

INTRODUCTION

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BEFORE 1937 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's (RCMP) investigations of "Revolutionary Organizations and Agitation in Canada" were concerned almost solely with the Communist Party of Canada (CPC). During 1937, however, as the present volume reveals, the RCMP divided its gaze to encompass the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO). The Force acknowledged that the party and the CIO were distinct and separate entities, but its reports on "CIO Activities and Industrial Unrest" doggedly pointed out to the other branches of the state how the party's fingerprints were all over the emerging labour centre.¹ Consciously or unconsciously, it contributed to the contemporary demonization of the CIO. If much of what it reported was apparently culled from no more subversive a source than the *Labour Gazette*, students of the period may be thankful that the Force did not always rely on low-level scanning of the press. Its ferretings shed welcome light on an important but under-researched period.² I will use the rest of this introduction

¹The disproportionate communist contribution to the CIO is a truism of North American Labour History. See Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour* (Toronto 1973); Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism* (Princeton 1977); Harvey Levenstein, *Communism, Anti-Communism and the CIO* (Greenwood, CT 1981).

²A number of recent books and articles have touched on different aspects of the Popular Front, but there is still no comprehensive study of the period in Canada. Remarkably, Irving Abella's *Nationalism* remains indispensable over twenty years after publication. The most detailed study of the party in the Popular Front years, Norman Penner's *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond* (Toronto 1988) is a conventional, top-down narrative that makes no use of the author's insider knowledge and provides little sense of what were clearly exciting times for the party. For some of the latter, see Peter Hunter, *Which Side Are You On Boys? ... Canadian Life on the Left* (Toronto 1988) and Bryan D. Palmer, ed., *A Communist Life: Jack Scott and the Canadian Workers' Movement, 1927-1985* (St. John's 1988).

to tease out some of what the 1937 *Bulletins* have to say on why the party grew in the late 1930s, whether its new line took it to the right, and whether the Popular Front opened up the possibility of a Canadian Road to Socialism.

I

It was obvious to the RCMP that its old enemy was thriving. After hitting rock-bottom in 1931 at around 1400 members, the party started to recover during the remainder of the generally reviled Class Against Class period and by mid-1934 reached a membership of 5,500, more than it had ever boasted.³ Growth accelerated during the Popular Front. Membership doubled between July 1935 and October 1937, rising from 7,390 to 15,000, with a growth rate of roughly 200 members a month in 1934-35, 250 a month in 1935-1936, and 300 a month in early 1937.⁴ The party opened its doors, as East Toronto organizer Jack Scott put it, to "anybody ... who wanted to come in."⁵ Most new members came from the unemployed movement or — in much fewer numbers — the labour unions.⁶ While recruits from the unemployed movement made the party more "Canadian" than in the 1920s, it remained overwhelmingly European-born. The ethnic distribution of Winnipeg's membership in mid-1937 had a familiar look: the 715 members were 42 per cent Ukrainian or Russian, 14 per cent Jewish, 12.6 per cent Polish, 14.4 per cent Scandinavian, German or Hungarian, and 17 per cent Anglo-Saxon; only 22 per cent of Southern Ontario recruits in 1937-38 were native born.⁷ The resistance of second-generation immigrants to the party was one of the reasons underlying the makeover of pro-communist national language organizations along Popular Front lines. Several changed their names in 1936-37. Thus, for example, the Polish Labour Farmer Temple Association became the Polish

³Revival started thanks to the success of the Workers' Unity League's mass campaign for state non-contributory unemployment insurance between February and June 1931. Although there was almost certainly a decline in the remainder of that year, due to mounting state attacks on the party and its unemployed associations, recovery clearly resumed during the WUL's heyday of 1933-34.

⁴The Force logged every membership rise. See *Bulletin #843*, 10 February 1937 and *#867*, 17 August 1937 (Alberta); *Bulletin #845*, 24 February 1937 and *#865*, 28 July 1937 (Saskatchewan); *Bulletin #862*, 30 June 1937 and *Bulletin #870*, 16 September 1937 (Manitoba).

⁵Palmer, *A Communist Life*, 51.

⁶Although the CPC no longer made unemployed struggles a national priority, local cadres continued to mould and lead them. There is an abundance of information on the unemployed in the 1937 *Bulletins*.

⁷*Bulletin #862*, 30 June 1937; Stewart Smith, "The Party Recruiting Drive in Southern Ontario," in *A Democratic Front for Canada: Reports, Speeches, Resolutions of the Thirteenth Session of the Dominion Executive, CPC, June 1938* (Toronto n.d.), 64

People's Association and the Yugoslavian Workers' Clubs were broken down into the Serbian People's Movement and the Croatian Cultural Association, the better to promote "the national traditions of their people." In the manner of the party centre, some language organizations also retitled their journals. The most influential ethnic newspaper, the weekly *Ukrayinski Robotnychi Visti* (*Ukrainian Labour News*), became the daily *Narodna Hazetta* (*People's Gazette*) in September 1937.⁸

For the first time since the early 1920s, holding the Soviet franchise was advantageous. The party's invitation to join the Soviet-led campaign for international anti-fascism resonated with Canadians of liberal disposition and conscience, and a sizeable number of new members entered from the "progressive" middle class. As American historian Maurice Isserman observes, not "everyone could pour cement for the Dnepropetrovsk Dam or stand guard with a rifle in Madrid's trenches; Communist party membership offered a vicarious sense of participation in both."⁹ Just as important, the party provided opportunities in one or other of its "fronts" for a growing and socially diverse periphery of Canadians, not yet ready or willing to become members, to express in practical ways their concern for a more democratic Canada and a safer world. The Popular Front mobilized them around a myriad group of actions. Solidarity with Republican Spain, for example, could be expressed by gathering 100,000 cigarettes or knitting socks for the lads at the front, by donating time — one group of garment workers contributed new suits of clothes to be raffled — or simply money. Thousands of collecting-tins rattled for Spain, calling for contributions towards such humanitarian projects as the upkeep of a Canadian-sponsored school for Civil War orphans and Dr. Norman Bethune's mobile blood-transfusion unit.¹⁰

⁸ *Bulletin* #840, 20 January 1937; #842, 3 February 1937. See also, University of Toronto, Robert Kenny Papers, Box 2, folder 6, "Memorandum on the Work of the National Language Organizations," October 1937; John Kolasky, *The Shattered Illusion: The History of Ukrainian Pro-Communist Organizations in Canada* (Toronto 1979) 5; Carmela Patrias, *Patriots and Proletarians: Politicizing Hungarian Immigrants in Interwar Canada* (Montréal 1994), 206-8. Hinting at the devious intent behind Muni Ehrlich's rebirth as "Jack Taylor," the RCMP seemed gratified that the party still had to practice bogus Canadianization.

⁹ Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party during the Second World War* (Urbana 1993).

¹⁰ The significance of the Spanish struggle is manifest throughout the 1937 *Bulletins*. See also, Victor Hoar, *The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion* (Toronto 1969); Ted Allen and Sydney Gordon, *The Scalpel, The Sword: The Story of Doctor Norman Bethune* (Toronto 1976); William Beeching, *Canadian Volunteers: Spain, 1936-1939* (Regina 1989).

The RCMP noted how the party was attempting to broaden its appeal by consciously attuning itself to national values and symbols.¹¹ If there was a single dominant signifier of the Popular Front, it was Bethune's ambulance unit, which the party turned into an icon of native humanitarianism and ingenuity. Bethune, the *Daily Clarion* editorialized, was vindicating the "Nation's Honor."¹² In an interview Tim Buck linked honour, nation, solidarity, sacrifice and patriotism in the space of six lines: "*We Canadians* have done something to aid our Spanish brothers and sisters; but not enough by far ... But, let us be clear that *we Canadians* have only made the first few small steps towards the fulfilment of our sacred obligations to the Spanish people ... I am convinced that *our Canadian people* are ready and willing to exert the supreme efforts so vitally necessary." "*Canada*," the party leader concluded, "must do her share."¹³ At their most important meetings communists emphasized their Canadian-ness by steadfastly refusing to sing "God Save the King" while wrapping themselves in the flag. Behind the platform at the Alberta provincial convention was a "large maple leaf with Tim Buck's picture in the centre," while at the Eighth Dominion convention the backdrop was "a huge banner depicting a young Canadian worker with a wife and child standing before a green maple leaf on which were drawn symbols of the wealth of Canada: lumber, wheat, factories, mines." The banner carried the message that "Our Country is Rich Enough to Make Our People Happy."¹⁴ Not content to let these patriotic symbols speak for themselves, the party sought out new audiences and spoke to them on the issues they considered important and in language they could understand. When party representative G. [Sam?] Walsh addressed the Kitchener YMCA, his audience's four key questions were: was the CPC compatible with democracy? did it seek to destroy Christianity? what were its ultimate aims? and how did it intend to achieve them? An informant reported that he responded "in a capable fashion."¹⁵

The RCMP paid close attention to the party's fishing expedition into the middle class. A mole in the Montréal Young Communist League (YCL) reported that the McGill University unit continued to be a productive source of new recruits.¹⁶ Some of these student recruits may have remained sympa-

¹¹The Force recognized what the party was up to. Its report on Buck's interview was headed: "Communists Acting as Representatives of [the] Canadian People," *Bulletin* #839, 13 January 1937. For another comment in similar vein, see *Bulletin* #862, 30 June 1937.

¹²*Bulletin* #839, 13 January 1937.

¹³*Bulletin* #839, 13 January 1937.

¹⁴*Bulletin* #867, 17 August 1938; #874, 27 October 1937.

¹⁵*Bulletin* #840, 20 January 1937.

¹⁶On the party and student politics, see Paul Axelrod, "Spying on the Young in Depression and War: Students, Youth Groups, and the RCMP, 1935-1942," *Labour/Le*

thetic after graduation; at a meeting of the Montreal Trade Union Commission, a delegate submitted a list of 90 professional contacts, mainly architects and engineers, who had indicated an interest in unionizing.¹⁷ Not all cities produced so rich a yield, however. Annie Buller complained about the Brandon party's lack of inroads among teachers and students.¹⁸ Norman Bethune's inspiration apparently left Winnipeg's medical fraternity unmoved; at a banquet in his honour, Dr. S.J. Johannesson regretted that the city's doctors "had not come together to honour such a distinguished pioneer of the medical profession."¹⁹ The Force logged one bit of evidence that hinted at journalistic sympathies with the party's greatest *cause celebre*: the British Columbia Institute of Journalists sponsored an address on Spain by the left-wing American journalist Anna Louise Strong, editor of *Moscow News*.²⁰

Of all the professional groups monitored, lawyers had the highest profile. They dominated the new front groups the party created explicitly to facilitate middle class involvement, such as city and provincial Committees in Aid of Spanish Democracy, the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion (FMPB), and especially the Canadian League for Peace and Democracy (CLPD) (ironically, as this even softer-tined successor to the League Against War and Fascism became the dominant Popular Front agency, the party's original vehicle of the "class struggle in the courts," the Canadian Labour Defence League (CLDL), continued its slow fade into insignificance).²¹ The *Bulletins* record the "fuss" the party made over, and the "great things" it expected from, R.L. Calder, K.C., president of the Canadian Civil Liberties Union (CCLU). Calder's proclamations of support for capitalism told colleagues that they could demonstrate concern for justice and human rights without abandoning their class. Jurists like Calder, E.J. MacMurray, K.C., a former Liberal Solicitor-General, and Judge Lewis St. George Stubbs must have helped legitimate broader bourgeois participation.²²

Travail, 35 (1995), 43-63; John Manley, "From United Front to Popular Front: The CPC in 1936," introduction to Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, eds., *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part III, 1936* (St. John's 1996), 16-21.

¹⁷ *Bulletin #854*, 5 May 1937; *Bulletin #870*, 16 September 1937.

¹⁸ *Bulletin #854*, 5 May 1937.

¹⁹ *Bulletin #865*, 28 July 1937.

²⁰ *Bulletin #850*, 7 April 1937.

²¹ Manley, "From United Front to Popular Front," 4-6; *Bulletin #851*, 14 April 1937. In A.E. Smith's autobiography, the CLDL simply disappears between 1936 and 1941, when it was reincarnated as the National Committee for Democratic Rights. See *All My Life* (1949; Toronto 1977), 180-205.

²² *Bulletin #872*, 5 October 1937; *#875*, 4 November 1937; *#877*, 30 November 1937. The RCMP noted Calder's part in the formation of another front organization, the League of the Rights of Man, "the purpose of which ... [was] to watch the politicians,

Evaluating the significance of the party's *embourgeoisement* is difficult. The RCMP perceived CLPD activists as dupes manipulated by "well-known ... [party] members" on the CLPD National Committee, "but it seems just as likely that "front" men and women were aware of the party's agenda. Some middle class Canadians may have attended left-wing meetings simply because they were events. When André Malraux, the epitome of the creative artist as anti-fascist combatant, visited Toronto, Massey Hall had to be booked. Before his address, the RCMP noted, he 'was feted at a dinner in the Round Room at Eaton's College Street store. Approximately 120 people attended including Dr. Salem Bland, Professor Felix Walter and Tim Buck.'" Movement funds were boosted by the sale of signed photographs of the novelist/fighter pilot at \$10 each (the RCMP report does not comment on the success of this early venture into celebrity merchandising).²³ On the other hand, bourgeois cultural capital does seem to have facilitated promotion through the party hierarchy. Peter Hunter was one of the few YCL leaders in the late 1930s with a proletarian background. Most of the party's younger leadership, he notes, "came from student and middle-class circles." New bourgeois cadres were entering the struggle when the party — its softly, softly approach to sympathizers notwithstanding — was demanding ever tighter ideological "vigilance" from its own rank and file. Bourgeois intellectuals like Stanley Ryerson came under particular pressure to demonstrate the completeness of their break with liberalism. As the hard-line political commissar of the National Training School, Ryerson presided over schooling that emphasized devotion to the Soviet Union and identified marxism with the latest shading in the party line.²⁴

study the legislation and regain the rights which the people have been losing for the past 100 years." On CPC involvement in the Montréal branch of the CCLU, see Larry Hannant, *The Infernal Machine: Investigating the Loyalty of Canada's Citizens* (Toronto 1995), 235-37. On McMurray and Stubbs, see Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 153-4, 176.

²³*Bulletin* #850, 7 April 1937.

²⁴Hunter, *Which Side Are You On, Boys?*, 116; Gregory S. Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History* (Montréal 1995), 51-2; John Manley, "Teaching and Learning 'The Concentrated Lessons of All Men's Struggles': Marxist Education in the Canadian Communist Party, 1924-1954," paper presented to the 18th International Congress of Historical Sciences, Montréal, September 1995. This is not to say that proletarian elements were any more tolerant of political deviance. In his attitude towards the "Trotskyite" heresy, Peter Hunter fully lived up to his surname. I will have more to say on the party's ideological "vigilance" campaigns in the introduction to the final volume of *The Depression Years* series. For the time being, however, see *Bulletin* #845, 24 February 1937; William Lawson, "Trotsky and Terrorism," *New Frontier*, January, March 1937; Burnett A. Ward, "Trotskyism in British Columbia," *New Frontier*, April 1937. See the interesting comments on Herbert Norman in Peyton V. Lyon, "The Loyalties of E. Herbert Norman," *Labour/Le Travail*, 28 (1991), 229-33.

Had the party managed to retain all the members who ever took out party cards (which, one *Bulletin* tells us, members started to carry openly again), it would have achieved a membership of over 20,000 by 1937-38. The *Bulletins* do not record that the CPC was constantly dogged by the problem of membership "fluctuation."²⁵ Turnover reached especially high levels during the Popular Front, when thousands of Canadians seem to have treated party membership like a rite of passage. Historically, fluctuation had been produced by a routinized party culture and the costs to personal life of the uniquely high level of activity the CPC demanded. These factors were intensified in the Popular Front by a blurring of the boundary between party and movement: if it was easier for sympathizers to enter the party, it was also easier for them to leave. The party's growth spurt ran out of steam in the "Roosevelt recession" of late 1937 and 1938, when the 3,000 new members who entered the party were precisely offset by the 3,000 who left; in British Columbia, in particular, the party door was not so much open as revolving.²⁶ Some new members left because they refused to tolerate the gap between the democratic ethos of "The Movement" and the party's bureaucratic internal regime. Jack Scott found that while some contacts would "sort of thrust themselves upon you," others who were "quite militant and quite for the Party ... were not keen on joining." The important thing was to be involved in the "struggle of the moment," and that could be done without joining the party. One militant informed Scott: "We don't need a Party. All we need is for Tim Buck to tell us what to do and then go out and do it." This pointed up one of the dangers for the party of submerging its identity. Another was pointed up by those who left because they resented a directive *not* to take full credit for their efforts *as communists*.²⁷

Despite constant reminders, the need to build the party was often overlooked in the heat and euphoria of the "daily struggles." The sheer weight of activity challenged the Leninist truism that struggle was the best educator. With the wisdom of hindsight, Scott felt that the party created a long-term problem for itself by failing to build a cadre at this time. The "ranks," he argued, "had an emotional position, so they drifted in and they drifted out.

²⁵This was common to other English-speaking parties. See Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?*, 149; Kevin Morgan, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics, 1935-1941* (Manchester 1989), 10. It may be worth pointing out that, in terms of membership, the CPC loses nothing in comparison with the CPUSA and CPGB. All three reached their pre-World War II peak in 1938, at which point the Canadian party had as many members as the CPGB and between one-quarter and one-third of the CPUSA's membership.

²⁶Sam Carr, "Building the Communist Party," *A Democratic Front for Canada*, 47.

²⁷Carr, "Building the Communist Party," 47-51; Palmer, ed., *A Communist Life*, 50-1. The phenomenon of the militant "fellow traveller" was international. See Phil Piratin, *Our Flag Stays Red* (London 1980 [1948]), 5.

They were not revolutionaries." This perception is worthy of further examination, but it needs to be noted that Scott was "all wrapped up in the Spanish show" and as frantically active as anyone else.²⁸ Moreover, the party did try to develop cadres. It placed increasing emphasis on formal political education, both as a means of brightening up branch life and of strengthening ideological convictions. Often, however, its efforts foundered on a pervasive anti-intellectualism that viewed theory and study as lower forms of activity — union cadres always seemed to find more pressing tasks — and on the "amateurish, accidental and spasmodic" quality of the education itself.²⁹

II

If the experience of younger Canadian party members was anything like that of their American counterparts, many of them must have been happy to "live with a policy that was natural, that heeded reality, and that could unleash [their] creative talents and energies." Peter Hunter, one of the main organizers of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, has observed that the Toronto YCL comrades who "ate, slept and breathed The Movement" were not motivated by "Economic determinism and self interest," but rather by "the desire for social justice, for peace, for a new world." All of those chosen for mass work, Hunter remembers, had an "ability to work with others, to recognize the other point of view, to compromise when necessary." The party, of course, was always supposed to "come first," but for Hunter — and surely for others like him — The Movement's imperatives sometimes prevailed.³⁰

A section of the rank and file, however, clearly felt that the drive for popular unity against fascism was imposing too many compromises on the class struggle. Their unhappiness about the leadership's direction can be inferred

²⁸Palmer, *A Communist Life*, 38.

²⁹After the 1937 convention, the party produced five "Branch Study Outlines" which formed the basis of its political education programme for the next year. They guided members through the five pamphlets produced to popularize the general party programme: Tim Buck, *The People versus Monopoly*; Sam Carr, *Communists at Work*; Earl Browder, *North America and the Soviet Union* (a rudimentary rehash of a pamphlet originally written for the CPUSA); CPC, *We Propose* (an outline of the programme), and Evariste Dubé, *French Canada Awakes*. See copies in University of Toronto, Kenny Collection, Box 2, folder 4. On the growth of party schools, see *Bulletin #838*, 6 January 1937; #844, 17 February 1937; #879, 22 December 1937. The RCMP's silence on the National Training School, after noting its inauguration, suggests, perhaps, that the party may have taken unusual measures to maintain the school's privacy. On the NTS, see Manley, "Teaching and Learning." The critical view of party education is in Carr, "Building the Communist Party," 51.

³⁰George Charney, quoted in Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?*, xii; Hunter *Which Side Are You On, Boys?*, 109, 117.

from an “educational letter” sent out in January 1937. In defending “bourgeois democracy,” the centre insisted, the party was not “going over to the right” or executing a “drastic change of policy.” Nor would it admit that previous tactics had been mistaken. Tactics had recently changed because the situation had changed. At every point, it insisted, tactics and line had been correct — although they had been incorrectly applied, with “a most sectarian method,” during the period of “illegality.” Responding to questions about the concept of social fascism, the party explained that this term referred to individuals who were socialists in words but fascists in deeds. The party did not repudiate the concept but rather confined it to a characterization of the “right wing” of social democracy — which in Canadian terms meant the CCF’s national leadership — and declared that an alliance between communists and social democrats of the left and centre was possible and desirable. Ultimately, the letter concluded, the decisive question for the party was: who is the “main enemy?” The answer was clear: Fascism. The party fought for bourgeois democratic rights because it was a stepping stone to “Soviet democracy” and because the “vast masses of people revere the democratic traditions of their country and can be organized to defend same.”³¹

This extract is an instructive source on the quality of internal party education. At best, the letter may have provided the rank and file with an easily assimilable line. Used in debate, however, it must surely have been unconvincing. Its cavalier treatment of party history (a practice that would become all too familiar) left rank and file members vulnerable to rivals with sharper memories. One can perhaps detect the hand of those who were constructing a cult of personality around Tim Buck in the admission (if such it can be called) that party tactics had been applied in a sectarian manner in the period of illegality. This periodization neatly absolved not only the Comintern and Moscow, but also every party leader who had served time in Kingston between 1932 and 1934. Any suggestion that “Comrade Tim” could have perpetrated even a mis-application of a fundamentally correct line was inconceivable. In reality, he had become party leader largely because of his willingness to implement the Comintern’s Class Against Class tactics. Under his leadership, the party had classified social democracy in general as social fascist.

The RCMP concluded from this letter that “as reflected in the various movements for unity [CPC policy] is merely a tactical manoeuvre designed to defeat its immediate enemy — Fascism.” If this analysis was perfectly reasonable, the RCMP did not stop to ponder whether the party had been forced to issue the letter at least partly because some members did not see Fascism as the “main enemy.” When Stanley Ryerson addressed the Congress of the

³¹*Bulletin #842*, 3 February 1937. The party had earlier made this analysis of social fascism in its short book *What the Communist Party Stands For* (Toronto 1936).

Mexican CP as the CPC's fraternal representative, he identified Fascism as a genuine threat only in Québec. Who was the fascist enemy? The party leadership was not so foolish as to identify Fascism with Conservatism: the unabated electoral rout of the Conservatives demonstrated their lack of political potency.³² Fascism, it seemed, equalled the "Hepburn-Duplessis Axis" supplemented by a handful of plutocratic "big shots," "the Bennetts, the Holts, the *Financial Post*, the *Globe and Mail*, etc." The party invited virtually everyone to the left of this rather puny aggregation to unite against it, a suggestion that seems to have struck some of its more intransigent members as the path to a dilution of the here and now struggle for working-class interests and Canadian socialism. One wonders whether some rank and filers — perhaps prompted by the Trotskyists, who made some significant appearances in the 1937 *Bulletins* — suspected that the CPC was determined to be the "saviour" of the bourgeoisie, as the French CP had been in the 1936 strike wave.³³

III

Grounds for such suspicion arose from the party's role in the burgeoning union movement. As ever, the party's contribution to labour struggles was unmatched, but it collapsed itself into the movement, willingly accepting the role of uncritical auxiliary. Preaching that unity should be the working class's guiding principle, it sought to place organized labour at the centre of the heralded people's coalition: a million workers organized in a unified labour movement, the party insisted, would be a "Mighty instrument for the defense of the workingman, his family and the majority of the Canadian people." As we have seen, however, that "majority" extended far beyond the working class.

The equivalent of the "Hepburn-Duplessis Axis" within the labour movement was the "Green-Woll-Frey misleadership" of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Against this triumvirate, the party seemed to exhaust all its militancy. In calling for maximum labour unity, it urged party members to carry the fight for the CIO and its continued membership of the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC) into their central labour councils and provincial labour federations (the AFL had suspended the CIO in November 1936).³⁴ At a

³²*Bulletin #842*, 3 February 1937. On the electoral scene, see E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto 1993), ch. 8 and Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A history* (Toronto 1987), ch. 15.

³³Dennis McColl, "Hepburn" and Peter Quinn, "Duplessis," *New Frontier*, October 1937. On Maurice Thorez, the French CP, and the Popular Front, see Fernando Claudin, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform* (Harmondsworth 1975), 199-207.

³⁴*Daily Clarion*, 18 March 1937, quoted in *Bulletin #849*, 24 March 1937. The AFL Executive Council's suspension of the CIO in August 1936 was endorsed by the full AFL convention three months later. See *The Depression Years, Part III, 1936*, 523.

Montréal trade union fraction meeting, Alex Gault reported that the party had been able to come out locally with a "more precise and open CIO line" precisely because local relationships between the CIO and TLC were so good.³⁵ Other party members, however, doubted whether this era of good feelings would continue indefinitely. Not only was the AFL increasing the pressure on its Canadian officials to move against the "dualist" insurgents, but the CIO was undeniably undermining the AFL in Canada. In British Columbia, for example, within months of merging their WUL union with the Lumber and Sawmill Workers' Union (LSWU) section of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, left-wing unionists joined like-minded Americans in a Federation of Woodworkers and were discussing a split from the AFL union. As late as 9 June 1937 the party was counselling against a break. One week later it underlined the volatility of the period (or perhaps the volatility of west coast communism) by deciding that the AFL's reactionary behaviour made a breakaway fully justified. The International Woodworkers of America (IWA) was formed in July.³⁶

The IWA's formation seems to have been one of those occasions when the BC provincial party "went its own merry way, ignoring, much to the consternation of the national office, party policy and strategy whenever it saw fit."³⁷ In general, the party leadership was desperate to avoid an AFL-CIO split and tried to combat the "fatalistic view" that this was inevitable. Its utilitarian view of unity led to its adopting a markedly tougher line on relations with the All-Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL). Since 1935 the CPC had always differentiated between the reactionary and progressive elements in the national union centre and had encouraged cooperation between the latter and the TLC. When the ACCL split at its 1936 convention, A.R. Mosher highlighted his "progressive" persona by publicly inviting John L. Lewis to ally the CIO and the ACCL. In 1937, however, the party worked out that if Mosher's initiative had succeeded (which, of course, it did in 1940), the TLC could not have resisted AFL pressure. The party duly altered its image of the ACCL, now arguing that its essential divisiveness could be seen in its attempts to "muscle in" on the CIO's steel and textiles drives. By calling on members to assist "the healthy unity movement" emerging among rank and file members of the AFL's Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks (BRSC) and Mosher's Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees (CBRE) and referring to the "isolated position of the CBRE and the ambiguous role played by the CBRE leaders" in

³⁵ *Bulletin #857*, 27 May 1937.

³⁶ *The Depression Years, Part III, 1936*, 10; editorials, "We Can't Afford to Lose Our Head," "A Critical Situation," and "Green Changes Situation," *B.C. Lumber Worker*, 19 May, 9, 16 June 1937. See also Abella, *Nationalism*, 112-3.

³⁷ Abella, *Nationalism*, 111. Abella does not mention the party centre's view of the IWA breakaway.

recent railway wage negotiations, it served notice of its loyalty to international unionism.³⁸ Aaron Mosher no doubt filed away this minor piece of treachery for future action.

As the 1937 TLC convention approached, the CPC urged its members to work in their unions and labour councils to generate unity resolutions for submission to the convention and discourage resolutions that endorsed the CIO. "This," one directive pointed out, "is hardly necessary now." Moreover, in the present circumstances it could only be provocative. Communists should concentrate on winning support for resolutions that would not rile the craft traditionalists but would promote party causes, such as independent labour political action, the creation of a TLC Organization Department, support for "Bill 62" (J.S. Woodsworth's pursuit of a "Canadian Wagner Act"), and solidarity with Spanish republicanism. The party was delighted when the convention passed off with the CIO still on board, one member enthusing that the "handful of reactionaries who went ... determined to cause a rift, did not get to first base." He, however, conveniently overlooked the hectic pre-convention politicking that had been required to prevent a "bitter floor fight" and the fact that the price of unity was the lifting of any real pressure on the TLC to change its non-interventionist policy.³⁹

The failure to energize the TLC was especially disappointing given the CIO's manifest failure to fulfil its early promise. The militant trend established towards the end of 1936 in strikes by the United Automobile Workers' (UAW) at Kelsey-Hayes Wheel, Windsor, the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) in Vancouver, and the United Textile Workers (UTW) at Empire Cottons, Welland, continued into spring 1937.⁴⁰ The *Bulletins* show in detail

³⁸On the ACCL split, see *The Depression Years, Part III, 1936*, 424-26; *Toronto Globe*, 30 September 1936; *Labour Review*, December 1936. For ACCL organizing in textiles, see *Bulletin #861*, 23 June 1937; Alfred Edwards, "The Mill: A Workers' Memoir of the 1930s and 1940s," *Labour/Le Travail*, 36 (1995), 273-5, 278-82.

³⁹*Bulletin #866*, 5 August 1937; *#869*, 9 September 1937; Abella, *Nationalism*, 28; *Bulletin #873*, 13 October 1937. According to a report from Montréal, half the 140 "progressive" delegates to the TLC convention were party members. "Bill 62" was J.S. Woodsworth's attempted amendment to the Criminal Code, to give Canadian trade unionists the *de iure* freedom from victimization theoretically guaranteed to American unionists by the National Industrial Recovery Act (1933) and the National Labor Relations Act (1935). The party did not mention Woodsworth's sponsorship of the Bill. See Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto 1959), 293-4.

⁴⁰John Manley, "Communists and Autoworkers: The Struggle for Industrial Unionism in the Canadian Automobile Industry, 1925-1936," *Labour/Le Travail*, 17 (1986), 105-33; *The Depression Years, Part III, 1936*, 519, 539-9; *Bulletin #843*, 10 February 1937.

how Canadian workers were no less inspired by the new union force than their American counterparts. The first six months of the year produced a national strike wave, not only in the classic CIO mass production industries but also in less glamorous settings where the WUL had done some notable pioneering work, such as longshoring and water transport, furniture, garments, shoe and leather, and sawmilling. Through the *Bulletins* we witness such novelties as militant laundry workers, professionals seeking union organization, and the explosive militancy of Québec's supposedly priest-ridden proletariat. We also see many reports of peaceful union growth.⁴¹

One inaccurate report suggested that the CIO was ready to back the Steelworkers Organization Committee's (SWOC) Canadian locals to the tune of \$500,000.⁴² In fact, despite several similar suggestions of impending bounty, it swiftly became clear that, in the wake of the UAW's American triumph at GM, Flint, in February and SWOC's "Big Steel" contract in March, the CIO's American leaders — the left as much as the right — were determined to follow a policy of retrenchment whenever possible. Equally swiftly, the magic in the letters "CIO" started to wear off. As Irving Abella has shown, the union building that was carried on in the CIO's name owed virtually everything to the solidarity of Canadian labour. The CIO contributed little more than a potent mystique (important though that was) to the UAW's breakthrough at General Motors, Oshawa. Shortly after Oshawa, the CIO called together its industrial organizers from all the main industrial centres in Ontario to hear CIO Regional Industrial Director, Hugh Thompson, tell them that there was no prospect of a general organizing drive in Canada. The RCMP's report makes no mention of the mood of the meeting, but one suspects it was sombre. The main business "decided" by the conference, attended by representatives of the CPC, YCL, the Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement (CCYM), and the CPC-led Ontario Unemployed Federation, was that Canadian unions would henceforth "finance their own strikes as no money can be expected from the USA." With

⁴¹The *Bulletins* underscore the image of 1937 presented by Douglas Cruikshank and Gregory S. Kealey, "Strikes in Canada, 1891-1950," *Labour/Le Travail*, 20 (1987), 85-145, especially 114-7. Robert Storey's contention that "The great dream of the CIO ... had [after Oshawa] little or no immediate impact on Ontario or Canadian workers as a whole? is accurate only in the sense that there were no further organizing coups of a similar stature. Robert Storey, "Unionization versus Corporate Welfare: The 'Dofasco Way'," *Labour/Le Travail*, 12 (1983), 7-42.

⁴²*Bulletin #840*, 20 January 1937. The sum Curtis mentioned was the total the CIO was allegedly prepared to make available for all SWOC's 1937 operations. Although very little of it crossed the border, it should be noted in SWOC's defence that what became known as the "Little Steel Strike" began on 26 May. With around 50,000 American steelworkers out by early June, SWOC's half-million dollars were rapidly consumed.

no sense of irony, the meeting also agreed that all CIO locals should give 25¢ per member to the Spanish Aid Fund and should be prepared to pay half the cost of sending to Spain any single unemployed members who wished to volunteer. The CIO's refusal to commit funds to Canada squandered the momentum of the auto strike and inevitably dissipated Canadian optimism.⁴³

The party instantly adapted to the CIO's *realpolitik*. When SWOC members at Cuthbert's Plumbing Supplies in Montréal went on strike in June, its stand was remarkably censorious. Ignoring evidence of rank-and-file combativeness (a contact reported that the strikers' morale was high, with 98 of the plant's 100 workers on strike, and predicted that the strike could be won given financial support from the CIO and other local unions), the party declared that the strike was "a serious mistake ... [which] should not have been called ... because of the apparent weakness of the union." Although it endorsed the view that the Montréal trade union movement would have to provide financial support to give the strike any chance of success, it seemed less concerned with building solidarity than with saving face with the *American* party, whose trade union leaders, it pointed out, would "lose all respect for the Canadian trade union section of the CP and [might] take the matter up with the higher bodies" if the CIO received any further appeals for financial aid.⁴⁴ The Montréal CIO used dues payments from local members to support the strike, but after three weeks the workers were forced back without a settlement.⁴⁵ Workers who continued to fight for recognition as CIO unionists, such as the coal miners of Minto, New Brunswick, discovered that their best allies were comrades in UMWA District 26. The CIO, Allen Seager notes, was "the proverbial giant with feet of clay."⁴⁶

The CIO's missed chance can be traced through the *Bulletins'* detailed accounts of developments in the textiles industry. As noted earlier, the first major strike of 1937 started in late December 1936 at Empire Cottons in Welland. UTW organizer and CPC member Alex Welch led 800 workers to a compromise settlement that included the workers' right to belong to a union of their own choice.⁴⁷ The strike did not arise out of thin air. The Workers' Unity League and Young Communist League had achieved some success in textiles, mainly in small knitting mills, in 1933-34. After the liquidation of the WUL in 1936, the party worked to bring the UTW into Canada. The *American*

⁴³ *Bulletin #857*, 27 May 1937; Abella, *Nationalism*; Daniel Benedict, "Goodbye to Homer Martin," *Labour/Le Travail*, 29 (1992), 117-55.

⁴⁴ *Bulletin #863*, 13 July 1937.

⁴⁵ *Bulletin #865*, 28 July 1937.

⁴⁶ Allen Seager, "Minto, New Brunswick: A Study of Class Relations Between the Wars," *Labour/Le Travail*, 5 (1980), 117-24.

⁴⁷ *Bulletin #843*, 10 February 1937.

union, however, after the cataclysmic defeat of mass strikes in New England and the Upper South in 1934, was initially too exhausted to offer more than its best wishes. Canadian communists responded by working through the Toronto District Labour Council, and as an interim measure organized a Textile Workers' Association in mid-1936. By July, when the first new Canadian UTWA local since the 1920s was formed in Toronto, Communist cadres were also probing the possibilities of unionizing textile workers in other Ontario towns. In August they had their first real strike success in Cornwall, where it formed another local at Courtauld's large rayon mill. Union organizers pressed home their advantage during 1937, leading strikes at Welland, Ontario Silknet in Toronto (April-May), Dominion Woollens in Peterborough (June-August), and Canadian Cottons in Cornwall (July-August).⁴⁸

Despite all the difficulties facing them, Canadian textile workers were clearly ready to organize and were "angered" to learn that Sidney Hillman had blocked plans to send the TWOC into Canada. Caught between the danger of alienating rank-and-file opinion and losing face with the CIO, the party devoted a full meeting of the National Trade Union Commission and part of an enlarged district bureau session to the textiles campaign before deciding to stand solidly behind the CIO.⁴⁹ Party leaders knew that the ACCL was dipping a toe into the Ontario mills ("further splitting the ranks of the textile workers"), while in Québec the Catholic Syndicates presented a threat to militant unionism.⁵⁰ Another possibility was that, having lost the UTW to the CIO, the AFL would launch a new union. The party decided that the membership should take the lead in organizing textile locals that could be affiliated to the CIO when it finally decided to move north. It proposed two alternatives, either a National Textile Workers' Union directly chartered by the TLC or the chartering of separate "federal" textile unions. In the latter part of 1937 the TLC set up the Canadian Textile Workers' Council, which by the end of 1938 operated as an umbrella for 10 textile locals. Meanwhile, cadres were to defend the TWOC by explaining the reasons behind its Canadian policy. "Under no conditions," the party ordered, "should the TWOC be criticised for their attitude toward Canada, since

⁴⁸David Milton, *The Politics of U.S. Labor: From the Great Depression to the New Deal* (New York 1982), 62-5; Thomas MacMahon, "An Appeal to Canadian Workers," *Daily Clarion*, 25 July 1936; also reports in *Daily Clarion*, 3, 6 June 1936; *The Depression Years, Part III, 1936*, 12-3, 372-5; *Bulletin #854*, 5 May 1937; #857, 27 May; #862, 30 June; #865, 28 July; #867, 17 August. For a valuable account of the Peterborough strike, see Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920-1960* (Toronto 1995), 166-90. See also Ellen Scheinberg, "The Tale of Tessie the Textile Worker: Female Textile Workers in Cornwall During World War II," *Labour/Le Travail*, 33 (1994), 160-1.

⁴⁹*Bulletin #863*, 13 July 1937; #865, 28 July 1937.

⁵⁰*Bulletin #863*, 13 July 1937; #865, 28 July 1937.

this would play into the hands of the anti-CIO forces and the reactionary AFL leaders."⁵¹

The UTW strikes in Peterborough and Cornwall in June, July, and August suggested that it remained possible to hold the line for the CIO in Ontario. In Québec, however, the party's traditional weakness could not compensate for the CIO's caution. Its base in the provincial textiles industry was tiny, and when 10,000 Québécois walked out of eight Dominion Textiles mills in August, under the leadership of the Catholic union, the party was confined to the sidelines. After a month of the most militant industrial conflict ever witnessed in Québec, the strikers returned to work at the behest of Cardinal J.M. Rodrigue Villeneuve, to await provincial mediation. Provincial party secretary Fred Rose, who had direct knowledge of French Canadian textiles workers and was one of the least sectarian of party leaders, refused to countenance a suggestion that the party campaign for the strikers to defect to a TLC union, since this might endanger the strike and discredit the TLC. He argued instead that the correct policy for the labour movement was to offer the Catholic union support and guidance, while the correct policy for the party unit was to agitate for rank-and-file unionism, with stronger picket lines and a more accountable leadership.⁵² The party adopted a philosophical outlook on its marginality to the Québec strikes (there were smaller but equally militant struggles at the Sorel shipyards and steel mills), viewing them as evidence of the inexorable growth of a general "movement towards struggle for a better life" by the French Canadian masses.⁵³

This long view also underpinned the party's contemporary movement away from the classical Leninist position on trade union work. Between first encountering '*Left Wing' Communism: An Infantile Disorder* in 1921 and the end of the 'Third Period' in 1934, the party remained more or less faithful to the principle that serious revolutionaries had to be involved as revolutionaries in the mass organizations of the class, actively leading rank and file unionists towards developed socialist consciousness.⁵⁴ When, however, the party decided to return to the international unions in November 1935, party leaders

⁵¹ *Bulletin #863*, 13 July 1937; *#865*, 28 July 1937; *Report of the Royal Commission on the Textile Industry* (Ottawa 1938), 186-7; Canada, Department of Labour, *Report ... for the Fiscal Year Ending 31 March 1937* (Ottawa 1937), 25-6.

⁵² *Bulletin #867*, 17 August 1937; Stuart Jamieson, *Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-66* (Ottawa 1970), 262-3. The RCMP's report uses the term "AFL" for what is clearly meant to be the Montreal Trades and Labour Council and/or the CIO.

⁵³ *Bulletin #869*, 8 September 1937.

⁵⁴ Even in the Third Period, when the CPC abandoned '*Left Wing' Communism* and withdrew from the mainstream unions, it did so in the expectation that its "red" unions would shortly become the mainstream.

had hinted at a willingness to suspend the principles of rank-and-file unionism when they called for communists to become “responsible leading” unionists rather than “permanent oppositionists.” They anticipated with relish a general growth of party influence in the CIO unions and a proliferation of communist trade union leaders and officials.⁵⁵ In 1937, with such as Alex Welch and Arthur Laverty (UTW), Sidney Sarkin (Amalgamated Clothing Workers, Montréal), Dick Steele and Harry Hunter (SWOC), Harold Pritchett (IWA), and Pat Sullivan (Canadian Seamen’s Union) all prominent figures, the party had to work out how — or even whether — these individuals should openly combine their union and party work; indeed the question of how all industrial cadres should conduct political work had to be confronted.

The 1937 *Bulletins* suggest that the party deliberately chose to compartmentalize industrial and political activity and reduced the latter to the single task of building the party. At the same time as the party urged employed members to make building the CIO their premier responsibility, it also instructed them to “remember their Party discipline insofar as admitting Party affiliation. *Never mention the Party.*”⁵⁶ Similarly, while it recognized that prominent communists would find themselves acting as union organizers, it declared that “having a party functionary act in the dual capacity of union organizer and Party organizer [was] ... a dangerous practice.”⁵⁷ Stewart Smith castigated party units in centres where the CIO was on the rise for letting party-building lag behind union-building. He also called for prominent communists not to conceal their politics. Apparently identifying Alex Welch and Arthur Laverty as culprits, he argued that “to deny Communist affiliation ... was only playing into the hands of the ‘red baiters’ and could only make things difficult for the C.P.”⁵⁸ Nevertheless, there is no suggestion that he wanted communists to use their union positions as propaganda platforms. Against his continued complaints about leading union cadres who felt “that their responsibilities to the building of the Party terminated when they became trade union officials,” the accused seem to have felt that they were simply doing what was necessary to actualize the party’s coalition-building aims.⁵⁹

⁵⁵*Towards a Canadian People’s Front*, Proceedings of the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee, CPC (Toronto, November 1935), 31-8. The RCMP took particular note of local union leaders’ party affiliations. It cited an *Ottawa Journal* (8 July 1937) report, which showed Cornwall union leader Arthur Laverty doing the party’s bidding. Noting that Laverty had a measure of influence with TLC president Paddy Draper, the RCMP pointed out “how quickly the Communist Party apparatus can be put into operation and how the Party functions in disguise.”

⁵⁶*Bulletin #856*, 19 May 1937.

⁵⁷*Bulletin #861*, 23 June 1937.

⁵⁸*Bulletin #865*, 28 July 1937.

⁵⁹Stewart Smith, “The Party Recruiting Drive in Southern Ontario,” in *A Democratic Front for Canada*, 61-75.

A reasonable case could be made for stressing the consolidation of the industrial unions. Even in the Third Period — when the struggle for socialism was supposedly on the immediate agenda — WUL organizers had tended to suppress political axe-grinding for the sake of building the red unions.⁶⁰ If the Popular Front offered a more promising organizing context, red-baiting remained common and many workers were still distrustful of communist motives. When UTW organizer and party member Alex Welch announced during the Ontario Silknit strike that the strikers' demand for union recognition referred simply to UTW local 2495 and not to the CIO, he was acknowledging that what made the CIO so attractive to unionizing workers could have the diametrically opposite effect on outsiders.⁶¹ Mitchell Hepburn had noted the ease with which nativist anti-communism had been whipped up amongst "white men" against alleged CIO "reds" at the Holmes Foundry strike in Sarnia-Point Edward, Ontario, in March; his hysterical attacks on the CIO did not prevent his re-election in October.⁶² The CIO was being built in a much less helpful legislative climate than in the United States. The beneficial effect of the Nova Scotia Trade Union Act on the organization of the DOSCO steel plant suggests what might have happened on a national scale if the King government had sponsored Woodsworth's Bill 62. In the real world of provincial rights, however, Liberal sympathies were unpredictable. Where one Liberal provincial premier, Angus L. MacDonald, used legislation to cement working-class support in advance of a provincial election, another, T.D. Pattullo, celebrated re-election by passing the British Columbia Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, which actually weakened the bargaining position of organized labour — and then there was Hepburn.⁶³

By explicitly ruling that socialism was no longer an immediate objective, the party acknowledged (arguably not before time) the necessity of striking a realistic balance between agency and structural constraints. But did the new realism go too far? The party perceived the CIO not only as "one of the main

⁶⁰John Manley, "Canadian Communists, Revolutionary Unionism, and the 'Third Period': The Workers' Unity League, 1929-1939," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, New Series, 5 (1994), 167-94.

⁶¹*Bulletin #854*, 5 May 1937. On the need for clandestine methods, see Edwards, "The Mill," 273-5.

⁶²Palmer, *A Communist Life*, 41-4; Duart Snow, "The Holmes Foundry Strike of March 1937: 'We'll Give Their Jobs to White Men'," *Ontario History*, 69 (1977).

⁶³On the American context, see Melvyn Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America* (Chapel Hill 1994); Robert H. Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions* (Baltimore 1994), 26-43. For the Nova Scotia/British Columbia comparison, see David Frank and Donald McGillivray, *George MacEachern: An Autobiography* (Sydney, NS 1987), 61-92; Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in B.C.* (Vancouver 1967), 116-7.

methods of bringing forth a political consciousness of the working class" but also as the means of drawing together "a definite coalition .. of all progressive forces" behind the labour movement. Declaring that "only true communists" recognized that this crusade represented "our salvation and the establishment of the Workers' state," party leaders continued to see themselves as its unseen guiding force. In the short term, however, their priority was to build the coalition, and they were prepared to "tail" prospective allies to achieve it.⁶⁴

IV

We have seen how the party accepted the CIO's insistence that Canadians accept financial responsibility for building industrial unionism. It did not stop there. It also ordered members to downplay the issue of Canadian autonomy in the new unions for fear of offending the CIO, but at the same time predicted that, if the issue did arise, the CIO would not oppose national autonomy anyway. Given John L. Lewis' record in the Nova Scotia and Alberta mining districts and the tight top-down control Lewis' right-hand men Philip Murray and Sidney Hillman were exerting over the steel and textiles campaigns, this was either disingenuous or wilfully forgetful. The party also dutifully echoed Lewis' belief that rank-and-file initiative could be centrally directed. Uncannily echoing Maurice Thorez, it wagged an admonitory finger at Canadian workers' "spontaneous actions" and advised them to think before they acted. In particular, "whenever a sit-down strike is necessary and advisable, it requires the most careful preparation." When workers employed a "mechanical adaptation of this important and delicate method of struggle," the party lectured, they harmed their own cause.⁶⁵

We may wonder whether workers interpreted this advice as sound and practical or as a patronizing invitation to leave strike strategy to the experts. We may also wonder whether the party, which only ever made demands on the working class, did not wish to see the CIO become too threatening to potential sympathizers from the middle class. Communist leaders believed that Mitchell Hepburn's vigorous opposition to the CIO had inadvertently facilitated the creation of the much desired progressive coalition. If Hepburn could bid for the support of "backward" sections of the working class, they could "assist the Liberal groupings striving for a break" with Hepburn to converge around the CIO. As the party placed increasing emphasis on multi-class unity, it publicly abandoned its traditional vanguardist aspirations and voluntarily suspended criticism of potential Liberal allies.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Bulletin #856*, 19 May 1937.

⁶⁵ *Bulletin #861*, 23 June 1937.

⁶⁶ *Bulletin #856*, 19 May 1937. In *Which Side Were You On?*, 9-13, Maurice Isserman presents a useful, brief discussion of the CPUSA's decision to submerge its identity in

In January, it was still possible to bait Ontario Health and Welfare minister David Croll (for allegedly swanning off to Hollywood to negotiate a film deal on the Dionne Quints when he should have been dealing with the problems of his unemployed constituents). By mid-year, however, with the party struggling to ingratiate itself with Liberal moderates, such criticism was unthinkable. Among those to whom it extended the hand of comradeship were Croll and Arthur Roebuck, who had both recently resigned from Hepburn's cabinet over his anti-labour policies, T. Duff Pattullo, and the Prime Minister himself. When Roebuck announced his intention to "speak with an independent voice ... [and] pursue his stand in favour of labour rights and ... progressive legislation," Stewart Smith withdrew his own candidacy to give Roebuck a clear run in the Toronto Bellwoods provincial seat. The RCMP reported that "some understanding" had been reached between Roebuck and the party leadership, but it is doubtful if the former Attorney-General had to promise much. All W.L. MacKenzie King had to do to earn the party's plaudits was refuse to be "stampeded" into joining Hepburn's attack on the CIO and send a goodwill message to the Canadian Youth Congress, "a gesture appreciated by all progressives." Even after Pattullo's anti-labour Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, the party leadership decided that he was not yet linked to the Hepburn-Duplessis Axis and rebuked the BC District Bureau for adopting an overly critical attitude towards him.⁶⁷

As the CPC strengthened its contacts with bourgeois progressives (and even envisaged embracing "sections of the lower Conservative organizations"), it adopted an increasingly sharp attitude towards the CCF. A comprehensive account of the relationship between the CPC and the CCF in the late 1930s is yet another theme awaiting its historian.⁶⁸ The *Bulletins* show that, whatever some of the dimmer reactionaries were saying about the "red" CCF, the Force

the Popular Front, a decision he considers appropriate. Mark Naison adopts a more critical but largely supportive perspective in "Remaking America: Communists and Liberals in the Popular Front," in Michael E. Brown, Randy Martin, Frank Rosengarten and George Snedeker, eds., *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Communism* (New York 1993), 45-73, while in the same volume, John Gerassi, "The Comintern, the Fronts, and the CPUSA," 75-90, presents the case for the opposition.

⁶⁷Ted Allan, "Guilty! Mr. Croll," *New Frontier*, January 1937; Thomas McCarthy, "Ottawa Notes," *New Frontier*, June 1937; *Bulletin #871*, 23 September 1937; Tim Buck, report in *A Democratic Front for Canada*, 12-25; Carr, "Building the Communist Party," 58.

⁶⁸Communist Party of Canada, *Canada's Party of Socialism: History of the Communist Party of Canada 1921-1976* (Toronto 1982), 113-6 is predictably tendentious, but scarcely less so are the pro-CCF accounts. See, for example, Walter Young, *The Anatomy of A Party: The National CCF* (Toronto 1969), 254-69; Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History* (Toronto 1975), 103-13.

knew that the CCF's national and (except in Saskatchewan) provincial leaders were anxious not to tarnish their constitutionalist image by having any truck with communism. Norman Penner has argued that the CPC had "no success ... in improving its relations with most of the leaders, members and supporters of the CCF."⁶⁹ There was still a significant minority of CCFers who found the electoralist calculations of Woodsworth and M.J. Coldwell profoundly frustrating and were prepared to defy official censure. The CCF's 1936 national convention had already tried to address their concerns by amending the party constitution "to allow for co-operation with any organization for the purpose of bettering the immediate interests of the common people," but many CCFers felt that their leaders' caution continued to harm both the party and the movement. Graham Spry resigned as Ontario provincial leader in April 1937 because he had become demoralized by the national party's inadequate response to the industrial struggle from below. Everywhere, he lamented, "there is a demand for labour organizers, ... the cry 'labour party' ... a new attitude, a new public opinion, and everywhere the CCF is almost totally ineffective."⁷⁰

The *Bulletins* reveal the contemporary balance of forces in the CCF, showing on the one hand how the BC provincial executive refused any electoral collaboration in the provincial election and decided unanimously to suspend prominent party member (and provincial CLAWF secretary) A.M. Stephen for his "persistent advocacy of a People's Front" with the CPC and "Left Wing Liberals," while, on the other hand 40 per cent of the delegates at the BC provincial convention voted against Stephen's suspension.⁷¹ In Ontario, the provincial executive's ban on electoral pacts with the CPC in the October provincial election also produced internal strife. David Lewis and J.S. Woodsworth clashed sharply over the younger man's persistent objections to the CCF's refusal to give J.B. Salsberg a clear run at the St. Andrew's, Toronto, seat. When, as Lewis predicted, Salsberg fell only 179 votes short of victory, a number of Toronto CCFers defected to the CPC, having concluded that the

⁶⁹Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 155.

⁷⁰Peter Sinclair, "The Saskatchewan CCF: Ascent to Power and the Decline of Socialism," in Samuel D. Clark, J. Paul Grayson and Linda M. Grayson, eds., *Prophecy and Protest: Social Movements in Twentieth Century Canada* (Toronto 1975), 192; Spry, quoted in Abella, *Nationalism*, 24-5.

⁷¹*Bulletin* #846, 3 March 1937; #850, 7 April 1937. The Force indulged in some tortuous speculation on the Stephen case, suggesting that he was aware that the CP was using him to extract information on CCF policy and was secretly relieved at the executive's decision.

880 votes gained by CCF candidate Harry Simon had probably cost Salsberg the seat.⁷²

With the CPC so clearly setting the movement's agenda, some top-level contact with the party simply could not be avoided. Among the notable CCFers prepared to appear on joint platforms at anti-fascist meetings, International Women's Day celebrations, May Day rallies and the like were Dorothy Steeves, Eugene Forsey, Lyle Telford, Dorise Nielsen (who later defected to the CPC), Tommy Douglas, John Buckley (one of two CCFers on the Friends of the Soviet Union's 1937 delegation to the USSR), Lewis and Spry.⁷³ When Norman Bethune's national fundraising tour reached BC, the CCF provincial leaders, whether through recognition of the popularity of his humanitarian work, solidarity with the Spanish Loyalist cause or simple politeness, chose to fete him at a reception in Steeves' home. Bethune, having just announced his party membership, repaid the CCFers hospitality by attacking their anti-unity stand and trouncing the only (unfortunately unidentified) person prepared to defend the CCF line.⁷⁴ Elsewhere, socialists and communists naturally gravitated towards each other. In Windsor, the CCF southwestern Ontario regional council and the city CCF clubs joined with the CPC, CLWF, and Jewish, German and Italian cultural organizations to pledge \$35 a week for the Bethune blood transfusion unit.⁷⁵ A number of CCF clubs were hit by defections to the CPC. Some of the BC defectors who left in disgust at their leaders' laxness in eradicating "Trotskyite filth" may well have been secret party members, but it is doubtful if the Reverend E.H. Baker, a provincial council member from Fraser Valley, fell into that category. He joined the CP simply because he needed to stand in "the vanguard of unity."⁷⁶

V

Although Canada's labour rebellion had subsided by the end of 1937, a propensity towards working-class unity remained. As the *Daily Clarion* celebrated "increased labour-progressive representation" in municipal politics (and Tim Buck's moral victory in polling over 44,000 votes in an unsuccessful bid for a seat on the Toronto Board of Control), CPC-CCF unity continued to break out. When veteran CCF leader S.J. Farmer presented the Manitoba legislature with a resolution calling for an embargo on trade with Japan, almost

⁷² *Bulletin* #872, 5 October 1937; #873, 13 October 1937. See Walter Young's account of the argument between Lewis and J.S. Woodsworth on this issue, *The Anatomy of a Party*, 267-8. Young does not mention the St. Andrew's result. Salsberg won the seat for the Labour-Progressive Party in 1943.

⁷³ *Bulletin* #849, 24 March 1937.

⁷⁴ *Bulletin* #867, 17 August 1937.

⁷⁵ *Bulletin* #844, 17 February 1937.

⁷⁶ *Bulletin* #847, 10 March 1937; #853, 28 April 1937.

2000 Winnipeggers turned out at a CLPD meeting to support his call.⁷⁷ At the top, however, an apparently unbridgeable gulf continued to divide the two parties of the left. Neither party was blameless. If CCF leaders can be criticized for dissipating so much “energy ... in a grinding series of accusations, hearings, and expulsions designed to maintain ideological purity, especially against the threat from the ‘left,’ and to find scapegoats for ... failures,” the CPC, in its opportunist — and quite fanciful — pursuit of an alliance with Liberalism, gave up all too readily on the struggle to achieve socialist unity.⁷⁸ There was always a tension in Dimitrov’s conception of the Popular Front between the need to prepare the working class for a rapid transition from “the defensive to the offensive against capital” and the need to placate bourgeois allies by holding the mass movement back: the CPC had seemingly resolved it by the simple expedient of forgetting the first priority.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Bulletin* #878, 10 December 1937; #879, 22 December 1937.

⁷⁸ Leo Zakuta, “Membership in a Becalmed Protest Movement,” in Clark, Grayson and Grayson, eds., *Prophecy and Protest*, 225.

⁷⁹ Fernando Claudin, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform* (Harmondsworth 1979), 204-5.