

THE COOPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH FEDERATION
AND AMATEUR THEATRICALS IN 1930'S VANCOUVER, BC

by

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates a collection of short one-act plays in the Arthur J. Turner Fonds held in the University of British Columbia Rare Books and Special Collections. These plays, written by Arthur J. Turner, Thorvald “Denny” Kristiansen and Hubert Evans in the mid 1930’s, formed part of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation’s broader social and propaganda efforts to educate and indoctrinate new members in the basic tenets of Socialism and the CCF platform. Like agitprop plays created elsewhere in Canada, Britain and the United States, dramatic groups within CCF clubs wrote and performed such plays as one of many means of legitimization for parties and movements of the Left along with other educational, social and political activities. For the CCF, a recently formed political party built by the merger of many disparate groups and cultures, solidifying their voting base and creating new centres for progressive culture, social gatherings, shared political vision and party solidarity was vital in the 1930’s to ensure the continued existence of the party as well as electoral success and political change. This research seeks to situate these plays amid their social, cultural, historical and political contexts to show that their emergence was a result of the unique set of circumstances created in the Depression-era and a manifestation of the larger global workers’ theatre movement. Finally, this research seeks to recover and publicize the plays of the CCF drama groups that have been almost entirely erased from the broader discourse of Canadian theatre due to their amateur status and exclusion from the hegemonic archive.

PREFACE

This dissertation is an original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Patricia Everett-Kabut.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BC	British Columbia
CCF/NDP	Canadian- the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. The CCF was the precursor to the NDP, the Canadian New Democratic Party, formed through the union of the CCF and Canadian Labour Congress.
CCYM	Canadian- Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement
CLC	Canadian Labour Congress
CP	International- the Communist Party
CPC	Canadian- Communist Party of Canada
CPGB	British- Communist Party of Great Britain
CUPE	Canadian Union of Public Employees
ILP	Canadian- Independent Labour Party
LOWT	International- League of Workers' Theatre
NDP	Canadian- New Democratic Party, formed after the merger of the CCF and CLC in 1961
PAC/PAP	Canadian- Progressive Arts Club aka Progressive Arts Players
SLP	American- the Socialist Labor Party
SPC	Canadian- Socialist Party of Canada
WTM	British- Worker's Theatre Movement
WUL	Canadian- Workers' Unity League

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Finally, I wish to thank some dear friends and family for their encouragement. There are no words to express the gratitude I have for my parents, Chuck Everett and Julie Hews-Everett to whom I owe everything and can never thank enough for all they have done and continue to do. Special thanks to Judith and Karol and my extended families of Everetts, Hewses, Lougheeds, Kabuts, Yeckels, Randalls, Harrises and the "Tuesday night Coven" as well for getting me to this point. My love and thanks go to my heterolifemate Julia Back, and always empathetic Amanda Salanga and Alison Hanford, as well as my Canadian posse. Love and thanks to Lindsay and Anina for their usually hilarious friendship and a metric ton of yarn. Thanks to the musical singalong crew for helping maintain my sanity and to Sean and Kerry for transcribing and attempting to play the "Opera Parliamentary". Thanks to Pickle, Penny and Dangerous Beans for keeping me company in my often lonely office.

Finally, my deep and heartfelt gratitude goes to my partner in crime and husband David Everett-Kabut whose vitally important support made finishing this work possible. It is entirely possible that I would have been found dehydrated and starved to death at my desk or on the couch surrounded by overdue library books and moldering tea mugs without the love and support of this singularly unique man.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my comrades, past, present and future, of the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 2278, representing Educational Support Workers at the University of British Columbia.

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Introduction

At an educational session prior to a meeting of the Vancouver District Labour Council in March 2015, after a short presentation on elements of the background history of the labour movement and progressive Canadian political parties, I challenged trade unionists from across the city who represented auto workers, public employees, stage employees, teachers and more to take a copy of a nearly unknown script and read aloud words that had not been performed for some seventy years. In the ensuing twenty minutes, a parable intended for an audience of children and their parents about monkeys on a deserted island who stage a socialist uprising sparked a conversation about the nature of government, free speech and the need for activists in the labour movement to stand up to tyranny. In this moment, the true power of theatre was made clear as a disparate group of relative strangers was united by a common experience and provoked into discussion by an old idea, expressed simply. While the message and strategy of the play *A Story of the Simia* felt somewhat dated and naïve when held up to the judgement and cynicism of contemporary tastes, the fact remained that a play reading got a group of people debating political theory and current events, just as Arthur Turner would have hoped when he wrote this agitprop in the early to mid-1930's. Clearly the affective power and trans-historical value of this play remain intact.

The historical connections between theatre and other artistic outlets of culture working alongside and on behalf of political and cultural movements have manifested themselves in many forms and places across the globe as people have sought to influence the world around them through alternative forms of expression. Theatre very easily becomes a tool of instruction, a weapon of propaganda, or a means of indoctrination that can activate an

audience. The ancient Greek Dionysia contained days of performances held to honour and ridicule gods and patriarchs alike and served as epicenters of democratic debate and socio-political discourse for male citizens. Morality plays and counter-cultural feast days and performances played tug of war over the souls and minds of people in the medieval period: establishing, subverting and re-establishing moral, socio-cultural and political norms through play acting. Corneille's *Le Cid* set off a war of pamphleteers arguing over the role of theatre as a tool for moral instruction to the point where the state, in the form of the Académie Française, had to intervene and restore cultural order by reaffirming the rule of neo-classicism in seventeenth century France. In times of stricter institutional control of dramatic content, playwrights offered praise and flattery to monarchs and the powerful, reaffirmed feelings of nationalistic pride in times of progress as well as decline, offered audiences paragons of nationalistic virtue, images of the state personified, and a common cultural milieu around which to unite in times of crisis.

It is no great surprise that in order to conquer a colony, empires sometimes squelched or banned language, sport, religion and the arts, as the English authorities did to the Irish before the foundation of the Gaelic League in the earliest rumblings of "the troubles," or the United States government did to Native Americans and Native Hawaiians, for it is these things which ignite passions in people, providing a means through which they can identify themselves in the struggles of others, proclaim their solidarity and stand up to their oppressors. In Canada, colonization took a similar form in the destruction of languages, art and culture of aboriginal groups and a wholesale project of indoctrination of aboriginal youth through the residential schools. Cultural suppression of minorities and critical movements within a population (along with the myriad other ways political leaders suppress those who

challenge the status quo) are means by which the powers that be can maintain their control over the political landscape and preserve their place of authority.

The playwrights who wrote for workers' theatre groups in the 1930's in the United States, Britain and Canada were hardly the first to use theatre as a tool for spreading ideas, education and indoctrination and inciting rebellion, but were situated as one group in a long and distinguished line of people motivated to inspire others in thought, feeling and action against governments and economic systems they felt were not meeting their needs. The momentum of this agitprop work carried on long after the workers' theatre movement was confined to the archives. Augusto Boal saw tremendous successes with his Theatre of the Oppressed work in Latin America and Europe. Vancouver's Theatre for Living (formerly Headlines Theatre) seeks to keep this tradition alive in Canada by working to examine homelessness, attitudes of 'other-ness', mental health and most recently challenging the culture of fear using similar applied theatre methodologies. On the educational side, creative drama has made its way into classrooms as a tool for young people to engage empathetically with curricula, recognizing the powerful responses generated through theatre techniques for audiences and participants alike. The workers' theatre movement is no exception to the rule, but another facet of the human impulse to use drama and performance as tools to envision and agitate for improvement in the world around us.

What follows is an exploration of a collection of scripts that show how the workers' theatre movement rose and fell in Vancouver, BC, as a response to the social and political upheaval of the Great Depression in the 1930's, and an analysis of their relation to similar work emerging in the United States and Britain. An artistic outgrowth of a unique and active time in the Canadian labour movement, these scripts from a fledgling political party--the

Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in British Columbia--represent one isolated corner of a much larger global movement in which groups of largely unemployed and politically dissatisfied young men and women used theatre as a tool of propaganda to advance their progressive aims and win the hearts and minds of an ideologically shifting public while the years following the Great Depression led to sweeping progressive reforms and the golden age of the labour union.

Personal Investment in The Research

I was first exposed to the scripts housed within the Arthur J. Turner Fonds in the Rare Books and Special Collections division of the University of British Columbia library in the first year of my doctoral program during a library tour. Sarah Romkey, the archivist who introduced our cohort to collections at UBC, mentioned in passing that she found a few folders of workers' theatre scripts that were mostly unstudied and about which very little was known. While I had started my PhD intending to research Pacific Northwest vaudeville performance circuits, a series of life events, most notably my election as president of UBC's Teaching Assistants' Union (Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 2278) and our subsequent strike, led my personal, professional and academic lives in a new direction. I developed a keen interest in Canadian labour politics and history that married nicely with my previous work studying other points of convergence of politics and the arts.

Throughout the writing of this dissertation I have continued to serve as the President of CUPE 2278 through times of relative calm, times of tumult, and two rounds of bargaining. I have attended a host of national and provincial conferences, conventions, sector councils, specialty committees for young workers and women, district labour councils, Labour Federation conventions and educational events, and more. In my capacity as president of a

CUPE local I have walked picket lines with other locals, attended New Democratic Party rallies and conventions, met with and lobbied politicians and assisted campaigns. All of these experiences colour my perceptions and interpretations of the plays discussed in this research and the social, historical and political context from which they emerged.

A final important element that influences this research and has helped shape the sometimes broad background information offered and the conclusions drawn is my international student status and the interdisciplinary nature of this work. As an American student trained in American institutions before moving to Vancouver, I began this work with little working knowledge of Canadian history, politics or theatre, and for that reason I include a certain amount of background information and contextualization that Canadian scholars may take for granted. Similarly, as this research is geared primarily toward theatre academics who I imagine will have little background in labour/political history, I offer some contextual histories where necessary. This dissertation is thus written in the hopes that it will make sense and be of use to scholars on both sides of the border and across disciplines.

Turner, Kristiansen and Evans

After investigating each of the plays found in the Turner Fonds, I set about identifying which plays could be attributed to a single playwright or to a group. Several plays could be attributed to Arthur J. Turner and/or the South Hill CCF Club of Vancouver, one could be tied conclusively to Denny Kristiansen of the Vancouver Centre CCF and another could be tied to Hubert Evans of Roberts Creek, British Columbia. Turner was very active in Socialist circles and the CCF, serving as the president of the South Hill Club before going on to represent East Vancouver in the BC Legislature. Denny Kristiansen worked on the Canadian Pacific Railway steamships and was an amateur actor who participated in CCF

dramatics and the Progressive Arts Club's famous 1935-36 production of *Waiting for Lefty*. Hubert Evans wandered BC extensively before settling in Roberts Creek on BC's Sunshine Coast about an hour and a half outside of Vancouver. Evans was a prolific professional writer who wrote for a wide array of Canadian periodicals, many for children, and also wrote short stories. I also sought out a connection between Kristiansen, Evans and Arthur J. Turner in the hopes of an explanation for why these plays were included in his papers in the archive. I remain unable to draw a firm conclusion beyond the probability that the scripts were shared among allied CCF clubs connected through the party and the social life of the clubs, motivated largely by Turner's strong interest in CCF drama.

Collectively, the three men represent some of the variety of individuals who were united by shared politics and an interest in the role of drama in serving the educational and social needs of their political party. These plays, taken into consideration alongside the work of the Progressive Arts Clubs, represent the dissatisfaction and disillusionment of a generation of young activists who sought a new and different way to communicate their concerns with the public and win their support. This impulse, far from isolated in the southern part of British Columbia, was shared across Canada, the United States and Britain, and resulted in a surprisingly large network of artist activists. The political affiliation of the workers' theatre groups spanned the full breadth of the Left, but the central aim at the heart of it all was to use the power of theatre to shine a spotlight on the social ills of the day and seek their remedy.

This research presents a previously forgotten and largely unknown collection of plays that add to the growing, but still largely unexplored, body of knowledge about the Canadian Left and Canada's history of amateur dramatics. The plays found within the Turner Fonds

suggest that the workers' theatre movement in Canada was far more robust than previously believed and developed beyond the confines of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC), its Progressive Arts Clubs and allied cultural and ethnic groups to include the CPC's often-contentious political rivals, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). This research is thus presented as an act of recovery that broadens our understanding of a pivotal moment in Canadian history in the Depression-era, and the way a group of dissatisfied working-class activists in the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation sought to rehearse for revolution using the same tools as other Leftist groups throughout the Western world and build upon the momentum already created in Vancouver by their political and dramatic rival, the Progressive Arts Club.

By and large, scholarship about workers' theatre in Canada has been dominated by the CPC's Progressive Arts Club. Toby Gordon Ryan's book *Stage Left: Canadian Theatre in the Thirties* covers her personal experience with the PAC in Toronto and the experiences of other PAC activists in other Canadian urban centres whom she interviewed years later. Bonita Bray's MA thesis and journal article about the Vancouver PAC's production of *Waiting for Lefty* builds upon this work and gives us a significant understanding of the Vancouver PAC. Sandra Souchotte's journal article "Canada's Workers' Theatre" in the *Canadian Theatre Review* offers another brief PAC-centred and Toronto-centric overview. The most substantive scholarly research on Canadian workers' theatre has been carried out by the University of Guelph's Alan Filewod, most notably in his book *Committing Theatre: Theatre Radicalism and Political Intervention in Canada* and his introduction to his recent edition of the Canadian workers' theatre classic, *Eight Men Speak*. Filewod's access to the extensive Toby Gordon Ryan Collection housed in the archives at the University of Guelph

in Ontario yields a view of Canada's workers' theatre that skews eastward and towards the PAC. Significantly less is known about workers' theatre of the West, and next to nothing is known of Vancouver's workers' theatre scene outside of the PAC's one notable production of *Waiting for Lefty* at the Dominion Drama Festival in 1936.

While Vancouver's PAC did see great success with its award-winning production of *Lefty*, they produced very little else of note. The Vancouver area's Cooperative Commonwealth Federation clubs began to form drama groups, likely because of the early interest expressed in workers' theatre as a tool for education and entertainment by Arthur J. Turner, who had connections with the British workers' theatre movement, and perhaps also in response to the success of the PAC's production of *Lefty*. Held within Turner's papers, mostly political correspondence from his years as an MLA in East Vancouver for the CCF and later the NDP, are a handful of files that contain copies of CCF drama scripts and radio plays and a small amount of ephemera related to the short-lived CCF dramatics groups.

This dissertation seeks to introduce these scripts to scholarly and labour audiences to which they are currently unknown, contextualize the scripts within the social and political contexts from which they emerged, and offer insights into the reasons behind the CCF's short-lived foray into dramatics in the late 1930's. The small, but determined, CCF dramatics groups studied here sought to enliven and bolster the CCF's concerted effort to create a progressive community and culture in British Columbia and operated on educational, social and political levels, often in overlapping ways. Drama served as a pedagogical alternative to other supplemental educational activities of the CCF, which typically used topical debates, speaking tours and reading/study groups to inform members and the public of the tenets of their brand of social democracy. Drama provided a productive social space for like-minded

men and women to share in cooperative and collaborative labour-intensive work that was ultimately also quite fun. Participating in putting on short plays offered members a sense of ownership and a place within the CCF community, and along with other social events it blurred the distinctions of social life and party life while members were immersed in the CCF and its views. In a period of tumultuous politics (the 1930's), experimentation through workers' theatre performances allowed both the drama club members themselves and the CCF as a party to find their public voice in non-traditional and unthreatening ways, using familiar dramatic forms to deliver less familiar ideology in a format that was fun and entertaining.

Ultimately, by creating original works, the CCF clubs tailored and propagated their political message and agitated for political and social change, just as most other agitprop drama groups did at the time, but they did it in a style that audience members would be accustomed to and that fit comfortably within the CCF's broader social and educational schema. A great deal of CCF programming was geared toward education, appealing to the mind through study, debate, speeches, radio, etc. Drama (and likely CCF choirs, bands and sports) could engage members emotionally, physically and intellectually, thereby achieving multiple angles of influence on individuals and the broader public.

While the significance of Canada's Progressive Arts Clubs is undeniable, they were not the only organizations seeking to create original dramatic work for Canada's working class in the Depression-era. Indeed, at least in Vancouver and southern British Columbia, the CCF drama clubs may have been more active and original than their PAC peers at the time, and further archival research may reveal a large network of CCF drama clubs across the country that were writing and adapting original work. This research offers a first foray into

the world of CCF drama in BC in the 1930's and hopefully will serve as motivation for others to undertake a prolonged search in unanticipated archives to recover more of Canada's amateur theatre history.

Chapter One introduces the project and outlines the methodology and historiographical strategy used throughout this research. Chapter Two is a selective history of workers' theatre and notable events in labour history, included to help contextualize the CCF workers' theatre among its British, American and especially its Canadian peers. The main crux of the work is contained in Chapters Three to Five in which case studies are presented examining scripts from three CCF Clubs and the ways in which they reflect the distinct personalities of their authors. Chapter Three is a discussion of the life and work of Arthur J. Turner and the South Hill CCF Club along with analyses of three original one-act plays written and produced there: *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* and *The Story of the Simia or The Monkey Rebels* which are both about the basic theory behind socialism, and *Boys of the Old Brigade* which is an anti-war play. Chapter Four discusses Thorvald "Denny" Kristiansen and his work with the Progressive Arts Club production of *Waiting for Lefty* about a New York taxi drivers' strike, his involvement with the Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement, and his play *Big Business* which speaks about class consciousness and worker identity in the face of the evils of capitalism. Chapter Five covers the life and work of Hubert Evans, the Roberts Creek CCF Club and Evans' play *You Can't Tell Me* which deals with the theme of ignorance in the face of progressive change. Chapter Six offers some conclusions and proposes areas for future research.

Methodology

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this research is to recover as much information as possible about the purpose and aims of drama groups within the CCF Clubs in the Vancouver area in the 1930's. Wherever possible, I have tried to reconstruct production histories on the basis of archival materials such as programs, newspaper announcements and internal CCF Club documents to place these scripts within the broader context of BC's labour history and shed light on this short-lived but popular amateur theatre tradition with a socio-political focus. This project offers a close look at the content of the material, related ephemera, reviews and recollections of performances as well as an analysis of the dramatic material from BC playwright activists with the CCF. The result is an investigation of three clubs within the CCF that produced workers' theatre pieces during the 1930's in Vancouver and vicinity, and the ways in which these theatre groups interacted with their parent organization.

In limiting the scope of this project, I invite comparison with other localized examples of the workers' theatre movement in Canada in order to reconstruct the shape of the broader movement and the ways in which the individuality of each location and its respective issues and concerns were manifested in the performances. Ephemera generated by the National CCF makes mention of drama clubs as one of the enticements of CCF membership, and evidence of drama groups from at least five CCF clubs in southern BC (Kitsilano Beach, South Hill, Advance CCF, Roberts Creek and the Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement) lead me to believe that while perhaps not omnipresent, drama groups were also not uncommon in the CCF of the 1930's, and that future research

will someday uncover drama groups in CCF clubs in communities across Canada ("C.C.F. Drama Festival Program.").

Research Questions

The questions guiding this research include an exploration of the extent to which the Vancouver workers' theatre movement can be considered a result of its unique time and place, exacerbated by the bad management of BC relief camps, poor labour relations and the hardship of the Great Depression as felt in Vancouver. Did the relative geographic isolation of Vancouver yield a workers' drama unlike other major urban centers in Canada, Britain and the United States, or is there something intrinsic to Workers' Theatre, regardless of its origins? To what extent was the manifestation of the WTM in Vancouver an inevitable end result of the economic and social hardship of the period?

Other questions guiding this work seek to place the workers' theatre in Vancouver within the context of other workers' theatres in Canada, the United States and Great Britain. What was the nature of the relationship between the Progressive Arts Club and the CCF drama groups, if any? What was the nature of the relationship between the CCF drama clubs and their parent political party? By looking at the plays of the BC CCF clubs through the lenses of local, national and international socioeconomic conditions and local, national and international artistic trends, I hope to contextualize these plays both artistically and culturally, ultimately arguing that British Columbia's Leftist artists were just as active as others across Canada, the US and Britain.

Research Methodology

After extensive review of the Arthur J. Turner Fonds involving folders of materials from his days working with the South Hill CCF drama group, I photographed each page,

yielding nearly 1000 photographs of scripts, documents, letters and ephemera. Photos of play scripts were digitally edited one by one to increase the readability of text, given that the bulk of the originals were thin carbon copies with a great number of edits, notes and marginalia in pencil. Some documents were written in the form of dramatic sides and contain only part of the dialogue of a scene, others were written out by hand and still others seem to be missing portions or are scenes that were intended to be added to another play. The plays that seemed complete and intact I transcribed into a digital document, keeping notes on edits, typographical errors, places where transcription was made difficult by the condition of the documents and where words might not be what I had transcribed and so on. I reviewed duplicate copies of plays for any inconsistencies and noted these where necessary to indicate changes made over various drafts and revisions.

Once they were typed and cleaned up, I sought to categorize the plays according to author or dramatic group responsible for the creation of material. In the case of the two plays *Halcyon* and *Fish Scales*, no author was indicated and a review of other materials and literature has yet to reveal any further evidence as to their origins or performance history, if any. These plays I have set aside for now and mark them as an area for future research. The remaining plays either include the name of the playwright, or other materials in the Turner Fonds, Evans Fonds, City of Vancouver Archives and Provincial Archives or memoirs have suggested who wrote the scripts.

Table 1: Plays Found in the Arthur J. Turner Fonds, UBC Rare Books and Special Collections

Author	Title	Origin	Subject Matter
Arthur J. Turner English born, Canadian immigrant	Boys of the Old Brigade*	BC	Anti-war protest play referring to WWII
South Hill CCF	The Story of the Simia or The Monkey Rebels	BC	Children’s theatre about socialism and the injustice of the capitalist system.
“T, H and W”	The Great Money Trick**	BC	Literary adaptation of a popular labour-focused novel
Hubert Evans Born Anglo- Canadian	New Country*	BC	Radio play about BC job loss, generational change, pastoralism. Most likely from the 1940s or 50’s.
Roberts Creek CCF *	You Can’t Tell Me*	BC	The importance of Unionism
Denny Kristiansen Danish, immigrated to Canada in 1920s	Big Business*	BC	The similarities of blue collar and white collar workers and the need for unionism to protect both from unscrupulous employers
Author	Title	Origin	Subject Matter
Arthur J. Turner and Carl Robinson and two mystery versions	John Ball*	BC	Radio Play about British priest John Ball who took part in a peasant revolt in 1381. There is one copy of a script credited to Turner and Robinson and two other <i>John Ball</i> plays by an unknown playwright and of unknown provenance. Origin date is unknown, but likely later than the bulk of Turner’s other work.
Walt Anderson	Box Car*	Unknown	Riding the rails, police brutality, hoboism
Unknown	Halcyon	Unknown	Anti-war play
Unknown	Fish Scales	Unknown	A play about May Day
Alan Baxter and Harold Johnsrud	The Dead Cow*	USA	Part of <i>Parade</i> , a two act revue that played at the Guild Theatre in NY, May 20-June 22, 1935 (League).

Author	Title	Origin	Subject Matter
Upton Sinclair American	The Second Story Man	USA	Turner's memoir references his writing to Sinclair asking for scripts when the drama group was getting started and noting that Sinclair sent them some. This may be one of those scripts.
* Author's name included on original manuscript ** Author's name listed on CCF Drama Festival Program, AJT Fonds *** Author's name suggested in <i>Somewhere a Perfect Place</i> , Turner's memoirs.			

Theoretical Lens of Analysis

Given my background as a researcher of Applied Theatre, I am inclined to interpret these scripts as early examples of the present-day Applied Theatre movement. Contemporary efforts to define Applied Theatre as a field offer a noticeably reliable definition of the goals of workers' theatre, too. Phillip Taylor's book *Applied Theatre: Creating Transformative Encounters in the Community*, a 2006 text on the subject, describes Applied Theatre as "...a useful umbrella term... for finding links and connections for all of us committed to the power of theatre in making a difference in the human life span" (Taylor 91). Christopher Balme defines Applied Theatre as "...forms of theatre that engage directly in social praxis...we are outside of the framework of traditional Western aesthetics in the sense that art should be non-instrumental. Applied theatre is always theatre for a specific purpose" (Balme). Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton begin to create a broad definition, asserting that Applied Theatre projects

...most often are played in spaces that are not usually defined as theatre buildings, with participants who may or may not be skilled in theatre arts and to audiences who

have a vested interest in the issue taken up by the performance or are members of the community addressed by the performance. (Prendergast and Saxton 6)

Viewed with these definitions in mind, the scripts of the workers' theatre movement seem to fit well within the criteria. Thus, the assumption that underlies this research is that the plays found in the Turner Fonds were intended for more than just entertainment or artistic expression and in fact had a deliberately active and political intent. The plays were often performed in places outside of a traditional theatre space, such as a union hall, picket line or factory. The actors were by and large amateurs, with little theatrical experience, who were drawn to work on the project by an intense connection to the subject matter of the performance or by other activists who were already involved. The scripts themselves were often written collaboratively and based on alternative source material like a newspaper article in the case of the play *Fish Scales*, a novel, or historical events reflected in short story form as seen in *Boys of the Old Brigade*. The audiences who viewed these performances tended to be workers, CCF party members, labour supporters and Socialist activists who certainly had a vested interest in the social commentary being offered by each play, but the plays were also intended to make the message more appealing and entertaining for the masses still to be converted to the CCF doctrine.

Attempting a Movement

Much like the work of the Progressive Arts Clubs creating theatre with a Communist ideology for use at party events and to meet party propaganda needs, CCF workers' theatre was a small movement within a movement. Alan Filewod cautions that viewing workers' theatre in Canada as a "movement" per se obfuscates the multiplicity of performative events, styles, cultures, genres and performative impulses that influenced (but is not the same as)

what is canonically recognized by theatre scholars as the “Workers’ Theatre Movement” (Filewod 105-15). However, as the field of Performance Studies continues to expand, and with it our understanding of what theatre and performance are, it stands to reason that the narrow boundaries of “workers’ theatre” could also benefit from expansion, especially in the Canadian context. If one accepts the concept of a “Canadian Workers’ Theatre Movement” as an amorphous collection of different groups using the emotional power of the performing arts to further their political aims, and includes the work of CCF drama groups, Progressive Arts Clubs, the Ukrainian Farmer Labour organizations, political cultural performances from Canada’s immigrant communities, protests, speeches, rallies, marches, etc., it becomes clear that something was happening; if not a “movement,” then it was certainly an attempt at one, even if it was not as widespread in Canada as in other countries.

Sociologist Benita Roth suggests that “definitions of social movements by sociologists abound” (Roth). In seeking to distil the qualities and qualifications of movement-hood from the multiple definitions emerging from her field, Roth proposes that the following attributes comprise the definitional core of what we deem to be a “movement”:

Sociological definitions of movements stress qualities like collective and innovative behavior, extra-institutionality, their network character and multicenteredness, the shifting and fluid boundaries of movement membership, and the willingness of members to disrupt order a little or a lot (Gerlach and Hine 1970). Social movements are generally seen as phenomena of the modern era and industrialized society, whether located in the “First” world or not (Hobsbawn 1959; Tilly 1986).

Industrialization and urbanization, technological advancements, and ongoing

democratization allowed people to push for change collectively from the margins of the polity, from outside of less-than-open institutions. (Roth)

The criterion of “collective and innovative behaviour” is certainly achieved by virtue of the fact that theatrical work is inherently a collective process, and the use of agitprop in Canadian politics was a relatively new vehicle of discourse. The CCF, as a fledgling political party, functioned outside of the traditional and established channels of Canadian government and could hardly be deemed “institutional” in nature in its early years. Like their British and American peers, the CCF dramatics groups communicated with each other and shared scripts as part of a multi-centered network. Script sharing between countries and likeminded organizations was also relatively common as evidenced by the American scripts and correspondence in the Turner Fonds from Upton Sinclair, British WTM leader Tom Thomas, the Mena, Arkansas labour college, and the very presence of work by Denny Kristiansen and Hubert Evans in Turner’s Fonds. Minutes from the CCYM also indicate that Denny Kristiansen “had sent away to Boston for a Peace Play, and was hopeful of being able to produce it in the near future” (Greer "3."), suggesting that he too sought outside assistance from his peer network in getting his group off the ground. Roth’s criterion of “shifting and fluid boundaries of membership” is epitomized by the fluctuation in CCF club membership as members moved seeking work, joined or quit because of their employment status, ability to pay dues, or availability of time for club participation. Other factors included the fluctuation of cultural organizations’ participation with the CCF like the Ukrainian Labour Temple and so on, the presence of truly working-class members alongside the petit bourgeoisie, the waxing and waning of the Socialist Party of Canada’s support of the CCF clubs, and the generally precarious membership evidenced by the constant need to recruit

new members. At their very core the CCF clubs were an attempt at a new way of organizing typically marginalized people within a new and different political party pushing for radical change.

If we apply Roth's amalgamated definition to an exploration of Canadian Workers' Theatre beyond the CCF to include the PAC, cultural performance groups like the Ukrainian Labour Temple, arts groups of the Communist Party and so on, it becomes even more clear that there was a collective, collaborative yet decentralized movement to use the arts toward political ends in an effort to achieve the goals of the Left. Because so little research has been conducted and published shining a light on Workers' Theatre in Canada, particularly work that was not connected to the Progressive Arts Club, I suspect that in time, as more material is uncovered, the question of the status of Canadian Workers' Theatre as a movement will be more clearly answered.

Challenges of the Archive and Historiography

Some of the unique challenges of this research are undoubtedly faced by historians of all sub-disciplines. Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* articulates a notion, particularly useful for theatre historians, of a split between the textual/physical/material evidence of the archive and a broader and more widely encompassing notion of embodied or more ephemeral immaterial evidence (what she calls "the repertoire"). In this research, material that would be part of Taylor's "archive" consists of the plays and press clippings found in the Turner Fonds, CCF Club archives, Provincial Archives, and City of Vancouver Archives, minutes and ephemera from CCF clubs in the region, and news clippings about productions from local papers.

This division seems to resonate with most of those who have written about historiographical methods from about 1989 onwards. An overview of the contemporary arguments about theatre historiography and the shaping of our field seems to suggest three primary areas of concern and interest that are ultimately epistemological, material or narrative/methodological in nature, and each explicitly or implicitly ties back to the division described by Taylor. The concern over knowledge and truth has undergone a tremendous shift from the surety of positivism, in which an empirical and universal truth could be found through the use of logic and reason rooted in preferential treatment of text, to the more nebulous post-positivist sense of personal and specific truths that vary according to circumstance and do not necessarily leave a written or physical mark behind.¹ The rejection of universal truth has led to an idea of historiography in which feminism, queer theory, post-colonialism and the intersection of these theories and others become the lenses through which one views source material and color the ultimate interpretation provided by the historian. History becomes constructed as a fluctuating narrative rather than the black and white portrayal of fixed and accepted ideas as fact that was encouraged by the positivists. In the absence of a universal truth, we are left with a multitude of ways of knowing about the same thing and only by familiarizing ourselves with a cross-section of histories about a time, place or event can we hope to understand the wider episteme.

The compilation of evidence and multiple interpretations of that evidence can suggest the larger truth, but even then, like a house built on shifting sand, new evidence and new ways of thinking may fundamentally alter future interpretations of the past, making the factually sound interpretation of today obsolete. It is with this multiplicity of perspectives

¹ Circumstances reflecting social, political, cultural, economic, gendered, radicalized, colonial, sexual (and so on) influences.

and ways of knowing in mind that the contextualization of the plays of the CCF becomes all the more important. Here, my background as an applied theatre practitioner, a union leader, a political party activist, an educator trained in progressive pedagogies, and a younger person who has struggled to find a place within the political system around me creates a sense of common ground and shared experience with the subjects of this research. Through this embodied experiential knowledge, I seek to rekindle, even in the smallest measure, the repertoire surrounding the plays included in this research.

Derrida suggests that there is “no power without control of the archive, if not memory” (11). This offers some key assumptions based on our post-positivist epistemology. First, history is accepted as a narrative construct of the historian; manipulated and constructed to provide a clear and logical story with some elements included to the exclusion of others, much like a conventional playwright constructs a script highlighting only the most pertinent facets of the story and excluding details deemed insignificant. Second, the material ensconced within the archive is not immune to political and social factors; someone selected certain materials as necessary for preservation sometime and with a certain intention for doing so to the exclusion of other materials deemed unfit, unworthy or unimportant. They who control the archive control what ideas are preserved in perpetuity and can potentially manipulate the construction of the historical narratives written in their time and into the future. Historically, Derrida, Taylor, Tracy C. Davis and others would argue that this selection of material reflects only the hegemony, and that the voices of the disenfranchised, suppressed and/or minorities were effectively silenced and “erased” from history, leaving no concrete trace behind. Taylor argues that this erasure from the textual archive is what happened as a result of Spanish conquest in Latin America, but the effects go much farther

than that to include the erasure from the historical record of women, ethnic and racial minorities, other colonized groups across the globe, and those in a political minority, different sexual persuasions, religions or creeds to name a few.

The presence of CCF script material and ephemera in the archive at UBC owes much to the social and political standing of Arthur J. Turner himself. As the archive of a local politician, his papers are imbued with an intrinsic political and cultural value that the papers of someone who led a more ordinary low-profile life, Denny Kristiansen for instance, are not. That Turner sought to preserve the scripts he and his colleagues wrote for South Hill, as well as the work of Kristiansen and Evans alongside them, speaks to the deep personal value Turner placed on these materials, his memories of their creation and his desire to see them preserved in perpetuity. Even if relatively few people saw these plays performed live in their day, their inclusion in the archive at an institution such as UBC speaks to the inherent value Turner believed they had and his desire that they be enjoyed and revisited after his death. That Turner's work was deemed significant enough to be preserved by University archivists is a reflection of his position of relative security within the hegemonic structures of the day.

By embracing 'other' non-textual, 'unhegemonized' forms of knowledge (Taylor's "Repertoire"), the historian can seek to reclaim, regenerate, reimagine and rewrite history to replace the stories of those lost to the written record and to expand our understanding of that which we thought we "knew." For the theatre/performance historian, recognizing the significance of the repertoire has the potential to increase the evidence available to researchers tenfold by expanding the definition of performance to include a wider range of human endeavours and adopting additional ways of knowing. In the case of this research, my position as a political scientist and union local president, and my background as a theatre

artist and scholar place me in a unique position to consider the workers' theatre scripts found in the Turner Fonds from multiple angles. The scripts are political tools, instructional tools, working collaborative theatrical documents, and concrete evidence from a particular time and place of how the art of theatre was used in the CCF.

The ephemerality of theatre means that the moment a performance is over, a vast amount of information is lost forever. The play text, actors' notes, promptbooks, sketches, publicity materials, photos, reviews, ads, programs, costumes, interview transcripts, protest signs, and more may form the textual/material archive, but the phenomenological experience--the precise tones, expressions, movements and emotional qualities of the live performance--is lost. It is this ephemerality that the repertoire seeks to stabilize and record for posterity by accepting embodied knowledge, including the performers experiences and audience reactions, the affect and effect of the performances, as equally valid for study. The methodological concern over how exactly to do this remains an area of discussion for historiographers.

As suggested before, the purpose of the theatre/performance historiographer² is to construct meaning that seems to be true and reasonable when the available historical evidence has also been taken into account. How one goes about doing this and what evidence is used becomes a matter of personal methodological choice and theoretical inclination. For Tracy Davis, the feminist theatre historiographer's task is to reclaim the role of women in the theatrical past, find plays by women that have been "lost" to history by virtue of their exclusion from the patriarchal archive, argue that fundamental absence from the archive does

² The contemporary choice to refer to those who do this work as "historiographers" (writers of history) as opposed to "historians" (recorders of events) suggests the agency and deliberate interpretation engrained within this post-positivist thinking about historical research. They are distinct, but intersecting practices.

not mean absence from history and that this is a history that is vitally important to study and examine to ensure women's voices are not excluded from the archives of the present and future. For a post-colonial historiographer like Diana Taylor, the task becomes one of seeking out evidence of the performative culture of those under Spanish colonization in Latin America. Adopting what little embodied knowledge has been passed down over time as valid historical evidence can begin this act of recovery of lost histories and narratives and provide a deeper insight into our understanding of colonialism in Latin America regardless of Spain's control of the written record.³ While the performance histories and traditions of one village may not suggest a universal truth of what performances in all villages under colonial rule were like, many such localized and specific histories can be amalgamated into a more cohesive bigger picture that presents a meaningful and telling history.

So too, the performance history and practices of CCF clubs in Vancouver may suggest how similar work may have been conducted elsewhere in Canada. The act of recovery inherent in bringing long forgotten scripts to light follows the same impulse as feminist and postcolonial scholars in seeking to find previously suppressed/forgotten works. The CCF was a fledgling political party in the 1930's and while its contemporary incarnation, the New Democratic Party, is a large and validated party functioning at all levels of government, its place in the social fabric of Canadian political life is not so mainstream that every facet of its history, including dramatic propaganda, is known and recognized, nor were these materials necessarily actively preserved at the time. The plays that remain and were archived at UBC were preserved because they were connected to men of significant social and political power who maintained their position well beyond the 1930's, namely an

³ Or indeed any archive that reflects the hegemony at the cost of the minority or disenfranchised.

NDP MLA, Arthur J. Turner, and noted professional writer Hubert Evans. That the work of Denny Kristiansen survived and made it into the archive is unusual and occurred only through his connection with Turner, who at some point compiled a collection of script material before his papers were entrusted to UBC. In conversations I had with Kristiansen's son Lyle during the course of this research, he implied that there was one other extant script by Denny Kristiansen, but the script could not be located at the time of this writing. I cannot help but wonder how many other scripts written by average amateur enthusiasts in the CCF across Canada have since been lost over time without the recognition of office or career to indicate the importance of their archive.

Bruce McConachie and R.G. Collingwood advocate a somewhat different methodology that seems especially well suited to the theatrically minded, rooted in empathy and imaginative re-creation. Immersed in a deep understanding of the historical past, the historiographer can put herself in the shoes of the historical figures and imagine why they acted as they did. McConachie cites Collingwood's example of imagining why Caesar chose to cross the Rubicon, what his motivations, reasons, and goals were and so on.

In my efforts to reconstruct a sense of the workers' theatre movement in Vancouver, I often combine the empatho-logical techniques of McConachie and Collingwood with the aforementioned case study rooted techniques of Taylor. This includes using empathic imagination to interpret decision-making processes, performance choices, venue selection, casting and so on while exploring individual scripts and production histories to the extent that archival material remains. While re-establishing a sense of the repertoire behind these plays via the traditional theatrical research mode of seeking promptbooks, reviews, articles, advertisements, programs, interviews, site visits of performance spaces and other ephemeral

traces of the productions was one angle I pursued, an additional way of looking at the repertoire in this research, shaped by the empathetic historiographical ideas of McConachie and Collingwood, came from trying to establish the functional goals of dramatic groups as part of the larger CCF social and educational mission. The papers of the Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement held within the MacInnis Memorial Collection at UBC Rare Books and Special Collections reveal a great deal about the publicity given to the social activities of CCF youth clubs. Dramatics, along with dances, educational meetings, sports and hiking groups, choirs, bands, and so on, are listed as reasons to attract young people to join the CCF and ultimately embrace its political ideals (Greer "Organizational Meeting of the CCYM"; Greer "Fifth Meeting of the C.C.Y.M."; CCYM *What Are You Doing to Make a Better World*; CCYM *This Way to a New Canada*). Viewing and breathing new life into these scripts with an understanding of this driving motivation for creating productions lends a special angle to the interpretation of these materials in much the same way that the more traditional theatrical repertoire might. In the absence of any surviving first-hand repertoire, my attempt at generating a second-hand repertoire through intense study is rooted in deep contextual research, my understanding of similar practices in similar situations and personal experience with political activism, theatre production, and a desire to spread a message and educate through progressive advocacy.

On the Significance of the Turner Fonds

Arthur J. Turner and his Fonds stand out in this study for several reasons. As a lifelong union activist and an early member of Vancouver's Socialist and ultimately CCF/NDP community, Turner's involvement in the development of the CCF in the Vancouver area feels omnipresent at times in the archives. References to Turner have shown

up in the meeting minutes of the South Hill, Vancouver Centre and East Vancouver Clubs, in letters and correspondence with other clubs through his role within the larger organization under a variety of leadership roles, and ultimately as a CCF and NDP Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) in British Columbia. His papers and the scripts contained within the Turner Fonds reveal a sense of the communal and cooperative atmosphere actively perpetuated and encouraged by the CCF clubs. The CCF sponsored educational programs, socials, dances, dramatic performances, bands, choirs, sports teams and hiking adventures. In Depression-era Vancouver, joining a CCF club was more than just a political affiliation; it was an adoption of a new immersive lifestyle, community and progressive culture. Turner's enthusiasm for workers' drama combined with his later public stature as an MLA and impulse to archive his life's work seems to have coalesced fortuitously to preserve these works in a way that simply could not and possibly did not occur for most other workers' theatre scripts generated by other CCF clubs.

Here, the desire to preserve the archives of those in power may assist in the attempt to recover what was once lost. The social significance afforded to political leaders and the urge to preserve governmental documents in this case appear to have offered protection to materials that might otherwise have slipped through the hegemonic archival process. As Taylor's discussion of the archive and the repertoire reveals, the process of archiving papers is never without a conscious choice of inclusion or exclusion. While I hoped to recover other scripts from this period by amateur groups among the CCF clubs of British Columbia in the archives, aside from another version of *You Can't Tell Me* in the Hubert Evans Fonds, nothing else has surfaced yet. Indeed, the records for clubs known to have more active drama groups associated with them, including the papers that have survived from the groups listed

in the New Westminster CCF Drama Festival program from 1936 that competed against Turner's South Hill Club and the Progressive Arts Club, generally reveal standard political party minutes, charters, dues check-off sheets, membership lists and correspondence with little to no mention of the broader social programming that was a regular feature of each club, and nothing about the dramatic activities within the group. What this reflects in terms of the perceived value, or lack thereof, for the dramatic and social activities of the CCF clubs is certainly a point of frustration for the workers' theatre historiographer. But absence from the archive does not necessarily indicate an absence from club life. It may simply result from a lack of the impulse for preservation of the ephemeral. One clear exception is the Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement (CCYM) Club that appointed Denny Kristiansen as a chairperson in charge of its dramatics for a short period while Kristiansen was unemployed during the depths of the Great Depression. One of the scripts found within the Turner Fonds, titled *Big Business*, was written by Kristiansen, pointing again to Turner as a central figure in Vancouver's CCF workers' theatre movement and a vital player in the preservation of this unique theatrical moment in Vancouver's history.

What makes these materials from the Turner Fonds so extraordinary is in fact their very ordinariness. These plays are not major works of literary genius; rather, they reflect in their very construction the rank-and-file nature of their authors, and suggest the optimism and dedication of those involved in pursuing this work as part of the life of the fledgling party. While frustrating for the theatre historian, this may also explain the absence of CCF drama from the archive: such scripts may not have been deemed 'important' or 'good enough' to preserve. This conundrum is often at the heart of theatre history research, however, as summarized by Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton in *Applied Theatre*:

Although many people might identify theatre as dramatic literature – that is, plays – most theatrical performances, even if they can be called plays, are never published. Most human performances are unrecorded. They pass by unremarked. Theatre history, then, is for the most part the history of the forgotten and unremarked, traced through the survival of the exceptional. (Filewod 2)

The plays of BC's CCF workers' theatre movement are fundamentally a product of enthusiastic amateurs seeking a new and engaging way to get their message across in a time of turbulent labour politics and economic collapse, using tools they were somewhat familiar with. They reflect a very specific moment in time and are a product of the tremendous upheaval felt across society. The success of the Progressive Arts Club's production of *Waiting for Lefty* and the absence of politically progressive drama from the Little Theatres and touring shows that provided most of Vancouver's theatrical fare opened a niche market that was primed and ready for more. This work seeks to bring these plays back into the light.

Social and Academic Significance

Most of the research on workers' theatre seems to have occurred in the 1970's and is focused predominantly on American, English and Russian movements. With the exception of more recent work by Alan Filewod in *Committing Theatre* (2011) and *Workers' Playtime* (2001), and Bonita Bray's "Against All Odds: The Progressive Arts Club Production of *Waiting for Lefty*" (1990), discussed in the following chapter, Canadian workers' theatre has been relatively unexplored since the 1970's. Many of the Canadian books on workers' theatre take the form of memoirs written by practitioners (Toby Gordon Ryan and Arthur J. Turner being two prime examples). While the first-person perspectives are fascinating, they have limited grounding in the broader socio-political context of the time, especially outside of

their respective political parties, and offer hardly any critical examination. Furthermore, what little has been researched in a rigorous and scholarly way predominantly involves the work of groups from Eastern Canada. This research sheds light on what happened in British Columbia during the 1930's and makes available previously unpublished script material in the hope that further work can be done to uncover other such obscure plays from other groups and create a greater sense of the workers' theatre movement across the whole of Canada. This research expands our understanding of the amateur theatre tradition in Canada, offers a sense of the greater variation in the work that was being done to generate Canadian proletarian drama, and further informs the more significant body of research on the Progressive Arts Club carried out in large part by Filewod, Ryan and Bray. By sharing these works once again with the public, I hope these plays may see new life and possibly continued performance linking the theatrical and labour past with the present.

Study Delimitation

This study is limited to the one-act play scripts made available in the Arthur Turner Fonds in UBC Rare Books and Special Collections, with a focus on the dramatic work of the South Hill CCF, with which Turner was associated, the Vancouver Centre CCYM, with which Denny Kristiansen was involved, and the Roberts Creek CCF, which included the involvement of notable BC writer Hubert Evans. Additional theatrical work by Denny Kristiansen will also be explored as he forms an attractive bridge between the CCF clubs and the Progressive Arts Club that shared similar goals but little else.

Further delimitation includes the bounds of geography in selecting only scripts written by local BC playwrights. While the Turner Fonds contains some noteworthy material from other locales, like the play *Oscar Sapp* by Harold Coy, which was written while he

attended a labour college in Mena, Arkansas, and two versions of a play called *John Ball* of unknown provenance that may or may not be later versions of an incomplete play written by Arthur Turner and Carl Robinson, the history of these plays, and others like it, stands apart from the main thrust of what will ultimately be a local story with wider ramifications. To this end, this research consists of in-depth exploration of the following playwrights whom I have been able to conclusively trace to British Columbia and their respective plays:

- Arthur J Turner and the South Hill CCF club that are responsible for the following one-act plays: *The Story of the Simia or the Monkey Rebels*, *Boys of the Old Brigade* and *The Great Money Trick* (an adaptation of “The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists” by Robert Tressell)
- Denny Kristiansen, who was associated with the Progressive Arts Club’s production of *Waiting for Lefty* and wrote the one-act *Big Business*. A few other plays by Kristiansen are referenced in Arthur Turner’s memoirs, but these scripts were not included in the Turner Fonds, nor could I locate them during a visit with Kristiansen’s son, Lyle Kristiansen.
- Hubert Evans, whom I have linked to the Roberts Creek CCF, and the play *You Can’t Tell Me*.

Contemporary social movements highlighting social injustices--the Occupy movement against the concentration of wealth among the top 1% of society, student movements highlighting generational conflicts and a lack of economic opportunity, and anti-war movements--make arguments similar to those Turner, Kristiansen and Evans make in their plays. For the CCF, the answer to these social problems was a Social Democratic government and progressive political policymaking, which has yet to be fully realized. For

the current generation, the solutions to these perennial problems remain elusive. The cyclical nature of society and politics is remarkable. Despite the 75+ years that have passed since Turner, Kristiansen and Evans wrote their plays, they still offer a relevant point of view and speak to how far we have come as a society, yet how far there is still to go.

CHAPTER TWO: Grounding CCF Drama in Theatrical and Political Contexts

Global Workers' Theatre Movements

The similar movements occurring in Russia, Germany, Britain, the United States, and Eastern Canada most directly shaped the workers' theatre movement in British Columbia and thus form part of the contextual milieu within which I interpret the CCF drama club scripts that form the central focus of this research. Arguably one of the most active decades for organized labour, the 1930's mark a period of vitality and growth in the ideas surrounding labour, unionism and Leftist politics, and it should come as no surprise that this period of time yielded such a rich body of related dramatic work throughout the Western world. Though frequently troubled by infighting and schisms over the finer nuances of their doctrines, their visions for the future and how to go about securing them, the labour movement and the Left held at their core a fundamental desire to unite and organize workers, farmers, and progressive allies with the goal of achieving collective action toward social justice and greater equality. The methods by which they attempted to win over these hearts and minds expanded beyond the walls of the workplace, or even the political party meeting, to include all parts of a worker's life and promoted progressivism not just as a political idea, but as a distinct culture and way of life.

While shop-floor organizing, of necessity, remained a focal point of union drives, unions as well as other groups in the labor movement gave serious consideration to other organizing methods and arenas. Educational programs, sports, and excursions were designed to orient whole lives toward labor activism and unions. (Young)

Workers' theatre was one of many new experimental directions in which artists took the theatrical medium around the turn of the century. The impulse to tackle social issues on the stage and challenge audiences to move beyond the comfort of melodrama and romanticism was felt globally. Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov and others were early experimenters with realism and naturalism, paving the way for subsequent forays into the dark and grim realities of the human condition and the real-life challenges beyond the walls of the theatre. These changes in topic and tone were revolutionary at the time, but were not always greeted with joy by those heavily invested in the status quo. William Winter, a prolific New York drama critic, summarized the opposition between the old and new succinctly.

Granting to Ibsen and his followers the highest and best motives, they have altogether mistaken the province of the theatre in choosing it as the medium for the expression of social views...which once adopted, would disrupt society... Since when did the theatre become a proper place for a clinic of horrors and the vivisection of moral ailments? (Winter qtd. in Williams 3)

Disrupting society and shedding light on the commonplace horrors of the lives of working-class people at the heart of industrialized society were just what those involved with the workers' theatre movement intended to do, and in so doing they gave us new ways of viewing the social role of drama. What follows is an overview of how drama in particular came to be a powerful organizing tool that sprang from several cultural traditions and inclinations, but grew into a worldwide movement in the 1930's, and specifically how workers' theatre manifested in the CCF in British Columbia in this period. The use of workers' theatre in Russia, Germany, Britain, the United States and Canada motivated and

inspired a generation of labour activists while marking a period of lively theatrical creation ranging from amateur to professional, whether brought to life playing in the corner at a membership meeting or making it onto the Broadway stage. Despite the geographical isolation of British Columbia from other urban centers where workers' theatre was a growing medium, through the exchange of script material, correspondence and theories, the workers' theatre of the BC CCF clubs was part of a web of interconnected and loosely organized activists with the same goals.

Early Rumblings of the Workers' Theatre Movement

While there are certainly antecedent forms of early workers' theatre in Russia, particularly in the Proletkult movement and in the back and forth discussions of the role of art, activism, reality, symbolism and theatre between groundbreaking theatre artists Konstantin Stanislavski and Vsevolod Meyerhold, the story of workers' theatre in this region truly begins after the Soviet revolution in 1917.⁴ The creation of a workers' culture on a massive scale was a deliberate act on the part of the Bolsheviks to win the hearts and minds of the common people who were divided, ravaged by war, famine, internal and international strife, the statistical majority of whom were illiterate peasant descendants of serfs. The result was a multi-pronged approach using as many popular mediums as possible with the sole purpose of generating material geared toward informing the masses and engendering loyalty to the state. These forms varied widely and included a large-scale, visually stimulating poster campaign laden with Soviet iconography, dozens of short propaganda films called *agitki*,

⁴ *Proletkult* translates to *people's culture* and was a movement beginning around 1908 whose proponents argued that a proletarian culture free from the confines and limitations of bourgeois ideology was the best way to promote proletarian class-consciousness and to foster militancy within the working class. In many ways it functioned as a social and arts club for its members and rivaled the offerings of large unions and Party clubs. It was incorporated into the ministry of education at Lenin's behest at the first All Russia Congress in 1920 (Stourac and MacCreery 25- 26).

mass spectacle performances of national identity, and theatrical performances (Stourac and McCreery xiii-25).⁵ This multipronged approach was repeated in Canada as the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation sought to present itself as more than a political party—as a way of life.

The realism and naturalism espoused by Stanislavski and the artists of the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) and epitomized in their seasons filled with the plays of Ibsen, Chekhov, Lev and Tolstoy that felt groundbreaking in the previous decades were dismissed as culturally elitist. Revolutionary artists, directors, filmmakers, circus performers, and actors joined the Bolshevik party in their desire to create a new kind of theatre for the masses that would both educate and call to action, laying groundwork that would influence later theorists and artists like Bertolt Brecht. “These new spectators had to be fully involved but in a way that sharpened their critical faculties. Only in this way could they use their understanding of what lay behind everyday events to revolutionize society” (Stourac and MacCreery 16).

To achieve these aims, theatre artists looked to the popular forms of the past: traveling players, circus, fair performances, music hall, clowning, mime, puppetry, concerts and expositions, to experiment with new forms that would meet the needs of theatre’s new propaganda function. This was exemplified by the thousands of amateur theatre groups of the Soviet Union whose collective work established many of the forms and standard elements of workers’ theatre produced all over the world, and whose influences are felt in the scripts in the Turner Fonds.

Numerous visitors to the Soviet Union [in the 1920’s] reported that every factory and every trade union had a theater group attached to it. By 1926 the Russian Federated

⁵ See Stourac and MacCreery’s “Theatre as a Weapon” and Mally’s “Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State” for two excellent overviews of early Soviet theatre and performance.

Soviet Socialist Republic, just one of the Soviet Union's Republics, had some 20,000 amateur dramatic circles, involving about 280,000 worker-actors who were performing for an audience of 25 million people per year. (Friedman "A Brief Description" 113)

One particularly important group that would shape much of the workers' theatre both inside and outside of Russia was the Blue Blouses. Arthur Turner of the South Hill CCF Club directly mentions the Blue Blouses as a source of inspiration, as does Toby Gordon Ryan of the Toronto Progressive Arts Club. The Blue Blouses originated the 'Living Newspaper' in which the headlines, news, editorials, cartoons, decrees and ideas of the day were brought off the page and portrayed live before an audience. The intention was to raise awareness about important issues, educate the audience, and agitate them into action by complementing the printed newspaper. As the Soviet Union sought to improve its literacy rates, the Living Newspapers also allowed for a cooperative and collective way to creatively shape and disseminate information to the masses. Allusions to topical events of the day and the inclusion of actual newspaper material in Hubert Evans' *You Can't Tell Me* show a direct connection between the BC workers' theatre and this impulse to use drama to highlight current events and inform audiences.

In the work of the Blue Blouses little scenery, if any, was used and the stage was usually bare except for a piano. Twelve to twenty male and female actors wore a standard uniform of blue blouses (hence their name) with black trousers or skirts and black shoes. This standardized and non-illusory uniform further separated the Blue Blouses from the naturalistic and realistic art theatre they rejected. The actors mingled with and paraded

through the audience to build a close relationship with them and encourage critical thinking and active participation.

As this movement grew in the Soviet Union, the techniques and activist intention of the work of groups like the Blue Blouses were shared internationally through tours, conferences, networking and correspondence. Most of the prominent players in the British, American and Canadian workers' theatre movements had contact with the Blue Blouses directly or through the International Workers' Dramatic Union whose bulletin was printed in multiple languages, one issue of which is found within the Turner Fonds (Union). Germany, Britain, the United States and Canada proved to be fertile ground for amateur agitprop for many of the same reasons as the Soviet Union was: a polarized society, often a strong Communist Party presence, volatile economy and lively tradition of amateur theatre and performance. Friedman estimates that in Germany, for instance, theatre groups associated with the Communist Party were reaching over 3.5 million workers per year by 1928 (Friedman "A Brief Description" 113). The American Federal Theatre Project produced a copious amount of Living Newspaper pieces, agitprop, and short plays steeped in allegory that hinted at a working-class revolution.

The FTP's *Revolt of the Beavers*, performed in New York, is a notable example of a production that incorporated the use of folktale and allegory (much like Blue Blouse groups did) to spread a proletarian message. In the play two children adventure in Beaverland and are exposed to the Chief Beaver who forces the other Beavers to work in the "busy wheel," turning bark into food, which is ultimately hoarded by the chief. One feisty beaver named Oakleaf, with assistance from the children, leads the rest of Beaverland in a rebellion to overthrow the Chief and return society to a system of sharing. The production sold out for the

duration of its run despite reviews proclaiming it “Marxism a la Mother Goose.” *Revolt of the Beavers* was defended by FTP head Hallie Flanagan as a children’s play about the moral of sharing, but the play became a focus of anti-Communist sentiments in the early days of the Red Scare and marks the beginning of the end of the FTP (Archives). Arthur Turner’s *Story of the Simia* from the South Hill CCF Club (see chapter four) bears remarkable similarities to *Revolt of the Beavers* in both content and style.

Archival records and memoirs by activists in the British and Canadian movements also directly reference the influence of the Blue Blouses and the work being created in the Soviet Union (Ryan; Rifkind; Arthur J. Turner *Somewhere*). What began as a deliberate national project soon spread and became a global, albeit relatively short-lived, phenomenon. This chapter will explore the international pockets of interest in workers’ theatre that most influenced and affected the creation of a similar project in Vancouver in the mid-1930’s, beginning in the Soviet Union, then spreading to Britain, the United States and Canada. The Soviet Union, Britain and the United States most directly influenced and affected the creation of similar projects in Vancouver in the mid-1930’s primarily because of the connections made through mail correspondence and the sharing of scripts over a surprisingly vast network of artist activists. My discussion of the work going on outside of Canada reveals some of the connections between international leaders and Arthur Turner that I have unearthed in the archive. This body of work represents the international context within which the CCF plays developed and to which they may be compared.

British Workers’ Theatre Movement

When Arthur J. Turner first set out to establish a group committed to the creation and performance of workers’ theatre in the early days of the Cooperative Commonwealth

Federation in the early 1930's, he consulted a fellow Englishman, the leader of the British Workers' Theatre Movement: Tom Thomas. Given the preponderance of British influence in the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council due to the large number of skilled immigrant workers who relocated to British Columbia in the Twenties and Thirties, Turner's experience with British trade unionism and the range of after-work cultural side offerings of active large British unions, this connection seems logical.⁶⁷ The origins of the movement in Britain paved the way for Turner to create similar theatrical material in British Columbia.

The socio-political landscape of Britain in the 1920s was in a state of flux. Post-WWI economic stagnation, a Conservative government, high rates of inflation and the costs of living and decreasing wages hit the working class hard. In such an unsettled political landscape, the Communist Party (CP) found fertile ground and its membership grew at unprecedented rates across Europe, the United States and Canada. The intention was to rally the working class, organize labourers and ultimately prepare for a global revolution. In order to meet these goals, a new way of inspiring and communicating with the masses was needed and the theatre, though also emblematic of the worst excesses of the bourgeoisie as epitomized in the mega-spectacle popular entertainments of the day, had great potential. The theatrical medium, with some adjustments in content and traditional form, was primed to become a tool for education, instruction and a call to action.

The earliest indications of the start of a workers' theatre movement in Britain grew out of the 1926 General Strike. Two notable artists began to explore the power of

⁶ The British-ness of Canadian and BC labour is explored in greater depth by Champion in "The Strange Demise of British Canada" (Champion). (See also McDonald "Working"; McDonald *Making Vancouver*; Griffin; MacDonald).

⁷ For instance, choirs, bands, cricket, rugby, hockey, football, golf and tennis teams, dances, conferences and union libraries were a few of the many cultural amenities organized as part of union life for some of the larger British unions, particularly in the Rail industry (Worley *The Foundations* 44-45).

performance in advancing a social critique and a call for action (Carle). For both Christina Walshe and the Scottish miner and poet Joe Corrie, this General Strike provided inspiring material for early Leftist activism emerging from the world of the arts. Strikes would prove powerful inspiration to others creating workers' theatre pieces elsewhere, including Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty*. The timing of the Vancouver PAC's successful production of *Lefty*, coinciding with the Vancouver dockworkers' and relief camp workers' strikes, speaks to the power of drama to articulate the frustrations of the working class. Christina Walshe worked extensively with her partner, the composer Rutland Boughton, who shared her socialist views, incorporating them into opera. The pair later became good friends with notable Fabian playwright George Bernard Shaw as a small coterie of progressive British artists developed over time. Walshe is credited, among a number of others including Huntly Carter, Havelock Ellis, Eden and Cedar Paul and her partner Rutland Boughton, with establishing the Workers Theatre Movement in 1926 as a result of their perceived need for a proletarian theatre following the General Strike. The WTM was an evolution of the prior Council for Proletarian Art, created by members of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the Independent Labour Party (ILP). It was spurred on by the enthusiastic William Paul, editor of the CPGB paper, *The Sunday Worker*, who was involved in several of the earliest WTM productions. Historian Matthew Worley argues that the origins and evolution of the WTM were "rooted firmly in the federal, collaborative traditions of the British labour movement" (Worley *Class against Class* 204). Thus, the early impetus to create a workers' theatre in Britain, the United States and Canada came from multiple sources and across political and union lines.

Worley cites the earliest WTM performance as muckraking American Socialist writer Upton Sinclair's play *Singing Jailbirds* at the Memorial Hall in Ferringdon, London, in July 1926, some two months after the short-lived general strike ended. *Singing Jailbirds* centers on the political prisoner Red Adams, who is locked in solitary confinement after striking, and dreams of his life as a free man. It features a number of the songs from the Industrial Workers of the World (aka "Wobblies") songbook. The play was inspired by a 1923 strike in California in which strikers were arrested without criminal charges. The parallels between the strike in California and the general strike in Britain made this play a logical choice. It is important to note, as well, that international cooperation and the sharing of dramatic material was a vital part of the success of the Workers' Theatre Movement, which did not limit itself to domestic drama, but instead presented the plight of the worker as an international issue and a source of camaraderie for the working class. Indeed, one of Sinclair's plays, *The Second Storey Man*, can also be found in the Turner Fonds. The sharing of letters and scripts among the Canadian Turner, British Tom Thomas of the WTM and American Upton Sinclair clearly illustrates the internationality of workers' theatre.

The WTM manifesto, most likely written by Huntley Carter who wrote on behalf of the movement for *The Sunday Worker*, advocated for theatre to be used as a propaganda machine, for plays to be performed at factories and worksites, and for the workers themselves to write and perform their own material about topical issues and the plight of the local worker (Worley *Class against Class* 204-05). This *modus operandi* is in keeping with Turner's intentions for CCF drama. The WTM's shift toward more strictly domestic British drama took some time, but ultimately yielded a small body of British workers' theatre scripts, at least one of which ("The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists") made its way into the hands of

Turner and is referenced in letters from Tom Thomas to Arthur J. Turner in Vancouver in the mid-1930's. Turner's later communication with the Friends of the Canterbury Cathedral in 1951 concerning the play *John Ball* reflects the continued connection between British Columbia and activist artists in Britain.⁸

Another notable early production by the WTM was Jim Corrie's *In Time of Strife*. Corrie, a Scottish miner and member of the Bowhill Village Players, wrote this play in response to the 1926 General Strike. Corrie's three-act play focuses on the families of the strikers and takes place entirely within the domestic sphere. Set in the family kitchen, it explores the individual struggles faced by family members during the strike. For Corrie, successful workers' theatre needed to be relatable to its audience, and he felt there was no shame in being overtly political, sentiments echoed in the memoirs of both Turner and Toby Gordon Ryan of the Toronto PAC.

Poets nowadays seem to talk so much to themselves, with their backs to us. And their subject matter, to my mind, doesn't seem to be very important in this age of such revolutionary changes. I have always written to the other fellow, shouting at him at times to try and get him round to my way of thinking—preaching a bit too much perhaps. But, then, that is my nature. I think that being plump and plain cuts more ice than just being smart for smart's sake. (Corrie 22)

This important adjustment in thinking about the role of the arts in the lives of common people and the need to reevaluate the relationship between author/playwright/performer and audience member is characteristic of the shift in thinking

⁸ Arthur Turner and Carl Robinson appear to have worked together on a play, *John Ball: The Mad Priest of Kent*, in the late 1940's or early 1950's. Copies of this play and correspondence with Canterbury Cathedral and University of British Columbia theatre professor Dorothy Somerset are in the Arthur Turner Fonds, Box 1 File 8.

during the 1930's when a class-conscious artistic movement became an active part of the larger progressive movement. No longer the realm of the wealthy and educated, the arts were becoming a tool for social justice and change. The early strides made in England by the likes of Walshe, Corrie and the WTM paved the way for similar work in British Columbia. The manifestation of dramatics groups in British Columbia's CCF clubs is in keeping with the political zeitgeist of the late 1930's.

Linked to the WTM in time and tone, though not necessarily directly associated with the formalized organization, Rutland Boughton's nativity play/opera *Bethlehem* was performed in December 1926. Originally written in 1915, *Bethlehem* had become a staple performance piece for amateur dramatic societies across Britain. Through his Glastonbury Festival, launched in 1914, Boughton and his librettist Reginald Buckley hoped to promote English theatre and create a socialist artists' Utopia. Over the eleven years the festival ran, some 350 productions were mounted and Boughton made a name for himself as a British playwright and composer. In response to his frustrations with British authorities following the general strike of 1926, Boughton restaged the piece with Jesus being born into a miner's cabin before an audience of King Herod dressed as a capitalist, top hat and all, flanked by police and soldiers instead of wise men. Much to the shock and horror of the audience at the Glastonbury Festival, this new vision of the nativity cost Boughton his patronage. This provocative restaging of the nativity story is generally considered to have triggered the end of the Glastonbury Festival Players and the Glastonbury Festival itself (Hurd).

This incident is instructive in two ways. First, it shows a shift in thinking about the role of theatre away from passive entertainment to activist criticism in the name of social justice. Second, it clearly shows how much was at stake in terms of the personal and

professional risk taken by Broughton and the extent to which audiences were (or in this case were not) willing to accept this new activist theatrical intervention in their lives. In taking such a bold stance re-envisioning the nativity as he did, Boughton was doing more than sympathizing with strikers. He was defiantly challenging capitalism and the Church, two of the most potent forces shaping the British status quo.

Reactions to the growing body of Leftist performance was mixed even among progressive and sympathetic audiences. Worley argues that while members of the WTM and similar groups across Britain felt that they were at the vanguard of the revolution, Communist Party members seem to have been less convinced.

...while the workers' theater group occasionally enlivened party socials in the late 1920s, the preponderance of 'upper middle-class bohemians' within the fledgling movement's core suggests that Aitken Ferguson's dismissal of the early WTM as 'a few cranks who are endeavouring to act their way into socialism' may well have had a resonance for many British communists. Certainly, the young workers who took over the WTM at the end of decade often did so in spite of the disinterest (and even hostility) of their older comrades. According to Phil Poole, who became WTM secretary, many in the party regarded [the WTM] as a bit of nonsense. (Worley *Class against Class* 204)

This mixed reception within the Communist Party was a challenge for the CCF organizers as well. The minutes of the CCYM reflect the struggles Denny Kristiansen faced in trying to convince others to join him in writing and producing plays (Greer "Organizational Meeting of the CCYM"). National CCF print materials seem to favour drama clubs, however, and drama was frequently listed as one of the offerings of CCF Club

life and a reason to join the party (CCYM *This Way to a New Canada*; CCYM *What Are You Doing to Make a Better World*). In each organization, it seems much of the success or failure of dramatic groups depended on the level of interest and dedication of one or two committed members. For the British WTM this was Tom Thomas; in the South Hill CCF, Arthur Turner; for the CCYM in Vancouver Centre, Denny Kristiansen was at the vanguard; and in Roberts Creek Hubert Evans carried the torch.

As British workers' theatre continued to grow, despite the scepticism of some, regional drama groups began to emerge, including the Workers' Arts Club in Salford, a WTM in Manchester, small groups associated with the National Council of Labour Colleges, and the Hackney People's Players under the direction of H.B. "Tom" Thomas. Under his leadership, the Hackney Players made the gradual shift from more traditionally formatted plays requiring extensive rehearsal and limited by the audience/actor divide to the more experimental agitprop favoured in continental Europe, particularly in German cabarets and among the Soviet Union's Blue Blouses. This new direction was imposed on the WTM when Thomas eventually took the reins.

Meanwhile, a schism in the Left over doctrinal differences was beginning to split the WTM. In 1928, the Communist Party of Great Britain made a conscious decision as part of their "New Line" strategy to break all ties with Social Democracy and expunge any remnants of it from their number. For the next five years the Communists would use the WTM as a deliberate and calculated alternative to the cultural and social programming and ideologies of the rest of society, including any remaining former allies on the Left. Worley contends that "...from such a position, the party was able to clearly define its cultural ideology in line with

the politics of ‘class against class,’ while the artificial boundaries that were seen to divide ‘politics’ and ‘culture’ were systematically torn down” (Worley *Class against Class* 205).

The WTM, now under the control of the CPGB, was one of a number of Communist groups aimed at spreading their message, activating audiences and raising membership numbers and funds for the party. One of the first challenges of the deliberately Communist WTM was in finding material to produce that would resonate with a working-class audience while meeting their progressive social and political objectives and getting rid of the limitations of the staged dramas that had been presented to that point.

Examples of this new WTM work were the plays *Still Talking* and *Strike Up*, presented in 1929 under Thomas’ leadership. Both used actors planted in the audience to bring the action off the stage and into the meeting space. This was an ideal strategy in *Still Talking*, which was set in a public meeting. Having plants in the audience transformed the role of audience members from passive observers of a drama into the audience at the meeting in which urgent labour concerns were being aired. The audience was activated by proximity to the dramatic material (both physical and ideological) and was essentially allowed to rehearse for the revolution. This same tactic would be used in Vancouver’s PAC production of *Waiting for Lefty*.

Strike Up was more of a revue format than a traditional drama and included satire, parodies of contemporary songs, short dance performances, comedy bits and monologues. This melange of performances allowed the WTM to make the most of the skills of their amateur performers while also advancing their political and cultural agenda. From here, under the revitalizing leadership of Thomas, scenery and props were largely done away with and the focus shifted toward short punchy works that were extremely mobile and could be

performed just about anywhere, from the union hall to the factory picket line. Thomas references *Strike Up* in a letter to Arthur Turner in March 1930. “We have recently got out an entirely new performance of “Strike Up” a workers review, and when I can get some copies done, I shall send you some of the material we used. One of the items which will be particularly useful is the scene from “Hallelujah I’m a Bum” by Paul Peters, which I have mentioned to you before” (T. Thomas).

Tom Thomas and Arthur Turner were in contact via letter as early as 1929. As political divisions among the Left complicated the WTM for Thomas, the schisms were just as challenging for Turner. In 1930, Turner was the Chair of the Independent Labour Party in BC before serving as interim chair of the Socialist Party of BC before it joined the CCF in 1933. As Thomas experimented with new forms and material for his WTM, he shared much of what he learned with Turner while also sympathising with Turner’s expression of concern over the splintering party politics of the left in BC. Thomas writes, “I appreciate your difficulties. We meet the same thing here, but the more I see of the game, the more I am convinced that what you call the “lefts” have the only dramatic message to put across” (T. Thomas). Thomas went on to advise Turner:

The problem of getting revolutionary ideas across to the Conservative Trade Union element is a difficult one, but one that must be solved if you are really going to be a propaganda organisation. It is no use preaching to th (sic) the converted. The way to do it is to first of all hold their interest by the humorous or dramatic quality of your performance and gradually lead them to the only possible conclusion, which of course is the revolutionary conclusion. It is something we cannot learn in a day, but what we

must aim at all the time, and no doubt you might be able to adapt some of our stuff in a way that would not bar your activities from the trade unions. (T. Thomas)

Through these letters, Turner was able to communicate with the leader of the WTM and gain access to dramatic material and sage council. Part of the vast international web of workers' theatre groups in the 1930's, all of which had the same basic goal at their centre, the WTM and CCF drama groups experienced many of the same social and political challenges. The WTM laid much of the groundwork that later groups could build from, and the connection between Turner and Thomas shows this direct genealogy.

After gaining experience working with the plays of George Bernard Shaw, Karel Čapek and Elmer Rice to name a few, the WTM organizers summarized their experiences and outlined their rationale for embracing an emerging form of drama: agitprop. Short for agitation and propaganda, agitprop plays were short, punchy pieces that required little in the way of performing space, props, scenery, costumes, and arguably even theatrical skill. The Report of the first Workers' Theatre Movement Convention from 1932 listed three major beneficial traits of agitprop.

(1) Its flexible, and usually short, form is quickly adapted to meet local and topical situations. The preparation of special items dealing with events as they arise, should be a matter of days only. (2) Instead of emphasizing the ability to portray characters, a difficult job for workers with very little spare time, it uses instead the class experience of the worker-player, which convinces a worker audience much more than the studied effects of the professional actor. (3) The direct approach to the audience, together with the fact that the performance is surrounded by and part of the crowd, is of great value in making the worker audience feel that the players are part of them,

share their problems and their difficulties, and are pointing a direct, reasonable way out. (WTM Convention Report qtd. in Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove 130-31)

Agitprop thus met the needs of the growing movement on every level. It could be developed quickly and respond to the ever-changing political landscape surrounding labour activism. While artistic merit was not ignored, agitprop capitalized on the innate knowledge of the worker actors and did not rely on intensive theatrical training or design. Most importantly, agitprop felt like a dynamic presentation that sprang forth from the ranks of the working-class audience and rejected the elitist snobbery of high culture, embracing instead the activism and passion of those fighting for social justice in a genuine and relatable way. This was not high art or even the socially conscious dramas of the Realist and Naturalist schools; this was drama for the people by the people.

From the perspective of the CCF Clubs, agitprop as envisioned by the WTM, exemplified by the Russian Blue Blouses and communicated to Turner via letters from Thomas and copies of *New Masses* magazine out of New York, celebrated the amateur enthusiast and met the activist and educational goals that the party was keen to expand. Agitprop was portable, simple, inexpensive and culturally and politically relevant. Furthermore, outside of the Communist Party's forays into agitprop through the PAC, mostly in Toronto, and in the Ukrainian and Finish community organizations, Canadian agitprop was hardly mainstream, and in BC it was a new and exciting medium. Garfield King, founder of the Vancouver Progressive Arts Club, echoed Turner's excitement about the principles behind agitprop in an interview about his organization's production of *Waiting for Lefty*. King described his goal for the Vancouver PAC as rooted specifically in the production of plays "which tend to the achievement of social justice" (King qtd. in B. D. Bray).

Just like generations of theatre artists before them, the WTM struggled with questions of form and content, seeking an artistic style that would most successfully articulate their message. The unities of time and space, for instance, proved an insurmountable challenge when one sought to bring together the ideas of a working-class activist and a capitalist boss in any situation other than a strike or hostile meeting. This struggle to find workers' theatre scripts was echoed in the letters between Turner and Thomas, with Thomas suggesting in 1930 that with so many groups producing new workers' theatre, soon the issue would be one of selection rather than lack of options (T. Thomas).

A third concern for the WTM was accessibility. While the well-heeled audience member could readily attend a theatre performance on a given night, this luxury was not one afforded to the common British working person who subsisted on a minimal salary and had little, if any, leisure time. The answer to all of these concerns was to adopt the agitprop style popular in progressive German and Soviet theatre at the time. Agitprop required no stage, lights, makeup, costumes, orchestra, or grand performance hall. It was an accessible format that allowed for maximum flexibility, unlimited mobility and minimal financial outlay. This no doubt appealed to the CCF Clubs as well, which had access to local community halls like the Ukrainian Labour Hall or CCF clubrooms, but no formal theatres.

Tom Thomas' introduction to this kind of dramatic form came, as one might expect, through seeing live performances in public places during his extensive travels in Germany and the Soviet Union as he rose to prominence in the British WTM. Upon his return and throughout the mid-Thirties, Thomas encouraged each district of the CPGB to form a workers' theatre of its own and apparently envisioned an international WTM.

In a 1929 letter to Turner, Thomas writes, “I shall be delighted to be able to report to my committee that we have formed a branch in Vancouver B.C!” (H. B. Thomas). Communist theatre groups began to pop up across Britain, bearing names like the “Red Megaphones,” “Red Star Troupe of West London,” the “Red Radio of Hackney,” “Red Magnets of Woolwich,” the “Edinburgh Red Pioneers” and the “Red Blouses of Greenwich” (Worley *Class against Class* 206).

Groups communicated with each other through their affiliation with the WTM and attended the odd weekend training camp. Local leaders of WTM groups got in touch with workers’ theatre groups outside of Britain fairly regularly as well. Jimmy Miller (a.k.a. Ewan MacColl) of the Manchester WTM is known to have been in contact with Rudi Lehman of the German Young Communists League and the two men shared scripts and song material. The same was true of Tom Thomas who continued to visit and correspond with other theatre troupes in Germany and Russia along with his continued correspondence with Arthur Turner. Workers’ Theatre festivals also proved fertile ground for the sharing of ideas, techniques and material. Evidence of at least one such festival held in New Westminster, British Columbia, in 1936 suggests that there were enough groups and interest for such an event among the BC workers’ organizations. The popularity of Canada’s Dominion Drama Festival as a locus for little theatres to share their work provided a perfect model for the CCF and PAC groups to replicate for their own purposes.

The WTM was but one piece of the Communist cultural program available to party members in the 1930’s. Other notable groups included the British Workers’ Sports Club, whose lofty goal was to promote global peace by uniting the working class in sporting events. The Federation of Workers’ Film Societies (FWFS) sought, much as the WTM did, to

use their medium as a tool and weapon in the class war. Under the banner of the Communist production company Atlas Film Company Limited, the FWFS distributed 24 Soviet films, produced four episodes of the Workers Topical News and two films, *The Charter Film* and *Glimpses of Mother Russia*, between 1929 and 1931. Other cultural outlets of the CPGB included photo clubs, proletarian bookshops, a music association, and organized weekend trips and outings. To belong to the CPGB was to live the party lifestyle in which politics, culture, family and work were united and deliberately detached from the rest of the work being carried out by activists on the Left. This all-encompassing party life was mirrored by the early CCF clubs, which offered a range of social, educational and sporting activities from drama to hikes up Grouse Mountain. For both the CPGB and the CCF, drama functioned as one element of their broader social and cultural project.

Toward the end of the Thirties, WTM leader Tom Thomas' unapologetically Leftist political views came under fire. Thomas rejected the Popular Front movement that was fighting Fascism by uniting the Left through a renewed effort at homogenization and cooperation. He was asked to resign from his role leading Britain's WTM, and the British movement effectively died not long after. The timeline for the WTM in Britain is very much in keeping with similar work being carried out in the United States, Canada and elsewhere. Having begun in the early years of the Depression at a time when power dynamics, class, social status and the very fabric of capitalist life were being questioned, a movement emerged that catered to a new audience and played by new rules. Just over a decade later, theatrical tastes and trends as well as global politics had shifted to the point that the seemingly crude and rudimentary workers' agitprop no longer drew an audience.

American Workers' Theatre Movement

As a geographic neighbour and a cultural powerhouse that historically dominated a large portion of the popular theatrical offerings in Canada, American theatre looms large in any history of Canadian workers' theatre. For Turner and the CCF, the American Workers' Theatre movement was a natural ally, a source of dramatic material and a model for performance techniques and the organization of amateur theatre enthusiasts across the country. The presence of the play *Oscar Sapp* a.k.a. *Mr. Millionbucks* in the Turner archive and reference to a performance by Turner's CCF club of the same play suggests a direct link between Turner and at least part of the American movement. *Oscar Sapp* was written by Harold Coy of the Mena, Arkansas, Labour College in the early Thirties and was performed widely (Coy; "Sapp Will Thrill School Audience"; Arthur J. Turner *Somewhere*). The surprising success of the Vancouver Progressive Arts Club's production of the American play *Waiting for Lefty* by Clifford Odets is another example of the close link between BC workers' theatre and the groups that were active in the United States.

Emerging from the Great Depression

In the United States, as in Canada, the desperate economic climate of the Great Depression led to a radicalized segment of the population mobilizing for progressive reform like never before. The movement grew out of the "harsh conditions of the depression when unemployment, evictions, speed-ups, wage cuts, and hunger were facts of life confronted daily by the American worker. Facing these conditions the worker-actor used his theatrical activity to express his anger and present a hoped-for alternative to his present plight" (Friedman "A Brief Description" 114-15). The 1930's saw a period of greater social activism in the theatre than had ever been seen in previous decades in the United States as

organizers and activists among the working class rejected the bourgeois escapism of romanticism, melodrama and vaudeville in favour of performances that spoke directly to their lives and offered a vision of and a route to a more egalitarian future. Prominent groups doing this work included the various permutations of the New Playwrights Theatre, Workers Laboratory Theatre, the Provincetown Players, the Group Theatre, some offshoots of the Little Theatre Movement, and the Federal Theatre Project.⁹ A host of smaller companies located in large industrialized urban centers facing high unemployment like New York and Chicago also emerged, and smaller towns and cities more often than not had their local theatre groups as well.

The workers' theatre movement was not just a few foreign-born "others" and disaffected native intellectuals trying to impose an alien ideology on indifferent American workers. It was a home-grown product of extraordinary socio-economic circumstances that provided, for a brief moment, fertile soil and a receptive audience. ("Workers' Theatre Movement" 108-09)

Comparable to their likeminded peers in Germany, the Soviet Union, Britain, and Canada, Americans' use of theatre as a tool for propaganda and a weapon of the class war and as part of a broader project of defining a class culture developed gradually, more often than not under the leadership of a particularly keen individual or small group. The origins of this impulse to weaponize the stage began around 1910. Between 1925 and 1932, the movement began to coalesce and expand. The period 1932-1935 marks the heyday of workers' theatre in the United States before its slow decline by the beginning of World War II.

⁹ The New Playwrights Theatre underwent a series of changes in their general makeup, membership and name over the course of their existence.

Organizing a Workers' Theatre Movement

With such a large and ungainly movement as the workers' theatres of the twenties and thirties, organizational tools became a vital lifeline for the widespread and often isolated theatre troupes outside of New York. The sheer size of the workers' theatre community is reflected quantitatively in the expansion of the number of groups attending the Dramatic Bureau of the New York Cultural Federation. The first meeting of the Bureau hosted nine groups in July 1931. By September, there were fourteen groups represented. By November, there were twenty-eight and by April 1932, one hundred groups were associated. Straining under the burden of an ever-increasing number of interested groups, the Bureau re-organized and formed the League of Workers Theatre (LOWT). The LOWT organized the movement, created an agitprop school, shared material among member troupes, held dramatic competitions and shared a "vast network of correspondence" much like the Progressive Arts Clubs in Canada or the Workers' Theatre Movement in Britain (Friedman "A Brief Description" 114).

A large portion of that correspondence was printed in the official organ of the Dramatic Bureau/LOWT, *Workers Theatre* magazine, which was replicated in Canada by the PAC magazine *Masses*. Just as membership in the LOWT ballooned from 1931 onward, so did subscriptions to the magazine. The first issue saw 200 copies printed. By September 1933, that subscription base had grown to 3,500 all across the United States and likely into Canada, allowing the message of the LOWT to spread far and wide. *Waiting for Lefty*, for instance, was published in *Workers Theatre* in 1935, enabling the play's influence to spread as smaller groups mounted the play across the US and Canada. With such a large subscription base, the magazine re-organized and changed its name to *New Theatre*, reaching

its peak distribution of some 18,000 copies in 1935 before the movement in the States and elsewhere began its steady decline.

Workers Theatre helped to consolidate the workers' theatre movement in two ways. First, it acted as a communications network through which groups throughout the country came into contact with each other and with the LOWT and through which skits were published. Second, it was the forum in which theoretical and technical questions were debated on the national-level, thus creating a common political, technical, and artistic framework for the emerging workers' theatres nationwide. (Friedman "A Brief Description" 114)

Pushing Back Against Broadway and the Syndicates

The rise of the Little Theatre in America was gradual, but occurred largely in response to the theatrical stranglehold of the New York syndicate and the monopolies of the Shuberts, the Orpheum and Pantages circuits. With centralized control of large national theatrical tours, dramatic material became sanitized almost beyond recognition. Rather than risk offending the patrons whose ticket purchases fed the whole machine, subject matter, content, and actors' conduct had to be beyond reproof, inoffensive, amusing and never rock the boat. The question, "will it play in Peoria?" (referring to Peoria, Illinois, as a quintessentially generic example of American mainstream tastes), came to represent this sentiment. Any material that did not meet these conditions was typically a local and short-lived phenomenon, and certainly not part of the touring machine, while the rest of the nation was fed milquetoast dramas and vaudeville delivered by a handsome or beautiful star. "Everyone wanted a sure thing. Nothing was encouraged that would rock the boat... The theatre, which depended on the carriage trade to fill its expensive seats, was naturally not

going to offend its patrons” (Williams 6). The Little Theatre movement was not isolated to the United States, but spread throughout Canada as well.

Perhaps in response to the tidal wave of dull material that had become so commonplace on the stage, or perhaps in an answer to the decline of the road as the monopolies’ stranglehold over contracts left parts of the country totally unserved, a small collection of little theatres and community theatres began to fill in the gaps. While not all of the Little Theatres dotting the American landscape produced plays that pushed boundaries, some of the most notable theatre artists of the era emerged from this movement and paved the way for other progressive theatrical experiments, agitprop and workers’ theatre. The first Little Theatres were the Wisconsin Players, formed in 1910, which was soon followed by the Goodman Theatre in Chicago in 1911. Others continued to form over the next two decades, notably the 1915 arrival of semi-professional groups the Provincetown Players and Theatre Guild. Formed out of the impulse to provide an alternative to the theatrical fare offered by the New York syndicates, these small groups became incubators for American theatrical talent and created a space where more experimental and socially conscious work could be carried out without the restrictions necessary in a company ruled by the profit-hungry box office.

The situation was much the same in Canada where the Vancouver Little Theatre Association, as a case in point, served as the incubator for the Vancouver Progressive Arts Club’s founders Garfield King and Guy Glover, both of whom cut their teeth as producer, director and actor on VLTA stages, before expressing frustration over the Little Theatre’s limitations. The Little Theatre movement across North America served as a necessary stepping-stone for the creation of progressive theatre companies like the Provincetown

Players and the Theatre Guild as well as later workers' theatre groups that discovered and fostered some great talents, including progressive playwrights Clifford Odets, Eugene O'Neill and John Howard Larson. Larson's play *Processional* went on to be one of the most produced workers' dramas in the late 1920's and was widely considered to be an "example of the best work of the movement" if the many references to it from the 1920s and 30s are to be believed (Papa x).

In 1929, John Howard Larson started the New Playwrights Theatre that focused directly on the issues facing working class New Yorkers. New York came to be the epicentre of the American Workers' Theatre as a number of prominent groups including the German language Communist agitprop mobile theatre group Prolet-Bühne, Yiddish and other ethnic theatre groups combined to form the Workers' Dramatic Council in 1932, performing predominantly in their native tongues in the immigrant neighbourhoods and boroughs of New York. This was particularly the case within the Yiddish community of New York, which had a lively community theatre scene in the Twenties and Thirties.

Much of the United States was experiencing economic insecurity and tests of will Yiddish-speaking immigrants had known for decades, when they fled Eastern European pogroms and anti-Semitic governments. Artists like Nadir and Cutler, and their American Jewish artistic community, could bring their earlier education in poverty and survival, and their own forms of leftist politics and messianic tradition, into Yiddish theatre when responding to challenges of the period. (Schechter 2)

The Jewish community became a backbone for the movement in some cities and was particularly active in Chicago. *Workers Theatre* magazine in May 1934 informed readers about Chicago's Jewish Workers' Club's on-the-ground experience when reality and drama

became intertwined. The report highlights the extent to which the mobility of the theatre troupe and the activism at the core of their mandate occasionally created unexpected places and contexts for performance.

The group was booked to present an eviction play written by one of its members before an Unemployment Council branch. Arriving at the hall, they heard news of an eviction that was taking place around the corner. They accompanied the Unemployed Council members to the scene of action, helped put the furniture back in the house, fought off the cops, and then proceeded to present the play. Thus, reality and make-believe were merged into a decisive educational experience for actors and audience. (Alice Evans qtd. in Friedman "A Brief Description" 116)

In Canada, support for workers' theatre and the growing working-class culture of resistance came from many similar immigrant communities with histories of socialist movements, especially the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association (ULFTA), the Finnish Socialist Organization of Canada, the predominantly Jewish Labour League, Hungarian Workers Clubs, Polish Workers' and Farmers' Association, Yugoslav Workers' Clubs and Russian Farmer-Worker Clubs. One notable play clearly aimed at these diverse groups titled *So This is Canada* "depicts the struggles of an immigrant family who have been deluded into coming to Canada by profuse propaganda" (qtd. in B. D. Bray 37). According to research by Bonita Bray, *So This is Canada* was performed by groups as diverse as the Women's Labour League who were associated with the Independent Labour Party and represented women in the labour movement, the North Vancouver Dramatic Arts Section of the Workers' International Relief who were a German/Russian organization supporting the

Soviet Union, the Japanese Workers' Theatre Group, the CCF Dramatic Section, and the Workers' Training School (38).

Through cultural organizations, many of which had loose ties to the Communist Party, immigrants could find community and a safe environment in which they could give voice to their shared experiences as non-Anglo immigrants and workers. As in the United States, these cultural organizations became loci for community organizing around political, social and cultural issues, providing a sense of home away from home for the thousands of immigrants who moved to North America in the early 1900s.

The Prolet-Bühne and Worker's Laboratory Theatre

One particularly notable group that shaped American workers' theatre (and by extension, Canadian workers' theatre) was the German-American Prolet-Bühne. Just as the Soviet Blue Blouses revolutionized popular theatre in Russia, the Prolet-Bühne brought a new style of theatre, rooted in agitprop, to American cities. They began productions in 1928 and continued to create what theater historian Daniel Friedman labels as "overtly political" theatre until they disbanded in 1934 (Friedman "The Prolet Buehne"). Heavily influenced by the German and Russian agitprop style, they were able to produce short, punchy German-language pieces that could travel easily and were accessible to their primarily working-class audience. Under the leadership of Communist John Bonn, the Prolet-Bühne perfected their own style of a very rhythmic and compelling group recitation. This style of performance relied heavily on spoken text delivered presentationally, sometimes with the use of minor choreography or musical instruments, to convey meaning, and rarely required much in the way of costume, props or scenery. The scripts were split up among the actors with a majority

of the lines recited as a chorus of working people pitted against a corrupt and evil capitalist, foreman, police officer, etc. (Friedman "A Brief Description" 116).

These pieces were performed at gatherings throughout the city of New York, but particularly in German immigrant neighbourhoods and near places where German workers were employed. Through the work of the Worker's Laboratory Theatre and its Shock Troupe, this kind of short, punchy, mobile unapologetic agitprop work was also created for English-speaking audiences and translations of Prolet-Buehne plays, including one of their most popular, a recitation piece pitting a generic capitalist against a generic worker called *Tempo!* *Tempo!*, extended the reach of the immigrant workers' theatre messages.

Interviews by Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove offer valuable first-hand insight into the lives and experiences of prominent workers' theatre activists. Mike Gold, author of the English language recitation piece "Strike!," described the effect recitation could have on the audience during his play. "The audience is swept more and more into the excitement all around them; they become one with the actors, a real mass; before the recitation is over, everyone in the hall should be shouting 'Strike! Strike!'" (Gold qtd. Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove 266).

This very same reaction was seen at the end of Vancouver's PAC performances of *Waiting for Lefty* as the audience joined in with the actors' call for a strike, and recitation and choral speaking were a prominent part of much of the work by the Toronto Progressive Arts Club, including their most famous piece, *Eight Men Speak*. Indeed, Toby Gordon Ryan, one of the leading activists in the Toronto PAC, cited her time observing the Prolet-Bühne and training at the Artef School in New York as one of the greatest influences that shaped her time working with the Toronto PAC and its later iteration, the Theatre of Action (Ryan).

Likely because of Ryan's interactions with the progressive theatre scene in New York, the modernist techniques used in the Toronto PAC's productions differ greatly from the more straightforward style of workers' theatre that was common in Vancouver, where the participants were more likely to have experienced the production processes of the Little Theatre.

The traditions of cultural performance in each of these diverse communities created an atmosphere where newfound actors could rely upon a certain amount of familiarity with the stage. Because performance was part of the social milieu of urban life in each ethnic or nation-based immigrant community, workers' theatre likely felt like a natural extension of the entertainments already taking place. This was true in Canada as well. Bonita Bray cites the experience of two actors in the Vancouver PAC's production of *Lefty* as being typical:

Harry Hoshowsky and Mike Kunka were typical of those who volunteered. They were young--only fifteen years old--and had little direct theatrical experience. But they had grown up singing, dancing, and playing music for audiences in the [Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple] association's hall, and understood the dynamics between spectator and performer. (84)

Historians Raphael Samuel, Stuart Cosgrove and Red Megaphones member Evan MacColl argue that this multiculturalism set American workers' theatre apart from the other theatres of the Left in this period, though I would add that Canadian workers' theatre clearly benefitted from the same kind of multicultural activism.

America's multi-racial society therefore generated a workers culture that differed radically from that in Britain. Almost every ethnic minority in America had its own theater group...In New York...the Jewish Artef group, the Hungarian Dramatic

Circle and Uj Elöre group, the German Prolet Buehne and Die Natur Freunde, and numerous negro groups, including the theatrical wing of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, all mobilized to activate and entertain their own specific communities. (Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove 260)

With so many influences, debate over the proper stylistic theory for workers' theatre raged among the growing number of troupes. According to one historian, as of 1929 there was only one English-speaking workers' theatre group in the United States, but that number grew to some 400 groups a scant five years later during the most active decade of the workers' theatre movement as a whole (Miller). Two of the more notable groups producing theatre for the working class in the 1930's that exemplify the division over theory and technique are the Shock Troupe of the Worker's Laboratory Theatre and The Group Theatre. This same division can be cited for the work of the Toronto PAC whose work included more modernist techniques like those of the Prolet-Buehne, WLT and Shock Troupe, and the work that came out of British Columbia's PAC and CCF clubs that had much more in common with the Group Theatre and the Little Theatre Movement.

The Worker's Laboratory Theatre and the Shock Troupe

The Worker's Laboratory Theatre devised and performed new Leftist works and fostered many of the greatest proletarian playwrights of the day, including Clifford Odets (who was later associated with the Group Theatre). The WLT was formed in New York in 1928 as a cultural initiative by organizations out of Europe, including the Communist Workers' International Relief. Over time, their repertoire grew to meet the growing demands of an increasingly political and activist community in the wake of the 1929 stock market collapse. By 1931, demand for their productions such as the plays *Tempo! Tempo!*, *Vote*

Communist, and *Art is a Weapon* was so great that a new troupe was created to meet this growing need for Leftist productions. The “Shock Troupe,” a mobile unit of the WLT, could move rapidly to perform at union meetings, on picket lines, at rallies and other non-traditional venues that ensured they could reach a wider range of working-class audiences and more readily fulfill the political aims of agitprop.

The Shock Troupe employed a “militant symbolism” as the primary aesthetic theory behind their agitprop work. One report of a performance by this group in which they were hoisted by rope into a building being held by a sitdown strike and lowered back outside after the performance was over suggests the simplicity, mobility and tenacity of these performers. The Shock Troupe productions were deliberately simple, effective, provocative and above all else, mobile. The ability to seek out their audience meant that their stage was the street corner and their audience was whoever happened to pass by. Taking their aim at reaching the working-class masses as quickly as possible, members of the Shock Troupe moved in together, forming a living collective near the Communist Party headquarters in New York to allow them to maximise their mobility and arrive at strikes, meetings, or rallies with very little notice (Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove 270-77).

Bolstering their rapid-fire deployment and simple aesthetic were the theories of Marx and the coming revolution, but also a desire to embrace some of the more experimental art forms coming out of the Soviet Union. In particular, the early works of Eisenstein, the Soviet filmmaker, resonated with the troupe. Echoing the Workers’ Theatre of the Soviet Union, Sergei Eisenstein’s theories about the use of montage rather than a more linear storytelling strengthened their view that the working class was better served by work that deliberately

abandoned the trappings of the bourgeois stage.¹⁰ For Eisenstein, deeper meaning could be found through creating a pastiche of images, events and material. In film, the juxtaposition or harmony created through the editing process brought greater meaning to the work as a whole. For the Shock Troupe, the application of this theory to their work yielded a hodgepodge of popular and distinctly North American forms including vaudeville, revues, comedy acts, musical numbers, and burlesque that were united in tone and mode with the work of Moscow's Proletkult, but with a distinctly North American flair (Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove). This style was adopted in large part by the Toronto PAC due to Toby Gordon Ryan's personal experience and connection with this kind of work.

The Shock Troupe also counters the impression that theatre for the working class was largely an unorganized amateur affair. The Shock Troupe was well known for producing consistent quality work based on their steadfast beliefs in Marxist ideology and their own unique performance style. The ultimate strength of the Shock Troupe was deeply rooted in their dedication to ideology, theatrical theory, their practical mobility and the earnestness with which they embodied the message of the CPUSA. Cohabitation led to a close-knit group, a rigorous schedule led to a technically refined performance and the simplicity of their work meant that they could be deployed in short order wherever they were needed, something which the Toronto PAC seems to have tried to replicate to the extent that they were able.

Internationally, the effect of the Shock Troupe was felt in their willingness to share script material with other workers' theatre groups. For instance, Will Lee, an active member of the Shock Troupe, shared repertory material with a friend in the Glasgow branch of the

¹⁰ See Eisenstein's theory of the "Montage of Attractions" written in 1923 and early examples of his films such as *Strike* (1925), *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *October* (1928).

WTM, and Canada's Progressive Arts Club cites the Shock Troupe and Blue Blouses as major influences in their work (Ryan). This sharing of material spanned group distinctions and party alliances to some extent as well. The Turner Fonds contains material sent to Arthur J. Turner (a Social Democrat) from Tom Thomas of the British WTM (a distinctly Communist group) as well as the script *Oscar Sapp* by Harold Coy, from Commonwealth College, a labour college in Mena, Arkansas. The American script *The Dead Cow* by Allan Baxter and Harold Johnsrud can also be found in the Turner Fonds, though it is unclear how it came to be there.

The Group Theatre

On the other end of the Leftist spectrum in the American workers' theatre movement was New York's Group Theatre. To the extent that they were able, the BC CCF clubs and Vancouver PAC seemed far more comfortable creating work along the lines of the Group Theatre than emulating the Prolet-Buehne and WLT. The theatrical fare on offer in Vancouver in the Thirties was predominantly the work of popular touring shows and the Vancouver Little Theatre, both of which were rooted in the more traditional aesthetics that the Prolet-Buehne and WLT sought to avoid. With little to no experience of such work, it is unsurprising that those at the vanguard of workers' theatre in Vancouver, none of whom were professional theatre artists and only some of whom had any theatrical experience, would rely on a more familiar style to deliver their more revolutionary content.

Harold Clurman, Lee Strasburg and Cheryl Crawford left the Theatre Guild resolved to form a new and fundamentally disciplined and refined naturalistic American theatre. Dismissing the claims that the lack of native drama was the result of a shortage of playwrights, skilled actors or a canon to draw from, Clurman argued that "...if we were

providentially blessed with a host of admirable plays and players, and an epidemic of virtue broke out over the entire theatre-world, we should still hardly have effected the establishment of any sort Theatre.... Nothing can be wrong with the theater when no Theatre exists. And America has as yet no Theatre” (qtd. in W. Smith 4). For the Group Theatre, the best method to sway the hearts and minds of the working class was through the techniques of social realism that could be borrowed from the bourgeois stage but adapted to meet the needs of the common man. They were heavily influenced by the work of a generation of new Leftist playwrights, many of whom worked with the Group, and by Konstantin Stanislavski and his system of acting. The new socially conscious professional theatre at the core of the Group’s manifesto required a new kind of acting, rooted in the emotional depths at the core of each character to create psychological realism. Group founder Lee Strasberg trained under Stanislavski, as did Group member Stella Adler, and this made for a lively debate over the differences of acting technique. After the Group dissolved, Strasberg, Adler and Group member Sanford Meisner each founded their own schools of acting technique with subtle differences of approach.

While the successes of the Group Theatre were many, perhaps the most notable for the context of this research was their involvement in the premiere of Clifford Odets’ *Waiting for Lefty* that went on to be one of the most highly regarded and frequently produced workers’ theatre plays in North America and possibly the most successful in Canada. The one-act play highlighted the New York taxi drivers’ strike of the previous February amid the context of continued ills and corruption inherent in the capitalist system during the Great Depression. In six scenes, six taxi drivers’ lives are explored, revealing anti-Semitism, the devastation of families, the antagonism between classes and the core message that only

through this class consciousness and action could the working poor unite and gain some measure of control over their lives. The eponymous Lefty, a union organizer, represents a measure of hope and optimism for the taxi drivers, but when news arrives that Lefty has been murdered en route to the meeting, the necessity of a strike proves clear. The play was intended as a performance to bolster fundraising efforts by the League of Workers' Theatres and *New Theatre* magazine. Once the play began, it was clear that *Waiting for Lefty* was not just another agitprop piece or anything resembling the escapist fluff of the Broadway stage (W. Smith 196-200). Harold Clurman later recollected the night in his memoirs.

The first scene of *Lefty* had not played two minutes when a shock of delighted recognition struck the audience like a tidal wave...The actors no longer performed; they were being carried along as if by an exultancy of communication such as I had never witnessed in the theatre before. Audience and actors had become one. Line after line brought applause, whistles, bravos, and heartfelt shouts of kinship....

(Clurman 146-47)

Reports of the performance, if they are to be believed, include audience members gasping with empathetic shock, murmuring disapproval and contempt for the character of the corrupt union boss, thrusting their closed fists in the air in the Communist Party salute and rising to their feet chanting "Strike! Strike!" with a small cue from the planted cast members seated among them. Harold Clurman recalled,

...it was something more than a tribute to the play's effectiveness, more even than a testimony of the audience's hunger for constructive social action. It was the birth cry of the thirties. Our youth had found its voice. It was a call to join the good fight for a

greater measure of life in a world free of economic fear, falsehood, and craven servitude to stupidity and greed. (Clurman 147).

Lefty went on to play for months of subsequent Sundays at the Civic Repertory Theatre before moving on to Broadway and a lengthy national tour. The LOWT printed the script in *New Theatre* magazine, opening the material up to production across the country by workers' theatre groups both large and small. Over time, the play spread globally with the Progressive Arts Club's notable Vancouver production going on to win the Dominion Drama Festival's award for best English language play of the year in Ottawa in 1936, and a reportedly excellent production in London, England mounted by the Unity Theatre, an outgrowth of Tom Thomas' Workers' Theatre Movement.¹¹

The story of the opening night of *Waiting for Lefty* grew to be the stuff of theatre legend and put the Group Theatre and Clifford Odets on the map. The "unity of background, of feeling, of thought, of need" described by Clurman as the primary purpose of the Group Theatre's work came to life as the line between audience and performers was blurred. This kind of communion became the goal, sometimes reached and sometimes not, of each subsequent production by the Group Theatre. Production of Odets' other works, *Awake and Sing!* and *Paradise Lost*, proved enormously successful, as did plays by Robert Ardrey and Oscar Saul. The Group also continued to foster talents that went on to shape American theatre and film in the years following the end of the Group including Elia Kazan, Stella Adler, Robert Lewis, Anna Sokolow, Franchot Tone, Will Geer, Marc Blitzstein, Luther Adler and many more who made up a who's who of Broadway and Hollywood, both on and

¹¹ See Chapter 3 for more information of the Dominion Drama Festival and *Waiting For Lefty*.

off the stage.¹² As was generally the case with theatres of the Left, the onset of World War II effectively spelled the end of the Group Theatre as its members moved on to other projects, and the shifting political landscape made workers' theatre seem obsolete.

The Federal Theatre Project and the Decline of Workers' Theatre

The slow but steady decline of independent workers' theatre in America began toward the end of 1935. Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove, McConachie and Friedman, Papa and Williams all seem to agree that the beginning of the end can be traced to the creation of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP).¹³ With reliable paid work on offer, the independent workers' theatres lost their most talented writers, performers and technicians. Friedman notes that even John Bonn, who led the Prolet-Bühne, accepted a job leading the German section of the FTP while at least five Workers Laboratory Theatre actors took on the FTP Living Newspaper projects.¹⁴

The Federal Theatre Project was created under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935 with the aim of putting unemployed workers in the entertainment industry back to work and exposing the American public to theatre, often for the first time in their lives. Often called the "People's Theatre," the FTP under the leadership of Hallie Flanagan and her goal of creating a "vigorous new audience," attracted over thirty million Americans to its productions before it was defunded in 1939 (Flanagan qtd. in O'Connor 171).

¹² An inordinate number of members of the Group Theatre were summoned to speak before the House Un-American Activities Committee's communist witch-hunt in the early Fifties. Many former members of the Group were blacklisted, spelling the end to their careers. Others, like Lee J. Cobb (who played the original Willy Loman on Broadway in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*), eventually succumbed to the outrageous pressure to 'name names' of other Communist Party members.

¹³ For excellent coverage of the FTP, see also Levine's *Left-Wing Dramatic Theory in American Theatre* and Denning's *The Cultural Front*.

¹⁴ Living Newspaper was a live interpretation of the news of the day that could be mounted quickly, inexpensively, and employ a large group of actors. It came to be one of the most politically charged projects under the wing of the FTP and was criticized for its radical content. (Williams 224-225)

Flanagan's history as a director and teacher at Vassar College with a keen interest in experimenting with campus productions that blended applied theatre techniques like workers' theatre, agitprop, Living Newspaper and educational drama made her a natural choice to lead the FTP.¹⁵ Flanagan was also the first academic to publish a paper on broadly defined workers' theatre in America, "A Theatre is Born," for *Theatre Arts Monthly* in 1931. While most of the work of the FTP was standard theatre fare, some of their work was quite controversial and bears mentioning in a history of workers' theatre because of its progressive content, tone and goals.

Certainly one of the largest draws of the Federal Theatre Project was the free tickets that were widely circulated. As federal funding was slowly cut away, tickets began to carry a nominal fee of never more than \$1.10. Through the use of block ticket sales, large organizations (labour unions, religious or social welfare organizations and community groups) were able to subsidize the cost of tickets for their membership or buy the tickets at a discount, sell them at face value, and thereby raise funds to use on other projects. Data collected by the FTP research department on audience experience suggests that in the first two years of its existence trades and office workers (generally unionized) made up approximately one quarter of the audience, likely due to the selling of ticket blocks to organized labour.¹⁶ "Professionals," who were generally teachers, made up the next largest category at around 21%, though these data understandably varied from city to city and theatre to theatre (O'Connor 171-77). Nevertheless, it is clear that the FTP presented an

¹⁵ See Margaret Ellen-Lifford and Hallie Flanagan's script for *Can You Hear the Voices* for one example.

¹⁶ This data was limited to the first years of the FTP and only reflects voluntary subjects and the information they willingly disclosed, so it is subject to some discrepancies and there are certainly gaps within the information. O'Connor explains these shortcomings in some detail in "The Federal Theatre Project Searches for an Audience".

opportunity for working-class people to attend the theatre in large numbers and in large groups of union members, exposing new audiences to live theatre and helping to establish habits of theatre-going and build the appetite for working-class drama.

Despite the impressive successes of the FTP, it was never safe from attack. Elmer Rice fiercely defended the Living Newspaper projects from government censorship, but as the increasing paranoia against “Red propaganda” grew, the FTP was forced to scale back its projects and go on the defensive. Critics of Roosevelt’s New Deal were quick to attack the arts programs as havens for communists, wasters, boondogglers and idlers. In reality the proportion of Left-leaning social dramas compared to non-political entertainments was relatively small, but the political pieces attracted a great deal of attention. The Children’s Theatre wing of the FTP is a good example. Thousands of performances of plays written by proponents of educational drama, like Charlotte Chorpenning and her script for *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, for example, made the rounds through schools and community centers without raising any alarm at all. However, when the Children’s Theatre wing presented a new play by Oscar Saul and Lou Lantz titled *Revolt of the Beavers* about the working beavers of Beaverland and their overthrow of the gluttonous wicked King Beaver, the play and the FTP were condemned for producing communist allegory.

The beginning of the end of the FTP was at hand, despite the fact that, as historian Jay Williams quips, “. . . thousands of children saw it and loved it without a single known case of subversion” (Williams 228). The South Hill CCF children’s play *A Story of the Simia, Or The Monkey Rebels* bears a strong resemblance to *Revolt of the Beavers* in their use of a fictional animal society complete with power differentials and hierarchal social structure as an allegory for human society, and both suggest that only through violent action could an

egalitarian peace be reached. In fact, *A Story of the Simia* makes this final message about the need for a Socialist revolution far more explicit than *Revolt of the Beavers* did through human dialogue at the end that directly relates the allegory to human life, where *Revolt* leaves this point significantly vaguer.

The re-election of Roosevelt in 1936 bought the FTP more time, but its critics in Congress highlighted the more politically provocative plays as reason enough for the program's closure.

At its zenith, it was the second-largest and busiest nationally sponsored theater in the world - that of the Soviet Union was its only superior - showing plays, circuses, puppets, vaudeville, and dance to an audience of nearly 400,000 people a week... It might have become the wonder and envy of the world, but the vision was too dazzling for myopic political eyes. (Williams 241)

Censorship, red tape, budget cuts, orders and threats slowly chipped away at the FTP's ability to function. Workers and audiences protested these cuts and attacks, but to no avail. In December of 1938, Hallie Flanagan testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Her previous work, including the article published in *Theatre Arts Monthly* in which she had praised the Russian theatre, misquotations, scenes cut from FTP plays before performance and other flimsy evidence were used as examples of Flanagan's extremism. In 1939, the Appropriations Committees of the House and Senate debated the future funding of the FTP and, ultimately, it was cut in a joint committee compromise bill, effectively ending the largest federal theatre project in American history.

Friedman suggests another more nebulous explanation for the decline of independent workers' theatres after 1935 that also helps explain the demise of the FTP and is equally

valid as an explanation for the decline of workers' theatre in Canada in the late 1930's.

Friedman believes the end of these projects had everything to do with a fundamental cultural shift. The sense of classes in conflict in the depths of the Depression created an atmosphere where militant agitprop and even the social dramas of the FTP made sense, and revolution felt near at hand. The shift toward the defensive policies of the Left's united front to combat rising fascism in Europe meant that the revolutionary spirit and call to action at the core of workers' theatre content was at least put on hold, if not entirely out of reach, in the face of a new foe; and the call for internal social reform of the FTP's political work was put on the back burner. The desire to professionalize the movement also led the more experimental and militant groups to reconsider the advantages of more conventional techniques, topics and scripted material, especially in light of the tremendous success of the FTP plays. In Canada, this urge to professionalize was certainly felt by the Progressive Arts Club in Toronto, which would go on to rebrand itself as the Theatre of Action. Finally, as the economy recovered as the nation began to prepare to fight WWII, unemployment levels dropped, the working class returned to work or prepared to fight, and the peoples' theatre movement fell dormant.

The decline and persecution of the FTP as part of the larger communist witch-hunt in the United States undoubtedly served as a cautionary tale for Canadian workers' theatre artists, including those of the CCF. The plays of the CCF drama groups advance the distinctly socialist message of the party while avoiding the overt militant communism favoured by the Communist Party and the Progressive Arts Clubs. Where PAC productions were public affairs aimed at provoking action and social change, the CCF productions were geared more toward an internal audience and thereby avoided some of the scrutiny and hostility faced by their peers. The close RCMP monitoring of the PAC's production of

Waiting for Lefty in Vancouver and *Eight Men Speak* in Toronto in this same period shows that Canada was not immune to the paranoia of the Red Menace.

Canadian Political Context

The story of Canadian workers' theatre is rooted in the politics of Depression-era Canada. This was a period of dramatic changes as disparate groups of Canadians sought to organize in new ways to solve the social, political and economic challenges that lingered from the late 1920s to the beginning of WWII. For the purposes of this research, it is necessary to understand the early days of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, how its structure and early tendency towards decentralized semi-autonomous regionalized groups led to a great deal of variation between each CCF Club and the party's relation to other prominent political parties at the time.

In response to the financial, social and labour turmoil of the Depression, progressive Canadian scholars, notably F.H. Underhill, a professor of History at University of Toronto, initiated the ideas behind the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR). Underhill received support from colleagues outside of Toronto, especially from faculty at McGill and Montreal's United Theological College. Heavily influenced by British pre-war socialism, the central aim of the League was to substitute "...a planned and socialized economy for the existing chaotic individualism and which, by achieving an approximate economic equality among all men in place of the present glaring inequalities, will eliminate the domination of one class by another" (Underhill). Specifically, Sidney and Beatrice Webb and George Bernard Shaw's ideas of Fabianism through which society would gradually shift to socialism without violence, beginning with the creation of the welfare state and state control of industry. The LSR advocated for a sweeping series of reform-minded policy changes

including public ownership of utilities, transportation and industries prone to monopolies, nationalization and regulation of banks, development of agricultural cooperative institutions, generous labour reform, public health services, graduated taxation, government control of the economy and cooperative international trade (Underhill).

Because the LSR was intended primarily as an educational organization acting in support of other political parties, it is unsurprising that about a year later it was incorporated into the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and that the CCF would maintain this educational mandate as one of its core principles of organization; an objective that was served by dramatic groups, reading groups, debate and lecture series and the like. Underhill and his LSR colleagues were tasked with writing the party's first platform using the LSR manifesto as a model. It was delivered as a manifesto in Regina, Saskatchewan, in 1933 and promised progressive solutions to social problems like nationalization of industry and universal welfare including hospitalization, health care, unemployment insurance and pensions.

The CCF united farmers, labour unions and the bulk of the socialist movement. In British Columbia, the Socialist Party of BC, of which Arthur Turner was briefly the President, officially joined the CCF a year after the Regina Manifesto. In the national election in 1935, the CCF took 8.9 per cent of the popular vote, winning seven seats in the House of Commons. The BC CCF was sufficiently successful in the 1933 election to form the official opposition party in the Legislative Assembly, due in large part to lingering labour strife, high rates of unemployment, mass dissatisfaction with government relief camps for single working men and a desire for radical social change among BC's working and middle classes. In BC and elsewhere, the fledgling CCF party established regional and neighborhood

clubs in the major cities to attract the participation of Canadians not already associated with labour unions or farming organizations. These clubs served many social roles within the life of each community, but the primary aim was education with an eye toward mobilization and the election of candidates. CCF clubs sponsored study groups, speakers, choirs, radio shows, bands, and drama groups (Miller).

Farther to the left, the Communist Party of Canada (CPC), in existence since 1921, offered the most radical approach to dealing with the hardships of the Depression, though with mixed success. The National Unemployed Workers' Association, associated with the Communist Party, sustained a large membership by 1930 and the Communist Party's Workers' Unity League was vital to the organization of the On to Ottawa Trek in 1935, when homeless unemployed men traveled by jumping onto boxcars to air their grievances in the capital. However, the fear of foreign radicalism that was so rampant at the time crippled the CPC's ability to organize and effectively form a successful political party. The Red Scare mentality meant that leaders of the Communist Party were perpetually challenged in court, most notably by the arrests of eight party leaders, the topic of the Toronto Progressive Arts Club's play *Eight Men Speak* in 1933. Organized labour generally did not tolerate the CPC, and union members, including CPC leader Tim Buck, were often thrown out of their unions because of their Communist Party affiliation. For the CCF, the CPC made a fairly logical ally, however, the relationship between the parties was often fractious and hostile. The CPC attacked the CCF as class enemies and the CCF was quick to distance itself from the Communists in the hopes of looking more restrained in the eyes of the public and government and thereby preventing themselves from being subjected to the same Red Scare motivated attacks faced by the CPC.

A final social force that came to prominence in Depression-era Canada was the Youth Movement. The leading organizations centered on youth activism in the 1930's were the Student Christian Movement, the Canadian Student Assembly, and the Canadian Youth Congress. The CCF also had a large youth movement, the Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement (CCYM), from which many of the workers' theatre scripts to be examined later came forth. Similarly, the Young Communist League offered young people supportive of the CPC a group of their own. Because so few Canadian young people were attending college in the 1930's, about three per cent of Canada's youth, predominantly from middle and upper class families, campus activism was limited. Left-wing students also faced surveillance and penalties for supporting communists or communist causes or challenging capitalism more generally. The most unifying issue that resonated with Canadian youth regardless of political affiliation or leanings was peace and disarmament. Given the carnage of World War One and the direct and personal experience Canadian youth invariably had with soldiers who were killed or injured, this advocacy for pacifism is unsurprising. The global violence and uncertainty of the Twenties and Thirties from the Russian Revolution and civil war to the coups, civil wars and steady rise of Fascism in Italy, Spain and Germany no doubt added to the desire for peace and prevention of future war. However, this broad youth-oriented movement was not long lived. Once Canada joined World War Two in September 1939, "...university students, by all accounts patriotically supported the cause," including the Communist Youth League (Axelrod). Once the Defence of Canada regulations took hold, it became illegal to speak out against the war and government policy. Leading critics in the universities or elsewhere had to "[keep] their ideas to themselves" (Axelrod).

Canadian Amateur Theatre and Workers' Theatre

Subsequent chapters will go into more specific depth about the history of Canadian workers' theatre, particularly the theatre that emerged from within the CCF in British Columbia. This background is intended to help contextualize the work of the CCF drama clubs within the broader context of Canadian theatre history and in relation to the similar movements that developed elsewhere in the world in the same period. While workers' theatre remains a small area of focus in Canadian theatre history, it overlaps with the narratives of Canadian theatre history that have been largely focused on the work of the Dominion Drama Festival, the Little Theatre Movement and the extensive professional touring circuits. Much of Canadian theatre history foregrounds the work that took place in Eastern Canada; therefore, this final section seeks to resituate the theatre history of British Columbia within the larger, more Eastern-oriented narratives of Canadian performance.

Professional theatre in Canada was dominated by touring productions, mostly American or British, for much of the early history of the country, though some small exceptions are worth noting that mark the early rumblings of workers' theatre in Canada. Sandra Souchotte contends that the first Canadian workers' theatre emerged as early as the 1830's from the Typographical Association of Quebec City, which supported a "flourishing group of actors who performed comedies specially written for them... full of local colour and subtly subversive to established authority" (Souchotte 169). For English Canada, it would be another hundred years before a more deliberately radical workers' theatre would emerge alongside the growth of progressive political parties and as part of the larger global movement to use theatrical agitprop to educate, indoctrinate and sway audiences. The economic, political, theatrical and labour conditions of the 1930's proved fertile enough

ground to generate a short-lived flurry of activity that resulted in a small but lively body of workers' theatre plays.

In the early twentieth century, Canada saw a tremendous growth in amateur theatre groups presenting their work on stage and leading into a vibrant radio drama scene in later decades. While the world of professional theatre in Canada remained dominated by touring non-Canadians until the end of WWII, this created a space and demand for local talent to take to the stage in amateur theatricals. As an alternative to the American theatre syndicates' safe, neatly packaged crowd-pleasing and distinctly American product, early Canadian theatre artists looked to the art theatres of Europe for a model. Two such results were Toronto's Arts and Letters Club Players and Vincent Massey's Hart House Theatre, both in Toronto. Much like the Little Theatre movement that was flourishing in the United States at the time, the Little Theatre movement in Canada saw tremendous success in the 1920s and 1930's in bringing homegrown theatre to towns across the country and presented still more opportunities for Canada's would-be actors, directors, designers and writers. In Vancouver, early examples include the University of British Columbia's Players Club, formed by Frederic Wood, and the Vagabond Club, a collective of amateur theatre enthusiasts of varying industries whom historian Maria Tippet describes as "well-heeled hobbyists" to share in the mutual enjoyment of the arts (Tippett 7).

With a proliferation of Little Theatres springing up across Canada in the 1930's, the Dominion Drama Festival was established, with Massey as its first Chairman, in the hopes of nurturing Canadian theatre makers and encouraging cross-pollination through adjudication, coaching and feedback at regional and national-level festivals (Wasserman 7-10).

During the years of its existence 1933-70, (with a hiatus from 1940-46 due to the war), the DDF helped institutionalize amateur theater in Canada. Whether it accomplished much more than that has been a matter of some debate. It certainly provided a proving ground for Canadian talent which often went on to New York, London, Hollywood, or by the 1950s to Stratford or other areas of the nascent Canadian professional theater... Through special trophies and cash prizes, the DDF also encouraged the writing and production of Canadian plays...but the quality and adventurousness of the work the festival inspired was often questionable.

(Wasserman 11)

This long-standing tradition of amateur theatre in Canada undoubtedly helped the development of workers' theatre groups, particularly the Progressive Arts Clubs (PAC) and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation Dramatics groups that melded their progressive politics with the existing enthusiasm for amateur theatricals to explore Canadian agitprop with the added benefit of a lively Little Theatre from which to draw skilled participants. While historically, professional touring groups from the United States would perform in the larger Canadian cities, the majority of plays were produced on a small scale by clubs, organizations, and cultural and religious groups made up of enthusiastic amateurs, in makeshift venues in church basements, schools, private homes and community halls (Nesbitt 1-12).

Canadian novelist and playwright Robertson Davies wrote of the tradition of amateurism and the state of Canadian drama:

Every great drama, as you know, has been shaped by its Playhouse.... Now what is the Canadian playhouse? Nine times out of ten... it is a school hall, smelling of chalk

and kids, and decorated in the Early Concrete style. The stage is a small, raised room at one end. And I mean room. If you step into the wings suddenly you will fracture your nose against the wall. There is no place for storing scenery, no place for the actors to dress, and the lighting is designed to warm the stage but not to illuminate it.

(Filewod 10)

Davies mocks and rails against these conditions, but cannot deny that they were the norm. Thus the unpretentious familiarity of amateur theatre in Canada eased the development of Canadian workers' theatre in many ways. Audiences were arguably accustomed to a less professional standard and style of performance, and the mobilization of workers into acting groups did not require any extraordinary measures. The rough aesthetic, minimal scenery, lights and costumes and occasional weak performance of a novice actor would likely not have taken away from the message of the play or the impact it made on an audience that was well versed in the willing suspension of disbelief.

Vancouver Little Theatre

Davies' quip about the Canadian playhouse is certainly true of amateur groups and homegrown artists, but it belies the range of venues for professional theatre that were clustered in urban centres of Canada. Vancouver welcomed a great many touring productions and vaudeville performers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in no small part due to the rail connection to the Seattle area that expedited travel after it was completed in 1904. Vancouver was home to several theatres before 1917 including an Opera House built by the Canadian Pacific Railway, two theatres built by Greek-American impresario Alexander Pantages and another two built as part of the Orpheum Circuit. As the demand for vaudeville increased, Vancouver saw the construction or repurposing of several other spaces

to house it. Foreign performers and foreign material aimed at the least common denominator almost exclusively dominated these venues and they did little to articulate much that was “Canadian”.

One of the most prominent amateur theatre organizations in the Vancouver area was the Vancouver Little Theatre Association (VLTA) founded in 1921 by bookkeeper Sam Wellwood and artist C.A. Ferguson, former members of the Vagabond Club. Ferguson later described his attraction to the Little Theatre movement.

The Little Theatre movement was then beginning to take hold and make some headway [in the world]. Sam [Wellwood] and I were interested and discussed the possibility of such a thing in Vancouver. Reinhardt’s intimate theatre, the designs of Urban, Jones, Lee Simonson and the Russian Theatre all interested us and gave us ideas. (Ferguson qtd. in Nesbitt 11)

This atmosphere of experimentation with theatre and an eschewing of the profit motive that Fergusson and Wellwood believed limited the commercial popular entertainment on offer made the work of the VLTA stand out. It served as a crucible that brought together theatre artists who were looking for something new and different, but had no desire to take to the stage professionally. Within this environment many of the people who would later be involved in the Progressive Arts Club’s production of *Waiting for Lefty*, including director Garfield King, developed skills that would serve that production and organization well.¹⁷ The community theatre structure of the VLTA also bears mentioning as it closely resembles the *modus operandi* of the PAC and CCF drama groups that would soon follow. Sam Wellwood addressed this feature in an article published in the *The Daily Province* intended to garner

¹⁷ King’s first directing projects for the VLTA were *The Intruder* by Maurice Maeterlinck and *Suppressed Desires* by Susan Glaspell, both works by significant modern playwrights.

support for the VLTA that also suggests some political proximity between the VLTA and the PAC and CCF drama groups.

A noteworthy feature of the little theater movement is its democratic character and its discouragement of the star system. It is not an affair of one class. It finds room among its workers not only for amateur actors and actresses of ability, but also those whose talents are humbler perhaps, but no less necessary to the perfect ensemble, such as carpenters, scene painters, musicians, seamstresses, ushers, businessmen and so on, each in his separate sphere doing the thing he can for the good of things as they should be. By this means the drama is made once more, as in Shakespeare's day, a living force in the community, reflecting the significance and beauty of life, which still underlies our drab conventions and voicing also the social tendencies of the time, the dreams and theories which may become the actualities of tomorrow. (Wellwood qtd. in Nesbitt 16)

The early years of the VLTA were successful beyond any of its founders' imaginings. The membership peaked at about 1400 people, meaning a substantial influx of capital in addition to ticket sales from audience members who did not belong to the Association. The Depression hit the VLTA hard, however, and that level of membership was unsustainable in the harsh economic climate of the 1930's. A bright spot for the VLTA was their participation and success in the regional and national Dominion Drama Festival where they won awards in four different years, and in their own local drama festival that was intended to support smaller amateur theatres in the Lower Mainland. They saw a brief resurgence after WWII before beginning a steady decline that would eventually prove fatal (Nesbitt).

The Vancouver Little Theatre Association purchased its own theatre, the Palace, a former legitimate theatre space turned movie house, in 1921 in East Vancouver. After renovations, they renamed it the Little Theatre in 1923. Later renovations saw another name change to the York in 1940 and the VLTA continued to produce plays and one-acts there until it was sold in 1978 (Cultch).¹⁸ The York was a perpetual economic burden for the VLTA and in selling it, the VLTA effectively admitted financial defeat. Unable to compete with the new civic theatre, the Vancouver Playhouse, and the increasing professionalization of theatre in the city, the VLTA ultimately fizzled out by 1980.

Workers' Theatre Movement and the Progressive Arts Club

Alongside the Little Theatre Movement, a group of theatre enthusiasts was beginning to organize in the Fall of 1931 with the intention of using theatre for political ends in much the same way as was being played out in the Soviet Union, Germany, Britain and the United States. To date, the history of the Progressive Arts Club remains the most well known of Canada's workers' theatres in large part due to the publications of Alan Filewod, Sandra Souchotte, an anthology of PAC plays, *Eight Men Speak*, and an accessible memoir by one very outspoken participant. This section will begin with an overview of the PAC's better known activities in Eastern Canada before exploring its less well known branch in Vancouver, its ties to the VLTA and its relationship to a new rival in the dramatics groups of the CCF.

¹⁸ The story of the York Theatre is a bright spot in Vancouver's theatre history. After it was sold, the new owners converted it into a Bollywood film house. It was later converted into a music venue, narrowly avoiding demolition and was renamed the New York. Some time later it again reverted to showing Bollywood films under the name of The Raja until that too closed. With demolition looming again, and in the wake of the demolition of another Vaudeville-era theatre, the Pantages on Hastings Street, the York was rescued by city planners, the Wall Financial Corporation and the Vancouver East Cultural Centre (aka The Cultch). It has been thoroughly restored and is currently operated by the Cultch as a theatrical venue once more. (Cultch)

Toby Gordon Ryan's memoir *Stage Left* chronicles her involvement in the Canadian workers' theatre movement and includes interviews with her friends and colleagues from the period. An Ontario native, Ryan moved to New York to study acting at the Artef School, one of the many collective activist theatre groups based in New York.¹⁹ She describes seeing the Prolet-Bühne perform a mobile piece of agitprop during that period. "This New York appearance by Prolet-Bühne – and several additional performances I saw later – shed light for me on a new and dynamic form of theater. The experience certainly helped broaden my own view of the stage as a potent instrument for change and a voice through which one could reach and affect people" (22).

Upon her return to Toronto, Ryan joined Toronto's Progressive Arts Club, which was founded by a small group of activists within the Communist Party including her future husband, Oscar Ryan. Toby Ryan brought the experience she had gained in New York with her as the young group began to grow and produce artistic works of their own in the style and spirit of the agitprop and activist work of the groups in the United States. The mandate of the PAC was simple, according to Oscar Ryan:

We wanted to cover every area of the arts... Those who came together in PAC were dissatisfied with the established cultural values of the country. We felt that literature, the graphic arts, theatre, etc., were merely reflections, and usually imports, from the United States and Great Britain. We thought two things— one, that we would like to see a more genuine Canadian reflection in the arts. But even more, because of the times we were living in, we especially wanted a more radical, a more basic outlook by artists, a more critical attitude to the society we lived in... (Ryan 26)

¹⁹ The full name for the Artef School was the Arbeiter Teater Farband, or Workers' Theatre Alliance (Filewod).

The artistic policy of the PAC was written with the typical fervour of the Canadian Communist Party and outlined a number of objectives to dismantle the status quo and liberate the proletariat. The policy reads much like a manifesto calling artists to action in support of the coming revolution.

The awakening proletariat must have a revolutionary culture that will expand with the growing realization of its need and the methods necessary to their fulfillment. They must have songs that will stir them emotionally, that will waken a response in their own subjective suffering, and lead them on to revolt. They must have plays that will depict the drabness and sorrow of their daily lives and resolve the doubts and fears that arise in the minds of individuals, as a result of these apparently hopeless contradictions and frustrations, into a clarified determination to assert their own strength as a class. In teaching the workers the ways and means by which they can achieve their social salvation the theatre must take its place with the soap box and working class press. (qtd. in Souchotte 170)

The specific mention that theatre should be used as a soap box is telling and reflects the tone and techniques of much of the work that would come. Theatre, for the CP, was yet another tool, along with mass communication through newsletters, magazines, and leaflets, to try and sway the public. The PAC went on to do both, producing 12 issues of the magazine *Masses* and a number of successful plays. The PAC plays were all critical of the government and society, most notably, if not notoriously, *Eight Men Speak*, about the red scare politics of Section 98 of the criminal code and the arrest and near murder of Tim Buck, President of the Communist Party, and seven other Party leaders. One can imagine Oscar Ryan's confidence in the coming revolution as he said the plays of the PAC were not "the sort of frothy

traditional plays the Canadians had seen in church basements, echoing the progressive sentiments of similar groups throughout the world. The PAC plays dealt with urgent questions – unemployment, human rights, war, strike situations, whatever – and spoke in very direct terms to the people involved” (Ryan 42).

The play *Theatre – Our Weapon* reads, and was no doubt performed, like a living, breathing manifesto of proletarian rage. The lines are broken into short declarative phrases shared as a mass recitation among characters that bear numbers rather than names.

1st: Is it possible for our theatre NOT to be a weapon?

Chorus: No!

1st: Down with the theatre where the bourgeois comes to digest its heavy meal!

2nd: Down with the theatre where the idle parasites come to amuse themselves!

3rd: Down with the theatre where drunken debauchery dopes the minds of the masters and their obedient slaves!

4th: Down with the theatre which lulls the indignation of the hungry slaves of capitalism

Chorus: DOWN WITH IT! (Filewod et al. 2)

Where the Eastern Canadian PAC and the plays of the CCF drama groups that came a few years later in BC differ most was in their view of the artistic vehicle that best carried the political and social lesson in each piece. The PAC were unapologetically modernist in their use of language, choral speaking, mass recitation, and lack of regard for verisimilitude. Their work was experimental and provocative much like the experimental theatre coming out of Europe and aspired to by some of the Little Theatres that were keen to experiment with the aesthetics of New Stagecraft. The PAC used the power of theatre to create profound visual

metaphors and moods to deliver their messages, while the CCF drama groups' work was much more in keeping with traditional and straightforward forms of delivery.

The idea of multiple Progressive Arts Clubs in other major cities across Canada including Montreal, Halifax, London, Winnipeg and Vancouver, with the encouragement of the Canadian Labour Defence League (CLDL) and Communist Party of Canada, came only a few years after the Toronto PAC was formed. The Vancouver Progressive Arts Players reportedly began with a \$20 investment from CLDL lawyer and VLTA director Garfield King and his friend, a Dr. Murphy (Press). Guy Glover was brought on as a director. King and Glover met while working together at the Vancouver Little Theatre Association where King was a producer and both had directed productions. King served as director of *The Intruder* by Maurice Maeterlinck in the VLTA's first season, 1921, and directed *John Fergusson* by St. John G. Ervine in 1930. Glover directed Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* in 1934 (Nesbitt 127-30). The PAC in Vancouver did not replicate what was at times the in-your-face and experimental style of the Toronto PAC.

Whether Garfield King and Guy Glover were resistant to the experimental style of the Toronto PAC because of their experience working with the VLTA (which favoured new scenic and lighting techniques, but chose plays with less aggressive character than the Toronto PAC did), or whether they lacked the appetite to reproduce the kind of work that landed the Toronto PAC in a great deal of political and legal trouble is unknown, but both are potential explanations for the coastal differences in the character and tone of the PACs. The history of Canadian workers' theatre has been largely dominated by research on the PAC of Eastern Canada and on the Little Theatres, but the CCF drama groups occupied a middle space between them. In Vancouver, at least, the PAC and the CCF clubs were not as

dissimilar as might be expected, largely because the Vancouver PAC was more mainstream than their Toronto counterparts and perhaps because they were not exposed to the revolutionary work of the Prolet-Bühne as Toby Gordon Ryan of Toronto was.

The relative ease of coexistence between the workers' theatre groups in Vancouver, particularly the Progressive Arts Club Players who may or may not have had loose ties to the Communist Party and the drama clubs of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, is puzzling given the fervent animosity between the CCF and the Communist Party on the political level at the time, particularly over the concept of the United Front. Those in favour argued that the Left could only succeed if united and that fissures along doctrinal lines only weakened the movement. Those who opposed the United Front, like Turner and much of the CCF leadership, felt that the United Front was a thinly veiled effort by the CP to take over the CCF and other political rivals. The following is an excerpt from the *BC Federationist* that captures some of this anger as the editors responded to readers' requests that they let up on the criticism of the Communist Party.

...Conquer to control or destroy has been the one fixed policy of the C.P. This is totalitarianism within the working class movement. When compared with the CCF method of trying to live beside and work with, trades unions and kindred organizations, it represents a very different outlook. (qtd. in Arthur J. Turner *Somewhere* 28)

When I asked Lyle Kristiansen if his father Denny Kristiansen's participation in the PAC was complicated by his strong CCF allegiance, Lyle said, "No, there were certainly Communists among the members of the [Vancouver] PAC, but it wouldn't have been in [the Communist Party's] best interest to try and direct the PAC" (L. Kristiansen). It would seem

that the diversity of the members of the Progressive Arts Players allowed them to coexist with the CCF far more easily than if they had all been Party members as in the Toronto club. The CP's attempts at reconciliation of Leftist groups during Popular Front period also suggests an explanation for this peaceful coexistence.

Theatre historian Candida Rifkind seems to agree:

Although the [Progressive Arts] Players were affiliated with the Vancouver PAC, their production of *Waiting for Lefty* is an example of the coexistence of revolutionary and reformist socialisms in the field of leftist theater. Any Communist hold on the production was loosened by the fact that its directors, Guy Glover and Garfield King, hailed from the Little Theatre and social democratic circles. The production itself used amateur actors, many of them unemployed immigrants who were drawn to auditions by advertisements placed in socialist, union, labour, and other leftist newspapers. (Rifkind 148)

Some of the success of the Vancouver PAC's *Waiting for Lefty* can also be attributed to timing. The year 1935 was a particularly tumultuous period for labour in Vancouver, epitomized by the prolonged strike of BC dock workers and the June 18th "Battle of Ballantyne Pier" in which locked-out dock workers, hired scabs, armed police and Mounties engaged in a skirmish that left several hospitalized and many seriously injured (Nicol). This was all exacerbated by the arrival of striking Relief Camp Workers Union members from sites outside of Vancouver who were protesting their living conditions, wages and work under the Department of Defense make-work scheme. It was in this context that Garfield King and Guy Glover created their Vancouver branch of the PAC and set about producing

their first play: Clifford Odets' agitprop guised in the thin veil of social drama, *Waiting for Lefty*.

Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* is perhaps the best-known play to come out of the theatrical Left in the 1930's. When he wrote *Lefty*, the young Odets was an actor and co-founder of the Group Theatre in New York City. The play became a smash hit on Broadway and gained the attention of workers' theatre groups across the globe. The play was inspired by an actual strike of New York taxi drivers in 1935 and the first scene is set within the context of the union meeting troubled by a clash between members and a corrupt union boss and his lackeys. Subsequent scenes introduce us to the main characters and give us individual insights into why each man decided to strike. Some of the characters, like Joe and Edna, while dissatisfied, still show a sense of hope and resiliency in the face of abject poverty. Others, like Sid and Florence, are more hopelessly trapped within their socioeconomic situation, and limited by the world around them in which dreams feel unattainable. In a summer filled with dramatic and violent strikes in Vancouver in 1935, *Lefty* made an obvious choice for Vancouver's recently formed Progressive Arts Club Players.²⁰

The cast was mostly composed of unemployed workers and benefitted from the large number of experienced performers from Vancouver's Ukrainian community as well as the use of the Ukrainian Labour Temple as a free rehearsal and performance space. Many of Vancouver's other immigrant communities had similarly organized groups and places for political, social and cultural gatherings as well, and this generated a body of about 150 member worker-actors who were at least semi-skilled in various cultural arts and could transition into workers' theatre fairly easily (Bray). Other members of the cast were drawn

²⁰ For more on *Lefty*, see Filewod's article "A Qualified Workers Theatre Art: *Waiting For Lefty* and the (Re)Formation of Popular Front Theatres."

from the VLTA and at least one, Denny Kristiansen, came from a CCF drama club. In a 1976 interview commemorating the 40th anniversary of *Lefty*, Denny Kristiansen spoke about his theatrical experiences in the workers' theatre. "I was active in the CCF and we had put on various plays. People from a Ukrainian organization here contacted me and asked if I was interested in helping form a workers' theatre. We called a meeting at the Ukrainian Labor Temple" (D. Kristiansen qtd. in Campbell).

The production was performed before packed houses under the watchful eyes of the RCMP anti-communist forces.²¹ The censorship of PAC productions deemed to be seditious or inflammatory was felt nationwide beginning with *Eight Men Speak* about the arrest of eight Communist Party leaders in 1933. The authorities that threatened to revoke the licenses of the theatres that hosted the PAC shut down productions of *Eight Men Speak* in Toronto and Winnipeg. The same kind of threat was leveled in Vancouver, despite the fact that *Waiting for Lefty* was enormously popular in the United States and significantly less inflammatory than *Eight Men Speak* in terms of blatantly communist content. "The city license inspector H.A. Urquhart wrote the owner of the [Ukrainian Labour Temple] hall that a repeat performance would mean closing down his hall" (D. Kristiansen qtd. in Campbell). The official letter from 1935 cited the "nature and character" of *Waiting for Lefty* as grounds for the revocation of the Hall's license. Support for the PAC and the Ukrainian Hall came from unexpected corners including several professors from the University of British Columbia including outspoken English Professor Dr. Garnet Sedgewick and a Professor of French, Dr. A.F.B. Clark. Other supporters of the production included members of the press:

²¹ For the most exhaustive study on the PAC's production of *Waiting for Lefty*, see Bonita Bray's MA thesis, "The Weapon of Culture: Working-Class Resistance and Progressive Theatre in Vancouver, 1930-38," and journal article "Against All Odds: The Progressive Arts Club Production of *Waiting for Lefty*" (1990).

Bob Buchette of *The Sun* and Jim Butterfield of *The Province* and the Chief of Police, Col. W.W. Foster, who was the Vice President of the Vancouver Little Theatre Association. When asked why the production was so troublesome for the authorities, Kristiansen said, “Oh there was a bit of swearing in *Waiting for Lefty*, but nothing like the sex talk of today...It was a powerful depression play, a radical play. That’s why they wanted to stop it. And it was banned in some American cities” (D. Kristiansen qtd. in Campbell). The popularity of *Lefty* was likely due as much to the controversy it created as to the actual skill of the performers. Press reviews were generally favorable to gushing and at least one article suggests that when the play moved from the Labour Temple to the Orpheum Theatre on Granville Street, demand was sufficient to warrant adding extra late night streetcar service.

When *Waiting for Lefty* took the BC Regional Drama Award, there was some concern over how the production would make it to Ottawa for the Dominion Drama Festival National Finals. Nearly everyone in the cast was on government relief, and fundraising efforts to send the play to Ottawa included tag sales, donations and benefit performances in Vancouver’s Empress Theatre, filling it for three nights (Campbell). It took immense public pressure to coerce the City Council to permit a tag sale that would raise funds to send the play to Ottawa on March 28 (Ryan 53). In an interview with the PAC’s Toby Gordon Ryan, Denny Kristiansen describes the challenges of getting *Waiting for Lefty* to the Dominion Drama Festival in 1936.

I remember standing on a downtown street corner with this sign, *Waiting For Lefty*, across my chest...I’d call out, ‘Send Lefty to Ottawa!’ And fellows would say, ‘Who the hell is Lefty? Why can’t he ride the rods like the rest of us?’ Despite the cracks, we raised \$600 to send the cast of 20. (Ryan 53)

As the cast of *Lefty* made their way to Ottawa via train, they played in Kamloops and Winnipeg while en route, staying in the homes of local supporters and performing again on their return trip. While in Ottawa, the cast was wined and dined by Conservative leader (and former Tory Prime Minister) R.B. Bennett and CCF leader J.S. Woodsworth and attended tea at Government House on at least two occasions. The general response to the production was positive with a standing ovation from the well-heeled DDF audience. A favourite anecdote of Lyle Kristiansen's, also reflected in the newspaper piece from 1976, concerned Lady Margaret Tupper, a leader in the Manitoba Drama League, denouncing the audience while pacing back and forth, calling them "God Damned hypocrites" for their vocal approval and admiration of *Waiting for Lefty* while doing little if anything for the actual struggling workers in their own companies and communities (L. Kristiansen).

Despite police efforts to censor or shut down the production, it beat the VLTA entry for the DDF that year in the regional competition and grew in influence by going on a national tour. *Lefty* ultimately won the award for Best English Language Play of the year at the 1936 Dominion Drama Festival. The wild success of *Waiting for Lefty* was never to be recreated by the Vancouver PAC, however.

Harry Horshowsky, who played the young labour spy in *Lefty*, explained the aftermath of the play to Toby Gordon Ryan years later.

When we came back from Ottawa, we put the play on-again, quite a few times. We also did a parody on Waiting For Lefty for cast and friends. But we now had to search for other works... I think there was a period when we were doing an awful lot, very rapidly...the club had done many, many plays. For two, maybe three years afterwards they were involved in a number of productions. I don't think we were searching for

another *Waiting for Lefty*. I think we were now making up our minds as to whether we were going to continue in the field of acting. (Horshowsky qtd. in Ryan 57)

Other plays the Vancouver PAC took on included *Private Hicks* and *Devil Among the Skins* and one of Irwin Shaw's better known anti-war plays, *Bury the Dead*. One evening of entertainment consisted of three one-acts played in memory of a lost comrade, Patrick O'Neil, who was killed while serving in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion in the Spanish Civil War. This theme and fundraising for the Friends of the MacPaps were also common in the years following *Lefty* and included a number of one-acts, some of which toured the Lower Mainland (Ryan 62-71). But the PAC was never to see the same sort of success in subsequent productions as it did with *Lefty*, and the Vancouver PAC dissolved by 1939 (Bray; Rifkind; Ryan; Filewod).

Progressive BC History as Context

Another essential element in fully understanding and appreciating the work of the CCF drama groups is how they emerged as part of the larger Progressive movement in British Columbia and elsewhere and how they both created and reflected Progressive culture. Many of these plays dealt with topical issues such as the Relief Camps in BC, while others filled a more informative role in teaching the basic tenets of Socialism. To truly grasp the impact, significance and aims of the plays discussed in this research, one must have a basic understanding of the socio-political context that governed the lives of the CCF party activists, playwrights, actors, audience members and their allies and adversaries outside of the party.

This selective history begins at roughly the beginning of the lifetimes of the CCF playwrights covered in this research; Arthur J. Turner, Denny Kristiansen and Hubert Evans, all born towards the end of the nineteenth century. While far from exhaustive and somewhat

simplified, this history is offered to provide some of the socio-cultural context from which CCF drama sprang forth. The Twenties and Thirties in Canada, and in British Columbia in particular, were years of great social, political, economic, and cultural change and this is reflected in the dramatic work of the CCF that makes up the rest of this research.

Pre-World War I

Labour relations in British Columbia in the early 1910s grew heated and violent. In a period of particularly intense relations between coal miners and management on Vancouver Island, one can begin to see the earliest rallying cries of what would come to be one of the most militant decades in the history of B.C. labour. The years 1912-13 saw British Columbia's most dramatic job action yet in and around Cumberland, BC. Workers clashed violently with mine management, who were backed by special constables and the 72nd Regiment, over the issue of mine safety following the death of thirty-two miners in a gas explosion. Clashes between striking workers, management-hired (mostly Chinese) scabs, and provincial forces escalated into violent riots, shootings and burnings with some 250 people arrested, including the president of the B.C. Federation of Labour. After two years of active striking and over a million dollars spent on strike pay, the union ran out of money and the strike was ended with little practical improvement in working conditions.

Immigration booms in the years before and after World War One dramatically changed the demographics of Canada, creating issues around labour, organized labour, politics and racial discrimination. Particularly alienated by the labour movement were the thousands of Chinese, Japanese and Indian immigrants who moved to British Columbia and the Western United States to work in construction, on railroads, in the timber and mining industries and in household service. Believing them to be a threat to organized labour and

jobs for white Canadians, organized labour vigorously attacked their right to work and access to citizenship. Central, Eastern and Southern European immigrants faced similar racism in eastern Canada and were barred from union membership. This socio-cultural exclusion led to the creation of radical left-wing organizations to serve these populations such as the Ukrainian Labour-Farmers' Temple Association (which would prove invaluable in the workers' theatre movement in Vancouver a few decades later), the Finnish Socialist Organization of Canada, and the predominantly Jewish Labour League along with radical leftist associations of Serbian, Hungarian, Polish and Croatian immigrants who would support the Industrial Workers of the World and the Socialist and Communist Parties of Canada and add to the growing complexity and division between parties of the Left.

Western European immigrants fared better and those who favoured Liberal politics were absorbed into the existing unions and political parties, including British immigrant Arthur. J. Turner and Danish immigrant Thorvald "Denny" Kristiansen, who both ultimately joined the CCF. This early split along cultural and ethnic lines in the political parties of the Canadian Left did nothing to help ease tensions between rival parties. The sometimes fierce division between the Communist Party of Canada and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation finds its roots in earlier decades.

With large and crowded urban populations, increasingly covered by union membership, living in miserable conditions under the harsh control of wealthy industrialists, the stage was set for a period of widespread labour unrest, particularly in Quebec and British Columbia, but spreading throughout Canada. As with strikes in the United States, civil authorities intervening in the name of public order (invariably favoring management) violently ended Canadian strikes at various points, deepening the divide between labour and

management, and intensifying the distrust felt by workers for the forces of law and order.

Vancouver labour historian Robert A.J. McDonald estimates that between 1901 and 1914, the city of Vancouver alone saw 76 strikes involving nearly 13,000 workers ("Working" 49).

In the same period, the city was undergoing an unparalleled expansion as immigrants from the British Isles, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa were arriving en masse. The population of Vancouver in 1900 was a meagre 27,010 even after the population growth that resulted from the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Ten years later, the population had nearly quadrupled to 100,401 with immigrants from the British Isles making up 34% of the total (N. MacDonald). These British immigrants, including Arthur Turner who arrived in 1913, brought with them the practices and strong ties to organized labour culture and left-leaning political views that made Vancouver increasingly fertile ground for socialist organizations, unions and decades of militant demonstration by the working class both before and after World War One, and bolstered the numbers of CCF clubs across the province.

World War One

Some 620,000 Canadians, including writer Hubert Evans, served in World War One out of a total population of about eight million, which had obvious effects on the labour force back home. Canadian troops suffered heavy casualties with 60,661 deaths and another 172,000 soldiers wounded (Bumsted 169). Popular support for the war was mixed, with the province of Quebec being particularly opposed. Anglo Canada was largely united out of a sense of imperial duty and dual identity as British subjects and Canadians at the start of the war. Yet, as the war raged on, and as life on the home front changed dramatically and hardships mounted, popular support and a steady stream of willing recruits waned, particularly among those who aligned with the political Left. The Left was divided over the

ethical implications of World War I with many supporting the national effort and others, many of whom were active socialists and labour organizers, refusing to be ‘cannon fodder’ in what they viewed as a fundamentally imperialistic class war arbitrarily pitting worker against worker. The ethics of war, viewed with the benefit of hindsight after World War I was over, is explored in greater depth in the South Hill CCF’s play *Boys of the Old Brigade*. Suspicion of the intentions of those on the far Left led to the imprisonment and deportation of many of Canada’s labour leaders, particularly Wobblies and Socialists, before WWI drew to a close, further alienating those on the far Left. The arrest of Communist Party leaders in Ontario serves as the inspiration for the PAC play *Eight Men Speak*.

Canadian Labour in the Interwar Years

The popular and labour unrest that grew as a result of World War One showed itself in different ways. In the East, workers called for reform and greater involvement on the part of government in setting reasonable labour standards. In the prairies, the inevitable drop in the price of wheat led to a growing popular and increasingly radical leftist farmers’ movement as the earliest iterations of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation were formed. In the more radicalized West, particularly in British Columbia, political discontent led to massive strikes and protests and the election of Leftist political leaders including candidates from the CCF.

Amidst waves of strikes throughout the interwar period, the most notable was the Winnipeg General Strike in 1919. The grim conditions of a wartime economy along with high unemployment, high inflation, continued attacks on the rights of unions, harsh working conditions, the terrible living conditions of the urban working class and the waves of illness including the Spanish Flu that killed some 50,000 Canadians gave Winnipeg unions much to

be angry about and much to fight for. In May 1919, metal and building trades negotiations failed, leading to a sympathy strike as other workers joined the building and trades workers in their walkout. On May 15, the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council called for a General Strike to shut the city down.

For the authorities and business owners, the popular uprising that led to the Russian Revolution a mere two years before in 1917 no doubt provided a worrisome backdrop as the masses took to the streets of Winnipeg. For activists like Arthur Turner, it was a sign of change coming, as he described in an interview at the age of ninety-four.

When the Russian Revolution broke out, I and many others thought, 'Here it is. Here it is. Bang,' you see. Not that we thought it would happen right away in Canada. By the end of the war, things were in such a bad state. We used to look forward for newspapers, wondering 'which country's had a revolution yesterday?' All this upset creates a chaos in thinking and in one's attitude toward the world. (Turner qtd. in Melnyk 134)

With Labour councils in Toronto and Vancouver (including Turner's union) adding their voices in support, one can imagine the growing paranoia of the Canadian authorities who feared that a Communist revolution in Canada was at hand. Ministers from the Canadian cabinet introduced militia and Mounted Police forces to restore order, as the local police would not promise they would not join the strike themselves and were fired. Labour unrest persisted, with notable strikes and police raids in Cape Breton, Alberta and British Columbia, until the economic boom of the mid-1920s. The psychological effect of the Winnipeg General Strike and its aftermath on the working class cannot be understated both in terms of its legendary status as an uprising of the masses and as an incident of unjust abuse of power

used to target activists on the Left. The feeling that a great change was looming in Canada would have been palpable for those, like Turner, who believed a revolution to be inevitable: “The situation was like dry tinder; it seemed that anything could happen” (qtd. in Melnyk 134).

While organized labour sought to improve the lot of Canadians through bargaining and job action, other groups were forming to meet the needs of dissatisfied Canadians in the interwar period. The Progressive Party was formed in 1920 to serve the needs of Canada’s struggling farmers with tariff policies taking pride of place in their platform. It won 64 seats in the 1921 federal election to the Conservatives’ 50 seats and the Liberals’ 117. The longstanding tradition of a two-party system in Canada was broken. Though its power and prominence dwindled in each subsequent election because of internal divisions over policy, the Progressive Party set a precedent for a viable third-party alternative and what remained of the party was ultimately absorbed into the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in 1932. On the provincial level, farmers’ parties were also formed in Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, seeing modest electoral success in 1920. In 1921, conditions for farmers, particularly, continued to worsen with the price of wheat bottoming out at half of its prewar price and the persistent drought and heat waves that would ultimately create the Dustbowl. With crops failing, farms were lost as mortgages and taxes could not be paid and the spillover effect on prairie towns left much of the middle of the country in a state of economic collapse. In a few years thousands would leave the prairies seeking work, many of whom ended up in Vancouver.

By the mid-1920's, the Canadian economy looked to be improving, but this boom was based on speculative investments, a housing bubble and the substantial availability of credit for purchases such as houses, cars, and home appliances for the average Canadian. The interwar period was a time of tremendous economic boom in Vancouver as well, as the city became an export hub for timber, metals, minerals, prairie wheat and other resource commodities around the world, with exports of all products jumping from 1.5 million cargo tons to 6.3 million at the end of the Twenties. This success, however, was fleeting. The collapse of the stock markets in October 1929 signalled the start of the Great Depression worldwide.

As the demand for Canadian resources dwindled, job loss on a massive scale pushed the country into further economic woe. While statistics for unemployment in Canada are difficult to work with, given the large population of farmers and the fact that they are not counted amongst the unemployed in federal data, non-agricultural unemployment has been estimated at 27 per cent in the worst years of the Depression. When underemployment and the unemployment of women seeking work are included, that number climbs to somewhere near 50 per cent of non-farm workers. With the environmental and economic casualties in the prairie provinces also taken into account, the full reality of economic collapse in Canada can be imagined.

In BC, years of questionable management by the provincial Liberal government, made worse by the collapse of global markets, led to massive debts at the provincial level to the tune of around \$90 million at the start of the Conservative Tolmie government in 1928, the last Conservative government to win control of British Columbia to date. By 1931,

unemployment in British Columbia climbed to around 26-28%, one of the highest rates in Canada (Kealey).

Unemployed workers from across Canada flooded into the more temperate city of Vancouver because, as the popular saying goes, ‘Vancouver is the only city where you can starve to death before you freeze to death.’ So-called “hobo jungles” sprang up around the city as the unemployed and homeless (predominantly young single men) built ramshackle shantytowns in which to live. To deal with the ‘vagrancy’ issue, increasing numbers of unemployed single men were compelled by city and provincial police forces to enter relief camps run by the Ministry of Defense, doing menial work for twenty cents a day while living in barely tolerable work camps away from the city. These men went on to organize, with help from activists from the Communist Party, and went on strike, led protests, marches and occupations of government buildings, demanding “work and wages,” culminating in the On to Ottawa Trek in which thousands of men jumped freight trains heading east to air their grievances at the national-level.

The Great Depression and Relief Efforts

As in the American states, private organizations, charities and provincial governments traditionally handled relief for the poor and unemployed. Also like American states, the provinces soon found that their resources could not meet the demand for relief in such a large-scale depression and they sought additional funds from the federal government. Prime Minister Mackenzie King reacted much like U.S. President Herbert Hoover in taking a more measured approach to relief and focused on trying to improve the economy with moderate direct government spending. R.B. Bennett, King’s successor in 1930, followed a similar path in rejecting direct federal relief to unemployed Canadians. The lack of federal funds drained

provincial budgets that could not be replenished by taxation when there was little wealth to be taxed. The area around Vancouver provides a striking example of the inability of the general population to pay taxes in the Depression. Arrearages in Burnaby, BC, were 72 per cent of the taxes levied, while North Vancouver and West Vancouver saw arrearages of 64 and 60 per cent respectively (Bumsted 187). With so little money coming in, services, let alone relief for the unemployed, could barely be delivered.

By 1935, with an election looming, the situation was so dire and Canadian society growing so volatile that Prime Minister Bennett looked to Roosevelt's New Deal for a way forward. This shift was one of political calculation, but also reflected a growing acceptance that stabilizing the economy and relieving some of the pressure from an increasingly desperate public were pragmatic and the only ways to prevent further unrest and political resistance from the Left in Canadian politics. Economist A.E. Grauer wrote in 1939:

Since the Great War, the Great Depression has been the chief stimulus to labour legislation and social insurance. The note sounded has not been so much the ideal of social justice as political and economic financial expediency. For instance, the shorter working week was favoured in unexpected quarters not because it would give the workers more leisure and possibilities for a fuller life but because it would spread work; and the current singling out of unemployment insurance for governmental attention in many countries is dictated by the appalling costs of direct relief and the hope that unemployment insurance benefits will give some protection to public treasuries in future depressions and will, by sustaining purchasing power, tend to mitigate these depressions. (Grauer qtd. in Finkel 83)

While the federal government was making small concessions in increasing relief funds and easing the hardship of the unemployed, including an attempt in 1935 to create national unemployment insurance (that was later struck down in court), other protest groups were growing on the provincial level and nationally, each making its own demands specific to its constituencies and offering their own solutions to the conditions of the Great Depression. The cure for the Depression therefore looked very different from province to province and group to group, and a collection of alternative political parties emerged with competing ideas of how to fix the Canadian economy with and without new modes of capitalism, including the rapidly growing CCF.

The first forty years of the twentieth century in Canada were a period of dramatic social, cultural and political change as Canada's industries, population, economy and politics adapted to the forces of immigration, world war and economic depression. This heated, active and trying time made a natural context for politically active, inflammatory and propagandistic theatre to emerge as a way to win the hearts and minds of the dissatisfied public and garner their support for a nationwide social movement against the status quo. The rampant unemployment and lack of relief aided the movement by making dissatisfied militant labour activists available due to their unemployment, paradoxically leading them to fight against the very unemployment and stagnant economy that brought them together and made the movement possible in the first place.

Only in the context of immense suffering, huge class divisions, arrogant abuse of corporate power, widespread racism, anti-immigrant feeling, militant labor unrest, and the increasing threat of fascism can the birth, brief prospering, and demise of the workers' theatre movement be understood. (Miller)

Dramatics and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation

The subsequent chapters will explore the work of three writers associated with the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation drama clubs in Vancouver and Roberts Creek, BC. This section is intended to serve as a brief introduction to the material that will follow. The use of theatre in the CCF Clubs is a relatively new area of study. A review of the literature about workers' theatre in Canada reveals few mentions of CCF drama. Where it is mentioned, it is often only cited as an area in need of future research (Rifkind), or as a slightly relevant historical footnote to the history of other Canadian theatre luminaries such as George Luscombe (Filewod 168).²² Bonita Bray's MA thesis, "The Weapon of Culture: Working-Class Resistance and Progressive Theatre in Vancouver, 1930-1938," and her subsequent journal article about the PAC's production of *Waiting for Lefty* provide the most in-depth look at Vancouver's contributions to the workers' theatre movement in Canada, but they too focus primarily on the work of the Vancouver PAC at the expense of the CCF drama clubs.

The near-absence of CCF playgroups from the critical and historical literature of the field is not surprising, however, given what seems like a truly scarce and sporadic surviving archive. References to other playgroups in national CCF promotional material would seem to suggest that this was not solely a BC phenomenon, yet the CCF clubs have received far less attention than the Progressive Arts Clubs and Canada's Little Theatres. This may be due in part to the geographical bias toward Eastern Canadian work in Canadian theatre scholarship, but is also likely a result of the ephemerality of the workers' theatre archive and repertoire. The plays and ephemera preserved in the Turner Fonds seem at this time to be the only

²² According to Alan Filewod, Luscombe participated in a CCF drama troupe in East York as a teenager and attended a CCF theatre school in 1946 (Filewod 168).

surviving documentation of CCF drama in British Columbia. To uncover evidence of similar theatrical activities in other provinces will doubtless require the discovery of a cache of work in the papers of another CCF activist who, like Turner, chose to preserve their writing, and was also supported by an institution or repository that agreed such materials were worth preservation. An investigation into the Toby Gordon Ryan archives at Guelph or the Canadian theatre and performing arts special collections in Toronto may reveal more histories, but that remains an area for future research.

Dramatics as a tool for education, engagement and outreach in the CCF in British Columbia arrives somewhat late in the game compared to what was seen in the CPC and PAC. Arthur Turner expressed an interest in using theatre toward this end as early as December 1929 in his letters to Tom Thomas of the British WTM, but the bulk of the material and ephemera in the Turner Fonds suggests that CCF dramatics did not amount to much until 1935/36, about the same time as the PAC's tremendous success with *Waiting for Lefty*. It is certainly plausible that Turner's early interest in workers' theatre, though keen, was not shared until the broader workers' theatre movement had become more established in Eastern Canada, the US and finally in Vancouver where Turner and his CCF comrades could see first-hand the success of the Vancouver PAC's production of *Lefty*. In this way, the PAC appears to have established a model, based on and informed by similar work being conducted in the US, Britain, Russia and Germany that the CCF also chose to explore, suggesting that, though a later arrival, the CCF was still very much a part of the global workers' theatre movement of the 1930's.

Within the CCF in British Columbia, and likely other provinces, novice writers joined the progressive cause and penned short agitprop one-acts, many examples of which are found

in the Turner Fonds at UBC Rare Books and Special Collections. As an indication of the popularity and quantity of playgroups that emerged from the CCF in the aftermath of the PAC's production of *Lefty*, we can refer to a playbill from September 11, 1936. The CCF hosted a drama festival for its various clubs' drama groups to further foster workers' theatre performances, further the educational objectives of the movement and mobilize its membership. Turner recalls about ten play-reading groups in the Lower Mainland by the mid-1930's (Arthur J. Turner "Trade Unionism"). Like the remainder of the work done by the PACs in Canada, the CCF clubs produced original and scripted work relying on established playwrights like Upton Sinclair as well as published plays from other workers' theatre groups that advertised in *Workers' Theatre* magazine or shared material through mail. The majority of the scripts found in the Turner Fonds, however, appear to be original plays written by CCF members.

This celebration of amateurism is echoed in a letter to Arthur J. Turner from the English workers' theatre movement's Hackney Group. The author, presumably the Hackney group's producer and National Organizer of the workers' theatre movement, H.B. "Tom" Thomas, appears to be responding to questions originally posed by Turner in a previous letter sometime in mid- to late- 1929.²³

1. We had no professional assistance in starting in Hackney and I am of the opinion that professional assistance should be welcomed but accepted very cautiously, as the

²³ While the signature at the end of the letter is hard to make out, it appears to read HB Thomas, and earlier references in the letter identify its writer as the Producer of the Hackney Group and "National Organizer of the WTM." The timing of the letter as well as the references to the writer's roles in the workers' theatre movement would seem to confirm this suspicion. Thomas played a vital role in the WTM in England, attended the German Workers' Theatre League, the Olympiad of the Theatres and Arts of the Peoples of the USSR and the first congress of the Workers' Dramatic Union, eventually serving on its praesidium (Stevenson). That Turner, a newcomer to the world of workers' theatre and an Englishman, would write to Thomas as the national organizer of the WTM is not hard to fathom.

high standards they are accustomed to makes most pros (sic) very impatient with the shortcomings of amateurs. Keeness, imagination and a working-class outlook are much more important.....

2. Our main difficulty was undoubtedly plays. We found on examination that there were quite literally NO proletarian plays to perform, and throughout the whole of our existence we have laid stress on the fact that the workers have got to write their own plays, and particularly W.T.M.ers. (Williams)

Conclusion

The international spread of the Workers' Theatre Movement was truly impressive in a period with limited communication technologies by today's standards. What began as a deliberate national project of the Soviet Union spread throughout Europe and North America and in each location benefitted from the addition of local techniques, cultural influences and tastes, and the talents of individual theatre enthusiasts. The sharing of ideas and dramatic material through correspondence and printed scripts in periodicals like the *Canadian Masses*, *American Workers' Theatre*, Soviet publications of the International Workers Dramatic Union and British *Red Stage* to name a few, meant that material flowed across state and provincial lines and occasionally international boundaries.

The work of Leftist theatre artists in Vancouver was one niche of the much larger movement and benefitted greatly from the experimentation and earlier efforts of activist artists working in many languages and different environments, but the intention behind the work remained the same: to educate, inspire and activate audiences to strive toward a better future for the common worker.

CHAPTER THREE: Arthur J. Turner and the South Hill CCF Club

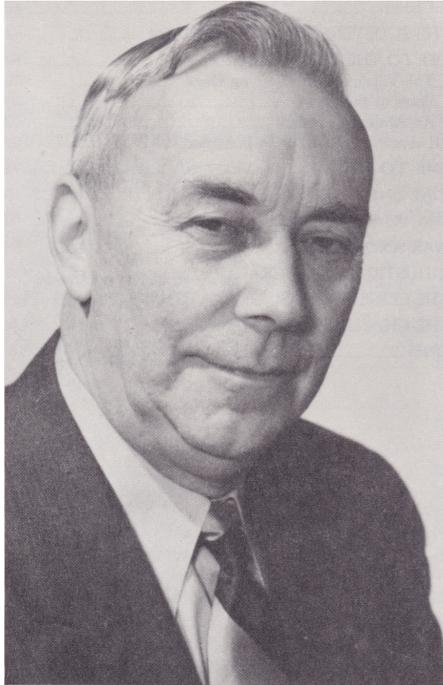


Figure 1: Arthur James Turner

Introduction

The following chapters explore three of British Columbia's Cooperative Commonwealth Federation playwrights and their respective CCF clubs. A background history and description of the activities of each of the clubs is provided where possible along with biographical information about each playwright and their connection to workers' theatre in Vancouver, BC. Without the interest in drama expressed by Arthur Turner, Denny Kristiansen and Hubert Evans, workers' theatre might never have become a part of their CCF groups. Under their leadership, dramatics became part of life in the BC CCF and aided the social and educational mission of the political party in its early years. Drama was a tool that helped spread the message of social democracy while building a sense of camaraderie and

belonging among those who produced plays for the CCF and those who watched them at party functions, socials and educational.

These plays serve as examples of the ways in which the CCF sought to try new techniques for mobilizing its membership, much as the Communist Party did in the same period, and articulate a clear sense of class-consciousness and a desire to see Canada become a more just society under the leadership of its newly formed party. An exploration of the work of the dramatic groups of the CCF adds to our understanding of working-class culture in Canada in the Great Depression and suggests that the tradition of amateur theatre performance of agitprop and social dramas extended beyond the purview of the Communist Party's propaganda machine to include the CCF. Evidence of this work occurring in at least five CCF clubs in British Columbia suggests that this was not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a larger impulse motivating a decentralized movement in Canada. Further research is needed to understand the full extent of CCF drama across Canada, but the following chapters offer the first detailed description of several CCF dramas, their role within their respective clubs and the lives of the men who wrote them.

The first playwright, Arthur J. Turner, provides the point of entry for the rest of the work by CCF playwrights, as it is his personal papers, archived at the University of British Columbia, that have preserved this material for posterity. Turner was an early activist with the CCF and several other permutations of BC's leftist political parties in the 1920's and 1930's, and went on to represent East Vancouver in the provincial legislature. His work and the work of the South Hill CCF Club, of which he was President for a time, make up the bulk of the dramatic material and contextual archival ephemera in the Turner Fonds and provide context for the rest of the materials covered in this research.

This chapter is an exploration of three plays associated with Turner and the South Hill CCF club: *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*, *Boys of the Old Brigade* and *A Story of the Simia, or the Monkey Rebels*. These plays reveal stylistically different structures, are directed toward different audiences and go about discussing the basic tenets of Socialism in different ways. Together, they show a willingness to experiment with theatrical form and content to best convey each story and educational message. They bear striking similarities to work created outside of Canada and link the Vancouver CCF with the global workers' theatre movement, particularly that of Britain and the United States.

Arthur J. Turner

In many ways Arthur J. Turner exemplifies the dedicated working class people who created workers' theatre dramas in British Columbia in the Thirties. Born in Norwich, England on September 12, 1888, Arthur Turner was the middle child of six. His father, a coachman, died when Turner was four years old, forcing the family out of the coach house in which they lived into a smaller home where they were supported by his mother's income as a dressmaker (Arthur J. Turner "Trade Unionism" 2). To help support the family, Turner left school and joined the workforce.

I left school when I was 12 1/2 years old, and I was working before I left school, evenings and Saturdays, as an errand boy, and leaving at 12, then I got permanent jobs. My first job was as a telegraph boy...this was in one of the suburbs of London, Erith ... and I was a page boy to a doctor, and I worked at a draper's shop and all incidental work as a youngster. (2)²⁴

²⁴ The text from these interviews comes from a transcript made available to me by the Provincial Archives. I have rationalized the punctuation and other stylistic elements of the text in this transcript for improved readability, but the content remains unaltered.

Another incident in early childhood made its mark on Turner and set him on a path that would eventually lead him to a life of political activism in the CCF. Clearly, his early experiences with wealth inequality shaped his world view as well as his ideas about engaging young people in political thought. The motivations behind Turner's children's play *A Story of the Simia*, which is basically a primer on Socialism, are even clearer when viewed with this memory in mind.

...when I was about 9 years old, I was playing with a kiddie... about my own age, and I don't know how the question or the conversation arose, but ... a remark he made to me just stuck, and I remember it right to this day, and that is, he said: "why should there be rich and poor?", and that clicked as far as I was concerned... because at that particular time, too, this was at that early age, my heroes were not kings and queens and generals and admirals, they were the rebels in English history, rebels like Herod (sic) the Wake, William Tell, that's not in English history, but, Dick Turpin, who refused to pay the tolls, and he'd jump over the toll-gates, and Wat Tyler in the fourteenth century in Kent... They were my heroes, and so... with that, and this remark by the kiddie, "why should there be rich and poor?," in my opinion, started my mind in a rebellious, revolutionary, socialist direction. To me, that's very important, and I attach those facts to the establishment of Socialist Sunday Schools, which appeared later in Canada where people were prompted by the same idea, that if you plant a seed in a child's mind, at a very young age when they are impressionable, that's an important thing in their life, and they set a pattern in their life, as it set a pattern in mine. (3)

Turner apprenticed as a coppersmith and became active in London's Social

Democratic Party after a lengthy “search for something...to which I could attach myself, and an organization to which I could join” (3). His early education in Socialist thought was rooted in his weekly sojourns to the public library where he would read the Socialist and Labour papers: “...they were all there, or most of them were there, and you could read them ... you couldn't take them out, but you could read 'em, and I used to go and eagerly gobble them up ...” (6).

His family did not share Turner’s new political fervour, however. Turner described his feelings of distance from his family because of his status as “rebel” and his rejection of the traditional conservative religious English values held by his mother and siblings:

...my change of accepting Socialist ideas, and overthrowing the supernatural religious ideas... they caused an upset in my family because I was the only one in the family that turned rebel. None of the others had switched, they just carried on ordinarily without any particular thinking or reading. It disturbed [my family], but they got over it. You see, I was a rebel in the family. It's like somebody going wrong in a family... there's a family pattern set, particularly in those days, and if somebody goes wrong and become a rebel, well then he's regarded as a somebody who's undesirable in the family... ‘somebody went wrong in my family’ is equivalent nowadays as somebody taking drugs or committing a lot of crimes... (10)

Unswayed by his family’s disapproval or his lack of funds, Turner continued his involvement with the Democratic Socialists in London. At the age of about 23, he ran for office in Acton, London, the first of many campaigns in which Turner would end up taking part over the rest of his life.

I must confess, that we had a limited choice of candidates, and as long as we were enthusiastic enough, and we had the time, well, then, that was it -- we got into the swim and had a fine time. Mind you, we were on our own. Our only meetings were street-corner meetings. We didn't have the money to hire a hall, and we'd pitch up our platform. We'd carry these portable pulpits around and we'd stick them up at the corner of a street, and we'd start talking, and people would gather around and all that sort of thing... and the only other activity was the distribution of leaflets from door to door, that is our election manifestos, from door to door... the first part was a philosophical statement on the Socialist position, the objects and principles of the party were based upon... 'the social ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange'... We made no bones about it. And then, from there, we give out a program of what we thought could be done, and what we thought should be done, at the local level. (10-11)

This keen political involvement and willingness to run a campaign from a portable street corner pulpit was an early experience that made Turner's transition to Canadian electoral politics and his use of agitprop seem like an easy and natural progression. Turner showed an early inclination toward self-education, party ideology, political performance and public speaking that served him well in later years.

He traveled to Victoria, BC by train in 1913, shortly after marrying his first wife, Ida Emily White, in Quebec (Church). While in Victoria, Turner worked as a metalworker. When asked what took him to Canada, Turner answered that it was the lure of opportunity that made him move across the Atlantic.

Well, a friend of mine left who I was living with, and working with. [He] came to Canada with his family, and he wrote and told me and another chum that there were chances here, in Canada, to get a better living, and chances here to make a change in your life, and did I want to come out? ... and I came out, anyway, and I worked at my trade ... by that time I was a journeyman, and I worked at my trade out here, but ... soon after I got here, things went to pieces. This was 1913 and there was a Depression in Victoria and everywhere else in Canada and that was when the war broke out, in 1914, and I couldn't stay on the job I'd had, and I had to move around, and I got into the ship-building and shipyards and metal trades, and I carried on there until that war was over. (Arthur J. Turner "Trade Unionism" 13)

The couple then moved to Vancouver in the mid 1920's. Turner later described his reasons for moving from Victoria to Vancouver.

When the war ended, there were thousands laid off in Victoria in the shipyards. There was 3,000 in one week, laid off, and then I realized there was nothing in Victoria for me, and so I came to Vancouver, and I didn't know a soul in Vancouver, but I decided ... and I tried to get a job in Vancouver, I couldn't... things hadn't been settled down, and they were loaded with unemployed, and so I hunted around - I couldn't get a job - so I hunted around and I started up a repair shop of my own ... A one man repair shop of my own ... so that I could earn a living, and it took me quite a while. It took me about 3 months before I could get really going, but I survived through it, and I made a comfortable little business for myself and a few employees. (21)

All the while, Turner remained an active member of the Socialist party in the early Thirties and an avid trade unionist. He served as chair of the BC Independent Labour Party in

1930, then as interim president of the Socialist Party (British Columbia) just prior to their merger with the CCF in 1933. Turner welcomed the changing attitudes of Canadian labour in the 1920's and 30's and its shift toward direct political action, of the kind he had grown accustomed to in London.

It was only after ... the end of the war, when the unions began to realize that they couldn't achieve their ends by continuing campaigning for trade-unionism only, and they had to associate themselves with political action. After over 100 years of struggling with petitioning, praying, and demanding of governments, that certain laws be changed ... It was only after that long period that they decided, maybe reluctantly, but they decided that they had to give some attention - more attention to - direct political action, rather than just petitioning and praying to governments, that something be done. (17)

This union between organized labour and political organizations led to the creation of the CCF and even more formally to the creation of the NDP through the CCF's merger with the Canadian Labour Congress in 1961. Turner remained an active Social Democrat for most of the remainder of his life. He was elected a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) of British Columbia, representing East Vancouver, in the election of 1941, and continued to serve in this capacity as an MLA, Party Whip and Deputy House leader until 1966 when he retired from active political life at the age of 78. Turner died in Vancouver on December 13, 1983 (Arthur J. Turner *Somewhere*; D. d. J. Webster).

As an active member of the South Hill CCF Club, Turner expressed an early interest in the use of drama as a tool of propaganda as seen in his letters to Tom Thomas in 1929 (T. Thomas; H. B. Thomas) and as summarized in his memoir, *Somewhere A Perfect Place*.

While the rest of the documentation in the Turner Fonds regarding CCF drama suggests that performances were taking place in the mid-Thirties, Turner was contemplating its use within the progressive movement while he was a member of the Independent Labour Party and Socialist Party of Canada, at least three years before the CCF was even formed. Drama, for Turner, was one of many tools useful for converting and cultivating new Democratic Socialists:

...the Democratic Socialists believe in political democratic action, that you have to get people to vote socialist. You can't convince the masses...force it on them. You can try to push them, or persuade them, and lead them and all that sort of thing, but you can't force them. And it's a matter of conversion... (Arthur J. Turner "Trade Unionism" 38)

In articulating club membership as a conversion of people's thinking, Turner hit on an important concept in the way the CCF functioned differently than most previous parties. CCF clubs were largely self-founded and self-directed, especially in the early days, and different clubs took on different characters depending upon the interests and passions of the respective membership. Turner described the formation of CCF clubs as follows:

Well, [CCF members] just were enamored with the Regina Manifesto and they says ... "Hell, here, we want to get in on this... that's all"... and they just formed a club and they formed ... they gave it president, secretary, treasurer and all the rest of it, and members, and set their own fees, and ... there was very little organization that coordinated their efforts, because it all happened so quickly ... some active soul would contact people that they knew, and they might advertise in the local paper... (42-43)

CCF membership offered a range of activities geared towards engaging new members and giving them as many reasons to stay as possible. Aside from political and educational lectures, debates and guest speakers, CCF clubs were associated with a veritable smorgasbord of extracurricular options that indoctrinated CCF members into party life and perpetuated a growing progressive culture. Turner recalled some of these options that were available for members in the Vancouver area.

...during the early days of the CCF ... we had a number of very interesting activities. We had an adult football team ... soccer ... not the Canadian Football. We had a football team for little boys ... young boys - Juniors. We had a gymnastic group ... oh, we put on physical ed for youngsters. We had several play groups. We had about 10 play-reading groups, we had a brass band, and we put on, in the Exhibition Park, a full day of AAA sports ... official Amateur Athletic Union Sports ... AAU. And we filled the Exhibition Park with that sports day with all the records ... put down ... official records and all that sort of thing... And we were a live organization at that time. And our band ... our brass band ... they put on free concerts down at the old Pantages Theatre, Sunday nights for several months and the condition they made with the manager of the theatre ... was that we would give the manager the collection ... and the players got nothing. A lot of them were out of work ... we gathered up these instruments, and it was a pretty good band for the time ... but when they got jobs ... they all went in different directions ... they'd play at election meetings, and it would play at picnics...

Turner believed the band also helped lure potential new CCF members who wanted to listen its music:

That's right. Just like people when they see that ... hear the Salvation Army Band on the street ... and they're not Christian at all, but they like to hear a bit of music ... and they're going to stand and watch it. (46-48)

Where CCF drama was concerned, Turner was just the “active soul” needed to start exploring agitprop at South Hill. His deep personal interest in the functional potential of drama as a simultaneously social, educational and useful tool for conversion was likely a reason for the extent of the dramatic activity at the South Hill Club and may have inspired other clubs, like the Roberts Creek Club associated with the work of Hubert Evans, and the Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement associated with Denny Kristiansen, that are the subjects of subsequent chapters of this research.

Learning about the Agitprop and Blue Blouse drama groups in Russia and Germany during the revolutionary upheavals, some of which performed outside factory gates, I thought, while in the South Hill Club, it would be helpful to our movement if we could also weave into our propaganda that kind of activity which would make a break from speeches, or be complementary to them. Determined to make a try, I laid out a program that a day would not pass unless something was done toward that end. To my happy surprise, in a few weeks we had a small group willing and anxious to get going. (Arthur J. Turner *Somewhere* 58)

The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists and The Great Money Trick

Seeking script material for his newly formed drama group, Turner wrote several letters to people he hoped would be helpful, or at least sympathetic, including famous Leftist American novelist Upton Sinclair, English Workers' Theatre Movement organizer Tom Thomas of the Hackney Group in London, and contacts in the Soviet Union.

...And then we were faced with what do we do for material? Where can we find short one-act plays ... that don't require a lot of properties ... a lot of frills, and backdrops and all that sort of thing ... and so ... I wrote letters to Russia, I got an address in Moscow ... and I wrote letters to the United States, where they had one or two tries at it, and I wrote letters to England, where they had a workers theatre movement, and ... while I got replies back ... and they sent me some material, but for some reasons, I ... we couldn't adapt it somehow, to what we wanted here.

We wanted simple groups ... and easy to do, without having to have professionals on the stage, and all that sort of thing. And I also wrote to Upton Sinclair, and he wrote back, and I told him what we wanted ... and I asked him his permission to use his material, and he said: 'You're quite welcome to it', and he sent me some copies of some of his plays, and we used some of it ... we couldn't use it all, because it was too elaborate, but anyway, we got together, a few of us and we re-wrote some of the stuff, and we wrote some of our own, and that's how we got started. And ... every one of our plays you'd have to have the Socialist objective, the Socialist moral, which we were criticized by some people ... 'Why'd you have to do that ... why don't you just have plays?' Hell, I says, 'we're not going to use our time up just having plays for fun...' I'd want to leave a lesson, when they've listened to the play ... they've come away with a thought that might sink in. And that was our objective. (48-50)

The Turner Fonds at the University of British Columbia reveals some of this correspondence, including a copy of Sinclair's play *The Second Storey Man*, lists of plays from the New Theatre League and Brookwood Labor College in New York that were available for purchase, and one report from the International Workers Dramatic Union

(IWDU) in Moscow. The extent to which Turner availed himself of these lists to acquire material for the South Hill Club is unknown, as is the extent of his alliance with the IWDU, but at least one copy of a play from the Labour College in Mena, Arkansas, *Oscar Sapp* by Harold Coy, is preserved among Turner's papers, suggesting the possibility that Turner reached out to American workers' theatre groups for script material and participated in the exchange of dramatic materials that allowed workers' theatre to spread internationally. Fellow Englishman Tom Thomas also seems to have been particularly helpful as Turner contemplated starting a drama group, and the Fonds contains two illuminating letters about starting a workers' theatre group and the process of adapting Robert Tressell's novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* into a play (T. Thomas; H. B. Thomas). Through his connections with the United States, Britain and Russia, Turner can conclusively be linked to the international workers' theatre movement.

The impression one gets combing through these letters, scripts and ephemera is that Turner was keenly interested in organizing such work, but had little practical theatrical know-how, not surprising for a man who was a trained coppersmith. In his memoir, *Somewhere: A Perfect Place*, Turner seems to confirm this assessment: "...out of all our tries we found it difficult to adapt any [of the plays] for our use. Not being easily discouraged it was agreed we should try to write our own. Nobody could say we were not ambitious" (Arthur J. Turner *Somewhere* 58). As is the nature of archival research, piecing together the production history of the various scripts found in the Turner Fonds is like piecing together a puzzle when one does not know what the final image is to be, but a few pieces of information

about Turner's adaptation of Tressell's novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* into the short play *The Great Money Trick* begin to suggest the larger picture.²⁵

Tressell's novel, published posthumously in 1914, was intended to "...describe the relations existing between the workmen and their employers, the attitude and feelings of these two classes towards each other; their circumstances when at work and when out of employment; their pleasures, their intellectual outlook, their religious and political opinions and ideals..." according to Tressell's introduction (Robert Tressell 7). The novel paints a picture of life in the south of England for workers in the building trades. To cover the whole of working life from cradle to grave, Tressell includes a host of characters from children and women to "worn-out old men" and covers a span of twelve months over fifty-four chapters. The novel was, and remains, immensely popular with working-class audiences all over the world as evidenced by the numerous printings in the last hundred years, here laid out by Tressell's biographer, Dave Harker:

In the century since 1914, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* has had 117 printings in the UK, plus one braille version, 15 printings in Canada, Australia, the USA and Russia, and translated printings in Russian (3), German (6), Dutch (2), Polish (2), Slovak (1), Czech (1), Bulgarian (reportedly) (1), Japanese (1), Persian (1), Chinese (2), Korean (1), Turkish (1) and Spanish (1), plus several often inaccurate and overpriced print-on-demand versions in English, and various plays, radio programmes, TV films, tapes and CDs... Generations of workers have taken the book to their hearts and it is one of the most frequently loaned books of all time. (Harker)

²⁵ Turner asked Thomas for a copy of his script of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*, but Thomas' response suggests he was out of copies at the time of writing. It is unclear if a copy was ever sent. The version of the *Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* clearly lists the South Hill CCF as the author, leading me to believe this was a new adaptation of the novel.

The working class popularity of the novel in Britain, Canada and elsewhere made it a logical choice for source material for the CCF club, whose members would likely have been familiar with the original.

Robert Tressell was actually the pen name of an Irish-born house painter who eventually made his life in England and chose the surname Tressell as a cheeky working class-conscious nod to the trestle table he and other labourers would have used while at work (Wilson 37). The novel incorporates autobiographical elements to create a scathing critique of class disparity between workers and employers and argues that the workers are also complicit in their own wage slavery by not standing up to their bosses' unreasonable demands. Initial published versions were much abridged and a great deal of Tressell's Socialist message was cut. The unabridged version was not published until 1955, so the South Hill CCF would have based their dramatic adaptation on one of the earlier, less dogmatic, though still distinctly Socialist versions (Harker).

"The Great Money Trick" is one chapter of the novel, but arguably the section that best incorporates Marxist theory with Tressell's experiences of trying to convince his fellow workers of the need to see the world differently. Like the other plays in the Turner Fonds, notably *Boys of the Old Brigade* and *A Story of the Simia* from Turner's South Hill Club and *Big Business* by Denny Kristiansen of the CCYM, the bulk of the material is a primer on the basic ideas of the Left; in this case, Marx's Surplus Value or the profit that is a return on invested capital. With amusing dialogue, instructive subject matter and the popularity of the original text, Turner and his team had chosen source material that would greatly ease the process of adaptation from novel to workers' drama. The dialogue-heavy novel (see Table

1.0) also made adaptation a somewhat simpler process than it might have been had Turner and his colleagues been required to write dialogue from scratch.

The December 1929 letter to Arthur Turner from Tom Thomas contains the first mention of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and appears to be a response to a request for assistance from Turner.

My adaptation of “THE RAGGED TROUSERED PHILANTHROPISTS” I am out of at the moment, but will send it on if you would like to have it. You are apparently referring to the novel in your letter when you ask for information as to what parts we perform. I have selected what I consider the best (or actually a small part of the best) and worked it into pplay (sic) form. Our group alone has performed it about 30 times.

It lasts about 2 ½ hours. (T. Thomas)

The source material and character work are compelling and it is easy to grasp why this novel was of such interest to writers for the workers’ theatre. Early adaptations of the text were created by the Hackney Group in London under Tom Thomas’ leadership and Turner’s workers’ theatre group in Vancouver. At least one other version is noted as available for purchase on a list found in the Turner Fonds from the Socialist Party of America in Chicago, describing it as a “Play in six scenes. 15 characters,” for sale for one dollar (America).

Incidentally, interest in the novel was rekindled in the late 1960s, and since then several stage adaptations, radio plays and movies based on the novel have been produced in the U.K. Notable adaptations include a version in a BBC television drama anthology series called Theatre 625 that was broadcast on BBC2 in 1964, a Joint Stock Theatre Company production in 1978, a production in 1984 by the prolific Scottish agitprop theatre group 7:84, six hour-long episodes broadcast by BBC Radio 4 in 1989, an adaptation commissioned by

the Public and Commercial Services Union in 2008, another radio play version for BBC Radio 4 in 2009, and another adaptation co-produced by Liverpool Everyman and the Minerva Theatre in 2010 (Brenton; R. Tressell; Lowe; Morahan). In its own right, the CCF version shows the efforts made by CCF activists in broadening their own education about labour and the politics of the Left through extensive reading groups and networks of CCF speaking tours. From the perspective of an organization seeking to educate, entertain and indoctrinate, using one of the most widely read proletarian texts as source material was a logical choice as some of the audience would have been familiar with the material, but bringing it to life and visually presenting Owens' lecture on Socialism would have increased the effectiveness of the agitprop. If, as I am led to believe, Turner was the primary source of energy in getting the South Hill CCF club's drama group off the ground, the bulk of the dialogue falling on the shoulders of Owens (who was played by Turner) would no doubt have made the prospect of appearing in a play far less intimidating for new actors who might thus have been more inclined to get involved in this and subsequent productions.

Uncovering a previously unknown adaptation of the novel, Turner's *The Great Money Trick*, also adds to the arguments about the significance of Tressell's work as a classic of proletarian literature and furthers our understanding of the international reach and significance of the novel. It is one more way in which the CCF workers' theatre can be seen to have been connected to the vast web of international workers' theatres.

With fifty-four chapters to choose from, it is easy to see why Turner would seek advice from a prominent workers' theatre playwright and organizer like Thomas on adapting the book for the stage. The portion adapted by Turner and his fellows at the South Hill CCF club was chapter twenty-one, "The Reign of Terror: The Great Money Trick," the same

chapter Thomas had adapted with the Hackney Group. Within this chapter, a group of men working on finishing the construction of a home discuss the basics of the capitalist system and the ways in which it is constructed to exploit the worker.

Frank Owen (aka Owens), the Socialist who tries to get his fellow workers to see the truth of their exploitation, delivers the majority of the dialogue in a lengthy lunchtime speech.²⁶ The message is concise and clear, and makes a logical argument for why workers must control the means of production and unite against the oppressive upper class. Using pieces of leftover bread from the workers' lunches, Owens demonstrates how wealth remains concentrated in the hands of the capitalist class at the expense of the workers.

Owens: I am a capitalist; or rather, I represent the capitalist class, that is to say, all these raw materials belong to me²⁷ It does not matter for our present argument how I obtained possession of them; the only thing that counts is the admitted fact that all the raw materials which are necessary for the production of the necessities of life are now the property of the capitalist class. I am that class, all these raw materials belong to me ... now you three represent the working class, you have nothing, and, for my part, although I have all these raw materials, they are of no use to me; what I need is the things that can be made out of the raw material by work, but as I am to (sic) lazy to work myself I use the money trick to make you work for me. But first I must explain that I possess something else besides the raw materials. These three knives represent the machinery of production: the factories, tools, railways, and so forth, without

²⁶ The character's name in Tressell's novel is Frank Owen, but Turner uses "Owen" and "Owens" interchangeably in his script, especially in the scripted dialogue. Turner's chosen spelling of the name is used whenever his material is cited. However, as he predominantly calls the character "Owens", I will use this spelling in my discussion of the character.

²⁷ He is referring to the bread.

which the necessaries of life cannot be produced in abundance. And these three coins, (taking three cents from his pocket and tossing on the table) represent my money capital...

(Owens now cuts up one of the slices of bread into a number of blocks of small size)

OWENS: ...These represent the things which are produced by labor, aided by machinery, from the raw materials. We will suppose that three of these blocks represent a week's work. We will assume that a week's work is worth \$20. And will suppose that each of these cents is \$20. We'd be able to do the trick better if we had the \$20 gold pieces, but I forgot to bring them with me. (S. H. CCF "The Great Money Trick" 1-2)

This last line is an opportunity for a moment of humour when Owens draws attention to his status as a member of the working class by highlighting the absurdity of his having \$20 gold pieces lying about at home. This is echoed by Philpot who responds, "I'd have lent you some, but I forgot and left my purse on the grand piano" (S. H. CCF "The Great Money Trick").

The plays continues:

Owens: (particularly addressing Philpot, Harlow and Easton)

You say that you are in need of employment, and, as I am the kindhearted capitalist class, I am going to invest all my money in various industries so as to give you plenty of work. I should pay each of you \$20 per week; you must each produce three of these blocks to represent a week's work. For doing this work you each receive your wages; the money will be your own to do as you like with, and the things you produce

will of course be mine, to do as I like with. You will each take one of these machines, and as soon as you have done a weeks work, you shall have your money.

(Philpot, Harlow and Easton start work and Owens sits down lazily to watch them, and when finished pass up the nine blocks to Owen who pays them a coin apiece) (S. H. CCF "The Great Money Trick" 3)

This is another moment when comical physicalization could add humour to the performance as the actors could portray over-the-top versions of lazy capitalist and industrious workers depending on the direction of the play, in much the same way the Soviet Blue Blouses might have made caricatures of the classes. One can imagine Owens miming smoking a cigar or checking a pocket watch perhaps while his colleagues appear to be diligently working on slicing their lunch leftovers.

Owens: These blocks represent the necessities of life, you can't live without some of these things, but, as they belong to me, you will have to buy them from me. My price for these is \$20 each

Easton: Well we've got to eat, here goes.

(Buys from Owens, followed by Philpot and Harlow, all these consume their purchase, Owens consumes two blocks)

(Slyme and Bert have meanwhile put a box each side of Owens and stand on them)

Bert: (to Owens) What are you going to do with the money, you've got all that and the grub to (sic).

Owens: The money will be used to pay more wages with; and the commodities, some I will send away to foreign countries and the others will go to the warehouse to be used some other time.

Slyme: (piously) Ithonk (sic) you are a cheat.

Harlow: (turning to Philpot and Easton) I don't quite get this 'ere stunt, let's go to work again. (S. H. CCF "The Great Money Trick" 4)

The process begins again with the workers diligently going back to work to produce goods for Owens the Capitalist. The workers are fleeced once again and then Owens suddenly takes the "machinery" away from his workers.

Owens: My good mon', my stock of surplus goods has reached a point where something will have to be done, you having produced so well and so quickly that we will have to close the factory until they are sold or sent away. Call round in a month's time, perhaps there will be something doing then.

Philpot: What the 'ell are we going to do?

Easton: What about the necessaries of life? We must have something to eat.

Owens: Of course you must, and I shall be very pleased to sell you some.

Easton: But we ain't got no blinkin' money.

Owens: Well, you can't expect me to give you my goods for nothing. You didn't work for me for nothing, you know. I paid you for your work and you should have saved something for a rainy day. Look how much I have got by being thrifty. (S. H. CCF "The Great Money Trick" 4)

The workers huddle to discuss this new development in their workplace situation and decide to appeal to Owens' conscience, referencing their "wife and kiddies at home." Slyme challenges Owens' Christianity and status as a gentleman, but Owens is not moved.

Owens: (with emphasis) I represent the business world. I kept them as long as I could. What more can I do? You surely don't expect me to keep them without working, do you?" (S. H. CCF "The Great Money Trick" 4)

No doubt echoing the sentiments of the many out-of-work members of the CCF club, Philpot, Easton and Harlow respond together, "Let us work then, we're willing." When this fails to move their "employer", Philpot and the others threaten to steal the necessities of life from the well-supplied Owens.

Philpot: Look 'ere govnor, we can see yer robbin' us and we're goin' to take what we wants, and you nor all yer tribe ain't goin' to stop us.

(All three make a movement for the heap of bread.)

Owens invokes the right of the Capitalist class to use the police to protect his gains and threatens police and military intervention, an all too familiar tactic to BC's unemployed and/or striking workers.

Owens: (raising hand) "Stop! If you attempt to take these things do you know you'll be guilty of stealing? I will call on the law to protect my property and— (S. H. CCF "The Great Money Trick" 5)

Owens is interrupted by a shrill whistle that breaks the building tension and startles Philpot who says, "Gawd! I thought it was a cop!" (5). This is another opportunity for the insertion of a bit of clowning or physical humour that would have entertained the audience. Bert reassures Philpot and confirms it was the warning whistle that lunch was coming to an end and not the police coming to get him for his seditious ideas. Owens continues his threats.

Owens: (continuing) And if the police are insufficient, well, I'll have the military shoot up a few of you. That will soon bring you to your senses.

Harlow: “Well I’m damned if that don’t take the bally cake factory”. (S. H. CCF "The Great Money Trick" 5)

Owens brings the lesson of the great money trick home by summarizing what he hoped his audience (the workers in the play and the workers watching it) have learned through his demonstration.

Owens: (coming in front of box) Look here mates, we’ve got to get back to work in a few minutes. Just listen to me. I tried the simplest way I knew to show you what kind of a rotten and robbing system we live in. The harder and faster we work, the sooner we are out of work; or, to put it in another way, the more food we produce the less we have to eat. Now, think about it a little more and you won’t be in such a hurry to condemn me, because I’m a socialist and what’s more when the bosses put up a man for you to vote for – well, you won’t have to be told what to do with ‘em.” (S. H. CCF "The Great Money Trick" 5)

An alternate hand-written side for Owens’ final speech, also included in the Turner Fonds, has a somewhat more active ending and suggests a way forward for Owens’ newly educated comrades, and those in the audience as well. It echoes the feeling of the ending of arguably the best known workers’ theatre play of the 1930’s, Clifford Odets’ *Waiting for Lefty*, which had played in Vancouver before large audiences the previous year when it was put on by the Progressive Arts Club. *Lefty* ends with a call to action by the actors that is met with shouts of “Strike!” by the audience, often with little or no cue from the cast. One could imagine a similar reaction by the CCF audience at the end of this version of *The Great Money Trick*. It is unknown which ending was preferred by Turner.

Owen (looks at his watch) He's ahead of time, -- listen to me fellows. – I have tried to demonstrate to you what a robbing system we live in. The harder and faster we work the sooner we are unemployed; or to put it another way, the more food we produce, the less we have to eat. Do a little more thinking about this and you won't be in such a hurry to condemn me for preaching Socialism; and more than that – join a workers organization so that you can help to overthrow this wonderful scheme of things that denies to the useful members of society – the fundamental right to live. In this world there is plenty for everybody – and if we organize we can get it! What do you say boys?

All: (except Grass) (Raising hands) “You bet we will, let's go!” (S. H. CCF "Alternate Ending")

The dialogue in this sample and in the rest of the script is expressive and simple and manages to convey a sense of the characters' socio-economic background as working class Cockney labourers. For an audience of CCF club members who likely would have been used to participating in conversations, rallies and study groups about Left politics, the values of the CCF and the need for stronger representation of the working class, the impulse behind Owens' speech, that is to say, the urge to rally one's fellow workers to stand up for themselves and unite against capitalist oppression, would probably have felt familiar. In presenting a familiar conversation in a lively new and entertaining way, Turner and the other dramatists brought a change of pace and change of approach to the greater educational and organizational project of the CCF. This tactic is part of what makes *Waiting for Lefty* so effective as well. In portraying the struggles of the common working man on the stage, *Lefty*

re-presents the idea of labour action as something dramatic and heroic whereby ‘yet another conversation’ about a strike becomes far more concrete, dramatic and inspirational.

Generally speaking, the adaptation mirrors Tressell’s dialogue exactly, albeit with a few slight adjustments in tone. Following is a comparison of a segment of both texts side by side (See Table 2). However, a few notable differences between Tressell’s novel and Turner’s adaptation for the South Hill CCF club stand out and exemplify the ways in which local workers’ theatre groups would adapt and change material to suit the immediate needs of their group and their local political situation.

Table 2: Comparison of the Original Novel and the CCF Adaptation of *The Great Money Trick*

South Hill CCF adaptation: <i>The Great Money Trick</i> (S. H. CCF "The Great Money Trick")	Robert Tressell’s novel: <i>The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist</i> (Robert Tressell)
Bundy: (Disgustedly) "Blasted rot, I call it, Wat the 'ell's the use of the likes of us troublein' our 'eds about politics?"	'Bloody rot, I call it,' chimed in the man on the pail. 'Wot the 'ell's the use of the likes of us troublin' our 'eads about politics?'
Harlow: (with deliberation) "Oh, I don't see that the workers are really the people that count if they ever wants to step in on the affairs of the country; so I reckon we ought to take some interest in it but at the same time, I can't see no sense in this here Socialist wrangle that Owens is always talking about."	'Oh, I don't see that.' replied Harlow. 'We've got votes and we're really the people what control the affairs of the country, so I reckon we ought to take SOME interest in it, but at the same time I can't see no sense in this 'ere Socialist wangle that Owen's always talkin' about.'

The CCF version inserts a line that the original novel does not contain about why the character Owen is late in arriving for lunch, which, depending on how it is played, could be a moment of light bawdy humour and also makes a comment about the insurmountable social barriers of class:

Grass: Suppose 'h thinks its (sic) the lady's boudoir, so 'e likes to dream and linger.

(S. H. CCF "The Great Money Trick")

The Turner Fonds contains several notes about the importance of humour. A letter from Tom Thomas to Turner says, "It is no use preaching to th (sic) the converted. The way to do it is to first of all hold their interest by the humorous or dramatic quality of your performance and gradually lead them to the only possible conclusion, which of course is the revolutionary conclusion" (T. Thomas). A note in Turner's unmistakable handwriting within the file containing *The Great Money Trick* and its related ephemera in the Turner Fonds reads, "As originally written not enough comedy" (A.J. Turner, underlined in the original), so it is conceivable this was one insertion of a comedic bit to lighten up the piece and capture the attention of the audience in an otherwise theory-laden performance. This note also strengthens my theory that physical comedy, clowning and possibly mime could have been used to enliven the performance. It is reasonable to assume that directorial and acting choices may have found other opportunities for humour, particularly in mocking the characters Crass, Hunter, Rushton and the "kind hearted capitalist" as out of touch, elitist stereotypical figures, as was often done by the Soviet Blue Blouses and the German-American Prolet Bühne.

Two themes that are prominent in the original text of the novel are downplayed significantly or omitted entirely in the dramatic adaptation by the CCF members: the infighting among members of the working class and the threat of foreign competition. Early

in the chapter “The Great Money Trick,” Tressell describes the harsh and sneaky tactics of the overseers Crass and Hunter and businessman Rushton, for example:

Each man knew that unless he did as much as ever he could, Crass would report him for being slow. They knew also that when the job began to draw to a close the number of men employed upon it would be reduced, and when that time came the hands who did the most work would be kept on and the slower ones discharged... They all cursed Crass, but most of them would have been very glad to change places with him: and if any one of them had been in his place they would have been compelled to act in the same way--or lose the job. (Robert Tressell)

However, none of this sort of material is found in the CCF adaptation of the work. On a purely practical level, and with the limited experience of the playwrights in mind, we might speculate that this material is not included simply because it is not written in dialogue form, but this explanation seems unlikely, as the addition of a narrator character is seen in other plays written and performed by this group during roughly the same period. Perhaps a more likely explanation is that, given the atmosphere of togetherness that was central to the cooperative movement in Canada along with the efforts by the Communist Party at the time to present a united front with the CCF and Socialists, it might have made sense to downplay the message of worker against fellow worker.²⁸

²⁸ Ultimately, the motivation for this “united front” is questioned at length by Turner in his memoirs as well as by other CCF historians who felt that the CP was simply trying to undermine the CCF and conquer and control them from within under the guise of “cooperation” (Turner 27-30). There were, however, members of the CCF who believed the CP to be earnest in their desire to band like-minded Leftist groups together against the common conservative enemy.

Tressell's novel also makes several mentions of foreign competition, highlighting it as an evil of the capitalist system, and the "kind-hearted capitalist" character uses this as an excuse not to help the workers.

'Of course,' continued the kind-hearted capitalist, 'if it were not for foreign competition I should be able to sell these things that you have made, and then I should be able to give you Plenty of Work again: but until I have sold them to somebody or other, or until I have used them myself, you will have to remain idle.'
(Robert Tressell)

In the context of the Great Depression, Canada in the 1930's faced challenges with international trade and joblessness similar to those in the United States and elsewhere. Canada's Depression, James argues, was rooted in the drop in the price of wheat, Canada's primary export, as well as pulp and paper and metal ores. International trade experienced a profound drop both because of protectionism geared at protecting domestic production (and producers) and the protectionist tariffs passed by trading partners like the US Smoot-Hawley Act that raised tariffs to record levels on over 20,000 imported goods (James 120-21). Canada responded in kind with Prime Minister R.B. Bennett's "Canada First" campaign that raised duty rates on textile products, agricultural and electrical tools, meats and a "substantial range of other American products" (James 121) in the hope of encouraging Canadians to buy locally made products, thereby supporting local manufacturers and thus Canadian employment. One of the psychological effects of protectionism in the Canadian context put forward by economist John Dales, that there may be a psychological imperative urging people to support domestic producers and production, may also have been at work (Dales). As a political and social manoeuvre in a time of economic crisis, it seems natural that a

nation might pull its focus inwards with the aim of supporting itself and eschewing ties to any foreign “others,” be they imported goods or indeed imported people, when domestic goods and labour feel threatened by international competition.

The late 1930’s saw renewed discriminatory rhetoric vilifying foreigners and blaming them for the lack of employment for Euro-Canadians. Gillian Creese observes that the intensely anti-Asian racism in the labour movement in British Columbia was rooted in a strategy of exclusion of non-whites from union organization, despite white organizers’ articulations of class-consciousness.

Racism was expressed both through dominant ideologies about the inferiority of non-Europeans and through discriminatory practices in the labour market, in the political system, and in most areas of daily life. Asians were not equal to whites in the province during the first half of this century, either in popular consciousness or in the social institutions of the society. Racial inequality was firmly linked to, and much acrimony rested upon, the role of Asians as cheap wage labourers in the economy. The push and pull of Asian immigration was tied to their status as wage labourers. (Creese 27-28)

Creese’s work goes on to explore why such policies of exclusion were generally common practice in Vancouver’s labour movement, summing up the primary reasons for exclusion as manifestations of social psychology rooted in prejudiced ideas of the racialized unassimilable other or, alternately, exclusion based on the assumption of a threat of economic competition.²⁹ The reality is likely some combination of the two and an acceptance of the

²⁹ For more on these complex and nuanced arguments, see also Ward, Phillips, Loosmore, McCormack, Warburton, Giddens, Roy, Schwantes, Wynne, Bercuson, Pentland, Hak and Isitt.

anti-Asian sentiments deeply rooted in BC history and normalized over generations.³⁰ The diversity and multiculturalism of Vancouver was embraced to a greater degree by the Communist Party than the Eurocentric CCF.

Canada had a long history of protectionism across various industries as part of its larger movement to maintain economic and cultural independence (especially from the United States) and protect domestic production, so this particular theme might have resonated well with the Canadian audience of the CCF's play. However, again, the Socialist message of worker unity and solidarity may have come into play. Vancouver had tremendous issues with Anglo-Canadian racism and discrimination, particularly against Asian immigrants and workers, though at times class unity was also advocated regardless of race as seen in the following excerpt from *The BC Federationist*, a Vancouver labour newspaper in 1919.

It is time that all workers in Canada realized that the 'Chink' is as much part of this country as the Scotchman [sic]; that the 'Bohunk' is as necessary as the Englishman; that all of us are exploited by a master-class who cares not what nationality we are so long as we remain willing slaves. (qtd. in Hak 61)

This was echoed in 1930 as the Depression ravaged the Canadian labour market in an anonymous opinion piece published in the *Creston Review* in the Canadian Rockies.

³⁰ Anti-Chinese sentiment in British Columbia, for instance, dates back to at least the late 1800s when Chinese immigrants came to work on the Canadian Pacific Railway. As Turner explains, by 1884, according to a federal report, the Chinese population in BC had reached 10,492, the majority of whom lived in Vancouver, Victoria and Nanaimo, and racist public outcry resulting from the belief that immigrants were responsible for the softening economy and rising unemployment led to the passage of federal legislation initiating a head tax specifically for Chinese immigrants in 1886 (Arthur J. Turner *Somewhere* 62). After decades of increasingly expensive head taxes failed to stop Chinese immigrants from moving to Canada, the Chinese Immigration Act was passed in 1923 forbidding additional Chinese people to move to Canada (with the exception of students, diplomats and those receiving special permission). This act was not repealed until 1947.

In Canada the opinion prevails in many quarters that our unemployment problem is largely due to an influx of immigrants, but such a cause cannot be advanced in the case of Great Britain, Germany, or even in the United States, with its rigidly restricted immigration quotas. Yet unemployment seems to be almost universal; in fact there is less in proportion to the population of Canada than in other countries... the problem is a huge and difficult one. Nobody yet has the solution. All must think and study, and that is the sole reason for this article- to encourage real study of the problem, instead of the present prevailing tendency to lay the blame on somebody else. ("Immigration and Unemployment")

Given the complex nature of public debate on the role of immigrants in society, Asian and otherwise, blaming the economic problems faced by characters within *The Great Money Trick* on foreign competition, and by extension, the problems faced by CCF members as well, could have brought this issue to the forefront, thus detracting from what I suspect was the primary goal of the one-act: elementary education about Socialism. The theme of in-fighting in the working class, whether local or international, waters down the central message highlighted by the play script: the structural problems associated with capitalism. If the main objective of performing this one-act was instruction in the basic tenets of Socialism, then keeping a clearly and easily digestible message at the forefront would have made pedagogical as well as theatrical sense. Turner and his drama group also limited the number of characters required in the play to nine from the dozens of characters in the original novel, again making it easier to produce and to move from venue to venue.

So far, the archives have only yielded evidence of two performances of *The Great Money Trick*, though Turner's memoir suggests it was performed twenty times and was very

successful. "With or without scenery or a curtain, in the open air or in a hall it went over in a big way. In spite of gloomy predictions of some of our Party speakers it was a distinct success. We played it twenty times. We had a few other tries, but none were as good" (Arthur J. Turner *Somewhere* 58-59).

In his 1973 interview with Marlene Karnouk as part of the BC Aural History Programme, Turner further described the performance circumstances and reception of *The Great Money Trick*.

...it made a beautiful 20 minute one-act show... and very popular. We played it in the park, in the open, and we played in on ... in rooms, and we played it at picnics, we played it in halls with and without a curtain. . . anywhere at all, because all we had was a little tiny box each to sit on, and a lunch box, and that's all we had, and our overalls. And it worked. We must have played it about 20 times. (Arthur J. Turner "Trade Unionism" 50-51)

A program tucked amidst copies of the play suggests it was performed on Friday, September 11th, 1936, as part of a CCF Drama Festival in the nearby city of New Westminster at the local Legion Hall. The plays in competition were *The Giant Killer* by the Kitsilano Beach C.C.F. Dramatic Group, *The Great Money Trick* by the South Hill C.C.F. Dramatic Group, *Citizen No. 3* by the Advance C.C.F. Dramatic Group and *Underground* by the Progressive Arts Club Play-reading Group.³¹ According to the program, Turner himself directed the play and took the lead role of Owen, the Socialist agitator ("C.C.F. Drama Festival Program"). The Turner Fonds contains acting sides with Owen's lines and cues

³¹ Kitsilano Beach is an area to the direct southwest of the downtown core of Vancouver while South Hill is an area in the southern part of Vancouver bordering Richmond.

written out by hand in Turner's distinctive cursive. Sadly though, there are no acting or performance notes to give a hint as to what the specific production might have looked like or how Turner interpreted his character.



Figure 2: Program from the CCF Drama Festival, Arthur J. Turner Fonds, University of British Columbia Rare Books and Special Collections

The other evidence of performance of *The Great Money Trick* that I have uncovered is a short article advertising a performance of the “I.L.P. Players at Maple Hall, Jan 31st,” most likely in 1931, from an unidentified newspaper (“C.C.F. Drama Festival Program”).³²

³² Given the moniker of the I.L.P. (Independent Labour Party) and the reference to the performance occurring on a Saturday later in the article, I am led to believe that this article would have appeared in 1931, just prior to the incorporation of the ILP with the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation the following year. Because of leap year, January 31st would not fall on a Saturday again until 1942, by which time Vancouver's workers' theatre movement had effectively ended. Furthermore, Turner's communication with Tom Thomas of the

This brief clipping outlines an evening of entertainment offered at the Maple Hall, which no longer exists, but was likely a community hall used for various club and community group gatherings in the area near where Turner lived and worked in South Hill, similar to a Legion or Odd Fellows Hall. Headlining that evening was the I.L.P. Players' performance of "Little Bits From Here and There." This was followed by a repeat performance of a "Court Scene," first staged in 1926 by "the Party." Turner is listed as a cast member in this performance as well as in a performance of *The Great Money Trick* that followed.

In "The Great Money Trick" the part of Owen (Ragged-Trousered Philanthropist) is ably taken by A.J. Turner, while the droll character of Bundy is more than admirably filled by Jack Dennis, ably assisted by W. Ford as Meek, H.W. Speed as Philpot, Jack Price as Foreman Crass, and Ed. Cullen taking the part of Sawkins. (Isaacs 40)

The rest of the evening included a series of soloists, including Turner's wife, and Paul Cado and his six-piece string orchestra with "Hawaiian strains and other popular airs," all for the cost of 35 cents for adults and 10 cents for children. The piecing together of many small performances by workers' theatre groups easily made for an entire evening's entertainment. However, these pieces were also able to stand on their own and be performed at union meetings, picket lines, worksites, or anywhere else those involved could find a willing audience.

Here, evidence of two very different situations in which Turner played the role of Owen in *The Great Money Trick* some five years apart (1931 in the Maple Hall and 1936 at the CCF Drama Festival) suggests the versatility and portability required of workers' theatre. The ability to perform in different venues, for different audiences and even in somewhat

British WTM took place in 1929 and 1930. It is reasonable to assume that Turner's version of *The Great Money Trick* could have been completed, rehearsed and performed within the next year.

changing political contexts is one of the most useful attributes of workers' theatre. The plays were able to evolve along with the changing needs of the political party they served. The continued relevance of *The Great Money Trick* as well as Turner's continued interest in theatre as a tool for political education and indoctrination over a five year period despite the flux the political Left underwent in this time and the advancement of his own political career shows a real commitment by Turner to the creation and production of workers' theatre in this period and to the educational mission of the CCF. The shift from a rough performance in a local hall to a somewhat more professional festival environment also suggests a growing interest among other CCF clubs, progressive groups like the PAC and even the Vancouver Little Theatre in creating and seeing Workers' Theatre in Vancouver.

Boys of the Old Brigade

Another of the plays associated with Turner (via the CCF Club of which he was President) reveals a scathing criticism of war that would have been controversial in its day outside of progressive political groups. The economic and human toll World War I took on Canada is examined critically in the radio play *Boys of the Old Brigade*, which dates from the mid- to late- 1930's. Typical of workers' theatre in the 1930's in Canada and the USA, the drama takes place in a fictional town, in this case "Mapleton," likely a wink at the Canadian context.

While the exact dates of creation and performance are unclear, notations on the back of one of the pages of the script in the Turner Fonds list the following dates and locations, presumably for rehearsals and/or meetings of those involved in the play's production.

"Tuesday May 12th studio 12-15, Monday " 11th 1026 W. 13th 4%, Monday "11th Fairview Club 8 pm, Thursday " 7th Roy's 3252 Heather St. 8:00 pm" (Isaacs 40). May 12th fell on a

Tuesday in 1926, 1937 and 1943. Given the timeline of Turner's other dramatic work and his shift away from dramatics when he became an MLA for East Vancouver in 1941, it is most likely that this radio play was written and produced in and around 1937. The interwar years of 1918 to 1939 mark the heyday of the CCF in Vancouver, so it is reasonable to imagine that there was some public appetite for CCF drama over the radio as well as availability of party funds necessary to produce it (S. H. CCF "Boys of the Old Brigade"). Furthermore, the references in the script to "quintuplets" and the "Dionne babies" refer to the May 28, 1934 birth of the first known quintuplets to survive infancy. The five Dionne girls were born in Ontario, put under the wardship of the Provincial Crown and made into one of Canada's most popular tourist spectacles. This was a sensational news story throughout the 1930's, engendering radio broadcasts on their birthdays and countless articles in newspapers (Radio Canada).

References to the character "Lawyer Taylor" as a "disabled veteran of the Great War" would have resonated with the numerous wounded veterans of World War I who returned to Canada after fighting abroad. Turner's anti-war sentiments are evident in his 1973 interview with Marlene Karnouk, in which he describes his general sense of the working class' resistance to military conscription that he witnessed in the lead up to WWI. This resistance to wartime conscription is clearly rooted in Turner's class-conscious politics, and *Boys of the Old Brigade* brings the economic point home, too.

...the attitude of the workers at that time was they were opposed to conscription. And they took a stand, in that connection, because of the fact that the industrial manufacturers in Canada refused to limit their war profits to 5%. MacKenzie [sic] King asked the industrial business people if they would limit their war order profits to

5%. They said no, they wouldn't take any war-orders, they'd have to be unlimited... and the workers used that as an example... used that as a reason why, if wealth was not going to be conscripted (because they demanded that wealth and industry should be also conscripted so that they would make some sacrifice). If they were not going to be conscripted, then we, who have to offer our bodies, and our lives, and our homes, are not going to be conscripted. And they made a case that way. And the campaign went on all over Canada, in varying degrees. (Arthur J. Turner "Trade Unionism" 18)

When asked about his personal feelings about wartime service, Turner claimed that he would have refused to be drafted into WWI, regardless of the consequences.

I was determined, and of course, perhaps (I don't know whether I should say this) but I... in my mind, I was determined that while I was in the next class for conscription, I was determined I wouldn't go, but it never came to that, so, perhaps it might be an idle boast that I would refuse and I would have gone to jail first, but... I was in the next class. (21)

Boys of the Old Brigade offers a cautionary tale and an early critique of Canada's attitude toward involvement in a possible second world war in the late 1930's. The weakness of the League of Nations as exposed in the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, the Spanish Civil War between the duly elected Socialist Republicans and the Nationalists under the leadership of General Franco (with the assistance of Hitler and Mussolini) would have been contemporary events hinting at the possibility of a Second World War looming on the horizon. A large number of Canada's Leftist activists joined the Mackenzie-Papineau

Battalion to fight against the Fascists in Italy, most self-educated in Leftist theory and hailing from Canada's working class (Petrou).

Boys of the Old Brigade is the longest play found in the Turner Fonds written by CCF members, likely because it was intended for radio and not live performance at meetings or social events as the other plays were. Other notable differences, such as the reliance on incidental music and indications of sound effects within the script, further differentiate the subtleties of radio drama from stage plays. Given the expansion of the CCF clubs in British Columbia in the early 1930's, the use of radio communication was undoubtedly a tactical move to spread the CCF message beyond the socialist reading rooms of Vancouver and out toward the interior of the province. An outpouring of support for the CCF (including the formation of a number of new CCF clubs) surged through the Okanagan between 1932 and 1934, for instance. The CCF and its message of Left populism and social democracy was later described as a "mania" among "thousands of people" in the Okanagan by Kelowna Conservative J.W. Jones. Labour scholar Robert McDonald credits much of this surge to the oratorical brilliance on radio of CCF spokesman and lecturer Dr. Lyle Telford. Dorothy Steeves, the BC MLA for North Vancouver, wrote that on "a summer evening one could hear the whole of a Telford broadcast simply by walking down any street in the city and picking it up as it poured from the open windows" (McDonald "Telford"). McDonald notes that the 1930's was a decade that saw the number of BC homes with radios jump by 48% and argues that the use of widely spreading technology likely played a role in the political shifts in BC and elsewhere during this time.

The expense of the radio time for political broadcasts was often covered by sympathetic local businessmen or professionals who belonged to or supported the CCF. As Turner recalled, one local dentist, Dr. Llewellyn Douglas, was a big supporter of CCF radio.

He paid for the CCF radio time for months and months on end. He wasn't able to advertise himself as a dentist, that was against the professional ethics of the dentists, but he could make possible for the CCF to have radio time, and we always gave him credit for that time. (Arthur J. Turner "Trade Unionism")

Given the successful use of the radio for spreading CCF dogma, it is not difficult to imagine an appetite in the party for CCF radio plays to broadcast along with the more traditional speeches and fiery oratory.

Boys of the Old Brigade seems to be doing just that. This radio short features a typical family, Mr. and Mrs. Butters, who own a feed store, and their employee, Bert, who is sweet on the daughter of the family, Jeannie Butters. Set in Mapleton, a clear nod to Canada, the play opens with rumours of an impending war following the assassination of the king of "Slappovia" and the crumbling of treaties and defensive measures taken by other neighbouring states. This reference to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the crumbling treaty system that led to World War One is unmistakable and clearly articulates criticisms of imperialism and the war by the CCF.

The founding document of the CCF signed in 1933, the Regina Manifesto, lays out the fundamental policies of the CCF. Regarding external relations and war, the Manifesto reflects attitudes similar to those of the play against imperialist warmongering.

We stand resolutely against all participation in imperialist wars. Within the British Commonwealth, Canada must maintain her autonomy as a completely self-governing

nation. We must resist all attempts to build up a new economic British Empire in place of the old political one, since such attempts readily lend themselves to the purposes of capitalist exploitation and may easily lead to further world wars. Canada must refuse to be entangled in any more wars fought to make the world safe for capitalism. (Federation)

Yet when WWII drew near, the CCF National Council was publicly split 13-9 over supporting the war effort. CCF President J.S. Woodsworth proposed a resolution in parliament in 1937 urging that Canada should remain neutral in the event of another world war. By the time the actual vote to join Britain in WWII took place on September 8, 1939, only Woodsworth spoke out against the war and voted against Canada's participation. This move ultimately cost him his role as leader of the CCF (Zakuta 58-60).

The CCF responded with more mixed and pragmatic feelings to Canada's participation in WWII, according to Turner.

...the CCF at that time, took the position that we wanted victory and democracy, and winning victory would then increase the urge to have a democratic government in Canada. And reluctantly, well the CCF was largely divided on it, but that became the official position at that time, they would say "we'll go in and win the war", and then we want to turn our attention to having a more democratic government in Canada. It was a sort of compromise, if you like. Because while we figured that it was a war that was only to protect capitalism, nevertheless, you were in it, and the whole of Canada was wrapped up in it, people's lives were wrapped in it ... people were losing their lives, and getting maimed and wounded, and all that sort of thing, and it was causing general dislocation, so you might as well get it over with, and try and make some

basic changes. (Arthur J. Turner "Trade Unionism" 19-21)

Early dialogue in *Boys of the Old Brigade* criticizes the irrationality that seemingly isolated events like the assassination of an archduke in a far-off country on another continent should lead to war, let alone a war involving Canada. This is coupled with the theme of generational wisdom. This theme also appears in the other workers' dramas found in the Turner Fonds, notably *A Story of the Simia* and *You Can't Tell Me*. *Boys of the Old Brigade* in particular puts youth in a position of greater rationality than their elders who are prone to old ways of thinking and blind nationalism based on past experience, and troubles the assumption that the future is dictated by the past: a message that would have resonated with the young(er) activists who made up a substantial portion of Turner's CCF club.

The play begins with a conversation between Mr. Butters and his younger employee, Bert.

BUTTERS... (With statesman-like gravity) Looks bad, Bert. Country's headin straight for war... it's only a matter of hours.

BERT ... Sufferin' sailor! How come?

BUTTERS... Shot that's heard clean round the world. The king of Slappovia was assassinated this afternoon

BERT ... Kind of tough on him...but it's his funeral, not ours.

BUTTERS... (His manner that of a weary father explaining to a dull-witted child) Killing that king has started complications in other countries. Canada's going to be drawn into this, sure as you're a foot high.

BERT ... Oh yeh?

BUTTERS... (Positively) Oh yeh.

BERT...(Chuckling) Not a chance. Listen boss. As a diplomat you're a good feed merchant.

BUTTERS...(As man to man) You'll see. I know what I'm talking about. Come over to the house after supper. The radio'll have the full story. (S. H. CCF "Boys of the Old Brigade")

While undeniably simplifying the situation, Bert, ever the skeptic, serves as a voice of reason highlighting just how odd Canada's involvement in a war triggered by the assassination of a leader in a far-off land could seem. The following scene in the Butters' home expands upon this theme and begins to criticize the blind faith of Mr. and Mrs. Butters' generation in rationalizing Canadian involvement in the war as a matter of national pride, patriotism, justice and duty, even though no actual attack has been made on Canada itself.

BUTTERS... Only a matter of hours now. Slappovia has made up her mind to vindicate her national honour. None of the other countries want to fight, of course, least of all ours. For all of them it will be purely a defensive war, you understand.

BERT... Fine. If they all stay home nobody'll get hurt.

BUTTERS... Well, anyway, our cause is just. That's a great satisfaction ... a GREAT satisfaction. Our hands are clean. Emmie, what's that verse ... used to be in the old reader?

MRS. BUTTERS... I'm sure I don't know. What verse are you talking about?

BUTTERS... My strength... no that's not it. My hands are like the hands of. Shucks! I mind you speaking it... time you took elocution lessons. My hands... my strength... my cause....

MRS. BUTTERS...(the light dawning) Oh! You mean “My strength is as the strength of ten....because my heart is pure.” (This in her best elocuting manner)

BUTTERS...(Exultantly) That’s the one... that’s it. MY STRENGTH IS AS THE STRENGTH OF TEN.....BECAUSE MY HEART IS PURE. (To Bert) That goes for our country....you bet it does.

JEANNIE...(Crisply) To be quite frank, father, I don’t see the application.

BUTTERS...Where’s your patriotism, girl? Can’t you see? We want only peace we work for peace, but when war is forced on us...then watch out, by ginger! (S. H. CCF "Boys of the Old Brigade")

This quotation comes from the first stanza of Alfred Tennyson’s poem “Sir Galahad,” one of several poems dealing with the legend of King Arthur.

My good blade carves the casques of men,

My tough lance thrusteth sure,

My strength is as the strength of ten

Because my heart is pure. (Tennyson)

In “Sir Galahad,” Tennyson portrays Galahad as boastful regarding his ability, whereas he is portrayed as somewhat more grimly determined in Tennyson’s subsequent poem, “The Holy Grail.” This may reference the shift Mr. Butters makes in his view of the war over the course of *Boys of the Old Brigade*. He is boastful and keen in his discussion of the war when he thinks he will not be doing the fighting, but his attitude shifts later on in the play. Caught up in the moment of excitement and nostalgic reverie, Mr. Butters compares the battle with Slappovia and the men who will fight with the errant knights of yore.

Safe in the assumption that he is too old to fight in another war, Mr. Butters reflects with nostalgic patriotism on his service and states that he would fight again if the army would have him. Lawyer Taylor then informs Butters that he is in luck and that a special war measure passed in Ottawa would “save the country millions,” tying into Turner’s previously articulated concerns that working class bodies were being conscripted, but not Canadian wealth:

TAYLOR... Look at the extravagance in sending all young fellows out to fight, look at the waste. The best of them get killed and a lot more have to be paid pensions as long as they live. Some of these young pensioners are tough. They live a long time....they draw a lot of public money before they’re finished.

MRS. BUTTERS... Well, Mr. Taylor, I’m sure pensions are the very least a grateful country can do for them.

TAYLOR... It’s not necessary this time, Mrs. Butters. And the young married men leaving their wives and little children....

MRS. BUTTERS... Dearie me, yes. Don’t I just know.... (Weeps)

TAYLOR... Now, now, Mrs. Butters. We all know war is a cold-blooded business. Let’s not get sentimental. These efficiency experts who drafted the bill knew their business. They found that providing for all those young families while the father was in uniform was a terrific drain on revenue...and quite needless. So the new act rules that only men over fifty are to be called up now and, of those, the more prosperous will be drafted first. (S. H. CCF "Boys of the Old Brigade")

The grim economic pragmatism of the war measure is met with surprise and a timely comedic dig at the treatment of Canada’s returned veterans from the First World War.

TAYLOR...(Patiently) I said only the **prosperous** men over fifty would go. Hence, **veterans, as a class**, will be exempt” (emphasis added).

This moment of dark humour coupled with political commentary is in keeping with much of the other CCF work, namely the laughably ridiculous premise and inside jokes of *A Story of the Simia*, an added humorous bit in *The Great Money Trick*, and the sarcasm and tongue-in-cheek style of *You Can't Tell Me* and *Big Business*, in which humour is used to lighten the mood and maintain the interest of the audience alongside the moral lesson of the play. The scene ends with Mr. Butters joking about an injured ankle from a bowling accident while expressing his willingness to fight again, and he is met with proud approval from his wife who continues knitting a pair of socks for him to wear into battle.³³

The next scene sees the Butters Hay and Feed Company being run by the young people, Bert and Jeannie, and the business is thriving with the influx of previously unimaginable government contracts for supplies supporting the war effort. The scene proceeds to comment on the reversal of fortune enjoyed by those who stay home in wartime

³³ The significance of sock knitting is another nod to World War One. Recognizing the need for more socks beyond the British War Office allowance of three pairs per soldier every six months and the litany of medical issues and maladies caused by poor footwear and exposure to cold wet mud, including “trench foot,” made access to knitwear a major issue. The call went out on both sides of the conflict and aid groups like the Red Cross, women’s societies and church groups organized hand-knit sock and mitten drives en masse. In Canada, the flying knitting needles of women on the home front were responsible for hundreds of thousands of socks that were sent to the front. One estimate suggests nearly 28,000 pairs of socks were sent to the Western Front by groups in Hamilton, Ontario alone in November 1915 (Phillips 9). The publication of knitting patterns for socks and other comfort knits for soldiers boomed in the war years and popularized the use of the seamless “Kitchener Stitch”, named after British Field Marshal Horatio Herbert Kitchener who made one of the most public requests for socks from the home front, to close the toe of knit socks without a seam that could blister and damage soldiers’ feet. This stitch remains one of the most common seaming techniques in hand-knits to date.

to fill the positions of the departed soldiers. In this case, it is the youth who take the place of their elders in positions of authority in business as opposed to being shuttled off to serve as cannon fodder, as in the First War, emphasising the CCF's initial resistance to Canadian involvement in a potential Second World War. Casey articulates much the same idea as he and Bert discuss their new roles in the service club now that the elders are being called to war.

CASEY ...It'll be all young fellows...guys like you and me, that have had to play second fiddle to you solid citizens of this burg for too darn long. You, me, all our bunch...we're all moving up into responsible positions since the old crowd got called up.

Jeannie also speaks of her work on the Businesswomen's Lunch Club, further emphasizing the reversal of generational and gendered responsibilities the new war measure leads to. Unlike the First World War that nearly decimated a generation of young men and women, war with Slappovia has triggered advancement and promotion for the next generation of young people.³⁴

A pre-war send-off for the troops based on the newspaper records of send-offs from 1914 is thrown by the young folks for their departing soldier fathers, beginning with the satirical rewrite of the popular 1915 patriotic song, "Laddie in Khaki (The Girl Who Waits at Home)" by Ivor Novello, performed and recorded by Robert Carr, which becomes the amusing "Daddie in Khaki" in the hands of the CCF script writers.

³⁴ About 630,000 Canadians went to war in WWI and about 66,000 did not return alive. Out of a nation of about 8 million, these numbers speak to the devastating effects of the First World War on Canada.

Daddie in Khaki / I'm waiting for you, / I want you to know / That my heart beats true, / I'm longing and praying / And living for you, / So come back dear old Daddie in Khaki. (Novello; S. H. CCF "Boys of the Old Brigade")

Given the plethora of popular music generated during WWI and popularized through the sale of sheet music, audio recordings and radio, the use of song in *Boys of the Old Brigade* is worth some examination. Several mentions are made of “Tipperary” being played in the background or whistled by other characters at various points in the play. This refers to the enormously popular 1912 song, “It’s a Long Long Way to Tipperary,” by Jack Judge and Harry Williams. Frequent lines about the elderly being “in the army now” and having to make due with less also allude to the 1917 song “You’re in the Army Now” by Isham Jones with lyrics by Tell Taylor and Ole Olsen. Both “Tipperary” and “Laddie in Khaki” are songs in which a couple is divided by war and awaits reunion, a common theme in WWI music, including the popular “Keep the Home Fires Burning” and “Take Me Back to Dear Old Blighty.” As *Boys of the Old Brigade* was intended to be a radio play for CCF-friendly audiences, the addition of music adds a visceral connection with audience members and additional auditory interest within the larger program. It also fills out time in the performance. Indeed, the stage direction, “NOTE. REPEAT OR USE OTHER SUCH SONGS IF NEEDED TO FILL OUT TIME” (S. H. CCF "Boys of the Old Brigade") after the lyrics for “Laddie in Khaki,” suggests that in performance, even more music could have been included to lengthen the piece when necessary.

Music and singing played an important role in the social life of the CCF clubs. UBC Rare Books and Special Collections has several copies of CCF and Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement (CCYM) songbooks published by the national party for

regular club use and summer schools, and one booklet published by the Burrard CCF Club in Vancouver. The minutes of the CCYM suggest that sharing a song together was regularly part of their club meetings (Greer "Minutes of the CCYM Meeting Held September 12, 1939 in Mr. Pleasant CCF Clubrooms."). Within the broader labour movement, songs such as "Solidarity Forever," written by Ralph Chaplin in 1915 about strength through unity; "Bread and Roses," based on a poem by James Oppenheim in 1911 about fair wages and dignified conditions; and the Socialist anthem, "The Internationale," written by Eugène Pottier, still make regular appearances at union conventions, rallies, Labour Day picnics, May Day marches, etc.³⁵

Aside from the obvious ease and humour of merely exchanging the word "Laddie" for "Daddie" and "little" for "dear old" in a popular song that the audience is likely to have known and have heard ad nauseum two decades before, there are also some striking political comments one could read into the choice. Because it is the "laddies" of whom the song speaks who grew up to become the daddies that are heading off to war again in the CCF radio play, there is a dark harmonious symmetry to the idea that these men should be twice sent to war, leaving behind loved ones, even more so when one considers that the children who 'sing' the second version are presumably the offspring of 'the girl who waited at home' and her laddie in the original song. Wittingly or otherwise, and viewed with the benefit of

³⁵ Having attended a number of these events including conventions for the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and the BC Federation of Labour, I can personally attest to the emotional response and feelings of connection and loyalty triggered by lively group singing of these classics of the labour movement. Singing and other similar performative rituals like oaths of office and oaths of membership, raising one's left fist in a sign of solidarity, and group-based challenges like the CLC Winter School Choir Contest (which my class won in 2015) are traditions that continue to bring groups of people together and support a sense of belonging and unity through shared experience, tradition and a common vocabulary.

hindsight, the choice of song draws attention to the generationality of WWI and WWII and their destruction of the natural progression of life from parent to child.

In imagining the same soldiers who fought in WWI returning for WWII in *Boys of the Old Brigade*, we also see what socialist activists would have argued was the wasteful futility of the “war to end all wars” and the arbitrary forces that called men to fight. As a case in point, if one assumes that the CCF’s Regina Manifesto serves as an adequate representation of CCF values and generally reflects the values held by South Hill CCF club members at the time *Boys of the Old Brigade* was written, a number of their central policies are addressed by the content of the play. First among these key tenets is the opposition to war based on imperialist notions and the demand that Canada remain independent, as previously discussed. However, other central tenets of CCF ideology make their appearance in the play as well. Through a combination of changes to taxation, social services, health services and the creation of a new social order, the CCF sought the total “removal of economic inequality” (Federation). By forcing older wealthy men to wage war in place of young men who might benefit from an army pension, the economic disparity of Canada was highlighted and mocked as well as the implied avarice of the government leaders who were loath to pay out hard-won pensions for national service in wartime. The conscription of the wealthy and old in the play might also be a nod to the federal government’s desire to avoid another conscription crisis like the one faced in 1917. In the world of the play, only those who willingly went to war the first time would be sent again and presumably the resistance to conscription seen in Quebec and elsewhere would be avoided by this clever political manoeuvre.

Finally, the song choice mocks any sense of romance or nostalgia in war. The patient and long-suffering feminized home front in the original song is transformed by the CCF into

a world of opportunity for the young, in which a delivery boy can rise to the ranks of CEO in the absence of his previous employer. Remaining behind is a tremendous opportunity, not a hardship full of “weary days” and “pain” that could only be assuaged by the return of a brave loved one, as the second verse of “Laddie in Khaki” describes life on the home front.

After the song “Daddy in Khaki,” the radio play continues with a speech from Young Casey Jones, the son of the proprietor of the Mapleton Hotel. Earlier, when discussing what he will say at the event, Casey tells Jeannie and Bert that he remembers his “old man telling of the rousing talk he gave ‘em. I’ll look that one up” (S. H. CCF "Boys of the Old Brigade"). The speech, copied from his aforementioned father’s words from WWI, is intended to motivate and inspire the troops before their deployment and uses a nostalgic tone, clichés and platitudes praising the soldiers who are to leave and the work to be done in their absence by the “homeguards.” For a speech intended to motivate and inspire, Young Casey Jones’ effort seems only to make matters worse by highlighting the years of looming warfare, the sumptuous banquets to be missed back home, the mud and cold yet to be endured and the likelihood that the soldiers may never return home as heroes to enjoy the fruits of their labours. One can imagine the comically overblown dramatic gravitas an actor might inject into the following speech.

CASEY: ...I have been asked to say a few suitable words to you, the fighting men of Mapleton, on behalf of the citizens of this fair town, and while I know that talk is cheap and it is easy for us mere homeguards to indulge in it, we want you to know we will be with you in spirit, just as the banner up there on that wall says, all through the war. Even if it lasts for years and years as some experts say it is going to, we will still be with you.....IN SPIRIT. We want you to remember that.

We know our part is not a spectacular one, but they also serve who only stand and wait. However, we at home will not just be waiting. We will be doing our routine tasks, we will hold up our end, we will fight the battle on the home front. But home front or foreign soil, what does it matter so long as all of us do our best? We will keep the home fires burning. Our service club, of which so many of you are members, will.....and does... pledge to you its unswerving loyalty. I venture to say that as we gather at the monthly banquets we will make a special point of remembering those of you who, in glad response to the call of duty, cannot be present to share in that sumptuous repast.

To those who cannot read our hearts we may seem gay and carefree, but we want to say we will not forget you men over there in the mud and the cold. We pledge ourselves that we will build up this country for which you so loyally are prepared to sacrifice your all, we will build it, I say, into a land fit for heroes to live in.

(APPLAUSE) (S. H. CCF "Boys of the Old Brigade")

This satire of the blind patriotism and nationalism of wartime, and this level of thinly veiled sarcasm, hint at a lack of support for the looming Second World War on the part of the CCF club producing this work before the CCF nationally began to publicly support the war effort in late 1939. Interpretation of the socialist doctrine of the CCF was a source of some discord within the party in the late thirties. Its pacifism and resistance to the inevitably class-based process of national conscription were at odds with the larger, more broadly conceived ideas of Canadian nationalism, identity, and duty that had matured during WWI. The 1939 resignation of J.S. Woodsworth, the CCF party leader (a mere two years or so after this play would have been produced), over his refusal to support Canada's entry into WWII (when the

party line, swayed by broader public opinion, shifted to support the war effort) is a notable example of this fundamental philosophical division within the party.

By contrast, other contemporary radio plays often rang with the blind patriotism or romantic escapism so amusingly mocked in this script by characters like Casey Jones. The Canadian National Railway was an early bulwark against the American radio programming that was already dominating the airwaves by the mid-1920s, including the CNR's 1931/32 *Romance of Canada* series out of Montreal, written by playwright Merrill Denison. The early broadcasts by the CNR were live readings of popular English language plays. The first was titled *The Rosary*, broadcast on May 5, 1925 out of Moncton (Fink 930-31). Other radio broadcasts in the 1920s included sports, church services, political speeches, "morning exercises, health and gardening hints, cooking lessons and other programming directed at women in the home during the daytime" (Vipond 94-95). Regular weekly broadcasts by Vancouver's CNRV players, whose serial radio dramas catered to the common listener, often included works by Shakespeare or light classical dramas that offered escapism from the harsh realities of Depression-era British Columbia. Directed by Jack Gilmore, the Vancouver CNRV Players were professional actors who produced an estimated 95 plays between 1927 and 1931, most of which were adaptations, but some of which were original and occasionally the work of a local writer. Radio historian Mary Vipond notes that the early start of radio drama in Vancouver was unusual. "While they may have been precursors of the 'Golden Age' of Canadian radio drama, in the twenties they were unique – even among the CNR stations" (Vipond 96).

The 1931/32 *Romance of Canada* series out of Montreal, for instance, glorified a romanticized version of Canadian history. One radio play, *Pierre Radisson*, envisioned the

conversation between an early French explorer in the New World on his return to the court of Britain's King Charles II. Other *Romance of Canada* plays dealt with the struggle for control of the Red River country by the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company in the battle of Seven Oaks, while another chronicles Alexander MacKenzie's journey to the Pacific (Vipond; Denison). In these cases, and others like them, moments of Anglo-Canadian triumph and adversity were dramatized in such a way as to promote a strengthened link to a homogenized and sanitized Canadian history and Canadian national identity, downplaying the more unpleasant details of colonialism and whitewashing over the experiences of racial, cultural and political minorities. The popularity of radio dramas continued into the 1930's, but the content on mainstream broadcasts by the newly created Canadian Broadcasting Company and others followed in much the same vein as the CNR programming.³⁶ *Boys of the Old Brigade*, while light-hearted and humorous, was more political than the vast majority of the radio dramas of its day (Fink 930-33).

Despite the fact that Young Casey Jones copied his father's 1914 speech, his father is somehow unimpressed by the same words some twenty years later. It would seem that the naïve optimism, blind nationalism and excitement of war and the long-suffering martyrdom of those left behind do not carry through for the elder Jones now that he knows exactly what to expect the second time around.

BERT ... That spell you gave 'em. Your dad claims he never heard such a string of baloney in all his born days.

³⁶ It should be noted that a change in tone seemed to take place as radio drama in Canada matured. The earlier years of mainstream radio dramas were marked by less provocative subject matter than in the 1940s and 1950s when social realism and new techniques of editing, musical interludes and voice acting styles and techniques made for weightier radio drama covering a wide range of contemporary social issues (Drainie 43-74; Allan).

CASEY... Why dog-gone him! I copied it pretty near word for word from the one he gave in this very hall to the soldiers that were leaving back in 1914.

The next scene sees our return to the Butters Hay and Feed Store where Bert and Jeannie are discussing the work of the local women's chapter and their overbearing provincial organizer who is put in her place after trying to shame the disabled veteran, Mr. Taylor, for not being in uniform. Again the gentle mockery of the self-aggrandized homeguards jumping onboard to help the war effort is hard to miss.

BERT: That dame burns me up. Taylor put her in her place though, the other evening.

JEANNIE ... Mr. Taylor?

BERT... He was sitting in your living room, him and me, when this female sword swallower barges in, looking for your mother... he was puffing away on his pipe, thoughtful like, with that artificial hand of his in his lap when she up and says, "You're not in uniform yet, Mr. Taylor?" Taylor just shakes his head and she gives him a look like he'd been caught betraying secrets to the enemy. "My man will be in Europe soon," she crows, contemptuous like. "That's nice," Taylor drawls. "You might ask him to take a look round for my arm over there." "Arm?" this Dame asks. "Yeh," says Taylor. "I lost one over there, twenty years back."

And for the rest of the evening the old she-gladiator treats him like he'd had that wing shot off just to spite her.

Bert and Jeannie's discussion then turns to a conversation about buying a bungalow. Now that Bert has been given a promotion and is running the feed store in place of Mr. Butters, the financial stability the young couple might never have had seems within their

reach when a phone call interrupts the conversation. Jeannie announces that her father has called her mother, that the war is over and the troops are returning home. A stunned Bert can only say, "Over? Why it hasn't started yet!" (S. H. CCF "Boys of the Old Brigade")

The final scene ends the radio play as tidily as one might expect from this genre in the late 1930's. The following morning, Bert and Jeannie are discussing the return of Mr. Butters, and Bert seems disappointed to be losing his new position before Jeannie enlightens him about her father's boot camp-induced change of heart with the punch line of the radio play.

JEANNIE ... it's true. These weeks of regular exercises and outdoor life have done something to dad. He doesn't want to sit at a desk. He hankers to stay outside... To tear along the country roads... Talk to the farmers... Work in the fresh air. You couldn't keep him at a desk now, not with the ball and chain. 'Let Bert do the worrying for a change,' he said to tell you. Tell him I'm through.

BERT ... (After an astonished pause) Dog-gone these modern wars. They don't give a fella time to get his bearings.

JEANNIE ... you leave these modern wars alone. They're better than the old kind. This way nobody gets hurt. And all because Slappovia has the same law as us. With them too, **nobody under fifty goes, and even then only the ones that can afford it.** You see, old dear, the fighting's done by **men of mature judgment.**

BERT ... fighting? But there wasn't any fighting!

JEANNIE ... naturally not. That's where the judgment comes in. [emphasis added]
(S. H. CCF "Boys of the Old Brigade")

The play ends with a mildly provocative exchange between Bert and Jeannie who, it seems, will live happily ever after in their new bungalow after all, as strains of “Tipperary” or “Land of Hope and Glory” signal the end of the performance.

The light tone and comedy within this radio play no doubt make for entertaining listening, but the criticism of war, class, generational limitation and blind patriotism are abundantly clear. The notion that wars begin and end only through the application of “mature judgement” is a serious criticism of the rush to war resulting from the collapsing system of European alliances during WWI and a cautionary tale that seems to predict the looming Second World War that was only a few years away.

This radio play, like the other short plays discussed in this research, serves multiple objectives. First, it is instructional in that it teaches the listener or viewer about the party stance on key social and political issues, in this case the antiwar stance of the Social Democrats. Second, the performance challenges views that mirror the more socially conservative status quo. Blind patriotism and naïve service to one’s country are gently mocked. Characters that fall into this line of thinking are not taken seriously, but are satirized or portrayed generally negatively as being somehow unenlightened, if not downright villainous. Third, there is no denying that pieces such as *Boys of the Old Brigade* have a mission of entertainment. Drama, humour, music, and performance serve as the proverbial spoonful of sugar to help the doctrinal and political medicine go down.

A Story of the Simia, or The Monkey Rebels

A Story of the Simia, or The Monkey Rebels is another example of the dramatic work coming out of the South Hill CCF Club, but it is somewhat different from *The Great Money Trick*, *Boys of the Old Brigade* and indeed any of the other plays in the Turner Fonds. It was

intended as a children's play, functioning on at least two levels, one for the younger viewers and one for their CCF club member parents. The play is framed by a family with a sceptical father character loosely debating labour politics that closely resembled the events of the day in Vancouver. When the children's Uncle Ned visits them, he uses a parable about monkeys trapped on a deserted island under the thumb of a lazy baboon and his church and state monkey lackeys to teach the children about rudimentary socialism. Over the course of his tale he ultimately sways the opinion and wins the support of the father as well. In this bit of dialogue in Ned's story after the Baboon shuts down the means of production due to an overabundance of coconuts, it is easy to see clear allusions to Vancouver's rampant unemployment and the protests, strikes and sit-ins organized by left-leaning groups in the mid-Thirties.

UNCLE NED: The fat baboon consumed from ten to a dozen nuts a day, but although he did his best to keep the wheels of industry turning, the nuts began to accumulate around him in such vast quantities that he had to shut down operations. The result was that they had an unemployed problem on the island, and the little monkeys formed a procession and marched around the tree demanding the right to work. (S. H. CCF "A Story of the Simia, or the Monkey Rebels")

This particular moment, in which the monkeys demand the right to work, would have resonated with audiences at CCF meetings and rallies, considering that the slogan of the unemployed activists in Vancouver was a demand for "work and wages" in the 1935 Relief Camp Workers Union strike (McMartin; McDonald "Working"; Kealey). This slogan would have appeared on picket signs, posters and banners held by marchers as they made their way through downtown Vancouver. Liberal Premier Thomas Dufferin Patullo, elected in 1933,

used the same slogan to outline his plans to revitalize the economy of British Columbia in the throes of the Depression. The strikers' use of the slogan was indicative of Patullo's failure to deliver on his campaign promises to provide substantial work and wages to all British Columbians (Fudge, Tucker and Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History.).

The play continues with a militant call to arms and a critique of the rhetoric used by the opposition to describe the organized workers.

Things began to get desperate, and one little monkey with a reddish hide and an intelligent face jumped on a tree stump and made a speech to the effect that the little monkeys should combine together, knock the block off the baboon, and take the tree for themselves. The baboon said this was treason and sedition and contrary to the ethics of civilization; they would go back to monkey barbarism if they carried on like that. He further stated that law and order would be maintained no matter at what cost, and he proceeded to pick out a few of the strongest of the little monkeys and told them that he would give them a coconut a day each if they would severely maul and, if necessary, kill any of the others who came too near the tree or who were guilty of seditious utterances. (S. H. CCF "A Story of the Simia or the Monkey Rebels")

To have been guilty of sedition in its many forms circa 1910-30 is considered by labour historian Mark Leier to have been a political offense more than a legal one. It was a charge used by governments when labour and Leftist activists grew militant and disruptive, but their disruption could not be dealt with through ordinary legal means (Leier). Within the broader Canadian context, Section 98 of the Criminal Code (which outlines sedition, treason, threats to the standing government and conspiracy in loose terms) was used extensively to corral and jail Communists and activists on the Left during wartime. Parts of Section 98

were amended and repealed in 1936 (roughly the time *A Story of the Simia* would have been written) because of the history and ease of abuse of this legislation and a push from the labour movement for its repeal. The toll this legislation took on activists from the Left went deeper than the simple threat of jail time. “The psychological impact of such a law on freedom of speech and association inevitably is significant. The language of the section was susceptible to extended definition to include a wide range of conduct, and the possibility of police harassment, without prosecution, was unlimited” (Leier).

Section 98 of the Criminal Code was used in the arrest of eight leaders of the Communist Party including Party leader Tim Buck on August 11, 1931. Nine men were arrested initially, but one, a seventeen-year-old member of the Young Communist League, was found innocent at trial. Seven of the men, including Buck, received jail sentences of five years, and Tom Cacic received a two-year sentence before being deported back to Yugoslavia. The ensuing outrage over their arrest and incarceration was supported and strengthened by the Toronto Progressive Arts Club’s (PAC) single performance of their original play, *Eight Men Speak*, and the subsequent controversy caused by its censorship.

The play may have been inspired by a performative stunt organized by PAC leader Oscar Ryan and the Canadian Labour Defense League of having a “Workers’ Jury” attend the actual trials “as best and as often as they could,” which then tendered their verdict of “Not Guilty” in August of 1931 (A. E. Smith 133). The men began their sentences on February 20, 1932, and only one day later, shots from a rifle and revolver rang into Buck’s occupied cell, barely missing him and triggering a retrial with Buck charged with “incitement to riot” and sentenced to an additional year in prison.

The arrest of the eight and Buck’s retrial had the effect of legitimizing the Communist

Party as a civil rights champion at a time when its membership was evaporating. It also gave Buck the aura of a folk hero, a status pushed by Party propagandists (including two of the authors of *Eight Men Speak*). (Filewod et al. 9-10)

The campaign to secure the freedom of the eight prisoners took place on multiple levels through Party machinations, the Canadian Labour Defense League's legal battle against Section 98, and a battle to persuade the public. The theatrical performance was intended to serve the latter function. Shifting from a guerilla style of counter-judicial agitprop with the Workers' Jury to a scripted drama reportedly took about two months. The script was written by a committee of four: Oscar Ryan, a Party activist, cultural organizer and CLLD publicity director; E. Cecil-Smith, a journalist for *The Worker* and previous editor of the PAC's *Masses*; and Frank Love and Mildred Goldberg, who were members of the PAC and also acted in *Eight Men Speak* (Wright and Endres). The play features a non-linear plot that mixes traditional scripted dramatic scenes with more experimental mass recitations and agitprop to humanize and tell the story of the trial of the eight arrested men and to denounce Section 98 and its abuse in silencing political prisoners. It paints Buck in particular as a political martyr and strengthened his growing status as folk hero.

What is perhaps most remarkable about the play, however, was its reception by the authorities and public. After one performance under the watchful eye of the authorities and a stenographer who took down the script, the production was halted by threats to revoke the license for the theatre should another performance be allowed, which Filewod argues was the intention all along, regardless of the content of the play (Filewod et al. 13-16). The same tactic was used when the PAC tried to stage *Eight Men Speak* in Winnipeg in May of 1934. Similar threats of censorship were leveled when the PAC in Vancouver staged Clifford

Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* in 1935, indicating a pattern of repressive behavior by the authorities seeking to squelch Communist and Leftist propaganda and gatherings in the name of the "public interest" (B. Bray; Filewod; Filewod et al.; Ryan).

The Toronto Star's January 15, 1934 editorial about *Eight Men Speak* is telling of the shift in public perspective, which began to see the CP as a defender of civil rights and not the radical threat the government claimed. In censoring the PAC, the authorities simply created more controversy and drew attention to the very thing it hoped to suppress.

It does not seem desirable that court trials should be parodied on the stage, but to prevent the undesirable by resorting to unlawful methods on the part of the authorities is more undesirable still because worse results can flow from it...By banning it in a way that makes a brass band issue of it the police commission and Queens Park takes some chance of giving the play the advertising it wants. (qtd. in Filewod et al. 17)

Theatre historian Alan Filewod notes that the PAC was established as part of a broader piece of the CP's Third Period strategy of creating public groups "through which the Party could promote revolutionary action" (Filewod et al. 7). This use of theatre to strengthen and improve public perception of the party and provide an additional Party mouthpiece for propaganda is similar to the role dramatic groups played within the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation.

The increasing violence and threats experienced by the monkeys in *A Story of the Simia* would have been experienced by strikers, activists and sympathisers at the hands of the police during the work camp strikes, occupations and demonstrations in Vancouver throughout the 1930's. Notable examples of this use of force to quell labour unrest include the Battle of Ballantyne Pier on June 18, 1935, in which 1100 locked-out dockworkers and

their supporters attempted to force their way past the police at the docks and were brutally beaten with clubs and tear-gassed in the ensuing melee (Beare, Rosiers and Deshman 8). The On to Ottawa Trek, in which striking relief camp workers sought to ride cargo train cars from Vancouver to Ottawa to air their grievances in Parliament, also culminated in a violent clash between activists and the authorities. The Trekkers were stopped in Regina, Saskatchewan, by the RCMP and only a small delegation was allowed to progress to Ottawa to represent the rest. Those who remained behind, hoping for a resolution, were housed in the Exhibition Grounds. A July 1, 1935 rally of about 1200 supporters and 300 trekkers was ambushed by RCMP and police who clubbed, beat, gassed and shot at those gathered. Both sides suffered casualties. One plainclothes police officer was dead, a trekker later succumbed to his injuries inflicted by police, hundreds were arrested and thousands of dollars of damage had been done.

These memories and others like them from similar events in the Thirties would have been fresh in the minds of CCF audience members viewing themselves through the allegory of *A Story of the Simia*, which was performed in 1936/37. During the Battle of Ballantyne Pier, playwright and CCF member Denny Kristiansen reportedly lofted party leader Harold Winch so he could be seen and address the crowd of protestors. Winch stood balanced with one foot on a lamppost and the other on Kristiansen's shoulders to warn the mob of irate strikers not to invade the police headquarters. Apparently, there was a machine gun lying in wait inside (V. Kristiansen; L. Kristiansen). The (ab)use of power in all its forms was both a direct experience and not too distant memory for Vancouver's activists on the Left, who refused to be cowed. The play continues:

No matter what he did however, he could not allay the discontent because all his arrangements failed to satisfy the pangs of hunger. The little red fellow dodged the monkey police and, as a result of incessant teaching, began to get a following. A dangerous situation arose and monkey civilization was tottering. (S. H. CCF "A Story of the Simia or the Monkey Rebels")

The play ends with a violent Socialist revolution in which the oppressed little worker monkeys overthrow their baboon overlord and his minions of church and state and go on to establish an idyllic Socialist utopia, each living and working according to their needs and abilities happily ever after. The violence of the ending is somewhat surprising given that the CCF advocated for a non-violent and gradual shift from capitalism to socialism. The ending of the play, while not actually realized in Canada in the Thirties, clearly articulates the dream and vision of the Left's activists in imagining a better system in place in Canada rooted in Democratic Socialism and the way it might come about. In his memoirs, Turner described the reception of the play:

The young...were keen on the drama approach and we staged short skits with a social content such as "Alice in Blunderland ", adapted from a short article by Bruce Hutchinson, "Mr. Million Bucks," and a story of a boss monkey and his monopoly of trees. The youngsters enjoyed all these. So did the adults. (Arthur J. Turner *Somewhere* 59-60)

Turner's memoir makes his theories of the tremendous pedagogical value of drama for children and young adults abundantly clear. "Even my short experience in the area of children's plays was convincing enough (sic) to know that in this field of 'active make-believe' there is a chance to track young minds from the dead end of just watching strings of

useless and brain neutralizing programs to the helpful reality of 'doing something'" (Turner 60). In many ways his thinking is in line with the progressive pedagogical theories that were popularized over the course of Turner's lifetime and continue to shape ideas about education today. Progressive education is characterized by an emphasis on hands-on learning, group work to develop social skills, and impressing on youth the values of social responsibility and democracy. The pedagogical theories of John Dewey emphasizing democratic processes in the classroom and relevant and experiential learning are very much in keeping with Turner's ideas about involving children in active make-believe. For Dewey, learning is an interactive social experience through which gradual social reform takes place. By allowing young people to practice democracy in the classroom by working cooperatively and allowing them to have a say in the form and content of their education, Dewey argued, they were actively being prepared to take their roles as informed and involved citizens when they reached adulthood (Dewey). Whether consciously or otherwise, with its access to study groups, drama groups, music groups, choirs, political debates, eloquent speakers, outdoor education, active political participation and so on, the CCF club model exposed young people to a Deweyan sort of political education. Turner expands on this idea by saying, "in childhood and early adulthood there is the desire — either latent or expressed — to be more than a spectator, to do something. Even minor activities can leave a lasting impression and assist in molding a useful life" (Arthur J. Turner *Somewhere* 60).

Conclusion

For Turner, the plays served an educational and social role and, furthermore, supported the CCF party in the long term. Within the CCF, drama presented an opportunity for social gathering, entertainment and education. A later document from the Cooperative

Commonwealth Youth Movement (CCYM) particularly highlights the importance of drama as providing one of many opportunities for “fun and fellowship” available to members (CCYM *This Way to a New Canada*). Another contemporary informational leaflet features images of hula-dancing CCYM women from a variety show in Toronto and claims, “Drama – may be a vivid way of telling your story to the world, or it may be just a barrel of good fun. The CCYM has it both ways” (CCYM *What Are You Doing to Make a Better World*). While documents like these are clearly aimed at selling memberships in the political party to politically active young people by highlighting the fun to be had and the social connections to be made, the inclusion of a seemingly widespread drama program cultivated a culture in which amateur agitprop serving the party agenda was normalized and fostered. One can say with certainty that drama programs were a feature of CCF club life in British Columbia’s Lower Mainland in the 1930’s as evidenced by references to drama groups associated with the South Hill Club, Vancouver Centre CCYM, Roberts Creek CCF Club, Kitsilano Beach, Advance CCF, and Turner’s assertion that there were “six or seven CCF and associated play reading groups in the lower mainland” (“CCF Drama Festival”, Turner 59-60). Further CCF documents distributed from the national party cited above list drama as an activity in which one might expect to participate upon joining a CCF club.

However, a review of the scholarly literature reveals little to no mention of the dramatic work associated with the CCF. Alan Filewod’s book *Committing Theatre: Theatre Radicalism and Political Intervention in Canada* is the most comprehensive academic account of Canada’s workers’ theatre to date, and it makes one reference to the CCF drama groups in a short biography of Toronto Workshop Productions’ George Luscombe, who participated in a CCF song, dance and drama group with his CCF Youth Club and attended a

theatre school associated with the CCF in 1946 (Filewod 168; Carson). So the extent to which the dramatics programming of the CCF was truly widespread remains an area for future research. However, I contend that it was widespread. Here the limitations of archival research and the inability to know what simply was not preserved by an archive dominated by the hegemonic class may account for the lack of widespread concrete physical evidence. However, the evidence uncovered in this research as well as references like Filewod's and Neil Carson's to Luscombe's work in Ontario, and the publications from the National CCF organization advertising drama activity in CCF Clubs collectively suggest that CCF agitprop occurred across Canada.

In the BC CCF, the blooming talents of young writers and actors were encouraged, providing opportunities for experimentation and personal artistic fulfillment, but they were simultaneously harnessed and used to further the political aims of the CCF clubs and national party, as Turner explains:

I offer another reason why socialist and labour organizations should seriously promote what we would call extra-political activities. Let us face the question. What percentage of our membership attend the regular business meetings between elections? Five, ten — you name it. Most seem content, except during election campaigns, to function only as supports. I submit the possibility that a large number of these non-active members could be induced to take part in other kinds of activities which also help to strengthen the Party. (Arthur J. Turner "Trade Unionism")

What Turner is articulating here is a belief common throughout (and central to) the workers' theatre movement of the past, and even the progressive educational movements of today: that

through involvement in theatre, drama, and active storytelling, the hearts and minds of people can be won over, inspired and motivated, and this can lead to powerful social change.

The amateur workers' theatre movement in Vancouver and its manifestation among the members of the South Hill CCF Club is one case study of such work being carried out in the 1930's. It reflects a reaction to a particularly militant and active period in BC labour history. As Turner reflects, "[t]his surge of self-expression coincided with, or perhaps, was a part of the increased political activity of the time" (Arthur J. Turner *Somewhere* 59-60).

**CHAPTER FOUR: Thorvald “Denny” Kristiansen
and the Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement**



Figure 3: Denny Kristiansen (second from left) while working in a BC logging camp as a "cook's flunky". Photo courtesy of Lyle Kristiansen's private collection

Denny Kristiansen

Following a similar trajectory as Arthur J. Turner's, Thorvald “Denny” Kristiansen's life in British Columbia is another story of a hardworking immigrant making his way through Depression-era Vancouver and working on theatre on the side. Kristiansen moved from Denmark to Canada, hence the nickname “Denny,” in 1923 at the age of 21. He found employment hauling bricks to build the Hume School in Nelson, BC, and then later worked as a waiter and steward on the many sternwheeler ships servicing the waterways of the BC interior. Denny went on to work as a “cook's flunky,” serving BC logging camps (L. Kristiansen). Vera Kristiansen, Denny's daughter-in-law, provides a description of Denny

that captures a sense of his attitude and work ethic in her biography of her husband's family, "A Very Political Family." "He had no family in Canada. He taught himself English by copying the Saturday Evening Post... Once when he was down to his last dime, he bought himself a ten cent cigar, and before he finished it, he had a job" (V. Kristiansen 6).³⁷

In 1930, Denny Kristiansen moved to Vancouver and was hired to work on the BC Coastal Service ships of the Canadian Pacific Railroad as a dining and cabin steward and became active in their union as well as the Vancouver Centre CCF club. With significant labour unrest in the early years of the Depression and tumultuous dock workers' and Relief Camp Workers' Union strikes raging through the summer of 1935 under the organization of the Workers' Unity League, part of the Communist Party, Kristiansen's becoming actively involved with organized labour and the politics of the Left comes as no great surprise.

It was during this time that Kristiansen became involved with workers' theatre in both the Progressive Arts Players' (aka Progressive Arts Club) production of *Waiting for Lefty*, where he played the role of the downtrodden and hopeless young taxi driver, Sid, and later as a playwright, actor and Dramatics Chair with the Vancouver Centre Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement (CCYM). Kristiansen's involvement with the Progressive Arts Players included many performances of *Waiting for Lefty* in Vancouver as well as the cross-Canada tour to the Dominion Drama Festival in Ottawa the following year. This production won the award for best English language play in 1936.

It was through his activity in the CCF though that Denny met his future wife, Hilda Moreland, at a party dance in Vancouver in 1936, where he reportedly told her she would

³⁷ I have retained typographical, spelling and grammatical errors in my transcription of *Big Business* to highlight the fact that Kristiansen wrote his script in English despite the fact that he was an immigrant and not a native English speaker, yet found a place within the CCF.

marry him one day.³⁸ True to his word, they were married later that year on September 18, 1936 (L. Kristiansen). A few years after his return from Ottawa after playing Sid in the PAC's production of *Waiting for Lefty*, Denny Kristiansen continued his participation in workers' theatre by creating a drama committee, which he chaired, in the newly formed CCYM in Vancouver Centre.

Throughout the mid- to late- Thirties, Denny continued to work for the CPR BC Coastal Service, working weeks at a time and returning for stints of shore leave between contracts. When asked how and when his father was able to find time for the workers' theatre group he hoped to create within the CCF, Lyle Kristiansen supposed that his father did his playwriting and performances entirely during these periods between work assignments; making the most in the Great Depression, given its lack of available paid work (L. Kristiansen). Arthur Turner's memoir references some of Kristiansen's work with his CCF club's drama group that likely occurred between the PAC production of *Waiting for Lefty* in 1936 and the early days of the CCYM dramatics committee in 1938/1939: "...the Vancouver CCF clubs dramatic group presented in Victory Hall two one-act plays "White Collar" and "When do we Eat", both by Denny Kristiansen. Denny was deeply engrossed in a 'workers' theatre'. He had a flair for humour" (Arthur J. Turner *Somewhere* 59). It is likely that *White Collar* actually refers to the script by Kristiansen found within the Turner Fonds titled *Big Business*. The central message of the play is an appeal to white-collar workers to view themselves as *workers* who are just as much in need of union protection as blue-collar

³⁸ Hilda Kristiansen (née Moreland) was another prominent CCF and NDP activist, earning their highest honour, a lifetime honorary membership. She became synonymous with Vancouver's West End community projects, including intense campaigning for traffic calming measures to prevent the West End from being used as a thoroughfare between North Vancouver and the rest of Downtown which she continued until her death in 2006.

workers, so the title offered by Turner makes sense. Elsewhere in his memoirs, Turner refers to a play as *Mr. Millionbucks* when its actual title, according to the scripted material in the Turner Fonds, was *Oscar Sapp*, suggesting that Turner's South Hill group either had a practice of renaming plays, or perhaps that Turner simply misremembered the exact titles when writing his memoirs decades later. Unfortunately, scripts for *White Collar* (if it is not the same play as *Big Business*) and *When Do We Eat* have yet to be found. The only extant play I have uncovered by Denny Kristiansen is *Big Business*.

The Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement

The Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement is an interesting case study that offers one example of how the semi-autonomous CCF clubs functioned and excelled in certain areas depending on the interest and commitment of their member activists. While workers' theatre plays were not the most successful educational and outreach projects undertaken by the CCYM, they did form a cornerstone of its plans for creating an organization that was as much a social club as a political party. The efforts of the leadership of the Vancouver Centre CCYM in creating an organization that appealed to a broad range of young people, all the while incorporating them into the CCF and establishing lifelong bonds to the party, were impressive. Their vast array of activities and efforts toward organizing new CCYM clubs and attracting new members are reflected within the minutes of the CCYM held in the Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection at UBC Rare Books and Special Collections. This practice of offering a range of extracurricular activities under the umbrella of the party was shared by the Communist Party in Canada and suggests that the processes by which both groups sought to mobilize and recruit their membership were similar.

The earliest archival records of Denny Kristiansen's activity in creating a drama group within the CCYM date back to the Vancouver CCYM's first official meeting on October 5, 1938, where he is listed as the Chair of Dramatics. Three previous exploratory meetings are also referenced in these first minutes, and it is reasonable to assume that Denny Kristiansen and quite possibly Hilda Kristiansen were involved in these early meetings as well, given their activity in the Vancouver Centre CCF club that was rolled into the CCYM. Grace MacInnis, daughter of then-CCF National President J.S. Woodsworth, and a CCF powerhouse in her own right, served as President of the CCYM, and Grace and her husband Angus MacInnis ultimately became lifelong friends of Denny and Hilda Kristiansen (Greer "Organizational Meeting of the CCYM").

The early minutes of the Vancouver CCYM reveal a keenly interested and active cohort of about thirteen members under the leadership of a small executive board. According to the minutes, the President was Grace MacInnis, the Secretary Olive Greer, the Chair of Organization Mrs. Wright, the Chair of Education Ella Gehl, the Chair of Dramatics Denny Kristiansen, the Social Chair Violet MacInnis and the Chair of Sport Bill Greer. The Vancouver CCYM is notable because it clearly indicates that the idea of membership in the CCF was intended to include more than a simple party affiliation, but also a range of activities from reading groups and educational lectures to the presentation of plays, fairly regular social dances and a commitment to building camaraderie through sport.³⁹ CCF membership was more than a party affiliation; it was a lifestyle. These activities make up what historians Ivan Avakumovich and Candida Rifkind call a "democratic socialist

³⁹ Hiking seemed to be a particularly popular activity organized by the CCYM and the North Shore of Vancouver was a frequent destination. A hike up what is known today as the 'Grouse Grind' up Grouse Mountain was organized by the Sports Chair and Social Chair on November 11, 1938 (Greer "3."). I can only wonder at this choice of event given Vancouver's cold and wet winters.

subculture” in Canada, and theatre played an important role in expressing democratic socialist ideals and educating members and the public (Rifkind 150). The democratic socialist revolution, then, was encouraged at every possible level in Canadian life.

The CCF clubs may have been the lowest level of the political organization’s hierarchy, but they were an important forum for self-improvement, education and the forging of a democratic leftist culture. Just as the Communist Party and its various committees and organizations would take up almost all the waking hours of its members, so did the CCF network of clubs, constituency associations, study groups and cultural activities fill the members’ leisure time with party activities. (Rifkind 150)

Each committee was given a good deal of freedom in how they wanted to move forward in their individual jurisdictions. Many of these decisions were directed by the interests of those in positions of leadership: thus the drama clubs of the South Hill Club, Roberts Creek Club and CCYM reflect the particular passions of individual activists who were keen to pursue them: Turner, Evans and Kristiansen respectively.

The election of the officers was followed by a discussion of the functions of all the different committees. It was decided that each member has the right of affiliating with the group carrying on the activities in which he is most deeply interested. Each committee was empowered to carry on and a meeting of standing committees was called for Wednesday evening, October 19, at Hilda Kristiansen’s. (Greer "Organizational Meeting of the CCYM")

Ten days later, the committee chairs met at the Kristiansens’ home in Vancouver and each committee chair gave a report of their progress. Denny Kristiansen suggested that the

next CCYM meeting include a “reading of some short story or play of social significance, by a member of the club” and also “made a drive for membership in the group” (Greer "Organizational Meeting of the CCYM").

The next meeting of the CCYM was held on November 2, 1938 at the home of Olive Greer. The minutes indicate a growth in membership, and considerable time was spent acquainting the new members with the group’s structure and purpose before moving on to committee reports. The minutes state that Denny Kristiansen was in the process of securing a “peace play” from someone in Boston and was “hopeful of being able to produce it in the near future” (Greer "3."). Kristiansen was reportedly also “prepared to start choir speaking” (Greer "3."). Whether this refers to choral speaking and mass recitation similar to the work of the American Federal Theatre Project or the Soviet Blue Blouses or some other form is unclear, though given his background with Vancouver’s PAC and the training in these sorts of techniques members of the Toronto PAC were known to have, I am inclined to believe that Kristiansen envisioned something along more agitprop lines.

The frequency of CCYM meetings was also a subject of discussion at this meeting. It was agreed that there would be a general business meeting held on the first Wednesday of every month and the third week of each month would be reserved for a social or educational event (Greer "3."). While these events might often be an educational lecture or debate or dance, they were occasionally nights for the dramatics club to perform their productions.

The fourth meeting of the CCYM was held in the Mount Pleasant CCF Hall on Dec. 7, 1938. The Social Committee reported an upcoming dance and the Sports Committee reported two successful hiking trips up Grouse Mountain and Capilano Canyon and a planned trip on Dec. 18th to a cabin on Hollyburn Mountain. Additional activities included

dance lessons for members and a bowling club with the hopes of starting a track and field team in the spring. The Organization Committee reported that they were helping to establish CCF youth groups in New Westminster and Vancouver Heights, and had been in contact with the group that had formed in North Vancouver.⁴⁰ “A greeting was brought from North Vancouver, by Mr. Wilkins, 10 present. North Vancouver uses dances, and entertainments to keep the group together. Offered to help our group put on a concert at any time” (Greer "Fourth Meeting"). The variety of programming on offer and the tenacity of the Organizing Committee in expanding the Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement beyond the confines of downtown Vancouver is impressive and speaks to their desire to spread the message of the CCF, and the many social perks of membership, as far as possible. Denny Kristiansen was not present at this meeting, but Violet MacInnis reported that the Provincial Organizer of the CCF was interested in a CCYM skit being performed in January and asked for interested members to contact Denny. Even on a provincial level, the CCF seemed keen to support the use of theatre as a tool to spread the message of the Left and Canada’s working class and unemployed. While dramatics may not have been at the very center of the CCF’s mission, it certainly formed a part of their education and propaganda machine, particularly in the hands of the fresh-faced youth of the CCYM (Greer "Fourth Meeting").

The fifth meeting, held on Jan. 4, 1939, proceeded much like the previous meetings with reports from the committees on the success of dances, hikes, the formation of a new choir, and a Socialist reading group. New CCYM groups were being formed in outlying areas and the visiting President of the Glenburn Branch spoke about his group, “stating how they wished to build a Socialist library, with books on physical Education and Dramatics, also”

⁴⁰ The Vancouver Heights District is just to the east of present-day Hastings/Sunrise and the Pacific National Exhibition grounds in the easternmost part of Vancouver before entering Burnaby.

(Greer "Fifth Meeting of the C.C.Y.M."). Meanwhile, the Dramatics Committee at the Vancouver Centre CCYM seemed to be finding it difficult to organize enough interested people to put on a play. "The Chairman reported that he had tried to form a dramatic group, but had not found enough people interested, to put on a play... Call made for new members for the Dramatic Club...." (Greer "Fifth Meeting of the C.C.Y.M."). Later, during Executive elections, a Mrs. Eckland was elected Chair of the Dramatics Committee by acclamation.

When asked why his father seemed to move away from the CCYM, Lyle Kristiansen explained that it was around this time that his father and maternal grandfather (Hilda's father, George Moreland) were having a period of intense political difference of opinion, and for the sake of family peace Denny withdrew from party life somewhat, allowing his father-in-law to remain active. Hilda Kristiansen's parents, George and Augusta Moreland, were British immigrants who were "thoroughly radicalized by the hardships they endured as prairie settlers" in Saskatchewan (Howard 240-41). George Moreland was active in founding the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association and was present, along with his wife, at the founding convention of the CCF in 1932. When they moved to Vancouver in the mid-thirties, they continued their activism in the CCF.

With Denny Kristiansen no longer serving as the Chair of Dramatics, the CCYM continued to try to produce working-class plays. The minutes of the sixth meeting of the CCYM on February 1, 1939 report that the dramatics group was busy preparing a new play titled *Incubus* to be presented two weeks later on February 14 at the Maple Hall (Greer "Sixth Meeting of the C.C.Y.M."). The subsequent minutes from March indicate that additional performances were held in Renfrew, Richmond and Jubilee on March 6, 8 and

10.⁴¹ Two new plays had been received by the Chair and a new play reading group was to be formed to explore additional dramatic material (Greer "Seventh Meeting of the C.C.Y.M.").

The CCYM Executive went on hiatus over the summer and by the time they reconvened, in September, the tone of the meetings was shifting away from organizing additional clubs and securing new members to more philosophical discussions about the impending war. One example of this shift is the following note at the end of the September minutes. "The meeting was followed by an open forum, with members taking part in discussing the part we should play in the war" (Greer "Minutes of the CCYM Meeting Held September 12, 1939 in Mr. Pleasant CCF Clubrooms."). No mention is made of dramatic activity until October 1939 when a new convenor of Dramatics is called for. In November of 1939 a play called *Weinies* [sic] *on Wednesday* was in the works along with a concert around Christmas. By the December 6, 1939 meeting, *Weinies on Wednesday* was reportedly coming along and the group suggested they should "secure a list of the publications of Samuel French" (Greer "C.C.Y.M. Meeting, Epic CCF Hall, December 6, 1939"), indicating that there was still a desire to produce plays, although the desire to write new, original material seemed to have waned.

Much like the South Hill CCF Club, the CCYM was influenced and shaped by the particular interests of its leadership. Where Arthur Turner was key in arranging for dramatics to be produced in South Hill, Denny Kristiansen's passion and previous experience performing in *Waiting for Lefty* with the Progressive Arts Club in Vancouver led him to try to produce workers' theatre with the CCYM. Without the interest and dedication of a few key players, workers' theatre would likely not have progressed within the Cooperative

⁴¹ Presumably the names of CCF clubs in the Lower Mainland

Commonwealth Federation, but where there was significant interest and an active leader willing to organize it, drama served as an additional educational and social outlet within the party structure. My discussion of Denny Kristiansen's play *Big Business* focuses on the importance of Kristiansen in generating new material for the CCYM and promoting drama within the party.

Big Business by Thorvald "Denny" Kristiansen

Very little physical archival evidence surrounding its performance life exists for this script, found in the Arthur J. Turner Fonds at UBC Rare Books and Special Collections. However, given what we know about Denny Kristiansen's skills and interest in theatre as expressed in the media, in an interview with his son Lyle, and in references to his work by others, as well as how similar work was conducted in other CCF clubs, we can draw some conclusions about the play. *Big Business* is a thought-provoking one-act play that makes an argument linking the plights of blue- and white-collared workers as a united working class struggling in the face of harsh economic depression and capitalist hierarchy. The play also makes a timely comment about the effects of a stagnant economy on the subsequent generation and the extended reliance on their parents that youth must have in the face of a turbulent job market.

Without a date on the original document, it is hard to know for sure when this play was written or performed, but given the work done by Turner in fostering workers' theatre in Vancouver, the CCF play festival held in late 1936, along with Kristiansen's involvement with *Waiting for Lefty* throughout 1936, it seems likely that this play followed the success of *Lefty* but came before Kristiansen became the Chair of Dramatics for the CCYM in October 1939, as *Big Business* is not mentioned anywhere in the CCYM minutes. The play certainly

predates the Kristiansens' 1941 purchase of the rooming house known as "the CCF House" at 1220 Barclay Street, because Denny Kristiansen's address at 1773 Davie Street is listed as the contact for groups seeking rights to produce the play (D. Kristiansen 7).

As with most of the workers' theatre plays in Canada, the US, Britain and elsewhere, *Big Business* takes place in one location and requires a very simple set that could be easily moved and assembled, allowing the performers a great deal of mobility and flexibility in where they performed. This play was likely performed at CCF party meetings and socials for education in the guise of entertainment. The play takes place within a typical office with typical office props and furniture.

A city office with an entrance on right, door left leading to cloth (sic) closet. Window center stage. Right front, Hopkins desk, partly facing center stage and audience. Four desks placed center and left of stage. Filing cabinet, left front. Usual office equipment. Phone on Hopkins and Morgan's desk. Routine office work continued during most part of the play. (D. Kristiansen 1)

The play opens with an everyman character, the tired and aged Sam, washing the office floors and lamenting the professional life he never had. Sam could very well represent any of the older members of the CCF in the 1930's and his kind nature and colloquial and folksy demeanour likely made him quite endearing to the audience. "...Thirty years ago I dreamt of sitting at a desk like this, giving orders to a lot of people, doing big things. A lot of things I didn't know then. You can't climb without a ladder..." (1). For Sam, and the generation of workers he represents, the days of working one's way up through a company are long gone, and without formal education and connections to those with power and capital, moving up the ranks through hard work and sheer determination was a largely impossible

task. Sam's character also represents the parents of the economically stunted generation of young men who were unable to find steady work in the throes of the Great Depression and could not independently support their families.

When Sam calls his wife on the phone to check in, he finds out that his son, Jack, along with Jack's wife and children, have moved back into the family home after Jack lost his job. Sam muses worriedly, "So now we have them again, and here I thought that he at last had a steady job. Oh I'm getting senile. I ought to have known it better... it isn't one thing its (sic) another. What a wonderful world we are living in where the old men have to work to keep the young ones" (1).

The play continues with the introduction of some of the white-collar office workers: the stenographers Miss Scott and Miss Morgan, who represent any young woman working as a secretary or stenographer in an office. The women complain about the smell of the soap used to wash the floors and ask Sam if he could do it during the night. Sam replies that with twenty-four floors to wash in a 12-hour work night, he would like to see them do any better. The women laugh at the possibility of their washing floors for work, placing a clear division between their perception of themselves as skilled workers and the low value of Sam's time and labour. Sam wisely replies:

...yes go ahead and laugh, but lots of young girls like yourself would be tickled to death to get a job cleaning offices. Girls with brains and education too. You believe me, this is the capitalist system. You take what you can get and like it. Any time the boss don't need you, out you go with the rest of them. You are a wage slave, you bet you are. Ever heard about that? (2)

As Sam finishes his thought, the young male clerks, Brown and Burns, enter with Burns overhearing the conversation and proclaiming rather glibly, “Why Sammy old boy I do believe you’re a red” (2). In what is probably the most effective monologue in the one-act, Sam dismisses Burns’ jibe, taking pride in the label and schooling his co-workers on their shared role as wage slaves. This monologue was undoubtedly well received by the CCF audiences and one can imagine the cheers of support coming from the audience in hearing their own opinions reflected back to them by the wise old Sam.

...sure I’m a red, like you say; only you don't know what that means. I am a radical. You'd better look that up in your dictionary when you get home and find out what it means. I suppose you think this system is alright. Look at me, an old man, twenty years I have worked here, every night, not much sun I’ve seen and I haven’t got a thing to show for it. This morning my son came home with his family, lost his job, now I have to keep them. He is well educated, we spent lots of money on him so that he could be somebody. Graduated with honors as Civil Engineer. The last job he had was an office job like yours. And now he has lost that too. Got laid off unexpectedly. You bet, Mr Burns white collar people are workers absolutely dependent on a wage and a job for a living. (2)

The flippant Burns appeals to his colleague for support in brushing aside Sam’s ideas with another trivializing jibe against Socialism.

BURNS: oh, why yes. But why bother about that socialist nonsense, the Socialist (sic) know everything, how to run the world, the only thing they don’t know is how to make a living. What do you say Brown? (2)

Mr. Brown, however, doesn’t dismiss Sam as easily.

BROWN: (Rather sobber) (sic) I think Sam is right. We earn our money by our work, just as he does, so what's the difference.

Before the conversation can go any farther, the office staff are interrupted by the impending arrival of the "Big Bad Wolf," as Miss Scott calls their boss, Mr. Hopkins (2). Hopkins admonishes Sam for the slowness of his work and asks him to finish cleaning before the morning staff arrives, then instructs Miss Morgan to fire him. "Sam is getting too old for this job miss Morgan. I have had several complaints about him lately, better give him notice to leave by the first, then get a younger man who can get through" (2). This comes as a harsh blow as seen from the perspective of the audience who are already aware of Sam's family obligations and the demands of the physical labour on his aging body. Key pieces of CCF policy laid out in the Regina Manifesto spoke to issues of social support including access to old age pensions, unemployment insurance, family allowances, subsidized housing (especially for seniors), medicare and hospital insurance, all of which the character Sam could have benefitted from directly (Federation). Here, theatre is used expertly to highlight key political issues the CCF hoped to tackle through policy and through the socialization of public services in Canada (D. Webster 7-10).

The play shifts somewhat from here and we are introduced to the realities of Mr. Hopkins' business, the generically named "Canadian Manufacturing Co." Hopkins receives a phone call notifying him that one of their accounts is leaving because they can receive the same goods for 20% less elsewhere.

Hello. ----- Oh good morning----- but you can't mean that why we have had your business ten years or more.-----You can get it twenty per cent under our price. Well we can't meet that.-----No it is out of the question----- Well we are very sorry to

loose [sic] you. Good-bye. That was Norman & Co., Mr. Brown, we have lost them also. Isn't it Hell. They are able to obtain a large shipment, not less than twenty per cent below our price. Can you imagine twenty per cent. Somebody is selling below cost. (3)

The news gets worse for Mr. Hopkins as he is informed by Mr. Brown that another account, Smith & Smith, went into bankruptcy as well, meaning the loss of another large portion of their business. Hopkins laments the loss and wonders aloud at what the instructions from company headquarters will be. The human toll of failing business is also noted by Mr. Hopkins, though moments before he had set the wheels in motion to fire Sam, also in the name of efficiency.

Ten thousand devils that's awful--- that will be the biggest loss that we have ever had! 50,000. ----This is serious (sits down staring straight front) What will they say to that in Montreal... Oh I know what they will say. "During these times take every precaution against loss and cut operating expenses to the bone." ---- (to himself) Cut operating expenses, that is easy for them to say, they neighter (sic) see nor know those people who work for them. But damn it I have to do something this time. I must cut til it hurts. (D. Kristiansen 3)

Hopkins turns his attention to a discussion with Miss Scott of the workers' salaries. Miss Scott reveals that the General Superintendent receives \$1000 per month to which Hopkins replies, "No no. We can't touch that" (3). Meanwhile, according to Miss Scott, the office staff salaries range from \$50-\$110 per month and the factory workers receive the minimum wage of \$12-\$16 per week, highlighting the sharp contrast between the wages of management and labour; doubtless a sore subject for the CCF club members in the audience.

With no room to trim from their already minimum wages, and unwilling to cut the salaries of those at the top, Hopkins comes up with another plan inspired by a memo from the previous spring sent from the home office and tries to sell it to his staff as a new benefit.

HOPKINS: ...Take this down Miss Scott. Beginning at the first of next month we will deduct 20% from the workers wages, office and factory help for reinvestment in the company, a large block of shares is offered to them, at 16% below market price Thus giving them an opportunity to become shareholders in this company that they have strived so vigorous to build. When the share are fully paid up, they will get complete control of them, also during the time of payment 7% interest will be added semi-annually. It is a good investment, a real chance to save for a rainy day... (4)

In a style very common in workers' theatre, the next portion of the play takes the form of a debate of the pros and cons of the offer. By debating both sides, the performers are ostensibly giving both sides of the argument credence and allowing their audience to draw their own conclusions. However, in a live performance, the overwhelming support of one side, that is, the side of the worker, would undoubtedly win. This dialectical approach is a pragmatic way to lay out an argument in a very convincing, educational and entertaining fashion unique to scripted drama. A speech, debate or study group would not likely have been as successful as this short staged performance in reaffirming the audience's commitment to the values of Social Democracy and swaying the audience.

The clerk, Burns, begins the debate by showing his support for the idea.

BURNS: so we are going to be shareholders, not a bad idea, at least a good way to save money. And when the shares are paid up in full we will get dividend also. The shares are still paying 7% you know. (4)

Miss Morgan, however, is not fooled by the promises of capital and serves as the voice of reason.

MORGAN: what will you do with all that money Burns? I suppose it will go to Palm Beach for the winter, clipping coupons now and then. You are an optimistic ass. (4)

Miss Scott presents the practical notion that the company investment plan is in reality an immediate pay cut based on speculation.

SCOTT: it may be a good way to save money, but I don't see how I can possibly live on 20% less than I get now. I can't afford to save. (4)

With minimal wages to begin with, not to mention that Miss Scott and Miss Morgan's wages historically would have been lower still than those of their male clerk colleagues, any amount of saving is out of her reach, a situation the working-class audience of the CCF would have known well. Clerk Brown echoes these sentiments.

BROWN: Save my eye, don't you understand that it is merely a smart way to evade the minimum wage law. We are given an opportunity to become shareholders, so he says. It's a brilliant idea, especially when the employer is losing money. It is going to be too bad for you Miss Scott if you don't except (sic) this great opportunity. You will immediately lose your position like Sam this morning. It's a durty (sic) shame to fire the poor old man. Why he belongs in this building, he has been here for over twenty years. No pention (sic) for him, just a kick, you're through, that's all -(Pause). (4)

Burns begins to question the sincerity of the shareholding offer and Brown launches into another monologue about the trickery of big business, returning the message of the play once more to the merits of Socialism, thus continuing the educational and propaganda thrust of the play.

BROWN: ...In my opinion it amounts to just this, a 20% cut in salary. No its not phoney. Just slick business trickery. They have all ready (sic) cut us down 30¢ since 1929, a little more and we will be paying out money to hold our jobs. Hell, just imagining somebody selling us shares without even asking us if we wont (sic) to buy. Sure this is a free country. Free to starve if you don't do what your (sic) told. Then these damned old timed politicians, warns (sic) us that Socialism will take away our freedom, Hell, take away something we never had. The Socialists are right when they say 'We have nothing to loose (sic) but our chains.' (4)

At this point Sam returns, having forgotten his hat earlier, and Miss Morgan informs him that he has been fired. Sam laments the loss of his income in light of the seven members of his family depending on his wages and determines to appeal this decision to the boss.

SAM: ...it is too terrible he doesn't understand what he has done. Him with his large income, don't know what it means to worry. He must give me a chance. (5)

Sam pleads his case when Hopkins re-enters, but it falls on deaf ears as Hopkins claims that Sam is simply too old to do the work. Sam is about to leave when a messenger bearing a telegram arrives.

HOPKINS: ...What! Whats (sic) that! Good Heavens, what next! (Paces up and down floor) of all the damn fools and idiots. Just listen to this. Received wire re: failure of Smith and Smith, Firm loses \$50,000. You are personally responsible. Must ask for your resignation at once. So they [think] they can do that to me. Miss Morgan get the head-office on the phone please. (5)

While Miss Morgan calls the head office, Hopkins realizes he and Sam are in the same situation, both having been with the company for twenty years, and are being treated

without dignity or respect despite these years of service. Hopkins' line draws the first of several parallels between his situation as a white collar worker and Sam's situation as a labourer under Hopkins' management.

HOPKINS: 20 years. It's a long time. Too long perhaps. (To himself) I have worked hard, I have sacrificed. When things run smoothly it is my dear Mr Hopkins. (to others) These people down East who employ thousands of workers, and never see them, they don't know what it all means. They only think in terms of dividends, dividends and more dividends. Darn their rotten telegrams. (5)

The head-office is on the phone and the audience hears half of the conversation from Hopkins. It is clear that Hopkins is being fired and replaced by a new and younger manager from Montreal and that the company places the blame for their loss of business when Smith & Smith filed for bankruptcy squarely on his shoulders. Like Sam's, Hopkins' pleas fall on deaf ears in the face of power and money.

...They hung up on me. So I'm, fired, its almost funny, if it wasn't so damnable tragic. I'm to (sic) old to start with a new company. (slumps down) They are sending out a man to take my place immeditately (sic). I'm no longer of any use to them, I who have slaved here 20 years, who have made large profits for them, cut expences (sic) to the bone, then a failure beyond my control happens, and they just fire me. Why? In the name of commonsence (sic) can you tell me why? (6)

The office staff is quick to jump to Sam's defence and point out the correlation between Hopkins and Sam's positions.

BROWN: (Jumps up) Yes I can tell you why. For the same reason you fired Sam.

Because there is no human interest in business today. Your (sic) hawling (sic) now, a

moment ago you told Sam that he was too old and useless, you fired him, you cut our salaries you worked us till we were blue in the face. Why? To make profits for the owners. Now when you are not making profits you get fired exactly like Sam did. (6)

Hopkins tries to defend his actions toward Sam, still not making the logical connection that sits at the heart of the message of the play.

HOPKINS: I don't think that I have been harder than other men in my position.

SAM: No Boss. The trouble is that you have failed to see your true position... that any man working for a [living] is a working man be he janitor or be he boss. If he realized that, he would try to co-operate instead of always dictating. Society has created artificial barriers between us people who do the work. (5)

Mr. Brown takes the play to the next level of Socialist rhetoric and brings home the core lesson that the strife between blue and white collar workers is a capitalist construct and that only through broad-based solidarity can they see justice in the workplace or indeed in society.

BROWN: Sam is right in a lot of things. He knows something about the things that really matters in life. I'm sorry for you Mr. Hopkins, but you will have lots of time now to reflect on thigs (sic) that you never thought of before. Remember the time that you tried to smash the Unions in the factories, you had no use for silly Socialist theories, Oh no. Well here is one theory you have today realized is correct. We who work for a master are slaves, absolutely at the mercy of the class who alone can employ us. The class who own the means of production and we have nothing in common with them, but every thing in common with our own class. (6)

Hopkins is beginning to see the light and lambasts the role the media play in trying to placate the masses in service of the bosses. “Things are rotten to the core, business is going bankrupt. And look at the headlines in the morning paper. (picks up paper and reads) ‘Business definatly (sic) on upward trend’ here is another ‘Conditions getting better by leaps and bounds’. What a lot of bunk. What a lot of hokum. Those men that write it know better” (6). Sam, in agreement, adds that the papers, too, are controlled by capital. “Sure they do but they must obey orders. The great God, money power, rules the newspapers. What we need is a real paper, owned and controlled by the working class themselves” (6).

This line is particularly interesting given the CCF’s efforts to generate their own media in the form of radio broadcasts and club newsletters. The CCYM also tried to produce a CCF newspaper, though it does not appear to have had a wide circulation as only 73 copies were printed at the cost of \$2.50 (Greer "Eighth Meeting" 1). Other labour-friendly publications varied by party affiliation, but notable examples include the *Labour Statesman*, *The Federationist*, *The Clarion*, sector-based papers like the *British Columbia Lumberman*, and specific interest magazines like the Progressive Arts Club’s *Masses* and *New Masses* or the American *Workers’ Theatre* magazine (aka *New Theatre*).

Brown and Hopkins begin to hatch a plan to create a new Leftist newspaper using some of Mr. Hopkins’ capital and their newfound free time, given that the company is about to collapse.

BROWN: if people would only stop to realize how rotten things really are. Sam was talking about a workers paper. We have some small sheets but they’re not effective, it takes money to start a real paper. But believe me if we had a daily press and could get men like you Mr. Hopkins to get behind it, we could do something.

HOPKINS: Yes. Why not. A daily paper, not afraid to print the truth about conditions, what a howl it would create. Take for instance this scene we inaugurated this morning about the employees shares, they pressed me to do it last Spring, its putrid And the government contracts, full of graft and corruption. If the taxpayers knew the real truth about some of these things it would tear things wide open. (D. Kristiansen 7)

Hopkins goes on to commit to using his political and social clout to advance the workers' cause and try to shift the opinion of his white-collared peers to understand that they, too, are workers with little to lose and much to gain in a socialist utopia.

HOPKINS: ...I have a few dollars, we will start things moving. My word means something in this town yet. I can still go to my club, and the business luncheons, and I'll tell them my own case. I'll make them realize that they too are workers and I'll tell them about human interest. (7)

The play ends with a small bit of humour that marks a lovely dénouement with the reconciliation of Sam and Hopkins and the recognition of Sam's knowledge and value as a human and worker.

HOPKINS: xx (sic) Now about you coming along to work for me?

SAM: I'm afraid I don't know much about the newspaper business.

HOPKINS: Well you can teach me Socialist theories. (7)

While perhaps less than extraordinary as dramatic literature, *Big Business* is an excellent example of amateur agitprop and is very much in keeping with generic form. The simple plot and dialogue, minimal mise en scène, local references and clear and pointed political overtones served their intended purposes of entertainment and education. The

numerous spelling and typographical errors in Kristiansen's manuscript also reveal the work of someone who learned English as an additional language, hinting at some of the diversity of the CCF and Vancouver in this period.

The fact that the message of *Big Business* specifically targets a white collar audience is also rather unique compared to the rest of the CCF plays in this research which are geared towards a somewhat broader audience. Denny's living situation in downtown Vancouver, as opposed to the more working-class South Hill neighbourhood of Turner's club or the rustic fishing community of Roberts Creek where Evans lived, may account for some of this difference.⁴²

Conclusion

The story of Denny Kristiansen's theatrical activity in Vancouver is but one example of many across the Western world in which young activists took on the task of fighting for a vision of a new world beyond the darkness of the Great Depression-era. Because of the efforts of CCF club leaders and groups like the CCYM in Vancouver Centre, belonging to the CCF was more than a simple party affiliation. It took on multiple roles including educational institution, social club, political party, artists' collective and debating club. For Denny Kristiansen, an immigrant speaking English as an additional language, the CCF offered camaraderie, opportunities for artistic expression, a social network, family, and a political and cultural support system. CCF party life was all-encompassing.

⁴² 1773 Davie Street is between Denman and Bidwell Streets. This area of the city was (and still is) popular with European immigrants and recent arrivals to Vancouver (C. o. Vancouver). Neither Kristiansen's home on Davie St, nor their boarding house on Barclay remains, though the majority of this dissertation was written within a few blocks from both locations.

Denny and Hilda ran a four-storey, 16-unit rooming house at 1220 Barclay St. in Vancouver. The house came to be a hotspot for the Left and was called “the CCF house” by neighbours due in large part to the signs erected on the roof during each election, announcing who the local CCF/NDP candidate was. “During the 40s, 50s, 60s, and 70s, 1220 Barclay was a popular meeting place for many of BC's best known labour, socialist and feminist leaders and home to a few of them. Hilda's reputation as a gracious hostess and chef was renowned not only by them, but by dozens of her son's schoolmates and many newly arrived Danish immigrants who came to regard 1220 as a home away from home” (“Hilda (Moreland) Kristiansen Obituary”). (“Hilda (Moreland) Kristiansen Obituary”) (“Hilda (Moreland) Kristiansen Obituary”) (“Hilda (Moreland) Kristiansen Obituary”) Lyle Kristiansen described his mother’s commitment to the CCF as follows: “You would call her a stay at home mom today...but she was always organizing something...” Some of his earliest memories include overhearing conversations through his bedroom curtain from the adjoining living room as CCF members and party leaders discussed the issues of the day. (L. Kristiansen).

Along with his wife, Hilda Kristiansen, this spirit of activism embodied by Denny, other members of the CCYM and the leaders of the CCF helped shape the city of Vancouver. And through the legacy of their son Lyle, who served as an NDP MP in the interior, and his own politically active family, the dreams of members in the early decades of the CCF took on new life as the torch was passed to the next generations. Lyle passed away shortly after I interviewed him at his home on the Sunshine Coast in April 2015.

Theatrically, Denny Kristiansen’s significance to the broader Canadian Workers’ Theatre movement is clear. As a playwright and organizer, he used theatre as a tool to

motivate, educate and inspire his colleagues. As an actor, he formed a common thread between Vancouver's famous Progressive Arts Club and its production of *Waiting for Lefty* and the dramatic activities of the CCF in Vancouver Centre. His play *Big Business* is also unique among the CCF plays held in the Turner Fonds because he directly deals with the idea of white-collar workers as being equal partners in the class struggle for decent work and wages, moving the discourse beyond the rhetoric of the proletariat vs. the bourgeoisie by arguing that just treatment and fair wages are workers' issues, not just the issues of the teeming underclass. This theme is also explored in the American agitprop play *Oscar Sapp* from the labour college in Mena, Arkansas, also in the Turner Fonds, suggesting that *Big Business* may have been written as the result of international workers' theatre influences. This message and its call for solidarity between classes and job classifications would have resonated well in Vancouver among CCF and other Leftist circles in the wake of the general economic hardship of the Depression that made no such distinctions between classes of workers.

CHAPTER FIVE: Hubert Evans and the Roberts Creek CCF Club



Figure 4: Hubert Evans in his “double ender” boat and campsite off the Sunshine Coast, BC

Help me to see and to help others see creative purpose.
Help me to write with sincerity and without sentimentality.
Thine is the gift. May I ever be a faithful steward of the talent entrusted to me,
and never use it for unworthy ends.

“Writer’s Prayer” by Hubert Evans (1932)

Introduction

This chapter will explore the play *You Can’t Tell Me* credited to the Roberts Creek CCF club. This play was included in the Arthur J. Turner Fonds at UBC Rare Books and Special Collections along with several other plays written by members of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in the mid- to late- 1930’s. UBC’s Rare Books and Special Collections houses two versions of *You Can’t Tell Me*. The first, hereafter referred to as

“Version A,” is contained within the Turner Fonds and is subtitled “A Comedy Sketch Written and Produced by Roberts Creek C.C.F. Club” (R. C. CCF). The second, hereafter referred to as “Version B,” housed within the Hubert Evans Fonds among Anna Winters Evans’ papers, is a slightly extended version that bears no mention of a CCF club, but gives credence to my belief that Hubert Evans, a notable writer and playwright from Roberts Creek, and his wife were likely CCF members and the authors of the script credited to the Roberts Creek Club (“You Can't Tell Me”).

Version A uses a series of vignettes to show generations of ignorance in the face of new and revolutionary ideas. The common location throughout the play is a BC relief camp where workers Jim, a young CCF supporter, and Gus, “an older man whose ears are plugged with the cotton wool of prejudice” (R. C. CCF 1), are discussing local politics. The play jumps between Jim and Gus’ commentaries and short scenes in other times and places in history. Jim argues that the stubborn prejudice against new ideas epitomized by Gus’ behaviour was also experienced by men considered to be pioneers, including Christopher Columbus and Galileo, by the early adopters of new technologies like surgical anaesthesia and telephones, and by those who fought for labour rights in Yorkshire woolen mills. The last vignette shows women reading Vancouver newspapers fifty years in the future and marvelling at how backward the relief camps and politics of the time were. In each case, what once seemed controversial, new and untested, much like the CCF itself would have seemed in the 1930’s, ended up being accepted as natural and normal in time despite naysayers like Gus. Jim and Gus’ privileged position reflecting on the past with the benefit of hindsight is imagined anew in a futuristic conversation between Jim and Gus’ ancestors, reflecting back on the 1930’s with their own hindsight. The play ends with optimism that

fifty years later, the CCF will have managed to solve the social ills of the 1930's and achieve a bright new future for all classes in Vancouver.

Version B includes a longer excerpt of primary source material in the Yorkshire labour rights vignette and more developed banter between a husband and wife (as opposed to a wife and her matronly neighbour) in the future vignette ("You Can't Tell Me"). Both versions are very similar in content and tone, and it is impossible to say with certainty which came earlier. Version B from the Anna Evans Fonds was filed amongst a series of radio plays Hubert Evans wrote for the CBC in the 1950s. Assuming that the original order in which the documents were archived was maintained and reflects some measure of temporal proximity in the Evans Fonds, I believe that Evans revisited the original script years later for potential conversion into a radio play. However, as Version A (the version found in the Turner Fonds) is explicitly credited to the CCF and Version B makes no mention of the CCF at all, Version A will be the primary focus of this chapter.

While membership records of the Roberts Creek CCF club from the mid-1930's proved elusive after I searched local and provincial archives, an overview of Evans' written work and the Evans biography by Alan Twigg suggest that even if Evans had not been a formal member of the CCF in Roberts Creek, as I suspect he was, he certainly would have been familiar with them and shared many of the same political ideals. A story in Twigg's biography, *Hubert Evans: The First Ninety-Three Years*, illustrates Evans' connections to organized labour, humanitarian philosophy, and left-wing political groups such as the CCF. Evans shared a story with Twigg about teaching out-of-work "drifters" how to fish, helping them build skiffs and thus allowing them to make a living on the Sunshine Coast, much to the chagrin of the relief officer who was concerned about the dilution of his workforce. During a

Depression-era fishermen's strike on the Sunshine Coast, Evans served on a successful strike committee. "...I served on one of the strike committees when the salmon trollers declared, 'We fish to live, not live to fish.' We succeeded in upping the price of a dressed coho from 4.5 cents to 7.5 cents a pound" (Twigg *Hubert Evans: The First Ninety-Three Years* 19). Evans added that during this time he also wrote "several left-wing plays, contributed gratis, to left-wing publications" (Twigg *Hubert Evans: The First Ninety-Three Years* 19). Due to the references to relief camps and relief camp workers in the play, I am convinced that *You Can't Tell Me* was one of these plays written during the period of this fishing strike and given to the Roberts Creek CCF Club. Alan Twigg, who interviewed Evans extensively to write his biography, believed Evans to be ideologically aligned most closely with the CCF.

There were communists involved in the [trollers' strike], and Evans was good friends with some of them, but his political radicalism was more in tune with the Christian idealism of such men as J.S. Woodsworth and T.C. Douglas, and he became an early supporter of the socialist Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). (Twigg *Hubert Evans: The First Ninety-Three Years* 20)

According to Twigg, Evans' "doctrinaire radio and stage plays" were produced by the CCF on CJOR radio in Vancouver and at union hall meetings, just like the plays written by Turner and Kristiansen discussed in previous chapters. "[Evans] has often stated," continued Twigg, "that had he his writing career to do over again, he would further develop his skills as a playwright. The immediacy and economy required for dramatic impact suit his 'lean and vigorous style.'" As time wore on, however, Evans wrote fewer plays and, according to Twigg, "had increasingly less involvement in the political process" (21). Still, Evans' brief experimentation with writing plays for radio and stage seems to have left a lasting impression

on his writing style. Years later, Evans described his style as he reached the end of his career. “After sixty years I still see a story as a play. The characters are on an imaginary stage and I’m a member of the audience. I just try to get them to show themselves. This can be very limiting. On the other hand, I think it narrows down the focus” (Evans qtd. in Twigg *Hubert Evans: The First Ninety-Three Years* 38).

Hubert and Anna Evans

Hubert and Anna Evans offer a final example of activist CCF members who used theatre as a tool for instruction and mobilization within their club. Hubert Evans, unlike Turner and Kristiansen, was a professional freelance writer. His career spanned seven decades. He worked in many forms including short story, poetry, radio plays, one-acts, children’s books, articles and serials. Dubbed by Margaret Laurence “The Elder of the Tribe,” Evans’ legacy and influence on Canadian fiction run much deeper than those of his fellow CCF playwrights Turner and Kristiansen (Laurence et al. 391; Fink et al.). Because of Evans’ background as a professional writer, his play bears a more nuanced flavour and tone and conveys more subtle depth than the unapologetically propagandistic works of his CCF peers (Nelson). Anna Evans was a professional teacher and writer in her own right and the two worked together on a great many projects throughout their careers. She may very well have collaborated with him on his plays for the CCF.

Hubert Evans was born in Vankleek Hill, Ontario in 1892. As a young man, he worked as a reporter until serving overseas in World War One. Wounded at Ypres in 1916, he was honourably discharged in 1918 with the rank of Lieutenant. His wartime experience is reflected in his 1927 novel *The New Front Line*. After the war, he moved to northern British Columbia where he served as a union organizer, a hatchery labourer, prospector, foreman and

superintendent on the Skeena River by day, and writer in his off time. In 1920, Hubert married schoolteacher and writer Anna Winter, his childhood sweetheart. Hubert Evans continued working in the fishery until 1926 when he decided to write full-time. He worked as a reporter in Nelson and New Westminster, BC for several years until a chance trip to Roberts Creek on the Sunshine Coast changed his life (Luhan, Stein and Everett; Fink et al.). Evans described his and Anna's attraction to the slower pace of life and connection to the land he found in Roberts Creek.

In April 1927 a young couple seeking a less hurried life-style than they had found in cities visited Roberts Creek. During a stroll they stopped to watch an elderly man fastening claws to the end of a long cedar pole he had shaped. "For hooking up mussels, the big ones down low on the wharf piles," the man explained. "Mussels for eating?" "For catching shiners tomorrow. Shiners make good cod bait. I aim to go cod fishing the day after." Three unhurried days to catch a cod! Then and there the couple knew their search had ended. (qtd. in "Remembering Hubert Evans")

The Evans's were Quakers, so the slower and more thoughtful pace of life in Roberts Creek likely seemed a perfect fit. It was there that Hubert and Anna raised three children: Elizabeth, Joan and Jonathan. Aside from nine years living in and around Kitimat in northern BC, most of the rest of Hubert and Anna's lives were spent in Roberts Creek. The Hubert Evans Fonds at UBC's Rare Books and Special Collections includes letters regaling friends and loved ones with stories of life on the Sunshine Coast: raising their children, boating in the Gulf Islands, working the land and building their home. This deeply felt connection to the land is reflected in Evans' poetry, stories and novels and forms a common thread throughout his work (Evans "Brief Biography"; Luhan, Stein and Everett). The connection between

Evans' faith, his political philosophy rooted in social justice—a pillar of CCF doctrine—and his love of the land, three themes repeated throughout his works, was articulately expressed by Margaret Laurence in her citation when her friend Hubert Evans was awarded an honorary doctorate from Simon Fraser University in 1982:

Hubert Evans is a Quaker, and his work has been illuminated by his faith, a fighting faith that struggles for social justice, a meditative faith that mourns suffering even as it jubilates life, a faith that recognizes laughter as a gift of God. He has worked for himself and his need to communicate, as all serious writers do, but in so doing he has worked for 'another' – for his beloved family, for the people of his land, and for the holy spirit that has moved him and given him grace. (Laurence et al. 391-92)

Contextual Works

Evans' first novel, *The New Front Line*, was published in 1927. The story follows Hugh Henderson who returns from fighting in WWI and is torn between taking up a life in business following in his father's footsteps or joining the new front line pioneering land in BC. This urban/rural divide and celebration of pastoralism is echoed in much of Evans' work and reflects his commitment to the land and a simpler way of life. The title juxtaposes the front line experienced by both the protagonist and Evans during wartime with another battle: taming the final frontier of the Canadian west. *The New Front Line* also bears biographical similarities to Evans' own early life. Henderson and Evans faced similar battles at home in distancing themselves from the civilized, settled and conventional paths expected of them by family and society in favour of a more rugged, independent, self-directed life in the wilderness of BC, each accompanied by a likeminded school teacher wife and partner.

Alan Twigg observes further parallels between Hugh Henderson's rejection of commercialism and the life dictated by his father as an articulation of Canada's growing national identity and independence in the years following World War One:

If one accepts the suggestion that Canada only began to come of age upon recognition of its subservient colonial status, the gentle rebellion of Hugh Henderson against the respectable mercantilism of his father echoes Canada's slowly developing disenchantment with the paternalism of the British Isles following World War One. The raw materials exploited by Canada's allies were, as Hubert Evans was in a position to see first-hand for three horrendous years, all too human. Canadian troops did their duty. They did as they were told. And they were slaughtered. (Twigg *Hubert Evans: The First Ninety-Three Years* 58)

Twigg's analysis of a deeper message in *The New Country* is in keeping with Evans' politics and belief system. As someone who supported the parties of the Left and was a practicing Quaker, Evans' pacifism was a deeply rooted value reflected in his other novels, poems and plays as well. His opposition to participation in foreign wars was echoed elsewhere in British Columbia's CCF clubs, most notably in the agitprop play by the South Hill CCF club, *Boys of the Old Brigade*, discussed previously in this dissertation.

In the years preceding the Great Depression, Evans was published in about fifty different periodicals. Of being a writer in this period, Evans said, "...in those days, if you could put a short story together, you could sell it. But you couldn't make a living just by writing for Canada. So I wrote pulp stories. The most popular kind back then were war stories by American guys who'd never even been there. I couldn't write about violence so I wrote outdoor stories. Animal stories" (Evnas qtd. in Twigg *Hubert Evans: The First Ninety-*

Three Years 13). Some of Evans' most beloved and widely read pieces were stories about Derry, an Airedale Terrier modeled after a dog owned by the Evans' while living in Cultus Lake outside Vancouver in the Twenties. The three Derry books, *Derry, Airedale of the Frontier* (1928), *Derry's Partner* (1929), and *Derry of Totem Creek* (1930), were so widely read by young people that Twigg credits Evans as being "one of the most popular writers for young people in North America" (17) in the Twenties and Thirties.⁴³

Twigg characterizes Evans' work for youth and adults alike as being first and foremost concerned with the progressive cultural and political values of "social responsibility, personal values and the dictates of the conscience" (69), noting that Evans could not see how a writer could "put onto paper what he does not feel keenly in his own mind" (71). Echoing the argument put forward by Arthur Turner about the importance of teaching young people progressive values at an early age and Turner's motivation for writing agitprop for young people in *The Story of the Simia*, Evans claimed that "you can still change a person's viewpoint up to the time they're twenty" (Twigg *Hubert Evans: The First Ninety-Three Years* 59).⁴⁴ This marriage of progressive social values, literature and drama forms a common chord between the works of CCF club insiders like Turner and Kristiansen and this likeminded ally and club member, Evans. Evans hung a favorite quotation by Albert Camus above his writing desk that speaks to this marriage of the arts and social justice in his view. It

⁴³ These stories appear to have some staying power. Copies of Evans' *Derry* books are still in circulation though out of print. A portion of one story titled "The Motherless Cub" was most recently reprinted in 1997 in *The Best Canadian Animal Stories: Classic Tales by Master Storytellers* edited by Margaret Whittaker.

⁴⁴ Arthur Turner said, "I am impressed with the need for encouraging young groups to participate... [I]n this field of 'active make believe' there is a chance to track young minds from the dead end of just watching strings of useless and brain neutralizing programs to the helpful reality of 'doing something'. In childhood and early adulthood there is the desire — either latent or expressed — to be more than a spectator, to do something. Even minor activities can leave a lasting impression and assist in molding a useful life" (Arthur J. Turner *Somewhere* 60).

reads, "an artist may make a success or failure of his work. He may make a success or failure of his life. But if he can tell himself that finally, as a result of his long effort, he has eased or decreased the various forms of bondage weighing upon Man, then in a sense, he is justified and can forgive himself" (Evans "Brief Biography").

These socio-political values can be seen in several notable examples from Evans' short stories, suggesting his broader political and social beliefs that were very much in line with the CCF doctrine in the Thirties, as well as Evans' dedication to the environment of British Columbia. "A Trust Fulfilled" shows valiant young people helping a prospector safeguard his discovery of a pitchblende deposit intended for extracting radium for medical use and features the miner's heated criticism of European monopolies and their cheating of the sick through the price fixing of lifesaving medication. "Mactavish Winks" concerns the preservation of a beaver habitat threatened with destruction so outsiders could build a golf course motivated by capitalist greed. The story highlights the ills of capitalism and its destruction of British Columbia in its steady creep westward, a common theme for Evans' work. In "What Shall It Profit," the heroine quits her well-paying job extracting pitchblende to work with a union activist who is organizing a workers' night school and co-op in an attempt to reverse the destructive influence of the unscrupulous mining corporation.

"The Western Wall" is a more developed short story that sees the protagonist, Jim, navigating Depression-era Vancouver and observing the hardship wrought by capitalist greed and the class-based game of cutthroat the working class was forced to play. The 'new frontier' of Evans' first novel has given way to the metaphorical wall at the westernmost edge of the world stymying the forces of empire and expanding civilisation. Jim's social consciousness is awakened through a series of encounters with archetypal figures of the

period such as the religious zealot, the down-and-out beachcomber, the society girl, and so on. Jim's assessment of the world around him is beautifully articulated in a passage that reflects Evans' socio-political values and would have been well received by likeminded members of the CCF:

The multitude, the honest, ordinary people, must spend their lives in the performance of obscure tasks, and if they were to be hounded year after year by the fear of losing what income they had, then the whole of living was a cruel mockery. And the makers of the thousand and one things who, through advertising, did their best to make such people believe they must have these products, were guilty of an indirect form of mental torture. In every newspaper and magazine, on signboards and the radio, people were continually told they owed it to themselves, to their families, most of all to their children, to be the owner of such and such an article, or the consumer of such and such a patent food. Talk as the advertisers might about 'serving the public' it was themselves they were serving, and the hypocrisy they employed to cloak their greed for success made them little short of despicable. (Evans "The Western Wall")

Evans' most widely read novel, *Mist on the River* (1954), also takes a political tack in its exploration of the effects of colonialism on British Columbia's First Nations. The story follows a teenage Gitksan boy named Cy Pitt who is torn between his assumed future as tribal chief and his desire to embrace the encroaching white culture. Caught between two worlds, Cy must find his own way. A particularly poignant plot point, inspired by Evans' experience during his time spent in Kitimat in 1945 while Anna Evans worked as a teacher, concerns a young boy who contracts tuberculosis and dies when the tribe refuses to send him to the hospital in Prince Rupert. By contemporary standards, it feels bizarre, if not

inappropriate, to read a novel written by an Anglo-Canadian written from the perspective of a First Nations boy, but Evans is respectful of the Gitksan culture and his depiction generally avoids Indigenous stereotypes and relies heavily on his own experiences living in and amongst the people of Kitimat. He described his intention to present the people he knew faithfully in an interview with Alan Twigg. Evans' reference to George Ryga's play also suggests a continued interest in Canadian theatre beyond his CCF drama experience.

I could have written about the injustices Indians faced. You know, like *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. I've seen all that. I know all that. But I had commercial-fished and trapped and built canoes with these people. I could roll a cigarette and sit on my heels and talk with them. I was one of them. I wanted to show how they were really just like us.

(Centre)

The majority of Evans' short stories and poems focused on aspects of life on the Sunshine Coast and elsewhere in British Columbia or his boyhood in Ontario, and while occasionally political in tone, much of his work after the Depression-era focuses on the natural environment and people's relationships with it.⁴⁵ Still other works stand out as a continuation of Evans' political work in the same vein as his CCF play *You Can't Tell Me*. For instance, remarkably progressive for its time, his novel *No More Islands* criticized the Japanese-Canadian internment during WWII and the threats of blind nationalism and racism. Evans' poetry toward the end of his career also expanded on his typical themes of the interplay between humans and the environment, occasionally with a humorous political twist as seen in his poem "More On Gulls": "When I toss food scraps to my resident gull / It calls its comrades before it eats. / My gull is a Socialist. / When they come, it snatches, squabbles /

⁴⁵ See Evans' third novel *O Time in Your Flight* (1979), E.g. *Whittlings* (1976), and *Mostly Coast People: Selected Poems* (1982).

and competes with the best of them. / My gull is a capitalist. / My gull is a mixed-up voter at election time” (Evans "More on Gulls").

Taken collectively, Evans’ oeuvre paints a picture of a lifetime of genuinely Canadian experiences from the urbanity of Eastern Canada at the turn of the century to the musings of a man ninety-three years old approaching the end of his life. Throughout his work, the fundamental progressive values of personal and social responsibility and harmony with nature in the face of the challenges of modernity ring loud and clear. His play written for the Roberts Creek CCF club is in keeping with the character of the bulk of his work that has earned him a place in the canon of Canadian literature.

Evans and the Roberts Creek CCF Club

With a paucity of evidence in the archive to go on, it is difficult to pin down the activities of the Roberts Creek CCF Club with any certainty, let alone the specifics of its dramatic activity. The communities of the Sunshine Coast including Roberts Creek, Gibsons and Sechelt, being small and isolated towns in a remote part of British Columbia at that time, likely had a small CCF membership, though their ties to the party and core party ideals were fairly deep. In 1905, a group of Finnish Socialists settled in Gibsons Heights where they farmed, erected two community halls (the Labour Hall and the Socialist Hall), created a local Farmers’ Institute (a resource-sharing community-based business and social organization) and opened a co-op store. J.S. Woodsworth, founder of the CCF, served as the Methodist Minister in Gibsons in 1917, where he found common ground with the local Socialist Finnish community ("From Tree to Sea").

Much like in other isolated Canadian communities, the Community Hall came to form the centre of community life and fostered the amateur theatricals of the area. In 1933/34

construction of a Community Hall in Roberts Creek was undertaken by volunteers with donated materials and funds. This provided a social gathering place for meetings, dances and performances. The Roberts Creek Players, a Little Theatre style drama club, supported in large part by the Women's Club of Roberts Creek, was formed in 1939. Their repertoire consisted largely of light-hearted comedies and farces, a far cry from the political agitprop work of the CCF clubs. A retrospective article in the October 3, 1945 issue of the *Coast News* reflected fondly on the work of the Roberts Creek Players. "Many and varied have been the experiences of the Club, and in spite of obstacles a number of good plays have been produced under the able direction of Marguerite Haslam, who has worked tirelessly on behalf of the Club" ("Players Ready for Bigger and Better Season" 8).

The Roberts Creek Players continued to be very active into the 1940s and '50s and took an active role in the community during World War II. "Besides providing entertainment for the community, the Club has been able to make a number of contributions to various wartime causes, such as \$83 to Russian Relief, and \$150 to the hall building fund, thus helping to pay for the fine new stage recently built" ("Historical Characteristics 8). Other evidence of dramatic life in Roberts Creek includes reports of "regular dances, amateur theatrical shows and talent and drama nights for all the family" ("Historical Characteristics"). If the Roberts Creek CCF Club functioned in the same way as other similar clubs, then the plays found in the Turner Fonds bearing the Evans' name might very well have been performed here in conjunction with CCF meetings and/or social events. A great deal of overlap would have existed between CCF members and the Roberts Creek Players Club, much like the relationship of the Progressive Arts Club, Vancouver Little Theatre and CCF drama groups with Denny Kristiansen being a prime example of this fluidity between groups.

The Rock Creek Players' donation toward Russian Relief provides a particularly clear indication of their support for likeminded causes.

You Can't Tell Me by the Roberts Creek CCF Club

You Can't Tell Me connects public resistance to the social and political changes proposed by the CCF to what club members viewed as the naïve stubbornness that left previous generations on the wrong side of history. The description of the character Gus as “an older man whose ears are plugged with the cotton wool of prejudice” (CCF 1) is indicative of this feeling. The play further articulates a sense of the optimistic belief on the part of the CCF members that their seemingly radical proposals would one day seem as natural and acceptable as the notion of a round Earth revolving around the sun, anaesthesia, labour rights, telephones and so on. The blend of humour and reasoned argument makes *You Can't Tell Me* similar in many ways to the other work being carried out in dramatic groups in BC's CCF clubs; but with somewhat more complexity in its staging, it makes better use of the theatrical form than the more bare-bones CCF agitprop plays seen elsewhere in British Columbia at the time. The stage description explains the two playing spaces required.

SCENE: In this the “stage on a stage” idea is used, or for small halls, the platform can be partially divided by a screen and two spotlights used as the action shifts. Down stage, RIGHT, where JIM and GUS remain during the entire action, there are a couple of boxes for seats. The largest part of the stage is provided with a curtain which can be quickly drawn. (R. C. CCF)

The play begins at lunch break on a relief camp road-building site. Jim, “a young Socialist,” and Gus, “an older man whose ears are plugged with the cotton wool of prejudice,” sit down to eat and talk (1). Gus begins with a sarcastic and topical line, “Good

old work and wages,” a clear reference to the demands of relief camp workers and the unemployed in British Columbia in the 1930’s. The 1933 BC provincial election saw the defeat of the Conservatives and a victory for the Liberals under Duff Patullo’s “Work and Wages” slogan, as opposed to the CCF (which formed the official opposition), whose rallying cry was “Humanity First” (McMartin). As in other examples of CCF drama discussed elsewhere in this research, this is a quick, humorous, topical jab at the party’s opposition.

Jim and Gus banter about politics for a few lines, arguing about which party, the Liberals or the CCF, would have given them a better outcome, with Gus declaiming the CCF as new, unproven and unlikely to last in his opinion. This criticism would have been commonplace during the election when the CCF was trying to establish itself as a new party and gain a foothold in the BC legislature.

GUS: (Taking huge bite of his sandwich) Don’t you crow. One thing – I didn’t vote for no quack scheme. I didn’t let ‘em kid me you could get shut o’ want and unemployment by votin’ in some fly-by-night party. Better social order!! Ya can’t tell me.” (R. C. CCF 1)

This final line is repeated throughout the play and establishes the connection between the past, present and future. For Gus, want and unemployment are natural, implying that the proposals of the Socialists are “unnatural” and “dangerous” (1). This kind of thinking, says Jim, is exactly what Christopher Columbus was told. At this point the scene shifts to behind the curtain (or the other side of the playing space, depending on the configuration of the playing space and location of the performance). As with most agitprop, *You Can’t Tell Me*

was designed to be mobile and flexible enough to be performed anywhere with minimal scenery, props and costumes, the sparse *mise-en-scène* giving way to flexibility and function. In the first vignette, two men in fifteenth-century garb, or the nearest approximation CCF club members could muster given a necessarily low-budget production in the Depression-era, are revealed behind the curtain; one is Christopher Columbus and the other is one of his critics. The vignette establishes a pattern that is followed throughout the play wherein someone with a progressive idea is derided by one of their peers. Here, Columbus, arguing that the world is round, is dismissed as a mad man. The action returns to Jim and Gus as if there were no interruption. Gus reiterates of CCF policy that “taint reasonable” (2), further connecting his ideological resistance with the scene about Columbus and the backward notions of the earth as flat. Jim counters with another example and draws another parallel to the CCF.

JIM: You mean nothing’s reasonable before it’s been tried. I bet they said that to the first man who built a boat or made fire by rubbing two sticks together. (2)

The banter continues for a few lines before the scene shifts to the next historical vignette. The curtain reveals men in Italian Renaissance garb, again suggested by minimal costuming such as a hat change or the addition of a robe. One of the men is Galileo. His own naysayers, who refuse to entertain the truth of the Earth’s orbit around the sun as it conflicts with Holy Scripture, accompany Galileo. The audience, with even a rudimentary knowledge of astronomy, would likely see this attitude as naïve and misguided in the face of the obvious truth and make the connection between this situation and the position of the CCF as the newly formed party sought to legitimize itself in the eyes of voters. The vignette ends in the same pattern as before with the line, “You can’t tell me.”

The action returns to Jim and Gus again. Gus dismisses the ignorance of others without recognizing it within himself for the ways in which Jim's stories parallel their own situation in the relief camp in Depression-era Vancouver, while Jim continues to press his argument about the state of ignorance in their own time.

GUS: (Swallowing hard) Back in those times folks were so dog-gone ignorant.

JIM: Ignorance always did hold up the parade. Most of this suffering today is caused by ignorance. (3)

Gus declares that ignorance and suffering will always be and Jim segues into the next vignette about Doc Simpson and the use of chloroform as a surgical anaesthetic. It proceeds in the same manner as the previous vignettes. Jim presses Gus to connect the easing of suffering through anaesthesia with the idea of government relief and the promises of the CCF to improve the lot of the working class. Gus responds with typically dismissive answers of the day that were undoubtedly used as arguments against the CCF as well. Social welfare programs like unemployment insurance, hospital insurance and medicare were major pieces of the CCF platform, and the argument that these programs would be too costly was repeated ad nauseam by the opposition (Hak).

GUS: (Munching) I never said suffering was a good thing. Not on your life.

JIM: Then why not try and do away with some of it, here and now.

GUS: Takes money, piles of money. Country ain't got it.

JIM: If there's another war, they'd find the money fast enough, you bet.

GUS: Nope. Trade can't stand it.

JIM: Same old cry. They said that about the slaves—about the Yorkshire mills. (4)

The remaining vignettes would have hit even closer to home for the CCF audience members. The next scene features the well-to-do daughter of a Yorkshire woollen mill reading the newspaper. In it she finds a letter denouncing slavery and applauding the British ban on slavery and a rebuttal piece. These quotations are from an actual speech delivered in 1830 by one Reverend Hamilton, quoted in a letter written by Richard Oastler, founder of the Factory Regulation Movement, published in the *Leeds Mercury* (Kydd 98-100). Evans includes a citation to the original article in the script for curious readers to seek out.

This vignette is particularly notable in that it not only continues the message of the play and the argument that the CCF is a new idea that will soon be accepted as normal, but it also incorporates education about labour history and casts the CCF as being part of the continuation of centuries of struggle for labour law reform. Given the close ties between organized labour and the CCF, both on an organizational level and in the allegiances of CCF members themselves, this scene in particular addresses the educational mandate of party gatherings in much the same way that CCF debate nights, reading groups and lectures did, all of which were commonplace activities in the Thirties. Evans' use of primary source material for his dialogue in this play is also similar to Turner's use of dialogue pulled from *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* in his play, but Evans, a professional writer, does so with greater skill, using only a portion of an especially eloquent historical document as the basis for one scene as opposed to the verbatim adaptation of Tressell's novel that makes up Turner's play. This sampling from primary sources is also repeated in the following vignette about telephones.

SOPHIA: (Reading aloud) "to the editor of the Leeds Mercury: 'It is the pride of Britain that a slave cannot exist on her soil and if I read the genius of her constitution

aright I find that slavery is most abhorrent to it – but the air which Britons breathe is free – the ground on which they tread is sacred to liberty!” From the speech of Re. R.V. Hamilton, at the anti-slavery meeting held in Cloth Hall Yard, September 22nd, 1830. (4)

Sophia continues reading the letter written by Richard Oastler expounding on the virtues of Hamilton’s argument. Oastler’s famous letter equating Yorkshire woolen mill factory conditions with slavery was part of Britain’s ten-hour workday movement and campaign for improved safety regulations and working conditions. Given the poor conditions of the British Columbian relief camps during the Depression, this vignette ties in closely with the stories of our main characters, Jim and Gus. As well, the audience watching the play could easily draw parallels between the past and their present situation, and the cooperation among organized labour, the CCF and the Communist Party’s campaigns to improve working conditions and pay in BC’s work camps (Kydd 98-100). The play continues:

Let the truth speak out, appalling as the statements may appear. The fact is true.

Thousands of our fellow creatures, both male and female, the miserable inhabitants of Yorkshire towns, are at this very moment existing in a state of slavery. Innocent victims at the accursed shrine of avarice, they are every morning compelled – not by the cart whips of the Negro slave driver, but by the dread of the equally appalling thong or strap of the overlord to hasten, half dressed, but not half fed, to those strongholds of British infantile slavery – the worsted mills in the town and neighbourhood of Bradford. (R. C. CCF 4)

Sophia’s father, “a rugged, harsh and upright manufacturer” (4), enters and tells her not to concern herself with the paper. Sophia challenges him about whether or not his profits,

likely made on the backs of wage slaves and children in England's notorious woollen mills, are right. Her father's response mirrors Gus' (and the CCF's opponents') arguments about government spending and the preservation of the free market.

SOPHIA: You could make less cloth, father, if it would make a happier people.

FATHER: (Impatient) Less cloth! Less cloth! You don't know what you're talking about. The trade wont stand it.

SOPHIA: (Going toward him appealingly) If you'd been a poor man, father, I'd be a mill hand now. (R. C. CCF 4)

The scene ends with Sophia lamenting her father's likely role in the exploitation of child labour and the position she might have found herself in had the circumstance of her birth been different. Like other CCF plays, *You Can't Tell Me* places young people in a role of seeing injustice with greater clarity than their parents. This quality is repeated in *Story of the Simia* and *The Great Money Trick* by Arthur Turner.

The script returns again to Jim and Gus, and Gus responds with a typically dismissive comment diminishing the role of labour activists in correcting some of the wrongs of early industry, a point of pride that is still echoed in contemporary Canadian labour and by the New Democratic Party that evolved from the merger of the CCF and the Canadian Labour Congress:⁴⁶

GUS: [...] Slavery, child labour. These things always right themselves in time. What you can't see, young fellow, is that some changes are possible and some are, well--- not possible, that's all. (5)

⁴⁶ My experience as President of the Canadian Union of Public Employees local 2278 at UBC from 2011 to 2016 has exposed me to a great number of union and NDP speeches, rallies, conventions, social media and marches in which the eight-hour workday, weekends, holiday pay, child labour laws and so on are listed with great pride as the benefits won by the labour movement and labour parties.

Jim counters that people used to think the telephone, a device widely accepted as common and necessary by the 1930's, was a change that was not possible and would not work either before the play shifts to the next vignette.

Here we find an American man, “a solid American citizen of two generations ago” (5), and his wife. She asks if there is anything interesting in the news and he responds, “The police in New York have just taken into custody one of the worst rascals unchanged” (5). The wife responds, “Land o’ Goshen! What for?” and he begins to read from the paper another primary source document. The article quoted in the script was originally printed in a Boston newspaper in 1865 (Evenson 117-18).

JOHN: Listen, I’ll read the piece to you. “a man of about forty six years of age, giving the name of Joshua Coppersmith has been arrested in New York for attempting to extort funds from ignorant and superstitious people by exhibiting a device which he says will convey the human voice any distance over metallic wires, so that it will be heard by the listener at the other end. He calls the instruments a ‘telephone’ which is obviously intended to imitate the word ‘telegraph’, and to win the confidence of those who know the success of the latter instrument without understanding the principles on which it is based. Well-informed people know that it is impossible to transmit the human voice over wires as may be done with dots and dashes and signals of the Morse code, and that, were it possible to do so, this thing would have no practical value. The authorities who apprehended the criminal are to be congratulated and it is to be hoped that his punishment will be prompt and fitting, and that it may serve as an example to other conscienceless schemers who enrich themselves at the expense of their fellow creatures. (5-6)

This news article served as the basis for a BC Telephone Company advertisement in 1928. The advertisement, titled "Poor Joshua," includes this exact segment of the original 1865 article ("Poor Joshua"), and it is possible that the Evans's read this advertisement before incorporating the news article into a vignette in *You Can't Tell Me*.

**Poor
Joshua!**

*He ought to have
known better*

Over 60 years ago an eastern newspaper published the following item:

"A man about 46 years of age, giving the name of Joshua Coppersmith, has been arrested in New York for attempting to extort funds from ignorant and superstitious people by exhibiting a device which he says will convey the human voice any distance over metallic wires so that it will be heard by the listener at the other end.

"Well-informed people know that it is impossible to transmit the human voice over wires as may be done with dots and dashes and signals of the Morse code, and that, were it possible to do so, the thing would be of no practical value."

B. C. TELEPHONE CO.

Figure 5 "Poor Joshua" ad for BC Telephone, The Chilliwack Progress, 3 May 1928

This scene is another example of primary source materials outside of everyday circulation being presented to party members through drama. In the vignette, husband and wife both dismiss the idea of the telephone as madness and the vignette ends much as the others before it.

WIFE: Talk through a wire! Poppycock!

JOHN: Wire indeed. He can't tell me. (6)

The first trans-Canadian phone line was fully operational in 1932, the same year the CCF was founded and just a few years before this play was likely performed. Previous trans-Canada phone calls beginning in 1916 had to be directed through circuits in the United States. Here again, Evans uses an example of contemporary and noteworthy technology that had been relatively normalized to prove the central thesis of this play, that what seems impossible, foreign or strange in the present may very well seem perfectly acceptable in time. For the fledgling CCF, this was an assertion of their legitimacy as a political party, an articulation of their plans for the future and a direct challenge to those who argued the CCF would not last.

It seems as though Jim is beginning to turn Gus toward the side of progress as the men continue their lunchtime discussion. Here Evans injects a moment of humour to break up what could have been a monotonous evening of preaching to the choir.

GUS: (Filling his pipe) Heck. You can't stop progress, but there's a lot of difference between progress and – revolution.

JIM: (Grinning) You say that as if it hurt you. (6)

Like Turner, Evans uses humour to maintain the interest of his audience and entertain them as much as educate them; in Roberts Creek, as in Vancouver, drama for CCF clubs was likely

just as much about community building and camaraderie as it was a means of education and political engagement.

The play continues with Gus still resisting the idea that he is a revolutionary in any way, so Jim continues to press the subject.

JIM: Don't be afraid of the word. Why, not so long ago people wanting votes for women were called that – revolutionaries. (6)

The curtain is pulled again revealing “an excited demagogue... He wears a long ‘Prince Albert’ coat and his stovepipe hat stands on a table beside a jug and glass of water” (6). The orator is denouncing women's suffrage.

ORATOR: (Wagging his finger at audience) and I ask you, who is this Susan B. Anthony, who goes about our fair country advocating a scandalous state of affairs which in her abysmal ignorance she terms “the rights of women”? Who is she? She is a revolutionary, aiming at nothing less than the breaking up of the very foundations of society, the overthrow of every institution organized for the sanctity of the altar, the family circle and the legitimacy of our offspring; recognizing no religion but self-worship; no God, but human reason; no motive to action but lust. The whole plan is coarse, sensual and agrarian – the worst phase of French infidelity and communism. (6)

Cheers and applause are heard and a few boos as the offstage actors suggest the Orator's audience. One can imagine the CCF audience joining in with the boos before the Orator continues his diatribe. The CCF had a very active female membership in British Columbia with notable female leaders in the CCF/NDP including Grace MacInnis, Laura Jamieson and Dorothy Steeves, who all took provincial and/or national roles within the party.

The Vancouver CCYM chapter was run almost entirely by women, according to their minutes in the Dorothy Steeves Fonds. However, feminist scholar Joan Sangster argues at length in *Dreams of Equality: Women of the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* that the view of the CCF as a socialist, and therefore egalitarian, party obfuscates the complex gender divide seen throughout the CCF:

Women's economic dependence and double burden of work, as well as the influence of prevailing sexist ideas about gender roles, were fundamental causes of women's secondary status in the CCF. Not only did women have less money and work for longer hours than men—leaving them with fewer material resources of even the energy so necessary to political participation—but the dominant ideology of gender presented women as 'private' beings whose lives centred on marriage and family, rather than public beings whose interests should be politics and government.

(Sangster)

The inclusion of a scene specifically about women's rights is indicative of the complexity of women's political involvement in the CCF during this period and even more significantly, Evans' own views on women. Evans' Quaker beliefs may offer some explanation for such a distinctly feminist scene. Quaker views on women have historically been more progressive than those of many other faiths as evidenced by the large number of Quaker women involved in the women's suffrage movement, abolitionist groups and activism for peace in the 19th and 20th centuries (Mack 349). Within his own marriage, Evans' respect and admiration for his wife Anna Winter Evans offers another insight into Evans' appreciation of the agency and strength of women. "I knew my wife ever since we were thirteen and we both always had the same idea. To travel light. To not have any

encumbrances. To own only what you can carry on your back” (Twigg "Hubert Evans: Bc Book Look"). Elsewhere in Alan Twigg’s interviews, Evans credits Anna with inspiring him to write for young people to shape their minds in a positive way, to write material he felt was worthy and not simply produce pulp pieces, to spend summers traveling the Sunshine Coast by boat (with their piano and children) preparing rustic meals shore-side. And it was Anna’s “...Quaker concern over Indians that took [them] north in the first place” when they moved to Kitimat at the request of aboriginal activist Guy Williams so she could teach in the local schoolhouse in 1945 (Twigg "Hubert Evans: Bc Book Look"; Twigg *Hubert Evans: The First Ninety-Three Years*).

As the play nears its end, Jim and Gus shift to a discussion of what life will be like in the future. Jim believes that change is a constant force, while Gus expects life to remain much the same.

GUS: (Unimpressed) I bet things will be much the same fifty years from now.

JIM: Nope. They’ll either be a whole lot better—or a whole lot worse. (6)

The scene shifts more dramatically this time with lighting and sound cues suggesting that the audience is moving forward in time and will be seeing Gus’ future family members.

All lights begin to flicker, the flickering increases, there is a rumble, as of thunder, the light RIGHT remains down, but other lights come up LEFT. A neat colorful room or a worker’s home as it will someday be, is disclosed.

A young wife, simply but attractively dressed, is seated at table writing as her friend and neighbor, a vigorous and healthy appearing matron enters, with a bundle of old newspapers in her arms. (6-7)

The neighbour bears “Vancouver newspapers – of fifty years ago” addressed to Gus that were unearthed when the “old shacks” (presumably Gus and Jim’s homes) down near the “new powerhouse” were demolished (7). The way in which the script imagines the future fifty years hence (the as yet unimaginable mid-1980s) is curious. A new powerhouse close at hand seems to be the most futuristic element imagined by the playwright until near the end of this scene.

The Version A script found within the Turner Fonds states that the women begin to read the newspapers aloud and follows with an important stage direction that helps date Version A to sometime in 1935 when the Relief Camp Workers’ Union was at its height:

(NOTE: in its original form, the excerpts from the papers dealt with the relief camp strike/delegation to Victoria for more relief, etc., while the neighbor interjected timely comments. It has been thought more effective to have similar and more up-to-date actual reports of gross injustices substituted at discretion of later producers in this sketch.)

The Version B script found within the Evans Fonds does not contain the above direction. Both include discussion of news regarding the destruction of surplus livestock and agricultural goods in an effort to control market prices, though Version B goes into greater detail than the Turner Fonds Version A. In both versions, Evans skillfully incorporates primary source newspaper pieces into his play to keep the material relevant for his audience.

Next, the harsh realities of the Depression-era are contrasted with the society news section of the paper. Frivolous by comparison, announcements such as what a bride will wear are juxtaposed with school closures and the hardships of extreme poverty faced by the people of British Columbia in the 1930’s.

NEIGHBOUR: Seems all topsy-turvy, doesn't it? Especially after reading about people underfed, having not enough clothes, schools having to close, workers collected in what they call here "Relief Camps".

FIRST WOMAN: How could such places really relieve anything?

NEIGHBOUR: They didn't. And what about the boys and girls – like ours?

FIRST WOMAN: It must have been hardest of all on them. (6)

The women go on to reflect on how far their future society has come and celebrate the fact that they do not have to be selfish in order to adequately feed their children under the new (presumably socialist) system under which they live, though they acknowledge that their new society is far from perfect and they still have "other obstacles to come" (8). Their conversation ends as the women mull over the moral of the play, that "the law of change is the only changeless thing" (8).

The lights flicker, "but not so violently," and the action shifts back to Jim and Gus. The less violent lighting was perhaps intended to leave the audience feeling less disconnected from the optimistic future presented moments before. Offstage, a whistle sounds, signifying the return to the present-day and the end of lunch for Jim and Gus. Jim thinks aloud, "Sure, things'll be different fifty years from now." Gus, who has apparently learned nothing, responds, "You can't tell me!" as he exits and returns to his relief work (8).

Conclusion

You Can't Tell Me envisions the process of the growth of the CCF and the political change the party and its social democratic members viewed as inevitable as parts of a larger process. The frustration felt by forward-thinking people in the face of ignorance, religious blindness and fear of change is shown as natural if not inevitable. For a group of (mostly)

young activists seeking to bring about a new social order through political change, this message was well crafted and likely well received. The play places the young activists among the illustrious company of global explorers, scientists and suffragists, all of whom would have been viewed as wronged parties held back by prejudice who eventually ended up on the right side of history. In conversations with Lyle Kristiansen, MP for the NDP for two terms beginning in 1980 and 1988 and an NDP activist all his life, I found this attitude of having fought for the right things, even when they were unpopular, pervasive. His good but sometimes unpopular causes included reproductive rights, unemployment insurance, health care and universal enfranchisement, all of which are easy to take for granted today, but all of which required a fight to win. The central message of *You Can't Tell Me* feels as relevant today as it likely did in 1935, and reflects a central value of the CCF/NDP.

It is encouraging, too, that the playwright envisioned a longer lifespan for this script beyond a first run or two in 1935. By creating material that was adaptable to changing times, the playwright articulates a commitment to a prolonged fight for change that envisions change as possible but also as something that can only be hard-won. The news items the play discusses include efforts at price controls through the destruction of surplus livestock and agricultural products around the world; but adapted to the current political climate, this could just as easily be a discussion of high un(der)employment rates, student debt, precarious labour, austerity government, or the 99% vs the 1%. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that both Jim and Gus were right. Tremendous change has occurred since the 1930's, yet very little has changed at the same time.

CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

The Great Depression was a period unlike any other. While economic fluctuation is a natural part of the capitalist system and an increasingly globalized economy, the full scale and nearly universal impact of the Depression across the globe and the effects it had on all aspects of society make it stand out. For Vancouver and its outlying areas, the Depression brought a wave of newcomers seeking work, or at least more hospitable climates, and BC was ill equipped to handle the masses of unemployed. Within this context of widespread poverty and insufficient government response, the way was paved for a fledgling political party composed of the union of Socialists, labour, farmers and co-operatives to argue for a better way of doing things: the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation.

Under the banner of the CCF, political life became involved and all consuming. With a range of social, educational and political events and activities on offer, CCF clubs formed a focal point for the progressive community, particularly among the youth. For the young and un(der)employed, the CCF was a place to share ideas, ask questions, and fight for change in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. Among the many offerings of the CCF were small drama groups in which amateur enthusiasts could try their hand at performing, and theatre was created to be a tool through which party ideas could be spread in a casual, entertaining and non-threatening way. With some support from the party and CCF dues income, the groups had funds with which to operate and, through the party, had access to meeting, rehearsal and performance spaces. The party also offered a built-in audience when plays were performed at meetings and socials, publicity through Club newsletters, newspaper and word of mouth. For the Vancouver area CCF clubs, the success of the Progressive Arts Club's production of *Waiting for Lefty* also offered a tangible example of the power and

potential of agitprop as a tool of instruction and indoctrination that Vancouver audiences were ready and willing to hear. While Arthur J. Turner toyed with the idea of drama as a political tool in the early 1930's, as evidenced by his correspondence with the British Workers' Theatre Movement leader Tom Thomas, it was not until the political climate heated up in the mid-1930's in the depth of the Great Depression, with relief camp unrest, a dock workers' strike and the success of *Lefty* that CCF dramatics really took off in South Hill, Vancouver Centre and Roberts Creek.

When taken as one element of the CCF ideology and publicity machine, the workers' theatre pieces developed in the 1930's by CCF clubs are revealed to be a product of their very specific conditions of time and place. The material generated in Vancouver and Roberts Creek, British Columbia, bear specific markers of their respective local contexts. While traits such as the use of humour, persuasive language, archetypal characters, minimal scenery and stage effects are common across the art form, the specific content, cultural references and local jokes reflect the desires of a very particular audience. This material could never have been generated anywhere else. The 'leisure time' required to carry on such work was the happy accident of Great Depression joblessness; and as the economy recovered and the dissatisfied jobless went back to work, the time and energy necessary to create workers' theatre evaporated as did the Canadian Workers' Theatre Movement, if indeed we can label it as such.

While the archival records are limited, there appears to have been a significant amount of this work going on in the Vancouver region, and the works of Arthur Turner, Denny Kristiansen and Hubert Evans serve as representatives of the kinds of plays that were generated at the time. The Progressive Arts Club, which dominates the scholarly and critical

literature on Canadian Workers' Theatre to date, was joined by at least six to ten play groups associated with the CCF in British Columbia alone, according to Arthur Turner (Arthur J. Turner *Somewhere* 59-60; Arthur J. Turner "Trade Unionism" 46-47).

There is no evidence of any substantial hostility between the PAC and the CCF clubs in BC, despite the bitterness between the Communist Party and the CCF at the time.

Compared to the PAC in Toronto, the Vancouver PAC seems to have been less overtly tied to the Communist Party, perhaps because its leadership came out of the Little Theatre Movement and viewed their work more as socially conscious drama than outright Party propaganda. Compare, for instance, the Vancouver PAC's production of *Waiting for Lefty* that won the Dominion Drama Festival award for best play in English with the overtly pro-Communist *Eight Men Speak*. *Lefty* was originally accompanied by a production of Chekhov's *The Bear* (*T. P. A. C. o. Vancouver*). In contrast with *8 Men Speak* about the arrest and attempted assassination of Communist Party leaders which was only allowed one performance in Toronto before it was shut down by police, *Lefty* was far less threatening to the social order and far less saturated in fractious Communist Party rhetoric and ideology. The somewhat more relaxed attitude of the Vancouver PAC allowed it to coexist more peacefully with the CCF drama clubs than might have happened elsewhere, and even participate in a drama festival sponsored by the CCF in 1936 ("C.C.F. Drama Festival Program").⁴⁷

A final concern of this research was about the geographical isolation of BC from the rest of Canada and much of the United States and whether or not this yielded a stylistically

⁴⁷ The PAC's submission to the CCF Drama Festival was a play written and directed by Harold Griffin called *Underground*. The listed characters are Communist Party officials, their family, and a Fascist rebel. The play takes place in a "Cell in Military Prison in Fascist Controlled Seville" and later in the "Communist Headquarters in Same City," so it is likely about the Spanish Civil War ("C.C.F. Drama Festival Program").

different kind of workers' theatre. Despite the geographical isolation and difficulty of travel—Arthur Turner could not travel to see the Prolet Buehne perform like Toby Ryan of the PAC in Toronto could, for instance—the mail allowed BC's CCF clubs to remain connected to the rest of the workers' theatre movement. Correspondence between Turner and Tom Thomas of the British WTM and the International Dramatic Workers' Union, for instance, suggests that when help was sought from outside, it was forthcoming. Copies of scripts from well outside of the Vancouver region also suggest this kind of letter writing connection between groups. The Turner Fonds contains a play from the Labour College in Mena, Arkansas, material from Upton Sinclair and plays from outside of Turner's own CCF drama club, including the work of Hubert Evans and Denny Kristiansen, as well as a few other scripts of unknown provenance. This kind of communication, as well as drama festivals and the workers' theatre magazines (*Worker's Theatre* and *Masses* being the most prominent in North America), allowed small groups to benefit from each other, trade material and prosper together, despite their distances from each other. This communal sharing of work, ideas and techniques provided a support network that moved the genre forward and spread the idea of workers' theatre far and wide.

Viewed within the context of previous work researching Canadian workers' theatre, this research sheds light on a small and mostly forgotten pocket of dramatic activity that has gone largely unexplored. Much of the literature on Workers' Theatre focuses on the work carried out in the Soviet Union, Germany and the United States, particularly under the Federal Theatre Project. In Canada, the Progressive Arts Club, especially the PAC in Toronto, dominates the literature. Highlighting the work of amateur enthusiasts within the

CCF clubs, I add further dimension to our knowledge of theatre and popular entertainment in Vancouver in the 1930's and new native material written for the Canadian stage.

By highlighting the work of amateur enthusiasts working within a political party structure, I offer evidence that the impulse to use theatre as a social tool for education and indoctrination has manifested itself in more ways and from different directions than previously thought. Like the Communist Party, the CCF used theatre as a tool for communication with its membership and those whom they hoped to influence, and as a source of education and entertainment in otherwise speech heavy meetings. By tapping into the power of representation to tug at the heartstrings, entertain, amuse, infuriate and inspire, workers' dramas reached audiences in a way that speeches and impassioned rallies might not have and, thus, theatre became another channel through which the party tried to change the world.

Robin Whittaker's dissertation on Canadian non-professionalized theatre articulates a substantial problem in Canadian theatrical discourse.⁴⁸ Whittaker makes the case that non-professionalized theatre in Canada is marginalized in the critical and historical discourse and that in doing so, critics and scholars neglect and discredit an extensive portion of Canadian dramatic activity that merits closer scrutiny and forms part of a "dynamic continuum" between professional and non-professional practice.

The discourse of Western theatre practice is founded on, and maintained as, a central legitimizing struggle between the terms "professional" and "amateur." This is the

⁴⁸ This phrase is used in place of "amateur" or "community theatre" because Whittaker feels it a less loaded term that moves away from presumptions of legitimacy and assumed value. I use the word "amateur" throughout this work as a description that conjures the implications Whittaker seeks to avoid. The plays of the CCF drama groups were written and performed by the rank-and-file who had little to no experience or training in theatre arts and whose productions came together through sheer force of will. This plucky can-do attitude encapsulated with the work "amateur" should, I feel, be worn as a badge of honour in recognition of the sheer amount of work undertaken against all odds.

struggle between “specialists” and “non-specialists,” “legitimates” and “illegitimates.” But at the same time that these terms are aligned as antithetical and employed in general usage as descriptors of practices, attitudes and employment statuses, their morphing connotations are seldom critiqued. The resultant relationship is not a dialectical synthesis of the practices forming the field of theatre but a cooptation such that professional practice synecdochically stands in for the entire field in critical discourse, while amateur practice is parenthetical or erased.

(Whittaker 11)

An extension of this tendency to privilege the professional over the amateur in the critical and historical discourse is in part due to the archive’s worrying lack of records of Canada’s performance diversity. The presence of archival records of CCF drama groups in and around Vancouver occurred simply because of the keen interest in theatre of one man, Arthur Turner, whose prominence as an MLA gave him the social caché necessary to have his papers preserved. For others who participated in CCF drama and led relatively ordinary lives, like Denny Kristiansen, there was no such option to preserve their work in perpetuity and thus, the bulk of his work, and that of others like him, is lost forever. In highlighting the work of a group of amateur theatre enthusiasts, I seek to shed light on an area of Canadian theatre history that is vulnerable to erasure by virtue of the fact that it was created, performed and viewed by everyday Canadians and not the well-heeled elite with the privilege of access to the trappings of the professionalized theatre. My hope is that in deliberately seeking out other amateur and non-professionalized theatre groups in the CCF, the PAC, and in non-political situations, we can recover an important absent part of Canada’s theatrical heritage and also encourage the amateur groups creating a massive amount of work today to actively

and consciously preserve their work for posterity. With the availability of modern recording and storage technology, this act of preservation is far simpler than ever before and presents the opportunity to democratize the archive.

One of the strengths of this research lies in the fact that script material has been recovered that is tied to at least three CCF Clubs, not all of them in the Metro Vancouver area. This would seem to suggest that the practice of local clubs hosting their own drama groups and performances might have been more widespread across BC and the rest of Canada. Evidence of additional drama groups within the CCF that attended the CCF Drama Festival in 1936 would seem to support this theory, though I have yet to uncover any additional information about these groups or their dramatic material. It is perhaps somewhat unusual, albeit very fortunate, that Arthur J. Turner somehow amassed the collection of scripts that he did and saw to their preservation, when most other clubs and activists did not.

My own biographical details align in many ways with the men discussed in this research. As one of the methodological goals of this work was to weave in my personal interpretations of their choices and behaviours through an empathic historiography, I make use of these areas of overlap. Turner and Kristiansen were both immigrants and Evans was a native of Ontario who moved to BC whereas I am an American expatriate. Turner and Kristiansen were active union members and members of a range of CCF committees. I am active in the labour movement as president of my union local and sit on numerous Leftist committees and organizations.⁴⁹ All three men lived and survived in BC during the greatest

⁴⁹ CUPE Local 2278 represents the Teaching Assistants, Markers and English Language Instructors who work at UBC. In my tenure as president we went on strike, went through mediation, internal personnel changes, bylaw revision, political campaigns and at the time of writing and defending this dissertation we are currently bargaining the next Collective Agreement for our approximately 3000 members. The struggles of labour organization, the internal squabbles, at times unwavering solidarity, ideologically based schisms and so on are all experiences shared by activists on the Left in the 1930's and the 2010's.

economic disaster in Canadian history. I have spent the last five years living in Vancouver during “the Great Recession.” These similarities give me additional perspective in trying to understand the decisions and motivations of early CCF members, particularly those who see theatre as a tool for good.

An additional strength of this research was my ability to visit and interview Lyle Kristiansen, son of playwright and activist Denny Kristiansen. Meeting with Lyle and Vera Kristiansen allowed me to grasp a deeper understanding of what life was like as a member of the early CCF. As lifelong activists, NDP members and a serving MP, they were able to give me an appreciation for CCF/NDP life, the challenges and successes of the party and a better sense of who Denny Kristiansen was. Turner’s position as a NDP MLA and Hubert Evans’ fame as an author made gathering biographical data far easier, but Kristiansen’s life as a true member of the rank-and-file, coming and going as employment required, perhaps speaks more directly to the experiences of the men and women doing similar work elsewhere.

The greatest limitations of this work are the struggles faced by any historian who delves into the archive. The story of how this material arrived in the Turner Fonds remains a mystery. The provenance of these scripts is unknown and details such as how a play from Arkansas made it to Vancouver, BC (*Oscar Sapp* by Harold Coy), who wrote the plays in the Fonds that do not indicate an author (*Halcyon* and *Fish Scales*), more details about performances, casts, costumes, sets, props, audience reactions, the success or failure of the plays and so on are all lost to history. At best, one can offer educated hypotheses about content and reception based on the limited material that has survived. The Turner Fonds also contains script material that has an author about whom nothing could be discovered. The play *Box Car* by Walt Anderson falls into this category. Another play, *The Dead Cow* by Allan

Baxter and Harold Johnsrud, appears to have been part of a satirical musical revue titled *Parade* that played on Broadway between May and June of 1935, but how a copy of this script ended up among Turner's papers remains a mystery (League).

The nature of archival research is that what is selected for preservation depends so heavily on what is deemed 'valuable,' and what is valuable to one might not be for another. Arthur Turner and Hubert Evans both have Fonds containing their papers in the archive because they held positions of power, politically and culturally. Denny Kristiansen's papers, on the other hand, are largely lost to time, with the exception of what little his son Lyle maintained. The hegemonic cultural forces at work devalue what falls outside of the mainstream; thus, finding materials for a fairly decentralized fledgling Leftist political party proved difficult. Materials for the Roberts Creek CCF were not found and the minutes of the South Hill CCF and CCYM reveal precious little about the dramatic activities of their clubs. The ephemerality of theatre in general and the amateur nature of the CCF workers' theatre performances further limited the amount of published material (reviews, programs, etc.) that could be uncovered to shed light on the performance life of the scripts that were preserved.

One key project for future research is to explore the archival records of other CCF clubs across Canada to see how widespread the use of drama for propaganda and education was during the mid- to late- Thirties. With three definitive examples in and near Vancouver, indications of several additional clubs in the area and printed material from the National CCF advertising drama as one of the party offerings, there is reason to believe that this was a more widespread phenomenon than the current literature on Canadian Workers' Theatre may lead one to believe. The preference afforded to quasi-professional and professional theatre in Canadian history discredits a great deal of the theatrical activity that existed in the country.

The CCF drama scripts offer a truly unique view into the hearts and minds of everyday Canadians during a particularly fascinating and trying time. Another area for more research is the Vancouver Progressive Arts Club and the extent to which it was or was not controlled by the Communist Party as its Toronto group was. As this fell outside of the primary focus of the research, it remains an area yet to be fully explored, but certainly offers fertile ground for future research. My initial exploration of this idea seems to suggest that an East/West comparison of the PAC could reveal unexpected insights into regional social, cultural and political differences in Canadian activist theatre.

A handful of scripts remain unaccounted for, and thus are not included in this research: *Box Car* by Walt Anderson, *Halcyon* and *Fish Scales*. These plays give one very little to go on and present a substantial research challenge that the limitations of dissertation research made impossible at this time. A final project for further exploration would be a more in depth look into the use of radio plays as a form of CCF propaganda. *Boys of the Old Brigade* seems to have been written in the Thirties along with the other dramas, so it is included in this research, but *John Bull* by Arthur Turner and Carl Robinson and *New Country* by Hubert Evans seem to fall outside of this time period. This conclusion is based on the radio plays' content, the timeline of the body of work by each author and/or archived correspondence about the piece. A survey of Hubert Evans' radio plays for the CBC alone could yield another dissertation.

The most readily apparent application of this research capitalizes on the main goal of this project as an act of historical and cultural recovery that celebrates the amateur status of the work(ers) and seeks to reverse the erasure of groups that fall outside the bounds of the hegemonic archive. While the references within the plays largely date them and make them

too specific to be revived without a historical presentation accompanying them, there are still moments that resonate with contemporary audiences. With so little known about this aspect of the CCF/NDP's history, this material serves as an interesting point of entry into conversations with activists on the Left, those who are active at present as well as those who have retired.

I shared a preliminary report showcasing some of this material with the Vancouver District Labour Council at its March 2015 pre-meeting educational session. After my brief introductory history lecture and overview of some of the primary source material from the archive, a group of council delegates took roles from *A Story of the Simia* from the South Hill CCF Club and the play was read aloud, presumably for the first time in seventy-five years or more. The audience seemed to delight in the change of pace from speeches and lectures, and they engaged with the ideas presented in the play much as one might imagine the audience of the South Hill CCF would have. The play elicited an emotional response (laughter, amusement, cynicism, and feelings of nostalgia to name a few) from those gathered that allowed for a relaxed but fruitful discussion after the play was finished. Many of those present were the children or grandchildren of some of BC's activists from the Thirties who gladly shared stories of their family connection with the snake parades during the relief camp workers' union strikes, rallies, the On to Ottawa Trek and so on.

The conversation moved organically from personal stories that added to the contextual history of the dramatic material to present-day applications of the ideas. A conversation about the significance of the line in *Simia* about "seditious utterances" led to a fruitful conversation about the cyclical nature of history and the looming threat to free speech and charter rights enshrined in Bill C51, the "Anti-terrorism Act of 2015," that was under

review at the time and later passed by the House of Commons. Clearly, the educational/social role of drama as envisioned in the politics of BC's Left in the 1930's has the potential to invigorate the meetings and rallies of the present.

The use of propaganda has not diminished in our cynical digital age, but even if the content remains more or less the same, the vehicle has changed dramatically. While radio and drama are less likely tools for spreading a specific message in the present-day, the internet and television are awash in a perpetual flurry of videos generated to support a political party, cause or candidate and to portray that "product" in the best and most convincing light, often at the expense of nuanced truth. The popularity of semi-satirical political 'edutainment' such as the *Daily Show*, *the Colbert Report*, *Last Week Tonight*, *The Rick Mercer Report*, the popularity of Tina Fey's portrayal of Sarah Palin in the 2008 US presidential election on *Saturday Night Live*, the political commentary of shows like *South Park* or *The Simpsons*, web-based material such as *JibJab*, *The Onion*, or *The Lapine*, all speak to the massive appetite for political humour and a Left-leaning presentation of the stories and events of the day. I posit that this is fundamentally the same aim as that of the CCF dramatists in the Thirties.

If indeed the old adage that 'everything old is new again' proves true, there may be a revival of workers' theatre in the coming decade. Indications that this is already happening to some extent, if indeed it ever stopped, can be seen in the political plays of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, contemporary political plays like Marcus Youssef, Guillermo Verdecchia and Camyar Chai's *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the aXes of Evil*, the Theatre for Social Justice work of companies like Sojourn Theatre, Theatre for Living, Teatro Campesino, Augusto Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed, or the performance art of Guillermo Gomez-

Peña or documentary theatre of Anna Devere Smith, to name a few. Theatre and activism have been linked since the earliest days of Western performance and this connection is unlikely to break. By recovering one more example of the practical application of drama in politics, this research offers a new connection with the past and a blueprint for the future.

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