

Canadian Socialism and the Woman Question, 1900-1914

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Linda Kealey

THE STUDY OF THE EARLY SOCIALIST movement in Canada has until recently focused on its political and institutional development. In such studies British socialist immigrants, especially those in the skilled trades, usually emerge as the most important leaders of socialism in this country. New research investigating the participation of non-English workers and women in the socialist movement has altered this analysis and the important contributions of immigrant socialists have begun to be acknowledged. With regard to women in the early socialist movements of Canada, however, little has been done. Women's history has only scratched the surface, concentrating instead on the more visible middle-class reform movements and their protagonists. This paper examines women in the Canadian socialist movement and attempts both to illuminate the role of women within the institutional life of the movement and to analyze the ideological dimensions of the "woman question" in the pre-World War I period.¹

¹ The standard published sources include: Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930* (Kingston 1968); Norman Penner, *The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis* (Scarborough 1977); A.R. McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement 1899-1919* (Toronto 1977). See also Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks* (Montreal 1981) and Gerald Friesen " 'Yours in Revolt': The Socialist Party of Canada and the Western Canadian Labour Movement," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976), 139-57. Unpublished theses include: George R.F. Troop, "Socialism in Canada," M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1922; Adam K. Tadeusz, "Canadian Socialism and the Origin of the CPC, 1900-22," M.A. thesis, McMaster University, 1980; Ross A. Johnson, "No Compromise, No Political Trading: The Marxist Socialist Tradition in B.C.," Ph.D thesis, University of British Columbia, 1975. For women's history dealing with socialist women: Wayne Roberts, *Honest Womanhood. Feminism, Femininity and Class Consciousness Among Toronto Working Women 1893-1914* (revised edition, unpublished); Carol Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred: The Ideas of the English Canadian Suffragists 1877-1918* (Toronto 1983) discusses Flora Macdonald Denison and Emily Stowe as critics of the economic system; Angus McLaren, " 'What Has This To Do With Working Class Women?': Birth Control and the Canadian Left, 1900-39," *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 14 (1981), 435-54; Joan

L. Kealey, "Canadian Socialism and the Woman Question," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 77-100.

Socialist adherence to prevailing ideas on the importance of women in the home, ambivalence toward working women, and an incompletely articulated vision of woman's role under socialism all served to reinforce a secondary role for women in socialist organizations as supporters of male activity. Suspicion of bourgeois women's organizations, especially suffrage, and of autonomous women's groups generally, hampered women in the socialist movement from assuming leadership roles with few notable exceptions. Although some organizational and tactical differences emerged between 1900 and 1914 among different socialist groups, they differed little in ideological terms on women's issues; none challenged the structure and ideology of capitalist patriarchy in this period. One of the crucial components of this ideology was the notion of the "male breadwinner" or the ideal of the family wage. The expectation that men would support their families even under socialism, while countered by socialist insistence on the need for the economic independence of women, clearly predominated within socialist and trade union circles. Whatever the economic reality of the "male breadwinner" as the mainstay of the family, the presumption of this ideal served to undercut the notion of independence for women. While some writers have stressed the structural difficulties of women workers' position in the labour market and in the family and dismissed the importance of ideology, it is my contention that the latter operated very powerfully to support existing inequalities in trade union and particularly, socialist organizations. This ideology helped to perpetuate attitudes and policies on the "woman question" which limited the appeal of these organizations to women. It also defined the contributions women could make to the socialist movement.²

The important socialist groups which emerged in this period were the Canadian Socialist League (1899), the Socialist Party of Canada (1904), the Social Democratic Party (1907-11), and the Socialist Party of North America (1911). These groups provided the institutional framework for the socialist movement in pre-war Canada and will be sketched briefly before turning to an examination of the role of women in these organizations and attitudes toward the "woman question" among Canadian socialists.

The Canadian Socialist League (CSL) emerged at the close of the nineteenth century from social reform groups which promoted solutions for the ills of

Sangster, "Finnish Women in Ontario, 1890-1930," *Polyphony*, 3 (1981), 46-54; Linda L. Hale, "The B.C. Woman Suffrage Movement 1890-1917," M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1977; Ramsay Cook, "Frances Marion Beynon and the Crisis of Christian Reformism," in Carl Berger and R. Cook, eds., *The West and the Nation* (Toronto 1976).

² On the question of the family wage see Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, "The 'Family Wage': Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists," *Capital and Class*, 11 (1980), 51-72 and Michèle Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today* (London 1980); for Canada see M. Patricia Connelly, "Women's Work and the Family Wage in Canada," in Anne Hoiberg, ed., *Women and the World of Work* (New York 1982), 223-37.

industrializing Canada through remedies such as the single tax, direct legislation, and Bellamyite Nationalism. Originally based in Toronto and its environs, the League grew to over 60 locals within three years and attracted interest in other parts of Canada, particularly British Columbia where numerous locals were organized. Eventually George Weston Wrigley, editor of the League's Toronto newspaper, *Citizen and Country*, moved the operation to Vancouver in 1902. In the beginning, the CSL basically carried on the personnel and the social concerns of 1890s radicals, but moved forward to focus on the common ownership of major resources. The CSL, and its 1902 provincial successor, the Ontario Socialist League (OSL), gave expression to the need for a Christian socialist organization which stood for "the brotherhood of man," best achieved through a challenge to social inequality through education, agitation, and electoral politics. "Modern civilization is crushing the life and soul out of the people," proclaimed George W. Wrigley in 1899. The CSL advocated serious study of political economy, close ties to the labour movement, and reform through education and the ballot. While the CSL in 1900 affirmed that its approach was to man as "man," not as "capitalist" or "wage slave," the OSL programme of 1902 recognized "the existing system founded on class distinction, under which the possession or control of the means of production, including land, capital and machinery enabled the capitalist to practically enslave the workers." The OSL platform of public ownership, reduction of hours of labour, increases in wages, progressive income tax policies, and other political reforms, including equal suffrage for men and women, was a far cry from the loose CSL groupings of 1899-1900 which had rejected a constitution or platform as too divisive.³

Wrigley's contacts in Vancouver proved significant; there he encountered printer R. Parm Pettipiece, spokesman for the Kootenay miners and organizer of a CSL branch in the Kootenays. Wrigley and Pettipiece collaborated on the *Canadian Socialist* (formerly *Citizen and Country* and later the *Western Clarion*, Socialist Party of Canada). In summer 1902, the OSL proposed a joint executive committee between Ontario and B.C. Socialist Leagues and in 1903,

³ *Canadian Socialist* (Toronto), 6 June 1902; for additional information on the roots of the CSL and its early history see: Gene Homel, "Fading Beams of the Nineteenth Century": Radicalism and Early Socialism in Canada's 1890s," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 5 (1980), 7-32; see also the general published and unpublished sources cited in note 1; see also J.M. Conner, "The Canadian Socialist Movement" and "Anti-Poverty Society and the Nationalists," in Conner Papers, J.S. Woodsworth Collection, University of Toronto Rare Books and Special Collections; Archer Wallace, "History of Socialism in Toronto," typescript, University of Western Ontario Library. Russell Hann has found references to a Socialist League of Canada in *The Lamp*, 1 (15 August 1894) and 2 (15 September 1894). Miss M. Simpson was vice president, Miss M.E. Youmans, secretary, and Miss E. Adams, librarian; *Citizen and Country*, (hereafter *C&C*), 4 May 1900; the quote from Wrigley appears in *C&C*, 11 March 1899.

the formation of a national party. In late 1904, the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) emerged, largely under SPBC leadership.⁴

The SPC stressed the "irrepressible conflict of interest between the capitalist and the worker . . . culminating in a struggle for the possession of the reins of government." Political action was of paramount importance, while industrial or trade union activities were downplayed. In economic terms the party stood for the transformation "of capitalist property . . . into the collective property of the working class," management of industry by the workers, and production for use rather than profit. The party pledged its officeholders to support only that legislation which benefited the working class. Dubbed "impossibilists," SPC members consistently stressed the need to overthrow capitalism through class-conscious propaganda and rejected "immediate demands" as compromising this goal. Eventually this uncompromising position led to discontent and the creation of new socialist parties.⁵

The Social Democratic Party (SDP) of Vancouver was created in 1907 when Ernest Burns and his wife, Bertha Merrill Burns, were suspended from the SPC for arranging speaking engagements for Walter Thomas Mills, a "reform socialist." The Burns and 60 others left to form the new SDP. Bertha M. Burns had noted rising discontent within the SPC as early as summer 1906. In a letter to Mrs. Ramsay MacDonald, she wrote:

Matters are going on in the same old way here, the Impossibilist element in full control, but there is a strong movement among the foreign comrades, led by the Finns, who outnumber the English speaking members of the SP of C, for a reconstruction of the constitution along more rational lines, and for a platform of Immediate Demands.

She wrote again to Mrs. MacDonald in 1907 that the SPC had lost many of its former supporters to the new Social Democratic Party; E. T. Kingsley, editor of the *Clarion*, was "left with only a few ranters to support him — lip revolutionists but utterly incapable of any organized activity." She also noted that the new party had "a good percentage of women . . . and we mean to so conduct it that we shall keep them there."⁶

Toronto's Finnish Socialists were also pressing for changes in the SPC. At the 1908 Ontario provincial convention of the SPC, the Finnish branch appointed a committee to draft a broader programme. The Finns wanted practi-

⁴ Carlos A. Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917* (Seattle 1979), 109; *Canadian Socialist*, hereafter CS, 2 August 1902 and 9 August 1902; Wrigley was appointed special organizer for the interior of B.C. and remained in the west for three months, later returning to Ontario to publish *Social Justice*.

⁵ The SPC platform remained essentially unchanged until World War I and was published in every edition of the newspaper.

⁶ Schwantes, *Radical Heritage*, 180; Bertha M. Burns to Mrs. Ramsay MacDonald, 26 July 1906 and 29 April 1907, J.R. MacDonald Papers, Public Archives of Canada, hereafter PAC.

cal measures included to accomplish political reforms. They proposed the inclusion in the programme of universal suffrage without regard to sex, municipal ownership of land and utilities, municipal housing, a stand against contract work on government projects, and municipal responsibility for employing the unemployed. The convention vote split along ethnic lines and the Finns lost by one ballot.⁷

In British Columbia the Finnish comrades had by this time set up a separate ethnic executive which they defended as necessary within the SPC to strengthen ties among their compatriots and to carry out propaganda work. By spring 1909, Port Arthur (Ontario) Finns passed a resolution aimed at securing a party referendum on affiliation to the Second International, opposed by the Dominion Executive, and a Dominion convention. A year and a half later in 1910, the *Clarion* carried a proposal from the Port Arthur Finns and others for another referendum, this time to organize the SDP.⁸

Among the English-speaking members in Ontario chaos and discontent also reigned. In the summer of 1909 J. Stewart, secretary of the Central Committee, Toronto Local, wrote to the Dominion Executive Committee asking for affiliation of the SPC to the Second International, which the Dominion Executive refused. This refusal led to protest from ethnic branches in Winnipeg; in Toronto the conflict led to the revocation of the charter of Local Number 1 by the Dominion Executive and the reorganization of the ethnic branches into separate locals. A new English-speaking local (Number 24) emerged which sided with the Dominion Executive and claimed jurisdiction over all the English-speaking comrades. The dissidents of Local Number 1 protested this move, the expulsion of around 200 comrades (146 Finns, 30 Jews, 22 English, 10 Italians) from the party, and the high-handed manner in which the Dominion Executive interfered in Ontario. The ousted members appointed a committee to draft a pamphlet to explain their position and the contents were ratified at a joint meeting of the branches on 23 December, 1909. The committee included Mrs. Bellemare, long-time secretary of Local Number 1, James Lindala, prominent Finnish leader, Leon Tredler of the Jewish branch, and Colombo from the Italians, as well as two English members. Their pamphlet outlined the events of the past few months and suggested that the SPC was not growing because the most outspoken English-speaking comrades, now in Local 24, attacked religion, maligned the trade unions, insulted people, and talked wildly about guns. The prime culprit in all of this was George Weston Wrigley aided by comrades Woodhouse and Watkinson.⁹

⁷ *Western Clarion* (Vancouver) hereafter *WC*, 26 September 1908; the vote was 18-17.

⁸ *WC*, 29 August 1908; *Cotton's Weekly* (Cowansville, Quebec), hereafter *CW*, 27 May 1909; *WC*, 17 July 1909 and 29 October 1910.

⁹ *WC*, 7 August 1909; 30 October 1909; 6 August 1910. The latter issue reported the secession of the North Winnipeg locals from the SPC. The pamphlet, "Facts for Ontario Socialists," was reprinted in *WC*, 22 January 1910.

The Dominion Executive dissolved the Provincial Executive Committee in Ontario. The dissidents quickly organized a convention in Toronto in May 1910 initiated by the Galt, Guelph, and Berlin members. This convention endorsed changes in the platform which instructed the national and provincial executives on when referenda must be held and passed another resolution asking for a vote on affiliation to the Second International. The Ontario dissidents called for a Dominion convention and chose Berlin as the new provincial headquarters. If the SPC as a whole chose not to recognize this meeting, the dissidents resolved to continue to meet. At the 1911 convention, the independent socialist newspaper, *Cotton's Weekly*, noted the new spirit of "hopeful enthusiasm and practical work" which sharply contrasted with the gloomy meetings of 1910. SPC intransigence in the face of demands for change resulted by 1911 in the creation of a rival national party — the SDP. The membership of this new party was dominated by the Finns, Ukrainians, Jews, and Poles who were organized in language (ethnic) locals. English-speaking members were in the minority but tended to assume leadership positions.¹⁰

The Socialist Party of North America (SPNA) emerged in the winter of 1910-11 as a break-away group from the SPC. A small group of only three or four locals in southern Ontario, the SPNA objected to what they deemed "reformism" among the elected representatives from the SPC and they aligned themselves with the more extreme impossibilism of the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB). Despite the revolutionary programme of the SPC, the SPNA felt that political leadership was lacking and that the SPC engaged in too much vote catching. Eventually the SPNA revised its opinion on trade unions and urged its members to join unions, thus breaking with the extreme impossibilism of the SPGB. A number of the SPNA's members later participated in the founding of the Communist Party of Canada after the war.¹¹

The roles of women in these organizations, the attitudes of socialist groups to the role of women and the "woman question," and the restrictions imposed on women by both ideology and organizational structures were important, although not dominant, issues in those pre-1914 organizations. The "woman question" had emerged previously in the writings of Marx, Engels, and Bebel who recognized that women were subordinate in nineteenth-century society and found the origin of this inequality at that point in history when private

¹⁰ A resolution from Local 24 (Ontario) to dissolve the Ontario Provincial Executive Committee appears in the *Western Clarion*, 9 April 1910; see also 22 April 1910. The 1910 Ontario convention proceedings were reported in both socialist newspapers. See *CW*, 16 June 1910 and *WC*, 19 June 1910. By August 1910, Local Berlin's SPC charter was revoked by the national executive. See *WC*, 6 August 1910. The 1911 Ontario convention was reported in *CW*, 4 May 1911. Still using the name of the Socialist Party (of Ontario), the dissidents reported a membership of 20 locals with 625 dues-paying members. H. Martin of Berlin was the new provincial secretary; *CW*, 9 February 1911.

¹¹ Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 6-7; *The Worker* (Toronto), 5 April 1926, contained an article by "F.C." (Florence Custance) on the history of the SPNA.

property and the monogamous family appeared and mother right ended. The emancipation of women thus depended on the destruction of private property and the disappearance of traditional marriage and the family which could only occur within a socialist revolution. Socialist opinion, however, divided on the question of equal rights for women and the desirability of separate organizations for women; some thought these issues to be of secondary importance, or too reformist, while others defended them. Within Canadian socialism, the "woman question" also proved divisive. Preliminary research indicates that those groups which stressed the importance of social reforms and recognized the importance of the "woman question" appeared to have more success in attracting women members. Without membership lists it is difficult to estimate how many women were involved in these socialist organizations. The Christian socialism of the CSL and the OSL attracted a number of women, particularly those with some experience in social reform groups. The SDP appeared to attract substantial support from women in the ethnic communities who sympathized with many of the immediate demands, including woman suffrage. Although the SPC recognized the need for women's support, in the difficult pre-war years considerable debate emerged in the party. A controversy over a women's column in the party press, ongoing ambivalence over woman suffrage, and the creation of several socialist study clubs for women, all indicate dissension over the role of women in the SPC and perhaps help to explain why less than 10 per cent of the membership was female.¹²

Even the limited success of socialist groups in attracting women members was circumscribed by fundamental ambivalence toward women and particularly working women, an ambivalence shared by the larger labour movement of the period. Most socialists, male and female, stressed the role of women in the home. Supporting the political activities of the husband and bearing and educating the next generation of socialists was considered as women's essential contribution to the movement. The problems of working women were acknowledged, but subordinated to the larger task of social change. The socialist movement offered no more than a rhetorical bow to the need for women's economic independence. A number of women successfully challenged this

¹² See F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York, 1970, 1884); August Bebel, *Woman and Socialism* (New York 1910 reprint). Recently published works on U.S. women and socialism include the major studies of Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism 1870-1920* (Urbana 1981) and Sally Miller, ed., *Flawed Liberation* (Westport 1981). See also comparable studies on European women and socialism: Charles Sowerwine, *Sisters or Citizens: Women and Socialism in France since 1876*, (Cambridge 1982); Barbara Caine, "Beatrice Webb and the 'Woman Question,'" *History Workshop*, 14 (1982), 23-43; Jane Slaughter and Robert Kern, eds., *European Women on the Left* (Westport 1981); Alena Heitlinger, *Women and State Socialism* (Montreal 1979). The membership figure for the SPC of less than 10 per cent women members comes from a letter to *Cotton's Weekly* written by Mila Tupper Maynard which urged the socialist movement to "Reach the Women." See *CW*, 1 April 1909.

traditional perception of women's role in the movement and became organizers and speakers for socialist organizations. Attempts were made to raise the "woman question" within the context of socialism with varying degrees of success. Like their United States sisters, Canadian women socialists sought to raise the question in an effort to become more than the "slaves of slaves."¹³

Turn-of-the-century Christian socialism, as embodied in the CSL, had promised women a wider political role. CSL members participated in an independent political action convention in September 1900 where a resolution on universal adult suffrage had been proposed; by 1902 universal suffrage was included in the platform of the OSL, successor to the CSL. Universal suffrage was one of a series of reforms proposed by Christian socialists to combat social inequalities and the female vote was promoted as a means of protecting the interests of women and children particularly.¹⁴

The most common role for women in the CSL was a supportive one and took the form of soliciting subscriptions for *Citizen and Country* as part of the drive for socialist education. Two women of the OSL, however, took active roles in the 1902 Ontario provincial election; Margaret Haile and May Darwin illustrated the willingness of some women to claim a political niche for their sex. Both espoused through their words and actions that women had an important role to play in socialist politics. Haile became the first woman candidate for the provincial legislature, running on the OSL platform. Described as an expert stenographer, Haile was a Canadian with wide experience in the New England states where she had served as Socialist Labor Party state secretary for Connecticut and later in a similar position in Massachusetts for the Socialist Party of America. During the Ontario election campaign she proclaimed that socialism knew no lines regarding colour, creed, sex, or nationality. Haile's election meetings were supported by prominent female reformers and suffragists. In May 1902, at a Toronto election meeting, Haile's candidacy was supported by Augusta Stowe-Gullen who "gave an interesting address in support of the principles of socialism and the enfranchisement of women." In response to Stowe-Gullen, Haile made it clear that she was a socialist rather than a woman suffrage candidate; she agreed that women should have the franchise, but only as a step toward the ultimate goal of socialism. Other middle-class women reformers spoke up for Haile, including Mrs. Dr. Gordon, a supporter of woman suffrage, Jean Grant of the University of Toronto, and Clara Brett Martin, the first woman lawyer in Canada. Their presence suggests the common ground shared by Christian socialists and middle-class reformers.¹⁵

¹³ For the United States, see Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*.

¹⁴ *C&C*, 14 September 1900 and 30 May 1902.

¹⁵ Women associated with the league were: Mrs. J. W. King, treasurer, Miss McKenzie, Mrs. John Carroll, all of Toronto, and Mrs. McCoy of Wallaceburg; contributors to the "Socialist Propaganda Fund" in 1903 were Miss Agnes Murphy, Mrs. G. H. Robinson, Mrs. George Wrigley, Miss M. E. Youmans, all of Toronto, and Mrs. Holmes, Sturgeon Falls. Small town Ontario newspapers may reveal more women involved in

Present throughout Haile's campaign was May Darwin who chaired or spoke at many of the candidates' meetings. Darwin's activities as a socialist were noted as early as November 1901 in the daily press when she spoke at a CSL meeting on "Women and the Social Problem." In her speech, Darwin argued that women and children were the greatest sufferers from the competitive system and she urged women to join the socialist movement. Women were drawn to the work of socialist propaganda because the movement advocated the brotherhood of man and the equality of the sexes, she noted.¹⁶

The links between socialism, the woman question, and the labour movement were illustrated by Darwin's activities. Not only was she secretary and treasurer of the CSL, she also wrote a woman's column for the labour newspaper, the *Tribune*, and she served as a member and chairperson of the local labour council's education committee. Later she also ran for office on the socialist platform. Darwin was prominent in the union label committees of the period as well, thus reinforcing her ties to the labour movement.¹⁷

Union label committees, like women's auxiliaries and the Women's Labour Leagues, provided a focus for socialist women organizing working-class women. The union label campaign was aimed at wives, sisters, and mothers of trade unionists rather than the public at large. Trade unionist misgivings about women's activities even in this limited arena were apparent. Darwin welcomed the chance to form a local of the International Union Label League in fall 1902, but she noted at the organizational meeting that it would have happened sooner if male unionists had informed the women earlier. The TLC representatives who organized the meeting urged women to buy label goods since it was useless for men to organize if their wives did not spend their pay cheque on label goods. D.W. Kennedy, secretary of the Toronto Trades and Labor Council, warned the women of the menace to fair wages caused by the patronage of Chinese laundries and the purchase of prison-made goods. Under Darwin's leadership, the label committee's work fell almost entirely to the women thereafter and Darwin and several other women eventually resigned in 1905 to protest the lack of male support.¹⁸

In the early socialist movement in Ontario, Darwin and Haile were clearly exceptions in their public roles. Many more women worked behind the scenes. In the aftermath of the 1902 election, a Toronto organizer wrote to the *Canadian Socialist* noting that his local had added ten "lady comrades" but no men. The women, he remarked, frequently expressed their views and were invaluable-

the league's activities; *C&C*, 16 May 1902 and 30 May 1902; Haile's activities in the United States are discussed by Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*, 94, 105, 117.

¹⁶ *Globe* (Toronto), 9 November 1901; *Tribune* (Toronto), 18 November 1905.

¹⁷ A revised version of Wayne Roberts, *Honest Womanhood* (unpublished) has been of immense help on May Darwin. See also *Globe*, 30 October 1902; *Tribune*, September 1905-January 1906 for the woman's column; Toronto District Labor Council, Minutes, 7 April 1904, 20 April 1905.

¹⁸ *Globe*, 30 October 1902; *Tribune*, 18 November 1905.

ble in social events. Women were especially valued for their contributions toward social and educational goals. Even prominent women like Haile and Darwin accepted roles which focused on the social and educational, rather than public-speaking, aspects of propaganda work. Darwin, for example, presided at the daily drawingroom reception at the socialist tent on the Exhibition ground in Toronto and reported it a great success. While Darwin and others undoubtedly used these roles to encourage more women to participate in socialist activities, clearly a sexual division of labour permeated the socialist and trade union circles much as it did the labour market.¹⁹

On the west coast, as on the east, early socialism took shape in groups of Christian socialists and in a short-lived Socialist Labor Party (SLP). A few women were among the founding members of the Ruskin Colony (near Port Moody) which collapsed before the turn of the century. Several of the men and women from Ruskin became associated with a branch of the Canadian Socialist League there and helped to found the SPBC in 1901 and in 1904, the SPC.²⁰

The SPC encouraged women to join the organization and tried to reach women through public meetings addressed by women members. Socialist members of the British Columbia Legislature also sponsored woman suffrage bills before World War I. The question of appealing to the special needs and interests of women, however, caused friction in the party. A number of outspoken women were attracted to the SPC in the west. One of these was Bertha

¹⁹ CS, 23 August 1902; *Social Justice* (Toronto), 5 March 1903 noted that Comrade Darwin accepted the secretary's post with no salary; *Social Justice* (*SJ* hereafter), 6 August 1903, 3 September 1903, 1 October 1903. Roberts argues that Darwin was able to synthesize the primarily domestic role of women within the family with her support for equal pay for working women. While in Darwin's case this appears to be accurate, it is my contention that socialists in general had difficulty doing so because of their acceptance of the primacy of wifehood and motherhood, their emphasis on the ideal of the family wage, and their restricted notions of economic independence for women.

²⁰ McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries*, 20-6; Ormand Lee Charlton and J.M. Cameron were associated with the Ruskin Colony and later the CSL and SPC; *C&C*, 8 July 1899; The "Constitution and Bye Laws of the Industrial Union" can be found in the Ormand Lee Charlton Papers, University of British Columbia Special Collections. The Dorothy Steeves Collection at UBC contains a typescript of reminiscences and poetry by "Annie" (H.M.) Charlton, wife of O.L. Charlton in which she recalls going to Ruskin for health reasons and meeting her future husband. While there, she was introduced to the *Appeal to Reason* and other socialist writings. Mrs. Charlton's name appears infrequently in the *Western Socialist*, successor to the *Canadian Socialist*. The Charltons later joined the SDP, then the Federated Labor Party and finally the CCF. J.M. Cameron was also associated with the Christian Commonwealth in Ruskin and in Ladner, B.C.; *C&C*, 8 July 1899, 15 July 1899, 12 August 1899, 11 May 1900; Mrs. Cameron ran a small store at 530 Westminster Ave., Vancouver where she sold socialist and labour literature. See *WS*, 10 April 1903. For the early history of the Socialist Party of B.C. see McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries*, 25-6; *Western Socialist*, 10 April 1903, 24 April 1903, 1 May 1903; *WC*, 14 August 1904 and 12 January 1907.

E. Merrill who was involved in the SPBC, the American Labor Union (ALU) and in assisting R.P. Pettipiece to run the *Western Clarion* during 1903. Bertha Merrill's involvement in socialism stemmed from her experience as a newspaper employee where she observed the treatment of its female workers. By 1903 she had married Ernest Burns and in 1904 she acted as provincial secretary for the SPC in British Columbia. Burns was an ardent propagandist for the party and, in August 1904, she gave a lecture to the Vancouver and Victoria locals on "Woman and the Social Problem." She asked her audience "what share shall woman have in this reconstructed society?" Commenting on contemporary fears of race suicide, the term used to describe deliberate family limitation and concern for smaller family size, Burns reassured her audience that women would still be mothers in the new socialist society; furthermore, she suggested that in a just society, women might choose to have larger families, once the onerous burdens of capitalist society were removed. She castigated working women for underestimating their length of stay in the paid labour force. Burns, however, described homemakers as the most important female group and the one most in need of socialism, because domestic influence surpassed the influence of working women by affecting the whole family. Echoing other feminists and socialists in both Canada and the United States, she envisioned the home as woman's chief power centre. In her candid remarks, however, she cautioned women:

Unless you, women, secure your political and economic freedom while the battle for freedom is on, I am not sure that these men, once slaves themselves will not seal you as slaves unto themselves forever. . . . Socialists don't believe in property rights in human beings, but too often I have heard Socialist orators allude to the wives and children as that portion of private property socialism would guarantee to every man desiring to own such — Property! Man does not reckon woman as a whole human being.

To illustrate her final point, Burns recounted the story of a British Columbia Local secretary who counted men as whole members and their wives as fractions. Burns took her own message seriously and remained active in party affairs until 1907 when she and Ernest left the SPC to form the SDP in Vancouver, of which she became secretary.²¹

Even though the location of the party newspaper may have overrepresented the activities of western women, British Columbia probably did contribute the largest number of English-speaking women to the SPC. Dozens of women sent in subscriptions to the socialist press or raised funds for specific campaigns. Others took on active roles within their locals as organizers of social events to commemorate Labour Day or the Paris Commune and they organized general social get-togethers. Occasionally a social event aimed at recruiting potential

²¹ McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries*, 42, cites Bertha Merrill as involved in the ALU; *WS*, 10 April 1903; *SJ*, 6 August 1903; Bertha M. Burns to Mrs. MacDonald, 29 April 1907 in J.R. MacDonald Papers, PAC; *WC*, 13 August 1904.

women comrades was held. Reports of socialist meetings often noted with approval the presence of "ladies," or pointed out new female members. Visits by United States socialist women or suffrage lecturers attracted both men and women, although at times, the numbers of women disappointed the *Clarion's* reporters.²²

While the SPC professed interest in recruiting more women, the attitude of the male leadership toward women was ambivalent. While elected representative J.H. Hawthornthwaite sponsored several woman suffrage bills in the British Columbia legislature on the basis of equality and justice of women, he also cautioned that the franchise would not cure all ills. In 1909, he remarked that the average woman was just as qualified to vote as an average man, but also stated that the average woman was "necessarily more conservative than man." SPC socialists like Hawthornthwaite admired the militancy of British suffragists, but a *Clarion* columnist also indicated that he believed that the suffragists of the old country would vote for the old parties once the vote was won. This same writer stressed that women of the ruling class oppressed both working-class men and women. Nevertheless, the writer concluded:

Now sisters if your vote will alter your condition, by any means get it; but you will have to use it right. If you don't get your vote, make the man use it right.²³

Women in the SPC were divided among themselves on the issue of the franchise. In an open letter to the Women's Political Equality League (PEL) in

²² See, for example, issues of the *Western Clarion* and *Cotton's Weekly* between 1909 and 1914 for women like Mrs. M.A. Owen of Fernie, B.C. who sent in scores of subscriptions. Besides Bertha M. Burns, women who took part in public activities involving speaking or a position in the organization were: Dora Kerr, Kelowna; Mrs. Gray, Mara; Ruth Lester; Louisa Parr and Mary Norton, Mount Pleasant; Hattie Bone, Ada Clayton, and Mrs. Cameron, Victoria. The wives of E.T. Kingsley and J.G. Morgan occasionally took part in organizing activities in the party. In Vernon, B.C. in 1909 Comrade Mrs. Clarke and Comrade Mrs. Paterson (wife of secretary George W. Paterson) spoke "from the socialist woman's point of view," *WC*, 6 March 1909. Social events are described in the *Western Clarion*, 18 June 1904, 21 October 1905, 27 January 1906, 15 February 1908, 9 May 1908, 20 February 1909. Visiting lecturers included Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *WC*, 24 June 1905; May Wood Simons, *WC*, 30 September 1905, 23 May 1908, and *Cotton's Weekly*, 26 January 1911; Lena Morrow Lewis, *WC*, 18 and 25 November 1905; Irene Smith, *WC*, 3 February 1906; Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *WC*, 24 April 1909.

²³ *WC*, 10 February 1906, 12 May 1906, 7 July 1906, 20 March 1909, 27 March 1909. See also the resolution of support for suffrage from Toronto's English branch of the SPC in *WC*, 3 April 1909. The Socialist Party of America also balked at supporting such a "bourgeois" reform. See Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*, ch. 6. Lena Mortimer of Vancouver wrote the *Western Clarion* in May 1911 after attending a meeting which discussed the "woman question." She overheard men leaving the meeting say that women should stay at home and let the men do the voting. "To me it was the same old yarn," she wrote. She commented further that if women were fit to be mothers, educators of children, and involved in a variety of areas, they should have the vote. *WC*, 27 May 1911.

1911, M.H.T. Alexander recounted her experiences at a PEL meeting where she was asked to join. Alexander concluded that one could not consistently be a member of both organizations:

You claim that votes for women will change conditions under which women work! And yet you talk largely of upholding private property interests and dower laws and such like things. . . . You talk of working girls in tones that proclaim them as something of an entirely different calibre to your selves. . . . The vote will not then seriously touch on the majority conditions of women. . . . To a Socialist there is no inequality between the sexes. Rather is the inequality in prevailing economic conditions.²⁴

The ambivalence toward suffrage was only one indication of the SPC's difficulties over the woman question. A controversy emerged in late summer and early fall 1908 that underlined the SPC's problem in this area and suggested the underlying tension over separate women's activities. George Weston Wrigley wrote in to suggest a woman's column in the *Western Clarion* in August. Editor D.G. McKenzie's response to this suggestion touched off a debate, not only on the column, but also on the role of women within the SPC itself. In August, the editor remarked that "so far as women are concerned while we have a few women comrades, some of who are second to none and a leap or two ahead of most of the men, yet as a general rule, a woman who is a socialist is a socialist because some man is." By mid-September McKenzie had retreated, as women wrote in to denounce him. McKenzie referred to E.T. Kingsley who preceded him as editor and financed the paper and claimed it was Kingsley's decision to make. McKenzie stated his skepticism of female abilities to keep up with the pace of producing a column and warned against modelling any column on those which appeared in the bourgeois press. B.O. Robinson of Toronto condemned the editor for his "narrow-minded egotism." She warned that male opposition and intolerance would defeat the ultimate goal of socialism, "for women with spirit of revolt aroused in them can never be encouraged to join such an obvious man's movement." Robinson pointed out that socialist propaganda did not appeal to women, especially women workers; she further asserted that "it is just as ridiculous to ignore their [women's] position as it would be, say that of the miners or any one particular line of industry. . . ." Thereafter Robinson became involved in organizing a Socialist Women's Study Club in Toronto.²⁵

Edith Wrigley of Toronto traced the indifference among male socialists to women's problems to the lack of the female franchise. Until women could vote for socialism, she argued, no energy would be expended by the SPC on women. Wrigley criticized male socialists because they did not encourage their wives and daughters to participate in SPC activities. The men never took them to meetings, nor did they pay dues for them. Tackling McKenzie's assertion that

²⁴ WC, 2 December 1911.

²⁵ WC, 22 August and 12 September 1908.

women only joined the SPC because of their relationships with male socialists, Wrigley chided McKenzie that

I have come in contact with women full of the spirit of revolt and very often it is not because some man is a socialist but because of some man she is working for. . . .

She closed her letter with a plea for more equality and democracy in the socialist movement.²⁶

Others wrote to the *Clarion* to protest as well. "A Worker" suggested that socialist men stay home with the children and let their wives go to propaganda meetings. As a socialist woman, she challenged McKenzie's estimation of socialist womanhood and concluded: "We want common sense and logical revolution but we want it to include the working woman's field." George Weston Wrigley also wrote in again to urge a change in party attitudes toward women and noted that he had to recommend the United States publication, *Socialist Woman*, to the workingman's wife for lack of other alternatives. Men and women were needed in the SPC to make it "a two-sex working class movement," Wrigley said. Ada Clayton of Victoria, commenting on the correspondence over the woman's column, noted that she too recommended *Socialist Woman* to show the part women could play in the movement and urged women to send material in to the *Clarion*. The debate over the woman's column, however, soon fizzled out and such a column never did appear.²⁷

In the east, however, a woman's column began in *Cotton's Weekly* in late 1908 and continued to appear for almost a year. Published from Cowansville, Quebec, by William U. Cotton, lawyer, prohibitionist, and Christian socialist intellectual, *Cotton's Weekly* remained an independent organ of socialist commentary until its incorporation into the SDP. Its woman's column combined articles on domestic topics with commentaries on the roles of women at home and in the work force, and with appeals for socialism. Mary Cotton Wisdom wrote and edited much of the material and reprinted articles from U.S. and European socialist journals including pieces by Josephine Conger-Kaneko of the popular *Appeal to Reason*, read by many Canadian socialists. In one of Wisdom's earliest pieces she appealed "To the Wives of Workingmen" to recognize the importance of understanding politics and the need for female activism if any change in women's position were to occur. Women no longer needed to follow the conservative idea that men should run their affairs:

. . . it is time for the women of working class, and all women who sell their labour power, anyhow, anywhere, to rally to the sides of their fathers, of their brothers, of their husbands. . . .

Her columns encouraged women to speak up for themselves as well as for their

²⁶ WC, 12 September 1908.

²⁷ WC, 12 and 28 September 1908. *Socialist Woman* was begun by Josephine Conger-Kaneko in 1907 and changed its name to *Progressive Woman* in 1909. See Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*, 148.

men, and they also documented social conditions under capitalism which she felt might be changed if women had the vote. In an article in *Cotton's Weekly* in May 1909, she recommended that men change places with women for a few years. If women were the only enfranchised group, they would begin government housecleaning immediately and concentrate on issues relating to the home, children, sanitation, housing, and property. Mary Cotton Wisdom stressed the suffrage reform as integral to socialist and feminist activism and echoed the vision of Frances Willard, WCTU leader and Christian socialist, and other women's movement leaders, that women were social housekeepers capable of using their domestic skills in cleaning up corrupt politics.²⁸

The attitude of the eastern-based *Cotton's Weekly* toward women sharply contrasted with that of the *Western Clarion*. Both newspapers and the debates carried in their pages reflected the ferment over the "woman question" within the socialist movement. The years 1908-09 marked a crisis point for public discussion of women's roles within the socialist movement. The divisions over woman suffrage and the debate on the woman's column were part of a larger debate on the very nature of the SPC itself. The influx of ethnic groups into the ranks of the SPC and the visible participation of ethnic women in party activities also raised the issue of women's participation in socialist politics.

Within Toronto's SPC, for example, ethnic women were already very active members of their branches. In June 1907, organizer Wilf Gribble enthused over the commitment and hard work of Finnish and Jewish comrades compared to their English-speaking brothers. Finnish and Jewish women, he also noted, took a lively interest in their respective branches and the Finnish women had even organized their own sub-branch. English-speaking women were more retiring, according to Gribble. In August 1908, however, a Toronto correspondent to the *Clarion* commented that "great hopes are entertained of an awakening amongst the English-speaking women comrades this winter."²⁹

²⁸ *Cotton's Weekly* began as the *Observer* on 17 September 1908. The name was changed in December 1908 and the paper shifted its focus from local news to discussion of ideas. In the issue dated 21 January 1909, Cotton described the editor and manager of the paper as members of the SPC. See *Observer*, 17 September 1908; *Cotton's Weekly*, 3 December 1908 and 21 January 1909. See Mary Cotton Wisdom's column in the issue of 31 December 1908; *CW*, 27 May 1909. For a closer look at Mary Cotton Wisdom's column, see Janice Newton, "Women and Cotton's Weekly: A Study of Women and Socialism in Canada, 1909," paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, Edmonton, 1980. *Cotton's Weekly* became the *Canadian Forward*, organ of the SDP in the early years of World War I. Josephine Conger-Kaneko edited the woman's column in the popular U.S. socialist weekly, *Appeal to Reason* (Girard, Kansas). Her column urged women to become involved in socialism while discussing the suffrage movement, women's work, child labour, and other issues. See Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*, 113-8.

²⁹ *WC*, 22 June 1907; 8 August 1908; see also Varpu Lindstrom-Best, "The SPC and the Finnish Connection," in Jorgen Dahlie and T. Fernando, eds., *Ethnicity, Power and Politics in Canada* (Toronto 1981), 113-9.

Finnish women were particularly prominent in North American socialism. In the United States women comprised 35 per cent of Finnish socialists. Lindstrom-Best's work on Ontario Finnish women indicates that several women were among the group of fifteen Finns who joined the SPC early in 1905 and at the end of that year the entire Finnish Society, which included several more women comrades, joined as one of the Party's language locals. Finnish women also joined sewing circles connected to the SPC, which functioned like union auxiliaries, and supported the suffrage movement in Canada and the United States.³⁰

At the 1908 Ontario provincial convention of the SPC, Finnish socialists pressed for an enlarged platform which would include political reforms such as universal suffrage. Although the Finns lost the vote, the "woman question" apparently played a significant role in the entire convention which was held in September as the debate raged over the woman's column. The resolutions committee proposed, and the convention carried a motion, that the convention instruct all speakers and local organizers to make a more direct appeal for universal suffrage, to arrange meetings with women lecturers and to supply more literature relevant to women. George Weston Wrigley's summary of the convention reiterated his support for women in the party and repudiated the views of Comrade Leheney, the SPC organizer in Alberta, that women had no place in a revolutionary movement. Wrigley also criticized several men for their "weak" objections to the franchise for women. Finally, he noted with approval the fruitful organizing work of the Finnish woman, Sanna Kallion, a Port Arthur delegate.³¹

A further development of the debate over the role of women in the SPC occurred in September as well. Women in the Toronto Local organized a Socialist Women's Study Club to increase their general knowledge of socialism, but particularly to analyze the position of women in capitalist society. A score of women met every week from September 1908 until May 1909 to read Engels and other authors. Reporting on these sessions, E.M. Epplert urged women to study socialism since "as working women we have double chains to

³⁰ Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*, 302; Lindstrom-Best, "The SPC and the Finnish Connection," and *The Finnish Immigrant Community of Toronto 1887-1913* (Toronto 1979), 31-2; Joan Sangster, "Finnish Women in Ontario," 53; *Cotton's Weekly* noted the presence of a woman suffrage section in the Port Arthur Labour Day parade in 1912. *CW*, 11 September 1912; Carl Ross, "The Feminist Dilemma in the Finnish Immigrant Community," *Finnish Americana*, 1978. As more research is published on the role of Finnish women and women of other ethnic groups in Canada, comparisons can be made, not only between ethnic and Canadian women socialists, but also between the United States and Canada.

³¹ *WC*, 26 September 1908. The SPC Party platform for the 1908 Ontario election included a specific appeal to working women for the first time. See Broadside, "Ontario Provincial Elections. June 8, 1908. Manifesto of Toronto Local Socialist Party of Canada," Metropolitan Toronto Public Library.

lose." Although the club appears to have folded in spring 1909, its existence in this critical period of debate over the woman question indicates the importance of the issue.³²

The SPC's ambivalence toward suffrage, the refusal to initiate a woman's column, the more active roles of ethnic women, and the organization of the Toronto Study Club suggest the difficulties experienced by some women (and men) within the party. While much of the evidence is incomplete and limited by a necessary reliance on the party press, it nevertheless suggests that the leadership found the recognition of the seriousness of the "woman question" incompatible with SPC ideology. The party's general "impossibilist" position created friction in many areas, including the woman question. The consistent and inflexible focus on the need to overthrow capitalism through class-conscious propaganda which would educate working-class voters, and the rejection of "immediate demands" as compromising this goal, left very little room for those who envisioned a broader base of support and a longer timetable for the overthrow of capitalism.

The SPC refused to give any ground on the woman question. SPC women were far from unified on the question and some of its prominent women speakers supported the party's position. Ruth Lestor, a British emigrant to Canada, accompanied her party-organizer husband on his travels and spoke to the women comrades. In summer 1909, speaking on "The Woman's Place," Lestor argued that a woman's class position was of paramount concern because sex was not the chief factor determining women's industrial position. She argued that the capitalist hired whoever was cheapest and most efficient without regard to gender. Reiterating the position of other party speakers, Lestor observed that socialist women had to pay special attention to the housewife who was narrower in outlook than her working sister because only then would socialism reflect the atmosphere of the home and become the hope of rising generations. On the suffrage issue, however, Lestor differed with party views and acknowledged the potential of the franchise for increasing women's class-consciousness. She envisioned this as a first step toward working-class unity. Lestor appeared confident that working women's political power would be used for the overthrow of capitalism. Private property was the source of female oppression and women needed socialism even more than men because they suffered more burdens under the capitalist system.³³

By July 1911, Lestor's tone and attitude toward women in the SPC had become quite critical. While noting the behaviour of some women comrades approvingly, she castigated women in general as cruel to each other, more prone to "superstition," and less capable intellectually of understanding the effects of their own position as economic dependants. She staunchly defended the SPC's treatment of women: "every daughter of the proletariat who has

³² *CW*, 4 February 1909; *WC*, 20 February 1909 and 15 May 1909.

³³ *WC*, 10 July 1909.

sound instincts in the direction of revolution will be treated as a comrade and an equal." Women must be socialists first and women second and, preferably, sex should not play a role at all.³⁴

Lestor's anger reflected her increasing isolation from women in the party. At one point she commented that she had no close female companionship because "I rarely found one of my own sex worth talking to." She criticized women for throwing obstacles in the way of party membership and dismissed women in the party who were disruptive and reactionary (probably referring to SDP defectors). Lestor's venting of spleen perhaps reflected profound disappointment and bitterness in the aftermath of several years of factional fighting.³⁵

The formation of the Social Democratic Party promised to allow women more scope to pursue issues and organizational forms which directly addressed the woman question. Attracting and keeping women members was of paramount importance to the Vancouver dissidents in 1907; at the 1911 Ontario convention of the SDP, three of 32 delegates were female and all from Toronto. Mrs. Bellemare, former secretary of Toronto Local 1, SPC, had taken part in the debates of 1910 over the Dominion Executive Committee's action in expelling a large number of members of the SPC. Of Mrs. Crawford, the second delegate, little is known. The third, Elizabeth Nesbitt, was associated with the first Socialist Sunday School in Canada, which opened in Toronto in September 1911 through the joint efforts of the Finnish, Jewish, Italian, and English locals. The school taught children to think critically about economics, science, history, and evolution. In a report on the Sunday School, Nesbitt commented that "we hold naught good or worthy of our respect that does not give mother and child the place of honour." Toronto remained the most active focus for English-speaking women in the SDP; between 1912 and 1914 long-time SDP and Socialist Sunday School activist Mrs. Elizabeth Crockett contested several elections. In late 1912, she ran for alderman on the Political Action Committee's ticket, a group comprised of the SDP, Independent Labor Party, and the Trades and Labor Council; in 1914, the SDP nominated Crockett for Board of Education in Ward 1 and Miss Fraser in Ward 5.³⁶

³⁴ *WC*, July 1911.

³⁵ *WC*, July 1911; see also "W.W.L." [Le Feaux] on "Morality" in the same issue. He sees women as slower to grasp the need for emancipation from wage slavery and concepts of morality because of women's training and nature. An unsigned article on "Sex Equality" in *WC*, August 1911, denies the equality of the sexes and presents an evolutionary view of women as more passive and conservative; males were characterized by "variation" and "unrest."

³⁶ Burns to Mrs. MacDonald, 29 April 1907, J.R. MacDonald Papers, PAC; for the Ontario convention, see *CW*, 4 May 1911; Elizabeth Nesbitt reported on the Socialist Sunday School in the *International Socialist Review*, 12 (1911-12), 884; for Mrs. Elizabeth Crockett: see *Globe*, 28 November 1912; *CW*, 26 November 1914.

The SDP supported reforms of interest to women such as universal suffrage and the abolition of child labour, but it also provided its female members with the possibility of separate women's committees to deal with women's issues. Mary Norton, secretary of the Vancouver SDP, remembered the members of the committee in a 1973 interview and explained that women were treated as full members of the SDP; discussion of women's issues took place separately and usually occurred in afternoon meetings because of the difficulty of getting to evening meetings. Norton and several other members of the SDP women's committee were involved in the British Columbia suffrage campaign. While Norton felt that "until we get the socialist platform, we're not going to get far with suffrage," she also noted that she never revealed her socialist connections to the members of the Pioneer Political Equality League.³⁷

Women's organizations in the British Columbia SDP were widespread enough to require a provincial secretary to organize them. In the fall of 1913, *Cotton's Weekly* carried a report of an executive meeting at which Bertha M. Burns was elected provincial secretary of the Women's Organizations, and all locals were instructed to elect their women's organization committees. Not until the fall of 1914 did an organization emerge in Toronto. Rev. W.E.S. James spoke at the organizational meeting of the Women's Social Democratic League, chaired by Mrs. McGregor. James explained that women were needed in the socialist movement to be wives, mothers, and sweethearts of socialists. Women also needed to be organized to articulate working-class consciousness and to develop the ideal of woman in the cooperative commonwealth, James said. According to a newspaper report, the formal establishment of the Women's Social Democratic League signalled the beginnings of a nucleus "to be extended in every town and city" in Ontario for the purpose of aggressive campaigning aimed at women.³⁸

By 1914, then, the socialist movement in Canada had divided into two organizations, the SPC and the SDP, and each responded differently to the woman question. Both adhered formally to the position that women's involvement in the party was important to the triumph of socialism. The SDP, however, strongly influenced by its ethnic components and the need for more immediate appeal to the working class, accepted a role for women's organizations within the party structure. The SPC, on the other hand, resisted any special status for women's issues in the party. Only in Toronto in the winter and spring of 1908-1909 was a small breakthrough observable with the Socialist Women's Study Club. At the level of ideology the SDP position on the

³⁷ Mary Norton, interview, 1973, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Accession Number 141-1 and 141-2. See also Moira Farrow, "Great-grandma Still Does Battle," *Sun* (Vancouver), 24 November 1969.

³⁸ *CW*, 6 November 1913, 15 October 1914, and 12 November 1914. Mrs. Bellemare was contact person for the Women's Social Democratic League in Ontario.

"woman question" differed little from that of the SPC; it was in the area of tactics and structure that the two socialist parties differed.

An essential component in the attitudes towards women of both the SPC and the SDP was the socialist conception of the role of women's paid labour force activity and its relationship to the family. While an occasional writer in the socialist press thought otherwise, male and female writers on the subject usually agreed that women's work threatened male jobs, a position also held by the trade union movement. Reports in the *B.C. Federationist* after 1912 pointed to the low wages paid to women, particularly in Vancouver and the failure of both women and unions to organize the female labour force to improve the situation for women and eliminate competition between men and women. The SPC's officially hostile position on trade unions was undercut by the fact that many of its members nevertheless belonged to unions. The SDP espoused participation in unions and disagreed with the SPC's attitude on this question. Nevertheless, both parties shared certain perspectives on women's work and its relationship to the family.³⁹

According to the socialist view, women and children were driven from the home into the labour market because the male wage earner could not support the family. The need for several incomes to maintain the family allowed capitalists to lower wages and thus women and children competed in the labour market with men. Socialists repeated this theme over and over again, in defending their beliefs against charges of "free love," that capitalism and not socialism was destroying the family by making female and child labour necessary; wages were thus lowered to the point where marriage for many men and women remained an impossibility. In reply to the often-asked question concerning the position of women under socialism, writers in the socialist press stressed that women would be economically independent in a socialist system and that this independence would alter the relations between men and women, thus raising women to the status of comrade and equal partner. But the socialist application of economic independence for women apparently varied according to marital status and whether or not a woman had children. Family responsibilities were pre-eminent in the case of married women.⁴⁰

While occasional writers defended married women's paid work as integral to her independence, most commentators indicated their acceptance of the ideal

³⁹ *CW*, 1 April 1909, 19 May 1910, 2 January 1913, 10 December 1914. *B.C. Federationist*, 28 September 1912, 18 April 1913, 25 April 1913, 3 July 1913, 13 June 1913, 29 August 1913, 13 March 1914, 9 October 1914, 16 October 1914, 20 November 1914, 4 December 1914. For an estimate of trade union membership see McCormack, 56, where he cites 60-90 per cent trade unionists among the SPC members.

⁴⁰ *WC*, 4 November 1905; *CW*, 17 June 1909, 1 July 1909, 23 September 1909. Comments on married women's freedom to choose a partner appear in *WC*, 14 December 1907, 26 December 1908, 19 April 1913; *CW*, 11 February 1909, 8 April 1909, 30 June 1910, 13 November 1913.

of the family wage, that is, the male breadwinner's primary responsibility to provide for all members of the family. "Gourock," for example, in the *Western Clarion* of 1908 stated this position most clearly:

Socialists don't believe in mothers working at all. They hold that under a sage industrial system wherein the worker would obtain the full value of his products, the man could earn sufficient to raise and maintain his family under proper conditions and that various exigencies which may arise, such as sickness and accident, be provided against by the community.

Another writer promised that "your wife will no longer have to leave the baby at the creche on her way to the factory." While some allowed women a choice in the matter, the expectation was clear that married women would not choose to work. Given the conditions and wages for women in pre-war Canada, the socialist position is understandable; however, the emphasis on marriage and motherhood and the ideal of the family wage served to restrict female potential. Motherhood was presented as woman's true vocation, and freedom of choice as to marriage partner emerged as the socialist conception of women's future economic independence. Women need not marry for bread, as they did under capitalism; once women were economically independent they would marry on the basis of love and free choice and "Let the Best Men Win!"⁴¹

In the socialist future, maternity would be elevated to its proper place and the state would provide the best possible care. A number of writers speculated that married women would cease to be drudges once municipal or state-run laundries, bakeries, kitchens, and kindergartens were in place. Mary Cotton Wisdom noted the double burden of working-class women: while the men were agitating for the eight-hour day, their wives often put in sixteen-hour days and had to deal with the needs of infants in the evenings. She urged men to pitch in and help their wives and she described socialism as meaning honour for mothers and a lightening of their workload. A clerical advocate of socialism described the true home under socialism in terms of "love . . . innocent childhood . . . work enough . . . leisure for reading and study and recreation . . . all the comforts of life and none of its harmful luxuries."⁴²

The situation of single wage-earning women also received attention from socialists. They tended to perceive wage-earning single women only as dependants and as future wives and mothers. Socialist newspapers reprinted information on the appalling conditions of women workers in other countries, citing statistics from investigations into working conditions; conditions in Canada received less attention until 1909-1910 when the *Clarion* and *Cotton's* began to carry more stories on women's work in Canada. Often the discussion of

⁴¹ Barrett and McIntosh, "The 'Family Wage' "; Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today*; *WC*, 26 December 1908; *CW*, 17 June 1909; *WC*, 14 December 1907 and 19 April 1913; *CW*, 11 February 1909, 30 June 1910, and 19 January 1911.

⁴² *CW*, 19 January 1911, 4 May 1911; *WC*, 13 January 1906; *CW*, 13 May 1909, 11 November 1909, 3 April 1913.

inadequate wages led commentators to remark on prostitution as the only way out for many working women. Socialists viewed the "social evil" as arising from inadequate wages and in their newspaper reports combatted the idea that women preferred the prostitute's life to hard work. The future socialist society with equal pay for equal work, and consequent independence for working women, would cease to be troubled by women selling themselves to make a living and by the double standard in general.⁴³

Working women's needs were largely ignored by socialists, as some women had pointed out in the controversy over the woman's column. The position of self-supporting working women was of intense interest to some socialists, especially those closest to working women. Helena Gutteridge, one of the prime movers behind the establishment of the 1914 Women's Employment League, provided leadership in this area. As a working woman and self-described socialist, Gutteridge concerned herself with these issues. She helped organize women laundry, garment, and domestic workers in British Columbia, served on the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, was an active member of the Local Council of Women, and advocated woman suffrage. Through her columns in the *B.C. Federationist*, Gutteridge hammered her readers on the question of women's work, pointing out that women worked in many dangerous and heavy industries for below subsistence wages. Her reports on the Women's Employment League showed that the majority of women workers seeking help were single women with no other recourse. Married women's work, she noted, arose because "the wages earned by husbands and fathers are too small to keep the household going." Women's economic inferiority, she asserted, led to a "sickly degenerate race born of the mothers who try to fulfill the triple duty of worker, wife and mother. . . ." Gutteridge moved beyond this familiar analysis to bring her feminist insights to bear on the question of women's work; she pointed out that the woman worker had to fight on two fronts — against the employers and her male comrades:

The history of women in industry . . . is the story of struggle against not only the capitalist class who have exploited them mercilessly, but also against the men of their own class who said because they were women they must not expect to be looked upon as co-workers or receive the same pay when doing the same kind and quantity of work.

Gutteridge demonstrated the contradiction inherent in socialist and trade unionist attitudes to women's work which sought to organize women only in lower-skilled jobs for less pay. Working-class men wanted to keep the highly-skilled jobs for themselves. Women workers received a confused message:

First she shall not join the union, as in the early days, then she must, because his interests are at stake, then finding that does not keep him top dog, she must leave the

⁴³ See *CW*, 10 June 1909; *WC*, 8 October 1910, 17 April 1909 for comments on working conditions in other countries. *CW*, 28 January 1909, 9 September 1909, 8 December 1910; *WC*, 20 February 1909, 19 June 1909, 30 April 1910; *CW*, 13 November 1913 and 19 May 1910.

trade entirely alone — it belongs by divine right to him. Oh, Chivalry, thy name is man!⁴⁴

Gutteridge, like May Darwin, illustrated the rare linkage of socialism, feminism, and commitment to the labour movement. Isolated in that position, she was an unusual figure whose influence is difficult to measure. Her writings and public activities served to raise, as other socialist women did, the central issue of women's double burden as both a member of a specific class and as a female. The socialist and labour movements' acceptance of the primacy of wifehood and motherhood, their distrust of women workers as competition and potential strikebreakers, and the ideal of the family wage reinforced the structural inequalities within the movement and in the labour market. Advocacy of equal pay for equal work stood side by side with, and in contradiction to, the family wage ideal and comments on the deterioration of the family (the increasing impossibility of working-class marriage, high infant mortality rates among working-class families arising from the need for married women's work, and the growth of prostitution in the cities). While a few women socialists decried the pitfalls of female economic dependence on men and noted that women were not always engaged in domestic duties, by and large, men and women socialists subscribed to prevailing notions of woman's role in the home and

⁴⁴ Helena Gutteridge (1880-1960) was a British emigrant to Canada in 1911. In England she had participated in the suffrage movement and was associated with the Labour Party. Gutteridge appears not to have joined the socialist movement officially until after World War I when she joined the SPC and the CCF. For more information see "Helena Gutteridge's Story, . . ." *Pacific Tribune*, 8 March 1957, 11; see also Susan Wade, "Helena Gutteridge: Votes for Women and Trade Unions," in Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess, eds., *In Her Own Right* (Victoria 1981) 187-204. My thanks to Kandace Kerr of Vancouver for sending me a copy of her tape "Helena Gutteridge" produced for Vancouver Coop Radio, 1980. *B.C. Federationist*, 16 January 1914, 9 October 1914, 16 October 1914, 20 November 1914, 27 November 1914, 4 December 1914, 16 January 1914. The Women's Employment League was organized in September 1914 to deal with the problem of large numbers of women out of work. The Local Council of Women helped to organize a mass meeting on 22 September with representatives of the Trades and Labor Council, the city of Vancouver, and the Board of Trade, as well as a wide variety of middle-class women's groups. The meeting resolved to raise money and find employment for women by approaching the Dominion government for war contracts to sew uniforms and by setting up an employment office. Over 1,000 women were estimated as unemployed in the city. Eventually a toy manufacturing business was set up (employing 250, three days a week); an equal number were assisted in finding other employment, primarily in domestic work. By June 1915 the Women's Employment League was absorbed into the Civic Relief Department. See Local Council of Women, Vancouver, Minute Books, 1914-15 especially minutes of 17 September 1914, 22 September 1914, 5 October 1914, University of British Columbia Library, Special Collections. See also *B.C. Federationist*, 9 October 1914, 16 October 1914, 20 November 1914, 27 November 1914, 19 February 1915, and 18 June 1915.

stressed the social and educational roles of women socialists in supporting their husbands and bringing up the next generation of socialists.⁴⁵

Canada's pre-war socialist movement subscribed to views on the woman question which were at the same time constricting and potentially liberating. Socialist analysis pointed to the exploited position of women under capitalism as both workers and wives and mothers. Women's issues, however, were subordinated to the main task of replacing the capitalist system with the co-operative commonwealth. From the Christian socialism of the CSL in the early part of the century, through the "impossibilist" SPC and the "reformist" SDP, some women drew attention to the necessity for making these organizations responsive to the needs of women, with varying degrees of success. They did so not only to advance the women's cause, but also because they appreciated the need for a "two-sex movement." They realized that a socialist movement which ignored the problems and potentials of women was a flawed socialism at best.

The author acknowledges the helpful comments of Mercedes Steedman, Nolan Reilly, Paul Stevenson, Rosemary Ommer, and Gregory Kealey. The paper is part of a larger research project which will examine women's involvement in Christian socialist groups of the nineteenth century through the socialist parties of the early twentieth century to the founding of the Communist Party. The study will include prairie and maritime women and will look at the links between the labour movement and socialist activity as well as overlaps between the women's movement and socialist groups.

⁴⁵ Barrett and McIntosh, "The 'Family Wage,'" 52, note the difficulties of advocating equal pay (based on the premise of the individual wage earner) at the same time as advocating the family wage (based on the notion of the male breadwinner); structural difficulties for women in the labour market which were, and are, compounded by family responsibility, have been cited by Wayne Roberts as the prime determinant of women's roles in the labour and socialist movements. Roberts' argument served as a necessary corrective to earlier interpretations of working-class women as ideological pawns of "middle class" notions of the female role. Roberts however has underestimated the importance of the notion of the reconstituted socialist family as central to the vision of a new social order. See Roberts, *Honest Womanhood*.