

# **The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in the Maritimes, 1899-1916**

David Frank et Nolan Reilly

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# THE EMERGENCE OF THE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT IN THE MARITIMES, 1899-1916

David Frank and Nolan Reilly

A *STANDING* theme in the writing of Canadian history has been the innate "conservatism" of the people of the Maritimes. Historian Ernest Forbes has recently shown the weaknesses of this "Maritime stereotype" as an interpretation of the Maritime experience. Several studies of social and political movements in the region have also questioned the adequacy of this approach to regional history. As J.K. Chapman has noted in an account of one Maritime radical's career, the Maritimes "shared in the collectivist responses to industrialization and unbridled capitalism which appeared in Great Britain and North America in the closing decades of the nineteenth century." Businessmen and politicians raised the standard of Maritime Rights. The churches began to turn their attention to social action. Small producers established farmers' and fishermen's cooperatives. Trade union membership increased and workers engaged in militant strikes. In the early 1920s radical politics also enjoyed success. The established political parties were often compelled to respond flexibly, though incompletely, to these new concerns and pressures in regional politics. It is also important to note that the region's diverse economic structure and pervasive economic difficulties created enormous obstacles for the establishment of a more successful radical tradition in the Maritimes. But it is clear that "conservatism" is not an adequate explanation of regional history.<sup>1</sup>

The emergence of a small but vigorous socialist movement in the Maritimes in the early twentieth century casts further doubt on the "Maritime stereotype." At a time when the region included about 13 per cent of the Canadian popula-

<sup>1</sup> E.R. Forbes, "In Search of a Post-Confederation Maritime Historiography, 1900-1967," *Acadiensis*, 8 (1978), 3-21; E.R. Forbes, *The Maritime Rights Movement, 1919-1927* (Kingston 1978); R.J. Sacouman, "The Differing Origins, Organization and Success of Maritime and Prairie Cooperative Movements to 1940," in Robert Brym and R.J. Sacouman, eds. *Underdevelopment and Social Movements in Atlantic Canada* (Toronto, forthcoming 1979); Don Macgillivray, "Industrial Unrest in Cape Breton, 1919-1925" MA Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1971; Nolan Reilly, "The Origins of the Amherst General Strike, 1890-1919" (Paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting, 1977); A.A. Mackenzie, "The Rise and Fall of the Farmer-Labour Party in Nova Scotia," MA Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1969; J.K. Chapman, "Henry Harvey Stuart (1873-1952): New Brunswick Reformer," *Acadiensis*, 5 (1976), 79-104.

tion, Maritimers made up about 10 per cent of the membership of the Socialist Party of Canada. The circulation of *Cotton's Weekly*, the Canadian socialist newspaper, ranged from 7.7 to 15.6 per cent of the national circulation. At its peak in 1910, the Socialist Party of Canada had 15 locals in the Maritimes and claimed about 300 members. By 1913 *Cotton's* boasted a circulation of more than 2,400 copies in the Maritimes and Newfoundland.<sup>2</sup> The strength of the socialist movement in the Maritimes in this period was no less than in Central Canada and bore many resemblances to the stronger radical movement in western Canada. Although the historiography of Canadian radicalism has been dominated by accounts of western movements, a full picture requires attention to the history of socialism in the other regions of the country.<sup>3</sup>

Our purpose in this paper is to trace the emergence of a socialist movement in the Maritimes in the years 1899-1916 and to describe the scope, activities and importance of the movement. We will introduce several key individuals and communities, and explore the socialists' approach to a number of economic, social and political issues. Reference to a variety of local situations within the region will, we hope, provoke further research in these areas.<sup>4</sup> The history of the early socialist movement in the Maritimes sheds some new light on the response of Maritimers to industrial capitalism, and also helps to establish a basis for studying the development of Canadian socialism as a whole.

During the 1890s the new era of industrial capitalism awakened intellectual concern among various Maritimers. In Halifax novelist Marshall Saunders described urban social problems. At the University of New Brunswick political economist John Davidson lectured on contemporary labour problems. Politi-

<sup>2</sup> Data on the institutional evolution of the movement and the circulation of *Cotton's Weekly* are presented in Tables I and II. The estimate of party membership is from the *International Socialist Review* (April 1910). Circulation data for *Cotton's* were derived from the weekly reports on copies printed and copies sold which appeared in each issue of the newspaper. According to Ross McCormack's important study, national party membership never exceeded 3,000; see McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto 1977), 68.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930* (Kingston 1968) and Norman Penner, *The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis* (Scarborough 1977) both neglect the regional experience. In addition to McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries*, important studies of western radicalism are David Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations and the General Strike* (Montreal 1974) and Gerald Friesen "Yours in Revolt": The Socialist Party of Canada and the Western Labour Movement," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, I (1976), 139-57.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, a parallel movement emerged in Newfoundland during this period, and we have prepared a short sketch of this movement in an appendix to this paper. We have not attempted to show the relations between the socialists and other elements in the labour movement in detail, as McCormack's study has done for western Canada. Nor has our study achieved the intensive focus on the region exemplified by F.A. Barkey, "The Socialist Party in West Virginia, 1898-1920," PhD Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1971.

cians pondered the labour policies of Gladstonian Liberalism, and clergymen explored the principles of the social gospel. In the press and in public lectures and discussions, the social reform ideas of Henry George and Edward Bellamy attracted attention.<sup>5</sup>

This pattern of middle-class concern produced at least one organization which, though not avowedly socialist, provided a forum for the discussion of socialist ideas and had "many members who are out and out socialists." In Saint John in May 1901 a Fabian League was formed "for the discussion of Sociological questions" and the "propagation of all ideas that tend to lighten the toil, promote the welfare and elevate the social and moral conditions of the people."<sup>6</sup> The leading spirit among the Fabians was W.F. Hatheway, a wholesale grocer and former president of the Board of Trade. In his poetry and essays Hatheway praised "the nobility of labor" and deplored contemporary extremes of wealth and poverty. In 1903 he stood as a Conservative-Labor candidate for the provincial house.<sup>7</sup> In cooperation with the Saint John Labour Council, the Fabians sponsored an investigation of New Brunswick industrial conditions. League members inspected sawmills, cotton mills, and factories, and reported their findings at public meetings. As a result, a provincial royal commission prepared a Factory Bill, which was enacted in 1905. To one contemporary observer, however, the Factory Act was "perfectly harmless from the employers' standpoint." In late 1905 the Fabians adjourned their meetings indefinitely.<sup>8</sup>

The formation of the first distinctly socialist organization in the region was the result of a turn towards the Marxist socialism of Daniel DeLeon's Socialist Labor Party. In 1898 various Halifax reformers participated in the creation of the United Labor Party. One of the members, stenographer A. M. Muirhead,

<sup>5</sup> Marshall Saunders, *The House of Armour* (Philadelphia 1897); John Davidson, *The Bargain Theory of Wages* (New York 1898); A.S. Kendall Papers, Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS); E.R. Forbes, "Prohibition and the Social Gospel in Nova Scotia" *Acadiensis*, I (1971); Karen E. Sanders, "Margaret Marshall Saunders: Children's Literature as an Expression of Early Twentieth Century Social Reform," MA Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1978. For examples of the social gospel and interest in George and Bellamy in Halifax, see *Acadian Recorder*, 27 December, 31 May, 18 February 1898; *Halifax Herald*, 30 May 1899; for these references we would like to thank Ian McKay, Halifax.

<sup>6</sup> *Butler's Journal*, April 1903, June 1901; H.H. Stuart, "Socialism in Eastern Canada," *Weekly People* (New York), 24 February 1906.

<sup>7</sup> W.F. Hatheway, *Canadian Nationality, The Cry of Labor and Other Essays* (Toronto 1906); James C. Graves and Horace B. Graves, comp., "New Brunswick Political Biography," Public Archives of New Brunswick (PANB), Vol. VII. Hatheway polled 3,570 votes.

<sup>8</sup> "Documents from the New Brunswick Assembly Papers Relating to the Factory Commission and Factory Act 1905," PANB, 49, 90-1 *et passim*; Stuart, "Socialism in Eastern Canada."

corresponded with the New York headquarters of the Socialist Labor Party,<sup>9</sup> and in February 1899 the Halifax group resolved to form a section of the SLP. "The change was made not without loss," reported Muirhead, "for the 'Girondist' element was strong." But he was pleased to note that the new local formed "one of the termini of the Socialist girdle round the northern half of the continent."<sup>10</sup> The Halifax group published a monthly newspaper, *The Cause of Labor*, and carried their message to open air meetings in the city's parks and streets, where they spoke on "Questions of vital interest to Workingmen."<sup>11</sup> The party's most popular spokesman was a young law student, Adolph F. Landry. The son of an Amherst railway worker, Landry had gone to work as a boy in the Springhill coal mines. He survived the disastrous 1891 explosion and subsequently worked as a carpenter before coming to Halifax.<sup>12</sup> By 1903, however, the Halifax socialists were in disarray; according to H.H. Stuart, the Halifax SLP "unfortunately split over the ST&LA question, and finally broke up."<sup>13</sup>

In industrial Cape Breton the emergence of the socialist movement was closely linked to the growth of the coal industry and the experiences of the trade union movement. At the end of the 1890s the industrial boom in Cape Breton attracted thousands of immigrants, both from within the region and from beyond. Immigrant coal miners from Scotland and Belgium had been familiar with socialist ideas in their homelands. Native Cape Bretoners like Alex McKinnon and Alex and Hugh McMullin, who had lived and worked in western Canada and in the United States, returned home imbued with socialist ideas. In 1900 two members of the Halifax Socialist Labor Party, D.N. Brodie and Fred Lighter, settled in Glace Bay.<sup>14</sup> The year 1904 brought two important setbacks for the local labour movement. The first major strike undertaken by the Provincial Workmen's Association was badly defeated during the summer by Dominion Iron and Steel with the aid of federal troops and militia. An Independent Labor Party, advocating a minimum wage and public ownership of mines, railways and other natural monopolies, nominated Stephen B. MacNeil, a PWA leader, to run in the federal election in November 1904. The local socialists actively supported the campaign. MacNeil did poorly in the election, as did a second labour candidate in a provincial by-election in December.<sup>15</sup> In

<sup>9</sup> Socialist Labor Party of America Records, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Records of the National Executive Committee, 1878-1906, A.M. Muirhead to Henry Kuhn, 24 January 1898.

<sup>10</sup> *The People* (New York), 1 May 1899.

<sup>11</sup> *Acadian Recorder*, 25 July, 22 August 1899; *Butler's Journal*, June 1901.

<sup>12</sup> *Butler's Journal*, June 1901; *Eastern Labor News*, 15 May, 6 November 1909.

<sup>13</sup> Stuart, "Socialism in Eastern Canada." The Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance was a dual trade union federation established by the SLP to challenge the American Federation of Labor.

<sup>14</sup> Stuart, "Socialism in Eastern Canada."

<sup>15</sup> Joe MacDonald, "The Roots of Radical Politics in Nova Scotia: The Provincial

the wake of these disappointments, a Socialist Club was formed at Glace Bay on 22 November 1904 and a similar club at Sydney Mines in 1905. The socialists participated in public debates with local clergymen and gained influence within the PWA. P.F. Lawson, editor of the *Provincial Workman*, was converted to the socialist cause and shared the socialists' enthusiasm for the newly-formed Industrial Workers of the World. Forced to resign his position, Lawson moved to Chicago to work for the IWW.<sup>16</sup>

Organized socialism also took root in New Brunswick during this period. In July 1902 Martin Butler and Henry Harvey Stuart collaborated in the formation of the Fredericton Socialist League which became branch 67 of the Canadian Socialist League. Martin Butler's road to socialism began in the Maine and New Brunswick woods. As a youth he lost his arm in a mill accident and supported himself as an itinerant peddler. A self-described "poet, printer, peddler, patriot, workman, editor," Butler established a monthly newspaper in Fredericton in 1890, which continued to publish until 1915.<sup>17</sup> *Butler's Journal* staunchly advocated republicanism and egalitarianism, defended "The Rights of Labor" and celebrated "the honest, large-hearted working men and farmers of New Brunswick."<sup>18</sup> Butler's populism was also accompanied by an interest in Bellamyite and Christian socialist ideas.<sup>19</sup> In 1898 Butler published the Socialist Labor Party's Declaration of Principles, "to which we give our unhesitating and unqualified approval." Without abandoning his republicanism, Butler now gave equal importance to "Canadian Independence" and "Social and Economic Reform." "We have not lost sight of the principles of national independence, which we have advocated for so long," he assured his readers, "but consider that the principles of economic administration should take precedence." "Monarchy is but a modification of Despotism, as is Republicanism an off-shoot of Monarchy," Butler explained, "Only in Socialism can be found true freedom and social and economic equality for all."<sup>20</sup>

A frequent contributor to the journal and an important influence on Butler

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Workmen's Association and Political Activity, 1879-1906," Unpublished manuscript, Carleton University, 1977; H.H. Stuart, "Address Regarding the ILP," 24 October 1904, H.H. Stuart Papers, University of New Brunswick. MacNeil polled 869 votes in a contest against Liberal Alexander Johnston and Tory William MacKay. In the provincial contest, in which the Tories fielded no candidate, James Boyd polled 2080 votes against Liberal A.S. Kendall.

<sup>16</sup> Stuart, "Socialism in Eastern Canada," *Sydney Post*, 14, 18, 29 November 1904; for examples of socialist ideas within the PWA see PWA, Grand Council Minutes, 1904, II, 242; 1905, II, 485; 1907, III, 617.

<sup>17</sup> *Butler's Journal*, May 1903. For his poetry, see Martin Butler, *Patriotic and Personal Poems* (Fredericton 1898).

<sup>18</sup> *Butler's Journal*, July 1891, July 1892, August 1892, May 1895.

<sup>19</sup> *Butler's Journal*, July 1893, December 1899.

<sup>20</sup> *Butler's Journal*, August 1898; *Canadian Democrat*, April 1901.

was H.H. Stuart.<sup>21</sup> A printer in his youth, Stuart had become a teacher in 1894. Active as a Sunday School teacher and temperance advocate, Stuart was a strong Presbyterian until he withdrew in 1899 to become a lay preacher in the Methodist church. In 1897 and 1898 he was a reader of socialist newspapers like the *Appeal to Reason*. In a letter to *Citizen and Country* in 1899 he signed himself "A New Brunswick teacher who teaches and preaches socialism." A few months later he was dismissed from his post at Fredericton Junction for "circulating the *Weekly People*, placing socialist books in the Sunday School Library, and talking socialism in public places."<sup>22</sup> He soon secured another teaching post and was a founding member of the New Brunswick Teachers Union in 1902. In *Butler's Journal* Stuart reviewed the progress of the international socialist movement and informed readers in 1899 that socialism stood for public ownership of mines, railways, utilities, insurance companies and for "cooperation in manufacturing and commercial life" direct legislation, universal peace and abolition of poverty. "In fact" he concluded "socialism in its true sense is nothing more or less than Christianity applied."<sup>23</sup>

The establishment of the Fredericton Socialist League in 1902 affords an opportunity to analyse briefly the ideological positions adopted at this stage by Butler, Stuart and their supporters. In an extensive Declaration of Principles, the Fredericton group appeared to depart from the Christian socialism and reformist principles of the 1890s and to stress the doctrine of class struggle which was to be associated with the Socialist Party of Canada after 1904. The Declaration contained no appeals to "Christianity applied" as a justification for a socialist programme. In place of the limited public ownership programme espoused earlier by Stuart, the League announced that it "stands squarely for the public ownership of all the means of production, distribution and exchange." A sharp distinction was drawn between "Government" and "public" ownership, with a warning against "such public ownership movements as are an attempt of the capitalist class to secure governmental control of public utilities for the purpose of obtaining greater security in the exploitation of other industries and not for the amelioration of the condition of the working class." While socialists were pledged to support trade unions, the Declaration added that "the workers can most effectively act as a class in their struggle against the collective power of capitalism by united action at the polls." A large obstacle facing the workers, however, was the fact that "the capitalists largely control the newspapers, colleges, churches and political parties, and use them to advance their own interests." Here then was a prime role for the socialists to

<sup>21</sup> On Stuart, see H.H. Stuart, "Biographical Notes," Stuart Papers, UNB, and J.K. Chapman, "Henry Harvey Stuart." Hatheway, Stuart and Butler are the subject of G.H. Allaby, "New Brunswick Prophets of Radicalism: 1890-1914," MA Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1972.

<sup>22</sup> *Citizen and Country*, 21 October 1899; *Butler's Journal*, January 1900; *Western Clarion* 7 March 1908; Stuart, "Socialism in Eastern Canada."

<sup>23</sup> *Butler's Journal*, February 1899.

play: "We desire to educate the people to become conscious of their interests and to refuse to fight the battles of the capitalists." The ultimate aim was described as "the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of the Co-operative Commonwealth."<sup>24</sup> As President of the Fredericton Socialist League, Stuart carefully distinguished his group from the Socialist Labor Party, whose views on trade unionism he disapproved, and the Saint John Fabian League, which he considered "scarcely Socialist." In 1904 Stuart travelled to Cape Breton to participate in the campaign to elect an ILP candidate to the House of Commons. Never numerous, the Fredericton socialists actively pursued their educational work, "each year finding the soil of the Province more receptive and encouraging."<sup>25</sup>

The establishment of the Socialist Party of Canada in January 1905 was the product of a merger between the Canadian Socialist League and the Socialist Party of British Columbia. The new party adopted a programme of uncompromising class struggle. The party platform described an "irrepressible conflict" between capitalist and worker which was "rapidly culminating in a struggle for possession of the reins of government." The party platform specified no immediate demands, but called on workers to unite under the party banner in order to achieve three goals:

1. The transformation, as rapidly as possible, of capitalist property in the means of wealth production (natural resources, factories, mills, railroads, etc) into the collective property of the working class.
2. The democratic organization and management of industry by the workers.
3. The establishment, as speedily as possible, of production for use instead of production for profit.<sup>26</sup>

The party regarded its "impossibilist" position as the most revolutionary in the world and refused to join the Second International on the grounds that the International was a reformist body.<sup>27</sup>

The Socialist Party of Canada soon achieved ascendancy within the socialist movement in Canada. In the Maritimes the party supplied a rallying point for socialists in the region. Members of the Fredericton Socialist League welcomed the formation of the SPC, adopted the party platform, and in April 1905 formed Fredericton Local No. 1 of New Brunswick.<sup>28</sup> In August 1907, with the help of Stuart, the Cape Breton socialists received a charter as Local Cape Breton and brought 31 new members into the party.<sup>29</sup> In February 1908 a second New Brunswick local, with 40 charter members, was formed among the

<sup>24</sup> *The Maine Socialist* (Bath, Me.), 12 March 1904.

<sup>25</sup> Stuart, "Socialism in Eastern Canada."

<sup>26</sup> *Platform, Socialist Party of Canada.*

<sup>27</sup> McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries*, 53-61, 70-1.

<sup>28</sup> Charter, Local Fredericton No. 1, Socialist Party of Canada, Stuart Papers; *Fredericton Daily Gleaner*, 27 July 1905.

<sup>29</sup> Clipping and handbill, 1907, Scrapbook No. 1, Stuart Papers; *Western Clarion*, 24 August 1907. In October 1905 John Taylor of Sydney Mines had sought information about establishing a local, and in 1906 Charlie O'Brien, the prominent Alberta SPC and



CPR workers at McAdam Junction.<sup>30</sup> A third New Brunswick local was formed in 1908 in rural Albert County. Here the inspiration was Roscoe Fillmore, whose road to socialism was a reminder that one of the concomitants of rural depopulation and emigration in the Maritimes was the contact young labourers established with labour and socialist movements they encountered while travelling in search of work. Born in 1887, Fillmore went to Portland, Maine as a youth and worked at casual jobs and in a locomotive repair shop. One evening in 1903 he heard a socialist speaker on a streetcorner, and on his return to Albert soon afterwards he was a convinced socialist. A voracious reader, Fillmore confirmed his socialism through extensive reading and on trips to Portland, Rochester, Alberta and British Columbia. In western Canada he worked on the harvests and on railway construction and met a number of militant unionists and socialists. On his return to Albert County early in 1908 he organized a party local and soon became the region's most active socialist agitator.<sup>31</sup>

The year 1909 was a time of rapid growth for the socialist movement in the Maritimes. Early in 1909 there were five locals in existence; by the end of the year there were 15 locals.<sup>32</sup> In New Brunswick new locals were formed in Saint John, Newcastle and Moncton; in Nova Scotia locals were established at Amherst, Halifax, New Glasgow and Springhill; in Cape Breton locals were organized at Sydney, Sydney Mines and Dominion No. 6, and a large branch was formed in Dominion. In April 1909 the Dominion Executive appointed Wilfrid Gribble to conduct an organizing tour in the Maritimes. A British-born carpenter and ex-serviceman, Gribble was an active Toronto party leader with a flair for propagandistic verse. The tour was financed partly by the party executive, but mainly from contributions to a special fund established by Fillmore.<sup>33</sup> Gribble arrived on 5 May, planning to spend two months in the region, but remained until 24 October. At the end of his tour he reported: "I have been and still am surprised at the ripeness of the field for Socialist propaganda in the Maritimes, especially in Nova Scotia" and added that "If the same amount of public propaganda that was put in Ontario had been put in Nova Scotia, the

UMW leader, toured the Maritimes; *Western Clarion*, 21 October 1905, *Cotton's Weekly*, 21 August 1913.

<sup>30</sup> *Western Clarion*, 22 February 1908.

<sup>31</sup> *Western Clarion*, 8 February 1908; R.A. Fillmore, unpublished autobiographical manuscript, Dalhousie University Archives. We would like to thank Mrs. Rosa Skinner for her assistance in discovering this manuscript and for permission to use autobiographical details for this paper.

<sup>32</sup> *Western Clarion*, 8 January 1910.

<sup>33</sup> *Western Clarion*, 3 April, 22 May, 2 October 1909. On Gribble, see Wayne Roberts, "Artisans, Aristocrats and Handymen: Politics and Trade Unionism among Toronto Skilled Building Trades Workers, 1896-1914," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976), 97; Wilfrid Gribble, *Rhymes of Revolt* (Vancouver 1912).

# **SOCIALISM**

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**The ONLY solution of present day political problems.**

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**Will be discussed by**

**HENRY HARVEY STUART**  
**of Newcastle, N.B.**

**and prominent Local Workers**

---

**To-Night**

**FRIDAY, AUGUST 9th. 1907**

**AT**

**Temperance Hall,**

**Charlotte St. - Sydney**

**At 8 O'clock**

**Under auspices of Local Cape Breton Socialist  
Party of Canada**

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**ALL ARE WELCOME**

Table I: Socialist Organizations

	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916
<b>Nova Scotia</b>																		
Glace Bay						I	I	I	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Amherst											X	X		?		X	X	
															Y	Y	Y	
New Glasgow											X							
Springhill											X	X	X					
Sydney Mines							I				X	X	X	X	X			
Dominion #6											X							
Halifax		S	S	S	S	S					X	X	X					
North Range									I		X							
Dominion #1											X							
Port Morien												X						
Inverness														?			?	
Sydney											X		X					
Stellarton												?						
Westville											?							
Joggins											?							
<b>New Brunswick</b>																		
Fredericton				C	C	C	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
McAdam										X	X							
Albert											X	X						
Newcastle											X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Moncton											X	X						
Saint John			I	I	I	I	I				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Whitehead															X	X		
<b>Key:</b>																		
I)Independent organization																		
X)SPC																		
Y)SDPC																		
											S)SLP							
											C)CSL							
											?)partial evidence							

results would have been immeasurably more; this I have not the slightest hesitation in saying."<sup>34</sup> The Maritime locals also sponsored a tour by W.D. "Big Bill" Haywood of the IWW in November and December. The massive coal miners' strike in summer 1909, lasting for ten months in Cape Breton and 21 months in Cumberland County, provided a host of illustrations for socialist propagandists. In 1910, on Gribble's recommendation, a Maritime Provinces Executive Committee was established at Glace Bay. In November 1913, at the insistence of Saint John members, separate provincial executives were established for Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.<sup>35</sup> The institutional evolution of the movement in the region may be followed in detail in Table 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Western Clarion*, 8 July, 2 October 1909, 8 January 1910.

<sup>35</sup> *Western Clarion*, 20 November 1909, 1 March, 22 November 1913.

A significant measure of the growth of socialist influence in the region is provided by the circulation figures for *Cotton's Weekly*. The "live propaganda paper" founded at Cowansville, Quebec by W.U. Cotton in December 1908, was modelled on Julius Wayland's immensely successful *Appeal to Reason*. Always more popular than the official party organ, the *Western Clarion*, *Cotton's* reported a national circulation of 31,000 copies in 1913.<sup>36</sup> Readers in Atlantic Canada consistently accounted for a substantial part of the *Cotton's* readership. Detailed circulation figures are given in Table II. For a sample issue in each of six years, from 1909 to 1914, readers in Atlantic Canada accounted for 15.6, 13.0, 9.8, 7.7, 8.9 and 7.8 per cent of the paper's national circulation. In December 1910 *Cotton's* had more than 1300 subscribers in the region. Of these more than 1100 were in Nova Scotia, principally in Cumberland County (553), Cape Breton and Victoria Counties (334), Halifax (99) and Pictou (43).<sup>37</sup> The newspaper had little success on Prince Edward Island, where circulation never exceeded 100 copies. The socialists found greater response in Newfoundland, where there were 265 subscribers in 1913 and the socialists enjoyed an episodic organizational presence. By late 1912 copies of *Cotton's* every week were being mailed into all but two federal constituencies in the Maritimes. Nevertheless, the urban and industrial centres of Cape Breton, Cumberland, Inverness, Halifax and Saint John accounted for about three-quarters of the subscribers. Readership reached a peak of more than 2400 copies in October 1913.

The socialists encountered some vexatious obstacles in their efforts to build a radical movement in the region. The soil of Albert County proved inhospitable. Upon its formation, the party local was denounced by the clergy and the meeting place was stoned. Clarence V. Hoar wrote that the members felt "shunned as if they were poisonous reptiles, and . . . were thought capable of such outrages as bomb-throwing or throat-cutting." A clerk at the Bank of New Brunswick, Hoar was compelled to resign his job and move to Portland, where he remained an active socialist.<sup>38</sup> Fillmore himself made frequent forays into Moncton, where party supporters included William Mushkat, a Moncton merchant and Russian emigré of 1905, and his daughter Sophie Mushkat, later active in the Alberta SPC. On one occasion Fillmore's street meeting was disrupted and the socialists took the offender to court; the next night the police broke up the meeting, but the pugnacious Fillmore was able to intimidate the police chief into allowing meetings to continue.<sup>39</sup> There were similar difficulties in Nova Scotia. In Pictou County organizer Gribble had no trouble in

<sup>36</sup> We would like to thank Mr. E.M. Penton, Ottawa for permission to read his unpublished manuscript, "*Cotton's Weekly* and the Canadian Socialist Revolution, 1909-1914," *Cotton's Compendium of Facts* (Cowansville, Quebec 1913), 94.

<sup>37</sup> *Cotton's Weekly*, 22 December 1910.

<sup>38</sup> *Cotton's Weekly*, 14 October 1909, 15 September 1910; *Western Clarion*, 4 July 1908.

<sup>39</sup> *Western Clarion*, 9 October 1909; Fillmore manuscript.

**Table II**  
*Cotton's Weekly* Circulation in Atlantic Canada, 1909-1914

Issue of	Total	Canada	percent of Atlantic national circulation	NS	NB	PEI	NFLD
23 Dec. 1909	5014	786	15.6	514	268	4	?
1 Dec. 1910	10383	1352	13.0	1147	171	13	21
7 Sept. 1911	11962	1173	9.8	927	225	6	15
24 Oct. 1912	26274	2025	7.7	1382	430	27	186
9 Oct. 1913	27556	2439	8.9	1683	420	71	265
12 Mar. 1914	19619	1546	7.8	1156	230	47	113

*Cotton's Weekly* Circulation in NS, NB and PEI, by federal constituencies, issue of 24 Oct. 1912.

Nova Scotia		New Brunswick	
Annapolis	30	Carleton	0
Antigonish	10	Charlotte	7
Cape Breton North and Victoria		Gloucester	0
Cape Breton South	43	Kent	17
Colchester	346	Kings & Albert	40
Cumberland	43	Northumberland	6
Digby	350	Restigouche	2
Guysboro	6	Saint John City	158
Halifax	14	Saint John City & County	208
Hants	270	Sunbury, Queens	12
Inverness	24	Victoria	14
Kings	188	Westmoreland	83
Lunenburg	10	York	19
Pictou	28	Prince Edward Island	
Richmond	48	Kings	9
Shelburne and Queens	16	Prince	6
Yarmouth	6	Queens	7

SOURCES: Each issue of *Cotton's* contained a report of circulation figures for the previous issue. The table was compiled from these reports, and from a detailed breakdown in the issue of 7 November 1912.

attracting attentive crowds at his open air meetings in New Glasgow and Westville. In Stellarton, however, he faced competition. His streetcorner speeches were surveyed by "a bunch of bosses standing at the opposite corner" to take note of his audience and his oratory was interrupted by the arrival of the Salvation Army "who showed their Christian spirit by starting a meeting close by, thumping the drum and howling something like 'Oh, you must wear a collar and a tie. Or you won't go to heaven when you die.'" <sup>40</sup> In Halifax Gribble spoke nightly at the Grand Parade, but the members found their efforts "slow, uphill work." <sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *Cotton's Weekly*, 5 August 1909.

<sup>41</sup> *Western Clarion*, 23 October, 18 December 1909; *Cotton's Weekly*, 23 September 1909.

The socialists did achieve some influence in the public press. In Moncton an influential recruit to the socialist cause was Bruce MacDougall, editor of the fiercely independent weekly, *Free Speech*. Stuart contributed many articles on labour and socialism and the paper published the SPC platform, complete with membership application. In June 1909 the *Clarion* announced that the radical paper "has come out flat-footed for Socialism." When the editor published an attack on Saint John's mayor, police magistrate and other leading citizens in September 1909, he was swiftly convicted of libel and *Free Speech* was suspended.<sup>42</sup> By contrast, Stuart himself enjoyed greater success in Newcastle. In January 1907 he took up an appointment as editor of the *Union Advocate*, a local weekly. His first editorial, "Socialism in Canada," announced the end of the two-party system. In subsequent issues he attacked railways and corporations and advocated public ownership, reported sympathetically on the growth of the New Brunswick teachers' union and the local labour movement, and described developments in international labour and socialist activities. In local affairs, Stuart advocated a single tax on unimproved land and opposed bonus-industries, proposing instead a system of joint ownership in exchange for concessions to industries. He ceased to edit the *Advocate* in 1910 and returned to teaching. Elected to the town council in Newcastle in 1911, Stuart was returned each year, except for 1914 and 1917, until 1919. Stuart continued to write for many newspapers, including the *Eastern Labor News* and made frequent public speeches. Although he advocated a variety of reforms, ranging from the abolition of the Senate to free textbooks in the schools, he remained a member of the SPC and helped sustain the small Newcastle local which, except for a lapse in part of 1912-13, remained in existence as late as 1916.<sup>43</sup>

The SPC's strongest New Brunswick unit was in Saint John, where the local formed in 1909 was still thriving in 1913 with 30 paid-up members. The local held weekly meetings and maintained a hall. Three of the leading members were British immigrant workers Alec Taylor, J.W. Eastwood and F.O. Hyatt; Fillmore had known Hyatt in the west where they "raised a bit of a row with the unemployed of Calgary."<sup>44</sup> In November 1909 Fillmore earned his first night in jail in Saint John. When Haywood arrived in town, Fillmore accompanied him to King's Square where the Salvation Army was holding forth that evening.

Said Haywood, "Why don't we hold a meeting?" Said I, "As soon as these people are through." As the Army marched away I shouted "Fellow Workers" and the meeting was on but not for long. In five minutes all traffic on King Street was jammed where it enters the Square.

The police ordered Fillmore to end the meeting and when he refused he was

<sup>42</sup> "Articles from Free Speech," Scrapbook, Stuart Papers; *Western Clarion*, 5 June 1909; *Union Advocate*, 1, 22 September 1909.

<sup>43</sup> *Union Advocate* (Newcastle), 9 January 1907, various issues, 1907-1919; Chapman, "Henry Harvey Stuart."

<sup>44</sup> *Western Clarion*, 14 February 1914, 27 August, 19 November 1910.

whisked off to jail.<sup>45</sup> This was not the last trouble with the Saint John authorities. When the socialists attempted to run a candidate in the 1911 federal election, on a "free speech" platform, they were prevented from filing their nomination papers.<sup>46</sup> "Free speech" fights continued in Saint John during the summer of 1912, when the police chief continued to issue orders to disperse outdoor socialist meetings. In June 1913 the *Eastern Labor News* complained that the labour paper was banned from the Saint John public library.<sup>47</sup>

The Saint John socialists achieved some influence in the local labour movement, but not without some soul-searching on their part. When the local was first formed, Colin McKay noted, "some of the comrades made the mistake of sneering at the trade unions . . . and this blunder has not been wholly forgotten yet. At any rate the trade unionists have held aloof." However, McKay himself helped revive the Saint John Trades and Labour Council in 1910 and Hyatt subsequently became a delegate to the council and was elected secretary of the council; when the New Brunswick Federation of Labour was formed in 1913, Hyatt was a member of the executive. "My own impression," wrote McKay, "is that he has done more to make converts to Socialism by his connection with the trade union movement than by any of his speeches in the Socialist Hall."<sup>48</sup>

The socialists enjoyed mixed success in the region. They established a presence in most of the urban and industrial districts in the region and generally failed to reach the fishing, farming and lumbering population of the Maritimes. A few exceptions to this pattern may be noted. Locals were established among farmers in the Saint John Valley (Whitehead Local) and in the Annapolis Valley (North Range), and Stuart enjoyed considerable personal influence in the Newcastle district. And in industrialized Pictou County, where there was pronounced radicalism in the 1920s, the SPC was much less successful in the pre-war period than in other industrial communities. In the coal mining and factory towns of Cumberland County and in the coal and steel communities of Cape Breton, the socialists enjoyed their greatest influence. To analyse the socialist movement in these areas we turn to two brief case studies.

In Cumberland County the socialists played an influential role. In December 1908 Amherst socialists were corresponding with party headquarters and a local was formed with ten members in January 1909. Three months later recording secretary Albert Collins, a local labourer, boasted that the unit had almost 40 members. "It is really surprising to find so many people who have for years been nursing the principles of socialism within their thinking chambers," wrote Collins to the *Clarion*.<sup>49</sup> Gribble spent seven days in Amherst during his tour that summer, addressing 13 meetings in that time; in his report to *Cotton's* he singled out the careful preparations made by the Amherst mem-

<sup>45</sup> Fillmore autobiography; *Eastern Labor News*, 27 November 1909.

<sup>46</sup> *Western Clarion*, 18 November 1911.

<sup>47</sup> *Eastern Labor News*, 2 March, 22 June, 6 July, 27 July 1912.

<sup>48</sup> *Western Clarion*, 15 April 1911, 11 October, 22 November, 2 August 1913.

<sup>49</sup> *Western Clarion*, 30 January, 20 March 1909.

bers for his meetings.<sup>50</sup> Roscoe Fillmore also found ready audiences in the factory town. On 1 July 1909 he took over the bandstand at the town's Dominion Day celebrations and lectured the crowd on socialism for about 20 minutes; when the band concert began, Fillmore led an audience of about 100 people to a hall for a socialist meeting.<sup>51</sup>

An analysis of Amherst socialist supporters shows the close links between the socialists and the local labour movement, in which they occupied key leadership positions. In 1903 Dan McDonald and George McLeod organized the tailorshops and helped build the town's first trades and labour council. Also active in the labour council and their international union were moulders John McLeod, Tom Godfrey, John Logan and James Duxberry. Blacksmith Zabred McLeod, carpenters John Ball and William McInnis and fellow socialist Clarence Babcock took the lead in organizing workers in the large Rhodes-Curry Co. works. Among the almost 30 socialists identified in Amherst, the majority were skilled workers; carpenters and tailors led the way with solid representation from shoemakers, millmen, masons and machinists. Although information on women's participation in the socialist movement is scarce, in 1915 a Mrs. Zora Richardson was corresponding with the *Clarion* on behalf of the Amherst SPC. She may have been the owner of a boarding house that sheltered itinerant socialists and was used as union headquarters during the 1919 general strike. Mrs. Logan and Mrs. Godfrey, who together with their husbands had immigrated from Scotland, were also known for their strong socialist ideas.

A similar situation prevailed in Springhill among the Cumberland County coal miners. Socialist agitators were well received on their visits to Cumberland. Gribble found Springhill "simply grand" and added: "I think Springhill must have broken the record in number of names on charter application."<sup>52</sup> A month later in Joggins, Fillmore held a successful meeting in the UMW Hall, and with the help of the local UMW secretary, Walter A. Grice, formed another party local.<sup>53</sup> *Cotton's Weekly* quickly achieved a large circulation in Cumberland County and carried extensive reports on the progress of the miners' strike, submitted by local socialists. Among the leading socialists in Springhill were Seaman Terris and William Watkins, both popular UMW leaders; Terris later ran for the House of Assembly on a socialist ticket and Watkins, secretary of the Springhill UMW local, later became president of District 26. Perhaps the most flamboyant radical was Jules Lavenne, a Belgian coal miner and socialist, who was a strong booster of *Cotton's* and other socialist literature and organizer of a Socialist Young Guard among the miners' children.<sup>54</sup> On one occasion during the 1909 strike Lavenne entered the compound where immigrant strikebreakers were housed and on a Sunday morning, riding a white horse

<sup>50</sup> *Cotton's Weekly*, 12 August 1909.

<sup>51</sup> *Amherst Daily News*, 2 August, 27 July 1909.

<sup>52</sup> *Western Clarion*, 5 June 1909.

<sup>53</sup> *Western Clarion*, 17 July 1909.

<sup>54</sup> *Cotton's Weekly*, 6 April 1911.



and carrying a red flag, he led them through the town to join the strikers.<sup>55</sup> Fillmore later recalled that many German and Belgian miners, recognizing socialist songs sung by the strikers, had come out in support of the strike; he noted many of the German coal miners had been members of the German Social Democratic Party.<sup>56</sup>

The socialists had an important impact on the development of working class political activity in Cumberland. In 1908 Amherst unionists and Springhill coal miners discussed and planned formation of a local labour party.<sup>57</sup> The Cumberland Labour Party was formally launched on 1 May 1909. The founding convention adopted a statement of principles which was based on the Trades and Labour Congress platform, but prefaced by a declaration in favour of the collectivization of all the means of production, distribution and exchange. Two candidates were named to stand for election to the provincial legislature.<sup>58</sup> The candidates were Seaman Terris, the Springhill miners' leader and Adolph Landry, the former Halifax SLP spokesman. (After leaving Halifax, Landry worked in the Amherst and Moncton area as a representative of the International Correspondence Schools and appeared frequently at labour and socialist meetings, sharing the platform with Keir Hardie in Moncton in 1908 and Wilfrid Gribble in Amherst in 1909.)<sup>59</sup> Upon formation of the Cumberland Labour Party, both Stuart and Fillmore appealed to the new organization to join the SPC, urging them to become "class conscious workers" and "up to date workingmen by throwing away your immediate demands and adopting the platform of the Socialist Party of Canada."<sup>60</sup> Shortly afterwards the party members voted by a two to one margin to endorse the "platform and principles" of the SPC.<sup>61</sup> An unexpected provincial by-election in November 1909 occupied the Labour Party's attention. Landry was chosen to run and after a vigorous campaign he polled 1,250 votes, mainly in Amherst and Springhill.<sup>62</sup> In June 1910 the party met in convention at Maccan and "solemnly dissolved" in favour of the SPC. Those who were not already members of the SPC signed applications. The meeting then reconvened under Fillmore's chairmanship as a "Socialist convention" and nominated Landry and Terris to run in the next provincial general election.<sup>63</sup> The Maritime Executive made the candidacy of

<sup>55</sup> Jim Brennan Interview, Springhill, 1975.

<sup>56</sup> Fillmore autobiography. A similar account is given in *Eastern Labor News*, 18 June 1910.

<sup>57</sup> William Watkins to David Coleman, 2 July 1908, Miner's Museum, Glace Bay; *Western Clarion*, 19 December 1908.

<sup>58</sup> *Eastern Labor News*, 15 May 1909.

<sup>59</sup> *Eastern Labor News*, 15 May, 6 November 1909; *Amherst News and Sentinel*, 9 September 1904, 15 September 1905, 11 April 1905; *Amherst Daily News*, 28 July 1909; *Western Clarion*, 19 December 1908.

<sup>60</sup> *Western Clarion*, 19 December 1908; *Eastern Labor News*, 22 May 1909.

<sup>61</sup> *Western Clarion*, 11 June 1910.

<sup>62</sup> *Eastern Labor News*, 27 November 1909.

<sup>63</sup> *Western Clarion*, 11 June 1910.

Terris and Landry conditional on Landry's membership in the SPC; Landry apparently did not become a member, however, and a dispute followed over the "ideological purity" of Landry and Lavenne, his most important supporter in the party. The result was the expulsion of Lavenne and the party's failure to contest either the provincial or federal elections in 1911.<sup>64</sup>

The Springhill local apparently collapsed after the defeat of the 21-month strike in 1911. The Amherst local survived; although it lapsed in 1913, it was soon reorganized and active in 1914 and 1915. Amherst also provided the only instance of a local of the Social Democratic Party of Canada in the region. A local was formed in Amherst by T.H. Dorion in late 1913 and continued to exist in 1914 and 1915.<sup>65</sup>

The Cumberland radicals also had an impact on local politics. In the 1910 elections the Cumberland Labour Party successfully ran three labour candidates in Springhill and two in Amherst. The labour candidate for mayor in Amherst was narrowly defeated, but in 1911 he became the first mayor to break the reign of the town's business elite in that office. In the 1914 town elections a "Socialist ticket" was sponsored by the SDPC members. Three members ran for council seats and machinist Leon Knowlton was the candidate for mayor. During the campaign some 3-4,000 copies of the SDPC platform were distributed. Another manifesto, written by the Amherst socialists, was addressed "To the Wealth Producers of the Town of Amherst." "As tomorrow is election day," the document proclaimed, "you will be called upon to vote for the suppression or continuance of the system that makes the rich richer and the poor poorer. . . . Our present social system puts profit ahead of human life and while it exists the Golden Rule is impracticable. We are not making a personal canvass for votes. We are leaving it to the discretion of the workers themselves to vote for their emancipation." Knowlton obtained 361 votes the next day, more than 25 per cent of the ballots cast.<sup>66</sup>

In industrial Cape Breton the socialist movement had become well-established prior to 1909. In 1908 one "Rover Jim" was overjoyed on his first night in Glace Bay to discover "an enormous Socialist meeting" of 1200 people.<sup>67</sup> H.H. Stuart, concerned that ILP units might challenge the SPC in the Maritimes following the endorsement of political action by the Trades and Labour Congress, was confident that such efforts would fail in Cape Breton, "for the Cape Breton comrades are able to much more than hold their own in debate."<sup>68</sup> On his arrival in Cape Breton in 1909 Gribble was likewise impressed by a "whole crowd of stalwarts, . . . some of them exceptionally well

<sup>64</sup> *Western Clarion*, 3 June, October 1911, January 1912; *Eastern Labor News*, 27 May 1911.

<sup>65</sup> *Cotton's Weekly*, 18 June 1914; *Canadian Forward*, 16 December 1915.

<sup>66</sup> *Amherst Daily News*, 2, 29 January, 4 February 1914; *Cotton's Weekly*, 26 February 1914.

<sup>67</sup> *Western Clarion*, 28 November 1908.

<sup>68</sup> *Western Clarion*, 19 December 1908.

posted." At an open air meeting in Sydney Mines the audience forced him to speak "till my voice squeaked and still they wanted more, so we had a song, the Red Flag;" by dark he had gained 25 membership applications. Sydney Mines, Gribble predicted, would become the "Nanaimo of the East." "Comrades should know," he reported, "that results have been obtained long since in Cape Breton that are being manifested now. These recruits we are getting are no sudden conversions, but men and women who have been merely waiting for the assembly to be sounded."<sup>69</sup>

As in Amherst, the socialists were predominantly working-class in membership and enjoyed close links with the local labour movement. In a group of 25 prominent SPC members in industrial Cape Breton, at least 12 were coal miners; other occupations included steelworkers and printers, a baker and a tailor. Three party members, Wilberforce McLeod and Alex and Hugh McMullin, were officials in local cooperative societies; the first two were also active in the formation of the Cooperative Union of Canada. Four party members were prominent trade union leaders: J.B. McLachlan and J.D. McLennan were executive officers of District 26 of the United Mine Workers of America, Alf Brenchley was secretary of a UMW local, and steelworker H.C. Gregory was secretary of the Sydney Trades and Labour Council.

Gribble arrived in Cape Breton in the midst of the turmoil preceding the strike for recognition of the UMW. A strong proponent of the official SPC position on the ineffectuality of trade unions, Gribble greeted the arrival of UMWA President T.L. Lewis with loud sneers. According to Gribble, "Lewis talked 'Brother Capital and Brother Labour', 'fair profits', 'rightful division of the products', 'conciliation' and a lot of other rot." Gribble's attitude no doubt troubled prominent socialist trade unionists like McLachlan and McLennan. More suited to the situation was Jimmy Simpson, the Toronto trade union leader and party member, who arrived on the scene to write sympathetic reports on the strike for the Toronto press. Gribble and Simpson represented opposite tendencies within the SPC on the party's "impossiblism." The two socialist spokesmen clashed briefly at one public meeting in Glace Bay before Gribble, with the consent of the local members, agreed to continue his organizing tour elsewhere in the region. "The majority of the miners are in a state of fatuous confidence as to their success," wrote Gribble unperturbed, "and are just now unfitted to some extent for listening to the real thing. It will not be long before many of them will be disillusioned however and then will be the chance of Maritime comrades to see that the only hope of the workers is again expounded to them." During the remainder of his tour Gribble predicted defeat for the coal miners and, according to the *Eastern Labor News*, "accused the trade unions of being no use to the working class, because they stood for the present system of industry."<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> *Cotton's Weekly*, 10 June, 1 July 1909; *Western Clarion*, 2 October 1909.

<sup>70</sup> *Cotton's Weekly*, 10, 17 June, 15, 29 July 1909; *Eastern Labor News*, 18 September 1909.



*A group of delegates to the international convention of the United Mine Workers of America, 1910. Included were J.B. McLachlan (top left), Seaman Terris (top right) and J.D. McLennan (bottom right). College of Cape Breton Archives.*

Socialist agitation continued unabated through the long strike period. The course of events featured strikebreaking, evictions, armed confrontations, arrests and blacklists. "It has been a grand time for socialist propaganda," wrote McLachlan in the *International Socialist Review*, "The local comrades have taken advantage while the miners were in a mood to think and have spread the literature of socialism amongst them, where, hitherto stoic conservativeism [sic] reigned, it is now fast becoming red." McLachlan also noted that the socialists were particularly effective in gaining the support of non-English speaking workers for the UMW. Visiting a group of imported strikebreakers, he found the workers were unimpressed when the interpreter introduced him as an officer of the UMW. "He then said, I was a member of Glace Bay socialist local. That did the trick, in a moment they were round me shaking my hand and the grins gave place to beaming faces."<sup>71</sup> At the invitation of the socialists, Big Bill Haywood toured the Cape Breton district in early December. The famous Wobbly addressed crowded audiences in local theatres in Sydney Mines, Sydney and Glace Bay and smaller meetings at Dominion and Dominion No. 6.

<sup>71</sup> *International Socialist Review*, June 1910, 1104.

His topic was "The Class Struggle" and according to the report filed by the Cape Breton socialists "He told the workers that they must achieve their own emancipation. They need not look for some kindly saviour to do it for them." He also "gave a very different idea of unionism from that held down there in the past — that of making the union an industrial school in which the workers study and develop themselves in such a manner that when the Socialist Party has achieved political emancipation, the industrial union would be prepared to efficiently and economically man and administer the means of production. His picture of the coal miners under an industrial democracy brought forth the hearty and spontaneous cheers of the workers."<sup>72</sup>

In October 1909 a convention of the five Cape Breton locals resolved to contest the next provincial election on the issue of "the present system of exploitation." The convention declared that "The present industrial system is based on the exploitation of the worker, the working class being under the necessity of selling its labour power for what maintains a bare existence" and concluded that "this condition can only be remedied by the abolition of the present wage system under which all production is carried on for the profit of the capitalist class." The resolution also noted that "all other political parties under whatever name known stand for the maintenance of the present system of exploitation."<sup>73</sup> In May 1910 the socialists again confirmed their "uncompromising hostility" towards other political parties and selected their candidate. Born on a Cape Breton farm, on the death of his father Alex McKinnon went to work at ten years of age and entered the mines at 14. Through night school study he earned a certificate qualifying him as a mine manager. An admirer of Eugene Debs, he learned his socialism under the influence of the Socialist Party of America and in Chicago attended the party's Ruskin University. Returning to Cape Breton, he became town engineer for Glace Bay from 1906 to 1918. A founder of the Socialist Club in 1904, McKinnon was an effective speaker with a talent for "making puzzling things plain."<sup>74</sup>

The provincial election finally took place in June 1911. McKinnon claimed the honour of being the first socialist candidate for any legislature east of Saskatchewan. An election manifesto attacked the capitalist system and called for "collective and social ownership of all the means of life by the working class." "What do we mean by a 'revolution'?" the manifesto continued, "We mean that the proletariat must become the politically dominant class and use this power to take over the ownership and control of all capitalist industries." Comrade McKinnon was running on "the only vital and real issue before the workers of this country as well as the world, viz.: 'Socialism versus Capitalism'."<sup>75</sup> McKinnon polled a total of 713 votes, mostly in the mining towns where there were SPC locals. In the dual constituency McKinnon's vote

<sup>72</sup> *Cotton's Weekly*, 23 December 1909.

<sup>73</sup> *Western Clarion*, 13 November 1909.

<sup>74</sup> *Eastern Labor News*, 4 June 1910; *Cotton's Weekly*, 9, 16 June, 1 July 1910.

<sup>75</sup> *Western Clarion*, 3 June 1911.

amounted to 11.4 per cent of the total polled by Tory John C. Douglas, the leading candidate.<sup>76</sup> This showing was no better than Stephen B. MacNeil's vote as a labour candidate in 1904, but the socialists once more raised "that \$200 to pay the fine" and conducted similar "clear-cut revolutionary propaganda" in the September federal election. On this occasion McKinnon received only 223 votes, though in a class contest this was sufficient to result in a margin of defeat for the sitting Tory member.<sup>77</sup> In both elections McKinnon had faced Liberal and Tory candidates with some prominence as supporters of working-class causes; as mayor of Glace Bay John C. Douglas had opposed the use of troops in the 1909 strike; J.W. Maddin and Douglas had both appeared as solicitors on behalf of the UMW; colliery doctor A.S. Kendall had supported the consideration of compulsory recognition of trade unions. In the light of these candidacies, and the radical character of the socialist campaign, the socialist votes in 1911 must be regarded as class conscious ballots. The electoral results indicated the existence of a strong core of socialist supporters, but they also revealed that the party system in Cape Breton responded resourcefully to working class militancy.

Following the 1911 campaigns, the Cape Breton socialists remained active. In April 1912, for instance, the Glace Bay local boasted 59 members and in the next four months recruited 42 new members and sold more than \$200 worth of socialist literature. Among the most popular items were issues of the *International Socialist Review*, *Coming Nation*, *Western Clarion*, *New York Call*, *Progressive Woman* and the various books and pamphlets published by Charles H. Kerr. *Cotton's Weekly* continued to circulate in the hundreds and one coal miner recalled that as a boy he read *Cotton's* to his father. The party local continued to hold public meetings and weekly educational classes and maintained rooms on the main street in Glace Bay, where a huge portrait of Karl Marx stared down from the wall.<sup>78</sup>

The socialists in the Maritimes, as elsewhere in Canada, shared many of the customs of the world-wide movement from which they drew inspiration. They celebrated the First of May and the anniversary of the Paris Commune, signed their correspondence "Yours in Revolt" and, on public occasions, wore red neckties. They made no important contributions to the development of Marxist theory in Canada, but in this they were little different from most North American socialists, whose commitment and zeal habitually found expression in tireless activism. The primary immediate goal of the socialist movement was the making of socialists; the precise strategy and tactics which would be necessary to achieve socialism received relatively little attention. Thus the socialists

<sup>76</sup> Nova Scotia, *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 1912, Appendix No. 19, pp. 3-5.

<sup>77</sup> *Western Clarion*, September 1911, 61; Canada, House of Commons, *Sessional Papers*, 1912 No. 18.

<sup>78</sup> *Western Clarion*, 2 November 1912; interviews with Murdoch Clarke, 27 September 1975, Fred Brodie, July 1977.

placed great emphasis on the importance of education and propaganda in their work, but like most British and North American socialists of their time they were prepared to wait with confidence for the gradual growth of socialist strength and the economic and social crises which must take place before the socialist commonwealth was inaugurated.<sup>79</sup>

Stuart never tired of repeating one of the fundamental propositions of the socialist movement. "We have been looking for justice to come as a gift from the master class," he stated in an address in Glace Bay in 1904, "forgetting that, if the workers are ever to be free, *they must free themselves*." Writing frequently on educational issues, Stuart attempted to educate his fellow teachers to "The Proper Teaching of History;" "The purpose of history," he wrote, "is, or should be, to teach the rising generation to avoid the mistakes of their ancestors, and so be able to substantially improve the social, moral, industrial and political system handed down to them by their immediate progenitors."<sup>80</sup> One Sydney Mines socialist, John MacAllister, eloquently attacked the role of the school and church in propagating capitalist morality. "As soon as the poor man's child can totter out of doors, it is taught to pull off its cap and pull its hair to the quality. . . . Industry, Honest and Content," he scoffed. "The first item is taught because industry gives the rich everything they desire, the second because honesty prevents an iota of the said being taken away again, and the third because content hinders these poor slaves from ever objecting to a system so comfortable to the rich who profit by it."<sup>81</sup> In addition to attending weekly classes, party members often contributed long reports, letters, discussions and poetry to socialist and labour newspapers and to the daily press. But only Roscoe Fillmore could rival Stuart for the volume of contributions. His writings ranged from a discussion of the role of labour exchanges in the capitalist economy to a careful study of capitalist development in China, which was published in the *International Socialist Review*. In the light of the literature many party members perused, it was not surprising they impressed visitors with their erudition. In Glace Bay one party member's library featured at least 14 Kerr editions including: Engels, *The Origin of the Family*; Emile Vandervelde, *Collectivism and Industrial Evolution*; Karl Kautsky, *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History*; A.M. Lewis, *Evolution Social and Organic*; John Spargo, *The Common Sense of Socialism*; C. Osborne Ward, *History of the Ancient Lowly*; Antonio Labriola, *Essays on the Materialistic Conception of History*; and Karl Kautsky, *The High Cost of Living*.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>79</sup> For discussion of the ideology of socialists in Britain and the United States, see Stephen Yeo, "A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896," *History Workshop*, 4 (Autumn 1977), and Paul Buhle, "Intellectuals in the Debsian Socialist Party," *Radical America*, 4 (April 1970).

<sup>80</sup> Stuart, "Address Regarding the ILP," 24 October 1904, Stuart Papers; *Union Advocate*, 20 October 1909.

<sup>81</sup> *Cotton's Weekly*, 4 May 1911.

<sup>82</sup> Personal information.

But the outstanding feature of the ideology of the early socialists was their continual stress on the primacy of the class struggle. "Labour produces all wealth," declared the SPC platform, "and to the producers it should belong. The present economic system is based upon capitalist ownership of the means of production, consequently all the products of labour belong to the capitalist class. The capitalist is therefore master; the worker a slave."<sup>83</sup> In election manifestoes, the party's candidates reduced the issues before the electorate to the simple one of "Capitalism versus Socialism." In "Keep the Issue Clear," Fillmore characteristically insisted that the party's preaching was restricted to the class struggle: "Its campaigns are fought on that issue. Campaign speeches of organizers and candidates are not in advocacy of reforms but on the robbery of the slave at the point of production."<sup>84</sup> Because the party's strategy depended on the conquest of political power in order to enforce "the economic programme of the working class," political activity was supervised with some rigour by local, provincial and dominion executives. The sanctions against Landry and Lavenne in Cumberland County in 1911 provide a dramatic illustration, and on at least three occasions, in Albert County in 1908, in Cumberland in 1911 and in Cape Breton in 1912, party members who supported "the capitalist ticket" were expelled from the party by their comrades.<sup>85</sup>



*Roscoe Fillmore (left) with a group of agricultural workers in Central Siberia, c. 1923. A prominent Maritime socialist, Fillmore worked in the Soviet Union as an agricultural specialist in 1923-24. Dalhousie University Archives.*

By comparison, other issues dividing party members appeared to be of less significance. Although issues like religious belief and trade unionism caused

<sup>83</sup> SPC Platform.

<sup>84</sup> *International Socialist Review*, 1915-16, pp. 614-7.

<sup>85</sup> *Cotton's Weekly*, 15 September 1910; *Western Clarion*, 17 February 1912.



tension within the party, they did not result in any open splits among the Maritime socialists. Many party members had become socialists without abandoning strong religious beliefs. H.H. Stuart, who almost personally represented the transition from Christian socialism to Marxism, perceived no contradiction between socialism and Christianity. "A true Christian could not obey Christ's injunction to 'Do unto others as one would be done by'," he wrote, "without being an uncompromising foe to the system of wage slavery." Religious beliefs for Stuart were a private matter: "Whether a socialist believes in God or no God is his own private business, and the party must tolerate no interference in such matters. If the candidate for membership is sound in his economics, he should be admitted; if unsound thereon, rejected."<sup>86</sup> Fillmore, however, was a convinced lifelong atheist. Raised a strict Baptist, he had read Ingersoll, Huxley and Paine in his youth, and after a protracted spiritual struggle, rejected religious belief. But he refrained on principle from undertaking anti-religious propaganda. In 1911 the Maritime Executive opposed a campaign to have the SPC declare socialism and religion incompatible. Fillmore denounced such efforts for losing sight of capitalism and attacking the effect instead of the cause. In the east, Fillmore pointed out, "Comrades are up against a different sort of worker, a priest-ridden worker. . . . These Comrades have not catered to the church — they have simply ignored its insults and antagonism and have gone on their way pointing out the enslavement of the workers and the cure."<sup>87</sup>

Similarly, on the issue of trade unionism wide differences prevailed within the party. "The mission of the Socialist Party of Canada," declared the masthead of the *Western Clarion*, "is not to further the efforts of the commodity labour-power to obtain better prices for itself, but to realize the aspirations of enslaved labor to break the galling chains of wage servitude."<sup>88</sup> In practice, however, many of the party's most effective spokesmen were trade union leaders who consistently defended short-term working class interests. When millworkers in northeast New Brunswick went on strike in May 1907, H.H. Stuart championed their cause in the *Union Advocate*: "One workman alone is of no importance in the world today. Only the power that can be exerted by many men moving together with one mind and purpose will avail to elevate and improve the workingman's condition. Workmen, unite! By doing so, you have everything to gain and nothing whatever to lose."<sup>89</sup> In Cumberland and Cape Breton counties in Nova Scotia, the socialist movement was dominated by working-class members active in the labour movement. The treatment accorded party organizer Gribble in Glace Bay in 1909 contrasted sharply with the favourable welcomes enjoyed by Simpson and Haywood, socialists for

<sup>86</sup> *Western Clarion*, 22 October 1910.

<sup>87</sup> Fillmore manuscript; *Western Clarion*, 19 November 1910, 28 January 1911.

<sup>88</sup> *Western Clarion*, 27 March 1915.

<sup>89</sup> *Union Advocate*, 15 May 1907.

whom trade unionism was an essential component of the socialist movement. The case of the Maritimes suggests that on the trade union issue the socialists ignored the party's official indifference and pursued vigorous pro-union policies. This may have been the case in other areas as well. As Ross McCormack has pointed out, some 60 to 90 per cent of the party membership were trade unionists, and party leaders often substituted a "reluctant pragmatism" for the official party "impossibilism." Similarly, Tim Buck's recent memoirs have confirmed a picture of a party which operated in a decentralized fashion: "The Socialist Party of Canada had been a national organization, but the Dominion Executive had never exerted any great authority. It had, generally speaking, made pronouncements and published the paper, the *Western Clarion*, but each local organization had done pretty much as it wished."<sup>80</sup>

The Maritime socialists also perceived that the economic and social structure of their region tended to inhibit the rapid progress of the socialist movement. A Saint John socialist, Colin McKay, made an impressive effort to apply "the laws of expanding capitalism" to the political economy of the region, and addressed the problems of small industry, farmers and fishermen. "In a region of small industry, where the employer is obviously not getting rich," he noted, "the ideas of Socialism do not meet with a ready reception. It is not easy to grasp the fact that the small employer is a mere vassal in many cases of the larger capitalism." In general, he concluded, "the habits of thinking and feeling of the Maritime workers are those peculiar to small scale industry, and it is not an easy matter to inoculate them with scientific Socialism." Like most socialists of his time, however McKay remained confident of the progressive nature of capitalist development and foresaw that the expansion of capitalism in the region would increase the appeal of socialism: "Still there is no doubt that Socialist ideas are germinating. The provinces are growing more and more industrial, and the new conditions produce new modes of thought."<sup>81</sup> Stuart shared similar reflections, writing that "the small business firms are being rudely awakened to the fact that they are doomed to speedy extinction unless something is done to check the freezing-out process that is being applied to them by the big corporations." Ultimately, this process would bring strength to the socialist movement: "The Union of all the citizens of the country on equal terms — otherwise known as the Socialist Commonwealth — is the only solution of the industrial problem; but the remedy will not be applied until the majority of the small operators are clean driven to the wall. Then they will turn to Socialism as their only hope."<sup>82</sup> In his analysis of the fishing industry McKay perceived similar promise for socialism. He observed that the traditions of cooperation in the industry helped the fishermen more readily to "grasp the

<sup>80</sup> McCormack, *Rebels, Reformers, and Revolutionaries*, 55-65; Tim Buck, *Yours in the Struggle: Reminiscences of Tim Buck* (Toronto 1977), 122.

<sup>81</sup> *Western Clarion*, 2 August 1913; *Eastern Labor News*, 13 September 1913.

<sup>82</sup> *Union Advocate*, 20 March 1907.

possibilities of cooperation generally;" "among the fishermen of Nova Scotia I have been surprised at the tendency to Socialist modes of thought..." However, he did not expect that cooperative societies were capable of controlling the course of changes in production and marketing methods sponsored by the capitalist fish companies. Instead, he placed his faith in the progressive dynamic of capitalist development: "there is every reason to expect that the evolution of capitalism within the fishing industry will follow the course it has taken in other industries. In time the workers in the fishing industry will find themselves in the same position as the workers in all capitalistic industries. The laws of expanding capitalism operate to reduce practically all classes of workers to the same status. Capitalism itself develops class conscious workers and creates conditions from which the only way of escape is by the overthrow of the rule of the capitalists and the establishment of the cooperative commonwealth."<sup>93</sup>

The high tide of the socialist movement in 1909-10 did not last. By 1914 there remained four SPC locals in New Brunswick, two in Nova Scotia, an SDPC local in Amherst and an independent organization in Newfoundland. Socialism remained a radical movement supported by small numbers of people in the region. With the beginning of the war, opportunities for socialist influence declined. Still, party locals remained active in 1915 and 1916 in Newcastle, Amherst, Saint John and Glace Bay. In contributions to the *International Socialist Review*, Fillmore denounced the leaders of international socialism who, he charged, had "betrayed the movement;" "When war threatened, in order to have been consistent, the European Socialists should have opposed it even to the point of organized armed revolt."<sup>94</sup>

Two episodes in the early part of the war indicated the persistence of socialist activity in Saint John and Cape Breton. The Saint John socialists mounted a vocal opposition to the war. Gribble, who had settled in the city and married a local socialist in 1915, remained a prominent speaker. Following a Sunday evening meeting at the Socialists' Hall, Gribble was arrested and charged with making seditious utterances. In the trial it was revealed that Gribble had called the King "a puppet" and "had changed the recruiting motto" "Your King and Country Need You," into "Your King and Country Bleed You." Gribble denied he had spoken these words, but admitted saying that "Crowns and titled kings are puppets in the hands of the capitalist class." Socialists around the region rallied to Gribble's defence and collected a substantial defence fund. In January 1916 Gribble was convicted, but the presiding justice imposed a moderate sentence of two months for this criminal offence.<sup>95</sup> In 1916 the Glace Bay socialists nominated McLachlan to run in the Nova Scotia provincial election. An election manifesto proclaimed the principles of

<sup>93</sup> *Western Clarion*, 2 August 1913; *Eastern Labor News*, 13 September 1913.

<sup>94</sup> *International Socialist Review*, 1914-15, pp. 398-403.

<sup>95</sup> *Saint John Globe*, 8 December 1915, 13, 20 January 1916.

socialism and stated that McLachlan was "nominated by the Socialist Party to contest the election in the interest of the working-class alone." "The members of the Socialist Party," the leaflet concluded, "can do no more than give the worker a chance to express himself." McLachlan obtained 1,038 votes, 14.1 per cent of the total polled by the leading candidate, John C. Douglas, a substantial increase over 1911.

In the years before the war the socialists opposed the formation of labour parties. In Halifax and Pictou County labour parties contested the provincial elections in 1911, but in Cumberland and Cape Breton the socialists successfully maintained their place as the only working-class party. After 1916 the socialists' policy changed. Political frustration, growing industrial militancy and discontent with wartime policies and the formation of the Canadian Labor Party in 1917 led SPC members in Canada to turn towards the radical One Big Union movement or to make common cause with more moderate elements in the labour movement. In the Maritimes the socialists threw their energy into the election of farmer and labour candidates. In 1917 McLachlan became president of the newly-formed Cape Breton Independent Labor Party, whose candidates did better than any other labour candidates in Canada in the 1917 election. In New Brunswick Stuart stumped the countryside advocating "a truly popular political party by union of the workers, farmers and all others who perform any useful labor with hand or brain."<sup>96</sup> Labour candidates achieved significant successes in local politics in Moncton, Halifax, Sydney and the Nova Scotia mining towns. In 1920 seven Farmer candidates were elected to the New Brunswick legislature and four Labor and seven Farmer members were elected to the Nova Scotia assembly. In 1921 one Farmer MP was elected in New Brunswick and McLachlan, though defeated, polled more than 8,900 votes in the federal election. But these developments marked a new stage in the history of radicalism in the Maritimes, for the distinctive political identity of the socialists was submerged within a broader movement.

As in Western Canada, the radicalism of the post-war period was rooted in the formative experiences of the previous decades. The most prominent radicals of the 1920s and 1930s in the Maritimes included H.H. Stuart, D.N. Brodie, J.B. McLachlan and R.A. Fillmore, who were all active figures in the pre-war socialist movement and subsequently became leaders of the Communist Party and the CCF in the Maritimes. On the invitation of McLachlan, Brodie and other Cape Breton radicals, in 1921 W.U. Cotton, erstwhile editor of *Cotton's Weekly*, settled in Glace Bay as editor of the *Maritime Labor Herald*. During the 1920s and 1930s the champion Jimmie Higgins of the Glace Bay local, H.G. Ross, remained a tireless salesman of radical literature. At the same time, there was also discontinuity, as the deepening underdevelopment of the region accelerated the exodus of population from the region; individual Maritimers such as Sophie Mushkat, P.F. Lawson and Fred

<sup>96</sup> *Union Advocate*, 9 July 1918.

Thompson became prominent in western radicalism.

The emergence of a socialist movement in the Maritimes in the years before the First World War reminds us not only that radicalism in Canada was an established movement prior to 1919, but also that Maritimers played their part in this movement. Available estimates of party membership and newspaper circulation show that Maritimers offered the socialist movement a proportionate share of its nation-wide following. Rooted in the influences and inspirations of the 1890s, the radical movement in the Maritimes, as in Canada as a whole, soon became Marxist in principles and working class in character. The Socialist Party of Canada provided an ideological and organizational rallying point, but the Maritime socialists also exercised considerable autonomy in their activities. The official "impossibilism" of the SPC guaranteed the party's political purity and proletarian character, but did not prevent the socialists from participating in non-revolutionary working-class struggles as well. As in western Canada, the strongholds of the radical movement were in the mining and industrial centres where the growth of industrial capitalism was most rapid and the course of class conflict most sharp. This parallel development suggests that the emergence of Canadian socialism owed more to the common conditions of working-class experience in eastern and western Canada than to any peculiarities of regional life or culture in east or west. For thousands of Maritimers, the early socialist movement was an important part of the region's political life, but given the large obstacles imposed by the region's economic and social structure, the achievements of the early socialist movement in the Maritimes were not substantial.

#### APPENDIX I: Early Socialism in Newfoundland

SOCIALIST ideas also gained supporters in Newfoundland in the years after 1899. In July 1899 the Socialist Labor Party newspaper, *The People*, carried a long report on conditions among Newfoundland fishermen. A year later another long despatch from Bell Island described the efforts of the iron ore miners to organize against the Dominion Iron and Steel Company.<sup>1</sup> In October 1906 the *Western Clarion* carried reports of the formation of a Newfoundland Socialist Party. The leading spirit was Robert E. Scott, an itinerant Socialist Party of Canada member who in May 1906 had led a 5,000-strong "Red Flag" parade in Montreal.<sup>2</sup> By January 1907 the new group had held ten meetings. The small "socialist society" devoted its energies to circulating socialist literature and speaking to local groups on the merits of socialism.<sup>3</sup> One active member of the socialist grouping was George Grimes, a Methodist lay

<sup>1</sup> *The People*, 30 July 1899; *The Weekly People*, 14 July 1900.

<sup>2</sup> *Western Clarion*, 7 March 1908; *Union Advocate*, 9 Jan. 1907.

<sup>3</sup> *Evening Telegram* (St. John's) 8 January, 8 February 1907. We would like to thank Bill Gillespie, St. John's, for this information.

preacher, who continued to describe himself as a socialist when he was elected to the legislature in 1912 as a member of W.F. Coaker's Fishermen's Union Party.<sup>4</sup> Joey Smallwood has recalled meeting Grimes in St. John's as a youth and that Grimes helped spark his interest in socialist literature.<sup>5</sup> In Newfoundland, the circulation of *Cotton's Weekly* reached a peak of 260 copies per week in July 1913.<sup>6</sup> An organization known as the Newfoundland Socialist League was active in the summer of 1914, but reported "a large amount of hidebound prejudice to deal with."<sup>7</sup> Subsequently this group formed a Socialist Party of Newfoundland with a platform and constitution modelled on the SPC.<sup>8</sup> In January 1915 James Stirling, the secretary, reported 50 members in the St. John's local and "in many outside places the gospel of discontent is taking root."<sup>9</sup> Stirling appealed for donations of literature and continued to correspond with the Dominion Executive of the SPC throughout 1915. On one occasion he asked for suggestions on how to discuss socialism with the fishermen: "They think they would have to work just as hard and long under a cooperative administration as now, fishing in the season; mending nets, etc., when the season is over."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Cotton's Weekly*, 4 December 1912.

<sup>5</sup> J.R. Smallwood, *I Chose Canada* (Toronto 1973), 74.

<sup>6</sup> *Cotton's Weekly*, 3 July 1913.

<sup>7</sup> *Western Clarion*, 18 July 1914.

<sup>8</sup> *Western Clarion*, 7 November 1914.

<sup>9</sup> *Western Clarion*, 30 January 1915.

<sup>10</sup> *Western Clarion*, 27 March 1915, October 1915.

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