fascism meant the oppression of women, "whose small measure of independence and self-respect, won under capitalism, and limited as it is, are totally lost under fascism."<sup>89</sup> This warning, buttressed by reports of women's status in fascist Germany and Italy, was emphasized over the next four years: women were reminded of their loss of jobs and rights and their equation with breeding machines -- in sum, the assumption of female inferiority -- which characterized Nazi and Italian policies. Often, these descriptions were contrasted with the enlightened Soviet society, in which, it was said, women's equality was an established reality.

Fascism was a threat to women as individuals; it was also a threat to women as mothers, for it was an aggressive, war-seeking ideology, endangering the lives of women's husbands and sons. In a new world war, initiated by fascism, warned the Clarion, "there will be no respect for civilian lives ... apart from this direct threat, are not working women the great sufferers in war; they see their husbands herded to slaughter and bear babies to manhood only to have them claimed by the capitalist class as bullet targets."<sup>90</sup> Invoking the well-established argument of women's maternal instinct for the preservation of life, and

drawing on working-class memories of past, senseless sacrifices in war, the Party tried to draw women into the anti-fascist cause. Lastly, some Party documents added frankly, women should be recruited because, as potential munitions workers, (and given their proclivity to conservatism) they could be the easy target of post-war propagandists in the event of a war.

Using these arguments, the CPC tried, through various organizational means, to help create a mass anti-fascist movement with a large female component. In 1935 the Party made efforts to support the local League of Nations Societies' disarmament petition, and in the Clarion, the Womens International League (WIL) gained some sympathetic coverage. The CPC's major initiative, however, was to organize support for the newly-formed Canadian League against War and Fascism (CLWF), in 1937 renamed the Canadian League for Peace and Democracy (CLPD). The League was founded in 1934, primarily by Communists and socialists, as the Canadian branch of an international organization which was to "enlist and coordinate the support of trade unions, workers, Church groups, women's groups and language groups, educators, professionals ... and liberals of all classes in a broad movement against war and fascism."<sup>91</sup> In keeping with Popular Front policies, the CPC tried to allow broad participation in the CLWF, deliberately taking a back seat so as to "reassure skeptical liberals and socialists",<sup>92</sup> and many of the latter, fervently believing in the necessity of a united Left, quickly forgave the Communists for their past vilification of socialists as 'social fascists' and joined the CLWF.<sup>93</sup>

In 1937, the CLWF's name was changed to the League for Peace and Democracy, an alteration which reflected the moderate and accommodating

politics of the League,<sup>94</sup> but which also revealed the influence of the Spanish Civil War on Canadian socialist pacifism. Many CCF pacifists found their faith in neutralism shaken by events in Spain, and they moved away from strict non-violence to support a war for 'peace and democracy'. By 1936-37, for example, CCF peace advocates Jean Laing and Rose Henderson had joined the Canadian Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, another United Front effort of socialists and Communists, which raised popular support and funds for the Republican cause. These socialists created a pool of supporters for the CLWF and then later the CLPF; notable CCF women like Laing, Henderson and Alice Loeb were drawn under the Popular Front umbrella, while newer activists like Nora Rodd, came to associate anti-fascism with the CPC. Rodd began her political life in the CCF, but because of the CPC's more vocal opposition to fascism, she became a Communist. Even though she believed that woman's life-giving instincts were a central reason for her interest in peace, she saw no contradiction between such anti-war ideals and her support for one side in the Spanish Civil War. Peace, it was understood by Rodd and many others, was dependent on a triumph over fascism.

Women were highly visible in the CLWF, an indication that, as the CPC contended, anti-fascism was a pressing issue for left-wing women. At the CLWF's founding convention, the Communist group included Dorothy Livesay, Julia Collins and Becky Buhay Ewen, and the larger, socialist/WIL contingent included Alice Chown, Ida Siegal, Alice Loeb, Agnes Sharpe, Mildred Crang, and many others. Women at the convention arranged their own meeting one night, and formed a national Women's Council which set forth plans to set up local Women's Councils, as well as organize a Dominion Congress of Women against War and Fascism. They

were vocal about the need to organize women, as women, against fascism because of the "enslaving, oppressive"<sup>95</sup> nature of fascist ideology. As Elizabeth Morton proclaimed in a rousing feminist speech to the delegates:

Under fascism, women are relegated to blind, unquestioning creatures, and even classified in Germany for breeding purposes. Women are demanding to know why there is poverty in the midst of plenty. A thinking woman is a dangerous thing, and the ruling class realizes that.<sup>96</sup>

In later Executive meetings, Morton proposed a women's column in the League publication as a means of ensuring discussion of women's issues. Despite her arguments, a weaker resolution was adopted, advocating "more articles on women",<sup>97</sup> but no separate page in the paper. And at the second Congress of the CLWF, speeches, replete with strong feminist rhetoric, were made by Annie Buller, Ida Siegal and Rose Henderson, all of whom decried sexual discrimination against working women, including women in the professions of teaching and medicine. The women at the Congress concluded by calling for political rights for their sisters in Quebec, and by denouncing any and all "dogmas" of male superiority.<sup>98</sup> Clearly, a feminist understanding of women's inequality and subordination was part of the appeal made to women to join the anti-fascist movement.

Exhortations for women to join in the work of the Canadian Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy (CASD) or of the Friends of the Mackenzie Papineau Battalion were usually made in less feminist terms. For many left-wing women and men, Spain was a crucial touchstone of the 30's generation: "it was the issue that brought the most recruits into the Party and the catalyst that led many into the Popular Front movement."<sup>99</sup> The war was perceived as a key testing-point between the



forces of the progressive Left and the evil of fascism, or as a symbol for the future fate of Europe.

Yet, even within the CASD, women organized autonomously to design special campaigns intended to draw in homemakers, and women in existing social service groups. At its 1937 meeting, the CASD convened a committee for 'Child Welfare and Women's Work', which was to address women's social service clubs, plan separate publicity for women and recommend programs for local women's CASD committees, such as "neighborhood teas, study groups, home-cooking sales or a Christmas drive for a gift of milk to Spanish children, to be called the 'Women's Council for Humanitarian Aid to Spain'".<sup>100</sup> This committee also advocated another quintessentially Popular Front: a national knitting contest, organized through local girls organizations and the press. Indeed, as in other wars, knitting became a symbol for women's contribution to the cause. Advocating support for the CASD's work, Alice Cooke commended those women who in 1937, decided to "march in the May Day parade and knit as they walked for Spain."<sup>101</sup> Even the most avid knitters, however, would have had trouble competing with the example cited by Becky Buhay:

Mothers, wives and sweethearts are knitting for the boys in the Mac Paps ... women's organizations have contributed to Spanish relief with socials, rummage sales and above all, knitting. An outstanding example is Mrs. Kisman of Calgary, who knitted 50 pairs of socks. This proves progressive women stand in the forefront of the fight against fascism.<sup>102</sup>

Besides knitting socks, many women contributed an important share of the CASP's local organizing work; they did office and secretarial work, launched fund-raising campaigns and helped to organize tours for speakers like Norman Bethune, thus generating important publicity and propaganda for the Republican cause. There were some

exceptions to this rule; the most interesting was Jim Watts, a young journalist from Toronto who went to Spain as a Clarion reporter and stayed as an ambulance driver for British Medical Aid. Direct involvement in the war, however, was rare. Despite the idealization of La Passionaria as the heroine of the war, most Canadian women played very different roles: a significant number served on the executive of the CASD, and many more did support work for the CASD or the Friends of the Mac-Paps.

By the end of the decade, the Party's connection of the anti-fascist struggle to the women's movement had become very pronounced: on the one hand, women were reminded of the dangers of fascism as a misogynistic ideology, and on the other, they were enrolled as 'mothers' in the fight against fascism and for peace. Although the latter had been, in some form, a continuing theme in CPC strategies since the 1920's, the style and content of the Popular Front anti-war movement was distinct. In contrast to the Third Period emphasis on organizing working-class women to defend the USSR, appeals were made to all classes of women in professional, fraternal, social service groups, and union auxiliaries to join a United Front against fascism. In order to cast its net widely, the Party advocated tactics ranging from traditional and non-threatening roles for women -- like knitting -- to alliances with feminist organizations. The latter reflected a sympathy for feminism and the women's movement never before expressed by the Party. The rationale, of course, was not to embrace feminism ideologically, but rather to draw larger numbers of women into an anti-fascist alliance with the CPC.

(vi)

The success of the Party's Popular Front work can be measured not only by the size of the CLWF, but also by the Party's own expanding membership. Although the CPC ranks increased gradually during this decade, the most significant gains were made during the late 1930's. Within the Party's growing membership, women remained a minority of 25% or less. Still, women's radicalization merits examination: why did women become active in Communist politics, and did their politicization differ from that of CCF women?

Like most women in the CCF, female Communists were drawn to politics as a result of their experience of working-class life and their introduction to socialist ideas. Yet, there were differences between the two parties: more Communist women came from working-class, emigrant backgrounds than did their CCF counterparts, and most Communist women absorbed a reeducation in Marxism/Leninism, rather than the eclectic socialism of the CCF. Some of the original members of the Party in the '20's, affectionately referred to as the 'old Bolsheviks', were working-class emigrants from Tzarist Russia and/or veterans of the European socialist movement who had rejoiced in the October Revolution, and who found their belief in an international revolutionary movement confirmed by their experience of working-class life in Canada. To many Jewish immigrants who came to Canada already fired with hopes for universal social justice, says Erna Paris in her history of Canadian Jews:

Sweating in the Spadina shops only 'proved' Marxist theories of class exploitation. It seems clear enough that on Spadina Avenue class considerations overrode those of ethnic or national solidarity. For most immigrants, conditions in the garment

trades provided a basic and blunt introduction to the need for socialism.<sup>103</sup>

These emigrants' children, who grew up in the 1920's and '30's, also shared certain experiences of working-class life: many left school at an early age to pursue wage-work at a time when job security was ephemeral, and wages for the unskilled extremely low. To achieve a level of economic security, most families needed more than one wage earner, yet in the worst of the Depression, with 25% of the country out-of-work, families were lucky to have one person working. For those with jobs, the Depression sharpened the inherent insecurity and inequality of the workplace; with a ready supply of labour, employers could cut wages and implement speed-ups more easily. In short, in the workplace, or in their day-to-day struggle for economic solvency, many working-class youths found verification of a Marxist analysis of class inequality and class struggle. Moreover, the CPC's ethnic followers often gravitated towards geographical areas and occupations which reinforced their class, cultural and socialist solidarity; the Finns, for example, moved to Northern Ontario to work in resource industries or as domestics, while the Jews took their skills to the needle trades of Montreal, Toronto or Winnipeg.

In the 1930's, as in the '20's, a large proportion of new female members came from the Party's three main ethnic groups. After the denigration of language organizations during the Third Period, many members were relieved to find in the Popular Front a re-affirmation of comrades' work in ethnic organizations. Perhaps partly for this reason, ethnicity remained a factor in women's recruitment to the Party. Instrumental to this ethnic connection were the three language organizations sympathetic to the CPC, which drew women into a

closely-knit ethnic subculture thriving on social, recreational and artistic activities like the Ukrainian summer camp, the Finnish Sports Association or the Yiddish Theatre. The FOC, for instance, offered women a well-developed Finnish socialist culture as an entrée to the CPC: through their reading of Vapaus, through the myriad of activities in the local Finn Hall, through the Left Finn Theatre or the Workers Sports Association, women gained an introduction to socialist ideas and the Party. Similarly, UFLTA and the Jewish Labor League (later the United Jewish Peoples Order, or UJPO), encouraged respect for the USSR, and provided an introduction to Left-wing ideas through a network of social and cultural activities. For some progressive emigrants and their children, who were talented artists, athletes or actors, these ethnic organizations provided an important opportunity, perhaps the only one, to express their talents.<sup>104</sup> For Jewish children in Toronto, says Paris, there was a special progressive school, the Morris Winchevsky School, and during summer vacation, a left-wing camp, Camp Naivelt, just outside Toronto. And when they were older,

The adults sang in their own choir ... formed their own brass band, had their own modern dance company, and produced their own theatre, which was usually about their particular proletarian experience ... There were lectures and Marxist study groups ... and special groups for women ... The Jewish Labor League was a universe limited by specific boundaries but with much intellectual, cultural and emotional richness to offer.<sup>105</sup>

Moreover, the ethnic connection in the CPC encompassed more than official membership in one of the language organizations. The cultural and class milieu of one's early years could lead one quite naturally into Party circles: to be working class, Jewish and growing up near Spadina in Toronto, meant that you had a good chance of having a friend, aunt, cousin, or even parent in the movement. And if your parents were

involved, you could quite literally 'grow up' in the movement, for red diaper children were raised on a diet of Young Pioneers and political meetings. Once active in the Party, Jewish Communists found a subculture, "not institutional or religious, but of identity, style, language and social network"<sup>106</sup> to sustain their feeling of ethnic connection and political loyalty.

Because of the direct links between the FOC, UFLTA, the UJPO and the Party, some women did move directly from one group to another. Mary Kardash, for example, grew up in a radical Ukrainian household; her father was a labour organizer and both parents were active in UFLTA. Kardash became active in the Ukrainian youth organization attached to UFLTA, subsequently became a YCL organizer, and later an important Party activist in Manitoba.<sup>107</sup> Other women described a more indirect path to their involvement, but still one which evolved with their ethnic identification. Toby Ryan, for example, grew up in a working-class, Jewish socialist family and through her early contacts with the Workmen's Circle and Jewish Theatre, became interested in acting and progressive cultural groups. She later became an important force behind Left Theatre attached to the CPC.<sup>108</sup> Some Jewish women also linked their experience of anti-Semitism to their attraction to radicalism. Shaska Mandel, who before emigrating from Tzarist Poland had experienced virulent anti-Semitism, gave her political loyalties in Canada to the Communist Party, which to her represented the post-revolutionary ideal of racial tolerance in the Soviet Union.<sup>109</sup>

Woman's ethnicity, some Communists argued, also influenced the kind of role she played in radical politics. The Ukrainians, it was rumored, did little to remove themselves from patriarchal peasant

traditions; thus, Ukrainian women were likely to be 'Party wives', doing essential, but low-profile support work. In an account of Ukrainian life in Alberta, Helen Potrebenco describes a culture which was unsympathetic to women's equality:

It appears that the struggle to keep women in their place in peasant society is much more determined and immediate than in industrial society ... An old Ukrainian proverb says that three corners of the house rest on the wife's back and only one corner on the husband's. To keep women in their place peasant men had only their superior physical strength and even this was not enough because peasant women are very strong ... Thus, there seems to have been other ways developed to keep women from seeking equality.<sup>110</sup>

For Ukrainian women, she concludes, this meant that they were encouraged to participate in politics only as second-class citizens, "doing most of the work, without the credit. It wasn't considered nice for women to want positions as paid organizers, or to participate in demonstrations except by preparing food for them."<sup>111</sup> Although Potrebenco's critical assessment may be challenged by later historians,<sup>112</sup> there is no doubt that Ukrainian women were less visible than Jewish, Finnish or English-Canadian women as Party cadres or Party leaders.

These cultural differences might be attributed to the fact that both the Finns and Jews encouraged (or at least accepted) women's wage-labour before,<sup>113</sup> and sometimes after marriage, and also to the established traditions of women's political involvement which these groups brought to the CPC. Finnish women had been organized into their own socialist groups since the pre-war SDPC, and Jewish women, some historians argue, brought to North America traditions which encouraged their political activism, particularly in the labour movement. Jewish women in the U.S., say Baum, Hyman and Michel, had already been exposed to the labour movement in Eastern Europe and some had been active in the

Bund.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, despite the secondary status of Jewish women in religious life, "there was much in the Jewish historical tradition which assumed women's heavy economic responsibilities in the workplace and in the home, and which enabled Jewish women to develop strong and capable personalities."<sup>114</sup> Although no simple, monocausal explanation of 'cultural baggage' can explain the high numbers of Jewish women in the Party, such cultural traditions could have been one factor, along with women's immediate experience of life in Canada, which stimulated their political activism.

Whatever their ethnic background, women who joined the Party in the '30's stressed their experiences of wage labour, of working-class neighbourhoods, or their witness to the 'poverty amidst plenty' around them, as the salient reasons for their radicalization. For them, the Depression and the rise of fascism were the central reference points of their youth. Few saw women's oppression as the primary reason for their interest in radical politics, although they saw women's equality as one measure of a socialist society. During this period, most women, even if they came from rural homes, first made contact with the movement when they moved to large urban centres. 'I came from a large immigrant farm family, who lost everything in the Depression', remembered one woman:

For us, there was no relief. I was a teenager in the '30's in Saskatchewan. My first job was at 14, helping on another farm ... I left home for Saskatoon to join my older sister... For single women like me there were only two choices -- domestic work or prostitution. I chose the former ... working for \$5 a month ... My first job, I lived in the pantry with the washer and only a cotton cot. Employers always took advantage because there was a large labour pool.<sup>115</sup>

Moved by the "injustice of the Depression" Mickey Murray became involved in the Unemployed Movement and in the CLDL, in which her older sister served as Secretary, and from there, she moved into the Communist Party.



Another young Saskatchewan farm woman, Josephine Gehl, also received her introduction to radical politics in Saskatoon. Already sympathetic to radical ideas because of her progressive-minded father, Gehl found herself "taking a radical stand"<sup>116</sup> as she worked her way through University. During the Depression, she worked in retail stores, and then was on relief for three years. Although Gehl joined the Party at the end of its 'illegal period', her most formative memories are of her years on relief:

We were all on relief and very active in labour politics. Some aspects of relief were very degrading ... like the snooping on relief recipients ... the effect of the Regina Riot in 1935 was important to me. I participated in the crowd disturbances; I saw the police brutality ... from this I became involved in the Mothers Committee to release those arrested in Regina.<sup>117</sup>

Many women like Gehl and Murray made contact with the Party through organizations like the CLDL, unemployment associations, or increasingly in the Popular Front, through youth groups like the Canadian Youth Congress. And because Popular Front strategies allowed comrades' involvement in a wide variety of progressive groups, their potential sphere of influence was enlarged. A substantial number of women who became involved in the late 1930's, or even in the war years, were also influenced by the CPC's anti-fascist message. Jewish comrades especially, identified with the victims of German anti-Semitism, but other women also perceived fascism as the main impetus for their radicalization. Claire Culhane, a young Montrealer who became involved through the Young Communist League, heard the Party's anti-fascist and anti-capitalist message and it struck a responsive chord. Already thoughtful about social inequality and how she might "lead a very plain life, helping others", Culhane became a 'ready candidate':

In my second year of nursing, I was suspended ... I'd find myself in the public ward with someone very ill and no linen left, so I went upstairs to the private ward for an armful -- and I was in trouble every week on an issue like that ... when I came back to Montreal, friends in the YCL took me to a meeting about Spain, and I immediately understood what they meant by capitalism -- I had seen it in the hospital! So I was a ready candidate for the YCL; I even tried to go to Spain.<sup>118</sup>

Women who were drawn to the CPC through anti-fascist groups or working-class organizations soon encountered a reeducation in socialist ideas which helped to cement their new political allegiances and shape their view of the woman question. The predominant ideological framework provided by the Party was Marxism, although during the Popular Front, members' reading probably ranged more widely, taking in 'classics' like Upton Sinclair's The Jungle, and plays and novels by progressive American authors like Clifford Odets and Mike Gold.<sup>119</sup> Nonetheless, new members were usually given some basic introduction to historical materialism, and to Leninist ideas about organizing. The former bred a fairly straight-forward materialist perspective stressing economic causation and a class analysis; the latter solidified one's feeling of integration into a closely-knit and righteous political army, led by an elite with astute, even absolute, political knowledge. (As one woman put it, "we had a sense of belonging to a group which was on the right side of History.")<sup>120</sup> Members who were interested in the woman question were also encouraged to read Lenin's conversation with Clara Zetkin, and Engels' Origin of the Family.

For many new recruits, Communist meetings and study groups were in themselves an education: "I went to meetings and heard speakers ... and it was such an education, after missing a formal education",<sup>121</sup> explained one woman. Or, as a Ukrainian woman who found her world explained and expanded by her membership in UFLTA put it: "before I just

read for myself ... now, ... I saw the world!"<sup>122</sup> Many women claimed that they lacked "theoretical background"<sup>123</sup> until they became involved in the Party, and even then, they often expressed insecurity about their grasp of theory. Other women, probably a smaller group, delved enthusiastically into the Marxist classics. From a Left study group, remembered Kate Magnussen Bader, she gained an interest in Marx, and her subsequent reading provided her with an explanation of 'how her society worked and where she fit into it'. The result was her total commitment to revolutionary politics.<sup>124</sup>

In sum, women's commitment to Communism emerged from their introduction to new ideas, and the conjunction of their class, cultural and family experiences. The latter, of course, were problematic for women. One's introduction to radical ideas or invitation to Party events often came from family members; yet, family pressures could also be a deterrent to women's wholehearted activism. Even if a woman's husband or father was a Communist, she could still be pressured -- one woman recalls with physical violence -- to remain in the kitchen, and urged not to enter the male domain of politics. Female Party cadres scolded their male comrades for the 'uncommunistic' behavior, and urged them to involve their wives in the mainstream of Party life, but the problem always remained. To most women members, however, the problem did not seem to be a major and insurmountable one; they remained optimistic that in the future, men would encourage and welcome women into the Party. Their class consciousness and their understanding of women's oppression as an outgrowth of class inequality -- an understanding confirmed by their education in Marx and Engels -- precluded any assault on the Party's male-dominated power structure.

The Party did routinely deplore women's minority status in the movement. As Annie Buller lamented in Discussion:

Why is it that in recruiting women in unions, in unemployed associations, ... we do not work out a plan to stimulate the recruitment of women to the Party? Proletarian women, tested in the struggle do not find their way into the Party. One reason is that districts have not taken this work seriously... there are districts where no attempt is made to recruit women and to boldly promote them to leadership positions.<sup>125</sup>

Few Communist women achieved national prominence, much less power, although a larger group became local organizers or perhaps regional leaders. Annie Buller and Becky Buhay, for instance, remained the perennial female nominees for the Central committee throughout the 1930's. During the Popular Front, Buller participated in the Party's labour work, organized J.B. MacLaughlin's 1935 electoral campaign, then in 1937, she was posted to Winnipeg to work as organizer and manager for the western Communist newspaper. Becky Buhay also travelled extensively throughout the 1930's; in 1935, after returning from a year of International Relief Aid work in Moscow, she moved to B.C. to join Tom Ewen. She spent two years organizing in B.C., and touring the country to raise funds for the Mac Paps. In 1938-39, she returned to the leadership of the CLDL, and just before the war broke out, she was heading to Nova Scotia as an organizer. During this period, Buhay gave up her directorship of the Women's Department; both Buller and Buhay remained indirectly connected to the Women's Department, speaking on its behalf, and writing articles on women for the Clarion, but they were generally assigned to other areas of political work.

New talents took up the editing of the Clarion's women's page and the maintenance of the Women's Department. Alice Cooke, an older Party member from Owen Sound, who had joined the Party in 1934, headed

the Women's Department and took on a major share of Clarion work, with aid from Anne Smith (Stewart Smith's wife) and Mary, 'Ma' Flanigan. Flanigan, a working-class Irish emigrant, joined the Party in the late 1920's, and during the CPC's illegal period, often assigned comrades working 'underground'. A charismatic figure, Flanigan assumed local fame for her maternal social skills; she cooked for all Party schools and Conventions and she often performed a repertoire of labour songs. Like 'Mother' Ella Reeve Bloor of the CPUSA, Flanigan was awarded a maternal nickname, an indication of what some historians have called the "cult of motherhood"<sup>126</sup> in the Party.

Other styles of female leadership, however, did exist in the Party, and in the 1930's a small group of able women made their way into positions as local organizers, educators and administrators. Kate Magnussen Bader left the employ of the Party's Central Office for Thunder Bay where she was involved in organizing around relief issues. In Saskatchewan, Florence Theodore, an English immigrant who joined the Regina WLL in 1933, and the Party in 1934, was an important impetus behind the Mothers Committee and the Citizens Defence Committee for the Trekkers, and in B.C., Annie Stewart, also a veteran of the WLL, headed the Provincial Women's Commission in the late 1930's. New faces also appeared on the scene. Beatrice Ferneyhough went from organizing office workers in Toronto to work as a local organizer in Alberta, and Marjorie Cooper, after leaving the Saskatchewan CCF for the CPC, became an educational functionary in B.C. From the prairies also came three sisters, Josephine, Ella and Elsie Gehl, all of whom became active Communists: Josie worked as a regional organizer, ran in elections and eventually sat on the Regina School Board; Ella did organizational and

administrative work for the Party; and Elsie was later to take up a post with the National Women's Commission. In Saskatoon, Josephine's one-time roommate Gladys MacDonald served as coeditor of the Communists' agrarian paper, Factory and Furrow, and in Manitoba, Margaret Mills worked as an administrator for the Party. Although none of these women achieved the national stature of Buller and Buhay, they supplied an important source of energy, initiative and labour to the second-line of Party leadership. In Regina, recalls one woman, "before World War II, women had a certain place in the movement ... which was recognized ... at that time, it seems as if half or more of the local leadership were women."<sup>127</sup>

The Popular Front also drew more women from Anglo-Saxon and middle-class backgrounds to the Party. Helen Paulin, who came from a Westmount background, already defined herself as a Christian and a pacifist when she encountered Communists at McGill in the SCM and the Social Problems Club. Her decision to join the YCL, she remembered, came from an activated social conscience: "the Depression affected me ... seeing the contradictions between our home in Westmount and the people who lived in stockyards ... I settled that I could be a Christian and a Communist ... and we would all work together for peace."<sup>128</sup> The Party, she added, also provided activists with psychological needs, "the sense of belonging to a cause...", and during illegal periods, with even a touch of "romance".<sup>129</sup>

In the 1930's, an artistic/intellectual group also began to form around the CPC; many of these intellectuals were active in the burgeoning Left Theatre movement or wrote for New Frontier, the successor to the Masses. Like Canadian Forum, New Frontier was a

journal of art, fiction and intellectual comment, but the latter was largely sympathetic to the CPC, as the former was to the CCF. Still, New Frontier (NF) editors, committed to the Popular Front, published works of unaligned artists and writers, and occasionally engaged in debate with other socialists -- a change from the more sectarian Masses. Both the Theatre movement and New Frontier were part of an emergent "culture of protest"<sup>130</sup> expressing working-class and intellectual discontent of the 1930's. This culture did not emphasize the oppression of women; rather, the theme of class conflict almost always predominated. Yet, NF fiction sometimes spoke to the particular dilemmas of women on relief, or women's role in the unemployment movement, and it published some commentary on women's unequal status in society. And however small a hearing women gained in NF, they fared better than in The Canadian Forum, which was almost totally silent on the woman question.

Two of the brightest talents in this radical group around NF were Dorothy Livesay and Jean Watts, both of whom had actually joined the Party in the Third Period -- a testament to the fact that the CPC's militant Third period rhetoric did not deter, but actually appealed to many young radicals. Both Watts and Livesay came from comfortable backgrounds but the university education which affluence assured them helped direct their already inquisitive and rebellious minds towards radical politics. Their exposure to socialist ideas on campus, their witness to the suffering of the Depression, (and in Livesay's case, her experience of political upheaval in Europe) solidified their commitment to socialism, and by 1933-34 both were involved in the CPC. Livesay, who eventually trained as a social worker, was involved in various Party

campaigns including the unionization of office workers and the establishment of the CLWF. Some of her writing, shaped at this time by her aroused social awareness and her political sympathies, was also used as 'agit prop' by Party groups.<sup>131</sup>

Jean Watts worked as a journalist and wrote for NF, primarily about the war in Spain, which she viewed first-hand. But she was probably best known for her contribution to the Left Theatre movement in Toronto.<sup>132</sup> In the early '30's, Watts joined the Progressive Arts Club, then aided with the birth of one of its progeny, the Workers Experimental Theatre (later, the Workers Theatre). Watts, Toby Ryan and the other Workers Theatre actors used Watts car to go 'on tour'; although lacking costumes, props and money, the Company took a collection of agit-prop plays to factory gates across southern Ontario. In 1934 Watts went to study progressive Theatre in New York. When she returned, the Toronto group had hired its own director from New York's New Theatre School, and like the thriving Left Theatre groups in Montreal, Winnipeg and Vancouver, expanded and refined their theatrical offerings. Watts remained one of the mainstays of the movement until she left for Spain; after her return, she wrote and spoke of her experiences in the War, maintaining her involvement with the Party, although it was not Watts, but her husband, who was editor of NF, who was interned in 1939.

The New Frontier editorial board also included Margaret Gould, a prominent Toronto social worker. In the 1920's, Gould, then Sarah Gold, had worked as an organizer in the needle trades. A University of Toronto graduate in political science, Gold anglicized her name and spent her early social work career doing research and educational work



for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees, before she joined the Toronto Welfare Bureau. Already known as a radical in the social work profession,<sup>133</sup> Gould became a regular speaker for the Toronto Women's Progressive Association in the late 1930's. Impressions of her 1937 tour of the USSR were published in the Toronto Star, and later collected as a book, entitled I Visit the Soviets. Aside from some minor concerns, Gould wrote positively of the USSR, including an enthusiastic discussion of the status of Russian women. Her account of Soviet life -- the observations of a respected professional -- must have had some favourable influence on Star readers, as well as on the already-converted in left circles.<sup>134</sup> Gould's sympathy for the Soviet experiment was already evident in her discussion of the woman question published in NF in 1936. Her article did not contain anything theoretically new; in an economic vein, for example, she argued that the Soviet approach proved that "economic freedom is the basis for all freedom and progress" and concluded that women needed no:

Narrow sectarian struggle for special legislation and education merely to ameliorate women's lot. We need, rather, an understanding of the social and economic conditions which have produced the so-called woman problem.<sup>135</sup>

At the same time, Gould wrote with intelligence and sensitivity about the problems of working women; she defended the rights of all women, single and married, to meaningful employment (sometimes an unpopular stand in the Depression); and she argued persuasively for the emancipation of women's personality and capabilities -- all indications that she was one of the more thoughtful exponents in the CPC on the woman question.

Like many Communists of the time, Gould was particularly enthusiastic about the USSR's generous provision of creches and maternity care, and its support for a strong family unit. In the latter case, her comments may have been partly designed to offset fears of the Soviet's 'collectivization of women and nationalization of children', so often voiced by anti-communists. At the same time, however, Gould revealed a true sympathy and strong belief in the family ideal, as witnessed by her repeated enthusiasm for the "strong family ties which ... thrived in the Soviet Union."<sup>136</sup> This is not to say that women like Gould, in the artistic/intellectual group close to the Party, did not question women's subordination in existing family life, or their fixed gender roles in the Party. Indeed, it was Dorothy Livesay who observed that many women were unable to play a role in politics because their husbands still regarded them as property. Livesay seemed painfully aware of the difficulties of being an 'emancipated' woman while having inherited the values of a sexist society, and she implied that she and others tried, at least, to question and expand the limitations of traditional relationships in a sexually conservative society.<sup>137</sup> And some examples do exist of other members' attempts to work out more egalitarian family relationships: Becky Buhay lived with Tom Ewen, although they did not legally marry, and both took on full-time organizing jobs for the Party; and Annie Buller's husband looked after their son when she was absent on Party business. Yet these experiments were not always long-lasting, and they were unusual rather than the norm. Many more Party members conformed to traditional family forms, with women not only responsible for domestic labour and child care, but also subject to the opinions and authority of their husbands.

(vii)

The Popular Front was characterized by a strong emphasis on the preservation of the family, in part a reflection of prevailing Soviet policies, but more importantly, a consequence of the internal logic of Popular Front objectives. Within the Soviet Union, the 1930's witnessed increasing emphasis on population growth, security in the face of war, and a reinforcement of traditional family life. Some of this enthusiasm for the family inevitably filtered out to the Comintern's member parties through visitors' accounts of the USSR and Soviet publications. The CPC's position was also shaped by the very nature and objectives of Popular Front strategies. As the Party embraced issues like education, child welfare and rising prices in its work among women, a new accent on women's central role in the family emerged. Popular Front efforts to make the Party 'popular' and palatable to the working classes also contributed to the Party's defence of the family, for the sanctity of the family unit was perceived to be at the heart of working-class culture. Although little research exists on Canadian working-class culture in the 1930's, American labour historian Alice Kessler-Harris argues that the Depression, "while it imposed on the family pressures that pushed women into wage-work, also fostered a public stance that encouraged family unit and urged women, in the interest of jobs for men, to avoid paid work themselves."<sup>138</sup> In a similar vein, sociologist Jane Humphries argues that the Depression exacerbated "sex-linked relations of dominance and strengthened traditional ideas [like the family] thus weakening women's drive for liberation."<sup>139</sup>

For all these reasons, the Communist press and the work of the Women's Department came to emphasize the consolidation of the family and women's important role as mothers. Women were not to be meek, passive or apolitical mothers; rather, they were to be strong 'Ma Joads', but they were seen as mothers, first and foremost. The Depression, argued the Clarion, denied women the husbands and happy homes they wished for and deserved; this lament only reinforced the notion that women's goals and life choices centred on motherhood. The unfortunate lot of Canadian women was contrasted to social life in the USSR, where economic security and maternity benefits had given women the choice to live a "real family life".<sup>140</sup> Articles which dealt with the topic of family instability reasoned along economistic lines: because of the economic insecurity under capitalism, the North American family was under stress and often existed as an imperfect, unsatisfying institution. Under such conditions, marriage was reduced to an "economic necessity"<sup>141</sup> for women, or if married, women's mothering abilities were strained. "A lack of economic security", concluded one writer, "makes above all, a poor type of mother. And if she is an inadequate mother, the children and family suffer."<sup>142</sup>

While the Party's contention that economic insecurity adversely affected family life may have been quite true, the CPC's overall analysis of family life was limited. 'Capitalism is destroying the family; Communism will restore it' was the message, which failed to analyze the patriarchal nature of family life, or the family's own "social dynamic", which, along with economic insecurity, contributed to family discontent.<sup>143</sup> The Party's view may have reflected prevailing Depression fears of family breakdown, but it did not challenge the

status quo in a truly radical, much less revolutionary sense, for it reinforced traditional notions of women's separate sphere and sometimes excused women's subordination in the family.

In the CPUSA's Woman Today and in Popular Front novels, (both of which reached some Canadian members) argues American historian Elsa Dixler, the view of womanhood is barely distinguishable from mainstream women's magazines. The advice column in Woman Today and many short stories and novels, she maintains, fit neatly into Popular Front tactics of "avoiding any alienation of the American masses by accommodating themselves to accepted social norms, especially those pillars of society, heterosexuality and monogamy."<sup>144</sup> Women were portrayed primarily as working-class housewives, and only secondarily as political beings. Moreover, if friction occurred within a Communist household, women were usually advised to accommodate themselves to their husbands' politics, not to reeducate their menfolk to women's needs. Lastly, the sterility of middle-class marriage and the parasitism of middle-class women was contrasted to the healthier, robust (and romanticized) working-class family, although even in Communist pairings men "could feel 'restless' with monogamy and pursue affairs, while women did not."<sup>145</sup>

While Dixler's observations all point to the CPUSA's obeisance to the patriarchal family, her conclusions may be too harsh. Even Dixler admits, for example, that when Communist women discussed the Soviet experiment or described male-female relationships in the 'ideal' Communist future, they described relationships based on comrad sharing, not on unequal power relations. This was a vision which did differ appreciably from the fiction in mainstream women's magazines. In

an oral history done by Paul Lyons, many Communists remember their efforts to establish marriages of "partnership and shared interests", and women recall their efforts to "secure autonomy" for themselves within the family.<sup>146</sup> Canadian Communist women also imagined a more egalitarian family as part of the socialist future. Margaret Gould described her 'ideal', as she believed it was expressed in the Soviet Union:

With new family life, children now receive a lot of fathering, as well as mothering ... in all, Russian woman appears to have freed herself from many of the inhibitions which warp the personalities of women in most countries ... they are not dependent upon men, they stand on their own feet and fight with their comrades for the welfare of all. Consequently, Russia has discarded that false chivalry which calls womanhood and motherhood sacred but blindly allows both to be exploited.<sup>147</sup>

However illusory her picture of the USSR, Gould's vision did indicate that Communist women hoped for an alternate role for women in the family. Finally, according to some labour historians, within working-class culture, the idealization of motherhood was based on a different material and social reality -- namely, women's economic contribution to the family and her role as a household 'manager' -- than middle-class notions of motherhood in women's magazines and the cinema. Thus, to working-class radicals, it is argued, an idealized motherhood meant strength and resourcefulness, not dependence and passivity, and the family ideal represented an "escape from the drill of the market place and the disciplinary force of capitalism",<sup>148</sup> not merely an affirmation of patriarchal power.

Despite these considerations, in the last resort the CPC's emphasis on the preservation of the family and on the idealization of motherhood was a conservative, rather than liberating force for women. However distinct was the working-class image of motherhood, and whatever

humanity the family ideal symbolized, it remains that the family as it was then constituted still upheld men's primary importance and power. Family life was too easily equated with women's subjection to male authority and women's confinement to one occupation alone -- domestic labour and motherhood. Despite the dreams of some Communist women, and the attempts of some Party members to live out an alternative, more progressive family life, overall, the CPC's vision of the family was a very traditional one. The Party's economistic analysis of the family and its assumption that motherhood was women's 'natural' vocation were made worse by the fact that Communists, unlike the earlier Utopian socialists, were content to wait until 'after the Revolution' to start transforming their personal and family lives. Amidst the pressures of constant meetings and political organizing, and in concurrence with Popular Front attempts to integrate into 'normal' working-class life, it was easier to construct marriage as a junior partnership -- with the woman the junior partner. As James Weinstein points out of the American Party:

The struggle against male supremacy within the Party conflicted with its emphasis on Party members living like "ordinary workers" and also with the Victorian moral standards that prevailed among the rank and file members ... the result was that, the struggle against male supremacy was taken seriously mostly in the student division of the Party, and that as Party members aged, married and went to work their lives became more and more like everyone else's.<sup>149</sup>

Although Canadian Communists reproduced the USSR's emphasis on the family within their own Party, some CPC members were uncomfortable with the Soviets' new policies restricting access to birth control and abortion. In 1936, articles designed to explain the new laws appeared in The Clarion; they were a response, it was admitted, to the "many letters"<sup>150</sup> from readers who opposed the Russian decision. These

opponents feared the truth of rumours that "birth control information was not available in the Soviet Union", and that the new policy on abortion was designed to create "a bigger army."<sup>151</sup> The Soviet policies on abortion were defended by a well-known American Communist, Jessica Smith, and in a translated article, by Krupskaya, indicating that prestigious names were needed to explain an unpopular decision. Both authors argued that the Soviets' liberal abortion laws, made at a time of economic and social insecurity, were no longer necessary, and that popular opinion was opposed to abortion. Yet, in a frank aside, Krupskaya pointed to the real reason for the changes, calling them as "encouragement to motherhood".<sup>152</sup> A few months later, an article written by a Canadian comrade and recent visitor to the USSR, Sonia Airoff, repeated the major arguments of Smith and Krupskaya, trying to correct the "many" Canadian members who saw the law as a "major tragedy".<sup>153</sup> Airoff did her best to try and convince her readers that the new law actually gave women more freedom:

The new law does aid the freedom of women ... women often don't want abortions for themselves but are pushed into it by their husbands' threats. Now she knows she can have the child and is also guaranteed his support. At first many irresponsible people were using abortions. Only one in a million women wouldn't want children. Women totally support the law -- it gives them the real freedom of motherhood.<sup>154</sup>

Whether or not the author's rather convoluted logic convinced the "many members" is not recorded. Interestingly, when Margaret Gould wrote of the new abortion laws in her book, she did not voice direct approval of them, instead commenting that the "government claimed that ... improved economic and social conditions no longer made the law necessary",<sup>155</sup> and she also relayed the fact that Russians' views on the new law did differ.



The discomfort that North American Communists felt with the new abortion laws attested to their feeling of investment in the Soviet Union's treatment of women and perhaps to their desire for more liberal abortion laws in their own country. At the same time, the issue was generally perceived to be a personal, not a political concern, and few -- if any -- would have ever considered breaking with the Party over it. Since the decline of the WLLs, birth control and abortion had been downplayed; indeed, since the 1920's the Party had only spoken to the former issue. Lobbying for birth control clinics was seen as radical and risky enough; abortion was outside the pale of accepted political work. This, along with Communists acceptance of the argument that "social and economic conditions" no longer made it necessary in the USSR, explains their acceptance of the Soviets' new laws.<sup>156</sup>

During the Popular Front some women did remain active, at the local level, in birth control issues. Despite the Soviets' discouragement of birth control, the International Women's Secretariat advised its member parties to take up the issue, using demands for public, free clinics as rallying points for working-class and middle-class women. The Secretariat could use the argument that, in capitalist countries, economic insecurity still necessitated access to birth control. Or perhaps, thinking pragmatically, they realized that women were determined to pursue this issue anyway. In Canada, Communists' involvement in birth control campaigns increased during the Popular Front, as compared to the early 1930's because of the increased flexibility allowed in local action and because of the wider interest of Party women in social welfare and family issues. In 1936-37, the Clarion carried a series of articles on the history of the birth control

movement, and reports of the speeches of birth control advocates touring the country. The CPC also supported the Nurse Palmer case, the rallying point for all birth control supporters in the 1930's. In Toronto, the Party held a public meeting featuring speakers like Margaret Gould, who maintained that "birth control should be available to all classes ... it is not to solve the economic problem, but to give individual women a safeguard to their health, and the ability to decide whether or not to have children."<sup>157</sup> Her arguments, stressing maternal health, the right of the working-class to decide on family limitation, and women's right to decide when to bear children, resembled the arguments made by the WLLs in the 1920's. In Vancouver, the local WLL initiated its own campaign for birth control, circulating a petition to be presented to the local government, which demanded:

Because the burden of caring for the home and children falls principally upon the shoulders of the working-class mothers, who oftentimes, rather than bring other children into the world ... resort to crude and dangerous means in order to procure abortions, and ... as thousands of women are suffering due to the lack of proper knowledge of Birth Control ... the government is asked to provide such information.<sup>158</sup>

By 1939, however, discussion of birth control had been largely pushed out of the women's column, replaced by articles on consumer issues and the anti-fascist movement. Party women put their energies elsewhere, content to let the birth control issue fall back into the realm of the private and the personal.

( viii )

In the latter part of the 1930's, the only women who could outdo CCF women in 'militant mothering', were women from the Communist Party

of Canada. Like women in the CCF, many Communists saw their political involvement as a direct extension of their maternal and domestic concerns. At the same time, they quite justly distinguished themselves from a 'bourgeois' mentality which confined women to the home, ignored class issues, and avoided militant action. To socialist women, militant mothering meant a politics shaped by one's feminine preoccupation with family, child welfare and consumer issues, but it also meant a politics of direct involvement in the class struggle and in the transformation of capitalist society. Although the association of women's political interests with their occupation as homemakers was part of a continuing tradition in the CPC, the Party's Popular Front equation of motherhood and politics was more self-consciously, and more purposefully promoted than ever before in Party history. Encouraged by the Popular Front intent to integrate established values of working-class life, including the sanctity of the nuclear family, into their campaign for social change, the Party used motherhood as a leitmotif in their mobilization of women.

During the late 1930's, the CPC's work among women was molded by the Party's overall objective of creating a broadly-based inter-class alliance for socialism, and against fascism. This translated into attempts to appeal to women on issues of immediate need and concern in their community -- from better working conditions to better playgrounds -- and to address their desire to avoid another World War. Released from the more rigid Third Period concentration on women in the workplace, Communists now reached out to women in the home, asking them to tackle child welfare, consumer and relief issues. The strict Leninist emphasis on mobilizing only working-class women into

'revolutionary' groups was abandoned, and the singular lesson from Engels, that to involve women in social production was to advance women towards socialism, was temporarily modified. The politics of the Communist women's peace lobby was also transformed; using both feminist and maternalist arguments, the Party attempted to utilize women's historic connection to the peace movement to build a massive anti-fascist movement with a significant female component.

Because of the Party's aspiration to mass influence, women's issues took on new importance in the CPC, and Party women were offered unprecedented opportunities for participation in socialist-feminist causes. Moreover, during the late 1930's, Communist women found a small, but receptive audience in the growing socialist-feminist milieu within the CCF and WIL. A decade before, Florence Custance had easily equated feminism with Mrs. Huestis' calls for moral reform of prostitutes; now, Communist women found CCF women standing beside them on the Longshoreman's picket line or marching beside them in the Toronto May Day parade. The existence of this sympathetic socialist-feminist milieu undoubtedly encouraged the interest of many Party women in Popular Front work.

As the Party enlarged its emphasis from workplace to community organizing; as it altered its rigid revolutionary forms to allow local flexibility in action; and as it more systematically recruited women in the home, it began to achieve some success in giving women's issues a higher profile in the movement and in augmenting the numbers of women in the Party. And within the Party, more women moved to positions of local and regional significance. The Party's increasing membership, of course, was also the product of Depression conditions: the CPC appealed

to many women, not because of its work among women, but because in a time of economic insecurity and international threat, the Party appeared firm in its defiance of fascism and militant in its opposition to unemployment. To those women of awakened social conscience who yearned for direct action in local struggles and who desired more than the "electoral utopia"<sup>159</sup> prescribed by the CCF, Communism was an appealing ideology.

In many ways, the Popular Front represented a high point for possibilities of Communist organizing in North America, for at a local level much innovative political organizing was accomplished. In its work among women, the CPC scored successes in drawing women into relief and unemployment struggles, which sometimes gained their ends and often gained public sympathy, in initiating consumer activism anew, in stimulating debate on child welfare and educational issues and in sustaining a female presence in the anti-fascist movement. On the labour front, Communists could point to impressive achievements in the organization of textile, rubber, garment and electrical unions which included large numbers of women workers. Although the Party remained wedded to the conservative 'ideal' of the family wage, and although many unskilled women workers remained outside the bounds of Party organizing, there was hope for women workers in the rapid growth of industrial unionism, a movement which Communists helped to create and direct. Whether or not these unions, once organized, would begin to tackle questions of importance to women, such as equal pay, equal seniority and child care became a crucial dilemma for the CPC during and after World War II.

At the same time that Communists achieved some success in their work among women, they remained limited and restricted by their Popular Front penchant for excessive accommodation to the dominant social norms. Communists could stretch their socialism as far as the point of liberalism, and sometimes found themselves imitating the status quo, rather than fashioning a truly radical alternative for CPC women. Some Popular Front excesses were more professed than practiced; few activists, for instance, spent their time radicalizing the Boy Scouts or arranging bingo for the neighbourhood ladies. But some working-class women's groups did abandon their own organizations for activities in non-partisan women's organizations which offered little hope of socialist content, and the CPC's attempts to cultivate liberal opinion and integrate into working-class culture inevitably led to acceptance of sexist social norms. Reminiscing about her early life in the Communist movement, Becky Buhay pointed to women's isolation from the mainstream of Canadian life:

When I first got involved, the woman revolutionary was seen as some sort of monstrosity. Isolated by this label, it often bred in her a certain sense of superiority, which isolated her still further. She dressed differently, defied the conventions, generally scorned the womanly arts and artifices, and held herself aloof.<sup>160</sup>

In the Popular Front, however, the Party headed in the opposite direction: women's maternal and domestic roles were used so intently as organizing motifs, that no deep and critical inquiry about them could be sustained. No new theoretical approach to the woman question replaced the theories of Lenin and Engels, put aside for the practical purposes of the Popular Front, and without new theoretical departures or sustained questioning of gender roles in the Party, the old political sexual division of labour remained fixed. Women were largely active at

the base of the Party's pyramid of power, and women's issues were segregated into a place of secondary priority. Ironically then, the Popular Front was a time of contradiction for the CPC's work among women: its renewed commitment to women's issues and innovative organizing held out the possibilities of scoring major gains for women on the Left. At the same time, there was a distinct danger that the woman question would disappear into a sentimental meld of motherhood and apple pie. During the next decade, war conditions would provide an excellent opportunity for the Party to either forge ahead on women's issues, or fall irrevocably into irrelevance.

## Footnotes: Chapter V

- 1 Bryan Palmer, Working-Class Experience (Toronto and Vancouver, 1983), p. 212.
- 2 Jane Degras, ed., Communist International Documents (London, 1971), p. 335.
- 3 As the CPC's official historian defined it: "the Peoples' Front was to incorporate the working class, peasantry, petty-bourgeois intellectuals and others whose interests were fundamentally opposed to monopoly capital." Gerry van Hauten, Canada's Party of Socialism (Toronto, 1982), p. 111.
- 4 Some Communists did dislike the order to 'walk over' to the Internationals, but there were no major upheavals in the WUL. Ian Radforth, "'It Pays to Strike and Fight': The Workers Unity League in Ontario", unpublished paper, York University, 1980.
- 5 Tova Yedlin, "Women in the USSR: The Stalin Era", Atlantis, Vol. 3, no. 1, (Fall, 1977).
- 6 As Leon Trotsky argued in The Revolution Betrayed, such reactionary policies were a natural extension of the economic and cultural backwardness of the country, and of the Thermidorian political reaction in the Soviet Union. The cult of the family, he maintained, was encouraged to satisfy the need of the Soviet bureaucracy for a stable, authoritarian hierarchy of social relations. Leon Trotsky, "Thermidor in the Family" (1937) in Women and the Family (New York, 1970), pp. 61-73.
- 7 Sue Bruley, "Women in the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1921-1939", (Ph.D. London University, 1980), p. 231.
- 8 CPC Papers, Communist Party Head Office, 9th Plenum of the Central Committee, Nov. 1935, p. 139.
- 9 Ibid., p. 139.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid., p. 146
- 12 CPC Papers, Communist Party Head Office (hereafter CPC Papers), 9th Plenum, p. 146.
- 13 CPC Papers, 8th Dominion Convention, 1937, p. 56.
- 14 Ibid., pp. 56-57.



- 15 Ibid., p. 58.
- 16 Ibid., p. 59.
- 17 Florence Theodore, "Working in Women's Clubs", Discussion, no. 4, Oct. 8, 1937.
- 18 CPC Papers, 8th Dominion Convention, p. 59.
- 19 Whether or not this meant the Women's Day Branches were to be accorded equality with other Party Branches is unknown.
- 20 H. Mathieson, "Why I Have Changed My Mind About Women's Branches", Discussion, no. 4, Oct. 8, 1937.
- 21 Kate Fountain, (later Magnussen and Bader) "The Organization of Women", Discussion, no. 3, Oct. 1937.
- 22 The Worker, (W), July 27, 1935.
- 23 The Daily Clarion, (DC), Jan. 9, 1936.
- 24 W, Aug. 24, 1935.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 W, Sept. 7, 1935.
- 29 DC, Nov. 24, 1936.
- 30 DC, Nov. 7, 1936.
- 31 DC, March 16, 1936.
- 32 W, April 16, 1935.
- 33 DC, Dec. 30, 1936.
- 34 Patricia Bird, "Hamilton Working Women in the Period of the Great Depression", Atlantis, Vol. 8, no. 2, (Spring, 1983); Marjorie Cohen, "Women At Work in Canada During the Depression", Paper presented at the Blue Collar Workers Conference, University of Windsor, May, 1979.
- 35 The walk over to the ILGWU may also have resulted in more emphasis on the skilled aspects of the trade, and less on industrial unionism and shop floor democracy -- to the obvious detriment of women workers. One historian of women's work in the needle trades believes that some CPC women objected to the walk over for this reason. Personal correspondence with Mercedes Stedeman, May 13,

1984.

- 36 In the U.S., the leader of the Fur Workers, a Communist, Ben Gold, led his union out of the AFL into the CIO. In all of North America, only Local 40, led by Maxie Federman, defied Gold's lead. A battle ensued between the AFL group, and the pro-CIO group (generally Communists). See Erna Paris, Jews: An Account of their Experience in Canada (Toronto, 1980), pp. 162-163, for a longer account of the dispute.
- 37 Ibid., p. 163.
- 38 DC, Oct. 12, 1936; Manitoba Commonwealth, Oct. 9, 1936.
- 39 Harvey Levenstein, Communism, Anticommunism and the CIO (Westport, 1981), p. 40, 71.
- 40 Ibid., p. 40.
- 41 The Daily Clarion made some brief references to the Toronto domestic workers union. DC, Jan. 25, 1936; DC, May 1, 1936. The Party's analysis of women's increasing ghettoization in part-time and full-time domestic work was quite correct. In one government-sponsored study done in Manitoba, an economist concluded that between the late 1920's and 1937, the number of domestic workers in the province almost doubled, at the same time that wages were approximately cut in half. A. Oddson, Employment of Women in Manitoba (Economic Survey Board, Province of Manitoba, 1939), pp. 44-46.
- 42 U of T, Kenny Collection, Box 2, "We Are Organizing Domestic Workers", Discussion, 1937.
- 43 PAC, Department of Labour Records, RG 27 (hereafter Department of Labour), V. 400, file 39-13.
- 44 PAC, J.L. Cohen Papers, MG 30 A 94 V. 11, "Kaufman Strike".
- 45 Stuart Jamieson, Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-1966 (Ottawa, 1968), p. 250.
- 46 DC, Aug. 27, 1936. Stuart Jamieson suggests that many of these strikes, including the Cornwall ones, were the final products of organizing attempts by the WUL. This is most certainly true for the Peterborough strikes, as the WUL newspaper was carrying 'inside' reports from the Peterborough mill in 1935. See Kenny Collection, Box 50, Unity, May 1935.
- 47 Bernard Rawlinson, "Cornwall: The Diary of a Strike", New Frontier, October, 1936.
- 48 Ann Walters, an industrial organizer with the Party, had been trying to organize the mills there in 1934 and '35. However, it is sometimes difficult to ascertain the exact role Communists played in

union drives, for the Clarion now gave favourable coverage to all working-class activists, not just to Communist trade unionists. Moreover, in some cases, Popular Front strategies compelled Communists to take a back seat role in their labour work, restraining their bids for leadership positions to show their sincere commitment to coalition politics. Harvey Levenstein, Communism, Anticommunism and the CIO, pp. 50-51.

- 49 See Irving Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour (Toronto, 1973), p. 26, for a brief reference to this strike.
- 50 PAC, Department of Labour Records, RG 27 V 386. A strike against Botany Dry Spinners and Circle Bar Knitting was led by organizer Alex Welch. Employer W. Mitchell said he would not talk to a CIO agitator, and the Globe and Mail, May 28, 1937, referred to Welch as a "Communist agitator".
- 51 PAC, Dept. of Labour, V. 388, file 27-176.
- 52 Irving Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour.
- 53 PAC, Dept. of Labour, V. 388, Ottawa Evening Journal, August 10, 1937 and Daily Clarion, August 14, 1937.
- 54 Labour Gazette, September 1937, p. 964. Terms of settlement for the Cornwall and Peterborough disputes stipulated that a provincial Industry and Labour Board would establish a new schedule of hours and wages in the Minimum Wage Act of 1937. Workers also received the right to elect a grievance committee, assurances of no discrimination against union members, rest periods for female workers, and improvements in piece work rates. By 1939, the Cornwall mill had secured a union. Labour Gazette, March 1939, p. 256.
- 55 PAC, Cohen Papers, Elmer Hickey to J.L. Cohen, Sept. 14, 1937.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Irving Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour; Bryan Palmer, Working-Class Experience; Norman Penner, The Canadian Left (Toronto, 1977).
- 58 CPC Papers, 8th Dominion Convention, p. 57.
- 59 U of T, Kenny Collection, Box 13, Ontario Convention Report, 1938.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 DC, July 22, 1939.
- 62 It is difficult to substantiate one interviewee's claim that such a 'Morals Commission' existed. But other people remember prestigious leaders -- Annie Buller, for instance -- giving unsolicited advice on one's personal life, advice which was usually designed for the

Party's best interests and good image.

- 63 DC, Aug. 27, 1935 and Sept. 25, 1935.
- 64 DC, Dec. 26, 1936.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 CPC Papers, 8th Dominion Convention, p. 7.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 DC, May 7, 1938.
- 70 DC, Aug. 29, 1936.
- 71 The Clarion also included information on beauty contests, something Florence Custance refused to do in the Woman Worker. See DC, Aug. 4, 1938, for a picture of a beauty contest showing only women's legs.
- 72 DC, Nov. 16, 1938.
- 73 DC, March 5, 1938.
- 74 DC, Nov. 16, 1938.
- 75 DC, March 9, 1935.
- 76 DC, Sept. 14, 1935. My italics.
- 77 DC, Nov. 21, 1936.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 DC, Nov. 9, 1935.
- 80 DC, Dec. 3, 1935.
- 81 The only consistent references to a Single Unemployed Women's Association came from Toronto, and even here, the Communists' involvement seems to have been minimal. DC, March 5, 1935, Sept. 12, 1935, and Dec. 19, 1935.
- 82 Interview with Elsie Gehl Beeching, Nov. 12, 1980.
- 83 Interview of Joan Sangster and Karen Teeple with Lil Himmelfarb Ilomaki, Jan. 30, 1983.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Ibid.

- 86 Interview with Louise Sandler, Jan. 30, 1983.
- 87 See Jane Humphries, "Women: Scapegoats and Safety Valves in the Great Depression", Review of Radical Political Economy, Vol. 8, no. 1, (Spring 1976) for a discussion of how working-class homemakers 'took up the slack' with extra domestic labour during the Depression. My own reading of the radical press and oral interviews generally support her thesis.
- 88 DC, Dec. 28, 1938. In a subsequent article, however, the author was more respectful of housewives' work and contribution to the family income. In 1939-43, a theoretical debate developed within the CPUSA over the nature of housework within capitalism. This debate spilled over into Canada in the early 1940's. (See Chapter VI) At the very end of the Popular Front, there were a few Clarion articles which asked what housework entailed and what it signified for women's emancipation. While some writers tried to stress homemakers' important contribution to the family economy, a few assumed that housework was boring drudgery, and that the main hope for women's emancipation was her involvement in social production. In sum, there was no consistent and well thought-out Party analysis of housework.
- 89 DC, March 2, 1935.
- 90 DC, Feb. 27, 1935.
- 91 York University Archives, E.A. Beder Papers (hereafter Beder Papers), Box 9, CLWF file.
- 92 Thomas Socknat, "Witness Against War: The Canadian Pacifist Movement, 1920-45" (Ph.D. McMaster University, 1981), p. 334.
- 93 A left-wing CCFer, E.A. Beder, served as the first CLWF president, and he was succeeded for the next four years by A.A. McLeod, a Maritime minister with a strong pacifist background. Although McLeod was a Communist, the League itself included a much wider political spectrum of liberals and socialists on its board, including Salem Bland, Tommy Douglas and William Irvine.
- 94 E.A. Beder claimed that the name change was "useless", and reflected the League's overly moderate approach, and its inability to create a decisive politics for socialism and against imperialism. Beder Papers, Box 9, CLWF file. Beder to A.A. McLeod, n.d.
- 95 U of T, Kenny Collection, Rose Henderson to the First Canadian Congress against War and Fascism, Oct. 6,7, 1934.
- 96 Elizabeth Morton, ibid.
- 97 Beder Papers, Box 9, National Bureau Minutes, May 15, 1935.
- 98 Kenny Collection, Proceedings of the Second National Congress against War and Fascism, Dec. 6-8, 1935.

- 99 Robert Rosenstone quoted in Paul Lyons, Philadelphia Communists, 1936-1956 (Philadelphia, 1983), p. 25.
- 100 PAC, FOC Collection, MG 28 V 46 Vol. 142, Proceedings of a Conference called by the Canadian Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, Oct. 23, 1937.
- 101 DC, April 22, 1937.
- 102 DC, July 23, 1937.
- 103 Erna Paris, Jews: An Account of their Experiences in Canada, pp. 133-134.
- 104 Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers (New York, 1976), p. 342.
- 105 Erna Paris, Jews: An Account of Their Experiences in Canada, pp. 146-147.
- 106 Paul Lyons, Philadelphia Communists, 1936-1956, p. 73.
- 107 Interview with Mary Kardash, Oct. 20, 1980.
- 108 Toby Ryan, Stage Left: Canadian Theatre in the Thirties (Toronto, 1981), chap. 1.
- 109 PAO, Abella Oral History Tapes, Interview of Elaine Mitchell with Shaska Mandel, Sept. 27, 1969. Anti-semitism was cited by many other interviewees as part of their early experiences which led them to the CPC. See also Erna Paris, Jews: An Account of Their Experience in Canada, chap. 10.
- 110 Helen Protrebenko, No Streets of Gold: A Social History of Ukrainians in Alberta (Vancouver, 1977), p. 47.
- 111 Ibid, p. 261.
- 112 No one has yet analyzed the Communist newspaper for women, Robitnysa.
- 113 Other historians have pointed to a correlation between woman's wage labour outside the home and her increased independence in the family, and ability to participate in outside activities. Sue Bruley, "Women in the Communist Party of Great Britain", compared wives of coal miners and women who worked in the Lancashire mills, and found the latter were more active in the mainstream of the Party. Similar evidence is found in Diana Gittens, "Women's Work and Family Size between the Wars", and Joanna Bornat, "Home and Work A New Context for Trade Union History", in Oral History, Vol. 5, no. 2, (Autumn, 1977).
- 114 Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman and Sonya Michel, The Jewish Woman in America (New York, 1975), chap. 5.

- 115 Interview with Mickey Murray, Oct. 9, 1980.
- 116 Interview with Josephine Gehl, Nov. 10, 1980.
- 117 Ibid.
- 118 Interview with Claire Culhane, Dec. 4, 1980.
- 119 These examples are taken from Daily Clarion articles and book lists.
- 120 PAO, Abella Tapes, Elaine Mitchell interview with Helen Paulin, Sept. 21, 1972.
- 121 Interview with Mickey Murray.
- 122 Helen Potrebenco, No Streets of Gold, p. 171.
- 123 Interview with Claire Culhane. There is every reason to believe that women's grasp of theory was as good as men's; however, they were probably not encouraged to immerse themselves in theory, and they were readier to admit their inadequacies.
- 124 Interview with Kate Bader, Dec. 7, 1980.
- 125 Discussion, no. 2, Sept. 1, 1936.
- 126 Elsa Dixler, "The Woman Question: Women and the American Communist Party, 1929-41" (Ph.D. Yale University, 1974), p. 194.
- 127 Interview with Elsie Beeching.
- 128 PAO, Abella Tapes, Interview with Helen Paulin.
- 129 Ibid.
- 130 Bryan Palmer, Working-Class Experience, p. 221-223.
- 131 For more detail on Livesay, see Dorothy Livesay, Right Hand, Left Hand (Toronto, 1977), and Room of One's Own, Dorothy Livesay Issue, Vol. 5, no. 1/2, (1979).
- 132 For a longer discussion of Watts' role in the Left Theatre see Toby Ryan, Stage Left: Canadian Theatre in the Thirties, chap. V.
- 133 James Struthers, "Lord Give Us Men: Women and Social Work in English Canada, 1918-53", Paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association, Vancouver, 1983. It is not clear if Gould was a Party member, or sympathizer. She may have been a member of a 'closed' Party club. These clubs often included professionals who were not openly Communists. Their special treatment was designed to "allow them to continue working in their own fields". Merrily Weisbord, The Strangest Dream (Toronto, 1983), p. 91.

- 134 The editor of the Toronto Star wrote a very complimentary introduction to Gould's book.
- 135 New Frontier, (NF), November 1936.
- 136 Margaret Gould, I Visit the Soviets (Toronto, 1937), p. 123.
- 137 Dorothy Livesay, Right Hand, Left Hand, chap. 1.
- 138 Alice Kessler-Harris, Out to Work (New York, 1982), p. 251.
- 139 Jane Humphries, "Women: Scapegoats and Safety Valves in the Great Depression", The Review of Radical Political Economics, Vol. 8, no. 1, (Spring 1976), p. 98.
- 140 DC, Oct. 3, 1936.
- 141 DC, Oct. 12, 1936.
- 142 NF, November 1936.
- 143 Ellen Kay Trimberger, "Women in the Old and New Left: The Evolution of a Politics of Personal Life", and Peggy Dennis, "Response", in Feminist Studies, Vol. 5, no. 3, (Fall 1975).
- 144 Elsa Dixler, "The Woman Question: Women and the American Communist Party, 1929-41", p. 43.
- 145 Ibid, chap. II.
- 146 Paul Lyons, Philadelphia Communists, pp. 92, 94.
- 147 Margaret Gould, I Visit the Soviets, p. 123, NF, July 1936.
- 148 Jane Humphries, "Woman and Working-Class Families", The Review of Radical Political Economics, Vol. 9, no. 3, (Fall 1977); Craig Heron, "Working-Class Hamilton, 1895-1930" (Ph.D. Dalhousie 1980).
- 149 James Weinstein, Ambiguous Legacy: The Left in American Politics (New York, 1975), p. 163.
- 150 DC, Oct. 3, 1936.
- 151 Ibid.
- 152 DC, July 1, 1936.
- 153 DC, Oct. 3, 1936.
- 154 Ibid.
- 155 Margaret Gould, I Visit the Soviets, p. 125. My italics.
- 156 It appears that some Party members even accepted the rationale that



the Soviet Union needed more babies. Merrily Weisbord uses this controversy as an example of how Communists accepted the idea that "the Soviet Union was all good". When two women intellectual Party members in Montreal "were upset at learning that there were no abortions or divorces in the Soviet Union, they addressed their problem to Bella Gauld...she explained that the Soviet Union, surrounded by hostile forces, had to produce babies because it needed soldiers. 'We walked out of there feeling stupid', recalled one woman. 'Why couldn't we have figured that out?'" Merrily Weisbord, The Strangest Dream, p. 216.

157 DC, Nov. 12, 1936.

158 DC, Aug. 22 and Aug. 29, 1936.

159 Swankey quoted in Warren Carragata, Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold.

160 DC, 1936.

CHAPTER VI

FROM 'WORKING FOR WAR' TO 'PRICES AND PEACE': COMMUNIST WOMEN

IN THE 1940'S

The Communist Party of Canada entered the 1940's as an illegal organization, yet, within two years it was tolerated by, and tolerant of the government which had made it illegal. By the end of the decade it was technically legal, but subjected to severe anti-communism. The tumultuous oscillations in the Party's fortunes were the product of its loyalty to the USSR, the policies of the Canadian state, and the response of the Party to social and economic conditions in Canada. The woman question was carried along in these twists and turns of events. In this decade, the CPC's work among women was dictated first, by the Party's overall needs and objectives, in particular its defence of the USSR, and second, by the economic boom of the War years and the later conservatism of post-war society.

When the Party was illegal, women played an important part in the fight against internment, and during the war, they were encouraged to take up non-traditional jobs in war industry. A significant minority of Party women assumed new political roles: Dorise Nielsen served as an M.P., and some women moved into regional prominence as educators and organizers. Encouraged by the influx of women into social production, which had always been seen as essential prerequisite in their Marxist model of women's emancipation, the Party renewed its calls for women's economic equality, demanded unionization, equal pay and day nurseries, and even maintained that women should have a job of their choice in the post-war economy. The last demand did not match the consensus among Canadians who largely accepted the closing of day nurseries and the return of the women to the home. In accordance with these trends, and

with the guidance given by the International, the Party came to stress two campaigns directed at housewives and mothers: prices and peace. In building these campaigns, the Party returned to some tried-and-true tactics of the previous period: materialism was invoked as a rationale for peace, and an 'On to Ottawa Trek' was used to protest inflation and rising prices. But their effectiveness was limited, in part because the prevalence of anti-communist feeling hindered the Party's work, but also because the methods were tired and time-worn. As the Party entered the 1950's, the most difficult decade of its existence, there were signs that the CPC's historic claims as defender of women's equality would soon be challenged and found wanting.

(i)

In August of 1939, the Communist Party's Popular Front against fascism was shaken and altered by the USSR's announcement of the Soviet-German non-aggression Pact, and subsequently, by Canada's declaration of war against Germany. Canadian Communists, like their American and European comrades, were startled by the Soviet announcement. Only weeks before, American Party leaders had haughtily dismissed rumours of such a Pact as preposterous.<sup>1</sup> Now, Party members were asked to reconcile their commitment to anti-fascism with a treaty signed with their long-established foe, Adolf Hitler. Some Party members found such a reconciliation impossible and they left the Party; many more stayed to debate their differences within the Party; and most came to accept the USSR's rationale for the Pact. In terms of the Soviet Union's previous foreign policy, the Pact could be explained:

Party members reminded themselves that the USSR had sought, without success, security pacts with the capitalist democracies as a protection against Hitler. Rebuffed by the governments which had secretly wished the destruction of Soviet socialism, the USSR made its own pact, in order "to buy time ... to avoid a war on two fronts ... and to prepare its defences".<sup>2</sup> "We never really believed the pact was 'real'", remembers one woman, "but it was a chance for the USSR to liberate sections of Poland."<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, the Pact created internal dissatisfaction and debate, and further confusion occurred when war was declared in September of 1939. The first response of the Party leader, Tim Buck, was to call for a fight against fascism on two fronts, but Buck quickly recanted when the International rejected involvement in a war of "inter-imperialist" rivalry. The Canadian Party's position, writes their official historian, became "one of neutrality between two belligerent blocs".<sup>4</sup> This description understates the Party's hostility and opposition to the European war. In the Clarion, the Party published its 'Keep Canada Out of War' Manifesto, and its election platform of 1940 condemned British imperialism as much as German imperialism, accusing the Canadian government of "being dependent on British imperialism and seeking rich profits from its war involvement."<sup>5</sup>

The Party's anti-war stance gave the federal government an opportunity, undoubtedly long-wished for, to restrict the Canadian Communist movement. Using the Party's anti-war position as an excuse, the government quickly moved to ban its publications and arrest and intern its leaders. Whatever the Party's hypocrisy in its position on fascism and the war, there is evidence of government hypocrisy as well.

The authorities used the War Measures Act not so much against fascists, as against radicals and trade union militants who, it was feared, might slow war production with strikes, and the government carefully manipulated prevailing anti-Soviet feeling after the Hitler-Stalin Pact to dodge criticisms for its removal of civil liberties. RCMP Commissioner S.T. Wood almost seemed to have been explaining government policy when he wrote in 1941 that "it is not the Nazi nor the Fascist, but the radical who constitutes our most troublesome problem."<sup>6</sup>

The effect of the government's action was temporary disruption of Party organization: along with the CPC, its siblings, the YCL, CLDL, FOC and UFLTA were proscribed and their property seized. The Defence of Canada Regulations, which made it legal for authorities to detain a person without trial, allowed the government to round up Communists and after closed 'trials' by magistrates, sentence them to months or years of imprisonment. Unable to work openly, the Party simply adjusted to alternate underground work. By 1940, The Clarion, transformed into a series of regional weeklies, was issuing an illegally mimeographed newsheet, along with a new magazine, Monthly Review. A new legal newspaper, The Tribune, was soon established with no formal Party connection, under the editorial auspices of progressives like Margaret Fairley, who had not previously been associated with the Party. Some Party leaders went into hiding to escape arrest, and many rank-and-filers found themselves using new means of communication. One woman member, for instance, remembers a typical method of distributing anti-war material:

A few of us gathered during the night, and chose a district. We went from door to door for a short period of time, then quickly dispersed, before the police could be called ... that's how we gave out anti-war material.

Such clandestine work, a marked contrast to Popular Front politics, obviously reduced the effectiveness of the Party. Meetings were held, but usually in small numbers and in secrecy. In Regina, for instance, Saskatchewan Party leader Florence Theodore and a few fellow members gathered one evening for a meeting that was passed off as being a 'bridge party'. The party was raided by the police, and unfortunately for Theodore, her host, "a rather lazy comrade", had hidden his many undelivered political leaflets in the cold air register, providing ample evidence for the police.<sup>8</sup> Theodore was subsequently interned, and spent six months in jail. Some comrades were luckier, Josie Gehl, remembers her sister, "only narrowly escaped capture", and Becky Buhay managed to "get to Montreal, don a babushka and get lost in the crowd."<sup>9</sup> By late 1940's, however, Buhay was back in Ontario. It was a difficult time for all in the leadership, recalled Beatrice Ferneyhough:

People were scattered and uprooted and Becky could go nowhere without recognition, and it was tough financially. For a time, all Becky could do was to stay quietly in her room, her needlework was a source of revenue, but a few comrades who were working also contributed to her upkeep.<sup>10</sup>

Although the government quite naturally focused its primary attention on the Party's first line of leadership, it did not ignore men and women in positions of secondary influence who could have still kept the Party functioning. Understandably, Annie Buller, as editor of the Midwest Clarion, was arrested (on charges relating to an article on Finland in the Clarion) and was imprisoned in the Portage la Prairie jail. She had difficulty winning her release, even after the Party had reversed its position on the War, when she could write to Mackenzie King pleading her "dedication to the common people ... opposition to fascism" ... and loyalty to the war effort.<sup>11</sup> Other Party women, with lesser

administrative and organizational duties, were also apprehended; at least six women were interned across Canada, none of whom are mentioned in the recent collection of internees memoirs, Dangerous Patriots.<sup>12</sup> Ella Gehl, who was doing administrative work for the Party, spent 10 months in Portage la Prairie, a jail which also housed Party workers Ida Coley and Margaret Mills; the latter worked as an organizational and administrative secretary in the CPC's Winnipeg office.

Gladys Macdonald, a co-editor of the Saskatchewan-based Factory and Furrow, was caught publishing the newspaper with a mimeo machine in the house of a friend, and she was interned first in Battleford jail, and later in the Kingston penitentiary. At her trial, Macdonald refused to apologize for her actions, stating that "she was in full accord with everything she had published in the Factory and Furrow". She was then jailed for "advocating communist politics".<sup>13</sup> Macdonald, like some of the other internees, engaged left-wing lawyer J.L. Cohen to help plead her case for release. Macdonald may not have been a well-known national Party leader, but her activities, as Cohen's files reveal, were important at the local level, and this probably explains her long internment. In the late 1930's, she had worked as an organizational secretary of the provincial CPC, did speaking on behalf of the Party, and helped recruit members and organize new Party units. By 1940, she was on the Provincial Executive and, living under an assumed name to protect her safety, she maintained a large hand in putting out The Furrow.

Although she was first sentenced to one year, Macdonald's case was reviewed in August of 1941, and she was reincarcerated until 1942. Like Buller, Macdonald felt intense frustration with her continued



internment after her promise in late 1941 to join the war effort. By 1942, a campaign for Buller and Macdonald's release was well underway. Postcards and leaflets were sent to various organizations and well-known progressives; they gave biographies of Buller and Macdonald and implied that the government was foolish to imprison such women. As one postcard sent to Violet MacNaughton, a fellow Saskatchewanian, explained of Macdonald:

Right this minute there is a very sweet and charming young girl with a shy and retiring disposition who is sitting behind barred windows in one of the worst jails in Canada ... This girl's name is Gladys Macdonald ... It was the depression that taught Gladys certain lessons ... She became interested in the troubles of other people ... she helped in the fight against fascism. She was a good, honest progressive woman. In the days when the word was sometimes used as a reproach she was probably called a "red" by the authorities. Now ... she is in Kingston Jail where conditions are reported to be very harsh and severe ... The position of Gladys Macdonald today is an insult to every progressive woman in Canada.<sup>14</sup>

Although a few Party women were interned, most Communist women played very different roles during this illegal period. Besides doing the necessary grass roots maintenance work, like the anti-war leafletting campaign previously cited, women also played a crucial role in the internees' support and release campaigns. In the fall of 1939, when many Party wives were suddenly confronted with their husbands' arrests, their immediate task was to find a means to support themselves and their families. Anne Lenihan, the wife of a Communist Calgary alderman, Pat Lenihan, was placed on city relief after her husband's arrest. Although she found it almost impossible to feed and clothe her children on \$31 a month, she at least felt consolation in the fact that "I was not discriminated against because Pat was liked as a leader and people didn't think he should be interned ... including some of his political opponents."<sup>15</sup> Other women picked up old skills and returned

to work in factories and offices in order to support themselves and their families.

Next to economic survival, the central preoccupation was gaining the internees' freedom. In a rare, published account of the personal experience of an internee's wife, Mary Prokop related the fear and frustration felt by most families after the initial police raids. The RCMP broke into the Prokop's Winnipeg apartment in the early morning, took her husband away, giving no charge, and interrogated Mary (who, having some prior advice, "knew what to do .... I pleaded ignorance") and confiscated their reading material, including Mary's Bible.<sup>16</sup> In the next few days, none of the wives could penetrate the wall of silence surrounding the arrests, but as the women began to contact one another and realize the extent of the arrests, they started to meet in mutual support groups, helping each other with relief applications, family problems, and offering each other moral and psychological support.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to these support groups, some women began to organize a public campaign to speed their husbands' release and to try and protect political properties seized by the government. These efforts, says Mary Prokop, were undertaken in an atmosphere of strained nerves and continual tension: women were worried about relief payments, were sometimes forced to move, were subject to constant surveillance, and even had to fend off insurance agents sent by the government to assess the internees "riches and property supposedly piled up in the hungry thirties".<sup>18</sup> Soon, two organizations solidified: an Aid Committee collected funds for internees' families from sympathizers in the labour movement, and a Committee for the Release of Labor Prisoners began public lobbying for the internees' release. A constant stream of

letters to Ottawa demanded the internees freedom, or pending that, recognition that they were political prisoners, and separation from fascist internees. A lawyer was engaged for the internees, even though, as many women expected, the official hearings they obtained simply reaffirmed the Communists' "danger to the state",<sup>19</sup> and hence, their necessary confinement.

As the remaining Party leadership reestablished communication with Party members, the internees' wives were given guidance on how to run their political campaign. In 1940, many Party wives in Winnipeg became active in the municipal elections, in which Communist Rose Penner and Joe Forkin were candidates, and in the subsequent provincial contest in which (Communist) Labor candidate Bill Kardash was elected. These electoral contests were used as a public platform to advocate "full democratic rights and freedoms" (meaning release of the internees), and in both cases, significant electoral support for the Party pointed to some public disapproval of the government's use of the Defence of Canada Regulations.<sup>20</sup>

By the end of 1940, a Canada-wide organization, The National Council for Democratic Rights (NCDR) was created out of the shell of the Canadian Labor Defence League, and with veteran leaders A.E. Smith and Becky Buhay at the helm, it spearheaded the drive for the internees' release. From Winnipeg, three members of the local committee, wives Helen Krechmanowsky and Mary Prokop, and Jacob Penner's son, Norman, were sent to accompany a NCDR delegation to Ottawa. At the end of March, 1941, the Winnipeg group again joined other internees' relatives from Toronto, Halifax, Thunder Bay, Welland and Windsor; they congregated in Ottawa to exert pressure on the government to cease "the

internees' internment without trial, or at least to alter their status as prisoners of war, end censorship, allow family visits and gain maintenance for the families."<sup>21</sup> Although the Minister of Justice responded "cooly"<sup>22</sup> to the delegation, the tide of public opinion had begun to shift. Communists were finding more support from the labour movement, which resented the internment of trade union leaders, and from civil libertarians who objected to the government's abrogation of civil rights. Even the Toronto Star sounded a sympathetic note, a breakthrough considering the press' censorship of the Communists' campaign. By the time the NCDR took its case to Ottawa again in February of 1942, the delegation could point to increased trade union and individual endorsements of its work. By this time, of course, Communists combined their demands for the internees' release with protestations of firm support for the war, for Hitler's invasion of the USSR in late 1941 "changed the character of the war",<sup>23</sup> reversing the Party's all-out opposition to all-out support for the war effort. In April of 1942, Communists gave strong organizational and political support to the 'yes' option in the conscription plebiscite, and over the summer, the government began to release the Communist internees.

The internees had won release largely due to the turn of events in Europe, but also because of the impact of the NCDR's campaign. Women's role in local Committees to aid the internees and in National Council work was impressive: NCDR delegations were almost entirely women, and at the local level, women did most of the essential organizational and publicity work. A cursory glance at the NCDR's leadership -- Kate Magnussen, Jennie Freed, Mrs. Swankey, and many more -- indicates that many of these women were 'Party wives' who, one might

argue, were simply campaigning for their husbands' freedom. Yet, this analysis erroneously downplays women's political work as wifely duty. Many of the women in the NCDR were activists in their own right, while others gained new political experience while doing NCDR work. Moreover, these women believed their political organizing was promoting the socialist ideals they commonly shared with their husbands. The part they played in the NCDR pointed to the essential role women often assumed when Communists were forced to go underground. Women were largely by-passed in the arrests because of their secondary positions in the Party, or even their lack of Party membership. Yet, it was they who in a time of delicate and unusual circumstances -- censorship, constant surveillance and economic adversity -- had to become the decapitated movement. Thus, Communist women were offered a temporary opportunity to alter their traditional political roles; unfortunately, the alteration was a short-lived, rather than a permanent change in Party life.

(ii)

One of the staunchest defenders of the NCDR's work was a newly-elected female M.P. from northern Saskatchewan, Dorise Nielsen. Nielsen became one of the Party's most valuable members during the 1940's, although during the next decade she became disillusioned with the CPC and moved to Communist China. The product of a Conservative British family, Nielsen emigrated to B.C., then moved to Saskatchewan in 1926. Already well-educated, Nielsen obtained a teaching position at Norbury, in the north of the province. The experience of moving to the backwoods, and witnessing the extreme poverty around her, threw Nielsen

into a profound state of culture shock: "I was a seedling", she later remembered, "that didn't transplant easily into the rough country and people around me."<sup>24</sup> Her personal experience of northern hardship was to deepen over the next years; she married a local farmer and they settled in a two-room cabin, with no water or electricity. Amidst crop failure and severe cold, Nielsen had five children, and the first died in infancy for lack of adequate medical attention. Encouraged by her husband's contacts with the Wheat Pool and the CCF, Nielsen became involved in local politics; she worked for the Farmer-Labor candidates in 1930 and 1935, and by 1937 she was vice-president of her provincial CCF constituency, Meadow Lake. In 1937 she was elected to the CCF Provincial Council, but within a year she was involved in a major inner-Party debate over United Front tactics, as Nielsen and others in her constituency wished to ally with Communists in the 1938 election. Rejecting these tactics, the CCF Provincial Executive disbanded the Meadow Lake constituency executive for violating the CCF constitution, which disallowed membership in another party. The controversy continued to simmer, particularly because many CCFers in Nielsen's area felt that the depression emergency necessitated cooperation with other Leftists.<sup>25</sup> Nielsen kept up connections with individual CCFers, including the provincial president, even though she and others resented the fact that electoral 'cooperation', allowed a few years before for candidates like T.C. Douglas, was now denied in her case.<sup>26</sup>

In 1940, after Nielsen had won a federal nomination as a Unity candidate in the North Battleford riding, the CCF provincial executive was split over whether or not to support Nielsen. Some on the provincial executive recognized her as "a first class candidate"<sup>27</sup> and

urged support, while others who feared her Communist connections, called for total disassociation. Nielsen won without the official CCF endorsement, although some executive members privately wished her well and many local CCFers worked on her campaign. Her victory, with a 2,000 vote margin, was the result of her own political talents, a poverty-stricken and desperate electorate responsive to her message, and a lack of opposition, save the completely disreputable Liberal incumbent, Cameron MacIntosh. MacIntosh, as Nielsen pointed out in her campaign speeches, had barely set foot in his riding, and rarely spoke of it in parliament -- indeed, he rarely spoke at all!<sup>28</sup> After her success, the CCF extended its congratulations and expressed the wish to "work in harmony"<sup>29</sup> with her in Ottawa. Since 1938, Nielsen had claimed loyalty to social democracy<sup>30</sup> and during the 1940 election she had not completely adopted the CPC's anti-war position. But by the time of her election, she was a CPC member<sup>31</sup>, and by 1941-42, it became clear to the CCF and the public that she had opted for the Communist Party.

Although Nielsen was a compelling speaker and an intelligent educator, she later reflected that her years in politics had been unplanned, and had even been unpleasant:

I went through years of political life for which I was not really fitted. Although I realized the necessity for political work, I never liked it. In fact, I disliked it -- very much. Never under ordinary circumstances would I have agreed to participate in such a life. But the 1930's were not ordinary, and I was more or less forced by circumstances to play the role I did in North Battleford.<sup>32</sup>

Whatever her inner doubts, Nielsen was committed to the rural population in her impoverished constituency, and resolutely pursued their interests, as well as various social reform causes, in her Commons career. She quite consciously tried in her speeches to present a

'woman's point of view' on the war, on women's right to work, and on the welfare of children, and in doing so, she stimulated discussion in the House of Commons on issues like maternity leave, socialized health care and infant mortality. Her interest in women's issues crossed the spectrum from equal pay and job discrimination to the protection of motherhood and infant care. She often spoke of women's maternal aversion to war, and she stressed that women's first concern was security of the home and family:

As regards all [our] young women ... I do not think it would be incorrect to say that their one great hope and desire is that very natural desire to marry, to have a home and children.<sup>33</sup>

In her book on women and Reconstruction, New Worlds for Women, published in 1944, Nielsen spoke of all women's right to an education and a job, yet she once again stressed women's primary desire for a secure home and happy family:

The average woman's first concern is to be sure that her husband will have a job, and even more than that, that her children will have jobs and the chance to live a decent life ... While women have pretty well accepted as their lot in life the homemaking job, they do want that job to be fruitful.<sup>34</sup>

Ironically, although motherhood was a central theme in her speeches, Nielsen's own family life created a double burden which made her political career emotionally difficult and exhausting. Although she felt restricted by domestic responsibilities and confined by traditional family life, Nielsen loved her children and worried that she did not devote enough time to them. Some contemporaries regarded her marriage as a union of "intellectual unequals" and saw Nielsen's creative and public pursuits as, in part, an outlet for the intellectual energy which found no expression in a dreary cabin in northern Saskatchewan.<sup>35</sup>



In the 1930's, Nielsen had corresponded with Violet MacNaughton, women's editor of the Western Producer; her letters and essays included detailed and poignant indictments of the "prison-house" society in which the human spirit was crushed by poverty, and human agency ground down by social restrictions. This prison house, she wrote, was "constructed by our forefathers ... who did not foresee the tragedy of their unplanned, unregulated individualism", and for women, she continued, the prison was most confining for the stultifying Victorian conception of the "nice little woman ... still corsets our minds and our actions."<sup>36</sup> Nielsen made clear her desire to "cast off the restricting corset of custom ... to think, to be a builder of new ideas ... to shoulder social responsibilities and face the problems of the time."<sup>37</sup> Nielsen's election to parliament gave her that chance, but her career was complicated by her family responsibilities.

After her election, Nielsen and her husband separated and he was unwilling, or unable to look after the children, so she first took them to Ottawa, then later left them in a Saskatoon boarding house run by Sophia Dixon. The latter arrangement soon exploded in unpleasant charges and counter charges about the children's behavior, and extremely distraught, Nielsen returned and removed the children. The next year, the children boarded with the Kardash family in Winnipeg, and later, they moved back to Ottawa with their mother. Years later, she still viewed this period with regret and guilt, lamenting that "for many years, against my wishes, I was forced to neglect my children."<sup>38</sup>

Nielsen's childcare problems were symptomatic of the conflicts and stresses experienced by many socialist and communist women in organizational and leadership positions. For these women, having a

family and participating in politics meant two full-time jobs, both of which demanded nothing less than excellence, for not only did they have to prove themselves as female politicians, but they also had to answer to the community's disapproval of 'negligent' mothers. Dorise Nielsen, maintains Saskatchewan historian Georgina Taylor, experienced more criticism than most CCF female leaders for her 'neglect' of her family for an active political life.<sup>39</sup> In some cases, another family member or friends offered good child care, but social pressure might still engender women's guilt about disregarding their 'natural' role. This very difficult problem for women was not understood by men in the Party, who were seldom bound with the duty of child care, and who were unaffected by the social pressure to achieve 'ideal motherhood'. For all these reasons, children remained an important deterrant to women's full participation in Party politics. Unless graced by unusual circumstances, women were less likely to be active in the Party -- other than in auxiliary work - at that point in their life cycle when they had young and growing children. This meant that women were unable to participate at precisely the period when many men were forging a political career for themselves.<sup>40</sup>

In any case, Nielsen's defeat in the next federal election cut short her parliamentary career. Her Communist affiliation, as well as an altered electoral situation -- other parties, including the CCF, ran candidates -- ensured her defeat. Soon afterwards, she moved permanently to Toronto and took up work in the Party's Education Department. She later worked as an editor of National Affairs, participated in the Party's National Executive, and in the post-war years was active in the Communist-led peace movement.

(iii)

While still an MP, Nielsen was an enthusiastic participant in the inaugural convention of the Labour Progressive Party (LPP), the revived CPC. "We had a most inspiring convention in Toronto", she wrote to Violet MacNaughton, "and I have felt more assured all the time about the correctness of decisions made. I find myself in most resolute company and among kindred spirits".<sup>41</sup> By 1942, despite the CPC's supposed illegality, the authorities were well aware of the Party leaders' whereabouts; indeed, they had some informal contact with them.<sup>42</sup> By the end of the year, reassured by the Party's total commitment to the war and to 'national unity', the Canadian government released all its Communist prisoners, although maintaining the technical illegality of the Party. Subsequently, the CPC decided to "set up a public electoral party ... with a communist point of view",<sup>43</sup> but officially separated from the Comintern. Not coincidentally, by 1943 the Comintern had been disbanded by Stalin, who saw that a war-time partnership with the Allies and post-war political manoeuvring would be aided by the Communist International's formal dissolution. The Canadian Party's new name, Labor Progressive, symbolized its separation from its Communist (Moscow-linked) heritage, and the LPP's aim to consolidate its ties with labour and effect a coalition of progressive forces in Canada. In a sense, therefore, the LPP picked up where the Popular Front had left off in 1939. The structure of the new Party, however, was now changed from a Leninist one to an "educational" one; "instead of small units, large clubs met weekly and often held forums where public figures, including reform-minded liberals, gave lectures."<sup>44</sup>

At the LPP's first national convention, held in August of 1943, approximately 25% of the 600 delegates were women, an unusually high number which probably reflected the enlistment of men in the forces, as well as the important role women had recently assumed in the NCDR. The Party's resolutions on women pointed to the influx of women into the labour force, and argued optimistically that "the value of women's labour was being recognized and women's trade union consciousness was developing."<sup>45</sup> At the core of the resolution were two major premises: first, that total war must be pursued, and secondly, that a "democratic Reconstruction", including improved rights for women, such as "equal pay, childcare, technological training and prenatal and maternity care", must follow the war.<sup>46</sup>

The Party recognized that wartime conditions necessitated new methods of organizing in their work among women. Because of the boom in war production, women were suddenly welcomed, indeed pressed into industrial work. It was estimated that one quarter of a million new women workers entered war production, and although war contracts tended to be concentrated in central Canada, some western and eastern women were encouraged with financial aid, or simply the promise of good, steady wages, to relocate. The National Selective Service Act (NSS) and the federal Department of Labour regarded women as a large reserve labour pool to be developed in a three-step strategy: first, single women would be utilized, next, married women, and finally, married mothers. Efforts were made to induce housewives into part-time jobs in the service industries quickly being vacated by women workers in search of better pay in war production, and money was allotted, on a federal-provincial cost sharing scheme, for day nurseries.<sup>47</sup> To

encourage women's entry into war jobs, an intensive propaganda campaign of films and articles extolled the attractiveness, excitement and rewards of women's participation in the armed forces and in war production, although such non-traditional roles were always portrayed as temporary, rather than permanent occupations for women.<sup>48</sup> And lastly, in the midst of the war, a sub-committee of the Reconstruction Committee was struck to look specifically at the post-war needs of women, and to make recommendations for policies to enhance the status of women.<sup>49</sup>

Although the Party's Popular Front appeals to women in the home on the basis of issues like child education and rising prices were not entirely foresaken, its primary emphasis was now on women's 'new' role as wage earners. The CPC called for an ever-increasing enlargement of female labour in war production, buttressing its case with examples -- often drawn from the Soviet experience -- of women's equal capabilities in all facets of industrial work. Communists were eager to aid women's entry into social production, in part because of their primary concern -- the success of the war against Hitler -- but also because they had long seen women's involvement in wage labour as a key to their radicalization. The CPC's preoccupation with women's wage labour was given increased prominence during the war due to the publication of a major Marxist debate over women's domestic labour and wage labour<sup>50</sup> -- a debate explored more fully later in this chapter.

At public meetings, conferences sponsored by Communist unions, and in the Party press, the necessity of women's entry into production and equality in industry was constantly underlined. Women workers, the Party further maintained, required special attention: as well as unionization, women needed equal pay legislation, government funding for

day nurseries, and a secure guarantee of jobs after the war. These ideas were accorded some support in the larger labour movement; at the 1942 and 1944 Canadian Congress of Labour conventions, for example, resolutions on equal pay were widely supported, and the 1944 presidential address decreed that the post-war employment of women was a "crucial" issue for trade unions.<sup>51</sup> The CPC's repetition of these themes in its educational and agitational work helped to raise labour's consciousness about women's unequal status in the labour force; indeed, Communist delegates at these CCL conventions probably helped advance and pass the equal pay demands.

Yet, in its own trade union work, how well did the Party live up to its war-time pledges to organize women into unions and defend their rights as women workers? In the case of equal pay, Communists could cite one or two examples of their unionists fighting for equal pay: in 1945, the Pacific Tribune pointed out that equal pay had been won in a B.C. local of the Communist-dominated International Woodworkers of America.<sup>52</sup> An overall assessment of the Party's national performance, however, leads to the conclusion that the equal pay demand was more rhetoric than action. Instances of Party unionists fighting for this reform are few and far between. Indeed, to rectify wage discrimination would have meant a major labour offensive which the Party was reluctant to pursue during the war. Because of its support for total war production, the Party advocated containment of strike action and in some cases, lauded 'labour-management consultation'. With such a conciliatory attitude, it is hardly surprising that the struggle for equal pay remained only in the realm of ideas. After the war, the demand for equal pay was not discarded: articles in the CPC press urged

women's organizations and unions to defend women's right to a job and equal pay, and in Ontario, LPP members of the Legislature A.A. MacLeod and Joe Salsberg gave their support to the equal pay bill introduced by the CCF in 1949. But in the face of increasing public pressure against married women's right to work, and declining Communist power in the union movement, the Party's championship of the issue faltered. The moment of industrial strength, during the war, was the opportune time to push for equal pay, and that moment had been lost.

During the war, the CPC also stressed the urgent need for child care facilities for working mothers. Communists pressed for extension of the federal-provincial cost-sharing agreement to provinces where no nurseries existed, and for increased financial aid to the whole day nursery program. In Vancouver, the Women's Labor League and the (Communist) Housewives League took the matter into their own hands and organized a day nursery, soliciting financial aid from union donations and Red Feather funding. Even after the WLL was dissolved in 1943, the day nursery was kept open by the Children's Aid Society as a play school.<sup>53</sup> As the war neared its end in 1944, the Ontario Party convention passed resolutions calling for more provincial subsidies for day care, and advocating University courses to "encourage the profession [of early childhood education] and [measures] to place salaries and hours on an equal footing with other teachers."<sup>54</sup> When Premier Drew announced that funding for nurseries would be withdrawn, Communists took their protests to City Hall and Queens Park, but they only succeeded in gaining a minor concession: some centres were left open for lunch and after-school programs for children of working mothers. The day care issue, however, never became a priority for the Party. Although some

Communist women felt strongly about the issue, it was not accorded significant time and energy from the Party as a whole.

In the final analysis, the most concrete gains for women workers were probably the consequences of the Party's continuing CIO organizing. During the war years the union movement grew by leaps and bounds: the CCL unions tripled during the 1940's, in part because of the efforts of CPC militants. Women workers in the rubber, auto, aerospace, textile and electrical industries were the beneficiaries of these successful union drives, and some contemporary observers, as well as later historians, believed that women's new union experience increased their self-confidence and cultivated their sympathy for the labour movement.<sup>55</sup> On a more negative note, however, there is no substantial evidence of Communists defending (other than in words) the seniority rights of women workers after the war. Most unions, whatever their politics, quickly abandoned women war workers. And most union leaders agreed to the idea that veterans' interests (or even the interests of male workers who were not veterans) took precedence over those of women, no matter what their seniority rights. Many women, apparently, acquiesced to this idea.<sup>56</sup>

Women who did continue to work after the war were concentrated in less-skilled blue collar jobs, or increasingly, in the service sector. Those who maintained jobs in the electrical or textile industries in the late 1940's were often members of two unions, the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE), or the United Textile Workers (UTW), which were to some extent, Communist-led. The former evidenced some concern about the problems and inequalities facing women workers. In the U.S., the UE had an equal proportion of women on its executive council and put an end to discriminatory pay<sup>57</sup>,



and in Canada, the union held special conferences for working women and issued educational material designed to encourage women's participation in union activities.<sup>58</sup> The UTW, whose leadership was Left-wing (but denied being Communist)<sup>59</sup> took special interest in the organization of women workers and tried to use organizing tactics, such as inviting women's families to important union meetings, which would increase women's participation in the union.

Some Communist women stayed active in unions unattached to the Party. In Vancouver, for instance, Communist Barbara Stewart remained committed to the AFL's Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union despite attempts to remove her because of her CPC affiliation. A few Party women also tried to initiate white collar unionism. In B.C., Jean Pritchett and a few other comrades attempted to organize through the AFL's Office Workers Union, but had little success, either with their letter-writing campaign to workers, or with persuading AFL officials of the value of organizing clericals. Pritchett later switched to the CIO's Office and Professional Workers Union (OPWU), and joined a campaign to organize a Vancouver Trust Company, where one contact had expressed an interest in unionization.<sup>60</sup> The organizing effort failed, Pritchett concluded, in part because white collar workers saw themselves as better educated and better treated than blue collar workers, but also because the Company used intimidating tactics to scare the workers.<sup>61</sup> Despite some support for the OPWU from the Left, it remained a small union, its few locals representing workers in union offices. And even here, claimed Claire Culhane, the OPWU occasionally encountered indifference:

I joined the Office Workers Union ... it was a feeble affair here. It never got off the ground because even progressive,

Left unionists didn't care. In fact, the leadership of Mine Mill [a CPC union] didn't want a union for its own clerical workers!<sup>62</sup>

The Party's Women Commission knew only too well that the post-war period would witness an attack on the rights of women, especially married women, to well-paying jobs. Time and again, in 1945, '46 and '47, the Tribune or other Party journals warned that:

Reactionary elements in industry will try to dismiss women workers and while there is no doubt that many do intend to leave their work ... many will not find this desirable or economically feasible. Reforms have been won -- training programs and labour policy -- and these must be retained.<sup>63</sup>

Despite these warnings, the CPC was unable to check the pressure which pushed women out of skilled or well-paying jobs back into the home, or increasingly, into jobs in low-wage ghettos. Except for some pockets of Communist strength, such as the UE, most wage-earning women never experienced a Left-wing union; indeed, the majority of women remained outside the union movement altogether. While Communist tactics must certainly be faulted, for once again, women workers took second place to more 'important' industrial tasks, and the sexual division of labour within industry was never seriously challenged, there were extenuating circumstances. Post-war prosperity offered many workers hopes of achieving the 'ideal' of a sole male breadwinner and family wage, and post-war popular culture extolling women's roles as mothers and homemakers shaped a social conservatism unsympathetic to married women working outside the home. Even radical trade unionists felt the pressure of these ideas and consequently avoided a direct challenge to contemporary platitudes about women's place in the home. Furthermore, the social democratic offensive waged against Communists in the trade union movement drained incredible time and energy, some of which might

have been channelled into the organization of women workers. In the late 1940's and early 1950's Communist trade unionists were engaged in a life-and-death struggle with CCF unionists, and under such conditions initiatives were difficult: defence was the order of the day. The case of one Communist woman in British Columbia, Mickey Beagle, provides an example of how Communist activity was cut short by the trade union movement's wholesale adoption of the Cold War:

I had been active in union auxiliaries ... during the war I went to welding school and worked in the Shipyards ... In 1946, I went to work in a small plant on the Fraser River -- with mostly women. During talk of a strike, I talked union ... and I brought a man from the union to sign people up. I was in that union until the division came and political split in 1948. Then I was blacklisted [and didn't work there anymore].<sup>64</sup>

(iv)

It was not only in trade union work that the Party exhibited an increasingly defensive stance in the late 1940's. The contrast between the Party's optimistic prognosis for the future in 1944-45, and its defensive posture at the end of the decade was symbolized by two Party publications on women: Dorise Nielsen's New Worlds for Women, published in 1944, and Beckie Buhay's 'Woman in the Struggle for Peace and Socialism', printed as a Party educational document in 1948. Nielsen's book was a simply written, although never patronizing, educational tool meant to address 'every woman' on the question of Reconstruction. Although she concentrated on women's post-war role in the home, Nielsen's "program for women" also included "equal pay, opportunity for a choice of work, scholarships and training for girls",<sup>65</sup> as well as a comprehensive system of social services, nurseries and new housing. She even suggested some imaginative innovations like cooperative cooking and

laundries to socialize domestic labour. Nielsen looked hopefully to a coalition of progressive forces which would cement women's war-time gains, particularly the right to a job. Her sentiments, of course, echoed the CPC's war-time platform calling for a united front of progressive forces -- including liberals, if need be -- to win the war and oppose what they called 'the Tory Interests'.

Buhay's document, on the other hand, reflected the Party's return to a more combative attitude towards business and the Liberal government, and a more pessimistic appraisal of the forces opposing women's inequality. Buhay reviewed the history of the working-class women's movement and concluded that the advances women made during the war did not cancel "the many discriminations" still lodged against her:

Inequalities are bound to intensify if reaction makes gains, with capitalism facing serious economic crisis ... No sooner had the war ended than a drive was on to send women back to the kitchen. Married women were driven out of the civil service and more specialized and higher paying jobs.<sup>66</sup>

While Buhay took heart from the rising employment rate of women, much of her document outlined the ghettoization of female labour and deplored the massive wage differentials between men and women workers. Moreover, she was forced to admit that this discrimination was all too acceptable to many "labour men", by which she may have also meant Communist labour men:

Strong prejudices among new workers and in trade unions still persist on woman's right to work and to receive equal rates. This arises mainly from the fear of depression and of men losing their jobs. This prejudice is shown by a lack of an energetic program to organize women workers in the unions, and instead of being promoted to leading positions, the women are still being left in the background.<sup>67</sup>

Buhay's program of reform, which was similar to Nielsen's, included "an open door, without any discrimination for women, married or

single in all fields of Canadian life ... women's right to work, equal education and expanded social services."<sup>68</sup> Significantly, however, she placed considerable emphasis on two campaigns which were directed towards housewives, and which were gaining increasing Communist attention -- the prices campaign and the peace movement.

The contrast in Communist fortunes between 1944 and 1950 can also be illustrated by the successes, then defeats of Communist women in local politics. In the 1930's, the Party made some successful incursions into municipal politics, a process which gained psychological momentum with the elections of provincial MLAs in Ontario and Manitoba in the 1940's, and finally in 1943, with the election of Fred Rose to parliament. By 1945, with these electoral coups in hand, Tribune circulation at nearly 20,000 weekly, membership at an all-time high, and a lingering positive attitude towards the Soviet Union, the Party felt optimistic about the future. Still favouring electoral work, the LPP ran candidates in the 1945 general election and in various municipal contests: in local contests women candidates were more numerous, and were sometimes victorious. In Hamilton, for instance, Helen (Anderson) Coulson sat as an alderman in 1945 and 1946. Anderson, who was by the late 1940's a member of the National Executive Committee of the LPP, was of Finnish origin, and had worked as a domestic in her native British Columbia before she moved to Ontario, where her husband's involvement in trade union politics led them from northern mining towns to Hamilton's steel mills. Widowed by the war, Anderson became actively involved in local politics and ran on an LPP platform stressing the need for new housing, a higher minimum wage, free milk for school children and tax relief for small homeowners. A strong supporter of the 1946 Stelco

Steel strike, she was elected to the Board of Control in 1946, but was defeated in the 1947 election, described by the LPP as "an abrupt swing to the right".<sup>69</sup> One reason for her defeat was growing anti-communist feeling. In later years Coulson was victimized by the Hamilton Spectator, which stressed her LPP connection and insinuated Soviet influences on LPP policies. Despite the exaggerated innuendo behind much of the press' anti-communist coverage of the LPP, the Communists' uncritical ardour for the USSR left them vulnerable to such anticommunist propaganda.

In Toronto, Communist candidates also gained election to the Council and the School Board in the war and immediate post-war years. In 1944, May Birchard, a School Trustee who was sympathetic to the LPP and who was vocal about the need for more child care facilities, ran successfully for alderman. By the time of her defeat in 1947, however, she had shied away from the LPP and denied any Communist connection. Her denials, though, probably came too late.<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth Morton, now an LPPer, Edna Blois Ryerson and Hazel Wigdor all served as school trustees in the late 1940's. In 1947, Morton campaigned for free milk for school children, while Hazel Wigdor fought for a cost of living bonus for teachers. It was not their espousal of these moderate reform causes, however, which eventually secured Communist' defeats;<sup>71</sup> rather, it was their Party affiliation. After the Gouzenko affair and Fred Rose's arrest, Communists became increasingly unpopular. By the early 1950's, the LPP label was a liability rather than an asset, and only Edna Ryerson managed to keep her seat on the School Board into the 1950's.

In the West, women also scored brief successes in municipal politics. Winnipeg School Trustee Margaret Chunn became the first

Communist woman to hold office in that city's government. From 1947 to 1949, she made common cause with fellow LPP School Trustee Joseph Zuken on issues like free milk for school children and an end to military recruiting in the schools. But in 1949, she was defeated. In anti-communist editorials, the Winnipeg Free Press made it clear that it welcomed women into civic government -- as long as they were not Communist women.<sup>72</sup> In Saskatoon, Josephine Gehl ran successfully for the School Board while working as the Saskatoon Party organizer in 1945-46. Gehl's major achievement during her tenure on the High School Board was to spur the introduction of equal pay for women teachers. Gehl questioned the Board's prevailing rationale that "male teachers did more extracurricular work"<sup>73</sup> and therefore deserved better pay. The female teachers called for a survey of this assumption, and not surprisingly, the results showed that women actually performed more extracurricular work. Since the budget for that year had already been passed, Gehl advised the female teachers to "keep the issue alive until next year"<sup>74</sup> and privately counselled them on who to lobby on the Board. The result was an equal pay agreement in the next contract.

In B.C., two LPP women, Elizabeth Brewer and Elizabeth Wilson sat on the Burnaby School Board until 1948; Wilson was a vocal opponent of a resolution that urged women teachers to resign on marriage. And in Vancouver, Communists savoured, but never tasted, a mayoralty victory. In 1947, LPPER Effie Jones was defeated by only 5,000 votes in her bid to unseat the incumbent, Charles Jones. Effie Jones was an English school teacher who had immigrated in 1919, and since the 1930's had been involved in left politics. She had headed the 1938 Relief Strike Mothers Committee, she was prominent in the Housewives Consumer

Association, and she made a name for herself in tenants rights work and in her local ratepayers association. In the 1947 election Effie Jones was characterized as "low fare Jones" and Charles Jones as "high fare Jones", as one of Effie's central campaign issues was her opposition to the B.C. Electric Monopoly and their constant rate increases.<sup>75</sup> While Effie Jones remembers that "it was a disadvantage being a woman ... a tremendous fight for a woman to step into the municipal arena at that time, particularly one who aspired to be mayor",<sup>76</sup> it was probably her politics, more than her gender, which disadvantaged her candidacy. She later claimed that, when it looked as if she might win, her opposition "rounded up the drunks ... and told them to vote against me"; a more telling observation was her comment that "I lost the election ... in the business district, where I had no support".<sup>77</sup>

Although the anticommunist feeling of the post-war period had a negative effect on the Party, forcing it to expend much energy on defensive strategies, not all Communist activity was suffocated. In the late 1940's, the Party's Women's Commission continued with its work much as usual. Aided by the guidance provided by a reconstituted International Women's Secretariat, the Women's Department issued directives on educational work, suggests for International Women's Day celebrations, and plans for agitational work, especially on the prices and peace campaigns.

In both Communist newspapers, the Pacific Tribune and the Tribune, a women's column was used to bring women's issues to the attention of Party members and the public. During the war, the Tribune's women's column was temporarily discontinued, but coverage of women's issues, particularly those relating to the needs of women war



workers, found a place in the body of the paper. In the post-war years, a women's column reappeared, for a time edited by Alice Cooke. Like Cooke's Popular Front column, this one included a mix of political commentary with household hints and recipes. A typical month in 1948 included a regular childcare feature, articles on women in the Soviet Union, recipes, comments on consumer issues and news of electoral politics and women's peace activism. This column, however, had fewer entries, and lacked the vitality of Cooke's earlier women's page.

The Pacific Tribune also ran a women's column, edited for a time by Kay Gregory, with contributions by other B.C. women, including Claire Culhane. This women's page included discussion of women's wage labour, electoral politics and Marxist education; however, the central focus was women's family life, so issues like prices, child education, and peace were the important staples of discussion. Little mention, in either paper, was made of the birth control issue, and one can only assume that, as one comrade remembers, such discussion took place between female members on an informal, private basis: there was a sharing of needed information on good doctors and diaphragms, but no public campaign for legalization of birth control.<sup>78</sup>

While some of the issues discussed in these women's columns -- the Bomb, inflation -- represented concerns particular to the late 1940's, the more general theoretical discussion of women's status within capitalism did not differ markedly from discussion in the 1930's, or even the 1920's. Engels was still seen as the essential key to the understanding of woman's inequality, while works by Marx and Lenin were also cited. As in the Woman Worker, an occasional reader voiced her discontent with her status as a domestic labourer, and she was greeted

greeted with the stock reply that women would see their liberation from domestic drudgery with the dawn of socialism. In 1947, for instance, one correspondent asked Alice Cooke for a definition of Lenin's term "double slavery", adding that personally, she "bitterly resented a seven day week as homemaker with no wages". "Women are people", she pleaded, "even though we are treated like machines."<sup>79</sup> Cooke replied, in a rather tired tone, to the question:

Of course, there is double slavery for women, and only we progressives admit it. Short of changing the system to socialism, as an individual we can carry out our own educational campaigns, but the solution is not antagonism against men for ... our slave-owning husbands, our own particular lord and master, is as much a victim of past tradition as is the domestic slave wife.<sup>80</sup>

Cooke reiterated the dangers of housewives becoming isolated and 'backward', and urged her reader to treat her own domestic role with respect, so that others would too, (advice which did not coincide with contemporary Party debates on domestic labour). If the reader has any failings, Cooke concluded weakly, being a good cook was not one of them, and she ended with some recipes sent in by the disgruntled housewife. Whether or not this compliment pacified her reader was not recorded.

Although Cooke's message sounded all too familiar, there was some evidence that, within the Party's Women's Commission, there was a renewed interest in the late 1940's in working out a Marxist approach to the woman question. In 1947-48, the chair of the Commission was assumed by Dorise Nielsen, who had a proven commitment to work among women, and in 1948, Buhay's document, 'Women's Place in the Struggle for Peace and Socialism' was issued as a comprehensive guide to the Party's past, present and future program for women. This document included discussion of women's history of struggle, information on women's contemporary

social and economic situation, a platform of principles for the Party to organize around, and some references to current theoretical debates on women's place in a capitalist economy. The Buhay document was used in the Party's educational work with women: accompanying the document were sets of questions and answers designed to clarify Marxist theory and quiz women on their 'correct' understanding of the woman question. At national Party schools, however, the Buhay document never assumed a prominent position: even though women constituted a growing minority of Party school students, most lectures concentrated on everything from historical materialism to imperialism, but not the woman question.<sup>81</sup>

Inter-Party discussion on convention resolutions concerning women also indicated that at least some women (and perhaps men) were concerned about the Party's work among women. In December of 1948, Hazel Wigdor, in a pre-convention discussion, called the Party's proposed resolution "undiluted maple syrup"<sup>82</sup> and argued for a more thorough approach to work among women. To buttress her case, Wigdor quoted unimpeachable sources, repeating Tim Buck's criticism of male comrades' "underestimation of women's work", and citing W.Z. Foster's contention that the CPUSA had yet to "attack the forces of reaction which still have a hold on womankind."<sup>83</sup> There has been nothing fundamental written since Engels and Bebel, Foster had said, "therefore, the U.S. Party is establishing a theoretical sub-commission to delve into the subject."<sup>84</sup> Wigdor implied that such a fresh approach -- "some tilling of brain soil"<sup>85</sup> -- was also needed in Canada. Communists, she concluded, had to more effectively show that, as Lenin said, real freedom for women is possible only through Communism. Furthermore, she concluded, new deliberations on the woman question had to be treated

with seriousness by the whole Party, not discarded as a secondary priority:

These are not questions to be bottled, labelled and put away on the shelf marked 'Women's Commission', as a housewife does her jars of preserves. Too often the fight of women comrades to have the question of women's work properly discussed is regarded with a bored air of tolerance, with perhaps a teasing remark of 'feminism'.<sup>86</sup>

Wigdor's criticism may have been construed by some as 'feminism', but that was a misrepresentation of her ideas. She, like many other Party women, rejected what they termed "the sexual antagonism"<sup>87</sup> inherent in feminism; they were well versed in a Marxist and Engelian tradition and they situated women's inequality firmly within a class context. What they did want was an expanded Marxist analysis of women's inequality, and more organizational attention to work among women.

At the 1949 convention, the panel discussion on women reflected some of the Party's problems in responding to these calls for more concerted action on the woman question. The convention resolution repeated the Party's long-established, stated aim of "translating our program into terms that are best understood and most appreciated by women"<sup>88</sup> but unfortunately, the methods of work listed were also long-established ones. The Party advocated federal election work, especially in one riding, as a priority for women's energies, a suggestion which did not question or alter the traditional use of women as election workers. It also spoke, rather paternalistically, of furnishing "correct leadership"<sup>89</sup> for women, of strengthening the national and local Commissions' work by adding responsible male comrades and women from mass organizations, and of increasing the amount of special literature for women. These tactics were hardly new, and one woman's experience on her provincial Women's Commission indicated that

they simply were not working, or that they were not even followed by Party functionaries at the local level. Claire Culhane worked on the B.C. Women's Commission after the war and she contended that:

On paper, it was yes, we need a Women's Commission to bring women along, make them more political, but there was never any discussion over how they were going to find the time to study ... the women's groups were minimal ... although some women like Effie Jones did fantastic community work ... I chaired the B.C. Commission at one time -- which was the biggest<sup>90</sup> laugh because I didn't have a clue about politics, or women.

The reason for the Party's inability to make good its ideals, suggested Culhane, was the refusal to take one's politics into one's personal life and in particular, to alter the traditional family set-up. There was more than one 'double standard' existing for women, she maintained:

There wasn't a recognition of women's problems. My husband [a Party leader in B.C.] was a talented speaker. He would get going on women's rights ... but he could give a fantastic speech on women's rights while I was home with the kids! Theoretically, there was no question of not recognizing me as a woman or as an individual.<sup>91</sup> But in practice? And this was fairly common.

Thus, while some re-thinking of the woman question went on at one level of Party life, it is unlikely that this permeated the Party as a whole. At a Party educational in the late 1940's, a panel of prominent LPP leaders (all men) discussed, quite frankly, the successes and failures of work among women. Tim Buck summarized much of the discussion with his comment that "we've done better than other Parties, but we haven't done enough."<sup>92</sup> But the panelists, including Buck, did not come up with any new insights; in fact, a large amount of time was spent going over the usefulness of women's trade union auxiliaries. Examples of women's vital work in strike situations were easily cited, but all Buck could suggest to extend this work was to advocate "better leadership".<sup>93</sup> At this same educational, concern was expressed that

women members numbered only 19% of the Party, and one leader emphasized the need to promote more women to responsible leadership positions. Yet, only a few years earlier, Tim Buck, in the private surroundings of a National Executive Committee meeting, had reminded his colleagues that "we must consider all the boys who are coming back from the war, and see if they can be integrated into the leadership".<sup>94</sup> At this earlier meeting Buck did not mention any need to promote the post-war woman -- lauded by Annie Buller as a woman of 'new independence and raised consciousness' -- into the leadership.

Thus, in the post-war years, the problem of women's secondary role in the Party persisted, despite the Women's Commission's concerted efforts to the contrary. In its work among women, the Commission continued to implement some Popular Front strategies, now modified by new economic conditions and new social problems, as well as by the altered overall objectives of the LPP. Attempts were still made to construct a united front of left-wing, progressive women, but unlike the period of the 1930's, the late 1940's and early 1950's witnessed decreasing emphasis on flexibility in community work, and increasing stress on the construction of two national organizations, the Housewives Consumer Association (HCA) and the Congress of Canadian Women (CCW).

(v)

Ironically, the campaign to roll back prices, which directed its message primarily at housewives, arose shortly after an inter-Party debate on domestic labour, a debate which reaffirmed the primacy of women's wage-labour in women's politicization. This controversy was

sparked by the publication in 1939 of a series of articles in the Peoples World, and later a book, Woman Power, by American CPer Mary Inman. Inman was part of a longer, more informal discussion within the CPUSA about the nature of housework: was it work?; was it 'waged'?; was it socially useful?, asked American writers in the late 1930's.<sup>95</sup>

Inman's aim was to explore domestic labour from a Marxist perspective, thus helping the Party to understand how to organize housewives for socialism. Her point of departure was the passage in Engels' Origin of the Family which stated that 'two forms of production -- production and reproduction -- underlay all social institutions'. Inman argued that the latter -- reproduction -- had not been sufficiently explored by Engels, or other Marxists; she then proceeded to analyze women's role in reproducing labour for capital. Household work was not only socially useful, she maintained, but it was socially productive: their work was essential to capitalism, for in the home women created their husband's labour power (by cooking, cleaning, preparing him for work), as well as reproducing new labourers for capitalism. Although women's 'wages' were disguised in their husbands' wages, women definitely worked for capitalism, not just for her family: "she was as indispensable to industry as a man working in a Firestone tire plant,"<sup>96</sup> concluded Inman.

Inman's attempts to develop a Marxist theory of domestic labour was, in some ways, ahead of her time; it was not until the late 1960's that the subject was again seriously considered by European and North American Marxists. These later theorists may have taken issue with key aspects of Inman's arguments -- such as her contention that housewives produced surplus value -- but they would have applauded her attempt to look beyond Engel's preliminary statements and to analyze the material

conditions of women's household labour in order to formulate a strategy for women's emancipation.<sup>97</sup>

At the time, however, Inman's work was greeted with concern, even hostility, by the American and Canadian parties. In 1943, the Canadian Communist press, Progress Books, published a book by Avrom Landy, entitled Marxism and the Woman Question, intended as a rebuttal to Inman. Landy treated Inman with considerable scorn, always referring to her as Mrs. Inman, and ridiculing her ignorance of Marxist theory. He had major disagreements with Inman's interpretation of Engels, and with her contention that the household was a centre of production, as well as consumption. He mocked her idea of housework as labour power, saying condescendingly of housework: "of course, the capitalist couldn't exploit the worker if back of him were not his wife, his doctor... but the same is true of the sun and the air, without which the worker would not work."<sup>98</sup> Throughout his book Landy reinforced the orthodoxies which had always prevailed in the Party: that modern industry tended to separate production from the domestic sphere; that women's household labour was 'private service'; and that the key to women's emancipation was their involvement in social (wage labour) production.

It is noteworthy that Landy's book was written in 1943, just after the Party had embraced the war effort. In his first chapter, he admitted that politically, "the question is how to help win the war against Hitler's slavery".<sup>99</sup> Reaffirming his contention that the struggles of women in industry "are decisive for the position of women", he added:

It is because confusion about the role of housework can readily



feed reactionary efforts to keep women out of war production that we have undertaken to deal at length with pseudo-Marxist attempts to provide an economic justification for the glorification of domestic drudgery.<sup>100</sup>

The disagreement with Inman, therefore, was the result not only of a long-standing theoretical understanding in the Party, but also of an immediate tactical necessity. The latter was important to the CPC's promotion of the war effort; the former was essential to the maintenance of the Party's entrenched understanding of Marxism. Even after the war, however, Landy's book was still cited as a key Marxist document by the Canadian Party: it was integrated into Buhay's arguments in her 1948 publication on women; it was used in educational classes on the woman question; and as late as 1949, it was referred to in the press as the 'correct' response to Inman. Landy's conclusions were therefore indicative of, and important to, Communist thinking. Although he tried not to disparage housework, Landy did maintain that it was "slavery and drudgery"<sup>101</sup> and that, with contemporary technological knowledge, it should be abolished -- and would be under socialism. The major appeal to housewives, he concluded, should be the promise to take them out of their isolated, backward existence. To characterize domestic labour as productive might give women "pride in capitalism": we must set out the "difficulties and misery connected with the home ... that is the ground out of which the immediate issues and struggle grow ... Women must hate capitalism, because it keeps them at domestic drudgery and fails to provide cheap food, low rent and nurseries."<sup>102</sup>

Although Landy's last suggestion became part of the CPC's strategies, there were more contradictory elements to his argument which were also reflected in the CPC's thinking. His attempts to distinguish between Marxists' and Communists' long-established and correct "defence

of the family" and Inman's erroneous "defence of housework" were extremely weak.<sup>103</sup> Also, Landy's characterization of household work as 'private service' could be used to rationalize the separation between the private sphere and the public sphere which had always kept the Party from coming to terms with women's family experiences and integrating women, on an equal basis, into public, political work. Furthermore, as well as harbouring a negative attitude towards domestic labour, Landy made no concrete suggestions, such as cooperative or shared housekeeping, for the immediate aid of housewives. Like many other aspects of women's emancipation, the question of domestic labour had to be postponed indefinitely until socialism appeared. Lastly, Landy's arguments reaffirmed the Party's theoretical imperative to organize wage-earning women at a time when trade union politics were becoming more difficult (due to the Cold War), and paradoxically, less important to Party strategies, (as the Housewives Consumer Association took priority). Work among housewives, it was therefore implied, was secondary to more important Party objectives.

Ironically, in the late 1940's, work with housewives was seen as a cornerstone of the Party's work among women; indeed, in reminiscing about the post-war period, it is the Housewives Consumer Association (HCA) and the prices campaigns which Party members immediately describe. The post-war HCA evolved quite naturally from the Party's Popular Front work. During the war, housewives leagues which had been initiated in the late 1930's continued with consumer advocacy work. In Toronto, for instance, the HCA lobbied for an investigation of rising prices by the Wartime Prices and Trades Board; HCA members served on this Board; and the HCA publicized proposals for a cost of living bonus for soldiers'

dependents. The Toronto Association had small groups which met by municipal Wards, and regular city meetings for a membership which went beyond Party ranks. At the end of the war, many local HCAs became proponents of a new housing policy and called for the maintenance of war-time price controls. Some also lobbied for higher wage scales and the continuation of day nurseries.

By 1947, housewives associations existed in Toronto, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, Edmonton, Montreal and Vancouver, and their efforts were increasingly centralized around one objective: to pressure the federal government to roll back prices and maintain price controls. This campaign evolved as an outgrowth of the LPP's thinking on work among women, which was influenced by advice from the International Communist Women's movement. Immediately after the war, the 1946 LPP convention resolution on women had concentrated on the need to defend women's right to work, but it also noted women's important support work in strike struggles, and the need to mobilize women against rising prices. The latter suggestion was given much more emphasis in Beckie Buhay's educational document and in Dorise Nielsen's International Women's Day message in March of 1948. The role of women wage-earners is decisive to the socialist struggle, argued Buhay in 'Woman in the Struggle for Peace and Socialism', but we cannot forget the majority of women and the political power they hold:

The majority of Canadian adult women still fall into the category of housewives and the part of the housewife in the fight against monopoly cannot be minimalized ... at least one quarter of a million voters in the 1945 election were housewives ... and never have housewives been so articulate as they are today over rising prices.<sup>104</sup>

Nielsen too argued that the prices campaign was essential to the Party's work among women as it built upon women's present concerns and anger

over the current inflationary spiral. "The main fight is now the battle to roll back prices and reimpose controls ... the fight against profiteering and to protect the home,"<sup>105</sup> she advised. Because homemakers managed the budget and supervised family consumption, it was thought, and because women wished the best for their families, they could be rallied to a campaign to curtail price rises and maintain the improved standard of living achieved during the war. While this tactical reasoning was consistent with Landy's admonition to get "women to hate capitalism ... because it fails to provide cheap food ... for their families,"<sup>106</sup> it also stood very close to Mary Inman's suggestion that women's roles as housewives be treated with dignity, and that women be mobilized on the basis of their important contribution, as domestic labourers, to society. In practice, the Party did not simply emphasize the 'slavery' associated with domestic labour; it also used women's sense of occupational self-worth, and their feeling of commitment to their families, to rouse them on the prices issue.

The campaign to roll back prices had much in common with some of the Party's earlier efforts in the 1920's and 1930's to radicalize working-class housewives on consumer issues. Perhaps Communists even saw these campaigns as part of the long-established populist/socialist tradition of women leading bread riots and food demonstrations, as they had in 19th century Europe.<sup>107</sup> Yet, even though the 1947 prices campaign of the HCA reaffirmed, once again, the equation of women with the 'separate sphere' of domestic labour, it also offered a radical critique of society's economic institutions. An HCA pamphlet, for example, put forward an analysis of excessive profits made on basic foodstuffs by private business, and outlined the decreasing buying power

of workers' real incomes.<sup>108</sup> Both these issues raised important questions about the injustice of capitalist social relations. Moreover, the prices campaign was a model of women's self-organization: valuable experience was gained because women organized and led the movement, and some of these female activists later took up other political tasks in the Party.

Much of the HCA's efforts were directed towards federal lobbying. In March of 1947, a Western delegation led by Winnipeg School Trustee Margaret Chunn, and including some prominent Communists, as well as a few CCFers, presented a brief to the federal Minister of Finance, A.B. Abbott. Their primary request was the continuation of price controls, including reimposition of controls already lifted. The government, already forewarned about the presence of Communists in the HCA, only reluctantly met with the delegation, although other M.P.s, mostly CCF ones, gave them an audience. The delegation's mission was entirely unsuccessful; the government, which had no intention of alienating business and did not view the consumer movement as a threat, announced its lifting of price controls as the disappointed HCA women listened from the House of Commons Gallery.

A few months later, Eastern cities sponsored their own protests: wives from Timmins planned a "bread and butter calvalcade"<sup>109</sup> to Ottawa to begin on June 7, and later in June, the Toronto HCA organized a delegation of one hundred people to visit the Minister of Finance and to lobby other M.P.s, while simultaneously holding a consumer issues conference in Ottawa. The Toronto delegation was well organized, replete with thousands of badges in the shape of rolling pins -- perhaps a double entendre, signifying women's anger, as well as their pie-making

abilities. Their efforts, however, gained nothing more than a "brush-off"<sup>110</sup> by the cabinet.

Trying a different tactic, the HCA suggested a 'buyers strike', an idea that was endorsed by some sympathetic trade unionists. Although no major national results were evident, some victories were achieved at the local level: in Vancouver, an anti-pork strike, protesting escalating bacon prices, was temporarily successful in reducing the price of bacon by 5¢, and in Regina, the 'Bring back the 5¢ chocolate bar' campaign, with its parades of young people and adults, at least succeeded in gaining some public sympathy for the HCA.<sup>111</sup> In 1949, the National HCA made a last attempt to lobby Ottawa on the prices issue. This time, a petition campaign, 'The March of a Million Names', was organized. At the end of March 1949, 500 men and women set out on a chartered train to Ottawa, to deliver the petitions with a million names on them. Rebuffed by the Prime Minister, the delegation gave their brief to the new Minister of Finance, but again, the government wished only to avoid the HCA, fearing that it "was being used for Communistic purposes".<sup>112</sup> Although they didn't gain a sympathetic hearing, the HCA later claimed partial victory for one of their demands had been an end to the price fixing of wheat and flour, and after subsequent investigations under the Combines Act, fines were placed on one mill, and the price of flour came down.

Eventually, the HCA's concerns were integrated into the new national organization initiated in 1950, the Congress of Canadian Women (CCW). Although it achieved some local and minor successes, the HCA had been unable to create a large and broadly-based movement of homemakers. The favourable response to the 1949 petition indicated some popular

approval of the HCA's goals, but the Association had difficulties in translating this into direct aid and activism. Perhaps their one-issue focus did not interest some women; moreover, this limited focus posed the potential problem of demoralization if no significant victories were secured. Furthermore, their 'On to Ottawa Trek' strategy, utilized so successfully in the 1930's unemployed movement, no longer functioned well in the late 1940's. Perhaps the Canadian working class was, as Bryan Palmer suggests, becoming more and more integrated into the "atomized mass culture of commercialism"<sup>113</sup> and subsequently, was less moved by the more affluent protest against rising prices, than they had been over the unemployment crisis. Also, once the HCA, a national, centralized organization, became closely identified with the CPC, it was vulnerable to anti-communist criticisms, and this cost it the support of other trade unionists and leftists. Although a few Saskatchewan CCF women risked disapproval by supporting the 1947 delegation to Ottawa, by 1949, such support was unthinkable. While the CPC's Popular Front organizing had occasionally earned the aid of local CCFers, or the support of a concerned community, their efforts in the 1940's were increasingly isolated by growing anti-communism in Canadian society.

Indeed, it was not only the King government which avoided the HCA as a pariah. Most CCF women, especially in Ontario, refused any support for the Association. There were a few exceptions, but because of the CCF's intense hostility to the LPP, such women were forced to make a choice for one group or the other. There were to be no more Rose Hendersons allowed in the post-war CCF. One woman faced with this choice was Rae Lucock. Lucock, the daughter of United Farmers of Ontario activist, J.J. Morrison, had been active in the CCF since the

1930's. Radicalized both by her early exposure to socialist ideas and also by her personal experiences of unemployment and relief during the Depression, Lucock spent considerable time in the '30's organizing CCF clubs across the province. In 1943, she was elected to the Toronto Board of Education and to the Ontario Legislature as an MPP from Bracondale riding. She did not retain the CCF nomination in 1945, perhaps, as Margery Ferguson, another HCA activist suggests, because Lucock "in her approach to political questions was willing to unite with other political groups on questions of common good and better living conditions for all"<sup>114</sup> -- in other words, she was a United Fronter. After 1945, Lucock became more active in HCA work, and served as its president from 1947-49. Other CCF women became alarmed at this turn of events and wanted her exposed as a Communist. In 1949, when she was in Ottawa with the March of a Million Names delegation, Lucock received a letter from the CCF telling her to either dissociate herself from the campaign, or be expelled from the Party. After a series of discussions with the CCF, in which she refused to give up her United Front activities, Lucock was expelled. She remained active in the CCW, and in the Bathurst Street United Church, although in the latter, there were again some questions raised about her Communist activities. Lucock claimed that there was no contradiction between her Communist sympathies (she denied being a Party member) and her religious beliefs. To her, as Margery Ferguson explained:

Religion was based on the teachings of the Bible. That was of course, doing good, and helping others in need. Rae believed that the church had a role to play in activities to improve the lives of those in need.<sup>115</sup>

For its part, the Church responded differently than the CCF, allowing Lucock to continue her participation in the congregation.



Rae Lucock came to prominence through the Housewives, but she also participated in other campaigns. In 1947, for example, she helped to organize a women's support picket for the United Packing House Workers strike. Depending on the region, strike support work and union auxiliaries continued to be important tasks for Communist women, and sometimes this auxiliary work was connected to the prices campaign. In B.C., an International Woodworkers Union (IWA) auxiliary was formed in 1942. At an IWA executive meeting, Mona Morgan, who did secretarial work for the union and who was married to an IWA leader, Nigel Morgan, was persuaded to take on the job of organizing the auxiliaries across the province. The auxiliaries gradually grew, especially in the smaller communities, and in 1946, they organized a large women's contingent as part of the 'Trek to Victoria' sponsored by the province-wide loggers strike. During the strike, Mona Morgan had a radio show, 'Five Minutes with Mona', and a large part of her message concerned prices: "My broadcasts were about issues like how the strike affected the family, pensioners, and prices ... in fact, the prices issue came up in every second broadcast. As controls came off and prices went up, it was a ready-made issue."<sup>116</sup> She also talked about safety in the woods, an issue which held a lot of concern for the IWA auxiliary members, and following the strike, one auxiliary at Lake Cowichan managed to successfully lobby for better transportation to hospitals for injured loggers. In the post-war period, the IWA auxiliaries were by no means a mass movement -- Morgan remembers about 20 regular members at the Vancouver meetings -- but they did have the energy and resources to put on local conferences for wives of trade unionists on consumer issues; in

1946, for instance, the Auxiliary collected petitions protesting milk increases, and sponsored a conference on prices and pensions.

In other regions, depending on the character of the trade union movement, Communist women sometimes put their energies into labour support groups. Often, these organizations were ephemeral, existing primarily to aid a current dispute -- as with the United Packing House Workers picket, or the women's aid to the 1946 Stelco strike in Hamilton -- but they still served as important psychological and financial aid to the union movement. And occasionally, women involved in auxiliaries moved on to other areas of Party activity. In Thunder Bay, for example, a woman who took a major part in organizing support for the Canadian Seaman's Union strike of 1949 explained the genesis of her political involvement: "I was active during the big strike of the Seaman's because I was in the Labour Council auxiliary. I went down to the Union Hall and arranged food for the men. I also billeted [five] men in my home."<sup>117</sup> In the 1950's she maintained her activism through the CCW and the peace movement.

After the prices petition in 1949, representatives of the HCA met to discuss the formation of a Canadian women's organization whose aims would be "more comprehensive than just economic ones."<sup>118</sup> The result was a new national group, the Canadian Congress of Women (CCW). A smaller CCW group had been established as early as 1948, as a local affiliate to the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), a post-war international for Communist-bloc women's organizations. Central to the objectives of both the WIDF and the CCW was a commitment to the peace movement, a commitment which had been growing in strength within the CPC's work among women since 1945.

When Dorise Nielsen wrote New Worlds for Women in 1944, the LPP remained hopeful of post-war Allied cooperation, hence Nielsen's book rarely mentioned international relations. By 1946, however, after Hiroshima and the first signs of the Cold War, the Party was more concerned about Soviet-U.S. relations, and the 1946 convention resolution on women put forward one or two recommendations for women's peace work: Women's LPP Councils, it suggested, "could be used to give advice on ... the peace issue ... and the Party should ... assist housewives and other women to make vocal their demands for peace and an end to the atomic bomb policy of the western powers."<sup>119</sup> Following this convention, Women's Peace Action Councils were established by Party women in some cities to give a sharper focus to women's concern about international issues; these Councils were eventually drawn into work either with the CCW, or with the Canadian Peace Congress.

By the end of the decade, and especially after the formation of NATO, the calls for women's involvement in the peace movement became more frequent and more urgent. Buhay's 1948 document charged that in appealing to housewives, "there are two sides to the coin: one is the campaign against rising prices and profiteering, and the other is the peace movement."<sup>120</sup> By the early 1950's, Rae Lucock, in an address to the CCW, cited peace as a key issue for women:

Our Conference, above all, must decide upon ways and means whereby we ... can appeal to every Canadian woman, and to every Canadian women's organization, to do better work together in 1951 to safeguard peace.<sup>121</sup>

In fact, she reminded her audience, women's campaigns for other social reforms were contingent on the disarmament issue, for without peace, money would be channelled into arms rather than the social services

needed for "healthy families ... and a better life ... for our children."<sup>122</sup>

The emphasis of the LPP on women's peace work was related to the overall objectives of the Party. After 1948, the Party became firmly committed to the concept of Canadian independence from U.S. domination: this theme, says Norman Penner, "was all pervasive in every aspect of Party interest."<sup>123</sup> Alarmed by the U.S.'s new-found atomic power, and fearful of American intentions in the Mediterranean and Europe, the USSR urged North American Communists to build a peace movement able to contain, or at least restrict American aggression and imperialism. Influenced by the Cold War and by the needs of Soviet foreign policy, as well as by certain "nationalist"<sup>124</sup> traditions within the CPC, Canadian Communists became preoccupied with countering American imperialism at home and abroad. Unnerved by escalating international tensions and by the formation of NATO - a military alliance against Communism -- and fearful of a second use of the bomb, they responded positively to the construction of a peace movement which directed all its criticisms against the U.S.

Canadian Communist women were tied to the International Communist movement through the Women's International Democratic Federation, and in 1945, the first meeting of WIDF listed "world peace and the rights of women and children"<sup>125</sup> as their two main aims. Although no Canadian attended the 1945 meeting, a year later Pearl Wedro and Mrs. Agnew went to Budapest as Canadian delegates to the WIDF. They and future Canadian representatives to the Federation came back to Canada convinced of the urgent need to make peace a central issue for women. In 1949, for instance, Dorise Nielsen, Mary Kardash and Libbie

Park, a nurse from Toronto with long-standing left-wing sympathies, attended the WIDF meeting in Moscow. At that meeting, the WIDF Council recommended the establishment of "national organizations which see the main task as an extension of the struggle for peace ... In Canada, the U.S., Britain and other countries we can build mass organizations through national women's congresses."<sup>126</sup> Clearly, this was the role the CCW was intended to fulfill.

Although the WIDF urged women peace activists to work through and with other women's organizations, no common cause with "reactionary pacifists", or people who counselled peace at any price, was countenanced. "The present women's peace movement", said a Soviet delegate in her 1949 speech to the Federation, "has nothing in common with pacifism, with a passive rejection of war."<sup>127</sup> The WIDF suggested tactics which resembled Popular Front peace organizing, for it advocated the need to "work using all forms of struggle -- poll meetings, petitions, individual talks .... and [work] with other peace committees and conferences."<sup>128</sup> At the same time, its emphasis on defending the Soviet Union against the western powers bore some similarities to Third Period peace organizing, when pacifist groups were rejected as manifestations of liberal naiveté, and Communist slogans demanded a 'militant defence of peace and the Soviet Union'.

In organizing women for peace, the Party used the long-established tradition of linking maternalism and peace activism. "Women, Mothers of Canada", announced the CCW after its formation in 1950, "Life and Peace is in your hands". The CCW's organ, Woman's Voice, then went on to quote from the United Church Women's Missionary Society: "everything woman creates, home, family, civilization, is

destroyed by war ... women work with effort for war ... How can they be mobilized for peace?"<sup>129</sup> In 1949, Vancouver Communist women sponsored a Mothers Day 'Action for Peace' forum which intended to "pay tribute to working-class mothers who sacrificed their sons ... in the last war ... and to put an end to the armaments race".<sup>130</sup> Many Communist women remember the early Canadian Congress of Women in terms of its work for peace, and they explain women's interest in peace by pointing to their own, or other women's maternal feelings. Women were the first behind the ban the bomb petition, contents Mary Kardash: "It was natural, first because at the time, many women were not working and they had more time to go out and petition and, then, there was their dedication to their offspring and the future."<sup>131</sup> Another woman actively involved in the CCW and peace work in Toronto put it more eloquently:

Why women and peace? Women have a built-in nurturing in us ... it is a natural instinct to protect and nurture the young. Women have always been the movers and shakers in the peace movement ... after all, they give birth to life, they nurture it -- and when so much of your life is in that child, how could you possibly think of the destruction of that child?<sup>132</sup>

The strength and earnestness of women's belief in maternalism indicated that this appeal was more than 'superficial' propaganda used by the Party to justify women's role in the peace movement. It is true that the LPP (like the CCF) tried to use maternalist arguments for political advantage, hoping they would earn women's sympathy for their peace initiatives. "In the fight for peace", argued Elsie Beeching, who was in the CCW and the Peace Congress, "you had to use every weapon that you could mobilize, and the fact that women were mothers could appeal to women's emotion and protectiveness. Perhaps this is sort of a perversion of an extreme feminist approach, but the struggle for life is primary and if the maternal appeal should be used ... if it works ...

it's legitimate."<sup>133</sup> But on another level the maternal appeal reflected deeply-entrenched social assumptions shared by women and men in the movement -- ideas that women's 'natural' desire was to nurture and mother, and that women were more emotional and humane than men. Many women in Communist peace work were housewives and mothers who, like the later Women Strike for Peace activists, were products of post-war cultural thinkings - in particular the "post-Freudian idea that the making and raising of children was a sex-specific vocation requiring the full-time duties of a resident mother."<sup>134</sup> Yet, it would be too simple to state that they had succumbed completely to the feminine mystique, for as Amy Swerdlow points out of other female peace activists, they rejected motherhood as only a private function, and instead, saw it as a contribution to society in general. Thus, their maternal consciousness stimulated and shaped their social conscience:

They were not concerned with transforming the ideology of femininity, but rather with using it to enhance women's political power. They used the feminine mystique to legitimize women's right to dissent from military policies ... and sex role stereotypes to legitimize ... opposition to cold war policies ... And by stressing international sisterhood, rather than domestic responsibilities, they challenged the privatization and isolation of women which was a key element of the feminine mystique.<sup>135</sup>

Like the feminists of the suffrage era, these Communist women utilized prevailing concepts of motherhood to understand, rationalize and project their political views. But their outlook, by remaining closely tied to dominant cultural ideals and accepting of sex-role stereotyping, also posed difficult contradictions for women's wider participation in the Party. The maternal appeal left unquestioned patriarchal values, in particular a biological-deterministic equation of women, nurturing and motherhood; and it was these assumptions which

could -- and did -- restrict women's equal participation in political life. If the Party had at least balanced its use of maternalism with some questioning of these ideas, it might have been able to face up to the problem of separating women from domestic life and involving them in the mainstream of the Party. As it was, the Party's treatment of the woman question remained limited not only by the traditionalism of its Marxism, but also by its refusal to question fixed and 'natural' gender roles on its own doorstep. Ironically, in the 1950's, in a period of anti-communism and the CPC's peak isolation from society, the Party faced the danger of adopting uncritically the values of the suburban feminine mystique. Moreover, there were dangers ahead: maternalism might have worked well in the 1950's, but it might not appeal to the next generation of feminists and socialists, the products of very different social conditions, who sympathized with the cause of peace, but who rejected the equation of women with motherhood, and motherhood with peace.

(vi)

During the war and post-war years, the Communist Party experienced intense highs and lows in its prospects and hopes for growth. In 1939, the Party's opposition to the 'Phoney War', made it vulnerable to attack by the state, and the government's internment policies threatened to put a full stop to Communist activities. Women were instrumental to Party life in this difficult period, because of their efforts to get internees released, their participation in the NCDR, and their continuation of day-to-day Party work. After 1942, when



the Party had put the embarrassment of the Hitler-Stalin Pact behind it, and thrown itself into the war effort, there once again seemed possibility for growth, and also, for progress on the woman question. Because the LPP so resolutely supported the war effort, it urged women to involve themselves in industrial production, and the LPP's founding platform placed new emphasis on its work among women: unionization, equal pay, and the right of every woman, married or single, to a good job were made Party demands. The last two demands were radical for the time, for even though business and government encouraged women to enter the work force, they stressed the temporary nature of the job, and the enduring feminine demeanor, rather than equal capabilities, of women workers. Because of the Party's overwhelming preoccupation with the survival of the USSR, however, and subsequently, their 'no-strike' policy, it was difficult to make good stated intentions to pursue equal pay. Furthermore, even though the Party called for maintenance of women's employment after the war's end, it seemed unwilling, or at least unable, in the midst of post-war reaction, to swim against the tide, holding to its demand of a job for every woman. The returning veterans, rather than Rosie the Riveter, became the focus of Party concern.

The two campaigns which came to take precedence in the Party's work among women in the late 1940's were prices and peace, both of which were directed largely at housewives. Women were very gradually swelling the ranks of the labour force, especially in the expanding service sector, but housewives, still a majority of women voters, were perceived as the essential female constituency to address. Communists were undoubtedly influenced by the demographic and economic nature of post-war society: a baby boom, increasing prosperity, and hopes of

achieving a single (male)-income family wage all tended to reinforce an emphasis on women's role in the home. Yet, ironically, this emphasis on women as homemakers co-existed with the Party's recent theoretical reaffirmation that women's wage labour was the key to their raised consciousness and involvement in the class struggle, and its contention that women must reject the 'drudgery of domestic labour under capitalism'.<sup>136</sup>

While the demands of bread and peace took centre stage, it would be wrong to claim that women were absent from all other areas of Party work. In the immediate post-war years, women continued to play a significant role in the educational and cultural areas of Party life; for example, Margaret Fairley edited the cultural magazine, New Frontiers, and Becky Buhay and Dorise Nielsen played a prominent role in the Party's Education Department. Moreover, a significant minority of women made their way into the middle and regional leadership of the Party. Women like Dorise Nielsen, Mary Kardash in Manitoba, Josephine Gehl in Saskatchewan, Beatrice Ferneyhough in Alberta and Minerva Cooper-Miller in B.C. -- and more -- did important work as organizers, educators and leaders.

Yet, by the 1950's, there were also signs of a slowing of Party growth. New Frontiers lost some of the dynamic female writers of the Left, like Dorothy Livesay, Jean Watts and Margaret Gould; Dorise Nielsen and Minerva Cooper-Miller left the Party; and no women took over the prestigious roles that Becky Buhay and Annie Buller had for years exercised in the Party. Moreover, there were also serious problems on the trade union front. The Party had little time or energy for new organizing efforts or for challenges to women's unequal wages. In one

union dominated by the CPC -- the UE -- there were some efforts to do extra educational work for women workers. But there were few unions where the CPC could be tested on their work among women, for most Communist efforts were spent struggling to fend off attacks by hostile social democrats. Criticisms, as well as conclusions then, must remain tentative.

When a new Communist-led organization, the Canadian Congress of Women, was formed in 1950, it published a charter of women's rights, impressive for its radical demands for the restructuring of society along egalitarian lines. The CCW's platform on women's rights, particularly its attention to economic equality, was more comprehensive than that of other women's and socialist organizations, including the CCF. But in terms of action, there were problems with the Party's work among women. Its radical platform often remained a showpiece rather than a call to arms. Despite the Party's self-criticism on this very problem, and the efforts of some Communist women to encourage more consideration of the woman question, the Party did not move out of its long-held view that the organization of women was a 'secondary' task, and that real equality would come 'after the Revolution'. Confessions that the Party was not doing enough came at every convention, like catechisms said by rote; yet, there was no evidence of any decisive response to these admissions. Most women in the Party, even those who were critical, remained committed to the Party's brand of Marxism and its Leninist approach. As Party loyalists, they were hopeful of future change on the woman question; as Josephine Gehl put it, "traditional attitudes towards women remained ... but with progress within the Party, we know they will eventually disappear".<sup>137</sup>

A significant group of women also remained uninterested in the CPC's work among women because they believed it divided the solidarity needed in the class struggle, or because they believed women were ghettoized into insignificance by a separate Women's Commission. As one such woman pointed out: "At every convention, there were two items at the very bottom of the agenda -- youth, and women -- and I didn't like that".<sup>138</sup> Although she went on to argue that women were far from equal in society, or even in the Party, she still saw little good coming from the work of a women's department. She simply perceived that the woman question was not really integrated, or important, to the rest of the Party.

Over the last three decades, the Communist Party had been in the vanguard of new thinking on women's inequality and women's emancipation. Its loyalty to the version of socialism found in the USSR and to one interpretation of Marxism had both inspired, but sometimes limited, its approach to the woman question. To its credit, it had constantly emphasized women's exploitation in the workplace, and demanded women's economic equality and independence, to be predicated on reforms like equal pay, day care and maternity pay. Yet, it had never come to terms with women's need for reproductive rights, nor with the complexities of sexual politics and patriarchal culture that existed within the Left. The Party grappled with the problems of housewives and was committed -- albeit sometimes in a confused way -- to their emancipation. Yet, familial relationships and gender roles remained largely unquestioned and intact within the movement, just as they had in the Soviet Union. The Party carried these assets, as well as its limitations, through the 1940's into the next decade. By the mid-1950's, some Party members were

badly disappointed with the limited growth of the Canadian Congress of Women. Some women felt it was too small, and isolated from the masses of Canadian women; some wanted it disbanded in favour of community work; and others thought it could be saved.<sup>139</sup> This debate was a foreshadowing of Communists' inability to deal effectively with the next decade of feminists. In the 1950's, in the aftermath of the crippling effects of anti-communism and the explosion and exodus after the 20th Congress, a decimated Party would be confronted by a major challenge to its long-time claim to leadership on the woman question. A new wave of feminists and socialists would cast a critical eye on the Party's stance on women's issues -- and indeed, on the very history of the Party itself.

## Footnotes: Chapter 6

- 1 Only a month before, U.S. Communist Party leader Earl Browder had said: "there is as much chance of a Russo-German agreement as of Earl Browder being elected President of the Chamber of Commerce". Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, The American Communist Party (Boston, 1957), p. 387.
- 2 Gerry Van Hauten, Canada's Party of Socialism (Toronto, 1982), p. 133.
- 3 Public Archives of Ontario (PAO), Abella Oral History Collection, Interview of Elaine Mitchell with Helen Paulin, Sept. 21, 1972.
- 4 Gerry Van Hauten, Canada's Party of Socialism, p. 134.
- 5 Tim Buck, Thirty Years (Toronto, 1952), p. 164. See also Norman Penner, The Canadian Left (Toronto, 1977), p. 99.
- 6 Quoted in Marvin Gandall, "Do We Need a Security Service?", Canadian Dimension, Vol. 17, no. 6, p. 7.
- 7 Interview with Lil Bochner, Sept., 1980.
- 8 Interview with Bill and Elsie Beeching, Nov. 12, 1980.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 University of Toronto (U of T), Thomas Fisher Rare Books Room, Kenny Collection (hereafter Kenny Collection), Box 41, Becky Buhay material.
- 11 Public Archives of Canada (PAC), Communist Party of Canada Collection (CPC Collection), MG 28 IV 4, Vol. 39, Annie Buller's prison notebooks, 1942. Draft of a letter to William Lyon Mackenzie King.
- 12 Kathleen and William Repka, eds. Dangerous Patriots (Vancouver 1982).
- 13 Public Archives of Canada (PAC), J.L. Cohen Papers, MG 30 A94 Vol. 31, Gladys Macdonald file.
- 14 Archives Board of Saskatchewan (ABS), Violet MacNaughten Papers, A-1, file E-40.
- 15 K. and W. Repka, eds., Dangerous Patriots, p. 38.
- 16 Ibid., p. 98.
- 17 The wives committee described by Mary Prokop is different from the one described by Peggy Dennis in her account of the American wives committee to aid the Smith Act victims. In Peggy Dennis, Autobiography of an American Communist (Berkeley, 1977), Dennis

remembered: "I drew little personal solace from this work...we women did not work well together...we were not equipped to help each other because we had no experience in the Party to meet each other as individuals, only in impersonal political concepts", p. 215. Dennis' analysis offers a more in-depth -- and critical -- view of Party life than does Prokop's. However, her description of the wives committee is also particular to U.S. history, and to Dennis' high profile in the U.S. Party (which may explain her alienation from the other women). Perhaps the experience of rank-and-file women like Prokop was quite different. It is true, however, that in interviews, Communist women often skirt over their personal or emotional reactions to events, instead stressing a 'political' analysis of the situation.

- 18 Mary Prokop quoted in K. and W. Repka, Dangerous Patriots, p. 101. Many women, Prokop says, simply eluded these insurance agents. Prokop simply avoided being home. Rose Penner apparently chased the insurance agent away with a broom.
- 19 K. and W. Repka, Dangerous Patriots, p. 103.
- 20 Ibid., In the 1940 municipal election Joe Forkin had 3,012 votes and Rose Penner 3,200 votes. In the April 1941 provincial election Bill Kardash won with 5,889 votes. In the 1941 municipal election Joe Forkin took over Jacob Penner's aldermanic seat with 3,632 votes. pp. 107-110.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 108-109.
- 22 The Tribune, April 12, 1941.
- 23 Gerry Van Hauten, Canada's Party of Socialism, p. 140.
- 24 Saskatoon Star Phoenix, March 21, 1940.
- 25 In the 1930's, in local constituencies, the relationship between CCFers and CPCers was sometimes different than the hostility which governed the national and provincial parties. Local activists sometimes did not understand or support the CCF's 'no cooperation' policy. See Peter Sinclair, "The Saskatchewan CCF and the C.P.", Saskatchewan History, Vol. XXVI, no. 1, (Winter, 1973).
- 26 Social Credit agreed not to run against Douglas if a similar concession to Social Credit was made in another constituency. See Archives Board of Saskatchewan, (ABS), CCF Papers, A. Vockeroth to George Williams, Dec 8, 1938.
- 27 ABS, CCF Papers, B. Aitken to George Williams, Feb. 16, 1940.
- 28 In her campaign speeches, Nielsen would have all the Hansards brought on stage and she would carefully go through them pointing to the one or two innocuous sentences Cameron made during his term.

- 29 ABS, CCF Papers, George Williams to Dorise Nielsen, March 28, 1940.
- 30 ABS, CCF Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Toby Nollett, Feb. 1, 1940.  
"I am a social democrat still ..."
- 31 Personal correspondence. Christine Nielsen to Joan Sangster,  
January 26, 1984.
- 32 Public Archives of Canada (PAC), Nicholson Papers, MG 27 III C26,  
Vol. 1, Dorise Nielsen to A.M. Nicholson, Sept. 24, 1975.
- 33 Canada, House of Commons, Hansard, May 4, 1944, p. 2632.
- 34 Dorise Nielsen, New Worlds for Women (Toronto, 1944), p. 17.
- 35 Interview with Sophia Dixon, November 4, 1980.
- 36 ABS, Violet MacNaughton Papers, file D-53, Nielsen to MacNaughton,  
n.d. (Nielsen wrote under the pen name of Judy O'Grady).
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 PAC, Nicholson Papers, Nielsen to Nicholson, Sept. 24, 1975.
- 39 Georgina Taylor, "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How  
Saskatchewan Women Reconciled Their Political Activities for the CCF  
with Traditional Roles for Women" (M.A. University of Saskatoon,  
1983).
- 40 See Chapter IV for discussion of women, childcare and political  
activity in the early CCF. It is difficult to draw precise  
conclusions about the relationship between women's life cycle and  
their political activism. In interviews, many women agreed that it  
was more difficult for women with young and growing children to be  
active than it was for single, or older women. Some interviewees,  
like Sophia Dixon, pulled back from politics in this period of their  
lives. (In Dixon's case, she was teaching all her children in the  
home as they didn't attend school). However, a significant number  
of interviewees, who were on women's committees, or worked as local  
organizers or educators, did find ways to cope with childcare and  
continued to be active when they had children. I think this  
indicates, in part, that my interview 'sample' is somewhat biased,  
for it tends to represent women at the middle and low leadership  
level of the Party, rather than the rank-and-file.
- 41 ABS, MacNaughton Papers, Nielsen to MacNaughton, Sept. 14, 1943.
- 42 William Beeching and Phyllis Clarke, eds., Yours in the Struggle ...  
The Reminiscences of Tim Buck (Toronto, 1977). Tim Buck described a  
secret audience with Mitch Hepburn while Buck was still officially  
'in hiding'. The government also used the CPC to help it recruit  
European emigrants who could work behind Nazi lines, pp. 302-307.
- 43 Ibid., pp. 316-317.



- 44 Merrily Weisbord, The Strangest Dream (Toronto, 1983), p. 125.
- 45 Communist Party of Canada Papers, Communist Party of Canada Head Office, 1943 National Convention.
- 46 The Tribune, Sept. 18, 1943.
- 47 See Ruth Pierson, "Women's Emancipation and the Recruitment of Women into the Labour Force in World War II", CHAR, (1976).
- 48 Yvonne Mathews-Klein, "How They Saw Us", Atlantis, Vol. 4, no. 2, (Spring, 1979).
- 49 Gail C. Brandt, "Pigeon-holed and Forgotten: The Work of the Subcommittee on the Post-War Problems of Women, 1943", Social History/Histoire Sociale, Vol. XV, no. 29 (May 1982).
- 50 A. Landy, Marxism and the Woman Question (Toronto 1943).
- 51 University of British Columbia Archives, Canadian Congress of Labour Convention Proceedings, 1944.
- 52 Pacific Tribune, Feb. 3, 1945.
- 53 United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union Auxiliary Tapes. In private possession of Susan Radosovic (hereafter, UFAWU Tapes). Interview with Jean Bird, n.d.
- 54 U of T, Kenny Collection, Box 13, Ontario LPP Convention, 1945.
- 55 Annie Buller in National Affairs Monthly, Vol. 2, no. 1, Jan. 1945. For a later commentator on women's war experiences, Katy LeRoutegel, "Cats, Mothers and NutTappers", Branching Out, (July/August 1977).
- 56 Very little has been written on Canadian women and the end of war production. Gail Brandt's "Pigeon-holed and Forgotten" argues, on the basis of a 1943 government questionnaire to women workers, that most women accepted or desired a return to the home. This is supported by American historian Alice Kessler-Harris in Out to Work (New York, 1982), p. 294. Kessler-Harris says few women, or trade unionists, openly challenged the idea that women would be replaced by veterans. Yet, in another work on the U.S., Nancy Gabin, "Women Workers and the UAW in the Post-World War II Period", Labor History, Vol. 21, no. 1, (Winter, 1979/80), states that UAW women fought to keep their jobs and make their seniority meaningful, even though male workers, including trade union activists, didn't care, or even worked against their cause. I have yet to find any similar fights by Canadian women to retain their war-time jobs.
- 57 Alice Kessler-Harris, Out to Work (New York, 1982), p. 291.
- 58 Yet, by the 1960's, the UE's interest in women's concerns -- at least in some locals -- was faltering or minimal. In a recent critical view of one UE local, Stan Gray, "Sharing the Shop Floor",

Canadian Dimension, Vol. 19, no. 2, argues that union leaders relied on references to past initiatives to 'prove' their interest in women's equality and at the same time allowed blatant discrimination, such as separate seniority lists, to exist. This situation may be characteristic of only this one UE local. However, it may also be seen, more generally, as a long-term consequence of the CPC's union initiatives in the 1930's and 1940's. Party efforts were often concentrated on union organizing, but seldom on challenging the sexual division of labour within an industry or the ideal of a male breadwinner. See Chapter V.

- 59 Although Madeleine Parent may not have been an official member, she was sympathetic to the Communists.
- 60 Many CCFers were also invited in certain OPWU organizing efforts.
- 61 UFAWU Auxiliary tapes, Interview with Jean Pritchett, n.d.
- 62 Interview with Claire Culhane, Dec. 2, 1980.
- 63 National Affairs Monthly, January, 1945.
- 64 UFAWU Auxiliary tapes. Interview with Mickey Beagle, n.d.
- 65 Dorise Nielsen, New Worlds for Women (Toronto, 1944), p. 110.
- 66 U of T, Kenny Collection, Box 57, Becky Buhay, "Women in the Struggle for Peace and Socialism".
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 John Weaver, Hamilton: An Illustrated History (Toronto, 1982), p. 157.
- 70 U of T, Kenny Collection, Box 26, A.E. Smith to May Birchard, Jan. 5, 1947. "There was no need to say 'I am not a Communist' ... but I'm sorry to see you defeated ... and the manner in which you contributed to it".
- 71 Hazel Wigdor was not defeated in 1948; she simply didn't run. Another LPPer, Sam Walsh ran in her place and was elected, but in 1951 he too was defeated.
- 72 Winnipeg School Board Division # 1 Administration, School Board Minutes, January 13, 1948 and June 1, 1948. Winnipeg Free Press Oct. 27, 1947 in its lead editorial said "We express general satisfaction with the prospect of electing a woman to Council ... and a minimum of regret if Mrs. Chunn, a communist member of the School Board fails ... to obtain ... election. A following editorial urged Communists like "Zuken, Penner and Forkin" to go live in the Soviet Union.

- 73 Interview with Josephine Gehl, Nov. 11, 1980.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Municipal History Society of Vancouver, Your Worship, Members of Council: Highlights from Reform Movements in the Lower Mainland (Vancouver, 1980), p. 15.
- 76 Ibid.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Interview with Lillian Marcus, Sept. 3, 1980.
- 79 The Canadian Tribune, Dec. 27, 1947.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 Public Archives of Canada, CPC Collection, MG IV 4, Vol. 1 and 2. The offerings given at week-end schools, National schools and lists of lectures all reveal a paucity, or absence of material on the woman question. This certainly reinforces the charge, made by LPP women at the time, that the woman question was segregated from more 'important' Party work. Yet, a substantial number of students at Party schools were women. Becky Buhay estimated, in 1947, that 40% of Party school students were women. See U of T, Kenny Collection, Box 3, 1947 Convention. But judging from one set of attendance records found in the CPC papers at the PAC, this estimate seems a little high.
- 82 Pacific Tribune, Dec. 17, 1948.
- 83 Ibid.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 Interview with Josephine Gehl, Nov. 11, 1980.
- 88 U of T, Kenny Collection, Vol. 2, Proceedings of the 1948 Convention.
- 89 Ibid.
- 90 Interview with Claire Culhane, Dec. 2, 1980.
- 91 Ibid.
- 92 U of T, Kenny Collection, Box 9, Discussion of Panel on Work Among Women, n.d. This appears to be an educational forum, or a talk at a Party school.

- 93 Ibid.
- 94 U of T, Kenny Collection, Box 9, National Executive Committee Meeting of the LLP, Aug. 17, 1945.
- 95 Elsa Dixler, "The Woman Question: Women and the American Communist Party, 1929-41" (Ph.D. Yale University, 1974), p. 130.
- 96 Mary Inman quoted in Elsa Dixler, p. 132.
- 97 For examples of the recent debate see Bonnie Fox, ed., Hidden in the Household (Toronto, 1980). A summary of the Marxist debate since the 1960's is Eva Kaluzynska, "Wiping the Floor with Theory: A Survey of Writings on Housework", Feminist Review, Vol. 6, (1980).
- 98 A. Landy, Marxism and the Woman Question (Toronto, 1943), p. 61.
- 99 Ibid., p. 7.
- 100 Ibid., p. 7. Landy's italics.
- 101 Ibid., p. 46.
- 102 Ibid., p. 46.
- 103 Ibid., p. 37. Moreover, his contention that Marxists defended the family is not entirely true. Marx and Engels, as well as later Marxists, had treated the family -- especially the bourgeois family -- critically.
- 104 U of T, Kenny Collection, Box 57, Becky Buhay, "Woman in the Fight for Peace and Socialism", p. 11.
- 105 U of T, Kenny Collection, Box 9, National Women's Commission, "Notes for International Women's Day", by Dorise Nielsen, Feb. 28, 1948.
- 106 A. Landy, Marxism and the Woman Question, p. 46.
- 107 In an account of her life in the Australian Communist Party, one woman remembered the new Housewives Association of the post-war period: "We were urged, all thirty of the most advanced of us, by a member of the Central Committee, to storm Parliament House with our grievances ... We were reminded of the feats of the French miners' wives, who, in the wave ... of mass strikes, detrousured and publicly humiliated a mine manager". Daphne Gollan, "The Memoirs of Cleopatra Sweatfigure", in Elizabeth Windschuttle, eds., Women, Class and History (Melbourne, 1980), p. 327.
- 108 National Housewives Consumer Association, Roll Back Prices (Winnipeg, 1947).
- 109 The Canadian Tribune, June 10, 1947.

- 110 Ibid.
- 111 Interview with Bill and Elsie Beeching, Nov. 12, 1980.
- 112 PAC, King Papers, MC 26 J4, Vol. 439, Letter from A. Heeney to Rae Lucock, April 6, 1948, and Internal Memo from J.W.P. to P.M., June 21, 1948.
- 113 Bryan Palmer, Working-Class Experience (Toronto and Vancouver, 1983), p. 189.
- 114 Private correspondence, Margery Ferguson to Joan Sangster, Nov. 3, 1983.
- 115 Ibid.
- 116 Interview with Mona Morgan, July 20, 1981.
- 117 Interview with Hanna Anderson, Oct. 8, 1980; Interview with Mickey Murray, Oct. 9, 1980. Murray added that Anderson took five strikers into her very small house, to the displeasure of her overcrowded family.
- 118 Private correspondence, M. Ferguson to Joan Sangster, Nov. 3, 1983.
- 119 CPC Papers, Communist Party National Headquarters, 1946 Convention.
- 120 Becky Buhay, "Woman in the Fight for Peace and Socialism".
- 121 PAC, CPC Collection, Vol. 9, All Canadian Conference of Women, March 9, 10, 1951.
- 122 Ibid.
- 123 Norman Penner, The Canadian Left, p. 105.
- 124 Ibid., pp. 105-108.
- 125 PAC, Frank and Libbie Park Papers, MG 31 K9, Vol. 21, WIDF Conference, Moscow, 1949.
- 126 Ibid.
- 127 Ibid.
- 128 Ibid.
- 129 U of T, Kenny Collection, Box 53, Woman's Voice, Vol. 2, no. 4, (Sept. 1950).
- 130 Pacific Tribune, May 6, 1949.
- 131 Interview with Mary Kardash, Oct. 20, 1980.

- 132 Interview with Lillian Marcus, Sept. 3, 1980.
- 133 Interview with Bill and Elsie Beeching, Nov. 12, 1980.
- 134 Amy Swerdlow, "Ladies Day at the Capitol: Women Strike for Peace versus the HUAC", Feminist Studies, Vol. 8, no. 3, (Fall, 1982), p. 514.
- 135 Ibid., p. 515.
- 136 A. Landy, Marxism and the Woman Question, pp. 46-47.
- 137 Interview with Josephine Gehl, Nov. 11, 1980.
- 138 Interview with S.S.
- 139 U of T, Kenny Collection, Box 45, "Assessment of Work Among Women", n.d. This was probably written in the mid-1950's.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE CCF TACKLES THE WOMAN QUESTION

Like the CPC, the CCF experienced a re-thinking of the woman question during the war and post-war years. Prompted by altered war-time roles for women, and urged by women within the Party to acknowledge and act on women's inequality, the CCF considered--in some provinces for the first time--what a policy on women's rights would look like. Although the ensuing debate on women's rights was in no way a major priority of the CCF, it did assume some increased significance, as compared to the 1930's, on the Party's agenda.

A renewed interest in the organization of women was also reflected in the awakening impulse of Party women to set up provincial women's committees, and even a national women's committee. Although the latter enjoyed a tenuous and short life, many provincial women's committees expanded their constituency in the late 1940's, and they looked forward optimistically to an enlarged role for women in the Party. Most of these committees were at least peripherally concerned with employment issues, but their primary goals came to be the sensitization of housewives to issues like health care, education, and particularly, rising prices.

Despite their optimism, however, the 1950's proved to be a decade of retrenchment and reaction, temporarily halting the expansion of socialist and feminist organization. In many areas of the country the Party felt besieged by reaction, and internal debates raged over whether to modify or defend the CCF's historic socialist principles. By mid-decade, women's committees had suffered some setbacks and the discussion of women's issues faded, partly because the era of the 'feminine mystique',



with its affluence, high birth rate, and retreat to the home was a hostile environment for socialist-feminists, but also because the Party, never convinced of the urgency of women's issues, failed to pursue and defend a radical Reconstruction policy on women's rights.

(i)

The war-time and post-war interest in a policy on women's rights, and the emergence of provincial women's committees coincided with a period of optimism for the Party's fortunes in Canadian political life. Although a pacifist minority within the Party was deeply disturbed by the CCF's support for Canada's declaration of war in 1939, these people did not attempt to leave, or disrupt Party life. Mildred Fahrni, for example, retreated from Vancouver and worked with Japanese internees at the Slocan detainment camp; Gertrude Telford maintained her CCF work but was not a vociferous advocate of the war effort; and Elizabeth Kerr wrote, with veiled cynicism in her column, comparing contemporary manifestations of patriotism to the misguided Germanophobia of World War I, but she too stopped short of open rebellion against Party policy.

The federal Party developed a policy of critical support for the war effort. While it came to accept sending troops overseas, it also urged the government to conscript wealth, to curb profiteering, to extend collective bargaining rights to labour, and to enact social welfare legislation. This was a popular platform for many working-class and middle-class Canadians who supported the war, but who were suspicious of the continuing exploitation of workers by capital and who wanted a meaningful social Reconstruction after the war. Unhampered, as the Communists were, by government harassment, the CCF soon experienced growth and

increasing popularity. A number of electoral gains made during the war years heightened the Party's anticipation of a political breakthrough in the near future: in 1942, the York South electorate chose a socialist, Joe Noseworthy, over the leader of the Opposition, Arthur Meighen; in 1943, the Ontario CCF became the official opposition; and in 1944 the Saskatchewan CCF swept to power.<sup>1</sup> These victories were tempered by the 1945 debacle in Ontario, the defeat that same year of Members like Jamieson, Steeves and MacInnis in B.C., and by the inability of the Alberta and Manitoba Parties to make major electoral breakthroughs. Nonetheless, by the late 1940's, many CCFers still felt, as one Manitoban activist did, that "we ...were going somewhere and that we might even see power one day."<sup>2</sup> In the late 1940's, most provinces still had expanding memberships, and a larger federal treasury allowed a more sophisticated operation, with paid researchers and organizers. Moreover, the CCF was now making significant inroads into the labour movement. CCF trade unionists had been associated with important strikes in Kirkland Lake, Windsor and Hamilton, and they were slowly but surely winning their fight to oust Communists from the Canadian Congress of Labour and dominate the union movement.

Accompanying the rising hopes of the Party was a temporary 'revolution' in the status of Canadian women. For the first time in years--since the last war to be exact--women were courted and considered by government and industry. Employment prospects for women opened up, wages climbed, and a well-organized propaganda campaign assured women that they were equal to men in their skills and talents.<sup>3</sup> While most of this propaganda also stressed that women's incursion into non-traditional work was a temporary expedient, it still had an effect on

women's expectations, as some surveys revealed women's desire to hold on to their well-paying jobs after the war.<sup>4</sup> The temporary provision, at least in some provinces, of day nurseries, the homage paid to women's equal capabilities, and some public debate about economic discrimination against women all heightened the feeling of many CCF women that a change in women's status was now at least in the realm of the possible. As one woman commented in the CCF press as early as 1941: "after letting us all see there is nothing a country cannot afford in time of war, men will never again be able to convince women that there is anything peace cannot afford."<sup>5</sup>

Women's war work and the war-time "rhetoric of equality"<sup>6</sup> sparked new interest in the question of women's status in Canadian society, and as we have seen with the CPC, offered socialists a golden opportunity to press for the economic and social emancipation of women. Similarly, within the CCF, the war stimulated new discussion of women's issues and their role in political life. Russia's entry into the war as an ally may also have stimulated thought on women's issues, as after 1942, some CCF papers carried positive articles discussing women's 'equal' role in Soviet industry and the Red Army, and describing how the USSR's planned economy had provided equal job opportunities, equal pay, creches and maternity care.

In 1942-43, as the major influx of women into the labour force was underway, the CCF press expressed a growing concern for women war workers. CCF provincial newspapers carried articles encouraging women's participation in war production, initiating demands for equal pay, and urging expanded social services, like day nurseries, for women workers. While some of these articles may have been intended, in part, to aid the

war effort--just as the Communists' platform on women was calculated to bolster the Allies' cause--they were also designed to make a case for needed labour and social reforms. Even on the prairies, where few war industries were located, the CCF newspapers discussed women's new role in the labour force. The Alberta women's columnist lamented the soon-to-end "honeymoon for women workers...who after the war will be pushed back to jobs at Woolworths,"<sup>7</sup> and in the Saskatchewan Commonwealth, one author implored fellow socialists to promote, in the post-war period, the war-time tolerance for married women workers. In British Columbia, the Federationist gave expanded coverage to issues confronting women workers, and in 1945, in a lead editorial (a spot rarely assigned to women's issues) entitled 'Equality for Women', the paper outlined the need for a Reconstruction policy of planned employment for "all men and women, including equal pay for women".<sup>8</sup>

In British Columbia, the three female Members of the Legislature, particularly Laura Jamieson, had for many years been concerned with women's employment issues. Jamieson tried to bring sexual discrimination to public attention, and promote reforms to correct women's lower economic status. In her reply to the budget speech in 1942, for instance, she spent considerable time exposing the meagre wages and limited living conditions of women in white collar ghettos:

In an exploiting society such as ours where the workers never get the full return for their labours, the weaker groups naturally suffer most. Women, as workers, are in a weaker position even than men. In the war industries they have made gains; but the promise of equal pay for equal work has not been lived up to...Another group of women are retail clerks...who may earn \$11.40 a week after deductions...I ask you, how is she to live?<sup>9</sup>

Jamieson urged legislation, on the New Zealand model, requiring the

unionization of all workers, as a remedy to this "perpetual exploitation of...women workers".<sup>10</sup> She then attacked the government for its refusal to provide money for day nurseries for women war workers. Government members had charged that there were too few women involved and that such women shouldn't be "neglecting their homes"<sup>11</sup> anyway. Jamieson inquired why criticisms were not made of women "who go to their golf clubs all day, leaving their children in the charge of quite poorly trained domestics, girls who in the depression years they could get for \$20., \$15., or \$10. I have noticed," she concluded sardonically, "that women who talk most against mothers working in industry seem to feel that it has some connection with the difficulty of getting cheap domestic labour".<sup>12</sup>

Unfortunately, Jamieson's commitment to working women did not permeate the Party. Compared to the 1930's, there was an increasing awareness of women's issues, but discussion of women's status and remedies for women's emancipation still occupied a small segment of the CCF press and CCF politics. The war-time interest in women's status, however, did encourage some CCF women to ask pointed questions of their Party. What is to be our view of women's role in post-war society, they queried, and should the CCF have a formalized platform on women's rights?

(ii)

In this debate on women and Reconstruction which began to emerge in the CCF press, most writers agreed that the war would unalterably change women's consciousness. Women, suggested one article in the Saskatchewan Commonwealth, have found "new confidence and also awareness of conditions, like wages, so that even those who go back to their homes

will carry a broadened interest in affairs outside the home. The war," she concluded optimistically, "has taught us new ways of using women's energy".<sup>13</sup> Her words might have been uttered by those feminists who gathered twenty-five years earlier for Canada's War Conference for Women. At that 1918 meeting, the women's movement agreed that, given women's role in the war effort, they could no longer be ignored by the government. Their optimism, of course, was dampened in the 1920's. Like the feminists during World War I, the CCF press of the 1940's also prophesied that women would take up new political responsibilities as a result of their role in the war. "Women must become a political force in the post-war world," wrote Margaret Williams in the Saskatchewan Commonwealth, "They must train themselves for public life, learn about social conditions, become advocates of change, and realize that the war is a 'revolution' and bold policies must follow it".<sup>14</sup>

Yet, beyond some of these generalizations, there was not agreement on exactly what women's role in post-war society would be. Indeed, the debate which occurred was often unfocused and wide-ranging, and though some common themes can be discerned, the most important fact may simply be that such a debate over women's status--a relatively new phenomenon in the Party--occurred at all. What most discussion of women's post-war options did agree on was the delineation of two major choices for women: continued employment or a return to homemaking. And while it was sometimes argued that a place had to be made for women in the labour force, the majority of writers stressed that women would prefer to return to the home. Although these two options were not always presented as antithetical, and some writers stressed that a woman should be free to choose one or both options, there was a strong emphasis on

woman's role as homemaker, and an implicit assumption that this choice would preclude work outside the home.<sup>15</sup>

Even the minority who were concerned with the second option, women's wage work, did not always agree, how women were to be best integrated into the workforce. The majority view was the one taken by Grace MacInnis, and indeed by the Liberal government's sub-committee on women and Reconstruction, that women should be participants in a general Reconstruction plan of full employment, rather than objects of 'special treatment'.<sup>16</sup> Despite this classic socialist belief in egalitarianism and fear of tokenistic palliatives for the female worker, MacInnis also suspected that women might be ignored as partners in Reconstruction schemes. As she observed in a radio broadcast in 1943:

Most post-war blueprints ignore the status of women. The assumption is that women will return to the home; for them, is there no post-war planning? Women in the services, in industry have become persons in the full sense of the word. The post-war world will have to cope with more women wanting work outside the home...and for that reason, we need more part-time work, and social services...Women should be entitled to follow any calling they chose.<sup>17</sup>

CCF women did not, however, oppose government demobilization and retraining schemes which perpetuated women's relegation to 'feminine' low-paying job ghettos. At the time, access to non-traditional work and a direct challenge to the sexual division of labour were not part of the socialist agenda. In sum, all the contradictions had not been ironed out of CCF ideas on Reconstruction and the woman worker. Although most CCFers in principle upheld the idea of an overall policy of full employment and no 'special treatment', they usually conceded that, in practice, women made up a distinct interest group, more likely to suffer economic discrimination, and thus requiring some kind of 'special treatment' after all.

While the CCF showed some new interest in women wage earners, the dominant theme in the discussion of women and Reconstruction in CCF publications was woman's role as homemaker. It was assumed that, after the war, "women will continue to find their greatest happiness, and the most important usefulness in the home sphere".<sup>18</sup> Little criticism was made of this assumption, an indication that, underneath the war-time fascination with Rosie the Riveter, lay a widespread acceptance of the 'temporary expediency' argument justifying women's war work. A few voices of protest were heard: in the New Commonwealth, one woman advanced the radical idea that, until domestic labour was no longer equated with women, sexual equality was impossible,<sup>19</sup> and in B.C., George Weaver warned of the dangers of accepting the supposedly progressive Beveridge Report of Britain, with its assumption that most women in the post-war world would be homemakers. In his critique of Beveridge, Weaver argued that "there is no place for women in post-war plans...it is assumed they will go back to the kitchen...[and] an age-old assumption by both sexes of male dominance exists in these plans".<sup>20</sup> Weaver's ideas were insightful, but they did not represent mainstream views within the movement. More often, woman's role as homemaker was portrayed as inevitable and desirable.

Housewives, however, were not to be isolated from politics. Rather, now that women's war work had proven their capabilities, they could use their new knowledge and confidence to become the 'housekeepers' of the post-war world. Their political interests, it was believed, would be largely shaped by a desire for "happy and cooperative homes"<sup>21</sup>; thus, child care, health care, inflation and housing were seen as key issues for women. And on the prairies, electrification and improved social



services were added as primary concerns. In the CCF press, women were urged to emulate their socialist sisters in Australia, who had succeeded in transforming some of their maternal concerns into public policy: "Australian [women] socialists concerned with the advance of the race... helped to gain a real housing plan, child welfare and health measures... and all these are very close to the thoughts of women".<sup>22</sup> "Women can contribute to politics through their roles as mothers and socializers," wrote Margaret Williams in the Saskatchewan Commonwealth, "and what kind of world do they want?...one enriched by a true vision of a motherhood".<sup>23</sup> And in Ontario, a radio broadcast designed to sell the CCF's Reconstruction policy to women reminded the listeners that politics:

Is choosing a government which will give us a chance at a good and happy home, which concerns mothers and housewives just as much as men, and perhaps even more so. What do women want? A nice home, a job for the breadwinner, education for her children, security for old age and sickness and prices at a reasonable level. On these things the old Parties have broken their promises, but the answer is not to run away from politics.<sup>24</sup>

The answer, of course, was to vote CCF, and to make sure that homemaking did not entail a retreat from politics, but was an avenue to political involvement.

Many of these ideas had been themes in the decade of 'militant mothering'. One repeated assumption, for example, was the fear that women were often isolated from political discussion, and more apathetic than men. "Some women say politics is for men", wrote the women's columnist in the Saskatchewan Commonwealth, "but Sister, you should be interested because this is your life being decided--lives are deeply affected by government...for example, taxes affect the home".<sup>25</sup> And in a telling reference to her maternal feminist foremothers, the author ended by linking the destiny of CCF women to that of their suffragist ancestors:

"Don't forget how hard women had to fight for the vote. We must not fail these trail blazers now!"<sup>26</sup> In fact, many of the cartoons adorning CCF election pamphlets during the war years used the same symbol of the suffragists--the broom. These pamphlets, invariably titled something like 'But I'm not interested in politics' demonstrated how women might exert pressure to change government policies affecting their homes. They showed homemakers, with broom in hand, sweeping away the evils of "disease, delinquency and poverty",<sup>27</sup> just as an earlier generation of women reformers had swept away "corruption, graft, the liquor interests".<sup>28</sup>

Although the Party's Reconstruction literature spoke positively of women's enlarged role in post-war politics, the Party had few concrete proposals for the reform of women's status. As the war neared an end, some CCF women began to demand such a policy. In 1944, Harriet Forsey challenged the CCF to act, in an article in the Canadian Forum entitled 'Will Women Win the Peace?' One of Forsey's contentions was that any advancement towards equality after the war would depend on the powers which controlled Canadian economic life, and she feared that, with a government controlled by capitalists, women would be pushed out of work, a fact "justified with all the appeals to the moral and religious sanctions of the past, articulated through women's magazines, ads, stories and articles".<sup>29</sup> She urged the CCF to formulate a socialist policy on the equality of women. "If this has already been done," she added, "it has not been sufficiently publicized."<sup>30</sup> Forsey's article, with its references to women in the professions and to women's right to choose a career, reflected some of the middle-class assumptions and biases which had long been present in the ranks of the CCF. Nonetheless, she did make a forceful feminist argument for women's right to work, and she articulated an

urgent appeal for the Party to take some action on the woman question.

Forsey's article was followed by similar requests in the CCF press. In Ontario, a woman wrote to the editor of the Commonwealth's women's page, angrily asking "what is the CCF doing about women and jobs... [for] women are losing them and taking wage cuts". After assuring the editor she was "not a feminist on a rampage for women's rights", the author proceeded to offer a probing feminist analysis of women's second-class status in society. She pleaded with the Party to reject the philosophy of "economic scarcity" being used to exclude women from the workforce, and to publicly state that "no part of society should be confined to dishes, diapers and dusting" as women were.<sup>31</sup> And another correspondent to the Ontario paper even suggested that, while women's political apathy was a fact, "for women rank-and-filers accept the seniority of men and are passive by conditioning", it might disappear if the Party produced evidence of its concern for women's problems, including their equal right to a job.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, it was not only in Ontario, where war industry had been concentrated, that the need for a policy on women was expressed. In Alberta, the question was posed in terms of what rural women wanted in the Party platform, and in Manitoba, CCF women asked for a statement on equal pay. In B.C., one Party member raised the question in a long contribution to the Federationist, in which she defended a resolution on women soon to be presented to the 1946 federal convention. She advised Party members to support the resolution on women's rights, putting aside the CCF custom of "making no distinction on the basis of sex" in favour of the recognition that women were a "functional group, needing special attention like farmers or trade unionists. Even within our movement," she gently reminded her colleagues, "women are relegated to auxiliary

work and women with families find it hard to be active". Outside the movement, she concluded, "even more action is needed to rectify women's inequality, including better educational opportunities and an end to discrimination in the job market".<sup>33</sup>

Some provincial councils and conventions did address the concerns expressed by these women, and a more detailed discussion of their replies will be given in the section on provincial Women's Committees. At the federal level, the resolution mentioned in the previous paragraph, presented to the National Convention by the Ontario Provincial Council in 1946, became an issue of contention not only during, but also after, the convention. The ensuing controversy reflected some of the major conflicts and debates surrounding the attempts by socialist-feminists to have a formal policy on women's equality enunciated by the Party.

In 1942 and 1944, the one or two resolutions on women's equality presented to the National Convention were dealt with rather hastily; one was rejected because "such matters are subsumed under the [Regina] Manifesto".<sup>34</sup> But in 1946, the issue could no longer be ignored, and more time was given to a resolution from the Ontario Council, which asked the federal Party to develop a comprehensive policy on women, including:

1. Equal opportunities with men for training for all occupations
2. Equal access with men to all occupations
3. Equal pay for equal work
4. Discontinuance of the present practice of dismissing married women or refusing them jobs
5. Emancipation of the housewife...
6. Protection of household workers...
7. The setting up of a Women's Bureau...<sup>35</sup>

After the Convention, the National Council left the matter with the federal Research Secretary, Lorne Ingle, for, as he confided in a letter, "the National Council meeting did not have time to consider the subject;

it will do so at the summer Council meeting".<sup>36</sup>

Although there was some minor disagreement about the usefulness of a federal statement on women, as opposed to CCF women in each province preparing briefs, CCF women across Canada were eager to cooperate with Ingle, and many sent suggestions for policy development. When he had prepared a draft statement, he circulated it to a list of well-known CCF women, some of whom sent more suggestions back to the Research Secretary. Ingle seemed surprised at the critical responses he received. After digesting some of these letters he grumbled that, "the Toronto group is quite critical of the brief. I personally feel research on this kind of subject by national office is not nearly as useful as research on some other subjects and that research can better be carried on in the provinces."<sup>37</sup> Perhaps, like the National Council, Ingle did not see the issue as particularly pressing, but his critics had good reason to reject his brief.

Ingle's proposals revealed a lack of familiarity with women's issues. A large section of his report, for example, referred to the Royal Commission on Equal Pay set up by the Conservative government in Britain--a study biased in favour of the employers' point of view. Not only was Ingle ill-informed on the equal pay issue, but he was unenthusiastic about measures like maternity leave (a principle of the ILP since 1919) and about schemes like cooperative laundries, which feminists knew would greatly aid working mothers. Moreover, his brief made use of traditional stereotypes--he described the male "head of the family"<sup>38</sup> as the breadwinner--and he was unsympathetic to the idea of married women workers. Claiming that married women had higher levels of absenteeism and were less efficient than men, he stressed that:

No employer should be forced to retain a married woman if she is incompetent. Married women...should not expect special considerations or favours because of home responsibilities...Neither public nor private enterprise can carry on business with incompetent... lazy or abnormally absent employees.<sup>39</sup>

His words shocked and dismayed the Toronto group, which was particularly concerned with the 'problem' of the married woman worker. While Ingle's brief did include some acceptable proposals, like better vocational training for women, it ultimately disappointed many women, not only because of its weakness on employment issues, but also because it failed to explore section 5 of the original resolution, the emancipation of the housewife.

Among the responses to Ingle's brief were two critiques, significant for the outlook they represented within the movement. In her correspondence with Ingle, Grace MacInnis was critical of his failure to cover all the issues outlined in the original resolution, and of his tendency to simply "comment on issues, rather than telling us how to make them CCF policy."<sup>40</sup> She suggested immediate legislation barring sex discrimination and referral of the resolution to the provincial women's committees. In her longer comments, though, MacInnis was critical of the ideas behind the original resolution. "To me," she wrote, "the important phase of this whole question is our attitude...to it. I have tried to emphasize what to me is the most essential--that only in working for social equality shall we get sex equality."<sup>41</sup> MacInnis stressed that a socialist Reconstruction policy would naturally encompass women, as it proposed a "society of full employment, and opportunities for every human being."<sup>42</sup> She agreed with the Dominion Advisory Committee on Reconstruction, which had said that "the post-war problems of women cannot be considered apart

from the post-war problems of society in general", and she ended her report by describing her positive experience at a recent United Nations conference on women, at which "the emphasis was on human rights rather than women's rights".<sup>43</sup>

MacInnis' argument--which had a strong following in the Party--warned against 'special treatment' for women, and emphasized that women's equality would emerge from their inclusion in a socialist policy of 'jobs for all'. Like most socialists of the time, her views were well intentioned, but confused: considering the existing sexual division of labour and women's structural subordination in the labour force, much more than a policy of full employment was required. At the end of her critique, MacInnis repeated another prevalent view in the CCF; she added that women, as mothers and homemakers, were well-fitted to carve out "a new approach to world problems that is essential if humanity is to survive".<sup>44</sup> Although she did not elaborate on this idea, one can assume that MacInnis accepted the views of activists like her mother, who saw a distinct role for women, as mothers, within the socialist movement. MacInnis, like many CCFers before her, did not see any contradiction between this 'special role' for homemakers and mothers and the 'special treatment' women should not receive in the movement. "My reasoning for emphasizing women's integration into a socialist economy, she concluded, "may appear strange...contrasted with the older feminist approach to the problem of women's status."<sup>45</sup>

Echoes of this 'older feminist approach' were found in the reply of the Toronto group to the Ingle brief. Their response was written by a subcommittee of the Toronto CCF Women's Council, which included Alice Loeb (a survivor of the Women's Joint Committee), Edith Fowke, Barbara

Cass-Beggs, Margot Thompson (drawn in because of her expertise on trade union issues), and other CCF women.<sup>46</sup> The group agreed that special legislation was one necessary pre-condition for women's equality. Their brief stressed the economic basis for women's subordination in Canadian society: "economic equality is not the whole solution, but it is a basic step towards full equality in all phases of life."<sup>47</sup> To achieve women's equality, they proposed a number of reforms. They called for vocational training, without emphasis on 'men's' and 'women's' jobs, and they advocated equal pay legislation based on the concept known as the 'rate for the job'. They called for a Women's Bureau in the Department of Labour, special measures to end discrimination against married women workers, and suggested the CCF develop more ideas on the emancipation of the housewife, including cooperative restaurants. Many of their criticisms centred on Ingle's prejudice against married women workers, and they concluded with the hope that in a truly socialist society "it would be possible for women to choose freely whether they wished to work at home or outside the home."<sup>48</sup> From their later research for the Ontario Women's Committee, it is clear that these women sometimes thought in terms of 'careers' for married women, a reflection of their own high education and middle-class status. But they were not strictly bound by their class perspective, for they also made reference to the problems of women in blue and white collar jobs, and they sincerely believed that reforms like equal pay would help to alter the economic inferiority of women who worked out of economic necessity. Sadly, their suggestions about a comprehensive policy on women's equality were never integrated into a formal statement and promoted by the federal Party, in part because many women eventually did turn their energies into work at the



provincial level, and also because of disinterest and lack of leadership at the National level. After Gladys Strum's election in 1945, an attempt was made to set up a National Women's Committee. The Committee met during conventions and corresponded by mail, and for a few years, provided a national network of communication between CCF women. But without funds for research or organizers, and forced to rely on organization by mail, the Committee could not maintain itself. Despite Strum's commitment to the project, she did have other concerns which she had to attend to, and after her defeat, the Committee gradually disappeared. In 1950, Nellie Peterson wrote to Lorne Ingle from Alberta, inquiring about the federal Women's Committee, because, as Nellie explained, "Mrs. Anne Peters...who is president of the Alberta Women's Committee...undertook this work feeling it would meet with response... and [the results have] been less gratifying than anticipated. Particularly disappointing to her," concluded Peterson pointedly, "is the effort on the National level, where there is little indication of life."<sup>49</sup>

(iii)

Aside from the one major attempt in 1946-47 to secure a federal policy on the status of women, much of the debate and activity on women's issues took place at the provincial level. During the 1940's, two changes occurred within the Party vis-a-vis women: first, some women CCFers gained a foothold in the trade union movement, and second, on a much larger scale, women's groups within some of the provinces expanded and attempted to consolidate provincial CCF women's organizations.

The increasing activity of CCF women in the trade union movement coincided with the CCF's political offensive against Communists within

the CIO. In the 1930's, except for one or two organizers like Jean Laing, the CCF had little influence in trade unions with a large female membership, and Communist influence held sway in many garment, textile and small manufacturing union locals. But in the 1940's, CCF women became more visible as organizers and administrators in CCF-led unions like the United Steel Workers (USW), United Packing House Workers (UPHW), Office and Professional Workers (OPW), and the Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU). Although the first two, USW and UPHW, were unions which experienced a large influx of women workers during the war, the best known CCF women--Eileen Tallman, Margot Thompson and Margaret Lazarus--did not begin their careers on the shop floor. Rather, they came to union work through their CCF politics.

Margot Thompson, a University of Toronto graduate who held pacifist views, was working at the university library when she was persuaded by friends to "put her ideas into practice"<sup>50</sup> by joining the CCYM. After becoming actively involved in the CCF, she was offered a job on the UPHW staff, and later with the Steel Workers. She, like Eileen Tallman, became part of the political offensive against Communist influences in the trade union movement. As she remembers, "at that time there was a struggle to prevent the CPC from running the show. The USW had a rugged time in Hamilton with Communist activity. They handpicked their staff [presumably Communists]...Morden Lazarus knew me and that was how I got the job".<sup>51</sup> Thompson eventually worked in publicity for the USW, editing the union paper, Steel Shots, a job never before held by a woman. At the time she was hired, remembers Thompson, there were four women working in an office shared by four unions, and there existed a strong feeling of camaraderie, and dedication to the movement:

Everyone pitched in...if work piled up--whether it was a man or a woman. The esprit de corps was terrific. I could be sent out to leaflet a plant in the morning, or occasionally called at night to help...We were hard-working idealists.<sup>52</sup>

Margaret Lazarus and Eileen Tallman came to their union work by similar routes. Lazarus had been an associate editor of the Ontario Commonwealth, and like Thompson, was put on the Steelworkers staff because of her CCF politics, and her proven writing and organizing talents. Tallman had been active in the Toronto CCYM since its inception, and served as CCYM National Secretary. Already well-known for her CCYM work, and her organization of labour support for various strikes, Tallman was offered a job with the Steelworkers in 1940 as an organizer of bank workers. In 1941 she helped Montreal bank employees mount the first Canadian strike in the banking industry. Although that strike was broken, the next year Tallman helped to successfully unionize workers at the John Inglis Munitions plant in Toronto. She was subsequently sent to the Vancouver USW office to do administrative work, including "training union financial officers, turning out organizational leaflets and launching a paper for the B.C. membership".<sup>53</sup> Her other major task in B.C. was to help rout Communist influence in the union movement. After some success on that count, she returned to Toronto to head the massive Eaton's organizing campaign. Within four years, Tallman and her staff signed up 10,000 members into the RWDSU, but the union was ultimately defeated by the perennial organizer's problem--employee turnover--and by the Company's intense anti-union campaign. Moreover, there were difficulties that arose from operating within outdated labour laws.<sup>54</sup>

While these three women were usually noted as the 'important' CCF women in the union movement, there was a small, but growing number of

unionized women who identified with the CCF, a phenomenon aided by the CCF orientation of many trade union leaders. In their union work, however, women like Thompson and Tallman would not have identified the promotion of women, as women, or 'women's issues' as their primary concerns. In discussing post-war dismissals of women, for instance, Thompson recalls that "some women did resent their lay-off from unionized plants, but there was no organized protest...because it wasn't just women's jobs that were lost, it was jobs period which were endangered...and that's what was important."<sup>55</sup> They were not very interested in women's committees, and they saw their own accomplishments as a sign of the growing acceptance of women of talent within the labour movement. (Or, at least, they were willing to put aside evidence to the contrary, due to their fierce trade union loyalty.)<sup>56</sup>

Yet, their lack of feminist consciousness involved more than personal disinclination and the belief that they could "do a man's job",<sup>57</sup> for their early education in CCF politics of the '30's and their daily involvement in the union movement reinforced an emphasis on class, rather than sexual inequality. At that time, the only women's groups associated with unions were auxiliaries--not an identification mark for these career unionists--and the overwhelming male ethos, socialist egalitarian logic and class-conscious emphasis of the labour movement reinforced their class perspective. For these women, whose immediate political practice immersed them in the struggles of a (largely male) working-class movement, the fight for safe working conditions, basic bargaining rights and decent wages seemed to be the most pressing--and sex-blind--questions.

Moreover, the union movement of the 1940's was not a fertile ground for the discussion of the 'woman question'. Some CCF trade

unionists, as well as politicians, seemed confused about basic women's issues like equal pay and the right of married women to work. Barbara Cass-Beggs remembered that, although many CCF unionists supported the equal pay campaign, "others rather ignored it", and one prominent leader "was less than enthusiastic because he had the idea that if women got equal pay they would end up displacing men who needed jobs."<sup>58</sup> Margot Thompson remembered the "low turn-out and low interest"<sup>59</sup> when she invited a speaker from the U.S. Women's Bureau to address the issue of equal pay in Toronto. Furthermore, in Saskatchewan, equal pay and the right of married women to civil service jobs were not automatically granted by the CCF government.<sup>60</sup>

Even though Margot Thompson and Eileen Tallman were not avowed feminists, their work often revealed a concern for women's equality. Thompson, along with Margaret Lazarus, was responsible for much of the research that underlay the CCF's equal pay bill in Ontario in 1950. Working as a part of a sub-group of the Ontario Women's Committee, they made an exhaustive study of wage rates and equal pay legislation in other countries. Their research was then put into legal terminology by Andrew Brewin and passed on to the Ontario CCF caucus. Unfortunately, recalls Margot Thompson, this CCF bill was defeated "and a couple of years later a Tory equal pay bill was passed, but it had absolutely no teeth in it: it was full of loopholes."<sup>61</sup>

In the Eaton drive, Tallman and the RWDSU made equal pay an important issue. As one organizing pamphlet pointed out, Eaton's employees were paid according to sex, age and marital status, and for women that meant less pay. "Does a landlord charge less rent to a woman? Does the butcher charge less for a pound of beef to a female

customer?",<sup>62</sup> asked the union rhetorically. After the defeat of the union vote, Tallman concluded that the high number of women white collar workers, unfamiliar with, and suspicious of a union, was one reason for the Company's victory. But her pessimism about women's conservatism and lack of union consciousness did not persist in later years, as she witnessed "women's growing participation and militancy in the trade union movement."<sup>63</sup>

Thus, in the 1940's, a small group of CCF women became important organizers in the trade union movement. This represented a step forward from the Party's previous alienation from women workers and altered the overwhelmingly male-dominated CCF trade union leadership. At the same time, the numbers of CCF female unionists remained limited. Influential figures like Tallman, Thompson, and Lazarus were centred in Ontario and perhaps B.C., and these women represented leadership appointments rather than evidence of a rank-and-file upsurge of politicized women. These three women were not self-proclaimed feminists; for they saw class, socialist and union advancement, rather than the more 'sectarian' women's concerns as the important issues. Yet, they performed progressive--even 'feminist'--work in their promotion of concepts like equal pay in a time when such issues did not have widespread social acceptance, and when trade unions were not generally concerned with the special needs of women workers.

(iv)

During the 1940's, the minority of Party women who held leadership and organizational positions gradually swelled, a reflection of men's absence in the forces, women's increasing activism and the positive

influence of altered and widened war-time roles for women. Yet, women still constituted less than 50% of Party membership--one estimate in Ontario stood at 15-30%--and in all provinces women were a minority of the Provincial Council and Provincial Executive. Women usually held anywhere from one-sixth to (at most) one-quarter of Council positions, and as in the '30's, women's election to National Council was even less likely than their election to Provincial Council.

Within the movement, women were still prominent as constituency secretaries, and in publicity, library and educational work. While these tasks were essential to the life of the Party, they did not signify women's equal influence and power in the Party. Moreover, there is evidence that, by the early 1950's, educational work was becoming more routine and, some would argue, less important to the Party. Many CCF reading lists lost their eclectic character and became summaries of CCF pamphlets and books. One activist remembered debates within the provincial education committee over whether to teach "socialist politics... or merely outline skills."<sup>64</sup> And in B.C., the provincial education committee found itself chastised by David Lewis, who demanded, at one National convention, that Eve Smith censor the B.C. literature offerings according to (his) narrow definition of 'politically acceptable' material.<sup>65</sup>

As in the 1930's, a small, but important group of women were used as constituency and election organizers. In Saskatchewan, women like Eva Pfeiffer, Florence Baker, Elsie Gorius and Gladys Strum earned reputations as efficient organizers, and in the 1940's these Saskatchewan women were sometimes sent to help organize campaigns in neighbouring provinces. Women seldom worked as paid, or full-time organizers for the Party, although, at the end of the decade, Nellie Peterson took over Bill Irvine's

job as provincial organizer in Alberta. In 1949, Peterson was elected Vice-President of the Alberta CCF. She had already sat on the Provincial Board, run in elections, and her political skills were well-known in the Party. Yet, even in these circumstances, there was some disapproval of Peterson's election, and as she recounted, the 'problem' was that she was a woman:

When I was elected Vice President, almost immediately there was a move from the floor to have a second V.P. They didn't say it, but it was the first time a woman had got that far. We stopped it when we faced it head-on, and asked 'are you doing this because a woman was elected?' but we were fairly certain it was.<sup>66</sup>

Peterson's personal determination and dedication to politics meant that she was not held back by such anti-woman feeling. But, as noted in an earlier chapter, not all women had such exceptional determination, or lived in a family situation supportive of women's political activism. In the 1940's, women's political participation was still conditioned by social assumptions which presumed women's first place was in the home. Indeed, in one Ontario riding, women even claimed they were being denied memberships, until the Provincial Council stepped in and re-affirmed women's right to equal membership.<sup>67</sup>

For women who sought nominations, family support provided a psychological bulwark against social disapproval. Beatrice Trew, a former teacher and farm wife who was elected to the Saskatchewan Legislature in 1944, described her nomination, making it clear that her husband's support was important:

The constituency nominating convention first nominated my husband, who declined because he could not afford--financially--to leave the farm. But he suggested me because...as he said, I was smarter anyway.<sup>68</sup>



For farm women like Trew, political activity and frequent absences from home created an economic burden on the family unless they could afford, and find, domestic help. As Trew explained, after her election she had to find someone to fill her place, or consider leaving politics:

A man with a family usually has a wife to run the home while he's away. A woman's place in the home is hard to fill. My teen-age daughter had to look after her ill grandmother, help her dad with housework and attend school for almost a month before I could get any help. No one would go to a country home. Finally a woman came... Without her, I might have had to resign.<sup>69</sup>

Another Saskatchewan woman, Gladys Strum, who sat in the federal House and in the provincial Legislature, had similar problems when she worked as an organizer in 1941, and she found little understanding from her CCF brothers, whom she later concluded were unable to accept her assertive, feminist (and, in their terms, unfeminine) style.<sup>70</sup> Although she enjoyed her work, Strum considered resigning, for she worried about the welfare of her teen-age daughter, her husband, who had tuberculosis, and the state of their farm. When, at one point, she had to hurry home to tend her husband's illness, she referred to the disapproval sometimes expressed about her lifestyle. "I hope the voters believe that Mrs. Strum's husband would probably have contracted the illness anyway, even if she had not been out CCFing",<sup>71</sup> she confided to the Party's office secretary. Later, she pleaded with the Party Executive to make her a paid organizer, as juggling her onerous role as farm wife with absences from home was extremely difficult. "Does the CCF contest divorce cases as a correspondent?", she asked the executive, adding less humourously that, "perhaps she should warn women in her next speaking engagement to stay out of politics."<sup>72</sup>

In Ontario, there were few women who worked as paid organizers, although many women dedicated enormous amounts of their time to volunteer political work. Those with families and homes to care for found their work easier if they had the political and emotional support of their husbands, partly because, claimed one woman, "fewer people could afford babysitters then".<sup>73</sup> As Majorie Mann, who was involved in the Ottawa CCF, the Ontario Women's Committee and Provincial Council noted about her experiences: "My husband was supportive...and looked after the kids... but many other women didn't share this situation."<sup>74</sup> Barbara Cass-Beggs was even more precise in her characterization of the dichotomy between socialists' public lives and their reluctance to attempt any radical restructuring of their private lives:

In general, CCFers were radical in politics, but not in their personal lives. They were not for the status quo in politics, but when it came to their personal lives, well sexism was just not combatted.<sup>75</sup>

Because she and her husband, both of whom were professionals, had agreed to accomodate two careers, Barbara was able to immerse herself in political life. Moreover, their measure of economic security meant that they could employ someone to look after the children. But Barbara Cass-Beggs remembers her experience as unusual and "lucky". In fact, when she and David Cass-Beggs tried to initiate a socialist discussion group on "personal living" to address egalitarianism within relationships they were disappointed, but not surprised, to find that "the idea was well received by the women, but much less so by the men."<sup>76</sup>

In the 1940's, CCF women might have drawn hope from the fact that more women ran for federal and provincial office than in the previous decade. Yet, women were still a small minority of candidates, and

they seldom ran in winnable ridings. Alice Loeb charged that the Party accepted "comparative strangers as candidates, while prominent CCF women were ignored".<sup>77</sup> CCF constituency associations, largely male in composition, feared a woman candidate would be less popular with the voters--a fear which in some instances may have been correct. As one CCF woman from northern Alberta remembered of her candidacy, local townspeople rejected the idea of a woman politician and did not hesitate to tell her husband so:

After my nomination...many did not like the idea of a woman candidate and possibly M.P. Some of them said openly, 'We are not going to have a woman represent us'. In fact, some said, 'If she gets elected, she will not treat us to drinks'. The worst reaction was in...Vegreville. One man tried to intimidate my husband by saying, 'If your wife gets elected she will be in Ottawa only to service the male M.P.s.'<sup>78</sup>

Other female candidates, like Margaret Mann, who ran in Portage La Prairie, maintained the opposite view: "I was not discriminated against because I was a woman...I think if people were going to vote CCF, they did so anyway."<sup>79</sup> Yet, Mann also admitted that she only got the nomination because the riding was seen as a lost cause. To a Party loyalist like Mann, however, it did not matter that she was a "sacrificial lamb" because the important thing was "putting the case for socialism before the public eye". A woman of intelligence and ability, Mann also saw the election as a personal "challenge" and a valuable political experience, no matter what its outcome.<sup>80</sup>

Despite the constraints on women's political careers, a small group of CCF women was elected to public office, and these women were often held up as role models for other aspiring CCF women. After her defeat in the provincial sphere, Laura Jamieson became involved in

Vancouver municipal politics, and in other cities, a few CCF women gained election to School Boards and aldermanic positions. During this decade, Beatrice Trew became the first CCF woman to sit in the Saskatchewan House; Rae Lucock and Agnes Macphail were elected to the Ontario Legislature in 1945; and at the federal level, Gladys Strum sat for one term, from 1945 to 1949.

In the House of Commons, Strum was concerned with issues relevant to her rural riding, such as price controls on farm machinery. At the same time, Strum, like Dorise Nielsen, saw herself as a spokesperson for women's concerns. In her response to the Speech from the Throne in 1946, for example, Strum stressed that the government had badly neglected the 'domestic field' and thus, women's needs. The very heart of the nation is the home, continued Strum, and the government should safeguard homes by providing better widows' pensions, by initiating housing and construction, and protecting families against eviction. Strum also gave speeches on issues like the need for pre-natal allowances to decrease infant mortality, and the right of female veterans to employment in the civil service, both of which cast her as a advocate of women's causes. Like many CCF women of the period, she saw women's first interest as the home and children, but she was also concerned that women be given choices about education, training and employment.

Gladys Strum was the only CCF woman to sit in the Federal House until the 1960's. Most women participated at a very different level of the movement, doing grass-roots work, electioneering or fund-raising. The latter remained an important prerogative of women's groups throughout the 1940's. Most fund-raising was done at the local level, although a national CCF cookbook, put together by Mrs. Nicholson and other Ottawa

women, was published in the late '40's, and netted \$5000 for the federal treasury, as well as funds for local clubs. Although it is difficult to gauge the importance of women's fund-raising to the Party, it is clear that, in some constituencies, women's efforts were heavily relied on. In 1945, for instance, Ernie Winch sent a desperate "SOS" to a local CCF women's auxiliary, asking for a donation to his depleted election fund.<sup>81</sup> Also in B.C., the Saanich Women's Council, which did educational work and fund-raising, was informed by the District CCF Council how some of their auxiliary funds were to be spent. The women, with independence in mind, suggested that the men could make those decisions when they did the work.<sup>82</sup> And there are other examples of local disputes over the control of women's auxiliary funds. When a women's auxiliary was set up in Port Arthur, the women discovered that the constituency executive did not want the auxiliary to have a separate bank account. Perhaps the men were not concerned with the amount of money, as much as the principle of control. In any case, one participant in the ensuing debate remembered: "Our meeting almost split in two and we [the women] only won by one vote... it was husbands against wives that night!"<sup>83</sup>

(v)

During the 1940's a small, but significant group of CCFers were dissatisfied with women's secondary role in the Party, and they attempted to increase female membership and augment women's role in policy making. As in the 1930's, women's columns in the CCF newspapers and women's committees were two tools used to stimulate women's interest in socialism and encourage their participation in the Party. And as in the '30's, many varieties of women's committees existed: some remained largely

auxiliaries, some combined fund-raising and educational work, and some acted as political lobby groups. In contrast to the 1930's, however, this decade saw a number of ambitious attempts to construct more powerful provincial women's CCF networks.

These women's committees claimed their aims were the publication of socialist policies and the mobilization of women unacquainted with the CCF platform. Yet, despite repeated declarations of loyalty to the Party, there remained suspicions of semi-autonomous women's groups. These suspicions had more than one origin. Some men argued that women's groups threatened socialist unity and posed the possibility of feminist concerns outpacing other Party priorities. CCF women were sometimes critical, but usually for different reasons. In a few cases, their opposition sprang from an individualism which gloated that any woman of talent could advance, without 'special attention', in the Party. But by and large, female opponents feared women's groups would become ladies auxiliaries, thus isolating women from important decision making, or that they would prevent the larger Party--especially men--from addressing women's rights. Agnes Macphail, for instance, was sometimes brusque and impatient with CCF women's groups. Her attitude was partly the product of her own history as an isolated, yet successful, female politician, but it also reflected her fears that women's groups would perpetuate women's role on the sidelines of political life. Some women participated in women's committees, but worried about their political consequences. Nellie Peterson sympathized with women's problems in becoming politically active and believed women had a distinct perspective to bring to socialism, but she didn't want the Alberta women's committee to limit itself to auxiliary work and she balked at any form of assured representation for women

in the leadership:

I don't think I would have accepted the principle of a woman being given a seat on the Provincial Board simply because she was a woman, because that would have been an insult, or tokenism, when women had the abilities...we could and should have earned this ourselves.<sup>84</sup>

These dilemmas and debates were not new to the B.C. CCF Women's Council. In B.C., a tradition of organizing women, as women, had prospered in the 1930's, and it persisted into the 1940's. The central focus for women's organization had always been the Vancouver Women's Council, which in the '40's was given continuing aid by Laura Jamieson and Elizabeth Kerr, some help from Dorothy Steeves and Grace MacInnis, (who remained less interested in women's work) and important new leadership from Hilda Kristiansen, Claire McAllister and May Campbell.

An English emigrant, May Campbell had first become involved in politics through the United Farmers of Canada. After moving to B.C., she joined the CCF, became deeply involved in Victoria constituency work, and ran as a federal candidate in 1945. As a youth, Hilda Kristiansen was also influenced by the Saskatchewan farm and socialist movements. When she moved to Vancouver in 1934, she joined the Young Socialist League, her local CCF Club and the Vancouver Women's Council. After marriage to a fellow socialist, Denny Kristiansen, who was active in Vancouver's Left Theatre, she raised a family, and ran a boarding house, while at the same time carrying on with her political activities. Like other CCF women, she believed it was important to extend her activism to other women's organizations, so she took her progressive views into the Local Council of Women, the PTA, and her chosen cause, the play schools movement.<sup>85</sup>

The efforts of these women coincided with those of CCF women who tried to sustain a women's column in the B.C. Federationist. In 1940 and 1941 both Elizabeth Kerr and Laura Jamieson wrote on women's issues for the CCF paper, and in 1944, Claire McAllister began to write a column, 'Women's Views', which lasted off and on for four years. McAllister had spent three years teaching in Cape Breton, where, she said, "conditions opened my eyes to the need for social change."<sup>86</sup> On her return to B.C., she became involved in consumer coops and housing issues, and began contributing to the Federationist. Her 'Women's Views' column contained information on the activities of the Provincial Women's Council and covered topics ranging from cooperatives, education, and mothers allowances to rising prices. Although she did comment on employment issues, her column concentrated on issues affecting homemakers. And some correspondents heartily endorsed this emphasis, claiming women needed to "move beyond our own little homes", taking their motherly concerns with them. "We have to make a choice", one such author argued, "Knit a sweater for our boy today or prevent him from going to war tomorrow. We are paying the price for being absorbed in our own little world; the fate of our sons hangs in the balance."<sup>87</sup>

In 1943, the Vancouver CCF Women's Council tried to expand into a provincial organization, and two years later, they asked the Party to make this provincial women's committee a standing committee of Council, giving them voice, but no vote, at Council meetings. Their attempts to expand met with some success: between 1944 and 1947, reported the Women's Council's secretary, affiliated groups grew from 10 to 22, with many of the outlying women's committees "showing new responsibilities for the political education of women, as well as fund raising".<sup>88</sup> For



six months, the Women's Council used a travelling organizer to help establish new women's committees, but most organizing was done by mail. The women also tried to obtain contacts from Provincial Council members, assuring them that their aim was not to segregate the sexes, but to swell Party ranks. In order to garner support for the Council, women had constantly to repeat that general Party work was not neglected and the unity of men and women in the CCF was not endangered. "Our purpose," explained May Campbell in her 1946 report, "is to bring into the CCF women with an awakening social conscience...but we also remember that the women's cause is the man's. They rise or sink together."<sup>89</sup> She then delineated the educational methods used, such as "study groups, sewing gatherings and educational councils"; explained how CCF women 'bored from within' other women's organizations, "taking part in the discussion on social problems and showing the socialist implications of these problems"; and carefully added that "all this is done together with general CCF work".<sup>90</sup>

A year later, when Hilda Kristiansen took over the chair of the Women's Council, the Vancouver executive was meeting once a month, and they put out a regular bulletin for other committees across the province, as well as sending them CCF pamphlets like 'Consumer versus Profiteer' for group discussion. The Vancouver Council was also involved in its own political campaigns, including formulating new CCF policy, training women for political office and raising funds to sustain a CCF radio show. In the smaller provincial groups, women were more easily channelled into their traditional fund-raising roles, although many of these groups also attempted one annual educational campaign. In Alberni, for example, they set up a loaning library; in North Burnaby, they sponsored regular Sunday forums on political issues; and in South Westminster, the Women's

Auxiliary studied legislation concerning widows pensions and lobbied the Party for a better pensions policy. In order to get their resolutions presented to Provincial Conventions, Women's Council members had to channel them through constituency organizations, and they had some successes with this tactic, initiating resolutions on widows pensions, a Women's Bureau in the Department of Labour, and government aid to co-operative nursery schools.<sup>91</sup>

Although women on the Council had high hopes for this expanding women's network, they knew that the small numbers of women involved, and the difficulties of communicating with groups outside Vancouver made the Women's Council's existence tenuous. It was also hampered by its lack of funds for resources and organizers, and perhaps also by its position as a standing committee, without votes and power, on the Provincial Council. Moreover, there was a significant body of opinion in the Party which continued to downplay the Council's importance. In a letter to the Federationist in 1949, the Council's secretary commended the women's work, but added the Council "has not done enough due partly to the indifference and skepticism of many women members over its usefulness".<sup>92</sup> Historically, there existed a strong ideological tradition in the B.C. Party which disapproved of separate women's organizations and stressed the common class experiences of men and women. An opinion piece on Reconstruction in the Federationist made precisely this point, claiming that women's absence from post-war planning was "not a feminine, but an economic...problem because women, just like men, want good wages, working conditions and leisure time".<sup>93</sup> Such arguments, of course, ignored the fact that women already occupied a subordinate position within the working class, and that their post-war rehabilitation needed solutions

designed specifically to alter women's role as a reserve army of labour.

Despite this current of indifference and opposition, socialist-feminists like Jamieson, Kerr and Kristiansen remained strong supporters of women's self-organization, in part because they believed women brought a distinctly feminine or 'maternal' perspective to the socialist movement. Jamieson, for example, suggested that women rejected capitalism, not like men, because "they dislike the waste...and want planning and orderliness", but because women, with their humane awareness, born of a different socialization, "begin with pity...with individual cases...and then extend that to all of humanity".<sup>94</sup> Jamieson also thought that women, underrepresented in the leadership, might gain confidence in small, comfortable women's groups and later take that confidence into larger Party work, and for this reason she also supported non-partisan efforts like the Vancouver Women's Citizenship School, which tried to give women training in parliamentary procedure, public speaking and resolution-making.<sup>95</sup>

While not all the Party saw the value of women's groups, the majority of Party leaders and writers came to accept the view that women's consciousness was different than man's. They believed women were more apolitical than men, and that women's family concerns often conditioned their political interests. As Grace MacInnis put it: "Many women leave politics to their husbands...the job of the CCF is to find a way to connect women's interest in bread and butter issues to politics".<sup>96</sup> In 1945, a Federationist editorial referred to the 'fact' of women's different political perspective. Arguing that legislatures needed more women, the writer explained:

Why do we need more women?...first, because job security, good housing, health, prices, recreation and educational facilities have been women's concerns and second, it is reasonable to conclude that women, being passionately interested in freedom of opportunity and security would move with more determination than men towards these goals.<sup>97</sup>

It is unlikely that this editorial would have appeared in the Socialist Party of Canada or CCF press two or three decades earlier. It was indicative of a growing consensus that the Party had to solicit more aggressively women's distinct point of view, and women's votes. Although the latter assumption reflected, in part, the Party's electoral opportunism, the admission of the Federationist's editorial that "women and men are not yet on an equal footing in the movement"<sup>98</sup> also indicated that some CCFers realized the need to create a socialist Party more balanced in its representation of women and men.

This increased discussion of women's role in the Party--however small it was--was the product of changing economic and social conditions in the war and immediate post-war years, and the cumulative educational efforts of the Women's Council. The Council could not, however, sustain its growth in the next decade. By the mid-1950's, the Women's Council was involved in fewer educational and political activities, and was reporting less often to Provincial Council. Without substantial funds for organizing, it was difficult to sustain a provincial organization. Moreover, the woman question was still not a Party priority, especially when heated debates over the Right and Left 'deviations' of the CCF were occurring. In the early 1950's, questions of 'reformism versus socialism', and the anti-communist drift of CCF foreign policy all seemed more pressing issues. As one Party member who watched the B.C. Women's Council of

the 1940's evolve put it: "The Women's Council was never considered that important...it was the wrong time to discuss women's rights; it was not a priority then. It was simply ahead of its time".<sup>99</sup>

On the prairies, CCF women's groups also showed increased vitality in the 1940's, although they laboured under the same problems, and within the same inter-Party debates as the B.C. Council. Again, the value of separate women's groups was sometimes at issue, and again, women's issues were seen as less pressing than other concerns. Different social conditions, however, altered the formation and outlook of prairie Councils. Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba had fewer war industries than Ontario and B.C.; thus, employment issues had a smaller profile in prairie women's committees. Also, the organization of rural women into CCF groups was hampered by women's inability to leave their farm responsibilities. Thus, in Alberta, the provincial Women's Council was dominated by Edmonton, and in Manitoba, the women's network was dominated by Winnipeg.<sup>100</sup> In the late 1940's, these two Councils did expand into towns like Lethbridge, Red Deer, The Pas and Flin Flon, but many rural areas and small towns were still not represented on the Women's Council. In some areas there were simply few CCF women, and they chose to concentrate on other social, or non-partisan women's groups. As Margaret Mann explained of Portage La Prairie: "There were very few women active in the CCF, very few women active in anything...so I put my efforts into revitalizing the Local Council of Women, trying to make it more responsive...and active".<sup>101</sup>

In both Alberta and Manitoba, urban CCF women tried to build a provincial organization, officially recognized by Provincial Council. In Alberta, the CCF Women's Auxiliary and the old Women's Section of the Labor Party merged in 1940 to form a Women's Council. Although quiet

for a number of years, the Council took a new lease on life in 1947 when it obtained a seat on the CCF Provincial Board by becoming a standing Committee (with voice but no vote) whose mandate was to "coordinate and expand the activities of women members in the province".<sup>102</sup> The President of the Council, Mary Crawford, and some of its Edmonton leaders were veterans of Party work in the 1930's. Other recruits, like Ruth Cherry, a Calgary school teacher, and Anne Peters of Lethbridge, brought new enthusiasm and ideas to the regenerated women's organization. The model for the Women's Council, suggested Cherry in a series of newspaper articles reminiscent of Edith Patterson's political writing, should be the British Labour Party, which constructed different educational programs and schools for its Party women. And the Alberta women followed this advice, trying to establish new channels for women's political education. They sponsored speakers, financed and conducted a radio program to air CCF women's views, and attempted to sustain a regular women's column in The Peoples Weekly, including reports on Council activities and political commentary, especially on consumer, educational and family issues.

The Council hinted that it would like to widen its (professional and middle-class) membership with more "wives of trade unionists",<sup>103</sup> but no account of their success was given. In order to combat the small number of women outside Edmonton and Calgary, the Council set up a Board with a representative from six geographical regions of the province. While some local enthusiasts, like Anne Peters, did initiate regional women's committees, the decentralization attempt was not entirely successful, as the Edmonton Council continued to dominate the provincial Council. Furthermore, many committees found it difficult to escape women's two traditional roles in the movement--electioneering and money-

making. Perhaps this is why Mary Crawford urged the Edmonton women in 1948 to "sit back, and to quietly study...leaving money-raising for a while."<sup>104</sup> Indeed, some Party women who were in the leadership of the Party remember the Women's Council more as an auxiliary, "serving coffee and raising the necessary money,"<sup>105</sup> than as a political lobby for women's interests.

In Manitoba, women consolidated a provincial women's organization in 1943, under the leadership of long-time activist Edith Cove. The women elected their own officers, but reported directly to Provincial Council and to provincial conventions. Like the Alberta Council, the Manitoba one had some initial successes with its expansion scheme, especially in the labour towns of La Pas and Flin Flon, where Mrs. Welsh, a Swedish emigrant, became the mainstay of the Northern CCF women's groups. Despite the temporary engagement of an organizer, however, the Council was less successful in penetrating rural Manitoba. Also like the Alberta Council, the Manitoba one still spent considerable time creating a social life for the movement and raising funds for local CCF causes. In at least one convention report, the only mention of the Women's Council referred to the convention tea they sponsored. Indeed, the policy statement outlining the aims of the Women's Council did not emphasize a new role for women in the movement. It gave the routine assurances that women would not neglect their constituency work, then argued tactfully that "there may be times...when women want to meet together...study groups give women additional knowledge, experience in parliamentary practice... and it is hoped this will better fit women for service in their local unit". The policy statement then reaffirmed three other purposes of women's groups, all traditional work for women in the movement--"fund

raising, social and goodwill, and electioneering."<sup>106</sup>

Nonetheless, many Manitoba women's committees were also committed to educational work. In Flin Flon, each meeting, along with business and fund-raising reports, included a reading and discussion. In Winnipeg, the Women's Council hosted speakers on subjects like civil liberties and the provincial labour code, sponsored forums on the need for police women and family courts, and passed resolutions on old-age pensions and women's right to do jury duty. In some of these educational ventures, they cooperated with the Local Council of Women. In the absence of any visible debate within the Winnipeg CCF Women's Council over their co-operative relationship with the LCW, one must assume that the LCW's liberal reformism did not rankle the Winnipeg women as much as it had sometimes disturbed CCF women in Vancouver.

This Manitoba Women's Council was, in its day-to-day activities, similar to the Winnipeg Women's Labour Forum of the '30's. Yet, in the 1940's, there was a decrease in the militance, and autonomy, of CCF women. In the latter case, CCF women actually wanted closer ties with the Party, perhaps feeling this 'legitimacy' would enhance the status of the Women's Council. At the 1947 provincial convention Mrs. Welsh urged a closer relationship with the Party, "by making provision in the constitution for Women's Councils, and defining their work and activities".<sup>107</sup> There is no evidence that her suggestion was carried out. Instead, the Women's Council remained a standing committee of the Provincial Council, a status which had both positive and negative effects. In times of disinterest in women's issues, the Women's Council could be kept alive with appointments made by the Provincial Council. But this did not mean that appointed women were committed to women's self-organization



in the Party. (And precisely this problem arose in Ontario.) Yet, because the Women's Council was not elected from the convention floor, and had no constitutional status or vote on the Provincial Council, it lacked a measure of power and prestige, if only token prestige, which might have helped it to move beyond its auxiliary role.

In Saskatchewan, the constitutional status of a CCF women's organization never became an issue because, in 1944, a conference of CCF women decided to "reject the idea of a separate women's organization under a provincial president". Instead, the meeting opted for a "flexible" option of "either a club with a membership of both men and women, or of only women, according to the local situation". Conference participants may have believed that this strategy would encourage women to move beyond auxiliary work and enter the mainstream of the movement, for the hope was expressed that, without a women's organization, "women would participate in club activity...and develop an interest and responsibility in matters of public concern".<sup>108</sup> (At the same time, however, women's political participation was not seen in the same light as men's, for the conference added that "this does not mean that every woman should seek a seat as an M.P., but...they will inform themselves about policies...for government is housekeeping on a large scale and women who can keep house are also capable of expressing opinions on a larger housekeeping".<sup>109</sup>) Also, there had never been accord within the Party on the necessity and role of women's organizations. Only a month before this conference, an attempt was made at the provincial convention to ensure at least one female member in the two member constituencies represented on Provincial Council. The resolution was defeated. Lastly, Saskatchewan women may have felt that, with the Party on an electoral upswing, women's efforts would be best spent on

general Party work, rather than a women's organization.

Even though the Saskatchewan Party did not set up a provincial women's council, many local women's CCF clubs flourished. In Regina there were five such women's groups, which raised money for elections, assisted with enumerating and scrutineering, and heard educational addresses from various speakers. Like other provincial parties, the Saskatchewan CCF sponsored a women's column, comprised of both political commentary and household hints, in the provincial newspaper. The Saskatchewan Commonwealth had the longest-running and liveliest column, but all three women's columns shared common concerns and themes. During the war, for example, they expressed a growing interest in women's employment issues, but by the late 1940's, the recurring motif was the relationship of women's family responsibilities to the political world. This connection of women's interests with the preservation of the home and the family was deeply embedded in the Party's understanding of what comprised women's issues. It marked a continuum with ideas of 'militant mothering' inherited from the early CCF, and also reflected the persisting patriarchal views of the family within Canadian society. As one group of sociologists has argued, feminist ideas in the post-war period took shape within the bounds of dominant notions of femininity, and "these notions included the idea of women's separate [family] sphere". Although the concept of separate spheres was not new, the precise form it took in the post-war years was distinct, and included the "idea that women were different, but equal; they had basically achieved equality...but women as mothers brought feminine qualities to society which men could not provide".<sup>110</sup>

Although the theme of woman as homemaker predominated over the theme of woman as worker in the Commonwealth, the Saskatchewan Party did

explore issues relating to working women, particularly equal pay, and the right of married women to work. In Saskatchewan, these two issues came to the fore as the newly-elected CCF found its commitment to women's equality on trial--a commitment ultimately found wanting. In 1946, when the Public Service Act was amended, Beatrice Trew and other Members tried to include a proviso disallowing discrimination based on sex, race or religious opinions. Their efforts were disappointed by the government's addition of a qualification which stated that, in an 'emergency', married women could be dismissed, unless they could demonstrate 'special need, circumstances or particular skills'. Trew and other CCF women felt that their Party had reneged on its commitment to equal treatment for women, presumably bowing to public hostility to married working women. In response, Trew, Telford and others wrote and circulated to various constituencies two resolutions on women's work, hoping to gather support for a challenge to the government's views. Their concern, said Telford, was that "the government has accepted the specious argument that married women aid unemployment".<sup>111</sup> In another letter she worried about reports that the government intended to "dismiss married women from the civil service".<sup>112</sup> "Our economic and social problems," she reminded her fellow CCFers, "will never be solved by turning out married women. Socialism will not be built on discrimination".<sup>113</sup> Perhaps, in this case, Telford and Trew's organizing efforts would have been aided by the existence of a provincial women's committee, which could have unified opposition to, and lobbied against, the government's policies.

Judging from Trew and Telford's lengthy justifications for their two resolutions, they expected opposition to their proposals. But support from some CCFers was forthcoming, and at the next provincial convention a

resolution was passed urging the government to "review legislation which... fails to provide equal status for any person on grounds of sex or marital status".<sup>114</sup> This victory was short-lived, for a year later, CCF women faced yet another disappointment. In 1947 the government introduced a Bill of Rights which purposely omitted discrimination based on sex. CCF women in Saskatchewan, and in other provinces, were very upset with this exclusion. Presumably, the CCF government was interested in maintaining protective legislation, such as special labour standards, but some women rejected the government's protective attitude. When Margaret Mann, of Manitoba, wrote to the Saskatchewan minister in question, asking for an explanation, she was informed that "there were some rights--such as jury duty--which women did not want".<sup>115</sup> She immediately presented his letter to the Local Council of Women, which rejected the Minister's justification and started a (successful) campaign in Manitoba to get women admitted to juries. In Ontario as well, CCF women were disappointed. The Saskatchewan government was held up as a shining example of socialism in action. How could socialist feminists explain this disregard for women's rights? While on a trip to Saskatchewan in 1947, Barbara Cass-Beggs privately expressed her dismay in a letter to Marjorie Mann:

The thinking women here are heartbroken by the omission of 'discrimination on sex grounds'...if we really stand for equality in the CCF this should go in...although it obviously creates difficulties, it also gains respect amongst just the group which can be most helpful to us--the thinking group.<sup>116</sup>

At the time that Barbara Cass-Beggs penned this letter, she was deeply involved in the Ontario Women's Committee, which, since its establishment in 1942, had expanded across the province. Its impressive growth must be seen against the backdrop of the social and political life of

Ontario in the 1940's. In Ontario, women's war-time employment had a strong impact; furthermore, the provincial party expanded and anticipated high electoral hopes during this decade. A cadre of well-educated feminists, many of them Torontonians, acted as a catalyst to the organization of women within the Party. These socialist-feminist CCFers fastened onto the war-time optimism concerning women's new roles and carried that spirit of feminism into the post-war years.

By the early 1940's, a Toronto CCF Women's Council had replaced the disbanded Women's Joint Committee. The impetus for the Council's expansion into a provincial organization came both from Provincial Council and local CCF women. In 1941 the CCF's Provincial Executive discussed how the CCF might capitalize on the war work of CCF women in order to attract positive publicity for the Party. Six months later, the Provincial Council, perhaps on the suggestion of Toronto Women's Council, created a Women's Committee to investigate women's role in the movement.

The first few women appointed to head the Women's Committee, however, were not supporters of women's self-organization, indicating that the Council was apprehensive of feminist ideas and anxious to keep the Women's Committee tied closely to its own objectives. The first president was Caroline Riley, whose credentials as a veteran of the Edmonton CCF Women's Council made her a respectable candidate. Riley, however, feared the Committee would become another auxiliary, and she therefore forwarded an alternate proposal suggesting a committee of both men and women. But she was outvoted, and appointed President despite her objections to the project. Her disapproval of women's committees was made apparent in 1942, when she reported to the Ontario Executive on her recent trip to the West. Riley said she spoke to Laura Jamieson, Mary Crawford, Louise

Lucas and Beatrice Brigden, and claimed she found "no similar committee functioning in the West. All these women stressed the importance...of avoiding separate sections for the sexes".<sup>117</sup> One can only wonder at Riley's interpretation of their ideas, as all these women were sympathetic to women's groups.

Over the next two years, Riley and her successor, Evelyn Howe, made some attempts to organize Party women but, not surprisingly, the Committee did not experience massive growth. In 1944, the Committee was given an official mandate to "develop and extend opportunities for women to make their full and distinctive contribution to the building of the Cooperative Commonwealth",<sup>118</sup> and a new President, Alice Katool. Katool, an efficient organizer, made a number of recommendations, including special educational functions for women and a plan to have a province-wide convention of women elect its own executive. And at the 1946 provincial convention, a panel of women acted on Katool's suggestion, making plans for a 1947 women's conference. Ironically, though, Katool was also known as an opponent of separate women's groups. Indeed, she was appointed by the Provincial Council precisely because she did not have any strong feminist sympathies. As she explained:

The Provincial Executive decided we should set up a women's organization. Well, I was the...President. I only did it because I was impartial. I wasn't selective, and I wouldn't make it a separate entity.<sup>119</sup>

Other prominent CCF women shared Katool's fears about the segregation of women within the Party. Avis McCurdy, for example, proposed the appointment of a Women's Convenor, either a male or female, to study and assist the special problems of women. McCurdy claimed the Party as a whole should address women's rights, and that a women's committee might

become a 'coffee-making' group--a valid fear, as the Party had often channelled women into auxiliary work. As she remembered:

I was opposed to it [women's committees] from the beginning. There are many important jobs to be done. Let's do them with the men. I wouldn't join a women's group like the Liberal and Conservative women's auxiliaries, who did the tea and sandwiches, thank you very much. I was determined this wasn't going to happen [in the CCF], and I didn't know how to stop it. It was a matter of principle, to do things together, including issues like decent wages [for women].<sup>120</sup>

For a well-educated and seasoned political activist like McCurdy, who did not feel restricted by her sex, it was difficult to comprehend the psychological and political strengths to be gained from women's organizations. She did not see a women's committee as an effective lobby for women's issues, even though she herself was often frustrated with the Party's neglect of these issues. At the 1945 provincial convention, for example, in the wake of women's lay-offs from industry, the question of women was pushed to the bottom of the agenda and McCurdy reacted angrily with a letter to Council:

I am writing...for dozens of men and women...and groups of women...to see if anything can be done--on the question of women. To put it mildly, we were appalled that the convention, its chairman and resolutions committee, would so willingly ignore what ought to be one of our major concerns ...Today the pressures are increasing--to drive women from industry and other public work, to keep pay for women at a low level, to keep women in their homes...the attitudes of men and women in our society, and in our movement are indifferant and wrong.<sup>121</sup>

As a consequence of McCurdy's letter, the Provincial Council worked out a resolution on women's equality, which was sent to the National Convention in 1946. Much of this resolution, discussed earlier in the chapter, was concerned with employment issues, and a small sub-group of the Ontario Women's Committee was formed to address the needs of working women.

This Status of Women subcommittee was created after a debate between CCF feminists and Party leaders about the proposed Ontario Bill of Rights. Andrew Brewin persuaded Barbara Cass-Beggs and others not to fight for the inclusion of 'sex' in the Bill, presumably because women might lose certain legal protections and 'privileges' they already possessed. The women concurred, but formed a committee to investigate discrimination against women in the workforce and to recommend legislated reform.<sup>122</sup> These women put together a comprehensive research report which was a convincing indictment of systemic discrimination against women in the labour force. The report, which covered teaching, white collar work and industrial work, included extensive research on wage differentials, and made an important contribution to existing knowledge on women's economic status in Ontario. The Committee also made a number of proposals for legislation, including a Women's Bureau, an equal pay law, and a Bill of Rights. (Apparently, some women still believed 'sex' should be included.) Using their research, a draft bill on equal pay was prepared for the CCF caucus. Their committee continued to meet into the early 1950's, although after the presentation of their major report in 1948 and the loss of the CCF's equal pay bill, their efforts decreased and finally ended in the mid-1950's.

The larger Ontario Women's Committee spent some time exploring women's employment issues, but it was primarily concerned with politicizing the homemaker. At the first province-wide women's conference held in 1947, the women delegates elected their own executive, thus gaining a greater measure of independence from Provincial Council. Conference delegates like Jean Laing, Alice Loeb and Lucy Woodsworth were veterans of CCF women's organizations of the 1930's. But many women on the



Committee represented a new generation of CCF activists, who had become politically aware during the Depression and politically active during and after World War II.

Many of the Committee's leaders were well-educated and active in other Party work. The first elected President was Marjorie Mann, an Ottawa homemaker who had joined the CCF while working as a teacher in Windsor in the '30's. By 1947, Mann had worked in her constituency, served on Provincial Council and managed an election campaign. Barbara Cass-Beggs, the Vice-President, was a British-born musician and teacher. An Oxford graduate, Cass-Beggs came to Canada in the late 1930's; she too served on Provincial Council, and in 1949, headed the Toronto CCF Council. The Committee was conscious of its poor working-class representation, and it made some attempts to interest the wives of prominent trade unionists, but it was not generally concerned with the class bias of its membership. As Margaret (Peggy) Stewart put it in one discussion: "What types of women do we want?...from the well-known to the obscure, business women, homemakers--in short, anyone".<sup>123</sup>

The first women's conference in 1947 drew together a wide variety of women's groups with aims ranging from education to fund-raising. The women concentrated on two perennial questions asked of CCF women's committees: "Why don't women come into the CCF, and how do we make CCF women more active?"<sup>124</sup> The Conference made a number of proposals designed to stimulate women's interest in the Party, including the employment of a woman organizer, utilizing radio broadcasts, and participating in other women's groups. Since, it was agreed, many women felt alienated from politics, organizers had to offer a variety of activities, including social functions, discussions and educationals. Fund-raising was not

discouraged, but the Conference implied that women should gradually be given more 'responsible' Party jobs. At a later Women's Conference, lessons in basic electoral tasks, like silkscreening and scrutineering, were offered. As one historian has pointed out, these methods perpetuated women's behind-the-scenes, secondary roles within the Party.<sup>125</sup> The rationale, however, was not to keep women in these jobs, but to gradually promote women, through their diligent constituency work, into more powerful positions.

The Committee always faced the dilemma of utilizing, while it was trying to change, women's traditional roles. The Committee Executive for instance, considered selling Christmas cards or cookbooks in order to collect funds for their work, but on second thought decided against this idea, reasoning that "we do not want to start out raising money for things we think should be done; if we consider them worth spending money on we should urge the CCF as a whole to accept responsibility".<sup>126</sup> Yet, Committee members like Marjorie Mann still believed that it was sometimes necessary to draw on women's traditional roles in order to arouse their interest in politics. Writing of an organized visit to a local bakery, she commented on this dilemma:

It was the best attended thing the women have had...And some of the people who came have been on our lists for ages but we never see them at 'legitimate' activities... The whole show just proved once again that we have to have an infinite variety (including the illegitimate) of activities if we are going to catch the interest of all the people we have on our lists.<sup>127</sup>

The Committee did wish to make women a stronger, and more prominent force in the Party, and to this end, they suggested tactics used by past CCF women's groups: giving women a chance to chair committees,

including more women in delegations and electing more female convention delegates. Some Committee members, including Alice Katool, asked Provincial Council to place at least one woman on each provincial committee "to give women needed political experience".<sup>128</sup> And the Women's Committee did feel it had some minor successes. Marjorie Mann said that women in her constituency "are now taking on new jobs and doing them well",<sup>129</sup> and in another letter, she pointed to a more prominent success story: "Margaret Stewart was first involved through the Women's Committee. She is now riding president and is being considered for an organizer's job".<sup>130</sup>

Most of the Committee's efforts were concentrated on two aims--drawing new women into the Party and promoting a 'woman's view' of socialism. The Committee's socialist models were Fabian and labourite; leaders of the British Labour Party like Mary Sutherland were given an enthusiastic welcome by the Committee, which admired the work of the Women's Section of the Labour Party, and its publication, Labour Woman. Its organizing methods, by necessity, relied heavily on 'organizing by mail'. Given the problems of establishing a committee over great distances, and without financial aid, their efforts were substantial. By 1950, the Women's Committee reported twelve women's committees operating within the province, with contacts in at least one-third of the ridings. The Committee kept up a voluminous correspondence--mimeographed in the National Office at night--with its members and constituency executives, suggesting programs, meeting agendas, and even circulating a kit of socialist novels for women, put together by Adeline Haddow, a Hamilton representative on the Women's Committee.

Although the Women's Committee operated through its own channels, its loyalty to Party ideals was never in question; thus, fears of its 'separatist' feminist inclinations, voiced from time to time at conventions, seem somewhat paranoid in retrospect. Perhaps some Party members resented the (perceived) implication that women were unfairly underrepresented in the leadership, but the Committee was less vocal about the need to promote women, than it was about its intent to augment the Party's membership rolls. Its major campaigns concentrated on utilizing women's traditional role in the family to arouse their political interest in socialism. Its 1947 conference, for example, proposed subcommittees dealing with housing, child welfare, price controls, and nursery schools. The Committee also distributed a questionnaire on Mothers Allowances, hoping the results would give the CCF caucus information with which to recommend reforms of the Mothers Allowance act. The campaign for socialized health care, and the need to organize around consumer issues--both acceptable Party goals--were also seen as priorities by the Women's Committee.

In the case of consumer organizing, the Women's Committee was confronted with the existence of another left-wing consumers group, the Housewives Consumer Association (HCA). In Ontario, CCF women developed a particularly strong antipathy to the Housewives. Their hostility was influenced by the intense anti-communism of many trade union leaders and of National Office, but it was also the product of the Hitler-Stalin pact, which had done much to discredit the CPC in the eyes of CCFers, and of years of experience with 'United Front' work. Many CCFers had simply grown weary of the inevitable struggle for power which developed in such groups, and shunned contact with the Communists. When the HCA

was formed, some CCF women from Sudbury and Toronto joined, and as late as 1946, some CCF trade unionists looked longingly at the HCA's "proletarian constituency",<sup>131</sup> lamenting the loss of recruits to the LPP. As a result, a few Party leaders argued that CCF women should join the HCA to "present their views to the non-political women involved",<sup>132</sup> but the Women's Committee, and especially Marjorie Mann, disagreed. Mann argued there could be no chance of democratic control in the HCA, and wanted it exposed as a Communist front. She saw this as part of a larger battle against Communism:

The struggle against the Housewives is part of a test against Communism. The LPP, finding their way blocked in the unions because the men of the unions recognize the signs of the communists when they appear in men's clothes. The LPPers realize that the sign of a communist is more difficult to detect when it comes in women's clothes.<sup>133</sup>

As an alternative to the HCA, the Women's Committee urged women to join the Consumers Association of Canada (CAC), established in 1947 with a government subsidy. From the very beginning, some CCF women rejected this advice, looking with suspicion on the CAC's government connections and conservative outlook. In the Ontario Commonwealth, Marion Harrington responded to these admonitions to join the CAC with the claim that "support for the CAC will drive consumers' protests into a blind alley...their message is to teach Canadians to live with austerity".<sup>134</sup> And when Vida Knowles was advised to urge Winnipeg women to join the CAC, she refused, asking why she should urge "her organization to join a 'small c' conservative organization, after having kept them out of a left-wing [HCA] one".<sup>135</sup>

Women who supported the CAC option soon shared these doubts. CCF women had trouble 'boring from within' the CAC, as they were quickly

labelled 'partisan' in their efforts to put the Association on a progressive course. By the end of the decade, leading Women's Committee members had labelled the CAC a "liberal and CMA [Canadian Manufacturers Association] dominated diversion to siphon off grass-roots consumer protests".<sup>136</sup> Disillusioned with the CAC, the Women's Committee advised its members to conduct their own price surveys, and channel their energies into a CCF-led campaign for price controls.

The decision of the Women's Committee to reject both the HCA and CAC left it with no interest group to work with on one of its chosen priorities, rising prices. Yet, despite the problems it had encountered with the CAC, the Committee, at its 1950 conference, still suggested that women continue with the tactic of "getting into other women's organizations, and putting forward CCF priorities".<sup>137</sup> At this same conference, the Committee divided Ontario into four zones to decentralize its work and devote more attention to rural areas, and it announced it had been given a page in The Commonwealth, on the rather strict proviso that they "write it, advertise it, promote it, and demonstrate a proven interest by other women in the page".<sup>138</sup> Mann pronounced the Conference "our best yet... new women are involved...including two wives of top trade unionists".<sup>139</sup>

Yet, by mid-decade, the Women's Committee was experiencing difficulties. It had faded in size, and it had failed to carve out a new role for women in the Party. Many women's groups remained limited to auxiliary work, and the women's page in the newspaper could not be sustained.<sup>140</sup> Part of the problem was simply exhaustion; leaders like Mann and Cass-Beggs could not continue indefinitely, and as Mann confided, she was relieved to to back to full-time teaching in 1950, as there "was less nervous and emotional exhaustion"<sup>141</sup> than her unpaid organizing for the

Committee. Moreover, funds for work among women were not forthcoming, for the Party saw such work as 'superfluous', especially as the Party faced electoral and membership decline. Some CCF leaders complained that the women's committee took competent women away from other 'essential' Party business, and a few Committee members came to share this opinion. Even Marjorie Mann worried about raising extra money for the Committee "as this would mean time and energy taken away from the total movement, and with the movement in such a bad way, we can't think of extra appeals".<sup>142</sup> After the disastrous 1951 provincial election, Peggy Stewart, a long-time supporter of the Women's Committee, began to wonder if the women were "dissipating our energies by trying to make a women's committee function",<sup>143</sup> and she decided to put her energies elsewhere. Her concern, however, was not only the general Party malaise; she was frustrated with rank-and-file women members who seemed content with auxiliary roles, with the failure of the Committee to alter women's role in the movement. Ironically though, this political apathy may have been encouraged by the Party's abandonment of women's issues, and its relegation of their concerns to the bottom of its political agenda.

Furthermore, in the post-war years, as women retreated into the nuclear family, organizing women for political action was at best a difficult task. In the labour force, a persisting "conception of maternalism" channelled women into low-paying, 'feminine' occupations and portrayed women's wage labour--especially that of married women--as secondary, undesirable, and unimportant. A baby boom, affluence, and a "drift towards an insular, family-centred culture of consumption"<sup>144</sup> produced a climate inhospitable to women's socialist and feminist organizing. Social and economic conditions had simply not yet produced the

massive conflicts and contradictions--increasing work outside the home, rising social expectations, the influence of black and student movements--which generated the later wave of feminism in the 1960's.

The Ontario Women's Committee tried to integrate itself into this post-war culture, making housewives a target group, and concentrating on issues relating to family life. But this fixation with the preservation of the family ultimately mitigated against a critical analysis of women's privatization in the family, and their social and economic inferiority, both in the family and in the workplace. Also, the Party's indifference to women's issues and its denigration of the Committee as an 'auxiliary' further dampened the possibility of women's militance. One historian has charged that, "as the Women's Committee developed into a separate organization...it prolonged rather than reduced sexual segregation."<sup>145</sup> This analysis oversimplifies by insinuating that, by virtue of its autonomy, the Women's Committee was doomed to renege on its original feminist intentions. It was not simply the Committee's separate existence which hampered its work, for the prevailing social climate, the attitude of the Party to women's organization, and last, but not least, women's utter loyalty to the Party were also factors. Because the Committee lacked a feminist analysis of women's powerlessness, it failed to challenge the attitudes and structures of male prejudice--including the idea that women were primarily responsible for domestic labour--which existed within the Party. Always proud of the fact that they were, first and foremost, socialists and Party loyalists, the Committee tempered and subdued their feminist politics. While some of the Committee's feminist leaders perceived this problem, they did not feel the time was ripe for its exposure. They left that to the next generation of feminists within the Party.



(vi)

The 1940's marked a point of departure from the CCF's former attitude towards the woman question, because for the first time, the Party discussed a comprehensive platform on women's rights. Unlike the CPC, the CCF had not incorporated a women's platform or national women's department into its political practice, but in the wake of social and economic changes prompted by the war, the Party addressed the problem of women's inequality in Canadian society and gave new attention to the problems of women workers. The ensuing policy debate never became a priority for the Party, nor was there a clear consensus over the direction such a policy should take. In the last resort, the CCF remained unconvinced of the urgency of women's rights, and by the 1950's, policy statements on women's equality had faded from sight, with the one significant exception of legislation for equal pay.

The war-time environment inspired the Party to ask what a socialist Reconstruction policy would mean for women, and hopes of electoral victories prompted it to pursue the 'woman's vote'. At the same time, the efforts of CCF women, who pushed and prodded their Party to consider a solution to women's social and economic inferiority were essential to the CCF's new attention to women's issues. Socialist women, like many Communist women, embraced the image of Rosie the Riveter and insisted that their socialist brothers take note of it. They warned that war-time gains for women workers would be easily eroded if socialists did not oppose women's dismissals, even if that meant challenging popular notions that women's place was in the home. And although socialist-feminists were disappointed by the post-war reaction against women workers, a small group of CCF women continued to press for reforms to rectify women's subordinate

position in the labour force.

The 1940's were also significant for the emergence of CCF women as important organizers in the trade union movement, and for a renewed interest in the organization of CCF women's committees. In almost every province, women tried to enlarge women's organization, and at the national level, with the aid of Gladys Strum, women's committees corresponded with letters and occasional meetings. These attempts to share ideas, coordinate common action and build larger women's networks all indicated a growing desire to promote women's self-organization within the Party. The explicit goals of women's committees were to augment the number of women in the Party and to make CCF women more active, but implicit in their work was their desire to rectify the imbalance of the Party's male-dominated leadership, and to make the Party, as well as the public, more conscious of women's issues.

Most of the provincial women's committees, especially during the war, took some interest in women's employment issues, but they were primarily concerned with addressing housewives. Their definition of women's issues, stressing women's role in the family, reflected their own occupational status, and also the dominant conception of women's proper sphere in post-war society. It also followed logically from the Party's historic understanding that woman's political consciousness was largely shaped by her role in the family. Women's Committees believed that women, especially homemakers, felt alienated from party politics, and that their alienation took the form of apathy, or conservatism. Women's committees hoped to overcome this alienation by publicizing a socialist perspective on issues related to family and community needs such as health care, child education and rising prices.

But, paradoxically, this one-dimensional characterization of women's calling in life also limited women's full involvement in the Party. As in the 1930's, the strict association of women with domestic labour, and the Party's unquestioning acceptance of the sexual division of labour relegated women to secondary, 'feminine' roles in the movement, just as they were streamlined into lower-paying 'feminine' jobs in the marketplace.

During this period, CCFers were adamantly opposed to the Communist Party. Yet, there were some similarities in these parties' treatment of the woman question and the roles women played in the movement. Women in both parties were a minority of the Party leadership, but they comprised an important core of local organizers, educators and leaders, and they performed support work essential to the movement. Both parties focused on the economic basis of women's oppression; they stressed the low wages of women workers or the financial strain of rising prices on housewives as the key women's issues of their time. Both were concerned with the needs of women workers but, by the late 1940's, placed more emphasis on the mobilization of women in the home. And ultimately, both parties suffered declining vitality in their work among women during the mid-1950's in part because anti-socialist ideas and prevailing notions of femininity proscribed the possibilities of militancy, but also because women in the CPC and CCF, loyal to a socialist vision stressing unity in the face of adversity, were not ready to challenge the inequalities and contradictions within their own movement.

## Footnotes: Chapter VII

- 1      Gerald Caplan, The Dilemma of Canadian Socialism: The CCF in Ontario (Toronto, 1973); Jack Granatstein, "The York South By-Election of February 9, 1942: A Turning Point in Canadian Politics", CHR, Vol. XLVIII, no. 2 (June, 1967); Walter Young, Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF (Toronto, 1969), chap. 5; S.M. Lipset, Agrarian Socialism (Toronto, 1949), chap. 6.
- 2      Interview with Margaret Mann, Nov. 27, 1983.
- 3      Ruth R. Pierson, "Women's Emancipation and the Recruitment of Women into the Canadian Labour Force in World War II", CHAR, (1976). See also Chapter VI.
- 4      Gail C. Brandt, in "Pigeon-holed and Forgotten: The Work of the Subcommittee on the Post-War Problems of Women, 1943", Social History/Histoire Sociale, Vol. XV, no. 29, (May, 1982), suggests that few women, especially married women, expected to stay in their war-time jobs. But Ruth R. Pierson and Marjorie Cohen, "Educating Women for Work", in Michael Cross and Gregory Kealey, eds., Modern Canada, 1930-1980's (Toronto, 1984), suggest that the surveys taken during the war actually came up "with conflicting results", and that some showed a significant number of women did wish to remain in their war-time employment.
- 5      Manitoba Commonwealth, March 28, 1941.
- 6      Ruth Pierson and Marjorie Cohen, "Educating Women For Work", p. 234. It may have only been rhetoric to the government, but socialist women were influenced by it.
- 7      The Peoples Weekly, Sept. 1, 1945.
- 8      B.C. Federationist, May 31, 1945.
- 9      University of British Columbia Archives, MacInnis Collection, Box 24, Legislative Scrapbooks, Budget Debate, 1942, p. 4.
- 10     Ibid., p. 4.
- 11     Ibid., p. 5.
- 12     Ibid., p. 5.
- 13     Saskatchewan Commonwealth, Dec. 14, 1943.
- 14     Saskatchewan Commonwealth, Nov. 1. 1943.
- 15     In an interesting comment made after the 1948 election, Agnes Macphail articulated this assumption that a home and a career (especially in politics) were incompatible. "I have a soft

spot for working mothers, and the fight for nurseries...I would have liked to have children of my own, but you can't be in politics at the same time". Queens University Archives, George Grube Collection, Box 40, Scrapbooks, Globe and Mail, June 8, 1948.

- 16 Yet, as Ruth Pierson and Marjorie Cohen, "Educating Women for Work", argue, women were seen as a distinct group, for post-war training, education and job opportunities were divided into male and female categories. Women were to take domestic training; men were not.
- 17 Saskatchewan Commonwealth, (hereafter Sask Comm), August 16, 1943.
- 18 Sask Comm, Oct. 14, 1942.
- 19 Ontario New Commonwealth (Ont N Comm), Jan. 24, 1943.
- 20 B.C. Federationist, (B.C. Fed), Jan. 21, 1943.
- 21 Glenbow Archives, CCF Collection, Box 5, Radio Broadcast, 1949.
- 22 Manitoba Commonwealth, (Man Comm), March 29, 1940.
- 23 Sask Comm, May 12, 1943.
- 24 University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Books Room, Woodsworth Memorial Collection (WMC), Box 10A, Radio Script.
- 25 Sask Comm, May 31, 1944.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Public Archives of Canada (PAC), CCF Collection, MG 28 IV I, Vol. 50, Pamphlet entitled 'Women Protect Your Home'.
- 28 Carol Bacchi, Liberation Deferred: The Ideas of the English Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918 (Toronto, 1983), illustration entitled 'Canada Needs a Clean-Up Week', p. 31.
- 29 Canadian Forum, August, 1944.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ont N Comm, April 25, 1946.
- 32 Ont N Comm, May 10, 1945.
- 33 B.C. Fed, Aug. 1, 1946.
- 34 PAC, CCF Collection, Vol. 10, 1944 Convention.
- 35 Ibid., Vol. 198, Research, 'Women' file.

- 36 Ibid., L. Ingle to G. MacInnis, Feb. 4, 1947.
- 37 Ibid., L. Ingle to Geneva Misener, March 17, 1948.
- 38 Ibid., Research Report.
- 39 Ibid., Research Report.
- 40 Ibid., G. MacInnis to L. Ingle, Jan. 13, 1948.
- 41 Ibid., G. MacInnis to L. Ingle, Jan. 5, 1947. Her emphasis.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid. Her emphasis.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Women who prepared the report were drawn from the Ontario Women's Committee subcommittee on the Status of Women, which also included Peggy Brewin, Edith Fowke, Eva Sanderson, Margaret Lazarus.
- 47 PAC, CCF Collection, Vol. 198, Report of the Status of Women Committee.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 PAC, CCF Collection, Vol. 60. Nellie Peterson to Lorne Ingle, April 8, 1950. In 1952, a letter from Olive Valteau to Lorne Ingle confirmed that "the National Women's Committee is no longer functioning". Vol. 121, O. Valteau to L. Ingle, Nov. 4, 1952.
- 50 Interview with Margot Thompson, Oct. 6, 1981.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Wayne Roberts, ed., Where Angels Fear to Tread: Eileen Tallman and the Labour Movement (Hamilton, 1981).
- 54 Eileen Sufrin, The Eaton Drive (Don Mills, 1982).
- 55 Interview with Margot Thompson.
- 56 One CCF woman, for example, was not given equal pay for her job in the union, but she never made her fight for equal pay public.
- 57 Interview with Margot Thompson.

- 58 Interview with Barbara Cass-Beggs, June 4, 1981.
- 59 Interview with Margot Thompson.
- 60 Beatrice Trew, Gertrude Telford and some other CCF women had to circulate a resolution to well-known CCF women and constituency associations to help pressure the government to extend these rights to women. See section on Saskatchewan in this chapter.
- 61 Interview with Margot Thompson.
- 62 Eileen Sufrin, The Eaton Drive, p. 129.
- 63 Ibid., pp. 208-209.
- 64 Interview with Margaret Mann.
- 65 Lewis objected to pamphlets, purchased and offered for sale by the B.C. Education Committee, written by the British Socialist Party. The latter were critical of policies of the British Labour Party, which Lewis considered the CCF's 'sister' Party. Lewis demanded they be removed. Smith refused until the Education Committee was consulted. A disagreement on the convention floor, and later within the Party, ensued. Interview with Eve Smith, July 19, 1981.
- 66 Interview with Nellie Peterson, Nov. 21, 1980.
- 67 U of T, Woodsworth Memorial Collection (WMC), Box 1, Provincial Executive Minutes, Oct. 1, 1943. The Executive received a complaint that the Keewatin CCF club was refusing to let women join.
- 68 Beatrice Trew, quoted in Georgina Taylor, "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How Saskatchewan Women Reconciled their Political Activities for the CCF with Traditional Roles for Women" (M.A. University of Saskatoon, 1983), p. 160.
- 69 Beatrice Trew to Librarian, Legislative Library, Regina, n.d. Copy in possession of Georgina Taylor.
- 70 Archives Board of Saskatchewan, Interview of Georgina Taylor with Gladys Strum, August, 1981. Another CCF leader in Saskatchewan, Carlyle King, charges in Donald Kerr, ed., Western Canadian Politics: The Radical Tradition (Edmonton, 1981), p. 39, that Strum lacked administrative abilities. In fact, he says he only accepted election to the Vice-Presidency of the Party in 1944 to 'help' Strum (who defeated him for the Presidency). Strum, he claims, always avoided important decisions by going for a hair appointment, or some other 'unnecessary' excuse. As Georgina Taylor points out, King's views seem

somewhat exaggerated and may be coloured by the fact of his defeat in 1944.

- 71 Archives Board of Saskatchewan, CCF Papers, Strum to Georgina Mathers, March 24, 1941.
- 72 Ibid., Strum to CCF Executive, Oct. 31, 1941.
- 73 Interview with Marjorie Mann, April, 1980.
- 74 Interview with Marjorie Mann, April, 1980.
- 75 Interview with Barbara Cass-Beggs.
- 76 Ibid.
- 77 PAC, CCF Collection, Vol. 50, Ontario Provincial Executive, March 20, 1945.
- 78 Nancy Zaseybida, quoted in Myrna Kostash, All of Baba's Children (Edmonton, 1977), p. 256.
- 79 Interview with Margaret Mann, Nov. 27, 1983.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 UBC Archives, Shepard Collection, Ladies Auxiliary Book, Ernie Winch to the South Westminster Ladies Auxiliary, May 16, 1945.
- 82 UBC ARchives, MacInnis Collection, Box 61, Saanich Women's Council Minute Book, Sept. 22, Oct. 6, 1942.
- 83 Interview with Jean Robinson, Oct. 9, 1980. A slightly different account of this conflict appears in a letter to Marjorie Mann, from Mrs. Tait, (PAC, Marjorie Mann Papers, MG 32 G12, Vol. 1, Nov. 2, 1948.) Mrs. Tait says that she inherited the leadership of the Port Arthur women's organization from a good organizer, but one who "wanted a separate bank account--a separate organization in all effect". Tait claimed that she had to therefore tread a fine line between "Two ways...those who promote the financial gain aspect and those who wish to explore the reasons we are in the CCF".
- 84 Interview with Nellie Peterson, Nov. 21, 1980.
- 85 Interview with Hilda Kristiansen, Dec. 8, 1980. The 'play schools' movement tried to gain public and government support for nursery schools for pre-school children.
- 86 UBC Archives, MacInnis Collection, Box 51, Biographical Material.
- 87 CCF News, Dec. 16, 1948. (Name changed from B.C. Federationist.)
- 88 Manitoba Commonwealth, July 19, 1947.



- 89 PAC, CCF Collection, Vol. 82, May Campbell in Report of Women's Committee to 194 Provincial Convention, April 11-13, 1947.
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 Interview with Hilda Kristiansen. It is interesting to note that Kristiansen says the last resolution found favour with the Party because it was justified primarily on the grounds that nursery schools were beneficial to the formation of the child's character, rather than the argument that working women needed child care, as some CCF men, unsympathetic to married working women, thought "nursery schools were simply a sop to the professional woman". Interview with Hilda Kristiansen.
- 92 CCF News, May 30, 1949.
- 93 B.C. Fed, June 10, 1943.
- 94 B.C. Fed, July 25, 1940.
- 95 Laura Jamieson, "Women's School for Citizenship", Canadian Forum, March, 1945.
- 96 B.C. Fed, Sept. 13, 1945.
- 97 B.C. Fed, June 21, 1945.
- 98 Ibid.
- 99 Interview with Jessie Mendels, Dec. 8, 1980. The women's committee was revived again and took on new organizing tasks in the early 1960's.
- 100 A similar problem did exist in Ontario and B.C., with Toronto and Vancouver dominating those provincial committees. However, it was particularly important in Manitoba and Alberta to have rural representation, and the problem of involving rural women seemed especially acute here--in comparison to Saskatchewan, where the CCF had a stronger base in the farm community.
- 101 Interview with Margaret Mann, Nov. 27, 1983.
- 102 Peoples Weekly, Oct. 18, 1947.
- 103 Peoples Weekly, Feb. 26, 1949.
- 104 Glenbow Archives, CCF Papers, Box 23, Edmonton CCF Women's Club Minutes, Sept. 13, 1948.
- 105 Interview with Nellie Peterson.
- 106 Man Comm, June 7, 1947.

- 107 Public Archives of Manitoba (PAM), CCF Collection, Vol. 3, 1947 Convention, June 26-28, 1947.
- 108 Sask Comm, Aug. 16, 1948.
- 109 Ibid.
- 110 Birmingham Feminist History Group, "Feminism as Femininity in the 1950's", Feminist Review, Vol. 3, (1979), p. 50.
- 111 ABS, Gertrude Telford Papers, xxxii, copy of letter, 'Dear Worker', and 'Notes on Resolutions', and iii, Study Outline, 'Legislation Affecting the Home'.
- 112 Ibid.
- 113 Ibid., 'Legislation Affecting the Home'.
- 114 ABS, CCF Papers, 13th Provincial Convention, July 21-23, 1948.
- 115 Interview with Margaret Mann. Similarly, in a letter to Marjorie Mann, in Ontario, Saskatchewan's Attorney General, J.W. Corman justified the Bill, arguing that "equality...would take away many privileges women already possess...we need legislation for specific evils, like equal pay". PAC, Marjorie Mann Papers, Vol. 1, J.W. Corman to M. Mann, Sept. 20, 1947.
- 116 PAC, Marjorie Mann Papers, Vol. 1, B. Cass-Beggs to M. Mann, July 12, 1947.
- 117 U of T, WMC, Box 1, Report of Riley to the Provincial Executive, Oct. 2, 1942.
- 118 Queens University, Ontario CCF Papers, William Neff Papers, Box 1, Women's Committee, Report, June, 1944.
- 119 Interview with Alice Katool, May 31, 1981.
- 120 Interview with Avis McCurdy, May 30, 1982.
- 121 U of T, WMC, Box 2, Avis McCurdy to Ontario Provincial Council, Nov. 25, 1945.
- 122 The women who prepared the 1948 report were basically the same group that replied to Ingle's brief. See footnote 46.
- 123 PAC, CCF Collection, Vol. 60. Findings of Discussion Groups from Sept. 1948, by Peggy Stewart. On occasion, CCF women were also willing to cooperate with women of other political persuasions, in events like the Women's Citizenship Dinner in Toronto, a non-partisan forum which focused on the need for more women in public life. This cooperation was not extended to women in the Communist Party.

- 124 PAC, Mann Papers, Vol. 1, CCF Women's Conference, 1947.
- 125 Dean Beeby, "Women in the Ontario CCF, 1940-1950", Ontario History, Vol. LXXIV, no. 4, (December, 1982).
- 126 PAC, Mann Paper, Vol. 1, Letter to Committee Members, Nov. 10, 1948.
- 127 Ibid., M. Mann to Morden Lazarus, Oct. 14, 1949.
- 128 U of T, WMC, Box 2, Provincial Council Minutes, April 12, 1947.
- 129 PAC, Mann Papers, Letter to Saskatchewan CCF Women, n.d., probably 1947. Furthermore, a few women who became active in the women's committee also became Provincial Councillors at some time.
- 130 PAC, Mann Papers, Vol. 1, M. Mann to 'Margaret', Oct. 29, 1950.
- 131 PAC, CCF Papers, Vol. 60, M. Mann to David Lewis, Feb. 16, 1948.
- 132 Ibid.
- 133 Ibid.
- 134 Ontario CCF News (formerly Ontario New Commonwealth), March 25, 1948.
- 135 PAC, Mann Papers, Vol. 1, Mary Morrison to Marjorie Mann, July 16, 1947.
- 136 Ibid., Marion Bryden to M. Mann, April 24, 1951, and Mann to Bryden, May 3, 1951.
- 137 Ibid., Women's Conference Report, 1951.
- 138 Ibid., M. Mann to Margaret, Oct. 29, 1950.
- 139 Ibid., M. Mann to Mary Sutherland, Oct. 29, 1950.
- 140 PAC, CCF Collection, Vol 460, 6th Conference of Ontario Women's Committee, June 12, 1953. (One of the last remaining full reports of the women's conference before it was resurrected again, with new organizers--like Peggy Brewin--in the early 1960's.) At this conference, Marion Bryden, who was looking after the women's column, said she had difficulty gathering material to fill the space, and she asked to be relieved of the job. The column was temporarily discontinued.
- 141 PAC, Mann Papers, M. Mann to Margaret, Oct. 29, 1950.
- 142 Ibid., Mann to B. Cass-Beggs, June 27, 1950.

- 143     Ibid., Peggy Stewart to M. Mann, Feb. 16, 1951.
- 144     Bryan Palmer, Working-Class Experience (Toronto and Vancouver, 1983), p. 274.
- 145     Dean Beeby, "Women in the Ontario CCF, 1940-1950", p. 279.

## CONCLUSION

In 1962 the NDP hired a National Women's Director to develop new programs designed to draw women into the Party. In her first written report, the Director pointed out that she began her tenure "without records, files, precedent or pattern".<sup>1</sup> Although her statement in part revealed the doldrums that CCF women's groups had fallen into in the later 1950's, it was also a sad reflection of the Party's amnesia about three decades of a rich and diverse history of women's organization within the Party. Just over a decade later, Canadian feminists resurrected the practice of holding large International Women's Day celebrations, and pointed to their marches and demonstrations as 'new-found tactics' for the women's movement. A bewildered generation of older Communist women asked how their annual attention to International Women's Day since the 1920's had been so easily forgotten. Both of these incidents reflected the virtual exclusion of women from the written history of the Canadian Left, an exclusion resulting from a number of factors, including the less influential role women played in both the CCF and CPC, the minimal interest in women's issues which characterized both Parties, the denigration of the CPC's earlier importance in the aftermath of anticommunism and the 20th Congress, and last, but not least, the persisting devaluation of women in Canadian society.

Yet, as this thesis has shown, women did play an important, and also distinctive, role in the making of Canadian socialism. Although often concentrated in the lower echelons of Party organization and activity, or channelled into 'feminine' occupational spheres, women were the indispensable foot soldiers in the battle for socialism.

Moreover, issues pertaining to women's economic and social equality were at different times and to different degrees, a concern and organizational focus for socialists and communists. Women's contribution to the evolution of the Canadian Left, and the Left's treatment of the woman question changed considerably over time, within as well as between the two Parties. The CPC and CCF emerged from different ideological traditions, and lived out distinct political lives, although sometimes overlapping in causes, converts, ideas, and, increasingly in the 1940's, in competition and hostility. Even within each Party, ideology (in the case of the CCF), region, and ethnicity produced variations in political culture which in turn affected views on women's equality and women's role in political life.

Ideological variations were particularly evident in the CCF, which was born as an eclectic coalition of labourites, radical farmers, Fabians, Christian socialists and Marxists. While only the Marxist tradition boasted an 'analysis' of the woman question, other founding groups had well-established practices of (and were sometimes more sympathetic than Marxists to) women's separate or 'semi-autonomous' organizations. The Women's Section of the United Farmers of Canada, the Women's ILP, and the Women's Western Labor Conference all provided models for later CCF women's groups. Moreover, these earlier women's networks, fashioned by feminist-socialists like Beatrice Brigden and Laura Jamieson, who had moved from social reform to social democracy, helped to draw women into the CCF and cement new political allegiances.

In the two decades after the Regina Convention, women's auxiliaries and women's committees flourished as an integral part of CCF organization. Some women's groups were largely fund-raisers, some

combined educational work with fund-raising, while some concentrated primarily on female leadership training, education and social action. Neither rural nor urban CCF women's committees experienced a linear evolution towards greater and greater strength; they grew, declined, then grew again, the ebb and flow of their existence conditioned by the enthusiasm of local female leadership, the current attitude of the Party towards women's organizations, and the wider social and economic climate of the time.

Women's auxiliaries supplied a comfortable niche for socialist women uninterested in entering the mainstream of a male-dominated Party, but who nonetheless wished to engage in some self-education and do support work based on traditional female talents and roles. And their work did contribute, both in a financial and social sense, to the growth of the CCF. Yet, women's auxiliaries were also places where women were channelled and forgotten by Party leaders unconscious or uncaring of the need to challenge women with non-traditional political roles.

The more politically conscious women's committees played an even more important role in the CCF: they were the voices of feminism--sometimes the only ones--within the Party, urging the promotion of women into leadership roles, and raising current women's issues for discussion. In the light of the Party's tendency to attach limited priority to women's issues and to conveniently ignore the glaring imbalance of power within its own ranks, these women's committees were extremely valuable pressure groups. Without them, discussion within the CCF about women's emancipation would have been meagre indeed.

In its publications, election appeals and in leaders' speeches, the CCF often portrayed women as a specific interest group, influenced



primarily by their central role in the family. Most women's committees concurred with this view, for their primary orientation was towards homemakers. Like the Communists, many CCFers feared that housewives, isolated in the home, were politically apathetic, or worse, conservative, and that their conservative views might influence other family members.<sup>2</sup> In order to interest women in CCF politics, socialists thus stressed 'maternal' and family-related issues like health care, prices, education, and, in the 1930's, peace.

The concerns of women wage-earners were usually of secondary importance to women's committees, reflecting women's minority status in the labour force, as well as prevailing ideals of female domesticity. But increasingly in the 1940's, the working woman gained more attention both from the Party and from women's committees. As a result of women's wartime experience, the activity of a few CCF women in the trade union movement, and especially in Ontario, the persistent efforts of a new generation of socialist-feminists, issues like equal pay were raised and demands for a charter of women's rights, including the right to a job, were voiced. Party members disagreed, however, on the usefulness of 'separate' CCF women's groups to lobby for such demands--or indeed, to work on any women's issues. Male fears of 'feminist' control, the old cries of socialist egalitarianism, and very real apprehensions about the transformation of women's committees into auxiliaries produced opposition to women's self-organization, and to any 'special attention' to women--even though, in its election appeals, the Party already did address women as a distinct interest group.

Yet, these opponents of women's groups could not have provided convincing proof that women shared equal roles and power within the Party.

Although the 1940's saw more CCF women advancing into local organizing and leadership positions, and although women made important contributions to certain areas of Party life--such as educational work--they still tended to be concentrated in grass roots activity, like electioneering and fund-raising, to be underrepresented at conventions and in the National leadership, and to be almost completely absent as election candidates. Their limited representation in the seats of power reflected persisting social barriers--not the least of which was women's responsibility for child rearing--to women's political activism.

In contrast to the CCF, the Communist Party attempted a more centralized and well-planned approach to the woman question. Their understanding of women's inequality came from Marx, Engels and Lenin, and their strategies from respected mentors and revolutionary leaders in the Comintern, though local needs and social conditions also influenced CPC strategies. Communists believed that women's economic and social inequality was endemic to capitalism, and unlike the CCF, the Party established a set of women's demands in its platform, as well as a Women's Department to conduct organizational and agitational work. The CPC gave more thought and time to the woman question than had previous Marxist parties in Canada, and in its unionization of women workers, its organization of women on relief, of housewives against rising prices, of women against fascism and the atomic bomb--and in other campaigns--the Party set out impressive precedents for Canadian socialism.

The CPC's work among women and the role of women within the Party changed from the 1920's to the 1950's, although some common threads of activity can be isolated. In the 1920's, the Federation of Women's Labor Leagues flourished as a result of a dynamic debate on women's

equality in Russia, a dedicated Canadian organizer, Florence Custance, and a measure of organizational flexibility, given the vicissitudes of mobilizing women of different languages across vast distances. The WLL prioritized certain women's issues which endured throughout the Party's history: the unionization of wage-earning women, the mobilization of working-class housewives around issues like prices, and activity in the peace movement. Mothers' Clinics and the need to legalize birth control information were also part of the WLL platform, although this demand for reproductive rights lost its prominence in later years.

The WLLs, largely the brainchild of Florence Custance, were shaken by her death in 1929, and were subsequently unable to oppose Party directives to affiliate with the new trade-union centre, the Workers Unity League. During the Third Period, the Party's militant, but sometimes dogmatic and economistic treatment of women's issues led to some positive progress in the organization of women workers, although overall, it limited the possibilities for the semi-autonomous organization of women and narrowed the whole debate about women's equality. Beginning in the latter part of the Third Period and carrying on into the Popular Front, Party ranks swelled, new directives came from the Comintern, and in the interests of the Popular Front, the CPC's work among women was strengthened and made more creative as the Party directed its efforts to a wide variety of community issues, as well as union organizing and the anti-fascist movement. During the Second War, the Party's theoretical emphasis on women in social production as the harbingers of class struggle found balance in the CPC's attempts to integrate women into war production and organize women workers. But in the aftermath of war, and amidst the growth of anti-communist feeling, the Party was ill-prepared to extend this work.

For this reason, as well as new advice from the International, the Canadian Party, like Communist Parties elsewhere, favoured a return to 'bread and peace' as rallying cries for women's organization.

By the later 1940's the number of women in the Party leadership had increased since the early days of Florence Custance; a very small core of women, like the influential Becky Buhay and Annie Buller, were national leaders, and a larger group were effective local organizers and leaders. Yet, the CPC evidenced a sexual division of labour similar to that in its social democratic rival, the CCF. Women made inordinate contributions to grass roots work, electioneering, fund-raising and social convening, and were often highly visible in educational and cultural work. They were less visible, however, as theoreticians, union organizers and policy makers.

Also like the CCF, the CPC tended to see women as a distinct interest group shaped by their role as care-givers in the family. While the organization and recruitment of wage-earning women always had a stated priority--and was more important to the CPC than to the CCF--the mobilization of working-class housewives consumed a large amount of the Women's Department time. This emphasis on women's domestic labour reflected an understanding of the important material and emotional role that women played in the working-class family, and an astute reading of prevailing ideals of domesticity for married women. Yet, Party strategies to mobilize housewives raised some important questions. By the late 1930's, the CPC claimed it wished to defend and preserve the family; at the same time, it also called for an end to the "domestic drudgery"<sup>3</sup> of women's work in the home. Surely the two were not so easily separated. Concerned that household work was isolating and led to women's apathy or

'backward' political views, the CPC appealed to women with issues like rising prices. While their efforts to involve women in radical politics were admirable, their tactics indicated that domestic labour was to remain something to organize around, not something to change altogether. Aside from a few brave calls from Communist women for shared work in Communist households, consistent stress was not placed on either the collectivization of domestic work, or sharing it equally with men. The transformation of family life, along with an end to women's unpaid labour in the home, challenges to the sexual division of labour, and women's reproductive freedom, were either largely ignored by CCFers or assigned to the never-never land of 'after the revolution' by Communists.

(ii)

Women's contribution to the making of Canadian socialism, I have argued, was both important and distinctive, and attention to women's inequality was part of the Left's agenda. At the same time, one cannot escape the overwhelming fact of women's secondary status and less powerful roles in both Parties. In terms of membership, and especially in terms of leadership, prestige and theoretical stature, women always fell behind men. Moreover, neither Party attached an importance to women's emancipation, making women's equality a first-place prerequisite in their vision of socialism. This thesis, therefore, has also addressed an important question--an inversion of Charles Fourier's classic quotation so often used by socialists--'why has women's emancipation not been the measure of socialist movements?'.

Socialists have long promised sexual equality, not only in the socialist future, but also in the here-and-now of their own movements. Yet,

ironically, perhaps tragically, socialist Parties have reproduced the social relations of gender--and hence, women's oppression--found in the outside world. Canadian Communists decried any evidence of 'male supremacy' within their ranks; some even did battle with these attitudes, but ultimately, Communists found male supremacy a difficult foe to vanquish. Canadian socialists were less visibly concerned with unequal gender relations in their Party, but the criticisms of Party women, such as Elizabeth Kerr's charge that her fellow socialists were "mid-Victorian"<sup>4</sup> in their views of women, indicated very similar problems within the CCF.

The reasons that both movements found it difficult to alter women's secondary status within their movements and attach priority to women's issues, were factors internal to Party life, as well as external social forces pressing inward on the Party. Both the CCF and CPC were limited by the fact that they never fully grasped the nature of women's oppression. The Communist Party's understanding of women's inequality and its strategies for change were heavily influenced by Comintern advice, and work among women fell into line with the political priorities of the Party as a whole. To positive effect, the Russian influence might encourage new attention to women's issues, or offer new political insights, as with Custance's work in the 1920's, or with the innovative organizing done during the Depression. But the Comintern influence could just as easily narrow the definition of the woman question, encourage rigid organizing strategies, or alter work among women to service other, more 'important' Party needs. The organization of women, therefore, was subject to the whim of 'experts' from afar; it was not shaped primarily from the struggles and ideas of women immediately involved in the socialist movement.

Comintern advice, however, was not the only factor shaping Canadian Communists' approach to the woman question; Comintern policies were sometimes negotiated through the peculiarities of Canadian conditions and through the understanding of Canadian Party leaders. The CPC's definition of women's oppression was also shaped by its particular use of Marxist and Leninist concepts, and by the social composition and needs of its own membership. Unfortunately, in hands of the CPC, Marxism became a rigid set of rules, rather than methodological tools for inquiry--admittedly, a fact related to the Party's links to the Comintern and the triumph of Stalinism in Comintern circles. Marx was used to show the need to draw women into social production; Engels was cited as proof that private property caused woman's subordination; and Lenin was quoted to caution against organizing along 'bourgeois' lines by addressing sexual questions. From the 1920's, but especially the 1930's on, new views of women's subordination, even alternate Marxist views, were dismissed, as in the case of Trotsky, "shunned as if [he] was on an invisible Index".<sup>5</sup> The Party repeatedly stressed one or two 'lessons' of Marxist theory--such as women's exploitation as wage earners, or the need to draw women into social production--thus creating an economistic and deterministic Marxism, which could not explain the more complex sexual and cultural manifestations of women's oppression. In fairness to the CPC, it is true that much of the re-evaluation of Engels and widening of traditional Marxist theory about women's inequality has taken place since the 1960's. One can hardly blame Communists of the 1930's for not reading the latest in Marxist-feminist theory. But there were a few instances--such as Mary Inman's theoretical challenges on the question of women's domestic labour--of attempts to shed new light on old Marxist orthodoxies, and

they were always quickly dismissed by the Party.

The social composition and social experience of Party members tended to reinforce, rather than reduce the Party's limited use of Marxist ideas. CPC members came largely from working-class backgrounds, and many joined during the 1930's and early 1940's, a period of economic depression and political repression. Their daily experiences of wage labour, poverty, relief, police actions and government indifference sparked their interest in radical ideas, and for many, confirmed an emphasis on class, rather than sexual inequality. Most Communist women saw sexual equality as an important goal, but their concerns were contained and shaped by the strict interpretation of Engels and the heavy emphasis on capitalism as the 'cause' of sexual inequality always promoted in Communist publications and educational work.

Many Communist members also came from emigrant backgrounds and one appeal of Communism may have been its emphasis on class solidarity in the face of the rampant nativism in Canadian society. At the same time, despite the Party's various attempts to integrate its European-born comrades into Canadian society and to weaken ethnic loyalties in the Party, ethnic identities remained firmly intact, and there is no evidence that women's ethnic identification encouraged new views or emphasis on the woman question. The cultural background of Jewish and perhaps Finnish women may have stimulated a certain political militancy, or even a feeling of equality with men. But this does not mean that these women identified with other women, or more acutely experienced and actively fought for sexual equality. Indeed, their ethnic identification might have had the opposite effect.



Lastly, while connections to the Comintern, a rigid use of Marxism, and the social base of the movement tended to obscure questions about sexual inequality, the Leninist structure of the CPC also hindered an emphasis on women's emancipation and prevented the integration of women into all levels of Party life. Whatever the theoretical intentions of democratic centralism, its operation in the CPC tended to cut off democratic decision-making in favour of leadership control. In certain respects, the Party's use of Leninist organizing did successfully aid their work: a uniformity of principle and purpose, a centralized organization, the idea of uniting into a disciplined revolutionary force all led to some effective, efficient organizational coups. But the way Leninism was used also had negative consequences for the cause of sexual equality, because in the wake of the Party's centralized operation and uniformity of purpose, gender differences were easily papered over, rather than explored and debated. Despite the existence of some grass-roots discussion in the CPC, in decision-making, its members deferred to leaders from above. The result was a Party with a pyramid structure, with men (generally) at the top, and power flowing downwards rather than upwards. As one woman who became disenchanted with Party organization in the '50's explained:

When I suggested that we voice our opinion before the Central Committee had decided on the question at issue, I was seen as 'disruptive'. So the line was laid down: we couldn't discuss this issue until after the Central Committee had, and given us their decision...I explained when I left, 'that's exactly what I don't want any more of!'<sup>6</sup>

This deference to leadership and the lack of a vibrant inner-Party democracy stilled the voices of those less confident of theory, less assured of their social worth and less valued by other members--and such people

were more likely to be women.

This problem of an overbearing leadership was linked to the use of the Leninist concept of the 'vanguard'. The vanguard was supposedly the most 'advanced' in consciousness, ready and willing to share their superior insights with other Party members. Of course, as one of the most recent feminist critics of Leninism has pointed out, the process of deciding what was advanced and what was backward was not a neutral one.<sup>7</sup> In the CPC, these decisions were made by (largely male) leaders, already influenced by Comintern directives and by their own understanding of social, including gender, relations. The result was a rigid and linear concept of advanced consciousness which failed to take into account "that consciousness was many-faceted, and people could be backward on some issues and forward on others".<sup>8</sup> Correct ideas were those replicating the Party's prevailing economism and emphasis on the class struggle, as well as the leadership's current priorities, while incorrect ones, such as a feminist emphasis on sexual oppression, were easily dismissed as backward and dangerous. Furthermore, the whole idea of a vanguard tended to imply a very high level of commitment, including the ability to travel and organize whenever the Party called, which was difficult for a woman with family responsibilities to live up to, especially if she was currently living up to the Party's emphasis on 'defending the family'.

Lastly, during much of the Party's history, Leninism, as interpreted by the Comintern and the CPC, stressed key organizing targets: heavy industry, strikes, and in general a focus on social production, were given strategic priority. This prioritization tended to minimize the importance of women's (seasonal and 'temporary') wage labour and women's work in the home; moreover, it ignored the expression of power relations,

in gender and sexuality, not directly addressed by the struggle between labour and capital.<sup>9</sup> Such an emphasis could only postpone a more complex understanding of women's oppression, and delay actions to eradicate it.

If the CPC's use of Leninism worked against the full discussion and implementation of sexual equality, then one might presume that the CCF, a social democratic Party with very different methods of organizing, had more successes in integrating women into all levels of Party life. The CCF, by virtue of a more democratic decision-making process and because of an emphasis on local and provincial organization (at least in the early years), allowed greater opportunities for criticism and flexibility. But in the CCF too, leadership opinions, which were largely unsympathetic to feminism, were highly influential; furthermore, the CCF leadership could also be dictatorial and undemocratic on occasion.<sup>10</sup> Like the CPC, the Party's commitment to sexual emancipation was hindered by the social composition of its membership and the context of women's radicalization. Lastly, the CCF was handicapped by its lack of theoretical interest in the woman question. Ironically, the CPC posed and promoted the woman question, but lacked the internal democracy and Party structures to let it blossom in Party debates; the CCF seldom addressed the woman question, even though its Party organization might have facilitated more innovation and discussion.

As in the case of the CPC, the class position and social experiences of CCF members to some extent militated against a primary pre-occupation with women's emancipation. An alliance of farm, working-class and middle-class Canadians, the early CCF was largely influenced by the economic content of the 'lean' '20's and 'dirty' '30's. CCF women understood and explained their conversion to radicalism in terms of their

experience of, or witness to, economic deprivation and class inequalities which they believed were shared equally by men and women, not by instances of sexual discrimination. Even the professional female so well represented in the CCF ranks--the teacher--was the product of very different social circumstances than the university-educated woman who later sparked the women's movement of the 1960's. Teachers of the earlier period, for example, often came from farm or working-class families, had few career options and life choices (including a university education) and, at least in Saskatchewan, many returned to economically disadvantaged farming communities to practice their profession.

In the 1930's a small group of former suffragists and feminists like Laura Jamieson, Rose Henderson, Helena Gutteridge and Beatrice Brigden made their way into the CCF, carrying "the zest of the suffrage struggle"<sup>11</sup> with them. Some like Henderson and Gutteridge, were already sympathetic to socialism; others, like Jamieson and Brigden made a transition from 'feminism with a social conscience' to socialist-feminism. Their outlook often included some form of feminist pacifism; they avidly promoted the psychological and educational value of separate women's groups; and they urged discussion of women's issues within the Party. Ultimately, though, their 'spirit of feminism' remained a small part of CCF policies; their voices a minority within the movement. The same was true of the next generation of feminist-socialists whose political teeth were cut during and after World War II. In the Ontario Women's Committee of the 1940's some leaders experienced and understood the immense barriers to sexual equality which existed around them; they even voiced some hesitant feminist criticisms of these barriers. But again, their views represented a small part of CCF membership.

One reason for the CCF's indifference to these feminist observations was the philosophical basis of its socialism. A more eclectic collection of socialists than the CPC, the CCF included Fabians, Christian socialists and Marxists, and as I have argued in Chapter I, this eclectic base, and more importantly, a lack of concern with women's oppression within many of these traditions, hindered the development of an understanding of sexual inequality. Some Marxists in the Party were conscious of the need to address the woman question, and to their credit, did so. But, with few exceptions, their analyses usually reflected the same economic determinism and Marxist orthodoxies seen in the CPC. The Utopian and Christian traditions did portray women as a distinct social group, perhaps more moral, more sentient than men; but pedestals preclude an analysis of oppression. The small group of feminists within the CCF failed to convince the Party--and sometimes didn't even dare ask--that the roots and extent of women's inequality be thoroughly examined. CCF policies addressed women's issues in a piecemeal way: certain instances of sexual discrimination, such as women's lower wages, were opposed, and certain 'facts', such as the idea that women's political concerns were shaped by her family concerns, were taken for granted. But woman's social and economic status, her role in productive and domestic labour, her sexual subordination were not analyzed in a broader sense, in order to achieve a theoretical understanding of oppression, or a comprehensive program for emancipation.

Although the inability of both the CCF and CPC to achieve an understanding of women's oppression was, in one sense, a failing internal to the Party, this is only half of the picture. External forces--the economic and social realities of Canadian society in the 1920's, 30's and

40's,--also inhibited socialists and communists from facing the issue of sexual inequality. These external forces pressed to the very core of both Parties, in effect shaping, aiding and abetting the internal problems I have just described. Central to the social reality of Canadian life in these decades was the assumption that women were not merely members of families: they were the pivot of the family. Women were largely responsible for domestic labour, and most psychological studies and popular advice literature over the period treated child rearing as a suitable, in fact natural, role for women. Women who aspired to a public, political career were treated as oddities (if successful ones) and judged on their loss of 'femininity'; CCF M.P. Gladys Strum remembers that the press "wrote about her hats, but not about her speeches."<sup>12</sup> Even in the war years, when the image of Rosie the Riveter impinged on popular culture, the maternal and domestic image of womanhood was never abandoned.

This hegemonic view of women's responsibility for domestic work was difficult to escape, and some of the popular idealization of motherhood was reproduced in the CCF and CPC. Within the Communist Party, and to a lesser extent in the CCF, a critique of the family was occasionally entertained, but it was framed primarily in economistic terms: society was criticized for failing to provide the economic security and social services needed to allow women the healthy motherhood and happy family life they so fervently desired. The fact of women's role as primary parent was rarely questioned. As almost every chapter of this thesis has reiterated, socialists' adoption of this social ideal of motherhood had contradictory results. On the one hand, women's family concerns were used to positive effect to interest and involve women in political issues like prices, education and health care. Moreover, socialists were very

pragmatically addressing women's issues which emerged from the contemporary concerns of working-class and middle-class women, the majority of whom still worked, for some time, in the home. On the other hand, the wholesale acceptance of women's responsibility for family care was dangerous, for women's domestic duties often prevented them from participating equally with men in all aspects of Party life. One might also suggest that it was the duty of socialists to look beyond contemporary assumptions about womanhood and to carve out more egalitarian alternatives to the familial ideology of the time. It is true that, primarily in the CPC, some activists did personally challenge the inequalities of traditional marriage and family life, but these personal experiments did not represent the majority in the movement (and were not always supported by the leadership).

Other dominant social assumptions about women's economic and social roles also found their way into both Parties. Prevailing conceptions about women's wage labour, for example, portrayed women as secondary and temporary earners, in comparison to male 'breadwinners', and except for the war years, implied dissatisfaction with married women working. Socialists, and particularly Communists, were more dedicated than most trade unionists to the organization of women workers, and both parties made a contribution to the growth of industrial unionism in Canada. But Communist women like Becky Buhay still chastized her fellow Party members for 'failing to take women workers seriously'. Communists, as well as CCFers, to some extent absorbed the view of women as secondary workers and replayed the 'ideal' of the family wage within their movement. In everything from policy discussion to graphics, cartoons and radical fiction, the man was given a lunchbucket and the woman a broom.

One might argue that this picture simply reflected the 'reality' of women's secondary status in labour force participation. But socialists rejected and opposed many other prevailing 'realisms', such as men's low wages, so why uphold this one? By failing to question the ideal of the male breadwinner, socialists obscured a full exploration of women's economic exploitation and in the long run, undermined the goal--which they supposedly upheld--of economic independence for women.<sup>13</sup>

Socialists and Communists, therefore, could not entirely escape dominant social norms which contradicted sexual equality. Living in a society characterized not only by private property, but also by male dominance, they ultimately found the latter difficult to erase from their worldview, and incorporated some of the prevailing dictums about women's 'proper sphere' into their politics. To some extent, Party structures and organization may have compounded, rather than relieved, this problem. It is possible, for example, that women, socialized to their 'private' role in the family, and less vocal, confident and competitive than men, were less proficient at (and perhaps less interested in) the competition and sometimes factional fights necessary to climb into leadership positions.

If socialists had difficulty resisting prevailing platitudes about women's proper sphere, they had little support from other progressive movements of the period. The women's movement, largely dispersed after the early '20's, was a weak and scattered affair, consisting largely of middle-class reform groups like the National Council of Women, whose anti-socialism made them less-than-attractive allies even for some CCF women. Feminist ideas were rejected by the CPC until the Popular Front period, when some dialogue between CCF feminist-socialists and Communist women did produce an uneasy but fruitful anti-fascist alliance. But



except for this alliance, feminism played little role in the CPC, and in fact, it had little to offer either socialist or communist women. Weak, unimaginative, undynamic, the women's movement provided no theoretical challenges or strategic alternatives to socialists' treatment of the woman question.

Neither did the labour movement. Although it is difficult to generalize about thirty years of trade union history, a survey of TLC and CCL publications<sup>14</sup> indicates that the labour movement, and particularly the TLC, did not challenge socialists with new ideas on women's equality. Neither trade union centre consistently examined or advocated economic equality for women, nor did they suggest new, creative strategies for organizing women. In fact, it was socialists and communists who were often most dedicated to the cause of unionizing women workers, and who persuaded fellow unionists to take up this cause. The CIO unions were generally more sympathetic to women workers, and both unions took more notice of women during World War II (so did the government for that matter), even pushing for equal pay, as unions had during World War I. But countless issues of TLC and CCL publications addressed women only through traditional women's columns, offering recipes, household hints, or at best, advice on how to support 'your union man'.

Thus, factors both internal and external to Party life, often shaping and reinforcing one another, inhibited an understanding of women's oppression and a full-fledged dedication to women's emancipation. Given the CCF and CPC's very secondary commitment to women's equality, why then did so many women devote themselves to the socialist cause?

As already pointed out, many women were radicalized around economic and class-related issues, and their socialist consciousness did not

encompass a preoccupation with sexual inequality. But even women who were interested in women's issues, who wished to free women from social restrictions and encourage their participation in politics, saw much that was positive and encouraging in the CCF and CPC. The socialist or communist movement, they maintained, offered more avenues for women's activism and political growth, more opportunities to participate in policy making, and more attention to women's equality than the other mainstream Parties of the Right.<sup>15</sup> In no other political party did one find the comprehensive platform of women's demands, or even a verbal opposition to 'male supremacy' which characterized the CPC. In no other political party did one find the opportunities to direct educational work, or to organize separate women's committees, that existed in the CCF.

Furthermore, the CPC and CCF did speak to some issues of sexual equality left untouched by the earlier feminist movement, and ignored by reformers and politicians in the period between the 1920's and 1950's. The need to unionize women to alter their wages and working conditions, the need for equal pay and maternity services, the right to social services to ease the burden of the housewife, the need to organize women on welfare, and occasionally, the need to give women birth control information--all these principles were at some time pursued by socialists and Communists, giving women faith that, through socialism, women's equality could become a reality. However imperfectly socialists and Communists addressed women's inequality, they did at least recognize its existence, and they often made a convincing case that many aspects of sexual inequality were caused by the economic and social deprivation endemic to a capitalist social order. Lastly, while criticisms of the CPC's and CCF's equation of domestic concerns with women's issues can be made in

hindsight, this particular definition did speak meaningfully to many women of the time whose daily concerns centred on the family, but who nonetheless wanted women to assume a more active political role, and who wished to make women's role in the family less burdensome and more economically secure.

Furthermore, socialist and Communist women who promoted this political outlook stressing maternal concerns quite rightly saw their politics as distinct from the brand of ameliorative reform promoted by liberal women in the NCW, and from the earlier reform efforts of the suffragists or maternal feminists. Socialists' emphasis on the abolition of private ownership, on the redistribution of social wealth, on effecting public responsibility for social needs and services, as well as their militant participation in struggles for economic justice, and for a just peace abroad, did make theirs a distinct, 'militant mothering'.

Historians of the early Utopian socialist movement have convincingly argued that by the late 19th century, Scientific Socialism, with its stress on Marxist (and one might add Fabian) solutions, dominated western socialist thought, displacing dreams of a Utopia which had included feminism and sexual emancipation as a fundamental part of a socialist transformation. As class-based economic issues came to dominate communist and social democratic parties, causing a "sexual retrenchment... women's aspirations were stranded outside Socialism--to be either ignored, attacked as bourgeois deviationism, or relegated to the category of secondary issues which would be tackled once the primary battle had been won."<sup>16</sup> This assessment relates accurately to the Canadian socialist and communist movement of the '20's, '30's and '40's, which never fully embraced the cause of women's equality. Canadian socialists did, however,

sustain a necessary dialogue about, and some campaigns against sexual inequality in Canadian society. Moreover, within both movements there always existed a number of female socialists who wished for more: they struggled to awaken other women's interest in socialism, to enlarge the socialist definition of equality, to quicken the equalization of political roles--in short, they sustained the 'Utopian' dream of women's emancipation.

## Footnotes: Conclusion

- 1        PAC, CCF Papers, MG 28 IV I, vol. 460, 'Report of the Women's Director'.
  
- 2        Political scientists are not in complete agreement about differences in voting behaviour according to sex. Robert Alman, "The Social Bases of Political Cleavages" in John Meisel, ed., Papers on the 1962 Election (Toronto, 1964) argued that the 1962 election showed slightly--but not substantially-- more support for the NDP from men. Recent studies do imply that fewer women vote NDP, but as Jill Vickers and M. Janine Brodie, Canadian Women in Politics: An Overview (Ottawa, 1981), point out, this may be attributed, in part, to the fact that fewer women are union members. Sylvia Bashevkin, "Women's Participation in Ontario Political Parties, 1971-81", Journal of Canadian Studies, Vol. 17, no. 2, (Summer, 1982), also claims slightly fewer women vote NDP. But it is dangerous to simply project these findings back into the 1930's and '40's and apply them to the CCF. Nor can evidence that women didn't vote CCF be equated with women's conservatism or backwardness.
  
- 3        A. Landy, Marxism and the Woman Question (Toronto, 1943), pp. 37, 46.
  
- 4        B.C. Federationist, July 7, 1938.
  
- 5        PAO, Abella Tapes, Interview of Helen Paulin with Elaine Mitchell, Sept. 21, 1972.
  
- 6        Interview with S.S., Nov., 1983.
  
- 7        Shelia Rowbotham, Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism (London, 1979), p. 109.
  
- 8        Ibid., p. 109.
  
- 9        Ibid., p. 96.
  
- 10       One example was J.S. Woodsworth's dissolution of the Provincial Council in Ontario in 1934 and the reorganization of the Party by the National Council. The expulsion of Jean Laing and others for their United Front activities in 1936 could also be cited.
  
- 11       B.C. Provincial Archives, Jamieson Papers, 311, file 9.
  
- 12       Archives Board of Saskatchewan, Interview of Georgina Taylor with Gladys Strum, 1981.
  
- 13       See Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh, "The Family Wage: Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists", Capital and Class, Vol. 9, no. 12, (Summer, 1980).

- 14 Canadian Congress Journal, Canadian Unionist, and TLC Convention Proceedings.
- 15 Recent literature on the Liberal Party confirms this view. A National Federation of Liberal Women (NFLW) was set up in 1928, but, according to its historian, it was almost completely inactive until the late 1940's. Few Liberal women had an significant role in policy making (in fact, neither did the men for the Party was largely cabinet controlled). The Federation, after the Second War, began to meet in conventions and pass resolutions, but these were largely ignored by the Party leadership. See Patricia Myers, "A Noble Effort: The National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada" (M.A. University of Waterloo, 1981). Other historians also mention that the Liberal Women were perceived, at best, as an auxiliary, or even sometimes as a 'nuisance'. See Reginald Whitaker, The Government Party: Organizing and Financing the Liberal Party of Canada, 1930-1958, and Franca Iacovetta, "A Respectable Feminist: The Ideas of Cairine Wilson, first female Senator, 1930-62", unpublished paper, York University, 1981. There were, of course, also some similarities between the parties of the Right and Left in their treatment of women--such as their failure to encourage women to run for office, and their stress on women's maternal role. But such a comparison is beyond the scope of this thesis.
- 16 Barbara Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem (London, 1983), p. 285.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACCL	All Canadian Congress of Labour
<u>B.C. Fed</u>	<u>B.C. Federationist</u> (later <u>B.C. CCF News</u> )
CCASD	Canadian Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy
CCL	Canadian Congress of Labour
CLDL	Canadian Labour Defence League
CLPF	Canadian League for Peace and Freedom
CLWF	Canadian League against War and Fascism
CI	Communist International
CPC	Communist Party of Canada
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
CCF	Cooperative Commonwealth Federation
<u>DC</u>	<u>Daily Clarion</u>
IWS	International Women's Secretariat
LPP	Labor Progressive Party
<u>Man Comm</u>	<u>Manitoba Commonwealth</u>
NCDR	National Council for Democratic Rights
<u>Ont N Comm</u>	<u>Ontario New Commonwealth</u> (later <u>CCF News</u> )
<u>Sask Comm</u>	<u>Saskatchewan Commonwealth</u>
TLC	Trades and Labour Congress
WILPF (WIL)	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
<u>W</u>	<u>The Worker</u>
<u>WW</u>	<u>The Woman Worker</u>
WUL	Workers Unity League
YCL	Young Communist League

## BIBLIOGRAPHY



### Note on Sources

When I began this dissertation, the Communist Party of Canada kindly let me look at some of its Archives, then housed at its headquarters on Cecil Street in Toronto. Since that time, their Archives have been placed in the Public Archives of Canada, and I was allowed access to these in 1984. Thus, my footnotes include references both to information taken from the Communist Party of Canada Headquarters, and to material from the Communist Party of Canada Papers at the Public Archives of Canada (PAC). These sources are now merged into one at the Public Archives.

BIBLIOGRAPHYPrimary SourcesI. Manuscript Collections

Archives Board of Saskatchewan.

Violet M. MacNaughton Papers

Gertrude Telford Papers

Georgina Taylor Oral History Collection

Saskatchewan CCF/NDP Collection

United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) Collection

Communist Party of Canada Headquarters Archives.

Glenbow Foundation.

Alberta CCF/NDP Papers

Walter Smith Papers

Hamilton Public Library, Special Collections.

ILP Records

Municipal Election Scrapbooks

Multicultural History Society of Ontario.

Annie Buller Papers

International Ladies Garment Workers Union Papers

Queens University Archives.

George Grube Papers

Ontario CCF/NDP Papers

William Neff Papers

Provincial Archives of Alberta.

United Farm Women of Alberta Papers (Winnifred Ross Papers)

Provincial Archives of British Columbia

Laura Jamieson Papers

Public Archives of Canada.

J.L. Cohen Papers

Communist Party of Canada Papers

CCF/NDP Papers

Finnish Organization of Canada Papers

William Lyon Mackenzie King Papers

Louise Lucas Papers

Grace MacInnis Papers

Agnes Macphail Papers

Marjorie Mann Papers

A.M. Nicholson Papers

Libbie and Frank Park Papers

Public Archives of Manitoba.

John Bracken Papers

Beatrice Brigden Papers

CCF/NDP Papers

United Farmers of Manitoba Papers

Public Archives of Ontario.

Irving Abella Oral History Collection

Communist Party of Canada Collection

Simon Fraser University Archives

Sara Diamond Oral History Collection

Toronto City Archives

Clipping Files

University of British Columbia Archives.

William Bennett Memorial Collection

UBC Oral History Collection

Angus MacInnis Collection

Shepard Papers

Eve G. Smith Papers

Dorothy Steeves Papers

University of Manitoba Archives.

Dorothy Livesay Papers

University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Books Room

Flora MacDonald Denison Collection

Robert Kenny Collection

Woodsworth Memorial Collection

Vancouver City Archives.

Clipping Files

Winnipeg School Board Division Number 1.

Winnipeg School Board Minutes

York University Archives.

E.A. Beder Papers

II. Government Documents

Canada. Department of Labour. Labour Gazette.

Canada. Department of Labour. Labour Organization in Canada.

Province of Manitoba. Economic Survey Board. A. Oddson. The Employment of Women in Manitoba. Winnipeg: 1937.

Public Archives of Canada. Department of Labour Records.

### III. Newspapers, Magazines and Journals

Alberta Labor News

B.C. Federationist, later B.C. CCF News

Canadian Congress Journal

Canadian Forum

Canadian Trade Unionist

The Communist

The Communist International

Frontiers

Imprecorr

The Industrial Banner

Labour Leader

The Labor News

The Labor Statesman

Marxist Review

National Affairs, later National Affairs Monthly

New Frontier

Ontario New Commonwealth, later CCF News

Pacific Tribune

Peoples Cause

Peoples Weekly

Saskatchewan Commonwealth

The Weekly News, later The Manitoba Commonwealth

The Western Clarion

The Woman Worker

The Worker, later The Daily Clarion and The Canadian Tribune

#### IV. Pamphlets

American League against War and Fascism. Women, War and Fascism.  
New York, 1935.

Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. Women, In Peace as in War, Protect  
Your Home. n.d.

Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. B.C. Election Committee. Lady!  
Did You Say You Weren't Interested in Politics. 1945.

Flynn, Elizabeth Gurley. Women in the War. New York: Workers  
Library, 1942.

I.W.A. Auxiliary. What Every Woman Should Know. Vancouver, n.d.

Lapin, Eva. Mothers in Overalls. New York: Workers Library, 1943.

Millard, Betty. Women on Guard: How Women of The World Fight for Peace.  
New York: New Century Publishers, 1952.

National Housewives Consumer Association. Roll Back Prices.  
Winnipeg, 1947.

#### V. Interviews

Hanna Anderson	October 8, 1980
Kate Bader	December 7, 1980
Elsie and William Beeching	November, 12, 1980
Lillian Bochner	September 4, 1980
Ruth Bulloch	July 18, 1981
Barbara Cass-Beggs	June 4, 1981
Claire Culhane	December 4, 1980
Taime Davies	July 14, 1982
Sophia Dixon	November 1, 1980
Mildred Fahrni	December 3, 1980
Gordon and Marion Fines	October 21, 1980
Edith Fowke	December 30, 1983

Josephine Gehl	November 10, 1980
Kay Hladiy	October 16, 1980
Mary Kardash	October 20, 1980
Alice Katool	May 31, 1981
Carlyle King	November 12, 1980
Hilda Kristiansen	December 8, 1980
Margaret Mann	November 27, 1983
Marjorie Mann	April, 1980
L.M.	November 29, 1980
Avis McCurdy	May 30, 1982
Grace MacInnis	July 17, 1981
Lillian Marcus	September 3, 1980
Jessie Mendels	December 8, 1980
Eloise Metheral	November 11, 1980
Eugena Moore	December 7, 1983
Mona Morgan	July 20, 1981
Mickey Murray	October 6, 1980
On to Ottawa Group: Taime Davies Lil Himmelfarb Ilomaki Alex McLennan Ernie Solwell	January 30, 1983
Nellie Peterson	November 21, 1980
Jean Robinson	October 9, 1980
Nora Rodd	November 8, 1981
Stanley Ryerson	July 16, 1981
S.S.	November, 1983
Eve G. Smith	July 19, 1981

Margot Thompson                      October 6, 1981  
 Daisy Webster                         December 2, 1980

# VI. Personal Correspondence

Sam Carr                                March 10, 1984  
 Margery Ferguson                      November 3, 1983  
 Christine Nielsen                      January 26, 1984  
 Toby Ryan                               January 11, 1984

# Unpublished Theses and Papers

Brouwer, Ruth. "The Methodist Church and the 'Woman Question',  
 1902-1914." Unpublished paper, York University.

Bruley, Susan. "Women in the Communist Party of Great Britain,  
 1921-1939." Ph.D. Dissertation. London University, 1980.

Cohen, Marjorie. "Women at Work in Canada During the Great Depression."  
 Paper presented at the Blue Collar Conference, Windsor, May, 1979.

Dixler, Elsa. "The Woman Question: Women and the American Communist  
 Party, 1929-1941." Ph.D. Dissertation. Yale University, 1974.

Finkel, Alvin. "Obscure Origins: The Confused Early History of  
 the Alberta CCF." Paper presented at the Canadian Plains  
 Research Centre Conference, 'Building the Cooperative Commonwealth',  
 June, 1983.

Fragar, Ruth. "Women in the Needle Trades: The Question of Militancy."  
 Unpublished paper, York University, 1982.

Grantham, Ronald. "Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement in B.C.,  
 1898-1933." M.A. Thesis. University of British Columbia,  
 1943.

Heron, Craig. "Working-Class Hamilton, 1895-1930." Ph.D. Dissertation.  
 Dalhousie University, 1981.

Iacovetta, Franca. "A Respectable Feminist: The Ideas of Cairine  
 Wilson, first female Senator." Unpublished paper, York University,  
 1981



- Kawecki, Tad. "Canadian Socialism and the Origins of the Communist Party, 1900-1922." M.A. Thesis. McMaster University, 1980.
- Kealey, Linda. "Canadian Socialists and the Woman Question, 1900-14." Paper presented at the Winnipeg General Strike Symposium, March, 1983.
- Kirkey, Donald. "Building the City of God: The Founding of the Student Christian Movement in Canada." M.A. Thesis. McMaster University, 1983.
- McKillop, A.B. "Citizen and Socialist: The Ethos of Political Winnipeg, 1913-1935." M.A. Thesis. University of Winnipeg, 1970.
- McRae, Penny. "Annie Buller and Becky Buhay: Working-Class Agitators." Unpublished paper, Carleton University, 1979.
- Myers, Patricia. "A Noble Effort: The National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada, 1943-1973." M.A. Thesis. University of Waterloo, 1981.
- Newton, Janice. "Women and Cotton's Weekly." Unpublished paper, York University.
- Radforth, Ian. "'It Pays to Strike and Fight': The Workers Unity League in Ontario." Unpublished paper, York University, 1980.
- "Ontario Labour in the 1920's." Unpublished paper, York University, 1978.
- Smillie, Elizabeth. "Dorise Nielsen: Prairie Populist." Unpublished paper, Trent University.
- Struthers, James. "'Lord Give Us Men': Women and Social Work in Canada." Paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association, Vancouver, 1983.
- Socknat, Tom. "Witness Against War: Pacifism in Canada, 1900-1945." Ph.D. Dissertation. McMaster University, 1981.
- Taylor, Georgina. "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How Saskatchewan Women Reconciled Their Political Activities for the CCF with Traditional Roles for Women." M.A. Thesis, University of Saskatoon, 1983.
- "The Women...Shall Help to Lead the Way: Saskatchewan CCF/NDP Women Candidates in Provincial and Federal Elections, 1934-65." Paper presented at the Canadian Plains Research Centre Conference, 'Building the Cooperative Commonwealth', June, 1983.
- Usiskin, Roseline. "Toward a Theoretical Reformulation of the Relationship Between Political Ideology, Social Class and Ethnicity: A Case Study of the Winnipeg Jewish Radical Community." M.A. Thesis, University of Winnipeg, 1978.
- Wiseman, Nelson. "A Political History of the Manitoba CCF/NDP." Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Toronto, 1975.

## Secondary Sources

### Articles

- Alexander, Sally. "Introduction" to Maud Pember Reeves, Round About A Pound A Week. London: Virago Press, 1979.
- Barber, Marsha. "An Interview with Dorothy Livesay", Room of One's Own, vol. 5, no. 1/2, 1979.
- Barrett, Michele, and McIntosh, Mary. "The Family Wage: Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists", Capital and Class, vol. 9, no. 1/2, Summer, 1980.
- Bashevkin, Sylvia. "Women's Participation in Ontario Political Parties, 1971-1981", Journal of Canadian Studies, vol. 17, no. 2, Summer, 1982.
- Beeby, Dean. "Women in the Ontario CCF: 1940-1950", Ontario History, vol. LXXIV, no. 4, December, 1982.
- Bird, Patricia. "Hamilton Working Women during the Period of the Great Depression", Atlantis, vol. 8, no. 2, Spring, 1983.
- Birmingham Feminist History Group. "Feminism as femininity in the nineteen-fifties?", Feminist Review, vol. 3, 1979.
- Bland, Sue. "Henrietta Homemaker and Rosie the Riveter: Images of Women in Advertising, 1939-50", Atlantis, vol. 8, no. 2, Spring, 1982.
- Bobroff, Ann. "The Bolsheviks and Working Women, 1905-1920", Radical America, vol. 10, no. 3, May/June, 1976.
- Bornat, Joanna. "Home and Work: A New Context for Trade Union History", Oral History, vol. 5, no. 2, Autumn, 1977.
- Brandt, Gail C. "Pigeonholed and Forgotten: The Work of the Subcommittee on the Post-War Problems of Women, 1943", Social History/Histoire Sociale, vol. XV, no. 29, May, 1982.
- "Weaving It Together: Life Cycle and the Industrial Experience of Female Cotton Workers in Quebec, 1910-1959", Labour/Le Travailleur, vol. 7, Spring, 1981.
- Burstyn, Varda. "Economy Sexuality and Politics: Engels and the Sexual Division of Labour", Socialist Studies, 1983.
- Caine, Barbara. "Beatrice Webb and the 'Woman Question'", History Workshop, no. 14, Autumn, 1982.
- Clements, Barbara. "Working-class and peasant women in the Russian Revolution", Signs, vol. 8, no. 2, Winter, 1982.

- Courville, L.D. "The Conservatism of the Saskatchewan Progressives", Canadian Historical Association Report, 1974.
- Delmar, Rosalind. "Looking Again at Engels Origin of the Family", in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, eds., The Rights and Wrongs of Women. London: Penguin Books, 1976.
- Dodd, Dianne. "The Birth Control Movement on Trial, 1936-37", Social History/Histoire Sociale, vol. XVI, November, 1983.
- Fragar, Ruth. "No Proper Deal: Women Workers and the Canadian Labour Movement, 1870-1940", in Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz, eds., Union Sisters. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1983.
- Gabin, Nancy. "Women Workers and the UAW in the Post-World War II Period", Labor History, vol. 21, no. 1, Winter, 1979/80.
- Gittens, Diana. "Women's Work and Family Size Between the Wars", Oral History, vol. 5, no. 2, Autumn, 1977.
- Hanson, S.D. "Estevan, 1931", in Irving Abella, ed., On Strike. Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1974.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. "Man and Woman in Socialist Iconography", History Workshop, no. 6, Autumn, 1978.
- Hoffman, G. "The Saskatchewan Farmer-Labour Party, 1932-34: How Radical Was it at its Origins?", Saskatchewan History, vol. XXVII, no. 2, Spring, 1975.
- Humphries, Jane. "Women and Working-Class Families", Review of Radical Political Economics, vol. 9, no. 3, Fall, 1977.
- "Women: Scapegoats and Safety Valves in the Great Depression", Review of Radical Political Economics, vol. 8, no. 1, Spring, 1976.
- Jenson, Jane. "The French Communist Party and Feminism", in Ralph Milliband and John Saville, ed., The Socialist Register. London: Merlin Press, 1980.
- Kaluzynska, Eva. "Wiping the Floor with Theory: A Survey of Writings on Housework", Feminist Review, vol. 6, 1980.
- Klehr, Harvey. "Female Leadership in the Communist Party of the USA", Studies in Comparative Communism, vol. 10, no. 4, Winter, 1977.
- Kosviainen, Auvo. "The Finns and the Crisis over Bolshevization in the Workers Party, 1924-25", Migration Studies, C-3, Institute for Migration, Turken, Finland, 1975.
- Lane, Ann. "Women in Society: A Critique of Engels", in Berenice Carroll, ed., Liberating Women's History. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976.
- Leab, Daniel. "United We Eat: The Creation and Organization of

the Unemployed Councils in the 1930's", Labor History, vol. 8, no. 3, Fall, 1967.

Manley, John. "Women and the Left in the 1930's: The Case of the Toronto CCF Women's Joint Committee", Atlantis, vol. 5, no. 2, Spring, 1980.

McLaren, Angus. "Birth Control and Abortion in Canada, 1870-1920", Canadian Historical Review, vol. LIX, no. 3, 1978.

----- "'What Has This To Do With Working-Class Women?': Birth Control and the Canadian Left", Social History/Histoire Sociale, vol. XIV, no. 28, November, 1981.

Mathews-Klein, "How They Saw Us", Atlantis, vol. 4, no. 2, Spring, 1979.

Milkman, Ruth. "Women's Work and Economic Crisis: Some Lessons from the Great Depression", Review of Radical Political Economics, vol. 8, no. 1, Spring, 1976.

Mills, Allen. "The Canadian Forum and Socialism, 1920-34", Journal of Canadian Studies, vol. 13, no. 4, Winter, 1978.

Naison, Mark. "Harlem Communists and the Politics of Black Protest", Marxist Perspectives, vol. 1, no. 3, Fall, 1982.

Newton, Janice. "Women and Cotton's Weekly", Resources for Feminist Research, issue 8, Fall, 1980.

Petryshyn, J. "Class Conflict and Civil Liberties: The Origins and Activities of the Canadian Labour Defence League, 1925-40", Labour/Le Travailleur, vol. 10, 1982.

Paris, Erna. "The Education of Madeleine Parent", in Myrna Kostash, ed., Her Own Woman. Toronto: Macmillan, 1975.

Rosenzweig, Roy. "Organizing the Unemployed: The Early Years of the Great Depression", Radical America, vol. 10, no. 4, July/Aug., 1976.

Ross, Carl. "The Feminist Dilemma in the Finnish Immigrant Community", Finnish Americana, 1978.

Sangster, Joan. "Finnish Women in Ontario, 1880-1930", Polyphony, vol. 3, no. 2, Fall, 1981.

Seager, Allan. "Finnish Canadians and the Ontario Miners Movement", Polyphony, vol. 3, no. 2, Fall, 1981.

----- "The Pass Strike of 1932", Alberta History, vol. 25, no. 1, Winter, 1977.

Shaffer, Robert. "Women in the Communist Party, USA, 1930-1940", Socialist Review, vol. 9, no. 3, May/June, 1979.

Sinclair, Peter. "The Saskatchewan CCF and the C.P.", Saskatchewan History, vol. XXVI, no. 1, Winter, 1973.

----- "The Saskatchewan CCF: Ascent to Power and the Decline of Socialism", Canadian Historical Review, vol. LIV, no. 4, December, 1973.

Slaughter, Jane. "Feminism and Socialism: Theoretical Debates in Historical Perspective", Marxist Perspectives, vol. 2, no. 3, Fall, 1979.

✓Strom, Sharon. "Changing Women's Place: Feminism, the Left, and Industrial Unionism in the 1930's", Feminist Studies, vol. 9, no. 2, Summer, 1983.

Strong-Boag, Veronica. "The Girl of the New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920's", Labour/Le Travailleur, vol. 4, 1979.

----- "Canadian Feminism in the 1920's: The Case of Nellie McClung", Journal of Canadian Studies, vol. 12, no. 4, Summer, 1977.

Swankey, Ben. "Reflections of an Alberta Communist", Alberta History, vol. 27, no. 1, Autumn, 1979, and vol. 28, no. 4, Autumn, 1980.

✓Trimberger, Ellen Kay. "Women in the Old and New Left: The Evolution of a Politics of Personal Life", Feminist Studies, vol. 5, no. 3, Fall, 1975.

Wade, Susan. "Helena Gutteridge: Votes for Women and Trade Unions", in Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess, eds., In Her Own Right. Victoria: Camousan College, 1980.

Wilson, Donald. "Matti Kurikka and A.B. Makela: Socialist Thought Among the Finns in Canada, 1900-1932", Canadian Ethnic Studies, vol. 10, no. 2, 1978.

Woywitka, Anne. "A Pioneer Woman in the Labour Movement", Alberta History, vol. 26, no. 1, Winter, 1978.

Yedlin, Tova. "Women in the USSR: The Stalin Era", Atlantis, vol. 3, no. 1, Autumn, 1977.

# Books

- Acton, Janice, et. al. Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1974.
- Allen, Richard. The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973.
- The Social Gospel in Canada. Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1975.
- Angus, Ian. Canadian Bolsheviks. Montreal: Vanguard Publications, 1981.
- Armstrong, Pat, and Armstrong, Hugh. The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and Their Segregated Work. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978.
- Atkinson, Dorothy, Dallin, Alexander, and Lapin, Gail, eds. Women in Soviet Russia. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977.
- Avakumovic, Ivan. The Communist Party of Canada. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975.
- Socialism in Canada. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978.
- Avery, Donald. Dangerous Foreigners. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979.
- Bacchi, Carol L. Liberation Deferred: The Ideas of the English Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983.
- Balabanoff, Angelica. My Life as Rebel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973.
- Barrett, Michele. Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis. London: Verso Editions, 1980.
- Baum, Charlotte, Hyman, Paula, and Michel, Sonya. The Jewish Woman in America. New York: New American Library, 1975.
- Bebel, August. Woman Under Socialism. New York: Schocken Books, 1971.
- Bellamy, Edward. Looking Backward. Introduction by John Thomas. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.
- Betcherman, Lita-Rose. The Little Band. Ottawa: Deneau, 1981.
- Bland, Salem. The New Christianity. Introduction by Richard Allen. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973.

- Bloor, Ella Reeve. We Are Many. New York: International Publishers, 1940.
- Brodie, M. Janine, and Vickers, Jill. Canadian Women in Politics: An Overview. Ottawa: Canadian Institute for the Advancement of Women, 1982.
- Boxer, Marilyn, and Quataert, Jean. Socialist Women. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978.
- Buck, Tim. Thirty Years. Toronto: Progress Books, 1953.
- Buhle, Mari Jo. Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981.
- Bussey, Gertrude, and Tims, Margaret. Pioneers for Peace. London: Allen and Unwin, 1965.
- Caplan, Gerald. The Dilemma of Canadian Socialism: The CCF in Ontario. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973.
- Caragata, Warren. Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold. Toronto: Lorimer and Company, 1979.
- Clarke, Phyllis, and Beeching, William, eds. Yours in the Struggle: The Reminiscences of Tim Buck. Toronto: NC Press, 1977.
- Clements, Barbara Evans. Bolshevik Feminist. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979.
- Cross, M., and Kealey, G. Modern Canada, 1930 - 1980's. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1984.
- Dahlie, J., and Fernando, T., eds. Ethnicity, Power and Politics in Canada. Toronto: Methuen, 1981.
- Degras, Jane, ed. The Communist International, 1919-1943: Documents. 3 vols. London: F. Cass, 1971.
- Dennis, Peggy. The Autobiography of an American Communist. Westport: Westport: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1977.
- Dumas, Evelyn. The Bitter Thirties in Quebec. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1975.
- Eisenstein, Zillah R., ed. Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979.
- Endicott, Stephen L. James Endicott: Rebel Out of China. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980.

- Engels, Frederick. The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. Introduction by Evelyn Reed. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972.
- Epstein, Melech. Jewish Labor in the USA, 1914-1952. New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1952.
- Ewen, Jean. China Nurse, 1932-39. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1981.
- Flynn, Elizabeth Gurley. The Rebel Girl: An Autobiography. New York: International Publishers, 1973.
- The Alderson Story. New York: International Publishers, 1963.
- Fox, Bonnie, ed. Hidden in the Household. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1980.
- Gornick, Vivian. The Romance of American Communism. New York: Basic Books, 1977.
- Gould, Margaret. I Visit the Soviets. Toronto: F. White, 1937.
- Grele, Ronald, et al. Six Practitioners Discuss the Method, Theory and Practice of Oral History and Oral Testimony. Chicago: Precedent Publications, 1975.
- Heitlinger, Alena. Women and State Socialism. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1979.
- Hoar, Victor, ed. Recollections of the On-To-Ottawa Trek. Toronto:
- Horn, Michiel. The League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada, 1930-42. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980.
- Howe, Irving. World of Our Fathers. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976.
- Howe, Irving, and Coser, Lewis. The American Communist Party: A Critical History. New York: Praeger, 1957.
- Hutchines, Grace. Women Who Work. New York: International Publishers, 1934.
- Irvine, William. The Farmers in Politics. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976.
- Jamieson, Stuart. Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-1966. Ottawa: Information Canada, 1968.



- Kealey, Linda, ed. A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880's - 1920's. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979.
- Kerr, Donald, ed. Western Canadian Politics: The Radical Tradition. Edmonton: NeWest Institute for Western Canadian Studies, 1981.
- Kessler-Harris, Alice. Out To Work. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Kollantai, Alexandra. Selected Writings. Introduction by Alix Holt. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977.
- Kostash, Myrna. All of Baba's Children. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1977.
- Kraditor, Aileen. The Radical Persuasion, 1890-1917: A Study of the SLP, SPA and IWW. Louisiana; Louisiana State University Press, 1981.
- Kolasky, John. The Shattered Illusion: The History of Ukrainian Pro-Communist Organizations in Canada. Toronto: PMA Books, 1979.
- Krawchuk, Peter. The Ukrainian Socialist Movement in Canada, 1907-1918. Toronto: Progress Books, 1979.
- Landy, A. Marxism and the Woman Question. Toronto: Progress Books, 1943.
- Lewis, David. The Good Fight. Toronto: Macmillan, 1981.
- Lipset, S.M. Agrarian Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950.
- Lenin, V.I. The Emancipation of Women: From the Writings of V.I. Lenin. New York: International Publishers, 1975.
- Levenstein, Harvey. Communism, Anticommunism and the CIO. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981.
- Lindstrom-Best, Varpu. The Finnish Immigrant Community of Toronto, 1887-1913. Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1979.
- Livesay, Dorothy. Right Hand, Left Hand. Erin: Press Porcepic Ltd., 1977.
- Luxton, Meg. More Than a Labour of Love. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1980.
- Lyons, Paul. Philadelphia Communists, 1936-1956. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982.

- Mann, Margaret. The Strike That Wasn't. Brandon: 1972.
- MacPherson, Ian. Each For All: A History of the Cooperative Movement in English Canada, 1900-1945. Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1979.
- Mardiros, Anthony. William Irvine. Toronto: James Lorimer, 1979.
- Massell, Gregory. The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974.
- McCormack, A. Ross. Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977.
- McEwen, Tom. The Forge Glows Red. Toronto: Progress Books, 1974.
- McKenzie, Kermit. The Comintern and World Revolution, 1928-1943. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964.
- Miller, Sally. Flawed Liberation. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981.
- Mitchell, Juliet. Women's Estate. London: Penguin Books, 1971.
- Mitford, Jessica. A Fine Old Conflict. New York: Vintage Books, 1956.
- Municipal History Society of Vancouver. Your Worship, Members of Council, New Westminster: Jackson Printing Co., 1980.
- Nearing, Scott, and Nearing, Nellie. Women and Social Progress. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1912.
- Nielsen, Dorise. New Worlds for Women. Toronto: Progress Books, 1944.
- Palmer, Bryan. Working-Class Experience. Toronto: Butterworth and Company, 1983.
- Palmer, Howard. Patterns of Prejudice. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982.
- Paris, Erna. Jews: An Account of their Experience in Canada. Toronto: Macmillan, 1980.
- Penner, Norman. The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis. Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1977.
- Potrebenko, Helen. No Streets of Gold: A Social History of Ukrainians in Alberta. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1977.
- Prentice, Allison, and Trofimenkoff, Susan. The Neglected Majority. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977.

- Quataert, Jean. Reluctant Feminists in German Social Democracy, 1885-1917. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- Research Committee of the League for Social Reconstruction. Social Planning for Canada. Toronto: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1935.
- Repka, Kathleen and William. Dangerous Patriots. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1982.
- Roberts, Wayne. Honest Womanhood: Feminism, Femininity, and Class Consciousness among Toronto Working Women, 1896-1914. Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1977.
- Where Angels Fear to Tread: Eillen Tallman and the Labour Movement. Hamilton: Labour Studies, McMaster University, 1981.
- Robin, Martin. Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930. Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre, Queens University, 1968.
- Rodney, William. Soldiers of the International. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968.
- Rowbotham, Shelia. A New World for Women: Stella Browne, Socialist-Feminist. London: Pluto Press, 1968.
- Women, Resistance and Revolution. London: Penguin Books, 1972
- Rowbotham, Shelia, Segal, Lynne, and Wainwright, Hilary. Beyond the Fragments. London: Merlin Press, 1979.
- Ryan, Toby Gordon. Stage Left. Toronto: CTR Publications, 1981.
- Russell, Dora. The Tamarisk Tree. New York: Putman, 1975.
- Schultz, Patricia. The East York Workers Association. Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1975.
- Scott, Hilda. Does Socialism Liberate Women? Boston: Beacon Press, 1974.
- Slaughter, Jane, and Kern, Robert. eds. European Women on the Left. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981.
- Smith, A.E. All My Life. Toronto: Progress Books, 1977.
- Smith, Dorothy. Feminism and Marxism. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1977.
- Smith, Jessica. Women in Soviet Russia. New York: Vanguard Press, 1928.

- Steeves, Dorothy. The Compassionate Rebel. Vancouver: J.J. Douglas Ltd., 1977.
- Stewart, Margaret, and French, Doris. Ask No Quarter: The Story of Agnes Macphail. Toronto: Longmans, Green and Company, 1959.
- Starobin, J. American Communism in Crisis. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972.
- Strong-Boag, Veronica. The Parliament of Women. Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1976.
- Struthers, James. No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-41. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983.
- Stites, Richard. The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978.
- Sufrin, Eileen. The Eaton Drive. Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1982.
- Tax, Meredith. The Rising of the Women. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980.
- Taylor, Barbara. Eve and the New Jerusalem. London: Virago Press, 1983.
- Tentler, Leslie Woodcock. Wage-earning Women. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Thompson, Paul. The Voice of the Past. London: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Thonnessen, Werner. The Emancipation of Women: The Rise and Decline of the Women's Movement in German Social Democracy, 1863-1937. Translated by Joris de Bres. London: Pluto Press, 1976.
- Trotsky, Leon. The Third International After Lenin. Edited by Gus Howowitz. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970.
- Women and the Family. Introduction by Caroline Lund. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970.
- Watson, Louise. She Never Was Afraid: The Biography of Annie Buller. Toronto: Progress Books, 1976.
- Weaver, John. Hamilton: An Illustrated History. Toronto: James Lorimer, 1982.
- Weinstein, James. Ambiguous Legacy: The Left in American Politics. New York: New Viewpoints, of Franklin Watts Inc., 1975

- Weisbord, Vera Buch. A Radical Life. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974.
- Weisbord, Merrily. The Strangest Dream. Toronto: Lester and Orphen Dennys, 1983.
- Whitaker, Reginald. The Government Party. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977.
- Windschuttle, Elizabeth. Women, Class and History. Melbourne: Fontana/Collins, 1980.
- The Woman Question: Selections from the Writing of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, V.I. Lenin, Joseph Stalin. New York: International Publishers, 1951.
- Wright, J.F.C. The Louise Lucas Story. Montreal: Harvest House, 1965.
- Vance, Catharine. Not By Gods, But By People: The Story of Bella Hall Gault. Toronto: Progress Books, 1968.
- Van Hauten, Gerry. Canada's Party of Socialism: A History of the Communist Party of Canada, 1921-1976. Toronto: Progress Books, 1982.
- Yedlin, Tova, ed. Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. New York: Praeger, 1980.
- Young, Walter. The Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969.
- Yuzak, Paul. The Ukrainians in Manitoba: A Social History. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953.