The history of socialism in Canada is marked by both partisan disagreements and cooperative partnerships with other movements for social justice, including the women’s movement. Communist women in the 1920s were ambivalent in their attitudes towards women’s organizations. On the one hand, they were deeply suspicious of middle-class feminists’ tendency to define women’s interests and needs based on their own privileged class location. On the other hand, cross-class alliances were not new to many women in the Labor Leagues, and the Comintern’s united front strategy of 1920-1928 encouraged calculated efforts by the WLLs to influence the more progressive women’s organizations. WLL women struggled throughout most of the 1920s to maintain their independent critique of reformism while also cautiously supporting some non-Communist women’s organizations.

Allies were carefully chosen. Certainly there was no room for cooperation with rigidly conservative groups such as the International Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE), a favourite target for the Woman Worker. In the first issue of the paper (reproduced at the beginning of this book) the IODE came under fire in three separate contributions. Not only was this organization of wealthy British “ladies” a leading proponent of militarism and British-style imperialism, its members took reactionary positions on a range of other issues, perhaps most notably on unions. The editor predicted that “if an anti-strike movement develops in Canada the IODE will be the founders.” Leftists outside the Communist Party agreed that the IODE was thoroughly status quo, and it was roundly criticized by peace activists, labour groups, and by the farmers’ Member of Parliament in Ontario, Agnes Macphail.
There was a fear that the Senate, with its strong ties to big business, would only be strengthened if wealthy women were added as Senators. The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC), whose support for working-class women was often patronizing, was dismissed rather politely when it advocated the appointment of women as Senators. It was not the Council’s support of “sex equality” that was at issue here, one writer noted, but its investment in the Senate itself, which the WLLs, along with the Labour Party, steadfastly argued should be abolished. Characterizing the Senate as an organization of rich old men with strong ties to big business, the contributor worried that the addition of wealthy women would only strengthen the institution. The Woman Worker also took issue with the NCWC’s support for censorship of “pernicious” and “demoralizing” literature, for radical publications such as New Masses were banned by Customs with this charge. Such actions confirmed that the NCWC agenda, no matter how apparently well meaning, was to shore up the status quo.

Communist women were also furious at the moralism that had so often fuelled middle-class women reformers’ approach to the problems of working girls and women whose lives had been spotlighted since the 19th century by commissions and studies on industrial conditions. In the article, “How Well-To-Do Women Would Reform Wayward Girls,” left-wing women’s exasperation was directed at the Toronto and Ontario Councils of Women and at Judge Margaret Patterson of the Woman’s Court, for offering “fallen women” moral platitudes and criminalization when material circumstances needed challenging. The author of this article also pointed to the double standard of morality and accountability that labelled the working class girl “wayward” for sexual behaviour that was covered up for the middle-class girl. Elsewhere in the paper, the Toronto Local Council of Women (LCW) was commended for its protest of beauty contests, with the qualification that the WLLs had taken this stand first. Communist women were fearful that preoccupation with personal beauty could be a frivolous distraction for working-class women from serious issues like the class struggle, and their opposition to beauty pageants can be read in this light. But the WLL analysis also challenged once again the middle-class tendency to moralize and blame the victim, in this case the women themselves who, in the minds of certain social reformers, were “exposing themselves” in beauty contests. The Woman Worker offered instead a critique of the capitalist commercialization of working-class women’s bodies through such forums. This was similar to the
materialist critique they developed of prostitution (see section on "Women and the Sex Trade").

The YWCA presented the Labor Leagues with a different case. For years the YWCA had offered young single working girls opportunities for social get-togethers along with programs and services like cheap "respectable" shelter, assistance in travelling to new communities, employment training, and advice for job seekers. As a great many working-class daughters were reached by the YWCA, the WLL responded with a mixture of support for some of its more realistic attempts to meet working girls' needs, but also nervousness at the competition they represented for the loyalties of these girls. The YWCA in Canada was, after all, still very much a reformist Christian organization which emphasized spiritual uplift and training for respectable womanhood over economic security. The WLL Federation was more encouraged by the actions of the Industrial section of the World YWCA which pushed its national counterparts to survey and improve factory laws and working conditions and promote the unionization of working women and girls. Custance promised the support of the WLLs should the Canadian YWCA pursue this line of work, but she doubted the organization would ever make that move since the wealthy conservative funders of the organization called the shots.

Women's organizations like the YWCA, the NCWC, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) were publicly identified with the women's movement—a movement which was not on the whole well received by Communist women. The middle-class basis of much of the women's movement was a constant source of tension for Communist women who, while supporting many feminist demands, did not call themselves "feminists." Communists could not forget that leading international feminists, such as Britain's Emily Pankhurst and Mrs. Flora Drummond, were viciously anti-labour, and the reputation of some Canadian feminist figures was not much better. Socialist women had also long been put off by feminists' unquestioned faith in legislative solutions, and they did not share their elation when progress was made at the end of the war on women's right to vote in federal and provincial elections. Individual women in the pre-war socialist parties had sometimes supported woman suffrage, but they were much more realistic than their liberal-minded sisters about what the vote could accomplish. While suffragists had regarded the vote as an important symbol of equality as well as a practical tool for promoting social change, socialist supporters had always seen it as one small step towards an equality that would only be fully realized after a class
revolution. Suffrage reports in the Woman Worker, such as those concerning the continuing battle for the vote by Quebec women, were written with an eye to the bigger changes required before freedom would be possible for more than a select few.

In an editorial entitled “Which Freedom?” Custance offered a historical analysis of the growth of the feminist movement and the continuing class divisions between women. Industrial capitalism and machine production, she argued, created the preconditions for feminism. Middle-class women gained increased leisure and incentive to move into the male world of education and the professions. Finding advancement closed to them, they began to agitate for women’s rights. Working-class women found themselves forced into factory production where they too were compelled to fight for their equality, although their struggle was shoulder to shoulder with the men of their class. Alluding to the sexism and discrimination faced by women in industry, Custance conceded that working women have had to struggle for equality and demand, for example, equal pay for equal work, but, she added, “this is a class question rather than a sex question, a condition of labor rather than of man’s dominance.” She was relying here on the traditional Marxist belief that women’s emancipation would fall upon the heels of the revolution. Women in the meantime should not necessarily be silent about sexual inequality, but they should not be “led astray” by the liberal feminist “Slogan of Freedom.” Nor should they be fooled, the Woman Worker warned, by rich women for whom “freedom” meant the right to trivialities like cigar smoking, held up by a new club of women in England as a “symbol of independence.”

One feminist reformer gained more respect from the Woman Worker than any other non-Communist woman. Agnes Macphail, Canada’s first woman MP, was elected in 1921 as a Progressive candidate and representative of Ontario’s farming communities. If her unwavering hard line anti-militarist stance was the most attractive part of her platform to WLLers, her active support for workers and for the Labour Party platform won her considerable attention in the first year of the paper’s publication. Macphail herself, although a strong advocate of feminist reforms, was not entirely comfortable with the label “feminist” and this too might have enhanced WLLers’ trust in her judgement.

Conscious of the need to forge links between industrial women (socialists’ usual focus) and farm women, the WLLs attempted to woo women in select farm organizations like the progressive United Farmers of Canada (UFC). Building such a bridge proved difficult. In 1928 Custance criticized the judgement of the women’s section of
the UFC in Saskatchewan when its leadership encouraged the affiliation of its members to the Saskatchewan Provincial Council of Women. Writing to defend the UFC women's position, the president exposed the urban bias of WLLers, explaining rural women's isolation and their need for connections with urban women in the province through such affiliations. Custance conceded the Labor Leagues' blindness to the full meaning of this isolation but held on to her point that conservative Councils of Women were hardly the appropriate allies for farm women who should be joining in the fight against capitalism.

With the Comintern Congress of 1928 and the triumph of Stalinism the united front strategy was called off by Soviet leaders increasingly mistrustful of western liberal politics and organizations. The WLLs now came under fire for pursuing the very alliances they had formerly been instructed to develop. A total turnaround was easier in theory than in practice, and the Women's Labor Leagues appear to have had more ambivalence than Canadian Communist Party leaders about the new policy line. It is true that a certain hardening of the WLL line on women's reform organizations appears in the Woman Worker in 1928 and 1929, with more pointed critique of the Councils of Women and liberal pacifists in particular (see "Peace and War" section). Yet this was only a difference in emphasis, not the about face expected by the Comintern directive. The reality was that the Federation of Women's Labor Leagues and its Locals had always approached coalition work with a critical edge. By the end of the Woman Worker's publication in 1929, the Federation of Women's Labor Leagues was still approaching farm groups and it was still defending the feminist pacifist reformer Agnes Macphail against her conservative critics. The promise of coalition-building, for all its pitfalls, proved too compelling to be abandoned completely.

Further Reading:
- Carol Lee Bacchi, Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).


SEPTEMBER 14th has been named election day. From now on each of the political parties will be hard at work trying to convince the voters that it is the fittest party to be in power to represent the interests of the people of this country.

It must be understood, however, that political parties represent certain interests only, and never the interests of the whole community. The Conservative Party represents the interests of the banks, the big manufacturers, the speculators, and those who want trade protection against other countries. The Liberal Party represents the interests of small business, and those who want free trade. The Progressive Party represents the interests of the farmers. The Labor Party represents the interests of the workers.

The two most powerful parties are the Conservative and Liberal Parties. The farmers and the workers are only just realizing they must take a hand in government instead of only being used by the old-time parties.

For many years we have witnessed the stage fight between the Conservative and Liberal Parties, each strived for the reins of government by trying to discredit the other. In this election campaign we shall see the same thing. This does not mean we should be indifferent to the evil practices of evil doers in the government, but we must at least understand the nature of the fight between the Liberal and Conservative Parties, and we must not allow ourselves to be drawn into battle in their behalf.

These two parties, no matter what they may say to the contrary, represent the interests of the various groups of capitalists, and the interests of these, more often than not, conflict with the interests of workers and farmers. It is left to the workers and farmers to think of their interests in the same way, and although their parties are small, because they lack the wealth, yet, their interests are those of the great majority of the population of this country, therefore, these interests are of the greater importance.

It is not reasonable to expect, that those who work for wages and receive scant recognition in the factory and workshop should get more out of their masters by returning either them or their lawyers to Parliament. But it is necessary that the workers should get a greater measure of the wealth they produce, and to get this they must use pressure. This is why there is a Labor Party in the field. The program of this Party is of great importance to the workers, and must be supported by them.
No other party can be expected to give the workers, without pressure, such requirements as Old Age Pensions, Unemployment and Health Insurance, A National Minimum Wage, The Eight Hour Day and Five Day Week, Nationalization of the Natural Resources and their use for the cultural development of the people and not for speculation, and the repeal of laws which victimize the workers.

Experience has shown that the constitution of this country will not permit these benefits being granted the workers. At least this is the excuse given by the politicians of both Conservative and Liberal Parties. Therefore, it becomes necessary to call for the repeal of the British North America Act and the abolition of the Senate, which stand in the way of these benefits.

When all the issues which will come before the people at this election are boiled down, there will remain one thing only for the workers to do in order to get something out of this government turmoil, this is, vote for the candidates of the Labor Party—support the Labor Program—work for a government that will be free from speculation, graft and evil practices—a Workers' and Farmers' Government.

AGNES MacPHAIL, M.P.*

[Editorial]
August 1926, p. 3.

ELSEWHERE in this issue of The Woman Worker there is printed a poem dedicated to Agnes MacPhail, M.P. At this time it is fitting that we, too, should express our opinion on the actions of the only woman member of the Federal Parliament.

Miss MacPhail, a daughter of a farmer, a teacher by profession, has represented a farmers' constituency through two Parliaments. During these periods she worked consistently for the benefit of the electors. She also supported the most progressive measures brought before the House which would benefit the workers of this country. In fact, Miss MacPhail supported the Labor Platform.

Her fearlessness, her political independence, her deep interest and care for the well-being of the womanhood and childhood of Canada has endeared her to the working women of farm and city alike.

It is not surprising that the progressive electors of Grey County should send her forth again to battle in the elections for a seat in Parliament. This expression of confidence in Miss MacPhail by the farm men and women is a marked contrast to that afforded the women of the Conservative and Liberal Parties.
When a number of women, prominent in the ranks of these two parties, were questioned about contesting seats in Toronto, they declared that such a thing would be hopeless. Their opinions were, that a woman to brave the forthcoming political storms would have to possess cunning, brains, personal magnetism, pretty clothes, and a good bank account—and—would have to be approved by the men at convention. This last was the greatest difficulty, especially as a Federal campaign is looked upon as a man’s business.

We can be thankful that the farmers of Canada have not such a viewpoint, otherwise we should not have known Miss MacPhail. It did not require all the qualities outlined by the Toronto women of the Liberal and Conservative Parties to convince the farmers that Miss MacPhail was fitted to represent them. Instead, it was the qualities of frankness, sincerity, sound judgment and forceful expression that convinced them of her fitness to be their representative. The organized farmers and advanced workers of Canada lead the way in the fullest understanding of “Sex Equality.” Upon the shoulders of men and women alike must rest the responsibilities of work and duties. Those who do not understand this belong to the decaying system of privilege. When more women like Miss MacPhail are in the Federal House we shall know that the new social order is in sight.

**WANTED—WOMEN M.P.’s**

*(Dedicated to Agnes McPhail, M.P.)*

August 1926, p. 6.

O women—in our hours of ease,  
You are so good and kind, but, please,  
We want your sound and splendid sense  
Within that House of Sad Pretense.  
Is it enough? One lonely woman’s zeal  
Fighting your battles for the Commonweal?

Your country’s heart is sick and sore  
Watching the capers of the party bore;  
His brainless squabbling for power and Gain  
While causes die for which you toiled in vain.  
Is it enough? One lonely woman’s zeal  
Fighting your battles for the Commonweal?

Was it for this your women pioneers  
Toiled for your rights in agony and tears  
To give you power to waste your precious vote
On venal partisans, creatures of wont and rote?
Is it enough? One lonely woman's zeal
Fighting your battles for the Commonweal?

One lonely woman in that squabbling throng,
Trembling, indignant, angry at the wrong
That murders pity for the aged poor
And pensions jobbery for the genial boor.
Is it enough? One lonely woman's zeal
Fighting your battles for the Commonweal?

Within your ranks are women brave and true,
Charged with the passion of their country's rue.
Call them to service in their country's need;
Your nation's heart is sick of graft and greed.
Is it enough? One lonely woman's zeal
Fighting your battles for the Commonweal?

Call them as women, free from party ties,
Which chill the heart and blind the seeing eyes.
We want their sound and splendid sense
To sweep that House of Sad Pretense.
Is it enough? One lonely woman's zeal
Fighting your battles for the Commonweal?

* {Editors' Note: Macphail was spelt inconsistently in the original.}

BEAUTY CONTESTS

September 1926, p. 5.

The recent beauty contest in Toronto has brought forth condemnation from ministers of the church and artists. Both object to the display of feminine beauty in such a vulgar fashion. The onus of the responsibility for thus exposing themselves is placed upon the girls who take part.

We have an objection to beauty contests too, but not on the same grounds as the ministers and the artists. We like to see the daughters of the working class maintaining their beauty and physical fitness. Our objection to beauty contests is, that they are used merely as a means of advertising. In this particular case, not only did merchants advertise their wares, but the city of Toronto used the contest to advertise Sunnyside, to take trade to the refreshments booths, and to get revenue for the Transportation System.
The Journey Started

"And what do you get for this, may I ask?" So questioned a woman at whose house I called canvassing for our labor candidate. Said I, "Well, madam, if you wish to know I can tell you. I get sore feet, a tired tongue, and a weary body, but I get no money, and this is what I think you refer to." The woman of the house seemed a little taken aback at the answer. Changing her tone of voice, she said. "I am a Conservative, our whole family have always been conservatives, so you know where my vote will go. But, I really think you should get pay for your work. Our Conservative men get paid for their work, but they think the women ought to work for the cause. The women are beginning to kick." This last comment was spoken half confidentially. "Well," I replied, "in the Labor Movement the men as well as the women [...] Our Party, the Labor Party, of wage workers [...] does not get financial aid from big business and people who own whiskey distilleries. We have to depend on the small contributions donated by wage workers. Of course, it is for the benefit of wage workers that the Labor Party exists." "Wage workers!" retorted the lady with a gesture of disgust; "most of those persons are idle, thriftless beings, the women waste their money on movies and the men on drink; they make no effort to get on, and grumble about the fellow who does." "That is a rather rash statement," said I. "Let us see who these wage workers are." I went through a list for her benefit. "There are the men who make the roads, clean the roads and look after the drains. Imagine what would happen if these cleaners refused to work! Then there are the men who build the railroads, the men who work the mines, and the men who run the trains, etc., etc. Not forgetting the women who have to work in factories and stores. In short, madam, the wage workers are the very people upon whom you depend for the necessities and comforts of life."

I discovered that our Conservative lady, while not living in a very pretentious house, was living off the interest on mortgages. This I discovered when I attacked those who lived by means of rent, interest and profit.

Seeing that it was impossible to convince her that Labor's cause was the only cause, I thought I would leave her with something to think about. So I said, "I must be moving on, but let me tell you that the people you despise because they are workers will one day be masters. The workers are beginning to learn how important and necessary they are; in fact, that all society depends on them. When the workers become masters, all will have to work, and those who do not work will not eat."
She looked at me quite angrily, and banged her door as if to show what she would have liked to have done to me were it possible.

**I Meet a Harder Nut**

I thought that this Conservative woman was a hard nut to crack, but presently I struck another even harder. Seated on her verandah in a rocking chair, was a plump contented-looking woman. I approached her and asked her the usual question: “Are you interested in the election?” “No, I don’t bother my head about such things,” she replied. “This is rather unusual,” said I, “perhaps I can interest you in the program of the Labor Party, our labor candidate will have to support this program if he is elected.” I went through the program, explaining the reason for Old Age Pensions, how the Senators had rejected the bill, and why we must get rid of the House of Senate. I told a vivid story of the misery of the unemployed, and explained why they were entitled to Unemployment Insurance.

She listened the whole time with a self-satisfied smile on her face, and when I concluded, she said, “I’m not interested.” “Not interested,” said I, in amazement, “not interested in the needs of others who are not as fortunately placed as yourself?”

“I’m not interested. I have nothing to worry about. Why should I worry?” she replied.

Said I again, “But is it nothing to you that the aged poor are sent to jail, that unemployed girls are jailed as vagrants, that some sell their bodies for bread, that little children starve for the necessities of life?” “These things do not concern me,” she replied. I had never experienced such heartlessness. I felt disgusted with the woman, and thought I would take a chance at offending her so I said. “It may be that things won’t always continue rosy with you, you may even stand in need of the things for which we are fighting.”

“I do not think so; my husband has provided for my needs. I’m comfortably fixed. As for voting, I leave that always to him.”

Such indifference, such contentment, such selfishness! I felt I wanted to shake that lump of inhumanity. I left her consoling myself with the thought that when she died no one would miss her.

**Time Alone Will Change**

I was yet to meet another immovable human. Going up to a woman who was taking it easy on her verandah, I said, “I suppose you are interested in the election?” “I should say I am. Who are you canvassing for?” “The Labor candidate,” I replied. She laughed, saying at the same time, “Don’t waste your time here, I’m a Conservative; I’m proud of it, and you couldn’t change me in a thousand years, however hard you tried.” “Very well,” said I, “I’ll not waste my breath on you; I leave you to Father Time.”
An Old Trade Unionist

That day’s work was very disappointing. But it could have been worse. I did meet one person who said, “Yes, my vote goes to the labor candidate.” This person was an elderly man. He said, “I heard the labor candidate speak, he’s a fighter. I belong to a trade union,” he added. “Friend, you look as if you need a pension right now,” said I. “Yes,” he said, “I cannot work any more, I’m done for.” “Cheer up,” said I, “our man will fight for you.” His eyes welled with tears as I shook his hand. Poor soul! His trade had ruined his health, he was hanging on to life by a thread.

Another Side of the Mountain

Fortunately, the following day I struck a different crowd of women. I discovered that the ages of women made quite a big difference. By this I mean, the majority of the women I met during my first day’s work were elderly women—the grandmother age. Their families were off their hands and their minds were fixed on the past. They did not need Old Age Pensions.

The different crowd were women whose families were babies, or who were struggling along with children of school age or children preparing for a career. These women, finding a pair of sympathetic ears to talk to, did not hesitate to tell their stories of daily struggles; the small wages their husbands earned; what each had to do with that wage to make ends meet; how they denied themselves pleasure so that their children should have a chance to make good. And when I said, “Well, what are you going to do about it? How do you intend to help yourself at this election?” “Oh! I don’t know,” often came the answer, “my husband always advises me.” “But cannot you think for yourself, you have the vote, this is for your own expression of opinion, not your husband’s,” I would say. Nearly always the answer would be, “I haven’t time to read. I know nothing about politics.”

It required a lot of patience to tell each woman in turn what was at the root of her grievances, and why the workers must stand together.

Most of these women thought “politics” was something quite outside their homes. They had no idea that hours of labor, even wages, the cost of living, the education of their children, the school cadets, were bound up with politics.

When I explained these things to one young mother, she said, “How glad I am you came to tell me this, we women need educating so much.”

Privation

Some of the tales of suffering in working class homes were heartrending. One mother asked me to step inside, so we could talk at ease. This woman was raising a family of six children. Her husband had been off work for nearly six months through illness. The result was she was struggling under a burden of debt; the biggest worry was the six months arrears of rent. In addition to this her eldest daughter, a girl of fifteen, was in ill-health. Her husband had just managed to get work, but his wages were very low, just
forty cents an hour. She had tried to get work herself, but the wages offered her were so low that it would not pay her to go out and to leave the children to look after themselves.

It was lunch hour and the children came in from school. Their meal was bread and peanut butter. "Tell me how my husband can get more wages; tell me how I can get work; these are the things we need most," the poor woman exclaimed, half crying.

We talked about the Labor Movement. I explained how she and her husband must interest themselves in this, as this is the movement that provides the means through which the workers can struggle for the things they need. Also, that they must support the Labor candidate as an expression of trust in the Labor Movement. Each vote for the labor candidate strengthened the cause of labor.

With the promise that she would talk the matter over with her husband, I left this poor mother with her family and her burdens.

Crude Notions

And what notions, strange notions, our working class housewife had of Miss Agnes MacPhail! Our working woman is just as ignorant of the forward march of her sex into the field of political activity as she is of politics in general.

"Miss McPhail! That woman! She's a disgrace to us women! No decent woman would sit among all those men!" was but one of the comments of disapproval.

So it fell to me to champion our only lady member of the Federal House of Commons. "Miss MacPhail is one of our most courageous and best women," I would reply. "She is not in Parliament for herself, but for a cause. She has to fight for this cause and she displeases many of those men in Parliament. This needs courage. She fights against war, the wrong education of our children, and many other things which hurt us, as well as for things which benefit us. Miss MacPhail urges other women to join her, to help her. She does not like being there alone, but it is due to our backwardness that she is. We have yet to wake up."

(Forgive our sisters, Miss MacPhail, for they know not why they think these things.)

I Meet the First Woman Rebel

It was the day before the election. I had just a few more houses to visit. My rebel woman was sweeping her verandah. I wondered, as I approached her, whether she would be another hard nut to crack. "Are you interested in the election?" I asked. "Indeed I am," she said, "and I'm going to vote for the man who can help the workers." This was like balm to sore ears. Then, as if to give vent to her pent-up indignation, the result of the struggle with poverty, she denounced the conditions of toil for the workers, the long hours they worked, the low wages they received, how workers felt themselves...
forced to join certain organizations to secure jobs for themselves. She stormed against the newspapers which printed one thing one day and the opposite to the same subject the next. Finally, she wound up by saying "In Russia the workers were compelled to take drastic action. I tell you, that is what will happen in Canada one of these days, and it may not be so very far off. Do not misunderstand me. I love Canada. I am not unpatriotic. I have heard that you people in the Labor Movement want to destroy our country, that you have no use for it."

Here was a real rebel. I told her her words made me glad, and that she was the most intelligent woman I had struck during my canvassing expedition. I assured her that she was figuring out things pretty correctly. But it was necessary to correct her wrong impression of Labor's attitude toward Canada. I told her that we in the Labor Movement liked Canada so much that we wanted Canada for the only useful people, the workers and the farmers, the producers of life's necessities. Now Canada was in the hands of speculators, profiteers, sharks of every kind, who bled her of her wonderful wealth as well as robbed the workers of the fruits of their labors. In fact, we wanted the World for the Workers.

I left my rebel woman, knowing she was on the right track and knowing that two votes from that house would be cast for the labor candidate.

The Mountain

What was the mountain I visited? Not a summer resort! Oh, dear, no! It was the mountain of ignorance, apathy, prejudice, mainly the result of mal-education. And what a Mountain! A mountain of slaves, caressing and hugging and worshipping the chains of bondage. As I reflect upon my visit to this mountain, I feel I want to bore, bore and bore, into its very bowels. I want to make it a seething volcano of working class activity and consciousness. I want to make it a live force struggling against injustice and for freedom.

Will this mountain, now under the control of the dark forces of a master class, ever be won to fight for freedom? Of course it will! Of course it must! But, Oh! for the tools! Certainly those we have will have to be adjusted to this task. Those we have not, we must make.

But go to the mountain—the masses—the workers!

DRINK NOT THE CAUSE OF THE CLASS POVERTY OF THE WORKERS

December 1926, p. 5.

At a recent meeting of the Toronto pastors of the United Church, it is reported that thirty-three pastors stood up and declared that in the last year
they had not been called upon to assist a single family which had become destitute through DRINK.

From this statement we must conclude that they had been called upon to assist some destitute families. If this is so, then we must ask, Are there other reasons for poverty and destitution besides drink? Then, as this must be so, we must ask, Are these not as bad as drink?

The preachers of the Gospel must know that there is one great CAUSE for the poverty of the workers. They must know that a certain condition prevails which keeps the workers on the border line of destitution despite the hours they toil and the economy they practise. Why cannot they be frank and declare: The poverty of the workers lies at the door of the master class, the exploiters of the labor of the workers?

And as exploiters, the Liquor Interests care not about the misery their commodity brings. They only laugh when they see the foolish workers pouring liquor down their throats, getting befuddled, and losing their senses. This means profit to them; why should they worry?

Workers will continue to be between the devil and the deep sea until they see that their interests lie in getting rid of the profit system.

WHAT SOME WOMEN CALL FREEDOM

December 1926, pp. 5-6.

Wives and daughters of some wealthy business men in a place called Wallasey, Cheshire, Eng., have formed a Club. Their object for so doing is to make cigar smoking popular for women. They regard this as a symbol of independence, as up to the present cigar smoking has been only a privilege for the men.

Leaving the habits of the Indian women; who are supposed to be barbarians, out of the question for the moment, we will agree that rich women, like all other women, have certain bonds to break. But, unfortunately, cigar smoking will not break them. The bonds that tie them are linked to a social system which has private property as its foundation. The bonds that enslave rich women will break, only when certain other bonds which tie the wage workers to the same system, break first.

To help break their bonds these women would do well to help the workers in their struggle. But will they? Oh, no! They would much prefer smoking cigars, because it is the least trouble, and certainly the least disagreeable.

Working women in this case will not worry themselves about the habits of their rich sisters. They are wiser if they take the path with the men of their class, in the direction of working class independence and freedom. This will mean the end of the wage slave system, and all else will follow in its train.
CONSERVATIVE WOMEN MAKE DEMAND FOR EQUAL REPRESENTATION

January 1927, p. 4.

Women members of the Conservative party are demanding a 50-50 basis in representation at the forthcoming national convention of their party.

This speaks for itself. Conservative women have received a raw deal during the past few years at the hands of their men. But, really, what else could be expected when Conservative men look upon their women, not as political equals, but as merely society entertainers.

The women of the Labor Movement are more fortunately placed. Sex equality from the political standpoint is not questioned. This is because men and women alike in the Labor Movement must go forward together in the struggle for economic freedom.

TORONTO LOCAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN PROTEST AGAINST BEAUTY CONTESTS

February 1927, p. 6.

The Toronto Local Council of Women have done right in protesting against commercializing the beauty of young women. We have protested right along against this. We welcome this addition to our protest.

HOW WELL-TO-DO WOMEN WOULD REFORM WAYWARD GIRLS

By A.I.


Who are wayward girls? Why a certain type of girl who belongs to the working class.

Are there, then, no rich wayward girls? Well, this is a funny question. But, between you and me, in confidence, you know, it can be said that when a daughter of the rich class happens to do an act similar to that of some of the daughters of the poor, few hear about it. She is sick and is sent away for a rest cure. Wealth, you know, covers a multitude of sins. It is said, too, that one is guilty only when found out.
Wealth cloaks the moral "turpitudes" of the rich. The poverty of the workers makes them "social lepers" when they happen to follow the conduct of No Man's Land.

The unfortunate poor girl cannot hide the results of her wanderings from the path of moral convention of to-day. Once discovered she knows no peace. She must live. But she is a leper. She cannot find work. She becomes hardened. She loses all sense of responsibility. She knows only that of her body. She spurns sympathy. She feels everyone's hand is against her. She pursues her path, takes chances with her life, limb and freedom.

But surely the surroundings in which these girls lived in their young days, their bringing up, the kind of homes they lived in, their associates, their education, their experiences on the street, their whole environment—have something to do with their fall from the present-day standard of morals?

Well, you, dear reader, who ask this question, may think this way, but Dr. Margaret Patterson, of the Toronto Women's Court, the Ontario Provincial Council of Women, and the Toronto Local Council of Women evidently think otherwise.

If press reports are true, then the women who belong to the before-mentioned organizations must look upon these so-called wayward girls in the light of being criminals, that their actions are the result of real inborn badness and wickedness of heart, or that they are feeble-minded. For were this not so they would not have presented to the Ontario Government the demand—that the terms of imprisonment for wayward girls be increased from the present two-year maximum to that of five years.

Social Safety First

These ladies may, of course, put forward the claim that these wayward girls are a social menace, and that social safety demands their isolation.

If these wayward girls are a social menace there must be something wrong with society to have produced this menace. Things do not come of themselves; everything has a cause. This means that our wayward girls are merely the result of a cause. And what do Social Service organizations declare about this. They state that broken homes, poverty-stricken homes are the cause of ninety per cent. of the wayward girls.

Then society is to blame. These girls are not criminals, but victims of a vicious social order, one that condemns ninety per cent. of the people to lives of poverty, and gives the ten per cent. the privileges of wealth and luxury and ease.

It is not imprisonment that these girls should have, with guards, military discipline, cells, hard work, and all the conditions that go with hard labor. They deserve a better fate, because of the things they lacked during childhood. They should have hospital homes, sunshiny and bright, with doctors and nurses in attendance. They should live in artistic surroundings and ex-
experience a taste of real culture. They are condemned to short lives anyway, so why not give them a little taste of heaven while they are on earth.

These girls are human beings with warm blood running through their veins. They have feelings; they long after the things of life, and long more for these things when they are absolutely denied them.

Our good women sing in church, "As pants the hart for cooling stream," yet they do not think that the poor, wayward girl in the first place panted for a little sunshine, a little kindness, a little happiness, a little joy, as well as often for a little food. And this because she was human.

And what of the men who buy? Ah, he is privileged to a certain extent. But some of these, too, are social victims. Their poverty will not allow them to marry. But they do not lose their freedom, as do the wayward girls.

Oh, the cruelty of the poverty of the workers!

Oh, why cannot the workers see and feel more keenly the insults the present system levels at their class!

Arouse yourselves, working women! The wayward girls are your sisters—the victims of the social conditions of to-day. The wayward girls are daughters of the workers. We cannot allow this stigma to remain. We must fight against the evil, prostitution, by fighting the conditions that make the prostitute.

WAR IS DECLARED ON "DEMORALIZING LITERATURE"

April 1927, pp. 5-6.

The National Council of Women, in its recent meeting, went on record favouring a Board of Censors who shall determine what we shall read. This is because it is thought that a great deal of harmful literature is being devoured by Canadian readers. The terms "pernicious" and "demoralizing" applied to literature can cover a vast field. And these women, whose interests are bound up with the present order of things, can claim that anything which criticizes this order is "pernicious" and "demoralizing."

Recently, a magazine called "New Masses" was declared "Unfit" by the Customs Department of the government. There is only one reason why such a magazine should be refused the privilege of the Canadian mails, and this is that it is "progressive." Unlike the Tabloid Press, "New Masses" is strictly educational.

But no doubt it is the way "New Masses" teaches that does not find favor in the eyes of "some persons near the government." It is inclined to ridicule the present order of things, to shock mock modesty, to call a spade a spade.
If "New Masses" is to come back to Canada again it will have to wrap all its thoughts in heavy bandages of cotton wool, so that only very deep thinkers can peer through for truth. Such is hypocrisy!

THE Y.W.C.A. IN CANADA

[Editorial]
October 1927, pp. 2-3.

WITHOUT a doubt the Young Women's Christian Association can claim to be the most popular of young women's organizations at this time. The thing that has helped to make it popular is the protection it offers.

Time and experience have made even this organization face a few facts, and if the reports we have received are any proof of this, then it can be said that, at least, the World Committee is trying to cope with some of the conditions.

The Industrial Section of the World Committee is putting some very pointed questions to its national bodies. To us Nos. 3 and 4 are interesting questions. These questions ask what the Associations are doing to promote improvement of factory law, a higher standard of life, and if they are encouraging the organization of women engaged in industry, this means, into trade unions?

We wonder how the Dominion Council in Canada will answer these questions. Indeed we would like to see the answers. So far as we can gather the Y.W.C.A. here has not done much, if anything, along this line. There has been no visible sign that they have helped the girls of their organization to help themselves by forming trade unions to keep up the wage standard.

We are aware they (the official and honorary members) have interested their Y.W.C.A. membership in sport, culture (literary and deportmental), but this is only individual improvement and not the collective improvement of working girls at the seat of production where their labor power is exploited.

In this country the Y.W.C.A. institutions are big and expensive. The maintenance of these cannot possibly be borne by the membership. Campaigns are put on for financial assistance. And herein lies the root of the trouble. It is a case here of "those who pay the piper calling the tune."

When the Dominion Council of the Y.W.C.A. sees fit to start work along the lines wanted by the Industrial Section of the World Committee of the Y.W.C.A. they will find the organized labor women of Canada ready to help them.
WOMEN FOR THE SENATE


The National Council of Women, the national body that represents the many and varied organized groups of women in this country, other than the groups of working-class women, holds its annual meeting in Stratford during the early days of October.

Among the resolutions which will engage the attention of this meeting will be one which will request the Dominion Government to grant to women the right to be appointed members of the Senate. If there should be clauses in the British North America Act which forbid women to be so appointed, the Dominion Government will be asked to urge the Imperial Government to amend the Act so that equal rights may be granted to women to be members of the Senate.

While we support “sex equality” there are circumstances which alter cases. If working women support sex equality in this matter they will be acting against their “class interests.” We have not yet found any difference between the men and women of the rich class, both equally exploit the working class.

Organized labor in Canada is opposed to the Senate. It has declared it to be a useless instrument. It has always acted the part of an enemy to the workers. It opposed Old Age Pensions. It is against Unemployment Insurance.

Yet its members are old men, persons who have served their day in the House of Commons. These men receive an annual salary of $4,000, and they get this until they die. Their pension is secure. In addition, most of them are on the boards of directors of the Big Houses of Finance and Big Business Concerns. If women of a similar class are appointed to the House of Senate, and this is what would happen, the workers might have to fight a stronger foe. We do not want the Senate strengthened—we want it out of the way.

Working women cannot possibly lend support to such a resolution. Instead, we must support the demand of the Canadian Labor Party, which is “Abolish the Senate.”

WOMEN OF QUEBEC REFUSED THE VOTE

[Editorial]

March 1928, pp. 2-3.

THAT the women in Quebec must attend to the needs of their homes and families and not bother about elections, is the decree of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Quebec, Canada.
After a heated debate, the bill for Women's Suffrage which was introduced into the House by Mr. Tremblay, member of a Montreal riding, was defeated by 39-11 votes.

It is reported that it was the members of the rural ridings of Quebec who opposed the bill. These rural overlords gave as their opinion that "women should not go canvassing votes and running for public office when there was the home and the children to look after." And so, it might be commented, disturb the comforts and personal attention the women must give to their good rural husbands.

Perhaps, too, they had in mind that their women might ask for Birth Control rights. This surely would grieve those good rural husbands who delight in having their wives surrounded by their flocks of babies.

However, it can be left to Mr. Tremblay to state the case so far as the good men of Quebec are concerned. It is evident he knows. In reply to those who opposed the bill, he said: "I think it would be better for married men to stay at home with their wives and discuss political matters instead of drinking around town. In this way discord in family circles would be in a large measure done away with."—Toronto Star, Feb. 28th.

It is absurd to refuse to grant the right of the vote to the women of Quebec. They have the right to vote in Federal elections, why not then the right to vote in provincial and municipal elections? Without doubt these men fear the forward march of women, and that this spells the doom of their dictatorship over, at least, their own immediate females.

So far, very little has been done in the Province of Quebec by those women who are interested in obtaining suffrage, and this little has been confined to the process of lobbying. This is a somewhat feeble way to tackle the question. It is not enough to go to the Provincial House and corner the members and try to coax them into supporting Women's Suffrage. What is wanted is a provincial campaign in order to make the demand for suffrage as wide as possible. The women of Quebec need this for themselves, that is, if we are to believe reports. This campaign could disclose the fact that the French-Canadian woman is more exploited than her sisters of the other provinces—as a wage worker she works for less and under worse conditions than the women elsewhere in Canada—as a mother she is classed in the list of those having the highest death rate.

The Women's Labor Leagues of Montreal will not waste time if they help to push forward such a campaign. They can stir the unions into action for this cause. They can help to put a little life into the Quebec Section of the Canadian Labor Party by urging this Section to take a prominent part in such a campaign.

Forward to the task of waking up the Province of Quebec from its medieval sleep!
UNITY BETWEEN WORKING WOMEN OF CITY AND FARM

[Editorial]
March 1928, pp. 3-5.

In this issue of The Women Worker there is published a letter received from the President of the Women’s Section of the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section).

This letter, as our readers will gather, is sent in answer to our criticism of the action of the officers of the Union in urging their Women’s Section to affiliate with the Saskatchewan Provincial Council of Women.

The reason advanced by the President, Mrs. Hollis, is that they considered this affiliation necessary because they felt the need of contact with the city and urban women. This is a feasible reason. Perhaps we who live in the crowded cities where life and activity are continual cannot fully realize what isolation means to our sisters living on the farms in the vast prairie provinces of this country.

We would like to make clear that our criticism was not directed against the Saskatchewan Provincial Council of Women in particular. We are aware that there are many well-intentioned women, even working women, working with the various provincial councils; in this connection can be mentioned the Regina Women’s Labor League, a unit of the Federation of Labor Leagues.

But this fact does not make the Women’s Council Movement, as it might be called, a movement best suited to the needs of the working women of farm and city.

‘Tis true, this movement takes all forms of social welfare work under its wing; it interests itself in women’s right; it endeavors to lift the standard of citizenship onto a high level, etc., but its attitude towards the workers is one of “patronage” and “sympathy”—an attitude which is obnoxious to working women who know only too well the source of all wealth, the reason for poverty, and why one class is enslaved and another class privileged and enriched.

Naturally, this very fundamental fact makes them view everything of a social nature with different eyes, as, for instance, instead of advocating that jails and reformatories should be made more comfortable for the delinquent girl, we say, give a working girl an adequate wage, and thus enable her to live a respectable life. Again, we do not consider such a girl as being born “bad,” but we say instead, that she is the victim of the social system of today, and in some cases have to show our well-to-do sisters who are connected with Council Movement, that they are not altogether guiltless in contributing to the delinquency of working girls through their support of low wages.
It can be seen that there is little in common between working women and women of leisure who spend a part of their time in social uplift work.

On the other hand, we are heartily in agreement with Mrs. Hollis’s statement that she considers “the problems of Agriculture and Industry as practically the same.”

It is because these are the same that we claim that industrial workers and farmers must get together to solve the big problem of their enslavement to CAPITAL. This is why we want to establish closer relations with our sisters of the farm. And, too, this is why we must show the limitations of the Women’s Council Movement.

ANSWER TO OUR CRITICISM

Saskatoon, Feb. 8, 1928

March 1928, pp. 15-16.

Mrs. Florence Custance,
Editor Woman Worker,
211 Milverton Blvd.,
Toronto (6).

Dear Madam:

Having always been interested in social and economic questions and feeling personally that the problems of Agriculture and Industry are practically the same, I brought your paper before our Executive Board and got them to subscribe for it for use in our Central Office.

The first number received, October, 1927, contains a criticism of our organization, or rather the officers, for advising our women members “to co-operate and work in harmony with the Provincial Council of Women.” Your reasons for adverse criticism of the above action are stated very clearly, and the chief seems to be that the P.C.W. is “anti-labor.” You also fear that the farm women of Saskatchewan are being persuaded into affiliation with an organization that is trying to undermine the political influence of Miss Macphail.

The Women’s Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers’ Association was for many years affiliated with the Provincial Council of Women; the question as to the advisability of affiliation was frequently discussed, chiefly because we wondered if the farm women were receiving much benefit from such affiliation. The conclusion arrived at was that this was practically our only bond of connection with the city and urban women, and only in this way could the viewpoint of the rural women be placed before them.
It may be news to you that the Labour Women of Regina (one of the most active labour organizations in our Province) are also affiliated with the P.C.W. The Council thus gives us a direct means of contact with the labour women, and altogether we think this has been of great benefit to the women citizens of Saskatchewan.

Members of the Council of Women have worked on the Minimum Wage Board and have generally been very sympathetic with labour.

Miss Macphail's action with regard to Cadet Training and Peace Propaganda has received very enthusiastic support from Western farm organizations of which our women are active members.

In affiliating with the P.C.W. it is distinctly stipulated that we have full freedom of independent action, as Article II of the Constitution shows. Article II reads:

"The aim of this Provincial Council is to bring the various organizations of women in Saskatchewan into closer relation, through an organized union, but no society entering the Provincial Council shall thereby lose its independence in aim or method, or be committed to any principle or method of any other society in the Council, the object of which is to serve as a medium of communication and a means of prosecuting any work of common interest."

Our aim in this affiliation, if it takes place, is to work with other women citizens in every possible way to improve social and economic conditions, whether in city, town or rural communities. As members of our own farm organization we have equal status with the men, and very often are able to interest them in reforms being asked for by the women citizens of the province. Thus, by co-operation with other women, as far as possible, and with our own men, we can help in accomplishing many needed reforms.

I thought you would be interested to know our general attitude in these respects.

Wishing you every success in your work.

Sincerely yours,

(Mrs.) A.L. Hollis,

President Women's Section, United Farmers of Canada,

Saskatchewan Section, Ltd.

THE FAILURE OF THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT TO BRING FREEDOM TO WOMAN


The great activity shown when occasion demands by political parties in their efforts to get the woman vote, brings to mind many of the promises and
prophesies which were made by friends and foes in those not distant days
when it required a little courage to wear a "votes for women" button.

Of course the "Antis" sounded their usual alarm—the home would be de­
stroyed—and one admits that many suffragists also showed their ignorance
of the "world process" by their optimistic arguments along opposite lines:
And after it was all over what happened?

In the first place, the anti-suffragists who were loudest in proclaiming
that "woman's place is the home" were the very first to step out and seek po­
litical and other offices. And of all the others who fought so well for this
right of self-expression, only one or two, here and there over the whole
country, saw that this was not the end of the struggle, but only a very small
beginning.

To be sure, it was not a working class movement. The majority in it were
middle class and fairly satisfied with conditions—as one well known club
woman said to me "It seems so absurd that my gardener can vote and I
can't." It was just a matter of status with her.

They were the sort who used to get up in meetings and enquire anx­
iously—"but who will do the menial work," when one was trying to picture
a better social order. Evidently, if it meant work and responsibility for all,
they were not going to stand for it. But they were mostly nice, kind ladies,
and they often meant well, as on the occasion when one of them undertook
to investigate conditions in a certain workshop, she brought back an excel­
lent report, and when asked from whom she got her information, she said,
"Oh, I went right to the manager!" And how they wanted to supervise the
spending of working class housewives at the beginning of the war. It seems
that some of these wasteful creatures were discovered buying oranges and
pickles—and later on it was gramophones and pianos!

But when election time came these same fine ladies were very busy call­
ing on women in various working class districts, and acting so "perfectly
lovely," that many a foolish woman voted against her own interests and
against her family and her class, because she was so flattered she was easily
deceived.

In the U.S.A. a group of influential ones, called "The Women's National
Party," are now going before Congress—supported by members of the em­
ployer's association—and opposing legislation that would aid great
numbers of women to an approach to economic equality with men. They
call it, asking for "equal rights." If, for instance, men are working ten hours
a day in certain places, women employed there must also have the "right" to
work ten hours a day. If successful, they will nullify the work of years done
by trade unions and labor groups for the betterment and relief of working
women. It may be that they do not grasp the serious problems of the woman
worker, but, anyway, they are proving again that the business of fair play for
all who work for wages is the worker's own task.
Another reason why the vote has been of so little use to us is the fact that hundreds of thousands are always disfranchised.

The law requires certain conditions and the worker following his job or moving about in search of employment is thus automatically off the voters' list.

And the working class generally is suffering today in "mind, body, and estate" because we've been too confiding, too good natured, too patient. We have failed to see that whatever value there was in the vote was lost entirely unless used for ourselves. And if this be intelligent selfishness there's little to argue about.

Certainly the so-called "dignity of labor" is only an election phrase, but there are enough workers to give it real meaning. We could very well take a lesson from the conduct of those in authority over us. They realize what class loyalty means, even though they may not like or in any way approve of each other individually. Yet they are rarely so silly as to be caught voting or acting in any way against their class interests. They stick together.

And since we have in Canada such a high class paper as "The Woman Worker" it must be now much easier to get together in great numbers with one common denominator—working class freedom.

If we meet just as working women, with no handicaps because of race, creed or color, it will speed up the day when voting will not be the farce it now is, when governments will not be something remote and threatening, when the ruling of peoples will give place to the administration of things "for the well-being of all."

October 30, 1928

H.D.P.

FARM AND RURAL WOMEN

[Editorial]

January 1929, pp. 3-4.

TWO conventions were held recently, which are of interest to working women. One was that of the Women's Institutes of Ontario, and the other was that of the United Farm Women of Ontario. Both are organizations of farm and rural women.

The former organization is a well established one, and the convention was its twenty-seventh annual meeting. One of the delegates claimed that the organization was "a factor to be reckoned with" since it had now 1,100 Institutes established in Ontario with a membership of 40,000.

Perhaps one reason why the organization has had such progress and met with success is that it has received grants from the Provincial Government. This has also resulted in the organization becoming a political football, al-
though the great bulk of the women may not realize it. That this is so, can be seen from the fact that last year one woman who was eligible to stand for the position of president was passed over, and it is claimed, simply because she supported Liberalism.

It is clear that the Women’s Institutes have a long way to go yet.

The United Farm Women of Ontario, on the other hand, are, on the whole, far more advanced from the political standpoint, since they are a definite part of the farmers’ organization. As such, of course, they do not receive a government grant, nor do they get special privileges, such as lecturers supplied by the government. They should not regret this as was done in their convention.

Naturally, because the United Farm Women of Ontario is a more advanced organization it is not as strong from the standpoint of numbers. There are at present 78 clubs, with a membership of 1,925.

Among the subjects discussed at the convention of the United Farm Women were, “Maternal Mortality,” which, it was claimed, must receive more attention, and plans devised to prevent the deaths of mothers through child-birth. Opposition was expressed to the proposed Ontario Divorce Court on the ground that it would lead to more divorces and greater domestic misery. Agreement was expressed to the proposal that women should sit in the Senate. One resolution was passed which demanded that at least one woman should sit on the Township Boards of Education. Equality of Property Rights was also demanded, as expressed in a resolution which claimed that a wife should receive half interest in the property, money, etc., belonging to the man.

The secretary of the U.F.W. of O. reported that their organization was affiliated with the Provincial Council of Women, and this action had been taken to make women’s efforts more effective.

We doubt very much if this was a wise step. Evidently, the farm women have forgotten the treatment meted out to Miss Agnes Macphail because of her letter to the school boy who wanted information about China, when that country was in the turmoil of war and revolution.

Apart from the many shortcomings of the organizations of the farm and rural women, they can teach the working women of the towns and cities a lesson on organization. If our working women were organized as well a great deal more could be accomplished, and a stronger and more effective labor movement would be the result.

Let us take this lesson to ourselves and bend more energy to the task or organization.