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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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Cooperation and Community in the Thought of J.S. Woodsworth

Allen Mills

The higher conception of "no revenge for wrongs," and of freely giving more than one expects to receive from his neighbours, is proclaimed as being the real principle of morality. . . . In the practice of mutual aid, . . . we thus find the positive and undoubted origin of our ethical conceptions; and we can affirm that in the ethical progress of man, mutual support — not mutual struggle — has had the leading part. In its wide extension, even at the present time, we also see the best guarantee of a still loftier evolution of our race.[1]

Kropotkin

For no man giveth, but with intention of good to himself; because gift is voluntary; and of all voluntary acts, the object is to every man his own good; of which if men see they shall be frustrated, there will be no beginning of benevolence, or trust; nor consequently of mutual help.[2]

Hobbes

I have no objection whatever to the word "socialism," but I would point out that socialism has a great many meanings today. In the cooperative commonwealth we have chosen a phrase into which we have the right to place whatever meaning we wish.[3]

Woodsworth

I

THE NOTION OF "COOPERATION" was employed by a vast array of radical thinkers in the English-speaking world in the late nineteenth century. Edward Bellamy used it, as did Robert Blatchford and L.T. Hobhouse. Laurence Gronlund wrote a work of early Marxism entitled *The Cooperative Commonwealth*. At the same time, theories of cooperation helped launch a multiplicity of left-wing political groups, socialist and labour parties and, most especially,

[1] Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid* (Boston 1902), 299-300.
[2] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Michael Oakeshott (Oxford 1946), 99.
[3] *Hansard*, 5 February 1934, 266.

Allen Mills, "Cooperation and Community in the Thought of J.S. Woodsworth," *Labour/Le Travail*, 14 (Fall 1984), 103-20.

movements imitative of the famous Rochdale pioneers.[4] Canada was part of this rising tide of cooperativism.[5] Cooperative ventures flourished after 1900, particularly in the prairie grain growers' movement, Alphonse Desjardins' *caisse populaire* in Quebec and George Keen's Cooperative Union in Ontario and the Maritimes. The idea too was widely discussed. Agrarian leaders as unalike as T.A. Crerar and E.A. Partridge used it, but so did such urban radicals as Salem Bland, William Irvine, and F.J. Dixon. It is not surprising that Canada's first, nationally-organized democratic socialist party should have been named the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, and that the CCF's first national leader, James Shaver Woodsworth, should have made frequent and eloquent use of the theory of cooperation. To make sense of Woodsworth's use of this theory is the central purpose of this essay.

Woodsworth was born in Ontario in 1874 but grew up in Manitoba. As a young man in Brandon and Winnipeg, his intellectual world was a mixture of nineteenth-century English liberalism, Anglo-Canadian nativism, Methodism, and the pioneer assumptions of a new agricultural frontier. A product of the professional middle class, he was well-educated and also well-travelled, having by 1906 visited Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Egypt, and Palestine. Ordained a Methodist minister in 1900, his growing social conscience led him in 1907 into settlement work in Winnipeg's North End where he became superintendent of All Peoples' Mission. Thereafter he moved increasingly away from a conventional ministerial role and took on the character of a social activist and would-be politician. In 1909 he published his first extensive work of political criticism. *Strangers Within Our Gates* establishes a benchmark for understanding Woodsworth's incipient notion of community.

It opens to view the mind of an ethnocentric, Anglo-Saxon, liberal nationalist. Woodsworth revealed a finely-developed corporate sense of the unity and integrity of the Canadian nation and a firm dislike of cultural pluralism. However, the consensual unity that he believed Canada must possess was a unity in support of liberal individualist values. Two years later his work on the city appeared. *My Neighbor* made explicit some of the themes of organizational interdependence, coercion, and centralization that, in time, became integral elements in his account of cooperation. By now Woodsworth's thought was increasingly secular and tinged with the presuppositions of socialism. In 1913 he moved from All Peoples' Mission to become director of the Canadian Welfare League. In 1917 he was dismissed from this position because of his public criticism of registration. His resignation from the Methodist ministry occurred in 1918 and there followed a crucial formative period in which he had

[4] The history of Rochdale-type cooperativism has been well described by Charles Gide, *Consumer's Co-operative Societies* (New York 1922), and C.R. Fay, *Co-operation at Home and Abroad* (London 1920).

[5] Ian MacPherson's *Each for All: A History of the Co-operative Movement in English Canada, 1900-1945* (Toronto, 1979) is the definitive work on cooperativism in English Canada.

intimate contact with the advanced forms of radical thought in British Columbia and the Prairies. During this time he worked on the waterfront in Vancouver, joined the Federated Labour Party, organized for the Non-Partisan League in Alberta, took part in the last days and aftermath of the Winnipeg General Strike and, finally, ran successfully for the House of Commons in 1921. To Woodsworth the prime advantage of a seat in Parliament was the opportunity it provided to publicize his ideas. Organizationally he was active as well. By the mid-1920s he helped consolidate the coalition of radical Progressives and labourists that constituted the Ginger Group and in 1932-3 he was the central figure in the formation of the CCF. In his own lifetime the CCF failed to obtain the electoral success that he had hoped for, and Woodsworth ceased to be its national leader after he voted against Canada's declaration of war in 1939.

Woodsworth's life and thought showed the effects of character, intellect, and circumstance. As I have argued elsewhere, he was a complex man and often of contradictory dispositions.[6] Highly principled, he could be surprisingly practical; possessed of an acute intellect, he chose a life of action; raised in an intensely religious environment, he advanced a largely secular understanding of society; and although in touch with what he felt were the most progressive forms of social thought, he carried with him to the end a stubborn streak of pioneer and protestant individualism. In the midst of this jumble of identities, if one principal image of him comes through, it is that of the political educator. At bottom, he believed that Canadians could be *persuaded* of the merits of socialism. The making of socialists, then, was an intellectual activity, requiring for its success a constant appeal to the spoken and written word. Socialism, to Woodsworth, would arrive not so much by practical lessons borne in upon humanity by economic history but through voluntary action that derived from the power of clear, methodical, and rational argument itself. This is not to say that Woodsworth was unaffected by or insensitive to historical circumstance. It is to argue, however, that he chose a life of political ratiocination. To this end, he wrote the two early books, the several definitive articles in 1918-9 in the *BC Federationist* and, once elected to the Commons, seized the occasions of the Throne Speech and budget debates and, in the 1930s, the debate on the cooperative commonwealth resolution, in order to explicate his social and economic theories. These are the main sources for my account of his theory of cooperation. My claim is that in spite of inconsistencies and ambiguities along the way there is a remarkable continuity in this aspect of his thought. He was after all an intellectual in politics, for whom ideas, as much as the material circumstances of life, became the force at work upon his scheme of political action.

The central claim of this essay is that throughout Woodsworth's "mature"

[6] Allen Mills, "The Later Thought of J.S. Woodsworth, 1918-1942: An Essay in Revision," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 17, 3 (1982), 75-95.

thought, from 1918 to 1939, there were one dominant and two subsidiary uses of the idea of cooperation. The use that predominated was what I call the "materialist" one.[7] Here Woodsworth emphasized that the evolution of monopoly capitalism had required ever greater specialization, interdependence of economic functions, concentration of production, centralization of managerial direction, and social or collective forms of ownership, but that the supreme advantage of such a "cooperative" form of industry was that, for the first time, poverty could be overcome through the harnessing for public purposes of monopoly capitalism's tremendous productive efficiency. Cooperation then, in this sense, was primarily concerned with the structure of industry and the opportunity afforded by monopoly capitalism to provide a decent minimum income to the average worker, what was called at that time, "a living wage."

The first of two subsidiary meanings of cooperation utilized by Woodsworth was what I call the "relational" or "intrinsic" conception. This conception spoke to the idea that the social relations presupposed by cooperation required no instrumental justification, but were instead the ground and precondition of human life itself; to use an old-fashioned turn of phrase, that cooperation was what humanity was fitted or destined to practise. This I take to be at the heart of the modern doctrine of community contained in Rousseau's General Will, Marx's idea of species being, and Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid.[8] The human relationships inherent in this sense of cooperation would be "intrinsically" valuable. Later I will argue that there was only a slight trace of this sense of cooperation in Woodsworth's thought and that in its near-absence there predominated a liberal individualist version of cooperation and community.

Finally, Woodsworth employed the notion of cooperation to denote the economic efforts of workers and farmers to exercise control over the work and marketplaces. According to this use of the notion, the pattern of human association was to be voluntarist and decentralist, thus creating a tension in his thought between the coercive and centralist implications of the materialist conception and the localist and participatory emphases of this last one.

[7] I recognise the difficulty of using the term "materialist" since it bears so many philosophical meanings. As used in this essay it is a short-handed way of expressing a preoccupation with the distribution of wealth and the type of economic organization necessary to promote sufficient industrial production to meet the income needs of the average worker, what radicals at that time called "a living wage." Frank Scott made use of "materialist" in roughly this way, in contrast to a concern for more "spiritual" values, in a speech in 1950. See Sandra Djwa and R.J. Macdonald editors, *On F.R. Scott: Essays on His Contributions to Law, Literature, and Politics* (Kingston and Montreal 1983), 78-9. A similar distinction is to be found in George Grant, "An Ethic of Community," *Social Purpose for Canada*, ed., Michael Oliver (Toronto 1961), 3-26.

[8] A more recent version of this account of community is Robert Paul Wolff, *The Poverty of Liberalism* (Boston 1968), 162-95.

II

ACCORDING TO KENNETH MCNAUGHT, Woodsworth began his intellectual odyssey towards socialism in 1910.[9] *Strangers Within Our Gates*, published the year before, can therefore be seen as part of Woodsworth's pre-socialist existence. Nevertheless there were some important continuities between this early work on the immigrant question and his later outlook, most especially in his affirmation of liberal values and his admiration of a free, democratic yeomanry.

Strangers Within Our Gates argued a forthright, though not always uncomplicated, view of the ethnic character of Canada. Leaving aside the more egregious nativist and racialist claims of A.R. Ford, Woodsworth's collaborator, it is clear that Woodsworth as well had very decided preferences with regard to suitable immigrants to Canada. Essentially, he favoured persons that were white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant. It would be convenient to attribute this predilection to simple racial prejudice, but a more ambitious and somewhat less barbarous social theory lay at the bottom of it.

Woodsworth did not believe in the equality of all cultures. Because of a mixture of factors — historical and environmental good fortune, genetic inheritance or cultural distinctiveness (he was unclear on this matter) — he held that Anglo-Saxon peoples were highly civilized and superior. This was of course a commonplace opinion of nineteenth-century British intellectuals from Macaulay through Carlyle, H.R. Buckle, and John Stuart Mill to Sidney and Beatrice Webb. To this whiggish and somewhat ethnocentric view, Woodsworth added the perspective of a North American frontier democrat. For him, Canada was an Anglo-Saxon, English-speaking, Protestant, *and* democratic nation. Woodsworth was not above using an argument based upon the claims of kith-and-kin, namely, that such an identity was to be preserved because it was near and familiar. Nevertheless his fundamental justification for the maintenance of this identity was that its unity and homogeneity guaranteed not only Canada's "civility" but also the social integrity necessary to democratic government. To Woodsworth, democracy did not presuppose cultural and social pluralism and diversity, but procedures to establish the common good within a consensual social order:

> Another word of warning from the United States: "The heterogeneity of these races tends to promote passion, localism and despotism and make impossible free co-operation for the public welfare."[10]
>
> It is generally agreed that the two races are not likely to mix. . . . We confess that the idea of a homogeneous people seems in accord with our democratic institutions and conducive to the general welfare. This need not exclude small communities of black or red or yellow peoples. It is well to remember that we are not the only people on earth.

[9] Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics* (Toronto 1959), 52-7.
[10] J.S. Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates* (Toronto 1972), 208.

The idealist may still dream of a final state of development, when white and black and red and yellow shall have ceased to exist, or have become merged into some neutral gray. We may love all men yet prefer to maintain our own family life.... We, in Canada, have certain more or less clearly defined ideals of national well-being. These ideals must never be lost sight of. Non-ideal elements there must be, but they should be capable of assimilation. Essentially non-assimilable elements are clearly detrimental to our highest national development, and hence should be vigorously excluded.[11]

Who, then, qualified for inclusion in this "ideal of national well being?" They were to have a blood affinity, be socially and economically self-dependent, energetic, abstemious, politically freedom-loving, thrifty, Christian (though they were to belong to non-sectarian and non-sacerdotal churches, so that Catholics, and Protestant sects like the Mormons, were unacceptable), ambitious, possessed of a keen business sense, home-loving and family-oriented, honest, and English-speaking. Stated so completely, it might be wondered whether Canada would have admitted any immigrants whatever, if Woodsworth had had his way. In fact, he was prepared to be more open to non-conforming types if they could by easily assimilated. He especially opposed the setting up of ethnically homogeneous agricultural colonies.[12] These, he claimed, created nations within a nation, and fostered the sort of localism and segregation that divided an otherwise unified, democratic people. Thus, he recommended that such colonies not be placed too close together and that the public schools, trade unions, and independent churches be used to assimilate and incorporate the aliens. Jews and French-Canadian Catholics were to be proselytized and converted to Protestantism by Methodist missions.[13]

It is most significant that Woodsworth's ideal immigrant, for the most part, embodied the virtues of liberal individualism rather than the more sociable qualities associated with a corporate-organic vision of society.[14] Group identities and traditional collective loyalties, he explained, were to be undermined by the state in favour of a pan-Canadian identity composed of homogeneous, individuated citizens.[15] If Woodsworth sanctioned any higher social group above the individual, it was no more inclusive than that of the family.

Finally, implicit in Woodsworth's early account of the immigrant question

[11] *Ibid.*, 231-2.
[12] *Ibid.*, 234.
[13] *Ibid.*, 245-251.
[14] The only occasion when Woodsworth considered the question of socialism was in his observation that many Jewish immigrants were socialists. However, he seems to excuse them: "[N]aturally the Jew is individualistic. But the intolerable conditions that exist in Eastern Europe have driven them almost to despair. Socialism has come as a gospel, and they have welcomed it with almost religious devotion." *Ibid.*, 128. No doubt, set free from despair, the Jew in Canada would, according to Woodsworth, resume his trend towards liberalism and individualism.
[15] As for Indians, Woodsworth favoured the ending of the treaty and reserve systems. He quoted, approvingly, a Rev. Thompson Ferrier: "As fast as our Indian ... is capable

is a celebration of an independent, democratic, free-hold yeomanry. He observed that many of the immigrants to Canada before World War I had come from areas dominated by Habsburg and Tzarist absolutism, where serfdom was still a remembered reality. Often their religion was of a Catholic type. Such people embodied a condition of political, economic, and religious backwardness. They were unused to the management of farms, were deferential to authority, and politically apathetic; they had embraced a purely local perspective on the world, were illiterate and superstitious, and thus likely to be ignorant and immoral. To Woodsworth they were serfs and barbarians and unworthy of inclusion in the Canadian ideal of educated, independent, Protestant, and technically innovative yeoman farmers.

III

THE EARLY WOODSWORTH HELD THAT, as a British nation, Canada was heir to the triumphs of liberal-whiggism; as a North American society of immigrant free-holders, Canada had escaped the experience of feudalism. Aristocracy, absolutism, and serfdom had had no dominion over Canada. These early views remained with him so that, when he later conceived of the emergence of industrialism in Canada, he saw it as occurring within a simple producer society of independent farmers and craftsmen.

Pre-Confederation Canada to him was rural, local, egalitarian, and democratic.[16] Markets encompassed only a small area; farmers were self-sufficient, and employers and employees were roughly equal in power; industry was on a small scale and controlled by owner-craftsmen and class divisions were minimal; labour was rewarded in a manner equivalent to its social utility; social relationships were neighbourly; and the achievement of responsible government guaranteed a commendable measure of democracy. Here, then, was Woodsworth's idyll or pastoral myth of an early Canadian society of freeholders, a sort of Upper Canadian, Grit version of the utopias of John Lilburne and Thomas Jefferson. But there was a serpent in Eden: the machine.

Industrialization to Woodsworth was at bottom a *technological* revolution.[17] The new machinery of production and the new forms of energy used to drive it required, for efficiency, large units of production.[18] Thus the factory

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of taking care of himself, it is our duty to set him on his feet, and sever forever the ties that bind him either to his tribe or the Government." *Ibid.*, 160.

[16] J.S. Woodsworth, "Toronto," *Woodsworth Papers*, XVI. *Hansard*, 24 April 1922, 1070; 29 June 1923, 4654; 15 June 1925, 4299-4030; 13 February 1929, 87; 17 June 1931, 2751; 15 February 1934, 604; 25 February 1938, 839.

[17] *B.C. Federationist*, 21 March, 1919. *Hansard*, 14 May 1923, 2723-4; 9 September 1930, 50-51; 17 June 1931, 2751; 2 March 1932, 727; 25 January 1937, 242.

[18] *Weekly News*, 10 September 1926; 12 November 1926. *Hansard*, 14 March 1922, 87; 24 April 1922, 1127; 29 May 1922, 2248-9; 7 May 1923, 2551-3; 9 September 1930, 51.

system came to be, and with it wage labour and the degradation of work.[19] Small independent craftsmen-entrepreneurs could not compete and became machine operators in the factories. Work was mechanical, repetitive, and uncreative; workers had no control over the production process; they became wage slaves. The logic of profitability and technological necessity prompted ever-larger units of production. Firms amalgamated, and became national and then international in their ambit. The growth of trusts, combines, and monopolies announced the coming of the modern corporation.

Woodsworth was to argue that the modern corporation was a necessary precondition of future economic security and justice. In the meantime, however, he was more exercised by its inadequacies and inequities. An obvious deficiency of the modern firm was the dehumanizing of work. Productivity required economies of scale, mechanization, specialization, and hierarchy of managerial authority.[20] In all this the worker became an automaton. A second criticism Woodsworth made had to do with the patterns of ownership. In a crude way he espoused the insight of the Marxist, namely, the inevitable contradictions within the capitalist corporation between the means and the relations of production. In the era of the owner-managed enterprise, Woodsworth claimed, possessive individualist premises of the rights of private property were morally plausible. The tools of production at that time were few and simple; the owner was an active participant in the process of production; and so the returns to his labour were perhaps justified. However, as the scale of production grew, the means of production had been transformed, but the class relationships of ownership had not. Thus the unimaginably large assets of the modern corporation were still considered by conventional opinion to be a species of "private property," as if they were still the tools of a pre-industrial artisan.

With the coming of the modern firm, what had happened, in Woodsworth's view, was that production had become social and collectivized; that is, it had become "cooperative."[21] Units of production had been integrated and combined; industrial specialization and dependence on international suppliers and markets had established interdependence; the functions of ownership and management were now separate; the natural resource monopolies exploited what were essentially public resources; often, especially in Canada, the enjoyment

[19] *B.C. Federationist*, 18 October 1918. *Hansard*, 14 May 1923, 2724; 11 June 1935, 3545.

[20] *B.C. Federationist*, 18 October 1918. *Hansard*, 2 June 1924, 2709; 19 April 1926, 2565; 4 May 1931, 1244-9; 2 March 1932, 732; 9 March 1934, 1329-30; 16 May 1934, 3105-6; 22 January 1935, 87; 27 February 1936, 581-3.

[21] *Weekly News*, 25 March 1927. *Hansard*, 14 March 1922, 89; 30 March 1922, 518-20; 16 June 1922, 3076; 24 April 1924, 1459; 24 February 1928, 766; 31 May 1929, 3105-6; 21 April 1931, 768; 17 June 1931, 2751; 11 October 1932, 64; 1 February 1933, 1692; 16 May 1934, 3105; 27 February 1936, 580; 12 March 1937, 1748; 1 April 1937, 2430.

of a monopoly status owed its existence to government, that is, "public" legislative design, for example, the grant of a protected status through tariff policy, or of a charter or franchise, as with the banks. Moreover, the modern firm no longer had just one owner, its shares instead being widely or "publicly" held. Wealth in the era of monopoly capital was sometimes acquired by illegitimate means such as stock watering, manipulation, and speculation; monopolies were so large they would subvert the public good, unless regulated. For all these reasons, the modern corporation must be viewed as a *public* body, necessarily subject to government control and ownership:

> Today we must remember that there is no such thing as private ownership of property. Since we produce collectively in all our larger industries, we must recognise more and more that no one can absolutely say with regard to a huge plant or a large railroad, "This is distinctively my business and I will brook no interference." Rather we must remember that we are advancing to a condition in which the public will claim a very real part in the carrying on of the process of production.[22]

However, for Woodsworth, the most profound moral incongruity of privately-owned monopoly capitalism was the unequal distribution of wealth.[23] The private firm, he held, would always be governed by the sectional profit of the owners. To maximize profit it would seek new markets at home and in the farthest corners of the earth. (Economic imperialism was inherent in privately-owned capitalism.[24]) But there was a finite limit to the availability of new markets. And, as long as the distribution of wealth remained so unequal, there would never be sufficient demand to buy up all of the goods that industry was capable of producing. Woodsworth conceded that in its formative period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the monopoly sector had been astoundingly expansionist and profitable, leading to the re-investment of profits in greater production facilities. But this had served only to dramatize even more the tragic contradiction of poverty in the midst of plenty: on the one hand there was industry's undoubted productive potential but on the other the actual mass poverty of the early 1920s and the Great Depression. Monopoly capitalism was in principle a productive machine of undreamed of efficiency and productivity. But there were limits to its growth so long as there were no new markets to conquer and so long as the common worker was paid an income that would allow the purchase of little more than the means of subsistence.

In this aspect of his argument, Woodsworth was, of course, almost wholly dependent on the underconsumption theories of J.A. Hobson. But Woodsworth advanced other reasons for his belief that the private ownership of financial

[22] *Ibid.*, 24 April 1924, 1459.

[23] *Ibid.*, 30 March 1922, 518-20; 10 February 1925, 54-62; 24 February 1928, 766-7; 1 April 1930, 1149; 9 September 1930, 51; 31 March 1931, 474; 2 March 1932, 726-8; 1 February 1933, 1691; 5 February 1934, 266-7; 2 January 1935, 89.

[24] *Ibid.*, 18 July 1924, 4796; 4 June 1929, 3216; 2 March 1932, 727-8; 25 January 1937, 240-2.

institutions was socially deleterious,[25] although here the intellectual influences derived not from Hobson but from Irving Fisher and F.W. Taussig, the American monetary theorists. His argument, briefly, was as follows. Those who controlled the supply of money often had a private interest in deflation. In contrast, a public-spirited financial policy would expand the money supply in step with the growth of productivity of industry. Such a goal required the public control and ownership of the banks. Thus, if monopoly capitalism remained in private hands, it would continue as an economic system of inevitable scarcity. In spite of its potential productivity, it would never actually guarantee to the common worker a living wage or a decent standard of living. Hence the imperative of socialism.

Modern industrial society in Canada then, according to Woodsworth, had, through technological necessity, been forced from paradise, but only to better prepare it for the attainment of the cooperative commonwealth, which was at hand. Technology may have obliterated the craftsman and proletarianized the worker, but it also provided the solution to the riddle of scarcity. The machine multiplied the power of labour a thousandfold; economies of scale lowered costs; the centralizing of management decisions over larger units of production augmented the benefits of planning. To perfect such a system what was needed was a technocratic industrial and financial elite animated by public service and the needs of the common worker, rather than private profit and individual acquisition. And to this whole emergent system Woodsworth gave the name of "cooperation," which thus for him stood mainly as a synonym for industrial concentration, combination, economic interdependence, economies of scale, planning, centralized coercive direction, and collective ownership.[26] This conception emphasized that cooperation was a principle denoting centralized production and planning, public ownership, and egalitarian distribution — what I call the materialist account of this term.

IV

COOPERATION WAS A MANY-SIDED IDEA among English-Canadian radicals in the first decades of this century, and its several senses often joined and overlapped. However, three senses of the term can be analytically distinguished in Woodsworth's thought. First, the materialist one, that is, cooperation as a principle of economic centralization, public ownership, and egalitarian distribution. Secondly, his vocabulary sometimes, though infrequently, alluded to a relational conception of cooperation, that is, a sense of the spiritual aspects of familial sentiment and solidarity that would characterize the attain-

[25] *Ibid.*, 14 March 1922, 89; 2 February 1923, 44; 24 April 1924, 1458-9; 4 March 1925, 753-9; 14 April 1926, 2416-18.

[26] *Weekly News*, 8 October 1926. J.S. Woodsworth, *My Neighbor* (Toronto 1911), 117. *Hansard*, 7 May 1923, 2551-4; 24 April 1924, 1459; 21 February 1927, 526; 26 March 1928, 1707; 18 September 1930, 397-401; 21 April 1931, 764; 4 May 1931, 1245-9; 17 June 1931, 2750; 5 June 1936, 3456.

ment of socialism.[27] E.A. Partridge, of all of Woodsworth's contemporaries, perhaps best expressed this conception. Finally, Woodsworth also used the word to describe the voluntaristic and associative efforts of workers and farmers to exercise some control over the marketplace and factory.[28] Sometimes Woodsworth conveyed the several senses of cooperation within the body of one speech.

> We must insure that what is presently to be built up is a new social order, based not on fighting, but on fraternity — not on the competitive struggle for the means of bare life, but on a deliberately planned cooperation in production and distribution for the benefit of all who participate by hand or by brain — not on the utmost inequality of riches, but on a systematic approach toward a healthy equality of material circumstances for every person born into the world — not on an enforced dominion over subject nations, subject races, subject colonies, subject classes or a subject sex, but, in industry, as well as in government, on that equal freedom, that general consciousness of consent, and that widest possible participation in power both economic and political, which is characteristic of democracy.[29]

However, measured by frequency and emphasis, what predominated in Woodsworth's world view was the materialist notion of cooperation as a principle of industrial centralization, collective ownership, and egalitarian distribution.

Woodsworth's view of community was inevitably affected by this materialist conception of cooperation. In his thought, the crucial moral advantage of socialism came to be its promise to provide economic security.[30] This was to be achieved by the *public* appropriation of the benefits of technological and monopolistic rationality. Indispensable to the achievement of the new order in Woodsworth's view were the technocratic, public-spirited, central planners. Under their benevolent aegis socialism would cease to be an economy of endemic scarcity and periodic depressions, and would instead become a regime of growth and egalitarian distribution.

To demonstrate the primacy of materialist considerations in Woodsworth's views on cooperation, one means is to ascertain whether material plenty *within* a monopoly capitalist society would have satisfied him. If the fundamental failing of capitalism was its material scarcity, and if for some unexpected reason this condition no longer held, in the absence of a relational account of cooperation there could be little criticism of capitalist society, and socialism

[27] *My Neighbor* (80-2) contains a good example of the "relational" sense of cooperation, except that it is Woodsworth quoting the American labour historian, Richard T. Ely. Speeches by Woodsworth that did touch on this "relational" sense are to be found in *B.C. Federationist*, 7 February 1919, and *Hansard*, 11 April 1927, 2268.

[28] *Hansard*, 16 June 1922, 3076; 5 February 1934, 266; 11 February 1935, 696; 27 February 1936, 582.

[29] *Ibid.*, 11 April 1927, 2268.

[30] *B.C. Federationist*, 3 January 1919; 7 February 1919. *Hansard*, 29 May 1922, 2250; 23 May 1930, 2494; 21 April 1931, 767; 1 February 1933, 1691; 24 February 1936, 443.

would have become irrelevant. In fact Woodsworth did consider such a possibility. His answer is illuminating: "If private ownership is going to function and supply us with all the goods we need, and if it is going to secure us democracy and industrial freedom than let us continue private ownership."[31]

Woodsworth, of course, thought that this was an impossible contingency, but he at least recognized the implication of his ideas.

Moreover, the achievement of Woodsworth's ideal of economic security would *not* have been *without high cost, namely the imposition of industrial* technocracy. For, with the coming of the "cooperative commonwealth," *industrial workers would still labour in gargantuan firms under a minute* division of labour, strict industrial discipline, growing mechanization, and the *dominance of a managerial, planning elite. Admittedly, this harsh reality,* according to Woodsworth, was to be mitigated by public ownership, a new *industrial ethic of public service, and by the introduction of industrial democ*racy, either in the form of traditional collective bargaining or more syndicalist models.[32] However, it is not evident that such measures would have been enough to imbue work with a sense of human significance. Yet it must be recognized that Woodsworth himself consciously rejected the model of bureaucratic socialism:

> May I say that the name [Cooperative Commonwealth Federation] is descriptive of the basis and purpose of the new organization. It does not advocate a bureaucratic state socialism. We recognize very clearly that there are certain measures which must be dealt with by the state; there are other matters that may be left to voluntary cooperative effort. We clearly emphasized that in one of the planks of our platform, . . . the encouragement of all cooperative enterprises which are steps to the attainment of the cooperative commonwealth.[33]

Of course, any move towards decentralized economic decision-making would have introduced the market principle and cut across the centralist and unitary emphases of the planning process. Yet Woodsworth was fond of characterizing competitive, laissez faire market societies as chaotic, anarchic, and irrational.[34] What they needed was the scientific and rational direction provided by state planning. Clearly, then, Woodsworth conceived of the cooperative commonwealth as a fused or mixed system of economic relationships; centralized and participatory, directed and voluntaristic.

What is additionally perplexing, however, is that the two parts of this mixed system were given by him the same name: "cooperation." In the one case the term denoted the principle of industrial centralization and *dirigisme*,

[31] *Ibid.*, 30 March 1922, 518.
[32] *Ibid.*, 2 June 1924, 2710; 2 March 1932, 732; 5 February 1934, 266; 19 April 1934, 2330; 11 February 1935, 696; 24 February 1936, 449; 27 February 1936, 582-3.
[33] *Ibid.*, 1 February 1933, 1688. See also 2 March 1932, 732; 5 February 1934, 266; 19 April 1934, 2330; 11 February 1935, 695-6.
[34] *Ibid.*, 7 May 1923, 2554; 21 April 1931, 764; 29 April 1931, 1112; 4 May 1931, 1248; 11 February 1932, 114; 1 February 1933, 1690.

and in the other the voluntaristic and associative enterprises of workers and farmers in trade unions and producers' coops. E.A. Partridge, for one, in *A War on Poverty* saw the contradiction between the two uses. He favoured what he called "state-wide cooperation" and "altruistic communalism," and an end to "vocational cooperation" which was how he described the self-interested action of unions and cooperatives.[35] By contrast Woodsworth espoused both these ideas of cooperation. In so doing he left behind a perplexing intellectual and practical conundrum.

In any event, what can be definitively resolved is the relative bias in Woodsworth's own intellectual system. The emphasis in his world view was upon the materialist notion of cooperation as centralized direction and egalitarian distribution. His intellectual affinities, in the final analysis, lay more with state socialists like Comte, Bellamy, and the League for Social Reconstruction than with anarcho-socialists such as Morris, Cole, Kropotkin, and Woodcock.[36] Woodsworth was in fact more of a bureaucratic socialist than he would allow.

One lacuna in Woodsworth's thinking on cooperation as industrial efficiency is remarkable. To Woodsworth, modern economic development led necessarily to mechanization, largeness of scale and collective ownership. Small business was therefore doomed to extinction. The one glaring exception to this was the family farm. After flirting with the policy of use-hold titles for farmers, Woodsworth came out solidly for the protection of the small, independent, free-hold farmer.[37] In the 1930s, Woodsworth and the early CCF advanced policies not just to preserve but indeed to re-establish the latter's independence and to rescue the farmer from the status of tenant of the larger, and perhaps economically integrative and rationalizing forces of the mortgage and trust companies, and banks. Agriculture was one economic sector that was to be exempt from economic and technological rationalization. It was to be the one industry where a voluntaristic rather than a directive and coercive account of cooperation was to prevail. Why? The cynic might say that this was the result of electoral expediency. Perhaps there is a theoretical reason: that Woodsworth continued to be enamoured with the ideal of an independent, free-hold yeomanry.

V

WOODSWORTH IN MANY WAYS STRADDLED two worlds, that of his pioneer youth and that of the new industrial order of the city. Poised between them he

[35] E.A. Partridge, *A War on Poverty* (Winnipeg 1925), 80-2, 105, 110, 162-3, 207.

[36] Paul Meier's two volumes on William Morris, *William Morris: The Marxist Dreamer* (New Jersey 1978) fail to convince me that Morris was a "consistent" Marxist. Clearly Morris had an anti-bureaucratic, anti-statist, and anti-technological emphasis; in a word he was an anarchist in his socialism.

[37] *Hansard*, 14 May 1923, 2723-4; 2 March 1932, 730; 5 February 1934, 268; 11 June 1935, 3544; 27 February 1936, 579-80. *Weekly News*, 25 August 1933.

simultaneously expressed both conventional and radical ideas. In his discussion of the relationship of cooperation to theories of freedom, Woodsworth employed arguments from his youthful liberalism and laissez faire to justify more advanced, collectivist accounts of community. Consequently, his cooperativism, while it posited the advantages of association, could not quite escape dependence on liberal individualist premises.

Certainly there was one version of individualist doctrine that he roundly and consistently rejected. This was the theory of individualism as acquisitiveness and competition. Woodsworth was sure that the era of competitive laissez faire was at an end.[38] Industrial society had in his view ineluctably moved in the direction of concentration. As early as 1911, in *My Neighbor*, Woodsworth had been absorbed by the question of the challenge to public policy when people lived close together in cities and worked in large enterprises. The conclusion he had come to then remained with him the rest of his life: society, he believed, must now be thought of not as an aggregate of relatively autonomous and isolated individuals, but as an organism, a web of interdependent parts.[39] Human society had now become so complex and demographically concentrated that the interest of each was bound up with the interest of all.

The problem was, according to Woodsworth, that conventional Canadian opinion on this matter, as with its view of property rights, was frozen in the outlook of an earlier dispensation when the economy was simple and local. Notions of political and economic freedom derived from an uncomplicated past were somehow deemed to be still appropriate in a vastly altered society. Thus, because a person could vote and make a free contract, liberty was supposedly secure. It was not, in Woodsworth's view.[40] In the modern world of the monopolistic firm, workers had been stripped of the independence that came with ownership of the tools of their trades. International economic integration made it certain that individual citizens would have no control over the rise and fall of the business cycle, and no responsibility, therefore, for their predicament should they become unemployed. Especially in an over-supplied labour market, the workers had little economic security and no capacity to bargain for a "living wage;" in one-company towns the employees' economic dependence was worse again.

Added to economic slavery was political domination.[41] In earlier times,

[38] *Hansard*, 11 April 1927, 2268; 21 April 1931, 763-4; 4 May 1931, 1248; 20 May 1932, 3137-8; 16 May 1934, 3105; 22 January 1935, 86-7; 11 February 1935, 696; 11 June 1935, 3543-5; 8 May 1939, 3729.

[39] *My Neighbor*, *passim*, but especially chapters 1-3.

[40] *Hansard*, 30 March 1922, 518-19; 14 May 1923, 2727; 2 March 1932, 728-9; 16 May 1934, 3104-7; 22 January 1935, 87; 11 February 1935, 694; 27 February 1936 582; 15 February 1938, 484; 25 February 1938, 837-40; 27 April 1939, 3297.

[41] *Ibid.*, 24 April 1922, 1127-8; 18 June 1923, 4026; 29 January 1926, 574; 9 February 1932, 75; 11 February 1932, 117-18; 2 March 1932, 728-9; 15 February 1934, 604-5; 4 March 1934, 1077.

Woodsworth seemed to say, legislative assemblies successfully practised responsible government. This had changed with the rise of monopoly capitalism. Economic power was now so concentrated that it even overshadowed the parliamentary state:

> We have reached a stage which might very well be described as economic slavery. There are very few people who are free today. A man is not free to speak in this city of Ottawa if his speeches are likely to prove unacceptable to the powers that be. Very few people are free to speak out for fear of losing their jobs.... Until a man is free economically he is not really free, and political freedom has become a sham.... The state has been and is today... an instrument of capitalism.[42]
>
> It is not sufficient to have what is called political freedom, the right to vote. It is not sufficient to have the right to travel up and down the king's highway. In order to enjoy complete freedom a man must have economic freedom.... That is the important thing and it is dependent on a measure of economic independence. Today, if a man is to have freedom of association with his fellow workmen, he has to have some sort of economic security.[43]
>
> In practice what freedom is left to the individual in a great industrial concern? Very little, and political freedom becomes absolutely futile unless we have freedom in the economic world.... Big business takes advantage of the old time psychology to urge freedom but I submit that what we call freedom from government restraint means in practice that the big industries and the big commercial concerns control us body and soul.[44]

Although he painted a highly fatalistic picture of business domination of the state and society, Woodsworth was not completely pessimistic. Education would arouse a majority of the electorate to embrace the necessity of public regulation and ownership.

In essence there were two sides to Woodsworth's argument for regulation. First, he reasoned that Canadians should recognize that they lived in an increasingly complex society.[45] The actions of each invariably intersected the interests of others. It followed that while individuals would lose a good deal of freedom under the regime of regulation, they would be worse off again if there were no regulation at all. A prudent citizenry would readily apprehend this. Already, Canadians had embraced this view by their support of statist measures such as water works, public schools, roads, public health standards, and even, Woodsworth argued somewhat disingenuously, conscription for military service in the last war.[46] The principle was capable of extension to wider

[42] *Ibid.*, 11 February 1935, 694.

[43] *Ibid.*, 25 February 1938, 839-40.

[44] *Ibid.*, 22 January 1935, 87.

[45] *My Neighbor, passim*, but especially chapters 1-3. *Hansard*, 16 May 1934, 3103; 22 January 1935, 87; 11 June 1935, 3545.

[46] *Ibid.*, 16 May 1934, 3102-7. A disconcerting characteristic of Woodsworth was his willingness to use arguments he had rejected as morally inappropriate in other contexts. Thus throughout his life he rejected the morality of conscription. In this case though he uses conscription in World War I as support for his view that government is always, properly, founded on coercion.

economic matters, such as compulsory marketing boards:

In [British Columbia] there are fruit growers who desire to make a living, who have invested their capital in properties and who through a number of years have planted trees and put work on them. Now they find they have a crop to market, but they also find that the market is so arranged that they cannot possibly sell their individual crops without having some sort of cooperative scheme. They have tried voluntary cooperation, but because of certain individuals who are anti-social in their outlook they have been prevented from carrying out their scheme of cooperation. Is it strange that they should come to parliament requesting that it be made possible for the majority to obtain their will? The fact is that the majority of citizens out there feel that they cannot carry on without some sort of coercive measures. It is merely an extension into a new sphere of the ordinary governmental arrangements which we now have. . . . Anyone who knows the history of farming in the west . . . knows perfectly well how they have been trying through cooperative efforts to improve their situation. They have realized how difficult — impossible in fact — it was for them to act as individuals, and to get what was coming to them: hence the formation of cooperatives.[47]

What is most revealing in the above is the degree to which Woodsworth spoke the language of individual utility to justify the imposition of cooperative measures. It is as if he was saying that, in less straitened times, the apple grower and grain farmer would have had no need of compulsory marketing arrangements, but in present circumstances they were pressed in that direction. Cooperation, then, was a circumstantial virtue, a course of individual expediency and practicality, rather than of intrinsic principle.

More illuminating again was an article written in 1926 in the *Weekly News* and a parliamentary speech in 1935. In both he expressed, in language close to that of Hobbes, a view of society and government as instrumental goods and as the outcomes of rational self-interest and calculative individual utility:

Well, personally I'm a Socialist because I'm a thorough-going Individualist. I want to have my own way, to enjoy as much as I can or, in a more idealistic phrase, to live out my own life. Under the crazy anarchist system I find I can't do it. With some reasonable arrangement of our economic and social life I think I would more nearly have my own way, enjoy more, and live out my real life. . . . The child that has learned to watch the policeman's signal stands a better chance than the wild creature that darts across the street. Perhaps after all the highest development of individuality is possible only in social relationships. Self-restraint may be a form of self-expression.[48]

You cannot drive as you please, left or right; you have to drive to the right. You have to stop and go with the signal lights, and so on. . . . Regulation is almost instinctively opposed by the children of the old pioneers and as one of them I understand their feeling. We have been so accustomed in the simpler forms of society to going our own way that we hate to be regulated. I confess that I hate to obey the traffic signals on the street; . . . and yet I know perfectly well that the traffic of a modern city cannot be kept moving on the old uncontrolled basis. We cannot get through to our destination unless we observe the rules of the road.[49]

[47] *Hansard*, 16 May 1934, 3104.
[48] *Weekly News*, 27 August 1926.
[49] *Hansard*, 22 January 1935, 87.

Society and government, then, were to be somewhat grudgingly embraced, not in the name of an intrinsically meritorious, communal ideal, but out of a recognition that one's self-interest was marginally more effectually guaranteed under collectivist arrangements.

The other part of Woodsworth's apologia for greater regulation appealed specifically to the condition of political and economic freedom under monopoly capitalism. Classic laissez faire theory posited a free individual in a competitive society under an open, democratic government. In Woodsworth's view none of the latter conditions obtained any longer and a return to an older state of society was impossible. Individuals confronted by the power of economic concentrations were in effect "coerced" and unfree. Moreover, without economic freedom, political liberty was useless. Here was echoed the thought of the liberal-socialist, L.T. Hobhouse: "Liberty without equality is a name of noble sound and squalid result."[50] Assuredly, Woodsworth also used the language and imagery of liberalism; socialism was, for him, the fulfillment of laissez faire under the new monopolistic circumstances of industrialism:

> I believe in democracy far more than the Liberals; I believe in freedom far more than the Liberals, and I would urge upon them that the principles of Liberalism, the principles of freedom and the principles of democracy have to be worked out under twentieth century conditions and not under nineteenth century conditions.[51]
>
> My quarrel with Liberal doctrine is not that it advocates individual freedom and all that kind of thing, but rather that Liberal policies are essentially based on conditions that no longer exist. If we are to secure true individual freedom and true security we shall have to recognize conditions that are here now and that are apparently permanent.[52]

VI

I HAVE ARGUED THAT OF THE THREE senses of cooperation that appeared in Woodsworth's thought, it was the materialist one that predominated. This idea of cooperation denoted economies of scale, large planning establishments, and directive managerial patterns, all of which were necessary to realize sufficient productivity to overcome economic scarcity. Cooperation and, by implication, his theory of community, thus became subsumed in an image of industrial society that was hierarchical, coercive, centralist, and bureaucratic. In pinning his hopes to the munificence of monopolies, Woodsworth helped incorporate the working class into an industrial order that although publicly-owned, nonetheless degraded work and, in effect, allowed the worker little effective control over his place of employment. If his theory had allowed greater place to a relational or intrinsic account of cooperation, Woodsworth might have provided himself and by implication, his party, with the intellectual wherewithal to challenge such a conception of the status of the worker. This he did not do.

[50] L.T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (London 1911), 86.
[51] *Hansard*, 16 May 1934, 3107.
[52] *Ibid.*, 11 February 1936, 103.

Moreover, I have sought to establish that in Woodsworth's account of community there is a decided inclination towards a liberal view of social reality. Woodsworth was raised on nineteenth-century Manchester liberalism.[53] He conceded that he was at times a cantankerous individualist; in his early writings on immigration, he extolled the liberal virtues and advocated a course of public policy that would undermine the forms of communal life that the immigrants had established in the new world. (This view, while he qualified it somewhat, later on, he never completely abandoned.)[54] All his life he celebrated and sought to protect the life-circumstances of the independent commodity producer. His theory of community-employed instrumentalist and utilitarian reasoning and his justification of coercive rules and planning appealed to individualist and libertarian premises.

Clearly, Woodsworth was also a socialist. He introduced to Canadian political discourse the language of society and association, and he helped break the hold on the public mind of possessive-acquisitive theories of individualism. But for all that, his socialism was cast in a liberal mould. His understanding of the central ideas of cooperation and community revealed the extent of this "unantagonistic symbiosis."[55] It was an understanding that made human community and cooperative endeavour depend on individual utility and expediency, and calculative self-interest, rather than on the recognition that community and society precede human choice and are, consequently, constitutive of humanity's very being.

I am deeply in debt to Thelma Oliver and Brian Keenan for their help in the writing of this paper.

[53] *Ibid.*, 19 April 1934, 2328.

[54] Mills, "Woodsworth," 85-7.

[55] It is an obvious aspect of my argument that Canadian democratic socialism, insofar as Woodsworth represents its philosophical dispositions, derived not from a corporate-organic-collectivist view of society but from liberalism. Thus, *pace* Gad Horowitz in *Canadian Labour in Politics*, I do not believe that the relation between the non-Marxist left in Canada and Canadian liberalism has been that of "antagonistic symbiosis," but something much more amicable.