

Radicalism in Decline:
Labour and Politics in Industrial Cape Breton,
1930 -- 1950

by

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ABSTRACT

Cape Breton, the site of major strikes during the 1920s, remained a hotbed of political radicalism and trade union militancy for many years. In the early 1930s the Communist Party had considerable influence, and most of the coal miners joined the Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia, a CP-led breakaway from the United Mine Workers of America. Ideological opposition to the communists was spearheaded by the Catholic-inspired Antigonish Co-operative Movement, but this did not prevent the communist leader, J.B. McLachlan, from getting substantial votes in elections. The change of communist policy to the "united front" weakened the party's influence, although communists and the officers of the re-united miners' union were able to help the Sydney steelworkers finally establish a union, and to successfully press the provincial government to pass the 1937 Trade Union Act. Left and right in Cape Breton were also able to work together during the 1937 provincial election. The unity line of the communists, along with the impact of the Antigonish movement on Catholic voters, prepared the way for the UMW affiliation to the CCF in 1938, and during the war CCFers won the local seats in both the federal and provincial legislatures. However, the CCF could never win elections elsewhere in the Maritimes, and the move of CCF policies to the right in the post-war years only served to gradually undermine its support in Cape Breton. In the UMW the dissatisfaction of the miners with their bureaucratic officers brought about the 1941 slowdown, one of the most costly wartime industrial disputes, and productivity fell. The union policies advocated by the CCF (and the CP during the war), helped end opposition to the mechanization of the mines. Following defeat in the 1947 strike, the miners had to accept modernization on the company's terms, although this meant the loss of jobs. The steelworkers' union won a national strike in 1946, but thereafter was unable to hold wage rates for Sydney at a level equal to those paid in Ontario steel plants. The militancy and radicalism of the miners and steelworkers of earlier years had almost completely disappeared by 1950. Dramatic anti-communist episodes in both the steelworkers' and miners' unions in the 1949-50 period marked the triumph of union bureaucrats and Cold War politicians over radicalism in Cape Breton.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACCL	All Canadian Congress of Labour
AFL	American Federation of Labor
AMW	Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia
CBLC	Cape Breton Labour Council
CBTLC	Cape Breton Trades and Labour Council
CCF	Cooperative Commonwealth Federation
CLDL	Canadian Labour Defence League
CPC or CP	Communist Party of Canada
CIO	Committee for Industrial Organization (later Congress of Industrial Organizations)
GWU	General Workers Union
ILP	Independent Labour Party
LPP	Labour-Progressive Party
MWIUNS	Mine Workers Industrial Union of Nova Scotia
MWUC	Mine Workers Union of Canada
NAC	National Archives of Canada
OBU	One Big Union
PANS	Public Archives of Nova Scotia
PWA	Provincial Workmen's Association
SWOC	Steel Workers Organizing Campaign
TLC	Trades and Labour Congress
TUEL	Trade Union Education League
TUUL	Trade Union Unity League
UMW	United Mine Workers of America
USWA	United Steelworkers of America
WUL	Workers' Unity League

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All responsibility for errors or weakness of interpretation in this thesis is my own.

Introduction

Canadian history provides few examples of sharp class conflict to match the record of industrial Cape Breton in the first half of this century. The coal miners, in particular, displayed great militancy in their numerous strikes, and frequently showed themselves willing to support radical political theories and policies. This included widespread backing for the Communist Party (CP) in some periods, and for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) at other times. Working-class radicalism of this type has been rare among Canadian workers. If nothing else, the history of Cape Breton shows that such radicalism was possible for a sizeable group of native-born workers in what has generally been regarded as the most conservative part of the country, the Maritime Provinces.

This thesis takes up the story of Cape Breton labour politics in the 1930s when the Communist Party had a considerable influence in the area. The theme of this study is the process whereby the local radicalism and union militancy was contained and controlled, and then gradually transformed into political behaviour and ideology acceptable to mainstream capitalist society.

Changes in the economy and in the technology at the workplace played an important part in this political transformation, but the emphasis here is on the

Ideological contention between representatives of different political outlooks aimed at winning influence among the workers. Implicit in this approach is the view that important political changes came from conscious choices made by workers themselves. More precisely, this refers to the options chosen by the politically active layer of working-class men and women out of the range of alternatives made available to them. In most times and places, the inventory of political options accessible to the majority of people is narrow. Some concepts do not provide practical options because indoctrination against them renders them unthinkable, because they appear to have no possible chance of winning wide support and hence have no viability, or simply because there are no articulate spokespersons for them. Nonetheless, the choices made by the people themselves do matter, not least because they tend to widen or constrict future alternatives.

With these considerations in mind, the central argument presented in this thesis is that political changes in the Cape Breton union movement in the late 1930s mainly resulted from policies initiated by the Communist Party, but led to a weakening of the communist influence and the triumph of the CCF and "business" unionism in Cape Breton. Once they had become predominant in labour politics in the area, the moderate CCF and union leaders discouraged rather than nurtured the spontaneous

rebelliousness of the workers, the base from which radicalism had grown. By the years following the Second World War, therefore, Cape Breton radicalism had been greatly diminished.

While much attention is paid in this thesis to the changing support given to the Communist Party, the point is not that the party's policies were invariably radical or revolutionary, or that only party members upheld a sincerely radical or socialist viewpoint. During a few war years the CCF policies seemed at least as radical as those of the communists. For most of the period, however, the CP gave the most consistently radical leadership, and usually backed militant union policies. The growth and decline of Communist Party support in Cape Breton, therefore, was closely linked to the rise and fall of radical ideas and union militancy among the workers.

In the early 1920s the policies of the Communist Party struck a direct chord in the experience of the people in the mining communities, especially Glace Bay, and the party gained a following throughout the mining district and in the steel city of Sydney. The coal towns and villages of Nova Scotia had a well-developed tradition of class struggle by the beginning of the Twentieth century, and a considerable amount of research has been done on the miners of the 1920s and earlier. The history of labour strife in industrial Cape Breton in particular,

culminating in the big strike of 1925, has probably received more attention than any other subject in Nova Scotian labour history.¹

Several specific aspects of this earlier history can help to explain the potential for communist support among the working class of Cape Breton by the 1930s. First, the miners of Nova Scotia had formed one of the earliest industrial unions in North America, the Provincial Workmen's Association (PWA), to which most coal miners belonged by the 1880s. Beginning in 1907 there was a rivalry between the PWA and the incoming United Mine Workers of America (UMW), which ended in 1919 with the establishment of UMW District 26 as the union representing almost all the miners of the province. During these years of trade union activity the mining communities became "union" towns, not "company" towns; that is, by the Twentieth century, their municipal politics were usually

¹See Ian McKay, "Industry, Work and Community in the Cumberland Coalfields, 1848-1927," Ph.D. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1983; Sharon Reilly, "The Provincial Workmen's Association of Nova Scotia, 1879-1898," M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1979; David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Miners 1917-1926," Ph.D. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1979; "The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation," *Acadiensis*, Vol.vii, No.1, 1977; "Class Conflict in the Coal Industry; Cape Breton, 1922," in G.S.Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History*, Toronto, 1976; Donald MacGillivray, "Military Aid to the Civil Power: the Cape Breton Experience in the 1920s," *Acadiensis*, Vol.iii, No.2, 1974; as well as popular histories: Paul MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, Toronto, 1976; John Mellor, *The Company Store*, Toronto, 1983.

dominated by the union, not the company.² Second, the extremely bitter history of class conflict in the district was partly caused by the domination of the coal and steel industries by one large corporation, financial control of which always lay outside the province, and which generally displayed a ruthlessly exploitative attitude towards its workers. This was the British Empire Steel Corporation (Besco), which after financial collapse in 1928 was reorganized as the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation (Dosco).³ The major strikes of the early 1920s were largely attempts to defend miners' wages and conditions against the corporation's efforts to build up its falling profits at the expense of the miners.⁴ Finally, in the course of the large strikes there was direct state

²David Frank, "Company Town/Labour Town: Local Government in the Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1917-1926," Histoire Sociale/Social History, XIV, 27 (May 1981), pp.177-196; Del Muise, "The Making of an Industrial Community: Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1867-1900," in D. MacGillivray and B. Tennyson, eds., Cape Breton Historical Essays (Sydney, 1980).

³Dosco owned the Sydney Steel Plant, Halifax Shipyards Ltd, Wabana Iron Mines, the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company (Scotia) plants at New Glasgow, and various steel processing operations in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick. In coal it owned the Dominion Coal Company (Domco), which operated the mines in the Glace Bay and New Waterford areas, and in Springhill through its subsidiary, the Cumberland Railway and Coal Company. Through the Scotia company Dosco also controlled the Old Sydney collieries at Sydney Mines, and the Acadia Coal Company mines at Stellarton and Thorburn.

⁴Frank, "Rise and Fall of Besco"; "Class Conflict in the Coal Industry."

intervention in the form of military occupations of the mining communities, among the most blatant examples in Canadian history of such state assistance to an employer in defeating strike action.⁵

These were experiences that created the miners' predisposition to embrace a Marxist analysis which declared that the class struggle pervaded all of social life, that the capitalist state was an instrument serving only the interests of the capitalist exploiting class, and that the working class must unite to transform the world. One interpretation of Cape Breton politics in this period strives to emphasize the indigenous, "home grown" character of radicalism in the area, denying that communists from the party centre in Toronto had much influence on local developments.⁶ But it was the marriage of political theory with the spontaneous anger of the miners and their families that created the political radicalism. Radical theory was first introduced to the area by socialist speakers and writers around the beginning of the century.⁷ By the 1920s radical or revolutionary theories were put forward almost exclusively

⁵Macgillivray, "Military Aid to the Civil Power."

⁶This is especially the case with Paul MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers.

⁷David Frank and Nolan Reilly "The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in the Maritimes, 1899-1916," Labour/Le Travailleur 4 (1979).

by members of the Communist Party. Through the speeches of local party representatives, most notably James B. McLachlan, and those of party leaders who visited the area in the early 1920s, such as Malcolm Bruce, "Moscow" Jack MacDonald and Tim Buck, and through party publications, many of the miners came to see their specific quarrels with their employer, the Dominion Coal Company, as part of an ongoing battle between the working class and capitalism, a class war that could only end with the triumph of socialism. The miners' radicalism was expressed clearly in an often quoted passage from a resolution passed at the UMW District 26 convention held in June 1922:

... we proclaim openly to all the world, that we are out for the complete overthrow of the capitalist system and the capitalistic state, peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must, and we call on all workers, soldiers, and minor law officers of Canada, to join us in liberating labour.⁸

Something similar to this outlook continued to be very widespread in the mining towns in the decades that followed, a time of continuing wage cuts, strikes, military occupations, and economic depression. Radicalism could grow and persist under the necessary circumstances: a persistent communist presence making radical ideas available in popular form, accessible to poorly educated people; and the continuance of material conditions driving

⁸Labour Gazette, July 1922, p. 692.

the miners to an angry acceptance of theories which explained their misery and gave hope for the future.

There were rival ideologies, of course. Large numbers of the miners were Roman Catholics, and the local churches, the Catholic church especially, fought communist doctrines with considerable success.⁹ In addition, the 1920s can generally be described as a period in which mass consumerism and the "middle-class" outlook were growing throughout North America, and Nova Scotia was no exception. Nonetheless, class consciousness, in essentially the Marxist definition of the term, grew in Cape Breton in these years. At no time did the number of active Communist Party members in the area exceed one or two hundred, at most, but the party's influence was much more expansive. Even many who would not have thought of themselves as radical adopted into their thinking important elements of the Marxian viewpoint. In the mining towns the idea of classes and the class struggle became the basis for action for many, and were familiar concepts to everybody. Contrary to the charges of opponents, the communists never advocated violent action, except as a theoretical concept, reserved for a future crisis in which revolutionary violence would defeat counter-revolutionary

⁹On the Catholic struggle against communism see Gregory Baum, "Social Catholicism in Nova Scotia." In Religion and Culture in Canada, edited by Peter Slater. Waterloo, 1977.

violence. What was called for was an all out "class war" through union struggles, social protests, and voting behaviour, all in preparation for a great revolutionary transformation of the world.

For workers to adopt these views required the ideological rejection of the world picture defined by schools, Liberal and Conservative politicians, clergy, most newspapers and books, pervasive and seductive advertising, and the newly emerging and powerful media of the radio and motion pictures. It is not easy to understand how these immensely strong pressures to conform to the narrow range of acceptable political views could be even partially or temporarily defeated. No doubt, however, the miners became aware of the contrast between the harsh realities of life in the mining communities and the description of the world emanating from mainstream sources, and this caused widespread rejection of conventional political thinking. The conditions of the miners led them to many confrontations, small and large, with the management of the mines. Large-scale strikes occurred when the coal company tried to increase or maintain profits at the miners' expense, while many of the frequent small-scale strikes in individual mines concerned issues of control over the work process, as the traditional "miner's freedom" at work came under assault from management. The spokesmen of the right in the union,

pragmatic "business" unionists who had the support of the JMW's international leadership, were not keen to lead such battles. They usually counselled moderation, since their union strategies and tactics were limited by their conviction of the permanence of capitalism. On large scale issues of wages, business unionists essentially thought the miners could only hope to make advances in times of prosperity, of rising profits; and on the question of control at the point of production, they were never prepared to contest management's right to manage. Thus they opposed most local strikes, especially "illegal" walk-outs that broke the terms of signed contracts or did not conform to government regulations.

It was primarily the communists who, in the name of the class struggle, gave militant leadership to strikes wherever they had the slightest hope of success during the 1920s and early 1930s. They also gave their backing to "wildcat" strikes on issues concerning working conditions at the point of production, although the party never developed a real theory of workers' control at the workplace. The communists' support for union militancy caused the most rebellious miners, the natural leaders of such local struggles, to draw close to the party. The frustrations of the miners at low wages, the sufferings of their families as their standards of living fell, the support given the absentee coal company bosses by the

forces of the government, all led to the anger of the people. To this the communists added concepts of class struggle and of the eventual revolutionary transformation of society, and from this blossomed the radicalism of the 1920s and 1930s in Cape Breton.

With communists playing such an important role in the labour politics of the area over many years, in the chapters of this thesis considerable attention has had to be given to changes in the Canadian Communist Party line, especially its trade union policy. Communist history is usually divided into a number of periods characterized by the policies dominant in each time, in rough outline as follows. From 1921 to 1928 was the first united front period, when North American communists supposedly were "boring from within" the existing trade unions. From 1928 to 1935 was the "third period" of intense class struggle, during which efforts were made to build "revolutionary" unions. From 1935 to 1939 was the second "united front" period, during which communists renewed efforts to work with moderate union leaders and social-democrats. In 1939-41, the Comintern characterized the war as an inter-imperialist struggle, and Canadian communists were mostly driven underground. In 1941-45, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union transformed the war for communists into a worldwide battle against fascism, communist policy opposed any union activity disruptive of war production.

Then, in the years following World War Two, the Cold War forced communists to adopt mainly defensive policies in the unions and elsewhere.

Different views of the significance of these changes in policy are central to many controversies concerning the history of communism. The American and Canadian parties, most scholars agree, closely followed the leadership of the Communist International (Comintern), and of the Soviet Union. Many historians argue the changes in strategy were frequently sudden and almost always inappropriate as far as North American conditions were concerned, and reveal the complete domination of the communist parties by the Soviet leaders, particularly Stalin. This therefore leads to the most common indictment of communists -- that they represented alien political ideas which could never win broad support in Canada or the United States, foreign strategies ill-suited to the political and social climate in which workers lived and worked. If the Communist Party did manage to attract a few indigenous radicals, it is frequently asserted, this could only result in isolating radicalism from any mass support.¹⁰

¹⁰For examples of this view of the American communists see: Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, The American Communist Party (New York 1957); Daniel Bell, Marxian Socialism in the United States (Princeton 1967); Theodore Draper, American Communism and Soviet Russia (New York 1968); Philip Jaffe, The Rise and Fall of American Communism (New York 1975); Bert Cochran, Labor and Communism (Princeton 1977). For Canada see: William Rodney, Soldiers of the International (Toronto 1968); Ivan

Communists have found some defenders among historians. In particular, historians who have done detailed research on the trade union activity of communists at the shop floor level among various groups of workers have sought to exonerate communists from many of the accusations made against them.¹¹ Such studies, in Canada and the United States, give little support to stereotypes of communists as bad trade unionists who damaged workers' immediate interests by adventurism or who disrupted union organizations because of their ideological dogmatism.¹² And in no case has substance been provided to

Avakumovic, The Communist Party in Canada. A History (Toronto 1975); Ian Angus, Canadian Bolsheviks (Montreal 1981); Norman Penner, Canadian Communism (Toronto 1988). A very different interpretation, of course, is to be found in the Communist Party's own histories and memoirs, such as: Tim Buck, Thirty Years (Toronto 1952); Tom McEwen, The Forge Glows Red (Toronto 1974); or the official Communist Party history, Canada's Party of Socialism (Toronto 1982).

¹¹For Canadian examples see: Jerry Lembcke and William M. Tattam, One Union in Wood. A Political History of the International Woodworkers of America (New York 1984); Jim Green, Against the Tide. The Story of the Canadian Seamen's Union (Toronto 1986); John Manley, "Communism and the Canadian Working Class During the Great Depression: The Workers Unity League, 1930-1936," Ph.D. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1984; Allen Seager, "A History of the Mine Workers Union of Canada, 1925-1936," M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1977; Douglas Neil Caldwell, "The United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers, District Five, Canada, 1937 to 1956," M.A. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1979.

¹²Two historians who have written defending the role of American communists in unions are: Roger Keeran, The Communist Party and the Auto Workers (Bloomington 1980) and James Robert Prickett, "Communists and the Communist Issue in the American Labor Movement, 1920 - 1950," Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1975. Both

support another common allegation made by the contemporary opponents of the communists, the charge that they used undemocratic methods in their trade union work.¹³ Communist trade unionists were rarely in positions enabling them to exercise undemocratic or bureaucratic power in unions, even assuming that they wished to do so; communist influence among workers most frequently arose as they strove to organize new unions or led rank-and-file movements for greater democracy in established unions. The more honest of the communists' critics, moreover, agree that the principal reason they exerted influence in the unions was because they worked harder and longer without reward, sacrificed more, and took more personal risks than other union organizers.

On the central argument of opponents that the Communist Party was primarily an agency of the Soviet Union, in its crudest form this amounts to a claim that genuine radicalism could not be indigenous to this continent, and that the only tenable trade unionism was moderate business unionism. At the other extreme, the

describe the communists as having made good trade unionists; but Prickett, in distinction to Keeran, argues that they became "bad" or ineffectual communists in the process, losing sight of their aim of spreading revolutionary consciousness among the workers.

¹³This was often more a matter of innuendo than direct accusation. A union was invariably described as being under communist "control" if communists were included among the leadership.

communists themselves in most periods would not admit that any contradiction existed between their role as working-class radicals and their loyalty to the Soviet Union, the first homeland of socialism. A few historians believe this contradiction has been exaggerated. Roger Keeran writes of the communist union members he studied that their "ties to an international movement did not keep them from being leading fighters for industrial unionism in the auto industry. The moral and intellectual strength that communists derived from their international ties made them better fighters than they otherwise would have been."¹⁴ The belief that they formed part of a powerful international movement no doubt helped strengthen the commitment of many communists. However, in studying the record it is clear that the Communist Party did regularly adopt new policies on what amounted to "orders from Moscow," and not on an analysis of national conditions; and sometimes these policies do seem to have been extremely inappropriate in the local circumstances. Further, while communists should be defended as among the leading proponents of democracy within the union movement, inner-party democracy was almost non-existent on basic policy questions. Therefore, because changes in policy were imposed from above, they were often mechanically and clumsily applied by communists.

¹⁴Keeran, The Communist Party and the Auto Workers, p.3.

These things being said, the contrary still remains true, that the communists were the principal representatives of whatever genuine North American radicalism existed. The contradiction is perhaps partly to be resolved by drawing a line of distinction between rank-and-file communists, militants from the shop floor, and the full-time party professionals who became totally committed to defending the party line, whatever it might be. An interesting recent example of this approach to Canadian communist history is provided by Bryan Palmer, in his preface to the autobiography of rank-and-file activist Jack Scott.¹⁵ Palmer argues that Scott was an honest radical, and studies of the role of ordinary communists in Canadian unions can find many such, but that the Communist Party centre and its agents were representatives of "the distortions of Stalinism." However, the paradoxes in the history of Canadian Communism cannot be resolved simply by such a depiction of misled militants and bureaucratic party leaders. The Communist Party centre, for all its faults, along with the doctrinaire version of Marxism-Leninism that was current in party study classes, played essential roles in the process whereby a militant trade unionist like Scott, albeit a natural rebel, could become

¹⁵Bryan D. Palmer, ed., A Communist Life: Jack Scott and the Canadian Workers Movement, 1927-1985 (St. John's, 1988).

a lifelong radical. It also seems probable that "Stalinist" leaders like Tim Buck, for at least a long part of their careers, were themselves much more honest and committed than Palmer would admit. The contradiction between being a genuine radical and a slavish party hack must in fact have existed within the outlook of many communists, perhaps to some degree within all, ordinary members as well as leaders. There were truly revolutionary aspects in the party's message to workers; the communists' critical analysis of capitalism was penetrating and powerful, awakening many to resist injustice; and the courage, dedicated hard work, and self-sacrifice displayed by many party members was quite remarkable. On the other side, there were intense efforts within the party to achieve unanimity of belief in a changing political line imposed from above, which must have led to considerable mental dishonesty and self-deception. There was also a stultifying tendency within the communist movement to argue dogmatically from the authority of classic texts by Marx, Lenin or Stalin.

Communists in all Western countries attempted the impossible: they undertook a commitment to revolution in what were and remained non-revolutionary conditions; they tried to be loyal both to the Soviet Union and the cause of social transformation in their home countries; and they attempted to retain critical and independent judgement

while repressing tendencies towards "bourgeois individualism" and upholding "democratic-centralism" within the party. The difficulties involved were perhaps easier for worker militants who didn't involve themselves too deeply in theory; and this surely was the case for most of the Cape Breton communists. Political radicalism helped make more intense their commitment to the struggle, but they were always, first and foremost, militant trade unionists. In left-wing political organizations, recruits have generally come from two sources: natural fighters from among the workers and middle-class intellectuals. Most Cape Breton communists came from the ranks of the workers, and remained there.¹⁶

The same working-class character was found among the CCF membership in Cape Breton, and there was at least as sharp a divergence in outlook between local activists and national CCF leaders as existed in the CP. The CCF, of course, was a very different sort of organization from a Leninist party. The CCF sought to build a mass electoral party which was relatively vague and loose in its ideological rigour. The CP, in contrast, restricted membership to committed activists, and in practice usually required members to express their agreement with each change of party line. The CCF was not like this, although

¹⁶The one exception that comes readily to mind is A.A. "Bert" MacLeod, a communist intellectual originally from Cape Breton who became prominent in the party in Ontario.

it also experienced changes in policy over the years which were consistently initiated by the top leadership, the primary criteria being their estimate of how a given strategy would affect the party's electoral prospects. As within many other political organizations, the forms of democracy in the CCF overlaid and served to legitimize the manipulations of power. In the history of the CCF, however, the open exercise of party discipline seems to have been used almost exclusively to eliminate members who advocated alliance or unity with communists. An early example of this was the struggle within the Ontario CCF in 1933, which ended with expulsions of those advocating CCFers work closely with the communists.¹⁷ CCF leaders had two strong reasons for fearing getting too close to the CP: first they believed that any public association with communism would hurt their electoral prospects; and second they never wanted to chance the appeal communist radicalism might have to the left-leaning and susceptible among the CCF membership.¹⁸

The concern of CCF leaders with keeping control over

¹⁷Gerald L. Caplan, The Dilemma of Canadian Socialism. The CCF in Ontario (Toronto 1973), pp. 50-50.

¹⁸The preoccupation of CCF National Secretary David Lewis with the dangers of communism is apparent throughout his autobiography. David Lewis, The Good Fight (Toronto, 1981). The strong opposition of J.S. Woodsworth to any alliances with the CP is also well attested. See Kenneth McNaught, A Prophet in Politics (Toronto, 1959), pp. 269-70.

disgruntled members with radical tendencies perhaps also arose from the fact that CCF policies, when they changed, seemed always to move from left to right. All commentators agree that the CCF had generally much more radical sounding rhetoric and stated purposes in its early years than it did later, particularly after the war.¹⁹ In much that has been written on the CCF the explanation provided for this right-ward transformation is that the broadly based CCF "movement" of pre-war years became subordinated to the CCF "party" and its leaders, concerned exclusively with the attaining of political power through elections.²⁰ In order to have a wider appeal to voters, the CCF moderated its policies and suppressed or purged its radicals. Radicalism, it is added, came mainly from the CCF clubs, filled with socialist intellectuals, and the alliance of CCF party leaders with union leaders aided this process of moderating the CCF's image and outlook. But there were few middle-class intellectuals in the CCF in Cape Breton, and there it was more a matter of the CCF national leaders helping insure the victory of the right wing in the miners' and steelworkers' unions, than of the

¹⁹See Michael S. Cross, The Decline and Fall of a Good Idea. CCF-NDP Manifestoes, 1932 to 1969 (Toronto 1974), for documentary evidence of the CCF's move to the right.

²⁰The movement to party thesis is presented in full force in Leo Zakuta, A Protest Movement Becalmed: A Study of Change in the CCF (Toronto 1964); but similar ideas are expressed in Walter D. Young, The Anatomy of a Party: the National CCF (Toronto 1969).

unions pushing the CCF policies to the right.²¹ If the unions became a right-wing influence on the CCF and the later NDP, the CCF had first helped to create a union movement that would play this role. Overall, it is impossible to apply the "movement to party" thesis to the CCF in Cape Breton, where radicalism was not introduced to the miners by CCF movement intellectuals, but was widespread among union members before the CCF came on the scene. With regard to the CCF, at least as usefully as with the CP, a distinction should be made between local worker CCF activists and the middle-class intellectuals and union bureaucrats who led the party. Cape Breton workers supported the CCF believing it was a genuine socialist party, but it is doubtful if the workers' vision of socialism ever had much in common with that of the national party leaders.

The argument of this thesis is that ultimately both parties failed as leaders of radicalism in Cape Breton, but that the Communist Party, with all its weaknesses, came closer to awakening genuinely revolutionary political consciousness among the workers. The CCF national

²¹This is also true in other centres of local militant industrial unionism. For example, in 1948 Bob Carlin of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers in Sudbury was purged from the CCF for "appeasing" communists in his union, although he had won the Sudbury seat in the provincial legislature for the CCF in 1943 and 1945. Abella, Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour, pp. 100-1.

leadership never at any time had such truly radical aims. The communist line regarding social-democratic parties like the CCF was that they preserve capitalism by selling the potentially revolutionary workers the illusion that socialism can be won gradually, peacefully, and legally. In most of Canada it would be ridiculous to claim the CCF/NDP has played a counter-revolutionary role, since the politics of class struggle have never taken the centre of the national political stage, and capitalism needed no social-democratic saviour. In industrial Cape Breton, however, it can be argued that the CCF did, in practice, have the effect of moderating the political outlook of many workers, strengthening moderation in the union movement, and served as the main agency for reconciling the radical workers to the fundamental political and social structure in Canada.

Another point to be remembered is that the influences operating between the unions and labour-oriented political parties were reciprocal. The developments in the unions had a great effect on both provincial and federal elections in the area. Conversely, the representatives of the political parties had a considerable influence on the policies that were followed within the unions. The distinction that was often made by the participants themselves between union activity and "politics" was false. Union activity was extremely "political" in itself,

and the direction taken in union politics was probably always of much more practical significance to the lives of the workers than was the choice of a local representative in the legislature. In the pages that follow, therefore, the story of labour politics in Cape Breton in the 1930s and 1940s is followed primarily in chronological order, but with politics within the union movement and in the community in general discussed in separate chapters.

Chapter One deals with the communist influence in Cape Breton towns in the early 1930s, and with the ideological ferment as the state, the churches, the mainstream politicians, moderate union leaders, and others rushed to combat these radical ideas among the workers. Chapter Two discusses the communist role in the coal miners' union movement in this same period, and the rise and fall of a communist-led breakaway union in the early 1930s. The principal difference between this and earlier treatments of Cape Breton radical politics is that it shows that widespread militancy continued to exist in the area after the 1920s, and it rejects versions of this history that systematically downplay the role of the Communist Party in Cape Breton.

Continuing the analysis of communist activity in the area, Chapter Three focusses on the effect of the CP's "united front" policies in Cape Breton in the years 1935-39. In this thesis this period is regarded as crucial in

undermining the strength of radicalism in the area. It is argued that it was not primarily ideological attacks, or any transformation in the local situation, that brought about the CP's fairly rapid decline in influence in Cape Breton in the late 1930s. It was events outside the area, indeed outside the country, that brought about this change. One of these events was the coming of the big industrial union movement in the US and Canada. Even more important was the change in the policy of the international communist movement. It is also argued here that the local struggle against communism had led to a shift to the left, at least temporarily, of the whole spectrum of what constituted acceptable politics. In this the movement led by Catholic priests, the Antigonish Co-operative Movement, played a key role. And even the middle class in Sydney and Glace Bay saw the CCF as relatively acceptable when compared to the Communist Party. This helped bring about the electoral triumphs of the CCF in Cape Breton in 1939-40, the first CCF victories east of Manitoba.

Turning to union activity in the early years of the war, Chapter Four looks at the explosion of militant union activity among the coal miners in Cape Breton, and dwells especially on the slowdown strike of 1941, and the relationship of these Cape Breton developments to the general transformation of Canadian labour relations during

World War Two.

Chapter Five describes the most important advance made by the workers movement in Cape Breton in the time covered by this thesis, the building of the second large industrial union in the area at the Sydney steel plant. This was in part made possible by alterations in the policies of the provincial state in the late 1930s. This chapter deals further with the successful consolidation of the steel union during the war and in the 1946 strike, but shows that the union that emerged had become firmly dominated by right-wing union ideology and leaders by the post-war years.

Chapter Six resumes the story of the coal union in the later war years and during the 1947 strike, concentrating on the important issue of those years, the question of mechanization of the mines. It is argued that the ideological transformation in the union movement of the 1940s produced the less militant policies of the miners in the 1950s, when modernization transformed the workplace and greatly reduced the number of coal miners employed.

Chapter Seven further assesses changes in Cape Breton labour politics in the war years and the immediate post-war era. This begins at the high point of CCF ascendancy in local politics, when the party's platform still retained the rhetoric of socialism, and high hopes existed

for electoral victory in Nova Scotia and at the federal level. These hopes were never fulfilled, and for the CCF in Cape Breton, as elsewhere in Canada, the discouraging results of elections in 1945 helped move party policies to the right. The Communist Party's wartime policies further weakened its local influence, and helped to undermine the Cape Breton workers' radicalism. With the great decline of radicalism in the area, support for even the moderate social democracy of the CCF was in decline by the late 1940s.

The final chapter deals with the triumph of anti-communist politics and right-wing unionism with the coming of the Cold War to Cape Breton. Two symbolic incidents are discussed, one occurring in 1949 and the second in 1950, which displayed the ascendancy of the right in both the steel and coal unions by those years.

This was a victory of the "right" only relative to the earlier radicalism, of course. Cape Breton remained a bastion of strong trade unionism, and continued to elect CCF representatives for some years after this. However, in describing the behaviour and outlook of workers in unions, and their political activities, it seems impossible to avoid the use of terms such as "right" and "left," "militant" and "moderate," "radical" versus "right-wing" or the like. Clearly, these are relative terms, but at any given time refer to real distinctions in outlook. All

Twentieth Century politicians in Cape Breton, Conservatives and Liberals as well as Communists and CCFers, claimed to be the real friends of the workers, and literally no-one in a town like Glace Bay would dare oppose the abstract principle of trade unionism. But throughout the history of the miners' union movement "left" and "militant" as contrasted to "right-wing" leadership factions had existed. The "left" was generally associated politically with the communists, and with a radical class-oriented approach to political questions. In the union the "left-wing" usually opposed the policies of the international leadership of the UMW, called readily for strikes, and demanded local union democracy and autonomy. The "right" politically supported vague workerism, Lib-Lab or even Labourite-Conservative candidates, and eventually settled on the CCF as an alternative to the class struggle politics of the Communist Party. Within the union the "right-wing" stood for support of the international policies of the UMW, for co-operation with the company and the government and the avoidance of strikes where possible, and for bureaucratic, centralized control of union affairs rather than undisciplined and spontaneous actions by the rank and file. These "left" and "right" categories, however, were shifting ground. Leading individuals changed their orientation often. The most common change was for union

officers, once elected and faced with the responsibilities and the temptations of office, to move to the "right" in their policies. This seemed an almost invariable transformation with regard to District 26 presidents: John W. MacLeod, D.W. Morrison, and Freeman Jenkins were all elected as men of the "left," and all were regarded as extreme "right-wingers" before ending their time in office.

Somewhat the same shift from left to right occurred in the general orientation of the politics of labour in Cape Breton during the two decades covered in this thesis. In describing this process the aim has been to show how the economic conditions affecting the workers, as well as the important technological changes at the workplace, interacted with the ideological leadership given by the political parties to produce certain levels of consciousness among the workers. Beyond this, the principal actors in this story are the activists among the rank-and-file coal miners and steelworkers, those who attended union meetings, supported the CP, the CCF, or the co-operatives at various times.²² It was the political

²²Given the conditions and outlook of the time, this group of active participants in the political movements was overwhelmingly male, and the leading figures mostly came from the dominant ethnic groups, the Anglo-Celtic majority. Women, as well as men from ethnic minorities, played far less part in union and political affairs than did men from the majority groups, and this is reflected in the account given in this thesis.

choices made by these people, and the conditions and influences leading to these choices, that form the main subject matter of this thesis.²³

²³Some of the material in this thesis has been previously published in another form. Parts of Chapter One and Chapter Two were included in M. Earle, "The Coalminers and Their 'Red' Union: The Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia, 1932-1936," Labour/Le Travail 22 (Fall 1988), pp. 99-137. Part of Chapter Three was included in M. Earle and Herbert Gamberg, "The United Mine Workers and the Coming of the CCF to Cape Breton," Acadiensis XIX, 1 (Autumn 1989), pp. 3-26. A portion of Chapter Four was included in M. Earle, "'Down with Hitler and Silby Barrett': The Cape Breton Miners' Slowdown Strike of 1941," Acadiensis XVIII, 1 (Autumn 1988), pp. 99-137. The publishers of these periodicals have graciously given permission for the republication of this material in this thesis.

Chapter One

Radical Politics in Cape Breton Communities, 1930-5.

The working-class political activity that is discussed in this thesis took place in the towns of Cape Breton County, including Glace Bay, New Waterford, Dominion, Reserve and smaller mining communities, and the steel plant city of Sydney.¹ These were all communities that had mushroomed rapidly in the early years of the century after the formation of the Dominion Coal Company and the Dominion Iron and Steel Corporation led to expanded employment in heavy industry. Sydney had a population of 2427 in 1891, 9909 in 1901, 17723 in 1911, and 28305 in 1941. Glace Bay's population was 2459 in 1891, 6945 in 1901, 16562 in 1911, and 25147 in 1941. New Waterford was first listed in the 1921 census as 5612, and numbered 9302 in 1941.² Most of this rapid population increase consisted of people of Highland Scots descent

¹Excluded from consideration are the mining towns on the North-side of Sydney Harbour, Sydney Mines and Florence. The miners there displayed militancy equal to that of miners on the South-side. They were, however, somewhat isolated from the other miners by geographical distance and by the fact they worked for the Old Sydney Collieries, not the Dominion Coal Company. Old Sydney was also a Dosco subsidiary, when not in receivership, but different policies were deliberately applied by the corporation to these different groups of workers. In electoral politics, the Sydney Mines miners, however radical they might become, were outnumbered in a riding that was largely rural as well as containing the port of North Sydney, primarily a traditional fishing community.

²Census of Canada, 1911; Census of Canada, 1951.

moving in from the rural areas of Cape Breton Island to work in the mines or the steel mill. As of the 1941 census, 87 per cent of the population of the county was born in Canada, although substantial numbers of migrants also came to the industrial Cape Breton area from Newfoundland and the British Isles, as well as smaller groups from Italy, Eastern Europe and the West Indies.³ But in comparison to the miners of Alberta and British Columbia, the majority of whom were European immigrants of many national origins, there was relatively little ethnic diversity in Cape Breton.⁴

Religious and ethnic differences did exist in these towns, but perhaps the most striking characteristic of all these communities was their "proletarian" nature. Not only were industrial workers in the majority, but there was not a well-established traditional Anglo-Saxon middle class. There were, of course, the company officials, and a sprinkling of small businessmen, clergy, lawyers and doctors, but in comparison to towns with longer and slower growth, the middle class was small and weak, and a

³Census of Canada, 1941, gives a total population of 87,152 for Cape Breton South, 75879 of whom were born in Canada, 4812 born in Newfoundland, 2923 in Continental Europe, 2065 in the British Isles, 834 in the United States, 298 in the West Indies, 143 in Asia 180 in Syria or Lebanon, and 198 elsewhere or unknown.

⁴On the ethnic diversity in the West, see Charles Allen Seager, "A Proletariat in Wild Rose Country: The Alberta Coal Miners, 1905-1945," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1981.

substantial proportion of small merchants in the area were Jewish or Lebanese.⁵ In religion, slightly more than half the population throughout the industrial area was Catholic, but the proportion in the various communities was somewhat different. In Sydney, Glace Bay and Sydney Mines just under 50 per cent of the population belonged to various Protestant churches, but New Waterford was approximately 74 per cent Catholic, and Dominion 80 per cent.⁶

These religious differences had a bearing on the impact of radical political ideology in the different towns; all the clergy opposed communism, but the Catholic clergy appears to have done so more intensely and effectively. The miners of New Waterford, compared to Glace Bay or Sydney Mines, displayed somewhat less militancy in union affairs or radicalism in politics in the early 1930s, probably because of religion. Yet the record also shows that religion was not the major determinant of the level of militancy. Whether the coal miners were Protestant or Catholic, they were generally more radical than the other workers of the area. Sydney, where an attempt to build a union at the steel plant had

⁵Census of Canada, 1941, listed 395 persons of Jewish origin in Glace Bay, 445 in Sydney, and 99 in New Waterford. Almost invariably the Jews in the area were self-employed, as merchants or professionals.

⁶Census of Canada, 1941.

been defeated in 1923, had its radicals, but they were in a small minority. The centre of radicalism was in the largest mining town, Glace Bay. This was where the most active leadership was provided by J. B. McLachlan and his immediate followers, and it was the UMW locals in the Glace Bay sub-district that consistently took the most combative positions on all union matters.

As might be anticipated, the high points of workers' activity in electoral politics followed surges in union militancy. Labour candidates Alex MacKinnon in 1911, and J.B. McLachlan in 1916, finished at the bottom of the polls in Cape Breton county in provincial elections. Labour did much better in the federal election of December 1917, when miners' leader Robert Baxter and Sydney steelworker John Gillis got a high proportion of the vote running as Independent Labor Party (ILP) candidates.⁷ It was in the period immediately following the First World War, however, that labour candidates got their best results. In the provincial election of 1920 Farmer-Labour candidates won eleven seats throughout the province.⁸ In Cape Breton County Farmer-Labour candidates swept the

⁷David Frank, "Working Class Politics: The Elections of J.B. McLachlan, 1916-1935," in Kenneth Donovan, ed., The Island: New Perspectives on Cape Breton History, 1713-1990 (Sydney, forthcoming 1990). The writer is indebted to Dr. Frank for an advance sight of this soon to be published article.

⁸ MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, pp. 70-1.

field. Elected were: D. W. Morrison, later the Mayor of Glace Bay and President of District 26, as a Labour/Great War Veterans Association candidate; Joseph Steele, a carpenter from Sydney, as a Labour candidate; Forman Wye, who had been a machinist in the Sydney Mines steel plant until it closed, and who also represented Labour; and A. R. Richardson, from South Bar, as a Farmer candidate.⁹ Labour also did better than ever before in the Cape Breton area in the 1921 federal election. M.A. MacKenzie of Sydney ran as a Farmer-Labour candidate in Cape Breton North-Victoria, getting 35.4 per cent of the vote in this largely rural riding. J.B. McLachlan ran for Labour in the two member Cape Breton South-Richmond constituency. He received the majority of the vote throughout the mining district and even in Sydney, but was defeated in the constituency as a whole, which at this time included a large rural area.¹⁰

These electoral victories and near victories came at a time of rising union militancy among the miners. They brought few tangible benefits to the workers of Cape

⁹A. A. MacKenzie, "The Rise and Fall of The Farmer-Labor Party in Nova Scotia," M.A.Thesis, Dalhousie, 1969, p. 196.

¹⁰David Frank, "Elections of J.B. McLachlan," makes a convincing argument that it was the rural nature of much of the constituency that defeated McLachlan, rather than the dirty tricks of his opponents. This was the election in which the Liberal candidate, W.F. Carroll, made use of a forged letter claiming McLachlan had taken a bribe to agree to a wage reduction for the miners.

Breton, however. Although forming the official opposition in the provincial legislature, the alliance between Labour and Farmer representatives soon broke down, and the Labour members had no influence on the policies of the Liberal government during this period of great labour upheavals in Cape Breton. It was the Conservatives who benefitted politically from the anger of the workers at the Liberal government's role during the 1925 strike. In the 1925 election the Conservatives swept to power in the province, greatly helped by the Maritime Rights issue, while presenting themselves in Cape Breton as true friends of the workers who, unlike the Labourites, could attain power. This appeal worked; Labour still got substantial votes in the Cape Breton ridings, but not enough to prevent defeat by Conservatives.¹¹ The Conservatives also won the local seat in the federal election of 1925, in which J.B. McLachlan ran as a Labour candidate. McLachlan had a strong vote, but considerably down from his showing in 1921. A year later, in 1926, D.W. Morrison contested the seat for Labour, but again the majority of miners' votes was not sufficient to carry the constituency.¹²

In the 1920s local Labour clubs or Independent Labour

¹¹MacKenzie, "Rise and Fall of the Farmer-Labor Party," pp. 170-4.

¹²Frank, "The Elections of J.B. McLachlan." The winning candidate in 1925, 1926 and again in 1930 was Conservative Finlay MacDonald.

Party (ILP) branches appear to have been activated only at the time of elections, and then generally to have made a broad appeal calling on workers of all factions to unite behind a labour candidate. The unity in electoral politics was much more effective in the 1920-1 period than it was to be again until the late 1930s. This was partly a matter of the international division in socialist politics between communist supporters of the Bolsheviks and moderate social-democrats. There existed no organized social-democratic party in Canada until the CCF emerged in the 1932-3. However a definite split had appeared between the left and right in the miners' union. J.B. McLachlan had unequalled prominence as a miners' leader, but was well known to be a communist. Thus when he was a candidate little support came from the right-wing members of the UMW, who tended either to support one or the other of the mainstream parties, or to vote for moderate labourite reformers. What was presented as the extremism of McLachlan and other radicals no doubt alienated some workers, as well as rural voters or members of the middle class. By the late 1920s it also appears that labour in Cape Breton was somewhat demoralized by defeats in strikes. In the 1928 provincial election Labour candidates J.B. McLachlan and Forman Waye came third, behind the Liberals, in Cape Breton East.¹³ In the federal election

¹³Frank, "The Elections of J.B. McLachlan."

of 1930 there was no Labour candidate.

This political discouragement perhaps reflected the general conditions in the mining towns. Despite the solidarity displayed in strikes the miners' living standards, dependent on a declining coal industry, fell throughout the 1920s.¹⁴ The 1921 average daily earnings for contract miners in Nova Scotia was \$7.22. By 1929 this had fallen to \$5.65, and by 1933 it was \$5.60. The 1921 rate for datal «daily paid» underground workers was \$3.90, in 1929 the rate was \$3.35, and in 1933 it was \$3.14.¹⁵ The sufferings endured in the great strike of 1925 did not avert substantial wage cuts, and a sense of defeat and demoralization weakened radical organization and influence in Cape Breton in the years that immediately followed. One Communist Party member wrote in March 1928: "[I] might as well say we have no branch here now. We have not met since Nov. last ... the miners are in a state of apathy like you never seen."¹⁶ As the miners' conditions deteriorated further, however, there was renewed response to radical and militant ideas.

¹⁴Based on Dominion Bureau of Statistics figures, C.B. Wade estimated the 1932 real earnings of miners at 58.6 percent of 1921 earnings. C.B.Wade, History of the UMW of A District 26, unpublished manuscript, PANS.

¹⁵W. F. Carroll, Report of the Royal Commission on Coal «Ottawa, 1947», p. 303.

¹⁶Harry Campbell to Annie Buller, 19 March 1928, Communist Party of Canada «CPC» Papers, MG 28 IV4, M 7378, National Archives of Canada «NAC».

By the beginning of the 1930s the miners and their families were living in desperate circumstances, and the coming of the worldwide depression had destroyed hope for any early improvement in conditions. Even more devastating than the lowered wage rates was the unemployment and under-employment in the mining communities. Unemployment was widespread, particularly among the younger men, and those miners who were employed worked only one, two, or three shifts a week. In 1931 80 per cent of the miners of Nova Scotia worked less than 200 shifts, and earned less than \$1000 during the year.¹⁷ When, in the first week of September 1933, all the Glace Bay sub-district mines worked a full week, it made front page headline news.¹⁸ Employed miners, as well as the unemployed, depended most weeks on relief payments to keep their families alive. Struggles over the methods of payment and the amount paid were frequent.¹⁹ In Glace Bay relief payments were generally at a slightly higher level than in most Nova Scotia towns because of the pressure exerted on the town council by miners' delegations and demonstrations of the unemployed, but at best the relief enabled people to survive at a bare subsistence level. In 1932 the maximum

¹⁷Carroll, Royal Commission, p. 305, p. 308.

¹⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 17 November 1933.

¹⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 17 November 1932, 21 May 1934; Sydney Post-Record, 7 April, 7 July 1933.

to which a family's weekly income could be subsidized in Glace Bay, regardless of family size, was \$10.00.²⁰ This maximum was increased slightly in the following years, but malnutrition, poor clothing, and inadequate heating was the lot of many miners and their families, and combined with this material poverty was the humiliation of living on relief and the fear of further cuts in wages, cuts in relief payments, or complete unemployment if mines were closed.

When the Communist Party entered its "left" phase at the beginning of the depression, it saw the coal mining area of Cape Breton as a prime target for a revitalized appeal to action, and in response to the deteriorating living standards in the early 1930s in Cape Breton there was renewed response to radical and militant ideas. There were numerous types of communist-led activities in the communities aimed at involving working people in radical politics. The centre of this activity in Cape Breton was the town of Glace Bay where J.B. McLachlan resided, and where he began editing the weekly Nova Scotia Miner in December 1929. The party's following in Glace Bay owed much to McLachlan's personal appeal. Certainly no other miners' leader commanded the respect and popularity he did. The approval he received, however, cannot be seen as restricted to his personal qualities of courage and

²⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 7 November 1932.

honesty as a leader, but extended to the revolutionary ideas he so freely and forthrightly expressed. And McLachlan's was not the only radical voice in the area. Throughout the mining areas there were other men with leadership experience at various levels of union activity, who within District 26 constituted what can be termed a left opposition to moderate or right-wing union policies. Like McLachlan they saw the union battles as part of a general class struggle, and some of these militant miners became Communist Party members. There were also a smaller number of women who joined the party. The local membership was never very large; no exact figures on the numbers in Glace Bay are available, but the really active membership probably never exceeded 20 to 30 at any time. Actual membership, however, required a degree of commitment and level of activity that few were willing to provide for long periods. Some seem to have passed in and out of the party, while retaining a basic loyalty to its ideology. It also seems clear that over many years in the Glace Bay area the influence of the communists went far beyond their numbers. Evidence of this is given by the large attendance regularly obtained at the public meetings the party held throughout the 1930s and 1940s in Glace Bay. George MacEachern, who was very active in the Communist Party in Sydney and who frequently went to Glace Bay, says of these years:

In Glace Bay we could fill any hall with no trouble when we had a meeting with someone like Tim Buck or Annie Buller speaking. There was a whole section of people there who would speak of "The Party" -- just "The Party," meaning the Communist Party -- and most of them were never members.²¹

The influence of the CP in Glace Bay grew in the early 1930s when the popular, communist-led movements included many rank-and-file miners, women, and the young unemployed men. Displayed in all the mass activities was the aspiration of the working people to overcome their helplessness in the face of great economic forces, and their repudiation of politicians and union bureaucrats who cared little about their circumstances. A substantial number, facing the desperate conditions of the depression and influenced by communism, reacted not with despair but with struggle. This strong response to communist ideology led the party centre to regard Glace Bay as an important base, and at almost all times during these years there was at least one full time party organizer stationed there, men such as Jim Barker, Sam Scarlett, A.A. MacLeod, or Phil Luck, and there were also frequent visits from leading party figures such as A.E. Smith, Annie Buller, and Tim Buck.

Communist-led activity mainly took the form of meetings, demonstrations, and protests involving the Unemployed Association, the very active AMW Women's

²¹Interview with George MacEachern, July, 1984.

Auxiliary, and AMW locals on issues such as unemployment, relief, workman's compensation, rents, and evictions. Almost every week delegations appeared before the Glace Bay town council.²² For example, in November 1932 the town council was visited by delegates from each of the AMW locals in Glace Bay, the AMW Women's Auxiliary branches, and the unemployed organization, each delegation speaking to protest the low maximum of \$10.00 relief, calling for workers' representatives on the relief commission, workers' control of the distribution of clothing, better treatment of unemployed single men, and many other specific demands.²³ The AMW also on at least one occasion used strike action on a relief issue. In December 1932 they organized a two day strike in the mines at Reserve because the relief maximum there was only \$7.00 per day, regardless of the size of the family. This was, they announced, a "hunger strike," not a strike against the company. The strike succeeded; the Reserve municipality raised the maximum relief orders to \$10.00 for families and \$3.00 for single men, the levels in nearby Glace Bay.²⁴ These struggles, delegations to council meetings and the like, were frequent through these years, and all

²²Glace Bay Gazette, 17 November, 15 December 1932, 23 February 1933.

²³Glace Bay Gazette, 17 November 1932.

²⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 20, 21, 22 December 1932.

were led by the communists while reflecting the strong desire of workers to gain control over at least some of the conditions affecting them.

One important form of communist activity in the early 1930s in Glace Bay, as elsewhere in North America, was the organization of the unemployed. In the mining towns the older miners suffered from under-employment, getting barely enough work to survive. The largest unemployed group was the young single men, most of whom had never been employed. Their organization in Glace Bay was first called the Unemployed Association and later the Unemployed Union, and the AMW worked closely with it under both names. AMW miners Rankin MacDonald and John R. MacDonald were among the principal leaders of the unemployed in Glace Bay. Rankin MacDonald was a Communist Party member, but John R. MacDonald, although a left-winger, probably never was. The style of the protests of the time arose naturally from the spontaneous anger of the unemployed, but they also resulted from the policies of the CP. The unemployed organization during this "left" period as standard tactics issued outspoken demands and sought confrontations with authority. In May 1933, for example, unemployed demonstrators led by Rankin MacDonald marched into the town jail demanding to be locked up and fed.²⁵ The unemployed of Glace Bay were invariably active on the

²⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 11 May 1933.

picket lines in any local strike of the AMW or other workers, and the organization seems to have included almost all the young unemployed men in the town.²⁶

The AMW Women's Auxiliary was the most direct form of communist work among women in Glace Bay. It concentrated on the problems of women as wives and mothers, raising such demands as free school books and the elimination of military cadet corps in the schools, as well as relief issues. Women's Auxiliary "fraternal" delegates attended AMW conventions and spoke at length giving the women's views on union issues. At the May 1933 convention a resolution was proposed to give miners' wives a vote in all contract referendums, a week earlier than the men. The argument advanced was that this would inject more militancy into the vote, since women knew better than men how difficult it was to live on the low wages. The delegates tabled this resolution which provoked an angry response from J.B. McLachlan in the Nova Scotia Miner.²⁷ He had long argued that wives should be given "voice and vote" at union meetings.²⁸ The greatest coup of the AMW Women's Auxiliary was its preparation of a report which, based on the women's own research, claimed the average

²⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 6 January 1934, gives the active membership of the Unemployed Association in Glace Bay as 814.

²⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 9 May 1933; Nova Scotia Miner, 20 May 1933.

²⁸Nova Scotia Miner, 25 January 1930.

daily income per person in miners' families was thirteen cents. This gained considerable attention after A.A.Heaps, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) Member of Parliament from Winnipeg, read out portions of the report in the House of Commons. A Women's Auxiliary resolution, which was published in local newspapers, called Prime Minister Bennett a liar, causing the local Conservative MP, Finlay MacDonald, to make an angry and threatening public reply, which in turn evoked a defiant response from Mrs. Annie Whitfield, the militant leader of the AMW women.²⁹

The Glace Bay communists also engaged in education, performing what they termed propaganda work as distinct from agitation. Frequent public meetings were held, such as one in 1933 at which Sam Scarlett spoke on "What is the Workers Unity League?," or another at which the speaker was McLachlan on "Imperialism."³⁰ In that same year a "School of Class Warfare" was set up on a farm near Glace Bay, conducted by A.A. MacLeod.³¹ There were also communist fund-raising and social events. The "Workers Educational Club" held dances on most Saturday nights.³² A

²⁹Nova Scotia Miner, 15 October 1932; Glace Bay Gazette, 18 October, 11 November 1932.

³ Advertisements, Glace Bay Gazette, 10 June, 2 December 1933.

³¹Glace Bay Gazette, 2 April 1933.

³²See advertisements in most issues of the Nova Scotia Miner, 1932 and 1933.

certain number of local communists also went on visits to the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, including McLachlan himself, Mrs. Whitfield, and Rankin MacDonald.³³ These expense-paid trips to the Soviet Union were one reward a hardworking local radical could get for many years of service, and the participants were expected to take part in numerous report-back meetings on their return.

It would not do to exaggerate the support for communism in Glace Bay. It was surely always a minority who would have genuinely welcomed a revolution in Canada. The tendency, however, in much of the writing about Cape Breton politics at this time, has been to underestimate the amount of real support the Communist Party had in the area. Any unbiased look at such evidence as the backing received by CP members in the union movement, the attendance at CP rallies or meetings, and the vote McLachlan got in elections, would suggest that communism was a widespread viewpoint in Glace Bay. This cannot have resulted from any ignorance of the evils of communism as described by its opponents. The popular support for communism grew during years of almost constant ideological attacks on radical ideology by the mainstream politicians, newspapers, and clergy of the area. Anti-communist propaganda in the 1930s in such periodicals as the Sydney

³³Nova Scotia Miner, 15 March 1930, 19 September, 24 October 1931.

Post-Record or the Glace Bay Gazette hammered away continually on the themes that it was an atheist doctrine, that the Christian religion was repressed in the Soviet Union, that communism was not democratic, and that it was un-British. One element of key importance in the anti-red message after the Second World War was missing in the 1930s. It was not the Soviet Union, but Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy that could be seen as posing a direct military threat to the British Empire, Canada or the United States. Nonetheless, the number of anti-communist sermons and editorials was far greater than those directed against fascism or right-wing extremism. This rhetoric against communism meant that while there were CP supporters, there was also opposition to communism that was more vehement, more strongly asserted, than standard political partisanship. Communism was regarded by its opponents as "beyond the pale," outside the spectrum of acceptable politics. However, it should also be added that even many anti-communist workers came to accept certain ideas promulgated by the party. Almost all the miners and steelworkers seem to have come to think of themselves as forming part of an embattled working class facing representatives of a ruthless and greedy capitalist class, a way of thinking the actions of the Dosco corporation did little to dispel.

Other towns in Cape Breton had no radical political

movements equivalent to the movement in Glace Bay. In New Waterford, for example, the much weaker AMW was led by Tom Ling, who also ran for the ILP in the 1933 election.³⁴ Ling was a left-winger prepared to work with the Communist Party, as revealed when he served as a member of the "Workers' Jury" set up by the party's supporters in 1931 in Ottawa during the trial of Tim Buck and other CP leaders.³⁵ Ling was never a party member, however; nor is there any evidence of party membership for William Dwyer, the leader of the unemployed movement in New Waterford.³⁶ It seems unlikely that any leader openly professing communism could have found any following in Catholic New Waterford. The local weekly paper, the New Waterford Times, tirelessly published anti-communist rhetoric. It consistently advanced a Catholic pro-labour line, opposing Christian social reform ideas to communism, with frequent articles based on the Papal encyclicals on labour by Leo XIII and Pius XI.³⁷

³⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 6 June, 22 July 1933.

³⁵Nova Scotia Miner, 28 November 1931.

³⁶Dwyer was the leading figure in such struggles in New Waterford until his sudden death at age 43. Glace Bay Gazette, 30 November 1932, 27 March, 2 May 1933, 10 January 1935.

³⁷Few copies of the New Waterford Times appear to have survived, but its editorials, written by a man named Fergus Byrne, were often reprinted in the Glace Bay Gazette. See, for example, "One Remedy Only," 5 June 1933; or "Orderly Reform of Chaos," 9 January 1933.

The steelworkers of Sydney had lost a strike in 1923 and failed to establish a union at the plant, after which the management, like that of other big corporations in the 1920s, sought to appease the workers with an employee representation plan. This form of representation lacked sufficient power to oppose the company's control over wages and conditions, but helped stave off a union at the plant for many years. Also, the depression hit Sydney hard, and the steel plant was nearly completely shut down during the 1931-3 period. What radical leadership there was in Sydney was mainly devoted to the movements of the unemployed. One centre of radical activity among the immigrant workers of Sydney was the left-wing and pro-Soviet Ukrainian Farmer Labor Temple Association, which owned a "temple" in Whitney Pier which was often used for left-wing meetings. But CP activity was neither as widespread nor as open as in Glace Bay. The principal leaders of the unemployed workers' movement in Sydney at this time, Dan MacKay and M.A. MacKenzie, had both been blacklisted from working at the plant for union activity, and both were radicals. Neither, however, was a Communist Party member. It was during this period that George MacEachern reports first becoming involved in political activity, first in the unemployed organization and later

in the Communist Party.³⁸

Another important development for the future of radicalism in Cape Breton was the publication in Sydney, beginning in 1933, of the weekly paper the United Steelworker. The editor and publisher was M.A. MacKenzie, who had been the Labour-Farmer candidate in Cape Breton North-Victoria in 1921, and who had been a left-wing Alderman on the Sydney city council for several terms in the 1920s. MacKenzie had a varied earlier career, including work as a printer, and set up a small job printing business at the same time he launched the paper. The editorial line taken by the United Steelworker was an eclectic appeal for working-class unity, and editor MacKenzie wrote: "We don't pay much attention to names, parties or tags they are only symbols, shibboleths."³⁹ Articles favorable to the One Big Union, the new CCF party, the co-operative movement, and J.B. McLachlan and the Communist Party were all included.⁴⁰ The United Steelworker ceased publication late in 1933, due to

³⁸David Frank and Donald MacGillivray, eds., George MacEachern: An Autobiography (Sydney, 1987), pp. 41-61.

³⁹United Steelworker, 19 August 1933.

⁴⁰For examples see "An Economic Jacobs Coat," and "Why We Should Abolish Capitalism" (reprints from OBU Bulletin), United Steelworker, 29 April, 29 July 1933; "If the CCF Gets A Majority" and "The CCF," United Steelworker, 13 May 1933, 24 June 1933; "Co-operation In Action," United Steelworker, 3 June 1933; "Last Word of Advice to Workers," United Steelworker, 19 August 1933.

financial problems. When the paper resumed publication in June 1934 as the Steelworker, it took a line much more thoroughly supportive of the Communists and the USSR, and attacked the CCF and the co-operative movement as "Blind Alley Crusaders."⁴¹ This change was symbolized by the change in quotations below the masthead. The United Steelworker had a quote from Shelley: "Arise like lions after slumber, in unvanquishable numbers; Shake the chains off like dew, which in sleep have fallen on you: You are many they are few." The Steelworker adopted Marx's "Workers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains, you have a world to gain!" Another indication of the closeness of editor M.A. MacKenzie to the communists at this time is that in the fall of 1934 he visited the Soviet Union as part of a CP organized "Workers Delegation."⁴² The paper's line of close support for the Communist Party continued until the late 1930s, when it underwent a few changes. The colorful and flamboyant MacKenzie, however, never became a party member, and the paper was never a disciplined party "organ." In style it was rather like a sensational tabloid, crusading on local issues, and coining insulting

⁴¹For examples see "The Ruling Working Class," Steelworker, 16 June 1934; "A Blind Alley Crusade," Steelworker, 28 July 1934; "A Blind Alley Crusader," Steelworker, 11 August 1934.

⁴²Steelworker, 6 October, 29 December 1934.

nicknames for opponents. The rival paper, the Post-Record, was usually referred to as the "Boast-Braggart," while the RCMP were called the "Scarlet Riders of the Plain People."

The fact that MacKenzie and his paper became strong supporters of the CP was symptomatic of the mood of the times in Cape Breton. When the newly formed CCF made its first efforts to win adherents in the area, it made little headway against the extreme criticism directed at its reformist policies by local communists. The split in the miners' union between the UMW and the AMW was at its height, and the main support the CCF got at this time in Cape Breton was from a few UMW right-wingers. The CCF was formally established, with a provisional leadership and program, at the Calgary conference in August 1932. In November two labour Members of Parliament from the West, Angus MacInnis and E.C. Garland, spoke at a meeting in Glace Bay promoting the new party. They were severely heckled by a group of local communists and the meeting ended in a shouting match between MacInnis and J.B. McLachlan.⁴³ However, in February 1933 a Glace Bay Labour Club was formed and voted to affiliate to the CCF.⁴⁴ This was a small organization dominated by those close to the rump UMW district officers; Silby Barrett was its

⁴³"Visiting Labor M.P. is Badly Heckled at Meeting Here," Glace Bay Gazette, 24 November 1932.

⁴⁴ Glace Bay Gazette, 25 February 1933.

president, and "Sandy" MacKay, District 26 Secretary-Treasurer, was on its executive board. A letter was written to CCF leader J. S. Woodsworth informing him of the new CCF club in Glace Bay and inviting him to come and speak in the area.⁴⁵ This response to the CCF from the leaders of the right wing of the divided union movement was surely motivated by their anxiety to find a political force to counter the Communist Party in local labour politics. J. B. McLachlan, writing in the Nova Scotia Miner, certainly thought so. He denounced the CCF, claiming its affiliated United Farmers government in Alberta was worse in its attacks on workers than were the Grits or Tories. He then assured "CCF High Priest Woodsworth" that the "gang in Glace Bay" were suitable material for the new party:

They are as fine a bunch as ever diddled a cushy job out of the workers, or usurped their funds, or burned workers' papers, or jailed their leaders, or any of the other distinguishing features of good C.C.F. leaders. In building up the bosses' third party in Canada they ought to appear, if not useful, at least ornamental. They have considerable practice in swindling the working class and can belly crawl to the master better than most.⁴⁶

In June 1933, when Woodsworth came to Glace Bay as part of a tour of Eastern Canada, he had a large and successful meeting, but he faced verbal attacks from McLachlan and

⁴⁵J. H. Jamieson to J. S. Woodsworth, 23 February 1933, CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 26, NAC.

⁴⁶Nova Scotia Miner, 25 February 1933.

other radicals.⁴⁷ One Glace Bay miner who was 14 years old at the time later remembered being coached before the meeting to ask Woodsworth if the CCF would be similar in policy to the British Labour Party. When Woodsworth agreed that it would be, McLachlan and others spoke up denouncing Labour Party policies and declaring leaders like Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald were betrayers of the working class.⁴⁸

Shortly after Woodsworth's visit a CCF candidate came forward in Glace Bay for the provincial election held that year.⁴⁹ Donald O. "Dawn" Fraser, better remembered as a labour poet than as a politician, did badly in the contest, getting 297 votes compared to the 1734 given J. B. McLachlan, who ran as a "United Front" candidate.⁵⁰ McLachlan's campaign had a very "left" style, declaring that the Liberal, Conservative, and the new CCF parties all represented the capitalist class, and only the election of J.B. McLachlan could give the workers of Glace

⁴⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 15 June 1933.

⁴⁸Interview with Nelson Beaton, Glace Bay, 12 April 1986.

⁴⁹This was the election in which the Liberals under Angus L. MacDonald swept to power, taking 22 seats out of 30. Glace Bay Gazette, 23 August 1933.

⁵⁰The full Glace Bay results were Currie (Liberal)-3626, Cameron (Conservative) - 3622, McLachlan - 1734, Fraser 297. Glace Bay Gazette, 30 August 1933. These are corrected results after a recount requested by McLachlan, who hoped to save his deposit. Glace Bay Gazette, 24 August 1933.

Bay a voice in the House of Assembly. Campaign advertisements called for class war:

WAR IS DECLARED,
by the working people of Glace Bay in a United
Front against: the closing down of mines, the
sale of workers' homes, the stealing of public
funds, the starving of workers' families.⁵¹

Three other labour candidates ran in the Cape Breton area. A miner named John MacDonald campaigned in Sydney Mines under the United Front banner.⁵² In New Waterford Tom Ling, the local leader of the AMW, ran as an ILP candidate.⁵³ In Sydney, steelworker Dan MacKay was nominated as an ILP candidate, but after Woodsworth's visit adopted the CCF platform and name.⁵⁴ None of these candidates did as well as McLachlan.⁵⁵ Ling and MacKay, left-wingers who were not communists and who later were to join the CCF, spoke in support of McLachlan, and opposed Dawn Fraser, an official CCF nominee.⁵⁶ M. A. MacKenzie and his United Steelworker supported Dan MacKay in Sydney

⁵¹Glace Bay Gazette, 7 August 1933.

⁵²A third communist or United Front candidate in the province was Joe Wallace in Halifax. Halifax Herald, 29 July 1933.

⁵³Ling defeated Clarie Gillis of Glace Bay, later to become the CCF MP, for the nomination. Glace Bay Gazette, 6 June 1933.

⁵⁴United Steelworker, 29 April, 15 July 1933.

⁵⁵Ling got 587 votes, MacDonald 586, and MacKay 1451. MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 174.

⁵⁶Both Ling and MacKay spoke at meetings in support of McLachlan. Glace Bay Gazette, 21 August 1933.

and gave some support to the CCF as a national party, but supported McLachlan rather than Dawn Fraser.⁵⁷ At this point the communists were the most influential force in local labour politics. Almost all labour men in the area who were militant in union activities backed the communist led AMW against the UMW and were prepared to co-operate with the party in political activities. For example, Forman Wye of Sydney, former Labour MLA and later to become a CCFer, spoke in support of McLachlan's campaign.⁵⁸ Yet it is important to note the limits to this communist political strength. No candidate who appeared too "Red" could actually win an election, not even McLachlan in Glace Bay. The candidates in Sydney and New Waterford avoided any open support for communism, while personally endorsing McLachlan.

Dawn Fraser, however, attacked McLachlan and the Communist Party, and was denounced in return.⁵⁹ Although Fraser had been nominated by the Glace Bay CCF club which they had set up, none of the well known UMW leaders seem to have been active in supporting his ineffectual campaign. He adopted the rather poor tactic of bringing religion openly into the political discussion, and wrote letters to the newspaper arguing that CCF policy exactly

⁵⁷United Steelworker, 20 May, 19 August 1933.

⁵⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 21 August 1933.

⁵⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 9 August 1933.

fitted Papal encyclicals on labour and other Christian teachings, which was denied by a number of angry responses, quoting Quebec bishops.⁶⁰ In fact, the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church in Canada had come out at this time with statements opposing all forms of socialism, including the CCF, and Fraser only succeeded in drawing attention to this fact.⁶¹ However, he was right in discerning that the Church in the Cape Breton area was moving in a direction that would in the long run help the CCF politically. In an effort to combat the communist influence locally in these desperate early years of the depression, many of the clergy and other Catholic spokesmen were keen to publicise those Catholic social teachings that were critical of the failings of capitalism. Along with denunciations of the communists as atheists and promoters of violence, frequent explanations were given of the Papal encyclicals Rerum Novarum and Quadragesimo Anno, as providing Christian answers to the sufferings of the working class.⁶²

⁶⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 21 April 1933; 9 May 1933; 15 May 1933.

⁶¹Gregory Baum, Catholics and Canadian Socialism (Toronto 1980).

⁶²For example the Knights of Columbus sponsored a series of radio broadcasts in 1934 by Rev. Dr. T. O'Reilly Boyle on these encyclicals. Glace Bay Gazette, 9 March 1934. Another indefatigable Catholic anti-communist propagandist was Fergus Byrne, "Labour Editor" of the New Waterford Times, whose articles were often reprinted in the Glace Bay Gazette. See, for example, "Orderly Reform

The most important form of Catholic social action in the area was the Antigonish Co-operative Movement led by priests from the St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department, in particular Moses Coady and J.J. Tompkins. This movement had begun promoting producer co-operatives among fishermen in eastern Nova Scotia. In August 1932 an office was opened in Glace Bay to develop a programme of adult education and the building of credit unions and consumer co-operatives.⁶³ This expansion into industrial Cape Breton represented an effort to counteract the spread of communism among the miners.⁶⁴ In early 1932, at the annual Catholic Rural and Industrial Life Conference held in Sydney and sponsored by the Archdiocese of Antigonish, Alex S. MacIntyre gave an influential speech on the alarming spread of communism among the workers and the Church's weak response.⁶⁵ MacIntyre, an ex-communist and the UMW Vice-President in the deposed 1923 executive, became the co-operative movement's chief organizer in Cape Breton. Great emphasis was laid on the transforming power

of Chaos," Glace Bay Gazette, 9 January 1933.

⁶³Glace Bay Gazette, 19 August 1932.

⁶⁴For an opposing view on the role of the Antigonish movement see Daniel W. MacInnis, "Clerics, Fishermen, Farmers and Workers: The Antigonish Movement and Identity in Eastern Nova Scotia, 1928-1939." Ph.D. Thesis, McMaster University, 1978.

⁶⁵Gregory Baum, "Social Catholicism in Nova Scotia" in Peter Slater, ed., Religion and Culture in Canada (Waterloo 1977).

of education through study meetings:

Mass meetings were held at which the value of education and the possibilities of economic and social improvement were set forth. The consumer co-operative movement, in particular, was emphasized. It was difficult to get a hearing. Large numbers of the industrial workers had been flirting with left-wing theories and in some cases they were beginning to be pronounced revolutionaries. The Communist propaganda was doing its work ... It was hard to hold an audience with a programme that called for evolutionary and constitutional methods.⁶⁶

However, while the central motivation for the Antigonish Movement's concentration on Cape Breton at this time was the wish to defeat communist influence, its co-operative message, while directly contradicting ideas of class struggle and opposing all violence and illegality, was based on a radical sounding critique of capitalism. The evils of capitalism could be overcome when the workers became "masters of their own destiny" through their power as consumers.⁶⁷ In opposing communism, therefore, this movement did not promote ideas of a directly conservative or reactionary nature. Its message to the people made an appeal to much the same frustrations, fears, and alienated outlook that the communists drew upon. There were millennial aspects to both the communism and the co-operative movement of this period, each speaking of an imminent and fundamental transformation of the life of the

⁶⁶Coady, Masters Of Their Own Destiny, p. 56.

⁶⁷See M.M.Coady, Masters of Their Own Destiny (New York, 1939).

people and the creation of a new and better society. The proletarian revolution, however, was to involve a protracted, bitter, and inevitably violent struggle with dying capitalism; whereas the co-operative movement promised adherents an easier and more rapid change to the new Jerusalem. Both communists and co-operators pointed to the failures and the injustice of capitalism and called on the workers themselves to take action to transform society. But whereas communism called on the workers to confront the capitalist system with "clenched fists" to "demand a living," the co-operative movement seemed to offer a peaceful, non-confrontational "middle way," the co-operative path to the peaceful transformation of society.

The Antigonish Movement always claimed it was strictly neutral in politics or union affairs, and it never endorsed the CCF. In the early years it could not have done so without defying the Catholic hierarchy's pronouncements against socialism. But a movement of this type, having the sanction of the Church, did gradually prepare the minds of local Catholic voters, some who would never have supported communist or radical labour candidates, to regard the social reformism of the CCF as within the range of acceptable politics. The CCF, for example, was to win the majority of votes in the strongly Catholic New Waterford area in the early war years, a

district in which the communists always had relatively few supporters,⁶⁸ and many individuals directly involved with the co-operative movement were eventually to become active CCFers. The Antigonish Movement was the most effective ideological counter to the radical theories of the communists in Cape Breton in the 1930s, but at the same time this Church-sanctioned movement made certain forms of radicalism respectable to Catholic voters.

This religious factor did not help the CCF in its early years, however, and following the 1933 election no CCF organization appears to have survived in the Cape Breton area.⁶⁹ In the federal election of 1935 Cape Breton South constituency had a four-party race, but no CCF candidate. Aside from the Liberal and Conservative candidates, McLachlan ran openly as a Communist Party candidate, while D.W. Morrison, the UMW district president, ran for the Reconstruction Party with the support of the right-wing in the union movement. Both Dawn Fraser, the former CCF candidate, and Clarie Gillis, who was to win for the CCF in 1940, spoke for Morrison and Reconstruction.⁷⁰

⁶⁸McLachlan only got 403 votes in New Waterford in 1935; Hartigan (Liberal) got 2836, MacDonald (Conservative) got 634, and D.W. Morrison (Reconstruction) got 674. Glace Bay Gazette, 15 October 1935.

⁶⁹See J.J. Holmes, Sydney, N.S., to J.S. Woodsworth, 7 February 1934, CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 26, NAC.

⁷⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 19 August, 5 October 1933.

This 1935 election, in which McLachlan ran openly as a Communist candidate, provides the most dramatic evidence of support for radical politics in Glace Bay. McLachlan's election appeal read:

Miners and steelworkers of Cape Breton, Communism is our hope for the future. Surely we have had plenty of capitalism. A few Communists in the gashouse at Ottawa cannot inaugurate a new system, but if there are any concessions to be wrung from this dying capitalism that can be of use to our class, they could at least ensure these.⁷¹

In the full constituency which included Sydney and New Waterford as well as Glace Bay the results were: Hartigan (Liberal) 10,409; MacDonald (Conservative) 7,335; McLachlan (Communist) 5,365; Morrison (Reconstruction) 5,008. McLachlan's third place result was better than any labour candidate had achieved since his campaign in 1921. In Glace Bay, with 28.1 per cent of the vote, he came a close second to the winning Liberal, who received 29.6 per cent.⁷² The size of the Communist vote horrified the local middle class, and for weeks following the election the Glace Bay Gazette published the full texts of anti-communist sermons in the town's churches.⁷³ The winning

⁷¹Nova Scotia Miner, 27 April 1935.

⁷²Glace Bay Gazette, 15 October 1935. William White, "Left Wing Politics and Community: A Study of Glace Bay 1930-1940," M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1978, breaks down the vote showing that McLachlan had substantial majorities in working-class wards in Glace Bay.

⁷³Glace Bay Gazette, 21 October, 4, 11, 18, 25 November 1935.

candidate himself, Dr. Hartigan, used most of the space in his open letter thanking voters in an explanation that the communist vote was really unintentional on the part of those who cast those ballots. Part of this letter reads:

To those who say that there was a large Communist vote polled in Cape Breton South I wish to state that such was not the case. That vote was polled by people who for years thought they were voting for something constructive, and had their hopes dashed to the ground; then born of pessimism and the depression they sought to register a PROTEST. I repeat there are very few Communists in Cape Breton.⁷⁴

Dr. Hartigan's view has been echoed in some of the most widely distributed writings on Cape Breton labour in this period. Paul MacEwan, for example, writes: "The people supporting him [McLachlan] were not communists, but simply McLachlan's personal following."⁷⁵ John Mellor is somewhat more ambiguous, writing of the early depression years that "It wasn't difficult to recruit converts to communism," but also arguing that in 1935 the assistance of prominent communists during McLachlan's election campaign harmed his prospects.

The Communist Party of Canada sent its heavyweights into Cape Breton to campaign for McLachlan, but he did not welcome their assistance. By now he had lost all faith in the party leaders although he still remained a true devotee of the communist philosophy. Annie Buller, Sam Scarlett, "Moscow" Jack MacDonald and Joe Wallace added their vociferous support to McLachlan's campaign, but support from such

⁷⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 19 October 1935.

⁷⁵MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 186

well-known radicals served only to repulse a great many McLachlan supporters. There are many in Cape Breton today who stoutly maintain that the invasion of communists during the election campaign was intended as a subtle means of making sure McLachlan was not elected. Many more remain convinced that if McLachlan had run as a Labour candidate instead of as a Communist, he would undoubtedly have won.⁷⁶

Sam Scarlett was not in Cape Breton in 1935, Jack MacDonald left the CP in 1930, and McLachlan was full of praise for Annie Buller's work as his campaign manager, and the suggestion that the CP leadership deliberately aimed to hurt McLachlan's campaign in this way is ridiculous. However, the point that McLachlan might have won had he been a moderate labour candidate rather than a communist is plausible enough. In a recent article David Frank notes that the combined vote received by McLachlan and D.W. Morrison in this election is close to the winning vote Clarie Gillis was to receive in 1940.⁷⁷ But what should be understood is that it was McLachlan and his local followers who were taking a "left" line at this time, not the central CP leadership, who had already started to shift towards the "Popular Front" policy. At a party plenum held in Toronto the month following the election, McLachlan was the subject of some criticism for

⁷⁶Mellor, The Company Store, p. 324, p. 335.

⁷⁷David Frank, "Working Class Politics: The Elections of J.B. McLachlan, 1916-1935," in Kenneth Donovan, ed., The Island: New Perspectives on Cape Breton History, 1713-1990 (Sydney, forthcoming 1990).

not seeking unity with the CCF during the election. He responded:

When Comrade B. [Annie Buller] came down she had a meeting of the active workers in the election, and ... she was going to send a letter to the CCF for the united front, and the secretary of the CCF who was there said: "Why do that, the whole three of us are here now." We had the CCF. In fact there is no CCF down there but that one young fellow who was still in the CCF, but who after the election came into the party.⁷⁸

The political situation in Cape Breton labour politics, however, was on the verge of transformation by this new CP policy of the "united front."

But before considering the changes in CP strategy in the mid-thirties, it is necessary to have a detailed look at the coal miners' union movement, the most important area of radical political influence during the "left" period in Cape Breton. It was in Canadian unions, above all, that the communists concentrated their efforts and had their most dramatic impact, and few groups of workers in the country responded as eagerly as Cape Breton miners to the communist appeal.

⁷⁸Towards a Canadian Peoples Front. Reports and Speeches at the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee, Communist Party of Canada (Toronto, 1935).

Chapter Two

The Communist Party and the Coal Miners, 1930 - 1936

The fierce union battles conducted by coal miners and their potential for radicalism made them prominent in the strategies of the Communist Parties in both Canada and the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. Most miners were members or potential members of an industrial union, and at many times and places coal miners proved ready to listen to the class struggle message of the communists. Communist activists among the miners of both Canada and the United States, however, became frustrated in their efforts to work within the dominant miners' union, the United Mine Workers of America. During the 1920s UMW International President John L. Lewis earned a reputation as the most right wing of major American Federation of Labor (AFL) leaders and the friend of capitalists and Republican politicians. In consolidating his dictatorial control over the union, one of his early weapons was a fiercely anti-communist policy, and the UMW constitution was amended so that membership in the Communist Party became grounds for expulsion. This is one of the reasons why the UMW under John L. Lewis's leadership became noted for its lack of internal democracy. The union also steadily lost membership throughout the 1920s; in many American coalfields the union was completely destroyed by employer offensives. The decline in the coal industry as

other sources of energy grew in importance found the UMW unable to resist effectively the drastic fall in the miners' standard of living. Lewis's strategy centred on attempts to reach national agreements with the coal operators and Republican administrations to rationalize the chaotic American coal industry. However, through the 1920s and the beginning years of the depression, UMW calls for action along these lines were ignored, and the coal owners and the government paid less and less attention to the union as its power declined.¹

Communists therefore saw the UMW as weak, even dying, as well as being a notoriously undemocratic and corrupt union, a right wing organization claiming union jurisdiction over miners, workers with an unequalled history of militancy. Many prominent radical leaders were expelled from the union in the early 1920s when the UMW declared communists ineligible for union membership. J. B. McLachlan was the best known Canadian example, but there were many others in both countries driven out of the union. In response, communists in the United States at first supported the "Save the Union" movement that opposed John L. Lewis in the UMW, and then from 1928 to 1933 worked to build up a rival union, the National Miners'

¹Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren VanTyne, John L. Lewis, A Biography (New York 1977).

Union.² In Alberta, the coal miners had given widespread support to the One Big Union (OBU) in 1919, but had been forced to return to the UMW by blacklists and pressure from the government and coal companies. Working within AFL unions such as the UMW was encouraged by the newly formed Canadian Communist Party in the early 1920s, but militant miners in the western coal fields regarded the UMW as little better than a company union. By 1925 UMW control over its District 18 (Alberta) had collapsed, and communists felt they had to support the formation of the Mine Workers Union of Canada (MWUC).³

The creation of rivals to existing unions was unacceptable policy for the CP, supposedly, until the change to the "Third Period" strategy in 1929. Communist support for the break from the UMW in Alberta in 1925 provides evidence that the division of communist trade union policies into sharply defined periods is sometimes overemphasized. In the U.S., James Prickett points out that communists broke with unions of clothing workers as well as miners before 1929. Further he argues that there were good reasons for the split with these unions. Among both needle workers and coal miners the communists had substantial followings, yet communist leaders had been

²Theodore Draper, "Communists and Miners 1928-1933," Dissent 19 (Spring 1972), pp. 371-92.

³Allen Seager, "The Mine Workers Union of Canada."

undemocratically expelled from the unions.⁴

In most accounts the CP policy in UMW District 26, in contrast to District 18, conformed closely to the accepted periodization of communist history. Ian Angus, for example, declares that the party urged miners to remain in the UMW up to 1929 in District 26, and then made a sudden change to a policy of breaking with the international union.⁵ The official Communist Party history, Canada's Party of Socialism, claims the party combatted all secessionist tendencies within AFL affiliates in Canada in the 1920s, with the single exception of giving support to the MWUC in Alberta to prevent further splintering of District 18. "In the case of District 26, Communists successfully persuaded the coal miners not to pull out of the United Mine Workers of America."⁶ This interpretation

⁴Prickett, "Communists and the Communist Issue in the American Labor Movement."

⁵Angus, Canadian Bolsheviks, p. 280. Angus puts this forward as the prime example of the abrupt sectarian change of CP policy in 1929. Paul MacEwan in Miners and Steelworkers follows Wade, History in the erroneous claim that the communists opposed a break with the UMW even in 1932.

⁶Canada's Party of Socialism, p. 37. The treatment in this history of the party's role in the coal unions in the 1920s and 1930s is cursory and inaccurate. It certainly does not reflect the attention paid by the party to both Districts 18 and 26 during those decades, a period in which there were no other industrial unions in Canada to compare with the miners' unions in size and militancy. On policy in the 1930s, Canada's Party of Socialism (p. 85) states disingenuously: "The WUL set itself the goal of recruiting independent unions into its ranks. When the LWIUC [Lumber Workers Industrial Union of Canada] and the MWUC broke with the reformist ACCL in 1930, they decided

of the party's strategy for District 26 demands modification.

The long history of contention between left and right in the UMW Nova Scotia worked against any easy imposition of control by the international leadership, and during many periods the left had the majority support. However, John L. Lewis always had a local faction willing to follow his leadership, even when he deposed the popular district leadership in 1923. Nevertheless, from 1923 to 1925, J.B. McLachlan and the CP, although harshly critical of Lewis and the District 26 leaders he appointed, did oppose attempts by the One Big Union to take the miners out of the UMW.⁷ The CP opposition to the split, however, seems more strongly motivated by the party's hostility to the OBU than by the principle of unity within the UMW. McLachlan was later to argue that the communists themselves should have led a breakaway at that time. The miners were ready then, he claimed, and hence lost confidence in the Communist Party when it urged remaining in the UMW. In this the Canadian party followed the advice

to affiliate with the WUL." No mention is made of the hard work communists performed to get the MWUC to break with the ACCL, nor is any mention at all made of the AMW or the situation in District 26 during those years.

⁷Wade, History. McLachlan himself was courted by the OBU, which aroused some suspicions concerning what he would do. See Tim Buck letter to J. B. McLachlan and Alex. A. MacKay, 24 April 1925, MG28 IV4, Vol. 8, File 6; and McLachlan letter to Buck, 26 May 1925, MG28 IV4, M 7376, CPC Papers, NAC.

of American communist leader William Z. Foster, who argued that District 26 miners should stay in the UMW to join the struggles in the U.S. against the John L. Lewis regime.⁸

Once the break from the UMW took place in Alberta, it became the aim of the CP to work for the unification of all Canadian coal miners in the MWUC. By August 1925 Tim Buck was writing to McLachlan that "everything points to the consolidation of our forces in the M.W.U. of Canada" and arguing that McLachlan should consider taking national office in a united miners' union.⁹ But 1925 was of course the year of the big strike in Nova Scotia, no time to make any move to split the ranks of the miners' union. However, it was surely during this time, with the miners showing their militancy in both the East and West, that the vision first emerged of a great industrial union, 50,000 or 60,000 strong, embracing all coal and metal miners and also oil and smelter workers in Canada. This became the constant long-term policy of the Canadian Communist Party from roughly 1926 until 1935.¹⁰

During 1926, 1927, and 1928, the three years

⁸Party Plenum, 7 February 1931, MG28 IV4, M7381, CPC Papers, NAC.

⁹Buck to McLachlan, 13 August 1925, MG28 IV4, Vol. 51, File 73, NAC.

¹⁰See, for example, Politburo Minutes, 24 August 1931, MG 28 IV4, Vol. 6, File 9, CPC Papers, NAC; Minutes of National Miners Convention, 30 June 1934, Reel 13, UMWA Papers, PANS.

preceding the "Third Period," only tactical considerations prevented the CPC from leading a breakaway from the UMW in District 26. The relative demoralization of the Cape Breton miners in these years was one problem. Another difficulty the party recognized early was the great strength the UMW had in the Nova Scotia district through the check-off of union dues, a privilege hardly any other unions enjoyed at this time. In 1927 the party was partly instrumental in having the Westville miners, the one section of Nova Scotian miners who had left the UMW, join the MWUC. Tim Buck hoped that this might provide an opening wedge for winning the District 26 miners away from the UMW. Buck wrote to a Westville miner that there were hopes of eventually uniting all Canadian miners in both coal and metal mines in the MWUC, but cited the UMW check-off in Nova Scotia as a major stumbling block.¹¹ Little progress was made in 1927 in overthrowing the UMW, but in the following year CP organizer Joe Gilbert was sent to the area to make another attempt. A "Progressive Miners Committee of Nova Scotia" was formed to work for a split with the UMW, but this action only resulted in the

¹¹Harry B. Rudolph, Westville, to Tim Buck, 8 July 1927, Buck to Rudolph, 15 July 1927, Buck to John Stokaluk (the communist vice-president of MWUC), 15 July 1927, Buck to F. Wheatley, MWUC president, 15 July 1927, H. Campbell, Glace Bay, to Buck, 1 August 1927, MG28 IV4, Vol. 51, File 77, CPC Papers, NAC.

expulsion and blacklisting of two militants.¹²

In 1929, on the urging of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) the Canadian party formed a "revolutionary" trade union centre, the Workers' Unity League (WUL).¹³ In the miners' union movement, this meant communists henceforth would work to change the affiliation of the MWUC from the ACCL to the WUL. There was nothing new in 1929 about CP efforts to destroy the UMW in District 26. Far from being forced reluctantly to adopt a new policy of dual-unionism, communist activists among the coal miners had been working for several years for a break with the UMW. The new emphasis on "revolutionary" unionism, however, led to some "leftist" errors in the style of union work at this time, according to the party's later judgement. In late 1929, just as the WUL was being launched, Harvey Murphy was sent to Alberta and Jim Barker to Cape Breton to get things moving. Both were later to be criticized severely for their errors; but it seems probable that the policies they followed were at least

¹²The radicals' only consolation was that at that year's UMW district convention, despite the presence of international vice-president Philip Murray, the delegates voted to reinstate the two expelled men, John Miller and Mickey F. McNeil. Manley, "Workers Unity League", 73-76; Wade, History; letters Joseph Gilbert to Annie Buller, 5 June 1928, W. Sydney to Buller, 25 June 1928, MG 28 IV4, M 7378, CPC Papers, NAC.

¹³Undated RILU letter to Central Committee of the C P of Canada, received November 1929, MG28 IV4, Vol. 11, File 29, CPC Papers, NAC.

generally approved by WUL secretary Tom McEwen and by Buck and other leaders.¹⁴

The renewed effort under Barker's guidance to overthrow the UMW in Nova Scotia met quick defeat in 1929-30, but perhaps helped to prepare the way for the much more successful party activities a few years later. An important step was the establishment of a newspaper aimed at the miners. The radical paper of the early 1920s, the Maritime Labour Herald, had been destroyed in 1925, its premises burned twice. In December 1929 the first edition of a new paper, The Nova Scotia Miner, was printed in Glace Bay, declaring itself the "organ of District 26 Left Wing Committee." Worked into the masthead, on either side of the emblem of a crossed pick and shovel, was the slogan "Workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains."¹⁵ Even without this slogan it would have been immediately clear to anyone in Glace Bay that this was a communist newspaper because its editor was J.B. McLachlan. Yet it would also have been understood that it represented a substantial grouping of left-wing miners. In that time and place the close alliance of militant unionism and communism was assumed. Although the paper had been set up largely at the prompting of the Communist

¹⁴Party Plenum, 7 February 1931, MG28 IV4, M 7380-7381, CPC Papers, NAC.

¹⁵Nova Scotia Miner, 14 December 1929.

Party, the funding at its beginning came apparently exclusively from contributions by the miners, and thereafter by sales.¹⁶ Within a few weeks a circulation of 3000 was claimed.¹⁷

From its inception the Miner attacked the UMW and called for the creation of a new union, in articles such as: "Time For A New Union," "Lewis Steals Funds While Miners Starve," "Corrupt Officials of the Past What of the Present?"¹⁸ When the 1930 contract with Dosco was announced, it included only a small increase of three percent for the datal men and nothing for the contract miners. The Nova Scotia Miner immediately published a call for a district convention to set up a new union, and Tom McEwen, the secretary of the newly formed Workers Unity League, made a special journey to Nova Scotia to attend the convention.¹⁹ The District 26 executive forbade attendance at this "outlaw" convention, and struggles took place in UMW locals all over the district on the question of whether to send representatives. The left was defeated in most locals and few elected official delegations.

¹⁶An "Honour Roll" listing contributors was printed in the first issue. Nova Scotia Miner, 14 December 1929.

¹⁷Murdoch Clarke, Circular letter to left wing contacts, 28 February 1930, Communist Party Papers, MG IV - 4, M 7376, Public Archives of Canada.

¹⁸Nova Scotia Miner, 11 January 1930; 18 January 1930; 25 January 1930.

¹⁹Nova Scotia Miner, 1 March 1930.

Nevertheless, under the leadership of the communists, the convention pushed ahead to form the Mineworkers Industrial Union of Nova Scotia (MWIU).²⁰ On the charge of promoting a dual union, the six miners who had signed the call for the "outlaw" convention were expelled from the UMW and blacklisted by the coal company.²¹ Though The Miner tried to present the new union as representative of a large proportion of the miners of the district, the MWIU won little support and soon ceased to exist, its officers remaining on the blacklist.²² Murdoch Clarke, the young secretary of the MWIU, was sent by the party to the Lenin School in the Soviet Union and then was active for some years in the communist movement and the MWUC in Alberta, before returning to Glace Bay in the late 1930s.²³ Rankin MacDonald, MWIU president, became a principal leader of the Glace Bay organizations of the unemployed.

There was no disguising the fact that this effort of communists and militants to oust the UMW in Nova Scotia had been a total failure. The miners were not yet ready for such drastic action. The left militants were in

²⁰Minutes of Convention, Sydney N.S., 15 March 1930, UMW Papers, PANS.

²¹Wade, History.

²²Nova Scotia Miner, 22 March 1930.

²³Interview with Murdoch Clarke, Glace Bay, 11 April 1986; Charles Allen Seager, "A Proletariat in Wild Rose Country: The Alberta Coal Miners, 1905-1945," Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1981, 446, 455.

disarray following this setback. J.B. McLachlan and Communist Party organizer Jim Barker quarreled bitterly, and McLachlan resigned as editor of the Miner and refused to run as a candidate in the 1930 Federal Election.²⁴ The Party tried to keep the Nova Scotia Miner in operation, Tim Buck writing to Barker that the paper "must come out ... it constitutes the greatest single factor in the struggle in Cape Breton today."²⁵ By June 1930, however, the Miner's circulation had fallen to under a thousand, and there was no money to carry on.²⁶ In the UMW district elections the left made no gains; D.W. Morrison and his right-wing colleagues were returned to office with little apparent difficulty. But the left was still in existence, and it appears that both local radicals and the Communist Party centre in Toronto learned lessons from the MWIU fiasco and similar failures elsewhere in 1930, and engaged in considerable internal criticism of the tactics used.²⁷ In the future the party determined that its tactics would

²⁴Barker telegram to Ewan, 26 May 1930, MG28 IV4, M 7376, Party Plenum, 7 February 1931, MG28 IV4, M7380-7381, CPC Papers, NAC.

²⁵Buck to Barker, 17 April 1930, Communist Party Papers, MG IV-4, M7376, Public Archives of Canada.

²⁶Party Plenum, 7 February 1931, Communist Party Papers, MG IV - 4, M7380, M 7381, Public Archives of Canada.

²⁷Party Plenum, 7 February 1931, MG28 IV4, M7380-7381, CPC Papers, NAC. John Manley also argues this point in "Red Unionism in Cape Breton", unpublished paper, n.d., Dalhousie University, and in his thesis, "Workers Unity League."

be guided more by those with a firm knowledge of local conditions, and the party itself would not attempt to take such an open and prominent role in union affairs. Another embarrassment for the communists in the MWIU episode had been that the party appeared to have contradictory policies in Alberta and Nova Scotia. In Alberta the MWUC was torn between ACCL loyalists and the communist led faction who wanted to affiliate with the WUL. In the one MWUC branch in Nova Scotia at Westville, however, those loyal to ACCL President Mosher were dominant. Therefore the Cape Breton communists at the time of the MWIU convention opposed any talk of joining the MWUC.²⁸ Later in 1930 the MWUC in Alberta renounced its affiliation to the ACCL and in 1931 officially joined the WUL. The openly-expressed aim of the communists thereafter was to unite coal miners in the east and west in the MWUC, with the eventual aim of a united national metal and coal miners union.

These aims were expressed in a remarkable politburo resolution on party work in Nova Scotia written sometime

²⁸Minutes of Convention, Sydney N.S., 15 March 1930, UMWA Papers, PANS. Westville MWUC delegates, mainly loyal to the ACCL, attended the MWIU of NS convention calling for the Cape Bretoners to join the MWUC. The communists rejected this and put through a decision to affiliate with the WUL.

in late 1931.²⁹ This document is extraordinary for its combination of careful planning based on intimate local knowledge and its flexibility in tactical matters. Much of the plan of action depended on building up the pit committees in each mine, which were to lead the fight on all local grievances, while building support for the district-wide struggle against the UMW. When, as was anticipated, "the company will demand another reduction" and "the District Board of the UMWA will recommend its acceptance," "the miners will resent this and will fight against it." The party must "make sure they will have leadership" so that the fight against the check-off and the break with the UMW could succeed. Efforts were also to be made to involve the Westville miners, since there was a danger they might split off from the MWUC and be reformed as an independent local chartered by the ACCL.³⁰ But, the resolution emphasized, "flexibility should be practiced" with regard to the affiliation with the MWUC and WUL and

²⁹Resolution of Pol Bureau CPC on Party Work in District No. 1 (Nova Scotia), n.d., MG28 IV4, Vol. 6, File 9, CPC Papers, NAC. The document mentions an event occurring in September 1931 and refers to the ending of the Josco/UMW contract on 31 December as a forthcoming event.

³⁰This is in fact what happened. The Westville men never rejoined the other miners in the district. They remained in a local directly chartered by ACCL until the ACCL merged with the CIO unions to form the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL) in 1940, and even then refused to rejoin the UMW, insisting on having an independent local directly chartered by the CCL and, after 1956, by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC).

the name of the new union, since the miners showed a preference for "the old name of the 'Amalgamated Miners of Nova Scotia'." If necessary "the miners should be deferred to." "Both the suitable name and the affiliation can be attended to after the change provides the better conditions for their attainment." These plans, and the deference to local sentiment, appear to reflect closely the line taken by J. B. McLachlan regarding the mistakes of 1930.³¹

The emphasis placed on the pit committees was to bear much fruit in the months to follow. The radicals took the initiative in most of the locals of the union, particularly in the Glace Bay sub-district, and won the support of a majority of the rank and file. This strong leadership at the local union level was to lead to the majority support the new breakaway union received. It also was to influence greatly the nature of the union that was formed, with its extreme tendency towards decentralization and local autonomy. These were characteristics that were to be both a strength of the AMW in building a militant base and a weakness in inhibiting united action and consistency of policy.

The Nova Scotia Miner resumed publication in July 1931 under McLachlan's editorship, with its condemnation of

³¹Party Plenum, February 1931, MG28 IV4, M 7380-7381, CPC Papers, NAC.

John L. Lewis and the International as strong as ever. New grounds, even stronger than expected, for a condemnation of the district officers soon appeared. The UMW district convention in 1931 called for wage increases and improved working conditions, but the district officers felt these demands were unrealistic, and entered negotiations with a proposal to renew the 1930- 1931 contract without change. H.J. Kelley, the General Manager of Dosco, rejected the UMW proposals out of hand, and demanded a 10 per cent cut in wages for the datal men, a 14.2 per cent cut for loaders, and cuts averaging 12.5 per cent for contract miners; and worse was to come. Dosco revealed plans which sent waves of shock through the mining communities- a programme of mine closures. The corporation had worked out a strategy for weathering the depression that involved cutting back its operations in both steel and coal production and reducing labour costs through layoffs and wage cuts. In the negotiations it revealed a "reallocation" scheme under which four mines would be closed. Further, Kelley stated that "there would be no available work with the company for the men who would be displaced by the closing of the collieries and the corporation had nothing to keep them with."³²

These plans for mine closures raised an anguished

³²Wade, History. Wade quotes from now unavailable minutes of the negotiations.

outcry from all classes of society in the towns affected, and with the negotiations between the company and the union at an impasse, the Conservative provincial government of Col. G.S. Harrington intervened. Under government pressure Dosco agreed to extend the existing contract to March 1932 while a commission of inquiry was held, chaired by Sir Andrew Rae Duncan, who had headed the major Royal Commission on the Nova Scotia coal industry in 1925-1926. In presenting its brief to the commission, Dosco claimed both shutdowns and wage reductions were necessary for it to continue operating on a sound business footing; and the commissioners were apparently convinced, for when the commission report was published on 20 February 1932 it approved all the company's demands for wage cuts and mine closings.³³

The district officers found themselves in a difficult position. Dosco was inflexible and had the support of the Duncan Commission's report, yet D.W. Morrison and his colleagues dared not recommend a strike. They had already been told by John L. Lewis that no support money would be forthcoming from UMW headquarters and, with Dosco planning to close down mines in any event, a strike seemed to have little chance of success. The executive also feared "that

³³1932 Duncan Commission Report, PANS. Dosco planned to close No.14 at New Waterford, No.11 in Glace Bay, and the mines at Florence and Thorburn. Public pressure on the company caused a change in plans, and only No.14 was actually shut down at this time.

a strike without financial aid from the International would mean the break-up, the dissolution, of District 26."³⁴ They therefore sent out a recommendation to the miners to accept the wage cuts, and a pithead referendum was set for 15 March to vote on the contract. McLachlan in The Miner thundered: "Kick Fakers Union Out- Tricked, Betrayed and Sold Out".³⁵ On 12 March Premier Harrington intervened with a radio announcement of a "million ton" coal order he claimed to have negotiated with the federal government of his fellow Conservative, R.B. Bennett.³⁶ Despite this, the miners rejected the agreement in a vote of 5841 to 4698, the heavy "no" vote in Glace Bay swamping slight "yes" majorities elsewhere.³⁷

The district executive made no move to call a strike and ordered the miners to work at the reduced rates, pending the decisions of a special district convention. At this stormy convention the officers again recommended

³⁴Wade, History. Wade reports a personal conversation with D.W.Morrison in 1950.

³⁵Nova Scotia Miner, 5 March 1932.

³⁶Sydney Post, Glace Bay Gazette, 14 March 1932. "Harrington's Hoax" was well utilized by the Liberals in the next year's election campaign. Glace Bay Gazette, 18 July 1933.

³⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 22 March 1932. This was characteristic of votes on contracts throughout the 1930s, even after the reunification of the AMW and UMW. UMW negotiated contracts were invariably voted against by the Glace Bay miners, and supported by the Springhill and, usually, New Waterford men.

acceptance of the wage cuts, arguing that a strike was impossible and that the men should put all their energies into resisting the closing down of mines. These recommendations were voted down, and the left called for a referendum vote on "whether we stay in the UMW of A or revert to a provincial organization."³⁸ This was ruled out of order by President Morrison, and the convention finally voted that the executive resume negotiations with the company on the basis of the wage demands of the 1931 convention. The results of these negotiations were to be presented to the miners in a new referendum, and if this was rejected a strike was to be called. There seems to have been some confusion as to what was being decided, for the left wingers later bitterly denied the convention gave the executive a mandate to hold another referendum, and argued this was just another example of the executive's trickery.³⁹ But the officers met with Dosco, received H.J. Kelley's refusal to rescind the wage cuts, and announced a second referendum for 26 May 1932. The ballots on this occasion made it clear the issue was whether or not to strike. They read: "Are you in favour of the proposed wage agreement in preference to a strike?" The results were 5198 in favour of the agreement, 1598 against.⁴⁰ This

³⁸MacEwar, Miners and Steelworkers, 164.

³⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 19 September 1932.

⁴⁰Sydney Post, 27 May 1932.

looked like a substantial victory for the district executive. The majority of the miners, although bitterly resenting the wage cuts, appeared to have accepted the officers' pleas that a strike could not succeed. But underneath this superficial victory, the large scale revolt against the UMW was beginning. The left was no longer interested in UMW sponsored referendums; some important locals were already on their way out of the UMW.

The first rank and file mass actions of this revolt were the decisions of Phalen and No.11 miners, in pithead votes, that they would no longer agree to the company check-off of union dues. The UMW officers barred these locals from participating in the pithead referendum on the strike issue, and the Dominion 1B local, in protest, refused to vote in the referendum.⁴¹ The momentum of this revolt against the UMW grew rapidly in the Glace Bay sub-district, and in a 18 June meeting of representatives from Phalen, Reserve, Glace Bay Mechanics, No.11, Victory and 1B locals the delegates decided to break with the UMW and form the Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia.⁴² The choice of name was significant. This was the name of the Nova Scotia miners' union that existed between 1917 and 1919 before the vote to affiliate with the UMW. The miners acted as if this 1919 decision could now be

⁴¹Sydney Post, 3, 27 May, 8 June 1932.

⁴²Wade, History. The vote was 32 to 3.

reversed by simple majority votes to disaffiliate with the international. The name selected also bowed to the rank and file wish for an independent Nova Scotia union. The communists had made clear their aim to have the district join the MWUC, which was affiliated with the WUL. The previous month President James Sloan of the MWUC had come from Alberta, and he and McLachlan had toured the district addressing meetings.⁴³ There had also been a fierce battle put up at the April convention to seat a Westville MWUC delegation.⁴⁴ Yet the communists were careful not to press this issue unduly.

These "flexible" communist tactics markedly differed from those of early 1930 when the MWIU was formed. Communists were predominate in the leadership of the new union, but they did not seek to exclude non-communists from office. All elected leaders were working miners who had records of opposition to the UMW District and International executives. Robert Stewart, a fiery Scot, often rashly outspoken, became the AMW's Secretary-Treasurer and only full time officer. He was certainly a party member at this time. The President, John Alex MacDonald, had been on the UMW District executive during the 1925 strike, had a militant reputation, and was also a party member. Tom Ling, the principal AMW leader in New

⁴³Nova Scotia Miner, 14 May 1932.

⁴⁴Sydney Post, 30 April 1932.

Waterford, was never a party member, but was prepared to work very closely with the communists through this period.⁴⁵ The same seems to have been true of many other local AMW men. One AMW leader, however, stands out as having an anti-communist reputation at this time as well as later. This was Clarie Gillis, later to become a CCF MP, who was for a time the Vice President of the AMW. His inclusion in the AMW executive was to cause difficulties for the more radical leaders, but his presence also enabled the new union to counter claims that it was "dominated by Moscow." The communists would most probably have been able to keep Gillis out of office, if they had striven to do so, but this would have damaged their efforts to draw all the miners into the AMW. For similar reasons the Communist Party and The Nova Scotia Miner did not play any open, direct role in working out the details for the new organization. The party relied on its supporters within the left wing pit committees, and otherwise showed the wisdom to allow the genuine upswelling of rank and file revolt against the international to take its own course.

⁴⁵Ling was the Nova Scotian member of the "Workers' Jury" set up by the Canadian Labour Defence League to conduct a parallel "trial" when Tim Buck and other Communist Party leaders were sent to prison in 1931. Nova Scotia Miner, 28 November 1931. Tom Ling was later Vice President of District 26 UMW from 1942 to 1950. John Alex MacDonald was International Board Member during this same period.

The spread of this revolt in the summer of 1932 was very rapid. Four of the six UMW locals represented at the founding meeting, 1B, No.11, Phalen, and Reserve, were quickly reorganized as AMW branches,⁴⁶ and a series of mass meetings began at other locals, leading up to pit-head votes on the question of joining the AMW or staying with the UMW. Even before 15 July, when the first of these referendums was held, at Florence, the size and enthusiasm displayed at these meetings showed the swell of favorable sentiment for the new union.⁴⁷

The UMW officers tried to fight back, themselves touring locals to defend the international union, and thumping the anti-communist drum as hard as they could.⁴⁸ In this they were assisted by the local newspaper, The Glace Bay Gazette, which editorialized:

J.B. McLachlan in the Nova Scotia Miner paved the way for the new union by attacking Lewis. But why is Lewis being "exposed and weakened"? For no other reason than that he has been fighting the battle of organized labour against subversive forces, both inside and outside his union, who seek control not for the purpose of promoting the interests of the rank and file of the miners, but for reasons which have little to do with the interests of genuine labour.⁴⁹

Such propaganda against the AMW would take its toll over

⁴⁶R. Stewart, Report to AMW Convention, 19 September 1932, UMWA Papers, PANS.

⁴⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 15, 20, 23, 27 July 1932.

⁴⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 27 July 1933.

⁴⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 1 August 1932.

the long term, but in the short term nothing seemed able to prevent the forward surge of the new union. In early August all the large locals in the Glace Bay and the Sydney Mines sub-districts voted by substantial majorities to join the AMW. The new union had less success in the New Waterford sub-district. In this predominantly Catholic area anti-communist attitudes were much more prevalent, and the AMW was always weaker. But by September 1932 the AMW could claim successes even in New Waterford, though controversy surrounded the new union's victories at both No.16 and No.12 locals because of low turnouts in the pithead votes, and UMW cries of fraud.⁵⁰ In the mainland sub-districts AMW organizers John Alex MacDonald and Bob Stewart won a sweeping victory in Stellarton, Pictou County, where the miners voted overwhelmingly to join the new union;⁵¹ but in Springhill they failed to get even a hearing. There the tight UMW organization was able to prevent the holding of any meetings.⁵² Yet when the AMW men held their first convention in September 1932 in Glace Bay, they appeared to be well on the way to taking complete control of the district.

The radicals had called for a new type of union, a

⁵⁰New Waterford Times, 10 September 1932; Glace Bay Gazette, 3, 10, 13 September 1932.

⁵¹Glace Bay Gazette, 13, 14 September 1932.

⁵²Glace Bay Gazette, 15 September 1932.

union that would give control of its affairs to the rank and file, and that would therefore be much more militant. It would naturally form part of the workers' class struggle. One AMW man explained this as follows in a letter to the Glace Bay Gazette:

Our aim is to accept the full product of our labour. Of course, that will make us "reds", won't it, whereas the UMW of A is satisfied with the exploiters paying us as much as they can afford out of the product of labour, just as if it were a divine right for the existence of exploiters ... One of the aims of AMW is to have a rank and file union. Of course, this is unexplainable to men like the District 26 executive.⁵³

Many of the miners were un-ashamedly "red" by this time. The preamble to the AMW constitution called on all workers to:

... aim at the abolition of the wage system as their ultimate goal, by taking over the raw material, the machinery of production, and the means of distribution and convert same to render service to all humanity, instead of the present economic system of production for profits only, for the non-producing owning class, and the exploitation of the producing non-owning class. We firmly believe that the capitalist system can no more function efficiently, and that we can expect only intensified exploitation and unemployment, with all the misery and privations that follow in its wake until a new system is ushered in which will economically emancipate the workers from wage slavery which robs them at the point of production.⁵⁴

It has been argued that the AMW was not really a communist

⁵³Letter from Wm. Pilling, Glace Bay Gazette, 22 December 1932.

⁵⁴Constitution of the AMW, in UMWA Papers, Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS).

union, since it was "an indigenous movement, with its roots in the conditions of the times, and the leadership provided by the miners themselves."⁵⁵ So it was, but this does not mean it was not communist led. The leaders of the union were miners, but they were miners very much under the influence of communist ideas, and a leading handful were party members. If to be a communist union implies communist "control," and undemocratic domination over the affairs of the union by the party, then the AMW does not fit the stereotype. Yet communists did provide most of the leadership of the AMW throughout its existence and retained the enthusiastic support of the membership. The AMW, in other words, was both "indigenous" and "red."

It is difficult, however, to assess how much of the AMW's support arose out of miners' acceptance of the communist ideology of class struggle as opposed to a desire for district autonomy. The reasons for support certainly varied greatly in the mining communities, with the direct influence of political radicalism being greatest in Glace Bay. The sentiment for independence of outside control was strong throughout the union, so much so that the communists were never able to achieve their aim of affiliating the AMW to the Workers Unity League (WUL), even though J. B. McLachlan was the national president of that organization. Within the AMW itself

⁵⁵Paul MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 170.

there was pressure for decentralization, for considerable autonomy of the locals from the district organization, and the union originated in a strong spirit of rebellion against the direction of Nova Scotian affairs by the UMWA international executive. Most of this emphasis on local control, however, appears to have been motivated by a wish for the freedom to engage in greater militancy, rather than representing some abstract form of local patriotism. And in the conditions prevailing at the time, this union militancy could not but lead towards political radicalism.

By far the most common description the AMW men gave of their union was that it was a "rank-and-file" union. The miners tried to ensure this rank-and-file control in the constitution adopted at the AMW's first convention. "Supreme power" was vested in the "referendum vote of the rank and file of the union," a clause that reflected the miners' resentment of the occasions when the UMW district officers had overridden referendum votes. The delegates also showed a strong suspicion of having professionals or experts handle union affairs. "Consultation with a lawyer is to be only in purely criminal or legal cases. In all union work such as agreements, settlement of grievances or internal work of the union we shall always rely on the advice, guidance or counsel of members of our own organization." Officers were to be elected for one year terms, were subject to recall, and were to be paid no more

than a working miner; and of the elected officers, it was decided that the union could afford to pay only the Secretary-Treasurer for the time being, others being paid on the basis of the time lost from work. (Bob Stewart, the Secretary-Treasurer, was in fact to be the only full time officer throughout the life of the AMW, and to receive only a portion of the wages designated for him. A part-time typist was the AMW's sole additional employee.)⁵⁶

There was also almost unanimous agreement that the check-off for union dues should be abolished. "The miners," said one delegate, "do not want an organization maintained by compulsion." All miners should pay dues, but should do so consciously, deliberately, not through involuntary automatic deductions. A miner from Sydney Mines said: "Until miners begin to pay dues one hundred percent over the table, then, and not til then, will there be unity among the miners."⁵⁷ The option of collective withholding of dues was seen as another method of ensuring rank-and-file power in the union. All these democratic, or even ultra-democratic, measures were promoted by the communist leadership. Opposition to the check-off, for example, was the policy of the MWUC and other WUL unions

⁵⁶Constitution of the AMW of NS, UMWA Papers (Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia).

⁵⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 21 September 1932.

at this time.⁵⁸ The WUL has been described as tending towards ultra-democracy and being adventuristically militant in its first years, but becoming a little more moderate, its communist leaders more "professional," from about 1933.⁵⁹ Unlike some of the new WUL unions, led by enthusiastic but inexperienced young communists, the AMW men were experienced trade unionists. Nevertheless the AMW also began with organizational policies of extreme decentralization in the name of democracy, policies that were later modified. The basic tenet put forward by the communist trade unionists throughout this period, however, was that undemocratic union bosses were sure to be class collaborators, that union democracy and uncompromising struggle against exploiting employers were intrinsically bound together. A miners' organization that was a rank-and-file union would be certain to be a militant fighting organization.

What now was needed, the AMW men knew, was to make their union "one hundred percent," to unite all the men in the pits behind its banner. It was axiomatic to any trade unionist that the miners needed unity in one organization to defend their interests against the company, and the AMW held that since they had won the support of a large

⁵⁸ N.S. Miner, 12 March 1932. The UMW in District 26 were the only large union in Canada actually to have the check-off privilege, so the point was mostly academic elsewhere.

⁵⁹ Manley, "Workers Unity League."

majority, all others, if they had any respect for democracy, should join them. But the UMW officers had no intention of surrendering their positions; they defended their stand on the basis of the UMW constitution, and were able to hold the loyalty of a substantial minority of the more moderate miners. The UMW also had other important strengths. It had the contract with Dosco, it had the check-off of union dues, and it was only with the UMW that company officials would agree to negotiate disputes, grievances or future contracts. AMW appeals to government to arrange a miners' referendum were rejected. "You can hardly expect the government of Nova Scotia.... to select what labour union a man shall join," wrote Premier Harrington,⁶⁰ adding in another letter that the AMW was following "McLachlan's policy, not very successful in the past, and it would be well for you to cut loose from him and his propaganda and decline to follow him further."⁶¹

With company officials refusing even to meet with them, and carrying on affairs as if the UMW represented all the men, the only option that appeared open to the AMW was a district strike for recognition, a direct assault on the combined forces of the UMW, the company and the

⁶⁰Harrington to John A. MacDonald, AMW president, 29 October 1932, printed in Glace Bay Gazette, 1 November 1932.

⁶¹Quoted from a letter of Harrington's to J. A. MacDonald, no date given, in Nova Scotia Miner, 26 November 1932.

government. But this was a dreadful prospect. Many in the movement remembered 1909-1911, when the UMW fought a strike for recognition against both the company and the old union, the Provincial Workmen's Association. The hardships suffered during this losing strike, and the bitter animosities engendered in the communities by a strike carried out with a divided union movement, set a terrible precedent.

Nevertheless, the AMW had come into being to take militant action to improve the miners' conditions, and many of its radicals pressed for action. In May 1933 an AMW convention passed a resolution threatening a district strike unless Dosco recognized the union's grievance committees in the various mines within ten days.⁶² The company sent no reply, while UMW officers issued a statement that UMW miners would be ordered to work in the event of any strike.⁶³ The AMW leaders, however, did not send out strike ballots immediately, as the convention had instructed.

The reason for this hesitancy appears to have been the leadership's doubts about the rank-and-file militancy because of divisions that were apparent at the convention. A resolution to affiliate with the MWUC/WUL was tabled

⁶²Glace Bay Gazette, 11 May 1933.

⁶³Glace Bay Gazette, 16 May 1933.

without a decision after much heated discussion.⁶⁴ There was also an intense controversy about the observance of May Day as a holiday, as the AMW constitution demanded. On May Day, just a few days earlier, most AMW miners had stayed away from work, and a large rally had been held. But a few AMW men, along with the UMW men, had insisted on working, and the mines had been able to hoist some coal.⁶⁵ Some convention delegates wanted the May Day provision dropped from the constitution, while others defended it fiercely. The issue was compromised by leaving the clause in the constitution, but allowing each local to decide whether to work the May Day or not.⁶⁶

These divisions at the convention reflected a submerged disagreement between those who were ready for militant action and those who were not, now that the situation in the district appeared to be leading towards a major strike. In the discussion of the strike resolution itself there had been a minority of delegates who had argued for a Sub-district No.1 (Glace Bay) strike only, rather than risk calling a district-wide strike vote in the event of the company refusing the demand for

⁶⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 12 May 1933. The motion to table the resolution was passed by the close vote of 28 to 25. this was the last overt attempt to achieve the affiliation with the MWUC and WUL, although this continued to be an aim of the communists until 1935.

⁶⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 1 May 1933.

⁶⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 13 May 1933.

recognition of mine committees. Although all openly attempted to appear militant, the leaders of the union did not dare proceed directly to a strike vote when the ultimatum to the company was ignored. Instead a mass meeting was held in Glace Bay at which a series of meetings at locals was decided upon to "educate" the members on the issues, with a strike referendum to be held sometime following these meetings.⁶⁷

At this point another strike issue emerged, one that seemed to hold the potential for mobilizing rank and file UMW miners as well as the AMW men. Dosco, as part of its strategy for weathering the depression, had allowed its subsidiaries, Acadia Coal in Pictou County and "Scotia" in Sydney Mines, to go into receivership. In April the Eastern Trust Company, receivers for Scotia's Princess and Florence mines, demanded the miners accept wage cuts of 25 per cent. "Continuation of operations depends upon the willingness of the employees to make sufficient sacrifices to enable the company to produce coal in keeping with today's prices."⁶⁸ The Sydney Mines pits were the only places where the miners were all AMW, and they were not prepared to accept further cuts to their already low wages. On 31 May 1933 a mass meeting of Princess and Florence miners voted unanimously to strike, and to ask

⁶⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 23 May 1933.

⁶⁸Sydney Post Record, 7 April 1933.

all the miners of the province to come out on a sympathy strike in their support. AMW Secretary Bob Stewart, who was present at the Sydney Mines meeting, thereupon issued a strike call to all locals of both unions throughout the province.⁶⁹

Reactions were predictable: Eastern Trust threatened the permanent closure of Princess and Florence mines; the government denied it could help mine company finances; and the local newspapers outdid themselves in denunciations of the AMW's leaders. The strike threat "classes the leaders.... as industrial wreckers.... (who) should be placed in straight jackets here and turned over to their political advisors in Russia."⁷⁰ The UMW issued a statement to all its locals warning members against heeding the strike call: "In our opinion about the worst thing that could happen to the miners of Nova Scotia would be to strike at the present time, violating agreements with the company and giving the company the opportunity to close more mines for all time. Therefore we require our members to remain at work until requested by the UMW of A to do otherwise."⁷¹

Under these pressures, the AMW leadership began to waver and divide on whether to proceed with the strike.

⁶⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 1 June 1933.

⁷⁰New Waterford Times, 5 June 1933.

⁷¹Glace Bay Gazette, 3 June 1933.

AMW Vice President Clarie Gillis opposed the strike, and attacked Stewart for calling it without consulting other officers. Gillis was the only AMW officer who was well known to hold political views well to the right of the other leaders, but up to this time he had taken a relatively militant stance on union issues. His opposition to the strike was combined with an argument that it would be undemocratic to proceed without a vote of the full membership on the issue. This view prevailed, and the strike was postponed until a vote could be held.⁷²

The Nova Scotia Miner called Gillis a "double-crosser" and McLachlan's editorial called for a massive vote for a strike:

Failure of the AMW to carry out to the letter the demand of the Sydney Mines men implies the AMW has no faith in the workers, either inside or outside their union, and the workers of Nova Scotia will not fail to accept the AMW at its own valuation..... This week will see the AMW crown itself with fighting working class glory or bury itself in a coward's grave.⁷³

The vote gave a strong majority for a strike, but no more than a quarter to one third of the AMW membership took part in the voting. It seemed that the miners were understandably nervous about a strike, but were reluctant to vote against a sympathy action in support of the Sydney

⁷²Glace Bay Gazette, 3, 5 June 1933.

⁷³Nova Scotia Miner, 3 June 1933. Gillis soon resigned as AMW Vice President and remained in the union but inactive until the unity movement of 1936.

Mines men. In any case, with the low turnout in the referendum, the AMW executive again postponed the strike.⁷⁴ Premier Harrington then announced some government assistance for Scotia, so that the proposed wage cuts could be reduced to approximately 15 rather than 25 per cent. Realizing that no sympathy strike was likely to take place, the Princess and Florence miners voted to return to work on these terms.⁷⁵ Following this, on 18 June an AMW meeting of representatives from all the locals decided to postpone indefinitely a general strike for recognition.⁷⁶

Thus the AMW's militancy had been tested and failed the test, and in retrospect this appears to have been the decisive crisis in the life of the AMW. The UMW executive, the Dosco corporation, and the government were intransigent enemies of the AMW and its "red" leadership, and it seems certain that nothing short of a district strike could have achieved the AMW aim of becoming the union representing the miners. This is not a judgement on the wisdom or folly of carrying out a district strike in the circumstances prevailing at the time, or on whether the strike could have been won. The great hardships a general strike would have brought are apparent, as are the

⁷⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 10, 13 June 1933.

⁷⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 16, 17 June 1933.

⁷⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 19 June 1933.

immense difficulties the strikers would have had to overcome to win even partial success. Yet J.E. McLachlan's line on the strike question at this time seems to have been that it was essential for the AMW to "put up or shut up" in the miners' eyes, and that if a united and militant AMW leadership gambled with outward confidence on the willingness of the rank and file to wage a major strike, there was a very good chance of winning at least a partial victory.

One possible interpretation of this is that McLachlan and other communists were for a strike on general principles, caring little about the possibilities of success or failure. This would be consistent with the view that communists of this time were committed to a blind militancy in which an heroic failure in struggle was to be welcomed almost as much as victory.⁷⁷ There is little to support such an assessment of the Cape Breton communist leadership's outlook in 1933. The communists were miners or ex-miners themselves, and they shared memories of the bitter experience of hard fought strikes. They certainly thought of union activity as part of an irreconcilable class struggle, but they were in the union movement to win victories, not to glory in defeats, and they surely had no wild notions that the struggles on union issues could be

⁷⁷Angus in Canadian Bolsheviks, for example, takes such a view generally of the activities of the WUL.

rapidly transformed into a revolutionary political upheaval. There may well have been doubts and fears on the strike issue even among the Communist Party members and supporters, but McLachlan's line seems clear; and Bob Stewart, from all appearances his most devoted follower among the top AMW leaders, did his best to have this line carried into practice, but failed. The point here is not whether the AMW would have won or lost if it had plunged ahead with a strike, but that McLachlan's and the other radicals' promotion of a strike was calculated, not blind, militancy.

Victory for the AMW in replacing the UMW and forcing recognition from Dosco, if possible at all, probably would have required a district strike, and this action was seriously considered only in spring 1933. Less than a year later, in late 1933 and early 1934, the Acadia miners in Stellarton and Thorburn fought a lock-out and a losing strike resisting drastic wage cuts imposed by the Eastern Trust receivers. In this lengthy struggle, involving both AMW and UMW miners, initiative began with the local AMW but soon passed to the UMW executive, in spite of a dramatic incident in which a crowd of Stellarton AMW men forced UMW President D.W. Morrison to board the train out of town.⁷⁸ The local AMW leader, Murdoch Wilson, showed

⁷⁸James M. Cameron, Pictonian Colliers (Halifax 1974), 158.

himself to be less militant than the rank and file in either camp, even allowing himself to be outflanked on the left by the UMW executive, to J.B. McLachlan's disgust.⁷⁹ The AMW's policy of local autonomy, however, left the central leadership of the union with little influence over Wilson's actions. The UMW eventually negotiated a face saving settlement which the AMW denounced as a sell out. But threats by the AMW executive in Cape Breton of a district wide strike were, by that time, empty bluster.

But if a district strike was not a possibility, what strategy did the AMW leaders have? They sought desperately but unsuccessfully for a reasonable alternative. Through 1934 and 1935 AMW miners showed their militancy in numerous short strike actions in various mines. These were on specific local grievances and deliberately aimed at defying the clause in the recently signed UMW/Dosco agreement which forbade any walkouts during the life of the contract. Through these struggles the AMW leaders hoped to force company recognition of the union, and also to win over UMW loyalists in a "united front from below," a communist tactic frequently applied at that time.

One example of these many strikes was the walkout in May 1934 at the Dominion 1B mine. This involved a grievance over the dismissal of miner William Stefura, who

⁷⁹Nova Scotia Miner, 25 November 1933. Wilson eventually resigned, denouncing the AMW leaders as reds. Glace Bay Gazette, 13 May 1935.

was accused of neglect of duty in an incident in which a coal car got loose and killed a horse. The AMW claimed this was victimization and that Stefura's unfair treatment was partly due to his being an immigrant. After a one week strike, with partially effective sympathy stoppages being staged at other mines, the company gave in and reinstated Stefura, pretending the intention had only been to suspend him in any case. This strike was on an unusual issue; most of the stoppages involved such grievances as longwall rates or safety matters. But the Stefura strike was typical in two of its characteristics. First, despite AMW appeals for unity, most of the UMW miners were willing to work, but they could not turn out enough men to run the mine. Second, the company steadfastly refused to meet with any AMW representatives, and a crude "negotiation" took place through statements made by the union and the Dosco officials and published in the newspapers.⁸⁰

Such small scale strikes on many, perhaps most, occasions won minor concessions, but they did not advance the AMW's aims of forcing recognition from the company or winning over the UMW loyalists. The likelihood of the AMW attaining its fundamental objective and supplanting the UMW steadily receded. The rival unions contended for control of the district until 1936, but from 1933 UMW strength gradually grew, while the AMW declined, though

⁸⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 16, 17, 18 19, 21 and 23 May 1934.

probably holding the loyalty of a larger proportion of the miners throughout Nova Scotia to the end, and certainly always having the majority in Cape Breton.⁸¹

One important development improved the morale of UMW loyalists and the organizational and financial support available to the District 26 executive. In the summer of 1933, taking quick advantage of Roosevelt's "New Deal" legislation, the UMW recovered its position as the largest and most powerful union in the United States. In one of the most remarkable unionizing campaigns in history thousands of American miners, many of whom had never been previously organized, poured into the resurgent UMW.⁸² From this time, also, John L. Lewis began to acquire a new reputation as an aggressive union leader who was winning concessions for his followers despite the depression. Lewis's own exultant reports of these triumphs were well publicized by District 26 officers in local Nova Scotia newspapers.⁸³

The AMW was not crushed by these developments, but it could never recover the initiative and momentum of its first year and once committed to a prolonged dual union struggle soon moved away from the ultra-democratic posture

⁸¹The AMW remained in Sydney Mines until 1938, two years after its district organization was dissolved.

⁸²Dubofsky and VanTyne, John L. Lewis, 183-190.

⁸³Glace Bay Gazette, 26 June, 8 July, 4, 10 October 1933.

of its beginning.⁸⁴ In particular, the union found it was very weak organizationally and financially; it had only one full time officer and it was unable to pay him regularly.⁸⁵ The AMW policy of "across the wicket" dues collection had failed badly; the impoverished miners did not pay their dues and the union was close to collapse as a district organization. In autumn 1933 the AMW reversed its policy on voluntary dues collection and began to demand the company check-off, and the struggle for the check-off became a major issue in the inter-union rivalry in 1934 and 1935.⁸⁶

The new Liberal government of Angus L. MacDonald and its Minister of Mines and Labor, Michael Dwyer, seemed at first to be more impartial on the union issue than the Conservatives had been, particularly when, in December 1933, it advised Dosco that the existing law required it to check-off dues for the AMW, as it did for the UMW, when requested to do so by employees.⁸⁷ In early 1934, however, the government put through a law that required the company to collect dues only for the union with the greatest num-

⁸⁴This seem to have been a common experience in the communist led WUL unions of the period. See John Manley, "The Workers Unity League."

⁸⁵AMW Financial Report, 1 August 1933 to 31 October 1933, UMWA Papers, PANS.

⁸⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 20 September 1933.

⁸⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 13 December 1933.

ber of signed up deduction requests. Card counts were to be held on 15 November each year. The AMW protested the unfairness of having the card counts administered by Dosco officials who were biased against their union, but the government passed the bill, refusing an amendment that a secret ballot be substituted for the company count.⁸⁸

A card count was held in November 1934 and again in 1935. In both of these the UMW cards were declared to be in a slight majority for almost all companies: Dominion Coal Company in Glace Bay and New Waterford, Cumberland Railway and Coal Company in Springhill, Acadia Mines in Stellarton, and the smaller non-Dosco companies throughout the province. The single exception was Scotia at Sydney Mines, where all the miners had put in AMW cards.⁸⁹ In 1934 the count in Glace Bay was 2848 for the AMW and 2293 for the UMW, but since in New Waterford sub-district the count was 1663 UMW and 435 AMW, the UMW won the check-off for all of the Dominion Coal Company, which encompassed both sub-districts. In Pictou county the count was 641 UMW and 549 AMW, while in Springhill the UMW had 722 and the AMW 508. The UMW also got 100 per cent of the cards for the non-Dosco mines in Inverness, Joggins, River Hebert, and elsewhere, so that its overall total was 6604 to the

⁸⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 29 March, 3, 25, 28 April, 1 May 1934.

⁸⁹Sydney Post Record, 16 November 1934; Glace Bay Gazette, 20 November 1935.

AMW's 6066.⁹⁰ In 1935 the position was almost unchanged in all areas except Springhill, where the approximately 500 AMW cards of 1934 were transferred to the UMW, giving a district-wide UMW total of 7221 and an AMW total of 5754.⁹¹ It should be noted that the AMW had a majority in Cape Breton in both counts, and this majority increased slightly in 1935. After each of the counts the AMW men charged, probably with some truth to their claims, that fraud and intimidation of workers by the company officials had falsified the results, and the union entered into fruitless legal action on this.⁹² The AMW was able to hold the check-off only in Sydney Mines, and its finances suffered greatly thereafter.

The provincial government had also showed its partisanship in the role played by Mines Minister Dwyer at the small mine in Inverness, where he helped force the AMW minority back into the UMW.⁹³ But it was the activity of Dwyer during January 1935 in Springhill that caused Bob

⁹⁰These figures are those presented at the January 1935 AMW convention as the final official count in Glace Bay Gazette, 22 January 1935. They are slightly more favorable to the UMW than the figures given immediately after the count in Glace Bay Gazette, 17 November 1934.

⁹¹Glace Bay Gazette, 17 November 1935.

⁹²Glace Bay Gazette, 26, 30 November, 12 December 1934; Protest submission to M.Dwyer by AMW lawyers, 19 November 1934, UMWA Papers, PANS.

⁹³Glace Bay Gazette, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12 December 1933.

Stewart to refer publicly to him as a "four-flusher."⁹⁴ It was only in late 1934 that the AMW got any organized following in Springhill, but in the November 1934 card count the UMW were shocked to find that close to half the miners submitted AMW cards.⁹⁵ The Springhill UMW organization acted swiftly and ruthlessly. By January most miners were back in the UMW, and then a strike was called to enforce the dismissal of the local AMW leadership. This was the only time and place in which organized violence was used in the inter-union struggle; several of the AMW men were brutally beaten by groups of UMW men. A crowd forced Bob Stewart out of town, and the most prominent local AMW leader, James Columbine, was beaten up, blacklisted by the company, and eventually deported to his native Wales as an immigrant living off relief.⁹⁶ The strike was fully successful in forcing the Springhill AMW out of existence, and Minister Dwyer went out of his way to facilitate this UMW victory by his public statements and personal attempts to talk the AMW miners over.⁹⁷ The UMW leadership attempted other strikes for the closed shop

⁹⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 7 February 1935. Because of this and because an AMW convention voted to consign a letter from Angus L. MacDonald "To the wastebasket", the government refused to correspond with the AMW for months.

⁹⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 17 November 1934.

⁹⁶Wade, History.

⁹⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 23, 25, 26, 30 January, 2, 4, 5, 7 February 1935; Halifax Herald, 30 January, 5 February 1935.

where they were in the majority, at Stellarton in May 1934,⁹⁸ and at New Waterford in July 1935,⁹⁹ but in both cases most UMW miners refused to participate in shutting AMW men out of the mines, and the strikes failed.

The card counts had shown that the AMW was holding most of its membership, but everyone could also see that the UMW was never going to be driven from the district. By 1935 there was some slight upturn in the economy, and it could be hoped that a united movement could wrest more from Dosco than the very slight concessions the company had granted the UMW since the split began. In January 1935 the two year contract signed by the UMW had provided only 5 per cent increases for the datal men and nothing for contract miners.¹⁰⁰ Thus the necessity for unity was growing more urgent for many miners, and probably the AMW men in particular, who were cut off from any negotiations with Dosco.

At this time, also, the major shift that was taking place in the policy of the Communist Party led local communists to move decisively towards unity in the miners' movement. Unity was now the major theme being promoted by the central leadership of the Communist Party in its Canada-wide trade union policy, leading to the disbanding

⁹⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 25 May 1934.

⁹⁹Sydney Post Record, 29 July 1935.

¹⁰⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 29 January 1935.

of the WUL and the return of its constituent unions to the TLC. This was a policy springing from the Comintern's strategy of the "United Front Against Fascism and War," and also from the situation in the North American trade union movement at this time, with communists eager to participate in the CIO struggles for industrial unions. Formerly reactionary union leaders like John L. Lewis were now promoting the CIO, and the abandonment of rhetorical attacks on such union leaders seemed the necessary price communists had to pay to become involved in the new industrial union movement, the most exciting development in North American unionism in the century.

At the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee, held in November 1935, the Communist Party made clear its new policy, publishing the major speeches in a pamphlet.¹⁰¹ The keynote speaker was Stewart Smith, who had been the Canadian party's delegate to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern. Interspersed with quotations from Georgi Dimitroff's speech at the Seventh Congress, Smith explained that for Canadian communists achieving the Popular Front Against Fascism and War meant fighting for trade union unity and also for a united front with the CCF. This policy was enthusiastically supported by almost all participants in the plenum. J. B. McLachlan, however,

¹⁰¹Towards a Canadian Peoples Front. Reports and Speeches at the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee, Communist Party of Canada (Toronto 1935).

argued that Nova Scotia had no CCF with which to unite, and that while the miners were for one union in Nova Scotia, they were not ready to rejoin the UMW.¹⁰² In his "Reply to Discussion" Stewart Smith agreed that in "such a situation as we have in Nova Scotia, there must be no running ahead," but unity was necessary and workers "must be and can be convinced if the proper work is conducted."¹⁰³ Party organizer Bill Findlay was sent to Cape Breton to work for unification, and in the months that followed McLachlan reluctantly co-operated in a unification process that led inexorably to AMW surrender to the UMW.

In early 1936, after two inconclusive meetings between the AMW and UMW executives on the question of unity had occurred, a rank-and-file unity movement got underway on the initiative of AMW miners from which officers of both unions were explicitly excluded.¹⁰⁴ Both executives were willing to comply. The UMW officers had made it clear that they would accept unity only on their terms, the return of the men to the UMW, and rightly judged that if they held firm this would be the result. The AMW leaders were in a situation providing few options, and may have hoped that a

¹⁰²Ibid., 152, 153.

¹⁰³Ibid., 65.

¹⁰⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 13 December 1935 and 22 January 1936.

rank-and-file unity movement could be turned into a "united front from below" that would bring about reunification on the best possible terms. As late as February AMW leader Bob Stewart apparently still hoped the result would be unity outside the UMW. "Unity Platform, Not Lewis, Is What Miners Want Now" was the title of an article he wrote for The Nova Scotia Miner.¹⁰⁵ But as the unity committee met over the following months, there was a steady trend of AMW concessions in the face of UMW threats of withdrawal.¹⁰⁶

In the end the unity agreement provided that all the AMW members would return to the UMW with no new initiation fees and with full membership rights.¹⁰⁷ The AMW executive agreed to this, provided John L. Lewis give assurance that he would respect District 26 autonomy in the future. Lewis thereupon sent a letter which read, on this point:

The autonomy given District 26 is one of the fullest. There is no desire on the part of the officers of the International union to intrude upon or impair the autonomous rights of the District in any manner or form.¹⁰⁸

Given Lewis's known record of autocratic behaviour, this letter had little value other than saving face for the

¹⁰⁵Nova Scotia Miner, 8 February 1936.

¹⁰⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 13, 15, 22, 27 January, 1, 10, 12 February, 9, 21, 30 March 1936.

¹⁰⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 30 March, 1 April 1936.

¹⁰⁸Wade, History.

surrendering AMW. And this was, in reality, an unconditional surrender to the UMW by the AMW, as was made clear when the AMW officers were all required to sign special loyalty oaths before being allowed membership rights in the UMW, even though this contravened the unity agreement.¹⁰⁹ Nonetheless, the AMW miners felt they had no choice but to return to the UMW, and those in Glace Bay, New Waterford, and Pictou sub-districts all returned to the older union at this time. At Sydney Mines the men stayed in the AMW for two years longer.

As a rebellion against the international and its policies, none of the AMW's aims were achieved. It had aimed for militant action to win concessions on wages, but the split in the union movement had weakened the miners in relation to the company, and probably brought about lower wage settlements during those years. An opposite case might be argued that the coal company moderated its demands for wage-cuts because of the threat of the AMW, but this seems doubtful. Further, the AMW and UMW split had probably facilitated Dosco's establishment of substantially lower rates paid the Sydney Mines and Stellarton miners compared to those in Glace Bay, New Waterford, and Springhill, a differential that continued for years, even after the Acadia and Scotia coal companies were reunited with Dosco in 1939. The break with the

¹⁰⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 9, 11 May 1936.

international had also been an attempt to bring more democracy and district autonomy to the union, but the UMW with which the AMW men reunited was even more bureaucratic than the organization they had left. During the split the rump UMW had lengthened the district officers' terms of office from one to two years.¹¹⁰ The district conventions were also now to be held every second year instead of annually. The district executive's control over the finances of the locals was to be strengthened, by having the check-off remitted by the company to the district office rather than to the locals, as had been the previous practice. Never again could disgruntled locals withhold their "per capita" dues payments from the international, as some had done prior to 1932.¹¹¹

For the AMW miners their organization failed to achieve any advancement of their living standards in a hard time, but perhaps it did bring one real benefit to its members. The hardships, the humiliation of living on relief, the insecurity, and the fear for the future with which people lived in the depression years are often said to have taken a severe emotional toll. The AMW and the radical ideology with which it was associated told the workers that none of this was their fault, but the fault of the capitalist

¹¹⁰Constitutional amendment passed at UMW Convention, Truro, Glace Bay Gazette, 24 November 1934.

¹¹¹Glace Bay Gazette, 23 August 1932.

system, and that they could make efforts to assert their own control over their circumstances. The extent to which this helped to improve the pride and self esteem of the miners, and raise hopes for the future, may have been great. And there were ways in which the militants could regard their defeat as being mitigated. There were no expulsions or blacklistings, and all the AMW men were soon able to play a full part in the reunited UMW. The AMW-UMW split, as an episode in the history of District 26, can be viewed validly as evidence of the continuity of the miners' radicalism over many years and as a turning point in the nature of this radicalism. The AMW assertion of the class struggle form of unionism against the UMW's business unionism provided a bridge carrying forward a radical leadership and a tradition of militancy from the bitter strikes of the 1920s to the later period of the 1930s and the 1940s. But the AMW was a rebellion that failed, and the defeat of such a protracted effort to break from the UMW had long-term effects. After this political radicalism still maintained some hold on the miners' consciousness, but in a somewhat diluted and declining form. For a time almost undiminished union militancy continued to exist, but it was increasingly to be channelled and constrained by the legal framework of collective bargaining and the institutional practices of business unionism. The militants could take no decisive action against this

trend, remembering well the defeat of the AMW. No serious attempt to replace the international was to be made again until more than 40 years had passed.

Chapter Three

The United Front in Cape Breton, 1936-9

The aftermath of the AMW's failure was a serious weakening of communist influence in Cape Breton. One view might be that this was a typical, or even well-deserved, result of the CP's dual-union tactics in promoting such organizations as the AMW or the Workers Unity League. Ian Angus, for example, writes:

The Workers Unity League constantly combined a readiness to enter all-out combat, regardless of the balance of forces involved, with a total refusal to seek allies beyond its own ranks. This combination of adventurism and sectarianism led to defeat after defeat. The only lasting achievement of the WUL was the isolation of thousands of left-wing labor militants from the mainstream of Canadian labor.¹

The AMW militants in Cape Breton, however, were not isolated, and it does not seem to have been left extremism or adventurism that discredited the CP leadership with some of its Cape Breton followers, but the abrupt move of the party to the right at the end of the "left" period. The communists brought unconcealed radicalism to the union movement during the "left" years, calling the WUL affiliates "revolutionary" unions. This rhetoric did not mean unions' economic aims should be supplanted by political aims, but that the efforts to defend living standards should be regarded as part of a conscious

¹Angus, Canadian Bolsheviks, pp. 273-4; similar views are expressed by Penner, Canadian Communism, pp. 97-125.

working-class struggle against the moribund capitalist system. In these bleak depression days any militant strike, even if concerned with "bread and butter" issues, could seem politically radical; and the communists usually denounced all union moderates who opposed such strikes as agents of capitalism. In some cases, such as the Glace Bay miners, the communist rhetoric was well in tune with the sentiments of a large section of the workers. The radical line was certainly divisive, since the AMW could never win the support of all the miners. Nonetheless, the overt class struggle policy of the CP activists probably led to a wider direct communist influence in Cape Breton than at anytime before or since.

For the militant miners who tended to follow the communist lead the unification with the UMW in 1936 was perhaps accepted as necessary. They had more difficulty swallowing the extent to which the central leadership of the CP now tried to play down, or even eliminate, criticism of union bosses the party had earlier condemned, using such epithets as "labour fakirs." The disruptive effect on the Cape Breton CP organization brought about by dissatisfaction with the new policy was greatly magnified by the reaction of J.B. McLachlan, the most prestigious local radical.

Reunification of the miners within the UMW had been accepted by McLachlan with great reluctance, and shortly

after this he resigned from the Communist Party. With his many years of bitter hostility to John L. Lewis, McLachlan could never believe Lewis had become a progressive union leader, and perhaps his personal hatred for Lewis was an important element in this decision. This was the conviction of George MacEachern, a fellow party member at the time:

Jim had been hurt personally; he had lost his position with the UMW, he was blacklisted, he couldn't go back in the mines after 1923 and he had hate of John L. Lewis and all that he stood for. All that he stood for in 1923 could well be hated, if you can hate. I felt Lewis had changed. And I felt we had to trust him. We had no bloody choice there.²

It is easy to understand why communists involved in CIO organizing struggles, as George MacEachern was at the Sydney steel plant, might think there was no choice about accepting that John L. Lewis had changed. Lewis had changed his policies, in fact, since he was supporting the struggles to build new unions, and he had shown he was now prepared to work with communists. He had also become the symbolic leader of the CIO for workers all over North America, gaining a wide prestige never equalled by any other union leader. Communists had good reasons for feeling they had to refrain from attacks on Lewis at this time, or even for joining in the chorus of praise for him. But this meant that they had to turn a blind eye to the

²David Frank and Donald MacGillivray, eds., George MacEachern: An Autobiography (Sydney 1987), p. 96.

fact that Lewis, however militant he might be, had abandoned none of his dictatorial practices within his union.

McLachlan appears to have thought the new unity line of the party was being taken too far if it required him to avoid any criticism of reactionaries like Lewis, and he continued to attack John L. Lewis sharply in The Nova Scotia Miner. For example, when Lewis forced through a vote at the 1936 UMW convention which gave him, as International President, the unrestrained right to depose district officers throughout the union, this led McLachlan to write that no one except a "swollen, impudent, aspiring fascist" would seek such power.³ At party meetings McLachlan himself came under sharp criticism for writing such articles from the Communist Party organizer, Bill Findlay, criticism he would not accept.⁴ He therefore resigned, writing to party leader Tim Buck in June 1936: "I refuse to follow the Party in Canada in its sad march to the right."⁵ A number of other Cape Breton party

³"Lewis Becomes Dictator of UMW," Nova Scotia Miner 8 February 1936. See also "Everything Charged Against AF. by Lewis He Does in UMWA Only More So," Nova Scotia Miner, 29 February, 1936.

⁴Frank and MacGillivray, eds., George MacEachern, p. 96.

⁵McLachlan to Buck, 13 June 1936, quoted in Manley, thesis, "Workers Unity League," p. 371. I have been unable to obtain sight of this letter, which is partially quoted by several writers.

members followed McLachlan in resigning, and the CP was never to regain the influence it had held in the mining districts.

This was the beginning of the period when communists in Canada and the United States had their greatest impact as union organizers. But with their acceptance of these opportunities, some part of their earlier emphasis on the class struggle, and on rank-and-file democracy in the unions, was lost. The policies of this time, and even more the circumstances during the war and the succeeding cold war, led communists in unions to downplay or even to conceal their political affiliation. They also came to rely a great deal more on holding positions in the leadership of unions, a false reliance that did little to preserve them from later being purged from unions they had done much to build. It is impossible to know how much of this perspective was in the mind of J.B. McLachlan in 1936, but he could surely see that a UMW led by John L. Lewis was as far from being a democratic, rank-and-file union as it had ever been, and that the Communist Party was prepared to ignore this unpleasant truth.

It is also probable that McLachlan was generally unhappy with the Communist Party policy of striving for a united front with the CCF at this time. This is much more plausible than the claim made by several writers that he himself was soon urging that the miners "get together with

Woodsworth and his group in the west."⁶ This claim is based solely on one anecdote told by some family members and friends years later when they, themselves, had joined the CCF. In fact, this was exactly the policy that the Communist Party had adopted by early 1936, trying to efface completely its earlier characterization of the CCF as "social fascist."⁷ But it is difficult to believe that J. B. McLachlan, like a repenting sinner on his deathbed, turned to the CCF, a party he had denounced as "the bosses' third party in Canada" soon after its formation.⁸ McLachlan, after all, left the Communist Party on the grounds that it had moved too far to the right.

McLachlan died the following year, but his break with the party had badly disrupted communist organization and influence in Cape Breton. The loss of men such as Bob Stewart, the AMW secretary-treasurer, also contributed to the disarray of the local party.⁹ Some notion of the bitterness involved in this split is given in a statement by D.N. Brodie a few years later, in which he referred to J.B. as "dragged down in his old age by the yellow jackals

⁶MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 189; Mellor, The Company Store, p. 337.

⁷G. Pierce (Stewart Smith), Socialism and the CCF (Montreal 1934).

⁸See "The Careerists," Nova Scotia Miner, 25 February 1933.

⁹Stewart seems to have rejoined the party some years later.

in his own following."¹⁰ The Communist Party did not lose all its influence in the area, but it was never to recover the position it held prior to McLachlan's resignation. The party centre in Toronto also appears to have become preoccupied with anti-fascist unity and placed less emphasis on working among the miners. It was about this time that the Nova Scotia centre for the party was moved from Glace Bay to Halifax on the grounds that this was the political capital of the province, even though the party had relatively few followers there.¹¹

During the "united front" period, also, the party rarely put forward an independent platform during elections, but continually attempted to cooperate with others. A strong case can be made that it was these rightward changes in the policy of the Communist Party, above all else, that paved the way for the CCF electoral victories in Cape Breton. All the major developments in Cape Breton labour politics during 1936, 1937, and 1938, up to the affiliation of District 26 with the CCF, were consistent with, and to a considerable extent made possible by, the united front policy of the Communist Party, and were actively promoted by local party

¹⁰Brodie statement on refusing to run for Mayor, Glace Bay Gazette, 17 February 1938. This split reached into D.N. Brodie's own family; while he was never in the CP, and became the CCF M.L.A., his son Fred was well known to be a CP member.

¹¹Interview with Dane Parker, Halifax, 23 May 1985.

activists.

Although the sway the party had over local radicalism had been decisively weakened, it still retained a strong influence within the unions over many years. It was the CP unity policy that made possible the temporary truce in the long struggle between left and right in the miners' union movement in Cape Breton during the late 1930s. This was also facilitated by the fact that while UMW district officers Morrison, MacKay and Barrett retained their bureaucratic power, following the lead of their autocratic boss John L. Lewis they adopted a slightly more militant posture and displayed a willingness to work with communists. One example of the increased militancy of the District 26 organization after the reunification was the struggle to organize the miners in Minto, New Brunswick. A strike in 1937-38 was defeated, but some of the organization established at this time persisted, and the groundwork was laid for the successful unionization of Minto in 1941.¹²

The unity of the local militants with union leaders in Cape Breton was increasingly under strain in the period leading up to the war, since neither the miners nor the steelworkers achieved much increase in wages during this period. The Sydney steelworkers were to finally succeed in

¹²See Allan Seager, "Minto, New Brunswick: A Study in Class Relations Between the Wars," Labour/Le Travailleur 5 (Spring, 1980), pp. 81-132.

establishing a union, but did not have a signed contract until 1940.¹³ As to the coal miners, in 1937 the UMW executive negotiated a nine per cent increase for the datal men, and six per cent for the contract miners. This was far from achieving the recovery of the 1931 rates as had been called for at the 1936 convention, and the militants in the locals campaigned against acceptance. The pithead referendum went heavily against in Glace Bay, as usual, but acceptance was carried by the votes of the New Waterford and Springhill men.¹⁴ Rank-and-file dissatisfaction continued and increased throughout this period, and would eventually culminate in the 1941 slowdown strike.¹⁵ In both the steel and coal negotiations the local union teams had the dubious assistance of Silby Barrett, as well as Senator William Sneed, a John L. Lewis henchman from Pennsylvania, whose main aim in Nova Scotia seems to have been to avoid strikes that might prove costly to the union's head office.¹⁶ In 1937 and 1938 the CP and its local followers, however, refused to engage in open criticism of the union bureaucrats, and even publicly

¹³See Chapter Five below.

¹⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 8, 22 March, 3 April 1937.

¹⁵See Chapter Four below.

¹⁶For George MacEachern's opinion of Sneed, see Frank and MacGillivray, eds., George MacEachern, pp. 80-1.

defended them from the criticism of worker militants.¹⁷

As a result, a temporary rift developed between M. A. MacKenzie, the editor of the Steelworker in Sydney, and local CP representatives. The development of the line followed by the Steelworker is interesting, as this paper was for long to remain the principal voice of the radical left in the area. In 1936, the Steelworker, unlike McLachlan and the Nova Scotia Miner, was closely supportive of the CP's change to the "united front" line, and it was full of praise for John L. Lewis for his CIO work.¹⁸ This support for the CIO was only to be expected, given the importance any radical Sydney paper would naturally place on building a union at the steel plant. From March to June 1936 the Steelworker serialized a long article by Tom MacEwan, "Unity is the Workers' Lifeline," spelling out the party's line for the unions; and the paper hailed the reunification of the AMW miners with the UMW as a great advance.¹⁹ There was no criticism of McLachlan in the Steelworker, but it fulsomely supported the CP line up to November 1936 when financial problems

¹⁷See, for example, letter from William Findlay, Communist Party organizer in Glace Bay, defending the UMW District Executive from various criticisms. Steelworker 11 December 1937.

¹⁸Steelworker, 11 January, 22 February, 29 February, 7 March 1936.

¹⁹"Bravo C B Miners," Steelworker, 4 May 1936.

caused it to cease publication.²⁰ The Steelworker began to be printed again in May 1937, and a strange period of several years duration followed in which there was a sharp difference in the paper's policy towards national and local communists. The paper consistently supported the communist line at the national level; "Arise Canada," the platform of the CP written by Tim Buck, was serialized in August and September 1937, and CP spokesmen such as Roscoe Fillmore, Joe Wallace, and John C. Mortimer contributed regular articles to the paper.²¹ However, from 1937 to 1939 the paper was usually at odds with local representatives of the CP, calling for greater union militancy in both the new steelworker's union and the UMW, while the communists were following the unity line and avoiding strong criticism of union officials. Articles attacking the officers of UMW District 26 appeared frequently in the paper, for example in a series of

²⁰In September 1936, for example, British Communist M.P. William Gallagher visited Cape Breton and spoke in Glace Bay. Paul MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 190, makes much of a confrontation between McLachlan and Gallagher at this meeting. The Steelworker, 19 September 1936, gives a long report of this meeting and Gallagher's speech, but does not mention McLachlan at all.

²¹J.C. Mortimer, in particular, had a regular column entitled "Letters to Bill" in the pre-war period. It then took the form of war commentaries by "Kentucky Colonel" until the end of the war, and then "Let's Face Facts" by "J.C.M." after the war. Mortimer was a United Church minister who joined the CP in the late 1930s, and remained one of the Party's most fluent and effective spokesmen in the Maritimes until his death in the 1950s.

columns entitled "A Miner Speaks" printed in 1937.²² William Findlay, the Communist Party organizer, wrote to the Steelworker defending the UMW leaders, and Findlay and the local CP was then denounced in the reply from "A Miner."²³ In Sydney, CP members and other shop floor activists during the building of Local 1064 had been supported by the Steelworker. However, in the years that followed the formation of the union, when little was won for the workers the paper increasingly became critical of the steel union executive, including the CP members in its leadership, such as George MacEachern.²⁴ The CP and the left-wingers in the leadership of the steel union were in a difficult position, however, since the national and international leaders of the USWA would support no extreme actions or strikes during this period.²⁵ But though the lack of militancy in the policies of Local 1064 can be partly blamed on the head office of the union, the communist policies during this time were generally much less militant than they had been a few years earlier. The alliance of rank-and-file militants with communist leaders

²²No indication is given of the identity of "A Miner," but a likely possibility would be Angus MacIntyre of Glace Bay, a militant and later a left-wing CCFer.

²³See letter to the editor from William Findlay Steelworker, 11 December 1937; and reply "A Weasel in a Hen-Coop?" Steelworker, 18 December 1937.

²⁴Steelworker, 30 July 1938.

²⁵See Chapter Five.

was no longer almost certain, since the communists now often counselled moderation, and at times even faced attack on their left flank.

Another example of the relatively moderate policies adopted by the CP during this unity period is provided by the unemployed movement. There were many unemployed throughout the 1930s, but the organized movement in Glace Bay seems to have been highly active in two periods, 1932-4 and 1938-9. One episode casts a revealing light on how dramatically the confrontational style of the earlier unemployed movement had given way to more restrained tactics by the late 1930s. In 1933 a tiny group of young unemployed men broke away from the communist-led Unemployed Association in Glace Bay. This group, numbering perhaps a dozen, called themselves "The Unemployed Co-operators," adopted an outspoken anti-communist attitude, and advertised their members willingness to do odd jobs for low pay. The Unemployed Association denounced this group for breaking the solidarity of the unemployed single men's struggle for decent relief or proper jobs; which prompted the Glace Bay Gazette to defend these "public spirited" young men from the other thousand or more unemployed youths in town, "those who prefer the dole to honest work."²⁶ When the unemployed movement again

²⁶See Glace Bay Gazette issues of April, May, June, 1933 for "Unemployed Co-operators" adverts; and editorial, "The Anti-Cooperators," Glace Bay Gazette, 18 May 1933.

became very active in 1938 it was still led mainly by communists.²⁷ In its methods, however, it seemed more like the anti-communist Unemployed Co-operators. The organization of the unemployed was renamed the General Workers Union (GWU). It sent a delegation to Halifax, where it met Premier MacDonald and had "a very sympathetic hearing."²⁸ Then, working amicably with the Glace Bay Board of Trade, the union established an office with a phone, registered most of the unemployed young men as members, and advertised its members' willingness to do odd jobs, collect firewood, sweep chimneys and the like.²⁹ A tag day, supported by town officials and the Board of Trade, was held to finance setting up the office.³⁰ The GWU became a fairly powerful organization in the area for a brief time: the Glace Bay organization spread to Sydney, New Waterford, Dominion, and other small towns; it conducted a brief strike of 100 relief workers in Sydney; it sent delegates to a national conference in Toronto; and

There is no evidence that the Antigonish Movement had any direct role in setting up the "Unemployed Co-operators," but the general influence of the co-operative idea as an alternative to confrontational struggle against the system is clear.

²⁷Ignacius MacNeil and Murdoch Clarke, well known local CP members, were the most frequently mentioned leaders of the GWU in all the news reports cited below.

²⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 4 June 1938.

²⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 14 July, 15 August 1938.

³⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 15 July 1938.

it came to monopolize the local labour market for unskilled construction workers.³¹ It claimed to represent approximately 2000 young unemployed men in Glace Bay alone.³² It is unclear whether this approach achieved more real benefits for the unemployed than the earlier style, but it certainly made more efforts to work effectively within the system, instead of denouncing and making demands. Yet it had essentially the same leadership: the principal leader of the unemployed in Glace Bay in 1938 and 1939, Murdoch Clarke, had been sentenced to six months imprisonment for heading a very militant hunger march in Edmonton in 1932.³³

For communists like Clarke all across the country, this extreme change in policy was the result of an altered world situation. In its political propaganda during this period the CP dropped almost all references to the class struggle in Canada. Instead the concentration was on the danger of fascism and war. In the years 1937-8, aside from the general "League Against Fascism and War," the biggest specific international issue around which meetings and solidarity work was organized was the Spanish civil war.

³¹Glace Bay Gazette, 18 April, 16 May, 8, 23 September, 1938, 22 March, 6, 10, 15 April, 30 June, 23 November, 1 December 1939.

³²Glace Bay Gazette, 13 January, 15 April 1939.

³³Canadian Labor Defence League pamphlet The Alberta Hunger March (n.d.), CP Papers, MG28 IV-4, 61, NAC.

In Cape Breton, as elsewhere, appeals were made for financial and other support for the Loyalist government in Spain.³⁴ This was met with denunciations from the pulpit and editorial attack from the Catholic editor of the Glace Bay Gazette, who supported Franco as the defender of Christianity, as did the diocesan newspaper The Casket (Antigonish).³⁵ The Gazette also denigrated Dr. Norman Bethune during his fund-raising visit for his blood-transfusion units in Spain.⁶ Presumably more progressively minded Catholics found it expedient to be silent on the subject of the Spanish war, and in general the miners supported the Spanish Loyalists. At least four young men from Glace Bay appear to have fought in Spain in the international brigade, two of whom were killed.³⁷

The CP, in this period in which it sought to build unity in the struggle against fascism at home and abroad, usually avoided holding meetings or making statements in its own name. Everything was done through "fronts," if possible including prominent people well known not to be CP members. It had always been party policy to work

³⁴See "Phalen Local to Aid Loyalists in Spain," Sydney Post-Record, 23 January 1937.

³⁵Sydney Post-Record, 18 January 1937; Glace Bay Gazette, 22, 25 January 1937; for The Casket, see any issue printed in 1937-8.

³⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 27 September 1938.

³⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 3, 6 February 1939.

through such "fronts" but this was more emphasized in the unity period. The call for the relatively small-scale "fronts" on specific issues was an echo of the communist appeal for the broadest possible "popular front" in national politics.

From 1935 to 1939 communists persistently called for a united front of the CCF and the CP, an invitation that was adamantly rejected by the leaders of the CCF. In Cape Breton, however, there was no effective CCF organization until 1938. A new branch of the CCF was reported to have been organized in Glace Bay in 1936, following a visit to the area by CCF organizer J.E. Garland. Silby Barrett was on its executive, but no further record of this group exists.³⁸ Later in 1936 the UMW convention passed a resolution calling for the revival of a labour party in Nova Scotia, with no mention of the CCF.³⁹ The opportunity to set up a labour party came in the following year, when, shortly after the passage of the Trade Union Act, the Liberal government called an election. This was 1937, the period in which the communists were working most amicably with the union leaders, so there was a genuine, if temporary, united front of labour in electoral politics in Cape Breton. Soon after the election call a Labour Party was formed in Glace Bay which nominated a United Church

³⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 21 July 1936.

³⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 7 November 1936.

minister, William Mercer, to contest the seat.⁴⁰ Mercer's election campaign involved active CP members James Madden and Fred Brodie, former AMW president John Alex MacDonald, UMW International Board Member Silby Barrett, and future CCF MP Clarie Gillis, as well as the future MLA, D. N. Brodie.⁴¹ At the final public meeting of the campaign the principal speakers were Mercer, Gillis, D. N. Brodie, and William Findlay, the CP organizer.⁴² At a meeting called specifically for the unemployed workers the speakers were Mercer and CP member Ignacius MacNeil.⁴³ Mercer had previously shown himself willing to work with communists, having had some involvement with the CP organized League Against War and Fascism.⁴⁴ In his campaign speeches Mercer defended himself against anti-communist attacks by his opponents by claiming his socialism was the true expression of Christianity.⁴⁵ The Labour Party Platform called for "protecting and furthering the interests of the common people," stated that political "domination by the

⁴⁰Sydney Post-Record, 12 June 1937.

⁴¹Glace Bay Gazette, 31 May, 12 June 1937. Paul MacEwan, in his account of the Glace Bay Labour Party, claims "The new party was greeted with enthusiasm ... by all the local opponents of the Grits and the Tories except the Communists". MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 189.

⁴²Glace Bay Gazette, 25, 26 June 1937.

⁴³Sydney Post-Record, 18 June 1937.

⁴⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 14 December 1935.

⁴⁵W. T. Mercer Papers, MG 9, 28, Beaton Institute.

present owners of our means of life" should end, and made specific demands for such reforms as unemployment insurance, public works to end unemployment, and improvements to the minimum wage law.⁴⁶ There was nothing in all of this to which the CCF of the period would have objected, except the well publicized association of CP members with the campaign. In the industrial seats in Cape Breton the Liberal and Conservative candidates mainly sought in their speeches to claim the credit for the new Trade Union Act. Harrington, the leader of the Conservative Party, tried desperately to save his Sydney seat at the end of the campaign, and made a radio speech claiming there was an "unholy tie" between the Liberals and the Dosco corporation, and that the company had timed its wage increase for the steelworkers to hurt his election chances.⁴⁷ This did him little good; the Liberals came in with an increased majority, and Harrington lost his own seat.⁴⁸

Mercer did remarkably well after a campaign of only a few weeks, coming second to the Liberal candidate, but

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Sydney Post-Record, 26 June 1937; Glace Bay Gazette, 26, 28 June 1937.

⁴⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 30 June 1937.

well ahead of the third place Conservative.⁴⁹ This result was so encouraging that the Glace Bay Labour Party decided to remain in existence, to work to elect candidates to political office who would represent workers' interests. Dissatisfaction with the traditional political parties remained very intense among the miners. The policies of the CP had become less radical, but little improvement had occurred in the conditions that prompted support from the miners for the communists' earlier more extreme rhetoric. The Antigonish Co-operative Movement also had achieved relatively little in transforming the living conditions of the workers and their families. Unemployment remained high, wages were still very low, and in 1938 the miners became highly alarmed at the prospect of increased unemployment when the coal company began to implement plans for greater mechanization of the mines. An attempt to install new electrical loading machinery in one newly opened shaft led to a lengthy lockout of 89 men when the miners refused to operate the machines. The men in the other locals supported the locked out miners financially for many months, until the company was forced to abandon these plans.⁵⁰ The support given by the provincial

⁴⁹The official returns were Currie (Liberal) 4172, Kerr (Conservative) 2832, Mercer (Labour) 3396. Glace Bay Gazette, 7 July 1937.

⁵⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 9 June 1938. This incident, and the whole question of mechanization, is treated at length in Chapter Six.

government to mechanization gave added impetus to the miners' desire for representation in the legislature.

These were the issues concerning the miners when the District 26 convention was held in August 1938. A number of resolutions calling for the UMW to support a "farmer-labour" party had been sent in by the Glace Bay Labour Party, and from union locals.⁵¹ Among these was a resolution, put forward by James Ling of No. 12 Local in New Waterford, calling for affiliation of the UMW with the CCF. The argument advanced for the CCF was that united labour representation was needed in federal as well as provincial politics. The UMW delegates decided to hold a special sitting on this and other proposals, to which delegations of the steel workers, fishermen, co-operatives and others were invited.⁵² At this special convention sitting the resolution to affiliate to the CCF was adopted almost unanimously.⁵³ The one opposing vote came from Robert Stewart, former secretary of the AMW, and it has been claimed that his vote is evidence of CP opposition to the affiliation.⁵⁴ Stewart, however, had resigned from the CP along with McLachlan in 1936, and there were party members at the convention who did vote for the

⁵¹Sydney Post-Record, 11 August 1938.

⁵²Glace Bay Gazette, 11 August 1938.

⁵³ Glace Bay Gazette, 16 August 1938.

⁵⁴See White, "Left Wing Politics," p. 127.

affiliation.⁵⁵ A few years later the CP was to fight hard against union affiliations to the CCF, but not in 1938. The first reaction of CCF National Secretary David Lewis, in fact, was to fear that the affiliation decision was part of a plan by the Communist Party to infiltrate the CCF.⁵⁶ There is no evidence, however, that the CP, any more than the CCF leadership, had any advance knowledge that the resolution would be put forward at the district convention, and if they were behind it, this was a colossal blunder. It certainly is also clear, however, that the miners who proposed the resolution, and the majority of those voting for it, did not regard the CCF affiliation as a repudiation of the CP. The decision was in many respects the natural culmination of the communist campaign for the united front. The Ling brothers of New Waterford, who framed the resolution, were never CP members, but they were union militants who had long worked closely with the CP. Tom Ling had been the principal leader of the AMW in New Waterford. The wording of the affiliation resolution echoes this long contact with the communists rather than any direct CCF influence. It moved

⁵⁵Evidence for a CP presence at the convention was given by the passage of a resolution supporting the Loyalist cause in Spain. Glace Bay Gazette, 23 August 1938. Communists were not alone in supporting the struggle against Franco, but were usually the initiators of solidarity action on this issue, a sensitive issue in Cape Breton, given the right-wing Catholic support for Franco.

⁵⁶David Lewis, The Good Fight (Toronto, 1981), p. 153.

"that the district as a whole will affiliate with the CCF," but referred to "a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess," and declared that "the working class must organize ... for the purpose of acquiring the power of government, in order that this power may be converted from an instrument of oppression into an instrument for the overthrow of special privilege for the owning class." A convention should be held of all "organizations and groups who were sincerely interested in the bettering of conditions for the working class ... for consolidating the different groups into one United Front for Political Action."⁵⁷ There was no specific mention of the Communist Party.

Both the union militants and the district officers, so often opposed on issues, supported this resolution, and fervour for the CCF soon spread throughout the mining towns and among the steel workers in Sydney. M.A. MacKenzie in the Steelworker editorialized:

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

⁵⁷Resolution quoted in Stephen MacPherson to D. Lewis, n.d., CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 27, NAC.

⁵⁸Steelworker, 20 August 1938.

This enthusiasm for the CCF did not mean that the majority of the militants and radicals had now developed a less radical outlook on politics. Local politics had indeed become less radical, but this was result of the alteration of CP policy in 1936. Support for the CCF, in 1938, from Cape Breton radicals who had often followed communist leadership is not surprising when the reaction of the Communist Party itself to the UMW affiliation with the CCF is examined. The party's national leader, Tim Buck, in a Toronto speech, said:

The historic decision of the Nova Scotia miners is evidence of the fact that tens of thousands of trade unionists all over the country want independent working class political action. They want to unite their forces to defeat reaction on the parliamentary field. United action between the Communist Party and the CCF remains one of the vital needs of the labor movement.⁵⁹

John C. Mortimer, a prominent member of the CP in Nova Scotia at this time, welcomed the affiliation and claimed his main criticism of the CCF was its resistance to unity. "I'm expecting the UMW to infuse new blood into Woodsworth's party ... to make itself felt, not merely by strengthening the movement for a united front, but by throwing the CCF more completely into the day to day struggles of the working class and all the common folk."⁶⁰ It is probable that the CP was more uneasy about the

⁵⁹Tim Buck, "Reaction is Advancing What Must Be Done," Daily Clarion, 23 August 1938.

⁶⁰Steelworker, 27 August 1938.

affiliation than is revealed by these statements, but the unity policy left the party little choice but to support the UMW decision. As is suggested by Mortimer's reference to "new blood," the CP also no doubt hoped that they could make some advance towards their aim of some form of unity with the CCF, or could have members join the CCF through the UMW. If so, the communists reckoned without the determination of the CCF leaders to prevent this, and without the assistance the UMW officers would provide these leaders in making sure communists were excluded.

National Secretary David Lewis and other CCF leaders were taken entirely by surprise by the UMW affiliation, since there was no active CCF organization in Cape Breton.⁶¹ Lewis immediately wired District 26 President D.W. Morrison inquiring "whether decision supported by rank and file and whether move sponsored by communists or other people."⁶² Within a few weeks Lewis was able to meet the UMW officers at the TLC convention held in Niagara Falls, and was reassured that it did not seem likely the CP had planned the affiliation and that it should be possible to make sure the communists were kept out of any

⁶¹ Lewis, The Good Fight, p. 153.

⁶²Telegram, D. Lewis to D.W. Morrison, CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 195, NAC.

participation in the CCF in Cape Breton.⁶³ If this could be done it was obvious that the District 26 affiliation would provide a wonderful opportunity for the CCF, not only to gain a base in Nova Scotia, but also to develop much closer relations with the union movement throughout Canada. The UMW at this time was the largest and most powerful union in North America, and the leading force in the CIO in both Canada and the United States.

The CCF, however, had never previously had the direct affiliation of a union, and its constitution had no provisions that covered this. The major concern, as David Lewis saw the problem, remained the danger of communist infiltration if party members were elected by union locals to represent them at CCF conferences or other meetings. Cape Breton miners in particular, given their radical outlook, might well be influenced by the CP united front line. To avert this, and to assist in setting up the CCF organization in Nova Scotia, Lewis and CCF MP Angus MacInnis made an organizing trip to the area in October. This visit was a great success, with many well attended meetings in the mining towns.⁶⁴ CCF clubs were set up with constitutions specifically excluding any person who was a

⁶³David Lewis and Angus MacInnis, "Report of Organizing Tour Through Nova Scotia and New Brunswick," n.d., John L. MacKinnon Papers, MG 19-11, Beaton Institute, Sydney.

⁶⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17 October 1938.

"member or active supporter of any other political party."⁶⁵ The Glace Bay Labour Party was dissolved, despite the protests of its communist members, and was then reactivated as a CCF club excluding them.⁶⁶ Lewis also rapidly drafted national by-laws regarding union affiliations that excluded communists for eligibility as union delegates to CCF conventions.⁶⁷ Lewis's concern to prevent the election of communist delegates was still evident several months later when the first Nova Scotia provincial convention was being organized. He wrote suggesting the UMW be represented by a block delegation appointed by the district executive rather than by delegates elected by the locals, advancing the astonishing argument that this would be "more democratic."⁶⁸ The UMW executive replied that this procedure would not be acceptable to the miners, and arranged that the locals elect delegates but that all union delegates must also be

⁶⁵Glace Bay Central CCF Club Constitution, John L. MacKinnon Papers, MG 19-11, Beaton Institute.

⁶⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 17 October 1938.

⁶⁷Lewis wrote in his report: "It was clearly impossible to consult the members of the National Council [of the CCF] as to these provisions without delaying the affiliation for two or three months, a delay which could have proved fatal. The delegation [Lewis and MacInnis], therefore, took the responsibility of presenting them to the UMW on behalf of the National Council in the conviction that they are in complete accord with CCF policy". Lewis and MacInnis, "Report of Organizing Tour".

⁶⁸D. Lewis to D.W. Morrison, 22 April 1939, CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 28, NAC.

members of a CCF club.⁶⁹ After all these precautions, one or two communists were elected as delegates to the early CCF conventions, but were refused entry.⁷⁰ With these well planned actions and the co-operation of the UMW officers, Lewis was able to arrange that an effective CCF organization was set up in Cape Breton, with communists excluded from all participation, although the CP continued to appeal for unity and pledged support to CCF candidates in elections.⁷¹ Given the national policy of unity, local CP members could only make muted protests against the CCF rejection of their appeals. But whether the communists realized it or not, the affiliation of the UMW with the CCF meant that the CP was finished as a significant force in electoral politics in Cape Breton. When the Communist Party ran candidates against the CCF after the Second World War, they received a negligible vote.⁷²

Political enthusiasm for the CCF grew in the area through 1939, fueled by visits from prominent CCF leaders. In February Harold Winch of British Columbia addressed

⁶⁹A.A. MacKay to D. Lewis, 29 April 1939, CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 28, NAC.

⁷⁰H.I.S. Borgford to D. Lewis, 17 August 1939, CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 27, NAC.

⁷¹William Findlay to H.I.S. Borgford, 5 June 1939, CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 27, NAC.

⁷²In 1945 Jim Madden, running for the Labour Progressive Party, got only 854 votes. Sydney Post-Record, 12 June 1945.

meetings in Glace Bay, and David Lewis and party leader J. S. Woodsworth attended the first provincial convention of the Nova Scotia CCF, held in Sydney in May.⁷³ At this convention, UMW district officers D. W. Morrison, Silby Barrett, and A. A. MacKay were all elected to the provincial executive of the CCF.⁷⁴ They, along with other relatively right-wing CCFers, certainly were in a dominant position in the provincial party compared to more radical miners, and over the long term the connection with the CCF was to strengthen the right in the union. But the position in Cape Breton in this period should not be equated with many later union affiliations to the CCF or New Democratic Party, decisions arrived at by union bureaucrats and meaning relatively little to the rank-and-file union members. The District 26 affiliation had been initiated by a union local, it had met with no opposition and thus seemed to indicate unprecedented and inspiring political unity, and the overwhelming majority of UMW members in Cape Breton were keenly supportive of the CCF in its first years. The party obtained considerable funding from the UMW, and arrangements were made for a levy on union members through the dues check-off for the CCF. But UMW members provided much more than money. All the locals in Cape Breton were to supply the CCF with active election

⁷³ Glace Bay Gazette, 20 February, 26 May 1939.

⁷⁴ MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 199.

campaign workers, and the CCF electioneering at the grass roots began months before an election was formally called.

In August a CCF convention was held to nominate a Cape Breton candidate for the next federal election. After William Mercer declined the nomination, Clarie Gillis was chosen from a large group of aspirants.⁷⁵ Before the federal Parliament was dissolved, however, the CCF gained its first Cape Breton electoral victory. Michael Dwyer, the Minister of Mines and Labour in the provincial cabinet, and MLA for New Waterford, resigned in order to become president of Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company, a Dosco subsidiary. In a December 1939 by-election, CCF candidate Douglas MacDonald, the UMW District Board Member for the New Waterford sub-district, was victorious. This was a startling transformation of the voting patterns in New Waterford. In the 1933 election, Labour candidate Tom Ling had received only a small vote, and in 1935 J.B. McLachlan also did badly in New Waterford.⁷⁶ In the provincial election of 1937 no Labour candidate had contested New Waterford, and it appears few people before

⁷⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 7 August 1939.

⁷⁶ Ling received 587 votes, while the Conservative candidate got 2969 and the Liberal, Michael Dwyer, got 3263. Glace Bay Gazette, 23 August 1933. The New Waterford results in 1935 were: D.J. Hartigan (Liberal)- 2836; Finlay MacDonald (Conservative) 634; J.B. McLachlan (Communist) 403; D.W. Morrison (Reconstruction) 674. Glace Bay Gazette, 15 October 1935.

the 1939 by-election thought Douglas MacDonald had any real chance, particularly since no Conservative candidate was nominated.⁷⁷ However, the CCF was helped by a split in the Liberal ranks, when a candidate who failed to get the Liberal nomination ran as an "Independent Liberal."⁷⁸ During the campaign the official Liberal attack was directed mainly against the CCF, and, in this early wartime election, relied primarily on red scare tactics. Liberal advertisements claimed the CCF was closely aligned with the Communist Party. It was asked how "any Christian" could vote CCF "after the wanton invasion of peaceful little Finland by the brutal hordes of Communist Russia," and stated that "It is an undisputed fact that several avowed Communists are now actively engaged, on public platforms and otherwise, in support of the CCF candidate in this election."⁷⁹ A few years earlier these would have been sure-fire tactics, but in 1939, probably to his own surprise, Douglas MacDonald was elected.⁸⁰

This election of a CCF candidate by the Catholic voters of New Waterford was remarkable, when it is

⁷⁷MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 203.

⁷⁸Glace Bay Gazette, December 4 1939. The official Liberal was J.L. MacKinnon, and the Independent was Francis Stephenson.

⁷⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 4 December 1939.

⁸⁰MacDonald received 3093 votes, the official Liberal 2614, and the Independent 1204. Glace Bay Gazette, 6 December 1939.

remembered that this was a time during which prominent members of the Catholic hierarchy in Quebec continued to make well publicized speeches condemning the CCF. In December 1938 the Glace Bay Gazette featured an account of a speech by Cardinal Villeneuve in Montreal in which he said the CCF's economic platform was "practically the same as Communism," based on a "materialist conception of social order," and "not acceptable" to the Catholic Church.⁸¹ But Catholics in Cape Breton were getting mixed signals on the CCF. Two weeks before Cardinal Villeneuve's statement Dr. George H. Derry, a prominent American Catholic educator and a Papal Knight, spoke to youth meetings in Glace Bay and Sydney arranged by the Knights of Columbus. His theme was the danger of communism, as shown by events in Spain and elsewhere, and the communist influence in American and Canadian unions. However, referring to the CCF in Cape Breton, he "recommended it as a means of fighting Communism. He advocated the students get into the movement and become leaders."⁸² It was not until 1940, however, that Bishop Morrison of Antigonish wrote a letter declaring that Catholics were free to support the CCF.⁸³

⁸¹Glace Bay Gazette, 1 December 1939.

⁸²Glace Bay Gazette, 17 November 1938.

⁸³Bishop Morrison letter on CCF, 19 February 1940, St. Joseph's Parish Papers, MG 13, 116 (6), Beaton Institute.

But above all, for many local Catholics, it seems to have been the Church sanctioned co-operative movement that transformed their political outlook. The Antigonish Movement, by the late 1930s, had become world famous as a successful method of self-help for the poor, and of ideologically defeating communism, and had received a letter of commendation from the Pope.⁸⁴ "What happens ... amounts to a counter-revolution, a counter-revolution to communism, whose challenge to human nature is deeper than that of communism," said Dr. Coady in a speech to a 1936 congress of co-operatives.⁸⁵ By 1938 Antigonish Movement speakers were consistently referring to their "success" in combatting communism.⁸⁶ The leaders of the movement were no doubt aware that the communists still had considerable influence in the unions, for it was in 1938 that the St. FX Extension Department, for the first time, began to directly concern itself with trade unions. Evening courses were begun for local union members on the history of the labour movement and labour economics.⁸⁷ But, if generally it was felt that communist influence was under control in

⁸⁴Vatican letter to Bishop Morrison, 8 March 1938, St. Joseph's Parish Papers, MG 13, 116 (6), Beaton Institute; See also Glace Bay Gazette, 21 April 1938.

⁸⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 20 August 1936.

⁸⁶See A.S. MacIntyre speech, Antigonish, Glace Bay Gazette, 10 August 1938.

⁸⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 18, 21 November 1938.

Cape Breton, the co-operative movement and other methods that had been used in combatting it had brought many Catholics to the point where the CCF seemed fully acceptable. It also seems that New Waterford, with the menace of communism no longer so evident, had begun to move in a more militant direction in union affairs at about this time. In pithead votes over many years, the Glace Bay miners had invariably voted against, and the New Waterford men for accepting contracts recommended by the District Executive. By the early war years this had changed, however, and the New Waterford men were to be as militant as those in Glace Bay during the 1941 slowdown. With these changes in Catholic thinking and in the outlook of New Waterford miners, the election of Douglas MacDonald in 1939 is not so surprising.⁸⁸

Inspired by this victory, CCF activists conducted a very vigorous campaign for Clarie Gillis during the federal election in early 1940. Gillis's opponents did not attempt to use the anti-communist rhetoric which had failed in New Waterford. The local Liberal Party relied on the national slogans that an experienced government should be retained in office during wartime, which was to win

⁸⁸New Waterford was not only the first CCF seat in Nova Scotia, but the longest lasting, being held until after the change to the New Democratic Party in the 1960s.

Mackenzie King another majority.⁸⁹ The CCF campaign in Cape Breton mixed socialism with wartime patriotism, Gillis claiming that both Liberals and Conservatives "serve capitalism to the disadvantage of the workers," and there was a strong likelihood of war profiteering.⁹⁰ Party leader M. J. Coldwell, in his speech in support of Gillis, vowed the CCF was determined "to bring the war to a successful conclusion."⁹¹ The problems the CCF had faced nationally at the beginning of the war when J. S. Woodsworth clung to his pacifist principles had little impact in Cape Breton, where the miners reacted with strong patriotic reflexes to the war. For example, the Secretary of the Glace Bay CCF, John MacDonald, enlisted immediately on the outbreak of war.⁹² Clarie Gillis was an excellent wartime candidate. He was a decorated veteran of the First World War, and had long been a prominent leader of the Canadian Legion in the area.⁹³ In his union

⁸⁹See Liberal advertisement, "King and Hartigan are vital for victory," Glace Bay Gazette, 18 March 1940.

⁹⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 12 March 1940.

⁹¹Glace Bay Gazette, 11 March 1940.

⁹²Glace Bay Gazette, 11 September 1939. By contrast, Rev. H.I.S. Borgford, the Nova Scotia Provincial Secretary of the CCF in Halifax, considered resigning because of the stand the CCF National Council took in support of the war effort. See H.I.S. Borgford to D. Lewis, 17 October 1939, CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 27, NAC.

⁹³Glace Bay Gazette, 7 November 1932, 20 March 1933, 19 August 1935.

activity Gillis had a reputation as a strong critic of the policies of the union executive, but at the same time showed himself to be an opponent of the more extreme radicalism of the CP.⁹⁴ He had been particularly active in the fight against the mechanization of the mines. It also helped in the constituency as a whole that he was a Catholic, but not a figure liable to alienate Protestants by any widely publicized association with exclusively Catholic organizations such as the Knights of Columbus. On election day in March 1940 Clarie Gillis was elected M.P. for Cape Breton South by a narrow margin.⁹⁵ In Glace Bay he received a majority of more than 2000 over the incumbent Liberal, Dr. D. J. Hartigan; and he was able to reduce Hartigan's majority in Sydney to 444, and in New Waterford, Hartigan's home town, to only 300.⁹⁶ The triumphant Gillis was paraded through Glace Bay by a large crowd of exultant miners.⁹⁷

By this time communist policy had changed, and such a triumph for the CCF was probably bitter to the communists.

⁹⁴He had, for example, been for a brief time the vice-president of the breakaway AMW, but had never supported McLachlan in election campaigns.

⁹⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 27 March 1940. The final result, after the soldiers' vote was included, was: Gillis (CCF) 11582; Hartigan (Lib) 11364; Nunn (Cons) 9719. Glace Bay Gazette, 3 April 1940.

⁹⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 27 March 1940.

⁹⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 27 March 1940.

The party policy during this period of the non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union was that this was another inter-imperialist war. Local communists may well have called on workers to write the word "peace" on their ballot during this election, as Paul MacEwan claims, although it is doubtful if Cape Breton party members would have been comfortable with this tactic.⁹⁸ In any case, the CP had before this election been made illegal under wartime regulations, and there existed no open party organization in Cape Breton. Whatever they might say in 1940, the communists had spent the previous four years calling for united support for any labour candidate. For their part, the CCFers, although they would freely admit their party owed much to the Antigonish Movement in Cape Breton, would have refused to acknowledge any debt to the communists. Nonetheless, this CCF victory was in large part a belated result of the unity policy of the Communist Party.

The coal miners who sent Gillis to Parliament, however, were no doubt also acting out of their continuing deep dissatisfaction with their working conditions and wage levels. The divide between the aspirations of the rank and file and the policies adopted by the UMW district leadership was growing wider by the beginning of the war, and the communists no longer sought to moderate the

⁹⁸MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 204.

workers' criticism of union bosses in the name of unity. Despite the frequent protestations of the Cape Breton miners that their patriotic backing for the war effort was equal to that of any Canadians, the first years of the war were to be years of confrontation and intense labour strife in the coalfield.

Chapter Four

The Miners' Slowdown of 1941.

In Nova Scotia by the late 1930s the miners of UMW District 26 possessed what the steelworkers and many other workers across Canada were struggling to acquire: a well established union organization and collective bargaining rights protected by law. Yet this did not lead to a contented workforce and stable industrial relations. On the contrary, the miners appear to have been the most dissatisfied group of workers in Canada at this time, prepared to defy the provincial and federal governments and the leadership of their union. Rarely has the divergence between the militancy of the rank and file of a union and the conservative business unionism of union officers emerged so clearly as in the UMW in Cape Breton in the early years of the Second World War.

The executive officers of District 26 in this period, Silby Barrett, D.W. Morrison, A.A. MacKay, and others, had long sought to cooperate with the government of Nova Scotia, hoping to influence laws and regulations effecting the miners, and to strengthen the position of the union. One issue on which the miners, the union, the corporation and provincial politicians had long been united was that of lobbying federal authorities to maintain or increase the subventions paid on Nova Scotia coal delivered to central Canada, enabling the less efficient Maritime coal

industry to compete with cheaper imports of American coal. On this, or on efforts to improve the Workmen's Compensation Act, the union officers would be supported by the full membership. Men like Barrett and Morrison, however, followed some other policies that were totally unacceptable to the more militant spirits among the miners. Like many of their colleagues in the leadership of unions throughout the continent these officers were business unionists who accepted the permanence of the capitalist system, and saw a common interest between capital and labour in productivity and prosperity. In the right conditions they were capable of a degree of militancy in pursuing wage concessions and, above all, union recognition and union security, but they believed that union officials must exert discipline over the workers in order to preserve the terms of contracts and repress direct action by the rank and file. The officers could point to the UMW policy, enshrined in its constitution, of always honouring contracts, a policy which had frequently brought the officers into alliance with the company and government against the union membership. At the time of the beginning of the war the UMW District officers were especially anxious to display their moderation to government in order to promote the consolidation and expansion of the new industrial union movement with which they were associated. In part what

they were attempting was to change the reputation of industrial unionism; previously, industrial unionism had been regarded on all sides as having radical, even revolutionary potential. The top leaders of the CIO, John L. Lewis, Sidney Hillman, Philip Murray, and others, upheld the view that industrial unionism could be disciplined to follow the practices of moderate business unionism as developed by Samuel Gompers and the leaders of the craft unions of the AFL. Essentially they held out to government and industry the promise of labour peace in return for union recognition. Even big business, if guided by enlightened self interest, it was argued, should see that more stable and peaceful labour-management relations, and hence higher and uninterrupted production, would result from recognizing unions and engaging in orderly collective bargaining. Responsible union leaders would then be able to control the militancy of workers, and both workers and business would thereby prosper.

Canadian CIO leaders in this period were envious of the legal system of industrial relations that had been established by the federal government in the United States and were seeking similar concessions from the federal and provincial governments. Also by 1939-40 the essentially conservative union leaders were worried by the strength of the left forces in the emerging CIO unions. Men such as Charles Millard and Silby Barrett were disturbed by the

fact that a large proportion of the active organizers in the emerging CIO unions were communists or militants prepared to work closely with the CP. After the CIO unions were expelled from the TLC in 1939, there seemed a danger that radicals would take over the movement. This fear provided much of the motivation for the 1940 merger of the Canadian CIO unions with Aaron Mosher's All Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL) to form the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL). This ensured that older and conservatively led unions like the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees, or the UMW would be in the majority. Two of the six man CCL executive were from the UMW, Silby Barrett of District 26 and Pat Conroy of District 18, who was to become CCL Secretary-Treasurer.

The District 26 officers at the beginning of the war therefore wished to impress governments with the moderation of their policies, and the responsibility with which they would act during the national emergency. Government and business alike could achieve much more by cooperating with them, they argued. The UMW scored one great success following this policy in the early war years, the organization of the miners in Minto, New Brunswick. At Minto a major UMW strike in 1937-1938 had failed to win union recognition, and a conciliation board

had recommended against the UMW.¹ In July 1941, however, the UMW finally forced the Minto Coal Company, the largest coal company in the area, to sign a contract.² That same month the report of a commissioner appointed by the government to study the lack of coal productivity in Minto was sent to the federal Minister of Labour, Norman McLarty. The commissioner, Justice M. B. Archibald of the Nova Scotia Supreme Court, recommended as a first priority that:

The organization of the miners throughout the entire area should be continued and made as complete as possible, and in this organization the employees should have the encouragement of the operators. I am satisfied that the miners if permitted to organize and enjoy the benefits of collective bargaining and agreements with respect to working conditions would co-operate with the operators in producing the maximum amount of coal that is possible under present conditions.³

This reasoning is exactly what the UMW leaders wanted to impress upon the authorities. However, in the long organized Cape Breton sub-districts of the union, the policy of war-time cooperation with the government and careful avoidance of strikes came into direct conflict

¹See Allan Seager, "Minto New Brunswick: A Study in Class Relations Between the Wars," Labour/Le Travailleur, 5 (1980), pp. 81-132.

²Glace Bay Gazette, 14 July 1941.

³"Report of Commissioner on Inquiry into Causes of Lack of Capacity Coal Production in Minto-Chipman District, N.B.," Labour Gazette, 41 (September 1941), pp. 1073-1084.

with the long-frustrated aim of the coal miners to recover the wage reductions imposed on them during the 1920s and the early years of the depression. Not until 1943 did the wages of coal miners across Canada equal 1921 levels, and the wage rates in Nova Scotia remained substantially below those of miners in Alberta and British Columbia.⁴ Although almost all of the UMW miners of Nova Scotia worked for subsidiary companies of Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation (Dosco), the miners of Dosco's subsidiaries in Sydney Mines (Old Sydney Collieries Ltd.) and Pictou County (Acadia Mines Ltd.) had lower wage rates than did the Dominion Coal Company (Domco) mines in Glace Bay, New Waterford and Springhill.⁵ This inequity dated from the early 1930s, when Dosco had allowed Old Sydney and Acadia to go into receivership, and additional wage cuts had been forced upon the miners. When Dosco took over these companies again in 1938, it refused to agree to corporation wide contracts or equal wage rates for its miners throughout the province.

For the leaders of District 26 to have had any realistic hope of suppressing the militant actions of the

⁴Labour Gazette, "Wage Rates and Hours of Labour in Canada, 1944," Supplement, October 1946, Table II, p.9; "Numbers and Earnings of Coal Miners in Canada, 1921-1938," Appendix C, Supplement, March 1940, p. 131.

⁵Both Acadia Mines and Old Sydney were part of Dosco subsidiary Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company. Up to 1939 the Old Sydney mines were generally referred to as "Scotia" mines.

miners, some substantial increase in wages or benefits would have had to be made by Dosco, but the corporation was prepared to make no concessions it could avoid. Dosco advertised itself as "Canada's Largest Industry" with products that were "more nearly 100% Canadian than any similar products available anywhere," and the "Only Producer of Steel and Steel Products in Canada Wholly Self-Sustained Within the Empire,"⁶ but its war-time pride in being Canadian did not lead to generosity to its workers. In its Sydney and Trenton steel plants, at its Peck Rolling Mills at Montreal, and at its Halifax Shipyards, as well as in its Domco mines, Dosco was the adversary of Canadian workers in war-time strikes throughout the country. It tenaciously resisted the establishment of unions in its unorganized subsidiaries and fought against any wage increases where it faced organized workers. In its mines, Dosco appears to have been determined to hold on to any short term profits it could make while the expanded wartime coal market lasted.

Dosco's intransigence prompted and sustained militancy on the part of the miners. For Canadian labour in general the 1938-40 period was one of few industrial disputes. Stuart Jamieson points out that the war years were the first time for decades that the pattern of labour strife in Canada diverged from that in the United States,

⁶Globe and Mail, 14 July 1941.

and argues that this was a "delayed response," as the great wave of industrial unionization that occurred in the United States in the late 1930s came to Canada in the middle years of the war. Jamieson notes that the number and duration of industrial disputes was high in 1937, fell to a low level through the 1938-1940 period, gradually mounted again in 1941 and 1942, and reached a peak in 1943.⁷ But in Nova Scotia throughout 1939 and 1940 strikes increased, amounting to nearly half of all the Canadian strike activity during those years.⁸ Although a few of these strikes involved the newly organized steel workers in Sydney and Trenton, and the fish plant workers at Lockeport, locked out by their employers in 1939, the great majority were "outlaw" or "illegal" strikes of the

⁷Stuart Jamieson, Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900 - 66 (Ottawa 1976), pp. 277-8; Douglas Cruikshank and Gregory S. Kealey, "Strikes in Canada, 1891-1950," Labour/Le Travail, 20 (1987), pp. 85-145.

⁸Nova Scotia had 36.1 per cent of all strikes in Canada in 1939, 71.9 per cent of the workers involved in strikes and 43.4 per cent of the time lost through strikes. Labour Gazette, 40 (February 1940), Table V, "Strikes and Lockouts in Canada in 1939 by Province." In 1940 Nova Scotia had 42 per cent of strikes, 51.3 per cent of the workers involved, and 24.9 per cent of time lost through strikes across the country. Labour Gazette, 41 (February 1941), Table V, "Strikes and Lockouts in Canada in 1940 by Province." Cruikshank and Kealey, "Strikes in Canada," pp. 136-8, estimate strikes in the national coal industry at 46 in 1937, 26 in 1938, 53 in 1939, and 66 in 1940, and show Nova Scotia provincial totals as 50 strikes in 1937, 31 in 1938, 49 in 1939, and 79 in 1940, while also showing that Alberta and British Columbia, the other areas of extensive coal mining, had few strikes during 1939 and 1940.

miners. The Labour Gazette listed 39 miners' strikes in Nova Scotia in 1939 and 55 in 1940.⁹

These were all short stoppages at individual mines, spontaneous actions by the miners or called by meetings of the union local. All were referred to as "illegal" strikes for several reasons: none complied with the legal strike requirements in the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act; the strikes were not authorized by the UMW executive and contravened the well proclaimed UMW policy of abiding faithfully by the terms of its contracts; and the UMW contracts with Dosco subsidiaries all contained clauses outlawing any work stoppage for any grievance during the life of the contract. When, as was frequently the case, long negotiations for a new contract took place after the end of a contract period, the UMW officials invariably agreed that the miners would work under the terms of the old contract in the interim. Domco and the other Dosco companies consistently refused any direct negotiations of grievances with miners on "illegal" stoppages of work. From 1938, the UMW and Domco had agreed to submit grievances that could not be resolved between local union

⁹Labour Gazette 39, p. xiii; Labour Gazette, 40, p. xiii. During 1940 government authorities frequently complained of a total of 211 illegal miners' strikes in District 26 in the two and one-half years preceding November 1939. It is not clear how this figure was derived. It was advanced in Judge MacArthur's report and then constantly repeated in the rhetoric of politicians attacking illegal strikes.

mine committees and management to a single "Umpire," whose decision would be binding. The man who the company and union officials had agreed upon to serve as Umpire was John W. MacLeod, a former District 26 president and then company official for many years. Neither the umpire system nor the decisions handed down by MacLeod were satisfactory to the rank-and-file miners, and by 1939 grievances were leading to strikes.

The varied grievances involved in these strikes seemed to contemporary authorities to show no pattern other than a militant predisposition of the miners to stop work on any provocation. In May and June 1939 Springhill and No.11 Glace Bay miners both struck in solidarity with men dismissed by the company after serving jail sentences for liquor offenses. Miners at Florence struck on a grievance concerning rates for working a new system; at Sydney Mines' Princess mine a dispute concerned the demand of a few men for contract rates rather than daily pay; at No 16 in New Waterford the walkout concerned the rate for some longwall men; at 1B mine in Dominion a stoppage of several days occurred over the sale of a company house. The men of No.12 at New Waterford struck over the dismissal of a miner who had a fist fight with a company official, and the strike ended only when the official was charged with assault. A similar issue at the Albion Mine in Stellarton, the dismissal of a man for "inefficiency,"

brought all four Pictou County mines to a standstill, and the Stellarton miners even threatened to bring out the maintenance and pump men.¹⁰

These strikes indicate the widespread dissatisfaction of the miners with company policies and with the established grievance procedures. Most grievances involved a direct struggle between the miners and company officials for control of the work process in the pits. But while issues of control were the direct cause of most of these "illegal" strikes, they would have undoubtedly been much less frequent had the miners felt they were receiving fair or adequate wages from the hated Dosco corporation. Underlying all this wildcat strike activity was the frustration of the men at the failure of union efforts to increase substantially the basic wage rates, or even to reach the wage level that existed before the wage cuts the miners had been forced to accept in 1932.¹¹ In the 1937 contract there was a six per cent increase for the contract miners and most of the daily paid (datal) men, leaving wages still below the 1931 rates. The Domco

¹⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 9 May, 3 June 1939; 24 May, 8, 11, 18 July 1939; 28, 31 July 1939; 27 July, 2 August 1939.

¹¹These wage reductions and the inability of the UMW to defeat them had played an important part in bringing about the creation of the rival AMW in 1932. See Michael Earle, "The Rise and Fall of a 'Red' Union: The Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia -- 1932-1936," M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1984.

miners, in a pit head referendum, voted by a narrow margin to accept this two year contract, although there was considerable opposition to it led by the former AMW leadership. The Glace Bay miners voted heavily against the contract, but it was carried by the votes of the miners of New Waterford and Springhill.¹² It was under this unsatisfactory 1937 contract, which formally ended on 1 February 1939, that the miners were still working in 1939 and most of 1940. In the view of the militant miners the officers were taking a weak line in negotiations with the company. In August 1939, just as war was breaking out in Europe, a contract including no wage increases was voted down by the miners.¹³ No strike action was proposed by the union executive, which declared it would re-enter negotiations with the company. The anger of the militants

¹²Glace Bay Gazette, 8 March, 1, 3 April 1937. Glace Bay sub-district voted 1973 for, 2891 against; New Waterford 1472 for, 551 against; and Springhill 941 for, 213 against. The total was 4386 for, 3655 against. The miners of Pictou and Sydney mines, as well as other UMW men who did not work for Domco, did not have a vote on this referendum. This was the usual breakdown of miners' votes throughout the 1930s and early 1940s. Glace Bay invariably had a majority against accepting contracts and for left wing candidates in union elections, while New Waterford and Springhill usually took less militant positions. A very significant change in the 1939-1941 period was to be the adoption of a more militant line by the New Waterford men. For details of District 26 votes on contracts, see Appendix A.

¹³Sydney Post-Record, 23 August 1939; Glace Bay Gazette, 23 August 1939. The vote was 3781 votes against, 2805 for acceptance, the heavy Glace Bay vote this time swamping smaller majorities for acceptance in New Waterford and Springhill.

was shown by a two day general strike at most of the mines in both Glace Bay and New Waterford, purportedly in solidarity with strikes on local grievances going on at Caledonia mine and No.11. The district executive as well as the company denounced this "outlaw" strike. The miners returned to work on the promise from the union and the provincial government authorities of a general inquiry into grievance procedures; but as the Glace Bay and New Waterford men resumed work, the miners at Florence mine came out on strike on a local grievance.¹⁴

Early in September the UMW officers of both Canadian mining areas, District 26 and District 18, met with the federal Minister of Labour and promised full co-operation in the war effort.¹⁵ However, the beginning of the war added a cause for additional work stoppages because of the refusal of the miners to go into the pits with "enemy aliens." There was still considerable unemployment in the mining area in 1940, and many of the miners adopted the view that Italians or other "aliens" should not have work while "native born" young men were unemployed.¹⁶ These stoppages seem to have had little direct connection with

¹⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 24, 28, 29, 30, 31 August 1939.

¹⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 15 September 1939.

¹⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 20 May, 12, 13 June, 1, 3 July, 2, 3 August 1940. Approximately 100 Italian miners at Dominion were out of work for over a year, although both right and left union leaders called on the miners to allow them to work.

the miners' militancy on other issues,¹⁷ but they did add to the number of strikes, which quickly became a matter of concern to provincial and federal governments. After a strike at Sydney Mines in October 1939, the new provincial Minister of Mines and Labour, L.D. Currie, established a formal inquiry, conducted by Judge Neil R. MacArthur.¹⁸ In his report MacArthur deplored the frequent illegal strikes in the mines, which he declared were brought about by small groups of men who "regard with no sense of responsibility the resultant loss of earnings occasioned to their fellow workmen." Praising the UMW district and international organization, he pointed out that "the advocacy of illegal strikes and tie-ups is contrary to the established policy of the union":

"Pit action," as it is sometimes called, and collective bargaining through the avenue of negotiation, cannot both survive side by side. One is an orderly system, the other in the end destructive. One demands that Labour function through the voice of its elected officers and Local Unions, the other ignores and disregards constituted authority.... I urge, in the interests of the Union and its membership, a one hundred per cent loyalty to your elected officers while they hold office. It is their duty and responsibility, not only to promote the

¹⁷It is perhaps relevant that 1B mine, which was most disrupted by the miners' refusal to work with the local Italians, was to be the weakest Glace Bay local in terms of the miners' support for the slowdown in 1941.

¹⁸Currie, the MLA for Glace Bay, had become Minister of Mines and Labour early in 1939 (Glace Bay Gazette, 7 February 1939), replacing Michael Dwyer, who had resigned to become President of Dosco's subsidiary Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company when it came out of receivership.

interests and protect the rights of the membership generally, but also to safeguard the constitution, principles and established policies of the Union. This responsibility may, and at times does, involve the distasteful task of using drastic measures in order to keep the "family home" in order. Nevertheless, when conditions require it, this duty and responsibility should be fearlessly faced.¹⁹

The MacArthur report was referred to favorably in all the conciliation proceedings in the Nova Scotian coal industry in the following year, and the union officers remained anxious to display their co-operative attitude to the government. In December the UMW executive circulated a letter to all locals warning against "petty strikes" and threatening union disciplinary action against violations of contracts and the UMW constitution, and the principal message in President D.W. Morrison's annual New Year message was that the UMW was now on a "wartime responsibility basis," pledged to avoid disruptions of war production as a patriotic duty.²⁰

By this point the Domco miners had been working for almost a year under the expired 1937 contract, and early in January a four party conference took place in Glace Bay

¹⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 27 November 1939, gives a summary of the report. Lengthy passages were quoted in "Report of Board in Dispute between the Acadia Coal Company, Limited, and its Employees" and "Report of Board in Dispute between the Old Sydney Collieries, Limited, and its Employees," Labour Gazette, 40(August 1940), pp. 768-78. Similar remarks to MacArthur's were made by Judge J.K. Crowell in an inquiry into a strike at Springhill. Glace Bay Gazette, 21 November 1939.

²⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 22, 30 December 1939.

between representatives of the UMW, Domco, and the provincial and federal Labour Departments. The result was a joint application by the UMW and Domco for a federal conciliation board.²¹ When some UMW locals passed resolutions of no confidence in the district executive and opposed the conciliation board, President Morrison responded that particularly in wartime it was necessary to follow legal procedures, that the executive had rejected a company proposal for binding arbitration, and that the UMW would have an excellent representative on the board, Professor F.R. Scott of Montreal, well recommended by the CCF. Morrison further stated that at the recent International UMW convention he had discussed the situation with President John L. Lewis, who was very critical of the illegal strikes. Lewis had "said that the UMW was a business concern and had to carry out its operations and contracts on business lines."²²

The conciliation board was chaired by Justice C.P. McTague of the Ontario Supreme Court, who was appointed by

²¹Glace Bay Gazette, 5, 23 January 1940.

²²Glace Bay Gazette, 5, 7 February 1940. Lewis was, in his leadership of the American UMW, entering perhaps his most militant period, when he broke with Roosevelt and the Democratic administration and the CIO leaders who continued full co-operation with the government, and led massive strikes that forced the equalization of the rates paid miners in the Southern and Northern coalfields and the union organization of the "captive" coal mines owned by the steel corporations. His policies with regard to District 26, however, were very different, since he constantly supported moderation throughout this period.

the federal government to head most of the important conciliation proceedings during the early war years. The Domco representative was businessman Ralph Bell of Halifax, while Frank Scott represented the UMW. The UMW argued for a fifteen per cent rate increase on the grounds of the increasing cost of living in wartime, while Domco maintained it was financially unable to pay any additional wages.²³ The report of the board, released in late March, was unanimous. It recommended minor pay increases ranging from three to 19 cents a day, retroactive to February 1939, for the lowest paid datal men, and nothing for the contract miners except for a few of the longwall men at Springhill. It also recommended that the company write off any arrears of rent and coal payments owed by miners as of February 1940 and the report called for a tribunal to be set up in advance to arbitrate if a new contract was not negotiated 15 January 1941. The report also criticized the custom of referring wage contracts to a referendum of the miners:

Such procedure is no longer effective in the same Union in the United States. It definitely imposes an almost unbearable burden on the Executive. The referendum frequently is not a genuine expression on the merits of the contract but tends to be one of want of confidence in the union executives who have negotiated it. We do not put our views in the form of any recommendation but merely throw out the suggestion that it is in the interests of the

²³Glace Bay Gazette, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27 February 1940.

Union as a whole that these matters should be considered and within the Union itself rectified in the interests of efficiency and strength.²⁴

Since it seemed unlikely the miners would accept this poor offer, UMW President Morrison issued a statement that negotiations would be conducted with Scotia and Acadia coal companies seeking a uniform rate for all miners, and a referendum on the Domco recommendations would be delayed until the miners of Pictou County and Sydney Mines could vote at the same time. These negotiations led to another conciliation board, chaired by Justice W.H. Harrison, which recommended no wage increases.²⁵ Soon after this the UMW executive announced that since the district convention was to be held at the end of August, the various conciliation boards' recommendations could be discussed then.²⁶ During these lengthy negotiations and conciliation proceedings the frustration of the miners had grown, as

²⁴"Report of Board in Dispute between the Dominion Coal Company, Limited, and its Employees," Labour Gazette, 40 (August 1940), 321-3.

²⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 9 April, 30 July 1940. In separate reports on the two companies, Scotia and Acadia, the majority recommended no rate increases, accepting the employer's claim that it could afford no higher wages and that productivity at these mines was lower than the Domco mines. The UMW's representative, District 26 Vice-president P.G. Muise, in a minority opinion called for equal pay with the rates offered Domco miners by the McTague board. "Report of Board in Dispute between the Acadia Coal Company, Limited, and its Employees" and "Report of Board in Dispute between the Old Sydney Collieries, Limited, and its Employees," Labour Gazette, 40 (August 1940), pp. 768-78.

²⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 6 August 1940.

was evident from the support given to mass meetings called by left-wingers in Glace Bay.²⁷ None of the executive officers was present at these meetings, and prominent on the platform were men who had been, and perhaps still were, members or sympathizers of the Communist Party.

It does not appear that much in the form of direct CP organization was maintained in Cape Breton in this period of illegality, though there is evidence that some literature was distributed.²⁸ No internments of local Communists are recorded, although there was a certain amount of RCMP investigation and harassment.²⁹ Recently published "intelligence bulletins" for the period reveal that the RCMP were highly concerned about the activities of Pat Sullivan and Charles Murray in Lockeport, and later even more alarmed when Sullivan visited Sydney and Glace Bay at the beginning of 1940. The police appear to have been blind to the much more deep-seated radicalism in Cape Breton, writing about the danger of Sullivan planning the disruption of Cape Breton industries.³⁰ A year later, with Sullivan and Murray safely interned, the police reported

²⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 27 May, 24 June 1940.

²⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 4 June 1940, reports a Canadian Legion meeting denouncing the spread of "Communistic literature."

²⁹Steelworker and Miner, 20 March, 6 April, 16 November 1940.)

³⁰Gregory S. Kealey and Reginald Whitaker, eds., R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins. The War Series, 1939-1941 (St. John's, 1989), pp. 102, 113, 158.

on the mining area:

When so many strikes throughout Canada can be traced directly to Communist manipulation it is gratifying to know that the recent strikes in the Cape Breton coal fields were the result of only the usual maladjustments as between management and labour and have been, or are being, settled without "red" influence of any sort.³¹

Throughout all the troubles in the mines through the summer of 1941, the RCMP persisted in reporting there was no communist influence in Cape Breton, although they could certainly have found such influence if they had looked more closely.³² It is difficult to say whether this was simple stupidity, or whether the police recognized that internments of left-wing miners or steelworkers would have caused even more disruption in Cape Breton industry. These reports were sent to the government, and were probably intended to provide justification for actions the police wished to take. Perhaps their blindness to CP connections in Cape Breton was therefore intentional. These connections did exist, however. While it is doubtful that anything like an underground CP organization existed in the mining areas, there didn't have to be. There was a large informal network of "left-wingers" who had worked together previously in the AMW or in CP activities, and

³¹Kealey and Whitaker, eds., R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins, 1939-1941, p. 364.

³²Kealey and Whitaker, eds., R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins, 1939-1941, pp. 374, 399.

they were the men prepared to lead the growing opposition to the policies of the District 26 executive officers.

At the same time as this internal opposition grew, government pressure on the officers to control the wildcat strikes continued. Labour Minister Currie said in the Legislature that the public would soon demand government intervention: "Every time we pick up a newspaper we find there's a new strike. Until laboring men agree to live up to contracts, I am sure that we cannot get new industries into this province." In response, CCF MLA Douglas MacDonald, speaking as a member of the UMW District Board, said that the Board would do "anything we can" to help the Labour Department.³³ The concern of the federal government was emphasized by the appearance of Labour Minister Norman McLarty at the District 26 convention in Truro at the end of August 1940. In an interview in Halifax before a private meeting with UMW officers, McLarty said he had come to Nova Scotia to look into the disputes in the coal fields, a situation that was "not healthy in wartime." In his speech to the delegates at the convention, he pointed out that there were "more sporadic strikes in Nova Scotia than in all the rest of Canada.... It is true that the most labour strife is centred in a province where Canadian Labour has its widest privileges " He also argued that "some action must be taken to remove this canker. I am

³³Glace Bay Gazette, 12 April 1940.

advised that these strikes are without the approval of your union and without disciplinary action from your union.... maintain the dignity and integrity of your union and see that these ill considered, irresponsible strikes are eliminated."³⁴ Provincial Minister Currie also warned the convention:

[The strikes] do you men more harm than the operators. It has been argued that the companies are largely responsible, but remember, gentlemen, that two wrongs do not make a right.... To a large extent I have every reason to believe your claims that the operators do not want your unions are correct, but as long as there is a trade union act in this province they will not be allowed to break your organization... [It is] the duty of the executive to discipline the men. The time has come to impose self regulation. It may be that some punitive law will have to be imposed, but so far I have refused to allow anything like that.... [The Nova Scotia Trade Union Act] is very imperfect, but it is pioneering the way.³⁵

The principal message of both ministers was directed at the officers: government support for unions was conditional on the leaders showing that they were prepared to discipline and control the workers.

³⁴Halifax Herald, 28 August 1940; Glance Bay Gazette, 29 August 1940.

³⁵Glance Bay Gazette, 29 August 1940. Presumably it was this concern with wildcat strikes that led the Nova Scotia Legislature, early in 1941, to pass an act empowering the Minister of Labour to appoint conciliators "whenever in his opinion the interests of industrial peace may require it to be done." An Act Respecting the Appointment of Commissioners of Conciliation, Statutes of Nova Scotia, 1941. This act was never used, no doubt because of the extensive involvement of federal authorities in labour relations throughout the remainder of the war.

This message impressed the officers much more than it intimidated the rank-and-file delegates. A stormy debate followed the speeches and McLarty was "engulfed in a flood of complaints" against the policies of Domco. One delegate said: "They have put us in a bad position in the eyes of the people. The statement that there is no more loyal body of men than the miners of Nova Scotia is true, but we refuse to have our patriotism exploited for the profit of the Dominion Coal Company." Although no delegate openly defended the principle of wildcat strikes, many argued that the specific strikes that had occurred were the fault of Dosco, not the workers. The executive was eventually able to get a clause opposing illegal strikes included in a vote of thanks to the speakers, but the mood of the miners was clearly far from conciliatory.³⁶

When the convention was addressed by CCF leader M.J. Coldwell, CCF National Secretary David Lewis, and MP Clarie Gillis the delegates were more warmly welcoming. All three speakers argued that the war should lead to a new order in Canada, that it could best be fought by developing social and economic justice at home, and that labour should be given a place in government as had been done in wartime Britain. Gillis was the only one of the

³⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 29 August 1940. The delegates unhappiness with the existing grievance system was made clear by the resolution passed that in a new contract the UMW would no longer agree to pay its share of the umpire's salary. Glace Bay Gazette, 6 September 1940.

CCF speakers who dealt directly with the situation of the miners, and he attempted to dress up his basic support for the position of the UMW executive in militant language:

I am not in favour of these petty strikes. When we fight it should be a good fight.... Dosco owns some twenty-three subsidiary companies across Canada. They control the industry, yet we are tackling our problems in sections.... They will close up all the openings in Nova Scotia and they won't open new ones unless they are mechanized. They will reduce the number of employed and increase their own profits.... The Corporation can use the profits of one branch to establish another and come to the workers with empty pockets.... Conciliation boards are appointed by the government in the interest of the operators. We must go into the financial structure of the corporation, but not by a conciliation board.

However, Gillis added,

the cause of the petty strikes in mines in this province was more deep rooted than any discontent among the men. Industry had advanced money to the American Federation of Labor in the effort to eliminate the Committee for Industrial Organization. The petty strike was used as a weapon to discredit and wreck the CIO.... This movement had extended to Canada and the same effort was being made against the UMW, a CIO affiliate. We should attempt a closer examination of our problems in each difficulty, closer co-operation with our executive and stricter adherence to our constitution.... The movement to wreck the unions had succeeded to a considerable extent and chaos exists in every local.... our organization is in danger.³⁷

The response of the miners to Gillis's ludicrous suggestion that their local strikes were the result of a plot laid by big business and the AFL was not recorded, but overall he and the other CCF speakers were well

³⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 30 August 1940.

applauded and the convention passed a resolution praising Gillis for the "able and consistent manner in which he has represented his constituency and the workers of Nova Scotia" in Parliament.³⁸

When the contract dispute and the McTague recommendations were discussed, however, one delegate asked why there had been no minority report from Frank Scott, and said: "I, for one, don't believe Scott is the honestest man in Canada." The explanation from Secretary-Treasurer MacKay, that Scott had wanted to oppose the board's findings but could find no way to disprove the company's claims about its financial situation, was not well received by the delegates.³⁹ The convention would not accept the McTague recommendations, and some of the more militant even called for a general strike to restore the 1921 wage rates. Delegates also refused to agree that the recommendations were sufficiently acceptable to be put to the men in a referendum, and there were strong demands

³⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 4 September 1940. Clarie Gillis was in his most left phase in this early stage of his career as MP. For example, he was the only CCF Member who supported Mrs. Dorise Neilsen's amendment to the bill introducing Unemployment Insurance that workers on strike should be eligible for benefits. (Glace Bay Gazette, 27 July 1940, 1 August 1940.)

³⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 31 August 1940. This question of Scott was particularly embarrassing to the CCF leaders and the UMW officers in their attempts at this convention to get agreement on the employment of a full-time research director, since it seems that the man they had in mind for the job was another CCF intellectual from Montreal, Eugene Forsey.

that the rates for the Scotia and Acadia miners be raised to equality with the Domco men. The convention eventually instructed the executive to enter new negotiations demanding increases. If a better offer was not received by 30 October, the International was to be approached for assistance and a strike ballot was to be sent out.⁴⁰ President Morrison and the rest of the executive made no effort to conceal the fact that they were for acceptance of the McTague recommendations. "The fight we have on our hands is not to organize a strike but to prevent one," said Vice-President Muise. Morrison wound up the convention by appealing to the men to "bend our every effort to assist Canada's war effort," and by arguing for putting the McTague recommendations to a referendum: "Is it fair that 72 men here should tie the hands of 12,000? It is not, and I will not be a party to it."⁴¹

The week following the UMW convention, the executive officers, along with Clarie Gillis and David Lewis of the CCF, were active participants at the founding convention of the CCL, having managed to get the District 26 delegates to endorse the merger with the ACCL.⁴² As

⁴⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 6, 7 September 1940.

⁴¹Glace Bay Gazette, 6, 7 September 1940.

⁴²CP supporters had tried to build some opposition to the merger with the ACCL, but given their long years of supporting unity of the labour movement, could only mount obscure criticisms of the "undemocratic" way in which this merger was being engineered. See report of John Alex

anticipated, the conservative slate, including Silby Barrett, was easily able to defeat the left wing in the election of the first CCL executive. Barrett and the other right-wing officers of District 26 had a much narrower victory in their own district elections in October. All managed to win re-election, but the voting in Glace Bay sub-district and Pictou County was heavily against President D. W. Morrison and International Board Member Barrett, and their margin in New Waterford was slim. Barrett in particular was very nearly defeated by left-winger John Alex MacDonald, who led in the election until the votes of the peripheral regions of the district came in. Close as the election was, the domination of the right on the District Board was strengthened. The radical Bob Stewart, former AMW Secretary-Treasurer and the Board Member for Glace Bay since 1938, was defeated by 25 votes in a five man contest by John Morrison of the large Phalen local.⁴³ Several factors explain why right wing officers held district power even though the left was more influential among miners in the largest sub-district, Glace Bay: the "favorite son" bias of the miners, who tended to vote for a man from their own local or sub-district; the large number of candidates splitting up the

MacDonald's remarks at miners' mass meeting, Glace Bay Gazette, 27 May 1940.

⁴³Glace Bay Gazette, 14 September, 9, 10, 16 October 1940.

vote, election to paid union office being one of the only avenues of social mobility open to ambitious miners; and the fact that incumbent officers were usually the only candidates known to miners in locals far from the centre, so that the incumbent could almost invariably count on the votes of men in the Joggins mines, in Inverness, or in Minto, New Brunswick.

With their tenure in office established for another two years, the executive officers held a referendum on the recommendations of the McTague and Harrison Conciliation Boards, disregarding the protests of union locals against this flaunting of the decision of the convention. The executive argued for acceptance of the awards since the contracts would only be applicable for a few months, until the end of January 1941, and they did offer some miners small increases retroactive to February 1939 and the remission of coal and housing debts. In the pithead vote of Domco miners on the McTague recommendations the contract was accepted by a vote of 3614 to 2775. As usual, the Glace Bay men voted against acceptance, but the New Waterford and Springhill votes provided the margin for agreement. The Pictou County and Sydney Mines miners totally refused to cast any votes in their referenda on the Harrison reports, and demanded the recall of the officers for holding the referenda in contravention of the

convention decision.⁴⁴

Because "illegal" strikes had continued since the convention, the federal government called a meeting in early December at Ottawa attended by the District 26 officers, Thomas Kennedy, the International Secretary-Treasurer of the UMW, Nova Scotia Labour Minister L. D. Currie, and federal Minister McLarty. They decided to hold an enlarged conference at Halifax on 12 December which top Dosco officials would be asked to attend.⁴⁵ A few weeks previously District 26 leaders had attended the CIO convention at Atlantic City, and the presence of Kennedy at Ottawa and later at the Halifax meeting indicates a new level of intervention by the International.

On 8 December the 200 UMW workers at the International Pier in Sydney went on strike. These were not miners, but the men who loaded the ships with coal at the Pier. Their work had greatly increased since the war began, "bunkering" ships for the Atlantic convoys, but their wages had gone down because of a new system of payment. Dosco officials immediately blew up the importance of this strike by stopping operations at three Glace Bay mines on the grounds that there was nowhere to send the coal produced with the Pier closed down.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 8, 20, 22 November 1940.

⁴⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 4 December 1940.

⁴⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 10 December 1940.

Immediately after the strike began the District officers revoked the UMW charter of the Pier local. Although the men returned to work after a strike of only three days, the charter remained suspended pending an investigation by the International Board.⁴⁷ The charter was returned by the International, but the local's eight officers were temporarily expelled from the union, and blacklisted by the company. Among those blacklisted was the articulate young president of the local, Donald MacDonald, who ten months later was elected CCF MLA for Sydney. It is difficult to think of MacDonald, who was to become president of the Canadian Labour Congress, as an extreme union militant, and he later claimed he had been opposed to the strike.⁴⁸ However, the district leaders, going into the conference on 12 December, may have felt that these Pier workers, isolated from the bulk of the miners, were a relatively safe group to choose for exemplary victims of the toughened discipline against wildcat strikes.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Halifax Herald, 11 December 1940; Glace Bay Gazette, 11 December 1940.

⁴⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 13 January 1941.

⁴⁹This threat of ejection from the union by removal of locals' charters was not to prove a very potent weapon, however. The UMW always faced the possibility that the miners would be driven to attempt a break with the International as in the AMW years. Early in the new year, when Stellarton and Sydney Mines pits each went on strike, a wire from John L. Lewis threatening charter revocation was used to get the Stellarton men back to work. There were no blacklistings, however, and no record of even the threat of removal of their charter against the Sydney

The Halifax conference was chaired by provincial Minister L.D. Currie, and was attended by the District 26 Board, UMW International Secretary-Treasurer Kennedy, Dosco President Arthur Cross of Montreal, Dosco Vice-President and General Manager H.J. Kelley, Nova Scotia Steel and Coal President Michael Dwyer, and numerous provincial and federal Labour Department officials. Federal Minister McLarty was not present, but was represented by Dr. Bryce Stewart, the Deputy Minister of Labour, and M.S. Campbell, Chief Conciliation Officer. Also representing the federal government was J. McGregor Stewart, Dominion Coal Administrator. This well publicized meeting was clearly intended to take some decisive steps to end strikes in the coal fields. The principal result, presented as an important breakthrough in labour-management relations by both the Labour Gazette and the UMW Journal, was the establishment of a tribunal for final and binding settlement of grievances in the mines, named the "Joint Board of Adjustment," with one representative from management, one from the union, and a jointly agreed

Mines men. Glace Bay Gazette, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10 February 1941. The UMW officers may have been hesitant to use the threat of charter revocation against the Sydney Mines men in case the bluff would be immediately called, since these miners had stayed with the AMW for several years after the rest of the miners had returned to the UMW.

upon chairman.⁵⁰ J.W. MacLeod, who had been the "Umpire" under the preceding grievance system, became the chairman, and Secretary-Treasurer MacKay the UMW representative, but there is no evidence suggesting that this board had better success in curbing walkouts than did the single "Umpire" it replaced.⁵¹ The Halifax conference agreed with the recommendation of the McTague Board that, should the company and union fail to reach agreement in negotiations by 15 January 1941, a tribunal consisting of the same men, Judge McTague, Ralph Bell and Frank Scott, should "settle the terms of a new contract." With unconscious irony the Labour Gazette report stated that it was a "fine tribute" to the work of the conciliation board that the same personnel for the tribunal should now be agreed upon by all parties.⁵²

The government's wartime wage policy for all Canada

⁵⁰Halifax Herald, 13 December 1940; Glace Bay Gazette, 17 December 1940; Labour Gazette 40 (December 1940), p. 1239; UMW Journal, January 1941. A revealing aspect of this agreement is that although Dosco persisted in the pretence that its various coal subsidiaries were quite separate, and must conduct negotiations independently, it agreed that the management appointee to this binding grievance board for all companies should be "from the management of one of the companies." If the company and union could not agree on a chairman, he was to be appointed by the federal Minister of Labour.

⁵¹The attitude of the radicals is indicated from the name "Disjointed Board of Maladjustment" immediately given to the board by the Steelworker and Miner, 4 January 1940. In the contract signed at the end of the 1947 strike Dosco and the UMW returned to the one umpire system.

⁵²Labour Gazette 40 (December 1940), p. 1240.

was made clear the next week, when PC 7440 was issued on 16 December. Wage settlements were to be tied to a "fair and reasonable" standard, the rates payable in the period 1926-1929. However, for each five per cent rise in the cost of living index a five per cent wartime bonus could be permitted. Justice McTague was appointed "Conciliation Advisor" to the Minister of Labour, with the specific responsibility of reviewing all conciliation findings to ensure they complied with the order.⁵³ Predictably, the UMW and Domco negotiations failed, and on 15 January 1941 notice was given that the services of the McTague Tribunal would be required. The tribunal did not meet until 28 February, when the company again claimed it was financially unable to pay any general increase, while the UMW disputed this and argued that miners' wages in the 1926-29 period had been abnormally depressed, and that the cost of living was now unusually high in the area. The tribunal disregarded the union's pleas and accepted the company's claim that it could not afford a large pay hike. When the award, again unanimous, was made public on 13 March, small pay raises were included for the Old Sydney and Acadia men, for shippers at the Sydney Pier, and for the mechanics working in the mines, but no basic rate increase for most of the men. Although it was found that due to a rise in cost of living of 7.2 per cent, they were

⁵³Labour Gazette 41 (January 1941), pp. 22-4.

entitled to a 30 cent bonus per shift, the "finances of the companies and general condition of the industry ... do not ... warrant the full payment of this amount now." Instead, a 15 cents per shift war bonus was recommended, with an additional 15 cents to be added when it was judged appropriate. The tribunal stipulated that the increases and bonus would be retroactive to 1 February only if the union accepted the contract within 30 days.⁵⁴

It was extremely improbable that the miners would vote to accept this contract, since the "outlaw" strikes had continued through early 1941 and sub-district conventions had been held, with representation from Glace Bay, Sydney Mines, and New Waterford locals, that showed the increasing influence of the left. At these meetings the delegates had fruitlessly pursued the idea of a recall of executive officers, registered their opposition to the provisions of PC 7440, and threatened a general strike over the delay in getting a reasonable contract. After the McTague report was published not even the Glace Bay Gazette thought that the miners would agree to its terms. Rumours circulated that the executive might sign without a referendum, and resolutions were passed in several locals against any such action.⁵⁵ However, at a board meeting on

⁵⁴Labour Gazette 41 (March 1941), pp. 231-236; Glace Bay Gazette, 15 January, 28 February, 1, 14 March 1941.

⁵⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 13, 15, 24 January, 10, 17, 25 February, 17, 29, 31 March 1941.

the eve of the Easter weekend, just before the 13 April deadline for signing the contract, the district executive board decided to accept the contract without a referendum, by a vote of five to three.⁵⁶ This decision was revealed almost immediately by one of the minority, the New Waterford Board Member, MLA Douglas MacDonald.⁵⁷

The indignation of the miners was at once made apparent. Miners at the Florence pit were already on strike on a local grievance, and they were joined in a general walkout of the men in all the mines in Glace Bay, New Waterford and Sydney Mines sub-districts. A statement supporting the miners' strike "to restore democracy" was issued by SWOC Local 1064 in Sydney. The strike call was sent out by a "tri-sub-district convention" attended by delegates from locals in the Glace Bay, New Waterford and

⁵⁶Roll call vote, 21 votes for signing without referendum: President D.W. Morrison, 1 vote; Secretary-Treasurer MacKay, 1 vote; and Board Members Tattrie (Springhill), 4 votes; Nearing (Stellarton), 3 votes; and John Morrison (Glace Bay), 12 votes. Against, 10 votes: Vice-President Muise, 1 vote; Douglas MacDonald (New Waterford), 5 votes; Carey (Sydney Mines), 4 votes. International Board Member Barrett was present but not voting on a district matter. Note that the man who swung the issue was Glace Bay Board Member John Morrison with his 12 roll call votes, although he later seems to have received relatively little of the blame. Minutes of District 26 Board Meeting, 11 April 1941, UMW Local 4514 Papers, MS 9-32, D6, Dalhousie University Archives.

⁵⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 12 April 1941. See also MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 230.

Sydney Mines sub-districts.⁵⁸ This body and its "policy committee" were to guide the actions of the miners throughout the slowdown. Prominent in its leadership were the well known militants and radicals of the district, almost all old AMW men. Some, like John Alex MacDonald and Bob Stewart, were members or former members of the Communist Party.⁵⁹ Others, such as Tom Ling of New Waterford and Angus McIntyre of Glace Bay, were from the left wing of the local CCF.⁶⁰

The executive officers, faced with this rising storm, argued that their only choices had been to sign the contract or carry out a disastrous strike. There was no time for a referendum, given the 30 day deadline the tribunal had set; and they were advised by Professor Scott

⁵⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17 April 1941; Sydney Post-Record, 16 April 1941.

⁵⁹Stewart left the party in 1936, following J.B. McLachlan out in protest at the right turn of the time. He does not appear to have subsequently rejoined the CP, although he was to be an active supporter in the post war years. MacDonald may well still have considered himself a party member at this time, and his stand in 1940-1941 seems to have adhered closely to party positions.

⁶⁰The Ling brothers had put forward the resolution at the 1938 convention for District 26 affiliation with the CCF. McIntyre had been the first secretary of the Cape Breton Regional CCF Council, and was one of the men Clarie Gillis defeated in the contest for nomination as party candidate for C.B.South. He then resigned as secretary and possibly from the beginning his leftism led to some uneasiness concerning him on the part of the leadership. See letters, H.I.S.Borgford to D. Lewis, 17 August 1939; Lewis to Borgford, 24 August 1939, CCF Papers, MG 28 IV I, Vol. 27, National Archives of Canada [NAC].

and the UMW International Board that it would be advisable to sign at once. The executive pointed out that while a referendum "is looked upon by some as a great democratic and sacred principal [sic], it is also true that our last district convention decided that no referendum vote would be held at that time, notwithstanding the fact that the executive officers had recommended that a referendum vote might be taken." A telegram sent to all District 26 locals by the top International officers, John L. Lewis, Philip Murray and Thomas Kennedy, called on the men to end the strike; and within a few days the Springhill local voted to endorse the district officers' actions.⁶¹ Despite these endorsements, the district officers had permanently lost any substantial support from Cape Breton miners, even among the moderates. Only a small minority of right-wing miners would henceforth speak in their favour, although the Glace Bay Gazette attempted to bolster up the confidence of the right wing by printing letters backing the officers. Reflecting radical opinion, the Steelworker and Miner declared that Dan Willie Morrison had joined the ranks of the world's great betrayers like "Judas, Benedict Arnold, Laval and Quissling [sic]."⁶²

The strike was ended after four days by a tri-sub-district convention decision, and a petition to the UMW

⁶¹Glace Bay Gazette, 17, 21 April 1941.

⁶²Steelworker and Miner, 19 April 1941.

international board was circulated, asking for the removal of President Morrison and Secretary-Treasurer MacKay from office. According to a later statement by the convention committee, this petition was signed by 5845 miners within a few hours.⁶³ The response of the International was to appoint Senator William Sneed of Pennsylvania, whom Lewis sent frequently to deal with District 26 problems, and David Stevens, UMW International Board Member for District 7, Illinois, to investigate "internal dissension" in the district. Sneed and Stevens arrived on 14 May, met with the executive on 16 May and then held hearings for two days at the Sydney Courthouse, after which they returned to the United States to report to the UMW International Board.⁶⁴ The miners were not placated by this investigation. Before the commissioners arrived, the slowdown strike had begun, at first as an apparently spontaneous movement among the miners in New Waterford and Sydney Mines. Memory of the slowdown strike conducted in 1921 under the leadership of J.B. McLachlan may have contributed to the popularity of this idea among miners. At a tri-sub-district convention held on 11 May the policy

⁶³Glace Bay Gazette, 19 April, 11 July 1941. According to the Policy Committee's "A Message to the Unions of Canada," published in the Canadian Tribune, 16 August 1941, 10,000 miners eventually signed the petition demanding the resignations.

⁶⁴Sydney Post-Record, 16, 19 May 1941; Glace Bay Gazette, 16, 17, 19 May 1941.

of "curtailment of production" was almost unanimously endorsed. The delegates also pledged that the locals would abide by this decision until it was rescinded by another convention.⁶⁵

A circular letter was promptly sent out by the district executive stating this curtailment policy was contrary to the constitution of the UMW, and would not be tolerated. A full page Dosco advertisement in the Glace Bay Gazette appealed to wartime patriotism, quoted Winston Churchill, and declared: "We therefore join with the President and officers of District 26 of the United Mine Workers of America in requesting the immediate discontinuance of this policy of curtailment of coal production." These blandishments had little effect, nor did the first attempts by the company to coerce the miners. At the Sydney Mines collieries, when the management tried reducing the workforce after the mine output fell due to the slowdown, there was a week of strikes until the company rescinded the policy.⁶⁶

The "curtailment policy" posed several difficulties for the company. In both the mines working the longwall system and those operating under the older "room and pillar" system, the workforce was composed of roughly half contract miners and half "datal" men. The contract miners

⁶⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 5, 8, 12 May 1941.

⁶⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 13, 17, 21, 22, 27, 28 May 1941.

dug the coal and loaded it in cars to be sent to the surface, and were paid for the weight they produced. The datal men transported the coal and maintained the mine, and were paid a daily wage. It was the contract miners who were formally on slowdown, and although the amount they were paid would be reduced, they still had an income much greater than any strike pay they could have received in a full tie-up. So long as the mine operated, the lower paid datal men would receive their full wage per shift. Since the company's profits suffered, the natural counter to such tactics was a lockout, but the company was under pressure from their customers and the government to keep up coal production, and wished to make what profit they could from coal operations while sales were assured. Presumably Dosco also preferred that all the odium incurred for disrupting war production be directed at the miners.

Support for the slowdown remained solid and effective in the Glace Bay and New Waterford mines throughout the summer. In some respects this solidarity was remarkable. The penalty of public disgrace for being a strikebreaker was immense in the union conscious mining towns, but breaking solidarity was neither so clear cut or readily detected during a slowdown. The miners generally worked in pairs in isolated places in the mine, and all that was required to increase a man's income when the unpaid bills

began to mount was to load a little more coal. Yet it was universally agreed, by both proponents and opponents, that the slowdown was effective in cutting production in almost all Cape Breton's Domco mines by at least one third from May until September.⁶⁷ Although the Scotia miners in Sydney Mines voted to end their slowdown in the middle of June, when they and the Acadia miners received a slight pay increase, the sympathies of the Sydney Mines men appear to have remained with the convention, since they continued to send delegates as observers, and it retained the title "tri-sub-district convention." At both Sydney Mines and Stellarton wildcat strikes took place during the slowdown.⁶⁸

On 6 June, by Order in Council PC 4016, coal mining was declared an "essential service" under the Defence of Canada Regulations. Although this amounted to no more than bringing mining into the same category as many other industries regarded as necessary to war production, the local newspapers interpreted the timing of this step as an

⁶⁷Since the Reserve mine was in the process of closing down and having a new pit opened, it took no part in the slowdown with the consent of the other locals at the conventions. The one mine in which support was reported to be somewhat weak and fluctuating was 1B at Dominion. Glace Bay Gazette, 19 July 1941.

⁶⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 5, 9, 16, 24 June, 31 July 1941.

effort to intimidate the Nova Scotia miners.⁶⁹ Later in June the district officers went to Ottawa to meet with government officials, and this meeting was followed by a renewed effort by the UMW International to bring the Cape Breton miners under control. At the beginning of July John L. Lewis placed Silby Barrett in control of District 26, with "full authority to act for the international office in all matters involving the locals."⁷⁰ Although the other district officers were not removed as the miners had demanded, Lewis seems to have thought this step could defuse the situation. However, it only succeeded in making Barrett, who for some time had not been much involved with district affairs, the main focus of the miners' resentment. Silby Barrett was certainly not helped by the historical parallel with his 1923 appointment as provisional head of the district when the left executive led by J. B. McLachlan had been deposed by John L. Lewis. Moreover, in July 1941 the Steelworker and Miner, with unconcealed relish, published the 1924 letter accusing Barrett of misappropriation of funds, which had led to his removal from office.⁷¹ Barrett may have gained national

⁶⁹Labour Gazette 41 (August 1941), pp. 963-4; Sydney Post-Recc., 1, 7 June 1941; Halifax Herald, 7 June 1941; Glace Bay Gazette, 7 June 1941.

⁷⁰Telegram John L. Lewis to D.J. MacDonald, Chairman of the tri-sub-district committee, Glace Bay Gazette, 2 July 1941.

⁷¹ Steelworker and Miner, 12 July 1941.

prominence in the labour movement by his leading role in the Canadian CIO, but locally no union leader was more closely associated with heavy-handed bureaucracy.

Barrett met with the district board, and then sent out a circular to the locals repeating the charge that the slowdown was unconstitutional, and demanding compliance with this stand by 15 July. The board declared the tri-sub-district conventions "illegal and unconstitutional," on the grounds that conventions of a single sub-district only were permissible, and then only when properly convened by the board member. Letters were also sent to 13 individual leaders of the convention, ordering them to appear before a union tribunal on 15 July to face charges of violating the constitution. Barrett appealed to the miners to end the slowdown in the name of loyalty to the UMW and to Canada. Additionally he referred to "illegal spending" by the locals, and from this time the locals were cut off from receiving their share of the checked-off dues payments. The convention policy committee defiantly replied that the miners would end the slowdown only when the officers were removed, and the largest local, Phalen, sent a wire to Lewis demanding the removal of all the executive, including Barrett as well as Morrison, Muise, and MacKay. On 11 July the policy committee indicated that curtailment of production would stop only if the entire executive, including Barrett, resigned and were replaced

by three provisional officers sent by the International to hold an election as speedily as possible, and if the miners received a "decent increase in wages that will allow us to live as Canadian citizens should live."⁷² The committee also called for a one day strike, a demonstration and a mass meeting on 15 July, the day the 13 men were to appear before the UMW tribunal.

On 15 July all the mines in the Glace Bay and New Waterford areas were shut down. Over 5000 men marched through Glace Bay "to form what was considered the largest parade of workers in the history of this mining community." The event was very orderly, the miners of each local marching as a contingent carrying "Union Jacks and banners." The entire procession was led by two large banners reading: "WE ARE FIGHTING FOR DEMOCRACY" and: "DOWN WITH HITLER AND SILBY BARRETT." The parade escorted the 13 accused men to the UMW District Office, and then proceeded to the Miners' Forum, the hockey arena, where a mass meeting was held. The 13 accused, having made their brief appearances before what they called the "kangaroo court," were greeted as heroes at the rally. Bob Stewart, John Alex MacDonald, Tom Ling, Angus McIntyre, Freeman Jenkins, Convention Chairman Dan J. MacDonald, and other speakers all denied the validity of the trials and urged

⁷²Halifax Herald, 10 July 1941; Sydney Post-Record, 10 July 1941; Glace Bay Gazette, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 July 1941.

the miners to continue the slowdown and not make the mistake of starting a full strike, in which the authorities could defeat them. Norman MacKenzie and George MacEachern of the Sydney steelworkers' union spoke in solidarity with the miners, and the meeting unanimously passed a resolution demanding the repeal of PC 7440.⁷³

The efforts of Barrett and the UMW executive to bring the miners under control had been turned into a triumphant display of solidarity and of the ascendancy of the left in the locals and among the rank-and-file miners. A few days later a Phalen meeting passed a resolution that the local would have no further dealings with the district officers. Phalen did not intend to break with the UMW, local President Freeman Jenkins assured the press, but it would no longer recognize this district executive. Three other locals, Caledonia, No.11, and No.12 at New Waterford, sent telegrams to John L. Lewis demanding the executive's removal. Lewis wired back an ultimatum that unless these locals complied with the constitution and subordinated themselves to the district office before the end of a week, their UMW charters would be revoked. On the same day, 19 July, Barrett issued another press statement repeating demands that the men return to full production. On 21 July letters were sent out to the locals informing

⁷³Sydney Post-Record, 16 July 1941; Glace Bay Gazette, 15, 16 July 1941.

them that the 13 men who had appeared before the tribunal were suspended from UMW membership.⁷⁴

By this time the slowdown had become a hot national news story, and editors throughout the country were demanding that the government deal promptly with this unpatriotic disruption of war production. For example, throughout the summer the virulently anti-union Toronto Globe and Mail published a series of editorials fulminating against the slowdown strike being conducted by the coal miners of Cape Breton. In July the paper denounced "the sheer pusillanimity" of Federal Minister of Labour Norman McLarty in dealing with this "crystal clear case of deliberate sabotage of the national war effort" and by the end of August the editor was exhorting the government to "send in the troops now and end the grotesque and indefensible situation at the Cape Breton coal mines."⁷⁵ Domco purchased space for full page spreads in newspapers and explained that the curtailment policy resulted from an inner-union quarrel, for which the company had no responsibility.⁷⁶ This pressure also affected Minister of Labour Norman McLarty, who decided to make a direct appeal to the miners' patriotism in a full

⁷⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 18, 19, 23 July 1941.

⁷⁵Globe and Mail, 24 July, 29 August 1941.

⁷⁶Globe and Mail, 9 July 1941; Halifax Herald, 9 July 1941.

page advertisement published in various newspapers and in a radio broadcast over CJCB Radio Station in Sydney, with the Minister's voice coming over the telephone lines from Ottawa. McLarty claimed that "all parties admitted the dispute concerned only the union members themselves," ignoring the fact that the men were also demanding better wages and repeal of the government's wage policy. Referring to the miners' defiance of the UMW executive he said: "Your government has declared in favour of collective bargaining but it is your responsibility to see that it works." Only one sentence came close to a threat: "This slowdown is discouraging the continuance of the government's policy of subventions to the coal mines of Nova Scotia and endangers the employment which they stimulate."⁷⁷

The CCL executive also met with McLarty and appealed for government support for collective bargaining rights by the active enforcement of PC 2685, which called for employers to recognize unions. The slowdown was discussed, and Mosher, Conroy, Millard and the others were quick to back their colleague Silby Barrett. The executive passed a resolution expressing the "unqualified support" of the CCL for the UMW board's efforts to obtain "full compliance with the policies and laws of the union by certain members

⁷⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 22 July, 1941; Sydney Post-Record, 22 July, 1941; Halifax Herald, 22 July, 1941.

of the union in the Cape Breton coal fields."⁷⁸

Neither the CCL endorsement of the UMW executive nor McLarty's appeal weakened the stand of the miners. Delegates at the tri-sub-district convention said the minister was mistaken if he did not understand that the wage rate was the principal issue. McLarty was then sent a request for a direct conference involving the convention, the government and the coal company. The response to John L. Lewis was even more determined. The convention sent him a telegram stating that if the charters of the three locals were revoked, all ten UMW locals in Glace Bay and New Waterford would secede from the union. Lewis, in fact, quietly backed down. The threatened locals were given an extension of the ultimatum, and then the matter was allowed to drop.⁷⁹

The miners' slowdown now began to get some support from a somewhat surprising source, the representatives of small businessmen in the area. The Glace Bay Board of Trade and the Retail Merchant Association informed McLarty that the men's unfairly low wages were the root of the problem, and that the miners had good reasons to have lost confidence in their union officers.⁸⁰ The sympathetic stance of local small business towards the miners'

⁷⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 24 July 1941.

⁷⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 24, 29 July 1941.

⁸⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 25 July 1941.

rebellion continued through the summer, and perhaps is largely explained by the extent to which these merchants depended upon the miners as customers, and had a direct interest in higher wages being paid them. Some food retailers were by this time themselves in difficulties, having extended credit to miners.

McLarty remained impervious to this pressure, informing the Retail Merchants' Association and the convention committee that the miners' grievances would only be considered when full production resumed. At the end of July the minister met with UMW Secretary-Treasurer Kennedy and Barrett and they adopted two new initiatives: McLarty would visit the area himself and the UMW International would send Senator Sneed again to District 26 to take charge of union affairs. McLarty then travelled to Glace Bay where he repeated that nothing could be done for the miners until they gave up the slowdown, and urged them to co-operate with Senator Sneed. Although Sneed met with the convention committee on several occasions, and sent an optimistic wire to McLarty, he also failed to convince the miners to give way. In a last ditch effort, he warned the men in a radio broadcast that unless they resumed full production they could not "expect the protection" of the union. "Officers of local unions and membership in Cape Breton, you cannot fight your government; neither can you fight the international union

of the UMW of A." If they complied, he hinted strongly, they would almost immediately get the full bonus payment under PC 7440.⁸¹

In the last week in August the coal company took more decisive action, apparently acting on a plan coordinated with the UMW officers and the government. On 23 August, a Saturday, executive officers Morrison, MacKay, and Muise met with Domco officials. On the Monday company officials formally questioned miners as they arrived at the pits on their stand on curtailment. On 27 August the officials at Caledonia mine began "refusing lamps" to some of the miners, turning them away when they reported for work. Over the days and weeks that followed, these "lamp stoppages" went on in a planned system of escalation, first at one mine and then another. Only contract miners who supported curtailment were dismissed, 16 the first day at Caledonia, 20 the next day, and the same number on succeeding days. The same process began at No.2 on 29 August, and at No.12 New Waterford on 30 August, and later at other mines. Fruitless protests were sent to the Labour Minister and other authorities, a committee was set up to collect funds for the support of the laid-off men, and there was discussion of launching a full strike. The Sydney SWOC passed a resolution that its members would

⁸¹Sydney Post-Record, 28 July 1941; Glace Bay Gazette, 28, 30 July, 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 16, 21 August 1941.

strike in sympathy if the miners were forced into this action. By 3 September No.12, where 140 longwall men had been dismissed and others refused to work their places, had been completely closed down. MLA Douglas MacDonald asked Minister of Justice Ernest Lapointe to take action against this "lock-out of 1100 men," in "direct violation of the industrial disputes investigation act." A similar protest was sent by the Glace Bay Army and Navy Veterans Association, who said many of those dismissed were veterans or the fathers of men serving overseas. McLarty replied that this was not a lockout; the coal company "is merely suspending men who do not give a day's work for a day's pay," and they would be immediately re-employed if they expressed willingness to abandon the slowdown.⁸² The government's attitude to strikes was definitely stiffening at this time. On 17 September PC 7307 was passed, tightening the regulations governing legal strikes and increasing the penalties for illegal strikes.⁸³

At the same time the "lamp stoppages" began, the government and company authorized the payment of the additional 15 cent per shift bonus to the Springhill

⁸²Halifax Herald, 23 August 1941; Sydney Post-Record, 27 August, 4, 10 September, 1941; Glace Bay Gazette, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 August, 4, 8, 10 September 1941.

⁸³Labour Gazette 41 (October 1941), p. 1209.

miners.⁸⁴ This was presumably the "carrot" to go with the "stick" of the dismissals. There was also another rather farcical attempt to use the "stick" at this time. A strike of 15 pump workers in late August had led to the closing down of the two mines at Stellarton for several days. The authorities apparently decided to make examples of these men, and two of them were actually arrested and brought to trial on the criminal charge of "illegal" striking, although the men charged could not be proven to have been involved in the strike, and the cases were dismissed.⁸⁵ In Cape Breton the company continued the lamp stoppages until the second week in September, when the total dismissed came to approximately 400 men, including most of the leading convention delegates. By this point the other miners were unable to work because the number to operate a shift was insufficient, and they refused transfers on principle. Money was collected from working miners for the men thrown out of work, and the slowdown policy was reaffirmed by votes of convention delegates, but the pressure had begun to have an effect on the miners' earlier unbreakable solidarity. As early as 24 August Bob

⁸⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 1 September 1941. A day later, the employees of the company owned Sydney and Louisburg Railway also got the additional bonus. Glace Bay Gazette, 3 September 1941.

⁸⁵Halifax Herald, 3 September 1941; Glace Bay Gazette, 22 August, 3 September 1941. One man was drunk on the day in question, and the other had been sent home by his supervisor.

Stewart of Caledonia mine had proposed that the miners return to full production for a month to see what the government would do for them. This idea was overwhelmingly rejected by convention delegates, and Stewart was attacked as a traitor by the Steelworker and Miner, but Stewart continued to press for this plan at subsequent convention sessions.⁸⁶

Pressure was particularly intense on the discharged miners, who had no income other than the amount that could be collected for their relief. Rumours were now prevalent that many working miners were increasing production to save their jobs, yet not contributing heavily to the fund for the men out of work. Soon after their dismissals these men had been handed discharge slips, implying their severance from the company was permanent. But the company also offered to return the lamp of any man who signed a paper promising full production, and by the middle of September a number of the men began to accept this offer. On 16 September, 84 No.12 men were reported to have accepted back their jobs on the basis of full production. On 22 September the local at No.16 voted to abandon the curtailment policy for 30 days; and at Caledonia, the mine hardest hit with dismissals, men were gradually returning

⁸⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 25 August 1941; Steelworker and Miner, 30 August 1941.

to work, promising to end the slowdown.⁸⁷

The second annual CCL Convention was held at Hamilton in early September. The Cape Breton miners understood the importance of having their position presented, and in mid-August had elected delegates. Because the locals' funds had been frozen by the officers no money was available to send these delegates, but at the end of August one delegate, John Alex MacDonald, was sent. He spoke at various union meetings in Ontario and collected money to pay for the attendance of miner delegates at the convention, and a delegation of 34 led by Angus McIntyre was rushed to Hamilton at the last moment. Arriving a day late, the delegation marched on to the convention floor greeted by a standing ovation. A large banner had been hung on the wall reading: "GREETINGS TO THE FIGHTING NOVA SCOTIA MINERS."⁸⁸ This welcome was extremely displeasing to the right wing, a displeasure openly revealed by President Aaron Mosher.⁸⁹ Mosher had earlier directly involved himself in attempts to prevent the left wing delegates coming from Cape Breton, in his

⁸⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 8, 16, 22 September 1941.

⁸⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 16, 19 August, 1, 8, 18 September 1941.

⁸⁹Mosher reportedly tried to damp down the applause, saying: "You can please yourselves if you want to make a rebel of this convention or carry on in the proper manner." Glace Bay Gazette, 10 September 1941.

anxiety to ensure a right majority.⁹⁰ Before the convention opened the CCL executive had passed a resolution opposing any strikes that broke existing contracts, and Mosher's opening speech, broadcast nationwide by the CBC, appealed to government to make it mandatory for employers to engage in collective bargaining, but called for labour peace in wartime. "It is more important to defeat Hitler and his gangsters than to bring the most tyrannical and reactionary employer in Canada to his knees."⁹¹ The left appears to have had the majority of vocal floor delegates, but they were in the minority in roll call votes conducted on the basis of numbers represented. In the election of CCL executive board members John Alex MacDonald got 199 votes, more than any other left candidate, but the right slate was elected, with Charles Millard getting 269 votes and Silby Barrett 231. A heated struggle arose over a resolution tabled by the Sydney SWOC delegation which asked the convention to "condemn the action of the Executive in opposing the struggle of the miners for trade union democracy and a better standard of living." The convention resolutions committee, chaired by Pat Conroy, put forward an alternative resolution calling for the dismissed men to be

⁹⁰Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour, p. 71.

⁹¹Labour Gazette 41 (October 1941), pp. 1245-6.

re-employed, the slowdown to end, and urging the government to get more money for the miners. In the end the right wing resolution, defeated by a floor vote, was carried by a roll call vote of 199 to 158.⁹²

The Cape Breton delegates were disappointed by this decision and by the opposition shown to their position by prominent CCF leaders at the convention, such as Millard or Conroy, and David Lewis behind the scenes. They were, however, heartened by the strong support they had been given by the left forces at Hamilton, which included the vociferous backing of almost all the rank-and-file CIO delegates in attendance. At the tri-sub-district convention held on 17 September it was decided to carry on with the curtailment policy, even though there was no hope of official support from the CCL and it was clear the solidarity of the miners was collapsing. In fact, the miners surely felt they were defeated, for in a telegram sent to McLarty they agreed to resume all production if the government would guarantee that Domco would rehire all the dismissed men and pay the full bonus under PC 7440.

⁹²Canadian Congress of Labour 1941, Minutes, pp. 98-9, 102. Irving Abella, in his account of this convention, argues the left forces, inflamed by the change of Communist policy now that the Soviet Union was in the war, "were less fractious than ever". "Most ironically, they even joined with the Congress executive in condemning District 26 of the UMW for conducting an 'illegal strike'." Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour, 71. This is untrue, as a reading of the convention minutes clearly shows.

McLarty replied that the men must first begin normal working, and then their grievances could be dealt with. The delegates interpreted this reply to mean that "McLarty thought they were going back licked."⁹³

Although the convention held to the curtailment policy, it was now mainly concerned to extract some face saving concession from the government and union authorities. At a public meeting on 24 September it was decided to send telegrams to Prime Minister King and to John L. Lewis. King was asked to guarantee full bonus payments, and Lewis to meet with three delegates from the policy committee to hear their side of the matter. On 28 September a convention was held to consider the replies from the prime minister and President Lewis. Neither promised anything, but the delegates chose to interpret the wording of each as sufficiently conciliatory to permit a return to full production. There seemed little choice, since two locals, Caladonia and No.16, had already voted to return to full production, and individual miners were beginning to do so at the other mines. The convention almost unanimously voted to abandon the curtailment policy. This was a retreat "in good order," wrote the Steelworker and Miner, and the Canadian Tribune claimed

⁹³Steelworker and Miner, 20 September 1941; Glace Bay Gazette, 18, 30 September 1941.

the miners had scored a "moral victory."⁹⁴ Tom Ling was one of the few delegates who spoke frankly of the slowdown having been defeated, but he asked the miners not to get discouraged: "We took a bad licking in 1925 and came back in 1941 and 16 years from now the younger generation will come back driven by the same conditions."⁹⁵ The dismissed miners were rehired, and within a short time the additional bonus was paid to the Domco miners.⁹⁶ The union also reinstated the 13 suspended members, and restored the funds to the locals, and no local lost its charter. But at best these concessions were evidence that the miners surrendered in sufficiently good order to prevent the authorities from attempting any retribution against them. They can hardly be called the fruits of victory.

Given the forces arrayed against them it is difficult to imagine how the slowdown could have resulted in a victory for the miners. There was always an element of confusion over whether the main aim of the curtailment policy was the removal of undemocratic officers or concessions in wages. McLarty may have deliberately misinterpreted the miners' aims when he claimed this was

⁹⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 25 September 1941; Steelworker and Miner, 27 September 1941; Canadian Tribune, 4 October 1941.

⁹⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 29 September 1941.

⁹⁶At the same time the government permitted the coal company to increase the price of coal twenty-two cents per ton. Labour Gazette 41 (October 1941), p. 1268.

purely a union matter in his July statement, but up to that point many statements had been made indicating that the dismissal of the officers would immediately lead to the resumption of full production. And on both questions the miners were throughout inhibited from pushing their struggle to its full extent. Part of the reluctance to stage a full scale strike arose from the fact that the miners realized how unpopular a wartime strike would be, and their own frequent protestations of patriotic support for the war effort were not insincere. Moreover, they were never prepared to seek a full break with the UMW. Memory of the defeat of the AMW must have had much to do with this reluctance, as well as the fact that both the Communist Party and the CCF threw the weight of their influence against any action that would split the union movement at this time. Within the union the miners' revenge against the executive was taken a year later when all the District 26 officers were defeated in the district election by humiliatingly large majorities. The efforts of D.W. Morrison, Silby Barrett and the other UMW officers to influence government by their moderate policies had thus led to the loss of their offices. The defeated officers did not fare too badly: Morrison was appointed a special representative by John L. Lewis, Barrett continued to hold important CCL office, and A.A. MacKay was appointed

chairman of the Domco-UMW Joint Adjustment Board.⁹⁷

What may have been temporarily set back by the slowdown was the efforts of CCL leaders to convince the government of the value of the collective bargaining process in bringing labour peace. The UMW was still the largest union in Canada, the prototype industrial union, with the legal guarantee of the check-off in Nova Scotia, and yet its officers had plainly displayed their inability to discipline and control their members. For the next two years the government did nothing to force anti-union employers to engage in meaningful collective bargaining. In February 1942 Mackenzie King defended his government's inaction during the Kirkland Lake gold miners' strike, by the argument that he opposed government compulsion against either capital or labour. As an example of the government's refraining from action against workers, he pointed out that: "Although the first principle [of PC 2685] states that every effort should be made to speed production by war industries, the government did not exercise compulsion on miners involved in the slowdown in Nova Scotia coal mines."⁹⁸

The slowdown lasted something over 90 working days, during which the approximately 7,500 Glace Bay and New

⁹⁷MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 237, 282-5.

⁹⁸Quoted in L. S. MacDowell, 'Remember Kirkland Lake' (Toronto 1983), p. 208.

Waterford miners produced about two thirds normal output.⁹⁹ The 1500 miners of Sydney Mines took part in the slowdown for only one month, or about 20 working days. By a quick estimate, if the slowdown was regarded as a full strike involving only one third of the men, the working days lost would be approximately 235,000. For the five month period of May to September 1941 Nova Scotia's total coal production was over 600,000 tons less than for the corresponding months in 1940.¹⁰⁰ Although this was one of the most costly labour disputes that occurred in Canada during the Second World War it has received little attention in what has been written on the labour history of this period.¹⁰¹ Most historians have concentrated on the important trend of the time, the eventually successful struggle for unionization of the workers in heavy industry and the consequent transformation of the Canadian labour relations system. Since strikes for union recognition have been regarded as the most important industrial disputes of the time, the significance of the coal slowdown, an action of workers who had long been unionized and a rebellion

⁹⁹Ninety days is an underestimate, based on a five day week. Some of the mines worked six days per week. See Glace Bay Gazette, 2 May 1941.

¹⁰⁰Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Coal Statistics for Canada (Ottawa, 1942), Table 45, p. 39.

¹⁰¹The only published account of the slowdown is in Paul MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers (Toronto 1976), 225-38.

against established union authorities, has not been recognized. The miners, however, were motivated by much the same impulse which led other workers to struggle for the establishment of a union. Coal miners in Cape Breton, like steel workers in Hamilton or metal miners in Northern Ontario, wanted better wages and working conditions. They also wanted something less easily defined: much greater control over their work process and over their lives, democracy at the workplace. What the history of the miners' union in this period reveals most clearly is that from the beginning of large scale industrial unionism in Canada there was a divergence of aims between the most active and militant workers and the leadership of the unions.

As the writings of such historians as Irving Abella and L. S. MacDowell have shown, the upsurge of industrial unionism was powered mainly by the efforts of large numbers of rank-and-file Canadian workers to achieve union rights.¹⁰² The new unionism had to overcome determined resistance from industrialists, and the reluctance of Mackenzie King and other Canadian politicians to assist unionization by passing legislation comparable to the American Wagner Act. It was the rising tide of strikes in

¹⁰²Irving Abella, Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour (Toronto 1973); Laurel Sefton MacDowell, "Remember Kirkland Lake" (Toronto 1983) and "The Formation of the Canadian Industrial Relations System During World War Two," Labour/Le Travailleur 3 (1978), pp. 175-196.

1943 and the growing shift of workers' votes to the CCF that eventually pressured the federal government in early 1944 to enact PC 1003 which granted enforceable trade union rights to workers. But compulsory conciliation before a strike could begin was incorporated in the new law, as in the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, and work stoppages were made illegal during the length of a contract. As MacDowell points out: "The government's primary concern had been, and continued to be, the elimination of industrial conflict, and the concessions to labour contained in the new legislation were primarily designed to accomplish that purpose."¹⁰³ What MacDowell's account does not make clear is the degree to which such controls over workers were acceptable to the right-wing leaders of the union movement and their mentors in the national leadership of the CCF party. Although the top leadership of the CCL, men such as Aaron Mosher, Charles Millard or Silby Barrett, found some of the legal constraints on unions irksome, they were fully prepared to accept, indeed consciously welcomed, a legal system designed for controlling the spontaneous militancy of workers. The system of labour relations that attained a mature form in Canada during the Second World War offered

¹⁰³MacDowell, "The Formation of the Canadian Industrial Relations System," p. 194. See also Jeremy Webber, "The Malaise of Compulsory Conciliation: Strike Prevention in Canada during World War II," in Bryan Palmer, ed., The Character of Class Struggle (Toronto 1986).

workers the concession of collective bargaining rights, but only within a structure of strong legal pressures designed to force all union activity into this bureaucratic, business unionist mold. This did mean that many workers who never had union representation before, got such representation, and this almost certainly led to improvements in wages and working conditions. But in some respects the new framework of laws, and the industrial unions that emerged in this period, led to less, rather than more, direct workers' control on the shop floor. Also, while industrial unions had long been associated with the growth of radicalism and class-conscious politics among the workers, over the long run the industrial union movement does not seem to have had this effect. The struggle for the industrial unions seems to have been accompanied by a temporary growth of political support for both the CP and the CCF. This political support declined greatly in the post-war period, which was also a time in which the CCF succeeded in smashing much of the organizational strength of the communists in the labour movement.

The experience of District 26 in the 1939-1941 period showed both the strength and the limitations of union bureaucracy in controlling a dissatisfied and militant work force. The miners' "illegal" strikes and the long slowdown seem to foreshadow the wave of wildcat strikes

throughout the well established Canadian labour movement in the 1960s.¹⁰⁴ As the new industrial unionism came to central Canada, the theoreticians of business unionism spoke of introducing democracy to the workplace. Unquestionably unionization led to advances for the workers in wages and conditions, and in some freedom from arbitrary treatment by management. But, as the struggle within the UMW revealed, the concept of union democracy held by many of the leaders of the labour movement was limited mainly to forms legitimizing the authority of union bureaucrats. Indeed, much of the intervention of state regulation in industrial relations was directly aimed at ensuring only unionism of this type could legally exist. The system of labour relations and the trade union movement that emerged achieved much for Canadian workers, but they could never satisfy workers' aspirations for more control over the labour process, bringing at best a badly flawed democracy to the workplace. The following chapter deals with one of the success stories of the industrial union movement in this period, the building of the steel workers union at Sydney. It also reveals something of the ambiguity of this success with regard to issues of workers' control and of political radicalism.

¹⁰⁴See Jamieson, Times of Trouble, pp. 401-3.

Chapter Five

The Building of a Steel Union Local, 1935-46

Probably the most lasting advance made by Cape Breton labour during the late 1930s was the unionization of the Sydney steelworkers. This was made possible by a combination of circumstances: the earlier strivings of radicals to promote a union at the plant; the temporary unity of left and right labour activists during the United Front period; the support given by the coal miners and their union to the steelworkers; the inspiration given to local steelworkers by the victories of American workers in the big sit-down strikes reported in the newspapers; and the decision by politicians in Nova Scotia to adopt new policies aimed at avoiding labour strife. All of these were probably necessary ingredients in the 1937 establishment of union locals as recognized bargaining agents for the workers at the plants at Sydney and at Trenton, N.S., the earliest victories for the steel union in Canada. This was only a precarious union foothold, however, and it required some years of struggle by the steelworkers in both Nova Scotia and Ontario to consolidate the position of the union in the Canadian industry.

Efforts to build a union at the Sydney steel plant were first made by the Provincial Workmen's Association in the 1903-4 period, an attempt that ended with the defeat

of a PWA strike and the smashing of the organization at the plant.¹ In 1920-2 the Railway Brotherhoods tried to organize the men working on the plant's railway and failed.² Between 1917 and 1923 the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers of America attempted to unionize the plant. This culminated in the strike of 1923, the military occupation of Sydney, a sympathy strike by the miners, the defeat of the strikes of both miners and steelworkers, and the blacklisting of union leaders.³ In the aftermath of this struggle the steel corporation set up a "plant council" with elected representatives from each plant department. Such employee representative plans were set up in many industries in North America in the 1920s. At the Sydney plant this was called the "Bischoff Plan," named for the general superintendent of the time. The plant council continued in existence for almost 14

¹William G. Snow, "Sydney Steelworkers: The Troubled Past and the Birth of Lodge 1064." Unpublished paper, Beaton Institute, Sydney, 1979; Ron Crawley, "Class Conflict and the Establishment of the Sydney Steel Industry, 1899-1904." M.A. Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1980.

²George MacEachern, "Where Labor Came From and Where it is Going," unpublished paper, n.d., MG 19.2, Beaton Institute.

³MacEachern, "Where Labor Came From"; Snow, "The Troubled Past"; Donald MacGillivray, "Military Aid to the Civil Power: The Cape Breton Experience in the 1920s." Acadiensis III, 2 (Spring 1974), pp. 45-64. C. Heron, Working in Steel. The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935, Chapter 4, "Resistance," pp. 112-159, gives a good account of these early efforts to unionize the Sydney plant.

years, serving to provide some forum for the workers to express their views to management, but having no real power to influence company policies. Like other "company unions" its main purpose was to deflect efforts to build a real union at the plant. One such effort, which obtained little response from the workers, was made by the One Big Union in 1928.⁴ In 1930 the International Association of Machinists tried to organize a craft union, which resulted only in long lay-offs for all participants. George MacEachern, closely involved with later union organizing at the Sydney plant, was recording secretary of this abortive union.⁵

For most of the 1931-3 period the plant was partly or wholly shut down because of economic conditions, and the efforts of local radicals was mainly directed to the unemployed movement. The unemployed struggles, however, had a significant effect on later union organizing. George MacEachern writes:

During the depression years there was a great opportunity to learn about organization and agitation in the unemployed movement. Most of us who were willing to play a leadership role in those days never forgot what side we are on in the class struggle.⁶

As indicated earlier, it was during this period that

⁴MacEachern, "Where Labor Came From."

⁵MacEachern, "Where Labor Came From."

⁶MacEachern, "Where Labour Came From," p. 6.

MacEachern joined the Communist Party, and when work began to pick up slightly at the plant in 1933-4 efforts began to be made again to build a steel union.

The well known radical, Sam Scarlett, formerly in the "Wobblies" (the Industrial Workers of the World) in Western Canada and the U.S., then in the One Big Union, and by this time a CP member, was involved in this attempt to organize the Sydney steelworkers. This at first had little success, but this time the organizing efforts were persisted in, mainly by George MacEachern. Through the CP he was in touch with organizers in other steel mills in Canada: "In Sault Ste. Marie Ivan Campbell, in Toronto Dick Steele, in Hamilton Tom MacClure, Harry Hamburg and Milton Montgomery, in Montreal Lucien Dufore and Jack Shaw and in Trenton Alex Neal were all trying, without pay, to build steelworkers' unions."⁷ The tactic adopted at Sydney in 1934 was for MacEachern and other radicals to get elected to the plant council, and then by agitating for demands on wages or other issues, try to prove to the workers that a real union was needed. A special council meeting was held in early 1935 attended by the president of Dosco, British industrialist Sir Newton Moore. Confronted with wage demands, Sir Newton refused to

⁷Frank and MacGillivray, eds., George MacEachern: An Autobiography, p. 70.

consider any increases at that time.⁸

When this incident took place, MacEachern felt the moment had come to act, and he and another councillor, Harry Davis, withdrew from the plant council, and called for a genuine union. The idea at this time was to build an independent local steel union, and later join a nationwide Canadian steel union affiliated with the WUL. The union's leaflets proclaimed:

The STEELWORKERS UNION OF N.S. is an INDEPENDENT organization, organized on an INDUSTRIAL basis and completely under the domination of the rank and file. Our membership consists of HUNDREDS of members representing every department and trade with the exception of the bricklayers who have their own union. We are not affiliated with any other organization or any publication. WE WANT YOUR SUPPORT not only in the demand for better wages but in EVERY DEMAND THAT CONCERNS THE WORKERS.⁹

These appeals won some support, but although over 600 workers joined, this was not sufficient to challenge the company, or to attempt a strike for recognition. After a time, therefore, organizing efforts "bogged down."¹⁰ The main support the union received outside the plant was from such sources as the Steelworker, J. B. McLachlan and the Nova Scotia Miner, and the militant miners in the AMW, and

⁸Special Meeting of Joint Council with Sir Newton Moore, 7 March 1935, USWA Papers, MG 19,7, Beaton Institute.

⁹USWA Papers, MG 19,7, Beaton Institute.

¹⁰MacEachern, "Where Labor Came From," p.7; see also accounts in Snow, "The Troubled Past" and; Frank and MacGillivray, eds., George MacEachern.

it is possible many steelworkers were reluctant to join a union with radical connections. Nonetheless, the organizational work done in the 1930-5 period, among both employed and unemployed steelworkers, laid the base for later success.

It was at this point that the situation was transformed by external events: the change in CP policy to the United Front, and the formation of the CIO. By 1936, the WUL had been dissolved and the CP was urging its followers and former foes to unite. The newspapers also began to be filled with stories of CIO successes in the massive sit-down strikes in the United States, a source of powerful inspiration to the workers in Sydney, as elsewhere in Canada. After what appears to be a brief hiatus, the union movement at the plant had gotten underway again, centered in the mechanical department and particularly the machine shop, where MacEachern worked. The efforts to build the steelworkers' union were also connected to the re-unification going on at this same time in the miners' union movement. When the steel union held public meetings in April 1936, it had guest speakers from both the UMW and the AMW on its platform.¹¹ The union's early leadership included CP members and radicals, such as George MacEachern and John Johnston, as well as leaders of the left in the immigrant community like Mike Oleschuk.

¹¹Sydney Post-Record, 2, 14 April 1936.

There were also men such as Carl Neville, Dan MacKay, and James Nicholson, who were to become stalwarts of the CCF, but who, in some cases for religious reasons, would never support the CP.

This 1936 organizing campaign, therefore, was not so closely associated with political radicalism as had been the 1935 union; and it soon acquired the inspiring CIO label. In mid-1936 MacEachern applied for and received a charter from the CIO's Steel Workers Organizing Campaign (SWOC). The SWOC in the U.S. had been formed in June 1936, as a result of an agreement between the CIO and the almost defunct Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers. The SWOC leaders were preoccupied with trying to organize the American steel industry, and provided the steelworkers in Nova Scotia little or no funds or practical help in organizing. The one possible source of direct assistance was the recently reunified UMW in Nova Scotia, and George MacEachern and Carl Neville attended the District 26 convention at Truro in October 1936 where they were promised support in organizing the steelworkers.¹² As was well publicized at this time, John L. Lewis was particularly anxious to see industrial unionism come to the steel industry, so closely connected

¹²Sydney Post-Record, 24 October 1936.

to coal.¹³ In the United States large financial contributions were made by the UMW to the CIO, and much of this was spent on the SWOC. Philip Murray, Vice President of the UMW, was appointed head of the SWOC, and his secretary, David J. McDonald, became SWOC secretary-treasurer. Many other UMW officials, such as Van Bittner, were appointed to the SWOC while their salaries continued to be paid by the UMW. In addition to this, the UMW donated or loaned large sums for organizing expenses. Little money was spent in Canada, however, which Lewis always seems to have regarded as an unimportant side-show.

In Nova Scotia the arrangements for meetings, the drive to get the steelworkers to sign union cards, all the shop floor organizing work, was done by George MacEachern and a few others, all unpaid work. However, Lewis named District 26 UMW International Board Member Silby Barrett to head the SWOC and the CIO drives in Canada, while receiving his pay from the UMW. Barrett's main contribution to the organizing of the Sydney and Trenton plants was that he brought the prestige of the UMW and the CIO to the meetings and rallies of the steelworkers organized by the shop-floor militants. A large number of

¹³See for example, publication of the full text of a Lewis letter to AFL President Wm. Green on organizing steel workers, Gloucester Bay Gazette, 12 June 1936.

these meetings took place during 1936.¹⁴ The formal setting up of Sydney SWOC Local 1064 took place on 13 December 1936, at a meeting in which Carl Neville became the first president.¹⁵ At this point the Sydney SWOC had approximately 300 out of a potential 3000 membership, and the Trenton local had about the same proportion of the workers there organized.¹⁶

The Dosco management continued to resist the formation of a union, declaring the workers' views were sufficiently represented by the plant council. At a meeting of the plant council in December, just before the formation of the SWOC local, General Manager H. J. Kelley announced a seven and one-half per cent raise for all the plant workers.¹⁷ Then, in April of 1937, after the new trade union bill had been introduced in the Nova Scotia legislature, another seven and one-half per cent raise was announced.¹⁸ Giving concessions at strategic moments was a

¹⁴Steelworker, 18 April, 13 June, 25 July, 7 November 1936. Glace Bay Gazette, 14, 16 November 1936; Sydney Post-Record, 6, 18 January 1937.

¹⁵Frank and MacGillivray, eds., George MacEachern, p. 72; Glace Bay Gazette, 3, 22 December 1936; Sydney Post-Record, 14 December 1936, 18 January 1937.

¹⁶"Steel Union Marks First Anniversary," Glace Bay Gazette, 14 December 1937.

¹⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 7 December 1936. This amounted to two and one half cents per hour for the basic laborers.

¹⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 7 April 1937. This amounted to three cents per hour for the basic laborers.

tactic the corporation had used with success in earlier years, but in early 1937 such maneuvers did not prevent a majority of the steelworkers in both the Sydney and New Glasgow areas from flooding into the new union.¹⁹ In early March John L. Lewis himself announced steel in Nova Scotia would soon be organized.²⁰

The SWOC executive, including George MacEachern as corresponding secretary, along with Silby Barrett, D. W. Morrison and the UMW district board, began to bring pressure on the provincial government for legislation supporting the workers' right to organize trade unions. In March 1937 representatives of the two unions met with Premier Angus L. MacDonald on this subject.²¹ There were also informal meetings of steelworkers with the premier.²² It seems that MacDonald had already been brought close to the point of agreeing with these demands, when he was upstaged by the leader of the Conservative opposition, G.S. Harrington. On 24 March Harrington introduced a private member's bill in the legislature which called for

¹⁹Frank and MacGillivray, eds., George MacEachern, p. 66; Glace Bay Gazette, 9, 11, 12, 18 January 1937.

²⁰Sydney Post-Record, 10 March 1937.

²¹Glace Bay Gazette, 15 March 1937; Sydney Post-Record, 12, 15 March 1937.

²²Frank and MacGillivray, eds., George MacEachern, p. 76.

trade union rights to be recognized in law.²³ Harrington, the MLA for Sydney, no doubt knew of the approaches that had been made to the premier, but his bill had a somewhat different origin. The TLC, inspired by the passage of the Wagner Act in the United States, had begun pressing for a similar law in Canada. Informed by Prime Minister Mackenzie King that such labour legislation fell entirely under provincial jurisdiction, the TLC had circularized all provincial party leaders across Canada with a draft law. It was essentially this TLC draft bill, giving workers an enforceable right to form unions, that Harrington introduced in the legislature. It seems apparent that Harrington was desperate to find a way to win popularity away from the Liberals.

Angus L. MacDonald and his government, rather than oppose this Conservative bill, sought to recover any political ground they might have lost by putting forward an amendment that strengthened the proposed law. The amendment provided that, in any case where the employers already had an established system of checking off deductions from the workers' pay, they would be required to check off union dues. Premier MacDonald and Glace Bay member L.D. Currie specifically argued for this amendment

²³Glace Bay Gazette, 25 March 1937.

as being needed by the Sydney steelworkers.²⁴

After the bill had its second reading, a public hearing on it was held in Halifax by the law amendments committee, although with the support of both parties it seemed certain the bill would be passed. At the hearing Mr. A.H. Whitman, the representative of the Canadian Manufacturers Association, said the proposed law would "dragoon men into union membership" and the check-off would place large sums in the hands of "foreign agitators." Speaking for the bill were Silby Barrett and P.G. Muise for the UMW and CIO, and George MacEachern, Dan MacKay, and Carl Neville for the steelworkers. Barrett said: "People like the Canadian Manufacturers Association are making bolsheviks in Nova Scotia." It was George MacEachern who got the headlines, however, by what the Gazette called his "threat" in saying "I hope we won't be forced to take strike action."²⁵

A few days later the bill passed its third reading and became law.²⁶ This was the first trade union law in Canada that explicitly stated a positive right for workers to form a union, by making it illegal for an employer to

²⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 31 March 1937. Michael Dwyer, the Minister of Mines and Labour, and well known to be a former (and future) Dosco official, was conveniently absent when this bill was debated in the house.

²⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 14 April 1937.

²⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 19 April 1937; Sydney Post-Record, 19 April 1937.

discriminate against union members, and requiring employers to meet and bargain "in good faith" with any union supported by a majority of their employees. The check-off provision the Nova Scotia law included was unique at this time; the check-off was rare anywhere else in Canada and the United States until after World War Two.²⁷

Why was the Nova Scotia government in the Spring of 1937 willing to pass the most advanced labour legislation in Canada? Something more than temporary political expediency seems to have been involved, since the Liberal government could have ignored the steelworkers' demands without much danger of losing the forthcoming election. The answer seems to be that Angus L. MacDonald had become convinced that, at least as far as heavy industry was concerned, cooperation rather than confrontation with the unions would bring industrial peace. Nova Scotia, after all, had the experience of the big labour battles in the coalfields in the 1920s, following which the provincial governments had moved to attempts to co-opt rather than to crush the UMW organization. When MacDonald came to power in 1933, one of his first steps had been to establish a provincial ministry of labour, combined with the ministry

²⁷The Gazette reprinted an article from the Eastern Chronicle (New York) suggesting the check-off began in the coal industry in Nova Scotia, and hardly existed outside of this. Glace Bay Gazette, 5 April 1937.

of mines, and he and the cabinet had met annually with the District 26 executive to discuss possible changes to the laws affecting miners. As to the check-off, the UMW had this as a legal right from 1927, and changes to the check-off law had been used to help the UMW defeat the radical AMW, as we have seen. Extending this system of union legality to the steelworkers therefore must have seemed the path to labour peace in the province to Angus L. MacDonald. His statement after the act was passed was along these lines:

This legislation goes further probably than any similar legislation in Canada and is more advanced than much of the labor legislation in the United States. It was enacted without strikes, violence or bitterness of any kind and it was passed after representatives of both employers and employees were heard by the law amendments committee of the house. The example set by Nova Scotia in peaceful settlement and negotiation might well be taken as a model in many other parts of the continent where a recognition of unions and right to check-off have not yet been obtained despite prolonged bitterness. As we were the first province to work out peacefully and without bloodshed the system of responsible government we now enjoy, so also have we worked out what I hope will be a measure of the greatest value to both employers and employees alike.²⁸

There is a note of self-congratulation here, as MacDonald contrasted peace in the province to events occurring elsewhere at this time. This was the era when the sit-down strikes were going on in the United States in the automobile and rubber industries, and violent incidents in

²⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 19 April 1937.

these American struggles were constantly in the newspapers. In Canada, during the very week this trade union legislation was brought forward in Nova Scotia, in Oshawa, Ontario, the big strike of the General Motors workers was beginning, a CIO strike that met with hysterical opposition from Ontario Premier Mitchell Hepburn. There were other ideas current in those days, however, mainly associated with the "New Deal" in the United States. It was just at this time that the Wagner Act was upheld by a surprise decision of the Supreme Court of the U.S.; and it was in March 1937 that the representative of "Big Steel," Myron Taylor of United States Steel Corporation, signed an agreement with SWOC after secret negotiations with John L. Lewis, thus averting what threatened to be a major strike.²⁹ Angus L. MacDonald no doubt was convinced this was a better method of obtaining labour peace than the crude methods of repression of unions adopted by Hepburn in Ontario and by Maurice Duplessis in Quebec.

However, it seems that Angus L. MacDonald's sympathy with organized labour hit its highest point in 1937. In the years that followed his policies were generally sharply opposed to the interests of the labour movement in

²⁹The strike that did come a few months later against "Little Steel" was ruthlessly and violently opposed by the companies, Bethlehem, Republic, Inland Steel, and others, and resulted in a major defeat for the SWOC and CIO.

the province, particularly when workers in such areas as the fishing industry attempted to unionize. In Nova Scotia, the single important result of the passage of the Trade Union Act, as MacDonald no doubt intended, was the establishment of the steelworkers' unions. Very few other workers in Nova Scotia found it possible to take advantage of the new act, although more than a few attempts were made. Inspired by the Trade Union Act and CIO successes in the United States, efforts were made to establish unions of store clerks, sugar refinery workers, construction workers, and many others.³⁰ The spirit of the times was shown when 70 relief workers engaged in paving the highway between New Glasgow and Antigonish staged a "sit-down" strike for several days.³¹ Almost none of these attempts to organize unions met with any long-term success. There was no mechanism set up under the law, such as a provincial labour board, to enforce the provisions against unfair practices by employers, and the government soon revealed it was not its intention to actively promote unionism where it did not exist. One significant test case was the efforts of Halifax fish plant workers to unionize,

³⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 27 January, 16 March, 7, 11, 17 May 1937.

³¹Glace Bay Gazette, 28 May, 2, 4 June 1937. The men were on the relief rolls in Antigonish and Pictou counties, and were demanding their pay of 27 cents an hour be raised to 30 cents. The contractor simply removed his equipment and left the province.

which led to a strike at the beginning of 1938. The strike was defeated, as was the effort to achieve recognition of the union, largely through government assistance to the employer.³² Nonetheless, even if the steelworkers alone benefitted, the leaders of the CP in Nova Scotia and other union militants could look on the policy of cooperating with the UMW bureaucrats as achieving a notable success in the passage of the Trade Union Act and the creation of the SWOC locals.

On 23 April 1937 the plant council at the Sydney plant ceased to exist, and in early June, the earliest date votes could be arranged at Sydney and Trenton, the workers voted by overwhelming margins to have their union dues deducted.³³ The result of the vote in Sydney, as announced by Deputy Minister of Labour E.B. Paul, was that 95 per cent of the plant workers voted for the check-off.³⁴ The steel locals were established, at least so far as having the security of regular dues collection in a period in which many unions, notably including the SWOC in

³²L. Gene Barrett, "Underdevelopment and Social Movements in the Nova Scotia Fishing Industry to 1938," in Robert J. Brym and R. James Sacouman, eds., Underdevelopment and Social Movements in Atlantic Canada (Toronto, 1979), pp. 127-60; Interview with K. Dane Parker, May 1985.

³³Sydney Post-Record, 23 April, 9 June 1937; Gloucester Bay Gazette, 24 April, 5, 9 June 1937. In Trenton the vote was 1118 to 48, in Sydney 2984 to 133 in favour of the check-off.

³⁴Sydney Post-Record, 9 June 1937.

the U.S., had great difficulties getting their members to pay dues. Some indication of how unusual the dues check-off was at this time is provided by a book published on the American SWOC in 1940, which gives a ten page description of how the SWOC was meeting difficulties in dues collection through such devices as "dues pickets" or even physical intimidation of members by union "goon squads." The dues check-off by the company is mentioned as existing in only a few rare instances.³⁵ With the steady income from the check-off, the Nova Scotia steel locals helped finance the SWOC in Ontario and even in the U.S. during this period.³⁶

However, though Dosco had been forced by the law to grant the check-off and meet with the union periodically, nothing required the corporation to make any offers acceptable to the workers. After unilaterally deciding to bring the base hourly rate to 43 1/2 cents by giving another seven and one-half per cent increase at the end of June 1937, when the vote for the check-off and the provincial election were both imminent, Dosco refused to give any wage concessions to the union. The basic rate for labour on the plant was \$0.36 an hour in 1929, and this was reduced to \$0.325 in 1931, and then to \$0.28 in 1932.

³⁵Robert R.R. Brooks, As Steel Goes (New Haven, 1940), pp. 161-71.

³⁶Frank and MacGillivray, George MacEachern, p. 72; Abella, Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour, p.55.

In 1935, apparently in an effort to undermine the union organizing efforts, the rate was raised to \$0.35, in December 1936 to \$0.375, in April 1937 to \$0.405, and in July 1937 to \$0.435 per hour.³⁷

While 43 1/2 cents was the rate for basic labor at the plant, the more skilled men received somewhat higher rates; but in the days before union rates and seniority provisions became effective the wages paid were arbitrarily determined by management. Another form of payment used at the plant was "tonnage," incentive pay for amounts produced above a specified base amount. This was sometimes given only to certain key workers in a department, which would encourage them to press their helpers for increased production, although these men did not receive any incentive pay. Another common practice was "contract" work. This usually involved some particularly dirty or arduous task, and the foreman would make an agreement with the laborers that they would be required to do no other work during the shift once they finished this job. In the way remuneration was determined, tasks assigned, and promotions made there was a good deal of favoritism and discrimination involved, as there was in the hiring practices. Many sources refer to patronage

³⁷Dosco, "Memorandum Showing Changes in Basic Wage Rates, Sydney Steel Plant, 1914 to July 30, 1964," 2 August 1964, in author's possession. The basic hourly rate was \$0.14 in 1914, \$1.04 in 1949, and \$2.00 in 1964.

systems based on religion and on fraternal orders operating in the various sections of the plant:

... in the mechanical department it was good to be a Mason or an Odd Fellow. In the open hearth you'd get along fine if you belonged to the Knights of Columbus. They had this sewed up. Of course, there was a good reason for that, it was good for the boss. I know in the machine shop it would be embarrassing sometimes to see the people that would be promoted simply because of the ring or pin they wore and a better man would be laid aside.³⁸

The workforce at the Sydney plant was probably the most ethnically varied that existed at any place of employment in the Maritime provinces. The largest group were the Canadian born Anglo-Celts, mainly of Scottish descent, Catholic and Protestant. Others, progressively less favoured in the plant's patronage systems, were recent immigrants from Newfoundland, Eastern Europeans and Italians, and finally the Blacks, mostly West Indian immigrants. Members of these minorities working at the plant generally got the heaviest, dirtiest and lowest paid jobs. Most of the Blacks that got on at the open hearth, for example, worked on the coal burning gas producers.³⁹

³⁸Frank and MacGillivray, eds., George MacEachern, p. 27. See also Heron, Working in Steel, pp. 73-111, for a general account of working conditions in the pre-union days in the steel industry.

³⁹These points and the general statements about conditions on the plant in the following paragraph are based largely on numerous interviews with retired steelworkers conducted by the author during the early months of 1990 as part of the Steel Project at the Beaton Institute.

The coming of the union did not with a single stroke eliminate racial and other discrimination at the plant, but among the union's first demands were seniority rights in cases of lay-offs or job transfers. The union also demanded rates be applicable to the job, and not to the man. In an effort to combat favoritism, the union further wanted all jobs classified. There was a strong conviction held by the skilled workers at the plant that the corporation did not pay enough for the proficiency gained by years of experience, but rewarded friends of the bosses with increased pay and promotions. This situation was not instantaneously transformed by the winning of bargaining rights by the steelworkers. In 1940, several years after the union came into existence, the executive issued the following statement:

RAMPANT FAVORITISM ... is the menace which the UNION is out to combat... There is hardly a department that has not had its share of these inexperienced "experts" whose main claim to a special job is their social connections ... The fight is on and will continue until the rank and file steelworker is assured of a square deal and an opportunity to advance on the basis of merit.⁴⁰

The company had also put up a determined resistance over the years to any shortening of the working day, despite some public outcry on this subject, and calls for eight hour legislation. Up to 1930 the Sydney plant had a twelve hour day and a seven day week. One reason for these long

⁴⁰Union Bulletin, 5 February 1940, USWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

hours, as Craig Heron argues, was the control it gave management over the workers. A man putting in a twelve hour day and a seven day week had little leisure for trouble-making union activities, as the management understood.⁴¹ In May 1930, following an investigation conducted by Protestant ministers, the long hours of work at the Sydney plant were the subject of a debate in the House of Commons, and even Sydney's Conservative MP, Finlay MacDonald, declared himself a supporter of the eight-hour day.⁴² These occurrences were partly the result of a campaign conducted by the plant council, which was never completely dominated by the management. A partial advance on hours was the council's biggest achievement: the eight-hour shift came in for all continuous operation departments at the end of 1930, and for most of the plant by 1935, when the continuous departments got a six day week.⁴³ This 1935 concession on hours appears to have been another attempt by management to stave off support for the independent union formed at that time. Long hours remained an issue, however. In the early years of the union one of its unsatisfied demands continued to be the eight-hour day and the 48 hour week for all the workers on the plant, and

⁴¹Heron, Working in Steel, pp. 87-89.

⁴²Sydney Post, 22 May 1930.

⁴³Doane Curtis Memoirs, unpublished manuscript, D. Curtis Papers, MG 9, 1, Beaton Institute; Heron, Working in Steel, p. 109.

the 40-hour week was not won for all the employees until 1950.⁴⁴

Dosco, through the systems of patronage and coercion operating at the plant, through company welfarism (a pension scheme for long-term employees), through industrial relations efforts such as publication of the Besco Bulletin during the late 1920s, and through the plant council, had fought long and hard against the establishment of a union at the Sydney steel plant.⁴⁵ Dosco management clearly continued to hope during the first years following the passage of the Trade Union Act that the union organization could be destroyed, and it was very uncooperative, with this in view. Dosco gave way where the laws required, and checked off union dues; although even on this management made difficulties, refusing for some time to make the deductions weekly, as the union requested, rather than monthly.⁴⁶ Company officials did hold meetings with the union, and some grievances were negotiated, but the surviving minutes show the steadfast refusal of H. J. Kelley and other Dosco managers to grant any substantial demands. In at least one

⁴⁴Bryan C. Williams, "Collective Bargaining and Wage Equalization in Canada's Iron and Steel Industry, 1939-1964, Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations, 26/2 (April 1971), Appendix A, p. 337.

⁴⁵For corporate welfarism at Sydney, see Heron, Working in Steel, pp. 99-111.

⁴⁶Sydney Post-Record, 5 July 1937.

meeting General Manager Kelley made some unsuccessful attempts to red-bait MacEachern and sow division in the union.

Kelley asked M'Eachern if he was the person elected to the Executive of the Communist Party. M'Eachern said he was but that had nothing to do with this matter. Being there as a Trade Unionist he was not influenced by any outside Parties... At this point Kelley tried to ignore MacEachern. [He] turned to our President and said "We will, Mr. Neville, bargain with you collectively." [Neville replied:] "We have had nothing but nos on every question and do not think it at all fair to the men. We would like an understanding so we can work together."⁴⁷

The management also made unnecessary difficulties at the beginning about meeting with union committees. In the midst of the 1937 provincial election held just after the check-off was won, a brief walk-out of the workers in the bar mill occurred when the management refused to meet the shop committee to discuss a grievance concerning their "tonnage" rates. This was quickly settled, with the well publicised intervention of the local Liberal candidate and of Michael Dwyer, the minister of labour. Conservative candidate Harrington claimed the whole incident was staged to make the Liberals look good.⁴⁸

This affair seems the result of deliberate provocation by the management, but it is doubtful that the

⁴⁷Minutes of meeting November 1937, Minutes of Union Executive Meetings with Management, 1937-8, USWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

⁴⁸Sydney Post-Record, 23, 24, 26 June 1937.

company was trying to affect the election; it seems to have been part of a deliberate policy of non-cooperation with the union. A few years later, in a brief to the 1940 conciliation board, SWOC International Representative Philip Clowes argued that full recognition of the union and a decent contract would bring "harmonious relations" to the plant. Dosco management replied that bad relations had existed since the advent of the union, in contrast with the "harmonious" period when the plant council was in existence. In "evidence" the corporation included in its memorandum to the conciliation board the minutes of the last plant council meeting in April 1937, which was filled with polite thank-yous and mutual protestations of esteem between company and employee representatives.⁴⁹ This document's inclusion in a 1940 brief can perhaps more readily be taken as "evidence" that the company still retained hopes of destroying the union.

The executive of the newly formed local was in a very difficult position in these first years, partly due to the hostility from the Dosco management, but also because of the political situation within the SWOC in Canada and the United States. Local 1064 had been built, as we have seen, through what was largely a rank-and-file struggle, but the SWOC as a whole was organized from the top down. From its

⁴⁹Dosco, Memorandum Covering Negotiating Meetings Between the Union and the Management, 4 May 1940, USWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

inception a strongly centralized organization was set up. One source of power for the central office was the control of funds. All dues collected were first sent to the SWOC headquarters, and then the local union's portion was remitted back. As one early commentator wrote:

Discipline as well as economy is served by this policy since the relatively limited funds of the local unions do not permit them to flout the authority of the national officers. The SWOC has, for example, laid down a policy that no strike shall be called without the approval of the national office. A local violating this rule would find itself denied financial support from the national treasury and dependent upon its own slim resources.⁵⁰

For its first six years the SWOC's top leaders, like Philip Murray, were appointed, as was its top leadership in Canada: first an American organizer named Ernest Curtis, then Silby Barrett, and then Charles Millard. It was not until 1942 when SWOC became the United Steelworkers of America that the incumbents in these top offices faced elections. Thus from its inception the steel union had a strongly bureaucratic character in its central organization, while it was reasonably democratic at the local level. From the union's earliest years local executives had to face having their field of action constrained by the central leadership, as the Local 1064 leaders soon found.

The Sydney steelworkers had flooded into the SWOC

⁵⁰Brooks, As Steel Goes, p. 157.

expecting some advances in material benefits in a fairly short time. Months went by, the union dues were regularly checked-off, and the local purchased a union hall in 1938.⁵¹ However, there were no increases in wages or improvements in conditions at the plant, and when these did not come some of the steelworkers began to press for militant action. But John L. Lewis of the CIO, and the leaders at SWOC headquarters in Pittsburgh, Chairman Philip Murray and Secretary-Treasurer David J. McDonald, were not going to support any strike action at this time in Sydney; and if any local Sydney militants thought they could defy the international leaders and take strike action on their own, the influence of the Communist Party would in this "United Front" period be very much against any such action. It was for these reasons that M.A. MacKenzie in the Steelworker began to be very critical of the local CP and the leaders of the steel union, with the result that George MacEachern for a while brought out a weekly paper for the Sydney SWOC local, the Union News, with some assistance from the UMW leadership. "Because the Steelworker couldn't be at all depended on, we got out a paper of our own."⁵²

As announced in this new paper, it was under the

⁵¹A former drugstore in the Ashby area, purchased in June 1938 and renovated, with a formal opening in February 1939. Sydney Post-Record, 17 February 1939.

⁵²George MacEachern: An Autobiography, p. 69.

leadership of Silby Barrett and William Sneed that the Sydney local entered its first contract negotiations with the company in the summer of 1938.⁵³ Sneed, at one time a Pennsylvania state senator, was as we have seen a regular agent of John L. Lewis for dealing with UMW District 26 affairs. For these steel negotiations he was appointed a representative of SWOC headquarters. In the meetings Local 1054 officers found him the very opposite of militant, while the company was intransigent with regard to any concessions.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, under pressure from Senator Sneed and Silby Barrett, the Local 1054 executive after some weeks of negotiating recommended acceptance of a contract with no wage advances or significant improvements in conditions.⁵⁵ M.A. MacKenzie in the Steelworker editorialized that the union leaders were "either inept juveniles in the art of negotiation, or are base traitors."⁵⁶ When this contract was put to a referendum vote on 8 August it was rejected by the union membership by 1177 votes to 835.⁵⁷

Local 1064 President Neville's New Year message at

⁵³Union News, 18 June 1938.

⁵⁴Frank and MacGillivray, George MacEachern, pp. 80-1.

⁵⁵Sydney Post-Record, 2, 5 August 1938.

⁵⁶"The Shackle Agreement," Steelworker, 30 July 1938.

⁵⁷Sydney Post-Record, 8 August 1938; Steelworker, 13 August 1938.

the beginning of 1939, printed in the Sydney Post-Record, stated that 1938 had been a "year of difficulties and struggle" with few "material blessings" for the steelworkers to look back on.⁵⁸ The restiveness of the Sydney steelworkers found some expression when on 23 February 1939 another walkout took place at the bar mill. The strike lasted two weeks, and was partly over money and partly political. The company was trying to rush through an order for Japan, and the men demanded special tonnage rates for this, as well as displaying some reluctance at this time to work on material going to the fascist and militaristic Japanese state. Despite promises from Silby Barrett the strikers received no financial support from the International SWOC. The sed with the ideological leadership given by the political parties to produce certain levels of consciousness among the workers. Beyond this, the principal actors in this story are the activists among the rank-and-file coal miners and steelworkers, those who attended union meetings, supported the CP, the CCF, or the

⁵⁸Sydney Post-Record, 2 January 1939.

the beginning of 1939, printed in the Sydney Post-Record, stated that 1938 had been a "year of difficulties and struggle" with few "material blessings" for the steelworkers to look back on.⁵⁸ The restiveness of the Sydney steelworkers found some expression when on 23 February 1939 another walkout took place at the bar mill. The strike lasted two weeks, and was partly over money and partly political. The company was trying to rush through an order for Japan, and the men demanded special tonnage rates for this, as well as displaying some reluctance at this time to work on material going to the fascist and militaristic Japanese state. Despite promises from Silby Barrett the strikers received no financial support from the International SWOC. The strikers returned to work after receiving a pledge from the provincial department of labour that the conditions at the plant would be fully investigated.⁵⁹

Shortly after this the active unionists at Sydney were angered by the appointment of Forman Waye as SWOC district organizer for Nova Scotia by Philip Murray. This appointment was made on Silby Barret's recommendation, without prior consultation with the local membership.⁶⁰

⁵⁸Sydney Post-Record, 2 January 1939.

⁵⁹Sydney Post-Record, 25 February 1939; Gloucester Bay Gazette, 23, 24, 25, 27 February, 7 March 1939.

⁶⁰Sydney Post-Record, 28 March 1939.

There does not appear to have been any strong personal objection to Waye, a well known local labour activist, who was a few weeks later elected provincial president of the CCF.⁵¹ The anger seems to have been directed at the undemocratic method by which Waye was appointed, when the local executive believed it had been promised some say in this appointment.

Behind this, of course, was the determination of the SWOC head office to keep firm control over such appointments, and not permit men to get office who might not always be loyal to the existing leadership. It was about this time, according to Irving Abella, that Murray began to be concerned about the left-wing connections of the SWOC organizers earlier appointed in Ontario. Presumably he had no intention of adding to the power of the communists within the union by giving the Maritime appointment to someone like George MacEachern, in many ways the natural candidate for the job. Ironically it was Carl Neville, a Catholic trade unionist who had strong ideological affinities to Philip Murray, who was outraged by the action of the SWOC chairman. The communists in the local union executive, against whom this maneuvering was directed, had no intention of resigning over such a matter, but it was the last straw for Neville. He resigned as president of the local a few days after writing a

⁵¹Sydney Post-Record, 29 May 1939.

letter to Murray pouring out his outrage at the role played by Barrett and Sneed in the 1938 negotiations, at Barrett's "betrayal of the Bar Mill workers," and Barrett's part in the undemocratic appointment of Waye.⁵² An accusation was also made that Waye gave confidential information to M.A. MacKenzie to use in his paper's attacks on the Local 1064 executive.⁵³ Murray simply passed all these matters over to Barrett himself to investigate.⁵⁴

Silby Barrett was also in charge of the 1939 round of negotiations that took place with Dosco seeking a contract.⁵⁵ These negotiations achieved nothing, since the company would make no concessions and also refused to join in an appeal for a conciliation board.⁵⁵ The new Local 1064 executive elected on 28 June, headed by Norman MacKenzie, made approaches to the UMW concerning joint negotiations with Dosco.⁵⁷ The executive again attempted

⁵²Carl Neville and Clarence MacInnis to Philip Murray, 31 March 1939, USWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

⁶³Neville and MacInnis to Murray, 4 April 1939, UMWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute; Steelworker, 1 April 1939.

⁵⁴Murray to Neville and MacInnis, 22 April 1939, UMWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

⁶⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 6, 20, 23, 30 May 1939.

⁵⁶Sydney Post-Record, 9 June 1939.

⁵⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 28 June 1939; Sydney Post-Record, 5 July 1939.

to bargain with Dosco, meeting with President Arthur Cross when he visited Sydney. They were faced with a complete refusal by Dosco to consider any increase in wages, the company claiming it was unable to afford any raise. When the corporation's profits of \$1,500,000 were mentioned, the union was told these were required to pay for the two new open hearths then under construction at the plant.⁵⁸ The Trenton workers were also making no headway, and their frustration was indicated by a brief strike in early August.⁵⁹

Beginning early in 1939 the Sydney SWOC encountered another menace that might have destroyed it. In January the SWOC, with other CIO unions, had been expelled from the TLC, so it was no longer affiliated to any Canadian central body.⁷⁰ Soon after this Doane Curtis, who had been active during the 1923 strike and then had been on the plant council for years, led an effort to build a rival union at the plant, affiliated with the All Canadian Congress of Labor (ACCL). The Canadian Steelworkers Union made a nationalist appeal, "Canadian Unions for Canadian Workers," and raised the question of union funds flowing

⁵⁸Sydney Post-Record, 18 July 1939; Glace Bay Gazette, 11, 22, 24 July 1939; Norman MacKenzie, Proposed Radio Address, N.D., USWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

⁶⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 1, 3, 4 August 1939.

⁷⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 20 January 1939.

to the U.S. without any benefit being received.⁷¹ Although it came to nothing, this was a serious threat to the SWOC at Sydney. The independent steel local at Algoma did become affiliated with the ACCL at about this time, and in March ACCL President Aaron Mosher came to Sydney to promote the new union.⁷² The failure of the SWOC to make any gains for its membership certainly gave the national union plenty of dissatisfaction to work on, as Carl Neville pointed out in his letters to Philip Murray.⁷³ Doane Curtis, the organizer of the Canadian Steelworkers Union at Sydney, claims in his unpublished memoirs that the union had more than 1000 members signed up. He also maintains Silby Barrett told him that it was fear that the SWOC in Canada would be destroyed that led Barrett, Charles Millard, and D.W. Morrison to approach Mosher in early 1940 to suggest the merger of the CIO unions with the ACCL.⁷⁴ This is no doubt an exaggerated view of the importance of the national union movement at this time, but it would certainly have continued to be a threat to Local 1064 for a long period if Mosher had not embraced

⁷¹Canadian Steelworkers Union Leaflet, Doane Curtis Papers, MG 19, 1, Beaton Institute.

⁷²Mosher to Editor of Steelworker, 24 March 1939, Doane Curtis Papers, MG 19, 1, Beaton Institute.

⁷³Neville and MacInnis to Murray, 31 March, 4 April 1939, USWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

⁷⁴Doane Curtis Memoirs, MG 19, 1, Beaton Institute.

the CIO offer, and pressed his followers in Sydney to rejoin the SWOC.⁷⁵

More than by the national union threat to SWOC, this merger was probably motivated, on the side of both the right-wing leaders of the CIO and of Aaron Mosher, as a move to contain the communists in the CIO ranks. For, with the signing of the non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, and the beginning of the Second World War, the trade union policy of the CP changed. The communist leaders had long urged restraint on the militant workers influenced by them, and called for maintaining unity with the right-wing of the movement at almost all costs. Now they began to press for militant action in the unions in which they worked.

In steel, left-wing union activists influenced by the Communist Party were strong at the local level, as we have seen. The CP also had considerable power within the national SWOC organization in Canada. The National Director in Toronto, appointed some years earlier by Silby Barrett, was a very able and energetic young communist named Richard Steele, and other CP members such as Harry Hamburgn and Harry Hunter were prominent Ontario SWOC organizers. By 1939 these men felt the situation urgently

⁷⁵Norman S. Dowd to Doane Curtis, 21 November 1940, Doane Curtis Papers, MG 19, 1, Beaton Institute; D. Curtis and Emerson Campbell to Mosher, 10 June 1941; Mosher to Curtis and Campbell, 18 June 1941, CLC Papers, MG 28, I 103, Vol. 42, NAC.

required some success in improving wages and conditions in Nova Scotia, the only area where the SWOC was the recognized bargaining agent. Without some victories of this sort to point to, SWOC organizers in the Ontario plants would continue to have difficulty winning over the workers. It was further felt that a coordinated national struggle was needed in the basic steel industry. Thus in November 1939 delegates from the Sydney, Trenton, and Hamilton SWOC locals, and the Algoma local (still an ACCL affiliate) met in Ottawa and put together a set of demands for a national steel agreement. The demands included a basic rate of 50 cents an hour, the eight hour day and 48-hour week.⁷⁵ This program was central to all the struggles of the steel unions through the early war years.

By the beginning months of 1940 the conflict between communist organizers in Canada and the Pittsburgh headquarters of SWOC, partly on tactics, was coming to a head. In February Dick Steele wrote to George MacEachern strongly urging a strike at Sydney without waiting for approval from Philip Murray:

... the only way to get a decent union agreement with DOSCO is by strike action ... our hesitation has generally been based upon the fear that sufficient support will not be forthcoming from the International ... strike action conditional upon International support ... would never win, because the membership would naturally look firstly in that

⁷⁵SWOC leaflet, November 1939, USWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

direction... You will betray the rank and file if you continue to hesitate... all other issues are secondary to that of ACTION in DOSCO.⁷⁷

Steele further argued that the time was ripe to act, that Canadian autonomy within SWOC gave them the power to act after consulting only Silby Barrett, the Canadian regional director. Steele had been working on Barrett, apparently, and was assured he would give his sanction to a strike.

Things were, in fact, moving rapidly toward a strike at Sydney. At the end of January 1940 the union called off further negotiations with Dosco.⁷⁸ A circular was sent out to all members asking them to "rally around the Union" for the coming struggle.⁷⁹ In early February a strong grievance arose at the coke ovens on a seniority issue.⁸⁰ After giving the company a week's notice so necessary maintenance could be arranged, the coke ovens employees, fully backed by the local, came out on strike on 9 February.⁸¹ This stoppage lasted a week, and ended in

⁷⁷Steele to MacEachern, 6 February 1940, USWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

⁷⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 25 January 1940.

⁷⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 30 January 1940; Local 1054 Circular, 24 January 1940, USWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

⁸⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 6, 8 February 1940; Union Bulletin, 5 February 1940, USWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

⁸¹Glace Bay Gazette, 9 February 1940; Union Bulletin, 10, 13 February 1940, USWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

victory for the workers on the specific issue involved.⁸² In the midst of the coke ovens strike the union held a strike referendum of all the plant workers. The steelworkers voted 2253 to 257 for a walkout if Dosco did not give in to their demands after another attempt at negotiations.⁸³ Negotiations during the next weeks proved fruitless, and the union announced a strike would begin on 21 March.⁸⁴ The strike was averted by interventions from the government and the international office of the union. The federal department of labour, in a series of telegrams, told the Sydney local that the Dosco plant came under the provisions of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act during wartime and they could not legally strike without going through conciliation proceedings.⁸⁵ The union appeared ready to strike in defiance of these orders, arguing that the company and government had previously taken the position that the plant was not engaged in war production, and hence did not come under the act.⁸⁵ Just before the strike was to begin,

⁸²Glace Bay Gazette, 17 February 1940.

⁸³Glace Bay Gazette, 13 February 1940.

⁸⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 1, 15, 19 March 1940.

⁸⁵Telegrams, W. M. Dickson, Deputy Minister of Labour, to Norman MacKenzie, 9, 13, 15 February 1940, USWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

⁸⁵Norman MacKenzie to W.M. Dickson, 9 February 1940, USWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

however, a wire from David J. McDonald, SWOC secretary-treasurer, was received. McDonald had been contacted by officials of the government, and he demanded the "illegal" strike be cancelled.⁸⁷ Reluctantly the Local 1064 executive complied, and signed a joint application with the company for a conciliation board.⁸⁸

A minor struggle then followed in the local as to who was to be the steelworkers' representative on the conciliation board, with figures as different as Dick Steele and Mayor Slaven of Sydney being proposed. The final choice was a priest who had been active in the St. FX Extension Department Labour School, Fr. T. O'Reilly Boyle.⁸⁹ He was to prove a rather weak selection from the point of view of the union. The board, chaired by Justice Lucien Cannon of the Quebec Supreme Court, began its hearings in Sydney on 11 April, with Dosco President Cross in attendance and Philip Clowes, from the SWOC head office, making the main presentation for the union. The union argued for a basic 50 cents an hour, seniority provisions, the 48-hour week, and the other demands agreed upon in November, 1939, with the other steel locals. Dosco

⁸⁷Report of Executive March 20th 1940, USWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

⁸⁸H.J. Kelley and N. MacKenzie to Norman McLarty, Minister of Labour, 21 March 1940, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute; Glace Bay Gazette, 21 March 1940.

⁸⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 23 March 1940.

argued its inability to pay any higher rates, declaring it had special difficulties in competition with the Ontario steel producers, the poor quality of Cape Breton coal and Wabana ore, and the distance of Sydney from the central Canadian market.⁹⁰

After hearings in Sydney and in Montreal, the Cannon board considered the matter all through May and June.⁹¹ Finally, on 4 July 1940 the Cannon board issued its report. The unanimous recommendations called for some shortening of hours of work, but rejected the union demands for holidays with pay and for an increase in wages. The company claim that it was unable to pay was accepted. The board did call for a war production bonus of 15 cents a shift, to begin six months after the contract was signed.⁹² The idea of bonus payments in lieu of basic increases was taken from the June order in council, PC 2585, and the whole approach foreshadowed the government policy of wage freeze to be adopted at the end of the year in PC 7440.⁹³ When Steel Labor, the union journal published in the U.S., hailed the Cannon report as a victory, Local 1064 protested in a letter to the editor:

⁹⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 10, 11, 12 April 1940.

⁹¹Glace Bay Gazette, 13, 26, 27 April, 6 May 1940.

⁹²Glace Bay Gazette, 4 July 1940; Labour Gazette, 40 (July 1940), pp. 662-5.

⁹³Labour Gazette, 41 (January 1941), pp. 22-4.

We can see no victory in a decision which, with the exception of 15c per shift bonus, practically recommends that prevailing conditions continue as they are...the Company still has the right to work men sixteen hours in some departments without overtime pay ... The grievance machinery, with the exception of the umpire, has been operating for over three years ... the workers do not take kindly to such a glowing interpretation being put on the mediocre concessions recommended by the Board.⁹⁴

However, on the basis of this report, negotiations resumed, Philip Clowes returning to Sydney to guide the discussions with management.⁹⁵ Negotiations then dragged on again for weeks, and the Cannon board was reconvened to deal with various points.⁹⁶ Finally, at the beginning of September 1940, on the recommendation of the executive the steelworkers voted 950 to 457 to accept a contract based on the Cannon report. The low turn out, 1407 voting out of 3500 eligible members, shows what little enthusiasm the workers had for this contract.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, more than three years after the union being established with the dues check-off, it finally had a signed contract with the management, the first SWOC contract with a basic steel

⁹⁴George MacEachern to Vincent Sweeney, 25 August 1940, USWA Papers, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

⁹⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 15 July 1940.

⁹⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 2, 10, 29 August 1940.

⁹⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 4 September 1940.

producer in Canada.⁹⁸

Meanwhile a transformation had been taking place in the leadership of the SWOC in Canada. In May 1940 the annual SWOC convention was held in Chicago. President Norman MacKenzie and other Local 1064 officers attended and had a meeting with Philip Murray.⁹⁹ They and other Canadian locals were informed that Murray's personal representative, Philip Clowes, would be empowered to make an investigation of the SWOC in Canada. Philip Murray had decided that the communists must be "cleared out" of the Canadian SWOC. Clowes' first action, on 4 June, was to fire Dick Steele, and replace him by Charles Millard as the general secretary of SWOC in Canada.¹⁰⁰ Silby Barrett gave his approval to this, and he remained nominally Millard's superior officer in the Canadian SWOC. Barrett, however, gradually came to play a less active role than the dynamic Millard, who was both an active CCFer and a

⁹⁸The steelworkers at Trenton also signed a contract in this year, following protracted negotiations and a conciliation board. Glace Bay Gazette, 20 August, 25 September, 6 October, 14 November, 3 December 1940.

⁹⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 16, 28 May 1940.

¹⁰⁰Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour, pp.56-7. Millard had been the president of the United Auto workers at Oshawa at the time of the strike there. Forced out of the Auto Workers by the left-wing within that union, he had been appointed to office in the CIO in 1939.

virulent anti-communist.¹⁰¹

Steele and the other communists in the SWOC tried to fight back, and probably had the popular support of most of the active membership in Canada. Norman MacKenzie, George MacEachern and other left-wingers on the executive of the Sydney local certainly supported Steele and opposed Millard. Other officers such as Vice-President Ed Corbett, who later became quite right-wing, seem to have been much more radical at this time, and the left-wingers seem to have had wide support from the workers. In Local 1064 the entire executive was re-elected by acclamation late in June.¹⁰² Four locals in Ontario condemned the dismissal of Steele, as did Local 1064 President Norman MacKenzie.¹⁰³ But these protests had no effect on the control Murray and Millard had over the organization, which was strengthened later in 1940 when the SWOC, along with the UMW and other CIO organizations in Canada, affiliated with the new Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL).¹⁰⁴ One particular benefit of this for SWOC was that the local steel union at

¹⁰¹Barrett was, above all, John L. Lewis's man, while Millard was a Murray appointee. During 1940-1 a rift developed between Lewis and Philip Murray, after Lewis resigned as CIO president and Murray replaced him. As Lewis lost influence over the SWOC, Barrett's involvement declined.

¹⁰²Glace Bay Gazette, 20 June 1940.

¹⁰³Abella, Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour, p. 58.

¹⁰⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 23 August 1940.

Algoma, which had been affiliated for some time with Mosher's ACCL, now joined the SWOC. Emboldened by these developments, Millard on September 17 fired SWOC organizers Harry Hunter and Harry Hamburg, both members of the CP. Four of the Ontario locals immediately met and formed an "Ontario Executive" of the SWOC, led by Hunter and Hamburg, which operated as a rival leadership to Millard and Barrett for months. Finally, in June 1941, after a conference of SWOC in Montreal the Ontario Executive was dissolved and the dissident Ontario locals returned to the SWOC.¹⁰⁵

However, the victory of the anti-communist forces in the SWOC was not as complete as Irving Abella implies when he states: "shortly afterwards Mackenzie and MacEachern--the left-wingers in Local 1054 in Sydney were defeated in executive elections."¹⁰⁶ Because of ill health, Norman MacKenzie did not re-offer in the June 1941 election for president, and Dan MacKay won a narrow victory over past-president Carl Neville and George MacEachern. This cannot be regarded as a triumph of the right-wing in the local however. Dan MacKay resigned after a few months in office, and MacEachern was elected to replace him. Then, from 1942 until the end of the war, left-winger George MacNeil was

¹⁰⁵Abella, Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour, pp. 59, 64.

¹⁰⁶Abella, Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour, p. 54.

Local 1064 president.¹⁰⁷ From 1941 on, as Abella indicates, right-wing CCFer Millard and his appointees were firmly in control of the national organization of the steel union in Canada, but more often than not the left-wing retained considerable influence at the local level. Dick Steele, Harry Hunter, Harry Hamburg had been appointed to their jobs, and could be arbitrarily fired, regardless of their popularity with the workers they had helped organize. This was not possible with elected local leaders, as in Sydney, or in Stelco Local 1005 in Hamilton, where left-winger Tom McClure remained union president until replaced by a CCFer in 1945.¹⁰⁸

Of all the CIO unions that had been created, in large part, by communist grass-roots organizers in both Canada and the United States, the steel union was the first to engage in an anti-communist purge. One reason for the delay in the SWOC's transformation from an "organizing campaign" to a union with at least the formalities of democracy was probably the desire of the top leaders to first eliminate influential communists in the union in the U.S. and in Canada.¹⁰⁹ Philip Murray and the steelworkers

¹⁰⁷For Local 1064 elections, see Appendix C.

¹⁰⁸Bill Freeman, 1005. Political Life in a Union Local (Toronto, 1932), p.35.

¹⁰⁹Frank Emspak, "The Break-up of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), 1945-1950," PhD Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972, p. 33.

organization had also by this point broken away from the guiding hand of John L. Lewis and the UMW. In the convention at Cleveland in June 1942, six years after SWOC was founded, the organization finally became the United Steelworkers of America, with its top officers in the U.S. and Canada subject to election, rather than appointment.¹¹⁰ The week before the convention Silby Barrett resigned as Canadian Regional Director of SWOC, stating he could no longer manage both this job and his work as UMW International Board Member.¹¹¹ A temporary equilibrium by this time existed in the union in Canada, with the right-wing in control at the top, while the left often were in leading positions in the locals. Appointed officials of the union from this time on, men like Larry Sefton, Murray Cotterill and Eamon Park, were CCFers loyal to Millard.

During 1941 a renewed effort began to organize the steelworkers in Ontario and Quebec, and to win meaningful wage concessions where the union existed, a fight that had probably earlier been weakened by the anti-communist struggle in the steel union. As the war went on the demand for steel grew, employment in the industry and productive capacity rapidly increased, and the workers naturally sought better wages and conditions while their labour was

¹¹⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 6 June 1942.

¹¹¹Glace Bay Gazette, 20 May 1942.

in high demand. The federal government sought by its wage and price controls to hold down "inflationary" increases, and set up national and regional war labour boards to intervene in any threatened wage disputes. Although PC 2685, passed in June 1940, called on employers to voluntarily recognize unions, no federal legislation provided an enforceable right to collective bargaining until the passage of PC 1003 in February 1944. The wartime struggles of the steelworkers had a considerable impact on the process of change in Canadian labour law.

Local 1064 played only a supportive role in the 1941 SWOC strikes at National Steel Car in Hamilton and at the Dosco subsidiary Peck Rolling Mills in Montreal, although at one point a one day sympathy strike was proposed at Sydney and Algoma.¹¹² When negotiations for a new contract with Dosco began at Sydney in August 1941, the union demanded an increase in the basic rate from 43 1/2 cents to 62 1/2 cents, and a 40 rather than 48-hour week. Similar demands were made by the steelworkers at Algoma and at the Trenton plant, where one wildcat strike had just ended and another was about to begin.¹¹³ The negotiations with the employers became meaningless, however, since the new government wage controls specified all increases had to be approved by a war labour board.

¹¹²Glace Bay Gazette, 29 April, 1, 2 May 1941.

¹¹³Glace Bay Gazette, 14, 19, 21, 22 August 1941.

From the beginning the steel union sought to have basic steel declared a "national" industry, so as to have its cases heard by the National War Labour Board rather than one of the regional boards. In 1942, however, both the Algoma and Sydney steel locals followed regulations and applied for wage increases to their respective boards in Ontario and Nova Scotia, each asking for a basic rate of 55 cents an hour, exclusive of the cost of living bonus they were receiving.¹¹⁴ These applications were turned down, and in August 1942 strike votes were taken at both the Algoma and Sydney plants. The Sydney workers voted 3074 to 38 in favour of a strike, and at Algoma the vote was 3112 to 22.¹¹⁵ To avert a strike, the government set up a royal commission on the steel wage issue headed by Justice F.H. Barlow, which held hearings in Sault Ste. Marie and Sydney in October and November.¹¹⁶ In January 1943 the commission's report came out. The majority recommended no increases to the basic rate, although CCFer King Gordon's minority report eloquently argued that both equity and a more efficient war effort required a raise of rates for the steelworkers.¹¹⁷ On 12 January the strike began at Sydney, and the Algoma and Trenton workers walked

¹¹⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 17 June 1942.

¹¹⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 21 August 1942.

¹¹⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 31 October, 12 November 1942.

¹¹⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 11 January 1943.

out the following day.¹¹⁸ At all these plants the strikes were solid, with no effort made to bring in strike-breakers. Although Minister of Labour Humphrey Mitchell declared these were illegal strikes, the cabinet and Mackenzie King immediately began negotiations with Millard.¹¹⁹ In a "Memorandum of Agreement" the prime minister promised the steelworkers could present their case to a newly constituted National War Labour Board, no longer to be chaired by H. Mitchell, and the government would "recommend" the board declare steel a "national" industry and set the basic rate at 55 cents. Trenton was also to be a "national" industry if the Regional War Labour Board declared it constituted a "basic" steel plant.

On the basis of these promises, the Algoma and Sydney workers returned to work after two weeks on strike. The Trenton workers, feeling betrayed, continued their strike for several more days before the national union leaders convinced them to resume work.¹²⁰ The new National War Labour Board, however, did not carry through the government's recommendations, since it did not declare steel a "national" industry, the basic rate was set at 50 cents plus the nine cent cost-of-living bonus, and Trenton

¹¹⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 12, 13, 14 January 1943.

¹¹⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 16 January 1943.

¹²⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 25, 26, 27, 30 January 1943.

was not given the status of "basic" steel. The feeling of the steelworkers was, said Millard, one of "general discontent" after the NWLB report came out.¹²¹ However, these developments in the steel industry had an important effect on the demands of labour for better collective bargaining legislation, as pointed out by Laurel MacDowell in her account of the wartime changes in the law.¹²² But although some concessions were won from the government for union organization in general, the steelworkers' "discontent" carried on throughout the war years. The war brought fairly steady full employment, and this, more than the slight increases in hourly rates, caused a raise in the average earnings of steelworkers.¹²³ It also made the bargaining position of the workers stronger, and increased the leverage they would have in a strike. Nonetheless, no further steel strike occurred until 1945. The steelworkers no doubt felt the public pressure against strikes in

¹²¹Glace Bay Gazette, 1, 6, 9 April 1943.

¹²²MacDowell, "The Formation of the Canadian Industrial Relations System During World War Two."

¹²³Another effect of the shortage of labour during the war years was the employment of women in production work at the Sydney plant. All these women were laid off at the end of the war. The writer encountered no record of the women being active in the union, nor of any discussion within the union of issues involving the women. This temporary employment of women at the Sydney steel plant in non-traditional jobs deserves examination for the light this should cast on gender relations during this period. It is the writer's understanding that research has commenced on this topic in preparation for a doctoral thesis.

wartime, and all the political parties, including the CCF and, most adamantly, the CP, opposed any disruption of war production. The involvement of the government also affected the situation, because it allowed the union to conduct what amounted to nationwide bargaining in basic steel, even though they still did not have union recognition at the largest Canadian operation, Stelco. One cause of friction for Sydney and Trenton workers was temporarily removed in October 1943 when parity at 59 cents an hour was won with the rates paid at Stelco and Algoma.¹²⁴

Almost immediately after this, Dosco announced it was going to close several parts of its Trenton plant, notably the nut and bolt mill, displacing about 700 workers.¹²⁵ From the beginning accusations were made that it was the award of higher wages to the Trenton workers by the war labour board that had prompted this decision, and that this was the beginning of a general Dosco move of its operations to central Canada.¹²⁶ There were many protests, including a one day "work holiday" involving about 25,000 workers, including the UMW, the steelworkers in Trenton

¹²⁴Bryan C. Williams, "Collective Bargaining and Wage Equalization in Canada's Iron and Steel Industry, 1939-1964," Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations 26/2 (April 1971), pp. 308-43.

¹²⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 26, 27 October 1943.

¹²⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 8, 11 November 1943.

and Sydney, and the Pictou and Halifax shipyards.¹²⁷ The Nova Scotia government set up a Royal Commission headed by Judge Carroll to investigate the plant closing which produced a report which was very critical of the corporation.¹²⁸ Despite all protests, the plant was closed. This was, according to a recent study, the culmination of a long process of corporate neglect of the Trenton facilities:

The labour scarcity of the war provided the political precondition for closure of the rolling mills and nut and bolt plant, the wage increases awarded by the Federal Labour Board served as an excuse while the cause, a conscious corporate strategy of industrial neglect and winding down, was left unchallenged.¹²⁹

Equal rates for Nova Scotian steelworkers with the basic hourly rate paid in Ontario did not last for long. In February 1944 the Ontario WLB approved an increase of the Stelco rate to 64 cents, and the same increase was permitted at Algoma by the board in April, while Sydney and Trenton rates remained 59 cents an hour.¹³⁰

¹²⁷There were, in fact, two one day protest strikes. The first, on 8 December, involved only the Pictou county workers. The second, after Freeman Jenkins' disapproval was overridden by the UMW district convention, was held on 28 December. Glace Bay Gazette, 6, 8, 28 December 1943.

¹²⁸W. F. Carroll, Report of the Commissioner on Trenton Steel Works (Halifax, 1944).

¹²⁹L. Anders Sandberg, "Dependent Development, Labour and the Trenton Steel Works, Nova Scotia, c. 1900-1943," Forthcoming, Labour/Le Travail.

¹³⁰Williams, "Collective Bargaining and Wage Equalization," p. 317.

Throughout the remainder of the war the Sydney local sought fruitlessly to eliminate this five cent differential with the Ontario rate. A union advertisement in August 1945, placed in the newspapers when the local applied to the Nova Scotia regional board for parity with Ontario, asked:

SHOULD NOVA SCOTIA WORKERS BE PAID LESS? ... At the present time Nova Scotia workers employed in the steel making industry are receiving \$125.00 each per year less than workers doing exactly the same jobs in Central Canada. As a result more than a million dollars purchasing power is lost to Nova Scotia each year... Nova Scotia must decide. In the days of peace ahead must mass discrimination against this province continue --or will we receive equal treatment with the rest of Canada? ... Make Nova Scotia an Equal Partner in Confederation.¹³¹

Another advertisement, published during the provincial election campaign in October 1945, took the form of an "Open Letter to Nova Scotia's Political Leaders." It asked: "Mr. Political Leader ... where do you stand on the question of equal wages for Nova Scotians?"¹³²

The establishment of a common wage structure throughout the basic steel industry of Canada was part of the aims of the USWA in the 1945 strike, the most important crisis in the national history of the union. The strike began on 15 July 1946, and lasted for almost three months. The union demands at the beginning were for

¹³¹Glace Bay Gazette, 22 August 1945.

¹³²Glace Bay Gazette, 17 October 1945.

increases of 19 1/2 cents in the basic hourly rate in Ontario, and 24 1/2 cents in Sydney, for a 40-hour week. Vacations with pay were also demanded.¹³³ The union called for centralized bargaining at the national level, and national bargaining occurred in practice despite the opposition of the companies up to 1945. Wartime controls were still in effect and all negotiations during the strike were directly with the federal government, which took over control of the steel plants before the work stoppage began.¹³⁴ Most of the negotiations took place in Ottawa, some in the full glare of publicity in hearings before the House of Commons Industrial Relations Committee.¹³⁵ During the course of the long strike, the union demands were gradually lessened by C. H. Millard, and on his recommendation the strike was finally ended on 3 October when the workers voted to accept a 13 cents an hour increase, with the Sydney differential and other issues yet to be resolved.¹³⁶ But though the immediate gains were slight, this long and costly strike resulted in the breakthrough victory for the USWA in Canada. The

¹³³Murray Cotterill, "To Moulders of Canadian Opinion," 1946 Pamphlet, CLC Papers. MG 28, I 103, vol. 44, NAC.

¹³⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 11 July 1945.

¹³⁵Sydney Post-Record, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26 July 1945.

¹³⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 3 October 1945. The Stelco workers voted 20-1 to end the strike, at Algoma the vote was 12-1, while at Dosco the vote was 5-1.

management at Stelco, which had tried to keep up production and break the strike with a substantial group of "loyal" employees, were forced to accept the union as the bargaining agent for all the hourly workers. Because of Stelco's resistance to the union, it was in Hamilton that the really dramatic events of this strike occurred, and the large scale confrontations on the picket line.¹³⁷

It is not necessary to go into much further detail on the strike at Stelco and the protracted national negotiations that took place. Here the concern is with the significance of this strike at Sydney. At the Dosco plant, as at Algoma, the strike shut down operations completely. No effort was made by management to continue production, and the union readily agreed that necessary maintenance work would continue, and late in the strike permitted the unloading of ore to build up winter stocks before the shipping season closed.¹³⁸ There was never any need for mass pickets, and there were no violent incidents. Soon after the beginning of the strike there was a large parade and public rally in support of the strikers in Sydney, and a similar rally on the Labour Day weekend.¹³⁹ Throughout

¹³⁷For a good account of the strike at Stelco, see: Wayne Roberts, ed., Baptism of a Union: Stelco Strike of 1946, Hamilton, 1981.

¹³⁸Sydney Post-Record, 12 September 1946.

¹³⁹Sydney Post-Record, 24 July, 3 September 1946.

the dispute, it was mainly a war of words in Nova Scotia. Dosco, beginning in the weeks preceding the strike, inserted a series of advertisements in local newspapers: "Let's All Know More About Sydney Steel." There were about ten separate full-page advertisements, but the theme of all was to argue that Dosco, with its technical difficulties due to the sulphur in local coal and the poor quality of Wabana iron ore, and its transportation costs because of the distance to the Central Canadian market, was losing money, and could afford no wage increases.¹⁴⁰ The union replied with its own advertisements, and received messages of support from the UMW and other unions.¹⁴¹ The strike received full editorial support from the Glace Bay Gazette, by this time owned by the UMW, and of course from the radical weekly Steelworker and Miner. But even the Tory Sydney Post-Record spent most of its editorial ire blaming the strike on the Liberal government and its continuation of wage and price controls in this postwar period.¹⁴² In general, therefore, the long strike proceeded quietly in Sydney. Funds came from donations from other unions, notably the UMW, and were raised through public events as varied as a stage-show put on by

¹⁴⁰Sydney Post-Record, 18, 21, 25, 28 June, 2, 12, 22 July 1945. See also Glace Bay Gazette, same dates.

¹⁴¹Sydney Post-Record, 23 July 1945; Glace Bay Gazette, 20, 24 July 1945.

¹⁴²Sydney Post-Record, 15 July 1945.

the Whitney Pier Ethiopian Society, or a large benefit dance.¹⁴³

But despite the solidarity of other unions and the sympathy of the general public, the union had only sufficient money to provide minimal support to those in most need, not regular strike pay. The endurance of the strikers was well tested in this long strike, which can be said to have fully established the union at Sydney, as well as in Ontario. Although Local 1064 had union grievance procedures and the check-off since 1937, the workers' confidence in the union, and the management's reluctant acceptance of the permanence of the union at Sydney needed the 1945 victory, however incomplete this was.

Perhaps the most startling development at Sydney came after the workers voted to return to work after a mass meeting at the Sydney Forum at which the national settlement was explained. The Sydney differential, the strikers were told, would go before the NWLB, and "indications were" that it would be eliminated.¹⁴⁴ The following day, however, General Manager Clem Anson announced the plant would not be reopening, since Dosco was unable to pay the wage increases agreed upon by the government. "The corporation had held to this line from the

¹⁴³Sydney Post-Record, 3, 5, 8, 15 August 1945.

¹⁴⁴Sydney Post-Record, 2 October 1945.

beginning, and now was able to force the government to cover the cost of the wage increases. On 9 October Donald Gordon, federal Prices Board chairman, announced that additional subsidies were to be given to Dcsco, and work resumed at the Sydney plant.¹⁴⁵

On 26 November 1945, by a majority decision, the NWLB found in favour of the Sydney local's claim for the additional five cents an hour increase to end the differential.¹⁴⁶ But with the ending of wartime controls in 1947 the union found itself unable to enforce joint collective bargaining in the basic steel industry in Canada. In the years that followed Local 1034 struggled hard to keep up with the wage settlements won at Stelco and Algoma. The last year this was achieved was 1954, when the basic rate at all three plants was \$1.185 per hour, and the forty-hour week had finally been established. Thereafter the differential grew wider almost every year, as the economic position of the Sydney plant weakened as compared to the Ontario steel producers.¹⁴⁷ The Sydney local was in no position, presumably, to engage in militant action, and no union-authorized strike occurred at the plant again until 1972. Part of the reason for the

¹⁴⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 5, 7, 9 October 1945.

¹⁴⁶Department of Labour News Release, 25 November 1946, CLC Papers, MC 28, I 103, vol. 44, NAC.

¹⁴⁷Williams, "Collective Bargaining and Wage Equalization," Appendix A, Table 1, pp. 337-8.

relatively moderate policies of the local, however, was the defeat of the left in the union both nationally and locally in the immediate post-war era.

As indicated earlier, by the early 1940s the right-wing was in firm control of the international and Canadian head-offices of the USWA, and all appointed Canadian staff were loyal CCFers and supporters of C. Millard. In the JSWA elections at the beginning of 1945 the left in the union and the communists (now reorganized as the Labour Progressive Party) ran Local 1064 President George MacNeil against Millard for the position of Canadian national director, and Tom McClure of Hamilton Local 1005 ran against J. Mitchell for director of District 5, which covered all Canada except the Maritimes. (No opposition was put up against the incumbent in Maritime District 5, Stanley Hessian of Trenton.) This was very much a political contest. Supporters of MacNeil-McClure attacked Millard and his supporters for tying the union to the CCF, and called for the end of political affiliations. The question, according to the Steelworker and Miner, was "whether a political party is going to dictate the policy of organized labor or whether the trade unions are to be recognized as the fundamental foundation on which political action shall be based."¹⁴⁸ The Millard

¹⁴⁸Steelworker and Miner, 27 January, 17 February 1945.

supporters counter-attacked with the charge that the communists were seeking to control the union.¹⁴⁹ Millard and Mitchell won a decisive victory in the voting on 15 February. MacNeil appears to have received a majority in Sydney, but nationally he was outvoted approximately two to one, McClure five to one.¹⁵⁰ The personal popularity of such local leaders as MacNeil and McClure could not shake the hold the right-wing had on the national organization. Incumbent officers at the international and national level had the free use of all the publicity organs of the union to publicize their case; they also could command the loyalty of the staff men, dependent on them for their jobs. Further, the steel union had no tradition of democratic elections except at the local level. No candidate ever ran against Philip Murray for the presidency, and in the 1960s when opposition was finally put forward to his successor, David J. McDonald, this was at first widely regarded as treason to the union.¹⁵¹ In both Canada and the United States, part of this anti-democratic tradition within the union developed during the period when opposition often was communist-led, and

¹⁴⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 15, 30 January, 9, 13 February 1945.

¹⁵⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 15 February 1945; Steelworker and Miner, 17 February 1945.

¹⁵¹See John Herling, Right to Challenge. People and Power in the Steelworkers Union (New York, 1972).

crushing the communist influence seemed to the leaders to override any qualms about democratic methods.

But it also is likely that the communist label by itself contributed substantially to the defeat of MacNeil and McClure. The anti-strike policies of the communists during the war may have undermined their hold on militant union members to some degree. For example McClure is reported to have argued strongly against the Stelco local joining the 1943 strike.¹⁵² It seems probable, also, that the policies of the LPP in the 1945 provincial and federal elections, going to the extreme of calling for a coalition with the Liberals, alienated some of the party's support. This seems to have particularly angered the rank-and-file CCFers who previously had only reluctantly followed their party's policy of complete non-co-operation with the communists. In any case, in the final months of the war, the contest between right and left in the union heated up, and the right-wing for the first time won almost all the key offices in the basic steel locals. At Stelco Local 1005, after considerable anti-communist work within the local by staff man Larry Sefton, the right-wing was able to narrowly defeat Tom McClure as union president in June 1945.¹⁵³ A year later, in June 1946, just before the national steel strike began, Ed Corbett defeated George

¹⁵²Freeman, 1005, p. 42.

¹⁵³Freeman, 1005, p. 48.

MacNeil for the presidency of Local 1054.¹⁵⁴ One consequence of this was that the union leadership at the local as well as national levels was almost exclusively composed of CCFers during the successful 1945 strike. The left-wingers were certainly very active supporters of the strike, and through the Steelworker and Miner and at meetings frequently criticized Millard and the union leadership for not giving a militant enough lead, or for unilaterally lessening the strikers' demands.¹⁵⁵ At Hamilton, writes Bill Freeman:

The Communists played an important role in maintaining a spirit of militancy ... and some claim they forced Millard to keep the strike going until the workers got a better settlement. It is clear, though, that they played a secondary role in the strike and that the political benefits of the struggle went to the CCF faction within the union.¹⁵⁶

The same seems to have been the case with the Sydney local; it was the right-wing CCF faction that was strengthened by the strike.

The CCF and the existing USWA leadership had shown their policies could lead to material benefits for the workers, just as a strongly anti-communist climate emerged with the communist spy-trials and the beginning of the

¹⁵⁴Sydney Post-Record, 25 June 1945.

¹⁵⁵For examples, see Steelworker and Miner, 10 August 1945; or report of Glace Bay LPP meeting, Sydney Post-Record, 14 September 1945.

¹⁵⁶Freeman, 1005, p. 59.

Cold War. Thus it seems likely that the influence of the right over the general membership of most unions became much greater in this immediate post-war years. The most important change at the Sydney steel local seems to have been in the attitude of men like Corbett or Dan MacKay. At the local level such union activists, although always supporters of the CCF, had generally worked closely with the communists, and often could themselves be regarded as part of the left, rather than the right, in the union. MacKay, for example, a long-time militant from the time of the 1923 strike onwards, was the leader of the Local 1054 delegation to the 1941 CCL convention, where he took a position harshly critical of the line that CCL leaders Mosher, Millard and others had adopted on the Cape Breton coal miners' slowdown.¹⁵⁷ By the post-war years MacKay, Corbett and others became much more anti-communist, and also much less militant in the union policies they upheld. Presumably some of these men became genuinely convinced of the evils of communism and of the gains to be made through exclusively "business unionism." It was also expedient for them to follow this path, given the Cold War political climate, and the consistent pressure they had from the national and international leaders of their union, and the appointed staff. In any case, by 1946 the dominant local leadership had hardened into a genuinely right-wing group.

¹⁵⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 11, 12 September 1941.

The left continued to be active in Local 1034, but remained in a minority position in elections and other tests of strength until the 1960s.

The USWA on the national scene was the leading anti-communist force in the CCL throughout the 1940s and early 1950s. Most of its efforts to expand during this time took the form of raids on supposedly communist-led unions which had been expelled from the CCL, most notably the Mine, Mill and Smelters Union.¹⁵⁸ Such policies directly involved the Sydney local only insofar as they led to struggles between the left and right in the local, usually won by the right.¹⁵⁹ But the steel union, as we have seen, had little tradition of democracy at the national or international levels. This anti-communist crusade helped consolidate a tradition of un-democratic practices in the union regarding methods for dealing with opposition. The leadership of the USWA and of the CCL displayed no concern for democratic processes in the methods used to expel or destroy communist influence in the unions. Later, any serious opposition within the union was regarded as disruptive and disloyal.

As discussed in the previous chapters on the internal

¹⁵⁸See Abella, Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour, Chapter 5, pp. 86-110; Mike Solski and John Smaller, Mine Mill (Ottawa, 1985).

¹⁵⁹See telegram regarding local's "screwball letter ... re raiding," Corbett to Pat Conroy, 4 February 1949, CLC Papers, MG 28, I 103, vol. 42, NAC.

struggles within the UMW, the 1920s and 1930s had seen a struggle between the left and right in the unions that involved opposing conceptions of the fundamental role of the union movement. The left, usually led by the CP, saw the economic struggles of the workers through unions as part of the class struggle, in which victories could only be partial and temporary until the revolutionary transformation of the whole political and economic system took place. Ultimately the main purpose of the union struggle was to educate and discipline the workers in preparation for the final political struggle. The left therefore more readily called for strike action and militancy, and more consistently supported industrial unionism and rank-and-file democracy. These policies, if not totally abandoned by the communists, had been greatly weakened during the United Front period of the late 1930s, and again during the later war years.

The right regarded capitalism as permanent, thought workers and their employers often had common interests, and that the role of unions was exclusively to pursue bread-and-butter issues. The craft unions also aimed to preserve the privileges of skilled workers and avoided involvement in electoral politics. The history of the building of the steel union shows clearly what transpired as the new industrial unions were built. The SWOC and then the USWA were quite effective in combating the narrow

craft outlook that had helped prevent the unionization of heavy industry. The union leaders also were directly involved from the beginning in electoral politics, supporting the CCF in Canada, and Franklin Roosevelt and the Democratic Party in the United States. But industrial unionism did not lead to the long-term advancement of radical politics as had been anticipated. The USWA was from its beginning dominated at its top by the ideology of right-wing unionism. A left-wing or communist minority, sometimes influential at the local level, was soon defeated in the steelworkers' union, as it was later in most other new unions. By the late 1940s right-wing business unionism became defined as the only valid type of union both in law and in the prevailing ideology in the union movement. The left alternative of class-struggle unionism was made illegal by the new legal framework which constrained the freedom of unions to operate in certain ways, while simultaneously granting the unions improved legal standing if they remained within these limits. Radical or "class-struggle" unionism was also thoroughly defeated ideologically, partly by default, since the communists never fully or consistently presented this outlook to the workers after 1935.

The steelworkers' union, created during a period of co-operation between left and right, subject to early anti-communist purges, and lacking much internal democracy

at the international level, developed perhaps the most right-wing policies of any of the new unions in North America. In return for security for the union, and higher wages and improved benefits for the workers, the union officials should function in close collaboration with the management to improve productivity and, where necessary, help discipline the workforce. One of the most explicit and influential expressions of this viewpoint can be seen in a book entitled The Dynamics of Industrial Democracy published in 1942 by two of Philip Murray's closest advisors, Clinton S. Golden, director of a large district of the USWA and later a vice-president, and Harold J. Ruttenberg, the union's research director. This work called for a transformation in the outlook of management, and "the growth of constructive union leadership, after management ceases its opposition [to the] union shop ... a necessary prerequisite for constructive union-management relations ... [which] tends to make management more efficient and unions more cost-conscious, thereby improving the competitive position of a business enterprise and increasing the earnings of both workers and owners."¹⁵⁰ The authors dealt with the difficulties in transforming local leaders who evolved in conditions of conflict to the constructive leaders needed in the period

¹⁵⁰Clinton S. Golden and Harold J. Ruttenberg, The Dynamics of Industrial Democracy (New York, 1942), pp. xxiv-xxvi.

of co-operation with the management. The book then goes so far as to advocate the expulsion of those who built the union if they cannot make this adjustment quickly enough, and gives an example of such an expulsion.¹⁶¹

With these views existing among the top leaders of the union, it is surprising the USW^U remained as militant as it did in its many strikes in the postwar years in the United States. (As previously mentioned no union-authorized strike occurred at the Sydney plant between 1945 and 1972.) But direct struggles over the level of wages formed only one part of the union's policies. In 1947 it engaged in what was perhaps the most extensive labour-management collaboration that had occurred to that date, when the "Co-operative Wage Study" (CWS) plan began to be introduced first in the US and then in Canada. This was a program of job evaluations conducted jointly by representatives of union and management throughout the steel industry in North America. This was aimed at ending the chaos in wage rates existing in integrated steel plants, with the huge multiplicity of un-skilled, semi-skilled, and skilled jobs involved in the different productive processes and maintenance required in this industry. The plan succeeded in standardizing the job classifications of hourly workers in steel plants throughout the continent. Each job was awarded a given

¹⁶¹Golden and Ruttenberg, Dynamics, pp. 50-62.

number of increment points above the basic unskilled rate. CWS job evaluations began to be conducted by a labour-management committee at the Sydney plant in 1949, and in 1953 the CWS plan was made part of the contract, with the hourly increment for each point set at 4 cents, as was then the case at Stelco and Algoma.¹⁶²

Whatever the merits of policies of union-management cooperation such as the CWS job evaluations, it can readily be seen that the steel union that had been firmly established at Sydney by the post-war years retained little of left-wing concepts of class struggle. A small minority of active union members was still influenced by such radical ideas, but there was relatively little effective democracy in the USWA above the local union level. On the job the workers had better wages and conditions than in the non-union era. They faced much less chance of arbitrary dismissal, and favoritism in hirings and layoffs, or promotions and the like, if not eliminated, was much less blatant, after the union seniority provisions came into force. The lengthy and elaborate grievance procedures often gave little satisfaction, and there was little that can be regarded as direct workers' control at the point of production. However, the improvements brought by the union made

¹⁶²Williams, "Collective Bargaining and Wage Equalization," p. 328.

support for the union all but universal among the Sydney workers, even those who were apathetic about their own participation, or who were sharply critical of various policies of the local leadership.¹⁶³ If the Sydney steel union has failed in various respects over the years, it has unquestionably led to better material conditions for the workers and given them a sense of self-worth and confidence they never had in the non-union era.

But so far as political radicalism was concerned, by the post-war years the Sydney steel union, as well as the USWA in general, had become an institution of social control and essential conservatism. The workers' political activity was to be limited to voting CCF in elections and contributing money at other times, and their union activity to legal "business unionism." The CCF itself, in its general political stand, had moved well to the right in its policies by the post-war years, and the CCF role within the union movement became more clearly one of spearheading the right-wing campaigns to defeat any communist influences. Despite its longer and stronger tradition of radical trade unionism, UMW District 26 also moved steadily to the right in its policies, and the CCF leaders helped to facilitate this. With the coal miners, however, declining productivity and the question of

¹⁶³In recent interviews with over 75 retired Sydney steelworkers the author found none who explicitly opposed the union.

mechanization became the key issues during the war years. This issue of mine mechanization was closely interwoven with the contention between miners and the management for control of the work process, with the miners' continuing militancy on wage issues, and with the overall decline of the coal industry in the post-war years.

Chapter Six

The Miners, Mechanization, and the 1947 Strike.

One of the most convincing explanations of the special militancy of coal miners emphasizes the working conditions that existed within the older technology of coal mining. The reasoning is as follows. The technology of mining gave the miners great independence at work, and enabled miners to resist incursions on their individual control of the conditions of their work longer than many other craft workers. Coal miners also had many opportunities to discuss common problems with fellow workers, safety considerations created a need to cooperate with others when in the mine, and the shared dangers in the pits gave them strong feelings of fellowship with other miners. With this outlook blending independent self-reliance and cooperation, when miners encountered injustice, their reaction was strong resistance and broadly based community solidarity. The outlook created by these work conditions was then augmented by other circumstances such as the isolation of mining towns and the great economic importance of coal, bringing about the unequalled combativeness of coal miners in so many different places throughout the world.

This explanation of the origins of coal miners' militancy can readily be applied to Cape Breton in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Similar

work conditions prevailed here as in mines in Vancouver Island, the Crow's Nest Pass, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, or Wales, and a comparable union militancy existed in all such areas at various times. The most unusual feature of coal mining in Nova Scotia was the extent to which the industry was dominated by one corporation.¹ From the 1920s about ninety per cent of the miners in the province worked for Domco or another of the subsidiaries of Besco/Dosco; and the policies of the corporation no doubt added to the miners' union solidarity. But Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, like other mining areas, had the one industry "company towns" that became transformed into "union towns."² The miners in Cape Breton also used much the same technology and had much the same work conditions as elsewhere, so it seems probable that miners' union consciousness arose from similar causes.

If the technology of mining explains the militancy of the miners in the earlier period, a reasonable argument might be that technological change initiated the later

¹Most comparable to Domco were the so-called "captive mines" owned by U.S. Steel and other steel corporations. But whereas Domco had unionized workers from its beginning, the "captive mines" were among the last mines in the United States to be organized.

²David Frank, "Company Town/Labour Town: Local Government in the Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1917-1926," Histoire Sociale/Social History XIV, 27 (May 1981), 177-196; Del Muijs, "The Making of an Industrial Community: Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1857-1900," in Don MacGillivray and Brian Tennyson, eds., Cape Breton Historical Essays (Sydney, 1980).

decline of militancy and of political radicalism. This chapter, however, argues that this was not the case in Cape Breton, since the most significant transformation in the methods of work in the mines of Cape Breton, the elimination of hand loading during the 1950s, was predated by a major defeat in the 1947 strike, and a consequent fall in both union militancy and support for radicalism in politics. Even before the strike one indication of a less militant outlook in the post-Second World War period was the acquiescence by the miners to the necessity for the modernization of the mines, which was sure to lead to the loss of jobs. However, if not the cause of a loss of militancy, the transformations of the workplace in the 1950s probably made less possible a renewal among the miners of the earlier militancy that had arisen ultimately from their independence as workers.

In his classic book on the independent work conditions of miners, The Miner's Freedom, Carter Goodrich argues:

The indiscipline of the mines is far out of line with the new discipline of the modern factories; the miner's freedom from supervision is at the opposite extreme from the carefully ordered and regimented work of the modern machine-feeder.... Coal mining is an industry in which the majority of men are piece workers under very slight supervision; it is also an industry in which a great number of the other employees ... are on jobs that are quite as unstandardized and almost as little supervised as those of the miners

themselves.³

This miner's freedom at work came from the fact that the men usually worked alone, without supervision. Writing in 1925, Goodrich predicted this was about to change rapidly in mines in the United States: "Machine methods of production and factory methods of supervision have already begun to invade the mines, and the industry is apparently in the first stages of a great industrial revolution."⁴

There were basically two forms of underground coal mining, "room and pillar" mining and "longwall" mining, both of which provided solutions to the problem of extracting coal from seams deep underground without having the roofs of the mine tunnels collapse on the miners. Longwall mining was rare throughout the United States, where almost all underground mining used the "room and pillar" system, sometimes called "bord and pillar." In this system the miners worked in scattered "places" or "rooms" which belonged, "almost as a personal possession" to a pair of miners working as "buddies."⁵ A system of tunnels, designed for transportation and ventilation, led

³Carter Goodrich, The Miner's Freedom (Boston, 1925), pp.13-4.

⁴Goodrich, The Miner's Freedom, p. 55.

⁵It was probably in the mines that our word "buddy" for a companion or friend originated. The older word used in the mines in England was "butty." North American pronunciation made this "buddy" and the word spread into general use early in this century.

down to a "side entry" or "level," a tunnel along the coal seam. Running off this side entry, each "place" or "room" was a narrow tunnel advancing a few feet each day into the seam of coal. If the seam had a "dip" or incline, it was better to have the room advance upwards into the seam, to make it easier to haul out the coal. The end wall of the tunnel advancing into the seam was the coal "face." The width of this tunnel was usually about 15 to 20 feet, and the height was that of the seam, perhaps more than six feet, but often less, so the men had to crouch down, or in the worst cases kneel or lie down, when working at the face. Some places or "rooms" were easier to work than others; for example, some were dry and some very wet. These "rooms" were connected to the neighboring tunnels by "break-throughs," shafts cut mainly for ventilation, which left "pillars" of coal to support the roof. In a later, more dangerous operation, the pillars of coal might be "drawn," and the roof allowed to cave in at that point. In a large mine there would be hundreds of individual "rooms" operating at the same time, and miles of tunnels connecting them.

The men working at the face were contract miners. They worked on a type of piece work system in which they were paid for the weight of coal they loaded in mine cars and sent to the surface. One of the first struggles of the miners everywhere, often a struggle won even before they

were successfully unionized, was to have their own "checkweighman" at the surface to make sure the company weighman wasn't cheating them. The basic process of getting out the coal was as follows. First, the coal was undercut, that is, a slot about four feet deep was cut into the seam near the bottom. Several noles were then drilled higher in the coal, filled with gunpowder and tamped and then the "shot" was "fired" to cause the coal on the face to shatter and fall to the floor. The miners then loaded the coal into cars, cleaned up the area, laid new track and did "timbering" (put up wooden roof supports as necessary). In the nineteenth century this was all done by the miners with hand-tools: picks, shovels and hand drills. By the early twentieth century most mines had cutting machines run by electricity or compressed air, and usually the undercutting at the face was done by "machine runners" who went from place to place with their machines making the cuts. A little later in most mines powered drills for preparing the shot holes were introduced. By the twentieth century, in Nova Scotia and in many American states, the law required the use of a "shotfirer" as a safety measure. Shotfirers were experienced miners given the job of going to each place, inspecting the preparations for the shot, and firing it off. Gradually also the mules or horses used to pull the coal cars in the mines were replaced by motorized systems of

transportation. So there was considerable mechanization early in the century, but up to the early 1930s in most of the United States, and up to the 1950s in Nova Scotia, the coal was still hand loaded, shovelled by the miners into cars.

Miners often took great pride in their work and in their skills, although it was a matter of some controversy how far coal mining should be regarded as a "skilled" craft. The miners certainly regarded themselves as skilled men, but mine bosses often claimed mining was at best semi-skilled work, needing mainly a strong back. In general it appears that the most important expertise involved was the knowledge of dangers in the mine, to be able to anticipate underground fires, explosions, poisonous gases, or cave-ins. Coal miners, arguing safety considerations, most strenuously resisted any weakening of the regulations requiring a certain level of experience before a man could work alone at the face.⁶ Whatever level of skill was required, it seems the miner's pride in his work was closely bound up with his freedom from supervision at the workplace. Despite the dirt, danger and heavy labour in the mine, it wasn't like a factory where, as one of Goodrich's informants said, the "boss was always

⁶The Nova Scotia government, for example, relaxed the restrictions in the law during the Second World War, when there was a shortage of experienced mine workers. The miners steadfastly opposed this. See Glace Bay Gazette, 13, 18 March 1942.

looking down your shirt front."⁷

The room and pillar system was one in which the miners only occasionally saw a foreman or any other supervisor. The distances underground were often very great, so that the foreman could visit each place only about once a week in many cases. Miners, therefore, were workers who traditionally decided most things for themselves, including when and where to set props and when it was safe to stay in the mine and when not. With miners, the common desire of workers to control their own speed and methods of production was reinforced by the fact that a man's personal safety was directly involved. Further, the old custom was that the miners left work when they wanted to, and miners often decided to leave early if there were no cars available, or if they felt they had loaded enough coal for the day. Miners also might decide they had loaded enough coal for the week after three or four days, and take a day off. (Absenteeism later became a continual complaint of the coal managers in periods when there was regular work available in the mines.) Thus in many ways contract miners had the traditions of small independent contractors, rather than disciplined factory workers. Efforts to establish a controlled work force or impose "scientific management" according to the ideas of Frederick Taylor, didn't get far in the coal mines. In the

⁷Goodrich, The Miner's Freedom, p. 59.

early nineteenth century the coal bosses presumably felt that the piecework system of mining, the fact that the contract men were paid only for the coal they produced, made direct supervision unnecessary. In later years, as higher productivity was sought, many mine owners and managers sought to exert more direct control over the work process, but this was resisted by the miners with considerable success for a long time. The period from approximately 1890 to 1920, when large scale consolidation of industry was taking place, and workers in many industries throughout North America were being brought under more intense industrial discipline, was also the period of the rise of coal miners' unions to unprecedented power.

The contract miners usually made up slightly more than half the workforce in a mine. The remainder of the workers were daily paid or "datal" men. These were company employees who worked in the mine, or on the surface, on tasks to do with maintaining the mine, transporting the coal out to the surface, or preparing it for market by sorting or washing. Some were skilled men like mechanics or carpenters, or the foremen and shotfirers. Others were unskilled, like the trapper-boys who opened and shut ventilation doors, the drivers for the pit ponies, the tracklayers and the like. Given the great distances underground, even these workers were often left to work

relatively unsupervised. The unskilled among them were usually the younger relatives of the miners, aspiring for a "place" of their own at the coal face. Surface jobs likewise were often filled by relatives of the contract miners, or sometimes by elderly or disabled miners. The closeness of mining communities, and also perhaps this frequency of family relationships between skilled and unskilled, explains why in mining the "craft" unions of the contract miners were early developed into industrial unions encompassing all the workers in and around the mines. The difference between the miners and other laborers in the mines, therefore, was primarily age and experience. And in the Cape Breton mines the distinction between contract workers and "dotal" men was not always clear. Many of the contract men were paid wages for some of their work, and some of the skilled workers in the mine, pipelayers and the like, were paid under a "local contract" individually negotiated with the mine management. In general it was the contract miners whose experience shaped the outlook of all the mine workers; and the contract miners in this system had great independence at work.

Room and pillar mining was the most common technique, but after the 1920s Nova Scotia began to employ the system of "longwall" mining, rarely used then in the United States. Whereas in room and pillar mines the men worked

alone or with one partner, in the longwall system the miners worked as a team, cutting and loading the coal along a long face of the seam, or a "longwall" several hundred feet long. As the cut advanced into the coal seam, the miners removed the props, and allowed the roof to collapse down behind them as they moved forward, along the whole length of the wall. There are two types of longwall mining, longwall "advancing" and "retreating," based on whether the wall advances into the seam from the point nearest the mine entrance, or if tunnels are made to the extent of the coal to be mined, and the coal then mined back towards the entrance. The longwall system had the advantage of more easily taking out most of the coal, as pillars were not needed to hold up the roof. However, it seems to have been a more capital intensive system, and generally only existed where conditions forced its use.⁸ Longwall mining was, up to the 1950s, generally regarded as less advantageous than the room and pillar system, but it is not really clear why.⁹ This system was used in very

⁸Paul Weir, "Report on Possibilities for Increased Mechanization, Cape Breton Mines, Acadia Coal Company Mines, Springhill Mines, of Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation, Limited," February 1946, Devco Papers, Beaton Institute.

⁹Reasons given in the Carroll Commission report for preferring the room and pillar system seem somewhat contradictory. The fact is that room and pillar mining was used in situations where getting out the coal would be easier, regardless of the system used. W.F. Carroll, Report of the Royal Commission on Coal (Ottawa, 1947), pp. 79-80.

deep mines, or mines with thin seams, where the weight of the earth above required much larger pillars of coal to hold up the roof, or made it impossible to later "draw" the pillars, so that room and pillar operations became uneconomic. The longwall technique was not new or unknown. It was in widespread use in Britain by the late 19th century, for example. But it is clear that the basic outlook of the miners everywhere was established under the room and pillar system. Miners working the longwall system worked as a team and loaded coal cut from the wall by machines, usually shovelling the coal onto a moving belt, rather than into cars. Nonetheless, these miners clung to the piecework system of payment by tons loaded, and also maintained the independent spirit of other contract miners. The transition to longwall mining does not seem to have produced any great alteration in the miners' outlook, any more than the earlier transformation from the hand pick to cutting machines had done.

One writer on this topic, Keith Dix, makes a convincing argument that, with respect to the miners' "freedom" at work, the really important step in the mechanization of the American mines was the transition from hand loading of coal to mechanized loading. So long as the miners continued to load the coal with shovels, and to be paid for the amount of coal sent to the surface, there could be no really decisive change made in the

labour relations and labour discipline in the coal industry. Dix claims there remained a high degree of spontaneous "workers' control" at the point of production in any hand loading operation. The big change, mechanization of the loading, was completed in most of the big American mines by the mid-1930s.¹⁰ Such full mechanization greatly increased productivity, and soon involved the loss of large numbers of jobs in the mines, since the machines could produce more coal with fewer men. Mechanization also entailed the loss of the miner's traditional independence at work, the work process becoming much more closely supervised, as well as tied to the speed of the machines. In some ways, it appears that the closer control over the workforce brought about by mechanization was more important to management than was the actual increased efficiency of the machine. A few years of mechanized loading brought about the transformation of the contract miners into hourly paid machine operators. The traditions of union solidarity that had been built up in the earlier period continued to have an effect, but some of the basic work conditions that helped create the militant spirit of coal miners were changed.

Hand-loading was not eliminated in the Cape Breton

¹⁰Keith Dix, Work Relations in the Coal Industry: The Hand-Loading Era, 1880-1930 (Morgantown, 1977).

mines until the early 1950s, but then its eclipse was rapid. In 1945 an official of the Dominion Coal Company stated: "... this company's operations are fully mechanized with the single exception of loading the broken coal at the face. This is still done by hand labour."¹¹ By 1957 another company official could boast of progress in the Cape Breton mines to almost complete mechanization, describing a process which "... embodies the cutting and breaking down of the coal, the mechanical loading of the same, its transference to the surface, and the cleaning and classifying of the product with a minimum of handling during the complete operation of extracting the coal from the solid and loading into railway cars."¹²

In Cape Breton, as elsewhere, the miners often resisted mechanization because of the loss of jobs and also, although this was less well articulated, because of the loss of workplace control. In North America in general, however, it is unclear whether the workers' resistance was of much long term effect. It was often the unionized mines that mechanized first, because their management had more problem keeping down labour costs. The

¹¹Memorandum on the Mechanization of the Collieries of the Dominion Coal Company Limited, Devco Papers, MG14,13 A (b), Box 8, File 9.

¹²Frank Doxey, "Mechanization at Dominion Coal Company, Ltd., and Old Sydney Collieries, Ltd., Cape Breton, N.S." Speech given at meeting of the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy at Ottawa, reprinted in Teamwork (Sydney), May 1957.

UMW leadership, particularly the international president John L. Lewis and his advisors and experts, aimed at a rationalized, modernized American coal industry with nation-wide collective bargaining. The union's central leadership therefore always supported mechanization, presumably preferring fewer but better paid jobs in the mines. In much the same way the union's head office never fought to preserve mining practices that promoted direct workers' control at the local level. On issues such as the right to leave work early, the union's official policy as often as not was supportive of management's "right to manage," even where this meant innovative forms of supervision. The UMW, as we have seen, also enshrined in its constitution the principle of the sacredness of the contract, and steadfastly opposed the frequent "wildcat" strikes which were the main instrument whereby miners at the local union or mine committee level could attempt to oppose incursions on the miners' customary rights, or could try to resist mechanization. The top officers of the union, John L. Lewis in particular, always sought to centralize power in the UMW at the expense of the independence at the district or mine local level.¹³ Lewis therefore had little sympathy for "workers' control" at the place of work, or for saving jobs by resisting

¹³See Melvin Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, John L. Lewis: A Biography (New York, 1977).

technological change, though perhaps the anxieties of coal miners about these things were the real well-springs of the almost unprecedented power Lewis held by the 1930s and 1940s.

When Cape Breton miners made efforts to resist mechanization, therefore, they never had the support of the central leadership of their union. Without this support, it is very doubtful if their resistance was the real reason that the transformation of the work in the coal mines of Cape Breton was delayed until the 1950s. Probably of more importance was the unwillingness or inability of Dosco to make the capital investments necessary to modernize their mines in the late 1920s and early 1930s at the time this process was underway in so many American mines.

When the Dominion Coal Company was formed in the 1890s by the American financier H.M. Whitney, its mining technology appears to have been well in line with advanced North American standards. From the beginning, for example, the Domco mines had electrified haulage systems for bringing the coal to the surface. Compressed air-driven coal cutters of the "Puncher" type were introduced before 1895, and in later years replaced by other air-driven machines, such as the radial cutters installed in 1911. In 1919 electrically-driven cutters were introduced in some mines where it was believed they could be safely operated.

In 1925 in the new longwall operations air-driven "M & C Samson Chain Cutters" were installed, and some electrically-driven longwall cutters were tried in No.10 mine in 1932.¹⁴ On transport in the mines the coal company claimed to have "kept pace with the best developments in this field." From the 1920s on "shaker" conveyers and belt type conveyers began to be used. Some of the mines had air powered or battery powered locomotives before World War I, although pit ponies still worked in many of the mines until after World War II.¹⁵ With regard to mechanical loading, some unsatisfactory experiments were conducted with "Sullivan" loaders in 1917, and with "Duckbill Loaders" in the 1928-1932 period. These loaders were withdrawn from use after they failed to improve production.¹⁶ But it was in this period, around the beginning of the depression, presumably, that the Nova Scotia mines fell behind in productivity, as new mechanical loading machinery was installed in many American coal mines.

The financial and corporate history of the Dominion Coal Company, and its record of bad labour relations, no doubt had an effect on the company's ability to make heavy

¹⁴Mechanization in the Collieries of Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation (n.d. -- circa 1950), Devco Papers, MG 14/13 A(c), Box 32, File 2, BI, pp.7-8.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 8-10.

¹⁶Ibid., p.11.

investments in new equipment. In 1899-1901 the company founder, H.M. Whitney, was also behind the creation of the Dominion Iron and Steel Company, which built the steel plant at Sydney, and provided a market for Domco's expanding coal production. In 1906-7, however, Domco defaulted on its contract to provide suitable coking coal to the steel company and lost an enormous sum in the ensuing lawsuit, and at much the same time, 1909-11, it faced a long and bitter strike of its miners. Consequently the coal company came under the financial control of the steel company, where essentially it remained until the government takeover in the 1960s. During the years 1920 to 1927 it formed part of the huge, but financially overcapitalized and mismanaged British Empire Steel Corporation (Besco). During this time the corporation attempted to wrest profits from the mines by reducing the miners' wages, and the dramatic strikes followed. Besco went bankrupt in 1927, and was reorganized and refinanced as the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation (Dosco) in 1928.¹⁷ But as a subsidiary company of the newly formed Dosco, Domco had little capital available for mechanizing its mines in the years 1925-35 during which large scale mechanization was taking place in Illinois and Pennsylvania.

¹⁷See David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation." Acadiensis VII, 1 (Autumn 1977): 3-34.

Further, even without modernization, the richer American coalfields had natural advantages that made it easier to extract coal cheaply than was the case in Nova Scotia. In bituminous mines considered worth working in most parts of the United States there was little water to be pumped out, the coal seams were thick, and were reasonably level and near the surface. Whereas 500 feet was considered a deep mine in the U.S., Nova Scotia mines were much deeper, one Springhill mine being close to 3000 feet deep. In the Sydney coalfield the seams extended out far under the sea, and mines became deeper as they were worked over the years, averaging about 1000 feet deep by the 1920s.¹⁸ Until the much more advanced modern machinery was introduced, easier or harder conditions for mining were more important variables in terms of mining efficiency than was the degree of mechanization. In 1944 a report found that the least mechanized mine in Cape Breton, Dominion No. 4, Caledonia Mine in Glace Bay, had the best record of productivity, reckoned by tons produced per man-day. It still had pit ponies, but it was not as deep as most other local mines, had good roof conditions,

¹⁸Comparison Nova Scotia, British, United States Mining Conditions (n.d.-- circa 1925), Devco Papers, MG 14/13 A(c), Box 32, File 1, BI, p.11.

and was worked entirely by room and pillar.¹⁹

In general, in Cape Breton mines conditions were closer to those found in the long-worked and deep British mines than in American mines. Hence in 1923 longwall mining commenced in the deep submarine mines of the Sydney coalfield:

The longwall system ... was introduced as a solution to the problems encountered under heavy depth of cover with the room and pillar system. These problems had to do with the proportion of recovery of coal in the seams and with roof support. Dosco [sic] engineers considered the change to be one of necessity and not of choice. It was impossible to obtain a high proportion of recovery and to keep working places open.²⁰

This move to longwall mining meant that in the mechanization of Cape Breton's mines special local solutions had to be found. The mining machines developed in the United States were all designed for room and pillar systems, and could not be used efficiently on longwalls. One problem was the narrowness of the longwall tunnel along the face. This was eventually to lead to the development of the "Dosco Miner" in the late 1940s, specifically designed for use on the Cape Breton longwalls. In the 1920s and 1930s, however, the fact that machines developed elsewhere could not be used effectively

¹⁹G.A. Vissac, Report to Emergency Coal Production Board on The Dominion Coal Company, September 1944, Devco Papers, MG 14 13 D, Box 157, BI.

²⁰Weir, "Report on Possibilities for Increased Mechanization," p.7.

in Cape Breton no doubt helped to delay the mechanization of the mines.

In the early years of the depression Dosco had no capital available for large scale modernization. But by the late 1930s the company, even with the federal subsidies provided for coal transported to central Canada, was finding it harder and harder to hold any place in a market dominated by much cheaper, more efficiently produced American coal. Whether owing to greater mechanization, or to natural advantages that made coal extraction easier, the productivity of American mines was much greater by this time. In 1938, therefore, Domco attempted to move towards full mechanization of its mines. A new mine (No. 20) was opened through a shaft sunk from the No. 2 mine on the Phalen seam to connect with the Harbour seam. In this mine the company, with the permission of the Nova Scotia government, the regulating authority, installed electrically operated loading machinery in the form of "Joy loaders and chain conveyers."²¹ This step, which would have made No. 20 the first completely mechanized mine in the district, was preceded by visits of officials of the company, government, and union to American mines where they saw similar equipment in operation. But the long history of strife with the company had made the miners suspicious of

²¹Glace Bay Gazette, 9 January 1938.

any initiative the management might take, and the men could clearly see that modernization was sure to mean massive job losses in an area that already had widespread unemployment.²² The miners of the Phalen UMW local in the New Aberdeen area of Glace Bay, where the mine was located, refused to operate the new machinery, declaring it unsafe. In response the company shut down the new mine, locking out 89 men, who were then supported for months by a levy of 25 cents on all the Glace Bay sub-district miners.²³ At the UMW District 26 convention in August 1938 the mechanization of No. 20 was the hottest item on the agenda. The official policy of the UMW, as expressed in a letter from John L. Lewis and by International Secretary-Treasurer Thomas Kennedy in his speech at the convention, was that the UMW could not oppose progress in the form of mechanization of mines.²⁴ The Nova Scotia Minister of Mines and Labour, Michael Dwyer, also spoke at the convention urging the miners to accept the necessity of mechanization.²⁵ The anger of the delegates on this issue, however, forced the district officers to oppose the

²²This was what eventually happened in the 1950s. Mechanization and rationalization reduced the number of men employed in the mines from between 12,000 and 13,000 to approximately 3,500 within a few years.

²³Glace Bay Gazette, 9, 10, 13, 24 June 1938.

²⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 16 April, 13 August 1938.

²⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 20 August 1938.

scheme. The officers did not attack the principle of mechanization, but claimed there were safety considerations in this specific case, and argued the company's move was badly timed, given the widespread unemployment.²⁶ The delegates voted a levy of 10 cents per month on all District 26 miners to support the locked out men, and passed a resolution calling on the government to ban new electrical machinery at the coal face.²⁷ The miners' resistance was to win a lengthy delay in the mechanization of the mines; the machinery was removed from No. 20 in early 1939, and the company was forced to shelve its plans for large scale modernization of its mines until after the war.²⁸ Part of the company's brief to the 1945 Royal Commission on the Coal Industry was a memorandum recounting this story of the attempted mechanization of No. 20, and blaming all the company's slowness to modernize on the miners' resistance.²⁹

The superior productivity of American mines to that of the Dominion Coal Company increased through the war years. By 1944 the productivity of American mines averaged

²⁶See report of speeches by D.W.Morrison and Silby Barrett on this issue, Glace Bay Gazette, 12 August 1938.

²⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 17 August 1938.

²⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 23 January 1939.

²⁹Memorandum on the Mechanization of the Collieries of the Dominion Coal Company Limited, Devco Papers, MG14,13 A (b), Box 8, File 9.

5.04 tons of coal per man-day. Further, productivity in the most mechanized states was much higher, and it was these states that exported coal to Canada. In the mines of Illinois the average tonnage per man-day was 7.82 before the war's end.³⁰ In 1939 the tons per man at the Domco mines averaged 2.31 a day. Despite all the wartime exhortations to increase production, this fell to 1.52 tons per man per day by 1944.³¹ This fall in productivity in Nova Scotian mines increased in the years following the defeat of the 1941 slowdown. The efforts of the company, the government, and the union officers to subdue the miners' militancy only led to an increase of individual as well as collective behaviour expressive of the miners' dissatisfaction. If these policies were aimed at securing and increasing the production of coal during the war, they failed dismally. The government would certainly have achieved this end much more successfully by putting real pressure on Dosco to pay decent wage increases to its miners, providing subsidies if necessary. This would probably have been a less expensive policy than the policy that failed, since the coal company was given more and more subsidies during the war, with little increase in the

³⁰Weir, "Report on Possibilities for Increased Mechanization," p.4.

³¹Memorandum on Fatal Accidents in Mines (n.d., circa 1950), Devco Papers, MG 14/13 A(b), Box 8, File 11, BI.

production of coal.

As described in Chapter Four, in the period preceding the 1941 slowdown there were a very large number of "illegal" or "wildcat" strikes in the Cape Breton mines, and stepped-up efforts by mine managers to exert more direct control over the work process seems to have prompted many of these walkouts at individual pits. These local strikes continued throughout the war. According to Dominion Coal Company figures there were 265 illegal stoppages in their Cape Breton mines during the war (not counting strikes in the Sydney Mines "Old Sydney" mines).³² A very large number of these strikes seem to have been initiated by a management program aimed at countering the falling productivity by more heavy-handed methods of direct control over the work practices in the mines. Mine managers began asserting authority in ways that went against what had been the traditional practices. For example, the contract miners, since they were paid by the tonnage produced, had generally regarded it as their right to go home when they felt they had loaded enough coal, or when some problem with the supply of coal cars or the like made it impossible for them to carry on their work. Managers now often suspended men who left the mine

³²Domco, Statement as to Illegal Stoppages of Work September 1939 to June 1945, Submission to Carroll Commission, 26 September 1945, Devco Papers, MG 14 13 Box 155 Folder 2, BI. See Appendix D, Wartime Wildcat Strikes, taken from the above statement.

before their shift was officially over, and this led to many strikes. Company officials described the cause of one typical tie-up, a two-day strike at 1B mine, as follows:

Nov. 22-24, 1941. Loaders on 5 south wall went home at 9:00 A.M. in protest when two of their number were suspended for going home early on Nov. 21st, without cleaning off their sections. 900 tons [lost].³³

It seems clear that such management tactics were counter-productive in circumstances in which the miners were ready to walk off their jobs at the slightest provocation. Domco management, however, appear to have viewed the question as mainly one of badly disciplined workers, and they were not willing to buy better co-operation from the workers by increases in wages. H.C.M. Gordon, Domco general manager, expressed the company view when he stated that "it was always said that wage increases would bring about a better relationship and production." Increased wages had only led to more absenteeism, he claimed.³⁴

Despite Mr. Gordon's view, it seems probable that the underlying problem with coal productivity was that wages in the mines, low before the war, were very far behind those being paid men in other booming war industries. This led to intense dissatisfaction among the miners,

³³Domco, Statement as to Illegal Stoppages of Work September 1939 to June 1945, p. 3.

³⁴Minutes of Negotiations, Ottawa, 15 February 1947, UMWA Local 4514 Papers, MS9, 32, D9, Dalhousie University Archives.

accounting for their readiness to strike, and underlay other factors leading to declining productivity. Individual absenteeism in the mines increased dramatically, partly because in the main only the older men stayed in the pits, and productivity fell simply because these older men lacked the physical strength to do the work efficiently. Enlistments in the armed forces were very high in the mining districts, and younger miners also went to better paying jobs in wartime factories, plants, or shipyards.³⁵ Older miners stayed at work to advanced ages because of the inadequate pension scheme. The company provided a fixed total amount, giving pensions to approximately 250 men. Applicants for pensions literally had to wait for pensioners to die to be added to the list. Consequently in 1944 more than 700 men working in Domco's mines were over 65 years of age.³⁶ The mine workers in the later war years were therefore a very discontented body of men, and the average age of the miners had gone up throughout the years of war. Also during these years the

³⁵Over 4500 Nova Scotian miners enlisted during the war. Teamwork, 15 May, 15 June, 15 July, 15 September 1945.

³⁶G.A. Vissac, Report to Emergency Coal Production Board on The Dominion Coal Company, September 1944, Devco Papers, MG 14 13 D, Box 157, BI, F.W. Gray letter, pp. 71-2. The pensions averaged \$40.00 per month, or \$480 annually; the total allocated for this by the coal company was \$110,000 annually, which provided for 246 pensioners. The pension was entirely paid for by the company, which had no legal obligation to pay it. No other Canadian coal company provided any pensions at this time.

number of face workers, the actual producers of the coal, fell proportionately to the total employed in the mines. Enlistments were high among these men, and men with the necessary mining certificates were harder to replace than were the datal men.³⁷

By the end of 1942 the government proclaimed a "grave emergency" in national coal production, an Emergency Coal Production Board was set up, and substantial sums were paid to the coal company as "production subsidies."³⁸ In June 1943 regulations were enacted under which miners were "frozen" on their jobs and former miners forced to return to the pits.³⁹ In October 1943, under PC 8021, coal strikes were specifically declared illegal for the duration of the war.⁴⁰ All of this availed little. Canadian coal production fell steadily behind the increase in consumption during the war and the deficit was made up by heavier imports from the United States. While production increased somewhat in the West, in Nova Scotia

³⁷Carroll, Report of the Royal Commission, p. 312.

³⁸Of \$22,721,120.95 coal production subsidies paid out up to March 1946, \$15,204,505.96 went to Domco, \$2,474,303.28 to Acadia Coal, and the remainder went to other firms, mostly outside Nova Scotia. W.F. Carroll, Report of the Royal Commission on Coal (Ottawa, 1947), p.558. These were subsidies over and above the subventions on coal transportation costs.

³⁹Labour Gazette 42 (December 1942), p. 1404.

⁴⁰Sydney Post Record, 5 November 1943; Labour Gazette 42 (December 1942), p. 1404; Jamieson, Times of Trouble, p. 290.

the amount of coal produced fell throughout the war years, after a temporary rise in 1940.⁴¹

By the end of the war, however, there seems to have been a great transformation in the attitude of the miners on mechanization and the importance of improved productivity. The leadership of the miners, both left and right wings, including the leadership at the local union level, had come to accept the necessity for rapid modernization in the Cape Breton mines to forestall the complete collapse of the industry. Somehow, between 1938 and 1945, a complete reversal of the stand of the miners on mechanization appears to have occurred. How this came about needs explanation.

In 1942 the district executive headed by D. W. Morrison, facing the district elections later in the year, tried hard in presentations before the National War Labour Board (NWLBB) to get some increases for the miners, but failed. They were then forced by international headquarters to sign a contract with no change in wages, and without a referendum. This was a repetition of the action that led to the 1941 slowdown, but Senator Sneed, as the representative of John L. Lewis, told the executive that holding a pithead vote as to whether to accept a government order would be contrary to the international

⁴¹Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Coal Statistics for Canada, 1945, Table 42, p. 38.

constitution of the UMW.⁴² Later, just prior to the UMW elections, the NWLB did order the wages of the Acadia miners in Pictou County and the Old Sydney men in Sydney Mines to be adjusted up level with the wages of Domco miners in Glace Bay, New Waterford, and Springhill.⁴³ This, however, did not save Morrison and his fellow officers from overwhelming defeat in the voting in October 1942.⁴⁴

The officers chosen to replace them had all been active in the leadership of the 1941 slowdown. Freeman Jenkins, the new district president, had risen to prominence during the slowdown as the president of Phalen local. When elected in 1942 Jenkins was the youngest district president ever chosen, and was a man with somewhat more formal education than most of coal miners at that time, as he had attended Mount Allison University for a period.⁴⁵ The new vice-president was Tom Ling, the prominent New Waterford union militant, and John Alex MacDonald, former AMW president, defeated Silby Barrett for the position of international board member. The new

⁴²Glace Bay Gazette, 14, 15 July 1942.

⁴³Glace Bay Gazette, 12 October, 26 December 1942.

⁴⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 30 October 1942.

⁴⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 10, 14 October 1942. Bob Stewart, always bitterly opposed to Jenkins, attacked him prior to the election and referred to him contemptuously as "this college student." Letter to Editor, Glace Bay Gazette, 2 October 1942.

officers were pledged to a more militant and democratic conduct of union affairs. Thus the coal miners perhaps could feel they had made important political advances, with the election of this "left-wing" district executive, and the CCF electoral victories. There were also some material advances for the miners during the war. For one thing, full employment was a new thing, bringing a modest prosperity to the coal mining districts for the first time in many years. Secondly, in 1943 there was at last a substantial increase in the miners' pay rates.

The officers, headed by President Jenkins, engaged in long negotiations with the NWLB seeking a better contract in 1943, and might perhaps have been expected to lead a district strike. They were saved the necessity of doing so, however, by the strike of the miners in Alberta, UMW District 18, in November, which led to a conciliation award that broke through the government wage freeze guidelines. Given this precedent, in the 1943 award by the NWLB the Nova Scotia miners got their one big wartime pay boost. The previously granted wartime cost-of-living bonuses were incorporated in the basic wages, and the miners got an across the board raise of \$1.00 per day. The award also included a provision for a one-week paid vacation, the first time any vacation pay had been included in the contract. In the referendum held in March of 1944, the miners voted 8942 to 1228 to accept a

contract based on this award.⁴⁶

But though some things seemed to be going the miners' way, direct control of their union was in some respects moving further away from the rank and file. Paradoxically, change in an apparently democratic direction sometimes had incorporated within it the increased control of affairs by experts and bureaucrats. An example of this is given by the way the District 26 brief to the National War Labour Board was prepared in 1943. The popular newly-elected executive, in a display of its democratic approach, arranged for a wage scale committee made up of delegates from all the locals to discuss the contract demands.⁴⁷ But present in discussions with this rank-and-file committee was the actual author of the brief to be presented in Ottawa. This was Eugene Forsey, the prominent CCF intellectual, who had been hired as a researcher by the Canadian Congress of Labour in 1942.⁴⁸ The wage scale committee gives the formal appearance of a democratization of the negotiating process, but it is hard not to believe that Forsey, as an expert economist, must have in reality had a decisive influence over the UMW's bargaining position. The complexity of the issues seemed to make

⁴⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 28 March 1944.

⁴⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 6, 19 March 1943.

⁴⁸The UMW footed the bill for Forsey's modest salary. Districts 18 and 26 each contributed \$1000.

expert assistance in negotiating and arguing positions necessary, as did the increased government regulations. In 1944 District 26 hired a full time research and education director, C.B. Wade, who was thereafter largely responsible for preparing the union's briefs and submissions. Wade, though this was not openly admitted, was a Communist Party member. Both Forsey and Wade, it should be said, seem to have done conscientious and thorough work, and there continued to be efforts by the union to involve the local unions in the process of developing briefs and union positions in negotiations. There is little question, however, that the well developed ideas of intellectuals such as Wade or Forsey could not fail to have a strong influence on the union's policies on such issues as mechanization.

Another example of this is the effect of the purchase of the Glace Bay Gazette by the union on the ideas of the miners on such involved questions. As the newspaper vigorously propagandized for the CCF and the UMW, in the process it indoctrinated the miners themselves along lines acceptable to the leadership of these organizations. As discussed in a later chapter, the political character of Gazette editorials was a matter of controversy at times. But certain lines were commonly advanced by both right and left factions at this time, such as advocating increased productivity for the war effort. For example, the Gazette

for some time published as a daily feature an "Honor List," which listed the record of each of the mines on men absent from work each day, praising the mine with the lowest record of absenteeism.⁴⁹ This was during the period when the controversial Robert Reeds was editor, and there was some opposition to this line on absenteeism. Angus MacIntyre wrote in a protest letter: "We are in the unorthodox position of having Domco propaganda broadcast to the world in the miners' labor paper."⁵⁰ Nonetheless, the Gazette then and later, whoever was guiding its editorial policies, continued to oppose absenteeism, and promote productivity, including the mechanization of the mines.

In fact, as the war progressed, almost all public voices loudly championed the necessity for the workers to cooperate with management and government to increase war production. This was demanded in appeals to the miners' patriotism; it was the official UMW position; it was the call of the two mainstream political parties; it was also the line taken by the CCF, who added that Canada should follow the British example and give a greater voice to unions and socialist politicians. As for the Communist Party, by the later war years it was the most avid

⁴⁹Glace Bay Gazette, November, December 1942.

⁵⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 10 December 1942.

promoter in Canada of a "no-strike" policy, and of worker-management production committees aimed at increasing war production. These "Joint Labour-Management Production Committees" were promoted throughout war industries, and were installed in most coal mines, beginning in 1942. These do not seem to have had any real impact on coal mining productivity in Nova Scotia, but they were supported by the Liberal government, Conservative politicians, Dosco officials, the UMW officers, and the CCF. Among the first and strongest proponents of these joint production committees were the communists.⁵¹ Since in earlier years it had most frequently been miners who were members or close followers of the Communist Party who were the leaders of militant action in the mines and the union locals, the change in CP policy likely had a considerable effect on attitudes on mechanization and productivity at the local union level.

Mechanization was first discussed in terms of the Cape Breton mines' poor record of war production, but by an easy transition became part of the planning for peacetime. It took some time however, before this became a central issue. In the 1943 briefs from the company and union to the National War Labour Board, the question of mechanization was not raised. The company claimed productivity was down because of absenteeism, while the

⁵¹F. Brodie letter, Glace Bay Gazette, 6 May 1943.

union argued higher productivity for the war effort could only come with decent wages for the men.⁵² By 1944 it was clearly too late for any modernization of the mines to effect the war, but it was also clear that the mining industry in Nova Scotia could only survive in a competitive peacetime world if it became much more efficient. Mechanization no doubt meant the loss of many jobs in the mines, but without it the mines would soon all close down. One leading figure whose ideas may have been influential in bringing about an acceptance of this view was Clarie Gillis. Gillis had been the president of the Phalen UMW local in 1938 when the miners so vigorously resisted the mechanization of No. 20 mine. In fact, it seems probable that Gillis' prominence in leading this fight was a major factor in getting him the CCF nomination in the following year. In his early years as an MP Gillis championed the miners' causes quite forcefully. He even went so far as to express heretical views about the subventions on coal, saying that the miners benefitted little from this federal assistance to the marketing of Nova Scotian coal in central Canada so long as the industry was controlled by Dosco.⁵³ His position on the future of the mines was always very pessimistic during

⁵²United Mineworkers Brief to National War Labour Board, 1943, MS9 32 F5, Dalhousie University Archives.

⁵³Glace Bay Gazette, 7 August, 25 November 1940.

this period. Again and again he declared there was little chance of most of the mines remaining open after the war, and called for some alternative forms of industry for Cape Breton.⁵⁴ "I wouldn't give two cents for the future of the industry here," he was reported to say in 1946.⁵⁵ His often repeated views on the poor future of the mining industry no doubt led many to support efforts to keep the mines open through modernization.

In any case, the unanimity of all political tendencies and public figures on the issue seems to have brought about a general acceptance among the miners at the end of the war that the mechanization of the mines was essential. Quite probably many of the rank and file had some suspicion of what this might mean in loss of jobs, and could have been led to oppose these changes, but there was no leadership given to this outlook. Mechanization of the mines was a key issue in presentations to the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry, headed by Judge Carroll, which opened its hearings at Sydney in January 1945.⁵⁶ The Domco brief to the commission emphasized the necessity of mechanization; but the UMW brief claimed the union was more sincerely anxious for the modernization of the mines than was Domco. The union called for "the immediate and

⁵⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 7 August 1940.

⁵⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 30 September 1946.

⁵⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 16 January 1945.

most aggressive experimentation in the Maritime mines themselves with mechanical loading and other mechanical devices leading to increased productivity," but said this must be "integrated with an overall programme for full employment in the Maritimes." The union also called for nationalization of the coal mining industry in which so much public money had been invested in subsidies.⁵⁷ The commission held a long series of sessions in the Maritimes, before beginning its Western hearings later in the year. These hearings drew public attention to the terrible problems that would be faced by the coal industry in the post war years, and added emphasis and urgency to the idea that the mines could only continue to operate in competition with American coal if their productivity was greatly enhanced through more modern technology.

At the District 26 convention in 1945, held in New Glasgow immediately following the Maritime hearings of the Royal Commission, mechanization was discussed at the last session. No definite stand was taken on the question, but a resolution put forward by Bob Stewart was passed which recommended sub-district conventions deal with the matter as soon as the company came up with new proposals. There was some grumbling on the part of rank-and-file delegates, but no strong voices were raised to oppose the principle

⁵⁷United Mineworkers Submission to Carroll Coal Commission, Jan 1945, MS9 32 F6, Dalhousie University Archives, p.69.

of the full-scale mechanization of the mines. One delegate hoped mechanization would be taken up "slowly and cautiously," to avoid unemployment. Another said the industry would "fold up" without mechanization, and a third called for nationalization of the mines to precede modernization.⁵⁸

The hot issue at the convention, as usual, was wages. The NWLB had just rejected the UMW submission asking for a wage increase, explaining that although there was inequity with the rates paid in Western mines, Domco could afford no increases.⁵⁹ The convention delegates called for a referendum vote on a strike, partly on the recommendation of Clarie Gillis, who said under the existing law a strike vote was the only means of forcing the government to reopen negotiations. The communists, most vocally represented at this convention by Murdoch Clarke, protested against this, saying a strike would be "disastrous." Nonetheless, the resolution was adopted, calling for a referendum on a strike beginning 1 April if there had been no advance in negotiations by that date.⁶⁰ The communists were, by this point, opposed to even the suggestion of a strike. As the date for the strike referendum approached J. C. Mortimer's column in the

⁵⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 9 February 1945.

⁵⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 18 January 1945.

⁶⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 31 January 1945.

Steelworker and Miner declared all wartime strikes played into the hands of Hitler.⁶¹ Caledonia local, led by Bob Stewart and other left-wingers, suggested the strike vote be postponed while government officials were asked whether such a vote was required to reopen negotiations. Caledonia also passed a resolution that the UMW should "press for mechanization."⁶² Murdoch Clarke wrote to the Gazette that a "strike would result in much of the public funds now invested in coal mines being withdrawn ... strikes and threats of strikes will ruin the coal industry."⁶³

This position must have put a strain on the loyalty of communist supporters, normally the most militant voices among the miners. It seems almost like ridiculous shadow-boxing, since C. Gillis was calling for miners to vote for a strike "not because they want a strike but because existing regulations compel them to take a strike vote" in order to make application for a federal conciliation board.⁶⁴ The communist line made Gillis, who probably never in his life wholeheartedly supported a strike, appear militant. Such a communist stand, particularly with the war almost won, must have weakened the party's

⁶¹Steelworker and Miner, 10 February 1945.

⁶²Glace Bay Gazette, 19 February 1945.

⁶³M. Clarke letter, Glace Bay Gazette, 19 February 1945.

⁶⁴C. Gillis letter, Glace Bay Gazette, 19 February 1945.

influence. It was only a few weeks later, after the victory in Europe, that the communist policy was to change back to something closer to its customary support for militant union activity.

The pithead vote, held on 20 February, was heavily in favour of a strike.⁶⁵ No-one took the strike deadline of 1 April 1945 seriously, however, since there were no protests when this date came and President Jenkins extended the contract. In May the UMW presented its case for a one dollar a day increase for datal men, a 33 1/3 per cent increase in rates for contract miners, and two weeks vacation, before a board composed of Judge Carroll, T. E. Vaughan of Halifax representing the company, and Freeman Jenkins himself, representing the union.⁶⁶ The board recommended two weeks holidays, 10 per cent increases for contract miners, and 2 1/2 per cent increases for datal men. Jenkins concurred with these recommendations, except for some details concerning absenteeism and its effect on paid holidays.⁶⁷

Although this contract had been recommended by the district president, it was voted down by the miners in the

⁶⁵The vote was 6097 for the strike, 1856 against. Glace Bay Gazette, 27 February 1945.

⁶⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 19 May 1945.

⁶⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 2 June 1945.

pithead referendum held on 14 June 1945.⁶⁸ This was perhaps due to the fact that the contract was not clearly explained to the men, with the union leaders preoccupied with the federal election, which took place on 11 June. The accusation was also made that the vote was distorted by an inaccurate report that Secretary-Treasurer Scott opposed the contract, a story which was deliberately leaked to the press and radio after a Caledonia local meeting.⁶⁹ Whatever the reason, having rejected this one year contract, a few months later, in October 1945, the miners voted to accept almost identical terms in a two year contract.⁷⁰ Presumably the miners were reasonably satisfied with the contracts negotiated by their officers, since a year later, in August 1945, the officers were all re-elected to their positions. Following the lead of the international board, for the first time these elections were for four-year terms.⁷¹

By 1946, however, the miners were, emulating the steelworkers, demanding parity with those doing similar work elsewhere in Canada. At the district convention in October, the demand was for a \$2.50 per day increase, and for a 40-hour week (instead of the existing 48-hour

⁶⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 15 June 1945.

⁶⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 16 June 1945.

⁷⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 31 October 1945.

⁷¹Glace Bay Gazette, 14 August 1946.

week).⁷² This amounted to a 48 per cent increase, but would bring the rates up to Alberta levels. Another demand was the development of a comprehensive pension plan to be paid for by a 15 cent per ton increase in the price of coal. The delegates at this 1946 convention, between quarrels about the committee men's reimbursement, and an attack by Clarie Gillis on Research Director C. B. Wade, also took a militant stand on the conduct of the coming negotiations for the 1947 contract. These, they agreed, should not be allowed to drag on for months as had been the case in previous years, and a resolution was passed that a strike referendum be called to strengthen the executive's hand in negotiations.⁷³ There was little opposition to this. With the war over, the communists were again supporting militant action, and accusing the CCF of undermining union solidarity. The party, however, like Jim Wade at this convention, was being forced into a defensive position throughout the Canadian union movement.

The strike referendum was held 26 November 1946. The ballot read: "Are you in favour of a strike if, in the opinion of the executive officers, no satisfactory settlement of wage demands can be obtained." President Jenkins, in a radio speech the night before the vote, said the miners were only asking a wage of \$40.00 per week,

⁷²Glace Bay Gazette, 28 October 1946.

⁷³Glace Bay Gazette, 2 November 1946.

which a recent survey (conducted by Research Director Wade) had shown was the minimum necessary to maintain a family of four. Jenkins called for a vote to strike, but added: "It is the earnest hope of every officer of the union and every miner that those who now have authority over such questions will not force us into a strike."⁷⁴ The union membership responded with an overwhelming vote, 7068 to 1930, in favour of a strike if the executive felt it necessary.⁷⁵

With this mandate the executive officers appear to have entered negotiations in a very militant mood. Jenkins in one interview even stated that a "no contract, no work" policy would be applied on 31 January 1947 if the existing contract expired and no new agreement had been reached.⁷⁶ Then, as the negotiations began, the union spelled out its position in a full page newspaper advertisement, "Some Reasons for Maritime Miners' Wage Demands."⁷⁷ Early in January negotiations were broken off, Jenkins stating that the union "cannot believe that the company's counter-proposal, ... a wage increase conditional upon increased output, is an offer made in good faith."⁷⁸ Negotiations

⁷⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 18, 26 November 1946.

⁷⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 27, 28 November 1946.

⁷⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 9 December 1946.

⁷⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 16 December 1946.

⁷⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 8 January 1947.

then shifted to Ottawa, where Minister of Labour Mitchell and John Owens, representing the UMW International head office, became involved. After government mediation, the UMW lowered its wage demand to \$1.40 per day. Dosco offered \$1.00 a day increases, but said these had to be conditional upon increases in productivity.⁷⁹

It was at just this time that the Carroll Royal Commission, which began its hearing two years earlier, finally released its massive report.⁸⁰ This report provided an extensive description of all facets of the Canadian coal industry, but put forward relatively little in terms of recommendations. The majority recommendations, signed by Justices W. F. Carroll and C. C. McLaurin, basically only called for the continuation of existing tariffs and of the long established policy of providing transportation subsidies on coal delivered to the Central Canadian market. They also recommended a permanent federal fuel board be set up to continue the work of the wartime board. Like the judges, the third commissioner, Angus J. Morrison, UMW District 18 Vice President, and a CCF Member of the Alberta legislature, rejected nationalization of the Nova Scotia mines as a solution. However, he recommended more extensive assistance to the coal industry to enable mechanization to take place, along with

⁷⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 8, 9, 25 January 1947.

⁸⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 22 January 1947.

increased government regulation of the affairs of Domco.⁸¹ Whatever the recommendations, however, the main impact of this report, as District 26 moved towards a strike, was to emphasize that the coal industry, particularly in Nova Scotia, was in very serious long-term trouble.

In a final effort to hold off the strike the government appointed Judge Carroll as arbitrator. On 1 February the pits throughout the district were closed, but Carroll and Humphrey Mitchell were able to convince Jenkins and the rest of the executive that Carroll's arbitration might lead to a satisfactory settlement. The union executive, following a meeting with representatives of the locals, announced a "truce" until 15 February, and on 4 February the miners returned to work.⁸² Carroll's recommendations, presented at an Ottawa meeting of the district officers with H. Mitchell, included a 40 cent daily increase, retroactive to 1 February, and a further \$1.00 tied to increased production, and arrangements for a pension plan.⁸³ The UMW rejected these proposals, and the strike recommenced on Monday, 17 February 1947.⁸⁴

It was clear the sticking point was the fact that the

⁸¹Report of the Royal Commission on Coal (Ottawa, 1947), Chapter XIV, Recommendations, pp. 579-600.

⁸²Glace Bay Gazette, 30 January, 1, 3, 4 February 1947.

⁸³Glace Bay Gazette, 14 February 1947.

⁸⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 17 February 1947.

increase proposed had been tied to productivity. The wage issue, essentially, had been agreed upon by both the union and company, but the UMW declared it would never accept an increase contingent upon stepped-up productivity.⁸⁵ The Glace Bay Gazette presumably directly expressed the views of the UMW executive in an editorial printed the day the strike resumed. The editorial declared:

Management in all industry fully controls the working and the placement of machinery, the allotment of tools, and the investment of capital, and the disposition of the working force ... [the miners] therefore, cannot place their wages and consequently living standard at the mercy of absentee shareholders reluctant to invest capital in the modernization of the Maritime coal mines.⁸⁶

The implicit argument was that productivity up to competitive standards was not under the control of the workforce if technically up-to-date equipment was not provided by the management. By the time the strike was well underway, in March, the union had taken this argument a step further, and was blaming the company for its failure to mechanize years earlier. An "open letter" to Prime Minister MacKenzie King declared "... the Montreal executives of Dominion Steel & Coal Corporation have failed in their managerial job of providing the most modern tools and machines, at least one basic need of the

⁸⁵Minutes, Ottawa Meeting of United Mine Workers, Dominion Coal Company, and Department of Labour Officials, 15 February 1947, MS 9 32 D9, Dalhousie University Archives.

⁸⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 17 February 1947.

industry. They talk about the miners being responsible for low production ... we are not responsible for low production and we have presented irrefutable evidence to prove it."⁸⁷

The company, essentially, adopted the position that unless it could see some improvement in productivity, and, behind this, get the upper hand in the many questions of control that had long led to wildcat strikes, there was no point in proceeding with modernization of the mines. Domco officials continually railed against absenteeism, contract-breaking strikes, many traditional work practices, and all spontaneous expressions of the miners' independence at work, which they believed prevented efficient operation of the mines. For the coal company management, modernization meant establishing more direct control over the work process as much as it meant the introduction of new machinery. The company also was well aware that the closing of many of the mines, and the loss of many jobs, would be entailed in updating mining methods in Cape Breton. The condition that wage increases be tied to productivity was one the company thought it could justify by the claim that without government subsidies of millions annually it would have steadily lost money. But behind this lay the wish to place the union in a position

⁸⁷Freeman Jenkins, Open letter to Mackenzie King, 19 March 1947, CCL Papers, MG I 103 Vol.33, NAC.

of having to help discipline and control the miners in the coming period of technological change in the mines. Thus, though mine mechanization had not entered directly into most of the negotiations that preceded the strike, how mechanization was to be carried out was really the main issue at stake in this strike. By this point all agreed that without new machinery and much increased productivity, the mines could not stay in operation for long. If the company won the strike and was able to require increased productivity independent of any mechanization, it would be in a position to direct the modernization process with little interference from the union, yet would be able to pressure the union to assist in controlling the workers.

This strike, the first district-wide strike since 1925, was a very different type of struggle than the earlier strike, which had involved an attempt to starve out the workers through cutting off credit at the company stores, and to intimidate them through the use of police and the military. Such tactics were not used in 1947, and there was no question of any attempt to directly break the strike through the use of strike-breakers. The miners and their families in 1947 faced economic hardships during this long strike, but nothing like the near starvation that had been their condition in 1925. There was no strike pay as such, but relief was given out by the union on the

basis of need. Funds were donated by other unions, and large amounts were received from the international UMW.⁸⁸ As with the steel strike the year earlier, the battle was largely conducted through press releases and advertisements in newspapers. The coal company advertisements such as "Increased Production Must Come First," were answered by such union advertisements as "Here Are Some Facts About Absenteeism."⁸⁹ The coal miners had the support of their union-owned daily, Glace Bay Gazette, while the Sydney Post-Record gave its usual backing to the company. The union tried to pressure the provincial government into giving support to the strikers by calling for telegrams to be sent to Premier Angus L. MacDonald.⁹⁰ The UMW also protested the importation of coal into the province, and set up pickets on the Halifax docks.⁹¹ In the mining areas themselves, the only pickets established were part of a campaign by the executive to stamp out bootleg coal operations. Probably very unwisely in terms of union morale, Freeman Jenkins insisted that the selling of coal from bootleg pits by miners be treated as strike-breaking, and picket lines were stationed on the

⁸⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 10 March 1947.

⁸⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 27 February, 5 March 1947.

⁹⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 29 March 1947.

⁹¹Glace Bay Gazette, 6, 7 March 1947.

roads to stop and inspect trucks for the illicit coal.⁹² In one incident a Phalen Local "flying squad" of 200 men smashed up a bootleg pit on one man's property.⁹³

This strike lasted three months and ended in defeat for the miners. The company was prepared to wait out a strike, and had the assistance of the federal government in doing so. Wartime subsidies from the federal government, which guaranteed the company against losses, continued to be paid up to 31 March 1947, well into the strike period.⁹⁴ Presumably both the provincial and federal governments were well satisfied with a defeat for the striking miners, whose troublesome militancy had long been a problem from the perspective of government.

Throughout the strike negotiations had continued, involving government officials, as well as John Owens of the UMW International Board, meeting with the Dosco President, Arthur Cross of Montreal. Finally, on 19 May, the district board signed a "memorandum of agreement." This included clauses calling for grievances to be dealt with within seven days, for the "Joint Board of Adjustment" to be replaced by a single umpire, and a

⁹²Glace Bay Gazette, 10, 12, 13 March 1947.

⁹³Glace Bay Gazette, 14 April 1947.

⁹⁴MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 272; District 26 Research Department, "Background Material No.2, The Federal Government and the Strike," 17 March 1947, CLC Papers, MG 28, I 103, vol. 33, NAC.

clause reinforcing the applicability of the "hours of labour" clause in the contract. There was agreement on the principle of a contributory pension scheme, details to be worked out. There was to be an immediate increase of \$1.00 per day, supplemented by an additional 40 cents per day on 1 December 1947 if by that time productivity had reached 1939 levels. (For the Domco mines, this amounted to going from an average of about 1.52 to 2.42 tons per man-shift.) These productivity requirements were specifically applicable only to the mines operating with the existing equipment; rates for mechanized mining were left to be negotiated later. In terms of money, this was slightly better than the 40 cents immediately, \$1.00 tied to productivity that the union had rejected at the beginning of the strike, and the terms were therefore recommended to the members as a victory. Actually there had been a complete surrender on the key issue of accepting an increase tied to productivity. The preamble to the agreement read:

Basically it is necessary, and we agree, that there shall be joint co-operative action by the parties to bring about increased production, which is vital and necessary for the stability and prosperity of the industry, the communities, and the people affected thereby.⁹⁵

The Steelworker and Miner as well as the Glace Bay Gazette hailed this surrender as a victory, and both the Phalen

⁹⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 20 May 1947.

and Caledonia local meetings agreed.⁹⁶ On 23 May 1947 the miners, in their pithead referendum, voted 5968 to 1447 to accept the contract.⁹⁷

When the miners returned to work on 27 May, however, they were outraged to find that the company had instituted various changes to customary working practices in the mines. Men refusing to work under the new conditions were arbitrarily suspended. Management claimed this was their right under the contract clause that stated "the management of the mine and the direction of the working force is vested exclusively in the operator," and that the UMW officers, in discussions in Montreal, had agreed to having this clause strictly interpreted in order to increase productivity. Fifty-eight points detailing various changes had also been agreed upon, according to the company. This was denied by the union executive, who claimed these points had only been listed for further negotiation. The district board ordered the men to cease work again.⁹⁸ After two more weeks of strike, the company agreed to institute its changes somewhat more gradually, and the miners returned to work.⁹⁹

⁹⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 21, 22 May 1947; "Congratulations Miners," Steelworker and Miner, 24 May 1947.

⁹⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 26 May 1947.

⁹⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 29 May 1947.

⁹⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 6, 11, 12 June 1947.

The company actions at this time seem to have been designed to "rub in" the fact that the real issue of the strike had been questions of control, and that the strike had been defeated. Nonetheless, the union leadership attempted to save face with claims of victory. In a letter written at this time to CCL Secretary Pat Conroy, Freeman Jenkins wrote:

We feel that all things considered, we won the strike. The second walk-out was completely successful and prevented Dosco from imposing intolerable changes in working conditions, hours of work and many forms of speed-up ... It is our opinion that from now on the industry should make great strides forward. There is already evidence of a very significant increase in man-day output and an improvement in the quality of management will be bound to improved industrial relations.¹⁰⁰

In fact, however, this defeat had left the miners largely demoralized, the union funds depleted, and led to the transformation of Jenkins, himself, from a popular "left-wing" president to a very unpopular and "right-wing" president. Largely because of the financial weakness of the district, the miners voted in September 1947 to stop subsidizing the Glace Bay Gazette, and the paper, after struggling along for a little over a year longer, ceased publication.¹⁰¹ Because of losing the strike the miners were left in a very weak position in negotiating contracts

¹⁰⁰Freeman Jenkins to Pat Conroy, 19 June 1947, CLC Papers, MG 28, I 103, vol. 33, NAC.

¹⁰¹Glace Bay Gazette, 12 September 1947; Last issue of daily Glace Bay Gazette, 15 January 1949.

for a considerable period. In October 1949, after very lengthy negotiations, the miners accepted a one year contract providing an increase of 50 cents in the datal rates, with nothing substantial for the contract men.¹⁰² In 1950 they were forced to agree to a two year contract providing no increases.¹⁰³ There was certainly no further talk of equality with the rates paid in the Alberta mines.

Following the 1947 agreement, all the leaders of the miners, "left" as well as "right-wing," urged the men to make efforts to increase production to the required levels so as to get the 40 cent increase in December 1947. "Coal Production is Up!" proclaimed the Steelworker and Miner soon after work resumed in June. "Dosco is emphasizing 'teamwork' ... [the miners should] give it an honest try and we'll bet our shirt that they will get production."¹⁰⁴ The union leaders and the Glace Bay Gazette also continually worked to promote productivity, and proclaimed a new era of union-management co-operation had been instituted in Cape Breton following the steel and coal strikes.¹⁰⁵ These statements almost echoed the sentiments usually expressed in the publication Teamwork published by

¹⁰²Sydney Post-Record, 13 October 1949.

¹⁰³Sydney Post-Record, 5 April 1950.

¹⁰⁴Steelworker and Miner, 28 June 1947.

¹⁰⁵"Coal, Steel Strikes Bring New Deal for Cape Breton," Glace Bay Gazette, 6 August 1947.

the Dosco industrial relations department during these years. Although production was not quite up to the required levels by 1 December 1947, Dosco management showed its "good-will" by allowing the promised 40 cents increase in the daily rates. Dosco management was well aware that the most important effect of the union's defeat in this major strike was that in the period of mechanization that was coming the company very clearly would have the upper hand. The company actions, in fact, were to meet little resistance, even though there would be great dislocations and increased unemployment in all the mining towns.

In 1949 two Glace Bay mines, No. 11 and No. 2, were closed down, the beginning of many more mine closings.¹⁰⁶ Near the end of 1949 the federal government passed an act providing assistance to the coal company in the form of loans amounting to \$7,500,000 to modernize its operations.¹⁰⁷ With this funding, full scale mechanization took place during the 1950s. The mechanical loading equipment that was installed over this decade included 13 Joy loaders in room and pillar operations, and 39 Dosco Miners in longwall operations.¹⁰⁸ The "Dosco Continuous

¹⁰⁶MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 285.

¹⁰⁷Sydney Post-Record, 25 November 1949.

¹⁰⁸Louis Frost, Chief Mining Engineer, "A Review of the Coal Properties Operated by Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation, Ltd.," Devco Papers, MG 14 13 Box 32 File 4,

Miner" was developed by the company's engineers for use on the longwalls, and manufactured at Dosco's Trenton plant. (In the 1960s the Dosco Miners were replaced by Alderton Shearers.) As part of the modernization, a considerable increase in the size of surface operations was necessary, since the mechanical loading meant more "dirty" coal was sent to the surface. Much more elaborate sorting and washing facilities were therefore built. With the modernization process came an increase in productivity, but also the closing of mines, and a steady fall in the number of miners employed. In 1945 Dosco had eighteen mines, employing close to 13,000 men, in operation: there were eleven Domco mines operating in the Glace Bay and New Waterford areas; two Old Sydney Company mines in the Sydney Mines area; three operated by Acadia Coal Company in Pictou County; and two operated by Cumberland Railway and Coal at Springhill.¹⁰⁹ By 1973 this had been reduced to three mines, all in Cape Breton, employing 3500 men.¹¹⁰ Through all this period the miners and their union were able to exercise very little control over the speed or direction of these changes. The coal industry was in such

BI, p.102.

¹⁰⁹Dosco Submission to Royal Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation, Sydney, 21 September 1943, Devco Papers, MG 14 13 D, Box 157, Folder 1, BI.

¹¹⁰"The Devco Succession," Cape Breton Post, 24 October 1987.

deep trouble that there was a constant threat of complete closure of the mines.¹¹¹ In 1965 the federal crown corporation Cape Breton Development Corporation (Devco) was set up to phase out coal mining entirely, a policy that was reversed during the energy crisis of the 1970s. The Cape Breton reputation for union militancy persisted, but there seemed little hope of conducting successful strikes in the mines during the 1950s, 1960s, or 1970s.

While a tradition of strong unionism continued to exist in the mines of Cape Breton, it is possible the change in technology occurring in the 1950s created work conditions under which the younger miners would develop different attitudes from their predecessors in the days of hand loading. Wages in recent years have certainly been much better, safety practices are no doubt improved, and miners expect a decent pension instead of continuing to work at advanced ages, as once was common. It is, however, probable that the old contract miner, loading coal with his pan shovel, did have more personal independence at his place of work. Hence he may have had a more independent spirit in disputes with the boss than the modern coal miner, who is more like workers in other industries. However this might be, it cannot really be argued that it was the mechanization of the Cape Breton mines that was

¹¹¹See the report of J. R. Donald, The Cape Breton Coal Problem. Ottawa, 1956.

initially responsible for the decline in the militancy of the miners after 1950. It is, of course, true that the strike in 1947 was the last major industrial struggle of the miners until the strike in 1982. But in fact, in many respects the miners who fought and lost the 1947 strike had already lost the hard edge of the radicalism of earlier years. The greatest change in the attitude of the miners that revealed a less combative outlook seemed to be their view of mechanization itself. In 1938 the miners strongly resisted mechanization of the mines; by 1946 they appeared to have accepted the necessity for modernization of the whole industry; and after the 1947 strike they were forced to accept that this modernization would take place entirely on terms set by the coal company. This seems a decisive change away from a struggle to preserve workers' control at the workplace; after this, the new mechanization and more intense supervision at work were only reinforcing an already established new order in the mines.

The 1947 District 26 strike had coincided with a major strike, also ending in defeat, of Nova Scotia fishermen.¹¹² Both of these large industrial disputes took place just as the federal government's wartime controls

¹¹²See Jean Nisbet, "Free Enterprise at Its Best": The State, National Sea, and the Defeat of the Nova Scotia Fishermen, 1946-1947," in M. Earle, ed., Workers and the State in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia (Fredericton, 1989).

over labour relations ended, and the Nova Scotia government was preparing legislation to replace the federal Orders in Council, particularly PC 1003. The 1947 Trade Union Act was introduced in May, and because of the attitude of Angus L. MacDonald's government to these two recent strikes, was perhaps less favorable to the workers than it otherwise might have been. Fishermen were excluded from the act, and restrictions on the right to strike were emphasized.¹¹³ The 1947 strike was the last great burst of miner militancy for years to come, and its defeat also signalled the beginning of a long period of demoralization and weakness for the labour movement in Nova Scotia, and the movement's domination by its right-wing.

Experiences during the war years and the strikes of 1945 and 1947 had helped to transform the two very powerful unions of Cape Breton, the UMW and the USWA, to a much less militant posture than in earlier years. Partly instrumental in this change to moderate policies had been the alliance of the CCF leadership and right-wing business unionists, an alliance aimed at the elimination of significant radical or communist influence among the steelworkers and miners. The electoral successes of the

¹¹³See Brian MacLean, "Who's Protecting Whom? Capital, Labour, the State and Collective Bargaining Legislation in Nova Scotia, 1937-1960," B.A. Honours Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1979; and Kirby Abbott, "The Coal Miners and the Law in Nova Scotia," in Earle, ed., Workers and the State."

CCF in Cape Breton, however, were based primarily on the support of unionized labour, and over the long-term, the changes in the unions would have some unanticipated and adverse consequences for the CCF in the area.

Chapter Seven

The CCF in Triumph and Decline, 1940-6.

Cape Breton County had some unusual features as a stronghold of the CCF. First, it was probably the only area in Canada in which the CCF ever received majority support from Roman Catholic voters.¹ This seems mainly an unanticipated result of the earlier work of the Antigonish Cooperative Movement combatting communism in the area. Second, the CP had for many years had considerable influence among the most militant miners, and as previously argued, it was the adoption of the "united front" policy by the CP in the late 1930s that made possible the CCF triumph in elections. It is the argument of this chapter that from the time of the CCF's achievement of political ascendancy in Cape Breton, its national leaders and policies worked to undermine the radicalism and union militancy that had been the original basis for the party's popularity among the miners and steelworkers.

Cape Breton was the one area in the Maritime provinces in which the CCF ever achieved electoral victories; and it was exclusively as a party of labour

¹Gregory Baum, Catholics and Canadian Socialism. Political Thought in the Thirties and Forties (Toronto, 1980); and "Social Catholicism in Nova Scotia," in Peter Slater, ed., Religion and Culture in Canada (Waterloo, 1977).

that the CCF won support in Cape Breton County, with its powerful industrial unions, the UMW and the USWA, and the area's tradition of political radicalism and labour militancy. Most of the Maritime economy was relatively weakly industrialized, characterized by such primary industries as agriculture, fishing, and logging; and unlike Canada's west, where farmers supported the CCF, the petty producers who made a precarious living from the Maritime fisheries, forests, and farms remained conservative in their voting patterns.² Thus, Cape Breton stood alone as the CCF's political beach-head in the Maritime region, and ultimately proved to be a dead end for the party. The Cape Breton victories, however, did represent a very important breakthrough for the CCF as a national party. Up to 1940, although the CCF aimed at becoming the party of farmers and labour across the country, it had no representation in Parliament from a constituency east of Manitoba. The CCF affiliation of the UMW, and the election of Clarie Gillis as MP for Cape Breton South were the first important successes the party enjoyed in winning the support of eastern Canadian industrial workers. These events preceded by several years the upsurge of CCF popularity in wartime Ontario, and were

²See Robert Brym, "Political Conservatism in Atlantic Canada," in Robert J. Brym and R. James Sacouman, Underdevelopment and Social Movements in Atlantic Canada (Toronto, 1979).

instrumental in gaining support for the CCF in the emerging industrial union movement of the period in central Canada. In Cape Breton also, it was during the war years that the CCF came to the height of its popularity and success.

During the miners' slowdown in 1941 the CCF and the Communist Party pursued different policies and roles. The communists consistently and actively supported the rank-and-file miners against the District 26 officers. The Canadian Tribune, for example, published statements by the miners' policy committee and editorials with titles such as "Miners Fight for Justice."³ Tribune editor A.A. MacLeod visited Glace Bay several times during the slowdown to express support for the miners, once speaking at a mass meeting in the Miners' Forum along with communist supported MP Dorise Neilsen and CCFer Clarie Gillis.⁴ The Communist Party's policy on union struggles began to change when the Soviet Union was invaded by Germany in June 1941, and in 1942 the party adopted a position strongly against any disruption of war production. But this policy change was not as sharp and sudden as is frequently claimed.⁵ In the summer of 1941,

³Canadian Tribune, 26 July, 16 August, 23 August 1941.

⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 25 August 1941.

⁵For example, see Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour, p. 70 and Ivan Avacumovic, The Communist Party in Canada (Toronto 1976), pp. 139-66.

while calling for unification behind the war effort, the CP took the line that unity could only be achieved by increasing democracy, creating trade union rights, and removing inequalities in Canada, and that strikes were inevitable so long as employers were permitted unchecked exploitation of workers.⁶ This was very similar to the line the CCF followed; the difference was that the communists were often willing to make statements critical of the policies and actions of important union leaders, and the CCF were not willing to do so, since these men were also prominent supporters of their party.

The miners' actions had in fact created a very difficult situation for the CCF, especially for the local MP Clarie Gillis. The miners had elected Gillis to parliament, but the District 26 officers were themselves leading members of the CCF, and the district office provided the money for campaigns. It was also clear, from statements made by CCF leader M.J. Coldwell opposing the slowdown, that the central leadership of the party supported the UMW officers rather than the men.⁷ Gillis compromised as best he could, attacking the coal company and criticizing the government, while avoiding any direct

⁶See "Labor is the Key to Victory," Canadian Tribune, 13 September 1941. This article specifically mentions the slowdown, fully supporting the miners in a section entitled "Dosco Stalls Coal Production."

⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 13 August, 17 September 1941.

reference to the officers; and he came under strong radical attack for this.⁸ Eventually, to his embarrassment, he had to share a platform with Mrs. Neilsen and A.A. MacLeod, at the Glace Bay rally in support of the slowdown; but while Nielsen and MacLeod gave full support to the miners' attacks on the officers, Gillis could only offer to act as a negotiator, saying "no side was wholly right and no side wholly wrong" and "someone has to act as a bumper."⁹

The equivocations of Gillis on the issue, the anger of many of the miners at M.J. Coldwell's statements against the slowdown, and the role of CCF leaders at the Hamilton CCL convention might have damaged the CCF in Cape Breton. Clarie Gillis wrote to David Lewis in some concern about this:

Immediately upon the return of the delegates from Hamilton they began to spread rumours among the miners that the CCF had opposed them in the Hamilton Convention, citing what they said was a fact that you had lobbied against them at the convention. Of course, I understood what had happened there and I have explained matters to some of the delegates that I had a chance to talk to. None of this has been made public.¹⁰

⁸Steelworker and Miner, 19 May; 21 June 1941. It was during the slowdown that editor M.A. MacKenzie turned finally to full support of the CP locally as well as nationally. The Steelworker and Miner from this time on was a loyal CP organ in all but name.

⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 25 August 1941.

¹⁰Letter C. Gillis to David Lewis, 25 September 1941, CCF Papers, MG IVI, vol. 5, NAC.

There was even a move, resulting from the miners' anger at the CCF role during the slowdown, to put up independent labour candidates in the October 1941 provincial election, which might have hurt the CCF badly.¹¹

In the event, this was not done, and it is probable, given the Communist Party's renewed efforts of that time for unity with the CCF, that local communists themselves opposed this. The communists no doubt experienced some increase in their influence at this time, but nothing that could be consolidated, partly because the CP was illegal, many of its leaders still imprisoned during 1941. The Steelworker and Miner from about this time onward closely followed the communist line and can probably be regarded as the local voice of the CP. The paper did not take a strong stand during the election, and accepted election advertisements from all sides.¹² However, in its editorial policies the weekly did favour the CCF candidates, and after the voting hailed the election victories of the CCF as advances for the workers, writing that the "miners of Cape Breton ... betrayed on the economic field, counter-attacked on the political field."¹³

Despite the CCF's equivocal role during the slowdown,

¹¹Glace Bay Gazette, 30 September 1941; Letter from "Democrat," Steelworker and Miner, 4 October 1941.

¹²Steelworker and Miner, 25 October 1941.

¹³Steelworker and Miner, 1 November 1941.

therefore, it was to be the CCF that profited in local politics from the miners' frustration and anger. Moreover, grassroots CCFers had been among the strongest proponents of the slowdown, and MLA Douglas MacDonald of New Waterford increased his popularity with the miners by his actions. MacDonald, of course, was the board member who opposed signing the contract and revealed what the executive was doing, as well as taking a strong stand against the dismissals by the company. Clarie Gillis had been sufficiently ambiguous in his statements to avoid suffering any widespread or permanent loss of popularity. Politically, therefore, the CCF came out of the slowdown quite well, ready for new triumphs in Cape Breton in the provincial election campaign that began within weeks of the end of the strike.

Some months earlier Angus L. MacDonald had resigned as provincial premier in order to serve in the federal war cabinet, but Liberal Premier A.S. MacMillan was able to call an election with high confidence of success, given the continued demoralized state of the Conservative Party at this time. The CCF nominated D.N. Brodie, a long-time left-wing printer, active in the local Y.M.C.A., as the candidate in Glace Bay (CB East).¹⁴ Douglas MacDonald, of course, was renominated in New Waterford (CB Centre); while Donald MacDonald, former president of the Whitney

¹⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 4, 6 October 1941.

Pier local of the UMW and at this time the manager of a co-operative store, was nominated in Sydney (CB South).¹⁵ The CCF concentrated their energies on the constituencies where they had some chance: these three, plus Cape Breton West, Cape Breton North, and one Halifax seat.¹⁶ In Glace Bay the Conservatives did not enter a candidate, leaving a straight contest between Brodie and Minister of Mines L.D. Currie.

The Liberal campaign literature contrasted the "Amazing Progress" under eight years of Liberal rule with the eight preceding years under the Conservatives, and called on electors to "Vote Liberal for Victory."¹⁷ Currie, no doubt aware he was in trouble in his constituency, tried to defend his position during the slowdown, and declared himself a wholehearted supporter of trade unions. The Glace Bay Gazette editorialised that "having such a representative ... it would be folly on the part of his fellow citizens not to return him to the legislature."¹⁸ Currie was, however, directly attacked by Clarie Gillis and by Freeman Jenkins, president of Phalen local, for his actions during the slowdown.¹⁹

¹⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 13 October 1941.

¹⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 15 October 1941.

¹⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 15 October 1941.

¹⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 22, 23 October 1941.

¹⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 24, 25 October 1941.

Before the campaign finished, the CCF was given encouragement by the results of the provincial election in British Columbia, in which the party did better than ever before. A lengthy telegram from David Lewis was published in local newspapers announcing these results and calling on the Cape Breton miners and steelworkers to "join hands with their fellow workers on the Pacific coast." The B.C. victory, Lewis stated, was "due to growing realization of workers that victory in the war and in the peace to follow depends on CCF policies of conscription of wealth ... and that the totalitarian anti-labor policies of Canadian governments must be ended."²⁰ This, along with calls to emulate the socialist movements in Britain, New Zealand, and Australia, was typical of the CCF rhetoric at this point of the war, at a time when the party's popularity was on the rise across the country. Otherwise, the local CCF campaign in Glace Bay consisted of a large number of small ward meetings addressed by the candidate and others. These meetings culminated in one large rally on the last night before the election, at which Brodie and Clarie Gillis were the main speakers.²¹

In the voting, although the Liberals won an easy victory throughout most of the province, the CCF captured three seats in Cape Breton. In New Waterford Douglas

²⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 23 October 1941.

²¹Glace Bay Gazette, 25, 28 October 1941.

MacDonald scored an absolute majority over his two opponents, obtaining 3918 votes to the 2275 for Brown (Liberal) and 1155 for Gregor (Conservative). In Glace Bay D.N. Brodie defeated L.D. Currie by a wide margin, 6222 to 4052. The most unexpected victory, however, was that scored by Donald MacDonald in Sydney, where he had a majority of 95 votes over George Morrison, the former Liberal MLA.²²

The CCF results in this election were the best the party ever achieved in Nova Scotia, and second only to the 1920 Labour-Farmer results for a third party in a provincial election. This can therefore be regarded as the moment of the CCF's highest popular triumph in Cape Breton. Clearly it was so in terms of seats held in the legislature, but it was also the time in which the CCF had its most enthusiastic following, and its followers really thought the party would sweep on to victory both in the province and in the nation. The Cape Breton miners and steelworkers, moreover, probably thought of the CCF unambiguously as a socialist party, and a party of the working class. The CCF in those years still maintained the Regina Manifesto as its basic political creed, with its call for the eradication of capitalism, "the cancer which

²²Glace Bay Gazette, 29 October, 4, 5, 6 November 1941. The CCF candidate in CB North, Robert Bartlett, came second: Bartlett (CCF) -- 2737, O'Handley (Lib) -- 3344, MacDougall (Cons) -- 2387.

is eating at the heart of our society."²³

CCF socialism was modified somewhat at this time by frequent patriotic references to the war effort, but such views would also be more than acceptable to most of the Cape Breton miners. The CCF leadership, moreover, continually advanced the argument that the wartime controls over industry and the economy should become socialist controls. This was the way to improve Canada's contribution to the war. In M.J. Coldwell's speech to the January 1942 Nova Scotia Provincial CCF Convention, he proclaimed that to achieve "a 100 per cent war effort, a new social order, based on economic justice, would have to be built." On the same occasion Angus MacInnis, MP, declared the CCF was "ready for full scale conscription as soon as industry, finance, and other resources were similarly regulated."²⁴ When the provincial legislature opened, the new CCF members moved an amendment to the Speech from the Throne calling for the conscription of wealth as well as men.²⁵ In his maiden speech D. N. Brodie called the absentee ownership of the coal mines and other industry the "curse of Nova Scotia" and predicted the return of unemployment after the war. "Will the profit

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

²⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 17 January 1942.

²⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 24 February, 3 March 1942.

system solve that problem?"²⁶

The issue of conscription, of course, was the hot national question in 1942, the year Prime Minister Mackenzie King held a national referendum to release him from his promise to Quebec never to institute conscription. The communists, despite their party's illegality and its interned members, campaigned vigorously for a "yes" vote on conscription.²⁷ In Glace Bay, as elsewhere in the country, a "Tim Buck Plebiscite Committee" was formed. Chairman James Madden and Secretary Fred Brodie wrote to the Steelworker and Miner calling for a "unanimous 'yes' for Democratic Total War and Victory."²⁸

This campaign brought the communists into some unusual alliances: at the culminating meeting in Glace Bay the principal speakers were Canadian Tribune editor A.A. MacLeod, prominent Conservative E. McK. Forbes, K.C., and a representative of the Canadian Legion.²⁹ The CCF seemed uncertain on the conscription issue at first, and then came out for a "yes" vote, undoubtedly the popular line to take in English Canada. In parliament CCF MPs voted

²⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 25 February 1942.

²⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 16 February 1942, F. Brodie letter, 18 March 1942.

²⁸Steelworker and Miner, 18 April 1942.

²⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 27 April 1942.

against nolding the plebiscite, but later urged a "yes" on conscription.³⁰ This was a change in policy that the CCF leaders seem to have felt needed lengthy explanations. In a public meeting at Glace Bay Clarie Gillis argued that the CCF had wanted conscription tied to the "conscription of wealth." It was now necessary, he argued, to vote "yes" to conscription, so the way would then be clear to campaign on the "true issue," achieving "equality of sacrifice" and an "all-out war effort" through the "conscription of wealth, industry, and finance." CCF leader Coldwell, in a radio speech, and MLA D.N. Brodie, in a newspaper advertisement, made similar points supporting a vote for conscription.³¹ The "yes" majority in the national plebiscite, of course, was overwhelming in all provinces except Quebec. The majority in CB South was a substantial 74 per cent, but despite the campaigning of the communists and the CCFers this was something less than the overall provincial "yes" vote of 79 per cent, and Ontario's 84 per cent.³²

This conscription plebiscite provides a good example of the comparative positions of the CCF and the Communist Party throughout the later war years, once the communist policy changed following the German invasion of the Soviet

³⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 21 February, 23 March 1942.

³¹Glace Bay Gazette, 13, 22 April 1942.

³²Glace Bay Gazette, 28 April 1942.

Union. The Canadian Communist Party, soon to be reorganized as the Labour Progressive Party (LPP), and the CCF usually, in fact, took up very similar positions on the substantive issues: both urged a "yes" vote on conscription, both were enthusiastic supporters of the "Joint Labour-Management Production Committees," both called for more representation of labour on war committees and for improved trade union legislation, and both urged workers to avoid wartime strikes.

The differences were most often a matter of style and rhetoric. The communists tried to show their extreme patriotism and to advertise the fact that they had put aside the internal class struggle in order to win the war against fascism. Further, they pressed forward this new policy in a mechanical and dogmatic manner, though this was a surprising policy given their earlier line that the war was an "inter-imperialist struggle,". The CCFers, believing the political climate throughout the country was shifting to the left, and that their party was moving toward victory, often sounded more radical than did the communists. Yet the difference between the parties was usually more a matter of words than substance when it came to specific policy measures.

It was not difficult to appear more radical than the communists in the period from 1942-5. The party during 1942 managed to have its internees freed, and its leaders

freed from the threat of imprisonment.³³ The Soviet Union's heroic fight against the Germans won that country and even Joseph Stalin considerable popularity in Canada, which helped the Canadian communists gain some support. When Tim Buck spoke to a "Total War Rally" at the Glace Bay Miners' Forum in November 1942, he called for the opening of a second front in Europe, and for unity even with capitalists in Canada to win victory.³⁴ In 1943 the Comintern was dissolved, and throughout 1944 the communists in Canada, following the lead of American party leader Earl Browder, moved more and more to the right in their policies.³⁵ The communist policies on avoiding strikes and promoting all-out war production have been mentioned earlier. Party statements began to appear which cited the "spirit of Teheran," praising the agreement reached by Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill at their Teheran meeting, and calling for a continuation of wartime alliances, including peaceful class relations at home,

³³Glace Bay Gazette, 7 October 1942.

³⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 7 November 1942.

³⁵Paradoxically, it was during this period, when the Comintern ties between the parties had supposedly been ended, that the Canadian communists appear most slavishly to have guided their policies by what they saw as the interests of the Soviet Union. Of course, it was then that the Soviet government and people appeared at their most heroic, fighting the Nazi hordes.

into the postwar era.³⁶ By this time the communists were even becoming critical of the CCF for asking for "fundamental social change" and for stating their aim was "socialism." This, said the communists, was unrealistic, given the political views of the majority of Canadians.³⁷ In the United States, Earl Browder had gone so far as to formally dissolve the Communist Party. In Canada, by May 1944, the communists said they were seeking a coalition of all progressives, including those in the Liberal Party and government, to keep reactionaries like Conservative Premier Drew of Ontario and Maurice Duplessis of Quebec from attaining national power. This progressive coalition was to finish winning the war and to carry on progressive reforms in peacetime, in a new era characterized by the peaceful alliance of the Soviet Union and the United States.³⁸

Communist calls on the CCF for united action were consistently rejected, even though some CCF voices, such as columnist Elmore Philpott, began to call for greater unity.³⁹ In August 1943 the communists, unable to get the

³⁶For example, see F. Brodie letters, Glace Bay Gazette, 16, 23 February 1944.

³⁷Brodie Letter, Glace Bay Gazette, 2 March 1944.

³⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 30 May, 7 September 1944.

³⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 24 November 1942; For samples of the many Philpott pieces arguing for unity with the communists, see Glace Bay Gazette, 25 February, 14 August 1943.

ban on their party lifted, formed the Labour Progressive Party. One of its first steps was to seek affiliation with the CCF.⁴⁰ CCF leaders vehemently rejected this, and sought to display publicly their opposition to the communists.⁴¹ Nonetheless the LPP persisted in pressing for "labour unity." This was the theme of a series of meetings addressed by Annie Buller throughout Nova Scotia in October 1943.⁴² Later that month, after a debate at Victory UMW Local between Fred Brodie, representing the LPP, and Clarie Gillis and Russell Cunningham, representing the CCF, the local instructed its delegates to the CCF provincial convention to press for unity between the CCF and the LPP.⁴³ Although it was clear this viewpoint had little real support from delegates, this became the hottest issue at the convention, held in Sydney 25 to 27 October. The national CCF leaders, despite the small following of the communists, were very anxious to create the appearance of an almost unanimous rejection of all communist blandishments by the CCF membership. Further, wrote David Lewis to CCF Provincial Secretary Cunningham at the time, "this sort of action should be

⁴⁰Steelworker and Miner, 11 September 1943; Glace Bay Gazette, 23 August 1943.

⁴¹Glace Bay Gazette, 7, 24 September 1943.

⁴²Glace Bay Gazette, 14 October 1943.

⁴³Glace Bay Gazette, 22 October 1943.

very carefully planned. It should as far as possible be made to appear to be spontaneous."⁴⁴ Led by National Secretary Lewis and MP Clarie Gillis, speaker after speaker at the N.S. convention rose to denounce the communists and repudiate any alliance with them.⁴⁵ Despite such rejections, the LPP persisted in calling for unity, claiming it would continue to support CCF candidates in elections.⁴⁵ At the same time, the communists began to strengthen their fight against the affiliations of trade unions to the CCF, calling for an alteration of the CCF constitutional regulation that restricted union representation to CCF conventions.⁴⁷ At the UMW District 26 convention in December 1943 the CCF and Clarie Gillis were able to defeat a resolution from Caledonia local seeking CCF-LPP unity.⁴⁸ A few months later a meeting of Caledonia Local passed another resolution, this time calling for a coalition of the CCF and the LPP with "reform minded Liberals."⁴⁹ The CCF's

⁴⁴David Lewis to Russell Cunningham, 4 October 1943, CCF Papers, MG28, IV 1, vol. 28, NAC.

⁴⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 26 October 1943. The vote in favour of a resolution against the LPP affiliation was 96 to 1.

⁴⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 6 December 1943.

⁴⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 10 December 1943.

⁴⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 22 December 1943.

⁴⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 24 October 1944.

regional monthly, The Maritime Commonwealth, denounced this Caledonia resolution, behind which lay the "sinister influence" of the LPP which sought to "dominate or destroy" the CCF.⁵⁰ Finally, in January 1945 the LPP abandoned efforts at electoral unity with the CCF, stating this decision was reached after the CCF insisted in running against General McNaughton in a by-election.⁵¹ Nevertheless, at the 1945 UMW convention, a resolution supporting the LPP line of a democratic coalition was defeated.⁵² Soon after this the Cape Breton LPP decided it would field a candidate against Clarie Gillis in the next federal election.⁵³

Although by 1944-5 the extraordinary, even ludicrous, claim of the LPP was that the CCF was too doctrinaire in its calls for socialism, the CCF policies really moved to the right during the later war years, at the same time as the policies of the Liberals and the Conservatives were moving to the left. The CCF leadership's total rejection of the frequent LPP appeals for unity was fundamentally guided by a fear of radicalism. Whatever policies the LPP might adopt, the CCF leaders saw communists as the representatives of "red" revolution, while they stood

⁵⁰The Maritime Commonwealth, November 1944.

⁵¹Glace Bay Gazette, 10 January 1945.

⁵²Glace Bay Gazette, 1 February 1945.

⁵³Glace Bay Gazette, 9 March 1945.

themselves for gradual, legal, "evolutionary" change. The height of CCF wartime radicalism, perhaps, was the party's six point plan for "total war" announced by M.J. Coldwell in June 1942. This called for: nationalization of all financial institutions; compulsory interest-free loans to be levied on the rich to finance the war; government ownership or control of all essential war industry; 100 per cent tax on all profits above four per cent; union representatives on all government control boards; and for maximum as well as minimum incomes for all Canadians.⁵⁴ Then, from the time of the July 1942 CCF national convention, the party began to emphasize post-war planning and reconstruction in its policies, mainly a call for many of the wartime controls over industry and the economy to be extended into peacetime, along with improved social welfare measures.⁵⁵ "Win the War and Win the Peace" was the slogan of a Glace Bay CCF meeting addressed by USWA Canadian Director Charles Millard and Ontario CCF Leader E.B. Jolliffe in November 1942.⁵⁶

During 1942, 1943, and 1944 the CCF seemed to be surging ahead on all fronts. In February 1942 came the by-election victory of J. Noseworthy in a Toronto riding; in 1943 the party won 34 seats and became the official

⁵⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 12 June 1942.

⁵⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 27, 28 July 1942.

⁵⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 5, 16 November 1942.

opposition in Ontario; and in 1944 the CCF swept to victory in Saskatchewan.⁵⁷ In a 1943 Gallup poll the CCF registered 29 per cent popularity, compared to 28 per cent for each of the other major parties.⁵⁸ These advances, however, brought the party under ever stronger attack from the right, well financed by some business interests.⁵⁹ The response of the CCF leadership to these pressures was to move to the right, and to try to distance the CCF policies from communism and any radicalism.

In November 1943 the British Columbia leader of the CCF, Harold Winch, in a speech at Calgary, said that the CCF when in power would immediately institute socialism, and would use the constitutional powers of the police and military to deal with those who refused to abide by the new socialist laws.⁵⁰ This was followed by a great outcry against Winch's "revolutionary" views from both Conservative and Liberal politicians. John Bracken, the new leader of the "Progressive" Conservatives, spoke of the danger of "reckless revolution." Ontario Premier Drew

⁵⁷Lewis, The Good Fight, pp. 192, 205-6.

⁵⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 13 October 1943.

⁵⁹One extensive mail campaign of anti-CCF literature was carried out by Gladstone Murray, former director of the CBC beginning in 1943. A second mass mailing took place during the 1945 election, when the pamphlet Social Suicide, by B. A. Trestail, was distributed. Glace Bay Gazette, 23 November 1943, 19 May 1945.

⁵⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 10 November 1943.

charged that this showed clearly the CCF was a revolutionary party. At a Halifax meeting Finance Minister Ilseley said there were two wings in the CCF, a revolutionary wing led by Winch, and a "mild" wing led by Coldwell.⁵¹ Not to be outdone, Nova Scotia's minister of labour, L.D. Currie, told the Women's Liberal Association that the CCF was out to destroy private property, and "the right to private property is not a right given by the state, but by God himself -- It cannot be taken away by the state or any power on earth."⁶²

The national leaders of the CCF, such as M.J. Coldwell and David Lewis, made relatively little attempt to defend Winch's statements. "Coldwell and I issued statements in which we carefully rephrased what Winch intended to say and as carefully refused to repudiate what he had said because we decided ... it would likely start an internal quarrel."⁶³ From this time in particular the leadership moved to have the party moderate its "socialism." A public statement made by Lewis and CCF President Frank Scott a day or so after the Winch controversy claimed that the CCF was a supporter of free enterprise, and had no wish to abolish property rights.⁶⁴

⁵¹Glace Bay Gazette, 19, 24, 26 November 1943.

⁵²Glace Bay Gazette, 25 November 1943.

⁵³Lewis, The Good Fight, p. 252.

⁵⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 29 November 1943.

CCF spokespersons thereafter continually reiterated the claim that the party wanted to encourage small business, and only saw public ownership as necessary in the case of inefficient monopolies.⁵⁵ At the CCF national convention in Montreal in 1944 David Lewis was able to get a policy adopted that modified the "too sweeping" Regina Manifesto by restricting the concept of socialization. "Where private business shows no sign of becoming a monopoly, operates efficiently under decent working conditions, and does not operate to the detriment of the Canadian people, it will be given every opportunity to function, to provide a fair rate of return and to make its contribution to the nation's wealth." This change in party policy, Lewis claimed, was necessary because of the "added responsibility" the party had, now that it had become a powerful political force.⁵⁶

When the Glace Bay Gazette tried to explain this new policy, claiming the CCF did not make a "fetish" of "socialism now," and stood for only gradual change, it got into trouble. No less a party stalwart than Woodsworth's daughter, Mrs. Grace MacInnis, wrote to say the CCF did indeed stand for socialism; while Fred Brodie of the LPP said the editorial only caused "confusion" since Gillis

⁵⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 1 April 1944.

⁵⁶Lewis, The Good Fight, pp. 249-50.

and others did say they were for "fundamental change."⁶⁷ But it is clear that by the time the Labour-Progressive Party was criticizing the CCF for espousing socialism, the CCF national leadership was back-peddling very rapidly in case anyone took its claim to be a socialist party seriously. The LPP, at its least radical, and promoting all round class-collaboration, still served as a communist bogey-man for the right-wing. The CCF, while claiming to be a socialist party, took care to promote little real socialism. This was the national stand of these parties in the period in which it appears that the workers of Canada were more ready than ever before or ever since to listen to a socialist message.

This was certainly the case in Cape Breton, where the workers' enthusiastic support for the CCF continued throughout the war years, particularly in the mining towns. This widespread fervour for the cause was displayed in the period between the election campaigns in a variety of activities, such as the week-long CCF Carnival at the Glace Bay Miner's Forum in July 1942, CCF Garden Parties throughout August 1943 in Glace Bay, and CCF tag days in different communities.⁶⁸ There was even a performance of a

⁶⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 17, 25, 29 August 1944.

⁶⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 29 June 1942, 5, 16 August 1943, 2 February 1944.

CCF play, written by Dawn Fraser.⁶⁹ One interesting organization sponsored by the CCF as well as the co-operative movement was the New Waterford "Post-War Reconstruction Club," which held meetings discussing the economic future of the community, municipal affairs and the like.⁷⁰ The club began a local lending-library, and, as did various UMW locals, held discussion meetings following the "Labour School of the Air" broadcasts from the CJFX radio station in Antigonish.⁷¹ There were also frequent meetings featuring CCF celebrities from other parts of the country. For example there were the visits of A.M. Nicholson, MP, and later E.B. Jolliffe and C.H. Millard in 1942, and Eugene Forsey, David Lewis (twice), Elmer Roper, and A.M. Nicholson again, in 1943.⁷² In New Waterford efforts were made to activate women in the CCF, and Miss Louise Larade, who was prominent as a CCL organizer in Nova Scotia in the war years, volunteered to help bring women into the party.⁷³ The New Waterford CCF

⁶⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 30 April 1943.

⁷⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 9 March 1943.

⁷¹Glace Bay Gazette, 23 March 1943.

⁷²Glace Bay Gazette, 5 September, 16 November 1942, 13, 22 March, 17, 28 May 1943.

⁷³Glace Bay Gazette, 15 September 1943. Larade, from New Waterford, was very active throughout these years in organizing store clerks, waitresses, laundry workers and other groups of working women in Cape Breton and later in the Kentville area.

seems to have been more conscious of women's problems than usual at this time. In 1943 a meeting was held devoted to the problem of women's employment in the post-war period.⁷⁴ All of this activity was in addition to frequent meetings of CCF clubs. If CCF activists had the time, a "home study" course on CCF policies was available, based on the book by David Lewis and Frank Scott, Make This Your Canada, and George Weaver, Economics for Workers.⁷⁵ One further important element in sustaining the CCF support was the fact that a daily newspaper, the Glace Bay Gazette, was purchased by UMW District 26 in July 1942.⁷⁵ Tremendous battles were to take place concerning the policies of the newspaper, but its existence undoubtedly promoted the policies of the CCF, and must have helped build confidence that the movement was growing stronger throughout the province.

In 1942, still in the first flush of confidence following the Cape Breton victories, and the purchase of the newspaper, the CCF decided it would begin efforts to build the movement on the Nova Scotia mainland. Russell Cunningham was appointed provincial organizer, and it was decided to contest the by-election being held at Antigonish. A nominating meeting was held, and when it

⁷⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 17 September 1943.

⁷⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 9 November 1943.

⁷⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 28 July 1942.

proved impossible to find any local candidate, Cunningham himself accepted the nomination.⁷⁷ As a part-time farmer as well as a railway worker, the idea was that Cunningham could appeal to the mostly rural voters of Antigonish. The Gazette pitched in, helping to bring out a "By-Election Daily News" in Antigonish during the campaign.⁷⁸ In Cunningham's election campaign efforts were made to make a special appeal to farmers, calling for fair prices for meat and produce, and asking how much of the prices paid by workers the farmers actually received. A Gazette editorial declared that Glace Bay miners were helping fund Cunningham's candidature as a "gesture of friendship" for the Antigonish farmers.⁷⁹ All the Cape Breton CCF MLAs, Donald MacDonald, Douglas MacDonald, and particularly D.N. Brodie, were active in the Antigonish campaign.⁸⁰ There was no Conservative candidate, and Premier MacMillan and Liberal candidate John Gorman spoke of the CCF candidature as an invasion.⁸¹ On election day the voters seemed to agree, voting 2640 to 1137 for Gorman.⁸²

⁷⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 5, 6 October 1942.

⁷⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 13 October 1942.

⁷⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 14 October 1942.

⁸⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 16 October 1942.

⁸¹Glace Bay Gazette, 17 October 1942.

⁸²Glace Bay Gazette, 20 October 1942.

The results were as good as the CCF could have realistically expected, since their campaign truly was an "invasion" with almost no active local backing. This attempt at Antigonish, however, was symptomatic of the dilemma in which the CCF found itself in Nova Scotia. Its strength among the miners and steelworkers of industrial Cape Breton was based on its claim to represent the workers and to stand for socialism. It had, however, no analysis or rhetoric that could appeal to the small producers -- farmers, fishermen, wood-lot owners -- who made up so much of the Maritime population. The CCF got nowhere in appeals to this electorate by using a watered down form of the socialist appeal used in Cape Breton, or a slightly modified version of the program that had succeeded in rural Saskatchewan. The victories in Cape Breton were to prove to be a complete dead end, though in 1942 this failure in Antigonish seemed only a temporary set-back to the supporters of the party.

The CCF provincial leader with the most prestige and press-coverage from the time of his 1940 election onwards was MP Clarie Gillis. He was quite an orator, and never appears to have let a lack of facts slow his tongue, as many of his listeners remembered. "He was an effective speaker who always made sure that the facts fitted his theme rather than the other way around, a route he regarded as the timid way of the intellectual," was the

way David Lewis put this.⁸³ By the end of the war, Gillis had moved sharply to the right in the CCF and became noted for the virulence of his anti-communism.⁸⁴ However, while Gillis was never truly a radical, or even a real militant as a trade unionist, he came closest to radicalism when he first went to parliament. In the early war years he took positions to the left of the CCF parliamentary caucus. For example, when the bill introducing Unemployment Insurance was debated in 1940 he was the only CCF Member who supported Mrs. Dorise Neilsen's amendment which would have made striking workers eligible for benefits.⁸⁵ Gillis probably also gained support in his constituency for his outspoken stands on Maritime rights issues and demands for economic concessions for the region. One of his early achievements was his successful struggle to have a plate mill, moth-balled at the Sydney steel plant since the First World War, re-activated with federal money.⁸⁶ Gillis was certainly a very active MP. During the 1945 election the main advertisement for Gillis, "The Records Speak," consisted of an immensely long reference list from Hansard

⁸³Lewis, The Good Fight, p. 158.

⁸⁴Gillis' anti-communist stance took a rather ludicrous form when he publicized a tavern brawl he supposedly had with a "red" in Ottawa in 1950. Steelworker and Miner, 22 April 1950.

⁸⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 27 July, 1 August 1940.

⁸⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 3, 11 March, 2 April, 17 May 1941.

of his speeches in parliament over the five previous years.⁸⁷ If a little hard to handle at the beginning, Gillis soon became very useful to the national leaders of the CCF in helping to build the party's influence within the union movement, heading the CCF campaign for trade union affiliations in Ontario in 1942.⁸⁸ As a genuine working-class representative, he became the party's main parliamentary spokesman on labour issues. He also soon fell in with the overall political line of the CCF leadership, and helped to see that this was applied in Nova Scotia, though he had his difficulties, as we have seen, at the time of the coal miners' slowdown.

In provincial politics the three CCF MLAs followed fairly closely the political lead of the national party. The CCF policy for the province, as outlined by Donald MacDonald in the legislature in March 1943, for example, called for such things as improvements in the trade union act, improved workers' compensation and mothers' allowance, and better housing and education policies.⁸⁹ At the provincial convention in October 1943 "sweeping reform in the whole social and political structure in Nova Scotia" was called for. Specific proposals were: political

⁸⁷Sydney Post-Record, 5 June 1945.

⁸⁸Gad Horowitz, Canadian Labour in Politics (Toronto, 1968), pp. 72-3.

⁸⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 15 March 1943.

patronage to be eliminated; education for equal opportunities to be guaranteed; collective bargaining to be ensured; government assistance in production and management to be provided for farmers, and fishermen to be given guaranteed prices; plans to be made for returning service men and women; "socialization" of mining and other basic industries operated as monopolies; a social security scheme to be worked out in cooperation with federal government - medical plan, hospitalization, old age pensions, etc.; and the franchise to be from age 19. Donald MacDonald, in his speech supporting this list, said the CCF policy aimed for farmer-labor unity, while reactionaries aimed for division between urban and rural peoples.⁹⁰ The party certainly tried to develop a program that could win seats outside the industrial area of Cape Breton, though it was never to succeed in this.

Organizationally David Lewis and the national CCF office kept close watch over the provincial party. Early in 1942 Angus MacIntyre of Glace Bay was chosen CCF provincial secretary, a choice that was most likely unacceptable to Lewis.⁹¹ MacIntyre was a militant miner, and had been one of the leaders of the rank-and-file delegation to the CCL's Hamilton convention in 1941, a delegation which had been very critical of the role of

⁹⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 27 October 1943.

⁹¹Glace Bay Gazette, 28 January 1942.

Lewis and the CCF leadership. MacIntyre also appears to have earlier had some friction with CCF provincial and national leaders when he was Cape Breton secretary of the party, at which time Lewis wrote:

It looks as if you ought to take some steps fairly quickly to replace Angus MacIntyre as Regional Secretary. Of course, we had our doubts at the time he was appointed, but it is sometimes better to go slowly in these matters.⁹²

Possibly some pressure was brought to bear again in 1942, for MacIntyre resigned after a few months, and was replaced by Russell Cunningham, a man much more acceptable to the CCF leadership.⁹³

Lewis usually attended the provincial conventions of the party, and as his correspondence shows, kept well in touch with events and personalities in the area. His interference could sometimes backfire, as he admits himself in reference to the question of the location of the provincial office of the CCF. Impressed with Fred Young, director of the YMCA in Halifax, Lewis appointed him provincial organizer for the CCF in Nova Scotia.

When I triumphantly informed the Nova Scotia provincial president, secretary, and others, of Young's readiness to come on staff as provincial secretary and suggested that the provincial office should be moved to Halifax, imprecations rained on me from almost every leading CCF

⁹²Letters H.I.S. Borgford to D. Lewis, 17 August 1939, Lewis to Borgford, 24 August 1939, CCF Papers, MG28, IV 1, vol. 28, NAC.

⁹³Glace Bay Gazette, 10 June 1942.

person on Cape Breton. The provincial council met, without representation from mainland Nova Scotia, and angrily rejected my proposal. They would simply not countenance moving the CCF capital from Glace Bay to Halifax.⁹⁴

Much of the active role of the central office in provincial matters was simply a matter of assistance in getting the movement underway. It also, however, was intended to secure a uniformity of political views in the CCF across the country, particularly on such sensitive issues as relations with the communists. Another aim was no doubt to secure loyalty to the central leadership. Immediately after Douglas MacDonald of New Waterford was first elected MLA in late 1939, Lewis wrote him a long letter of congratulations and helpful advice, enclosed a number of books for him to read, and informed him that he had written to some contacts in Halifax with a view to setting up an advisory committee to help him with his work in the legislature.⁹⁵

After Douglas MacDonald was joined in the legislature by the two other CCF members, Donald MacDonald of Sydney was named the house leader. It is possible that this also reflected some party bias against the New Waterford member

⁹⁴Lewis, *The Good Fight*, pp. 246-7; see also Lewis to Cunningham, 22 January 1944, Cunningham to Lewis, 27 January 1944, CCF Papers, MG28, IV 1, vol. 25, NAC.

⁹⁵Lewis to Douglas MacDonald, 28 December 1939, CCF Papers, MG28, IV 1, vol. 26, NAC. The book-list read as follows: "Social Planning for Canada," "Democracy Needs Socialism," three New Zealand pamphlets, two Irvine pamphlets, Williams pamphlet, and "Towards the Dawn."

because of the radical stand he had taken during the slowdown, but this would be hard to prove. In 1945 Douglas MacDonald refused to stand again after serving out his term, claiming the job was too time-consuming along with his union job. The new house leader, "Donald the Duke" MacDonald, to give him his local nickname, was also soon appointed CCL organizer for Nova Scotia, under Silby Barrett.⁹⁵ As such he came to represent the connection between the national leaders of the CCF and the CCL, and to be an important supporter of the essentially right-wing line of these leaders in the Maritime labour movement.⁹⁷

Another matter in which national CCF intervention led to some controversy was the editorial policies of the Glace Bay Gazette. The newspaper was bought by the UMW, as mentioned above, in July 1942. For both the union and the CCF, a daily paper seemed a marvelous acquisition with its possibilities for propagating their political views. Apparently on David Lewis' recommendation, the union executive hired a Toronto Star reporter named Robert Reeds to become the managing editor of the Gazette.⁹⁸ Reeds

⁹⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 30 April 1942. The nickname seems to have come from what was felt to be his somewhat pretentious deportment, speech and dress.

⁹⁷MacDonald was later to become the President of the Canadian Labour Congress.

⁹⁸Except where otherwise noted, facts given here about the Gazette's history under UMW ownership are taken from a serialized account published in the newspaper in 1947. Glace Bay Gazette, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 September 1947.

seems to have been a very energetic and ambitious editor, but also, unfortunately, a man rather lacking in tact. He also had political ideas somewhat out of line with those of the Cape Breton miners, though perhaps current in some Ontario CCF circles. While he was for the workers, it was clear he thought the workers should be disciplined and controlled by leaders who knew what was good for them. His continual propaganda in the paper against absenteeism by the miners has earlier been noted. He was also a great admirer of those he considered strong leaders, like John L. Lewis.⁹⁹ Other particular favorites of his were men he considered able bureaucrats or experts, such as Donald Gordon of the wartime prices board, or Elliot Little of federal selective services. These, he wrote, were "men the CCF will need" when it took power.¹⁰⁰ Reeds was also quite virulently anti-communist, and communists still had considerable influence in the UMW.

Reeds was full of big and expensive plans for the expansion of the newspaper and its subscription list. Immediately after he took over he arranged a "New Gazette Birthday Parade," ending with speeches by Clarie Gillis and himself. The new paper, he announced, would have "more comic strips, more pictures, more news from every part of the world, more news about Cape Breton, and more news

⁹⁹Editorial, Glace Bay Gazette, 15 October 1942.

¹⁰⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 12 September, 2 December 1942.

about the CCF, the working people of Nova Scotia and the rest of Canada."¹⁰¹ Appeals were soon being made to the miners for more money and support, and an aggressive and over-ambitious scheme to build the number of subscriptions, and expand into New Waterford and Sydney, was put into operation. New equipment was also purchased, and a national CCF periodical, The New Canada Weekly, based mainly on reprints of Gazette articles, was started.¹⁰² The newspaper was steadily losing money, but Reeds promised it would soon become self sufficient.

These things might have taken some time to lead to trouble, except that the miners were already very suspicious about the purchase of the Gazette. The executive at this time was still that headed by D.W. Morrison and Silby Barrett, immensely unpopular since the slowdown strike. One fear expressed was that the paper would come under control of appointees of John L. Lewis and the international union.¹⁰³ Up to, and even after, the election of Freeman Jenkins and the left-wing executive, Reeds was accused of using the Gazette to support the old executive.¹⁰⁴ Another of the first big editorial

¹⁰¹Glace Bay Gazette, 25 August 1942.

¹⁰²Glace Bay Gazette, 24 October 1942.

¹⁰³Steelworker and Miner, 8 August 1942.

¹⁰⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 15 October 1942; Steelworker and Miner, 21 November 1942.

controversies came with the visit of Tim Buck to Glace Bay. Reeds had published several anti-communist editorials, and Tim Buck took critical note of these in his speech at the Glace Bay Forum. Reeds then published a statement saying he was going to sue Buck.¹⁰⁵ Reeds then went about the UMW locals explaining his position on the slander suit, and appealing for the miners to agree to a \$1.00 per month levy to pay for the Gazette.¹⁰⁶

The new executive therefore took office in November 1942 with some bias against the flamboyant Gazette editor, who soon made it clear he would accept no direction from the executive officers. After a short time, a violent quarrel took place between Reeds and Freeman Jenkins. Jenkins attempted to fire him, an incident took place in which Tom Ling kicked down the door of the newspaper office, and Reeds resigned and then retracted his resignation. After this Reeds, still in control of the newspaper and using its columns to publish his side of things, began visiting locals and appealing for their support against the union executive. Using the line that the rank-and-file should take control of the paper he was successful for some time in holding his own against the union officers. He had also quarrelled bitterly with MLA D.N. Brodie, who wrote a very angry letter to David Lewis

¹⁰⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 3, 4, 7, 9 November 1942.

¹⁰⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 13 November 1942.

denouncing Reeds.¹⁰⁷ After about a month of this stand-off Reeds was finally persuaded to resign, leaving the newspaper badly in debt.¹⁰⁸ Jenkins and the other UNW officers, moreover, were for some time after this in no way disposed to accept advice or control from the CCF national office or David Lewis as to the newspaper's policy.

From this point on the paper's business affairs were directly controlled by the district executive, working with the circulation manager, Floyd Gates. Editorial writing was entrusted to a young university graduate from Sydney, Nathan Cohen. Problems began to arise, however, as Cohen, who had joined the CCF, gradually began to move in his sympathies and his editorial policy to support the communists. The Gazette also regularly published a column by Elmore Philpott, once the leader of the Ontario CCF, who now often argued for unity with the communists. David Lewis, noting the newspaper's change in policy, wrote to Russell Cunningham:

Annie Buller has been in your province [and] ... might swing support away from us to the Labour-Progressives. I notice too they are receiving a certain amount of publicity in the Glace Bay Gazette, and from the way in which this stuff is written up in the Gazette I am beginning to wonder a little about Nate Cohen's political

¹⁰⁷Brodie to Lewis, 15 December 1942, Lewis to Brodie, 8 January 1943, CCF Papers, MG28, IV 1, vol. 28, NAC.

¹⁰⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 2 February 1943.

reliability from our point of view.¹⁰⁹

Cunningham replied that he feared Cohen was "more or less influenced by the Communist doctrine" but that Clarie Gillis still had illusions about him and it was difficult to act without causing unnecessary "friction."¹¹⁰ This question of the Gazette's political reliability was one of the concerns that led the CCF provincial convention held at this time to decide to publish a new CCF periodical, The Maritime Commonwealth.¹¹¹ The Gazette was also continuing to lose money, and another levy from the miners was called for to pay its debts, which roused resentment, particularly in those locals outside the area in which the paper circulated.¹¹² The Stellarton locals even went on a brief strike in protest at the levy.¹¹³ The 1943 district convention of the union agreed to substantial increases in the union's monthly dues, temporarily eliminating the debts and financial problems of the paper. The delegates also passed a resolution that required the paper editorially to conform to the policies of the UMW and the

¹⁰⁹Lewis to Cunningham, 4 October 1943, CCF Papers, MG28, IV 1, vol. 28, NAC.

¹¹⁰Cunningham to Lewis, 7 October 1943, CCF Papers, MG28, IV 1, vol. 28, NAC.

¹¹¹Glace Bay Gazette, 26 October 1943.

¹¹²Glace Bay Gazette, 10 August 1943.

¹¹³Glace Bay Gazette, 26, 28 August 1943.

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Throughout 1944, however, the editorial line of the Gazette continued to be much friendlier to the LPP than the CCF leadership would have liked. It even received praise from LPP representative John C. Mortimer in his column in the Steelworker.¹¹⁵ Further, Cohen's editorials, generally adopting an impartial, "Let's hear all sides" approach, were popular with the miners, judging by testimonials Cohen received at some meetings.¹¹⁶ To partly counter Cohen's influence, the CCF leaders managed to get the union executive to hire Jim Wright, a newsman from Ontario CCF circles, as a "feature writer."¹¹⁷ By the time of the CCF convention in November 1944, Cohen's editorial policies were being attacked as "fence-sitting" with regard to the LPP.¹¹⁸ Finally, early in 1945 Cohen resigned, forced out, according to the Steelworker, by "sinister parties in the hierarchy of the UMW and CCF," mentioning John L. Lewis, Clarie Gillis and David Lewis as

¹¹⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 18 December 1943.

¹¹⁵Steelworker and Miner, 10 June 1944.

¹¹⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 4, 11 December 1944.

¹¹⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 8 July, 8 November 1944; Steelworker and Miner, 18 November 1944.

¹¹⁸Glace Bay Gazette, 13 November 1944.

possibly being the parties in the "dark plot."¹¹⁹

After these struggles concerning the editorial policy, the Gazette reverted to a line consistently supportive of the UMW executive and of the CCF, and also critical of the LPP, but generally avoiding controversy. Circulation manager Floyd Gates took over as editor, and many of its editorials were reprints. It continued to lose money, and required subsidies from the union. After the 1947 strike, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, the miners voted against further subsidies for the paper. The newspaper's staff then attempted to run it in co-operation with the union, and it continued in operation as the Gazette until January 1949. An attempt was then made to run it as a weekly entitled The Star, but this foundered after a few issues.¹²⁰

One aspect of these editorial battles was that they make it obvious that the Jenkins UMW executive and the CCF leaders were somewhat at arms length in their policies during this period. Of course President Freeman Jenkins himself, Secretary-Treasurer Adam Scott, and Vice-President Tom Ling were all active members of the CCF, but they had come into UMW office as left-wingers, critical of

¹¹⁹Steelworker and Miner, 3 February 1945. Cohen went on to work for a while for the Canadian Tribune in Toronto, before his flirtation with communism ended, and he began his distinguished career as the most famous of Canadian drama critics in the 1950s.

¹²⁰The Star (Glace Bay), 4 February, 28 April 1949.

the alliance of the CCF leaders with the right-wing union bureaucrats of the CCL like Mosner, Millard, and Conroy. It was to take a few years before Jenkins himself was to be regarded as one of the worst of these bureaucrats. As for International Board Member John Alex MacDonald, he had long been associated with the communists, whether or not he had continued to hold formal membership in the party. As late as November 1942, after his election, he had shared a platform at a public meeting with President George MacNeil of USWA Local 1064 and Tim Buck.¹²¹ Charges were laid with the international board that he was a communist, and therefore not eligible under the UMW constitution to hold office. MacDonald was supposed to take office in April 1943, but it was not until September that he was cleared by the international board.¹²² This long delay, while John L. Lewis had appointed defeated officers Morrison and Barrett to well-paid union jobs, led to a number of protests from the miners.¹²³

Another example of the independence of the district executive from the CCF leadership was the appointment of C.B. Wade as research director in 1944. Wade was well qualified, with an M.A. from Queen's University, and it is

¹²¹Glace Bay Gazette, 7 November 1942.

¹²²Glace Bay Gazette, 22 September 1943. Whatever his political opinions were thereafter, MacDonald kept away from overt political activities and controversies.

¹²³Glace Bay Gazette, 19 May 1943.

not clear whether Jenkins or the other executive board members knew he had communist sympathies when he was given the job. They stood by him, however, when he came under severe attack from Clarie Gillis, in particular. In August 1945, during the steel strike, the government passed PC 3589, a law which provided for a secret ballot vote of any striking workers to be taken by the department of labour to ascertain if the workers support the strike. Passage of this law, which was widely regarded as an anti-union regulation, led to protests from all sections of organized labour. Clarie Gillis, however, as a member of the Commons industrial relations committee, had agreed to this measure in committee, and later avoided voting on the issue, although other CCF MPs voted against it. This was given publicity through a letter attacking Gillis sent to the newspapers by Ethel Meade, provincial secretary of the LPP.¹²⁴

At the District 26 convention in October a resolution criticizing Gillis for this was put forward, for which Gillis blamed Wade, in particular. Gillis defended his stand on the strike vote as a stand for democracy, defending workers against the possibility of strikes being forced on them by union leaders. He also claimed that there was some difference between the recommendation he

¹²⁴Steelworker and Miner, 14 September 1946; Glace Bay Gazette, 9 October 1945.

had agreed to and the law that was passed, although no-one else could see this difference. He then counter-attacked with a long speech at the convention denouncing Wade as dishonest, never willing to co-operate with "your representative in Ottawa," because of his ideological position.¹²⁵ Wade defended himself ably against Gillis' charges, and in the end a resolution of confidence in his work was passed, with the rider that he should communicate more with the CCF MP. President Jenkins ended this debate with the reaffirmation of the UMW's affiliation to the CCF, but stating:

At the same time we are not the servants of any political party, and no party is going to tell us what to do. I will not allow any man's politics to interfere with his job. All that matters is that he does his work well.¹²⁶

Four years later Jenkins was to reverse this position, but for the time red-baiting was kept out of District 26.

By the end of the war, however, the influence of the communists among the miners was a mere shadow of what it had been a few years earlier. This was no doubt largely due to the influence of the CCF, as well as the continuing anti-red pressures from such sources as the church, the top union leaders, and the Labour School run by the St. FX Extension Department. The wartime policies of the communists themselves, however, had probably also

¹²⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 24 October 1945.

¹²⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 29, 30 October 1945.

undermined their support among workers, particularly when such extremes as the coalition with the Liberals were preached.

In the 1945 federal election the local LPP nominated a Glace Bay miner named James Madden to run against Clarie Gillis.¹²⁷ Tim Buck, on hand for the nominating convention, spoke on the radio, and gave the LPP line on the election. No party could get a majority, he claimed, and therefore the only hope for peace and progress was a coalition of all the progressive forces, whether members of the LPP, CCF, or Liberal parties. The CCF, by seeking power, were selfishly putting their party interests above the people's interests.¹²⁸ Ironically, within a few weeks after this speech, and before the election was held, Canadian communists had news of a letter condemning the policies of Earl Browder written by a prominent French communist, Jacques Duclos. Because Duclos was known to be expressing views held by the Soviet party leadership, the downfall of Browder followed in short order. In Canada this meant a quick reversal of policies such as the coalition with the Liberals and the like.¹²⁹ This policy

¹²⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 23 April 1945.

¹²⁸Text Tim Buck Broadcast, Steelworker and Miner, 5 May 1945.

¹²⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 25 May 1945; Avakumovik, The Communist Party in Canada, pp.164-5; See also Steelworker and Miner, 1 September 1945.

change, however, came too late to save Jim Madden from the humiliation of getting only 845 votes in the election.¹³⁰ Madden was not a prominent or well known figure, so he could command few votes based on his personal popularity. Gillis, of course, was very well known, and gaining popularity even with middle-class voters. Nonetheless, this was the first direct electoral test of the communist's strength in Cape Breton since the McLachlan campaign of 1935, and it appeared to show the support for the party was very weak. Elsewhere in Canada, in the Ontario provincial election as well as the federal contest, the CCF are reported to have lost seats because of the labour vote being split with LPP candidates.¹³¹ This was certainly not the case in CB South, where Gillis won with a large majority.¹³²

For the CCF, although they increased their seats nationally, this election, along with the party losses in Ontario, was a vast disappointment, one from which the party never recovered. The party had to contend with the propaganda campaign directed against it, mainly in the form of the widely distributed booklet by B.A. Trestail,

¹³⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 12 June 1945.

¹³¹Avakumovik, The Communist Party in Canada, p. 163 reckons this "cost the CCF five seats in the Ontario election and ten in the federal."

¹³²The results were: Gillis 14,311, Hartigan (Lib) 9944, Buckley (Cons) 7103, Madden 846. Glace Bay Gazette, 12 June 1945.

Social Suicide.¹³³ Despite such attacks the CCF really had hopes of becoming at least the official opposition in 1945. Clarie Gillis may even have seriously meant it when he said in an interview before the election: "There is every indication that the CCF will sweep the Maritimes on June 11."¹³⁴ The effect of this disappointment on the politics of the CCF was to push the line further and faster to the right, in the illusory hope that more moderate, mainstream policies would win votes.

The CCF election manifesto had declared: "We should plan for peace as we plan for war." The other parties were "all out for free enterprise. The CCF alone asserts that in that direction lurks depression, unemployment, stagnation of trade, and ultimately war." Social planning was what the country needed.¹³⁵ This was hardly a clarion call for a radical socialist transformation of the world, but it was more so than the CCF was ever again to put forward.

When the provincial election was held later in the year, the party election program concentrated on such items as job creation, marketing boards for farmers and fishermen, improved education, and housing.¹³⁵ The Cape

¹³³Glace Bay Gazette, 18 May 1945.

¹³⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 11 May 1945.

¹³⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 20 April 1945.

¹³⁵Glace Bay Gazette, 15 October 1945.

Breton CCF nominees were Donald MacDonald, re-offering in Sydney, Russell Cunningham in Glace Bay, and Michael McDonald, a popular young miner from Reserve, in the New Waterford riding. Douglas MacDonald declined to run again, and D.N. Brodie was defeated in a nomination convention by Cunningham, a much younger man. Brodie, to show there was no hard feelings, served as Cunningham's campaign manager.¹³⁷ In this election, held after Angus L. MacDonald's resumption of the Liberal leadership, the Liberals won another landslide victory across the province. In Sydney Donald MacDonald lost his seat, defeated by the Liberal candidate by a narrow margin.¹³⁸ Cunningham won in Glace Bay, and Michael McDonald in New Waterford, giving the CCF two seats in the legislature.¹³⁹ Cunningham, who had earlier been elected provincial president of the CCF, became CCF house leader. He also had the rather hollow satisfaction of being the official Leader of the Opposition, since the Conservatives won no

¹³⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 1, 2 October 1945.

¹³⁸The Sydney results were: Smith-McIvor (Lib) 4778, MacDonald (CCF) 4448, Campbell (Cons) 1851. Nova Scotia Election Returns, 1886-1973, Micro MB 3, Beaton Institute.

¹³⁹The Glace Bay (CB East) results were: Cunningham (CCF) 5332, McGillivray (Lib) 2719, Beaton (Cons) 1002. The New Waterford (CB Centre) results were: McDonald (CCF) 3860, McIsaac (Lib) 2725, Doucette (Cons) 518. Nova Scotia Election Returns, 1886-1973, Micro MB 3, Beaton Institute.

seats in this election.¹⁴⁰ At a CCF provincial convention held a few weeks later at New Glasgow, the delegates tried to encourage themselves that they were still going forward, by referring to the fact that they had fielded more candidates than ever before, were now the official opposition, and the like.¹⁴¹ In Nova Scotia as on the national scene, however, the CCF was never to recover the optimism of the period before these 1945 elections. It had become clear that the party's popularity had already retreated from its high-water mark.

It is perhaps impossible to declare with any certainty what are the motivations behind the voting patterns of large numbers of people. However, it seems very probable that the earliest successes of the CCF in Cape Breton were based mainly on the enthusiastic support of the miners and steelworkers aiming through their votes to help bring about some real change in society. The CCF appealed to the radical workers who had supported the communists, and it also gained voters ideologically influenced by the Antigonish Movement who would never have voted communist. In Cape Breton this socialist momentum for the CCF carried on through the war years, up to the 1945 election. But for the party in the province and the Maritimes generally, its isolation could be expressed in

¹⁴⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 24 October 1945.

¹⁴¹Glace Bay Gazette, 7 December 1945.

geographical terms -- it could never break out of industrial Cape Breton.

In federal politics after 1945, CCF leaders believed that the combination of capitalist prosperity and the Cold War meant that they had to even more strenuously distance themselves from any suggestion they were soft on communism, and moderate their earlier socialist rhetoric. But, though they adopted these policies, the number of CCF seats went down in each successive election. In Nova Scotia, although there was relatively little post-war prosperity, the CCF attempted to become acceptable to the mainland electorate by a similar right turn in policies and election platforms, without ever achieving any increase in their proportion of the vote outside Cape Breton.¹⁴² In 1949 the party managed to hold its seats in Cape Breton, but again no other CCF candidate in the province could do well enough to hold his deposit. The party also lost its position as official opposition, since the Conservatives, on the comeback with their new leader Stanfield, won seven seats.¹⁴³ For the CCF leadership the lesson of these defeats was that they should court

¹⁴²For an outline of the CCF electoral record throughout the Atlantic region, see Patrick J. Smith and Marshall W. Conley, "Empty Harbours, Empty Dreams': The Democratic Socialist Tradition in Atlantic Canada," in J. William Brennan, ed., "Building the Co-operative Commonwealth." Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada (Regina, 1985).

¹⁴³MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 278.

popularity with a political line closer to the mainstream parties. An example of this thinking is given in the report of the education committee to the September 1949 CCF provincial convention. The problem lay, this document claimed, in the "natural conservatism of Nova Scotians" and their "fear of centralized authority and increased bureaucracy under CCF government." This was made worse by the "tendency among CCF spokesmen to emphasize the doctrinaire Socialist content of the movement. Bulk of Nova Scotians are pragmatic and hard-headed and cannot be convinced by Utopian speculations." The primary recommendation, therefore, was that the "Doctrinaire socialist approach should be minimized."¹⁴⁴ By the 1950s, with the coal industry and the general economy of Cape Breton in dramatic decline, the CCF had no more radical leadership to offer than did the mainstream parties. In its published manifesto during the 1953 election campaign the CCF called for "Labour policies to promote understanding and teamwork between employer and employees in a program for greatly increased production [emphasis in original], making it possible for the employees to share in the increased wealth produced".¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴Report of the CCF Education Committee, 17-18 September 1949, D.N. Brodie Papers, MG12, 18, Beaton Institute.

¹⁴⁵CCF Manifesto Nova Scotia Election 1953, CCF Papers, MG28 IV1, Vol. 28, NAC.

The trouble was that this abandonment of the socialist content in the CCF message achieved nothing in terms of increased votes for the party in mainland Nova Scotia. If anything, these policies gradually undermined the strength of CCF support, where the party did have a base, in the Cape Breton area. As the CCF policies became more moderate, the fervour of the working class support in Cape Breton probably grew less. The decline in party membership and activities was marked.¹⁴⁶ Gone were the days of high participation in CCF sponsored events that existed during the war years. This seems to have been partly a matter of disillusionment with the CCF as a socialist party, and partly growing defeatism as to its prospects of ever winning provincial or federal power. The party continued for some years to hold Cape Breton seats, since for working-class voters the CCF no doubt remained preferable to the Liberals and Conservatives, and the less radical the party appeared, the more it came to attract middle class votes in the Cape Breton area. In provincial elections, the CCF held two of the Cape Breton seats until 1956, and one lasted to 1963.¹⁴⁷ Clarie Gillis increased

¹⁴⁶MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 302.

¹⁴⁷In the 1945 election, Donald MacDonald was defeated in CB South (Sydney), but Michael MacDonald won CB Centre (New Waterford) and Russell Cunningham won CB East (Glace Bay). Both held these seats, with declining majorities, in 1949, and were re-elected in 1953. In 1956 and 1960 only Michael MacDonald in New Waterford was elected for the CCF. He was defeated, running for the new

his majority in the 1945 election, while the CCF national upsurge continued, and held it in 1949, when the CCF lost seats elsewhere.¹⁴⁸ Gillis, in particular, seemed able to attract a wider vote, including many middle class voters. He was on the left of the CCF in Parliament when first elected, but had moved sharply to the right by the post-war period, when he became noted for the virulence of his anti-communism.¹⁴⁹ He probably also gained support locally for his outspoken stands on Maritime rights issues. In 1953 Gillis won his most resounding victory, getting an absolute majority of all the votes cast.¹⁵⁰ He was defeated in 1957, and failed to win re-election in 1958.¹⁵¹ Clarie Gillis thus remained a successful politician over many years, but the tone of his campaigns in the post-war years was very much less radical than at the time he was first elected. It was therefore apparent that if the working-class electorate in Cape Breton retained much socialist fervour after the war this could

NDP, in 1963.

¹⁴⁸The CCF percentage of the provincial vote fell from 14 per cent in 1945 to 9.5 per cent in 1949, and nationally, its seats in Parliament fell from 31 to 13. MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, pp. 249, 278-9.

¹⁴⁹An example of Gillis's public stance of extreme anti-communism was given when he publicized a tavern brawl he supposedly had with a "red" in Ottawa in 1950. Steelworker and Miner, 22 April 1950.

¹⁵⁰MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 291.

¹⁵¹MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, pp. 306-8.

find little expression through voting for Clarie Gillis and the CCF.

The CCF, all commentators agree, had generally much more radical sounding rhetoric and stated purposes in its early years than it did later, particularly after the war.¹⁵² In much that has been written on the CCF the explanation provided for this right-ward transformation is that the broadly based CCF "movement" of pre-war years became subordinated to the CCF "party" and its leaders, concerned exclusively with the attaining of political power through elections.¹⁵³ In order to have a wider appeal to voters, the CCF moderated its policies and suppressed or purged its radicals. Radicalism, it is added, came mainly from the CCF clubs, filled with socialist intellectuals, and the alliance of CCF party leaders with union leaders committed to "business unionism" aided this process of moderating the CCF's image and outlook.

In the miners' and steelworkers' unions in Cape Breton, it was more a matter of the CCF helping insure the

¹⁵²See Michael S. Cross, The Decline and Fall of a Good Idea. CCF-NDP Manifestoes, 1932 to 1959 (Toronto 1974), for documentary evidence of the CCF's move to the right as a national party.

¹⁵³The movement to party thesis is presented in full force in Leo Zakuta, A Protest Movement Becalmed: A Study of Change in the CCF (Toronto 1964); but similar ideas are expressed in Walter D. Young, The Anatomy of a Party: the National CCF (Toronto 1969).

victory of the right wing in the unions. If the unions later became a right-wing influence on the CCF and the NDP, CCF influence had helped to create a union movement that would play this role.¹⁵⁴ Overall, it is difficult to apply the 'movement to party' thesis to the CCF in Cape Breton, where radicalism or socialist ideas were not introduced to the miners by CCF movement intellectuals, but were widespread among union members before the CCF came on the scene. The miners called in the CCF in 1938 as a vehicle for seeking political power through elections to supplement their militant union activity, as well as to move towards the more distant and vague political aim of a socialist society. The miners support for the CCF was lost when party leaders, to appeal to a broader electorate, moderated the party platform and sought to prove themselves as anti-communist as anyone in the Cold War era. They also acted to moderate union activity, restrict it to purely economic matters, and allied themselves with the bureaucrats and business unionists in the union movement. The CCF, and later the NDP, therefore, was able to maintain the formal support of the unions, and

¹⁵⁴This is probably true in other centres of local militant industrial unionism. For example, in 1948 Bob Carlin of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers in Sudbury was purged from the CCF for "appeasing" communists in his union, although he had won the Sudbury seat in the provincial legislature for the CCF in 1943 and 1945. Abella, Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour, pp.100-1.

union financial support. It was not able, however, to maintain any hold over the hearts and minds of rank-and-file union members.

In Cape Breton, at least, the CCF history was not a matter of a broad movement becoming a narrow party, but of what type of party this was from its beginning. It may have moved to the 'right', but its national leaders were never very 'left' at any time. As one recent commentator on the 'movement to party' thesis on CCF history has pointed out, all political parties need not be defined as organizations subordinating all else to striving for electoral victories.¹⁵⁵ Communist parties, in some periods, provide one example of parties emphasizing, more highly than elections, general social change and the creation of 'revolutionary class consciousness' through union struggles and other mass activity. To show that the CCF always concentrated on elections almost exclusively is to characterize it as basically a liberal-reformist party with very little socialism or radicalism in its essential nature. In both the union movement and the general political field the CCF, as an organization, was a force for moderation, for a lessening of class struggle, in Cape Breton.

¹⁵⁵Alan Whitehorn, "An Analysis of the Historiography of the CCF-NDP: The Protest Movement Becalmed Tradition," in J. William Brennan, ed., 'Building the Co-operative Commonwealth' Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada (Regina 1985).

As to the communists, by the post-war years they were only a small minority in Cape Breton. There, as elsewhere, the Cold War affected the outlook of the people. The revelations regarding communist "spy rings" that came out in 1946 in the Gouzenko affair in Ottawa no doubt brought about a strengthening of anti-communist sentiment in Cape Breton as elsewhere. There continued to be a communist presence in the area for some years, however, in spite of all the anti-Communist propaganda in the press, radio and the new medium, television. The survival of so radical a weekly as the Steelworker and Miner so long in Cape Breton seems to be in itself evidence of the strong roots political radicalism had developed there; but by 1949-50 the periodical was coming under continual attack, and its readership and revenues from advertising were falling. Publication halted in late 1950, after the death of editor M.A. MacKenzie. Efforts to keep the paper alive, or resurrect it, continued for several years, issues coming out at intervals until 1953, but the Steelworker's last year of full operation was 1950. By that time there was little more than a shadow of the old Cape Breton radicalism remaining, as was revealed by the triumph of anti-communist policies within the unions of both the steelworkers and the miners in the course of the years 1949 and 1950.

Chapter Eight

An Epilogue to Radicalism, 1949-50.

The Cold War came to the union movement of Cape Breton in a couple of dramatic incidents in the 1949-50 period that revealed how weak political radicalism had become in the area by that time. This was an era in which the newspapers were filled each day with the threat of the Soviet Union and communism, and the anti-red climate reached high temperatures. In Cape Breton local political figures did not fail to play their part in the struggle against communism. For example, L.D. Currie, by this time the provincial Attorney-General and soon to be appointed a judge, made a speech in January 1949 to the Sydney Board of Trade on the danger of communism. Dwelling at length on the idea that in communist countries children were indoctrinated from an early age, Currie felt it was the duty of our society to do the same, giving our children our higher Christian values.¹ One story in the news in early 1949 which aroused much anti-communist sentiment in the Cape Breton area was the trial and imprisonment of Cardinal Mindszenty by the communist authorities in Hungary. All night prayer-vigils for the Cardinal were held in local churches, and one Sydney priest, Fr. Allan MacDonald, broadcast on the subject on the local radio

¹Sydney Post-Record, 13 January 1949.

station, CJCB. Noting that the "Communist-Satanic movement dares to have its agents in our land and among us here," he called for a campaign to boycott the Steelworker and Miner.² The radical weekly weathered this attack, as it did some later onslaughts, such as a circular letter from Pat Conroy, CCL secretary, calling on affiliates to boycott the paper.³

Despite these attacks, in Cape Breton labour circles up to 1949 the appearance, or perhaps the illusion, was maintained that there was still substantial local support for radicalism. Two labour councils were in operation in the area, CCL unions affiliating to the Cape Breton Labour Council (CBLC), and TLC unions to the Cape Breton Trades and Labour Council (CBTLC). But left-wingers, including CP members, were active in both councils. George MacEachern continued to be prominent in the CBLC, and Arthur Williston, port agent for the Canadian Seamen's Union (CSU), was the long-term secretary of the CBTLC.⁴ It was perhaps apparent by the late 1940s that the left-wing were a minority in both the Cape Breton UMW locals and the Sydney steel union, but their influence was still regarded as being fairly wide. Moderate leaders wanted to avoid

²Sydney Post-Record, 3, 7, 14 February 1949; Steelworker and Miner, 19, 26 February, 5 March 1949.

³Steelworker and Miner, 8 October 1949.

⁴Glace Bay Gazette, 10 April 1948.

splitting the movement, although the right began to have stronger popular representation in the union locals at this time. The general political climate, as well as specific programs aimed at trade unionists, such as the Saint F X Extension Department's Labour School, was having an effect on a growing number of the rank and file. The 1B local of the UMW, for example, was by this time under consistently right-wing leadership, and on every issue that arose passed resolutions that reflected this. For instance, when the Cardinal Mindzsenty affair was in the news, 1B sent out calls for the public condemnation of the actions of the Hungarian government by the CCL and the Canadian government.⁵ Caledonia local, however, where Bob Stewart was the secretary, could just as regularly be counted on for left-wing resolutions on all matters.⁵ Other UMW locals fell somewhere in between these two extremes. Up to 1950 President Freeman Jenkins' position seems to have been similar to that of Percy Bengough of the TLC, who for long continued to support the CSU in the name of trade-union unity despite the protests of the right-wingers and the AFL leadership in the United States. At the 1947 CCL convention Freeman Jenkins was among the few prominent non-communist union leaders who refused to

⁵Sydney Post-Record, 12 February 1949.

⁵For example, see the Caledonia condemnation of CCL actions against the left-wing textile union in Yarmouth, N.S., Sydney Post-Record, 26 January 1949.

support the anti-red resolution passed that year, reportedly saying that he represented "14,000 miners who would see hell freeze over before they would support such a resolution." 1B local alone attacked Jenkins' position on this, and sent a letter to Mosher and Conroy, congratulating them on their anti-communist stand.⁷ Jenkins, of course, was to some extent only following the lead of UMW International President John L. Lewis at this time. Although the UMW constitution since the 1920s had declared communists ineligible to hold office, Lewis was the most prominent anti-communist union leader to persist in refusing the anti-communist pledges required of unions by the Taft-Hartly Act in the United States. After initial resistance, most of the AFL and CIO unions had quickly given way and complied with the Taft-Hartly Act, right-wing factions finding this a useful tool in smashing left opposition in the unions.⁸

In Cape Breton few union activists by the late 1940s would publicly express any sympathy for communism, but most were still prepared to take a stand against blatant red-baiting. Even communists, most ordinary labour men seem to have felt, should have the right to speak. When in April 1948 Mr. N. Nathanson, the owner of Sydney radio

⁷Glace Bay Gazette, 9, 17 October 1949.

⁸See Frank Emsbak, "The Break up of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), 1945-1950," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972.

station CJCB, decided to exercise some political censorship over broadcasts, he ran into a storm of protest. He refused radio time to the Labor Progressive Party and later to the Seamen's union on the grounds that their views were unacceptable to the public. Protests were made by both Cape Breton labour councils, by the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, and by the executives of both District 26 and Local 1064.⁹ Nathanson finally gave way on the issue after a meeting with the presidents of all these organizations.¹⁰

Attacks on the communists in the Canadian labour movement mounted during 1948, however, and they became more and more isolated. Caledonia local mandated its delegates to the 1948 CCL convention to demand the reinstatement of the reputedly communist-led Mine Mill and Smelter Workers Union which had been suspended by President Mosher, but the suspension was upheld.¹¹ Early in 1949 Bob Carlin, the leader of the Mine Mill local in Sudbury, visited Cape Breton seeking support for his union, which was being subjected to a devastating raid and red-baiting attacks from the Steelworkers Union. His visit led to a test of strength between left and right in the Cape Breton movement. Carlin spoke at various local union

⁹Glace Bay Gazette, 20, 21, 29 April, 17 May 1948.

¹⁰Glace Bay Gazette, 8 June 1948.

¹¹Glace Bay Gazette, 4, 12 October 1948.

meetings in the area, appealing for support and attacking the leadership of the CCL and the USWA. Following his speech at a meeting of the Cape Breton Labour Council intense controversy arose, the position of the CCL executive being defended by Donald MacDonald, the CCL representative and former MLA. The right wing appears to have triumphed in the CBLC at this time. Indeed, this appears to have been a crucial turning point; henceforth left-right battles continued in the Labour Council, but the right almost always had the upper hand if things came to a vote. In the CBLC elections, Ed Corbett of the Steelworkers' Local 1064 defeated long-term president John R. MacDonald, of No. 11 Local, a left-wing CCFer, and George MacEachern and other radicals were also defeated. The 18 local passed a resolution condemning Carlin and congratulating Corbett on his election, and took a long deferred decision to affiliate with the Labour Council, since it now appeared to be firmly under right-wing control.¹² The left fought back locally, attacking the national leaders of the USWA and the CCF as red-baiters. Clarie Gillis, for example, came under strong criticism in the Steelworker and Miner when he supported the deportation from Canada, as American communists, of

¹²Sydney Post-Record, 31 January, 1, 3, 4, 5 February 1949; Steelworker and Miner, 5, 12 February 1949.

international leaders of the Mine, Mill union.¹³ The paper also strongly opposed the affiliation of Local 1064 to the CCF, when a referendum of steelworkers was held on this issue. Whether this left agitation had a strong effect, or whether the workers simply wanted to avoid paying a political levy, the affiliation was voted down despite the appeals of the union executive.¹⁴

It was the struggles of the Canadian Seamen's Union, however, that brought the politics of the Cold War most sharply to the union movement of Canada and of Cape Breton. Nova Scotia had seen the defeat of the Canadian Fishermen's Union, an affiliate of the CSU, in 1947.¹⁵ Throughout 1947 and 1948 most trade unionists throughout Canada in both the CCL and the TLC continued to support the CSU, a TLC union. Despite the well-known communist connections of some of the CSU leaders, the anti-union tactics of the employers led even right-wing CCFers like Clarie Gillis to support the seamen during their strike on the Great Lakes in 1948.¹⁶ Then in early 1949 the Canadian government and the shipping companies brought in Hal Banks

¹³Steelworker and Miner, 26 March 1949.

¹⁴Sydney Post-Record, 15, 22 February 1949; Steelworker and Miner, 19, 26 February 1949.

¹⁵See E. Jean Nisbet, "Free Enterprise at its Best": The State, National Sea, and the Defeat of the Nova Scotia Fishermen, 1946-1947," in M. Earle, ed., Workers and the State in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia.

¹⁶Glace Bay Gazette, 21 May 1948.

and the Seafarers' International Union (SIU), notorious for its gangster methods of operation, to smash the CSU. At first almost all union organizations in Canada supported the CSU, since this was a case in which red-bashing was clearly destroying any effective union movement for the seamen. Pressure from the government and from the right-wing leadership of the American unions, however, led the TLC in the end to betray the CSU and the seamen to the SIU goons. The national CCL, backed by the CCF leaders, declared itself "neutral" on the SIU-CSU battle; but it was events in Sydney that made clear what this neutrality amounted to.

When the news came of the violent attack by armed thugs, aided by the police, on CSU strikers occupying the Lady Rodney at the wharf in Halifax, the response in Cape Breton labour circles was universally one of backing for the CSU. The Nova Scotia Federation of Labour held a parade through Sydney ending in a mass meeting pledging support to the CSU. The principal speakers were Tom McLachlan, federation president, Vice-President Ling of the UMW, and Ed Corbett, president of the steel union. Corbett said the Halifax attack on the CSU had "deliberately put the clock back 25 years" in labour relations in the province, and the attempt to "drag the red herring of Communism over the trail of dockyard blood" ground salt into "a major wound in the heart of organized

labor in Nova Scotia."¹⁷ The executive of District 26 sent a letter calling for wholehearted support for the CSU from all UMW members, many locals voted to levy their members for funds for the CSU, and Freeman Jenkins broadcast an appeal from a Halifax radio station on behalf of the CSU.¹⁸ A second large rally was held in Sydney's Strand Theatre on 17 April, with all the prominent labour leaders of the area on the platform. Ed Corbett chaired the meeting and pledged that the Sydney steel union was "one hundred percent behind the seamen and their union."¹⁹ District 25 and Local 1054 each pledged \$1000, and in a Tag Day held in Sydney approximately \$550 was collected in support of the CSU.²⁰

In the weeks that followed, however, as the CSU strike, with its "picket line around the world," became a big international issue, Corbett was not alone in having second thoughts. Election campaigns were beginning across the country: the Nova Scotia election was set for 9 June, the B.C. election for 15 June, and the federal election for 27 June. The red scare was being pushed by the federal Conservative leader, George Drew, who called for the

¹⁷Sydney Post-Record, 9 April 1949.

¹⁸Sydney Post-Record, 12, 14, 16, 18, 21 April 1949.

¹⁹Sydney Post-Record, 19 April 1949.

²⁰Searchlight, 26 May 1949; Steelworker and Miner, 7 May 1949.

reinstatement of Section 98 of the Criminal Code, which had made membership in the communist movement illegal until it was repealed in 1935.²¹ "We believe in freedom," said Drew, "but not in the kind of freedom that allows Communists to carry on their treacherous activity."²² The CCF was therefore particularly anxious at this time to avoid showing any support for men, like the CSU leaders, who were reputed to be communists. Across the country CCFers faced attacks such as that made by the Conservative candidate in Sydney, who had no doubt that many socialists were "sincere" but thought they were "playing into the hands of Communists."²³ Thus, although CCF MPs Gillis and MacInnis had spoken up for the CSU the year before, at this crucial time they were silent. As to the CCFers in the leadership of the CCL, such as Aaron Mosher, Pat Conroy, and Charles Millard, they had already shown themselves to be determined, even ruthless opponents of the communists in such unions as Mine Mill and the United Electrical Workers. It was certainly politically expedient for the CCL to ignore the destruction of the CSU, a union with which they were not affiliated. Even Percy Bengough, president of the TLC, was soon to be forced by the AFL

²¹Sydney Post-Record, 22 February 1949.

²²Sydney Post-Record, 12 May 1949.

²³Sydney Post-Record, 7 May 1949.

leaders to betray the CSU.²⁴

In May 1949 the seamen's struggle became a hotly debated local issue in Sydney. The three ore carriers owned by Dosco's subsidiary, the Dominion Shipping Lines, were tied up in Halifax harbour by the strike, and several coal carriers leased to the company were waiting in Louisburg harbour. Early in May the president of the CSU, Harry Davis, came to Sydney to negotiate with Dosco. In a speech to a meeting of Local 1064 Davis said he was willing to sign a contract with Dosco identical to that of the previous year.²⁵ A week later Eamon Parks from the national headquarters of the steelworkers union was in Sydney, and Corbett and other Local 1064 leaders were called to a meeting in Toronto.²⁶ Then on 19 May Dosco officials announced that negotiations with the CSU had failed, that they had signed a contract with the SIU, and that the ore ship the Arthur Cross had left Halifax for Newfoundland with an SIU crew, and was to be followed soon by its sister ships, the Wabana and the Louisburg.²⁷ On 21

²⁴Earlier in 1949 Bengough was called to a Miami meeting of the AFL and publicly humiliated for his "soft" stand on communism in the TLC, with regard to the CSU in particular. See Sydney Post-Record, 9 February 1949.

²⁵Sydney Post-Record, 5 May 1949.

²⁶Sydney Post-Record, 13 May 1949.

²⁷Sydney Post-Record, 19 May 1949. The Arthur Cross was named for the Chairman of the Board and President of Dosco, Arthur Cross of Montreal.

May the Post-Record carried a full page Dosco advertisement: "Why Are Dosco Ships Manned by SIU Crews?" This claimed the CSU had adopted unreasonable demands, and the company had therefore signed a contract with the SIU, "a reputable, powerful union" which had "agreed by contract 'to co-operate with the shipowners to exclude all subversive elements from the ships' personnel.'"28

Up to this time the solidarity of Cape Breton unions with the CSU had been unbroken. Just that week President Jenkins of the UMW had made another statement in support of the CSU, and even right-wing local 1B had pledged aid to the seamen.²⁹ At this point things began to change. The CCL affiliates such as the UMW locals and Local 1064 all received a circular letter from the CCL leadership calling for local unions to remain strictly "neutral" in this jurisdictional dispute between the CSU, a TLC affiliate, and the SIJ, an AFL union.³⁰ At almost the same time the federal minister of labour, Humphrey Mitchell, sent a letter to all Canadian unions saying the CSU strike was all the fault of the union's communist leadership, and its strike actions in foreign ports were illegal.³¹ However, up to Ed Corbett's return to Sydney from the meeting of

²⁸Sydney Post-Record, 21 May 1949.

²⁹Sydney Post-Record, 11, 14 May 1949.

³⁰Sydney Post-Record, 19 May 1949.

³¹Sydney Post-Record, 18 May 1949.

the National Council of the USWA in Toronto, Local 1064 held firm to its position of solidarity. On 21 May, the day before President Corbett returned, in reply to Dosco's full page advertisement the local issued a statement saying that when the ore ship arrived, the CSU picket lines would be respected by the steelworkers.³²

But Ed Corbett returned to Sydney with a completely changed attitude to the CSU. He also came back, says one source, in "a terrible nervous state."³³ The implication is that he was subjected to physical threats when in Ontario. In any case, when the Arthur Cross came into Sydney harbour Corbett reversed the stand taken by his union the day before, and ordered the steelworkers to unload the ship, ignoring the CSU pickets outside the gate.³⁴ Little happened for several days, partly because of the incompetence of the SIU crew in getting the ship ready for unloading, but the steelworker dock crews were subjected to verbal harassment from the CSU pickets. On 25 May Clem Anson, Dosco General Manager, sent out a statement to all employees saying operations would have be cut back and lay-offs result if the ore wasn't unloaded. On the same day Corbett issued a statement claiming that the plant's dock workers had been threatened with violence

³²Sydney Post-Record, 21 May 1949.

³³Frank and MacGillivray, eds., George MacEachern, p.135.

³⁴Sydney Post-Record, 23 May 1949.

by CSU pickets. Specifically Corbett said that the CSU had threatened to "burn the homes" of men who unloaded the ships.³⁵ Rumours also were circulated that a mob of militant coal miners, armed with pick handles, was coming over from Glace Bay to back up the seamen. That afternoon at a packed meeting of the steelworkers, with CSU men outside "pleading for support," Corbett repeated these charges of CSU threats, and said the local had no alternative but to support the company because of its contract. Arthur Williston of the CSU, as well as Vice-President Tom Ling and Bob Stewart from the UMW, were in the hall and attempted to speak to the steelworkers, but Corbett prevented this.³⁶ He then declared the dock workers would have "physical support" at midnight when they went on shift.³⁷ As one participant recalls:

We had heard that ... the UMW ... had hired buses, and they were coming in in force with sticks and clubs... I was only a kid then, and this was all excitement ... we were asked to go down to the docks to support our brothers, in 1964. We were given time off the job and everything, so we went down. I remember I had a stick... Oh, there was all kinds of people down there, bosses, and one of the guys in support of the CSU was standing in front of the dock office ... condemning Dosco... behind me, one boss in particular, was saying: "Why doesn't somebody go up and clout that bastard? Shut him up." But no-

³⁵Sydney Post-Record, 25 May 1949. See also Corbett speech to the Rotary Club, Sydney Post-Record, 29 June 1949.

³⁶See Corbett account of this in his speech to the Rotary Club. Sydney Post-Record, 29 June 1949.

³⁷Sydney Post-Record, 26 May 1949.

one did... and this big amount of buses that were supposed to come -- there was nothing. There was a bus came in with a few people on it... a few radicals ... were standing outside the gate.³⁸

There was no actual violence, but the CSU pickets were successfully intimidated by the large number of steelworkers, and that night the ore began to be unloaded. General Manager Anson exulted: "The show was typical of Cape Breton labor's efforts to combat Communism."³⁹ About a month later Corbett gave a speech to the Sydney Rotary club, attempting to justify his actions. To this appreciative audience of businessmen he declared he had been dealing with "International Communism in its rottenest form" and "I am absolutely glad about taking the stand that I have."⁴⁰ The Steelworker and Miner, however, declared of the steelworkers' executive:

Remember them with shame, workers of Cape Breton. Remember the dirty scab herders ... these vultures who prey on the fears of honest rank and file workers and turn them into weaklings who cross a picket line. These are the men who sold out the Seamen to Dosco ... and these are the men who will sell out the Steelworkers when Dosco cracks the whip over their heads.⁴¹

Nonetheless, the protests of the left and of the UMW could

³⁸Interview with Cecil "Ashie" Neville, Sydney, 25 April 1990.

³⁹Sydney Post-Record, 26 May 1949.

⁴⁰Sydney Post-Record, 29 June 1949.

⁴¹Steelworker and Miner, 28 May 1949.

not prevent the other ore ships, the Wabana and the Louisburg, being unloaded in turn, and the same was true of the chartered coal carriers.⁴² On June 4, with its large AFL affiliates threatening to withdraw, the executive of the TLC gave in and suspended the CSU. The strike went on for some time, but it was lost, and so was the possibility of continued existence for the CSU. In the years that followed the TLC and the Canadian government had much embarrassment in having to deal with the activities of the SIU, who continued their gangster ways.⁴³

The incidents in Sydney, as the SIU replaced the CSU on the Dosco ore carriers, were only a small part of the overall story of the CSU defeat and demise. These were not as dramatic or violent as episodes occurring elsewhere at the same time. Recent books on the CSU and the SIU do not even mention the events in Sydney during the 1949 strike.⁴⁴ But what happened at Sydney had more than local significance. It clearly displayed the part played by the leaders of the CCL and of the CCF in betraying the Canadian Seamen's Union. The main responsibility for the

⁴²Sydney Post-Record, 28 May, 3 June 1949.

⁴³See William Kaplan, Everything That Floats: Pat Sullivan, Hal Banks, and the Seamen's Unions of Canada (Toronto, 1987).

⁴⁴Jim Green, Against the Tide (Toronto 1985); William Kaplan, Everything That Floats (Toronto 1985).

destruction of the union obviously lies with the shipping companies, the government, and the reversal of policy on the part of the TLC. But the CCF national leadership, and such prominent CCF trade union leaders as Conroy and Millard, were prepared to quietly acquiesce to the smashing of the CSU by gangster methods in the name of anti-communism.

It should be noted that these events in Sydney took place in the midst of the 1949 provincial and federal election campaigns. M.J. Coldwell, the national leader of the CCF, was actually in the Sydney area when the Arthur Cross came into the harbour and the local crisis was reaching its height.⁴⁵ CCF political meetings were taking place all throughout this period, but there is no record of any public comments being made on the seamen's strike by Cape Breton candidates Clarie Gillis, Russell Cunningham, Micky McDonald, or Vince Morrison. Campaigning under the slogan "For Right, Freedom and for Security, Vote CCF," the local CCFers seem to have carefully avoided statements on the divisive issue of the CSU.⁴⁶ It is, however, quite clear that Ed Corbett got his orders on the CSU issue from Charles Millard and the other USWA leaders in Toronto. It is also inconceivable that the national leadership of the CCF did not have advance knowledge of

⁴⁵Sydney Post-Record, 23 May 1949.

⁴⁶CCF Advertisement, Sydney Post-Record, 28 May 1949.

the position taken by Millard and other CCL leaders. This position was not "neutral" as the CCL claimed, but was a hostile position, helping to isolate the doomed CSU as both the CCL and CCF leaders were well aware. There was no advantage to be gained for the CCF leaders by overtly hostile statements about the CSU. Their policy was to remain quiet on the issue, as Coldwell made apparent after a CSU delegation visited his hotel room in Halifax to appeal to him for support. He made a statement deploring the violence that had occurred on the Halifax waterfront, but committing himself to no stand on the strike or the role of the SIU.⁴⁷ At the beginning of the strike Clarie Gillis was reported by the Steelworker to have attacked the CSU as being led by "commies" who were "destroying the merchant fleet of Canada."⁴⁸ Coldwell was reported by the Canadian Tribune to have told a reporter in Sydney that the CSU "needed a house-cleaning" and that CSU President Harry Davis and Secretary T. G. McManus were "definite communists."⁴⁹ These reports from left-wing sources may well have distorted what Gillis or Coldwell actually said, but the CCF leaders' public silence on the issues showed that their hostility to the CSU outweighed any concern they may have had for the seamen.

⁴⁷Halifax Chronicle-Herald, 20 May 1949.

⁴⁸Steelworker and Miner, 9 April 1949.

⁴⁹Canadian Tribune, 30 May 1949.

The CSU incident marked the beginning of a long period of right-wing ascendancy in Local 1064. The left-wingers continued to exist in the union, but in a weakened minority position. This was made clear when Ed Corbett was able to get a vote through at a steel union meeting obligating the steelworkers' delegates to the Cape Breton Labour Council to support his policies at meetings of that body. Left-wingers George MacNeil, Jack Eddy, and Frank Smith were thus forced to resign as delegates.⁵⁰ With regard to the UMW members, their support for the seamen's union was strong, but not completely solid. The rumoured mass pickets of miners in support of the CSU did not materialize. In fact, though some UMW leaders such as Vice-President Tom Ling, continued to express their solidarity with the CSU in the strongest terms, the UMW locals were divided on the issue. At a meeting of 1B local the District 26 officers were charged with interference in the internal affairs of the Steelworkers Union, and 1B members voted to write to Local 1064 praising its "firm stand."⁵¹ Both Mechanics and Phalen locals endorsed the "hands-off" policy on the CSU the CCL had called for, and said any miner acting in support of the CSU would do so as an individual.⁵² No 11 local, however, firmly repudiated

⁵⁰Steelworker and Miner, 25 June 1949.

⁵¹Sydney Post-Record, 28 May 1949.

⁵²Sydney Post-Record, 26, 28 May 1949.

the CCL circular, and condemned the leadership for sending it out.⁵³ And, as might have been expected, Caledonia local denounced the actions of the steel union in the strongest possible terms.⁵⁴ But President Jenkins, while critical of the steel union, was restrained in his remarks. Corbett's speech to the Rotary Club, Jenkins said, "consisted of truths, half-truths and hallucinations," but his major criticism was that Corbett had chosen to speak before such an audience.⁵⁵ Jenkins did not attend a July meeting of the Cape Breton Labour Council at which there was another confrontation between Ling and Corbett on the CSU strike. The meeting, following an appeal for unity from President Tom McLachlan of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, voted to shelve all discussion of the CSU strike for six months.⁵⁶

Freeman Jenkins, it may be assumed, was beginning to feel pressure to comply with the general anti-communist mood at this time. In any case, one year later the District 26 president was to be the prime actor in a second dramatic intrusion of the Cold War in the Cape Breton union movement. This began with a dispute at the

⁵³Sydney Post-Record, 19 May 1949.

⁵⁴Sydney Post-Record, 30 May 1949.

⁵⁵Sydney Post-Record, 5 July 1949.

⁵⁶Sydney Post-Record, 11 July 1949; Steelworker and Miner, 16 July 1949.

Caledonia Mine which at first appeared typical of many short work stoppages. The management decided to cancel the "local contract" held by a few men at the mine, roadmakers and pipelayers, and this led to a strike of several days when the disgruntled men received the support of the other mine workers.⁵⁷ One of the pipelayers involved was Bob Stewart, who was blamed by the management for instigating the strike. Dosco management appears to have determined to make an example of this well known radical, and fired him. After an incident involving the mine manager, Stewart was found guilty of threatening behaviour and placed on suspended sentence by the Provincial Magistrate. More to Stewart's long-term disadvantage, his dismissal was upheld on appeal by the umpire, C. Roy MacDonald.⁵⁸ Caledonia Local refused to accept this situation, and pressed for the reopening of the case and the reinstatement of Stewart, the secretary of the local.⁵⁹

Stewart had been one of the most well known radicals in local politics and union affairs for many years. He had been Secretary-Treasurer of the AMW, and also UMW Board Member for Glace Bay for one term. He had played a prominent, if somewhat controversial role in the 1941 slowdown, had run for district office on several

⁵⁷Sydney Post-Record, 3, 6 February 1950.

⁵⁸Sydney Post-Record, 18 February 1950.

⁵⁹Sydney Post-Record, 24 February 1950.

occasions, had been secretary of the Caledonia Local for years, and continued to have a fair amount of support. When D.W. Morrison, the mayor of Glace Bay since the early 1920s, decided not to stand in 1950, Stewart was one of the two contestants for the office of mayor. The election was held on 7 March, a short time after Stewart was fired by the coal company. He was defeated by his opponent, drugstore owner Dan A. MacDonald, but made quite a respectable showing, getting 3759 votes to MacDonald's 4207.⁵⁰

As the Caledonia Local continued to agitate over Stewart's dismissal, they found that the District 26 executive, particularly President Jenkins, showed no disposition to pursue the case. It is impossible to say what Jenkins had in mind. Did he wish to see Bob Stewart, long one of his most biting personal critics, eliminated from the scene? Did he have some devious plot from the beginning of this affair? It is impossible to answer, but Jenkins must certainly have been aware his support among the rank and file was slipping. Early in March the executive had decided to recommend the miners accept a two-year contract with no wage increases.⁵¹ The defeat in the 1947 strike had left little scope for further militancy, in the eyes of Jenkins and his fellow officers.

⁵⁰Sydney Post-Record, 8 March 1950.

⁵¹Sydney Post-Record, 11 March 1950.

In the referendum on 4 April the contract was approved by a narrow margin, with Glace Bay sub-district voting heavily against.⁵² By this point Freeman Jenkins, who had been elected as a left-wing union president, had become the defender of moderation in relations with the company, and had lost most of his popularity in Glace Bay. All of this may have influenced his reluctance to spring to the defence of a popular leading militant like Stewart, even when demands for this became widespread.

Stewart, along with Charles Wadman, the president of Caledonia Local, conducted a campaign of visits to locals in Glace Bay, New Waterford, and Sydney Mines explaining the case and criticizing the lack of action on the part of the district executive.⁵³ Almost all the locals passed resolutions backing Stewart, and even Silby Barrett wrote to the newspaper supporting Stewart.⁵⁴ By this time Jenkins had begun to raise the issue of communism. Defending his position at a Phalen Local meeting he said he had done all that could be done for Stewart, but that "sinister and subversive elements are using the case to gain control of the union."⁵⁵ Jenkins also took the

⁵²Sydney Post-Record, 5 April 1950.

⁵³Sydney Post-Record, 4, 16, 20, 25, 29 March, 12 Apr ' 1950.

⁵⁴Sydney Post-Record, 10 April 1950.

⁵⁵Sydney Post-Record, 10 April 1950.

position that Stewart, since his firing no longer a miner, was therefore not eligible to be a union member, and should resign as secretary of Caledonia Local. It was finally announced that a commission from the UMW International would come to pronounce on Stewart's case and his status as a member of the union.⁵⁶

The district election had been set for 13 June, and the locals began making nominations at the beginning of May. These nominations in themselves amounted to something like primary elections, since each local held a ballot on its nominees for the various offices. Local after local voted to nominate Bob Stewart for district president. No. 11, No. 15 in New Waterford, even 1B, nominated Stewart. By the close of nominations Stewart's name had been put forward by 15 locals representing approximately 9600 members, and Jenkins by only 12 locals representing about 2000.⁵⁷ Then, on 21 May, came the bombshell announcement that Jenkins had declared Bob Stewart ineligible for office. At the same time Jenkins fired C.B. "Jim" Wade, the director of research and education for District 26, whom he had defended from the red-baiting attacks of Clarie Gillis in 1946. According to one source, Jenkins' actions against both Wade and Stewart at this

⁵⁶Sydney Post-Record, 2 May 1950.

⁵⁷Sydney Post-Record, 4, 5, 10, 22 May 1950; Steelworker and Miner, 10 June 1950.

time were masterminded by Clarie Gillis.⁵⁸ Whether or not this was the case, it was clear Jenkins would have the quiet, if not open support of the CCF leadership in these actions.

This was not true of some of Jenkins' fellow officers. The following day Vice-President Ling, International Board Member MacDonald, and Glace Bay Sub-District Board Member Allan MacPhee made statements dissociating themselves from Jenkins' actions, and declaring he was violating the constitution with regard to Wade's dismissal and the matter of Stewart's eligibility for office, by acting without approval of the district board. The Sydney Post-Record, however, praised Jenkins as beginning a "'house-cleaning' designed to rid the powerful union of any Communistic influence," and surmised he had the support of the union's international headquarters. Bob Stewart declared he was not a member of the Communist Party. "I don't say the Communist Party is wrong, but I am definitely not connected with it." He then called for the locals to demand Jenkins be recalled.⁵⁹

On 25 May a District Board Meeting was held, at which the majority voted to reinstate Wade. Jenkins refused to comply with this, and also declared Stewart's name would not be on the ballot for president. The next day C.B. Wade

⁵⁸ Interview with John Roach, Stellarton, July 1984.

⁶⁹Sydney Post-Record, 22, 23, 24 May 1950.

issued a statement defending his record and declaring: "It is not the 'firing' of Wade ... that is the issue, it is the tearing up of the constitution and the firing of union democracy out of the district office." At a special meeting of Caledonia Local, with many members of other locals attending, including Tom Ling, John Alex MacDonald, and Allan MacPhee, Wade received further support and so did Stewart. Also a resolution was passed to request John L. Lewis to arrange for new nominations if Stewart was ineligible. Nonetheless, on 2 June Secretary-Treasurer Adam Scott, acting on the advice of International Vice-President Kennedy, sent out ballots for the other offices, but declaring Freeman Jenkins had been returned unopposed as president for another four years. On the following day various locals received telegrams from Kennedy supporting Jenkins on the issue of Stewart's eligibility for office.⁷⁰ Jenkins this week also received the high accolade as a of being the subject of a "portrait" as a responsible union leader in Time magazine.⁷¹

In the days that followed, up to the district elections, local after local passed resolutions denouncing Jenkins and calling for his removal from office. Caledonia had passed such a resolution, and then circulated the locals asking for support. In reply Jenkins sent out a

⁷⁰Sydney Post-Record, 29, 30 May, 2, 3 June 1950.

⁷¹Time, 5 June 1950.

circular letter threatening disciplinary action against those sending out "false statements." One or two locals tried to compromise, refusing to support the strong position taken in the Caledonia resolution, but also asking for an investigation by the international office of Jenkins' actions.⁷²

The Steelworker and Miner from the beginning of the whole affair had been warm in its support of Bob Stewart and his candidacy for president, and denounced Jenkins in the strongest terms.⁷³ The paper also struck at those it considered right-wing candidates for office in the district, declaring that John Delaney, Dan Joe MacIsaac, and Stephen Dolhanty were supporters of Jenkins. The Steelworker supported the re-election of John Alex MacDonald, Tom Ling and Allan MacPhee, but called for the defeat of Adam Scott, Jenkins' "office boy."⁷⁴ On the eve of the election Dan Joe MacIsaac struck back. MacIsaac was the president of 1B Local, secretary of the Glace Bay CCF Council, and a candidate for Glace Bay board member. The Steelworker, he said in a prepared statement, was an "anti-democratic, anti-labor sheet" which was using "character assassination and lying statements" against him

⁷²Sydney Post-Record, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9 June 1950.

⁷³Steelworker and Miner, 1, 22 April, 13, 20, 27 May, 3 June 1950.

⁷⁴Steelworker and Miner, 3, 10 June 1950.

and others, trying to "smash the local CCF."

The district elections will be held shortly and the editors are anxious to see lackeys of International Communism elected, therefore they must brand and smear every active union man who is trying to protect the UMW and its political arm, the CCF. The National CCF Party and the Canadian Congress of Labor were forced to drive the party liners out of their ranks in order to prevent these two great bulwarks of Canadian democracy from becoming tools of International Red Fascism and eventually destroyed. The members of District 26 must be prepared to stand behind the constitution of their union and drive out the Red Fascists.⁷⁵

The "lackeys of International Communism," presumably, were all those supported for election by the Steelworker and Miner. The election, therefore, seemed a contest between right and left in the district, with the right discredited by the blatantly undemocratic actions of Jenkins.

Probably to their own astonishment the right-wing candidates won the election. Adam Scott was re-elected secretary-treasurer, while Vice-President Tom Ling was defeated by Steve Dolhanty, International Board Member John Alex MacDonald lost to John Delaney, and Glace Bay Board Member Allan MacPhee was beaten by Dan Joe MacIsaac.⁷⁶ These election results are not easy to interpret, since the miners' anger at Jenkins, as measured by the protests of the locals, seems to have been very extensive and quite genuine. According to Paul MacEwan,

⁷⁵Sydney Post-Record, 12 June 1950.

⁷⁶Sydney Post-Record, 14 June 1950.

among rank-and-file miners "the belief had spread that the best possible rebuke for Jenkins would be the election of new men, uncompromised by any form of association with him."⁷⁷ But the publicity given to the repudiation of Jenkins by Ling, MacDonald, and MacPhee had been very wide -- it is impossible to believe the miners were unaware that voting against these men would seem like support for Jenkins. The Sydney Post-Record was in no doubt about the question:

Freeman Jenkins ... has every right to regard the election, in which the heaviest vote for years was recorded, as a striking vindication of his recent action in declaring Bob Stewart ineligible to run for any executive office. It was a bold stroke, and rightly taken. Stewart ... is in avowed sympathy with the Communist cause, and for this reason alone the ranks of organized labor should be turned against him.⁷⁸

The support for Stewart, and the anger against Jenkins, in the union locals, however, seems too widespread for this triumphant Tory analysis of the miners' votes to be correct.

The matter remains puzzling, but some things can be said about this election. First, it was only in the pages of the Steelworker and Miner that Delaney or MacIsaac were declared to be supporters of Jenkins, and despite his actions at this time, Adam Scott seems to have been a popular officer. These men were certainly regarded as

⁷⁷MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers, p. 284.

⁷⁸Sydney Post-Record, 15 June 1950.

right-wingers, or moderates, compared to those they defeated, but they had built independent reputations as active union men, and were certainly not regarded merely as creatures of Freeman Jenkins. MacIsaac, as mentioned previously was a prominent local CCFer, and well-known as the 1B local president, to be strongly anti-communist. John Delaney had served as district teller for years, and had long been one of the leading figures in the co-operative movement in Glace Bay. He was the son of W P Delaney, who had died in office as district secretary-treasurer in 1932. It seems probable that the election of men such as this reflected a real move to the right in the miners' thinking in this Cold War era, particularly in this dispirited time following the defeat in the 1947 strike and the beginning of large scale modernization of the mines. But this does not have to mean that the miners found Jenkins' tactics acceptable.

The Cape Breton miners and the steelworkers, like workers elsewhere in Canada at this time, were possibly stirred to some anti-communist feelings by the religious arguments and by appeals to patriotism, as the Soviet Union was presented as the enemy in a potential Third World War. But this did not make them really hostile to local union activists who were reputed to be CP members. It was rather the fact that the workers did not themselves want to be accused of communism. Thus workers found it

increasingly troublesome to have their union accused of being communist. The defence put up by the left was essentially two-fold: first that red baiting was an attack on trade union unity, and giving way to it would weaken the unions; and secondly that the political views of union leaders was irrelevant, what mattered was their record as trade unionists. However just these arguments might be, they were quite weak. The right forces in the unions, led in Canada mainly by CCFers, made it clear they would not accept unity with the left or the CP, and they had support from the employers, the state, and usually the international head office of the union. The price for peace and unity in the unions was the elimination of the communists; and this may have seemed to many workers to be in the interest of the union movement.

To a very considerable degree the ground had been cut from under the communists' feet in the unions by their own policies. As the inheritors, and the main proponents of political radicalism within the union movement, communists and communism represented the idea of class struggle, the concept of irreconcilable differences between capital and labour. But since the adoption of the united front policies in 1935, the CP had only half-heartedly, at best, raised the ideas of class struggle within the unions. They had often sought to win allies among the moderate union leaders, and communist union leaders had often found it

expedient, because of red-baiting, to conceal or deny their connection to the party.

The right-wing was able to point to the communist changes in policy, particularly during the war years, and accuse them of having loyalties outside the union movement. The answer to this should have been that of course they had loyalties outside the union movement; so did everyone, to church, to family, or to a political party and ideology. The question was whether these outside loyalties strengthened or weakened their commitment to the union movement and their activity as trade unionists. A very strong case can be made that the communists, overall, were more strongly motivated to give time and energy to the union. Perhaps because of their minority position, in Canada and the United States, communists usually were the most ardent proponents of direct democracy in unions. The communist influence in unions generally had arisen because they were, in fact, exemplary in the hard work and self-sacrificing spirit in the building of the unions. But the historical background of communist policies over many years in the unions made it impossible for CP members to make the forthright claim that their membership in the party, their commitment to the revolutionary transformation of society, made them better, not worse, trade unionists.

The situation in Cape Breton, as in other areas at

this time, was that while some traditions of union militancy persisted, there was no longer much strength of political radicalism. This seems to be made very clear with the events in the area's two major unions in 1949 and 1950. Thereafter, however, union militancy confined to the limits of legal collective bargaining and business unionism was not enough to mount any real resistance as the depressed industrial economy in the region led to mine-closings, the decline of the steel plant, rising unemployment and falling wages, and the steady movement of youth away from the Cape Breton area.

Conclusion

This thesis has chronicled labour politics and union activity in industrial Cape Breton during two crucial decades. For many of these years the miners and steelworkers of this area were in the vanguard of Canadian labour; earlier than in most places they had strong industrial unions, they were able to dominate local politics and elect CCF representatives, and in 1937 they induced the Nova Scotia government to pass the most advanced labour law in the country. The reason for these early advances was that Cape Breton miners had a record of militant strike action unsurpassed in Canada. By the end of the 1940s, however, Cape Breton was becoming a depressed backwater in terms of the Canadian economy, its labour movement was well under the control of moderate leaders, and it no longer had any real importance on the national labour scene.

In some respects a decline in the fighting spirit of Cape Breton labour is easily accounted for by the economic deterioration of the area in the post-World War Two period. While much of Canada enjoyed an economic boom in the 1950s and 1960s, economic stagnation and declining employment was the lot of industrial Cape Breton, not conditions that were propitious for militant unionism. Coal, the main local resource, fell in importance as an energy source, and the mechanization of the mines and the

closing of pits during the 1950s caused a large fall in the number of miners employed. In the early 1950s more mines were closed and the large-scale lay-offs at the Sydney steel plant began. The issue from this time forward became one of a struggle to keep the steel plant and the mines in operation, hardly circumstances in which union militancy could easily be maintained. At the end of the 1960s, the coal mines were taken over by the Cape Breton Development Corporation (Devco), a federal crown corporation mandated to gradually ease the mines out of operation. Only the energy crisis of the 1970s caused the reversal of this plan to end coal production. For the community of Sydney the big crisis came on "Black Friday," 13 October 1967, when officials of Hawker-Siddeley, by then the owners of the Sydney steel plant, announced it was to be closed. The public outcry caused the provincial government to set up the Sydney Steel Corporation (Sysco), which has since operated the plant. But through all the years the number of workers employed at the steel works and in the coal mines steadily fell, and no industry was built up that provided replacement jobs in the area. Cape Breton, therefore, experienced little post-war prosperity. The region's workers did have access to greater security through unemployment insurance, and other elements of the modern "welfare state," and the dissatisfied could move out of the area to more affluent regions such as Ontario.

But industrial Cape Breton is a region that has experienced almost steady economic decay since World War Two.

In terms of traditional Canadian politics or moderate trade unionism there were no strong responses that could have been made in the situation faced by the miners and steelworkers in the 1950s and later. Strike activity always raised the spectre of the closing down of industry; and in politics the wisest course seemed to be to vote in a representative of the ruling party in hopes of gaining government largess to help the local economy. The union movement held on in the mines and the steel plant, but after the steel strike of 1946 and the coal strike in 1947, there seemed no possibility of successful industrial action. Cape Breton was one of the low-employment areas in an economically depressed region of the country. Those who kept their jobs had to forget dreams of wage-parity with Ontario or the West. Politically, CCF politicians held sway in Cape Breton until the late 1950s, but the socialist fervour displayed by the CCF in the early 1940s had evaporated after the party did not make the gains it expected federally or provincially in the 1945 elections. By the 1960s Cape Breton voters had begun to show signs of developing the client mentality to be expected of an area dependent on handouts from the richer economy of central Canada, and the traditional governing parties began again

to win elections in the area.

In contrast to this, rising prosperity is often cited as the root cause of the failure of the CCF and social-democratic politics in other parts of Canada after World War Two. The Depression did not come back to Ontario, Quebec, or the West after the war, and the Liberal federal government installed many of the social welfare measures the CCF had earlier publicized. But though unemployment insurance and other social legislation certainly helped Maritimers, economic depression did return to this area after the war, so prosperity cannot explain the defeat of socialist ideas in Cape Breton. Perhaps the opposite was true, and local economic decline brought about the demise of radicalism. But given the strong tradition of working-class struggle in the region, it seems remarkable that in the years of economic collapse the workers of Cape Breton did not turn to some more radical form of social or political movement. More dramatic or sensational protest actions, at the very least, might have been expected.

The argument of this thesis has been that it was not principally economic decline, nor increased welfare, nor the Cold War rhetoric of the post-war years that removed the radical alternative in working class politics in Cape Breton. Instead the emphasis has been on the ideological struggle of earlier years, when the changes in CP policy, the work of the Antigonish Movement, and the combined

influence of right-wing business unionists and the leaders of the CCF succeeded in taming radicalism in the area. By the post-war years these forces had persuaded most workers to cease listening to the communists, and political radicalism was no longer a practical option. Leadership is important, sometimes even decisive, in the development of political and social movements, and in Cape Breton there was no longer leadership able to give radical form to the discontent of the workers. The communists were defeated and on the defensive, and the CCF had moved to "middle of the road" policies. Most union leaders now called for co-operation with management in increasing productivity, and sought to keep shop floor militancy under strict control. The increases in the legal rights enjoyed by unions had been accompanied by an increase in regulations and bureaucratic controls over workers. Democratization of the workplace, so far as this had occurred, had proved to be mainly a means of reconciling the worker to the authority exercised by his bosses, just as a major function of the system of representative or parliamentary democracy has been to legitimize the power wielded by the state as a means of preserving order in an unequal economic system.

This is not to deny that real advances had been achieved by the workers in terms of union rights, increased wages, and social security by the post-war years. These benefits reached even the people of an

economically depressed region like Cape Breton. But such advances were combined with greater, not less, control over the workers' lives by their employers, and by union and state bureaucracies. This was far from the new world aimed for in the radical vision shared in large part by followers of the Antigonish Movement and of the CCF, as well as by the communists among the working people. This had been a vision of a better material life, certainly, but above all it had represented the aspiration of the miners, the steelworkers, and their families to seize control of their own lives. This enclave of radicalism in Cape Breton was defeated, as might be expected. However, a frequent claim by the leaders of movements in which radicalism is replaced by moderate policies is that the rank and file demand this change. This was definitely not so in Cape Breton. The leaders from the CP and the CCF deserted the cause of radicalism before their followers among the miners and steelworkers.

Although they were defeated, it can also be said that the militancy and radicalism of the Cape Breton workers helped to change the world. Most of the political structure, trade union laws, social legislation, and economic policies that have been developed in Canada throughout history ultimately derive from the efforts of the economic and political elite of this country to prevent radical political movements and the ideology of

class-struggle from emerging. Cape Breton in the 1920s and 1930s provided one Canadian example of the class struggle coming out into the open, and thus served as a frightening object-lesson for governments and some corporate bosses throughout Canada. The various advances, such as collective bargaining and unemployment insurance, which were won by working people in Canada during World War Two and its aftermath, were reluctantly conceded because the Liberal government feared a radical shift in the workers' political thinking. Indirectly, therefore, these laws which have benefitted workers across Canada were an achievement to which the radical labour movement of Cape Breton contributed as much as any group in the country.

Appendix A

UMW DISTRICT 26 REFERENDUM VOTES ON CONTRACTS AND OTHER ISSUES

The following are the votes on contracts with the Dominion Coal Company (Domco) and its subsidiary Cumberland Railway and Coal Company. This covered the approximately 4500 miners in Glace Bay, 2500 in New Waterford, and 2000 in Springhill. The approximately 1500 miners in Stellarton and Thorburn, and the 2000 in Sydney Mines worked for Acadia Coal Company and Old Sydney Collieries, subsidiaries of the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company (Scotia), in receivership 1932-8. All of these companies were part of Dosco's holdings, but only in some years did the Scotia miners come under the same contract as the Domco miners. About 1500-2000 non-Dosco miners in the district worked under separate contracts with smaller companies in Inverness, Minto, N.B., or the River Hebert and Joggins area of Cumberland County. Break-down of the vote by sub-districts is given, if the information is available.

According to the Report of the Royal Commission on Coal 1946, Ottawa, the weighted average daily earnings for contract miners in Nova Scotia was \$7.22 in 1921, \$5.08 in 1925, \$6.65 in 1929, \$5.60 in 1933, \$6.67 in 1939, and \$9.14 in 1944. Datal rates were \$3.90 in 1921, \$3.35 in 1925, \$3.35 in 1939, \$3.14 in 1933, \$3.36 in 1939, \$5.67 in 1944.

2-Year Contract ACCEPTED (In effect 1 February 1930 to 31 January 1932), no increase for contract miners, 3% for datal men, referendum 27 March 1930 (Sydney Post, 28 March 1930. Votes for Phalen, the largest Glace Bay local, not included -- irregularities alleged.)

SUB-DISTRICT										
1		2		3		4		5		DISTRICT
GLACE BAY		SYDNEY MINES		SPRINGHILL		NEW WATERFORD		PICTOU COUNTY		26
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	TOTALS
2105	1876	452	1010	942	218	1233	532	663	247	5395 3883

1-Year Contract REJECTED, wage cuts averaging 12.5% for contract miners, 10% for datal men, voted down in referendum 15 March 1932 (Glace Bay Gazette, 22 March 1932.)

SUB-DISTRICT										
1		2		3		4		5		DISTRICT
GLACE BAY		SYDNEY MINES		SPRINGHILL		NEW WATERFORD		PICTOU COUNTY		26
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	TOTALS
1465	3605	626	623	788	201	1030	1021	789	391	4698 5841

1-Year contract, ACCEPTED(In effect 1 February 1932 to 31 January 1933), terms as above, wage cuts averaging 12.5% for contract miners, 10% for datal men, referendum 26 May 1932 (Sydney Post, 27 May 1932. Phalen, No.11, and No.1B not voting.)

SUB-DISTRICT										DISTRICT	
1		2		3		4		5		26	
GLACE BAY		SYDNEY		SPRINGHILL		NEW		PICTOU		TOTALS	
		MINES				WATERFORD		COUNTY			
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
										5198	1598

1-Year Contract, ACCEPTED(In effect 1 February 1933 to 31 January 1934), no substantial changes from previous contract, referendum 1 February 1933 (Glace Bay Gazette, 1 February 1933 -- only UMW members, AMW not voting.)

SUB-DISTRICT										DISTRICT	
1		2		3		4		5		26	
GLACE BAY		SYDNEY		SPRINGHILL		NEW		PICTOU		TOTALS	
		MINES				WATERFORD		COUNTY			
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
968	59	-	-	765	40	412	147	531	17	2776	263

1-Year Contract, ACCEPTED(In effect 1 February 1934 to 31 January 1935), no changes from previous contract. No referendum taken. The contract was voted on and accepted at the UMW convention in Truro, November 1933.

2-Year Contract, ACCEPTED(In effect 1 February 1935 to 31 January 1937), no change in contract rates, 5% increase for datal men, referendum 8 February 1935 (Glace Bay Gazette, 8 February 1935. UMW only, Domco Sub-Districts 1, 3, 4 only.)

SUB-DISTRICT										DISTRICT	
1		2		3		4		5		26	
GLACE BAY		SYDNEY		SPRINGHILL		NEW		PICTOU		TOTALS	
		MINES				WATERFORD		COUNTY			
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
1339	398			892	43	587	439			2818	880

2-Year Contract, ACCEPTED(In effect 1 February 1937 to 31 January 1939), 6% increase for both contract miners and datal men, referendum 2 April 1937 (Glace Bay Gazette, 3 April 1937. Domco Sub-Districts 1, 3, 4 only.)

SUB-DISTRICT										DISTRICT	
1		2		3		4		5		26	
GLACE BAY		SYDNEY		SPRINGHILL		NEW		PICTOU		TOTALS	
		MINES				WATERFORD		COUNTY			
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
1973	2891			941	213	1472	551			4386	3655

2-Year Contract, REJECTED, no wage increases, voted down in referendum 22 August 1939 (Glace Bay Gazette, 23 August 1939. Domco Sub-Districts 1, 3, 4 only.)

SUB-DISTRICT										DISTRICT	
1		2		3		4		5		26	
GLACE BAY		SYDNEY MINES		SPRINGHILL		NEW WATERFORD		PICTOU COUNTY		TOTALS	
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
1364	2863			683	292	758	626			2805	3781

2-Year Contract, ACCEPTED (In effect 1 February 1939 to 31 January 1941, mostly retroactively), no increase for contract miners, slight increases for datal men, rent arrears written off, referendum 20 November 1940 (Glace Bay Gazette, 20 November 1940. In Sub-District One, Reserve Local refused to vote, only 1B Local approved contract. Sub-Districts 2 and 5 refused to vote on their separate contract with Scotia.)

SUB-DISTRICT										DISTRICT	
1		2		3		4		5		26	
GLACE BAY		SYDNEY MINES		SPRINGHILL		NEW WATERFORD		PICTOU COUNTY		TOTALS	
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
1608	2099			977	113	1029	563			3614	2775

1-Year Contract, ACCEPTED (In effect 1 February 1941 to 31 January 1942), McTague Award, no change in basic rates, but a wartime cost of living bonus of 15 cents per day for all employees. Executive signed contract without referendum, slowdown strike followed.

1-Year Contract, ACCEPTED (In effect 1 February 1942 to 31 January 1943), no change in wages, except for cost of living bonuses already received. Executive forced to sign without a referendum, on orders of National War Labour Board and the International headquarters of the UMW. Later, after contract signed, the NWLB agreed the wages for Sydney Mines and Pictou miners should be brought up level with Domco miners.

2-Year Contract, ACCEPTED (In effect 1 November 1943 to 31 January 1945, the War Labour Board refused to make retroactive to 1 February 1943). This contract followed the substantial increases won by the District 18 miners after a strike in November 1943. Increase of \$1.00 per day across the board, wartime cost of living bonuses incorporated into basic rates, one week paid holidays. Referendum 28 March 1944. (Glace Bay Gazette, 29 March, 4 April 1944 -- District totals include votes for Inverness and Minto)

SUB-DISTRICT										
1	2	3	4	5	DISTRICT					
GLACE BAY	SYDNEY	SPRINGHILL	NEW	PICTOU	26					
	MINES		WATERFORD	COUNTY	TOTALS					
YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO				
3742 549	721 89	1176 206	1904 158	1120 112	8942 1228					

Strike vote, called in order to become eligible legally to apply for a federal conciliation board, after any increase in wages was rejected by the National War Labour Board. Referendum held 20 February 1945 (Glace Bay Gazette, 27 February 1945. No vote in one Joggins local, but totals include Minto vote of 235 for, 7 against, and Inverness vote of 130 for, 44 against.)

SUB-DISTRICT										
1	2	3	4	5	DISTRICT					
GLACE BAY	SYDNEY	SPRINGHILL	NEW	PICTOU	26					
	MINES		WATERFORD	COUNTY	TOTALS					
YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO				
2224 838	1084 250	888 211	968 382	568 124	6097 1856					

1-Year Contract, REJECTED, voted down in referendum 14 June 1945. Ten per cent for contract miners, two and one half per cent for datal men, 2 weeks vacation. (Glace Bay Gazette, 15 June 1945 -- District total includes the vote for Sub-District 6, Inverness -- 125 Yes, 49 No.)

SUB-DISTRICT										
1	2	3	4	5	DISTRICT					
GLACE BAY	SYDNEY	SPRINGHILL	NEW	PICTOU	26					
	MINES		WATERFORD	COUNTY	TOTALS					
YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO				
1458 2097	746 696	318 1122	893 891	532 277	4072 5132					

2-Year Contract, ACCEPTED (In effect 1 February 1945 to 31 January 1947), referendum 30 October 1945. The NWLB authorized a price increase of 33 cents per ton of coal, to provide two weeks annual vacation, plus wage increases as in June award, made retroactive to February 1945. (Glace Bay Gazette, 31 October 1945 -- District total includes the vote for Sub-District 7, Minto -- 141 Yes, 69 No.)

SUB-DISTRICT										DISTRICT	
1		2		3		4		5		26	
GLACE BAY		SYDNEY MINES		SPRINGHILL		NEW WATERFORD		PICTOU COUNTY		TOTALS	
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
2721	583	1118	169	1031	303	1522	277	732	158	7265	1559

STRIKE VOTE -- to strengthen hands of union executive in negotiations --Referendum 26 November 1945. (Glace Bay Gazette, 28 November 1945.)

SUB-DISTRICT										DISTRICT	
1		2		3		4		5		26	
GLACE BAY		SYDNEY MINES		SPRINGHILL		NEW WATERFORD		PICTOU COUNTY		TOTALS	
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
										7068	1930

2-Year Contract -ACCEPTED (Ending three month strike) (In effect 1 February 1947 to 31 January 1949) Referendum 22 May 1947. The contract allowed a \$1 per day across the board increase, effective on the date contract accepted. An additional 40 cents per day was payable 1 January 1948 on condition productivity was increased to 1939 levels. (Glace Bay Gazette, 26 May 1947 -- District totals include votes for Inverness -- 142 Yes and 7 No, and for Minto-- 334 Yes 6 No.)

SUB-DISTRICT										DISTRICT	
1		2		3		4		5		26	
GLACE BAY		SYDNEY MINES		SPRINGHILL		NEW WATERFORD		PICTOU COUNTY		TOTALS	
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
2078	620	883	158	615	247	1314	356	602	53	5968	1447

Referendum, 11 September 1947, on whether to continue funding Glace Bay Gazette, and on whether to hold an early convention. (Glace Bay Gazette, 12 September 1947, Totals include Inverness votes on Gazette-- 27 Yes 80 No, on Convention-- 45 Yes 63 No.)

SUB-DISTRICT											
1		2		3		4		5		DISTRICT	
GLACE BAY		SYDNEY MINES		SPRINGHILL		NEW WATERFORD		PICTOU COUNTY		26 TOTALS	
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
GAZETTE ISSUE:											
1354	1327	135	760	26	283	224	481	75	602	1841	3533
CONVENTION ISSUE:											
1418	1323	273	626	45	259	257	433	120	495	2158	3199

2-Year Contract, ACCEPTED, on new mechanized mining rates, \$10 a shift for operators of Joy loaders installed in two mines. Referendum 2 October 1947 (Glace Bay Gazette, 3 October 1947. Total includes the vote for Sub-District 6, Inverness-- 64 Yes, 7 No.)

SUB-DISTRICT										
1		2		3		4		5		DISTRICT
GLACE BA.		SYDNEY MINES		SPRINGHILL		NEW WATERFORD		PICTOU COUNTY		26
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	TOTALS
922	840	176	121	59	69	305	234	237	141	1763 1412

1-Year Contract, ACCEPTED, in effect 1 February 1949 to 31 January 1950 (mostly retroactive). Datal wages up 50 cents per day, daily bonuses negotiated during war incorporated in contract rates. Referendum 12 October 1949 (Sydney Post-Record, 13 October 1949.)

SUB-DISTRICT											
1		2		3		4		5		DISTRICT	
GLACE BAY		SYDNEY MINES		SPRINGHILL		NEW WATERFORD		PICTOU COUNTY		26 TOTALS	
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
2564	1103	815	198	792	87	1472	369	669	245	6312	2002

2-Year Contract, ACCEPTED, in effect 1 February 1950 to 31 January 1952. No significant changes in wage rates. (During negotiations wage cuts for Pictou county miners had been threatened.) Referendum 4 April 1950 (Sydney Post-Record, 5 April 1950.)

SUB-DISTRICT											
1		2		3		4		5		DISTRICT	
GLACE BAY		SYDNEY MINES		SPRINGHILL		NEW WATERFORD		PICTOU COUNTY		26 TOTALS	
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
1081	2091	512	375	494	87	561	616	753	54	3401	3223

Appendix B

District 26 Elections -- 1930-50

President, Vice-President, Secretary-Treasurer, and International Board Member -- plus one Board Member elected by each Sub-District. (Breakdown of vote by Sub-Districts is given where available.)

UMW District 26 Election 1930 (Sydney Post, 20 August 1930 -- Incomplete returns -- Phalen, No 11, Mechanics in Glace Bay, and the Sydney Mines locals not included.)

President:

D.W. Morrison, Glace Bay	-- 4053
Dan Ross, Sydney Mines	-- 1078
Alex Campbell, Reserve	-- 1030

Vice-President:

P.G. Muise, New Waterford	-- 3515
Wm. Carey, Sydney Mines	-- 970
L. Broderick, Glace Bay	-- 657
Silby Barrett, Glace Bay	-- 567

Secretary-Treasurer:

W.P. Delaney, Glace Bay	-- 3852
Rod MacLeod, Port Morien	-- 1393

International Board Member (for two-year term):

Wm."Doc" Hayes, Springhill	-- 2073
D. O'Connell, New Waterford	-- 1028
Clarie Gillis, Glace Bay	-- 785
M.F. MacNeil, Dominion	-- 714
Wes. Bond, Glace Bay	-- 289
D. Lynk, Glace Bay	-- 233
D. O'Handley, Glace Bay	-- 139

Board Members elected: (Candidates in Glace Bay: Arthur Petrie, John Alex MacDonald, Joe Nearing.)

Sub-District					
1	2	3	4	5	6
Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inverness
Petrie	Stewart	McKay	MacDonald	Carr	Chisholm

UMW District 26 Election 1931 (Sydney Post, 19 August 1931)

Incomplete returns, Florence in Sub-District 2 not included.

President D.W. Morrison re-elected by acclamation.

Vice-President: (Candidates P.G. Muise, New Waterford; Alex B. Farrell, Glace Bay; J.H. Jamieson, Glace Bay)

Sub-District	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring-hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inverness	Total
Muise	1080	313	546	1220	416	112	3587
Farrell	1857	170	34	222	42	23	2348
Jamieson	402	57	79	116	55	20	729

Secretary-Treasurer: (Candidates: W.P. Delaney, Glace Bay; A.A. "Sandy" MacKay, Glace Bay; Alex MacDougall, Glace Bay.)

Sub-District	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring-hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inverness	Total
Delaney	1731	662	545	1061	406	109	4920
MacKay	922	677	72	223	37	21	1952
MacDougall	891	78	40	214	135	27	1385

Board Members elected:

	Sub-District					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring-hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inverness
	Petrie	Stewart	Tattrie	MacDonald	Nearing	Chisholm

Amalgamated Mine Workers of N.S. Elections, 1932-5.

The AMW elected its first executive at its founding meeting 18 June 1932: President John Alex MacDonald, Vice-President Alex B. Farrell, Secretary-Treasurer Robert Reid Stewart, all from Glace Bay. Farrell was replaced as vice-president at a meeting on 6 August 1932 by Clarie Gillis of Glace Bay. (R.R. Stewart, Report to Convention, 19 September 1932, UMWA Papers, Microfilm reel 6, PANS.) Gillis was replaced in the summer of 1933 by Joseph Nearing of Glace Bay. These officers, MacDonald, Nearing and Stewart, remained in office until the AMW's first pit-head election in 1934, along with informally chosen board members for each sub-district: A. B. Farrell in Glace Bay; Fred Ludlow in Sydney Mines; James Columbine in Springhill; Tom Ling in New Waterford; and Murdoch Wilson in Pictou County.

AMW Election, 7 August 1934 (Glace Bay Gazette, 8 August 1934. 1B and New Waterford figures not included.)

Secretary-Treasurer Bob Stewart re-elected by acclamation.

President:

John Alex MacDonald, Glace Bay - 1341
Adam Scott, Sydney Mines - 983

Vice-President:

Joseph Nearing, Glace Bay - 1152
Fred MacDonald, Sydney Mines - 1102

Board Members elected:

Glace	Sydney	Springhill	New	Pictou
Bay	Mines		Waterford	Co.
Wm. Pilling	F. Ludlow	J. Columbine	T. Ling	M. Wilson

AMW Election, 14 August 1935 (Glace Bay Gazette, 15 August 1935.)

President:

Fred MacDonald, Sydney Mines - 1373
James Simpson, Sydney Mines - 1267

Vice-President:

Joseph Nearing, Glace Bay - 1719
Frank Munroe, Stellarton - 815

Secretary-Treasurer:

Robert Stewart, Glace Bay - 1887
James Birmingham, Sydney Mines - 702

Board Members elected:

Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.
J. Fortune	A. Scott	J. Columbine	T. Ling	E. MacKay

UMW District 26 Election 19 October 1932, during UMW-AMW split. (Glace Bay Gazette, 24 October 1932)

President D. W. Morrison and Vice President P.G. Muise re-elected by acclamation.

Secretary-Treasurer:

A.A."Sandy" MacKay, Glace Bay - 2601
Peter MacNeil, Glace Bay - 461
Ambrose White, New Waterford - 448

International Board Member -- two-year term:

Wm."Doc" Hayes, Springhill - 1726
Silby Barrett, Glace Bay - 994
Thomas Reedy, Springhill - 219

Board Members elected:

			Sub-District			
1	2	3	4	5	5	
Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring- hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inverness	
Petrie	Stewart	Tattrie	MacDonald	Nearing	Chisholm	

UMW Election August 15, 1933 (Sydney Post-Record, 16 August 1933) Incomplete returns- Stellarton and Inverness not included.

President D.W. Morrison re-elected by acclamation.

Vice-President:

P.G. Muise, New Waterford - 1624
 Silby Barrett, Glace Bay - 959

Secretary-Treasurer:

A.A. MacKay, Glace Bay - 1890
 M. MacKenzie, Stellarton - 659

Board Members elected:

Sub-District					
1	2	3	4	5	6
Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring-hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inverness
Petrie	Stewart	Tattrie	Hines	Nearing	Chisholm

UMW District 26 Election 21 August 1934 -- First for two year terms. (Glace Bay Gazette, 22 August 1934.)

President D.W. Morrison re-elected by acclamation.

Vice-President:

P.G. Muise, New Waterford - 2384
 James Johnstone, Whitney Pier - 914

Secretary-Treasurer:

A.A. MacKay, Glace Bay - 2514
 D. Ryan, Thorburn - 690
 Matt Donovan, Glace Bay - 458

International Board Member:

Silby Barrett, Glace Bay - 1317
 Wm. Hayes, Springhill - 1121
 R. MacPherson, New Waterford - 838
 Harry Davis, Springhill - 311
 J. Campbell, New Waterford - 293

Board Members elected:

Sub-District					
1	2	3	4	5	6
Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring-hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inverness
Petrie	Stewart	Tattrie	MacDonald	Nearing	Chisholm

UMW District 26 Election 9 Dec 1936 (Glace Bay Gazette, 9, 10 December 1936)

President: Candidates D.W. Morrison, Glace Bay; William Beaton, Glace Bay.

Sub-District	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inverness	
Morrison	1520	144	557	748	400	52	3421
Beaton	1442	47	302	419	334	22	2566

Vice-President:

Angus MacEachern, New Waterford	3615
P.G. Muise, New Waterford	2019
Oscar Goldrich, Springhill	852
James Johnstone, Whitney Pier	843

Secretary-Treasurer:

A.A. MacKay, Glace Bay	2151
Ian MacLeod, Glace Bay	1159
James Ling, New Waterford	1140
Wm. Noiles, Springhill	883
A. MacDonald, Glace Bay	638
D.J. MacDonald, Glace Bay	295
M. Young, Glace Bay	245
M. Donovan, Glace Bay	123

International Board Member:

Silby Barrett, Glace Bay	3221
R. McPherson, Glace Bay	1517
Wm Hayes, Springhill	1066
Ed. Emberley, Springhill	877

Board Members elected:

Sub-District					
1	2	3	4	5	6
Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inverness
Petrie	Stewart	Tattrie	MacDonald	Nearing	MacLeod

UMW District 26 Election 12 October 1938 (Glace Bay Gazette, 15 October 1938)

President:

D. W. Morrison, Glace Bay	--	4718
Wm. Beaton, Glace Bay	--	2086
Louis Broderick, Glace Bay	--	1435

Vice President:

Angus MacEachern, New Waterford	--	2986
Clarie Gillis, Glace Bay	--	2938
R. Wilson, Springhill	--	1260
James Johnstone, Whitney Pier	--	300

International Board Member:

Silby Barrett, Glace Bay	--	3252
P.G. Muise, New Waterford	--	2371
J. McPherson, Glace Bay	--	960
Leo Carrigan, Glace Bay	--	409
J.D. Ryan, Thorburn	--	361
J.B. McNeil, Glace Bay	--	754

Board Members elected:

Sub-District						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inverness	Minto
Stewart Carey	Emberley	MacDonald	Nearing	MacLeod	Walker	

UMW District 26 Election, 4 Oct 1939 -- to replace Vice-President MacEachern (Glace Bay Gazette, 18 October 1939)

P.G. Muise, New Waterford	--	2130
Clarie Gillis, Glace Bay	--	1930
Adam Scott, Sydney Mines	--	1691
Howard Tattrie, Springhill	--	1263
Donald MacDonald, Whitney Pier	--	951
J.H. Jamieson, Glace Bay	--	540
Thomas Ling, New Waterford	--	502
Joe Nearing, Glace Bay	--	285

UMW District 26 Election 9 October 1940 (Recount published
Glace Bay Gazette, 24 October 1940.) No Minto vote.

President: (Candidates D.W. Morrison; Wm. Beaton, Glace
Bay; Dan Leslie, Glace Bay.)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring- hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv- erness	Minto	Total
Morrison	1204	498	754	741	201	157	-	3555
Beaton	1462	360	349	379	362	43	-	2956
Leslie	1297	143	115	257	75	16	-	1903

Vice-President: (Candidates P.G. Muise; Allan Foley, Glace
Bay; G.Demmings, Springhill; James Ling, New Waterford; A.
Scott, Sydney Mines; Angus "Blue" MacDonald, Glace Bay)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring- hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv- erness	Minto	Total
Muise	596	206	245	810	149	159	-	2105
Foley	1731	44	28	48	33	6	-	1890
Demmings	165	22	857	28	35	16	-	1153
Ling	406	41	37	446	69	8	-	1007
Scott	421	700	30	57	33	8	-	1249
McDonald	540	23	33	43	255	17	-	911

Secretary Treasurer: (Candidates: A.A. MacKay, Glace Bay;
Stephen MacPherson, Sydney Mines; James P. MacNeil, Glace
Bay; William Noiles, Springhill; Herb Warner, Glace Bay;
Russell Jackson, Glace Bay; Joe Nearing, Glace Bay.)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring- hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv- erness	Minto	Total
MacKay	1020	434	271	295	183	116	-	2319
Noiles	92	40	872	31	73	9	-	1117
McNeil	133	55	14	837	20	28	-	1087
Nearing	455	230	27	95	245	24	-	1076
Warner	975	38	6	25	24	4	-	1072
McPherson	614	114	24	86	38	21	-	897
Jackson	437	33	10	11	14	3	-	558

UMW District 26 Election 9 October 1940 (CONTINUED)

International Board Member: (Candidates: Silby Barrett; John Alex MacDonald, Glace Bay; Angus F. MacDonald, New Waterford; Tom McLachlan, Glace Bay; W. Hayes, Springhill.)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
Barrett	861	409	373	214	134	128	-	2118
J. MacD.	1358	263	49	70	268	13	-	2021
A. MacD.	240	84	41	1104	52	49	-	1570
McLachlan	1159	123	29	58	35	5	-	1409
Hayes	195	89	790	31	121	16	-	1332

Board Members elected: (Glace Bay - John Morrison 1150, B. Stewart 1125, A. MacIntyre 943, M. MacD. 420, J. McNeil 250)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inverness	Minto	
Morrison	Carey	Tattrie	MacDonald	Nearing	MacLeod	Walker		

UMW District 26 Election 14 Oct 1942 (Glace Bay Gazette, 30 Oct 1942)

President: (Candidates D.W. Morrison, Freeman Jenkins)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
Jenkins	2224	673	208	932	431	62	92	4622
Morrison	839	321	291	331	107	92	50	2031

Vice President: (Candidates P.G. Muise, Tom Ling.)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
Ling	2039	506	186	847	394	68	56	4106
Muise	707	390	288	442	127	90	71	2115

UMW District 26 Election 14 Oct 1942 (CONTINUED)
 Secretary-Treasurer: (Candidates: P.G. Muise, Glace Bay;
 Adam Scott, Steve Dolhanty, Sydney Mines.)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring-hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
Scott	1649	500	113	651	305	28	50	3296
MacKay	960	157	328	404	163	99	82	2193
Dolhanty	188	352	33	98	20	25	5	721

International Board Member: (Candidates Silby Barrett,
 John Alex MacDonald)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring-hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
MacDonald	2201	608	187	876	431	88	102	4493
Barrett	619	302	290	248	73	52	37	1621

Board Members elected: (Glace Bay Vote - Alan McPhee 759,
 Wilton 737, J. Morrison 686, Nearing 245, R. MacDonald
 225, M. MacDonald 184)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	
McPhee	Carey	Tattrie	MacDonald	Munroe	MacNeil	Walker		

UMW District 26 Election 8 August 1944 (Glace Bay Gazette,
 16 August 1944)

President: (Candidates: Freeman Jenkins, Norman MacDonald,
 Glace Bay)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring-hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
Jenkins	1722	1008	400	875	402	127	216	4750
MacDonald	1104	210	64	365	62	13	6	1824

Vice President: (Candidates: Tom Ling, New Waterford; John
 Mann, Sydney Mines; Bob Stewart, Glace Bay)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring-hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
Ling	1644	356	319	953	304	104	210	3890
Mann	252	701	53	131	44	3	8	1192
Stewart	873	143	86	179	93	19	2	1395

UMW District 26 Election 8 August 1944 (CONTINUED)

Secretary-Treasurer: (Candidates: Adam Scott, Steve Dolhanty, Sydney Mines)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring-hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
Scott	2270	799	424	950	299	113	215	5070
Dolhanty	432	496	41	242	141	24	5	1381

International Board Member: (Candidates: John Alex MacDonald, Joe Nearing, Glace Bay; James P. MacNeil, New Waterford)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring-hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
MacDonald	1936	912	353	480	357	104	209	4361
Nearing	753	113	52	128	45	8	4	1103
MacNeil	135	90	38	651	31	21	4	970

Board Members elected: (Glace Bay Vote - Alan McPhee 1579, Dan T. McNeil 497, Alan Morrison 440, J. Morrison 282)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inver-ness	Minto	
McPhee	Carey		Tattrie	MacDonald	Munroe	MacNeil	Guss	

UMW District 26 Election 13 Aug 1945 -- First election for four-year terms. (Glace Bay Gazette, 14 August 1946)

President: (Candidates: Freeman Jenkins; Alex Gillis, Sydney Mines; Bob Stewart, Glace Bay)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Spring-hill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
Jenkins	2045	497	446	963	568	-	-	4519
Gillis	413	692	122	220	73	-	-	1520
Stewart	663	62	82	229	63	-	-	1099

UMW District 26 Election 13 Aug 1946 (CONTINUED)

Vice President: (Candidates: Tom Ling, New Waterford; Steve Dolhanty, Sydney Mines; Bernard Fortune, Glace Bay; Wm. Noiles, Springhill)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
Ling	1226	249	215	942	359	-	-	2991
Dolhanty	493	904	71	293	151	-	-	1912
Fortune	1326	32	14	148	44	-	-	1564
Noiles	103	16	357	40	107	-	-	623

Secretary-Treasurer: (Candidates: Adam Scott, Sydney Mines; Frank Turner, Glace Bay)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
Scott	1965	936	522	991	548	-	-	4962
Turner	1088	299	103	324	93	-	-	1907

International Board Member: (Candidates: John Alex MacDonald, John Delaney, Glace Bay; James P. MacNeil, New Waterford, Leonard Nearing, Glace Bay; N. McDougall, Sydney Mines)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
MacDonald	1311	309	287	345	353	-	-	2605
Delaney	1018	446	216	298	82	-	-	2060
MacNeil	119	57	114	732	141	-	-	1163
Nearing	627	32	20	52	36	-	-	767
McDougall	45	399	17	11	26	-	-	498

Board Members elected: (Glace Bay Vote - Alan McPhee 1112, D.J. MacIsaac 1073, Alan Morrison 456)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inverness	Minto	
McPhee	Carey		Tattrie	MacDonald	Munroe	MacNeil	Guss	

UMW District 26 Election 13 June 1950 (Sydney Post-Record, 14 June 1950)

President Freeman Jenkins declared himself re-elected by acclamation.

Vice-President: (Candidates: Tom Ling, Wm Cook, New Waterford; Steve Dolhanty, Syd.Mines, Wm Noiles, Springhill)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
Dolhanty	1816	1110	71	524	172	88	359	4140
Ling	1191	115	133	376	171	20	105	2111
Cook	262	19	21	727	35	7	8	1079
Noiles	163	19	419	38	118	5	8	770

Secretary-Treasurer: (Candidates: Adam Scott; Herb Warner, Glace Bay; Michael Higgins, Gardiner)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
Scott	1338	789	437	965	325	101	441	4396
Warner	1167	232	126	238	70	11	12	1856
Higgins	964	237	71	290	82	10	7	1661

International Board Member: (Candidates: John Alex MacDonald, John Delaney, Tom McLachlan, Glace Bay; Buddy MacSween, New Waterford)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inv-erness	Minto	Total
Delaney	1287	530	245	341	220	73	12	2708
MacDonald	936	432	269	115	169	24	434	2379
MacSween	239	111	55	1183	68	15	9	1680
McLachlan	1046	121	48	47	35	5	4	1306

Board Members elected : (Glace Bay vote - Dan J. MacIsaac 1085, A. McPhee 687, J. Morrison 703, A. Briggs 423, J.B. MacDonald 406, J. Hanrahan 242)

	Sub-District							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Glace Bay	Sydney Mines	Springhill	New Waterford	Pictou Co.	Inver-ness	Minto	
MacIsaac	Carey	Tattrie	MacDonald	Munroe	MacDonald	Guss		

Appendix C

Local 1064, United Steelworkers of America
Officers Elected 1937 - 1950
(Source -- USWA Papers, MG19/7, Beaton Institute)

18 May 1937 -- Results:

President -- Carl Neville (Acclamation)
Vice-President -- Tom Wilde
Fin. Secretary -- Jack Johnston
Treasurer -- James Nicholson
Rec. Secretary -- Clarence MacInnis
Journal Agent -- Palmer Robson
Corres. Rep. -- George MacEachern

29 June 1938 -- Results:

President -- Carl Neville - 916 Reg MacDonald - 146
Vice-President -- Norman MacKenzie (Acclamation)
Fin. Secretary -- James Nicholson -832 J MacNeil -196
Treasurer -- George MacNeil - 694 James MacNeil - 291
Recording Secretary -- Clarence MacInnis -912 H Stowe -100
Journal Agent -- Palmer Robson -752 John Nagy -233
Corres. Rep. -- George MacEachern -728 G Fitzsimmons -297

28 June 1939 -- Results:

President -- Norman MacKenzie (Acclamation)
Vice-President -- Ed Corbett -235 Dan MacKay -230
Fin. Secretary -- James Nicholson (Acclamation)
Treasurer -- George MacNeil - 271 James MacNeil -184
Recording Secretary -- Bernard MacDonald (Acclamation)
Journal Agent -- Palmer Robson -345 Louis Surette -248
Corres. Rep. -- George MacEachern (Acclamation)

26 June 1940 -- Full executive re-elected by acclamation.

25 June 1941 -- Results:

President -- Dan MacKay-910 C.Neville-898 G.MacEachern-774
Vice-Pres. -- K.MacNeil-815 D.Curtis-652 N.MacDonald -607
A.MacDonald-471
Fin. Secretary -- James Nicholson (Acclamation)
Treasurer -- George MacNeil -1300 E.Campbell -1210
Rec. Secretary -- Bernard MacDonald -1370 J.Dunn - 1141
Journal Agent -- P.Robson-937 T.Peddle-572 R.MacDonald-500
W.MacQueen-498
Corres. Rep. -- J.Devereaux - 1306 J.Eddy - 1187

26 November 1941 -- Election for President following resignation of Dan MacKay. Results:

G.MacEachern -396 C.Neville -381 A.MacDonald -148

24 June 1942 -- Results:

President --George MacNeil
 Vice-Pres. -- Kenzie MacNeil
 Fin. Secretary -- James Nicholson
 Treasurer -- Coll MacDonald
 Rec. Secretary-- William MacKinnon
 Guide -- William MacQueen
 Guard -- Angus D MacDonald

30 June 1943 -- Results:

President --George MacNeil (Acclamation)
 Vice-Pres. -- Bernard MacD-245 A D MacD-105 C Bent-140
 Fin. Secretary -- James Nicholson (Acclamation)
 Treasurer -- Coll MacDonald-293 Ed Alexander-172
 Rec. Secretary-- William MacKinnon (Acclamation)
 Guide -- William MacQueen (Acclamation)
 Guard -- Dan MacKay-301 A.Momberquette-181

28 June 1944 -- Results:

President --George MacNeil-394 C.Bent-203 A.MacDonald-75
 Vice-Pres. -- B.MacDonald-269 W.MacKinnon-199 N.MacInnis-133 A.MacIntyre-56
 Fin. Secretary -- James Nicholson (Acclamation)
 Treasurer -- Coll MacDonald-336 Ed Alexander-262
 Rec. Secretary-- William MacKinnon
 Guide -- Walter Coadic
 Guard -- Dan MacKay

27 June 1945 -- Results:

President --George MacNeil
 Vice-Pres. -- Bernard MacDonald-258 Cyril Bent-226
 Fin. Secretary -- James Nicholson (Acclamation)
 Treasurer -- Albert Martin-195 Coll MacDonald-147 N.MacDonald-123
 Rec. Secretary-- William MacKinnon
 Guide -- Walter Coadic
 Guard -- Dan MacKay-327 A.W.MacIntyre-119

3 October 1945 -- Vice-Pres. election following resignation of Bernard MacDonald. Results:
 Clarence MacInnis- 62 Neil MacInnis-15

26 June 1946 (Two-year terms begin) -- Results:

President -- Ed Corbett - 750 George MacNeil - 308
 Vice-Pres. -- Clarence MacInnis
 Fin. Secretary -- James Nicholson
 Treasurer -- Ted Pledge-442 A.Martin-195 D.Steele-?
 Rec. Secretary -- Hugh MacKenzie-513 W.MacKinnon-406
 Guide -- Walter Coadic
 Guard -- Dan MacKay-600 Frank Smith 366

6 November 1946 -- Election of Recording Secretary:
Ed Alexander-43 Frank Smith-26 Don Steele-13 F.MacArthur-3

7 May 1947 -- Election to fill vacancies:
Vice-Pres.-- Dan MacKay-645 Paul MacLeod- 296
Fin. Secretary -- Clarence MacInnis-607 Wm.MacKinnon-326
Guard --Martin Merner-247 A.Momberquette-180 M.McNeil-157
Frank Smith-134 Frank Murphy-123 Neil MacInnis-88

30 June 1948 --Results:
President -- Ed Corbett-1624 George MacNeil-746
Vice-Pres. -- Dan MacKay-1608 Neil MacDonald-691
Fin. Secretary -- Clarence MacInnis- 1594 Wm.MacKinnon-696
Treasurer -- Ted Pledge-1635 Dan Edwards-610
Rec. Secretary -- Ed Alexander-1177 Frank Smith-1056
Guide -- Walter Coadic-1392 Bill Barron-846
Guard -- Martin Merner-1268 A.Momberquette-907

26 June 1950 -- Results:
President -- Ed Corbett-1842 George MacNeil-523
Vice-Pres. -- Dan MacKay (Acclamation)
Fin. Secretary -- Clarence MacInnis-1602 Wm.MacKinnon-626
Treasurer -- Ted Pledge-1641 Frank Smith-588
Rec. Secretary -- Ben O'Neil-864 Ed Alexander-849
R.Fogarty-509
Guide -- W.Coadic-1185 M.McNeil-502 C.Isaac-249 J.Eddy-236
Guard -- Martin Merner-1592 James Ryan-554

Appendix D

Wartime Wildcat Strikes, Glace Bay and New Waterford Mines
September 1, 1939 to June 20, 1945.

(Taken from a summary prepared by the Dominion Coal Company
for the Carroll Royal Commission, September, 1945. The
figures given for each category of strike indicate the
number of strikes and the estimated tons of lost
production.)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Pay</u>	<u>Control</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Total</u>
	<u>Demands</u>	<u>Issues</u>	<u>Issues</u>	
1939	5 14,875	1 90	1 650	7 15,615
(from 1 Sept)				
1940	16 12,270	13 9,940	5 10,135	34 32,345
1941	7 8,745	8 5,995	13 68,805	28 83,545
1942	13 7,912	20 9,300	21 19,421	54 36,633
1943	18 24,740	21 13,114	34 39,516	73 77,370
1944	14 6,090	32 12,080	10 11,045	56 29,215
1945	3 1,470	6 1,954	4 7,540	13 10,964
(to 25 June)				
Totals	76 76,102	101 52,473	88 157,112	265 285,687

The above are strikes occurring in the eight mines in Glace Bay and the three in New Waterford. The category of "control issues" is made up of the 71 strikes the company categorized "Refused to carry out instructions or conform to ordinary practice," plus those categorized "Resulting from action of other workmen." The detailed accounts of the strikes makes clear this meant disputes about who was required to do certain jobs, so that both "control" categories indicates strikes arising out of disagreements between the workers and management about how to carry out the work. The "other" category includes "Sports or other diversions" (10), "Sympathetic action in support of others" (43), and "Internal union affairs" (35). The internal union affairs referred to were protests against the union executive. The sympathetic actions were generally strikes following the disciplining of one or more men for leaving early, using abusive language to managers, or the like, and might also be regarded as control issues. It can therefore be seen that a large proportion of the strikes involved such issues, although occurring in a period in which there was widespread dissatisfaction with the level of wages for miners compared to other war workers.

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