

Pacifism or Anti-Imperialism?: The CCF Response to the Outbreak of World War II

James Naylor

Volume 8, numéro 1, 1997

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/031123ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/031123ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (imprimé)

1712-6274 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Naylor, J. (1997). Pacifism or Anti-Imperialism?: The CCF Response to the Outbreak of World War II. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 8(1), 213–237.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/031123ar>

Résumé de l'article

L'auteur examine ici la position de la Co-operative Commonwealth Federation sur le déclenchement de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, mais plutôt que de s'en tenir au discours de J.S. Woodsworth qui oppose un refus présumé « pacifiste » à l'effort de guerre, il se tourne vers les membres de la CCF et tente de cerner le contexte et le langage de leurs débats sur les questions plus générales du militarisme, du fascisme et de l'impérialisme. Ces discussions ont très rarement été formulées en termes pacifistes. Pour la CCF, il allait de soi que le fascisme et la guerre étaient deux fléaux inhérents au capitalisme et que toute guerre entre puissances capitalistes avait un fond impérialiste. Approuver la participation à une telle guerre, c'était non seulement se montrer peu scrupuleux, mais c'était aussi ébranler les assises de la future identité socialiste et prolétaire. Une fois la guerre enclenchée, la CCF nia à peine son ambivalence initiale face aux hostilités, mais choisit de la réexprimer en des termes pacifistes moins provocateurs pour l'État canadien, les Alliés et l'effort de guerre.

Pacifism or Anti-Imperialism?: The CCF Response to the Outbreak of World War II

JAMES NAYLOR

THE STORY OF J.S. WOODSWORTH'S "PACIFIST" OPPOSITION TO CANADIAN participation in World War II is a staple of Canadian political history, as is his failure to carry his caucus and his party along this "lonely route where conscience is the only compass."¹ Posed in such terms, the episode quickly became a parable with meaning for both friends and foes of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (and, after 1961, the New Democratic Party). Woodsworth came to represent the soul of the CCF – a "prophet in politics"² – whose principles survived the contamination of national politics but in the end could only achieve an otherworldly "moral victory." Not surprisingly, the realists and pragmatists won, and the nation (and the CCF) marched to war.

The structure of this narrative is a familiar one, and its appeal to a movement that, in so many ways, lost its innocence in the cold war and the economic expansion of the 1950s and 1960s is understandable. But it has come to obscure what most CCFers thought they were debating in the late 1930s. The issue, which clearly emerged in the famous emergency meeting of the CCF National Council on 6 and 7 September 1939, was anything but otherworldly. Rather, the debate focused on the character of the war and its meaning for socialism. Only Woodsworth, among the more than forty members present, articulated any clearly pacifist sentiments, and even he focused his argument quite differently, appealing to deep strains of socialist anti-imperialism among his audience. Indeed, this was, for the most part, the debate that rippled through the CCF in the months and years leading up to this meeting. Woodsworth, as an individual, and pacifism as the motive for opposing the war, were not the primary players in this debate.

1 *Vancouver Daily Province*, 10 September 1939.

2 Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto, 1959). Such characterisation emerged immediately upon Woodsworth's death. See Bruce Hutchison, "Saint in Politics" in "The First Ten Years, 1932-1942: Commemorating the Tenth Anniversary of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation," 1942, in National Archives of Canada (NA), MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol 13, File: "CCF, National Conventions and Interprovincial Conferences, 1932-60."

Nevertheless, they quickly became its public face. In the context of war, socialist misgivings about the roles, not just of Germany and Italy, but of Britain and France in the approaching crisis were downplayed and the language of social class that had pervaded the debate in the CCF recast. Woodsworth, of course, stood centre stage as he publicly distanced himself from the CCF's (highly qualified) support of the war in the House of Commons the day after the National Council met. Here, he emphasized the pacifist side of his response to war, trusting to "moral force" to confront the war-mongers.³ As Kenneth McNaught has commented, it "will probably remain an open question whether Woodsworth's stand in 1939 was influenced more by his rational conviction or by his emotional attachment to . . . pacifism."⁴ But for the CCF as a whole, this was not the case. CCF opposition to the war had been packaged as pacifism by Woodsworth and, for the leadership of the CCF, this was acceptable. As Thomas Socknat points out, liberal pacifism had become a significant, if minority, creed in the most middle-class of Canadian institutions, universities and the United Church; it was, in the dominant discourse, respectable if misguided.⁵ Woodsworth had one foot in this tradition and it was this connection that the CCF chose to emphasize in an otherwise hostile environment.

The debate within the CCF about international developments was much broader and more interesting than the CCF publicly let on. It is a difficult debate to unravel both because of diversity within the CCF and the complexity of European events of the 1930s. The party was home to pacifists, isolationists, and anti-imperialists, as well as those raring to pick up a gun and fight fascism on whatever front they could – all in the name of socialism. The CCF was able to contain these differences and, when the crisis came, present its historic reticence to acquiesce in capitalist war as a non-threatening pacifism.

The CCF's attitude towards war was determined by three factors: the experience of the First World War, the character of the Depression, and the existence of the Communist Party. The first provided a set of lessons about war upon which almost all socialists could agree. The second focused the CCF's attention on domestic issues and the third limited the CCF's ability to address international ones. Activism on any question raised the issue of the CCF's relationship to the Communists, and international questions were particularly problematic. The CP's eager and self-conscious internationalism prompted it to respond quickly to international crises, forcing the CCF to evaluate their response in light of internal disputes about working with the Communists.

What we know about the CCF and war is refracted by historians who have been primarily interested in what Frank Scott referred to as the CCF's most

3 McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics*, 311.

4 *Ibid.*, 330.

5 Thomas P. Socknat, *Witness Against War: Pacifism in Canada, 1900-1945* (Toronto, 1987).

“dangerously bourgeois element”⁶: the League for Social Reconstruction, as well as the mostly middle-class pacifists in the party. Socknat has chronicled the impact of pacifism on the early CCF, although without a clear sense of its boundaries. Despite “a socialist/pacifist alignment”⁷ of sorts, pacifist activism was not a focus of CCF activity. Indeed, there were really only isolated pockets of pacifists in the CCF, mostly connected either to the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom or the Fellowship of Reconciliation.⁸ While their influence is significant, so too is the fact that pacifists, and particularly male pacifists, were much more likely to be university professors or United Church ministers. However individually important, pacifists like Carlyle King in Saskatoon, Stanley Knowles in Winnipeg or Anna Sissons or George Grube in Toronto were not representative of the CCF as a whole as suggested, for instance, by Socknat who speaks of the “the CCF’s early brand of pacifism.”⁹

Nor was the League for Social Reconstruction typical of the CCF as a whole, despite the bright light that has been shone on them. Such middle class elements had a different relationship to public policy than working-class socialists in the CCF. They spoke in different forums. Frank Underhill urged *Maclean’s* readers to “Keep Canada Out of War,” while Frank Scott spoke through the Canadian Institute for International Affairs, certainly an organisation with few proletarian credentials.¹⁰ They sought to persuade parliament to defend its right to decide, and to decide for neutrality in case of war. As Michiel Horn describes, the LSR was both nationalist and statist, part of a broader Canadian intelligentsia that “during the inter-war years looked to Ottawa for leadership”¹¹ and particularly a foreign policy independent of Britain. Theirs was a world that stretched from the Ottawa Mandarins to the CCF, and LSR members often spoke the language of progressivism because for them the possibility of influencing government policy was not as remote as it was for the ranks of the CCF. For the latter, letting Ottawa decide foreign policy was to relinquish popular control.

To identify pacifism and isolationism with middle class members of the CCF is not to imply any kind of consistency, unanimity or essentialism. Grube, for instance, relied on an isolationist rather than pacifist stance to argue in the

6 Cited in John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto, 1985), 233.

7 Thomas P. Socknat, “The Pacifist Background of the Early CCF,” in J. William Brennan, *Building the Co-operative Commonwealth: Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada* (Regina, 1984), 57.

8 Each is described in Socknat, *Witness Against War*.

9 Socknat, “The Pacifist Background,” 62.

10 Michiel Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada, 1930-1942* (Toronto, 1980), 151-2; R. Douglas Francis, *Frank H. Underhill: Intellectual Provocateur*, (Toronto, 1986), 107.

11 Horn, *League for Social Reconstruction*, 116.

fall of 1935 that “Abyssinia is not worth a general conflagration.”¹² There was also a strong anti-imperialist side to the LSR’s (and Woodsworth’s¹³) arguments, although one with deeper roots in J.A. Hobson and British Liberalism than in Marx or Lenin. In 1937, Frank Underhill foresaw an approaching European war as just “another of the good old balance-of-power imperialist struggles like all of the great wars of the past.”¹⁴ The Grubes and Underhills were not without influence on the ranks of the CCF, of course. They often wrote for the party press and lectured at local meetings, and their arguments about war were often seamlessly appended to others’. But it is important to note that they were a small minority in the CCF. Their experiences were quite distinct from the greater number who came to the CCF through their previous experience in socialist and labour parties, from the farmers’ movement or from labour struggles of the 1930s. Especially important here is the strong traditions of the older socialist parties – the Socialist Party of Canada, the Social Democratic Party, and the various labourist parties.¹⁵ Their views of war and (as we shall see) fascism as primarily class phenomena held great sway in the CCF and shaped the kind of debate that the party would have over these events. Whatever their own class backgrounds, they sought to build the CCF as a proletarian party which meant, to them, not simply recruiting workers but defending a working-class view of the world. My argument is that the CCF very much tried to wrestle with a class analysis of foreign events and war right up to September 1939, that large numbers of CCFers shared the same assumptions about these developments as did that other working-class tendency, the Communist Party, and that it was this tradition and debate that was effectively muted once the war began.

Foreign policy had not been very much on the minds of Western labourists and socialists when they met in Calgary in August 1932 to found the CCF.¹⁶ Rather, the reassuring “spirit of Locarno” still pervaded the international atmosphere and discussion in Calgary focused on the more pressing rampages of the depression and domestic social issues. The subsequent year’s convention had a

12 *New Commonwealth*, 14 September 1935.

13 Alan Mills portrays Woodsworth as a lifetime Hobbesian liberal in *Fool for Christ: The Political Thought of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto, 1991), 71. Ian McKay makes this point in *For a Working-Class Culture in Canada: A Selection of Colin McKay’s Writings on Sociology and Political Economy, 1897-1939*, (St. John’s, 1996), 574.

14 Cited in Francis, *Frank H. Underhill*, 107.

15 See Peter Campbell, “‘Stalwarts of the Struggle’: Canadian Marxists of the Third Way, 1879-1939,” Ph.D. dissertation, Queen’s University, 1991, and Craig Heron, “Labourism and the Canadian Working Class,” *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (Spring 1984).

16 NA, MG 28, IV, 1, CCF Records, Vol. 1, File: National Council and Executive Minutes, “Conference Resulting in the Formation of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation held in the Labor Temple, Calgary, Alberta, August 1/32.”

different mandate – producing a statement of principles, the Regina Manifesto – which required some statement on external relations. This was done almost without discussion, in part because its content was uncontroversial, weaving pacifist, anti-imperialist and isolationist sentiments seamlessly together. The declaration endorsed disarmament and world peace and the idea of a league of nations while at the same time identifying capitalism as the source of international conflict. “[G]enuine international co-operation,” read the Manifesto, “is incompatible with the capitalist regime that is in force in most countries.” It dismissed the League of Nations as “mainly a League of capitalist Great Powers,” and declared “We stand resolutely against all participation in imperialist wars.” Finally, it named British imperialism specifically, arguing that Canada must distance itself from London and “refuse to be entangled in any more wars fought to make the world safe for capitalism” (a statement that was conspicuously absent from the LSR manifesto).¹⁷ The translation of the Regina Manifesto into an “immediate program” was a constant challenge for the CCF, no less so in foreign affairs and the language of this debate reveals much about the party. This came to a head quickly as the 1934 national CCF convention hammered out an election manifesto. The National Council proposal reflected pacifist and isolationist sentiments; the first two sentences read: “The C.C.F. is unalterably opposed to war. Not a Canadian shall leave the fields of Canada to fight in foreign fields.” This provoked a long debate. An amendment to add the words “to uphold capitalism” after “foreign fields” was defeated. But, in the end, these two entire sentences were deleted and replaced by the following: “We recognize that modern war arises from the clash of interests in a world economy, based on competition; therefore the establishment of permanent world peace depends on abolishing competition and building the Co-operative Commonwealth.”¹⁸

Few, if any, CCFers would dissent from this view; indeed, it was axiomatic to all Depression era socialists. The issue, instead, was the extent to which class would be the defining element of the CCF’s propaganda and analysis. A focus on the inexorable link between capitalism and war was a defining characteristic of the world view of the Socialist Party of Canada, the organisational backbone of the early CCF in British Columbia. In 1932, the SPC adopted a program that supported anti-colonial movements, that identified militarism as essential to capitalism, and denounced the “capitalist-imperialist” League of Nations as creating “false hopes and illusions both as regards anti-militarism and change

17 Regina Manifesto, in Walter D. Young, *The Anatomy of a Party: the National CCF, 1932-61* (Toronto, 1969), Appendix A, 310-11. The LSR Manifesto simply reads: “(10) A foreign policy designed to obtain international economic co-operation and to promote disarmament and world peace.” Horn, *League for Social Reconstruction*, 220.

18 MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 1, File “National Council and Executive Minutes,” “Minutes of the C.C.F. Convention, Winnipeg, July 17th, 18th, 19th, 1934,” 6, 11, 12.

in the economic status of the workers.”¹⁹ The economic crisis of the 1930s was in itself a threat to peace. The heightened search for profit in war industries and in intensified international competition between capitalists and states explained growing international tensions. This was not an issue that divided the left. The CCF and the Communist Party, for instance, shared what might be considered an economic determinist view: The *New Commonwealth* (the organ of the Ontario CCF) “recognize[d] as fully as Mr. [Leslie] Morris [of the CPC] that war arises from the clash of economic interests in the competitive capitalist economy.”²⁰ There was no difference of opinion that socialism, by abolishing competition and scarcity, would “create a system wherein [war] is unnecessary.”²¹ It was this community of interest that made the most successful of the unity efforts of the decade possible, the Canadian Youth Congress. Uniting not just Communists and CCFers, but other social, political and religious youth groups as well, the CYC displayed “remarkable unanimity of opinion” on the “true causes” of war.²²

By the mid-1930s, though, the issue of war was becoming increasingly immediate and vague propaganda inadequate. The rise of fascism, attacks by Japan on China and Italy on Ethiopia, and the Spanish Civil War, all forced the CCF to deal with war as an immediate threat. Collectively, these developments reinforced socialists’ tendencies to deal with war as a specifically class-based phenomenon. The CCF, no less than other currents on the left, analysed these events as the epiphenomena of capitalism at its highest stage. The world-wide economic crisis had removed the veneer of civility obscuring the character of capitalist social relations. As one delegate told the 1935 Ontario CCF Convention, “Fascism is Capitalism gone nudist.”²³ And Upton Sinclair defined fascism to CCFers as “Capitalism plus murder” (a definition they would also apply to modern war).²⁴ The decade was replete with examples of the measures to which capital would go to defend itself. From the relief camps, to Section 98 of the Criminal Code, to the police attack on the On-to-Ottawa Trek, to the attack on Tim Buck in Kingston Penitentiary, to the Padlock Law in Quebec, there were plenty of putatively fascist incidents. CCFer Fred Fish expressed the connection most succinctly: “The basis of Fascism is economic, and finds its expression, however camouflaged, during the decline of capitalism throughout

19 University of British Columbia, Special Collections (UBC), Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, Box 45A, File 45-3, “Socialist Party of Canada Minutes, 1931-33,” Provincial Executive Minutes, 10 October 1932.

20 *New Commonwealth*, 1 December 1934.

21 *New Commonwealth*, 20 April 1935.

22 *New Commonwealth*, 8 June 1935.

23 NA, MG 28 IV, I, CCF Records, Vol. 48, File: Ontario Conventions, 1935-1945, minutes, “Annual Convention of the C.C.F. (Ontario Section), 20 Apr. 1935.”

24 *New Commonwealth*, 10 September 1938.

the countries of the world. Fascism breeds war, and war is the concomitant of the system the C.C.F. pledges itself to obliterate."²⁵

It would be wrong to dismiss these comments as rhetorical excesses. In the context of European developments and North American social and economic pressures, fascism appeared as a growing and omnipresent threat. Admittedly, the "full tide of this Fascist reaction has not yet reached the English-speaking democracies. But the tide is coming in . . . time to our countries also."²⁶ Growing organically out of liberal capitalism, its early signs could manifest themselves in a variety of ways; how might fascism be "camouflaged" in Canada? There were various possibilities. The tendency to see in government actions the seeds of fascism was widespread whether it was Bennett's iron fist or the municipal disenfranchisement of property owners with tax arrears.²⁷ This was hardly a feature of individual declarations. In 1937, Herbert Orliffe, the Ontario Provincial Secretary, wrote to CCF unit secretaries accusing Mitch Hepburn of representing an "incipient fascism" and provincial president John Mitchell regularly warned of a rising domestic fascism.²⁸ Fascism could also coalesce around an extra-parliamentary pole. When, for instance, the Communists wrote the CCF claiming that "[w]e all agree that the party of [renegade Tory H.H.] Stevens is the crystallization of a Fascist party in Canada under a cloak of demagogic promises,"²⁹ they were not far from the mark. Frank Underhill told the founding convention of the Ontario Co-operative Commonwealth Youth Movement (CCYM) that "Stevens' attempt to exploit the discontent of the petty bourgeoisie is an exact parallel to the preliminary steps which were the prelude to Fascism in Italy and to the Nazi terror in Germany."³⁰ On other occasions, Aberhart was tarred with the same brush. Indeed, in the debate over whether to co-operate with the independent Tory New Dealer W.A. Herridge, the staid Angus MacInnis wrote privately to David Lewis: "I can see no quicker way to fascism in Canada and the total discredit of all third parties than the Herridge line at the present time."³¹ And there were, of course,

²⁵ *New Commonwealth*, 13 October 1934.

²⁶ *New Commonwealth*, 20 October 1934.

²⁷ "The amendment made to the Municipal Act at the last session of the provincial legislature, under which Arthur William's reeve ship in East York is being challenged, can quite accurately be described as fascist in character and designed to limit, to outlaw democracy. . . ." *New Commonwealth*, 25 January 1936. See also Patricia V. Schulz, *The East York Workers' Association: A Response to the Great Depression* (Toronto, 1975).

²⁸ NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Papers, Vol. 49, File: Ontario Council and Executive Minutes, 1934-37, circular letter, Herbert Orliffe to "Dear Comrade Secretary," June 1937 and Vol. 48, File: Ontario Conventions 1935-1945, minutes, "Fifth Annual Provincial Convention, CCF (Ontario Section), 15-16 April 1938," President Mitchell's Opening Address.

²⁹ NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 362, File: Correspondence: re: Communist Party and activities, 1935-1943, Sam Carr to M.J. Coldwell, 25 July 1935.

³⁰ *New Commonwealth*, 20 October 1934.

³¹ NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Papers, Vol. 102, File: Mrs. Grace MacInnis, Angus MacInnis to David Lewis, 5 July 1939.

small self-declared fascist groups as well in Quebec where the CCF confronted clerical fascism when, for instance, they tried to hold meetings in support of the Spanish Loyalists in Montreal.³² The preface to a resolution from the Kamloops CCF reflected a widespread sentiment by 1938 when it noted that “since the formation of the C.C.F. Party there have been tremendous changes in the World Situation owing to the rise of Militarism and Fascism in all countries including Canada.”³³ “Only a Liberal sentimentalist,” felt Underhill, “can be blind to the many signs which point in the Fascist direction on this continent.”³⁴ Hoping to claim leadership of the anti-fascist struggle in Canada, David Lewis pointed to Quebec clerical fascism and to Hepburn and Aberhart, as evidence that the CCF had to dedicate itself to exposing the fascist peril in Canada.³⁵

The fear of impending fascism persisted, in fact, into the war as the Ontario Provincial Council openly warned of the Premier’s drift towards fascism, the Windsor CCF decried rumours of a national coalition government as fascistic, and the Stanley Park CCF in Vancouver considered the corporatism evident in government regulatory boards as evidence of fascism.³⁶ Again, the concern pervaded the CCF. While the language was amended for the audience, M.J. Coldwell warned Parliament on 9 September 1939 of the dangers of “a totally regimented and totalitarian state.”³⁷

This concern was not just focused on Canada, but shaped their view of international developments in particular. Most importantly, evidence of an emerging fascism was apparent in British Toryism. In 1935, Sir Stafford Cripps, the left-wing Labour MP and political confidant of several leading CCFers, particularly Graham Spry, told the Ontario CCF convention that fascism was the inevitable outcome of decaying capitalism and added that “We have in England suffered too. There has been a growth of Country-Gentleman Fascism which can be just as oppressive as the more violent Fascism of other countries.”³⁸ It was easy to view Italy’s aggression against Ethiopia in a similar light as Britain’s history of imperialist adventures, and Britain’s failure to come to the aid of the Spanish republic was read as covert support for Franco as the British Conservatives’ lesser evil. Indeed, it was Britain that was likely to lead Canada

32 *New Commonwealth*, 31 October 1936 and 6 November 1937.

33 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Papers, Vol. 12, File 1938 Convention – Resolutions and Delegates, M.J. Coldwell to David Lewis, 27 April 1938.

34 *New Commonwealth*, 20 October 1934.

35 *New Commonwealth*, 30 October 1937.

36 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Papers, Vol. 48, File: Ontario Conventions, 1935-45, resolutions, CCF Ontario Section, 3 and 4 April 1942 and resolutions, Preliminary Agenda, CCF Provincial Convention [Ontario], 20 February 1939; and Vol. 79, File 79-5 British Columbia – Conventions, minutes, CCF (BC) Provincial Council, 5 June 1943.

37 Cited in *New Commonwealth*, 21 September 1939.

38 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Papers, Vol. 48, File: Ontario Conventions, 1935-1945, minutes, “Annual Convention of the C.C.F., 20 April 1935.

into war and according to David Lewis, “[t]o break the bonds which tie us to the imperialist interests of Great Britain is a first duty for Canadian socialists.”³⁹ Some soon developed even bleaker images. In the context of Chamberlain’s dealings with Hitler, the Windsor Central CCF referred to the “Tory, Fascist National Government” of Great Britain in a resolution to the provincial convention.⁴⁰ Indeed, in the aftermath of Munich, the CCF press questioned rhetorically how long Moseley would be kept out of Chamberlain’s government.⁴¹

While such offhanded comments were plentiful, the Ontario *New Commonwealth* printed a two-page spread a week later by Carroll Coburn, one of the CCF’s main propagandists, entitled “How Another War Might Bring Fascism to Great Britain.” While viewing fascism as avoidable (Carroll pointed to the strength of the British labour movement in preventing it), he also noted the extent to which the First World War had undermined Britain’s international economic role, thus increasing the precariousness of British capital, and the willingness of the British state to restrict democracy in war through the Defense of the Realm Regulations. Although he acknowledged that Britain was wealthier and more stable than Germany or Italy, he added that in those countries “we have seen what Fascism really is – capitalism with its back to the wall.” British capitalist was potentially headed down the same road. On top of the possibility that the economic disorganisation of depression era Britain may only be maintained through Fascism “however constitutionally it may be adopted,” a war would only provide the “motive and opportunity” for capitalist rulers to impose fascism. No doubt the limitations on liberty under the War Measures Act during the First World War was still fresh in CCFers minds; although in the 1930s such measures portended an even more vicious regime.⁴² Coburn’s analysis built on common CCF assumptions about capitalism and fascism, and drew a conclusion that was becoming an increasingly common argument against war in the CCF. Supporting capitalist governments in their wars against fascism was akin to fighting fire with gasoline; it threatened to spread fascism rather than extinguish it.

39 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Papers, Vol. 244, File: CCYM General 1935-1950, David Lewis to Eamon Park, 15 March 1938.

40 NA, MG 28, IV, 1, CCF Papers, Vol 48, File: Ontario Conventions, 1935-1945, resolutions, “Preliminary Agenda, CCF Provincial Convention [Ontario], 1939, 20 February 1939.

41 *New Commonwealth*, 8 October 1938. Generally more sympathetic to the left-wing Independent Labour Party than the Labour Party itself, the CCF also publicly despaired of the Labour Party’s ability to provide an effective alternative government. See *New Commonwealth*, 31 October 1936, “British Labor Party Conference in Edinburgh Wavers on Vital Issues.”

42 *New Commonwealth*, 15 October 1938. Colin McKay agreed with his analysis, although argued more optimistically that the British labour movement “generally have discovered the power of solidarity” and would not easily allow fascism to gain power, *New Commonwealth*, 12 November 1938.

So, what to do? How did the CCF plan to confront the threat of fascism and particularly of war in the dangerous 1930s? This was, of course, no new problem. In 1914, a far more united European labour and socialist movement had dramatically and decisively failed to prevent such a catastrophe. Little came, then, of resolutions proposing a general strike or some "definite action" in the event of war.⁴³ For the most part, the CCF fell back on a highly propagandist and somewhat maximalist approach arguing that the only alternative to war was socialism. Woodsworth was no less convinced of this than the rest of his party, telling the 1936 National CCF convention that "Only the abolition of capitalism with its social injustice, its imperialism, will end the age-long curse of war." The CCYM spoke in similar terms, of creating a social system where war was "unnecessary."⁴⁴ This was hardly a guide to anti-war action, and those anxious to act against the threat of war looked elsewhere to supplement their socialist activity in the CCF. The WIL and pacifist groups attracted some, as did united action with the others. In 1934 and 1935, the Soviet Union and the Comintern responded to the growing threat by abandoning its isolation and initiating the popular front. One of the first manifestations of this was the League Against War and Fascism founded in late 1934. The CCF played a considerable role in its founding; much of the initial publicity was undertaken by means of a well-attended national tour of British Labour MP Aneurin Bevan and German Social Democrat Kurt Rosenfeld.⁴⁵ And the movement was built upon significant local organising. In Hamilton thirty-eight local organisations affiliated and local CCF leader Sam Lawrence played a major role helping to organise a demonstration of 5000 by August 1935. In keeping with the discourse we have already observed, they unanimously condemned the fascistic characteristics of the Bennett New Deal and various examples of "legislated fascism" in the provinces.⁴⁶

43 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 5, File: National Council and Executive Correspondence, 1934, "Resolutions: C.C.F. Annual Convention, July 17-19, 1934, Winnipeg"; UBC, Angus MacInnis Collection, Box 45, File: 45-5 Socialist Party of Canada 1934-35, "Provincial Executive 8 July 1934," resolution from Vancouver Centre. Woodsworth was particularly opposed to motions calling for general strike in the event of war, NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 107, File: J.S. Woodsworth, Woodsworth to N.F. Priestley, 23 April 1934. Nevertheless, Jean Laing, CCFer representing the Toronto Labour Council, urged the first Canadian Congress Against War and Fascism to adopt a clause calling for a general strike in the event of war. NA, RG 146, Records of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), Vol. 791, "Report: First Canadian Congress Against War and Fascism, 6 and 7 October, 1934," 18. (Access 96-A-00065).

44 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 1, File: National Council and Executive Minutes, 1932-36, Minutes of CCF Annual Convention, August 1936, p.2; *New Commonwealth*, 20 April 1935.

45 Two thousand attended in Winnipeg; one thousand in Vancouver, *New Commonwealth*, 18 and 25 August 1934.

46 NA, MG 28 IV, 4, Communist Party of Canada (CPC) Papers, Vol. 39, File: 39-37, "Conference of Canadian League Against War and Fascism, Hamilton District, April 27th and 28th, 1935; *New Commonwealth*, 10 August 1935.

PACIFISM OR ANTI-IMPERIALISM?

The CCF's relation to the League Against War and Fascism is complicated. In part, it reflected widely varying attitudes within the CCF to the Communist Party; opposition to the CP did not necessarily mean opposition to collaborative activities.⁴⁷ In their opposition to working with the Communists in the League, some leaders of the CCF found themselves between a rock and a hard place. While understandably wary of the CP's new found interest in unity and often unwilling to be associated with Bolshevism, they had to acknowledge that the CCF and CP shared a general analysis of the sources of fascism and war, and that the CCF had lost the initiative in this work. The result was a patchwork response to the popular front and the League Against War and Fascism. For instance, T.C. Douglas and the national CCYM affiliated to the League while the Ontario CCYM, albeit active in such work, did not.⁴⁸ As well, key figures in the party had quite varying views of this work, many agreeing with David Lewis, Graham Spry and Eugene Forsey, among others, who maintained an ad hoc policy, wanting to distance themselves from the CP when necessary, but willing to work with them on "immediate issues."⁴⁹ In part this was out of fear of ceding terrain to the communists, but it was also the product of a recognition among many loyal CCFers that European fascism had succeeded due to working-class disunity and, however misguided, the Communists were their class allies.⁵⁰

Not all CCFers agreed. In some cases, fear of the Communists fed sectarianism, as when it was declared that the CCF and CCYM were themselves "Leagues Against War and Fascism."⁵¹ The Ontario CCF executive, which was particularly opposed to the popular front, declared that the CCF was too busy fighting the *causes* of war and fascism to be active in the League Against War and Fascism. As the Communists became increasingly intent on rallying liberal opponents of fascism to its popular front, they increasingly dropped their appeal to socialism leading the BC Convention to curtail its participation in the League Against War and Fascism by a resolution which declared that "we believe that War and Fascism can only be avoided by removing the cause – the capitalist system."⁵² The communists increasingly seemed to abandon this goal in the last half of the 1930s.

47 For a fuller discussion, see Naylor, "Politics and Class: The Character of 1930s Socialism in Canada," unpublished paper, Canadian Historical Association, 1993.

48 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Papers, Vol. 1, File: National Council and Executive Minutes, National Council, Winnipeg, 30 November 1935, pp. 8, 9.

49 NA, MG 30 D 297, Graham Spry Papers, File 1-26, Irene Biss to Graham Spry, 26 August 1937; NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Papers, Vol. 46, File: Ontario Correspondence with Provincial Secretary, 1934-41, David Lewis to Herbert Orliff, 21 April 1937 [erroneously dated 1936] and Vol. 12, File: 1938 Convention – Resolutions and Delegates, Eugene Forsey to David Lewis, 18 May 1938.

50 See Naylor, "Politics and Class."

51 *New Commonwealth*, 1 February 1936.

52 UBC, Angus MacInnis Collection, File 64-1: CCF (Provincial Party) 1937-38, minutes, Provincial Convention, C.C.F. (B.C.), 2-5 July 1937.

The related issue that tested CCF/CP relations on issues of war and fascism was the Spanish Civil War. Both parties were quick off the mark in organising to defend the republic in the autumn of 1936 and, given the gravity of the situation, there was considerable pressure for them to work together. Indeed, this was precisely the kind of immediate issue that led many prominent CCFers to cooperate with the CP, including many who had opposed other united activities.⁵³ Now there was little debate and the CCF played a central role here, allowing one of their own, Ben Spence, to chair the Spanish Aid Committee⁵⁴ while Graham Spry played a central role as vice-chair of the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy that included Communists. As Spry remembered, "The idea of a C.C.F. hospital in Spain, an idea to which Dr. Norman Bethune's blood transfusion unit gave reality, was partly a C.C.F. tactic to match the Communists' recruitment of C.C.F. lads for the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion of combatants."⁵⁵ Certainly the Communists gained the most publicity and support around Spain as the Party that was actively fighting fascism.

The Spanish Civil War was also a test of the strength of pacifism in the CCF. Notably, there is little evidence of this being an issue. Certainly the focus on humanitarian aid was in keeping both with whatever pacifist impulses existed in the CCF, along with its legalism, but there was little opposition to overt support for the Mac-Paps. There were only rare reports of CCFers fighting in Spain,⁵⁶ but money was raised by the CCF "for the Spanish Loyalists," and for the wounded members of the Mac-Paps.⁵⁷ Dr. Lyle Telford of the BC CCF was indignant when the federal government questioned his practice of signing passport applications for Canadian volunteers going to Spain.⁵⁸ There were no protests from CCFers that war was an inappropriate means of fighting fascism in Spain. Rather, the CCF officially opposed an arms embargo on Spain

53 For instance leaders of the generally anti-popular front Ontario CCF Executive such as Jolliffe and Leavens, NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 49, File: Ontario Council and Executive Minutes, 1934-37, minutes, CCF Ontario Provincial Executive, 23 October 1937. They required, at times, some prodding by David Lewis, who feared that the CCF would lose face if they were not active on Spain, *ibid*, 7 May 1938.

54 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 49, File: Ontario Council and Executive Minutes, 1934-37, minutes, CCF Ontario Provincial Executive, 9 July 1937.

55 NA, MG 30 D297, Graham Spry Papers, Vol. 68, File 69-15: memoirs (ms), "Remembering the Agitators of the Thirties," 1969, p.7.

56 But see *New Commonwealth*, 15 July 1937.

57 UBC, Angus MacInnis Collection, Vol. 46, File 46-3, minutes, Provincial Council, C.C.F., (B.C.), 28 May 1938 and NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Papers, Vol. 49, File: Ontario Council and Executive Minutes, 1938-39, minutes, CCF Provincial Executive, 30 August 1938.

58 NA, RG 146, CSIS Records, Vol. 749, "Canadian League for Peace and Democracy, Vancouver," 9 February 1937. (Access 96-A-00065).

as well as attempts by Ottawa to prevent Canadians from fighting there.⁵⁹ Individual CCF personalities such as William Irvine were blunt, using the Spanish war both to condemn pacifism and to suggest that “we” may someday have to fight the same battle.⁶⁰ After all, the Spanish conflict was not a “capitalist war.”

Spain, however, was only one front and the CCFers pressed for greater activity against fascism and war in general, particularly as the party backed away from most popular front activities. The result was the 1937 pamphlet “Why Armaments” and the campaign to “take the profits out of war” by cutting arms spending and nationalising munitions producers. The national petition became the first real national CCF campaign, carefully crafted to appeal to both pacifists and straight anti-imperialists and to drive home, in a particularly reductionist manner, the connection between profit and war.⁶¹ But there were growing differences that were particularly apparent in Saskatchewan where a uniquely pacifist CCF branch in Saskatoon led by Carlyle King confronted an increasingly pro-interventionist provincial leader George Williams. The arrival of the pamphlets from Ottawa ignited a small war in the provincial office.⁶² The National CCF Executive chided Williams for publicly displaying the disunity of the Saskatchewan CCF on this issue and Woodsworth, incidentally, used the occasion to deny that he was a “do nothing pacifist.”⁶³

For the moment, though, the Williams/King dispute had surprisingly few echoes elsewhere. The CCF had few early advocates of military participation such as Williams and for the most part the fuzzy line between anti-imperialism and pacifism in peacetime allowed quite contradictory statements to go unremarked. This only provoked some comment in 1938 when the Ontario CCYM – CCF youth were, not surprisingly, particularly active in issues of war and

59 NA, MG28 IV, 1, CCF Records, Vol. 48, File: Ontario Conventions, 1935-1945, minutes, “Fifth Annual Provincial Convention, CCF (Ontario Section), 15-16 April, 1938. T.C. Douglas, as national CCYM leader protested attempts to ban volunteers, *New Commonwealth*, 23 Jan. 1937.

60 NA, RG 146, CSIS Records, Vol. 748, “Canadian League for Peace and Democracy, Edmonton,” 3 April 1936 and 20 June 1938. (Access 96-A-00065).

61 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 12, File: National Conventions and Inter-Provincial Conferences, 1937 Convention – Report; *New Commonwealth*, 6 and 18 February 1937. See also T.C. Douglas’s comments to the Second Canadian Congress against War and Fascism, 6-8 December 1935 in NA, RG 146, CSIS Records, Vol. 791, “League against War and Fascism, 2nd Conv.” Report, 7 (Access 96-A-00065).

62 This is best documented in Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Co-operative Commonwealth Federation – Saskatchewan Section Papers, B 7 II, File 192: National Defence, 1937.”

63 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, CCF Papers, File: National Council and Executive Minutes, 3 March 1937. Allen Mills notes that however much Woodsworth detested war, a “pacifist” response to the war was hardly a foregone conclusion: “A curious observer of Woodsworth’s politics might have concluded in, say, 1935 that in the event of an eventual war against fascism Woodsworth would not necessarily have chosen personal non-violence and national non-involvement.” *Fool for Christ*, 192.

peace – attempted to adopt a more concrete response to war. After noting that “the cause of war lies in the drive for profit inherent in the capitalist system and that only a fundamental social change can eradicate the cause of war,” the CCYM convention called for an extensive campaign against war among youth and instructed its executive to apply to the federal government for the recognition of CCYM members as conscientious objectors.⁶⁴ The action was not entirely unprecedented; in 1934 the BC Young Socialist League (connected to the Socialist Party and CCF) had collectively pledged never to participate in war.⁶⁵ In reply, the national CCF executive unanimously chided the Ontario CCYM for crossing the line from socialism to pacifism by refusing to fight under any circumstance and not just in an imperialist war. Speaking for the Executive, David Lewis responded that “our national policy and our parliamentary group have for two years been calling on the government of Canada to take a stand in support of countries such as Spain and China, victims of Fascist aggression, and to supplement that action in support of these countries by the demand for concerted democratic action against the brazen progress of Fascist expansion.”⁶⁶

The central leaders of the CCF lavished considerable attention on the CCYM in this period, in part because of the importance of the war issue to youth, and because the CCYM was on the front lines of public debate over foreign policy because of their involvement in the Canadian Youth Congress.⁶⁷ In that forum, as in the League Against War and Fascism, the Communists fought hard for collective security, for military preparedness, and for sanctions. Despite the dismissal of the League of Nations as imperialist in the Regina Manifesto, the CCF’s attitude towards it was anything but clear. Many, like Woodsworth, continued to emphasise the class character of the League of Nations and pointed to the dangers involved in collective security and even sanctions in the hands of imperialist governments.⁶⁸ And, as a whole, the CCF was disturbed by the CP’s “War Mongering on the Left.”⁶⁹ This policy tended to elide the differences between pacifists and anti-imperialists. E.A. Beder, the secretary of the League Against War and Fascism, drew this conclusion as he

64 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 344, File: CCYM, General, 1935-50, Eamon Park to David Lewis, 24 February 1938; *New Commonwealth*, 23 January 1937

65 *New Commonwealth*, 8 December 1934.

66 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 344, File: CCYM, General 1935-1950, David Lewis to Eamon Park, 15 March 1938.

67 Indeed, the 29-year-old David Lewis went out of his way to have himself appointed as a CCF delegate to the 1938 CYC convention. NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 344, CCYM General 1935-1950, David Lewis to Eamon Park, 16 May 1938.

68 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 1, File: National Council and Executive Minutes, minutes, National Council, 30 November 1938, p. 13.

69 *New Commonwealth*, 5, 12 and 19 June 1937.

PACIFISM OR ANTI-IMPERIALISM?

summarized the differences within his organisation in 1936: "To generalize, one can say that the liberals and communists favor the collective idea centering around the League of Nations and the application of sanctions, whereas the pacifists and socialists favor the fullest sort of opposition to imperialist war."⁷⁰

This was far from a unanimous position in the CCF however. The ideal of an international organisation mediating and even policing international differences was attractive and much of the CCF's critique of the League of Nations was the extent to which capitalism and imperialism prevented this. Some like William Irvine of Alberta urged from the outset that the CCF support economic and military sanctions against Italy.⁷¹ Evidence was readily forthcoming in the cases of Spain, Ethiopia and China where the great powers had prevented the League from acting effectively to stop aggression. Indeed, many supporters of the League felt the same way, particularly in the League of Nations Society. David Lewis not only urged CCFers to be active in this venue as a means of mobilising support for a reformed League of Nations as alluded to in the Regina Manifesto, but also recognized the corollary: the relative abandonment of class as a means of international analysis.⁷² The fact was, though, that the League was not going to be reformed any time soon and undoubtedly many CCFers hoped that sanctions would be applied and be successful while, simultaneously, recognising their concomitant dangers. Only this can explain how, a resolutely anti-League CCF in British Columbia could demand that the international body name the aggressors in Spain (with the assumption that they would take action against them).⁷³ By 1938, when BC's Angus MacInnis stood up to urge support of sanctions and collective security, he argued that such a move would not imply abandoning socialists' understanding of imperialism or the class nature of the League. "It is not true," he argued, "that a League, even a capitalist League could not be made to function to preserve peace." An example was sanctions: why had they not worked? "[I]t is not only the capitalist countries," he added, "who are to blame for the non-functioning of the League, because I have heard myself socialists opposing the imposition of sanctions on Italy in the

70 York University Archives (YUA), Edward Arthur Beder Collection, Box 9, File: VI.49 Draft and Printed Copies of Minutes, National Bureau, Canadian League Against War and Fascism, 1935-37, Beder to A.A. McLeod, 1 June 1936.

71 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 1, File: National Council and Executive Minutes, minutes, National Council, 30 November 1935, 12.

72 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 93, File: T.C. Douglas, David Lewis to Douglas, 28 November 1938; MG 30 D 211, F.R. Scott Papers, Vol. 12, File: C.C.F., General, 1935-August 1938, David Lewis to F.R. Scott, 2 July 1936: "I was under the impression that we were going to avoid general statements about war being inherent in the capitalist system & concentrate on outlining a policy towards the League. I am much happier that you have combined the two."

73 UBC, Angus MacInnis Collection, Box 46, File 46-1 CCF (Provincial Party) 1937-38, minutes, Provincial Convention, C.C.F. (B.C.), 2,3,4, and 5 July 1937.

Abyssinian affair.”⁷⁴ David Lewis, stressing that he had “no illusions” about the League of Nations, basically agreed, although warning that collective security can easily provide a “cloak” for imperialist interests.⁷⁵

The CCF’s attitude to the League of Nations was unresolvable and its position that collective security would be appropriate to a “reformed” League provided a rubric under which quite different positions could be found. It spoke to all of the criticisms of the League and offended few, and it sold to the masses. The “muddled confusion” that the “Youth in Revolt” columnist saw in the Canadian Youth Congress applied to the CCF: “What was the attitude to the League of Nations [at the 1937 CYC]? After all sides had been heard the proposal enunciated was for ‘reform’ of the League. What ‘reform?’ That was left unstated. It was felt that ‘reform of the League’ could be widely interpreted – and would therefore be acceptable to the vast majority of the congress. The opinion was advanced that it would be supported by socialists who condemn the League as capitalist. It would be supported by those who desire the strengthening of the ‘collective security’ sections of the League covenant. The French-Canadian Catholic groups would support it because to them ‘reform’ meant exclusion of the Soviet Union.”⁷⁶ The inadequacies of the League provided the occasion for socialist education, which many argued was all that the CCF could do in any case, but any attempt to proceed to further action threatened to unearth deep differences of opinion.⁷⁷ In November 1938 the British Columbia Provincial Council urged that something be done soon about “the present vacillating foreign policy” of the CCF.⁷⁸

Of course little was done, or could be done, before war broke out in September 1939 and the situation the National Council faced in its deliberations had been qualitatively transformed. The fascinating discussion that took place at the National Council was deeply rooted in the kind of social analysis I have been describing. Pacifism and isolationism were, at best, bit players in this drama.

74 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 12, File: National Conventions and Inter-provincial Conferences, minutes, 1938 Convention, 88.

75 *Ibid.*, 91-2.

76 *New Commonwealth*, 22 May 1937.

77 This, for instance, is how the BC CCF Provincial Executive responded. In 1936, they passed such a motion: “That, in the opinion of this Committee, no good purpose would be served at this time by any action on the part of this organization, either in unqualified repudiation or support of economic sanctions against Italy; but that a vigorous policy be developed to awaken public opinion to the menace of war arising from the present conflict of imperialist aims under capitalism.” UBC, Angus MacInnis Collection, Box 45, File 45-12 CCF Executive and Convention Reports, 1935-36, minutes, Provincial Executive, C.C.F. (B.C.), 18 January 1936.

78 UBC, Angus MacInnis Collection, Box 46, File 46-3 CCF (Provincial Party), minutes, Provincial Council, C.C.F. (B.C.), 26 November 1938.

PACIFISM OR ANTI-IMPERIALISM?

While Woodsworth reminded the audience of his "Christianity" and Frank Scott commented that "Hitler is a product of Europe,"⁷⁹ these were not the focus of discussion. Rather, debate concerned two issues: was this an imperialist war? and what policy best assured the future of the CCF and of socialism? Notably, all participants were on the same page, none had to justify their assumptions about the nature of social class, fascism, or war.

The tone of the meeting was remembered quite accurately over two decades later by M.J. Coldwell:

Before the meeting, I was well aware of the fact that Mr. Williams and some of his Saskatchewan supporters were for all-out participation in the war, even to the extent of agreeing to the conscription of manpower. On the other hand, non-participation was very strong in British Columbia and Manitoba. A great deal of time was spent in discussing the causes of the war crisis. So keen was the discussion that, at one stage, the leader of the Party in Manitoba moved a resolution to the effect that the Council should refuse to discuss any measure that would put Canada into the war. The motion was seconded by Mr. Woodsworth, who argued that all the known facts clearly placed the developing war into a category of an imperialist struggle and that to support the war would be to disobey Convention resolutions on foreign policy.⁸⁰

Opponents of the war spoke like Chester Ronning of Alberta: "We must refuse to participate in a capitalist war. We made that stand in Regina."⁸¹ John Mitchell, president of the Ontario CCF agreed: "This war is an imperialist war. . . . What can we do as the CCF to hasten the end of the war. If all nations refused to supply them with the necessary means to make war, the war could be stopped."⁸² National CCF Organizer E.J. Garland urged all to "Hold firm to your convictions, arrived when reason prevailed," reminded them that the question was whether they would fight with Chamberlain "who went to Hitler's assistance," and argued that this "is a war between two power groups."⁸³ The notion that this would be a war for democracy naturally had a rough ride given the experience of the previous war. Frank Underhill asked: "Why should we ally ourselves with all the capitalists in this country to bring about democracy, with the McCullaghs, Drew, Hepburn and The Financial Post. All these people

79 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 3, File: National Council Meetings and Reports, Emergency National Council Meeting, 7 and 7, September 1939, pp.2 and 5.

80 NA, MG 27 III C12, M.J. Coldwell Papers, Vol. 58, File: Memoirs 17-32, "Memoirs, No. 24, 21 April 1964."

81 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 3, File: National Council Meetings and Reports, "Emergency National Council Meeting, 6 and 7 Sept. 1939," 8.

82 *Ibid.*, 12.

83 *Ibid.*, 13.

are getting into the war with both feet.”⁸⁴ The dangers of supporting a war led by the likes of a Chamberlain were apparent. As Lorna Cotton argued, the “ultimate victor is fascism either British or German fascism. There is not much choice between the two. We have no faith in the peace which would come out of Chamberlain and his like.” Frank Scott opined that “Fascism will come quicker by participation They [capitalists] will use the war to create an instrument of class government.”⁸⁵ Quebec’s Guy Musson agreed, and Manitoba MLA S.J. Farmer added that the CCF’s support of the war would not give them any real leverage to reshape the post-war world.⁸⁶ Finally, Stanley Knowles offered the important observation that supporting the war would forever mark the CCF: “After the war is over, if we have given our consent to it we will never be looked upon as a movement that meant something else.”⁸⁷ Opposition to supporting the government’s war effort then was substantial and, as the National Vice-Chairman of the party, BC’s Grant McNeil pointed out, agreeing with Woodsworth’s motion did not make him a pacifist.⁸⁸

This was the terrain upon which supporters of participation had to respond. Primarily this meant George Williams of Saskatchewan. He clearly acknowledged that “the war is the outcome of capitalism” and that if fascism came to Canada, it need not be imposed by Germany: “There is sufficient big business and big interests in Canada for fascism to come.”⁸⁹ A.A. Heaps, who led the majority of his Manitoba Independent Labor Party in support of participation, agreed “that capitalism may be the root cause.”⁹⁰ As well, Williams argued (more articulately afterwards than at the National Council meeting) that “this is not an Imperialist War. England and France do not stand to gain a foot of land or a five cent piece in wealth.”⁹¹ While others may define imperialism more broadly, Williams recognized that this was very much the issue that CCFers had

84 Ibid., 6.

85 Ibid., 5.

86 Ibid., 12, 14. Note that in keeping with historians’ tendency to label any opposition to the war, Nelson Wiseman has automatically termed Farmer’s stance “pacifist.” *Social Democracy in Manitoba: A History of the CCF/NDP* (Winnipeg, 1985), 23.

87 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 3, File: National Council Meetings and Reports, “Emergency National Council Meeting, 6 and 7 Sept. 1939,” 4.

88 Ibid., 23.

89 Ibid., 3, 4.

90 Ibid., 8. The Manitoba ILP, which was affiliated to the CCF but maintained a stormy relationship with the provincial CCF, opposed the National Council’s war position and argued in favour of full participation, although even they were not unanimous in this. NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 61, File: Manitoba: Correspondence with the Provincial Secretary, 1934-1946, Charles Biesick to David Lewis, 26 December 1939 and 23 May 1940 and Vol. 109, File: War, 1939, J.S. Woodsworth to David Lewis, 5 October 1939.

91 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 106, File: G.H. Williams, 1937-1941, G.H. Williams to M.J. Coldwell, 5 December 1939.

to resolve in their own minds. The other card they had to play was another working-class principle – internationalism. As Angus MacInnis, pointed out: “I am an international socialist. Socialists all over the world are in it.” There was more than a little irony in this statement. CCF foreign policy had been driven by a sense of proletarian internationalism; that international competition and war was the product of capitalism. Workers had no quarrel with each other. Now, the same principle by which socialists had resisted militarism was invoked in the interest of participation in war. Still, as MacInnis had noted earlier in the meeting, the Great War had hardly seen the demise of the working-class movement, but rather its flowering in size and militancy.⁹²

In the end, prompted somewhat by a telegram from the British Labour Party,⁹³ the National Council adopted the famous compromise proposed by the BC members – to issue a statement that the CCF would support only economic aid to the allies, that it would oppose any expeditionary force being sent overseas, and that it would concentrate on preserving democracy at home. This was widely touted as the only policy that would have been able to keep the CCF united. David Lewis argued that no principles were abandoned: “I don’t feel that I have compromised. All that has happened is that taking for granted that Canada is at war. . . . The question is whether young Canadians are going to be sent to Europe to fight this war. If we can prevent this, the CCF would have done the greatest thing that could be done. Let it go out to the country that the CCF is the only party that has had the courage to say that no young Canadian shall go overseas to fight the battles of Chamberlain and his ilk.”⁹⁴

This was not exactly the message that was read by the country. The fact was that the CCF had abandoned opposition to the war itself and, for the moment, all the King Government was really proposing was economic aid. The press often painted the National Council as supporters of the Prime Minister’s position.⁹⁵ Moreover, the policy contrasted sharply with Woodsworth’s public disavowal of the war, which naturally grabbed the headlines in the days that followed. What did CCF members think of what had happened? How did they interpret both international events and the National Council decision.

What is most apparent is that Woodsworth was far from a “lonely” figure. The party membership never had an opportunity to debate the issue of war in

92 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 3, File: National Council Meetings and Reports, Emergency National Council Meeting, 6 and 7 September 1939, pp. 18 and 23.

93 *Ibid.*, 25. Coldwell felt that “[t]his message, undoubtedly, reinforced the members of the party who supported Canada’s participation in the war.” NA, MG 27 III C12, M.J. Coldwell Papers, Vol. 58, File: Memoirs 17-32, Memoirs, No. 24, 21 April 1964.

94 *Ibid.*, 26.

95 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 97, File: E.B. Jolliffe, Jolliffe to David Lewis, “Monday” [September 1939].

September 1939 but certainly the party was hardly overcome with war hysteria. Indeed, the country was not. Ted Jolliffe noted "an attitude of stony indifference" to the war, particularly in the wake of the Defence of Canada Regulations, the effect of which "has been to silence the anti-war feeling which undoubtedly exists."⁹⁶ Woodsworth received a storm of letters in support, "some 225" by early October.⁹⁷ The notable feature of the few letters that remain in the CCF papers is that they consistently praise Woodsworth's actions as a socialist and anti-imperialist; there is not mention of pacifism. A Regina correspondent writes with sadness "that not more members of the C.C.F. share your views & are divided between the socialist principle of condemning an imperialist war & so called patriotic feeling towards the mother country who leads us blindly to destruction." A letter from Vancouver reads: "your stand on war (the true Socialist stand) is approved and appreciated by all informed & class-conscious workers. As an old comrade I salute and thank you."⁹⁸

Following the debate within the CCF is particularly difficult since the party seems to have systematically destroyed correspondence on the issue.⁹⁹ The minutes of an apparently raucous Ontario Provincial Council meeting on 17 September 1939 are missing from an otherwise complete File.¹⁰⁰ Concern about running afoul of the Defense of Canada Regulations was very quickly apparent in CCF circles as, for instance the CCF printing house refused to print *Socialist Action*, the organ of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers' League "because [it claimed] of its Marxist stand against the new imperialist war."¹⁰¹ There was also concern about publishing views such as Woodsworth's which may hinder recruitment. The declaration of war was hardly conducive to free speech and, although the CCF campaigned hard to maintain civil liberties during the war, a

96 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 41, File: Ontario General Correspondence, 1940 (February-January), "Report on Ontario by E.B. Jolliffe," 8.

97 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 109, File: War, 1939, J.S. Woodsworth to David Lewis, 5 October 1939.

98 NA, MG 28 IV 1, Vol. 107, CCF Records, File: J.S. Woodsworth, 1933-1942, H. Thiessen, Regina to J.S. Woodsworth, 10 September 1939 and Chris Lorimer, Vancouver to J.S. Woodsworth, 12 September 1939.

99 For instance, David Lewis wrote to Frank Scott on 30 November 1939, "Coldwell informs me that G.W. destroyed in his presence all that correspondence. I have therefore done it here and will you please do the same." NA, MG 30 D 211, F.R. Scott Papers, Vol. 12, File: C.C.F., General, September 1938-1940.

100 University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, J.S. Woodsworth Memorial Collection, Box 1, Ontario CCF Council and Executive Minutes, minutes, CCF Ontario Provincial Executive 30 September 1939.

101 NA, RG 18, RCMP Papers, RCMP Papers, *Socialist Action*, Montreal, Vol. II, No. 5A. The SWL also felt compelled not to continue to use the mails.

wave of caution, not surprisingly, swept over the party.¹⁰² By early 1940, David Lewis was advising party members not to discuss the causes of the war.¹⁰³ To his mind, and others, the banning of CCF papers was a concrete possibility.¹⁰⁴

The most systematic evidence of CCFers' reactions comes from British Columbia, Ontario and Saskatchewan, where there were vocal centres of opposition to the National Council's decision. From the outset BC Provincial Secretary Bert Gargrave reported that the decision would be difficult to sell within the CCF. In fact, at the end of August, a group of "7 or 8" federal candidates had met with the provincial executive and urged that a statement be made that the approaching war was imperialist in nature and "that we should have nothing to do with it."¹⁰⁵

Although it hardly amounted to an endorsement of the war, Gargrave reported that "the National Council's statement is overshadowed by the failure of our members to vote against the declaration of war, a stand which incidentally is very hard to reconcile with the exception of possibly Coldwell and Heaps, with the feeling of the National Council. The general dissatisfaction is running very high, and there is no predicting the outcome."¹⁰⁶ A week later he reported a close call: "We have met with the Provincial Executive since our return, and had quite a job in convincing them that the National Council's statement was the only one under the circumstances, and endorsement of the statement was only carried by a vote of five to four after a lengthy and acrimonious debate." Gargrave, who considered himself distant from the "doctrinaires" of the BC party, added his own feelings that it would have been easier to convince the BC party of Woodsworth's position.¹⁰⁷ Not surprisingly, individual CCF branches dissented and, although in some cases it is possible to point to Communist Party influence (the Comintern considered this an imperialist war

102 As an example, while some individual CCF leaders such as Eugene Forsey were publicly active in defending Trotskyist Frank Watson who received a six month sentence and \$300 fine for criticising the war in defiance of the Defence of Canada Regulation, the CCF itself decided to approach the Minister of Justice privately on his behalf. *Ibid.*, January 1940 and MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 2, File: National Council and Executive Minutes, minutes, National Executive, 24 January 1940. On concerns about publishing, NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, File: War, 1939, Margaret Sedgewick to David Lewis, 25 September 1939.

103 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 41, File: Ontario General Correspondence, 1940 (February-January), David Lewis to Delmar Von Dette, 31 January 1940.

104 Young, *Anatomy of a Party* 96.

105 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 101, File: Angus MacInnis, 1933-1939, MacInnis to David Lewis, 30 August 1939.

106 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, File: 77-4 British Columbia: Correspondence with Provincial Secretary, H. Gargrave, B.C. Provincial Secretary, to David Lewis, 15 September 1939.

107 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, File: 77-4 British Columbia: Correspondence with Provincial Secretary, H. Gargrave, B.C. Provincial Secy, to David Lewis, 21 September 1939. Garland disparaged the doctrinaires in a letter to Eugene Forsey, Vol. 94, File: Eugene Forsey, Garland to Forsey, 27 December 1938.

until 1941), the strong reservoir of anti-imperialist sentiment in the CCF would, in itself, be sufficient explanation. The Penticton, Saanich and Refrew CCF Clubs all attempted to organise to overturn the National Council's decision in favour of Woodsworth's "anti-imperialist" stance.¹⁰⁸ In the end, the National Council's position on the war was only adopted by the BC Provincial Council by a deeply divided executive voting as a block against the dissidents.¹⁰⁹ CCF unity and survival had become the prime objective. Prominent BC CCFers were still keen to call a spade a spade as witnessed by the storm created by MLA Dorothy Steeves when she denounced the imperialist character of the war before a mass meeting of a thousand supporters at the end of September.¹¹⁰ Indeed, eight months later Angus MacInnis resigned from the National Council, claiming that the other BC representatives on the Council had failed to support him and the CCF's official war policy.¹¹¹ It had been a hard sell.

Ontario was more ambivalent. Members of the provincial executive systematically visited CCF units across the province to persuade them of the wisdom of the National Council's decision. They were able to report considerable success despite pockets of opposition from both those who felt that the CCF was selling out to imperialism and those who supported greater participation. It is difficult to determine precisely either how much support for the war members felt the National Council's statement implied or their particular motivation; but undoubtedly many would have shared the feelings described by National Organizer E.J. Garland when he reported that in "both Chappleau and Fort William quite a number of members expressed strong appreciation of the stand taken by Mr. Woodsworth but believed that we should hold the movement together at all costs."¹¹² The youth movement was more difficult to convince and the CCYM, led by Eileen Tallman, strongly opposed the statement and

108 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, File: 76-7 British Columbia: Correspondence, circular letter, To all CCF clubs from Penticton CCF Club, 11 September 1939; Kenneth Wm. Richmond, Victoria to National Secretary, CCF, 12 September 1939; and F.P. Norris, Secretary Treasurer, Renfrew CCF Club, Vancouver, 4 October 1939.

109 UBC, Angus MacInnis Collection, Box 46, File 46-3 CCF (Provincial Party), minutes, Provincial Council, C.C.F. (B.C.), 30 September 1939. Grace MacInnis pointed out that the Provincial Organizer (Colin Cameron), the Provincial Secretary (Bert Gargrave) and the editor of the *Federationist* (Barry Mather) all support Woodsworth's position. *Ibid.*, Box 54A, File 54A-12 Correspondence 1939, G. MacInnis to Woodsworth, 13 October 1939.

110 *Vancouver Daily Province*, 30 September 1939.

111 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 101, File: Angus MacInnis, 1940-1944, Angus MacInnis to David Lewis, 18 April 1940. He had felt this consistently since the September 1939 National Council Meeting, File: Angus MacInnis, 1933-1939, MacInnis to Lewis, 14 October 1939.

112 Reports of visits to the units are in University of Toronto, J.S. Woodsworth Memorial Collection, Box 1, Ontario CCF Council and Executive Minutes. The quote is in a letter from Garland to Bert Leavens, 12 October 1939.

declared their intention of continuing to press for complete non-participation. Woodsworth was moved to appeal to the national leadership to stop what he perceived to be the badgering of the Ontario CCFM to toe the line, a charge that David Lewis denied.¹¹³

Organised opposition to the National Council's position soon seemed to have waned. Indeed, the statement had sought to limit severely Canada's participation in the war and anti-war activists could find plenty of room within its parameters to further this struggle. The CCFM, for instance, concentrated on opposing conscription while the movement as a whole fought for "democracy at home" by undertaking an extensive campaign for the preservation of civil liberties in wartime.¹¹⁴ The Saskatoon CCF attempted to organise other anti-war CCF units, but the furor in Saskatchewan was mainly over George Williams' increasingly adamant stance in favour of increasing the party's support of the war effort.¹¹⁵ As the Communists pointed out, the war quickly became, for the CCF, an anti-fascist and not an imperialist venture.¹¹⁶

By 1942 the CCF (and, incidentally, the Communist Party) was active in "Total War" committees and firmly committed to military victory over Germany and Japan. In the post-war, there were few greater supporters of the United Nations as the guarantor of world peace than the CCF. There would be strong echoes of an earlier CCF, but paradigms had shifted. No longer would it be automatically assumed that socialists looked at international events across class divisions. "Their" armies and diplomats became "ours." In January 1939, William Irvine had warned against being drawn into international dealings. "Munich," he felt, "was just like Ethiopia, like Spain, and like Manchuko. These are the things which we expect under the system. We can't attempt to treat these symptoms." The goal of socialists could only be to build socialism, "the first practical step toward [a] new internationalism."¹¹⁷

In stark contrast, nine months later Ted Jolliffe worried to David Lewis that it was necessary "to convince the waverers that we have not become imperial-

113 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 101, File: Angus MacInnis, 1933-1939, MacInnis to David Lewis, 18 October 1939 and 7 February, 1940; Vol. 109, File: War, 1939, Woodsworth to Lewis, 27 September 1939, Lewis to Woodsworth 2 October 1939 and Woodsworth to Lewis, 5 October 1939.

114 *New Commonwealth*, 28 September, 19 October 1939.

115 NA, RG 18, RCMP Papers, Vol. 3519, *Socialist Action*, Vol II, No. 6, Montreal, November 1939; SAB, Carlyle King Papers, A225, I, File 42, CCF War Policy, passim.

116 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 362, File: Communist Statements and Publications, 1936-1951, leaflet: "One Year of War What Next?" by Toronto District Committee, Communist Party of Canada.

117 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 101, File: Angus MacInnis, 1933-39, William Irvine to David Lewis, 9 January 1939.

ists.”¹¹⁸ Already the line of demarcation – the “river of fire” that separated socialist assumptions from the dominant ideology – was fading. The CCF was deeply implicated in the war and the managing of wartime capitalist society. In Manitoba, the CCF followed this path to its conclusion, joining a coalition government in 1940; the specific interests of class seemed to have no place while the country was at war.¹¹⁹ Nationally the CCF did not go this far. They were, in fact, aghast at the Manitoba decision. But the expansion of the federal state would offer its own lures to CCFers individually and programmatically. The character of debate in the CCF changed, as did the language. Woodsworth’s opposition to the war could only be understood as pacifism as CCFers lost the language to understand the character of 1930s anti-imperialism – a language that was innate to pre-war socialism. It continued to be spoken, for instance, by small groups of revolutionary socialists who still argued that “Capitalism cannot stop fascism.”¹²⁰ But they were now a voice in the wilderness.

Why had it happened? On one level, socialists once again had been drawn into the nationalist and ideological vortex of war. On another, the political conclusions that had been deduced from their first principles had served them poorly. The fact was that capitalist nations had found themselves at war against fascism, and it was difficult not to choose sides. David Lewis astutely noted that there were, in fact, two wars being fought: an inter-imperialist war and a war of the liberal democracies against fascism.¹²¹ The fact that the Communists could so easily change their attitude to the war in August and September 1939 can be explained not just by the servility of national Communist Parties, but the fact that socialists generally were deeply troubled by the complex character of the war. It was evident that both war and fascism were rooted in capitalism, but when capitalists fought fascists, their reductionist analysis seemed unhelpful. And, of course, when the USSR was invaded in 1941, the war took on an additional character for Communists, and socialists, around the world. Class analyses of international events had been abandoned by the Communists in the mid 1930s as they sought broader alliances in fighting the immediate threat of fascism and the CCF followed suit at the end of the decade. Very soon it was difficult to distinguish their response to international events from liberal, and even conservative, anti-fascists. They soon concentrated their attention on the home front, defending civil rights and fighting for the “security” within capitalism

118 NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 97, File: E.B. Jolliffe, Jolliffe to David Lewis, “Monday” [September 1939].

119 Wiseman, *Social Democracy in Manitoba* 24-36.

120 NA, RG 18, RCMP Papers, Vol. 3519, *Socialist Action*, Montreal, Vol. II, No. 5A.

121 *New Commonwealth*, 19 October 1939. Lewis continued to argue this, reiterating the imperialist character of the war, see NA, MG 28 IV 1, CCF Records, Vol. 99, File: David Lewis, 1940-1942, Lewis to Willmoore Kendall, 20 February 1941.

PACIFISM OR ANTI-IMPERIALISM?

that had eluded so many Canadians during the 1930s. The CCF's internationalism would become increasingly identified with the struggle of the allies; by the end of the war the liberal internationalist goal of a "United Nations" would find no stauncher advocates than those within the CCF.

The CCF's class analysis that had been the defining character of 1930s socialism failed the task of confronting the horrific world of 1939. It was not so much abandoned, as forgotten. The use of class in understanding international relations would never again have such axiomatic salience within the CCF. For CCFers, it was this proletarian truth that was the first casualty of war. After the war, it was only vaguely remembered as "pacifism."