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The United Mine Workers and the Coming of the CCF to Cape Breton*

WHEN THE DISTRICT 26 CONVENTION OF the United Mine Workers of America (UMW) in August 1938 voted to affiliate with the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the immediate reaction of the national CCF leadership was one of surprise and suspicion. Surprise because the CCF had almost no organization in Nova Scotia and it had received no advance information concerning this decision.¹ Suspicion because, given the history of Communist Party (CP) influence among the miners, there was some fear that the affiliation might be a CP ploy to infiltrate the CCF. District 26's decision, however, was not the result of a Communist Party scheme, although no opposition was put forward by the party. The CP organization in Cape Breton was weaker than it had been in earlier years, and the late 1930s was a period of relative truce in the long battle between left and right in Cape Breton labour politics and in the internal politics of the UMW. Affiliation with the CCF was supported almost unanimously at the convention, and enthusiastically endorsed by both left and right in the mining communities, who joined in a united front to secure labour representation in federal and provincial legislatures so that the workers might have a voice in the framing of laws and the actions of government. This decision marked a turning point in the direction of labour politics in the Cape Breton area and an important stage in the decline of Communist Party influence in the miners' union. The UMW affiliation led to the election of a CCF federal Member of Parliament and several provincial M.L.A.s., the earliest successes the party had in eastern Canada, and among the few it ever achieved in this region of the country.

The U.M.W.'s affiliation was the first union affiliation to the CCF, and there were few union organizations in Canada who could have provided as much assistance in a locality as the UMW could in Cape Breton. Many later affiliations of unions to the CCF and the New Democratic Party (NDP) have been disappointing in their political results. These affiliations were arranged with union leaders, who could not deliver the votes of the union membership at election time. The District 26 affiliation arose from a rank-and-file initiative, and signalled a mass adherence to the CCF. Therefore the party got enthusiastic election workers and

* Research for this article was assisted by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, for which the authors wish to express their gratitude.

1 David Lewis, *The Good Fight* (Toronto, 1981), p. 153.

4 *Acadiensis*

votes from the union's rank and file in the Cape Breton constituencies, as well as substantial support in money and organization from the District 26 union bureaucracy. Moreover, the affiliation of one of the most powerful unions in Canada greatly strengthened the CCF's influence in the national labour movement.² But the affiliation also had an important impact upon the union itself, on inner union politics, the ideology and leadership of the union and the policies of the union movement. Just as the union greatly influenced electoral politics, affiliation with a labour oriented political party interacted with and influenced the nature of the union movement in Cape Breton.

Most political parties of the left have sought connections with trade unions, but there have been differing views on what form the relationship between a union and the party should take. One position is that a trade union is exclusively an organization which regularly attempts to improve the wages and working conditions of members of the union and sometimes supports the economic struggles of other workers, and union efforts to influence government actions or laws should be limited to issues concerning the economic position of the workers or trade union rights. The more political needs of labour ought to be met by the actions of political parties in sympathy with labour's needs, or better yet, a party specifically representing labour's cause. This was the position held by the leadership of the CCF, although not shared by all its grass-roots activists. The party's central focus was always on seeking political power through elections in order to carry out constitutionally acceptable reforms, and union affiliations were sought in order to obtain the votes of the union members, and financial and organizational support for electoral politics. But direct political activity in any other forms by the workers was neither desired nor approved by the CCF leaders, even though they were sometimes obliged to support such activities when they occurred.

At the other extreme is a position which regards a close integration of trade union activity with the party's political program as a necessary and desirable goal, while recognizing that the union and the party must be distinct organizations and that daily demands result in different emphases in policy. Underscoring this theoretical position is a model of society which sees class conflict as permanent and exacerbating, and the only resolution to the problem as total class transformation. Economic struggles of labour are therefore conceived in political terms and, although bread and butter issues are not eschewed by this outlook as somehow trivial or insignificant, the victory or defeat in these issues is interpreted in

2 This was particularly true after the formation in 1940 of the Canadian Congress of Labour. In 1942, for example, Clarie Gillis, M.P. from Cape Breton and a UMW member, toured union locals in Ontario seeking affiliations to the CCF. Gad Horowitz, *Canadian Labour in Politics* (Toronto, 1968), pp. 72-3.

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terms of how well workers have fared in a process (albeit long) heading to potential accession to political power by the working class. This was the position generally, though not always consistently, upheld by the Communist Party of Canada. Any material gains won for workers by unions under capitalism could only be partial and temporary and the revolutionary transformation required more of workers than their votes. Mass political action would be necessary, and this meant that workers must develop a revolutionary political consciousness. The role of the Communist Party in unions, therefore, was to lead workers in struggles that were primarily economic, to be sure, but also to endeavour in these struggles to educate the workers to the nature of the class conflict and the necessity for proletarian class power.

In North America after the Second World War a form of narrowly economic "business unionism" assumed an almost unquestioned dominance in national labour movements, although it was unlike the earlier "pure and simple" unionism of Samuel Gompers in that it did have fixed alliances with specific political parties, the Democratic Party in the United States and the CCF in Canada.³ It is often implied that some inevitable social and historical law was at work here, and that modern industrial society invariably develops in a bureaucratic direction in which economic and political institutions, whether of capital or labour, become separate in form and function. The integration of trade unions as institutions playing a specifically defined and limited role within a stable capitalism is regarded as an inexorable result of the industrial process.⁴ Yet in the crisis ridden context of the 1930s it was far from clear that the radicals in the labour movement would be defeated. Powerful as were the tendencies and pressures leading unions towards bureaucracy and accommodation with capitalism, their victory was not certain.

The dramatic confrontations of Cape Breton miners and the giant British Empire Steel and Coal Corporation (Besco) in the early 1920s are well known, as is the solidarity that existed within the mining communities during the big strikes against the company's wage cuts.⁵ But within the miners' union there was an

3 See Gad Horowitz, *Canadian Labour in Politics* (Toronto, 1968).

4 Still widely influential on this matter is the study originally published in 1915 by Robert Michels, *Political Parties. A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York, 1962).

5 On the miners' struggles in the 1920s see: David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Miners 1917-1926", Ph.D. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1979; "The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation", *Acadiensis*, VII, 1 (Autumn 1977), pp. 3-34; "Class Conflict in the Coal Industry; Cape Breton, 1922", in G.S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto, 1976), pp.161-84; Donald MacGillivray, "Military Aid to the Civil Power: The Cape Breton Experience in the 1920s", *Acadiensis*, III, 2 (Spring 1974), pp. 45-64; as well as popular histories: Paul MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers* (Toronto, 1976); John Mellor, *The Company Store* (Toronto, 1983).

6 *Acadiensis*

almost perpetual state of contention between left and right for leadership within the locals and the whole of the district. The left was composed of miners who were militant on union issues and who were often also political radicals, and an influential handful were Communist Party members. The right were moderates who were loyal to the American head office of the UMW and the business unionist principles of International President John L. Lewis. As has often been noted in the history of trade unions, there was a strong tendency for the elected officers of the district, even those elected as candidates of the left, to develop bureaucratic and right wing outlooks in office. Two noted examples were district presidents John W. MacLeod, elected in 1924, and Freeman Jenkins, elected in 1942; both won office as candidates of the left, and both came to be regarded as extreme right wingers while in office. Alex A. (Sandy) MacKay, the long time district secretary-treasurer and stalwart of the right, was actually a Communist Party member when elected in 1924.

The undoubted leader of the left for many years was J. B. McLachlan, who was deposed from office by John L. Lewis in 1923, and imprisoned for sedition that same year. Because of this he was seen by many as a heroic martyr, as a man who was prepared to suffer for his principles. McLachlan was well known to be a communist, and while he was in office as secretary-treasurer District 26 voted to affiliate with the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU). McLachlan constantly, in his rhetoric, presented the miners' battles with the coal company as part of an irreconcilable class struggle. He called for "100 percent strikes", strikes in which essential maintenance men were withdrawn, raising the threat of flooding and irreversible damage to the mines, and in 1923 he led the miners out on a strike in solidarity with the steel workers in Sydney, demanding the withdrawal of the military from the area. The right wing among the local miners, and the UMW International President John L. Lewis, opposed all of these actions, and during the 1923 sympathy strike Lewis moved, deposing McLachlan and all the rest of the district officers and appointing Silby Barret provisional president of District 26. The sympathy strike violated the UMW constitution and general policy, Lewis claimed, since it engaged the union in a political strike in defiance of governmental authority, and breached a signed contract with the company.⁶ The issue was not that Lewis stood for "bread and butter" unionism while McLachlan had wider political motivations. Given the intransigence of the Besco corporation, the employer of both the miners and the steel workers, and the support given Besco by the state, militant and even radical union action was

6 John L. Lewis had used an almost identical issue to expel an important rival from the UMW in 1921. This was Alex Howat, the fiery leader of the miners in Kansas, who was deposed for breaking a contract and defying state law, and who also, like McLachlan, was briefly imprisoned. Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, *John L. Lewis, A Biography* (New York, 1977), pp. 115-8.

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necessary to hold the line on "bread and butter" issues. Lewis was prepared to neglect the immediate material interests of the union membership in order to uphold the principle that the UMW was a law abiding organization, invariably faithful to its contracts. He was also willing to accept the risk of this or other districts leaving the UMW, rather than weaken his control over the union.

In the early 1920s the militant unionism of J. B. McLachlan certainly had the support of the majority of the miners in Cape Breton, and in the years that followed there was always a strong constituency for political radicalism in the mining towns, particularly the largest of these towns, Glace Bay. But the militancy of the miners and the organizational strength of the Communist Party in the area declined in the late 1920s following the big strike of 1925, when, despite their solidarity, the miners failed to avert substantial cuts to their wages. Bureaucratic and moderate leaders were able to hold the leading positions in the district through these years, although a radical oppositional force always existed in the union, contending for office and influence.

In electoral politics the right wing union leaders tended either to support one or the other of the mainstream parties, or to be moderate labourite reformers. There existed no organized social-democratic party to command their allegiance. In the 1920s local Labour clubs and Independent Labour Party (ILP) branches appear to have been activated only at the time of elections, and then generally to have made a broad labourite appeal calling on workers of all factions to unite behind a labour candidate. The attractiveness of this appeal to the right wing leaders of the UMW was no doubt much less when the candidate put forward was McLachlan or another radical.

In the provincial election of 1920 Farmer-Labour candidates swept the four seats in Cape Breton county, winning 11 seats throughout the province.⁷ D. W. Morrison, the mayor of Glace Bay and later the long term right wing president of District 26, was among those elected, and served one term in the provincial legislature. Thereafter, until the victories of the CCF in 1939-1940, no labour candidates were elected, although J. B. McLachlan in his frequent electoral campaigns always made a respectable showing. Until 1935, when McLachlan ran openly as a Communist candidate, the Communist Party and McLachlan almost always attempted to run a united front election campaign, but they could never win the support of the right in the union. From the early 1920s until 1936, however, the Communist Party remained the strongest continually organized force in labour politics in the area, even though the party's numerical strength and the extent of its influence waxed and waned, and it could never succeed in elections or in displacing the right wing leaders of the union.

In the early 1930s the Depression conditions in the mining communities and the lack of effective resistance by the UMW officers to the company's wage cuts

7 MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, pp. 70-1.

8 *Acadiensis*

led to a widespread communist-led revolt against the international union, and to the formation of the Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia (AMW). This breakaway union had the allegiance of a majority of the miners, but with the support of the company and the government the UMW was able to retain a substantial minority of the miners as members. During the early Depression years the Communist Party was in its most radical phase, striving through the Workers Unity League (WUL) to win workers throughout Canada to “revolutionary unionism”, and strongly denouncing right wing labour leaders and social-democratic politicians as traitors to the working class.⁸

In 1933, therefore, when the newly formed CCF made its first efforts to win adherents in Cape Breton, Communist Party influence in the area was at a high level, the miners’ union movement was split between the UMW and the AMW, and the communist condemnation of the reformist policies of the new party was at its most extreme. The CCF was formally established, with a provisional leadership and program, at the Calgary conference in August 1932. In November two labour Members of Parliament from the West, Angus MacInnis and E.C. Garland, spoke at a meeting in Glace Bay promoting the new party. They were severely heckled by a group of local communists and the meeting ended in a shouting match between MacInnis and J.B. McLachlan.⁹ However, in February 1933 a Glace Bay Labour Club was formed and voted to affiliate to the CCF.¹⁰ This was a small organization dominated by those close to the rump UMW district officers; Silby Barret was its president, and “Sandy” MacKay, District 26 secretary-treasurer, was on its executive board. A letter was written to CCF leader J. S. Woodsworth informing him of the new CCF club in Glace Bay and inviting him to come and speak in the area.¹¹

This response to the CCF from the right wing leaders of the divided union movement was surely motivated by their anxiety to find a moderate political force to counter the Communist Party in local labour politics. J. B. McLachlan, writing in his weekly newspaper, the *Nova Scotia Miner*, certainly thought so. He denounced the CCF, claiming its affiliated United Farmers government in Alberta was worse in its attacks on workers than were the Grits or Tories. He then assured “CCF High Priest Woodsworth” that the “gang in Glace Bay” were suitable material for the new party:

8 For accounts of the changes in Communist Party policies see Ivan Avacumavic, *The Communist Party in Canada* (Toronto, 1975); Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks* (Montreal, 1981); William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International* (Toronto, 1968); and Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism* (Toronto, 1988).

9 “Visiting Labor M.P. is Badly Heckled at Meeting Here”, *Glace Bay Gazette*, 24 November 1932.

10 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 25 February 1933.

11 J. H. Jamieson to J. S. Woodsworth, 23 February 1933, CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 26, Public Archives of Canada [PAC].

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They are as fine a bunch as ever diddled a cushy job out of the workers, or usurped their funds, or burned workers' papers, or jailed their leaders, or any of the other distinguishing features of good C.C.F. leaders. In building up the bosses' third party in Canada they ought to appear, if not useful, at least ornamental. They have considerable practice in swindling the working class and can belly crawl to the master better than most.¹²

In June 1933, when Woodsworth came to Glace Bay as part of a tour of Eastern Canada, he had a large and successful meeting, but he faced verbal attacks from McLachlan and other radicals.¹³ One Glace Bay miner who was 14 years old at the time later remembered being coached before the meeting to ask Woodsworth if the CCF would be similar in policy to the British Labour Party. When Woodsworth agreed that it would be, McLachlan and others spoke up denouncing British Labour Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald for selling out the working class.¹⁴

Shortly after Woodsworth's visit a CCF candidate came forward in Glace Bay for the provincial election held that year.¹⁵ Donald O. "Dawn" Fraser, better remembered as a labour poet than as a politician, did badly in the contest, getting 297 votes compared to the 1734 given J. B. McLachlan, who ran as a "United Front" candidate.¹⁶ Three other labour candidates ran in the Cape Breton area. A miner named John MacDonald campaigned in Sydney Mines under the United Front banner.¹⁷ In New Waterford Tom Ling, the local leader of the AMW, ran as an ILP candidate.¹⁸ In Sydney, steelworker Dan MacKay was nominated as an ILP candidate, but after Woodsworth's visit adopted the CCF platform and name.¹⁹ None of these candidates did as well as McLachlan.²⁰

12 *Nova Scotia Miner*, 25 February 1933.

13 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 15 June 1933.

14 Interview with Nelson Beaton, Glace Bay, 12 April 1986.

15 This was the election in which the Liberals under Angus L. MacDonald swept to power, taking 22 seats out of 30. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 23 August 1933.

16 The full Glace Bay results were Currie (Liberal) — 3626, Cameron (Conservative) — 3622, McLachlan — 1734, Fraser—297. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 30 August 1933. These are corrected results after a recount requested by McLachlan, who hoped to save his deposit. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 24 August 1933.

17 A third communist or United Front candidate in the province was Joe Wallace in Halifax. *Halifax Herald*, 29 July 1933.

18 Ling defeated Clarie Gillis of Glace Bay, later to become the CCF M.P. for the nomination. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 6 June 1933.

19 *United Steelworker*, 29 April, 15 July 1933.

20 Ling got 587 votes, MacDonald 586, and MacKay 1451. MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, p. 174.

10 *Acadiensis*

Ling and MacKay, left-wingers who were not communists and who later were to join the CCF, spoke in support of McLachlan, and opposed Dawn Fraser, an official CCF nominee.²¹ M. A. MacKenzie, editor of the left wing paper *United Steelworker* in Sydney, gave some support to the CCF as a national party, but supported McLachlan, as well as MacKay and Ling, locally.²² At this point the communists were the most influential force in local labour politics. Almost all labour men in the area who were militant in union activities backed the communist-led AMW against the UMW and were prepared to co-operate with the party in political activities.²³

Dawn Fraser, however, attacked McLachlan and the Communist Party, and was denounced in return.²⁴ Although Fraser had been nominated by the Glace Bay CCF club, none of the well known UMW leaders seem to have been active in supporting his ineffectual campaign. He also adopted the rather poor tactic of bringing religion openly into the political discussion, and wrote letters to the newspaper arguing that CCF policy exactly fitted Papal encyclicals on labour and other Christian teachings, which was denied by a number of angry reponses, quoting Quebec bishops.²⁵ In fact, the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church in Canada had come out at this time with statements opposing all forms of socialism, including the CCF, and Fraser only succeeded in drawing attention to this fact.²⁶ However, he was right in discerning that the Church in the Cape Breton area was moving in a direction that would in the long run help the CCF politically. In an effort to combat the communist influence locally in these desperate early years of the Depression, many of the clergy and other Catholic spokesmen were keen to publicise those Catholic social teachings that were critical of the failings of capitalism. Along with denunciations of the communists as atheists and promoters of violence, frequent explanations were given of the Papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, as providing Christian answers to the sufferings of the working class.²⁷

21 Both Ling and MacKay spoke at meetings in support of McLachlan. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 21 August 1933.

22 *United Steelworker*, 20 May, 19 August 1933. This Sydney paper was soon to be renamed the *Steelworker*, and later became the *Steelworker and Miner*.

23 For example, Forman Waye of Sydney, former Labour M.L.A. and later to become a CCFer, spoke in support of McLachlan's campaign. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 21 August 1933.

24 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 9 August 1933.

25 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 21 April 1933; 9 May 1933; 15 May 1933.

26 Gregory Baum, *Catholics and Canadian Socialism* (Toronto 1980).

27 For example the Knights of Columbus sponsored a series of radio broadcasts in 1934 by Rev. Dr. T. O'R. Boyle on these encyclicals. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 9 March 1934. Another indefatigable Catholic anti-communist propagandist was Fergus Byrne, "Labour Editor" of the *New Waterford Times*, whose articles were often reprinted in the *Glace Bay Gazette*. See, for example, "Orderly Reform of Chaos", *Glace Bay Gazette*, 9 January 1933.

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The most important form of Catholic social action in the area was the Antigonish Co-operative Movement led by priests from the St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department, in particular Dr. Moses Coady and Fr. Jimmy Tompkins. This movement had begun with work promoting producer co-operatives among fishermen in eastern Nova Scotia, and expanded into industrial Cape Breton in August 1932 when an office was opened in Glace Bay to develop a programme of adult education and the building of credit unions and consumer co-operatives.²⁸ Alex S. MacIntyre, an ex-communist and the UMW vice-president in the deposed 1923 executive, became the movement's chief organizer in Cape Breton. The central motivation for the Antigonish Movement's concentration on Cape Breton at this time was the wish to defeat communist influence among the miners and other workers.²⁹ However, its co-operative message, while directly contradicting communist ideas of class struggle and opposing all violence and illegality, was based on a radical sounding critique of capitalism. The evils of capitalism could be overcome when the workers became "masters of their own destiny" through their power as consumers.³⁰ In opposing communism, therefore, this movement did not promote ideas of a directly conservative or reactionary nature. Instead it put forward a "middle way," the co-operative path to the peaceful transformation of society.

The Antigonish Movement always claimed it was strictly neutral in politics or union affairs, and it never endorsed the CCF. In the early years it could not have done so without defying the hierarchical authorities. But a movement of this type, having the sanction of the Church, did gradually prepare the minds of local Catholic voters, some of whom would never have supported communist or radical labour candidates, to regard the social reformism of the CCF as within the range of acceptable politics. The CCF, for example, was to win the majority of votes in the strongly Catholic New Waterford area in the early war years, a district in which the communists always had relatively few supporters,³¹ and many individuals directly involved with the co-operative movement were eventually to become active CCFers.

This religious factor did not help the CCF in its early years, however, and following the 1933 election no CCF organization appears to have survived in the

28 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 19 August 1932.

29 In Sydney in early 1932, at the annual Catholic Rural and Industrial Life Conference, sponsored by the Archdiocese of Antigonish, Alex S. MacIntyre gave an influential speech on the alarming spread of communism among the workers and the Church's weak response. Gregory Baum, "Social Catholicism in Nova Scotia" in Peter Slater, ed., *Religion and Culture in Canada* (Waterloo, 1977).

30 See M.M.Coady, *Masters of Their Own Destiny* (New York, 1939).

31 McLachlan only got 403 votes in New Waterford in 1935; Hartigan (Liberal) got 2836, MacDonald (Conservative) got 634, and D.W. Morrison (Reconstruction) got 674. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 15 October 1935.

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Cape Breton area.³² In the federal election of 1935 Cape Breton South constituency had a four party race, but no CCF candidate. Aside from the Liberal and Conservative candidates, McLachlan ran explicitly as a Communist Party candidate, while D.W. Morrison, the UMW district president, ran for the Reconstruction Party with the support of most of the right-wing in the union movement. Both Dawn Fraser, the former CCF candidate, and Clarie Gillis, who was to win for the CCF in 1940, spoke for Morrison and Reconstruction.³³ In the full constituency, which included Sydney and New Waterford as well as Glace Bay, McLachlan's third place result was better than any labour candidate had achieved since his campaign in 1921. In Glace Bay he did particularly well, coming a close second.³⁴

The bureaucratic leadership of the UMW could find little comfort in these election results. In 1933 and in 1935 they had adopted the CCF and the Reconstruction Party in succession, attempting with little success to find a political vehicle which would win the large number of miners who were dissatisfied with the mainstream political parties away from the dangerous ideology of communism. The following of McLachlan and the CP was never large enough to win elections; but it was nonetheless substantial, particularly in Glace Bay, the largest of the mining towns. Militancy on union issues and a drive for rank-and-file democracy in the union movement were given leadership by the communists, and though the coal company and the government upheld the UMW as the recognized union, a majority of the miners of Cape Breton still gave their support to the communist-led AMW.

In 1935, events far from Cape Breton helped to change this situation. Internationally the communist movement, following the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany, adopted the policy of the "Popular Front Against Fascism and War". For the Canadian party this policy meant seeking united action with the CCF, disbanding the WUL and pressing for the unity of the Canadian union movement.³⁵ In the United States the Committee for Industrial Organization

32 See J.J. Holmes, Sydney, N.S., to J.S. Woodsworth, 7 February 1934, CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 26, PAC.

33 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 19 August, 5 October 1933.

34 The results were: Hartigan (Liberal) 10,409; MacDonald (Conservative) 7,335; McLachlan (Communist) 5,365; Morrison (Reconstruction) 5,008. In Glace Bay McLachlan had 28.1 per cent of the vote, while Hartigan received 29.6 per cent. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 15 October 1935. William White, "Left Wing Politics and Community: A Study of Glace Bay 1930-1940", M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1978, pp.183-4, breaks down the vote showing that McLachlan had substantial majorities in working-class wards in Glace Bay.

35 For the CP's policy on unity, both nationally and in Cape Breton, see *Towards a Canadian Peoples Front. Reports and Speeches at the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee, Communist Party of Canada* (Toronto, 1935).

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(CIO) was formed under the leadership of UMW International President John L. Lewis, and Lewis and the UMW acquired a much more progressive and militant reputation and showed a new willingness to permit communists to work within the CIO. By late 1935 the Central Committee of the Canadian CP was strongly urging the return of the AMW miners to the UMW.³⁶ This pressure and the miners' desire for unity in confrontations with the coal company led to the reunification in early 1936.³⁷ It seemed a necessary move, since it was apparent that the AMW would never succeed in driving the UMW out of the district. Yet it required the militant miners and the local communists to give up many of their aims for local autonomy and rank-and-file democracy, and to accept, at least outwardly, a good deal of the business unionist principles that the UMW upheld. In fact, communist organizers almost everywhere in North America led shop floor struggles for the new industrial unions of the CIO, and soon communists were to have their greatest influence in the union movement, if this is measured by the number of leading positions in large unions held by Party members. A few major union leaders, most notably John L. Lewis, were now willing to work with communists, at the same time as the communists themselves moved somewhat nearer to the position of the separation of politics from union work, of less emphasis on the class struggle.

The communists justified this change in policy as a necessary reaction to the overwhelming threat of fascism and war, which required unity with social-democrats like CCFers whom they had previously condemned as agents of capitalism. Within the trade unions communists were never again able or willing to argue openly for the integration of class struggle politics with the economic struggle, and Party members often felt forced to conceal or downplay their politics, to become much more conventional union leaders, even to accept with gratitude the defence that they were "good" unionists "in spite of" their CP affiliation.³⁸ While this new policy may have at least temporarily given the CP

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 65, 152-3.

37 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 30 March, 1 April 1936. The miners in Sydney Mines refused to return to the UMW until 1938.

38 The one brief period in which Communists again injected more of the general class struggle into their union work was the during the Second World War before the Soviet Union was invaded by Germany. The changing trade union policies of the Canadian Party are covered briefly in Avacumavic, *The Communist Party in Canada*; and Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*. A useful account of the practices of Communists in the leadership of a Canadian union is given in Douglas Neil Caldwell, "The United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers, District Five, Canada, 1937 to 1956", M.A. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1979. Accounts of the policies of the America CP are given in Roger Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers* (Bloomington, 1980); Bert Cochrane, *Labor and Communism* (Princeton, 1977); James R. Prickett, "Communists and the Communist Issue in the American Labor Movement, 1920-1950", Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1975.

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greater scope for activities in many places, it led to a serious disruption of its organization and a permanent weakening of its influence in Cape Breton. The rightward move of the party was too much for J.B. McLachlan, particularly with his bitter personal hatred of John L. Lewis and the UMW. He resigned from the Communist Party in 1936, and other local communists followed him. Although McLachlan was in poor health up to his death in 1937, and unable to play a major role in local politics, the CP was never to recover the influence it had held before his resignation. The influence the party did retain in those years was not openly displayed as it had been in the days of the AMW and the Communist candidacy of McLachlan. The United Front policy required party members to seek unity with other forces in the union movement and in labour politics.³⁹

From 1936 until CP policy changed in 1939 with the beginning of the war and the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact, there was what can be termed a working unity in the Cape Breton labour movement. UMW district officers Morrison, MacKay and Barrett retained their bureaucratic power, but adopted a more militant posture following the lead of their autocratic boss John L. Lewis, president of the CIO as well as the UMW in those years.⁴⁰ Silby Barrett was appointed the Steel Workers Organizing Campaign (SWOC) head for Canada by Lewis, and brought the prestige of the UMW and CIO to meetings and rallies of the steelworkers in Sydney for which the shop floor organizing work was done by local communists and militants, notably George MacEachern.⁴¹ The Sydney SWOC committee and the UMW executive also worked together to pressure the Nova

39 The interpretation of McLachlan's resignation from the CP presented here, and indeed the interpretation of all the events leading to the dominance of the CCF in industrial Cape Breton, differs sharply from the explanation given in most published accounts of politics in Cape Breton in this period. Such writers as White, "Left Wing Politics and Community"; Mellor, *The Company Store*; Terrance D. MacLean, "The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in Nova Scotia 1938-56", in R.J. Morgan, ed., *More Essays in Cape Breton History* (Windsor, 1977); and Gerry Harrop, *Clarie* (Windsor 1987); all follow Paul MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers* very closely on these matters. MacEwan's general argument is as follows: there was never a wide communist influence in Cape Breton, merely a great personal following for J.B. McLachlan; McLachlan brought his followers around to support of the CCF before his death; communist influence thereafter was restricted to a tiny handful of malcontents who fruitlessly opposed the Glace Bay Labour Party and the coming of the CCF; Clarie Gillis and the CCF were fully in the grand tradition of McLachlan and Cape Breton militancy. On all of these points this essay disputes both MacEwan's data and his interpretation.

40 One example of the increased militancy of the UMW district organization was the struggle to organize the miners in Minto, New Brunswick. The strike in 1937-38 was defeated, but the groundwork was laid for the successful unionization of Minto in 1941. See Allan Seager, "Minto, New Brunswick: A Study in Class Relations Between the Wars", *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 5 (Spring 1980), pp. 81-132.

41 George MacEachern's account of the organizing of the steel plant is given in D. Frank and D. MacGillivray, eds., *George MacEachern: An Autobiography* (Sydney, 1987), pp. 61-92.

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Scotia government to pass the 1937 Trade Union Act, which helped to bring the union to the Sydney steel plant.

The unity between left and right seems to have been most effective in 1937. Immediately after the passage of the Trade Union Act, the Liberal government called a provincial election. A Labour Party was formed in Glace Bay, and, less than a month before the election, nominated a United Church minister, William Mercer, to contest the seat. James Madden and Fred Brodie, both active communists at this time, were active on Mercer's election committee, as were many other radicals, such as John Alex. MacDonald, former AMW president. This was a real "United Front" campaign, since UMW right-wingers like Silby Barrett were also involved, as were future CCF M.P. Clarie Gillis and M.L.A. D.N. Brodie, along with CP organizer William Findlay.⁴² Funds were donated to the campaign by various UMW locals.⁴³ The Liberal candidate, L. D. Currie, was elected, but Mercer came second, well ahead of the third place Conservative.⁴⁴

Such a result, after a very brief campaign, encouraged the idea that a labour candidate supported by left and right could win. This no doubt made the miners more receptive to the concept of turning to the CCF, although the unity of local militants with the union leaders was soon under strain. Little advance was made in wage settlements for the miners; and the new steelworkers' union could achieve no satisfactory contract with the company for its first few years, while restrained from strike action by the lack of support from the U.S. leadership.⁴⁵ Local communists, however, clung to the unity policy, refused to openly criticize union leaders, and even defended them from the criticism of militants.⁴⁶ The frustrations built up in this period were to lead to an explosion of wildcat strike action in the early war years. They also presumably helped to enhance a desire for political representation in the provincial and federal legislatures that led the miners and the steelworkers to support the CCF enthusiastically.

42 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 31 May, 12 June 1937. Paul MacEwan, in his account of the Glace Bay Labour Party, claims "The new party was greeted with enthusiasm ... by all the local opponents of the Grits and the Tories — except the Communists". MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, p. 189. The newspaper accounts make clear that the communists were among Mercer's most active supporters, as at the culminating meeting of the campaign, when the principal speakers were Mercer, William Findlay the CP organizer, Clarie Gillis, and Silby Barrett. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 25, 26 June 1937.

43 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 11 June 1937.

44 The official returns were Currie (Liberal) 4172, Kerr (Conservative) 2832, Mercer (Labour) 3396. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 7 July 1937.

45 Sydney's independent radical weekly, the *Steelworker*, sharply criticized the steel union executive, including its communist members, during this period. *Steelworker*, 30 July 1938.

46 See, for example, letter from William Findlay, Communist Party organizer, defending the UMW District Executive from various criticisms. *Steelworker*, 11 December 1937.

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In 1938 the miners of Glace Bay became extremely concerned about the threat of mechanization in the mines. A new mine was opened through a shaft sunk from the No. 2 mine on the Phalen seam to connect with the parallel Harbour seam. In the new mine the Dominion Coal Company, with the permission of the Nova Scotia government, the regulating authority, planned to install electric cutting machines and electrically operated loading machinery.⁴⁷ The militant miners of the Phalen local feared that this was the beginning of the mechanization of all the mines, leading to a massive loss of jobs.⁴⁸ The miners refused to operate the new machinery, and the company shut down the new mine, locking out 85 men, who were then supported for months by a levy of 25 cents on all the Glace Bay sub-district miners.⁴⁹ At the UMW convention in August 1938 this issue was the hottest item on the agenda. The official policy of the UMW, as expressed in a letter from John L. Lewis and by International Secretary-Treasurer Thomas Kennedy in his speech at the District 26 convention, was that the UMW could not oppose progress in the form of mechanization of mines.⁵⁰ The Nova Scotia Minister of Mines and Labour, Michael Dwyer, also spoke at the convention urging the miners to accept the necessity of mechanization.⁵¹ The degree of anger of the miner delegates on this issue, however, forced the district officers to oppose the scheme, not in principle, but as unsafe in the mine concerned and badly timed, given the widespread unemployment.⁵² The delegates voted a levy of 10 cents per month on all District 26 miners to support the locked out men, and passed a resolution calling on the government to ban new electrical machinery at the coal face.⁵³ The miners' resistance was to win a long delay in the extensive mechanization of the mines; the company was forced to shelve plans until after the war.

The Liberal government's role in supporting the company's plans for mechanization helped to convince the miners of the urgency of electing labour representatives to political office. Various resolutions calling for the UMW to support a "Farmer-Labour" party had been sent in to the convention, from the Glace Bay Labour Party and others. James Ling of No. 12 Local in New Waterford put

47 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 9 January 1938.

48 This was what eventually happened following the 1947 strike. Mechanization and rationalization reduced the number of men employed in the mines from between 12,000 and 13,000 to approximately 3,500 within a few years.

49 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 9, 10, 13, 24 June 1938.

50 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 16 April, 13 August 1938.

51 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 20 August 1938.

52 See report of speeches by D.W. Morrison and Silby Barrett on this issue, *Glace Bay Gazette*, 12 August 1938.

53 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 17 August 1938.

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forward a resolution calling for affiliation of the UMW with the CCF, arguing that a national party was needed to unite labour representatives in Ottawa. On the recommendation of Clarie Gillis, a special convention sitting was called to consider these proposals, to which delegations of the steelworkers, fishermen, co-operatives and others were invited.⁵⁴

At this sitting, on 15 August 1938, the resolution to affiliate with the CCF was adopted almost unanimously.⁵⁵ Only Robert Stewart, former secretary of the AMW, soon to be elected Glace Bay Board Member on the UMW District Executive, voted against the resolution. His was not a Communist Party vote against the affiliation, as has been claimed.⁵⁶ Stewart had left the party with McLachlan in 1936 and, although he later rejoined, was not a party member at this time. Communists were present at the convention, and not without influence, as is evident from the resolutions passed in support of the Republican government in Spain.⁵⁷ Yet the CP members present did not oppose the CCF affiliation. Militants and the district officers, frequently opposed on issues, all spoke in favour of the resolution, and the decision was hailed throughout the Cape Breton mining districts and by labour spokesmen in Sydney. The radical Sydney weekly, the *Steelworker*, editorialized:

There is a lot of ominous knee shaking in the ranks of the paid political agents of monopoly capitalism as a result of the unequivocal decision of the UMW Convention at Truro to affiliate with the CCF in order to take their rightful place in the political field to defend the rights of labor — both industrial workers and farmers — at the next election.⁵⁸

The wording of the UMW resolution to affiliate with the CCF does not support the view that the miners themselves understood they were thus moving towards more moderate politics. It referred to “a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess”, and declared that “The working class must organize...for the purpose of acquiring the power of government, in order that this power may be converted from an instrument of oppression into an instrument for the overthrow of special privilege for the owning class”. A convention should be held of all “organizations and groups who were sincerely interested in the bettering of conditions for the working class...for consolidating the different groups into one United Front

54 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 11 August 1938.

55 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 16 August 1938.

56 See White, “Left Wing Politics”, p. 127.

57 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 23 August 1938. Communists were not alone in supporting the struggle against Franco, but were usually the initiators of solidarity action on this issue.

58 *Steelworker*, 20 August 1938.

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for Political Action".⁵⁹ This language reflects more the history of the communist influence on the miners than any speeches of CCF leaders like Woodsworth.

But the enthusiasm for the CCF did reveal a changed situation in local labour politics mainly due to the alteration of CP policy in 1936. Support for the CCF, in 1938, from local militants and radicals who had often taken their lead from the communists was not surprising when the reaction of the CP itself is considered. Responding to the UMW affiliation with the CCF, CP national leader Tim Buck, in a Toronto speech, said:

The historic decision of the Nova Scotia miners is evidence of the fact that tens of thousands of trade unionists all over the country want independent working class political action. They want to unite their forces to defeat reaction on the parliamentary field. United action between the Communist Party and the CCF remains one of the vital needs of the labor movement.⁶⁰

John C. Mortimer, an important spokesperson for the CP in Nova Scotia, wrote welcoming the affiliation and claiming his main criticism of the CCF's leaders was their resistance to unity. "I'm expecting the UMW to infuse new blood into Woodsworth's party...to make itself felt, not merely by strengthening the movement for a united front, but by throwing the CCF more completely into the day to day struggles of the working class and all the common folk".⁶¹ The CP was very likely more uneasy about the affiliation than these statements would indicate, but the unity policy left the party no choice but to support the UMW decision at this time. There is also more than a hint in Mortimer's reference to "new blood" that the CP hoped that they could influence the CCF or even get members involved in it locally through the UMW.

However, there is no evidence that the CP had planned the affiliation as a means of infiltrating the CCF, as CCF National Secretary David Lewis at first feared.⁶² The leadership of the CCF were determined to prevent any such communist involvement. Lewis, as soon as he heard of the UMW affiliation, wired D.W. Morrison "to greet" the decision, but asked "whether decision supported by rank and file and whether move sponsored by communists or other people".⁶³ Early in September Lewis met the UMW officers at the TLC convention held in Niagara Falls, and was reassured that the communists were not behind

59 Resolution quoted in Stephen MacPherson to D. Lewis, n.d., CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 27, PAC.

60 Tim Buck, "Reaction is Advancing — What Must Be Done", *Daily Clarion*, 23 August 1938.

61 *Steelworker*, 27 August 1938.

62 Lewis, *The Good Fight*, p. 153.

63 Telegram, D. Lewis to D.W. Morrison, CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 195, PAC.

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the affiliation.⁶⁴ However, there remained organizational problems and still considerable worry about communist infiltration. The CCF had never previously had the direct affiliation of a union, and the constitution had no provisions that covered this development. In particular, what was to prevent communists being chosen by union locals to represent them in CCF bodies? The miners might well be swayed by the CP united front line. Indeed, the UMW resolution had explicitly called for "one United Front for Political Action", although there was no specific mention of the Communist Party.⁶⁵

To assist in setting up the CCF organization in Nova Scotia, and to ensure that communists were excluded, Lewis and Angus MacInnis, Vancouver M.P. and Woodsworth's son-in-law, made an organizing trip to the area in October. Their visit was highly successful, with many well attended meetings in the mining towns.⁶⁶ CCF clubs were set up in the various towns, all with constitutions expressly excluding anyone who was a "member or active supporter of any other political party".⁶⁷ Over the protests of its communist members, the Glace Bay Labour Party was disbanded and reformed into a CCF club excluding them.⁶⁸ Lewis also quickly put together a set of national by-laws regarding union affiliations that similarly excluded communists for eligibility as union delegates to CCF conventions.⁶⁹ Lewis's concern to prevent the election of communist delegates was still evident several months later when the first Nova Scotia provincial convention was being organized. He suggested the UMW be represented by a block delegation appointed by the district executive rather than elected by the locals, on the grounds that this would be "more democratic".⁷⁰ The executive decided that this procedure would not be acceptable to the miners, and arranged that the locals elect delegates but that all delegates must be members of a CCF club.⁷¹ A few communists were in fact elected as delegates to the early CCF

64 David Lewis and Angus MacInnis, "Report of Organizing Tour Through Nova Scotia and New Brunswick", n.d., John L. MacKinnon Papers, MG 19-11, Beaton Institute, Sydney.

65 Resolution given in Stephen MacPherson to D. Lewis, n.d., CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 27, PAC.

66 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17 October 1938.

67 Glace Bay Central CCF Club Constitution, John L. MacKinnon Papers, MG 19-11, Beaton Institute.

68 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 17 October 1938.

69 Lewis wrote in his report: "It was clearly impossible to consult the members of the National Council [of the CCF] as to these provisions without delaying the affiliation for two or three months, a delay which could have proved fatal. The delegation [Lewis and MacInnis], therefore, took the responsibility of presenting them to the UMW on behalf of the National Council in the conviction that they are in complete accord with CCF policy". Lewis and MacInnis, "Report of Organizing Tour".

70 D. Lewis to D.W. Morrison, 22 April 1939, CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 28, PAC.

71 A.A. MacKay to D. Lewis, 29 April 1939, *ibid.*

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conventions, but they were turned away at the door.⁷² With these prompt and astute moves, and with the co-operation of the UMW executive, David Lewis was able to see that an active and effective CCF organization was set up in Cape Breton, and the local communists were excluded from all participation, although they continued to appeal for unity and pledged support to CCF candidates in elections.⁷³

Political enthusiasm for the CCF continued to grow in the area through 1939, with visits from prominent CCF leaders. In February Harold Winch, prominent in the party in British Columbia, spoke to several meetings in Glace Bay; and David Lewis and party leader J.S. Woodsworth attended the first provincial convention of the Nova Scotia CCF, held in Sydney in May.⁷⁴ In August a convention was held to nominate a candidate to contest Cape Breton in the next federal election, and when Rev. William Mercer declined, Clarie Gillis was chosen.⁷⁵ Before the federal campaign began, however, the CCF scored its first Cape Breton electoral victory.

The Minister of Mines and Labour in the provincial cabinet, Michael Dwyer, had resigned in order to become president of Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company, a Dosco subsidiary. In the December 1939 by-election called to fill his New Waterford seat, CCF candidate Douglas MacDonald, the UMW District Board Member for the New Waterford sub-district, was victorious.⁷⁶ MacDonald's success was a remarkable sign of the political transformation that had taken place in the strongly Catholic New Waterford area, where union militancy and political radicalism had traditionally received less support than in Glace Bay. In the 1933 election, for example, Labour candidate Tom Ling had received only a small vote.⁷⁷ In the federal campaign in 1935 J.B. McLachlan also did badly in the New Waterford voting.⁷⁸ In 1937 no Labour candidate made the effort to win the provincial seat, and it appears that even the CCF leadership thought Douglas MacDonald had very little chance in the 1939 by-election.⁷⁹

72 H.I.S. Borgford to D. Lewis, 17 August 1939, *ibid.*, Vol. 27.

73 Statement and letter, William Findlay to H.I.S. Borgford, 5 June 1939, *ibid.*

74 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 20 February, 26 May 1939.

75 *Ibid.*, 7 August 1939.

76 *Sydney Post-Record*, 6 December 1939.

77 Ling received 587 votes, while the Conservative candidate got 2969 and the Liberal, Michael Dwyer, got 3263. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 23 August 1933.

78 The New Waterford results were: D.J. Hartigan (Liberal)- 2836; Finlay MacDonald (Conservative) — 634; J.B. McLachlan (Communist) — 403; D.W. Morrison (Reconstruction) — 674. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 15 October 1935. These results are not easy to interpret. Hartigan was a hometown candidate; the Conservative, MacDonald, did very badly; and it is questionable whether Morrison's vote hurt MacDonald's or McLachlan's result.

79 MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, p. 203.

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The Conservatives did not put up a candidate, but the CCF was helped by a split in the Liberal ranks, a candidate who failed to get the Liberal nomination running as an "Independent Liberal".⁸⁰ The official Liberal campaign was directed mainly against the CCF, and relied heavily on red scare tactics. Presumably it was believed this would work well in the New Waterford area, particularly in wartime. Liberal advertisements claimed the CCF was rapidly coming under the control of the Communist Party and asked how "any Christian" could vote CCF "after the wanton invasion of peaceful little Finland by the brutal hordes of Communist Russia". "It is an undisputed fact that several avowed Communists are now actively engaged, on public platforms and otherwise, in support of the CCF candidate in this election".⁸¹ The voters, however, seem not to have been swayed by this red-baiting campaign. MacDonald received 3093 votes, the official Liberal 2614, and the Independent 1204.⁸²

In the federal election on March 1940, Clarie Gillis was elected M.P. for Cape Breton South by a narrow margin.⁸³ In this campaign Gillis's opponents did not use the anti-communist rhetoric which had failed in the New Waterford by-election. The Liberals relied on the appeal to keep an experienced government in office that was to win Mackenzie King a national majority in this wartime election.⁸⁴ The CCF campaign in Cape Breton was socialistic with patriotic overtones, Gillis claiming that both Liberals and Conservatives "serve capitalism to the disadvantage of the workers", and there was a strong likelihood of war profiteering.⁸⁵ But the CCF was also determined "to bring the war to a successful conclusion", stated party leader M. J. Coldwell in his speech in support of Gillis.⁸⁶ Clarie Gillis was a veteran of the First World War, and had long been a prominent leader of the Canadian Legion in the area.⁸⁷ Gillis was a miner who had, up to

80 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 4 December 1939. The official Liberal was J.L. MacKinnon, and the Independent was Francis Stephenson.

81 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 4 December 1939.

82 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 6 December 1939.

83 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 27 March 1940. Gillis was to hold the seat until 1957.

84 See Liberal advertisement, "King and Hartigan are vital for victory", *Glace Bay Gazette*, 18 March 1940.

85 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 12 March 1940.

86 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 11 March 1940. The crisis the CCF faced nationally at the beginning of the war when Woodsworth clung to his pacifist principles had little impact in Cape Breton, where the miners reacted with strong patriotic reflexes to the war. For example, the Secretary of the Glace Bay CCF, John MacDonald, enlisted immediately on the outbreak of war. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 11 September 1939. By contrast, Rev. H.I.S. Borgford, the Nova Scotia Provincial Secretary of the CCF, from Halifax, considered resigning because of the stand the CCF National Council took in support of the war effort. See H.I.S. Borgford to D. Lewis, 17 October 1939, CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 27, PAC.

87 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 7 November 1932, 20 March 1933, 19 August 1935.

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this time, gained a reputation as a somewhat militant critic of the policies of the union executive, but at the same time showed himself to be an opponent of the more extreme radicalism of the CP.⁸⁸ In Glace Bay he received a majority of more than 2000 over the incumbent Liberal, Dr. D. J. Hartigan; and he was able to reduce Hartigan's majority in Sydney to 444, and in New Waterford, Hartigan's home town, to only 300.⁸⁹ The final result, after the soldiers' vote was included, was: Gillis (CCF) — 11582; Hartigan (Lib) — 11364; Nunn (Cons) — 9719.⁹⁰

The CCF was able to dominate electoral politics in industrial Cape Breton for years to follow. In the 1941 provincial election CCF candidates won in Sydney, New Waterford and Glace Bay.⁹¹ It is always difficult, if not impossible, to determine precisely the motivations behind the voting patterns of large numbers of people. Yet it seems very probable that these early successes of the CCF in Cape Breton were based mainly on the enthusiastic support of the miners and steelworkers aiming through their votes to help bring about a socialist transformation of society. The CCF could appeal to the radical workers who had supported the communists, and it could also draw in voters ideologically influenced by the Antigonish Movement who would never have voted communist. The CCF in the war years still upheld the Regina Manifesto as its basic political creed, with its call for the eradication of capitalism, "the cancer which is eating at the heart of our society".⁹² As the CCF policies became more moderate, the fervour of this working class support in Cape Breton probably grew less, but for working-class voters the CCF no doubt remained preferable to the Liberals and Conservatives, and the less radical the party appeared, the more it came to attract middle class votes in the Cape Breton area. In provincial elections, the CCF held two of the Cape Breton seats until 1956, and one lasted to 1963.⁹³ Clarie Gillis increased his majority in the 1945 election, while the CCF national upsurge

88 He had, for example, been for a brief time the vice-president of the breakaway AMW, but had never supported McLachlan in election campaigns.

89 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 27 March 1940.

90 *Glace Bay Gazette*, 3 April 1940.

91 Donald MacDonald was elected in Sydney, Douglas MacDonald re-elected in New Waterford, and D.N. Brodie in Glace Bay won a straight contest against L. D. Currie, the Minister of Mines and Labour, by 6191 to 4049, the largest majority in the province. MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, p. 243.

92 Regina Manifesto, reproduced in M. Cross, *The Decline and Fall of a Good Idea* (Toronto, 1974), p. 23.

93 In the 1945 election, Donald MacDonald was defeated in CB South (Sydney), but Michael MacDonald won CB Center (New Waterford) and Russell Cunningham won CB East (Glace Bay). Both held these seats, with declining majorities, in 1949, and were re-elected in 1953. In 1956 and 1960 only Michael MacDonald in New Waterford was elected for the CCF. He was defeated, running for the new NDP, in 1963.

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continued, and held it in 1949, when the CCF lost seats elsewhere.⁹⁴ Gillis, in particular, seemed able to attract a wider vote, including many middle class voters. He was on the left of the CCF in Parliament when first elected, but had moved sharply to the right by the post-war period, when he became noted for the virulence of his anti-communism.⁹⁵ He probably also gained support locally for his outspoken stands on Maritime rights issues. In 1953 Gillis won his most resounding victory, getting an absolute majority of all the votes cast. He was defeated in 1957, and failed to win re-election in 1958.⁹⁶ Clarie Gillis thus remained a successful politician over many years, but the tone of his campaigns in the post-war years was very much less radical than at the time he was first elected. It is therefore apparent that if the working-class electorate in Cape Breton retained much socialist fervour after the war this could find little expression through voting for Clarie Gillis and the CCF.

The Communist Party, when it ran candidates against the CCF at the end of the war, was never able to gain more than a negligible vote.⁹⁷ The decision at the 1938 UMW convention, whether the delegates understood this fact or not, had ended any hope of the CP being again a significant independent force in elections, although the communists retained a considerable influence in the local unions of the UMW and among the Sydney steelworkers so long as traditions of union militancy and radicalism, of the class struggle, remained strong. In the 1941 slowdown strike of the miners, the election of a left-wing UMW executive in 1942, and many other labour battles, rank-and-file militancy came to the fore, and local communists were active in the leadership.

Many CCF supporters also demonstrated strong union militancy; but the influence of the CCF leadership was constantly aimed at promoting moderation in union affairs, and an acceptance of the bureaucratic rule of union officials and a purely economic and strictly law abiding definition of what constituted acceptable union activities. The CCF leaders, allied with the international and national leaders of the miners' and steelworkers' unions and with the right-wing of the local unions, were eventually able to purge communist leadership from Cape Breton unions, as they did throughout most of the Canadian union movement. Two landmark final episodes in Cape Breton were the CCF-led

94 The CCF percentage of the provincial vote fell from 14 per cent in 1945 to 9.5 per cent in 1949, and nationally, its seats in Parliament fell from 31 to 13. MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, pp. 249, 278-9.

95 An example of Gillis's public stance of extreme anti-communism was given when he publicized a tavern brawl he supposedly had with a "red" in Ottawa in 1950. *Steelworker and Miner*, 22 April 1950.

96 MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, pp. 291, 306-8.

97 In 1945 Jim Madden, running for the Labour Progressive Party, got only 854 votes. *Sydney Post-Record*, 12 June 1945.

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Sydney steelworkers breaking the Canadian Seamen's Union picket line in 1949, and the bureaucratic red-baiting activities of UMW District President Freeman Jenkins in 1950.⁹⁸ As elsewhere in this period, the methods used to smash radical influence did much to undermine democracy in the local unions, and the process also involved centralization of power by the national and international head offices of the unions. Local union bosses such as Ed Corbett, president of the Sydney Steelworkers, and Freeman Jenkins, president of District 26, were under pressure from both the CCF and their union headquarters to clean out communists in the leadership of the locals. The anti-communist role played in unions by the national CCF and by such figures as Charles Millard, Canadian Director of the Steelworkers Union and prominent in the Ontario CCF, is well known. It is, of course, difficult to establish exactly the behind-the-scene role played by CCF national leaders and the top union officials in specific local events. For example, George MacEachern claims Ed Corbett's reversal of policy on the Seamen's strike came after a visit to meet with Steelworkers Union leaders in Ottawa from which he returned in "a terrible nervous state".⁹⁹ Similarly, Jenkin's anti-communist coup in the UMW in 1950 was rumoured to be masterminded by Clarie Gillis.¹⁰⁰ Such stories do not provide hard evidence, but are plausible given the prominent role played in those years by CCFers in the central leadership of the union movement in purging communists and CP-led unions throughout Canada.¹⁰¹

The CCF as a national party, all commentators agree, had generally much more radical sounding rhetoric and stated purposes in its early years than it did later, particularly after the war.¹⁰² In much that has been written on the CCF the explanation provided for this rightward transformation is that the broadly based CCF "movement" of pre-war years became subordinated to the CCF "party" and its leaders, concerned exclusively with the attaining of political power through elections.¹⁰³ In order to have a wider appeal to voters, the CCF moderated its policies and suppressed or purged its radicals. Radicalism, it is added, came mainly from the CCF clubs, filled with socialist intellectuals, and

98 For brief accounts of these events, see MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, pp. 275-6 and 281-4.

99 Frank and MacGillivray, eds., *George MacEachern*, p.135.

100 Interview with John Roach, Stellarton, July 1984.

101 See Irving Abella, *Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour* (Toronto, 1973).

102 See Cross, *The Decline and Fall of a Good Idea*, for documentary evidence of the CCF's move to the right.

103 The movement to party thesis is presented in full force in Leo Zakuta, *A Protest Movement Becalmed: A Study of Change in the CCF* (Toronto, 1964); but similar ideas are expressed in Walter D. Young, *The Anatomy of a Party: the National CCF* (Toronto, 1969).

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the alliance of CCF party leaders with union leaders aided this process of moderating the CCF's image and outlook.

In the miners' and steelworkers' unions in Cape Breton, it was more a matter of the CCF helping ensure the victory of the right wing. If the unions became a right wing influence on the CCF and the later NDP, CCF influence had helped to create a union movement that would play this role.¹⁰⁴ Overall, it is difficult to apply the 'movement to party' thesis to the CCF in Cape Breton, where radicalism was not introduced to the miners by CCF movement intellectuals, but was widespread among union members before the CCF came on the scene. The CCF in Nova Scotia faced the insoluble problem that while socialist rhetoric could win elections in industrial Cape Breton, it had no power to draw votes throughout the remainder of the province. Unlike the farmers of the West, people in the rural areas of the Maritimes never responded to the CCF appeal. The efforts to moderate the party's platform in the post-war years did nothing to improve its electoral performance in other parts of Nova Scotia, and, if anything, gradually undermined its support in Cape Breton. The miners had called in the CCF as a vehicle for seeking political power through elections to supplement their militant union activity, as well as to move towards the more distant and vague political aim of a socialist society. The party leaders, to appeal to a broader electorate, moderated the party platform and sought to prove themselves as anti-communist as anyone in the Cold War era. They also acted to moderate union activity, restrict it to purely economic matters, and allied themselves with the bureaucrats and business unionists in the union movement. In Cape Breton it was not a matter of a broad movement becoming a narrow party, but of what type of party this was from its beginning. It may have moved to the 'right', but its national leaders were never very 'left' at any time. As one recent commentator on the 'movement to party' thesis on CCF history has pointed out, all political parties need not be defined as organizations subordinating all else to striving for electoral victories.¹⁰⁵ Communist parties, in some periods, provide one example of parties emphasizing, more highly than elections, general social change and the creation of 'revolutionary class consciousness' through union struggles and other mass activity. To show that the CCF always concentrated on elections

104 This is probably true in other centres of local militant industrial unionism. For example, in 1948 Bob Carlin of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers in Sudbury was purged from the CCF for "appeasing" communists in his union, although he had won the Sudbury seat in the provincial legislature for the CCF in 1943 and 1945. Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour*, pp.100-1.

105 Alan Whitehorn, "An Analysis of the Historiography of the CCF-NDP: The Protest Movement Becalmed Tradition", in J. William Brennan, ed., *'Building the Co-operative Commonwealth' Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada* (Regina, 1985).

26 *Acadiensis*

almost exclusively is to characterize it as basically a liberal-reformist party with very little socialism or radicalism in its essential nature.

It certainly cannot be asserted that CCF political ascendancy was entirely responsible for the lessening of the militancy of the workers of industrial Cape Breton. The industries of the area, the mines and the steel plant, were in drastic decline in the years that followed the war. The 1946 strike of the steelworkers and the 1947 coal strike were the last large scale militant actions the workers of the area could mount for many years. While much of Canada entered into the economic boom of the 1950s, economic stagnation and declining employment was the lot of industrial Cape Breton. These were not conditions that were propitious for militant unionism. Nevertheless, the long history of union battles in Cape Breton might raise an expectation that the miners, in particular, would not accept with quiet resignation the rationalization of their industry and the loss of so many jobs in the early 1950s. But leadership is important, sometimes even decisive, in the development of political and social movements, and in Cape Breton there was no longer leadership able to give radical form to the discontent of the miners. The communists had been defeated and the political leadership of the CCF pressed for moderation and co-operation with the company in increasing productivity, not militancy. In its published manifesto during the 1953 election campaign the CCF called for "Labour policies to promote understanding and teamwork between employer and employees in a *program for greatly increased production* [emphasis in original], making it possible for the employees to share in the increased wealth produced".¹⁰⁶

Thus by the 1950s the class struggle unionism that Cape Breton had seen in earlier years was only a memory, and the political leadership of the CCF had helped to undermine radicalism and union militancy in the area. The acceptance of the political leadership of the CCF in 1938 can be seen as an indication that political radicalism was already in decline among the workers of Cape Breton. This is certainly partly true. The radical leadership many had followed, the CP, had itself adopted much less radical policies; and the ideological opposition to radicalism represented by the Antigonish Movement most probably had considerable effect. But many of the class conscious miners who welcomed the CCF to Cape Breton in 1938 and 1939 had far more radical aims than did the leadership of the party they supported. In both the union movement and the general political field the CCF, as an organization, was a force for moderation, for a lessening of class struggle, in Cape Breton.

106 CCF Manifesto Nova Scotia Election 1953, CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 28, PAC.