

Winning Women for Socialism: The Ontario CCF and Women, 1947-1961

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Volume 36, 1995

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/ilt36art03>

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Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Azoulay, D. (1995). Winning Women for Socialism: The Ontario CCF and Women, 1947-1961. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 36, 59–90.

Article abstract

This article examines the role of women in the Ontario Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in the period 1947 to 1961. Taking a revisionist approach, it argues that the main concern of Ontario CCF women, as expressed through the Provincial Women's Committee, was with expanding the party's membership and support by attracting other women to the party, and not with advancing the equality of women, as the existing literature contends. It is further argued that women were not significantly under-represented in positions of power within the CCF, that the party's sexual division of labour was due largely to the timidity of its female members, and that the methods used to "win women for socialism" were practical and sensible under the circumstances.

Winning Women for Socialism: The Ontario CCF and Women, 1947-1961

Dan Azoulay

THE MAIN CONCERN of the Ontario CCF for much of the period 1947 to 1961 was basic organizational survival. Postwar prosperity and the Cold War-induced phobia of left-wing organizations had undercut the party's popular support and, more importantly, severely weakened its membership base.¹ Members were needed to find candidates, raise money, publicize the CCF program, and run election campaigns, and without this solid rank-and-file base the CCF could not hope to survive as a political force. As such, the party focused heavily in this period on retaining its existing organization and recruiting new members from various "economic" groups, including farmers, trade unions, and to some extent, the professional middle-class.²

It is within this context of organizational revival and expansion that the role of women in the Ontario CCF in this period must be viewed. Largely under the

¹The number of regular members, for example, declined from approximately 11,000 in 1948 to just under 6,000 in 1950, and did not recover to the 1948 level until 1961; Provincial Office revenues fell from over \$30,000 in 1948 to just over \$20,000 in 1952, and did not surpass the 1948 level until 1959; and in terms of legislative representation and popular support, the CCF went from 21 seats and 27 per cent of the popular vote in the election of 1948 to 2 seats and 19 per cent two years later. After the 1963 election, it still held only 7 seats and 16 per cent of the popular vote. Ontario, *Reports of the Chief Electoral Officer, 1948-1963*; Dan Azoulay, "Keeping the Dream Alive: the CCF/NDP of Ontario, 1951-1963," PhD dissertation, York University, 1991, 549-51.

²This organizational impetus was clearly reflected in the structure of the party at the Provincial level. The Provincial Council, the governing body of the movement, consisted of various committees whose purpose was essentially two-fold: to retain the support of existing members, primarily through the Membership Education committee, and to recruit new supporters, through the Organization Committee, the Farm Committee and the Trade Union Committee.

guidance of the Provincial Women's Committee, CCF women served in a number of capacities: as candidates, party officials, delegates to party gatherings, fund-raisers, and policy-makers. Their main function, however, was organizational: to attract the economic group known as "housewives" to the party and make them into active democratic socialists. The survival and eventual triumph of the CCF, in other words, was their top priority, and toward this end they employed organizing techniques particularly suited to their target group.

As straightforward as this proposition might seem, historians have interpreted the experiences of CCF women in Ontario and elsewhere from a different perspective. Although few scholars have ventured beyond 1950, the focus to date has been on how women and their policy concerns have been treated by the CCF — the so-called "woman question" — and the conclusion has invariably been that women used the party chiefly as a vehicle to achieve gender equality, including more responsible positions within the CCF, and that the male-dominated leadership generally ignored or resisted their aspirations.³ Joan Sangster, who has studied the issue of woman and the Left most extensively, writes that the "implicit" rationale of the Ontario CCF Women's Committee, and indeed all CCF women's committees formed in the 1940s, was "to promote women ... into more responsible party positions" and "to change women's traditional roles."⁴ The "dreams of equality" which active CCF women are alleged by Sangster to have pursued, at least prior to 1950, are portrayed to a large degree, if not primarily, as feminist dreams for gender equality, and the failure of the CCF to adopt a more forward-looking stance on women's "oppression" is attributed mainly to a leadership "largely unsympathetic

³See, for example, Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto 1989); and "'Women and the New Era': The Role of Women in the Early CCF, 1933-1940," in J.W. Brennan, ed., *Building the Cooperative Commonwealth: Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada* (Regina 1984); Dean Beeby, "Women in the Ontario CCF, 1940-1950," *Ontario History*, 74, 4 (December 1982), 259-83; John Manley, "Women and the Left in the 1930s: The Case of the Toronto CCF Women's Joint Committee," *Atlantis*, 5, 2 (Spring 1980), 100-19; Georgina Taylor, "'The Women Shall Help to Lead the Way': Saskatchewan CCF-NDP Women Candidates in Provincial and Federal Elections, 1934-1965," in Brennan, ed., *Building the Cooperative Commonwealth*, 141-60; S. Mann Trofimenkoff, "Therese Casgrain and the CCF in Quebec," in L. Kealey and J. Sangster, eds., *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto 1989): 139-68.

⁴Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 218-9, 223. Sangster does qualify this by noting that "the committee was less vocal about the need to promote women than it was about its intent to augment the party membership rolls," but this comes as a brief afterthought, following an extended argument about the "feminist" rationale of the Committee. Beeby presents a similar interpretation of the nature of the Women's Committee, saying that it had a "larger purpose of addressing feminist issues," but that the committee "quickly separated 'feminism' from membership activities" and "by concentrating on the latter it rapidly devolved into a *de facto* auxiliary." Beeby, "Women," 273.

to feminism."⁵ A corollary to this standard view, advanced most forcefully by Dean Beeby, is that the methods which the Ontario CCF used to attract women and make them into active members deliberately "ghettoized" them, in turn dampening their supposed feminist militancy and perpetuating their subordinate status within the party. "The leadership of the Ontario CCF," writes Beeby, "largely relegated women members to traditionally female party work," which in turn set "cultural limits on the party activities of women" and "compromised party principles of sexual equality."⁶

This paper will show that the picture was not quite so simple, at least for the period 1947 to 1961. It will show that gender equality was never the main concern of most active CCF women, including those who established and maintained the Provincial Women's Committee throughout this period; that the power imbalance in the party between the sexes was minimal; that the sexual division of labour was as much self-imposed as it was super-imposed; and that the CCF's approach to organizing women was the only approach possible for a party whose main goal was organizational recovery. But the main points this study seeks to convey are, again, that most CCF women in these years were preoccupied with attracting "housewives" to the party, where they could be converted into democratic socialists and made into active members, and that the specific methods they used to achieve this goal — social events, political education, and electioneering duties — demonstrated a pragmatic recognition of prevailing gender roles in society and a willingness to turn the status quo to the CCF's advantage.

The goals of CCF women and the recommended methods of achieving them were articulated unequivocally by the main organization responsible for directing women's activities in this period: the Provincial Women's Committee (PWC). The PWC was the first truly provincial women's committee of the Ontario CCF. Although

⁵Sangster refers repeatedly to the Ontario CCF Women's Committee as "feminist" and "socialist-feminist," without qualification. She notes, as well, the CCF's "indifference to women's equality" in the family and work place, as if this was a leading concern of CCF women. In her brief discussion of the early 1950s, Sangster does say that CCF women's first loyalty was to the party rather than women *per se*, but still assumes that CCF women were feminists who simply subordinated their feminism temporarily. "Loyal first and foremost to socialist ideals and to the party, CCF women tempered and subdued their feminism" until "the time was ripe." Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 221-2, 232.

⁶Beeby, "Women," 261, 275, see also 279; Sangster, "Women and the New Era," 91. Sangster does try to distance herself somewhat from Beeby on this point, but is not entirely successful. She blames not the organization or methods of the Women's Committee for ghettoization, but the lack of a truly feminist perspective among CCF women. At the same time, however, she seems to agree with Beeby when she writes that the educational methods of the Committee "tended to perpetuate women's behind-the-scenes roles" and that its "maternalist rhetoric" played "an influential role in shaping ... women's understanding of reality" and thwarting women's "economic independence." Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 218, 222, 235.

women's groups and clubs had existed from the earliest days of the party, particularly in Toronto,⁷ their activities — most of which centred on fund-raising and discussion of traditional women's issues — were only occasionally co-ordinated or directed by a higher body prior to 1947. The absence of any province-wide organization of CCF women was no doubt related to the ambivalence with which separate women's groups were viewed by party members. Feminists felt they segregated women into menial roles, much like auxiliaries, while many more felt such groups raised feminist consciousness at the expense of socialist consciousness. Not until World War II, when the issue of women's equality became a subject of public debate following the massive influx of women into the war industries, did the CCF move to establish a provincial women's committee to address women's issues as well as capitalize on the growing support for the CCF among women. By 1942 the Toronto CCF Women's Council, successor to the Toronto CCF's Women's Joint Committee of the mid-thirties, had become a provincial committee, with a mandate to widen support for the CCF among women across the province. But because of on-going opposition within the party to the very idea of a separate committee, the latter was largely inactive. It took the poor showing of CCF in the federal and provincial elections of 1945, which many blamed on the failure of rank-and-file CCF women to support the party, to overcome this long-standing opposition, and in 1947, with a view to getting CCF women more active on a full-time basis, the then president of the PWC proposed the creation of a new committee, one with a broader organizational base and a more democratic structure. The proposal was accepted and preparations were begun for a province-wide convention to elect an executive for the new committee.

The re-christened PWC came into being in late May 1947 when close to ninety women, representing a third of the province's ridings, assembled at the CCF's national headquarters in Ottawa to elect the Committee's leaders and discuss its mandate. In terms of its constitutional status, the PWC was to be a standing committee of the Provincial Council, equal in status and responsibilities to any other Council committee. Despite being the only elected Council committee, the PWC was not intended to be a women's auxiliary but an integral part of the party, "no different from other committees of the CCF which appeal to or work with special groups such as farmers, trade unionists, [and] students."⁹ Furthermore, the PWC's

⁷See Manley, "Women and the Left in the 1930s"; and Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, ch. 4.

⁸Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 209-17; Beeby, "Women," 259-60, 269-72.

⁹National Archives of Canada (NAC), Marjorie Mann Papers, Anonymous report of Women's Conference, 30, 31 May 1947; Mann to Toronto Members of Steering Committee, 11 May 1947; and PWC, "Report to Convention, April 1950" (quote). Beeby, "Women," 276-7, and Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 222, designate the PWC as a typical women's auxiliary, of the sort found in the old parties. Regarding the activities the PWC encouraged, this is a valid observation, but structurally the PWC was not an auxiliary. Except for the fact that the PWC was an all-female committee elected at an annual women's conference

Executive would consist of four officers — chair, vice-chair, Corresponding Secretary, and Recording Secretary — and ten members at large, to be elected at an annual CCF Women's Conference. Also elected were the chairs of various Executive sub-committees set up to deal with such matters as labour, farmers, publicity, status of women, and cost of living. Contact between the Executive and women in the individual ridings would take place through so-called "corresponding members," also members of the PWC, who were essentially corresponding secretaries for local women's committees or for individual women in CCF clubs and riding associations. They would be responsible for distributing information issued by the PWC and for directing the activities of CCF women at the local level. The PWC's structure would undergo only minor changes in its fourteen-year history.¹⁰

Nor did the central purpose of the PWC change very much. Its principal objective was always to attract women to the CCF, "particularly the occupational group known as 'housewives'," where they could be made into socialists and active party workers, and to get existing CCF women to play a more active role.¹¹ As the first chair of the PWC, Marjorie Mann, declared at the CCF's 1948 convention, "the chief purpose of the provincial women's committee is to find ways and means of getting more women active in the CCF":

(essentially an educational conference), it shared the same status as any other Council committee and its members had the same rights and privileges as regular party members. By contrast, the women's sections of the Liberal and Conservative parties had their own newsletter, internal regulations, separate representation at party conventions, and a virtually autonomous membership and fund-raising structure — in short, Liberal and Conservative women maintained a parallel organization, loosely affiliated to the main party. Patricia Myers, "A Noble Effort": The National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada, 1928-1973," in Kealey, *Beyond the Vote*, 39-62; Sylvia Bashevkin, *Toeing the Lines: Women and Party Politics in English Canada* (Toronto 1985), ch. 5.

¹⁰NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, PWC, "Report of the Ontario CCF Women's Conference," 30, 31 May 1947. In an effort to get more local women involved directly in the Committee's work and to reduce the costs of attending the meetings of the Executive, the 1950 annual Women's Conference decided to de-centralize the operations of the Committee. Seven regional women's committees were set up as an intermediary level between the PWC and local women's groups. The new Provincial Committee, or "central" committee as it became known, from then on contained the Executive officers, the chairs of sub-committees, and the chair and secretary of each regional committee, all still elected at the annual Conference. McMaster University Archives (MUA), Ontario CCF/NDP Collection, Hamilton, Minutes of Fourth Conference of Ontario CCF Women, 1-3 June 1951; Minutes of CCF Women's Provincial Committee Conference, 9, 10 June 1950.

¹¹Mann Papers, Mann to Toronto Members of Steering Committee, 11 May 1947 (quote); document sent to ridings, probably by Steering Committee, entitled "So the women of the Ontario CCF are having a conference! What's on their minds?"; NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, Report of Discussion Groups, Ontario CCF Women's Conference, 30, 31 May 1947.

In every community there are many women who are sympathetic to the CCF but who are unable or unwilling to enter into the activities of the CCF Club. ... It is the function of [local] women's committees to provide facilities ... through which the maximum number of women may make their best contribution to the CCF.¹²

The PWC's mandate was formally spelled out at the 1950 Women's Conference in a document entitled the "Long Term Plan," the closest thing to a constitution for the Committee:

Because we believe it is in the best interests of the people of Canada to establish socialism in this country, and because we feel that enough women are not accepting their full share of responsibility in promoting the growth of the CCF, we believe it is the responsibility of the Ontario CCF Women's Committee to discover and to promote methods by which a greater number of women will be able to make a more effective contribution to the growth of the CCF in each riding.¹³

This would remain the central goal of the PWC and its local committees throughout its brief history.¹⁴

Some CCF women, it is true, viewed the PWC and its associated bodies as having more feminist objectives, either as a training ground for developing women's political skills, such as public speaking, or raising their political consciousness so that they would strive to play a more prominent role in political life. At the 1951 Women's Conference, for example, "spirited discussion centred around a proposal that the Women's Committee should undertake as its major task the selecting, preparing and supporting of women for public office." In the end, however, the resolution was defeated. Most delegates felt that the PWC should stick with its "broader aims" of "bringing CCF women together and giving them opportunities to exchange ideas and develop self-confidence."¹⁵ Many women, particularly those in leadership positions themselves, hoped that in the long run women would be represented to a greater extent in public office. But most realized that in the short term this sort of politicization was remote and that for now it was important to get women working for the CCF in any capacity. For those who never run for office, Mann told True Davidson (one of only two women in the CCF who held public office at the municipal level), "there is much that they can do to make their

¹²MUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Collection, PWC, Report to Convention, October 1948.

¹³MUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Collection, PWC, "Long Term Plan."

¹⁴See, for example, the "Draft of Rules and Objectives for Local Women's Sections" issued by the PWC in 1960, Queen's University Archives (QUA), Kingston, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers. Sangster's interpretation of the PWC is quite different, and in my view incorrect. She argues that the "implicit" goal of the PWC was "to rectify the imbalance of the party's male-dominated leadership and to raise the party's profile on women's issues." *Dreams of Equality*, 223.

¹⁵Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library (TFRB), Woodsworth Memorial Collection, University of Toronto, *CCF News*, July 1952.

contribution to politics in ways with which they are familiar. And it is our job to help work out ways in which such women can make a contribution which will increase the influence and strength of the CCF."¹⁶

The methods recommended by the PWC to reach its principal objectives remained basically unchanged as well. These, too, were spelled out clearly at the time of the PWC's founding and in subsequent documents and discussions. At the founding convention, delegates spent a lot of time discussing why more "non-political" women had not joined the party. The three main reasons cited were: first, the political timidity of women — the belief that politics were the responsibility of men and that, as one delegate put it, "it is 'queer' for a woman to be in politics"; second, the fact that women lacked the time to get involved in political work since they were tied down with domestic responsibilities or community work; and third, the fear of social backlash, such as being called a Communist or putting their husband's job at risk. These and other inhibiting factors were confirmed in opinion polls of the day.¹⁷

Delegates did not propose much to surmount the last two problems, but did suggest ways of making women more comfortable with political action. Most seemed to feel that the general organizational approach and the specific techniques had to be catered specifically to women. It was felt, for instance, that women preferred a more personal approach, in informal, unthreatening settings. Thus instead of discussing the CCF over the phone or inviting prospective members to a regular party (i.e. constituency) meeting, women should be asked to attend an informal gathering or social function, preferably in someone's home, and with no men present, as this might deter women from speaking up. It was also thought that women wanted a less ideological approach. So rather than discuss socialist theory to the prospective CCFer, "which she didn't understand," CCF women should talk about "bread-and-butter problems in which she is vitally interested." The PWC recommended, therefore, that speeches and discussions at meetings "should be on

¹⁶NAC, Mann Papers, Mann to True Davidson, 3 January 1949. This pragmatic approach was not always easy for PWC leaders. Mann recalls one woman who used to boast that her main skill was "juggling" or "jogging" stacks of paper to make sure they were all aligned and who would try to teach this skill on any occasion. "I tell you it was very difficult to keep from scorning it, and yet we knew perfectly well that *anybody* who could do *anything* was to be accepted and congratulated." Marjorie Mann, interview by author, 25 February 1993, Ottawa.

¹⁷Chatelaine magazine conducted a poll in January 1948 among the women of its "Consumer Council" and respondents blamed the low political profile of women on the following factors: 22 per cent said it was due to "other responsibilities" such as marriage, children, and home responsibilities; 21 per cent blamed "fear" or timidity, and fear of publicity and failure; 18 per cent blamed it on "indifference" (preferred leaving politics to men); 17 per cent blamed it on lack of public confidence in women; 15 per cent blamed it on prejudice against women outside the home; and 6 per cent said it was because women lacked emotional stability and intelligence. Clipping of article found in NAC, Mann Papers.

topics of genuine interest to the group," such as housing, cost of living, child welfare, and education.¹⁸

With respect to specific methods for drawing women into the CCF, several ideas were advanced. Small discussion groups, based on recent radio programs, movies, or books, were seen as particularly effective. Or perhaps a committee could be established to look into an issue of interest to women, such as mother's allowances or pensions, and from this a discussion could follow. CCF women were also encouraged to find potential recruits by getting involved in community organizations in which women played a prominent role, such as Home and School Associations, consumer groups, civil liberties groups, and church groups. The Canadian Association of Consumers (CAC) was recommended as a particularly appealing target, because CCF women "will come into contact with far more women and far more kinds of women than we would otherwise have" and would, in turn, be able to publicize the CCF.¹⁹ The most highly-recommended method for attracting women, however, were fund-raising projects, such as tea parties, bazaars, rummage sales, and euchres, since these were the sorts of activities women felt most comfortable with. These events would have the added benefit of raising money for the party. In short, the PWC adopted a gender-specific organizing approach as a way of easing women into left-wing politics, an approach that remained popular throughout its existence.²⁰

As far as which types of women should be recruited, the PWC did not usually specify. Generally speaking, all potential CCFers were to be approached. But "housewives," because they were seen as especially apathetic politically, and with potentially a lot of influence in their communities because of their community work, were the main target.²¹ Indeed, it seems that most CCF women were middle-class housewives, actively involved in community work; no doubt the most active of them were either of pre-parental age or above forty, and hence relatively

¹⁸"Draft of Rules and Objectives for Local Women's Sections"; NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, "Findings of Discussion Groups on Programme Planning, Women's Conference, September 1948."

¹⁹NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, untitled document from PWC regarding CAC, 1948. Almost every member of the PWC in 1948 was a member of the CAC.

²⁰"Findings of Discussion Groups on Programme Planning." The PWC's 1960 "Draft of Rules and Objectives" stated that "initial political interest can be created by discussion of political issues of particular concern to women" and that "Women's Sections of local C.C.F. clubs can make a contribution by drawing potential members into activities which interest women."

²¹MUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Collection, "CCF Women's Provincial Committee Conference," 9, 10 June 1950. According to one historian, the PWC targeted housewives because the CCF believed that in the June 1945 elections, many wives of CCF members — especially union members — hadn't voted CCF. Beeby, "Women," 272; Peg Brewin, letter to author, 25 March 1993.

unburdened by domestic responsibilities.²² More important was the question of what to do with women once they joined the party. The PWC did not identify specific ways in which women could best serve the CCF. There was, in other words, no streaming of women into a "task ghetto" based on the assumption that they were only capable of certain roles and not others. The object, as the Long Term Plan stated, was to get women involved in any aspect of the party, "whether it be in the administration of party affairs, or as candidates and elected representatives, or in the vital jobs of money raising, local activities, details of election work, etc." Most delegates to the founding convention agreed with Grace MacInnis's assertion that women have a "responsibility to share both the work and the policy-making" of the party and to serve as delegates to CCF gatherings and play "a full part when they get there."²³ Women were also encouraged to develop their public speaking skills by running for executive positions in CCF Clubs and Riding Associations, and by holding study and discussion groups.²⁴

Nevertheless, the leaders of the PWC realized that CCF women were more comfortable with and, in some cases, more suited to doing particular tasks. These tasks were the more menial ones associated primarily with party organization, such as fund-raising and canvassing, which, because they did not consume a lot of time and could be done in settings with which women were most familiar, namely the home and their immediate neighbourhood, were seen as particularly appropriate for women. As a result, the PWC often encouraged CCF women to hold social functions in their homes to raise money and discuss current affairs, to act as scrutineers and committee-room workers during elections, and to canvass their neighbourhoods for new members and renewals.²⁵

What remains to be seen is how closely the actual behaviour of CCF women conformed to the mandate of the PWC. That is, what did CCF women actually do in this period, and did their role change much over time? The activities of CCF women can be divided into three general categories: social activities, mostly related to fund-raising; organizational activities between and during elections; and educational activities. These categories are not, of course, exclusive. Organizational activities, for instance, can be broadly defined to include things such as fund-raising

²²NAC, Mann Papers, Brewin to Mann, 27 February 1950.

²³NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, "Report of Discussion Groups, Ontario CCF Women's Conference," 30, 31 May 1947.

²⁴In 1952, women interested in running for local office were encouraged by the *CCF News* women's page to attend the Municipal Affairs Workshop of the Toronto and District CCF Leadership Training Weekend in the fall, and the Toronto Inter-Club Council sponsored a 10-week evening course on public affairs from the women's point of view to encourage women to stand for public office. *CCF News*, July, November 1952.

²⁵NAC, Mann Papers, Minutes of Ontario CCF Women's Committee, 13, 14 September 1947. Peggy Brewin recalls that "we encouraged fund-raising and social events, as the women active in Women's Committees felt comfortable and were successful at this." Letter to author, 25 March 1993.

and political education, both of which contribute to the party's organizational strength, and social activities can easily embrace political education in some instances. Nevertheless, for the purposes of simplification, these categories will suffice.

Two other points are worth emphasizing. First, the activities of party women did not necessarily take place through the formal structure of local women's committees, as anticipated by the PWC; in fact an overwhelming majority of ridings had no separate women's groups to speak of. While no more than six or seven ridings had women's clubs or sections prior to 1959, mostly in Ottawa, Toronto, and the Far North, many did have what the PWC referred to as "active" women.²⁶ As the PWC observed at the 1948 Women's Conference,

there is no one pattern of organization for women's work in the CCF. In some ridings women work solely in the general club; in others there is in addition a women's committee which organizes special projects; while in others there is a women's group which meets regularly in addition to the general club meeting.²⁷

To some extent, the PWC even considered community groups in which CCF women played a prominent role, such as the CAC, part of the its organization.

Second, the level of activism among party women fluctuated directly with the fortunes of the CCF in this period. In the late forties, when the CCF held the position of Official Opposition and membership levels were high, activism was high as well. In its first few years of operation the PWC sent out material to corresponding secretaries in close to forty ridings, and usually between sixty and seventy delegates representing most of these ridings attended the Women's Conference each year.²⁸ Another sign of the relatively high level of activity of CCF women in this period was the beginning of a separate women's page in the party's monthly paper, the *CCF News*, beginning in 1950. But when the CCF's popularity declined in the early fifties, disillusionment and apathy set in among party members, resulting in a

²⁶QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Report of Provincial Council Meeting, 6, 7 March 1948; "CCF Women's Provincial Committee Conference," 9, 10, June 1950; NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, Minutes of Provincial Council Meeting, 10, 11 May 1958; Mann interview. As of March 1948 the following centres had active women's groups: London, Ottawa West, Ottawa East, Carleton, Hamilton (joint women's committee), Welland, and Elgin. By 1950, no more than four ridings had such groups. As well, no more than 15 per cent of women members were active on average in any riding. "CCF Women's Provincial Committee Conference," 9, 10 June 1950; NAC, Mann Papers, PWC, Report from ridings, 1947; QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Report of Provincial Council Meeting, 6, 7 March 1948.

²⁷NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, Report of Second Ontario CCF Women's Conference, 25, 26 September 1948.

²⁸NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, Ontario CCF, Minutes of Executive, 23 September 1952.

dramatic decline in activity.²⁹ As membership declined, few CCF constituency organizations and clubs could afford the "luxury" of separate women's groups or activities and all energies turned towards keeping the regular party apparatus functioning.³⁰ The growing strength of the "mystique of feminine fulfillment," which asserted the primacy of the home and family as women's ultimate goal in life, may also have contributed to a lessening of partisan political action by women.³¹ In the ensuing years, hampered by a shortage of funds and with its leaders determined to concentrate more on general party organization, the PWC scaled down its activities and by 1955 was largely "inactive."³²

Not until the late fifties, when the economy began to falter and with the CCF's move to form a New Party, did signs of renewed activity among CCF women appear. The revival began slowly, with the emergence of women's committees in several ridings that had not seen much activity in a few years.³³ In 1958 there were six such committees functioning in individual ridings or under district associations of ridings. By the following November there were seventeen, located mostly in southwestern Ontario and the Far North.³⁴ Many seem to have emerged with little help from the PWC, which was itself just beginning to recover from the stagnation of the mid-fifties. But by 1959, under the chairmanship of Peggy Brewin, the PWC was taking a leading role, contacting CCF women in various ridings and assisting them in setting up committees. It also began sending out questionnaires to local committees to keep in touch with their activities and in 1960 began issuing its own newsletter.³⁵

By far the most common activity among CCF women, however they were organized and regardless of the shifts in CCF support, was organizing social events. Sometimes these events were held to bring women out to a party function for the

²⁹Mann told Lucy Woodsworth in 1950 that "I have never known a time when it took so much steady constant encouragement to get people to do things. When some of your most reliable people start letting you down the going is really tough." NAC, Mann Papers, Mann to Woodsworth, [1950]; see also Azoulay, "Keeping the Dream Alive," 1-44 passim.

³⁰NAC, Mann Papers, Irwin to Mann, 13 February 1950; Brewin to Mann, 18 June 1956; QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, B. Cass-Beggs, "Report of the Women's Committee," 1952; Marjorie Pinney, interview by author, 19 March 1993, Toronto.

³¹Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York 1963); Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 193.

³²NAC, Mann Papers, Brewin to Mann, 16 February 1950, and 23 November 1951.

³³QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Report of 1957 Provincial Convention; NAC, Mann Papers, Latham to Mann, 1 October 1961, and Brewin to Mann, 18 June 1956; NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, Ontario CCF, Minutes of Council, 10, 11 May 1958.

³⁴QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Ontario CCF, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 19 November 1959; Report of Provincial Women's Committee to Provincial Executive, 17 November 1959.

³⁵QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Ontario CCF, Minutes of Council, 31 January, 1 February, and 8, 9 August 1959.

first time. Things like card and tea parties were seen as the best way to introduce "politically shy" women to the party.³⁶ Even more important was the fund-raising aspect of these events. Rummage and bake sales, bazaars, dances, raffles, euchre parties — all of these were effective in raising funds. In fact, CCF women were generally recognized as being the party's principal fund-raisers. In 1950, the *CCF News* noted that "The Ladies' Committee of the Timmins CCF are the backbone of the movement in Timmins, and among the most active money-raisers in the province."³⁷ The campaign manager of the Kingston CCF, in a letter to the Provincial Office during the 1948 election campaign, said that the riding's finances depended almost entirely on the activities of women. "We depend mainly upon our Women's CCF club, who have already raised over \$200 by means of a rummage sale and a home-cooking and fancy-work sale. Next Saturday comes another rummage sale and no doubt a further contribution to the provincial election fund."³⁸ The Greenwood CCF Ladies Club in Toronto was also a very active fund-raising unit. In 1957, it spent a lot of time raising money for the party's federal candidate in that riding. Euchres were held every other Saturday throughout the winter, as well as a cake raffle and rummage sale in the spring. The Ladies Club also saved the party money by assisting in various party social events, such as preparing the Provincial Women's Luncheon at the annual CCF convention, organizing a pot-luck luncheon before summer adjournment, and serving refreshments at the CCF Club's Christmas party.³⁹

Because they gained a reputation for being so adept at fund-raising, CCF women were usually asked to organize fund-raising events for the party, such as luncheons or banquets, where CCF women did the catering as well as handle the ticket sales.⁴⁰ Women were not, however, pressured by party leaders into assuming this role. Quite the opposite, it seems. Party leaders were on at least one occasion berated for not making greater use of the fund-raising abilities of the women. At a Provincial Council meeting in 1950 Agnes Macphail stressed the importance of using women and women's activities for fund-raising projects, noting that "many ridings are not taking the opportunity of using women in these activities." Marjorie Mann agreed, suggesting that when local campaign committees are set up, "at least one woman be added to each committee" to ensure women's fund-raising talents not be overlooked.⁴¹

Another key function of CCF women was political education. Because discussion groups, research, and lectures were seen as a very important means of getting

³⁶QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, PWC, "Party Line" (newsletter), 30 March 1961; *CCF News*, August 1958.

³⁷*CCF News*, February 1950.

³⁸QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Walker to Coburn, 15 May 1948.

³⁹*CCF News*, March 1957.

⁴⁰NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, Ontario CCF, Notes on National Expansion Drive Campaign.

⁴¹NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, Ontario CCF, Minutes of Council Meeting, 11, 12 February 1950.

new women involved with the CCF and turning them into socialists, local women's groups — particularly if they met regularly — would usually include one of these activities on their agenda. Discussions might focus on parts of the CCF's program, or might follow a political program on radio or television, a presentation by a member of the group on a particular issue, or a guest lecture by a community leader or politician.⁴² Moreover, to encourage broad participation among traditionally shy women, informal settings and procedure were preferred. The Ottawa Women's Committee no doubt spoke for many other women's groups when it observed that "our members ... wanted to learn more, but in an informal way so that we could get our attendance of about 20 or more to learn and participate and not hesitate to comment or ask questions." So at the start of its 1960 season it held a very successful "get acquainted" type of meeting, where each woman introduced herself and told why she had joined the CCF. This was followed by listening to a few trade union records over coffee. The result was that "the group became more integrated. The fact that our meetings are held in living rooms helps the informal atmosphere."⁴³ Other educational efforts by CCF women included writing articles and book reviews for the *CCF News* or trade union journals and, in the case of members of the Women's Committee and its subcommittees, presenting research reports to delegates at the annual conference.⁴⁴

The PWC, in fact, did a lot to promote political education among party women. The most common method was mailing party literature to corresponding members; in its first year of operation alone it sent out 2000 pieces of mail to the ridings. This material covered a range of issues, although information on organizational matters figured prominently. It also arranged an annual speaking tour by a CCF leader, or a prominent socialist woman, often from the British Labour Party or the United Nations.⁴⁵ After its operations were de-centralized in 1950, it organized regional education conferences for CCF women. Much of the talk at these gatherings focused on election preparedness, key campaign issues and, after 1958, what women could do to promote the New Party. There was, as well, the annual Women's Conference, which featured addresses by keynote speakers and four or five education workshops for delegates.⁴⁶

⁴²QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, "Party Line," 30 March 1961.

⁴³QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, PWC, Newsletter, February 1960. Some of the political discussion among CCF women also took place inadvertently, while they were doing menial electioneering duties. *CCF News*, November 1956.

⁴⁴*CCF News*, April 1952, February 1951; MUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Collection, Ontario CCF, Report of Provincial Women's Committee to provincial convention, October 1948, and 10-12 April 1952; NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, PWC, Minutes of Literature Preparation Committee, 25 October 1947.

⁴⁵*CCF News*, September 1950; MUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Collection, PWC, Report of Second Women's Conference, 25, 26 September 1948.

⁴⁶NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, Report of Second Ontario CCF Women's Committee, 25, 26 September 1948; *CCF News*, February 1958, July 1960; QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Ontario CCF, Minutes of Council Meeting, 24, 25 September 1960.

Among CCF women's educational activities might be included their work in strictly non-partisan community projects and organizations. This work was aimed largely at raising the profile and prestige of the CCF and quietly publicizing the party's ideology and program. In the late forties CCF women's groups sent hundreds of CARE parcels to socialist families in war-torn Europe and throughout the period participated in the local Councils of Women, Home and School Associations, welfare councils, family courts, and agencies aimed at securing nursery schools and better facilities for seniors.⁴⁷ Perhaps the most popular community organizations in which CCF women participated were consumer groups. In fact, so many CCF women belonged to local branches of the CAC or, less frequently, the Housewives' Consumers Association, that these were almost considered part of the party's organization.⁴⁸

The topics which CCF women discussed and promoted in these years were not restricted to "women's issues," such as cost of living, rent controls, and equal pay legislation. Women also discussed issues which the CCF as a whole, and in the legislature particularly, was pursuing at the time: health insurance, education, civil liberties, world peace and, by the end of the decade, nuclear weapons, automation, and unemployment.⁴⁹ The emphasis for the PWC, at least, was on women gaining a broad socialist consciousness. As it stated in 1960, one of its functions was "to carry on a program of political education in socialist principles — how these principle apply to political issues in general and to those issues which may be of special interest to women," which is why delegates to the annual Women's Conference were often encouraged to know and to promote recent democratic socialist publications, several of which were circulated in "kit" form from riding to riding.⁵⁰ This sort of political education, announced one delegate at the PWC's

⁴⁷NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, "Findings of Discussion Groups on Programme Planning, Women's Conference," September 1948; *CCF News*, April 1952.

⁴⁸The Housewives' Consumers Association was seen as less effective, and as a communist front organization as well. It had little following among CCFers, except in parts of Toronto and the Far North. Unfortunately for the CCF, community work probably did more harm than good. Not only did it divert energies from general party organization, but women were usually forced to maintain an air of non-partisanship and avoid overt political activities, such as canvassing, lest they be accused of divided loyalties. Several women leaders recall that while community work may have made the CCF somewhat more respectable, it did not lead to new recruits or many conversions to the CCF way of thinking. QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Ontario CCF, Report of Council Meeting, 6, 7 March 1948; NAC, Mann Papers, anonymous document entitled "The CCF and Community Services Connected with the School," [1950]; Mann interview; Mary Eady, interview by author, 6 April 1993, Toronto.

⁴⁹NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, Report of Second Ontario CCF Women's Conference, 25, 26 September 1948; *CCF News*, March 1948; QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Press Release (excerpts of speech by Peg Stewart), 1 November 1960; NAC, Mann Papers, PWC, "Notes on Programme Planning," 1947.

⁵⁰QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, PWC, "Draft Rules and Objectives for Local Women's Sections," March 1960 (quote); MUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Collection, Report of Women's

founding convention, must continue "until every woman understands democratic socialism as well as a favourite recipe."⁵¹

Nevertheless, certain "maternalist" issues were of prime concern to CCF women because of their station in life as mothers and housewives and because of the need to attract to the party women in similar positions. The issue of prices and cost of living generally is a good example. At the founding convention delegates passed two resolutions. One called for national health insurance, and the other called for the restoration of wartime price controls and subsidies on certain essential household items.⁵² To assist in the fight for low prices and high product standards, CCF women were also encouraged to join the CAC and to become familiar with the literature distributed to them by the PWC's subcommittee on Prices. This concern with consumer issues did not abate much over the entire period.⁵³ Other maternalist subjects to which women frequently turned their attention were penal reform, child welfare, and mothers allowances.⁵⁴ Because all of these were issues in which many non-political women would have a vested interest, they were used by the PWC and local groups to get women thinking about politics and to provide a non-intimidating introduction to the CCF program and ideology.⁵⁵

Gender equality was also a concern, though a relatively minor one in this period. The PWC had a subcommittee on the Status of Women, chaired by Barbara Cass-Beggs, whose general mandate was to investigate working conditions for women employees, but whose main concern was whether women were being discriminated against in the work place, especially in terms of wages. To educate CCF women on the issue of wage parity in the late forties, it organized listening groups and citizens' forums and presented pay equity skits at the annual Women's Conference. After the CCF introduced a bill on equal pay for work of equal value in 1949, using data provided by the subcommittee, it sent riding secretaries

Conference, 9, 10 June 1950; NAC, Mann Papers, Adeline [Haddow] to Mann, 31 March 1950.

⁵¹NAC, Mann Papers, PWC, Reports from Ridings, 1947. The Ottawa CCF Women's Committee, for example, set up study groups so that women would "attain a more complete understanding of Democratic Socialism" (quote); Ottawa CCF Women's Committee, "Program for Spring 1949."

⁵²NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, Report of Ontario CCF Women's Conference, 30, 31 May 1947.

⁵³At the Women's Conference of 1960, for example, the PWC called on the federal government to expand consumer research and information facilities, and to implement the recommendations of the Stewart Price Spreads Commission report, especially a code of ethics for advertising. *CCF News*, July 1960.

⁵⁴*CCF News*, May 1955, February 1956, May 1957.

⁵⁵This, incidentally, was the main thinking behind the introduction of a "Woman's Page" in the *CCF News*. As Mann said to a fellow PWC member, "I have an idea that you don't think much of the idea of a women's page generally, but you know our women; we are eager to get them reading something in the paper." NAC, Mann Papers, Mann to Margaret, 29 October 1950.

information on the subject, with the recommendation that CCF women give it a thorough airing.⁵⁶ Yet even this issue was pursued, in part, for the political benefits which might accrue to the CCF, instead of for the benefits to women *per se*. Peg Stewart, a PWC member from London, favoured making the "status of women" the theme of the 1949 Women's Conference because "it requires political action" by women. "We must not lose sight of the fact," she told Mann, "that we are primarily in existence to interest women in the C.C.F., so that anything we do for the general good must have some political significance or at least political activity involved."⁵⁷ Further, to make the CCF's position on pay equity palatable to non-feminist women, the PWC told members that equal pay would give men greater wage and job security, "as it discourages employers from hiring women for less money or replacing men with women at lower rates."⁵⁸

But pay equity, and to a lesser extent employment discrimination, were really the only non-maternalist issues in which CCF women were interested in this period. That gender equality did not loom larger in the "agenda" of Ontario CCF women may be attributed to several factors. First, some women feared that any focus on issues of gender equality would divide the party and alienate potential CCF voters, women voters in particular.⁵⁹ Second, as democratic socialists first and foremost, the preoccupation of CCF women was with class/economic equality, from which gender equality would follow naturally. "Women, married or unmarried, just as men, married or unmarried, need economic equality," Cass-Beggs told delegates at the 1948 Women's Conference. "We realize that economic equality is not the whole solution, but it is a basic step towards full equality in all phases of life."⁶⁰ Even the maternalist issues CCF women studied stemmed to a large degree from concerns about economic inequality. Price controls, for example, were favoured as a way of lessening the gap between rich and poor and alleviating the malnutrition of low-income groups.⁶¹ In 1947, the PWC considered amending the CCF book, *Who Owns Canada*, which presented a breakdown of the costs of producing certain products and where most of the profit went, to focus in on products bought by

⁵⁶MUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Collection, Cass-Beggs to riding association secretaries, 25 March 1949.

⁵⁷NAC, Mann Papers, Stewart to Mann, 18 January 1949.

⁵⁸NAC, Mann Papers, Cass-Beggs to "Dear Madam," 8 March 1950.

⁵⁹NAC, Mann Papers, Copy of letter from Peg Brewin to Mary Morrison, [1948].

⁶⁰MUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Collection, Report from the Status of Women Committee to the Ontario CCF Women's Conference, September 1948. See also Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 13-25, and Susan Walsh, "The Peacock and the Guinea Hen: Political Profiles of Dorothy Gretchen Steeves and Grace MacInnis," in A. Prentice and S. Trofimenkoff, eds., *The Neglected Majority*, vol. 2 (Toronto 1985), 144-59, in which most CCF women see the restructuring of the capitalist system as a prerequisite to gender equality.

⁶¹QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Report of Women's Committee [to CCF convention], [1952]; NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, PWC, Reports from workshops on "Housing" and "Social Services" from 1951 Women's Conference.

women for the home, thus conveying the socialist opposition to uneven wealth distribution in a way which women could relate to. In other words, the "dreams of equality" which most CCF women harboured in this period were primarily economic ones.⁶²

A third factor was the traditionally insignificant place which the issue of gender equality held in CCF ideology. "Fabianism rarely entertained discussion of women's oppression," writes Sangster, "while the Christian socialist and Bellamyite traditions [in CCF ideology] often portrayed women as more moral and material beings, but did not delve to the roots of their oppression."⁶³ When the party addressed women's concerns at all, it was instead from a maternalist perspective, one which stressed the role of women as housewives, as nurturers and care-givers within the family. This was clearly evident in the party's electoral propaganda aimed at women, with its emphasis on such traditional maternalist concerns as prices, health, and education. Some broadening of the party's thinking on women occurred during and immediately following World War II, when the issue of equality for working women became more prominent, but the maternalist emphasis persisted.⁶⁴ The party's official programs and pronouncements in the 1950s, though not as overtly maternalist as in the past, were still far less concerned about gender inequality than about improving the rights and material well-being of the producing classes and their families through an expanded welfare state.⁶⁵ In short, CCF

⁶²NAC, Mann Papers, Mann to "Committee Member," 10 November 1948.

⁶³Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 232.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 227-36.

⁶⁵CCF, Ontario, *First Term Program* (1948); CCF, Ontario, "Looking to the Future: The CCF Program for Ontario, (1955)," CCF/NDP Papers; CCF, Ontario, *Challenge for Ontario* (1958). Two qualifications, however, must be made. First, postwar party programs did not identify many issues in gender terms. Except for its support for higher mothers' allowances, a visiting homemakers' service, and a Women's Bureau in the Department of Labour, issues were discussed in terms of their effect on "citizens," "consumers," and "families," not on men or women. Second, although postwar party programs make few references to gender equality, apart from the recurring demand for "equal pay for equal work," party leaders did on occasion demonstrate some sensitivity to the issue. At the party's 1952 convention, for example, party leader Ted Jolliffe told delegates that the CCF must address the problems of all disadvantaged groups. "We must not," he said, "overlook the importance of the housewife, of the woman who ... is probably a slave to the requirements of her household, the demands of her children and her husband, and who is not particularly interested in politics at any time." And at the 1957 convention the Provincial Council announced that "we aim (in the words of our official national program) at ensuring that every person — regardless of occupation, sex, colour or creed — will have full opportunity to share in the nation's progress and to develop his talents in a society free from exploitation of man by man or class by class," likely the first official endorsement of sexual equality by the party. *CCF News*, May 1952; CCF, Ontario, "Report of the Annual Convention, 18-20 April 1957," Ontario CCF/NDP Papers (emphasis added).

ideology in this period, as previously, did little to encourage new ways of looking at gender relations.

Nor should we underestimate the influence of the times themselves on the CCF's approach to the woman question. The Depression and World War II had so disrupted family life and traditional gender roles that in the immediate postwar years Canadians expressed a strong desire for normality; the uncertainties and anxieties produced by the Cold War further fed the desire for conventional values and behaviour. Out of this emerged a renewed emphasis on home and family, and in particular, on women's traditional role as stay-at-home wives and mothers. Thus the marrying age fell, marriage and birth rates increased, and for several years at least, young women exchanged the world of work and post-secondary education for marriage and motherhood. The cultural assumptions underlying these developments, moreover, were reinforced daily in government films and publications, radio and television programs, women's periodicals, child-care manuals, and other vehicles of cultural expression. All of these hammered home the message that, as one historian puts it, "women's most basic satisfactions came through service to others in the domestic sphere" and "good wives and mothers stayed properly at home far from the temptations of employment."⁶⁶ Against such powerful cultural forces, not even the barely visible feminist movement dared question the prevailing orthodoxy.⁶⁷

In this highly conservative environment it would have been surprising, indeed, if the CCF had begun to explore seriously the issue of women's rights or, more to the point, if CCF women had somehow not been affected by the ideological currents of the day. In the era of the "feminine mystique" most CCF women, like non-CCF women, were probably less inclined than in recent years to question the structure of gender relations in their society. When the *CCF News* asked six "prominent" CCF wives in 1950 if married women had the right to work, all six said "yes," but felt that women's first obligation was to their children.⁶⁸ Denise Bristow, a member

⁶⁶V. Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945-60," *Canadian Historical Review*, 72, 4 (December 1991), 471-504, quotes on 475; A. Prentice, et al., *Canadian Women: A History*, 319-43; P. Kome, *Women of Influence: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto 1985), ch. 6. See also Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, especially chs. 1-3; Birmingham Feminist History Group, "Feminism as Femininity in the nineteen-fifties," *Feminist Review*, 3 (1979), 48-65.

⁶⁷The two main organizations which addressed the issue of women's equality in this period were the Federation of Business and Professional Women and the Federation of University Women (FUW). Their members, however, were anxious about raising the issue of gender equality. Laura Sabia, a leading figure in the Canadian feminist movement of the 1960s, recalls that a she made her way up the ladder of the FUW in the 1950s and early 1960s, "it was interesting to note how scared women were about status of women issues. There was always this great fear of being criticized, this feeling that we must be ladylike about it and we mustn't upset the men." Kome, *Women of Influence*, 78.

⁶⁸*CCF News*, March 1950.

of the Rosedale CCF in the early 1950s whose husband Dudley was a two-time federal candidate for the party, remembers that "this was an era when if women got pregnant, they just quietly left" their jobs. "It was the normal thing to do."⁶⁹ CCF women might grumble about their domestic obligations occasionally, but like Bristow, most did not question them. In a 1947 article for the Cooperative Press Association's women's column, Peg Stewart railed against the fact that women, especially suburban women in single-family dwellings, were stuck alone at home with kids and household drudgery while men could leave whenever they wanted:

There you are stuck all day, with the housework and the cooking and the baby's sniffles. You look forward to the end of the day. Pappy may not be any movie hero for looks, and he probably doesn't sparkle with witticisms — not at home, anyhow — but at least he's a change from what the teacher said and how mean the little boys down the street are. You may even just like to have him around. So what happens? He has a meeting. He gulps his supper, tells Johnnie he'll fix his toy some other time, assures Mary he'll try to tell her a story tomorrow night, says why don't you wipe the baby's nose, and gallops off, oozing virtue.⁷⁰

But as much as she resented her situation, like most CCF women Stewart was resigned to it. "I like men too much to propose that they should be confined in the same way as women — they couldn't take it. Whining about our hard lot doesn't do a thing for us, either. It only makes the boys tired of us. We might as well face it. While the children are small, you're stuck." She could only suggest that until the children have grown up, housewives should arrange for someone to relieve them of mothering duties one afternoon a week and that they make sure to set time aside with husbands, alone, away from the house.⁷¹

Other suggestions offered by CCF women to alleviate the "boredom and frustration" of their lives took a more traditional turn. In a 1952 piece in the *CCF News*, PWC member Peggy Brewin called upon the government to provide more training of women in household sciences, to make sure they didn't spend their idle hours in "cheap and uncreative amusements" when they should be serving their home and their community:

It cannot be denied that many housewives are failing in the task of creating a happy home and family life. Instead of it being a joy, it has become a dull and disillusioning chore ... A

⁶⁹Denise Bristow, interview by author, 26 April 1993, Burlington.

⁷⁰NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, Peg Stewart, "Flying the Coop," 8 May [1947].

⁷¹See also NAC, Mann Papers, Mann to True [Davidson], n.d. In at least one case, a CCFer groomed her husband to take over her CCF activities while she turned to raising the kids full time. Effie Byers of Stratford, a member of the PWC in its early years, told Mann that "I've tried my darndest to get Ernie interested in the CCF. ... Now that he has taken a hold and is really doing a good job, I guess I'll have to bow out of actively taking a part for a year or so till the children get on a bit, but I believe this is as it should be." NAC, Mann Papers, Byers to "Folks," August 1949.

large number of housewives are frustrated and woefully ignorant of the issues at stake in the larger community of which they are a part. Surely this is not through lack of will but because of ignorance and poor training.⁷²

Brewin was not the only CCF woman concerned about the allegedly poor performance of women in their traditional sphere. The Toronto CCF Women's Committee held a panel discussion in 1954 entitled "How should we educate our daughters?." According to Anne Park, whose husband Eamon had introduced the CCF's pay equity bill in 1949, the supposedly greater educational and job opportunities open to women in these years were threatening a "breakdown in society" as women increasingly neglected their homemaking duties. "It is now evident, however, that training for homemaking and home-management is not so available to girls since the status of women has changed and improved. It is also evident that society still needs good homemakers if the family as a basic institution is to survive." Participants at the conference evidently agreed, for they concluded that schools should include more instruction on homemaking in the curriculum, that girls should be channeled into subjects like homemaking and child care, and that "other agencies" in the community could facilitate the "proper" education of young women through adult education programs. "There was no suggestion that women's place was in the home only," added the panel, "but rather that while she needed to be an active community person and an individual in her own right, ... she was also [required to be] an effective homemaker and an efficient housekeeper." In short, the feeling was that women had to learn to play all their roles well. "A tall order," proclaimed one woman loudly as the session came to a close.⁷³

In other words, and despite the concern in some quarters about wage and job discrimination, CCF women were generally resigned to making the best of their situation. To the limited extent that gender equality was a concern, they were content to wait for democratic socialism to prevail. As such, it is surely unfair to condemn the CCF for not making gender equality a bigger part of its program, as some historians have done,⁷⁴ when most women in the party did not see it as a pressing issue themselves. If there was an ideological division among CCF women in these years it was not so much between feminists and non-feminists, but between the more "idealistic" purists, who favoured constant discussion of socialist principles, and the more pragmatic "organizers," who favoured fund-raising activities and winning power for its own sake.⁷⁵

⁷²CCF News, September 1952.

⁷³CCF News, January 1955.

⁷⁴See Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, especially 224-38.

⁷⁵NAC, Mann Papers, Tait to Mann, 2 November 1948. For more on this serious ideological split in the party in this period, see Azoulay, "The Cold Within: The Ginger Group, the Woodsworth Foundation, and the Ontario CCF, 1944-53," *Ontario History*, 84, 2 (June 1992), 79-104.

But exactly where the balance lay in the educational activities of CCF women, as between gender and non-gender issues, is not entirely clear. It most likely depends on which level of the women's organization we are talking about. At the local level, where it was more important that potential recruits feel comfortable, the emphasis was probably on gender issues, albeit from a socialist perspective, whereas at the provincial level of the movement — among the well-educated and well-read PWC members and at the annual Women's Conference — the emphasis seems to have been on broader issues. This makes sense given the pragmatic organizational strategy of the PWC, as well as the role of the women's groups as a "training school" of sorts for democratic socialists, where women would gradually be introduced to general socialist principles and policies. "Graduates" of this training would predominate in leadership positions and would therefore be more likely to emphasize broad socialist education.⁷⁶

The final activity in which CCF women were heavily engaged, though less frequently, was electioneering. In the months preceding an election and especially during the campaign itself, electioneering activities loomed large in their efforts. In election years, a good deal of the literature mailed by the PWC to its corresponding members and much of the discussion at the annual Women's Conference dealt with how to prepare for and run an election campaign. As a result, women could be found doing many tasks during the campaign itself. After the 1948 election the PWC reported that "women were doing every kind of job — committee room [work], distribution, canvassing, telephoning, house meetings, publicity, script writing, broadcasting, campaign manager, candidates, scrutineering, [and holding] teas for

⁷⁶The agenda of the annual Women's Conference illustrates the point. At the 1950 conference, two speakers addressed the question "Does Canada need the CCF?," a third spoke on the role of the United Nations, and another on women's work in the municipal field. These speeches were followed by workshops on housing, labour, the cost of living, and social services. In 1951, keynote speakers talked about pay equity, old age pensions, education, and labour legislation, followed by discussion groups on most of these topics as well as the United Nation's functions and the municipal franchise for women. In 1952, the topics under discussion were rental housing, the cost of living, low payments for widows on Workman's Compensation pensions, and the problems created by a sudden influx of immigrants to Canada. In 1960 the keynote speakers and delegates addressed the issues of unemployment, national defence, human rights, social security, and the anti-labour actions of governments. Nor is there much evidence to suggest that the apparently gender-neutral issues, such as social services, were addressed from a woman's perspective. CCF women favoured more social services for the economically under-privileged, whether they were women or not: a government health plan, better old age pensions, higher mother's allowances, and child care for mothers who are forced to work because of the high cost of basic necessities. *CCF News*, July 1954, July 1960; QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, PWC, Report of Women's Committee [to provincial convention], 1952; NAC, CCF/NDP Papers, Reports of workshops at 1951 Women's Conference.

candidates.”⁷⁷ Although it is hard to say where the balance lay in this array of activities, it is likely that only a small minority were involved in the more responsible and prestigious positions, such as writing and broadcasting scripts, or acting as campaign managers or candidates. In the 1948 and 1951 provincial elections, for instance, only four women ran for the CCF in each case, several of whom had taken over the candidacy from their husbands. Instead, women tended to do the more menial, albeit crucial duties, like distributing pamphlets door-to-door, telephone canvassing to invite women to political functions, holding social events to raise money for their local candidate and the Provincial Office, and stuffing envelopes or preparing posters in committee rooms.⁷⁸

Nor did the electoral role of CCF women change much over time. The proportion of women candidates remained at about 5 per cent throughout the period, with only a handful serving as campaign managers or returning officers; by the late fifties, CCF women were still doing the same supportive, administrative functions.⁷⁹ A report from the Toronto riding of St. Paul's during the 1957 federal election campaign illustrates the point. According to the party's candidate, Margot Thompson, women did most of the “behind the scenes work.” Many worked as enumerators, compiling lists of eligible voters in each subdivision and then typing out voters' lists, and on election day some did paid official work, largely as deputy returning officers and poll clerks. But most did volunteer work canvassing, addressing cards and envelopes, running the campaign headquarters and arranging social functions for key party workers and party leaders. “It's in the steady grind of campaign work that women probably far out-number men,” observed Thompson. “A candidate who couldn't count on a large number of women to work would have a hard time running a campaign,” a fact which numerous male CCFers were not reticent in conceding.⁸⁰ So despite the repeated encouragement by the PWC that women get involved in all aspects of election work, and that they do so as individuals rather than women's groups (“for a fuller sense of participation”), only a handful of CCF women served in positions beyond their traditional duties.⁸¹

There is, however, little evidence to suggest that the male-dominated leadership pressured female members into assuming particular roles or hindered their

⁷⁷MUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Collection, Ontario CCF Women's Committee Report to Convention, October 1948 (quote); Report of Women's Conference, 25, 26 September 1948.

⁷⁸NAC, Mann Papers, Report of Women's Conference, 25, 26 September 1948; Ontario, Chief Electoral Officer, *Returns of General Elections*, 1948 and 1951.

⁷⁹CCF News, May 1957, November 1958, February 1958. About 15 per cent of the CCF's by-election candidates, however, were women. *Returns of General Elections*, 1948-1959.

⁸⁰CCF News, May 1957. See also comments by Murdo Martin, the CCF's federal candidate in Timmins, who attributed his victory in the 1957 to the women in his riding. CCF News, July 1957.

⁸¹PWC, “Report of Women's Election Conference,” February 1958, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers.

entry into other aspects of party work.⁸² CCF leaders, male and female, did call upon women to organize fund-raising events and prepare food for party gatherings, but women were quick to agree, for a number of reasons: they enjoyed the work and felt they had special abilities in these areas⁸³; they believed this work was the truly difficult work in the party ("that anybody can do the campaign manager's job" as Mann put it)⁸⁴; and they knew they could do much of this sort of work at home, such as telephone canvassing and preparing for bake and rummage sales.⁸⁵

Most importantly, women themselves felt more comfortable in these supportive roles and lacked the confidence to move beyond them. As Bashevkin notes in her study of female political involvement in Canada, "conventional patterns of gender role socialization teach females to be submissive, deferential, private beings and also define elite-level political participation as masculine and thus inappropriate for women."⁸⁶ This was especially true in the ultra-conservative fifties when, as Betty Friedan states in her landmark study of the roots of postwar sexual oppression, the "only dream" of North American women

was to be perfect wives and mothers, their highest ambition to have five children and a beautiful house, their only fight to get and keep their husbands. They had no thought for the unfeminine problems of the world outside the home; they wanted men to make the major decisions.⁸⁷

⁸² Most studies of CCF women hold that the sexual division of labour was deliberately foisted on CCF women. Sangster, "'Women and the New Era': The Role of Women in the Early CCF, 1933-1940," in Brennan, *Building the Cooperative Commonwealth*, 82, argues that women were "sex-segregated" into menial tasks or "support work," and that they were "held back from advancement into the leadership and from seeking nominations." Beeby, "Women," 261, 264, argues similarly: "the leadership of the Ontario CCF largely relegated women members to traditionally female party work" and during elections "the party repeatedly exhorted its female members to take up the tasks traditionally viewed as the special duties of party women." These contentions, however, seem more appropriate to the old-line parties. See Myers, "'A Noble Effort'" and Bashevkin, ch. 5.

⁸³ Eady interview.

⁸⁴ NAC, Mann Papers, Mann to Adeline [Haddow], 26 April 1949; Mann and Bristow interviews.

⁸⁵ Marjorie (Pinney) Wells, for example, says that women did this sort of work "not because it was seen as *the woman's role*, but because that's where they had the time and the ability to do their bit." (Pinney) Wells interview.

⁸⁶ Bashevkin, *Toeing the Line*, 147. Not until the late 1970s do a significant number of Canadian women in Canada begin to question the ideology that prescribed a separate woman's sphere. See Meg Luxton, "Two Hands for the Clock: Changing Patterns in the Gendered Division of Labour in the Home," in Ian McKay, ed., *The Challenge of Modernity: A Reader on Post-Confederation Canada* (Toronto 1992), 439-55.

⁸⁷ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 18; see also V. Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams."

The low proportion of women candidates, for instance, was due largely to the fact that women preferred to play less prominent roles during elections. Marjorie Mann, certainly one of the least bashful CCF women in this period, admits that she "felt more at home" doing campaign committee work and feared the prospect of being a candidate, in her husband's footsteps. "I had no self confidence whatever about being a candidate or speaking on behalf of or for the CCF."⁸⁸ The same factor accounts in large part for the absence of paid female organizers. Simone Macdonald, wife of the Provincial Leader, says that women were too shy for this kind of work. "I don't think there is any doubt, from the conversations I used to have [with other CCF women]," she recalls, "that we did not have the self-confidence the men appeared to have." As a result, "women didn't offer themselves" for organizing work.⁸⁹

When women were willing and able to assume "non-traditional" tasks, however, they were generally welcomed. Certainly there would have been some chauvinism in the party, a belief that women were not capable of playing more prominent roles and should therefore not be encouraged to do so. Regarding the paucity of paid women organizers, for instance, Mann recalls that because "there were so few women who could [do this sort of work], it didn't occur to the men to look around beyond those few who could. ... They were quite happy to take on somebody like Peg [Stewart] ... when they came upon them, but there was nothing by way of encouraging women to do that kind of thing."⁹⁰ There was likely some overt discrimination as well, particularly at the local level, where members would

⁸⁸Mann interview. The paucity of female candidates was also due to considerations of expediency. Given the presumed discrimination among voters against women candidates, some women CCFers felt that it would hurt the CCF to run women as candidates and thus would not have supported women seeking nomination. NAC, Mann Papers, Copy of letter from Peggy Brewin to Mary Morrison, [1948]; Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 208. The absence of women candidates in winnable ridings, specifically, was largely a result of more men (who constituted 75 per cent of the constituency membership) competing for nomination. Bashevkin, *Toeing the Line*, 145-6.

⁸⁹Simone and Donald Macdonald, interview by author, 19 March 1993, Toronto. Mary Eady and Peg Brewin tell a similar story. Eady interview; letter from Peg Brewin to author, 16 April 1993. An anonymous party document called "The CCF and Women" notes that "the opportunity [for advancement within party ranks] is open to women" but that "not enough of them are able or sufficiently confident yet to stand for such office." NAC, Mann Papers, "The CCF and Women," 1955. Agnes Macphail was another prominent CCFer who attributed the sexual division of labour largely to the timidity of women. As Terry Crowley writes, she did not subscribe "to the conspiracy theory ... that saw men deliberately excluding females from political activity." *Agnes Macphail and the Politics of Equality* (Toronto 1990), 106, quote on 158.

⁹⁰Mann interview.

have been less inhibited in expressing their views, though the paucity of riding records makes it difficult to comment either way.⁹¹

There were, on the other hand, some male leaders who did encourage women to play an equal role. Stewart told Mann that "our local president is a very nice generous guy, and pushes me to the front a lot. I chaired the Forsey meeting here on Monday night, I think it's the first time a woman has chaired a public meeting for us here, and I was in quite a tizzy."⁹² Stewart was in fact one of the success stories of the PWC.⁹³ Initially quite timid, her role on the PWC during its first three years gave her the confidence to tackle the job of Riding President in her London riding. Surpassing the accomplishments of her prominent husband, Miller, she eventually served as a party vice-president, president, and provincial secretary. Mary Eady, who also served in various capacities at the provincial level, identifies Ken Bryden, Lazarus's successor as Provincial Secretary and later an M.P.P., as one of several male leaders who saw women as a great "untapped resource" and who encouraged them to seek more prominent roles. He treated women with "absolute equality and ... would nudge us to articulate what we thought should happen, not just on women's issues but on other [things]."⁹⁴

Whether males were generally encouraging or discouraging as far as women were concerned is, of course, difficult to say. What is more certain is that women who wanted to advance to higher positions met few obstacles in the way of discrimination or chauvinistic thinking in this period. The equality of opportunity which women enjoyed in the CCF generally was one of the main reasons why many women did not see the need for "special women's activities" such as the PWC.⁹⁵ "In all my years in the party," says Eady, "I never heard anybody say, 'well I'm not going to support her because she's a woman or she shouldn't run, what does she know.' Now somebody might say that, but that was because maybe she *didn't* know anything, not because she was a woman."⁹⁶ The Provincial Office was not averse

⁹¹On the other hand, there were no references to discrimination in any of the correspondence I read between the ridings and the provincial office, and not one of the dozen or so women I interviewed — all of whom were quite active in their local riding association — could recall any examples of discrimination.

⁹²NAC, Mann Papers, Stewart to Mann, 28 April 1949.

⁹³Peggy Brewin was another. She served as corresponding secretary to the PWC in the early fifties and was its chair by 1958. She was also President of her constituency association (St. Paul's) on several occasions. Brewin to author, 25 March 1993.

⁹⁴Eady interview. Peg Brewin writes that "personally I think the CCF was always more receptive to the idea that women were equal to men in the role they played in the party" and that "relatively speaking, the Party encouraged women to be active. Peg Stewart was a good example." Brewin to author, 25 March, 16 April 1993.

⁹⁵NAC, Mann Papers, "The CCF and Women," 1955.

⁹⁶Eady interview. Bristow has similar recollections: "it didn't seem to me that there were just certain jobs that females were relegated to. . . . At the level at which I was working, I didn't ever run into anyone saying "'Now you shouldn't be going door-to-door' for instance." Bristow interview.

to hiring women organizers, for example, even if they lacked experience. The will was there, but for most of these years, the personnel and the funds were not. As Mann told Cass-Beggs in 1950, "there was only one [female] person available [to do summer organizing] and possibly a second. Morden [Lazarus] was ready to recommend anybody — man or woman — but they just weren't available. ... Personnel is just as big a problem as the money. I thought I had an excellent woman here ready to take on a summer organizing job, but she got cold feet!"⁹⁷ In these lean years it would have been foolish indeed for the male-dominated party hierarchy to have refused the assistance of women in any capacity on the basis of their gender alone. As a result, women who showed any initiative or ability — and had the time — were absorbed fairly quickly into positions of responsibility at the provincial level. Simone Macdonald states that if women had offered themselves in key positions, like organizer, "they would have been picked up right away. The party was desperate to have them."⁹⁸ Marjorie (Pinney) Wells, chair of the CCF's Organization Committee throughout the fifties, shares this view:

There was absolutely ... no distinction whatsoever on a gender basis. Women, from my experience, were welcomed into any and all positions as equals. We were so desperate for anybody who would do *anything*, [that] it didn't matter if you were a man or a woman. You were welcomed with open arms.⁹⁹

The CCF even practised an informal form of affirmative action by asking, at the behest of the PWC, the chairs of Executive committees to have at least one woman representative on their committees. That the PWC did not favour any more formal policy of quotas stemmed from strong divisions among women themselves as to the merits of this approach.¹⁰⁰

Finally, it is worth noting that despite the very real sexual division of labour in the Ontario CCF in these years, women were not significantly under-represented in positions of power. The "glaring power imbalance between men and women" in the CCF, as one historian puts it, is not that apparent.¹⁰¹ Between 1947 and 1961 the average proportion of positions which women held on the party's provincial Executive and Council — the main decision-making bodies — was 20 per cent and

⁹⁷ NAC, Mann Papers, Mann to Barbara [Cass-Beggs], 27 June 1950. When Mann suggested to the Provincial Secretary that a certain female CCFer be hired to do some summer organizing in eastern Ontario, he said that although she lacked any organizational experience or training of any sort, "if Miss McInroy decides she wishes to do some organizing work, I shall certainly accept her offer." NAC, Mann Papers, Lazarus to Mann, 28 June 1950.

⁹⁸ Macdonald interview; Eady interview.

⁹⁹ (Pinney) Wells interview.

¹⁰⁰ NAC, Mann Papers, Notes of Meeting of Toronto Women's Committee, 6 December 1947; True [Davidson] to Mann, 7 February 1949.

¹⁰¹ Quote in Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 226. See also Beeby, "Women," 262.

26 per cent respectively, with the proportion increasing significantly over the period as women gained more confidence and their child-rearing responsibilities waned.¹⁰² Women also held about 33 per cent of riding executive positions, though usually as Secretaries or Treasurers, and were apparently well-represented as delegates to conventions.¹⁰³ In fact, several former activists boast that by the late fifties, with Peg Stewart as party President and Marjorie (Pinney) Wells as a Vice-President, women were practically "running the party."¹⁰⁴ This may be overstating matters somewhat, but given that women represented between 25 and 30 per cent of the CCF's membership in these years, it is clear that women were not noticeably under-represented in the CCF's councils of power.¹⁰⁵

In short, the largely patriarchal CCF hierarchy did not impose a sexual division of labour on its members, as most historians claim. Rather, the sexual division of labour stemmed largely from the psychological limitations of women themselves (rooted in a sexist socialization process to be sure), and from the constraints created by their domestic responsibilities and economic dependency. While women may not have been strongly encouraged by party leaders of either sex to rise above these constraints, those who tried were generally welcomed and accepted for what they could contribute to a party desperate for any leadership ability whatsoever. Evidently, and notwithstanding the various limitations, many were successful.

There was, however, an element among CCF women who resented the sexual division of labour, or at least felt somewhat uncomfortable with it, and believed that women should be more strongly encouraged to serve in all capacities. Avis McCurdy and True Davidson, both prominent party leaders, believed that the PWC should encourage more women to run for office. Barbara Cass-Beggs, perhaps the CCF's most committed feminist, was forever suggesting that the role of CCF women be expanded to include more part-time and full-time organizing, as only a handful

¹⁰² Statistics derived from *CCF News* and TFRB, Woodsworth Memorial Collection, *Reports of the Annual Convention*, 1947-1961. Women ended up chairing a variety of Council Committees in these years, though they tended to dominate the Literature and Education Committees, both seen as traditional female preserves.

¹⁰³ This figure is based on an internal party survey of twenty ridings in 1960-61 and is the only precise information I have come across on this question. From file entitled "Women's Committee Correspondence" Box 4, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Queens. Moreover, a 1955 party document on the role of women in the CCF across Canada notes that "a European observer at one of our annual provincial party conventions commented on the high percentage of women delegates present." NAC, Mann Papers, "The CCF and Women."

¹⁰⁴ Eady and Macdonald interviews. Quote from Eady.

¹⁰⁵ Beeby, "Women," 261; NAC, Mann Papers, PWC, Membership reports from ridings, 1947; "The CCF and Women," 1955. Estimates of the number of women in the Ontario party at any one time vary widely, but most historians peg the number at between 20 and 30 per cent for the period before 1950. Sources for the 1950s, although scarce, suggest a figure between 25 and 33 per cent.

of women did paid organizing work in any one year. At the 1950 Women's Conference she also recommended that the PWC hire a Provincial Organizer, and that "something be done to get women working on legislation which will help women as a whole." But her suggestions were supported by only five ridings. Most delegates called, instead, for an increase in the usual "social" activities of CCF women.¹⁰⁶ The pressure on women to maintain their fund-raising activities, in particular, increased by the early fifties as the party's financial situation deteriorated, and even though many PWC leaders found this emphasis distasteful, insofar as it tended to solidify women's roles in the party, they accepted it as necessary for the party's survival.¹⁰⁷ There was always the pragmatic awareness, as well, that most women preferred or could only do the more menial tasks and that things like tea parties and bazaars were, after all, quite effective in getting women more involved in the party.¹⁰⁸ In any case, the PWC was always on guard against appearing to serve goals other than the advancement of the CCF *per se*. When a member of the PWC suggested the PWC send a letter to all women members of club executives, "giving them encouragement and urging them to accept responsibilities as they present themselves," the opposition was so strong that the matter was deferred to the next meeting, but never raised again.¹⁰⁹

Only with the CCF's 1958 decision to form a New Party does the role of women in the Ontario CCF change somewhat in the direction envisioned by the party's small feminist faction. The New Party initiative was essentially an attempt to revive the CCF by broadening its support among "liberal-minded" working-class and middle-class individuals and coincided nicely with the public's growing disaffection with the two main federal parties in the late fifties. The Ontario CCF leadership supported the decision to form a new left-wing political coalition, but was anxious that the CCF enter the New Party in force, to avoid labour domination of the party, which was not only undesirable in itself, but which would hurt the public image of the New Party as a broadly-based "people's party." As a result, in the thirty-six months preceding the founding of the New Party in July 1961, the CCF focused its efforts largely on strengthening its own membership. New Party Clubs, the organizational vehicle through which new "liberal-minded" supporters were to be brought into

¹⁰⁶NAC, Mann Papers, Minutes of Ontario CCF Women's Committee, 9, 10 February 1950; QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, PWC, Report of Women's Committee [to convention], 1952; MUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Collection, PWC, Report of Women's Conference, 9, 10 June 1950.

¹⁰⁷NAC, Mann Papers, Mann to Peg Stewart, March 1950; Rough Draft of National Council pamphlet on National Expansion Drive (i.e. fund-raising drive), [1951].

¹⁰⁸NAC, Mann Papers, Brewin to Mann, 27 February 1950; Mann to Woodsworth, 25 January 1950; Mann to Lazarus, 14 October 1949; untitled document on organizing women in CCF, probably written by Mann, 17 February 1948; Mann to Tait, 25 January 1950.

¹⁰⁹NAC, Mann Papers, PWC, Meeting-By-Mail, 12 January 1949.

the New Party, were only promoted in areas where people were unwilling to join the CCF.¹¹⁰

All indications are that the Provincial Women's Committee's view of the New Party was similar to that of the Provincial Office: that the New Party was essentially a gimmick to expand the CCF's membership base and that the CCF should do what it could to enter the New Party as a powerful force, which meant giving priority to attracting people into riding associations, and into New Party Clubs only when this was not possible.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, several female party leaders also saw the New Party as an opportunity to get women more active as organizers, not for its own sake, but to enhance the New Party's organizational capacity after its founding. In a letter to the chair of the PWC, the Provincial Secretary, Peg Stewart, said that the PWC should get heavily involved in the CCF's annual spring membership drive by getting women to do door-to-door canvassing for renewals and new memberships. This would ensure a strong CCF contingent at the founding convention, she observed, and would also be valuable "from the point of view of teaching some of our own women how interesting this job is. Because certainly there will be plenty of it to do when the New Party is formed, and we will be up against the same old problem — men being brought in through their unions, and the women being left out through sheer inertia and shyness." Her comments were echoed by others.¹¹²

As a result, CCF women played a leading role in bringing both men and women into the New Party and they did so in ways which differed markedly from the past. Prior to 1958, CCF women spent relatively little time canvassing for new members, renewals, or funds, or setting up new clubs¹¹³; most activities, as indicated, involved social/fund-raising events. A few party women gained prominence for their organizational prowess — Marjorie (Pinney) Wells in Halton, Jo Carter in Kenora-Rainy River, Edith Smith and Mina Wright in Temiskaming — but they were the exception. Apart from the fact that many women felt uncomfortable with such a public role, many simply did not have the time to leave their domestic duties. After 1958, however, there are more reports of women doing just this sort of work, especially in northern Ontario, where CCF women had traditionally shown a greater propensity to perform all functions.¹¹⁴ Women played a key role, for example, in

¹¹⁰For more on the founding of the Ontario NDP, see Azoulay, "This March Forward to a Genuine People's Party? Rivalry and Deception in the Founding of the Ontario NDP, 1958-61," *Canadian Historical Review*, 74, 1 (March 1993), 44-70.

¹¹¹QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Stewart to Chapman, 7 March 1960; PWC, "Party Line" (newsletter), 30 March 1961; letter to Martha, 30 March 1960, possibly from Marjorie (Pinney) Wells.

¹¹²QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Stewart to Chapman, 7 March 1960. See also article by Eileen Robins in *CCF News*, July 1961.

¹¹³Mann, Macdonald, Eady, and Pinney interviews.

¹¹⁴In 1961, for example, Lois Renaud was hired as a part-time organizer for the New Party in Port Arthur by her riding association, although she had been unofficially serving in this capacity for some time before then. Northern CCF women seemed much more active, and

organizing the many women's groups which appeared suddenly in the late fifties.¹¹⁵ Less attention was given to New Party Clubs, in line with instructions from the PWC and the Provincial Office, but even here women played an active role and seemed eager to capitalize on the surge in public interest in the New Party. This is clear from the fact that many women pressured the Ontario Committee for the New Party (OCNP), the body set up to co-ordinate New Party activities in the province, to send them New Party Club organizing kits, containing New Party literature and membership forms, so that they could help set up clubs.¹¹⁶

CCF women also helped establish Women's New Party Clubs, in which the proposed constitution and program of the New Party were discussed and social events held to raise money for it. The exact number of clubs established, however, is unclear; there are few references to such clubs in official party records or newspapers and former activists cannot remember there being any.¹¹⁷ This, plus the fact that the OCNP did not have the desire or the money necessary to hire club organizers suggests that compared to clubs organized around particular interest groups, such as doctors, engineers, and social workers, women's clubs were rare indeed.¹¹⁸ Another possible reason for the scarcity of such clubs was the absence of literature directed specifically at "politically uncommitted women." The closest that New Party publicity came to targeting women specifically was a 1961 letter addressed to "Housewives" from the federal Director of New Party Clubs, Desmond Sparham, in which women are asked to help build the New Party, for the sake of their own politicization and the well-being of their society.¹¹⁹ Beyond this one-page letter, however, the New Party made few references to women or women's issues in its three-year gestation period.

Nevertheless, the active role which women played in founding the New Party across Canada was recognized by the appointment of a Director of Women's Activities and a Women's Committee at the national founding convention of the New Democratic Party, as it was renamed, in the summer of 1961. This, in turn, inspired CCF women in Ontario to ask for a separate Director and Department of Women's Activities at the provincial level. At the founding convention of the Ontario NDP in October a separate meeting of women delegates chose five individuals to represent them in discussions with the new provincial Executive regard-

involved in a wider variety of activities. QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, PWC, "Party Line," 30 March 1961; Brodack (President of Port Arthur CCF) to Stewart, 30 June 1961; NAC, Mann Papers, PWC, Reports from ridings, 1947.

¹¹⁵QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Report of Provincial Women's Committee to Provincial Executive, 17 November 1959; PWC, "Party Line"; Burgess to Stewart, 21 October 1960; Ontario CCF, Minutes of Council, 14, 15 January 1961; Brewin to author, 25 March 1993.

¹¹⁶QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Powell to Peg [Stewart], 18 February 1960.

¹¹⁷QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Houle to Stewart, 27 March 1961.

¹¹⁸QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Sparham to Stewart, report on New Party Clubs in Ontario, 24 April 1961; PWC, Newsletter, April 1960.

¹¹⁹QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, R. D. Sparham, "A Letter to Women," 1961.

ing a resolution passed at that meeting requesting that a Department of Women's Activities be set up for Ontario. By the end of the year, the Executive agreed to allow the establishment of an Ontario Women's Committee, with Peggy Brewin, the driving force behind the October resolution, as its first chair.¹²⁰ Officially, at least, the PWC's life had expired along with the CCF's.

It is possible, therefore, that the role of women within the party changed somewhat by the late 1950s, that the division of labour along gender lines, which so many historians have emphasized, became somewhat less distinct. Even if this were so, however, it has been argued that the central theme of this period as far as CCF women are concerned was not the struggle for equality within and without the party. The few who have written on the subject of women and the Left in Ontario have chosen to emphasize the feminist elements within the CCF and their fight for gender equality. While such elements may have predominated in shaping the priorities of CCF women prior to 1947, such was not the case for the years 1947 to 1961, when the struggle to maintain and expand the participation of women in the party in order to advance the CCF was paramount. The methods used to achieve this end, furthermore, were highly sensitive to the social climate of the day. Women were drawn into the party and made into active members through social, educational, fund-raising, and electioneering activities, all traditional service-oriented activities with which most women at the time felt comfortable and, in view of their heavy domestic responsibilities and meagre financial resources, were able to perform. It was hoped that through these activities women would gain the confidence and ability to tackle more responsible positions in the party, which an increasing number did over the period. But because the main thing was simply getting women to contribute to the CCF in any way possible, this was not a pressing concern among party leaders of either sex.

That this was so has not pleased historians. The PWC has been strongly criticized for, as Sangster writes, trying "to integrate itself into the post-war culture of consumerism, family, and domesticity," an approach which she feels "mitigated against a critical analysis of women's privatization in the family and their oppression in the workplace." "One might suggest," she states, "that socialists should have looked beyond contemporary assumptions about womanhood to carve out more egalitarian alternatives to the familial ideology of the time."¹²¹ Beeby is equally critical. "Having identified housewives as a target group, the Women's Committee undertook activities fitted to cultural assumptions about the social function of women ... [in order] to achieve the higher, party goal of increasing membership." In the process, he concludes, "it prolonged rather than reduced sexual segrega-

¹²⁰ QUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Papers, Brewin to Stewart, 11 October 1961; Report of meeting to discuss plans for meeting on Women's Activities at founding convention, 20 September 1961; Ontario NDP, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 10 December 1961.

¹²¹ *Dreams of Equality*, 222, 226-9. Quotes on 222.

tion."¹²² In effect, the PWC has been reprimanded for allegedly abandoning its original goal of gender equality and promoting, through its structure, methods, and rhetoric, the sexist ideology of the era, thereby dampening the militancy of CCF women.

Even if such a contention could be proven, surely it is somewhat unfair and not a little ahistorical. After all, most CCF women did not consider gender equality a priority at any time in this period, when they considered it at all, and those who did saw it as a long-term goal. The immediate goal, as stated, was to ensure the survival and eventual triumph of democratic socialism. To have put gender equality at the forefront of the party's agenda, given the social attitudes of the time, would certainly have made this goal more elusive. This is not to say that CCF women were deliberately channelled into menial tasks or, in violation of the CCF's philosophical commitment to sexual equality, blocked from rising to positions of responsibility. As this paper has tried to demonstrate, women faced substantial social, psychological, and financial barriers to political action, but when they were able to overcome them managed to ascend the party hierarchy in significant numbers. Men or women who had anything to contribute were generally welcomed, for gender discrimination was a luxury the CCF could simply not afford in its desperate struggle to survive. Shortly after the 1951 election disaster, the chair of the Women's Committee told the party's annual convention that "if the CCF is to go forward, there will have to be a much greater emphasis by men and women alike on this job of winning women for socialism."¹²³ Most CCFers would have agreed, and the survival of the democratic socialist movement in Ontario was due in no small measure to their realism.

I would like to thank the readers and editor of this journal for their useful comments on an earlier draft of this paper, and to my friend and colleague, Phillip Buckley, for his constant encouragement.

¹²²Beeby, "Women," 279.

¹²³MUA, Ontario CCF/NDP Collection, Report of the Women's Committee to the provincial convention, 10-12 April 1952.