"THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE ROCKS THE WORLD": WOMEN IN VANCOUVER'S COMMUNIST MOVEMENT, 1935-1945

Brian T. Thorn

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ABSTRACT

The period between 1935 and 1945 was a key one for the Communist Party of Canada [CPC or CP] due to the tumult of the Great Depression and the Second World War. Women were key players in the success that the CPC had during this period, one in which Communist and other left-wing movements grew and were more "respectable" than they were during the Cold War that would follow. Yet women were secondary players in the Communist movement in Vancouver. While CP women played crucial roles in raising money for the Party, setting up fighting organizations such as the Vancouver Housewives League, and supporting the Allied war effort, CP members of both sexes pushed Party women into more traditional "feminine" roles of wives, mothers, and ornaments. The Vancouver Communist Party offered a substantial challenge to Canada's liberal state and the CP provided radical women with an outlet to channel their abilities against capitalism. In the end, however, the CP failed to alter substantially the fundamental division of labour between radical men and women. Communists upheld the mainstream doctrine of "separate spheres": they believed that men were workers, labour organizers, and producers while left-wing and working class women were domestic, passive, and consumers. This thesis concludes that while we cannot expect radical organizations to be completely separate from the gender ideals of the period in which they existed, the CPC did little to challenge traditional gender roles.

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The Martin family of Surrey, Richard, Sandra, Karen and Tara, gave me a place to live when I was in need. At long last, they will have a chance to see what their support wrought! I hope that they will not be too disappointed. Back at home in Ontario, other friends such as Hilary Foley, Tyler King, John Lee, Rodel Ramos, Daryl Smith, and Marcia Wilson have been sources of constant support. Perhaps my greatest debt is to my parents, Allan and Patricia, and to my sister, Andrea. Needless to say, they have always been sources of comfort, financial and otherwise, to me over the years. To them, this thesis is dedicated.

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In May of 1939, as the world headed towards the Second World War, Jean Mason, a prominent member of Vancouver's Communist and women's movements, wrote a letter to the Communist Party newspaper the *People's Advocate* that encapsulated the views of many left-wing women on the nature of their role in capitalist society. It also offered an apt view of how the Communist Party of Canada [CPC or CP] in Vancouver saw women's role. Mason commented on the capitalistic nature of Mothers' Day and what it meant for left-wing and working-class women. She first remarked that "it would be a fine thing indeed, that is for capitalism, if the mothers of the nation could be lulled to a subconscious and false contentment through the highly commercialized sentiment of Mothers' Day."[1] Mason went on to note that:

> it would seem that still another of the old sayings of capitalism -- "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" -- has been shot to pieces. Most mothers know how untrue this is and the job that confronts all mothers on this day is to get together and work together for a solution to the many ills the human race is suffering from.[2]

Mason concluded that:

> mothers want something more than flowers and candy one day of the year. They want a society in which all their children will have the right to a happy home environment, higher education, suitable employment and a happy life for all, and one of the most effective means of achieving this is to join the numerous progressive women's organizations, raising a united voice to demand legislation that will put an end to the miserable existence so many of us are living under

[1] *People's Advocate*, 19 May 1939.
[2] *People's Advocate*, 19 May 1939.

> today. Let's change the old saying so that "the hand that rocks the cradle rocks the world."[3]

Mason turned the traditional notion of women being important in the capitalist world into a statement of women working to change an unequal society. This statement - "the hand that rocks the cradle rocks the world" - demonstrates, in so far as one sentence ever could, the contradictory ideology at work within the Vancouver Communist Party during the 1935 to 1945 period. While, on one level, the Vancouver CP did open up spaces for women to fight against capitalist oppression, the Party still believed that women were innately wives, mothers, and helpers.

In this thesis, I contend that while women were important, indeed crucial, members of the Vancouver CP, the Party's male leadership did not value properly women's contributions to the movement. Although the Party favoured gender equality in theory, its actual policies did not live up to this noble rhetoric. CP women themselves held to traditional conceptions of their role in society while the Party leadership and most male Party members pushed women into secondary roles. Communist women organized bazaars and afternoon teas, cooked meals for striking workers, and served in Women's Auxiliaries, but they did not run for parliament or, for the most part, speak in public on the Party's behalf. In this work, I will show the two-sided nature of Communist Party policy on women's issues. While women were important to the Party, and the CP newspapers contained a great deal of material either directed at or about women, the Party did little to

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[3] *People's Advocate*, 19 May 1939.

advance women's concerns. At the same time, while there is no doubt that the CP could have done a better job of integrating women into the Party, we must also keep in mind that the context of the period limited what the Party could do about women's issues. Therefore, I have tried to contextualize the Party's view on women, keeping in mind the milieu of the 1930s and 1940s, a time when most adult women were housewives and mothers.

My interest in this topic stems from my personal politics as a socialist-feminist. My historical interests center on left-wing movements, women's and gender history, and feminist theory. Socialist-feminism holds that men, while also oppressed under capitalism, have more freedom than women to work and live in the competitive world.[4] Socialist-feminists seek to understand how class has defined women's experiences and how gender has defined working class women and men's experiences.[5] In this thesis, I use the insights of historical materialism to describe the class-based oppression that male and female Communists lived under and fought against. I also use feminist insights in order to understand the particular oppression that CP women lived with. Louise Johnson points out that recent socialist-feminist historians, rather than applying Marxist categories to women's labour, have looked at women's work in terms of different experiences of class and gender-based oppression.[6] These historians have looked at class as an objective reality that men and women experienced differently in different

[4] Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham, "Introduction: Reclaiming Anticapitalist Feminism," in Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham, eds., *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference, and Women's Lives*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1997) 8-9.
[5] Louise C. Johnson, "Socialist Feminisms," in Sneja Gunew, ed., *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*, (London: Routledge, 1990) 320; Anne Phillips, *Divided Loyalties: Dilemmas of Sex and Class*, (London: Virago, 1987) 29.
[6] Johnson, "Socialist Feminisms," 315.

historical contexts.[7] They have tried to respect the viewpoints of working women: they have portrayed working class women as agents of history and I have tried to do the same here.

Socialist-feminism is particularly useful for my study since I plan to build on the arguments of Marxist and feminist scholars while challenging the orthodox view of Canadian Communism. Marxist historians challenged political and diplomatic scholars for ignoring class whereas feminist scholars charged that historians of elites ignored women.[8] Socialist-feminists have brought class into feminist scholarship in dealing with working class women's lives and with how gender roles among working people have developed historically. In doing this, socialist-feminist historians have revised the arguments of political, working class, and feminist scholars to show how class and gender have been equally important and how they have interacted.[9] Socialist-feminists attempt to understand women in

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[7] Johnson, "Socialist Feminisms," 320. For a recent example of this kind of scholarship, in a European context, see Laura Lee Downs, *Manufacturing Inequality: Gender Division in The French and British Metalworking Industries, 1914-1939*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

[8] For examples of Marxist history see Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979). For examples of early feminist history see Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); Catherine Lyle Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada*, Second ed., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974).

[9] For examples of socialist-feminist history see Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993); Christina Burr, *Spreading The Light: Work and Labour Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Toronto*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1930*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Dubinsky, *"The Modern Chivalry: Women and The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1930,"* (M.A. Thesis, Carleton University, 1985); Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women For The Cause: Women, Labour, and the Left in Canada, 1890-1920*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Janice Newton, *The Feminist Challenge To The Canadian Left, 1900-1918*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989).

terms of their class position: John D. Rockefeller's wife was clearly more privileged than the wife of a logger in British Columbia in the 1930s and 1940s.

Socialist-feminist historians have not simply "added women and stirred," as some scholars have put it. Indeed, while these writers have integrated working-class and left-wing women's experiences into such topics as unionization, strikes, the workplace, and radical politics they have also analyzed how gender, that is perceptions of what it meant to be "male" or "female," coloured the experiences of working women and men. This focus on gender adds to socialist-feminist scholarship by noting how individuals and groups construct their identities as workers and as "masculine" and "feminine" individuals.[10] These socialist-feminist scholars, while sensitive to the importance of constructed gender roles, maintain the importance of class as an objective reality, exemplified by one's relationship to the means of production, and the importance of sex difference. Historically, women workers have been doubly marginalized as workers and as women. Following from this, I examine Vancouver Communists to see how the ideological and class position of female Party members influenced their position as women, how their position as women influenced their ideological and class position, and how the presence of women in the Party influenced CPC ideology and action.

Historians have often portrayed British Columbia as being Canada's most radical province.[11] While I do not draw on the "Western Exceptionalism" argument,

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[10] Burr, *Spreading the Light*, 180 and *passim*. A useful recent summary of these debates can be found in Joan Sangster, "Feminism and the Making of Canadian Working-Class History: Exploring the Past, Present and Future," *Labour/Le Travail* 46 (Fall 2000): 127-165.

[11] Bryan Palmer made this claim in his *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking The History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed., (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991) 419.

this view is not without some basis in fact.[12] Indeed, one of the reasons I chose to look at Vancouver's history was its reputation as a radical city. During the period that I study, Vancouver experienced a great deal of left-wing activity. The Workers Unity League [WUL] was active in organizing workers during this period; similarly, the On-To-Ottawa Trek and the Post Office and Art Gallery sit-down strikes of 1938 began or occurred in Vancouver.[13] The Communist Party of Canada was central in these struggles, particularly in organizing single, unemployed men.[14] Historians of Vancouver's radical history have ignored the role of women in these struggles. These writers have acknowledged that women were involved but, with some notable exceptions, scholars and writers have not examined the specific roles that women played during this period, nor have they examined why women fulfilled

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[12] Western exceptionalism is the argument that Canada's western provinces are more radical than the Eastern ones primarily because of the harsher conditions in Western Canada and the presence of a resource proletariat in the western provinces. See David J. Bercuson, *Confrontation At Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations, and the General Strike*, 2nd ed., (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990) passim; Bercuson, "Labour Radicalism And The Western Industrial Frontier," *Canadian Historical Review* 58:2 (June 1977): 154-175; A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, And Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977). Numerous historians have challenged "Western Exceptionalism," remarking that workers in the eastern regions of Canada were often equally radical. See Craig Heron, ed., *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Gregory S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (Spring 1984): 11-44; James Naylor, *The New Democracy: Challenging The Social Order in Industrial Ontario, 1914-1925*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

[13] Sean Griffin, ed., *Fighting Heritage: Highlights of the 1930s Struggle for Jobs and Militant Unionism in British Columbia*, (Vancouver: Tribune Publishing Company Ltd., 1985) 10-11.

[14] See Maurice Rush, *"We Have A Glowing Dream": Recollections of Working-Class and People's Struggles in B.C. 1935-1995*, (Vancouver: Centre for Socialist Education, 1996) 206.

these roles.[15]

Thus, this thesis helps fill a significant gap in the historiography on women in Canada and on Canadian Communism. While Canadian historians have examined women in left-wing movements, they have done little on Western Canadian women during the Depression and war years. Veronica Strong-Boag studies women and gender during the period between 1935 and 1939; however, her work does not address female roles in the context of a specific city or in left-wing movements.[16] Historians such as Ruth Frager and Joy Parr look at women workers' lives during this period but in Ontario, not in Western Canada.[17] Mary Horodyski, Linda Kealey, and Patricia Roome look at radical women in the Western Canadian context; however, these scholars do not look at the 1935-1945

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[15] Griffin acknowledges throughout his book that women were involved in the battles of the 1930s but he does not specify how they were involved. See Griffin, *Fighting Heritage*, *passim*. On radical women in Vancouver, see Irene Howard, "The Mothers' Council of Vancouver: Holding The Fort for The Unemployed, 1935-1938," in Robert A.J. McDonald and Jean Barman, eds., *Vancouver Past: Essays in Social History Vancouver Centennial Issue of BC Studies*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985) 249-287; Irene Howard, *The Struggle For Social Justice in British Columbia: Helena Gutteridge, The Unknown Reformer*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992); Barbara K. Latham and Cathy Kess, eds., *In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in British Columbia*, (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980); Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro, eds., *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia*, (Victoria: Camosun College Press, 1984); Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 124-192. For an American perspective see Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981).

[16] See Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939*, (Markham, Ont.: Penguin, 1988) 41-70. For an American perspective see Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987).

[17] Ruth Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity and Gender in The Jewish Labour Movement, 1900-1939*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992). Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

period or at Vancouver.[18]

This study will add to the recent socialist-feminist arguments in Canadian history. In particular, it builds on the work of Linda Kealey and Janice Newton in its attention to the role of Women's Auxiliaries in the Communist Party's trade unions. It also adds to Kealey and Newton's arguments surrounding the Canadian left's attitude toward its female supporters. Kealey points to Women's Auxiliaries and the use of female social networks as examples of how women's activism came into labour struggles in ways different, but no less legitimate, from the ways in which men's labour activism came to the fore.[19] Kealey also notes that left-wing movements, while radical in many ways, were not always sympathetic toward women's involvement.[20] Janice Newton argues that women played significant roles in building the socialist movement in Canada during the early years of the twentieth century.[21] These women believed that socialism had the power to change the private and public worlds.[22] In contrast to Mariana Valverde, Newton states that early Canadian feminists were not simply racist and elitist.[23] This thesis adds to

[18] Mary Horodyski, "Women and the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919," *Manitoba History* 11 (Spring 1986): 28-37. Linda Kealey, " 'No Special Protection - No Sympathy': Women's Activism in the Canadian Labour Revolt of 1919," in Deian R. Hopkin and Gregory S. Kealey, eds. *Class, Community and the Labour Movement: Wales and Canada, 1850-1930*, (St. John's: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1989): 134-159. Patricia Roome, "Amelia Turner and Calgary Labour Women, 1919-1935," in Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, eds., *Beyond The Vote: Canadian Women and Politics*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989): 89-117.

[19] Kealey, *Enlisting Women For The Cause*, 6.

[20] Kealey, *Enlisting Women For The Cause*, 6.

[21] Newton, *The Feminist Challenge to the Canadian Left*, 6.

[22] Newton, *The Feminist Challenge to the Canadian Left*, 6-7. For an American perspective on a similar topic, see Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*, xiii-xix.

[23] Newton, *The Feminist Challenge to the Canadian Left*, 7-11. For an example of the scholarship that has portrayed early Canadian feminism as elitist and racist see Mariana Valverde, "When the Mother of the Race is Free: Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism," in Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds., *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992): 3-26.

Kealey and Newton's work in looking at how Communist women saw their roles in the movement and in looking at how the Party viewed left wing and working class women.

Historical writing on women and socialism during the Depression and World War II period is scarce. Joan Sangster's *Dreams of Equality* remains the only full length treatment of this period in Canada. Sangster demonstrates that while left-wing groups were ahead of their time, particularly in their attention to the concerns of working class men, they often treated female Party members poorly. Sangster argues that, during the 1935-1939 period, the CPC attempted to draw proletarian women out of the domestic sphere in order to increase the Party's support, not out of any intrinsic commitment to women's equality. The CPC's record on women's issues during World War II was equally poor. In 1940-1941, before Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, women were prominent in fighting against the internment of fellow Communists. During the 1941-1945 period, Communist women took jobs in industries vacated by men, as did many other women.[24] According to Sangster, while the CPC offered lip service to the cause of women, it was not sympathetic toward their liberation.

This thesis will also comment on the traditional historiographic view of Communist movements in North America. Most historians of Canadian Communism argue either that the CPC was a tool of Moscow or that it was

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[24] Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 124 and 165. For an insightful look at a similar situation from the American perspective see especially Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) 1-20.

insignificant.[25] William Rodney argues that the Canadian Communist movement was both subordinate to the Communist International [Comintern] and insignificant.[26] Irving Abella credits CP members with playing an indispensable role in organizing workers for CIO unions; he points out that CP organizers did work that "no one else was willing or able to do."[27] In spite of this, Abella argues that communism, as an ideology, spoke only to a minority of Canadians, none of whom were rank and file workers.[28] While Abella says almost nothing about women in the CP, his general argument, that Communists played crucial roles in organizing the rank and file of the Canadian labour movement, holds true in the case of CP women's activism in organizing Vancouver's waitresses and domestic servants.

Ian Angus, a Trotskyist, argues that the CPC in the 1921-1929 period was a positive force that promised to change Canada for the better.[29] According to Angus, it was not until Tim Buck led his 1929 "coup" that the party became subservient to the Comintern.[30] Angus's analysis of the party in the 1930s is not terribly nuanced: Tim Buck, whatever his faults, was hardly the Canadian

[25] Important historians who subscribe to this school of thought, in addition to those mentioned below, include Ivan Avakumovic, who seconded Rodney's point of view, and Norman Penner, who argued that the Comintern's needs nearly always took precedence over those of national Communist parties. See Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975) 1-23 and Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond*, (Toronto: Methuen, 1988).

[26] William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International: A History of the Communist Party of Canada, 1919-1929*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968) v.

[27] Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, The Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress Of Labour, 1935-1956*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973) 221.

[28] Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour*, v.

[29] Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada*, (Montreal: Vanguard Publications, 1981) v.

[30] Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, v-vi.

equivalent of Joseph Stalin.[31] More convincing is the scholarship that has attempted to go beyond the traditional view of the CPC in dealing with the social history of Canadian Communism. In his article "Communists And Autoworkers," John Manley argues that Communists were successful in convincing autoworkers that they should move into industrial unions.[32] Communist organizers in Ontario's car factories played a significant role in forging class consciousness among rank and file workers and laid the foundation for the United Auto Workers in Canada.[33] Manley convincingly demonstrates that the Communists played an important role in Canadian labour history.

In addition to the arguments of Kealey, Sangster, Abella, and Manley, I have relied on two other historians of North American Communism for my analytical framework. Bryan Palmer and Robin Kelley argue that while there is no doubt that the North American CP followed the orders of the Comintern, this was far from the whole story. Palmer argues that there was, in addition to the Party that slavishly followed Moscow's orders, a CP that organized at the ground-level to bring workers into the labour movement and to combat oppression.[34] Robin Kelley has argued similarly that, while the CPUSA branch in Birmingham, Alabama had no

[31] Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, vi.

[32] John Manley, "Communists and Autoworkers: The Struggle for Industrial Unionism in the Canadian Automobile Industry, 1925-1936," in David J. Bercuson and David Bright, eds., *Canadian Labour History: Selected Readings*, (Toronto: Copp Clark Longman, 1994) 266. For another attempt to go beyond the traditional viewpoint of Canadian Communism see Bryan Palmer's "Introduction" to Jack Scott's memoirs. Jack Scott, *A Communist Life: Jack Scott and the Canadian Workers Movement, 1927-1985*, Bryan D. Palmer, ed., (St. John's: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1985) 1-8. In the American context see Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*, (New York: Grove Press, 1983).

[33] Manley, "Communists and Autoworkers," 266.

[34] See Palmer, *A Communist Life*, 5-6.

trouble following orders given from the Kremlin and New York, where the national leadership of the CPUSA was located, the Party responded to the particular situation at hand in the South.[35] In the case of Alabama, the situation was markedly different from those in other parts of the United States and in Europe; the Party in Alabama responded accordingly.[36]

The primary research relies heavily on Communist Party newspapers such as the *B.C. Workers News*, *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, the *People's Advocate*, and *The Advocate*. These newspapers detail CP women's involvement in Women's Auxiliaries and in organizing bazaars and carnivals. They also contain a gendered discourse found in the language, advertisements, photographs, and cartoons. The memoirs of prominent Communists Tim Buck, Tom McEwen, Leslie Morris, Maurice Rush, Jack Scott, and Al King show that, along with CPC historians, male Communist leaders themselves rarely looked at women's and gender issues.[37] Sara Diamond's interviews with female CP activists, which are housed at Simon Fraser University's archives, proved invaluable. I also interviewed six women who were prominent in the movement; these interviews revealed many aspects of women's experiences in the CP. Other primary sources for this thesis came from the William Bennett and Angus MacInnis Memorial Collections at the University of British Columbia [UBC], which contain pamphlets, letters, and minutes of meetings that concern the CP and gender issues. Special Collections at UBC also houses the Tom McEwen Fonds; they contain correspondence, manuscripts,

[35] Kelley, *Hammer And Hoe*, xiii-xiv.

[36] Kelley, *Hammer And Hoe*, xiv.

[37] Tim Buck, *Yours in The Struggle: Reminiscences of Tim Buck*, William Beeching and Phyllis Clarke, eds., (Toronto: NC Press, 1977). Leslie Morris, *Look On Canada, Now: Selected Writings of Leslie Morris 1923-1964*, (Toronto: Progress Books, 1970). Scott, *A Communist Life*.

newsletters, pamphlets, and minutes of meetings concerning McEwen, longtime CP activist and head of the Workers Unity League [WUL]. I also utilize the papers of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers as well as the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union Fonds, also found at UBC Special Collections.

In chapter one, I argue that women's experiences in the Vancouver CP during the latter years of the Depression were two-sided. While women were crucial to the successes that the Party had during this period, women's activism in the CP was limited. Women participated in auxiliaries, brought food to strikers, organized afternoon teas, and fought for abortion rights, but they rarely made speeches or ran for public office. I argue further that women's activism during this period was couched in language that reinforced traditional roles as wives, mothers, and helpmates. CP women's activism in such left-wing organizations as the Housewives' League and the Mothers' Council followed a similar pattern.

Chapter two focuses on CP women's experiences during World War Two. As is well-documented, women took over men's jobs during World War Two because these men were enlisted in the armed forces.[38] While the Party recognized the importance of CP women in the war effort, it looked upon this new role for women as transient. The Party, like much of Canadian society, felt that women would return to the home and family after the war ended. Even during the war, the Party represented CP women's contributions to the war effort in terms of women's supposedly natural roles as wives and mothers.

In chapter three, I examine images of beauty in Vancouver Communism

[38] The key text in the Canadian context is Ruth Roach Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986).

during the 1943 to 1945 period; I try to come to some understanding of the particular CP conception of feminine beauty and its meaning. I examine beauty pageants, photographs, cartoons, and other images of masculinity and femininity in the CP press to elaborate on the relationship of radical movements and gender politics.[39] The beauty pageants, photographs, and cartoons are two-sided and complex. The CPC had a proletarian conception of female beauty, one that was very different from the dominant society's view of beauty. While the beauty pageants offered some women the opportunity to become involved with the Party, they upheld the idea that physical beauty defines a woman's worth. Similarly, the photographs and cartoons often show women stepping outside of the home and into roles previously the sole domain of men; however, according to the CP, these women ultimately had to return to the domestic sphere to raise children and to service their husbands.

The Vancouver CP's view of women and gender was ambivalent. In writing this thesis, I take into account the historical context in which the CP emerged and study the movement's accomplishments and failures with this in mind. As we shall see, simplistic answers to questions concerning women's role in left-wing politics cannot be found. With this said, we cannot overcome the problem of sexism in labour and left-wing movements unless we confront and study this problem. This is an important argument to consider in these times of "the third way" and neo-liberalism. We need to understand the problems that exist in labour and left-wing movements and work to challenge them.

[39] On beauty pageants in general see Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983). On the rise of the beauty and fashion industry in North America see Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).

Chapter One:
"You Have To Fight And Struggle For Everything":
Vancouver's Communist Women During The Great Depression

On 4 June 1935, when the Great Depression was at its height in Vancouver, the city's longshoremen walked off their jobs, commencing a strike that would last for six months.[1] The employers, banded together into the Shipping Federation, had declared that the collective agreement had ended and locked the longshoremen out.[2] One of the key issues was the ongoing anti-union activity on the part of the Shipping Federation; the longshoremen went on strike in order to stop the Federation from sending scabs to cross picket lines. They also went out in sympathy with a longshoremen's strike in Powell River, B.C. that had begun on 17 May.[3] The "Battle of Ballantyne Pier" was the climax of the Vancouver strike: on Tuesday, 18 June 1935 Police Chief William Wasbrough Foster decided to end the strike and led a five-person delegation to negotiate with the strikers.[4] On the same day, Mickey O'Rourke, a World War I veteran and Victoria Cross winner, stood at the head of the strikers' ranks as they marched down Heatley Avenue and Alexander Street to Ballantyne Pier; O'Rourke and his fellow workers wanted to talk to the scabs working on the waterfront and to convince them to join the strike.[5] When the strikers indicated to the police delegation that they would continue the

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[1] Maurice Rush, *"We Have A Glowing Dream": Recollections of Working-Class and People's Struggles in B.C. 1935-1995*, (Vancouver: Centre for Socialist Education, 1996) 38n.
[2] Sean Griffin, ed., *Fighting Heritage: Highlights of the 1930s Struggle for Jobs and Militant Unionism in British Columbia*, (Vancouver: Tribune Publishing Company Ltd., 1985) 65-66; Paul Phillips also mentions the strike and the Battle in *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia*, (Vancouver: B.C. Federation of Labour/Boag Foundation, 1967) 103-104.
[3] Rush, *"We Have A Glowing Dream,"* 34.
[4] Griffin, *Fighting Heritage*, 65-66.
[5] Griffin, *Fighting Heritage*, 65-66.

strike, Foster attacked the strikers with a battalion of police that he had hidden behind boxcars.[6] The Battle went on for approximately four hours as police fired tear gas at the strikers, sent mounted police into the crowd, and assaulted strikers and bystanders.[7] More police arrived in cars and shot strikers as they fled the scene.[8] As groups of strikers attempted to escape in different directions, mounted police followed them down Heatley Avenue and Alexander Street, while continuing to club and trample workers.[9]

Although the strikers received support from religious groups and some members of the public, the strike ended in failure.[10] The Communist-influenced Longshoremen and Water Transport Workers of Canada [L&WTW] was unable to prevent the hiring of scabs while the mainstream media portrayed the strikers as having breached the 1934 collective agreement that they had signed with their employers.[11] After the strike, company unions were once again formed and many workers were blacklisted; it was 23 years before longshoremen were united into one union.[12]

On 21 June 1935, the *B.C. Workers News*, the Communist Party of Canada's [CPC or CP] weekly newspaper, published an article about the Battle of Ballantyne Pier. Since Communist Party members played leading roles in the Longshoremen's Union, it was not surprising that the CP newspaper contained

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[6] Griffin, Fighting Heritage, 66; Rush, *"We Have A Glowing Dream,"* 38n.
[7] Rush, *"We Have A Glowing Dream,"* 38n.
[8] Griffin, *Fighting Heritage*, 66.
[9] Griffin, *Fighting Heritage*, 66-67.
[10] Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 104.
[11] Griffin, *Fighting Heritage*, 72-73.
[12] Griffin, *Fighting Heritage*, 73.

information on the strike.[13] The article's focus on the role that the Longshoremen's Women's Auxiliary played in the strike was revealing.[14] The article read, in part,

> the Women's Auxiliary to the Longshoremen's Union and women sympathizers were out in full force, marching with the strikers, lending first aid to the injured, and keeping a supply of coffee and sandwiches on hand ... several women suffered from the tear gas. The fact that the strike headquarters were being used as a first aid station did not deter the police from throwing tear gas upon the injured and helpers.[15]

This article raises a key issue concerning women's involvement in Vancouver's Communist movement during the period between 1935 and 1939. The Party used women as domestic labourers and nurses while men were fighters against the capitalist state. In this instance, the Party did not challenge traditional gender roles. CP men fulfilled "masculine" roles while Party women fulfilled "feminine" ones.

The Women's Auxiliaries [WAs] of the Communist-led trade unions are a case study of female involvement in Vancouver's Communist movement. CP newspapers frequently praised the work of the Women's Auxiliaries, stating that Party women were important helpmates in the struggle against capitalism. The International Woodworkers of America [IWA], the Longshoremen and Water Transport Workers, and the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers

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[13] On the Vancouver CP and the Longshoremen see R.C. McCandless, "Vancouver's "Red Menace" of 1935: The Waterfront Situation," *BC Studies* 22 (Summer 1974): 70; Rush, *'We Have A Glowing Dream,"* 34-38.

[14] Both Griffin and Rush mention the Women's Auxiliary in passing, without devoting any analysis to the role that the WA played in the strike. See Griffin, *Fighting Heritage*, 66-67; Rush, *"We Have A Glowing Dream,"* 38n. Griffin mentions that the WA set up a first aid station at the union hall. See Griffin, *Fighting Heritage*, 67.

[15] *B.C. Workers News*, 21 June 1935.

[Mine-Mill] all had WAs.[16] The Communist Party played a significant role in organizing workers into these unions and Communists were prominent in their leadership.[17] The Women's Auxiliaries provided fundraising and food and drink to strikers, among other things.

Holding socials was one of the major functions of Women's Auxiliaries. These socials provided Communist women and men with a time to relax outside the pressures of the working day. At these socials, Communists discussed issues related to the Party and raised money for the Party; these socials were also a key part of Communist culture in Vancouver. One social featured "the Women's Commission of the CP ... sponsoring a garden party on Wednesday, July 19, from 2 until 5 PM at 3428 Cambridge Street, for Party women and their friends. An interesting program including music and games has been arranged and lunch will be served. Women are cordially invited."[18] The Women's Auxiliaries also visited sick workers in hospitals. In this way, these women were acting as nurses to men who were injured and unable to fulfill their roles as the primary breadwinners for their households. An editorial in the IWA newspaper *The B.C. Lumber Worker* noted that "the loggers in the hospitals ... will testify to the good work the women

[16] On the IWA's Women's Auxiliary see Sara Diamond, "A Union Man's Wife: The Ladies' Auxiliary Movement in the IWA, The Lake Cowichan Experience," in *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia*, eds. Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984) 287-296. On the Longshoremen's WA see Griffin, *Fighting Heritage*, 66-67; Rush, *"We Have A Glowing Dream,"* 38n. On Mine-Mill see Al King with Kate Braid, *Red Bait! Struggles of A Mine-Mill Local*, (Vancouver: Kingbird Publishing, 1998) 51-53.

[17] On Communist Party organizing of workers in these unions see Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour: The CIO, The Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour, 1935-1956*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973). On the IWA see Jerry Lembcke and William M. Tattam, *One Union in Wood: A Political History of the International Woodworkers of America*, (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 1984).

[18] *People's Advocate*, 14 July 1939.

are doing - union and non-union men alike are visited regularly and supplied with papers, tobacco, and other requirements to the extent of the finances of the Auxiliary."[19] Similarly, the WAs held parties for the children of logging families. At one such party, 125 children and 150 adults enjoyed games, while the children were given apples and bags of candy. The party lasted until midnight, when "they departed for home, tired but happy."[20]

Communist women were also prominent in left-wing organizations that emerged in Vancouver during the Depression period. Women were particularly important as organizers in the CP's Women's Labor Leagues [WLL].[21] The League was originally formed in 1924 in Ontario.[22] With the onset of the "Third Period" policy of the Comintern, the League came together with the Workers' Unity League [WUL].[23] The Comintern hoped that the WLL branches would participate in the revolutionary labour movement that it had launched in its "left turn," a reaction to the failed "united front" policy of the 1920s.[24] The Comintern rejected the "boring from within" idea that it had advanced to save Communists in all countries from the effects of the post-World War I "Red Scare."[25] During the 1920s, Communist trade unionists remained members of anti-Communist unions such as those

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[19] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 6 December 1938.
[20] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 9 November 1935.
[21] Irene Howard, "The Mothers' Council of Vancouver: Holding The Fort For The Unemployed, 1935-1938," in Robert A.J. McDonald and Jean Barman, eds., *Vancouver Past: Essays in Social History Vancouver Centennial Issue of BC Studies*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986) 265-266; Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989) 28-51.
[22] Howard, "The Mothers' Council of Vancouver," 265-266.
[23] Howard, "The Mothers' Council of Vancouver," 266; Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 61.
[24] Howard, "The Mothers' Council of Vancouver," 266.
[25] Lembcke and Tattam, *One Union in Wood*, 20.

under the banner of the conservative American Federation of Labor [AFL].[26] With the "left turn," the Comintern ordered indigenous CPs to form industrial unions to compete with the craft unions, a practice called "dual unionism."[27] The WLL branches were placed under the control of the WUL and they functioned as a subsidiary of the WUL.[28] The Party paper frequently praised the WLL's efforts and the WLL offered radical women an avenue through which to become involved with the CP.[29]

While the WLL provided an outlet for militancy among Vancouver women, this radicalism was always voiced in the language of women as mothers and wives standing up for their rights. The Women's Labor League supported the unionization of Vancouver's waitresses. The CP was particularly concerned about the situation for waitresses since the women worked under very poor conditions. Waitresses at the Trocadero Cafe, at 156 West Hastings Street, began a sit-down strike in September of 1936 to protest against low wages and poor sanitary conditions, and for the dismissal of a female strikebreaker, and mandatory union membership for the Trocadero wait staff.[30] One of the strikers, Marion Sarich, noted that "I was a bus girl, I was working seven days a week at, I don't know I think it was 25 cents an hour ... they weren't allowed to work us over eight hours but they

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[26] Lembcke and Tattam, *One Union in Wood*, 20.
[27] Lembcke and Tattam, *One Union in Wood*, 20.
[28] Interview with Mona Morgan, 7 June 2000 by Brian Thom. Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 60-61.
[29] Robert Shaffer contends that the Communist Party of the United States offered an outlet for radical women to become involved with the Party. He also contends that the CPUSA was an important institution in the struggle for women's rights in the US during the 1930s. See Robert Shaffer, "Women and the Communist Party, USA, 1930-1940," *Socialist Review* 45:9 (No.3 May-June 1979): 73-118.
[30] *B.C. Workers News*, 4 September 1936.

did ... So we started organizing and had a strike."[31] The CP's Housewives' League, the Women's Labor League, and the CP Women's Auxiliaries supported the strike, as did much of the general public.[32] Anita Anderson, another striker and bus girl at the Trocadero, remarked that "the police were sympathetic to the strikers because they ate there and got to know the bus girls and the waitresses. The customers became just like a family because they were eating there everyday and you saw them everyday."[33] Anderson commented on a case of solidarity among workers in the service industry: "the Fraser Cafe in New Westminster which was a union house ... invited us for meals and they gave to the strike fund. I remember picking up some money towards the strike from them and from other unions."[34]

The Party's newspaper devoted considerable space to the Trocadero strike. "The spirit of the employees is good and they are determined to win out, evidence of this being that three girl pickets compose ditties as they pace up and down on the picket line," an early article noted.[35] The end of the strike generated a headline: "Trocadero Cafe Strike Ends; Favor Employees."[36] The story continued that the conditions of ending the strike were "that Grace Hensler, strike breaker, be fired and that the waiter and three waitresses who stayed on the job during the strike join the union, also that the employer contribute $1.00 per month towards

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[31] Women's Labour History Collection [WLHC], Simon Fraser University [SFU], interview with Marion Sarich, Summer 1979, by Sara Diamond.
[32] WLHC, SFU, interview with Marion Sarich. For the unionization of waitresses in the U.S. and the CP's role in it see Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991) 99.
[33] WLHC, SFU, interview with Anita Anderson, Summer 1979, by Sara Diamond.
[34] WLHC, SFU, interview with Anita Anderson.
[35] *B.C. Workers News*, 4 September 1936.
[36] *B.C. Workers News*, 11 September, 1936.

laundering and upkeep of the uniform."[37] The CP's women's organizations did much of the recruiting for female-dominated unions such as the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union. Since most female Communists were of working-class background themselves, they were able to appeal to the waitresses in a direct manner, based on shared class and gender backgrounds. Of the female CP members in Vancouver who are still alive, Elspeth Gardner's father was a street railwayman and she "could only afford to go to university because of scholarships."[38] Similarly, Vi Dewhurst and Mona Morgan were involved with the IWA's Women's Auxiliaries and their husbands were key IWA leaders.[39] Betty Griffin, while she had been a student at the University of British Columbia [UBC], went to work at Boeing's after World War II began.[40]

The Women's Labor League also advocated legalizing abortion and making birth control information available to women of all classes. The WLL brought speakers to Vancouver to lecture on these needs. The *B.C. Workers News* wrote that "women need clinics for birth control." Commenting on the "campaign conducted by the Women's Labor League," the paper described a lecture given by "Mrs. Howmartin of London, England." "Her lecture gave a much-needed impetus to the work, not only with valuable information on how free birth control clinics are managed in England, but in imparting to us a little of that fighting spirit shown by the suffragette campaign."[41] The WLL also called a public meeting at which they

[37] *B.C. Workers News*, 11 September 1936.
[38] Interview with Elspeth Gardner, 29 June 2000, by Brian Thom.
[39] Interview with Viola Dewhurst, 23 May 2000, by Brian Thom; interview with Mona Morgan, 7 June 2000.
[40] Interview with Betty Griffin, 18 May 2000, by Brian Thom.
[41] *B.C. Workers News*, 31 July 1936.

promoted a petition calling for the legalization of birth control. The WLL pointed out the class-based nature of access to birth control:

> private clinics are operating openly in Vancouver, and it is well known if a woman has the funds she can obtain scientific contraceptives and information. It is the women on relief or low wage earners who suffer either by using very unscientific and sometimes dangerous practices even to the extent of abortions.[42]

The WLL also organized summer camps for working class children. A writer in the *B.C. Workers News*, commenting on the successes of the WLL, stated that it had accomplished "such tasks as doubling membership in the coming year, working for a permanent site for a children's summer camp" and "setting up a children's group beside every branch....."[43] Earlier in 1935, the paper gave an example of how CP women challenged oppressive conditions:

> the Women's Labor League ... is calling a conference to take place at the Lumber Workers' hall, 130 West Hastings Street, on Friday May 17, in support of the Workers' Children's summer camp. ... this conference has for its purpose the welfare of the undernourished working class children of the city.[44]

Communist Party women were also leaders and members in the Mothers' Council of Vancouver. CP and Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation [CCF] women allied to form the Council out of the Mothers' Day Committee, a group formed to protest against the mistreatment of the single unemployed men.[45] The

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[42] *B.C. Workers News*, 7 February 1936.
[43] *B.C. Workers News*, 6 December 1935.
[44] *B.C. Workers News*, 10 May 1935.
[45] On the Mothers' Council see Lorne Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost: The Unemployed, The Agitator and The State*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987) 135-136; Griffin, *Fighting Heritage*, 37; Howard, "The Mothers' Council of Vancouver," 257-261; Rush, "*We Have A Glowing Dream*," 28n; Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 112-120.

Committee staged a demonstration on Mothers' Day, 1935 to support them. The *Workers News'* headline ran "Mothers' Day To Be Day Of Working Class Struggle."[46] The article noted that the Mothers' Council wanted to give relief camp boys "a bit of home life on Mothers' Day."[47] On Sunday, 12 May, the women marched in a parade from "Cambie Street Grounds to the "Shell" at Stanley Park" at noon. CP and CCF women spoke at the gathering and all of the women formed a "living mother's heart" to symbolize their efforts to abolish the relief camps. The Council photographed the "Mothers' Heart," made copies of the picture, and then sold the pictures; proceeds from the sale went to aid the single unemployed men.[48]

The Mothers' Council subscribed to the ideology of "militant mothering."[49] The Council used maternalism, the idea of women as "natural" wives and mothers, in a radical sense. It called on women, as the wives and mothers of the unemployed, to stand up for their homes and families against capitalism.[50] As the examples from the *Workers News* indicate, the Party saw Communist women's role as being to act as nurturers and caregivers to the downtrodden camp boys. Mona Morgan has stated that the members of the Mothers' Council always referred to the single unemployed men as "our boys," reinforcing the maternal attitude that

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[46] *B.C. Workers News*, 10 May 1935.
[47] *B.C. Workers News*, 10 May 1935.
[48] *B.C. Workers News*, 10 May 1935.
[49] John Manley, "Starve, Be Damned! Communists and Canada's Urban Unemployed, 1929-39," *Canadian Historical Review* 79:3 (September 1998): 469-470; Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 91-164.
[50] Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 138-142.

the Council wanted to convey.[51] The idea of "our boys" gave back to these men, portrayed by capitalists and the state as dirty idlers, a sense of solidarity with working class and left-wing women. The Mothers, in bringing the "boys" home for a meal, also gave these men a temporary domestic haven from unemployment and homelessness.

The Mothers' Council worked in an auxiliary capacity for men who were challenging the social order. The women of the Mothers' Council aided the men on the On-To-Ottawa Trek, calling on "all persons who have donations in cash or kind for the Bazaar and Rummage Sale on February 11th to aid the Regina Trekkers, to bring these items to the O'Brien Hall, 404 Homer Street, anytime on Tuesday, the 11th."[52] The *Workers News* applauded the Mothers' Council for playing the role of real working class mothers in their defence of the camp boys who are to face trial at Regina."[53] The defence itself was maternal as the CP women supplied nourishment and recreations at a bazaar to aid the Trekkers:

> anyone visiting the bazaar will be assured of a good choice of goods. Refreshments will be served. A feature of the affair will be the old fashioned teacup reading. You will not only get a kick out of buying the goods at the bazaar, but you will have the satisfaction of knowing you are helping defend the camp boys.[54]

The Vancouver Housewives' League was another organization in which Communist women were prominent. Although not explicitly a Communist Party

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[51] Interview with Mona Morgan, 7 June 2000. Irene Howard states that this term was ironic given that many of the unemployed men were in their late thirties! See Howard, "The Mothers' Council of Vancouver," 264.

[52] *B.C. Workers News*, 31 January 1935. Regarding the On-to-Ottawa-Trek see Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost*, 125-197; Griffin, *Fighting Heritage*, 13-64.

[53] *B.C. Workers News*, 7 February 1936.

[54] *B.C. Workers News*, 7 February 1936.

organ, CP women, such as Effie Jones, who became well known when she ran for the mayoralty of Vancouver in 1947, were members of the League.[55] The Vancouver Housewives' League was formed in 1938 to combat high food prices and low wages and to agitate for a higher standard of living.[56] As Effie Jones put it, "we found that not only had we to watch the prices and fight them but we had to work on evictions. They were putting people out in the snow."[57] "Mrs. M. Norton," secretary of the Housewives' League, "pointed out that as consumers their first consideration was to prevent rise in cost of living. Retailers and manufacturers were themselves organized to look after their own benefits and it was up to the consumer to do likewise."[58] Peggy Forkin urged Vancouver housewives to organize to combat present high prices of staple food" at an International Women's Day meeting held in Victory Hall.[59] Forkin pointed out that

> we get fatherly admonitions to housewives to stop hoarding when the fact is that the vast majority of Canadian housewives are finding it financially impossible to make both ends meet, let alone store reserves ... the price of butter to the housewife has gone up seven cents a pound since the Wartime Prices And Trade Board was appointed.[60]

Forkin laid down a gendered challenge to the "fatherly" Canadian government that told working class housewives how to live when it had no conception of what the

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[55] For brief commentary on the Vancouver Housewives' League, as well as on Effie Jones, see Howard, "The Mothers' Council of Vancouver," 267-268 and 268n; Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 138-139. On the idea of the radical housewife and consumer see Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1919-1929*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 108-139.

[56] Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 139.

[57] WLHC, interview with Effie Jones.

[58] *People's Advocate*, 16 September 1938.

[59] *People's Advocate*, 11 May 1938.

[60] *The Advocate*, 6 October 1939.

lives of working class women were actually like.

CP women often did ground-level work such as providing food for strikers. The Housewives' League acted in an auxiliary capacity to the strikers who occupied the Vancouver Art Gallery and Post Office in May and June of 1938 to protest against the relief system. This protest culminated in "Bloody Sunday," 19 June 1938, when the Vancouver police attacked the protesters, injuring many, Steve Brodie being the most famous.[61] According to Effie Jones, the Housewives' League worked in the kitchen of "the Ukrainian Hall and it was wonderfully organized down there."[62] Mona Morgan has also remarked that the Mothers' Council and the Housewives' League provided "sandwiches, salad and food" for the unemployed "boys."[63] The League "had the trouble of defending them in court ... And so the women of the Housewives' League ... got the best lawyer in Vancouver at the time, Adam Smith Johnston, his name was."[64]

While the Party encouraged women to organize and fight, it usually limited women's role to that of a "Jimmy Higgins." The term, borrowed from Upton Sinclair's 1919 novel, refers to a loyal, rank and file party member who did day-to-day party work such as handing out leaflets while receiving little recognition for his, or her, efforts.[65] In the case of CP women, the term has a particular gendered

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[61] On "Bloody Sunday" see Steve Brodie, *Bloody Sunday - Vancouver, 1938*, (Vancouver: Young Communist League, 1974); Griffin, *Fighting Heritage*, 85-104; Rush, *"We Have A Glowing Dream,"* 22-25. For non-CP commentary on this event see Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 118-119; Patricia E. Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History*, (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1980) 101-102.

[62] WLHC, interview with Effie Jones.

[63] Interview with Mona Morgan, 7 June 2000.

[64] WLHC, interview with Effie Jones.

[65] Heather McLeod, *"Not Another God-Damned Housewife: Ruth Bullock, the "Woman Question" and Canadian Trotskyism,"* (MA Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1993) 2 and 2n.

connotation since they performed "women's work," such as providing food and first aid to men, in their struggle against capitalism.

In addition to "women's work," the Vancouver CP was also concerned about gender, that is perceptions of what it means to be male or female. Thus, along with the more concrete aspects of women's activism in the Vancouver CP, the gendered side of the CP reveals a great deal about the Party's attitude toward women and the family. Male Communists constructed themselves as respectable family men in contrast to capitalists who had helped to destroy the family in effecting the Depression. They also contrasted their respectability with both fascist movements and conservative trade unionists. While the portrait of male Communists as respectable, monogamous family men contributed to the CP's critique of capitalism, right-wing movements, and conservative trade unionists, it reinforced women's position in the domestic sphere.[66]

Prominent CP member William Bennett was particularly vocal on this issue.[67] A pamphlet from Bennett's papers remarks that "it is a common misconception industriously spread by our enemies that the Communists are

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[66] On the idea of Communists and labour organizers as respectable family men see Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) 188 and 206-228.

[67] "Ol' Bill" Bennett was a prominent Communist who wrote a regular column for the Party newspapers. On Bennett see Mark Leier, *Rebel Life: The Life and Times of Robert Gosden Revolutionary, Mystic, Labour Spy*, (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1999) 120-121.

opposed to the family, and propose to destroy it as a social institution."[68] In fact, the author continued, it was capitalism that threatened to destroy the family:

> look at what is happening in the United States today! The richest country in the world is witnessing the break-up and scattering of literally millions of families, as the result of the crisis, unemployment, social degeneration, the starvation dole system and the movement to abolish even the present miserable standards of relief in order to "balance the budget."[69]

The CP portrayed itself as respectable in terms of sexual mores, favouring the monogamous, heterosexual marriage and disavowing any allegiance to "bohemian pseudo-radicalism in relation to sex and the family."[70] The Party constructed its own message in opposition to bohemian promiscuity:

> There is in the United States, as in all capitalist countries, a growing circle of middle-class people among whom the degeneration and dissolution of family relations has proceeded quite far. A considerable number of these people accept this degeneration as "progressive" and make a theory out of it. When they become real progressives on political and economic issues of the day, they try to graft upon the genuinely progressive movement their own particular theories about the family and sexual relations in general. They thus help to give "evidence" ... that progressive, radical, and revolutionary movements really are enemies of the family. This is especially true of self-styled "radical" circles

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[68] University of British Columbia, Special Collections Division [UBCSC], William Bennett Collection, Box 1, File 2, "What Is Communism?," n.a, n.d. Although no date is specifically given, I assume from the context that the pamphlet was written during the Depression. Similarly, while the pamphlet contains an interview with Earl Browder, leader of the Communist Party of the United States from 1934 until 1945, it also makes reference to the CCF so the pamphlet was likely written and produced, and was certainly used as a educational tool, in Canada. On Browder see Maurice Isserman, *"Which Side Were You On?": The American Communist Party During the Second World War*, (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1982) 1-9.

[69] UBCSC, "What Is Communism?"

[70] UBCSC, "What Is Communism?"

of petty bourgeois bohemians in the big cities.[71]

Many CP members had conventional sexual lives. Although Elspeth Gardner became a lawyer, an occupation that very few women entered at this time, and "married late," other CP women, such as Vi Dewhurst, Betty Greenwell, Betty Griffin, and Mona Morgan, met their husbands through the Party and had children.[72]

Bill Bennett and his fellow Communists contrasted their respectability with the sexual depravity of European and North American Fascists and typified their foes as anti-family and bohemian in their sexual mores. Commenting in the *People's Advocate* on Dr. Joseph Jeffers, a pro-Nazi physician in North America, "Ol' Bill" remarked that:

> This man-like individual is described in the press as "an anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic evangelist." Together with his wife he is charged with conducting a house of ill-fame. In his home were staged parties at which the lowest depths of sexual depravity were reached, lewd exhibitions of the most disgusting character. Evidence of witnesses and moving picture films taken without his knowledge prove the charges beyond the shadow of a doubt.[73]

Bill Bennett went on to say that:

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[71] UBCSC, "What Is Communism?" As Eric Hobsbawm has noted, revolutionary movements have often had reservations concerning ideas and actions supporting free sexual expression. Hobsbawm suggests that this is because the "libertarian" portions of revolutionary movements have clashed with the more "puritanical" sectors and these latter groups have usually won out. See Eric Hobsbawm, "Revolution And Sex," in *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz*, (London: Abacus, 1998) 310-311.

[72] Interview with Elspeth Gardner, 29 June 2000; interview with Vi Dewhurst, 23 May 2000; interview with Betty Greenwell, 29 May 2000; interview with Betty Griffin, 15 May 2000; interview with Mona Morgan, 7 June 2000.

[73] *Peoples' Advocate*, 7 July 1939. The Communist Party in the U.S. likewise associated bohemian promiscuity and homosexuality with crass materialism, capitalism and the bourgeoisie; it also equated artistic and sexual freedom with frivolity. See Rosalyn Baxandall, "The Question Seldom Asked: Women and the CPUSA," in Michael E. Brown et al., eds., *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Communism*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993) 151.

> these advance agents of Hitler policies and practices, are typical of their masters--assassins, thieves and sex perverts. So capitalism exposes itself. It accuses socialism of the crimes it itself commits just as the Nazis accuse the democratic people of crimes which are committed daily by Nazi fascism.[74]

For an organization that was so radical in many ways, the CP did not step outside of the mainstream with regard to heterosexuality, monogamy, and the family.[75]

Other fascists were attacked for their sexual behaviour. In particular, the Party ridiculed Fritz Kuhn, leader of the fascist group the German-American Bund, for his sexual indiscretions, noting that:

> the Hitler agent, although married, is not living with his wife, but is constantly in company with a mysterious blonde. The doctor bills were learned to have been paid by check to certain unnamed doctors, or in payment for special medical attention to unnamed lady friends of Kuhn.[76]

While this example offers a critique of fascism, the Party is not concerned with fascist racism or violence but with the personal sex lives of individual fascists. In another column, Bennett wrote that the Nazis were "dope fiends and sex-perverts doing the bidding of the finance-industrial lords of Germany. The drug addict Goering must have had an extra heavy shot in the arm last Saturday when he addressed his fellow Nazi gangsters at Nuremburg."[77] Bennett focuses on the personal deviance of individual Nazis while failing to make a wider critique of

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[74] *Peoples' Advocate*, 7 July 1939.
[75] Baxandall, "The Question Seldom Asked," 151.
[76] *Peoples' Advocate*, 2 June 1939. On Kuhn see Geoffrey S. Smith, *"To Save A Nation": American Countersubversives, the New Deal and the Coming of World War Two*, Revised Ed., (New York: Elephant Paperbacks, 1992) 87-100. Smith remarks that Kuhn was convicted of molesting a young girl in 1938; see Smith, "*To Save A Nation*," 95.
[77] *Peoples' Advocate*, 16 September 1938.

fascism; he also continues to link sexual deviance with fascism and capitalists. Similarly, the image of Goering as a "drug-addict" sends the message that fascists are abnormal and insane, denying them humanity and also denying that fascism had supporters among the "normal" population.[78] CP members were not sexual and cultural radicals from the 1910-1917 period nor were they 1960s "hippies" interested in artificial stimulation as a means of "dropping out" of society. Owing, in part, to the working-class background of many CP members, the Party associated drugs and sexual freedom with middle-class, bohemian values that were bourgeois, decadent, and fascist.

Men and women associated with the CP's trade unions were also concerned with proper gender roles in the workplace and the domestic sphere. In particular, IWA loggers and labour organizers constructed a more positive radical manhood. Communist unionists were key to the formation of the International Woodworkers of America. During the 1920s, when union organizing was especially dangerous owing to the "Red Scare," Communists were the only group of people willing to organize the loggers of B.C.[79] In the lean years of the Depression, Communists continued to work as organizers in the unemployed and relief movements in company towns and in logging camps.[80] Communists had forged bonds with logging communities so that they were able to organize workers when industrial unionism emerged in the B.C. logging industry during the mid-1930s.[81] With the Comintern's switch to a policy of "dual unionism," the CPC

[78] To be fair, the Party offered more substantial critiques of fascist violence and torture in other issues of the paper but the point, I think, remains a valid one.
[79] Lembcke and Tattam, *One Union in Wood*, 18.
[80] Lembcke and Tattam, *One Union in Wood*, 18.
[81] Lembcke and Tattam, *One Union in Wood*, 18.

established the Workers Unity League [WUL] and the Lumber Workers Industrial Union [LWIU] to compete with the conservative craft unions that operated under the umbrella of the American Federation of Labor.[82] When, in 1935, the CPC moved to the Popular Front position of joining with social democratic, liberal, and conservative political parties to combat the threat of fascism, the LWIU allied with the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners [UBCJ] to become the Lumber and Sawmill Workers Union [LSWU].[83] In July of 1937, the LSWU left the Carpenters and sided with the new CIO movement, and changed its name to the IWA.[84]

These Communist loggers constructed a masculinity that was particularly proletarian, in contrasted to both bourgeois masculinity and the "maleness" of conservative trade unionists. A short story written about the murder by company thugs of two Finnish union organizers, Viljo Rosval and Jon Voutilainen, presented male labour organizers as close to nature, strong, and sexualized.[85] The author remarked that:

> organizing in the bush in the middle of winter with the thermometer anywhere from ten to forty degrees below zero, the country covered with deep snows and a string of camps covering a territory of fifty or sixty miles and separated from each other by distances varying from five to fifteen miles, then the question of geography and distance immediately becomes an important factor. This handicap, if such it may be called, can only be overcome by men possessed of a splendid

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[82] Lembcke and Tattam, *One Union in Wood*, 20-21.
[83] Lembcke and Tattam, *One Union in Wood*, 42-43.
[84] Lembcke and Tattam, *One Union in Wood*, 53-54.
[85] On the murder of Rosval and Voutilainen see Andrew Neufeld and Andrew Parnaby, *The IWA in Canada: The Life and Times of an Industrial Union*, (Vancouver: IWA Canada/New Star Books, 2000) 30-31.

physique and stamina. The weak and faint-hearted are useless here.[86]

Women were nowhere to be found; rather, men worked outside the home and organized other male workers. Moreover, only a certain type of man, one who is physically and mentally strong as well as sexually attractive, could hope to work in the bush and organize loggers. The story continued:

> comrades Rossval and Voutilainen do not expect pleasantries in the front line trenches of the class war. These are the tasks that confront organizers of the L.W.I.U. and only the physically and mentally fit survive in the service of the union. It is a far cry from this obscure imperative task and its faithful servants to the palatial office, the mahogany desk and the senile and corpulent moghul of A.F. of L.-ism, but the historian of the future will have no difficulty discerning that which is genuine and that which is spurious.[87]

Communist organizers in the logging industry operated according to a certain type of proletarian masculinity. The author elevated the two organizers over the labour aristocrats who sit at desks and no longer resemble the workers whom they claim to represent. In the world of the labour organizer, physically and mentally strong men worked outside the home to earn money and organize loggers. Historians have called this phenomenon "Marxist masculinity" and "virile syndicalism," where radical movements attempt to reconstitute or transform, but not eradicate, male privilege.[88] The union organizers wanted to give loggers the power to challenge the

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[86] UBCSC, Tom McEwen Fonds, Box 2, File 3, "Men of the Forest: A Story of the Lumber Workers Industrial Union of Canada," n.a, n.d.. Since the LWIU did not change its name to the IWA until 1937, I assume that the author wrote the story during the 1930s.

[87] UBCSC, "Men of the Forest."

[88] On this point I have been influenced by Todd McCallum, "Not A Sex Question? The One Big Union and The Politics of Radical Manhood," *Labour/Le Travail* 42 (Fall 1998): 19. See also McCallum's MA thesis *"A Modern Weapon for Modern Man: Marxist Masculinity and the Social Practices of The One Big Union, 1919-1924,"* (MA Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1995) 4-5; Francis Shor, "Masculine Power and Virile Syndicalism: A Gendered Analysis of The IWW in Australia," *Labour History* 63 (November 1992): 83-99.

Lumber Trust and conservative unionists. They were not concerned with working class women's subordination in the home.

B.C. loggers also made a link between masculinity and risk. Working as a logger in British Columbia was a dangerous job. Accidents occurred frequently, company thugs beat up and killed union organizers, and company officials were often indifferent or hostile to the concerns of loggers and unionists.[89] In response, the loggers prized risk-taking and feats of strength and skill as integral parts of their masculine identities. An article in the *Lumber Worker*, entitled "Tough Guys Of Tall Timbers," notes that

> the first work on the tree is done by the finest and bravest men in the lumber camps - the timber toppers. For this job, it is said that a man needs nerves of steel, the muscles of a gorilla, and the stamina of a marathon runner. No wonder he is nicknamed the Human Fly. He is the king of the woods, the highest-paid and most skilful of all lumberjacks.[90]

It was important to demonstrate this skill and bravery: "after his job is over the timber-topper doesn't as a rule descend the tree at once. To entertain his pals below he often performs some of the most hair-raising stunts you can imagine."[91] The *Lumber Worker* also noted that "the timber-topper stands on the tree top. With his hands locked behind his head he moves slowly round in a complete circle, staring up into the sky at all times. One slip when doing this would mean certain death."[92] The author concluded that "in spite of all these dangers you can never get

[89] On the I.W.A. in particular and on loggers in general see Myrtle Bergren, *Tough Timber: The Loggers of B.C. - Their Story*, (Toronto: Progress Books, 1966) *passim*; Lembcke and Tattam, *One Union in Wood*, *passim*.
[90] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 2 February 1938.
[91] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 2 February 1938.
[92] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 2 February 1938.

a man of the tall timbers to give up his job ... the lure of the great woods and the hazards of the man-killing Douglas Fir always brings them back to the most dangerous job of the twentieth century - lumber-jacking!"[93] The risk is part of the attraction for these men; even though their actions are dangerous they perform them, regardless of the risk involved, in order to conform with working-class male culture.

Even their recreation was rough. In Vancouver's Skid Road, home for loggers when work was finished, "the saloons ... were noisy with talk, and some young logger who had one too many, could always be seen, hair tousled and mackinaw askew, looking for a fight or being dragged out of one by his comrades."[94] Myrtle Bergren recounts another incident that had occurred in 1927 when a tree crushed three loggers.[95] She went on to comment that an old logger had to wait for his partners to saw him out from under a tree; when they finally got the logger to Youbou, he had to wait another three hours for an ambulance to take to the hospital in Duncan which was 28 miles away.[96] Although this rough lifestyle was a legitimate expression of male, working-class culture in B.C., it was a "macho" culture that led to many deaths while excluding women from participation.

What can we conclude about CP women's roles and the Party's construction of a respectable masculine identity during the 1930s? The Vancouver Communist Party's position on women and proper gender roles was two-sided and complex. While the Party was committed to gender equality in theory, this

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[93] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 2 February 1938.
[94] Bergren, *Tough Timber*, 26.
[95] Bergren, *Tough Timber*, 67.
[96] Bergren, *Tough Timber*, 67.

commitment did not always exist in practice. In the specific context of the 1930s, Party members viewed women as auxiliary contributors to the struggle against unemployment, but generally held to a white, middle-class conception of a woman's role in society. While Communist women were crucial to the success that the CP had, male and female Communists saw women's contributions as expected and natural not as constructed. Communist women and men attempted to "perform" the role that society expected of them.[97] Betty Griffin remarked that CP women did not think about their subordinate status in the Party; concerning their double work load of domestic and Party work, Griffin said that they "just did it."[98] Rosaleen Ross, whose parents were members of the British Labour Party prior to immigrating to Canada, noted that, as a child in a progressive family, her participation in the radical movement was "taken for granted" and was "just part of the job."[99] This helps to explain why most Party women did not challenge their secondary role. The prevailing gender norms of the period, especially the idea of separate spheres, limited the extent to which the Communists could go beyond dominant ideas surrounding women and sexuality. No doubt the CP would have had a difficult time attracting anyone to their party had they attempted to go drastically beyond white, Anglo-Celtic values about sex.

The dominant gender ideals of the period strongly influenced the Vancouver CP. The notion of "separate spheres" was part of this dominant gender ideal. The term "separate spheres" describes men going out into the world and

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[97] On gender as performance see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990) passim.
[98] Interview with Betty Griffin, 18 May 2000 by Brian Thom.
[99] Interview with Rosaleen Ross, 15 May 2000.

earning money while women remain in the home as the guardians of the domestic sphere.[100] Given that CP women were mostly mothers and wives in working-class families, their husbands, as with most men at this time, felt that women should not work outside the home for wages after they had married.[101] The "breadwinner ideology" was closely related to separate spheres. Most people felt that men should be the sole wage earners in families while women had to remain pure and virtuous while looking after the children and the home.[102] The dominant culture also assumed that males were superior to females. Where women were "calm ... receptive," "passive" and "users," men were "restless, adventurous, creative, active," and "makers."[103] Women became housewives and caregivers while men became workers and bosses. "Respectable" society held that females had to become wives and mothers; this was considered a woman's biological destiny.[104] Similarly, society defined a woman's value according to her physical appearance.[105] Men, it was thought, wanted an attractive woman for a wife and a mother to his children. During this period, "respectable" citizens were white, middle class, English-speaking, and Protestant. To that end, middle class, Anglo-Canadian women disdained immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe and Asia as "threats" to the superiority of the white race.[106] Canadian elites preferred

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[100] Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada*, (Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books, 1988) 19.
[101] Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*, 24.
[102] Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*, 24.
[103] Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, 18.
[104] Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, 18.
[105] Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, 18.
[106] Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983) 53.

immigrants of "good, sound British stock."[107]

The Communist Party of Canada, founded in 1921 in Guelph, Ontario, despite its radical orientation, held on to many of the norms of the period. Taking inspiration from the Russian Revolution of 1917, the CPC's founders created a highly centralized, underground, illegal organization that sought to effect revolution in Canada on the Bolshevik model.[108] The CPC, unlike later political parties such as the Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation, had no desire to work within the established parliamentary system. The Party did not want "part-time" revolutionaries; instead, it only wanted committed members who were willing to devote their lives to the cause.[109] The CPC agreed to adhere to the dictates of the Communist International [Comintern] in Moscow, which became the governing body of CPs all over the world.[110] Canadian Communists saw the Party as being the "vanguard" of the fight for working class emancipation from the capitalist system. The Party embraced iron discipline with local Party "cells" owing absolute allegiance to the CPC leadership.[111] This model followed Lenin's view that had led to a successful revolution in Russia.

Yet the radical orientation of the CPC did not extend fully to women. This is curious given that women such as Bella Hall Gauld and Florence Custance were among the Party's founders.[112] The Party followed Lenin's view on "The Women

[107] Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred?*, 53.
[108] William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International: A History of the Communist Party of Canada 1919-1929*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968) 39.
[109] Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond*, (Toronto: Methuen, 1988) 3-4.
[110] Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975) 10-11.
[111] Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada*, 17.
[112] Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 28-31.

Question" and this suggests an explanation for the CPC's gender policies. Lenin believed that the Communist Party needed women to leave the home and become committed revolutionaries. Lenin, like many Communists, believed that most women were politically "backward" and of no use to the revolutionary movement. Lenin felt that the CPs had to guide women in the struggle against capitalism. Moreover, he believed that, once the revolutionaries had established a Communist state, then women's emancipation would follow as a natural and inevitable result of capitalism's overthrow. Lenin was also disdainful of the efforts of feminists such as Inessa Armand and Aleksandra Kollontai to challenge conventional views of sex and marriage. In a Leninist analysis, the revolutionary movement did not seek women's emancipation as an end in itself; CP women were always individual fighters in a male-dominated Party.[113] Canadian Communists felt tied to the Leninist view of a vanguard Party leading the different CP cells, like the women's section. This tie to Leninist dogma helps to explain the conservative nature of the CPC on the woman question.

While the CP espoused gender equality and addressed women's concerns in the newspaper, the Party was found wanting when it came to putting these ideals into practice. The CP constructed an ideal of male Communist respectability which upheld the heterosexual, monogamous family even as it presented a critique of fascism. As CP member Lil Stoneman said "you have to fight and struggle for everything."[114] Vancouver's Communists made sure that Party women always had to fight and struggle *harder* for everything.

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[113] Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 18-19.

[114] WLHC, Interview with Lil Stoneman, Summer 1979, with Sara Diamond.

Chapter Two:
"We Can't Have Peace If We Don't Have Unity":
Vancouver's Communist Women Confront World War Two

From 14 to 19 December 1942, Communist Party candidates swept the elections for the executive offices of the Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders Union, Local No. 1, Vancouver.[1] Since shipbuilding was crucial to the Allied war effort, the Communists' victory came as a shock to the anti-Communist unionists of the Canadian Congress of Labour [CCL], who were affiliated with the craft unionists of the Trades and Labor Council-American Federation of Labor [TLC-AFL]. The CCL responded to the Communist threat by declaring the election unconstitutional.[2] Shortly thereafter, the CCL suspended the Communist officers and the union charter, and appointed the regional Congress director as the administrator of the Boilermakers' Union.[3]

In the days that followed, the commission that the CCL executive council appointed to solve the problem declared the election invalid but stated that suspending the charter was also unconstitutional.[4] In the subsequent election, the Boilermakers elected the Communists again; the CCL responded by trying to set up shipyard unions based on industrial lines in order to fragment the Communists' strength.[5] On 3 November 1943, the B.C. Supreme Court ruled the

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[1] University of British Columbia Special Collections (UBCSC), Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, Box 34, File 2, "Report of Commission Appointed by the Executive Council of the Canadian Congress of Labour at Its Sessions In Ottawa, January 9, 1943."
[2] As recounted in Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia*, (Vancouver: BC Federation of Labour/Boag Foundation, 1967) 133-134.
[3] Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 134.
[4] Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 134.
[5] Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 134.

CCL's actions illegal.[6] The situation ended in victory for the Communists with the formation of the Shipyard General Workers' Federation of British Columbia that the CCL gave the responsibility of chartering local unions.[7] The Supreme Court's decision forced the CCL to grant the radical Boilermakers their independence, give the union full status as a national union rather than keeping it as a Congress local, and reduce the union's per capita tax for membership in the Congress from twenty-five cents to three cents.[8]

While the CCL was deciding the fate of the Boilermakers' Union, rank and file union members were hardly idle; indeed, the union issued bulletins as these events unfolded, providing information to union members as well as comic relief. Some of this humour related to the women who were new to such unions as the Boilermakers. With the commencement of World War II, women came into the war industries in record numbers to replace men who had been released from their jobs to fight in Europe.[9]

The dominant culture felt profoundly uncomfortable at seeing women come

[6] Howard White, *A Hard Man to Beat: The Story of Bill White, Labour Leader, Historian, Shipyard Worker, Raconteur*, (Vancouver: Pulp Press, 1983) 33.
[7] Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 134.
[8] White, *A Hard Man to Beat*, 33.
[9] The key text in the Canadian context is Ruth Roach Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986). The American literature on this subject is vast; what follows is only a partial list. See, for example, Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War With America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982); Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie The Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II*, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts, 1984); Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987). A much-cited text that focuses on the European experience is Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

into the wartime work force. The larger society felt that women's entry into what were previously male dominated occupations was a temporary phenomenon.[10] It was thought that women would return to the home after the war ended, marry, and have children.[11] Even during the war, the armed forces emphasized that women serving in the Canadian Women's Army Corps [CWAC] were still feminine and heterosexual and that these women would return to the domestic sphere as soon as the war had ended.[12] Some elements in the dominant culture feared that the women serving in CWAC would turn to homosexuality or become manly as a result of serving in what were formerly male jobs.[13] A similar fear arose surrounding women workers in industry.

The dominant society's view of women, shaped by the necessity of war, was ambivalent. While the armed forces and the war industries needed women's labour, mainstream society felt that the presence of women in non-traditional occupations signified disorder. A "moral panic" developed over women's activity in industry and the military. There was concern over the possibility of male soldiers and CWAC members having sexual liaisons and upsetting morale; a panic also spread concerning the possibility of outbreaks of venereal disease and illegitimate pregnancies.[14] There was also a sexual division of labour that emerged because of the war. Men became heroic soldiers who served on the front lines while

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[10] Numerous historians have commented on the temporary nature of women's entry into non-traditional jobs. In particular see Honey, *Creating Rosie The Riveter*, 6-17; Milkman, *Gender at Work*, 1-11; Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All,"* 215-220.
[11] Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All,"* 217-218.
[12] Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All,"* 135-136.
[13] Nancy Louise Olson, *"Assembling A Life: The (Auto) Biography of Alexis Amelia Alvey,"* (MA Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1998); Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All,"* 140-160.
[14] Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All,"* 169-187.

women remained on the home front as auxiliary supporters to the men; women rationed their families' food intake, put together care packages for servicemen, and brought their old pots and pans to the authorities to be used for scrap metal.[15]

An example from one of these bulletins illustrated the gendered aspect of the war. In a section entitled "The Scrap Pile," the writer remarked: "welder's wife to neighbor: I don't like this business of women working in the shipyards. You know how attractive my husband is!"[16] Another example from the same bulletin portrayed a woman worker challenging a man on the correct way to perform a task. "Charge hand to lady bolter-up: 'Now put the nut on the other way. In the shipyard we have to put them on the wrong way.' " The "lady bolter-up" responded by saying "Oh! smart guy, eh? Think I'm dumb? I'll put them on the right way - same as I did the other two plates. Beat it before I crown you!"[17] Some women felt that their femininity was threatened because they had taken on men's jobs:

> they found a woman in the States who is sorry she went to work in the shipyards. Listen ... Yeah! I should have got a nice easy job in an airplane plant. I went to a dance the other night, and I had on an evening gown, sleeveless and low in the back. The men were all complimenting me on the fine muscles I had on my shoulders and my arms. One stoop even told me I had a manly walk. Now I gotta practice at home to walk like a lady.[18]

World War II also effected change for the Communist Party of Canada.

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[15] Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All,"* 33-41.
[16] UBCSC, Tom McEwen Fonds, Box 2, File 5, "Bulletin No. 10. Wednesday, April 14, 1943. Issued by Boilermakers' and Iron Shipbuilders' Union Of Canada - Local No. 1."
[17] UBCSC, Tom McEwen Fonds, Box 2, File 5, "Bulletin No. 10."
[18] UBCSC, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, Box 34, File 2, "Bulletin No. 9. Wednesday, April 7, 1943. Issued by ... Boilermakers' and Iron Shipbuilders' of Canada - Local No. 1."

Between the beginning of the war, on 1 September 1939, and Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, Communist Parties the world over, acting in compliance with the Communist International's viewpoint and in response to the Nazi-Soviet Pact, opposed the war effort, saying that it was an imperialist venture by British and Canadian elites.[19] With Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, the CPC switched its policy to one of support for the Allied war effort, even if this meant allying with conservative or bourgeois liberal governments such as those of Winston Churchill in Britain, W.L. MacKenzie King in Canada, and Franklin D. Roosevelt in the United States.[20] Since conservative and liberal political parties were now CP allies, indigenous CPs attempted to make themselves into "respectable" political organizations that would attract large numbers of people with differing views and not challenge the capitalist status quo.

The Women's Auxiliaries supported the new CP line on the war. An article in The Ladies' Auxiliary, B.C. District Council, sent a resolution to Prime Minister MacKenzie King, "urging the necessity of an immediate second front."[21] The IWA Ladies' Auxiliary to Local 1-80 in Courtenay contributed material aid and established "a Home Comforts Organization at Courtenay which will send parcels to local boys overseas. Each member is knitting in her spare time and a dance is being planned to raise funds for the organization."[22]

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[19] Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950*, (Toronto: McClelland And Stewart, 1989) 166. In the American context, the key text is Maurice Isserman, *"Which Side Were You On?" The American Communist Party During The Second World War*, (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1982) 32-55.

[20] Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 169-170. See also Isserman, *"Which Side Were You On?,"* 103-117.

[21] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 10 October 1942.

[22] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 19 September 1942.

The Women's Auxiliaries of the CP-led unions also raised funds for the Red Cross and for Russian War Relief. The Party's support for the Soviet Union was not surprising given the admiration that the CP felt for Soviet-style Communism. Communist women working to raise money for the Red Cross, a conservative organization, was more revealing. As John Hutchinson argues, the Red Cross, while initially a purely philanthropic society that attempted to remain neutral in armed conflicts, transformed into an organization that supported militarism and romantic nationalism during the period between 1880 and 1906.[23] Hutchinson also notes that the national Red Cross societies, in Japan, France, the United States and elsewhere, supported the imperialist and militarist ideologies of their home countries.[24] The Red Cross supported an ultra-traditional conception of a woman's role in society. The society portrayed women as the source of all goodness: as mothers, caregivers and auxiliary supporters to brave soldiers who fought for a just cause.[25] Thus, the Vancouver CP's support for the Red Cross, given the latter's tolerance for militarism and nationalism, demonstrates the Party's attempt to construct itself as a respectable and conventional political party.

Several CP-led unions supported the Red Cross and Russian War Relief. At their meeting held on 7 December 1942, the secretary for the Hotel, Restaurant, and Culinary Employees' and Bartenders' Union [HRWU] said that the union had "received from the Red Cross an appeal to aid the Russian allies. An appeal was

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[23] John F. Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross*, (Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1996) 150 and 346-355.
[24] Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity*, 256-276.
[25] Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity*, 260-268. Hutchinson notes that l'Action Sociale de la Femme, a right-wing, anti-modern, anti-feminist, and pro-Catholic organization, called on French women to join the Red Cross. See Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity*, 264-265

read from the Youth Federation asking our support in assisting them financially in having a recreation for the benefit of the armed forces and trade union youth."[26] The International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers [Mine-Mill] was another CP-led union that had Women's Auxiliaries.[27] In a letter, dated 20 June 1945, from L.V. Lane, secretary of the Kimberly, B.C. Branch of the Red Cross, addressed to "Mrs. J. R. McFarlane," secretary of the WA to Mine-Mill Local 137, Lane writes that "the executive of the Canadian Red Cross Society, Kimberley Branch, wish to thank your organization, the Ladies' Auxiliary, Local 137, for the splendid donation which they made to the Red Cross effort."[28] In having the Women's Auxiliaries perform these "female" acts, the CP showed that it supported the doctrine of separate spheres.

The IWA Ladies Auxiliary of Duncan "held a dance on March 18 and the proceeds were donated to the Red Cross drive for funds. A good sum was realized."[29] The members of the Women's Auxiliaries of the IWA also raised money for Russian war relief and contributed "a goodly number of sweaters" and other knitted articles.[30] CP member Rosaleen Ross notes that women did much of the "behind the scenes" work in the Party; women performed such "feminine" tasks as

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[26] UBCSC, Hotel Restaurant, and Culinary Employees' and Bartenders' Union, Local No. 28 Fonds. Minutes of Meeting held 3 December 1942. 3 PM. The Labor Youth Federation [LYF] was the CP's youth wing; its name had changed from the Young Communist League [YCL] as a condition of the CPC/LPP becoming legal again in the fall of 1942; interview with Betty Griffin, 18 May 2000 by Brian Thom

[27] On Mine-Mill see Al King with Kate Braid, *Red Bait! Struggles of a Mine Mill Local*, (Vancouver: Kingbird Publishing, 1998) 51-53.

[28] UBCSC, Papers of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (Mine-Mill Papers). L.V. Lane. Letter to Mrs. J.R. McFarlane, 20 June 1945.

[29] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 20 March 1944.

[30] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 3 April 1944.

knitting sweaters and organizing dances to raise money.[31] Women in the IWA auxiliaries "went door to door canvassing for Victory War Bonds and they asked the government for more sugar so that they could make ... blackberry jam ... for the crippled children's solarium." The women "undertook to send cigarettes to the boys and men overseas and they did simply everything that was done for the war effort."[32]

Between June of 1940 and October of 1942, the Communist Party was an illegal organization.[33] Mona Morgan notes that after the outbreak of war, "it didn't take them a minute to bring the War Measures Act into play ... the Germans and Italians and the Japanese were herded off to internment camps but so were Communists and Labour leaders and there were 250 Communists who were interned in that period."[34] Morgan continues that "the authorities just went into homes, summarily picked up people, took them off, and took them to internment camps and again women are in charge not only with home and family but also with other things because the men and the other leaders are removed ... so the Party had to go underground ... it was a terrible time."[35] During this period the Vancouver CP's newspaper was shut down and the police and government destroyed its apparatus.[36] The authorities justified the repression because the CP did not support the war effort, although this soon changed. In Vancouver, the authorities arrested prominent Communists such as Tom McEwen and Fergus

[31] Interview with Rosaleen Ross, 15 May 2000 by Brian Thom.
[32] WLHC, SFU, interview with Myrtle Bergren.
[33] Interview with Mona Morgan, 7 June 2000 by Brian Thom; Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 166-169.
[34] Interview with Mona Morgan.
[35] Interview with Mona Morgan
[36] Interview with Mona Morgan.

McKean. Mona Morgan notes how the wives and families of these internees worked to gain the release of their fathers, brothers, and husbands as members of "a new organization ... the Council for Democratic Rights."[37] These women may have been acting out of "wifely duty"; however, many of them were also activists in their own right.[38]

Rose McEwen led a successful campaign to gain the release of her husband, Tom McEwen.[39] In a letter to the *Winnipeg Free Press*, she wrote:

> my husband, Mr. Thomas McEwen, has been interned. He was sentenced to two years hard labour in October 1940 for being a member of an "illegal organization," the Communist Party of Canada ... I appeal to you as a Canadian citizen, wife of a British subject and mother of a 14-month old Canadian boy to assist me in releasing my husband so that justice may be done.[40]

Rose McEwen continues :

> my husband was born in Scotland and is a skilled blacksmith by trade. Since coming to this country he has been always in the ranks of those who fought consistently for labour and opposed fascism. He feels, as do I and many others, that it is a burlesque of justice to intern an anti-fascist.[41]

She follows this point by stating "alone I am helpless to obtain his release," drawing on the image of a lonely mother raising a child without her husband's

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[37] Interview with Mona Morgan.
[38] Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 169.
[39] McEwen describes his internment in his memoirs, *The Forge Glows Red: From Blacksmith to Revolutionary*, (Toronto: Progress Books, 1974) 207-217. Maurice Rush also mentions McEwen's internment in *"We Have A Glowing Dream": Recollections of Working Class and People's Struggles in B.C. 1935-1995*, (Vancouver: Centre for Socialist Education, 1996) 166-167.
[40] UBCSC, Tom McEwen Fonds, Box 1, File 3. Letter from Rose McEwen to The Editor, *Winnipeg Free Press*, 21 November 1941.
[41] UBCSC, Tom McEwen Fonds, Box 1, File 3. Letter from Rose McEwen.

aid.[42] She also emphasizes her husband's skill as a blacksmith which would aid the war effort. Ironically, CP women used dominant cultural ideals of motherhood and British citizenship to campaign for their male relatives' release from captivity. The use of British citizenship was especially ironic, given that, during World War II, the dominant society did not consider CP members of Scandinavian or Eastern European background to be "white" or "respectable."

Demonstrating the importance of the "radical family" in the Vancouver CP, Isobella McEwen, one of Tom McEwen's daughters, wrote a letter to Louis St. Laurent, the Federal Minister of Justice, asking for her father's release. She wrote:

> my father fought Nazism and fascism, many years before this war began ... His family are all staunch anti-fascists. Both of his sons, and his son-in-law, were in the battle for Loyalist Spain. To-day his younger son is in Canada's active army; the older is employed in an important defence industry, and his son-in-law has already given his life in the Battle for the Atlantic.[43]

Isobella McEwen calls upon the discourse of nationality and citizenship in order to appeal for her father's release. She suggests that her father is as patriotic as any Conservative or Liberal Canadian since he has had sons die in the war against fascism. Indeed, Isobella notes that her father is even more of a patriot since he fought fascism many years before the established political parties saw it as a threat.

Rose McEwen organized the radical community to assist her in gaining

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[42] UBCSC, Tom McEwen Fonds, Box 1, File 3. Letter from Rose McEwen.

[43] UBCSC, Tom McEwen Fonds, Box 1, File 3. Letter from Isobella T. McEwen to The Hon. L. St. Laurent, Minister of Justice, 21 May 1942.

freedom for her husband. Labour lawyer John Stanton wrote to Louis St. Laurent that: "I understand from Mrs McEwen, wife of the above, that her husband has been interned for some time under Regulation 21 of the Defence of Canada Regulations, I have been asked by her to write you a letter of character reference."[44] Stanton goes on to say that "Mr McEwen has a reputation in this community both as a skilled tradesmen and as a man of pronounced anti-fascist views ... if released Mr McEwen would doubtless place his skill at the disposal of his country."[45] He continues his letter by noting that "the general internment policy of the Department Of Justice seems to me to require some considerable revision."[46] Stanton draws upon the same themes as the McEwen women, stating that Tom is a man of skill and a man with a long-standing record of opposition to fascism. Stanton notes that it is ludicrous for a man of McEwen's background to be interned while a war against fascism is going on:

> if men of Mr McEwen's reputation are to be indefinitely
> interned at a time when there is obvious need for
> the services of all who are sincere in their determination
> to defeat the Axis powers, there cannot but be serious
> harm done to the country's morale.[47]

An item from *The Toronto Daily Star*, written about Tom McEwen's release from prison, offers more information on the radical family:

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[44] UBCSC, Tom McEwen Fonds, Box 1, File 3. Letter from John Stanton to The Honourable Minister of Justice, 20 April 1942. Stanton was a lawyer prominent in supporting the CP and other radical organizations. See Stanton's memoirs, ***My Past Is Now: Further Memoirs of a Labour Lawyer***, (St. John's: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1994); ***Never Say Die! The Life And Time of John Stanton, A Pioneer Labour Lawyer***, (Ottawa: Steel Rail Publishing, 1987).

[45] UBCSC, Tom McEwen Fonds, Box 1, File 3. Letter from John Stanton.

[46] UBCSC, Tom McEwen Fonds, Box 1, File 3. Letter from John Stanton.

[47] UBCSC, Tom McEwen Fonds, Box 1, File 3. Letter from John Stanton.

> released from Internment with four others after two years, Tom Ewen, former Communist party organizer, stopped over in Toronto for a reunion with his soldier son and two daughters, then left for Vancouver to rejoin his wife and seek a war production job. Shown here are Mrs. Jean Kozar, a daughter, Ewen, his grandson, Tommy Kozar, nine months, another daughter, Isobella, and his son, Signalman Bruce Ewen.[48]

McEwen emphasizes his support for the war effort and the sacrifices his family had made in order to fight fascism. The article, quoting McEwen, continues that:

> "this family has been fighting Hitler for 10 years. Now we're going to fight harder than ever," said Tom Ewen ... the former Communist Party organizer left Sunday night for Vancouver, where his wife and two year-old son, whom he has seen only once, await him.[49]

McEwen then remarks that he intends to take a job in the war industries: " 'I am going to help carry on the fight for the lifting of the ban on the Communist Party so that we can all join freely in total war against Hitler,' he said ... A blacksmith, expert machinist, and riveter, Ewen has no doubt he can help build ships."[50] McEwen constructs himself, and his family members, as fighters against the cause of fascism. McEwen, fighting for a greater cause than capitalism's defeat, is even willing to work in the war industries of a country that had only recently imprisoned him.

Various radical families played key roles in organizing the Vancouver CP during these years. Other important Communist families besides the McEwens included the Bjarnason, Greenwell, Griffin, Gidora-Dewhurst, and Pritchett

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[48] UBCSC, Tom McEwen Fonds, Box 2, File 4. *The Toronto Daily Star*, 13 October 1942.
[49] UBCSC, Tom McEwen Fonds, Box 2, File 4. *The Toronto Daily Star*, 13 October 1942.
[50] UBCSC, Tom McEwen Fonds, Box 2, File 4. *The Toronto Daily Star*, 13 October 1942.

families.[51] Indeed, many CP women became involved with the Party because their parents were also left-wing. Rosaleen Ross's parents had been members of the British Labour Party and, after immigrating to Canada, Ross became involved with the peace movement and with the campaign against Spanish fascism.[52] These women assisted at strikes and demonstrations and organized consumer boycotts. "I think that ... was quite true of quite a number of progressive families that they were close knit to their children," notes Elspeth Gardner.[53] Gardner's father Peter Munro was a street railwayman and an activist with the union while her mother Elsie Munro, who had emigrated from Scotland, was active in the community with the Parent-Teacher Association [PTA] and with the Women's Labor League and the Housewives' League.[54] These Communist women came from similar backgrounds: they were working-class and often of British or Scandinavian descent; many were recent immigrants.

Many Communist couples, for example Mona and Nigel Morgan, Viola and Alf Dewhurst, Betty and Donald Greenwell, and Betty and Harold [Hal] Griffin, met through the Party.[55] Betty Griffin notes that "Hal was editor of the paper at that time and he was also one of those giving classes. And ... being sort of new and all, I was assigned to his class and he was very arrogant and I hated his guts!"[56] Betty

[51] Interview with Betty Greenwell, 29 May 2000 by Brian Thorn; interview with Betty Griffin; Rush, *"We Have A Glowing Dream,"* 158.
[52] Interview with Rosaleen Ross.
[53] Interview with Elspeth Gardner, 29 June 2000 by Brian Thorn
[54] Interview with Elspeth Gardner; Irene Howard, "The Mothers' Council of Vancouver: Holding the Fort for the Unemployed, 1935-1938," in Robert A.J. McDonald and Jean Barman, eds., *Vancouver Past: Essays in Social History Vancouver Centennial Issue of BC Studies*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986) 267.
[55] Interview with Mona Morgan; interview with Vi Dewhurst, 23 May 2000 by Brian Thorn; interview with Betty Greenwell; interview with Betty Griffin.
[56] Interview with Betty Griffin.

"inherited" two children that Hal Griffin had by his then-wife Kay, from whom he separated just before he married Betty.[57] "He went back to work and I went home with the kids. So, as a result, I had to stay home and look after kids at that time. Of course it was a wood stove, ice in the ice box ... I had no washing machine, diapers to do 'cause Sean ... was a year old ... and Shannon was four" Betty Griffin continues.[58] As the examples of the Griffin and McEwen families show, women played key roles in the functioning of "progressive" families. They raised the children, did the bulk of the housework and supported their husbands' political careers. CP women played an important role both in the Party and in their husbands' lives.[59]

CP women were active agents in organizing to help their husbands and male relatives; while Joan Sangster's argument about "wifely virtue" may well be true, it is no less true that Communist wives and daughters were important to the movement in numerous ways. During the period when the CP was illegal, women not only campaigned for the Party leaders' release but they also kept the Party paper going, using mimeograph machines, while being careful to avoid capture by the authorities.[60] Publishing a newspaper, which keeps members up to date on activities and also serves as a propaganda tool to draw in new supporters, is crucial to the functioning of any organization, particularly a radical group like the

[57] Interview with Betty Griffin.

[58] Interview with Betty Griffin.

[59] In a slightly different vein, Deborah Gerson shows how US Communist women in the 1950s used the discourse of familialism, which so often has a conservative bent, to attack McCarthyism's imprisonment of Communist fathers and husbands. See Deborah A. Gerson, "Is Family Devotion Now Subversive? Familialism Against McCarthy," in Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994) 151-176.

[60] Interview with Mona Morgan.

CP. Thus, the imprisoned CP leaders owed Party women a debt for keeping the movement alive while the wartime state kept them as its captives.

As they had in the Depression, Communist women organized against the high cost of living, a result of wartime rationing. This concern occupied a significant amount of space in the Party weeklies, for wage and price controls affected workers differently than they did the rich. "The worker's family must spend more on such necessities as clothes and food and it happens that clothing and food have increased most in price since the beginning of the war" noted one CP writer, Bert Marcuse. "Try to tell ... a worker's wife that the cost of living has only risen 16.9 percent ... and they'll probably tell you you're crazy ... workers who are earning less than the $1,700 of the average family has less money to spend on luxuries like travel, recreation, doctors."[61]

The war caused prices of staple working class foods to rise drastically, thereby increasing the hardship on working families. Largely because of the need for wartime rationing, consumption, of both necessities and of leisure items, became important to the Party and to CP women. For example, the Party commented that while the price of luxury foods, which working families cannot afford, remained the same, the price of the food that workers ate rose drastically: "such staple working- class family foods as stewing beef have gone up in price 65 percent since the war began".[62]

CP women used the International Women's Day Celebrations to develop the idea of the left-wing woman as a radical mother and consumer. Kay Gregory

[61] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 16 November 1942.
[62] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 16 November 1942.

noted that "this war ... has brought one penalty of which women are most aware - increased living costs."[63] In comparing the effects of World War I on living costs with World War II, the Party noted that:

> for the same period in this war, the wholesale index rose from 73.2 in Jan. 1939 to 82.8 in Jan. 1940, an increase of 9.0 for the year, including less than five months of war. Thus the effect of war upon the purchasing power of the worker is already more marked in this war than in the last. In this election all the issues which vitally concern women, the high cost of food, loss of civil rights and liberties, and indications of pending conscription must necessarily play an important part.[64]

The Party, while still portraying women as naturally consumers, called on mothers and wives to become active in voting in an upcoming election and to challenge the Canadian government on the issues of arresting dissenters and conscription. "There's a critical situation arising on the home front, and Mrs. Vancouver Housewife, that hard-working helpmate of you and I and that shipyard union across the street is getting good and angry about it."[65] Working-class families could not afford to buy foods such as vegetables and canned goods owing to "skyrocketing prices" because of the war effort.[66]

While the Party supported the Allied war effort, it was not uncritical of the effects of the war on working-class homes. "The Dominion Bureau of Statistics continues to claim "no marked change in the cost of living." But there's another "statistical bureau" in operation that tells a different story -- the household budget --

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[63] *The Advocate*, 8 March 1940.
[64] *The Advocate*, 8 March 1940.
[65] *The People*, 10 April 1943.
[66] *The People*, 10 April 1943.

the article noted.[67] The author concluded that "there seems no doubt that the Federal cost-of-living index is false in its application to lower incomes. Any index that includes numerous high-cost luxury items that are out of reach of the average working class family deserves the term "phoney."[68]

The Housewives League of British Columbia [HWL] led a campaign to bring down wartime prices. These women challenged the Canadian state that, when raising prices, took no notice of the working-class families who were left to cope with these changes. The HWL challenged the Canadian state by doing such things as presenting reports to municipal committees that challenged local government officials to protect citizens' interests: "the Housewives' League of British Columbia successfully obtained reconstitution of a civic war prices committee to sift complaints and forward them to the Ottawa board."[69] The example of the Housewives League demonstrated that consumerism is one site upon which the class struggle is played out. As Nan Enstad argues, women workers have used their status as consumers of so-called "luxury goods" to carve out space for themselves as women and as workers in order to resist capitalism and sexism.[70] In her comments on the 1909 shirtwaist strike in New York City, Enstad comments that the mostly Jewish strikers used the idea of utopian entitlement inherent in consumer culture to create a sense of "working ladyhood."[71] CP

[67] *The People*, 10 April 1943.
[68] *The People*, 10 April 1943.
[69] *The Advocate*, 26 January 1940.
[70] Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 1-16.
[71] Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure*, 120-121. For another examination of the relationship between women, consumerism, and labour radicalism see Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1919-1929*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 118-138.

women's activism was a logical extentions of women's activity, given that most Party women were wives and mothers.

The Housewives League challenged the Canadian state for its patronizing attitude toward working-class women. Commenting on sugar rationing, Effie Jones wrote that "I had estimated that more than 100 pounds would be needed for my family of three ... I planned to preserve more than ever this year because of the increasing shortages on grocers' shelves. I'm sure every provider housewife had the same idea."[72] The accompanying article remarks on the irony of the wartime Canadian government wanting "strong" citizens while bringing in rations that do not allow for healthy citizens.[73] CP women were active in opposing the wartime Canadian state and its attitude toward working class women. The work of the Housewives League and the other Communist women's organizations indicates that the CP had a more ambivalent attitude toward the war effort than many had previously supposed.

CP women were also involved as workers in the war effort and as organizers in left-wing unions during the war. Alice Person, who worked for the Hammond Cedar Lumber company and who was involved with the IWA as a shop steward, remarked that "it was still a hard thing to convince a lot of women to go out and work ... there was a real campaign that women were needed on the job, and this whole idea was ... that ... you'll be able to go back to your domestic work afterwards or go back to your housework."[74] Person continued: "that also gave the women independence ... it opened the door for women to get the idea, "well, why

[72] *The People*, 10 April 1943.
[73] *The People*, 10 April 1943.
[74] WLHC, SFU, interview with Alice Person, Summer 1979, with Sara Diamond.

should I go back and do housework, if I stay home I won't get anything."[75] Person's comments suggest the dual nature of women's experiences in the wartime work force. She goes on to comment on some of the labour issues that arose during the war: "number one ... for the women was the wage structure."[76] Other issues that arose were "hours ... improvement in conditions, like canteens and bathrooms, cleaning up, cleaner toilets."[77] These were some of the issues that made women want to join CP-led unions.

Jonnie Rankin went to work as a passergirl in the North Vancouver shipyards during the war. The passergirl stood on the siding of ships and caught hot rivets in a small cone; the rivets were then used to join steel to make flat decks for bombers and aircraft.[78] Rankin became involved with the radical Marine and Boilermakers Union and eventually married Harry Rankin who became well-known as a left-wing member of Vancouver's city council.[79] Jonnie Rankin described her initiation to the union and how a fellow unionist told her "how they formed the union, the basis of the union, and how they were fighting against piece work and contract work of any kind, and we should have part of the profit of the whole, and not cut each other."[80] War work was empowering: "I probably learned more in two days than I'd learned in twenty years someplace else. So I went out and fought hard against piece work."[81] Her experience was not unique for "a lot of women were buying back their self-respect. Some were able to pay off stuff. A lot of them

[75] WLHC, SFU, interview with Alice Person.
[76] WLHC, SFU, interview with Alice Person.
[77] WLHC, SFU, interview with Alice Person.
[78] WLHC, SFU, interview with Jonnie Rankin, Summer 1979, with Sara Diamond.
[79] Rush, *"We Have A Glowing Dream,"* 176-178.
[80] WLHC, SFU, interview with Jonnie Rankin.
[81] WLHC, SFU, interview with Jonnie Rankin.

had made better arrangements with their husbands. There were separations over it. But you had a new status."[82] "It was the beginning of the change ... in this decade of being accepted equally in industry" Rankin concluded.[83]

Gladys Hillend, who was secretary-treasurer for IWA Local 217 during the war years, was another example of a woman who came into the Communist movement because of the need for her labour during wartime. As a secretary-treasurer she would "usually make up a leaflet and hand it out as to why they should organize and then call for a meeting and have them come into the union hall. And when they'd come into the meeting we would speak to them."[84] Once in the meeting, "they elect their shop stewards and give them material for signing up members and this sort of thing right in the plant."[85]

Despite the empowering nature of the war for some left-wing women, there were also some limiting aspects. Hillend remarked that "I talked to some of these guys about getting their wives into it, but other than that, I didn't do too much ... we'd have special Women's Day meetings and we would try to get them for shop stewards in the places where they worked the most."[86] Even in the CP-led unions, women, according to Hillend, were concentrated "in the easiest and least-skilled" jobs.[87] Alice Person states that, after wildcat strikes or "shut-downs," during the war, employers, due to the shortage of labour, "couldn't fire you," but after the war had ended "they didn't have to hire you back if they didn't want to."[88] Jonnie Rankin

[82] WLHC, SFU, interview with Jonnie Rankin.
[83] WLHC, SFU, interview with Jonnie Rankin.
[84] WLHC, SFU, interview with Gladys Hillend, Summer 1979, with Sara Diamond.
[85] WLHC, SFU, interview with Gladys Hillend.
[86] WLHC, SFU, interview with Gladys Hillend.
[87] WLHC, SFU, interview with Gladys Hillend.
[88] WLHC, SFU, interview with Alice Person.

notes that, even in the left-wing unions, "the women would go first when there were layoffs" at the end of the war to make room for returning servicemen.[89]

Another aspect of CP culture that came out toward the war's end, and which showed the Party's conservative side, was the CP's concern with the threat of juvenile delinquency among Vancouver's youth. Jean Mason, Housewives' League President, noted that: "if boys and girls are to be given jobs, then it must be made someone's responsibility to look out for their interests." "It is up to those of us who realize the dangers to do everything in our power to protect these young folks from any contact which might exert a harmful influence or contribute to delinquency."[90] Mason was particularly concerned that "nothing prevents cafes, hotels or bowling alleys employing them on night work. A girl of 15 is reported working as a cigarette girl in one local night spot ... a shortage of older workers will cause employers to hire boys and girls who would otherwise be considered too young for such work."[91] The CP, and the organizations associated with it, were concerned about children and teenagers, especially girls, working at what were considered "adult" and "male" jobs.

Prominent CP member Maurice Rush echoed Mason's comments. "Recent statistical reports on juvenile delinquency tell a heart breaking story," he wrote in the *Pacific Advocate*. "It is not generally known that 50 percent of all those going into our penitentiaries are young men and women under 24 years of age." "The problem of juvenile delinquency has reached alarming proportions and if we fail to heed the warning of the recent unfortunate incidents we shall fail our

[89] WLHC, SFU, interview with Jonnie Rankin.
[90] *The People*, 26 June 1943.
[91] *The People*, 26 June 1943.

younger generation." Economic insecurity, abusive homes, and the community's failure to provide "healthy, recreational and educational activities" contribute to the problem of youth crime. Rush offered an analysis of the problems of youth crime and juvenile delinquency as well as a critique of the mainstream political parties: "the Tory-Liberal coalition government failed our young people miserably."[92] Youthful Vancouver residents such as "the servicemen looking for fun on leave" and "the teen-age war workers with more money in their pockets than most of their fathers had ever seen ... wandered Vancouver's streets with nowhere to go but the night clubs, the crowded dance halls, and the dives."[93] On one level, this represents the CP's effort to alleviate a genuine problem among Vancouver's youth. It is nonetheless curious how the CP borrowed the language of youth delinquency that right-wing anti-Communists would use against them in the 1950s.[94] In keeping with the CP's search for respectability and its opposition to frivolity, bourgeois distractions like mink coats, and bohemian "sex radicalism," the Party did not support youth culture apart from the CP's own youth organs. The CP was hostile to any sort of entertainment that did not relate to Communism or left-wing politics.

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[92] *Pacific Advocate*, 13 October 1945.

[93] *The People*, 27 November 1943.

[94] The literature here is vast. See especially, in the American context, Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992) 127-166; Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History*, (New York: Basic Books, 1993) 195-206; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, Revised Ed., (New York: Basic Books, 1999) 81-99; Kate Weigand, "The Red Menace, The Feminine Mystique, and the Ohio Un-American Activities Commission: Gender and Anti-Communism in Ohio, 1951-1954," *Journal of Women's History* 3:3 (Winter 1992): 70-94. In the Canadian context see Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Daniel J. Robinson and David Kimmel, "The Queer Career of Homosexual Security Vetting in Cold War Canada," in Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld, eds., *Gender and History in Canada*, (Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd., 1996): 317-388.

For a radical organization, the CP was hardly ahead of its time when it came to gender roles. CP members believed that women would return to the home after the war ended. Even during the war, the CP tried to portray Communist and other women as being domestic and "feminine." While the Party supported those women who went into the wartime work force, it went along with the middle-class, Anglo-Canadian viewpoint that women's participation in male-dominated industries was temporary. This provides us with an example of how the CP attempted to become a "respectable" organization that would exist alongside the established political parties; to do this, the CP subscribed to aspects of the dominant culture's gender values. The CP, however, only supported dominant values, and the Allied war effort, in order to aid the Soviet Union. This suggests that the Vancouver CP's view of radical politics was closely tied to Soviet Communism and that the CP's support for dominant values was a matter of pragmatism rather than selling out to capitalism. Indeed, the CP continued to offer a critique of capitalism during the war, through the activities of such organizations as the Housewives League, even as the Party praised Britain and the United States' challenge to European and Japanese fascism.

The Vancouver Communist movement held an ambivalent attitude toward women during World War II. In the context of a time when women came, if only momentarily, into the work force in greater numbers than ever before, the CP, even as it championed women's greater involvement, still portrayed women as wives, mothers, and caregivers, not as wage workers. In supporting the Red Cross and Soviet War Relief, Party women, while fulfilling an important role, stayed in their

traditional domain as nurturers. In campaigning for their male relatives' freedom from detention, CP women challenged the Canadian state while remaining in the domestic sphere. Similarly, in supporting the idea of the Communist woman as a radical consumer, the CP put a militant spin on traditional gender roles while still maintaining the idea of separate spheres. CP members were also concerned with the problem of juvenile delinquency among young people. The Party supported this idea not knowing that it would resurface as a tool of right wing anti-Communism during the 1950s. On one level, CP policy was similar to mainstream society, as the dominant culture championed bringing women into the war effort. On another level, CP women worked to free CP men from jail, albeit using conservative rhetoric to do so at times, before the Soviet Union's entry into the war. Even after the Soviets entered the war against fascism, CP women still challenged the capitalist state because of the raising of wartime prices and the state's indifference toward working-class housewives. In general, the Communist Party's attitude toward women was not static and unchanging but fluid and consisting of a number of complex elements. Despite Wilfred Kileen's comment to the IWA Women's Auxiliaries' Quarterly Council meeting that "we can't have peace if we don't have unity," the world, and the Communist Party in Vancouver, achieved peace without having a completely unified position on the "woman question."[95]

[95] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 30 July 1945.

Chapter Three:
"The Most Successful Picnic Yet Held In Vancouver": Communist Party Beauty Pageants In British Columbia During The Second World War

In 1945, *The B.C. Lumber Worker* advertised an event: "a contest for the most popular girl – the Miss United Nations contest." The contest was part of the Labor Progressive Party's [LPP] annual summer "United Nations Picnic" in Confederation Park, North Burnaby.[1] The picnic featured "all sorts of entertainment for all sorts of people, from nine to ninety, from all the nationalities that make up our cosmopolitan city of Vancouver--the United Nations Picnic held every summer ... is becoming one of the red letter days of the year for thousands of Vancouver workers and their families."[2] The *Pacific Advocate* noted that the event "is expected to be the most successful picnic yet held in Vancouver."[3] In contrast, "the more serious side" was "an address by dynamic Fred Rose, [Communist] M.P. for Montreal-Cartier."[4] Significantly, the newspaper included the "popular girl" contest as being part of "the lighter side" of the picnic's highlights along with "music, dancing, singing ... a contest for the best national costume will be colorful and interesting."[5]

While it would be easy to view popular girl contests as evidence of the CP's sexism, and of women's complicity in their own oppression, this view is too

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[1] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 30 July 1945.
[2] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 30 July 1945.
[3] *Pacific Advocate*, 21 July 1945.
[4] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 30 July 1945.
[5] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 30 July 1945.

simplistic.[6] Some authors have assumed that CP beauty pageants prove that the Party was a completely sexist organization.[7] Certainly the dominant culture's beauty pageants were not benign events designed to advance the careers of young, attractive women. CP beauty pageants were very different, yet they highlight the ambiguous position of the Party.

The newspaper followed up the comment on the beauty pageants with information surrounding a specific candidate in the contest. A picture of Audrey Lawson, "one of the ten contenders for the title of Miss United Nations," was featured prominently next to the article.[8] The caption below Lawson's photo read:

> Audrey Lawson ... represents Scandinavia at the United Nations Picnic at Confederation Park on August 5th. Although she may be unknown by many she has spent some time working at the District Office of the IWA and is a trade unionist herself, understanding the work which all good trade unionists must carry on. She replaces Mona Morgan who represented Scandinavia in previous contests.[9]

We learn much about the CP from this example. Popular girl contests played a significant role in Communist Party culture. Women's participation in the picnic, however, was secondary to the "more serious," and male, work of sitting in the House of Commons and working with the government of W.L. MacKenzie King to

[6] For a critique of the dominant society's treatment of women, particularly with regard to cosmetics and fashion, see Joseph Hansen and Evelyn Reed, *Cosmetics, Fashion, and the Exploitation of Women*, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1986) *passim*. Heather McLeod assumes that the mere presence of beauty pageants in the CP proves that the Party was incapable of questioning a sexist society. See McLeod, *"Not Another God-Damned Housewife: Ruth Bullock, The "Woman Question" and Canadian Trotskyism,"* (MA Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1993) 15n.

[7] I persist in calling the CP's popular girl contests "beauty pageants," because, although the Party's contests were different from those of the dominant society, the CP was still using women's bodies and personalities to promote and raise money for the Party. The CP's contests, moreover, borrowed much of their iconography and symbolism from mainstream pageants.

[8] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 30 July 1945.

[9] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 30 July 1945.

win the war.

CP beauty contests required a certain type of woman as a contestant: one who was either a left-wing trade union supporter, or one who worked for the union. Thus, the contestants in these beauty pageants were very different from those in bourgeois contests. The photo also demonstrates that the CP used attractive women to entice Party members to come to social gatherings and to promote a kind of feminine respectability.

Mainstream beauty contests emerged in a specific historical context and upheld particular values. The Miss America pageant became established during the latter years of the Depression and during the war years.[10] Its fame began to spread across the country and its general guidelines were established. The pageant's rules required, as they do now, that contestants be unmarried women between the ages of 18 and 28. Moreover, the rules required that eligible candidates could never have been married, divorced, or separated from a spouse. Mainstream beauty pageants set strict guidelines surrounding who could, and could not, participate in the proceedings. The Miss America pageant's rules also stated that candidates have to adhere to a rigid standard of sexual morality. In 1937, the Miss America conveners instituted a rule barring contestants from night clubs, bars, inns, and taverns during the duration of the competition. Additionally, contestants were not permitted to be seen with any man, including their fathers

[10] A.S. Riverol, *Live From Atlantic City: The History of the Miss America Pageant Before, After and in Spite of Television*, (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992) 33. I have focused on the Miss America pageant as it is the most prominent example of a mainstream beauty contest; I look briefly at other, smaller American beauty contests below.

and brothers, during pageant week.[11] Pageant winners felt that they had to adhere to a strict standard of sexual and moral respectability; consequently, one winner believed that she should not purchase alcohol or have sex when competing for a crown, or during her tenure as pageant winner.[12]

The Miss America pageant, as with other smaller pageants, has tried to construct itself as morally and sexually pure. Both the organizers and the contestants have attempted to portray the pageant as respectable based on the scholarship money given to the winners that, presumably, goes towards a college education. They have also promoted the pageant's respectability in terms of the experience of touring the world and coming into contact with different cultures that the pageant offers to winners. The participants contrasted the supposed purity of their experiences with those of "bikini contests" and "wet T-shirt" contests which they viewed as being based solely on physical appearance and on crassly displaying one's body for money that will not go towards a college education. The organizers and the contestants have argued implicitly that only promiscuous, working-class women would participate in a bikini contest since they would need the "cold, hard cash" that such a "tacky" or "sleazy" contest provides.[13]

As with the nation-wide Miss America pageant, state and city-wide beauty pageants had similar sets of official and unofficial regulations. In a beauty contest in a small town in rural Minnesota, for example, the contestants were all going on to college or university. Most were from prominent middle class families who had

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[11] Riverol, *Live From Atlantic City*, 33.
[12] Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999) 79-80.
[13] Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*, 80-83.

influence in the town's social hierarchy. Furthermore, these women were also "respectable" in that they were all active participants in activities such as cheerleading, sports, and church youth groups. Loners are almost always excluded from beauty pageants at any level.[14]

The discourse of female respectability in beauty pageants is also racially based. Traditionally, female beauty has been defined through whiteness; most often "beautiful women" had to be of Anglo-Saxon, usually Protestant, origin.[15] Indeed, there have only been four black Miss Americas: those of 1984, 1990, 1991, and 1994; similarly, there has only been one Jewish Miss America: Bess Myerson in 1945.[16] "Rule Seven" of the pageant's bylaws restricted black and Asian women from participating in the pageant until the 1940s and a black woman did not actually take part until 1970.[17] Thus, for most of the pageant's history, women of colour, typified as being anathema to the respectable image of womanhood that the pageant wanted to convey, were excluded both from mainstream beauty contests and from conventional, white, middle class conceptions of beauty. Stereotypically, and historically, black women have symbolized wantonness, promiscuity, sexual licentiousness and depravity.[18] Beauty pageants are greatly concerned with controlling their contestants in numerous ways: physically,

[14] Robert H. Lavenda, "It's Not A Beauty Pageant! Hybrid Ideology in Minnesota Community Queen Pageants," in *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage: Gender, Contests, and Power*, Colleen Ballerino Cohen et al., eds., (New York: Routledge, 1996) 33-38.

[15] For some effective commentary on this point see Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998) 14-58 and *passim*; bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, (Boston: South End Press, 1984) 1-15; hooks, *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics*, (Boston: South End Press, 1990) 57-64 and 89-92.

[16] Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*, 127 and 155.

[17] Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*, 127.

[18] Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*, 129.

sexually, and morally.[19] Certain types of women, specifically working class women and women of colour, were, for a long time, not even permitted entry into the beauty pageant.

CP beauty pageants were very different from those of the dominant culture. In sharpt contrast to mainstream beauty pageants, social activism, not cheerleading, denoted respectability. In the LPP's 1945 "Miss United Nations" all the contestants were "active in the trade union and progressive movement"[20] Instead of being respectable and conservative, these women were all activists in the labour and Communist movements fighting for working-class advancement against the capitalist state.

The list of candidates and sponsors read very differently from those of mainstream pageants. Instead of Anglo-Saxons representing Rotarians, the Miss UN ran: "Vera Olzewski as Miss USSR," sponsored by the Communist Party's "Ukrainian and Russian Club," "Mrs. Y Sertic as Miss Yugoslavia, Georgia Club; Margaret Chepak as Miss Hungary, Hungarian Democratic Circle; Rose Nicolette as Miss Italy, Grandview Club ... Mae Neveroski as Miss America, North Burnaby Club," and "Dawn Yip as Miss China," sponsored by the "Ginger Goodwin and West End Clubs"[21] Rather than allowing only white, Anglo-Saxon women to enter the contest, the CP encouraged women of Scandinavian, Slavic, Eastern European, Italian, and Chinese backgrounds to enter their pageants.[22] Although

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[19] Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*, 58-80.
[20] *Pacific Advocate*, 28 July 1945.
[21] *Pacific Advocate*, 28 July 1945.
[22] On the ethnic basis of much of the Communist Party of Canada's leadership and membership see Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975) 11-14.

considered "white" now, in the 1930s and 1940s, "old stock" North Americans of British descent looked upon Scandinavians and Slavs as inferior peoples. Furthermore, the different LPP clubs in Vancouver sponsored individual women as contestants, showing the left-wing orientation of the contest as well as suggesting its appeal to male and female Party members. The countries being represented in the Miss UN contest were all involved in fighting against Nazi Germany. In addition, the contestants had a connection to the countries that they represented, all of which had Communist parties themselves. Thus, the Miss United Nations contest was a cultural representation of the CP's support for both Communist internationalism and the Allied war effort.

An earlier example from the Party paper describing a Communist beauty pageant remarked that:

> on Sunday August 1 Confederation Park in Burnaby will be the scene of one of the feature picnic events of the year. The United Nations Picnic, sponsored by the Communist-Labor Total War Committee, will have as one of the major attractions the selecting of a Miss United Nations. Mona Morgan, popular secretary to Ernie Dalskog in loggers Local 1-71 and an Icelander, is representing the Scandinavian countries as Miss Scandinavia. This is one case where the "buying of votes" is legitimate and every woodworker will be interested in supporting this candidate.[23]

Mona [nee Bjarnason] Morgan, "an Icelander," would not have been allowed to participate in a mainstream beauty contest. In addition, her status as a prominent left-wing woman and a secretary to a well-known trade unionist shows that these beauty pageants were alternative competitions to those of the dominant culture. As

[23] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 12 July 1943.

Mona Morgan was born in 1913, she was 30 and married when this pageant was taking place, putting her, and the "Mrs. Y. Sertic" running for "Miss Yugoslavia," beyond the age range for the Miss America pageant and other smaller beauty pageants.[24] Unlike their younger counterparts in mainstream beauty contests, these women were "unavailable" for the marriage market. CP women were mostly mothers and wives in working class families; additionally, many were immigrants from Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and elsewhere.[25] This helps to explain why the CP held somewhat different gender and ethnic values from white, "respectable" Anglo-Canadian culture.

CP beauty pageants were different from mainstream contests in other ways. CP and union members voted on the candidate of their choice for the beauty pageant rather than having judges give "scores" to the candidates, as in a mainstream contest.[26] In addition, the ultimate goal of these contests was to raise money for the Party. There were no individual prizes for the winners. In August of 1943, Mona Morgan, supported by 6, 410 loggers and millworkers, won an IWA "popular girl" contest.[27] Another CP beauty pageant, the "LPP Bazaar And Carnival" held on 15-17 March 1945, at the Boilermakers' Hall, 339 W. Pender Street, reveals more about the Party and gender.[28] The "girls pictured on this page will wheedle votes for their respective constituencies. You pays your dime or dollar and you take your choice--and may the staunchest committee win," noted the Party

[24] Interview with Mona Morgan, 7 June 2000.
[25] On the different groups of immigrant women involved with the CPC see Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989) 42-54 and *passim*.
[26] Riverol, *Live From Atlantic City*, 6.
[27] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 6 August 1943.
[27] *Pacific Advocate*, 10 March 1945.

weekly.[29] In putting on this event, the CP wanted its members to "Sell Those Tickets!"[30] The advertisement remarks that "reports of ticket sales on the $800 in prizes offered on the admission ticket to the March 17 dances being held all over the province indicate that with very little effort these tickets can be sold by the thousands!"[31]

June Olson, a member of the Lake Cowichan Women's Auxiliary, says that "I won the Lumber Queen sponsored by the IWA in 1946 ... down in Duncan ... we didn't win it for beauty, we had a lot of supporters, we sold tickets and made money."[32] Olson's statement mirrors the beliefs of many female CP members about the beauty pageants. Mona Morgan says that the popular girl contests were not about who was the most attractive or poised but rather they were about "who could sell the most tickets."[33] CP member Betty Greenwell, also a beauty pageant winner, remarks that there "was no beauty about it" and that these pageants were "fundraisers" concerned with "how much your group raised."[34] CP members Vi Dewhurst and Betty Griffin have corroborated these statements; Griffin, in particular, remarks that the popular girl competition was "not a beauty pageant."[35]

Similarly, the IWA's Lake Cowichan Women's Auxiliary and carnival committee planned "a Miss Cowichan Lake contest for its annual Labor Day carnival. The Auxiliary asked every community and company in the Lake Cowichan

[29] *Pacific Advocate*, 10 March 1945.
[30] *Pacific Advocate*, 10 March 1945.
[31] *Pacific Advocate*, 10 March 1945.
[32] Women's Labour History Collection [WLHC], Simon Fraser University [SFU], interview with the Lake Cowichan Women's Auxiliary, Summer 1979, with Sara Diamond.
[33] Interview with Mona Morgan, 7 June 2000.
[34] Interview with Betty Greenwell, 29 May 2000, by Brian Thom.
[35] Interview with Vi Dewhurst, 23 May 2000, by Brian Thom; interview with Betty Griffin, 18 May 2000, by Brian Thom.

area to sponsor a contestant. "We would like our auxiliary to be represented in this 'Duncan Dominion Day Parade Committee' and that was that" remarked Lil Godfrey.[36] Godfrey went on to comment on the day of the parade that "we had those girls ... in their green and gold crepe paper dresses ... [they] had the insignia on their head and a big banner 'We support Local 80's Labor Programme, Equal Pay for Equal Work for all. Every union man's wife in an auxiliary, unity in war and peace.' "[37] Rather than emphasizing female grace or beauty as in mainstream pageants, these contestants, who wore green and gold: the colours of the IWA, promoted the union and women's role in it, as in the slogan "every union man's wife in an auxiliary."

CP women do not seem to have viewed the beauty pageants as sexist. Betty Griffin, reflecting in 2000 on her involvement, stated that they "didn't think twice" about whether the pageants were sexist or degrading to women.[38] Similarly, when asked about the beauty pageants, Mona Morgan initially remarked "what about them?"[39] Female CP members do not see the beauty pageants as having been important or revealing. They were not particularly interested in talking about the contests or about the influence that the pageants had on Communist Party culture. Elspeth Gardner did not initially remember that the Party had put on these events.[40] When asked why the CP might have had beauty contests Gardner remarked "I guess why they would reflects the times in that they weren't thinking so

[36] WLHC, SFU, interview with the Lake Cowichan Women's Auxiliary.
[37] WLHC, SFU, interview with the Lake Cowichan Women's Auxiliary.
[38] Interview with Betty Griffin.
[39] Interview with Mona Morgan.
[40] Interview with Elspeth Gardner, 29 June 2000, by Brian Thorn.

much about the feminist movement."[41] It seems that, at the time, CP women accepted their roles in the Party as natural and expected and did not think to criticize the Party. While this issue is complex, these women did not think that the Party was oppressing them. Antonio Gramsci's theory of "hegemony" helps to explain why these women did not question their status in the Party. Hegemony, as Gramsci defines it, means that through a series of struggles and negotiations between elites and the lower orders, a set of values becomes accepted.[42] These values work to keep the dominant classes in power since the lower orders accept their position in the social hierarchy as natural and inevitable. In terms of Communist women's experiences, Gramsci would say that they accepted their position as objects of male desire since both the CP and the dominant society had accepted this idea.

Michel Foucault argues that ideas of "surveillance" and "the male gaze" make men and, especially, women into "docile bodies" who will adhere to dominant sexual mores.[43] Foucault remarks that the idea of structured time and a world run by the clock, as opposed to by the rhythms of nature, came with the rise of an industrial capitalist society.[44] The ideas of structured time and "work discipline" made factory workers into human machines who would produce materials for as long as the supervisor required them. The "disciplinary gaze" of

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[41] Interview with Elspeth Gardner.

[42] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds and trans., (New York: International Publishers, 1971) 12-13.

[43] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 98-99.

[44] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977) 149-156.

the factory boss ensured that workers would do their work quickly and correctly.[45] Foucault goes on to comment on the birth of the modern prison system and on how this relates to the factory system. Using English Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Benthem's panopticon as a metaphor, Foucault describes how modern elites use discipline to create a docile populace. The panopticon consists of a tower looking out over a building which contains many cells with prisoners inside each cell; a supervisor sits at the tower and monitors the prisoners.[46] Because of the lighting, the supervisor can see all of the prisoners but they cannot see the supervisor. The inmates can also see into each others' cells. Foucault uses the idea of the panopticon to symbolize modern day power relations. For Foucault, power is not simply "top-down"; rather, the inmates police each other since they can see into each others' cells at all times.[47] If one of the inmates were to do something that defied what was "normal" for society, the other inmates would view that person as "abnormal."

In relation to gender roles, Foucault says that a set of rules concerning sex and gender have become accepted as natural and inevitable.[48] Society ostracizes and punishes those people who deviate from these norms. Heterosexual, white, middle class, Anglo-Saxon and male constitutes "the norm" for western society. Similarly, working class, female and "ethnic" constitute "the other" in modern life.[49] Of Communist women, Foucault would say that they have accepted their subordinate status as being natural and, thus, they do not

[45] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 174-175.
[46] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200.
[47] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 201-202.
[48] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 92-97.
[49] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 103-105.

challenge it. He would also say that the CP, while it resisted the binary form of "worker/boss," was not able to go beyond the dominant society's idea that men were active, producers, workers and "lookers," while women were passive, consumers, homemakers, and "looked upon." While the CP challenged white, middle-class, and Anglo-Saxon values in many ways, for example their support for working-class and ethnic "otherness," they did not go far enough in dealing with "the woman question."

The CP's beauty pageants had many positive aspects to them. They were an important part of CP culture in Vancouver; they gave certain women a chance to represent one of the Party's organs, and they played an important role in fundraising for the CP.[50] Stereotypically "feminine" activities such as seeking out plastic surgery or reading women's magazines and romance novels, while sometimes considered products of a sexist and patriarchal society, can offer evidence of women's agency and power.[51] Jonnie Rankin noted that:

> one fella, who was an old time left-winger,
> called me bourgeois ... he was always telling me
> ... about the Soviet women. The Soviet woman as
> far as he was concerned was always in love with
> a tank as far as I could see. And we used to wear
> these awful overalls, and so I used to put a big
> ribbon, bow, on my hat ... to sort of doll up this overall
> a little bit ... he was always telling me about Soviet
> women fighting on the front, which they did, and

[50] Interview with Betty Griffin.

[51] On plastic surgery see especially Kathy Davis, *Reshaping The Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery*, (New York: Routledge, 1995) 64-47; Elizabeth Haiken, *Venus Envy: A History of Cosmetic Surgery*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) 275-276. On women's magazines see Ellen McCracken, *Decoding Women's Magazines: from Mademoiselle to Ms.*, (London: MacMillan, 1993) 135-172. On romance novels, the key text is Janice Radway, *Reading The Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

> organizing the factories and everything else, but they were never frivolous according to him.[52]

Despite the view of many male Communists that fashion was bourgeois and decadent, this was not always the case. Janice Radway remarks that women reading romance novels are able to step outside of their everyday lives into a utopian world.[53] Radway suggests that these novels empower women and give them an opportunity to dream of a better life.[54] Similarly, Candace Savage and Susan Banet-Weiser both remark that participation in beauty pageants offers, for those few contestants, opportunities for adventure, wealth, and prestige.[55] While problematic in many ways, it would be a mistake to see these beauty pageants as simply evidence of the CP's sexist view of women.

Although the CP's pageants were very different from those of the larger society, the fact remains that Communist unionists used women's bodies to raise money and publicity for the Party. Ideas of beauty were prevalent in the pageants. The IWA's 1944 winning candidate for the Kinsmen's "Klondyke Karnival pageant was described in the *Lumber Worker* as "an attractive red-headed Princess," while other candidates were described as "pretty," "popular," and "lovely."[56] In another caption, this one regarding "Princess Valerie Hamilton of Duncan," the author notes that "Princess Valerie was the popular choice of the students of

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[52] WLHC, SFU, interview with Jonnie Rankin, Summer 1979, with Sara Diamond.
[53] Radway, *Reading The Romance*, 88-93.
[54] Radway, *Reading The Romance*, 86-113
[55] Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*, 12; Candace Savage, *Beauty Queens: A Playful History*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998) 118. For a fairly optimistic view of beauty, see Arthur Marwick, *Beauty in History: Society, Politics and Personal Appearance c. 1500 to the Present*, (Gloucester: Thames and Hudson, 1988).
[56] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 4 September 1944.

Duncan High School."[57] The idea of young women being "popular" and "attractive princesses" shows that the CP borrowed much of the language of beauty and popularity from mainstream beauty contests.[58] The IWA held a "Lumber Queen Contest" as part of the Duncan Dominion Day Carnival.[59] The contest winner was featured in a "colorful crowning" ceremony "to be held in Duncan on July 2."[60] The remark on "the colorful crowning ceremonies" indicated that the CP's beauty contests borrowed some of their iconography and symbolism from mainstream beauty contests such as the Miss America pageant, which had a similar crowning ceremony.[61]

A beauty pageant held in the Yukon, where CP stalwart Tom McEwen was running for M.P. in Whitehorse in early 1945, demonstrates the connection between proletarian female beauty and support for unionism. The Yukon Winter Carnival "was sponsored by a group of trade unions who are yet in their organizing stage. It has done more to make the people union conscious than any other undertaking could have done."[62] The article continued that the girls "participating in the carnival queen contest have on several occasions appeared at theaters, and other packed public places and in their brief addresses ... consistently" gave their support to "their union."[63]

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[57] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 18 June 1945.
[58] In 1958, the *Los Angeles Mirror* noted that American CP member Dorothy Healey "happens to be one of the very few female Reds who doesn't look like an irrefutable argument for celibacy." Quoted in Dorothy Ray Healey and Maurice Isserman, *California Red: A Life in the American Communist Party*, (Urbana and Chicago: University Of Illinois Press, 1993) 168.
[59] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 18 June 1945.
[60] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 18 June 1945.
[61] Savage, *Beauty Queens*, 113.
[62] *Pacific Advocate*, 24 March 1945.
[63] *Pacific Advocate*, 24 March 1945.

In her thank you speech, winner Doris Lesanko, garbed in white furs, noted that the carnival "is a splendid demonstration of what can be accomplished when a small community gets together."[64] She went on to say that "the same can be accomplished to help bring our boys back and to make sure that when they get back they have more to come to than when they left."[65] If these platitudes echoed those of mainstream beauty contestants, Lesanko went on to challenge capitalist hegemony, calling for the community to "get together and build, support and maintain our unions. Let us maintain the same spirit that we have displayed during the carnival in the months to come to build our unions and prepare ourselves for the peace to come."[66] The image of Lesanko "dressed in white furs" contrasts with her speech regarding building trade unions and supporting veterans coming home from the war. Both Lesanko and CP beauty pageants were politically aware and motivated which was not the case in mainstream beauty pageants.

To some extent, the Communist Party did hold to conventional standards of beauty. A photograph, in the *Pacific Advocate*, showing a woman in a tight, revealing dress in high heels, bears the caption: "forty thousand members of Lodge 727 IAM, call their "unionettes" rabble rousers because they were so effective organizing Lockheed plants. Rita Plant, trustee and a reporter for the Lodge paper, American Aeronaut, show what they mean."[67] The CP felt that union women, like Rita Plant, although they have come into the wartime work force, still

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[64] *Pacific Advocate*, 24 March 1945.
[65] Pacific Advocate, 24 March 1945.
[66] *Pacific Advocate*, 24 March 1945.
[67] *Pacific Advocate*, 25 November 1944.

have to adhere to traditional codes of feminine beauty, including posing in revealing outfits for male pleasure.[68]

Both Commmunists and members of the dominant society were concerned with the sexual morality of young women who were involved in military and workplace settings for the first time.[69] Communists were also concerned with the "moral panic" that surrounded women's entry into the work force during the war years. Numerous historians have noted that World War II saw women come into the work force in greater numbers than ever before. These same historians have remarked that a moral backlash against these women occurred on the part of the conservative public; the public expected that women would return to their homes and families when the war was over and maintain their traditional role as the guardian of the domestic sphere.[70]

The Vancouver CP was not immune to these concerns. A cartoon from *The People* shows an attractive woman with long dark hair working at a lathe surrounded by men working at their respective tasks. A male worker pushing a

[68] For feminist critiques of conventional standards of beauty see Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr, *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty*, (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984); Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women*, (Toronto: Doubleday Books, 1992). For a more positive view of women's agency with regard to standards surrounding beauty and fashion see Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983); Kathy Peiss, *Hope In A Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).

[69] See Pierson's chapter "Wartime Jitters Over Femininity" in her *"They're Still Women After All,"* 129-168.

[70] The literature here is vast. In the Canadian context the key text is Ruth Roach Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986). In the American context see especially Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

crate smiles in the woman's direction. Two men in suits, who look to be in positions of authority, are talking to each other. One of the men says that "we haven't had a day's absence since she was put in this department."[71] In another cartoon, a man whose suit, tie, and desk indicate he is a boss, is pictured sitting in his office which has a sign on the wall saying "stay on the job!"[72] The man is talking on the phone with his wife.[73] All the while, the man has on his lap an attractive blonde woman worker in overalls who is putting on lipstick. The man has his arm around the woman's shoulder; the caption below the cartoon reads "but dear, I've promised to stay on the job!"[74] The CP was concerned with the threat of marital infidelity and sexual liaisons that young women entering into the workforce was purported to precipitate. Notable in this example is the class difference between the supposedly flirtatious woman worker and the lecherous upper class boss.

A third cartoon shows an attractive woman in a hospital bed holding her newborn child. A nurse, holding a bouquet of flowers and a note, hovers over her. The nurse reads the note to the new mother: "it says on the card "From Your Fellow Riveters!"[75] The implicit message here is that while women can be workers for the duration of the war they are ultimately mothers and wives, a commitment that, according to some, is rooted in biology. This cartoon also offers an example of the ambivalent nature of CP policy toward women during the war.[76] While this

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[71] *The People*, 23 January 1943.
[72] *Pacific Advocate*, 13 January 1945.
[73] *Pacific Advocate*, 13 January 1945.
[74] *Pacific Advocate*, 13 January 1945.
[75] *The People*, 6 February 1943.
[76] For an examination of the gender ambivalence present in the dominant culture see Helen Smith and Pamela Wakewich, "Beauty and the Helldivers: Representing Women's Work and Identities in a Warplant Newspaper," *Labour/Le Travail* 44 (Fall 1999): 71-107.

woman is a "fellow riveter" and is, as such, someone who goes outside the home to work, ultimately, she has to return to domesticity. For the CP, while women could work in factories temporarily, biology ultimately takes over and women have to retreat to the home to raise children. As indigenous Communist Parties all over the world were supporting the Allied War effort, the national Communist Parties were trying to make their message palatable to a mass audience.[77] While the CP brought its message to a larger audience during the war, they supported a conservative conception of a woman's role in society.

Two other cartoons emphasize even more explicitly the anxiety the CP felt about women coming into the wartime workforce. One example portrays three women workers tending to a huge vat of molten steel at "Steel Mill No. 4."[78] The cartoon pictures one of the women talking on the phone and saying "I'll have to call you back Grace--I have something on the stove!"[79] This cartoon takes a traditional, domestic image of a woman, where she is pictured in the kitchen having to return a call to another housewife, and stands it on its head. In this instance, the woman is fulfilling what was a man's job for many years and calling to a woman who could also be working in the war industries. Even so, the message here is that women, even though they work in male jobs, could still be in the home as mothers and housewives. Another cartoon portrays a woman worker, whose head gets caught under a drill press, spinning around like a top.[80] While this is going on, her male

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[77] On this point see Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 165-172. The key text in the American context is Maurice Isserman, *"Which Side Were You On?" The American Communist Party During The Second World War*, (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1982) 119-157.

[78] *The People*, 20 February 1943.

[79] *The People*, 20 February 1943.

[80] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 6 December 1944.

supervisor is watching her and asks "what seems to be the trouble, Veronica?"[81] This example, while humorous to some, ridicules a woman worker for her lack of knowledge about her job. The CP makes light of women coming onto the job for the first time and, implicitly, reinforces the notion that women should be at home, tending to children.

The CP tended to view labour as a male preserve. Applying a gendered reading to some of the CP weeklies reveals that the Party did not desire a fundamental reorganizing of the relations between the sexes. Tom McEwen, commenting on the Yukon Winter Carnival, wrote that "it is highly significant that such an enterprise should at this time be pioneered by a young and virile trade union movement, which has practically grown up over-night in the Yukon."[82] McEwen's comment that the union movement is "young and virile" indicates that the CP felt that labour and political radicalism belonged to men. Moreover, only certain types of men could participate in radical politics: those who were young, strong, and sexually attractive. The CP supported the dominant heterosexual values of the time period. Historians have noted that gays and lesbians were coming into the military in Canada and the United States during the war so the CP's support for heterosexuality cannot be taken as a "given."[83] Nonetheless, it is also worth noting that homosexuality was widely seen as deviant during this

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[81] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 6 December 1944.

[82] *Pacific Advocate*, 3 March 1945.

[83] A recent thesis illuminates gay and lesbian roles in the Canadian armed forces during the war. See Nancy Olson, *"Assembling A Life: The (Auto) Biography of Alexis Amelia Alvey, 1942-1945,"* (MA Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1998). The key text in the American context is Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two*, (New York: Free Press, 1990).

period so it is not surprising that the CP did not speak out in favour of it.[84]

Another example from the radical press illuminates the idea of "radical masculinity."[85] A cartoon shows two muscular, working-class men in front of a Ford car plant each holding signs saying "For Union Rights! For Security! CIO-AFL" and each saying "We're digging deep for this fight too!"[86] This image suggests that, in the CP's view, only radical, muscular, and sexually attractive men can work outside the home and fight in wars. While the CP was content to challenge the capitalist hierarchy, push for union rights, and even give women space in the Party and in the wartime work force, it was unwilling to reorganize completely in order to bring in women and their concerns.[87] A cartoon in *The B.C. Lumber Worker* has a similar theme. It shows a small baby, symbolizing the new year 1945, pointing to a wizened, elderly man, symbolizing 1944; a large black rock labelled "Race Hate" burdens 1944.[88] At the doorway, where the baby 1945 wants to come in, stands a tall, white, muscular man whose t-shirt is labelled "organized labor."[89] 1945 says to organized labor "before I come in bud, am I gonna look like *that* when I leave?" referring to the decrepit 1944.[90] Organized labor responds "not if *we* can help it!"[91] The Party portrays labour as an attractive, muscular, sexualized man. The Party

[84] Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire*, *passim*.
[85] I have borrowed this term from Todd McCallum, *"A Modern Weapon for Modern Man: Marxist Masculinity and the Social Practices of the One Big Union, 1919-1924,"* (MA Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1995) 35.
[86] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 5 November 1945.
[87] Here I draw on Todd McCallum, "Not A Sex Question? The One Big Union and the Politics of Radical Manhood," *Labour/Le Travail* 42 (Fall 1998): 15-54; Francis Shor, "Masculine Power And Virile Syndicalism: A Gendered Analysis of the IWW in Australia," *Labour History* 63 (November 1992): 83-99.
[88] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 15 January 1945.
[89] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 15 January 1945.
[90] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 15 January 1945.
[91] *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 15 January 1945.

viewed labour and radical politics through a male lens while women, of all classes, were excluded from participation.[92]

The Communist Party in British Columbia did not, and could not, completely separate itself from the dominant culture on the issue of a woman's proper role in society. The Party's beauty pageants reinforced their ambivalent attitude toward women. While the beauty pageants had positive aspects in that they were an important part of Party culture, helped to raise money for the Party, and provided certain women with an outlet through which they could become involved with labour radicalism, they upheld the idea that a woman was most useful to the movement by virtue of her physical beauty. Similarly, while the Party's beauty pageants were very different from those of the dominant society, the Party still held to some traditional notions of what constituted female beauty. Although the CP was willing to support women's entry into the workforce for the duration of the war, it believed, like the dominant society, that these women should return to the home when the conflict ended. Moreover, the Party portrayed labour militancy and radical politics as being fundamentally masculine endeavours. Thus, while male CP members may have been *working* men, they were, above all else, still working *men*.

[92] McCallum, "A Modern Weapon For Modern Man," 33-44.

Conclusion:
"It Always Has To Be Fought For":
Whither Communist Women And Men?

On 3 July 1943, the Vancouver Communist Party newspaper *The People* published a photograph showing four attractive, fashionably dressed women workers walking arm-in-arm with one another. The heading above the photo of the smiling women, who were each wearing both dresses and pants, reads "Skirt Crusade Dropped." The caption below the photograph notes that the women's union, Local 400 of the United Autoworkers, CIO, was trying to work out a grievance with the women, "the right to wear skirts instead of slacks." The caption continues: "50 office workers at the Highland Park, Michigan, Ford Plant are back on the job in slacks." The caption concludes that "these girls played safe, wearing both skirts and slacks. Pretty warm, huh?"[1] On the surface, this seems simple enough: this is an example of women's activism on the job during the war years. These women are using fashion, an important part of women's culture, as a means of resisting the bosses' hegemonic control.[2]

This photo and caption provide us with a capsule version of women's activism in the Vancouver Communist movement as well as an example of how most male and female CP leaders and members viewed women's contributions to the movement. In this thesis, I have argued that women, like the "girls" in this photo, were important, indeed crucial, members of the Communist movement in Vancouver. Women organized consumer boycotts, were members of CP organizations such as the Women's Labour League, and helped to raise money

[1] *The People*, 3 July 1943.
[2] Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998) 4-8.

for the Party in many ways, including exhibiting their bodies in front of their comrades in beauty pageants. Like those in this photo, CP women expressed their radical views in typically "feminine" ways. For example, in organizing boycotts as members of the Housewives League, CP women reinforced the notion that women are naturally wives, mothers, and consumers, albeit radical consumers. Radical men, on the other hand, are workers, Party leaders, and producers. Similarly, in being involved in beauty pageants, CP women gave credence to the idea that women are useful to the movement, and to society in general owing to their physical beauty and intelligence.

I have tried to place the CP in the historical context in which it existed. Given that most women, both in radical organizations and in the dominant society, were wives, mothers, and consumers, it would be difficult for the CP to go drastically beyond mainstream models of gender, some might say. Working class men and women, not middle class bohemian "sex radicals," dominated the Communist Party. With this in mind, one might conclude that the CP did all that it could to bring women's concerns into their platform. If CP women were mostly concerned with things such as mothering, at least it was militant mothering with which they were concerned.

Even with this acknowledgement, the question remains: could the CP have done more about women's concerns? The answer is clearly yes. There were other, more radical, attitudes towards women and gender within left-wing politics that emerged at roughly the same time as did the Communist Party of Canada. Aleksandra Kollontai, a supporter of Lenin, had numerous lovers and sought to

free women from the monogamous marriage which she saw as imprisoning women, and men, in loveless unions.[3] Kollontai favoured "free love" or "erotic friendships" where two partners would be together and satisfy each other sexually until the love in the relationship had ended; then the partners would move on to the next relationship.[4] Thus, Kollontai sought to free women from bearing children, cooking, and cleaning for men while remaining unsatisfied sexually and emotionally. When Stalin came to power, he banished Kollontai to Oslo and changed the CPUSSR line on sex, free love, and homosexuality to one of disapproval and repression. The CPC followed the Comintern on this matter.

There were other radical solutions to the "woman question" in the English-speaking world. Observe Emma Goldman's critique of the institution of marriage from three decades before the period this thesis studies:

> as to the protection of the woman -- therein lies the curse of marriage. Not that it really protects her, but the very idea is so revolting, such an outrage and insult on life, so degrading to human dignity, as to forever condemn this parasitic institution. It is like that other paternal arrangement -- capitalism. It robs man of his birthright, stunts his growth, poisons his body, keeps him in ignorance, in poverty and dependence, and then institutes charities that thrive on the last vestige of man's self-respect.[5]

Ironically, Goldman compares marriage to that which the Communists hated above all else -- capitalism. Goldman goes on to offer an even more damning indictment of marriage:

[3] Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924*, (London: Pimlico, 1996) 740-741.

[4] Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Aleksandra Kollontai*, (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979) 73-74; Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 741.

[5] Quoted in Emma Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, Alix Kates Shulman, ed., (New York: Schocken Books, 1983) 210.

> the institution of marriage makes a parasite of woman, an absolute dependent. It incapacitates her for life's struggle, annihilates her social consciousness, paralyzes her imagination, and then imposes its gracious protection, which is in reality a snare, a travesty on human character. If motherhood is the highest fulfillment of woman's nature, what other protection does it need save love and freedom? Marriage but defiles, outrages, and corrupts her fulfillment.[6]

Goldman was a member of the "lyrical left"; this group established an alternative culture of sorts in New York's Greenwich Village during the 1900 to 1920 period.[7] Some of the lyrical left's values included opposition to monogamous marriage, and belief in sensuality and romantic self-expression.[8] Mabel Dodge, another member of this group, had numerous lovers and took the drug peyote.[9] In spite of this hedonistic lifestyle, the lyrical left supported feminism. As Floyd Dell, a member of the Greenwich Village group, writes: "irresistible economic forces are taking more and more women every year out of the economic shelter of the home ... making them workers and earners along with men."[10] "Every conquest of theirs, from an education which will make them fit for the world or earning, to "equal pay for equal work," is a setting free of men" he continues.[11] Dell goes on to comment that the final achievement for the women's movement will be "a social insurance

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[6] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks*, 210-211.

[7] Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State*, (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991) 89-90; John Patrick Diggins, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992) 126-128; June Sochen, *The New Woman: Feminism in Greenwich Village, 1910-1920*, (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1972) 3-26 and *passim*.

[8] Dawley, *Struggles for Justice*, 89-90; Sochen, *The New Woman*, 40-42.

[9] Diggins, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left*, 94-98; Sochen, *The New Woman*, 88-89.

[10] Floyd Dell, "Feminism for Men," in *Against The Tide: Pro-Feminist Men in the United States, 1776-1990 A Documentary History*, Michael S. Kimmel and Thomas E. Mosmiller, eds., (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992) 361.

[11] Dell, "Feminism for Men," 361.

for motherhood, which will enable them to have children without taking away a man's freedom from him. Then a man will be able to tell his employer that 'he and his job can go bark at one another,' without being a ... scoundrel."[12] There were groups of people who attempted to set up alternative sets of gender values. These values, which Goldman and other "bohemian sex radicals" attempted to apply to their personal lives, demonstrate that there were alternatives to the CP's view on women which was, as this thesis has shown, at best two-sided.[13]

In the end, we are left with a Communist Party that was not drastically better, nor drastically worse, than the dominant, white, Anglo-Canadian culture on the issue of women's concerns. This thesis suggests that we cannot expect radical or revolutionary movements to be completely separate from the society in which they exist. Radical movements emerge at particular times and in particular places and are products of those times. However much those of us who find ourselves at odds with the dominant culture might wish to think that these radicals were going drastically beyond the conventional norms of a particular period, this was not always the case. The examples of Aleksandra Kollontai, Emma Goldman, and the Greenwich Village lyrical left, however, suggest that more could have been done. Freedom, sexual and otherwise, is not given to us by a benevolent elite; indeed, in the words of Mona Morgan, "it always has to be fought for."[14] If there is a final lesson of hope to be taken from this thesis, let this be it.

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[12] Dell, "Feminism for Men," 361.

[13] On Goldman's and other sex radicals' personal lives see Candace Falk, *Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984) 97-120 and passim.

[14] Interview with Mona Morgan, 7 June 2000, by Brian Thom.

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