

“A Program for a Better Life:” Consumerism and Socialism in the Canadian

Depression

by

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Abstract

While many critics assert that consumerism is exclusively an economic, social or cultural outgrowth of capitalism, socialist responses to the Depression in Canada suggest otherwise. In various political and literary texts published during the 1930s, monetary reformers, social democrats and revolutionary communists frequently dream of an abundance that is correctly considered consumerist. In order to loosen the connection supposed between capitalism and consumerism and permit a better understanding of the latter, this thesis performs detailed readings of pamphlets and manifestoes produced by the Social Credit Party of Alberta, the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR), the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and the Communist Party of Canada (CPC), as well as poetry by F.R. Scott and Dorothy Livesay, and the novel *The Words of My Roaring* by Robert Kroetsch. Based on these analyses, consumerism is re-envisioned as an ethos that has been embraced by socialist ideologues as well as by capitalist societies.

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To Seanine,

for endless inspiration and clarity.

Introduction

Disaster can be instrumental in forming and shaping political movements. The Depression that struck much of the western world during the 1930s certainly had a powerful impact on the Canadian political landscape. Widespread unemployment, poverty, drought, and inadequate government responses provided plenty of fodder for attacks on capitalism, and social democratic and revolutionary communist organizations flourished. The League for Social Reconstruction (LSR) and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), cornerstones of social democracy in Canada, and the Social Credit Party of Alberta, a populist monetary reform movement with important ties to socialist individuals, groups, and ideology, were all founded in the early 1930s. Together with the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) (which was inspired by Josef Stalin to repeatedly announce the imminent demise of capitalism¹), these groups articulated and mobilized the dissatisfaction that many Canadians felt toward existing political and economic institutions.

In the process of voicing that discontent, each group – in different ways and for different reasons – situated consumerism as a key component of its discourse. Consumerism and socialism are two formations that critics do not frequently connect; rather, a wide array of authors approach consumerism as an economic, social, and cultural outgrowth or mode of capitalism. In some cases, that connection is drawn in the process of critiquing both formations.² Other writers, particularly those interested in locating the historical emergence of cultures of consumption, contest the frequent assumption that consumerism is only a feature of post-industrial capitalism, but do not question the link between consumerism and capitalism per se.³ Anthropologists of

consumption practices frequently detect similarities between capitalist and pre- or non-capitalist ways of consuming. However, such studies do not contest that a particularly accelerated style of consumption has become central to life in post-industrial capitalist societies, but focus on understanding exchange in its various guises.⁴ Considering the support for the notion that consumerism and capitalism are socio-economic twins, it would be completely consistent for an anti-capitalist ideology like socialism to be (or at least try to be) anti-consumerist as well.

However, as I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, the link between capitalism and consumerism is not exclusive. I do not take issue with Peter N. Stearns' contention that, historically, "an increase in prosperity was vital to consumerism's advent," nor that "New forms of money earnings are always involved in the rise of consumerism" (26). The styles of acquisition and accumulation that mark contemporary societies indeed seem to depend functionally on widespread access to money and credit, the origins of which Stearns locates in the growth of a commercial economy in sixteenth century Europe (26). However, I will attempt to refute, or at least qualify, Don Slater's assertion that "To state the obvious, consumer culture is *capitalist* culture" (26). While I agree that consumer culture or consumerism has developed (and perhaps must develop) within a capitalist system, the textual evidence I will offer in the coming chapters does not bear out Slater's claim that "Structurally, consumer culture is incompatible with the political regulation of consumption through either suppression of the market or traditionalist sumptuary codes and laws" (26). Though they envisioned a state in which market relations would have been highly regulated, vastly curtailed or even entirely

suppressed, Canadian socialists of the Depression also frequently dreamed of an abundance that is correctly considered consumerist.

In order to loosen the connection supposed between capitalism and consumerism and permit a better understanding of the latter, I want to re-envision consumerism as an ethos that has been embraced by socialist ideologues as well as by capitalist societies. To accomplish this rearticulation, I will analyze and situate a selection of texts written in the 1930s by individuals and groups committed to creating a socialist society – and in the case of Robert Kroetsch, by an individual writing thirty years after the Depression to problematize the plans laid out by one such group. Any attempt to better understand consumerism as a social formation – and meaningful and productive critical analysis rests on a fuller and more responsive understanding of a formation so central to life in the modern era – and how it relates to the political formations with which it has integrated, by which it has been shaped and which it has in turn shaped must begin by studying in detail and specificity the individual discursive events in which consumerism has been articulated. Considering the specific instances in which consumerism has been shaped and redefined by socialist groups and individuals will not only permit a more nuanced understanding of the link between consumerism and capitalism, but it will also illuminate both consumerism and socialism as discursive formations (albeit a fairly limited horizon of each), and begin to shed some light on the connection between consumerism and political formations in general.

In order to propose an alternate way of understanding consumerism, I would like to begin from the conception of what Don Slater (24) and Mike Featherstone (13)

call a consumer culture, or a culture of consumption. In Slater's words, the phrase consumer culture "implies that, in the modern world, core social practices and cultural values, ideas, aspirations and identities are defined and oriented in relation to consumption rather than to other social dimensions such as work or citizenship, religious cosmology or military role" (24). Rather than referring to a consumer culture, however, I substitute consumerism to stress that the individual is a key unit in this social formation and to emphasize that such an ethos is articulated and realized in and through political and economic as well as cultural and social practices, that it is more than just a dimension of social existence. Nevertheless, Slater's definition appropriately conveys both the preeminent position that consumption can take within a particular community, and the fact that consumption can function as a type of production: the production of meaning, including but not limited to social signification. The potential centrality of consumption to social, economic, political, and cultural life, which also inspires my use of the term consumerist rather than consumer when describing the ethos I will examine, in some cases significantly complicates the vision of communality presented by the socialist parties, groups or individuals that will appear in the following pages.

While it would be useful to start this investigation with a firm sense of what consumerism is, the goal of this project is to chart how socialist authors and bodies conceptualize and theorize consumerism in their own texts. My delineation of consumerism above is therefore very tentative and merely provides the general direction in which I expect to locate consumerist practices and principles in the texts I will consider. As I have already stated, I will especially emphasize how those

principles and practices are supposed to help constitute good selves. By invoking the concept of ethos, I wish to convey that consumerism is an attitude and a style as well as a code, a domain of self delineation and formation that entails living well, or properly, or rightly, or justly. An ethos of consumerism, then, is a vision of the correct actions and attitudes that a successful self executes and holds in relation to consumption. My notion of ethos is thus close to what Foucault identifies as the “*telos* of the ethical subject” (*The Use of Pleasure* 27-28), which can be gleaned by asking, “What is the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way?” (Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics” 265). I do not have the space here to conduct a detailed and exacting genealogy of socialism to trace the technologies of the self⁵ implicitly or explicitly conveyed along with such an ethos. Instead of considering how one assumes this ethos, I will elucidate the ethos itself, the patterns of conduct that, according to various socialists of the Depression, the model consuming subject followed. If consumerism is a mode of relating to society and to oneself, I will underscore how issues of right and wrong, examples of good behaviour and good living, and prototypes of the desirable self have helped to shape that mode.

The various forms of socialism that I will consider in the chapters to follow were, of course, more than ethical projects. In fact, they were primarily attempts to change political, social and cultural practices and institutions through more or less radical alterations to economic structures. However, the ethical frameworks and goals of socialist movements were crucial to what each did and tried to do. The range of things that Canadian socialists accomplished or attempted is rather wide; socialism is a variegated and nebulous entity, a spectrum that includes frequently antagonistic

poles. Monetary and political reform, regulation and cooperation, revolution and democratic evolution are all components of various socialist agendas. While several writers have proposed useful summaries of the key traits of socialism,⁶ my focus falls on select texts formulated (for the most part) by individuals and bodies that proclaimed themselves socialist. Certainly, all of the discourses that appear in the following chapters embrace collective provisioning, seek the good of the majority, and place their hopes of salvation in a rational and technocratic bureaucracy. But although the term socialism is useful shorthand for a group of sympathetic (or at least related) forms of working-class opposition to capitalism, I prefer to consider texts that announce themselves to be socialist interventions.

As I have already indicated, my investigations will focus on a series of distinct discourses. By discourse, I mean the set of words and ideas, whether supportive or critical, found in various texts by various authors, that congeal around a topic, idea, or term; any given discourse is a collaboration, a to and fro between various interested actors that defines the object of the utterances. My conception bears significant resemblance to Foucault's characterization of discourse as "violent, discontinuous, querulous, disordered even and perilous ... incessant, disorderly buzzing" ("The Discourse on Language" 229), except that I see a discourse as the product of many instances of utterance. Nevertheless, I am wary of Foucault's injunction to recognize the discontinuities between and specificities of every discursive event ("The Discourse on Language" 229). I do not, therefore, claim to present a complete or wholly representative selection of socialist texts by Canadian authors during the 1930s. Rather, I am investigating key moments in the (still ongoing) articulations of

social credit, social democracy, and communism – and in doing so I contribute another utterance to those very discourses.

My decision to focus on texts by (or about) Canadian socialists during the Depression is perhaps the most contingent and least defensible of my methodological choices. As the era that witnessed the formation of the LSR, the CCF, and Alberta Social Credit, the Depression was a vibrant period for socialists in Canada, and it is therefore a very fruitful period in which to trace the discourses I have identified. The artistic commitment to socialism was also at a high point during the 1930s. Besides Dorothy Livesay and Frank Scott, whose poetry I will consider in the chapters to come, Morley Callaghan (*Such is My Beloved, They Shall Inherit the Earth*), Anne Marriot (*The Wind Our Enemy*), Irene Baird (*Waste Heritage*) and Earle Birney were all connected with if not committed to socialist movements at the time through their written work.⁷ Furthermore, the penury that is virtually synonymous with the Depression was constantly translated into and countered with a rhetoric founded on the dyad of scarcity and abundance, and that dyad often serves as the vehicle for articulating a consumerist ethos.⁸

If the Depression suggests itself as an appropriate temporal limit to my investigation, Canada provides a more tentative geographical boundary. The influx and influence of British immigrants committed to the labour movement, affiliation and cooperation between Canadian and American labour unions and the influence of American and European writers and speakers on Canadian socialist parties (Penner, *The Canadian Left* 23-26, 40-45) are interconnections that a focus on only Canadian socialist texts threatens to efface. Moreover, the push for international working-class

solidarity renders an exclusively Canadian socialism a less tenable concept still. That socialism tried to work through the political apparatuses of individual national states out of necessity, and that the texts I study deploy rhetoric of nationhood – such as J.S. Woodworth’s introduction of the CCF’s *Regina Manifesto* as the beginning of a Canadian type of socialism (qtd. in Pierce, *Socialism and the C.C.F.* 2) – perhaps mitigate the arbitrariness of my selected field of inquiry. For my part, I will not consider the nation-shaping forces released in socialist self-constructions and constructions of the Depression. Ultimately, Canada provides a simple, clear, and engaging terrain – one that is constantly recognized and reshaped in texts by socialists – upon which to conduct my analysis.

Obviously, a Depression like the one that occurred in the 1930s is an unlikely, almost paradoxical event through which to consider the phenomenon of the consumer society: at a time when many were unable to consume much at all, it seems unlikely that a consumerist ethos could have been encouraged. There is some reason to consider whether consumerism was already a dominant formation in Canada in the 1930s, though. Martyn Lee (xviii) and David Harvey (125) single out the introduction of Fordist production techniques and labour practices in 1913 and 1914 as crucial moments that shaped the emerging patterns of twentieth-century consumption. Baudrillard suggests that 1929, the beginning of the worldwide Depression, marked “the point of asphyxiation” of the ideology of production which had governed capitalism and political economy up to that point: “the problem was no longer one of production but one of circulation. Consumption became the strategic element; the people were henceforth mobilized as consumers; their ‘needs’ became as essential as

their labor power” (*The Mirror of Production* 144).⁹ Furthermore, Gary Cross demonstrates in “Was There Love on the Dole?” that people in the U.S. and Britain tried to continue during the Depression a consumerist style of living that had already begun to take shape. While the same type of data and analysis have not been compiled for the Depression in Canada, it would likely prove somewhat difficult to exclude Canada from such significant economic, social, and political trends. I will not, however, attempt to trace the outlines of a consumer society from the limited sample I have chosen.

Besides providing conceptual boundaries to keep this project to a reasonable size, the Depression is a discursive stimulus that is integral to my analysis: the Depression is (and must be) profoundly different from the good times – whether past, or alive elsewhere, or waiting to be produced – that haunt these socialist texts. Because it is a site of experienced or imagined poverty, the Depression becomes a nexus of need and abundance, of deprivation and the (dream of the) end of deprivation – a space of reality and possibility. In fact, by attempting to recreate the reality of the Depression in Canada, the various retrospective studies of the era compound its ability to evoke dreams of improvement. The unbelievable hardship is made real through general histories (Bothwell, Drummond and English), economic analyses (Safarian), personal narratives and biographies (Burton; Gray) and documentary anthologies (Broadfoot; Horn, *The Dirty Thirties*). Care is usually taken in such records to differentiate the Canadian experience and events from the American, rendering the Depression as a national tragedy as well as a global one. But

these texts, like the contemporary accounts of socialists, reinforce the Depression as the fantastic realization of scarcity that elicited a variety of dreams of abundance.

Socialists' words about the Depression, more than the historical, economic, political, and social trajectories that those words sought to capture, interest me here, but there is obviously an important link between historical events and political and aesthetic responses; the crisis' trajectory and its impact on people must be understood before this study can proceed. A. E. Safarian writes in *The Canadian Economy in the Great Depression* that the crisis consisted of a decline in economic activity from 1929 to 1933, followed by an "uneven" and incomplete recovery that continued until the start of World War II (3). At the low point of economic vitality in 1933,¹⁰ nearly 20 percent of the work force was unemployed, Gross National Expenditure (GNE)¹¹ had fallen by 42 percent from 1929 levels, domestic investment, imports and exports were down significantly (Safarian 46), and only the United States experienced a greater decline in national income (60). The Depression's impact was as enduring as it was far reaching: as Safarian writes, "the recovery was very incomplete until as late as 1937" (86), at which point GNE was still 13 percent below what it was before the Depression began and 10 percent of workers could not find a job (83). But while Safarian adroitly analyzes the large-scale commercial, industrial, agricultural, and governmental trends in the Depression, he does not significantly broach the problem on which socialists seized: economic inequality. Not all Canadians were threatened by the prospect or reality of unemployment and poverty. As will become clear in subsequent chapters, most socialists felt that the property-owning class and the government representatives they allegedly controlled were thriving while most of the

population was suffering. To radical political actors, this accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few created a state of artificial scarcity – one which they planned to defeat. Against this false and unjust reality, socialists presented varying visions of a dream of abundance for all; I hope to unpack the consumerist ethos suggested in those dreams in the following pages.

As I have already suggested, socialism is an ideology that is expressed and practiced both within and outside of the domain that is titled politics. Consequently, I will not limit my investigation to political texts, but will work with the dreams of salvation presented in literary and political texts. Literature and politics are two key modes of discourse, two key forums for the production of meaning, in which socialists articulated an ethos of consumerism. Both of these modes of discourse carry certain aesthetic rules and criteria – some of which are common to both – according to which moments and artifacts of utterance are constituted, distributed and consumed. I do not want to argue that the difference between the political and the literary is primarily formal, nor eternal and unshifting, nor do I think it necessary to follow Jay Cantor's proposition that art and politics "are the same activity," that "art is constitutive of the world at every point.... Politics, work, all human culture is symbol formation, is poetry" (11). While the critical repositioning that Cantor's vision implies seems to have interesting possibilities, including undoing the "specialization of literature to 'creative' or 'imaginative' works" that Raymond Williams identifies as key to the formation of literature as a field of knowledge (48), such a radical reconsideration of the literary and the political is not necessary.

Literature may be another sphere of contestation that can have political impact – just as political discourses constantly have cultural and aesthetic impacts – but it also has other signifying possibilities. For my purposes, the important point is that, while the literary and the political are distinguished by sets of ever-changing criteria for evaluation and identification, two ways of meaning are consistently common to each, at least in the texts I will explore: politics and literature are both able to create political meaning and therefore effect changes in relations of power and domination, and both are central ways in which selves are suggested and formed. Each relies on a different set of rules for forming the objects of which they speak; each maps the same territory (here, socialism) with different results, and I will try to be attentive to those differences in my analyses.

Of course, the study of each kind of text permits a clearer understanding of the other: political writing provides important context for the interpretation of literature, and literature intervenes in political debates in ways that non-literary texts do not or cannot. The two genres can be kept relatively distinct according to their respective aesthetic conventions, the forms of truth that each attempts to access, and the methods through which and arenas in which each is presented to the public. I will explore these dimensions to some degree in the following chapters; for now, I would like to suggest that the artists whose work I will explore contributed to and were shaped by socialism in very important ways and that neither their work nor socialism as a whole can be understood without considering the other. Acting and arguing in aesthetic modes suggests alternative visions of praxis and politics than those present in the strictly political discourses; choosing literature as the vehicle for approaching politics

comments on the efficacy and desirability of both political and artistic expression, and alters both the content of political discourse and the notion of politics that permits such a discourse. My comparison of literary representations of socialist discourses to the self-representation of socialist organizations may even indicate within a limited scope how political and literary discourses construct one another.

As I have already stated, I will consider texts that announce themselves (in one way or another) as taking part in a socialist project; I will consider such announcements individually in each of the following chapters. As well, I will only consider what I call public texts: texts that were destined to be circulated (or at least were free to circulate) among the general populace rather than within a party or coterie of initiated. Focusing on public texts by no means judges the impact such texts had on the public, nor even suggests that any such impact was had. However, I am particularly interested in ethical interventions that were directed at the population in general – though I do not exclude texts aimed solely at “the masses,” “the workers” or “the farmer” – rather than in ethical injunctions aimed at party members. That is, I want to know what socialists considered an ethically consuming person, but not necessarily how they understood an ethically consuming comrade.

The first chapter will explore William Aberhart’s Social Credit Party of Alberta and Robert Kroetsch’s fictional account of the Party’s 1935 election campaign, *The Words of My Roaring*. During the Depression, Alberta Social Credit was an anti-socialist, anti-monopolist collectivist movement centred on managing consumption that had, paradoxically, important ties to socialist and communist ideologies. Social Credit thus provides a fruitful if unique site for beginning to

unravel the tensions and complements between socialism and consumerism. In the second chapter, I will look to social democracy as represented by the LSR, the CCF, and the poetry of F.R. Scott, a key figure in the creation of the LSR and the work of the CCF. A certain ambivalence attends the social democrats' ethical formulation that stems, I suspect, from the balance that the ideology seeks between socialist (self-) improvement and democratic empowerment. The third chapter will consider texts by the CPC and the poetic work of Dorothy Livesay, a committed Party member during the Thirties. The focus of these communist texts is on production and the attempt to liberate creative energies. The communist discourses therefore contribute some of the most ascetic injunctions regarding consumerism of any socialist discourse.

In the conclusion to the thesis, I will consider the ramifications of refiguring consumerism as an ethos produced through socialist discourses as well as capitalist societies. At the very least, that rendering should force a re-evaluation of the consumerism - capitalism link assumed by many critics and hopefully lead to new perspectives on how the social, cultural, and political challenges presented by each formation can be catalogued, assessed, and addressed. In fact, I expect that this study will suggest that the term consumerism masks too many conflicting and disparate strains, and that general studies of consumerism, the consumer society or consumption should give way to a more attentive style of reading each discursive event for the consumerism that it creates.

“We Are All Consumers:” Social Credit, Purchasing Power, and Rain

Formed in 1932 by William Aberhart, the Social Credit Party of Alberta never claimed to be a socialist movement. On the contrary, the Party often made a point of explaining how and why it differed from socialist and communist organizations in its early years. While it may seem like an unlikely starting point for an argument involving socialist discourses, Social Credit is nevertheless a useful place to begin to explore socialist constructions of a consumerist ethos. Because the Party shared various ideological goals, tactics and even personnel with socialist movements of the Thirties, it cannot easily be excluded from a discussion of Depression-era socialist movements. At the same time, the Party articulated and promoted a consumerist ethos more aggressively than any other Depression-era political party. The core belief that directed the Social Credit program was that the consumer was the key to economic and political salvation: liberated by purchasing power, the needs and wants of the consumer could end the Depression, repair the economy, and make a better world for all. Over time, though, the Party lost faith in the transformative potential of consumption and abandoned the consumerist ethos it had built as a viable vehicle for action by the state. *The Words of My Roaring*, Robert Kroetsch’s fictional rendering of Social Credit’s rise to power, extends that philosophical shift and radically reevaluates the social, psychological, and political impact of consumerist behaviour.

The Social Credit Party’s claim to socialist status has been bolstered by many scholars. Bob Hesketh writes that Alberta Social Credit planned “a redistribution of ownership of the means of production from its narrow base among big capitalists to a

broad base encompassing all citizens, an end to the profit system, and a wholesale reorientation of the underlying ethic of society from competition to cooperation” (97). Both David Elliott (“In Search of William Aberhart”) and Alvin Finkel (“Alberta Social Credit Reappraised”) have demonstrated that William Aberhart’s Social Credit movement had several links to socialist political groups of the day. Correspondence between Aberhart and William Irvine regarding possible affiliation with the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (qtd. in Elliott, *Aberhart: Outpourings and Replies* 84, 97), the assistance of Communist Party campaign workers toward the successful election of a Social Credit candidate in a 1937 by-election (“Alberta Social Credit Reappraised” 69), and the fact that H.B. Hill, a self-professed communist, coauthored the anonymous “Yellow Pamphlet” of 1933¹² with Aberhart (“In Search of William Aberhart” 14), all suggest that if the Social Credit Party was not sympathetic to socialism, the two ideologies at least held some common ground.

Just how much territory Social Credit shared with socialist movements is difficult to establish. An editorial in the September 24, 1934 edition of the *Social Credit Chronicle*, the Party’s official journal, is unequivocal in its condemnation of capitalism: “Let the supporters of Social Credit stand firm on this issue, let Alberta take the lead in showing the country that the people have broken away from the old yoke of the capitalistic system” (qtd. in Finkel, “Alberta Social Credit Reappraised” 72). Aberhart was often just as radical in his opposition to the injustices he perceived, but he did not employ the same socialist rhetoric. Accordingly, Aberhart draws a clear distinction between social credit and socialism in the *Social Credit Manual* (1935), one of the Party’s foundational documents:¹³

Social Credit is not based on any confiscation scheme by which we take the wealth of the rich or the well-to-do to give to the poor. Social Credit recognizes individual enterprise and individual ownership, but it prevents wildcat exploitation of the consumer through the medium of enormously excessive spreads in price for the purpose of giving exorbitant profits or paying high dividends on pyramids of watered stock. (7)

Aberhart's distinction between socialism and social credit demonstrates that the Party found its keystone not in the producer – neither the capitalist who finances productive enterprises nor the workers who execute them – but in the target of production, the consumer. Social Credit offers to protect the interests of the consumer against the predatory schemes of investors and financiers on the grounds of justice: socialism unfairly punishes hard work and success, while capitalism has permitted a few to benefit by swindling the majority. Pursuing economic equality (as socialist movements proposed) would be no more fair than giving capital free reign.

Aberhart's focus on the consumer rather than the producer is perhaps the most important reason why Social Credit does not fit neatly into the category of socialism. Alberta Social Credit was comprised of many factions and voices that were not always united; characterizing the Party as only socialist, capitalist, populist or pseudo-fascist¹⁴ would be misleading. Even if it was not entirely socialist, the Social Credit Party sought to substantially reshape the economic system to redress the failures and travesties that capitalism and the oligarchy of financiers had wrought by the 1930s.¹⁵ The Party's dissatisfaction with the status quo is hardly remarkable considering the economic situation in Alberta at the time: both urban homeowners and farmers suffered under inflated mortgages and interest rates when least able to make payments; as many as 15 per cent of Edmonton's residents and 13 per cent of

both Calgary's and Lethbridge's were out of work and on relief; and many who continued to work in industries like coal mining experienced significant cuts in hours and wages (Finkel, *The Social Credit Phenomenon in Alberta* 16-17). In response to such wide-scale suffering, Social Credit seized on the consumer as the agent with the right and the ability to prevail against scarcity.

The consumer's ability to effect change cannot be exercised without external support, however. At the beginning of the *Social Credit Manual*, Aberhart focuses on the state as the overseer and protector of the community: "It is the duty of the State through its Government to organize its economic structure in such a way that no bona fide citizen, man, woman, or child, shall be allowed to suffer for the lack of the bare necessities of food, clothing, and shelter, in the midst of plenty or abundance" (*Manual* 5). Significantly, Aberhart identifies the citizen¹⁶ as someone who depends on consumable goods, and describes the state as the body charged with the responsibility of providing such goods. That is not to say that the citizen is only a consumer, nor that the state is merely a distributor. Aberhart's passage does suggest, however, that mediating relations of consumption is one of the most important functions of government. Moreover, Aberhart's definition of the state and government as guardians of consumers' needs and interests places the consumer at the centre of the political sphere. Consumption is thus figured as a political act, and the consumer as a political entity.

Social Credit's politicization of the consumer is an important move in its formation of a consumerist ethos, yet it occurs as a step toward accomplishing a fairly modest redistribution. The Party's offer to provide the commodities needed for basic

survival is hardly an offer of untold riches to the citizen. However, Social Credit's discourse contains a potentially more tantalizing promise to the consumer – one that is bound up with Social Credit's (and socialists') understanding of the economic reality of the 1930s. The stipulation that necessities must be provided in times of plenty is an implicit assertion that the Depression was not just a time of poverty and unemployment. Aberhart makes the same contention much more candidly in *The Douglas System of Economics* (1933): “The Present Decadent Economic System was designed for an age of Scarcity when there would be all kinds of work to be found to provide for man's needs.... We live in an age of plenty, when machines, the product of man's genius, can supply us with all our needs with much less assistance of man's labour” (*Douglas System* 71). Aberhart's assertion that abundance is artificially masked by the Depression reveals a faith in technologically enhanced productive power that C. B. Macpherson considers the basis of Douglas social credit (94). For Douglas and Aberhart, the modern world – and here modernity is closely connected to technical innovation and sophistication – tends toward plenty; if plenty has not been realized, something is interfering.

Just what Social Credit considered plenty is as important a question as how the Party sought to release the bounty that should rightly have characterized the 1930s. Of course, the former question is also much more difficult to answer: Aberhart's invocation of an age of plenty does not offer a measure of the material improvements that Alberta's citizens can hope to receive. Rather, plenty is a notion that can elicit a variety of visions and responses and is closely related to demand and desire, both of which also resist comprehensive or exhaustive definition and

containment. Abundance and need are both sufficiently imprecise concepts that Aberhart's mobilized consumer might well wonder what, or perhaps how much, he or she was mobilizing for. Aberhart writes of food, clothing and shelter as if it is a definitive list of needs, and Social Credit planned to place an upper limit on how much income a citizen could accrue, "for no one should be allowed to have an income that is greater than he himself and his loved ones can possibly enjoy, to the privation of his fellow citizens" (*Manual* 55). The restraint that Aberhart envisions, however, is conspicuously indeterminate: he does not elaborate further on what he considers reasonable limits to individuals' enjoyment of material wealth, nor does he acknowledge the fluidity of the concept of need. Although modesty is an important aspect of the ethos that Social Credit presented, the restraint Aberhart invokes has no substance and represents the outcome of a complex socio-political and ethical calculation of (and perhaps contestation over) how to define "enough." That is not to suggest that Social Credit should be blamed for such oversights, but the Party's approach to (that is, its theorizations of) need, abundance and restraint is definitely worthy of consideration. Despite his modest promise to provide necessities, and in the absence of a declaration that the delineation of limits must be considered further, Aberhart releases abundance not only as proof of the consumer's agency, but as a goal and a dream capable of many different forms.

The mechanism which the Party believed would create abundance and the abundance it hoped to create were intimately entangled in the Social Credit plan. From its first articulation in *The Douglas System of Economics*, Aberhart's political and economic plan grows from a single unifying facet of human existence: "We are

all consumers” (71). This formulation of a community of consumers extends the potential reach of the Party’s ethos by rooting it in a fundamental physical reality. The Party also locates a very significant power in the community. The Depression has occurred because a “lack of employment has destroyed the purchasing power of the Consumer. This causes Underconsumption which in turn leaves more goods on the market, making less need of employment, and around the vicious circle we go.... The one and only method of recovery is to put a greater Purchasing Power in the hands of the Consumer” (*Douglas System 71*). To do that, Aberhart puts forth a “wondrously simple plan:”

1. Basic dividends are to be given to every bona fide citizen in the form of credit (not money) to provide for his bare essentials of food, clothing and shelter.
 2. An automatic price control system will be introduced to fix a Just Price at which goods and services will be available.
 3. Provision will be made for the continuous flow of credit.
- (*Manual 17-18*).

The state has the capacity and the duty to liberate the extant demand for goods among consumers and harness that power for the community’s good. The corollary to this is that the consumer has the power and the duty to pull society out of the Depression by using this purchasing power. Not only is the consumer a political entity, then, but her or his primary civic duty is to act on her or his impulses to buy, and thereby lead the province to economic salvation.

If Social Credit charged the consumer to buy out of a sense of duty to the community, it also assumed that citizens would want to buy – hence the Party’s selection of underconsumption rather than overproduction as its analytical tool. The state’s legitimacy may have rested on its ability to provide the bare essentials to its

citizenry, but Social Credit's plan also aimed at procuring something more than survival for the citizens of Alberta. Aberhart writes in the *Manual* that "If a citizen can curtail his living expenses by raising his own products, he would be able to purchase a few luxuries with the balance [of credit]. The only requirement necessary would be that all bills for food, clothing and shelter must be met before the luxuries can be bought" (31-33). The passage reveals how local Social Credit's plans were: though the Depression was a widespread, even global, phenomenon, the Party articulates a solution specifically for agrarian constituents with access to arable land to grow their own food. While the Party expects consumers to exhibit a demand for literally unnecessary commodities, it also demands that needs be satisfied before wants, thereby enticing the citizen-consumer to act responsibly. In fact, any consumer who failed to act responsibly and "squandered his dividends and was hungry or improperly clothed" would meet an unfortunate end: "The Credit House Inspector would warn the citizen that he was abusing his rights and privileges and that it must be stopped or he would lose his dividends. If necessary, he could be put on an Indian list" (*Manual* 33). The Party's love of ingenuity and self-sufficiency is as evident as its disdain for what it considers irresponsibility. Aberhart even prohibits personal debt for fear that a citizen might "become a vagabond or tramp with no fixed place of abode or sustenance" (*Manual* 19). A potential danger is also evident: Aberhart's attempts to balance the desire for luxury with the need for restraint suggest a concern that the former could overcome the latter.

Social Credit's consumer is thus a multi-faceted subject: compelled by physical needs as well as a taste for luxury, the consumer must act moderately and

rationally, work hard and be mindful of his or her civic duty – keeping money and credit flowing. The abundance that would be produced if all citizens adopted that ethos would be considerable: if state credit was intended to cover the basic costs of living, and if the Social Credit Party planned to punish any citizens who would not work when the opportunity arose (*Manual 33*), unused credit would be a regular, even expected, feature of Social Credit rule. In fact, self-sufficiency would not have lessened the amount of credit that the Party planned to provide and would be of interest to a Social Credit government for two reasons: it would ensure that more people's needs would be satisfied, but it would also free more of the distributed credit to be spent on luxury items. Social Credit's scheme was therefore designed to encourage and then harness a demand for luxury goods and personal leisure that would keep people spending.

In order to encourage an ethos that would drive the engine of abundance, the Party had to combat another ethical and economic propensity: the tendency to save. Individual security in the form of stored assets is a potential threat to communal well-being because the latter is ensured by the continued movement of wealth and commodities. Therefore, Aberhart argues that provision must be made to enforce consumption if it slows:

Credit is the life-blood of the state or community. Under no circumstances must it be allowed to stop its flow.

No hoarding of money or credit by any citizen should be allowed if the State is to continue healthy.

All basic dividend credits therefore must be claimed or drawn during the current year.

All salaries or wages or incomes from whatever source, must be expended by the end of the year following the receipt of the same.
(*Douglas System 75*)

Aberhart not only argues against amassing any particularly large personal fortune, but against any retention of monetary wealth at all. Of course, such a constant outflow of wealth could not be maintained if only necessities were purchased – hence the Party’s interest in luxury and the proper techniques for acquiring it. The drive to accumulate goods is thus not irresistible for Social Credit, and the responsible consuming that Aberhart promotes does not necessarily entail refraining at any point, but rather involves mastering the proper sequence or etiquette of consumption: first needs are satisfied, then wants.¹⁷ In fact, the Party advocates a structurally enshrined prodigality, one that bears some resemblance to the potlatch, except that both the individual and the community would immediately benefit from Social Credit’s form of total expenditure. The Party’s attempt to steer between two forms of self-interest suggests just how important the ethical component of its reforms were to the overall plan. The state would have to provide institutional supports to encourage citizens to begin and continue to abide by the proper consumerist code of conduct.

Ultimately, Social Credit emphasized responsibility and rationality as it formulated its ethos of consumerism – responsibility to the state, to the community, and to the self. Consumption demands responsibility on two fronts: a reasonable consumer will satisfy needs before addressing wants, and a consumer discharges her or his duty to the community at large by exercising her or his spending power. Consumers can thus produce wealth, but their ability to do so hinges on the beneficence of experts’ ingenuity: experts will have to determine how credit can be distributed to all citizens while they also design and guide the technologically enhanced modes of production that ensure, in turn, that consumers have things to buy.

Above all, a consumer will not abstain from consuming: a consumer should be content with food, clothing, and shelter if that is all he or she can afford, but he or she should also strive for comfort, leisure, and indulgences if and when it is reasonable to seek them – if and when those wants will not jeopardize others' survival. A responsible consumer does not jeopardize the community either by satisfying wants before needs, thereby becoming a burden on society, or by hoarding credit or money. In fact, because a consumer does not usually save,¹⁸ a consumer risks his or her survival for the good of the state and the community. Consumers do not, in other words, challenge the state; they are good subjects.

The Social Credit Party had a fairly detailed vision of the ideal consumer, but it did not nurture that vision indefinitely. The Party gave up its transformative ethical vision largely because it could not execute the changes to political and economic structures and processes necessary to support the modes of behaviour and self-formation the Party championed. While many scholars have argued that Social Credit abandoned its attempts to institute monetary reforms – essentially to challenge the federal government's monopoly on the regulation of banks and control over issuing currency – quite early into its mandate, Hesketh contends that “Social Credit was an ideologically driven government that, for many years, worked single-mindedly to implement social credit” (12). However, Hesketh does agree with other authors that “The constitution – and Aberhart's refusal to legislate in direct contravention of it – got in the way of the government's dreams” (12).¹⁹ The Social Credit government's push in the fall of 1937 to enact social credit reform legislation was repelled by the courts, the federal government, and the lieutenant-governor (Macpherson 178) and

such frustrations continued until, by the beginning of the Second World War, “the government would do nothing more to implement social credit until it had more support” (202) – or more to the point, any support – from a federal entity. That support never came, and the Party abandoned its efforts at reform. Social Credit’s consumerist ethos did not prove a strong enough vehicle to realize economic and political salvation; the institutions it challenged remained unchanged. Individualism replaced all vestiges of concern for the common good in the Party’s discourse (Hesketh 238). No longer the vehicle of action by the state, the ethos lost the political agency that had been imputed to it, and practicing consumption was no longer a primarily civic act.

The Social Credit Party’s abandonment of its consumerist ethos is carried a step further in Robert Kroetsch’s novel *The Words of My Roaring*. Published in 1965, the novel is an aesthetic intervention into politics as well as history, a reading of Alberta Social Credit that resurrects a moment of extreme privation in the midst of prosperity and explores the dreams and promises of an abundance that thirty years later had in significant ways been realized, though perhaps not for the community as a whole. *Words* considers the effectiveness of a political program founded on such dreams and promises and even the utility of politics in general in the face of a calamity as great as the Depression. Perhaps most importantly, the novel reevaluates the Party’s consumerist ethos by exploring the emotional and interpersonal tolls exacted by the set of practices and beliefs that Social Credit articulated.

The Words of My Roaring revisits the rise of Social Credit by focusing on one candidate who offers a rather unusual platform to his rural riding.²⁰ The novel,

Kroetsch's second, explores the nature of narration. *Words* is an exploration of self-creation, of beginnings and endings, and particularly of "the old dualities" (*Words* 77) – the logocentric epistemologies that limit and swallow lives and stories and against which the protagonist's narrative rages. The novel is also a story about rain, and it is this dimension that is most pertinent to my argument. The last thirteen days of Johnnie Backstrom's campaign for a seat in Alberta's legislature are completely defined by his unwittingly grave rhetorical question to a skeptical voter: "Mister, how would you like some rain?" (*Words* 10). Johnnie repeatedly tries to explain throughout the novel, "I didn't say I'd *make* it rain. I said it *would* rain. There's all the difference in the world" (*Words* 42). But whether he fashions himself as prophet or provider is of little consequence to his audience. To them, Johnnie's promise that rain will fall before they vote is a promise of bumper crops and high grain prices, and he is responsible for seeing that promise through.

Such an outlandish promise is perhaps to be expected from such a prodigious story-teller, or as Martin Kuester puts it, "a narrator *cum* local oral historian" who "filters the events that he recreates and the texts that he repeats – deaths, love affairs, and electoral speeches – through his memory, which is obviously affected by local narrative strategies of the tall tale told over a couple of beers" (403). As both protagonist and narrator, Johnnie is the teller of his own tale, literally a self-made man. The finest, or at least most frequently elaborated, product of his locutions is quite impressive: "I am six-four in my stocking feet, or nearly so, a man consumed by high ambitions, pretty well hung, and famed as a heller with women" (*Words* 8). Johnnie's current ambition to supplement his negligible income as an undertaker

entails winning a seat in the provincial legislature and securing the “Five solid years of good green indemnification” (*Words* 10) that comes with it. He joins a Party headed by a radio evangelist named John George Applectart and helps to spread the word about “cultural heritage and the flow of credit as the bloodstream of the nation” (*Words* 36). Johnnie’s propensity to talk complements his leader’s and is in fact fundamental to his own politics.

While Johnnie touches a nerve with his talk of rain, Applectart’s platform focuses on another source of the woes of Notikeewin, Johnnie’s home town and prospective seat: the displacement of wealth and productivity from rural Alberta into the hands of the already wealthy. For Applectart (as it was for Aberhart), the coagulation of wealth in the east is the root of Alberta’s economic problem. Borrowing the phrase from the CCF (Finkel, “Alberta Social Credit” 72), Aberhart dubbed the clique of eastern magnates who controlled Canada’s “great wealth (machinery and natural resources) ... ‘the Fifty Big Shots’” in the *Manual* (13),²¹ and Johnnie makes use of the same moniker. Applectart more colourfully refers to Toronto as “that scarlet Who-er of Babylon” (*Words* 30), and derides “her high-muckie-muck millionaires” (33). He is a populist hero who acts as “the voice of the prairies” when he connects “Satan and all of hell with the dirty Eastern millionaires, the financial racketeers” and “[rips] into all of the betrayers of Christ and His holy principles which, it turned out, had a lot to do with the price of wheat and hogs” (*Words* 34). The inflammatory Christian rhetoric that peppers his political sermons mocks Aberhart’s fundamentalist beliefs – beliefs which, while central to his vision of Social Credit, are not mentioned in either the *Manual* or *The Douglas System of Economics*.

More importantly, Applecart's fiery biblical allusions lay the blame for the Depression on a regional disparity in political and economic power.

In contrast to the Party he represents, Johnnie is unable to focus solely on the Fifty Big Shots (whose destructive self-interest could be addressed by political action) and ignore the drought (which can be mitigated but not combated in the political arena – though perhaps a combination of politics and religion such as Aberhart's could attempt to exert that kind of influence). The people of Notikeewin's fascination with Johnnie's promise of rain reveals where they locate the trouble. The unscrupulous prosperity of Toronto may be connected to their woes, but it is of secondary importance, a dream beside their reality and a prospective bounty which they can only hope to (re)claim. The novel creates a specifically local reality that has little to do with Toronto and its millionaires. In fact, the economic and political causes of the Depression are hardly addressed in the novel; rather, the focus is on climatic devastation and the experience thereof, an experience that suggests that the Depression was a problem without any human solution.

If the suffering of Jonah Bledd, Johnnie's hapless and downtrodden friend and campaign manager, is prefigured in his name, so too is the massive, uncontrollable, perhaps even divine, force that instigates his tribulations. The novel's focus on the tragic moments of Jonah's life and death, the dispossession of the walleyed farmer (*Words* 65) and a town full of people who, "If [they] could afford it ... would be content just to die" (39), demands Johnnie's ultimate rejection of Applecart's program as disingenuous and ineffective. Nothing but "a voice blasting away into the darkness" (*Words* 78) from the radio, Applecart cannot respond to the particularities

of life in Notikeewin. Neither can he offer a concrete program for change. After offering his leadership to his community for several days, Johnnie is left asking the question ““what in the Christly hell will you *do?*”” (*Words* 78). This question is central to Kroetsch’s reading of Alberta Social Credit: despite Aberhart’s detailed expositions of the cultural heritage, the unearned increment and the flow of credit, he constantly qualifies his texts and platforms as mere outlines, and defers explaining the actual methods for achieving the kind of society he envisioned:

You don’t have to know all about Social Credit before you vote for it; you don’t have to understand electricity to use it, for you know that experts have put the system in, and all you have to do is push the button and you get the light. So all you have to do about Social Credit is to cast your vote for it, and we will get experts to put the system in. (qtd. in Walter D. Young, *Democracy and Discontent* 88)

Aberhart’s basic unwillingness to cede any decision-making power to the citizens is a fundamental political failure. Dissatisfied with precisely this kind of evasive paternalism, Johnnie grasps for another path to follow.

The gap between campaign rhetoric and practical plan leads Johnnie to adopt as mantra what he first said by accident. He continues a campaign which began as a scheme to secure a regular income because he has developed a genuine concern for his fellow citizens after repeatedly witnessing their desperation. He presents to those people – his neighbours, friends, and perhaps enemies – a platform consisting primarily of a single plank: it will rain before the election. Johnnie does not explicitly abandon Applecart’s program, but supplements it with an improbable promise that is more concrete, local, and even seemingly effective than the leader’s religious metaphors and offbeat economic analysis. The political action that he delivers is

absurd and desperate. As such, that action questions the efficacy of orthodox politics to deal with human suffering.

A paradox attends the various manifestations of scarcity – of money, food, clothing, occupation, rain – that constitute the Depression in Kroetsch's novel. It seems that nothing can be done to aid the suffering of an entire town or province, and yet that suffering becomes a moral demand that compels Johnnie to find a way to resist and overcome the reality. This paradox, I would like to suggest, creates Johnnie not as hopeless, but as beyond hope, a figure who warily embraces despair and finds something sustaining in that act. He could be described as post-hope – simultaneously hopeless and contented having glimpsed the folly of both his cynical self-interest and his desperate altruism. Thus, he is able to continue as a candidate after he has rejected Applecart's ideology, rejected the usual boundaries of political intervention, and even rejected himself as a worthy representative of the people in favour of his opponent Doc (*Words* 167). There is no longer any point to his candidacy, nor is there any point in any other's candidacy, nor in renouncing his own. Notikeewin has passed beyond salvation, and yet it and its inhabitants persist. In that mere tenacious survival, the town has achieved a kind of (very modest) salvation. Even if it cannot provide any greater relief, politics does not disappear as a sphere of human action, and both Johnnie and the townsfolk continue to live as if further deliverance were still possible.

Johnnie may genuinely exist beyond hope, but his prospective constituents do not abandon the possibility of a more robust salvation. Clearly, his promise of rain does not justify the peoples' talk "Of a bumper harvest and where could they get extra help in a hurry. Of shopping trips to the city and winter clothes for the wife and kids.

Of paying off the interest on the mortgage for another year” (*Words* 16-17). Still, the people talk anyway. As Doc points out when the prophesied downpour finally begins the night before the election, ““There won’t be much of a crop, ... But at least they’ll get their seed back. And feed for the winter, and a little to sell, enough to pay the bills until spring.... Just enough to hope on”” (*Words* 159). Even a miraculous delivery from drought will not mean immediate affluence for the people of Notikeewin, yet it will bring hope of further recovery – and inevitably of eventual prosperity.

Hopes of new winter clothing and meeting mortgage payments are not terribly extravagant, but the dream of a more luxurious existence is not far behind. Sumptuous demand obviously plays an important role in the Social Credit Party’s discourse, but the Party does not employ specific symbols of material abundance in its texts. Yet the vague references to abundance that crop up in Aberhart’s texts are evocative: in the absence of specific icons of plenty, the dreams of abundance can run wild and desire can have free reign. In contrast, Kroetsch’s novel renders abundance, or more accurately the dreams of abundance, by deploying specific signs of material wealth. The sight of Doc Murdoch’s “new Chevrolet ..., green and hardly a speck of dust on it, the chrome shining, sparkling in the sunshine” should instigate indignation among an entire town standing in line for rations of dried cod; instead, it “brought a kind of hush over that crowd as if they were suddenly in church ... [and] they started speculating. One good crop, this fellow said. One decent harvest, somebody answered. Just let me land one forty-bushel crop by Jesus, somebody practically cried aloud” (*Words* 43). The Chevrolet signifies success and security to the townspeople – things they have not enjoyed for some time – and Johnnie’s prediction of rain speaks

to the same longings. The prophet's Model-A that Johnnie nearly acquires at the farmer's auction (*Words* 72) ironically mirrors Doc's car. Yet despite its dilapidated condition, it too creates a frenzy of admiration, even desire. The immediate leap from the elements of survival and subsistence to images of plenty that the townsfolk keep taking indicates a slippage from need to want.

This connection between commodity and abundance is interesting because it suggests that, in the world Kroetsch renders, and perhaps in the world of postwar affluence in which he composed the novel, wealth is signified first and foremost by objects of mass consumption. Such a vision evokes Jean Baudrillard's description of the consumer society in which sign-objects are constantly circulated and manipulated to display (in an empty way) social relations and hierarchies. This resemblance may be coincidental considering that Baudrillard's first major treatise, *The System of Objects*, was not published until 1968 (and not translated into English until 1996), but Kroetsch's vision does suggest that a consumerist ethos is better understood as a social rather than a political or even economic ontology. As in Baudrillard's writing, the townspeople's veneration of objects and their consumption is constantly undermined in *Words*. The Model-A demonstrates that absolutely any object will serve as their idol. Johnnie's manipulation of the tragic going of the rodeo clown (*Words* 92) is both a brilliant (and honest) political tactic and a deplorable moment of opportunism. Even his storied sexual exploits offer both pleasure and pain: his tempestuous marriage is the result of one "awkward and hurried trial" (*Words* 8), yet it is ultimately a loving and supportive relationship that helps to sustain him. Moments of consumption – of alcohol, of friendships, even of people – are at every

point painful as well as joyous. On the whole, they are more often painful; complaining to the disembodied voice of Applecart, Johnnie rails:

“Yes sir, Mr. John George Applecart, let me tell you about dualities. I’ve read the Bible a little myself. And I’ve lived a little too. And here I am,” I said. “I consume and I consume. Chapter and verse. Newspaper columns that bulge with advice. The want ads. Food. Hats. Socks. Gasoline. Women. Beer. Hardstuff. I have a large jaw and mouth, my appetite is healthy. My eyes are twenty-twenty and so eager they hate to sleep. My ears are wax-free and larger than normal. I consume and I consume. And in the end, where does it get me?” I waited. “In the end,” I said, “I am consumed. That’s all, that’s all. Consumed.” (*Words* 78)

Consumption may be enjoyable, but it is also a self-destructive and perhaps even an addictive act. That Johnnie addresses his tirade to Applecart suggests that the former considers a consumerist ethos to be an utterly inappropriate vehicle for political action. Moreover, the novel’s ambivalence toward consumption suggests that even as a social role, the consumerist ethos can be a threat to both interpersonal relations and to the self.

The Words of My Roaring presents the Depression as a phenomenon beyond the reach of human intervention. Consequently, it presents politics as hopeful but useless bluster – at least in the face of such an imposing set of problems. Both Applecart’s and Johnnie’s populist agrarian politics can offer compassion and sympathy to the people of Notikeewin, but not much more. An ethos of consumerism does not provide a way out of the Depression either; rather, this ethos is more likely to lead to the implosion of the consumer. Kroetsch thus turns the discourse of Social Credit and indeed the ethos of consumerism on themselves: politics, let alone millenarian politics, is mostly a space for talk, and the consumption that is so integral to (and almost synonymous with) abundance always threatens to consume the

consumer. There is no sense that consumers will or even can exhibit the rationality and responsibility that Aberhart's texts expect and promote. Rather, the people hit by drought and Depression salivate at the prospect of prosperity. Given the state in which they find themselves, they might be contented with food, clothing, and shelter, but they would not be content for long. Shiny new Chevrolets – or at least battered old Model-As – insist themselves as forcefully as mortgage payments and food. Kroetsch takes consumption – the keystone of Social Credit's discourse – and exposes the shortcomings and problems that riddle it. The distinction between need and want on which Aberhart implicitly relies to articulate the proper sequence of consuming cannot be maintained by the characters in *The Words of My Roaring*. For them, Johnnie's question about rain is an invitation to imagine and speak the lives that they could live, the people they could be, and the things that they could have if only that rain would fall.

Perhaps most importantly, Kroetsch's novel underlines the limited utility of the consumerist ethos as a political entity. Kroetsch's rethinking of the Depression and Social Credit in *The Words of My Roaring* suggests one way in which attitudes to consumerism changed from the 1930s to the 1960s. In opposition to the Social Credit Party's injunctions to liberate the desire to consume, to enjoy prosperity, and let the individual's satisfaction take care of society's salvation, the ethos Kroetsch invokes must forget politics, forget consuming – forget any glimmer of hope. The interaction between the novel and the political ideology it interprets is the sort of political agonism that Arjun Appadurai contends is crucial to determining value (57). Of course, Appadurai's insight is innovative because he applies a political model to the

commodity to understand the latter's position in social life. However, the same kind of valuation occurs in the contest between Social Credit, the institutions that blocked its reforms, and Kroetsch's novel: all three present different opinions on the validity of a consumerist ethos, thus suggesting that this validity is ultimately determined in the struggles to assert each opinion as correct. Aberhart's plan and rhetoric did not fall on deaf ears: despite the fact that Aberhart's version of Social Credit was publicly denounced by C. H. Douglas himself, Social Credit was such a force that, in the words of a cabinet minister of the incumbent United Farmers of Alberta,²² "If the Apostle Paul had been loose in Alberta for six months, he couldn't have stopped Social Credit" (Irving 317). In the election of 1935, the Party won 56 out of 63 legislative seats, took 54 percent of the popular vote (Irving 38), and began a reign that lasted uninterrupted until 1971. In the end, though, the Social Credit Party abandoned its consumerist ethos as a political vehicle; Kroetsch's novel continued this ethos' devaluation by rendering it not only as politically ineffective, but also as potentially personally and socially destructive. *Words*, then, offers a post-hope ethos – a lonely, frightened but persistent and pragmatic orientation to a world in which abundance has lost all meaning – in place of the consumerist ethos. Considering that Kroetsch's novel appeared at roughly the same time as critiques of consumer capitalism by authors like Herbert Marcuse (*One-Dimensional Man*, 1964) and Vance Packard (*The Waste Makers*, 1960) were becoming popular, *Words* might reflect a wider suspicion of the benefits of a consumerist ethos in the post-war Western world – perhaps a guilt or uncertainty that accompanied the elaborate acts of consumption that (according to Baudrillard and others) took centre-stage in the twentieth century.

Acquisition and the Enlightened Commonwealth

Consumerism is not a primary focus of Canadian social democratic texts published during the Depression, but the commentary that such texts do contain provides important insights into the notions of good living and human fulfillment fundamental to the social democratic project. While they condemn the social, cultural, and moral degradation that consumerism represented, the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR) and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) laud the material benefits of modernization and recognized public demand for goods, services, and leisure as not only ubiquitous, but valid and healthy. In fact, some of the arguments for a socialist state articulated by the LSR and the CCF attempt to activate consumerist desire while strongly warning against any too intense longing for consumerist abundance. For both groups, such a balance is struck by cultivating a suitably detached appreciation for material wealth that remains subordinate to more morally and culturally sophisticated impulses. In the end, however, both groups have significant difficulty maintaining the distinction between the consumerist values and practices that they reject as vulgar and stifling, and those values and practices that they wish to incorporate into the enlightened, developed, and somewhat altruistic ethos that they hoped to instill in Canadians. While the LSR and the CCF begin to undermine their own nuanced understanding of consumption and its motivations, F.R. Scott's Depression-era satires repeatedly endorse the values of justice, equality, and democracy, with their brief consideration of consumption occurring firmly in that context. Scott's poems suggest that practices of consumption must be embedded in a

broader set of values. In the process, those poems render a non-consumerist ethos for Canadians to embrace.

The LSR, the CCF, and Scott are certainly not the sole contributors to what I call the social democratic discourse of the 1930s.²³ Instead of attempting a comprehensive analysis of that discourse, I will consider a few texts written or published by figures central to the social democratic project at the time in order to demonstrate that at least some part of the overall social democratic discourse followed the path that I identify in this chapter. Considering the electoral success of the party, the fact that it formed the first socialist government in North America (in Saskatchewan in 1944), and its longevity, the CCF has had a significant impact on the Canadian political landscape and is an obvious candidate for this project.²⁴ The intimate connections between the LSR and the CCF are well documented: as Walter Young writes in his history of the CCF, *The Anatomy of a Party*, “the League provided intellectual leadership for the CCF for the better part of its history, and at the beginning demonstrated to [J. S.] Woodsworth and his colleagues that there was support for their new party outside farm and labour circles” (30-31). Key LSR members were intimately involved in the formation of the CCF, and four prominent members of the LSR²⁵ played an integral role in writing the CCF’s original statement of purpose named the *Regina Manifesto* – largely adapting an initial draft by a fifth member, Frank Underhill (Horn, “The LSR, the CCF, and the Regina Manifesto” 25).²⁶ Thus, the LSR is another of the primary forces to articulate a socialist ideology that embraced the institutions of parliamentary democracy. F.R. Scott was at the centre of both groups: he helped found the LSR and played a key role in the CCF,

eventually becoming the national chair of the party from 1942 to 1950 (Scott, *A New Endeavour* xvii, xxxiii). Moreover, he made significant contributions to the Canadian social democratic discourse as a legal scholar, political activist, and poet. His poetry – in particular the political²⁷ satires “An Anthology of Up-To-Date Canadian Poetry” and “Social Notes,”²⁸ published in the early to mid 1930s – is thus very much bound up with the formation of the social democratic ethical vision at that time.

Of course, variations exist between texts by Scott, the LSR, and the CCF, and those differences must be noted. Certainly, there is good reason not to conflate the LSR and the CCF. The former declined official affiliation with the latter to ensure that it would remain an educational and research body not involved in direct political action (Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction* 38).²⁹ In addition, while the word socialist was included in the CCF’s original name, the LSR was initially reluctant to describe itself using the same term because it wanted to avoid alienating any potential supporters.³⁰ The threads connecting the LSR, the CCF, and Scott are evident, though, and I think it would not only be useful to approach them as contributors to a common discourse, but disingenuous to do otherwise. On the other hand, the significant overlap in membership and ideological orientation suggests that, despite the LSR’s and the CCF’s separate spheres of action – public education and political action – it is at least fruitful, and probably necessary, to examine both groups together.³¹ On the other hand, because of the interconnections between the three figures I have chosen, the discourse formed in their texts is relatively uniform and does not evoke the variety of opinions and commitments disguised by the term social democratic.³² The homogeneity of the texts I have chosen means that I am

commenting on a central, organizationally privileged part of the social democratic discourse.

The few considerations of consumerism that appear in social democratic texts of the 1930s form part of those texts' critiques of capitalism. The LSR's first book, *Social Planning for Canada* (1935), is a lengthy articulation of why planning according to socialist principles is absolutely necessary for Canada and how a more rational and compassionate social order can be achieved. In the first chapter of the book, the Research Committee of the LSR³³ unravels the "faith in progress" (3) that has grown among Canadians thanks to a century of industrialization and modernization. That faith has also thrived on a general blindness to the social and cultural failures of those processes, and it has left modern capitalist societies like Canada and the U.S. "singularly unfit to cope intelligently with the critical stages of social disintegration" (LSR Research Committee 5) that Canada had reached by the early 1930s. Writing of the cultural ramifications of the faith in progress, the authors lament the stultification of the working class, the uneducated and the poor, for whom "the main concern of life is making a living. For most of them the dreams of economic security are unfulfilled. But through their thinking has seeped, like a poison, the philosophy of acquisition. They vacillate restlessly between the vision of riches and the dread of poverty" (LSR Research Committee 36). Caught between greed and a fear of penury, and lacking the leisure for cultural development (LSR Research Committee 36), the masses are driven to seek meaning and purpose in an empty, and potentially dangerous, obsession. Wealth and its signs, in other words,

occupy the space in the hearts and minds of the poor in which moral and cultural matters of a higher order should reside.

The Research Committee's indictment of the preoccupation with things has a precursor in F.R. Scott's "Xmas Shopping," the ninth of eighteen short pieces published in *The Canadian Forum* in 1932 under the title "An Anthology of Up-to-Date Canadian Poetry." The persona of "Xmas Shopping" wryly observes

It is so nice for people to give things at Christmas
That the stores stay open every evening til ten,
And the shop-girls celebrate the coming of Christ
By standing on their feet fourteen hours a day. (61-4)

The poem's complaint about the displacement of religion by a pernicious materialism finds a parallel in *Social Planning* (37-8), though the latter passage fixes on how the Protestant churches and the ethic they encourage are complicit in the classism and exploitation that mark Canadian society. The moral of "Xmas Shopping" is, as the spelling of the title suggests, that a true and recognizable Christianity is no longer part of Christmas. However, Christmas can be read as a metonym for an epistemology, a way of life, and a set of values, all of which have been lost amid a desire to give things that in turn drives contemporary commercial hyperactivity. Consumerist conveniences and practices have ascended to such preeminence that spirituality has become merely an excuse for the former's exercise. Meaningless acts of giving do not merely imply a moral emptiness on the part of the givers, however: a labour force has to be exploited to support the celebration. The fetishization of the gift captured in "Xmas Shopping" thus poses an immediate danger to the economically vulnerable, as well as a violation of social and economic justice and of Christian values.

Social Planning goes on to state explicitly something that Scott's poem implies: the philosophy of acquisition is not merely a part of the culture of the poor. In "Xmas Shopping," the speaker proposes that people in general, not unemployed or underprivileged people, enjoy giving things at Christmas time, although the implication is that shoppers must have some money to make purchases. The Research Committee goes further, demonstrating precisely why those with money and free time are no better cultivated than the undereducated and jobless:

Amongst the privileged as amongst the underprivileged group, the predominant economic interest tends to colour the individual's entire outlook.... This philosophy of acquisition renders impotent the finer impulses. So are members of the privileged group known rather for a vulgar display of houses and lands, of yachts and automobiles, than for their contribution to the cultural life of our age. (37)

The preoccupation of the rich with conspicuous consuming is in fact the antithesis of culture, a bane to both personal refinement and shared civilization. Adequate wealth and leisure time are apparently not the only ingredients necessary for self-development. At every level of society, the philosophy of acquisition is proof of the ethical and cultural decline caused by capitalism.

The breadth of influence enjoyed by the anti-culture of acquisition suggests that social democrats had little if any foundation from which to effect their desired ethical transformations. However, the LSR found a model for its preferred ethos among the CCF's popular base. The Research Committee praises "the extensive middle class of professional men and women – teachers, scientists, engineers, physicians, dentists, clergymen, nurses, social workers, etc., – and of the managers and skilled technicians in the ranks of industry" who have embraced social democracy:

Most of these have to a considerable extent in their individual lives eliminated the profit motive from their activities. Most of them are painfully conscious of the vulgarization and degradation which are inherent in a society dominated by money-making; and they would welcome the emancipation of creative energies which would come to them if they were active members in a planned and socialized community. For they feel themselves thwarted and perverted now by the necessity of serving mammon as well as following their own professional ideals. (473)

The LSR's enlightened middle class is not the only group to embrace the principles of the CCF and the possibilities of life in a socialist state: besides the farmers and workers who formed the party, "a considerable number of our industrial magnates ... are quite capable of appreciating the scope for their capacities of management and organization that would be provided in a socialist state" (LSR Research Committee 473). Only the middle class has rejected capitalism for ethical reasons; labourers and farmers seek primarily to protect their own economic interests (LSR Research Committee 472), while enlightened capitalists seem concerned most with applying their skills.

The LSR's image of the middle class speaks volumes about the group's understanding of human nature and the telos of human existence. The valuation of creativity and cultivation is repeated and expanded in *What is the Answer of the C.C.F.?: A Series of Questions and Answers on the Policy of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation*, a pamphlet written by the British Columbia CCF Federal Campaign Committee for the 1935 federal election. According to the latter text, the middle class is not the only group to have grasped a proper understanding of ethical motivation and self-realization. The authors of the pamphlet argue that "Even under capitalism it is generally a recognized fact that the highest forms of social activity are

not inspired by the desire to acquire wealth. They come from an innate urge to creative activity and a development of social consciousness, accompanied probably by an appreciation of the approbation of our fellow men” (2). Such a broad and enlightened consensus on values contradicts the LSR’s conviction that “The great condemnation of our system is that it makes an interest in ‘things’ the major interest to the almost complete exclusion of an interest in values” (LSR Research Committee 37). However, the very existence of a social democratic movement presupposes that the community is not totally devoid of values. Moreover, *Social Planning*’s version of the socialist middle class and *What is the Answer*’s analysis of social motivation suggest that people are, or at least have the potential to be, fundamentally creative, caring and social beings. Thus, despite capitalism’s failure to encourage an enlightened and magnanimous ethic, fragments of citizens’ true and good selves are able to shine through.

Though individual creativity and social consciousness are central to the social democratic construction of humanity, the defense of values mounted in the LSR and CCF texts focuses instead on capitalism’s erosion of justice, equality and democracy. The LSR’s *Manifesto*, for instance, condemns the individualist ideology of capitalism that led, and always would lead, to a social order that is “unjust and inhuman, economically wasteful, and a standing threat to peace and democratic government” (LSR 219). Moreover, it promises that, if economic relations were directed for the commonwealth, “a planned and socialized economy” would displace the “existing chaotic individualism,” and “an approximate economic equality among all men” would “eliminate the domination of one class by another” (LSR 219). The CCF

makes a similar statement in the *Regina Manifesto*, vowing to replace the “inherent injustice and inhumanity” and the “domination and exploitation of one class by another” with “economic planning” and “genuine democratic self-government, based upon economic equality” (1). The connections between justice, equality, democracy, and social consciousness are perhaps self-evident: the first three can be considered components of the last, signposts that guide social relations. More importantly, the centrality of these time-honoured political mores to both groups’ manifestos, as well as to the majority of their other texts, demonstrates how great an ethical currency the groups considered them to carry among Canadians. And if justice, democracy, and equality appealed to the citizenry as an orienting set of values, perhaps the real problem identified in *Social Planning* and *What is the Answer* is not the alienation of altruistic and noble values from the hearts and minds of the majority, but the imposition of a materialism that obscures those values and determines practical action.³⁴

The values that anchor the CCF’s and LSR’s texts also resonate throughout Scott’s “Anthology” and “Social Notes.” Each short verse under the respective general title catalogues a different way in which justice, democracy, or equality has been undermined by capitalism. Since only a few poems actually name, and hence define, the principle being violated – “Democracy: 1832-1932” (“Anthology” 44-6) and “Justice” (“Anthology” 82-94) being the most obvious – the exact reference of what is wrong is not immediately apparent. Like the political tracts of the CCF and the LSR, Scott’s poems assume that the public already understands and values justice, democracy, and equality. The poems thus focus on the gap between ideals and action,

demonstrating how rarely contemporary society actually follows the rules of proper social engagement.

Scott's poems also build upon common experience of that gap to authenticate their censure of capitalism. Several of the short verses that comprise each poem, like "Xmas Shopping," speak of a generic wrong, a situation that is presumably instantly recognizable as true despite the absence of historical detail. Those poems, in other words, present archetypal situations that sum up a vast number of similar injustices. In "Natural Resources," for instance, the poem's voice welcomes the audience to view "the vast natural wealth of this mine" ("Anthology" 6) – wealth that has gone to American investors instead of supporting the Canadian workers who extracted it. "This mine" has no name and no location, nor do the "pauperized Canadian families" ("Anthology" 10) or the "six American millionaires" (8) produced by the mine have any distinguishing characteristics. They therefore stand for all mines, miners, and investors. In a similar manner, "Hospital" ("Anthology" 31-5) does not offer a specific example to prove that a patient's treatment and dignity (here, the hours in which visitors are permitted) are indexed to his or her wealth; rather, the voice of the poem trusts that the existence of separate rules for the rich and poor will resonate with many readers' experience. "Motherhood" ("Social Notes" 28-32), "Great Discovery" ("Social Notes" 61-6), and "Penology" (75-90) all follow the same pattern: the exploitation of vulnerable mothers (figured here as ingratitude), the suppression of socially beneficial scientific discoveries, and the systematic abuse of prisoners –are presented as facts borne out by common sense. In other words, these

poems construct the reader as one who at least subconsciously knows such abuses to be true and ensures that that knowledge is made conscious.

Other verses in “Anthology” and “Social Notes” substantiate these observations and lessons by invoking specific moments in history. The Beauharnois scandal³⁵ inspires both the epitaph-titled³⁶ “Democracy: 1832-1932” (“Anthology” 44-6) and “Our Institutions” (“Anthology” 47-59). In the former, the corporation involved in the scandal is simply named as proof of the corruption immanent in the contemporary relationship between government and commerce; the latter recounts the less than honourable trajectory of the typical senator – whose name, as Sandra Djwa points out, bears a significant resemblance to those of Andrew Haydon and Wilfrid Laurier McDougald, two of the senators at the centre of the Beauharnois affair (*The Politics of the Imagination* 121). The “Epilogue” (119-29) to “Anthology,” an excerpt from H.H. Stevens’³⁷ “My Creed,” connects the poem to another text in a different discursive space – the terrain of memoir and non-fiction – and in doing so momentarily undoes any separation between poetry and politics. The poems that borrow from historical examples are perhaps particularly effective in showing the injustice, inequality, and lack of democracy in 1930s Canada because they offer objectively substantiated evidence to support their barbs. At the same time, the historical poems speak of injustices that are a step removed from the average citizen’s spheres of experience and influence, events captured in newspapers rather than in individuals’ memories. Nevertheless, whether historically inspired or tapping into common knowledge, the poems that form “Anthology” and “Social Notes” offer a plethora of examples of how capitalism violates Canadians’ true values at every turn.

The political engagements conducted through “Anthology” and “Social Notes” do not in any way undermine the gravity or legitimacy of poetry as a discourse. On the contrary, historically rooted verses, and those like “Epilogue” and “Stevens’ Enquiry” (“Social Notes” 1-4) that borrow from external texts, highlight the interconnections between art, politics, and economics. Not only is the poetic political, but the political is poetic. In other words, although Scott’s poems are more than manifestations of and contributions to an ideology, their attempt to perform overtly political acts in and through verse is integral to the modernist³⁸ aesthetic that Scott and his poetic contemporaries endeavoured to define. Scott writes in the preface to *New Provinces* (1936), a collection of Canadian poems that he edited, that the “new poetry” was marked by two achievements: “a development of new techniques and a widening of poetic interest beyond the narrow range of the late Romantic and early Georgian poets” (v). Prosodic innovation proved much easier than choosing modern subjects, Scott argues, but “In confronting the world with the need to restore order out of social chaos, the economic depression has released human energies by giving them a positive direction” (*New Provinces* v).³⁹ Scott’s poetry and social democracy were thus not merely parallel but closely connected responses to modernity, attempts to critique and replace systems of thought and practice that had lost their – or never had – epistemic and ethical efficacy and relevance.⁴⁰ Of course, political satire is hardly a modern phenomenon, but the new aesthetic that Scott begins to form in his fusion of poetry and politics further suggests that modernity – the formation to which Scott’s modernism seeks to respond – has opened up new opportunities for addressing the old problems of capitalism.

The irony that is a hallmark of “Anthology” and “Social Notes” is key to the critical and activist aesthetic that Scott helped articulate. In “Contemporary Poetry,” one of his earliest pronouncements of modernist poetics, A.J.M. Smith⁴¹ identifies “disillusion” (30) as the tie that binds together ultra modernists as diverse as T.S. Eliot, e. e. cummings, Wallace Stevens and Edith Sitwell. Later, in an article titled “Wanted: Canadian Criticism,” Smith goes on to lament the fact that “Irony isn’t understood. Cynicism is felt to be disrespectful, unmanly” (33) by most Canadians. Scott’s satires certainly work to make both traits more familiar if not more popular: the derision is palpable when the persona of “Stevens’ Enquiry” observes the shock felt by business men when they learned⁴² “how low were the wages / They had been paying their employees for years” (“Social Notes” 3-4). Similarly, the tension between differing senses of the word “Credit” in the poem of that title suggests how appropriate irony and cynicism are as responses to modern life: “if the Government spent any more on relief / So that [the unemployed’s] children might be decently clothed and fed / The credit of the country would suffer” (“Social Notes” 44-6). Irony forms in, and therefore highlights, the gap between the espoused values of Canadian society and the actual behaviour of its most powerful citizens and sectors. But the fact that “Anthology” and “Social Notes” are riddled with disillusionment does not necessarily mean that they are effective calls for citizens to close the gap between actual and ideal values.

Scott’s satires reflect many reasons for the public to be angry with the capitalist hegemony, but despite the absurdity of the recounted situations, the poems do not present a clear sense of agency. The workers turned “into the streets”

(“Anthology” 41) in “Sound Finance,” those sick with pneumonia who “must pay \$14 a shot – or die” (“Anthology” 81) in “Modern Medicine” and the unemployed man demonstrating because “his children were sleeping four in a bed / To keep warm” (“Social Notes” 73-74) in “Observation” are all victims who, though their plights demonstrate wrongs that should be righted, are in fact successfully repressed and exploited. In “General Election,” the final poem of “Social Notes,” the speaker both acknowledges and questions the power of democracy, deriding the thoughtless majority who “After discussing all the issues / ... have turned out the Conservatives / And put back the Liberals” (102-104). Throughout both “Anthology” and “Social Notes,” the dominance of the wealthy and privileged over the poor and working class is repeatedly demonstrated. The role of Scott’s poems in reversing the ethical decline under capitalism is to stoke fires already lit within reform-minded readers.

From another perspective, Scott’s poems take for granted that capitalism generates the agency of its own demise, that the rage and frustration of the exploited and disadvantaged masses is enough to drive them to act without having to consider whether they have the right or the ability to do so. The CCF and the LSR are discourses that remind the people of the power they wield perhaps more actively. The former habitually remind readers of their ability to vote; the latter make a similar point in a subtler way in *Social Planning*. Decrying the barbaric state of modern society, the Research Committee wonders “Why is it that in a period of alleged prosperity the majority of our citizens were living on the subsistence level? Why is it that we have allowed slums to grow up in our new cities? Why, even if for the moment we do not question the inevitability of depressions, must we treat our

unemployed like paupers, slaves or criminals?” (15). The emphasis on “we” lays blame upon the citizenry, but it also reminds them of their power in a way that is crucial to social democracy’s success. Canadians have chosen to mistreat the poor and unemployed, to disregard the health of the urban landscape and to distribute material wealth unequally, but they are still the ultimate source of power and decision.

In a similar way, Scott’s “General Election” shows the citizen the folly of his or her own choice. While the citizens within the poem miss the chance, the citizens reading the poem are capable of making a different choice. His satires as a whole demonstrate the same structure: within each poem, citizens are deprived of agency by a well-organized and unfeeling capitalist machine, a situation that serves to heighten the urgency for the reading public not to allow the situation to be realized. Besides taking some steps toward remedying the ethical ills of capitalism, Scott attempts to rectify the cultural failure of capitalism by offering a new, relevant, politically engaged, and socially conscious cultural model in which people can take part. Considering the prosody – plain diction, the absence of rhyme, rhythm and repeating form – and the subject matter put to work in that model, Scott’s modernism offers the public an accessible, compelling, and timely route into both political activism and cultural engagement. Ultimately, “Anthology” and “Social Notes” suggest a confluence between ethics and aesthetics – a kind of beauty in exposing injustice, corruption, and hypocrisy and in speaking truth to power in an attempt to refashion society for the good of all people.

The effectiveness of Scott's modernism as a political motivator is certainly debatable. For their part, in order to motivate citizens to action against capitalism, texts by the LSR and the CCF frequently offer something that Scott's satires do not: an explicit vision of the future that is possible. Scott's poems represent in an abstract way the Canada that could be if fundamental changes were to occur, but they do not offer any specific images of how things might be. In a 1935 article entitled "The Efficiency of Socialism," Scott presents a clear picture of what a social democratic state would have to offer the discerning citizen:

Socialism, through national planning, and the conscious co-ordination of economic activity, offers a hope of equating consuming power and production, of spreading the available work amongst those capable of working, and thus of abolishing for ever the problems of unemployment and overproduction. As this goal is progressively achieved (no socialist pretends that it will be attained at once), prosperity will be established on an increasingly permanent and equitable basis. (*A New Endeavour* 21)

The image of such a well balanced and controlled socio-economic order is perhaps a little utopian, but, more importantly, the passage illustrates an area that continually troubles 1930s social democratic texts. Scott's vision is one of moderation and control, a promise not so much of abundance as of an end to scarcity. That distinction is crucial, for it suggests that Scott's vision is built on a different understanding of the poles of scarcity and abundance than that which anchors the philosophy of acquisition. While in this passage prosperity is the goal of socialism, prosperity is used in a precise sense: not necessarily an abundance of goods and services, but a matter of proportion, a balancing act between production and consumption that can create a general state of satisfaction.

No matter how precise the articulation, of course, prosperity can be understood to mean different things, and social democrats seem happy to use that kind of slippage to their advantage. Scott's vision of the socialist future can easily be read as a promise of personal wealth, which to some extent it is, but there is a sense of limit in the passage that is subtly undermined by the word prosperity. A similar, though less surreptitious, double move is effected in a CCF pamphlet titled *Towards the Dawn: The Federal C.C.F. Platform Explained*.⁴³ Early in the text, the party articulates its mission as

the establishment in Canada of a Co-operative Commonwealth in which our economic life will be so organized as to provide our people with the highest standard of living consistent with our productive capacity.... In other words, the object of the C.C.F. is to build a society in which every man and woman has an opportunity for useful and congenial work, a decent income and a voice in the management of both political and economic affairs. It aims to establish a social order based on Freedom, Peace and Plenty for all. (*Towards the Dawn* 5)

Once again, the question of limits is a source of ambiguity: a decent income and congenial work hardly evoke consumerist frenzy, nor does the qualification that the standard of living to be achieved will be bound by considerations of sustainability. However, the characterization of these goals as "Plenty for all" simultaneously loosens the moderation that the authors have built into the passage. Similarly, the condemnation of "suffering, want and insecurity amidst actual and potential plenty" as "unnecessary and brutally unjust," and the promise that "A new social order of security and plenty for all is possible if the Canadian people will, in harmony with their traditions of pioneering, courage and vision, elect the C.C.F. to power" (*Toward the Dawn* 6), make productive use of an indeterminate and potentially loaded term.

Though there is no explicit appeal to the acquisitive side of citizens, the text nevertheless suggests that part of a socialist government's mandate might indeed be to deliver as many of the things that people desire as possible.

Later, the text makes less veiled promises of material wealth. The authors of *Towards the Dawn* write that an economy controlled by a socialized financial system “would distribute sufficient purchasing power among the people so that they might be able to obtain the maximum amount of goods and services. Thus, as the efficiency of production improved, the standards of living and the social services would improve proportionately” (8). Not only do the authors equate the standard of living with the number of goods and services that can be purchased, they also propose that a lack of disposable income is and should be the primary limit on consumer desire. Playing off of that desire involves some degree of validation; if social democrats did not appreciate an acquisitive ethos, they clearly did value the objects that helped to stimulate such behaviour. Shortly after it laments the ascendance of a culture based on commodities and commercialized services, the Research Committee demonstrates significant pride in the technological progress of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

Our faith in progress is based upon the economic development of a new country and upon the technical and scientific advances of the last century and a half in which all industrialized nations have shared. We need only contemplate the life of the majority of Canadians seventy-five years ago – without railways, without automobiles, without telephones or telegraphs, without electric light or electric power, without the thousand and one conveniences of the modern home, without aeroplanes, without radios, without Greta Garbo and without Gracie Allen – to appreciate how primitive was life before the rise of our modern era. (*Social Planning* 3-4)

There may be a hint of irony regarding the cult of celebrity that was evidently beginning to form by 1935, but *Social Planning* identifies a significant benefit in the commodities and services that had come from technological innovation and asserts that the people consuming those products were better off – or at least happier – for them.

The ambiguity of the social democrats' message may reflect a belief that they were attempting to mobilize an individualistic citizenry that was to some degree hostile to a message that stressed cooperation as (in part) its own reward. Certainly the B.C. Federal Campaign Committee felt a need to appease such desires: in *What is the Answer*, the group writes that “Under Socialism only such property as would be collectively USED would be collectively OWNED. Houses, cars, radios, etc., would still be privately owned” (12). By endorsing property rights over the sorts of goods that act as signs of affluence – perhaps a surprising move for a socialist party, which almost by definition challenges the institution of private property – the B.C. Federal Campaign Committee constructs some forms of consumption as private; consequently, arguments for social ownership can – even must – be recast to make a collectivist principle attractive on individualist grounds. Accordingly, the authors of *Towards the Dawn* argue that “Only social ownership of monopolies and social control and planning of our economic system can give security to the farmer on his land, homes to our people in the city and country and an abundance of personal possessions and services necessary to the welfare of the people” (10). Once again, the passage moves in two directions: the common good may be the ultimate outcome, but promises of personal affluence carry their own allure. To a certain extent, the CCF

assumes that the Canadian public is not interested in a common good that is more than or different from the sum of benefits to individuals. Rather, citizens will measure progress in terms of personal gain.

The LSR's attack on the philosophy of acquisition, Scott's ideal of balance, and the cautious phrasing of many of the CCF's and LSR's passages in praise of abundance all show that, rather than simply suggesting abundance in place of the scarcity inflicted on the majority of Canadians, social democrats tried to offer an ethical guide on how to accept that abundance – which a planned economy would certainly provide – without becoming enthralled by it. As William Irvine, one of the early CCF members elected to parliament, writes in 1933, “The people of this country know that there are goods and services of all sorts in great abundance, and that they are not in a position to secure sufficient quantities of these goods and services for the ordinary requirements of life” (Irvine 8). This is, very simply, an acknowledgement that all citizens need to consume and therefore require a certain share of material wealth to be both healthy and happy. Such is also the point when the B.C. Federal Campaign Committee emphasizes that a broad range of elements, including though not exclusively material things, contribute to the good life: “If it is idealistic to desire that all men, women and children [shall?] enjoy their share of the good things of life, then socialists are idealistic [in?] their desires and aims. Today's situation is such that the average person has to starve himself mentally and culturally in order to escape physical starvation” (*What is the Answer* 9). That mental and cultural starvation are the ultimate targets of the discourse formed by the CCF, the LSR and Scott, and their

promises to address the physical and material needs and wants of Canadians beg to be understood in that context.

Ultimately, it is the materialistic attitude of consumerism – an ethos dominated by a desire for wealth, even to the exclusion of any other values – bred by capitalism that social democrats found so objectionable and tried to combat. The LSR, the CCF and Scott tried to build a sort of anti-consumerist ethos that would entail consuming moderately – not spartanly, but still a far cry from the frenzied, desperate and self-destructive consumerist ethos that the LSR identified with capitalist culture – to go along with the bounty that a social democratic state was bound to create. Theirs was, then, partly a civilizing project: the texts alternately condemn and condone consumerist tendencies depending on whether the citizen maintains a restrained and cultured way of consuming, as well as the proper attitude toward modernity's material benefits – detached, moderate, balanced, and ultimately disinterested. This anti-consumerist ethos would be just one part of the responsible, democratically empowered, morally and culturally sophisticated ethos that social democrats sought to encourage in everyone.

However, the LSR and the CCF betray their own relatively neat association of hyper-materialism with vulgarity and shallowness and unsettle the nuanced reading of consumerism on which their ethical lesson is based. Despite their noble statement regarding the true motivations of human activity and achievement, the LSR and the CCF constantly critique the deplorable conditions in Canada in ways that appeal to a general desire for abundance. In the process, both groups legitimate that desire as natural and ubiquitous in itself, thus undermining their own efforts to reconstruct it as

merely a route to self-fulfillment. Moreover, neither body suggests that the abundance that socialism can produce will have limits; instead, abundance and its synonyms become loaded signifiers that carry many different meanings simultaneously. The LSR and the CCF suggest that the way to consume well, the way to live well, is to enjoy consuming the plenty that negates the Depression, but the ethical (socialist) subject must have higher goals than acquiring. In the end, though, the double movement that the LSR and the CCF repeatedly attempt undermines their ethical transformations. Invocations of plenty, abundance, affluence, and prosperity are not delineated with sufficient care to ensure that the public becomes as wary of developing an acquisitive philosophy as the CCF and the LSR present themselves to be.

The ambivalence that the LSR and the CCF show toward consumerist desire may stem from a tension between two goals latent in the movement: the impulse to shape Canadians into ethically and culturally sound individuals, on the one hand, and respecting the democratic choice of citizens in their current state, on the other. Perhaps the dilemma results from the fact that social democrats were not fighting only for an enlightened ethos, but also addressing the insecurities and (sometimes destructive) desires of the more basic levels of existence – where the threat of the Depression operated and where security and satisfaction began. Or perhaps the quiet and ambiguous legitimation of consumerism is primarily convenient for a party and a movement seeking support and power from a citizenry that they considered to be individualistic, materialistic, and hungry for prosperity. At any rate, the texts of the CCF and the LSR consistently lean on the image and language of material wealth,

and thereby liberate those images and that language to signify in a number of possible ways.

F.R. Scott's poetry, on the other hand, is more adept at fashioning a new ethos. "Anthology" and "Social Notes" affirm economic empowerment, freedom, and justice without reverting to images of plenty, thereby ensuring that those social ideals remain in the forefront. With heavy irony and cynicism, Scott visits the hypocrisy and self-interest of the contemporary Canadian economic and political landscape, offering a withering list of all the things that Canadians are missing. Along with justice and equality, Scott's wry verses gesture toward economic security and prosperity, but do not waver from their focus on dignity, nor offer an ode to consumerist joys. Furthermore, the aesthetic of engagement that the two poems enact suggests the need to see the cultural as political and the political as cultural. The ethic that Scott engenders does not emphasize consuming, though the reversal of scarcity is implied to some degree in his poems; the good citizen is primarily outraged at the injustices that bloat "Anthology" and "Social Notes." Scott's ethos entails seeking justice and equality, dignity and, considering the aesthetic that he formulates, a renewed engagement with culture. In "Xmas Shopping," the one moment of consumption that Scott does render, the moral superiority of another (more traditional) system of values is made clear. In a slightly different way than the LSR's and the CCF's political tracts, Scott's poetry makes strides toward building an ethos that is perhaps non-consumerist, but that is primarily the ethos of an informed and active political, social, and cultural being.

Red and Angry: Dorothy Livesay, the Communist Party, and the End of Capitalism

The transformations sought by the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) during the 1930s were probably the most ambitious and radical of any socialist movement of the time. Like the LSR and the CCF, the CPC prized cultural and scientific progress and, like Alberta Social Credit, the Party wanted to ensure the birth of an era of unprecedented material prosperity. In order to make certain that everyone's needs would be met with a minimum of effort and that social relations would no longer be exploitive and oppressive, the CPC envisioned a classless society formed not through education and reasoned discourse, but through the elimination of all classes other than the proletariat. Productivity is to form the basis of this exclusion: taking direct, almost literally manual, part in the process by which the goods and services necessary for life are created is the basis of good citizenship and social legitimacy, whereas living off of the labour of the majority of society – as the capitalist does – renders one an enemy of society and a threat to the achievement of the community's potential greatness. Accordingly, the CPC shapes a cooperative, responsible, and enlightened ethos that is productivist and therefore anti-consumerist: first and foremost, the Party's ideal citizen contributes his or her skills and effort for the good of the collective, only consumes what he or she needs, and creates personal meaning and value in the process. In contrast, the parasitic capitalist – a consumer gone awry – does nothing for society and serves only him or herself.

Dorothy Livesay's contribution to the communist discourse focuses much more closely on the needs of the present than on the sort of future articulated in the

texts of the CPC. Revolution is her primary referent, and her poems of that era are content to show why revolt is needed and how it must be effected. Livesay's poems envision a strong, canny, well organized revolutionary worker who produces violent uprising and, through it, a new society. Livesay's ethos is similarly productivist in that it is primarily concerned with the transformative work of revolution. However, a key part of that work is a particularly meaningful form of consumption: the violent sacrifice of the capitalist and the (potential) self-sacrifice of the revolutionary. While the Party's productivist ethos serves to relegate consumption to a secondary role as the purely marginal satisfaction of needs in the interest of production, Livesay's revolutionary ethos embraces a limited sphere of consumerism as a legitimate way of being a good, productive communist.

The CPC differs from the LSR, the CCF and Social Credit in at least two significant ways. First, the CPC predated the Depression, so the Party was not formed under the shadow of that particular crisis.⁴⁴ Second, and more obvious, is the Party's advocacy of immediate revolutionary change rather than democratic evolution and reform.⁴⁵ Of course, the radical nature of communism hardly needs an introduction, but the way the Party depicts revolution is worth some attention. The rationale for such a strategy echoes that offered in contemporary Social Credit and social democratic texts. For instance, the author of *What the Communist Party Stands For: Plain Talks on Vital Problems* (1936), writes that "capitalism has reduced mankind to a state of chronic misery, poverty, insecurity, fear, periodic carnage, insane luxury for the few, hunger and degradation for the many – a state that simply cannot continue if mankind is to progress" (98-99). The Party's complaints are virtually identical to

those of other socialist discourses of the era, but the reference to the interruption of human progress takes the place of an appeal to justice or equality. Beyond the general sins of capital, the CPC argues that Canada's owning class has acted particularly damnably during the Depression. According to the CPC's 1935 election platform pamphlet *The Communist Election Program: A Program for a Better Life!*, the early 1930s witnessed some of the worst abuses of the proletariat, and the CPC sees no signs that change is forthcoming:

Now, after six years of crisis and mass suffering, the capitalists and their federal and provincial governments are making new attacks upon the standard of living of the masses of Canadian people. Having somewhat eased their economic position by five years of plundering of the masses, the capitalists and their politicians are now telling the masses that 'better times' are coming back; but instead of 'better times' the position of the masses is being daily worsened, while profits grow larger and larger. (5)

This sacrifice of the majority for the good of the greedy and duplicitous few indicates both the potential power of the workers' numbers and the scope of their struggle: not even their own democratically elected governments can be trusted. In *What the Communist Party Stands For*, the Party points to the direct physical threat that the Depression and capitalist responses to it still pose to the poor and working class:

We cannot blame this plight of millions on 'natural forces.' There is nothing natural in such a situation. It is not natural that men should go hungry while the means to produce food are close at hand. It is not natural that there should be poverty in the midst of plenty. It is not natural that milk should be dumped into rivers while babies are starving. It is not natural that the most ingenious means of production and transportation should be rusting away while those who produce them and can operate them are being wasted away by starvation and disease. All this is most unnatural. It is insane. (9-10)

Again, the author invokes the number of victims affected, reminding the workers that they have power to right such abominable wrongs. The passage also suggests that the

CPC has to overcome a successful capitalist discourse that explained the Depression as the result of extra-human economic forces. In other words, the CPC has to demonstrate to its audience the considerable power it yielded as well as convince it that there is a reason to use that power and a target at which to direct it. Moreover, the Party's depiction of the dormant abundance and ingenuity suggests that all of the tools needed to solve the masses' problems are close at hand, if only the workers would realize the role they must play in causing change.

The CPC's reference to progress and its repeated illustration of the social regression due to contemporary capitalism indicates the prominent place that history holds in the discourse, which in turn points to the role of revolution as the key process that facilitates the development of humanity. In *An Indictment of Capitalism*,⁴⁶ Tim Buck, the general secretary of the Communist Party from 1929 to 1962 (Penner, *Canadian Communism* 122; 251), offers an overview of the methodology of scientific socialism and how revolution and history relate to the problems of the working class:

[Revolution] has developed since the earliest days of production ... as the result of the accumulation of strength of one class and the resistance of the old ruling class to this accumulating strength, until at a certain period the ruling class, being unable to stop the rise of the progressive class by any other means, is driven to try to stop it by violence and armed force.

Revolution comes because history proceeds forward from one epoch to another and because within the womb of every system and every form of society there is contained the germ of the next form, and this germ develops within the existing form of society up to the point where it becomes incompatible with existing property relationships, and has to break the shell that limits its development. That is what causes the revolutionary crisis which is spoken of in the program of the Communist International. That is what causes the break-down of government. That is what causes chaos. And unless the progressive class, the class which is striving to assert itself, – in this period our class, is able to establish its own form of government, then society tends to relapse into anarchy. (43-44)

For the CPC, history represents the ever-rising path toward the fulfillment of humanity's potential, and revolutions are the points of crisis at which giant leaps forward are made. However, revolution is rendered as inevitable, but not necessarily successful: the working class must choose between meaningful, productive upheaval and permanent chaos, repression and exploitation at the hands of a continuing capitalist hegemony. In either case, conflict cannot be avoided. Buck's organic imagery of the seedling outgrowing its shell is an oddly gentle, almost clinical summary of the collapse of government and societal chaos. Balancing the confidence contained in that metaphor with the caution immanent in the threat of anarchy is key to the CPC's construction of revolution: conflict is assumed, but victory is not. The CPC's duty is to convince the workers not only that "There can be no building of Socialism until the working class has taken over state power, has abolished the capitalist state... and has established a workers' state" (*An Indictment* 61), but also that, without socialism, the working class is doomed to stasis, and the improvement of people generally will be set back significantly.

Dorothy Livesay approaches revolution from a rather different tack than the CPC in her communist-oriented poetry. Livesay's activism on behalf of the CPC during the 1930s is well known thanks to her political autobiography *Right Hand Left Hand*, in which she details her introduction to communist ideas and increasing involvement in Party activities.⁴⁷ After learning about communism from an Economics professor and his student coterie while an undergraduate at the University of Toronto (*Right Hand* 31), Livesay witnessed the rise of fascism and the violent repression of workers while writing a thesis on symbolist poetry at the Sorbonne in

1931-32 (36). By 1932, she writes, her “political convictions became the dominating obsession of [her] life” (*Right Hand* 48). She turned to social work as a profession and, while training and working in Montreal, New Jersey and Toronto over the next few years (*Right Hand* 69ff.), Livesay continued as a passionate activist with the unemployed and poor on behalf of the communist movement.

Poetry was not the only genre in which Livesay helped build a discourse of communism. As Dean Irvine writes, Livesay “began in November 1932 to contribute reviews, agitation-propaganda (‘agitprop’) plays, and proletarian verse to *Masses*, the magazine published and edited by members of the PAC [Progressive Arts Club] from April 1932 to April 1934” (186).⁴⁸ She later published fiction and literary criticism as well as poetry, drama and reviews in publications such as *New Frontier* and *The Canadian Forum*. Although a consideration of all of her writing published during the 1930s related to her political convictions would be useful, I have chosen to focus on poetic texts written and published while Livesay was an active Party member.⁴⁹

Livesay’s visions of revolution are much more immediate and personal than the CPC’s. “A Girl Sees It!” (1933),⁵⁰ one of Livesay’s earliest published works with a communist bent, offers a provocative image of uprising that starkly contrasts with the sleepy, timid existence of the employing class: “Snow will be shaken off, / Stripped from the trees by struggling fists and arms – / Snow will be trampled in the streets ... / Snow will be bloody in the alley-ways” (“A Girl” 121-124). Early in the poem, snow and whiteness are established as symbols of the supposedly pure and gentle suburban bourgeoisie in general (“A Girl” 3) and more specifically of the false purity and beauty of the class as represented by the son of the employers and the

narrator's erstwhile lover (26). The rendering here is strong and defiant, almost jubilant at the possibility of violently confronting the ruling class and violating the purity of the snow with boot marks and blood stains. The path to revolution is not quite that simple, though: the voice of the poem, Annie, recognizes that "men who will not see the only way, / Then men who choose religion or some crank / Philosophy wherein to lose themselves – / These must be battled with before we'll find / The going easy, and the world's new army stretched / From mine to farm, on to the factories" ("A Girl" 111-116). "Yet," she proclaims, "it will come!" ("A Girl" 117), and provides images of revolt that are immediate, familiar and ultimately relatively easy to achieve: the workers have merely to assemble in power and literally crash through the soft and yielding snow. Similarly, in "Broadcast From Berlin" (1933), the speaker observes with great confidence, "Our people are in line: across the world it holds, / It surges forward. It is very storm, / A storm of labor, tearing up old roots, / Bring to the earth fresh nourishment" (30-33). In these earlier poems, the success of the workers' revolution is assured: Livesay's working class is already on the verge of rising up, and their fateful day is not far away.

Like "A Girl Sees It!" and "Broadcast From Berlin," "Spain" (1937) celebrates the communists' fight for a "grim, new heaven" (12). The depiction of the Spanish Civil War is much more cognizant of the sacrifices that any victory will exact, however:

It is for hills uncoiling and the green thrust
Of spring, that they lie choked with battle dust.

You who hold beauty at your finger tips
Hold it, because the splintering gunshot rips
Between your comrades' eyes: hold it, across

Their bodies' barricade of blood and loss. ("Spain" 3-8)

Though not strictly an account of revolution,⁵¹ the poem offers a less muscular picture of violent conflict and perhaps less naïve notions of blood and loss. In depicting battle that is already underway, the poem does not have to serve as a rallying cry to potential combatants. The poem's invocation of beauty, both an injunction to hold such a prize close and an explanation of how it can be held close at all, provides a stark contrast to the horrific reality of the battlefield. The tone is far less triumphant than that of "A Girl Sees It!," perhaps because the republicans and the communist International Brigade were suffering significant defeats at the time of publication. However, the facile bloodlust of "A Girl Sees It!" is replaced by a more complex response to the use of force in the defence of socialist ideals: the speaker is grateful, but solemn and hardened by the cruelties of battle. But while these three poems present very different understandings of the arc of the workers' struggle, they all support revolution as an absolutely necessary process and all represent opportunities to understand revolution intimately, even experience it vicariously. Livesay's visions of battle and bloodshed in "A Girl Sees It!," "Broadcast From Berlin" and "Spain" translate the language of revolution, antagonism and conflict into sights and sounds that suggest themselves to be immediate and, above all, real.

Their dedication to the revolutionary path meant that during the early part of the Depression, Livesay and the CPC sought to denounce the peaceful course to socialism proposed by social democrats. Trying to achieve socialism⁵² without outright conflict was more than pointless. The Party's and Livesay's critiques of social democracy followed from the "class against class" policy that Stalin introduced

to the Communist International⁵³ in 1928 (Penner, *Canadian Communists* 8). The policy was based on the belief that social democratic ideology diverted the proletariat from the true revolutionary path to socialism with a program doomed to failure.⁵⁴ Bodies like the LSR and the CCF thereby served to support the capitalist hegemony; in the words of Tim Buck in his *Thirty Years 1922-1952: The Story of the Communist Movement in Canada*, the establishment of the CCF in 1933 constituted “a revival of the opportunistic petty-bourgeois social reformism that had marked labor parliamentarism up to the end of the First World War” (111). The CPC fervently embraced Stalin’s directive, frequently calling the CCF “social-fascists”⁵⁵ and dedicating a book-length treatise called *Socialism and the C.C.F.* (1934) to denouncing the Party and its beliefs and tactics.

Socialism and the C.C.F. counters the CCF’s faith in democracy not by rejecting democracy, but by redefining it. Writing under the pseudonym G. Pierce (Penner, *Canadian Left* 149), Stewart Smith⁵⁶ claims that “To attain democracy for itself, i.e., for the majority, the working class in alliance with the toiling farmers must do away with the state representing democracy for the capitalist class, i.e., for the minority. He, who genuinely stands for democracy for the working class and the toiling farmers, i.e., the proletarian dictatorship, must stand for the overthrow of capitalist democracy, i.e., the capitalist dictatorship” (*Socialism and the C.C.F.* 124). Democracy cannot be a means to achieving equality between the classes as equality can only exist among those who wield political power. Hence, democracy is a possession, even a weapon, unique to one class and a manifestation of control rather than a diffusion of power.

Livesay's attack in "Pink Ballad," her first published poem to display an overtly communist stance, focuses on the impracticality of social democracy rather than the latter's duplicity and renders the CCF as a group of naïve buffoons rather than dangerous reactionaries. The speaker of the ballad dubs the CCF's promises "Sunshine and socialist guile" ("Pink Ballad" 4) and pokes fun at J. S. Woodsworth's "nice goatee" (6) and "Agnes" (MacPhail, a CCF MP at the time) for having never read Marx (10). The root of the ballad's hostility is the CCF's goal to form "By 'reason,' not by force / ... a little commonwealth" (14-15). The notion that capitalists can be convinced to surrender their power and privilege is ridiculous; there will never be, the speaker implies, a time "When Capital and Labor / Will share the self-same bed" ("Pink Ballad" 19-20). In its reference to guile, "Pink Ballad" does hint that the CCF's forecast of a future when "we'll all be equal: / Free leisure, work, repose / While Woodsworth is our premier / And Aggie hugs her foes!" (21-24) is something more sinister than naivety, but the poem's primary emphasis is on how absurd it is to challenge a social formation by trying to embrace rather than eliminate your enemies.

Ironically, the stilted language and form of "Pink Ballad" threaten to undermine the poem's critique and render the piece a simplistic and dogmatic piece of propaganda. The caricatures of Woodsworth and MacPhail and the repeated chorus distract from the poem's more legitimate concerns about the practicality and validity of the assumptions behind and tactics of social democracy. While perhaps less than a masterpiece, "Pink Ballad" certainly conveys communists' fundamental assumption that capitalists and workers are absolute enemies. The CPC's conviction that revolution is the only way to progress is bound up with the firm and clear distinction

that the Party sees between the interests of each class within society. There is no common value or principle, be it justice, equality or democracy, that can bridge the fundamental contradictions between the working class and the capitalist class. Whether merely a distraction from or an insidious sabotage of communism, social democracy cannot truly serve the working class because it ultimately seeks to reconcile and then serve the interests of all classes.

Early in *What the Communist Party Stands For*, the author exposes justice as the tool of the capitalist order and opposes it to interest – a concept that is more useful for the subjugated masses. Speaking to the disempowered poor about the system which forces them to continually serve the wealthy classes, the pamphleteer asks: “Why is it that robbing you of your only source of life is justice and protesting against this bloody justice is injustice? Something is wrong here.... Apparently all these notions about law and order, about justice and injustice, about crime and punishment, are made in the interests, not of you and the like of you, but in the interests of those who use them against you” (*What the Communist Party* 10). Justice, law, or any other institution meant to embrace all people of all classes effaces the fundamental and constant relations of exploitation and domination created by capitalism. Any politics that works from such notions without critically reconstructing them must be counter-revolutionary; to gain power and thereby democracy, the proletariat (including the middle and professional classes)⁵⁷ must reject the utopian rationalism of the LSR and CCF and fight to impose its interests on society as a whole.

The CPC’s defence of interests over justice and democracy is ultimately shaped by the Party’s conception of what constitutes a class. In explaining the

emergence of a working class (that is, communist) party, Buck explains the link between class identity and class interests: “The development of capitalist industry has brought into being a class of industrial wage workers which is a product of capitalist industry, ... which depends upon that industry... and without which this industry cannot be maintained. And, being brought into existence in a class it becomes a class by itself. It has separate interests, separate problems, separate struggles” (*An Indictment* 53). In turn, this definition of class follows from the communists’ conception of history: Buck writes earlier in *An Indictment of Capitalism* that “the fundamental belief of the Communist is ... that all history since the history of primitive society has been a history of class struggle. In all history the interests of one section of the community have conflicted with the interests of another section of the community, and the basic conflict has always been: The interests of those that have, versus the interests of those that have not” (42-43).

The interests of the workers provide a suitable basis for social transformation in part because, as the texts I have been considering here continually point out, the working class constitutes the majority of society. Beyond sheer numbers, however, the labouring classes are special because, as society’s primary producers, they are key to the proper functioning of society. *What the Communist Party Stands For* begins with a direct address to the worker, a reminder of how integral he or she is to the process of production:

You and the like of you have created all the machinery, all the raw material and all the fuel which is necessary to run an industry. You and the like of you are the live power that puts motion into the dead matter of every industrial undertaking. It is your blood, your sweat, your muscle and brain that is sunk into every piece of goods produced.

You have much at stake in this establishment – your whole life. If labor means anything, this is yours, more than the owner's. It is part of your very self. (5)

The integration of labourer and labour is such that the worker is physically imbued into her or his output. The basis of the workers' claim to not only the product of their efforts but to control of the productive process itself follows: the working class literally creates the goods and services that allow society to survive and thrive. The proletarians are thus directly responsible for the state of society: the needs and the good of all rest directly on their shoulders.

The idea that workers pour their blood, sweat, skills and ingenuity into the very things they create is further lionized by the CPC's renderings of the owning class. The unnamed authors of *What the Communist Party Stands For* single out the capitalists as particularly useless to society:

Engineers, technicians, draftsmen, machinists, chemists, and all kinds of experts are managing the big industrial giants of today, and these are hired people, while the board of directors and the other "big shots" of the corporation only decide upon policies which reduce themselves mainly to manipulating stocks. These people never produce. They could be removed without any loss to actual operations....

As to bankers and brokers, real estate operators and promoters – they do not produce anything essential to human life either, although they have the lion's share of control over production. As a matter of fact, they produce nothing. They transfer "paper" from hand to hand. That paper – call it checks or deeds or drafts or shares – is a claim to the fruits of somebody else's labor. (7-8)

These condemnations are perhaps the greatest possible that a communist can offer: the uselessness of capitalists is enough to constitute a loss to society in itself, but even worse, capitalists also transform the labour of others into their own benefit. The capitalist is thus doubly burdensome on society and is essentially an anti-producer.

In fact, a key component of the capitalist's ethos is the tendency to consume without producing anything of social utility in return. In *An Indictment of Capitalism*, Buck argues that imperialism, which the Party considered to be the last stage of capitalism, has created significant industrial and economic development, specialized production and prepared humanity materially for socialism, but "has at the same time developed to a tremendous extent that section of society which lives not by participating in production, not by manual labour in a factory, nor by mental labour in the office, but exclusively by clipping coupons" (*An Indictment* 54). Buck further impugns this "parasitical 'rentier' class" (*An Indictment* 55) in a pamphlet titled *What We Propose*: "The capitalists as such play no part in the production of wealth in Canada. Their only role today (when they do anything at all beside spending their unearned income) is that of jealous, grasping watchdogs of the rate of profit and the splendid privileges that their class enjoys" (70). Implicit in Buck's attacks is a sense that direct contributions to the creation of goods and services – measurable as labour – is the source of entitlement to the benefits of society. In other words, in the communist discourse, primary production is the basis of economic, political and ultimately social legitimacy.

If the parasitic capitalist is the enemy of the worker, the former also acts as a cautionary figure for the latter: the unproductive and exploitive life of consumption led by the big shots of industry is the precise opposite of the ethical model that the CPC tries to cultivate for the workers in these texts. In fact, the CPC's exhortations to class consciousness and revolution, along with its derogations of the capitalist class, frequently imply the ethical superiority of the working class' interests. Furthermore,

Buck's reference to the parasite evokes rot and decay, as well as a form of undeserved and even injurious consumption. The image suggests both that being a consumer who does not at all produce for the good of society is wrong and that consumption of more than a certain amount of resources is unacceptable. According to *An Indictment of Capitalism*, communists "visualize a society where all will share equally to the best of their ability and to the limit of their capacity in the production of the necessities of life, and all will share to the limit of their needs in the use of the necessities of life" (60). Not only will work and necessities be easy to secure, but all will possess a willingness to work⁵⁸ and a moderate desire for, perhaps even an indifference to, consuming. Part of proper social conduct, then, is being responsible for and responsive to the good of all, whether creating or consuming.

Buck's idea that consumption will be bound by needs indicates that consuming is a survival mechanism, a relatively insignificant and uncomplicated activity that, as long as it is moderate, has no real ramifications on the rest of society. In the same vein, Steven Smith argues that the basic flaw of reformist responses to the Depression is "that they are founded upon the theory that the crisis of capitalism is a crisis of 'distribution,' and that the problems of the distribution of commodities can be 'solved' without solving the problem of capitalist production" (*Socialism and the C.C.F.* 50). Production is preeminent, and matters of consumption flow from relations of production: "distribution is not independent of but is part of production" (*Socialism and the C.C.F.* 51). Moreover, the author of *What the Communist Party Stands For* describes capitalism as "a system where the primary purpose of labor – to satisfy the basic needs of humanity – is completely lost sight of in the scramble for bigger

fortunes, for fatter stock exchange slices and more ruthless ‘cleaning out’ of the small fellow” (19-20). Buck takes a somewhat surprising turn, then, in *The People vs. Monopoly*, the text of a speech he gave to the Eighth Convention of the CPC in October 1937 (*Canadian Communists* 150). He laments the fact that, after seven years of depression, profits have climbed past their 1929 levels, yet “wages in general are still close to the low levels to which they were cut during the crisis.... The burden of debt and taxation grows heavier while the income of the people stagnates. Prices move steadily upward thus curtailing the purchasing power of the people” (*The People vs. Monopoly* 7). Later in the text, he argues that “The issue of the day is ... higher purchasing power for the people” (*The People vs. Monopoly* 21) and identifies the interest and dividend income of the wealthy as an “unearned increment received by the favored few” (24). Buck’s references to purchasing power and the unearned increment, tropes central to the Social Credit message, may be nothing more than one body borrowing another, more popular, party’s rhetoric. However, those tropes evoke something of the Social Credit Party’s concern for protecting and encouraging the consumer and suggest an interest in the masses’ ability to consume that does not surface in most other CPC texts. The use of Social Credit rhetoric perhaps also suggests an appeal to a slightly different constituency: those (particularly rural) working poor who are more interested in obtaining a few more of the things they need and want than in completely transforming the social order.

Buck reiterates this construction of the public in *The West and the Federal Election*, the text of a speech given by Buck in Winnipeg in 1939. Buck states that “under present conditions, without requiring any fundamental change in the private

property system (for the majority of Canadians do not yet wish such a change and until they do it will not come) there can and must be a redistribution of the national income to raise the standard of living of the farmers and the workers” (*The West and the Federal Election* 11-12). A Communist Party that is amenable to the private property system is unthinkable, but the CPC acquiesces to the will of the masses in a way rarely permitted by the Party’s perpetually didactic tone. It is quite possible, even likely, that Buck was not being entirely forthright with his western Canadian audience, but the construction of the masses as strongly tied to (and perhaps subjugated by) private property suggests that the communist discourse strayed, albeit infrequently and very briefly, toward accepting the consumerist wants of the public as irrepressible.

Despite these few reversals, production consistently forms the centre of the CPC’s discourse. While the exploitation that riddles labour under capitalism is often underlined in the CPC’s texts, there is always a sense that labour is inherently dignified. It is therefore curious that Livesay’s poetry of the 1930s does not present the same picture of work as does the CPC. While the proletariat doubtlessly deserves esteem, as is evident in Livesay’s advocacy for revolution and in the very focus of her poetic gaze upon the labourer, Livesay’s Depression-era poems picture work as drudgery rather than illustrating creative and fulfilling production. Annie, the narrator and protagonist of “A Girl Sees It!,” chastises herself for being exploited by a sleepy bourgeois family and for being happy about it: “Proud! To be living in a house like that, and paid / For doing it, my body and my mind / For them, my own life bought and sold for them” (“A Girl” 36-39). Her initial ignorance, the result of her education

within the capitalist system, even renders her blind to her own enslavement. Once she has been removed from the bosses' house, rather than returning to the "unreal town, the paper roofs" ("A Girl" 73) of the wealthy neighbourhoods, she "worked in a store for a dollar a day, and lived / In an upper room down near the waterfront" (74-75). Despite the modesty of her means, Annie is still self-sufficient, but her contribution to society is somewhat more remote than that of the factory worker who garners much of the CPC's attention. If Annie's situation is less than praiseworthy, she is surrounded by men who are worse off, "tramping, / Looking for work" (76-77) and being harassed by authorities – "Nothing else ... to do / But slump and starve and then be hurried off / To jail again – the same charge, 'vagrancy'" ("A Girl" 89-91). Capitalism has thrown most proletarians out of work and left little meaningful or enjoyable work to be fought over by the lucky few.

Livesay's poem "Day and Night" considers the sort of directly creative labour with which the CPC seems to be most concerned, but the poem also resists constructing a laudatory image of that work. First published in the inaugural issue of *Canadian Poetry Magazine* in January 1936, "Day and Night" is one of Livesay's first documentary poems. The poem illustrates not only an absence of dignity within modern mechanized labour, but also a potentially physically, mentally and spiritually crushing type of work. Rhythm serves as both structural element and subject matter in "Day and Night;" after a brief description in blank verse iambs of a "red and angry" dawn (1) heralded by steam blasts and screaming whistles, the poem shifts into a heavy, jerking metre that echoes the workers' futile "dance in time to the machines. / One step forward / Two steps back" (8-10). Work is thus reduced to movement driven

ever faster by the “crack” (“Day and Night” 18) of the machines. Self-direction, meaning and humanity are evacuated from industrial labour in the poem’s vision, and the workers (all of whom are men⁵⁹) are reduced to unthinking components of the machinery itself, their only task being to “Move into sockets, every one a bolt” (“Day and Night” 6). Their harried pace is hardly mitigated by “the sound of Negro spirituals” and Cole Porter’s “Night and Day” – music Livesay cites in *The Documentaries* as constituents of the poem’s fabric (17). Here, labour is only oppressive, in no way an undertaking that is respectable or rewarding.

The formation of labour in contemporary society into empty, painful and potentially humiliating work is an important motif in “Day and Night,” but the real focus of the poems is revolution – the beginning of transformation. Through Annie, readers are taught “the hard fact / That one lone rebel does no good at all” (“A Girl” 98-99). For any worthwhile resistance to occur, ““You’ve got to know what you’re fighting against, and then / You’ve got to show others the way. Together you’ll swing / Out onto the road. That’s solidarity”” (“A Girl” 100-102). Few of Livesay’s other communist poems explain precisely how to conduct a successful revolution: in “Broadcast From Berlin” (30-37) and “Canada to the Soviet Union” (32-39), the speakers merely assert how near a successful uprising is.

Primarily, Livesay’s communist poems and especially “Day and Night” offer a politics of hate in response to the oppressive reality of capitalism. The scorching of the workers’ skin (“Day and Night” 73) and the burning of Daniel’s companions in Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace (85)⁶⁰ in “Day and Night” reveal that the destructive use of the workers literally feeds the autocratic machine and keeps it going. This

consumption of the workers ultimately serves their liberationist impulses, though. The mechanized factory is a storm that never quiets: “We bear the burden home to bed, / The furnace glows within our hearts: / Our bodies hammered through the night / Are welded into bitter bread” (“Day and Night” 98-101), yet that bitterness also provides the only way to interrupt the factory’s rhythm.⁶¹ A worker must use the few fleeting moments of silence allotted to him to “Add up hate, / And let it mount” (“Day and Night” 120-121), to “Add up hunger, / Labour’s ache; / ...[and then] Take your earnings: / Bread, not stones!” 126-137). In forcing the workers to replicate the machine’s efficiency, mass production is radicalizing the workers and setting the stage for revolution. Livesay’s poems seek to produce revolution, or more accurately, to produce a revolutionary ethos that will be emulated by proletarians. The verses do not look to the world that will be created after revolution, and therefore offer the public limitless possibility. Bloodied snow in the streets and workers pouring down a hill are liminal points, thresholds between old and new realities, but Livesay does not step beyond these points to render what the transformed society will look like.

Ironically, “Day and Night” also slightly undermines the efficacy of revolution. The success of a resistance to the mechanized and relentlessly crushing rhythm of industrial life is not really assured: though “The wheel must limp / Till it hangs still” (“Day and Night” 154-155), “crumpled men” will “Pour down the hill” (156-157) when it does. Suggesting, as does James Doyle in *Progressive Heritage*, that the ending of “Day and Night” “could signify either the complete perversion of human thought and experience or the workers’ ultimate revolutionary overthrow of the old order” (150) is something of an overstatement: the text’s penultimate voice

asserts that “Though I am overalled and silent / Boss, I’m far from dead” (143-144). Nevertheless, “Day and Night” is not as single-mindedly optimistic as “A Girl Sees It!,” “Broadcast From Berlin” or “Canada to the Soviet Union” about the outcome of an uprising, and Livesay’s meditations on the Spanish Civil War develop this ambivalent commentary on revolution. In works like “Doom Elegy” (1936) and “Spain,” the gory immediacy of the very moment of battle mingles pride and anger with gravity and a sense of loss. Together, these emotions mark the limit to a poem’s comprehension. Stepping beyond that moment is not appropriate because it is the moment of violence, the moment of sacrifice, the moment of victory or defeat, that is all important. Thus, Livesay’s poems do not explore the future that revolution will begin: whether trying to steel the workers for a fight or to convey the sadness and loss that will inevitably come, the moment of transformation – of revolution – is the crucial moment for being human.

In contrast to Livesay’s works, many CPC texts of the Depression venture to provide visions of the world after revolution has taken place. In *What the Communist Party Stands For*, the author both laments the enforced scarcity that has grown in a prosperous society and outlines what plenty might yet resemble:

The Communists say this huge waste of human energy and human resources, this colossal amount of human suffering, this humiliation of starving in the midst of plenty, this living on the dumping grounds of big cities at a time when humanity knows already how to build Empire State towers, this debacle which is worse than war and pestilence, can be avoided. Life can be made livable. Life can be made a continuous and uninterrupted stream of work, satisfaction of the basic human needs of everybody, and cultural growth. (23)

The Party’s vision precisely complements the worker’s ethos that I began to sketch above. Uninterrupted employment, access to basic necessities and cultural progress

are both laudable and perhaps rather Spartan goals, but they evoke a life dedicated to creative activity, to doing and building rather than passively taking things in. Here, labour is indeed the key component of the ideal life: satisfying basic human needs and generating ever advanced cultural artifacts require productive effort and are socially relevant reasons to labour, and since they are both part of good living, they are important components of the reproduction of labour.

Later in the pamphlet, the Party is more effusive about the communist future that can be had and suggests that the achievements of a communist society will not stop with the satisfaction of basic needs. Workers in a communist state must strive to ensure that

nobody will go hungry or without a roof over his head. But this is not sufficient. Make it your purpose to increase production. Employ the best services of scientists to improve your machinery and your methods of work. Encourage scientific research to advance science for the purpose of improving life. Extend this improvement not only to industry and agriculture but to all realms of life. The output of industry is sure to increase. Distribute the benefits of the increased production again among the population without exception, always heightening the technique of production to enrich the economic and cultural life of all members of society and to ease their labor. Continue this process indefinitely. When you do so there will be no crises, no unemployment, no exploitation, no wars, no fear of the future. (*What the Communist Party* 31-32)

The party's buoyancy may border on delirium, but the promises in this passage give a clearer indication of the ideal proletarian at the centre of the CPC's discourse. While working to serve oneself and society is important, so too are access to leisure and an appreciation for culture. The repetition of cultural growth as a significant outcome of revolution – a repetition that occurs throughout the Party's texts – underlines the importance of education and refinement to the worker's ethos. Of course, that

repetition also suggests that, under capitalism, the worker is culturally and perhaps intellectually stunted and backward; presumably, enlightenment and a taste for fine things will open a worker's mind and allow her or him to more easily grasp and internalize the behaviours demanded by a fully functioning and integrated communist society. In fact, the final vision of a communist society in this passage – a world without depression, exploitation, conflict or insecurity – reveals a confluence between self-interest and altruism in the Party's discourse. As in the Social Credit Party's version of a consumerist ethos, the CPC expects that being self-interested means being in perfect solidarity with the communal (that is, class) self. The CPC's worker is thus a happy part of the machine dedicated to the production and enjoyment of a good life for all.

The Party did not have to look to the future to illuminate the communist society it proposed. CPC texts of the Depression frequently hold up the Soviet Union as the incarnation of the Party's promised world.⁶² In *What We Propose*, a text based on a 1936 report by the CPC's Political Committee, Buck explains that

The Soviet Union, which today is astounding the world by the speed of its socialist development by the contrast between the ever-upward surge of socialist economy and the continuing insoluble crisis of capitalism, needs peace for socialist construction. Needs peace to complete the carrying through of the vast plans for the betterment of all the people. Needs peace for raising the material and cultural standards. Needs peace to complete the transformation of the land of Czarist oppression and semi-feudal poverty to the land of happy abundance. (65)

Predictably, the economic improvements of the USSR take centre stage, but the text also emphasizes that the people themselves have been made better by socialism. Armed with a thriving, modernized economy and greater cultural development, the

Soviet people are happy, secure, on their way to building a better socialist society, and provide an ethical blueprint for the working class around the world.

To a great extent, the ethical transformation allegedly achieved in the USSR means a change in the ways in which individuals value and interact with one another. *We Propose: Resolutions Adopted at the Eighth Dominion Convention of the Communist Party of Canada* (1937), praises the Soviet Union for achieving what the author identifies as the eternal goal of socially concerned thinkers: “Throughout the ages, social thinkers, philosophers, leaders of the people’s movements, dreamed of a society that would inscribe on its banners and realize in life ‘the Brotherhood of Man,’ a state of affairs where men would cease to exploit men, where instead of men fighting men, they would unite their forces to conquer and regulate Mother Nature to serve the interests of all people” (44). Respect and equality mark personal interactions and, most importantly, clear the way for even greater and more ingenious ways to exploit natural resources and create the things that Soviet society needs.

Ultimately, the Soviet Constitution sums up the traits and actions central to the life that the Party envisions for the proletariat in a classless society. The constitution “guarantees by law to every citizen three inalienable rights: The right to work ,the (sic) right to free education, the right to leisure” (*We Propose* 46). Productivity, enlightenment and leisure are fundamental components of good and proper living: their status as rights implies a certain demand for access to these activities, and, as the texts by the CPC and Livesay repeatedly demonstrate, work, knowledge and rest help the individual help society. In other words, good, personally satisfying living and proper, ethical, socially responsible living are in perfect

alignment in a communist society. The right to be productive also implies the right to work toward ends that fit with one's personality: "Each section of the population, workers in industry, collective peasants on the farm, intellectuals, scientists, artists all carry through their function in their own sphere of endeavor, for the common good of the people as a whole" (*We Propose* 49). The right to work is indeed a freedom of self-expression that can, it seems, play an important role in self-fulfillment. Considering the range of occupations that the Party identifies, the needs of society must be broad and multifaceted.

Such ethical transformations are both prerequisite to and consequences of the revolutionary changes that the CPC plans in its Depression-era texts. Thanks to "a rising standard of living with a corresponding development of democracy" in the USSR, "a new man is in the making, a joyous and happy man, physically fit, ideologically prepared to give his best for his fellow man, to create a society that will emerge from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom" (*We Propose* 46). The CPC's new man,⁶³ the builder of a kingdom of freedom, constitutes the Party's clearest acknowledgement that it sought to recreate the ethic of the worker as much as to refashion the world in which the worker lives, moves and labours. While the Party's discourse of interests travels some distance toward making the call for revolution immediately attractive, the texts of the CPC often assume that the working class has already internalized parts of the Party's new ethos. The workers are thus not only interested in tearing down capitalism for their own individual benefit; they already exhibit some of the social consciousness and ethical vision of the new Soviet man.

The preeminence of productivity in the CPC's ethos and in its visions of a communist society means that the Party's ethical orientation is essentially antithetical to consumerism. That is not to say that the ideal worker is only a worker: leisure, cultural growth and intellectual refinement certainly hold important positions in the CPC's ethos. However, it is work that is both personally satisfying and the quantifiable contribution of the individual to society, the medium for community formation and the ennobling duty and privilege of the good citizen. The CPC introduces need as the ethical limit of consumption, and that ethos is anti-consumerist because such a limit means that consumption cannot be an important mode of signification or relation. Further, the Party's references to need as the limit proper to consumption implies that consumption is profoundly non-productive. That in turn is because the CPC's entire discourse assumes production is more or less directly creative, the sort of work that produces a tangible thing, be it a physical good, a process, a service, that directly benefits humanity. Labour need not be physical or manual to be valid, but the model of industrial, manual labour does seem to form the basis for the Party's definition or implicit measure of work. Furthermore, the Party defines legitimate membership in society on the basis of that kind of productivity. Consumption, while integral to the reproduction of labour, seems to entail the removal and destruction of socially useful things for the individual's benefit. While such use is permissible to a point, it must be limited on the basis of need to be kept under control. In other words, consumption threatens to undermine the common good because it is a recognition of the needs and potentially the desires of the individual.

Thus, the worker's primary ethical duty is to keep the consuming self in check for the sake of the collective other.

Livesay's revolutionary ethos is equally geared toward creative productivity, but her model grasps consumption as something other than a threat to that productivity – at least in certain circumstances. Her productivist, revolutionary ethos has room for and even relies on a certain type of meaningful, productive consumption. If revolution is the ultimate goal promoted in her poems, capitalists are the fodder required for achieving that goal. Annie's image of trampled, bloodied snow and the destruction and silencing of the ever-grinding wheel of industry in "Day and Night" render the destruction of capitalists and their structures of oppression as essential to transformation. Moreover, the dead and mangled bodies of comrades fighting for Spain's freedom represent the greatest of the sacrifices that must be made as part of the ritual of revolution. The radical ethos that Livesay articulates thus contains a consumerist streak: the violent destruction of capitalists is indeed key to the creative moment of revolution, and the self-sacrifice required of communists invents them as both agents and objects of consumption. Such acts of consumption – the only acts, it should be noted, imbued with such significance in Livesay's literary discourse – are reminiscent of Georges Bataille's commentary on the luxury of death (34), a form of glorious expenditure (rather than catastrophic, as might seem to be the case) that permits, or more accurately is on a larger scale synonymous with, growth. Livesay's revolutionary ethos requires each worker to use up and destroy both capitalists and even themselves and their comrades in the process of building a new communist world. At the same time, however, consumption in general does not find a

place in her ethical vision. Livesay's revolutionary ethos legitimates a very specific, destructive and violent pair of acts of consumption. If the productivist ethos formulated by the CPC excludes making meaning through consumption as a legitimate approach to living in society, Livesay's revolutionary ethos demands that each worker be a proper revolutionary and consumer and, through these precisely balanced techniques, allows each worker to open new possibilities for communal and self-creation.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have outlined various points of convergence between socialism and consumerism that defy the assertions of many critics of both consumerism and capitalism. In the case of the Social Credit Party of Alberta, a quasi-socialist, populist party built on an opposition to scarcity, penury and depression embraced the economic possibilities of mobilizing consumerist desire. Indeed, Social Credit assumed that consumption is an essential human activity and that a plethora of consumer items are essential to societal happiness. However, the Social Credit Party ultimately abandoned its notion of the consumer as society's saviour and undid the ethical work that it had begun. In their texts, the CCF and the LSR activate consumerist desire in a way very similar to that of Social Credit, but their denunciation of an acquisitive ethos suggests a severe antagonism within the discourse. Ultimately, I read that tension to be between the elitist, Enlightenment desire to permit the full realization of each person's potential, on the one hand, and, on the other, the principle of democracy that the groups translate from a method of political organization into a model that validates personal choice in other spheres. Thus, the ability to consume freely within the limits defined by the commonwealth and by enlightened instincts is a key component of the CCF's and the LSR's visions of a good life. Moreover, this compromise suggests that the two considered the individual an important enough unit that its rights and privileges should not be completely subordinated to the community's.

While these political components of the Social Credit and social democratic discourses ultimately embrace different sorts of a consumerist ethos, the literary texts

add a level of complexity to each discourse's valuation of consumption. Kroetsch's unsettling of the Social Credit message by locating self-destructive tendencies in the Party's consumerist ethos has an effect similar to the LSR's condemnation of the philosophy of acquisition: the ideological discourse of Social Credit both accepts and repels consumerism as a framework for ethical behaviour. Or, more accurately, in the span of thirty years Social Credit's message undoes itself, both in the Party's discourse and in Kroetsch's fictional contribution to the dialogue. Works that are contemporary with *The Words of My Roaring*, like Packard's, Marcuse's, Debord's and Baudrillard's, suggest that Kroetsch's work was part of a contemporary (perhaps countercultural) critique. Scott's brief attempt to re-embed the economic activities related to consumption within the sombre and powerful system of meaning and values represented by Christmas goes a long way to providing a similar critique to Kroetsch's. Scott's poetry critiques capitalism without explicitly offering an alternative and is thereby able to avoid the demands that democracy – as both a principle that the discourse upholds and as the mechanism by which the CCF sought power – places with respect to consumer choice. Scott's ethic is primarily marked by a knowledge of that which is undesirable – injustice, inequality, inefficiency, and the ascendancy of practices of consumption and commerce over values.

As for the communist discourse, the tension between production and consumption in the CPC's ethical vision and Livesay's ethos is curious: the CPC's disdain for excesses of the self and Livesay's mobilization of them – of a furious and dedicated style of consumption – both serve the interests of creation. This complex interrelation, present in the Social Credit and social democratic discourses as well,

between contributions recalls not only the dissonance that defines discourse, but also the tentative, contingent, impermanent nature of self formation. If consumerism can be understood as an ethos, it cannot be understood as reified or fixed. The divergence between the CPC's and Livesay's ethos demonstrates both that the evacuation of consumption, or any other aspect of life in society, can only be accomplished through an unrealistic idealization, and that such an evacuation is never complete, that codes of conduct, practices and styles always return to haunt the moderate, enlightened, rationalist ethic that drives the will to exert total ethical mastery. Foucault's words of caution in "What is Enlightenment?" are perhaps the most apt summary:

we know from experience that the claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall programs of another society, of another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions. I prefer the very specific transformations that have proved to be possible in the last twenty years.... which have been made in the correlation of historical analysis and the practical attitude, to the programs for a new man that the worst political systems have repeated throughout the twentieth century. (316)

Perhaps I have suggested that capitalism is more a key support of consumerism than vice versa, that rather than being the culture of capitalism, consumerism is an ethic that (at least now) can and does overarch a variety of modes of socio-economic and political organization. If so, and if I have provided useful ways of coming to capitalism, socialism and consumerism, I hope I have also suggested that each of these formations must be considered, comprehended and debated with in their variegation and disparity.

Certainly, several directions for extending this study immediately suggest themselves. The same analysis that I have done here could be conducted outside of

the Canadian context and beyond the temporal limitation provided by the Depression. On the other hand, a much more thorough exploration of each discourse that I have begun to examine – within Canada, during the 1930s – would be equally productive; I am afraid that too often due to the limitations of this project I have been less rigorous and exhaustive than I might have been. For instance, the radio dramas written and performed by Aberhart and Ernest Manning during the Depression would provide the basis for a still fuller picture of Alberta Social Credit's message. Similarly, there are a host of literary figures who had various types of socialist commitments whose work contributed just as much to what I have called the social democratic and the communist discourses as the poetry of Scott and Livesay. There are also a significant number of political texts that I have not considered here that are equally deserving.

Ultimately, however, I consider this thesis' contribution to be an investigative methodology and an understanding of consumerism that can assist the sort of critical work I have just suggested. I hope I have made a strong case for approaching social, political, economic and cultural formations with the goal of unpacking the ethical injunctions manifest or latent in their various texts. Certainly, I think an inquiry into the consumerist ethos forwarded in environmental discourses – which I suspect pose a significant challenge to both contemporary capitalism (which, because of the challenges of finding new markets relies ever more on obsolescence and a disposable, or recyclable, culture) and the more destructive aspects of consumerism through notions of limit and sustain – would be of considerable value. At any rate, I hope that I have demonstrated the potential for trying to read the ethical in social formations. I

have done so in part because the subject as such is an important locale of the creation of social, economic and political formations, but primarily from a conviction that the ways in which notions of right and wrong, good behaviour and good living, are deployed and shaped in the interests of any project need to be understood with particular attention and care.

Notes

¹ In 1930, Stalin told the Sixteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that “the state of the principal contradictions of world capitalism, which have become intensified to the utmost by the world economic crisis ... show ... That the stabilization of capitalism is coming to an end. That the upsurge of the mass revolutionary movement will increase with fresh vigour. That in a number of countries the world economic crisis will grow into a political crisis.... It means, lastly, that the proletariat, in fighting capitalist exploitation and the war danger, will seek a way out through revolution” (Stalin 262). As I will show in a later chapter, the CPC was both inspired and compelled by Stalin (through the Communist International) to make similarly triumphant predictions during the 1930s.

² Fredric Jameson’s lamentation that western societies have become so immersed in consumerism that they embrace the “consumption of the very process of consumption itself” (*Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 276) proceeds from a number of direct indictments of capitalist consumer society, like those by Vance Packard (*The Waste Makers*), Guy Debord (*The Society of the Spectacle*) and Jean Baudrillard (*The Consumer Society*), and more general denunciations of capitalism and its culture, such as those of Thorstein Veblen (*The Theory of the Leisure Class*), Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (“The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”) and Herbert Marcuse (*One-Dimensional Man*), that touch upon, but do not necessarily focus on, consumerism.

³ Most notably, Neil McKendrick argues that while a consumer society began to emerge in seventeenth century England (McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb 5), “the consumer revolution was the necessary analogue to the industrial revolution, the necessary convulsion on the demand side of the equation to match the convulsion on the supply side” (9). Following McKendrick’s lead, Ann Bermingham notes substantial evidence that points to the development of nascent consumer societies in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century and France in the eighteenth century (1-3). Though many scholars, including Jean-Christophe Agnew (24) and Roy Porter (64), are convinced by McKendrick’s arguments, some would attenuate his vision of a consumer revolution. Jan de Vries argues that the idea of a “consumer revolution” effaces the fact that “The emergence of a consumer society was by no means sudden – certainly not confined to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century – nor was it limited geographically to Britain” (107). John Styles offers a similar opinion: “There is little doubt that the range and quantity of goods consumed in England and in its North American colonies did expand in the course of the eighteenth century, but it is much more questionable whether that expansion was so fast and so all-transforming as to constitute in any meaningful sense a revolution” (535). At any rate, none of these authors challenges the contention that consumerism is a product of capitalist society.

⁴ For example, Arjun Appadurai suggests that applying “Baudrillard’s deconstruction of ‘need’ and ‘utility’ ... to non-capitalist societies” can better reveal how consumption functions in the receipt of social messages as well as their sending (31). Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood write that “To speak sensibly of consumption here, in industrial society, in terms that also apply without strain to distant tribal societies that have barely seen commerce, still less capitalism, is indeed a challenge. But unless we make the attempt there can be no anthropology of consumption” (56).

⁵ Foucault defines the technologies of the self as “techniques that permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power” (“Sexuality and Solitude” 177).

⁶ Warren Lerner argues that “all professed socialists share the belief that within the capitalist system, the ownership of private property, particularly revenue producing property, has led to the economic and social exploitation of human beings” (xiii). George Lichtheim supplements Lerner’s assertion of conceptual integrity by accentuating history’s role in the cohesion of the ideology as a notion: “The term ‘socialism’ can be employed in a very general manner, denoting currents of thought hostile to the theory and practice of bourgeois individualism.... [The] cleavages separating communists from social democrats, and both from anarchists and anarchosyndicalists, occur within what may broadly be termed the socialist movement. The reason is that these parties or sects, however bitter and at times even murderous their internecine conflicts, share certain basic assumptions about the nature of man

and society – assumptions traceable to the Enlightenment, which transformed the outlook of significant minorities in Western Europe and North America between the middle of the eighteenth and the middle of the nineteenth century. Socialism in this sense is not a party label, but the designation of a historically conditioned response to a particular challenge” (x).

⁷ While Birney hardly published any literary texts until after the Depression (Nesbitt 175), he struggled to situate himself in relation to orthodox (Stalinist) communism. This struggle and Birney’s ideological alignment with Trotskyism are, according to Bruce Nesbitt, crucial contexts “for a substantial re-reading of much of Birney’s better-known prose and poetry of the 1940s and 50s” (Nesbitt 180). Birney’s novel *Down the Long Table* (1955) is a particularly significant retrospective consideration of communist commitment during the 1930s that, though I do not consider it in any great length in this thesis, would certainly prove a fecund text for the kind of project I have proposed here. For a consideration of the many literary producers working from a wide variety of commitments to socialism, see Larry McDonald’s “Socialism and the English Canadian Literary Tradition.”

⁸ As may become evident in the chapters to come, there is little variety among socialists’ invocations of the scarcity - abundance dyad. I will therefore spend very little time in this thesis considering how that dyad functions, how it came to play such a central role in Depression-era texts, and whether economic crisis can even be understood outside of that particular conceptual frame. Others have already offered some answers to such problems: Raphael Sassower wonders in “Scarcity and Setting the Boundaries of Political Economy,” “can one discuss the social, political, economic, and moral domains of contemporary society in terms other than scarcity and abundance?” (76). In *Scarcity and Modernity*, Nicholas Xenos offers a very robust historical exploration of how prominent economic and social thinkers throughout the modern era have refigured scarcity as a general and constant feature of human existence. One of my key foci will be, however, the constant juxtaposition of scarcity and abundance, the consequent slippage between sufficiency and luxury, and the impact both have on socialist views of the consuming ethos. Trying to quantify abundance would be futile, but it is important to recognize that the notion of abundance is always overdetermined, connoting both security and luxury and constantly slipping between the two. In a culture in which scarcity means an absence of consumable goods – notably food and clothing but also a plethora of “non-necessities” – abundance may mean a plenitude of commodities.

⁹ Baudrillard’s analysis is rather apt in that underconsumption was considered the cause of the Depression in many contemporary analyses.

¹⁰ As Safarian points out, the Depression had no single low point because different parts of the economy – employment, Gross National Expenditure, imports, exports, domestic investment, foreign capital – hit bottom at different times (66). However, he locates the overall depth of the Depression in 1932-33.

¹¹ GNE is constituted by consumer expenditure, government expenditure, gross domestic investment, and exports and imports of goods and services (Safarian 47).

¹² The Yellow Pamphlet, titled *The Douglas System of Economics*, was one of Aberhart’s first statements of Social Credit principles and policies (Irving 53).

¹³ Aberhart was the primary author of both *The Douglas System of Economics* and the *Social Credit Manual* (Irving 53, 297; Macpherson 155; Hesketh 41, 47). Throughout this thesis I will refer to Aberhart as the author of these documents, but take the ideas he expresses to be those of the Social Credit Party as a whole, a practice which I feel is appropriate considering Aberhart’s strict control over party policy (Hesketh 41-42; Macpherson 162).

¹⁴ The anti-Semitic underpinnings of social credit have been well documented. Major C.H. Douglas, originator of the social credit ideology, identified an international financial conspiracy, directed by a group of powerful Jewish financiers, behind most of the world’s economic and political problems. This group of financiers, he felt, were “consciously pursuing the enslavement of mankind” (Hesketh 24). Janine Stingel’s *Social Discredit: Anti-Semitism, Social Credit, and the Jewish Response* offers the most thorough exploration of anti-Semitism in Alberta Social Credit; see also Hesketh (48-50) and Elliott and Miller, who characterize Aberhart as a left-wing fascist (319-20).

¹⁵ Both Douglas’ social credit theories and Aberhart’s interpretation focused on a structural imbalance between production and consumption under industrial capitalism. According to the frequently cited A + B theorem, the cost to produce a good for consumption in any given production cycle equals A (wages, salaries and dividends) plus B (the cost of raw materials, overhead and interest on loans), but

the consumers of such goods only ever receive amount A as compensation for their work or investment. Since A never equals A + B (as B never equals zero), consumers never receive enough purchasing power to absorb all of the goods produced. Furthermore, because the owners of the means of production cannot sell all of the goods they have produced, most of their profits go as debt payments to the financiers who have provided the necessary capital. Therefore, only the directors of the international financial conspiracy – for Douglas, Jews; for Aberhart, the Antichrist – benefit under industrial capitalism. In response, Douglas and Aberhart proposed to distribute purchasing power in the form of credit to all citizens. This credit was to be drawn on the community's cultural heritage – the cumulative product of a community's natural resources and human ingenuity (Hesketh 19-22, 45-52; Macpherson 96-119).

¹⁶ Aberhart writes that “the question of the qualifications of a bona fide citizen would have to be taken up and settled very definitely” (*Manual* 51), but does not explain what criteria would determine a citizen as bona fide.

¹⁷ To some degree, the Social Credit plan is built on the assumption that need and want are distinct and self-evident concepts, the former being the domain of physical survival (or food, clothing and shelter), and the latter being related to any more advanced state of existence. Aberhart's definition of luxury seems to follow the same tack: he neither defines nor gives an example of exactly what constitutes a luxury good or service, but implies that food, clothing and shelter comprise the definitive list of necessities and that all other objects of consumption are superfluous to basic existence.

¹⁸ Aberhart allows citizens one method of saving: government bonds could be purchased with excess credit (*Manual* 23). Savings would thus still be incorporated into the state's circulatory apparatus.

¹⁹ Hesketh argues that as late as 1967, party leader and Aberhart protégé Ernest Manning still espoused social credit principles (238). However, the individual, not the consumer, comprised the focus of Manning's rhetoric, and Hesketh admits that “with the Douglasites but a memory and Alberta enjoying year after year of prosperity, the urgency of instituting reforms to increase purchasing power had abated” (238).

²⁰ Kenneth Graham asserts in “Picaro as Messiah: Backstrom's Election in *The Words of My Roaring*” that the novel “resonates with such a complex of mythologies and narrative traditions that it has refused to remain ... merely a vivid narrative account of the social and economic tensions surrounding the Alberta election of 1935” (177) – and therefore is not merely realist and modernist. While Graham astutely details the links between *Words* and various folkloric and mythological traditions (and Russell Brown performs a similar cataloguing in “The Same Old Story Once Again’: Making Rain and Making Myth in *The Words of My Roaring*.”), Kroetsch's vivid account is itself still a primary point of interest. The relentless flow between hope and despair that Kroetsch's novel creates as the Depression itself deserves attention.

²¹ Aberhart did not quite understand the label he was using: he refers in the *Manual* to “one or more men known as the ‘Fifty Big Shots of Canada’” (13) who have a stranglehold on the nation's wealth.

²² The United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) was the incumbent party defeated by Social Credit in the 1935 election. The UFA had controlled the legislature since 1921.

²³ I consider the social democratic discourse to be the accumulation of all the various texts, written and oral, in any genre, that explained and supported the cause of social democracy. Obviously, there are far too many and varied texts to consider in any single argument, let alone here. I do not, then, claim to present a representative selection from those texts.

²⁴ Parties that directly influenced and helped pave the way for the CCF include the United Farmers of Alberta, the United Farmers of Ontario, the various provincial Independent Labour Parties and the Non-Partisan League (see Walter D. Young, *Anatomy of a Party* 14-30 and Norman Penner, *The Canadian Left* 174-8).

²⁵ The four LSR members were Eugene Forsey, King Gordon, Joe Parkinson and Frank Scott.

²⁶ In fact, Horn argues that “even in its final form the Regina Manifesto was largely an adaptation and elaboration of the manifesto the LSR had adopted early in 1932” (“The LSR, the CCF and the Regina Manifesto” 31).

²⁷ By political, I mean verse that takes as its subject the events and failures of the political system of the day. I am not suggesting that there is any poetry that does not have a political impact, no matter how oblique.

²⁸ “Anthology” and “Social Notes” appear in Scott’s *Collected Poems* under the respective titles “Social Notes I, 1932” and “Social Notes II, 1935.” According to Sandra Djwa’s entry for Scott in *Canadian Writers and Their Works*, the verses that comprise “Anthology” were “Initially published as a series of nineteen short poems” (217). It is not clear, in fact, whether Scott or the editors of *The Canadian Forum* were responsible for collecting the short poems under the general title “Anthology.”

²⁹ The LSR modeled itself on Britain’s Fabian Society (League for Social Reconstruction Research Committee vii).

³⁰ The name adopted in the *Calgary Programme*, the document produced at the first meeting of the fledgling organization, is “The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (Farmer, Labor, Socialist)” (CCF, *Calgary Programme* 18). By the time the *Regina Manifesto* was written in 1933, the final three descriptors had been dropped from the title.

³¹ Young writes in *The Anatomy of a Party* that “The minutes of the CCF national executive for this period [1932-1940] indicate that although Underhill, Forsey, King Gordon, and Scott were not members of the executive, they were frequently in attendance and actively participated in the deliberations of that body” (72).

³² Among the major shortcomings of this chapter is that I have not investigated any texts that grew out of the Christian socialist tradition, the co-operative movement or the agrarian radical movements, all of which shaped the CCF significantly.

³³ The Research Committee, which is credited with authorship of *Social Planning for Canada*, was comprised of Eugene Forsey, J.F. Parkinson, J. King Gordon, F.R. Scott, Leonard Marsh, Graham Spry and Frank H. Underhill (LSR Research Committee viii). In the book’s preface, however, the Committee names several other LSR members who contributed “memoranda, draft chapters, criticism and revision” to the project (viii). Michiel Horn identifies a few of the members who contributed to the book but were not thanked by name because they wished to remain anonymous (*The League for Social Reconstruction* 68).

³⁴ I borrow the idea that practical action is semi-autonomous from consciously articulated systems of thought and values, from Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

³⁵ Beauharnois Power Company officials allegedly bribed members of the Liberal party, including three senators, in return for the right to divert the St. Lawrence river through the Beauharnois canal to generate hydroelectricity. The scandal seriously threatened William Lyon Mackenzie King’s political career (Regehr 189).

³⁶ While “Democracy: 1932-1932” is not actually an epitaph, Scott was not a stranger to the form. During the 1930s, he published “Epitaph for a Financier,” “Epitaph for a Lawyer,” “Epitaph for You and Me” (all in *Canadian Forum* [November 1930]: 55) and “Epitaph for a Professor” (*Canadian Poetry Magazine* 1.1 (January 1936): 17).

³⁷ H. H. Stevens served as minister of Trade and Commerce under R. B. Bennett’s Conservative government (Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction* 49).

³⁸ I do not wish to consider the merits and challenges contained in the term modernism here. Modernism is a complicated, broad-reaching and potentially homogenizing concept that, as Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou write in their preface to *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, “masks conflict and upheaval and any number of contradictory positions” (xvii). Michael Levinson lays out a useful method in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* that I would like to follow: “it will prove better to be minimalist in our definitions of that conveniently flaccid term *Modernist* and maximalist in our accounts of the diverse *modernizing* works and movements” (3). Due to my focus and limited space, of course, I will only explore a few such works by Scott; Ken Norris, Brian Trehearne, and Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski offer important and in depth accounts of the diverse modernizing works by Canadian authors.

³⁹ Marlene Shore goes so far as to argue that “The Depression ... was almost a fortunate occurrence for the modernists: it propelled them into political life and infused new energy into a movement which was floundering for lack of direction by the end of the 1920s” (34).

⁴⁰ Modernist poets would likely have recognized the strengths of poetry of earlier eras, but social democrats would probably not have been as charitable toward capitalism.

⁴¹ Smith, Scott and Leo Kennedy comprised what Ken Norris (59) and others have called “the McGill group” of poets. Smith also writes in his rejected preface to *New Provinces* that “The appearance of satire, and also of didactic poetry that does not depend on wit, would be a healthy sign in Canadian

poetry” and that the poet of the Depression “must try to perfect a technique that will combine power with simplicity and sympathy with intelligence so that he may play his part in developing mental and emotional attitudes that will facilitate the creation of a more practical social system” (“A Rejected Preface” 41).

⁴² The poem refers to H.H. Stevens’ *Royal Commission on Price Spreads (Anatomy of a Party 72)*. The report that resulted from the commission is cited numerous times in *Social Planning*.

⁴³ Walter D. Young identifies *Towards the Dawn*’s year of publication as 1938 (*The Anatomy of a Party 89*).

⁴⁴ The Communist Party of Canada was officially founded in May 1921, at a secret convention held in a barn outside of Guelph, Ontario (Penner, *Canadian Communism 47*). The Party inherited many of the members of previous parties, including the Social-Democratic Party of Canada, the Socialist Party of Canada and the Socialist Party of North America (Penner, *The Canadian Left 77*).

⁴⁵ A third significant distinction is that unlike the discourses of the LSR, CCF and Social Credit Party, CPC texts rarely mention the proliferation of goods as a possible manifestation of affluence. The party promises “Social insurance [that] will guarantee all toilers against unemployment, sickness and old age, etc., at FULL WAGES” and “Wages [that] . . . will steadily and rapidly rise” (*Communist Election Program 13*), as well as increasing leisure time, but references to the objects and services that can be bought with higher wages are rare.

⁴⁶ The text represents the Party’s revised transcription of Buck’s testimony at a 1931 trial in which he and seven Party comrades were convicted of “‘belonging to an illegal organization”” (Penner, *Canadian Communism 110*). The charges were laid under the controversial Section 98 of the Criminal Code, which made arguing the merits of violent action, let alone membership in a group dedicated to the use of force, a criminal offence, and which the House of Commons repealed (but the Senate upheld) six times between 1926 and 1930 (*Canadian Communism 118-120*). Section 98 was successfully repealed in 1936 (Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction 13*).

⁴⁷ Such details have been central to recent critical work by James Doyle (*Progressive Heritage*), Caren Irr (*The Suburb of Dissent*) and Larry MacDonald (“The Politics of Influence,” “Socialism and the English Canadian Literary Tradition”).

⁴⁸ The Progressive Arts Club formed in Toronto in 1931: “Not officially sponsored by the CPC and not restricted to Party members, the PAC attracted a variety of artists and would-be artists, mostly younger members of the Party and people recently provoked by the Depression to an interest in left-wing politics” (Doyle 89). PACs were also formed in Montreal and Vancouver during the 1930s, and Livesay worked for each group (D. Irvine 186).

⁴⁹ Not all of the poetry that Livesay published during the decade evinces her fierce political commitment. As might be expected, Livesay’s poetic work varied widely in tone, subject and theme over such a long period. Many of her poems, including those that fill her first two books, *Green Pitcher* (1928) and *Signpost* (1932), are personal, romantic lyrics that bear little resemblance to the work that emerged as she became more involved with communist politics.

⁵⁰ “A Girl Sees It!” is retitled “In Green Solariums” in Livesay’s *Collected Poems: The Two Seasons* (1972).

⁵¹ The Spanish Civil War was waged between the republican forces, who defended the leftist coalition that had been elected to govern the country in 1936, and the military, led by General Francisco Franco, which was supported in its rebellion by the wealthy and conservative segments of Spanish society (including the most powerful Catholic clergy in the country) (Penner, *Canadian Communism 135-136*).

⁵² In *An Indictment of Capitalism*, Buck distinguishes socialism from communism, stating that the former is “the form of government based upon councils of workers and farmers is the historical form of government which will make possible the final transition to Communism” (59).

⁵³ The Communist International was founded in 1919 by pro-Bolshevik socialists “to create and direct a world party with national units, named ‘Communist,’ to replace and destroy the influence of the existing socialist parties which, according to Lenin, had become hopelessly reformist rather than revolutionary” (Penner, *Canadian Communism 1*).

⁵⁴ According to Penner, Stalin “began to develop the idea that social democracy was ‘social fascism’ in 1924,” and by 1928, “In spite of the coming to power of Italian fascism under Mussolini, and the rising menace of the Hitler movement in Germany, the Communist International endorsed Stalin’s line that the main enemy of the working class was social democracy” (*Canadian Communism 8*).

⁵⁵ The CPC's stance toward social democracy evolved quite radically during the 1930s. Following the Seventh Conference of the Communist International in 1935, the International and the CPC readopted the strategy of forming a popular front with other progressive parties and groups (a tactic Lenin had advocated in his lifetime) in order to stop the related threats of fascism and war (Penner, *Canadian Communists* 19; Avakumovic 54). However, even after 1935, the CPC remained antagonistic to the "right-wing reactionaries" who ran the CCF and who, the CPC felt, continually blocked attempts to cooperate.

⁵⁶ Smith was a CPC stalwart who served on the Party's executive for thirty-two years, beginning at the age of 16 (Penner, *The Canadian Left* 89).

⁵⁷ In *The Communist Election Program*, the Party urges that "All forces of the working class movement, the toiling farmers, the professional and middle class people – all who suffer as a result of the capitalist crisis – must be united in the fight against hunger, fascism and war" (9).

⁵⁸ This willingness is to be inculcated during "the lower stage of Communism, called Socialism," in which "the rule is that everybody received according to his work" rather than his or her need (*What the Communist Party* 33).

⁵⁹ The fact that all of the workers portrayed in "Day and Night" are male does not, of course, code labour and therefore exploitation as masculine. However, the places that Livesay's poems suggest for men and women in the revolutionary movement are not entirely equitable. The use of an exclamation mark in the title of "A Girl Sees It!" suggests that a girl's discovery of class exploitation is remarkable if not surprising, but whether because of her age or because of her gender is tellingly ambiguous. Regardless, the title is a challenge to those (perhaps men) who have not yet been converted to such an obviously worthwhile cause. On the other hand, it is fitting that Annie "Sees It!" because she is doubly vulnerable to poverty: as a member of the working class she is at the whim of the privileged who employ (and thereby sustain) her, and as a woman she can bear children and has virtually no exit from the responsibility of raising (and paying for) a dependant. Whether similarly vulnerable working class women will be directly involved in revolt is unclear; Annie is hardly a weak character, but her cry "I have a son who'll be a fighter yet!" ("A Girl" 105) suggests either that revolution may be a purely male pursuit or that action may be deferred for a future generation.

Trying to declare Livesay a feminist or an antifeminist on the basis of a single poem would be ridiculous, though Susan Gingell argues convincingly, against Dean Irvine's identification of Livesay's antifeminism in her *Masses* poems (206), that "by recognizing her grounding from the start in Marxist feminism, which modulated over time into a less doctrinaire materialist feminism, readers will see the accuracy of representing her as a feminist, despite her contradictions and her quarrels with some aspects of this liberationist politics" (3-4). Regardless, "A Girl Sees It!" seems to reflect cultural historical circumstances in which women would have played a lesser role in armed conflict than men. Annie is perhaps as strong a female voice as the demands of realism allow her to be.

⁶⁰ Livesay alters the story of Daniel's companions: in the biblical tale, the three are spared from the flame (Irr 232).

⁶¹ It is not clear whether the liberationist impulse that "Day and Night" displays holds any promise for the black worker. Considering the brevity of the poem's exploration of race and that the parting image in that section shows Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego burning, revolution may be too little or too late to help the non-white proletariat.

⁶² The laudatory imagery and tone of CPC representations of the USSR are almost certainly the result of the considerable control that Stalin exerted on the Party's discourse. According to Penner, during his tenure as leader from 1922 to 1953, Stalin decided "at every turn what the defence of the Soviet Union entailed for the Soviet Party and for all Communist parties abroad" (*Canadian Communism* 34-35); by the time the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact was revealed in 1939, "the leaders of the Communist parties had grown accustomed to following wherever the [Communist International] pointed, because they knew that the policies and tactics ultimately came from Stalin" (287). In fact, Tim Buck was installed as leader of the CPC in 1930 along with the leaders of most other Parties in the west because "They were intensely loyal to Stalin and all of them were personally approved by him" (Penner, *Canadian Communism* 12).

⁶³ While *We Propose* offers a gendered vision of the ideal citizen, the CPC's discourse is generally much more inclusive and clearer than Livesay's poems about the role of women in the new society. According to Smith, "Soviet Canada unleashes a tremendous cultural revolution. Women are

emancipated; the barbarous sex inequality of capitalism under the disguise of the 'sanctity of the home' is abolished and woman takes her place as the full equal of man" (*Socialism and the C.C.F.* 216-217).

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