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The National Federation of Labor Youth and the Candy Bar Kids
Radical Youth, Popular Protest, and the Red Scare in Postwar Canada

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Résumé de l'article

Des milliers d'enfants et de jeunes à travers le pays sont descendus dans la rue pendant deux semaines au printemps 1947 pour protester contre une augmentation de trois cents du prix des barres chocolatées. La manifestation a d'abord suscité une couverture médiatique enthousiaste et a bénéficié d'un large soutien populaire, mais lorsque la Fédération nationale de la jeunesse ouvrière (nfly), l'organisation de jeunesse du Parti communiste, a annoncé son soutien, les anticommunistes de la presse et de la communauté ont attaqué les manifestants. La campagne a rapidement perdu de son élan, ce que les anticommunistes ont attribué à la présence des communistes, mais plus probablement était le résultat de leurs propres attaques dans la presse. Certaines de ces manifestations étaient des réactions spontanées à une augmentation de 40 pour cent du prix des barres chocolatées, tandis que d'autres étaient dirigées ou inspirées par la nfly. Quoi qu'il en soit, la mobilisation à l'échelle nationale de milliers d'enfants et de jeunes marque un tournant dans l'histoire de la gauche canadienne. Déclenchant en même temps qu'une grève nationale des travailleurs de l'industrie et des protestations de consommateurs activistes réclamant une plus grande sécurité économique et un État plus réactif, la manifestation des barres chocolatées des enfants offre une fenêtre sur ce moment critique de la lutte des classes. Les attaques contre cette protestation populaire au moment où le militantisme communautaire de longue date était sur le point d'être diabolisé, délégitimé et réduit au silence par des attaques anticommunistes, marquent une étape importante dans la guerre froide au Canada. En plus d'ajouter le défi des jeunes au capital et à l'histoire de la gauche populaire, l'événement contribue à la littérature croissante sur les enfants et les jeunes engagés dans la protestation politique, tandis que leurs stratégies de protestation créatives offrent une dimension juvénile à l'étude de l'activisme de performance.

ARTICLE

The National Federation of Labor Youth and the Candy Bar Kids: Radical Youth, Popular Protest, and the Red Scare in Postwar Canada

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Abstract: Thousands of children and youth across the country took to the streets for two weeks in spring 1947 to protest a three-cent increase in the price of chocolate bars. The protest initially generated enthusiastic press coverage and had widespread popular support, but when the National Federation of Labor Youth (NFLY), the Communist Party's youth organization, announced its support, anti-communists in the press and the community red-baited the protesters. The campaign quickly lost momentum, which anti-communists attributed to the presence of Communists but was more likely due to their own red-baiting attacks in the press. Some of these protests were spontaneous reactions to a 40 per cent increase in the price of candy bars, while others were led or inspired by NFLY. Either way, the countrywide mobilization of thousands of children and youth marks a turning point in the history of Canada's left. Erupting in tandem with a nationwide strike of industrial workers and protests of activist consumers demanding greater economic security and a more responsive state, the children's chocolate bar protest provides a window on this critical moment in the class struggle. The attacks on this popular protest at the moment that the long run of community-based militancy was about to be demonized, delegitimated, and silenced by red-baiting marks a significant milestone in Canada's Cold War. In addition to adding the youngsters' challenge to capital and the state to the history of the popular left, the event contributes to the growing literature on children and youth engaged in political protest, while their creative protest strategies offer a youthful dimension to the study of performance activism.

Keywords: Communist youth, children, protest, boycotts, performance activism, class struggle, prices, chocolate

Résumé : Des milliers d'enfants et de jeunes à travers le pays sont descendus dans la rue pendant deux semaines au printemps 1947 pour protester contre une augmentation de trois cents du prix des barres chocolatées. La manifestation a d'abord suscité une couverture médiatique enthousiaste et a bénéficié d'un large soutien populaire, mais lorsque la Fédération nationale de la jeunesse ouvrière (NFLY), l'organisation de jeunesse du Parti communiste, a annoncé son soutien, les anticommunistes de la presse et de la communauté ont attaqué les manifestants. La campagne a rapidement perdu de son élan, ce que les anticommunistes ont attribué à la présence des communistes, mais plus probablement était le résultat de

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Mots clefs : Jeunesses communistes, enfants, protestation, boycotts, militantisme de performance, lutte des classe, prix, chocolat

In mid-April 1947, Canadian confectionary manufacturers across the board raised the list price of chocolate bars from five to eight cents. Political watchers had been predicting the increase for weeks, as an inevitable consequence of the federal government's staged elimination of the controls that had held prices steady through the war years.[1] Children whose standard weekly allowance was only five cents felt the effects keenly as chocolate bars became unaffordable overnight.[2] Protests erupted immediately.

Days after the price went up, candy lovers in Niagara Falls, Ontario, announced a "city-wide strike," and the media reported widespread smuggling of candy bars from the United States – dubbed "candy-legging," a cheeky riff on bootlegging – where they still cost five cents.[3] But adult scofflaws were overshadowed by the dramatic spectacle of children and teens in the British Columbia resource towns of Ladysmith and Chemainus hooting and jeering, picketing stores, and harassing any unwary adults who had the temerity to cross their picket line to buy an eight-cent chocolate bar. News of the "eight-cent chocolate bar boycott" and the "children's crusade" against the scourge of inflationary postwar prices made headlines across the country, syndicated by the Canadian Press newswire service and broadcast on CBC Radio.[4]

1. "Nickels Nice to Look At but They Don't Buy Much," *Globe and Mail*, 19 April 1947, 4.

2. "Chocolate Bar Sales Drop Sharply since Price Raised," *Globe and Mail*, 15 April 1947, 4.

3. "Candy Bars Latest in Black Markets," *Globe and Mail,* 25 April 1947, 25.

4. "Eight-Cent Chocolate Bar Boycotted by Children," *Vancouver Sun*, 25 April 1947, 7; "Chocolate Bar Eaters," captioned photo, *Vancouver Sun*, 26 April 1947, 2; "War on 8-Cent Bar May Reach Here," *Vancouver Sun*, 26 April 1947, 2; "5-Cent Bar Back in 3 Stores Here," *Vancouver Sun*, 28 April 1947, 1–2; "'Don't Be a Sucker! Don't Buy 8-Cent Bars!'" audio clip, CBC Archives, https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1706723017.

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Youngsters such as those clustered in front of Ladysmith's Wigwam Café, hoisting homemade placards urging, "Let the Suckers Pay 8¢, We Won't," and "We Are on Strike," are part of the underexplored history of children and youth whose participation in social justice struggles has frequently been overlooked.[5] Their protests were a colourful departure from but also modelled on the contemporaneous strikes of industrial workers demanding higher wages and job security. The youngsters' rallies, pickets, and boycotts coincided with those of activist consumers, with whom they were allied. Like those striking workers and protesting consumers, the youths' protests reflected the widespread outrage at the federal government's broken promises of postwar prosperity, economic stability, and social security.[6] They crystalized people's anger at the inflationary spiral that eroded organized workers' hard-won wage gains but that the Canadian government, despite promises of economic security, did little to address. They reflected Canadians' rising sense of civic entitlement and evinced the popular appeal of the political left. Opposing them was a political, corporate, and media elite who were empowered by the anti-communist media frenzy surrounding the recent discovery of a Canadian pro-Soviet spy ring and determined to reduce the public's expectations and suppress dissent.

Inspired by news of the BC picket, children's chocolate bar protests erupted immediately across the country – part of the general discontent that erupted at war's end. Sympathetic news coverage of the teens' political theatre fuelled the movement and highlighted the widespread frustration with rising prices. Canadians of all ages were skeptical of the government's ability to either manage the postwar economy or navigate the transition from war to peacetime, as inflation eroded the equalizing effects of stable, state-controlled wartime wages and prices. Inflation rose by a remarkable 14.43 percentage points on the consumer price index in 1947, an increase of nine percentage points from the previous year and the biggest increase in the cost of living since 1941.[7]

Canadians' expectations of a more interventionist state had been raised by the quick economic recovery from the Depression that resulted when the state assumed control of the economy during wartime. By war's end, Alvin Finkel explains, "an overwhelming majority of Canadians" refused to accept

5. Histories more often recover evidence of women acting in defence of children. See, for example, Tara Brookfield, *Cold War Comforts: Canadian Women, Child Safety, and Global Insecurity, 1945–1975* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013).

6. See, for instance, Magda Fahrni, *Household Politics: Montreal Families and Postwar Reconstruction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Robert Allen Rutherdale and Magdalena Fahrni, *Creating Postwar Canada: Community, Diversity, and Dissent, 1945–75* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).

7. "Canada Inflation Rate in 1947," StatBureau, last updated 3 October 2014, https://www.statbureau.org/en/canada/inflation/1947; "Living Cost Rise Highest since 1941," *Globe and Mail*, 5 May 1947, 10.

a return to the so-called free market policies that had created widespread misery during the 1930s, demanding instead the universal, publicly funded social programs and planned economy being proposed by the parties of the left. The widely read 1943 Marsh report, *Report on Social Security for Canada* – although, as Finkel observes, less radical than the Keynesian economic theories that informed it – outlined detailed plans for a state-funded social welfare program to be implemented at war's end, effectively presenting such reforms as entirely possible. Forced to compete with the increasingly popular social democratic Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the Mackenzie King Liberals modelled their 1945 federal election campaign on the program of the CCF. Once elected, however, the Liberal government, "too attuned to the desires of capital to fulfill [its] election pledges to the people," reneged on implementing those reforms, determining them to be too costly as well as unpopular with the business class.[8]

Canadians' outrage at the Liberals' failure to make good on their wartime promises of a "high and rising standard of living" at war's end, announced with such conviction during the war, was fuelled as well by expectations of greater government accountability and a more direct relationship between citizens and the state.[9] Canadians who had borne the social and economic turbulence of the Great Depression and World War II, Janine Brodie argues, saw themselves increasingly as "social citizens," entitled to social stability and continued economic prosperity, guaranteed by the state. This new social consensus, Brodie asserts, was encouraged by political leaders, whose public pronouncements set out, or at least appeared to establish, the terms of the "postwar social citizenship bargain."[10] The Liberals, hoping to squelch demands for the workers' rights and economic security that they had promised during the war, offered platitudes supported by legislation that appeared to enshrine new rights for citizens.[11] But the expectations thus fostered were betrayed by the King government, which abandoned promises of universal social programs rather than raise business taxes, offering Canadians lower taxes instead.[12]

The Liberals' failure to control inflation helped to propel the general leftward shift in the political culture.[13] Socialist solutions for profiteering,

8. Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006); Finkel, *Our Lives: Canada after 1945* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1997), 136.

9. "New Liberal Program before Party Leaders," *Globe and Mail*, 1 October 1943, 18; "Throne Speech Highlights," *Globe and Mail*, 28 January 1944, 1.

10. Janine Brodie, "Citizenship and Solidarity: Reflections on the Canadian Way," *Citizenship Studies* 6, 4 (2002): 377–394.

11. Bryan Evans, Carlo Fanelli, Leo Panitch, and Donald Swartz, *From Consent to Coercion: The Continuing Assault on Labour*, 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 28–38.

12. Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice*, 129–141.

13. Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice*, 125–135; Ian McKay, "For a New Kind of History: A Reconnaissance of 100 Years of Canadian Socialism," *Labour/Le Travail* 46 (Fall 2000): 69–125.

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unemployment, low wages, and high prices had gained currency during the 1930s and remained popular with Canadians during the war years.[14] By 1943, the CCF was polling ahead of the two established political parties and had emerged as the left alternative in electoral politics.[15] The more radical Communist Party was leading successful strikes and popular campaigns in the community, a strategic shift that increased its appeal to many Canadians. Many non-communists supported Communist-led campaigns, and membership in its above-ground party, the Labor-Progressive Party (LPP), peaked at 20,000 in 1946.[16]

The candy bar protesters tapped a culture of resistance that had erupted during the 1930s and, although somewhat in abeyance during wartime, was re-energized in the immediate postwar years.[17] When youngsters began their protest, militant industrial workers were in the midst of a nationwide strike wave for livable wages, calling as well for paid vacations, better working conditions, and union security.[18] Striking workers and politicized consumers mobilizing against high prices were, as many observed, two sides of the same struggle. Buffeted hard through the Depression and determined not to be sidelined by policies geared to supporting business at their expense again, women organized by the left-led Housewives Consumers Association (HCA) were protesting rising prices and shortages of essential goods and demanding the reinstatement of wartime price controls.[19] HCA members canvassed

14. John Riddell and Ian Angus, "The Left in Canada in World War II," *Socialist History Project* (website), 9 October 2004, https://www.socialisthistory.ca/Docs/History/Left-in-WW2.htm.

15. Christopher Adams, *Politics in Manitoba: Parties, Leaders, and Voters* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008), 106–107; Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice*, 126.

16. Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975): 175–176.

17. Lara A. Campbell, *Respectable Citizens: Gender, Family, and Unemployment in Ontario's Great Depression* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Dominique Clément, "Generations and the Transformation of Social Movements in Postwar Canada," *Histoire sociale / Social History* 42, 84 (2009): 361–387; Julie Guard, "A Mighty Power against the Cost of Living: Canadian Housewives Organize in the 1930s," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 77 (2010): 27–47. On the suppression of labour militancy during wartime, see Wendy Cuthbertson, *Labour Goes to War: The CIO and the Construction of a New Social Order, 1939–45* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2012).

18. Cuthbertson, *Labour Goes to War*; Peter S. McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation: Shaping the Postwar Settlement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800–1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992), 268–286; Carmela Patrias, "Employers' Anti-Unionism in Niagara, 1942–1965: Questioning the Postwar Compromise," *Labour/ Le Travail* 76 (Fall 2015): 37–77; Donald M. Wells, "Origins of Canada's Wagner Model of Industrial Relations: The United Auto Workers in Canada and the Suppression of 'Rank and File' Unionism, 1936–1953," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 20, 2 (1995): 193–225.

19. Julie Guard, *Radical Housewives: Price Wars and Food Politics in Mid-Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019).

shoppers to sign petitions and postcards, marched on city streets to protest rising prices of milk, butter, and meat, and mounted delegations to confront civic, provincial, and the federal government, supported by hundreds of thousands of Canadians.[20] Less visible but also politically active were ordinary Canadians such as the milk producers, butchers, and farmers who protested the elimination of the wartime subsidies that had stabilized primary producers in these protected industries and secured their sales volumes by reducing prices to consumers. Veterans, likewise, protested government's failure to provide them with promised housing.[21]

Youth, too, were part of this wave of protest. Teens in Campbell River, BC, picketed movie theatres to protest an increase in ticket prices. Junior high school students in Haney, BC, struck to protest a gender-specific dress code, with the girls defiantly arrayed in the prohibited lipstick, slacks, and kerchiefs. Students in the town of Royalties, Alberta, struck to protest a one-dollar fine for damage caused during an energetic soccer game.[22] Banff high schools students struck to demand that their school switch to daylight saving time to coordinate its schedule with that of the community.[23] The candy bar protest of 1947 was certainly not the only youthful demonstration of the era, but its scale and visibility made it particularly significant, visible, and subject to anti-communist attack.

Radical Youth and Politicized Children

Politicized children and youth such as the candy bar protesters are evidence of the largely undocumented participation of children and youth in strikes and protests – an absence that parallels the long-standing erasure of women, which feminist historiography has done much to reverse. Feminist historians point out that working-class struggle frequently involves children, although they are often missing from history because their presence is unrecorded and unseen.[24] Susana Miranda and Franca Iacovetta's book on the

20. Guard, *Radical Housewives*; Magda Fahrni, "Counting the Costs of Living: Gender, Citizenship, and a Politics of Prices in 1940s Montreal," *Canadian Historical Review* 83, 4 (2002): 483–504.

21. "Vets Planning Mass Protest on Housing," *Vancouver Sun*, 5 May 1947, 1. On the problems of Canada's postwar housing policy, see Richard Harris and Tricia Shulist, "Canada's Reluctant Housing Program: The Veterans' Land Act, 1942–75," *Canadian Historical Review* 82, 2 (2001): 253–282.

22. "Pupils End 'Strike' at Turner Valley," *Calgary Herald*, 25 April 1947, 1; "Maple Ridge Pupils Strike on Dance Ban," *Vancouver Sun*, 2 May 1947, 1; "Movie Picketed as Price Fight Spreads," *Vancouver Sun*, 3 May 1947, 8.

23. "Banff Pupils Strike for Daylight Time," *Calgary Herald*, 6 May 1947, 1.

24. See, for example, Franca Iacovetta, "Gendering Trans/National Historiographies: Feminists Rewriting Canadian History," *Journal of Women's History* 19, 1 (2007): 206–213; Franca Iacovetta and Marlene Epp, "Introduction," in Epp and Iacovetta, eds., *Sisters or Strangers?*

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1984 strike of Portuguese women cleaners in Toronto offers one corrective to that erasure, demonstrating that children's presence on the picket line was "a visible reminder that the women had families to support." Those children were also "important allies" who alerted their mothers to strikebreakers who attempted to cross the picket lines.[25]

Ian Radforth's work on stone-throwing working-class boys who expressed their grievances through sometimes violent street protest and participated in waged workers' labour strikes in mid-19th-century Toronto recovers some of this lost history. Similarly, Dan Horner notes the presence of rowdy boys in his study of labour conflicts, rebellion, and riots in mid-19th-century Montréal.[26] Sharon Myers' study of the teenage boys who resisted their detention in the Saint John Industrial School in New Brunswick in 1927 contributes as well. Boys' protests against the bleak living conditions and their incarceration, she shows, involved arsons, bomb threats, and escape attempts.[27] In his study of Indigenous youth in Indian residential and day schools in British Columbia between 1900 and 1930, Sean Carleton describes Indigenous students' acts of resistance to their forced detention and abusive treatment. These youngsters set fires, stole food, ran away, and boycotted the system by evading the RCMP who attempted to force their attendance.[28]

In some instances, youth engaged in non-violent protest were able to gain notice because they were part of an activist community. This was the case of the Jewish youth who struck their Montréal Protestant school in 1913 to protest anti-Semitism. As Roderick MacLeod and Mary Anne Poutanen argue, these children are remembered because they were embedded within a politically

Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 3–22; Epp and Iacovetta, "Beyond Sisters or Strangers: Feminist Immigrant Women's History and Rewriting Canadian History," in Nancy Janovicek and Carmen Nielson, eds., *Reading Canadian Women's and Gender History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 225–254. By contrast, youth and young adult protest in the 1960s has been widely studied. See, for example, Ian Milligan, *Rebel Youth: 1960s Labour Unrest, Young Workers, and New Leftists in English Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), and a number of the essays in Lara Campbell, Dominique Clément, and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

25. Susana P. Miranda and Franca Iacovetta, *Cleaning Up: Portuguese Women's Fight for Labour Rights in Toronto* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2023), 304–305.

26. Dan Horner, *Taking It to the Streets: Crowds, Politics, and the Urban Experience in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Montreal* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020); Ian Radforth, *Expressive Acts: Celebrations and Demonstrations in the Streets of Victorian Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023); Radforth, "Playful Crowds and the 1886 Toronto Street Railway Strikes," *Labour/Le Travail* 76 (Fall 2015): 133–164.

27. Sharon Myers, "'Suffering from a Sense of Injustice': Children's Activism in Liberal State Formation at the Saint John Boys Industrial Home, 1927–1932," *Histoire Sociale / Social History* 52, 105 (2019): 1–30.

28. Sean Carleton, *Lessons in Legitimacy: Colonialism, Capitalism, and the Rise of State Schooling in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2022), 194–205.

active, working-class Jewish community that supported the children and validated their resistance as a contribution to their collective struggle.[29] In a different time and place but also engaged in non-violent protest were the children active in the US civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements of the 1960s, both supporting their activist parents and communities and demanding justice in their own right.[30]

The 1947 children's chocolate bar boycott has likewise been remembered, but more often as a quirky, rather appealing, episode in local history than as a story of resistance.[31] This apolitical version appears in a number of popular mediums, most of them one- or two-page online articles based on newspaper archives. Summer visitors to BC's legislature buildings can participate in interactive theatre based on the children's boycott, performed by university students as part of the legislative assembly's Travelling Plays program.[32] The written accounts describe the event as a benign expression of youthful exuberance. They conclude with the revelation that the National Federation of Labor Youth (NFLY) was involved in the campaign – an involvement described as ill intentioned and covert. They blame Communist infiltration, rather than red-baiting, for the protest's premature demise.[33] Two short items in *Canada's*

29. Roderick MacLeod and Mary Anne Poutanen, "Little Fists for Social Justice: Anti-Semitism, Community, and Montreal's Aberdeen School Strike, 1913," *Labour/Le Travail* 70 (Fall 2012): 61–99; MacLeod and Poutanen, "Kids on Strike at Montreal's Aberdeen School, 1913," *Bibliography on English-speaking Quebec,* last modified 4 July 2017, https://quescren.concordia.ca/en/resource/NPH6Z9AZ.

30. Peter J. Ling and Johannah Duffy, "Backing Dr. King: The Financial Transformation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1963," *Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics & Culture* 5, 2 (2012): 147–165; Daniel B. Moskowitz, "Schooled in Speech," *American History* 54, 4 (2019): 22–23; Kelly Shackelford, "Mary Beth and John Tinker and *Tinker v. Des Moines*: Opening the Schoolhouse Gates to First Amendment Freedom," *Journal of Supreme Court History* 39, 3 (2014): 372–385; *Tinker et al. v. Des Moines Independent Community School District et al.*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969), http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/firstamendment/tinker.html.

31. Perhaps because of its upbeat, pro-youth narrative, the story continues to have local appeal. The town of Chemainus, BC, recently commemorated the chocolate bar protest with a wall mural, which can be seen on the Mural Map of Canada website. The event is also referenced in a pictorial local history of Vancouver, and a children's novel is based loosely on the event. And, of course, the candy bar protest has a Wikipedia entry. See "Five Cent Candy Bar War," *Mural Map of Canada*, 2017, https://muralroutes.ca/mural/five-cent-candy-bar-war/; Michelle Mulder, *Maggie and the Chocolate War* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2007); Lani Russwurm, *Vancouver Was Awesome: A Curious Pictorial History* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2013); "Candy Bar Protest," *Wikipedia,* last modified 4 December 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candy_bar_protest.

32. "Parliamentary Players Program," *Legislative Assembly of British Columbia,* accessed 12 January 2024, https://www.leg.bc.ca/content-peo/pages/parliamentary-players-program.aspx.

33. Chris Bateman, "Historicist: The Candy Bar Strike," *Torontoist*, 20 February 2016, https://dailyhive.com/page/torontoist; Neil Cramer, "Chocolate Bar Strike," *Edmonton City as Museum Project ECAMP,* 13 January 2015, https://citymuseumedmonton.ca/2015/01/13/

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History and *Maclean's* magazine provide a somewhat less one-sided account but neglect any discussion of the Cold War context that informed the anti-communist articles published across the country in the mainstream press.[34] A more detailed account is found in the 2003 documentary film *The Five-Cent War*, which foregrounds the personal accounts of several of the event's original participants and includes a number of historians who locate the event in its Cold War context. The participants affirm that the protest was more or less spontaneous and recall their surprise at the attention they got from the press. One participant explicitly denies having any Communist connections.[35]

While brief references to the protest appear in a number of scholarly works,[36] theatre scholar Heather Fitzsimmons Frey's more extensive analysis makes an important contribution to the history of youth protest. Fitzsimmons Frey observes that the chocolate bar boycott was an expression of the postwar

chocolate-bar-strike/; Tom Hawthorn, "From a Shop in Ladysmith, Chocolate Strike Affected Sales across the Country," *Globe and Mail*, 23 April 2012; Rob Lammle, "A Brief History of the 1947 Chocolate Candy Bar Strike," *Mental Floss*, 7 February 2013, https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/48798/brief-history-1947-chocolate-candy-bar-strike; "The 5 Cent Candy War," *Ladysmith & District Historical Society* website, n.d., https://www.ladysmithhistoricalsociety.ca/histories/our-stories/the-5-cent-candy-war/; "This Day in History: May 3, 1947," *Vancouver Sun*, 3 May 2012, https://vancouversun.com/news/this-day-in-history-may-3-1947; Chris Zdeb, "April 29, 1947: The Chocolate Candy Bar Strike of 1947," *Edmonton Journal*, 29 April 2015, https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/april-29-1947-the-chocolate-candy-bar-strike-of-1947.

34. Sue Ferguson, "A Three-Penny Opera," *Maclean's* 116, 16 (2003), 52; Yanick LeClerc, "The War of the Nickel Bar," *Canada's History*, 9 May 2017 (reprinted from *The Beaver*, February–March 1999), https://www.canadashistory.ca/explore/business-industry/the-war-of-the-nickel-bar.

35. Phillip Daniels and S. Wyeth Clarkson, *The Five-Cent War*, documentary film, Telefilm Canada (Toronto: Travesty Productions, 2003).

36. In her book on snacks in food history, which includes a chapter on the Canadian chocolate industry, historian Janis Thiessen describes the chocolate bar protests that erupted in cities across Canada in response to the price hike, prompting an investigation by the Coordinating Board of Youth Centres. Joan Sangster, in her book on women on the Canadian left, notes that "Communist youth groups" organized alongside the HCA in the fight against inflation, "holding spirited and well-publicized 'Bring Back the Five Cent Chocolate Bar' marches" and threatening to boycott Coca-Cola in a bid to bring down Coke prices. Ian Mosby, in his book on food politics in wartime, refers to the children's boycott as part of the 1947 protests against the elimination of price ceilings. See Thiessen, *Snacks: A Canadian Food History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2017), 150; Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920–1950* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989), 187; Mosby, *Food Will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 91. There are also references to the protest in three books on chocolate as a commodity: David Carr, *Candymaking in Canada: The History and Business of Canada's Confectionery Industry* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2003), 73–74; Kay Frydenborg, *Chocolate: Sweet Science & Dark Secrets of the World's Favorite Treat* (Toronto: Clarion Books/HarperCollins Canada, 2015), 3–5; Carol Off, *Bitter Chocolate: Investigating the Dark Side of the World's Most Seductive Sweet* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2016).

era's shifting social consensus about the meaning of citizenship and changing beliefs about childhood and youth. Inspired within this milieu, she argues, the children's and teens' protests were spontaneous acts of engaged citizenship.[37] She acknowledges that NFLY and the HCA influenced the protests but describes their impact as negative. "The adults," she argues, including NFLY activists (some of whom were actually in their teens), "overshadowed the young people, promoting themselves and their cause while upstaging the young people's agenda, action, and voices."[38] Yet the evidence Fitzsimmons Frey offers in support of this conclusion is thin, as she relies on newspaper articles that framed the story according to their own biases. Did the adults overshadow the young protesters to advance their own ends? Or did newspapers regard NFLY leaders and HCA activists as more newsworthy than children?

To be sure, the Communist Party encouraged the comrades to "provide leadership" to local protests around issues of importance to working-class families. But Cold Warriors such as those in the press consistently overestimated the party's role in directing youth, just as they did with women.[39] Rhonda Hinther and Ester Reiter, among others, have established that youth work was typically left to the so-called language groups – the Ukrainian, Jewish, and other pro-communist organizations that delivered educational, cultural, and other programs to the youth and others in their movement.[40] The party, by contrast, encouraged community activism, in which women and sometimes children were active but rarely had the resources or the will to provide material support.[41] Youth campaigns such as the chocolate boycott would have had

37. On the expansion of citizenship to youth, see the chapters by Michael Gauvreau ("The Protracted Birth of the Canadian 'Teenager': Work, Citizenship, and the Canadian Youth Commission, 1943–1955") and Karine Hébert ("Between the Future and the Present: Montreal University Student Youth and the Post-war Years, 1945–1960") in Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, eds., *Cultures of Citizenship in Post-War Canada, 1940–1955* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

38. Heather Fitzsimmons Frey, "Canadian Chocolate War: Imagining, Fearing, and Depicting 'Youngster' Power," in Angela Sweigart-Gallagher and Victoria Pettersen Lantz, *Nationalism and Youth in Theatre and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 110, see also 115n9, 116n48.

39. Joan Sangster and Andrée Lévesque have each shown that women were never a Party priority. See Lévesque, *Red Travellers: Jeanne Corbin and Her Comrades* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006); Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*.

40. On this point, see Rhonda L. Hinther, *Perogies and Politics: Canada's Ukrainian Left, 1891–1991* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 75–102; Hinther, "Raised in the Spirit of the Class Struggle: Children, Youth, and the Interwar Ukrainian Left in Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 60 (Fall 2007): 43–76; Ester Reiter, *A Future without Hate or Need: The Promise of the Jewish Left in Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 153–256. On cultural work, see Kassandra Luciuk, "More Dangerous Than Many a Pamphlet or Propaganda Book: The Ukrainian Canadian Left, Theatre, and Propaganda in the 1920s," *Labour/Le Travail* 83 (Spring 2019): 77–103.

41. RCMP surveillance reports on the Housewives Consumers Association (HCA), the most

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the party's endorsement but, like the community campaigns led by women, were almost certainly self-organized.[42] Even without direct party support, taking leadership of spontaneous and local protests was consistent with young Communists' education as part of the left. NFLY activists, most of them red diaper babies who had grown up within the left movement, were deeply conscious of the politics of class struggle and active in an impressive variety of local, national, and international campaigns.[43] Young communists such as Norman Penner, Shirley Endicott, and Norman Nerenberg, active in the chocolate bar campaign, would have regarded themselves as part of a revolutionary vanguard with an obligation to use their organizing skills to help spontaneous protests evolve into a movement.[44]

Adults and senior youth activists may have reframed or influenced the children's message, but as Fitzsimmons Frey points out, the young protesters made extensive use of political theatre to frame their message for media and popular appeal. The children and youth who organized and participated in boisterous rallies and parades, stormed the halls of provincial legislatures, threatened to "eat worms" rather than overpriced chocolate bars, and hung threatening effigies of boycott-resisters as they "snake-walked" though towns are part of a long-standing tradition of performance activism, a strategy not exclusive to but closely associated with the political left. Such politically engaged theatre, as theatre scholar and historian Alan Filewod argues, has long been a part of working-class protest and would have been familiar to the young Communists who led at least some of the protests.[45] The remarkable "children's crusade" of 1947 contributes to this tradition of dramatic street activism and, in the process, charts a continuum from Depression-era protest to the youthful rebellions of the 1960s, while revealing, with new insights, how deeply contested was any notion of a postwar "consensus."

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successful such movement of the era, provide insight into police red squads' consistent failure to find evidence of direct Party control or material support. Guard, *Radical Housewives*, 188–196.

42. Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 185–187.

43. Kirk Niergarth and Dave Kashtan, "Fight for Life: Dave Kastan's Memories of Depression Era Youth Work," *Labour/Le Travail* 56 (Fall 2005): 199–236; Maurice Rush, *We Have a Glowing Dream: Recollections of Working-Class and People's Struggles in B.C. from 1935 to 1996* (Vancouver: Centre for Socialist Education, 1996).

44. Hinther, "Raised in the Spirit"; Hinther, *Perogies and Politics*, 75–102; James Laxer, *Red Diaper Baby: A Boyhood in the Age of McCarthyism* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2004); Paul C. Mishler, *Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Lévesque, *Red Travellers*, 24; Reiter, *Future without Hate or Need*, 153–256.

45. Alan Filewod, *Committing Theatre: Theatre Radicalism and Political Intervention in Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2011).

Chocolate Bar Protest Sweeps the Nation

As news of the Ladysmith and Chemainus boycott spread across the country, youth from coast to coast erupted into action. Within days, hundreds of youngsters in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Montréal, Fredericton, and Halifax had begun picketing candy stores and chiding adults who ignored their stern injunctions.[46] Youth organizations including the YM/YWCA, student unions, community teen councils, and recreational committees began organizing parades, demonstrations, and other public events to protest the price rise.[47] Merchants, school trustees, parent-teacher associations, and labour unions endorsed the boycott. The government's political opponents – not only those in the CCF and the LPP but also some in the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party – proclaimed their support as well.[48]

Just as quickly, NFLY announced it was leading the movement and began organizing events. On 28 April, nineteen-year-old Glyn Thomas, chairman of NFLY's Vancouver branch, revealed plans for a nationwide campaign led by the Toronto branch.[49] On 1 May – International Workers' Day – NFLY national secretary Norman Penner made it official, informing the press that NFLY was collaborating with other youth organizations and that mobilization was already underway. Student members of Club Chaufe, a "Jewish teen-age social and cultural club" led by Sam Chudd, had signed 3,000 NFLY pledge cards committing themselves to pay no more than five cents for a chocolate bar and to get "all my friends to join the candy-bar buyers' strike."[50]

Penner, aged 27 – a senior member, but within the normal age range for leftist youth groups[51] – and an experienced organizer, assured the press that the campaign also had community support. "No one is blaming the storekeepers," Penner asserted. "They are just as anxious as we are to see the prices come down." The Canadian Congress of Labour's regional director and representatives of the International Association of Machinists and the United

46. "B.C. Chocolate Bar Strikers Demand Return of 5-Center," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 26 April 1947, 1; "Nickel Candy Bar Campaign," *Calgary Herald*, 26 April 1947, 1; "3 Ottawa Stores Have Cut Prices 10 to 20 Per Cent," *Globe and Mail*, 28 April 1947, 15; "Teen-Agers Launch Buyers' Strike for Return of Nickel Candy Bars," *Gazette* (Montréal), 28 April 1947, 1; "Merchants Join Youth Boycott of 8-Cent Bar," *Globe and Mail*, 29 April 1947, 5.

47. "War on 8-Cent Bar," *Vancouver Sun*, 26 April 1947.

48. "Candy Bar Boycott Now Country-Wide," *Gazette* (Montréal), 29 April 1947, 16; "Bracken Charges Ottawa Spending Thwarts Output, Kills Initiative," *Gazette* (Montréal), 8 May 1947, 1.

49. "Dominion Strike Seen," *Globe and Mail*, 28 April 1947, 15; "Parading Pupils Launch 8-Cent Candy Boycott," *Globe and Mail*, 1 May 1947, 5.

50. "Parading Pupils," *Globe and Mail*, 1 May 1947.

51. The upper age limit for membership in the Co-operative Commonwealth Youth Movement was 35. James Naylor, "Socialism for a New Generation: CCF Youth in the Popular Front Era," *Canadian Historical Review* 94, 1 (2013): 55–79. No comparable information is available for NFLY.

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Mine Workers of America (none of them associated with the Communist left) affirmed their support immediately, and the young protesters were invited by other labour organizations to march in May Day parades alongside unionists in a number of cities.[52] Only the Toronto and District Youth Council, likely one of many civic-minded youth groups created by organizations such as the YM/YWCA, was reluctant to endorse the campaign, concerned that the protest might embarrass retailers and reflect badly on the teens. Instead of picketing, the council advised, students should write to their elected representatives.[53]

By week's end, chocolate bar protests had broken out in every major Canadian city and many smaller places.[54] Youth across the country, many with no identifiable connection to the left, began organizing. Whether responding to the news media or heeding NFLY's call to action, thousands of children and teens in cities and towns in every province from British Columbia to Nova Scotia began marching down streets, bearing picket signs demanding "Down with Chocolate Bars" and vowing, "Je Ne Veux Payer 8 Cents Pour une Barre." Newspapers and radio news provided daily updates on the youngsters' dynamic street protests, as they picketed stores and high school cafeterias and heckled recalcitrant store owners. Massing on Ottawa's Parliament Hill, they confronted the federal cabinet, demanding state intervention to bring down inflation, punish price-fixers, and reduce the price of their favourite treat.[55]

Newspapers of every political stripe wrote approvingly of the protest, including the pro-business *Globe and Mail*, which, like other papers, linked the local and national events. Local Toronto coverage began with the May Day parade of 500 teens marching from Harbord Collegiate (known for its many leftist students) to Christie Pits with placards urging "Don't be a sucker" and "Let's all fight inflation," tucking "anti-eight-cent candy-bar pledge cards" onto parked cars along their route. They joined Central Tech students en route and massed at a store where nickel bars were sold to support the merchant who was "trying to keep price levels down."[56]

52. "Candy Strikers on March in Labor Parades," *Vancouver Sun*, 1 May 1947, 12; "Labor Here in Colorful May Parade," *Vancouver Sun*, 5 May 1947, 9.

53. "Student Parade Protests Eight-Cent Candy Bars," *Globe and Mail*, 2 May 1947, 17.

54. "Parading Pupils," *Globe and Mail*, 1 May 1947.

55. "News Round-Up," CBC radio broadcast, 1 May 1947, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Archives; Daniels and Clarkson, *The Five-Cent War*; "Candy Bar Boycott, Montreal, May 1947," *Canadian Tribune*, Price Campaign, Montréal, QC, PA-093691, acc. no. 1974-264 NPC, box 03453, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC).

56. "Merchants Join Youth Boycott," *Globe and Mail*, 29 April 1947; "Parading Pupils," *Globe and Mail*, 1 May 1947; "Student Parade Protests," *Globe and Mail*, 2 May 1947. See also Bateman, "Historicist." On the concentration of leftist students at Harbord Collegiate, see Rhonda Hinther, "'Thoroughly impregnated with Bolshevik philosophy … and being a capable organizer': Annie Buller's WWII Incarceration and Almost Internment," unpublished paper, n.d.

Figure 1. Young activists in Montréal, some of them the children of Labor-Progressive Party and United Jewish People's Order members, protest a three-cent nationwide rise in the price of chocolate bars, on May Day 1947. Bilingual placards suggest that the campaign aimed to reach anglophones and francophones and may indicate that some protesters were among the latter group, although the Communist Party had few francophone members. "Candy Bar Boycott, Montreal, May 1947."
Canadian Tribune, Price Campaign, Montréal, PA-093691, acc. no. 1974-264 NPC, box 03453, Library and Archives Canada.

Similarly, the right-centre Montréal *Gazette* reported "smiling spectators … cheer[ing] encouragement" while hundreds of students, led by NFLY's Norman Nerenberg, paraded through Montréal streets bearing signs proclaiming, "En Greve pour 5¢ Barres, [de] Mai 1–Juin 1," and chanting, "We want the five-cent bar," and then posing for photos.[57] In Vancouver, the 700 teens, led by NFLY's Glyn Thomas, who "chain picketed" stores – bearing sandwich boards and picket signs demanding, "We Want Nickel Bars" and "Boycott Eight-Cent Bars" – received similarly positive press.

Even protests that hinted at violence received favourable coverage. In addition to the "snake parades" – a staple of left-labour protest that many would have recalled from the Relief Camp Workers' Union protest in 1935 – Vancouver protesters hoisted life-size effigies of "strikebreakers" who had bought an eight-cent bar. Two hundred Victoria protesters blockaded the

57. "Local Teen-Agers Join Candy Strike," *Gazette* (Montréal), 5 May 1947, 13. All descriptions of political influences in newspapers are from *Media Bias/Fact Check,* accessed 28 December 2023, https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/.

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Figure 2. Lethbridge students in a "candy bar parade" gather in front of Westminster School with protest signs: "We want five cent bars back."
Reproduced by permission from Galt Museum and Archives/Akaisamitohkanao'pa, Lethbridge, Alberta.

causeway, a main thoroughfare, before "storming" the legislature building. Local newspapers reported without censure the youngsters "shouting their battle cry," "screaming" catcalls, and creating "bedlam."[58]

Teens in other BC towns, including Sidney, Nanaimo, Mission, Abbotsford, New Westminster, Prince George, and Quesnel, protested as well.[59] Likely inspired by these dramatic antics, disabled veterans in Vancouver picketed the Shaughnessy Hospital canteen and the Veterans' Memorial Centre, prompting the centre, along with local stores and a restaurant, to drop the price of bars in support.[60] At the same time, protests erupted in Lethbridge, Alberta, and Windsor, Ontario. Edmonton's protest began with 70 youths on Monday,

58. "'Snake Parade' Here to Fight 8-Cent Bar," *Vancouver Sun*, 31 April 1947, 9.

59. "War on 8-Cent Bar," *Vancouver Sun*, 26 April 1947; "5-Cent Bar Back," *Vancouver Sun*, 28 April 1947; "'Snake Parade' Here," *Vancouver Sun,* 31 April 1947; "Candy Strikers on March," *Vancouver Sun*, 1 May 1947; "Women to Picket in Buyers' Strike," *Globe and Mail*, 2 May 1947, 7.

60. "Candy Bars 5¢ as Protest," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 28 April 1947, 1; "5-Cent Bar Back," *Vancouver Sun*, 28 April 1947; "'Snake Parade' Here," *Vancouver Sun*, 31 April 1947; "Teen-Agers Launch Buyers' Strike," *Gazette* (Montréal), 28 April 1947.

Figure 3. View of Lethbridge youth in a "candy bar parade" along 13 Street North. The sign in front reads, "Down with 8¢ bars."
Reproduced by permission from Galt Museum and Archives/Akaisamitohkanao'pa, Lethbridge, Alberta.

28 April, and gathered steam through the week, as hundreds of children and teens barricaded candy stores, "snake-dancing" and bicycling en masse down city streets. Merchants were reported to be "in sympathy" with the children despite a near-total drop in chocolate bar sales.[61]

Fredericton teens enacted a performance before a watching press, circling from store to store, demanding to know the price of bars and registering disgust before marching out, announcing that rather than buy overpriced candy, they were saving their end-of-wartime sugar rations "to make fudge at home."[62] Halifax teens were soon replicating the same performance, supported

61. "Children Parade in Protest against 8-Cent Candy Bars," *Edmonton Journal*, 29 April 1947, 9; "Candy Paraders Out by Hundreds," *Edmonton Journal*, 30 April 1947, 13; "Find 8-Cent Bars Are 'Not Selling,'" *Edmonton Journal*, 2 May 1947, 11.

62. "Dominion-Wide Strike Seen," *Globe and Mail*, 28 April 1947, 15; "Youth 'Chain Picket' Backs 8-Cent Candy Bar Boycott," *Toronto Star*, 28 April 1947, 1; "This Day in History," *Vancouver Sun*, 3 May 2012.

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by the 2,000-member Halifax Tri-Teen Council, which circulated a dramatic petition "the size of a window blind" calling for five-cent bars.[63]

The left-led Housewives Consumers Association, about to begin its own nationwide serial boycotts of overpriced food and essential goods, supported the young protesters by including chocolate bars on their boycott list and encouraging and sometimes helping to organize their protests.[64] The youngsters' boisterous chocolate bar protests provided a dramatic start to the HCA's long-planned national campaign.[65] One newspaper went so far as to claim that the "outcry against the eight-cent candy bar" was the "springboard" that launched the HCA's "nation-wide buyers' strike."[66]

At least some of the young protesters were already familiar with left protest and were no doubt encouraged by Housewives mothers. One recalled being brought to the chocolate bar protest as a young child by her mother, an active member of the Communist LPP and pro-communist United Jewish People's Order.[67] Similarly, when Regina youth took up the campaign, the local Housewives League stepped in to organize. The press described the organizers as grade 4 students who had walked out of class in a spontaneous wildcat strike.[68] More likely, the youngsters were encouraged by their activist mothers in the Regina Housewives League, who, like other leftist parents, raised their children to participate in the class struggle. The young activists were supported by teachers and parents but made their own signs inscribed with their own, original slogans. Their creative work, paraded on 1 May, delighted the press. Some 800 children and teens – "marching," the press hastened to note, "without adult leadership" – paraded through Regina's downtown, chalking their demands on buildings and sidewalks and chanting, "We don't want to buy a car, we only want a five-cent bar."[69]

63. "Students Prefer Worms to 8-Cent Candy Bars," *Globe and Mail*, 3 May 1947, 17; "N.S. Teen-Agers Apply Boycott, Bar Sales Drop," *Telegram* (Toronto), 3 May 1947.

64. "Women in West Prepare to Battle Rising Prices," *Globe and Mail*, 7 May 1947, 12; "Buyers' Strikes Gain Momentum in Western Cities," *Globe and Mail*, 17 May 1947, 1. On the role of the HCA, see Guard, *Radical Housewives*.

65. Sgt. CW to Inspector Leopold, file distribution slip, [date obscured] May 1947; A/ Cpl NOJ to [name redacted], 3 May 1947, Special Section; "Subversive Activity in Housewives' Consumers' League, Regina, Sask., 3 May 1947"; clipping, "4-Week Boycott Called in Regina," *Leader-Post* (Regina), 30 April 1947; and clipping, "Youngsters Tie Up Regina Traffic in Parade against 8¢ Chocolate Bars," *Daily Tribune*, 6 May 1947, all in RG146, vol. 3353, supp. 1, vol. 1, Housewives Consumers Association, Regina, LAC.

66. "Youth's Ban Widening into Buyer Strike," *Province* (Vancouver), 30 April 1947, 6.

67. Anonymous, interview by author, 4 December 2020.

68. "Student Parade Protests," *Globe and Mail*, 2 May 1947.

69. RCMP Special Branch reported 800 participants. Sgt. CW to Inspector Leopold, file distribution slip, [date obscured] May 1947, LAC; "Subversive Activity in Housewives' Consumers' League, Regina, Sask., 3 May 1947.

Young chocolate bar protesters engaged in creative protest alongside militant Housewives confirm the close relationship between the two campaigns. Regina Housewives League linked the two campaigns, urging consumers to boycott the bars, along with other overpriced food and other household necessities, while demanding the re-imposition of price controls.[70] Together, the youth and the women provided ready-made headlines that focused on their youthful and maternal appeal. The Regina *Leader-Post*'s story featured a twelve-year-old boy bearing a placard proclaiming, "I don't like eight-cent chocolate bars," accompanied by "a very tiny girl" whose sign read, "Me too." Another child's sign threatened, "We want five cent bars or no school."[71] A "crew of boy cyclists" provided sound effects by honking the horns of all the parked cars along their route. Turning the tables rhetorically on their red-baiting opponents, the HCA declared the eight-cent chocolate bar – and not communist activists such as themselves – "public enemy number one."

Left-Led Youth versus Big Chocolate

DETERMINING THE EXTENT to which NFLY assumed leadership of the campaign requires careful interrogation of the sources, but reports of protests in cities and regions with a significant Communist presence and the escalation of protests in these places hint at left leadership. Protests erupted in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Montréal, Toronto, Windsor, and Winnipeg, and in the resource towns of BC, all of which had strong LPP community and labour connections. Youth in Calgary, for instance, refused to wait for their schools' student unions and the Sat-Teen (Saturday Teen) club, an offshoot of the YMCA, to organize a "mass student demonstration."[72] Instead, they began picketing on bicycles.[73] The four eleven- and twelve-year-olds from Winnipeg's middle-class Wolseley neighbourhood who paraded on 26 April, brandishing handmade picket signs demanding, "Give Us Back 5¢ Chocolate Bars!," may well have been inspired by the Chemainus and Ladysmith protests reported that same day in the Winnipeg *Tribune*.[74] But the protest's sustained activity over the following days – involving a parade through the downtown area and the occupation of the Manitoba legislature, city hall, and the offices of the two city papers – supports Norman Penner's assertion that he helped organize

70. "4-Week Boycott," *Leader-Post*, 30 April 1947.

71. "Protests," captioned photo, *Leader-Post* (Regina), 2 May 1947, 1; "We Want Five Cent Bars," *Leader-Post* (Regina), 2 May 1947, 3.

72. Sat-Teen Club was established in Calgary in early 1945, under the auspices of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), to provide social and recreational activities for city teenagers. See Sat-Teen Club Fonds, Fonds F-2670, Glenbow Archives, Calgary, https://searcharchives.ucalgary.ca/sat-teen-club-fonds.

73. "Candy Bar Buyers May Go on Strike," *Calgary Herald*, 28 April 1947, 1.

74. "B.C. Chocolate Bar Strikers," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 26 April 1947.

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it.[75] Similarly, the endorsements from the YWCA and local youth organizations suggest the organizing skill of an NFLY activist.[76]

NFLY member Shirley Endicott was tagged by the *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Globe and Mail* as one of the Ottawa protest organizers, and the *Financial Post* asserted that there was "general agreement" that "the Commies" were involved.[77] At that rally, 300 students overran Parliament Hill vowing to "eat worms before the eight-cent [chocolate] bar." Braving a thunderstorm, these politically astute students were sufficiently well informed to name the cabinet ministers responsible for the budget and, presumably, the price rise, demanding, "We want [Finance Minister Douglas] Abbott!" and "We want [Reconstruction Minister C. D.] Howe!"[78] The young protesters' appeal to cabinet ministers for relief from high prices paralleled the demands of striking union members calling for wage hikes to keep pace with the rising cost of living, although the youngsters' rallies were more creative.

These youthful activists, led or inspired by NFLY, evinced a radical consciousness that had emerged in response to the misery and desperation of the 1930s, to which governments had failed to respond.[79] The Communist Party's appeal rose in the mid-1930s when, as part of its Popular Front program, the party directed the comrades to take action to defend the economic interests of the people.[80] Communist community organizers and party supporters mobilized their neighbours in rent strikes and resisting evictions. They led campaigns for more adequate relief benefits, curbs on high food prices, school milk programs, rent controls, and public housing. Under the banner of the Workers' Unity League, Communists organized unemployed workers, demanded housing and relief for single men, led a movement for work, wages, and unemployment insurance, and organized "unorganizable" workers in the mass production industries. Fifteen hundred Communists and

75. Penner's claim is cited in Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 187n63.

76. "Teen-Agers Here Support Candy Bar Ban," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 29 April 1947, 22; untitled photo, *Winnipeg Free Press*, 30 April 1947, 1; "Student Parade Protests," *Globe and Mail*, 2 May 1947; "Boys Boycott 8¢ Bars," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 2 May 1947, 3; "Students Protest 8¢ Bar," photo caption, *Winnipeg Tribune*, 2 May 1947, 30; "8¢ Bar Boycotted across Dominion," *Gazette* (Montréal), 3 May 1947, 19.

77. "Communists Run Candy Bar Strike Recruit Young Children for Parade," *Financial Post*, 10 May 1947, 1–2; "Housewives Deny Ottawa Gave Delegates Brush-Off," *Globe and Mail*, 17 July 1947, 10.

78. "Protest Parade by Students," *Ottawa Citizen*, 2 May 1947, 1, 16; "'We'll Eat Worms First' Students Spurn 8-Cent Bar," *Toronto Star*, 3 May 1947, 2; Don Brown, "5-Cent Candy Bar Sponsors Besiege Abbott and Howe," *Windsor Star*, 5 May 1947, 9.

79. Dominique Clément, "Generations and the Transformation of Social Movements in Postwar Canada," *Histoire sociale / Social History* 42, 84 (2009): 361–387; Guard, "Mighty Power."

80. Avakumovic, *Communist Party*, 97.

pro-communists defied legal injunctions and fought alongside Republicans in Spain as the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion. The Communist-led Canadian Labour Defense League organized popular protests against deportations and other legal abuses under section 98 of the Criminal Code and agitated for the law's repeal. When the King government used the Defence of Canada Regulations to intern leftists, union organizers, and war resisters on the eve of World War II, the CLDL mobilized broad-based support for their release. In advance of the Jewish Labour Committee and their erstwhile allies in the CCF, Communists initiated a civil liberties discourse in the labour movement that foreshadowed human rights legislation. At war's end, Canadians rallied in support of Communist-led campaigns for the extension of wartime price controls and other anti-inflationary measures, anxious to avert a widely anticipated postwar economic crisis.[81]

Support for left-led causes was indicative of the leftward shift generally. But even as politically unaffiliated Canadians accepted communist leadership of their unions and community campaigns and elected them to public office, support for the party remained soft. Communists waged a perpetual information war against a hostile state, which had for decades villainized, incarcerated, and legislated against them. As Cold War anxieties displaced the pro-Soviet sentiments inspired by wartime alliances, Communists and pro-communists were more readily demonized. By the late 1940s, official anti-communism, supported by the media, was reframing the political discourse. Even so, the transition was not immediate. Thousands of people had participated in or supported social justice campaigns led or supported by communists. Many did not immediately regard these peace, labour, community, and rights activists as enemies of the state, although that would very soon become the new political consensus.

Temporarily insulated from the red-baiting attacks that plagued the labour, party, and ethnic left by its youthful appeal, the candy bar campaign initially enjoyed public and media support despite NFLY's visible presence, which was openly acknowledged in the press. Parent-teacher federations, school trustees, and local youth organizations, including the YWCA, as well as retailers

81. David Bright, "The State, the Unemployed, and the Communist Party in Calgary, 1930–5," *Canadian Historical Review* 78, 4 (1997): 537–565; C. Scott Eaton, "'A Sharp Offensive in All Directions': The Canadian Labour Defense League and the Fight against Section 98, 1931–1936," *Labour/Le Travail* 82 (Fall 2018): 41–80; Chris Frazer, "From Pariahs to Patriots: Canadian Communists and the Second World War," *Past Imperfect* 5 (1996): 3–36; Guard, "Mighty Power"; Rhonda L. Hinther and Jim Mochoruk, *Civilian Internment in Canada: Histories and Legacies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2020); John Manley, "'Starve, Be Damned!' Communists and Canada's Urban Unemployed, 1929–39," *Canadian Historical Review* 79, 3 (1998): 466–491; Carmela Patrias, *Relief Strike: Immigrant Workers and the Great Depression in Crowland, Ontario, 1930–1935* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990); Patricia V. Schulz, *The East York Workers' Association: A Response to the Great Depression* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press 1975); Tyler Wentzell, "Canada's Foreign Enlistment Act and the Spanish Civil War," *Labour/Le Travail* 80 (Fall 2017): 213–246.

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in a number of cities, gave NFLY's Canada-wide campaign their "emphatic" support.[82] The "Toronto locals of all labour unions," both the left-leaning Canadian Congress of Labour affiliates and those of the anti-communist Trades and Labor Congress, affirmed that they were "behind the youngsters."[83] Scores of Canadians wrote in support of the boycott to their members of Parliament. Even social conservatives, such as Toronto school trustee W. R. Cockburn – a moralist known for his advocacy of "cleaner movies," "fewer cocktails," and "more plain Christian living," who condemned comic books as "degrading and harmful to youth" – endorsed the teens' motives, if not their strategy. Pronouncing himself opposed in principle to demonstrations, Cockburn nonetheless offered to mediate between the students and the candy manufacturers to resolve the dispute.[84]

Newspapers and their readers celebrated the young activists for taking on the confectionary manufacturers who had made an everyday luxury unaffordable to the many families struggling to get by.[85] CCF head M. J. Coldwell remarked that the across-the-board price hike "doesn't look very much like competition," an oblique reference to illegal price-fixing.[86] His remarks would have resonated with consumers, such as those in the HCA, who proclaimed that high prices were evidence of widespread profiteering.[87] Parents chimed in too. In her letter to the *Windsor Star*, Mrs. Eleanor Lucier expressed disgust at "the nerve" of confectionary manufacturers "trying to make people believe that eight cents is not too much for bars."[88] A reader of the *Winnipeg Tribune* accused candy manufacturers of deceiving consumers: "Anyone who will take the trouble to check the figures can demonstrate that candy bar manufacturers have raised their prices simply to get the same net profit as before the war, and then some."[89]

82. "Youth 'Chain Picket,'" *Toronto Star*, 28 April 1947; "Merchants Join Youth Boycott," *Globe and Mail*, 29 April 1947.

83. "Student Parade Protests," *Globe and Mail*, 2 May 1947.

84. "Trustee Calls 'Comic' Books 'Degrading and Detrimental,'" *Globe and Mail*, 26 September 1945, 4; "Education Board Head Advocates Cleaner Living," *Globe and Mail*, 12 December 1946, 8; "Trustee Offers to Mediate Student Candy Bar Boycott," *Toronto Star*, 1 May 1947, 3; "Student Parade Protests," *Globe and Mail*, 2 May 1947.

85. "Chocolate Bars Jump Two Cents," *Globe and Mail*, 8 April 1947, 1; "Chocolate Bar Sales Drop," *Globe and Mail*, 15 April 1947; "Parading Pupils," *Globe and Mail,* 1 May 1947; "If Minimum for Family $40 How Can One Live on $36?" *Toronto Daily Star*, 20 May 1947, 9; Finkel, *Our Lives*, 9–10.

86. "Chocolate Bar Sales Drop," *Globe and Mail*, 15 April 1947.

87. Guard, *Radical Housewives*, 176.

88. Mrs. Eleanor Lucier, "Chocolate Bar Price Again Criticized," letter to the editor, *Windsor Star*, 8 May 1947, 35.

89. Reader, "Income Tax Cuts," letter to the editor, *Winnipeg Tribune*, 13 May 1947, 12.

Left-led protests against trusts, combines, and cartels, such as those organized by the HCA, had alerted Canadians to price-fixing in food industries, including confectionary. Thus, when the leading candy manufacturers announced an across-the-board price hike in early April, people's suspicions were roused.[90] The three or four big confectionary companies that dominated the Canadian industry were well situated to control prices. Indeed, since their introduction to the confectionary market in 1930, Janis Thiessen notes, chocolate bars had always been five cents – a price people had come to regard as fair.[91] Apparently unconcerned about the ruckus over antitrust legislation, manufacturers announced in unison a two-cent price increase in chocolate prices; when it took effect, the price rise was actually three cents.[92]

Squeezed between the manufacturers and their irate customers, many shop owners nonetheless supported the protests. Sales of the targeted bars dropped, with stores in many locations reporting a decline in chocolate bar sales of up to 90 per cent. At least one Montréal merchant told a reporter that he had not sold a case of candy bars "this week," and Ottawa merchants were refusing to take their normal shipments "because they can't sell them." Yet many, forced to raise retail prices with no expectation of higher returns, did their best to support the students. Some Moose Jaw stores lowered their price to six cents.[93] Others observed the boycott and stopped selling the bars, as did the Winnipeg YWCA's "teen canteen." One store owner in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, tossed handfuls of chocolate bars at the protesters, and others posted signs advertising five-cent bars.[94] Retailers told the *Globe and Mail* that eight cents was "ridiculous" and that they were "ashamed" to charge so much for a chocolate bar.[95] Even some candy manufacturers, unnamed by the press but likely

90. C. F. Kendall, "On Cost of Living Comparisons," letter to the editor, *Globe and Mail*, 14 March 1947, 6.

91. Thiessen, *Snacks*, 128–167.

92. "Chocolate Bars Jump," *Globe and Mail*, 8 Apr 1947.

93. "Buyers' Strike Started in BC by Housewives," *Montreal Standard*, 10 May 1947; "Report Progress on Buyers' Strike," *Gazette* (Montréal), 26 May 1947; "Youth 'Chain Picket,'" *Toronto Daily Star*, 28 April 1947; "Pupils Storm B.C. Chamber Price Protests Bring Cuts," *Toronto Daily Star*, 30 April 1947, 2; "Parading Pupils," *Globe and Mail*, 1 May 1947; "Trustee Offers to Mediate," *Toronto Daily Star*, 1 May 1947; "'We'll Eat Worms First,'" *Toronto Daily Star*, 3 May 1947; L. M. McKechnie, "Reds Seen Duping Youth in 8-Cent Bar Campaign," *Telegram* (Toronto), 3 May 1947; "Manufacturer Raps 8-Cent Filled Bars," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 1 May 1947, 1, all in clippings, RG3353, Housewives and Consumers Federation of Canada (HCFC), part 1, LAC; RCMP report, "Housewives Consumers Association Saskatoon, Saskatchewan," 25 April 1947, HCFC, part 1, LAC.

94. "Merchant Hurls Chocolate Bars to Youngsters," *Globe and Mail*, 5 May 1947, 10.

95. "Merchants Join Youth Boycott," *Globe and Mail*, 29 April 1947.

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smaller firms not party to the across-the-board price rise by the big three, agreed that the price hike was unwarranted.[96]

Popular support for the movement was reinforced by a mostly sympathetic press. The liberal-populist *Toronto Star* portrayed the protesting youngsters as inflation-fighters, depicting one as chopping down the "beanstalk" of rising prices that sprouted the "inflation threat."[97] News writers, dubbing the protest "the children's crusade," made clear the connection between the children's boycott and the economic crisis that had provoked widespread consumer protests across the country. The eight-cent bar, an unnamed editorial writer observed, was "not particularly important in itself" but "is a very convenient target for people who want to express their resentment over high prices in general."[98] Street parades, another commented, were not "merely theatrical" but "significantly [indicate] that there is a body of public opinion determined to resist soaring prices and inflation."[99]

Press coverage suggests that Canadians, outraged about price hikes with no increase in earnings, endorsed the children's boycott as they did buyers' strikes, undeterred by either NFLY's very public assertions that it was leading the boycott or the well-publicized presence of Communist activists in the HCA. In an era in which the combined circulation of Canada's daily newspapers exceeded the number of households, NFLY's and the HCA's communist connections would have been public knowledge.[100] Although some may not have been aware of their presence, NFLY activists had been quoted in the press, and their claims to be leading the protests had been reported. As for the HCA, newspapers had been flagging the presence of communists in the Housewives' organization since 1938.[101]

Images of picketing children in the daily papers were both a playful spectacle and a powerful expression of the damage done to working-class families by the inflationary crisis. Protesting children and youth captured the all-too-common experience of many who struggled to make ends meet, much less splurge on small luxuries, as spiralling inflation eroded the value of stagnant wages. The boycott did little harm to the confectionary industry, which fought back with large advertisements pointing the blame at rising commodity prices

96. "Manufacturer Raps," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 1 May 1947, 15.

97. "Jack and the Beanstalk Giant Killer?," *Toronto Star*, 29 April 1947, 6.

98. "The Symbolic Bar," editorial, *Gazette* (Montréal), 10 May 1947, 8 (reprinted from the *Calgary Herald*).

99. G. O. Tease, "Juvenile Street Parade," *Leader-Post* (Regina), 5 May 1947, 11.

100. Royal Bank of Canada, "Canada's Newspapers," *RBC Letter* 28, 9 (September 1947), https://www.rbc.com/en/about-us/history/letter/september-1947-vol-28-no-9-canadas-newspapers/.

101. On the public revelations of Communists in the HCA, see Guard, *Radical Housewives*, esp. 116–199.

and government taxation.[102] But children who could no longer buy a candy bar were an engaging and powerful expression of the discontent that wracked the country and raised the stakes for a government that, as Finkel asserts, was determined to pursue an unpopular economic program against a wave of protest.[103]

The children's campaign for an affordable candy bar became a synecdoche for general discontent, ratcheting up the pressure on the business and government elites who were the targets of striking workers and protesting consumers. Employers and their apologists in government and the press blamed striking workers, who had used their postwar advantage to negotiate wage gains, for creating inflation.[104] It was harder to criticize protesting housewives and even more difficult to deny the pleas of "crusading" children who had won the hearts of the nation.[105]

Children's Crusade or Communist Plot?

Popular as they were, the protests were nonetheless regarded with suspicion by some in the press, who pointed to NFLY's presence as evidence of a Communist plot. Spontaneity, in these writers' opinion, was the hallmark of credible and legitimate protest. W. L. MacTavish, an influential journalist and editor of the *Windsor Star*,[106] dubbed the campaign a "Red carnival." Communist youth organizations, he opined, "scenting something useful to their purpose … took up the cause and organized it with typical Communist energy and methods."[107] G. O. Tease of the Regina *Leader-Post* asserted that "if legitimate direct action was desired," it would not be achieved by "street parades." On the contrary, "none could be more effective than every householder refraining from buying to the point of self-denial, any article exorbitantly priced."[108] Under the headline "Real buyers' strikes aren't organized," an unattributed editorial in the *Calgary Herald* clarified the argument: "Far more effective," and presumably more "real," the writer claimed, "is the

102. "Why You Now Pay 8 Cents for a Rowntree Chocolate Bar," *Globe and Mail,* 30 April 1947, 4; "5¢ Chocolate Bars Just Aren't Possible Now!" *Globe and Mail*, 7 May 1947, 4.

103. Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice*, 138–141.

104. Wellington Jeffers, financial editor, "Finance at Large: Campaign for Price Roll-Back and Wage-Boost Can Only Fail Unless Productivity of Worker and Encouragement to Investor Are First Steps," *Globe and Mail*, 21 March 1947, 20.

105. "Parading Pupils," *Globe and Mail*, 1 May 1947.

106. Gordon Goldsborough, "Memorable Manitobans: Wilfrid Lawrence 'Biff' MacTavish (1891–1951)," *Manitoba Historical Society Archives,* 11 August 2011, http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/mactavish_wl.shtml.

107. W. L. MacTavish, "Chocolate Bar Protest Starts Red Carnival," *Windsor Star*, 1 May 1947, 4.

108. Tease, "Juvenile Street Parade."

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unorganized or spontaneous buyers' strike … that never gets into the newspapers." Individual, unpublicized actions work, the editorial explained, because "in the long run, the consumer is the boss."[109]

To ardent Cold Warriors such as these, NFLY had no genuine interest in prices but was assuming control of "innocent" protests and "foment[ing] strife" solely to advance its Marxist political aims.[110] Such accusations were not entirely wrong, in that NFLY was attempting to hold the state to account, which is clearly a political goal beyond the demand for lower prices. NFLY activists, however, would have understood their role not as subverting spontaneous protest but rather as the opposite: providing leadership to grow it into a movement.

While some in the community saw earnest youth asserting newly minted rights as social citizens, others, including influential public figures, perceived a Communist plot. Addressing the convention of the nationalist Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, prominent public intellectual and "militant red-baiter"[111] Watson Kirkconnell announced that Canadian Communists affirmed their loyalty to Stalin when they organized "against housing conditions, milk and chocolate prices." He underscored his message by repeating the false claim that children in Toronto schools were being taught a Communist-inspired and anti-religious curriculum that encouraged disloyalty to their "native land."[112]

Ontario premier George Drew, another well-known anti-communist, informed the Ottawa Women's Canadian Club that Communists had "stirred up juvenile protests against the price increase in chocolate bars." He advocated cadet training in the schools as an antidote. In an oblique swipe at Communist women, who were well known to oppose such training, Drew pronounced any arguments against what Communists condemned as the "militarization of schools" as "mawkish nonsense."[113]

Arguing along the same lines in the press, W. L. MacTavish accused NFLY of subverting the youngsters' genuine outrage to recruit members, aided, he

109. "Real Buyers' Strikes Aren't Organized," *Calgary Herald*, 7 May 1947, 4.

110. McKechnie, "Reds Seen Duping Youth," *Telegram*, 3 May 1947.

111. Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006), 78.

112. "Speaker Attacks Communists Here," *Globe and Mail*, 28 May 1947, 4; Frank K. Clarke, "'Keep Communism Out of Our Schools': Cold War Anti-Communism at the Toronto Board of Education, 1948–1951," *Labour/Le Travail* 49 (Spring 2002): 93–120; Reginald Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945–1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 151, 277–279.

113. Harvey Hickey, "Drew Lashes Ottawa's Attempt to Undermine Autonomy of Province," *Globe and Mail*, 7 May 1947, 7. On Communist women's critique of the militarization of schools, see "With Our Women," *Daily Clarion*, 13 June 1936; Beatrice Ferneyhough, "Toronto Women Oppose Cadet Plan in Schools," *Daily Clarion*, 11 March 1939; "Trustees Fail to Take Stand on Cadet Work," *Globe and Mail*, 17 March 1939, 4.

claimed, by their allies in the left labour unions.[114] The Toronto *Telegram*'s L. M. McKechnie declared the boycott to be part of the "Communist grand strategy" to create chaos in order to advance "world revolution."[115] As these red-baiting attacks proliferated, even papers such as the *Calgary Herald* and the *Globe and Mail* that had initially supported the boycott changed tack virtually overnight. The *Globe*, which only days before had quoted NFLY activists in upbeat reports on the protests, now pronounced the campaign to be "sponsored and generally kept alive by the National Federation of Labor Youth," its success "attributable not so much to the youthful indignation as it is to the smooth organizational ability of the youth wing of the Canadian Communist party." Good organization, in these accounts, implied a Communist conspiracy and bad intent. "Mr. Norman Penner," the *Globe* proclaimed, "has followed to the letter his elder comrades' pattern for industrial disruption," being, along with his "associates … well-schooled in this sort of thing."[116]

The campaign, which had begun with such strong media support, was dropped by the mainstream press only two weeks after it had begun, prompting some to conclude that the protest had ended, too badly tarnished by the red-baiting to continue.[117] Yet a month later, seventeen-year-old NFLY activist Shirley Endicott appeared among more than 200 HCA delegates rallying in Ottawa, where she was quoted by the press on the struggle for lower prices, including those of chocolate bars.[118] This suggests that the campaign likely continued as a collaboration between NFLY and the HCA, two pivotal organizations of the broad community left, supported by the progressive language groups but without much popular support.

The symbolic power of chocolate bars, however, remained strong, providing rich fodder for cranky newspaper readers and members of Parliament. Confectionary firms that produced quality chocolate might "go out of the chocolate bar business altogether" if they were forced to drop their prices, warned one reader. Another blamed the price rise on the greed of "the kiddies' … own parents, brothers and sisters" who were "employed by such firms" and had struck "for higher wages."[119] Canadians continued to deluge their MPS with letters demanding government action to reduce chocolate bar prices.

114. MacTavish, "Chocolate Bar Protest."

115. McKechnie, "Reds Seen Duping Youth," *Telegram*, 3 May 1947.

116. "Chocolate Bar 'Strike' Blamed on Communists," *Calgary Herald*, 3 May 1947, 1; "Candy a Dandy Weapon," *Globe and Mail*, 6 May 1947, 6.

117. "Youths Shun Strike Led by 'Reds,'" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 6 May 1947, 41; "Communist Part in Parade Seen by Youth Groups: Organizations Decide to Forgo Candy Bar Strike Demonstrations," *Daily Colonist*, 6 May 1947.

118. Guard, *Radical Housewives*, 136.

119. Old Time Alderman, "Chocolate Bars," letter to the editor, *Globe and Mail*, 24 May 1947, 9; G. B., "Beauty Contests and Chocolate Bars," *Globe and Mail*, 25 June 1947, 11.

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Members from both sides of the aisle pointed to the tax on soft drinks and chocolate bars to justify or criticize the Liberal budget.[120] Retail stores cashed in on the "dizzying demand" for chocolate bars by advertising free bars with the purchase of books, clothing, or other items.[121]

Candy Bar Kids in the Class Struggle

The intensity of the attack on the children's boycott speaks to their opponents' awareness of what was really at stake. Their attackers were, of course, correct to accuse the movement of having connections to the Communist left. As much as the boycott was a demand for the state to control prices, it was also a skirmish in the class struggle. By the late 1940s, communists – both within and outside the LPP – were virtually alone in pointing out that capital exercised virtually unfettered control of the economy, supported and defended by the liberal state. The left's insistence that people's everyday problems were structural, rather than the result of personal failings, encouraged people to challenge the powerful and call governments to account. As Andrée Lévesque observes, although the Communist Party was never more than a "marginal presence" in Canadian society, its ability to raise people's awareness and mobilize support for progressive causes was significant. Indeed, she argues, it "left its mark on the entire twentieth century."[122] Led or inspired by the comrades, ordinary people acted on the belief that they had the power to advance progressive social change. The ruling class, no doubt correctly, perceived that collective resistance as a serious threat.

The children's chocolate bar protest provides a window on this critical moment in the class struggle. People of all ages and different class positions took to the streets to demand government accountability, restraint of capital, and state intervention in the economy to ensure fairness to working people, confident in their rights as citizens. That democratic expression of dissent was stifled by anti-communism, and this history has been largely lost or overlooked. The ideas that fuelled these mobilizations were squelched during the Cold War, but they re-emerged and were re-articulated in the New Left movements of the 1960s.

As Reginald Whitaker and Gary Marcuse demonstrate in their enduringly important account of the Cold War, the political quiescence of the 1950s

120. Harvey Hickey, "Gym and Pool for Fat MPs McIvor's Plan," *Globe and Mail*, 8 May 1947, 17; Hickey, "Gardiner Holds Farmer Earned Price of Butter; Dares MPs to Say Nay," *Globe and Mail*, 13 May 1947, 3; Warren Baldwin, "N.S. Wins in Principle on Tax Pact: Macdonald," *Globe and Mail*, 13 May 1947, 1; Hickey, "Progressive Tax Cuts after Man Reaches 55 Advocated by Beaudry," *Globe and Mail*, 21 May 1947, 3.

121. "Chocolate Bars Free," *Globe and Mail*, 17 May 1947, 2; "Chris Wahlroth & We Hear by the Grapevine," advertisement, *Globe and Mail*, 6 June 1947, 21.

122. Lévesque, *Red Travellers*, xii.

was far from an automatic turn to the imagined safety and security of the domestic. Rather, the rising political entitlement of the 1940s was deliberately suppressed by the state. It took the combined assault of the coercive power of the state, the influence of a compliant mass media, and a convergence of well-publicized "common sense" opinion, forcefully expressed by respected authorities, including those in the judiciary and the legislature, to demonize protesters, stigmatize dissent, and redefine popular discourse. The objective of this combined effort was expressly to discredit socialist ideas and, incidentally, to roll back popular expectations of a more equal society. Socialism in general and communism in particular were targeted explicitly by a broad range of respected public figures.[123]

In a more recent account of the Cold War from a cultural perspective, Mark Kristmanson uses the concept of cognitive maps to explain how Cold War elites shifted the cognitive terrain, making a defence of left ideas literally inconceivable. Cold War culture, he argues, justified the persecution of Communists and suspected Communists by redefining the cultural imagination. With public speech thus circumscribed, public opinion hardened against the popular left and justified the official persecution of even celebrated leftists, a process he illustrates with the attacks on the singer Paul Robeson.[124]

The result of active state suppression combined with an emergent Cold War sensibility was the reconstruction of postwar Canada, a country where thousands of ordinary Canadians had joined and supported community protests in actions that had received favourable press coverage, into a "society in which it was not safe to be an independent thinker" and in which civil liberties were limited.[125] The Cold War did more than quell demands for an enhanced role for the state in protecting the well-being of citizens; it effectively suppressed almost all forms of legitimate dissent. Fear was deployed to great advantage by political elites to dismantle popular expectations of the enlarged economic and political rights that had been promised during the war. So effective was this strategy that even children protesting the price of chocolate could be labelled dangerous traitors, their demands for fairness recast as part of a conspiracy designed to deceitfully foment discontent against the benevolent free market. Cold War rhetoric deployed by the press and anti-communist elites defined these angry children as mere dupes of the "Commies" with no real understanding of the economic principles at stake. Looking back at the protest now, as state policies are again fuelling inflation in a bid to serve the interests of business at the cost of squeezing workers, the children's voices tell

123. Whitaker and Marcuse, *Cold War Canada*.

124. Mark Kristmanson, *Plateaus of Freedom: Nationality, Culture, and State Security in Canada, 1940–1960* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2003).

125. Alvin Finkel, "Competing Master Narratives on Post-War Canada," *Acadiensis* 29, 2 (2000): 188–204.

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a different story. The only suckers back then, they said, were those who would pay eight cents for a candy bar without putting up a fight.

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