

Ideology/Representation/Text:
The Imagery of Communism in Australian
And English-Canadian Literature

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is an exploration into the space of communist imagery as an integral component in the literatures of Australia and Canada from 1920-1990. The pervasiveness of Soviet socialist realism in the literatures of Australia and Canada has been an overlooked and unexplored area of critical analysis. As a formulation induced by the domination of Stalinists within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, it sought to reaffirm the inauguration of a ‘New World’ based on the success of the October Revolution and the Civil War. It played a crucial role in the careers of writers affiliated to the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) or Canada (CPC), who were determined to introduce working-class issues and communist representation into their dramaturgy and fictionality. They incorporated the tropes of the communist, the Communist Party/union organiser, the peace activist, the scientific socialist and the martyr to the cause as the means through which they could communicate their political positions. The metonymies of communism permeated the descriptors of poets aligned to the CPA or CPC. This thesis demonstrates how these tropes and metonymies were inscribed in the textual practice of celebrated Australian and Canadian writers, in particular, Dorothy Hewett, Judah Waten, David Fennario and Dyson Carter. Their emulation of Soviet socialist realism and their adherence to its precepts of *partinost*, *ideynost* and *narodnost* generated their own unique hybrid, the subgenre of ‘New World’ social[ist] realism. There were three phases to communist writing, firstly, the Depression era dominated by the strike scenario and internal political conflict. The second phase of the post-World War II years found its vision in the ‘New World’ paradigm, which denied its colonial context and sought to replace it with the concept of a Future Soviet Australia or Canada. Nostalgia for ultra-radicalism in the 1930s emerged as the overriding perception in the late phase of the 1980s. This thesis asserts that the ‘New World’ writing of Australia and Canada was disabled by the political conditions of its production, without the supports available to the Soviet model to advance it strategically.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work and that I have given fully documented references to the work of others. This thesis has not, in whole or in part, been submitted for the award of any other degree in another higher education institution.

Signed:

Marvin Gilman
November 2014

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Introduction



Statue of Dr Norman Bethune, corner of De Maisonneuve Boulevard and Mackay Street, Montreal, photographer Marvin Gilman, 12 August 1990.

The initiative for this doctoral project began with the photographing of the above monument to Dr Norman Bethune in a triangular concrete island on De Maisonneuve Boulevard adjacent to the Sir George Williams Campus of Concordia University, Montreal, at which I completed my Bachelor of Arts degree in 1972. It made Canada's best-known communist a part of the university milieu at this inner city institution. The appearance of this statue at such a location brought into play the imaginary and real attributes connected to the imagery of communism grounded in a local situation. Little did I realise that the investigation of Bethune's statue would set off intensive research on the pervasive presence of communism in Australian and Canadian writing. The focus of this thesis is not the theory or practice or success or failure of communist ideology, but rather an investigation of the language tropes and metonymic conventions that functioned as a lexicon of the positive and negative aspects of this ideology through the genres of drama, fiction and poetry to the citizens of Australia and Canada. This study centres on cultural politics and identity politics, and in this particular case, political affiliation, which currently circulate as integral parts of contemporary critical practice.

Bethune's statue in Montreal is not an original but a copy of one at the Norman Bethune International Peace Hospital in Shih-chia Chang, People's Republic of China. Not only did the Chinese communists dictate his elevation in the consciousness of Canadians, they also determined his appearance in public places. Bethune may have been a peripheral figure in the Canadian cultural sphere during his lifetime, but he has been the subject of numerous writings based on his life. This includes five biographies¹, three specialised studies², three produced plays³, a plethora of poetry including two complete books⁴, and two films⁵,

¹ Ted Allan and Sydney Gordon, *The Scalpel, the Sword: The Story of Dr Norman Bethune*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1952). See also Roderick Stewart, *Bethune*, (Toronto: new press, 1973); David A. E. Shepherd and Andree Levesque eds., *Norman Bethune: His Time and His Legacy*, (Ottawa: Canadian Public Health Association, 1982); Zhou Erfu, *Doctor Norman Bethune*, (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1982) and Larry Hannant ed., *The Politics of Passion: Norman Bethune's Writing and Art*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

² Wendell MacLeod, Libbie Park, and Stanley Ryerson, *Bethune The Montreal Years: An Informal Portrait*, (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1978). See also Eugene P. Link, *The T. B.'s Progress: Norman Bethune as Artist*, (Plattsburg, NY: Center for the Study of Canada, 1991); and Roderick Stewart, *The Mind of Norman Bethune*, (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1977).

³ Rod Langley, *Bethune: a play*, (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1975). See also Ken Mitchell, *Gone the Burning Sun*, (Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1985) and Ken Gass, *Bethune Imagined*, (Toronto: The Factory Theatre, 2010).

⁴ Peter Stevens, *And the dying sun like blood: a Bethune collage for several voices*, (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1974). See also Sylvia Duvernet, *Norman Bethune Memorial Poems*, (Gravenhurst, ON: 1990).

⁵ Donald Brittain, *Bethune*, (Ottawa: National Film Board of Canada, 1964). See also Philip Borsos, *Bethune: The Making of a Hero*, (Toronto: Filmline International, 1990).

the most extensive treatment appearing in 1990, the feature-length *Bethune: The Making of a Hero*.

What is remarkable is the persistence of the Bethune legend into the twenty-first century, as the production of *Bethune Imagined* at the Factory Theatre in Toronto in November 2010 confirmed. This quantity of cultural material formulated him as a legend of national historic importance but elided the intelligibility of his signification.

Bethune functioned in a dual capacity. In the era of the Stakhanovite, he fulfilled the attributes of Canada's New Soviet Man from 1935 to 1939, which encompassed his membership in the Communist Party of Canada (CPC). Bethune needed the CPC and the CPC needed Bethune as their membership was almost entirely made up of migrants, Finns, Ukrainians and Jews; the scion of a prominent Anglo-Saxon establishment family was a valuable personage in their recruitment activities. His missions in Spain and China met the criteria for a Soviet superman, "a hero from the people who is guided by the party to greater things",⁶ although this was quite ambiguous in Bethune's case, he was not of working-class origin, not from 'the people' and had no occupational connection to the proletariat, whilst also lacking in any substantial knowledge of Marxism-Leninism.

His death elevated him to martyr status, which is confirmed in the obituary by Chairman Mao Zedong, *In Memory of Norman Bethune*, written on December 21, 1939, which emphasised his great self-sacrifice, "We must all learn the spirit of absolute selflessness from him. With this spirit everyone can be very useful to the people".⁷ When he was resurrected in the early 1970s as a vaunted political asset in the delicate negotiations between the government of Canada and the People's Republic of China (PROC) in regards to the opening of trade relations, he fulfilled his second function, as the national metonymy for Canadian communism.

Bethune's association with the CPC transformed him into a living example of the tropes of communism below, which operated as a key part of its lexical structure. These tropes are formulated from much of the literature covered in this thesis, as the positive ones relate to Soviet socialist realism as a projection of Stalinist discourse, whilst the negative ones emerge from the discourse of anti-communism's response to the overt strategies of the 'positive hero' focus of the socialist realist texts. They transformed the contest between the two ideologies into the Manichean dichotomy, good versus evil, as the two superpowers of the USA and the USSR contended for world leadership in the decades after World War II.

⁶ Steve Phillips, *Stalinist Russia*, (Oxford, England: Heinemann Publishers, 2000) 58.

⁷ Roderick Stewart, *Bethune*, (Toronto: new press, 1973) 197.

The Images of Communism

The positive tropes of communism have four distinct elements to them. The initial projection is the working-class hero, whose most complete composition was the amalgamation of his/her union organiser status with communist party affiliation. This was considered the highest category of proletarian achievement. A secondary position was the Stakhanovite, the outstanding worker who could cross class divisions and be applied to professionals committed to the cause, such as Bethune.

The second element is the peace activist stance, an integral part of communist ideology. It provided the foremost opposition to fascism's militarism and its imperialist ambitions. These were combined into a synergistic unity, one could not exist without the other.

The third element consisted of actively proselytising Marxist economic theory, which endowed the communist cause with the correct theoretical position. Disseminating Marxism's tenets was the foundational underpinning upon which the CP could legitimise communism's inheritance of the ultra-radical revolutionary position.

Certainly, the most cherished category in communist representation was elevation to martyr status, reserved for those who made the ultimate sacrifice, such as Bethune in China with Mao Zedong's Eighth Route Army. It required complete self-sacrifice, without any recompense expected or due.

As a consequence of the reiteration of the positive tropes of the communist image in drama and fiction as a means of articulating communism to the masses, the forces of anti-communism developed an antithetical representation founded on threat and menace to the society at large. This was established on racial profiling, evaluating the origin of the communist as an alien presence in the midst of the native-born of English, Scottish, and Welsh lineage. In Anglo Canada and Australia, the person of non-British heritage was automatically deemed unworthy of the traditions of the empire.

The second negative association for the communist was his/her adherence to the aims and policies of all things Soviet, a Sovietophile who expressed fanatical devotion to the personages and products of the USSR. This was expressed in acclamation of Soviet achievements, especially in the space race with the success of 'sputnik', as a confirmation of the advancement of Soviet science compared to the USA.

The most telling element in the negative tropes was the accusation of subversion of the core values and precepts of Western Christian civilisation. The three prominent features of Soviet power, the nationalisation of private property, atheism and the restructuring of the family unit by the substitution of state institutions, undermined the societal framework held in

place by the commercial, legal and religious establishment. The most vehement anti-communists usually had some connection, overt or covert, with Christian religious authority, and opposition to them condemned one to the satanic realm, in league with the AntiChrist.

The most dreaded appellation attached to communists was conveyed through their physical presence, they were carriers of an infectious virus, which would disable anyone in contact with them, face to face. The disease carrier trope formulated the communist as an 'untouchable' person, beyond the physical parameters of acceptable social standing. This untouchability status linked the image of the communist to the Hindu religious structure and its treatment of a distinct group, presently referred to as Dalits and formerly called Harijans, or scheduled castes in the era of Mahatma Gandhi.

These tropes collided, fused, attracted and repelled each other in the literary cultural sphere, especially in drama and fiction. They were a dialectical unity which articulated the conflicted dimensions of the representation. They were key components of the lexicon by which ultra-radical writers in Australia and Canada attempted to communicate their political commitments through their work. They employed these tropes in a system that had been defined by the Soviets as socialist realism, which had to be reconfigured by them to suit the political conditions of a pre-revolutionary era.

The prototypes for these tropes were outlined in the 1930 Kharkov Resolutions produced at the World Congress of the International Bureau of Revolutionary Writers. These are as follows with my tropes included in brackets:

Fight against Imperialist War: defend the Soviet Union against Capitalist aggression.
[the anti-imperialist]

Fight against Fascism, whether open or concealed, like Social Fascism. [the anti-fascist]

Fight for the developing and strengthening of the revolutionary labour movement. [the working-class hero]

Fight against race discrimination and the persecution of the foreign born. [the anti-racist]

Fight against the influence of middle-class ideas in the work of revolutionary writers.
[the anti-bourgeois]

Fight against the imprisonment of revolutionary writers and artists, as well as other class-war prisoners, throughout the world. [the martyr]⁸

Prior to the advent of Soviet socialist realism in 1934, the initial image of the communist was conveyed by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in 1848, "A spectre is haunting

⁸ *Workers' Art Magazine: The Official Organ of the Workers' Art Club*, Vol. 1, no. 1, April 1933, 5. Held at Mitchell Library, ML Q331.8506/1.

Europe – the spectre of Communism”.⁹ In this first appearance, the image is not given a readily identifiable representation, it is an absence that lingers in the consciousness of a continent. Its identification with ghosts and apparitions allowed communism’s opponents to associate it with a connotation of menace and threat to the wellbeing of the nation state. It inhabited the virtuality of the spectral until the October Revolution, when the image of Lenin was projected as the acceptable face of the Bolsheviks. This attainment of power provided the communists with a crisis of representation, how to modify their image to a more socially acceptable subject?

This began with the early works of adoration and acclaim for the Red Army commanders in the Civil War and, after 1921, the managers and administrators of the New Economic Policy. With Stalin’s ascension to power in 1928, the supreme leader became the image of communism in the 1930s and 1940s.

An especially poignant reminder of how Stalin became the primary image of communism in the 1930s and 1940s is an important incident in the life of one of the most notorious Americans caught up in the Soviet atomic spy network. Morris Cohen found “this big portrait of Stalin, four floors high. He looked like a movie star,”¹⁰ when he participated in the liberation of Buchenwald in April 1945. It had been prepared clandestinely by communist prisoners, square by square in readiness for the victory over the Nazis. In the literary sphere the Party had to invent a literature that would endow its image with a form and substance comprehensible to the proletariat, inducing the ‘positive hero’ that pervaded Soviet socialist realism.

Fredric Jameson asserted the positioning of the communist subject: “Evil thus, as Nietzsche taught us, continues to characterize whatever is radically different from me, whatever by virtue of precisely that difference seems to constitute a real and urgent threat to my existence. So from the earliest times, the stranger from another tribe, the ‘barbarian’ who speaks an incomprehensible language and follows ‘outlandish’ customs...or else that alien being, Jew or Communist, behind whose apparently human features a malignant and preternatural intelligence is thought to lurk: these are some of the archetypal figures of the Other, about whom the essential point to be made is not so much that he is feared because he is evil; rather he is evil because he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean, and unfamiliar”.¹¹

⁹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (London, England: Verso, 1998) 33.

¹⁰ Joseph Albright and Marcia Kunstel, *Bombshell The Secret Story of America’s Unknown Atomic Spy Conspiracy*, (New York: Times Books, 1997) 181.

¹¹ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981) 115.

It is extremely important to note the connection that Jameson draws in this description, precisely because the connectedness between Judaism and communism distorted public perceptions of communism and reinforced its almost total rejection in Christian societies as the work of the Anti-Christ. Jameson's nexus of the Jew and the Communist as the markers of evil presents a conceptualisation of the dilemma that surrounded the communist image, its cohabitation with Judaism, which reconstituted the communists as subversives of the social norms of Western society, but also simultaneously undermining its religious basis in a coordinated attack on Christianity as well. This symbiotic relationship between Judaism and communism could only be circumvented by tactically positioning in the leadership men of verifiable Christian heritage.

This was quite clearly the strategy of the CPC when it welcomed Norman Bethune, as two of his great-great-granduncles attained prominent positions in the Anglican Church; one became the Rector of Montreal and Principal of McGill University, whilst the other became the second Bishop of Toronto. Previous to Bethune's entry into the CPC in 1935, the leadership had displayed tremendous enthusiasm in 1933 for the recruitment of Stanley Brehaut Ryerson (1911-1998), son of the dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto and grandson of Egerton Ryerson, Chief Superintendant of Education for Canada West from 1844 to 1876. As Merrily Weisbord explained, "[Ryerson] didn't know then the importance the immigrant Party leadership would place on his education, background and native-Canadian respectability".¹²

Bethune's prestigious professional medical status eclipsed Ryerson's standing and made him a more desirable representative of the CPC to the leadership. In his biography of Tim Buck (1891-1973), a migrant from England who became general secretary of the CPC from 1929 to 1962, Oscar Ryan confirmed many aspects of Jameson's image of the communist as, "the stock villain was a bush-bearded communist, wild-eyed, slovenly and bomb-toting. The Bolshevik monsters were nationalizing women and (even worse) the banks, the industries and the big rural estates. The reds were bloodthirsty madmen, they were loathsome and they never bathed".¹³

As Jameson alluded to, the early communists in Australia and Canada were perceived as decidedly 'Other,' although they made significant attempts to counteract that imagery through the recruitment of important personages such as Bethune and Ryerson, and, in the Australian context, the novelist, Katherine Susannah Prichard. Because the aura of the alien migrant circumscribed their presence, it opened the way to scripting them into an image that

¹² Merrily Weisbord, *The Strangest Dream, Canadian Communists, The Spy Trials and the Cold War*, (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1983) 23.

¹³ Oscar Ryan, *Tim Buck: A Conscience for Canada*, (Toronto: Progress Books, 1975) 56.

was full of danger and malice to the native-born. One of the most serious criticisms of the early communists was their inability to modify their image into a more domesticated version, not only in Canada but in Australia as well, as Alastair Davidson observed: “the history of the CPA before 1950 can be understood better as a move away from Australian traditions into an alien tradition, which made the CPA inappropriate in Australia. After 1950 the history becomes a stumbling, groping, limping, move back to Australian traditions”.¹⁴

Communism functioned as the primary sign of violent opposition to capitalism and colonialism from the founding of the CPA in 1920 and the CPC in 1921, until the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991. I will be deploying communism as that signifier most readily understood as the matrix of an ultra-radical alternative strategy to middle-of-the-road capitalist liberalism and extreme right-wing fascism. Because communism threatened the major social constructs of the nuclear family, religious belief and most importantly, private property, it operated as a site of internal political contestation unparalleled in the social history of Australia and Canada. No other ideology in the twentieth century was able to supposedly menace the internal security of these nation states, except for the more recent phenomenon of Quebec separatism in Canada since 1976. In order to counteract communist activities, especially in organising and administering trade unions, the colonially-minded elite and their monopolies of knowledge in these countries evolved a dualistic system of oppression and repression to demonise the Communist image and endow it with a legacy of suspicion and distrust.

Prior to the emergence of the communists as the primary threat to the survival of Western political institutions in the aftermath of the October Revolution, the Aboriginal/Native occupied the space of the ‘Other’ in Australia and Canada. The power of the written word of the colonisers organised through parliamentary legislation or decree and enforced by the military and the police easily displaced the orality of Aboriginal/Native cultures.

Columbus’s first act upon landing on San Salvador was to command “a deed of possession to be drawn up”.¹⁵ The control of the technology of information dissemination from the printing press and telegraph through the development of mass media gave the colonisers hegemony over communication that served to displace the indigenes and reinforced colonialism. As Tzvetan Todorov asserted, “the history of the conquest of America teaches us that Western civilization has conquered...because of its superiority in human

¹⁴ Alastair Davidson, *Communist Party of Australia: a short history*, (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1969) xi.

¹⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1994) 28.

communication”.¹⁶ The colonial powers established what Harold A. Innis (1884-1952), the Canadian media theorist, referred to as a “monopoly of knowledge”, which confirmed political domination, territorial sovereignty and the inequitable distribution of wealth and privilege.

Terry Goldie interrogated the imposition of European preconceptions on indigenous peoples which transformed them into a repertoire of readily repeatable images, words, and perspectives. Goldie applied some of Foucault’s theories of power/knowledge to expose the perception that Australian, Canadian and New Zealand representations of the indigenous ‘Other’ were entirely constructed by white European modes of cognition. The individual novelist, poet or playwright he examined did not contribute any original comments to the subject of the indigene but merely reiterated the standard set pieces already part of this subject formation. In other words, there was what Pierre Macherey called an “ideological horizon”¹⁷ surrounding this discursive formation.

Jack Healy set out many of the descriptors used to encode the presence of the indigene, “weird + waning + savage + lurking + pagan + passion = Indian,”¹⁸ whilst Jameson offered a not dissimilar one of “alien + different + strange + unclean + unfamiliar = Jew or Communist”. In this thesis I will restrict myself to interrogating the dimensions of the imagery of the Communist.

In this investigation the sign already had certain attributes prescribed for it by the agents of semiotic control. As Foucault stated: “the sign does not wait in silence for a man capable of recognizing it: it can be constituted only by an act of knowing”.¹⁹

Terry Goldie confirmed this imposition when he wrote, “the indigene is a semiotic pawn on a chess board under the control of the white signmaker”.²⁰ My application of the image of the communist is, for the most part, conditioned by its manipulations within societies dominated by capitalist and imperialist forces, such as Australia and Canada. Oscar Ryan pointed to the social stereotyping of communist adherents, “Canadians who supported

¹⁶ Ibid., 251.

¹⁷ Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) 22.

¹⁸ J. J. Healy, “Indians in the prison of cliché,” Toronto: *The Globe and Mail*, 1989: C6.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Social Sciences*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1973) 59.

²⁰ Terry Goldie, *Fear and temptation: the image of the indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literatures*, (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989) 10.

the Russian Revolution were members of an international conspiracy of thieves and murderers, the incarnation of evil, the AntiChrist.”²¹

I would like to put forward an important connection here between Australia and Canada and the cultural traditions of India. The settler-invader cultures, by deploying the deep structure of myth, as explained by Roland Barthes, offers a system of interpretation that I will apply to the construct of the myth of the communist. Barthes presented three distinct categories of myth: A) signifier=form=discourse; B) signified=concept= communism or anti-communism; and C) signification=sign=utopia or dystopia. As he defined it, “myth means a delusion to be exposed”.²² The media of the settler-invader cultures of Australia and Canada sought to engender an image of their communists as the equivalent of ‘untouchables’ in the Hindu social system, categorising them as polluters of the societal norms and precepts valued by the core capitalist institutions of the church, the legal system and multinational corporations. Many of the associations connected to untouchability, such as being impure, lack of cleanliness, denial of access to Hindu religious sites, not belonging to society, were consciously attached by the propaganda strategies of the anticommunists to those espousing or offering support to communist principles. For instance, the infamous Hollywood Blacklist kept many accomplished filmmakers out of the movie industry for a considerable period of time after the McCarthy hearings in America in the early 1950s. Just as the Brahmins in control of the Hindu religio-ideological hierarchy continued to perpetuate the pariah status of the Dalits, formerly referred to as Harijans (scheduled castes) by Mahatma Gandhi, the ruling classes of Australia and Canada perpetrated similar tactics of domination, discrimination and injustice upon their political opponents.

The pejorative connotations of the ‘untouchable’ or Dalit superimposed onto the communist was a powerful argument intended to blur the public’s perceptions in attempting to evaluate communist ideology and condemned communists to the status of outcastes in bourgeois capitalist societies. By relying on the deep structure of the myth of the communist reinforced by repetitive propaganda techniques connecting the image of the communist with the qualities of vampires, ghosts, shadows and apparitions, the power elites of Australia and Canada sought to have their own value systems dominate the space of the public’s awareness, as Barthes stated, “myth has in fact a double function: it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us”.²³ In a recent example of the importance of public imagery to provide concrete support for ideological purposes, the Dalit Chief Minister of India’s Uttar Pradesh State, Kumari Mayawati, has initiated a very intense statue-building program dedicated to

²¹ Ryan, 57.

²² Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers, (London: Jonathan Cape 1972) 112.

²³ *Ibid.*, 117.

honouring past Dalit leaders, such as B. R. Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram, at a cost of over three hundred million dollars in the triennial period of 2007 to 2010. In this effort, Mayawati sought to project a positive visual image of the 'untouchable' as a sign of inclusivity and belonging in order to counteract the negative attributes deployed by the Hindu caste system.

R. T. Robertson perceived that the concept of untouchability deserved paramount status as an integral marker of the entire field of global literature written in English. It served as a recurrent pattern for the subjugated and excluded as a key trope in this literary field. Robertson's analysis concluded that Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* deserved canonical status within the so-called 'new literatures,' now global literatures, as the archetype of the alienated colonised individual. Robertson theorised that his outcaste metaphor applied most readily to African and Asian cultural groupings but found it wanting in regard to what he termed "the older nations of the Commonwealth,"²⁴ that is, the 'New World' of Australia and Canada. The 'Othered' minority of the nineteenth century in Australia and Canada, the indigene/untouchable was progressively overtaken by the Communist as the outcaste 'Other' in the perceptions of the political reality of the twentieth century.

Arun Mukherjee interrogated the critical reception of Anand's major novel and attempted to expose its inadequacies by concentrating upon the caste and class difference between the author and the subject of his writing and the verifiable gap between them produced "a voice for" and not "a voice of"²⁵ the Dalit community. Anand was identified by P. K. Rajan in his study, as: "projecting the world-view of the Indian revolution in its bourgeois-humanist phase. Now this bourgeois humanist world-view insists on the amelioration of the downtrodden...through the conscious re-ordering of the attitudes and dispositions of the upper castes towards the victims".²⁶ This fissure brought about a failure to articulate the dissonant discourse of the Dalit and its substitution by a 'bourgeois humanist' unconscious. Mukherjee insisted that the Dalits' political protests were effaced by the refusal of the text to adequately represent the dimensions of their position. In a similar manoeuvre, the literary critical establishment in Canada thwarted the admission of communist writing and criticism to its practice. Mukherjee's critique sought to substantiate her argument concerning the unwillingness of Eurocentric critical practice to interrogate the issues of voice, subject position and agency. By concentrating on the fictions of the agents of communism, most importantly, in Judah Waten's *Time of Conflict* (1961) and Dyson Carter's *This Story Fierce and Tender* (1986), this thesis will allow the dissident voices of the communists themselves to

²⁴ R. T. Robertson, "Untouchable as an Archetypal Novel," *World Literature Written in English* 14.2 (1975) 45.

²⁵ Arun Mukherjee, The Exclusions of Postcolonial Theory and Mulk Raj Anand's "Untouchable": A Case Study," *Ariel* 22.3 (1991) 58.

²⁶ P. K. Rajan, *Mulk Raj Anand A Revaluation*, (New Delhi: Arnold Associates, 1995) 43.

address their own ideological positioning and representation. In attempting to direct attention to these areas of oversight in Australian and English-Canadian literature, my work will seek to clarify critical discrepancies in comparative studies of Australian and Canadian literary discourses.

One of the overriding strategic manoeuvres in formulating opposition to communism produced the register of anti-communism. Tracing the origin of the term, its usage began around 1840 in revolutionary secret societies in France, where communism appeared as a revolutionary hope, but to its adversaries as a ‘menacing spectre.’ This connection with ghosts and apparitions, for example, is exemplified in the title of a collection of essays by Robert Manne, *The Shadow of 1917 Cold War Conflict in Australia* (1994). These metaphorical associations fostered the development of phantasmagoric qualities and imaginary excesses into the imagery of communism, and aided by the suggestiveness in medical terminology’s discourses on disease, a curious amalgam of these two sources gave wide currency to the depiction of communism as a virulent infection attacking the wellness of the corporeal nation-state. Fiona Capp corroborated this reflection, “one was possessed by Communism as one was infected by a contagious disease. In this mysterious way the germ of the ideology was spread”.²⁷

The constant reiteration of these metaphors served to characterise communism as a physical disability and association with it would deprive someone of their full mental and physical powers. This metaphor was repeated by J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI from 1935-1972, and one of America’s fiercest anti-communists, when he labelled communism “a disease infecting the nation”.²⁸ During this film one of Hoover’s agents inscribed a sequence of adjectives on a blackboard which revealed communists as “lying, dirty, shrewd, godless, murderous”.²⁹ As Fiona Capp observed, “To be identified as such [a Communist] by the Security Service was to be more than you seemed and at the same time to be unfathomable: to be duplicitous, veiled, cloaked, hidden, elusive, a phantom”.³⁰ This film was narrated by Ronald Reagan who, during his term as President of the USA from 1981-1989, would sometimes refer to the USSR as the ‘Evil Empire.’ How American authorities could project such intentions into communists is difficult to understand in the light of the fact that, as Jeffrey Richelson and Desmond Ball reported in their study, “the FBI has extensively infiltrated the US Communist Party since the 1930s, with the infiltration penetrating to the highest levels of the party. At one point the infiltration was so extensive that there was one

²⁷ Fiona Capp, *Writers Defiled*, (Ringwood, Vic.: McPhee Gribble, 1993) 23.

²⁸ James Klein and Julia Reichert, *Seeing “Red”*, (Heartland Productions: 1983).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Capp, 19.

informer for every 5.7 members”.³¹ It seems probable to suggest that the FBI knew more about the party’s activities than its own leadership. Their knowledge of the Party and its leaders allowed them to continually enhance the proportions of the ‘phantom’ menace to serve as the underpinning to their drive for world domination. The register of anti-communism which permeated communications within and between government agencies and the public rested entirely on Manichean dichotomy, the eternal binary of sacred/evil, or American godliness versus Soviet atheism. Alex Carey succinctly analysed this process, “notions like the American Way of Life, the Meaning of America, the Spirit of America, become symbols with the irrational power of the Sacred, and form an equally calculated exacerbation of American apprehension about the ‘alien ideology’ of communism and all its allegedly un-American characteristics, communism/socialism etc., become symbols of the Satanic”.³²

The semiotic of communism operated at the metacommunicative level, the self-reflexivity of images and tropes which materialise the object and the discourse about it guide its reading and interpretation. Framing these signs as menace and threat allowed the anti-communists to incorporate ‘views, images, fictions, or representations’ that played on fear and insecurity in the populace and corroborated apprehension and discomfort as the perceptions best able to counteract any positive regard for communism in the community.

This thesis will trace the image of the communist and its impact through representations in drama, fiction and poetry in Australia and Canada. It will focus on discovering the ambiguity, contradiction and paradox that enveloped its communication through texts categorised in Australia and Canada as equal to Soviet socialist realism, which is a serious misapprehension of the term and its usage. Without a revolution and civil war as the background to their fictions and plays, the ultra-radical writers of Australia and Canada operated within a specific unique to their conditions, which can be situated as ‘New World’ social[ist] realism, the prerevolutionary context precluding their admittance to a status commensurate with the epics of Soviet triumphalism, but, which, as a consequence of their political positions, demanded its own distinction, separate from social realism. The hegemony of Soviet socialist realism led critics to accept its universality as a dogma that governed all the adherents of communism. Ironically, the classics of Soviet socialist realism were mostly written before it was formulated as official doctrine. These works of the 1920s, Vsevolod Ivanov’s *Partisan Tales* (1921), Dmitri Furmanov’s *Chapaev* (1923), Alexander

³¹ Jeffrey Richelson and Desmond Ball, *The Ties That Bind: Intelligence Cooperation between the UKUSA Countries*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985) 289.

³² Alex Carey, *Taking the Risk out of Democracy: propaganda in the US and Australia*, (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1995) 6.

Serafimovich's *The Iron Flood* (1924), Alexander Fadeyev's *The Rout* (1925), Fyodor Gladkov's *Cement* (1925), Mikhail Sholokhov's *The Quiet Don* Parts I and II (1928), have survived to attain their status as the preeminent works of the genre. As C. Vaughan James asserted, they "cannot be simply transplanted elsewhere".³³

Through the concentration of power in Stalin, as he served simultaneously on three CPSU governing bodies, the politburo, the orgburo and the secretariat after the XVIIth Congress in February 1934, he was able to order into practice the formulation he has been credited with naming, "if the artist is going to depict our life correctly, he cannot fail to observe and point out what is leading it towards socialism. So this will be socialist art. It will be socialist realism".³⁴ This vignette is most probably a piece of apocrypha but its circumstances may have influenced Stalin to command an associate on the secretariat, A. A. Zhdanov, to prepare the actual formulation in his speech to the congress of the Soviet Writers' Union in August 1934, which marked "the formal institutionalisation of the 'method' of Socialist Realism".³⁵ One of the key definitions in Zhdanov's prescription was the introduction of the term, "revolutionary romanticism".³⁶ He placed this new type of romanticism in a totally different sphere, one dominated by the 'revolutionary' success of the CPSU. The basis of Soviet socialist realism was found in the three precepts of *partinost*, *ideinost*, and *narodnost*. These precepts calibrated "the evaluation of a particular work: its truthfulness or partymindedness; its pedagogic potential for mass enlightenment; and the degree to which the ideological content would be intelligible to the masses".³⁷

Through their length, fiction and drama were able to engage with the tropes of the communist, whilst poetry evolved around the metonymies and symbols of communism, emphasising ones particularly appropriate to their cultural traditions, such as in the Australian and Canadian context, 'New World', or the appellation of 'the people's' poet. One of the most common communist metonymies, the clenched fist salute was succinctly defined by Roland Barthes, "it 'symbolizes' the working class, its power, and its will"³⁸ in his analysis of Sergei Eisenstein's classic Soviet socialist realist film, *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). The symbols came directly from the official state emblems of the Soviet Union, such as the red star, the hammer and sickle and *The Internationale* song, and its leaders, Lenin and Stalin. The general secretary's name had a double understanding, his pseudonym meant man of steel. This was

³³ C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism Origins and Theory*, (London: Macmillan, 1973) 88.

³⁴ ³⁴ Ibid., 86.

³⁵ Ibid., 35.

³⁶ Ibid., 87.

³⁷ A. Kemp-Welch, *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia 1928-39*, (London: Macmillan, 1991) 261.

³⁸ Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, 45.

the metaphor for the socialist realist method, as Regine Robin asserted, it “designates the New World [of communism] and its hardness, evoking construction, solidity, and modernity, but also the forging of the new man, with his courage, and sacrificial heroism”.³⁹ One came from the success of Soviet space research in the 1950s, sputnik emerged into the literary sphere as a harbinger of the ‘New World’ yet to come. These metonymies dominated the technical aspects of ultra-radical poets, although they were tinged with ambiguity, contradiction and paradox at times.

It is within the context of this double understanding of the ‘New World’ as the future soviet utopia that this thesis seeks to interrogate the representations of literary resistance by ultra-radical writers in Australia and Canada to capitalism and colonialism. It focuses on an area that Stephen Slemon perceived as based on, “identifying a social force, colonialism, and with the attempt to understand the resistances to that force, wherever it may be”.⁴⁰

This area, Slemon analysed, is one often overlooked by First World theorists, such as Timothy Brennan, author of *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation* (1989), and others, and results in a foreclosing of analytical theory as a simple binary of European/Other, coloniser/colonised, powerful/powerless. The important middle ground of the settler-invader nations becomes the forgotten portion of contemporary literary investigation. The specific goal of this thesis is to disclose the extent of active political resistance by Australian and Canadian writers to colonialism and capitalism and its political supports, liberalism and conservatism. As Slemon asserted, “the idea of both literary and political resistance to colonialist power is the hidden term, the foundational concept”⁴¹ on which the ultra-radical writers of Australia and Canada sought to express their opposition to the imperial policies of the mainstream politicians. Political resistance itself is fraught with inconsistencies, resulting in ambiguity, contradiction and paradox, which will be the focus of the critical analysis in this project.

Slemon reinforced Alan Lawson’s concept of the in-between status of Australia and Canada, able to perceive the binaries of The West/The Rest and to defuse or collapse them by virtue of its own conditionality, its very own doubleness. As both a representation of ‘Other’ to the imperial power and representing the colonising imperial power to the ‘othered’ minority, this duality of the Australian and Canadian writer offers his/her writing the opportunity to, on the one hand, acknowledge colonialism through the coloniser’s language

³⁹ Regine Robin, *Socialist Realism An Impossible Aesthetic*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992) 271.

⁴⁰ Stephen Slemon, “Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World”, *World Literatures Written in English* 30.2 (1990) 32.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

and, on the other hand, undermine its discursive power by voicing opposition to its pervasiveness.

As Fredric Jameson revealed in describing his formulation of ‘Second World’, there is a hidden or concealed dimension to it, that is, capitalism versus socialism, or First World/Second World of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and its Eastern European satellites with the rest of the world’s population consigned to the Third World. Now in this thesis I will be uniting the sites of contestation of both the Eurocentric dimension of Fredric Jameson’s ‘Second World’ and its reformulation by asserting its very doubleness in a sub-genre of ‘New World’ social[ist] realism, which conforms to Lawson’s premise that the experiences of Australians and Canadians “is conditioned by, and grounded in, a sense of doubleness”.⁴² By interrogating the positioning of communist writers within English-Canadian and Australian literature, this thesis seeks to undo tired systems of representation by addressing the conscious forgetting and flagrant absences surrounding Fredric Jameson’s ‘Second World’ of communism within the ‘New World’ of Australia and Canada.

This comparative study of Australian and Canadian literatures seeks to carry out the task ascribed to investigators in this field, “question the discourses of inclusivity and ‘coverage’ which have so often been deployed within English studies to depoliticise literary writing and to obscure the struggle for power which takes place within textual representation”.⁴³

The Pivotal Years 1930-1956

The commitment of the mainstream political parties and prominent businessmen to the principles of the Empire and its rewards played a large part in the careers of important politicians. At the height of the Depression Richard Bedford Bennett (1870-1947), a multi-millionaire who had made vast sums of money in association with Max Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook, and eventually controlled the E. B. Eddy Company of Hull, Quebec, occupied the prime minister’s suite in Ottawa from August 1930 to October 1935. Not only was Bennett one of Canada’s leading capitalists, he was a fervent imperialist as well. After his retirement as Leader of the Opposition in 1938, he moved to England and, with Beaverbrook’s influence, became Viscount Bennett of Mickleham, Calgary and Hopewell, and took his seat in the House of Lords in 1941. This colonial mentality was emulated by Stanley Melbourne Bruce (1883-1967), Prime Minister of Australia from 1923 to 1929, and

⁴² Alan Lawson, “A Cultural Paradigm for the Second World”, *Australian-Canadian Studies* 9.1-2 (1991) 68.

⁴³ Slemon, 40.

the originator of 'Red-Scare' campaigns, who similarly accepted a viscountcy and became Viscount Bruce of Melbourne in 1947.

Both men allowed British imperialism to determine their place by defining the prime ministership of Australia or Canada as a mere stepping stone to a peerage in the House of Lords. They make appearances in Carol Bolt's *Buffalo Jump* (1972), in which a reenactment of Bennett's confrontation with a noted communist organiser of the On-to-Ottawa Trek, 'Red' Evans, in the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa is a pivotal scene, whilst Bruce is indirectly connected to the arrest and gaoling of a prominent communist organiser for the Seaman's Union in Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934). Until Bennett's and Bruce's viscountcies, conservative politicians had been content with receiving a knighthood, usually the Knight Commander of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George. The Right Honourable Sir Robert Menzies (1894-1978) took the desire for nobility to its highest degree, when he was awarded Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports in 1965. The occupations of the Kingston Eight, members of the CPC who were convicted in December 1931 and, after an appeal, gaoled in February 1932, were listed as Tim Buck, machinist; Tom Ewen, blacksmith; Malcolm Bruce, carpenter; Sam Carr, clothing worker; Tom Boychuk, tailor; Matthew Popovich, journalist; Tom Hill, electrician; Tom Cacic, miner. Their resistance to the Bennett government was articulated in *Eight Men Speak* (1933), one of the most important plays in Canadian theatrical history, which is closely interrogated in the Canadian drama chapter of this thesis. The proletarian status of these party members provided a sharp contrast to the business class politicians, intent on gaining admittance to the top echelon of British society through the House of Lords.

The clash between these groups, working-class heroes and their ruling class opponents, functioned as a primary construct in the dramatic and fictional renditions of class conflict in the 1930s, when the strike scenario dominated the texts of Australian communist writers, whether in the relief camps of Western Australia in John Harcourt's *Upsurge* (1934) or on the canefields of Queensland in Jean Devanny's *Sugar Heaven* (1936), whereas Canadian fictions concentrated on the recruitment of communist operatives in Earle Birney's *Down the Long Table* (1955) and Hugh Garner's *Cabbagetown* (1968).

The invasion of the USSR by Germany on June 22, 1941 changed the position of communists from non-involvement to active participation against fascist imperialist aggression. It brought the CPA into the mainstream struggle and, after its legalisation in late 1942, it underwent tremendous growth in popularity and membership. From a base of four thousand members in June 1940, it expanded rapidly to over twenty-three thousand in September 1944. The high point of success was reached with the election of Frederick Woolnough Paterson (1897-1977) to the Queensland Legislative Assembly on April 15, 1944,

the CPA's first and only democratically elected member of any Australian parliament. As the member for Bowen, he represented this electorate until April 28, 1950. His bashing by a Queensland police officer, identified as Detective Mahoney, whilst observing a lawful demonstration by striking railway workers in Brisbane on March 17, 1948, put his health in jeopardy and seriously undermined the effectiveness of his parliamentary role. As he remembered it, "for several months I was too sick even to attend parliament and when I did attend, it was a long time before I could attend to my parliamentary duties properly".⁴⁴ This example of state-sponsored repression illustrated the violent confrontation of the postwar period of 1946-1956, when anticommunist forces embarked on suppression of dissent in overt or covert actions.

An expansion of similar dimensions in support for the CPC occurred in the same time period. It also reached its highest membership numbers in 1944 and elected a member, Fred Rose, to the federal House of Commons in August 1943, and J. B. Salsberg and A. A. MacLeod to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, also in the same month and year. The party had already broken through in Manitoba, with the election of, firstly, William Litterick in 1936 and his replacement, William A. Kardash, in 1941 to the Legislative Assembly. Close cooperation with the USSR by the USA and Great Britain allowed the communist parties of Australia and Canada to attain widespread public support and receive parliamentary representation. They would never again stand so high in public esteem in their histories. How this token representation could be interpreted as a serious threat to democracy in the postwar period in Australia and Canada has more to do with the confrontation between the USA and USSR for world dominance in the Cold War than any internal political considerations. The fictions of the 1950s, especially Dorothy Hewett's *Bobbin Up* (1959) and Dyson Carter's *Fatherless Sons* (1955) brought the efforts of communist union organisers into the foreground as they attempted to remain relevant to proletarian struggle in the factories and mines as the industrialisation of Australia and Canada expanded considerably.

Igor Sergeievich Gouzenko's defection from the embassy of the USSR in Ottawa on September 5, 1945 initiated the Cold War which would establish American hegemony over the Western democracies, especially Australia and Canada, as a result of the collapse of the British Empire, in the era of anti-communism, from 1946-56. The Abbott Plan in 1947 committed Canada to a policy of continentalism, which meant closer economic integration with the USA. This is confirmed in the Washington Declaration which committed Great Britain and Canada to American leadership in the forthcoming struggle against communism and positioned America's national security as the primary concern of its leadership. It also

⁴⁴ Fred Paterson, *Fred Paterson: A Personal History*, (Brisbane: Brisbane Labour History Association, 1994) 46.

generated the destruction of Fred Rose's political career, as his arrest and prosecution became the focus of the Gouzenko Affair revelations. The era of anti-communism in the decade of 1946-1956 found its centre in the inquiries of royal commissions, the Canadian one in 1946 set up to investigate the allegations surrounding a Soviet spy network in Canada exposed by the 'secret' documents in Gouzenko's possession, and the Petrov Commission in Australia in 1954 was ostensibly to look at the same issue. These royal commissions were a means of formulating communism as a 'phantom' menace, as they perpetuated the myth of the communist as a serious threat to the stability of Australia and Canada. Both Paterson and Rose were victims of state suppression, Paterson directly through physical injury and Rose through political harassment and imprisonment. The Soviet defectors, Gouzenko and Petrov, were the media faces of anti-communism and their images were the focus of public perceptions of the menace of communism to Canada and Australia.

The short period of rapprochement with the USSR during World War II was only an outward projection of a 'hail-fellow-well-met' attitude on the part of the Western powers, basically a public relations exercise in friendliness and goodwill to secure unity amongst the Allies against fascism. Covertly, the security forces of the Western governments still kept their suspicions about the communist menace intact. Some activists misinterpreted the temporary friendly relations as a possible permanent condition in the postwar reorganisation of political spheres of influence. By divulging information under the guise of wartime comradeship, a few public servants would soon regret accepting government pronouncements of goodwill as a pretext for sharing classified material with Soviet embassy officials. A lack of incisive thinking by usually aware individuals led them to misconstrue a short-term strategic manoeuvre by democratic forces in their ongoing confrontation with a radically different ideology. Many of them cooperated under delusions fostered by a romanticised version of communism but most had "a common history: conversion during the Spanish Civil War; membership in a closed group; experience underground".⁴⁵

In the context of that time, between 1943 and 1945, what Raymond Boyer and Rose discussed was merely an exchange of information, that had previously been publicly disclosed and therefore never actually secret, between allies, and could never be equated with espionage, although that was the impression transmitted by the media to the public. As Weisbord correctly explained, "in international press coverage of the report the conventional explosive RDX was confused with the atom bomb".⁴⁶ This confusion was spread abroad by the American newspaper columnist Drew Pearson, who originally leaked the story of Gouzenko's defection, thereby triggering the arrests, and then followed it up the day after the

⁴⁵ Weisbord, 110.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 153.

initial report with claims that a “Russian agent in Canada had collapsed under questioning and somehow revealed the names of no less than 1,700 Russian agents operating in the United States and Canada. The next story reinforced the impression that the goal of these spy rings was to steal the secret of the atomic bomb”.⁴⁷

Through media distortion, an artificial linkage between the Canadian spies and the atomic bomb secret was fabricated in the public consciousness. The extent of this confusion is verified by the comments of Joseph Abbott, Country Party member of the House of Representatives for New England, to the Australian parliament on November 9, 1946, “we have read about the activities of the Soviet ‘spy ring, in Canada. We read in the report that the Soviet had used its legation to house spies charged with the task of discovering the secret of the atomic bomb and the manufacture of the atomic bomb”.⁴⁸ Weisbord also explained the full extent of media beat-up in the local press, “the full Royal Commission report would be serialized in the Montreal Gazette under the heading ‘The Red Shadow Over Canada, at the same time as that newspaper published the proceedings of the trials, often on the same page”.⁴⁹ The effect of this media disinformation was to reinforce misconceptions and create perceptions of a vast Soviet conspiracy intended to overrun the West by gaining the atom bomb secret.

The whole operation was formulated on the refusal of the USA to share scientific knowledge on atomic bomb production, over which they wished to retain exclusive control and thereby confirm their ‘monopoly of knowledge’ about this most important scientific development, and embark on their own imperialism. Their desire to retain this domination even excluded their allies from learning about it, “the consultation that had been promised in the 1943 Quebec accord and in the Hyde Park aide-memoire signed by Roosevelt and Churchill on atomic cooperation had not been provided”.⁵⁰ In early October 1945, President Truman made it clear that America would not assist any other nation in regard to atomic developments, “they will have to do it on their own hook, just as we did”.⁵¹ The Canadian trials were a circuitous way of severing relations with the Soviets, as previous agreements during the interim of Gouzenko’s defection in September, 1945 and the exposure of the allegations in February, 1946 had committed the Americans, British and Canadians to joint action on his accusations.

⁴⁷ Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945-1957*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) 61.

⁴⁸ Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates 28, Vol. 189, 803.

⁴⁹ Weisbord, 153.

⁵⁰ Whitaker and Marcuse, 41.

⁵¹ Gregg Herken, *The Winning Weapon: The Atomic Bomb in the Cold War 1945-1950*, (New York: Knopf, 1980) 36.

In the midst of this media frenzy, Winston Churchill, then Leader of His Majesty's Opposition, delivered his famous Iron Curtain speech at Fulton, Missouri on March 5, 1946, which contained the message that the Cold War enemy had two components, the external USSR and the internal one of national communist groups. The Americans, through their highly secret Operation Venona, had broken the Soviet cipher codes and had instantaneous access to and understanding of all messages passing between Moscow and its embassies abroad. Their cryptanalysis had mastered the Soviet system and, consequently, further enhanced their 'monopoly of knowledge'.

Arrested on March 14, Rose was charged with conspiring to violate the Official Secrets Act. The Canadian government had totally informed the Soviets of the details of RDX when two scientists from the Soviet Technical Mission had inspected its manufacturing operation at Shawinigan Falls in 1944. The exact details of this were put forward by Rose's defense when they examined Kenneth H. Cheetham, assistant to the director of research at the plant, during the trial of Raymond Boyer, the scientist who had transmitted his knowledge of the explosive, however insubstantial, to Rose. Whitaker and Marcuse discovered that "documents in the Public Record Office, London, indicate that RDX had been placed on a list for transfer of military technology to the Soviets approved by both the British and American governments as early as 1 May 1944 and had been officially disclosed in full on 16 November 1944".⁵²

The prosecution of Rose had nothing to do with the obvious lack of value in the information divulged. As revealed by Canada's Minister of Munitions and Supply after the exposure of the spy story, "Howe called in the press to explain that Canada really had no secrets that could be stolen".⁵³ Of the total of twenty trials arising from the royal commission's determinations, only ten people were actually convicted of a punishable crime, but the longest sentences of six years in prison were meted out to Fred Rose, Communist MP, and a high ranking CPC official, Sam Carr.

As outlined in a letter from the Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, S. T. Wood, to the Minister of Justice, Louis St. Laurent, the RCMP were focused on "two of the code-names that appeared repeatedly in Gouzenko's documents and that the Mounties linked to Communist MP Fred Rose and to a prominent party organizer in Toronto [Sam Carr]".⁵⁴ The government of Canada was determined to intentionally repress the influence of a freely elected parliamentarian. The aftermath of the Gouzenko Affair produced an intense

⁵² Whitaker and Marcuse, 73.

⁵³ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 51.

obsession with security in the Western democracies, and made it the keyword in the anti-communist campaign.

Australia also invoked royal commissions to investigate communism. The first of these was the State of Victoria Royal Commission on Communism led by Sir Charles Lowe in 1949-50. This investigation was called forth by the allegations in a series of articles in *The Melbourne Herald* by Cecil Sharpley, a CPA member who had renounced his former associates and decided to expose their tactics for obtaining control of certain unions. With the election of the Menzies government in 1949 a direct attack on the CPA was the Communist Party Dissolution Bill of 1950, which was defeated in a referendum in late 1951 by the narrowest of margins. The defection of the Petrovs launched The Royal Commission on Espionage, which basically engaged in minor harassment of CPA officials, “as Petrov’s documents did not provide evidence of recent Soviet espionage success in Australia on a scale comparable to those scored by Gouzenko’s chief, Colonel Zabotin, in Canada”.⁵⁵ As one of the ASIO officers assigned to the interrogation of the Petrovs and with exhaustive knowledge of the contents of documents H and J, the Moscow correspondence and a miscellany called the G series, Thwaites concluded that, “the Commission did not disclose any major instance of successful current espionage by Australians”.⁵⁶

Visual Representations of Communism and Anti-Communism

Photographs are part of this collection of views that constitute a conceptualisation of one ideology compared to another. For the purposes of this thesis, a worthwhile examination of the ideological implications of photographic images is a comparison between two of the most prominent representatives of Australian and Canadian communism and their anti-communist counterparts. The unspoken part of the defectors’ story is their physical presence, which tended to undermine the plausibility of their revelations. For instance, Gouzenko’s photograph clearly illustrated the interplay of context and meaning as mediated constructs. As Robert Bothwell explained, “From time to time he [Gouzenko] emerged from the shadows, always wearing a protective mask, which for most Canadians became his trademark”.⁵⁷ The necessity for the covering of Gouzenko’s face was stated as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police’s concern for his security. Gouzenko with the hood over his head with holes snipped out for his eyes and mouth carried all the residual terror associated with the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, the white supremacist secret organisation often connected to virulent anti-

⁵⁵ Michael Thwaites, *Truth Will Out: ASIO and the Petrovs*, (Sydney: William Collins, 1980) 108.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁵⁷ Robert Bothwell, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, (Edmonton, AB: Hurtig Publishers, 1985) 754.

Semitism, anti-Catholicism and overt racist violence against blacks in the southern states of the USA. It is quite important to note the use of 'shadows' by Bothwell, as this term is usually linked to descriptions of communists and not their opposite. It is understandable that Gouzenko's public appearances were very few, further adding to the mystery of his presence.



Igor Gouzenko, Toronto, late 1954, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, page 754, photographer unknown.

The Communist Parties of Canada and Australia and their opponents, the conservative forces bound to the new imperialism of America and its leading capitalists, fabricated their arsenals of image and trope in the heavily mediated environment of the publishing and radio media, as television did not start in Canada until 1952 and in Australia in 1954. Each side was determined to dominate the discursive and imagistic space of the text which surrounds the photograph, this gap, as Barthes formulated, “is *read*, attached...to a traditional stock of signs; now, every sign supposes a code, and it is this code (of connotation)”⁵⁸ upon which the conflict turned. Saturating this gap with captions, headlines and commentary, each side sought to redefine the presence of the communist and transmit it via the publishing media to the public sphere. This construct is not only rhetorical but imaginary, as Bill Nichols

⁵⁸ Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 7.

explained, it “pertains to views, images, fictions, or representations that contribute to our sense of who we are and to our everyday engagement with the world”.⁵⁹

In the context of Canadian communism, the image of Dr Henry Norman Bethune (1890-1939) has been proffered for over sixty years as the face of the benevolent party member selflessly serving the needs of the revolutionary proletariat in Europe and Asia. Bethune’s portrait taken in Madrid on February 2, 1937, whilst on voluntary duty as head of the Canadian Blood Transfusion Service attached to the Republican Army during the Spanish Civil War, bears no implication of malice and tends to contradict the lurking potential for aggression engrained in media treatments of the Communist. Bethune’s communism only assumed strategic importance in the 1960s, especially through the production of a National Film Board of Canada biography directed by Donald Brittain. Bethune’s connection to Mao Zedong during his service with the Eighth Route Army made him a hero of the Great Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s. Chairman Mao’s *In Memory of Norman Bethune* became one of the most important documents for study in the revolutionary fervor of the time.

In it Chairman Mao praised “his utter devotion to others without any thought of self, [which] was shown in his great sense of responsibility in his work and his great warm-heartedness towards all comrades and the people. Every Communist must learn from him”.⁶⁰

After the defeat of the Kuomintang in 1949 and the communist accession to power, the “study of his [Bethune’s] life became part of the elementary school curriculum. Statuettes and posters depicted him as a heroic figure. Postage stamps bearing his image were issued”.⁶¹

Bethune’s popularity with the top Chinese leaders during the Cultural Revolution and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Canada and China in 1971 led the Canadian government to officially recognise Bethune as a Canadian of “national historic significance”⁶² on August 17, 1972. Some Canadians disagreed with the government’s decision based on their belief that the “recognition of a Communist represented a shocking repudiation of traditional Canadian values”.⁶³ The specifics of these ‘traditional Canadian values’ were never made clear. Perhaps the fact that Pierre Elliott Trudeau (1919-2000) was Prime Minister at the time played an important part in the decision-making process, as Trudeau himself had been labeled a Communist by Premier Maurice Duplessis of Quebec during the early 1950s. The politically charged intellectual climate engendered by the extreme rightwing Union Nationale

⁵⁹ Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the image: social representation in the cinema and other media*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981) 3.

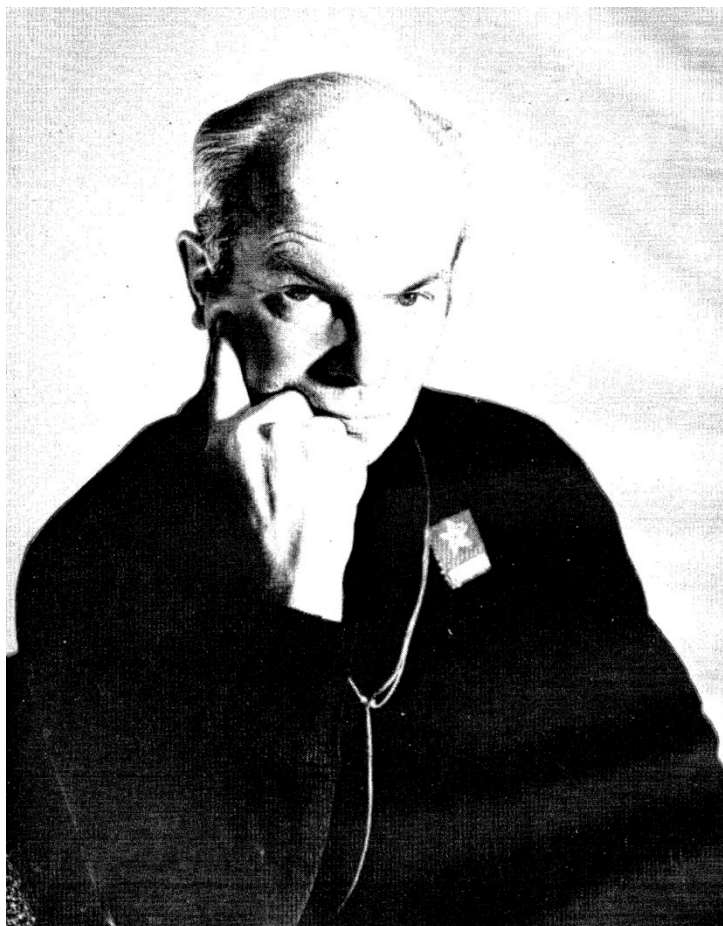
⁶⁰ Stewart, 1973, 197.

⁶¹ Ibid., 164.

⁶² Ibid., 166.

⁶³ Ibid., 167.

Party allowed them to consciously attack their opponents “as subversives, atheists, and Communist agents. The ‘Communist’ who was to prove the most prominent of all was Pierre Elliott Trudeau”.⁶⁴ This ‘smear’ tactic of the anti-communists did not prevent Trudeau from becoming one of the Three Wise Men recruited by Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson to the Liberal Party of Canada in 1965. Within three years he would replace Pearson as Prime Minister in 1968 and serve in that position until 1984, with a short interregnum as Opposition Leader for about nine months in 1979-1980.



Norman Bethune, Madrid Spain, early 1937, photographer unknown.

The contrast in these images between Bethune and Gouzenko points to the ambiguity of visual perception. It is only through the mediation of captions, headlines and commentary encoding these iconic signs that the observer is enabled to decode the message that has already been conferred on it. These images belong to a specific culture and find their relevance in a pattern of matching information circulating in that specific. These patterns are organised into codes and endure as cognitive structures, as Barthes interpreted it, “anchoring [the image] can be ideological; this is even...its main function; the text *directs* the reader among the various signifieds of the image,”⁶⁵ to which humans acquiesce in ordering social

⁶⁴ Whitaker and Marcuse, 298.

⁶⁵ Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, 29.

interaction. Through constant pinning down of the image, grounding it in a preconceptualised habitude, meaning can be extracted from it. As Bill Nicholls asserted, “A still image...is a remarkably mute object testifying only to a “having been there” of the image’s referent at that single instant in time of its capture...A large component of the work undertaken in the construction and reading of images becomes directed toward a distillation of that ambiguity of meaning into a more refined, and limited, concentrate”.⁶⁶

For the purposes of this thesis, images of Norman Bethune and Igor Gouzenko will operate as readily identifiable and culturally acceptable referents to Canadian communism and anti-communism. A similar match of Australian identities to fulfill similar functions occurs in the juxtaposition of Francis Joseph Hardy (1917-1994) and Vladimir Mikhailovich Petrov (1907-1991). Frank Hardy’s prominence as the accepted face of communism was brought into focus by his arrest and trial for libeling Mrs. John Wren in his fiction, *Power Without Glory*. As his obituary stated, “with the 1950 publication of Hardy’s *Power Without Glory* and the unprecedented political and legal uproar it engendered, communism was provided with an unmistakable local image”.⁶⁷ He accentuated his prominence by being one of the driving forces in the Realist Writers Groups of Melbourne and Sydney and providing support and direction to a number of communist writers, such as Dorothy Hewett and her social[ist] realist novel, *Bobbie Up*.

His photograph on the back cover of his most important novel, *But the Dead are Many*, projected the appearance of a nattily dressed professional, perhaps an academic, addressing a public audience. There is no overt suggestion of menace contained in his pose. Photographs of Petrov are not easily accessible. A reasonable selection appeared in *Truth Will Out: ASIO and the Petrovs* by Michael Thwaites. The one of Petrov hugging his dog, Jack, captured the friendliness of ‘the man and his dog’ attitude, much loved by Australians, but retained a certain roughness in the cigarette clenched between tight lips and the slight rumple in the shirt collar.

The need for a dog as protector, especially a German shepherd, could suggest a potential for violent confrontation. The small details in Petrov’s portrait negotiate connection to Barthes’ statement, “with regard to ‘good’ photographs, all we can say is that the *object speaks*, it induces us...to think”.⁶⁸

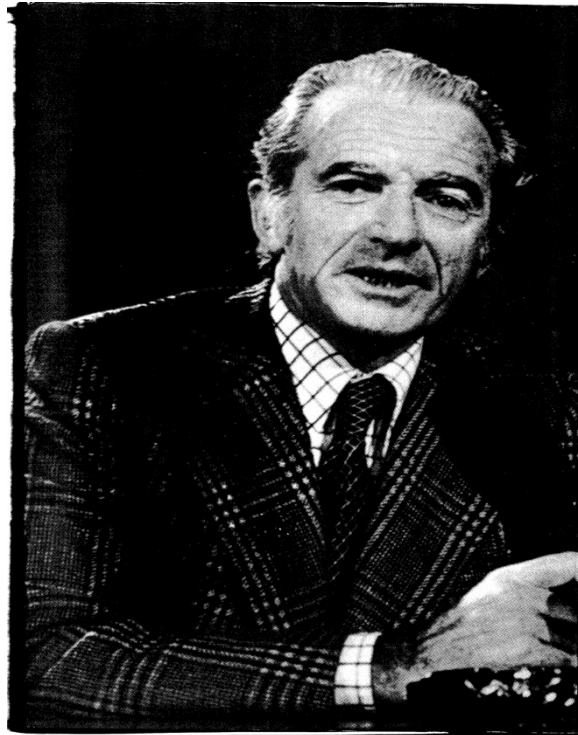
In my reading of these images, more threat and menace could be inferred in Gouzenko and Petrov compared to Bethune and Hardy. This is a clear instance of the paradox at the centre of interpretation of visual images. Essentially, to the Western consciousness the threat

⁶⁶ Nichols, 57.

⁶⁷ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 29, 1994, 11.

⁶⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: reflections on photography*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982) 38.

of communism came from a Soviet source, but in these instances we have two Soviets who are protecting the democracies of Australia and Canada, whilst the true blue Aussie and Canuck are undermining the foundations of their respective countries. The willingness of the Australian and Canadian governments to embrace the Soviet defectors as defenders of their way of life seems rather antithetical to the values they are defending. The Soviets are excused from the crime of which the Canadians were found guilty, passing classified information to a foreign power. It is these strategies of disconnection and reconnection that obscure the meaningfulness of the objects under examination and establish their, in Bill Nichols' phrase, "ambiguity of meaning."



Frank Hardy, location unknown, late 1975, photograph courtesy the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.



Vladimir Petrov, location unknown, late 1954, photographer Michael Thwaites.

Cold Warriors and Anti-Communist Hysteria

The emergence of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1947 played a pivotal role in counteracting the Soviet Union's worldwide drive toward political dominance. In the literary-cultural sphere, it brought into existence and financed the Congress for Cultural Freedom from 1950 to 1967. This organisation seized the democratic offensive on the cultural front, especially in Europe. It coordinated non-communist left intellectuals into a focused cultural formation providing publications and festivals in opposition to communist-initiated cultural products. How the hysteria of the era of anti-communism impacted on Australia and Canada can best be revealed in closely examining the careers of two prominent intellectuals, James McAuley and Watson Kirkconnell.

Sydney-born McAuley (1917-1976) found a platform for articulating a vehement anti-communist position when he was selected as editor of *Quadrant*, a literary-cultural journal sponsored by the Australian branch of the International Congress for Cultural Freedom. This Australian connection to international anti-communism was begun in 1954. The major players bringing about its formation were John Kerr, a labour lawyer who would be appointed Governor-General of Australia from July 1974 to December 1977, R. N. Spann, Professor of Government at The University of Sydney, Sir John Latham, retired Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia who had voted in favour of the Communist Party Dissolution Bill in 1951, Richard Krygier and McAuley.

As the membership rolls confirm, the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom (AACF) was not a totally new development on the political scene. It brought the separate

anti-communist activities of a number of prominent politicians together under the guise of support for cultural diversity. Krygier had worked for William Charles Wentworth (1907-2003), member of the House of Representatives for MacKellar electorate from 1949-1977, in his private campaign against communism in the late forties and this had opened communication with some prominent people and they eventually joined together to form the AACF.

The AACF avoided overt connection to Standish Keon (1913-1987), ALP member for Yarra electorate from 1949 to 1955 and one of the sitting members of the House of Representatives who were exiled from the ALP and formed the ALP (Anti-Communist), and B. A. Santamaria, the ideologue of the 'Movement'. Keon and Wentworth had teamed up two years earlier, on August 28, 1952 in a smear campaign over the grants by the Commonwealth Literary Fund to either known Communists or active workers for the Communist Party. Keon was the main parliamentary spokesman for the Catholic Social Studies Movement. Wentworth took up Keon's line of attack and suggested that "communist authors were not so much writing communist-oriented books as using CLF grants for 'sustenance', while pressing on with communist agitation"⁶⁹ in various endeavours. Keon and Wentworth articulated some far-fetched accusations under parliamentary privilege. When these were eventually disproved, their public credibility diminished considerably and the more discerning strategists at the AACF wisely decided to reject any direct involvement with them.

Unfortunately, the rather grave consequence of the Keon-Wentworth McCarthyist tactics was the total withdrawal of any financial support by the CLF between 1953 and 1966 for any communist writer, as Alan Ashbolt asserted, "only one kind of writer seems to have been excluded from the grants system - the avowed Communist. And only one kind of writing was excluded - writing that tried to interpret human behaviour or social and economic relations within a Marxist or quasi-Marxist frame of reference".⁷⁰ The suppression of communist writers became an active part of government policies but it did not prevent the publication of a substantial body of communist writing through the CPA's support for the Australasian Book Society.

The AACF was definitely an ultra-conservative group entirely focused on actively engendering anti-communist hysteria. As a construct of the CIA, it echoed the prevalent anti-communist rhetoric of the American media, "it used CIA money and the reputations of writers to give credibility to virulent anti-communist views".⁷¹

⁶⁹ Alan Ashbolt, "The Great Literary Witch-Hunt of 1952" in *Australia's First Cold War*, Vol. 1, ed. Ann Curthoys and John Merritt (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984) 160.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 181.

⁷¹ Susan McKernan, *A Question of Commitment*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989) 59.

McAuley had converted to Catholicism from Anglicanism in 1952. His conversion was formulated around restoring Catholic spirituality to a bland secular liberal society. McAuley's new faith offered him a "secure knowledge of the ordering of the spiritual world and the accounts of miracles and saints fascinated him".⁷²

McAuley's view of communism was entirely joined to the horrible and dreadful aspects formulated for it. To him, "it was not a political system supported by various groups of people, but an external thing, a Dragon, a 'Beast from the Abyss'. Once communism was seen in these terms the wars against it could become crusades, romantic battles against a monstrous evil".⁷³ McAuley ostensibly considered it his sacred duty to engage and defeat the Satanic representative in the communist partisan.

Throughout his life, he kept to a steadfast anti-communism by encouraging American involvement in the Vietnam War and forming a political group called Peace with Freedom in December 1965 to oppose the New Left on the campuses of Australian universities. Through this organisation he collaborated with ASIO's Special Projects division, "he considered it his political and moral obligation to report what he saw as subversive behaviour".⁷⁴ McAuley perceived the strategic cultural implications associated with the Cold War and positioned himself as the ultimate literary Cold Warrior in Australia. Ironically, the appearance of *Quadrant* in December 1956 coincided with the beginning of the end of communism's hold on intellectuals. With Nikita Khrushchev's revelations about the horrors of Stalinism at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in February and the USSR's armed repression of the Hungarian Uprising in October 1956, a large and influential number of Australian communist writers such as David Martin, Eric Lambert, Ian Turner and Stephen Murray-Smith and his journal *Overland* reexamined their commitments and moved into the non-communist left so that some eventually published in *Quadrant*, such as David Martin in 1960.

Canada's leading anti-communist in the literary sphere was Watson Kirkconnell (1895-1977), one of the founders of the Humanities Research Council of Canada and its president from 1943 to 1947. Located at Winnipeg's United College from 1922 to 1940, he wrote the section 'Publications in other languages' for the annual survey 'Letters in Canada' in the *University of Toronto Quarterly* from 1935 to 1965. His involvement with the HRCC was highlighted by the publication of *The Humanities in Canada* (1947), jointly written with A. S. P. Woodhouse, in which, "he placed the Cold War front and centre, arguing that Canadian scholars had a national duty to combat the ignorance and brutality of totalitarian

⁷² Ibid., 76.

⁷³ Ibid., 78.

⁷⁴ Cassandra Pybus, *The Devil and James McAuley*, (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1999) 224.

doctrines”.⁷⁵ Kirkconnell prided himself on revealing communist conspiracies to service clubs as their guest speaker. He claimed communists had taken over CCF clubs, the Student Christian Movement, and the National Federation of Canadian University Students on various university campuses. In 1947 he secretly authored a forty-page pamphlet for the Canadian Chamber of Commerce describing the dangers that communism posed for its members. Similarly to McAuley, he never abandoned this provocative ideological stance and affiliated himself in the late fifties, to an ultra-right “‘Freedom Foundation’ which denounced fluoridation of municipal water as a Communist plot and floated a phoney gold-prospecting scheme in British Columbia (including a secret machine for extracting the precious metal), the proceeds of which were to finance radio broadcasts to the enslaved people of Communist China”.⁷⁶

Kirkconnell and McAuley both offered their unwavering commitment to a revitalised Christian social order as their primary principle for sustaining an intellectual bulwark against communist infiltration and capture of literary and academic agendas. Kirkconnell wrote *Towards a Christian Social Order* (1945) for the Baptist Church over a part of which, the Baptist Union of Western Canada, he presided from 1938 to 1940. McAuley found a need for traditional religiosity and this was expressed for him in a renewed “Christian spiritual order”.⁷⁷ Both were successful at shrewdly co-opting anti-communism for personal advancement. They tend to confirm Edward W. Said’s comments that “Far from being a positive defense of freedom, organized anti-communism led aggressively to covert support by the CIA for otherwise unexceptionable groups as the Congress of Cultural Freedom”.⁷⁸

The fallout from anti-communism touched the daily lives of many important writers. One of the most bizarre instances involved Irene Baird (1901-1981), author of *Waste Heritage* (1939). She “was declared a ‘Communist’ by Ernest Bertrand, a minister from Quebec, supported vehemently by J. J. McCann, easily the most conservative minister in the Liberal government”.⁷⁹ The RCMP completely cleared her of any communist connection. She was even listed as a member of the council of the Writers’ War Committee, an anti-communist cultural group organised and chaired by Watson Kirkconnell from 1942 to 1944 in opposition to a communist-front group, the Writers’ Broadcasters’ and Artists’ War Council. A very similar incident was W. C. Wentworth’s suggestion about Kylie Tennant’s allegiance to the CPA in the parliamentary attacks by him and Keon on the Commonwealth Literary

⁷⁵ Whitaker and Marcuse, 278.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 279.

⁷⁷ McKernan, 80.

⁷⁸ Edward W. Said, “Gods That Always Fail,” *Raritan Journal* (Spring 1994) 7.

⁷⁹ Whitaker and Marcuse, 177.

Fund in 1952. Wentworth's backdown over this allegation was one of the main causes for the gradual diminishing of public credibility to the Keon-Wentworth accusations, but the innuendo communicated by these inaccurate remarks must have severely damaged both writers' reputations with their readers and probably curtailed their book sales significantly.

In examining the excesses of anti-communist hysteria, perhaps its clearest illustration as a 'phantom' menace is evident in the film, *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), directed by Ron Howard, in which the famous American Nobel Prize winner, John Forbes Nash, is revealed as a paranoid schizophrenic obsessed with discovering Soviet conspiracy codes in popular American media. His brilliant analytical research allowed him to discover a truly original idea, the Equilibrium Theory, which challenged years of economic thinking and led to the award of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 1994 to him.

During the height of the Cold War in the 1950s, Nash was a member of the mathematics faculty at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology from 1951 to 1959. It was during 1959 that his psychiatric condition manifested itself and recurred for a considerable period of time. It only began to regress as he himself stated in his Nobel autobiography, when he began to reject "politically-oriented thinking as essentially a hopeless waste of intellectual effort".⁸⁰

Through the imaginary character of William Parcher, a Department of Defense undercover operative, Nash is recruited to work on decoding what he perceived as secret Soviet encryptions in newspapers and magazines. He locked himself into his garage behind his home for long periods of time while he investigated the codes through sinister, he believed, mathematical formulations, which indulged his appetite for patterns. He was involved in a fantasy car chase scene when he believed Soviet agents were about to kidnap him. He also believed that he had a coded number implanted in his wrist which could be used to access high security areas but the implant never existed.

For the focus of this thesis, the real life experiences of Dr Nash serve as a cautionary tale on the extremes that the hysteria of the Cold War produced in the mind of one extraordinary individual. If someone as intelligent as Dr Nash could fall victim to the threat and menace perceived in the Communist image, the majority of the public at large, the average citizen, stood little chance of evading these negative connotations through the manipulations of the mass media in their assessment of this ideology. This threat was transferred by the unity of the English speaking world's intelligence systems' interconnectedness to Australia and Canada and similarly affected their citizens. The markers of evil and inferiority assigned to the communist successfully negotiated the process of

⁸⁰ Torsten Persson, ed. *Economic Sciences 1991-1995*, (Singapore: World Scientific, 1997) 201.

mediation in the fissure or gap that was at play in the imaginary space that Nicholls defined in an earlier reference to him.

Worthy of some thought is how the eliding of the Eurocentric basis of Communism, that is, its very Europeaness, made it impractical to the settler-invader cultures of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Too many of its propositions were fixed on a stultifying social system that was contrary to the mobility in social class evident in these new social communities where a manual labourer, like E. G. Theodore (1884-1950) could become Premier of Queensland from 1919-1925 or an ex-policeman, Bill Hayden, serve as Governor-General of Australia from 1989-1996.

Perhaps the most important difference in Australia in determining the fate of Communism was the coming into existence of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in 1891. Its early parliamentary success positioned it as the party of the working class even before Federation in 1901. Contrast this situation with that of Canada where the social democratic Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) did not appear until 1932 and this period of over thirty years provides a crucial factor in analysing the impact of Communism in Australia and Canada. The power of the ALP, especially at the federal level under Prime Ministers such as Andrew Fisher and James Scullin, before the beginning of the CCF gave social democratic reformism an extremely prominent vantage on the Australian political scene. With the ALP as the party of labour, the CPA would always encounter difficulty promoting itself as the vanguard of the proletariat, a proletariat with ready access to government through the ALP. The murky interrelatedness of the ALP and the CPA as with the CPC and the CCF/NDP deserves intensive research in its own right, which is beyond the scope of this thesis to accommodate.

The CPA and the CPC's collective resistance to capitalism and colonialism could be reconfigured for the purpose of this thesis as a 'postcolonial' communism in response to the Stalinist domination of the CPSU, based on the success of the revolution and civil war. They could only offer a minority counter-discourse to the pervasive rhetoric of the majority of writers inclined toward liberalism or conservatism. They did not have the official approval and support of constituted authority which energised the CPSU and directed the bureaucracy of the USSR. They had to operate outside of approved channels through underground or anti-authoritarian structures whilst combating the repression of the security forces, through direct surveillance and/or harassment and incarceration. These operational circumstances could not be correlated into a coherent state-sponsored unity, 'postcolonial' communist writers were relegated to outcaste status whilst the Soviets could dispense awards, medals and overseas excursions as prizes to their literary elite.

The Stalinist hegemony of the CPSU was grounded in the precept of revolution in one country, and completely disavowed any connection to the international revolutionary stance of the Trotskyists. This principle formed the foundational underpinning of the Communist International and its constant fluctuations in policy undermined the relevance of external party organisations on the periphery of the USSR and its eastern European satellites.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, communism has come full circle, returning to the spectral status of *The Communist Manifesto*. It exists today as a haunting presence, an apparition from the past, eternally lurking in the background of the political and literary history of the twentieth century. It was a collective illusion, as its believers never actually came close to achieving Marx's formulation of it as the higher stage beyond socialism, "that self-governing, stateless, co-operative society which has never existed anywhere".⁸¹ This thesis is an exploration into the space of the communist image as an integral part of the literatures of Australia and Canada.

This exploration is divided into two equal parts, chapters one to three, which interrogates Canadian drama, fiction and poetry; and chapters four to six, which investigate Australian literature and communism in the same sequence. Chapter one focuses on important members of the CPC, who became the subjects of dramatic presentations. Most prominent was the general secretary of the party from 1929 to 1962, Tim Buck, whose conviction and incarceration in 1932 form the basis for *Eight Men Speak* (1933). The life of Canada's metonymy for communism, Norman Bethune, became the focus for a trio of plays about his missions in Spain and China prior to World War II. Carol Bolt's *Buffalo Jump* (1972) detailed the events of a famous incident during the Depression era in Canada, the On-to-Ottawa Trek in 1935, which provoked a serious confrontation between the unemployed marchers, represented by 'Red' Evans, and the Conservative government of Prime Minister R. B. Bennett. Together they combined to form the 'Red Stars' of the Canadian stage. George Ryga in Vancouver and David Fennario in Montreal are formulated as Marxists with a primary allegiance to proletarian issues and images whilst sustaining the tropes of communism.

Chapter two dissects the fiction of Canadian communism with the decade of the 1930s emerging as the focus of the writing of ultra-radicals through three distinct phases of their work. This is examined through the 'positive hero' formulation of Soviet socialist realism and its dialectic of 'consciousness/spontaneity' as it appears in the father-son nexus. The main area of fictional reinvention was the contest for the allegiance of the politically astute and the disclosure of covert operations by governmental agencies to undermine these political activists. This is seen in Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage* (1939), Dyson Carter's *Tomorrow Is with Us* (1950), Earle Birney's *Down the Long Table* (1955) and Hugh Garner's

⁸¹ Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2009) 101.

Cabbagetown (1968). The quasi-autobiographical diary format in the 1970s delves into the awareness of the politically literate who demur from any connection to a collectivity, thereby reducing any possibility of achieving social change. The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War emerges as a source for the romanticisation of Canadian communism to tactically counteract the defeat and despair in the struggles at home.

The Canadian poetry chapter identifies a verifiable chain of connection in the appellation of the ‘people’s’ poet, through the writing of Milton Acorn, Dorothy Livesay and Joe Wallace. This metonymy played a prominent part in their concept of the direction of poetic activity. It was overtaken in the 1970s and 1980s by the considerable number of poems dedicated to or referencing Norman Bethune, which repositioned him as the primary metonymy of Canadian communism. His presence as an important participant in the Canadian poetic canon has never been sufficiently acknowledged in any literary historical treatment of Canadian poetry.

The Australian chapters follow the same sequence as the Canadian ones. Australian drama found its centre in the strike scenario, beginning in the 1930s in Betty Roland’s *The Miners’ Speak*, and Katherine Susannah Prichard’s *Solidarity*, and projected the CP/union organiser as the primary representative of communism in Australia. This portrait of the working-class hero was continued in Cusack’s *Comets Soon Pass* and Hewett’s *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home*. A sophisticated interrogation of Soviet communism and its internal squabbles was presented in Stephen Sewell’s *Traitors*, whilst Ron Blair’s *Marx* questioned the great theoretician’s public commitment to revolutionary action whilst undermining it in the private sphere. The image of the communist appears as a compromised figure, unable to sustain the dynamism of the revolutionary position in the dire circumstances of loss and defeat.

Australian fiction initially encountered the communist presence as the strike organiser in the Depression era in the works of John Harcourt’s *Upsurge* and Jean Devanny’s *Sugar Heaven*. Unfortunately, the defeat of their struggles leaves them in dire straits, either incarcerated or suffering from severe health issues. The postwar period brought awareness of the tenets of Soviet socialist realism to the literary coterie of committed members of the Communist Party of Australia. Frank Hardy, Dorothy Hewett and Judah Waten embarked on adapting the conventions of Soviet socialist realism’s ‘positive hero’ to Australian fiction. Through the support of CPA initiatives, the Realist Writers Groups and the Australasian Book Society, they took on the difficult task of producing *the* Australian communist novel.

In the final chapter, the concept of the ‘New World’ of communist domination and control took hold and became the primary metonymy of communist poetry. It brought the aura of an earthly paradise into Australian poetic discourse, superimposing a communist

future on the outdated colonial meaning intended by the term. This 'New World' of communist Australia found expression in the anthology, *New World-New Song*, which brought the work of proletarian poets to the public's attention.

There were many similarities in the writing of communist drama, fiction and poetry in the "New World" of Australia and Canada. My primary principle of selection is the writer's acceptance of a Marxist analysis of the social structure, which meant for some a concomitant adherence to the Stalinist CPA or CPC, although a few chose other organised variants of Marxism, such as the Trotskyist Earle Birney, or the DeLeonist David Fennario, or the Maoist Sharon Stevenson, whilst others steered clear of any overt political connection, but retained a commitment to interpreting the dynamics of social interaction from a Marxist or quasi-Marxist perspective. Allegiance to these variants of Marxism meant a refusal of the USSR's signifying force in their writing. They transmogrified the symbols of the USSR, especially in poetry, to project an alternative vision of communism, either one dominated by a concentration on the national aspect of it or one offering a closer connection to the leadership of Mao Zedong. This Sino-Soviet split is clearly evident in the work of Sharon Stevenson, who envisioned the future communist Canada as a "red dawn," a variant of "New World," dominated by Mao's conception of communism and in Juan Butler's *Cabbagetown Diary* (1970), in which the protagonist refuses connection to the Revolutionary Action Party (RAP), the ultimate determinant in Mao's interpretation of Marxism-Leninism is summarised in the party's name.

Their commitment to a Marxist or quasi-Marxist perspective is one that is overlooked or denigrated by practitioners of literary criticism which denied them entry into the canon of their particular national literature. A feminist inspired reinterpretation of women writers has allowed Jean Devanny and Dorothy Hewett to attain the status of feminist icons in their confrontations with the male establishment of the CPA. They have been reformulated as early feminists in the struggle against patriarchy and their writing is seen as extremely crucial to the development of Australian feminist criticism. This rereading has also gained Canada's Dorothy Livesay a greater contemporary relevance. Documenting these writers and their resistance to colonialism and capitalism originated in Dorothy Livesay's blatant critique of the oppression suffered by political dissidents in Canada, they "are condemned never to be heard in our popular periodicals: MacLean's, Saturday Night, Books in Canada, Today. How many of these have taken serious note of the poetry of struggle, of novels about the Thirties such as Oscar Ryan's *Soon to be Born*, of Joe Wallace's *Collected Poems*, of Milton Acorn's *More Poems for People*,...Concerning this side of Canadian writing there exists only the

persecution of silence”.⁸² This thesis seeks to shatter the silence suffusing this literature, especially in Canada, as it traces an initial attempt at “mining” the archive of communist writing as it swiftly vanishes from the knowledge networks of the literary intelligentsia. It aims to transmit a comprehension of the residue of an ideology that had a significant impact on the literature of the twentieth century in Australia and Canada.

⁸² Dorothy Livesay, *Right Hand Left Hand* (Erin, ON.: Press Porcupine, 1977) Foreword, p.ii.

Chapter One

Bethune/Buck/Evans: 'Red Stars' on Centre Stage

The “red stars” of Communist drama were all leading CPC members, Norman Bethune, Tim Buck and Arthur Evans. In this chapter I will closely investigate their representations through the tropes of the communist, as working-class heroes, or, in Bethune’s case, the Stakhanovite, the scientific socialist, the peace activist and the martyr to the cause. Through his prominence in the Canadian imagination, which has been dissected in detail in the introduction to this thesis, Dr. Norman Bethune, has been the focus of three plays written over a period of many years, the staging of these biographical memoirs shattered his preconceived popular mythology and inadvertently revealed a multiplicity of Bethunes. Tim Buck, general secretary of the CPC from 1929 to 1962 and the leading figure in the imprisonment of the so-called “Kingston 8” in 1932, dominated Oscar Ryan *et al*’s *Eight Men Speak* (1933), whilst Arthur Evans, a CPC member who organised the On-to-Ottawa Trek, a memorable event during the Depression, was the focus of Carol Bolt’s *Buffalo Jump* (1972). They had important events in their lives dramatically displayed within the trope of the martyr to the cause, as all three embodied the “positive hero” projection of ‘New World’ social[ist] realism on centre stage. They conveyed the politically correct image of the communist, whilst combating the negative tropes of the alien, the Sovietophile, the AntiChrist and the disease carrier in the ongoing confrontation between capitalism and its ultra-radical ideological alternative.

Two outstanding playwrights, George Ryga (1932-1987) and David Fennario (1947-), rewrote versions of the encounters between the marginalised and dispossessed and constituted authority from a distinctly ultra-radical stance without any direct involvement with the CPC. Ryga’s *Grass and Wild Strawberries* (1969) and *Captives of the Faceless Drummer* (1971) were extremely provocative plays designed to shock complacent audiences with their articulation of the encounter between the ‘New Left’ activists and the ‘Old Left’ establishment. Fennario concentrated on the working-class English-speaking community of Point Saint Charles and their wish for unionisation and improved working conditions within a radically different Quebec. They brought potent political dimensions to the forefront of theatrical awareness in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. They put their personal reinterpretation of *narodnost*, the spirit of the people, at centre stage and reinvigorated the trope of the subversive from an openly Marxist perspective.

In English-speaking Canada, theatre committed to political issues emerged as the agitation propaganda arm of the CPC during the early part of the Depression, from 1932-

1935. It was an initiative of the Stalinist ascendancy in the party, which embarked on building arts groups as a strategy to promote revolutionary change in the public sphere. In the early part of 1932, 35 members of a Saturday afternoon discussion group, as Robin Endres and Richard Wright asserted in their book, who were “mostly students and blue-collar workers, the latter predominating”⁸³ transformed themselves into the Progressive Arts Club (PAC) of Toronto. The club separated itself into three units consisting of writers, actors and trades personnel. This theatrical outfit brought to production a number of agitprop plays under the banner of the Workers’ Experimental Theatre, which shortened its name to the Workers’ Theatre from 1932 to late 1934. These plays depicted dire social issues exacerbated by the destructive effects imposed by the world economic collapse of the Depression. Two of the most influential figures at this time were CPC operatives, Oscar Ryan and Dorothy Livesay.

The Workers’ Theatre operated on the principles of mobility and speed, props and costumes were very simple constructions and lighting and scenery were the natural backdrops of their location. Agitprop conventions are described as “pointed, sketch-like situations, the songs and choruses directed at the audience, the threadlike dramaturgy, loosely linking scenes and songs”.⁸⁴ Agitprop productions were very short and direct, they avoided any concentration on the individual and his/her personal concerns, characters represented either the working class or the ruling class. It was essentially a vibrant display of working class issues directed to passersby on the street or gatherings of the unemployed or strikers. As Toby Gordon Ryan recollected its first production, “the play presented was *Deported*, a realistic play depicting a family of foreign-born workers, celebrating the betrothal of their eldest son, when they are served notice they are to be deported as charges of the state”.⁸⁵ Deportation was a government measure in widespread use as a means of repressing opposition and reinforced the trope of the alien as a way of perceiving the communist menace.

One prominent member of the Workers’ Theatre was CPC activist Dorothy Livesay, who acted as the secretary of the PAC, Montreal branch. She wrote *Joe Derry* (1933), a dramatic piece for children centred on the arrest of the leader of the Young Communist League (YCL) of Canada. She outlined Joe’s life beginning with the impoverishment of his childhood, as the child narrator related,

“But after his father lost his job

When they layed the men off, then it was bread

⁸³ Robin Endres and Richard Wright, eds *Eight Men Speak and Other Plays from the Canadian Workers’ Theatre*, (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1976) xxiii.

⁸⁴ John Willett, ed. *Brecht on Theatre: the development of an aesthetic*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) 61.

⁸⁵ Toby Gordon Ryan, *Stage Left: Canadian Theatre in the Thirties: A Memoir*, (Toronto: CTR Publications, 1981) 34.

He got only, and shabbier clothes
Paper shoes for his feet – no cap for his head”.⁸⁶

The struggling youth is transformed from his state of spontaneity into a higher consciousness when he becomes the organiser of a protest by unemployed workers, on the need for warm clothing to combat the devastating Canadian winter,

“They didn’t get it, until Joe said:
‘Let’s all go together, and demand it instead!’
In a strong body they marched together,
And behold! They got clothes for the winter weather!”⁸⁷

Then Joe is endowed with the peace activist trope as the reason for his arrest,
“Because he was the one who dared to tell
The truth about war”.⁸⁸

Her closing lines blatantly appealed for unity amongst all workers, calling for class solidarity as the only way to substantial gains for the proletariat.

Livesay formulated Joe Derry as a working-class hero, using the tropes of the organiser of the unemployed, the peace activist and the self-sacrificer, as outlined in my introduction to this thesis, to create a champion of the class struggle, as befitted the leader of the YCL. She articulated all three pillars of Soviet socialist realism, *narodnost*, *ideinost* and above all, *partinost*, high ideological consciousness and dedication to party political matters, to deliver the correct ideological perspective to the audience. In her attention to Derry, Livesay developed the ‘positive hero’ image, transforming him from the child of ‘spontaneity’ to the youth of ‘consciousness’.

In *Struggle* (1934), a mass chant composed for two groups one on either side of a stage, Livesay offered a reaffirmation of the CPC’s centrality to the class struggle in comparing the conditions of workers in Germany and Canada. In this sequence of exchanges she attacked fascism and the methods of the Nazis, whilst retracing many crucial events that reiterated the martyrs of the Canadian communist cause.

“Because three miners of Estevan, striking, were murdered in cold blood
Tim Buck forced to be silent!
Nick Zynchuk was shot in the back”.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Dorothy Livesay, *Right Hand Left Hand*, (Erin, ON: Press Porcupine, 1977) 108.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

Livesay pointed directly to the source of salvation for the workers,
“Who leads strikes in Germany?
The communists
Who demands work for the jobless?
The communists
Who fights against fascism?
The COMMUNISTS!”⁹⁰

Livesay’s praise of the party exemplified the concept of *partinost*, the central tenet of communist belief. The capital letters served to bolster the intent of placing the party at the forefront of the play’s reception by the reader. In her closing rhetorical questions, she reiterated the tropes of the working class hero, the peace activist and the martyr as the images of communist representation.

Another prominent communist who created pieces for the Workers’ Theatre, Oscar Ryan, then a CPC member employed as the publicity director of the Canadian Labour Defense League (CLDL), wrote *Unity* for a May Day rally at Hygeia Hall in downtown Toronto in 1933, the traditional day for expressing labour solidarity. In this short piece, Ryan had four well-dressed representatives of capitalism elucidate for the Canadian public on the evil actions emanating from Russia,

“2nd Cap.: Don’t you realize that the cause of all our troubles
(slowly) Is Russia?
(bitterly) Russia . . .
If only we got her out of the way, we’d have prosperity again!
Russia is a threat to our civilization, to you,
(loudly) to ME!”⁹¹

This characterisation of the capitalist applied the trope of the subversive with the accusation that the Russians were the cause of the Depression by flooding Western markets with cheap Soviet-made goods. It boldly suggested that the communists are an economic force of major proportions.

“2nd Cap.: That Russia’s dumping goods? That’s why we have a depression”.⁹²

⁸⁹ Ibid., 97.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 99.

⁹¹ Endres and Wright, 99.

⁹² Ibid., 100.

Then the capitalists in unison pointed to the usual suspects lurking on the fringe of society as the perpetrators of the Depression.

“1st Cap.: Less say ‘sall the fault of the Jews.

3rd Cap.: And the Indians.

2nd Cap.: And of course the Reds.

4th Cap.: Not the Jews, Not the Indians – Only the Reds!”⁹³

This quote exemplified the interconnectedness between the natives and the metis, offspring of Europeans and natives in Canada, as the primary menace that endangered nineteenth century Canada, and the communists, who had replaced them as the primary threat to the security of Canadian society in the twentieth century. This nexus between the communists and the natives/metis will be detailed in a comparison between their leading representatives, Norman Bethune and Louis Riel, in the section of this chapter focused on Bethune’s dramatic representation. Ascribing blame for the Depression to the reds reinforced the trope of the communist as subversive, they have undermined the economic base of social stability.

In opposition to these representatives, four workers pleaded for class unity, as the title suggests, as the only way to victory over the capitalists. As Endres and Wright pointed out, “agitprop theatre, written and performed by and for workers, was genuinely a workers’ political movement”⁹⁴ with the aim of enhancing proletarian solidarity by exhorting the audience through a call to action.

“4th Worker: And we shall defeat them, All our enemies, All, Through UNITY!

Crowd: (with clenched fists) Through united struggle!

4th Worker: Strong as steel, We must build Our UNITY!

4 Workers: UNITY

Crowd: (with clenched fists toward banner): UNITY UNITY! U N I T Y!”⁹⁵

In giving the clenched fist salute signifying the communists to the audience, Ryan evoked a direct physical non-verbal expression of the call to unity voiced by the actors on stage, a unity of mind and body evident to all.

Ryan’s playwriting continued in his contribution to the pivotal work of communist

⁹³ Ibid., 101-02.

⁹⁴ Ibid., xv.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 106.

expression in the 1930s, *Eight Men Speak* (1933), a dramatisation of the real life experiences of the imprisoned Kingston 8, then a focus of radical activity and a rallying point for public demonstrations and protests, which he partially authored in collaboration with Frank Love and two others. Love had written the groundbreaking *Looking Forward*, performed in August 1933, which he summarised in his interview, “the play showed the father completely discouraged [and on welfare], but the daughter was after him to go out and advocate unemployment insurance on street corners, or to organize the unemployed”.⁹⁶ Love recalled its importance, “until that time, the Workers’ Theatre had concentrated on the mass recitation, which was very, very effective. This play had real people on stage...So *Looking Forward* was one of the first Canadian plays to deal with a mass problem of the Canadian people”.⁹⁷ Love’s explanation established the first verifiable instance of *narodnost* on the Canadian stage, the degree to which the spirit of the people is made intelligible to the masses⁹⁸ and portrayed the prototype of the working-class hero, offering the organiser trope as a positive symbol to the unemployed. He articulated one of the controlling dynamics of Soviet socialist realism before they were prescribed by the CPSU through A. A. Zhdanov’s presentation at the Congress of the Soviet Writers’ Union in 1934, presumably through his awareness of the Kharkov Resolutions.

In August 1931 the federal government, through the office of the Ontario attorney-general, had moved to destroy the CPC, a legal entity at the time. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police and their provincial and local cohorts were very thorough, “party headquarters, the office of *The Worker*, the offices of the Workers’ Unity League, and the homes of every member of the Political Bureau were raided”.⁹⁹ They were charged with violating Section 98(3) of the Criminal Code of Canada, its most potent clause deemed that a person was liable to twenty years in prison for simply attending a meeting or distributing the literature of an unlawful organisation.

The highlight of their trial was the testimony of Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Sergeant John Leopold, an undercover agent, “who took the stand, dressed in full Mountie regalia, to clarify the danger”.¹⁰⁰ The time-honoured Canadian representative of Law and Order was an effective tactic in the intentional portrayal of the communist as subversive by the prosecutors. Leopold’s appearance in court was the first instance of the federal

⁹⁶ Ryan, 26.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 28-9.

⁹⁸ A. Kemp-Welch, *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia, 1928-39*, (Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1991) 261.

⁹⁹ Merrily Weisbord, *The Strangest Dream, Canadian Communists, The Spy Trials, and The Cold War*, (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1983) 37.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 38.

government's public admission of covert surveillance as a part of their strategy for containing communism.

The government's imprisonment of the so-called Kingston 8, Tim Buck, the general secretary of the CPC, Tom Ewen, leader of the Workers Unity League, Malcolm Bruce, executive secretary of the Canadian Labour Defense League, Tom Hill, a leader of the Finnish Organization of Canada, Sam Carr, John Boychuk, Matthew Popovich and Tom Cacic, stimulated the collective creation of *Eight Men Speak* by four members of the PAC of Toronto, Oscar Ryan, Ed Cecil-Smith (who later became the commander of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War), the aforementioned Frank Love and Mildred Goldberg. Whilst serving their sentences of up to five years, the communists organised a strike among the inmates of Kingston Penitentiary on October 17, 1932. During the chaos and confusion of this strike, or as it was termed by official government reports, the riot, a guard purportedly fired into Buck's cell, "with eleven bullet holes [appearing] on the back wall".¹⁰¹ He was able to save himself from injury or death by hiding behind a concrete pillar. This attempted assassination, as Weisbord explained, "made him a labour hero, almost a martyr".¹⁰² Weisbord's martyr reference allowed for Buck's elevation to the highest level attainable for a communist leader.

News of the incident spread quickly across the country and elicited enormous public sympathy for the imprisoned communists. Although the guard involved was never charged, Buck was given an additional nine months sentence for participating in a riot. All these events were tied together in the play, the focus being the trial of Guard X by a workers' court for the attempted murder of Buck. The play is centred on the inversion of imagery concerning the standard communist representations of the alien, the Sovietophile and the AntiChrist, as James Doyle observed, "Communism, represented by the eight victims of bourgeois injustice and especially by Tim Buck, stands for moral rectitude, intelligence, family values, and a commitment to genuine justice".¹⁰³ The playwrights inverted the markers of the bourgeoisie and made the communists the advocates of Western capitalist democratic values.

Eight Men Speak was given its premiere and only performance on December 4, 1933 at the Standard Theatre in Toronto to a sold-out audience of over 1,500 people.¹⁰⁴ Its presentation prompted an immediate reactionary move by the Toronto Police Commission, which threatened to revoke the permit of any theatre manager concluding a rental agreement

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 39.

¹⁰² Ibid., 39.

¹⁰³ James Doyle, *Progressive Heritage: The Evolution of a Politically Radical Literary Tradition in Canada*, (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2002) 131.

¹⁰⁴ Endres and Wright, 13.

with the Progressive Arts Club, which brought about the cancellation of a second performance set for the night of January 15, 1934. This police suppression provoked protest meetings by all the PAC branches across the country. These nationwide demonstrations about the play's enforced closure may have influenced public opinion to the point where the Kingston 8 obtained early release from their sentences in the autumn of 1934. The impact of the play far surpassed the expectations of the playwrights and the CPC.

According to his own statement in *Stage Left*, Oscar Ryan not only co-wrote *Eight Men Speak*, he also directed it, "Jim Watts directed the early rehearsals and when the load became too big, turned over the job to me but continued as assistant".¹⁰⁵ Alan Filewod expanded Ryan's authority and positioned him as the personal representative of the CPC, "Ryan embodied the leadership of the Party in the revolutionary struggle, and when Watts turned over the job [of directing] to him, she was quite literally surrendering leadership of the production to the Party".¹⁰⁶ Ryan's prominence in the Party is explained by Filewod, "in 1929, he [Oscar Ryan] was one of Tim Buck's closest supporters, and a voting delegate to the party convention which brought the militant Stalinist faction led by Buck to power".¹⁰⁷

Filewod's statement about Ryan is confirmed in the official history of the CPC, *Canada's Party of Socialism*, wherein it explicitly cited his part, "representing the YCL at the convention and basing themselves on a resolution adopted by the YCL's National Executive Committee, Oscar Ryan and J. L. Farby declared their agreement with the criticism made by the Comintern and that section of the party opposed to MacDonald's theory".¹⁰⁸ The deposing of MacDonald, widely perceived as a Trotskyite, and the accession to power of Buck put the party firmly in the Stalinist camp, where it was to remain for the rest of its existence. Ryan's power is further enhanced by Filewod's description of a photograph on page 16 of the below-referenced *Australasian Drama Studies* issue's closing scene of the play, "the primary judge, seated in the centre and commanding the stage, is Oscar Ryan, whose upraised fist, clenched in revolutionary salute, provides a dynamic contrast to the diagonally pointing fingers of the other actors. Ryan is the iconic authority of the Party at the centre of the play".¹⁰⁹ Ryan in person repeated the clenched fist salute of the communists, with which he had already closed *Unity* but, this time, he is the representative of the CPC engaged as the focus of this gesture.

¹⁰⁵ Ryan, 44.

¹⁰⁶ Alan Filewod, "The comintern and the canon: Workers' Theatre, *Eight Men Speak* and the genealogy of *mise-en-scene*," *Australasian Drama Studies*, 29 (October 1996) 22-3.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰⁸ Communist Party of Canada, *Canada's Party of Socialism*, (Toronto: Progress Books, 1982) 58.

¹⁰⁹ Filewod, 23.

Ryan employed Brecht's concept of *gestus*,¹¹⁰ combining an action with the social meaning attached to it to communicate directly with the audience.

The opening of the play has the deputy warden elaborate a scenario to the warden intended to implicate Buck in the impending trouble by the prisoners, "Tim Buck, agitator, plots convict uprising. How'll that be?"¹¹¹ This scenario becomes a media reality in the hands of the editor of a Toronto newspaper. His interpretation of the events is formulated as "Tim Buck, communist secretary, understood to be riot leader".¹¹² This is encapsulated in the headline of the next edition as "Extra. Extra. All about Tim Buck riot leader".¹¹³ This viewpoint is taken up by the news announcer on radio station BUNK in Toronto and transmitted as, "from Kingston we hear that strong belief is entertained that Tim Buck, fiery communist leader, is at the bottom of the Kingston rioting".¹¹⁴ Buck's trial by media reportage insinuated that a corrupted and manipulated version of the communist leader is offered up for public consumption and this is emphasised by the play on the call letters of the radio station. 'Bunk' is claptrap or humbuggery and not correct about the facts, precisely the innuendo that the playwrights wished to communicate about the trial. Buck's trial by media has already presented him as guilty in the public's perception but this scene undermined that interpretation.

The reiteration of the negative tropes about communism is expressed by a member of the RCMP, the omnipresent representative of Law and Order in Canada from the time of the wars with the natives/metis. The officer emphatically stated, "I wish to point out that you need not believe anything these men say. None of these men are Christians".¹¹⁵ He goes on to remind the jury that "these men mean to break up your homes, rape your wives, teach your children to be atheists, and above all take away your money. Are we to allow these thieves and murderers to be loose in our country?"¹¹⁶

These attributes meet the criteria of the subversive, who undermines Western precepts and values, especially those concerning private property and the primacy of the family, and is enlarged by the addition of the presence of the AntiChrist, a non-believer in the doctrine of Christianity. Combined together they have the force of supreme evil about them, certainly the most serious elements in any negative depiction of the communist.

Two other common tropes used in anti-communist rhetoric are the constant defining

¹¹⁰ Willett, 47.

¹¹¹ Endres and Wright, 35.

¹¹² Ibid., 43.

¹¹³ Ibid., 43.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 45.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 48.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 48-9.

of the communists as outsiders and tools of the USSR. The tropes of the alien and the Sovietophile are repeated by a couple in a streetcar,

“Girl: That’s what my boss said. He says the whole thing was directed from Moscow.

Young man: If they don’t like this country why don’t they go back where they came from?”¹¹⁷

To counteract these stereotypes a concerted effort is made very early on to depict Buck as a caring father with a young family in a letter from his eight-year-old daughter, “When are you coming home, daddy? I hope it’s going to be soon, daddy. Anyway I’m getting big enough to fight for you and we’re going to work hard to get you out”.¹¹⁸ These sentiments seem overdetermined for a person of such an age to express, especially the work ethic part, creating an ambiguous portrayal through the adult authors’ construction of the child figure. The playwrights have entwined themselves in the tension between the necessity of formulating Buck as a positive hero in the Soviet socialist realist mode and the sentimentality appropriate to bourgeois fatherhood.

Then, the martyrs of Canadian communism, its pantheon of working-class heroes, are each given a cameo appearance. The three Estevan, Saskatchewan miners murdered during their encounter with the RCMP whilst at a parade in support of their strike in September 1931, introduce themselves and explain how they were killed, closing in a united exclamation,

“All Three: Because we organized!”¹¹⁹

In the following scene, another martyr tells his story, “I am Peter Grabowski, unemployed transient, shot in the back at Hornepayne”.¹²⁰ In the next scene, it’s the turn of a heroic dead partisan, “I am Nick Zynchuk, killed by a police bullet in the back, killed at an eviction in Montreal”.¹²¹ This scene continued with the testimony of the prisoner Thomas Jones, the occupant of the cell next to Buck, about the behaviour of the guards in the late afternoon of October 20, “two guards marked a spot with a small box in the yard west of the wing where Buck was confined. This definitely brought the line of fire to Buck’s location”.¹²²

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 44.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 36.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 58.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 59.

¹²¹ Ibid., 59.

¹²² Ibid., 60.

Then Scene 6 is the re-enactment of the assassination attempt done in shadow play with a sound track of five bullets being shot, the curtain dropping on the last shot. With this rapid transition, the play connected Buck directly with the dead martyrs and placed him in their pantheon by association.

When each of the Kingston 8 is given an opportunity to speak, they establish their working-class credentials in their call for class unity as the only way to combat capitalism,

“Boychuk: For behind us lies the strength of the strongest class of all.

All: THE WORKING CLASS!”¹²³

This links back to the previous works by Oscar Ryan and Dorothy Livesay in their appeal to proletarian unanimity as the most vital part of the pre-revolutionary struggle.

One of the most telling uses of simile in the play is the description of Guard X in the stage directions, “He looks around at the court like a cornered rat”.¹²⁴ Tim Buck, at the beginning of the play, had used the following words as part of his defence on the charge of inciting a riot, “You can be a man – or you can be a rat. I did not choose to be a rat!”¹²⁵ The imposition of negative animal imagery on to threatening forces is a common rhetorical device in propaganda strategies, insinuating the connotation of the rat as a carrier of disease into the minds of the listeners. The Australian slang expression ‘to rat on’ someone acts in a very similar fashion, indicating a betrayal of trust. Here the effect is opposite to its usual treatment in anti-communist oratory, Buck refused the rat image, continuing the inversion of values intended by the playwrights, and Guard X is defined by it.

Two important communists are mentioned in the script, the aforementioned Joe Derry of the YCL is named by one of the Eight, when he addressed the jury,

“Boychuk: Joe Derry, young worker, called upon the youth to resist war. He was arrested. His trial draws near. Section 98 may send him to a Kingston cell”.¹²⁶

This utterance reiterated his peace activist trope applied by Livesay in her *Joe Derry* (1933). Another prominent CPC member, who will play the leading part in Carol Bolt’s *Buffalo Jump* (1972), to be analysed later in this chapter, is also proclaimed as a victim of Section 98,

“Hill: Section 98 was used to jail Arthur Evans, leader of the striking coal

¹²³ Ibid., 66.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 88.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 50.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 64-5.

miners”.¹²⁷

This statement invoked the communist party/union organiser role for him, establishing Evans in the trope of a working class hero.

Filewod focused on the deletion of this play from the canon of Canadian theatre. As he explained it, “it was too subversive to include. *Eight Men Speak* had to be denied agency because of its origins as Communist propaganda, even though it articulated a theatrical vision that was imagistic, fragmented, discursive, decentred: that was in fact modernist, and expressed all the traits latterly ascribed to the postmodern”.¹²⁸ As a precursor of theatrical form, *Eight Men Speak* deserved a significant place in the history of Canadian drama, but its politics overruled such an inclusion. The theatricality of *Eight Men Speak* confirmed it as the major work of the Workers’ Theatre period.

The Workers’ Theatre fell victim to the machinations of the Comintern’s new political direction. At the end of 1934 the era of Third Period Communism, the establishment of Stalinist hegemony, was over and the movement toward the Popular Front strategy was underway. This was devised by Georgi Dimitrov, leader of the Comintern from 1935-1943, to counteract the rise of fascism in Western Europe. At the seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935, he proposed that the communist parties would work together with the social democrats to form governments of the left, although the communists would not take an active role in governing, only offering official support to them.¹²⁹ Filewod connected the demise of workers’ theatre to the articulation of ‘socialist realism’ at the Soviet Writers Congress of 1934. This development “brought a new vocabulary into play (or redeployed an older, displaced vocabulary) to disallow the modernism of the agitprop theatre – a disallowance in effect demanded by the politics of the Popular Front”.¹³⁰

The Workers’ Theatre was reorganised under the leadership of Jean ‘Jim’ Watts, friend and confidante of Dorothy Livesay, in the spring of 1935 as the Toronto Theatre of Action (1935-1940), a workers-theatre concept based on the American radical theatre troupe, the New Theatre League. This group put into practice the Popular Front phase of revolutionary theatre. It also paid close attention to developing professional acting skills among its members. The Theatre of Action made its presence known with the first Canadian production of the Clifford Odets classic, *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), on February 27, 1936. It drew praise in a review by a local journalist, “it was well directed by Miss Jim Watts and

¹²⁷ Ibid., 63.

¹²⁸ Filewod, 30.

¹²⁹ G. Stern, Ed. *Atlas of Communism*, (New York: Macmillan, 1991) 81-4.

¹³⁰ Filewod, 26.

Martin Loeb, and consistently well acted by a large cast”.¹³¹ The Theatre of Action thrived over the next five years, also launching a playwriting contest in *New Frontier* requesting new Canadian scripts only.

From an ideological perspective, the Theatre of Action’s most important production was *Steel* (1938) by John Wexley in mid-March 1938, as it connected theatre directly to the proletariat. Toby Gordon Ryan recounted, “Here was a play that would give us the opportunity to bring workers to the theatre to see themselves on stage...Most important, the play dealt in human terms and with honesty about the effort it required to bring a union into a plant”.¹³² The working class hero trope found a new location and relevance in this setting. It met with some success, as it was “awarded the prize for the best play in the Central Ontario Regional Festival in April, 1938”.¹³³ With the declaration of war in 1939, the Theatre of Action found it difficult to function, as Toby Gordon Ryan explained, “if there was one major reason for the disintegration of Theatre of Action in 1940, it was that the leadership of the group simply could not agree on our role during the war”.¹³⁴

In the recollections of the theatre’s alumnae, the visit of Canada’s preeminent communist, Norman Bethune, to a rehearsal is one of the treasured moments in their history, as Ben Lennick remembered it, “Another outstanding visitor we had was Norman Bethune...He came up to 490 Yonge Street...very tanned-looking, very healthy looking too, sort of a bronzed glow about him”.¹³⁵ It is important to note the mythic proportions to Bethune’s appearance, as if he has supernatural endowments. This physical description enhanced the image of Bethune, projecting him as godlike in his features, beyond the attributes of the average human being. In the nationalistic 1970s and 1980s, Bethune was himself to become the subject of important theatrical productions, which will be intensely examined through their own interconnectedness in the following section. They enriched the mythology about his life and reclaimed Canadian communism from its almost total erasure through dramatic presentation.

Dr Norman Bethune

The elevation of Bethune into *the* Communist superhero was a result of Chinese influence. Margaret Atwood proposed in her study, *Survival*, a connection between the leader

¹³¹ Pearl McCarthy, *The Mail and Empire*, Toronto, April 11, 1936, 18.

¹³² Ryan, 154.

¹³³ Ibid., 163.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 215.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 179.

of the native/metis opposition to the Canadian government in the nineteenth century, Louis Riel (1844-1885), and a previously mentioned communist representative, Arthur 'Red' Evans, "Carol Bolt's *Buffalo Jump*, tells the story of one of Riel's successors-in-spirit, Red Evans (a composite hero based on two historical figures) and his fight against R. B. Bennett, reincarnation of Sir John A., and his Goliath Mounties".¹³⁶ When Atwood's book was written, the Canadian government's establishment of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, inspired by President Nixon's famous trip to Beijing in February 1972 to meet Mao Zedong, had not yet taken place and the heroic connotations of the subject, Norman Bethune, had not become the focus of dramatic attention at this time. Atwood's perception of the link between Riel and Evans took place prior to the positioning of Bethune as the primary representative of Canadian communism through his prominence in China. An adjustment today would indicate an equivalency between Riel and Bethune as his 'successor-in-spirit'. This parallelism draws support from the large number of works about Riel, including a play by John Coulter, *The Crime of Louis Riel*,¹³⁷ an opera by Harry Somers, *Riel*,¹³⁸ a narrative poem by Don Gutteridge, *Riel*,¹³⁹ and Rudy Wiebe's fiction, *The Scorched-Wood People*.¹⁴⁰

Two works paid direct homage to Bethune after the rapprochement with China began. Rod Langley's biographical drama, *Bethune: A Play* (1974) outlined the major events in his life. It was first performed on November 5, 1974 at the Globe Theatre, Regina, Saskatchewan. Langley incorporated three of the positive tropes of the communist, with a slight shift in the working class hero trope away from union involvement, as this clashed with the Bethune family's upper class standing. Instead, he stressed the outstanding worker, the Stakhanovite, aspect in Bethune's determination to improve the lot of his patients at a tremendous cost to his own physical health and wellbeing.

Bethune's pro-capitalist stance in the opening act, when he arrived in Detroit, Michigan to set up practice is historically accurate.

"BETHUNE: Here a man can make his fortune overnight with astuteness and daring...It's a gold rush. It's exciting. Here I'll succeed."¹⁴¹

Larry Hannant, a specialist in Canadian history, confirmed that Bethune did not hold any extreme left wing views until the last years of his life, "in the years up to 1935 Bethune

¹³⁶ Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972) 169.

¹³⁷ John Coulter, *The Crime of Louis Riel*, (Toronto: Playwrights Co-op, 1976).

¹³⁸ Harry Somers, *Riel*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Television, 1969 directed by Leon Major.

¹³⁹ Don Gutteridge, *Riel: A Poem for Voices*, (Fredericton, NB: Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1968).

¹⁴⁰ Rudy Wiebe, *The Scorched-Wood People*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977).

¹⁴¹ Rod Langley, *Bethune: A Play*, (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1975) 12.

was anything but a leftist. For the first forty-five years of his life, Bethune showed no inclination to join the political fray. He was a communist for only the last four years”.¹⁴² The beginning of Bethune’s attraction to communism was his involvement, as its secretary, with the Montreal Group for the Security of the People’s Health in the autumn of 1935. Bethune played a vital part in this group, which produced Canada’s first organised plan for socialised medicine.¹⁴³ This is explained in a letter to Frances, his ex-wife.

The group’s plans were released as a manifesto a week before the provincial election on August 17, 1936 but it was accorded only an acknowledgement of receipt from the political leaders of the time. Bethune’s campaign at this juncture was on the abstract level of criticism and suggestions for reform. It would find concrete form in his struggle to bring medical help to the Republicans in Spain and, subsequently, Mao Zedong’s Eighth Route Army.

Whilst he was engaged in an attempt to extend medical care to the socially disadvantaged, Bethune took on the trope of the anti-fascist fighter in an exchange with a friend,

“BETHUNE: But believe me Fascism is a deadly disease. And it’s spreading too fast. Not spreading because there are millions of Fascist fanatics in the world, but because we let the disease spread by not giving a damn.

COLEMAN: Surely you don’t believe the Fascists will take over here!

BETHUNE: There was a Fascist rally here just last night – right here in Montreal”.¹⁴⁴

When he arrived in Spain, Bethune identified a serious flaw in the delivery of blood to the Republican soldiers on the front line. His innovation of the mobile blood transfusion service, which became his claim to fame in Canada, was a development inspired by his innate ability to adapt new advances in technology to medical practice and by his desire to alleviate unnecessary suffering in others. As Hannant explained, “Bethune’s great insight was to perceive the need for blood *at the front*. Moreover, at his baptism into the horrors of the Spanish war, the front and the blood supply were virtually in the same place – in Madrid...It became clear to him that in this battle raging in a major city the two conditions for an immediate successful blood service were at hand – supply and demand”.¹⁴⁵ Langley gave this realisation dramatic form in this dialogue in Act Three, Scene 1.

¹⁴² Larry Hannant, ed. *Norman Bethune’s Writing and Art*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) 70.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 106-114.

¹⁴⁴ Langley, 92-3.

¹⁴⁵ Hannant, 127-28

“COLONEL: Where do you get the blood for here? Not from the hospital. We need it for the next battle here.

BETHUNE: There’s people living in my no-man’s land. Thousands of them...I’ll get my blood from them”.¹⁴⁶

In his treatment of Bethune’s time in Spain, Langley alluded to his drunkenness and sexual promiscuity as the reasons for his forced return to Canada. This was substantially correct, as disclosed by Hannant’s research, it was his affair with a Swedish volunteer, Kajsa von Rothman, who was working as his secretary at the blood transfusion unit that precipitated his recall. Von Rothman had elicited the interest of the Republican security apparatus, which was dominated by the communists, and their suspicions and her connection to Bethune, created the conditions for their perception of a loss of faith in his commitment to the Republican cause. Hannant’s comments informed that the “Spanish authorities stared down their noses at Kajsa, seeing her as a woman of loose morals, a supporter of the anarchists (and hence suspect to the communists), and more ominously, a spy”.¹⁴⁷

Essentially, it was his own Canadian comrades who forced Bethune out of Spain. As Larry Hannant reported, “the Canadians in the transfusion unit were themselves critical of him and instrumental in having the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy (CASD) bring him back to Canada”.¹⁴⁸ Langley offered a rationale for this event in the assertion by a leading Communist, Louis Kon, that Bethune would be more effective on a fund-raising tour because of his profile as a media celebrity in Canada.

“KON: What they need is money! You’ve become a hero in the English-speaking press. You’re in a position to appeal for money”.¹⁴⁹

Bethune’s innovative mind extended to comprehending the power of the media to move the public’s perceptions, another instance of his ability to exploit technological advance in the furthering of the communist cause. He quickly grasped the importance of an emerging medium, film, in obtaining support for the transfusion unit’s work in Spain. He had organised a competent crew to collaborate on the production of a movie that would play a significant part in embellishing his appeal for funds with substantial evidence that the audience could see with their own eyes. This film, *The Heart of Spain* (1937), would act as a visual accompaniment to his oratorical skills. His cross-Canada speaking tour enabled Bethune to

¹⁴⁶ Langley, 111.

¹⁴⁷ Hannant, 126.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 127.

¹⁴⁹ Langley, 128.

reiterate his credentials as an anti-war campaigner to a larger audience than interpersonal conversation would allow. He attacked the Western powers for their lack of awareness.

“BETHUNE: What’s the matter with England, Canada, France, and the United States?...Why the World War has already started. In fact it’s in its third stage. Spain, Ethiopia, now China. It is Fascism versus Democracy!”¹⁵⁰

The speaking tour could not last forever, and, as he admitted, his time in Canada and Spain had come to an end, which forced him to embark in a new direction.

Bethune’s activities in China will elevate him to the highest status possible for a card-carrying communist, the martyr for the cause. His meeting with Mao Zedong was a memorable moment in his life, certainly the most important stimulus to his continued presence in China. Langley’s treatment of this very exciting incident in Bethune’s life is understated and indirect, in a conversation with a minor character. Langley sought to deemphasise the vitality of Bethune’s communism in order to make his image more palatable to the Canadian audience.

“BETHUNE: I met Mao Tse Tung. We talked till the early hours of the morning. Everything seemed possible. I had a team then. A nurse, a surgeon, a caravan of medical supplies and full financial support from an outfit called the China Aid Council in New York. Now I sit”.¹⁵¹

Bethune’s encounter with Mao Zedong could have been the basis for more dramatic impact than Langley’s casual mention of the event. As Hannant revealed, “Jean Ewen [the aforementioned nurse], who was at a meeting between Bethune and Mao in late March 1938, recalled Bethune presenting his Communist Party card to Mao, a card signed by Tim Buck”.¹⁵² Langley failed to make use of this vital document, which Hannant identified as the primary source of Bethune’s claim to martyrdom, “in Bethune, Mao was graced with a martyr who shared his own faith in the power of human audacity. Indeed, if Norman Bethune had not existed, Mao might have had to create him”.¹⁵³

Langley endowed martyr status on Bethune through the complete sacrifice of his physical abilities. This is brought out clearly in the comments of a fellow physician,

“HALL: Look in the mirror. You’ve aged twenty years. Operating thirty hours at a stretch, giving lectures, running off to battles. You’re going to kill yourself.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 129.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 133.

¹⁵² Hannant, 331.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 332.

BETHUNE: It's true my teeth need attention. I need new glasses and I've gone completely deaf in one ear but apart from that I'm in pretty good shape. And *if* I've aged twenty years at least, I'm a spry sixty-nine".¹⁵⁴

Most of these words are taken directly from a letter written by Bethune on August 15, 1939 addressed to Dear Tim [Buck] and Canadian Comrades as reprinted in *Politics of Passion*.¹⁵⁵ Langley had Bethune announce his own oncoming death in the final scene,

"He holds up his bandaged arm.

BETHUNE: Blood poisoning. I cut it when I was operating. Careless. I've tried soaking the damn thing in formalgamate. It's no good, I'm septic".¹⁵⁶

Langley's ending seemed to echo Larry Hannant's view of Bethune's political consciousness, "Bethune's writing is virtually bereft of either the trappings or the structural foundations of Marxist philosophy...Ultimately, Bethune was most concerned about people; their health and happiness was the paramount issue".¹⁵⁷ In a letter to the editor of *The Globe and Mail*, Roderick Stewart, author of *Bethune*, commented about the shifting image of Bethune in China now, "Zhang Yesheng, the foremost Chinese expert on the Canadian doctor, was quoted in 2009 as saying that he is no longer referred to as a proletarian revolutionary but rather as a reformist, and above all, as a humanitarian".¹⁵⁸ Controversy continues to swirl around Bethune to this day, similar to the situation of Riel.

The second biographical treatment of Bethune's legend was Ken Mitchell's *Gone the Burning Sun* (1984), a one-act condensed version of the important events in his life delivered in monologue form by a single performer impersonating the famous surgeon. It was first presented at the Guelph Spring Festival in May, 1984. It lacked the depth of field of Langley's effort and deployed the voicing of Bethune's correspondence, as the principal means of transmitting the minimal action in the play. Mitchell's work suffered from repetition of many of Langley's markers in the scenes he employed to tell Bethune's biography. He conflated his communism with an affirmation of Christianity, when Bethune made a statement about his beliefs, his only actual pronouncement about politics and religion.

"BETHUNE: The papers say Bethune's a communist. Well, who knows? I do believe in the force of history. I try to fight oppression. To see justice served. If

¹⁵⁴ Langley, 145.

¹⁵⁵ Hannant, 352.

¹⁵⁶ Langley, 152.

¹⁵⁷ Hannant, 9.

¹⁵⁸ Roderick Stewart, "Bethune politics." Toronto: *The Globe and Mail*, July 21, 2012, 14.

that's communism, this country is full of communists...If it's red to be Christian, I am proud to be red".¹⁵⁹

This statement contradicted the actuality of Bethune's views, as his communism was clearly evident in his correspondence with Tim Buck and his party comrades.

In his meeting with Mao Zedong, Bethune is passionate and effusive about the great leader, especially his leadership during the fabled Long March. In the course of this encounter with the Chairman, the reality of the dire state of their situation is brought home to Bethune and his reaction descended into an unenthusiastic despair.

"BETHUNE: I'm not a miracle worker. I refuse to take the assignment! What the hell does this man expect – everything? (pause) He does. Everything?
He stares at MAO, astonished.
He sags for a moment, overwhelmed."¹⁶⁰

Mitchell proffered a discussion of Bethune's martyrdom in his own words in the closing scene, as he is about to enter his death throes. He quoted Frances, his ex-wife.

"BETHUNE: Beth – you'll never be happy until you die the death of an obscure martyr!... Every revolution needs a dying martyr. And I happen to be available".¹⁶¹

This self-reflexive awareness seems clearly out of context with the immediacy of the situation. How could Bethune be certain of his eventual elevation to martyrdom in the depths of, at this point, an unsuccessful revolutionary struggle? It would be a decade until the communists overthrew the nationalists and made Bethune a martyr figure.

In his Author's Notes, Mitchell explained his motivation for his particular rewriting of the Bethune myth, "while working in Scotland in 1980, I discovered an amazing coincidence: Bethune and I were blood-relations. At the very least we had common ancestors, the legendary Beaton clan that had settled on the Sacred Isle of Iona in the Hebrides during the Middle Ages".¹⁶² This connection is replayed in a little vignette that Bethune tells in his own final words.

"BETHUNE: I travelled out to the Hebrides, to the Ross of Mull...I wanted to unlock - the mystery of my beginnings, - a few derelict old huts, the name Beaton

¹⁵⁹ Ken Mitchell, *Gone the Burning Sun*, (Toronto: Playwrights Union of Canada, 1984) 29-30.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 37.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁶² Ibid., n.p.

carved above the door”.¹⁶³

Mitchell featured his family history in the closing moments of the play, forcing a personal private connection with a highly charged religious message into the public persona of Canada’s most famous communist, amending the myth to fit his own ends.

Mitchell immersed himself in Christian religious sentiment and romantic nostalgia in Bethune’s last statement, when he conflated Frances Penney and The Angel of Death, from Bethune’s own doggerel written on one of the Trudeau Sanatorium murals when he was a TB patient. He rewrote the Bethune myth into a personal memoir, reflecting himself through the subject of Bethune. His effort can best be understood perhaps as a statement of his own particular circumstances reinterpreted through the persona of Bethune.

Direct homage to Bethune is conveyed in George Ryga’s *Paracelsus* (1986). According to James Hoffman, *Paracelsus* was Ryga’s “grandest and most difficult work”.¹⁶⁴ *Paracelsus* had its only production at the Vancouver Playhouse on September 26, 1986 and is, in Hoffman’s opinion, “a spectacular failure”.¹⁶⁵ Although it is basically a dramatic biography of the renowned Swiss physician, it actually embellished the career of Canada’s foremost communist, Dr Norman Bethune, a mythological figure in the 1980s who acted as the contemporary equivalent to the historical innovator and reformer. The linkage between them served to enhance the martyr trope attached to Bethune. This is subtly teased out in the exchanges between two Canadian physicians, when they expressed differing views of medical practice, either as a commercial enterprise or a humanitarian response to the sick and suffering. Their positions were clearly indicated by the allusions to Bethune in the text. At the end of Act 1, Ryga offered his gesture of respect for the legendary Canadian physician.

“Dr. Webb: What’s the book?

Dr. Guza: A biography of Doctor Norman Bethune.

Dr. Webb: He was the guy who went to China, died there, didn’t he?

Dr. Guza: Yes.

Dr. Webb: People like that leave me cold”.¹⁶⁶

In Act 2 Dr. Webb, the entrepreneurial advocate, explicitly connected Bethune to the heroic medicos of the past.

“Dr. Webb: I’ve got to play the game – I’m a businessman, and screw your

¹⁶³ Ibid., 48.

¹⁶⁴ James Hoffman, ed. *George Ryga: The Other Plays*, (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2004) 363.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 364.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 380.

With this statement Ryga placed Bethune in the chain of great doctors, establishing a connection between them in a line of descent, from Paracelsus to Albert Schweitzer, the charismatic medical missionary to Africa, to the Canadian martyr in the Chinese revolutionary movement.

In James Hoffman’s estimation, the play “represents Ryga at his finest, his most absolute”.¹⁶⁸ The historical figure is only a mask for the ideology committed to the liberation of the toiling masses. He is a representative of communism in its post-revolutionary stage. As Christopher Innes pointed out, “Paracelsus appears as the healing principle, an embodiment of the utopian state, once communism has been achieved, where suffering will no longer exist”.¹⁶⁹ Ryga’s acknowledgement of Bethune was a distinct contradiction to his personal beliefs, he mythologised a member of the Canadian establishment, rather than his avowed cultural figure, “the true Canadian is not the official representative, a member of the Anglo-Saxon establishment, but the immigrant with earthy peasant values and a heritage of political struggle”.¹⁷⁰ This embrace of Bethune illustrated the warring extremes in Ryga’s own mind, “ambivalence marks Ryga’s interior dramaturgy. Romanticism contradicts his socialist aims”.¹⁷¹ It also reaffirmed the ambiguity inherent in mythological constructs, the embodiment that is anathema to the author’s personal values becomes acceptable from an ideological perspective.

A revisioning of Bethune from a postmodern perspective appeared in *Bethune Imagined* by Ken Gass, which had its premiere performance at the Factory Theatre in Toronto on November 13, 2010 directed by the playwright. Gass presented a portrait of Bethune as a sexist patriarch, making use of Brecht’s ‘alienation effect’, trying to manipulate three key women in his life in Montreal in the six months prior to his departure for Spain in 1936, whilst running the Montreal Children’s Creative Art Centre in his flat. Gass detailed relationships with his ex-wife, Frances Penny, a co-founder of the centre, Marian Scott and a young woman, Margaret Day. Gass sought to demythologise Bethune, forcing the audience to encounter a man who flirted with a woman he has twice divorced, who pursued the possibility of an affair with a married woman, and who seduced a neophyte in sexual matters.

Just as *Eight Men Speak* reversed the values of the bourgeoisie on to the communists,

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 398.

¹⁶⁸ James Hoffman, *The Ecstasy of Resistance: A Biography of George Ryga*, (Toronto: ECW Books, 1995) 235.

¹⁶⁹ Christopher Innes, *Politics and the Playwright: George Ryga*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985) 107.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 26.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 87.

Gass overturned the trope of the martyr by injecting serious criminality into Bethune when he performed a backroom abortion on the pregnant Margaret, a crime of major proportions in the Canada of the 1930s, especially in Roman Catholic Quebec. This is Brecht's *gestus*, a social gesture that combined action and social meaning. Gass's Bethune is an affront to one of the foundations of Western society, subverting the nuclear family, as he extinguished the life of his own child. This playwright has chosen to tear down the myth of the great man narrative, the self-sacrificing saint of Canadian communism, and endorse a postmodern critique based on his interpretation of Bethune as a misogynist of vast proportions.

The subject Norman Bethune was absent from Canadian drama during the anti-communist hysteria of the 1950s and 1960s, he became a central presence when the threat from communist activity began to wane in the 1970s and 1980s. The fact that a playwright chose to use his legend as a vehicle to question the myth of the great man by concentrating on his alleged criminal behaviour at that particular time, illustrated the implausibility of pinning down a representation to one politically correct version. There are a multiplicity of Bethunes represented in Canadian drama, the religious devotee of Ken Mitchell, the misogynist of Ken Gass, George Ryga's saintly inheritor of the Paracelsus tradition, and the physically decrepit martyr of Rod Langley.

George Ryga

George Ryga's *Paracelsus* (1986), his homage to Bethune, was his final play production. His sudden demise in 1987 brought a vibrant and defiant voice of the dispossessed and disenfranchised to an abrupt halt. As James Hoffman recounted his family history, Ryga's father was "a member of the Labour [sic] Progressive Party and the Communist Party, his politics were strongly to the left".¹⁷² Ryga's career as a writer came about through a disability, as his working life was severely compromised by the consequences of a serious work accident, "he was taken to hospital at Athabasca, where he learned he would lose the three middle fingers of his right hand".¹⁷³

"By 1953 Ryga was a member of the LPP's [Labor Progressive Party] National Federation of Labor Youth".¹⁷⁴ He took part in demonstrations supporting the Rosenbergs, as Christopher Innes detailed in his biography, "Ryga was forced to resign from his job after

¹⁷² Hoffman, *The Ecstasy of Resistance*, 28-9.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁷⁴ James Doyle, *Progressive Heritage: The Evolution of a Politically Radical Literary Tradition in Canada*, (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2002) 214.

leading a protest rally over the case of the notorious Rosenbergs in the U. S. A”.¹⁷⁵ He was a Canadian delegate to the World Peace Assembly in Helsinki, Finland, in 1955 and also travelled through Poland and Bulgaria on this trip to Europe. In disagreement with the official pro-Stalinist party line over the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, he resigned from the LPP. Thereafter, he continued to favour ultra-left concerns although remaining unattached to any specific party organisation. Through his involvement with world peace activism and the campaign for the Rosenbergs, Christopher Innes found the specific grounds for his work, “from this nexus [of struggle and hardship] flow his major themes: the positive value of manual work...the distorting emptiness of official history that presents the achievements of the governed masses as the acts of the governing few; the need of a unifying cultural myth drawn from the unarticulated experience of the immigrants and outcasts, the subculture of the working classes that built the country”.¹⁷⁶

In the vibrant nationalistic theatre scene of the sixties, Ryga foregrounded racism and intolerance in his attention to the interaction between native people and their white administrators in *Indian* (1962) and the acclaimed *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (1967). This play became Ryga’s *tour de force* and allowed him to take his place as a prominent Canadian playwright. The early one-act *Indian* portrayed the depths of personal despair suffered by a male indigene oppressed by an uncaring white society in which he has too often encountered humiliation and discrimination. Christopher Innes has extrapolated this in his comments, “the figure of the Indian can therefore represent all the oppressed because the audience...is incapable of seeing any distinction. But it is a standard Marxist perception. One proletarian group can stand for all, since what they share as workers overrides any differences of colour or creed”.¹⁷⁷ These same themes were expanded in the two-act *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, widely considered his best playwriting effort, first produced in 1967, for which he received the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Award in 1973 and which has often been referred to as “his most famous play”.¹⁷⁸ Christopher Innes has found a lack of unity in this play’s subtext, “On the one hand, there is Rita Joe’s personal history of degradation and defiance, on the other a socialist critique of the legal and political system in the abstract”.¹⁷⁹ Ryga failed to redefine the representation of the native, but simply reiterated the standard coloniser/colonised binary common to the encounters of the native/metis with European societies. The issue of

¹⁷⁵ Innes, 16.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 26.

¹⁷⁸ W. H New et al, *Literary History of Canada*, Vol. 4 2nd ed., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) 196.

¹⁷⁹ Innes, 38.

appropriation, the acquisition and exploitation of minority cultural material by the dominant cultural formation, now hangs over these plays and is not the focus of this thesis. For the purposes of this thesis, two of his less famous plays offer affirmation and corroboration of some of the tropes crucial to this investigation, such as the union organiser, the subversive and the martyr.

Grass and Wild Strawberries was first performed at Vancouver's Playhouse Theatre on April 10, 1969. In this play, "Ryga switched his attention to the confrontation between the New Left of the sixties and the Old Left tied to gradualism and trade unionism".¹⁸⁰ The figures of this opposition are portrayed in the male lead, Allan, and his Uncle Ted who "represents the hardline dogmatism that kept alive the Stalinist tendencies repudiated by Khrushchev in 1956".¹⁸¹ Their disagreement about the function of history brings into focus the depths of the antagonism between their worldviews,

"Uncle: History is all that lives on. Never neglect your history or traditions, particularly the revolutionary side of it".¹⁸²

"Allan: History is a record of wars and lies and hatred".¹⁸³

This debate focused on the communist view of the inevitable triumph of the proletariat as a consequence of history and a more practical approach which sees a repetition of events as the unchanging centre of things. Allan also offered an extremely knowledgeable assessment of the effects of Uncle Ted's support for revolutionary action,

"Allan: Why a revolution whose cost you already know? What have we gained, when a successful revolution becomes establishment the moment it succeeds".¹⁸⁴

Ryga applied the standard tropes of the union organiser and subversive to Uncle Ted, "I was in jail twice in my lifetime...Once for leading an illegal strike on company grounds and the second time for political activity that was not permitted".¹⁸⁵

He also utilised gesture to illustrate the failure of his revolutionary stance in the stage directions.

"Uncle Ted stands alone"

¹⁸⁰ Marvin Gilman, "Fennario and Ryga: Canadian political playwrights," *Australasian Drama Studies*, No. 29 (October 1996) 181.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁸² George Ryga, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe and other Plays*, (Toronto: New Press, 1971) 82.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

Broken and withered".¹⁸⁶

This final image seems to support James Hoffman's analysis of the playwright, "because of this [left-wing] political grounding, his writing anticipated a better tomorrow through the application of science and socialist cooperation among peoples...Typically, his fictional characters engage overwhelming, often destructive forces, and retain only a glimmer of that vision".¹⁸⁷

In his portrait of Uncle Ted, Ryga reiterated his 'struggle' narrative, which falls into the 'not-revolution' category, with his own understanding that the conflict between Uncle Ted and Allan, as the representative of the 'New Left', was another episode in the continual brawling between left factions that inevitably prevented the revolutionary phase from occurring in Canada. The conflict between the social reformism of the New Democrats, the successors of the CCF, and the CPC would always hinder the development of socialism in Canada.

The attack on the production of Ryga's *Captives of the Faceless Drummer* by the Board of Directors of the Vancouver Playhouse, which had commissioned it in late 1970, became a *cause celebre* in Canadian drama circles. As Peter Hay revealed in his introduction to its published version, "the financial and administrative excuses marshalled to suppress *Captives of the Faceless Drummer* served to veil a secret pact which the Board of Directors of the Vancouver Playhouse made with the Social Credit Government of British Columbia to avoid anything that might be considered (in whose opinion?) 'experimental, vulgar or controversial'.¹⁸⁸ Social Credit was tied to a reactionary view of the world, as its initial leaders in Canada were evangelists in Alberta before political success there allowed them to expand into neighbouring British Columbia.

This direct intervention by the right-wing government, very similar to the much earlier *Eight Men Speak* incident in 1933, was totally rejected by the drama community. As extensive media coverage kept the controversy in the public's awareness, a dedicated group rushed the work into rehearsal and production at the Vancouver Art Gallery on April 16, 1971. Appearing shortly after the October Crisis in Quebec in autumn 1970, highlighted by the Front de Liberation du Quebec's kidnappings of James Cross, British trade commissioner in Montreal, and Pierre Laporte, Minister of Labour and Immigration in the provincial Liberal government of Robert Bourassa, and Laporte's subsequent murder at the hands of his captors, this play centred on the relationship between a revolutionary leader and his diplomat hostage whilst in its subtext exploring larger issues such as the exploitation of the Quebecois by

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 105.

¹⁸⁷ Hoffman, *The Other Plays*, 15.

¹⁸⁸ Peter Hay, Preface, *Captives of the Faceless Drummer* by George Ryga, (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1971) 7.

English-speaking capitalists and, more importantly, class struggle as an ongoing condition of Canadian society. As Hay confirmed, “In *Captives*, Ryga takes the clichés of class struggle and gives them an actuality, a context - above all, a humanity which are new in Canadian dramatic literature, though not unseen in his previous works”.¹⁸⁹ The tropes of the union organiser and political subversive were again utilised by Ryga. “Through the ploy of the family album, Ryga constructed a revolutionary profile for the Commander”¹⁹⁰ and one of his lackeys, Marcel, in a double layering of this effect. In Act One, Scene 3, Marcel told the story of his cousin to the hostage, Harry.

“Marcel: They drowned my cousin, Phil...stuck his head into a bucket of water, trying to make him confess to handing out guns to the unemployed at Thunder Bay. He wasn’t confessing to nothing, so they held him down until he drowned”.¹⁹¹

The Commander reiterated the martyr trope of the communist in his description of his Uncle Steve’s death.

“The Commander: He was an organizer of the bush workers in northern Quebec when everything was up for grabs...shot twelve times through the body...My uncle Steve died trying to get twelve cents an hour more wages for the bush workers”.¹⁹²

The Commander traced his family history.

“My grandfather died in the Riel Rebellion”.¹⁹³

“My father had been boiled in a steam generator explosion six months earlier...my mother was on welfare when she had me”.¹⁹⁴

The Commander united the image of Riel, as the heroic leader of the native/metis, with the struggling worker in his father. They combined to justify a battle for social justice as the motivation for his actions. Just prior to his death the Commander expressed his concern for the unfortunates trapped in poverty, “You’ve punched the poor around...taken away their

¹⁸⁹ Hay, 9.

¹⁹⁰ Gilman, 183.

¹⁹¹ George Ryga, *Captives of the Faceless Drummer*, (Vancouver: Talon Books, 1971) 25.

¹⁹² Ibid., 92.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 46.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 61.

languages and then their pride with welfarism”.¹⁹⁵ At this point, Ryga enunciated the core of his own beliefs. As Christopher Innes explained, discussing one of his early works, “As a title [*Poor People*] this can stand for the focus in almost all of Ryga’s work”.¹⁹⁶

George Ryga brought political awareness of working-class issues with a Marxist perspective into his plays, recontextualising past struggles as the background to contemporary situations of class conflict, materialising the historical and the postmodern in confrontation over the direction of political activity.

David Fennario

A particularly bitter and unyielding voice of working-class anger and revolt is David Fennario (1947-), born David Wiper, of Point Saint Charles, Quebec. A product himself of this working-class, anglophone Montreal community, Fennario has channelled the despair and anguish of his family and friends into popular proletarian drama. Although Fennario first came to public attention in 1974 with his fictionalised autobiographical diary, *Without a Parachute*, discussed in the following chapter two on Canadian fiction, his artistic association with Centaur Theatre of Montreal as playwright-in-residence from 1973-1984 offered a suitable platform from which to address bourgeois Montrealers about the plight of their working-class neighbours in a series of hard-hitting plays. The one-act *On the Job* (1975) recorded the futile strike of a group of young workers in the shipping room of a Montreal dressmaking factory on Christmas Eve 1970. Their strike ended in disaster as they returned home unemployed.

Fennario built on the perspectives and strategies of *On the Job* in his next play, *Nothing to Lose* (1976). In this drama, a new foreman lacked the proper management skills to handle his crew of workers and this allowed ill-will to spread among them. A young Marxist playwright, a self-reflexive Fennario and his own political convictions, met two old friends at a tavern. After a victorious fight between his friend, Jackie Robinson, and the hated foreman outside the tavern, the Marxist writer advised the unionised workmen to launch a sit-down strike in order to force management into the streets. He persuaded them to adopt this communist-inspired strategy of workers’ control of industry. The playwright performed as a substitute in the union organiser trope, as the workers needed to draw their leadership from a more inspirational source than the co-opted union executive figure. The play closed on an upbeat note as the workers moved out of the tavern to put their plan for change into action. The hope engendered by this positive ending is a distinct contrast to the conclusion of the

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 106.

¹⁹⁶ Innes, 21.

previous *On the Job*. This presentation emphasised the proper Soviet socialist realist formulation, as it added the required optimistic ending with the workers empowering themselves rather than remaining powerless.

His fourth play, *Balconville* (1979), was Canada's first bilingual play and won the Chalmers Award for Best Canadian Play of 1979. Here he tackled the extremely sensitive subject of burgeoning Quebec separatism from a class conflict basis according to his ultra-left sympathies, rather than the cultural differences traditionally associated with the dominant English-speaking Protestants and the conquered French-speaking Catholics, the gulf between their languages and religions.

Mired in poverty and hopelessness, the unemployed and working poor of The Point, English and French alike, find themselves sharing a similar situation, condemned to marginality without a chance to climb out of the working class. Fennario ironically pointed out the emptiness of political promises from the established political parties as the programmed voice of Gaetan Bolduc, the sitting Liberal member of the House of Commons, constantly broke into the action of the play. In contrast to the ineffectual posturing of the establishment, the author subtly acknowledged the importance of local pressure groups, which can provide understanding and direction to the people's needs. As Johnny Regan, the main character and Fennario's surrogate in the play, told Claude Paquette, his Quebecois neighbour, "Together, we can fuck Bolduc?"¹⁹⁷ In the final scene the Regans and the Paquettes help each other save their furniture as fire engulfed their building; it is their collective unity that will produce, Fennario suggests, the only way to any future possibilities for them.

Fennario resigned from the Centaur in 1984 and became actively involved in organising a community-based troupe of amateur actors, the Black Rock Theatre, in The Point. For them he wrote *Joe Beef (A History of Pointe Saint Charles)*, which they performed at the Players Theatre of McGill University in 1985. It was subsequently honoured with the prestigious Pauline Julien Award in 1987.

This play articulated the fullest expression of Fennario's Marxist views, which he expressed in one of Joe Beef's speeches,

JOE BEEF: *reading from the Communist Manifesto.*

"And the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production and thereby the relations of production and with them the whole relations of society. All fixed fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices are swept away. All that is solid melts into the air. All that is holy is profaned. And man is at last compelled to face with sober

¹⁹⁷ David Fennario, *Balconville*, (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1980) 114.

senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind”.¹⁹⁸

Fennario clarified his political position by placing the words of Marx and Engels into the speech of his main character, another instance of Brecht’s *gestus*. This play highlighted the working-class struggles that marked the unofficial history of Fennario’s little *quartier* of Montreal. As Joe Beef informed the strikers, this will be a working-class history, not the bourgeois version transmitted through the state’s educational apparatus.

Fennario incorporated outdated agitprop conventions, such as exaggeration, demonisation of the capitalists, emotionality and coarse ridicule, but expanded them with the actual names of the merchants and businessmen who brought development to Canada’s natural resources and made Montreal the transportation hub for their commercial ventures. A chorus of Bourgeois and Workers, an agitprop convention, offer the generalisations common to agitprop but only as a commentary to the face-to-face confrontations between the leading entrepreneurs and local labour leaders.

Adopting this classic labour-versus-capital conflict, Fennario made it relevant by reducing it to an examination of those incidents specifically central to the Point’s (and Montreal’s) labour history. He identified the primary competitive advantage that Montreal offered to the capitalists in the speech that the Mayor of Montreal presented to the Royal Arch Millionaires Club.

“MR. J. J. C. ABBOTT: let us not forget our most precious commodity, the one most single element that promises to make Montreal a world metropolis – Cheap Labour”.¹⁹⁹

Setting in place the argument for the opposition to the strike scenario, this speech articulated Montreal’s ruling class ideology as it encountered initial attempts at union organising by two local activists, Al Lepine and Bill Darlington, who hold to the working-class position of class unity.

“DARLINGTON: We were both Knights of Labour who believed that Labour creates all wealth, therefore all wealth belongs to the workers”.²⁰⁰

Joe Beef emerged as the heroic representative of the workers’ struggle by providing them and their families with food and drink for the duration of the six weeks strike. The ability of the workers to withstand the serious effects of their work stoppage caused the

¹⁹⁸ David Fennario, *Joe Beef (A History of Pointe Saint Charles)*, (Vancouver: Talon Books, 1991) 54-5.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 59.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 73.

businessmen to circumvent Lepine's and Darlington's leadership strategy by co-opting a rival union to take over the workers struggle. The employers engaged the services of Samuel Gompers and his American Federation of Labor. Gompers pulls no punches in clearly stating his position,

“GOMPERS: The broads, the niggers and the frogs can all go fuck themselves, a gomp-gomp-gomp. Because all that one big union bullshit is just one big Commie pinko plot to take over our country and destroy our precious rights and liberties”.²⁰¹

By employing swear words and slang in the utterances of Gompers, Fennario brought this historic encounter of 1889 into the perceptions of his audience in a recognisable form, as ‘Commie pinko plot’ was a term with widespread usage in the anti-communist rhetoric of the mid-1980s. He also expressed the depth of the virulent contempt for the marginalised in Gompers’ usage of broads, niggers and frogs for the women, black and Quebecois workers.

His commitment to recording working-class history can be traced to his comprehension of the domination exercised by a bourgeois version of events and his own proletarian viewpoint, as he made clear to Paul Milliken in an interview, “I am working class and I am writing a play. And I’m also a socialist. And there’s a difference between Steinbeck writing *The Grapes of Wrath* and the grapes of wrath writing the book – the Okies themselves”.²⁰² Fennario’s Point Saint Charles Quartet has succeeded in presenting an accurate and consistent Marxist interpretation of the Point’s working class, whether English-speaking or French-speaking, to theatre patrons throughout the country.

Fennario returned to his early political posture in a one act play, *Bolsheviki*, produced by infinitheatre, which opened in Montreal on November 9, 2010. In a one man show, ‘Rosie’ Rollins voiced his experiences in the trenches of WWI, whilst serving in the Canadian armed forces in France. As a born and raised son of Point Saint Charles, his perspective is defiantly proletarian and, as the title indicated, pro-communist. Most memorable in his recollections was an incident of mutiny by his platoon, when they heard of the actions by the soldiers on the Russian front at the beginning of their revolutionary period. Set in a tavern in the Point, Rosie brought to the public’s awareness the spirit of revolt shared by the soldiers serving in his unit. Not surprisingly, the rebels are defeated and sentenced to jail for their treachery. Fennario focused on the disenchantment and despair of the soldiers, articulated by Rollins, as they dealt with the failure of their mutiny. The playwright relied on the tropes of the working

²⁰¹ Ibid., 85.

²⁰² Paul Milliken, “Portrait of the artist as a working-class hero: an interview with David Fennario”, *Performing Arts* (1980) 24.

class hero and the peace activist for his representation of Rollins, a necessity, perhaps, brought on by the limitations of the one-act form.

Carol Bolt

The tropes of the communist were dramatically enhanced in one of the most accurate depictions of the committed communist as union organiser and protest leader in *Buffalo Jump* by Carol Bolt, first presented in its revised and rewritten form at Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto in June, 1972. Her main character, Arthur H. ‘Red’ Evans, previously mentioned in *Eight Men Speak*, is the experienced party activist who positioned himself as the spokesman of the On-to-Ottawa Trek, a famous incident in the annals of the Depression in Canada. He identified himself in Act One as “a travelling salesman”,²⁰³ an ironic aside, then candidly admitted to his real purpose, “I sell young Canadian men to Moscow. It’s all for the glory of the hammer and sickle and the international Communist conspiracy”.²⁰⁴ Such an admission at the outset puts his activities under suspicion, as it holds to the trope of the Sovietophile, totally committed to the aims and policies of the USSR, and clearly indicated his lack of any special affection or consideration for his fellow Canadians. He is given extensive coverage in the official history of the CPC, “in early 1935, the WUL [Workers’ Unity League] decided to assign Arthur H. Evans the task of leading the RCWU [Relief Camp Workers Union] and organizing its struggles. A Communist with a great deal of experience in the IWW in the United States and the OBU [One Big Union] in Canada, Arthur Evans had already shown himself to be a highly capable and effective organizer”.²⁰⁵

Evans is typically blunt in his speech to the relief camp workers about their situation, “they [the government] want to force you into slave labor in a god-forsaken corner of God’s country where the people of Canada can forget what’s happening to you”.²⁰⁶ This is very similar to the speech traits identified by Katerina Clark in Zukhrai in Nikolai Ostrovski’s Soviet socialist realist classic *How the Steel Was Tempered* (1936), his utterances “are marked by the simplicity and clarity of the argument, the brief and easily understood sentences”.²⁰⁷ Evans is elevated to the man of ‘consciousness’ by his effectiveness in convincing the relief camp workers to depart for Vancouver to raise their issues and broaden

²⁰³ Carol Bolt, *Playwrights in Profile: Carol Bolt*, (Toronto: Playwrights Co-op, 1976) 28.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 28.

²⁰⁵ CPC, 94.

²⁰⁶ Bolt, 29.

²⁰⁷ Katerina Clark, “Socialist Realism *with* Shores: The Conventions for the Positive Hero” in *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, ed. Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997) 36.

their support base with the public.

Prime Minister R. B. Bennett plays Evans' foil. He is located addressing the Imperial Conference in Ottawa in 1935, at which he expressed a deep regard for the imperial power as the delegates are ordered "to cooperate in delivering a plan by which this great empire may continue its leadership among nations".²⁰⁸ In his closing remarks, Bennett declared his anti-communism by attacking the trade connections between Great Britain and the USSR, especially the large amount of wheat and wood supplies exported by the Soviets.

Bolt referenced through a minor character, Marjorie, a verifiable part of the workers' campaign in Vancouver.

"MARJORIE: my mother's lodge is going to form a big heart on the hill and the heart is going to be all mothers...And they're going to hold a banner and the banner will say 'Mothers Support the Relief Camp Marchers'".²⁰⁹

In *Canada's Party of Socialism*, a photograph at the top of page 94 is captioned, "In April 1935, women in Vancouver organized the Mothers' Council in support of the striking relief camp workers. Among their many activities was this demonstration in Vancouver's Stanley Park on Mothers' Day demanding the abolition of the relief camps".²¹⁰ The signs on the photo state, "Mothers Abolish the Relief Camps", a declaration with a stronger connotation than the statement of support in Marjorie's comments. As well, the mothers are formed in a heart-shaped arrangement.

Mobilising the mothers' support was aimed at dampening anti-communist rhetoric, as it illustrated the strength of the family in a time of difficulty. The strategy of upholding family values resonated within the party as a defence against charges that their policy was to precipitate the destruction of this basic unit of Western Christian civilisation and counteracted the trope of the subversive.

Whilst in Vancouver, a RCWU meeting is held and one of the members, planted there for that purpose by Evans as the stage directions inform, suggests they take their concerns directly to the powerbrokers in Ottawa.

*"COSGROVE leads Peter Lowe to the front of the audience. He looks to Evans for his cue".*²¹¹

On their stopover in Golden, B. C., the local newspaper trots out the usual alarmist

²⁰⁸ Bolt, 31.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 39.

²¹⁰ CPC, 94.

²¹¹ Bolt, 51.

hysteria of the subversive connoted by the communist presence.

“REPORTER: Aha! Bolsheviks! Communists. Bolshevik Communist dupes! They’ll rend and tear, destroy our town”.²¹²

When the Trekkers reach Calgary, the home of the world famous eponymous Stampede, Bolt encapsulates the future events in Ottawa with a deft satire in the comical Brahma Bull Riding vignette. She humorously foreshadows in the announcer’s monologue the true to life events that will transpire between the two opposing figures, Bennett and Evans.

“ANNOUNCER: They’re out of the chute. Red is holding on but this Bennett is a lot of bull. He’s a tough one, ladies and gentlemen, but Red’s a fighter. Oh no, he’s through. Bennett’s turning back at him, ladies and gentlemen”.²¹³

In preparation for the Trek’s arrival in Regina, the city’s Assistant Commissioner of the RCMP has received orders to forcibly stop it there. This represents the classic Canadian metonymy of law and order versus the menace of the foremost enemies of the state. After negotiations, a delegation of eight men is allowed to continue on to present their six main demands to Prime Minister Bennett. This sets the scene for the climax of the play, the confrontation between Bennett and Evans in Ottawa, which has already been parodied by Bolt in the Brahma Bull Riding vignette.

Bennett meets the delegation with two of the usual tactics common to the anti-communist strategy. Firstly, he accuses all but one of the men of being aliens, that is, not Canadians. Bennett’s second tactic is to smear ‘Red’ Evans in front of his fellow protesters.

“BENNETT: I remember when you embezzled the funds of your union and were sent to penitentiary.

EVANS: You’re a liar. I was arrested for fraudulently converting these funds to feed the starving. I say you are a liar if you say I embezzled”.²¹⁴

It is recorded in *Canada’s Party of Socialism*, “so effective was he [Evans] that his organizing activities had landed him in prison on three separate occasions”.²¹⁵ Bennett’s accusation of criminality adds an element of ambiguity to Evans’ representation. Is he the proper person to direct the trekkers? After Bennett rejects the six demands, he makes the situation clear to the delegation, that they are violating the law and will face the consequences

²¹² Ibid., 58.

²¹³ Ibid., 65.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 73.

²¹⁵ CPC, 94.

of that action.

The elements of this scene are corroborated in *Canada's Party of Socialism*, "the eight delegates of the trek met with the cabinet on June 22 [1935]. But rather than listen to Arthur Evans' presentation on behalf of the relief camp workers, the Prime Minister launched into a vicious attack on the trek leader".²¹⁶ Margaret Atwood also interpreted this scene as the pivotal event in the drama. She again reverted to the analogy with Riel, "the confrontation scene between Evans and Bennett...could be straight out of *Riel*: while Evans and his delegation are presenting their case, Bennett sits down behind a model of the Parliament Buildings so that his face is hidden".²¹⁷ The site of ultimate power in Canada dominates the scene and reflects the real dynamic of control by Bennett.

When their leaders returned to Regina empty-handed, the trekkers organised a mass rally of 3,000 people on July 1 1935. This is the closing scene of the play, as the RCMP intervened to close down the march.

This scenario is reported in *Canada's Party of Socialism*, "RCMP officers and the city police charged into the peaceful crowd, clubbing men, women and children. A four hour battle in the streets of Regina ensued in which about 100 people were hurt, a number of them shot by police. Over a hundred, including Arthur Evans, were arrested".²¹⁸ Bolt put an end to her play at this point in the confrontation between the trekkers and the RCMP. In the confrontation between Riel and the RCMP, then called the North West Mounted Police, he also lost.

Margaret Atwood has reserved very high praise for Bolt's work in her book. She discerned that the standard definition of 'the hero' had to be construed in a broader fashion in determining the implications of this play, "in *Buffalo Jump* the real 'hero' is not Red Evans by himself – he comes through merely as a catalyst – but the men on the march. These collective heroes are as capable of failure as individual onesthe point is that it is they, rather than individual 'great men', who are the real emotional focus".²¹⁹ Atwood's perception that the Trekkers act as a collective hero would be more in keeping with actual communist practice than the socialist realist formulation of the 'positive hero' created by Zhdanov and his followers. As a means of influencing public opinion, the collective hero was pre-empted in the Soviet sphere by the party itself, which represented the ultimate collective hero in its struggle against the bourgeois remnants in the Soviet state.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 95.

²¹⁷ Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972) 169.

²¹⁸ CPC, 97.

²¹⁹ Atwood, 172.

The plays about Bethune can not escape Atwood's contention that "Canadian history and the Canadian imagination...conspire to make a plausible heroic death – a death that accomplishes something, means something in terms of its society – almost impossible".²²⁰ Bethune's death was highly problematical, it meant very little in Canada outside of his friends and fellow members of the CPC. It was only after the restoration of diplomatic relations between the government of Canada and the People's Republic of China that his demise took on an importance it hitherto lacked. Its significance for Canada was negligible but the fact that the Master Helmsman, Mao Zedong, had appreciated his sacrifice allowed the humanitarian aspect of his work to take on heroic proportions. He did not save or change Canadian society itself, so his martyrdom is of questionable value to the country.

Livesay's Joe Derry, Ryan *et al*'s Buck, the multiplicity of Bethunes, Fennario's Joe Beef, and Bolt's "Red" Evans, allowed communist representatives a prominent position in Canadian theatre, one which has received little prior analysis. They performed in the "positive hero" mode of "New World" social[ist] realism, bravely battling the oppressive forces of capitalism in the pre-revolutionary phase of communist struggle. Their representations are entwined with the tropes of communism, presenting on the Canadian stage the conflict between the CP/union organiser (Evans), the peace activist (Derry), the scientific socialist (Beef), and the martyr for the cause (Buck/Evans), and their negative depictions, the alien, the Sovietophile, the AntiChrist and the disease carrier.

²²⁰ Ibid., 170.

Chapter Two

Birney/Carter/Garner: Serving the 'Red Banner' in English-Canadian Fiction

The reverberations of the Great Depression of 1929 to 1939 gradually achieved domination over the fiction of ultra-radical writers. Protests in the form of strikes and sit-ins, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War of 1936 to 1939, illegal operations by ultra-radical adherents and anti-communist covert clandestine activity, foregrounded this decade and made it the primary link in the texts of the majority of writers from 1930 to 1990. With their partymindedness, whether Stalinist, Trotskyist or DeLeonist, as the prime determinant of their writing, the tropes of the communist consistently programmed their portrayals of ultra-radical operatives, especially in the reminiscences of long-time CPC adherents, such as Dyson Carter and Oscar Ryan. In this chapter I will be looking at how these ultra-radical writers organised their subjects around the "consciousness/spontaneity" dialectic of the "positive hero" formulation of Soviet socialist realism. They incorporated both the positive images of the CP/union organiser, the peace activist and scientific socialist, the martyr for the cause into their work whilst simultaneously utilising the negative depictions of the alien, the Sovietophile, the AntiChrist, and the disease carrier. These tropes would dominate their texts and confirm them as writers of 'Second World' social[ist] realism.

There were three phases in the development of Canadian social[ist] realism, the early phase of the 1930s, which only produced two works at that time, *Waste Heritage* (1939) and *This Time a Better Earth* (1939), but the ramifications of the Depression continued to be the dominant period through constant re-examination of it throughout the twentieth century. The post-World War II era of 1946 to 1968 covered the second phase, with only five texts published, Dyson Carter's *Tomorrow Is with Us* (1950)²²¹ and *Fatherless Sons* (1955)²²², Earle Birney's *Down the Long Table* (1955)²²³, Hugh MacLennan's *The Watch That Ends the Night* (1958)²²⁴, and Hugh Garner's *Cabbagetown* (1968)²²⁵.

The most productive period was the third phase of 1970 to 1990. This was split into two distinct forms, the quasi-autobiographical diary format of disenchanted inner city youth such as David Fennario's *Blue Mondays* (1984) and Helen Potrebenko's *Taxi!* (1975), and the

²²¹ Dyson Carter, *Tomorrow Is with Us*, (Toronto, Progress Books, 1950).

²²² Dyson Carter, *Fatherless Sons*, (Toronto, Progress Books, 1955).

²²³ Earle Birney, *Down the Long Table*, (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1955).

²²⁴ Hugh MacLennan, *The Watch That Ends the Night*, (Toronto, Macmillan, 1958).

²²⁵ Hugh Garner, *Cabbagetown*, (Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1968).

‘faction’ of nostalgia for their past by CPC stalwarts, in Carter’s *This Story Fierce and Tender* (1986) and Ryan’s *Soon to be Born* (1980), and working-class chronicles of proletarian struggle, such as Jeremy Akerman’s *Black Around the Eyes* (1981) and Michael Ondaatje’s *In The Skin of a Lion* (1987).

With the founding of the CPC in Fred Farley’s barn in Guelph, Ontario on May 28-29, 1921²²⁶ the image of the communist entered the realm of participation and inclusion in narrative structures. It was an illegal organisation but it soon launched a legal version called the Workers’ Party in February 1922. In April 1924, after the non-renewal of the *War Measures Act 1914*, the CPC emerged as a legal entity in its own right. The Great Depression set the stage for the introduction of communist representations into contemporary fiction.

Irene Baird’s *Waste Heritage* (1939) captured the plight of unemployed male youth locked into a vicious cycle of despair and joblessness on Canada’s West Coast. She located the opening sequence of her fiction in the moment of the government’s crushing of the sit-down strike at the Vancouver Post Office on June 19, 1938, a historic event, and utilised this confrontation as her point of departure. Baird centred her narrative on the arrival in Vancouver of the ironically named Matt Striker. She gradually pieced together a depiction of the ravages already inflicted on Striker, whose previous experiences have almost completely compromised his chance for any type of useful life in the future. His mother walked out on him at age fourteen in 1930. At seventeen he was riding the rods while scrambling from hobo jungle to hobo jungle along the Canadian Pacific Railway/Canadian National Railway mainlines. As this novel built on the aftermath of the real life sit-in at the Vancouver Post Office and Art Gallery in June 1938, Matt’s circumstances are given as a young unemployed man on the move for six years searching for any kind of permanent employment.

Whilst the sit-downers have been mobilised into a disciplined unit of effective protest, Matt’s solitary lifestyle has gradually faded into his recognition of the power of group interaction and the role of vital participant in it available to him. Baird articulated the perception of the significance of the squad, a community of shared purpose, which Ted Allan in *This Time a Better Earth* (1939) similarly worked through. Instead of aimless wandering, the sit-downers movement offered Matt the possibility of contributing to their organisation. Communism is implied as the motivating force behind the unemployed workers’ organisation and loyalty to it and its aims found a voice in Hep, Matt’s squad leader.

With the help of widespread public support for their march on the legislative buildings in Gath (in reality, Victoria), expectations of success slowly filtered through the single jobless male ranks in their confrontation with the government. Unfortunately, the longed-for

²²⁶ Communist Party of Canada, *Canada’s Party of Socialism, History of the Communist Party of Canada 1921-1976*, (Toronto, Progress Books, 1982) 16.

settlement reached on their behalf did not provide results adequate to their needs. Without the gains he assumed were possible, Matt was overtaken by frustration. As he explained in a letter to a friend, “some of the boys feel this has been a sell-out at the last and they have been let down”.²²⁷ Incensed by what he perceived as the defeat of his cause, a small incident erupted into disorder and mayhem in the course of which Matt battered a policeman into unconsciousness. His trial and imprisonment formed the unexpressed afterword as the novel closed on this altercation.

Hep represented the committed communist who formed the core of many protest groups in the thirties, figures such as ‘Red’ Evans, the organiser of the On-to-Ottawa Trek, and J. B. Salsberg, fabled members of the CPC. He analysed the sit-downers’ situation adroitly, “the only thing that’s going to get us any action is by educating the public that these boys here are not just a bunch of hoodlums but men with a strong case”.²²⁸

Hep’s reaction to the agreement with the government settling the sit-downers’ dispute marked the distance in knowledge and understanding between the committed revolutionary, the man of ‘consciousness’, and Matt’s confused immature illusions, youth lost in the realm of ‘spontaneity’. In simple language he deftly revealed the context of events to Matt, “you don’t see what bringing this little stink here out in the open can do for the big main cause. All you’re looking at is just one little corner”.²²⁹ Katerina Clark remarked on the mentor figure of Zukhray in Nikolai Ostrovsky’s Soviet socialist realist classic *How the Steel Was Tempered* (1936), his “utterances are marked by the simplicity and clarity of the argument, the brief and easily understood sentences, the absence of affectation”.²³⁰ These qualities are exemplified in the colloquial conciseness of Hep’s explanation to Matt. The main cause, communism, had made considerable advances in the Popular Front strategy of the late thirties.

Hep and Matt expressed the overriding ‘positive hero’ dialectic of the Soviet socialist realist novel, the confrontation between the knowledge contained in the man of ‘consciousness’, and the lack of awareness of a young person dominated by ‘spontaneity’. They represented the basic myth of Stalinist political culture. This myth described Soviet society and history in terms of an ongoing ‘hierarchy’ of ‘fathers’, or highly ‘conscious’ members of the vanguard, and ‘sons’, or highly ‘spontaneous’ positive figures who were nurtured to political consciousness by the ‘fathers’.²³¹

²²⁷ Irene Baird, *Waste Heritage*, (Toronto, Macmillan, 1939) 309.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 315

²³⁰ Katerina Clark, “Socialist Realism *with Shores*, The Conventions for the Positive Hero” in *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, ed. Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko, (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1997) 36.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

Waste Heritage has established itself as a breakthrough text in proletarian fiction in Canada. Baird recorded the human cost of the Great Depression in the generation of single unemployed males uniting in their distress and solidifying into a cohesive revolutionary squad, albeit unarmed, aimed at alleviating some of their appalling conditions. Through grim unyielding realism Baird fashioned a thoroughly researched document of social unrest and strife with an extreme clarity of perspective. The introduction of a national unemployment insurance scheme in 1940 was probably hastened into existence by the tremendous popular approval for the Vancouver sit-downers and their protests.

Interestingly, Baird completely denied any affiliation with revolutionary forces, “I have never been connected with Communism and I have never thought of myself as a radical if being a radical means wanting to overthrow the system in which we live in favour of another political system”.²³² However, she added an extremely perceptive explanation to that statement of personal allegiance, as her fiction explained “how the organization for betterment of things that Matt Striker joins begins to give him back his self-respect and purpose. I would have lied if I had tried to show that radicals - that communists - were not a strong part of that organization”.²³³

Paul Cappon examined Baird’s observations about herself, “documentary realists like Baird are generally drawn from a petite bourgeoisie which, its own security threatened by the crisis, is sympathetic with the oppressed working class; but the writer is only a sympathetic observer, she is not of the working class, nor does she identify with it”.²³⁴ Baird was perceptive enough to acknowledge the presence of the communists, providing a voice for them but not a voice of them.

Robin Mathews has been the only Canadian critic to seriously assess Baird’s work from a revolutionary position. He has asserted that *Waste Heritage* (1939) “leaves the message that only a significant change in the social order can provide a change in the position of the people fighting for the simplest kind of social justice (work and wages)”.²³⁵ Dorothy

Livesay has also lauded Baird’s work in her memoirs, “It was and is a fine book”.²³⁶

Another relevant fiction of the late 1930s was written by a committed CPC member,

²³² Irene Baird, “Sidown, Brothers, Sidown”, *Laurentian University Review*, 9.1 (November 1976) 82.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 82.

²³⁴ Paul Cappon, Ed. *In Our Own House: Social Perspectives on Canadian Literature*, (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1978), 57-58.

²³⁵ Robin Mathews, “Waste Heritage, The Effects of Class on Literary Structure,” *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 6.1 1990, 66.

²³⁶ Dorothy Livesay, *Journey with My Selves, A Memoir 1909-1963*, (Vancouver, Douglas & McIntyre, 1991), 158.

Ted Allan (1916-1995), born Alan Herman. In *This Time a Better Earth* (1939) he graphically illustrated the Spanish Civil War from the scene of the action as it was being fought in the early part of 1937. Allan's narrative voice, Bob Curtis, is a twenty-one year old Canadian with Communist Party affiliation attached to the International Brigades of the People's Army of Republican Spain. Curtis, a journalist from Toronto, arrived in Spain in February 1937 as a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, as the Canadian Mackenzie-Papineau (Mac-Pap) Battalion had not yet been formed. The Internationals had an understanding among themselves, "We told ourselves that we were the vanguard of our generation. We used these words, not to dramatize ourselves, but merely to tell each other that we understood why we were going to Spain to fight".²³⁷ A slight injury forced Bob's separation from the members of his squad, who are ordered to the front lines at Jarama, whilst he recuperated at the brigade's home base at Albacete. Through a chance encounter with the commandant, Bob received the offer of an assignment in Madrid. Noting his journalistic experience, the brigade's authorities decided to utilise his talent as an announcer for the political department of the International Brigades responsible for a series of regular broadcasts to North America on a radio station called the Voice of Republican Spain.

Bob's commitment to his squad, a mixed batch of three Americans and three Canadians, is temporarily sidetracked in Madrid, but he does not lose total contact with his comrades in the trenches. The horror of their circumstances disturbed him when he learned that one has been killed, one permanently disabled and one wounded within days of their entry on active duty. This fiction focused on the struggle in Bob's consciousness between loyalty to his mates at the front and the usefulness of his reporter's job at the broadcasting station. Eventually, after the accidental death of his lover, he resolved this quandary by rejoining his squad on the dangerous edge of no-man's-land, leaving behind the 'spontaneity' of his romantic adventure for the 'consciousness' of armed struggle, finding harmony, the endpoint of Soviet socialist realism.

Bob never wavered in his commitment to his communist principles. As he elaborated on his political formation, 'socialism was the way out for me, for the world. I read more and more. Lenin, Marx, Engels, Stalin. I became very active. Study groups, demonstrations, picket lines'.²³⁸ Published just prior to the outbreak of World War II, *This Time a Better Earth* (1939) stands out as a clear anti-fascist statement, when equivocation by many world leaders, especially the British made combating the German Nazis and the Italian fascists an action entirely unsupported by established authority in Australia and Canada. The Mac-Pap veterans were denied any form of government pension for their service in Spain and their

²³⁷ Ted Allan, *This Time a Better Earth*, (New York, Morrow, 1939) 7.

²³⁸ Ibid., 142.

wish for an official monument to their group in Ottawa has been mired in bureaucratic red tape for many years. Bronwyn Drainie acknowledged the international dimension of their contribution, “that tough and selfless battalion is one of the best things Canada has ever given the world”.²³⁹

Bob Curtis represented all the attributes connected to the ‘positive hero’, he exemplifies the epithets outlined by Clark such as, ‘determined’, ‘serious’, ‘stern’, ‘calm’, ‘simple’ and ‘gentle’.²⁴⁰ He also contains all the tropes of the communist, the working class hero, the anti-fascist, the scientific socialist and the martyr to the cause, as his survival on the frontline is uncertain, due to the high death rate of the International Brigade members. Allan, a party member, developed the character of Curtis as a more aware individual than the non-communist Baird’s Matt Striker, but they both emphasised the primary tenet of Soviet socialist realist fiction, the elevation of the ‘positive hero’ into a higher state of ‘consciousness’ from the depths of ‘spontaneity’.

Cultural initiatives in the 1940s saw the establishment by the CPC of its own publishing unit, Progress Books in 1943, and in 1947 by its replacement, the Labor Progressive Party (LPP), a National Culture Commission (NCC) under the leadership of Stanley Ryerson. The NCC sought to encourage scholarly, literary and artistic production from within the ranks of Party members. This brought focus and energy to the writing career of one of its most important members, Herbert Dyson Carter.

Dyson Carter was Canada’s most prominent Communist writer over a considerable period of time, from 1936 to 1986, a half century. Primarily known early on for his insightful articles on science and technology, he initially produced two romantic fictions for popular mass market consumption.

Carter had enthusiastically embraced the tenets of Soviet socialist realism in the early days of his fiction writing, publishing a short story in 1936 in the magazine *New Frontier* entitled *East Nine* under the pseudonym of ‘Jack Parr’. He expanded his utilisation of this mode of production when he published *Tomorrow Is with Us* in 1950. The primary marker of Soviet socialist realism, the father-son nexus, is played out in the connections between the scientist, Alan Baird, and the leader of the CPC, Ted Kirby.

Carter exploited most of the tropes of the communist in his rendering of Kirby. He is the supreme leader of the CPC, whilst holding a membership in the Construction Workers’ Union, a complete working class hero. He acted as the prime mover in the establishment of the Canadian Peace Congress, as it attempted to counter the fear of nuclear warfare engendered by America’s deployment of the atomic arsenal. Marxism is transmitted through

²³⁹ Bronwyn Drainie, “Time to give the Mac-Paps their due,” *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, October 27, 1990, 3.

²⁴⁰ Clark, 32.

his speeches to union meetings. He has already achieved martyr status, having served three short prison terms but his possible conviction on the trumped-up spy charges, which provided the background for this fiction, would require incarceration in a federal penitentiary for some time, further enhancing this trope.

The negative tropes of the communist are attributed to him by others, especially the media through daily press reports. His participation in the ‘mythical’ spy ring was predisposed by his admiration for all things of Soviet origin. He is condemned by Joe Dunn as a ‘Moscow rat’²⁴¹, entirely submissive to the Kremlin’s directives. As a confirmation of his pariah status, a noted psychiatrist, Dr Leonard Sommerville, denounced him with the most potent medical terminology, “he [Kirby] and the force he represents, are the...viruses of an incurable disease”.²⁴² Sommerville expanded on the danger Kirby presented as a ‘moral cancer’²⁴³, one that had to be removed from the corporeal public body in order to save it.

Carter adopted the classic Soviet socialist realist dialectic of ‘consciousness/spontaneity’ in his development of the bond between Baird and Kirby. At the beginning Baird is totally opposed to any political affiliation, he is dedicated to his scientific research, submerged in the ‘spontaneity’ of invention. Gradually, through exposure to Kirby, his awareness was raised to a higher ‘consciousness’, which culminated in his willingness to apply for CPC membership, “I’m ready to join you. Your Party”.²⁴⁴ Baird’s re-education constituted the foundational underpinning of this fiction.

In *Fatherless Sons* (1955) Carter repeated the basic Soviet socialist realist dialectic in his title, by joining the two centres of this fictional formulation together in it. Initiating the peace activist trope, Carter dramatically emphasised the tragic dimensions of war through the family cycle of three generations of the Nelson clan, a pair of brothers separated by the loss of one sibling in the Boer War, and the others in the two World Wars. With one son sacrificed to the defence of the capitalist military-industrial complex, Carter had to endow the remaining one with all the characteristics of the ‘positive hero’. The working-class Nelson family of Deep Rock, Ontario are located in Carter’s reinvention of the hardrock mining town of Sudbury, Ontario, home of the International Nickel Company of Canada, the world’s leading producer of that metal. He concentrated on, firstly, the difficult years of the post-World War II transition to a peacetime economy and, secondly, the Korean War (1950-1953) and its effects on this community.

These were very trying times for ultra-left forces in Canada, reeling from the

²⁴¹ Dyson Carter, *Tomorrow Is with Us*, (Toronto, Progress Books, 1950) 55.

²⁴² Ibid., 229.

²⁴³ Ibid., 229.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 225.

repercussions of the Gouzenko Affair of 1946 which insinuated that the CPC was a threat to the nation as the primary source of Soviet spies, and the arrest and conviction of Fred Rose (Montreal-Cartier), the only LPP member ever elected to the House of Commons. Carter conveyed the extent of government suppression as the background to this fiction, ‘by legal, ‘democratic’ procedures, the government carried through wholesale plunder of the entire progressive movement. In Deep Rock the militant organisations were ruthlessly driven underground”.²⁴⁵

Against the flow of political movement and direction, Deep Rock’s branch 901 of the General Mine and Mill Workers’ Union, eighteen thousand men, actively resisted the anti-communist initiatives of the government and their employer, Trans World Alloys. Carter’s communist commitment drove him to focus on the complex of issues and personalities that separated the social democratic Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) followers from the staunch hardline Stalinists still entrenched on the union executive. Dan Grant, the branch secretary readily admitted, “the company hates me to death because I’m a Red”.²⁴⁶ Grant gloried in his Sovietophilia, taking great pride in keeping aware of events and developments in the USSR through extensive reading and conversing with returned travellers. The social democratic opposition to Grant and his fellow communists occupied the local seat in the House of Commons. Clyde Mercer of the CCF harboured an intense emotional reaction to the communists, “instinctively, profoundly, he hated the Soviet Union”.²⁴⁷

The confrontation between the CCF and the communists is teased out into the open when Irene Nelson gained nomination as the candidate of the United Front for Peace, a communist front organisation, in the Deep Rock electorate for the federal election of 1949. Carter based this account on his knowledge of a real life event, “in the March 1940 federal election, Dorise W. Nielsen, a candidate in the Saskatchewan riding of North Battleford, acquired the distinction of being the first member of the Communist Party of Canada to be elected to the House of Commons. She was elected as the representative of the ‘Unity platform’ which consisted of Communists and disaffected members of other parties”.²⁴⁸ Her campaign disrupted Clyde Mercer’s possible re-election, as the two leftist parties split the socialist vote, which allowed the Liberal Party standard-bearer to squeeze between them and gain a narrow victory.

Even after his electoral defeat, the bitterness between Mercer and the communists is sustained. Mercer is determined to destroy the communist powerbase in the union movement.

²⁴⁵ Dyson Carter, *Fatherless Sons*, (Toronto, Progress Books, 1955) 18.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 46.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 143.

²⁴⁸ Communist Party of Canada, *Canada’s Party of Socialism*, (Toronto, Progress Books, 1982) 139.

He planned to attack them strategically on their territory in his role as Canadian director of a rival American-dominated organisation, the United Metal and Mine Workers of America. Mercer's failure to undermine communist influence is not unexpected as Carter's overtly communist bias vehemently opposed the social democratic alternative.

At the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 Carter's authorial intervention reiterated his ideological position, the CCF leadership had "come to the rescue of the wobbling banner of American imperialism, and called upon Canadian youth 'to preserve and defend Democracy's precious freedoms'".²⁴⁹ On the other hand, when General Mine and Mill members take part in a pro-Korean War ceremony, they follow the directive of the CPC in presenting their display. The unionists "would march only at the very end, climaxing the parade with a dozen great banners bearing General Mine and Mill's motto, Unity-Security-Peace!"²⁵⁰ The peace movement in North America during the decades of the fifties and sixties often acted as a battleground between the communists, wishing to control it and employ it for their strategic purposes, and people genuinely inclined to the pacifist cause.

Carter's fiction highlighted an almost forgotten phase of Canadian labour history. The campaign by right wing groups and their social democratic partners to 'clean out the Reds'²⁵¹ was an integral part of the Cold War in Canada. The CPC's most important initiative was "helping build a Canadian labor movement. Steel workers, packing-house workers, hardrock miners, furniture workers and lumber workers were all organized by the party under Buck's leadership".²⁵²

One vital component in the gradual disintegration of the CPC's strength and prominence was the destruction of communist direction and control over Canadian unions. Covert political action accomplished this task which was condoned by the silence of the popular media but for *Fatherless Sons* (1955) exposure of this practice to public awareness. Carter's insight into the conflict for the allegiance and most importantly, the dues, of Canada's workers performed a valuable service in preventing the total erasure of significant working-class history by the bourgeois state apparatus.

Perhaps the most important book to appear in the second phase of the communist presence in English-Canadian fiction was *Down the Long Table* (1955) by Earle Birney (1904-1995). This book recorded the fictional undoing of a radical political career, based entirely on personal experience, in the service of the Communist League of North America (CLNA), the Trotskyite faction, in the hectic turmoil of the very early thirties. He condensed

²⁴⁹ Carter, *Fatherless Sons*, 378.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 414.

²⁵¹ Morris Wolfe, "The party owes him more," Toronto, *The Globe and Mail*, March 29, 1975, 23.

²⁵² Ibid., 23.

this involvement over a period of about eight years into the autobiographical main character, Gordon Saunders, alias Paul Green, and his rather short-term engagement with Marxism-Leninism and its two main offshoots, Stalinism and Trotskyism, which were contending for supremacy over the allegiance of ultra-left political activists committed to communism. Framed by the fictional reconstruction of a year in the life of the twenty-eight year old college instructor, this novel revealed the repercussions of Saunders' political involvements. In his year of leave of absence from a doctoral fellowship at the University of Toronto, Saunders surrendered his position at Wasatch College in Salt Lake City, Utah on September 2, 1932. Before departing his academic employment, he disclosed his working-class origins and open sympathy with proletarian issues.

In the autumn of 1932 the intensity and energy of the Canadian left offered possibilities to many individuals searching for practical solutions through political party organisations to the ongoing disaster of the worldwide Great Depression. The democratic socialist CCF under the leadership of J. S. Woodsworth (1874-1942) had very recently been formed. The leaders of the Communist Party of Canada were languishing in Kingston Penitentiary for violating Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada, which is explained in the play, *Eight Men Speak* (1933), discussed in more detail in the Canadian drama chapter of this thesis and had been accused of incitement to riot for leading a protest by the inmates on October 17, 1932. Birney focused the reader's attention on these contemporary events in the collage of newspaper headlines which make up chapter five of the text and set the stage for Saunders' return to his homeland. At an unemployed workers' rally in Queen's Park outside the Ontario Legislative Assembly buildings in November, 1932, the author reasserted the volatility of the atmosphere of friction and revolt in the immediate political situation in one protesting placard's message, "RELEASE TIM BUCK and JOIN NOOWOO"²⁵³ (National Unemployed Workers' Union) Tim Buck and the 'Kingston 8' were now charged with incitement to riot and NOOWOO was the main force behind the push for unemployment benefits. When Dirty Dirkin, a plainclothes detective, violently halted Saunders from continuing to jeer at the aggressive crowd control tactics of the motorcycle police intent on breaking up the unemployed gathering, he informed the newly arrived Torontonians of the political state of play. "There's eight of the top boys taking a five years rest in Kingston Penitentiary. And there's a few agitators still creeping around under phoney names, running cover organizations like this fake unemployed outfit today".²⁵⁴

On November 28, 1932 Saunders attended his first meeting of the Social Problems

²⁵³ Earle Birney, *Down the Long Table*, (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1955) 52.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

Club of the University of Toronto, described as a “Marxist study-class.”²⁵⁵ During the course of discussion Saunders openly articulated a jaundiced view of the Canadian proletariat. “If the Canadian worker is in the grip of anything, it’s his own desire to be a capitalist”.²⁵⁶ He also revealed doubts about the efficacy of the Soviet Utopia, “but I don’t believe Russia has either political freedom yet, or economic equality. She’s building socialism, so far as I know, yes, but she’s building a privileged bureaucracy of politicians too”.²⁵⁷ Saunders quickly departed the Social Problems Club of his own volition after Roberts, its guiding force, sought his expulsion.

Dismayed by the hardline Stalinists, Saunders turned to the seemingly less restrictive Trotskyites. The esteem of their high profile leader enhanced the appeal of their faction, “above all, it was Sather who had set a spell on him, Sather the protean and inimitable leader of the group and...of the whole Trotskyist movement in Canada”.²⁵⁸ Especially impressive was Sather’s attendance at the initial meeting of the Communist Party in May, 1921.

The equally important MacCraddock added lustre to their leadership team, “Like Sather, he had helped to found the Canadian Communist Party, had in fact been its leader until he too was exiled for heresy, to be succeeded by Tim Buck”.²⁵⁹ This characterisation seems an obvious reference to Jack MacDonald, a prominent figure in CPC circles, who will reappear in the 1980s fiction by Jeremy Akerman, *Black Around the Eyes*, as a prominent activist in the Cape Breton coal strike of 1922.

Captivated by the elite of the CLNA but more in thrall to the physical attractions of Thelma Barstow, a fellow Trotskyite, Saunders willingly accepted the challenge of organising a Vancouver cell of the party as the means to party preferment and his engagement and marriage to Thelma. In his description of the Sather/Saunders relationship, Birney reiterated the centrality of the father-son nexus in the Soviet socialist realism formulation.

In late May 1933 Saunders hopped a freight train west and assumed his new role as an underground political operative. Certainty and commitment dominated his new persona of Paul Green, Trotskyist organiser, “living the life that the world of 1933 had arranged for its single unemployable males along the skid row of Vancouver. And this was not only because he felt in truth now almost one of them but because he hoped to make some of them one with him”.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 67.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 82.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 86.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 110.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 150.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 183.

As Paul Green/Gordon Saunders quickly drew together a small band of followers, he also drifted into conflict with the Stalinists, popularly labelled the Black Monks. In particular his confrontations with Stephen McNamee, secretary of the Workers' Unity League, a front organisation of the CPC, exposed the extent of left-wing rivalry for direction and control of the workless in the intolerable conditions kept in place by an uncaring Conservative Party federal government.

McNamee publicly accused Paul Green/Gordon Saunders and his hero, Leon Trotsky, "You fascist scum! Mr. Trotsky's the biggest paid agent the international bourgeoisie ever had, he's a White Guard spy, a pal of Otto Kahn and John D. Rockefeller. He's out to wreck the Soviet Union and the Third International".²⁶¹ Later in the same verbal exchange, McNamee attacked the CCF in a similar strident comment, "the role of the CCF is to prepare the way for Canadian fascism and Trotskyism".²⁶²

At Saunders' appearance before the American Congress's sub-committee on Un-American Activities in the early 1950s, which acted as the *aide-memoire* of his past political activities, McNamee has been named by the presiding senator, presumably the infamous Joseph McCarthy, as the information source for the case against him. Undercover infiltration by Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) agents was a common tactic in the campaign against communism in the 1930s and the sharing of intelligence between the RCMP and the Federal Bureau of Investigation was normal operating procedure.

Placed in contact with the South Vancouver Workers Educational Army by the international organiser of the CLNA's New York office, Green/Saunders recruited its twenty-two members and their leader, Michael Halloran, which combined with his original cadre of three, Bill Smith, Ole Hansen and Fred Hughes gave him enough comrades to momentarily claim success at his mission of bringing into existence a Vancouver cell of the party. On July 29, 1933 he formally applied for recognition as the British Columbia branch of the CLNA. In the ensuing three weeks factionalism divided the Canadian section of the party. This internal strife brought about the total removal of Sather's influence, as he is now labelled an expelled renegade, and new leadership coalesced under Willy Baumling, a supporter of the Bauerite-Fieldite fraction of the CLNA.

At a momentous meeting held to discuss the new agenda put in place by Baumling, the Vancouver executive fragmented as it disagreed with the new leader's directives and this divisiveness caused a complete breakdown in the cell's operations. Green/Saunders glorious success has collapsed into undeniable failure as his comrades retreated to their old political positions. Betrayed and disillusioned, Green/Saunders gratefully returned to his Utah teaching

²⁶¹ Ibid., 216.

²⁶² Ibid., 217.

post filled with cynicism.

The provocative note in Birney's confessional concerned the accuracy of the American and Canadian governments unpublicised internal security policy of hiring paid informants to undermine the ultra-radical forces in North America. The two instances of this tactic exposed in this fiction conclusively prove that part of the federal government's clandestine strategy to suppress national internal dissension was the recruitment of undercover agents to spy on and disrupt the programs of many revolutionary movements.

Saunders' elevation to 'consciousness' is evident in his self-realisation of his own double betrayal by, firstly, Bill Smith in Vancouver to the local Red Squad, the consequences of which he was fortunate to escape. Then, secondly, the much more serious disclosure to the United States government's congressional investigators by John Langdale, alias Stephen McNamee, of his Trotskyist activities. The repercussions of Langdale's disclosures are left to conjecture as this fiction closed on that moment when Saunders is called to testify before the sub-committee armed with the facts divulged by Langdale. Betrayal by the state's undercover agents constituted the overriding perception Birney may have wished to transmit through his writing to discerning readers.

Down the Long Table (1955) penetrated with telling accuracy into the murky affairs surrounding the political machinations of ultra-radical groups in the early part of the Thirties. Another fiction with a retrospective take on that decade which focused on debunking the legend of Norman Bethune was Hugh MacLennan's *The Watch That Ends the Night* (1958). MacLennan strategically subverted the Bethune legacy by engaging a doppelganger figure to overturn Canada's foremost communist icon and deflate his hero worship with a renewal of Christian belief through the image of Jesus Christ himself.

The doppelganger effect had MacLennan's Bethune replacement established in the same social milieu as his real life counterpart. He is employed as a surgeon at a prominent hospital in Montreal in the 1930s, engaged in lifesaving procedures whilst simultaneously operating for two hours every day in a free clinic for the unemployed, which he had initiated. This main character, Jerome Martell, is a colleague of Bethune's and in communication with him in the organisation of his blood transfusion service during the Spanish Civil War. MacLennan had Martell depart for Spain but conspicuously kept Bethune and his double apart.

MacLennan did not conceive of any new approaches to the tropes of the communist in his depiction of Martell. His parents definitely had working class origins and he succeeded at an extremely high level in his surgical practice, a Stakhanovite of the medical profession. He is certainly an anti-fascist, as his support for the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy is based on rejection of Nazism. MacLennan projected Martell as a self-sacrificer, but for the

greater good of humanity, not a specific group. Martell's mistress belonged to the CPC and MacLennan delivered the trope of the Sovietophile through her acclaim for the engineering prowess of the USSR, "In Russia, a man like Harry would be appreciated. Technicians are given a chance in Russia".²⁶³

The AntiChrist trope is sheeted home to the communists through their influence on Martell and his willingness to abandon his family, his property and his professional status in Montreal. This viewpoint is offered by a former CPC member, when he stated, "he threw it all away. Why? Those God damned commies".²⁶⁴ A colleague of Martell referred to his political views as "like a disease. Jerome's sick with it".²⁶⁵ This statement reiterated the disease carrier trope assigned to communists, although Martell never officially joined the party, aligning with them as a fellow traveller. The ambiguity of his position is stressed when he signalled a commonality of purpose with them by raising the clenched fist salute at the opening ceremony of an Aid to Spanish Democracy meeting he addressed, "all but Jerome raised their clenched fists. Then Jerome...did the same".²⁶⁶ MacLennan communicated his perception of the impact of the communist lexicon in listing the keywords of the 1930s, "when someone would utter one of those key words of the period (cadre, stakhanovite, the masses – any one of the key words would suffice),"²⁶⁷ political debate would eventuate.

The marker of difference between Martell and Bethune is based in Martell's reaffirmation of Christian spirituality through his vision of Christ, "He wasn't the Jesus of the churches. He wasn't the man who had died for our sins. He was simply a man who had died and risen".²⁶⁸ Is it only a coincidence that the surname of MacLennan's hero of Christianity is the same as the eighth century Charles who halted the advance of the Moorish army at the Battle of Tours in 732 and saved Europe from Islam?²⁶⁹ MacLennan had been a Rhodes Scholar who had completed postgraduate studies in Roman history at Princeton University. He might have researched this era during that period.

MacLennan associated Judaism and communism through his narrative voice, "by no means all the communists in Montreal in those days were Jews, but I think it was the Jews who provided the passion".²⁷⁰ One of them had been the mentor figure in Martell's acquisition of knowledge about communism, "this young Jew Aronson talked to me about

²⁶³ Hugh MacLennan, *The Watch That Ends the Night*, (Toronto, Macmillan, 1960) 125.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 99.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 262.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 247.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 286.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 329-330.

²⁶⁹ Paul Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel*, (London, Pearson Education, 2000) 1.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 247.

Marx and socialism”.²⁷¹ MacLennan craftily implied that Jewish representatives were the means to Martell’s elevation in political ‘consciousness’. His doppelganger effect subverted the Bethune legend in authorising belief in a renewed Christianity as the antidote to the spread of virulent communism and its alleged partner, Judaism.

Earle Birney had taken up an issue, on which MacLennan’s fiction and Hugh Garner’s *Cabbagetown* (1968) also focused, the contest for the allegiance of the politically astute in the volatility of the Depression years. *The Watch That Ends the Night* (1958) conveyed the rejection of communism for a renewal of religiosity and *Down the Long Table* (1955) documented the short-lived career of a political operative, whilst Garner revealed the process of a political education.

Garner (1913-1979) was born in Yorkshire, England and arrived in Canada in 1919. His family settled in downtown Toronto, specifically the inner city slum area nicknamed Cabbagetown, which he utilised as the setting and title of his celebrated first novel. This book was originally published in an extremely abridged format of 160 pages in 1950 and then reissued in an unexpurgated version of 415 pages in 1968.²⁷²

Cabbagetown (1968) detailed the political education of its male protagonist, Kenneth Tilling. Tracing his life from the day he leaves Danforth Technical School in March, 1929 on his sixteenth birthday, this fiction reiterated the classic Soviet socialist realist ‘consciousness/spontaneity’ dialectic through Tilling’s gradual progression from an unthinking youth mimicking the conservative values of his family to committed revolutionary as a self-described ‘communist sympathiser’²⁷³ on the Jarama Front in the Spanish Civil War in February 1937, just prior to his twenty-fourth birthday.

These eight years coincided with the dark days of the Great Depression and this global economic catastrophe provided the socially realistic backdrop to the struggle of working-class youth, represented by Ken Tilling, to come to terms with the hardship brought about by the disruption and turmoil of this mammoth economic downturn. Ken’s powerlessness is intensified by his lack of a father, as Bob Tilling is the equivalent of Striker’s lost father in *Waste Heritage* (1939). As his mother, Mabel, recounted it, “Soon after coming back in 1919, he had disappeared”.²⁷⁴ This absent father motif connected Ken to the father-son nexus of the Soviet socialist realist tradition.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 167.

²⁷² An integral part of examining Garner’s political stance would have been a comparative reading of these two editions. Unfortunately, the cheap paperback of 1950, which sold almost fifty thousand copies in Canada, has not easily survived the ravages of time and extensive research failed to disclose a copy. This consideration of *Cabbagetown* will be restricted to the later 1968 edition.

²⁷³ Hugh Garner, *Cabbagetown*, (Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1968) 406.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 64.

In order to comprehend Ken's trajectory on the political spectrum, Garner located his starting point within the common cultural creed of Cabbagetowners, "citizens of Cabbagetown believed in God, the Royal Family, the Conservative Party and private enterprise".²⁷⁵ Ken's victimisation by his first employer at a local grocery began the long and painful series of disenchanting employment experiences which formed a significant portion of his political education. His loss of this position is a result of his voluntary responses to accusations made by the owner to his employees at a meeting to discuss merchandise stolen from the warehouse. His spontaneous remarks irritated McDonald and caused the termination of his job. As he is informed by a fellow employee, "'you shouldn't have talked back to him, Tilling,' said Carding".²⁷⁶ Tilling's 'spontaneity' is an indication of his 'son' status in the father-son nexus of the Soviet socialist realist novel.

Another part of his political awareness was produced by his self-education through the Toronto public library system. On numerous occasions Garner reiterated Tilling's intensive reading program. In deliberately amplifying the ongoing elevation of Ken's consciousness, Garner delineated the 'consciousness/spontaneity' dialectic of the Soviet socialist realist tradition, and the increasing gap that emerged in their awareness between Ken and his lifelong friends and associates in Cabbagetown.

The loss of his clerk's position in 1930 forced Ken into the morass of unemployment. Poverty became the major determinant of his daily activities. To augment his weekly rations allotted by the city's welfare department, he resorted to petty crime. After receiving a suspended sentence for his part in the attempted theft of toilet fixtures, Ken wisely decided to conclude his criminal career. He still held fast to the values dear to Cabbagetowners, "when the stock market panic had run its course he would be quite content with a steady job, a weekly pay envelope and a girl like Myrla".²⁷⁷

When Myrla confessed to being pregnant by her employer, Ken's conventional illusions are shattered and in the aftermath he departed his regular job at the soap factory. He wasted little time in jumping a freight train and riding the rails west to evade the trauma of the destruction of his petit-bourgeois dream with Myrla.

He put in a short stint as a farm worker in rural Manitoba before being arrested in Winnipeg by the RCMP in a raid on the CPR railyards. In this group of prisoners he encountered a radical for the first time. Impressed by this unnamed hobo's brave responses to the police interrogation, Ken questioned him about his allegiance, "It was a membership card

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 6

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 40.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 90.

in an organization he hadn't heard of before, The Industrial Workers of the World".²⁷⁸ Halfway through this novel, Ken has met the first mentor in his political education, the first father figure. Although he developed an intense respect for the IWW, Ken continued to refuse to identify with any revolutionaries. When Theodore East accused him of being a communist, he responded, "I believe a lot in what they believe but unlike most Reds I've talked to I don't put the working stiff up at the top of the noble pile. I'm a working stiff myself and like you I was brought up among them, and I believe that some of the worst sons of bitches in the world are other working stiff".²⁷⁹ In this discussion Ken revealed a rational understanding of the class struggle but seems constrained by emotion, probably based in self-loathing, from fully endorsing the communist position.

The father figure is not confined to one individual. In Ken's situation, a further two make appearances. Firstly, his encounter with 'Legs' Fisher in the Bowery in the winter of 1935 put a permanent positive opinion in favour of communism into Ken's consciousness. 'Legs' informed Ken in plain and simple language, as required in a man of 'consciousness', "maybe it's different for you an' me, Ken, but for the ordinary working stiff Communism seems the only hope".²⁸⁰ The effect of this remark is so profound that Ken retained it in his memory for the rest of the fiction.

After his return from America and just prior to his meeting with Noah Masterson, Mabel Tilling passed away. Ken perceived a moment of self-realisation when he closely examined a photograph of his maternal grandfather, "the old boy looks like a staunch Hastings County Conservative. I wonder what he would say if he knew his grandson was a Red".²⁸¹ Through this interior monologue perception, Tilling expressed full comprehension of the dimension of his political evolution.

The third father figure in Ken's life is Noah Masterson, who developed into Ken's principal surrogate father. When they meet at an unemployed workers' rally organised by the CPC in Queen's Park in August of 1935, Ken is carrying a large banner which reads, "WAGES, NOT TWENTY CENTS A DAY SLAVERY IN GOVT. CAMPS".²⁸² His banner attracted the attention of Masterson and, as he engaged Ken in conversation, "he wore a half-smiling expression as if savouring a secret joke".²⁸³ This kind of description fits within the father figure stereotype common to Soviet socialist realist fictions, as Katarina Clark

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 184.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 250.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 345.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 356.

²⁸² Ibid., 362.

²⁸³ Ibid., 365.

explained when discussing the character of Lyutikov in Alexander Fadeev's novel, *The Young Guard* (1951), "Fadeev has given him two masks, one of stern and unsmiling mien, and an alternative mask of a smiling – even laughing – figure".²⁸⁴ As the rally disintegrated into a number of scuffles involving some Catholic school students and the marchers, Ken attacked one of the students with a punch to the mouth. Noah's reaction to this outbreak of violence is a marker of the Soviet socialist realist code, as he remarked to Ken, "it looks as if the demonstration's over, thanks to all you hotheads".²⁸⁵ Hotheadedness was a primary descriptor for the 'son' in Stalinist socialist realist fiction, as Katarina Clark pointed out: "rather than 'brave', the son was often positively hotheaded".²⁸⁶

Noah Masterson combines three important factors in the 'father' figure role. He served in the Fourth Mounted Rifles of the Canadian Army during World War I, just as Bob Tilling had done. He also was an old ex-Wobbly, similar to Ken's first mentor figure, and claimed to have known all the old American ultra-radicals, "Eugene Debs, Robert Minor...Emma Goldman, Big Bill Hayworth, the whole lot of 'em".²⁸⁷ His surrogacy was completed when he referred to Ken as 'son', at the moment they bid farewell prior to Ken's departure for Spain. However, Masterson rejected the Communists totally: "I've no love for the Communist established church, or for its Trotskyite opponents either".²⁸⁸ This rejection of connection to communism preserved the role of true mentor/father figure for the yet to be introduced CP member, as is required by the Soviet socialist realist credo.

Ken's first direct encounter with communists occurred with the introduction of the new upstairs tenants in his own home, Jimmy and Dorothy Cluff. Dorothy informs Ken that Jimmy is an active member of the CPC, "he goes to weekly cell meetings out in the East End".²⁸⁹ In response Ken explicitly detailed his political views, "I believe in direct action. I'd like to see the hunger marchers and the unemployed burn the Parliament Buildings down".²⁹⁰ In this statement, Ken projected all the qualities of the 'son' figure, as Katerina Clark explained, "he is virtually expected to be perverse, headstrong, or wilful on occasion, his escapades and feats can provide the novel with color and excitement".²⁹¹

Dorothy Cluff exhibited the utopian visionary aspects of the CPC member. She is the only communist who genuinely expressed the expectation that the revolution will take place

²⁸⁴ Clark, 39.

²⁸⁵ Garner, 369.

²⁸⁶ Clark, 34.

²⁸⁷ Garner, 369.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 373.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 279.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 278.

²⁹¹ Clark, 43.

within the foreseeable future, “what we need is a workers’ government, and...within five years we’re going to have one”.²⁹² Jimmy, on the other hand, was extremely pragmatic in his efforts, “He pointed out items in the newspapers to Ken, showing him the wrongs and injustices that were being perpetrated every day against the members of the working class”.²⁹³ This series of intellectual discussions between Jimmy and Ken formed a significant part of his political maturation.

As further evidence of his expanding consciousness, Ken assures Jimmy that he would undertake serious study of socio-political material in the next few months, “reading everything the library had by John Strachey, Lenin, Kropotkin, Leon Trotsky, Beatrice and Sydney Webb, Engels, Stuart Chase, Leopold Blum, Fournier, and a dozen other writers who each had a different plan for ameliorating poverty. Some called it socialism, some communism, some Christian radicalism, some Social Credit”.²⁹⁴

The third representative of the communist image is Steve Rogers, who portrays the middle class intellectual identifying with the proletariat, but without the authenticity necessary to convince the working class individuals of Cabbagetown. Theodore East, a member of the far right National Canadian Youth group, took a very jaundiced view of him, “the young man known as Steve was dressed in very poor clothes if for effect. Theodore had seen too many poor people to be fooled as to how they looked”.²⁹⁵ Ken Tilling’s remarks are more telling, as he described Rogers: “he’d already met several of his ilk at the parties given to raise money for the Loyalist cause. Parlour Pinks was the phrase that fitted them best”.²⁹⁶ Ken’s disparagement of Rogers is confirmed in the closing pages, when Rogers refused to serve in Spain, “I can do more important work for the Spanish *campesino* right here at home, and for the Party also”.²⁹⁷

With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 more and more public discussion and media attention was focused on the plight of the beleaguered Loyalists fending off General Franco and his fascist supporters. Identification with the working class Loyalists began to motivate Ken and he attended many rallies fostering solidarity with them. He joined the League Against War and Fascism, a Communist front organisation which took the lead in collecting medical aid for the Republican forces. In conversation with Noah about these matters, Ken readily accepted Communist leadership on this issue, “when every member of

²⁹² Garner, 276.

²⁹³ Ibid., 311.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 313.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 269.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 396.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 395.

every working class in the world should be behind the Spanish people, they're the only ones who are doing anything concrete to help them. I don't care what their motives are".²⁹⁸

When he volunteered for duty in the Abraham Lincoln Battalion of the International Brigades, Ken's intellectual commitment to the working class is finally applied to practical ends. He gradually accepted the status of a 'fellow traveller' with the Communists based on his admiration of their organisational skills, "at least the Communist International functionaries who were handling the sending of young men to Spain from scores of different countries were models of efficiency".²⁹⁹ His personal respect for the leader of his squad of ten men on the *Berengaria* as it crossed the Atlantic Ocean is the final step in his acceptance of communism, "Danny was a real honest-to-God Russian Communist".³⁰⁰ Danny provided Ken with a hands-on type dedicated to the cause, as he had abandoned an engineering position in Detroit to join the International Brigades. Ken at last found the image of communism that met his criteria in this final representation. As a member of the vanguard of the proletariat, the representative of 'consciousness', according to Katarina Clark, "generally meant some Soviet official who was also a Party member".³⁰¹ This completed the pattern of the Soviet socialist realist novel, as the formula was expected to show how the forces of 'spontaneity' and 'consciousness' ultimately coexist in a state of harmony. Once this harmony is achieved, the 'positive hero' has made the great leap forward, which, as Clark informed, "represents the climax in the ritual resolution of the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic".³⁰²

Garner allowed the fictional Ken a heartening optimism as the Abraham Lincoln fighters approached their initial encounter with battle on the Jarama Front. In an authorial aside he signalled his respect for the volunteers and their betrayal by the appeasement efforts of the politically powerful back home, "they were already doomed to defeat, not by Spanish fascism, or Hitler, but by the machinators in Whitehall, the Quai D'Orsay and on Washington's Capitol Hill".³⁰³

Garner's personal political beliefs intersected with his 'positive hero' in his admission that it was Shaw's *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism* (1928) "that he considered the book which 'turned me into a social radical'",³⁰⁴ as this was one of the books on Tilling's research list. A second coincidental fact which united Garner's own

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 385.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 401.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 405.

³⁰¹ Clark, 33.

³⁰² Ibid., 48.

³⁰³ Garner, 414.

³⁰⁴ Paul Stuewe, *The Storms Below, The Turbulent Life and Times of Hugh Garner*, (Toronto, James Lorimer, 1988) 12.

political commitment with that of his autobiographical counterpart centred on the 'Legs' Fisher comment which forced Ken to revalue the communist perspective, "Hugh attributed his conversion to socialist political views to his friend 'Slats' Fisher, a convicted safe-cracker from Utah [who was] convinced that communism was the only answer for the oppressed working class".³⁰⁵ Fisher, his nickname changed to 'Legs', appeared in *Cabbagetown* (1968) as one of the mentor figures in Ken Tilling's transformation.

As Doug Fetherling has perceived, "Garner has great sympathy -- more than any other Canadian writer -- with the displaced, the dispossessed and the generally down and out, as a class and as individuals".³⁰⁶ *Cabbagetown* (1968) articulated Garner's concern for the poor and underprivileged in Canadian society during the terrible decade of the Great Depression through one worker's elevation of his political 'consciousness'.

Garner's own participation in left politics included two phases of activity in organised groups. In the latter part of 1935 and throughout 1936, he was involved with a youthful CCF group which met in Cabbagetown, "and after a few months was elected president".³⁰⁷ Garner also had the opportunity of meeting the CCF hierarchy, J. S. Wordsworth, M. J. Coldwell, and T. C. Douglas, when he attended the first Canadian Youth Congress held in Ottawa in 1936.

The Spanish Civil War produced a personal political crisis for Garner. It played on his sympathy for the downtrodden and his animosity for fascism. By February 1937 through surreptitious means he was on his way to Spain and the International Brigades. Diagnosed as suffering from shellshock he returned to Toronto in October 1937 after a rather short span of six months of actual combat duty. He now aligned himself with a YCL publication called *New Advance* and "was listed on the masthead as a member of the editorial board for the five issues produced between March and July 1938".³⁰⁸

However, Garner did not sustain his attachment to *New Advance* for very long. He drifted off into managing a food co-operative in Port Credit, Ontario in the summer of 1938. At the start of 1939 Garner was no longer an active participant in the political process and withdrew to further concentrate on his literary work. Garner's unexpurgated 1968 edition of *Cabbagetown* completed the second phase of social[ist] realism in Canada.

The work of Earle Birney, Dyson Carter and Hugh Garner constituted the second phase of communist representation in Canadian fiction. Birney, a Trotskyite, and Garner were not CPC members themselves, but they included images and characters falling under the influence of communism in their fictions about some of the pivotal events of the Great

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 43.

³⁰⁶ Doug Fetherling, *Hugh Garner*, (Toronto, Forum House Publishing, 1972) 30.

³⁰⁷ Stuewe, 66.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 66.

Depression as it played out in the Canada of the 1930s. Dyson Carter provided a dedicated communist perspective on the post-World War II era, when communism entered into a problematic existence, contending with the substantial resources of the anti-communist forces.

The most memorable communist oriented fiction has been produced in the years from 1970 to 1990, which formed the third phase of this study of English-Canadian fiction. Writers divided their craft into two structures, the autobiographical diary format, transmitting urgent signals of distress from working-class youth on the periphery of bourgeois Canadian society in its three largest cities, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, which dominated the 1970s, and the 'faction' of accurate historical re-enactment by Jeremy Akerman, Dyson Carter, Michael Ondaatje and Oscar Ryan, which thrived in the 1980s.

The diary of Michael Taylor, over the six week period of July 1 to August 15, 1967, with a closing epilogue dated October 21, constituted the contents of Juan Butler's *Cabbagetown Diary: A Documentary* (1970). In this work Butler (1942-1981) updated the raw experience of Toronto's working class youth from that seamy inner city area that Hugh Garner initially explored in *Cabbagetown* (1968).

Dominated by a white Anglo-Saxon Catholic male sensibility enveloped by racist and sexist attitudes, Butler's fiction powered along on the alienation of an unattached youth wrapped in a cycle of violence and poverty. It evoked the formally uneducated scribbling of a representative of Toronto's poor who has little sympathy but considerable understanding for his own social class. Mike Taylor has survived some rough times growing up in one of Toronto's most deprived districts.

George, Mike's mentor, represented the revolutionary option as a possible alternative to Mike's self-destructive lifestyle. He identified George as the inspiration for his writing, "I like George very much, in fact it's thanks to him that I'm writing this diary".³⁰⁹ George and Mike forged the father/son bond common to Soviet socialist realism.

George has run the gamut of far left-leaning positions, from carrying the membership card of the CPC to switching over to the Trotskyists and finally finding common cause with the Maoists, who "were mostly dropouts from other groups and they decided that the only way to power is through violent revolution".³¹⁰ The Maoists have formulated a plan of action through a front organisation, the Revolutionary Action Party (RAP) and "the word is bomb, baby, bomb. We'll start off slowly with selective terrorism. By that I mean we'll zap the politics in City Hall first. At their homes, in their offices, wherever we can hit them".³¹¹ The

³⁰⁹ Juan Butler, *Cabbagetown Diary: A Documentary*, (Toronto, P. Martin Associates, 1970) 76.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

Maoists are ready to create the pretext for revolutionary struggle.

When Michael is offered an opportunity by RAP to participate in urban guerilla warfare by tossing Molotov cocktails at a handicraft shop, he refused to take part by arguing from an individualist perspective, “Look, George, what the hell am I going to get out of this? Is it politics that’s going to feed me?...What the hell do I care if there’s poor people in Cabbagetown?”³¹² Michael’s failure to make common cause with the Maoists indicated a severe lack of progress in his political education.

Michael Taylor’s alienation from any meaningful involvement, personal and public, formed the concluding portion of his diary entry of October 21, 1967. In it he recorded his spiteful separation from a large anti-Vietnam War demonstration because the City of Toronto police failed to arrest anyone in a melee between some demonstrators and a group from the extreme right wing John Birch Society. After that fit of pique, he attacked his lover, Theresa, by throwing her out of their boarding house room for reporting her pregnancy to him. Taylor exhibited the tendencies of retreating to a state of ‘spontaneity’, turning away from the political cell or squad, centred on the man of ‘consciousness’ figure such as George that was so crucial to the commitments of Soviet socialist realist ‘positive heroes’.

Cabbagetown Diary (1970) revelled in the depiction of sordid sexual encounters, physical violence and criminal activity. It swerved away from meaningful social commitment to languish in totally self-centred alienation. The timeframe of Garner’s eight years in *Cabbagetown* allowed him to provide the conditions necessary to make Ken Tilling’s adherence to communism the final step in his political transformation. Although set in the same place, the difference in time presented in the two novels determined the exposition of character development available to the writers. Butler’s work operated as a quick sketch of a short six-week interval, whilst Garner explored the Great Depression and its affects in the details of a life over an eight year span. Outside of their geographical connection, the two fictions are separated by their authorial constraints and intentions.

The most powerful political voice of disadvantaged youth has been David Fennario, born David Wiper in Montreal in 1947, who first came to the public’s awareness through his quasi-autobiographical diary, *Without a Parachute* (1974). This work, although highly praised at the time of publication, pinpointed the ambivalence that encapsulates all autobiographical writing, dominated as it is by the twin urgencies of self-revelation and self-obfuscation.

Blue Mondays (1984) functioned as Fennario’s own corrective to the earlier youthful effort. In it he explicitly included the previously censored political action omitted from *Without a Parachute* (1974). In *Without a Parachute* (1974) Fennario composed a college assignment and geared his daily entries to the acceptable standards of his instructor, Sally

³¹² Ibid., 177.

Nelson. As he explained in the text in his entry for April 2, 1971 Sally Nelson “proposed that I have Dawson [College] print five hundred or so copies of my journal which I am to have copy-righted and placed in various bookstores on sale”.³¹³ Nelson’s major criticism of Fennario’s diary appeared a few paragraphs after that statement, “She also thought my political views were rather simplistic, narrow and limited in scope”.³¹⁴ Caving in to the authority figure of the state educational system, Fennario depoliticised the content and context of *Without a Parachute* (1974).

The political bits and pieces taken out of *Without a Parachute* (1974) constituted the central focus of *Blue Mondays* (1984). Working from the context and concerns of the Black Rock Group dedicated to a Marxist perspective in their attempt to radicalise the Point St. Charles working class community in Montreal, Fennario returned to his earlier life-writing in order to enhance and enlarge the political dimension compromised by an authority figure induced suppressive self-censorship over-determining his publication.

A comparison of two entries, one from each text, provides an insight into the pivotal role played by Fennario’s political commitment in them. The dual entries of February 3, 1970 revealed the dynamics surrounding the expression and suppression of political material. In *Without a Parachute* (1974) Fennario indulged in family reminiscences centred on the death of his alcoholic Uncle Art. In *Blue Mondays* (1984) he recounted his attendance at that evening’s class of the Spring Session of the study lectures of Section Montreal of the Socialist Labour Party of Canada (SLPC). Fennario reported on the Marxist cell’s routine, mainly reading from “copies of Daniel Deleon’s ‘What Means This Strike?’ pamphlet that Deleon made back in 1903”.³¹⁵

With these comments Fennario filled in the time and events purposely left out of *Without a Parachute* (1974) because of his complicity with the ideological state apparatus. Class consciousness and political commitment are the pressing issues surging through the mind that *Blue Mondays* (1984) reflected. Fennario provides the details of his work activities as an unskilled labourer in a clothing factory, packing boxes, stapling invoices, printing price tags, moving rolls of cloth. He also portrays his wife’s employment as a waitress and their mutual desire for revolutionary change through the SLPC.

Blue Mondays (1984) contained sharply-edged perceptions of doubt and disenchantment that continually close in on young revolutionaries scrambling to keep alive in the frenzy of consumer capitalist excess. Fennario’s wavering belief in Marxism haunted his notations. He recorded his disillusionment in a steady downward spiral of fading hope for

³¹³ David Fennario, *Without a Parachute*, (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1974) 206.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 206.

³¹⁵ David Fennario, *Blue Mondays*, (Verdun, Black Rock Creations, 1984) 157.

revolution, disbelief in its possibility and total loss of faith in the activities of Section Montreal, its members and its program.

Whilst working as a stocktaker in a department store warehouse, Fennario renews his revolutionary zeal in a reaffirmation of industrial unionism, the prime tenet of DeLeon doctrine. “[Yvan] showed me a list of names he’s collecting of people who want to join the CSN Union so I added mine, the first English name cause all the other blokes are afraid to join a French union. It’s beyond oppression in this place, it’s repression. I wrote Union on the shithouse wall. UNION and felt good for five whole minutes”.³¹⁶

From that moment of positive renewal, Fennario rebuilt his uncertain commitment to the SLPC into a rededication to revolutionary action, “if the SLP is wrong, then what else is there? I don’t see nothing else and I get scared when I think like this. Afraid to lose my faith, I guess. The only hope I’ve got, the best hope, the only way I can see right now to make my future come true”.³¹⁷ In his closing comments as the narrator walks through the Point with Liz, their recommitment to the necessity of radical change in society contrasts with the squalid surroundings of their neighbourhood, “past the firetrap tenement houses and broken wine bottle alleyways, talking about our lives and revolution. It’s slow, so goddamn slow, and so far away, but we’re doing the right thing”.³¹⁸

Fennario’s crisis of confidence about the strategy of the SLPC has given way to a reaffirmation of the necessity for revolutionary struggle as a prerequisite to a better future for him and his family. In his Prologue to *Blue Mondays* (1984), Fennario outlined the program of the Black Rock Group, a mini-manifesto calling for the decolonisation of Quebec under the leadership of progressive working-class forces. This position represented a clearer rendering of Fennario’s reality, a commitment to the cell or squad that was so vital to the development of the “positive hero” in Soviet socialist realist writing. It was far closer to the circumstances of the times in which he lived. It was a sharp rebuke to the innocence and nostalgia of the hippie movement in the sixties that reviewers and readers had found appealing in *Without a Parachute* (1974).

In his own terms Fennario defined himself as a cultural worker and his activities in that context are to facilitate unionisation through a group called Cultural Workers’ Alliance. “We’re trying to organise on an industrial scale and around the principle that there should be workers’ control of the industry”.³¹⁹

³¹⁶ Fennario, 1984, 172.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 173.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 186.

³¹⁹ Paul Milliken, “Portrait of the artist as a working-class hero: an interview with David Fennario,” *Performing Arts* 17, (Summer 1980), 8.2, 25

Through his participation in the activities of the Black Rock Group in the decade of the eighties, Fennario's political position found meaningful form and expressed the continuity of his commitment. In the material that he produced whilst an active collaborator with this SLPC cell, *Blue Mondays* (1984) and *Joe Beef: A History of Point St. Charles* (1985), which has been investigated in the Canadian drama chapter, he pointedly put in place his perception of himself and his Marxist allegiance that he wished to transmit through his writing. In the Black Rock Group, a Marxist collective, his desire for community and commitment found viable form. In the federal election of April 2003 Fennario was the candidate of the *Union des Forces Progressistes* (UFP) in the electorate of Westmount-St. Louis.

Helen Potrebenko's *Taxi!* (1975) again utilised the diary format as it recorded the timeframe of December 1970 to November 1972 in the life of Shannon, a woman taxi driver in Vancouver. In writing this novel the author has allowed her narrator to gradually dominate the text by articulating political commentary based on a revolutionary socialist position. As the narrative voice expanded into the diary, Shannon's activities tended to diminish in importance and the narrator, operating from an aware working-class consciousness, took over and controlled the content. This split between the narrative voice and the object of the biography exacerbated the difficulties of the life-writing method.

The narrator grounded the ordinariness of Shannon's work routine in a dogmatic Marxism, whilst the vibrancy and vitality of her daily existence spoke of caring and concern as a worker in a violent Eastend environment. Potrebenko articulates political directives about Shannon's experiences through the omnipresent narrative voice-over technique, for instance, "capitalism had begun its cataclysmic degeneration".³²⁰ The text's focus on the Vietnam War and the struggle of the Quebecois for independence disclosed a revolutionary determined to support resistance to the expansion of American imperialism.

Shannon's constant repetition of the term, 'after the revolution', establishes her commitment but she lived independent of any connection to a collective, a party cell or circle of like-minded friends. This solitary stance contradicted the possibility of any positive revolutionary action taking shape and being practiced. It emulated, in part, the stance of Michael Taylor in *Cabbagetown Diary* (1970), where the isolated solitary figure failed to achieve any meaningful engagement with organised forces for change, within which the revolutionary potential can be realised. This abstract notion of revolution permeates Potrebenko's text.

The narrator's analytical commentary on Canada's class structure worked against the flow of Shannon's highly personal observations. The sheer audaciousness of some of these statements, in particular, "working class consciousness in Canada reached a peak in 1919 and

³²⁰ Helen Potrebenko, *Taxi!*, (Vancouver, New Star, 1975) 11.

has been declining ever since”³²¹ tended to betray a lack of adequate education in left-of-centre Canadian political history. The ramifications of such a statement questioned the very existence of the Communist Party of Canada, which only began in 1921 and the formation of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in 1932. Moreover, the narrator’s understanding of Quebec did not seem to include any awareness of English-speaking workers and their plight as explained in *Blue Mondays* (1984).

As the diary entry format projected one part of the bifurcated structure of the third phase of the communist presence in English-Canadian fiction, the high point of achievement in politically committed writing came in the midst of the 1980s, a decade noted for greed and excess. This contrast expressed itself quite clearly in the novel of ‘faction’, a fictional retelling of working-class events within a context of accurate historical documentation. These writers reinserted aspects of labour history, union organisation and Communist Party activity into the nation’s cultural history that had been erased by the literary practices and academic biases of the bourgeois elite that had gained control of academic literary canons.

Soon To Be Born (1980) by Oscar Ryan (1904-1988) was written by a participant in many radical occasions in the nation’s past. He was the Young Communist League (YCL) representative at the CPC meeting that sought to install Tim Buck as the secretary of the party in June 1929, and then became a leader of the Canadian Labour Defense League (CLDL), as Alan Filewod reported, “He worked for the CLDL as its Publicity Director, he was one of the founders of the PAC ...and he was the founding editor of the PAC journal *Masses*”.³²² He has authored the pamphlet, *The Story of the Trial of the Eight Communist Leaders* (1931), and contributed to the collective responsible for the drama, *Eight Men Speak* (1933), which has received substantial attention in the Canadian drama chapter of this project. He also wrote the official biography, *Tim Buck: A Conscience for Canada* (1975).³²³

Ryan focused on working-class life in two different areas of Montreal, the Jewish quarter between Rue St. Denis and Boulevard St. Laurent and the Irish community of Griffintown in his detailed analysis of 1922 when his working-class heroes, Arthur Meller and Fred Shaughnessy, graduated from Montreal High School. Ryan cut to the quick of Canadian society in this authorial intervention, “Class distinctions were rigid. Distances between dirt farm, sweatshop and affluent Westmount were astronomical. The foreign-born were reviled, women enjoyed few human rights, Indians were exiles and the Inuit were not

³²¹ Ibid., 69.

³²² Alan Filewod, “The comintern and the canon, Workers’ Theatre, *Eight Men Speak* and the genealogy of mise-en-scene”, *Australasian Drama Studies*, No. 29 (October 1996) 21.

³²³ Oscar Ryan, *Tim Buck, A Conscience for Canada*, (Toronto, Progress Books, 1975).

even mentioned”.³²⁴

Fred Shaughnessy joined the very recently created Workers’ Party, the legalised front of the underground Communist Party of Canada. He inadvertently found himself at the initial meeting of the YCL, Montreal section, in the spring of 1924. The verbal eloquence of the Toronto representative sent to address the gathering so impressed Fred that he presented himself for election to office and was chosen organiser of this Montreal section. This encounter elevated him to the status of a working-class hero.

On a cross-Canada speaking tour for the YCL from September 1927 until March 1928, Fred’s diary highlighted some of the vivid personalities who championed the workers’ struggle in Western Canada. Especially noteworthy are the cameo appearances in Winnipeg of Jacob Penner, Matthew Popovich, soon to be one of the ‘Kingston 8’, and John Navis. Fred’s warm reception in Winnipeg’s North End confirmed its reputation as a location at the forefront of radical politics, when it acted as a haven for so many prominent leftwing personages, such as J. S. Woodsworth and Stanley Knowles of the CCF, and William Kardash, Communist member of the Manitoba Legislature from 1941 to 1958.

Ryan’s writing exploited filmic techniques such as the jump cut and the flashback to record the anguish and upset forced on so many individuals by the Great Depression. Especially poignant were Fred’s recollections of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion of the International Brigades. The terrible loss of so many young Canadian males is driven home by his aside, “Earlier this year, in February, we returned, 600 of us, all that was left, half the battalion”.³²⁵ Although disheartened by the very high casualty rate, the volunteers are reinvigorated by the large number of Torontonians gathered to salute their anti-fascist efforts, “Close to ten thousand have massed at Union Station”.³²⁶ Fred has suffered the loss of a leg, sacrificing a part of his body for the cause, but continues to contribute to the party dominated by his commitment to collective action, “Singly we’re no bloody saints or supermen, we’re no miracle-workers. But who knows what we could do when thousands work together!”³²⁷ He reiterated the primacy of collective action as the only force capable of creating permanent change to the social order.

Another writer who utilised the mixture of fact and fiction in the popular mode of ‘faction’ was Jeremy Akerman. His *Black Around the Eyes* (1981) re-enacted the major events in the miners’ struggle in the coal industry of Nova Scotia’s Cape Breton Island from the turn of the century to the epic confrontations with the British Empire Steel and Coal

³²⁴ Oscar Ryan, *Soon To Be Born*, (Montreal, Red Star Publishing, 1980) 21.

³²⁵ Ibid., 284.

³²⁶ Ibid., 286.

³²⁷ Ibid., 168-169.

Corporation in the 1920s. Akerman was born in the United Kingdom in May, 1942. After graduating from Cardiff College of the Arts, he migrated to Canada and settled in Nova Scotia. He was chosen leader of the New Democratic Party (NDP), which replaced the CCF of Nova Scotia in 1968.

Akerman was elected to the Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia as member for the coal mining constituency of Cape Breton East in 1970 and served until May, 1980, when he resigned the leadership of the party and, simultaneously, his seat in the legislature. In 1981 he became Nova Scotia's Executive Director of Intergovernmental Affairs. *Black Around the Eyes* (1981) strived to achieve two ends, firstly, document Cape Breton labour history and, secondly, pay homage to the legendary James Bryson McLachlan (1869-1936), the leading figure in the coal industry unions from 1902 to 1936. By inscribing the struggles of the colliers of Cape Breton Island into Canadian fiction, Akerman gave palpable form to the affection he held for his electorate.

Situated in the recollections of Donald Ross, an octogenarian, this book traces the trials and triumphs of three generations of the Ross clan employed in the mines of the British Empire Steel and Coal Corporation (BESCO) in a family saga format dominated by patriarchal authoritarianism. Donnie's father, Tom, entered the collieries at age ten and spent the next sixty-one years tussling with coal and the coal company for his livelihood. Tom was a member of the Communist Party because of his involvement on the executive of the Sydney Mines branch of the United Mine Workers of America and his devotion to J. B. McLachlan, a fellow party member. Bearing the nickname 'Educated Tom', because of his dexterity with the English language, the elder Ross often displayed his oratorical skills at *The Barrel of Blood*, "where the Communist Party used to gather and where my father often held forth on the theory of surplus value or on the inevitability of world-wide revolution".³²⁸

Through this work of 'faction', Akerman eulogised J. B. McLachlan, the saintly ultra-radical of Cape Breton unionism. As the narrator placed it in perspective, "Jim MacLachlan is to Cape Breton what Norman Bethune is to Canada".³²⁹ The prominence of Norman Bethune as the leading representative of communism in Canada is analysed in the introduction to this thesis. The comparison of J. B. McLachlan to him was an attempt to elevate the legendary union leader to co-equal 'positive hero' status with the foremost icon of Canadian communism. With this statement spoken through the narrator, Akerman overtly expressed the extent to which he added his portion of respect to the awe and reverence held by many Nova Scotians for the leadership of the legendary McLachlan as the key figure in that province's labour history of the early twentieth century.

³²⁸ Jeremy Akerman, *Black Around the Eyes*, (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1981) 58.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

The narrator's retrospections are focused on three important labour disputes, the 1909 strike, the famous slowdown of 1922 and the Battle of Waterford Creek incident, which climaxed the devastating work stoppage of 1925. As Donnie Ross described the scene in 1909, the lack of union solidarity undermined the workers and allowed their employer to succeed by the old dictum of 'divide and conquer'. As a result of the internal squabbling within the workers organisations, the men returned to the mines without any gains.

The slowdown of 1922 was the miners' protest against a wage reduction of thirty per cent. The newly formed Workers Party of Canada (WPC) under its leader, Jack MacDonald, was actively involved in the organisation of the work disruption. "The Bolshies were very active during the slowdown and it seemed like whenever you turned around Jim [McLachlan] and Red Dan were propangandizing. They had been recruited by "Moscow Jack" MacDonald, a fellow who came down from Toronto, [and] whirled his way around a couple of dozen meeting halls".³³⁰ Jack MacDonald had been at the original organising meeting of the CPC in 1921 and subsequently emerged as the party leader from 1922 to 1929. Again the miners did not emerge victorious, they merely reduced the extent of the wage loss from thirty per cent to eighteen per cent.

As Donnie Ross emphasised in his version of the events of 1925, the signs of BESCO's preparation for the conflict should have served as sufficient notice to desist from the impending confrontation. Unfortunately for the colliers, caution was never exercised and they plunged into a catastrophic dispute which affected the young and innocent most of all. Starvation was rampant.

On June 11, a showdown occurred between the two contending forces. After the town of New Waterford had been terrorised by company security personnel in the very early hours of the morning, four thousand people gathered and marched in protest.

Their confrontation with BESCO's security guards became the renowned Battle of Waterford Lake, an incident which is still remembered in the annual Miners' Memorial Day. The strike did not result in the outcomes expected by the miners. They collaborated in a Royal Commission ordered by the government of the day to investigate the crisis and recommend solutions.

Not surprisingly, the workers were forced to again accept wage reductions but these were not as severe as the company wished to put in place. Akerman offered this fictional retelling as, in his own words, "a work of love and a song of praise".³³¹ This fiction was a means of giving something back to the working-class battlers of his electorate and making sure their story would not disappear or be forgotten by posterity.

³³⁰ Ibid., 67.

³³¹ Ibid., 182.

Dyson Carter shared in the return to the 1930s in his autobiographical fiction, *This Story Fierce and Tender* (1986). Carter's most extensive examination of Canadian communism appeared in this self-reflexive mini-history of the Winnipeg branch of the CPC. In a postmodern turn, he adopted the pose of investigating his own life through the project of writing a biography of a well-known CPC member, Elgin Morley, whose circumstances closely duplicate the real life of Dyson Carter.

As a chronicler of the party, Carter underpinned his fictional memoirs with the tropes of the communist. Numerous instances of each trope permeated his text. The CPC member as working class hero is reiterated through the reminiscences of fellow members, when "we [the CP] led the strikes with the Workers Unity League, the unions won".³³² This trope was reaffirmed in the statement that the "workers we [the CP] had in the movement were nearly all union organizers".³³³ The figure of the Stakhanovite had particularly influential appeal as support for Morley's vision of communism, "To Elgin, Stakhanov was the great prophet of socialist labor".³³⁴ He perceived Stakhanovism as the proof of the exceptional achievements afforded to a liberated proletariat functioning in a state amenable to their interests. The party ordered Elgin to take control of the local Manitoba Peace Congress. In the leadership position, he actively pursued the peace activist trope by constantly offering support for the anti-war and anti-fascist stance of a CPC front organisation, Elgin had "the youth backing damn near every line the League [Against War and Fascism] took".³³⁵

As a practising scientist Morley evolved his own take on Marxism as scientific socialism. It was actually science in action that sustained his belief in communism, "The whole Soviet Union is science applied to human life. Marxism carried out in life".³³⁶ Morley could not fulfil all the positive attributes of the communist, as his commitment to the party was spiritual and intellectual. He would never sacrifice himself physically for the cause.

Morley's recruitment to the CPC was based on the need for Anglo-Saxon establishment figures, as Norman Bethune's case proved, to provide some native-born respectability to the migrants, who made up the vast majority of members. As one of his comrades divulged, "with his brains, education, with his name, real English name, I said he'd go clean to the top of the movement".³³⁷ This party policy was undertaken to undermine the negative trope of the alien presence assigned to the communists.

³³² Dyson Carter, *This Story Fierce and Tender*, (Gravenhurst, ON, Northern Book House, 1986) 457.

³³³ Ibid., 468.

³³⁴ Ibid., 495.

³³⁵ Ibid., 502.

³³⁶ Ibid., 524.

³³⁷ Ibid., 291.

His acceptance of the triumphs of the USSR confirmed him as a Sovietophile of the highest order, as his circle of comrades constantly recalled, “lucky for the movement that he was a fanatic for socialism!”³³⁸ Morley’s most repeated reminiscence to his colleagues retold the heroism of the Panfilov Guards in their encounter with the Nazi tank brigades hurtling toward Moscow.

Morley initiated the utilisation of the AntiChrist trope by associating it with the most revered figure in the communist hierarchy, Vladimir Lenin. He was described as “this devil in human shape, this anti-Christ”³³⁹ in a reactionary’s response to his return to Russia in 1917. This trope is repeated in a reference to the German Navy’s mutiny at the command of “anti-Christ Lenin!”³⁴⁰ Morley’s father’s superior in the Salvation Army informed him that “we were the first missions to be thrown out by the godless Bolsheviks”.³⁴¹

One of Morley’s migrant acquaintances connected communism with disease, “Plague of Lenin! Spreading over world”.³⁴² Communists are reduced to R. T. Robertson’s classical colonial position as beyond human contact, “They were untouchables in our set. Not really human”.³⁴³ Morley’s incorporation of this term reinforced its linkage of ‘New World’ communists to ‘Third World’ *Dalits*, polluters of the social norms of the higher classes. Their subversion of the state reiterated their outcaste status, “If we’re communists, we’re outside the law!”³⁴⁴

Carter’s knowledge of Soviet socialist realism allowed him to suffuse his writing with the tropes of communism. His autobiographical fiction coordinated them into the defining images of his unreliable retelling of his political career. The outstanding factor in this writing was his perception that the untouchability marker served as the distinction best able to articulate the communist image. Its presence supported recognition of the outcaste nexus between the communists of Australia and Canada and the ‘Third World’ of Asia and Africa.

One of the very few Canadian writers to be honoured by the USSR, Carter has received both the Lenin Centenary Medal (1970) and the award of the Order of Friendship of the Peoples (1980). He was employed as a Canadian government research scientist until he decided to change careers, producing a magazine, *Northern Neighbours*, which existed from 1956 to 1989, and writing non-fiction as well as fiction. Because he refused to renounce a belief that is the core statement of all his works, the view that all peoples need to be kept

³³⁸ Ibid., 537.

³³⁹ Ibid., 49.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 177.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 216.

³⁴² Ibid., 177.

³⁴³ Ibid., 11.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 447.

informed about the achievements of Socialism, Carter has been absent from the most prominent reference books on Canadian Literature, such as the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (1983) and the *Literary History of Canada* (1965) and its supplements.

In quite close alignment with *Soon to be Born* (1980), *Black Around the Eyes* (1981) and *This Story Fierce and Tender* (1986), another work, which re-enacted significant working-class events from the past with historically accurate details, appeared in 1987. *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987) by Michael Ondaatje marked a serious alteration in direction for the well-known poet. Dipping into the working lives of loggers, bridge builders, tunnelers and tanners, Ondaatje microscopically examined proletarian life in Toronto from 1915 to 1939. Incorporating authentic material centring on the City of Toronto's construction of two public structures, the Prince Edward Viaduct, popularly labelled the Bloor Street Bridge and the Rowland Harris Water Filtration Plant on Queen Street East, Ondaatje's novel of 'faction' proffered an image of Toronto driven by a dreamer in the real-life personage of the Commissioner of Public Works, Rowland Harris, as an antidote to the postmodern wonders of Skydome and the CN Tower, noted for their barrenness of style, and the city council's subservience to crass developers motivated by their desire for profits. "If some modern day Harris were to propose a Bloor Street viaduct or a Byzantine-style water plant, the outcry would be deafening...By contrast, the CN Tower, the modern civic monument par excellence, is essentially useless. Toronto would be the same without it. But take away either the bridge or the water works, and we'd be in trouble very quickly".³⁴⁵

Through his dynamic poetic prose Ondaatje designed selected scenes from the life of his 'positive hero', Patrick Lewis, in a cinematic tableau method of writing dominated by movie techniques of close-up, pan and zoom. Lewis occupied the position of the 'everyman' figure, participant in various events and happenings but always on the periphery, never the centre of public attention via media exposure. As the frameworks of the Bloor Street Bridge and the Queen Street East waterworks take shape, Ondaatje explored the unofficial version of their construction, the 'little man's' view of history from the worker's perspective. The immigrant workmen responsible for the physical labour involved in the countless tasks of putting up the viaduct are brought into focus through the author's detailing of the activities of one worker, "Nicholas Temelcoff is famous on the bridge, a daredevil. He is given all the difficult jobs and he takes them".³⁴⁶

Revolutionary ideology found its representative in Alice Gull, an alias taken on by a nun, who accidentally fell over the edge of the viaduct and was saved from death by the swift reaction of Temelcoff. When she later reappeared in the text as Patrick's lover, she articulated

³⁴⁵ Christopher Hume, "Viaduct bridges function and design," *The Toronto Star*, January 11, 1992, 6.

³⁴⁶ Michael Ondaatje, *In the Skin of a Lion*, (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1987) 34.

this stance. “You name the enemy and destroy their power. Start with their luxuries -- their select clubs, their summer mansions”.³⁴⁷ Although Patrick does not initially share Alice’s revolutionary fervour, he will carry out her destructive directives after her accidental death provoked him into seeking some palpable solace in burning down the Muskoka Hotel. After being sentenced to Kingston Penitentiary for his crime of wilful destruction of property, Patrick is assigned to painting duty with a fellow inmate named Buck. Tim Buck, the leader of the Communist Party of Canada, was actually in prison at this time, early 1934, for violation of the infamous Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada. Buck’s acknowledged presence may have contributed to the elevation of Lewis’s ‘consciousness’ whilst they were in contact in prison.

When released from imprisonment in January 1938, Patrick returned to Toronto to discover the city under military control. “The events in Spain, the government’s crackdown on unions, made the rich and powerful close ranks. Troops were in evidence everywhere”.³⁴⁸ Patrick unhesitatingly reaffirmed his commitment to the struggle that was interrupted by his incarceration.

In July of 1938 he activated a plan to blow up the Queen Street East waterworks, on which he laboured in the late nineteen twenties. He overcame the extremely difficult challenge of swimming into the building from the drainpipes leading into Lake Ontario and set explosive charges in place. At this juncture he encountered Rowland Harris, the Commissioner of Public Works. In this confrontation he accuses Harris of betraying the working class. His imprisonment has produced a more politically aware Patrick Lewis, but the wily Harris rebuffed him with this particularly trenchant analysis of Patrick’s situation. “You’re as much of the fabric as the alderman and the millionaires. But you’re among the dwarfs of enterprise who never get accepted or acknowledged. Mongrel company...You reject power”.³⁴⁹ Harris’s pro-capitalist rhetoric displaced Lewis’s revolutionary zeal, which allowed the dissipation of radical action in his decision not to follow through with the dynamiting and, in response, Harris generously allowed him to go free.

Ondaatje has very successfully come to terms with an issue he identified within this ‘faction’. “The articles and illustrations he [Patrick] found in the Riverdale Library depicted every detail about the soil, the wood, the weight of concrete, everything but information on those who actually built the bridge”.³⁵⁰ He set himself the task of filling in the human details absent from these official documents. The workers who laboured on these early monumental

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 124-125.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 220.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 238.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 145.

enterprises of Toronto's civic pride between 1915 and 1938 have been reclaimed from anonymity and their forgotten status in the master narratives of received authority.

In this self-proclaimed formal or perhaps formulaic novel, Ondaatje cleverly inserted an expanded 'consciousness' into the 'spontaneity' of his working class representative, Patrick Lewis. His closing section revealed the completion of this shift in perception, which has been an evolutionary process in the text's design. As Barbara Turner has observed, "The gulf between rich and poor, the conditions of the labour force, racism...these were the aspects of Canadian society the novel could address".³⁵¹ Within the tradition of revolutionary-oriented writing in English-Canadian fiction, *In the Skin of a Lion* unexpectedly emerged as a breakthrough in the final phase of Canadian social[ist] realism.

In its three phases, the contemporary treatment of current events in the pre-World War II era from 1930 to 1939, the postwar period of 1946 to 1968 and the final phase of 1970 to 1990, with its bifurcation into the diary format and the 'faction' of the Depression, Canadian fiction in English has clearly been involved with communism from the founding of the CPC until 1990. In focusing on this ideology and its representation, this thesis seeks to make intelligible various interpretations and intentions assigned to these fictions. They found their centre in counter-discourse, as the voice of the working class in opposition to the bourgeois hegemony of Canadian liberalism. They exposed the proletariat as a force for change, concentrating and organising their collective will in a national liberation movement seeking their empowerment. Although they articulated the terrible social conditions of the proletariat and offered a program for radical change by committed party members, such as Dyson Carter (CPC), Oscar Ryan (CPC) and David Fennario (SLPC), their writing never extended beyond the pre-revolutionary stage, the circumstances of that period precluding them from the triumphalism which was attained by the Soviet socialist realists. Because of the absence of the completion of this task in the triumphalism of the revolution, reconstituting the Great Depression from personal experiences or factual research contextualised ultra-radical writing in its most vibrant pre-revolutionary conditions.

The fiction of the thirties was written from the authors' vantage point of being in and of the times. The post-World War II era sought to, on the one hand, redirect communism into a renewed relevancy, whilst, on the other hand, reassess its validity. In the final phase of the 1970s and 1980s, the diary format, except for *Blue Mondays* (1984), brought instances of isolated individuals unable to recognise the necessity of collective political action to alleviate their predicaments. *Blue Mondays* (1984) illustrated the essentiality of the collective as the means to effective support and united opposition to the ruling order.

³⁵¹ Barbara Turner, "In the skin of Michael Ondaatje, giving voice to a social conscience", *Quill and Quire*, (May 1987) 21.

As well as its being the unspoken epilogue to *Waste Heritage* (1939), as Dorothy Livesay pointed out, “Their saga for jobs or welfare only ended, for some, when they enlisted in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion,”³⁵² the concentration on the Mac-Paps (or its surrogate, the Abraham Lincoln Battalion) of the International Brigades in Spain, as the focus of *This Time a Better Earth* (1939), *Cabbagetown* (1968), and *Soon to be Born* (1980), deflected the lost cause of communism in their homeland onto a persistent romantic image in a distant country. Romanticism overtook these writers’ perspectives in their retreat to the union struggles of the twenties in *Black Around the Eyes* (1981) and in the fifties in *Fatherless Sons* (1955), whilst the postwar era was suffused with the revelations of spying controversies in *Tomorrow Is with Us* (1950) and *Down the Long Table* (1955). The 1980s brought retrospective nostalgia for the CPC’s history into the memoirs of *Soon to be Born* (1980) and *This Story Fierce and Tender* (1986). The historical reconstructions of the eighties transmitted their awareness of an unsuccessful outcome in their homage to the confrontations of the distant past. The revolution that never happened was the unmentioned resolution to the quandary of these fictions’ preoccupation.

In this chapter, the tropes of the communist were deployed in Allan’s Bob Curtis, Carter’s Ted Kirby and Elgin Morley, Birney’s Gordon Saunders, Garner’s Ken Tilling, Ryan’s Fred Shaughnessy to elevate them to “positive hero” status within the realm of Canadian social[ist] realism. These writers were determined to endow working-class representations with credentials appropriate to their circumstances as the CP/ union organiser, the peace activist, the scientific socialist and the martyr to the cause to enhance their status as they emerged into an ultra-radical party “consciousness” of discipline, orthodoxy and hierarchy from the “spontaneity” of individualistic illusion.

³⁵² Livesay, 158.

Chapter Three

Acorn/Livesay/Wallace: 'The People's' Poets

Canadian communist poetic discourse, very similar to its Australian counterpart, exploited, as a technical necessity within the constraints of the length of the genre and its need to capture *le mot juste*, the metonymies and symbols of communism centred in the colour referent for it, red. In this chapter I will be interrogating the extensive incorporation into poetic utterance of the red flag and its emblems, the hammer and sickle, the five-pointed red star, and the clenched fist salute, the leaders of the USSR, Lenin and Stalin and its foremost theoretician, Karl Marx. The metonymies were the “new world,” or its variants “future world” or “better world,” a collective vision of a possible communist utopia, populated by the victorious proletariat, the “people.” In the Canadian context, we will see how the attraction of the “new world” was enhanced by the legendary Norman Bethune, whose importance as a subject in Canadian poetry as the representative of the tropes of the communist, the Stakhanovite, the peace activist, the scientific socialist and, most importantly, the martyr for the cause has extended through many poets over the decades since his death in 1939 and reinforced his function as the national metonymy of Canadian communism.

As a member of the Workers' Party of Canada, the then legal operation of the CPC, from 1922, Joe Wallace (1890-1975) mainly contributed propagandistic poetry to communist journals from the 1920s to the 1950s in commemoration of the great events and people in the international communist movement. Wallace hailed the success of the Russian Revolution in his very early effort, *The Five Point Star* (1922). He eulogised the leader of the revolution in *Lenin Lies Asleep in Moscow* (1924) and his later, *Masks and Men* (1953) as the dedication, “on the occasion of V. I. Lenin's birth – April 22”, proclaimed,

“Lenin—who changed men from the slaves
To lords of the machine
Lenin—who towers higher now
Than back in '17”.³⁵³

He also paid the expected obligatory homage to communism's renowned theoretician in the very short quatrain, *Karl Marx Monument*. His social conscience was touched by the executions of the two Italian workmen, to whom he wrote *Sacco and Vanzetti* (1927) and *Sleep On* (1936). In 1933 he finally gave himself over totally to the communist cause by

³⁵³ Joe Wallace, *Poems*, (Toronto: Progress Books, 1981) 97.

working for the Canadian Labour Defense League (CLDL) until 1936, when he became a member of the staff of the CPC publication, the *Daily Clarion*.

Wallace was certainly the earliest Canadian poet to recognise the efforts of local communists in the ultra-radical struggle. Foremost amongst these was his *The Saga of Doctor Bethune*, (1953) which initiated the catalogue of poems in praise of this legendary figure. The most emotional part of this work is his repetition of the familiar nickname, Comrade Beth, to indicate the closeness of the party faithful to one of their fellow members.

“Lift up your hearts, for we have Comrade Beth,
Doctor Bethune who died for us afar
Who is our glory and our morning star,
Our grief, our glory, and our morning star”.³⁵⁴

As a dedicated party member and its authorised poetic voice, Wallace exploited most of the metonymies of communism in his writing, especially Lenin and Bethune.

There was a definite split in the ranks of Canadian poets between the democratic socialist and communist forces at play in Canadian society after the onset of the Depression in 1929. Earle Birney, a Trotskyite, Dorothy Livesay, Patrick Anderson, Joe Wallace, and Milton Acorn were practitioners of revolutionary socialism. Leo Kennedy (1907-2000) moved from a liberal to a revolutionary socialist position from 1934-1939 when he joined a Communist cell in Toronto centred on Barker and Margaret Fairley, which included Stanley Ryerson, a member of the Central Committee of the CPC (1935-1969) and Lon Lawson, husband of Jean Watts, best friend of Dorothy Livesay. In this milieu he operated under the pseudonyms of Leonard Bullen and Arthur Beaton when publishing poetry.

His participation in this cell coincided with his work on the editorial committee of the united front monthly, *New Frontier*, which commenced publication in April 1936. It replaced the ultra-radical *Masses*, which only existed from 1932-1934. To this periodical Kennedy contributed openly polemical poems in support of communism.

In *Advice to a Young Poet*, Kennedy defined that role from a particularly communist perspective,

“Assert the toilers’ state,
Define the workers’ want.
Brandish the knitted fist,
Fuse slogan to your chant”.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 63

³⁵⁵ Arthur Beaton [L. K.], “Advice to a Young Poet,” *New Frontier* 1.7 (Apr. 1937) 26.

Kennedy's reliance on the metonymies of communist rhetoric is highlighted by his use of the proletarian utopia and the communist salute in this quatrain.

He reiterated in 1936 some of his earlier criticisms of Canadian poetry in an essay entitled, *Direction for Canadian Poets*. In this essay he commended the recent efforts of two compatriots in the socialist struggle as worthy proponents of progressive poetry: "Only Dorothy Livesay and F. R. Scott to date have quite shaken themselves free of the superseded traditions, the former by the study of marxist philosophy; the latter with pungent satires on the more revered of our national institutions".³⁵⁶ His message in support of communism was delivered poetically in *Calling Eagles* (1937),

"Come down into life, Eagles, where iron grinds bone,
hands falter
And brave men perish for a tyrant's peace;
Come where Spain strangles in blood, Ethiopia
Groans at the ironcased heel, Vienna
Numbers the dead, remembers Weissel and Wallisch;
Scream for Brazilian dungeons where Prestes rots
and fascist madmen rattle gaoler's keys;
You are part of this turmoil, Eagles, knit to its glory.
There is work for your strong beaks and the thundering wings,
for the clean flight of the mind and the sharp perception:
There is only a glacial death on the lonely crags".³⁵⁷

Kennedy's references to the defeated heroes, Georg Weissel and Koloman Wallisch, of the socialist cause in the Austrian Civil War of 1934, which brought the right to power, and resulted in their executions by the state and the imprisonment of Luis Carlos Prestes, a communist, by the Brazilian government for his leadership of the failed revolt by the National Liberation Alliance in 1935 testify to the commitment of Kennedy to revolutionary action as a means of bringing about the workers' state. His appeal to action carried the united front message in the use of both socialist and communist notables in the international struggle against fascism. Kennedy moved to Detroit in 1939 and to Chicago in 1942 for career advancement as an advertising copywriter and his Americanisation brought his revolutionary stance to an end.

The most prominent committed communist poet, as mentioned above by Kennedy, in the 1930s was Dorothy Livesay. In her final year as an undergraduate at the University of

³⁵⁶ Leo Kennedy, "Direction for Canadian Poets," *New Frontier* 1.3 (June 1936) 23.

³⁵⁷ Leo Kennedy, "Calling Eagles," *New Frontier* 2.2 (June 1937) 14.

Toronto in 1930-1931, Livesay and her best friend, Jean Watts, fell under the intellectual influence of a young lecturer, Otto Van der Sprenkel, a communist who had already visited the USSR. Her involvement with the communist cause officially began in 1932, as a member of the Young Communist League, after returning from a year at the Sorbonne, when she enrolled in the School of Social Work at the University of Toronto. Then in early 1933 she joined in the start of the Progressive Arts Club (PAC) of Toronto.

In her second year of study, 1933-1934, she moved to Montreal and a position at the Family Service Bureau. As she recalled, “by this time I was a militant activist, member of a party cell producing leaflets and agitprop plays and mass chants which we performed in the bleak, cheerless labour halls”.³⁵⁸ These agitprop plays were analysed in the Canadian drama chapter of this work. Livesay took on the responsibility of secretary of the Progressive Arts Club, Montreal branch, whilst residing in that city.

During Livesay’s stay in Montreal, the infamous Zynchuk Affair took place. In *An Immigrant* (Nick Zynchuk, 1933) she contributed to the public outcry that surrounded the death of the young unemployed migrant, who was shot by a police officer when he returned to his apartment to retrieve some belongings after eviction for non-payment of rent. Livesay also affiliated to another communist front organisation, the Canadian League against War and Fascism. She attended the first national congress of this group in Toronto in October 1933 and was elected to a position on the national executive to enhance the women’s effort in support of their goals.

In the spring of 1934, Livesay left Montreal for a position in Toronto. “I was recruited by J. B. Salsberg of the Workers’ Unity League to help organize the unorganized white collar workers”.³⁵⁹ J. B. Salsberg would, in the late 1960s, receive admiration and respect as a communist hero in a poem by Tom Wayman. Livesay was now the embodiment of the working class heroine, a communist party/union organiser, the highest trope available to a living comrade.

After a short sojourn in New Jersey, USA, she was reunited with her closest friend, Jean Watts, in the new united front enterprise, *New Frontier* (NF). “It was to rally the middle class intellectuals and artists to the cause of the international working class against war and fascism. Lon Lawson was editor-in-chief, with his wife, now Jean Watts Lawson, providing the funds from her capitalist grandfather’s estate. Thus, NF was not a strictly Communist Party organ”.³⁶⁰

In an essay entitled, *Proletarianitis in Canada* (1935), Livesay gave full expression to

³⁵⁸ Dorothy Livesay, *Right Hand Left Hand*, (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcupine, 1977) 73.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 115.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 219.

her then current thesis about contemporary Canadian literature, “It is my theory...that until we look to the people, and the industries, and the economics of our social set-up, we will have no original contribution to make. Until our writers are social realists (proletarian writers if you will) we will have no Canadian literature”.³⁶¹ She expanded on this position in a radio talk on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1936. In her concluding sentence to *Decadence in Modern Bourgeois Poetry* (1936) she summed up her argument with the declaration that proletarian art would be the renaissance of bourgeois art that was now dead and buried.

Although she produced a considerable amount of poetry during the decade of the thirties, in her *Collected Poems* (1972) she selected only twenty-six for inclusion in that book. Of these, three have received substantial appraisal in formulations devoted to interpreting the overtly political period in her writing. Certainly, she expressed unqualified admiration for the French Communist writer, Henri Barbusse (1873-1935) in her *Words Before Battle* (1935). As a biographer of Stalin and one of the heads of the communist initiated Writers’ Association in Defense of Culture, his sudden death in a Moscow hospital was felt by communists all around the world. By invoking his name, Livesay connected herself to the ultra-radical international intellectual community and the efforts of a large contingent of Europeans advocating serious action in the confrontation with fascism in Spain and Abyssinia.

“It is not enough for you,
Barbusse, nor for those slain
About Thermopylae.
And in this ominous
Barbed peace, we know:
It is not enough for us”.³⁶²

The dominant poem of her communist period and Livesay’s foremost proletarian statement is *Day and Night* (1936-1937). A play on the then popular Cole Porter song, *Night and Day* (1932), a romantic ditty, it turned the working world upside down in a radical snapshot of industrial depersonalisation. No other poem has been so frequently referred to as her social[ist] voice. In section two she injected a practical commercial interpretation into the communist motto, ‘one step forward, two steps back’.

“One step forward
Hear it crack

³⁶¹ Ibid., 67.

³⁶² Dorothy Livesay, *Collected Poems: The Two Seasons*, (Toronto:McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972) 102.

Smashing rhythm,
Two steps back

Your heartbeat
Against your throat

The roaring voices
Drown your shout
Across the way
A writhing wrack
Sets you spinning
Two steps back,

One step forward
Two steps back”.³⁶³

Section five expanded the scene on this factory floor with the action of the workers at their tasks as the furnaces produce steel. An impassioned plea for the power of the proletariat is contrasted to the employer’s domination in,

“We are mightier
In the end”.

In the final portion the poem voiced an impassioned note of expectant triumph by the workers over the capitalist forces. ‘The other way’ inferred the communist way.

“Day and night
Night and day
Till life is turned
The other way!”³⁶⁴

The united front strategy allowed many non-communist left radicals to become the object of serious attention for communist poets. Foremost among these was the Spanish poet, Federico Garcia Lorca (1899-1936), whose execution by Franco’s Falangists brought world-wide condemnation and international support for the Republican cause. Livesay alluded to this in *Words Before Battle*,

³⁶³ Ibid., 129.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 130.

“Remembering your friend in song,
Lorca, shot like a dog”.³⁶⁵

She developed her focus on the Spanish symbol of the democratic and Republican government in her *Lorca* (1939). She recognised the urgency of the Spanish people’s plight and sought to forge bonds of solidarity with the Loyalist side in their civil war. A clear communist message is implied in the phrase ‘sickle flight’.

“And if your rigid head
Flung back its hair
Gulls in a sickle flight
Would circle there”.³⁶⁶

Livesay’s third volume of poetry, also titled *Day and Night* (1944), won the Governor General’s Award for Poetry. This book provided an overview of her commitments and involvements over the preceding 11 years. It was a long delayed work brought to publication by the prosperity of the war years and the thaw in the relationship with the Soviets, who were now allies in the battle with Germany, Italy and Japan. The most blatantly political of her poems from the 1930s failed to gain any space in it.

Among the acceptable ones is *Queen City* (1944), an eight part suite of poems offering a series of sharply imaged observations of the less fortunate citizens of Toronto. In the final section she heaps praise on the master theoretician of communism,

“The sun’s distance is no chasm, for
I harnessed him with Copernicus
And Karl Marx, years ago”.³⁶⁷

In praise of her fourth book of verse, *Poems for People* (1947), she again was honoured with the Governor General’s Award for poetry. The importance of this politically conscious statement that wished to gather all humanity within the scope of her worldview has become a touchstone of committed Canadian poetry and one of the dominant metonymies in communist discourse. Milton Acorn explicitly connected himself to it in his *More Poems for People* (1972).

Livesay’s life bears such a remarkable resemblance to another Dorothy, the Australian

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 102.

³⁶⁶ Dorothy Livesay, *Day and Night*, (Toronto: Ryerson, 1944) 24.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 37.

Dorothy Hewett, that their memoirs, produced within the last decade of the twentieth century, function as an extremely vital link in this area of comparative study. In my previously published essay³⁶⁸ a comprehensive analysis was undertaken in a juxtaposition of these two poetic, political and powerful women.

As the most famous Canadian participant in the Spanish Civil War, Norman Bethune offered his own poetic salute to the heroic Loyalist dead prior to his arrival as part of the medical aid mission organised by the CPC. His *Red Moon* (1936) clearly implied a communist future for the troubled country suggested in the colour of the moon in the title. The concluding stanza is full of communist metonymies.

“To that pale disc, we raise our clenched fists
And to those nameless dead our vows renew,
“Comrades, who fought for freedom and the future world,
Who died for us, we will remember you”.³⁶⁹

The united front strategy provided an opening for non-communist poets to express their Marxist principles. The most prominent of these was A. M. Klein, who pointed to this in his early *Diary of Abraham Segal, Poet* (1932), in his portrait of the Segal family.

“My brother in his bed-room den displays
The dark capacious beard of Herr Karl Marx”.³⁷⁰

The League for Socialist Reconstruction purchased the journal, *Canadian Forum*, in 1936. The editorial board appointed Earle Birney, a professor of English, as literary editor. Birney was a Trotskyite revolutionary but his political connections were, supposedly, never made public knowledge. He acted as the conduit for Klein’s most politically outspoken poems. Birney fictionalised his ultra-radical political adventures in *Down the Long Table* (1955), which has received extensive analysis in the Canadian fiction chapter.

In *Of Castles in Spain* (1938), he confessed that family responsibilities excluded his participation on the Loyalist side,

“And I in an armchair – weigh and measure Marx”.³⁷¹

The other part of this poem reads as a strident diatribe against armament dealers, the

³⁶⁸ Marvin Gilman, “Lines of Intersection: The Two Dorothys and Marxism,” *New Literatures Review*, No. 28/29 (winter 1994-summer 1995) 23-32.

³⁶⁹ Norman Bethune, “Red Moon,” *Canadian Forum*, 17.198 (July 1937) 118.

³⁷⁰ A. M. Klein, “Diary of Abraham Segal, Poet,” *Canadian Forum*, 12.58 (Sept 1932) 156.

³⁷¹ A. M. Klein, “Of Castles in Spain,” *Canadian Forum*, 18.210 (June 1938) 162.

clergy and the aristocrats who are conspiring to suppress the Spanish workers. It closes with the socialist salute,

“The peon soon will stir, will rise, will stand,
breathe Hunger’s foetid breath, lift arm, clench fist,
and hail you to the fascist realm of death!”³⁷²

As the alliance with the Soviets was, overtly and officially, in total accordance with the national interest, two influential publications which keyed the expansion of a communist perspective on the Canadian literary scene of the 1940s were Montreal-based little magazines, *Preview* (1942-1945) and *First Statement* (1942-1945). They operated as the communication medium of groups of committed poets with an explicit political message. They were able to gain public attention because of the cordiality in the American-Soviet relationship, as these two superpowers pursued a common foe in the war against fascism. The difference between these two collective publications has been difficult to ascertain, although Sandra Djwa has asserted, “The First Statement Marxists were largely Stalinists and believed in a national communism. The Preview Marxists inclined toward Leninism; they advocated an international communism. One evening when the Preview members hired the Ritz-Carlton Hotel to discuss with First Statement members ‘nationalism versus internationalism’, this political distinction emerged as most significant”.³⁷³

In the *Preview* group, Patrick Anderson (1915-1979), an admitted communist, was the acknowledged leader and source of political direction and poetic verve. Anderson had the perfect credentials to act as the representative of this internationalist group. He was an Oxford-educated Englishman who had studied at Columbia University in New York on a Commonwealth Scholarship. Not interested in any direct involvement in World War II as a believer in pacifism, he migrated to Canada and became a private school teacher in Montreal from 1940-1946. Here he joined the Labor Progressive Party, as the CPC was called during the war years, and became a prominent propagandist for the communists in the electorate bordering on their then heartland, the seat of the only communist to ever be elected to the House of Commons, Fred Rose.

He was officially engaged as Cultural Director of the St Lawrence-St George Club of the LPP. He wrote an *Ode to the Soviet Dead* (1942) and his elegy to Lorca, *For a Spanish Comrade* (1943), and an appeal to the working class to be more militant in *Miners* (1943),

“draw up the loaded veins

³⁷² Ibid., 164.

³⁷³ Sandra Djwa, *The Politics of the Imagination: a life of F. R. Scott*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1989) 213.

of once blind power
and dredge for the long dark
and waiting monuments
of the people's dead:
Firing theses histories we forge
From shadows weapons".³⁷⁴

He also produced *A Mass of Remembrance* (1945), his homage to the many lost in the struggle against capitalism and fascism.

"Cantor: Generations of failures, fighters in a hopeless cause, workers in the dark:
and some inched forward.

Responder: The cobbler in his den, the lone boy on the ridge.

Cantor: Generations of the angry, who were beaten, and of the complacent who
were also whipped: and of the sour whose snarls were crushed into pulp and of the
soft whose smiles bled in the rock.

Cantor: Comrades, how will you remember?

1st Responder: I will remember because I am Man
Because I am bone of their bone...

2nd Responder: I will remember them because I am a worker and worn of toil

3rd Responder: I will remember them because I opt to act and aim my anger:
history is in my hands to mould and make ... Because I am bred of their blight
and born of sorrow, I will remember".³⁷⁵

In his role as cultural commissar, Anderson inaugurated the party's literary journal, *En Masse*, prior to the June 1945 federal election. As Michael Gnarowski perceived it, *En Masse* "was, either by example or quotation, to point Canadian writers towards a literature of the 'people', preferably worked out of the social inequities and the economic disparities in the system of North America".³⁷⁶

Most notably the magazine recommended to its readers a scientific study by Dyson Carter, *Sin and Science* (1945), and printed parts of Dorothy Livesay's poem, *V-J Day: Improvisations on an Old Theme* (1945). After this election the journal quietly disappeared as Anderson joined the editorial board of *Northern Review*, an amalgam of *Preview* and *First*

³⁷⁴ Patrick Anderson, "Miners", *Preview* 14 (July 1943): 12.

³⁷⁵ Public Archives of Canada, Patrick Anderson Papers, MG, 30D, 177, vol. 6, file "[1945-1949]", 10.

³⁷⁶ Michael Gnarowski, "New Facts and Old Fictions: Some Notes on Patrick Anderson, 1945 and *En Masse*," *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* No. 6, (Spring-Summer 1980), 66.

Statement. In his first book of poems, Anderson invoked the name of the one of the USSR's greatest heroes in *The Machine*,

“And now Stakhanov sculptor
Stares at the machine,
And it at him”.³⁷⁷

In *Armaments Worker* (1943) he praised the efforts of the bomb makers in building a communist future’

“whose green will be a people’s corn
when guns uncover evening –
work here in cities only half awake
quicken the anger and increase the pace,
look hard as comrade in your human strength
and soft as love on iron and its peace”.³⁷⁸

The initiator of the *First Statement* group was John Sutherland (1919-1956). On his team were his wife, Audrey Aikman Sutherland, Irving Layton, his brother-in-law, Louis Dudek and Miriam Waddington. It was Layton’s participation in this group that established his poetic persona and led to his emergence in the very late 1950s as the pre-eminent Canadian poet. From this marginal beginning, he gradually projected himself forward until gaining central importance in literary circles. In his memoirs, *Waiting for the Messiah* (1985), he disclosed some details of his quite picaresque life.

He admitted an allegiance to socialism from his high school days. Growing up in the east-end Jewish ghetto of Montreal, he attended meetings of the Young People’s Socialist League addressed by David Lewis, a future secretary of the CCF and eventually leader of its successor, the New Democratic Party (NDP), from 1971-1975. Lewis’s weekly instruction received ready acceptance from the youthful acolyte.

Layton moved increasingly to the left as he slowly progressed through the education system. Whilst an undergraduate at Macdonald College of McGill University, “having gobbled up some indigestible chunks of Das Kapital, Marx’s pamphlet Wage Labour and Capital, and The Communist Manifesto, I considered myself a Marxist”.³⁷⁹ In particular, he admired the qualities of Leon Trotsky’s personality, love of culture, fluency in European languages and an internationalist perspective on global issues.

³⁷⁷ Patrick Anderson, *The White Centre*, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1946) 17.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁷⁹ Irving Layton, *Waiting for the Messiah*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985) 178.

Layton refined his knowledge of Marxism when he embarked upon his thesis for his Master of Arts degree at McGill. His investigation of Harold Laski, the eminent professor at the London School of Economics, focused on whether Laski's claim to being a Marxist had any validity. Elspeth Cameron has asserted that, "Layton's feisty thesis used Marx, Engels and Lenin – especially Lenin – to demonstrate that the essence of Marxism lay in revolution. From this Marxist-Leninist perspective, he deplored Laski's distaste for violent political action, saying it resulted in idealistic social democracy".³⁸⁰

Although frequently disclaiming any direct connection to the CPC in his printed recollections of past events, his biographer has uncovered his very brief affiliation with this group. "Under oath before U. S. immigration officials at Montreal, 4 August 1953, Layton stated that he had belonged to the Labor Progressive Party for one week in 1946 after attending one meeting...he signed an application for membership and 'very likely' paid his dues".³⁸¹ Layton had been refused entry into the USA in the 1940s as an undesirable alien and was attempting to lift this ban on his presence during this hearing.

The high point of Layton's communist period was his contribution to the ferment engendered by *First Statement* (1942-1945). As his comrade-in-arms, John Sutherland, proclaimed: "Layton's poems from this early phase of his writing career, especially, 'Newsboy', 'De Bullion Street', and 'Words Without Music' are distinguished by a hard-fisted proletarianism which makes it potential dynamite in the closed chamber of Canadian letters".³⁸²

Rather obliquely, he paid the mandatory homage expected of communists to that great theoretician of socialism in *Karl Marx*, a densely imagistic treatment of the marginalised Marx attaining his moment of glory.

"They most dear, the sad-eyed astronomers,
The unprevailing princes who broke and fled;
Or Calvin, his golden beard full of the virtues,
And Luther who in a panic maimed a devil
Later repented caught and flogged a peasant,
The Moor has tidied their bones with a newspaper.

Now the winds are lashed to the Poles
And these bones charged with lightning

³⁸⁰ Elspeth Cameron, *Irving Layton: A Portrait*, (Toronto: Stoddart, 1985) 156.

³⁸¹ Ibid., Endnotes, 475, no.9.

³⁸² Miriam Waddington, ed. *John Sutherland: Essays, Controversies and Poems*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972) 54.

While his secular horse,
The shadow removed like a halter
Moves magisterially into the sun;
and O you black ugly beast O my beauty
Churn up these white fields of leprosy!”³⁸³

Layton’s knowledge of Marx is substantiated by his incorporation of his nickname, the Moor, into this poem and his shadow reference illustrated the old image of the communist being replaced by a brighter one invoked by the sun.

Although the majority of poets committed to communism were central Canadians, mostly Montrealers, probably due to the electoral success of Fred Rose, except for Livesay, the Maritimes made a significant contribution to the ultra-radical cause through the careers of three fiery communists, Joe Wallace, Kenneth Leslie and, most importantly, Milton Acorn. Leslie (1892-1974) won the Governor-General’s Award for poetry in 1938 for his book, *By Stubborn Stars and other Poems* (1938). The stars he was referring to in his title were the red stars of communism. Shortly thereafter, Leslie migrated to the United States and settled in New York City where he edited a prominent journal, *The Protestant Digest*, from 1938 to 1949. In the 1950s he underwent investigation by the infamous Senator Joseph McCarthy and his congressional committee on UnAmerican Activities.

Although Leslie has produced a considerable poetic oeuvre, his commitment to communism was more fully expressed in his tract, *Christ, Church and Communism* (1962). In this essay Leslie revealed his position that communism was the true expression of Protestant religious belief. Leslie’s influence on Canada’s People’s Poet, Milton Acorn, was given form and substance in Acorn’s sonnet, *By Still More Stubborn Stars* (1977), a reference to the title of Leslie’s award-winning book.

“By Still More Stubborn Stars
(for Kenneth Leslie)

There are men who can see one star break
Momentarily through a rake of clouds;
Guess which it is and thereupon stake
Course, life and many more thumping loud
Human pulses on a line more tenuous
Through an incoherent stagger of shocks,

³⁸³ Irving Layton, *The Collected Poems of Irving Layton*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971) 88.

Than one by which a new spider launches

His wee red splot of life over world-tops”.³⁸⁴

The star that has engaged both Leslie and Acorn is understood as the red star of communism. Acorn similarly acknowledged in his dedication to his book, *More Poems for People* (1972), his indebtedness to Dorothy Livesay with these words,

“To Dorothy Livesay
with grateful thanks for her permission to incorporate
the title of her book “Poems for People” in the title
of this book.
(Dorothy Livesay began in this book in the tradition
of Canadian poets who dedicated their poems and
their lives to the working class.)³⁸⁵

Although the 1950s proved a difficult time for the LPP, its literary publications played a vital part in the emergence of Canada’s unofficially acclaimed people’s poet, Milton Acorn (1923-1986). Born and raised on Prince Edward Island, he plied his trade of carpenter there for a considerable time, whilst submitting his early poetic efforts to *New Frontiers* and *The Canadian Tribune* of the LPP, of which he was a member. His primary influence, according to James Doyle, was fellow Maritimer, Joe Wallace, “Acorn’s first important literary and ideological contact”.³⁸⁶ Aware of the publication of the Bethune biography, *The Scalpel, The Sword* in 1952, Acorn wrote the first of his trilogy on this communist hero in 1953, “Norman Bethune, Died Nov.13, 1939”. In this sonnet he voiced commitment to the communist cause speaking through the character of Bethune’s interpreter, Yueh-ch’ien. Acorn’s homage to Bethune anticipated the popularity of the Canadian communist martyr, when he became the marker of committed poetry in the 1970s and 1980s. Through his success in *New Frontiers*, Acorn appeared frequently in the *Tribune* from 1955-1957. His *Callum* (1957) offered a eulogy to the accidental passing of a young miner, who had fallen down a mineshaft to his death. His proletarian persona commented on the anonymity of the worker’s demise,

“you’ll see no plaques of stone for men killed there
but on the late shift

³⁸⁴ Milton Acorn, *Dig Up My Heart*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983) 179.

³⁸⁵ Milton Acorn, *More Poems for People*, (Toronto: NC Press, 1972) title page.

³⁸⁶ James Doyle, *Progressive Heritage The Evolution of a Politically Radical Literary Tradition in Canada*, (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2002) 205.

the drill I'm bucking bangs his name in code ...

'Callum'''.³⁸⁷

His attention to the individual worker's plight rather than a general tribute to the masses indicated the beginning of the maturation of his poetic craft. In perhaps his last works while formally connected to a political group, he continued to champion the lowly workers, employed and unemployed, in their daily battle with the gritty meanness of capitalist exploitation. Especially, *The Miner's Wife* (1956) reiterated his solidarity with the working class.

Acorn aligned himself with many prominent communist personalities in his poems. *Of Martyrs* (1963) offered his respect for a heroic husband and wife electrocuted by the government of the USA for treason.

"Of Martyrs

for Ethel and Julius Rosenberg

I often think of martyrs

And when I do the wind shakes,

and with that pity I can touch their lives,

their flesh,

for they were the most loving of folk'''.³⁸⁸

Acorn was lifted into the national consciousness amid the controversy engendered by his not winning the Governor-General's Award for poetry in 1969 for a volume entitled, *I've Tasted My Blood*. This slight by the judges expanded into a literary uproar that generated enormous media exposure and public scrutiny. The upshot of this literary brouhaha was a raucous gathering of an important contingent of the Canadian poetic community at Grossman's Tavern on Spadina Avenue in downtown Toronto on May 16, 1970, when Acorn was given the newly inaugurated Canadian Poets Award along with some cash and was honoured with the title, 'The People's Poet', a title he fondly cherished for the rest of his life. His close friend, Al Purdy, explained the source of Acorn's inspiration: "the most important fact about him [Acorn], and this he would tell you without being asked, is that he is a Marxist poet, a Communist.(In fact he's the only Communist poet in Canada)'''.³⁸⁹

With his new status and notoriety, Acorn returned to the subject of Norman Bethune, in keeping with the Canadian government's reassessment of him in the opening up of

³⁸⁷ Milton Acorn, *The Canadian Tribune*, April 22 1957, 12.

³⁸⁸ Acorn, *Dig*, 41.

³⁸⁹ Al Purdy, introd. *I've Tasted My Blood*, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1969) xiv.

diplomatic relations with China. In *Bethuniverse* (1972), he rendered tribute to the medical significance of the martyred hero of Canadian communism by suggesting a replacement for the ancient physician's code of practice with a new version honouring Bethune's legacy of commitment to public health.

"Let there be a Bethune Oath
Improving on that of Hippocrates
To make curing no routine but wars against disease;
Strengthen health, increase and lead it
Into all which must be done, all which must be
felt, meant and seen".³⁹⁰

In a less serious piece, *Drunk Thoughts of Bethune* (1977), he tried to demythologise the rampant hero worship that was taking place in poetic circles in the mid and late 1970s, as the Bethune cult of personality took hold in Canada.

"Take for instance our Norm. He was normal
Though he's half-made-out a mad hero
Fighting to the death at war with death
Or Fascism".³⁹¹

Acorn continued to remember fellow comrades in the struggle against capitalism, even after he had attained a measure of bourgeois respectability, when he eventually captured the Governor-General's Award for poetry in 1975 for a book entitled, *The Island Means Minago*. Most notably, *In Memory of Joe En-Lai* (1977), he kept alive his political commitment in a very personal communication.

"Never give a sign it's over and done.
Greet every new friend partly for his sake;
Thinking of him as just now gone and due back soon;
And if he doesn't return let loose that tune
to find and call him back wherever he's run.
Remember him behind in time, dream of him ahead.
Follow these instructions, even if he's dead".³⁹²

Bearing in mind his ultra-radical position, Acorn was obviously prone to berating the

³⁹⁰ Acorn, *More Poems for People*, (Toronto: NC Press, 1972) 9.

³⁹¹ Acorn, *Jackpine Sonnets*, (Toronto: Steel Rail, 1977) 51.

³⁹² Acorn, *Dig*, 209.

conservative establishment and its representatives. In his *To the Canadian Ruling Class* (1972) he unleashed suppressed rage with direct accusations of theft and greed.

In an essay entitled, *My Philosophy of Poetry* (1978), he detailed his observations on the practice of poetry. He placed himself within the definition of political poet. “Now I am a poet who writes about politics. I don’t cover it up with any half-apologetic double-talk about ‘angelic ravings’, I call it politics”.³⁹³

But Acorn shunned doctrinaire communism, he had a very personal vision tempered by his ambivalence about the USSR and its commissars. He summed it up in this way, “I’m much more interested in a humanist government...which has learned many of the lessons of communism but none of its fanaticisms, except the fanaticism that every human being has a right to the necessities of life. I consider the publicized ‘democracy’ of the West to be little better than a bad joke, a disguise for class dictatorship. So when I see another country working to improve its human environment, I’m rather patient when it goes slowly in working out the techniques of democracy”.³⁹⁴

Milton Acorn’s achievement has been commemorated in the annual National Milton Acorn Festival held every August in his native Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. This festival’s goal is to honour him by organising itself as an alternative forum for published and unknown poets. The program features readings of poetry and fiction, folk and traditional music and the presentation of the Milton Acorn Memorial People’s Poetry Award. Inaugurated in 1987, among the winners since then of this honour are former compatriots, Bill Bissett and Al Purdy.

Norman Bethune was a popular subject shared by a significant number of Canadian poets in the 1970s and 1980s, as the forgotten man of 1930s communism became a national treasure for his service in international conflicts in Spain and especially, China. Raymond Souster’s *The Good Doctor* (1967) with its dedication, ‘for the memory of Dr. Norman Bethune’, was slightly ahead of the wave of enthusiasm for the legendary surgeon. Although never declaring any communist sympathies himself, Souster employed a few of the metonymies of communism, ‘man of the people’ and more importantly, his concluding line, “to him the red blood of the people, red flags that wave in joy of victory everywhere”³⁹⁵ to seemingly, offer support for the future triumphs of communism.

Certainly, the highest accolade to Bethune’s presence in Canadian poetry was the book-length biography by Peter Stevens, *And The Dying Sky Like Blood*, subtitled *A Bethune Collage for Several Voices* (1974). The title, a verse from a poem by Mao Zedong, whose

³⁹³ Acorn, *Hundred Proof Earth*, (Toronto: Aya Press, 1988) 52.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁹⁵ Raymond Souster, *Collected Poems of Raymond Souster*, Vol. 3 (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1982) 138.

respect and admiration for Bethune made him a pivotal figure in the Canadian-Chinese diplomatic sphere, confirmed his status with the two succeeding verses,

“To find heroes in the grand manner
We must look rather to the present”.³⁹⁶

This usage of Mao’s verse is obviously intended by the author to indicate the status he identified for the subject of his collage.

Stevens traced all the main events and locations of Bethune’s life, often repeating his nickname, Beth, to express familiarity. A melange of quotes, newspaper headlines, popular song lyrics, diary entries and medical reports, the poems only refer to communism peripherally. The most important reference is a quote from the supreme leader, Mao, “Have complete faith in his opinion and ability”.³⁹⁷ Bethune’s special relationship with Mao strengthened the force of his prominence in the construction of a vital connection between the PRC and the Canadian government. This collage by Stevens is overlaid with the fervour of strident patriotism, especially in the opening poem, *For Norman Bethune* (1974), in which he associated his heroic Canadian with the glorification of his homeland, “but it should be something to belong to the country he was born in”.³⁹⁸ As a migrant to Canada, Stevens may have sought to reflect his own aspirations in establishing a close literary connection with a national hero.

Robin Mathews gained renown and denigration in the literary circles of Canadian universities as the leading Marxist theorist of Canadian literature. As a poet, he has been infusing his work with a Marxist perspective for a considerable time. He also joined in the praise for Canada’s great dead communist in *Doctor Norman Bethune* (1976), acknowledging his selflessness and dedication to duty. He prefaced and concluded the following section with quotes from Chairman Mao.

“When you went from Gravenhurst, Ontario,
When you went to Spain
To work in the long lines of the wounded,
When you went to China – out from Yenan city –
To work at the edge of battle healing the wounded,
When you took up the battle against gangrene
In the flesh and the spirit,

³⁹⁵Peter Stevens, *And The Dying Sky Like Blood*, (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1974) frontispiece.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 99.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 15.

Was that your way, Norman Bethune,
Of speaking to us, your own people?

When you were sent faraway to fight fascism,
Travelling thousands of miles
To help in a war of resistance
Did you go from us, your own people –
This people you saw lurking in the shadows of history –
Did you go from us so we could move, someday, into the light?
[*Comrade Bethune's spirit, his utter devotion to others without any thought of self, was shown in his boundless sense of responsibility in his work and his boundless warmheartedness towards all comrades and the people*]"³⁹⁹

In his closing quatrain he proclaimed the global triumph of the working class in a world-wide victory over capitalism.

"They could hear the singing of the mingled voices
As if all the people of their country
And all the people of other countries
Were singing, together, at last, in celebration".⁴⁰⁰

The repetition of 'the people' conforms to one of the metonymies which is a commonplace of communist poetic strategies.

Marya Fiamengo's *Acknowledge Him Canadian* (1978) built a grandiose picture of Bethune as the microcosmic perfection of Canadian qualities and virtues, whilst, once again, quoting from the words of Mao Zedong in the following extract, which had been the introductory preface to the Mathews portion quoted above.

"[A man's ability may be great or small,
But if he has the spirit,
He is already noble-minded and pure,
A man of moral integrity and above selfish interests
A man of value to the people.]"⁴⁰¹

Fiamengo incorporated most of the above in her portrait of Bethune.

³⁹⁹ Robin Mathews, *Language of Fire*, (Ottawa: Steel Rail, 1976) 92.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 93.

“Came one man
A white star
A man of moral integrity
No pillar of state, church
or society
Yet a descendant of all these.
Our best self
Gathered into a single cell.
A man noble-minded
of value to the people.

This man came
like a meteor out of Ontario
into the red dawn of China
a man of value to us
and to all people.

Know him as Norman Bethune.
Acknowledge him Canadian”.⁴⁰²

The quotes from Chairman Mao offered the most telling testimony to the elevation of Bethune to the highest heroic status possible. The reiteration of ‘the people’ reaffirms its significance as a primary metonymy of communist expression.

The only direct statement of Bethune’s adherence to communism appeared in Laura McLauchlan’s *Doctor Bethune* (1980), in which she explicitly wrote “you joined the Communists”.⁴⁰³ McLauchlan made use of Bethune’s own statements in her work, quoting some comments in a letter to a friend, to support an image of the artistic impulses in Bethune’s personality.

Acknowledgement of a lesser known Canadian communist hero was presented in the work of Tom Wayman, who offered respect and admiration for one of the stalwarts of the communist political scene in his conversational *Joe* (1968), which indulged in flattery for the well-known J. B. Salsberg, a Communist Party member who served as a Toronto city councillor, and, subsequently, was elected to the Provincial Legislature of Ontario.

“When the returns were in, Salsberg said

⁴⁰² Marya Fiamengo, *North of the Cold Star*, (Oakville/Ottawa: Mosaic/Valley, 1978) 16.

⁴⁰³ Laura McLauchlan, *Lacuna*, (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1980) 40.

it was a personal victory for thousands
 you understand, when I was elected
 (and your parents scrutineers for me)
 somebody started a parade
 down Spadina with torches,
 and people: songs and shouts ...
 Several times MPP, several times alderman
 backed by the needletrades, the hungry on welfare
 candidate of the old Jewish working class".⁴⁰⁴

In an iconoclastic mood, he humourously played with the image of Marx in *Wayman in Love*, explaining his economic theories in practical terms.

"My name is Doktor Marx", the intruder announces
 settling his neck comfortably on the pillow.
 "I'm here to consider for you the cost of a kiss".
 He pulls out a notepad. "Let's see now,
 we have the price of the mattress, this room must be rented,
 your time off work, groceries for two,
 medical fees in case of accidents".⁴⁰⁵

Wayman paid tribute to the unique talent of the people's poet, Milton Acorn, in the realistic *Milton Acorn: A Reading in Vancouver* (1977). He focused on that particular quality that resonated from Acorn's poetry for him.

"beauty comes out of his mouth:
 beautiful words".⁴⁰⁶

Wayman's articulation of proletarian issues found its basis in his view that poetry is not a personal act but a communication to others of a communal unity, "So a poem is a way of talking about a kind of solidarity with other human beings who...make the things that keep the world going each day".⁴⁰⁷ Wayman locates his inspiration in the "members of the Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies) speak of the need to 'fan the flames of

⁴⁰⁴ Tom Wayman, *Waiting for Wayman*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973) 66.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁰⁶ Tom Wayman, *Free Time Industrial Poems*, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1977) 79.

⁴⁰⁷ Jon Pearce, "THE LIVES BEHIND THINGS: an interview with Tom Wayman," *Quarry* Vol. 28 No. 4 (Autumn 1979) 64.

discontent””.⁴⁰⁸ In his choice of notable communist subjects, Acorn, Marx, and Salsberg, Wayman sought to acknowledge them as the inheritors of the revolutionary position once held by the Wobblies and reaffirm his commitment to solidarity with the working class through some of its prominent representatives.

Sharon Stevenson (1946-1978) was probably the last Canadian poet to have any direct connection to organised communism, according to James Doyle, “Although she joined the old-line CPC, she left in the early 1970s to join the Maoist ‘Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist)’”.⁴⁰⁹ Her affiliation to Maoism pervaded much of her poetry, which was dominated, more than any other Canadian poet, by the perception of the ‘New World’ of the workers’ utopia based on Mao’s teachings as a guide to the proletariat’s inevitable triumph. Her *END MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL MAKE THE RICH PAY!* (1976) offered a vision of the power she perceived in Mao’s formulation of communism.

“Without Mao Tsetung Thought we grope in the dark,
slaves to the wind.
but grasp it & use it & shape the great storms
under heaven, over hell.
bring forth the New World: home”.⁴¹⁰

She reiterated her commitment to communism and the ‘New World’ of a future Maoist Canada in *POETRY TOO HAS A CLASS NATURE*, whilst incorporating the symbols of the hammer and sickle and the red star in this poem.

“pick up the bright sickle of revolution
grasp the bright red hammer of our class
follow the bright star of Mao Tsetung Thought
this world must be changed,
this world is our world, we shape it fresh each day
& revolution is our right!
fight shoulder to shoulder with brothers and sisters
A New World is clanging into being”.⁴¹¹

Rarely deploying proper names in her work, she recognised the affinity of Bethune and Riel for ‘the people’ as class heroes of earlier times and invoked their spiritual legacy as

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 65

⁴⁰⁹ Doyle, 285.

⁴¹⁰ Sharon Stevenson, *Gold Earrings*, (Vancouver: Pulp Press, 1984) 103.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 83-84.

inspirational figures.

“As Bethune did
Using his skills as a doctor
To beat back Japan
Let us emulate Bethune”.⁴¹²

She brought Riel to the forefront of *The Native People Are Standing Up The Working Class Supports Them*,

“& it breaks out in circles of fire
sparked by Riel”.⁴¹³

In *Weeding* she explicitly connected her vision of Maoism to her variant for the ‘New World’, red dawn.

“to communism! step by step to communism, & we
can’t do without our party.
fresh plant, glowing vision, red dawn”.⁴¹⁴

In her introduction to *Gold Earrings* (1984), the posthumous collection of Stevenson’s works, Robin Endres found the central tenets of her writing never wavered from her political position, “As a Marxist, and a working class woman herself, the one constant in her politics was the certainty that the working class would lead the struggle for and create socialism in Canada”.⁴¹⁵ Stevenson’s devotion to Mao Zedong brought a different perspective on communism into the consciousness of the Canadian literary community, although it never received any significant exposure outside of a few journals with very small readerships.

In the years between 1920 and 1990 there has always existed a noticeable contingent of committed communist poets authoring revolutionary verse in Canada. They have provided form and substance to an ultra-radical tradition that has supported working class causes and exposed capitalist methods of domination and exploitation. These poets have given the jobless, the immigrants, the working poor a voice of combat through which they could express their issues to the uncaring middle and upper classes luxuriating in comfort and ease. These poets are responsible for communism’s small but immensely important place in Canadian literary publications. In bringing the unsavoury and darker side of capitalist society to the attention of their readers, these communist poets expanded the boundaries of a formerly

⁴¹² Ibid., 82.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 95.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 109.

⁴¹⁵ Robin Endres, introd., *Gold Earrings*, (Vancouver: Pulp Press, 1984), 8.

restricted order of poetic subjectivity.

By directing homage to Karl Marx and, extensively, to Dr Norman Bethune, these committed writers endorsed a vital impulse in the twentieth century that had worldwide connections and global ramifications. For the most part these poets were not isolated individuals transforming their tortured inner sensibilities into modernist poetic form, but political workers operating in a context of counter-cultural awareness. Contemporaneous with the communist advance was a contradictory bias against permitting politics any active influence in interpretations of an individual writer's output. This critical practice has almost totally excluded any discussion of political agency from serious engagement with literary debate in Canada. The material gathered here is perhaps one of the few organised attempts to evaluate this underestimated and frequently overlooked segment of the Canadian poetic canon, a canon that over-privileged certain liberal humanist values.

The domination of Norman Bethune as the national metonymy of communism is unparalleled in the literary histories of the Anglosphere. No other person has occupied the space of communist representation as he has. His presence in Canadian poetry has not been featured in any substantial analysis of poetic content. As Larry McDonald has perceived, "if we open a representative sample of literary histories, companions, anthologies or student guides, we must be struck not only by how political allegiances and activities are ignored as possible influences on the poets' writing, but also by how various rhetorical devices are used to discount or devalue the political dimension when its existence is tacitly or obliquely admitted".⁴¹⁶

This survey of ultra-radical poetry in Canada makes no claim to be exhaustive or authoritative. It is intended merely as a selection culled to provide support for the argument in this thesis centring on the pervasive historical presence of communist symbols and metonymies as active participants in Canadian poetry. In this chapter we have seen how the red flag with its hammer and sickle, the five-pointed red star, the clenched fist salute, Lenin and Marx and especially, the "new world" of the future communist society in the control of "the people" function as a repertoire of poetic imagery consistently displayed as markers of their writers' allegiances. From the early Wallace to the later Stevenson the attraction of communism and its imagery played on the sensibilities of poets united in appealing for radical social change. Norman Bethune emerged as the readily recognisable national metonymy whose personal odyssey contextualised a global movement in a local identity known to the masses.

⁴¹⁶ Larry McDonald, "The Politics of Influence: Birney, Scott, Livesay and the Influence of Politics", *Dalhousie Review* Vol. 67.4 (Winter 1987/88) 428.

Chapter Four

Sharkey/Stakhanov/Alias Jack Smith: Cameos for ‘Reds’

Exposure to Stalinist cultural initiatives in the Soviet Union by three of Australia’s most prominent women comrades led to the development of the tropes of communism in Australian drama. The visits of Jean Devanny in 1931-32 and Katherine Susannah Prichard and Betty Roland in 1933 allowed them to make direct contact with the new Soviet agitation-propaganda techniques and the impending formulation of the basics of socialist realism. In this chapter I will be examining in detail Prichard’s and Roland’s application of the tropes of the working-class hero, the peace activist, the scientific socialist and the martyr to the cause as they initiated them in Australian drama. Through their commitments Prichard’s *Solidarity or Penalty Clause* (1939) and Roland’s *The Miners’ Speak* (1938) would focus on the CP member/union organiser as the key figure in Australian communist drama. Their writing skills would be brought to bear on the tropes of the communist in their comprehension of the Soviet *rabotnik*, the working-class hero determined to build the socialist utopia. The accession to power of CPA members such as Bill Orr in the Miners Federation in 1934 confirmed the depiction of the CP member/union organiser as the means to promulgating the communist message in the dramatic encounter of the strike scenario of the Depression era.

With the initiation of the Popular Front strategy by the Comintern in 1935, the Workers Art Clubs were tactically transformed into New Theatres with the goal of attracting non-aligned, left-leaning individuals into CPA front organisations. They initially followed the example of the American New Theatre League, introducing the works of its most prominent playwrights to Australian audiences. Specifically, *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), by Clifford Odets, played into the key scenario of communist influence, union organisation and control. It would become the touchstone of New Theatre presentations, as Connie Healy pointed out, “It was produced by Sydney New Theatre in 1936 and launched the Melbourne New Theatre in the same year. It was the first major production of the Brisbane New Theatre”.⁴¹⁷ Politically aware Australians transformed this American taxi drivers conflict into their concern for the safety and well-being of those workers involved in dangerous industries, such as underground mining. This strike scenario format featured in the plays of three prominent Australian communist women playwrights, Katherine Susannah Prichard, Betty Roland, Catherine Duncan and a known sympathiser, Dymphna Cusack.

⁴¹⁷ Connie Healy, *Defiance: New Theatre in Brisbane 1930-62*, (Mount Nebo, Qld.: Boombana Publications, 2000) 70.

A founding member of the Communist Party of Australia in 1920, Prichard (1883-1969) was knowledgeable in the tenets of socialist realism and put this awareness into action in the Workers' Theatre Group of Perth, her hometown, when they presented her one-act play, *Forward One*, in December 1935, which was also produced in Sydney in 1937. In her analysis Susan Pfisterer claims that it is "a play with a message – better working conditions for Australian women".⁴¹⁸

It also questions the leadership of male-dominated unions in fighting for the rights of women shop employees already guaranteed in labour agreements. The representative of emerging worker militancy, Vera Brown, reads aloud the legal regulations that allow the women to have a rest from the grueling hours of duty on their feet.

Vera and her co-worker, Elsie, devise a plan of action to bring awareness of their plight to the public's attention. A fall into unconsciousness by the third shop assistant forces a confrontation between Vera and the shop owner. Prichard's resolution is a wildcat strike led by the firebrand, Vera, who, whilst performing the role of strike organiser, enacts the trope of the working-class heroine, marking an important shift in broadening the appeal of communism to an ever expanding part of the workforce. The stage directions prior to the end confirm this scenario, "*The three girls come from the back room with their hats on, and walk across the showroom to the outer door with an air of defiant resolution*".⁴¹⁹

Part of Prichard's conclusion is the veiled assertion of communist doctrine in the strikers' actions, as they are intent on worker control of the shop floor. Her working-class heroine, Vera, is, in the Australian vernacular, being 'bolshie', meaning obstinate and uncooperative in imitation of the Bolsheviks, which is precisely the subtext Prichard, as the leading communist writer in the Australian literary world, wishes the audience to take away from the performance. Prichard's one-act play offers a very strong portrait of the necessity for unity and determination in workplace struggle. During her stay in the Soviet Union in 1933, according to Cath Ellis, she had been schooled in the nuances of socialist realism. Her portrait of Vera Brown expresses "*ideynost*, or the embodiment of political and social ideas of a progressive nature".⁴²⁰

Prichard expanded her demand for action by unions, through progressive, that is, communist leadership, in *Solidarity or Penalty Clause* (1939), first presented by The

⁴¹⁸ Susan Pfisterer, *Tremendous Worlds Australian Women's Drama 1890-1969*, (Sydney: Currency Press, 1999) xiv.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 124.

⁴²⁰ Cath Ellis, "Socialist Realism in the Australian Literary Context and Katherine Susannah Prichard" in *The Point of Change: Marxism/Australia/History/Theory*, ed. Carole Ferrier and Rebecca Pelan (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1998), 142.

Workers' Art Guild of Perth in 1940. Her writing was based on an actual strike in a Western Australian gold-mining town. Prichard concentrated on the plight of union militants blackballed by management and the desperate conditions they encounter by continuing in work with the same company. This condition of victimisation is illustrated in the dire straits of two unionists.

Because of their radical leadership of the Glory Hole strike, Mick and Bob are sent to the dangerous conditions of Number 2 stope, where inspectors had recommended them not to work over ten feet high but where they are now digging at twenty-five feet. Not unexpectedly, the walls cave in and Mick and Bob are trapped. They are rescued but Mick has not survived the collapse. When informed about her husband's death, Mick's wife calls for unity among the miners, as the only way to overcome the fatal consequences of management's retaliation against strike organisers. Prichard's focus on strike organisers reiterated the trope of the working-class hero, a key element in socialist realist formulations.

After the accident, the management's representative, Monty Leach, makes the assertion that communist agitators are the initiators of the work stoppage. Reinforced with a strike mandate, Paddy Ryan, the president of the executive committee of the mining division of the Australian Workers' Union (AWU), leads a delegation to negotiate with the general manager, who once again raises the issue of communist influence. He accuses Billy Flynn of being a "red agitator and a communist"⁴²¹ but Paddy defends him.

"PADDY: I'm a catholic and no communist, as you know; but I'm proud to be associated with this young man, if he is a communist, because he's putting up a good fight for the men on the mine."⁴²²

Ryan's defense of Flynn is a tactical manoeuvre by Prichard to legitimise communist influence within the miners' union, offering a vindication of the activities of prominent Central Committee member, Bill Orr (1900-1954), and the president of the Miners' Federation, Charlie Nelson (1896-1948). They were the key operatives in the CPA's drive to control the direction of the Miners' Federation.

Act 2 begins with the coroner's inquest into the Watt tragedy. The company's legal representative is a wily Perth solicitor, Mr. Bond, specially flown in for the coronial hearing. He deftly conveys the argument that Watt was responsible for his own death by not paying attention to the safety regulations. The jury agrees with his argument and returns a verdict rejecting any blame on the company's part for the death of Michael Watt, which means the case against the company is lost, and the family of the deceased will not receive any

⁴²¹ Katherine Susannah Prichard, *Solidarity or Penalty Clause*, (1939), microfiche, Campbell Howard Collection, University of New England, 26.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 26.

compensation. At this point the subtitle of the play, *Penalty Clause*, comes into perspective. If they continue their strike, the miners will lose a day's pay for each day of strike after the first day.

The company attempts to compromise the most prominent union officials by offering them better jobs on various mines some distance from Yallabiddy. They refuse these offers and prepare for the renewal of the strike. Monty Leach repeats his opposition to the work stoppage and reiterates his claim of communist direction to the strike call. At this juncture Prichard brings her awareness of Brechtian methods into the play by shifting the audience's focus from individual interaction to the overriding principle of unity by the strikers, through the device of a multiplicity of responders to Leach's accusations.

"VOICES: The reds didn't make the penalty clause. Too right, they didn't. The Coms didn't try to stop our holiday pay".⁴²³

The power of the voices signifies the unity of the workers as they overcome the objections to the continuance of the strike. The voices represent the combined active participation necessary from the union's perspective for the success of the strike.

In reply to Chick Ross's accusation of the untrustworthiness of the 'reds', the voices continue their advocacy of the communists, "the coms stand by the workers".⁴²⁴ Prichard's voices adhere to the precept of *narodnost*, the expression of the spirit of the people.

In the last scene Billy Flynn, the communist strike committee chairman, again invokes the necessity for workers' unity as the most important aspect of their struggle.

"FLYNN: We'll win this round like we did the last. Unity of the workers will win every struggle we put up against wrong and injustice.

(People in the hall burst into a spontaneous singing of 'The Red Flag' or 'Solidarity')".⁴²⁵

Dennis Carroll praised this play for its incorporation of advanced production techniques based on the then emergent Brechtian model, as Prichard had explained in the preface to it. Carroll asserted that the technique of audience inclusion found its fullest articulation in the final scene. Here he identifies the influence of *Waiting for Lefty* (1935) in the audience's mass singing of 'Solidarity', as the final curtain drops, "as in Odets' play, these 'voices' partly consist of 'plants', but if the production works the audience will join in

⁴²³ Ibid., 50.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 51.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 54.

the singing of ‘Solidarity’, which ends the play”.⁴²⁶ The mass singing at the end produces the prescriptive socialist realist ‘optimism’, necessary to the achievement of the formulation. Prichard’s miners’ union victory offered active support and encouragement to the pivotal roles of Orr and Nelson in the Miners’ Federation executive and represented her *partinost*, her dedication to party political work. Prichard understood that the strike scenario was the correct way to express communist ideology to a mass audience.

Another visitor, contemporaneous with Prichard, to the Soviet Union in 1933 was Betty Roland (1903-1996), the then mistress of a well-known communist, Guido Barrachi (1887-1975), a founding member of the CPA, who was expelled in 1925 but was allowed to rejoin in 1935.⁴²⁷ Upon her return with Barrachi to Australia, she joined the CPA and was ordered to active party political work. For this purpose, as Michelle Arrow explains, “She formed the kernel of what would become the Melbourne Workers’ Theatre in 1935, directing the group’s fledgling theatre efforts and writing sketches for performance”.⁴²⁸ Her early work was printed in the journal, *Communist Review*, edited by Barrachi.

The Miners Speak (1938) utilises agitation-propaganda tactics in presenting workers in the coal industry as they call for a strike to rectify poor working conditions and reform management practices. As in Prichard’s play, overwhelming support is offered to the leadership of Orr and Nelson, the key figures in the Miners’ Federation. It’s a one-dimensional effort, focusing on a single family’s history and experience within the industry to give depth to the issues.

It closes on an appeal to worker unity, very similar to Ryan’s *Unity* (1933) in the Canadian drama chapter, based on justice and fair play.

“7TH: Strike because we are united!

8TH: Strike because we have got right and justice on our side.

ALL: BECAUSE WE’LL WIN! STRIKE! STRIKE!!”⁴²⁹

In the closing stage directions, they “make an accompanying gesture with clenched fists”.⁴³⁰ This group action completes the positive ending necessary to socialist realist doctrine, the clenched fist salute commands the stage. Just as the unity of their voices gave unanimity to Prichard’s workers, the salute unites them in a non-verbal action.

⁴²⁶ Dennis Carroll, *Australian Contemporary Drama*, (Sydney: Currency Press, 1985) 39.

⁴²⁷ Jeff Sparrow, *Communism: A love story* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007) 18.

⁴²⁸ Michelle Arrow, *Upstaged: Australian women dramatists in the limelight at last*, (Sydney: Currency Press, 2002) 169.

⁴²⁹ Betty Roland, *The Miners Speak*, *Communist Review*, vol. V no. 11 (November 1938) 36.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

Another early work, *Workers, Beware!*, in *Communist Review* (January 1939), indicates an advance in awareness of agitprop techniques. She enlarged on the encounter between three ruling class representatives, B. H. P., King Coal, and Shipowner versus three working class types, a metal worker, a wharfie and a seaman. James (Jim) Healy (1898-1961), a CPA member, was elected secretary of the Waterside Workers' Federation in 1937. He was once jailed for contempt of court for supporting striking coal miners. Broadening the scope of her work to include the waterside workers was Roland's way of offering affirmation to the leadership of Healy.

The establishment types automatically connect union organisers to the Communist Party. They proffer right-wing totalitarianism as a way to counteract the communist menace. As this play was written prior to the Hitler-Stalin Non-Aggression Pact in June 1939, the lines were clearly drawn between the two ideologies. Roland makes use of the dispute over the shipment of resources to Japan to suggest the federal government's complicity in aiding the Japanese invasion and conquest of China, a serious international conflict at the time.

Roland's concern for the Chinese people being massacred by the Japanese war machine was repeated in *War on the Waterfront* (*Communist Review*, February 1939), which was banned by the New South Wales government, as Michelle Arrow explains, "New Theatre sought permission to produce the play in the Domain, and when it was refused they went ahead regardless. The participants were subsequently fined L5 each".⁴³¹ It was eventually formally presented by the Sydney New Theatre on January 29, 1939. Again employing the strike scenario between BHP and the maritime unions, it expressly condemned the Liberal government for colluding in the export of pig iron to Japan, and has been acclaimed by Michelle Arrow as, "perhaps the most famous of her agitprop pieces".⁴³² Substantial notoriety was given to this incident by the then Attorney-General's harsh treatment of the wharfies, eventually crushing the strike and earning Robert Menzies the nickname of 'Pig Iron Bob'.

Roland's dramatic efforts were essentially support material for the CPA's drive to take control and direction of important industrial unions. They displayed her *partinost*, dedication to the party's aims and strategies. They presented the miners and wharfies as anti-fascist fighters, a key part of the peace activist trope, in the struggle against Australian industries aiding fascism in international confrontations.

The power of the communist leadership in the Miners Federation was considerably expanded and made more relevant in the development of the actual Wonthaggi Mine disaster of February 15, 1937 into a production entitled *Thirteen Dead Reportage Drama on the Wonthaggi Mine*, by The Melbourne Writers' Group. The writers were eventually identified

⁴³¹ Arrow, 169.

⁴³² Ibid., 169.

as Alan Marshall, and the husband and wife team of Kim Keane and Catherine Duncan (1915-2006), one of the stalwarts of the Melbourne New Theatre Club. Its relevance is established by the assertion of Michael Keane in his biography of his mother, Catherine Duncan, “that night members of the New Theatre realised that this incident was exactly the scenario they had been looking for. By building a story around this tragic event, the miners would be helped morally and financially, their work and its dangers would be better understood”.⁴³³ The play was first presented at the King’s Theatre in Russell Street on July 5, 1937. As the opening Programme Notes clearly indicate, “Thirteen Dead attacks not people but a system”.⁴³⁴ It espouses the communist position in two important dimensions, firstly, endorsement of the Soviet working class hero, Aleksei Stakhanov (1906-1977), and secondly, through better working conditions in the USSR.

Two reporters on the scene of the Wonthaggi disaster are at the bar of the local hotel when they invoke the name of the Soviet high achiever whose life identified all that the ideal worker could aspire to in the Stalinist system. They directly refer to the man, who personally embodied the shock worker himself and became the figurehead of the second five-year plan in 1935 in a group that bore his name, the Stakhanovite movement.

The shock worker or *udarnik* was not a new type on the Soviet scene. The concept was already at play during Roland’s time there in 1933. Stakhanov was just a means of publicising the shock worker concept and putting a face to it. He achieved extraordinary attention in America, when he had his visage on the cover of *Time* magazine of December 16, 1935 (Vol. XXVI, No. 23) with the caption beneath it stating, “Stakhanovism’s Great Stakhanov”. Stakhanov was made famous by the records for production he set in the coal mining industry, a clear connection to the Miners Federation. The first instance of this was on August 31, 1935, when he allegedly mined one hundred and two tons of coal in five hours and forty-five minutes, 14 times his quota, within his six-hour shift. His prominence was enhanced when the First All-Union Stakhanovite Conference took place at the Kremlin on November 14-17, 1935. As 1936 had been defined as The Year of the Stakhanovite by *Time*, knowledge of him and his importance would have been in the forefront of the thinking of the authors of this play, although they misspelled his name for some unknown reason.

The second important aspect of this work is its extremely positive depiction of the working conditions in the mines of the USSR in contrast to those in Australia, which had caused the tragedy of the mine explosion. This proclamation of Soviet superiority is

⁴³³ Kim Keane, *Views from the Balcony: A Biography of Catherine Duncan*, (South Yarra, Vic.: Macmillan Publishers, 2011) 36.

⁴³⁴ Melbourne Writers’ Group, *Thirteen Dead: Reportage Drama on Wonthaggi Mine*, (Clifton Hill, Vic.: New Theatre, 1993) 18.

introduced in an exchange concerning work hours and gradually moves to an eyewitness account of the benefits for the average worker of the communist control of industry.

The advances of the Soviet production system, the six-hour shift, clearing dust, use of safety helmets, constant ventilation, regular thorough inspections, straight and high drives are listed in a dialogue between a miner returned from the Soviet Union and a doubter of the efficacy of that system, who falls back on the elements of the subversive trope in his analysis of the communists' activities. Support for workers' control of industry is evident throughout this encounter.

“FRED: When we own the mines, our welfare will come first. Until we own them, we've got to fight. And the first thing we've got to fight for is a full and open enquiry”.⁴³⁵

Support for the communist leadership in the Miners' Federation is implicit in the text. This support would be taken to an even higher degree in the Queensland context, as Connie Healy delineates, “When Queensland miners went on strike in March 1940 in support of a national miners' strike, Unity Theatre arranged to stage a short play on the strike”.⁴³⁶ CPA members in the New Theatre (called Unity Theatre in Brisbane) were compelled to offer total endorsement of the Miners Federation executive through the concept of *partinost*, maintaining high ideological consciousness to party political affairs.

The fullest depiction of a committed CPA member would appear in Dymphna Cusack's *Comets Soon Pass*, first presented at the Repertory Theatre, Perth, in October, 1943, and which won the Western Australia Drama Festivals Prize for 1943. As this was the high point of the Soviet Union's alliance with the Western powers against the Axis, Cusack (1902-1981) felt free enough to inject the martyr trope of the communist into Jack Evans, alias Smith. He is an undercover agent with orders from the party hierarchy to organise a union in the local canning factory, the complete communist party/union organiser. His credentials are enhanced by the disclosure that his father was a member of the International Workers of the World (Wobblies), authenticating his radical heritage.

As a hero of communism Jack has to suffer a physical injury to show the audience that no sacrifice is too great in the fight for the cause. In holding to her martyr trope, Cusack must make Jack a self-sacrificer, willing to undergo serious physical harm.

Cusack allows her main character to articulate the true believer's code of behaviour in a statement to his fiancée.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 42

⁴³⁶ Healy, 82.

“JACK SMITH: You’ve got to understand that I’m a Party member, Trall. I’m in the game – for keeps. It’ll be hard going most of the time. Not much money – travelling here, travelling there. Trouble with the police, like this Talbot affair; trouble with Fascist gangs like the Blue Guards here. Always on the run – maybe even jail again. Sometimes you won’t know where I am for weeks”.⁴³⁷

Jack Smith represents the revolutionary activist prepared to undertake any mission deemed high priority by the party hierarchy to achieve its goals. His alias testifies to the necessity for committed partisans to falsify their names in order to avoid detection by the security forces, although one wonders how a change from Evans to Smith would mislead anyone. As Stuart Macintyre informs in his history of the CPA “two young Lithgow comrades, Cliff Walker and Fred Airey had been sent for extended training at the International Lenin School along with a Victorian, Vic Varty...they would return as Richard Dixon, Jack Blake and Len Donald”.⁴³⁸ Richard Dixon would become one of the triumvirate, along with J. B. Miles and Lance Sharkey, who controlled the CPA. It is important to remember that the supreme leaders of the Soviet Union all bore pseudonyms, such as Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin. The fact that Cusack was able to put a representative CPA member on stage attests to the closeness of the connection between the Soviets and their allies in the anti-fascist war being waged all over the world at this time. The estimate of CPA membership in 1942 was 16,000, according to Alan Barcan, and would peak at 23,000 in 1945.⁴³⁹

Cusack’s portrait of Jack Evans contains the essence of *partinost*, although she never formally became a card-carrying member. She unconditionally demonstrated the determination and dedication of party spirit that is the core requirement expected of the true believer. Its significance is explained in the biography, *Dymphna Cusack* (1975), as this play provided the reason for the first visit of the author to the USSR to aid in its translation in June 1956.⁴⁴⁰ The Soviet hierarchy would go to great lengths to promote such a blatant display of party spirit.

Another significant portrayal of *partinost* but in an inner-city setting in the 1950s is a work by a longtime party member, Dorothy Hewett (1923-2002), who joined the party in 1943 and remained a member until 1968. Long praised as an important feminist statement,

⁴³⁷ Dymphna Cusack, *Comets Soon Pass in Three Australian Three-Act Plays*, (Sydney: Australasian Publishing, 1950) 67.

⁴³⁸ Stuart Macintyre, *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia from Origins to Illegality*, (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1998) 176.

⁴³⁹ Alan Barcan, *The Socialist Left in Australia 1949-1959*, (Sydney: Australian Political Studies Association, 1960) Appendix B, 23.

⁴⁴⁰ Norman Freehill and Dymphna Cusack, *Dymphna Cusack*, (Sydney: Thomas Nelson Australia, 1975) 104.

This Old Man Comes Rolling Home was first presented by the University of Western Australia Dramatic Society at the New Fortune Theatre, Perth, on January 11, 1967, although written in 1965. In this work Hewett foregrounded Communist Party activities in the working class Sydney suburb of Redfern through the depiction of Tom Dockerty, the husband of her proto-feminist heroine, Laurie Dockerty. The strength of the Communist Party in this area at this time is vividly outlined in a note to the Currency Methuen edition of the play, by Hewett's husband, Merv Lilley, a fellow CPA member, entitled *The Red Belt*, "in those years Dorothy Hewett squatted in a house on Marriott Street, East Redfern, which became the headquarters of the South Sydney section of the Communist Party...The Redfern, Alexandria and Waterloo workers called at the house to collect their Tribunes; the Redfern Ban-the-Bombers fanned out from it to collect signatures; the Redfern Tenants' Protection League planned their strategy there".⁴⁴¹ He extrapolates on the party, "the Redfern Communist Party branch was unique of its kind: strongly regional, anarchistic, easy-going but resentful of "the heads", whether the capitalist bosses or the Communist Party in Marx House in the city".⁴⁴²

Tom Dockerty is the representative of this Red Belt. At the outset in the description of the setting to Act 1, a sideboard is littered with "Tribunes, Soviet Union magazines,"⁴⁴³ which establish the political context of this drama. The official organ of the CPA nationally, and published weekly, the *Tribune* was eight pages in bulletin format. Tom is responsible for the distribution of it in this CPA section.

Tom is a disciplined and enthusiastic party person. As he is maintaining his property's value by painting the exterior of his home, he sings the communist anthem, *The Red Flag*. Set in the midst of a federal election campaign, Tom is totally involved in supporting his candidate, the party's general secretary from 1948-1965, L. L. 'Lance' Sharkey (1898-1967), a staunch Stalinist who ran in the Cook electorate, which included Redfern, many times in the late 1940s and most of the 1950s. His candidacy is mentioned by Jack Beasley in his introduction to the Currency Methuen edition of 1976, "just after the war, L. L. Sharkey, the Party secretary, got an astonishing 12,000 votes in the old Cook electorate, which included Redfern and which was subsequently re-divided; and there were Communist aldermen on the Redfern Municipal Council".⁴⁴⁴ Tom goes to extreme lengths to promote his party's leader.

He engages his daughter to paint 'VOTE SHARKEY' in foot high letters on a wall but she misspells his surname and paints 'SHAKY' instead. Tom realises the error but can do nothing about it, as the police close in on his vandalism. This mistake could be taken as an

⁴⁴¹ Merv Lilley, "The Red Belt" in *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home*, (Sydney: Currency Press, 1976) xiv.

⁴⁴² Ibid., xvi.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., viii.

example of situational humour, but as a CPA member, Hewett would be exposing herself to severe party punishment for such a breach of party discipline, as it could be interpreted as a sign of irreverence toward the party elite. It also exemplifies the 'Red Belter's' lack of respect for constituted authority of any persuasion, a quality of character which Merv Lilley asserts in his commentary on the play.

As a result of his intervention in a confrontation between a close friend and a foreman at his factory, an example of militant leadership, Tom gets the sack from his job. His daughter, Julie, realises that his many years of devoted union membership will impact on his fellow workers at the plant.

“JULIE: Don’t lose faith in your own. The men’ll stick,

they’ll get you back, but the question is, will you stick to them?

TOM: She’s right, y’know, Snow. We shoulda been talkin’ tattics. Tattics is the answer. Me an’ the boys’ll work it out tergether. They’ll stick like glue to ol’ Tom Dockerty”.⁴⁴⁵

The union’s support for Tom does eventuate in his reinstatement at his employment. The workers unite by obeying factory regulations, when using the lavatory, and this attention to detail delays the work process to the point where management feels compelled to recall Tom, which ends the workers’ go-slow effort.

To objectify Tom’s characterisation, Hewett allows one of the local women in her Greek chorus device to reveal her observations about him.

“VIOLET: Poor ol’ Tom. ‘E’s never been a whinger

in ‘is life. Tom Dockerty. Took what was comin’

and fought for ‘is rights. Seems like I been

buyin me Trib orf Tom Dockerty for centuries.”⁴⁴⁶

Hewett goes to great lengths to provide Tom with respectable goals as he approaches retirement age. He wants to stay in the local community and belong to the pensioners’ association and die as an honourable ‘Red Belter’. Merv Lilley in his comments characterises him “as no revolutionary,”⁴⁴⁷ although this is contrary to CP thinking in the postwar period, where a competent unionised worker with a settled family life and a home of his own was considered to be the ideal party member, as Joy Damoussi pointed out, “conventional marriage, the nuclear family and the male breadwinner were upheld as expected forms of

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 96-97.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., xvii.

behaviour”.⁴⁴⁸ Perhaps Lilley’s positioning of Tom is part of the worldview common to ex-communists, revising the past to suit present conditions, as he himself enunciates this paradox in his own words, when he compares Hewett’s unskilled factory hands in her novel, *Bobbin Up* (1959), to the people in this play, they are “a far cry from the Australian Communist ideal of the respectable tradesman who has learnt from his copy of Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder and works patiently and long for the support of his fellow unionists in every struggle”.⁴⁴⁹ Tom Dockerty seems to exemplify this description in its entirety.

Hewett’s extensive use of ‘strine, the Australian vernacular, was in keeping with the tenets of CP artistic policy in its postwar nationalist phase. The party had adopted a strong traditional popular cultural position and support for all kinds of activities was welcomed, such as folksongs, folklore, and the initiation of literary groups, such as the Realist Writers’ Group, of which Hewett was a member. The most popular production of the New Theatre was *Reedy River* (1953) by Dick Diamond, a folk musical based on ballads and poems of the nineteenth century. The spirit of the people could only be expressed in their own language, as Hewett herself explains in the program note to the first production (as reported in Lilley’s article), “my aim was to write of a self-contained world, the world of ‘the battlers’ of inner suburban Sydney, sometimes known as ‘The Red Belt’, with its own language, its own folklore, its own values, its own ethos”.⁴⁵⁰ Hewett succeeded in achieving her goal, as the words of her characters establish the uniqueness of their particular segment of Sydney’s social milieu.

The fight for control and domination of unions by the CPA in the 1950s reappears in one of the most searching analyses of the pervasiveness of communist infiltration of mainstream Australian society, Stephen Sewell’s *The Father We Loved on a Beach by the Sea* (1978), first performed at La Boite Theatre, Brisbane, on July 21, 1978. In a dual timeframe construction, set mainly in 1959 and partially in 1984, Sewell’s play returns to the industrial strife of the last year of the 1950s as seen through the experiences of the father figure of the title, Joe, who is a 33 year-old unemployed worker with a wife and three children. Sewell endows Joe with a formidable anti-communist stance, for which he employs two negative tropes of the communist representation, firstly, the Sovietophile dominated by the Kremlin’s agenda and, secondly, the alien presence. In Act 1 in the midst of a group of unemployed men waiting outside the gates of Commonwealth Engineering for a call to work just prior to Joe’s arrival, a workman named Charley accuses the ‘reds’ of being fanatics to the cause, who can only be controlled by their complete eradication.

⁴⁴⁸ Joy Damousi, *Women Come Rally: Socialism, Communism and Gender in Australia 1890-1955*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994) 134.

⁴⁴⁹ Lilley, “The Red Belt”, xvii.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, xv-xvi.

When two communist agitators enter the waiting group of workmen, they are greeted with vehement denunciation by the aforementioned Charley, who calls for their immediate return to Moscow. This is echoed by Frank, another workman, shouting, “Go back to Russia!”⁴⁵¹

Peter Fitzpatrick affirms the status of the alien assigned to the communist representatives by the workers’ remarks, their “defensive hostility is the fear of the alien”,⁴⁵² a negative trope common to anti-communist rhetoric. Joe tries to undermine the communists by insinuating a lack of patriotism on their part, another ploy common to anti-communist tactics.

Joe’s questioning of the patriotism of the agitators is extremely paradoxical, as the suggestion intended by his remark assumes that he did fight during the unidentified war, presumably the Korean one, as he himself states, “I didn’t become a soldier. Knew blokes who did. I didn’t want to get killed. [Laughs] No, so see I got this doctor to give me a certificate like”.⁴⁵³ Joe’s fear of the communists extends to hysteria in contemplating the annihilation of his wife and family, if they eventually take over, as a replay of the ‘better dead than red’ cliché.

Joe’s anti-communism is contrasted with his eldest son’s commitment to the party. Dan is a prominent member undergoing a crisis in 1984, as Australia is reeling under the breakdown of social order and the dominance of right-wing extremism has produced a totalitarian state as a defense against the imminent seizure of power by the menace of communism. Dan is one of the primary threats to this totalitarian regime and he is on the run as the play opens.

His dialogue with his brother, Mikey, recollects some of the family’s history and their relationships with their father. It all takes place in one day, Dan’s last day in Australia before he exits the country under party orders. He is able to identify the current state of right-wing domination as emanating from the lack of unity by communist groups, the Trotskyites, the Stalinists and the Maoists.

Dan expresses profound disillusionment with the cause in a long monologue, the entirety of Act 2 Scene 12. His disenchantment is reinforced by a party directive for him to leave the country, as he is totally against the party’s policy of forming a united front with the Labor Party in the forthcoming election campaign. He tells the party’s emissary, Tony, the extent of his lack of illusion about the course of present events. Fitzpatrick assesses this situation as a marker common to Sewell’s works, “none of Sewell’s plays is very sanguine

⁴⁵¹ Stephen Sewell, *The Father We Loved on a Beach by the Sea*, (Sydney: Currency Press, 1984) 56.

⁴⁵² Peter Fitzpatrick, *Stephen Sewell: The Playwright as Revolutionary*, (Sydney: Currency Press, 1991) 68.

⁴⁵³ Sewell, 49.

about the capacity of the revolutionary side to organize itself to much purpose”.⁴⁵⁴ The exaggerated fear of communism that motivates their opponents is clearly shown to be an overreaction, as the organisation is incapable of structuring itself into an efficient and orderly political force.

Tony assesses Dan’s position as primarily romantic without a grip on political reality. As a revolutionary romantic he is not equipped to deal with the day-to-day struggle demanded of the committed party worker. Dennis Carroll searches for meaning in the ending, “Sewell hints that Dan’s commitment may finally lead to some personal and political fulfillment,”⁴⁵⁵ although his tendency to romanticism suggests to me that he can never achieve any sort of satisfactory political resolution in the fragmentation of the radical left realm. Sewell’s understanding of the intense divisiveness between communist forces is given fuller scope in his treatment of the post-Lenin period in Soviet history in his next play, *Traitors* (1979).

Sewell expanded his interrogation of internecine strife between communist fractions in *Traitors*, first presented at the Pram Factory, Melbourne, on April 26, 1979 by the Australian Performing Group. In his second play he explored the dramatic potential arising from the historic reality created by Lenin’s death in 1924 within the CPSU through the conflict between the forces contending for power, those of the general secretary, Stalin, and the creator and commander of the Red Army, Trotsky. Sewell asserts that control of the secret police, the Cheka, was the key strategic manoeuvre that entrenched the supporters of Stalin in their dominance of the party and, thereby, the state. The clash between the Stalinists and Trotskyites is complicated by the shifting allegiance of a third party group, the Zinovievists. The interplay between these three factions descends into brutality and violence as the Stalinist means of ensuring their victory. The interpretation of a single word, the title of the play, defines the action and reaction of the drama’s intent, as Peter Fitzpatrick discusses in his study, “‘Who are the traitors?’ is asked very early in the play; the Stalinists who have betrayed the revolution, have defined the Oppositionists as traitors to the Party, the proletariat and the country, and the society they have created is one in which it is very difficult not to betray principles and friends”.⁴⁵⁶ Anna, a Trotskyite, is an intermediary in the negotiations with the Zinovievists, and offers a deal to their emissary, Joseph Rubin, which commits them to uniting against the Stalinists. Rubin, as the representative of Zinoviev, is anxious to ascertain Trotsky’s position in the quickly changing environment of the jockeying for power. Rumour and disinformation coalesce to confuse the negotiators.

⁴⁵⁴ Fitzpatrick, 40.

⁴⁵⁵ Carroll, 297.

⁴⁵⁶ Fitzpatrick, 38.

At this juncture the untimely death of the founder of the secret police, Felix Dzerzinski (1877-1926) allows the Stalinists to appoint his successor and ensures their ability to manipulate and control its agents. Anna is informed about this by an acquaintance, Mother Dybenko, “if Stalin’s got the Secret Police I wouldn’t like to be an Oppositionist”.⁴⁵⁷

Mother Dybenko’s statement foreshadows the arrest of Rubin and his brutalisation and torture by the Cheka agent, Giorgi Krasin, who is also Anna’s lover. Krasin has just returned from England where he assassinated a minor critic of the party, an assignment he questions deeply in his report to his superiors about the liquidation of Makarov. Krasin doesn’t comprehend that he has been designated as a killer by the agency, the most useful position for a Chekist.

Sewell opens Act 2 with the stage directions indicating the political situation. “Large portraits of Stalin and Bukharin are illuminated. Beside these are two other covered objects of equal dimension...the portraits of the disgraced Trotsky and Zinoviev”.⁴⁵⁸ As these paintings are at the Cheka headquarters in 1927, the allegiance of the secret police is clearly evident. Krasin is unable to come to terms with the directive to eliminate Makarov, as his six months in England prior to the murder has led him to understand that the Cheka had organised and paid for Makarov’s existence as an enemy of the Bolsheviks. He offers his resignation, but it is rubbished by his superior, Lebeshev. When Krasin threatens to go directly to the head of the Cheka, Dzerzinski, he is informed by Lebeshev that Genrikh Yagoda, a Stalin acolyte, has replaced the recently deceased director.

Sewell’s comprehension of the organisational changes within the secret police are drawn in broad brushstrokes, as the Cheka had been transformed into the Government Political Administration (GPU) by Dzerzinski in 1922 and Genrikh Yagoda (1891-1938) was appointed deputy commander of the GPU in 1923, not 1926 as this scene suggests, although he was, to knowledgeable critics, the actual man in charge of the agency after Dzerzinski’s death, even though Vyacheslav Menzhinsky held the actual office of director. Stalin’s ability to control the party is confirmed in the next scene, when Anna encounters an old friend at the United Opposition Headquarters in Moscow, and is informed about the extent of Stalinist tactics which completely thwart the Oppositionists.

Krasin’s interrogation of Rubin illustrates the nexus of party and state that motivates the attack on the United Oppositionists by the Stalinist disciples. His ultimate weapon against Rubin is expulsion from the CPSU, not the laying of charges in a criminal court. Sewell plays with the concept of the martyr here, as the torture and murder of Joseph Rubin contains the appropriate attributes, the dedicated revolutionary giving his all for the cause, but as a

⁴⁵⁷ Stephen Sewell, *Traitors*, (Sydney: Currency Press, 1995) 26.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

Zinovievist, he is on the losing side and cannot be elevated to this prominence by the Stalinists. Sewell's exploration of this situation develops a contrast to Cusack's treatment of the martyr trope. Jack Evans's partymindedness is matched by Rubin, their qualities of character are equal, but Rubin's loyalty to Zinoviev condemns him to death. Sewell is certainly pointing to the ambiguity inherent in such a trope.

In his depiction of the deadly conflict over the leadership of the CPSU, Sewell offers extremely confronting images of the dedicated CP member caught up in the daily combat of opposing factions, as Fitzpatrick points out: "behind the 'little subject' of their activities in the summer of 1927 lies the 'big subject' of the crisis of political faith caused by the collapse of the Communist ideal".⁴⁵⁹ Stalin's domination of the party allowed him total control of the state and its institutions and eventual dictatorship of the USSR. Sewell's dedication of this text to Victor Serge (1890-1947) expresses his unwillingness to accept Stalinist doctrine as the be-all and end-all of communism.

On the back cover of the Currency Press 1995 edition of this play, Sewell has inscribed the following, "Traitors was written in memory of Victor Serge".⁴⁶⁰ Serge was a libertarian socialist who had protested against the Red Terror of Dzerzinski and his Cheka operatives. He was a key member of both the Left Opposition of 1923-1925 and the United Opposition of 1925-1927, which brought Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky together against Stalin. In late 1927 most of the United Opposition, including Trotsky and Zinoviev, was expelled from the party and some, led by Zinoviev, capitulated in order to return to the party. In 1928 Serge was expelled from the CPSU and in March 1928 was arrested and spent two months in jail without charge.

With the great turning point of 1929 came Stalin's consolidation of power, and Serge was arrested and imprisoned again in March 1933, but this time he did not receive a quick release and an international outcry forced his banishment, firstly, to Belgium, then to France. The persecution of Serge in a way mirrors Sewell's treatment of Joseph Rubin, only Serge was too important a personage to kill outright and must be allowed to leave the USSR. He is believed to be the first writer to describe the Soviet government of Comrade Stalin as 'totalitarian'. Sewell expressed his misgivings about Stalinism directly, in *Traitors* (1979), and indirectly through Tom in *The Father We Loved on a Beach by the Sea* (1978).

Sewell's investigation of Stalin's rise to supreme power is closely connected to an examination of the actual lifestyle of the prime mover of theoretical communism, Karl Marx, in Ron Blair's *Marx* (1978), first performed by the South Australian Theatre Company at the Playhouse, Adelaide, on June 1, 1978. Blair's drama offers a thorough investigation of a year

⁴⁵⁹ Fitzpatrick, 17.

⁴⁶⁰ Sewell, *Traitors*, back cover.

in the life, from winter 1850 to winter 1851, of the champion of the proletariat in the nineteenth century.

In his introduction, 'Against the Odds', Blair seeks to shatter the veneer of veneration surrounding the mythology of Marx. As he explains, "in my portrait of Marx, today's disciples object to my showing him as domineering and abusive...More seriously, the Marxists most dislike that I show him as an anti-Semite and that I make a feature of his affair with their servant Helene Demuth and his cowardice about the child she bore him".⁴⁶¹ Blair pulls no punches in expanding on these objectives he has set for himself and in focusing his dramatic skills on a particularly repellant image of the mastermind of scientific socialism. Above all, Blair wishes to establish Marx as a subversive, committed to undermining the values of Western Christian civilisation.

In order to prove his point, Blair proffers two examples of cowardice on Marx's part. Firstly, he is challenged to a duel by August Von Willich, a Prussian revolutionary who is visiting his home. As a consequence of Marx throwing some wine in his face, Willich demands satisfaction from Marx but Schramm, one of his supporters, accepts the challenge and takes his place in the duel. Marx is content to let himself off the hook, so to speak.

Secondly, Marx bluntly informs Demuth, referred to as Lenchen, that she must claim that Engels is the father of their child, in order to remove suspicion from him. He also pushes her to make a public denial of his paternity. Marx's affair with Demuth has all the aspects of the *droit du seigneur* about it, and places him in the position of oppressing a servant woman that he ostensibly battles to liberate from those conditions. This is alluded to by Jenny Marx in a conversation with Demuth about Engels taking advantage of her.

Unquestionably, anti-Semitism from Marx's perspective has a double edge to it, as he is both the object and the subject of it. In his encounter with Von Willich, he is described by the most damaging word in the vocabulary of the Jew-haters, "Stupid, vile, yiddish numbskull!"⁴⁶²

When he is engaged in discussion with the doctor summoned to care for his dying daughter, Franziska, he employs the same derogatory term in condemning the attending physician for his religious belief. The fact that the term, yid, equal to the repugnant nigger, when describing blacks, is used as a means of insulting Marx and is uttered by him to the doctor shows the extent to which public expression of hatred of Jews had extended into mid-nineteenth century social situations, such that it held considerable currency in the popular discourse of the times.

⁴⁶¹ Ron Blair, *Marx*, (Sydney: Currency Press, 1983) viii.

⁴⁶² *ibid.*, 16.

Blair illustrates all the dimensions of the subversive trope in his portrait of Marx. He is shown to undermine matrimony and the family, to avoid any paid occupation, and to engage in discriminatory behaviour against a minority group. Together these elements combine to propel this play from criticism into mockery, whether the writer's awareness of it is conscious or unconscious. It can be assessed as falling under the rubric of mock-heroic, as there is never any attempt to have Marx appear as a rounded personality, with qualities that could be seen in the complete rendering of any dramatic persona, no matter their prominence in the wider sphere of political theory. Blair aligns himself with those who question the morality of communism, as represented by its foremost advocate, as the Marx of his portrait is without any identifiable positive characteristics.

The attention to unions with strong communist connections took on broader dimensions in the early 1950s. The Sydney New Theatre distinguished itself by bringing theatre to coalminers intent on maintaining workers' control of their pits in two instances in 1952. On June 23, 1952, they took an American play about a strike in a chain of stores entitled *The Candy Store* (1951) by Bernard Rubin and directed by Kenneth Warren to Glen Davis stay-down strikers at the request of the Miners' Federation. The men had been underground for two weeks and the troupe enthusiastically travelled down to its audience, "at the junction of five tunnels they met their potential audience of striking miners who proudly showed them the stage they had erected...almost a replica of their own in Sydney".⁴⁶³ The use of *The Candy Store* seems to echo the earlier replication of the strike scenario in Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* (1935). Later that year, in November, the troupe performed an agitprop sketch, "Stay Down Miner by Len Fox, inside the Great Greta coalmine in the Hunter Valley, to an audience of 32 stay-down strikers...whose 'stay-put' action covering over 20 days was in protest against dismissal notices".⁴⁶⁴ The importance of these presentations lies in their ability to bring to public recognition union activities that would be far removed from the concerns of bourgeois theatre. The dynamism of the language of the working class and its concerns was made relevant and potent when written into theatrical form and presentation. Workers' control of industry was at the forefront of these confrontations and active support for this was vital to the interests of the New Theatre, especially in this period immediately after the defeat of the Communist Party Dissolution Bill in 1951. The CPA needed to strengthen its attachment to the proletariat and taking theatre to the people was a means of achieving this goal.

⁴⁶³ David Milliss, *The New Years: The Plays, People and Events of Six Decades of Sydney's Radical New Theatre*, (Sydney: New Theatre Publications, 1992) 13.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

The realm of communist representation in Australian drama encompassed the early depictions of the communist party/union organiser at a time when the influence of communism moved to the forefront of many important Australian primary industry unions. Bill Orr and Jim Healy were both elevated to the Central Committee of the CPA. Australian perceptions of communist representations lacked the overriding martyr trope, performed by Norman Bethune in the Canadian context, and relied heavily on the working-class hero in a union context, more in keeping with the real life experiences of the party hierarchy. J. B. Miles, Lance Sharkey and Richard Dixon were all proletarians, who had come to political awareness through direct involvement in the rough and tumble of industrial action.

Betty Roland's *The Miners' Speak*, *Thirteen Dead* (1937) by the Melbourne Writers Group and Prichard's *Solidarity* speak to the success of Orr and Nelson, for the iron worker and the waterside worker, see *Workers, Beware* (1939). In their analysis of these communist women playwrights, Pfisterer and Pickett find, "that the feminist concerns of these particular playwrights were subsumed in favour of their communist agendas".⁴⁶⁵ As CPA operatives they were totally committed to the party line. Cusack's *Comets Soon Pass* (1943), Hewett's *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home* (1965) and Sewell's *The Father We Loved on a Beach by the Sea* (1978) interrogated the dedicated male party member, examining in detail the dimensions of their public commitments and its effects on their private circumstances. *Traitors* (1979) focused on the ambiguities of competing party factions inherent in the fluidity of the revolutionary situation, whilst *Marx* (1978) questioned the distance between the practical considerations of everyday reality and the ethereal otherworldliness of utopic visions.

All these plays were a part of Australian theatre and deserve to find their place in the critical analysis of its history. In this chapter I have shown how they displayed the tropes of the communist, the peace activist, the scientific socialist, the martyr to the cause and, most prominently, the CP/union organiser and his/her participation in the confrontation of the strike scenario as the direction to communist power and eventual development of a proletarian state. I have attempted to return these dramas to the foreground of dramatic criticism and evaluation, from which most have been deleted because of their perceived incorrect ideological content.

⁴⁶⁵ Susan Pfisterer and Carolyn Pickett, *Playing with Ideas: Australian Women Playwrights from the Suffragettes to the Sixties*, (Sydney: Currency Press, 1999) 102.

Chapter Five

Hardy/Hewett/Waten: 'Positive Heroes' in Australian Fiction

Dedicated CPA members were well informed about the basic tenets of Soviet socialist realism through direct contact with the USSR. As explained in the Australian drama chapter, Jean Devanny and Katherine Susannah Prichard were very early visitors in 1931-32 and 1933, respectively. These two women would be prominent writers of Australian social[ist] realist fiction in its initial phase from 1920 to 1940. Other important party writers, Frank Hardy in 1951, Dorothy Hewett in 1952, and Judah Waten would be post-war tourists, returning from the Soviet utopia and ready to embark on *the* Australian social[ist] realist novel based on the tropes of communism, the CP/union organiser, the peace activist, the scientific socialist, and the martyr to the cause. They would attempt to meet the Party's "literary perceptions, which invariably sought a positive hero, an absence of romance, a heightened socialist realism, and 'correct' attitudes".⁴⁶⁶

Australian social[ist] realists had to contend with the political context of pre-revolutionary socialism in Australia, far from the secure circumstances of Soviet writers, as they were in a post-revolutionary phase, immersed in celebrating the exploits of the victors of the Civil War and the builders of socialism.

Writers in Australia had to adapt their plots and techniques in order to accommodate the realities on the ground. This meant close attention to the sites of communist influence and power in Australia, mainly CPA adherents in the unions, in anti-fascist and anti-war groups and organisations of the unemployed in the Depression era.

There were three distinct phases to the writing of Australian social[ist] realism. The first phase was the 1920 to 1940 period, which produced six works focused on the strike scenario, three by Katherine Susannah Prichard, *Black Opal* (1921), *Working Bullocks* (1926) and *Intimate Strangers* (1937). Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934), John Harcourt's *Upsurge* (1934), and Jean Devanny's *Sugar Heaven* (1936) foregrounded the activities of the CPA cadre in their fictions in the party's class against class era.

The Early Phase, 1920 to 1940

A prominent participant at the founding of the Communist Party of Australia in 1920 was Katherine Susannah Prichard (1883-1969). As an active and important member of the

⁴⁶⁶ Jenny Hocking, *Frank Hardy Politics Literature Life*, (Melbourne: Thomas C. Lothian Ltd. 2005) 103.

CPA, she served for many years on the Central Committee. Prichard's writing in the 1920s was done within the framework of a pre-revolutionary position, supporting communities based on collective values and focusing on the trope of the union organiser.

Prichard's separation from the unfolding events in the nascent Soviet Union would continue until her trip there in 1933, when she was provided with the basics of Soviet socialist realism. Her efforts in the 1920s were focused on the conflict between communal values of mateship and a 'fair go' in the outback and the threat that American capitalism posed to the industrial co-operation of the local inhabitants. She aligned herself with the Lawson-Furphy tradition and gave unequivocal support to the democratic nationalist precepts on which it was based. She carried on their doctrine of mateship, an important underpinning of proletarian values, in *Black Opal* (1921) and *Working Bullocks* (1926).

Black Opal examined the self-governing community of the opal miners of Lightning Ridge. It thrived as a rural egalitarian society based on sharing the assets accumulated by their co-operation, "the unwritten law of the Ridge was that mates pooled all the opal they found and shared equally".⁴⁶⁷ This attitude towards their wealth was supported by the quasi-sacred principle of Ridge life, 'a mate stands by a mate'.⁴⁶⁸ Adherence to the ethos of mateship was analogous to a religious covenant and to violate it was tantamount to serious criminality.

Michael Brady is presented as the community's guide and mentor. He was "the court of final appeal in quarrels and disagreements between mates".⁴⁶⁹ Brady's father figure leads the opposition to the takeover of the mines by private enterprise, which would cause the miners to lose their independence and make them employees of a large corporation. Prichard's portrayal of Brady confirms the indeterminacy of the communist image in the pre-socialist realist phase of communist representation. He emerges as a shadowy figure with a "Utopian dream about the place,"⁴⁷⁰ which maintains the workers' council, the soviet, as the primary tenet of communism. Her perception of communist society was limited to a democratic utopian ideal, centred on the deliberations of the collective to articulate the people's needs, which had considerable resonance in small communities but could not be the ultimate authority in a state such as Australia or the USSR.

In her next fiction, *Working Bullocks* (1926) Prichard made a significant move forward in her understanding of ideological representation in Mark Smith. He is formulated as a religious figure, echoing the religiosity of the mateship credo, spreading a new gospel of unionisation and taking on the guise of a priest-like personage ministering to his flock of

⁴⁶⁷ Katherine Susannah Prichard, *Black Opal*, (London: Collins Publishers, 1921) 17.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 214.

embattled workers. His motto, “fight for a better world,”⁴⁷¹ offers an early metonymy of the future communist state but he is beset by self-doubt about the efficacy of his work. He bears the markers of the martyr, he suffers for the cause by serving a jail sentence and, although the strike is defeated, he retains his commitment to the struggle. Although there is a slight progression in her depictions of Brady and Smith, she is prone to reiteration rather than communist character development.

Pat Buckridge interpreted Prichard’s difficulty with communist characterisation to the quandary of the Australian Left in the 20s, “how...was the revolution politically relevant to Australia?”⁴⁷² This situation of uncertainty produced a text saturated with the valorisation “of political and other forms of human energy over ideological orthodoxy or organizational efficiency”.⁴⁷³

Prichard’s inability to produce the politically correct image of the communist was conditioned by her own political circumstances, as the CPA operated with minimal knowledge of the internal strife imploding the CPSU of the time. As Buckridge maintains, *Working Bullocks* (1926) reveals the “provisional strategies and makeshift solutions”⁴⁷⁴ that determined her writing prior to the declaration of Soviet socialist realism. Because of these discrepancies in Prichard’s discourse, two Marxist critics have perceived anarchistic tendencies in Prichard’s fiction of the 1920s, with Jack Beasley evaluating Mark Smith as “more anarchistic than communist,”⁴⁷⁵ whilst Jack Lindsay found her perspective in *Black Opal* (1921) “on the anarchist level”.⁴⁷⁶ The fact that these two noted Marxists took Comrade Prichard to task for incorrect ideological content points to her lack of sufficient tuition in the concrete details of communist ideological representations. Prichard could not surrender her adherence to the Lawson-Furphy tradition, which operated in the pre-communist era of democratic socialism, and saw workplace reforms as the primary objective of political action.

The timeliness of Prichard’s visit to the USSR in 1933 cannot be understated. This trip functioned as her reeducation program. Her knowledge of communist initiatives in the arts was considerably expanded, as she was presumably informed of the Kharkov Resolutions and

⁴⁷¹ Katherine Susannah Prichard, *Working Bullocks*, (London: Collins Publishers, 1926) 201.

⁴⁷² Pat Buckridge, “Katherine Susannah Prichard and the Literary Dynamics of Political Commitment” in *Gender, Politics and Fiction: Twentieth Century Australian Women Novels*, (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1985) 99-100.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴⁷⁵ Jack Beasley, *The Rage for Life: The Work of Katherine Susannah Prichard*, (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1964) 34.

⁴⁷⁶ Jack Lindsay, *Decay and Renewal Critical Essays on Twentieth Century Writing*, (Sydney: Wild & Woolley, 1976) 308.

the basic tenets of socialist realism. The consolidation of Stalinist power was in place and the correct party line was now available to her. In *The Real Russia*, published in 1934, in a chapter entitled, *Literary Culture in the Soviet Union*, she praises the Union of Soviet Writers and one of the guiding mentors of socialist realism, Maxim Gorky. With this new comprehension of the 'authorised' writing practice, she should have been able to embark on communist representations more appropriate to the party's precepts, although she was superseded in this by one of her fellow visitors to the USSR, Jean Devanny. Both were preceded by fictions that contained the initial projections of the communist image in 1934.

The key year in producing the communist presence in Australian fiction was 1934. Two novels brought this shadowy image into a recognisable form, Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934) and John Harcourt's *Upsurge* (1934). Although published in that year, Stead's work focused on the Seamen's Strike of 1925 in Sydney and its impact on the city as a subject in itself and the plight of the seven citizens caught up in its events. As Frank Cain and Frank Farrell explain, the strike leaders, Tom Walsh and Jacob Johnson, were identifiable communists, which allowed the Prime Minister, Stanley Bruce, to describe the conflict as "part of a concerted worldwide communist conspiracy to disrupt Australia's links with Britain and threaten the integrity of the Empire".⁴⁷⁷

The representative of militant politics is figured in the character of Tom Winter, one of the significant seven of the title. Winter mentions the attention the party attracted as a prominent issue in the federal election of November 1925, "It's all ridiculous, as there're only about two thousand real true-blue Communists in the Commonwealth".⁴⁷⁸ Winter's self-appointed mission is to identify the fifty most important capitalists in Sydney. His identification of them and, more seriously, the publication of their names would necessitate a counterattack by the forces of the state at the behest of the wealthy. As a communist party/union organiser in the midst of the strike, the consequences of that position overtake him when he is arrested and gaoled, on "a charge of sedition, inciting to riot, etc., for a speech he made to seamen at the Union's offices".⁴⁷⁹ Winter's incarceration undermines his health and provides him with the trope of the martyr, willing to undergo any deprivations for the cause. His self-sacrifice is based on ideological beliefs, not unemployment or low wages which beset the other poor men.

⁴⁷⁷ Frank Cain and Frank Farrell, "Menzies' War on the Communist Party, 1949-1951," in *Australia's First Cold War 1945-1953* ed. Ann Curthoys and John Merritt, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984) 110.

⁴⁷⁸ Christina Stead, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934), (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1965) 168.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 316.

Michael Wilding supports this image of Winter as a working-class hero, he “is presented as consistent, principled, committed”.⁴⁸⁰ The power of Winter’s communist vision finds a place in the fantasies of one of the poor men in his imagining of the workers’ utopia, “he saw a white figure emerging in the distance, that of Winter’s commonwealth of workmen, in which he would be somebody”.⁴⁸¹ Winter’s mistreatment is echoed in the minor vignette about the downfall of a professor at the University of Sydney, who had lost his position for, purportedly, having a mistress, although he was rumoured to be a Communist. This suggestion of victimisation for ultra-radical sympathies reflects the potency of retribution available to the forces opposed to communism.

Harcourt’s *Upsurge* (1934) marks the Communist presence through gendered representatives, two women and one man. The male figure, Steven Riley, dominates the image of communism but the female identities provide more rounded characterisations. Riley serves on the central committee of the Perth branch of the CPA, second in command to the leader, Martin Peacelove. Riley is portrayed as the party ideologue, teaching study groups the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism and owning an extensive library of communist classics, a scientific socialist of major proportions. Riley’s enthusiasm for communism is based on his assessment that the world of 1933, is in the “state of final crisis that Marx predicted for it”.⁴⁸²

Riley is introduced at a trial of militants arrested in a confrontation of the unemployed and the police during a march on the Premier’s office. Their deputation is refused an audience with the premier because of its inclusion of communists, which forces him to personally call for police intervention to break up the demonstrators. The resultant chaos and disruption involves Riley in hand to hand combat with an officer, who suffers a serious injury. During his trial this officer testifies that Riley was “the ringleader of the troublemakers”.⁴⁸³ As a convicted felon, Riley is sentenced to six weeks imprisonment with hard labour. His incarceration undermines his health and he reappears as a worn-out man, filled with hatred for the ruling class.

Riley’s participation in the unemployed demonstration is repeated a few months later in the Brideways River relief workers march on the state Treasury building. Once again the confrontation descends into a pitched battle between the police force and the protesters. Riley

⁴⁸⁰ Michael Wilding, *The Radical Tradition*, (Townsville, Qld.: James Cook University of North Queensland, 1993) 79.

⁴⁸¹ Stead, 176.

⁴⁸² J. M. Harcourt, *Upsurge* (1934), (Nedlands, WA.: University of Western Australia Press, 1986) 151.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 61.

is arrested and charged with “incitement to riot and resisting arrest”.⁴⁸⁴ In the same court and before the same magistrate he is given “nine months imprisonment with hard labour”.⁴⁸⁵

Homosexual overtones contained in Riley’s repeated violent verbal threat to the same magistrate in his two trials, “one of us’ll have the pleasure of ramming a plug of gelignite up your arse and blowing you to hell,”⁴⁸⁶ which Joy Damousi asserts, was “certainly not the construction of masculinity the Party wanted to promote,”⁴⁸⁷ his rejection of domesticity with Theodora Luddon, which was contrary to the conventional marriage expected of the Party faithful and resorting to brothels for sex reveals a less than exemplary revolutionary figure. His depiction is considerably removed from the ‘harmonious man’ of Soviet socialist realism, who keeps his personality in balance, although his personal life is not beyond reproach.

Superficially, Harcourt’s treatment of the representation of the communist falls within the positive tropes attributed to it, the communist party/union organiser, the scientific socialist, and the martyr to the cause but he tactically undermines these perceptions with methodical adroitness. His adjectival descriptors of Steven Riley, ‘wiry’, ‘sharp’, ‘hard’, ‘jeering’, ‘fierce’, ‘wolfish’, and a few adverbs, ‘surlily’, ‘grimly’, combine to push Riley toward a harshness of appearance on the edge of criminality. His time in prison has transformed Riley’s bookish intellectualism into a hardened cynicism. Riley contains within himself the ‘consciousness/spontaneity’ dynamic that characterised the masculine proletarian image of the Class against Class era of the early 1930s.

The martyrdom of Theodora comes about accidentally, not through intentional action on her part. Her recruitment to the CPA was influenced by heroine worship of Olive Curnow, without any intellectual engagement. When in possession of Riley’s library of the primary texts of communism, she never reads any of them. How serious is her communism? Its shallowness is exemplified in the messenger status she enacts between the male party executives. She’s only peripherally attached to the party. Her heroine, Olive Curnow, achieves a measure of success in leading the strike at Kronen’s Limited, but the liquidation of the firm means a severe loss of membership to the union. It’s a pyrrhic victory for the CPA.

Harcourt’s framing of his communist characters is tinged with irony. The leader of the CP is named Martin Peacelove, a play on the anti-war and anti-fascist stance of that communist trope. This irony is reflected in his naming of Theodora Luddon, a play on Luddite, as a martyr to the cause. Is he suggesting only a Luddite could support communism?

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 281.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 285.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁸⁷ Damousi, 168.

Overall, Harcourt's concept of the communist lacks nuance and is saturated with contradiction.

A mixture of contradiction and irony clearly points to ambivalence in Harcourt's communist sympathies. As he was never a member of the CPA, although, according to Richard Nile, he described himself as a "fellow traveller"⁴⁸⁸ and was recruited to the presidency for a short period of time of the Revolutionary Writers' League by Katherine Susannah Prichard, he gradually distanced himself from revolutionary circles and the content of his next novel, *It Never Fails* (1937), dispensed with political statement and did not attract any kind of literary attention. Harcourt achieved a vaunted position in producing a text which articulated a prominent status for itself in the subgenre of Australian social[ist] realism.

A novel which complemented Harcourt's in its examination of the strife between left factions contending for control of a strike's direction and impact was Jean Devanny's *Sugar Heaven* (1936). In the style of journalistic reportage, she fictionalised in quasi-diary form the actual strike of cutters on the North Queensland canefields from mid-August to early October 1935. Although overtly concerned with the reeducation of a young woman, from lack of awareness of class issues into a determined worker for the proletariat, in its wider dimensions it seeks to expose the machinations of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) government and its main support group, the Australian Workers' Union (AWU). The extent of this collaboration stifles the CPA cadre in their attempts to command and control the strike.

Her depiction of the CPA leader, Jack Hendry, has an otherworldly context, he is beyond human form, "she could not think of Hendry as a man. Had she possessed the words she would have named him for a symbol, a symbol of new life",⁴⁸⁹ 'New life' functions as Devanny's variant on the 'New World' of the future Soviet Australia. Devanny's list of adjectives to describe Hendry, 'responsible', 'mature', 'calm', 'judicial', 'quiet', 'formidable', 'gentle' add considerable support to the characterisation of Hendry, in Jake Moulds evaluation, "He's clear and he's philosophical. He's disinterested and confident. A big man",⁴⁹⁰

Devanny, the committed CPA member, provided a contrast to Harcourt's Riley in her portrait of Hendry, as the man with the higher 'consciousness', the most important attribute of the 'positive hero'. The effusiveness of praise for his leadership qualities clearly distinguish him, but connecting him to the working class, "he's just a bloke, with commonsense. Just a

⁴⁸⁸ Richard Nile, introduction to *Upsurge A Novel* by J. M. Harcourt, (Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 1986) xii.

⁴⁸⁹ Jean Devanny, *Sugar Heaven* (1936), (Carlton, Vic.: The Vulgar Press, 2002) 271.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 118.

cane cutter”⁴⁹¹ authorises his elevation to working class hero status. Moulds also achieves a semblance of heroic status, as the local Stakhanovite, “He was one of a gang of three that cut and loaded...thirteen tons a day for three and a half days, in the Tully. That’s a record”.⁴⁹² The communism they espouse is also otherworldly, almost similar to Shangri-la in its simile, “it’s like a great mountain with paradise at the top”.⁴⁹³ Devanny’s simile imagined the ‘New World’ or new life of communism as a state of utopian perfection.

This utopianism is undercut in the irony of her title, as the cane fields are not in any way heavenly for the residents, although this will occur in a Soviet Australia in the not too distant future. Her deviation from party policy includes an endorsement of peacefulness and restraint as the guiding principles for the strikers whilst they contend with scabs and their protectors, the state police. Aggression and violence were the markers of communist imagery in the Depression.

Devanny’s text never had the full support of the CPA hierarchy, although it was brought out under the imprint of a CPA front organisation, Modern Publishers. Devanny was able to provide the funds for publication from a helpful unidentified friend. It is quite remarkable that an important text in communist literature in Australia was unworthy of gaining total support from the party and might never have appeared except for the generosity of one unknown individual. Her overt criticisms of party policy in the book, identified by Drusilla Modjeska as its male chauvinism and racism,⁴⁹⁴ certainly played a part in the hindrance of the novel’s production, although it was extolled by The CPA’s supreme leader, J. B. Miles, “he took *Sugar Heaven* on the platform with him, talked about it at length”,⁴⁹⁵ Devanny was in a relationship with Miles for a considerable period of time and this played an important part in her constantly shifting treatment by the Party. These two issues were at the core of Devanny’s disagreements with the party. They eventually led to her expulsion in 1941 and, although reinstated in 1944, she continued to push for revision and change concerning women and minority groups.

A close collaborator with Devanny in many CPA activities, including being on the executive of the Fellowship of Australian Writers in 1938, Katherine Susannah Prichard brought her newly acquired knowledge of Soviet socialist realism to bear on *Intimate Strangers*, published in 1937. Prichard located her representative of communism in the dark

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 190.

⁴⁹² Ibid., 45.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 277.

⁴⁹⁴ Drusilla Modjeska, *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers 1925-1945*, (Sydney: Sirius Books, 1981) 228-229.

⁴⁹⁵ Carole Ferrier, *Jean Devanny Romantic Revolutionary*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1999) 140.

days of the Depression in Perth. Working class concerns are voiced by the communist agitator, Tony Maretti. His stirring speech to a significant assembly of the unemployed serves as the overt expression of Prichard's communist rhetoric. It offers conventional strategies, such as anti-government complaints, revolutionary catch-phrases and awareness of class interests except for the radical form the new society would take as its base. Prichard has Tony propose the soviet, "councils of workers and farmers will clear up all the mess of unemployment and destitution".⁴⁹⁶ Prichard was unable to surrender her allegiance to the workers' council as the foundation of communist society, although this had only played a peripheral part in the classic texts of Soviet socialist realism.

Tony's speech is hardly the action of a dedicated revolutionary contemplating armed insurrection against the state. It is merely a ploy in attempting to construct a semblance of the 'positive hero' of socialist realism, but it is a token gesture. Tony is the owner of fishing vessels, not a worker of a fishing company, although he is magnanimous enough to "work shares"⁴⁹⁷ with his own employees. This lack of alignment with the tropes of the communist recurs consistently in Prichard's writing.

Although she had sharpened her awareness of Stalinist writing practices, Prichard had decided in *Intimate Strangers* (1937) to incorporate them into her work in her own way. She continued this independent interpretation of political commitment in her trilogy of the Western Australian goldfields, published after World War II. The postwar period, from 1946 to 1968, marked the second phase of development in Australian social[ist] realism, which highlighted the emergence of the industrial novel as the focus of communist writers in agreement with the tenets of Soviet socialist realism.

These fictions of the thirties, although only peripherally in *Intimate Strangers* (1937), were united in their focus on the ramifications of strike action outside the factory situation and its impact on the individuals involved and in a wider context, the battle over which political party, the ALP or CPA, would dominate unions and their members. Harcourt's internal union strife resulted in the Militant Minority Movement (MMM), a CPA front organisation, emerging with the allegiance of the shop assistants' union whilst Devanny documents the collapse of CPA influence and the collusion between the ALP in government and the AWU union executive which offered them support and entrenched their domination, whilst disrupting the genuine efforts of the unemployed, such as the Brideways River relief camp workers to achieve sanitary living conditions or the unionised cane cutters to work in a healthy workplace.

⁴⁹⁶ Katherine Susannah Prichard, *Intimate Strangers*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937) 235.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

This quartet of 1930s fiction did succeed in projecting the communist representative into the realm of Australian fiction. They framed it within the context of organised working class struggle through the strike scenario, except for *Intimate Strangers* (1937), and the committed members of the CPA. They focused on the ultra-radical male figure, such as Winter, Riley and Hendry, as the tough-minded working class hero fighting from the fringe against the overwhelming forces of the bourgeois state apparatus. The strikes with which Hendry, Riley and Winter are involved crumble and Riley and Winter are sentenced to gaol. The strike was perceived as a test of one's virility and required courage and determination in challenging the establishment. The CPA member emerges as an unsuccessful figure, diminished in his physical prowess and defeated in the struggle to bring about the domination of the CPA as the driving force toward a Soviet Australia.

The inability to produce a resounding victory for the CPA pervades the dedicated party members' writing. Their *partinost* cannot betray the reality of party intellectuals failing to deliver a replica of Soviet socialist realism. Particularly revealing is the retreat by high level partisans, Devanny and Prichard, into conventional romantic prescriptions to conclude their novels by upholding bourgeois propriety, as does Harcourt in *Upsurge* (1934). Hope for a better future lies in the reunification of the family unit, not in the 'New World' of communist rule.

They were able to formulate a version of the 'typical' communist, a worker with extensive knowledge of Marxism-Leninism, and involved in proletarian struggle through the strike scenario. This mirrored the focus of the CPA to dominate unions and organisations of the unemployed as their strategy for initiating revolutionary activity in Australia's era of economic crisis.

The post-World War II Phase, 1946-1968

Prichard brought this focus on unions to her social history of the gold mining industry published between 1946 and 1950, *The Roaring Nineties* (1946), *Golden Miles* (1948) and *Winged Seeds* (1950). Structured on the family saga, she traces three generations of the Goughs, as they contend with the changes transforming the resource extraction industry around Kalgoorlie from 1892 to 1946.

In this Goldfields Trilogy Prichard returns again to two issues which pervade her fiction. Firstly, the representative of radical ideology takes shape in Nadya Owen, a Russian migrant who enunciates communist doctrine to Sally Gough, prior to departing for treatment of a debilitating phthisis of the throat at a sanatorium. This combination of severe illness and commitment to revolutionary ideology conflate into a reiteration of ambiguity in Prichard's

stance on radical political action. The fact that the bearer of the revolutionary message is suffering from a degenerative physical disorder moderates acceptance of the communist ideal. Nadya Owen and Tony Manetti serve as supplements to the linkage of ultra-radical ideology and its dissemination as an alien presence, reinforcing its foreignness and lack of an authentic Australian connection.

Her portrayal of Bill Gough, as a CPA member, in *Winged Seeds*, (1950), retains the attributes of Mark Smith in *Working Bullocks* (1926). He attains considerable respect from his fellow miners but his lack of success at recruiting them is noticeably evident, “most of the miners refused to listen to him when he talked communism”.⁴⁹⁸ This inability to attract the proletariat to the communist cause contradicts the dictates of the party, which was then at the forefront of union organisation in all the major industries.

Bill Gough is endowed with serious flaws, especially in his interpersonal relationships, which indicate the difficulty on Prichard’s part to produce the ‘positive hero’ of socialist realism. Jack Beasley, her fellow communist, echoes this assessment, “*Winged Seeds* of the decade 1936-46 called above all for the creation of a vital revolutionary character as the natural consequence of the trilogy’s unfolding and the book loses zest because this was not achieved”.⁴⁹⁹

As a lifelong member of the CPA, Prichard’s commitment to the propagation of heroic communist representation should have been the dominant strategy of her authorial position, but her initiatives in this regard are often perceived as inadequate. She affirmed her divergence from the accepted notion of communist attainment of power, “Communists do not want bloody revolution,”⁵⁰⁰ thereby foreclosing on the triumphalism of Soviet ideology, which obviously negated the underpinning of Soviet socialist realism. Derided by right-wing ideologues as an unrepentant Stalinist and denounced by her fellow communists as particularly unable to sustain the appropriate markers of Soviet socialist realism, Prichard’s fictions can be interpreted as mythologised fantasies of pioneering communities struggling with industrialisation and its concomitant effects on the social structure.

Through CPA initiatives in the early 1950s, the Realist Writers’ Groups and the Australasian Book Society, a reinvigorated socialist realism emerged. One of the foremost members of the Melbourne Realist Writers’ Group was Frank Hardy (1917-1994). His basically self-published novel, *Power Without Glory* (1950), played an important part in Australian literary history, although his two male representatives of communism were minor characters separated by contradiction and paradox. Firstly, Jim Morton, one of only a dozen

⁴⁹⁸ Katherine Susannah Prichard, *Winged Seeds*, (Sydney: Australasian Publishing Co., 1950) 224.

⁴⁹⁹ Beasley, 62-63.

⁵⁰⁰ Katherine Susannah Prichard, *Why I am a Communist*, (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1957) 12.

members in the fledgling Victorian branch in 1921, lacks any of the positive tropes attached to the communist, “thin and sallow-looking. His clothes – odd coat and trousers – were clean enough but threadbare. His shoes were down at heel and he limped”.⁵⁰¹ Secondly, he is also totally disheartened by the class struggle, as his interior monologue states, “Give up, Jimmy. What do the workers care that you are stony broke”.⁵⁰²

Morton cooperates in a plot to embarrass the master political manipulator, John West, in a preselection battle in the Fitzroy electorate. Although he is on the victorious side, Morton has to vanish from Melbourne in order to avoid retaliation from the gangsters associated with West. Morton projects a shabby, ineffective figure caught up in a situation far beyond his ability to competently handle.

A complete inversion of the Morton personage appears in the epitome of the noble CPA member, Ben Worth. His combination of all the positive tropes of the communist, the working-class hero, the peace activist, the scientific socialist and the martyr to the cause produced the ‘positive hero’ of Soviet socialist realism. As a factory worker, Worth’s proletarian status is rewarded with a position as a CPA organiser on two pounds a week.

His physicality, “wide-shouldered and handsome. His face, though inclined to be swarthy, was even-featured,”⁵⁰³ attracts the notice of one of John West’s daughters, Mary, who discovers outstanding qualities of character in him. “She admired his incisiveness, his courage, his dry sense of humour, his quiet self-confidence, his patient confidence in the inevitable triumph of communism”.⁵⁰⁴

Worth played a vital role in the Movement against War and Fascism, a CPA front organisation. He attained the pinnacle of communist achievement when he volunteers for duty in the International Brigades and is killed on the front line in Spain. As there were, reportedly, only sixty Australians actually involved in armed combat in Spain, Worth’s self-sacrifice endows him with superhero status. No other image of the communist could meet the high distinction of Hardy’s portrait of Worth as the ‘positive hero’. The fact that his two representatives are so paradoxical vividly illustrated the complexity of the ‘typical’ and the ‘exceptional’ communist. According to Dave Nadel, Ben Worth was a “Fictional character. Intended to represent a dedicated member of the Communist Party in the 1930s”.⁵⁰⁵ In a book entirely traversed by replications of real life personages revealed by the use of their initials,

⁵⁰¹ Frank Hardy, *Power Without Glory* (1950), (St. Albans, England: Panther Books, 1975) 408.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 409

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 573.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 590.

⁵⁰⁵ Dave Nadel, “Key to *Power Without Glory*,” in *Frank Hardy & the Literature of Commitment*, ed. Paul Adams and Christopher Lee (Carlton, Vic.: The Vulgar Press, 2003) 269.

the foremost Communist in the text has no counterpart in the verifiable construct of Hardy's fiction. Worth was rendered as an idealised version of Hardy's concept of the tropes of the Communist. Hardy had outlined his concept of socialist realism in his 'Author's note' to *Power Without Glory* (1950), "The organic essence of the works will be human personality, behaviour and manners: men and women alive in an environment that is peculiarly Australian, yet universal, typical of the stage of social history in which we find ourselves".⁵⁰⁶ It is this 'peculiarly Australian' aspect of the writing that separates the Australian version of socialist realism from its Soviet counterpart.

Hardy's difficulties with publishing *Power Without Glory* (1950) led to the launch of a publishing enterprise, the Australasian Book Society (ABS), based on subscriptions in advance for four books per year. The ABS was formulated on the model of the Left Book Club in England in the 1930s, which made cheap editions available to members without any bookseller involvement. It started with a small group of five people, the most important being Bill Wannon, its first secretary-manager. It was incorporated as a limited liability company owned by its members and not a cooperative endeavour, as has been assumed in some commentary about it. Jack Beasley recounted his informal history of it, "contrary to popular belief, there was no formal decision made by the Communist Party regarding the formation of the A. B. S".⁵⁰⁷

Indicating the class-based bias of literary production in the post-war era, the purpose of ABS was to publish "books that might not otherwise be published, and encourage the writing of books that might never have been written".⁵⁰⁸ As it drew attention to itself with the production of Waten's *The Unbending* in 1954, the power of the CPA began to express itself with the resignation of Bill Wannon, as Beasley points out, "he had no idea that Communist party control was to be introduced and would not have accepted the secretary's job under those conditions".⁵⁰⁹ This was the crux of the CPA's involvement with ABS. As Beasley explains, "the C. P. A., as do all political parties and organised bodies of opinion, where they can, exercised an absolute control of personnel".⁵¹⁰

Wannon was replaced by a series of CPA members in his executive position, including Beasley himself from 1961 until 1963, which coincided with "the highest number of members that A. B. S. ever had at one time in 1961 when it just topped 3.000".⁵¹¹ Although

⁵⁰⁶ Jenny Hocking, *Frank Hardy Politics Literature Life*, (Melbourne: Thomas C. Lothian Ltd., 2005) 118.

⁵⁰⁷ Jack Beasley, *Red Letter Days notes from inside an era*, ((Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1979) 134.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

the CPA controlled the management, there was a substantial ALP contribution, as Beasley reveals, “there was a lot of cooperation from A. L. P. members with influence in unions”.⁵¹²

The impetus for the production of Australian social[ist] realism emanated from these two communist initiatives, the Australasian Book Society and the Realist Writers’ Groups. The key operative in the Realist Writers Groups was Frank Hardy, who was personally responsible, according to his biographer, for the “revival of the Sydney Realist Writers’ Group”.⁵¹³ They gathered together to evaluate each manuscript, “dissecting the level of socialist realism achieved, the portrayal of the working class, the capitalists and the novels’ heroes; all were scrutinized for plot, character development, ‘correct depiction’ and strategy”.⁵¹⁴ This kind of thorough analysis was successful in resurrecting the writing of Dorothy Hewett and her production of *Bobbin Up* (1959) as well as playing a vital part in Judah Waten’s *Time of Conflict* (1961).

One of the beneficiaries of membership in the Sydney Realist Writers’ Group with access to the ABS was Dorothy Hewett and her fiction, *Bobbin Up* (1959). Hewett focused on the activities of a dedicated CPA member and, most importantly, shifted the gender of the communist representative to a feminist perspective in the character of Nellie Weber. She operates as the CP/union organiser at the Jumbuck Spinning Mills and her direction of the strike scenario elevates her to working class heroine status.

Hewett’s achievement in *Bobbin Up* (1959) is to deftly connect the success of the first satellite ever put into orbit, the USSR’s Sputnik with the reinvigoration of *partinost*, especially in the commitment of Nellie and other characters. The consciousness of Sputnik’s presence in the universe indicated the strength of the USSR’s scientific prowess relative to the USA and endowed it with superpower status. Sputnik 1 was launched on October 4, 1957 and was followed by Sputnik 2 on November 2, containing the dog, Laika.

Hewett explained this in her autobiography, “the wonders of the first man-made satellites are on everybody’s lips...it’s not surprising that I use Sputnik as an emblem of hope and revolution”⁵¹⁵ Its ramifications are carried over in the text in the decision by Tom Maguire to join the CPA, “it was Sputnik what recruited me. Nothin’ less than a satellite”⁵¹⁶. It also has a comic reference when Stan Weber compares his supervisor to Laika.

The simultaneity of Sputnik’s prominence in the affairs of the leading nations of the Cold War and Nellie’s life provides a cosmic background to the strike scenario, which brings

⁵¹² Ibid., 145.

⁵¹³ Hocking, 116.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 118.

⁵¹⁵ Dorothy Hewett, *WildCard: An Autobiography 1923-1958*, (Ringwood, Vic.: McPhee Gribble, 1990) 252.

⁵¹⁶ Dorothy Hewett, *Bobbin Up*, (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1959) 101.

a confluence to the factory workers lives, already detailed in individual episodes preceding it. At the union meeting debating the strike vote, Nellie advises them to launch a sitdown strike on the premises and not to leave until their demand, for reinstatement of all sacked married and older women, is met. This plan for workers' control of industry indicates the extent of communist control and direction of the impending dispute. At this juncture the fiction comes to an end but there is no closure, so that the eventual outcome of this confrontation is undetermined. This novel offered reaffirmation of communism and the centrality of the CPA to the liberation of the Australian working class.

At a time of serious crisis in the support of Australian writers for ultra-radicalism after the invasion of Hungary and Khrushchev's disclosures about Stalin's crimes at the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956, Hewett sought to reestablish belief in the efficacy of communism through this rearrangement of her work in the Alexandria Spinning Mills. As she divulges in *WildCard* (1990): "The bulletin didn't start a stay-in strike at the mill, as I wrote nine years later in *Bobbin Up*. That was wish-fulfillment".⁵¹⁷ This wish-fulfillment was tied to her still powerful allegiance to the CPA. In the aftermath of the suppression of the rebellion in Hungary and the loss of belief in Stalin, many rank-and-file supporters were reexamining their connection to communism. In this atmosphere of doubt and vacillation about Soviet policy, Hewett adamantly reasserted her commitment to communism and the CPA, her *partinost*, through *Bobbin Up* (1959) as the strategic manoeuvre to accomplish this purpose.

A similar strategy played a significant part in the writing of *Time of Conflict* (1961) by Judah Waten (1911-1985). Having recorded an important part of the pre-communist history of radical revolutionary activity in *The Unbending*, published in 1954, at a time when he was expelled from the CPA, Waten sought to reestablish his eminent standing in the party after being readmitted in 1957. As David Carter asserts, "[*Time of Conflict*] might be taken, quite seriously, as an attempt to write the great Australian communist novel".⁵¹⁸ Driven by didactic purpose, Waten relied on a formulaic approach to telling this tale. Carter situated *Time of Conflict* within Susan Suleiman's definition of the French *roman à thèse* and its expression in the *Bildungsroman* structure as the genre best able to transmit its message.

With an opening sequence about the Seamen's Strike of 1925, previously mentioned as the background to Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934), *Time of Conflict* (1961) touches all the sites of ultra-radical action in a thirty-year period until the early 1950s. It seeks to be both epochal and mythic in fictionalising a working class history of Australia from the perspective of a typical Australian in transition to communism.

⁵¹⁷ *WildCard*, 173

⁵¹⁸ David Carter, *Judah Waten: Fiction, Memoirs, Criticism*, (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1998), xxvii.

Mick Anderson is written as the ‘typical’ Australian, coming to the knowledge of communism through a series of encounters with capitalism and its support structure, the police, the courts, reformatory school, private property, the ruling class, existing on the level of ‘spontaneity’ necessary to the ‘positive hero’s’ advancement. The re-education of Mick powers the narrative along but his journey into awareness is always shadowed by the presence of Harry Timmins, who is already there intellectually. With a schoolmaster father, he has presumably read all the classical communist texts at the age of nineteen.

Mick’s entire indoctrination is aimed at *articulating* communism, performing it in public oration. When Timmins first appears in the text, Mick recognised him by his “voice”.⁵¹⁹ Mick can not attain his own voice without “listening”⁵²⁰ to him. His unqualified admiration for him is distinguished by Timmins’s ‘eloquence’.⁵²¹ In Mick’s scheme of evaluation listening-speaking become the dominant modes for acquiring power and status in the Party. The command of rhetoric drives his ambition throughout the fiction, as he states: “I’d like to be able to speak”.⁵²²

Harry is presented as the ‘exceptional’ communist, moving effortlessly through the Party’s hierarchical structure. When Mick returns to Australia after his four years of exile in New Zealand, he attends the CPA’s headquarters in Newcastle where he is informed that Timmins is a member of the Central Committee. Timmins embodies the concept of the ‘rising young star’, moving effortlessly up the chain of command. His adjectival descriptors are unambiguous and uncontradictory: sombre, unsmiling, hard, uncompromising, unequivocal, positive, clear, confident, these combine to acknowledge his high status as the man of ‘consciousness’, who acts from the correct political awareness.

This is reaffirmed in Mick’s interior monologue, “[he] felt a kind of inferiority towards the people around the table, especially Harry”.⁵²³ He reiterates this veneration for Timmins in this reflection, “the two communists he knew best, Lew Jenkins and Harry Timmins, walked on an elevation he could never hope to reach”.⁵²⁴

Timmins acts as Mick’s doppelganger. His travels parallel Mick’s, he left Wagga Wagga right after the election of 1925 and reappears in Newcastle just as Mick returns to Australia. When Mick decides to quit Newcastle, he must consult Timmins about this move. Once established in Sydney he finds Timmins ensconced at the Party’s headquarters. After his

⁵¹⁹ Judah Waten, *Time of Conflict*, (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1961), 14.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

service on a ship bringing armaments to the Republicans in Spain, Mick disembarked in Melbourne and is informed by his wife, “She had recently spoken to Harry Timmins, who was coming to Melbourne himself”.⁵²⁵ This doubleness aspect affirms their “consciousness/spontaneity” paradigm vital to Soviet socialist realism.

Whereas Mick is engaged in a groping, stumbling advance toward communism, Timmins is the primary *articulator* of communist discourse. This statement sets out the principles of CP doctrine and endorses his elevated ‘consciousness’ status, “The Communist Party is not a reformist organisation, but a revolutionary one,” Timmins replied. “That means it’s bound by iron discipline and strict rules of democratic centralism. The decisions of the C.C. are binding on the members between congresses. If the authority of the C.C. is flouted there can be neither a proper fighting organisation nor leadership”.⁵²⁶ This speech entrenches his positioning by fellow party members as a “theoretician”.⁵²⁷

Timmins performs the role of the master to whom Mick is apprenticed in the *Bildungsroman* tradition. The episodic structure of their encounters reiterates this binary construct. Mick, as the ‘typical’ communist, can only reach journeyman status in his rise through the party ranks, which is affirmed in his position on the State Committee level, one echelon lower than Timmins on the Central Committee. This two-tiered structure repositions the authority of the party hierarchy on a higher plane than the party membership. This structure insinuates that the classless society of the communist utopia is an illusory paradox, the Party itself is not classless.

Timmins fulfills the positive tropes of the communist. His extensive knowledge of Marxism establishes him as an expert on scientific socialism and his self-sacrifice makes him a martyr to the cause, “He gives everything to the movement...His time and his brains...He lives on the dole...And he’s a marked man”.⁵²⁸ This statement supports his status as the ultimate working-class hero.

The authentic Australian communist novel could only exist if it matched the markers of Soviet socialist realism, victory in the Civil War and building socialism in the Soviet Union. These two stages are never in play in Waten’s fiction, which is overridden by a sense of inadequacy, of unfulfilled possibility mirroring the never to be Soviet Socialist Republic of Australia.

The ABS was instrumental in developing the writing career of Ralph de Bossiere. His *Crown Jewel* (1952) was the society’s first published fiction. *No Saddles For Kangaroos*

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 246.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 174.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 174.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 113.

(1964) returned to the factory environment, union militancy and CP leadership. This fiction centres on two areas of conflict in the early 1950s, armed combat in the Korean War between the recently installed communist government in China and the USA, and the pursuit of the suppression of the CPA through the Liberal government's Communist Party Dissolution Bill. De Boissiere juxtaposes these two struggles within the daily routines of the employees of Automakers Corporation, a large American company presumably based on General Motors Holden Corporation, producing cars in a gigantic assembly plant in an outer suburb of Melbourne.

The Korean War brought the issue of the use of atomic weapons into the world's consciousness through the advice of the American General Douglas MacArthur to his Commander-in-Chief, Harry Truman, in December 1950 urging the American President to command the dropping of the A-bomb on Chinese forces in order to bring a quick resolution to their conflict. The imminent danger to humanity posed by atomic warfare produced in many concerned citizens the initiative to organise peace councils throughout the world committed to the destruction of such harmful weapons. De Boissiere makes this a focus of his writing through the constant circulation of petitions in the car plant and on the streets by the World Peace Council adherents.

The World Peace Council, founded in November 1950, coordinated the campaign of the first Stockholm Appeal, which demanded the unconditional prohibition of atomic weapons. Its presence in the novel is represented by the Victorian Peace Council meeting attended by one of the characters, Molly Bromley, driven to aid its work by the death of her son whilst serving in the Australian Army in Korea. Molly canvasses signatures which become part of the five hundred million gathered worldwide. The nexus between the quest for world peace and communism is mentioned by Fiona Capp, when she suggests that the Australian Peace Council was regarded as a Communist front by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO).⁵²⁹

Larry McMahon and Charlie Davidson act as the twin pillars of Communist discipline and determination. Openly committed members of the Party, they serve as shop stewards for the Vehicle Builders Union at Automakers, fulfilling the CP/union organiser trope of the working class hero. When Charlie is sacked for organising a lunchtime union meeting about three workplace issues, his reinstatement becomes the focus for the strike action which provides the momentum for the narrative. McMahon's portrait offers de Boissiere's version of the dedicated CPA member willing to undergo any hardship for the cause, "he was one of those people who, though not looking strong, can defy fatigue and toil without respite".⁵³⁰

⁵²⁹ Fiona Capp, *Writers Defiled*, (Ringwood, Vic.: McPhee Gribble, 1993) 113.

⁵³⁰ Ralph de Boissiere, *No Saddles for Kangaroos*, (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1964) 17.

Whilst painting pro-union slogans outside of Automakers during the strike, he is arrested and given a severe beating at the police station. The severity of the attack is evidenced in this comment, “Jack and Molly were thinking of the beating Larry had received at the hands of the police. He had to stay in bed for three days”.⁵³¹

When Larry volunteers for night picket duty at another strike, unrelated to Automakers, he is again critically injured when a policeman pushes him down to the ground. In the final chapter, it is stressed that he had received severe head injuries and suffers from the debilitating effects of migraines. McMahon has twice put his body on the line for the workers during a strike event and this has earned him the highest status possible, the martyr for the cause. McMahon personifies the Stalinist signified of orthodoxy, discipline and unity that marked the CPA cadre in the early 1950s.

De Boissiere focused on the activities of ASIO’s anti-communist unit in his disclosure about the methods they employed to recruit informants. Reg Crosby is blackmailed into supplying the names of “chaps who talk about peace with Russia. Some are Communists, others are not...We want to know who they are”.⁵³² Reg offers Larry McMahon’s name to the unidentified agent and in exchange receives a five pound note.

The ASIO agent continues to question Reg about Communist activists until he is laid off by the corporation. When Reg applies for a job at another factory, the personnel interviewer requests a reference and Reg suggests Automakers to him. The personnel official confers with the auto plant and then informs Reg that he is considered politically on the left. At that moment Reg realises that the personnel team at Automakers has lied about his political allegiance. This betrayal acts as the major turning point in Reg’s ‘conversion’ to Communism, that event signaling the author’s reaffirmation of communism’s power.

This author’s support of communism is at times ambiguous. Doubt and anxiety appear in Molly’s thoughts about Korea, “wasn’t it perhaps true that the Chinese were slaughtering millions of believers? Perhaps Larry and the Communists were sadly deceived”.⁵³³ This expression of disquiet in the midst of the text indicates that some uncertainty persisted in the writer’s support for Chinese communism. De Boissiere was writing after the split in the CPA in 1963 between the Stalinist faction aligned to the CPSU and the new CPA [Marxist–Leninist], which supported the leadership of Mao Zedong and the CPC. Through this comment he was perhaps aligning himself with the old line CPA.

The middle period in Australian social[ist] realism came to an end in the late 1960s. It had undergone a dramatic refinement from the tentative efforts of the earlier phase. The

⁵³¹ Ibid., 146.

⁵³² Ibid., 108.

⁵³³ Ibid., 308

expression of *partinost* found reaffirmation in the texts of Hewett and Waten. As the Cold War continued, some writers questioned their commitment to the CPA and its acquiescence to Soviet policy, especially concerning the ‘Prague Spring’ of early 1968. This brought on a revisioning of the Australian social[ist] realist text in the 1970s and 1980s, as the machinations over party policy gave rise to uncertainty and anxiety about the CPA’s direction and control.

The Late Phase, 1970-1990

Frank Hardy was caught up in this time of crisis which precipitated a schism in the CPA between the old-guard hard-line Stalinists and the adherents to the emerging power of Mao Zedong. This crisis eventually produced a shattering of the CPA monolith, so that two other parties emerged, the CPA (Marxist-Leninist) in 1963, which gave its allegiance to the Communist Party of China, and in 1972, the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA), dominated by its leader, Ted Hill, and his continued support for the CPSU.⁵³⁴ Carter’s claim to Waten’s *Time of Conflict* (1961) as *the* Australian communist novel was challenged by Hardy’s *But the Dead are Many* (1975). In it he took Waten’s approval of submission to party discipline and unity as the only valid way of life, as exemplified in Mick Anderson, and rearranged it into a focus on the dilemmas of the party intellectual entangled in the divisiveness of party strife, whilst attempting to hold fast to *partinost*.

Hardy’s fiction questions the concept of *partinost*, interrogating this primary communist tenet, the expression of partymindedness or party spirit in accordance with the directives of the Central Committee. He microscopically examines the higher level consciousness of the Party intellectual, an active *articulator* of communism, whereas Waten explored the indoctrination of a Party worker, intent on reaching the higher plane of ‘consciousness’. He incorporated the circumstances of the Moscow Trials of 1938 and the sentencing to death of the CPSU strategist, Nikolai Bukharin (1888-1938), as historical precedent for the difficulties encountered by his main character, John Morel. Morel is openly questioning his former allegiance to Stalinism in the months after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the crushing of Alexander Dubcek’s reformist government in August 1968.

John Frow has suggested that Morel’s biographer, Jack, acts as his “alter ego,”⁵³⁵ although, according to the apprentice/master paradigm, it is Trevor Duncan who mentors him, as Morel states, “I put them as questions to Trevor, like a troubled student to a wise

⁵³⁴ Beasley, *Red Letter Days notes from inside an era*, (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1979) 93 note 4.

⁵³⁵ John Frow, *Marxism and Literary History*, (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 150.

teacher”.⁵³⁶ Duncan is the enunciator of Party control: “a revolutionary Party has to enforce unity and discipline”.⁵³⁷ Morel is engulfed in the realm of “spontaneity,” spending endless hours in consuming alcohol in pubs and gambling on poker machines, whereas Duncan is the epitome of “consciousness,” always following the dictates of the Party. Morel is also connected to Duncan through his identification with him: “he was a fanatic – and so was my ideal self.”⁵³⁸

Hardy sought to engage with origins, the origin of Morel’s communist belief in reading Buratakov/Bukharin’s *A. B. C. of Communism* (1920), and the origin of the Bolsheviks, as Buratakov/Bukharin is a founding member of the Bolsheviks and the purported inheritor of Lenin’s legacy. Through a reassessment of the trial record and interviews with the wife and daughter of Buratakov/Bukharin, Morel reevaluates the trial, of which he claims to have been an observer. He concludes that Stalin’s leadership could only be reaffirmed by the purging of his revolutionary equals from 1917, within the overarching principle of *partinost*, “in the spirit of Party mindedness...they demanded higher vigilance of themselves and so perpetrated the vicious circle that was to strangle a whole movement, a whole epoch: the habit of vigilance seeking enemies where they did not exist and finding them to confirm the habit of vigilance”.⁵³⁹ Now endowed with this critical awareness of the CPSU, Hardy presents the party intellectual as acquiescing to ambivalence about the CPA and his status within it. This text clearly insinuates “anti-Soviet revisionist talk”⁵⁴⁰ as an active authorial strategy, as Beasley explains, Hardy’s “present attitude to the Soviet Union is unambiguously hostile”.⁵⁴¹

In an explicit manner the contrast of Ben Worth and Morel works through the split personality of Morel, the blemished self versus the ideal self, the blemished Communist, Morel, in opposition to the ideal Communist, Worth. The ‘positive hero’ of the thirties was replaced by the soul-searching activist in the Party intelligentsia questioning the basics of Party doctrine.

But the Dead are Many (1975) marked Hardy’s departure from his rather slight connection to Australian social[ist] realism and the ‘positive hero’ stereotype into a confrontation with the modernist psychologically troubled identity. It wasn’t at all surprising,

⁵³⁶ Frank Hardy, *But the Dead are Many*, (London, England: The Bodley Head, 1975) 108.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁴¹ . Beasley, *Red Letter Days*, 88.

as Beasley asserts, “he “never has understood...the worker most typical of his class, that is, the politically conscious militant trade unionist”.⁵⁴²

As he revealed in an interview in 1967 on the ABC television program, *Spectrum*, “I could write this positive hero-style kind of book about a communist. That wouldn’t be very difficult. But it’s been done before and explains little about the human condition. I must probe more deeply in a psychological way”.⁵⁴³ Hardy’s depiction of John Morel was a way of coming to grips with the demands he made on his own writing. A significant achievement in the evolution of his writing career, it also clearly indicated the gap between his concerns for the working class and his inability to deliver a fictional representation of the communist activist.

Hardy’s work revealed the inability of the individual searching for community in political action to achieve any positive outcome. His ‘exceptional’ communist, Ben Worth, is elevated to martyr status but the goal of a socialist Spain is not realised, the “better world” of communism is unachievable for his party elite. The plight of a John Morel mirrors the state of the party, fragmented in a collapsing spiral of disunity. This revelation negates the production of any facsimile of the ‘positive hero’, confirming Beasley’s critique of Hardy’s socialist realism.

Hardy was entrapped within a crisis of representation in the “ubiquitous spokesperson problem” encountered when projecting communism into literary form. His fictionality articulates the challenge of political expression, is it the presentation of ‘how things are’, which suggests an inability to produce the ‘positive hero’ due to local conditions or is it the delivery of ‘how things should be’, according to the dictates of the Party? As an advocate of deStalinisation, he could no longer support the CPA’s cultural initiatives in the midst of Brezhnev’s Stagnation. He was entangled within the ambiguity of his own political posturing, exposing the varying discourses of his own perceptions.

Hardy was partially reflecting his own personal combat with Judah Waten for the role of *the* officially endorsed communist novelist. He had stood for election to the Central Committee at the twenty-first National Congress of the Party in 1968 and lost to Waten. This was exacerbated by his continued support for the anti-Stalinist fraction which eventually gained control of the CPA, with the hardline Stalinists forming their own grouping, the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA) in 1972. This contributed to the diminishing of his representation as the face of the Party.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 71.

⁵⁴³ Tony Morphet, “Frank Hardy On Commitment” in *Frank Hardy & The Literature of Commitment* ed. Paul Adams and Christopher Lee (Carlton, Vic.: The Vulgar Press, 2003) 30.

The Party needed him, but didn't want him. His personal idiosyncrasies, gambling, drinking to excess, philandering, not repaying his debts were not acceptable to the party hierarchy. He could not abandon the relics of larrikinism that sustained his personal circumstances. His own 'spontaneity', his larrikinism, prevented him from becoming the man of 'consciousness' demanded by party discipline. He could not perform the basic socialist realist dynamic in his own life. He only spent seven and a half hours in the Melbourne City Watchhouse during the entire *Power Without Glory* affair, the *cause célèbre* of his writing career, but did spend three days in gaol for not paying parking infringements in 1986. How could a writer so blind to his own inadequacies provide the insight necessary to the production of the correct "positive hero" of communist literary discourse?

Judah Waten also focused on the CPA *apparatchik* in his *Scenes of a Revolutionary Life* (1982). A recently superannuated editor of trade journals, Tom Graves, revisits his past through a series of reminiscences saturated by sentimentality. This element of sentimentalism co-exists with a persona that has little claim on the day-to-day activities of a working-class reality.

Such a state is confirmed by the comment of his daughter-in-law in late 1975, he may have "had a revolutionary past, but essentially he was middle class, a paragon of middle class virtues".⁵⁴⁴ This assessment corroborated earlier criticism of Graves from 1930, "Franklin regarded him as a vacillator, a conciliator, and an unstable element...a petty-bourgeois intellectual".⁵⁴⁵ He evaluated himself in the third person: "he seemed to have been destined to live a comfortable, almost privileged, life".⁵⁴⁶

Waten's acknowledgement of the lack of working class connection in his text diminishes its relevancy to Australian social[ist] realism. It actually indicates a falling away from that discursive practice into the realm of modernist fictional memoir, although separated diachronically into only two time periods, the years from 1927 to 1933, when Graves is actively involved in subversive work, and the later years of respectability and bourgeois values. Waten's lack of attention to the gap between these time periods denies the process of maturation necessary to a comprehension of this evolution.

David Carter, his biographer, found a significant slippage between his plans for his memoirs and their actual development: "the validation of a communist life, the life of a communist man of letters, 'the revolutionary mind in a tranquil country like Australia'—even this has only a weak, implicit or deferred presence in the published memoirs".⁵⁴⁷ This

⁵⁴⁴ Judah Waten, *Scenes of a Revolutionary Life*, (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1982) 5.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 63.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁴⁷ Carter, *A Career in Writing*, 243-44.

tripartite conception is at some distance from the working class environment that would be the habitat most appropriate to upholding his self-image.

The most valuable aspect of this novel lies in the mention of the success in their native countries of African and Asian members of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Bloomsbury Branch, to which Graves belonged in his youthful sojourn in the United Kingdom. As he states in a conversation, “most of the branch members from the colonial countries became famous after the war”.⁵⁴⁸ He then lists their names and positions, Guna, a minister in Sri Lanka, Mazumdar, a High Court judge in India, Wallace, one of Kwame Nkrumah’s assistants, and Dr. Krishnan, a minister in the state of Kerala, India. The success of these communist activists in so-called ‘Third World’ countries acts as a means of measuring the lack of achievement by Communist adherents, for instance, Graves, in the ‘New World’ of European settler-invader countries, such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. Waten’s conception of ‘revolutionary’ suffers from exaggeration when placed in this context, as there is no accompanying list of prominent personalities in these countries.

Another re-examination of the past encounters of CPA members, this time on the Hobart wharfs, is fictionalised in Amanda Lohrey’s *The Morality of Gentleman* (1984). This text plunges into the morass of union unrest and political conflict resulting from the ‘Split’ in the ALP in 1954-1955, when its leader, H. V. Evatt, contended that the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, represented in an organisation named the ‘Movement’, was undermining the authority of the ALP leadership. The ‘Movement’, actually called the Catholic Social Studies Movement, and begun by B. A. Santamaria (1915-1998), had a religious mission to seek out and destroy communism, especially in trade unions. This novel exposed the inner workings of this industrial combat in the microcosm of the Hobart Waterside Workers’ Federation Branch. The Movement’s highly trained activists skillfully manipulate a disaffected WWF member in his refusal to pay his political levy, a union fundraising ploy designed to fund political work, and this singular act brings chaos and strife to the waterfront.

The tropes of the communist find expression in a facsimile of James ‘Big Jim’ Healy (1898-1961), General Secretary of the WWF from 1937 to 1961, and longtime CPA member, who appears under the name of Jim Travers. As the most powerful union official and national Central Committee member of the CPA, Healy/Travers controls the actions of the WWF and the CPA, Hobart wharf branch. As a communist/union organiser, he is the complete working class hero. He supplies the image of communism that the Movement crusaders are intent on eradicating.

⁵⁴⁸ Waten, *Scenes*, 171.

Lohrey provided an encapsulated dynamic of the Communist dilemma in the Cold War period of the late forties and fifties, in her perception of the shift in the capitalist media's ability to reinterpret the public's image of Healy/Travers. There is a collection of pertinent quotations by prominent Liberal Party politicians, such as, “‘the evil genius of industrial unrest’ (Prime Minister Menzies), ‘a viper in democracy’s bosom’ (Casey)”.⁵⁴⁹ When the union’s solicitor researches Healy/Travers’ history, he reads a profile published in the *Herald* during World War II when the USSR was an ally, “*Pipe-smoking, genial Jim Travers, a respected figure among the working men of the nation*, and an editorial in the same paper in 1956 at the time of his arrest, *hated by his thousands of opponents, always remains outwardly calm... his cynical sphinx-like imperturbability...a ruthless Communist boss.* . . The processes of historical re-evaluation are swift”.⁵⁵⁰

More extreme comments about Healy/Travers are uttered by a Liberal member of the Tasmanian Lower House concerning the strikers, “their conduct is dictated by a Moscow agent named Travers, a paid traitor, a tool of the Kremlin, a vile creature, a professional agitator”.⁵⁵¹ These phrases confirm two negative tropes of the communist image, the Sovietophile, a fanatical devotee of the policies of the USSR and the Subversive/AntiChrist, who undermines the core values of Western Christian civilization.

Lohrey utilised the disease carrier trope in an exchange between the Archbishop of Hobart and his secretary, “this union I am told is one of those most riddled with the Communist disease”.⁵⁵² Victor Moseley reiterated the same metaphor in a chat with his solicitor, “it’s one thing for a million red peasants to be taken in by this dirty foreign disease but white men raised on British traditions should be more immune”.⁵⁵³

Australia’s best-known anti-communist in the literary academic sphere makes an appearance in the text. James McAuley is presented in the guise of the Professor of English engaged in serious anti-communist activity through a “cultural association for the exchange of ideas between ourselves and our American allies, a humanistic bulwark on the Cold War front”.⁵⁵⁴ This is a direct reference to McAuley’s association with the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom, an organisation funded by the CIA to foment anti-communist hysteria in the literary cultural field. A clash of major proportions erupts on the Hobart wharfs and this engulfs these prestigious participants in the confrontation.

⁵⁴⁹ Amanda Lohrey, *The Morality of Gentlemen*, (Chippendale, NSW: Alternative Publishing Cooperative, 1984) 108.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 137.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

Lohrey's work takes a postmodernist turn in displaying a multivocal pluralistic pseudo-documentary of the strike experience. She reveals the intricacies of class warfare as it touches all segments of Hobart society in 1957. Most of all, she acknowledges how the political commitments of the various characters override all other considerations. These commitments are the signifieds of communism and anti-communism, so that these contradictory discourses dominate the text.

Although originally defined by Stalinists in the USSR, Australian social[ist] realism differed from their theories in its focus on the strike scenario and the contributions of the CPA-dominated union leadership to these vitally important working-class crises. Unfortunately, the lack of successful outcomes to these industrial confrontations left these fictions without their "optimistic" endings, which could herald the triumph of communism in Australia and authenticate their claims to classical (Soviet) socialist realist classification. As Susan McKernan explained: "in practice...the demands of socialist realism were difficult to meet".⁵⁵⁵

In this chapter I have shown how Australian social[ist] realist writers exhibited outstanding ability to inscribe the tropes of communism into their representatives of the "positive hero." They incorporated the "consciousness/spontaneity" dynamic to enhance their communist images within that textual prescription. They displayed resourcefulness and innovation in meeting all the criteria of the "positive hero" through the tropes of communism. From Prichard's Mark Smith, through Devanny's Jack Hendry, Harcourt's Steven Riley, de Boissiere's Larry McMahon, and Hewett's Nellie Weber, the ultra-radical revolutionary figure found representation in Australian fiction. They articulated the empowerment of communism as a vital political force within Australian society in the twentieth century.

⁵⁵⁵ Susan McKernan, *A Question of Commitment*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989) 31.

Chapter Six

Hewett/Manifold/Martin: Poets of the 'New World'

Australian poets with ultra-radical commitments, membership in the CPA, reiterated many of the symbols of communist discourse in their works, as they incorporated in their practice the red flag, the red star, the hammer and sickle taken from the banner of the USSR, the clenched fist salute body movement, and *The Internationale* song. They praised the leaders of the communist state, Lenin and Stalin, and asserted a formulation for the result of communist activity, the 'New World', and its variants, 'new life' or 'new vision', whilst directing their poems to 'the people', the collectivity who would be the beneficiaries of communist aims. The key element for many of them was an intense focus on the eventual state produced by their revolutionary success, the 'New World' of the future Soviet Australia. This emphasis on the 'New World' encoded the communist message and made it the primary metonymy of Australian communist poetry.

Initially, the colour referent for communism, red, played the dominant metonymic role in the Australian poetic sphere until the 'New World' overtook it. This was exemplified by its usage as a defining characteristic in Bartlett Adamson's reference to himself as the 'Red Bard', when he joined the CPA in 1943. In his collection published under the party's auspices, he unambiguously elevated the Soviet Union to the guiding star that would lead to the realisation of humankind's aspirations,

"Steadfast the Red Star shines and glows and gleams
In the warm firmament of human dreams".⁵⁵⁶

He also memorialised the revolution of 1917 in 'Red October' by paying homage to the twin pillars of the Soviet state leadership, Lenin and Stalin. His description of 'mighty-hearted Stalin' indicated a willful blindness to the accusations of starvation of the peasants and betrayal of his comrades in the show trials of his CPSU contemporaries in the late 1930s.

Adamson was joined in his praise of Stalin by John Manifold (1919-1985) in *Ballad of '17 and '53*, probably occasioned by his death in March of that year, which also anointed him as the inheritor of Lenin's legacy,

"Organising bread, imposing Peace, and divvying up the Land".⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁶ Bartlett Adamson, *Comrades All and other Poems for the People*, (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1945) 10.

⁵⁵⁷ John Manifold, *Nightmares & Sunhorses*, (Melbourne: Australasian Book Society, 1961) 22.

Here he eulogised Stalin as the deliverer of the communist promise put forth by Lenin in their slogan, 'Peace-Land-Bread', which defined the Bolsheviks' goals in 1917.

Manifold's most important articulation of his communist adherence occurred in a sequence entitled, *Red Rosary: Twelve Commemorative Sonnets* (1954), which expressed the depth of his respect and admiration for communist ideals, and linked their triumphs to significant political events, utilising a traditional codified form to formulate a rewriting of revolutionary acts and actors from a communist perspective to endow their struggles with grandeur and refinement.

He repeated Stalin's predominance in the sestet to "March 1953 DEATH OF STALIN". Its distilled emotion emphasised the powerful position that Stalin held in Manifold's perceptions of communism. To Manifold, Stalin was perceived as the ultimate working class hero, one who had universal appeal and significance.

The fact that this idolatry lingered through Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in 1956 marks these sonnets as particularly dated by the time of their republication in 1961. His failure to reevaluate Stalin indicated an unwillingness to question his commitments and accept the challenge of reconstructing his communist beliefs, although he did admit that the Soviets weren't infallible, "The Soviet Union is another man-made institution that *can* make the most ghastly mistakes – and has made at least some".⁵⁵⁸

Perhaps his service as a military officer at the front during World War II and his experience of Nazi Germany, whilst employed there as a translator from 1937 to the outbreak of war in September of 1939, may have allowed Manifold to develop an overwrought admiration for the Soviet leader during the Great Patriotic War.

Manifold intertwined this hero worship within the context of other sonnets about great revolutionaries, for instance, "January 1817 BOLIVAR RETURNS FROM HAITI", "June 1882 GARIBALDI ON CAPRERA", and "July 1942 PARTISAN VICTORY AT KOZARA", which is a paean of praise for Josip Broz Tito, the leader of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and president of that country from 1953 to 1980.

One of the most demanding challenges confronting communist writers was the need to link their contemporaries to the struggles of the past in order to project the communists as the legitimate heirs of the revolutionary position. In support of this legitimisation process, Manifold forged together disparate conflicts in world history by claiming their unity in the metonymy of the red flag, as it emerged triumphant in "April 1916 EASTER WEEK DUBLIN", in "May 1945 VICTORY IN EUROPE", and "December 1854 EUREKA

⁵⁵⁸ Rodney Hall, *J. S. Manifold an introduction to the man and his work* (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1978) 145.

STOCKADE”. This common imagery was deployed to indicate unity of vision in historic occurrences through the perspective of communism, synchronically and diachronically.

The Red Rosary’s unity lies in the poet’s concept of the interconnectedness of history, the primary authority for Communism’s accession to power, as predestining its triumph worldwide, not just in the Soviet Union and its eastern European satellites. As the placement of “November 1954 THE WATERSIDE WORKERS STRIKE” on the same page, 34, above “December 1854 EUREKA STOCKADE” confirms, Manifold is purposeful about his project. The juxtaposition of these two poems served as Manifold’s call to revolutionary action, through placing the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) and its leader, Jim Healy, in direct relation to Eureka and Peter Lalor. He evaluated disruption on the waterfront as the equivalent of Eureka and presumably the initiation of political change, although the Eureka Stockade incident did bring adjustments to the working conditions on the goldfields of Victoria, it did not create a new political structure in Australia. The WWF under Healy’s leadership was effective, especially in November 1954, at frustrating the Menzies government’s industrial reform campaign, but this was not the beginning of radical upheaval in Australian society. His two main attributes as a poet, firstly, ‘consistency’⁵⁵⁹ and, secondly, control of his material, combine to prove that the dates in the titles and their placements in the text are not accidental accretions but a cognitive decision in his poetic craft.

Manifold set out to elevate the quality of Australian communist poetry, which he considered little more than agitprop, by enhancing it with classical form and historical content. His decision to adopt classical convention to interpret revolutionary activity never met with approval by his ultra-radical contemporaries. Manifold’s patrician upbringing and Cambridge education demanded order and propriety as an antidote to the bias toward proletarian writing which motivated the majority of his cohort.

The image of the Australian revolutionary figure, as reflected in the interconnectedness of Healy and Lalor, was reinforced by another CPA member, Victor Williams, in his *Big Jim and Peter Lalor* (1959), which brought the two together in his closing couplet, when Healy stated,

“We’ll make the nineteenth of July
A new Eureka Day!”⁵⁶⁰

This appeal to Australian nationalism was a central tenet of communist rhetorical strategies in the 1950s. They sought to enlarge their connections to revolutionary forces in

⁵⁵⁹ Rodney Hall, *J. S. Manifold an introduction to the man and his work*, (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1978) 3.

⁵⁶⁰ Victor Williams, *The Years of Big Jim*, (Victoria Park, WA: Lone Hand Press, 1975) 97.

order to enhance their status as the inheritors of that position. Healy's unexpected death in 1961 robbed the Party of its most effective leader in the union movement.

The publication of *What About the People?*⁵⁶¹, co-written by Dorothy Hewett and Merv Lilley, refocused attention on the commitment to revolutionary action demanded of party members. This book was formulated on the two principles of Soviet socialist realism, *narodnost*, the spirit of the people, and *partinost*, the spirit of the party. Her *To the Communists* was a direct appeal to CPA members to actualise Marx's well-known eleventh thesis of Feuerbach, an appeal to actively change the world, after understanding it. Her play on Marx's famous quotation is rewritten as,

Interpret first the world, then change it brother.⁵⁶²

Hewett's early work, whilst a member of the CPA from 1943-1968, focused on support for unions, then the main power base of the party. She pleaded for social justice in the demands of Aboriginal stockmen to unionise in their confrontation with the station owners in the Pilbara region of Western Australia in 1946 in *Clancy and Dooley and Don McLeod*. She repeated the commonplace clenched fist salute as a marker of the communist response to capitalist exploitation,

“And we clench up our fists in the sweat of our hands,
For the voice of the workers is thundering loud –
FIGHT WITH CLANCY AND DOOLEY AND DON McLEOD”.⁵⁶³

In *Ballad of Norman Brown* (1963) she brought unionisation into the forefront of poetic concerns by paying homage to the first trade unionist to be killed by Australian police on the coalfields of Rothbury, New South Wales on December 16, 1928. Her *Song of the West Coast Seamen* (1963) voiced the plight of the union delegate in his encounters with established authority opposed to changes in working conditions. These three poems were fairly standard socialist realist fare.

Aside from these three works, a substantial portion of her poetry is marked by ambiguity and paradox concerning her vision of communism. Her rallying call to the party faithful, *My Party is the Party of Aragon* (1963), has her, seemingly, pledge allegiance to the CPA through connection to Louis Aragon, a prominent French author, who, prior to the publication of her poem, had recanted his unquestioning affiliation to communism. His wife, Elsa Triolet, remembered this statement in 1959, “There is no question whatever: In matters

⁵⁶¹ Dorothy Hewett and Merv Lilley, *What About The People?* (Sydney: Realist Writers Group, 1963) 89.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 12.

of art, I am not in agreement with this or that Soviet writer or critic and – more important, disagree with one or the other Soviet political leader. Socialist realism is indeed responsible for fiascoes, errors, and tragedies, even tragedies with violent endings”.⁵⁶⁴ Hewett’s knowledge of the inner workings of the Communist Party of France was rather minimal and perhaps lacking in detail, as there are no references in her autobiography, *WildCard* (1990), to any events or people in France.

On the verge of quitting the party, in *The Hidden Journey* (1968), she connected herself to the arrest and trial in 1965-66 of Yuli Daniel and Andrei Sinyavski in Moscow for publishing material deemed harmful to the Soviet Union as the framework for a reassessment of her commitment to the CPA. The tripartite structure of the poem traces her recollections of her visits to the USSR in 1952, 1965 and 1967. These remembrances of 1952 offer a sharp contrast to the position of working-class heroine she identified for herself in ‘Little Joe Flood’ (1955) in her “while the Heroes of Labour smirked in the avenue outside”.⁵⁶⁵ This kind of revisioning illustrates the ambiguity of the rewriting she undertakes in this poem. From the vantage point of hindsight she enumerates the various incidents of unease which now reconstitute her memory. For instance, she uses the verb ‘saw’ eight times in Part I but this is an inaccuracy because she is not ‘seeing’ for the first time, but revisioning her experiences. This appeal to sight is supported by her repetition of ‘eyes’ and their lack of vision, “blinkers on my eyes”⁵⁶⁶ and “Eyes, it was always eyes that gave me trouble”.⁵⁶⁷

Her reassessment as a writing strategy allows her to equate the destruction wrought by the Nazis with the effects of Stalinism, insinuating their unity in totalitarianism, which she confirms in the AntiChrist image of anti-communist rhetoric in Part IV,

The black backs of Satan ironically bending and bending, Wringing their dirty linen out in the sky.⁵⁶⁸

Hewett’s outrage at the treatment of Daniel and Sinyavsky focused on the demand for silence from dissenters that the Brezhnev hierarchy was reaffirming through their imprisonment. Her choice of Isaac Babel as her guest in the final four lines of Part IV, and her quoting of his remark at the Union of Soviet Writers Congress in 1934, “‘The Revolution has given us the gift of silence’”⁵⁶⁹, clearly indicates her bewilderment at her allegiance to communism and its concomitant compliance with the party’s control of literary production. As she explained to John McLaren, “the great fault of the Left has been its refusal to face the

⁵⁶⁴ Jurgen Ruhle, *Literature and Revolution*, (London: Pall Mall Press, 1969) 365.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 50.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 45.

truth about itself”.⁵⁷⁰ In *The Hidden Journey* (1968) she sought to amend her personal vision of communism with the facts suitable to her purpose and face the ‘truth’ about herself and declare her departure from communist adherence.

She never completely abandoned communism, as *The Mandelstam Letters*, which only appeared in 1979, about Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938) and Anna Akhmatova (1899-1966), repositioned her as the champion of the *Acmeists*, a Russian poetry group of the 1910s and 1920s, when Soviet art flourished with a diversity of attitudes and schools, the so-called “epoch of genius”. This came to an abrupt end with Stalin’s accession to the leadership and the centralisation of literary control and power in the official Union of Soviet Writers. Mandelstam and Akhmatova went into a period of decline with the formulation of Soviet socialist realism in 1934. Mandelstam’s *Stalin Epigram* (1934), a verbal assault on the general secretary likening his actions to that of a criminal overlord, resulted in his internal exile to Voronezh for three years. In *Third Moscow Letter* she linked Mandelstam and Mayakovsky together in a fraternal embrace, “I once made friends with Mayakovsky in Petersburg”,⁵⁷¹ uniting the two dissidents in their status as victims of the Stalinist forces in control of the USSR.

Through the persona in her poems, Hewett developed a martyr complex for public consumption, by forcing a connection with the oppression of Mandelstam and others, although she never personally faced imprisonment or exile. Her appearance at the Petrov Royal Commission in 1955 was self-initiated, as the commissioners had officially excused her from testifying, revoking her summons on the pretext that she was eight months pregnant and could not undergo the stress involved. She determined to appear to protest at being summonsed at all. Hewett’s concern for the victims of Stalin’s security services bears little resemblance to her own lived experience. Her assessment of the power of Stalin’s surveillance and detention of so-called undesirables in a country where the CPSU was the ultimate authority cannot be compared to the political context in Australia, where the CPA was the object of surveillance and not the authoriser of it.

She proclaimed and disclaimed communism to the end of her writing career. The fact that *To Russia – with love* (1995), a play on the James Bond novel title, holds the penultimate position in her *Selected Poems* testified to her lifelong obsession with it. She drew on the love story between John Reed, the author of the classic of the October Revolution, *Ten Days That Shook The World* (1919), and Louise Bryant, as the frame around which to construct a convoluted critique of the Soviet system with the comments of Frank Hardy and Dymphna

⁵⁷⁰ John McLaren, “Dorothy Hewett and the Left” in *Dorothy Hewett Selected Critical Essays* (Fremantle, WA.: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1995) 33-34.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

Cusack as recognisable voices offering condemnation of their surveillance and control mechanisms. The collapse of the communist state had reduced the value of their ideology to the status of “unsaleable junk”.⁵⁷²

Hewett rarely relied on the metonymies of communism although, for instance, in *Days of Violence, Days of Rages IV* (1987) she had the Party members singing *The Internationale*, she stayed away from generalisations, preferring the specifics of communism, naming names, towns, books, locations to construct her very personal vision of communism. She had a verifiable attraction to *Ten Days That Shook The World*, as she previously referred to it in *Days of Violence, Days of Rages I* as vital reading material when joining the CPA in Perth in 1943. Romanticising the October Revolution through the real life personages of John Reed and Louise Bryant made this monumental event relevant to her writing. Communism had an appeal that went beyond the boundaries of revolutionary Russia into an international sphere that caught up even these two young Americans in its dynamism, perhaps mirroring her very own lifelong engagement with it.

Iterability was the outstanding feature of Hewett’s poetry. Repeating various fragments, such as the examples given above, allowed her to interconnect people, scenes and incidents from the past into ever present forms of rewriting. It was not a discourse of familiarity but one of extreme strangeness to Australian poetry. Her 25 years in the Party, where she achieved the trope of the working class heroine, when she gave her occupation as organiser at the end of her poem, *Little Joe Flood in ’52* (1955), in David Martin’s anthology, *New World-New Song* (1955), marked a permanent but constantly shifting place in her memory.

Another party activist for a short period of time in the decade of the 1950s, David Martin (1915-1997), signaled his homage to the lower classes as the inheritors of history in *Twenty-second of June* (1941), long before he migrated to Australia in 1949. Unequivocal admiration for the working class and its liberation through the Soviet Union is expressed in,

“The serving beast
Burst the cursed yoke asunder,
Rose – a human! – in the East”.⁵⁷³

He repeated Marx’s call in *The Communist Manifesto* in his last line, Workers of the world, unite!⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷² Ibid., 156.

⁵⁷³ David Martin, *Poems of David Martin*, (Sydney: Edwards & Shaw, 1959) 20.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 20.

His *Lives to Waste* (1942) continued his adoration for the Soviet Union through effusive praise for the Red Army. Taking offense at an American journalist, Joseph Knickerbocker, for his comments that the USSR's military success was due to the fact that the Soviets had lives to waste, Martin glorified the industrial advances of factory production and the mechanisation of agriculture, before reducing his vehemence to a microcosmic scale, reversing the order of the American's statement to indicate how his death would be welcomed.

“O that he [Red Army soldier] had lived to greet tomorrow,
And Knickerbocker lay rotting beneath the snow”,⁵⁷⁵

Martin's delight in the victory of the Bolsheviks was renewed in his *The Burning River* (1943),

“Sing how we fashioned great and fair
The workers' and the peasants' state”.⁵⁷⁶

His most striking appeal to the connection between the proletariat and the communists appeared in *Armistice* (1945), endorsing the red flag as the correct funerary wrapping for dead Italian workers. He individualised the sacrifice of the proletariat in his *In Memoriam George Brown* (1946), a eulogy to a comrade from the Fifteenth International Brigade who had made the ultimate sacrifice in Spain during the Civil War. He recognised in the working class hero's death, his martyrdom for the cause, the beginning of the 'New World' of communist ascendancy.

A Letter to President Eisenhower (1953) strung together a litany of left wing notables in his plea for the commutation of the death sentence to two communists,

“Sacco is dead, but yet he lives, Joe Hill
Lives in a million wheels and tenements, and where
Will Julius live, and Ethel Rosenberg?”⁵⁷⁷

His anti-capitalism found its fullest articulation in *The Sailing of the Seventh Fleet* (1953), voicing his indignation at American militarism as it prepared to encounter an unspecified workers' state, presumably in Korea at this time. Martin exploited an extremely dramatic metaphor to signify the power of the USA's war machine, comparing the fleet to the biblical location of eternal damnation.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 74.

So in thrall to communism, Martin made a direct appeal to rival supporters, pleading for a joining of forces between the anarchists and the communists in *Four in the March* (1954). He chose the personage of Sacco as the bearer of the communist message.

A major contribution by David Martin to ultra-radical poetry was his editorship of the only collection of proletarian poetry ever published in Australia, *New World-New Song A Selection of Poems from the Left* (1955), which was presumably a CPA initiative. It communicated the distinctions of communist discourse in his foreword, “These are poems of the people by people’s poets”, a reiteration of the metonymy of ‘the people’ in his opening sentence.

John Booth, railway fettler, offered direct support for the CPA in his closing verse of *The Bush Navy*, “Humanity will feel the might that Communism brings.”⁵⁷⁸ The grand connection to the Eureka Stockade was repeated in *Peter Lalor* by Bill Jones, invalid pensioner of Queensland. Almost all the poets brought together in this chapter, except for David Campbell, are represented in this booklet, John Manifold, Dorothy Hewett, John Menin, Victor Williams and Martin himself. It is perhaps the only collection of communist poetry ever published in Australia.

Ultra-radical verse had reached its most direct expression in the work of John Menin, a transport worker in Western Australia. His publication, *Red Verse* (1943), was suffused with the metonymies of communism. He praised the great leaders, with a poem dedicated to each, Engels, Marx, Stalin and two for Lenin. His later *People’s Australia* closed with the combination of a few more, ‘new life’, a variant of ‘New World’ and ‘people’s reign’.⁵⁷⁹

New World-New Song stands as a landmark achievement in Australian poetry for its working class ethos, guided by CPA policies, written by workers themselves. It was essentially a reversion to the era of Proletkult in the USSR of the 1920s, a movement which emphasised proletarian art produced by artists of proletarian origin. This collection was totally in accord with the Soviet socialist realist principle of *narodnost*, reflecting the quotidian concerns of ordinary people building socialism. The qualities of the *narod* were articulated in their own words.

Oblique testimonials to the perceived power of communism appeared in the parodies of Soviet socialist realism by the arch conservative poet, David Campbell (1915-1979), well-regarded for his pastorals of outback characters and events. The power of the Soviet leadership had a significant impact on Campbell. They were articulated in his very late duo of 1979, *Three Looks at Lenin* and *A Nest of Gentlefolk*. Historical curiosities within the realm of Australian poetry, these two poems testified to how the long dead leaders of communism

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 12.

occupied a prominent place in the thoughts of their opponents. The first two parts of the tripartite work offered observations of Lenin by his wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, with the final piece of direct quotations from him attributed to his good friend, Maxim Gorky, the pathfinder of Soviet socialist realism.

The folksy tales from his wife, both anecdotal in style, *I Siberia: Vision* and *II Moscow: Kinship* take the form of peasant pronouncements, the former on how frigid conditions in the subarctic region added a special dimension to the microcosm of each animal caught in nature's icy grip. The latter recounted Lenin's reluctance to shoot a fox that had been prepared as an offering to him.

In *III Moscow: History* the voice of Gorky in a conversational tone delivered a deliberately mocking salute to the *raison d'être* of communism, History with a capital H as in the title. His Lenin stressed its importance as the determinant of all things,

“He talked of history:

Everything will be understood”.⁵⁸⁰

Campbell reiterated the style of the Lenin trio in *A Nest of Gentlefolk*, in which he incorporated the Soviet socialist realist convention of the father/son dynamic in Stalin and his son, Jacob, who is presented as the narrator of this poem.

Set in the milieu of the elder Stalin's dacha, the son, as the representative of 'spontaneity', elaborated on the 'consciousness' of his father in a jocular simile uniting the appearance of local mushrooms to the activities of the educated class.

Stalin was notorious for his suspicion of intellectuals and his reign of terror purged many of the top scientists and artists from their elevated positions. He preferred to subjugate everyone to his will, no matter the cost to the advancement of socialism. Campbell alluded to this in the conclusion, when he has 'the new people' remove all the mushrooms, the dead intellectuals, from the dacha's surroundings.

Campbell was able to directly connect the classic father/son nexus in *A Nest of Gentlefolk*, whilst having to substitute Krupskaya, who was childless, and Gorky for the role of the son in the Lenin poems. Campbell felt compelled to exploit elements of humour, irony and sarcasm, as the gentlefolk reference in the title insinuated, to demolish the superhuman proportions of Soviet leadership through their own means of heroic formulation.

Campbell purposely set out to tactically destroy their grandiosity through their own doctrine of prescribed myth-making. His knowledge of Soviet writing was gained from his

⁵⁸⁰ David Campbell, *Collected Poems*, (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1989) 322.

efforts “in the 1970s on ‘translations’ of Russian poetry”,⁵⁸¹ which presumably exposed him to the conventions of Soviet socialist realism.

The absence of a national metonymy for communism, such as Canada’s Norman Bethune, required Australian communist poets to adopt the ‘New World’ as their reference for the future Soviet Australia. It operated in a binary fashion, saturated with the time-honoured connotation for the arrival of the white settler-invaders in the Great South Land, whilst at the same time overlaid with the superimposition of the CPA version, taken from the cultural journal of the CPSU, *Novy Mir*, translated as ‘New World’ in the Anglosphere.

‘New World’ was often interchangeable with two variants, ‘new life’ and ‘new vision’ in the context of endowing communism with the possibilities of the utopianism inherent in it. The communist signified of the ‘New World’ sustained the aura of a paradisiacal future, regardless of gender, race, or religion, notwithstanding the Soviet state’s domination by the elite of the *nomenklatura*, the gulags, the secret police, and the commitment to the military strategy of the nuclear arms race.

Neither Manifold nor Martin had any exposure to the reality of the USSR, whilst Hewett’s two visits there were under the guidance of Intourist, the state travel bureau. They were writing about their illusion of communism, not the day to day gritty meanness experienced by the *narod*. They composed against a background of Stalinist totalitarianism which they initially ignored, but its domination eventually drove Hewett and Martin from the party.

Australian communist poetry was an ultra-radical minority discourse, which dissipated into a plaintive nostalgia that paralleled the diminishing status of the USSR as one of the world’s superpowers. Although a numerically weak force, it gave utterance to a counter-discourse that contributed to a repositioning of the notion of a ‘New World’, one that would supersede its foundation in British imperialist discourse with a *double entendre*, offering a counter-communication to the reading public’s colonially minded awareness.

⁵⁸¹ Laurie Hergenhan, *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Books, 1988) 483.

Conclusion

This thesis has established a substantial position for Australian and Canadian social[ist] realism as a distinctive part of their literatures, a subgenre unique to the settler-invader cultures of the Anglosphere. I have argued for its cohesiveness as a verifiable writing practice over several decades of the twentieth century. I have tried to articulate the notion that Soviet socialist realism could not be applicable as a totalising influence on ultra-radical Australian and Canadian writers. They were situated in a pre-revolutionary stage, unable to emulate the post-revolutionary Soviet triumphalism that motivated the Soviets' work.

These ultra-radical writers were inclined to deploy rhetorical strategies and devices suitable to their purpose, which consisted of the tropes and metonymies of communism. These tropes formulated the 'positive hero' and its basis in the 'consciousness/spontaneity' dialectic in order to provide solidity to the evanescence of the communist presence. The positive images were the CP/union organiser, the peace activist, the scientific socialist and the martyr to the cause. Anti-communist reaction to these produced the alien, the Sovietophile, the AntiChrist and the disease carrier as negative depictions designed to undermine support for communism in the public sphere. Numerous works collected here prove the existence of these tropes in the dramaturgy and fictionality of prominent Australian and Canadian writers, such as Dorothy Hewett, Judah Waten, David Fennario and Dyson Carter.

This thesis demonstrates the divergence between Australian social[ist] realism with its dependence on the strike scenario to project its leaders as 'positive heroes' and Canadian social[ist] realism and its focus on covert operatives within revolutionary groups and their surveillance by the government's undercover agents. These variations indicate the need to expand our understanding in conceptualising Soviet socialist realism as a text with unchanging universal dimensions.

Drama closely followed the periodic structure of fiction. The Depression era evoked the struggles of unionists in Australia, especially the Miners' Federation in Roland's *The Miners' Speak*, the Melbourne Writers' Group's *Thirteen Dead Reportage Drama on the Wonthaggi Mine* and Prichard's *Solidarity*, whilst the Canadian dramatists concentrated on the trials of the communist hierarchy, in Livesay's *Joe Derry* and Ryan et al's *Eight Men Speak*. Attention to the average party member was the focus of the post-World War II phase, although the exceptional timing of Cusack's *Comets Soon Pass* (1943) merits inclusion, in Hewett's *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home* and Stephen Sewell's *The Father We Loved on a Beach by the Sea*. These plays were eclipsed by the heroic stature of Norman Bethune, who became the central figure in Canadian communist representation in the 1970s and 1980s. This focus on Bethune was part of the wave of nostalgia for communism which also included

Fennario's *Joe Beef* and Bolt's *Buffalo Jump*. This was partially shared by the late phase of Australian drama's concentration on the friction within the CPSU in the 1920s in Sewell's *Traitors* and Blair's *Marx*, although these were written from a revisionist perspective and without the sentimentality which enhanced the dramatic biographies of Bethune.

Bethune emerged as the primary subject in Canadian drama's focus on communism, although this was highly problematic, as a multiplicity of Bethunes were unintentionally portrayed, which shattered the monodimensionality of the 'positive hero' depiction expected of the martyr to the cause. Bethune's domination of theatrical representation was never matched by any Australian identity. This difference is a crucial factor in understanding communism in the 'New Worlds' of Australia and Canada, an individual life became the dominant perception of communist activity, rather than the collective action of the communist party itself.

Fiction was separated into three distinct phases in both countries, the Depression years of the strike scenario, such as Devanny's *Sugar Heaven* and Harcourt's *Upsurge*, which is very similar to Baird's *Waste Heritage*. The post-World War II era, 1946-1968, saw the expansion of Communist Party involvement in the cultural sphere in the CPA's Australasian Book Society and Realist Writers' Groups (1944-1970), which played a pivotal part in producing literature which would not have appeared through the mainstream publishers, whilst the CPC's Progress Books and Stanley Ryerson's National Cultural Commission followed the same trajectory in Canada. The late phase of the 1970s and 1980s was inundated with nostalgia for communism in its most vibrant period, the Depression era, as typified in the memoirs of party members, such as the Australian Waten's *Scenes of a Revolutionary Life* (1982) and Oscar Ryan's *Soon To Be Born* (1980) and Dyson Carter's *This Story Fierce and Tender* (1986).

The rhetorical strategy of the metonymies of communism in the poetry of Australia and Canada, especially in the use of 'New World' or its variants, 'new life' and 'new vision', as a formulation for the success of communist activity, were expressed by poets in both countries, such as David Martin in his collection of proletarian verse, *New World-New Song*, and Sharon Stevenson in her poems, "*END MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL MAKE THE RICH PAY!*" and "*POETRY TOO HAS A CLASS NATURE.*" This was a 'New World' that would be the ultimate achievement of human destiny, a perfect state of unlimited potential for every person. Such perfectibility was impossible to sustain in the Stalinism which permeated the leadership of the CPA and CPC.

The dramatic, fictional and poetic texts collected in this thesis are connected in their desire to articulate communism as a minority counter-discourse to the majority liberal humanism of the capitalist democracies, such as Australia and Canada. Most importantly,

their subject of proletarian issues lost its power through the collapse of the USSR and its satellites in the turbulence of the early 1990s. As Ian Syson pointed out in 1997, “contemporary Australian literary culture suffers from the absence of class, - whether it be class-as-theme, class-as-informant, or class-as-critical- device”.⁵⁸²

The demise of the USSR was preceded by the implosions within the CPA and the CPC caused by the rise of Maoism, which separated both parties into two competing branches, the CPA and the CPA (Marxist-Leninist) and the CPC and the CPC (Marxist-Leninist). This fragmentation was the beginning of the end of any electoral possibilities for communism.

There had been divisiveness within the parties from the Hungarian Uprising and Khrushchev’s secret speech about Stalin’s crimes in 1956 and Alexander Dubcek’s Prague Spring of 1968 brought this underlying crisis into the hearts and minds of the membership. Stalinism could no longer be tolerated by many writers within the intellectual class of the party. This played a part in the withdrawal of committed writers, such as Dorothy Hewett and Frank Hardy, his dilemma finding expression in *But the Dead Are Many* (1975).

The end of the epoch of ‘New World’ social[ist] realism left the proletariat without a literature to express their position. This quandary has been exacerbated in the twenty-first century as literature evolves into a more pluralistic multi-vocal subjectivity, moving beyond the concerns of the working class into what is construed as postmodernism dominated by the politics of identity, an individual’s particularity defining their presence and not their economic position.

The vanishing of working class literature from the consciousness of the present day has led to the remnants of communist literature as an archive of the past when ideology held sway over a quantifiable proportion of the intellectual class. This thesis has been an exploration of this archive with the twin aims of preventing its total erasure from the literary cultures of Australia and Canada as well as contributing to the reexamination of the lexicon of a genre of writing that some contended had no redeeming features.

Another contributing factor to the demise of communism in the Western democracies was its own rigidity, the triumvirate of discipline, orthodoxy and hierarchy, so that it produced its antithesis, the ‘New Left’, based on sexual equality, environmentalism, flamboyant theatricality, direct action and, especially, disgust at the USA’s involvement in Vietnam, which became its defining characteristic. As David Cate perceived it: “Even Commies who committed espionage were respectable, law-abiding citizens who wore hats, believed in curricula and exams, fostered respect for parents and deplored narcotics. Life was

⁵⁸² Ian Syson, “Fired from the Canon: The Sacking of Australian Working Class Literature,” *Southerly* Vol. 57 No. 3 (Spring 1997) 79.

a ladder. The Party knew best”.⁵⁸³ The Party didn’t just wear hats, it was old hat. This conflict is teased out in Ryga’s *Grass and Wild Strawberries* and, partially, in Sewell’s *The Father We Loved on a Beach by the Sea*.

The writing of Australian and Canadian social[ist] realism was a method offering a way to understanding communism, which it perceived as a worthy path to the ultimate truth of the workers’ utopia. The fact that this state was unobtainable, as exemplified in the USSR, did not deter dramatists, fictionalists, and poets in attempting to transmit their perceptions of this fantasy to others.

The impact of Soviet socialist realism played a vital and vibrant part in the writing practices of prominent Australian and Canadian writers. They had to come to terms with the conditions of their writing, without the support of the victorious triumphalism of the Revolution and Civil War to sustain their work. This thesis does not claim to be the final word in the process of an archeological ‘dig’ into the archive of published material on ultra-radical writing. This thesis argues that such a practice existed and exerted considerable power over a segment of concerned writers determined to alleviate dire social conditions affecting the poor, the unemployed, unionists and their struggles in the midst of the twentieth century, from 1920 to 1990, when these issues commanded that close attention be given to them before they vanished completely from the public gaze.

This work makes no claim to being the ultimate authority on this subject, it is merely a preliminary exploration into this vital area of Australian and Canadian cultural history, and, in particular, into literature produced by communist or formerly communist writers composing according to the lexicon of Soviet socialist realism. In this process I have attempted to add my contribution to the knowledge circulating around this area of research. The short story and literary criticism are noticeable absences from this text, but they may provide future research opportunities for scholars in the field of comparative studies, although my publication⁵⁸⁴ on Canadian literary criticism may aid others who wish to pursue the issues raised in this thesis. Further work in this area is undoubtedly needed to clarify the positioning of some of the most important writers in Australian and Canadian drama, fiction and poetry.

⁵⁸³ David Cate, *Politics and the Novel during the Cold War*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010) 341.

⁵⁸⁴ Marvin Gilman, “Marxism/Socialism/Liberalism: English-Canadian Literary Criticism, 1890-1990,” *Literary Theory: Rereading Culture and Aesthetics*, ed. Jameela Begum and B. Hariharan, New Delhi: Pencraft International, 1997: 119-29.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AACF	Australian Association for Cultural Freedom
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS	Australasian Book Society
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
BESCO	British Empire Steel and Coal Corporation
CASD	Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy
CCF	Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CLDL	Canadian Labour Defense League
CNR	Canadian National Railway
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
CPA(M-L)	Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist)
CPC	Communist Party of Canada
CPC(M-L)	Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist)
CPR	Canadian Pacific Railway
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
LPP	Labor Progressive Party
MMM	Militant Minority Movement
NDP	New Democratic Party
NOOWOO	National Unemployed Workers' Union
OBU	One Big Union
PAC	Progressive Arts Club
PROC	People's Republic of China
RAP	Revolutionary Action Party
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
RCWU	Relief Camp Workers Union
RDX	Research Department Explosive
SLPC	Socialist Labour Party of Canada
SPA	Socialist Party of Australia
UFP	Union des Forces Progressistes

USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WIR	Workers' International Relief
WWF	Waterside Workers Federation
WUL	Workers' Unity League
YCL	Young Communist League

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