

CANADIAN SOCIAL COMMENT ART IN THE THIRTIES

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ABSTRACT

The Depression in Canada was a period of economic and social distress. Loss of optimism, restraint in development and severe physical hardship characterized the era. At the same time, social and political resistance to this collapse appeared in every facet of Canadian society, with the visual arts being no exception.

In the early part of the decade, protest through art appeared in the form of anti-capitalist cartoons and illustrations printed in communist-affiliated publications. They were politically direct, and visually unsophisticated. Their specific purpose was to raise the class consciousness of the working class and incite them to overthrow the capitalist system. In the mid thirties, however, elements of social comment began appearing more frequently in the works of fine artists. Although the criticism varied from intentional and direct to unintentional and subtle, it was usually anti-poverty and anti-Depression in focus rather than specifically anti-capitalist. Traditional aesthetic qualities were a consistently essential aspect of these works. Why did this shift in the nature of social comment art take place in the mid thirties, what interests were represented, and how does this contribute to a better understanding of the Depression in Canada? These questions will be investigated in relation to the political left in Canada, as it is here where social comment art received its support. As will be discussed, a rupture within the left which involved a struggle for hegemony between the Communist Party and the newly formed Cooperative Commonwealth Federation resulted, by 1935, in social democracy gaining

primacy over communism as the dominant political ideology of the left in Canada. Through the analysis of three works: Petroushka by Paraskeva Clark, Orchard by Carl Schaefer, and "D'Ye Ken John Peel?" by Miller Brittain, it will be shown how the "fine art" social comment of the mid thirties functioned as the visual ideology of the new left and propagated values consistent with its shift from working class to middle class base, and its factionalism, intellectualism and spirit of compromise.

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INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the Depression was a period of unprecedented economic and social disruption. In response to the disintegrating economy and burgeoning social problems, all facets of Canadian society found avenues of protest and resistance. Through the establishment of new political parties, union organization, and acts of civil disobedience, dissatisfaction with the existing situation was registered. Was art, with its associations of perception and sensitivity, a part of this resistance? What forms did it take and was it successful? Was protest isolated or was it part of a total cultural response? Because the analysis and articulation of much social and political criticism came from a socialist perspective it will be instructive to examine what impact the Depression had on the political left, which experienced considerable disruption at this time. Why did divisions within the left, which had been there for years, become fracturing during the thirties? Although there were many interest groups and parties operating within the left, focus here will be on the struggle between the Communist Party and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. This rupture is significant because from it emerged the formal organization and recognition of the social democratic left in Canada, one of the most significant and lasting aspects of the Depression's legacy. Did this rupture have an impact on the art?

It will first be necessary to establish a frame of reference with which to compare the social comment art of the mid thirties. One part

of this will be a close consideration of the dominant painting style during the twenties and early thirties; the wilderness landscape painted in the Group of Seven manner. Formal analysis of this style and the role of the artists at the time reveals a spirit of confidence, chance, courage, and adventure. These values were consistent with, indeed were essential to, the entrepreneurial nature of the national identity associated with the rising financial/commercial class. The character of nationalism during the twenties was tied to the notion of a colony breaking free from the dominance of the colonial power and establishing itself as an independent nation. Discussion of this will consider the struggle for power within the financial elite of the country and the concomitant fundamental changes in the economic base during this period.

As will be explained more fully, the wilderness landscape functioned as visual support for the new entrepreneurial Canadian identity; at the same time it acted as a critique of the dependent, colonial status of the dominion. This is not to imply that these artists were in any way formally organized along political lines or that they consciously applied their art to the specific purposes of any political ideology. It is important to understand what interests and values were represented by the wilderness landscape because it remained the dominant tradition into the early thirties. During the Depression, however, a growing number of artists and critics became critical of the continued emphasis on uninhabited, remote backcountry as steady subject matter. Whereas in the 1920's the wilderness landscape was a symbol

of national truth striking against colonial domination, by the 1930's it became to a new age of nationalists an escape from truth in that it failed to take account of the social and economic devastation of the Depression.

Not all artists affirmed entrepreneurial capitalism in this period, however. Some rejected the capitalist system in general, whether administered from Britain, the United States or Ottawa. During the twenties and early thirties artists who wished to make a public political protest through their art, for the most part did so through the context of the communist left. For the purposes of the argument presented here, it will be helpful to examine the nature of that art. The most consistent forms this work took was illustration and cartoons in the wide variety of Communist Party publications. Masses, organ of the Progressive Arts Club, an organization with loose Communist Party associations, focussed on the arts. It acted as the agent through which the role of art and the artist were defined from a communist point of view.

An analysis of selected images in Communist Party-supported periodicals will be helpful in determining the nature of the visual ideology of the communist left. Through the use of simple formal construction, recognizable symbols and repetition of theme, clear messages are imparted to the viewer. These images illustrate the glaring inequalities between the ruling class and the majority of workers and have the purpose of inciting the producing class to rise up against the existing system. The cultural message is that artists must use their

art as a political weapon in the class struggle. Consequently, a large proportion of art which functioned as social comment in the twenties and early thirties did so in a fully conscious and direct manner and was produced with the explicit purpose of inspiring the proletarian worker to overthrow the capitalist system and establish a communist society based on the Soviet model. This was the art of a confident movement. With a faith based largely on the Bolshevik Revolution, the Canadian Communist Party boldly asserted its ideology and its programmes. This included viciously attacking reformism and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). The establishment of the CCF, a social democratic party in the early thirties, initiated a struggle for dominance within the political left. The CCF appealed to industrial workers, farmers, professionals and intellectuals. With this broader base it became popular very quickly and in a short time appeared to the Communist Party as a threat to their influence with working people. However, the rise of fascism throughout the world and the violent destruction of the German left by Hitler during the thirties led to a change in policy among communist parties affiliated with the Communist International. The United Front policy adopted by the Canadian Communist Party in 1935 was a programme of compromise and conciliation. After this point the struggle was over and social democracy emerged as the dominant ideology within the political left in Canada. What impact did this ideological change have on the art which functioned as social comment in the 1930's? The CP's greatly diminished confidence to be direct, anti-capitalist and assertive will be discussed within the context of the communist left's disillusionment in the face of the Stalinization of the Soviet Union and the anti-communist,

anti-union climate in Ontario. The new party had a sophisticated analysis of Canadian history and economics, and although it considered itself a party of workers, farmers and professionals, its publications were aimed at a middle class and educated audience. Canadian Forum, organ of the CCF, acted as a forum for debate on the left and in this, cultural questions were included. New Frontier, a journal of farther left/United Front sympathies, was more specifically cultural in its focus. Poetry, fiction and artworks were reproduced along with theoretical discussions on the role of the artist. How was the role of the artist affected by the Depression?

The new visual ideology supported art which focussed on people and urban or farm settings rather than uncivilized wilderness. At the same time, however, this human focus was artful in presentation. Because of the importance of traditional aesthetics and the vague interpretation of social consciousness in art, some works were identified as socially aware art which contained critical elements but which were not themselves obviously anti-capitalistic and were not intended to be so by the artists. Like the new left, this art was based on compromise and a desire to criticize from within the system. Rather than finding form in cartoon and illustration, the social comment art of the mid thirties existed in a Fine Art context, produced primarily as easel paintings, exhibited in galleries and sold as commodities to the patron class.

Through an analysis of three different examples of works which function as social comment from this period, it will be possible

to illustrate how the perspective and values of the social democratic left found expression in the fine arts in the mid thirties. There were many artists working in this period within different media and from various points of view. Printmaking and watercolour enjoyed a resurgence of popularity. Leonard Hutchinson produced many prints of Depression conditions. Fritz Brandtner frequently published anti-war drawings as well as holding an exhibition and sale of his works to raise money for aid to the Spanish Civil War. Laurence Hyde worked with left periodicals as art director and illustrator, at the same time as he produced works in a fine art context. Petroushka, by Paraskeva Clark, a street scene involving a puppet show, is the most directly political. It was intended to be so by the artist, and this painting is not an anomaly in her work. She was a close friend of Norman Bethune and painted a still life of objects he sent her from the Spanish Civil War. In 1938 Clark painted Portrait of Mao with political posters from China and Spain in the background. And there are others, also intentionally political. Carl Schaefer's Orchard, Township Bentinsk, Hanover carries no obvious political criticism, but functions in a more symbolic manner. This work is important because it represents the civilized, human landscape but also because of its stark violent nature. Schaefer painted many landscapes in the twenties and thirties and included a dead tree in some of those works. But in the mid thirties he produced several oil paintings which included disturbing elements in a significant degree. Another of his works from this period, Summer Harvest, caused a stir in the press because of its presentation of bleak and barren fields and tree with good harvest. Many works

during this period, by Schaefer, make use of black and ominous storm clouds. Storm Over the Fields from 1937 juxtaposes black clouds with bright yellow wheat fields and high winds. Orchard, however, is used for the purposes of this argument because it represents the extreme: there are no optimistic elements--no yellow wheatfields, no rolling hills, no piles of hay. "D'Ye Ken John Peel?" will be the third artwork discussed. A satirical charcoal drawing by Miller Brittain, it is in appearance much like the illustrations from Communist Party publications a decade earlier. This work will be considered because although it looks like a cartoon, it was praised for its high aesthetic fine art qualities. Brittain's drawings also represent some of the few examples of clearly satirical works from this period.

The form and content of Petroushka, Orchard and "D'Ye Ken John Peel?" will be analyzed in relation to the wilderness landscape, earlier social comment work and the rupture within the political left in order to articulate and explain the fundamental changes in this art which occurred in the mid thirties.

CHAPTER ONE

The dominant theme of English Canadian art throughout the twenties and thirties was the wilderness landscape, painted in a manner associated with the Group of Seven. Explanation of this work will focus on a contemporary power struggle within the Canadian financial elite that was manifested in part through a fervent nationalism which found expression in the wilderness landscape style. In spite of infrequent sales and great effort by some to prevent the wilderness landscape of the Group from becoming established as the "true Canadian painting style", by the late 1920's the artists of the Group of Seven had made a permanent niche for themselves in Canadian art history. Because they maintained their influence over many young painters and because to others they represented, by the early thirties, an outdated immovable tradition which carried no this style so popular.

The second part of this chapter will look at how social comment art expressed itself in the early 1930's and why it appeared in the form it did. As it was associated with the communist left, it is appropriate to investigate the characteristics of the communist aesthetic and establish what values it represented.

The nature of Canadian painting in the early 1930's was determined by the artistic developments of the 1920's. During the twenties the

Group of Seven moved from being perceived as radical experimenters to having established artists with a highly influential style. Even by 1933 when they formally disbanded, the subsequent Canadian Group of Painters was dominated by the spirit of the Seven and their imitators.¹ The wilderness landscape had become the established theme with which to represent non-urban Canada. Nationally and internationally it was recognized by most observers as the logically representative style of a country so dominated by vast expanses of undomesticated wilds. A 1932 article in Apollo, entitled "Canadian Landscape of To-Day" maintains that focus on isolated mountains, streams and forests as chief subject matter is one of the things that gives Canadian painting its typical character. Furthermore it states, "The pioneers of the earlier years are still the leaders of today, although they have now been reinforced by a group of younger men."² There is no hint in this article of dissatisfaction among artists with the emphasis on landscape in Canadian painting. It is implied that the wilderness landscape remained strong as a genre, and that it continued to have a challenging impact on its historical juncture almost ten years after their first major international success at the Wembley exhibition in 1924. This was more than 15 years after early members of the Group such as A.Y. Jackson and J.E.H. McDonald began to show their works to the public. It also implies that young new artists find satisfaction in following acceptable, popular ideas and see no need to challenge them.

Although individual works have their own particular qualities, there are characteristics which are common to the wilderness landscape. In

spite of its emphasis on the wilds of nature with frequent storms and high winds, a sense of fear or uneasiness is never really transmitted to the viewer. Unfamiliarity with the region removes most viewers from direct understanding of and sensitivity to the life-threatening possibilities of such natural hazards as northern storms, isolated wilderness, and large deep lakes. Danger and apprehension are not responses because the threat remains in the abstract. In September Gale (fig. 1) by Arthur Lismer we are exposed to none of the terror of gale force winds over water. Although the waves and some of the trees are blown to the left, the large rocks in the foreground counter-act that movement and thus defuse the power of the storm-excited waves. The prominent pine tree does not bend much in the wind and is concretely anchored both in terms of geographic and pictorial structure. Panoramic view, very common in these works indicates the vastness of uncivilized area there is in this country. The perspective is presented in an illusionistic, conventional manner. Stability is reinforced compositionally with the use of large shapes handled in a relatively flat manner. The broad handling of the paint denies any sense of agitation, just as there are no harsh angles or disturbing spacial relationships. Even in works where one is confronted by a looming mountain or high cliffs they are painted in this same loose, comfortable way and exude more a feeling of solemnity and respect for nature's beauty than sublimation and fear as in the German Romantic tradition or the early Hudson River School.

Intense colours applied in thick impasto create a rich surface,



Fig.1 Arthur Lismer, September Gale 1921
Reprinted from John A. B. McLeish, September
Gale: A Study of Arthur Lismer of the Group
of Seven (Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons (Canada)
Ltd., 1955), p. 84.

as well as a sense of immediacy, spontaneity and chance. Colour is often bright and rich with strokes of pure hue painted in adjacent strokes. In spite of the rough handling of the brushwork these paintings exhibit a strong sense of pattern and design. In September Gale the large, flat shapes of the rocks are repeated in the pine tree and in the clouds. The area of small shapes representing the foreground tree acts as a foil to the repetition of large shapes as do the curved forms below it. Consequently, although the painting presents a pictorial depth it also has a strong sense of surface pattern. The wildness of the natural elements and the energy of the colours and brush strokes used are controlled by the patterning. This idea of control combined with the notions of chance and spontaneity were values integral to the optimistic and entrepreneurial nature of national feeling in the twenties. The nationalism associated with the Group of Seven was part of the movement in the twenties to assert Canada's independence from Britain. The illusion of political autonomy, assumed since confederation, had been rudely exposed at the time of the First World War when Canada and the other Dominions were automatically brought into the war by the declaration of Britain. Canada was thrust into a world of international politics; yet it had no control over its own foreign policy. The specifically Canadian images of the Group of Seven came out of the need for Canadians to assert their independence.

The movement in opposition to the colonial subordination of Canada to Britain developed after World War I. It wanted Canada to be a politically autonomous country within a loose federation held together

more by sentiment than legal bond.³ Those who advocated a fully autonomous Canada represented in part the growing power of the financier faction of the Canadian economic elite. After the war Britain had been left greatly weakened as an exporter of investment capital. As portfolio investment from London dried up, direct investment from New York increased, mostly through branch plants, production under U.S. patent license and joint ventures.⁴ A struggle for dominance among groups within the ruling class took place around these issues with the banking/entrepreneurial faction gaining primacy over the old guard British colonialists.

Because of the strong British background among Canadians at that time the argument in favour of total autonomy from Britain met with a great deal of hostility and resistance from those Canadians whose identity was integrally tied to England and whose financial connections were with the United Kingdom rather than the United States. Most middle class magazines such as Saturday Night were extremely pro-British. In almost every issue there was an article on the Royal family, an English village, the state of the empire or some other directly British interest. There were frequent advertisements for holiday cruises to tropical corners of the Empire. At the time of the First World War 64% of the first Canadian contingent that went overseas in 1914 were found to be born in the British Isles.⁵ Faced with such sentiments it is not surprising that any movement advocating a shift in allegiance may have felt it was necessary to be equally extreme in its rejection of the colonial tie. The issue

was debated in the press with the majority favouring the status quo.⁶ Partly for these reasons of racial background and public opinion, the campaign for autonomy from England had an anti-British rather than a pro Canadian focus. Emphasis was on the "breaking away" aspect of independence and could be described as a "negative" nationalism. The matter was not properly settled until the 1926 Imperial Conference which declared that Great Britain and the dominions

are autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. 7

The ideas of struggling for freedom and wrenching away from the bond of colonialism was part of the struggle for power within the financial elite of the country. It required a great deal of courage, energy, confidence in one's abilities, willingness to take chances and explore new entrepreneurial territory, not to mention sheer aggression, in order to wrest free from established financial patterns and push the economic focus of the country in a new direction. In this, the negative nationalist, who felt he was asserting Canadian independence in rejecting British portfolio investment in favour of American direct investment, contradicted the image of the comfortable British stockholder that liked his investments safe. So safe, in fact, that the British government enacted in 1900 the Colonial Stocks Act which stipulated that if Canada wanted to borrow in Britain it had to be willing to repeal any Dominion legislation that British investors felt may detract from the security of their investment.⁸ Consequently,

within a small but increasingly powerful faction of Canadian society the image of the conservative colonial was giving way to the image of the independent, aggressive nationalist.

The corresponding shift in values often found expression in the arts of the twenties. Referring to the effort in literature to break free of British literary forms, it was stated,

Colonialism is a spirit that gratefully accepts a place of subordination, that looks elsewhere for its standards of excellence and is content to imitate with a modest and timid conservatism the products of a parent tradition.⁹

It would therefore follow that rejection by the colony of the style of the colonizing nation is the rejection of a subordinate position. Rejection of England's standards of excellence and establishing a nation's own, is an act of reaching out and taking control. By the same logic, those who accept or imitate the seemingly harmless status quo are in effect supporting the domination of the colonizing nation over the colony.

The values of negative nationalism found their visual expression in the wilderness landscape. The enterprising, independent, individualist breaking free of tradition and colonial bonding was an image that applied not only to financial entrepreneurs but also to the artists of the Group of Seven. F. B. Housser in his book on the Group states,

This task demands a new type of artist; one who divests himself of the velvet coat and flowing tie of his caste, puts on the outfit of the bushwhacker and prospector; closes with his environment; paddles, portages and makes camp; sleeps in the out-of-doors under the stars; climbs mountains with his sketch box on his back. Possibly never before have such physical demands been made upon the artist... 10

Housser describes the artist as a caste of upper class city dwellers identified by their velvet coats and flowing ties. This image is within the British Academic tradition and although this clearly is an oversimplification, it is instructive for the purposes of this argument that Housser, an active supporter of the Group so perceived the traditional artist. But Canada was new, exciting, adventurous and this is symbolized by the nature of the untamed wilds. Advocates of this art believed our British and European connection as far as art is concerned, "has been a millstone around our neck".¹¹ The role of the artist here is one of an activist rejecting British passivity, an aggressor, who overcomes physical hardship to accomplish "the task" of expressing the essence of the north country, source of the Canadian spirit. Like the newly powerful financier, the artist of negative nationalism rejects the traditional bonds of colonialism and takes control of his own direction.

That the style of the Group of Seven was seen as crude and anti-British is evident in much of the debate that went on in the press. The most vehement was Hector Charlesworth, Editor in Chief of Saturday Night and special reporter for the royal visit in 1901. He staunchly defended the Royal Canadian Academy against the Group of Seven who he felt had attacked "standards of poetry and beauty that are eternal."¹²

Housser's book, written in 1926 was obviously functioning within the same nationalistic structure as the art he discusses. He indicates in the clause "closes with his environment" that paddling canoes,

portaging and sleeping outdoors is the natural habitat of the Canadian artist, and by extrapolation that of the average citizen, since we share the same geographical environment.

A connection is implied in this quote between the demanding nature of the physical environment and the hearty, capable character of the people. This attitude is in keeping with ideas of environmental determinism popular in the late 19th century which believed northern climates were synonymous with strength, self reliance, democracy and freedom.¹³ This theory was convenient to Canadian nationalism in the 1920's and its principal associations often underlay expression of nationalism.¹⁴

The images themselves, through form and content, also express values particular to the 1920's sense of nationalism. An aggressive painting style reinforced the image of the vigorous, independent venturesome Canadian male. The unfussy handling of the brush with its broad application suggests a confident hand. Use of colour was often pure and crude with some jarring juxtapositions, the impact being direct and forceful but not disturbing because of the element of purposefulness and control. The surface is a thick impasto which made no attempt to obscure or smooth over the active movements of the painter's hand. The spontaneous, yet controlled surface of the works which defuses even scenes such as September Gale ensures we will feel no threat or uneasiness: confidence in overcoming dangerous and unpredictable circumstances is implied. These aggressive

values were picked up, articulated and reinforced by reviewers whether or not they supported Canadian independence from Britain.

...the movement in Canadian painting associated chiefly with their names is spiritually the most robust thing the country has produced. This robustness, this vitality in them, is the surest sign of their intrinsic worth, and the accompanying phenomena of change, experiment, surprise, failure, adventure, which are always present in their work, must be welcomed as a necessary part of the process. 15

In his review Barker Fairley directly connects vitality, change, experiment, and adventure with the spirit of the nation. These qualities (which are also elements of progress and development) are recognized as worthy. Consequently, he identifies major progressive changes happening in the country, and indicates he approves, partly by the associations he makes and partly through his positive word choice such as "robust" and "vitality" coupled with "worth". Although "failure" is included, it is used within the context of "experiment". Thus it functions as a necessary component in the dialectic of "change" (progress implied) and is therefore positive. Fairley was on the political left himself and was married to an active Communist Party member. He wrote for The Rebel, a magazine founded by students and teachers at the University of Toronto which later grew into the social democratic Canadian Forum, for which Fairley also wrote.

Another reviewer, Hector Charlesworth, wrote for a much more conservative audience. Charlesworth, it will be remembered was Editor in Chief of Saturday Night and wrote many articles, columns and editorials. He was a most vociferous opponent of the Group of Seven.

The Group of Seven elects to present in exaggerated terms the crudest and most sinister aspects of the Canadian wilds; and has steadily campaigned against all painters of more suave and poetic impulse, and have been accepted by British critics as the exclusive authentic interpreters of Canadian landscape. 16

Through the juxtaposition of gentle words--"suave and poetic" with violent words--"crudest" and "exaggerated" Hector Charlesworth, in the second passage, indicates his awareness that a major rupture is occurring. Use of "sinister" to describe wilderness images presented by the Group is an indication of Charlesworth's confusion regarding the rejection of accepted British traditions. The word intimates the presence of hidden and evil forces. This suggests at least a subconscious suspicion that more is being threatened here than just a style of painting. But, it is in his sentence regarding the British critics where the true source of his horror is revealed. Charlesworth's fears were justified. The wilderness landscape style had been discussed in reviews and articles on numerous occasions favourably since the Wembley exhibition. In an Apollo article from December 1931 the focus is on the emergence of a truly Canadian school. In spite of the obvious awareness of French modernism and Art Nouveau, the article refers to the landscape style as "distinctly original, national and spontaneous".¹⁷ For those who wanted to remain tied to Britain, replication of corresponding values and "standards of excellence" must be maintained with great importance placed on these foreign judgments. In a sense, Canada was viewed as a remote neighbourhood of London. For the "Mother Country" to not only acknowledge the separateness of Canada but to celebrate it as "authentic" may have seemed like rejection to ardent British subjects such as Charlesworth and

reinforced the position of those who advocated political and economic "separatism" from Britain.

The formal qualities of the wilderness landscape were consistent with the anti-British nature of "negative" nationalism. The use of patches of pure unmixed colour, the seemingly heavy-handed, rough application of paint--in short, the obvious lack of finish and sophistication, downplayed illusion and asserted the role of the painter as participant in the material world. Emphasis is on surface design and pattern which bore unembarrassed witness to many of the Group's commercial art training and employment. Although some academicians were becoming less rigid in their style, these elements in essence functioned as a rejection of the slick, carefully finished, academic style associated with the Royal Canadian Academy. The RCA was structured after the Royal Academy and was one of the leading cultural institutions of the Canadian ruling establishment. Although the stereotype was beginning to change, the RCA had for many years emphasized fine art professionalism and academic training. It took its "standards of excellence" from the Royal Academy and valued competent modelling of form, predictable colour relationships and a smooth finish. The artist's hand was invisible and illusion of utmost importance.¹⁸ By extrapolation, therefore, a rejection of the RCA's values was also a rejection of British influence in culture - a form of colonial domination.

The use of wilderness imagery as content deserves closer consideration. It was celebrated as the spirit of the nation. However, few Canadians were familiar with this aspect of their country; the over-

welming majority lived on farms or in cities and towns. By the early 1930's thirty percent of the population still lived on farms and many more were first generation city dwellers.¹⁹ Wheat production and export expanded rapidly in the first 30 years of this century to where it dominated the economy. In 1925 it was the country's most valuable export, accounting for more than 25% of Canadian exports. In 1928 Canada's share of the world wheat exports was almost 50%.²⁰ Accordingly, the typical non-urban experience in the 1920's was agricultural in nature, not one of uncultivated, undomesticated, unpopulated north country.

The success of wheat production, encouraged developments in industry.²¹ The great influx of immigrants and extension of the railroads in the first part of the century provided both the work force and the markets for its expansion. The resulting shift in the balance of power away from agriculture and toward amalgamation of industrial and financial capital saw the development of pulp and paper, hydro electricity and the mining of new minerals.²²

Coinciding with the national perspective of the new financial elite, the wilderness landscape was also metaphoric for the entrepreneurial frontier. The frequent panoramas of tree covered mountains and northern lakes are in one sense an indication of where Canada must look in order to keep pace with the modern industrialized world. The untouched aspect of the wilderness image expresses a freshness and inspires optimism; new ideas, new technology, and new communities

are required. Underneath all this is the desire to break free of colonial domination and take control of our own economic and political development.

The relationship between the financier element of the Canadian elite and the encouragement of the wilderness landscape style of painting had an important connection. An influential force behind the development of the National Gallery of Canada was Sir Edmund Walker. Walker was President of the Bank of Commerce, member institution of an extremely powerful banking cartel. He had a wide reputation as a philanthropist, was trustee and member of the Board of Directors of the National Gallery of Canada, as well as, President of the Art Museum of Toronto. He was sympathetic to the style of the Group, feeling it represented a truly Canadian identity, and he encouraged the Gallery to exhibit, promote (nationally and internationally) and buy their works.

Although, during the 1920's, the wilderness landscape of the Group of Seven expressed the optimism of the industrial future, by the early thirties these images became more clearly identifiable as not being truly representative of the nation. Rumblings of discontent among some artists and art writers increased as they criticized the Group and its imitators for being insensitive to the human reality of the Depression. The cities became the focal points as they tried to cope with desperate populations swelled by the influx of farmers driven off the land. Relief lines, homeless unemployed, public demonstrations,

occupations of public buildings and labour battles all were highly visible events recorded daily in the newspapers. During the Depression the prairies suffered economic, social and environmental devastation unlike anywhere else in the country. Per capita net income declined from 1928 to 1933 by 72 percent in Saskatchewan, 61 percent in Alberta and 49 percent in Manitoba.²³ In some areas of Saskatchewan there were nine years of successive crop failure due to drought, grasshoppers, rust and frost.²⁴ Wilderness landscape painting remained unaffected in its optimism. In view of the crumbling economy and deteriorating fabric of society, with thousands living insecure, haphazard lives, the pristine, aloof beauty of the untouched wilderness was seen by some as profoundly irrelevant.

At the same time, the Group of Seven and their followers were painting wilderness landscapes, there existed an art scene of theatre, poetry, dance, literature, and visual arts, which strove to be socially integrated in production, form and content. It was sensitive to the human reality of the Depression, protesting an economic system, and political structure which it identified as the causes of this social destruction. Consequently, social comment art of the 1920's and early 1930's was the art of the political left. This is where most critical art came from and where it circulated. Because of the highly political nature of this art, its anti-"Fine" art manifestations and its close association with the Communist Party of Canada, these images have been ignored by most Canadian art historians.²⁵

To understand the form and function of this art, it is necessary to consider the nature of the dominant left at the time. With the founding of the Communist Party of Canada in 1921 and affiliation to the Communist International, a large part of the socialist movement became united around such tenets as the belief in the necessity and inevitability of a workers' revolution, and acceptance of the need for a strong centralized party which would motivate and lead the masses nationally and internationally. The Bolshevik revolution served as a living example that the working classes could take control and create a just and free society, or so it seemed in the twenties. Organizational activity and theoretical discussion centred around this knowledge. If revolution occurred in such an unlikely country as Russia with a very small proletariat, then surely there was hope for the industrial west.

Consequently, all effort went into educating and inspiring the working class. This was attempted in a large part, through institutional structures. During the initial growth of Canadian unionism party members were the key organizers and operatives.²⁶ The Communist Party-led unions had their own labour federation, the Workers' Unity League. The CP also supported a number of associated and "front" organizations such as the Young Communist League, Canadian Labor Defence League and the Women's Labor League, as well as, attempting to infiltrate and influence existing liberal and social democratic organizations.²⁷

Although the Progressive Arts Club (formed in 1931) was not an official arm of the Communist Party, its members were in the Party or sympathizers and it functioned as the cultural vehicle through which the ideas of the Party were propagated. The PAC organized readings, symposia, exhibitions, produced agitation-propaganda theatre and held workshops in journalistic and literary writing, for working people.²⁸ Chapters sprang up right across Canada in cities and small towns from Halifax to Vancouver.²⁹ Theatre became the most popular expression by the clubs, probably because it was mobile, required little training, was a highly visual public art form and allowed maximum participation, combining the efforts of writers, visual artists, and dramatists. These made it a useful tool for propaganda, agitation and organization.

The Progressive Arts Club published a small periodical called Masses through which the values and ideology of the communist left were manifested in cultural forms. Every issue contained short stories, poetry, and graphic work which illustrated the downtrodden plight of working people, enumerated the failings of capitalism and reiterated the necessity for a proletarian revolution. There were also theoretical articles on the social role of the arts, the decadent nature of "bourgeois" culture and what constituted "good" art from a communist point of view. Prior to this, there was no communist publication concerned with culture in Canada. Intellectuals on the far left were very rare in Canada (unlike the U.S.A.) until around 1933. Consequently, the concept of "proletarian culture" came

late to this country. Masses was an attempt to offer a communist alternative to the social democratic Canadian Forum.

The first editorial of Masses identified the role of art in society, as well as, defining the goals and position of the Progressive Arts Club and its organ.

[The purpose is] to provide a basis for the development of a militant working class art and literature...The [PAC] challenges all that is corrupt, all that is reactionary in Canadian Bourgeois society generally and in Canadian cultural life particularly. It rejects the theory that art can have nothing in common with politics, that art functions only by and for art...Art is a vehicle of propaganda. Art is the product of the current (and previous) social and economic conditions. 30

The values stated here are synonymous with the goals of the Communist Party. Art is to take an active and conscious role in the struggle for a workers' society. Art is not an end in itself, but a tool with which to incite the workers to revolution. Although it may be touted by bourgeois society as being outside politics, art in fact does take a political stand when it acts as an escape, an investment or an object of status for the ruling class because it thereby reinforces a hierarchic, class structured social organization. Consequently by attacking the cultural organization and policies of the elite classes one, by extrapolation, also attacks bourgeois social-political structures. The idea of breaking down the elitist nature of art under capitalism and viewing the artist as a contributing, equal member of society was compatible with the communist image of society which did not tolerate parasitic classes. The PAC attempted to take art out of its "fine" position and put it in the hands of the militant working class.

The assertion that art is a product of historical and contemporary economic conditions refers to Karl Marx's theory that social relations, structures, and institutions, are determined by a society's economic system. A society with an economy based on competition and profit will express itself differently in everything from education to architecture than a society whose economy is based on cooperation and equal distribution of wealth. Given this intrinsic relationship between socio-economic systems and culture, members of the Progressive Arts Club would have felt particularly motivated in their efforts to redefine art. Questioning the function of culture and using art as a political weapon was itself a revolutionary act. Accordingly, art was good or bad depending on its political effectiveness, and social awareness. Within this theory art is never apolitical, it either affirms or criticizes the status quo.

The concept of art as an actor, rather than an observer is reinforced by the vocabulary, tone and sentence structure of the quotation. Words chosen to describe art or its role are action words - challenges, development, rejects, functions, vehicle. All verbs are in present indicative, the most direct tense in the language. The straightforward, uncomplicated sentence structure is forceful and confident. Most interesting of all, perhaps, is the unembarrassed, purposeful use of the word "propaganda". Although there were a few articles in Masses in which art and propaganda were viewed as incompatible,³¹ it is clear from the general focus of Masses and the great majority of articles that propaganda was the legitimate function of art; indeed, that

expressing ideology along with image was unavoidable.

Art is one of the means of expression for society's ideas. And the paramount ideology of any period of human society is that of the ruling class. Art must always express either one or [an] other ideology. 32

These two quotes together support the Marxist tenet that the classes are in struggle against each other and even the seemingly most unlikely areas are battlegrounds for the minds and political sympathies of society's members.

The wilderness landscape of the Group of Seven also functioned in a critical way, but it questioned the styfling conservatism which retarded new approaches in art, not the very role of art itself.

The revolt of the Group of Seven was good, where it made use of a decorative technique closely allied with life itself, with hard work in the shops. But the revolt has proven its sterility mainly because the subject matter to which this technique was attached was isolated from life and from any social meaning. 33

The Group did not reject the concept of showing art in private galleries and selling to an elite audience. The "decorative technique" referred to here, in relation to work in shops, suggests that the commercial training of many Group members was acceptable to the communists because it was associated with productive, necessary, social labour. But when those skills were used to create escapist, comfortable images for the private consumption of an elitist class, from the PAC's point of view, all social relevance dissolved. Also in this passage, it is emphasized that style and content are to be compatible in their purpose, which itself must be directly social in nature, and at least indirectly political in function.

Visual expression of the ideology expounded by the communist left (as articulated in Masses) manifested itself in political cartoons, illustrations, set design, theatre programmes, pamphlet design, newspaper and magazine publication, posters, hand bills, etc. This was in keeping with the active political and social nature of culture and its agitational and organizational capabilities. Art did not function as a commodity; therefore, art galleries were irrelevant. And because galleries were run by and for those who were benefiting from the existing economic system (which had created a patron class), during the twenties they were not seen as a forum for political criticism. This is an important point; in Chapter Two artists who made social criticism from within the gallery structure during the mid thirties will be considered. The audience for art forms with social comment as their focus, was the supposedly revolutionary working class, and this proletariat did not frequent such institutions as art galleries.

The Communist press was very prolific. The Party circulated not only its official organ Worker, but also supported or produced a number of other periodicals, such as Worker's Unity, Canadian Labor Defender, Canadian Labor Monthly, Young Worker, Clarion, as well as Masses and others.

Little is known of the artists who produced illustrations and cartoons for these periodicals. This is partly because they never exhibited in art galleries and consequently were never reviewed or written

about. It is also due to the ideology they operated within, which did not glorify or mystify the artist. Even Avrom Yanofsky, who appears to have been one of the most active and versatile of the illustrator/cartoonists remains unmentioned except in memoirs,³⁴

Yanofsky's lino cut Group of Seven (fig. 2) appeared in Masses in April 1932. The artist identifies his audience as the potentially revolutionary working class. He does this in part by using a visual language identifiable by those he wishes to communicate with. Stereotypes, accepted and recognizable by the communist left and their sympathizers are combined with utilization of symbols. Typical of such illustrations at the time, the capitalists are male, fat, short, balding or wear shiny top hats. Their faces are jowly and evil.

Yanofsky's use of the Group signifies their connection to the ruling class. Although the works of the Group of Seven had a critical function within the nationalism of the twenties, by the early thirties it represented an escape from reality. Produced for the commercial market, it was an art of beautiful images. Clearly, the Group was not concerned with the problems of workers and their paintings made no visual acknowledgement of the Depression's terrible impact on people. Just as the Royal Canadian Academy represented the pro-British faction of the bourgeoisie, to the communists who supported cartoons and social realist illustration, the Group of Seven, with their modernistic images represented the decadence of the bourgeoisie.

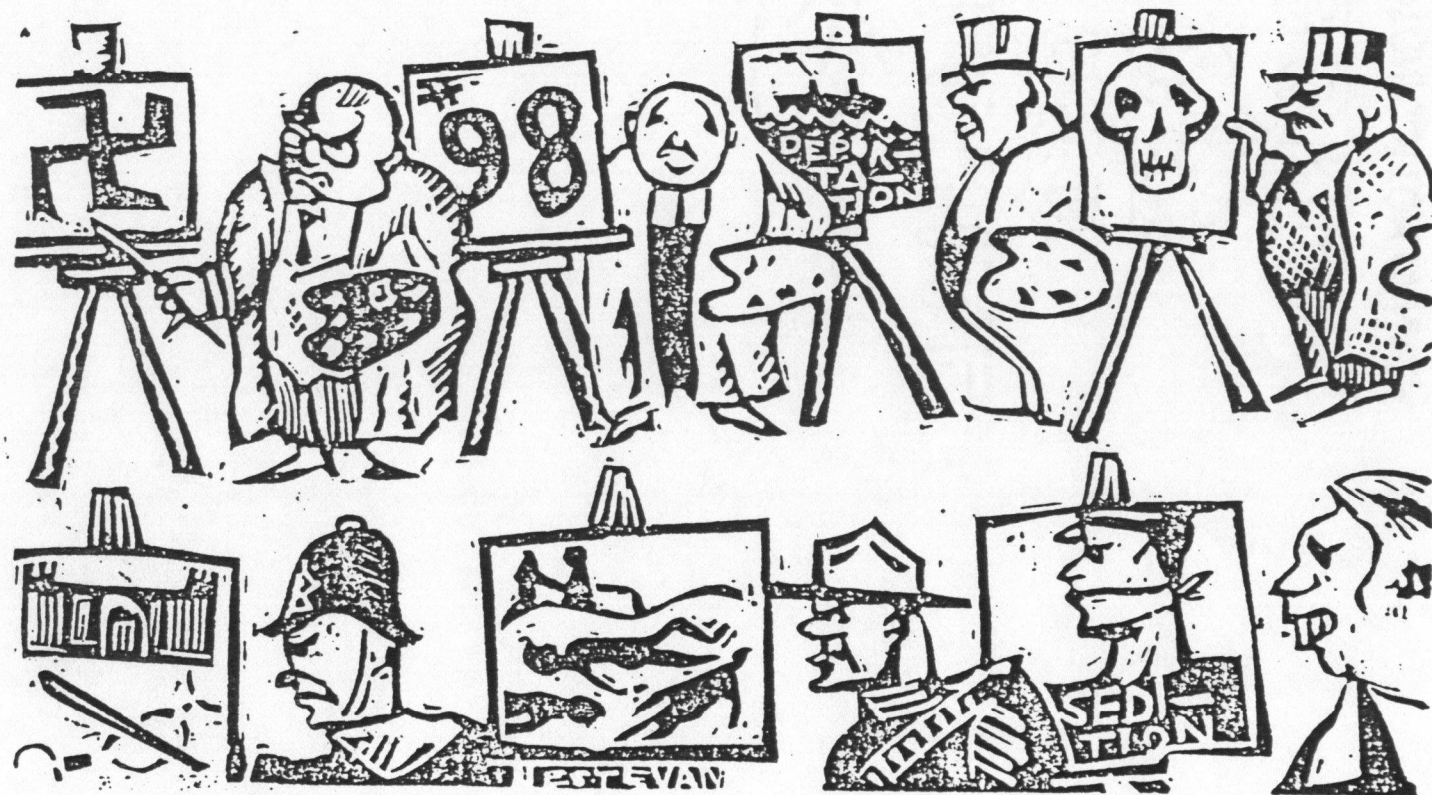


Fig. 2

Avrom, Group of Seven

Masses

April 1932

The "paintings" they exhibit here relate graphically and specifically to contemporary political events. The swastika (international symbol of fascism) refers not only to the rise of fascism in Europe and in Canada, but also to the inevitability of another "imperialist" war. True to the rhetoric of the communist press, this illustration connects national and international events. Between the swastika and the often employed skull of starvation are two "canvases" which make reference to two aspects of the law used to terrorize political dissenters. Sections 41 and 42 of the immigration act often allowed immigrants to be deported for so little as being "affiliated with an organization entertaining disbelief in or opposition to organized government."³⁵ This was a useful tool for the anti-communist forces because most of the communist leaders and active Party members were eastern European born, reaching as high as 95% in 1929. Individuals could be incarcerated on suspicion and deported by a Board of Inquiry, thus circumventing the courts and a public trial.³⁶

The number "98" was extremely significant to communists in the early thirties. A powerful symbol, even when printed in isolation, it evoked an instant emotional response in the viewer. Section 98 of the Criminal Code was a vague, general anti-sedition law used, in effect, to outlaw the Communist Party.³⁷ In 1931 it was used to arrest the top eight leaders of the CP and sentence them to five years in prison. Members of the Progressive Arts Club wrote a play called Eight Men Speak concerning the arrests and subsequent events.

Although it was only performed once, reception was very enthusiastic and the play became well known in spite of collusion between city officials and the police to keep the play from being seen.³⁸

The three bottom figures of Yanofsky's illustration represent the legal system and its role in maintaining the capitalist power structure. All levels of law enforcement were used against striking workers, mass rallies, and marchers. Police in such cities as Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg were sufficiently ardent in their anti-communism and zealous in their dealings with strikers that help was generally not sought from the provincial government. However, in small, more sympathetic communities the militia, RCMP or even the army were called in to disperse striking workers or rallies. Estevan was a case in point. Three deaths and a number of injuries occurred on "Black Tuesday" when several hundred miners and their families clashed with police while attempting to hold a parade to publicize their grievances.³⁹ Over a hundred were arrested. The Mine Workers Union was forced out of the area by the subsequent Royal Commission which imposed a settlement. However, the Estevan strike was a major propaganda victory for the communists and is considered a landmark of Canadian Labour history.⁴⁰ Articles on the strike and cartoon, and illustrations were so frequent in the left newspapers that Yanofsky's reduction of the situation to the depiction of three dead bodies and the word "Estevan" was sufficient to remind the viewer that those who held economic and political power in Canada would never allow significant social change beneficial to working people without a violent struggle.

The CP press spoke to the experiences and concerns of working people during the worst years of the Depression, not only because it knew how to identify its audience, but also because the Party-supported press was an essential part of creating that audience. Consequently, the focus on labour in the press coincided with the emphasis on labour organizing by the Party. As the education level among workers was low, visual material was an important tool in teaching the dynamics of class struggle and inspiring this class to affect its historic role according to Marx. Given the perceived urgency of the historical moment, the unsophistication of the audience, and the didactic nature of the images, content had primacy over style. As in Yanofsky's Group of Seven, power relationships between the classes were graphically exposed. Illustrations of sweat shops, factories, social and political conditions, etc. generally fell into two categories. One chronicled the victimization of the working class. They teach that a small minority accumulates wealth and power at the expense of the welfare of the majority. Yanofsky's print is a good example of this type, with such juxtapositions as bloated capitalist with a skull, and dead workers with a policeman. The other category instructs the worker on how to turn this situation around. In these images, such as Avrom Yanofsky's cover drawing for Worker's Unity (fig. 3) of June 1932 the capitalists are stereotypically evil and pig-like. The workers, on the other hand are seen as powerful and militant. They have strong physiques, determined set jaws and dress in work shirts and simple caps. They are animated and vocal against the belligerent.

WORKERS' UNITY

5 CENTS

No. 10

Official Organ of Workers' Unity League of Canada

June, 1932



Fig. 3 Avrom, Cover, Workers' Unity June 1932

silence of those who sit at the Imperial Conference.

It was common in social comment illustrations of the early thirties to use uncomplicated composition and flat ground in order to maximize the immediate impact. Group of Seven, being typical in this regard, is straight forward and clear in composition. The Worker's Unity cover, however, divides the image on a diagonal. This gives an out of balance and precarious atmosphere to the image. It also has the effect of compartmentalizing the classes, with "the bad guys" on a black ground and "the good guys" being on a white ground, and places them at odds along the visual and political tension line where white meets black.

As with other illustrations which teach a revolutionary answer to the inequalities of capitalism, perspective is used to reveal large crowds of workers in the process of rising up against the ruling class. Violence or threat of violence is used to indicate power relationships. In Group of Seven imprisonment, starvation, silence and death are forced on the workers by the capitalists who hold all economic and political power. Unity shows the workers as a shouting mass of movement descending on the silent, immobile Imperial Conference delegates, wielding signs as though they were axes. The main figure's arm is drawn in an impending gesture which will see his "worker's economic conference" sign smash through the tension line and destroy the conference table whereon lie the symbols of his oppression. The table is tipped up to show the

attributes of international capitalism. No subtleties or ambiguities are allowed; uncertain items are labelled. The message is that capitalism can be eradicated through the militant unity of the working class. Art is part of this struggle, and its role in society must be demystified if it is to be effective.

The striving to attain perfect beauty is not its (art's) function...The intrinsic value of a painting is a few cents worth of canvas and paints and the few hours of socially necessary labor that went into its make-up. That is all. 41

This definition relies heavily on Marx's labour theory of value which relates the essential value of all things produced to the number of labour hours required to make both the item and the materials used in its production. This passage sums up the approach of the PAC and illustrates not only the political commitment of its advocates but also the reductionist and unquestioning direction of the Communist Party.

The Communist Party dominated the left for over ten years. During this time it made a major contribution to the organization of working people in this country. It focussed primarily on industrial workers, miners and the unemployed. Because this narrow focus and the dependence of party members on Moscow for policy decisions prevented them from broadening this base, it failed to develop a strategy that appealed to other important sections of the population who were also searching for a way to fight back against the material, physical and psychological ravages of the Depression. In the early thirties the social democratic movement began to gain significant popularity, initiating considerable disruption within the left and causing a major shift in power. The following chapter will examine this political rupture,

describing it and exploring its causes, using this as a structure with which to explain the radical change in the dominant form of visual social criticism which occurred in the mid thirties.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Charles Hill, Canadian Painting in the Thirties (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1975), p. 21.

² Stewart Dick, "Canadian Landscape of To-Day", Apollo, 15 (June 1932), p. 280.

³ William H. Troop, "Canada and the Empire: A Study of Canadian Attitudes to the Empire and Imperial Relationships Since 1867," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1933), p. 26.

⁴ Tom Naylor, "The History of Domestic and Foreign Capital in Canada," Robert Laxer, ed., (Canada) Ltd. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1973), p. 52.

⁵ F. H. Soward, et al., Canada in World Affairs: The Pre-War Years (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 9.

⁶ Troop, p. 42.

⁷ Ibid, p. 43.

⁸ R. T. Naylor, The History of Canadian Business, 2 vols. (Toronto, James Lorimer & Company, Publishers, 1975), Vol 1, P. 235.

⁹ Frank Watt, "Nationalism in Canadian Literature", Peter Russell, ed., Nationalism in Canada (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Co. of Canada Ltd., 1966), p. 238.

¹⁰ F. B. Housser, A Canadian Art Movement: The Story of the Group of Seven (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1926), p. 15.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 13.

¹² Dennis Reid, The Group of Seven (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1971), p. 170, f.n. 16.

¹³ Elsewhere Housser states very directly, "Science recognizes that environment affects individuals and contributes toward the creation of racial characteristics." (p. 13).

¹⁴ Carl Berger, "The True North Strong and Free", Peter Russell, ed., Nationalism in Canada (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Co. of Canada Ltd., 1966), p. 15. Berger notes several examples of the northern myth in historical writing, novel, poetry and boys books. (p. 21).

¹⁵ Barker Fairly, "The Group of Seven", Canadian Forum 5 (February 1925), p. 144.

¹⁶ Hector Charlesworth, "Canadian Pictures at Wembley", Saturday Night 34 (17 May 1924), p. 1.

¹⁷ "Canadian Art: Foundations of a National School", Apollo 14 (December 1931), p. 327.

¹⁸ Rebecca Sisler, Passionate Spirits: A History of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts 1880-1980 (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co. Ltd., 1980), p. 11-29.

¹⁹ Michiel Horn, "The Great Depression: Past and Present", Journal of Canadian Studies 11 (February 1976), p. 48.

²⁰ W. T. Easterbrook and Hugh G. J. Aitken, Canadian Economic History (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1956), p. 490.

²¹ Ibid, p. 483.

²² Robert Laxer, "Introduction to the Political Economy of Canada", Robert M. Laxer, (Canada Ltd.) (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1973), p. 33.

²³ Horn, "Past and Present", p. 44.

²⁴ Victor Hoar, The Great Depression (Vancouver: Copp Publishing Company, 1969), p. 88.

²⁵ The writings of Barry Lord are the obvious exception here especially his book History of Painting in Canada (Toronto: NC Press Ltd., 1974).

²⁶ Penner, p. 136.

²⁷ Ivan Avakumovic, The Communist Party in Canada: A History (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 33.

- 28 Avakumovic, p. 126.
- 29 Dorothy Livesay, Right Hand Left Hand (Erin: Press Porcupic Ltd., 1977), introduction, n.p.
- 30 Masses 1 (April 1932), p. 2.
- 31 For example: T. Richardson, "In Defense of Pure Art", Masses 1 (July/August 1932), no p.n.
- 32 E. Cecil-Smith, "What Is 'Pure' Art?", Masses 1 (July/August 1932), no. p.n.
- 33 D. L. [Dorothy Livesay?] and C.R.P., "Brief History of Canadian Art", Masses 2 (May/June 1933), p. 9.
- 34 Yanofsky also performed in plays, painted sets and gave "Chalk Talks" (an ideological one-man comedy routine using spontaneous sketches. These sessions were used to "warm up" audiences before a P.A.C. Theatre performance.) See memoirs of Toby Gordon Ryan, Stage Left: Canadian Theatre in the Thirties (Toronto): CTR Publications, 1981, p. 39.
- 35 "Sections 41 - 42 - Immigration Act", Labor Defender 23 (July 1932), p. 4.
- 36 Avakumovic, p. 36-37.
- 37 Richard Wright and Robin Endres, ed., Eight Men Speak: and Other Plays From the Canadian Workers' Theatre (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1976), p. xxvi.
- 38 Wright, p. xxviii.
- 39 S.D. Hanson, "Estevan 1931", Irving Abella, On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in Canada 1919-1949 (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1975), p. 33.
- 40 Desmond Morton with Terry Copp, Working People (Ottawa: Deneau Publishers, 1980), p. 144.
- 41 E. Cecil-Smith, "What is 'Pure' Art?", Masses 1 (July/August 1932), no p.n.

CHAPTER TWO

During the first half of the 1930's an ideological struggle took place within the Canadian left. Between the establishment of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in 1933, a coalition of farm, labour and intellectuals, and 1935, when a United Front policy was developed by the Communist Party, the left responded to increasing anti-communist sentiment within the country by polarizing around key issues such as the need for revolution. After 1935 Social Democratic elements gained popularity over the Communist Party (CP) as the dominant ideology within the Canadian left.

The struggle in general had two stages. The first stage was marked by an all-out attack on the CCF by the Communist Party. Although the Party's attitude had for years been one of suspicion toward social democratic organization, in 1928 it declared war on the CCF after the Sixth Congress of the Communist International promoted Stalin's concept of "social Fascism". This held that social democracy shared several theoretical points with fascism and capitalism,¹ and that reformism would lull the working classes into a false sense of accomplishment, making it impossible for the CP to control the proletarian movement.² The Party organ Worker stepped up the frequency and tone of articles which attacked the CCF in particular, but also well known social democratic personalities such as J.S. Woodsworth and A.A. Heaps. By far the most abusive and comprehensive attack, however, was in a book entitled Socialism and the CCF in which a high-ranking party

member wrote 218 pages criticizing the new social democratic coalition.

As a matter of fact, there is no fundamental difference between the capitalist democracy of Canada and the Fascist Dictatorship of Germany. THEY ARE BOTH DICTATORSHIPS OF THE SAME RULING CLASS, THE CAPITALIST CLASS. The ruling class changes the form of its state in accordance with its requirements in striving to maintain its rule and crush the revolutionary forces of the working class and toiling farmers...Both fascism and social-fascism represent ideological super-structures of decaying monopoly capitalism ...The CCF promise of "socialism" is a hoax. It is a fallacy and a lie. It is monopoly capitalism covered with deceitful words. It is a fraud, an outgrowth of decaying, degenerating capitalism.³

In this way fascism, capitalism and the CCF are not only interrelated, but also share the same pro-capital, anti-worker/farmer basis. The CCF was seen as a sinister, untrustworthy, evil organization out to crush true progressive ideals. The hysterical tone of the text is an indication of how great a menace the CP considered the new party to be. The threat was real. If workers and farmers became convinced that short term, significant reform could be wrung from the existing system to reduce the immediate hardships of the Depression, surely they would find this option more attractive than waiting for some far-off revolution which might never come. This, coupled with the growing fear in Canada of both fascism and Stalinism made possible an exodus from the Communist Party as well as a draining away of potential party allies among workers, farmers and intellectuals. Consequently, the Party felt a strong, direct attack was essential to cope with the magnitude of potential loss. This continued until 1935 when the
4
Communist International brought in its United Front policy. The adoption of this tenet by the Canadian Communist Party marked a turning point in the struggle for ideological dominance within the

Canadian left, after which social democratic forces gained ascendancy over revolutionary communism. This event coincided with the introduction of socially critical elements into the works of Fine Artists and it will be discussed later what values these two situations had in common.

The United Front involved a radical change of attitude by the CP toward the CCF and Liberal Party. Turning from utter disdain and belligerence to conciliation and cooperation, the Communists proposed⁵ a coalition of all groups who wanted to defeat fascism. It had become clear that in Germany factional in-fighting among socialists had weakened resistance to the Nazis, in part allowing the destruction of the left by Hitler. The daily papers kept Canadians aware of events in Nazi Germany, the invasion of Ethiopia by Mussolini's fascisti, the growing pressure against the Republican government in Spain by Spanish fascists under Franco, and the invasion of Manchuria by Japanese fascists. In Canada too, fascism was quickly gaining popularity in Quebec with the rest of the country not far behind. Numerous Brown Shirt gangs and Swastika Clubs sprang up across the country as well⁶ as more subtle organizations which emphasized patriotism or anti-communism.

All this, combined with growing anti-communism in general made the Communist Party eager to form an alliance with others who also feared the consequences should fascism gain significant support in Canada. To encourage such a coalition the Party downplayed much of

its previous platform. No longer did they call for a Soviet Canada. Even the name of the Party organ was changed from Worker to Daily Clarion in order to de-emphasize the concept of proletarian revolution. International news, especially that which concerned anti-fascist struggles took primacy over domestic labour news, although this continued to be important. The more militantly anti-capitalist party papers such as Worker's Unity (organ of the Worker's Unity League) were phased out. Of the ones that continued to publish, more photography and fewer artworks were used. Consequently, the major forum for directly political art was eroded. The Party moved more into the background, preferring to work through intermediaries and sympathizers in attempting to influence organizations. The Canadian Youth Congress was one of its more successful instances. This gathering, which included young people from a wide range of political views, including Liberal, Protestant and the odd Conservative, advanced strong resolutions similar to the position of the Communist Party, such as condemnation of Hitler, Mussolini and Japan; sympathy with their victims; support for union organization, and improved education, health standards and employment opportunities. ⁷ More significant, however, was the disbanding of the Workers' Unity League in 1935 and the encouragement by the Party for ⁸ the member unions to join the American Federation of Labour. The WUL had acted as an important organizational and ideological tool since 1929. Giving it up not only illustrates the importance of the United Front to the Communists but it also represents the diminishment of hope for a proletarian revolution inspired through working class consciousness; A.F. of L. leader Samuel Gompers was increasingly more reformist in outlook.

In its eagerness to form political bonds, the CP made overtures toward the Social Credit, Liberal and Conservative parties. Concerned with not splitting the Communist/Socialist/Liberal vote, the CP often refused to run candidates in ridings where other progressives were running and would back the most likely pro-labour candidate to win to the extent that during the 1937 Ontario provincial elections, the Party supported a Liberal over a CCF candidate.⁹ This willingness of the CP to submerge its identity and ideology, and the Party's support for more liberal elements, aided the CCF in its struggle to attract advocates within the left because it provided a socialist alternative for those communists disgruntled by the political inconsistencies of the Party and the undemocratic manner in which it operated.

The growing disillusionment among communists was an important factor in the move to a social democratic left. The unbridled optimism and faith with which Communists supported the Russian revolution, particularly in the early twenties, became marred throughout the thirties by reports of Stalin's purges and his violent methods of collectivizing farm land.

"At the very time when under their new line the Communist parties of the Third International are preaching a united front against fascism, they themselves...are intensifying suspicion, division, and mutual hatred in the working class movements of the world. Worst of all, they are dimming the glory of the socialist ideal in the minds of thoughtful observers." 10

This identifies the irony within the United Front policy. Stalin, through the Third International, encouraged Communist Parties to settle their differences with even remotely progressive capitalist parties and

work jointly with those parties to fight fascism. At the same time, Stalin himself was brutally eliminating his old comrades who did not agree with his programmes. Although Canadian CP members did not exhibit Stalin's violent inclinations, they were not above purging undesirables from their ranks with a maximum of slander and rage, all the while making overtures to even Conservative and Social Credit Party members. Constantly courting the CCF, yet apparently hating Trotskyites even more than fascists, the Party tried repeatedly to convince the Federation to expel its Trotskyite members.¹¹ As the above passage indicates, the parallel with fascism was not unnoticed. Earlier in the article Grube observes.

...the thoroughness with which Stalin is killing off all the old guard Bolsheviks bears a most unfortunate family resemblance to the periodical purges of the Nazi Dictator.¹²

Although Canadian socialists were prepared to accept a certain amount of violence such as was necessary to remove the Czar from power, its use against Bolsheviks and Kulaks ("middle-class" peasants) who refused to collectivize their land seemed a negation of the ideals of equality and freedom represented by the Revolution. It also alienated farmers and farm organizations from the CP because it supported Stalin. Had the Russian people traded one brand of repression for another? A sense of betrayal, distrust and disillusionment of the "glory of the socialist ideal" ends the article, without optimism or hope. Seemingly, it was violence and worker-oriented political systems which related capitalism and fascism. Unfortunately, Hitler had also used socialist rhetoric to come to power and had consummated his dictatorship in the

name of the workers. This helped to increase apprehension about a possible worker's state in Canada. As will be discussed more fully, Canadian artists were also aware that in both countries artists had been controlled by the state and encouraged or forced to lend their skills to the legitimation of totalitarian regimes.

Although the struggle against communism had been constant since the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, it changed focus from the 1920's to the 1930's. Through the late teens and early twenties, when revolution seemed imminent in several European countries, those who fought against communism in Canada directed the attack against its revolutionary aspect. This was predictable, considering not only the political turmoil in Europe, but also the openly revolutionary goal of the Canadian Communist Party as proclaimed in its publications, teachings and organizations. Class consciousness among workers was highest within the Communist trade unions. In the thirties, however, it became increasingly clear that the working class was not going to be roused to revolution.

At the same time, the working class continued to organize and this manifested itself in the expansion of unionization.¹³ In Ontario the Premier was incensed by the prospect of industrial unions in the plants and mines of his province. He asked Ottawa for RCMP reinforcements to break the Oshawa strike, organized a provincial union-busting "militia" comprised mainly of students from the University of Toronto, and geneally directed his attacks specifically against working people

and their attempts to take some control over working conditions and their standards of living through unionization. Hepburn, however, maintained he fought the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) because it was working "hand-in-glove with international communism".¹⁴

Most of the major daily and weekly mass circulation papers also wrote in anti-communistic rhetoric but directed it at industrial unionization.

Industrial Worker, an anti-communist, anti-union monthly paper was

circulated in mining and industrial areas and among the unemployed. Its...policy is to counteract the undue influences of Communism which are spreading rapidly through labor's rank...It has named some of the apparently harmless organizations through which the Communist Party is working; told the story of what the mining and other industries have done and are doing in the interests of their workers, and marshalled evidence of the attempts to exploit labor for the furtherance of Red Party aims.¹⁵

The first sentence of the passage specifically indicates the audience for the paper as those employed in the sensitive high production and high profit areas. Most unemployed people were unskilled and therefore potential industrial workers. Concern here is for the "undue influence" within "labor's ranks", presumably among those elements of labour specifically targetted by the newspaper, that is, miners and industrial workers. Significantly, other, already existing unions, such as craft, railroad and marine worker unions were not mentioned. Why was communist influence not an issue in those unions? Furthermore, Industrial Worker with its concern for the "undue influence" of the CP among workers appeared a full year after the Communist Party had already disbanded its Workers' Unity League (its primary organizational and educational arm among workers) and fifteen years after the height of the world revolution scare. Clearly, the controlling interest of the Industrial Worker

were more concerned with keeping unions out and profits up. The anti-communist drive was intense and inspite of Hepburn's undemocratic methods and consolidation of personal political power, the provincial voters responded to his red-baiting hysteria and anti-Communist propaganda campaign by giving the Liberals 50% of the popular vote in the subsequent provincial elections.

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The reduction of faith in communism to effectively change the conditions of life for working people in the Depression, the growing fear of Stalinism and Nazism, and the concerted anti-communism campaign all worked against the Party in its ideological struggle with the social democratic factions of the left. With 1935 and the adoption of the United Front policy, the Communist Party effectively relinquished its already eroded position of dominance within the Canadian left. This is not to say that their membership dropped particularly. Although membership totals for both parties in the thirties are questionable, it is clear that each party increased with the CCF far ahead of the CP.

The ideology of the new left was articulated by the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, a political alliance of workers, farmers and intellectuals. The CCF brought together a range of socialist organizations and individuals who believed the establishment of a welfare state and a planned economy was the answer to the social and economic ravages of the Depression. Unlike the Communists, they felt this would be affected through the existing parliamentary system. Although they condemned capitalism for its injustice, inequality, instability and exploitation,

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social democrats still felt that the system which established and maintained such values would allow itself to be peacefully "eradicated". 18

This reformist point of view involved changes in confidence and attitude. Before the United Front, the Communists had been confident and assertive in their vanguard role. It was clear from the Russian example that mass revolutions were possible and as the capitalist system appeared to be keeping the majority of Canadians in poverty, surely once working people were infused with class consciousness they would gladly destroy the system which abused them. The unsalvagability of capitalism and the historically determined nature of the Party's role gave it a sense of conviction and righteousness. As total destruction of the system was the goal, compromise was not an issue and as Moscow made all the important decisions, Party in-fighting was minimized. These aspects combined to make the Communists a very confident political movement. This was reflected in the communist approach to unionization. Organizing and fighting against their employers demonstrated to working people that they need not be victims but could have some impact on their wages and conditions of work. This attitude of control was necessary in an ideology where the workers control the state. As discussed in the last chapter, even the art which operated within this ideology illustrated most graphically the confidence and programmatic attitude of the Party toward social and political change. It also created a climate and a forum within which art that made a social comment could do so openly and directly, indeed, it was the only acceptable form. The Party focussed its political proselytizing primarily on industrial

workers, miners, and the unemployed, as its response to the Depression was to fight back with strategies which would help build a totally new social order in the long run. However, short term tactics, such as the benefits of striking were not immediately obvious to workers who suffered even greater deprivation during labour disputes and who were often physically injured by strike breakers in the process.

The CCF, on the other hand was comprised of people who believed the most direct and practical response to the Depression was to relieve immediate hardships and work for major social and economic reform in the long term. Their focus was on the present, however, with the future a very distant eventuality, not of primary importance.¹⁹ The increasing urgency of the crisis hastened the establishment of the new party which had been in the incubation stage for several years. There had been a reluctance on the part of many groups to join as they felt their autonomy would be lost in a large organization. Consequently, the alliance's hesitant beginnings and factional structure created a party constantly wracked by doubts and in-party power struggles which drained the alliance of energy and resources.²⁰ The insecurity of the coalition was consistent with its approach to social change in that it was dominated by an attitude of compromise. By seeking reform from the existing system, the CCF in a sense legitimized that system's control, and admitted capitalism was here to stay. Asking concessions from the powerful reinforced the federation's lack of confidence and inferior position. As the party had little direct political power, it functioned more as a lobbying association, as many of the component

groups had always done. Typical were the farmers, whose standard of living was determined by powers in the east. They had formed associations in the early 1900's to urge reform in the banking and marketing systems; however, most farmers still believed in the privately-owned, family farm and free enterprise.²¹ And certainly Stalin's violent collectivization of privately held farms in the Soviet Union compounded their suspicion of socialists.

On some issues such as the need for a planned economy and nationalization of public utilities the CCF and the CP shared parallel views. This was awkward for the CCF which constantly dissociated itself from the Communists even after the United Front overtures. In 1935 the United Farmers of Ontario finally separated, as it felt the CCF was too close to the Communists.²² With this kind of pressure, it was difficult for the Federation to maintain an equilibrium, given the range of social and liberal view of its members. Radical ideas were often couched in more innocuous terms.²³ This hesitancy and unsure element was an important part of the ideology of the new left and is discussed here because it was reflected in art which made a politically critical statement during the same period.

Even before the establishment of the CCF, workers and farmers had found some degree of political expression from both a communist and non-communist point of view for decades.²⁴ Intellectuals, however, had never been a force in Canadian radical politics. Unlike the United States, in the conservative dominion, it was not considered

acceptable for intellectuals to be politically active, especially teachers and professors in public institutions.²⁵ This controversy increased in the early and mid thirties when the League for Social Reconstruction was established by a group of academics and professionals in an attempt to analyze the causes of the Depression and propose solutions. Although the LSR was not itself affiliated with the CCF, it became known as the "brain trust" for the social democratic left.²⁶ In the thirties it became more acceptable for academics to discuss political solutions to the problems of the Depression, as faith in business to lead the nation out of the economic slump had deteriorated. At the same time, it also became acceptable among some professional artists, trained within the "fine art" tradition to produce paintings and graphic work which responded to the social and economic conditions of the Depression. During the 1920's businessmen had enjoyed a measure of prestige consistent with the period of economic boom.²⁷ Although intellectuals through the LSR were not advocating policies radically different from the policies that Social Gospel, farm and conservative labour groups had recommended before them, the League did approach both the problems and solutions from an analytical and theoretical point of view. The League published pamphlets, articles, and books examining the inadequacies of the capitalist system and proposing solutions. Its two most important publications were The Canadian Forum, a monthly magazine; and Social Planning for Canada, an in-depth analysis of capitalism in Canada along with a programme for a planned economy including nationalization of key industries and the establishment of a welfare state.²⁸

Given the close relationship between the CCF and the LSR, the Canadian Forum acted as much an organ for one as for the other. It covered national and international news and was a forum for theoretical debate on the left. Culture was also a major focus. Fiction and poetry were an important part of each issue, along with theoretical articles discussing the role of art and literature in society. The magazine provided a forum for socially concerned intellectuals to express their political sentiments, contribute to the articulation of a social democratic ideology, and publish drawings, prints and literature which would unlikely be printed in more conventional magazines due to the subject matter of the art, which often focussed on Depression victims and carried an anti-capitalist message. The publication of these artworks contributed to familiarizing the readership with pictures which focussed on human topics either through anti-war or Depression-related imagery.

The Canadian Forum and the publications of the LSR generally, were aimed at an audience which was predominantly middle class. Consequently, many had at least some exposure to the conventions of literature, theatre, and art, either through formal education or personal associations. Articles on politics and economics, written by academics in these fields, were well researched and thoughtful, using statistics and logic, rather than rhetoric and outrage to persuade the reader, as was the style common to the Communist Party supported newspapers. This reflected the professional and academic complexion of the social democratic left's leadership during the mid 1930's. ²⁹

During the 1930's the character of Canadian nationalism changed. It will be remembered that in the 1920's nationalism of the rising entrepreneurial class had focussed on breaking away from England and was thus anti-British in sentiment. It proclaimed what we were not, that is, we were not a British colony any longer, as the old elite tied financially to England would prefer. In the thirties national feeling emphasized what Canada was. This involved a more descriptive approach to the Canadian identity. This attitude coincided with the increase in resource exports. No longer dependent on the vagaries of wheat crops and markets to determine viability of the economy, recovery was centred around other exports, particularly gold and base metals.³⁰ The opening of these new markets contributed to changing the image of Canada from one of endless wheat fields.

The need for an identity which would articulate what it meant to be a Canadian found expression in many areas of society from politics to theatre, publishing and art. James Woodsworth, first President of the CCF, stated at the founding convention of the Party.

Utopian Socialism and Christian Socialism, Marxian Socialism and Fabianism, the Latin type, the German type, the Russian type - why not a Canadian type? ...I am convinced that we may develop in Canada a distinctive type of socialism. I refuse to follow slavishly the British model or the American model or the Russian model. We in Canada will solve our problems along our own lines. 31

Whereas Woodsworth had experienced little positive reaction to this same proposal in the 1920's, it received a very favourable response from social democrats in the 1930's³² By rejecting "the Russian type" Woodsworth was giving public notice that the CCF was not another Moscow-dominated

organization like the Communist Party of Canada, and certainly this was true. However, to dissociate equally from Christian Socialism and Fabianism was more ironic, as the CCF grew in part out of the "Social Gospel"³³ of the twenties and was strongly patterned after the reformist Fabian movement in England.³⁴ Although progressives had been very anti-British in the twenties, British traditions were still the dominant component in the Canadian social synthesis. It was important, however, to subsume these ideas into a cultural composite which could be identified as Canadian.

In 1935 controversy developed around American publications entering Canada duty free. Many of those who advocated a tariff did so on nationalistic grounds. An article in The Canadian Magazine in part discusses the disadvantages of a Canadian publisher who pays duty on everything that goes into making a newspaper, when competing with an imported American publication. Comparing the publishing industry to railroad building, the author indicates that the essential purpose of publication is to foster national feeling.

Because Canadian publications are undoubtedly a nationalizing force, and do express opinions that are definitely our own, and because they have grown into a really great vitalizing force, it is surely not too much to ask that they might operate in their own field on an economic parity with the great publications across the line. 35

Although the author makes brief mention of financial disparity, the threat is clearly identified as more cultural than economic. Although nationalist sentiment in the 1920's usually expressed itself as anti-British, in the 1930's nationalism was pro-Canadian rather than anti-

American (the U.S. now having superseded Britain as the dominant influence). Rutledge is specific about this in his article:

We do not quarrel with the man who sings "The Star Spangled Banner", realizing that only a short while back we ourselves sang "Confound their politics, Frustrate their knavish tricks", with, we imagine, an equal lack of animus. 36

Even in this conservative magazine the need for a truly Canadian identity is expressed. However, the article is very careful not to offend America's right to free enterprise. Rutledge's reference to the popular anti-British song, sung to the tune of God Save the Queen is defused by his phrase "an equal lack of animus". This is rather odd. Surely those who felt no animosity toward Britain would not have been singing such an irreverent song, certainly not the supporters of the Canadian Magazine. It was giving away a book entitled R.B. Bennett free with subscriptions to the magazine in 1935. R.B. Bennett glorifies the leader of the Conservative Party, who happened also to be Prime Minister of Canada at the time. The author was Andrew D. MacLean, General Manager of the magazine. Rutledge, and the business class he spoke for, were looking for a Canadian national identity which could express itself but not offend the powerful.

Coinciding with the changing nature of the left and its shift from a revolutionary viewpoint to a reform-from-within viewpoint was a change in the character and visual appearance of art which functioned critically within society. Directly political art, unsophisticated in form and propagandistic and revolutionary in purpose became less dominant. Usurping its prominence was an art which made its criticism

from within the existing political and cultural structure. At the same time that socially concerned intellectuals were entering the politics of the left in response to the human needs of the Depression, socially concerned fine artists, formally trained and exhibiting within the gallery system made art which commented on the social reality of Depression Canada. It is important to emphasize here that my concern is with the social and political function of the art, not the private intention of the artist. Many of the works from this period are not obviously critical; however, when considered within their own historical context, we realize they form or evoke associations and contradictions which have social or political implications that cannot be ignored without misunderstanding or severely limiting the appreciation of these works.

The new visual ideology was developed in the pages of the social democratic Canadian Forum and the Marxist monthly New Frontier. Between March 1936 and April 1937 many articles appeared which questioned and discussed the role of the fine artist. New Frontier was published in opposition to Canadian Forum by a group who broke away from the former, believing it to be too mild in its politics.³⁷ While the Forum functioned as a cultural organ for the social democratic left, Frontier followed more in the tradition maintained by the now defunct Masses, that is, it called on artists to use art as a political weapon. However, unlike Masses, New Frontier aimed at a more educated, intellectual and generally middle class audience. This, combined with its United Front pallor made it appear quite social democratic although it was run by communists.

The aims of NEW FRONTIER are twofold: to acquaint the Canadian public with the work of those writers and artists who are expressing a positive reaction to the social scene, and to serve as an open forum for all shades of progressive opinion. 38

Here the editors declare their support for artists who respond to the social situation around them and who exercise their cultural skills in action against such conditions. But unlike the more doctrinaire Masses, New Frontier called for a United Front of culture in its willingness to print a range of opinion. Indicated here is a qualitative change in the kind of art the new left is supporting. No longer is it considered essential for the artist to be proletarian, make a specific partisan political commitment nor produce directly propagandistic work as defined by the Communist Party. "A positive reaction to the social scene" is sufficiently vague to cover even the most general social reference. At the same time, this is a very specific criterion, because it is the fine artist who is being wooed here. It must be remembered that right up to this period the wilderness landscape still had a stranglehold on the art-viewing public. Accordingly, for an artist to use urban scenes or people as primary subject matter was by itself a general social comment whether or not the artwork made any direct political references. This was understood by those who insisted on art being relevant to the immediate social reality. In an article in Canadian Forum written primarily regarding literature but applicable to the plastic arts, it is directly stated:

It is impossible for an artist to divorce himself from the social concepts of his age. He cannot be simply neutral; he cannot avoid taking sides. His attitude towards the economic and social ideas of his period may be implicit or explicit in his novels, plays or poems; but it is there.

The mere choice of subject matter will indicate his bias; his treatment of it will further betray his sympathies and antipathies.

...most of the supposedly "objective" artists are in fact biased in favor of the kind of society we have...39

Consequently, to choose to produce images of wilderness landscape on the one hand, or people and civilization on the other, was not a matter of making an inconsequential choice but involved these wider ideological implications whether or not the artist was aware of it. Following this premise, it would seem that to choose to paint human subjects was to break with the wilderness landscape. To break with wilderness landscape was to reject the optimistic and entrepreneurial values associated with it. This coincides with the loss of faith in business to lead the Canadian economy out of the Depression. It also refuses escapism and admits this period had devastating social consequences and that optimism was highly incongruent to the historical moment. To focus on the Canadian people and civilized rural areas, instead of uninhabited, unclaimed wilderness was an approach reinforced by the changed nature of nationalism which concentrated on articulating a Canadian identity based on descriptive observation. As it was clear that most inhabitants lived in cities and towns or on farms, it seemed probable people and civilization would figure prominently in any art which claimed to be truly Canadian in the mid thirties. Graham McInnes, well-known art critic in the 1930's wrote an article for New Frontier in June 1936 in which he praised the artists of the Canadian Society of Graphic Artists, whose high quality he attributed to their participation in the "new movement".

The position may be briefly, if imperfectly, summed up by stating that the dominant feature of these exhibitions was an interest in people rather than in things, and, secondarily, the development of a social consciousness among our artists. 40

McInnes was a primary advocate of the new art. Here he not only identifies people as important subject matter but also makes the connection between that subject matter and the social responsibility of art. McInnes's comments are also of interest as he was not affiliated with the communist or social democratic left. He also wrote on art for conservative magazines such as Comment and Saturday Night. Thus his interest was with the fine artist, exhibiting in traditional forums, historically tied through patronage to the middle and upper classes. The implied connection between social relevance of the art, and nature of the class targetted by the artist and critic is in keeping with the rejection of the working class as agent of social change and supports the enlightened middle class voter as the new hope.

McInnes also relates this emphasis on humanity and social awareness to the concept of what a true Canadian art should be. Two of the things necessary to "save" Canadian art were identified as

...artists who felt for the new Canada that is the work of millions of active people and thousands of indefinable cross currents and feelings and desires...and some event which might shake the lat. 45° painters from their complacency, and make them question their narrow and repetitive standards. There could be little doubt that in a young, vital country these would be found. 41

He again emphasizes the need for a change of subject matter. McInnes also expresses here the sentiments of the new nationalism when he

indicates that the rich and varied resources of the nation were more relevant to people than geography. The emphasis on variety encourages the reader to look beyond the narrow confines of landscape to find a more complete and realistic national identity. This sentiment is very specifically directed to wilderness painters in the author's second criterion. It is interesting to note that whereas in the teens and twenties the wilderness landscape was considered the very embodiment of "a young vital country" it now had become an entrenched, reactionary position, representing stagnation and a failed economy. It should be noted that debate concerned mostly subject matter rather than style. Modern styles were not frequently discussed. Particularly, abstraction was rarely mentioned in the press in spite of the experimental work done by well known artists such as Lawren Harris and Bertram Brooker.

At the same time social relevance was being encouraged, aesthetics was also being emphasized so that an equal balance between social content and aesthetics became the desirable formula. The admission of aesthetics as an essential element in art which had some social content (remembering how vaguely this may be interpreted) indicates that art school training, commercial art galleries, and bourgeois cultural history and tradition were acceptable to those who supported this art. Again the indication is that the message was for middle class consumption rather than a revolutionary proletariat. In a review of an exhibition of Soviet art in Toronto in the winter of 1936 McInnes tried to find a balance between social relevance and aesthetics. He does this by discussing the art in relation to polarities, situating

the works somewhere in the middle, a compromise position which attempts to take a stand without alienating either those who make strong political demands of art or those who believe that art should have no relevance to the temporal world.

He praises the work for its high aesthetic standard, which he identifies by the awareness of modern French painting evident in the Russian works. "There is practically no country in the western world which does not show the influence of the school of Paris."⁴² For McInnes this indicates that Russian artists are as artistically astute as, and aesthetically the equal of, fine artists in the West. He is careful to dissociate the works in this show from directly propagandistic styles. "The Russians have apparently passed beyond the point where overt propaganda was an essential part of Soviet Art."⁴³

At the same time, the social relevance of Soviet art was also emphasized in the review. In the absence of explicit social content McInnes focusses on the accessibility of Soviet art to the average citizen to make his point.

In point of fact the showing was extremely fine and essentially Russian. But like all arts which are close to the people it was both easily understandable, and vigorous without being nervously self-assertive...The arts in Soviet Russia are looked upon as an integral part of a normal well-rounded existence, and this means that the artists are able to avoid...the aloofness of those who live and work in a society which treats them as unrelated phenomenon. 44

Although McInnes identifies the art as "fine", he connects it not with an elite patron class but with "the people". The works are "understandable"

rather than esoteric and obscure. Even choice of vocabulary such as "vigorous" over "nervously self-assertive" suggest an image of the robust Russian worker viewing the paintings rather than the frail aristocrat. At the same time he advocates the integration of the artist into everyday life he indicates the aesthetic standard of fine art need not be lowered. Rather than blaming the artist for his lack of social concern, McInnes further entreats him by soothing the artist's traditional sense of alienation by identifying society as the force which has treated the artist as "unrelated phenomenon". This implies that cultural workers who wish to integrate their art with the social world would not necessarily be violating the true nature of art. McInnes's reference to the works being essentially Russian is likely an expression of his own Canadian "descriptive" nationalism popular in the thirties. It suggests a key to the artistic success of the Russian show was a strong sense of Soviet national identity in spite of French stylistic references. One is reminded of Woodsworth's insistence on a "Canadian" socialism which integrates, but is not dominated by, foreign influences.

McInnes's artistic discussion of the works is made in political terms. When he situates the artwork in the middle of two extremes they are not just the stylistic poles of overt propaganda and esoteric aestheticism but are directly connected to political positions.

[The show of Soviet art] was a sad disappointment to two totally opposed types of people and demonstrated once again the folly of trying to judge of art by any other than aesthetic standards. Those who expect the adoption of certain creeds and dogmas to be immediately discernible in the art of those who adopt them were heard to wail bitterly, "This isn't

a Russian show; it's just a French show. Why, it isn't even radical." Those who went prepared to damn the artistic output of a country in whose social experiments they did not believe were likewise cheated of their right to vociferous disapproval. 45

When McInnes refers to those who expect the artist's politics to be "immediately discernible" he is referring to the directly propagandistic style associated with the Communist Party. This represents not only the extreme in socially concerned art but the extreme left in politics as well. In the adversarial position are the conservative supporters of the status quo who condemn the "social experiments" of a country and its "artistic output" by association.

A catalogue for a show of Russian art a few months earlier also approached its own exhibition from a political perspective, focussing on the formal organization of artists, their collective and democratic participation in cultural organizations and their freedom to produce whatever style and forms of art they wished. Robert Ayre, who wrote the article in the catalogue was a respected writer on art from a middle class, conservative point of view generally. He makes a point of stating that an important element in the loosening of restrictions on artists and increase of aesthetic quality in the Soviet Union was the disbanding of the authoritarian cultural structures dominated by directives of the Central Committee, and the establishment of non-partisan cultural groups. "This", he quotes the Russian artist Alexei Kravchenko, "had a very healthy effect, since the more liberal attitude of the new organization has brought back into creative activity many of the...communist sympathizers temporarily silenced because of the narrowness

of vision of the old group." ⁴⁶ Ayre emphasizes lack of official political control, freedom of experiment and the voluntary nature of the cultural organizations. The implication is that through these measures aesthetic quality had improved in the Soviet Union since the days when the arts were regimented. Kravchenko's remarks also had some relevance to the Canadian situation, the point being that artists sympathetic to social issues but not associated with a party could have a contribution to make through their art. If free to do so through their own style and form, it would likely be of greater "aesthetic quality" than that produced under the close authority of dogmatists. However, he is also careful to point out that the new Union of Soviet Artists strives to bring artists

into more vital contact with the living issues of the day, to arouse their interest in the problems of socialist construction, to use their gifts to the fullest possible extent... ⁴⁷

Consequently, Ayre too saw the need for artists to maintain a balance between high aesthetic standard and social relevance. This approach was in keeping with the visual ideology articulated in the pages of New Frontier and Canadian Forum and coincided with the shift within the political left from dominance by the Communist Party to dominance by the social democratic movement. Like the new left, art which functioned critically was hesitant, ambiguous and polite. Both were continually justifying their existence on humanitarian and nationalist grounds. An anti-communist propaganda campaign, one is reminded, was being waged at this time in an attempt to fight industrial unionism and the growing popularity of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. This

undoubtedly contributed to the unwillingness of those who wished to criticize the inability of the national ruling elite to alleviate the hardships of the Depression from being direct and demanding in their methods. That communism would turn people into uniform automatons was well permeated through the fears of Canadians. Loss of individuality and freedom were important elements in the campaign. The anti-union newspaper Industrial Worker, circulated among miners and industrial workers, suggested that workers would lose their autonomy to negotiate directly with their employers as free individuals if they joined a union, and their lives would thereafter be directed from Moscow. Artists are particularly vulnerable to this type of fear because they are traditionally the prime example of the free individual expressing his individuality. This is a public as well as private act. An artist's personal expressions are considered to be the spiritual property of their whole society. If the artist is not free then neither is the society. In Graham McInnes's review of the Russian exhibition he wrote for his regular art column in Saturday Night he stated:

...though fine work may be inspired by an ideal, as soon as that ideal hardens into dogma, it degrades that which serves it.

...we presumed that the totalitarian state, whether fascist or communist, would shackle freedom of expression. 48

Although he tried to redress this attitude toward Russian art in his review, it is evident that anti-communist feeling and Stalin's own brutal behaviour still influenced the opinions of many people. Compounding the message to artists that totalitarian societies eliminated artistic freedom was the knowledge that Nazi Germany strictly controlled its artists. A major article in The Studio appeared in November 1936

which discussed official government organization of the arts in Germany and the Nazi attitude toward different styles. Practising artists came under the authority of the Ministry of Propaganda. The ministry also had connections with the German Labour Front and 60 art exhibitions a month were sent to factories.⁴⁹ Furthermore, artwork being officially promoted by the regime was

the work of artists regarded as exemplifying desirable qualities, such as patriotism, heroism, family piety, love of one's native countryside and powerful, poignant expression, held well in restraint, rather than excessive sensitiveness. 50

Although the article is written in a very matter-of-fact manner and at times is almost defensive or supportive of the Nazis, the message is clear: art under the totalitarian state is cliché, unimaginative and repressed. Not only is freedom of expression stifled but the artist himself may also be in danger. A review of a large show of German art at the Pennsylvania Museum of Art appeared in Time magazine in October 1936. The original exhibition was intended to cover German art from the 15th to the 20th centuries. "However, since practically every important German painter of the past 35 years has been driven from the country, [the exhibition ended in the 1870's]".⁵¹ One year later, on the occasion of the Degenerate Art Show in Munich, Saturday Night ran a full page article on German art. The author gives a full description of the disrespect with which the works are treated, quotes Hitler's speech in which he criticizes Cubism, Dadaism, Futurism, and Expressionism as "the silly concoctions of people to whom God denied the blessing of the true artistic talent".⁵² In a frightening example of arbitrary power Hitler continues:

I therefore admit at this time that it is my unalterable decision to do away with empty talk in the realm of art just as in that of political confusion....I was always determined--if fate should ever give us the power--not to discuss these matters with anybody, but here too to make decisions. 53

A connection between freedom of artistic expression and freedom of political expression was established. Just as the Nazis used art as a propaganda tool in factories to instil desirable values of "patriotism, heroism, family piety" etc. in the German worker, the Soviets used an art exhibition in which freedom of the artist to experiment with modern international styles also carried a political message. As has been illustrated, the message that artistic freedom means social and political freedom was understood by those Canadians who wrote about the exhibitions and was intimated in their reviews. Consequently, the exhibitions of Soviet art functioned as a negation of the undesirable image Russia under Stalin was experiencing in the West, a situation which contributed to a loss of support within the communist left and its sympathizers, who were suffering increasing disillusionment.

The connection between freedom and art was made in New Frontier's initial editorial.

We stand for the extension, as well as the defence,
of democratic liberties.

We hope to see those who have been sitting on the
fence lining up in support of culture and
civilization. 54

There is a certain urgency to this editorial. The reference to defense of democratic liberties seems incongruous from a predominantly socialist/

communist editorial board. From a left perspective capitalism is not a particularly democratic system. For New Frontier to wish to defend what relative democracy existed is an indication of how strong the fear of fascism was. The equation of culture with civilization put the artist right in the centre of that struggle.

A climax in the argument over the role of art was reached in an exchange of two articles by practising artists in the spring of 1937. Elizabeth Wyn Wood's article was written in reaction to a book review written by Frank Underhill, historian, co-founder of the League for Social Reconstruction and Associate Editor of Canadian Forum in which he criticizes writers and artists for not being moved by the "phenomenon of a civilization dissolving before their eyes."⁵⁵ Wood, an exhibiting sculptor, defends the status quo, which is the artist's right to escape into landscape precisely in order to live

in peace, in happiness and in creative energy without knowing the organization we call civilization...the artist has always had some doubt about civilization. He has only partly accepted it. He has walked off into the hinterland at every opportunity...He has...leaned very heavily upon the wilderness for spiritual stimulation and nourishment... 56

Wood's emphasis on the artist's spiritual need to avoid contamination of his artistic purity by too much contact with civilization is more than just an expression of the romantic call of the north. It is a defense of not only wilderness landscape as valid content and style but of the associated values as well.

Our millionaires are fine fellows who mush through the north as we do, eating hardtack and bully beef, and sometimes having their own doubts. Moreover, if they

are lucky enough to bring in a mine or two, the worst that can be said of them is that they are digging up gold for the People's Government to confiscate by and by. 57

This image is reminiscent of the twenties. The adventurous entrepreneur bushwhacking his way through the rugged wilds of northern Ontario in search of his fortune in resource exploitation, is a vision which supports a politico-economic system that many people were attacking as having created the Depression and as being incapable of coping with the resulting magnitude of human suffering. The description of millionaires as "fine fellows" in the same year that durable investment in agriculture was only 53% of the 1928 level ⁵⁸ and recovery was still minimal in human terms, seems at best irrelevant, at worst a glaring example of the oblivion that most fine artists lived in which was so objectionable to Underhill. The example of someone becoming a millionaire through gold is appropriate, however, to those who continued to support capitalism and its fantasy of personal wealth. With mining profits reaching 50%, as mentioned earlier, and 1937 gold production more than double that of 1929, ⁵⁹ gold was a symbol of capitalism's resiliency and continuing ability to benefit at least a minority of the population. (And it is appropriate to remember here how hard these "fine fellows" were fighting unionization of the mines in order to maintain their rate of profits.) Wood did not believe herself to be expressing a political position. It is clear from her article she felt art which registered social or political response to the Depression was propaganda and consequently lacking in quality and aesthetics. To illustrate her point Wood refers to Soviet art: "The bulk of art produced since the revolution...has been nothing

more than commercial illustration...,no more aesthetically satisfying than 'The Doctor' and other subject pictures of the Victorian era." 60

The same exhibitions of Russian art Graham McInnes and Robert Ayre regarded as of high aesthetic quality Wood describes as "essentially false, derivative and of little stature." 61

For Paraskeva Clark, art and politics are intrinsically linked. In her reply to Wood's article, printed by New Frontier the following month Clark advocates an active role for artists.

It is time to come down from your ivory tower, to come out from your pre-Cambrian Shield and dirty your gown in the mud and sweat of conflict. You need not be afraid of losing your individuality; that is impossible if you are convinced of the rightness of your cause. It is only possible if feeling and action are divorced by internal conflict. 62

Reference is made here to the traditional elitist position of fine artists. The invitation for artists to come down from their ivory towers and identify with those who are in conflict implies a rejection of the patron class, those who support and maintain the ivory tower because in the context of this polemic, the conflict is a political struggle between those who defend the existing power structure and those who demand social/political/economic change. Fear of losing individuality is synonymous with losing freedom of expression. When one's "feeling" for social justice is inconsistent with one's "action", that is, being a socially committed artist, one escapes the trap of pandering to those who promote the ivory tower and expresses true individual human feeling. "Think of yourself as a human being, and you cannot help feeling the reality of life around you, and becoming impregnated with it." 63 Consequently, Clark not

only felt the artist was under obligation to take her part in "defence and advancement of civilization" ⁶⁴ but that no loss of artistic quality or personal self expression need be sacrificed.

Shortly after this, Clark painted Petroushka, a work true to these sentiments. The directly political statement is conveyed with an awareness of Cezanne and Cubism interacting with elements of Russian folk art. The subject is a puppet show held in a city street (fig.4) filled with spectators. The painting was inspired by front page photographs in the Toronto Daily Star of June 1, 1937, one day after the "Memorial Day Massacre" where police attacked strikers at the Republic Steel Corporation plant in South Chicago.⁶⁵ When 2000 strikers marched on the plant, they were attacked by police who shot ten (killing five), severely beat 28 and injured 30 others.⁶⁶ Throughout the thirties attacks on strikers and their supporters by police, militia, and hired strikebreakers were common. Although this particular event occurred in the U.S., attempts of workers to establish collective bargaining in Canada were also met with hostility by employers, whose collusion with local and provincial authorities resulted in varying degrees of tension and violence. April 1937, when Paraskeva Clark's article appeared in New Frontier was the same month that industrial unionism was in its all important struggle for existence in Ontario with the Oshawa General Motors strike. Her painting Petroushka addresses these issues and makes a visual political analysis without using a directly propagandistic style. A policeman with a trudgeon is seen beating a worker. In his other hand he carries a pistol. This image relates directly to the



Fig. 4 Paraskeva Clark, Petrushka 1937

Reprinted from Mary E. MacLachlan, Paraskeva Clark: Paintings and Drawings (Halifax: Dalhousie Art Gallery, 1982), cover.

Republican Steel situation. However, Clark makes this a more general statement with the addition of the gleeful capitalist positioned behind the policeman. Fancy dress, shiny top hat and money bags in either hand, he is drawn from the traditional stereotype. His inclusion in the scene suggests a certain economic and political relationship between the figures. The capitalist employs the police force as an agent to control workers who organize against low wages, unfair treatment and poor working conditions. Hierarchy and chain of power are indicated in the painting by the placement of the figures. He who accumulates money is situated at the top. Directing his attention at the policeman, he waves the money bags which acts as incentive for the policeman to attack the worker. That the policeman functions as an agent for the capitalist indicates that the capitalist holds economic and political power over the worker; political in that the police maintain the law, that is, the judiciary, an arm of the national government.

Petroushka is a fine example of what McInnis termed "the new movement", that is, the painting shows "an interest in people rather than things" and "the development of a social consciousness among our artists." Rejecting landscape in this instance, Clark responds to a specific incident in the immediate social reality. It is also easily understandable without being heavy-handed or trite, another quality admired by McInnes as indicated in his review of the Soviet art show. As Clark reacts against the apathy of the wilderness landscape, visually, she rejects Wyn Wood's defence of that genre as a

valid escape from the mire of worldly struggles. Like many artists in the mid thirties, Clark encouraged artists to examine their role in society and approach their work with a greater sense of humanity:

Think of yourself as a human being, and you cannot help feeling the reality of life around you, and becoming impregnated with it. 67

Clark was certainly not unaware of the difficulties this presented to practising fine artists. Opportunities to show and buyers of Canadian art had never been numerous, but during the 1930's they diminished considerably. The National Gallery had its budget reduced from \$130,000 in 1929 to \$25,000 in 1934. In the period 1932-1936 only two contemporary Canadian works were purchased, a self portrait and a landscape. Up until 1939 the gallery favoured the wilderness landscape as did most of the few collectors.⁶⁸ Consequently, if artists wanted to be successful, it was almost essential that they produce landscapes. Paraskeva Clark was no exception; the bulk of her work is landscape. It was the genre which was reviewed and which sold.

I never touched landscape before I came here, but in Canada it's landscapes, landscapes, landscapes, a kind of national form of art, and it's the only thing you can sell anyway, so involuntarily you start doing that... 69

Thus the conflict between wanting to have a human focus and having to paint landscapes if one wanted to sell was a constant problem for those who wanted to work in a more relevant genre. Clark dealt with this by painting landscapes while at the same time doing still lifes, portraits, and social comment works; and, by directly arguing through her article in New Frontier for a more socially and politically relevant art.

Although Petroushka functioned as social comment, in keeping with the criteria for such art in the mid and late thirties, which stressed a balance between social comment and aesthetics, it was also sophisticated and artful in appearance. Drawing from her knowledge of Russian folk art Clark creates a lively surface of well-rounded figures and bright colour resulting in strong patterning extending over the whole surface. This gives the image a certain intensity without being decorative.

As mentioned earlier, among some critics such as Graham McInnes and Robert Ayre, awareness of modern French painting styles was a sign of aesthetic quality. This concept remained in the abstract, however. As modern styles were rarely seriously discussed in Canadian publications, it appears there was a general assumption that anything new and modern was by definition progressive and desirable. In a brief information piece McInnes wrote on Paraskeva Clark for Canadian Forum, the author centres on the Cezannesque quality of a landscape painted by Clark.⁷⁰ It is clear from the glorious references to Cezanne McInnes felt that to exhibit an awareness of the French artist's approach to form was indeed a sign of quality and aesthetics in art. Although having lived in Paris herself, Clark's familiarity with French art came more directly through her teacher in Moscow, Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, who had studied, among other places, in Munich and Paris.⁷¹ In his classes he emphasized substructure, form and geometry, considerations which informed Clark's work for many years whether landscape, portrait, street scene or still life.⁷² In Petroushka this concern for the structure of space is articulated through the use of interlocking planes

which distort and confuse the viewer's visual expectations. The space behaves unpredictably; it is disorienting and disturbing. Adding to the hectic surface pattern, incongruous spacial relationships and intense colour, is the unusual placement of the building at various contradictory angles to the horizon. They teeter at insecure angles, appearing to be falling out of the picture frame. The conscious manipulation of space in this painting results in a disquieting image which challenges the viewer to question his accepted notion of spacial relationships and visual presentation of the world as it has generally been described to him.

The image is insecure also in that it entreats the viewer to think and articulate the nature of his social existence but does not offer any tidy solutions. Clark attempts to be true to the complexity of social/political/economic relations within society. The visual and intellectual qualities identify the painting as belonging to the post United Front period when the new left was characterized by concomitant insecurity, greater intellectualism, and its appeal to a broader range of Canadians including farmers, urban workers and intellectuals.

A much less obviously political work is Orchard, Township Bentinck, Hanover painted by Carl Schaefer in 1935. Orchard illustrates a different approach to social comment than the directly critical approach of Paraskeva Clark. Rejecting wilderness landscape as an option, Schaefer most often painted "farmscapes". Although equally unpopulated as wilderness scenes, emphasis in Schaefer's rural landscapes is on civilization.



Fig. 5 Carl Schaefer, Orchard, Township Bentinck, Hanover 1935

Evidence of human society is everywhere--in the fences, the farmhouses, the tilled fields and the planted orchards. In 1935 Carl Schaefer produced a series of oil paintings which question the optimism of the existing dominant landscape style. By always reinforcing the human quality of the rural landscape and at the same time introducing jarring elements, Schaefer expresses "a positive reaction to the social scene" as proposed by New Frontier. Orchard is one of these works. (fig. 5)

Schaefer's rejection of wilderness landscape was in part due to his disinterest in mountains and his lack of finances to travel and paint in Northern Ontario. From 1932 to 1940 Schaefer and his family were forced to live their summers at his grandparents farm in southern Ontario due to Carl Schaefer's difficulty in finding year-round employment in Toronto.⁷³ Consequently, Orchard is to the artist intensely personal, both in terms of his immediate financial anxiety and in terms of his family heritage and individual identity. For whatever personal reasons Schaefer chose not to paint the dominant theme, that rejection also functioned as a critique. Reinforcing the aspect of criticism was his introduction of disturbing elements into his work during the mid thirties, such as a farmhouse perched precariously on a rise of land, dead, stark trees, and ominous storm clouds. Usually combined with more optimistic elements, Orchard represents a personal extreme.

This is not an image of optimism or contentment. Nothing could be farther from the notions and abundance and prosperity one associates with the idea of an orchard. Unlike the rich, comfortable panoramas

of the wilderness landscape, Orchard offers no solace, hope, or promise for the future. The trees appear to be dead and nothing grows in the field. What little growth exists, is last year's dried up grass. Stumps bear witness to the permanent destruction of three additional trees.

Orchard exudes despair and frustration. Unromanticized and undecorative in style, this is an intense and violent image. Dark furrows, gaping like open wounds, direct the eye up to an abrupt horizon. At this point we are threatened by sabre-like branches. The trees go out to both side frames, as well as quite close to the top frame--we are unable to go around, through, or over this menacing barrier. Yet we are unable to retreat as the very dominant direction lines of the furrows do not reverse. The rise of the hill, with its outer sloping edges, also reinforces the upward movement. Anxiety is heightened by tension in the negative space between the branches. The compressed and controlled composition allows no escape for the viewer.

The image stands as a symbol of the despair and agricultural devastation of the Depression. Agriculture suffered very much more than any other industry and was the slowest to recover.⁷⁴ Although Carl Schaefer did not live in the prairies, but in the relatively less affected southern Ontario, Orchard, by virtue of its bleak imagery, Depression context and uniqueness in Canadian landscape painting at the time, still functioned as a critical statement on a national scale.

This is also consistent with the demands of the new "descriptive" nationalism which emphasized the diversity of the Canadian experience and encouraged artists to describe that particularity. In his article "New Horizons in Canadian Art", Graham McInnes supported a concept of the national as a composite of self-identifiable regions. In this way the personal and the local are linked to a national identity. Regions maintain their identity; this creates the structure for national pride which has as its essence diversity itself. McInnes promoted

...artists who felt for the new Canada that is
the work of millions of active people and
thousands of indefinable cross currents and
feelings and desires... 75

He also identified a new Canadian landscape.

...the land as it looks after Canadians have
tilled it, lived by it and died in it--the
land which has left its mark on a people and
has in turn been marked by them. 76

A connection is intimated between McInnes's demand for artists to be sensitive to their surroundings and New Frontier's support of artists who express a "positive reaction to the social scene". McInnes frequently commended Schaefer and other like-minded artists who observed and interpreted their own immediate environment. It is clear from his article on the new movement that this referred to social, as well as, physical environment. At the same time, throughout all his articles McInnes consistently emphasized that response to one's social and material circumstances must be synthesized through the artist's aesthetic appreciation and expressed in a skilled and mastered technique.

A good native art must be the product of its
environment, but it must also be the product
of imagination and aesthetic sensibility. 77

McInnes felt Schaefer was successful in bringing together the real and the aesthetic worlds. In an article entirely devoted to the artist, McInnes emphasized Schaefer's long years training in wood turning and church decorating as well as in various graphic media and painting. He connected this to the artist's regional sensitivity and thereby promoted the combination of aesthetic judgement and artistic professionalism with awareness of immediate environmental (social and physical) surroundings.

...the long process of steeping himself in his native environment began to fuse with his imaginative qualities, his sense of form and his command of his media, and to produce the spirited, highly individual work by which he is now known. 78

When McInnes was writing about art, whether in a review or a general article, he usually emphasized these points. He accepted the concept of artists as an elite class but he did want them to be more aware of the world around them. Always of paramount importance to McInnes was aesthetics. Although he did support some printmakers and artists such as Laurence Hyde, Leonard Hutchinson and Nathan Petroff when they produced work for exhibition, any work they produced for illustration in radical periodicals was not discussed. The new art movement, like the new left, tried to find a balance between social criticism and an artful, pleasing, castigation of the status quo. Miller Brittain, a St. John, New Brunswick artist of the same period produced a series of satirical drawings in the mid thirties. Although they appear closer to book illustration or caricature, McInnes praised these works in a "Fine Art" context.

Brittain's human focus identified him as an artist making "positive reaction to the social scene" as defined by New Frontier. He drew and painted longshoremen, factory workers, union meetings and a range of other social situations. Unlike Paraskeva Clark, who painted many landscapes in spite of her preference for other subject matter and at the same time she was painting social comment works, Miller Brittain never painted landscapes. This was partly due to his residence in St. John. Sufficiently removed from Toronto, hub of the wilderness landscape cult, Brittain found inspiration elsewhere. In 1930 at age 18 he went to New York to study at the Art Students League for two years.⁷⁹ The school attracted teachers and students interested in making socially aware art. Although he intended to study commercial illustration, his earthy style was not conducive to the "tricky slap-dash" requirements of the director.⁸⁰ While at the school he became an admirer of Rembrandt, Hogarth, Goya and Daumier.⁸¹ In New York and throughout the United States, American Social Realists were active and in 1932 George Grosz arrived from Germany. A few years later, back in St. John, Brittain became involved for a time with the Oxford Group. The organization sought Christian solutions to social problems and was quite interested in the struggles of workers and unions.⁸²

Brittain's satirical and social comment works became admired by those who supported the new movement in Canadian art. Not only did his work have a human focus, it was inspired by a social concern for people in general during the Depression but was expressed in a manner

specific to his own experience, personality and environment. This was consistent with nationalism in the thirties which encouraged regional identification. It was also important to those who advocated an art which responded to the disintegration of society in the Depression, but which did so in an artful, sophisticated manner. Emphasis on personal response of the individual functioned to dissociate artists of the new movement from communist correlations. After the Stalinization of the Soviet Union, communism was often identified with stifling individuality and forcing people into the mould of unthinking automatons dominated by foreign ideas. Focussing on freedom of the artist to express his individual identity and at the same time offering public criticism of the established social order had the effect of making a statement against Stalinism at the same time as pointing out the injustices of capitalism, while presenting it as a freer, more desirable system.

Like Paraskeva Clark and Carl Schaefer, Miller Brittain was "nominated" by Graham McInnes "for the hall of fame in the vanguard of this new movement".⁸³ McInnes chose Brittain as one of the feature artists in his series "Contemporary Canadian Artists" published regularly in the Canadian Forum. To accompany the text McInnes selected a satirical work "D'Ye Ken John Peel?". (fig. 6)

Miller Brittain...has sounded a note of genuine satire without bitterness, while there is a sufficiently high regard for artistic canons in his work to suggest great promise for the future. 84

The identification of this work as legitimate satire dissociates it from political cartoons and illustrations common in communist publications



Miller Brittain, "D'Ye Ken John Peel?"

Reprinted from The Canadian Forum, December 1937

before 1935 and with which it shares certain elements. Just as the new left worked for social change in a polite, cooperative manner, McInnes preferred his social criticism "without bitterness". His definition of satire was dependent upon equality between the jester and his object.

Satire requires an audience for success,
and an audience implies a nation that
has learned to laugh at itself. 85

This approach to satire dismisses as propaganda any satire which functions within an attacker-victim model. Consequently, the communist cartoons of the twenties and early thirties which satirize the ruling class and their political system as the causes of the Depression are not within the framework of legitimate satire as defined by the exponents of the new movement. Thus in Brittain's drawing, the subjects are poked fun at but they are not attacked as a class. In this sense the image contradicts itself. It purports to be social comment yet in fact it gives the illusion, but not the substance of criticism. This indicates the audience for these works was those elements of the middle class not ravaged either economically or psychologically by the Depression and is reinforced by the subject matter of the drawing. The characters appear to be of British stock indicated by the form of fancy dress, very British moustaches on two of the men, and the room decor complete with academic portrait and what are possibly small watercolours matted and framed in an acceptable British manner. Their tune is an English hunting song. Brittain chose to satirize them not by distorting them into stereotypical absurdities common to the communist cartoons, with bloated bellies and bags of money, but by intensifying their concentration and by adding a certain grotesqueness to the hands. Considering

the high level of skill among some Canadian artists with which McInnes was no doubt familiar, this drawing does not seem as strong in traditional artistic canons as McInnes states. However, as a high aesthetic standard was paramount to his criteria for the new movement it was essential this aspect be emphasized. To reinforce the notion of quality in Brittain's work, McInnes related his work to a well known European artist. "Brittain...has more right than anyone since Krieghoff to be called the Canadian Breughel". 86

This is not to say McInnes was distorting the artist's intentions. Like Paraskeva Clark, Brittain undoubtedly did not believe that art was best left to the Ivory Tower and the Pre-Cambrian Shield.

I have no patience with those individuals who think of pictures merely as embellishments to a decorative scheme...A picture ought to emerge from the midst of life and be in no way divorced from it. 87

On the other hand, this did not mean that the artist should lend his skill to outright propaganda. "D'Ye Ken John Peel?" was conceived not as a cartoon but as an art object. It is of easel size and was drawn in charcoal, a substance which does not tolerate much handling. Clearly, time and planning were an integral part of the work. Care was taken in the full completion of every figure and article in the image. Unlike cartoons which usually have a central, immediately recognizable focus, Brittain's drawing has an overall composition. Balanced with a deliberate arrangement of shapes and skillful manipulation of light and shadow, the artist's eye is manifest. Every detail is completed diligently and every face particularized.

As with Paraskeva Clark and Carl Schaefer, McInnes emphasized aesthetic judgment informed with social awareness, when writing of Brittain's work. Clark's socially responsive paintings were direct and intelligent in their approach. Schaefer's were usually more interpretative and possibly less directly intended. Brittain's drawings, again different from the others, were satirical but politically harmless. Clearly, the art which functioned as social comment in the middle and late thirties was much more artful and subtle in its imagery than the earlier communist-associated art. However, like the communist illustrations before it, the new art made reference to economic hardships of the Depression, social injustices of capitalism and the dynamic of class struggle. Yet it did so in a tasteful, inoffensive, traditionally comfortable way, precisely in the style of the new social democratic movement, the new vehicle for political and social change in Canada.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Ivan Avakumovic, The Communist Party in Canada: A History (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1978), p. 99.

² Norman Penner, The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada Ltd., 1977), p. 153.

³ as quoted in Penner, p. 151-2.

⁴ Penner, p. 154.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Lita-Rose Betcherman, The Swastika and the Maple Leaf: Fascist Movements in Canada in the Thirties (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1975), p. 45.

⁷ Avakumovic, The Communist Party, p. 124-5.

⁸ Penner, p. 138.

⁹ Avakumovic, The Communist Party, p. 106.

¹⁰ Norman Thomas, as quoted in G.M.A. Grube, "The Moscow Trials," The Canadian Forum 16 (March 1937), p. 12.

¹¹ Avakumovic, The Communist Party, p. 101.

¹² Grube, p. 12.

¹³ Although manufacturing and metal mining were leading the relative recovery, increased profits in those industries failed to inspire improvements in wages and working conditions. In the spring of 1937 garment workers in Montreal were still working an eighty hour week for \$11. (Desmond Morton with Terry Copp, Working People, Ottawa: Deneau Publishers, 1980, p. 151) And in mining, where profits reached 50% of total production in 1936, the incentive to keep unions out of the mines was especially acute. (Irving Abella, "Oshawa 1937", in Irving Abella, ed., On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in Canada 1919-1949, Toronto: James Lorimer, 1974, p. 117) The struggle against industrial unionism was very intense in Ontario due to its concentration of manufacturing and metal mining. Hostilities reached a peak in the 1936 Oshawa strike against General

Motors. The provincial premier, Mitchell Hepburn, personally intervened in his anti-union zeal to prevent auto workers from organizing and to keep the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) out of Canada. Firing his Labour Minister and Attorney General, who disagreed with his extremism (Abella, p. 113), he took over both their posts, as well as, declaring himself negotiator for General Motors. Hepburn had ties with the principals of Algoma Steel and MacIntyre-Porcupine mines who were his stock advisers and close friends, and was aware of what would happen to his share values should the mines be unionized. Another useful friend of the Premier's was George McCullough, editor of the mining interest Globe and Mail, a major propaganda organ of the anti-communist/union forces. (Abella, p. 98, and John Charles "Tactics in the Ontario Elections", The Canadian Forum, 17, Sept. 1937, p. 194)

¹⁴ Hepburn to Lapoint, 13 April 1937, as quoted in Irving Abella, "Oshawa 1937", in Irving Abella, ed., On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in Canada 1919-1949 (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1974), p. 110.

¹⁵ "Do You Want It Here?" Maclean's Editorial, Maclean's magazine, 49 (December 1, 1936), p.4.

¹⁶ Abella, p. 124.

¹⁷ Avakumovic states in The Communist Party in Canada that CP membership in 1931 was either 1,385 or 4,000. It climbed steadily to 14,000 in 1938 (p. 115). In Socialism in Canada he confirms there are no reliable CCF membership statistics in its early days. Membership did increase sharply in the first few years, and stood at about 20,000 in 1938 (p. 93).

¹⁸ "No CCF government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism...", from the Regina Manifesto, initial statement of the CCF. As quoted in Ivan Avakumovic, Socialism in Canada: A Study of the CCF-NDP in Federal and Provincial Politics (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1978), p. 59.

¹⁹ Members were teachers, social workers, ministers, etc, who saw first hand every day the physical and emotional toll poverty and hopelessness was having on individual people and families. League for Social Reconstruction, Social Planning for Canada, Toronto: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1935, p. 10)

²⁰ Penner, p. 203.

²¹ Avakumovic, Socialism in Canada, p. 38.

²² Gerald L. Caplan, "The Failure of Canadian Socialism: The Ontario Experience, 1932-1945," The Canadian Historical Review 44 (June 1963), p. 96.

²³ Penner, p. 68.

²⁴ Although the CCF congratulated itself on its combination of labour, farm and intellectual, the farm groups involved in the organization were of a conservative variety and its labour support was more abstract assumption than concrete alliance. (Caplan, p. 94 and Penner, p. 213)

²⁵ Michiel Horn, The League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada 1930-1942 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 18, 12.

²⁶ Avakumovic, Socialism in Canada, p. 50.

²⁷ Horn, L.S.R., p. 12, 13.

²⁸ Forward to the volume was written by J. S. Woodsworth, prominent leader of the CCF and long time social democrat. He says of the book "It should be of great service in the formation of the future policies of the CCF." (p. vi)

²⁹ Avakumovic, Socialism in Canada, p. 91-92 and Horn, L.S.R., p. 187.

³⁰ A. E. Safarian, The Canadian Economy in the Great Depression (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1970), p. 204.

³¹ Horn, L.S.R., p. 77.

³² Ibid.

³³ Avakumovic, Socialism in Canada, p. 29.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 50, 67.

³⁵ Joseph Lister Rutledge, "Magazines and National Unity," The Canadian Magazine (January 1936), p. 13.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 12.

- 37 Dorothy Livesay, Right Hand Left Hand (Erin: Press Porceplic Ltd., 1977), p. 219.
- 38 "Editorial", New Frontier, 1 (April 1936), p. 3.
- 39 John Fairfax, "Art for Man's Sake," Canadian Forum, 16 (August 1936), p. 24.
- 40 G. Campbell McInnes, "New Horizons in Canadian Art," New Frontier, 2 (June 1936), p. 19.
- 41 Ibid, p. 20.
- 42 G. Campbell McInnes, "Art Under the Soviets," Canadian Forum, 16 (November 1936), p. 24.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 "Exhibition of Soviet Art," Henry Morgan & Co. Galleries, May 15th-June 1st 1935, n.p.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 G. Campbell McInnes, "the World of Art," Saturday Night, 51 (October 24, 1936), p. 22.
- 49 Bernard Causton, "Art in Germany Under the Nazis," The Studio, 112 (November 1936), p. 236.
- 50 Ibid., p. 240.
- 51 "Art: Retreat," Time, 28 (October 19, 1936), p. 48.
- 52 Naomi Jackson, "Modern Art in Germany," Saturday Night, 52 (October 16, 1937), p. 2.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 "Editorial", New Frontier, p. 3.

55 Frank H. Underhill, review of Yearbook of the Arts in Canada, by Bertram Brokker, in Canadian Forum, 16 (December 1936), p. 28.

56 Elizabeth Wyn Wood, "Art and the Pre-Cambrian Shield," Canadian Forum, 16 (February 1937), p. 14.

57 Ibid.

58 Safarian, p. 199.

59 Ibid, p. 205.

60 Wood, p. 15.

61 Ibid.

62 Paraskeva Clarke (sic), "Come Out From Behind the Pre-Cambrian Shield," New Frontier, 1 (April 1937), p. 16.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 "Five Steel Strikers Killed in Clash With Chicago Police," Toronto Daily Star (June 1, 1937), p. 1.

66 Thomas R. Brooks, Toil and Trouble: A History of American Labor (New York: Delacorte Press, 1971), p. 190-91.

67 Clarke, p. 16.

68 Charles Hill, Canadian Painting in the Thirties (Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, 1975), p. 13-14.

69 Lawrence Sabbath, "Artists in Action Series: 3-Paraskeva Clark," Canadian Art 17 (September 1960), p. 292.

70 G. Campbell McInnes, "Contemporary Canadian Artists: No. 7-Paraskeva Clark," Canadian Forum, 17 (August 1937), p. 166.

71 Mary E. MacLachlan, Paraskeva Clark: Paintings and Drawings (Halifax: Dalhousie Art Gallery, 1982), p. 11.

- 72 Ibid, p. 12.
- 73 Carl Schaefer to Toby Smith 13 February 1983, and Hill, p. 89.
- 74 Safarian, p. 195. Even as late as 1937 agricultural and vegetable products were 57% below 1928 levels whereas non-ferrous metals, for example, had increased over 100% with gold in the extreme--up 250%. (Safarian, p. 163) The prairie economy was hit the worst because of drastic decreases in world wheat prices and nine years of drought and crop failure. Agriculture income dropped by almost 80% between 1928 and 1933. (Safarian, p. 194)
- 75 McInnes, "New Horizons", p. 20.
- 76 Ibid.
- 77 G. Campbell McInnes, "Thoughts on Canadian Art," Saturday Night, 51 (August 1, 1936), p. 8.
- 78 G. Campbell McInnes, "Contemporary Canadian Artists: No. 1-Carl Schaefer," Canadian Forum 16 (February 1937), p. 18.
- 79 Donald F. P. Andrus, Miller G. Brittain: Drawings and Pastels 1930-67. (Fredericton, Beaverbrook Art Gallery, 1968), p. 7.
- 80 Pegi Nicol, Miller Brittain, " Maritime Art, 1 (April 1941), p. 17.
- 81 Andrus, p. 8.
- 82 Hill, p. 98.
- 83 McInnes, "New Horizons", p. 20.
- 84 G. Campbell McInnes, "Contemporary Canadian Artists: No. 11-Miller Britain (sic)," Canadian Forum 17 (December 1937), p. 312.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 G. Campbell McInnes, "The World of Art," Saturday Night, 52 (April 10, 1937), p. 20.
- 87 Nicol, p. 17.

CONCLUSION

During the twenties and early thirties the wilderness landscape image, painted in the manner of the Group of Seven was the dominant painting style. This style represented the values of the new entrepreneurial nationalism and emphasized spontaneity, courage, chance and the control of unpredictable elements. At the same time, images of a directly political nature criticized the capitalist system and these concomitant values. This criticism circulated within publications of the Communist Party, appearing in the forms of cartoon and illustration. The explicit purpose of these works was to incite the working class to revolution.

In the early thirties a rupture within the political left resulted in the social democratic movement gaining ideological primacy over the Community Party. This brought intellectuals into the left for the first time, and precipitated a shift in focus from working class militant to middle class voter. With this change came the inclusion of liberal elements. Individualism, used as a tool by the social democratic left to counter images of communist automatism and Stalinist authoritarianism, functioned also to create difficulty for the left, discouraging cohesiveness and plaguing it with indecision. In the final analysis, the social democratic left, with its emphasis on compromise and concession, affirmed the capitalist version of democracy and its promise of peaceful social change. Did social comment art exist in response to the Depression? Was the changing nature of the left relevant?

As we have seen, social comment art did exist in resistance to the Depression. This art took many forms and occurred in all media. Analysis and discussion of three selected styles indicates that the art of social comment which complemented the ideology of the new left exhibited the same values of individualism and polite resistance. It becomes clear that not only did the form and approach of artistic protest change from the twenties and early thirties to the mid thirties, but much more importantly, the fundamental message changed as well. As long as the Communist Party dominated the left, the message of social protest was strongly and unmistakably anti-capitalist. With the ascendancy of the social democratic movement, protest became anti-poverty and anti-Depression but never really anti-capitalist in spite of some rhetoric. It became polite in tone and reformist in nature. Just as the aesthetic of the social democratic left never questioned the essence of art or the social function of the artist, the political posture of the new left accepted the dominance of capitalism and worked for concession and reform within that context.

Was this art of aesthetic social comment isolated or were other art forms involved? Did other forms also experience this fundamental change? Culture was the obvious tool of protest and struggle for those involved in the arts. It is worth noting that literature, theatre, film, music and dance also felt to differing degrees the demand they be more socially relevant. The concept of proletarian literature popular in the United States in the teens and twenties never developed to the same degree. This was partly due to the late arrival of intellectuals into politics and partly due to the lack of networking necessary

to train workers in writing skills, as existed with organizations such as the John Reed Clubs in the U.S. The Progressive Arts Club was the closest equivalent. Although most of its activity was based in Southern Ontario, it did have chapters in some cities across the country. As with the visual arts, writers were required by the communist aesthetic to integrate their medium with the revolutionary cause. The Labor Defender, a communist publication ran an article supporting Masses, the organ of the Progressive Arts Club.

For many years the Canadian working class have continued their struggle without any great aid from intellectuals, artists and writers. In the belief, apparently, that this condition must soon be remedied...there has recently appeared on the streets a monthly proletarian literary magazine, Masses. They address themselves "to the workers, to the poor farmers, to the jobless man in the breadlines," and call on all class-conscious artists, writers and intellectuals to join their ranks. 1

This is consistent with the communist aesthetic as applied to the visual arts: the artist is to identify with the working class and not see himself as special or elite; his job is to illustrate and expose the inequalities of capitalism, his art is a tool of revolution, not a self indulgence. The unashamedly propagandistic approach applied equally to all the arts. However, after the passing of Masses in 1934 and the United Front policy of the CP after 1935, the concept of proletarian art making direct contributions to the impending revolution gave way to a focus on the traditional middle class writer and poet, in other words the fine artist of the literary world. Canadian Forum, which was bought by the League for Social Reconstruction ("think-tank" for the CCF) in 1935 and New Frontier, representing the United Front left, acted in dialogue to articulate a contemporary aesthetic for

Theatre also experienced similar changes. The Progressive Arts Club had been very successful in the early thirties in organizing non-professionals and semi-professionals into theatre groups. A group from Toronto toured the Niagara Peninsula, performing their plays in union and church halls, at picket lines and anywhere they could attract a working class audience, their primary enthusiasts. Some of the plays they presented were Solidarity Not Charity, Farmers' Fight, and Eviction.³ It is clear that in this earlier phase, the audience targeted was the revolutionary proletariat and the message was the same as the cartoons and illustrations discussed in Chapter One, that is, the capitalist system is unjust and unequal and it must be overthrown by the working class.

In the mid thirties the Workers' Theatre changed its name to the Theatre of Action and although it was still progressive in nature, there was a shift toward professionalism. They wanted to "broaden their audience" and attempt "more ambitious productions".⁴ In 1935 a professional director was hired from New York. He also gave acting classes in which he emphasized the combination of "Truth and Beauty".⁵ A more middle class, sophisticated audience is clearly being sought; the concept of combining truth and beauty alludes to the expression of political and social truths in an artful and professional manner. The audience is to be persuaded, not beaten over the head with a hammer and sickle.

The flexibility of the new critical aesthetic and the lack

literature as well as art. Leo Kennedy, a poet himself, wrote an article for New Frontier in which he laments the state of Canadian poetry. Trapped by the romance of landscape, Canadian poetry had become to some an irrelevant self indulgence. Kennedy conveys his frustration with the elitist poet who cloisters himself in an Ivory Tower while bread lines are forming. An anti-capitalist, active, political role is implied for the artist. The writer does not, however, entreat poets to write about poverty and degradation in order to inspire the proletariat to overthrow the capitalist system. He uses a nationalistic approach, and asks that the poet be sensitive to the Canadian reality and the Canadian experience. This meant, of course, being responsive to the hardships and deprivation of the Depression. Consequently, in actual practise the artist is encouraged to illustrate the failure of capitalism.

We need poetry that reflects the lives of our
people, working, loving, fighting, groping for clarity.
We need satire,--fierce, scorching, aimed at the abuses
which are destroying our culture and which threaten
life itself. 2

This is consistent with the humanistic and descriptive focus of nationalism in the thirties. It is also consistent with the shift within the visual arts in the mid thirties which rejected the role of outright propagandist for the artist and moved to a sort of nationalist, describer-of-Depression-Truths fine artist. Rather than encouraging the working class to write poetry, which would have been a twenties', pre-United Front approach, Kennedy admits most practising poets are of the middle class, are university educated and see the artist/poet as a special person removed from ordinary life, and he directs his remarks to them.

of grounding in a clearly anti-capitalist ideology allowed most of the same artists to lend their skills to support of the Second World War without apparent contradiction and without ever returning to the art of social comment. Miller Brittain became a bombardier with the Royal Canadian Air Force and Carl Schaefer was commissioned as one of a large number of official war artists. Paraskeva Clark was commissioned by the National Gallery of Canada to record the duties of the Women's Division of the Royal Canadian Air Force. The war ended the Depression and gave a sense of pride and purpose to the demoralized nation. After the war, the focus for art in Canada was centred in Montreal and with this shift came the challenge of abstraction and virtually the art of social comment disappeared from the fine art scene.

FOOTNOTES

¹ E.C.S. (Edward Cecil Smith), "Review: Worker's Art", Labor Defender 3 (April 1932), p. 3.

² Leo Kennedy, "Direction for Canadian Poets", New Frontier 1 (June 1936), p. 24.

³ "Workers' Theatre in Action", Masses 2 (May-June 1933), p. 13.

⁴ Toby Gordon Ryan, Stage Left: Canadian Theatre in the Thirties, (Toronto: CTR Publications, 1981), p. 75.

⁵ Ibid, p. 120.

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